


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

# TAI CHI CHUAN & INTERNAL ARTS

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A woman with short brown hair, wearing a purple Tai Chi uniform with blue trim, is shown in profile from the waist up. She is in a Tai Chi stance, with her right hand extended forward and her left hand raised and open. The background is plain white.

The five section  
programme

Tai chi or Zumba?

Lockdown lessons

Working with the  
five elements

Ba Duan Jin

Tai chi in combat

# Join Paul Online and at The Tai Chi Space



New and beginning-level students are welcome this spring; experienced stylists will learn refinements to deepen embodiment of neigong:

13-14 May 2023

## **INTRODUCTION TO QIGONG**

Heal, Strengthen, Root

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## **ENERGY ARTS FOUNDATIONAL QIGONG [INTENSIVE AND INSTRUCTOR TRAINING]**

Option to test for Energy Arts teacher certification

2-4 June 2023

## **ENERGY MECHANICS AND THE LOWER TANTIEN**

Fri evening - Neigong theory and practice (all students)

Sat-Sun - Choose the Tai Chi/Qigong or Bagua group

**Paul Cavel** has taught Taoist energy arts since 1995. He is the author of two books, *The Tai Chi Space: How to Move in Tai Chi and Qi Gong*, and *Heaven and Earth Qigong: Heal Your Body and Awaken Your Qi*. He has been a senior student of Tai Chi and Bagua Lineage Holder Bruce Frantzis since 2004.

Paul offers online courses, as well as instructor certification, qigong, tai chi and bagua courses at The Tai Chi Space in Finsbury Park.

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# Comment



Things continue to move forward with the union. This month we have a new website, well probably more an updated website but it looks good. For all of us the good news is that the search for instructors' facility is being upgraded as well so it should be easier for all those potential students to find us.

Also we have a new fund – the Gerda Gedes fund which, members can apply for to fund socially beneficial projects

On page 18 we publish the results of a survey. We asked members four questions to tell us about their experience of lockdown. The response was massive, far too big for us to use all of your comments but a number of themes emerged which I have tried to reflect in the report. Overall, the one that I personally, most empathised with, was that now it is all over, class sizes have shrunk and how hard it is to recruit new students.

Since I started teaching, most Christmas breaks brought phone calls from people wanting to start tai chi in the new year. Come January we would have a flush of new students. Not all of them stayed, inevitably, but there were usually a couple who stayed. I think the most memorable year was when we had over 20 turn up. They came in groups. People who had called me brought friends, I could barely cope. The following week ten of them turned up though I can't remember how many actually joined the class. As the saying goes: 'It takes 1,000 to start for one to finish'. I sometimes wonder if that isn't too generous a ratio.

The point is that in 2019 the enquiries didn't come. Everyone was being terrified by reports of a new virus. Potentially a killer which no one, the medics, the scientists and certainly not the government knew what to do about. At the end of 2020 we were all but locked down, Christmas was cancelled and by 2021 there was a new variant and although there was no official reaction people were cancelling by their own volition. A Christmas lunch, which I attend every year, was held for the first time since 2019. Usually over 100 people, but there were many empty seats. In fact so many people had paid and not turned up that we were offered another starter. Smoked salmon, my favourite!

And in new year 2022 just the hard core students.

But this year, we keep telling ourselves, everything is back to normal though no enquiries in December and no new students in January. The class a shadow of its former self. But things do seem to be changing, slowly. A few enquiries over the last couple of months has resulted in four new students. They all seem keen – when didn't new students seem keen? We shall see but at least there is life after lockdown and next month I am attending a seminar, my first since before lockdown, and planning a trip to Tai Chi Caledonia.

It still feels a bit fragile but normality seems within grasp.

*John Roper*

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## TAI CHI CHUAN & INTERNAL ARTS

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**A**t the members' update meeting in November last year, the board announced a number of initiatives to make the TCUGB more relevant to the members and the public.

These included:

**A simplified joining process** maintaining the high standards required from applicants applying to become instructors

**The reintroduction of the printed magazine**

**A revamped website** to make it easier for members and the public to understand the benefits and find a local teacher

**The simplification of grants** to help support members and the community interest aims of the TCUGB.

The board was delighted at the resulting positive feedback from members.

Because of the current economic climate many people are suffering financial and physical hardship. This can lead to problems of isolation, anxiety, poor physical and mental health and social exclusion.

We are hoping that our members can rise to the challenge and find innovative ways of teaching and helping disadvantaged individuals or groups who may be struggling and cannot afford to attend classes.

### How tai chi has helped others

To give a couple of examples of how tai chi and qigong can change lives for the better:

In the mid 1970s the Hong Kong government took the brave decision to introduce tai chi classes in the large housing estates with a view to improving residents physical health and wellbeing. An unforeseen benefit was that those attending the classes forged relationships with others, became friends, and had their social lives enriched as a result.

In this country, Tony Ulatowski, a former director of the TCUGB, introduced tai chi to schools in deprived areas of London arranging tai chi classes as part of the school curriculum with competitions between schools as well as entering students in other competitions. Such activities gave young people a sense of self-worth, of being part of a team and having a wider responsibility within a community.

TCUGB supported Tony by funding the children's transport costs and entry fees to the competitions. The school teachers gave their time and support for free often driving the teams to events.

### Gerda Geddes

When considering what to call the new grant it wasn't

hard to come up with the name The Gerda Geddes Fund as her life embodied many of the qualities and beliefs, we in the TCUGB embrace, and are wishing to promote with this fund.

Gerda was a migrant, moving between Norway the Far East and Britain, where she finally settled in Scotland. She opposed fascism by working with resistance groups during the Second World War, and used movement as a therapy working with Holocaust survivors. She was probably the first person to teach tai chi in the UK.

In an interview with our late editor, Ronnie Robinson, she recalled an incident when representatives of a certain group first visited the UK.

"I found the two men who came to be very, very arrogant. They didn't want to talk with anyone who had experience in tai chi and were very single-minded in their approach to the art, presenting everything as being very precise and very 'cut and dried'. I told them that my experience working with the Chinese never reflected this single-minded precision and that one person did something one way whilst another took a very different approach."

Something for us all to keep in mind when judging others.

### Applying for the grant

A total amount of £4,500 has been budgeted in 2023 for The Gerda Geddes Fund with a maximum amount of £500 per project.

Each application will be considered on its merits and there will be no set criteria so allowing applicants to be imaginative. Preference will be given to projects that reflect the objectives of the TCUGB and the benefits the project can bring to the public particularly the disadvantaged or isolated members of our society. 🌍

You can read about Gerda Geddes At:

[www.gerdageddes.com](http://www.gerdageddes.com)

Details of the scheme and an application form can be found on the TCUGB website: [www.taichiunion.com](http://www.taichiunion.com)

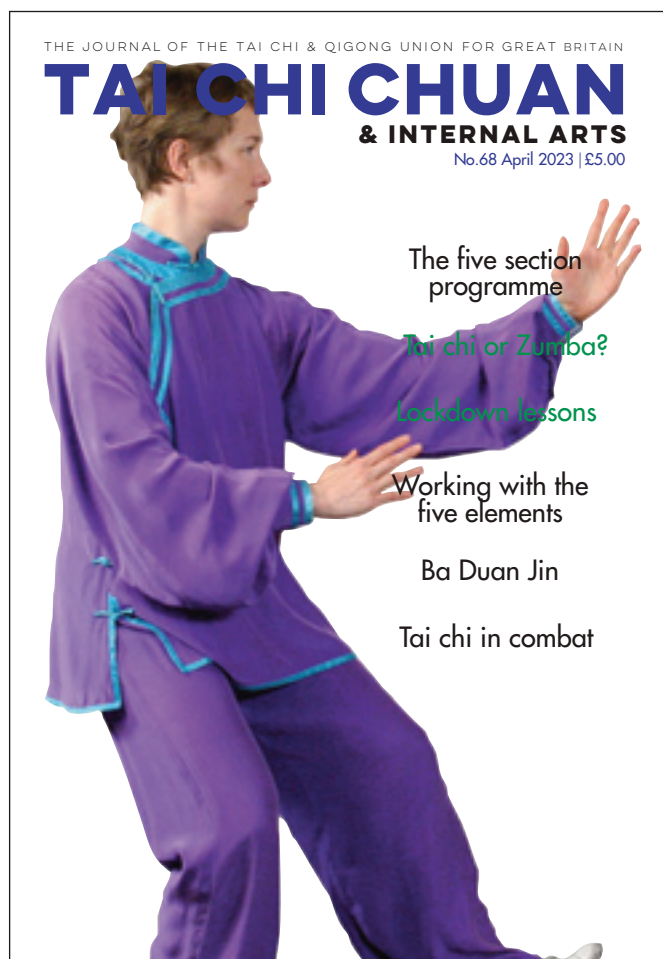
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# Advertise in TAI CHI CHUAN & INTERNAL ARTS

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

Well, three times each year 1,000 members of TCU receive a copy of TCC&IA and every month around 1,000 people log onto the TCC&IA website to read the magazine online  
So it looks like we are getting something right

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# Five sections to learning

## Sam Masich

Is Sam Masich's five section programme a comprehensive beginner's programme or preparation for traditional training? Forms and practices from the five section tai chi chuan programme have been adopted by tai chi chuan schools throughout Europe, the Americas, and even in Asia. This modular programme has been designed to meet the needs of contemporary recreational tai chi chuan groups and to prepare committed students for traditional full-curriculum tai chi chuan training.

## ◀ 7

Wuduan taijiquan, as it is called in Chinese, has been designed to be flexible and fun, following the premise that students who enjoy the learning process will stay around to take on more difficult challenges.

In the early days of the spread of tai chi chuan in the West, an issue emerged that affected many teachers. Traditional tai chi chuan forms were very long – usually around one-hundred movements or so – making it difficult for newcomers to commit to practise and training. The problem had been identified long before in Asia and approaches had already emerged to deal with the matter. The Cheng Man-ch'ing (Zheng Manqing) thirty-seven movement routine as well as the Beijing-government twenty-four movement 'simplified tai chi chuan' form created in 1956, represented two of the first attempts to actually design a curriculum to accommodate the specific needs of a particular populace in a given era. In both cases, a short form edited down from traditional Yang-style tai chi chuan was used along with other traditionally taught material that included sword forms and push-hands.

Not everyone tried to solve the short-form problem with the 'Zheng's 37' or the 'Beijing 24' however. Many

instructors with a background in traditional tai chi chuan styles would offer up, as a basic introduction to tai chi, the first 'section' of their long form – from 'raise hands' to the first 'cross hands.' Others would simply make up their own short form by pasting together a few sequences such as 'grasp bird's tail' left-side followed by the right-side variation.

While this served the interests of those eager for a 'taste of

tai chi', it made it difficult for students who wanted to take on tai chi chuan as a larger traditional study, as it remained unclear as to how one could progress from beginner to intermediate to advanced stages of the art. It is from this set of problems that the five section tai chi chuan programme was born.

