



## Kai Ming Association Newsletter

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坐

*Jing Zhou*  
*Sit quietly*

### MARTIALARTSANDSTILLNESS?

In Chinese Martial Arts, stillness lies between each activity. Even in the midst of furious fighting, we seek stillness.

It is like mortar to bricks and binds together the actions of the practitioners. We need silence between notes to blend into a melody.

For centuries Chinese martial arts has concerned itself with stillness.

But why?

Ancient warfare and battles demanded exhausting stamina.

Fear, adrenaline, anger, panic (fight or flight) hours of clashing swords, skimming spears, and hand to hand fighting, injuring and killing.

Then comes a lull in the barbarity; a few moments of quiet in the middle of the melee.

Or maybe the peace will last an hour, a year, or perhaps just an instant.

Just as the army knows how to re-group, so does the trained warrior. He must turn inward to recuperate and regain vigor.

He must find where his hidden stores of energy lie.

Without this stillness he may not be able to go on.

There is an old saying that goes "Movement on the outside; quiet within, but it is only when we take time from the fray that we find this quiet, this stillness and access it to find our hidden strengths and energy.

In other words, without stillness, the warrior might not be able to go on.

Some martial art skills are based on movement.

Punching and kicking. Yet other skills grow out of stillness.

Like rooting and waiting. Keeping your control until the opponent makes his move. Master Koh Ah Tee of Kuala Lumpa, Malaysia often referred to tai chi as "patience boxing".

The muscles and ligaments used for running are not the same, are not utilized in the same manner as those employed for rooting and power generation.

Only when the great outer muscles fatigue and allow adjustment muscles to take over, only when the weight sinks and ligaments and tendons are called upon to support the frame, do we enter the realm of strength that grows inside and increases with every minute of standing.

This is when strength can internalize, Therefore strength and calm can be gained from stillness, and something very important for the martial artist (and maybe for all people) - self-knowledge.

Quiet Standing is probably the most intensely self-analytical exercise you can do.

The muscles ache, the body craves movement, the mind may be beset by a thousand thoughts, you notice that annoying itch, you remember something that maybe you should have dealt with yesterday and you become anxious or angry.

Slowly, all this dissolves, into a world of attention to your body and mind.

You realise after a while that it is the stillness itself you are fighting. Each time you say relax to your mind and body, you do. Then you notice the ache in your hip or stiffness in your shoulders. Everything is trying to seduce you away from calmness.

Slowly the whole thing passes, and maybe later you feel that something that bothered you before no longer gets the same reaction. You are a little calmer, more open.

You can never be sure what made this so but maybe it was the standing, and this will make it worth repeating the next day, and the next; standing still and searching for stillness.

There are many questions martial artists are divided on, "are there meridians?, Is there Chi? But most accept there is stillness in that mysterious thing we call consciousness and we can all find it, standing quietly being one path to it.

If you watch beginners sparring (it's easier to see with them) nervous energy builds, they square off, adjust distance, anxious with expectation of who will kick or punch first, who will advance first. Eventually one will rush forward and even if no point is scored they feel relieved. It's a lot easier to charge in than face stillness....

A sign of a great martial artist is their ability to attack or retreat at great speed without hesitation, never appearing rushed they do just enough, even still during the explosive moments.

It is strange that we study combat in order to gain calmness. We very rarely have to fight, but we need to feel secure about our world and our safety yet we perfect only what we practice. Therefore, if we wish to learn calmness, we should practice calmness.

It will enable the student to ease the mind and re-energise the body.

Every day you can put it on like a comfortable old favourite jumper.

Just standing, noticing, sinking, feeling, exploring, moving things around your body, letting go, calming the mind, and just BREATHE.

### THE REALM OF STRENGTH GROWS FROM DEEP INSIDE AND COMPOUNDS

WITH EVERY MINUTE OF STANDING.

I recently saw the movie 'American Sniper' and the greater skill, it seemed, wasn't being able to shoot but stillness. He lay on the roof waiting and thoughts running through his mind; fidgeting physically and mentally. Eventually he got up and wanted to be involved in 'the action'. When he came back to the US he was suffering with PTSD which he eventually overcame through the practice of stillness within himself and those he started to help. The greatest battle is always the one within.

