

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

# TAI CHI CHUAN & INTERNAL ARTS

No.69 August 2023 | £5.00

Neigung in tai chi  
The rule of eight

Tai chi Caledonia '23

Tai Chi and arthritis

Teaching special needs

Ba Duan Jin

Gerde Gedes

An interview with Harriet Devlin

Paul Cavel with his teacher, master Bruce Frantzis China 2019  
photo by Maylis-Bernet

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# Comment



I was particularly interested in some of the conclusions from the survey we carried out for the last edition of TCC&IA. I started out with the impression that, the minute lockdown happened, everyone went digital and switched to online teaching. Not apparently the case. Some people stopped entirely but, in the end, while some teachers kept up online classes, most of us couldn't wait to get back to one-to-one teaching.

But it wasn't, I think, back to 'normal'. Since I started running classes there has always been a small but steady stream of enquiries. Every new year I usually had a number of new students – one January, several people bought their friends. I was pretty horrified to find I had 20 newbies plus my usual students. About half the new students came back the next week. Since the end of lockdown enquiries have been few and far between. January 2022, of course, we had just come out of a muted Christmas and new year but, from a tai chi point of view, 2023 was

no great shakes either.

From the survey, I get the idea that a lot of teachers were in the same situation. Overall classes have been smaller and slow to build back to pre-lockdown sizes. But, in 2023 I am finding that things are picking up. A few new students, more enquiries. It seems a bit soon to be looking at 2024 but maybe next year 2020/2021 will be fading into the distance and we really will be back to 'normal'.

A few points from this edition. The board has reminded everyone about the importance of having proper insurance. Even more important if you are teaching martial applications. There is a great deal to be had through the union and the article on page 17 has details of the different areas you need to cover.

And talking about 2024 and moving forwards Bob Agar-Hutton is planning to organise a two-day event in Milton Keynes. The general idea is a tai chi, qigong get together with opportunities to learn, practise and generally network with other teachers and practitioners (bring your students). He is looking for volunteers so check out page 24 for the details.

And with Tai Chi Caledonia now firmly back in the calendar we have a report on page 11 and an interview with Harriet Devlin (page 26) Gerde Gedes daughter. She talks about growing up in Hong Kong and watching her mother practise tai chi with master Choy Hawk-pang. Harriet made a, well attended, presentation about her mother at TCC. She has relocated to Scotland where she will be teaching in Edinburgh.

*John Roper*

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## TAI CHI CHUAN & INTERNAL ARTS

Is published by The Tai Chi Union for Great Britain C.I.C

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# Benefitting changes

**At the members' meeting in November 2022 the board set out it's aims and proposed actions with the focus on what could be done going forward to achieve the union objectives through improved services to members and support to the general public**

During 2023 significant progress has been made. Alongside the new website, we have brought in many new and improved services and benefits for the members. Details of these can be found on the new website under "membership benefits".

One key change is our new improved insurance products for all members from Protectivity, a highly rated broker with significant experience in martial arts insurance. For the first time, ordinary members who meet the insurance requirements can benefit from this arrangement. You can find details of the new arrangements on page 17, premiums start at £4.74 per month.

For the public we have made free information available and are currently working on implementing improved location searching for classes. More information will be available in the next few months. Of course, there is also the Gerda Geddes fund for members who work with those who are disadvantaged. The article from Ray Pawlett shows how this grant is already benefitting others and we look forward to receiving more applications. Details of how to apply can be found on the website page about membership benefits.

We hope that you agree that the union is a great organisation for everyone interested in the internal arts of tai chi, bagua, xing yi and qigong. In the next few months, we will be introducing a financial incentive for members to help to grow the membership. Join the union members' closed Facebook group to be the first to hear about this and other news.

While all the above has been happening, in the background the support team have been working hard improving administration and systems to make the organisation more robust and efficient. These changes are significant and are in addition to all the usual work from the team who run the company and produce the magazine on behalf of the board. Like the directors most of these are unpaid volunteers.

With so much work completed or well underway the board is now looking ahead at the plans for the union over the next two to three years to deliver on the company objectives for members and the public. We plan to update you later this year at the annual members' meeting but if you have ideas on what you would like to see and are prepared to work with the board to deliver them, then please get in touch. 📧

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After many years on the executive committee and then the board, Mark Peters has stepped down for a well-deserved rest. All of you who have worked with Mark will have appreciated his energy, contribution, and input. He moves away knowing that he leaves a strong foundation we can all build upon as we move forwards. The board is grateful to Mark for all his efforts and wish him all the very best for the future.



Tai chi in the treatment of arthritis. Julie Weeks writes. page 18

Picture by Nigel Kenny

# The rule of eight

## By Paul Cave



In China the number eight is regarded as auspicious and figures in just about everything, from feng shui and good luck charms to flight numbers and business opportunities of every imaginable kind. In modern times, emphasis on the number eight has become superficial, even superstitious. According to the I Ching (Book of Changes), eight primary energies called "trigrams" govern manifestation – in all times, all places and all dimensions – and this ancient philosophy lies at the heart of Taoism.

► Overleaf

◀ From page 9

**H**ow the number eight came to assume position over other numbers is an interesting question for over tea, but in terms of the philosophy and practice of the internal arts of tai chi, hsing-i and bagua there is little controversy. The number eight is applied to almost every aspect of training, from the construction of the formwork and content that powers forms to the energetic makeup of the human being who practices the arts, as well as the cosmic forces that mould and give shape to reality as we experience it. Although we can only explore the conceptual realms of these living and pragmatic arts here, they allow a practitioner the insight necessary for deeper embodiment.

## Neigong: the fabric of the internal arts

The fabric of Taoist energy arts is woven from 16 neigong threads that intertwine to create the internal mechanisms and external containers of qigong, tai chi, hsing-i and bagua. The exact same neigong threads can be woven in very different ways to generate radically different forms, qualities and training results. However, the neigong system itself is split into two categories, which yields eight yang and eight yin methods. That is to say each neigong component naturally develops either the yang or yin qi of the body and, as a whole, every thread contributes to an intimate and delicately balanced lattice. Being that neigong is divided into half yang and half yin, one might reason that, at least from a superficial perspective, yang neigong threads would dominate bagua, while yin neigong threads would dominate tai chi. But anyone who has experiential understanding of tai chi and bagua as internal arts (as opposed to only external forms) knows that nothing could be further from the truth.

To start with, each neigong component is either yang or yin in nature: that is to say, when you have initially gained control of any particular thread, it will produce a predominantly yang or yin quality and energy, depending upon its intrinsic value. Two examples of yin neigong are the dissolving processes (both inner and outer dissolving) and opening-and-closing (or pulsing) techniques; whereas basic bending and stretching of the soft tissues and spiralling energy currents are examples of yang neigong. All things considered, when any neigong technique is learned, chances are you will initially train it in a yang fashion simply because you are trying to make something happen. After some time, effort and practice you can sink into any neigong thread and realise its intrinsic nature through direct perception – whether yang or yin.

Arriving at this stage constitutes the first stabilisation point for embodying any particular neigong and should not be taken for granted as real commitment and resolve are

required. All, comes to the patient, diligent student who follows the circular nature of learning and regularly trains



**Paul Cavel teaching in Redlands, California (photo by Jaime Valdovino)**

the fundamentals in order to strengthen their foundation.

## Delving into the depths of subtlety

Assuming you have adequately prepared your foundation, the next step is to look towards developing a range of yin and yang qualities within each neigong thread. For example, the basic yang method of bending and stretching will be developed in a yin way or the yin method of pulsing will be developed in a yang way. Again, each neigong has a propensity towards either yang or yin, but can and should be developed along the spectrum of yang to yin. This allows you to get closer to the underlying principles that apply the same neigong to produce very different qualities, e.g. in the arts of tai chi and bagua.

An example is opening-and-closing techniques in bagua, which are trained with very little external motion. They are not accompanied by much bending and stretching relative to walking the circle and performing any of the 200+ postures or palm changes. There is no 'leakage' since all pressure is created within in the joints and cavities, and contained within the bag of skin and internal systems of the body (of course, always within 70-80 percent of the







Joshua tree, California (photo by Jaime Valdovino)

practitioner's capacity). This creates a yang pulse, which can only be implemented if the prerequisites are embodied and a good deal of the body's tensions have been released. Conversely, in tai chi, basic yang bend-and-stretch techniques, for example, are trained to create a very soft and relaxed outer shell (soft tissues), yet still penetrate down to the bone (although never into the bone itself). Again, this is only possible if some degree of the tension that has been accumulated in the body is released. Although at least this technique does not carry any imminent health risks, unlike the yang opening-and-closing pressures in bagua which, if the practitioner unwittingly intensifies before releasing sufficient tension in their body, can cause serious injury.

### Playing the yang-yin range

You must overcome this yin-yang hurdle because, if you go straight for cranking up the pressure in the joints in bagua, you will only manage to lock in more tension. Yet if you back off the effort in bending and stretching in tai chi, you will not create enough internal motion. You must first train neigong within their natural dispositions, releasing whatever tensions that surface as a result. Then and only then can you start playing any thread's ranging: from yin to yang or vice versa. This is why, traditionally, qigong forms have been practised alongside tai chi and bagua: qigong training is always that one step ahead and, when embodied, adds to your internal martial arts skill set.

