



Tai Chi Newsletter

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When is a martial art not a martial art?

This question sprang from a recent debate over the teaching and practice of tai chi chuan with friends who said few people really practice it as a practical martial art so shouldn't say they do. So, what is a martial art? Seems a good starting point. In Chinese terms, they are termed internal (nèijiāquán) when the focus is on spiritual, mental or chi related aspects, while others that concentrate on improving muscle and cardiovascular fitness are called external (wàijiāquán). I believe I practice a practical martial art, but my focus is now on a 'self-defense for life' i.e., mind and body development for well-being rather than defense against an external physical attacker. I still believe form without function is no form at all so martial awareness in training is essential to ensure mind-body connection, flow, root etc. otherwise its just slowly moving around without spatial awareness. I was almost tempted to say it would be an empty dance, but real dance requires the same mind-body connection to self and the environment as does tai chi.

Training a martial art does not require the smashing and bashing of others, but a peaceful mind under pressure. Prof. Cheng stated, "concentrate your spirit within and express total calm without, this is how one achieves perfection in both principle and practice".

This is the focus of this issue of our newsletter, and I look forward to hearing your thoughts.

Mark Peters

武术

Martial Art versus Relaxation

"What is the purpose of this discipline? To lengthen one's life, extends one's years, and give one an ageless springtime".

From The Thirteen postures song



Tai Chi is increasingly advertised around the country as another form of relaxation therapy or moderate exercise with significant gains for people's general health. In some classes, it is offered with no reference to its origins as a form of martial art; however, this approach can have a mystifying effect on the students who have to take on trust that these seemingly randomly choreographed balletic movements have some sort of coherence. It is far easier if the students have explained to them the fundamental martial origins and applications of the moves even if they do not intend to cultivate the skills necessary to apply them.

It is worth reflecting on the nature of martial arts in general. Despite the wonderful fantasy of much contemporary martial art cinematography, Taoist martial arts are essentially about controlling aggression and finding a path around conflict. Without some skills in this in contemporary society, people become ill. We see the young parent in the supermarket with the fractious child who responds to the child's cries and demands with increasing anger and even aggression, reflecting their own lack of balance, often with sad long-term consequences. The ability to calmly acknowledge and control anger and fear enables us to discover the least harmful ways of diffusing situations of aggression.

The practice of tai chi has immediate health benefits not least of which is the balance between gentle receptivity yin and assertive creativity yang. Such balance is necessary for both martial arts and a healthy lifestyle-

Excerpt from a classic text and application:

“By using the *xin* (heart-mind) to move the qi and make it sink, it can then gather and permeate into the bones. By using *qi* to move the body and make it compliant, it can easily follow the *xin*. If the spirit can be lifted then there will be no slowness or heaviness; this is what is called “suspending the head-top”. The *yi* (focused intention) and the *qi* must change agilely, only then will there be the wonder of roundedness and liveliness; this is what is called the “the changes and turning of the empty and full”. In issuing *Jin*, one must sink, relax thoroughly and concentrate in one direction. When standing the body, the body must be upright, comfortable, and support the eight directions.”¹

I understand this to mean that the mind (including feelings etc.) and intention must be calmly focused so that the student is consciously and as clearly as possible anticipating each move with no other distractions or considerations. To achieve this, the posture must be right: “suspending the head-top”, the sinews relaxed so as to “sink” and the shoulders hips aligned so as to “support the eight directions”

Let us apply this to preparation²

First take up the necessary standing posture, taking time to quietly and calmly focus (*using the xin*). Then allow the movement to rise within spontaneously shifting the weight to the right leg, gradually sinking the weight into it. When the body is stable then lifting the left leg and taking one step to the side then sinking the weight into the left leg; then turning the right foot until it parallels the left at shoulder width.

Repeat the process only this time concentrating on the hands and arms so that the arms are never locked but relaxed and slightly bent with the wrist facing forward and the hands facing down. The fingers slightly raised pointing in front of the feet and just slightly open.

Repeat the move again this time focusing on the head. It should be upright resting on the top of the spine neither forward nor to one side. The eyes should look straight ahead but be focused within, that is, not consciously focusing on anything in particular in the room. The tongue should rest gently on the roof of the closed mouth and the hearing should be tuned to the breath so that there is a state of calm focus (*li*).

The move is then repeated keeping in mind all the above but focusing in particular on sinking. Sinking the shoulders, dropping the elbows, and allowing the chest to depress slightly and consciously imagining ones energy gradually flowing to the tan t'ien. Then resting in this relaxed and completely focused pose “supporting the eight directions” as though ready for whatever should be necessary next.

