



Tai Chi Newsletter

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Tai Chi in the Summertime: A Perfect Season for Growth

By Mark Peters

There's something truly special about practising Tai Chi Chuan in the summer. As the days grow longer and the sun graces us with its warmth, I find myself naturally drawn outdoors, more attuned to the rhythms of nature — and that is where Tai Chi feels most alive; its why our park classes continue to grow.

Summer has always been considered a time of expansion and outward energy in traditional Chinese philosophy. It corresponds to the **Fire element** in the Five Element theory — the season of **joy, vitality, and expression**. When I practise during this time of year, I feel my energy more readily accessible, my body more open, and my spirit uplifted. Everything feels lighter, brighter, and more responsive to movement.



In the context of Tai Chi, the Fire element brings depth to our understanding of summer training. Fire is associated with the **Heart**, the **emotion of joy**, and the **spirit (Shen)**. These aren't just abstract ideas — they show up in our practice as a sense of connection, warmth, and clarity. When I teach or practise in the summer, I often feel a deeper emotional presence — not just in myself, but in my students. There's more laughter, more openness, and a collective sense of ease.

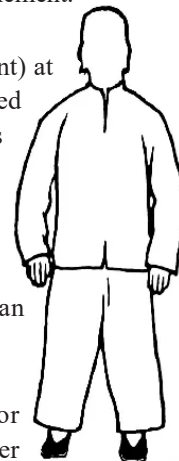
The Fire element also governs **circulation**, which is something we directly engage with in Tai Chi. The gentle, spiralling movements promote the smooth flow of blood and Qi throughout the body. In the warmer weather, this natural circulation is enhanced — muscles are more relaxed, joints more mobile, and the body more receptive to the internal changes Tai Chi offers. We're not fighting the cold; we're moving in harmony with nature's rhythm.

Practising outdoors also offers a deeper sense of connection. Weather permitting, we training outside on the advanced Sunday sessions; it's a quiet space under the shade of the trees where we can feel the earth beneath our feet. There's something grounding and calming about this direct contact with nature, especially in summer, as it offers a unique kind of medicine. The birdsong, the warmth, the gentle breeze — they all support

the Fire element's invitation to awaken joy and embrace life with softness and presence.

Fire also symbolises **transformation** — the turning of internal practice into radiant expression. I see this in my students as they begin to embody the form more fully, not just repeating movements but inhabiting them with intention and calm energy. Summer is a time when confidence naturally grows. People stand taller, breathe deeper, and begin to understand Tai Chi not just as a martial art or an exercise, but as a living philosophy. Health-wise, summer is a season of increased activity — and sometimes overstimulation. Tai Chi helps us balance the heat of the season with cool, calming breathwork and slow, deliberate movement. It supports heart health, emotional regulation, and mental clarity — all key functions of the Fire element.

As I stand in wuji (stillness before movement) at the start of each summer session, I'm reminded that fire isn't just about heat or energy — it's about **heartfulness**. It's the spark that fuels our passion, our purpose, and our connection to others. Even practicing on the beach recently felt truly connecting and invigorating. Tai Chi in the summer becomes more than practice - it becomes celebration.



So if you've been thinking of starting or returning to Tai Chi, I can't think of a better time than summer. The Fire element is alive and ready to be embraced; to truly spark that fire within.

Let the sun energise you, let nature guide you, and let Tai Chi transform your summer into a time of healing, connection, and joyful growth.



Tai Chi reading list

I am often asked if there any good books for the interested practitioner. I thought it would be an idea to set down a list of some of the titles I have found useful and interesting.

Some of these books may be hard to get or expensive. Sometimes you have to shop around or try again in a few months. Look for good second-hand copies, occasionally a few show up at our Sunday training.

There is no particular order, some are directly from the lineage, and others are by the more modern masters.

1. The Essence and Application of Taijiquan by Yang Chengfu.

Form Postures and applications from the perspective of Cheng Man Ching's principal teacher. Showing ninety-four postures, push hands and da-lu.