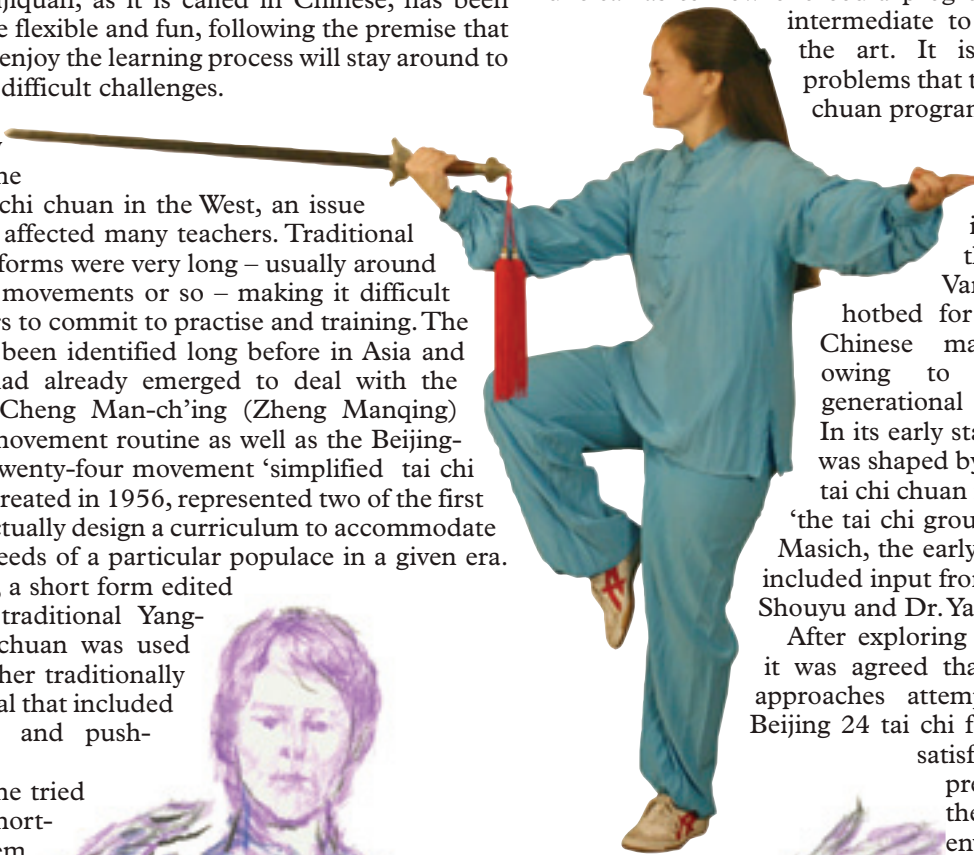
The five section tai chi chuan programme began its development in the late 1980s in Vancouver, Canada, a hotbed for tai chi chuan and Chinese martial-arts generally owing to its large multi-generational Chinese community. In its early stages, the programme was shaped by a small collective of tai chi chuan instructors known as 'the tai chi group'. Directed by Sam Masich, the early efforts of the group included input from both master Liang Shouyu and Dr. Yang Jwing Ming.

After exploring various possibilities, it was agreed that, of all short-form approaches attempted thus far, the Beijing 24 tai chi form came closest to satisfying the basic prerequisites of what the group had envisioned. Aside from its previously mentioned attributes, 'the 24' had the added advantages of being practised worldwide, connecting to the other People's Republic of China standardised forms and having much educational material already published and available. These seemed to be very good conditions for creating a large, cooperative, and good willed community of individuals.

A problem with the 24 was that not all of the movements are really simplified; for example, several of the transitions between forms, the complex angles and difficulty level of the kicks, and the two forward-stepping 'push down and stand on one leg' movements (better known as 'snake creeps down' and 'golden rooster stands on one leg') are probably better described as intermediate-level skills. It was decided to further edit the Beijing form, removing more difficult movements that tend to frustrate beginners, while still retaining the five-section structure and accessible and standardised feel.

This led to the development of the 'five section tai chi chuan solo barehand form (Yang-style)' which can be described as an edited version of simplified 24 tai chi form. The rest of the programme developed over time with important input from both masters Liang and Yang as well as Eston Hospedales, Chantal Fafard, Trude Smoor, and others.

Since tai chi chuan training includes much more than solo-barehand routines, development continued with barehand-partner, solo-sword, and partner-sword versions of the five-section choreography as well as a Chen-style variation. These four other routines were





developed as a representation of the overall art so that a beginner could experience a wide range of tai chi chuan practices. Importantly as well, the five section tai chi chuan programme could also function as a preparation for full curriculum training in any traditional style.

The ‘five section tai chi chuan partner barehand form’ reflects various traditional push-hands and sparring practices. The ‘five section tai chi chuan solo sword form’ and the ‘five section tai chi chuan partner sword form’ represent and prepare for traditional taiji sword and sabre studies. The fifth of the five-section routines is the five section tai chi chuan solo barehand form (Chen-style) which provides an experience of the older tai chi chuan



style while preparing students for the dramatic differences that can be experienced between styles.

There is no single set order for working through the five section tai chi chuan programme although some paths of study work better than others. This means that an instructor can work with a student or group of students in how the programme is implemented. Encouraged to take an active part in devising their own path of learning, practitioners can make personally-relevant training choices, still respecting and benefiting from the values of a traditional art.

Beyond the five routines – the ‘five-fives’, as it were – are practices having to do with partner-connection and with core-principles. These practices are meant to be interwoven with the learning of the five routines.

The five section tai chi chuan programme consists of material organised in three layers:

1. **Outer Layer (Form)**
2. **Inner Layer (Connection)**
3. **Deep Layer (Core-principles)**

It is advantageous to work concurrently with material from each of the three layers.

For example, core-principles material can be used to illustrate details



● Five section tai chi chuan ‘sensing-hands’

multi-functional partner work that supports solo and partner barehand form studies.

● Five section tai chi chuan ‘sensing-sword’ multi-functional partner work that supports solo and partner sword form studies.

### 3. Deep Layer (Core-principles)

The third layer trains core-principles underlying every aspect of five section tai chi chuan. These are explored through the ‘five words brocade’ (wuci tairan wuduanjin), a five

within the forms. Partner ‘sensing’ practices can deepen practice of partner forms. The long-term study of five section tai chi chuan allows students to understand the curriculum in terms of the outer, inner, and deep layers.

Following is a list of the full curriculum of Wuduan tai chi chuan programme accompanied by an ‘overview diagram’ that provides an at-a-glance view of the programme. The diagram depicts the programme’s three-layered structure and sketches out the connection between the various forms and practices. By illustrating the relationships of the component parts, the graphic can be used as an aid in devising optimal paths through the curriculum for individuals and groups in different circumstances.

### 1. Outer Layer (Form)

The ‘five section’ forms, each derived from the five section Yang-style solo barehand form, comprise the outer layer. They are:

- Five section tai chi chuan solo barehand form—Yang-style (Wuduan Yang-shi tai chi chuan; 20 forms, beginner)
- Five section tai chi chuan partner barehand form (Wuduan tai chi chuan sanshou; 50 forms, intermediate)
- Five section tai chi chuan solo sword form (Wuduan tai chi chuan; 27 forms, beginner/intermediate)
- Five section tai chi chuan partner sword form (Wuduan tai chi chuan duilianjian; 64 forms, intermediate/advanced)
- five section tai chi chuan solo barehand form—Chen-style (Wuduan Chen-shi tai chi chuan; 23 forms, intermediate)

### 2. Inner Layer (Connection)

The middle layer deals with connected interaction and is explored by two practices:


# TAI CHI



part neigong practice which includes:

- Five words of self-composure (wuci tairan)
- Five section tai chi chuan core-principles (Wuduan hexin dinglu)

## A modular programme

The five section tai chi chuan programme is 'modular' in its design, meaning it is possible to present the individual curriculum components in different sequences depending on the needs and aims of individual participants or a particular group. It is possible to move through the material in many ways following different lines of reasoning. It is possible to integrate core-principles at any stage or to weave lessons from jue-shou into the solo-form training. One could even create a 'formless' curriculum working with core-principles, the five words of self-composure, jue-shou and jue-jian. 



Five section tai chi chuan programme full curriculum instructor's intensives have taken place in Canada and in Spain in 2007, 2009, 2010, and 2015.

The first ever five section tai chi chuan international festival and masterclass will take place in Winchester, U.K from July 1-7, 2023. A seven-day, all-inclusive event, where one can meet, eat, and train together with tai chi chuan enthusiasts and experts from around the world. The event will run from Saturday, July 1 to Friday, July 7, 2023 and consists of two main components: July 1-2: the weekend festival where you can explore all things five section. July 3-7: the five-day five section tai chi chuan masterclass with master Sam Masich. The event is open to tai chi chuan players of all backgrounds



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## TAI CHI HEALTH

Maybe you saw some of the research comparing tai chi and zumba on BBC 2's *Trust me I'm a Doctor*? It all started in October 2015 when I first spoke to Nor Fadila Kasim, a doctoral researcher at Birmingham University. We discussed the idea of a research project comparing tai chi to a more obvious aerobic exercise and decided on Zumba Gold. We felt that this would fit the target group of the study: 60 to 75 years old writes Mark Peters

# Taking on the gold



Key study group help to determine and compare the differences between tai chi and Zumba Gold

Nor and Dr Sarah Aldred visited one of my *Painting the Rainbow* classes later that year to try tai chi and qigong for themselves, and I helped them apply for funding support from the TCUGB in early 2016.

The project started later that year and Nigel Ryan ran the sessions. The classes finished in December 2016 at which point the University of Birmingham School of Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation Sciences started their analysis of the research.

Word must have spread because in April 2018 the BBC contacted Nor and wanted to feature the work on BBC Science. Coincidentally, the BBC had also contacted me to discuss tai chi and pain management due to some recent research into tai chi and fibromyalgia. The universe seemed to conspire against me as when the BBC decided to film I was again going to be out of the country. The presenter turned out to be Dr Michael Moseley of *Trust me I'm a Doctor* fame. The show aired on BBC 2 on Wednesday 10th October. (I believe it may still be available on iPlayer.)

It is amazing how long things take. The full research *Tai Chi is an effective form of exercise to reduce markers of frailty in older age* was finally published in March 2020. Please contact me if you would like a copy. It includes details of all of the tests carried out, including functional fitness, flow mediated dilation, blood pressure, blood tests, psychological well-being and more.



Mark Peters

### An abstract

Frailty affects the quality of life of older age adults by limiting mobility, reducing physiological reserve and



**Prepare to dance! Tai chi vs zumba. Tai chi commences in an experimental class**

reducing independence. The frailty phenotype is typically characterised by exhaustion, loss or lack of physical activity, weight loss and weakness, although more recently there have been proposals to extend the frailty criteria to include physiological characteristics such as inflammation, oxidative stress and vascular function.

Exercise has the potential to prevent, delay or even reverse frailty, but not all exercise is perceived as suitable for an older population. The purpose of this study was to test tai chi and Zumba Gold as exercise interventions in older adults (65 to 75 years old) to improve characteristics related to the frailty phenotype. Muscle strength and flexibility (functional fitness as a measure of weakness), cardiorespiratory fitness, blood pressure, vascular function (FMD), markers of oxidative stress (total antioxidant capacity, malondialdehyde, 8-isoprostane, protein carbonyl), inflammation (CRP) and aspects of wellbeing related to exhaustion were assessed at baseline (pre-), six weeks (mid-) and 12 weeks (post-intervention). Both tai chi and Zumba Gold, improved, to a similar extent, systolic blood pressure, vascular function, and functional fitness, following the 12 week intervention. Furthermore, antioxidant capacity and lipid oxidation was significantly increased after 12 weeks of tai chi compared to baseline. Anxiety, physical and mental fatigue decreased in both groups, with a greater decrease in mental fatigue in the tai chi group.

