



Tai Chi Newsletter

<https://www.paintingtherainbow.co.uk>

<https://www.kaiming.co.uk>



Community Based Tai Chi & Chi-Kung for everyone

Improvement cannot always be measured, it is something you feel

call: 0121 251 6172

<https://www.taichinewsletters.co.uk> e-mail us: markpeters@kaiming.co.uk

Tai Chi Chuan: A Martial Art at Heart

By Mark Peters

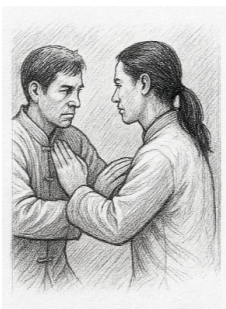
When many people picture Tai Chi Chuan (Taijiquan), they often see calm, flowing movement - gentle, meditative, and serene.

It's true that Tai Chi offers tremendous benefits for balance, relaxation, and wellbeing. But what is often forgotten—or never learned—is that Tai Chi Chuan has its origins in martial arts. At its core, it is a system of self-defence, discipline, and strategic movement.

“Tai Chi is not just slow movement - it's a martial conversation in disguise.”

The Martial Roots

Every posture in the form has a martial application. Movements like *Ward Off*, *Rollback*, *Press*, and *Push* are not abstract gestures—they are techniques designed to respond to physical attack. Even the softest transitions have intent. They conceal striking, yielding, locking, and redirecting energy.



Tai Chi Chuan is thought to have been developed in the 16th century by Chen Wangting, a retired military officer from Chen Village. He integrated fighting techniques with Taoist principles and Chinese medicine, creating an internal martial art that relied on sensitivity, structure, and intention rather than brute force. The word “*Chuan*” itself means “*fist*” - a clear reminder of the art's combative origins.

“The word ‘Chuan’ means ‘fist’ - Tai Chi has always been a martial art.”

Why the Slow Movement?

The slow, deliberate pace of Tai Chi often gives the impression that it's solely for meditation or health. But originally, these movements were slowed down to develop precision, body awareness, and internal power (*nei jin*). Explosive movement (*fa jin*), pushing hands (*tui shou*), and weapons training were all part of traditional practice.

In fact, many forms include faster sections or power-emitting techniques that are rarely taught outside of more martial-focused schools. I learnt Kwai Taiji (fast tai chi) from Master Liang He Ching in Malaysia; it is a clearly more martial set from the Yang Family lineage.

“The slowness trains control. The softness conceals strength.”

From Combat to Health

As Tai Chi spread in the 20th century, especially in urban centres and later around the world, it was often promoted for its health benefits. And rightly so—it improves posture, breath, joint mobility, and mental clarity. But the martial applications faded into the background, sometimes lost entirely. But Prof. Cheng Man Ching has been quoted as saying, “*form without function is no form at all*”. In my mind, if it works for martial it works for health too, and visa-versa. If it doesn't work for one, then it doesn't really work for either.

I've had students express surprise when I demonstrate a martial application from the form. For many, it's their first time seeing the art's deeper purpose come alive; so few tai chi clubs teach the whole art these days.

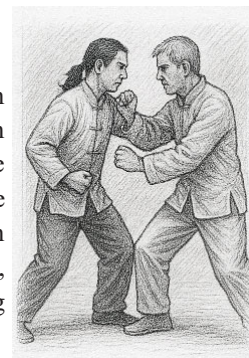
Why the Martial Matters

Even if you never intend to use Tai Chi for self-defence, understanding its martial foundation deepens your practice. It gives every movement a reason - structure becomes strategy, and softness becomes strength. The forms gain coherence, intention, and internal logic.

“Knowing the martial side brings clarity and purpose to every movement.”

Closing thoughts

Tai Chi Chuan is more than movement—it's a conversation with centuries of martial wisdom. When we honour its martial roots, we enrich the art as a whole. And we gain more than just skill—we gain insight, confidence, and a connection to something enduring.



So next time you practise, remember: you're not just moving through air. You're learning how to yield, respond, and, when needed, strike with precision.

Tai Chi Chuan is, and always has been, a martial art. That's where its true power lies.

“Tai Chi Chuan is not just about balance—it's about readiness.”

Its mind-body connection makes tai chi chuan a 'self-defence for life'.