2. Master Cheng's Thirteen Chapters on T'ai Chi Ch'uan By Chen Man-Ch'ing. Translated by Douglas Wile. A revised edition of the classic.

3. Cheng Tzu's Thirteen Treatises on Tai Chi Ch'uan by Cheng Man Ching translated by Ben Lo and Martin Inn.

A collection of thirteen essays from Yan Cheng-fu with commentary on the classics with great pictures of the form.

4. T'ai Chi Ch'uan a simplified method of calisthenics for Health and Self Defence by Cheng Man-Ch'ing. Described by the author as an introduction to the thirteen chapters for the thinking student.

5. Master Cheng's New Method of Taichi Ch'uan Self-Cultivation by Cheng Man-Ch'ing translated by Mark Hennessy. A translation of his last book, this is the one with the foot positions marked and explained along side the pictures of the postures. If you could only buy one book this would be my recommendation.

6. Tai Chi Chuan Roots and Branches by Nigel Sutton. The author presents his personal take on Master Cheng's form. A great book from one of the best-known western teachers, part of our lineage. Must have reading to build on Cheng's knowledge.

7. Tai Chi Chuan Form to Function by Nigel Sutton. Push hands explained with pictures.

8. Cheng Hsin The principles of Effortless Power by Peter Ralston. Ralston has a unique way of distilling and clarifying the classics. Not always easy to digest but worth going back to. You should read this one more than once, leaving a good amount of time and practice between each re-reading. It is remarkable how it reads differently as your knowledge expands.

9. Tai Chi Concepts and Experiments by Robert Chuckrow, PH.D. One of Cheng Man-Ch'ing's original New York students, Chuckrow has many useful insights into rooting, redirecting, and Nei Jin (expansive force). Great for understanding the release of tension, natural movement and optimal timing

10. Yi Chi Li of Opening & Closing and the Five Loosening Exercises of Tai Chi. A detailed examination of these exercises with great pictures and

explanations. Those looking for the finer subtle aspects as their training progresses should check this out.

11. View of the Back of the Class – Volumes 1 to 3.

These books should be your first choice as they are written by our club. Each chapter discusses different aspects of tai chi and qigong, from the perspectives of students and instructors.

12. The Complete Book of T'ai Chi by Stewart Mcfarlane. Out of print but lots of copies online. This form book is well illustrated and great for beginners.

This is by no means an exhaustive list, just the ones I have found useful. I am in no way responsible for any addiction contracted by reading a few of these! You may find yourself trawling eBay looking for the next literary fix while all the surfaces of your house disappear, sagging under piles of paper much to the annoyance of your ever-patient partner. I wonder if you get paid for an appearance on TV's Hoarders...?

By Carl Kinnin



Observations of a Watcher!

by Jenny Peters

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.
4. For this reason every 15 minutes the class is asked to rotate forming another group.
5. 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 would prefer) than their fellow instructor.
6. Some seem to need to impress, others just enjoy being impressed.
7. There are those who enjoy talking and those who like to listen and understand different approaches to the same focus.
8. 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.
9. 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 Kai-ming classes so enjoyable and interesting; all these different people and elements are needed to give credence to the meaning of our Associations name ‘OPEN MINDED’.

Want to learn something new?

Cheng Man Ching's Eight Exercises for Health



Thursday 14th August 1-4pm live on zoom £35

This set was taught by Prof.Cheng in New York between 1965 and 1974

Rarely taught in the UK, I am offering this set for the first time ever on zoom.

Prof Cheng developed the set to give easier access to aspects of tai chi that would improve balance and mobility for some of students and friends.

You can book and pay online at: <https://shorturl.at/XK6cS>

A WARNING....

There is a bug that's rarely seen
That gives a serious bite.
It's got two heads, two tails, and two eyes
And it's half black and white.