Playing the range is rewarding after much practice, where you can let go and follow the flow.

When you do, only amp up or down a notch at a time so that you can release whatever tensions are uncovered at each new depth and level of intensity. You keep all other active threads integrating smoothly.

Tensions can surface through both methods, and while either increasing or decreasing the level of intensity. By employing this incremental methodology, you will avoid unnecessary setbacks, rid your body of many layers of unconscious tension and eventually embody the skill to develop – at will – the whole range of the yang-yin spectrum of any neigong thread or combination of threads. This is the path to truly defining the yin nature of tai chi and the yang nature of bagua, as well as distinguishing each art in its own realm.

### Water meets steel: the paradox

Like yin and yang, water and steel are two ends of a continuum of internal power within Taoist energy arts. Tai chi is famous for its soft, water-like quality, whereas bagua is known for its strength or steel-like quality. However, it would be a mistake to conclude that their intrinsic qualities prevent tai chi from producing steel or bagua from producing water since each art can generate both qualities. The difference is that tai chi and bagua employ opposite philosophies, which initially signifies their distinctive stamps. Tai chi is governed by a yin methodology and bagua by a yang one.

You might recall that Yang Lu-chan had three top disciples: one was known for his hard energy, another for his soft energy and the third, Wu Chuan-yu, co-founder of the Wu style, for his transformational energy. (The other co-founder was his son, Wu Chien-chuan, who was Liu Hung Chieh's teacher, who in turn taught my primary teacher, Bruce Frantzis.) Both tai chi and bagua seek to instil in the practitioner the ability to transform from hard to soft and soft to hard in an instant – without any loss of power whatsoever, without a glitch or inertia revealing itself even for a millisecond.



In bagua, the swimming dragon body produces the state of liquid steel, a real paradox for those without experiential knowledge as these seemingly polar opposite qualities integrate into one. I can only conjure up one example from the West where softness and strength unify as such: in toilet paper, which is soft enough to prevent soreness yet strong enough not to break at the critical moment.

With all of these analogies and comparisons, what is the critical difference between tai chi and bagua if both can develop the same or similar qualities? Tai chi produces the quality of an iron bar wrapped in many layers of cloth, while bagua develops the feeling of twisted steel with a liquid core. Both can change and produce the whole gamut of yin and yang, but these definitions persist at their baselines. Tai chi utilises the qualities of the snake and the crane, as if they are in a dance with one another, whereas bagua manifests the quality of a swimming dragon. The flux between the snake and the crane is embodied in tai chi, but the dragon – especially in swimming form – embodies the absolute pinnacle of change, flux and amorphous energy.

## Master Bruce Frantzis: a living paradox

Anyone who has had the opportunity to sink their fist deep into my teacher Bruce's guts recognises how seamlessly he can manifest both water and steel, and switch between them at will – literally in an instant. When he generates liquid, it is possible to almost touch his spine from the front, penetrating through his abdominal muscles and organs. When he generates steel, it is impossible to penetrate past his surface muscles even though they do not tense and remain soft. This is in contrast to the iron shirt

method, where the internal pressures come from the fluids and organs themselves rather than manifesting a very dense outer shell. His ability to change between water and steel is fascinating, but the lightning speed and fluidity with which he does it is most striking.

## Embodying the paradox

The philosophies behind tai chi and bagua are as complex and diverse as the arts themselves, inclusive of phenomena such as the physical, the energetic, the mind, the cosmic, as well as the interplay between each and every aspect. Embodiment, stabilisation and integration of each level of practice enables the mind, body and qi to grasp the seemingly paradoxical concept of the next stage of development. As you progress through your training, the paradoxes give way to more profound levels of direct perception and reveal a whole new realm of internal arts training. 🇨🇦

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* (the latter of which he co-authored with his teacher). He has been a senior student of Tai Chi and Bagua Lineage Holder Bruce Frantzis since 2004. He offers online classes, and instructor certification, qigong, tai chi and bagua courses in Finsbury Park.

Find more articles like this one at

[www.paulcavel.com/blog](http://www.paulcavel.com/blog)

# Caledonia '23

by Suse Coon

Photography: Jennifer Scott [#taichicalledonia2022](#)

Organisers Al Scott and Aileen Mandic closed the curtains at Stirling University on a fantastic week of all round tai chi tuition from international teachers. If numbers seemed slightly down it was only because some participants budgeted for just the weekend or just the week, paths crossing briefly on Sunday evening. But then again, there was a contingent who opted for the luxury of the onsite hotel so there were options for everyone.

“It's going to have to be something pretty special to overcome Cally”

As well as international teachers, we met international students, Italian, Spanish, French, Canadian, German, Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian, Irish and Greek (I think) almost outnumbering the Brits.

The format remained the same – if it ain't broke, don't fix it – but since Al and Aileen took over following the death of Ronnie Robinson, they have begun to confidently put their own stamp on the event. There were the week long teachers who come for two years and offer in-depth training, while the weekend is a dizzy mix of 45 minute sessions; it is impossible to get round them all. They do, however, give you a taste of a teacher you didn't know and were considering making your main choice, while also providing a gentle introduction for new teachers. Delegates enjoyed the choice of styles, Wu, Chen and Yang, with less well-known variations such as Lihuebafa, from James Carss, to spice things up.

Cally isn't just about the workshops, though. It is the opportunity to refresh your own practice through shared experience with friends old and new. The social extras are just as important, from additional practice to the temporary labyrinth constructed by Marna Howie's husband David and the shop where tee shirts, books and random souvenirs can be found.

Two main meals are taken in the Student Union which involves a walk up through the woods and across to the MacRobert Centre beside the lake, while DIY breakfasts are catered in the chalets, allowing participants to get up and out at whatever time suits their practice. This year Sonja Schillo provided two hours of bagua at 7.30 a.m. with a qigong session by a different teacher each day at 8.30. After dinner, instruction in push hands is provided by a rotation of teachers, before an informal push hands session that lasts until after dark. Music and libations of whatever takes your fancy form part of the ambience.

On discovering that the latest Indiana Jones film was showing at the MacRobert Centre, a number of us took the opportunity to pop up and see that, too!

On Tuesday evening it has become customary to have a discussion evening. Last year we had a recorded presentation on the Tai Chi Union by Mark Peters and this year we were treated to an in person presentation by Harriet Devlin, the daughter of Gerda Geddes. This time the marquee was full and Harriet sold all but one of the books she brought with her. This was followed by Taco Tuesday, with an outside caterer providing a somewhat more exotic menu than normal university fare. Unfortunately this proved very slow to deliver but the cocktails created by Aileen's daughter and son-in-law filled the time.

Wednesday is Ceilidh night. There was initially great concern that Al seemed to have forgotten his kilt, until we realised that Gianfrance Pace had 'borrowed' it –



**Aileen Mandic**



**Al Scott**

(personally I think it looks better on Al but kudos to Gianfranco for entering in to the spirit of the occasion).

By the end of the week you feel a peculiar mix of gratitude, rejuvenation and exhaustion, there is much hugging and exchanging of contact details and, in my case, reminding people to send in their articles as soon as possible.

I know there are other similar festivals of tai chi in other countries but, while I haven't yet attended one, it's going to have to be something pretty special to overcome Cally. Roll on next year and keep July 12th-19th free. Sincere thanks to the dynamic duo and their army of helpers. 🙏

# Around the workshops

## Four seasons in a day

John Bolwell took us on a well guided and fascinating tour of playing tai chi with four different weapons. In a meticulous but also easygoing and humorous manner he taught us a different short form with a new weapon – or an object that can be used as a weapon – each day. Thanks to his expertly designed lesson series nobody got left behind or bored, on the contrary.

After every session I thought: ‘this is my favourite weapon’, until John got us acquainted with a new one. Learning to use a staff, walking cane and a dagger and towel as weapons made me feel more resilient.

We also explored various ways of stepping in four directions. The Scottish weather could be trusted to provide us with the fourth four.

I enjoyed the classes very much and would highly recommend them for both beginners and adepts. 🇳🇱

*Martijntje Goudsmit*



## Four Hands Sizheng

tuishou & moving step push hands  
Sam Masich

Sam Masich’s four days of workshops were a master class in Yang style Tuishou or push hands.

They started with the often missed out or ignored foundational work of sensing hands or Jueshou, an excellent introduction to partner work in tai chi and an essential requisite for good push hands practice.

Over the time Sam took a willing and enthusiastic group through to the four hands or sizheng tuishou fixed step method of pushing.



Sam’s teaching exhibits his wealth and depth of knowledge and was full of practical information to improve a key part of the tai chi curriculum.

The workshops included the revelation that the freestyle push hands that we all love to do is not part of the traditional curriculum of any family style of tai chi.

