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Daoist Immortal Three Peaks Zhang Series



Tai Ji Quan Treatise

Attributed to the Song Dynasty Daoist Priest
Zhang Sanfeng

Stuart Alve Olson

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Tai Ji Quan Treatise
(太極拳論, **Tai Ji Quan Lun**)

Attributed to the Song Dynasty Daoist Priest Zhang Sanfeng

Translation and Commentary by Stuart Alve Olson



Valley Spirit Arts
Phoenix, Arizona

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Tai Ji Quan Master T.T. Liang
太極拳師梁棟材

(1900 to 2002)



Photograph by Richard Peterson, Portland, Oregon, 1996.



*Qing dynasty painting of Daoist Priest
Zhang Sanfeng (張三豐)*

Preface



Zhang Sanfeng watching a bird attack a snake.

Taijiquan (T'ai Chi Ch'uan), at its core, is not a martial art, at least not in the sense of what is commonly thought of as martial art. Taijiquan is not really even a system of self-defense. Rather, it's a system of "defense against the self," as the main premise of practical application has more to do with a disciplined and trained response so you will not make the errors and defects that cause injury to your self. If you were attacked, for example, Taijiquan teaches you to yield and use an attacker's force against them, instead of relying on force, strength, speed, or techniques to overcome the opponent.

In nature, when snow falls upon a pine tree's branch and the weight of the snow becomes extreme, the branch bends, the snow falls away, and the branch naturally snaps back into place. This is the same natural reactionary

energy used within Taijiquan. Therefore, it is incorrect to say that Taijiquan is a martial art full of techniques relying on speed and strength. Even the story of how Zhang Sanfeng created Taijiquan demonstrates this aspect of using natural reactionary energy by relating how he had observed a snake defend itself against a bird's attack. Briefly, when the bird attacked the snake's head, the snake's tail would respond. When the bird attacked the tail, the snake's head responded. If the bird then went for the snake's body, both the snake's head and tail reacted.

When reading this book, keep this concept of using natural reactionary energy firmly rooted in your mind, rather than the practice of using external muscular force that is set forth in descriptions of many other martial art systems.

Taijiquan is based entirely on natural simplicity, which is so simple that it protects itself from discovery by most practitioners, especially those who attempt to view Taijiquan as a martial art.

The full scope of Taijiquan practice contains the following four benefits and goals:

1. Health and Longevity.
2. Defense Against the Self.
3. Mental Accomplishment and Wisdom.
4. Immortality and Internal Alchemy.

Although Taijiquan encompasses these four areas of practice and accomplishment, which sound difficult to achieve, they are all natural responses rooted in simplicity. Just as Zhang Sanfeng discovered long ago while seated in his meditation hut watching a bird attack a snake, the secret of the art lies in responding to what life throws at you in a natural, yielding, and simple manner. If you can keep this in mind and apply it to your life and practice, you can go far in acquiring the skills and benefits of Taijiquan.

Introduction

This work on Zhang Sanfeng and the *Tai Ji Quan Treatise* attributed to him provides a fundamental basis on which to study and practice Taijiquan. So many modern-day practitioners have no historical knowledge of the origins of Taijiquan nor of its great masters. The primary figure in the formation of Taijiquan is directly laid at the feet of the great immortal Daoist priest Zhang Sanfeng (Three Peaks Zhang). This work provides an in-depth biographical sketch of this elusive and shadowy figure, whose life spanned three dynasties—the Song, Yuan, and Ming. Despite the difficulty in proving the existence of Zhang and his invention of Taijiquan, it is important for Taijiquan practitioners to have knowledge of his person and life, so they may gain a broader understanding of Taijiquan and its connection to Daoist philosophy and internal alchemy (内丹, neidan). No matter the initial purpose or reason why people take up Taijiquan practice, they knowingly or unknowingly will delve into these two esoteric worlds.

Taijiquan is presently being taught throughout Western culture without any depth of understanding of the underlying principles or knowledge of the traditional writings—and this material, hopefully, elucidates the necessary need for traditional theory. Not studying Taijiquan classical literature only serves to denigrate the art, so it is my sincere hope that this material helps fill the gap between practice and theory.

Four primary reasons and functions exist for the practice of Taijiquan:

- 1. Health:** Taijiquan is the ultimate Qigong exercise as it increases blood circulation, strengthens central equilibrium, produces a deep relaxation of mind and body, and revitalizes the spirit.
- 2. Self-Defense:** Taijiquan is not so much a means of self-defense as it is a “defense against the self.” Meaning, from our own faults of lacking intuition, inability to move our bodies as one unit with the breath, poor sense of central equilibrium, and absence of intrinsic energy skills, we make the mistakes that lead to injury and defeat.
- 3. Wisdom:** An inherent mental accomplishment of wisdom comes with Taijiquan practice and study. Taijiquan is Daoist philosophy in motion and the more we understand its fundamental principles and

philosophies, the more we can integrate them into our daily life. Taijiquan is not just about movement; it is more about living in accord with the world around us.

4. Immortality: Taijiquan is internal alchemy, the development of *jing* (精, regenerative energy), *qi* (氣, vital-life energy), and *shen* (神, spirit). The practice of Taijiquan leads to longevity, and longevity leads to the strengthening of our spirit. When we have fully awakened our spirit, we can become immortal, at least in the Daoist sense of passing from this world fully conscious.

As my teacher remarked, “No Taijiquan teacher is worth their salt unless they can explain and interpret the meaning of these four functions in every verse of the Taijiquan classical literature.” This means that to master Taijiquan, a practitioner must not only thoroughly understand the importance of each of these four functions, but also practice according to the goals of each of them. It is not enough to just practice Taijiquan for health, as the skills and goals of self-defense, wisdom, and immortality are equally paramount to the mastery of this art of self-cultivation.

The *Tai Ji Quan Treatise* is the foremost text of all Taijiquan literature. It is one of three main texts, the other two being *The Mental Elucidation of the Thirteen Kinetic Operations* (十三勢行功心, *Shi San Shi Xing Gong Xin*) and *The Tai Ji Quan Classic* (太極拳經, *Tai Ji Quan Jing*), both of which are attributed to Wang Zongyue (王宗岳) in some schools of Taijiquan, while others attribute them to Zhang Sanfeng himself.

Beyond these three primary texts are twelve minor works attributed to various masters of the art. Chen Kung (陳公, aka Yearning K. Chen) presents all these texts in his Chinese publication: *Tai Ji Quan, Sword, Saber, Staff, and Dispersing Hands Combined* (太極拳刀劍桿散手合編, *Tai Ji Quan Dao Jian Gan San Shou He Bian*).¹ His book is a direct compilation of texts taken from the Yang family transcripts. The *Tai Ji Quan Treatise* is the first text listed, showing its great importance to the Yang family.

Within the body of this book, I have also provided commentary to further elucidate the meanings of each verse of the treatise. I hope my explanations provide a useful adjunct for Taijiquan practitioners and readers. My

comments are, for the most part, gleanings of information I received from Master T.T. Liang during my eighteen-year tutelage with him, and from the intensive study of Taijiquan texts I undertook during those years.

In conclusion, I hope this work serves the Taijiquan community and individual practitioners well, and that it stimulates renewed interest in the study of the philosophy and practice of Taijiquan.

—Stuart Alve Olson

¹ See the [Chen Kung Series](#) published by Valley Spirit Arts for the full translation of this text into multiple volumes.

Timeline of Zhang Sanfeng's Life

Song (宋) dynasty (from 960 to 1279)

1247—Born (either in the northeastern province Liaoning or in the southeastern province on Dragon-Tiger Mountain). Name Used: Quan Yi (全一), birth name.

1256—At age nine, he started studying Buddhism under Chan master Hai Yun. Names Used: Jun Shi (君室), Jun Bao (君寶).

Yuan (元) dynasty (from 1279 to 1368)

1290—At age 43, he left his family and position as County Magistrate in Liaoning to cultivate the Dao. Name Used: Yu Xuizi (玉虛子), self-given cultivation name.

1294—At age 47, he met Xuan Du, initiated as a Daoist priest. Name Used: Zhang Tong (張通).

1303—At age 56, he faked his death at Golden Terrace Monastery in western Shensi. Names Used: Zhang Tong, Xuan Xuan (玄玄).

1325—At age 78, he met Fire Dragon Immortal on Ge Hong Mountain. Name Used: Xuan Hua (玄化).

1329—At age 82, he left Ge Hong Mountain and entered the Wudang Mountains. Created Taijiquan during these years. Name Used: Xuan Hua.

1338—At age 91, he attained immortality. Names Used: Xuan Hua, Zhang Sanfeng

1339—At age 92, he left Wudang Mountain to cloud wander. Name Used: Zhang Sanfeng.

Ming (明) dynasty (from 1368 to 1644)

1379—The Jiang (姜) family reports Zhang (age 132) lived on their property in Sichuan province. Name Used: Zhang Sanfeng.

1381—Reports of a Daoist priest called Dirty Immortal Zhang (age 134) start circulating throughout Sichuan and Guizhou provinces.

1385—At age 138, he escaped from Emperor Tai Zu, went cloud wandering and eventually went into hiding in Yunnan province until 1399. Names Used: Qing Xu (清虛), Zhang Sanfeng.

1403—At age 156, Zhang met with Prince Jun. Name Used: Zhang Sanfeng.

1410—At age 163, he reappeared (either on Dragon-Tiger Mountain or Wudang Mountain). Name Used: Zhang Sanfeng.

1417—At age 170, he ascended into the immortal realms.

History of Zhang Sanfeng

Probably no figure in ancient Daoist lore is as enigmatic and difficult to trace as Zhang Sanfeng. No historical data can prove the assertion that he created what has become popularly known as Taijiquan, or that he ever wrote anything concerning Daoism or Taijiquan. However, there are figures in Chinese history during the Song dynasty matching some of the criteria of this popular immortal, but nothing so substantial and evident enough to actually pinpoint him. Despite the lack of historical evidence of his person, there still exists an abundance of Daoist texts attributed to him, and in consideration of the numerous written legends about this Daoist immortal, there is also no reason to not affirm him as Daoist lore has presented him. In fact, he represents in many ways the Daoist ideal of the elusive rogue, hermit, cloud wandering immortal envisioned in so much of Chinese literature and folklore.

The Creation of Taijiquan

Legend has it that Zhang's first realization of Taijiquan, came after seeing a bird and snake fighting. The story goes that Zhang was meditating in his hut on Wudang Mountain when he heard a magpie attacking a snake. He watched intently as the snake yielded and counterattacked all the movements of the bird. If the magpie tried to seize the tail of the snake, the snake struck back with its head. If its head was attacked, the snake countered with its tail. Likewise, when the center of the snake's body was attacked, both its head and tail responded. Zhang must have thought this was really clever and so believed that instead of utilizing the hard and unyielding movements in Shaolin Kung Fu (少林功夫), the martial art of Taijiquan should focus on the yielding, soft, and pliable aspects of the Snake style; the light, nimble, and changeable movements of Dragon; the intently focused, agile, and powerful traits of Tiger; the exacting, calm, and expansive energy of the Crane; and to be as light, nimble, and concealed as the Leopard.

In addition to the story of Zhang watching the bird and snake leading to his invention of Taijiquan, another story tells of another discovery he made while dwelling in his famous meditation hut on Wudang Mountain (無當山, Wu Dang Shan). This story relates that late one evening he went outside to practice his Taijiquan. When he began doing the movements of *Step Back and Chase the Monkey Away* repeatedly, he found that when he kept his buttocks opened and relaxed, his qi would rise up his spine and into his brain.¹ So he kept practicing this method night after night until he finally achieved immortality. It is this story that elevated Taijiquan from being just a method for health and self-defense into a working method of internal alchemy.

From the story of Zhang practicing the movements of *Step Back and Chase the Monkey Away*, it is obvious the Eight Operations² were originally practiced as separate movements and gestures, like katas in karate, and the repetition of each individual movement were performed in accordance to the Five Activities. This is important because it lends itself to the idea that Taijiquan as a style of connected movements was created post Zhang's era, and possibly not until the time of Wang Zongyue (mid or late 1600s).

How Zhang actually created Taijiquan, beyond the insights he experienced while watching the bird and snake, is unclear. But it is thought he had known or learned Shaolin Kung Fu earlier in his life, specifically the Five Animal exercises of the Tiger, Dragon, Snake, Leopard, and Crane. It is surmised that he took the principles of the Dragon and Snake forms (which is highly probable because many of the names of Taijiquan postures coincide with Shaolin Kung Fu posture names) and thus added the *Book of Changes* (易經, *Yi Jing*) theories on yin and yang (陰陽) and Daoist breathing techniques of Leading and Guiding the Breath (導引, *Dao Yin*). In essence, he created a physical form of expression of Daoist philosophy, or Daoist philosophy in motion, or possibly better said he created *moving internal alchemy*.

Over many years of studying the teachings attributed to Zhang Sanfeng, it has become vividly clear that the actual historical evidence of this Daoist immortal is for the most part unimportant, as it is the myths of Zhang that are so inspiring to all cultivating Daoists. Hence, to accept his existence is not nearly as important as accepting and applying the teachings attributed to him.

Legends of Zhang Sanfeng

Two versions tell of when and where Zhang Sanfeng was born. The first says that he was born in Liaoning province (northeastern China) in 1247 C.E., and the second says that he was born in the same year, but within the region of Dragon-Tiger Mountain (龍虎山, Long Hu Shan) in Jiangxi province (southeastern China). It is said he mounted a dragon and ascended into an immortal paradise in the year 1417, living to the venerable age of 170. Again, some records say he passed away in 1471 on Wudang Mountain and others claim it was on Dragon-Tiger Mountain. The accounts of Zhang's birthplace, his dwellings, and death appear to be altered depending on whether the sources tend more towards the Wudang Mountain martial art lineages or those of the Dragon-Tiger Mountain Daoist internal alchemy lineages. The martial art contingent seems to focus a great deal on his spending most of his life in northern China and on Wudang Mountain, whereas the internal alchemists seem to accentuate his life mostly in southern China, especially the two areas of Ge Hong and Dragon-Tiger Mountains. Truthfully, little information substantiates either account.

His birth name reportedly was Quan Yi, and he used the aliases of Jun Shi, Jun Bao, and Yu Xuizi during the first part of his life, and later used the other sobriquets of Qing Xu, Zhang Tong, Xuan Xuan, Xuan Hua, and Zhang Sanfeng. This elusive immortal called "Three Peaks," a name Zhang is said to have chosen for himself while cultivating on Ge Hong Mountain (葛洪山)³ or as other accounts tell, it was on Southern End Mountain (終南山, Zhong Nan Shan) or on Precious Chicken Mountain (寶雞山, Bao Ji Shan), where he saw three high peaks and so thought it a fitting name for himself.

According to legend, Zhang's life spanned three dynasties, beginning near the end of the Song, extending through the entire Yuan, and ending in the early Ming. Probably the best research done on the existence and history of Zhang Sanfeng can be found in Anna Seidel's chapter "A Taoist Immortal of the Ming Dynasty: Chang San-feng" in *Self and Society in Ming Thought* (W. T. Barry, editor, Columbia University Press, 1970).

In this work, Seidel presents a great deal of information on the possible existence of a Daoist priest named Chang (under several assumed names)

during the Ming dynasty, but could not prove conclusively if a figure named Chang San-feng (Zhang Sanfeng) actually invented Taijiquan or wrote any discourses on Daoism. Despite the efforts made here to render a reasonable history of Zhang, please refer to Anna Seidel's material, as it is a far more authoritative work.

Legendary history claims that Zhang in his early years was a county magistrate in the northeastern province of Liaoning, but quit his position in mid-life and left his family to become a Daoist priest. Zhang Sanfeng claimed to have been initiated as a Daoist priest by Xuan Du (玄獨), but this name could also simply mean a “mysterious stranger” or “hermit,” and for whatever reason Zhang chose not to reveal his identity or background. In any event, Xuan Du transmitted the meanings of *The Treatise on Understanding Reality* (悟真篇, *Wu Zhen Pian*) by Zhang Boduan (張伯端, 987–1082 C.E.). Therefore, in being given the Daoist surname of Zhang, he would have to have been initiated into either the Southern Complete Reality Sect (全真南派, *Quan Zhen Pai*) attributed to Liu Haichan (劉海禪), or, and most likely, the Azure Yang Sect (紫陽派, *Zi Yang Pai*) founded by Liu's disciple Zhang Boduan.

It is also noted that Zhang Sanfeng had a close but short relationship with the Northern *Quan Zhen* Sect at White Cloud Monastery (白雲觀, *Bai Yun Guan*) in Beijing, as it is recorded he befriended three master monks there. Zhang Sanfeng was later considered a patron immortal of White Cloud Monastery and so a statue and shrine was erected in his honor.

In 1325, when Zhang was 78 years old, it is said he met a Daoist hermit by the name of Fire Dragon Immortal (火龍仙, *Huo Long Xian*) on Ge Hong Mountain who taught him the internal alchemy methods for becoming an immortal and/or actually gave him the formula for producing the pill of immortality, as well as teaching him acupuncture. It was at this time he changed his name to Xuan Hua. The Fire Dragon Immortal claimed to be a disciple of Wang Zhe (王嘉), founder of the Northern Sect of *Quan Zhen*, and this may have been the reason for his connection with the priests at White Cloud Monastery in Beijing. But after practicing for four years, the Fire Dragon Immortal told Zhang he should leave and go find another auspicious and sacred place to practice, as Ge Hong Mountain would not be the place he would attain his immortality. This is when Zhang entered the

Wudang Mountains and decided this was the appropriate place to forge his immortality, and he did so for nine years and accomplished his goal.

After these nine years on Wudang Mountain, Zhang undertook the old tradition of what Daoists call “cloud wandering,”⁴ traveling throughout the sacred mountains of China, such as Hua Shan (華山) in Shaanxi province and Heng Shan (恆山) in Hunan province. In 1385, because the emperor Tai Zu (太祖) ordered him to take an official post, he escaped and went into hermitage in the mountain regions of Yunnan province until 1399 (the year when Hui Zong [惠宗] became emperor and the former emperor Tai Zu’s command would have been rendered invalid). It was this year that he reportedly reappeared in his birthplace on Dragon-Tiger Mountain and lived out his years until his immortal ascension in 1417.

