

THE JOURNAL OF THE TAI CHI & QIGONG UNION FOR GREAT BRITAIN

TAI CHI CHUAN & INTERNAL ARTS

No.65 April 2022 | £5.00

Yin Yang in Qigong

Qigong – a history

World Tai Chi Day

Zhan Zhuang

A Chen retreat



A week of
Chi & Chinese
Internal Arts
in the heart of
Scotland
May 15 - Friday 22
July 2022



The Location



Tai Chi Caledonia
takes place at the
gateway to the
Scottish Highlands,
near Stirling in

The Venue

This 25th event is also our 23rd year at Stirling University Campus which is set in a spectacular woodland, with lakes and acres of open green space which abound with wildlife. This fresh environment is perfectly suited for training.



The Programme

We offer a range of options for attending Tai Chi Caledonia, making it accessible to all. You can attend on a day, a weekend, whole or part week basis, residential or non-residential.

Weekend Sessions

Our teaching programme starts on Saturday morning at 10.00 after our introductory meeting. The weekend sessions include a choice of 48 x 45 minute sessions allowing you to get a taste of a variety of approaches to tai chi & chinese internal arts.

Week-long Sessions

Monday to Thursday you will train 2^{1/2} hours each morning and afternoon, over the four days allowing 10 hours intensive training, working on 2 separate disciplines (1 each from A and B) for 5 hours per day in total.

Booking Options & Programme Details visit: <https://www.taichicaldonia.com>

The Instructors



Wudang 8 Powers Taijiquan
Tina Faulkner-Elders



Nei Gong
Gianfranco Pace



Meditation & Movement
Margret Stürz



Practical Aspects of Taijiquan
Sasa Krauter



Taiji Thirteen Power Sword
Sam Masich



Baguazhang Fan
Sonja Schillo



The Mother Sequence
Margherita Padalino



Sensing Hands
Ben Morris

Guest Instructors

Visit our website for fuller descriptions: <https://www.taichicaldonia.com>



Bartosz Samitowski



Willhelm Mertens



Pim Van Der Broek



Javier Arnanz

Barry's Boot Camp

07.30 - 09.30 Sun till Thursday

Back, by popular demand. If you need a kick start to your day, this is it. Barry WILL waken you up.

Qigong Training

08.30 - 09.30 Sun till Thursday

Early morning Qigong sessions will be with a different teacher each day.

Push Hands

In addition to the structured classes there will be time for both formal and informal push hands training.



Gally Ceilidh - Wednesday

Always a popular evening, even if it is just to watch the 'non-Scottish'.

Testimonials

"As a newcomer to the event I would especially like to thank you and everyone else involved for organising Tai Chi Caledonia and for making me feel relaxed and welcome. I found it the most inspiring week and one that will stay with me for some time. The tuition was outstanding and I learnt just as much from everyone else - they were all so kind and helpful. I'm so glad I came and hope to come again next year."

"I wanted to thank you because I spent a week a little magic! I knew no one (except Annie and Daniel) and yet I felt good. Classes were exciting and the time passed very quickly. Bravo for the impeccable organization and with all my heart, thank you! The work continues! and next year!"

"I had a great time on Saturday thanks very much. It was shaping up to be another fantastic TCC, I was sorry to have to leave after one day and sorry I couldn't stay for the demonstrations - hope the rain stayed off, there was a biblical downpour on the way back to Glasgow! But blazing sunshine today so I hope you've got that in Stirling too - it's always a treat to train outside."



Bennie Robinson



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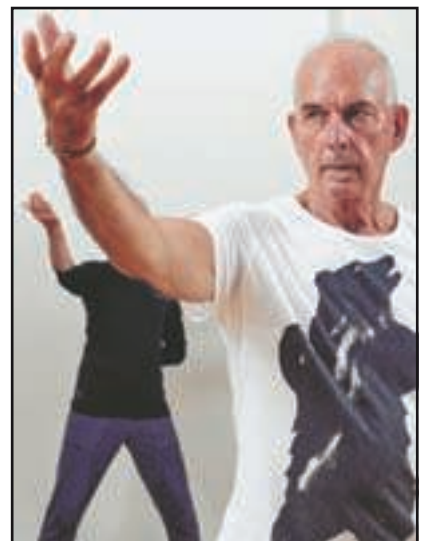
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Comment

The big item in the tai chi calendar this month is World Tai Chi Day on 30th April.

The event was founded by Bill Douglas and his wife Angela Wong Douglas 20 years ago. This was about the time I started in tai chi. As I became more connected to the art I noticed emails popping into my inbox advertising WTCD. I was impressed that such a thing existed although my tai chi master at the time seemed quite disinterested so I never really found out much more. Others, it seems, were more active and, as this edition has to go to press before the end of April, we are publishing reports from previous years.

Bill Douglas has spent many years collecting research on mind-body practices and the advantage of this type of practice in healing. We do seem to be in an era where what we do is being appreciated by conventional western medicine and mindful systems are no longer instantly dismissed as 'new age'.

It happens in all sorts of ways. About a year ago I fell into the clutches of the NHS and one day found myself on a gym bike, hooked up to an ECG machine. I rather felt that I was cheating. I learnt my breathing 40 years ago from a karate teacher. (Actually he also introduced me to the concept of using internal energy – ki he called it, chi in our terms.) So pedalling this bike was a bit of a doddle and they gave up before I did. But, on the wall in front of me was an interesting poster advocating abdominal breathing as a help to preparing yourself for and recovering from surgery.

'Good to know they are catching on at last,' I thought.

“Can you manage another two or three minutes?” someone interrupted my thoughts: 'What? Oh yeah, no problem.'

John Roper

TAI CHI CHUAN & INTERNAL ARTS

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Editor: John Roper **Assitant Editor:** Suse Coon **Production Assistant:** Jo Roper

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Editorial address: 14 Greenstead Gardens, Woodford Green IG8 7EX
editor@taichimag.org 07967 666794 www.taichimag.org

Passion re-ignition

As the world opens up more and more, many of us are up and running both face-to-face and online, whilst some are still awaiting a realistic and solid 'everything is safe' message from our governments and the World Health Organisation (WHO). I am enjoying running qigong workshops on Zoom, but prefer face-to-face for tai chi training and am still restricting partner work even with flow tests

Like in many areas of our lives, it's easy to get out of the habit of things. Some people I've spoken to have even lost their passion for training as they enjoyed the social aspects of classes. My wife, Jenny, wrote something I'd like to share with you:

Passion:

(1) Strong emotion, (2) strong enthusiasm

These two definitions of passion are taken from the *Oxford Dictionary*.

Of course, there are others, but these are the ones we feel best fit our values and meaning.

'To practise tai-chi and qigong with passion and commitment'. Unlike other arts and sports tai chi is not limited by age or disabilities, it is only limited by your own motivation. If you lose the passion, you lose the motivation. Like many others, if I really want something, the drive I put into it soon becomes a 'passion'.

It is mad to realise that it has been two years since Covid-19 hit the world and closed it down. The stop-starts, isolation, loss of friends and family members for some, has killed the drive and passion for life for many. Now is the time to relight that fire and invigorate that passion for the arts we love so much.

We realise students may come to tai-chi not really knowing much about it and just 'want to have a go'. We do get the odd one who arrives fired-up who has been looking for a class all their life it would seem. Generally, these are the words we dread. Usually, it means after a couple of sessions we never see them again. The reality of the actual 'doing' is just too much... tai-chi is not easy.

This is where passion comes in. Without it your training will be enjoyable but lacking in substance, and that's fine if you are happy with that. Steak pie is very nice but adding the kidney is where the flavour really kicks in. Add passion to your training and experience a banquet. (Veggie alternatives available.)

I feel qualified to speak about the difference it can make because I have lived with it ever since Mark began his search for, what he believed, was 'the real art.' It was not an easy task. There were lots of simple 'steak pies' out there. He had to remove several 'crusts' to examine their content before he found the one with the 'kidney'. But it was worth it.

He has developed as a person, along with his tai-chi. The 'passion' is consuming: once you have it you want it all. Fortunately for our own club we have over the years acquired students who feel the same way, some of whom have progressed to instructors and are encouraging more to develop that passion.

Tai-chi is a never-ending journey for Mark, but a journey he is enjoying so much, and which has enriched

his life immeasurably.

I find it hard to remember life without it.

I close with a remark from one of our newly graded instructors.

At the Christmas meal on receiving his certificate he told us that it meant more to him than any other scholastic achievement he had received. It meant we trusted him as a

person and his knowledge of the art itself, to allow him to be graded by the club to teach others. An honour he was overcome with and thanked us for.

It really had nothing to do with us. He has the passion, and we thank him for wanting to pass it on to others.

Jenny Peters



Mark Peters

Insurance update

We added a new provider recently. Based on members' feedback we have also added a 'book and pay online' link to our insurance page to make it easier for you.

What would you like from the Union?

As a CIC we have certain aims and purpose, for the wider community, as laid down in our articles of association (available on the website), but as a membership organisation your needs come first so what do you want from the TCUGB? To improve communication, we do need to make best use of all media including social media. Do you or your students have skills and a passion to help us all develop? Email me at enquires@taichiunion.com

Best regards,

Mark Peters
TCUGB Chairman

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It takes 1,000 to start for one to finish
so says the old Chinese proverb about tai chi chuan

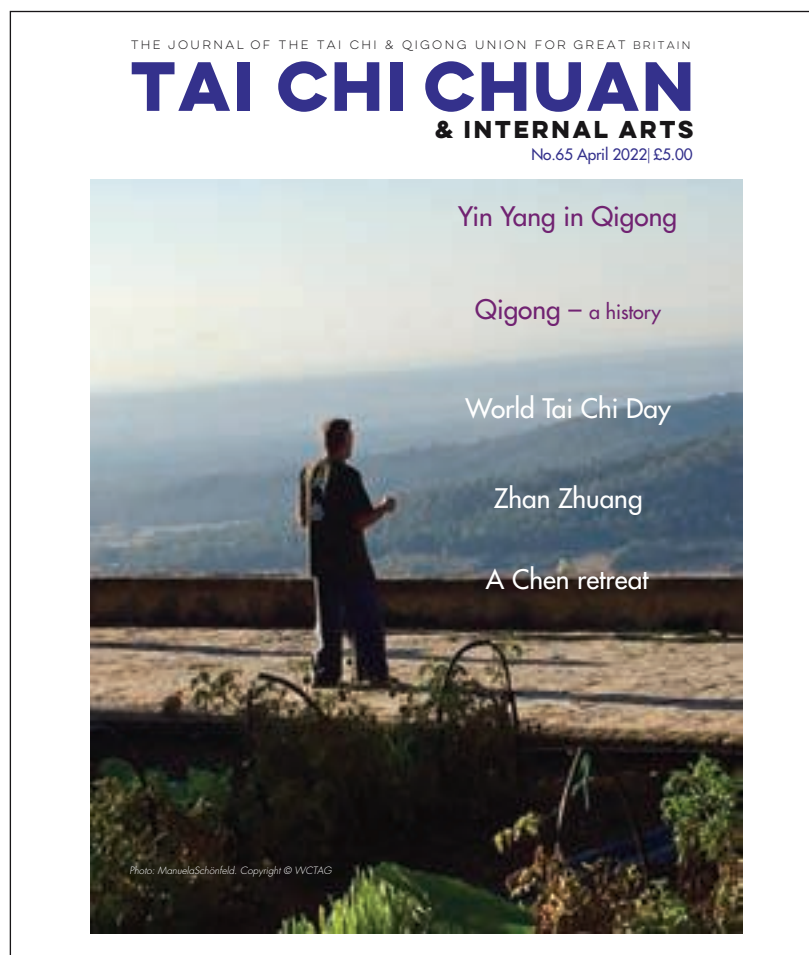
Well every month around 1,000 people log onto the TCC&IA website
to read the magazine

So it looks like we are getting something right

Reach these tai chi and qigong practitioners, advertise your events,
workshops and martial arts equipment in *your* magazine

email editor@taichimag.org for rates

And don't forget, TCUGB members get a 30% discount



The Tai Chi and Qigong Union for Great Britain
www.taichiunion.com Email: enquires@taichiunion.com

Celebrating

World
Tai Chi Day



From hopeful beginnings in the Nelson Atkins Art Museum, Kansas City, World Tai Chi and Qigong Day has become a genuinely global phenomenon. The vision of Bill Douglas and his wife, Angela Wong Douglas, has touched billions of people in more than 80 countries on every continent over the last twenty years.

