

# CLASSICAL TAI CHI

## FORUM 8

MARCH 2004

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In regard to Forum 6, Barbara R. writes:

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I found Master Hwa's discussion of yi and cold hands and dancers' problems in taking up tai chi interesting because of my own experience. When I used to do ballet, the palm side of my hands and fingers would get very warm and flushed and so would my teacher's. As she was older and had high blood pressure and none of the other students seemed bothered by "hot hands," it really kind of worried me a little. When I started doing tai chi and found out warmth and flush and tingling in the hands could all be signs of chi flowing correctly ( Very true- Master Hwa), I was relieved in retrospect, but disappointed, because I didn't have any of those experiences playing the form. I thought maybe it was because of so much keyboarding in the years between—enough to cause some carpal tunnel syndrome problems. Then, in the last few months, I began to have some color and tingling while practicing and hoped it was some healing effect taking place, although I still have to use wrist braces now and then and curtail my activities a little. Master Hwa's piece offers another explanation.

When I first started doing tai chi, I had no idea what most of the motions were for. Since then, I've learned a good bit more about applications and now often **play the form to an audience of imaginary opponents "walking the circle" around me like ba gua players. (That is the way to practice- Master Hwa)** This is actually much nearer the way I used to practice ballet--with the intent of expressing to an audience, real or imaginary, whatever character or emotion the dance I was doing was supposed to represent.

The "yi" in ballet--mind intent if not martial intent--seems to come in with the desire **to project ( "To Project" is the key- Master Hwa)**; so maybe it is learning about the martial applications that's making my tai chi playing better for me, whether it looks better or not.

Actually, I've gotten so I rather like catching a glimpse of myself in the "on guard" position (lute hands, or long arm and short arm, or even grasping the bird's tail), whereas I used to feel ridiculous doing it, particularly in exercises like "walking in the presence of the enemy." I think that women in the west even today often have a problem in perceiving fighting skills as being "artistic" enough to be appropriate for them because of the way they are often depicted in our culture and because of a tendency in the culture itself to label "art" as being more of a woman's thing than a man's and "defending" as being a masculine prerogative.

That attitude may make it more difficult for women who are attracted to tai chi because of its graceful movements to see that there is any martial aspect to

it. I can't think of any fighting skill in western culture that has anything

like the same cachet of art and beauty about it except maybe swordsmanship--as it has come down in fencing.....

Maybe one of the reasons I was drawn to Wu style was Wu Ying Hua and Wu Yan Hsia, although I'm not

sure I knew about them until I got into it, just as I didn't know about Master Young's daughter until I found your website.

The only difference any of this makes is that it can create a kind of little barrier that you've got to get over in your own mind. Punches still feel quite alien to me, although a "one inch" punch is certainly an improvement over a haymaker. I think the biggest help is to find something in the martial essence of tai chi that you can relate to and use it as a bridge to the rest. For me, maybe one of the best is something I read recently about **peng ( I think you mean teng jin, which means listening to opponent's jin(power). I will talk about this later-Master Hwa)** or which mean as an attitude

that permeates tai chi and almost incorporates the "audible force" rather than as any specific action. I certainly ought to be able to relate to that, after spending so much time walking herding breed dogs off leash and having to "listen" to their muscle tension and for anything about to come our way so as to be able to "ward off" their attacks on cars and cats before they start. That may sound bizarre, but just as you mentioned **applying the principles of tai chi to everyday life, I think you have to find your point of entry to a martial arts mindset, if it seems alien to you, wherever you can.**

**Master Hwa's reply:**

**I enjoy reading your piece very much, many good insights!.....**

Barbara R. writes in responding to Forum 7:

I found it interesting that Master Hwa saw the mysticism as a recent western addition. It had seemed to me that it is often western tai chi teachers who talk about it most.

It was nice to hear about Master Young's experience with Wu Chien Chuan. Dr. Wen Zee, in his book, Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan, North Atlantic Books, 2002, described a similar experience in pushing hands with Ma Yueh-Liang. **"I felt as if I were touching a piece of floating wood on the surface of water, unable to find any solid area on his body," he says on p. 111, "But at the same time, his energy already reached the bottom of my feet. I felt uncomfortable in my legs and had to move or change my step." (p. 111)**

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**Master Hwa's reply:**

**To attain that kind of capacity requires many years of training beyond proficiency in Tai Chi Form playing.**

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Ken L. writes:

hi, i have a question for master Hwa, **is fa jing the same as internal movement?**  
if not, can you explain more about fa jing and how to do it?

