

# Kai Ming Association Newsletter

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## Tai Chi a martial art for modern times.

When I first started to learn tai chi some 30+ years ago I was really interested in it as a fighting art that was less aggressive than Karate or Kung-Fu and more in line with Aikido but with less throwing. That is an overly simplistic view of external and internal martial arts, but enough to give an idea of my mind-set at that time. I remember trying a few martial arts out and reading a book about tai chi by Danny Conner. The search for ‘real tai chi’ led me to training in the UK and Asia, compete in the UK, America and Taiwan, and to continue to research, and refine my understanding and application of this fascinating art.

My study of how to apply tai chi as a martial art had a massive paradigm shift when I was asked in early 2000’s to teach Tai Chi to NHS staff for falls prevention. I started to explore how to put people back into balance rather than just take their balance. This shift in functional application helped me realise that tai chi is actually a muscular skeletal rehabilitation system; a real ‘self-defence for life’ that enables us, as human-beings, to strengthen our balance and reduce the strain of daily life.

For me, the real bonus of tai chi is like a super market offer of “buy one get one FREE” in that when you buy the martial

art you get the health art FREE and visa-versa.... One does not function without the other. Just moving slowly doesn’t make it tai chi.

The focus of this short article is not to consider the mindful and relaxing benefits of tai chi chuan but to remember and practice practical self-defence, which is often overlooked now we are all getting older. As a martial art, tai chi works by removing muscular strength/tension from your hands and arms, aligning your body and misaligning your opponent. If somebody grabs you, attack their balance don’t fight their strength; if somebody punches or kicks you, reposition and attack their balance, don’t fight their strength. Tai Chi is an art of relaxation (sung) and balance (zhong-ding).

Push-hands helps train these skills even though at first it can seem a little baffling. Work with a partner to overcome tension and find their balance. Tai Chi and dancing have this in common, it is only the finish that is different, usually... start slow and when you get stuck, don’t tense up but work with your partner to explore. A simple first martial application to practice is lift-hands; ask your partner to grab your collar with both hands and use lift-hands to take their balance whilst keeping your own.

As you learn the tai chi form, ask for martial applications so you have a clearer idea of what the postures are for, its shape, its flow etc. and remember if strength is needed then it’s not being done correctly. Developing these skills does not necessarily mean you plan to be a fighter but does mean you are developing your balance and spatial awareness.

You can choose how to use those skills in your life... maybe we’ll see you on ‘strictly’.



## ‘Into the Sky’ and ‘part the Clouds...’

We’re spaced around the room, some of us in socks, others in trainers or barefoot, following the flow of instructions.... letting our legs ‘sink down’ or our ‘arms float up’. When it comes to ‘turn and face the wall,’ the newest member of the group hesitates. “Which wall?” And we laugh, because the joke told in T’ai Chi circles is probably true. The first ten years are the hardest!

Two years after my first lesson, I still feel a Beginner, but that’s fine – because the ancient art has me lightly but firmly in its hold and you don’t have to be particularly bendy – or get sweaty – to do it. A fall in the street – and a broken wrist - was a Sign that a better relationship with the ground was required. Which brought me to an affordable, friendly class in a local church hall with an auspiciously clean floor.



The session begins with some warm-up stretching, swinging and circling and a series of breathing and balancing exercises to help focus the attention. All to the sound of music – wind over water and stone or a distant bell in a temple high in the hills of some Shangri La land... Then we go through the Form: a set of 37 meditative movements, designed, so the literature says, to promote the flow of energy (or chi) along the body’s meridian pathways - the same ones acupuncturists use – and a greater sense of connection between mind and body, heaven and earth. *vin and vang*. A touch cosmic for

some, perhaps, but the health benefits are basic enough.

Human beings, bipeds fresh from the trees, fall over a lot. Especially older ones, less bouncy than before. So a system that can lower blood pressure, build muscle strength and a core stability has to be a Good Thing.

