

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

TAI CHI CHUAN

& INTERNAL ARTS

No.64 January 2022 | £5.00



Dan Docherty

1954 – 2021

TAI CHI CALEDONIA

25



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



The Location



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

The Venue

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



The Programme

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

Weekend Sessions

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

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

Week-long Sessions

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

The Instructors



Wudang 8 Powers Taijiquan
Tina Faulkner-Elders



Nei Gong
Gianfranco Pace



Meditation & Movement
Margret Stürz



Practical Aspects of Taijiquan
Sasa Krauter



Taiji Thirteen Power Sword
Sam Masich



Baguazhang Fan
Sonja Schillo



The Mother Sequence
Margherita Padalino



Sensing Hands
Ben Morris

Guest Instructors

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



Bartosz Samitowski



Wilhelm Mertens



Pim Van Der Broek



Javier Arnanz

Barry's Boot Camp

07.30 - 09.30 Sun till Thursday

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

Qigong Training

08.30 - 09.30 Sun till Thursday

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

Push Hands

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



Cally Ceilidh - Wednesday

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



Testimonials

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

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

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



Ronnie Robinson
1953 - 2016
Always missed

Get in touch: bookings@taichicaldonia.com



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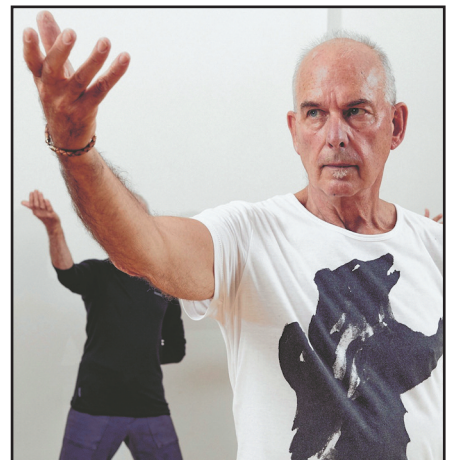
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Comment

Last year Dan Docherty, one of the founders and a driving force in the tai chi union, celebrated 50 years in martial arts. We had planned for this issue an article celebrating his tai chi journey. My colleague, Suse Coon who knew Dan, carried out a number of interviews with him and produced a great article telling his story (page 7). Caroline Izzard wrote a report on the camp held to celebrate the milestone (page 10). A front cover was planned. I was stopped in my tracks one Friday morning when I received a text telling me the Dan had died. The article would become his obituary. Our plans suddenly seemed shockingly prescient.

I only knew Dan by reputation, I met him once, on the doorstep of a tai chi studio in Bethnal Green. At the time he was clearly ill. My colleague Suse Coon did know Dan and had worked with him. From the number of tributes we received Dan was well known, liked and respected. His reputation was international.

In publishing time and space are constraining factors so let me apologise now if your tribute does not appear. The union has set up a tribute page and anything that we haven't managed to fit in will be published there. If anyone still wishes to pay tribute they can do so at: www.taichiunion.com/dan-docherty-1954-2021

There is never a good time to die but, somehow, just before Christmas seems particularly bad. The team at Tai Chi Chuan & Internal Arts offer our condolences to Dan's family. We hope the number of people who have given tributes and Dan's great legacy in tai chi may be some comfort.

John Roper

TAI CHI CHUAN & INTERNAL ARTS

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Union for members

Welcome to the 2nd issue of the new format magazine. hopefully you are enjoying the new sectional and more inclusive format. Please do send in your contributions and encourage your students/teachers to contribute, Mark Peters TCUGB chairman writes

We are working hard behind the scenes to keep improving things to better support our members, and the general public/organisations looking to the Tai Chi & Qigong Union for Great Britain (TCUGB) as the largest and most inclusive body for internal arts. We have updated the membership application process to improve standards and quality control: we have updated our standards and ethics policy, complaints and disciplinary procedures, and membership types. All these updates make us a stronger and more professional organisation.

The trademark issue has raised its head again, details of which are later in this magazine, plus shared on social media, and our website. As a CIC, one of our key aims is inclusivity not exclusivity; with this in mind we cannot knowingly accept any members' efforts to claim exclusive rights to any aspects of, or recognised style of the internal martial arts we represent.

Some members will be aware that Dan Docherty passed on 9th December 2021. He was a great force within the world of internal martial arts, with a personality to match. I first met him around 1990 and we grew to be good friends. He asked me to take over as TCUGB chairman in 2020. My thoughts and prayers are with him and his family.

This 2nd issue of the new format magazine includes a feature on Dan's '50 years in martial arts' event. His influence over the development of the arts via his teaching, competitions and international links leaves a legacy for us all.