During the years prior to 1399, Zhang traveled a great deal, and spent most of his time helping others, especially farmers. He would perform healings, collect medicines for them, and give them instructions on the Dao. The tales of his benevolence are numerous, and it was all these deeds that endeared him to the populace and eventually gained him the notice of emperors.

Zhang had been a cloud wanderer for most of his life and his whereabouts were often uncertain. Other cloud wandering Daoists who happened upon him said he was a true “hermit immortal” (隱仙, yin xian), and many claimed to have witnessed his spiritual skill of performing physical flight, and never leaving footprints no matter where he walked. Be it in the hot summer or the coldest of winter he would only wear one garment and sandals. When walking about areas with snow, it would all melt beneath his feet, and at times he would simply sleep in the snow, all evidence of his cultivated qi. Likewise, when he climbed mountains it was as if he flew up the inclines with great agility, lightness, and nimbleness, never showing signs of exhaustion or exertion. Disciples commented that when he felt the need, he could flap the sleeves of his robe and simply disappear. When Zhang ate, he consumed large quantities of food, but then sometimes would only eat every few days, and other times forego eating altogether for a couple months at a time. His mannerisms were very casual and free from restraint, and he had the temperament and presence of an immortal.

Nothing in the purported historical accounts about Zhang Sanfeng are ever mediocre, even his supposed death in 1303. The story runs that Zhang passed away while staying at Golden Terrace Monastery (金臺寺, Jin Tai Si) in western Shensi. He had announced his pending departure and gave his followers final instructions. A few days passed in preparation of the funeral and when the day arrived to place him in his grave, and his casket was about to be lowered into the ground, they all heard a knocking coming from within the casket. Upon opening it they found a smiling Zhang who had come back to life.

In all the legends about Zhang Sanfeng's description, they all relate that he was very tall, some reports say he was seven feet tall, and was well built with the resemblance of a tortoise and had a crane-shaped back, very long ears, and round, piercing eyes. His beard was black, long, very thick, and bristly. Zhang in Chinese woodblock prints is normally depicted wearing a Daoist cassock with a wide palm-bark rain cape, a wide brimmed bamboo hat, straw sandals, and carrying his sword and gourd. Other images show him in a seated meditation posture, with one such statue erected in his honor at Wudang Mountain. In other cases he is shown simply standing holding only a flywhisk.

Teachings of Zhang Sanfeng

Zhang maintained five practices of cultivation:

- 1) Performing sword movements in moonlight because this would “enliven the spirit” (增神, zeng shen).
- 2) Practicing Taijiquan in the dark of night because it “increased essence” (益精, yi jing).
- 3) Climbing a mountain on windy nights because it “broadened qi” (長氣, zhang qi).
- 4) Studying and reading scriptures on rainy nights because it “illuminated the mind” (明心, ming xin).
- 5) Sitting in meditation at midnight because it would bring “clarity to one’s nature” (見性, jian xing).

These five practices Zhang said were the essence of his Daoist cultivation.

The perspective in the Ming dynasty about the three religions of China (Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism) was that they all came from the same origin and Zhang Sanfeng basically shared this same general view as his contemporaries. Zhang maintained that these three religions had the same intent; i.e., to cultivate one’s original nature and to bring benefit and order to the world. Hence, whether one spoke of Lao Zi, Buddha, or Confucius, the basic premise was the same and, therefore, Buddhism and Confucianism could be classified as aspects of Daoist teaching. In the Ming dynasty, as well as in the previous Song dynasty, Daoists were known to study aspects of Buddhism and Confucianism, and vice versa. In Zhang Sanfeng’s *Essays on the Essentials of the Great Dao*, he explains,

Confucians try to practice the Dao of society to bring order and benefit to the world; Buddhists seek to realize the Dao to awaken and bring salvation to the world; while Daoist immortals simply preserve the Dao to transform all of humankind.

Zhang saw all three teachings as useful and part of a whole concerning awakening one’s Original Nature (元性, Yuan Xing).

His overriding view was that the cultivation of Dao meant the study and practice of three entrances for attaining immortality: “Awakening the

Spiritual Nature,” “Nourishing-Life,” and “Harmonizing the Yin and Yang.”⁵ But these three entrances he considered “had to be rooted in the cultivation of merit and virtue (功德, gong de),⁶ as these are the very essence of attaining the Dao, while the cultivation of the Elixir of Immortality is the application of the Dao. Both are necessary components for attaining immortality.”

What Zhang is implying here, as in all legitimate Daoist schools of internal alchemy, is that unless students are willing to change their mortal temperament and conduct through the measures of accumulating merit and virtue, the methods of internal alchemy meditation will have very limited results. Meaning, it is a student’s merit and virtue that is the foundation and catalyst, the very essence, for attaining the Dao, as no one can enter the Dao without merit and virtue. As *The Scripture on Dao and Virtue* (道德經, *Dao De Jing*) states, “the Dao honors and accepts only the good.”

Internal alchemy (cultivating and forming the Elixir of Immortality) is thereby the application by which a person can fully realize the Dao. Both “attaining the Dao” and “realization of the Dao” are the two necessary components for achieving immortality. In Daoism, this is summed up in the two characters *de* (得) and *wu* (悟), “attain” and “realize.”

As it is stated in the last verse of *The Exalted One’s Clarity and Tranquility of the Constant Scripture* (太上清靜經, *Tai Shang Qing Jing Jing*), “Attain and realize the Dao,” and it is these two distinct purposes and functions to which Zhang is referring.

“Attaining the Dao” means a cultivator has found his or her correct Dao and so practices it to attain merit and virtue, and “realizing the Dao” is the successful transformation into immortality produced from the practices and the cultivator’s merit and virtue.

This means no accomplished teacher or immortal could ever teach anyone true internal alchemy who has not first cultivated their merit and virtue, as an ill-tempered and ill-mannered person is simply not worthy of receiving the treasures of the Dao and immortality. The spirits of such people are simply too clouded and perplexed, hence they create their own obstacles for not attaining and realizing the Dao. So, in the end, not attaining or realizing the Dao and immortality, is not just a matter of teachers not wanting to

teach certain people, rather it is more a matter of such people not perceiving the cultivation of merit and virtue as necessary, and thinking only the application and method of internal alchemy is important. These persons simply cultivate in vain.

Beyond the creation of Taijiquan, Zhang's contribution to Daoist practices includes a distinct system of meditation. Zhang believed that tranquility must be achieved in all activities of sitting, standing, walking, and lying down. In brief, adding that self-cultivation should be approached on a cyclic and repetitive basis. For example, he taught a method called, "The Great Process for Refining the Elixir." In this method he taught students to sit for fifteen minutes (calling it the Quarter-Hour Method), standing for five minutes, sitting again for fifteen minutes, standing again for five minutes, sitting again for fifteen minutes, and then walking for five minutes. This was one cycle.

Within this cycle of sitting, standing, and walking meditation a student would spend the first eighteen days of this practice just ridding the mind of extraneous thoughts and distractions, and getting the breathing correct. This first stage was called, *Preparing the Cauldron*. Then a 99-day practice period, called *Forming the Pearl*, was undertaken. This second stage focused on congealing the jing and qi energies within the qi cavity in the lower abdomen called the Dan Tian (丹田, Elixir Field)—which is, in essence, a person's very center of being. The third stage took place over a nine-month period wherein the congealed essence of jing and qi (or pearl) was then moved up the spine and back, over the head, and down the front of the body, returning to the Dan Tian again. This stage was called the *River Cart*, as the sensation of the elixir is that of a fluid circulating through the meridians of the body. Other sects of Daoism refer to this process as the *Lesser Heavenly Circuit* or *Microcosmic Orbit*, but Zhang's method is the most pragmatic.

Zhang did not believe that toiling the body with long periods of forced meditation was useful. In fact, this is usually dangerous. He believed that entering true tranquility was a spontaneous response to diligent practice and not something that could be brought about or achieved through painful and forced practice. It wasn't that he thought long periods of meditation were useless; it was more a matter of understanding that a cultivator should enter

tranquility without the thought or forced effort of entering it. To Zhang, it had to be completely natural and spontaneous. In many ways Zhang's meditation method was as revolutionary as his invention of Taijiquan.

The Ming Emperors and Zhang Sanfeng

In 1385 of the Ming dynasty, the emperor Tai Zu sent envoys throughout the Daoist sacred mountain areas to search for Zhang, but to no avail. During the years 1403 through 1425, the emperor Cheng Zu (成祖) repeatedly sent his imperial officials and envoys to locate him in several known mountain regions where Zhang cultivated. But time and time again these envoys would be told they had just missed him or had the wrong location (and for eight years the imperials were unknowing of his ascension in the year 1417). Zhang's disciples would always forewarn him of the approaching imperial officials so he could quickly escape and go into hiding until their departure. The emperor Cheng Zu had hoped to convince Zhang to serve as an official in his royal court. Even though the emperor could not locate Zhang, he still, out of honor and respect for him, helped to make Zhang's prophecy for Wudang Mountain becoming a sacred place come true. This prophecy is one of the more popular stories attached to Zhang. After he built his meditation hut on Wudang Mountain, he placed all the unused wood, bushes, and rubble into a pile and predicted to his disciples that this mound of debris will one day flourish and become a famous monastery. It was Cheng Zu who had a large Daoist temple on Wudang Mountain constructed in 1420.

After Zhang's disappearance, later reports of his reappearance began circulating which claim that he took on the persona of being a crazy, poor beggar in order to not be recognized as the immortal the imperials were searching for, and ensuring his anonymity among the populace. When visiting a village, he would smear mud and dirt over his face and body, openly urinate in public, shout profanities at people, reek of bad odors from never bathing, and would on occasion appear belligerently drunk. All of this behavior earned him the moniker "Dirty Zhang."

Despite all of Zhang's efforts to maintain anonymity during his life, in 1459 the emperor Ying Zong (英宗) canonized him with the honorific title "Perfect Manifestation of Pervasive Subtlety." In 1486, the emperor Xian Zong (憲宗) granted him the title "Brilliant and Lofty Perfect Immortal." In 1623, Emperor Xi Zong (熹宗) announced Zhang Sanfeng had descended unto the temple altar on Wudang Mountain, visibly manifesting his spirit to everyone there, and so offered him the title "The Perfected

Flying Dragon Sovereign Who Bestows Salvation, Promotes Benevolence, and Benefits the World.”

All the emperors of the Ming dynasty admired and bestowed honors upon Zhang Sanfeng, which served to further propagate his status and create a surge of Daoist believers in him. The legend of Zhang’s life and immortality has since been told and retold, updated, and renewed constantly. Even into the Qing dynasty, stories still circulated about Daoist searchers meeting Zhang Sanfeng and being taught the Daoist arts of immortality from him.

The Written Records of Zhang Sanfeng

If Zhang had been a county magistrate in Liaoning province it would have meant he was well educated and would have most probably entered the civil examinations as a young man. If this were true, then indeed he would have had the literary skills to write at least some of the texts attributed to him. He was also thought to have had a photographic memory as he could remember by heart whatever books he read, and was very skilled in writing poems and discourses. The more popular and present Chinese texts that have been circulated bearing his name include:

Zhang Sanfeng's Secret Arts for Refining the Elixir (張三豐太極煉丹秘訣, *Zhang San Feng Tai Ji Lian Dan Bi Jue*)

Zhang Sanfeng Essays on the Essentials of the Great Dao (張三豐大道指要, *Zhang San Feng Da Dao Zhi Yao*)

Collections on the Sect of Zhang Sanfeng Daoist Arts (張三豐道術滙宗, *Zhang San Feng Dao Shu Hui Zong*)

Collections on the Sect of Zhang Sanfeng Martial Arts (張三豐武術滙宗, *Zhang San Feng Wu Shu Hui Tsung*)

All these texts, however, are basically excerpted and annotated reprints of an earlier compilation by Li Xiyue (李西月) in 1844, titled, *The Complete Book of Zhang Sanfeng* (張三豐全書, *Zhang San Feng Quan Shu*), a compilation of preserved sections from the Daoist Canon (道藏, *Dao Zang*) dedicated to the teachings of Zhang Sanfeng.

Anna Seidel mentions in her research on Zhang Sanfeng that a sixteenth-century work titled *A Record of Evidences of Worthy Persons in China's Dynasties* (國朝獻徵錄, *Guo Chao Xian Zheng Lu*) discusses what was known and believed about Zhang Sanfeng in the Ming dynasty, but it provides the same inconclusive conclusions as have the researches of present-day scholars.

In the end, there are numerous references to this person Zhang Sanfeng throughout the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties, yet none of these references pinpoint exactly who he was. The curious aspect to all this is that Zhang Sanfeng received a great deal of imperial attention, the Daoist hierarchy likewise conferred great honors upon him and have propagated

his teachings, people throughout China have left behind numerous accounts of encounters with this man, and yet with all this as reference, no real evidence exists of who he was, only of what he taught and what he represented. And all of it is based on the assumption that the person called Zhang Sanfeng is the same person under various other names. Even without concrete, verifiable proof connecting all the stories of him, it would be wrong not to accept the existence of Zhang Sanfeng, as it is highly improbable that a myth of this grand a scale could have been so widely accepted or existed for so long. Hence, to consider Zhang as just a myth equally means we must form the conclusion that all these emperors and imperial officials, all the learned and cultivated Daoists, and many reputable citizens who believed in and claimed the existence of Zhang were all just simpleminded fools.

The Disciples of Zhang Sanfeng

Interestingly enough, tracing the works and students descending from Zhang is far easier than actually tracing him personally, yet there is no conclusive evidence showing his post lineage to be completely accurate. However, it is recorded that Zhang Sanfeng had a disciple named Wang Zong (王宗). The disciple Wang Zong has long been confused with the later fifth-generation disciple Wang Zongyue (王宗岳). Obviously this confusion stemmed from the similarities in their names. But Zhang couldn't have taught Wang Zongyue as some have professed for the simple reason that Wang Zongyue lived in the mid-1600s, over two hundred years after Zhang's passing.

The following list concerns Zhang Sanfeng's descendent-lineage disciples and should not be confused with the Seven Disciples of the Wudang Sect, whom Zhang supposedly taught as well.

- 1) Wang Zong⁷ from Shensi province taught Chen Zhoutong (陳州同) from Wenzhou.
- 2) Chen Zhoutong then taught Zhang Songxi (張松溪) from Haiyan.
- 3) Zhang Songxi then taught Ye Jimei (葉繼美) from Siming.
- 4) Ye Jimei taught Wang Zongyue from Shanyou.⁸
- 5) Wang Zongyue taught Jiang Fa (蔣發) from Hebei.
- 6) Jiang Fa, in turn, taught Chen Wangting, (陳王廷, 1590?) from Honan, founder of the Chen Style of Taijiquan.
- 7) Chen Wangting taught his family members, and finally Chen Zhangxing (陳長興, 1771 to 1853), the fifth generation Chen family master taught Yang Luchan (陽露禪, 1799 to 1872), who later created his own Yang family style of Taijiquan.

In 1399, differing accounts claim that Zhang returned to either Dragon-Tiger Mountain or to Wudang Mountain, accompanied by his two disciples, Wang Zong and Chen Zhoutong. The Wudang claim appears less credible because it says that he returned to live in the temple the emperor Cheng Zu constructed in his honor, but the temple wasn't built until 1420, three years after Zhang's supposed passing. At some point in this period, seven other

disciples descended upon him, and Zhang taught all of them the secrets of immortality and Taijiquan before he mounted a dragon. These students came to be known as the Seven Disciples of the Wudang Sect (武當派七子, Wu Dang Pai Qi Zi), and are recorded as:

Song Yuanqiao (宋遠橋)

Zhang Songxi (張松溪)

Zhang Cuishan (張翠山)

Mo Gusheng (莫谷聲)

Yu Daiyan (俞岱岩)

Yu Lianzhou (俞蓮舟)

Yin Liheng (殷利亨)

Dating the Text of the *Tai Ji Quan Treatise*

In the publication of *The Complete Book of Zhang Sanfeng* (張三豐全書, *Zhang San Feng Quan Shu*) by Li Xiyue (李西月) in 1844, which includes the *Tai Ji Quan Treatise*, Li states that the contents of his work were taken from the Daoist Canon. The fourth and last compilation of the Daoist Canon was produced in the Ming dynasty in the year 1444. Without access to the Ming dynasty edition, it is uncertain whether or not Zhang's treatise was included.

Yet, in 1845 at White Cloud Monastery in Beijing, missing pieces of the canon were replaced. It could be assumed that it was during this reconstruction of the canon that the works of Zhang Sanfeng were placed, but this could only be true if the publication date of Li Xiyue is wrong or he had access to the Daoist Canon before White Cloud Monastery completed their publication. However, if this treatise was in the Ming dynasty edition, then it could very well have been the work of Zhang Sanfeng or one of his early disciples, such as Wang Zong. If, however, it was not included into the Daoist Canon until 1845, then it was more likely a work of Wang Zongyue attributed to Zhang Sanfeng, and was then passed down through the Chen family and to the Yang family.

The one real problem with the treatise is the inclusion at the end of the text wherein it correlates Taijiquan movements and functions with the Eight Diagrams and Five Elements. This portion of the treatise does not fit with what precedes it, neither in style nor in content, and obviously was added at some point to bring a greater correlation between Taijiquan and the underlying philosophies of Eight Diagram and Five Element theory.⁹ Where it came from, who wrote it, and when it was added to this treatise are all unknown, and left to conjecture.

Conclusion

The legends surrounding the figure of Zhang Sanfeng are bountiful, and ever so mystical and empyreal, like swirling mists drifting about the mountain regions he inhabited. In the person of Zhang Sanfeng we find several men being presented—from Dirty Zhang, to a reclusive immortal hermit, to a benevolent healer, a par excellence martial artist, an internal alchemist, a meditation master, and a deified sovereign of the Dao. Which is the true Zhang Sanfeng?

