

Classical Tai Chi Forum
Volume 5
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Dear Fellow Students,

Due to the summer holidays and the inappropriately timed blackout across the eastern US, we are somewhat later with our edition of the Forum than we had hoped. (We hope none of you were adversely affected by the blackout!)

As usual, the response to the Forum has been invaluable. JR has written a relatively long piece about his experience with “chi” healing, and others have written their questions and comments relating to the practice of classical tai chi. This is just how we envisioned the Forum to work; a place to share questions, ideas and experiences relating to Classical Tai Chi and a way to talk directly to Master Hwa about your practice.

We look forward to your continued response. Please mail your Forum correspondence to me at:
pareal0@yahoo.com

E. Marie.

Willie M. writes:

I have a difficult time maintaining balance during stepping and trying to hold postures like golden rooster. **Could you suggest a drill to improve balance and focus.** thanks

Master Hwa's reply:

Lesson #1 Tai Chi Walk is the best drill to improve balance and focus. Take for example the movement of lifting one leg from the ground; since this action alters the center of gravity of your body, you must make an adjustment in order to maintain your balance while standing on the weight bearing leg. Here the adjustment of the pelvis is what maintains the balance. Therefore, the movement of the pelvis serves two purpose one is transmitting the power from the waist to lift the leg; the other is the subtle shift to maintain your balance. **That is why the purposeful motion of lifting the leg using your pelvis is so important during your practice of walking forward and backwards in the tai chi lessons.**

Before practicing the tai chi walk, you most likely just step forward or backward without the purposeful lift. In this case you will not improve your ability of balancing because you just catch your unbalanced body before you fall down by your moving foot.

In the beginning, this kind of drills is as much to tune your nervous system as improving your physical prowess, such as the flexibility of the pelvis. Later on, the improvements are entirely on the nervous system. After several years of practice, a demanding test of your reflex ability to maintain balance will be to practice the tai chi form in total darkness or with closed eye (practice tai chi frequently with closed eye is strongly discouraged for obvious reason from martial art point of view. Trying that occasionally as a test is all right.).

Barry F. writes:

I was wondering **how much time it should take to play the complete square form. Also how much time should it take to play the complete round form?**

Thank you.

Master Hwa's reply:

The square form: Each movement in the square form always starts and ends with a complete stop. The movement itself is rather resolute and brisk. The playtime of the entire form therefore consists of stopping time and movement time, both times are comparable.

In Instruction Video, Lesson 15, the playtime I used is 14-15 min. It is better for a beginner to go a little slower, 16-20 min., to make certain that the student does not skip over the “stop” between the movements and to provide some thinking time. Speed of play in the square form is primarily for the consideration of learning and practice unlike that of the round form where more complex considerations must be taken into account.

The round form: In the video, the round form is played in the speed range from 8-12 min. This is a good speed range for daily practice of the form for all skill levels. But, for advanced practitioner, one should also experience playing the form at slower and faster speeds.

Slower speeds: When the playing speed slows, the level of internal force of the movement does not change. In other words, if you stop your internal movement in the midway, you will find that the internal force remains energized (it is almost like an isometric exercise). So playing at slow speed gives you more time to sense and experiment the details of the internal move.

What is changing with slower speed is the slower circulation of the internal energy in the body. Eventually, one will have a diminished sense of circulating energy or energy flow becoming intermittent. That means the playing speed is too slow, which will probably happen when it is close to 20 min.

Faster speeds: How fast one can play the form is limited by the internal energy possessed by the practitioner. Losing firm control of the movement, skipping details of the internal movement, building up tension and not being able to maintain the yin-yang balance are some of the signs that the playing speed is beyond the capability of the practitioner. When the speeds reaches 4 min., Compact Form will be the natural choice. It is an exhilarating experience to play the form in the 2-3 min. range while

maintaining the relax-energizing balance (ying-yang balance) in the body just as playing at the normal speed, and enjoying the rapid circulation of the internal energy. To achieve poise and relaxing at this speed is an important preparation for martial art application.

One does not learn to play this fast by practicing fast. The foundation is built at the regular speed where every detail is honed to perfection and that the internal energy is developed to a high degree.

William C. wrote:

I have been practicing through the second cloud hand. I get to practice the form a few times a day and try to integrate the principles into everyday life. **I notice a feeling of my body being an empty space inside at times, most notably after I am done with the form.** Sometimes it is a feeling of being empty and solid at the same time or empty, integrated and strong.

Master Hwa's reply:

When you could play the form instinctively without thinking, even though you still may not have much internal energy circulating in the body, you are already entering a meditative state. You will feel the "nothingness" after the practice. I remember when I was at that stage, I often felt so sleepy after practice. Sometime, sleepiness set in midway through practice, I started to stagger. When I told my teacher Young Wabu about this, he said that this was a normal response, just lie down rest a while. My students here in the class also report such happenings. Later on, when I could play the form with circulating internal energy, the sleepiness was gone. Still, practicing the form is both relaxing and energizing depending on the situation. I often practice the form in the middle of the night, very relaxing.

