

Kai Ming Association Newsletter

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Tai Chi in the Parks

2014 saw the collaboration between Painting the Rainbow (PtR), ActiveParks and Birmingham Open Spaces Forum (BOSF) bring Free Tai Chi classes to many of the parks across Birmingham. There are now approximately 50 parks taking part in the outdoor activities program, of which 20+ now have tai chi, and there are plans to expand this through 2015. Many dignitaries from other cities around the country have heard of the success of ActiveParks and asked to visit some of the activities, to see for themselves what takes place. Unfortunately for the ones who attended Mark's class at Cotteridge park they were "forced" or should I say "invited" to take part which they all enjoyed.

Many of our instructors are working flat out most days and really enjoying the lovely comments that the participants of the classes give them, plus meeting people who would otherwise not be able to get to our evening kai ming classes. The winter weather has been good to us so far and not too many sessions have had to be called off. Long may it continue.

We have also been successful in gaining a grant from BVT (Vision grant) to bring tai chi to BVT residents in the daytime

for free. The plan is to run a weekly session on Bournville Green starting in February/March.

Although PTR was initially my concept, Mark and I worked together to bring it into a viable CIC he has had an incredibly busy year because of my vision, co-ordinating all the allocations of instructors to parks, liaising with the Council representatives, attending meetings etc etc whilst still coping with all the other long running COPD and Rehab classes along with its mother club Kai Ming with all that entails, and finally his own business. For all the help and advice he has given me to bring my dream for PtR to life I can never thank him enough for making it his dream as well. I am sure he joins me also in thanking all the instructors and participants in the many classes, both indoor and open-air, who have committed themselves to turn up each week to support each other, their instructors, and improve their health and well being. This commitment has made and continues to make both Kai Ming and PtR so worthwhile.

Jenny Peters – founder of PtR



Grading Day

This years grading was a great success with some reconfirming their current instructor level, new junior instructors and others making the well deserves step from Junior Instructor to Full Instructor. In addition to this Nigel Ryan and Neil Rankine moved from Instructor to Senior

Instructor level due to their continued dedicated efforts and development in their understanding and application of tai chi chuan. Dependant of the level of grade, each person had to demonstrate competence in the syllabus; in addition to this ALL who graded had to deliver a short class on a line from the classics to both demonstrate their understanding and to demonstrate their abilities to lead a group. I will be sharing some of these class plans in forthcoming issues of our newsletters; the first is from Neil Rankine so I look forward to your feedback.



At our recent Grading I was given two lines from the Taijiquan Classics to research and then provide a short presentation - the Classics being various texts, essays and poems passed down from the great Masters of the past. They give us hints and tips on how to perform our Tai Chi Form and practice. The following is the background information to that speech.

My main source of inspiration and information came from Barbara Davis' book *The Taijiquan Classics*. I also referred to Dan Docherty's *Tai Chi Chuan Decoding the Classics for the Modern Martial Artist*.

The quotes were "In every movement, there is nothing that does not move". "In every stillness, there is nothing that is not still".

These two lines come from the Exposition of Insights into the Thirteen Postures (Shisan shi xinggong xin Juergen) which is attributed to Wu Yuxiang. It is possibly an edited version of *The Important Points (of Push Hands)*. Docherty translates it to *The Thirteen Tactics*. Wu Yuxiang was a senior student of Yang Luchan, so some of the thoughts in this poem may have come from the great man himself. The commentator is Chen Weiming (1881-1958) who studied with Yang Chenfu (the Grandson of Yang Luchan). He was also a classmate of Zheng Manqing.

In Davis's book *The Exposition* is written as a three part essay, which is labeled A,B,C.

In this Text from *The Classics* there are many mentions of the theory of Yin and Yang, the lines I was given above being one example. It is also very Daoist derived with themes of: qi, spirit, mind, body and softness. It has fourteen references to qi, compared to only six in the other four texts of the Classics. There is very little commentary on my lines from Chen Weiming only this:

"Inner and outer unite together; upper and lower are connected together; therefore it can be like this".

As you will appreciate the Classics can be very vague and mysterious and require deep thought to understand them. This is why in a teaching position it is best to try and demonstrate the principle and let students practice a move which includes the principle so they cannot only grasp the concept mentally but also to 'feel' the concept and benefits for themselves. In my humble opinion the two lines mean we must keep a link and harmony throughout the whole body when we move and at the same time keep our minds still and focused on 'the moment' so that we can quickly react to any change in circumstance.