In the beginning...

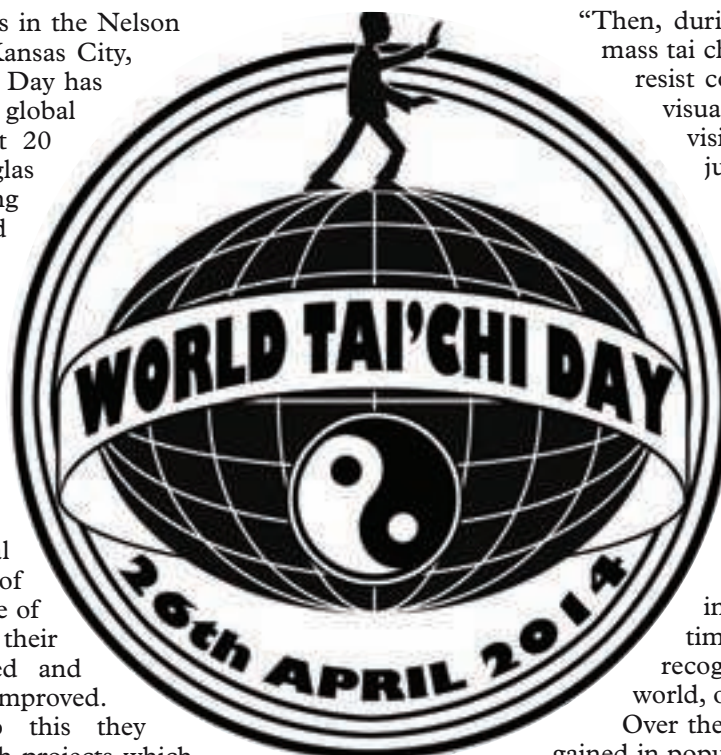
From hopeful beginnings in the Nelson Atkins Art Museum, Kansas City, World Tai Chi and Qigong Day has become a genuinely global phenomenon. For the last 20 years the vision of Bill Douglas and his wife, Angela Wong Douglas, has touched billions of people in more than 80 countries on every continent.

Bill's inspiration to start this worldwide event came from two distinct happenings: he was teaching tai chi and qigong in a number of settings, including situations where medical practitioners from a variety of specialisms took part. Some of the practitioners found that their stress levels were reduced and some physical conditions improved. When they looked into this they discovered medical research projects which tended to back up their personal findings.

Medical research proving the value of tai chi and qigong, amongst other practices such as yoga, is scant, (a sceptic would say there is no drug money to be made from it) but where it does exist there is clear evidence of positive results, albeit often with the proviso that a larger study is needed.

Then Bill's mother died and when the family were tidying up her things, they found a copy of the *Dao De Jing* that Bill had lent her with a note in it saying that she wished she had discovered these relaxation techniques much earlier.

The knowledge that medical research showed that tai chi and qigong could help 100s of millions of people but the media wasn't telling them about it, left Bill feeling he was hitting his head against a wall.



"Then, during a meditation, I saw this mass tai chi event the media could not resist covering because tai chi is so visually spectacular. And in my vision, I knew it was larger than just one event."

He made fliers and posters and booked the Nelson Atkins Art Museum in his home Kansas City. A beautiful space for one day in April. Numbers were slow to begin with but gradually built to around two hundred – much to Bill's relief – when the local news station turned up. The story was then taken up by CNN and attracted enough interest for Bill to invest his time fully in the event, now recognised by the tagline 'one world, one breath'.

Over the last 20 years, the event has gained in popularity to the extent that new data from the Princeton University Engineering and Anomalies Laboratory Global Consciousness Project identifies a spike on World Tai Chi Day. It would appear that we are all connected when we come together in 'coherent consciousness' no matter where we are physically.

And not only do we as individuals benefit. We are increasing coherence in global consciousness when we do. As are the International Day of Yoga, and world meditation events, that came into being following the creation of World Tai Chi and Qigong Day. ☸



Bill Douglas

www.worldtaichiday.org

To find an event near you or to add your event

www.hplconsortium.com/web/wtd/2020

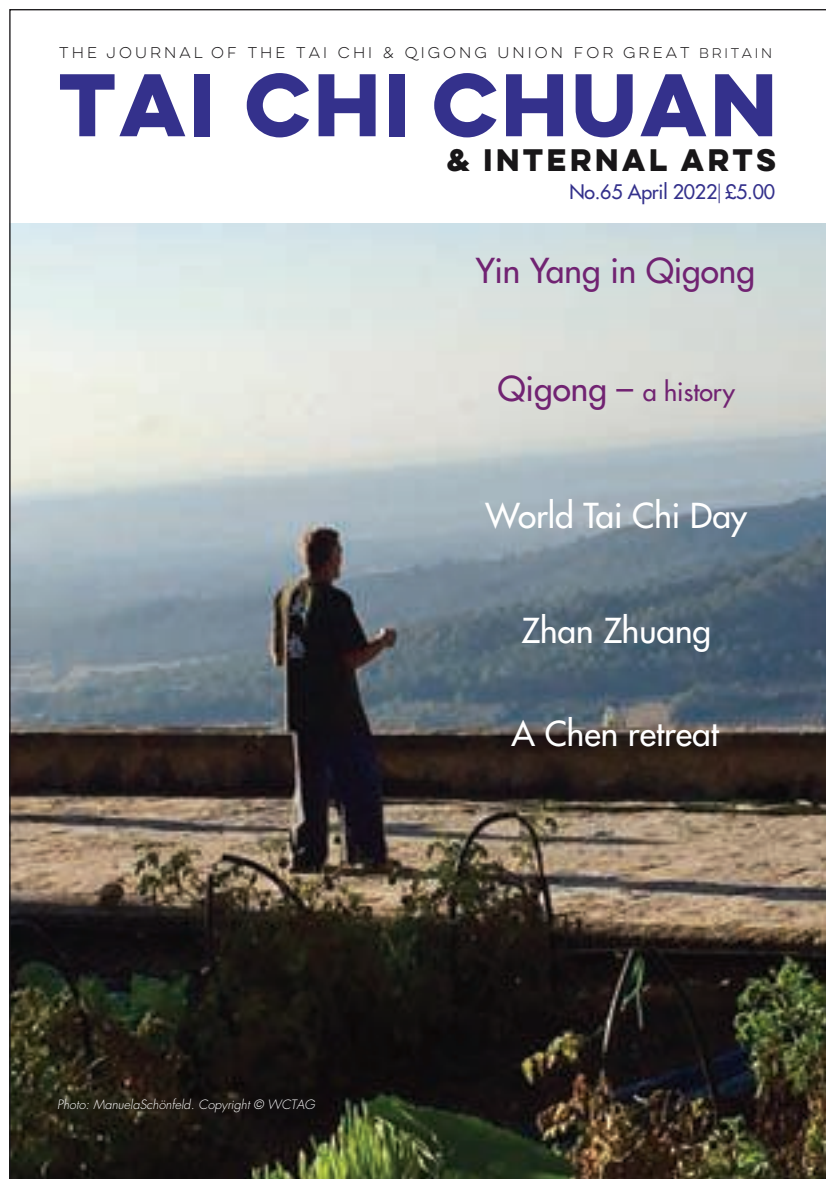


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www.taichiunion.com Email: enquiries@taichiunion.com

World Tai Chi days gone by

Jane Launchbury

World Tai Chi and Qigong Day sometimes falls on the same day as the spring 'Cuckoo Fair' in our Wiltshire village, which regularly attracts over 20,000 visitors. For many years Longwater Tai Chi has been invited to demonstrate tai chi and qigong.

Our first appearance was at the edge of the fair behind a bouncy castle, watched by a handful of noisy bouncy children. Things improved and for many years we have been in the opening procession and had a 30 minute performance on the main Maypole Green, always well attended, as it's a good place for tired visitors to sit down and rest their legs.

We get to use the Maypole Green PA system, so we can tell the crowd about World Tai Chi and Qigong Day, explain what they are watching and why they might like to try tai chi or qigong. Our students mingle in the crowds before and after in their tai chi tee-shirts and get into conversations and photographs.

At the end of the demos of solo and partner forms, including tai chi sword forms (practice swords and having advised the police and security in advance!), we always invite audience participation in a tai chi qigong set. It's been fun and good promo for tai chi. Plus a great opportunity to socialise with a group of our students.

Longwater Tai Chi and Healing Arts

www.longwatertaiichi.co.uk



Mark Peters 2006

It was a wonderful sunny Saturday for World Tai Chi Day in Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham. We had about 30 or 40 people and our students wore a t-shirt we'd had made locally as it seemed a nice idea. We practised tai chi and qigong together then demonstrated various weapon forms to give people an opportunity to see different aspects of the art.

2008

We held the session at the national climate change festival in Birmingham and over 100 people took part. There is video on youtube at:

www.youtube.be/nP25TZtqOfE

We gave away free t-shirts 'Tai Chi in the Square'. It was funny when people asked for a free t-shirt but didn't know what it was for.

2014

We held the session outside Birmingham Council house by the 'floozy in the jacuzzi', a well known landmark in the city centre. This time the council funded some t-shirts as I had started a 'tai chi in the park' project with them which was really growing and engaging Birmingham residents.

www.taiichijunior.com/?event=taichiqigongintheparkforworldtaichiday



Karen Soo 2019

As I recall there were around 100 attendees that day and some were regular class participants, others were not. I put the event in my monthly email newsletter and created some flyers to give out at my classes.

We did a Zoom event for 2020 and 2021 and will be repeating the event this year, 'live' in front of the Pump Room, Pittville Park, Cheltenham

www.shibashiqigong.com
www.youtube.be/elkUQJtniv

"Thank you for making this extraordinary event and health movement possible through your organising and participation each year"

Sincerely,
Bill Douglas & Angela Wong Douglas, co-founders of
World Tai Chi & Qigong Day

Peter Karran

Last April I did a talk for U3A on Zoom: a *Fools Guide*. I delivered it whilst doing qigong and Yang long form. I am planning to give it again to the local WI.



ZHAN ZHUANG

The internal athlete part II

by Sam Moor

Standing has foundational, intermediate and advanced levels of practice which emphasise different elements of the same continuum. My aim here is to elucidate key themes

Overleaf 

There are a wide variety of postures and an array of fascinating kinaesthetic tools that train the neuromuscular system in a unique way and, just like seated meditation, it is efficacious in building highly desirable brain plasticity. Postures range from a simple neutral stance to more physically demanding positions and even to postures on one leg.

Bio mechanics

Training seeks to build a real familiarity with, and visceral knowledge of, the raw materials of our own body and mind: all the postures we utilise should move us toward optimum biomechanics, present moment awareness and ease as our default settings for how we move and operate in the world.

