

CLASSICAL TAI CHI FORUM

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Dear Students,

Summer has arrived (at least in the Northern Hemisphere!) I hope your practice is going well and that you continue your resolve to learn and benefit from the internal discipline of classical tai chi.

It is great to hear your comments and questions. Master Hwa hopes you will continue this ongoing exchange. It will enhance your practice and learning of classical tai chi as well as his instruction.

I notice that so many of us have similar experiences and questions and there is no doubt that when we study from a tape, we feel sometimes that we are alone with one or another problem we have with learning.

The following are some excerpts and questions from emails that have come to us in the past month.

Please continue to send your observations and questions to me at:

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E. Marie

Tom C. writes:

Healing practice in Tai Chi

As far as I can tell, of all the founders of the major styles of taijiquan practiced today, only Wu Jianquan had a reputation as a healer (as well as a fighter). **Can you tell us something about how healing practices came to be integrated into classical taijiquan**, describe what some of those healing practices are, and include discussion of healing practices in your future teaching?

In the course of reading about the history of taijiquan, I recall coming across a brief account of how Quan Yu (Wu Jianquan's father) was injured in a fight with "the palace eunuch" (which I assumed was a reference to Dong Haichuan). A "Mr. Li" undertook to heal Quan Yu through the use of Daoist healing techniques. Ever since then, healing practices have been integral to the complete practice of Wu style taijiquan.

MASTER HWA'S REPLY

The integration of healing practice into tai chi is a natural process because we develop internal energy or “chi” in the practice of classical tai chi. When the chi is well developed, the practitioner’s touch will elicit certain responses from the person being “lightly touched” (recipient). The response is more pronounced when the recipient has injuries or things like nervous system disorder. In some instances, relief of the problem occurs. But, this is really the effect of “raw” power of chi. In order to fully utilize this power; one has to learn the fine art of healing. I, myself, have not gone through the training on healing technique. I certainly will, in the future, gather more information about it and report them.

I suspect the ability of healing was fairly common among early Tai Chi masters. The use of chi gong for healing, after all has a long history in China. At those early times, this was a necessity; otherwise the students would be crippled by the injuries received during sparring and fighting. Certainly with the power of chi, the ability of healing goes well beyond just contact sports injury.

I could talk little bit more about the effect of “light touch” on a recipient. The recipient will usually feel tingling of the hands and heat at the area of touch. The heat becomes more intense, may even turn into pain, if that area has injury or other problems. In some instance, relief of the problem may result. The interesting thing is that the effect is more pronounced if the hand is not in firm contact with recipient’s skin, preferably with a small air gap between the hand and the skin or having a sheet of cloth in between.

The classical Tai Chi is very rational and logical in its entire learning process until reaches the advanced stage involving “chi”. Then, our knowledge and understanding just cannot fully explain it.

Tom C. further writes:

And the key element--for me--is the "Internal Discipline" which Dr. Hwa presents so clearly. In my experience trying out different taijiquan styles and teachers, this information and guidance on "internal discipline" is very rare. If you study Wu style with him, you're very fortunate.

I had no idea that a direct student of Wu Jianquan's was living and teaching here in the U.S. I first read about Young Wabu in an article that appeared a few months ago in "Qi" magazine, describing the 1954 charity challenge match between Wu Gong Yi and the White Crane martial artist Chen. Then I corresponded with Bob Loce there in Rochester, who shared his experience learning Wu style with Young Sifu, and mentioned that he thought Mr. Young still occasionally led classes--at the age of

96! Fantastic. I wish Mr. Young and Dr. Hwa the best, and am thankful to them for bringing another strand of authentic taijiquan to the U.S.

With respect to the article on the 1954 fight between Wu Gong Yi and Chan Hak Fu, it was in the Autumn 2002 issue of the Qi Journal (Vol. 12, No. 3), which can be found at

<http://www.qi-journal.com/journalcatalog.asp?ref=backissue&skip=40>

Back issues are \$5. **It was a very good article, providing a lot of the context for the fight in terms of the popular culture of the time, and also referring to the viewpoints of multiple people close to the fighters and the organizers as to what happened and what its significance was. For me, it seemed to be a fairly balanced account (very refreshing in an article on martial arts history).**

MASTER HWA'S RESPONSE:

I agree fully on your comments about this article.