It is easy to assume that the legends surrounding Zhang are simply mythic history, yet within the mythical is always an element of truth. The myths of Zhang Sanfeng may in the end prove to be based on some factual incident or event, or of followers of his who chose to lend his name to the legend, or maybe he was just a shadowy enough figure in the Daoist pantheon that he could be given credit for all the various writings other teachers wished to have gain prominence by attributing him as the author. Whatever the case may be, and maybe it is all of them, the Daoist immortal Zhang Sanfeng is engraved in China's stone of antiquity forever, and perhaps this is his true immortality.

¹ In Daoist internal alchemy practices this is identical with the process of Reverting Jing into the Brain (還精補腦, Huan Jing Bu Nao).

² The *Eight Operations* is a more appropriate term for what is normally translated as the *Eight Postures of Warding-Off, Rolling-Back, Pressing, Pushing, Splitting, Pulling, Elbowing, and Shouldering*, as these operations are kinetic, not stagnant, potential postures of the body.

³ This is presently known as the Lou Fu Mountains (羅浮山) in Guangdong province. It is sometimes called Ge Hong Mountain because it is where the famous Daoist scholar and alchemist Ge Hong (283–343 C.E.) lived and cultivated. Today, it is a national park and has many memorials and temples dedicated to Ge Hong.

⁴ *Cloud Wanderer* (雲路, Yun Lu), a title for a Daoist who wandered about mountain regions looking for hermit teachers or simply to escape from all worldly affairs and live within nature.

⁵ These three methods of cultivation are also referred to as the Three Gateways of Daoist Philosophical Arts, Nourishing-Life Arts, and Joining Vital-Energies Arts, respectively.

⁶ Cultivating merit and virtue is the main practice of the Accumulating Virtue school of Daoism. The main text for this teaching is found in the *Tai Shang Gan Ying Pian* (太上感應篇). See *The Exalted One's Actions and Retribution Tablets* by Stuart Alve Olson (Valley Spirit Arts).

⁷ Wang Zong wrote a commentary on the Daoist classic *Yin Fu Jing* (*Yin Convergence Scripture*) that dates back to the mid-1400s.

⁸ Wang Zongyue is the attributed author of the two other major Taijiquan works: *The Tai Ji Quan Classic* and *The Mental Elucidation of the Kinetic Thirteen Operations*. He also supposedly wrote a book called, *Yin Fu Spear*. Again, because Wang Zong wrote a commentary on the *Yin Convergence Scripture* and Wang Zongyue wrote a book on *Yin Convergence Spear* (陰符槍, *Yin Fu Qiang*), some people assumed they were the same person.

⁹ For a much more detailed look at this subject, see *T'ai Chi According to the I Ching: Embodying the Principles of the Book of Changes* (Inner Traditions, 2001).

Zhang Sanfeng's Tai Ji Quan Treatise
太極拳論與点評

太極拳論

一舉動周身俱要輕靈尤須貫串宜鼓盪神宜內斂無使有矜陷
處無使有凸凹處無使有虧續安其根在脚淺於腿主宰於腰形
于手指由脚而腿而腰總須一致一氣向前退後乃能得機得勢
其有不沾不脫是勢安身便散乱于病必于胛腿求之上下前後左
右皆然凡此皆是意不在外面有上即有下有前則有後有左則有
右如意要向上即寓下意若將物掀起而加以挫之其力斯于根
自斃乃攘之速而考疑虛實宜分清是一處有一處之虛實
安之總此一實實固身節貫串無令有丝毫間斷耳
此係武當山張三丰祖師遺論欲天下豪傑延年益壽不
徒作技藝之末也

己巳年五月

梁棟材敬書



Explanation of the Title

Tai Ji Quan Treatise (太極拳論, Tai Ji Quan Lun)

Tai (太)

Although *Tai* is usually translated as “supreme” or “most high,” to get the full context of the meaning, it is better to look at the construction of the character. First, the character is built on two radicals: *yi* (一) “the one” is added to the radical *ren* (人), a “person,” and from this the character *da* (大), meaning “great” is formed. In totality, this character can mean “the one great person.” For the character to become *Tai*, the stroke *zhu* (丶) is added down into the center of *ren*. *Zhu* means “a point,” as in the “point of a flame,” and basically represents “the one point,” or “the flame within a person”—i.e., the Dan Tian within a person’s abdomen. So the character *Tai* (太) in its totality is describing, “the one great person who has his or her center,” and is therefore as Daoists perceive “the Supreme One.” The character *Tai* is well chosen for the ideal of Taijiquan because the root goal is to discover the flame, or heat, in your center—the Dan Tian.

Ji (極)

Ji means “the ridgepole,” the center pole holding up and supporting the roof of a house or the main tent of the clan, without which the structure would collapse. Thus, the very top of the ridgepole is viewed as the ultimate or highest point, the peak of something, or to reaching the very height of something.

The components of the character *Ji* include the following:

Mu, 木, represents a tree; in this case, a wood pole or beam.

Qiao, 巧, originally meant the breath, the act of respiration, so it really was the original character for *qi* (氣) as it relates to the breath, but the character is now obsolete and rarely used on its own.

Kou, 口, means the mouth and/or an entrance to something.

You, 又, means the right hand, or the right side of a thing.

Yi, 一, means the one, but in this case it is representing the base, or floor, of the house upon which the ridgepole is rooted.

The character *Ji* means “the ridgepole,” but contains a much more expansive meaning. The idea here, in full, is “the breath is the supporting frame and base so the right thing can enter.” It is through this supporting frame (the ridgepole and breath) that the “ultimate” can be achieved. In brief, this can mean, “attaining the highest point through right use of the breath.” In Taijiquan, the very basis of movement is learning how to move in perfect unison with the breath.

Tai Ji (太極) as a compound has come to be a reference term for both a philosophy and a symbol of that philosophy.¹ As a philosophical term it means the point when yin and yang separate and the Ten Thousand Things (all phenomena) are created. From *Wu Ji* (無極) comes *Tai Ji* (太極), and from *Tai Ji* comes the yin and yang (陰陽), and from the yin and yang the Ten Thousand Things (萬物, *Wan Wu*) are produced. Another way of presenting this theory is to say, “From absolute nothingness comes somethingness, from this somethingness two opposites come forth, and from these two opposites all things in the world are produced.”

Regarding Taijiquan practice, this means to first stand perfectly still (Wu Ji) and then once you begin moving (this is Tai Ji) the substantial and insubstantial (yin and yang) separate and the transformations of all the movements (Wan Wu) occurs, and these transformations are the functions of the Eight Diagrams and Five Elements. Finally, as you conclude the movements, you return to Tai Ji and then back into Wu Ji—Returning to the Source (原 歸, Yuan Gui). For this reason, Taijiquan is in all respects Daoist philosophy in motion.

Quan (拳)

Quan is a difficult term to translate. Normally, it is translated as “boxing,” “pugilism,” or “fists,” and the term *Quan* has been attached to many styles of martial arts. The character is comprised of the main radical, lower ideogram, *shou* (手), meaning “the hand” and/or “skill.” The upper ideogram, *shou* (𠂇), is also an old variant for the hand as well, and was derived into the character *bai* (拜), meaning “to offer reverence with the hands” (later it came to mean, “to bow in reverence”). So, in one sense, *Quan* means to pay reverence with the two hands, a salutation. But there is also the idea of a hand hidden within a hand, a secret and undetectable hand, or an internal hand. *Quan* is the reason why in traditional martial art schools of China adherents would greet each other in salutation with the left palm covering the right fist as the appropriate method of reverent salutation, and non-martial art schools would place their palms together for the same purpose. So *Quan* should not be translated here, especially in connection with *Taijiquan*, as boxing or fists, rather as something implying more of an internal meaning like “secret, concealed, or hidden hand.” Actually, it should be translated as “internal hands” or “internal skill.”

Therefore, translating *Taijiquan* yields several possible interpretations, including “The Supreme Ultimate of Internal Hands,” or possibly “The Secret Hands of the Supreme Ultimate,” or “The Secret Skills of the Supreme Ultimate.”

***Lun* (論)**

Lun is comprised of two characters, *yan* (言), meaning to talk and speak; and *lun* (論) meaning to arrange and put something in order. The idea here is an organized speech, a discourse. In Daoism, especially in connection with Taijiquan, generally four such qualifiers are used for written works:

- 1) *Jing* (經) means a book, classic, or scripture. If the text is attributed to a high heavenly immortal or deity, then the term “scripture” should be used. If attributed to a sage or someone of high skill, then “classic” is applied. If written by someone of just literary skills, then the term “book” appears.
- 2) *Lun* (論) is a “treatise,” “tractate,” or “discourse” used in connection with what a teacher said, usually written by a disciple of what they had heard.
- 3) *Ge* (歌) is usually translated as “song,” but is more like a poem, hymn, or verse.
- 4) *Pian* (篇) refers to the set of bamboo tablets on which a work was written, and simply translates as a “record” or “tablet.”

¹ Again, for a more detailed look at the history and formation of the Tai Ji Symbol and philosophy, see *T'ai Chi According to the I Ching: Embodying the Principles of the Book of Changes* (Inner Traditions, 2001).

The Text with Commentary

With every movement, the entire body must be light and nimble, and all of its parts must be kept strung together like a string of pearls.

一舉動. 周身俱要輕靈. 尤須貫串.

Yi ju dong. Zhou shen ju yao qing ling. You xu guan chuan.

This first verse of the treatise is the most crucial and important for correct Taijiquan practice. The three aspects of being light, nimble, and stringing all the parts together of every movement are the essential skills needed for genuine performance of Taijiquan. Actually, the remaining verses of this treatise are in many ways the more technical aspects of how to develop these three optimum functions of body movement.

When these three attributes of lightness, nimbleness, and stringing the parts of every movement together are accomplished, Taijiquan for the most part is mastered. This verse is explaining that with every motion of the body, not just the motions of the arms, feet, or waist, but in unison with the four limbs, torso, and head as well—all must function as one complete unit and be moved with lightness and nimbleness so that everything and every part of the body feels “strung together like a string of pearls.” In other words, move one pearl and all the other pearls move with it. Move one body part and all the other body parts must move as well.

In Taijiquan, the word “movement” (動, dong) needs some clarification, as movements within Taijiquan are regulated according to the functions and movements of the Eight Operations and the Five Activities. Hence, the idea here of *stringing all the parts together within the movements* ensures that the entire body moves as one complete unit and in accordance with the principles of the Eight Operations and Five Activities.

The function of *lightness* within the practice of Taijiquan originates in the principle of “Suspending the head from above as if by a thread” or sometimes rendered as “Retain a light and sensitive energy on top of the head.” In either case, the idea is, through imagination, to sense the top of your head as if it were being pulled slightly upward by an imaginary thread. However, the area that is sensed is not directly on top of the head, rather the

area of the soft spot we had as infants. This area is a little back from the actual topmost point of the head. The reason for sensing here is because when we imagine this spot being pulled upward, the chin will drop to a level position and the back of the neck will straighten slightly. Thus, the head will be in perfect alignment. In contradistinction, if you were to suspend from the actual top of the head, the chin would raise and the head tilt backward somewhat, causing the head to be out of alignment.

To be light doesn't mean raising your body upward so that all the energy is in your upper body like a ballet dancer. Lightness has several definitions, depending on which part of the body is being discussed. For example, lightness in the feet and legs doesn't mean no weight is placed on them (which would be impossible), rather that the body's weight is concentrated into the bottoms of the feet with an awareness and sensitivity.

A statement from the *Book of Changes* (易經, *Yi Jing*) best describes this sensitivity in the feet, when it says: "The fox walks cautiously over thin ice." Rather than focusing on the idea of being cautious and careful here, which the *Yi Jing* is recommending in this analogy—consider the way a fox literally walks on thin ice.

When a fox walks across a frozen lake or river, before committing its entire body weight into a leg, it first lightly places one forward paw on the ice, using a slight energy to make sure it is safe first and strong enough to support its weight. If the ice proves safe, the fox will place its weight down—if not, it withdraws the paw. This is the idea of being sensitive, alert, and light.

Likewise, in performing Taijiquan, specifically in stepping forward, the heel lightly touches the ground first (sensing if it is safe). Then the foot is rolled flat, allowing the body's weight to shift and sink into the Bubbling Well (湧泉, *Yong Quan*) point on the bottom of the stepping foot.

If Taijiquan adherents do not step in this manner, *like a fox walking on thin ice*, they are just blindly—and often, clumsily—setting down the feet without any awareness or sensitivity. This is like two hard objects connecting together but are easily separated—like two pieces of wood or bricks that lose contact when slid against each other.

In contradistinction, stepping with sensitivity and awareness, as in setting down the heel and rolling the foot flat, is like how a wet mop attaches and adheres to a floor. Try kicking a wet mop to separate it from the floor, and it won't easily slide away—nor lose its attachment to the floor. More likely your foot will just be entrapped by the strands of the mop.

Lightness, within Taijiquan, refers primarily to Intrinsic Energy (勁, Jin), the energy developed in the sinews and tendons through relaxed, sensitive, and alert use of employing the entire body as one unit. It is because of this lightness that when a Taijiquan master pushes, the opponent feels very little actual pushing strength coming from the master's hand. This is a result of the master's hands being sensitive, alert, and light, and not using any external muscular force.

To help illustrate this idea better, perform this simple exercise with two people. Person A extends her arm up and out at chest height with the palm facing upward. Person B stands to the side, placing his hands directly under A's wrist and elbow, supporting her arm. B then asks A to completely relax her entire arm, shoulder, elbow, and wrist so that the entire arm just rests on B's palms and is devoid of any energy. At this point, B is entirely holding up A's arm. Then, when B removes his palms, the result will be A's arm falling down immediately to her side. This exercise shows an example of collapsing, not relaxing, and is certainly not the way of Taijiquan.

Repeat the procedure with B supporting A's arm, but this time B tells A to put just enough energy into her arm to hold it in place and then removes his hands. Usually, A's arm will either bounce upward slightly or down slightly. Without telling A the correct response, practice the exercise until nothing happens, meaning A's arm remains in place when B removes his hands. No movement happens here, because A has learned to apply just the right amount of energy to keep her arm in place, while remaining as light and relaxed as possible.

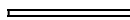
When a Taijiquan adherent can attach to an opponent with lightness and sensitivity, but not collapse when the opponent moves or attempts to get away, this person has developed an important aspect of intrinsic energy and is exemplifying the idea of lightness in the arms.

Two other aspects are of great importance in regards to acquiring lightness: learning how to rid the legs of all tension, and increasing the marrow in the bones.

Ridding the legs of all tension means learning how to relax the muscles in the thighs and calves. Normally, whenever we place the weight into a leg, the muscles tighten and cling to the bone. Just like when we make a fist to punch, the normal process is to wrap the muscles tightly around the bones of the hand and arm. This is what the Taijiquan principle admonishes against doing, when it says, “Do not use external muscular force.”

Concerning the legs, there must be a constant awareness of the tension created from every movement, and if there is a conscious effort to constantly let go of that tension, the legs will gradually become more and more relaxed over time—and lightness in the legs will be achieved. This is not easy to do, but it must be practiced and developed so that the intrinsic energy can pass through the legs and into the waist.

The third aspect of lightness involves the idea of increasing the marrow in the bones. An infant, for example, has soft and pliable bones because the marrow content is very high. In practicing Taijiquan, the qi and breath become hot. This heat creates increased blood circulation, and this increased blood circulation causes more blood and qi to spread throughout the body. In Daoist thought, all this new blood, qi, and heat begin to penetrate into the muscles and sinews of the body that surround the bones. Gradually, the qi and heat from the muscles then penetrate into the bones, creating more marrow. The more marrow, the greater the pliability and lightness acquired.



The function of *nimbleness* in Taijiquan practice does not necessarily mean quickness, but rather the ability to move effortlessly with agility as the situation requires. The true source of nimbleness comes from the spirit (神, shen). A cat is a great example of embodying nimbleness, not only because it can jump ten times its own height from its ability to apply lightness and nimbleness, but also because it does so in accordance with its spirit.

Observe the eyes of a cat the moment it is about to move and you will clearly see its spirit. Just as when a cat sees a mouse, it first concentrates its spirit, sinks into its rear legs, and waits with sensitivity and alertness. When

the mouse makes its move to escape, the cat springs off its rear legs and intercepts the mouse using lightness and nimbleness.

To be nimble in Taijiquan means to move effortlessly with all the parts of the body loose and relaxed, yet sensitive and alert, and distinguishing clearly the substantial and insubstantial aspects of your body, so you move with complete centeredness and grace throughout. When stepping, turning, or moving about in Taijiquan, it should feel as though your feet and legs are gliding across the floor, not like a laborious movement. In Sensing Hands practice, nimbleness gives you the skill to be able to interpret your opponent's every move, just like a cat catching a mouse.

The opposite of nimbleness is clumsiness and awkwardness concerning physical movement, and being dull and dimwitted regarding mental functions. In Taijiquan, you need to be nimble in movement and nimble in mind. In English, the definition of nimble is to be quick and agile, but in the Chinese language the term for nimble is *ling* (靈) and it has a much broader meaning, such as “lively spirit,” “quick witted,” “mysterious,” and “an active reflex.” The Chinese take it even further, as Daoists associate *ling* with immortals and being spiritual, as immortals are capable of physical flight, obviously the apex of lightness and nimbleness skills.

The function of “*stringing all the parts together like a string of pearls*” in Taijiquan practice is accomplished in three principle manners, or relationships, found within the concept of the Six Unions (六合, Liu He).¹

The Six Unions refer to a set of principles of movement, with the first three sets called “The Three Relationships.” These three relationships relate to certain body parts and movement:

The *first relationship* is a unified movement of the hips and shoulders. Meaning, that when, for example, the right hip is to be turned, the right shoulder will follow in unison, as if the two were connected and so move synchronously with one another.

The *second relationship* is a unified movement of the knees and elbows. For example, if the bent rear leg is to be raised by slightly unbending the knee, then the corresponding elbow will unbend at precisely the same rate.

The *third relationship* is a unified movement of the feet and hands. For example, like a marionette, when the feet are moved the hands follow accordingly.

This brief summary of the Three Relationships provides some insight as to how all the body parts connect and move in unison.