Members of the class

## Martial principles

with Paul Silfverstrale

One of the joys of Caledonia is that workshops are open to all levels of experience and styles. This presents a challenge for instructors and no more so that when working on martial principles. Being new to partner drills and martial applications, I was one of Paul’s beginners. But he quickly put us ‘terrified newbies’ at ease with simple but effective paired exercises for posture. We progressed through drills and applications, often the drill was a little different to the norm for experienced practitioners. One of Paul’s oft-stated phrases was: “Of course, you could do that... but that’s not what we are doing here,” ensuring we were stuck to his drills. So, even as a novice, I could contribute in this ‘hand here or there’ conversation. In the last exercise of the last day, and with much input from Paul, I had the immense satisfaction of using a throw to send my experienced drill partner staggering away across the grass. 🇳🇱

*Lorna*



Having trained with Paul’s material for a number of years, and knowing the push hands drills he uses, I was interested to see how he interpreted our system. I was not disappointed. His approach challenged and added to my knowledge. Paul has a genuine wish to help both experienced practitioners as well as those new to the game, and to open to ideas to improve his own knowledge. Paul’s friendly and honest teaching kept everyone on their toes (sometimes quite literally) without making those that did what we were not doing here feel daft. I would like to thank Paul for being so generous with both his knowledge and time throughout the week, and for inspiring me to improve my tai chi skills. 🇳🇱

*Tim*

who Sam chose to demonstrate techniques with were given important personal lessons in front of a group of more than 30 people – an interesting experience!

Class members with a lot or a little understanding and experience of push hands were taken several steps forward in their embodied knowledge and understanding.

The workshop strand contained ‘lightbulb moments’ for many of those present, much to work with and on, lots of helpful do’s and don’ts for tai chi practice and much humour. 🇳🇱

*Ken Symon*

# Around the workshops

## Xing yi quan –

for tai chi practitioners with Javier Aranz

At this year's Tai Chi Caledonia I attended a week long workshop on Xing Yi Quan for tai chi practitioners. Javier Aranz introduced a group of 11 students to the intricacies of xing yi, which, like tai chi, is also an internal martial art.



We found out that xing yi quan is based on the five phases concept – metal, water, wood, fire and earth. In our first few days of practice we learnt the five fists, each of which represents one of these elements and which can be practised in a creative cycle

and a destructive cycle. These sessions were very useful in discovering the difference between xing yi quan and tai chi chuan and how both can be integrated.

The differences and similarities became particularly clear in the partner exercises. During these partner exercises we used xing yi only, then tai chi only and then a mixture of both. At the end of the workshop I felt confident that I could include xing yi in my practice of tai chi to create interesting and effective results. 🇨🇪

Marion Pfeffing

## Sensitive standing

and walking with Helmut Oberlack

The aim of this week long workshop was for participants to gain a deep connection and awareness of how we walk and stand. By increasing the connection with our bodies and movement we were then aiming to incorporate these essential elements into the practice of tai chi and qigong into our own forms.

Practising began with exercises in standing to increase our awareness of feeling the sensation of sinking and rooting through the feet, while being aware of acupoint kidney 1 yongchuan, or bubbling spring in the ball of the foot. We did this by weight transfer in the bow stance, using various combinations, such as turning the waist and then transferring the weight from one foot to the other and then transferring weight before turning the waist.

From here we moved on to walking exercises – the first of these being millstone walking. This was a slow paced walk which became quite meditative.

We then alternated by stepping forwards with one foot fully weight bearing then turning the waist and repeating on the other side. In this movement we paid attention to protecting the position of each knee.

At each stage throughout the week's exercises, Helmut asked us to incorporate what we had learned and observed

into practising a movement from our own tai chi or qigong forms, on a before and after basis. We reported back the differences and improvements. This helped develop our body movement awareness.

During the week we moved onto other walking exercises. Wise scholar walking with its slow meditative relaxed flowing movements, combines the visualisation of the scholar slowly walking through his garden, hands behind back, bending to draw up in his hands the powerful scent of the wonderful flowers, and after breathing in the aroma on return to the upright position lowering the hands to his dantien. This movement connected us to and opened mingmen, the important gate of life acupoint in the lower spine, as well as to our dantien. The movement also incorporates waist turning, weight transference, bending and straightening the spine all co-ordinated with the breath.

White crane walking was a challenging but good exercise in balance as the crane is standing on one leg while extending his wings forwards then sideways as the non-weight bearing leg is bent and laterally rotated at the hip and the wings (arms) rise above the head. Group feedback identified the need to sink our weight by tucking our coccyx under and slightly turning the support foot at an angle to help maintain balance.

The rising movement brought our focus to the bahu acupoint on the top of the head to visualise being drawn upwards from this point. The sinking and rising movements related to the sensation of the energy rising and falling and also an awareness of the yin and yang quality in the movements.

We also practised some partner work in weight transference giving both resistance and support to each other to help us identify correct body alignment.



Throughout the week, although Helmut was instructing us how to perform these exercises he was very much guiding us to discover for ourselves how to move better with more awareness. As the week progressed he commented that our group was moving with more relaxed, soft, slow and smooth qualities and we were now more aware of combining the breath and the importance of the mind in executing the movements.

The workshop took all the participants on a journey of self discovery about the way we move, which I am sure we will all take forward into both our practice and daily lives, and for those of us who teach, to our students as well. 🇨🇪

Marna Howie



## Tai Chi Shotts Be More Tai Chi Academy

**Shotts sports centre**, 3 courts hall booked from 2 till 3pm on Sundays starting 2nd July 23.. train station is 5 min walk.. junction 5 M8.. a central Scotland gathering point for networking and the promotion and practise of Tai Chi Chuan in Scotland. There are court curtains for privacy if desired and space for weapons and push hands. You can have a swim in the pool afterwards if you like.



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We were taught that if we can't break a wall with a hammer, we should use a sledgehammer to force our way through. Power works completely differently. Why break the wall if you can enter through the door?

People often confuse softness with evasion. The fact that I can evade, dodge and resist elegantly makes me sophisticated - but it doesn't make me soft and responsive (and women in particular have the intuitive ability to sense this).



Nitsan Michaeli, one of the first Tai Chi teachers in Israel, has been studying and Practicing Tai Chi since 1980. He is also an activist on the frontline of the volatile and sometimes violent conflict between Israeli settlers and nomadic Palestinians.



**A report on a qigong weekend with Bob Lowey at the Centre for World Peace on Holy Isle. And the aftermath as Kirsten Wyeth finds out the benefits of qigong**

**T**ravelling to Holy Isle on the ferry from Lamlash on the island of Arran, I feel like a pioneer discovering an unknown territory and am filled with a sense of adventure. I try to take in the stunning scenery all around me which is a stark contrast to my home. On arrival, we are greeted by the welcoming Centre for World Peace volunteers and shown to our comfortable rooms. I have a view over the vegetable garden and immediately feel calm.

Our teacher, Bob Lowey, is friendly, down to earth and funny – with a lot of patience. He made us feel at ease from the start. I appreciated his teaching style, combining humour with solid instruction. He is a wonderful role model, someone who enjoys the art of qigong and sharing his knowledge with others. The teaching sessions were informative, enjoyable and fun, and sleep followed easily.

Over the weekend, Bob carefully went through two different qigong routines with us. Yi jin jing included movements with an assortment of names ranging from *presenting the pestle* through *plucking a star* to *swinging the tail*. Learning the *five animal frolics*, we mimicked a tiger, deer, bear, monkey and bird. We repeated the sequences until our muscle memory began to engage. We were all at different levels and this course was therefore suitable for beginners as well as those with more experience.

Mealtimes gave an opportunity to meet fellow students, who hailed from many different places, and an opportunity to share knowledge, experience and laughter. I feel I have made new friends and enjoyed chatting on a wide range of subjects with like-minded folk, while gaining insight and wisdom from shared life experiences. Wholesome vegetarian meals were eaten in a spacious dining room where you could also help yourself to a choice of teas at any time. Most ingredients are grown in the garden, which is fascinating to walk around, with a wonderful array of plants. Breakfast was a feast of porridge, fruit, toast and all the toppings you could wish for.

In between classes there was an opportunity to explore this peaceful island. Walking along a track close to the centre, I'm greeted by some friendly goats who didn't seem particularly bothered by me. They also seemed to enjoy watching our efforts when we were practising on the foreshore. Following the track around the coastline, the views across to Arran are breathtaking. Approaching St Molaise's cave, a solitary goat startles me and scuttles away and I feel like I have just met a reincarnation of the saint himself. The goats really like this place.

Waking up the first morning back home after a good night's sleep, I set up my home office space to start work, only to realise I've left my laptop at work and am now running very late. Strangely, I don't feel stressed and instead stop to think what to do.

As I drive to work in traffic, I am 'hearing' the music on



**Kirsten Wyeth practising on holiday**

the radio in a state of presence rather than thinking about the tasks for the day. As Genesis *Follow Me Follow You* plays, I'm reminded of how we followed and supported each other throughout the weekend and am struck by how grateful I am to have experienced such warmth and kindness from so many kind souls. Although I'm feeling muscles I didn't know I had, I am stronger, clearer-minded and grounded.

Determined to continue what I had been taught, I start to incorporate the exercises into my daily exercise routine which up until now consisted of yoga stretches. As I begin the qigong moves, I get things in the wrong order and miss things out, but I remember to be kind to myself, rather than getting frustrated.

A few months later, practising at home opposite a busy railway line, I'm transported back to the Holy Isle foreshore and our friendly goat audience with fond memories. I reflect that I am feeling more peaceful, physically stronger and mentally clearer. The movements are starting to resemble the more graceful flow that I had envisaged and I'm now enjoying refining and deepening my practice with more fluidity. As an extra bonus, I have found that yoga postures come more easily following qigong and I have gained more flexibility and stability.