We want to 'balance' our skeleton 3-dimensionally within the fluid and elastic elements of our fascial fabric and form a favourable long-term relationship with gravity

We do not want to force ourselves to blindly stand for as long as possible, nor disappear into a trance or think about special things. The aim is to develop a balanced physio-cognitive state of relaxation and non-distraction.

To sustain even a simple body-shape in a balanced way for a period can be surprisingly taxing and educational; any lack of whole-body integration is likely to become evident. Elements which do not exhibit sufficient structural support, appropriate tensional balance and functional connection will rapidly make themselves known, although this is something we are unlikely to notice until we try it for ourselves. Regular tactile cues and guidance from an experienced teacher are invaluable in moving us in a favourable direction because our usual body-mind habits are thoroughly ingrained.

Three dimensions

However, it is difficult for many people to comprehend that when we train in standing we do not want to hold ourselves in a fixed position using either overt control or brute force. Instead, we want to experience how our skeleton balances three-dimensionally within the visco-elastic elements of the fascial fabric in which it floats and learn how to optimise this process. There is a fluid omnidirectional stability that we want to uncover and develop which can provide an incredibly useful basis for human movement and function. As well as building many vital aspects of one's own body-knowledge, doing so allows us to form a favourable long-term relationship with gravity rather than continuing our usual futile fight against it.

The training process instigates as much letting go of that which is excessive as it does build up that which is deficient. If you have spent a lot of time stretching, for example, instead of operating as a well-connected elastic unit your body may exhibit the phenomena of being like separate bits pulled apart – far too loose in terms of useful, sustainable body connection and tensional balance. On



the other hand, if you have engaged with a lot of strength training your body may be far too tight and this too will have its due restrictions and compensations.

While these are simplistic examples every person

“It is hard to convey to intellectuals the intellectual superiority of experience”

Nassim Taleb

exhibits various combinations of such qualities. We all have bits that are too loose, too tight, too strong, too weak, move too much or not enough and yet it all works together, for better or worse. It is the working relationship, balance and integration of the whole that we want to come to know; to uncover and improve our own body-knowledge for ourselves for ourselves.

This presents an impossible task to realise intellectually and a difficult one to actualise via the complexities of

movement alone but standing offers a chance for us to do so because it of its simplicity.

Freeze frame

Comparing this to watching a film, a freeze-frame allows many more details to come to light; you lose the narrative and in doing so you get to see things as they are at that point in time. With the act of deliberate motion taken out of the equation, standing meditation comprises an experiential movement-snapshot and an opportunity to get to grips with the usual distractions of our own internal narrative. An over stimulated and distracted mind is like a wobbly low-definition camera, it is impossible to get a clear picture of what's what:

You are looking out over a large, beautiful lake. It is a stormy day and the surface of the water is being whipped by the wind and the rain to form an endless stream of indistinguishable waves, shapes and patterns. After steadily surveying the scene for a time the storm gradually allays – the surface of the lake begins to settle. Watching quietly and patiently you start to notice how each waning drop of rain and gust of wind distinctly pattern and affect the water. Eventually the storm subsides completely; tranquillity transpires, the lake becomes motionless and clear. To your immense curiosity you can see through the surface and all the way to the lakebed – the fascinating

A body unbound from tension is at liberty to respond to gravity with 'free' support from the ground upwards; to effortlessly inflate in all directions with fluid stability and elastic movement potential

topography of an underwater world presents itself.

The wind and rain equate to the incessant patterning of a busy mind upon our experience, it masks our ability to see beyond the surface. Via multiple tools implicit in good standing practice we can, over time, gradually lower our base rate of stimulation/distraction and perceive fundamental aspects and qualities of our own body and mind more clearly.

The gravitas of gravity

A simple way of looking at standing can be as the experiential study of gravity – our body is the subject and one's mind needs to be calm and stable in order to observe the results objectively. Let us imagine that, for a fish who spends her whole life in water, the very sensation of being immersed is so continuous that it would hardly be noticed. I do not know what the experience of a fish is like, but I do know that the persistent force of gravity is something we do not usually notice. Despite this, gravity is one of the most significant players in how the human body is organised and how we move. A fun example: when you jump into a swimming pool one immediately feels the whole body enveloped and supported by water – the sense of freedom is quite liberating. However, when you clamber out again you probably don't stand there and remark: "Ah gravity my old friend, how supportive!" But you could...

Standing is an excellent tool for traversing an

experiential path toward making gravity our friend by creating an optimum tensional balance across the entire fascial network of the body. One skill vital to this process is the release of unnecessary tension at progressively deeper levels. Releasing that which impedes the body from effortlessly supporting itself re-familiarises us with how we can deal with gravity in an optimal way and incurs significant gains in body awareness, postural stability and motor control. Furthermore, it facilitates considerable all-round health benefits.

Letting go

This act of letting go can be counter-intuitive but poses a rewarding challenge, for don't we all spend an inordinate amount of effort holding on to things? A tense body is a blunt and unfeeling instrument, extremely uneconomical and highly prone to injury and illness. While we neither want a body that is over-stretched or a floppy mess there is an intelligent middle way between the two extremes. Unfortunately, we do not know any better until we do and that means to continually accrue a wider experiential or 'felt' frame of reference.

Developing the release signal

If you clench your hand into a fist and hold it tight for a while you can see that the colour changes as the fluids are squeezed out from the tissues. After some time you may feel that the tension also manifests in the arm and shoulder and eventually other places too. If you persist for long enough you will start to lose the feeling in your fist completely, for along with the flow of fluids, your neural





functioning and perception will be severely impeded. When you eventually release the hand back to normal it is quite a relief: the colour returns as the fluids rehydrate the tissues and sensory perception and function are revived.

If you were to do the opposite and stretch your hand and fingers out as much as possible it would be the same as squeezing your hand into a tight fist but in reverse. It is certainly no better or more useful, all the same restrictions will manifest. When you release your over stretched hand back to normal, relief ensues once again.

The release signal is a specific command that your mind gives to tell your fist, or overstretched hand, to let go and return to normal. In order to be able to do this you already need to know where your hand is in your internal, or felt, body map. This is easy because we are usually reasonably aware of our hands, but not so the rest of our body. Through the lens of stillness, standing creates an opportunity to look for and build the feeling of the internal architecture and landscape of our body whilst doing something quintessential to human movement: balancing whilst upright. By developing and applying the release signal we can gradually restore the whole body back to balance and away from fixed extremes.

“It is important to note that this is not acquired by ‘trying’ to do it, that is counter intuitive”

New experience

Once a person has reached a certain benchmark, a new experience of how the body supports itself will come to light. Rather than being continually oppressed by gravity, a body unbound from inappropriate tension is at liberty to respond to it with ‘free’ support from the ground upwards; to effortlessly inflate in all directions with awareness, fluid stability and elastic movement potential. This has many similarities to the liberation of being in water but because we are immersed in gravity and infused with liquid ourselves, exhibits a highly desirable and sustainable balance between stability and freedom of movement.

It is important to note that this is not acquired by ‘trying’ to do it. It is counter intuitive. We do not want to pull ourselves up, suck bits in, try to be tall or tight-and-light, such in-fighting results in more unwanted tension. Neither do we want to collapse into a soggy heap in a bid to relax. Instead, our progress comes as the natural result of release combined with an open-minded sensory inquiry into omnidirectional balance.

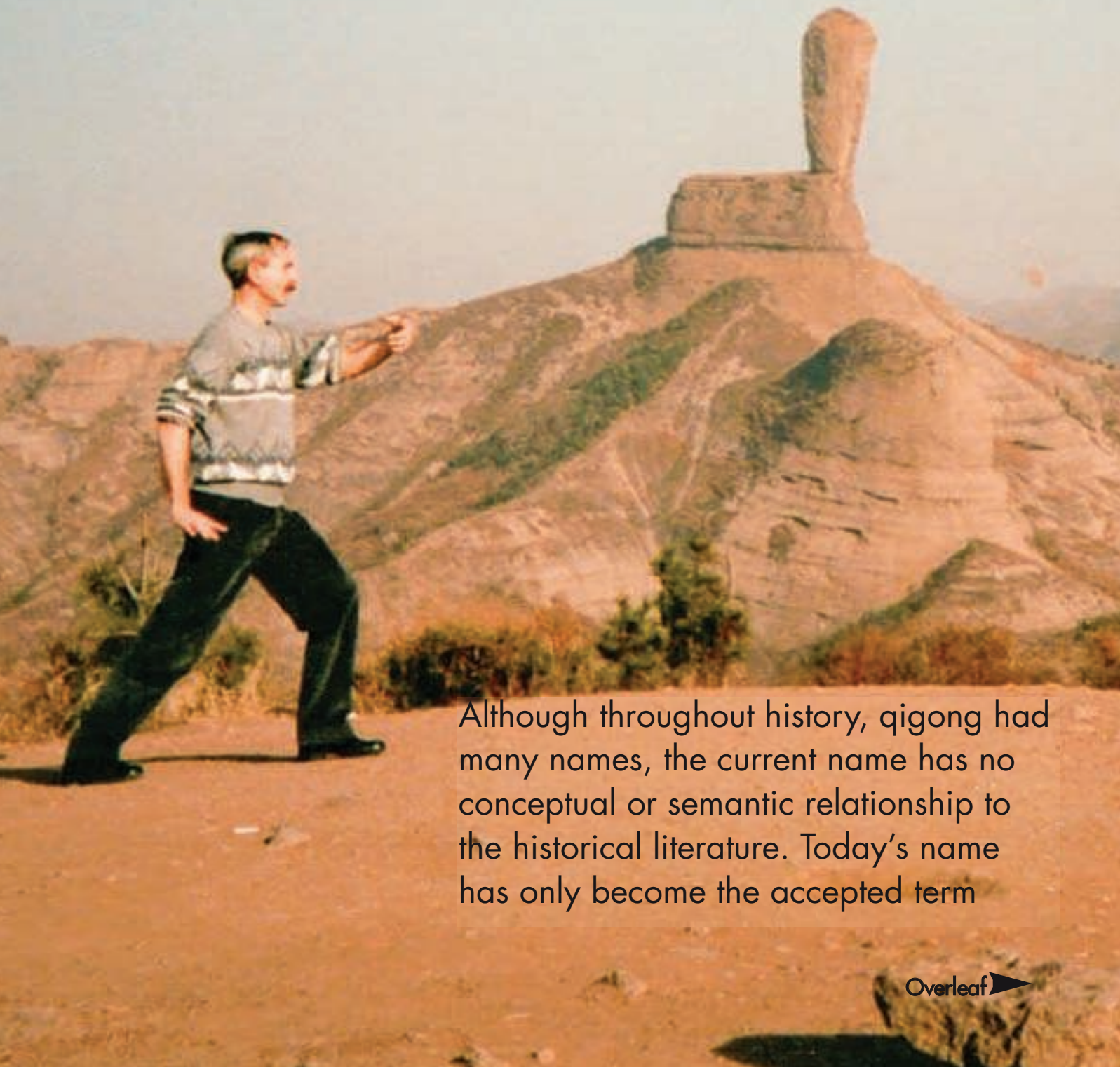
Overview

The genius and efficacy of standing lies in its simplicity. The absence of deliberate movement allows one the chance to discover and develop fundamental attributes of the body and mind that we usually miss due to habituation. By repeatedly bringing the wandering mind back to internally observing our standing form, not only can we develop some considerable skill in mindfulness, but also uncover an ever-deepening level of body-knowledge and awareness of ourselves as a holistic unit of function. 🧘

Sam Moor teaches Chen tai chi and yiquan in West Sussex
www.sussextaichi.co.uk www.theinternalathlete.net

Qigong roots – a history

Gordon Faulkner



Although throughout history, qigong had many names, the current name has no conceptual or semantic relationship to the historical literature. Today's name has only become the accepted term

Qigong is composed of two words which Chinese dictionaries define as follows.