**Master Hwa replies:**

The term “fa jin(jing)” may be explained as ‘thrust of power’. It could be a “sudden burst” but it could also be extended over a period of time.  
Yes, practice of internal movement is the practice of fa jin in a deliberate and systematic manner so that one could perfect the technique of fa jin. In addition, the practice of Tai Chi Form is also important to fa jin by building up your internal energy as well as providing a proper body structure base where you can launch fa jin effectively. One example is the topic of “heel on the ground” discussed in Forum 3. Another example is the body posture. Remember in the video, certain movements resulted in the posture of the body leaning forward forming a straight line with the back leg. This is ideal posture for “forward fa jin”. When you sit back with weight all on the back leg, a defensive posture, this is ideal for “side-way fa jin” with turning motion, such as ward-off or neutralization. If one try to “forward fa jin” while sitting on the back leg, with the body perpendicular to the ground, there is not much support to counter act the reaction force from “forward fa jin” and his body will likely tilt backwards losing much of the forward force. In the Form you are practicing, when ever your hand is moving forward, the forward arm is always at the same side of the body as the back leg, forward right hand with right leg at the back, and vice versa. This alignment provides better structural integrity of supporting the fa jin than that of forward right hand with left leg at the back.

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Steve B writes:

Hello....I bought the intro and four forms tapes early last summer....and have found them most excellent for learning the forms and the internal discipline....I have been studying regularly and steadily....and I am up to second cloud hands in the lessons.....I really enjoyed all of the examples in the lessons I have studied.....however, I would like to learn more about the martial applications.....

My question:.... **Can Stephen Hwa put together a tape that explains in more detail and gives more examples of the actual applications?.....Or does Stephen have any**

**books that can help explain this better??.....or is there any tapes that you can recommend that show more of the martial arts applications to each of the forms?.....**

**Master Hwa replies:**

I do not know any books or tapes explaining the martial art application of each one of the forms. Perhaps someone among our Forum readers knows such a source. It is very helpful to have such knowledge even just to make sense of Tai Chi Form and facilitate its learning, as indicated in the previous discussions. I did incorporate in the video discussions about martial art applications of the movements from time to time. There is certainly more can be said about it. I will consider some supplemental material on this topic.

I do want to point out that you are not going to see emphasis on fancy and complex moves in the applications even though each Form may appear to be complex with many moves. This is because few applications involving a set of consecutively movements more than two moves. In other words, in a single Form, there are many different application moves, not necessarily relate to each other. Even in a single movement, there may be separate applications with different parts of the body. For example, in the “walking forward brush knee”, while one hand is “forward fa jin”, at the same time, the other hand is “brushing knee” which is a very useful ward-off defensive move. Both will be used independently or together depending on situation. Further more, in actual application, very often one could not execute a move to its completion. Frequently one has to change the move right after starting the move. After all, the opponent is presumably also a skilled practitioner, who will not just let you dictate the situation.

The above discussion points to the fact that, in actual application, it has to be formless. One has to be able to draw upon all the bits and pieces of fundamentals learned from practice Tai Chi Form, push hand, and sparring, and instinctively and seamlessly applying them to the situation. Also, the rapid shifting from one move to the other requires the training of compact form. Large movements with long strokes are not often practical in actual application.

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Tony L. writes:

**I always thought Qi Gong is related to breathing, since Chinese word Qi means “air”. In your discussion, you have talked about Qi as nerve signal or sensations. Could you clarify this?**

### **Master Hwa's reply:**

Before nineteenth century, Chinese did not have the habit of inventing new word whenever new things came along. So, they borrow old words for new uses. For example, Barbara mentioned about “teng jin”. That literally means listening (teng) to opponent's power or force (jin). In other words, sense what opponent trying to do so one could respond accordingly. All senses are needed to get the information: touch and feel, look, and anticipation based on experience with that person. Early masters avoided picking any of the words listed above. Because, if one use the word “feel”, then students will concentrated on touch and feel, and loose out on developing other senses. So they pick a neutral, completely abstract word “listening” as a name.

This term Qi(air, gas) Gong(discipline) has a very ancient history. There is not a good word to describe Qi. Since Qi is suppose to circulating in body meridians, and reach into arms and legs. The flow of “air” certainly is not possible to achieve that. So the selection of “Qi(air)” probably followed the same tradition of picking a neutral word. Proper breathing technique is certainly important to Qi Gong. But, it is a necessary condition not a sufficient condition. Just like in Tai Chi, “tuck the behind in” is a necessary condition but not a sufficient condition to be good in Tai Chi. Certain mental discipline must be present to develop Qi Gong whether it is a mental concentration on the sensation of breathing, or, such as in Tai Chi, concentration on the sensation of stretching and internal energy flow during Form practice (so called motion induced Qi Gong), or visualize (create) by mind certain imaginary circulation in the body (visualization Qi Gong), etc.