In conclusion, studying the Classics can be like mining for gold or diamonds, very hard, difficult work but well worth it in the end.

Neil Rankine – Senior Instructor



Christmas Party

It was our second year at Flavourz and the Christmas party was a great success with around 60 people attending; we've already booked for 2015 in anticipation. Jenny and I tried to make arrival flow more easily, with a seating plan, to ensure groups could more easily sit together as well as make new friends but Flavourz forgot to put them out so we had a fun start.... Overall the meal was excellent, with some so stuffed they could hardly walk. It was a great meal and a great round-off to 2014

I don't do Stress - I do Tai Chi
CALL MARK ON 07831 743737 or SEE THE WEBSITE WWW.KAIMING.CO.UK

Car Stickers

In previous years we had car stickers made and they were a great success, I even remember being behind somebody on a motorway and seeing one of our stickers in their back window as I was about to shout at them for cutting me up; I smiled and relaxed because the car sticker said

"I Don't do Stress I do Tai Chi".

With this in mind we will be having a few designs that will be available shortly, both for Painting the Rainbow and Kai Ming so please ask your instructor for more details.



Tai Chi and Chiropractic: what can we learn?

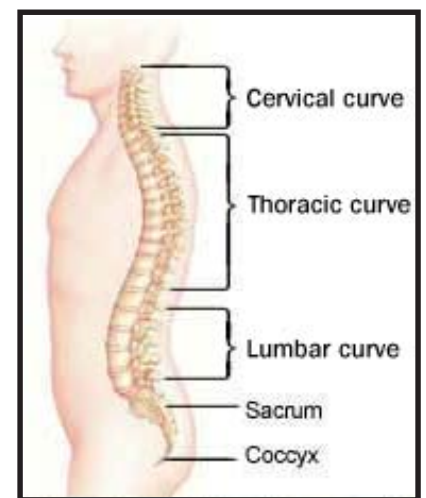
Humans are among the few animals that move though the world in an upright position. This position puts stresses on the spine not experienced by four-legged animals. The natural curves in our spines are thus important in providing shock absorption and structural integrity during upright, seated and standing activities.

Many people are unaware that as humans we have three natural spinal curves that are formed in early childhood. We are born with one continuous C-shaped curve. As infants, when we begin to raise our heads, and later, when we push up on our hands and crawl, the concave (or lordotic) curves of the neck (the cervical spine) and low back (the lumbar spine) are formed. The convex curve of the mid-back where the ribs attach (the thoracic spine) is left over from the original C-shaped curve. Please note that some children walk before crawling and never develop the spinal curves. The person with the resulting straight spine, referred to as a 'military spine', is prone to neck and back problems as well as headaches related to structural stress.

A healthy lower back depends on good spinal structure, unrestricted joint range of motion, maintenance of the lumbar curve, and the support of sufficiently strong low-back and abdominal muscles. The practice of good posture when standing and sitting, along with daily exercise to maintain muscle tone and joint movement, will help to reduce the chance of low-back injury.

A question that is often raised is the one of "does tai chi practice promote good posture?" A Chiropractor had indicated

that their tai chi instructor put great emphasis 'dropping the tailbone' which is actually contrary to good back health as it can flatten the lumbar curve. Back-care specialists spend a lot of time with patients working to restore and preserve the natural spinal curves; it is not surprising that concerns may be raised over a discipline such as tai chi that emphasises a posture that flattens the lumbar curve. I even remember some teachers specifically stating the importance of the C-shape in form and push-hands practice. Could this be a sort of 'Chinese Whispers' effect on lines from the classics such as "sink the chest and pluck the back".



Is tucking the pelvis in tai chi contraindicated for good lower-back health? I would argue that it is a case of balance as mild dropping of the tailbone can help to relax the pelvis and hip joints and thereby improving mobility and stability. It is the exaggerated tucking practiced by some students and instructors (not Kai Ming instructors obviously) that can lead to problems for the following reasons:

- 1) flattening of the lumbar curve – this stretches and weakens the supporting tendons and ligaments and opens the disc space posteriorly and closes the disc space anteriorly which can lead to disc herniation.
- 2) pelvis tilt over-engages the abdominal muscles. The balance between opposing muscle groups is central to musculoskeletal integrity; however in this position neither muscle groups is supporting the other. Both strong abdominal muscles and strong lumbar muscles are important for a healthy lower back. Furthermore, the posture can impact on digestion and function of the abdominal organs.
- 3) Hip range of movement is restricted – The hip flexors (anterior hip muscles) are

pulled tight as are the buttock muscles in order to tilt the pelvis.