Gong: *meritorious service; achievement; result; skill.*

Qi: *air, gas; smell; vigour; spirit; anger; atmosphere; attitude.*

Selection from those choices gives qigong today's meaning of 'vital energy skill' and many other similar variants from these choices.

Although throughout history, qigong had many names, the current name has no conceptual or semantic relationship to the historical literature. Today's name has only become the accepted term since the 1950s. Before that, the oldest and most diverse form is daoyin. One of the foremost Chinese academic sites for the study of these exercises is the Daoyin Yangsheng Centre at the Beijing University of Physical Exercise.

However, although I personally talk about daoyin, I also take note of a passage in the *Xunxi*, a 3rd-century BCE philosophical text. According to this passage,

聞而實喻

之用也 (When a name is heard, the reality is conveyed; such is the usefulness of a name). Thus, for the sake of this article, I will continue to use the modern name qigong. More about the origin of the name later.

Within qigong, qi has three aspects.

- Qi refers to the air breathed in and out and through qigong, which can improve the respiration function.

- Qi is the medium through which we connect all parts of the body and interact.

- Qi is the very essence of human life and qigong contributes to the growth of this substance.

Qigong is the modern umbrella term for a range of exercises known to work and develop skill with the body's energy. Currently, it is divided into five main overlapping traditions: Medical, Buddhist, Confucian, Daoist, and martial. The central aspect of these traditions is health.

The history of qigong in this period comes under the heading of 'fact, fiction, myth, and speculation'. And, to play devil's advocate, there are four concerns that can beset people researching qigong in its early development.

- **Pareidolia:** The tendency, when looking at something, for perception to impose a meaningful interpretation, so that one sees an object, pattern, or meaning where there is none.

- **Motivated Perception:** Seeing what one wants to see.

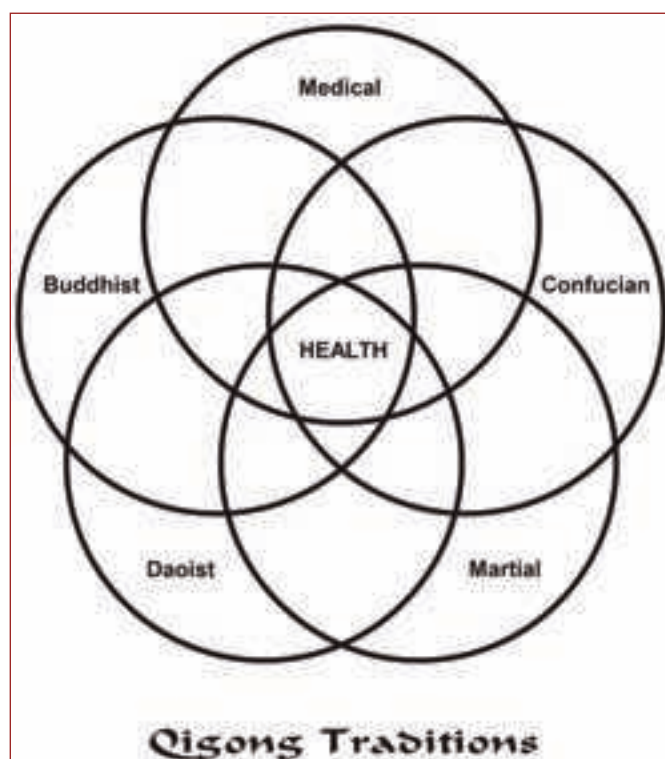
- **Motivated Reasoning:** Coming to conclusions one is predisposed to believe in.

4. **Confirmation Bias:** The tendency to look for and interpret information that supports their view. All the qigong information in the pre-imperial era is debatable and the history presented here follows the most commonly held beliefs.

The first use of the term qigong is another contested area. Many Chinese textual researchers agree it first appeared in the Jin dynasty (265-420 CE) in the *Lian jian zi*, a book written by the Daoist priest, Xu Xun. This text now only exists in the compendium *Jingming zongjiao lu*, which was printed around 1691 CE in the Qing Dynasty and, because of this, some researchers place the first use of the name in the Qing Dynasty.

The modern name qigong came to prominence after it was used by the Beidaihe Qigong Sanatorium and endorsed by the Chinese Communist Party in the 1950s to emphasise health and scientific approaches, while de-emphasising spiritual practices and mysticism.

As stated, the oldest term for qigong is daoyin. Daoyin is often translated as gymnastics. However, daoyin has significant differences from the modern understanding of



gymnastics. Daoyin exercises are based on the accumulation and conservation one's energy but the practice of present-day gymnastics requires the consumption of energy.

Dao (guiding) refers to the fact that physical movements are guided by the strength of the mind and stimulate the internal flow of qi within the body. Yin (pulling) means that with the aid of physical movements, qi can reach the extremities of the body.

The term daoyin first occurs in Zhuangzi, a late Warring States Period (476-221 BCE) text.

The pre-imperial history covers Neolithic period (c. 8500-2070 BCE), Xia Dynasty (c. 2070-1600 BCE), Shang Dynasty (c. 1600-1050 BCE), Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BCE), and Warring States period (c. 475-221 BCE).

Neolithic period (c. 5000-2000 BCE)

Some researchers believe qigong began either 7000 or 8000 years ago. A quick examination of Chinese history shows little evidence for this idea.

The first appearance of Chinese script is in the Shang Dynasty Archaic Language Period (1200-1000 BCE). This was only on oracle-bones and, therefore, contained no historical information. The first time we can look at factual historical evidence for qigong is in the following Pre-Classical Language Period (1000-600 BCE).

The main claim is down to a single piece of 7000-year-old pottery which appears to show a person in a qigong-like posture (pareidolia?).

Although various traditions of qigong try to trace their roots back to legendary people like Pengzu (the Chinese Methuselah), the immortals Chisongzi (Master Redpine) and Wang Ziqiao and the ancient master Ningfengzi, who have specific sets of exercises named after them, it is also clear the best speculation we have is that qigong evolved from shamanic rituals and dance during this period.

Xia Dynasty (c. 2070-1600 BCE)

Legends claim this as the first Chinese Dynasty with Yu the Great as the first emperor, but there was little proof

that the dynasty actually existed. It is not until the Zhou Dynasty, 554 years later, that we see any writings of this first Chinese dynasty. For this reason, it was believed to be mythical, but new archaeological evidence now shows the dynasty to have been real. However, there is no information on qigong during this dynasty.

Shang Dynasty (c. 1600-1050 BCE)

As previously stated, this dynasty is the earliest recorded Chinese dynasty supported by solid archaeological evidence and positive proof of the first written records.

The Yijing (Book of Changes) – possibly from this period, but more likely to be from the following Zhou Dynasty—was the first known Chinese book related to qi. It introduced the concept of the three natural energies or powers (san cai): tian (heaven), di (earth), and ren (man). Studying the relationship between these three natural powers was the first step in the development of qigong.

Zhou Dynasty (c. 1046-256 BCE)

This dynasty was the longest in the history of China, ruling the region for almost eight centuries. It had two periods, the Western Zhou (c. 1046-771 BCE) and the Eastern Zhou (c. 771-256 BCE). The Eastern Zhou is further divided into the spring and autumn and warring states periods.

Although the Western Zhou is considered the period when Chinese civilisation had its genesis, it was in the Eastern Zhou period that Daoism and Confucianism emerged with their influences on qigong practice.

Eastern Zhou (c. 770-476 BCE)

Spring and autumn period

In the book *Daodejing* (Classic of the Way of Power) ascribed to Laozi, chapters six and 29 contain text which mentions breathing in a qigong manner. Although the date of this text is debatable, the oldest excavated portion dates back to the late 4th century BCE.

Eastern Zhou (c. 475-221 BCE)

Warring States Period

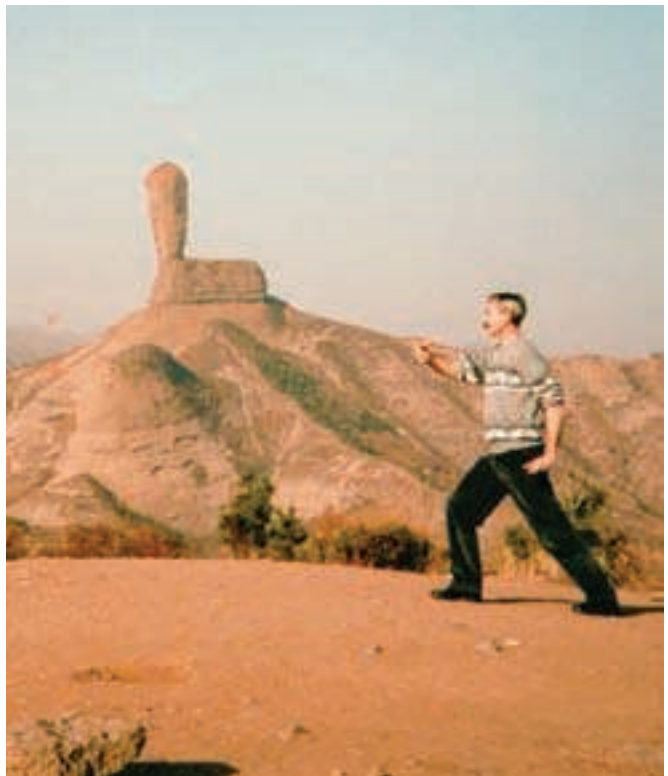
Qigong is absorbed into the Yangsheng tradition that was evolving in this period. Yangsheng, generally translated as nourishing-life, is the umbrella term for various self-cultivation practices, now considered as being primarily Daoist inspired. These longevity techniques are to keep the body healthy and maintain homeostasis by nourishing and prolonging life.

According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,⁷ Daoist self-cultivation practices can be divided into three categories: meditation, alchemy and yangsheng. The yangsheng category includes such practices as qigong, breathing, sexual hygiene and dietetics.

However, the *Encyclopedia of Taoism* widens the yangsheng practices to include massage, meditation and visualisation, healing, and rules of daily behaviour.

This indicates that the definition of yangsheng is very fluid and still evolving. No definitive list of what constitutes yangsheng practices can be made. It has changed over time and continues to change even today. One thing that has not changed is the inclusion of the core practice of qigong.

Qigong developed into a fairly systematic art for the preservation of health in this period. For example, a book believed to be compiled during this period, *Huangdi neijing* (*The Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic*), contains records of qigong, many of which deal with methods of practice,



symptoms, effects and points for attention. In the book, a dialogue between the Yellow Emperor and the renowned doctor, Qibo, stresses the combination of medical treatment with qigong exercises.

Actual practical details were found in jade. The Xingqi (circulating breath) instructions for practising qigong were engraved around 400 BCE on a dodecagonal block of jade in what appears to be seal script.

The *Neiye* (*Inner Cultivation*) text, dated between 350-300 BCE, had profound effects on the development of qigong and the encouragement of daily self-cultivation.

Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi (c. 369-286 BCE) described the relationship between health and the breath in chapter three of his book *Zhuangzi* titled *Yangsheng zhu* (Principal of Nourishing Life) which confirms that a breathing method for qi circulation was being used by some Daoists at that time.

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Qigong History Part 2 will begin with the Qin Dynasty unification of China.

Gordon Faulkner has had a keen interest in Chinese culture for over 60 years. He is a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society and a member of the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding. He started his martial training in 1968 and eventually switched to the style he does today, Chanquan-shu, in 1972 while serving with the RAF. In 1999 he became a closed door disciple of daoyin master Zhang Guangde and in 2003, Master You Xuande at Wudang Shan accepted him as a 15th generation disciple of Wudang boxing.

