



Kai Ming Association Newsletter

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This month's newsletter will focus on finding flow and connection. It is easy-ish to practice forms and get the shape and even the aesthetic look OK but that does not mean you have flow and connection. Yang Cheng Fu has been quoted as saying "not all tai chi is the real tai chi, the real tai chi has a different flavour" and even Prof. Cheng said "form without function is no form at all".

These statements could point to fighting but as tai chi is an art of finding balance in the flow from Yin to Yang, then maybe it would be better to see it as an art of not fighting yourself.

A good friend and student, Tony Rose, is also an Aikido instructor made me really think one day when he said that Tai Chi can be more violent than Aikido; in fact Aikido is often translated as "The Way of Harmony of the Spirit". This harmony or spirit, or moving into balance, is really at the heart of tai chi philosophy too but it can get a little lost in its attempt to show itself as a serious martial art. Tony's comment was not a dig, just an observation, and I really appreciated him saying it has it opened another door in my training and exploration of this wondrous art of tai chi chuan.

The articles following this introduction have within a message of flow and relaxation even though there is a discussion on straight-sword (jen). Being agile, light and connected both internally and externally comes from sensitive connection (ting Jing).

Smooth, Soft, Relaxed – it has to come from inside

One of the students at a class said to me after I demonstrated the Form – "that looked so smooth, why doesn't mine look like that".

Coming home that night, it struck me that it may have looked smooth to her, but it did not **feel** smooth to me. So after 10 years of Tai Chi'ing and people saying be relaxed/soft/etc. here was a different angle for me to focus on and refine.

I pondered over this for a few days and then realized the feeling, the smoothness, the relaxation, (whatever you like to call it) has to come from "inside". You cannot be externally soft until you are internally soft.

I then pondered on what "internally soft" meant, and how to get it.

In the meantime when doing my Qigong or Form exercises I tried to feel where were the internal hard angles, hard points, sudden movements, stuck bits. This over time has helped me to focus on those areas and to try to soften them; to work on why they felt hard. This often led me to doing the move but doing less – even more less. And to feel more the balance, posture, transition – and not just "do the move". It helped me focus on the bad habits I had developed.

My thoughts brought me to realize that mental softness is what makes internal softness, which in turn allows external softness.

The mind and thoughts affect everything – and have to be balanced, relaxed and aware – leading to softness. The sharp (or rather the not so smooth) edges of your mental feelings have to be managed, worked on, focused on, and "let go" so you can be more and more soft inside and then externally. We all know it is very hard to always do this in daily life. However, as we know, Tai Chi is not just

applied in the class or when Tai Chi'ing, it extends in all ways to your daily life. How you move, how you feel, how you touch, how you interact.

So hopefully slowly, slowly, more of that mental (internal) smoothness, softness, relaxedness can and will become more and more a part of everything you do and feel. Hopefully that will extend out to all those you meet and with whom you interact – leading to a better life for you and for them.



Thought on the Practice of the Straight Sword (Jen)

By Yin Qaihe (1958)

The sword art accords with natural principles. In movement and posture, perform with your hand what is in your mind, and with limitless adaptability. The sword techniques generally divide into sixteen: stabbing, chopping, cleaving, raising, carrying, filing, wiping, flinging, blocking, hanging, thrusting, twining, flicking, paring, propping, and clouding. The hands, eyes, body, techniques, and steps work together, through all the twisting and turning, advancing and retreating, with intent-directed power. After practicing it over a long period, the sword art will naturally be understood. In the ordinary practice of sword arts, the movements are usually fast. Dive like a fish and fly like a bird. Move as fast as the chasing wind, sudden as a lightning bolt. Your eyes should be quick, your sword should be quick, and your steps should be quick.

The sixteen techniques form the basis for using the sword, and they usually use hardness to win. But practicing Taiji (Tai Chi) Sword is slightly different. Every movement has the taiji concept, in both idea and shape, the sword tip typically

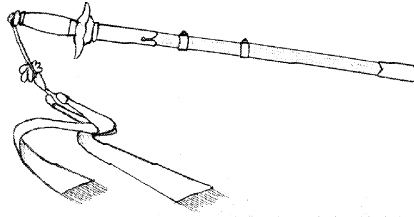
drawing taiji-circle patterns. It is no different from Taiji Boxing, abiding by the taiji theory of movement and stillness, and its subtleties of emptiness and fullness. You should concentrate your spirit and stabilize your energy. Your hands and feet should coordinate with each other. Your intention goes forth and the sword follows. Your mind should be at ease and your hand should be steady.