Barbara writes:

When I was watching a video of the 1995 International Wu Style Federation Convention and heard a speaker refer to “**lao jia**” and “**xin jia**” From the translation, it appeared these referred to the long form as taught by Wu Chien Chuan and as taught by his son, Wu Gong Yi. **The speaker said he had studied with both and set out to describe the differences,** which seemed to be mainly differences in depth of stance—he kept using Drop Stance (Downward Posture, Snake Creeps Down) with a deep drop as an illustration of “lao jia,” As a student of a student of Wu Chien Chuan and a student of a student of Wu Gong Yi, Master Hwa seems to be in about as good a position as the speaker (whose name I didn’t catch) to comment on this. the difference in “lao” and “xin” as I understood it is mainly a difference in how much external exercise you want to get along with the internal or whether you’re looking for a practical fighting form or a showier one..... **Pictures of Wu Chien Chuan doing Tai Chi suggest that he did do Drop Stance with a fairly deep drop, at least for the camera—but did he do it that way even in his last years? Would he have done it that way in free sparring?**

Master Hwa’s response:

I listened to that “speaker” and just cannot believe he said that. Just because he was taught “large frame” by Wu Chien Chuan when he was teenager, he thought that was all Wu knew! If he thought that when he was teenager, its excusable. But now at his old age, with all the published discussion about Wu’s prowess at Compact Form, he still thinks that way. He is truly clueless. Unfortunately, it is this kind of person, who saw a master play one style immediately assume that was that master’s style, or that family’s style, who has muddied the water about the history of tai chi. Prime examples are: Yang Ban-Hou had other teachers beside his father Yang Lu-Chan and therefore his style is different from his father. “Large frame” or “large circle” is the hallmark of Yang style, ignoring the fact that several Yangs are known for their zeal for compact form such as Yang Shao-hou, brother of Yang Cheng-Fu. This reminds me of a Chinese saying “sitting in the bottom of a well trying to figure out how big is the sky”.

You are right what they did for the camera was not representative of their style. During that era, printed picture in the book have very poor quality (I have several of such books), difficult to see any details. If a pose was in the compact form, it probably showed very little what was going on. Master Wu's pictures are all in very large frame style. An interesting story as told by one of Wu Chien Chuan's student was that he asked Wu why one of his tai chi photo had wrong posture. Wu said that the photographer told him to do this way. The story just show that these masters really did not give a hoot about their photographs.

My teacher Young Wabu describing how Master Wu, during sparring, could stick to the opponent keeping opponent constantly out of balance. This is the epitome of tai chi martial art. It is formless; an abstract of all the training he had gone through---leg power from "large circle", internal power from "small circle", movements from form practice, sense and touch developed during push hand and sparring exercise, etc.

J. R. writes:

I read the forum for June with interest, especially the statements about the Wu family healing ability and that intrinsic to Tai Chi once there is sufficient Chi development. In 1985 I injured myself severely..... I sustained one bruise that was the length of my entire thigh. I was attending Wu's Tai Chi Academy... ..I went to practice but Sifu Eddie Wu noticed my limping and asked what happened. When I told him he called me in the office and I bared my leg. He rubbed his hands together for what seemed 5 minutes and then just hovered the hands over the bruised area, moving very slowly over the area, not touching it. During this time, he had his eyes closed and was breathing deeply and regularly from the Tan Tien. After about 15 minutes it was done.

Whereas, I felt considerable heat during the treatment and the leg felt good. My leg actually felt more aches after and I thought oh wow, this did not work. Incredibly, I noticed that my range of motion had increased at least 50% and the more I moved the better the leg felt. For that I will always be grateful. On numerous occasions Sifu taught the 1st batch of us disciples the small circulation with reverse breathing. After a year or two of that

training, Sifu began gradually teaching us to do the "external qi gong healing" and we got to practice on each other. Some people reported feeling nothing. As for myself I felt fortunate that my injury provided a point of reference that I used in my practice..... By the way, Yoga Journal published a huge article about the Wu Family healing ability around that time.

In watching the Bill Moyers series Healing and the Mind which was done in 1995 one can see examples of the external Qi Gong which is done in Traditional Chinese Medicine. A lot of people dismiss this out of hand because it looks like chicanery to us from the "other" culture. I can personally vouch for the efficacy of it. As for being able to "do" it, all I can say is that one must keep up one's practice of the small circle breathing as a prerequisite. The power of the mind is paramount in these practices and the use of the imagination must precede the practice. If one has no imagination aka belief then the practice is unlikely to work. Since my injury preceeded my practice, it was not a great stretch of imagination on my part to begin to learn the healing techniques. I've never told anyone of these incidents and I hope the story if of some use. If you wish to forward this to the forum where it can be used by anyone please do so.

Master Hwa replies:

Really appreciate your sharing your experience with us. I hope others will be encouraged to send along their experiences as well.