The yin-yang in qigong

Peter Deadman

Chinese martial arts are commonly differentiated into two styles: external-yang (wajia) and internal-yin (nejia). Of course the distinction is not rigid, since like all yin-yang differentiation, each contains elements of the other. However it can be a useful shorthand.

Mention Chinese martial arts to most people and they likely think of people flying through the air, yelling and delivering dramatic kicks and punches, maybe even smashing bricks with their bare hands. Typified by the Shaolin fighting monks, this is wajia (pronounced whyjeea).

Wajia – external - yang

Like much modern exercise, these external styles aim for aerobic fitness, muscular strength, speed and agility, and the training can be hard to the point of exhaustion. This kind of practice develops high levels of fitness and martial power, and – like all aerobic or strength training – can deliver a powerful mood-altering effect by rapidly moving qi and blood.

However, it also comes with some potential disadvantages: it may not be suitable for the ageing body, there is an increased risk of injury, and its mood altering effects may be short-lived. Carried to extreme, it risks exhausting the body, weakening the immune system and increasing tension, and if used as self-medication for mental health problems can become addictive.

As the 7th century sage Sun Simiao wrote, "The way of nurturing life is to constantly strive for minor exertion but never become greatly fatigued and force what you cannot endure."

Neijia – internal – yin

What is called nejia includes qigong, the three famous internal martial arts – taijiquan (tai chi), xingyiquan and baguazhang, and non-Chinese practices such as yoga (which the Chinese call 'Brahmin qigong') and Pilates.

Neijia focuses on stillness, softness rather than tension, and full body-breath-mind integration. This means the mind penetrates the interior of the body – into the joints, connective tissue, muscles and bones, the core and the acupuncture channels and points. It seeks nourishment, health, wellbeing, fascial elasticity, sinew strength, soft power, resilience, balance and expansion of the mind. Movement is often synchronised with slow deep breathing, maximising the opportunity for awareness at every level of our being and (over time) helping to resolve both physical and emotional stagnation.

Compared to wajia, therefore, it can have a more prolonged effect on moving qi and blood and altering



emotional patterns, there is minimal risk of injury, and it can be practised at any age.

Like wajia, however, there are potential drawbacks. It can encourage too much inward focus and be frustratingly slow for those that have profound inner stagnation or plenty of fiery yang qi (especially the young).

Integration


Working with yin-yang in our practice and daily life, we seek a fluid balance that responds to ever-changing circumstances. As our needs vary, we may find that on some days we are drawn to quiet, internal practice, and on others to stronger more vigorous movements. We probably favour external practice when young and gravitate to internal practice as we age (as many wajia practitioners do), or choose more vigorous movement if we've been too sedentary and more stillness if we have been over-active etc.

For that reason, it's good to develop a variety of qigong

practices and to combine them with martial arts, hiking, dancing, swimming, playing sports etc. (Note though that in qigong it is best to fully absorb one style or form before learning something new).

Moving our focus

Even within quiet and slow qigong, we can focus more internally or more externally. One way of doing this is to close or open our eyes. When they are closed, we withdraw from visual sensations and enter the internal landscape of the body and breath. When they are open, we expand into the external landscape of birds, trees, sun, water, heaven and earth.

If we are feeling constrained or depressed, it may be best to focus outwards in this way or to favour vigorous and playful external practice. But if our thoughts are scattered, jumping from one thing to another, or if we are exhausted, convalescing, anxious etc. then it might be best to close our eyes, simplify our inputs and dwell in quiet and stillness. 

Peter Deadman has worked in health promotion for fifty years. He has studied, practised and taught Chinese medicine, yangsheng (nourishment of life) and qigong. He is co-author of: *A Manual of Acupuncture* and author of *Live Well Live Long: Teachings from the Chinese nourishment of life Tradition*
www.peterdeadman.co.uk

The tao of tai chi

Roy Wilson



It has been my privilege for the past 15 years to be a student of Wolfe Lowenthal, attending his workshops in Europe and the US. Although it could be said that I had been his student long before then, due to the influence of his three books about his studies with Cheng Man-ching: *There Are No Secrets*, *In Search of the Miraculous*, and *Like a Long River*.

I have been practising Cheng Man-ching's tai chi for 40 years. Many years ago I had a dilemma. I loved tai chi but I wasn't sure that the study of tai chi had the same spiritual depth as, say, Zen meditation. Wolfe Lowenthal's writing, and his teaching have convinced me that it does. The study of Wolfe's tai chi, in my old age, provides the compass for my spiritual life. There is evidence in Cheng Man-ching's teaching that he conceptualised tai chi as an art that can lead us to our original nature, the uncarved block of Taoism, sometimes referred to as our 'true' self.

Here is a poetic account of a moment of spiritual revelation during tai chi practice. Introducing an on-line course in tai chi Kenneth Cohen tells a story: "One winter evening – way back in the 1970s – I decided to take a walk outside. Snow was falling and hanging heavy on the pine trees. I thought, wouldn't it be wonderful to practise tai chi in this setting?"

"As I began practicing, something very odd happened. Normally, I experienced tai chi movements as arising from deep within, seemingly generated by the breath and by the slow shifting of my weight. But this time I disappeared; I was not doing tai chi. Rather, the falling snow, the trees, the air, the ground itself were unfolding through the various postures. I became a sphere of energy whose centre was everywhere. This was a kind of spiritual rebirth...mind and body were empty, subject and object disappeared in a unified field of awareness.

"I cannot claim the experience as my own, because the experience was without 'I'. But I do know that my tai chi has never been the same."

Taoism is one of the key influences on the development of tai chi chuan. And the notion of 'spirituality' is not absent from Taoist thought. The core Taoist text, the *Tao Te Ching*, holds that the world is spiritual:

*Trying to control the world?
I see you won't succeed.*

*The world is a spiritual vessel
And cannot be controlled.*

*Those who control, fail.
Those who grasp, lose**

Before considering Wolfe's views on the spirituality of tai chi, let's fill in a bit of background.

Wolfe Lowenthal was a direct student of Professor Cheng in New York in the 1960s, becoming for several years, in Wolfe's words, a 'tai chi bum', taking a part time job and spending many hours every day at the professor's school, first on Canal Street, and later in the Bowery. Those were heady days of social and cultural change in America, with the growth of the anti-Vietnam war movement, (in which Wolfe played a part) and the advent of psychedelia, recreational drug use, and the counter-culture. Into this volatile social milieu came, in 1964, a traditional Chinese gentleman deeply immersed in the classical Chinese thought of Confucius, Lao Tzu and the I Ching, who found expression of these ideas in the art of tai chi, as well as in traditional Chinese medicine, painting, poetry and calligraphy.

It was his encounter with Cheng Man-ching that liberated Wolfe from the rather alienated and constricted notion of masculinity that had characterised the 1950s in America, and showed him another way to be. Wolfe has written that Cheng Man-ching and tai chi led him back to the better part of himself.

* (Ch 29, Lao-Tzu (trans. Addiss, S. and Lombardo, S.) (2007) *Tao Te Ching*, Shambala, Boulder).



Roy Wilson

Professor Cheng viewed tai chi as a study of the Tao. He had taken the form and pushing hands he learned from Yang Cheng-fu, and re-fashioned them to fully embody the principles of classical Chinese thought. He shortened and simplified the Yang long form, to reflect the principles of simplicity and naturalness that he found in Lao Tzu. There is a revealing passage in an essay on calligraphy where Professor Cheng writes about taking the wrong course in his calligraphy. It had come to exhibit a certain seductive ease and decorativeness. With this realisation the professor went back to the beginning to return his calligraphy to a style with more integrity, by practising for years brushing a simple vertical line and then a horizontal line. Professor Cheng wrote: "I have searched for 'stability' for over forty years now and still have trouble writing a balanced horizontal line and a straight vertical line" (Hennessy, M., 1995, p.12).

Professor Cheng advised: "Practise what you know is true regardless of the difficulties – just like Chu Ting who practiced a balanced line for three years. There is certainly nothing eye-catching about a balanced line, and those calligraphic acrobats who disdain the balanced stroke are mistaken. Balance enables the transformation towards transcendence and true sublimity. A straight vertical line must likewise be acquired" (ibid.).

In writing about calligraphy Professor Cheng seems also to have had in mind his approach to tai chi chuan, given his tai chi form's naturalness and simplicity, its lack of any rococo flourishes, and its emphasis on balance and verticality. Douglas Wile (2007) notes:

"The goal of self-cultivation for both Confucians and Daoists is reversion to an original state of sincerity and simplicity...Zheng called his new abbreviated tai chi chuan form 'simplified tai chi chuan' (jianyi taijiqian). The significance of simplicity here goes beyond just shortening the form, but has to do with structural changes in the postures that facilitate sinking and relaxation. Relaxation is the precondition for true simplicity."

Wolfe follows his teacher, Professor Cheng, in conceptualising tai chi as offering the opportunity to return to our basic nature, to align with the movement of the universe. And key principles that aid this development are relaxation and naturalness:



“Naturalness is key...Lao Tzu speaks of being aligned with the Tao as a return to our basic nature, the true self which is unencumbered by the burdens of tension and hardness, of fear and aggression” (Lowenthal,W., February 2018).

It is a tenet of Eastern and Christian mysticism that our true self is obscured by the everyday self with which we meet the world. We have identified with too narrow and isolated a sense of who we are. Our true identity is far more expansive than we generally conceive, one with the divine principle, the Tao. It is my belief that tai chi can represent a path for gradually realising our true self, and that Cheng Man-ching conceptualised tai chi in this way. Wolfe, too, teaches tai chi as offering a path to wholeness, and oneness. Uncovering our true nature, our oneness with the universe, releases us from the grip of the fearful ego. And this, I think, is a spiritual project.

Robert Smith reports Cheng Man-ching expressing a view about the importance of ‘naturalness’ and the ‘intrinsic you’ in tai chi:

“Professor Zheng would go on to say that structure and flow together – the technique – make up only 30% of tai chi. He would then ask, ‘What is the missing 70%?’ It is the same as in many arts, in calligraphy – the queen of Chinese fine arts – for instance. 70% of tai chi is naturalness, the intrinsic ‘you,’ which can only come from inside you” (1995, p.56).

Professor Cheng reports that although he had studied tai chi chuan for fifty years, it was only ‘the year before last’ that he finally grasped the meaning of the word ‘relax’ (song) (Wile, 2007, p.95). Professor Cheng explains the meaning:

“If we go into a Buddhist temple, the main hall will have

a statue of Maitreya, with a big belly, laughing, and carrying a cloth sack. The inscription over the statue says, ‘Sitting there is baggage and walking there is baggage. What a joy to put down our baggage.’ What does this mean? It means that not only are we ourselves baggage, but everything – sons, daughters, wives, accomplishments, fame, fortune, official positions – are all baggage. But the most difficult baggage to put down is oneself” (Wile, 2007, p.96).

Wolfe’s teaching, following the professor, is all about putting down the burden of the ego, with its incessant fearful excursions into the past and the future. Through Wolfe’s tai chi we can relax, spine suspended, balanced, taking up our proper position between heaven and earth, in ‘the centre of time’ – the present moment.

In his writing and his teaching Wolfe elucidates those elements of the tai chi passed down to us from Professor Cheng, that lead us back to our natural, true self.

One of the key Taoist ideas inherent in Wolfe’s teaching is the notion of ‘wu wei, which could be translated as ‘not doing’ or ‘not forcing.’ Wu wei undermines the assumption that we are ‘doing’ the tai chi, ‘doing’ ourselves...It suggests that the roots of our actions spring from another level of our being, a deeper level than our fearful egos. And in fact tai chi practice deepens as we let go of trying too hard and allow our bodies to relax, align with gravity, to balance and flow. We need to get out of our own way.