[More details of the research and surprise findings](#)

### Tai chi group

Participants randomised to the tai chi group were guided by a certified instructor registered under the Tai Chi & Qigong Union of Great Britain (TCUGB). Sessions consisted of a 10 minute warm up, 40 min of shibashi qigong set of 18 movements, Cheng Man Ching style tai chi form, and ten minutes of cool down. During the

session, participants were constantly reminded to have natural and relaxed breathing, and to aim to synchronise the breathing with their movements.

### Zumba Gold group

Zumba Gold training was given by a certified instructor. Sessions consisted of ten minutes of warm up which included stretching and whole body movements, followed by 40 minutes of Zumba Gold routines. The routines were performed using slow to fast music from the selected rhythms of merengue, salsa, cumbia, flamenco and bachata. All movements involved elements of a cardiovascular workout, balancing, and dynamic stretching. The session was closed with cooling down and stretching session for ten minutes.

### Why tai chi?

The slow movements within tai chi, combined with deep diaphragmatic breathing, are believed to be beneficial to both physical, and mental health. A meta-analysis revealed that tai chi can improve fatigue in clinical populations to a similar extent to more intense exercise such as fast walking (*Xiang et al., 2017*). Musculoskeletal strength improves by increasing the neuromuscular response in the lower extremities during the slow movements (*Hass et al., 2004; Wu et al., 2004*), and specifically for older adults there are reports of a reduced risk for falling and improvements of functional fitness (*Rogers et al., 2009*). Benefits for cardiovascular health have also been reported, most consistently for blood pressure in both people with cardiovascular disease (*Wang et al., 2016*) and apparently healthy older adults (*Rogers et al., 2009*). However, less is known about the benefits of tai chi on vascular function, which is a risk indicator for cardiovascular events.

There is preliminary evidence that tai chi can improve vascular function (*Wang et al., 2002; Shin et al., 2015*), but other studies reported no such benefit (*Suksom et al., 2011*). There is also preliminary evidence that tai chi can



**Dr Michael Mosely (right) with (left) TCUGB instructor Nigel Ryan and the tai chi research group**

be effective in perturbing redox status and reducing inflammation (*Palasuwan et al., 2011; Huang et al., 2014; Mendoza-Nunez et al., 2018*).

Rosado-Perez et al. (2012) reported that daily tai chi training for six months significantly increased total antioxidant status (TAS), and the antioxidant enzymes superoxide dismutase (SOD) and glutathione peroxidase (GPx) in healthy older adults. Lipid peroxidation was decreased (as measured by malondialdehyde -MDA) post exercise training, compared to the no-exercise control group.

Similar results using a shorter eight week intervention also resulted in increased TAS and GPx concentration in both pre and post-menopausal women (*Palasuwan et al., 2011*). In studies to date, the comparison data either comes from baseline (*Palasuwan et al., 2011*), walking exercise (*Rosado-Perez et al., 2013*), or no exercise control (*Rosado-Perez et al., 2012*). However, many studies have proved that exercise is effective in improving frailty (*Chin et al., 2008*), and thus the more pertinent question relates to the value of tai chi compared to other forms of aerobic exercise. Hence in this study we chose to compare tai chi to a form of aerobic dance.

So why were Shibashi and Cheng Man Ching style tai chi chosen? Shibashi is now the most widely practised qigong set in the world which is amazing when you realise the Prof. Lin Housheng first developed it in 1979, when he combined elements of tai chi and qigong. In the same year, Prof. Lin successfully demonstrated his qigong skills at China's State Council (Beijing) to three deputy prime ministers and over 300 scientists.

I first learnt this qigong in 1991 when training with master Wu Chiang Hsing in Batu Pahat, Malaysia. It has become so popular that many people are now teaching shibashi sets, often without any formal training by a recognised teacher. The quality control and validity has gone out of the window. With this in mind, I asked to be re-assessed by professor Lin Housheng, the creator, and am pleased to say that I am now one of only four people in the UK qualified by him to teach sets one and two.

Over the years, I have witnessed the health improvements shown by students living with chronic conditions such as COPD, heart disease and chronic pain.

It is also effective for falls prevention. The seeming ease and gentle repetitive nature of the movements means they can be practised by young and old alike to increase energetic vitality, rejuvenate the body, mind and soul, and gain more physical agility and flexibility.

The Cheng Man Ching style of tai chi is based on yang style (Yang Cheng Fu), with the postures being smaller and more upright. The gentle nature of the style, with its main focus on 'sung' (relaxation), makes it ideal for the frail older group that were the focus of this study. I have been practising for approximately 30 years and have been teaching this form to patients with chronic medical conditions for over 15 years. I have used this combination of tai chi form and qigong in a number of studies over this time, including one for cardiac rehabilitation, the findings of which gained funding to produce the only tai chi DVD currently available on the NHS.

## Highlights from TV

During filming Dr Michael Moseley was fitted with a pulse monitor to check his heart rate, had ultra-sound scans of blood vessels to measure flexibility and elasticity, and blood tests to measure anti-oxidant production which is a healthy response to exercise. Dr Moseley was surprised that the seemingly gentle tai chi and qigong session felt like quite a workout. His heartrate doubled which is the same effect as a bout of aerobic exercise. Tai chi was shown to have a positive impact on heart rate, blood pressure, oxygenation, production of antioxidants, elasticity of blood vessels etc.

## Study outcomes

This study presents data to show that 12 weeks of tai chi improved markers of physiological and psychological health, which make up the frailty phenotype in older age adults. Tai chi is capable of stimulating similar improvements in vascular function, physical function and quality of life as an aerobic mode of exercise such as Zumba Gold, especially in strengthening leg muscles and body endurance, and thus it has the capability to reduce frailty. The authors of the study thanked the Tai Chi Union for Great Britain for their support in this study. 🇬🇧



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The team who provides the magazine and run the company are volunteers with just one paid member of staff!

This means we are completely focused on what is best for our members.

If you have ideas about how we can support you more then please get in contact

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# 5 Section Taijiquan

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### About 5 Section Taijiquan

The 5 Section Taijiquan Program has been adopted by taijiquan schools around the world. Designed to be flexible and fun, this modular program meets the needs of today's taiji groups and prepares more committed students for traditional taijiquan training.

Solo Yang-style & Chen-style taiji, partner forms and sensing-hands practice, solo & partner taiji sword partner practice, taiji core-principles and more!

A seven-day, all-inclusive event, where you can meet, eat, and train together with taijiquan enthusiasts and experts from around the world! The event will run from Saturday, **July 1 to Friday, July 7** and consists of two main components.

- July 1-2: an incredible **weekend festival** where you can explore all things 5 Section with top teachers running mini-workshops as well as a special Saturday-evening session with Sam Masich.
- July 3-7: **five-day 5 Section Taijiquan Masterclass** with Sam Masich where each day we will focus on some of the more challenging aspects of taiji using the 5 Section Program as a departure point.

*Participants not required to know the 5 Section Taijiquan curriculum.*

**Contact:** Patrick Foley [patrick@5-section-taijiquan.co.uk](mailto:patrick@5-section-taijiquan.co.uk)

**Location:** Sparsholt College, Winchester, Hampshire SO21 2NF, U.K.

**Website & Registration:** [www.5-section-taijiquan.com/](http://www.5-section-taijiquan.com/)



**Sparsholt College** is located just outside the ancient cathedral city of Winchester, U.K., in the middle of a picturesque rural landscape. It is easily accessible from several main airports. The college provides high-quality *ensuite student-style accommodation* and *excellent on-site catering*, and is the perfect residential venue with wonderful views and fantastic flexible spaces.



# Return to Samye Ling

What a pleasure to be back at Samye Ling (even on a freezing weekend in December), after the long recess and to practise with an enthusiastic group guided by Bob Lowey who was full of his usual pearls of wisdom and boundless good humour. Sally Eccleshall reports



Understandably, there were still ongoing safeguarding measures in place to protect both residents and visitors. They included being served in the dining room by monks and nuns and not being allowed to volunteer for washing up duties.

Our practice took place in the workshop which was toasty and warm and lit by most welcome sunshine on Saturday morning. Bob took us through our paces as we started to learn shujin zhuang gong, or the muscle and bone form of daoyin yangsheng gong developed by the late Professor Zhang Guande.



As usual there was an eclectic mix of people from novice to 'old timers' but it wasn't long before we formed a cohesive group learning, laughing and enjoying. We all opted to continue the study well into Saturday evening when, after completing the work for the day Bob led us through the most amazing body massage and relaxation. This resulted in a profoundly deep sleep for all that night.

Although I have been practising this form for many years it never ceases to amaze me that there is always more to learn and refine in both theory and movement. As there



were a good number of experienced teachers attending we were able to share our knowledge in small groups on Sunday morning, an excellent way to share our enthusiasm and deepen our practice.

We closed the session with the completed shujin zhuang gong to music, the whole group moving in unison and harmony.

At the close of the weekend, Ian from Ayr summarised it thus: "Informative, entertaining and professional tuition by Bob at his best."

As we said our goodbyes I realised that I had once again been re-motivated and energised by both being at Samye Ling and benefiting from Bob's tuition.

These words by Jayna, a 'qigong newbie' perfectly sum up the whole experience:

- 'Perfect pacing
- Wonderful teaching
- And a gift to take home'

And finally a huge thank you to Samye Ling for opening their doors to us once again. 🙏

Sally Eccleshall is based in North Yorkshire and has been a tai chi and qigong student for, she says: "too many years to count". She has been a teacher for 20 years



# Journey to well being

**WOW... I can hardly believe I have been practising qigong for the last ten years. That has to be, to date one of the biggest commitments I have ever made to looking after my health and well-being writes Marge Morgan**

Where did it all start? I began classes with Christopher Handbury in 2012, but it wasn't until 2018 that I really felt a personal connection to my practice. Christopher had just published a book *What is Qigong?*\* and he had included some student stories, mine being one of them as a sufferer of MS. It quickly became one of the best books I have ever read, a book I always have with me now. When I read back over my initial story, I feel a huge sense of warmth come over me, looking at me now, and what I have achieved. I know how I struggled. At the start of my qigong journey, it was different, something totally new to me. Looking back, I see how far I have come.

Since writing the first part of my journey, I have met with other difficult challenges. Qigong was instrumental in supporting and guiding me through difficult times. In February 2018 I was diagnosed with stage three breast cancer. Being told this is the most frightening and devastating thing you can ever imagine. It was life-changing to me, being thrown into the unknown and a life of chaos. Attending many scary appointments, surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and then all the horrid side effects that came along. It was unimaginable, impossible to explain.

This story in itself is huge but for another day. However, what I will say is how qigong helped me get through this. After the initial shock I made the decision; I was going to be positive, I was going to beat this, and qigong played a part in achieving my goal. I count myself lucky that I was already practising qigong regularly, so my knowledge, commitment, understanding and qi were already there. I felt prepared for what life was throwing at me. I just needed to adapt my practice to fit what I was going through.