## TO TEACH OR NOT TO TEACH-That is the question?

I don't know many students of Tai Chi who began training with the intention of eventually becoming an instructor. It's something that seems to happen one of two ways. Either the teacher of your class notices a "certain something" about you during sessions and sees a "prospective assistant" to cajole into training up and helping out (which is a great way of extending your learning yourself). Or after a few years of patient and dedicated practice and exploring the art, you come to the realisation that maybe the next step is to be at the front of the class.

In both cases many people feel a little "unworthy" or have never been the type of person with the confidence to contemplate this move.

Well Tai Chi has a way of changing all that, especially if you have a good teacher yourself who will put that little extra into his classes to inspire you to want more.



I think I can safely say that most of the Senior instructors within our association had no thoughts of attaining this position. In fact we have several who are still in a state of shock at how much it has changed and added to their lives and now teach most days for our mainstream club, Kai Ming, and also for Painting the Rainbow our Rehabilitation section.

Don't get me wrong the journey to be at the front of the class should not be taken lightly. It is a commitment, it demands patience, dedication and continued learning.

I have left in my mind perhaps the most important attribute of all - **The right Personality**. You need to be able to motivate your students. Make your class a relaxing time with a scattering of humour. Turn up to class when it's pouring down with rain and still smile

when there are only 3 students waiting at the door, and don't take it personally. Have infinite patience and be able to empathise with beginners (we all had to start somewhere!) Be able to be approachable but professional and last but not least, love the art and culture of Tai Chi Chuan.

Teaching can be a good way to fund your continued learning with your own Sifu and in fact they may help you set up a class of your own; however if they do not feel you are ready to take the step into this area you must be patient until they do.

### Here are some points you should consider before you take that step:

Evaluate your knowledge of the form and art you will be teaching.

Make sure you have general historical knowledge of Tai Chi and know your own lineage. Have a good understanding of the Tai Chi Classics.

Find a good location for the class, that's not too close to another teacher, with good parking and lighting for the winter months, one that has good access suitable for all age groups and abilities. One that's well heated in winter and aerated in the summer and last but not least, an affordable cost especially in the first few months whilst trying to establish your class and gain students.

Determine what the cost will be and how students will pay this i.e. weekly, monthly, 3 monthly and how: cash, card, standing order.

Remember if you choose weekly payments it could take time out of their training collecting this. Paying in bigger blocks shows commitment on their part to turn up each week, and you can pay your venue in advance to show your commitment.

Think about what you will teach and how you will teach it. Structure and continuity are important for your students.

Teaching will bring many challenges but also many rewards. It will enhance your own learning and practice and as one sifu once said –

***“Learn from your students; they make the same mistakes you do, only louder!”***

Nigel Sutton always used to say ***“The teacher is the taught”***. It really is a two-way street.



### PRACTICE THROUGH IMAGINATION

The power of the mind is stronger than we realise. By using our imagination we can actually influence our actions and abilities. In a sort of modern scientific equivalent of Laozi's Tao Te Ching ***“Without going outside, you may know the whole world”***, Harvard neuroscientist Steven Kosslyn has shown that when people imagine something, parts of their brains becomes active, the very same parts that would become active if the action was actually taken; our brains cannot easily distinguish between imagining doing something and actually doing something.

### Piano experiment

Neuroscientist Alvaro Pascual-Leone ran an experiment at Harvard Medical School where one group practiced playing a simple piano exercise and the other group imagined (visualised) playing, plus they were instructed to keep their hands still. The participants sat beneath a coil of wire that sent a brief magnetic pulse into the motor cortex of their brain, located in a strip running from the crown of the head toward each ear. The so-called transcranial-magnetic-stimulation (TMS) test allows scientists to infer the function of neurons just beneath the coil. In the piano players, the TMS mapped how much of the motor cortex controlled the finger movements needed for the piano exercise. What the scientists found was that after a week of practice, the stretch of motor cortex devoted to these finger movements took over surrounding areas like weeds spreading on a lawn. What was doubly fascinating was that the impact on the motor cortex was strikingly similar in the visualisation group.

Pascual-Leone wrote ***“Mental practice resulted in a similar reorganization of the brain”***. If his results hold for other forms of movement then mentally practicing your tai chi could lead to

improvement with less physical practice. Even more profound, the research showed that mental training has the power to change the physical structure of the brain.

