

# Iffley Acupuncture Clinic



Website Content

T'ai Chi and Chi Kung  
(Taiji and Qigong)

## Some background for the interested.

Taijiquan or T'ai Chi as it is more commonly written, is the most famous of the three *internal schools* of martial arts or *Neijia*. The other two are Xingyiquan and Baquazhang. The *internal schools* differ from the more widely practiced *external schools* or *Waijia* and so called Gongfu in a number of ways. Firstly, traditional exponents of the *internal schools* tended to concern themselves first and foremost with the promotion of health, longevity and wellbeing, and in addition, the pursuit of greater insight and understanding. Whilst important, the application of the Nei Jia as martial art was considered to be an additional bonus. In so doing, they aspired to live in harmony with nature and their surroundings, which in turn reflected the influence of their Taoist origins. Indeed, each of the *internal schools* exemplify within their practice, specific components and fundamental principles that had been proposed within the Taoist tradition.

The practice of Taiji Quan was an attempt to mimic and reflect in its movements, the fundamental principle of Yin and Yang within nature. Exemplified by a continual and harmonious interplay between two seemingly complementary opposites of expansion and contraction, up and down, left and right, full and empty and forward and backward; never over-extending or over-exerting, and each movement carefully balanced by an awareness of it's potential opposite. Thus, underpinned by the recognition that the circulation of Qi, could be hindered by extremes of any of the above, and the movements therefore, undertaken in a seemingly soft and gentle manner. Taiji attempted to generate internal harmony by cultivating mental and emotional composure; learning to still the 'chattering mind' through developing Yi or intention and, focussing the awareness on the Dantien or centre. In self-defence the underlying principles sought to borrow from an invading force or attack and utilise this energy in subsequent application or counter attack. This is exemplified in the *Taiji Classics* by the saying, "To use only a few ounces to move a thousand pounds".

It therefore becomes apparent that the other significant unifying factor of the *internal schools* was that attention was focussed in the first instance on inner development rather than outer (neigong rather than weigong). Primarily, this took the form of

developing an awareness of Qi, it's promotion and it's unhindered circulation throughout the body, but some of its' exponents subsequently sought to transform this abundance of energy into mind or *Shen*. In so doing they sought longevity, insight and enlightenment.

### Differing styles and schools of Taiji Quan

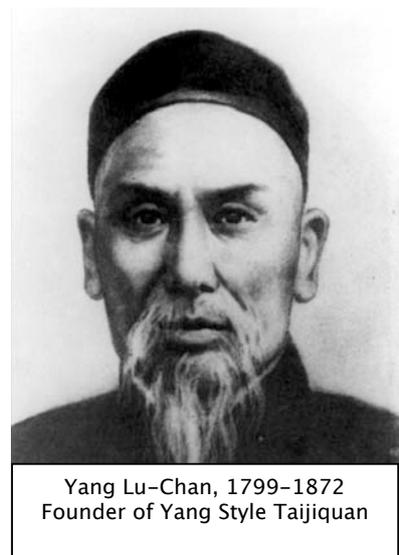
The creation of Taiji Quan is accredited to the legendary 14<sup>th</sup> Century Taoist sage



Chang San-Feng

Chang San-Feng . Whether or not it's inception was truly Chang's, remains a little uncertain, as there is recorded evidence of comparable systems that precede Chang San-Feng. However, it would appear that Taiji Quan as a system was the culmination of his thirty-year of study and exploration of in both Buddhist as Taoist arts. It seems more likely that he developed Taiji as a means of tempering the seemingly more dramatic and forceful aspects of the Shaolin and Wudang fighting systems, by applying the principles of Yin and Yang and their manifestations as exemplified in the Taoist classic, 'The I-Ching' or Book of Changes".