The initial first year of my battle with cancer was the most challenging. It can take years to completely recover, but the first one was the hardest. I used qigong in many different ways to recover. When I was physically exhausted or incapable of moving around much, qigong was there for me. I used breathing techniques and small gentle stretches. I would close my eyes and visualise doing qigong, being at one with my breath and going through the qigong routine. Most of my practice was spent sitting on the sofa. This was the best way for me at the time, it gave me a sense of doing something and was such a boost for me. I believe that because of my continued work with my inner energy, my qigong supported my healing. I recall one time after surgery when the nurse, who was checking my wound, said: 'Oh my god!' Her reaction filled me with fear, I didn't know what was happening. She went on to say:



**Marge Morgan**

'I can't believe how well you have healed in just a week.' I told her: "That's qigong."

My daily practice was with me through my cancer and throughout my road to recovery. It helped me find strength and regain my confidence. It helped me to smile and live again. Just recently, in early 2022, I was sent by my neurologist for an MRI of my brain and spine to check on my MS; this was to check for any differences since my last MRI in 2016. At my follow-up appointment, the news was good. My neurologist said there had been no changes since 2016. He said to me: "Whatever you are doing is working, so keep doing it."

I replied: "That's qigong, that is what keeps me well and why I will always have qigong in my life."

Where am I now? Ten years on? I am always learning. At times, I go back and re-read my books. I always seem to find something new, a different meaning or feeling, a way forward. I love this as it helps me with my continued qigong learning. Qigong gave me a better idea of what normal and healthy is: if I feel out of sorts, I have the information to figure out why, and how I can use specific movements to benefit the organ system and balance the elements, to help me. With qigong, I find I can connect to myself more easily and be more in touch with everything going on inside, and outside of my body. I feel I am more grounded, and more energised, I smile more, feel happier, and generally feel good about myself.

I thank Christopher Handbury for teaching me, and for sharing his wisdom and guidance. Without him, I would not be here today. I have found myself, I have a better understanding of my body, my spirituality, and my inner being. I have peace. 🙏

\**What is Qigong?* Christopher David Handbury  
Amazon £12.99

It was a strange time. In some ways the lockdown crept up on us, there was talk of 'herd immunity'; letting the pandemic take its course. Then, suddenly, we were told to stay home. And if we disobeyed there were stiff penalties. The week before London was pretty empty. No masks yet, they came later.

I was meeting a business associate when the call came. We were in an empty wine bar, my phone rang: "Hi John, Julie from the parish council, we are closing our halls." That was my tai chi class, the next day, stopped in its tracks, writes John Roper

# How was it for you?

Fortunately my students were all understanding and supportive. It led me to wonder how other teachers had managed. There was a perception that everyone was suddenly teaching online but did everyone have the technology? And what about the students, no one asked if they were tech savvy. We all take Zoom for granted now but before lockdown, I admit, I hadn't even heard of it.

So TC&IA decided to ask union members how they coped and how their students reacted. The response was overwhelming and in some ways surprising. And because of the number of replies I will apologise now, if you sent a response but we haven't had room to use it. What I have tried to do is to give you an overall idea of how things were and how they are now.

We asked members to answer a number of questions about what they did, how their students reacted and where they are now.

## What did you do when the first lockdown was imposed?

**This question initially showed how difficult it was to keep going. Teachers had mixed success with some stopping teaching and others just losing contact with students. Although while some students – and teachers – were nervous, others just wanted to keep going.**

**How our students reacted, and bear in mind many of them had their own worries and perhaps fears, about the pandemic, was likely to dictate where we were going to be.**

**Here are some of the responses:**

"We informed our students that classes would close until further notice."

"Everyone was understanding and in fact classes had got quieter the couple of weeks leading up to lockdown."

"I sent students regular e-newsletters."

"I ended classes. I started a regular communication – I wrote several papers on aspects of CMC tai chi, circulated it to students and asked them for their thoughts which I gathered and circulated."

"Many students were alarmed and fearful of closure of classes."

"Lost contact with students."

"I largely stopped because all the halls got cold feet about being used at all. Moved to teaching outside on a bit of spare ground by the river Torridge...tried Zoom and it was sort of helpful for the social contact side of things but a dead loss when it came to being able to see what the students were actually doing..so no good for actually teaching."

"I encouraged students to practise at home and keep in

touch, sent a monthly email to everyone with news updates, and links to anything I may have seen on the internet that was relevant to our class."

*"Classes were cancelled without notice and without any possibility of face-to-face communication. We did communicate by email. I did a video of our class warm up exercises and posted this at the beginning but did not maintain this."*

"I first closed my classes in March 2020 and went straight online within a week. Some students found it tough and dropped out but a hardcore of 4/5 stayed with me."

*"It was a difficult and stressful time for everyone but especially for people who were self-employed. My initial experience in Scotland was no state or local government help or support. There was no time to prepare and when the lockdown hit I lost contact with my students."*

"I was a student of tai chi.No one stayed in touch with me." [What? come on guys! ed.]

*"I was working at an elderly day centre and they closed all classes a week or two before the lock down."*

"No, lost touch with most students."

"I spent the first year of lockdown living with family and just taught one indoor student (my mother-in-law!)."

## Did you move to online teaching?

**Another mixed response with some teachers getting straight into online classes while others struggled. The same seems to apply to students.**

"By October I had arranged a booking system to do live classes and started having students book in from there."

*"I began live classes online via Zoom but these quickly lost numbers and I found that it was not particularly worthwhile trying to do a live class."*

"I ran two online Zoom classes a week but these had to cover for half a dozen or more live classes."

*"Thankfully we already had good email contact with everyone and quickly set up a WhatsApp group and moved classes online via Zoom."*

"I supplied my students with a Guide to getting on Zoom and a Guide to working safely on Zoom (which I still use). I changed my way of teaching to suit this type of technology."

*"I bought a camera, eventually a 2nd monitor. It worked*



John Roper



**One solution to lockdown was online video lessons. We broke down our form into individual moves showing lots of detail. We sent these out by email every week. Our students still use them and new students find them a useful resource for learning at home.**

*immediately I contacted everyone who had previously come to classes and we learnt the new technology."*

*"Yes, but many students didn't like online."*

*"I usually had around 25 in the class although the numbers varied between a record 52 in the height of lockdown down to around 15."*

*"Facebook was ideal – hardly any of our students have laptops*

*but almost everyone had a smart phone and is on Facebook: we found their younger relatives were happy to set up "mirroring" for them to enable them to watch the live stream on TV."*

*"Very difficult for everyone due to space restrictions, camera angles etc."*

*"I was able to "broadcast" from outdoors, with good view for students."*

*"I was able to charge for classes."*

*"No – I found it did not enable me to teach what and how I wanted and was difficult for my students to follow."*

*"Yes very quickly, within days. We experimented with platforms and subscriptions, investing some of the grants into lighting, sound and camera equipment. Where we had total control it was very successful and we are continuing online supporting people who cannot access classes for various reasons. For some clients the free access and the Joe Wicks effect devalued their membership and here student numbers still remain at 40% of pre pandemic levels. Some people eventually gave up exercising and many are now 'shut ins' and do not leave home."*

*"Yes. Bought a new iPad as a camera for Zoom. Also BT discs throughout for WI-FI connection. I also bought Apple AirPods for sound during Zoom."*

**When the first lockdown eased did you start face-to-face teaching straight away?**

**This seems to be a 'bite your arm off' moment for many. Students and teachers were keen to get back to working together though there was still nervousness and, for some, numbers were down.**

*"Yes. Student numbers held up well. I run not for profit classes so outside classes were free and when we moved back inside the numbers were ok for the hall costs."*

*"Yes, initially outdoors. A few students were not able to return, but most were keen to return."*

*"We started some classes almost straight away with limitations of numbers, social distancing."*

*"Yes. With reduced numbers and following hygiene requirements."*

*"As soon as we could we were out in the parks. Classes ran at about 50% of previous capacity."*

*"I started taking cards as well as cash payments as some people were freaky about handling cash."*



*"We eventually started back in a couple of halls. They all had air purifiers provided for them from the local councils."*

*"I had open air groups by the sea most days. At no charge."*

*"Taught individuals at weekends free of charge in a local park. Teaching staff forms helped to maintain a safe distance and avoid physical contact."*

*"When two meter distancing was permitted we recommenced out of doors, under a glazed awning."*

**With all restrictions removed are you back to face-to-face classes? Do you still run classes online?**

**Finally we were back. And in the answers to this question, while many teachers are still, at least partly, online I don't detect an overall enthusiasm. Especially from students. One thing that did come up is the size of classes being smaller.**

*"I much prefer face-to-face teaching as physical corrections and in person demonstration is so important to pass on tai chi properly. Maintaining loyal group of students is a key."*

*"Online teaching can't replace face-to-face teaching. Students learn more quickly and can be corrected more easily face-to-face."*

*"Online is a great addition to other classes and recording them provides a resource that can be sold."*

*"I continue to teach face to face and numbers are coming back."*

*"People expect online classes to be cheaper which makes it difficult to earn a reasonable income."*

*"I began to teach face-to-face, no online classes."*

*"A couple of students requested to continue with online but I have largely given this up as it was not something I enjoyed."*

*"Once everyone was happy to be indoors we trained inside and have continued so far to get back to normality."*

*"I am only doing face-to-face classes. The only difference is that some of my students are reluctant to get involved in push hands and physical contact generally though this is improving."*

I have tried to give a flavour of people's thinking through what was a weird time. I think it reflects the dedication and ingenuity of our members. Some of us teach because we like doing it, for others it is a business. Whatever the reason we did what we could to keep on teaching our arts.

One thing I noticed was the many times teachers mentioned their age. Us oldies are well represented at the teaching end of things. But one I must mention is the teacher who said their classes were now smaller, but they didn't mind as they will be 90 next year. 🇨🇰



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**Module 3:** September 4th & 5th **Module 4:** November 6th & 7th

Course location: Birmingham. Minimum prior experience is specified for each course

**To book or find out more information on possible funding etc., call, or email**

**Tel/WhatsApp: 07831 743737**

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**Tai Chi & Qigong  
Union for Great Britain**