### Applying imagery in your tai chi practice

Relaxation is the first step in practising the application of active imagery in your tai chi practice. To start, start by creating a deep state of relaxation through mindful breathing. As you breath in, be aware of the sensation of you breath entering your nose and flowing naturally down into you lungs; notice your abdomen expand as you breath down into your dantien. Notice that as you allow your breath to naturally dissolve, your abdomen relaxes your body relaxes; from there you can allow your minds eye to scan you body looking for and releasing any tension as you go.

Once you have enabled your mind to quiet, you can focus on your tai chi form practice; start by imagining yourself standing in preparation to commence your form practice. If you become distracted by extraneous thoughts, begin again with you body scanning until all thought have passed.

Once ready, imagine moving through your form, being clear about each detail: where is your weight? The sensations of transferring from one leg to the other and so on... Continue this active imagery through each move of the form until you have completed. This can be taken one stage further by having a particular intention in your practice eg martial application, weight transference, compression etc.

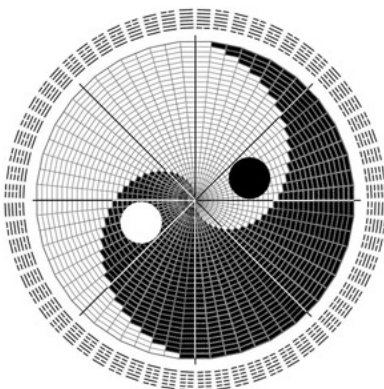
After completing this mental form practice, practice your form physically. How did this experience change your experience of your form practice? Maybe even alternate between practicing physically first then mentally first to experience the differences, if any. As you continue to practice you can choose to focus one once particular sense then another eg kinaesthetic, auditory and so on.

The old saying of *“where the mind goes, the chi goes”* can now find new depths of meaning.

Practicing with active imagination will help you remember your form more easily plus strengthen your body-being awareness, thereby strengthening your growing connections.

### **The Axle, the Wheel and other stuff**

Another instalment from one of the Kai Ming instructors on their interpretation of the tai chi classics. This was written by Steve Taylor, an instructor from Bromsgrove and Hopwood classes.



The phrase:

*“Stand like a perfectly balanced scale and move like a turning wheel”*

I thought about the wheel first.

For a wheel to turn smoothly the axle needs to be straight.

A bent axle is not much use and nor is one which is catching on something.

If it's straight, upright and free from obstructions, it can do its job properly and the wheel will turn.

What if the waist is the wheel? – After all it has the ability to turn.

Then surely the spine would be its axle - if it's upright, loose and unrestricted, it can turn freely and the waist can turn; if it's bent, twisted or obstructed, it becomes stiff and inefficient.

But how could the spine be obstructed? Even simply raising or lowering our chin instead of suspending the head as if it was held by a thread from above alters the alignment of our spine.

Locking our legs out straight can cause the spine to curve putting pressure between the vertebrae and restrict movement. Likewise, if our knees are bent, there will be some tension and the spine tilts forward, again restricting movement.

Then my thought turned to the perfectly balanced scale.

For a scale to work correctly, it needs to be set down on a level surface.

Obviously our legs play their part, making a stable connection to the ground.

We can create a perfectly balanced scale if we stand with our feet shoulder width apart, legs neither straight nor knees deliberately bent and with our shoulders and arms relaxed. Imagine a thread suspended from above, the head sitting on top of our shoulders, not tilted.

By keeping our waist relaxed and loosened, our feet not only have power but our legs make our connection to the ground even more stable.

Sat atop this perfectly balanced scale, our waist (the wheel) can turn freely around the spine (its axle).

To further the analogy, imagine our arm is a spoke of the wheel. The Peng, or ward-off energy, is our springy rubber tyre quality.

Now imagine the wheel; if the axle can spin freely the wheel will turn if someone pushes on it. But the tyre doesn't stiffen. It remains springy. The wheel doesn't collapse; it turns and can bounce objects away.

To conclude, it is said that the waist is the well spring of your vital energy, and the commander of your body.

All our movements originate here. Changes in full and empty derive from the movement of the waist.

This line from the classics forms the basis of Push Hands and many of the applications of Tai Chi Chuan.



Without relaxation, the energy rising up from the ground cannot be felt.

He believes that the earth's energy is Yin and the sun's energy is Yang.