By emphasising key principles, Wolfe’s teaching supports our experience of our deeper selves, the self aligned with the flow of the universe.

Wolfe’s emphasis lies in softness and non-competition.



Wolfe Lowenthal (L) pushing Roy Wilson

In form, pushing hands and fencing we seek increasing levels of relaxation and letting go. Letting go of what the professor called “The desperate will to succeed”. In the form, letting go allows our bodies to come into balance and align with gravity, to song (relax) and chen (sink). The lack of tension and competition encourages our bodies to settle and open to the flow of chi, and our minds to relax and become spacious.”

In pushing hands, Wolfe frequently reminds us of two key pieces of advice from professor Cheng: “Don’t use more than four ounces of force, or allow more than four ounces to build up on you,” and “Don’t resist, don’t insist.” In push hands practice we can easily be swept up in the fear of losing and the wish for the endorphin rush of winning. Both are characteristics of the fragile ego. Wolfe advises that, instead, we follow the advice of professor Cheng – to relax and ‘invest in loss.’ “Lose, lose, lose until you have nothing left to lose, then you will have gained everything” the professor urged. We can see here how the two person practice of pushing hands, becomes a spiritual exercise. Wolfe often reminds us that our study is of ‘the greatness of the chi’. And indeed, informed by his love of classical Chinese thought, and traditional Chinese medicine, the professor’s teaching on tai chi gives primacy to the development of the chi. The professor points to the importance of ‘the heart/mind and chi mutually guarding one another in the tantien’. The chi, led by the mind, concentrates in the tantian. Force blocks the chi, and leads to the chi rising in the body rather than sinking. Wolfe notes that the word Professor Cheng used can be translated as ‘idea’. All we need is the ‘idea.’ In professor Cheng’s own words:

“Refine your chi by first learning to sink it to the tantien, which is 1.3 inches beneath the navel – closer to the abdomen than the spine. Breathe in attentively and sink this chi slowly; abrupt breathing causes chi to rise. The four secret words for proper breathing are: fine, long, calm, and slow. Once you can do this remember to do it always and everywhere.” (Cheng Man-ching, 1999, p.21).

Energy gates

Wolfe and professor Cheng both emphasise three specific body points to develop chi, what Wolfe refers to as the three jewels. First the ni-wan point at the top of the head.

Second are the yongquan points in the middle of both feet which enable you to tap into the earth’s chi.

“Whether you are walking, sitting, or just standing, be

aware that your feet adhere to the ground. Continue until you feel your feet almost sink into the ground and connect to the earth’s gravitational pull. This too will develop a root” (ibid).

Third is the tantian point below the naval.

“Remember that Lao Tzu believed that softness keeps us young. It makes the waist lively and flexible, which enriches our urogenital chi, which bestows longevity. So whether you are walking, standing, sitting, or sleeping, keep your mind and chi mutually on guard in the tantien’ (ibid., pp.15-16).

To give you an idea of the elegance and spirituality of Wolfe’s writing, I’ll finish by outlining a recent piece he wrote in his on-line journal *Tai Chi Thoughts* (December 2021). It deals with our relation to time, our desire for ‘things’, and our resistance to the way things are (fighting).

Time: Wolfe warns that past and future are projections of our ego/mind:

“If our mind is slumped in its seat in the theatre of time, caught up in the past or future, we are going to miss the present. So in martial application, we will get pushed or we will get cut. But even more ominously, we will be immersed in fear.”

Desire for things: “Here we come to what Professor Cheng considers his central insight into the teaching of Confucius: ‘In order to illuminate the luminous virtue, one must eliminate the desire for things’.”

Wolfe notes that Professor Cheng directed us to invest in loss, and to relax:

“It’s not supposed to be a struggle. What happens to the breath when we struggle to maintain balance, when we struggle to gain victory or prevent defeat? The breath tightens up, so we become uptight. Not good! Bad for health, bad for martial ability.”

Fighting: Perhaps there is a time for fighting, but then Professor Cheng suggests a different way of looking at it: “Less oppositional, more with a sense of the ultimate spiritual connection that unites everything.

We fight as if we were joined with our opponent in the universal fabric of life”

Cheng Man-ching points the way. The four character secret: “Don’t resist, don’t insist.” The four ounce secret: “Don’t use more than four ounces nor allow more than four ounces to build up on you.”

In conclusion

After many years of daily practice of Professor Cheng’s tai chi, and under the guidance of Wolfe Lowenthal, I have come to experience the blessed relief of letting go, not ‘trying’ too hard to ‘do’ tai chi; the relief of letting the form reveal its essence to me. ‘Song’, relaxation and correct alignment, allows the chi, breath and mind, under the influence of gravity, to sink through the body to rest in the dantian. It is a dropping into the depth of the self to rest where the ripples on the surface have ceased – stillness in movement. 🌿

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Through the looking glass

Mike Henderson

Should the tai chi forms be practised on both sides (as a mirror image) is one of those questions that is often discussed. Many teachers encourage their students to practise their forms on both sides, and some do not. While it is universally agreed that all form applications need to be practised on both sides, the benefits gained from applying this to the forms themselves is open to debate. It probably depends on how you view the form in relation to your overall tai chi practice

You can see the form as a repository of technique and as such you should include as many applications as you can within its structure. This means that you can place extra emphasis and focus on each individual move. If you take this attitude then it is a logical extension to do the form on both sides as all applications are done on both sides. This allows a better balance of both body and mind allowing greater practice flexibility. It also encourages the practitioner to gain a greater balance in their form and strengthens their weaker side.

However many teachers take a more minimalistic approach, stripping away any extraneous movement to reach a fundamental core, or essence if you like, of tai chi practice. All moves come from martial application and not the other way round so, if you apply the core concepts of the form it should not matter on which side the forms are practised, the information being already embedded within the form itself.

Some instructors believe that the form should definitely not be practised on both sides, citing the body's lack of symmetry (we only have one heart etc). These teachers say, for example, that single whip is designed to open the lung meridian but when performed on the other side it closes this meridian. Similar reasons are cited for other moves that are only practised one sided in the form. The health aspect of the form is a whole other subject.

From a teaching point of view, however, it makes a lot of sense to be able to perform mirror image for the students, so I believe that it is important to practise forms on the left because of that. The alternative may be to demonstrate with your back to the class and claim to have eyes in the back of your head.

I have found that learning and practising mirror forms may expose weaknesses in your forms that need to be addressed. This is a very positive advantage to practising forms on both sides.

From a student's perspective, if you are confident in your forms there really should be no need to be taught the mirror image in class as you should be able to work it out for yourself. If you can't, then you probably need more work on your basic form.

That realisation in itself is a positive argument for attempting to learn mirror forms.



Mike Henderson

My biggest problem with teaching the form on both sides too soon is that if you start on the left before you are completely confident and polished on the right, you need a lot more than double the practice time to 'perfect' both. If you have a fairly fixed amount of time for practice you should stick to one side till you have gained enough understanding to be able to move on to the opposite side with confidence.

Differing approaches to teaching the forms on both sides are valid and rely on individual interpretations of the form and their relations to the martial moves that they are based on. A lot will come down to a teacher's or student's enthusiasms. Remember the old saying – What good is having a hundred knives if none of them are sharp?

Bottom line – don't worry about it, enjoy your tai chi journey and practise, practise, practise. e

www.facebook.com/Borders-Tai-Chi-111557881185334



Tai chi getting social

Emma Lee

Emma Lee is an instructor with Tai Chi Life and has been practising tai chi with Barry McGinlay for 20 years. Representing Team Longfei, she has won over 50 gold medals in over 30 competitions and World, European and British Championship titles in pushing hands, and hand and weapon forms. But, she says, tai chi is much more than this and has a social aspect that has led to opportunities to travel and has created lasting friendships



When I joined my first tai chi class, I was a shy, self-conscious 25-year-old. I don't know the degree to which practising tai chi helped reduce that shyness against the other aspects of my life and the passing of time. However, I credit my tai chi class with having the biggest impact.

I work as a nurse and in this context I have found evidence to be all about peer-reviewed publications. However, for me there is no better evidence than experience. I have experienced the things I talk about in this article, and I have experienced other people's experiences of them.

The schedule

I have always been fiercely protective of my training time when it comes to relationships with a partner, friends, or family and work. When I qualified as a nurse, most of my colleagues chose to work on wards. I made sure to find a job without evening or weekend commitments so that I could continue to attend my tai chi classes. Later, when a promotion required me to work unsociable hours, I made the decision to change to another nursing job.

It is my time. I know that if I miss any classes I am doing myself and my training colleagues an injustice because I am interrupting my progress and potentially theirs. There are always excuses not to attend class, it is down to you not to make them.

In a tai chi class, you might practise some solo work but

in the main you are working alongside other people. Once you feel comfortable in a group you are less likely to want to let colleagues down by missing training sessions, which can encourage students to do their best to attend classes regularly.

The traininghall

Whether a class is held indoors or out, you still have to leave your home or workplace and travel there. The mental health benefits of having a focus and a place to go, where you feel safe and happy, are invaluable. It can mean the difference between keeping a lid on any problems with depression, and letting them boil over.

When you train in the same venue over a period of time, particularly when you have free reign to leave your mark on it, being there can feel like coming home. In fact, depending on your home situation, it can feel like a haven. For me it is my Eden. No matter how loud it is in the training hall it is still quieter, both audibly and in spirit, than my home.

Training colleagues

Stay in the same class for long enough and your training colleagues become like a second family. The relationships forged are special. First strangers, then colleagues, then partners. Over time some of them may become friends, but even if not, they still become your kung fu brothers and sisters – your tai chi family.

I have trained with some of my tai chi family for 19 years.



We have shared blood, sweat and tears. They see you and feel you – both physically and emotionally. In training there is no hiding. This is one of the things I love about partner work. It bares all. It is the silent conversation. The smells, the intention, the energy – you cannot hide these things from your partner. The challenges and subtleties of the practice expose your inner fears. These are unique relationships.

When practising applications and pushing hands you are often physically very close to your partner. This relationship can be challenging. Being so close to people you are not intimate with is a new concept to most of us. However, if you are open to it and stick to it you develop a freedom, a release, a joy. It is a privilege to be allowed into the personal space of another human being.

Whether you are practising a form in a group, or with a partner, or practising applications or pushing hands, there is an exchange, a cohesiveness. At least that is the aim. Wow, what an opportunity to communicate with people in a completely different way. Surely all practitioners have felt that satisfaction when a group form is conducted in unison. This is social interaction at its best. Quiet, respectful, mindful, working as a team.

I recall hours spent training in a park in Taiwan, trying to perfect the group forms that we would perform at the World Championships there. It was hard work. Repetition, repetition, repetition, with lots of scathing feedback from our coach. Every time we made a mistake, we let down the group. We practised the same routine again and again. Now, however, when I see those team members, I feel such a unique bond with them. The effort we put into working together as a team never leaves you. It cements a type of relationship unlike any other and is a privilege to experience.

Social media groups

Our school has a WhatsApp group, and our teacher encourages us to use it as a community. When you practise, share it, mention it, talk about it, post a photo or video of it. Practise humility and generosity and share the trials and tribulations of your practice with your training colleagues. It works. It encourages people to share, chat and ask questions. When it snowballs it is teeming and, when it quietens, our teacher stirs it up a little.