I am feeling well, I think I must have been unwell for some time. I am enjoying a sense of renewal as well as an improved outlook on all levels. The menopausal anxiety which had been dragging me down appears to have dissipated and my digestion has improved. I have a new skill to improve my overall health right in my pocket – one that needs nothing more than my body and mind. Qigong is just the tool we need to help tame the mind and ground ourselves in this busy, changing world that we live in. 🇬🇧

Holy Isle website: [www.holyisle.org](http://www.holyisle.org)



# Are you covered?

**Our tai chi students are our friends, aren't they? Together we have a lot of fun working on our art. A bit of push hands and working out some self-defence moves. Chatting over a cup of tea. All very fine, until something goes wrong. It may not be your fault, just somebody overdoing a push. But it is your responsibility which is why proper insurance is really important**

**M**ake sure you take out a comprehensive policy that is specifically designed to cover you as a martial arts instructor; without it, you could leave yourself vulnerable to potential risks and financial losses.

As a martial arts instructor, whatever your discipline, it is crucial to ensure that you have adequate insurance, protecting you against potential claims. This overview provides a simple checklist of the essential cover that a martial arts instructor should consider when taking out insurance and why it is so important.

## Public liability insurance

Public liability is one of the most important insurance policies for any martial arts instructor. It provides coverage for accidental injuries to third parties or damage to their property that may occur during training sessions, competitions, or other related activities. For instance, if a participant injures themselves during one of your sessions and holds you responsible, public liability Insurance can cover legal fees and compensation costs. Specific to martial arts, participant to participant cover is not always included with liability cover as standard, so it is worth checking that it is.

## Professional indemnity insurance

Professional indemnity provides coverage for legal costs and claims made by students or participants in case of negligence, errors, or omissions in your teaching or coaching. This insurance safeguards you against potential financial losses resulting from claims against you. You will need to select the value of cover you need, between £1-£10 million for example.

## Personal accident insurance

Personal accident is designed to protect martial arts instructors and volunteers in case of accidental injury during activities. This policy can provide financial support

for medical expenses, loss of income, and rehabilitation costs resulting from covered injuries. It can offer peace of mind to instructors, knowing that they are covered in case of an accident.

## Equipment cover

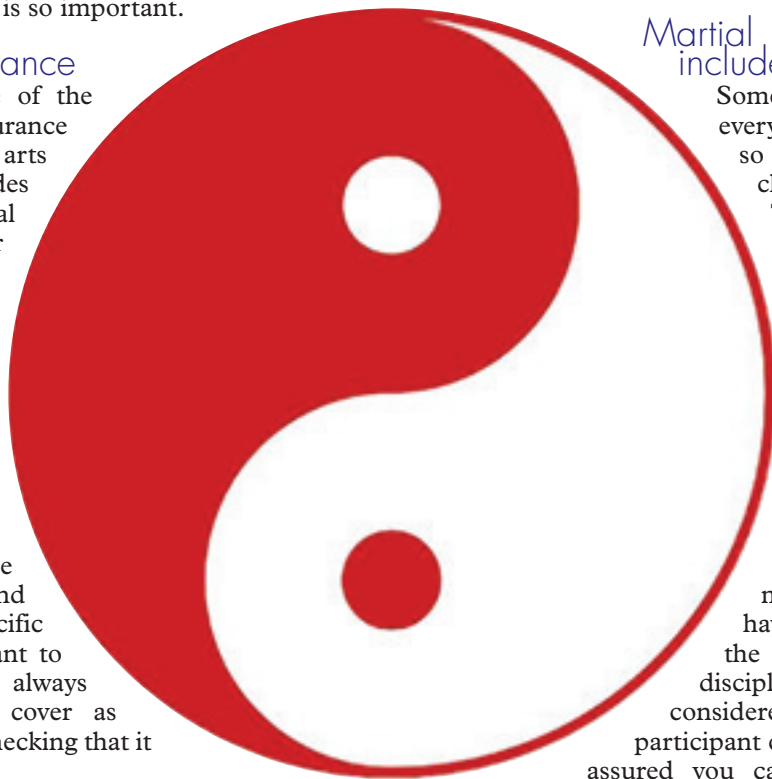
If your equipment (specific to your martial arts activity) is damaged, stolen or lost during your period of cover, this policy will cover you for the repair or replacement of these items, up to the value of cover you have taken out.

## Martial arts disciplines included

Some policies may not cover every discipline of martial arts so be sure to check that tai chi and qigong is included. These details are important in case you have to make a claim; your insurer may not cover you if there are inaccuracies in your details.

## Why it's important to have specialist martial arts cover

By taking out specialist martial arts insurance, you have the peace of mind that the specialisms of your discipline are properly considered such as participant to participant cover and equipment. Rest assured you can give your clients the benefits of your experience, in a safe and secure environment, whilst you mitigate potential risks and legal liabilities. 🇬🇧



Protectivity provides comprehensive liability cover for martial arts instructors and clubs, with tai chi, qigong and over 100 disciplines included. Underwritten by AXA XL, we are specialists in sports leisure insurance, with experienced claim handlers available, should the need arise. Get a quote online at: [www.protectivity.com/product/martial-arts-insurance](http://www.protectivity.com/product/martial-arts-insurance)

# Healing hands

Julie Weeks

I worked as an Occupational Therapist in the NHS and for many years I specialised in musculoskeletal conditions and achieved recognition as an accredited hand therapist (AHT) under the British Association of Hand Therapists (BAHT). Although tough, I loved my job, but I often felt there was something missing in my NHS job. Some patients were recovering from surgery or acute burns, several had arthritic conditions which caused relentless pain that could understandably, cause anxiety and often depression. Equipment, splints, exercises, and medication worked for many, but I felt others would benefit from a different approach.

For several reasons, alongside my NHS work I trained in Shiatsu which further enhanced my interest in the mind-body connection. I found a great balance with the two sides of western NHS and eastern private practice and have since been keen to consolidate these two facets of my working life. More recently, the opportunity to study for an MSc in health and rehabilitation at the University of Southampton arose, the natural topic for my dissertation was tai chi and hand function. This is a synopsis of that research

Photography by Nigel Kenny: [www.kennyimages.com](http://www.kennyimages.com)

All forms of arthritis cause inflammation and pain that impede movement and affect daily function. Pain reduces function and fear of increasing pain or joint deformity can lead to movement avoidance. Movement avoidance results in muscle weakness, which is exacerbated by sarcopenia (loss of muscle mass due to age or disuse). However, tai chi can be modified to suit individuals' abilities and therefore may be a form of physical exercise that can reduce the effects of sarcopenia.

Practitioners of internal arts are biased because we know the internal arts are cost effective therapies which support so much more than just physical movement. Yet there is sparse research evidence to underpin the benefit of internal arts and hence provide credibility for them within western medical opinions. Therefore, we need research to obtain data. However, research into internal arts is hard due to the variables of forms and different teaching styles, lack of funding and little precedent to conduct randomised controlled trials in internal arts intervention. I had the privilege of working with some wonderful people on this

small study. Here are some personal reflections, some extracts and the key findings. I believe these comments on tai chi probably apply to all internal arts.

Tai chi needs robust research data to establish its effectiveness:

Robust data will give it the credibility which will increase its value within the western medical field. There is increasing evidence to support the benefit of tai chi for lower limb strength, balance and falls prevention, and generic wellbeing, yet there has been very little research on its impact on upper limb (UL) or hand function. The QuickDASH (QDASH) (IWH, 2006) is a well-respected standardised UL self-report outcome measure with a proven history in hand therapy; hence it was chosen to collect data for this study.

## Public health services under pressure:

Because tai chi promotes functional independence in all aspects of health, it is a great all round preventative therapy that can help to reduce some of the pressure on

<b>Inclusion criteria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New to Tai Chi</li> <li>• Starting a 6-week course of Tai Chi for Arthritis (TCA)</li> <li>• Self-report joint pain of 4 or more on the JPSS</li> <li>• Sufficient written English to self-report the questionnaires</li> <li>• Willing to provide written consent</li> </ul>
<b>Exclusion criteria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serious medical pathologies that could affect UL function</li> <li>• Previous Tai Chi or Qigong classes</li> </ul>

public health services. Facilitating appropriate gentle physical, sustainable exercise regimes, will help people take ownership of their own physical, mental, and social wellbeing. Therefore, tai chi deserves recognition in the public health domain; data will help tai chi achieve this recognition.

## Financial health:

For the individual, tai chi classes are often cheaper than gym membership, require no specific clothes and open hand forms need no expensive equipment. For health providers tai chi is cost effective when compared to the huge expense of medication, commitments for professional appointments to treat musculoskeletal conditions and/or mental health issues. Many of these conditions will benefit from gentle, nourishing exercise within a supportive group environment. From a society view tai chi is a cost-effective therapy which can provide gentle movement found to have the potential to reduce many health issues associated with lack of movement including joint pain, falls, anxiety and depression, (*Francis 2013 and Solloway et al 2016*).

## Social wellbeing and mental health:

Recognition of the importance of both social wellbeing and mental health has improved recently, probably in response to the huge social and mental challenges people faced during lockdown. More is known on the connection between physical and mental health, with awareness growing for the connection with social wellbeing. People come to tai chi classes for numerous reasons and usually talk about physical movement; before long, they are also noticing improvements in their mental health and social wellbeing.