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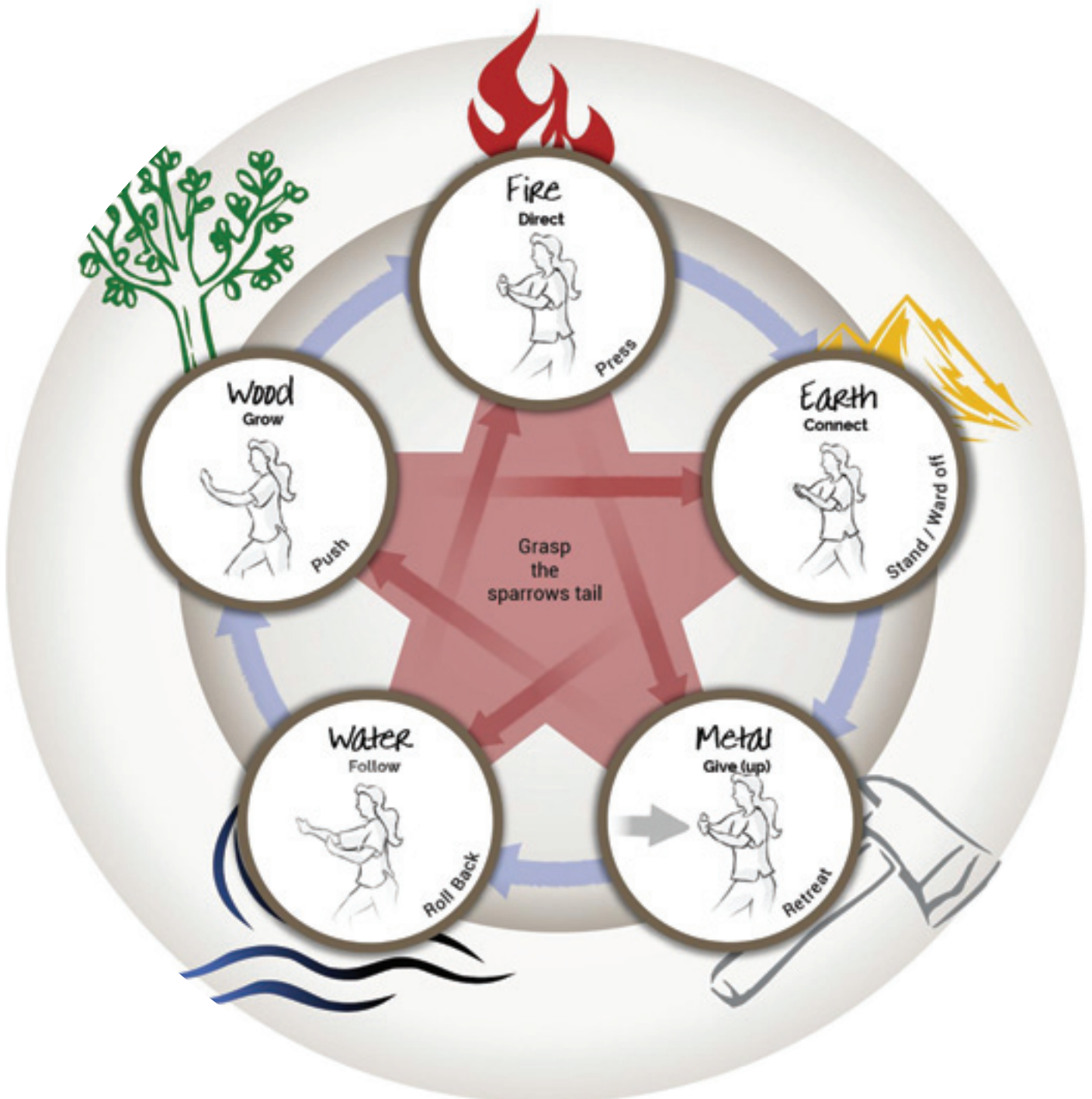
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# Five elements in the chair

Pim van den Broek



At the online Caledonia Festival in 2020 I taught some exercises with a chair.

These patterns were great exercises for myself when the lockdown in the Netherlands was on and partners weren't very much available; the girlfriend was at work and the cat wasn't up for it. In this article I'd like to share some of these exercises and I hope it will give you some inspiration in the practice of your form

The article is in three parts. First I'd like to explain why training with inanimate objects is a way of getting very clear answers about your tai chi and how you are progressing. The second part is where I give some exercises, related to some parts of grasp the sparrow's tail. In the third part of the article I'd like to get into why this is a very important part of the tai chi sequence, at least for me.

### Finding a good partner.

Kai Kherliang once told me: "The floor is always there, make it your best friend," and I took that advice to heart. An object is a very honest partner when you want to train.

People can give very good or very bad feedback. Whether they do not want to hurt your feelings or they do not want to lose, all kinds of dynamics can get in the way of clear communication. Also, your inner voice can choose not to listen to the advice given because you think you know better.

This will not work with an inanimate object. It just gives a very clear message whether you are doing it right or wrong. You want to move it and it doesn't go, then it's not the chair's fault for giving you wrong information, simple as that. Be humble and listen to your chair, be humble and listen to your partner.

### Finding good and honest information.

Let's start with a very simple exercise. If you sit on a chair, take a minute to close your eyes and feel the boundaries of your body. Feel where the end of you and the beginning of the world is. Sometimes the ending of you and the beginning of the rest of the universe is very clear and in other places it is more difficult to sense.

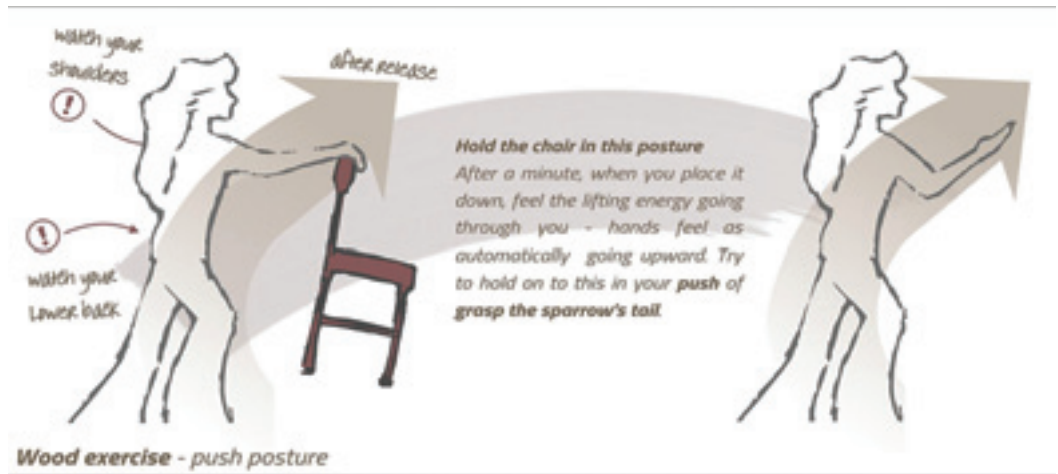
You will find that wherever you are touching something, like the ground or the chair, awareness of where you stop and where the surface of the object and the rest of the world begins, is very clearly outlined. The areas that do not touch anything are more vague, like, for instance the end of your head.

However good you (think you) are, the definition of your body always has a blurry edge where it is not touching something, compared with the places where your body is in contact with something. Imagine being in a completely dark room. Where do you end and where does the room begin? You know very well where your boundaries are if you hit the wall. Contact with objects defines the outline of your body.

The same can be said about the mind. Voicing your opinions to other people in conversations defines the boundaries of your thinking. In daily life as in tai chi, you might come across teachers who think the world of themselves but never go to other teachers' workshops. There is no contact, no clear definition of their boundaries or their limitations, so the mind (and ego) can expand freely. When you make the choice to connect and go to a workshop of somebody else, whether you completely agree or disagree with what is being said, it actually does not

matter. If you totally agree, fine; you get reassurance of the road you have taken and you might still learn a thing or two. If you totally disagree, also fine; it gives you a very good idea of who you are, like hitting the wall in the pitch black room. If it stirs up something, you'll get an idea of your boundaries and you might learn a thing or two about yourself. In any outcome, you learn.

The clearer the message the better the information about yourself. Train with inanimate objects and you get a very clear message. That's where the chair comes in. In the next part of this article I'd like to give you some ideas about playing with the chair (take a light one!) as a partner. Let's do a couple of exercises with five element energies.



Wood exercise - push posture

### Wood-expansion.

I always translate wood energy as an outburst where you are moved as a result of the energy expanding in all directions. Imagine sitting under a tree against the trunk and the tree grows very fast. The trunk gets wider and moves you sideways. Your moving really is a side-effect of the enlarging energy. You are not the endpoint of the energy, you are related to it.

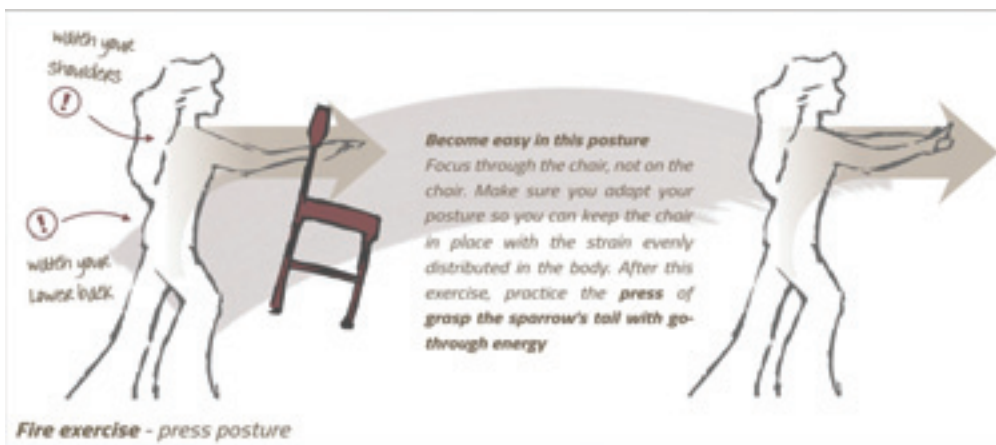
To feel this enlarging energy, stand upright behind a chair. Take the backrest of the chair and lift it for a minute or so from the ground. Be very aware of your posture while you do this, especially your upper body, keep it straight and don't strain your back. After a minute, once you place the chair back on the ground, your hands are probably rising upwards by themselves as a result of the exercise. Feel how this is an energy that expands and moves through you. You are not the endpoint but a means of this energy.

Now try to do the push from the grasp the sparrow's tail set and try to do it with this same going-through energy. Try to feel that the expanding is going through you.

### Fire-focus

This second energy has more of a quality of determination in it, a quality of focus: locked on target and nothing will stand in its way. Let's see if we can translate this energy into an exercise. Take the chair and put the backrest on top of your hands, just where the wrist ends. Lift the chair (be aware of your posture again) and have the feeling as if you are now focusing your energy forward. The chair is hanging but it is not standing in the way of where your focus is going. Now the energy is not being disrupted by the hanging of the chair on your arms. If you know the unbendable arm exercise, this one is very closely related. See if you can keep this posture for a minute.

Now try to have this same energy and project it in the

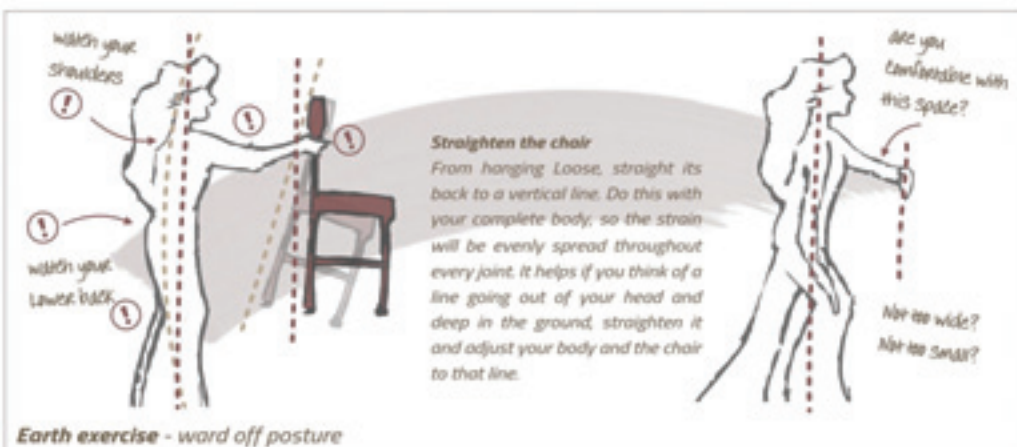


Fire exercise - press posture

press from the grasp the sparrow's tail set.