Social events and excursions

Christmas meals, attending seminars, training weekends away, demonstrations, competitions, and big once-in-a-lifetime trips; in a tai chi school all of this can be yours. Would I have visited half as many countries had I not joined a tai chi school? It really is a social practice. Tai chi offers a taste of another culture. When you fall in love with tai chi you fall in love with that culture and a door into a new world of social opportunities opens. 🌐

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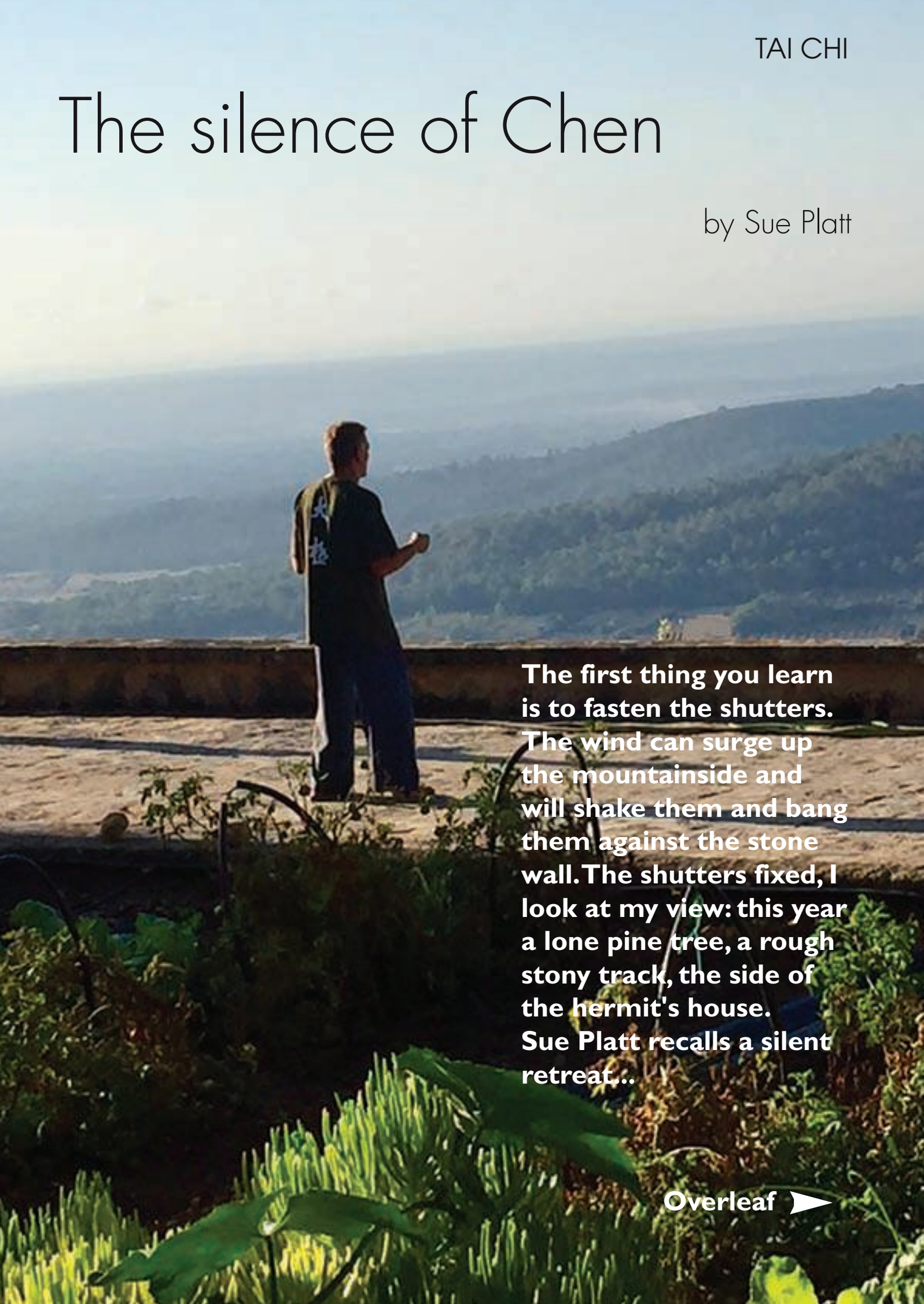
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The silence of Chen

by Sue Platt



The first thing you learn is to fasten the shutters. The wind can surge up the mountainside and will shake them and bang them against the stone wall. The shutters fixed, I look at my view: this year a lone pine tree, a rough stony track, the side of the hermit's house. Sue Platt recalls a silent retreat...



Today I greeted the dog, aged by seven years since last September. He is too tired to respond. His job is to bark the Angelus in case no-one has heard the bell.

A new development – is the monastery on a flight path now? I cannot remember so many planes... I have returned to Ermita Sant'Honorat in Randa, Mallorca where a tiny community of monks worship on this holy mountain. I am a tai chi student of Chen Xiao Wang and almost by accident joined this gathering eight years ago and have become attached to it ever since. It is of no matter that this is a German school and I am English because it is a silent camp; we only speak the first and last night. In between no communication of any kind is allowed. We stay in the rooms of the former novices; this year mine belonged to H. Jaime Artegies in 1867. It is simple and clean.

I first met Jan Silberstorff at Tai Chi Caledonia, where I spent a week learning silk reeling with him. Until then I had not encountered Chen style, nor such an empathetic teacher. Jan is the head of World Chen Taiji Association Germany (WCTAG), a world renowned teacher and the first western indoor student of Chen Xiao Wang. I discovered in my first week of the WCTAG silent retreat that while I could participate in the laojia yilu form – because moves are prepared and rehearsed, with subsequent correction by Jan – I could not do the 19 posture form as it is practised in an unbroken continuum.

Jan assigned his assistant and most senior student to teach me and with infinite patience she spent every morning with me until I could do the form unaided. I very much appreciated her help; I knew that this took her from her personal training.



Eat, pray, meditate

It may be a silent retreat but I had overlooked the daily 40 minute lecture. I had absolutely no knowledge of German so at the beginning it was an exercise in patience, although now I can understand about two thirds of what is said.

Jan would give me a five minute synopsis of the lecture afterwards and I felt guilty for keeping my fellow students waiting for their meditation in that hot, stuffy hillside room where we meditate.

The pattern of each day is the same, punctuated by pauses, not breaks, as we never leave our silence. At 8am zhan zhuang, breakfast, then a pause, seated tai chi meditation, chan si gong, 19 posture form, laojia, pause, lunch, pause, lecture, seated meditation, laojia from 4-6.30pm, pause, dinner, pause, seated meditation. We finish at 9pm, usually under a huge moon. The day is often very hot, but the nights are cooler.

In the morning there is birdsong and the sound of bells on untethered goats grazing on the hillside. Zhan zhuang to start the day but some students have already done their personal routine. An hour is long, but also not quite long enough. As the gong sounds for breakfast you are just getting into it.



By 8.30 the kitchen is in full swing, the strident voice of the housekeeper, the gentle reply of the monk. Jan corrects each of us before the hour is up at nine.

He says “Just listen” and you become very aware of sound: the breeze ruffling the bushes, the cats demanding to be fed, the clearing of throats, the rustling as my fellow



Sue Platt

students shift their position. Possibly, like me, they feel it is a bit too early for this.

We go straight in to breakfast. Sometimes, longing for food, you sit in front of it and have no desire to eat at all. The monastery grows marrows, onions, tomatoes, figs and grapes, but water is scarce. Meals are simple and repetitive, with saltless bread. You are not allowed to communicate with each other, yet you know your neighbour needs more bread and pass it to them. There is an old photo in the refectory of monks sitting around a table with bowls of beans and a basket of bread like us. They have high foreheads and all but one have beards. They are unsmiling and not looking at the photographer.

Shadow works

The pauses during the day are used for personal meditation, for practice, rest, walking around the monastery grounds (we are not permitted to leave) and for absorbing lessons learnt. Life lessons, too. Sometimes these periods of intense quiet bring up painful thoughts or

issues we thought we had resolved. In such cases we can speak to Jan, but he is most insistent on the non verbal, non communicatory aspect of our work there. “No mobile, no books, no diary; if this is too challenging I will look after them for you,” says Jan.

In silence, stillness and school

Why is communication not permitted? Because this is a time for more than internal reflection; meditation goes deep within. Our tai chi is slower and more unhurried than in school. Here we can be mindful of our movement. On the mountain we are detached in time and remote from our daily lives. We are higher than the birds of prey. We see their shadows on the plain. In fact, we can see the distant sea, and only at night does the fringe of twinkling lights reveal the shoreline and its burden of noisy bars and clubs. I am the oldest participant save one, an older man of whom the young say, reverently, that he was at Woodstock. While the rest of us wear tai chi gear of one sort or another he sports Hawaiian shirts.

We are invited to attend mass the last night but only if we wish to. We then make a symbolic crossing of the road outside the gates, to remind us that we are returning to civilisation the next day which, for most of us, means the clamour of Palma airport.

The next morning we return to our final standing practice, the gardener monk drags the hose through the dust for early watering, a distant cock crows, my neighbour has left his bag on the ground and a cat is tearing at it with her claws, the smallest sounds are magnified in the silence. I feel the presence of the little dog lying next to me.

Sadly, 2022 is to be the last silent retreat to be held in Mallorca. For many various and valid reasons it will now be held in Germany. I therefore feel the need to honour my experience by writing about it.

Photos: ManuelaSchönfeld. Copyright © WCTAG



Strange encounters

Jenny Peters

Call me a sceptic, writes Jenny Peters who teaches at the Kai Ming Association, but as soon as someone says to me “I can feel your chi” or “I think I have too much yin and not enough yang” I’m out of there

Once, a student told my husband he could see an aura of light around him and was sure that if he got too close, he would be thrown backwards by the power it contained. Well, all that told me was that perhaps my husband should have put on more deodorant that day.

You can read many many articles on the art’s mystical attributes, and that’s fine, but when our association, Kai Ming, was formed the committee of instructors decided our prime purpose was to open up the enigma that is tai chi, demystify it, look for western terms that could explain the eastern ones more clearly, and help people realise there is no magic, that the masters are only ordinary mortals who wanted that little bit more, so trained a great deal more.

I believe the true magic is within us all. The human body is the greatest tool we own, it has incredible engineering, wondrous powers of self healing, an efficient heating system (with built in thermostat), and ingenious plumbing linked to the waste disposal unit. Its electrical circuits alone would leave our computers standing, so, while we pay out lots of money to maintain these systems in our houses, we leave our best investment, our bodies, to look after itself.

As a nurse, I think tai chi may be the key to the maintenance, that we need. Also, maybe because I’m a nurse, I cannot equate with chi and meridians. For these I substitute oxygen and circulation. Those I can understand.

I recently read two articles written by people who say they have experienced life-changing benefits from tai chi. This is wonderful. It is great that they have felt elated enough to tell the world, the only problem I have with this is that both of them only acknowledged the yin or soft female qualities of tai chi, which is in itself, talking unbalance. Yin and yang, male and female, hard and soft, light and dark, they all go together.

One chap repeatedly said we should use tai chi in everyday life, when working, driving, shopping, socialising, sleeping. But although I read patiently through the whole article, he never actually divulged the secret of how to do this. The closest he got was to say you should flow through each day like a river. The theory of this statement is excellent, the instruction on how to attain this ability is sadly lacking.

The second article involved a man ‘finding himself’ by working through his grief and depression when practising the form. Obviously there was much more to his story than that, but I began to feel uncomfortable, when in the concluding chapter, he extolled the healing properties of his clothing or a hand brushing against parts of his body and the feelings this gave him of washing away his emotional problems.

Neither of these men mentioned the whole that is tai chi.

