



# Kai Ming Association Newsletter

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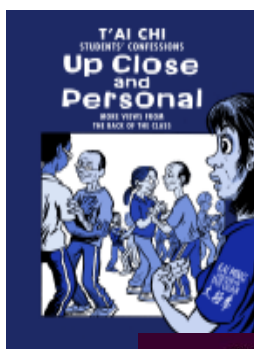
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Chinese New Year starts on 8th February and this year it is the year of the red monkey. The Year of the Monkey 2016 is a good year to break free and take calculated risks as there is nothing more powerful or rewarding than following your heart's desire. The energies are supporting these changes.

The most common Chinese ways of saying Happy New Year are Gong Xi Fa Cai (Mandarin) and Gong Hey Fat Choy (Cantonese).

This year looks to be an exciting one for us. We have published two tai chi books that are now selling internationally and the 3rd is 50% written so will be out later this year. You can order your copies from your tai chi instructor or via Amazon. Search for **Tai Chi: Students Confessions**.



## Tai Chi Boxing

Taijiquan (tai chi chuan) literally translates as 'supreme ultimate boxing' but boxing, in this context, is actually a general term used for martial arts. At a recent monthly training session I thought "why shouldn't it be boxing? What would it be like with gloves?" I'm not the first person to play with the idea, William CC Chen (One of Cheng Man Ching's most senior students) is famed for it, but I wanted to look at it from a different perspective; I wanted to explore the idea of 'pung-jing' (ward-off energy).

Some time ago, at a class, I mentioned **tai chi works by accelerating or decelerating your opponent**. What I mean by this is uproot and push is acceleration whereas as interrupting somebody balance as they move towards you is deceleration; literally bumping into you and stopping. The 20ozs boxing gloves I chose to use gave a method of testing this idea in a fun way.

We started by looking at how many times, throughout the transitional stages of a form posture, the opportunities for striking presented themselves; an example would be as you turn to start 'ward-off left' there is a potential strike to the head with the right-hand and a strike to the ribs with the left hand. Once you add 20ozs gloves the fun begins...

Often many of us are fearful of hitting and being hit, but what if you do not hit by using your own muscular effort and intention; what if you play with the structure of 'pung' so people literally bump into you, even bounce off you?

The 20ozs boxing gloves were the largest size I could find and looked more like clown gloves than boxing gloves. Working with a partner whose initial role was to step in and touch, to represent a grab or strike, gave sufficient energy to enable both parties to get a feel for the energy of pung via the gloves; the defender would practice the form

movement and intercept with gloved hands – not strike but position so the attacker couldn't help but run into the glove or gloves.

This game is actually a calibration exercise giving feedback on balance, position, pung-energy etc.

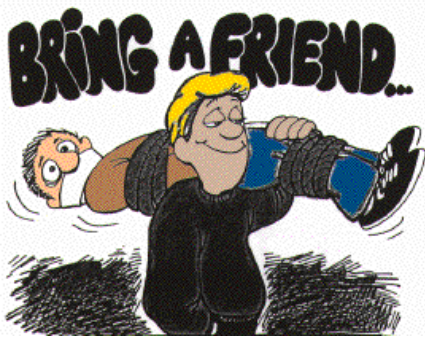


Once fear switched to fun we upped the game and practiced more dynamically (moving rather than stationary) and chose other postures such as roll-back and single-whip. 'Lu' has been translated as roll-back but back doesn't have to mean backwards, how about back as in return?

Building on my early comment of acceleration and deceleration, playing dynamically gives the chance to apply uprooting /throwing as well as stopping/ striking. It was fascinating to see the paradigm shift in attitude and application achieved by game play. Students that wanted the martial aspects, but struggled to take that step, now felt more comfortable stepping in without tensing up.

Overall the workshop was really well received and I can see we'll need to get some more gloves very soon.





### SPECIAL BRING A FRIEND MONTH

As more and more people come to enjoy Tai Chi and Chi-kung we thought it was a shame some friends miss out because they're fearful of just having a go. As an incentive we thought it would be a nice gesture to offer 'BRING A FRIEND MONTH' where we can offer them a **FREE** class to get a feel for it.

It hopefully will be a good experience for you both and if they decide to continue the club will be doing its bit for the environment, because you can share a car for the journey to your weekly class! It's up to you to explain to them the only thing they have to lose is their stress and anxiety for an hour, and at the very least they will enjoy an hour in the company of friendly like minded people.

It's up to you to get them there....

You could tell them you are taking them out to the theatre and a meal, or maybe you have tickets for the TV LIVE SHOW "Dancing on Ice"

Just think how pleased they will be when they get to your Tai Chi class and you surprise them with the truth!!!!....

KAI MING accepts no responsibility for any incidents that may arise from this disclosure!