The idea of movement “being strung together” is often translated with the inclusion of an implied meaning of “like a string of pearls.” No matter how much a person twists or moves it, a string of pearls remains strung together, and if one pearl is moved, then all the pearls move.

Hence, when moving in Taijiquan, all the body parts (pearls) move as though all the joints of the body were threaded together like a string of pearls.

Another function and meaning of stringing all the parts together must be understood from the words, “In every movement.” As stated earlier, there is a difference between the “movement” mentioned in this verse, as it is referring to an entire Taijiquan posture, while “parts” is talking about the gestures that make up the posture. It is the gestures within a posture that are connected like a string of pearls, not the postures themselves.

The idea that all the postures are connected without the slightest pause is probably the most frequently misinterpreted principle of Taijiquan practice. In fact, the postures are connected by using the analogy of a broken lotus root. The fibers remain intact and connected, yet there is a noticeable separation and distinction between parts in the root. Although the root is one piece, each break separates it into parts. Just as the postures within the Taijiquan form have clear breaks between them, they connect together—like a lotus root—to make a complete form. But, the gestures within each posture connect and flow like the movements of pearls on a string.

In performing Taijiquan, many postures and gestures are performed to complete an entire solo form. Each posture is distinct, with the beginning and end of each posture clearly distinguished in the mind. Otherwise, the posture movements will overlap, extend, or fall short, causing the practitioner’s mind-intention to be confused and unfocused. For example, when moving through the gestures (parts) of the Taijiquan posture *Rolling-Back* and into the gestures of *Pressing*, there must be a clear distinction of where *Rolling-Back* ends and *Pressing* begins. The pause between postures,

so to speak, may be minute and slight, but it is clear enough so that the spirit (shen) clearly distinguishes and senses it.

A way of understanding how this is applied in Taijiquan is to define all the postures and gestures into beats and half-beats (or *da* beats). Each gesture, or posture count, then has two parts, a beat and a half beat. For example, *Pushing* is defined by four beats—counted as one da, two da, three da, and four da. On each beat and each half beat the body is moved into certain positions, but on the last da, or half-beat, of the fourth posture count, there will be a slight pause so the practitioner doesn't overextend or contract the movement. Anyone watching would not necessarily perceive the pause, but within the mind-intention of the practitioner, this pause is clearly sensed and distinguished.

Whether talking about the gestures of a posture by “stringing all the parts together” or clearly distinguishing each posture from each other with the analogy of a broken lotus root, all movements in Taijiquan must accord with certain principles.

Although there are twenty-two traditional, foundational principles of movement in Taijiquan, the first ten are discussed in detail to focus on the aspects that apply to moving the body as one unit.

The Foundational Principles of Tai Ji Quan (太極拳基本要點, *Tai Ji Quan Ji Ben Yao Dian*) was first presented in Chen Kung's Chinese book *Tai Ji Quan, Sword, Saber, Staff, and Dispersing Hands Combined*. This list consolidates the theories of principles for the correct practice of Taijiquan. Chen Kung derived the list of these principles from the Yang family transcripts and they have become a standard reference for all Taijiquan forms. Master Liang always stressed teaching principles as the essence and heart of Taijiquan practice. Someone may learn the movements correctly from a teacher, but without the mastery of the underlying principles, the full skills and benefits of Taijiquan practice can never be accomplished. All practitioners of Taijiquan should deeply study and apply these principles to their practice so they can master the art of Taijiquan in its fullest sense.

- 1) Retain a light and sensitive energy on top of the head. 一) 虛領頂勁; Yi) Xu ling ding jin.
- 2) Express the spirit in the eyes to concentrate the gaze. 二) 眼神注視; Er) Yan shen zhu shi.
- 3) Hollow the chest and raise the back. 三) 含胸拔背; San) Han Xiong Ba Bei.
- 4) Sink the shoulders and suspend the elbows. 四) 沈肩垂肘; Si) Chen jian chui zhou.
- 5) Seat the wrist and straighten the fingers. 五) 坐腕伸指; Wu) Zuo Wan Shen Zhi.
- 6) Keep the entire body centered and upright. 六) 身體中正; Liu) Shen ti zhong zheng.
- 7) Draw in the tailbone. 七) 尾闕收住; Qi) Wei Lu shou zhu.
- 8) Relax the waist and relax the thighs. 八) 鬆腰鬆胯; Ba) Song yao song kua.
- 9) The knees appear relaxed, but not so relaxed. 九) 膝部如鬆無鬆; Jiu) Xi bu ru song wu song.
- 10) Adhere the soles of the feet to the ground. 十) 足掌貼地; Shi) Zu zhang tie di.
- 11) Clearly distinguish the insubstantial and substantial. 十一) 分清虛實; Shi yi) Fen qing xu shi.
- 12) Upper and lower should mutually follow each other, and the body should move as one unit. 十二) 上下相隨. 週身一致; Shi er) Shang xia xiang sui. Zhou shen yi zhi.
- 13) The internal and external should be mutually joined together with natural breathing. 十三) 內外相合. 呼吸自然; Shi san) Nei wai xiang he. Hu xi zi ran.
- 14) Use the mind-intent, do not use muscular force. 十四) 用意不用力; Shi si) Yong yi bu yong li.
- 15) The qi should circulate freely throughout the body, yet dividing the upper and lower activity. 十五) 氣遍週身. 分行上下; Shi wu) Qi bian zhou shen. Fen xing shang xia.

16) Mutually connect the mind-intent and qi. 十六) 意氣相連; Shi liu) Yi qi xiang lian.

17) Move in accordance with the gestures of the posture. Do not bend forward and do not expose your back. 十七) 式式勢順. 不拗不背. 週身舒適; Shi qi) Shi shi shi shun. Bu ao bu bei. Zhou shen shu shi.

18) All the gestures are to be uniform, continuous, and unbroken. 十八) 式式均勻. 綿綿不斷; Shi ba) Shi shi jun yun. Mian mian bu duan.

19) In performing the postures, be free of excess and deficiency, and seek to be centered and upright. 十九) 姿勢無過或不及. 當求其中正; Shi jiu) Zi shi wu guo huo bu ji. Dang qiu ji zong zheng.

20) Use the method of concealing by not outwardly exposing. 二十) 用法含而不露; Er shi) Yong fa han er bu lu.

21) Seek tranquility within movement; seek movement within tranquility. 二十一) 動中求靜. 靜中求動; Er shi yi) Dong zhong qiu jing. Jing zhong qiu dong.

22) Lightness brings about nimbleness, nimbleness results in movement, and movement results in transformation. 二十二) 輕則靈. 靈則動. 動則變; Er shi er) Qing ze ling. Ling ze dong. Dong ze bian.

Think of the first ten *Tai Ji Quan Principles of Movement* as a beginner's guide to applying Taijiquan, and the full twenty-two as more for those who are well acquainted with Taijiquan practice and principles. When these first ten principles are all applied within each posture and gesture of Taijiquan, all the parts will be strung together so that the entire body can move as one unit.

1. *Suspend the head as if by a thread* means to imagine a light and sensitive energy on top of the head, or to imagine a thread is suspending the head from above. This both stimulates the spirit and keeps the head in perfect alignment.

2. *Concentrate the line of vision* means to move the head and waist in perfect unison as if the eyes were in the waist. This also keeps the spirit focused and keeps the whole body moving as one unit.

3. *Sink the shoulders, suspend the elbows, seat the wrists, and relax the fingers.* *Sinking the shoulders* means to let them drop naturally, not

forcing them down. This is to help keep the breath and qi from rising into the upper body. *Suspending the elbows* means to imagine they are held in a position to better enable blood circulation and so not to let them collapse into the body. *Seating the wrists* is to imagine as if the hands and wrists were resting on a pillow, so that the wrists and hands are in perfect alignment. This will create the perfect conditions for blood and qi to flow freely into the hands. *Relaxing the fingers* means to keep each finger slightly bent, not straight and not curled, so the blood and qi can enter the fingertips. This entire third principle is primarily employed to allow blood and qi to flow through the entire arm and into the fingertips, as well as to create the conditions for intrinsic energy (jin) to be expressed out through the arms and hands.

4. *Hollow the chest and raise the back* aids in the development of adhering qi to the spine (raising the back) and sinking the qi into the Dan Tian (hollowing the chest). But it also helps in keeping the back rounded out and sinking the shoulders so that there is no pinching of the shoulder blades together.

5. *Abide by the lower Dan Tian* has two important functions: First, it keeps all the movements generating and functioning from the waist. Second, it keeps the mind-intention on sinking the qi into the Dan Tian.

6. *Draw in the Wei Lu (tail bone)* keeps the spine aligned and prevents leaning. Drawing in means to tuck the tailbone in and down about one inch so there is no protrusion of the buttocks.

7. *Relax the waist and thighs* means not to collapse the hips inward nor expand them outward, but to keep them in perfect alignment with the thighs. Relaxing the coccyx opens the perineum area so that blood and qi can flow into it freely and unobstructed.

8. *Do not let the knees pass over the toes* does not mean the knees can be aligned directly with the toes. It means that the calf and shin of the front leg is held upright and perpendicular to the floor, so that if looking down the toes can still be seen—as the knee isn't passing over or hiding them. This principle prevents overextension of the legs and from creating too much stress and tension upon the knees and legs.

9. *Round out the legs and knees* is crucial for ridding the legs of tension, for opening up the perineum area, and for developing root

(central equilibrium). In all related Asian inner-cultivation methods, be it meditation, yoga, martial art, Taijquan, and so forth, there is this principle of opening the legs so as to allow blood and qi to enter into the perineum area.

10. *Sink the weight into the Bubbling Well points* on the bottom of the feet is really a misnomer. Actually, it is impossible to place the entire weight of the body into specific qi centers, especially the Bubbling Well points, as they are located behind the balls of the feet in the hollow area near the center of each foot. Therefore, this principle can't be taken literally. The idea here is that if a person focuses on the Bubbling Well point when committing weight into a given leg, the entire foot can be relaxed and the weight will evenly distribute throughout the foot. Otherwise, there will be a tendency to press down the foot (causing the root to be easily severed from the tension) or more weight gets placed onto the heel of the foot or into the toes (again causing easy severing of the root).

Applying these ten *Tai Ji Quan Principles of Movement* can be seen, in analogy, as if a person were floating in mid air—from the head being suspended upward and the feet sunk downward—so that the entire body can function freely without hindrance, while the waist controls and generates all function of movement from the middle of the body.

Calmly stimulate the qi, so the spirit is retained internally.

氣宜鼓盪. 神宜內斂.

Qi yi gu dang. Shen yi nei lian.

Moving water cannot be boiled is the underlying message of “calmly stimulate the qi.” The qi is like an inherent oxygen within the blood deriving its power in the same manner as steam coming off boiling water.

Actually, the very ideogram for qi in the Chinese shows a pot with rice inside being cooked, with the vapors rising and symbolizing the energy of qi. In the human body, the idea is the same. The lower abdomen is like the pot, the breath like the fire, and the Dan Tian the rice. When we keep our breath in the lower abdomen, the fluids in the stomach are heated, and this stimulates the Dan Tian to expand. Like the pot in which the rice is cooked, it must remain undisturbed over the fire in order to cook. Hence, in order to stimulate the qi in the abdomen, it must be done calmly and without forcing the breath.

To give a better understanding of this principle, use a visualization technique by imagining a pot of water within your abdomen, filled to the brim, and then move through the Taijiquan postures with utmost concentration so as not to spill one drop of water from the pot—making no jerking-like motions, no disconnected movements, no leaning, and no sporadic movements. In this way the qi can be calmly stimulated and the mind-intent fully placed in the lower abdomen.

The Chinese character for qi means two things: breath and energy. Energy here means the very source of what animates a human body. Qi is the energy that allows motion in a human being. Therefore, the more powerful the breath is the greater the energy of the body will be, and the more natural the movement and animation of the body will be. For example, a common trick or game you may have played as a child involves standing in a doorway and pressing your hands against the door jambs with great force. If you have ever tried this, you know that when you release your hands from the door, the arms will float upward all by themselves. This is one of the best examples of how the qi animates the body. From creating tension in the arms, you are blocking the qi and blood flow. When you release the pressure on the door

jams, the blood and qi rapidly rush back into the arms, creating a movement that is not generated by external muscular force. It is precisely this sensation people should feel in their hands and arms throughout their Taijiquan form practice. If not, then it really isn't Taijiquan. When the arms feel as if they are floating, the qi is being calmly stimulated.

Another example demonstrating the idea of *calmly stimulating the qi* is to stand upright with the hands held in front of the thighs, elbows slightly bent, and the shoulders dropped and released of all tension. Focus all your attention into the Dan Tian and simply breathe. This will cause the hands and arms to gradually float and sink according to the breath. After some practice with this exercise, the hands and arms will naturally float up to shoulder level when the breathing is full and strong. In essence, it's a measure of how strong your qi is.

When about to start performing the Taijiquan form, stand first and just breathe. Let the hands and arms rise and fall according to the breath. This is exactly what is meant by letting the mind first lead the qi, the qi will then lead the blood, and the blood will lead the body. Place all the attention into the Dan Tian, then the breath and qi will follow and generate from the Dan Tian. At this point, the qi mobilizes the blood circulation throughout the entire body, and this causes the body to be capable of creating motion without external muscular force.

To *calmly stimulate the qi*, you must first put all your attention into the Dan Tian, and this is where the second part of this verse comes in, "so the spirit is retained internally." Actually, this verse could also read, "When the spirit is retained internally, the qi can be calmly stimulated," as each stimulates the other.

The meaning of "so the spirit is retained internally" is really defined by the idea of mind-intention. Meaning, when fully focusing on the Dan Tian, or better said, "Abiding by the Dan Tian," the breath and qi will begin to generate and accumulate in the lower abdomen. Just like with infants, it is not just their abdomen that moves with the breath, but their entire body.

Infants are still generating breath from where the umbilical cord was attached, and over time, as we age, the breath will rise into the lungs. As Daoists say, "the spirit (mind-intention) begins to rise toward the head."

In Taijiquan, the idea is to reverse this process, so the breath (qi) is led back down into the lower abdomen, where it is with infants. Abiding by the Dan Tian, then, sensing and focusing on the lower abdomen, is the essence of internally retaining the spirit. When breathing in this way, the qi will likewise be calmly stimulated.

In *The Mental Elucidation of the Thirteen Kinetic Operations* by Wang Zongyue, it is said,

Your mind-intention must be focused on retaining the spirit internally, not on the breath and qi. If your mind focuses only on the breath and qi, the result will be stagnation; you will only have breath, but no strength of the qi.

This passage raises the question on how to breathe while performing the Taijiquan movements. As Master Liang would say, “Don’t worry, by and by you will know it.” This simple answer was not his attempt to avoid the question, but to get a student to let it happen naturally. Just put your attention into the Dan Tian and abide by it. Sensing the lower abdomen, instead of trying to make something happen there, allows the qi to sink naturally into it. No one can force the qi into the Dan Tian; it must be done naturally and with mind-intent.

“Sink” is an important word choice, because it implies no force or expansion of the breath to get the qi into the Dan Tian, just mind-intent and allowing it to sink downward.

The bigger question pertaining to this verse is why do you need to calmly stimulate the qi and retain the spirit internally? Actually, these functions are at the root of mastering all Taijiquan skills—and occur from abiding by the Dan Tian.

To develop the qi, it must first be stimulated calmly. This calm stimulation has its source in the Dan Tian. The qi is calmly mobilized through the circulation of the breath and blood, and the source of doing this is through the mind-intent.

From abiding by the Dan Tian, the qi, breath, and blood begin circulating more fully throughout the entire body and, consequently, are heated. This internal heat then starts affecting the sinews, tendons, and muscles of the

body. Once the warm qi, breath, and blood have entered the muscles, they begin to penetrate into the bones and help create more marrow, thus increasing pliability of the bones and leading to greater health.

When the qi circulates freely throughout the body, it can then be directed through the arms and into the hands. This is the true nurturing of qi and it originates with the mind-intent. Therefore, to retain the spirit internally is actually rooted in the principle of sinking the qi into the Dan Tian.

The second benefit from abiding by the Dan Tian can be seen in the self-defense aspects because all the responses will be directed by the waist rather than by the upper body. And, because the reactionary force is generated from the waist, the qi and jin (intrinsic energy) can be more easily expressed as well. Intrinsic energy comes from the sinews and tendons, and so the more pliable and stronger they are, the greater the energy that can be released. When the qi and jin are expressed together, nothing is stronger. Therefore, this verse, “Calmly stimulate the qi, so the spirit is retained internally,” is full of meaning and purpose, and essential to the correct practice of Taijiquan.

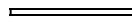
Avoid deficiency and excess, avoid projections and hollows, avoid severance and splice.

無使有缺陷處。無使有凸凹處。無使有斷續處。

Wu shi you que xian chu. Wu shi you tu ao chu. Wu shi you duan xu chu.

This particular verse must be discussed regarding performing the solo Taijiquan form and the self-defense aspects to acquire a fuller understanding of each of the three avoidances. These three avoidances are a way of saying what not to do to ensure that the instructions of the first line of the treatise are accomplished—*With every movement the entire body must be light and nimble, and all of its parts must be kept strung together like a string of pearls.*

In other words, if every movement is to be *light*, then there can be no deficiency or excess in the movements. If every movement is to be *nimble*, then there can be no projections or hollows when moving. If every movement is to be *strung together*, there can be no severance or splice taking place. Hence, this verse is actually a kind of mirror, reflecting what causes incorrect movement and function in Taijiquan.



Avoid deficiency and excess: To be deficient means the movement is defective as a result of not correctly applying the ten [Tai Ji Quan Principles of Movement](#), not using your waist to generate a movement, and so forth. For sake of illustration, assume a situation in which you are pushing an opponent, but instead of rising off your rear leg and sinking into your front leg, the weight is retained in the rear leg and your body leans back. This is a deficiency because the method and issuing of energy was defective. Therefore, you could easily be toppled backward. Excess would be the opposite problem. In pushing, there is an extending outward and toward the opponent, but if leaning forward, you could fall into the opponent or be pulled off balance.