Taiji was subsequently passed from one generation of masters to another, until it was taught to Chen Wang-Ting in the late 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Chen Wang-Ting is therefore accredited with the formation of the "Chen" family style of Taiji Quan, which then subsequently developed through generations of family members. Chen Chang-hsin taught Taiji to Yang Lu-ch'an (1799-1872) who in turn, formed the family "Yang" style of Taiji Quan. The Yang style of Taiji proliferated because the Yang family began to teach more openly and because



Yang Lu-Chan, 1799-1872  
Founder of Yang Style Taijiquan

Yang Lu ch'an also taught the royal family. It is now perhaps the most widely practiced of three main style of Taiji Quan. Yang Lu-ch'an had a student called Wu

Yu-hsing (1812-1880) who, after learning also from the Chen style, went on to form the family “Wu” style of Taiji Quan.

In his classes in Oxford, Jonathan Bruce teaches mainly in the Classical Yang style of Taiji Quan and Qigong exercises acquired through his many years of study. He has now been practicing Taijiquan for almost three decades and has studied with a



number of respected teachers and masters. He makes no claims to holding one lineage, nor to having mastered his art, but he can provide the majority of aspiring Taiji students with a thorough foundation and sufficient knowledge and insight to secure access to higher levels. He seeks to foster in his students not only clear and sound foundations within the movements of Taiji and Qigong, but also the cultivation of mind and spirit that essentially underlie development within these arts. These qualities were instilled early into his practice through his encounters with Master Liu Hsu-Chi, who emphasised that as part of the wider system of ‘Gongfu’, Taijiquan was a practice of ‘self-cultivation’. He endeavours to promote this mind-set in class, providing students with an opportunity to develop according to their needs, whilst at the same encouraging a spirit of exploration and progression. His practice and teaching have been informed by his equally long encounters and experience in Acupuncture and of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

### **A Typical Class**

By and large Jonathan’s classes tend to be of mixed ability, although periodically he will start a new beginners /introductory class. The latter offers an opportunity for prospective students who are perhaps more apprehensive about entering a seemingly established group and also a chance therein, for more directed input. Normally, when an introduction has been completed, students then naturally feed into a more established group, although if the number of participants remains large, then this will form the basis of a new and more secure group. However, prospective students need be assured, that many begin their attendance at a mixed ability group without too great a trepidation and are quickly and happily assimilated therein.

## Spirit and mindfulness

Whilst we enjoy a sense of fun and laughter during our training, (indeed we even foster this), we also demonstrate a degree of formality and mindfulness. The reason we do this is to ensure that a spirit of learning and development is cultivated and maintained, and to ensure that an everyday mind-set or mindlessness does not undermine the nature of the class. (Whilst it might be argued that this spirit of practice should infiltrate our whole lives, we need first to foster it within one environment, to find a starting point therefore).

However new students need to be assured whilst they will be encouraged to aspire to a higher level, they will not be asked to work over and beyond their capacity. Should others in the group seemingly display greater aptitude and vigour, then this should serve to inspire rather than create a sense of failure. We recognise that for some, progress will seem comparably slow, and be affected by age, previous experience, body type and condition etc. We are not however concerned with the rate of progress, rather that students participate with good spirit and intention. The reader is reminded of the story of, 'The tortoise and the hare'.

A typical class of Taiji and Qigong roughly follows a simple format.

### The beginning.

Class begins with the intention of being on time and with a formal bow. This bow reflects a number of aspirations for the class. Firstly a respect for the art itself; it's value and importance and a recognition that to develop within it we must aspire to do so. We are also symbolically leaving behind of previous events and affairs and as we begin our class we are now focussed on what is at hand. We bow also in humility, recognising that in so doing we are on more malleable and open to learning. Finally, we bow in respect for one another and as we bring our palms together, a recognition of our interrelatedness and our shared aspirations for something higher than the mundane or regular.

## Warming Up

Warming up will vary according to the needs and skills of the concurrent group and also the theme and direction of the class as a whole. Sometimes we will focus on developing flexibility, whilst at others, we explore body co-ordination and unity. Exercises may be directed towards opening and strengthening the spine during one term, whilst we may subsequently work towards developing the upper or lower body in the next. All of the exercises are designed to enable the player to access the Taiji more favourably and all will be undertaken according to the limits of the participant. Students will be asked to participate within each exercise in a manner that promotes progress, but not beyond their means and most definitely not to the point of exhaustion or injury. The same is true of all aspects of the class as a whole.