### Earth-balance

As you may be aware earth in five elements is not just the



Earth exercise - ward off posture

ground. It is more an inner quality that does not need expanding any more to voice itself. It doesn't have to prove itself, it just is. True strength lies not in expansion, true strength lies in knowing itself. You are much more focused on filling your space and the awareness of your boundaries. Downward and upward. The quality of this exercise lies in finding your inner line and seeing if it is possible to have it reflected in the line of the chair.

Try lifting the chair and holding the chair with both hands at its upper part. Try now to hold it straight vertical. If you just do this, the strain will be on you wrists, elbows and shoulders. Try now to connect the line of the chair with your body as a whole. It means connecting the chair's legs to your feet, the chair's backrest top to your top and see if you can get the chair vertical without straining only one part of your body. Try to get the strain even throughout the whole of your body, elbows, wrist, back knees, everywhere. The vertical line that goes through the chair is connected to the vertical line that goes through you. Not easy. Relax your shoulders, keep this posture for a while to get a good grasp on it.

Now try to have this same line in the posture of ward off, again in grasp the sparrow's tail. As you stand in it, be very aware of your boundaries and the inner line. Is your outward hand related to that line?

### Metal-retract

If you think of the seasons, metal is the autumn, when the leaves start to fall. Nature is getting rid of non-essential stuff and puts its energy in preserving for the next season, the next circle. It is retracting, retreating but without losing the essentials. Let's see if we can translate this into an exercise.

Stand behind the chair in a bow stance. Let your hands rest on the backrest of the chair. Move gently backwards so the chair will pivot on its back legs and start falling

backwards. Move it as softly as possible, without any strength.

You think you have it? Go even softer. Gravity hanging your arms down should be enough energy. This shouldn't be too hard to grasp and try it a couple of times. The next exercise is to become so soft, that you can take the chair in

your backwards move with you without it sloping backwards. That means to move it keeping all four legs on the floor.

In order to achieve this, become very soft on the contact points – your hands and your feet. Make the movement so soft that you invite the chair to start moving. The focus in this exercise is on the softness of connection.

To relate this exercise in a posture of grasp the sparrow's tail, you could almost place it

in between the press and the push. There is a retreating movement after the press where it is very important not to give up too much, otherwise you will find yourself in a difficult position to continue with the push. Give up but do not give away the essential.

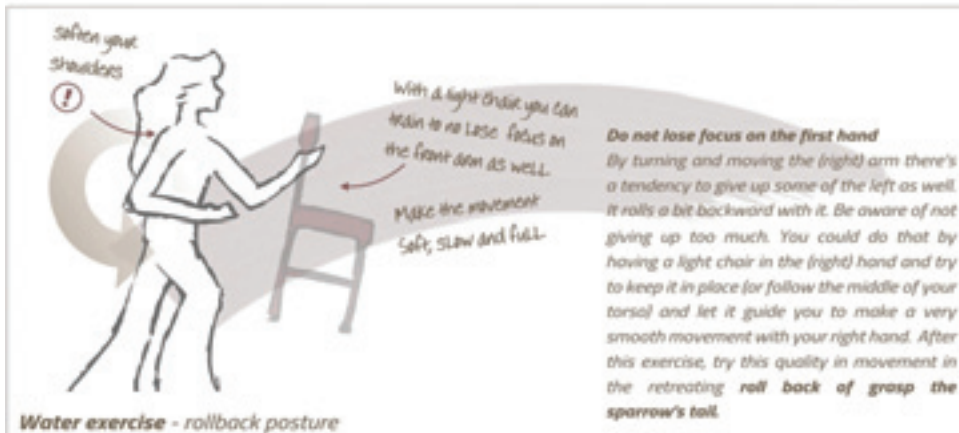
### Water-regenerate flow

Okay, in a very basic way we had wood, which has a dynamic structure quality; fire, which has a very focused structure quality, but only at the start of the movement (the beginning of the explosion); earth, which is about maintaining its balance, its structure; and metal, which is about giving up the non essential, but keeping for instance its basics; part of it is of course structure.

Now on the other side of the five element spectrum in



Metal exercise - retreat posture



Water exercise - rollback posture

between fire and earth, we have water. We saw that fire and earth make use of structure. In water you could say it is a bit different. Water is formless and it gives way, qualities that do not require structure. If you follow your opponent up until the part that you become part of her or his movements, your own structure might get in the way of getting synergy with your opponent. So in this element we use very little structure but volume instead. You follow like water, but without giving up. Think of a balloon filled with water. If I press the upper part together, the lower part becomes bigger. It doesn't lose its volume. Now in a movement I can follow my opponent and give up some of my parts, as long as I do not lose my volume. I go backwards because of a push, but I make sure that what I lose above the waistline fills up under it. Your front knee might go a bit forward for instance.

If the essence is formless and it reacts mainly on movements of the opponent, then training with a static object is very difficult. This is why I do not know of a very good exercise with a chair. The essence of water is reacting on change, and that is not what you are going to get from it. Think of the roll back movement in grasp the sparrow's tail. The flow and connection is very important. One of the things of this posture is that the front arm lots of times loses awareness because of the rounding movement of the other arm. Try to work on not losing volume there. You could actually use a light chair to hang on your wrist, but this will be more of a reminder. See if you can do the movement with that extra weight in a gentle way, without giving up too much. And what you give up in your upper body, you counteract with your lower body so volume serves as a substitute for structure.

### Completeness in grasp the sparrow's tail.

I tried to talk about five energies, in a very simple and easy-to-grasp way. If you look at the picture you can see that we did the exercises in the growing cycle, wood-fire-earth-metal-water.

Now look at the controlling cycle, the one in red. If you start with earth – it controls water. Water controls fire. Fire controls metal. Metal controls wood. Wood controls earth again. Look at the postures that we put in those positions. earth-ward off, water-roll back, fire-press, metal-retreat, wood-push. The controlling cycle of all five elements is very much represented in grasp the sparrow's tail.

I find it the most important set of postures in the form and keep on working at them the most in my practice. It has all the different qualities we have been working with. With these simple exercises you have a set of very versatile intentions you can work with throughout your form. See if

you can try to do it in your form with the information that your chair has given you in the exercises we did.

It is very important to point out that this goes with this combination of postures. You will find a lot of explanations with lots of different postures on the internet or in books, five elements with or without eight trigrams combined. Be aware that if I change one posture, the relationship to all the others changes.

Look at it this way, a lit candle is

yang compared to complete darkness. Compared to a wildfire, the same candle is yin and the wildfire is yang. The meaning of one element or posture is only valid in a certain context and in five element thinking, always evolving and subject to change. So do not say roll-back is water, but in this set of postures, roll-back is the posture with the most kind of water quality.



Pim van den Broek

### Wrapping up

I tried to write an article about material that is actually best explained in a workshop. There is a link ([www.fb.watch/iyRszF397J/](http://www.fb.watch/iyRszF397J/)) to the workshop that was given online in 2020 here. You can follow it for more detailed instructions.

The exercises are fairly simple, but that doesn't necessarily mean easy. You can make it as complex as you want. Earth energy easy? Try connecting with a heavy chair, and experience a complete other level.

The essence of this article is how you can interact with an inanimate object to get a grasp of these qualities that are part of a bigger flow: the five elements, and giving you a way to use them in postures in your form. As I said before: if you learned something from it, very good. If you totally disagree with this way of thinking, equally good. It gives you information on where you stand. You (or I) have touched an edge there...

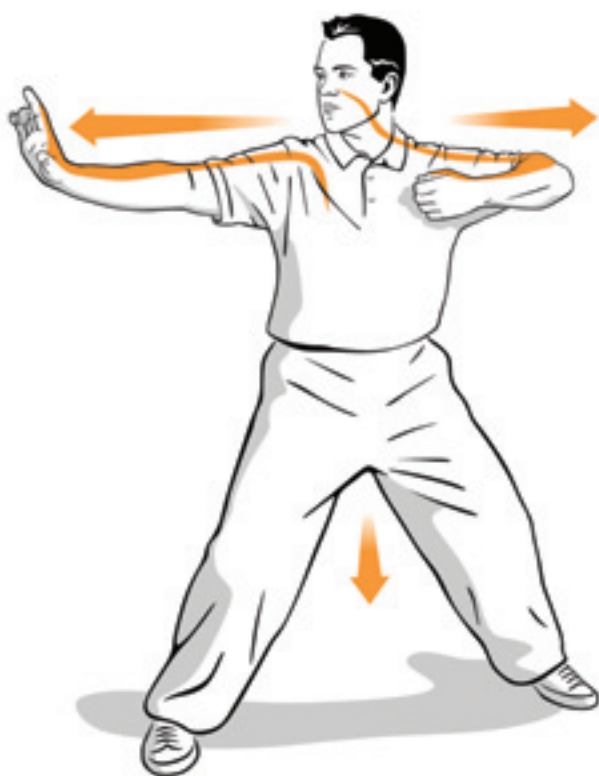
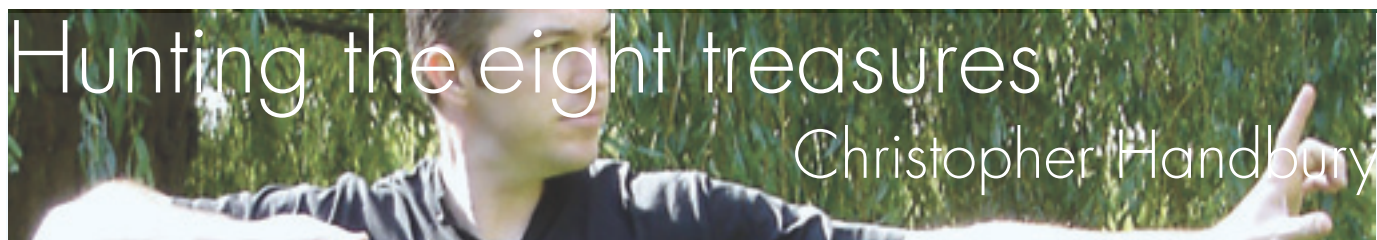
Have fun with it! 🍵





Tai chi or zumb? Dr Michael Mosely (L) and TCUGB instructor Nigel Ryan make a comparison page 12

Ba duan jin is one of the most recognised names of qigong throughout the world. The name often translates as eight pieces of silk brocade, a name given to the movements to represent the high quality of health it brings to the body and mind, like that of the finest silk used for traditional empirical brocades. Other titles are, 'eight treasures' or 'eight movements'



Historically, as with many traditional systems, the proof of origin is slightly jaded. The most reputable story is that of Marshal Yue Fei (born 1103AD) who developed the eight movements, from an original 12, to improve the health of his soldiers. Yue Fei's army was formidable in battle and this cemented the name of the eight brocades in history and folk tales, as the glue that made his army legendary.

Yue Fei also taught martial methods of combat to his soldiers, some of which are embodied in the eight brocades. He is also regarded as the creator of xing yi and eagle claw styles of combat.