### Thought on the practice of tai chi 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, both in 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 on the basis of 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 sword play 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.



Take risks...  
If you win you  
will be happy  
If you lose you  
will be wise



## **Mindfulness: what is it, why do we need it, how do I get it?**

**Mindfulness** - what is it? Mindfulness is a form of meditation that is done in everyday life. It is a calm mental state of awareness of the body's functions (such as breathing, movement, touch, sound, sight) and the content of our conscious thoughts. It focuses on experience within the mind at the present, as opposed to thinking about the future or the past. It is also removed from disconnected, random trains of thought (I've left the gas on. What if people don't like me? Does my bum look big in this?). It improves clarity of mind and leads to a new understanding of the world and our place in it. In tai chi, we obtain mindfulness by doing, i.e. in form practice and related exercises. Outside the class, we extend mindfulness into our routine lives, be it doing the washing up, walking the dog, or writing an essay.

Why do we need it? I think cultivating mindfulness is one of the most important benefits of tai chi. Many people struggle with the concept because it is alien to the way we have been brought up. Modern western society focuses on the material and creates little opportunity for relaxed contemplation. We spend our lives constantly on the go. Our senses are bombarded with verbal and visual stimuli that have no connection with the natural world and which manipulate, lead or influence our behaviour: TV, radio, newspapers, advertising, traffic etc. It's really hard to process all this information and as a result it soon comes to dominate our mind state. Modern life is characterised by the pursuit of material wealth and the desire to elevate our status above others in our peer group. In a global society, these needs can never be satisfied, leading to anxiety, stress and a loss of meaning. It's hard enough being alive as it is. The human condition is characterised by existential angst and a fear of death; we've got enough on our plates already without worrying about material possessions and status.

As a result, our external lives swamp the internal life. We have no connection with nature. We have little self-knowledge and little chance of achieving it in a culture

that frowns upon self-improvement. Conversations have little meaning or substance; everyone's talking and no one's listening. In short, we have no time to stop and smell the flowers.

One reason tai chi is amazing is that it can, in its own way, address these issues. It can help cultivate mindfulness and thereby remove us from the external stresses of life. It allows us to experience being in the moment.

Tai chi is 'multifunctional': it is a martial art that is also a philosophy; it improves physical and mental health. It's not an answer to life's challenges but it is a tool that can help us. In our world, there is little chance of ever having to use tai chi as defence against physical attack, but it has everyday use as self-defence against attack from modern society. The beauty of it is that the different components of tai chi are inextricably linked. Thus you may use it every day to benefit mental wellbeing, but one day it may also help you if you're mugged in the street.

So my argument is that by practicing tai chi, we can start to dispose of the mental garbage in our heads and connect with the real world, the natural world of which we are an inherent part. To me, it's mind blowing that a set of ostensibly simple movements and principles can help us achieve this. I am convinced that all people who come to tai chi classes will benefit from mindfulness.

How do we get it? I don't think you can start bombarding people in a class with teaching on mindfulness. The concepts are alien to most people brought up in our society and there's a good chance you'd scare them away. And you can't make people become mindful. But because it's inherent to tai chi, it can be introduced by stealth. You can prepare the ground and then mindfulness will happen.

According to Chuckrow (Tai Chi Book, 1998), mindfulness is a direct mode of mind, in which we experience through senses rather than through words. Therefore, we can bring in two activities in class:

1. During form practice, keep the class calm and quiet. Encourage students

to open their internal and external senses; to be aware of their movement, their body position, of the pressure on their feet, the sights and sounds around them, the movement of the air on their hands as they go from one position to another. This is probably best done in short bursts using simple movements that students don't have to think about. Remember, mindfulness is relaxed awareness and doing.

2. Encourage students to be aware of the internal commentary that runs in their heads while doing the form. Don't attempt to suppress it or pass judgement on it, just be aware of it. Let thoughts and feelings come and go,
3. Finally, suggest to students that they can extend this active meditation to everyday life, for example, when doing the washing up, feel the water and soap bubbles on your skin, listen to the sounds of the water and the noise of the plates, look at the way the sunlight falls on the bubbles. Learn to recognise the feelings and the clarity of mind that result. Then let it go. Don't force yourself to be mindful, just do it.

The best example I have is when I go surfing. When you catch a wave and stand on the board, time stands still. All you focus on is your balance and movement with the wave, and all your senses are filled with the sounds, feel and smell of the sea.

One of the big challenges is how to cope with people who come to class for a chat, gossip and a night out. These people subconsciously close their minds to learning; I find it particularly frustrating when you have someone who says they can't remember how to do a move in the form, but then won't practice it in class during individual practice sessions and instead wanders off to look at a newsletter or chat with their mates. I guess in it's own respect this is fine, people a free to do what they want, but it can disrupt the rest of the class. How would I deal with this? I think that if I saw it happening, I would bring the class together to work under my direction and cultivate focus on the movement; mindful practice really.