Teaching is a Real Privilege

When I asked Alexa (quicker than finding a dictionary) what privilege meant, it said,

"As a noun, a benefit enjoyed only by a person beyond the advantages of most".

When I was asked to cover Bob's classes whilst he had his hip surgery, the only thing I knew was that the last time I'd done this, it consisted of putting gloves on and sparring, mixed with press ups and sit ups. My background had been Karate, Kung Fu and Kickboxing since the 70s when everyone was Kung Fu fighting.

Standing in front of the class, I realised that this was a different group of people than I had previously been used to.

I had been visiting Bob's classes to help me get to know them, and them me for a few weeks, before taking the lessons.

Standing in front of them, I soon came to realise that they were just as dedicated as the training hall full of younger people that I had stood in front of in the past. Many had health issues but had still made the effort to attend class in cold January weather.

The energy they generated, and sense of community was something I hadn't experienced before. I felt honoured to help them maintain their health. One of the ladies even made me a Christmas hat which I wore during the class. I gained a lot from the experience, and I thank Bob for having the confidence in me to entrust his class with me and Steve and Mark for mentioning the opportunity. In my last day one of the classes gave me a card to say thank you for allowing the classes to continue and in their words 'keeping them out of trouble'.



I told them it had been a privilege, and I feel as if I have enjoyed that benefit more than most.

By Paul Meacham – Junior Instructor, Bromsgrove.



Rainbows End

What the Tai Chi Journey is all About

Huang Sheng-Shyan felt that Taijiquan (Tai Chi Chuan) was a living teaching, and that it must grow within each person rather than become stagnant and fixed.

He also acknowledged the individual contribution of genuine practitioners of Tai Chi, whatever their level.

He believed all teachers of a Martial Art have their strengths and their weaknesses and that if you trained within other disciplines simultaneously you must be sure you learned from each teacher's strong points and not their weak ones as he had always done over his lifetime.

For twenty years from the age of 14 for he trained with three Taoist sages in the art of Fujian White Crane. Some did argue that this training was a major factor in his later success at Tai Chi and he never denied it, but he always attributed his Ta Chi skill to the late grandmaster Cheng Man-Ching, who he met in Taiwan in 1949.



He knelt to and was accepted by Prof. Cheng as Cheng was the first Tai Chi exponent who had been able to deal comfortably with Huang's White Crane in a friendly test of skills.

Ben Lo Pang Jang of San Francisco (a famous student of Cheng) told Patrick Kelly that in the early days when Huang first attended Cheng's school he was already able to throw normal people ten metres using his White Crane hands, but the relaxed student of Cheng could escape his push to some extent.

Cheng at first refused to believe that he had not learned Tai Chi somewhere before, but then Huang showed Cheng the secret White Crane training manual handed down by his Taoist teachers, which on the first page had the characters : SUNG, SUNG, SUNG; meaning, Relax ,Relax, Relax. On the second page was: YI, YI, YI, meaning, MIND, MIND, MIND.

Cheng could see that the systems where very similar and that Huang had already achieved the first Ten years of Tai Chi through his training in this art.

Huang stayed with Cheng for ten years until 1959 when at Cheng's suggestion he emigrated to Singapore and later to Malaysia, setting up home in Kuching on the island of Borneo, practicing, teaching, and experimenting, developing his training system and opening new schools as well-trained instructors became available. Later travelling far and wide to many countries happy to share his many skills.

Patrick Kelly, one of his senior students, said Huang was exceptional in his teaching in many ways, one of which was his insistence that it was not a person's race (such as being Chinese) or the family lineage that had any influence on learning Tai Chi, but the person's attitude, practice methods and the help of a good master that led to success.

He also told Patrick that in his experience neither the very rich or the very poor would succeed in learning Tai Chi as they

were both too concerned with money.

In his later years when he was comfortably well off, his class charges were low monthly payments for two to three classes a week and if Patrick was short of money he would charge him nothing. Patrick often saw Huang pay the expenses of students who otherwise could not have continued practicing.

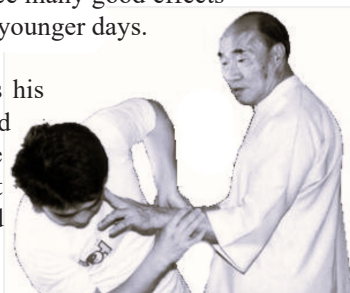
In the old Chinese tradition, he [Master Huang] never demonstrated the full extent of his abilities, especially the more internal ones.