In Chinese, the terms *que xian* (缺陷, deficiency and excess) as a compound means, “falling into a hopeless situation or trap.” Therefore, if your movements are deficient or excessive it will be easy to fall into the opponent, or off center, and for the opponent to take advantage of the defect. As mentioned, when the feet are light, like the fox walking over thin ice,

there is no deficiency; when the feet are nimble, there is no excess. Hence, not finding your root and center of balance when moving is deficiency, and pressing your feet down in order to establish a root is excess.

The principles of Taijiquan can be very subtle at times and therefore difficult to interpret as to what extent they must be applied, especially for a beginning student. For example, the principle of “suspending the head” is often taken too literally and the head is stretched upward. This is excess. To pay no attention and let the head slump down would be deficiency.

If you are practicing the solo form and feel clumsy and sluggish, you are not applying the principles of being light and nimble, and the spirit is not being retained internally. This is deficiency. When the Taijiquan solo form feels like a gymnastic performance, the breathing will become pensive and the muscles tense, and this is excessiveness.

Think of the terms “deficiency and excess” as also meaning “defects and difficulties,” because when things are deficient, defects are created, and when there is excessiveness, difficulties are created.

Avoid projections and hollows: To allow either of these corruptions means that the body is not centered, upright, or relaxed, and the qi and intrinsic energy are being obstructed. Basically, projections and hollows are corruptions of both movement and function. The Chinese terms for projections and hollows are *tu ao* (凸凹), which can also be translated as “protrusions and depressions.” Now, protrusions or projections are referring to issues like pushing out the abdomen, pushing the head upward, expanding the chest, straightening the limbs and joints, and so on. Hollows and depressions are exactly the opposite, such as contracting the abdomen, drooping the head, collapsing the chest, or over bending the limbs and joints.

There is a big difference, however, between creating projections and hollows, which are external dysfunctions, and following correct Taijiquan principles of movement, such as “hollow the chest,” “sink the qi,” and “keep the joints slightly bent,” which have to do with internal functions.

Taijiquan principles are subtle, and for the most part are performed internally with mind-intent, not external muscular expressions. For example, the principle of “hollow the chest” means to not trap the breath and qi into the

chest, “sink the qi” is rooted in the application of mind-intent, and “keep the joints slightly bent” is not a projection—it is referring to the natural positioning of the body that allows the blood to flow most freely through the joints. No principle could be a defect of either projections or hollows, as they signify the optimal internal functioning of the body.

Ideally, only 10 percent of Taijiquan movement is expressed externally, as 90 percent of the true functioning occurs internally and is unseen by others. Chen Kung in *Tai Ji Quan, Sword, Saber, Staff, and Dispersing Hands Combined* reiterates this point: “The principles of practice must be kept concealed internally, not expressed externally.”

Avoid severance and splice: In Chinese, *duan xu* (斷續) literally means to “separate through breakage.” Severance and splice, then, can occur in body movements, mind-intent, the breath and qi, and issuing intrinsic energy (jin).

In the solo form, the movements must be like a long, flowing river, continuous without jerks or stopping. Splice is an interesting term, because it is like the splicing of a movie film together where there can be no overlapping of images. As in Taijiquan, there can be no overlapping of postures either. The beginning of a posture must be as clear and defined as the end of it.

When performing the Taijiquan solo form (as mentioned earlier), each gesture of a posture should be divided into a count and half-count so that no overlapping of postures can occur. This also prevents the movements from being fast in one count and slower in others. Meaning, the form should be smooth and consistent throughout, and not lose the motion of being strung together.

However, there must still be a slight pause at the end of each posture. This pause is neither an example of severance nor splice, because the mind-intent is not severed. It is just a momentary awareness that the posture has ended so as not to create an overlapping of the movements.

In Sensing Hands practice, severance and splice are the corruptions of *Stick*, *Adhere*, *Join*, and *Follow*. *Stick* and *Adhere* are corrupted by severance, and *Join* and *Follow* are corrupted by splice. *Stick*, *Adhere*, *Join*, and *Follow*

were the original meanings of Warding-Off, Rolling-Back, Pressing, and Pushing.

The great Zen teacher, Dogen Zenji, rightly instructed his students by emphasizing the great importance of posture. He instructed that if someone wants to be a Buddha, one must sit like a Buddha, and so the real work of meditation practice is to constantly pay attention to posture, to constantly correct it, and to repeatedly sit to perfect the posturing of the Buddha. The same is true for Taijiquan—applying constant attention to gesture and movements is far more important than being sidetracked by the anticipation of experiencing qi or jin.

When practicing the solo form, thoroughly examine and pay close attention to the correctness of the postures, the gestures within each posture, and the rate of speed applied to the movements. Each beat of a posture must be neither too fast nor too slow, and performed in accordance with the breath. Each movement must be uniform, properly adjusted, strung together, centered, upright, and, most importantly, the entire body made light and nimble. Only through lightness and nimbleness can the words of this treatise be of any functional use. If your movements are not nimble and light, the corrupted practices of deficiency and excess, projections and hollows, and severance and splice will create the conditions for opponents to easily take advantage of you, and you will be unable to catch them unawares.

The energy is rooted in the feet, issued through the legs, directed by the waist, and appears in the hands and fingers.

其根在腳. 發於腿. 主宰於腰. 形於手指.

Ji gen zai jiao. Fa yu tui. Zhu zai yu yao. Xing yu shou zhi.

This verse is considered the secret of Taijiquan, at least in the self-defense aspects of the art. No other martial art system makes such exclusive use of deriving energy from the bottom of the feet. Jin (intrinsic energy) comes from the sinews and tendons of the body, and from increased levels of bone marrow. When you have developed your intrinsic energy, you reach a state of *Song* (鬆) energy, which is akin to the energy of a cat (sensitive, alert, and relaxed). Normally, Song energy is translated into English as just “being completely relaxed,” but it is much more than just that definition. With intrinsic energy comes a very heightened sense of alertness and sensitivity, so the “energy” being referred to in this verse is different than the internal energy of qi.

This verse can be divided into four basic and necessary functions:

- 1) Rooting the energy into the feet.
- 2) Issuing energy through the legs.
- 3) Directing the energy via the waist.
- 4) Expressing the energy in the hands and fingers.

Intrinsic energy can take on many forms and levels of skills. In *Tai Ji Jin*, volume 2 in the [*Chen Kung Series*](#) (Valley Spirit Arts, 2013), well over thirty such variations of intrinsic skills are explained. In this verse, the aspect of “issuing energy” (發勁, fa jin) is being described, and it is the very root of Song energy and the origin of developing the many variants of intrinsic energy and skills. Once the energy can be expressed in the hands and fingers, it can be expressed and issued from any area on the body. So, it is actually not the case that all functions and skills of intrinsic energy be solely expressed through the hands and fingers.

However, until the energy can be *rooted in the feet, issued by the legs, directed by the waist, and expressed in the hands and fingers*, all the other intrinsic energy skills cannot be developed. It is through these four functions

that the entire body is trained to become one complete unit—meaning the aspects of lightness, nimbleness, and all the parts of the body strung together—resulting in a state where Song energy is achieved. Therefore, it is crucial to learn how to issue energy in this manner.

Issuing energy is often described in terms of how a whip functions, as this relates so well to how the body reacts in regards to these four functions and how precisely the principles of Taijiquan interrelate. For example, when lashing out a whip, the length of the whip remains soft and pliable, yet energy is released out the tip of the whip. Likewise, the energy is produced and revealed for only an instant and then disappears. This is exactly how intrinsic energy functions within Taijiquan. The yang is revealed (issued) in an instant and then immediately the body returns to yin again. Intrinsic energy cannot be issued if the body is either constantly yang or yin. To be completely yang is just using external muscular force—this is not intrinsic energy. Nor can you be completely yin, as this is just to be in a state of collapse, not Song energy (sensitive and alert).

Like a rubber band that is stretched out too far, it will snap (extreme yang). If it is not stretched at all, it has no function (extreme yin). Hence, the sinews and tendons of the body are like the rubber band where there is both kinetic and potential energy. They must be developed and exercised properly through Taijiquan practice if the intrinsic energy is to be made capable of issuing out. To use another analogy, issuing intrinsic energy is like a bullet being shot from a gun, with just one instant of yang energy being expressed, and then immediately returning to yin.

This same idea is seen in the practice of Taijiquan sword. From using the entire body as one unit, the entire length of the sword can be made to quiver and vibrate right to the tip of the sword. But those who attempt this without using the whole body as one unit, without relaxing the hand and arm, who grasp the sword handle too firmly, only encounter dead metal. The same is true of training the saber and staff. So, the aspect of training intrinsic energy is paramount in Taijiquan. Indeed, the majority of all Taijiquan practices and principles, be they empty hand drills, two-person exercises, or weapons, the primary function is to aid in the development of intrinsic energy right along with accumulating qi.

Therefore, intrinsic energy, in the analogy of the entire body being perceived as and functioning on the workings of a whip, is indispensable for mastering Taijiquan, and this is not just concerning the self-defense aspects of Taijiquan. This idea is also crucial to the health and longevity aspects as well. From the development of intrinsic energy, blood circulation is increased, sinews and tendons are made strong and viable, and bone marrow is increased—all of which stimulate and mobilize the qi.

Consider the whip handle as being your foot, and when the length of the whip is lashed out, the entire length of the whip is soft, just as your body is soft (yin) as the energy generates from your foot, travels through the legs, and is directed by the waist. Then, just like a whip that releases a strong energy through the tip, the energy issuing through the body appears in the hands and fingers for an instant.

As Yang Chengfu (陽澄甫) stated, “You have hands, but it has nothing to do with hands.” Meaning, your hands may touch the opponent, but it is not the hands that push the opponent, rather it is the feet, legs, and waist that actually deliver the strike to the opponent. Like a whip, the energy is delivered or issued quickly, following the Taijiquan ideology that the body is yin, instantly yang, and then immediately yin again.

The statement “directed by the waist” is important because without the correct application of the waist, the intrinsic energy will be obstructed. Although using the waist in Taijiquan is one of those fundamental principles people are taught as beginning students, many practitioners misinterpret this injunction because they were never taught how to properly direct intrinsic energy through their waist. Actually, they were not taught how to properly allow the intrinsic energy through the waist, as the defects in issuing occur from trying to make something happen by applying some external, muscular movement that leads to any of the defects already discussed.

Assume, for example, you are applying *Brush Left Knee and Twist Step*. Your right hand is attached to the opponent’s left shoulder, your left hand lightly grasps the opponent’s left wrist, and your rear right leg is bent to issue. The energy of the push generates from your right foot and it travels up the leg. As the leg slightly straightens, the hips will naturally open up from the leg rising, which allows the energy to direct through the waist. The waist needs to stay open and relaxed here, otherwise your issuing energy will be

obstructed and ineffectual. This is what will release the energy through the waist and direct it into the opponent.

Immediately after issuing the energy out the hands and fingers, the hips close off again as the body sinks and returns to yin. Not to issue in this way will only result in the energy becoming obstructed in the right hip as it tries to pass through the waist. If it doesn't pass through, then external muscular force must be used to push the opponent.

Why does Taijiquan make use of deriving energy off the bottom of the foot? Aside from the fact that this allows the entire body to strike the opponent, it also makes it impossible for an opponent to detect the intention and attack prior to issuing.

As stated, the analogy of issuing the energy is like the function of a whip, but in reality this is difficult to achieve if the body has not reached some level of Song energy. Just as cracking a whip is not necessarily a given skill either. In cracking a whip, the hand must not grasp the handle too firmly. The whip must be held loosely if the correct motion is to be administered for the length of the whip to extend out and produce energy and sound at the tip. A master of the whip knows that it takes little force to produce the cracking sound. Likewise, it takes very little energy to produce intrinsic energy in the hands and fingers as well.

Enabling the intrinsic energy to reach your hands and fingers unobstructed is half the process, as you must also learn how to properly return to an insubstantial yin state. You must re-establish your root immediately after issuing, otherwise you will be excessive (extended), giving energy to the opponent, and thus create the conditions of deficiency within the movement. If you do not immediately become yin (insubstantial), the opponent has something substantial in you to counterattack or grab onto. Likewise, without immediately returning to yin, you will suffer the case of either double weighting or double floating.

Double weighting, in part, means maintaining the energy (weight, strength, yang, substantial) in the same-side forward leg and arm of the body, thus making it easy for an opponent to take advantage by pulling or grasping the forward arm, or by attacking the front leg. Double floating, on the other hand, means that no energy is maintained (no weight, no strength, yin,

insubstantial) in the legs. If, after issuing off your rear leg, the front leg is not rooted and returned to yin, it is like both legs are floating upward with no sense of balance or central equilibrium. In this case, if an opponent attaches or grabs on to any part of your body, in any manner, you will lose your center of balance.

To better demonstrate these two corruptions, perform these two tests with a partner. For double weighting, stand in a Bow Stance with the left foot forward and the right foot back, shoulder-width apart. Bring your left arm out as if pushing outward at the partner and maintain that position. Have the partner seize your left wrist and pull on it. You will find it easy to be pulled and have difficulty maintaining your root.

To experience the effect of double floating, have a partner stand in the same position but with the arms hanging down along the sides. Place a hand on your partner's chest and then fake a push into his or her body. The result will be your partner rising off both legs onto the tiptoes, and in that instant you can easily knock him or her over because the root has been severed by the defect of double floating.

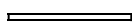
It is easy to understand how Taijiquan movements contain roundness in the arms, but it is more difficult to see how this applies to the legs and waist. When actually issuing off the rear foot, maneuver your knees and thighs as if they were straddling and turning over a ball. Imagine a large ball with your feet attached to each side of it, and then by simply rolling the ball over, it will stop as one of the feet is touching the ground, and if rolled back the other foot will stop the ball. So, when issuing, either in the solo form or during two-person practices, feel the energy coming up and off the rear leg, through the waist, then down into the front leg—and, lastly, the front foot finds its root.

In teaching students the proper way to move in Taijiquan, former masters almost exclusively used terms like “rise,” “shift,” “sink,” and “seat” to help eliminate the misconceptions and excessiveness from moving upward, downward, forward, and backward. In reality, there are only the actions of rise, shift, sink, and sitting in Taijiquan movements so that central equilibrium is constantly maintained. The Five Activities of Advancing, Withdrawing, Looking-Left, Gazing-Right, and Central Equilibrium are

purely aspects, principles, and movements of the feet, legs, and waist. However, the whole idea of both Advancing and Withdrawing function on the actions of rising, shifting, sinking, and sitting. For example, there is a huge difference between shifting into the front leg as opposed to leaning into the front leg. There is a huge difference between rising off the back leg and raising the body upwards (where both legs straighten). There is a huge difference between lowering and adjusting the waist to sink as opposed to bending the knees down. Lastly, there is a huge difference between relaxing the thighs and legs when being seated over the feet as opposed to feeling tension in the legs when doing so.

As mentioned, pressing the foot into the ground is like two solid objects coming together, which can be easily broken or separated. The feet need to be like wet mops, and the legs (calves and thighs) must be relaxed and devoid of tension and strain. Root cannot be gained by simply pressing the feet into the ground, nor by tightening the toes as if to grasp the ground.

When Master Liang was studying Taijiquan in Taiwan, he had the good fortune of meeting with a Daoist priest by the name of Yang (not a member of the Yang Luchan family), who had studied with Yang Jianhou (陽 健 侯) in China before his later escape to Taiwan. With this priest, Master Liang witnessed something he had never seen before with any of his other teachers. Yang could stand on one leg, yet his thigh and calf would remain as soft as cotton. This really impressed Master Liang, and it taught him the enormous gap between what was really meant by hard and soft styles of martial arts. Daoist priest Yang had, in all respects, mastered the principle of sinking all the energy into the Bubbling Well points (on the bottom of the feet), and so could issue and direct intrinsic energy through his legs and waist quite expediently.



Root acts as a person's center of balance and foundation. With root, a person can apply it to issuing and directing intrinsic energy (jin) for practical use. This skill comes from the foot utilizing the root, and is the secret of Taijiquan.

With a solid root, it's as if the feet were coiled downward into the ground. The legs easily bend and contract, and the intrinsic energy can issue out and be directed by the waist. When you have root in combination with being

light and nimble, all the controlling power can be concentrated throughout the entire area of the waist, functioning as if it were the axle on a cart.

When intrinsic energy appears in the hands and fingers, only then is the energy genuinely being issued (fa jin). So, let the feet be the feet, the legs be legs, the waist be the waist, and the hands be the hands, so that they are all in perfect unity with each other. If they are moved separately, dispersed about like scattered sand, there will be no practical use nor potential to issue.

Therefore, *rooting the energy in the feet, issuing it through the legs, and directing it by the waist so it appears in the hands and fingers* is a very important principle that leads to high achievement. Pay very close attention to this verse in the text. The significance of uniting the movement of these four parts—feet, legs, waist, and hands—is essential for learning how to gain a root, issue, direct, and exhibit the intrinsic energy.

The feet, legs and waist must act as one unit so that whether advancing or withdrawing you will be able to obtain a superior position and create a good opportunity.

由腳而腿而腰. 總須完整一氣. 向前退後. 乃能得機得勢.

You jiao er tui er yao. Zong xu wan zheng yi qi. Xiang qian tui hou. Nai neng de ji de shi.

This aspect of using the feet, legs, and waist as one unit is crucial to both the performance of the solo form and for self-defense. It also demonstrates the proper function of Taijiquan that is completely in the lower body, not the upper. The upper body follows the lower body, or, simply put, the upper body is just along for the ride. All the movements of Taijiquan must first be in the feet, legs, and waist. The feet must be trained so that the insubstantial and substantial aspects can easily be distinguished; the legs must be trained to rise, sink, shift, and step in accordance with the feet; and the waist must always be able to lead and direct the feet and legs. Then you can maintain a superior position and create good opportunities.

An effective method for training the feet, legs, and waist to function as one unit is to perform the entire Taijiquan solo form with the hands held behind the back, leaving you to just focus on the feet, legs, and waist. You will quickly learn how much you rely on your hands and arms. This exercise will strengthen your waist and teach you to pay more attention to all the rises, sinks, shifts, and steps. More than anything else, it really reveals how powerful the waist is and why it is the axletree of all Taijiquan movement.