By Dave Chandler

## Silk Reeling Energy

The development of silk reeling energy (chan ssu jing) is the basic method of practising Tai Chi Chuan and essential to its practice for health and for effective use as a martial art, according to Chen Xia-wang, 19th generation successor to the Chen style. As a basic method of practice, the function of silk reeling energy is to unify the body and connect the energy through the body with the dantien so that it can reinforce movements of all parts of the body. Training in Tai Chi, regardless of style, has its function in the connection of silk reeling energy through the body making it strong, fluid and accessible. Silk reeling energy is the application of the idea of silk reeling to obtain power and energy. The physical action of the body is similar to the action of wringing water from a towel. But the action is not just squeezing the towel with the hands, but a coordinated movement of the body that involves hands, arms, shoulders, waist, hips and knees, all together. It is as if the body itself was squeezing itself as if it were a towel. The spiralling of the waist creates spiralling of the whole body. This combines the whole body as one functioning unit. The classics say "When one part moves, all must move". Most people, if they do not train silk reeling, can only use 40 or 50% of their body to do any movement. But if you are well trained in silk reeling concepts then movement will involve the total body and you will be able to use 95% plus of your body's functional potential.

The functional benefits of using whole body power speak for themselves, be it to strike with your maximum potential or teach your body to function efficiently in everyday life. The mechanics of doing silk reeling exercises involves using the mind as well as the waist, dantien and chi; the mind must initiate the movement of the waist, and so on in a chain reaction. The dantien is the focal pivot point; even if the hands move, this must be connected back to the dantien and therefore cause a spiraling effect through the whole body. The difficulty is that Silk reeling is a principle and as you already know, principles are hard to explain, they must be realised. No one does it correctly

the first time; practice is the key, along with patience. Silk reeling energy is common to all styles and those who are proficient in whatever style they practice are using the same principle. The first thing to understand is that Tai Chi is a science and that it is also an art that everyone, no matter how strong or weak, large or small, can benefit from. Although the postures seem to be taught very exactly at first, you have to look to yourself to see your own body structure, strength and range of motion. From there you can determine the size of your stance, how low to sit and what posture is right for you. The movements must not be forced, they must be natural; only if they are natural can the breath and chi flow freely. Although some postures may seem a little awkward at first, you will find that by asking your instructor and looking at the mechanics, only slight adjustments are needed to make those postures your own. Your instructor will mention the dantien from time to time, and it is important to maintain awareness of this area as it is the local point for your movements; this is now your centre. From the start you must be able to preserve the centre whenever you move your arms, whether you are pushing or striking. If you can preserve and grasp the energy from your dantien when you are pushing then you will not lose (well that's the theory).

Standing post exercises are another key to training dantien awareness. These exercises, apart from making the legs ache, teach the practitioner postural alignment, relaxed whole-body poise and awareness of self. By relaxing into the hips, natural abdominal breathing is promoted and through visualisation, a focus and connection is formed. A springy power is developed in the whole body using tendons rather than muscular strength alone. This power allows you to feel as if you are supporting your whole body gently against gravity, similar to the idea of a boat bobbing/floating on water, rather than pushing yourself to a low stance and forcing a stretch. Chen Xia-wang cautioned that some people try to do silk reeling exercises too hard to push it along; this is wrong, the principle is to be natural.

When a person is able to move as one unit they are better able to concentrate force at a given point then they facing whether it is a push, pull or strike. In addition to this when a person is pushed or punched by an opponent they are able to reposition and never be hit on their centre. This can only be achieved if the body stays loose and the spiral can happen naturally. How often have you been pushed and tightened up because the force is too great? As you practice and become more familiar with silk reeling energy you will blend with and redirect any incoming forces thereby maintaining your balance and taking theirs.

The effectiveness of Chi Na is increased using the principle of silk reeling; the coiling power generated using whole body coordination will overcome the strength of any man's arm alone. Initially Chi Na will only affect the area being touched or held, but through practice and the extension of Silk reeling energy, an opponent's balance can be easily affected with little if any pain at the point of contact. A very useful by-product is the ability to remove tight lids from jars as a turning power generated by the waist and coordinated through the whole body is FAR greater than that generated by your shoulder alone; now you can eat as many pickled onions as like.



### Monthly Training Dates

We hold monthly advanced training sessions in South Birmingham. If you are interested in attending please ask your instructor.

9.30 to 12.30 (3 hours) - £25

### **2016 dates**

13<sup>th</sup> March  
10<sup>th</sup> April (my birthday)  
15<sup>th</sup> May  
12<sup>th</sup> June  
25<sup>th</sup> September  
16<sup>th</sup> October  
13<sup>th</sup> November  
4<sup>th</sup> December