There's a darker side to it all, of course. This is after all a martial art which began as a defensive fighting style – and imagining an opponent right in front of you can keep an action smooth and contained, even a kick or a punch. You can also learn how to break an attempted stranglehold by knocking an attacker off-centre or you can curve your fingers into a would-be killer's collarbone. Not one to practise at home. For less exciting situations, the everyday applications come in handy. Like how to open a heavy door with the minimum of effort. The whole thing reminds me of that old Kleenex ad: *Softness is my Strength.*

It isn't easy to learn - and hard to practise on your own. What looks like poetry in motion on YouTube is a real challenge for the less confident, well-co-ordinated student. So many subtle shifts of weight, transitional turns of the waist. Sometimes, feel sure I've 'got' part of the pattern, only to find a moment later that I'm – literally – on the wrong foot!

Three things help a lot. An instructor to be trusted in, with a sense of humour. The repetition of some of the sequences starts to embed them in the memory. Thirdly, the very visual language used in the teaching works to shape every move we make. We draw bows, hold balls, return to many mountains. My favourite image is a ward-off one – 'like holding a coat over one arm, while patting a dog with the other...'

There are a lot of animals in the T'ai Chi universe. When you're not embracing – or shooting a tiger, you're repulsing a monkey, making like a rooster on one leg or a cow gazing at the moon. All in a state of 'relaxed concentration', naturally.

In time, they say, you 'make the Form your own. For now, it's more than enough to grow a few 'rooting skills', find a better balance, a new rhythm and live a little more in the present. In the modern, mindful way. And if over 200 million

Chinese can do it – daily at dawn, in parks and in public....!

The class ends with a lovely sequence, performed twice, then a third time in silence. In which we play with another imaginary ball that becomes a balloon – picking it up, pushing it away- then hold and separate curtains, press down on heavy springs...until it's time to open and sweep our arms wide 'into the sky' and 'part the clouds.'

By Tessa Calvert-Linnell

PLAYING IN THE WAVES



### Not Forgetting the Women

*"My painful knees have improved so much."*

*"The mobility in my aching neck is unbelievably better."*

*"I realised that I wasn't using my inhaler as much."*

*"My stomach problems seem to have subsided."*

*"I can cope with the stress in my life now."*

These remarks all came from people who do Tai Chi. The origins of the expression "the thinking man's martial art" may be the same as that Tai Chi has an inherent softness of movement. It is said that the art originated among the ranks of monks and scholars, rather than from fighting

men and warriors. Be that as it may, it uses an energy which is very different from that of the fighting man. The monks and scholars possibly wanted to defend themselves in a less violent way, and so searched for such a method, eventually producing the idea of moving more from inside, from the internal energy, and so not damaging one's own body in the process.

### Patience

Such men appreciated the importance of patience. Patience is not in plentiful supply in our society, and the old saying "that if something is worth having it is worth waiting for" goes unobserved. When I had been studying Tai Chi for five years I looked back and realised that I had come a long way, relatively speaking, both martial and health wise. My life seemed broader somehow, and my general awareness improved. Students of the art usually are quite social, in my experience, and if they are not, at the outset, they soon become so. I feel this is because they are looking for more than an hour of instruction. Those who stay after the first few months seem to find that the art becomes an integral part of everyday life. They train the body in the physical and the mind in the mental aspects and slowly the two come together.

You need to *feel* Tai Chi, and this is what comes to the dedicated student. At times I have become something of an evangelist when extolling the virtues of the art. As a general rule, women are in a minority in the world of martial arts. In my view it is better for women to learn a 'soft' or internal martial art such as Tai Chi, because it is a fact that men are basically much stronger than women and when it comes to the crunch in real combat they are likely to come off worse. Even if a woman learns a tough external art, her body is not as a rule capable of withstanding a hard onslaught from a man. Women are fundamentally softer than men and can, in Tai Chi, take advantage of this fact, since in a sense the art lends itself to that quality.

### Balance

In my view, we can use the softness, in Push Hands for example, to draw men in and cause them to lose their balance. Cheng Man-ching himself said that

women are more naturally gifted in Tai Chi, so we should use this to help ourselves in confronting men. Not to oppose force with force but with a degree of yielding softness. It usually takes men much longer than women to learn this aspect, the yielding, but of course it has to be learned and incorporated by women also when it comes to the Push Hands aspect of the art.