To further help explain the necessity of using the feet, legs, and waist, practice the following exercise with a partner, first by doing it the wrong way so that the correct method will be much clearer.

Both people face each other. Person B grasps A's left wrist with his left hand and A's elbow with his right hand. B then makes a twisting motion with both hands to A's left arm, which causes A to bend forward and look down at the ground. For all intents and purposes, B can be said to be in total control of A and in a superior position.

A then takes her right hand and arm and strikes up toward B's face. The normal reaction will be for B to move his head back to avoid being struck,

thus losing control over A's left arm and the ability to take advantage of a good opportunity. This is the wrong way for B to react.

Try the exercise again, but this time when A strikes out the right hand towards B's face, the correct response is for B to simply sink all the weight into his left leg and foot, and then turn his waist toward the left. This will send A off balance and toward the ground. B, then, takes a superior position and turns it into a good opportunity.

This demonstration will teach you how effective and natural it is to use the feet, legs, and waist, rather than the arms and upper body when reacting to an attack.

Failure to obtain a superior position and create a good opportunity results from the body being in a state of disorder and confusion. To correct this, adjust the waist and legs.

有不得機得勢處. 身使散亂. 其病必於腰腿求之.

You bu de ji de shi chu. Shen shi san luan. Ji bing bi yu yao tui qiu zhi.

When a person doesn't know how to obtain a superior position and create a good opportunity, the body will always be in a state of disorder and confusion, causing defective movements such as double weighting, double floating, overextension, clumsiness, and loss of central equilibrium. All of these lead to defeat and poor performance of the solo form. However, once you learn how to correctly adjust the waist and legs, these defective movements will not occur. In fact, you will be truly difficult to defeat. This may sound boastful, but once you learn how to react with your lower body, whatever comes at you, you will instinctively be capable of redirecting the force. To quote from the *Tai Ji Quan Classic* (attributed to Wang Zongyue), you will be capable of "removing one thousand catties with only four ounces of energy," which results from knowing how to adjust the waist and legs.

The primary reason the body becomes disordered and confused is because of the hands and arms. People seek to defend and protect themselves with the hands first, a natural reaction after years of conditioning themselves to be strong and forceful. It is the hands and arms that cause the upper body to tense, and so the waist and legs are ignored. This is doubly troublesome because the legs and waist are so much stronger than the hands and arms.

Normally, when faced with a threatening situation, people initially react with the upper body, causing the breath to rise into the chest, the mind to freeze, and the hands to immediately move up to protect. Taijiquan, however, trains us to employ the opposite approach. The lower body reacts, the breath is kept low, the mind is calmed, and the waist and legs seek to protect. Yet, it is not the case that the hands and arms aren't used, they are, but the difference is that they respond in conjunction with the waist and legs. The hands adhere to the attacker to sense the substantial and insubstantial aspects of his or her body, and when the insubstantial is found, the feet, legs, and waist *issue* (fa jin) to the opponent.

Keep in mind, it is not the hands and arms that try to maneuver and manipulate the opponent, as this would only result in creating tension, resistance, and force. The opponent would then be able to interpret the intent and the encounter would become just a matter of strength against strength, speed against speed, and whoever is not the strongest or fastest will lose the bout. Therefore, in Taijiquan the idea is to redirect an opponent's force to place him or her into a defective position and to create a superior position for oneself. Thus making it easier to topple the opponent with just four ounces of energy.

But there is much more to learn here than just adjusting the waist and legs, as these only create the superior position and the good opportunity. Next, you must determine what a good opportunity is and how to take advantage of it. For this, three separate applications need explanation, even though they all happen simultaneously when finding a good opportunity.

The first application is called "Affecting the upper, middle, and lower parts of the opponent's body." As an example, once again consider the techniques of *Brush Left Knee and Twist Step*. In this example, person A's left hand is adhered to person B's left wrist (whose arm is across his body because A led it there). A's right-hand fingers are adhering along B's left flank, and A's left knee and foot adhere to the outside of B's right leg.

If, in one instant, A pulls on B's left wrist in a downward, diagonal manner (affecting the upper part of his body), pushes on B's left flank with her right hand (affecting the middle of his body), and collapses B's right leg inward with her left knee (affecting the lower part of B's body), A puts B in a dire situation of trying to recover and respond to three actions at once. Needless to say, this is nearly impossible for B to distinguish and escape from all three effects.

The second application is "Issuing from the bottom of the foot." Although issuing has been discussed, note how it would be applied in this situation. If A's right hand is just adhering to B's left flank, not pressing in or giving any tension, B will be unable to detect the issuing until after A has pushed him.

The third application is called, "Using a line of attack." This is much more difficult to explain, but in essence it is knowing where to issue the push so that an opponent has no chance to either find a center of balance or to turn

out of the push. If person B, for example, is put in a defective position in which his balance is already being affected, and A pushes on his body in a direction in which B is unable to find a root to remain upright, B is then defeated easily.

Lines are extremely important, and they are what make the really good Taijiquan masters appear to use no energy nor movement to topple opponents. Actually, this is true, as they are not using a lot of energy or movement. They simply don't need to. What they are using is really good physics.

There are ten variants of lines, but the secret to lines is in knowing how to use them while the opponent is in motion. It is not a matter of person B standing in a fixed stance and person A just walking up to him and pushing on a line so that he falls over. It is all about the motions B makes and the defective positions that A redirects him into.

Therefore, from learning how to adjust the legs and waist, the above three applications can be brought into play to take advantage of a good opportunity and the opponent's defective position.

Concerning adjusting the legs and waist, I once witnessed an interesting interchange between Master Liang and a so-called Taijiquan master who came to visit Liang at his home. During the visit, the man asked Master Liang about this principle of adjusting the waist and legs. After much side stepping of the question Master Liang was compelled to answer the man. But, as I had learned, if you pestered Master Liang too much on a question, he would demonstrate rather than explain. So, he first had the man stand with his waist turned to the side, with his left arm and leg in the rear. Liang then placed his left hand on the man's right elbow, and his right hand on his wrist. Liang then pushed on the man's arm, causing the man to sink further into his left leg. Liang shouted out "Incorrect! You must adjust your waist and legs."

The man then turned his waist towards Master Liang and while doing so brought up his right arm to attempt to sweep Liang's hands off of him. But Liang simply folded up his left arm and struck him with his elbow, and then readjusted his waist and legs and sent the man back up against the wall with

a push. Lastly, as was his nature, he jovially chided, “You are still wet behind the ears.”

Master Liang then had the man push on him in the same manner, but Liang simply adjusted his waist and legs and adhered his fingertips to the man’s arm, which caused the man to double-weight and to extend his body out and down diagonally. Immediately, Liang gave the man a small push, uprooting him and sending him back. Liang then proclaimed,

The *Tai Ji Quan Treatise* is very clear: adjust the legs and waist. There is nothing about adjusting the hands and arms. You resisted with your upper body and hands, so it was easy to take advantage of you. If you use your hands like that then you are just “putting legs on a snake” or “removing the pants to fart.” Superfluous actions, young man!

One of the clearest ways in seeing the basic ideas of a “good opportunity” and “superior position” is with the posture *Rolling-Back*. For example, if person A performs *Rolling-Back*, person B’s force is directed diagonally downward and away from her, so that B’s waist is turned to the corner and he is leaning his body forward. At this point, A has created a “good opportunity.” When A turns her waist straight ahead, and simultaneously attaches her hands lightly to B’s forward arm, with her weight in the rear leg, this is then a “superior position.” From this superior position, A can issue energy and topple B.

If, however, B has adjusted to a superior position, then A has no good opportunity to exploit. If it happens that A is then in an inferior position, her mind-intent will certainly be in disorder and confusion.

At the time of adjusting the legs and waist to overcome an opponent, this is also the juncture for defeat. Supposing A withdraws and attempts to return to a superior position, but only finds herself falling over, this is because she did not follow with the legs and waist. A must promptly seek to turn and change her legs and waist into a superior position. Immediately, A must issue out the intrinsic energy. Her entire body must be as if all the parts were strung together, along with being light and nimble. Otherwise, there will be no skill or victory.

Only with effortlessness can the simplicity of this function be experienced. It is not easy for the inexperienced to change from an inferior position to a superior one. Therefore, when practicing the round form (the solo movements), change and turn the waist and legs, clearly distinguish the substantial and insubstantial, and pay heed so that each part of your body directly follows the mind-intent. These are the methods for avoiding defeat.

Likewise, upward and downward, forward and backward, leftward and rightward, all of these are to be directed by the mind-intent, and not to be expressed externally.

上下前後左右皆然. 凡此皆是意. 不在外面.

Shang xia qian hou zuo you jie ran. Fan ci jie shi yi. Bu zai wai mian.

This verse is an extension of the previous one and is connected to the following one as well. The primary idea here is that no matter if you are in an inferior position about to be toppled or in a superior one seeking to create a good opportunity, any position can be adjusted by the legs and waist. The secret to these adjustments, so to speak, first resides in the mind-intent, not from external movement.

In Chen Kung's *Tai Ji Quan, Sword, Saber, Staff, and Dispersing Hands Combined*, the following passage comes from a section titled "Mind-Intent and Qi."

In regards to the mind-intent, it has been said by some that this is none other than just the mind [rational thinking mind], or that the mind and mind-intent are one in the same. But truly there is both a mind and a mind-intent. These are two separate things and should be thought of as such. The master of the mind is the mind-intent. The mind only acts as an assistant to the mind-intent. When the mind moves, it does so because of the mind-intent, and when the mind-intent arises, the qi will follow. In other words, these three—mind, mind-intent, and qi—in relation to one another, are all interconnected and work together in a rotational-like manner. So when the mind is confused, the mind-intent is disrupted; when the mind-intent is disrupted, the qi is dispersed and insubstantial. So it is said, "When the qi sinks into the Dan Tian, the mind-intent is strengthened and becomes vital; with a strong and vital mind-intent, the mind becomes tranquil." Therefore, these three mutually employ each other, and in truth they must be united and not allowed to become separated.

What is this mind-intent, and why is it different than mind? Mind-intent, by definition, is the unconscious will and spirit (shen) of a person and it reacts spontaneously and without thought or rational thinking. In analogy, this is

similar to the idea of when a person undergoes an adrenal rush and spontaneously acquires the strength to lift a car. There are countless stories of people doing such feats during a crisis, and even though science credits this to adrenals, it is the mind-intent that initially stimulates the adrenals.

For purposes here, however, the mind-intent is purely a question of a natural, spontaneous, and trained response to a situation wherein the thought process is overridden. Meaning, after a long period of practicing Taijiquan your body will move and react without any initial rational and calculating thoughts. It just moves.

It is said that Yang Panhou while sleeping threw a rat off his body, splattering it against the wall. When the students came to check on him in the morning he was fast asleep, and when awoken, he had no recollection of the rat. This is a function of mind-intent. As the *Mental Elucidation of the Thirteen Kinetic Operations* states, “So sensitive and alert not even a fly can alight.”

Yang Luchan while sitting by a river meditating was attacked from behind by a man, and without any external movement he repelled the man away. These are all examples of the function of mind-intent.

Actually, every time you tie your shoelaces and hold a conversation at the same time, this is a function of mind-intent. When we were younger and first learning to tie our shoes, it took great thought and calculation. After years of doing it, however, we no longer need to think about it. We use mind-intent a great deal in our daily lives, but because certain actions are so routine and mundane, we give them no conscious thought.

Therefore, when we perform Taijiquan with mind-intent, the qi can move freely throughout the body and the mind can be tranquil, without conscious thoughts, as we no longer need to focus on the movements. In other words, the process of thinking obstructs the qi from flowing and the mind-intent from functioning.

The *Tai Ji Quan Classic* states, “The mind-intent is like the commander of an army, the qi is like his officers, and the mind is like the troops.” If the troops are unruly and fail to follow the dictates of the officers and commanders, all then is disrupted. But if the mind-intent (commander) is

made strong and vital, both the officers and troops will obey their orders and the army can function smoothly and without error.

The mind-intent is the cornerstone and an absolute necessity of correct Taijiquan function. The solo form or any of the other exercises must function on the mind-intent. No one can mobilize the qi or issue intrinsic energy purely with rational thought and calculation. Rather, mind-intent is an action so spontaneous it is devoid of all preconception and thought. Achieving mind-intent in Taijiquan is difficult, to say the least, and takes many years of practice.

Mind-intent is the essence of what is meant by “internal.” Many internal stylists, from martial artists to meditators, erroneously consider that if they are concentrating on the Dan Tian, inhaling and exhaling while visualizing qi, and so forth, they are somehow practicing the internal arts correctly.

However, nowhere in any of the Taijiquan classical writings is it stated that the qi leads or dictates the mind-intent. The qi, in reality, can only be developed and mobilized through mind-intent. Attempting to find spontaneity and perfection of movement through concentrating on the breath, visualizations, or techniques will only confuse and bring disorder to the mind-intent and qi. Mind-intent is not the product of focusing on the qi or any of the intrinsic energies developed in Taijiquan. Conversely, all these are products of mind-intent.

Using the breath, visualizations, and techniques to acquire mind-intent and qi is like the anecdote in the *Zhuang Zi*, “Traveling north to Chu by heading south towards Yue.” Meaning, someone wishing to travel to a southern destination by heading in a northern direction. Unfortunately, many Taijiquan students are taught to follow this futile path and so end up doing nothing more than relying on externals. Their forms may look like Taijiquan, but in reality are just exercises in gymnastics and calisthenics.

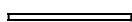
Master Liang always emphatically declared that “only 10 percent of the movement in Taijiquan should be visibly seen, the other 90 percent occurs internally and is unseen.” This is all a matter of mind-intent, and with 90 percent of your movement occurring internally, it doesn’t leave much room for fancy, exaggerated, and external movements.

Admittedly, in my ignorance, when I first started learning Taijiquan with Master Liang I wasn't impressed by his Taijiquan movements whatsoever. He was old, 82 at the time, and moved in a very compact and seemingly unenergetic way. It looked nothing like I had envisioned Taijiquan movements to be. However, I soon learned that he was functioning more on mind-intent than external movements. After forty-plus years of practice and from his age, the movements really were internalized.

On one particular occasion, I remember practicing the Taijiquan form with him. I was going through the form in a very expanded, flowing, and energetic manner. He just moved very compactly and unenergetically. When we were finished with the form he turned to me and said, "Beautiful, your Taijiquan movements are much better than mine." I was so proud of myself and arrogant enough to say at that time, "Yes, I felt like I was moving in the wind."

Liang then immediately chided me, "Yes, if you mean like passing wind. You bloody idiot that was only an external display of Taijiquan. Nothing was internal, and I saw everything, including your breath. How pitiful!"

He then walked calmly past me as if to leave the room, but seized my arm and threw me to the floor instantly without breaking his stride. Grinning down at me, he said, "Ready to be beaten and crushed into a pancake. Practice more, and learn to calmly stimulate your qi, then there will be hope for you."



No single explanation or word can fully define mind-intent. Yang Chengfu likened it to "meditation in action." Yet, the concept of this goes much further than just a focused and quiet mind. Rather, it is a mind in thoughtlessness, an abstract state of mind devoid of form, perception, consciousness, activity, and thought. Chan Buddhists consider it a form of samadhi, and Daoists as *wei wu wei* (active non-action). To the Taijiquan adept, mind-intent is the perfection of movement and spontaneity within tranquility, wherein movement and stillness are one in the same ("not two").

Master Hsiung Yanghou referred to it as the "one action" (一氣, *yi qi*). Philosophically, *yi qi* is considered the point or stage where yin and yang are in complete harmony, where the breath and body are one, where the body and mind-intent are one, where the mind and body are one complete unit.

Basically, it means the body, mind, qi, mind-intent, and movement all become one action, not separate ones.

Master Liang was never very philosophical about explaining mind-intent. His advice on the subject, especially to beginners was more frustrating than clarifying, and was always the simple advice of “just practice, relax, and by-and-by you will come to know it. Just use your imagination, then gradually it will become reality.”

Taijiquan is a matter of how Lao Zi in *The Scripture on the Dao and Virtue* explained inner cultivation, “Cultivation is a matter of subtraction, not addition.” This is the only way.

How can you learn to yield and lose by constantly trying to gain and win? People who talk about big secrets only fool themselves and others. They’re just imposters. Taijiquan is so simple, so spontaneous that the genius completely overlooks it. So don’t try to be clever. Use your imagination, not your clever mind and strength, then gradually it will all become a reality. Just like Lao Zi said,

When the mind rests in a state of nothingness, we can look at the inner enigma; when the mind tries to manifest an inner state of some kind, we can only see the outer manifestations.

In other words, by only paying attention to external expressions, we never realize the internal expressions. Mind-intent leads the qi, and this is the internal expression; the qi leading the body is then the external expression. But too many students attempt to do the opposite, erroneously thinking the body can lead the qi and the qi can lead the mind-intent. Only through the mind-intent, can the internal and external become “one” (yi qi).

Assuming that a person has already and completely unified the entire body and four limbs, there will then be a firm foundation for understanding how to adjust the legs and waist in any of the six directions—upward and downward, forward and backward, and leftward and rightward—each of which are of equal importance.

The text here is ultimately stating that the feet, legs, waist, shoulders, spine, and even the hands and fingers are to follow not only the principle of yi qi, but to likewise train, focus, and strengthen the mind-intent so that every part

follows its dictates. Then you can succeed in reaching a stage where the Six Unions, internally and externally, are all one in the same. It is at this stage you can find complete spontaneity and perfection of movement where the body moves in accordance with the mind-intent.

If there is to be an upper intent, there must first be a downward intention. Likewise, if there is advance, there must be withdraw; if there is left, there must be right. So, if your initial intent is upward, you must first have a downward intent. If you want to lift something upward, you must first have the intent of pushing downward. Then the root will be severed; it will be immediately and certainly toppled.

有上即有下. 有前即有後. 有左即有右. 如意要向上. 即寓下意. 若將物掀起. 而加以挫之之意. 斯其根自斷. 乃壞之速而無疑.

You shang ji you xia. You qian ji you hou. You zuo ji you you. Ru yi yao xiang shang. Ji yu xia yi. Re jiang wu xian qi. Er jia yi cuo zhi zhi yi. Si ji gen zi duan. Nai huai zhi su er wu yi.