TCUGB eco online store

Now the magazine is available online both as a flipbook and pdf download www.taichimag.org we are planning to add more back issues over time, so members can access and read them online. For those wanting a printed copy (from issue 61 onward) these are available at:

www.askonline.shop/collections/tai-chi-qigong-union-for-great-britain

We have now negotiated a better cover price of £5 based on the new layout. Prices are plus P&P dependent on location as some subscribers and members are not UK based. As a CIC we are a not-for-profit organisation, but we are also a not-for-loss organisation. The magazine costs (design, production and distribution) have not been covered by membership fees for a long time and that should have been shared openly with our membership sooner. The board are all volunteers and we are working to improve, hence the regular e-newsletters and social media posts. We are working to improve communication but do need your help and support with this.

The health committee is keeping on top of sharing

updates re Covid, risk assessments etc. with members. They are also looking to build a database of real research, and look to support new research. They can be contacted at:

www.taichiunion.com/tcugbhealthsubcttee

Regional officers

We put a call out for regional officers as local people have

a better handle on what is happening in their region. I have been asked by those who showed an interest what the role would involve. Truth is it's a new role so will develop over time. I image that at first it will be to link up teachers (members and non-members) locally to network. This would encourage non-members to join and gain support. Regional officers could recruit local support if it was felt a local team/committee would be beneficial. They can feed information to the technical panel when needed, highlight opportunities for development and even research. Maybe even, in the future, help to host regional TCUGB events. You can email me at enquires@taichiunion.com if that sounds of interest.

What would you like from the union?

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



Mark Peters

Mark Peters

www.taichiunion.com/

Twitter: [www.twitter.com/TaiGreat](https://twitter.com/TaiGreat)

Facebook page: www.facebook.com/tcugb

Open group:

www.facebook.com/groups/uktaichiqigongandinternalartstcugbopenforum

Members only group:

www.facebook.com/groups/1273194333034852

Google: <https://g.page/TCUGB>

Wu shù shì yè jì tǐng (Martial Arts are one family)

The trademark illusion

Last year there was a big controversy about trademarks. Members of the TCUGB tried to grab exclusive use of description of styles of qigong and tai chi. Many thought this was somewhat against the spirit of our art. Mark Peters reports an update to members on the current position

As TCUGB members may remember, an application was made to the Intellectual Property Office (IPO) to register as a trademark ‘Tai Chi 24’. This was done by one of our own members. The name ‘Tai Chi 24’ is for a commonly practised short Yang style form created in the 1950s and taught throughout the world. The application caused obvious concern among our members, many of whom contacted the IPO to raise this.

Unfortunately the application has been approved by the IPO and the trademark is now registered. However, the trademark that has been registered is for a figurative-trademark only, not a word-trademark, meaning the words are part of an image or logo. The registered trademark can be viewed on the IPO web-site using this link:

<https://trademarks.ipo.gov.uk/ipo-tmcase/page/Results/1/UK00003559150>

As a result, members who use the phrase ‘Tai Chi 24’ in advertising their classes may continue to do so without fear of infringement action being taken against them.

Despite the fact that many instances can currently be found of the registered trademark symbol ® being incorrectly used against the ‘words only’ on websites and social media pages, this common term ‘Tai Chi 24’ can still be used freely by all.

The TCUGB is not aware of any style of tai chi chuan or qigong that has been trademark registered ‘words only’ without further descriptive words adding to make the trademark more distinctive. The IPO should not permit the registration of generic words or terms, however the staff at the IPO do not necessarily have the specialist knowledge of Chinese language and culture to enable them to identify things we would say are generic. If it comes to the attention of any TCUGB member, of a generic term that registration is being applied for, please do let us know via the link at:

www.taichiunion.com/trademarking/

The website page also includes details of who to contact at the IPO and trading standards, along with a position statement from the TCUGB.

Qigong trademark update

The International Health Qigong Federation (IHQF) has recently been posting on social media regarding Health Qigong and its links to the Chinese government-sponsored ‘Belt and Road initiative’. The IHQF’s main agent in the UK is British Health Qigong Association (BHQA) and it was its director, Tary Yip, who trademarked the words ‘Heath Qigong’, in the UK, to prevent those not associated with IHQF/BHQA from using what many have always seen as generic descriptive words.

The IHQF and its representatives have been adding the words ‘Heath Qigong’ to a number of widely practised



Mark Peters

qigong sets (nine to date) including yi jin jing (muscle and tendon strengthening), wu qin xi (five animals frolics), and ba duan jin (eight strands of the brocade), implying exclusivity, but these qigong sets, and many others, are in the public domain, and are practised and taught by many people worldwide as health and fitness improving qigong. We encourage all members, where applicable, to use the term ‘Qigong for Health’.