Paul writes:

I have been working with the tapes for some weeks now and feel as if I have at last begun to practice real Tai Chi.

I have practiced Tai Chi for some years now with some access to class instruction. However I realize now that my practice was almost wholly external and not Tai Chi as described in the Classical commentaries. The practices on the tapes accord wholly with the direction I felt instinctively drawn to.

My question for Master Hwa is whether the Internal Discipline has a relationship with what I have read regarding Chan Su Chin? I would appreciate some information around this topic as I am working on integrating the Internal Discipline into my practice and would like a full understanding as far as possible at this time of where it leads.

MASTER HWA'S RESPONSE

Chan Ssu Chin or "silk reeling exercise" is used to help developing Internal Discipline. In forum 2, we talked about practice a single internal move repeatedly in order to get the feel of it. Here in Chan Ssu Chin, we have a group of movements, usually consists of just

a few spiraling and circular moves practiced repeatedly and continuously, so that one will develop the feel of Internal Discipline of these movements.

Many of those Chan Ssu Chin instructions do not teach how to use Internal Discipline in the movements. Hopefully, if one practices the movements long enough, by self-realization, one will eventually reach the optimum way to make these movements, i.e. the internal way.

Many of the movements in the Tai Chi Form can be converted to Chan Ssu Chin. You can convert the Cloud Hand, lesson # 8, into a Chan Ssu Chin. Begin at the starting point of Cloud Hand with the body at southwest direction; left hand under the right hand, both at face position; both feet's toe are even with an imaginary east-west line, in other words the left foot is now more forward than the normal cloud hand form. Pull the left side of the body with the left heel to southeast, followed by the right side of the body turning on the right heel. Pull the right side of the body with the right heel back to southwest and followed by left side of the body. This completes the cycle. And you can repeat the cycle continuously. All the movements still follow the "hand follow the feet, elbow follow the knee" rule and that the hand movements still follow the instruction of that lesson. But, the movements are left-right symmetrical (the actual cloud hand is not) and your feet are turning at the same spot without lateral movement.

In this way you can take time to improve your movements according to the lesson instruction and feel the stretch and energy flow up your leg, through the back, and finally to the hand. A word of warning, do not over do it in the beginning, you will have sour back muscle next day. The movements are surprisingly demanding, your body is not used to too many repetition that way.

Tony S. writes:

I am fascinated by the many aspects in the Tai Chi walk, Lesson 1. They make a lot of sense to me. It is difficult to remember all the different aspects when I try to do that walk though. Takes lots of practice. I remember my earlier lessons of tai chi from several different teachers. **They all want me to use curved steps. Lift one foot, bring it closer to the other foot and then step out in an S shape. I never find a good reason why.I wonder how can I use the tai chi walk in every day walk?**

MASTER HWA'S RESPONSE:

Interestingly, we are just talking about the curved step in our classes because several students coming from a karate background also use such steps. Certainly one of the reasons why such a step is needed is if one's stride is too wide (in contrast to stride too long). Then, one has to bring the lifted foot inward in order to be able to balanced on the other foot and then take a step forward and outward. This is the inefficiency of a wide stance. You want to keep the outer edges of your feet within your shoulder width.

Yes, the Tai Chi Walk, which is really the square form, has many elements; some of which are exercises, tuning and strengthening the lower body, and some teach how to maintain the proper posture of the body, in addition to train you how to walk. Some of these elements are not as prominent, actually hidden, in the round form of Tai Chi.

In everyday walk, you can stretch you forward moving leg out from the waist but keep your body weight on the back foot until the forward foot pull your body forward. In this way, you already achieve the desired effects of extending the walking movement upward into the torso of your body and avoid the undesirable impact force on your body accompanying every step when your forward foot carries your body weight slams to the ground. In the beginning you will feel some awkwardness in walking this way. Once you get used to it, you will like the feel of this. I take long walks everyday in this fashion; it's addictive.