## Why look at UL function?

We know UL function is important for our own personal care such as hygiene and food preparation, and to provide care for others. We often overlook how important UL function is for our balance, self-esteem, and personal expression; all of which have an impact on our mental health. Research into the benefits of tai chi is increasing, however very little directly looks at UL function.

No published studies were found that measured and recorded the impact of a short course of tai chi on UL function for adults with arthritis. Two studies (*Kwok et al., 2010 and Pei et al., 2008*) did suggest tai chi benefitted hand eye coordination.

A full list of references used for this study is available on request. A recent search (05/05/23) found an increase in articles on tai chi and UL however these relate to UL rehabilitation after strokes.

Grip strength enhanced by hand dexterity and joint

Qualitative questions	
Has your general health changed since you started the Tai Chi?	If yes please give details here:
General health theme 1	More relaxed... less stressed (D10)
Stress and relaxation:	Learned to relax a bit and move more slowly (S15) 'Mental health has improved... slowed down...' (M16).
General health theme 2	Able to move shoulders more easily (H03)
Smoothness of movements, flexibility and strength:	Improved flexibility (D10) Move more slowly and gently (S15) Shoulders feel stronger...can open jars more easily... (M13)
General health theme 3	Balance has improved (G02)
Balance:	Improved balance... (D10) Legs feel stronger, balance improved... (P14) Improved posture and balance... (D10) Can now do all the (warm up) exercises standing... (M13)
Has your ability to cope with your joint pain changed since you started the Tai Chi?	If yes please give details here:
Pain management:	Ability to respond to the pain has improved as I now have some 'tools' to use like breathing and meditative exercises (C01) Pain lessened (E07) No longer have pain, reduced movement left shoulder...no longer a problem (P14)

proprioception contribute to safe UL function which correlates to functional independence, these component skills deteriorate with age, and further reduce with joint pain. As the body continually adapts, it is reasonable to assume that some of the negative effects of sarcopenia on UL function can be reduced through regular physical exercise, including tai chi, yet there is paucity of evidence to investigate the impact of tai chi on UL function.

## Methods:

Between August 2018 and March 2019, tai chi for health instructors running tai chi for arthritis (TCA) (Lam and Hortsman 2002) courses for new participants recruited suitable adults. The inclusion criteria are outlined in table 1 and the sample demographics in table 2. Two short self-report questionnaires were given to participants on week one and week six of their course: The QDASH and the joint pain screening sheet (JPSS). The QDASH gathered information on UL function and the JPSS gathered information on location of pain (table 4) and severity of pain (table 5). Participants were asked to draw arrows on a mannequin drawing to show the location of their pain, then rate this out of 10 and answer qualitative questions on general health themes including stress and pain management (table 6).

## Intervention:

Participants were taught general principles of exercise safety the Tai Chi for Health Institute (TCHI) warm up exercise routine and started to learn the TCA program. TCHI instructors use the Stepwise Progressive Teaching Method (Lam and Miller 2011) which helped to reduce variables in teaching style and promoted consistency across the venues.

## Analysis:

Statistics were used to summarise, describe and analyse the results from the questionnaires.



## Results:

Results provide evidence of a positive trend towards improvement in self-report upper limb function and pain management for adults with arthritis. This is encouraging within the context of a six week project as literature connects regular tai chi practice with greater benefit over time.

The QDASH mean score was 38.73 at baseline and 24.09 at follow-up which gives a statistically significant result.

The QDASH paired samples analysis of difference between baseline and follow-up scores were statistically significant ( $p=0.01$ ).

The total number of arrows pointing to locations of pain ranged from 2-9 at baseline and 1-9 at follow-up and 7 (63%) recorded no change in number of arrows, which gives a statistically insignificant result.

Wilcoxon's non-parametric JPSS test results for number of arrows were not significant ( $p=0.059$ ).

The total pain scores ranged from 8-70 at baseline and 0-42 at follow-up with the largest improvement from 9-1 (88.88%) which gives a statistically significant result.

Wilcoxon's non-parametric JPSS test results for total pain score were significant ( $p=0.003$ ).

## Conclusion:

Summary findings from this small study provide evidence of a positive trend towards improvement and support the theory physical exercise is beneficial for health. This short course of TC had a positive impact on self-reported UL function and self-reported pain for adults with arthritis. No adverse incidents were reported and as TC is cost effective, offers group support, and caters for individuals' unique level of ability, results suggest clinical practice could explore the use of TC as a suitable form or physical exercise to maintain or improve UL function and help control pain, for adults with arthritis.

## What was positive?

Attendance during the course was encouraging.  
Support from instructors.

The QDASH is simple, short, easy to complete and calculate.

## What was negative?

This study was limited: data for six weeks on 11 female participants aged 62-80 years attending daytime classes.

## What do these results add?

A small contribution to the 'big data' that helps to underpin evidence to support TC, and suggests the concept that TC has a quantifiable effect on UL function and self-reported pain for adults with arthritis, important because of the increasing ageing population affected by arthritic conditions (Francis 2013).

## What I would like to see?

I would love someone to take this concept forward and find data to show the benefits to ULs of mindful practices like TC so that more people can maintain a greater level of functional independence for longer. 🇨🇦

I would like to thank the team involved in this study specifically Jo Adams PhD, Dissertation supervisor; students who participated and instructors who collected data (all named in the Dissertation); Miranda and Kevin Mole PhDs; The Elizabeth Casson Trust and Arthritis Research (now Versus Arthritis), who supported early modules in the MSc, and Purplelily Design for help with the graphics, thank you to all who supported me in any way.

### Dedication:

This research is dedicated to the precious memory of Miranda 'Coriander' Mole PhD.

### Dissertation:

Thank you for reading this article, if you have any comments or would like a copy of the full Dissertation, please email [taichivithjulie@gmail.com](mailto:taichivithjulie@gmail.com).

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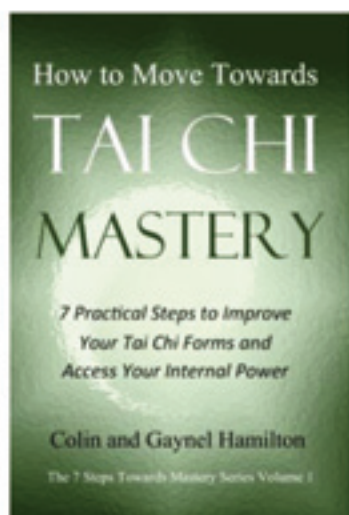
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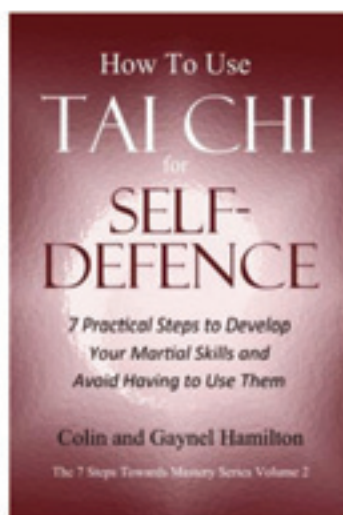
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# From Mystery to Mastery

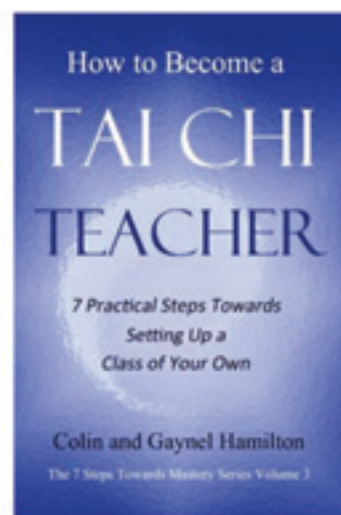
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*"Previous teachers just said reverse breathing without explanation. Have lowered my blood pressure 20 points since reading this book."*  
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*"Just brilliant; the authors pack a lifetime of key knowledge into less than 100 pages."*



*"I have in my collection over 100 books on Tai Chi. This book is by far the best in my collection...Explained in terms anyone can understand. It covers class style applications as well as those for tournament and most importantly street self defense...This book gets to the basic physics of why Tai Chi works if you practise and apply it correctly."*



*"Highly recommended to new teachers but it contains a fair bit of info for those who already teach and who may be needing some fresh ideas and inspiration."*  
*"Sound, practical advice in a conversational and very readable style...the authors can be said to have contributed something truly valuable to the literature and art of taijiquan."*



# Strength for mind

**When I was a child, my Mum had a part time job at St. Peter's Hospital in Bourne, Lincolnshire. St. Peter's was one of the old fashioned style of mental health hospitals and is no longer there, having been demolished in 2001.**

**Mum would take me along to events such as summer garden fetes at the hospital where I would meet her workmates and some of the patients. At the time, I didn't really think much about it. We were just going out to try and win a cake on the tombola stall.**

**Whether she realised it or not, I will never know but Mum was giving me a very useful life skill. By mixing and making friends with what we would now classify as people with learning needs I was quietly becoming accustomed to them' writes Ray Pawlett**

**M**y tai chi journey began in 1991 when I went to university at Nottingham Trent to study engineering. I have been fortunate to have studied extensively with (in chronological order), Shelagh Granpierre, Chris Pei and Joe Lok. There are a few other big names in my tai chi history but these are the people I have done the most work with.