Let hardness soften. Let fullness empty. Your upper body and lower should correspond to each other. Advancing and retreating should be orderly. To take advantage of gaps and seize the chance skilfully, observe how the opponent adapts. If he wants to rise up, he must first press down, so watch for that cue. If you only have hardness and are without softness, the techniques will not be lively and the postures will not be nimble. Taiji Sword therefore uses stillness to overcome movement, softness to defeat hardness. In Taiji Boxing, there are the principles of sticking, connecting, adhering, and following, and in Taiji Sword, these are also very important.

Practice based on the sixteen sword techniques and in accordance with the passive and active aspects of yin-yang. Slowness and quickness should complement each other, advancing and retreating should be appropriate. Use both precision and nimbleness. The movements should be continuous, unbroken, flow. The countless transformations of the sword should never depart from these principles. When these principles are merged with your practice, then the truth of the Taiji sword art will emerge.

I chose to share this with you because Tai chi straight-sword (Jen) was the favoured weapon of Professor Cheng Man Ching and holds the flavour of his approach to tai chi as a whole art. The love of swordplay seems to have flowed down as I fell in love with it, first when learning from Nigel Sutton then later with Tan Ching Ngee. Sword sparring is an excellent method for developing sensitivity and agility which can only add to skilful application. The 13-posture form developed by Tan Ching Ngee holds

the key elements and is a great foundation from which to build a love of the weapon. I plan to bring weapons awareness training to our monthly advanced training sessions through 2016 so I am looking forward to sharing this experience.



The Longquan Sword (Dragon Well Forge)

Nestled deep in the mountains of southwest Zhejiang China is Longquan City and the Dragon Well Forge. It is remote, off the beaten track, and presents many challenges to the dedicated travellers who make their way there during their trip to China.

So what is the attraction?

Longquan in China is a city of crafts persons. Three main ones date back hundreds/thousands years.

These are Ceramics (especially Longquan Celadon Plates which have a distinctive translucent crackled green glaze)

Stone-cutters producing stone lions, tomb markers etc.

And finally, the art that Longquan is most famous for in martial art circles SWORDS.

Longquan boasts over 200 sword forges and produces some of the finest weapons in China.

There are small family operated forges up to full scale factories.

The history of sword masterworks goes back into antiquity.

There are stories documented of the legendary swordsmith Ou Yezi and his skill.

The making of these swords was interrupted for a while because of modern events in Chinese history, but today produces many blades of masterful functionality and beauty.

Longquan spring steel swords are considered to be of the highest quality for performance, whilst the combat steel swords tend towards strength and considerable sharpness.

It is said that you need to shop around if you visit this city to purchase one, because as would be expected there are lots of stores selling them.

The ability to speak a little Mandarin is also helpful because it is said the finest blades are kept in a back room under lock and key awaiting someone worthy of them who will appreciate their worth (and who know doubt will have to have a few Yen on them!)

There is a trend at times to produce historical replicas. Many swords are designed to replicate the pattern of Qin and Hin dynasty blades.

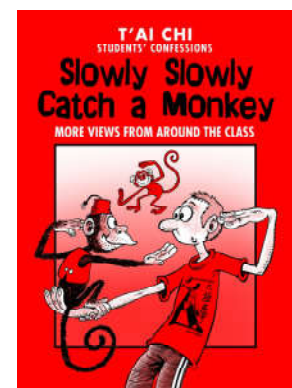
Movie replicas are also popular in Longquan.

In particular the sword used by Jet Li in HERO and the sword used to kill the king in THE PROMISE are being used as the pattern for rather beautiful replicas.

The shopper can at least be assured that although they need to be a little prudent, look around, and haggle over price, some of the swords sold in Longquan are literally not available anywhere else, and if they are then the price would be significantly increased

Longquan forges boast a long list of famous customers, from stars of Wushu and martial arts cinema such as Jet Li to famous politicians including Chairman Mao and Richard Nixon!

This article as an extract from our 3rd tai chi book "**Slowly Slowly Catch the Monkey**". It is available from your instructor or online at Amazon etc.