Applying the virtues of softness is frustrating and difficult and all sincere push hands students, men and women, must confront this problem. Recently during a push hands session we changed partners and I found myself facing a 'young buck' who had recently come from hard external martial arts to Tai Chi. During that session he had been pushing with only male students. As we began to 'play' and he had to invest in loss, he suddenly exclaimed, "Just what I need, I'm actually using my waist again instead of having to pile straight through with brute force." Obviously I thrashed him regardless, but who am I to show off...

### Investing in loss

It becomes clear that to reap the benefits of health from Tai Chi, relaxation and softness are essential and this is the great gift which women can bring to the class. Over my years of training in push hands, many times women students have complained to me that they dislike pushing with men because the man's ego sometimes gets in the way. Though it is hard for a man to learn investing in loss, for women it is sometimes, paradoxically harder, because in spite of having an inherent softness, as soon as a woman gains some advantage, then a male partner comes out with brute force, because he is losing his balance. A more experienced woman knows that as a man increases in hardness, ego threatened, the easier it becomes to unbalance him further. But the less experienced woman does not know this, feels threatened, and begins to resort to force, herself.

For this reason, at Kai Ming, we do not introduce push hands until a student has had at least three months of regular training. Students need to know one another and their teacher, for confidence to build. During this period the students begin to know their own space, feel at ease, and this enables them to meet push

hands in a much more favourable atmosphere when they begin it. It must be difficult for the external martial artist to understand why the Tai Chi Chuan student sees his art as a serious self defence method. It is not unknown for us to be the butt of the odd joke or two as the slow, graceful movements are observed. But as the years go by and external martial arts produce muscle strain, broken bones and tension, the Tai Chi student continues to be able to move with ease, with almost no injury results present in the body. Perhaps a case of the tortoise beating the hare.

### Practical problems

We sometimes forget that as our fellow students progress there is no realistic prospect of emulating a true to life fighting situation to test their abilities in that direction. So how do we solve this problem? I personally practise any new technique on my son who is six feet four inches tall. Due to my success in eluding his grabs, throttlings and lunges plus his frequent requests for cold compresses we both have to accept that the methods do work.

It is a sad fact that in this day and age we cannot escape the reality of violence in our society. An unprovoked attack is particularly important to women. I strongly suggest that Tai Chi is a very good first step in protecting oneself from such attacks. As a registered nurse I can say that a large percentage, perhaps fifty per cent, of problems I see in patients are either caused by stress or are stress related. To some extent, external martial arts increase stress, both physical and mental, accelerating the adrenalin output with all its consequences. I realise that some people enjoy the tough training methods, and find that 'hard' sessions release their stress and aggressions. But I feel these people are the exception rather than the rule. Ultimately their joints will remind them in later life of their earlier training days.

When asked the question, "Why learn Tai Chi?", Cheng Man-ching replied, "When you get to that point in your life when you know what you want, Tai Chi will provide you with the strength to enjoy it."

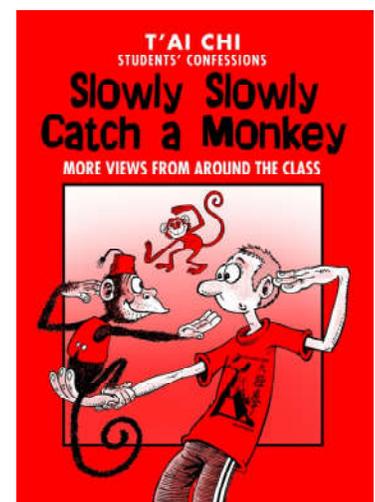
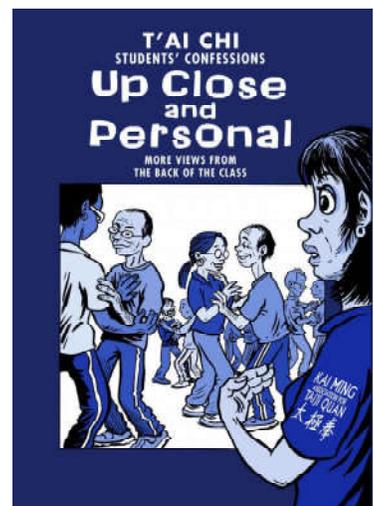
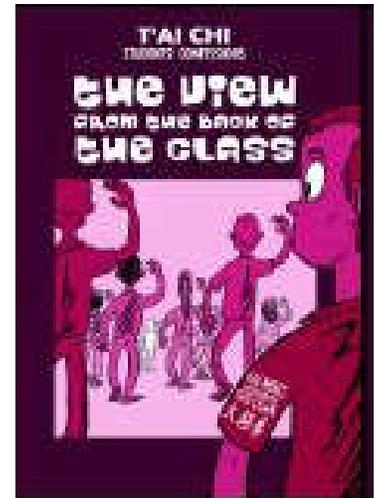
How can we argue with that?