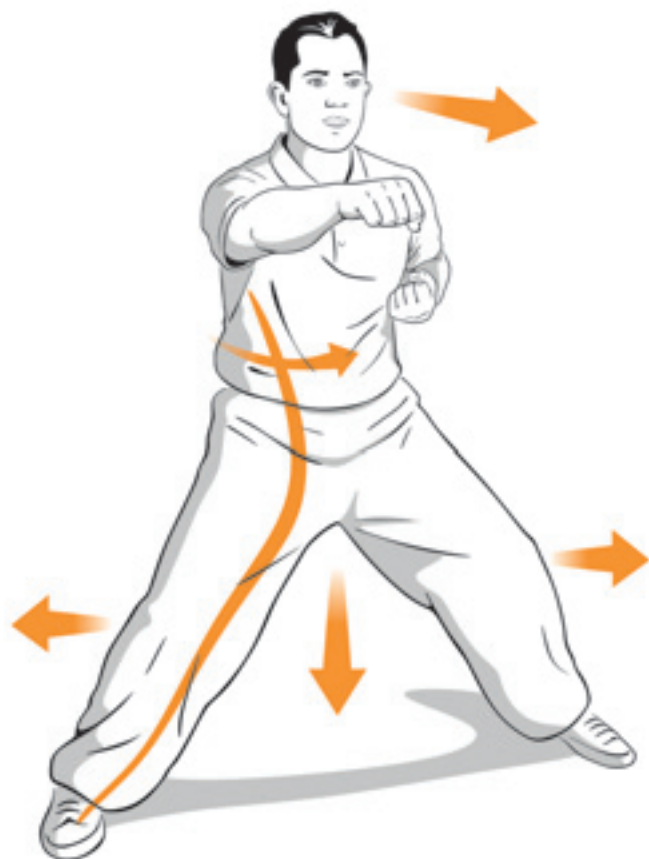
In terms of energetic health, the movements follow the natural cycle of qi as it passes through the energy system every 24 hours. Regular practice helps to promote the smooth flow of this cycle, which eventually, through daily dedication, creates momentum in the energy body. This momentum is like the pendulum of a grandfather clock, as

**I**like the eight treasures as it gives a sense of each posture being something of great worth, that brings wealth, wealth being our personal wellness.

There are numerous variations of the ba duan jin. Over time there have been further developments. But also in many cases, loss of the authentic method and outcome. Some of the names of each movement may also be different. Many martial arts systems have their own specific version, so don't be put off if your system is different. Any experienced teacher will be able to explain why they do it their way and for what reason, so just ask.

In essence, the eight movements help to regulate (harmonise) qi through physical postures and movements. These postures stimulate the muscular, fascia, blood and lymph systems. The practice also helps to regulate the nervous system which brings clarity to the emotional mind.

Each posture stimulates, or activates, specific aspects of the body by directing blood and qi through various actions of tension and release. These aspects or channels, closely relate to the energy pathways that are used by acupuncture and tui na massage. You may know them as meridians.



it assists the movement of blood to resolve stagnation (lack of movement) of qi and blood that daily life brings with it.

Ba duan jin is a remarkably useable form of physical therapy, that you apply to yourself. By 'usable' I mean you can use it to improve physical health, treat injuries, strengthen the body and heal emotional well-being. The intention of the practice is what makes it different from other physical methods, it becomes internal. Having just eight main postures, it's also easy to remember and requires little space to practise. This makes it suitable, or more enjoyable, for those who dislike remembering long forms.

When you apply the postures or movements correctly, you gradually build a connection to the fascia system, or RE-connect it, much as tai chi and yoga do, although the intention or attention may differ.

Building this connection eventually allows you to understand the structure of the body, and with time, to learn how to notice deviations in health or the energy body, so you can prevent any further symptoms, or at least take action sooner. Having knowledge of the medicine that goes with ba duan jin helps a lot too.

When it comes to healing the body and mind, the first action is to regulate the physical body. Many emotional disturbances are representations of the physical body, so it's a good place to start. Ba duan jin does this extremely well.

It is quite common for people to think they have no energy, or low energy, when they feel weak, tired or fatigued. Most of the time it is a lack of movement or restriction in the body/qi/mind paradigm that causes a sense of deficiency, not depletion of it.

Removal of such restrictions through ba duan jin, allows the functions of qi to regain harmony. When enough qi is available, or better still, accessible, we can use BDJ to strengthen the physical body and build resistance to ill health and emotional intrusion. When these two aspects are in harmony it allows the shen or higher emotional mind to develop. This phase is always personal and there are many systems of qigong available for such cultivation.

A traditional journey of development would be, ba duan jin, yi jing jing (muscle/tendon changes) and zhan zhuang (pile training), although a full system of BDJ contains many muscle/tendon changing methods as well as zhan zhuang.

I think the best way to utilise BDJ is to think of it as gently 'wringing' out the body, like twisting and squeezing dirty water from a dishcloth, but very specific. The movements are easily adjusted to suit current health and abilities which makes it suitable for all shapes, sizes and ages. As long as the principles and methods are adhered to, the outcome should be the same – greater health.

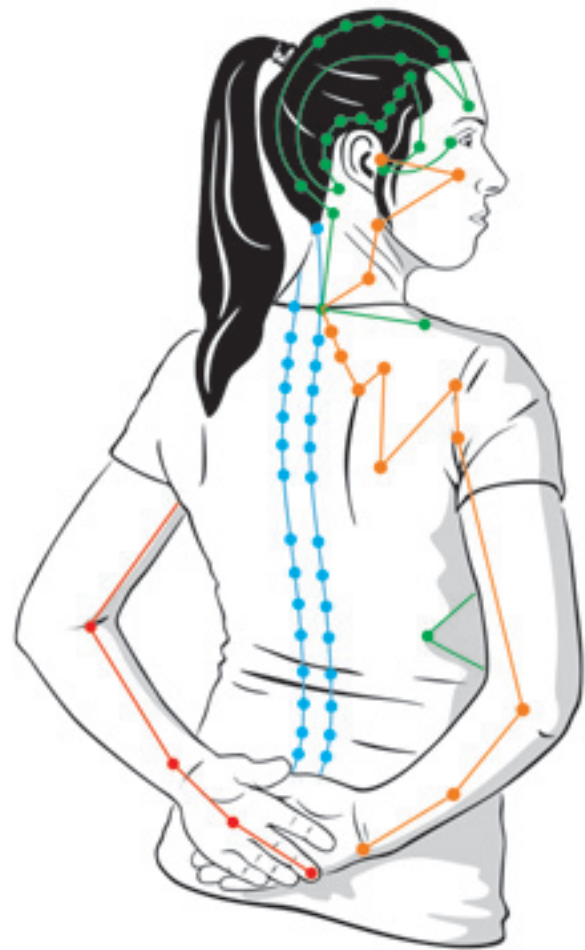
Aside from maintaining the correct order of the movements to promote the cyclic flow of the vessels, ba duan jin can be utilised via the application of five element theory. Some BDJ systems do exactly that, working more with five phases of earth, metal, water, wood and fire. Some work with the extra vessels, our deeper reservoirs of qi. Then it becomes a system of adjustment for medical benefit, especially when you incorporate the practice of zhan zhuang postures to cultivate energy.

Ba duan jin is the bread and butter of a good preventative health practice.

The targeted 'clearing' process of BDJ makes it an excellent partner to any other external or internal practice. When you have a clear, unrestricted flow of qi, it enhances whatever you choose to do, the connection is simply just better.

You can use it as a diagnostic tool to discover injuries or changes in structural feelings that might become problematic.

To give you a brief insight into the functions of each



posture or movement, here is a list of the movements and their internal association.

1. Supporting the sky – to regulate the sanjiao (triple warmer) and activate the energy system.
2. Archer draws a bow – to stimulate and strengthen lung qi, nourishes the liver and blood.
3. Plucking the stars from heaven – to stimulate the spleen and stomach for improved digestion, energy and clear thinking.
4. Turning the head – to ward off injurious feelings and a sense of apprehension. To build courage.
5. Wagging the head and tail – to cool the hearts fire, condition the 'qua' and stimulate 'ming men', the gate of life.
6. Carrying the moon – to nourish the kidneys, strengthen the spine and connect to the earth.
7. Thrusting fist with gazing eyes – to strengthen the physical body, calm the liver and nourish the sinews.
8. Lifting the heels – to improve posture, balance and calm the breath.

As you can see, ba duan jin has many benefits for health and wellness when incorporated into daily practice. If you know your own illnesses or injuries, you can also use the postures in isolation to improve recovery. Using a supportive method of 'mother-child' (five phases theory) applications can provide even better results.

All in all, you can use ba duan jin as a simple physical exercise or preparation method, a method of restoring health and healing injuries, or connecting deeper to the practice and you can use it as a vessel for self-discovery. Better still, open your heart, empty your cup, gift yourself some time each day to practise and see where BDJ can take you. 🧘‍♀️

More information email: [info@chi-fit.uk](mailto:info@chi-fit.uk)



Group mat stretches – qigong at Samye Ling, page 17

# A tai chi fighter

Interview by Robin Gamble

Barry McGinlay is a world tai chi champion, a European gold medalist, and has coached international, world, european and national tai chi champions. He has also competed in kickboxing at an international level. He is an instructor of the Longfei Taijiquan Association of Great Britain under the lineage of master Li Tianji and frequently trains with master Simon Watson. With over 30 years of experience, Barry is dedicated to teaching all aspects of martial arts and has been a tai chi and qigong practitioner for 18 years.

He has also studied hap ki do for over 30 years and has been teaching the discipline for more than 15 years. He is the head instructor of the London School of Hap Ki Do and is the founder of Tai Chi Life, a vibrant contemporary school based in the heart of London

**B**arry McGinlay is a martial artist with a strong base in the hands-on and competitive realms of tai chi, so I asked him how he feels about practitioners with seemingly miraculous powers of qi?

“You have to put your money where your mouth is,” says McGinlay. “Nowadays, if you want to test your tai chi there are a lot of ways to do it. For example in kick-boxing, sanda/san shou (Chinese kickboxing) or shuai jiao (Chinese wrestling) and tui shou/push hands competitions. In the past perhaps there weren’t so many opportunities. Now there are lots.

“But some people want money for old rope. You see people trying to feed this excessive spirituality but not having the minerals with the martial stuff, you need to mix it up. People feed this stuff more and more and some of these people are really good at marketing. These days a lot of energy is spent on marketing and people want to believe they can move you without touching you.

“Good for them perhaps but sooner or later it’ll come around. I remember being at the big Hannover tai chi gala and there was three hours of free push hands and maybe 200 people. A great chance for skill sharing. But you get some tai chi gurus who are there to teach but when the chance to freely push hands comes, they just sit there and don’t want to get involved. That’s not my thing. You need to get hands-on, you’ll win some and you’ll lose some, it’s only natural.”

One thing that triggered Barry’s interest in martial arts was growing up watching Bruce Lee’s movies. He told me that it made him want to learn different styles of martial arts. He started boxing at St. Pancras boxing club, and then learned judo in Scotland.

He says: “I came to London at 11 and got into judo again, then some aikido and then hapkido in 1980. At the same time I did kickboxing and then freestyle kickboxing and I did competitions. Then I broke my leg in a motorbike crash and I got into wing chun. Because of my leg I thought: ‘let’s focus on the upper body techniques in wing chun’.

“I trained in wing chun intensively for five years and learned siu lim tao and did lots of sparring. Later I got into tai chi. I was with a teacher for ten years until he started getting too ‘guru’d out’ for me. This is when the empiricism starts to take a back seat and you can’t ask questions any more and a sort of cult feeling develops in class. So I switched to bagau zhuang and trained quite intensively and then did some silat.” [The collective name for a number of martial arts from South East Asia. Mainly street fighting systems.]