When asked why, he said he didn't demonstrate more of them because many people doubted the things he did show, so the chance of many people being able to appreciate his deeper skills was very small.

He did on occasions, in the presence of small numbers of his old students, show some of these things, but on this subject I will for the same reason say no more, Let those who wish to doubt him do so and those with an open mind investigate further.

Like all genuine teachers who teach from their own experience, his teaching sometimes seemed opposite to other accepted methods, but the results always spoke for themselves. In the form, while most teachers stressed the postures themselves, he stressed the changes that occur in moving from one posture to another and, in later years, said the training method of holding postures went against the principle of constant change and could teach bad habits and interfere with the free flow of chi, although holding postures can also produce many good effects and he used it extensively in his younger days.

Taiji tui shou (push hands) was his favourite practice and entertainment. The more subtle and skilful you could be against him, the more he would laugh and return the compliment.



When some people insisted on relying on the external factors of strength and speed, substituting the desire to win for the opportunity to learn, their experience would be a short one and often a painful one.

Throughout the 70 years over which he developed his skills, he constantly sought to refine and internalize them through hours of daily practice and original thought.

Over the last 20 years of his life, I saw the physical movements he used being withdrawn from his legs and arms and then being concentrated and minimized within the centre of his body until at the last, it would appear to all but the most experienced eye that he would yield, neutralize and issue with no visible changes.

This is the stage of pure mind intention (Yi) and all the genuine internal masters have this to some degree.

But at the same time, a more important refinement was taking place un-noticed by most but he attempted to explain it on occasions. It involved REMOVING the intention, or Yi, from the process of issuing energy so that the issuing phase appeared naturally and spontaneously during the sinking and letting go of the mind with the result that it felt both to his mind and the others involved that the receiver of his energy threw themselves.

Such was his humour that once he lined us all up and had us marching on the spot and said that was what all people were doing each day, marching toward their own death.

Then he would pull a few people out and move them farther down the line, explaining that these were people who practiced Tai Chi and that while nobody could stop marching toward their death, they could move a little farther back down the queue!!!

Information taken from the writings of Patrick Kelly Senior student and devotee of Huang Sheng-Shyan



Push Hands, Balloons & Bands: Discovering the Heart of Tai Chi Chuan

Let's be honest - **Push Hands** (*Tui shou*) can look a bit odd when you first see it. Two people, hands touching, circling around each other like they're slow-dancing with invisible rules. But spend a little time with it, and you'll quickly realise it's one of the most exciting, enlightening parts of Tai Chi Chuan. If you've mostly been working on your solo form up to now, you might be wondering: *What's the point of Push Hands?* Why do we do it? And what on earth do balloons and Thera-Bands have to do with it?

Well, for those of you who came along to our **April monthly Advanced Training session**, this will all sound familiar! That day, we had a great time exploring the principles of *Tui Shou* using some simple tools - balloons and resistance bands - to deepen our understanding of connection, sensitivity, and structure. Whether you were there or not, here's a chance to revisit (or catch up on) the fun and the insights.

Push Hands: Where Tai Chi Come Alive

Forms are beautiful. They help us slow down, sink into our bodies, and develop balance, flow, and coordination. But here's the thing - when we move solo, no one is challenging our structure or balance. There's no outside force to deal with. It's all you, with no surprises.

Enter **Push Hands**. Suddenly, you've got a partner. Someone applying pressure, leaning a little too much, maybe catching you off balance. It's in these moments that your Tai Chi really wakes up.

Push Hands is where we train the principles of yielding, sticking, listening, and neutralising. All those elegant movements in your form? They now have *feeling* behind them. You learn how to root without tensing, how to be soft without collapsing, and how to respond rather than react.

It's not about overpowering your partner or pushing them across the room. It's about understanding energy (*dong jing*), learning to read another person through contact, and developing that all-important Tai Chi quality: sensitivity.

Listening with Your Skin

In Push Hands, one of the first things we develop is *Ting Jing*, or "listening energy". This doesn't mean listening with your ears—it means tuning in with your whole body. Through the

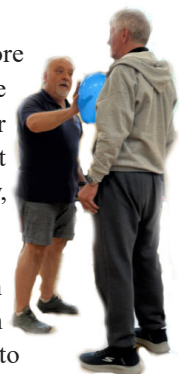
point of contact, you can feel tension, intent, direction, and imbalance. You become like water - sensitive, flowing, and adaptable.