What is being said in this paragraph applies to all of Taijiquan, whether you're talking about the solo form, two-person and weapon practices, or even the internal alchemy aspects. Needless to say, it is a very profound and extensive subject.

“If there is to be an upper intent, there must first be a downward intention; if there is advance, there must be withdraw; if there is left, there must be right.” Keep in mind that everything could be said in the reverse as well. *“If there is below, there must be above; if there is withdraw, there must be advance; if there is right, there must be left.”*

When performing the *Pushing* posture in the solo form, for example, if you are pushing upward there must also be the intent of sinking (below). Meaning, as the rear leg rises to issue, the front leg is, in turn, sunk. When shifting forward (Advancing) in Taijiquan, the rear foot must remain attached to the ground with some weight in it so as to maintain root and, if necessary, allow weight to shift easily back into it (Withdrawing). If you are going to move right, there must be an initial intent in the waist to go left, and vice versa. Within each posture of Taijiquan, many subtle movements are unseen by others, which include principles of movement and mind-intentions. It is not a matter of just shifting, stepping, and turning. Every aspect of the movement has a principle and a mind-intention.

Concerning the self-defense or two-person applications, this verse demonstrates how to break an opponent's root, place him or her in an inferior position, and how to protect your central equilibrium. If person A is to attack person B's upper body, for instance, A must pay attention to B's lower body; if A is going to advance toward B, A must pay attention to B retreating; if A is going to attack B's right side, A must pay attention to B's left side.

If A wishes to push on B's upper arm, A must ensure that her leg is positioned on B's leg to affect his root first. If A is stepping in to push B, she must sink into her rear leg first. If she is going to push B's left side, she entices him with a feint push on his right side first.

Master Liang always instructed that when pushing an opponent to do what he called, yin-yang pushing. Meaning, never push with both hands at the same time because if the opponent neutralizes you, there will be no recovery. Better to feign an attack with one hand so the opponent turns into your real push from the other hand. Likewise, if he or she neutralizes your real push, your other hand is in reserve to push again.

About the mind intent of pushing something downward in order to make it go upward, we can examine many things that work on this principle. For example, if you were to uproot a small tree, you would find it really difficult to just pull it upward, but if you first push down on the trunk, the roots below can be broken and the tree pulled up much easier.

A pulley works on this principle. Using a pulley, we pull down on the rope to lift something upward. Even the wheel works on this function. A wheel must first turn toward the ground in order for it to move ahead. Actually, nature itself works on this principle almost exclusively. A seed must first go down into the soil to rise up as a plant. Wind currents first push down on the earth to rise upward. The examples are endless, but the idea is always the same. Taijiquan makes constant use of these opposite-intent aspects.

The meaning of this verse is primarily about adapting to all circumstances and creating good opportunities and a superior position by causing confusion and disorder in the opponent. By exhibiting an opposite intent, the opponent can only sense your false attack on one side, but cannot detect your true intent or the real attack.

For example, if person A feints a push to B's right shoulder, B's body will begin to turn left to avoid the perceived push, thus bringing B's left shoulder toward A. At this point, B is in a defective position and A can apply the real push to B's left shoulder.

Above and below, left and right, advancing and withdrawing, these require the actions of "give and take" or "withdraw and attack." Simply put, when you entice an opponent to react in one direction, you can then attack him or her to the opposite direction. In the old texts, this is called, "revealing yin to express the yang" or "through the insubstantial, the substantial is exposed."

Clearly discriminate the substantial and insubstantial. There is an aspect of substantial and insubstantial in each part of the body. All the joints of the body must be threaded together without the slightest severance, just like drawing out silk threads so they do not break apart.

虛實宜分清楚. 一處有一處虛實. 周身節節貫串, 無令絲毫間斷耳.

Xu shi yi fen qing chu. Yi chu you yi chu xu shi. Zhou shen jie jie guan chuan, wu ling si hao jian duan er.

When doing Taijiquan, the substantial (yang) and insubstantial (yin) in your body are in constant change, and you must pay close attention to this because the changes are both coarse and subtle. The coarse aspect is seen in the feet and legs when shifting the weight from one leg to another, in turning the waist and drawing energy from one side of the hip or the other, and in determining what hand and arm is issuing (yang) energy and/or which hand or arm is guiding (yin).

This also relates to the Three Relationships of the elbows and knees, shoulders and hips, and the hands and feet moving in unison. Regarding the elbows and knees, the knee is substantial and the elbow must be insubstantial; shoulders and hips, the hip is substantial and the shoulder insubstantial; hands and feet, the foot is substantial and the hand insubstantial.

The idea of the Three Relationships is also, in part, the explanation of the second to last line of this verse, “All the joints of the body must be threaded together without the slightest severance,” because when all three aspects move in unison, the joints of the body are as if threaded together. For example, when the foot moves, the knee must follow, and the hip likewise then follows. Hence, the shoulder, elbow, and hands all likewise follow in the procession of movement. It is very much like the string of pearls—move one and they all follow, and there is no severance between any of them. The body must move and act the same.

The subtle has to do with the breath. When we inhale, the body becomes substantial and when we exhale, the body is insubstantial. For example, in self-defense use of Taijiquan, when person A first attaches her hand to

person B, she inhales to raise B's qi upward and make him substantial. Then she exhales when issuing out.

Also, when inhaling, the qi is brought onto the spine (called, "adhering the qi to the spine"), followed by an exhalation where the qi is directed into the lower abdomen (called, "sink the qi into the Dan Tian").

The whole point of clearly discriminating the substantial and insubstantial, or it could be said, "being completely aware of the yang and yin aspects of the entire body," is the fundamental aspect for attaining root (central equilibrium), because if you can't first know the substantial and insubstantial in your feet, you will never accomplish it in the rest of your body.

Every action in the Taijiquan solo form is about first finding your root and then proceeding. In the *Book of Changes* it says, "A fox walks on thin ice." This is an image of a fox standing on an embankment ready to cross a frozen lake. But instead of just assuming the ice is solid, the fox first puts one of its paws down to test the ice while remaining rooted in its rear legs. The fox is clearly discriminating what is substantial and what is insubstantial. We must be like this when performing Taijiquan as well, and should not take for granted the floor or ground beneath us. Always feel and sense what is under your feet and then you will gradually build a heightened sense of the substantial and insubstantial.

This line of the text also goes directly to the idea of "Folding-Up" technique used in Taijiquan. Actually, the folding-up skill is what Zhang Sanfeng saw in the snake when being attacked by the magpie. The folding-up abilities of the snake are what you emulate in Taijiquan application. If an opponent seeks to seize your fingers, your wrist folds and strikes. If your wrist is seized, then your elbow strikes. If your elbow is seized, your shoulder will strike. If your shoulder is seized, your head then strikes. If your head is seized, one of your legs should strike.

The last part of the verse, "just like drawing out silk threads so they do not break apart," is sometimes excluded from this treatise altogether—most likely because it was viewed as repetitive to the earlier statement of "all the joints of the body must be threaded together." But the idea of drawing out or reeling silk has a somewhat different meaning.

“Threading all the joints together” is a reference about the body moving physically as one unit, as advised in the first three relationships of the Six Unions. Whereas, “drawing out silk threads so there is no breakage” is a reference to the mental-intentive manner of moving when all the joints are threaded together, as advised in the last three relationships of the Six Unions. The first three are external, and the later three, internal. This last clause of the verse, then, should not have been deleted in other versions of this treatise because of its distinct reference to the Six Unions.

Long Boxing (Zhang Quan) is just like a long river or great ocean rolling on without interruption.

長拳者. 如長江大海. 滔滔不絕也.

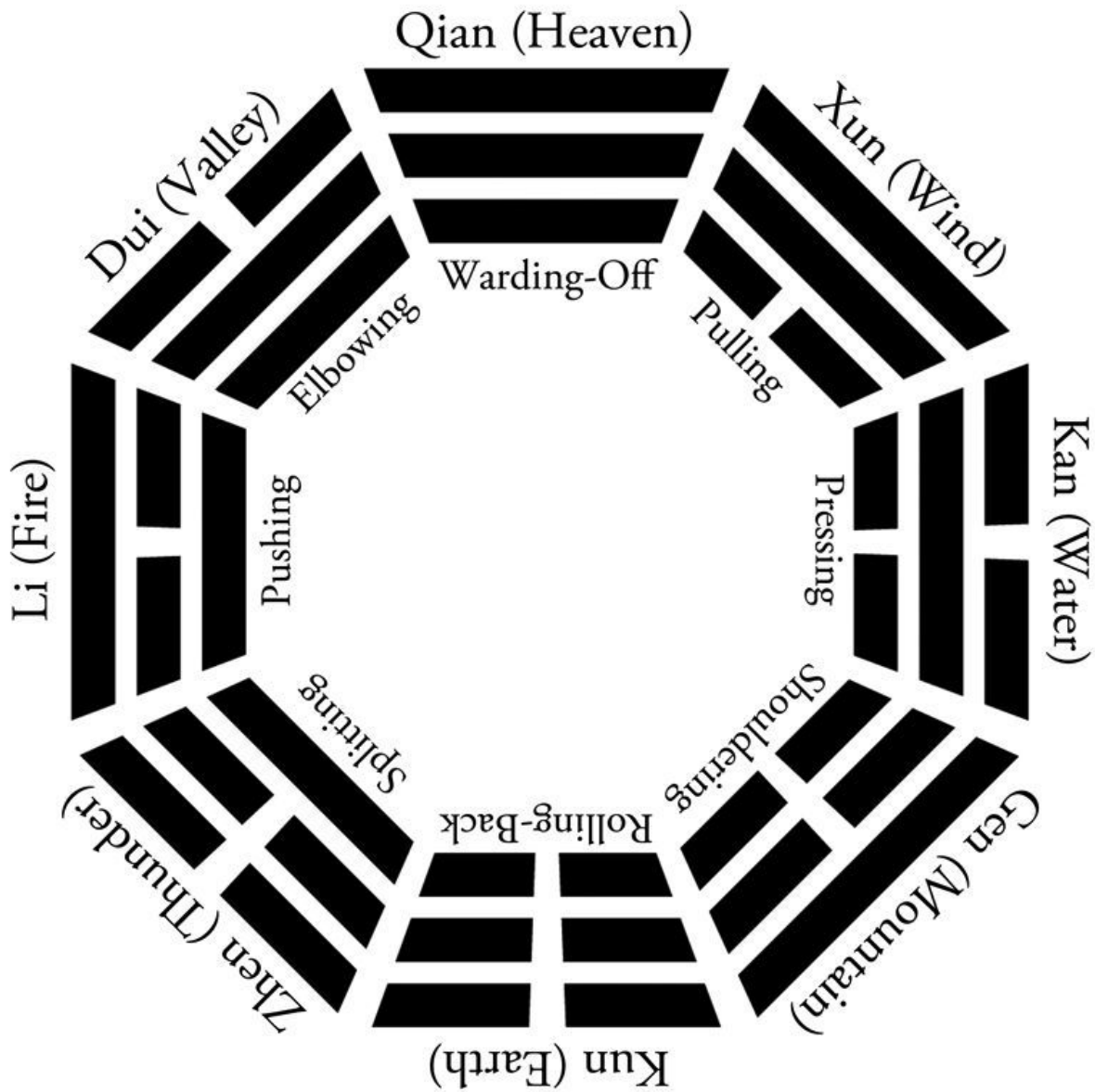
Zhang Quan zhe. Ru zhang jiang da hai. Tao tao bu jue ye.

This verse is very revealing about the origins of Taijiquan, as there is a style of martial arts called Zhang Quan (Long Boxing) that preceded the appearance of Taijiquan. Long Boxing is normally considered a Shaolin style, but it was very popular within many of the martial arts systems of China. It is thought that Wang Zongyue or Jiang Fa taught this style to the Chen family, and that they then revised it and created three separate Taijiquan forms from it.

Warding-Off, Rolling-Back, Pressing, Pushing, Pulling, Splitting, Elbowing, and Shouldering are the Eight Diagrams.

棚攬濟按採捌肘靠. 此八卦也.

Peng Lu Ji An Cai Lie Zhou Kao. Ci Ba Gua ye.



The Eight Diagram Images and Corresponding Eight Operations

Advance-Step, Withdraw-Step, Looking-Left, Gazing-Right and Central Equilibrium are the Five Activities.

進步,退步,左顧,右盼,中定.此五行也.

Jin Bu, Tui Bu, Zuo Gu, You Pan, Zhong Ding. Ci Wu Xing ye.

Warding-Off, Rolling-Back, Pressing, and Pushing are then Qian, Kun, Kan, and Li. These are the Four Cardinal directions.

擗擗 濟按即乾坤坎離. 四正方也.

Peng Lu Ji An ji Qian Kun Kan Li. Si Zheng fang ye.

Pulling, Splitting, Elbowing, and Shouldering are then Xun, Zhen, Dui, and Gen. These are the Four Diagonal directions.

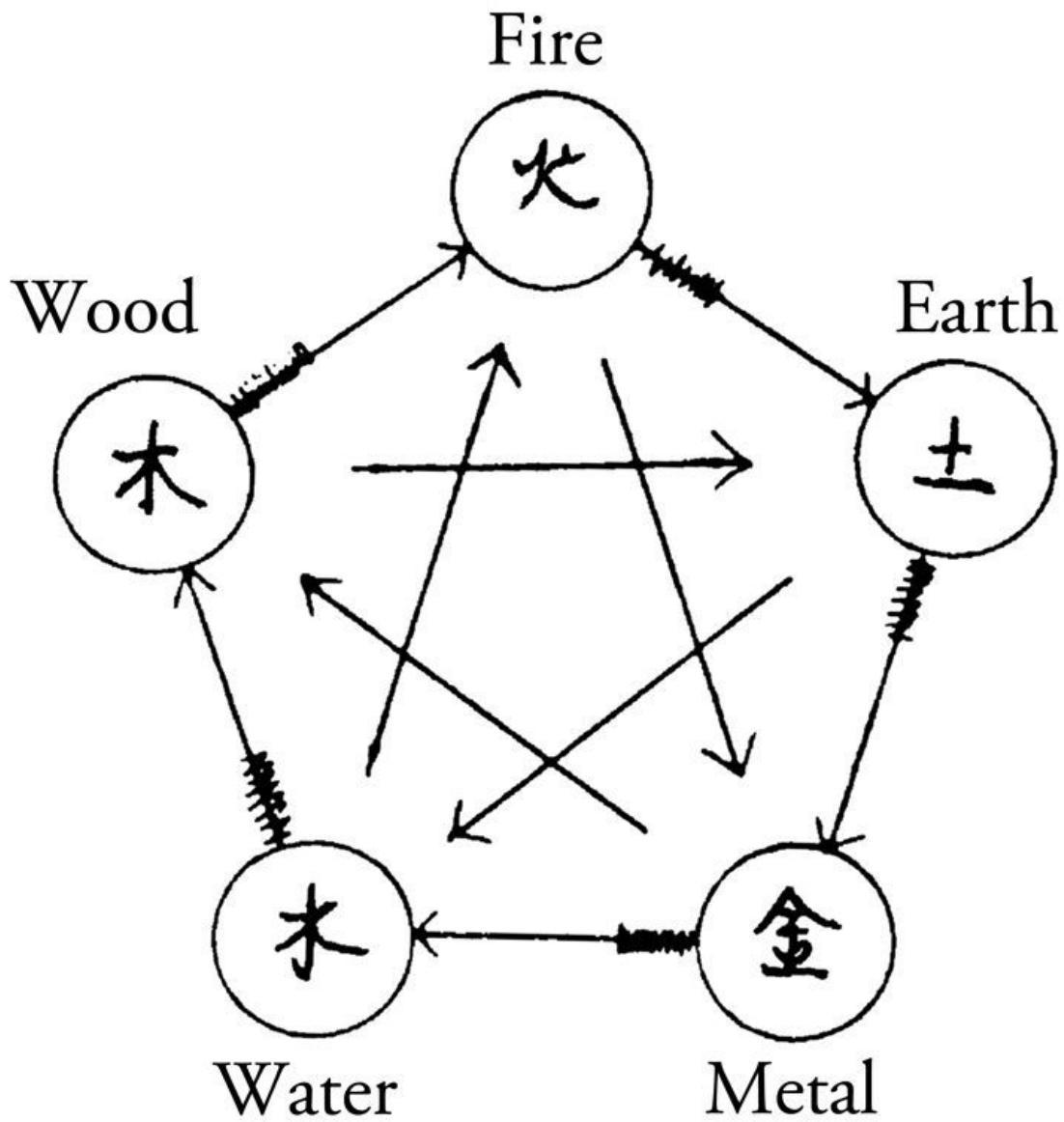
採捌肘靠即巽震兌艮. 此四斜角也.

Cai Lie Zhou Kao ji Xun Zhen Dui Gen. Ci Si Xie jiao ye.

Advancing, Withdrawing, Looking-Left, Gazing-Right, and Central Equilibrium are then Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth.

進退顧盼定即金木水火土也.

Jin Tui Gu Pan Ding ji Jin Mu Shui Huo Tu ye.



*The Five Activities
and Corresponding Elements*

Joined together these all become the Thirteen Operations.

合之則為十三勢也。

He zhi ze wei Shi San Shi ye.

T'ai Chi According to the I Ching: Embodying the Principles of the Book of Changes is entirely about these verses of the treatise, so please refer to that book for a much deeper and more extensive explanation of this section.

There really aren't thirteen postures of Taijiquan, but there are Eight Operations (Warding-Off, Rolling-Back, Pressing, Pushing, Pulling, Splitting, Elbowing, and Shouldering) that function with one or more of the Five Activities (Advancing, Withdrawing, Looking-Left, Gazing-Right and Central Equilibrium). Although this is normally translated as "Thirteen Postures," think of it as meaning thirteen operations, conditions, or functions.

These verses were most likely added to this treatise to connect it to the philosophical and alchemical traditions of the Eight Diagrams and Five Element theories that became the standard of almost all sects and traditions of Daoism. Without this correlation, the propagation of Taijiquan would have been near impossible for receiving credible attention within Chinese culture.