## Moving Qigong

Qigong can be translated as 'Qi cultivation' or the 'cultivation of Qi'. It includes therefore any practice or exercise that results in an increased awareness of, an accumulation and or the harmonious circulation of the principle life force, "Qi". Taiji might therefore be regarded as a Qigong. However, there are many styles and even schools of Qigong; some more medically and health orientated, some more focussed on developing mind and spirit, whilst others seem more directed at developing martial art skill and prowess. Jonathan has investigated a number of different traditions and diligently practiced each, thereby enabling appropriate assimilation and understanding. He will seek to show students how any exercise can ultimately achieve Qigong status, if the right intention, action and awareness is developed. In so doing, students will in turn develop a greater chance of becoming more self-reliant and independent learners.

After students have undertaken a preliminary warm-up they will begin to explore the practice of Qigong in moving form. This will take on various guises and depend on the underlying orientation and direction of the class at a given time. Practice may include, Five Organ Qigong, Animal forms, Wudang Qigong and foundation Qigong exercise from the Taiji and Yiquan tradition.

## Standing Qigong Practice

From the outside standing Qigong might be considered more of a meditation practice than one of exercise. Indeed a state of calmness, centeredness and grounding are both integral and achieved through its' practice. However, whilst the player might seek to foster a state on 'non-action' and complete relaxation, the result is one of an increasing and dynamic circulation of Qi and blood, and seemingly more akin therefore, to active exercise.

Nevertheless in Jonathan's class, *standing Qigong* practice is underpinned by the practice of Wuji or 'Wu Chi'. Wuji is symbolised by an empty circle and contrasts



therefore the Taiji that is reflected in the Yin Yang symbol that we are all now so familiar with. Whilst the Taiji is considered to be a symbol of movement and interplay, Wuqi is a state of complete calmness, stillness and inactivity, in which mental activity is quietened and the body achieves natural relaxation. It's

practice might be considered as an attempt to return to one's natural state of being, in which life's trials and tribulations are no longer attached to or given importance. The reader will recognise that these are big and not easily achieved aspirations, but they will nevertheless be more likely realised if the intention is to do so. However in more everyday terms, practicing Wuji will enable the student to access and understand the practice of standing Qigong more fully by instilling the appropriate qualities within; and so in turn their appreciation of the principles of Taiji.

Having achieved this relative state of calm and relaxation through an exploration of Wuji, the player then attempts to employ these qualities in the standing qigong practice. Here, they will learn to take up postures that serve to promote and facilitate a harmonious circulation of Qi and create within them a physical and energetic structure that achieves the same in Taijiquan and also moving Qigong.

## Classical Taijquan form

Students then move on to learn the classical Yang family style of Taijquan. Composed of some 105 movements, the form can be divided into three sections, which include a number of repetitions and variations. Traditionally this form is learnt in a systematic and accumulative manner with the rate of progress depending upon the capacity of the student to assimilate its' actions and in addition, the growth of the group as a whole. Initially the foundation form is learnt, within which the student becomes orientated in the basic structure of each movement and their subsequent sequencing. Students will learn this in three stages and in accordance with the three sections of the long form. This will form the basis for subsequent learning.

People wishing to deepen their experience and knowledge will then embark upon a period of refinement, within which the essential components and principles are sequentially explored and developed. This includes the learning of the so-called Yin-Yang form, which focuses on the breath and its coordination with movement. When applied appropriately, the movements of Taiji will become infused with and animated by the circulation of qi and blood. Students then go on to learn what has been termed, the 'centre form', whereby they learn to direct each movement from the centre of the body or dantien. In addition they learn how every movement is balanced by complementary and seemingly opposite movement of the body's centre; thereby ensuring that movements in one direction are truly balanced. Thus the student learns the significance of remaining 'centred' in the midst of movement. Students are then given the opportunity to explore the 'open and closed' or 'spiral' form. This form serves to teach the student how the movements of the form can be potentiated with the centre through appropriate spiralling of the arms and legs.

