

**CLASSICAL TAI CHI**  
**FORUM 11**  
**January, 2005**

**TO ALL OF MY STUDENTS I WISH A VERY HAPPY AND  
HEALTHY NEW YEAR AND GOOD PROGRESS WITH YOUR  
PRACTICE!**

**Jim D. writes:**

..... I understand the utility of redirecting incoming force, **but when blocking, how is it that the arm remains soft and subtle (in order that we may listen), and not rigid as in external martial arts?**

**Master Hwa's response:**

In the Forum 10, I discussed a similar question regarding the Dan Tien where you need to be energized and yet not rigid. In short, the rigidity in external martial art is indiscriminatory with every muscle in the arm stiffened up to the maximum. In tai chi, only the necessary energizing is employed. In addition, your blocking of the opponent's arm should use a force just enough to ward off his arm. If you use too much force then it's no longer redirect, but push back, and you lost the advantage of redirect.

Therefore your ward-off move is very fluid and delicate. This can only be achieved when you are not stiff or rigid.

I have an experiment I want you to try: Try to press the back of your hand against say a door frame, just like you are blocking an opponent's incoming arm. Do you find that one side of your forearm muscle is energized while the other side, the muscle is relaxed? Let me know your results.

Jim D. responds:

I tried your suggestion to "press the back of your hand against say a door frame" several times and had several different experiences. They are as follows: (1) a tightening of the outside of my forearm and back arm, or (2) a tightening of the whole arm to include the fore arm and biceps and back arm, and (3) resistance from the door jam which seemed to force me backwards as I pushed forward. These experiences seemed to be effected by the amount of pressure I applied.

### Master Hwa's response:

Your experiments showed three different cases, illustrating some very interesting points:

1. This is the expected case. You should be able to block using only the outside muscle of the fore arm (extensor) while inside muscle of the fore arm (flexor and palmaris) should be completely relaxed, in other words you only use the necessary muscle to achieve the task. Your arm is still supple and responsive and you can make counter move with the arm very quickly.
2. Here you are tensing or stiffening your entire arm, the muscles in the arm are stiffening indiscriminately. The arm has a wooden feeling and does not respond very quickly. One could achieve this state very easily by clenching the fist. That is why Classical Tai Chi has no clenched fist in its form.
3. Here you are applying a force beyond what your body structure (rooting) could support, just like forward fa jin with the body perpendicular to the ground. When we apply a force there is an equal and opposite reaction force which needs to be absorbed by the ground through the body. If your body structure is not firmly supported by the ground in comparison to that of your opponent, your body will move instead of your opponent. That is why I emphasized in the Overview Video that fa-jin is useful only when you detect an opening in an opponent's movement, such as taking advantage of his body's momentum or deficiency in his rooting and striking without any forewarning. It is not a move with brutal force but with fineness and sensitivity. That is the reason why training a tai chi fighter is much more difficult than training an external martial art fighter.

I believe case 1. is the natural response. Case 2. is a learned habit-a bad habit at that. Nowadays, all TV and movies show martial arts with tight fists and muscles bulging on the entire arm. People get brainwashed thinking this is the norm. This is purely for show. It will be hugely mistaken if one thinks this is the way to fight. Practicing tai chi will refine your natural ability of using only the right amount of force in the movements and not affected by emotions such as fear, tenseness since the move is now instinctive. If you try more times cases 1 & 2, I think you can clearly sense how you do differently between these two situations.

Jim D. wrote:

"As a footnote to the above, I asked my wife to take the back of her hand and push against the back of my hand (we were both seated and sort of facing each other. I was trying to explain to her, and myself, how I understood the physics of "ward off." Talking it through is a good teaching tool for me). As I gave in to the incoming force, which was light to moderate, I noticed that I could easily redirect it by staying relaxed and giving way to it. Another thing happened as well, I was able to follow her movement easily, no matter what the direction. It felt as if I was sticking to the back of her hand....and it seemed effortless. There seemed to be something else at work ...something I could not see...there was almost a feeling of emptiness...yet I was aware that my mind was in control, although there was little or no awareness that I consciously was thinking about following of her motions. It seemed intuitive."

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**Master Hwa's response:**

Your experiment with your wife answered your earlier question " I understand the utility of redirecting incoming force, but when blocking, how is it that the arm remains soft and subtle (in order that we may listen), and not rigid as in external martial arts." Your experience here is exactly what you should feel during push hands.