My tai chi style is the Yang style from the lineage of Yang Zhen Ji. My major qigong style is *phoenix in graceful clouds of blessings*, taught to me by the originator, master Joe Lok.

In 2011, I made the break and decided to give up my engineering career and created a small business that I call Ki-Ways. I teach tai chi, qigong, treatment work, meditation, energy, connection with nature and give shiatsu healing treatments as my full time job.

Very early in my self employed career, I was given the opportunity to teach tai chi to a group of people with learning needs. The experiences given to me by my mother and my world of tai chi became married together and the union has been a happy one since that day.

The world is a different place to what it was a few years

"If we can truly work from our hearts, then we can speak to that potential and not even need to know where it may or may not lead"

ago. Before lockdown, we had a healthy number of people coming but somehow the numbers didn't really recover after lockdown.

This kind of work is important to me as it gives benefit to many people: the service users, their carers and their families. So I wanted to keep it going even though it had



**Ray Pawlett's students**

become financially difficult.

In the TCUGB magazine, I saw mention of the Gerda Geddes Fund. This fund is to help disadvantaged people to have access to tai chi coaching.

I contacted the Tai Chi Union with my idea and they liked it. There was a simple application form for the grant which I filled in and sent to them. Our special class was then discussed at their board meeting.

They unanimously agreed that the cause was a good one and that the Tai Chi Union would award our group the maximum grant possible to pay the rent for the hire of the room. I felt that it is a little bit extra special as this is the first such grant to ever approved.

This means that for around seven months, the rent for



**“I also have a lot of experience in coaching tai chi for people with dementia” - Ray Pawlett**

the Learning Support Tai Chi Group is covered. I can now confidently go out and recruit new members to the group, safe in the knowledge that the group is stable and that we will not have to stop running it.

I am not a professional carer, so if a person needs that sort of help, then a carer must come with them. Other than that, there are no real restrictions on people joining the group.

I also have a lot of experience in coaching tai chi for people with dementia. From the outside, it could look similar and actually much of the content is similar. However the delivery is completely different. It is a great example of how coaches need to adapt to their group.

When coaching people with learning needs, your empathy is what will connect you to the participants. Some of the clients will be non-verbal. This really forces you to connect to them empathetically. The ability to connect deeply on this level has become a cornerstone for my work and I think those who helped me to hone the skill.

I believe that everyone has huge potential within them. We may not ever understand what that potential truly is, but it is there. Even with the most cognitively challenged people, this is also true.

If we can truly work from our hearts, then we can speak to that potential and not even need to know where it may or may not lead. This becomes empowering for the client on all levels.

I would like to share a little technique with you. Many people in the world of qigong know about the inner smile. It is easy to look up if you don't.

Sometimes, I come across people who have become very confused and distressed. I hold their hand, placing a little thumb pressure to the centre of the palm. This point connects energetically to their hearts through the pericardium channel. Then create an inner smile from your heart and smile with your face.

You will soon see the distressed person look up at you and smile. Stay with it for a while and let them find their new emotional state.

My experience is that the professional carer with that person will quickly say something like "Wow, he/she really likes you! He/she has been upset all day and you have cheered them up."



**Ray Pawlett and a pawful friend**

I quietly smile to myself and know what has really happened. 🇨🇭

# Tai chi convention

**How would you like to see (and participate in) a one or two day tai chi and internal arts extravaganza including seminars, discussions and competition to be held mid-2024? Robert Agar Hutton proposes a new event**

I went to the London tai chi competition this year and was not overly impressed. It was great to see friends but competition is not for everyone and the way it was run seemed sub-optimal to me.

I came away thinking: “Oh well, not my problem.” And then I remembered that for around nine years (actually eight times in nine years starting nearly 30 years ago) I ran a multi arts event called the UK MEET which did not have competition but was a chance for people to come along and try a number of different martial arts.

Then I thought: “Nah, I’m 70 this year, I don’t have the time, energy, or enthusiasm to start up some kind of seminars and competition event... then I thought, ‘So if not me, who?’.” [Remember, T.T Liang said: “Life begins at 70.” Ed]

So, here I am, asking YOU – would you like to see a one or (probably) two day event combining seminars and workshops and discussion sessions, along with competition – including a veterans’ section and sections for disabled people (I came across the term ‘differently abled’ some years ago, and although normally I run away from anything that even suggests ‘political correctness’, I really like and prefer that term) – so that we could cast a wide net. All internal arts and all flavours and styles welcome, without inter-group rivalry or politics. TCUGB or XYZ or ABCDEF, everybody come along, leave your ego and petty rivalries at the door, and come in and help people and have fun.

Also I’d really like to run an event that would focus on getting ‘normal people’ (not just us tai chi junkies) to come along, watch, and/or participate. We desperately need to increase the range of people who practise tai chi so encouraging more people to see it as a beneficial health and wellness discipline and also to show that there is a self-defence and fighting aspect to get people who are curious about that side of things to join in too.



**Robert Agar Hutton**

It would be great to have spectators at the event who were not related to, or fellow students of, the competitors. You know, ordinary people, like you get at a boxing or football match

So, I need *your* help: could you take on any of the following:

- 1) Help with the creation and running of the event?
- 2) Teach at the event?
- 3) Compete at the event?
- 4) Help spread the word about the event?
- 5) Do something else to do with the event?

If the answer to any of the above is “YES” (and just think what the publicity such an event could attract might do to help people and maybe also increase participation for your club) please contact me at [robert@ihtca.co.uk](mailto:robert@ihtca.co.uk) or call me on 07771 333 369

I know I said that I am planning the event for mid-2024, but don’t wait, contact me right away. Events take an ENORMOUS amount of planning and preparation. 🇬🇧





# 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

Reach these tai chi and qigong practitioners, advertise your events, workshops and martial arts equipment in *your* magazine  
email [advertise@taichimag.org](mailto:advertise@taichimag.org) for rates  
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# Inspiring legacy

**There can hardly be anyone in the tai chi world who has not heard of Gerda Geddes, the woman who brought tai chi to our shores. When her daughter, Harriet Devlin, came to Tai Chi Caledonia to give a talk about her inspiring mother and the legacy she has left, the marquee was packed**

Gerda's life story is detailed in the book *Dancer in the Light*, by Frank Woods but, briefly, she was born to an influential Norwegian family in 1917, became a resistance worker when the Nazis invaded and escaped to Sweden. She had rebelled against her upbringing, moving in the bohemian circles that led her to dance and the psychoanalysis of Wilhelm Reich. This led to her teaching breathing and how to express emotion through movement to great actors and musicians, before falling in love with an Englishman and moving to China in 1949. When the communists invaded, another escape was needed, this time from Shanghai to Hong Kong, with her first daughter baby Jane, but also with a love of tai chi. She found a teacher in Hong Kong who was prepared to teach a European woman, before leaving the debilitating climate with a move to England and helping her teacher and his family to move to the United States.

One of Harriet's earliest memories is of a large colonial bungalow on the peak in Hong Kong, raised over cellars so that air could circulate underneath, and her mother practising with two elderly gentlemen in the courtyard. These were master Choy Hawk-pang and his friend. Master Choy had been a student of Yang Cheng-fu, the grandson of Yang Lu-chan, and a fellow student of Cheng Man Ching. It wasn't done at all to mix with European women, they could only teach the martial art of tai chi chuan and neither could speak English but Gerda watched and copied and practised. Rather than seeing tai chi as a martial art, she began to perceive it as an allegorical journey through her study of Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, and through her increasing knowledge of Chinese literature, poetry and painting.

Gerda and her husband David returned to London when her health became too badly affected by the climate. They were true sinophiles, they loved everything Chinese, and owned some beautiful pieces of art, but understood that they did not wish to become cultural imperialists, adopting the culture without truly understanding it. Gerda studied the meaning and character of the animals and the movements in a way that most teachers didn't. She began to piece together an astonishing interpretation of the long form, through the names and symbolism of the movements and the sequences, which charted everyone's life journey from birth to death, as both a physical and a spiritual journey. She later wrote about this in her book *Looking for the Golden Needle*. On returning to London, she offered classes in tai chi to young dancers who were destroying their bodies, as an antidote to the torture they exposed themselves to, but it was some time before she offered open classes, having found The Place, founded by Robin Howard.

At first she couldn't remember the tai chi she had learnt and asked her teacher in San Francisco for a recording of him doing the form. The film was in mirror as she watched



**Harriet Devlin**

and Harriet remembers her frustration – and determination – as she went over and over the moves on the tennis court of their house in Kent.

Although Harriet had absorbed her mother's tai chi while growing up and knew the Yang long form, she began to attend her mother's classes at The Place in London.

Harriet's day job involved making museums and conserving buildings – she created a post graduate degree in building conservation for skilled tradesmen and professionals. But her other life involved studying tai chi chu'uan. Unlike her mother, Harriet wanted to learn everything, including the martial side and the applications. For this she had to go to New York, to Cheng man Ching's school and to San Francisco, to master Choy's son Choy Kam-man.

