

CLASSICAL TAI CHI FORUM 9 SUMMER 2004



Master Hwa's tai chi group

John C. writes:

In Forum 8, Master Hwa talks about proper body posture for fa jin, specifically the **body posture which leans forward to form a straight line** with the back feet. There are many example of this in the video. **I have some difficulty to consistently achieve this posture.** Mainly because **my previous teachers always insisted on maintain a body perpendicular to the ground not leaning at all times.** I could not get a good explanation why this had to be so. One teacher did mention something like “a better connection between heaven and earth”. The other teacher said it was “centering”; but he used “centering” to explain lot of things.

Master Hwa replies:

I have heard another explanation: In one of the early writing about Tai Chi, there is a sentence “the body has to be straight like a flag pole”. The Chinese word “straight” has two meaning, one is “straight”; the other is “perpendicular”. The latter is the argument used by some to justify that the body has to be perpendicular to the ground. I have not heard any functional justification for this body posture. The posture of body leaning forward and form a straight line with the back leg (see picture below at left) does require the practitioner to mindful of his center of gravity to make certain that it stays at or behind the ball of the front foot. If it reaches the front toe, its too far forward and easily tip forward by opponent’s pulling force. As such, some students are uncomfortable with this posture in the beginning until he or she can master the placement of center of gravity.

It is also important to “tuck in the behind” by tightening the stomach muscle. If a person has a very large girth or heavy upper body in contrast to lower body, than one can only achieve the right position of center of gravity with smaller step size.

In this forward position, if one tries to keep the body perpendicular to ground (see figure below at right), not only it weakens the delivery of forward fa jin, it is also not possible to avoid the pitfall of “double heavy (weight is supported by both front and back foot)” and lost mobility. But, most importantly, this posture loses the energy conduit from the heel of the back foot, up the leg, traveling along the back to the upper body.



forward fa jin

For example, with the figure at left, one will feel the stretch sensation all the way from the Achilles tendon to the neck during playing the form of Walking-forward-brush-knee, and during Cloud-hand when the back heel pulls the body backwards.

During sparring, forward fa jin on an opponent, the reaction force will travel through the upper body, the back and the leg, and be absorbed by the ground through the heel of the back foot. Such up-down energy flow is an integral part of the internal energy circulation and the resulting health benefits we try to develop by practicing Tai Chi.

When one is trying to maintain the perpendicular body posture in the forward position, the energy channel between the torso and the back leg is disrupted and it also creates an uncomfortable sensation in the back leg. This uncomfortable sensation will become more severe near the crotch and knee, if one turns the back foot outward, not in line with the direction of the body, as many of the practitioners do nowadays. It will eventually develop into hip joint and knee problems. If one does not fully “tuck in the behind” at this posture, one will likely develop an arched lower back and may develop lower back problems.

By the way, you need to remember the sentence “the body has to be straight like a flag pole”. Some of my students often bend their torso when they trying to use internal force. This has to be avoided, try to keep the torso straight.

Craig M. asks: **What is the martial art application of Cloud Hands?**

Master Hwa replies:

As the picture (below left) shows, while you control the opponent’s hand with your right hand, your left hand hooks to your opponent. Pulling your body back and turning at the same time with your left foot, you thus throw the opponent off balance (below right).

This application illustrates an important point in playing the form. Most of the times, when you draw your foot backwards, your intention is to pull your body back with that foot. So, your



cloud hand

attention should be on the heel of that foot. You should be imagining that your heel is going back to hook onto the ground and pull. Many students always hesitate by first placing the foot on the ground and then pulling with the heel. Instead of one move, this becomes two moves which break the continuity of the energy flow.

The above discussions are for the round form. For the square form, it is two moves, foot back and then pull.

Jay W. writes:

I started to learn the **square form**. It is quite interesting, also kind of difficult but very different from the round form though. I wonder if you **have any advice on learning this form**.

Master Hwa replies:

All of you have actually started to learn the square form in the Lesson 1 Tai Chi Walk. Perhaps the most demanding part of learning square form is to keep parts of your body still when it is not required to move. The pleasures of learning square form are knowing that you can move one part of the body and keep the other parts still. You feel you have gained control of that part of your body. When play the round form, the sensation of internal energy flow is a very pleasant feeling. In the square form, the end point of every move is usually where you can sense the most stretching of that part of the body. This stretch also gives a very pleasant feeling. Therefore, you need to be patient to allow enough stopping time at each end point, and enjoy the fruit of your effort before you start the next move. Also, you can utilize the stopping time to examine the posture of your body to see if it is correct.

Barbara R. writes:

In response to another **student's request for info on videos or books with martial applications for the postures**, I have a few suggestions. Leung Shum, who teaches Northern Eagle Claw Kung Fu and Wu Style Tai Chi in NYC, has two applications videos which I have found very helpful. These are Wu Tai Chi #3 and Wu Tai Chi #4, put out and marketed by ESPY-TV, who have an on-line website. These two videos give applications for about 35 different movements from the form and illustrate quite clearly the formal movement being used as well as showing its use from push hands and in a free sparring situation, starting from an opponent's attack rather than from a push hands position. While, as Master Hwa says, the use of the movements in a real fight has to be quite fluid and constantly adapted to circumstances, these examples may be enough to get your imagination working so that you will be able to think of applications of your own. One caveat with these tapes is that the form Leung Shum teaches is slightly different from the one we are learning from Master Hwa. (Leung Shum does a less compact version).

www.classicaltaichi.com

The WuStyle Taichi Chuan Federation also has an application video done by Eddie Wu (Wu Kwong Yu) and a sparring partner. As for books, two that give applications for the movements taught in them are *Wu Style Taichichuan--Forms, Concepts and Applications of the Original Style*, by Wu Yinghua and Ma Yuehliang, and *Wu Style Taijiquan*, by Wang Peisheng and Zeng Weiqi. Both of these are easily available in English from Wayfarer Publications (publishers of Tai Chi Magazine). I personally found the applications in both these books hard to follow, partly because it's just easier to understand the movement when you actually see it done--and with the Wu-Ma book, also because there are no real descriptions of applications, just several suggestions per move--the fluidity thing, again. The form in the Wang-Zeng book is a 30-some posture short form based on the style sometimes called "Northern Wu", but covers most major movements, while the form in Wu Yinghua and Ma Yueh-Liang's book is the Wujianquan long form as taught in Shanghai, so there may be minor differences in postures, as with Leung Shum's tapes. (He learned his form in Hong Kong, but through a different association.)

About the only Yang-style material I have with applications is Marshall Ho'o's Tai Chi Chuan video and accompanying book. These teach a 27-posture short form very similar to the well-known "24" and give applications for many of the included movements. Both book and video are Black Belt Magazine publications and were intended as an introduction to tai chi. They do not cover the entire long form, but are rather unusual in giving some applications and some push hands on the same tape with the short form--sort of giving you a taste of all of it at once. There are also some good video CD's (for use on computer) available from Plum Publications' website, some with applications, at the very reasonable price of \$7.95 each, but many, if not most, are entirely in Mandarin. There are also Chen and the other Wu style (Wu Yuxiang's, sometimes called Wu/Hao) tapes and CD's with applications, but I think most students would find Yang or Wu (as in Wu Chien Chuan) style movements closer to Classical tai chi and therefore easier to follow. (I find Wu closest.) Hope some of this is useful.

Looking at these tapes, I kept wondering demonstrator on a tape was only being marked. The instructor is, however, demonstrating with one of his students he's worked with closely for several years and whose physical condition and ability to fall or withstand a blow he is familiar with.

Master Hwa replies: Thanks for sharing this information.

www.classicaltaichi.com