**"Follow the opponent's motion until it dissolves into my own.  
Only when I can unite with the opponent to become "ONE", then I may prevail."**

To be "one" with the opponent means that you are able to peer into opponent's intention **subconsciously**, as you have described above. When an opening is detected, you can immediately take advantage of. All of these have to be instinctive without thinking.

Jim further wrote:

**"Other experiences I have had in practicing the Tai Chi walk, quarter body movements and the first four-Forms on your DVD is a tingling, warm sensation in my fingers and palms of my hands, especially at the heels of my hands and wrists.** I have had this experience in playing out Tai Chi 24 Forms, but not to the depth, degree or consistency that I have felt in playing the Forms in Classical Tai Chi. As a side bar to the above, I asked a client of mine who has studied Tai Chi 24 Forms and is a student of Aikido, to watch me play the first four-Forms of Classical Tai Chi. Her response... 'you look solid.' When asked to compare Classical Tai Chi to Tai Chi 24 Forms, she responded that the latter looked 'floppy.' I found the latter characterization to be humorous, but accurate."

**Master Hwa's response:**

The tingling and warm sensation you feel in your hand is the indication of the presence of qi. You are early to achieve that. As you said you have practiced tai chi before which helps.

Jim also wrote:

"Other insights that I have gained in playing out the forms are that my arms follow the direction of my body, but tucking in the buttocks at all times is difficult. Sometimes **I think I overdo it, especially in the Tai Chi walk. The over tucking-in and my self-consciousness seems to interfere with my center of gravity (and I am taking small steps )**. Yet, when I relax those muscles and unconsciously remember what I learned in practicing Tai Chi 24 Forms walk (still taking small steps), I seemed to move more freely...?"

**Master Hwa's response:**

In Forum 5 "tai chi walk & balance", I talked about when you lift one foot up, you have to readjust the pelvic position to account for the shift of your body center of gravity. Also, when you put your foot down you need to readjust your pelvis to allow the front foot to drop. If you are too rigid at the pelvic region, you will feel awkward and unbalance during these moves.

So, the tuck in has to be dynamic or pulsating such that it can relax momentarily to allow the readjustment to occur. After more practice you will get it. It is just matter of time.

He further wrote:

"I find that the Round Form Tai Chi walk enables me "to listen" to the placement of my feet, the shifting of my weight, the sense of meditation and mindfulness, and grounded feeling I experience while practicing "the walk." This is a real learning experience concerning self knowledge and self control. But it does not happen all of the time. With the Square Form, there is more of a sensing to be exacting when learning the movements. But I also find the the Square Form can be an enjoyable experience to, especially when playing what seems to be the transitional form between single whip and the first brush knee. **By the way, how can I find out the names of all the 108 Forms in Classical Tai Chi.**"

**Master Hwa's response:**

You can find such a list here <http://www.wfdesign.com/tc/tc.htm>. Although some of the names are different, such as monkey climb the tree vs. golden cock stands on left leg.

**Ken L. wrote:**

**...should one be fluent in internal movement before learning fa jing? or does that matter?..... Are you saying that leg power and fa jin are two seperate things? i've always had the impression that fa jin is issued from the legs and goes out to where it is applied.**

**Master Hwa's response:**

Yes, you want to be fluent in internal movement before learning fa jin. In fact once you are good at internal movement, you do not need to "LEARN" fa jin, it comes naturally. The practice of internal movement in Tai Chi Form is essentially the practice of fa jing in a slow and methodical way, without the issuing of power . When you can play the Form instinctively without thinking then you can fa-jin instinctively. If you try to do fa jin without internal discipline, you likely will push with your arm strength and acquire a bad habit of using your arm, making the learning of internal movement difficult.

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I know that one of the classical writings about tai chi mentioned that:

The jin should be  
rooted in the feet,  
generated from the legs,  
controlled by the waist, and  
manifested through the fingers.

From my own sense of fa jin, I want to change the above to the following:

The jin should be  
generated from the waist,  
controlled by the legs,  
rooted in the feet,  
manifested through the fingers.

Let me elaborate on this. I have discussed and demonstrated the generating of jin (a surge of power) from the waist many times before, especially in the Overview video so I will not repeat here. Now, when you generating the jin, it surge to the hand and the fingers for delivery. At the same time, an equal and opposite force will send from the waist downward through the pelvis to the leg and finally absorb by the ground through the foot. During that instant, the buttock and leg will naturally energized to transmit the force to feet and firming the lower body structure to support the fa jin. You can actually sense that during Form playing.