It therefore becomes apparent that whilst the basic choreography of the form remains constant from the onset, the students' appreciation of it increases with an accessible and enriching process of refinement.

## Tuishou or Pushing hands practice.

*Pushing hands* practice develops the foundation for applying Taijiquan as a martial art or self-defence. However, it is not a self-defence practice and serves only to teach the Taiji player the principles that underpin its' application. Based on the four foundations movements of the Taiji form, Ward-off, Roll-back, Press and Push, it can equally be learnt by people who have no actual interest in the martial arts, but who seek a means of evaluating their progress and structure, and for learning a truly creative way of interacting with others. In Jonathan's classes, pushing hands is never practiced in a competitive or aggressive manner, and only developed more intently by those who wish to do so. Those students in pursuit of martial prowess learn quickly that too great a reliance on stamina and muscle strength, serve only to undermine progress, and rigidity in mind and body will ultimately result in loss rather than success. It is not a compulsory practice and students wish to abstain are free to do so.

The object of the practice then, is to blend with opponents' actions rather than oppose them. To neutralise an incoming energy by redirecting it around and away from a comparatively secure but changing/rotating centre; thereby maintaining internal balance and a relative equilibrium. From this centred position, the skilled Taiji player then borrows from an incoming force and if so inclined, then adds to it with his or her own subsequent counter move. This philosophy has great significance to every day life and its principles can assist one in living more harmoniously in our seemingly busy and sometimes aggressive world.

During practice students explore and develop specific qualities or energies. Firstly the ability to "*Ting*" or listen; but in actual fact, it is more the capacity to feel and sense the intention and direction of an opponents action. To fully appreciate this quality, the player needs also to *Tsou* (to lead) and *Nien* or 'Adhere' or stick to his or her opponent. In *Tsou* an attack is seemingly met without any overt resistance and the incoming move is led away from one's centre until it reaches its' full extent. Conversely in developing *Nien*, the player learns to advance and stay in contact during an opponents retreat, 'sticking' to them to ensure that their centre, intention and qi are ascertained. Through developing these skills, the Taiji player is then able to *Hua* or

'neutralise' an opponents action or intention. Only when these qualities have been integrated can they fully comprehend the true nature of applying Taiji as a martial art, and only then is the action of *Fa Jing* or 'discharge' or 'attack' learnt or implemented. This last Energy need never be actually applied in full, but serve only to demonstrate the advantaged position.

The underlying intention therefore, when applying Taiji to the martial arts, can be reflected in Sun Tse's advice in the classic, '*The Art of War*',

*"If you know your enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself, but not know your enemy, for every victory gained you will also encounter defeat. If you know neither yourself or your enemy, you will succumb in every battle".*

#### Footnote:

We have reluctantly chosen to use the Pinyin phonetics in this discussion, because this system seems to have become more popular than the more familiar Wade-Giles system. (Alternative Wade-Giles phonetics\, T'ai Chi or T'ai Chi Ch'uan, Chi King, Nei Chia, Kung Fu, Hsing-Yi Ch'uan Pa Kua Ch'uan and Tantien) [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/neijia](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/neijia)

### Some words of wisdom from the masters of old.

Yang Cheng Fu's Ten Principles  
on Tai Chi Chuan

Narrated by Yang Cheng Fu  
Recorded by Chen Wei Ming

#### 1. Straightening The Head

Stand straight and hold the head and neck naturally erect, with the mind concentrating on the top. Do not strain or be tense; otherwise, the blood and vital energy cannot circulate smoothly.

#### 2. Correct Position Of Chest And Back

Keep the chest slightly inward, which will enable you to sink your breath to the dan tian (lower belly). Do not protrude your chest, otherwise you will feel uneasy in breathing and somewhat "top heavy".

Great force can be launched from the spine only when you keep the vital energy in your lower belly.