Thus, Zhang created the Thirteen Operations (十三勢, Shi San Shi), consisting of eight basic operations and functions (corresponding to the Eight Diagrams [八卦, Ba Gua]) and five governing activities and functions (corresponding to the Five Elements [五行, Wu Xing]). These later became, and erroneously translated, as the *Tai Ji Quan Thirteen Postures* (Warding-Off, Rolling-Back, Pressing, Pushing, Pulling, Splitting, Elbowing, Shouldering, Advancing, Withdrawing, Looking-Left, Gazing-Right, and Central Equilibrium). But none of these are postures *per se*. They are operations of movements, being active functions and not stagnant poses.

Also, the Five Activities are not postures but rather five functions used within each of the Eight Operations. So, in all, it is better to translate *shi* (勢) as "operation," rather than "posture." In performing the solo Taijiquan form, a posture (勢, shi) is a conditioned series of gestures (式, shi) connected together to form a movement (動, dong), not a stagnant posture. So, in the

first line of this treatise, Zhang states, “With every movement (一舉動, yi ju dong).” It does not say, “With every posture.”

Appended Verse

This treatise was handed down by Ancestor Zhang Sanfeng of Wudang Mountain, so worthy heroes everywhere can lengthen their lives and attain longevity, not merely as a means to martial skill.

原注云. 此係武當山張三丰祖師遺論. 欲天下豪杰延年益壽.

Yuan zhu yun. Ci xi Wu Dang Shan Zhang San Feng zu shi yi lun. Yu tian xia hao jie yan nian yi shou.

This appended verse goes to the fact that if martial art is the main concern of a person's cultivation, then longevity and health would suffer. Actually, if you look closely at the history of the martial arts, very few practitioners have achieved longevity. Martial art, in general, is very hard on the body, but the internal alchemical processes are kind to the entire bodily structure and functions.

¹ *Six Unions* (六合, Liu He): hands and feet, elbows and knees, shoulders and hips. The other three unions include breath and movement, mind-intent and qi, and spirit and tranquility.

The Original Movements of Tai Ji Quan

太極拳之勢

Tai Ji Quan Zhi Shi

This section lists the primary movements of Taijiquan. The names of the movements and drawings come from *Secrets for Tai Ji and Refining the Elixir of Zhang Sanfeng* (張三豐太極煉丹秘訣, *Zhang San Feng Tai Ji Lian Dan Mi Jue*), under a section titled, “The Illustrated Movements of the Seventy-Two Ways of Tai Ji Quan” (太極拳七十二路圖勢, *Tai Ji Quan Qi Shi Er Lu Tu Shi*).

These posture images are presented to help clarify the original naming of Taijiquan movements, as so many present-day styles of Taijiquan have eliminated certain movements or, in some cases, renamed them. Most styles have rearranged the order of the movements to suit the criteria and liking of their various founders. Hence, the reason for so many varying forms of Taijiquan with shorter and longer varieties. The above-mentioned book contains 105 illustrations, but most of these are repetitive, which is why just the basic thirty-eight movements are shown here.

Another reason for presenting this list of the primary Taijiquan movements is to demonstrate the underlying function of each of them. Meaning, every movement of Taijiquan is based on one of the Eight Operations of Warding-Off, Rolling-Back, Pressing, Pushing, Pulling, Splitting, Elbowing, and Shouldering. For example, *Waving Hands in Clouds* is actually an operation of Rolling-Back, *Lifting Hands* is a Splitting operation, *Brush Knee and Twist Step* is based on the operation of Pulling, and so on for every alternative name for the variety of postures. Likewise, each movement will initially incorporate other operations in order to complete its action, such as *Shouldering* first uses the operation of Pulling to make the opponent defective so the operation of Shouldering can be applied.

All the movements of Taijiquan function like this, and equally all the movements are guided by one or more of the Five Activities to ensure central equilibrium (root) is maintained and to avoid excess and deficiency in the movements. Knowing these correlations can help Taijiquan adherents greatly, and will bring greater clarity to their practices of Sensing Hands (推手, Tui Shou), Greater Rolling-Back (大 掇, Da Lu), and Dispersing Hands (散手, San Shou) should they endeavor to learn these exercises.



Beginning Tai Ji Gesture

太極起式

Tai Ji Qi Shi



**Grasping the
Bird's Tail**

攬雀尾

Lan Que Wei

2A) Warding-Off

2B) Rolling-Back

2C) Pressing

2D) Pushing



Single Whip
單鞭
Dan Bian



Lifting Hands
提手
Ti Shou



White Crane
Spreading Wings
白鶴亮翅
Bai He Liang Chi
Sometimes called,
White Stork Cools Its Wings



Brush Knee and Twist Step
樓膝拗步
Lou Xi Yao Bu
There are both left and right
styles of this posture.



Hands Playing the Guitar
手揮琵琶
Shou Hui Pi Pa



Step Forward, Deflect,
Parry, and Punch
進步搬攔捶
Jin Bu Ban Lan Chui



Follow to Seal
and Carry to Close
如封似閉
Ru Feng Si Bi
Also called *Withdraw and Push*
or *Apparent Closure*.



Crossing Hands
十字手
Shi Zi Shou

11



Embrace Tiger, Return
to the Mountain
抱虎歸山
Bao Hu Gui Shan

12



Punch Under Elbow
肘底看捶
Zhou Di Kan Chui
Sometimes called
Fist Under the Elbow.



Chase the Monkey Away
倒犖猴
Dao Nian Hou



There are both left and right
styles of this posture.

14



Diagonal Flying Gesture

斜飛勢

Xie Fei Shi

15



Needle at Sea Bottom

海底斜

Hai Di Xie



Fan Penetrates the Back
扇通臂
Shan Tong Bei



Turn Body and Chop
撇身錘
Pie Shen Chui
Sometimes called Elbow-Stoke.

18A

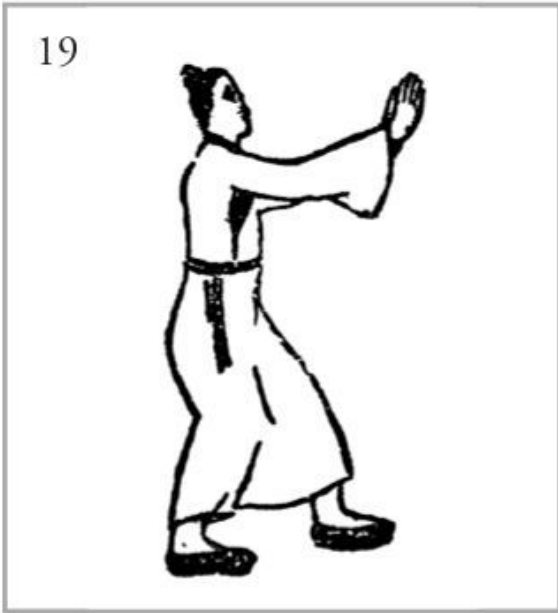


Cloud Hands
雲手
Yun Shou

18B



There are both left and right
styles of this posture.
Sometimes called
Waving Hands in the Clouds.



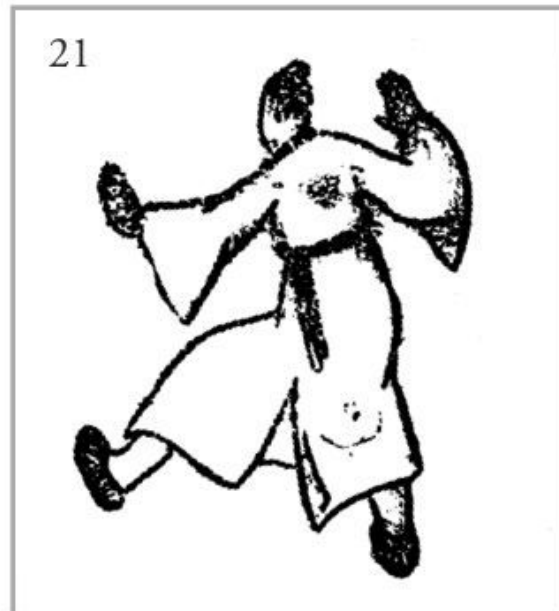
High Pat on Horse
高探馬
Gao Tan Ma



Separate Foot
分脚
Zuo You Fen Jiao



There are both left and right styles of this posture.



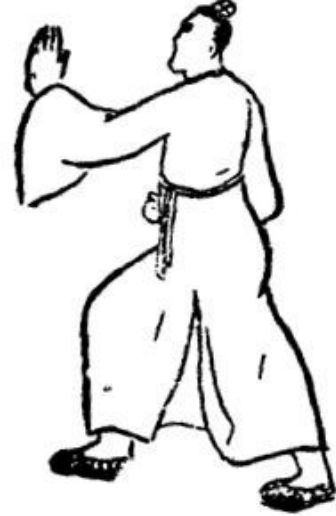
Turn Body and
Kick with Foot
轉身蹬脚
Zhuan Shen Deng Jiao

22



Advance Step to
Plant Hammer Fist
進步栽錘
Jin Bu Zai Chui

23



White Snake
Spits Out Tongue
白蛇吐信
Fan Shen Bai She Tu Xin



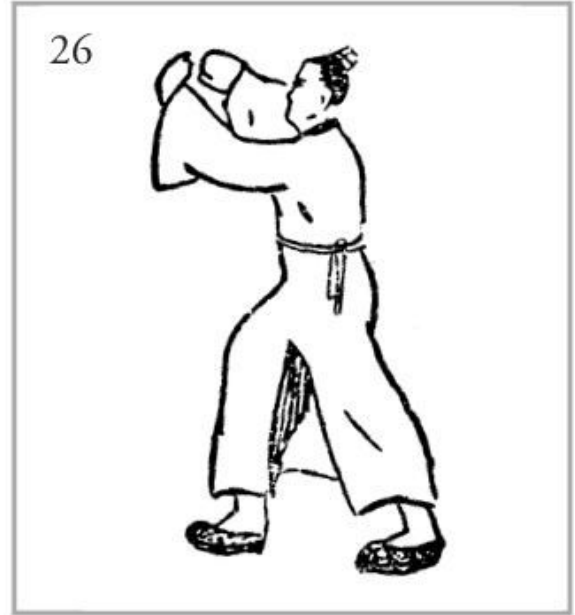
Unroll the Body
to Strike the Tiger
披身伏虎
Pi Shen Fu Hu



There are both left and right
styles of this posture.



Return Body and
Kick with Foot
回身蹬脚
Hui Shen Deng Jiao



Double Winds
Strike Both Ears
雙風貫耳
Shuang Feng Guan Er

27



Diagonal Single Whip

斜單鞭

Xie Dan Bian



Parting the Horse's Mane
野馬分鬃
Ye Man Fen Zong



There are both left and right styles of this posture.

29A



Jade Maiden Works
the Shuttles
玉女穿梭
Yu Nu Chuan Suo

29B



There are four sections of this
posture. Sometimes called
Fair Lady Weaves at Shuttles.

30



Single Whip Squatting
Down Gesture

單鞭下勢

Dan Bian Xia Shi
Sometimes called
Snake Creeps Down.

31A



Golden Rooster
Standing on One Leg

金雞獨立

Jin Ji Du Li



There are both left and right styles of this posture.



Crossing Legs
十字腿
Shi Zi Tui



Brush Knee, Impede,
and Hammer Fist
樓膝指擋錘
Lou Xi Dang Chui



Step Forward
to the Seven-Star
上步七星
Shang Bu Qi Xing



Retreat Step to
Ride the Tiger
退步跨虎
Tui Bu Kua Hu



Turn on the Feet to Sweep
Away the Lotus
轉脚擺蓮
Zhuan Jiao Bai Lian

37



Bend Bow to Shoot
the Tiger
彎弓射虎
Wan Gong She Hu

38



Conclusion of Tai Ji
合太極
He Tai Ji

Daoist Immortal Three Peaks Zhang Series

Tai Ji Quan Treatise: Attributed to the Song Dynasty Daoist Priest Zhang Sanfeng (vol. 1)

Refining the Elixir: The Internal Alchemy Teachings of Daoist Immortal Zhang Sanfeng (vol. 2)

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About the Author

Stuart Alve Olson, longtime protégé of the Taijiquan Master T.T. Liang (1900–2002), is a teacher, translator, and writer on Daoist philosophy, health, and internal arts. Since his early twenties, he has studied and practiced Daoism and Chinese Buddhism.

As of 2013, Stuart has published eighteen books, many of which now appear in several foreign-language editions. He is currently working on completing the entire [*Chen Kung Series*](#) with revised editions of earlier works as well as new volumes on sections he has never previously published.

Stuart has performed numerous book signings, appeared on many TV and radio talk shows throughout the United States, written several articles for martial art and Daoist magazines, and has taught Daoism and Taijiquan in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Canada, and Italy.

Stuart was voted the 2012 *IMOS Journal* Reader's Choice Award for "Best Author on Qigong."

He currently lives in Phoenix, Arizona, with his wife, Lily.

Brief Biography

On Christmas Day, 1979, Stuart took Triple Refuge with Chan Master Hsuan Hua, receiving the disciple name Kuo Ao. In 1981, he participated in the meditation sessions and sutra lectures given by Dainin Katagiri Roshi at the Minnesota Center for Zen Meditation. In late 1981, he began living with Master T.T. Liang, studying Taijiquan, Daoism, Praying Mantis Kung-fu, and Chinese language under his tutelage.

Starting in the spring of 1982, Stuart undertook a two-year Buddhist bowing pilgrimage, “Nine Steps, One Bow.” Traveling along state and county roads during the spring, summer, and autumn months, starting from the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center in Minneapolis and ending at the border of Nebraska. During the winter months he stayed at Master Liang’s home and bowed in his garage.

After Stuart’s pilgrimage, he returned to Liang’s home to continue studying with him. He and Master Liang then started traveling throughout the United States teaching Taijiquan to numerous groups, and continued to do so for nearly a decade.

In 1986, Stuart published his first four books on Taijiquan—*Wind Sweeps Away the Plum Blossoms*, *Cultivating the Ch’i*, *T’ai Chi Sword, Sabre & Staff*, and *Imagination Becomes Reality*.

In 1987, Stuart made his first of several trips to China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. On subsequent trips, he studied massage in Taipei and taught Taijiquan in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

In 1989, he and Master Liang moved to Los Angeles, where Stuart studied Chinese language and continued his Taijiquan studies.

In early 1992, Stuart made his first trip to Indonesia, where he was able to briefly study with the kung-fu and healing master Oei Kung Wei. He also taught Taijiquan there to many large groups.

In 1993, he organized the Institute of Internal Arts in St. Paul, Minnesota, and brought Master Liang back from California to teach there.

In 2005, Stuart was prominently featured in the British Taijiquan documentary *Embracing the Tiger*.

In 2006, he formed Valley Spirit Arts with his longtime student Patrick Gross.

In 2010, he began teaching for the Sanctuary of Dao and writing for its blog and newsletter.

In 2012, Stuart received the *IMOS Journal* Reader's Choice Award for "Best Author on Qigong."

Body of Works

Daoism Books

Tao of No Stress: Three Simple Paths (Healing Arts Press, 2002).

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Chen Kung Series

Tai Ji Qi: Fundamentals of Qigong, Meditation, and Internal Alchemy, vol. 1 (Valley Spirit Arts, 2013).

Tai Ji Jin: Discourses on Intrinsic Energies for Mastery of Self-Defense Skills, vol. 2 (Valley Spirit Arts, 2013).

Tai Ji Bing Shu: Mastering the Arts of Sword, Saber, and Staff Weapon Skills, vol. 6 (Valley Spirit Arts, 2014).

Forthcoming

Tai Ji Quan: Practice and Philosophy of the 108-Posture Solo Form, vol. 3 (Valley Spirit Arts, 2015).

Tai Ji Tui Shou & Da Lu: Mastering the Eight Operations of Sensing Hands and Greater Rolling-Back, vol. 4 (Valley Spirit Arts, 2014).

Tai Ji San Shou: Dispersing Hands Exercises for Mastering Intrinsic Energies Skills, vol. 5 (Valley Spirit Arts, 2015).

Kung-Fu Books

The Complete Guide to Northern Praying Mantis Kung Fu (Blue Snake Books, 2010).

Forthcoming

18 Lohan Exercises (Valley Spirit Arts, 2015).

About the Publisher

Valley Spirit Arts offers books and DVDs on Daoism, Taijiquan, and meditation practices primarily from author Stuart Alve Olson, longtime student of Master T.T. Liang and translator of many Daoist-related works.

Its website provides teachings on meditation and internal alchemy, taijiquan, qigong, and kung fu through workshops, private and group classes, and online courses and consulting.

For more information as well as updates on Stuart Alve Olson's upcoming projects and events, please visit: valleyspiritarts.com. Also, check out Stuart's author page at [Amazon](#).

Suggested Reading

Advanced Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan (Two Volumes) by Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming (Yang's Martial Arts Academy, 1986).

Fu Zhongwen: Mastering Yang Style Taijiquan, translated by Louis Swain (North Atlantic Books, 1999).

Lee's Modified Tai Chi for Health by Li Ying-arng (Unicorn Press, 1968).

Steal My Art: The Life and Times of Tai Chi Master T.T. Liang by Stuart Alve Olson (North Atlantic Books, 2002).

T'ai Chi Ch'uan for Health and Self-Defense by Master T.T. Liang (Vintage Press, 1974).

Tai Ji Quan and Meditation by Da Lu (Schocken Books, 1986).

Tai Ji Quan Principles and Practice by C.K. Chu (Sunflower Press, 1981).

Tai-Chi Ch'uan: Its Effects & Practical Applications by Y.K. Chen (New Castle Publishing Company, 1979).

Tai-Chi: The "Supreme Ultimate" Exercise for Health, Sport, and Self-Defense by Cheng Man-ch'ing and Robert W. Smith (Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1967).

The Tao of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan: Way to Rejuvenation by Jou Tsung Hwa (Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1981).

Dedication

To my wonderful wife, Lily,
for her constant support, encouragement,
and enthusiasm for Daoism and Taijiquan.
She is the embodiment of Lao Zi's ideal of the
"Inexhaustible Mysterious Female."