During in tai chi practice, preserving a natural and relaxed lumber curve can enable the student to achieve greater flexibility and fluidity of movement due to the resulting freedom in hip range of motion. When we slouch we end up 'hanging' on our ligaments and our muscles have to work harder to hold us up. If we instead, take advantage of our natural spinal structure for support, and allow the opposing muscle groups to balance each other, then achieving relaxation in standing and sitting becomes possible. If we accept that tai chi is a system of musculoskeletal rehabilitation then we must accept that it would not work against correct function but rather enhance it. Prof. Cheng has been often quoted as saying "form without function is no form at all" so lets look to consider that form practice is to develop relaxed (natural) and co-ordinated movement; it is to prepare us for the stresses and strains of daily life, both physically and psychologically. Its martial function is based on the Taoist concepts of none-resistance and natural action so to apply it effectively we must harness our intrinsic strength and structure whilst taking advantage of weaknesses in our opponent. I spend much of my time, these days, teaching tai chi for patient rehabilitation. The only real difference between applying tai chi as a martial art or as a system of rehabilitation is rebalancing rather than off-balancing the person you're working with.



**REGGAE'S RHYTHM
'SLOWS THE HEART'**

Doctor Frank Lipman of Manhattan's trendy Eleven Eleven Wellness centre has told me he sometimes plays reggae to his clients to help them meditate. "Your brain entrains to the rhythm around you, and reggae tends to have about 60 beats per minute—the speed of a slow heartbeat—which tends to slow you down as a result," he said. No wonder they're so laid back in Jamaica.

- ** *Stressed out?*
 - ** *Walking wounded?*
 - ** *Terminally curious?*
 - ** *Looking for something?*
- (the meaning of life for five quid a week)

Too old for kick-boxing, too young for Bingo, longing for a leisure pursuit you can do in the clothes you slob round the house in. Well look no further - *Tai Chi* could be for you, come for health, come for relaxation, come to learn the ultimate self-defence (but don't forget how to run away).

Yes all this and more, chill out, turn on, and disappear into your own dantien or whatever else you want it to be. A design for living possibly, a promotion for sanity defiantly, but mostly a life less ordinary....

Bob Flynn - Dudley student



THE INDISPENSABLE MAN

Some time when you're feeling important
 Some time when your egos in bloom
 Some time when you take it for granted
 You're the best qualified man in the room.
 Some time when you feel your going
 Would leave an unfillable hole
 Just follow these simple instructions
 And see how they humble your soul.

Take a bucket and fill it with water
 Put your hands in it up to your wrists
 Pull them out and the hole that remains
 Is the measure of how much you will be missed.
 You may splash all you please when you enter
 You may stir up the waters galore
 But stop! and you'll find in a minute
 That it looks just the same as before

The moral of this is quite simple
 You must do the best that you can.
 Be proud of yourself but remember,
 There is no indispensable man.

by Saxon White Kessinger



How to use up your Rhubarb..!
GINGER AND RHUBARB MUFFINS

Quick and easy to make if they manage to last longer than a day (which is when they taste the best) they can be frozen for up to 2 months and then thawed and popped in a hot oven to get the fresh baked taste back)

INGREDIENTS

- 175g thin rhubarb stalks, trimmed.
- 275g plain flour
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 15g caster sugar
- 1-2 tsp finely grated orange zest
- 150g butter, melted and cooled for 5 minutes
- 100ml milk
- 2 medium eggs, beaten
- 1 large piece stem ginger, finely chopped
- Chopped crystallized orange peel to decorate (optional)

Makes 12—Ready in 40 minutes.
 Preheat the oven to 190C/Fan 170C/gas mark 5. Line a 12 hole muffin tray with 12 paper muffin cases.

Cut the rhubarb stems in half lengthways then chop into 1cm pieces.

Sift the flour and baking powder into a large bowl and stir in the sugar and orange zest. Make a well in the centre. Whisk together the butter, milk and eggs and pour into the well. Stir until just combined but don't over-mix.