### 3. Relaxation Of Waist

For the human body, the waist is the dominant part. When you relax the waist, your two feet will be strong enough to form a firm base. All the movements depend on the action of the waist, as the saying goes: "Vital force comes from the waist". Inaccurate movements in taijiquan stem from the erroneous actions of the waist.

### 4. Solid And Empty Stance

It is of primary importance in taijiquan to distinguish between "Xu" (Empty) and "Shi" (Solid). If you shift the weight of the body on to the right leg, then the right leg is solidly planted on the ground and the left leg is in an empty stance. When your weight is on the left leg, then the left leg is firmly planted on the ground and the right leg is in an empty stance. Only in this way can you turn and move your body adroitly and without effort, otherwise you will be slow and clumsy in your movements and not able to remain stable and firm on your feet.

### 5. Sinking Of Shoulders And Elbows

Keep your shoulder in a natural, relaxed position. If you lift your shoulders, the qi will rise with them and the whole body will be without strength. You should also keep the elbows down, otherwise you will not be able to keep your shoulders relaxed and move your body with ease.

### 6. Using The Mind Instead Of Force

Among the people who practise taijiquan, it is quite common to hear this comment: "That is entirely using the mind, not force". In practising taijiquan, the whole body is relaxed, and there is not an iota of stiff or clumsy strength in the veins or joints to hinder the movement of the body. People may ask: How can one increase his strength without exercising force? According to traditional Chinese medicine, there is in the human body a system of pathways called jingluo (or meridian) which link the viscera with different parts of the body, making the human body an integrated whole. If the jingluo is not impeded, then the vital energy will circulate in the body unobstructed. But if the jingluo is filled with stiff strength, the vital energy will not be able to circulate and consequently the body cannot move with ease. One should therefore use the mind instead of force, so that vital energy will follow in the wake of the mind or consciousness and circulate all over the body. Through persistent practice one will be able to have genuine internal force. This is what taijiquan experts call "Lithe in appearance, but powerful in essence".

A master of Taijiquan has arms which are as strong as steel rods wrapped in cotton with immense power concealed therein. Boxers of the "Outer School" (a branch of wushu with emphasis on attack, as opposed to the "Inner School" which places the emphasis on defence) look powerful when they exert force, but when they cease to do so, the power no longer exists. So it is merely a kind of superficial force.

### 7. Coordination Of Upper And Lower Parts

According to the theory of taijiquan, the root is in the feet, the force is launched through the legs, controlled by the waist and expressed by the fingers; the feet, the legs and the waist form a harmonious whole. When the hands, the waist and the legs move, the eyes should follow their movements. This is meant by coordination of the upper and lower parts. If any part should cease to move, then the movements will be disconnected and fall into disarray.

### 8. Harmony Between The Internal And External Parts

In practising taijiquan, the focus is on the mind and consciousness. Hence the saying: "The mind is the commander, the body is subservient to it". With the tranquillity of the mind, the movements will be gentle and graceful. As far as the "frame" is concerned, there are only the Xu (empty), shi (solid), kai (open) and he (close). Kai not only means opening the four limbs but the mind as well, he means closing the mind along with the four limbs. Perfection is achieved when one unifies the two and harmonizes the internal and external parts into a complete whole.

## 9. Importance Of Continuity

In the case of the "Outer School" (which emphasizes attack) of boxing, the strength one exerts is still and the movements are not continuous, but are sometimes made off and on, which leaves opening the opponent may take advantage of. In taijiquan, one focuses the attention on the mind instead of force, and the movements from the beginning to end are continuous and in an endless circle, just "like a river which flows on and on without end" or "like reeling the silk thread off cocoons".

## 10. Tranquillity In Movement

In the case of the "Outer School" of boxing, the emphasis is on leaping, bouncing, punching and the exertion of force, and so one often gasps for breath after practising. But in taijiquan, the movement is blended with tranquillity, and while performing the movements, one maintains tranquillity of mind. In practising the "frame", the slower the movement the better the results. this is because when the movements are slow, one can take deep breath and sink it to the dan tian. It has a soothing effect on the body and the mind.

Learners of taijiquan will get a better understanding of all this through careful study and persistent practice.