Harriet also wanted to learn more about the flow of qi and the meridians, so she learnt shiatsu and became a shiatsu practitioner, later studying in Taiwan and Japan. Her mother never learnt qigong – there was no one to learn it from – but there were many teachers coming from China by this time and Harriet learnt qigong to use as a warm-up. Despite all this, it was her mother's spiritual



**Harriet Devlin’s talk at Tai Chi Caledonia**

disciplines that held a particular interest for her too.

Harriet has taught for most of her life, through her career and family life. If she has inherited her mother's passion and her mission, she says that tai chi chuan can be used on many levels, from simple exercise, to the martial, to the breathing and to the 'where am I on the journey of my life?'

After her husband and soulmate died, Gerda moved nearer her older daughter Jane, in Aberdeenshire and began to teach there. The opportunity to make a new life was embraced fully but Gerda knew when to stop and retired in 2002 at the age of 85. She also stopped practising, finding she no longer needed the movements – she was a living embodiment of the meaning of the moves. She died a few years later following a stroke, having declined all treatment. She was, Harriet says: “Luminous.”

Harriet, also retired now, has found herself drawn to Scotland, where she will carry on her mother's legacy by setting up new tai chi classes in Edinburgh. Harriet says: “My mother was interested in humanity, in people. Everyone is on the same journey through life, regardless of their race, creed or gender. She was a huge inspiration to everyone who met her, inspired herself by the Daoist principles that formed the precepts she lived her life by.”

Modestly, Gerda Geddes wished her name kept out of the limelight and said in the epilogue of *Dancer in the Light*: “You can't write a story without me being the heroine and I don't want to be a figure of any kind at all. I've always tried to avoid that. I think the only thing of importance I've contributed is the allegorical journey.”

Now she has another legacy, the Gerda Geddes Fund,



**Tai Chi Caledonia organisers Al and Aileen with Harriet Devlin**

something she knew nothing about but would have been delighted to see. The idea came from Ronnie Robinson, who became a good tai chi friend after she moved to Scotland, to enable people who would normally not have access to tai chi to take part. Gerda was a great admirer of the vision of Robin Howard, who was in a wheelchair himself, and who set up The Place in London, where she first taught. The first application has been disbursed and Ray Pawlett's article on page 22 details how life enhancing it has proved to be. 🇬🇧

*An Interview with Gerda Geddes, by Ronnie Robinson. Tai Chi Chuan & Oriental Arts magazine.*

*Looking for the Golden Needle: An Allegorical Journey by Gerda Geddes (out of print but Harriet and Jane plan to have it reprinted). Dancer in the Light, an autobiography by FrankWoods.*



Helmut Oberlach teaching sensitive walking Tai Chi Caledonia  
Report page 14



## Focused to win

Interview by Robin Gamble

Jeffrey Alexander Sutherland began his martial arts journey in 1977. He first studied judo and later sam tu-dang, a martial art based on harmony and balance. In 1989 he achieved his first black belt and in 1992 became the world champion at the sam tu-dang golden international championships.

Jeff trained in Chinese martial arts with wushu master Dr Wen Linjun, and completed a teacher training course under him in 2000. He is also certified by Dr Paul Lam to teach tai chi for arthritis and specialises in exercise for fall prevention in older adults.



**Jeffrey Alexander Sutherland**

**H**is School is the Jeffrey Alexander School of Martial Arts (JASMA) in SW London where he teaches tai chi chuan, shaolin chuan, and qigong. He says that he combines traditional teaching values with contemporary training methods.

Meeting Jeff, the first thing that comes across is his air of positivity. He says: “For me that is important in life and also in training, sparring and competing. If you get hit you haven't got time to commiserate. You just put that to the side, be positive and move forward. Even if you're taking multiple hits, during those flurries, you have got to stay focused.

“Whether you're fighting, or pushing hands it's all business. There's no happy, no sad, there's no remorse, you can't be saying 'sorry' when you hit someone. If someone hits you, you can't be waiting for them to say sorry to you. If you win a point you can't be celebrating. If you do you're distracted and then you are open to a counter attack. Whether you hit or get hit you must maintain the same attitude. You work to maintain an equilibrium.

“And that's important. Especially if you claim to be a tai chi person. You need have an understanding of yin-yang, and how yin and yang works with you as a person. Yes, we can read the classics. And we can learn from a teacher about yin-yang but we have to be able to apply the theories to ourselves. Because how it may work for this person might not be the same as how it works for the other person. I think that while many people have a generic understanding of what yin-yang is, they don't really look at themselves. When you look into yourself, and you try to decipher how it works for you, it can be a hard road because you're holding the mirror up to yourself. And there are parts of you, of your personality or your way of doing things that may be out of balance. And a lot of people do not want to address those things. So this whole notion of yin-yang is really important. It is very, very deep.”

Jeff has a long training history, and a lot of competition experiences. He has always kept notes about his experiences. As we said at the beginning he started off in judo in 1977. He says: “I have always been taking notes, for self analysis and improvement and all that. I actually found notes from February 1977. They are about a judo competition I had been in with some other school boys. I had done well, but I didn't feel comfortable with my ground game. From the age of 12 I was writing that stuff down.



“From judo, in around 1986, I went into full contact kung fu, it was kind of a hybrid style. In the 80s, there was a style in the UK known as wushu chuan. A lot of UK practitioners started there but I trained with some guys who branched off. One had his own system, which was based on harmony, balance and neutralising, it was a combination of tai chi, mixed with capoeira, some Chinese kung fu, and a few other bits and bobs.

They were a really clever bunch of guys. One was a doctor, one was an artist, and one was a martial artist. They researched the whole thing. I trained in that style from 1986 and around '89 I started competing. In those competitions, you have to do forms, and full contact sparring. It was interesting. There was one section where you had to do a certain number of takedowns within a certain period of time. And there was a really interesting sparring competition where it was three people sparring on the mat at the same time.

“It is called triangle sparring. So two of you might pair up against one. And then one of them can turn on you so you have to have all your wits about you in all directions. They call that triangle the king boxer. And I was very happy that in 1996 I actually beat my own instructor. So he got bronze and I got silver. That year I also became the world champion for that system. I liked the system, but it was very hard on the body. It was tough, tough, tough, tough.

“When I learned throwing we didn't use mats. We were in a church hall with wooden flooring, and my instructor, Everton, was six foot three and had dreads down to his waist, big ole hands. The guy could do box splits, front splits and do flying sidekicks over my shoulder height, and I'm five foot 11. The guy was an absolute beast and he used to throw us around like a rag doll. It was tough, and that toughness took its toll on my body. I had a hip dislocation though not in class, training outside the classroom with a friend. I dislocated my hip, broke my left and my right leg, and tore my anterior cruciate ligament on the right side. So I started researching. And that's when I found out about tai chi.”

In 1990, Jeff started training with a Chinese doctor, Dr. Wen Linjen, in North London. He taught tai chi,

baguazhang zhang, xingyi chuan, tongbeiquan and shaolin. Jeff started with shaolin it being similar to the styles he had worked with previously. And then tai chi chuan.

Jeff says: "His tai chi was something else.

"The first time I saw the doctor performing tai chi, I had already trained with him for a year in shaolin. As he moved across the hall he looked really heavy, like a barge, but like a barge floating on water. I was really fascinated. It was a dichotomy. I thought: 'how can he look so soft, but yet look so heavy at the same time'. That kind of attracted me to tai chi chuan and I took that up in 1991.

"Wen had learned from his grandfather. When he was six years old he was getting into fights in school. He wanted to defend himself. His grandfather said: "No, when you stop fighting, then I will teach you." By the time he was nine, he had stopped fighting at school and his grandfather started training him. On his way to school, he would go to the grandfather's house and train for an hour. At lunchtime he ran back to his grandfather's, to train again then go back to school, and again on the way home from school.

"He became the trainer for Yunnan Province. Later he graduated at Columbia University of Medicine and came to the UK in 1990. That's where I met him.

"Dr. Wen is a fighter and he was really keen to teach us about the energies. So he would come at us with his favourite move which was cloud hands. He would advance towards you doing cloud hands and he would sit down low, a bit like Tyson, but with cloud hands coming straight at you. And if you didn't get out of the way he'd get you."

A lot of tai chi practitioners are only interested in the health benefits so we asked Jeff whether he thinks it is important or necessary for them to study the application or the fighting aspects?

Personally, I don't think that you can have tai chi without the martial side. I say to my students 'imagine you are a chef. You are the world's greatest chef at making potato salad. You teach all your students how to make potato salad, and they become expert. Three generations later, your descendants go to a potato salad convention. And someone comes along and looks at your potato salad and they see these lumps in it and they ask: "What's that?" And your descendant says: "Potato." And they say: "Well, we don't have that in our potato salad."

"So what do you have in it?"

"Oh, we have mayonnaise. We have apple, we have raisins, we have onions and it tastes nice and looks good."

"But how can you call it a potato salad with NO potato in it?" For me that is like tai chi without the chuan in it.

"So the person might say: 'Well, we didn't have any potatoes where we lived. But, to pay homage to the ancestors, we present our salad in a bowl shaped like potato. So that tells you that we 'know' about potato, and one day, if we find potatoes, our descendants might reintroduce them'.

"Don't get me wrong, we can and do tai chi chuan, or 'tai chi', without the martial application, but you better know that it's not 100% real tai chi chuan.