They want to come together because yin and yang naturally compliment and change each other to create a balanced greater Qi or Da Qi



It's that time of year again when we need to be planning the **Kai Ming Christmas Party**. Last year we all went to Flavourz and the feedback was excellent...

It's a buffet restaurant near Junction 2 of M5 and serves 4 regions of food – Indian, Chinese, Italian and Mexican – plus has a fun relaxed atmosphere and is great value at around £15 per head.

We also had Christmas meal at lunchtime rather than in the evening which was really well received so we are planning this year to be a lunchtime event too. The date will be Sunday 14th December and the time 2pm.

We need £5 per person minimum deposit ASAP and the balance no later than 30th November

Please let your instructor know what you would like to do or contact Mark & Jenny on [markpeters@kaiming.co.uk](mailto:markpeters@kaiming.co.uk) or phone 0121 251 6172



### OBSERVATIONS OF A WATCHER!

Some years ago I was watching a class of my husband's students practicing in groups of three, so that they could help their partners by suggesting how they could improve their stances.

I made notes on my observations of the interactions that were going on between all the groups.

I found it very interesting and thought maybe I would write about this for one of the magazines we used to regularly have articles published in.

However life takes over, and the paper stayed in amongst the numerous pile of similar tatty scraps that I call a 'folder'. Then last year I was again observing a class, this time containing advanced 'players' and instructors, and guess what? Nothing seemed to have changed. The interactions and "pontificating" was still going on. Their form had changed

and improved, but their personalities and mannerisms were still the same.

So although a little delayed I decided that maybe the time was right to share my thoughts, and just maybe some of you will relate to the human dynamics within a class whether beginners or advanced. Within our clubs classes we have always encouraged a very social atmosphere, and many students tell us how they appreciate this aspect of their training.

Some who have previous experience in Tai Chi with other groups, comment that they prefer the less regimented atmosphere, and appreciate the freedom to chat and discuss what they are thinking or feeling about a new posture or some aspect of the class (within reason of course!)

Obviously this approach would not be for everyone, and I know that for some a very quiet focused class is the one that suits their way of learning, and for that reason when people contact us for more information and class venues we are open about our approach and do explain this. Sometimes after chatting, we recommend other Tai Chi Union teachers in their area if we feel (and they agree of course) that they are looking for specifics in teaching style we do not offer, although we do try and offer a very open approach.

People are always welcome to come and "have a go" at a class before they commit.

Also students do not grade for belts or sashes as such, unless they decide to go that step further and become an instructor themselves after some years of dedicated training and a feeling that this is the right path for them and the right time to take it. Now for the class observations I found so interesting.



1. The session begins and the focus on a posture or an element of Tai Chi is decided upon. Maybe it's a stance or transition or internalization of a movement that is under discussion.

2. They are often asked to split into groups of two or three to observe each

other's interpretation of what is taking place within the movement.

3. Often people automatically start working with the people they have chosen to in previous classes. They are more comfortable with them and it seems to indicate a comfort zone of familiarity.

For this reason every 15 minutes the class is asked to rotate forming another group.

4. There is always lots of body language and discussion, and some putting forward opinions more forcibly than others. Even amongst instructors, some appear to be more subservient (easy going if you'd prefer) than their fellow instructor.

5. Some seem to need to impress, others just enjoy being impressed.

6. There are those who enjoy talking and those who like to listen and understand different approaches to the same focus. Very interestingly professions come to the fore, teachers teach, engineers question body mechanics, and the councillors, therapists, and other 'people focused' workers want to solve others problems.

7. So within any given time in the session you will see, watchers, thinkers, doers, chatters, advice givers and yes the occasional person actually practicing what was decided upon at the start of the class.

That is what makes Kaiming classes so enjoyable and interesting, all these different people and elements are needed to give credence to the meaning of our Association's name 'OPEN MINDED'.

#### Monthly Training Dates

We hold monthly advanced training sessions in South Birmingham. If you are interested in attending or even considering training as an instructor, please ask *your* instructor.

9.30 to 12.30 (3 hours) - £25

#### **2015 dates**

8th Nov,  
6th Dec.

Christmas Party  
13th December at Flavourz

One supreme fact which I have discovered is that it is not willpower but imagination that creates.

Imagination is the creative force.

Imagination creates reality

JOHN KEATS