“At the same time I had a Korean hapkido teacher who introduced me to the diamond sutra, a foundational text of



Mahayana Buddhism. So also I had this scholar warrior approach and wanted to challenge and test myself in different scenarios and systems.

“Then I went back to kickboxing in the World Association of Kickboxing Organisations (WAKO) rule book. (You might have heard of Don ‘The Dragon’ Wallace and Bill ‘Superfoot’ Wallace, they were famous WAKO guys.) I was asked to do a trial for the UK team and I competed internationally. I also acquired a 2nd Dan in hapkido.”

McGinlay believes that practitioners shouldn’t be afraid to step outside their skill set and learn another system, or to compete. He says that he meets a lot of teachers who won’t step outside their martial arts system which leads me to wonder when they are doing their field research.

“In kickboxing I did world championships in three different countries and I came away with a bronze in the worlds,” he says. “In tai chi I’ve competed in the UK mainland, Europe and Asia and I learned a great deal from it. You even see some skullduggery, and naughtiness that happens in the competitive environment. More recently I’ve taken up Brazilian jujitsu and I find I can transfer a lot of my skills from Chinese martial arts into it.”

We know that many tai chi practitioners are only interested in the health aspects of the art. But he feels getting into aspects of the martial side can still be helpful. He says: “They don’t have to be fully submerged in the martial element but partner exercises will improve their sensitivity and awareness. They can have someone testing their structure which will make their solo practice more solid and complete. When we go through the form and implement skills from partner work it improves the awareness of the form work. You can think of it like getting double helpings, you know, double the benefits. Practitioners who combine partnered application work and forms will be stronger, they won’t be on a one way highway. They will understand both sides of the coin, form and application. It is important for teachers to give students that opportunity to learn both sides of the art.

“How well you present that concept is down to the skill of the teacher. I think of it like this: when you are a parent you learn to trick your children into doing things that are really good for them but that they don’t want to do, like eating vegetables. It’s tricking in a good sense. As a teacher you sometimes need the same skill. Students often say they don’t want the martial aspect, then next thing they say: ‘hey, look, I’m doing push hands and I’m enjoying it and I didn’t think I would’. They did not know they needed the applications but they ended up liking it.”

The mention of being a parent to your students raises an interesting concept. Barry told me that he thinks of it as bringing life experience to a teaching practice.



“Now, this is no disrespect to those teachers who aren’t parents but life experience as a coach is important. As a parent you need to offer compassion and compromise. The same with teachers and students, you can learn from your children and students. I am interested in this dynamic.”

Any interview about tai chi in a combat environment inevitably leads to the question of using tai chi in a street fight. So has tai chi ever helped Barry McGinlay in a combative environment?

“Yes,” he says, “there are a few, some on the street and other places that have been close quarters and intense. I haven’t always been the person who I am today. I have been a different kind of person and sometimes strayed from the right path. For me martial arts has been like martial arts therapy. I grew up a bit rough and I was looking for something deeper in martial arts. I encountered a lot of things on that path.

“Most recently in London, I saw this guy who was hooded up on a bike and clearly pursuing a woman, I guessed to mug her, it made me very uncomfortable. So I stood and watched and eventually said ‘Oi! leave the woman alone’ and he replied with ‘f\*\*\*k off’. He changed his course and came cycling towards me. As he came closer I saw he had a big knife drawn and I said ‘Wooh, hang on’. The scenario had changed drastically from fist vs fist to fist vs blade. So I put myself behind the bike rack and moved around to put a barrier between us, then dived into the pub and came out with a pint glass and said ‘OK, let’s go!’... nothing happened. The thug said: ‘We’ll go to Primrose Hill and have a one-on-one,’ and I said: ‘No we won’t’.

“My point is, after a lifetime of martial arts you are always monitoring the situation at a micro level. Importantly, the woman didn’t get mugged, or raped. She experienced a member of her community looking out for her. I didn’t get caught up in my story of being a martial



artist ‘I’m gonna take him out’ and rush in and get stabbed and a punctured lung or kidney. You need sensitivity and awareness. First rule is *if you are there, don’t be there*. It wasn’t even. It was knife against fist. So the situation changed. But what happens afterwards is you think: ‘This is crazy, why didn’t I do this or that or so and so...’ But most importantly I did what needed to be done and there was no violence.

“A lot of other scenarios in my past have been short and sharp and it wasn’t beautiful, more just a reaction. Also being able to talk people down. On many occasions I’ve managed to defuse things. I’ve learned this from tai chi and being around teachers who can talk and articulate themselves. I believe the voice is a really important weapon and should be used long before physical violence.”

There is then the question of what a tai chi person can do to improve their combat efficiency. McGinlay’s advice is to go and spar with lots of different people. He says: “In the question you’ve already insinuated that they are practising combat. So now, go and spar. Like in BJJ we’ve got an open-mat. Anyone can come and ‘roll’ which is sparring within the BJJ rule set, black belts with white belts and so on. So go to open push hands, san shou or shia jiao meet ups and express skill and share it. Share notepads with other practitioners.”

According to McGinlay the one thing that holds back combat efficiency in tai chi practitioners is fear. Fear of getting hurt, fear of looking stupid, fear of making mistakes, of not looking good. Fear of going outside the box of the form. “And fear of hard work,” he says. “They don’t want to work hard. They come to tai chi thinking it’s easy. It has a big name to live up to ... supreme ultimate. Real progress is not easy.”

These days people who want to engage in martial arts





have lots of options. We have BJJ, muay thai and MMA among others. It can seem strange that anyone would take up tai chi as a martial art. According to McGinlay it is because it comes across as the scholarly approach to martial arts.

“There is also the warrior aspect to it. It’s like the thinking man’s martial art. And when we talk about it as a martial art, a martial art should have weapons. BJJ doesn’t have weapons, modern muay thai doesn’t have weapons. But it must have a weapon to be a martial art, or it’s just a sport. If you are learning a martial art, you need weapons, learning fighting is different, fighting is not martial arts. Martial arts is a culture and a philosophy. Like budo, like Taoism, like Buddhism. There isn’t philosophy in raw fighting. So if you want something more, something that includes philosophy you might consider tai chi.”

“Talking about BJJ, I’ve been surprised how much carry over from tai chi I’ve used. Tai chi gives you such a strong foundation. I can’t say all of my benefits are from tai chi, but neither can others who have cross trained. So many people cross train. Even those ultra authentic guys in Chen village saying: ‘We are the original and authentic tai chi’. Rubbish. They do sanda, Chinese wrestling and so on. So it’s difficult for me to answer that question because I’ve learned different styles.

“But that has given me the ability to take things apart and put them together. Tai chi gave that to me. I’ve competed in world championships and kickboxing and against people who are way bigger than me, and tai chi gave me that too. And I’m not riddled with injuries like so many of my contemporaries. I put it down to my high interest account in tai chi, my ‘body bank’ is my tai chi and qigong. I swear by it. So for longevity it’s amazing. In the immediate sense you might not get quick benefits like in krav maga or MMA, but they’ll come later. With tai chi it takes longer to understand it. But those principles help me and I put them into BJJ.”

McGinlay thinks that, in combat, tai chi shows economy of movement, is relaxed and very direct: “Beauty and the beast,” he says.

“A lot of people talk about whether it’s wrestling and striking and I think it’s a combo of both of them. You see beauty in the form and beast in combat. Pretty and ugly. Prettiness of the form expressing the beauty and then the ugliness of the application. It’s ‘heavy hands’. I learned a lot from Simon Watson and Alex Kozma about that. Ugly, a beast and very direct.”

Finally, McGinlay talked about shen fa and zhong power, two big discoveries that he says that he has made in the past two years. “Shen fa is not just in the limbs,” he says, “and zhong power is shock power. Also allowing myself to relax my body more, and not mistaking that for being collapsed. Relaxed but at the same time being fast

and agile, and knowing when to put that heaviness on. I’m learning more freestyle push hands but with strikes added. So it looks a bit like chi sao, from wing chun. Heavy hands striking the body.

“That’s something I learned from Simon Watson and his teacher master Wang. Master Wang and Simon have that combat aspect in their body and can show and teach it in a really simplified way. Not complicated. I often see tai chi being taught in a complicated way and it shouldn’t be. I’ve learned a hell of a lot from Simon Watson and master Wang. Simon is interesting because he hasn’t done anything but tai chi. He is really under the radar but very effective. 🇨🇳



**Barry McGinlay**

### Dedication

Barry McKinlay wrote: I would like to dedicate this interview and my experience of tai chi and qigong over the last 20 years to Richard Watson of Longfei Tai Chi Association, who has recently passed away. Both Richard and his son Simon have been a huge influence in my learning and development of pushing hands, tai chi forms and weapons and my deeper understanding of tai chi and qigong culture, the history and philosophy of Chinese culture and its place within martial arts. I could not have achieved the level of understanding I have without the guidance and support of this great partnership of father and son, which is very rare to see. Richard was such a humble gentleman, very knowledgeable about many things not just martial arts but also about family life and how to have a harmonious, happy family life. This very much shone through his relationship with Simon, his son, and Karen, his daughter in law. Richard and Simon not only taught me a lot about tai chi and qigong, I have been indirectly shown how to be a good human being. I would like to thank the Watson family for all their generosity and everything, they have shared with me.

Thanks,  
Barry.



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# Odds at the end

## And the things people say...

### Pixels to spare – new site launch

The board has announced that the initial phase of the Tai Chi & Qigong Union for Great Britain’s new website is complete. A spokesperson says: “We hope that members are now pleased to be able to access the new look resource for our union. Phase 1 has involved several important improvements in the way the systems driving the website operated. We can now build up these to introduce further finesse. A key focus going forward is the adoption of multifunctionality to the web content and this will not simply be through written articles, but using multimedia, such as podcast, short videos and links to your websites.”

The website is the public face of the union, and within this the instructors’ register forms a key element in promoting union members. The next substantive stage will be to establish a postcode search function to improve visibility of teachers to prospective students. The new website is intended to support TCUGB members, students and the wider public. Member’s input is always welcome. 📧

### John moving on...

The union is bidding a fond farewell to webmaster John Johnston and we all owe him a big ‘thank you’. John has decided to retire from his webmaster role with us. Many of you will know John and understand the significant role he has played in making the TCUGB the organisation it is today. We will miss him and we wish him all the very best.

The board is organising a voucher for John J from Cotswold Outdoor, for around £120. A very small token of thanks compared to all his hard work. If you would like to be included then email Peter Ballam [financedirector@taichiunion.com](mailto:financedirector@taichiunion.com). Peter says: “I’m not sure how well you know John or have worked with him so please don’t feel obliged in any way.” 📧



“Go to your classes,  
not to be taught but to  
learn”  
Anon

Tai chi moves...by Neil Bradley



Ignore him - he's just trying to get our attention

### A date for your diary:

A seminar Saturday 13th May at the Yang Chen Fu centre in Cambridge. Develop your tai chi skills by learning how the 10 essential principles can be applied in practice.

It will include exercises to improve body mechanics, feeling, awareness and body cohesion.

Worldwide, Yang Chen Fu centres are under the auspices of the Yang Family Tai Chi Association.

The fee for the day is £30 for members of the association and £40 for non members.

To book, contact Mike Taylor: [miketaiichi@gmail.com](mailto:miketaiichi@gmail.com)

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