There is no cure for the bite it gives.
The symptoms are a curse.
The more you learn about it
The symptoms just get worse.

You can try to fight it
With a fan, a sword or a stick
But if you find you're travelling east
You really know you're sick!

Tigers and Swimming Dragons,
They'll haunt you through the night.
And Bears and Monkeys need all your wits
To ward off, left and right.

You'll find that you'll be standing
In a very funny form,
But the experts say 'Don't worry
This symptom is the norm.'

You'll hear 'plinky plonky' music
In your head so loud.
And your hands will suddenly float up and down
Just like a fluffy cloud.

So heed this warning that I give
Though it comes too late for me.
For I have been bitten very hard by this
Bug they call **TAI CHI**

Seek and You Will Find

(As long as you know what you are looking for)

Whilst reading a booklet for evening classes that came through my letter box some years ago I noticed that Tai Chi was available and thought I would give it a go,

I was in my early fifties at the time and something that started as a curiosity became a life changer.

This first introduction was with a group of enthusiasts who were following a 24-step form video, they also had added in some Chi Kung; meditation involved with crystals and candles, which I later found out, was not strictly regular Tai Chi.

After the local council became aware of the class and became involved, this group was stopped due to the need for qualified instructors.

So I looked for and found another local Tai Chi club.

This was the thirty seven step form developed by Grand Master Cheng Man Ching and after enquires established that my local class had a fully qualified instructor,

After steady progress learning the form, I began to realize how sophisticated the art was, and wanted it to become a way of life and develop a more relaxed and balanced way of life.

It was not easy; it had to be worked at, especially when I commenced push hands for the first time. This was very difficult, physically and emotionally trying to stay calm and relaxed and not become aggressive if I was pushed off balance.

At that time I purchased a book by Bruce Franzis called "The Big Book of Tai Chi,"

It is like an encyclopaedia of Tai Chi.

The chapters on physical and emotional self-defence, I found very useful and still use for reference.

Then after a number of years, I made a personal decision to move on. I felt the direction within the class had changed and was now not what I felt was right for me anymore, although I still valued what Tai Chi had given me and wanted to continue so hoped I would be able to find another club.

Then one day in a local paper was an advertisement for a day of activities in a nearby town, one of them was Tai Chi demonstration, so I went along to watch.

The Tai Chi instructor (who I had checked was qualified) taught the 108-step form.

I spoke to him after the demo and decided to join a class of his.



However, after 3 months of learning the first two sections of this form, I once again began to have problems with my calf muscles and hips.

This was the result of injuries from many years before. They had been a problem now and again since starting Tai Chi, but I always carried on training.

Now it had become more of a problem, and I was in pain so I was advised to rest and take a break from my classes.

Whilst resting and considering what to do next I came across a Tai Chi Association that had classes across the Midlands. I had been using the internet at my local library when I found them.

The club, which followed Master Cheng Man Ching's 37-step form, was called Kai Ming.

They had classes for people with all levels of competences and physical ability and there was also the availability of daytime sessions focusing on rehabilitation for people following cardiac problems and mobility issues.

I decided to enquire and phoned to speak to Mark Peters the founder of the club and Chief Principal Instructor. We had a friendly chat about my problems and he advised me to make a visit to my nearest venue and speak to the instructor there, which I did and decided to join and have a go, which I did and enjoyed.

Now in my mid to late sixties and retired from work I am attending three classes a week, and a monthly advanced training session that Mark teaches.

The difference I found with Kai Ming that had been missing from other training in the art was that with their help I have been able to adapt the form and Tai Chi practise to suit my difficulties whilst still following the principles.

At last I seem to be settled and it seems however long your Tai Chi journey may be if you know what you want it is out there. Never settle for less than what you believe it should be.

My improved quality of life is a testimony that my search was worth it.

By Terry Lalley - Sutton Coldfield Student

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**

July 6th

Aug 10th

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

Oct 12th

Nov 16th