"A person might not have the ability to practise the combat, or they may not have the interest in the combat, but it is a question of how we teach them. We can teach everybody the form, and then we can teach them the form applications. We can make it interesting. We have the three P's, 'purpose, practice and principle'. So for every movement the student has to know, what is the purpose? How to practise it? And what's the underlying principle?

Does it mean you get to be a fighter? No. But if you know that cloud hands is to catch the person's wrist on the outside gate, move it across to the ground, or, 'brush-knee-and-push' is to push their hand down, you know the application, you know the principle then you can teach somebody that and they can go into competitions.

"I can't overstate how important it is to understand about the basics. The basic drills, to know how to bring the discipline into the training. A lot of people do not train things like flexibility and fitness conditioning. All of that is important. We have our students stand in the horse stance, sitting low for X amount of time, let them suffer a little bit, build up their willpower. So I would say that the combat side, the application side is essential. However, a good teacher can weigh up how much the student needs to learn."

This is an area that Jeff constantly emphasises. The importance of training, not just the forms but for general fitness, something that is frequently overlooked.

"I think that, fitness conditioning for the body as well as the mind is crucial. Flexibility training and the jiben gong is, in my opinion, essential. Not many people really train in that way. The classics never tell us to go jogging. The classics never tell us to stretch every day. To make yourself strong. So why do they not tell us that? They are training manuals, so I ask: how come they're not telling us to do resistance training? Why are they not telling us to run up and down, make ourselves strong and flexible?

"It may well be that they take it for granted that we already are in that condition. But when people read the classics there's no mention of that. So most people don't think they need to do it.

Most of the masters don't show you that side of the training. But they did it when they were children. Like Yang Jun. Now Yang Jun is the person that I train with at the moment. I've been going to see Yang Jun since 2007. And every year I go and see him in seminars, either in Cambridge\* or in Paris. And he hardly ever tells people to practice jiben gong, but he's done a lot of it. You can tell when he does his kicks, when he picks his knee up to kick,



you can tell. And sometimes when he's talking and he demonstrates, while he is talking, you can tell from the way his body moves that he's done the basic drills.

“Yang Jun talks about when he was young, being at home with his grandfather. His grandfather would have

“In tai chi, if they don't move, we don't move. If they move we move first. I remember I was really fascinated by that”

friends around and Yang Jun would be under the table doing stance training for, hours; literally hours. I have seen children training in China doing four moves in a combination for an hour and a half nonstop. No supervision. No one coming over and saying, keep working. I think, in the West, we don't do those drills enough. We are not exposed to the drills. We are not exposed to the idea of doing one technique over and over again.

This series is about tai chi in combat so it was interesting to hear about instances when tai chi techniques, skills or tactics proved themselves useful to Jeff in a combative environment situation.

“Yes, a couple of times in the street, where things were going a little bit topsy turvy, I was able to apply some of the techniques my teacher showed me.

“In tai chi, if they don't move, we don't move. If they move we move first. I remember I was really fascinated by that, we did a few drills on how to make that happen. On one occasion, a while later, I found myself in a situation where I was confronted by three guys. At one point, there was this kind of a standoff moment, between me and the biggest of these. And he was getting ready to lay on some punches. I remembered the training we did. So I became totally present in that moment. Everything calmed down, everything just disappeared. It was just me and these three guys. And this notion came to me that he's about to move. So then when he then made his move I had already slipped his punch. And I was already right in. The look on his face said ‘wow, how do you get there so quick?’ I still received a beating from the three of them but it wasn't as bad as it could have been. I got a busted lip and had to get stitches, but at one point, it was fantastic. I had all three of them just like in a movie. I had my arms around these guys, heads down and I ran them off into the wall. And then I went down, and then they started laying kicks into me.

“There was something else I learned at that time. The idea of softness during combat. I was still more on the hard side of martial arts. This one guy picked up a broomstick, and came from above striking downwards at me. The system that I studied, said anything comes down this way at you, block, like a karate style block. But my tai chi teacher, said to me now that's not how you should do it. You should do it more on an angle and let it sweep past. Well the stick broke over my arm. And then my assailant pulled a knife and then started stabbing at me with it. So I learned the notion of using the angle to sweep out and not to go 90°, force against force.

“So if they move, then we move first. We can feel their energy, even before they have the thought. The energy moves first, and that's what we can tap into. That's the tai chi theory, about what's happening. But Western sports science theory says there are micro clues that you can pick up on if you're trained. And I believe it is a combination of the two.

“I see a lot of tai chi practitioners getting caught up in all this magic stuff. Tai chi practitioners in the West seem to regard that stuff highly. ‘If I look at you, you're going to go flying’, ‘I breathe on you, you drop down’. I think, that because some people have that notion in the back of their mind, it makes them less likely to be involved in the more practical, nuts and bolts side of tai chi chuan. They are less likely to develop the skill. There are some prominent figures around who act like, tai chi is not really punching, ‘we just brush our hand lightly and they will go flying’.

“Well, I don't know about that. With your body movement, you can lead the other person to make them go flying and if we want to, we can make out like it's a magic skill.

“I remember we were in China once, it was a nice exchange, but there was a guy, he was the main martial artist in this particular group, and he was dressed in combat gear. I think he was a part time military person and also a part time teacher at the school we were visiting and doing some demos. He came over and we were doing a bit of friendly pushing hands and, I kid you not, the guy literally gathered up his chi and tried to fajing me. I couldn't believe he was doing this. He tried to fling me away and of course I just stood there. He tried again. The third time I had to give him a bit of ‘face’ and moved back a little bit so it didn't look so bad. He obviously had this notion in his mind, ‘I'm going to fajing him, and he's going to go flying’. No, because that's not how we play. We play for reality. And there are people out there who have this notion in their mind that they can just pull the wool over people's eyes or just do a few moves and they're going to come out on top. I'm sorry, I know kids, 13 year old, 14 year old, 15 year old kids on the streets that will cane a lot of these people. So we shouldn't promote magic and woo-woo, but real skills bred in reality.



\*A seminar with master Yang Jun is planned for 2024 in Cambridge. No details are available at present. TCC&IA will publish these as soon as we have them.







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# Odds at the end

## And the things people say...

### New qualification to teach

**B**CCMA (the British Council for Chinese Martial Arts) has launched a nationally recognised professional coaching qualification. The new award is validated by the CIMSPA (the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity). There is more information on the BCCMA website, ([www.bccma.com](http://www.bccma.com)). You can also apply to join the first preparatory full day online training programme (via Zoom) on 17th September 2023. The fee is £60 for BCCMA members and £90 for non-members. Successful completion of the course will involve the assessment of your teaching skills and knowledge, including syndicate work, video evidence of your teaching practice and the completion of home-based written assignments.

The qualification will be a prerequisite if you decide to go on to undertake subsequent assessment for CIMSPA technical specialisms when they become available.

The course has capacity for a maximum of 20 participants booked on a first come, first served basis. 🇬🇧

To the casual observer tai chi might look like people waving their arms around, but Chen Man-ch'ing once said: "I had a dream in which I had no arms. Then I could do tai chi."

### Tai chi moves... by Neil Bradley



**"It's a funny story how we met, actually. I was looking for a tai chi instructor and she was looking for a billionaire."**



Yorkshire celebrated World Tai Chi Day in style, on the 29th of April 2023.

Five prominent instructors from across the region joined together to deliver sessions on Exercising Qi in the Channels (Paul Underhill of Gateway Tai Chi (Settle), Combining the Elements in daily practice (Bridget Tayan of the Zhong Ding Traditional Chinese Martial Arts Association (Harrogate). Qigong by Richard Siwiak of Metta Tai Chi (York), 7 Star Push Hands (Betty Sutherland of UK Tai Chi (Goole) and, Jennifer Fitzgerald of Dales Taiji (Leyburn),

Feedback from the participants confirmed that a great day was had by all. 🇬🇧

*Same time, Same date next year*

### Diary Dates to watch...

- 2nd & 3rd September: annual weekend camp . Bournville Birmingham
- Tuesday 5th September Fa Soong Gong (deep relaxing exercise)
- Heaven's Breath chi-kung (qigong) workshop on Thursday 12th October live on zoom 1-4pm

**Contact Mark Peters 07831743737**

### 2024

● Robert Agar-Hutton is proposing a two day tai chi and qigong event in Milton Keynes. He is looking for volunteers so contact him on **0771 333 369** to register your interest

● Master Yang Jun will be hosting a seminar at the Yang Chen Fu Centre in Cambridge. Dates to be confirmed. Details will follow as soon as we have them. 🇬🇧

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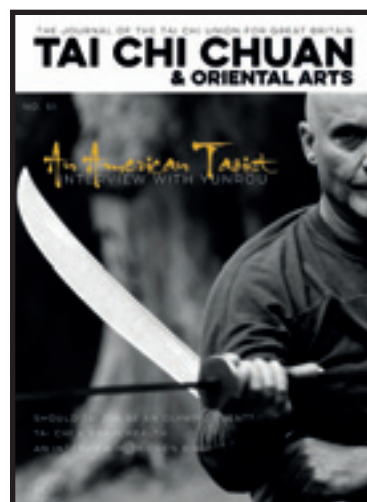
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Sword play at Tai Chi Caledonia.  
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