This sensitivity isn't magic - it's trained. And during our April session, we had a bit of fun training it in an unusual way...

Balloons: The Sensitivity Challenge

Remember this one? We used balloons to explore softness and contact. Try it again at home: inflate a balloon (not too full!) and hold it between your palms with a partner. Don't let it fall, don't let it pop, and try to move around each other slowly, staying connected through the balloon.

The balloon gives instant feedback. Too much pressure and it'll burst or slip. Not enough connection and it'll drop. It teaches you how to *maintain contact with intention*, without forcing. This is Push Hands training at its gentlest and most playful.



Structure and Elasticity

Next, let's talk about *structure*. Good Push Hands isn't about being rigid - it's about being elastic, like a well-built tent in the wind. You want to absorb force and return it, without collapsing or locking up.

This is where our trusty resistance bands came into play...

Thera-Bands: Feel the Elastic Connection

If you tried the Thera-Band exercise in the April session, you probably noticed how immediately it points out tension or poor alignment. Here's a refresher if you want to keep exploring it at home:

Tie a Thera-Band around a pole or door handle and hold the other end in your hand. Now move through some of your Tai Chi postures slowly while keeping the band stretched just enough to feel gentle resistance.

Notice how the band gives feedback as you move. If you tense up or jerk, it pulls oddly. If you stay soft but aligned, it flows with you.

Now try the same with a partner - each of you holding one end of the band. Can you move in harmony without letting it go slack or over-stretched? This mimics the elastic, responsive connection we're aiming for in Push Hands.



We also used it in the April session to represent *facia* - how the whole body is connected below the skin - to show how a stretch of the band stretch and off-balanced other parts of the body so the body as a whole.

What Push Hands Teaches Us (Without Saying a Word)

Every time you practise Push Hands, your body is learning:

- **Balance under pressure** - Can you stay centred when someone leans into you?
- **Yielding without giving up** - Can you soften and redirect force instead of resisting?
- **Maintaining connection** - Can you follow and lead without breaking contact?

These lessons extend far beyond martial skill. They show up in everyday life - how you deal with stress, how you handle difficult conversations, even how you carry yourself when things get hectic.

A Mirror for Your Practice

One of the hidden treasures of Push Hands is the way it reveals your habits. If your shoulder lifts when you push, or your knee drifts inward under pressure, you'll feel it straight away. It's a mirror, reflecting back your patterns and blind spots.

Rather than seeing this as criticism, it's an amazing opportunity. It shows you where to grow. And it keeps your solo form honed - because now you know what those postures are *really* preparing you for.

Play, Don't Compete

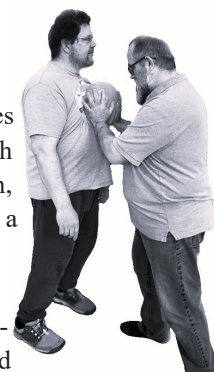
Push Hands is often misunderstood as a contest - who can push who off balance? But really, it's more like a conversation. You're not trying to dominate your partner - you're trying to *learn from each other*.

So treat it as play. Stay curious. Don't worry about "winning" - worry about *feeling*. Can you sense when your partner is about to move? Can you stick with them like a shadow? Can you keep your own balance while helping them find theirs?

Bringing It All Together

So - why do we do Push Hands? Because it brings Tai Chi to life. It gives meaning to the form. It builds skill through connection. And yes, it can be a lot of fun, especially when you add a balloon or a stretchy band into the mix.

And if you *were* at our April session - brilliant! Keep revisiting those balloon and Thera-Band exercises to refine your sensitivity and structure. If you *missed it*, don't worry - we'll keep weaving these tools into future sessions.



Because at the end of the day, Tai Chi isn't just about mastering movements. It's about connecting - to yourself, to others, and to the world around you. One soft step, one balloon, one push at a time.

By Mark Peters

Advanced monthly training sessions.

Sessions are held each month for 3 hours at Weoley Hill Village Hall, Bournville, to enable instructors time for their own training and for more advanced students to gain the time to develop a deeper understanding of the application of tai chi chuan.

Sessions are Sunday's 9.30-12.30 at **£35 per person**

June 8th

July 6th

Aug 10th

Sept 7th - 9.30am to 4pm - Just the Sunday this year

Oct 12th

Nov 16th