Using the external leg power to simulate forward and lateral fa jin is ineffective. Leg power is strongest in the direction of up lifting from the knee. That is why sprinters use the crouch start on starter blocks rather than start from up right position. To use leg power at up right position, to effect a push forward move, the move will have a low acceleration from rest in contrast to fa jin from the waist which can be made to have a sudden burst motion. Using the leg power really can not be called fa jin.

A few words about those classical writings on tai chi. These writings are a collection of short works attributed to different authors from Chang San-Feng to anonymous authors. Even though their authorship cannot be verified, they are considered to be the holy writ on tai chi. They do contain some key insights and principles of tai chi, well worthwhile to be acquaint with them. The translations of these writings can be found on the web such as <http://www.scheele.org/lee/classics.html>.

Ken L. responded:

thanks. i'll keep what you said in mind.

i have always wondered how in the world would it be possible to change the legs up and down power into a horizontal power as the classic says.

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Ken L. further wrote:

i think i can now control my arm movements with my torso with some success but i find that my torso's range of movement is limited and this makes my arms' range of movement also limited. i remember in the videos, you said that **the good athletes like tennis players will use regular movement and then at the point of contact, they use internal movement. is it feasible to do that in tai chi?.....** i've also formed the impression that the internal movement is good for short range power burst and **some movements of the arms in the tai chi form are meant to move the arms into position and not for power issuing. on those types of movements, it is not necessary to use internal movement to move. is that correct?**

**Master Hwa's response:**

Yes, internal movement is good for short-range power burst. During martial art application, one needs to position the arm or the palm to stick to the opponent and seeking the opening before fa jin. So, these positioning moves may not use internal to initiate. But, the Tai Chi Form is developed such that every arm movement is initiated from internal movement, so that the circulation of internal energy and qi will maintain continuity during Form playing. My students in the class often mention that they thought I just externally moved the arm in certain Form movement, but later realize that it is actually internally driven.

He also wrote:

"along the same concept, **i've heard and seen tai chi players who can transfer the opponent's force into the ground when pushed** and they say that using the same ground path, force can be re-issued back out to the opponent. **i dont know how to do that so i dont have a feel for that. how is that related to fa jing and internal movement?"**

**Master Hwa's response:**

What you describe is probably the store of opponent's force in the body like compressing a spring and later release the stored energy that will require the ground to push against.

He further wrote:

"the chen style classics wrote that tai chi is peng boxing. how is the chen style's concept of peng related to internal movement?"

**Master Hwa's response:**

Peng is one of the several basic moves in tai chi martial art applications, such as Peng (bouncing back); Chee (Press); An (Push). All of them require the use of internal power.

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**Marty H. writes:**

I am really enjoying learning from your video. It is now part of my every day life. I wonder **what kind of shoe do you recommend to play the tai chi? Is it preferable to practice the form outdoor than indoor?**

**Master Hwa's response:**

It is important to use shoes without elevated heel. In other words, the heel and the ball of the feet should be at the same level. We pay so much attention on our posture and the way we move to improve the health of our lower back. An elevated heel will negate some of this effort. Since, during Form playing, the body weight shifts all over different parts of the sole, the sole is best to be pliable and the shoe should fit well to the foot. It is also desirable to have a smooth sole so that when you turn with weight on the heel or ball, there is not too much resistance to ensure a smooth motion. The objective after all is to be able to play with a smooth and uninterrupted internal energy flow and qi circulation in the body.

I am using unpadding moccasin. I waxed the sole by contact with wax paper heated on a hot surface.

One always sees people playing tai chi in the park, especially in the orient. This is fairly recent phenomenon perhaps since the 1930th when tai chi becomes popular among the general population in china. For beginner, it makes no difference whether play the Form indoor or outdoor so long as the ground condition is good. Same thing is true when one is practice Square Form. For advanced practitioner practicing solitary Round Form, it is true meditation in motion. Then, it is better to play the Form indoor. As discussed above" The objective after all is to be able to play with a smooth and uninterrupted internal energy flow and qi circulation in the body." When playing outside, a sudden gust of cold wind can jolt the practitioner and cause interruption of smooth internal energy flow and qi circulation in the body.