The old adage: ‘the more the merrier’, in this art should read: ‘the more I see the more confused I get’. It is extremely difficult for the average student to know good from bad, right from wrong, pukka from dodgy.

Just try to imagine if you went into a superstore to buy

a tin of dog food and discovered they had a whole floor devoted to just that, hundreds and hundreds of the same product, but with a different manufacturer, all professing to be the healthiest, tastiest, and all the same price. How would you decide which to buy. You could ask someone who worked there which was the best. In the case of tai chi this would equate to



Jenny Peters

asking your instructor. If you follow this advice you will no doubt find out where he got all those little pearls of wisdom from which he quotes in class, supposedly off the top of his head.

Perhaps the main point is, don’t believe everything you read. Just because it has been published doesn’t mean it is right. Even as you are reading this, you should be thinking: “She may be right, she may be wrong, I’ll have a look on her club’s website, and see what their view is.”

I realise there is a vast market for relaxation classes and many tai chi teachers just teach these techniques. This might be because their own knowledge is limited but in my opinion such classes should not be advertised as tai chi, but as Chinese exercises.

When my husband was looking to begin training he attended an introduction night. The instructor was quite well known in our city, but, as we found out later, was not accepted by the governing bodies as teaching a recognised style. He came home looking bemused, and told me that the students, bearing in mind they were complete strangers, had, after the initial talk, spent several minutes running their hands up and down each others’ bodies trying to feel the chi. He didn’t stay to find out if anyone could feel his.


Later, when he was qualified, he tried to find teachers from other schools to practice with. One said: “No, I’m afraid you can’t come to my class or train with me, but we could sit and talk about tai chi if you like.” Another who was Chinese said I do not do push hands in my style. His style turned out to be his ‘family’ style. Which, after viewing his video, seemed to be ‘made up, wave your arms about, try to look ethereal’.

So having read about some of our encounters of the strange kind, perhaps you will understand my nervousness when cornered by a chi fanatic. I sometimes wish I could develop my own ring of confidence to repel them when overdosed by mystical jargon. 🐼

TAI CHI

Freezing the form

Mark Guest



Tai chi as an internal art has a lot in common with ice swimming where it can, literally, become a matter of life and death writes tai chi instructor and ice swimmer Mark Guest

TAI CHI

Ice swimming is swimming outside in water below 5°C wearing only a basic swimming costume, goggles and a swimming hat. It has seen significant growth in the last ten years, helped by the ice mile challenge introduced by the International Ice Swimming Association (IISA). There are also events held by IISA and the International Winter Swimming Association among others, and the third IISA world championships was held in Murmansk, Russia in March 2019.

In the autumn social media comes alive with the same questions from people looking to get into ice swimming. 'How long can I stay out?' 'What temperature is safe?' 'How often should I swim?' and so on. There are obviously some guidelines e.g. don't go in for half an hour if you've never done it before. However, this is very general advice, and as any experienced ice swimmer will tell you, every ice swimmer is different and every ice swim they do is different. This is serious stuff, as no ice swimmer can remain in the water indefinitely, and an inexperienced swimmer can experience hypothermia within minutes, leading to loss of mobility and consciousness, and the risk of drowning.



Lesson is in session

Ice swimming is about a conversation with your body: listening, learning and reacting. To be a safe ice swimmer, you must have a heightened awareness of your own body, what it is capable of and what it is telling you. When an ice swimmer first begins their ice journey, they need to learn to be aware of how they are feeling, including before they go into the water, whilst swimming and during the recovery (the afterdrop! Ice swimming is all about the afterdrop). This allows the swimmer to start to learn what



Mark Guest

their limits are for any particular swim, and any warning signals to look out for.

Into the unknown

During an ice swimmer's initial training, anything unfamiliar whilst swimming may mean having to cut short a swim in case it is a crucial warning sign. This could be a range of things such as difficulty with the stroke, an ache, a twinge or just a funny feeling. Depending on the outcome, this will give you the experience to know whether to carry on or not the next time it happens. Ice swimming does involve learning to ignore a lot of pain and even agony that would normally be taken as a signal to stop whatever you are doing immediately. For example, the hand pain is often likened to having your hands slammed in car doors, though this does subside after a few seasons. This means that being fully mindful of your whole body and every signal and subtle difference is crucial.

Ice swimmers also enjoy discussing the different things that they notice when they are ice swimming, and these conversations highlight that there is a lot of commonality as well as difference. For example, some ice swimmers notice that teeth start to feel cold, whilst others don't. The common response from an ice swimmer who hasn't felt what another swimmer describes, is that they will look out for it next time. We are always learning.





Ice swimming championships Murmansk

As this shows, you cannot tell someone exactly how to ice swim, only how to learn how to ice swim safely themselves. This is the same as tai chi. Learning the movements is the pathway to enabling the student to find tai chi for themselves. The equivalent questions to those of the ice swimmer above might be, 'How far away from my body should I hold my hand?', 'How fast should I do this?', and 'How many times will I have to practise this?' As with ice swimming, answers can be given, and of course everyone has to have some guidance and instruction to make a start. However, these answers only take someone to the starting line. Proceeding from this is about beginning that conversation between the body and mind, and developing awareness and response. Martial applications take this further, introducing the need to listen to the opponent's body. Slavishly rolling back when engaging an opponent is highly unlikely to produce

anything other than a grapple without responding to changes in their centre and balance, which have to be felt. Exactly mimicking the external appearance of a position or movement is not tai chi, just as ice swimming is not looking up in a general table how long you can stay in the water. Getting this wrong can genuinely lead to ice swimmers finding themselves in life threatening situations.

There are other similarities between ice swimming and tai chi, and although I doubt this will encourage anyone to try ice swimming, hopefully it has provided some insight that can be of use to all tai chi practitioners. 🌐

Mark Guest is now in his sixth season of ice swimming. He is the 197th person to complete an Ice Mile (2017) and competed for Team GB at the Third IISA World Championships.



Ice swimming championships Murmansk

As well as ice swimming Mark is a dedicated tai chi practitioner. Immersing himself in the practice he rapidly become an instructor in the Kai Ming School. Based on this, he was able to develop techniques and exercises that enabled the swimmers he helped to improve further. Kai Ming practises Cheng Man Ching style tai chi, which is based on Yang style tai chi, one of the most popular in the world. People can find out more about ice swimming at www.internationaliceswimming.com

The best place to find local groups and places is through Facebook, searching for wild swimming and ice swimming groups. He runs the Greater Birmingham Ice and Wild Swimmers Facebook group.

Odds at the End

And the things people say...

Living by the Tao

The last line of a calligraphic scroll by Cheng Man-ch'ing 「改過在靜慮」 is the key to grand master Cheng's motto. He exhorts himself with this virtue and he urges all tai chi practitioners to follow suit. We correct our flaws in practising tai chi as we correct our errors in daily life. As Confucius says: "I quietly watch and spy on myself to discover if I've done something or someone wrong." People who are able and willing to be self-examining and self-correcting live better lives. They can improve themselves. There is a myriad of things and happenings in this universe of ours. We are all equal and we share everything that this universe has to offer us. Unfortunately, there are humans who ruin this earth, who commit bad deeds that disturb the harmony of our world. They destroy the rhythm of nature and act against the precepts of this good earth. To combat this, and to follow the principle of yin and yang and the natural rhythm of life we respect day as day and night as night. We respect the four seasons and the laws of nature. When we do this, we are in the Tao 「道」. The acme of self-cultivation and self-development is no more than returning to the Tao and changing with it but not against it.



James Chan

From Chen Man-ch'ing's scroll, translated by : James Wah Kong Chan of Philadelphia. jchanamm@comcast.net

Tai chi moves



A tai chi beginner's musings

Dance no dance
Fight no fight
mind in matter,
matter on mind
root in earth,
fly to sky

turn, return
circle within circles
round on rounds
unbroken, unending
anti-clockwise, clockwise

figures of eight in knots
spirals and counter spirals
patterns woven
all in one, one in all
in and out, round about

twine like silken thread
spin like spider's web
first cast your net wide
later pull in tight

move at snail's pace
coil like a snail shell
never fear slow down
just fear stop up

health means exercise,
self-defence is healing.
body has five bows,
draw and then shoot

One ounce deflects
a thousand pounds
un-centred weight
is toppled by itself

tongue on palate
head erect, sit hips
elbows down, shoulders
down,
buttocks in, knees bend
open back, belly relax

wings spread, arching up
breath deep, sink like
stone
energy rises, warmth
spreads

Give way to right
Give way to left
Give way to rear
Then press ahead

Curl round, hook in
close
Pull and push at same
time
Draw back to settle
down
Hold, release,
spring sprung

Now, carry on, yourself!
Marnix Wells
29/10/2020

Always remember the tree: the trunk and roots are still and strong, the branches when young are strong but yielding, but with age become brittle and snap. If we keep ourselves supple, practising our tai chi, hopefully we will remain supple well into old age.

Perhaps we cannot change our genes, but at least we can give them a little help.

Jenny Peters – Instructor

How many tai chi teachers does it take to change a lightbulb?
A: 100. One to change the bulb and 99 to argue: "That's not how they taught it at my school."

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It takes 1,000 to start for one to finish
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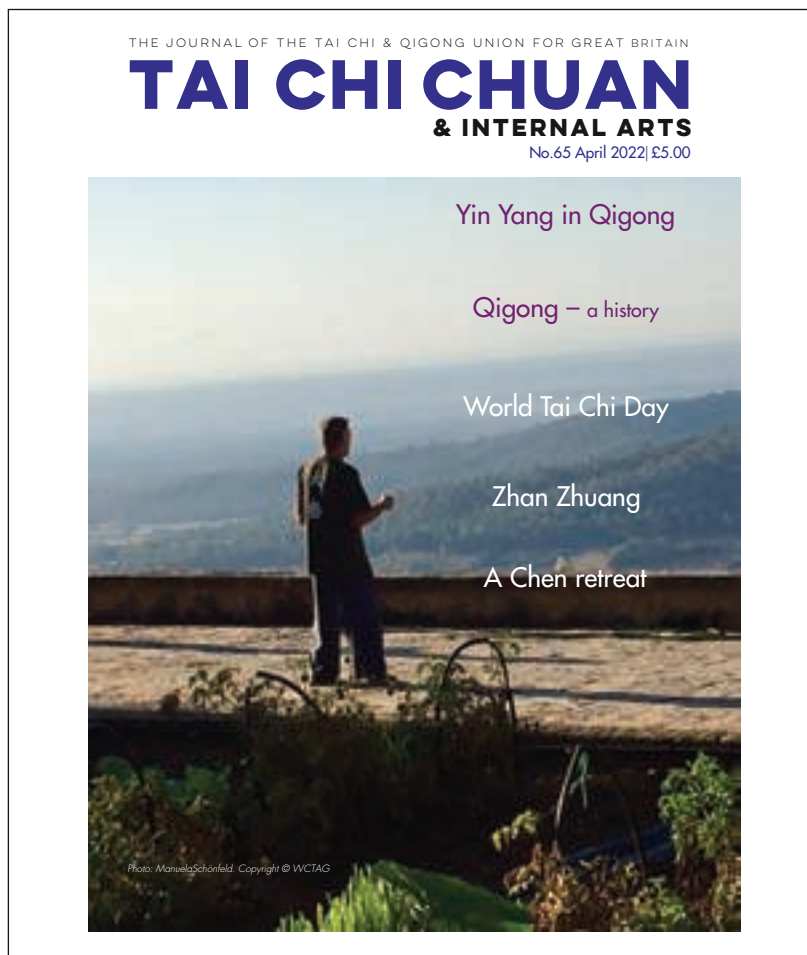
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