Gently fold in the rhubarb and stem ginger
 Divide the mixture evenly between the muffin cases. Bake in the preheated oven for 20-25 minutes, or until risen, golden and just firm to the touch. Sprinkle with the crystallized orange peel, if liked. Serve warm or cold



Paul Brennan is doing an amazing job translating old Chinese martial art manuals and I thought I would share this extract from one such translation

SIMPLE INTRODUCTION TO TAIJI BOXING

by Xu Zhiyi

[published Sep, 1927]

[translation by P. Brennan, Aug, 2014]

Taiji Boxing is a skill that approaches the Way. It uses stillness to defeat movement, softness to defeat hardness. With neither showing-off nor loss of temper, it



is dignified, elegant, and effortless. And when an opponent is defeated by it, he has no comprehension of what was done. Furthermore, if this art is obtained by the old and weak, or by women and children, it can also maintain health as well as self-defence, instead of being an additional harmful habit.

THE MERITS OF TAIJI BOXING

All boxing arts have their merits, their strengths and weaknesses, their focuses, their inevitable prejudices, and their special characteristics. Those who nowadays like to discuss which systems are good or bad end up praising the one they are already practicing. Though they will probably not be very accurate in their assessment, they will nevertheless fight to the very best of their ability. Although it is natural to be biased, the issue is actually that people are not clear about the special characteristics of their own art.

Taiji Boxing uses “emptiness and stillness” as its main principle. Every movement is serious about softness and dismissive of hardness. Those who fall in love with the external posture always get into trouble, for supreme achievement of this art is the cultivation of spirit. Its fighting method is not a matter of winning through strength, and thereby other styles pale by comparison. You now adequately know the special characteristics of this art. All of these arts have their special characteristics, though none of them in the beginning will seem different from any other.

The merits of this particular art are described below:

A. ITS HEALTH ASPECTS

1. It cultivates both body and mind.

In the practice of external boxing arts, the aim is to develop the body. They are imbued with a strong sense that the health of the spirit depends on the health of the body.

In the practice of meditation, the aim is the cultivation of spirit. It is considered that when the spirit is sufficiently strengthened, the body will be transformed.

Looking at them separately, it is apparent that each has its own truth. But looking at them together, it becomes clear that each simply has its own emphasis. Damo long ago passed down to us the Sineu Changing Classic and the Marrow Washing Classic, in which the “internal boxing arts” happen to be emphasizing body first, then mind. All of this shows that the methods of building health actually value cultivating body and mind simultaneously. Once you begin in Taiji Boxing, both body and mind are progressing together, therefore it cultivates both. The details of this concept are to be found in How to Practice.

2. The movements are mild.

Although strenuous exercise will show fast results, it will also cause unbearable problems. Every movement in Taiji Boxing should be soft, slow, compliant, and gentle. It noticeably stretches out the muscles and joints, and invisibly regulates the energy and blood. This means that while it cultivates the spirit, it also conforms entirely to the principles of physical education.

3. The postures are smooth and harmonious.

The posture is “upright and comfortable” and the energetic movement is a matter of “neither going too far nor not far enough” (from the Classics). These are each important basic principles. Therefore every posture is completely natural, meaning that it is smooth and harmonious. Strenuous boxing arts seek to be as risky and dramatic as possible, entirely different.

4. Development is natural.

Every part of the human body develops, according to physiology, in a proper sequence.

Strenuous exercise does not conform to the proper physiological sequence and very easily gives rise to bad habits. When practicing Taiji Boxing, “if one part moves, every part moves, and if one part is still, every part is still”. There is no particular area of the body that has any extra stress upon it. Therefore it accords with physiological function, being a beneficial practice rather than an obstructive abuse. The character of this art is to do what is natural.

5. It is particularly effective at treating illness.

Boxing arts have the effect of treating illness, as everyone knows. However, strenuous exercise consumes too much of one’s bodily strength, which weaker people will not easily replenish. This is counterproductive. One of the principles of Taiji Boxing is to adapt to physiological changes. It boosts energy and blood by focusing entirely on mildness, and so it does not cause breathing or pulse to become the slightest bit irregular. Therefore even if you have lung disease, you can practice it, and you will achieve extraordinary results. As for other ways it can treat illness, you will learn through personal experience.

6. It sculpts your temperament.

Everyone’s temperament is different, but one’s temperament always has an influence over one’s outward character, therefore one’s consciousness can transform one’s character. Those with even a smattering of psychological understanding can all agree with this. Taiji Boxing emphasizes methods of softness, “emptiness and stillness” being the main principle. If you have bad habits such as rashness or bluntness, these are things to be pushed aside. By practicing this art over a long period, you will be unconsciously cultivating a habit of grace, which will help you learn to take criticism. If you have a tyrannical attitude toward others, this kind of training will have noticeable results upon you.

Next instalment for martial aspects next issue...