Resist Not

Have you ever noticed that resistance leads to persistence? And behind all resistance is self-created fear. The only way to relax and stay relaxed is acceptance. You do not have to agree, or follow, or condone, but acceptance means you begin any interaction with a serenity, which invites others to engage with you. And out of engagement comes the satisfaction of creative expression and an enriching relationship. That's relaxation in action!

What stage are you at right now?

- Maybe you have heard of the four stages of learning, or maybe not but here goes
1. Unconsciously incompetent (you don't know you can't do it)
 2. Consciously incompetent (you know you can't do it)
 3. Consciously competent (you know you can do it)
 4. Unconsciously competent (you just do it)

Well tai chi also has stages of application, each of which going through the above four.

1. Brute force and ignorance - where you are stiff and tense and MAKE it work
2. A spark of belief - where you start to trust a little but still resist in the end
3. A willingness to 'invest in loss' and hope for an outcome that is enough to keep you on track
4. Amazement when things actually seem to work, most of the time
5. Belief in the magic and wonder as it all really begins to fall in place.

Now we all go through these stages and in the end, it is trust in tai chi plus the honesty and openness of your instructor that helps you keep moving forwards. Everything in the art you have ever seen (real that is not BS) can be achieved by everyone with hard work; just think back to when you came to your first class and how daunting it all seemed. Still the gentle effectiveness of the art amazes me and keeps my interest alive. The subtle changes and feelings as we progress naturally through the levels, slipping back occasionally, make this a real journey. My teacher, Willie Lim, likened

it to a plateau that becomes ever more clearly in view as we climb the path. The traditional Chinese term is 'to eat bitter' which translates as the willingness to practice when it seems pointless, to keep working even when you believe you are making no progress, to believe in the eventual benefits even when it goes against your old beliefs. Luckily, the journey is not a bitter or tasteless one with the support of a good teacher, and classmates, and to catch sight now and then of the wonder of tai chi keeps our interest alive.

My aim is not to put you off or even to sound like a cult but just to convey the commitment; you have already been making, and the frustrations we all feel from time to time. Remember there is no magic but the arts itself and we can all achieve it, enjoying each stage of learning.

Kai Ming means open minded and it is our intention to offer an open minded approach, encouraging questioning, to enable us all to learn. Living in each moment and acting mindfully in our practice ensure we can all see tai chi for what it is and all enjoy the experience. Maybe you want to learn to defend yourself, improve your health & well-being, relax or even eventually teach tai chi as you have gained so much yourself. What you will realise is that as you naturally work through the stages all is possible; whenever we fail it is because we want to jump ahead and have not patience. Patience is the key - rushing at it will not get you there any faster and will only frustrate. Relax, enjoy and before you know it you will have moved forwards. Maybe you have been stuck in traffic, rushing to get somewhere and realising you're getting nowhere fast; maybe you've even noticed others rushing in the traffic and come to the realisation that rushing at it doesn't get you there faster, it only gets you there more stressed...

Know there are natural stages, know you [like me] are only human, and know that your teacher is being honest when they say you will get it in the end.... Sit back

and relax. Tai Chi means supreme ultimate, it does not mean mediocre or make do, so surely it is worth the extra effort.



A WARNING....

There is a bug that's rarely seen
That gives a serious bite.
It's got two heads, two tails, and two
eyes
And it's half black and white.

There is no cure for the bite it gives.
The symptoms are a curse.
The more you learn about it
The symptoms just get worse.

You can try to fight it
With a fan, a sword or a stick
But if you find you're travelling east
You really know you're sick!

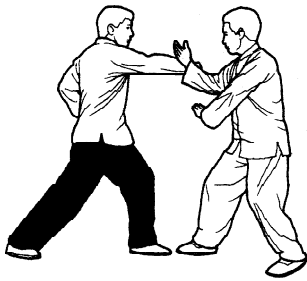
Tigers and Swimming Dragons,
They'll haunt you through the night.
And Bears and Monkeys need all your
wits
To ward off, left and right.

You'll find that you'll be standing
In a very funny form,
But the experts say 'Don't worry
This symptom is the norm.'

You'll hear 'plinky plonky' music
In your head so loud.
And your hands will suddenly float up
and down
Just like a fluffy cloud.