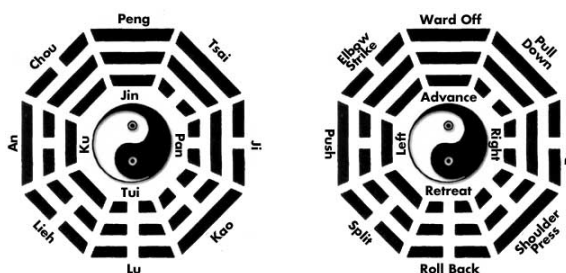
Working in this way on a seemingly simple movement could seem pointless but please be aware that attention to the preparation posture can make all the difference to the performance of the rest of the form. If the preparation is inadequate, it can be difficult to regain balance within the form. The martial applications are obvious. If one cannot achieve a focused attentive stance at rest, one will not be ready to respond simply and spontaneously to the opponents move.

1. P.79 of Davis, B. (2004) *The Taijiquan Classics*, Berkeley: North Atlantic Books
2. With help from Cheng Man Ching's (1985) *Cheng Tzu's Thirteen Treatises on Tai Chi Chuan*, Berkely: North Atlantic Books, p. 114

By David McLoughlin



The 13 Postures (Shi San Shi)



Everybody has heard of Tai Chi, but it goes deeper than that. And for those of you that practice tai chi on a regular basis, there is a principle that is followed in all styles of tai chi. From Yang, Chen, Wu, Wu Hao, Sun, Cheng Man Ching, and so on. And this is the 13 postures (Shi San Shi) which are the core principles of all Tai Chi forms.

It consists of 8 gates or energy, (postures). And 5 (directions) making it 13 postures in total. It does not matter what style of tai chi you practice as the shi sans hi are common to all even if the postures of that particular style vary.

It is still the same energy, but is expressed in a different way. For example in Sun and Wu Hao there is a lot of stepping in the forms. Where the back foot follows through the step. In Wu there is a lot of leaning within the form. As opposed to yang, Chen, and Cheng Man Ching. Another important aspect of Tai Chi which you should know and understand is the word Peng/Pung (Expansion) as without it THERE IS NO Tai Chi. In China any student that studies Tai Chi must learn and understand the 13 postures. and is the first form that they learn. Some of you may have heard of BA FA WU BU. Which is a form to demonstrate the 13 postures. when you watch the video link below you can see the different energies which are applied in the various styles. you can see Chen, Sun and Yang, and Wu Hao. What I mean by this, is by looking at the steps and the application in which it is applied.

<https://bit.ly/3Mjg5fj>

The 13 postures that I have found that comes close to the Cheng Man Ching style is the Yangjia Michuan 13 postures from the old ancient secret form of Yangjia Michuan. This is because Professor Cheng studied in depth with Yang Cheng Fu and Zhang Qinlin. He harmonised his training and developed the 37-step form. Which is also sometimes known as the yang simplified form.

Here is the Yangjia Michuan 13 postures. As you can see from the link above the style is very different, although the energy is the same just expressed differently. Take note that the front foot heel is raised slightly as you expand (Peng) this is the 13 postures of the old ancient yang form which

<https://bit.ly/3GRBUKY>

<https://bit.ly/3MI36tB>

Let's take a closer look at the 13 postures in more detail. In the order of the first Eight Gates (Pa-Men), the eight Ching trigrams are Heaven, Earth, Water, Fire, Wind, Thunder, Lake, and Mountain. The first Eight Gates can be divided into the Four Primary Hands (Ward Off, Pull Back, Press and Push) and the Four Corner Hands (Pull Down, Split, Elbow and Shoulder).

The 8 gates or energy

Ward Off – Peng

Peng is often referred to as a kind of “bouncing” energy. It is also considered the fundamental way of delivering energy and embodied in some way in each of the other Eight Gates. Example of Form movements: Grasping the Sparrow’s Tail – Ward Off.

Roll Back – Lu

Lu jing is receiving and collecting energy, or inward receiving energy. Form movements: Grasping the Sparrow’s Tail – Rollback

Press – Ji

Ji jing is pressing and receiving energy. This is an offensive force delivered by following the opponent’s energy, by squeezing or striking forward. Form movements: Grasping the Sparrow’s Tail – palm press.

Push – An

An jing is downward pushing energy. Pushing power comes from the legs pushing into the earth. Form movements: Grasping the Sparrow’s Tail, Fair Lady Works the Loom. Pushing or pressing with both palms in a downward direction, peng energy directed downward.