By Jenny Peters

## Tai Chi Books

Kai Ming have produced 3 tai chi books that are available via your instructor, our website or Amazon.

There is a special limited offer to buy all three volumes of £30 or buy separately at £15 each





Maybe you saw the show on TV but if not you can see it online at <https://bbc.in/2CzAiOF>

I first spoke to Nor Fadila Kasim a Doctoral researcher at Birmingham University in October 2015. We discussed the idea of a research project comparing Tai Chi to a more obvious aerobic exercise and decide on Zumba Gold due to the target group of the study.

Nor and Dr Sarah Aldred visit a class later that year to try tai chi for themselves and I helped them apply for funding support from the TCUGB in early 2016.

The project started later that year and Nigel Ryan ran the sessions as he was available, and I couldn't commit the time at that time. It concluded in December 2016 at which point they started to analyse the research.

The word must have spread because in April 2018 the BBC contacted Nor and wanted to feature the work on BBC Science! Coincidentally the BBC had also contacted me to discuss tai chi and pain management due to some recent research into tai chi and fibromyalgia. The universe seemed to conspire against me as when the BBC decided to film I was going to be out of the country, which was a real shame as I truly wanted to be there. Nigel did a good job and it actually turned out to be Dr. Michael Moseley for 'Trust me I'm a Doctor'. If I would have known, I'm sure Jenny wouldn't have minded postponing our holiday; I love the work he does. She just reminded me that we even postponed our honeymoon so I could take part in a competition :-)

So jump forward to October 2018 and the show was aired on BBC 2 Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> October. Its available now on iPlayer and on the the link I provided above.

Its seems the world is really waking up to the benefits of tai chi chuan so spread the word...

## Tai Chi Instructors needed

Are you interested in taking your tai chi training to the next level? Are you truly interested in developing your tai chi skills and abilities? Do you really enjoy your classes and practicing tai chi? Have you ever considered training as a tai chi instructor?

There is an old saying "the teacher is the taught" which really means to truly understand a skill you should look to teach it to others.

Kai Ming has now been teaching tai chi for some 25+ years with most of the instructors being there from the very beginning. We are always looking to encourage new students through the ranks and maybe that could be you.

**WE NEED YOU!**



Call Mark on 0121 251 6172 to discuss. The sooner you start the better. Training program starts early 2019 so register your interest.

## Holiday in Cornwall?



If any club members are interested in a holiday near Bude, Cornwall, we have a two bedroom bungalow (sleeps 6) and can offer a great price out of main school holidays. Dogs are welcome as they need a holiday too.

Please contact Jenny and Mark on **0121 251 6172** for details.



**KEEP CALM  
IT'S  
TAI CHI  
PARTY TIME**

*Remember to book for  
the Christmas Party  
Sunday 16th December*



Its 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 £16 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 16th December and the time 2pm.**

We need £5 per person minimum deposit ASAP and the balance no late than 30th November. No bookings after that date.

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

### PLEASE NOTE:

**Please send your Newsletter contributions for future issues to [markpeters@kaiming.co.uk](mailto:markpeters@kaiming.co.uk)**

Advanced Sunday training sessions 2018  
Below are the dates for 2018. Sessions run 9.30 to 12.30 and are £30

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure about attending or call Mark on 0121 251 6172

Oct 14th  
Nov 11th  
Dec 9th  
Jan. 13th 2019  
Feb. 10th 2019