So heed this warning that I give
Though it comes too late for me.
For I have been bitten very hard by this
Bug they call TAI CHI

The Song of Push hands



The Song of Push Hands (Da Shou Ge) is a Tai Chi Chuan (Taijiquan) classic written in the form of a traditional style poem.

Describing basic push hands principles and skills, it is among the earliest writings on Taiji Quan and respected by all practitioners. There are just four lines but a lifetimes practice to apply.

棚攏擠按須認真，
上下相隨人難進。
任他巨力來打我，
牽動四兩撥千斤。
引進落空合即出，
粘黏連隨不丟頂。

Peng (Ward off), lu (rollback), ji (push), and an (press) should be practiced seriously. Follow your opponent whichever direction he is heading, making it difficult for him to find an opening for attack.

Let him bring overwhelming force against me, I will lure him to make the first move and then use only four ounces force to move a thousand pounds.

Lure him in to fall into emptiness, then integrate and release your whole-body power (he) to throw him down.

Use zhan (sticking up), nian (adhering to), lian (linking to), and sui (following), and never diu (lose connection) or ding (resist directly against a force or too much).

These four lines can be interpreted as violent but “throw him down” can be interpreted as remove him from his aggressive intention but I’ll leave that to you to consider.

BEYOND TECHNIQUE

Until recently I saw it as being important to be at the front of the class during the Tai Chi sessions. Being near to the instructor, Mark Peters, enabled me to see more of the “detail” involved in his movements, and this in turn, helped me to imitate Mark’s movements more accurately.

The last two years I have attended Mark Peters Kai Ming Cheng Man-Ching Legacy Weekend”. Similarly, as in the other Tai Chi sessions I attend during the weekends I positioned myself as close to Mark as I could when he was teaching , I zoomed into him with intense focus and concentrated effort. I was hoping I could pin-point the specifics involved in Mark’s application of technique.

Now though, my continued study of Tai Chi has led me to adopt a different approach to learning. Rather than always zooming in and looking to identify a main part/s involved in a particular technique or movement and then trying to merely imitate the instructors movement (to blindly follow), now I try to absorb the essence BEHIND the movement and attempt to arrive at a genuine understanding of the principles and concepts.

Sometimes, when I was so intensely focused on looking for a specific key point, I now know I missed the true lesson (value) that was to be learnt from the overall feeling and meaning. (Thanks to Bob Hawkesford) for helping me with that realisation).

Understanding the principles, concepts, functional purpose and self defence applications are more important than just imitating or blindly following the instructors movements.

Also, if an instructor gives me a technique, then that is what I have, a technique, but if I am given the concept behind that technique, then I have so much more than just a technique, it opens the door to a whole new area I can explore.

I have received several Tai Chi concepts from Mark which have directed me towards further analysis, leading to discovery and a greater awareness, aiding my Ta Chi research and personal development.

Tai Chi definitely an enjoyable, constant learning process.
By Pete Jagger

Recipe Corner

QUICK GNOCCHI HOTPOT

500g Good quality bought fresh tomato sauce (flavoured with basil if wished)
800g Good quality bought potato gnocchi
6 slices parma ham (or other air-dried ham)
and a small pot of pesto for dolloping!

Peel and chop a medium red onion.
Heat a tablespoon of Olive Oil in a large-lidded, shallow casserole or wide heatproof dish, add the onion and fry for 6-7 minutes or until just coloured and translucent.

Stir in the tomato sauce, bring to a simmer, cover and cook for 5 minutes.

At the same time cook the Gnocchi in salted boiling water according to packet instructions until they rise to the surface, then drain and stir into the tomato base. Heat the grill,

To finish, arrange the ham in piles on top of the Gnocchi without touching each other, then dot with pesto (using 1-2 tbsps in total or to taste). Pop under the grill for 4-5 minutes until the ham is crisp and lightly browned. Serve straightaway.

Fried diced Aubergine may be added also if wished.



PLEASE NOTE:
Please send your Newsletter contributions for future issues to markpeters@kaiming.co.uk

Advanced classes / instructor training

Venue: Weoley Hill Village Hall, Weoley Hill, Bournville.

Sunday: 9.30-12.30 advanced classes (£30), 1-3pm trainee classes (£10)

Dates for 1st half of 2019

April 14th
May 19th
June 30th
August 3rd & 4th - Tai Chi weekend