Pull Down – Tsai

Tsai jing is grabbing energy. A force delivered by a quick grab and pull, usually of an opponent’s wrist, both backward and down. Form movements: Needle at Sea Bottom.

Split – Lieh

Lieh jing is striking energy that splits apart an opponent. Form movements include: Diagonal Flying; White Crane Spreads its Wings.

Elbow – Chou

Chou jing is elbow-striking energy.

Shoulder – Kao

Kao jing is a full body stinking energy. The peng energy is mobilized throughout the entire body, and then the entire body is used as one unit and the force is delivered with the shoulder or back.

Please note the links I have provided will help clarify the movements and direction of the form. To be honest it is easy, basically all moves are repeated in all directions.

The Five Steps

All thirteen postures, involve some movement of the feet and legs, but the final Five Gates involve more extensive movements of the feet and legs. All thirteen postures, involve some movement of the feet and legs, but the final Five Gates involve more extensive movements of the feet and legs. These are collectively referred to as the Wu-hsing – Five Elemental Phases of Change. The final five gates are associated with the 5 elements: metal, wood, water, fire, and earth.

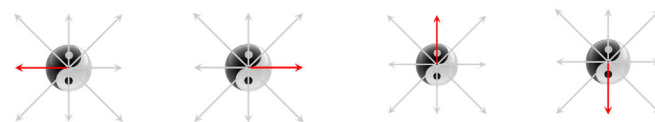
The steps are performed in all directions.

- Advancing Forward Steps (jin)
- Retreating Backwards Steps (tui)
- Stepping to the Left (ku)
- Stepping to the Right (pan)
- Zhong Ding – Central Equilibrium

Parts 1 and parts 2 of the Thirteen Postures are performed in four cardinal directions, connected by transitions, and alternated on the right side/left side

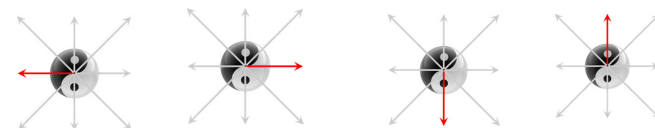
The movements - Part one

Begin at Center
Ward off
Grasp the Sparrow’s tail Press
Seal it closed
Push



The movements - Part two

Drag Down
Brush the Knee, Twist Step Wield The Pipa

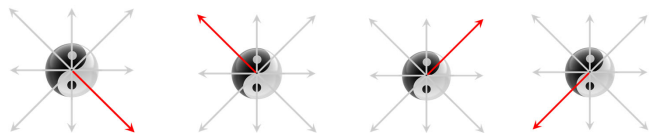


Part 3 of the Thirteen Postures is performed in four diagonal directions, connected by transitions, and alternated on the right side/left side

The movements - Part three

Moving Forward, using snake step:
Drag Down,

Twist the Joint
Elbow Strike
Shoulder Strike
Step Forward, Pull Down
Moving backward, using circle step:
Ward Off, Roll Back, Split
Push, Press Low, Press High



Return to Centre,
Embrace Tiger Return to Mountain
Learning the 13 postures can be a form in itself. Yangjia Michuan takes up 12 minutes to complete as it is performed in all directions.

I hope you enjoy the practice as much as I have
By Kevin Dalzeil

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

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.

Sessions are Sunday's 9.30-12.30 at £30 per person.

2022 dates

June 12th

September 3rd & 4th (weekend camp)

Oct 9th

Nov. 20th

Dec. 4th



*We must learn to be still in the midst of activity
and to be vibrantly alive in repose.
Indira Gandhi*

Cheng Man Ching Legacy Weekend Camp

From Saturday 03 September 2022

To Sunday 04 September 2022

Contact: markpeters@kaiming.co.uk or call 07831 743737

Each year we have a focus for the weekend camp and this year's theme is **“Breathing life into your tai chi”**

Saturday 3rd will include tai chi form work in the morning - Breath, intention, and expansion. The afternoon will focus on martial application without effort - sensitivity training, Sung, flow, and root.

Sunday 4th You will be learning a qigong set. We will focus on the three refinements (regulations) of mind, body, and breath.

The days will run

- 9.30 for 10am start
- 10am to 12.30pm with a 10 minute break about 11.30am.
- Lunch 12.30 to 1.30pm – lunch
- 1.30pm to 4pm with a 10 minute break about 2.45pm

Cost

The cost per day will be £40 per person (Kai-Ming members) £60 (non-members)



You can also pay via PayPal at <https://bit.ly/398VblC>