Everyone has the right to continue to practise and share these numerous sets, and to continue to use the set’s names without fear of prosecution, or association with IHQF and its representatives. As the IHQF appears to have declared its connection with the Chinese Government and CCP (Chinese Communist Party) we felt we should inform our members. The Tai Chi & Qigong Union has no political affiliations.

In future issues of our journal, we will be sharing a history of nei-gong, daoyin, zhan zhuang, xing qi, and qigong, along with the diverse styles of taijiquan and related internal martial arts.

Our mission is to protect members’ interests and to promote and encourage wide participation in and development of the internal arts. Through the journal and website we will keep members informed of any developments around the use of trademarks or attempts to restrict our practice. 🌱

TAI CHI

Dan Docherty

1954-2021

a tai chi journey

From karate in Glasgow to winning the South East Asia full contact championships: Suse Coon tracks Dan Docherty's tai chi journey

Overleaf 

TAI CHI JOURNEY

This article was originally written as part of a tribute to Dan Docherty's achievements in 50 years of martial arts, which he celebrated in August, both in person and via zoom. As the article was put together, our conversations covered footballing nuns (where I lived as a child overlooked his convent school), R.D. Laing* (that was an accidental message that appeared one night and rambled back and forth for half an hour until 'Mr Bruachladdich' appeared), the effects of 'this virus' and climate change on teaching tai chi and the invasion of China by the British. All typical of Dan's wider interests and concerns.

His accomplishments as a competitive fighter and teacher are legendary.

His first venture into martial arts was a karate course at Bellahouston Sports Centre in Glasgow in 1971 when he had just finished school. He was a black belt by the time he finished university in 1974 and went to study further in Paris. Having gained his LLB he joined the Inner Temple and read for the bar by correspondence course while still training in karate and reading about other martial disciplines.

Teaching martial arts seemed a much more agreeable way of earning a living than being a solicitor in Glasgow. He was fascinated by the sound of tai chi chuan but the tai chi chuan on offer at home was poor quality (taught by a dance teacher) and Dan knew it should be better.

Just as he was coming to the conclusion that he would have to go to the far east to train, he spotted an advertisement in *The Observer* recruiting inspectors for the Royal Hong Kong Police and saw a way to find a more meritorious teacher. He flew out to Hong Kong in 1974 and, after visiting some dodgy clubs with links to the triads (not a good idea for a policeman) George Button, the chief physical training instructor at the police training school put him on to Cheng Tin Hung. Cheng Tin Hung's tai chi was different from anything Dan had seen before, with its emphasis on evasive footwork and neigung. Dan had found his master.

Much of this can be read in *Wild Colonial Boy, Tales of a Kung Fu Cop*, which offers many insights to the relationship that developed over the years between Dan and sifu Cheng Tin Hung. But though Dan wanted to teach, he wanted to earn the right to address his master on the subject. He wanted to become an international champion to prove the art, then he could teach anywhere. There were teachers who were not champions. That was not the sort of teacher Dan wanted to be.

*Ronald David Laing (7 October 1927 – 23 August 1989), usually cited as R. D. Laing, was a Scottish psychiatrist who wrote extensively on mental illness.



Cheng Tin Hung demonstrates while Dan translates



Application with student

Chinese Full Contact fighting competitions are held on a raised platform without a rope. Opponents come from any martial art but few represented tai chi chuan and any part of the body is fair game except the groin. On one occasion Dan witnessed a young man being killed by a kick to the neck – perfectly legal. Cheng Tin Hung had brought Dan onto the board to help with translations and no doubt his honed lawyerly mind was a great asset. Gloves were worn which limited the tai chi moves that could be applied, but with only one year's training, and despite competing in the heavyweight division, two up from his natural place, he won the Chinese full contact championships, following this up by coming second in the South East Asian championships.

Honour

In 1980, Dan again made it through to the final of the South East Asian championships, only to meet Lohandran, the man who had defeated him on points four years earlier. While Cheng Tin Hung would stop at nothing to win (he offered Dan anabolic steroids, which Dan, son of two Scottish doctors, declined, telling him "I'll never take this kind of shit") he did advise him that he had done enough by the time he qualified for the final and could withdraw against the Malaysian Heavyweight champion without shame. Despite being already badly injured, Dan didn't see it that way. He said that people would interpret his withdrawal as fear which would discredit the school and the whole tai chi discipline, so went ahead – and won.

Respect

In Chinese society, you show respect to your teacher by doing anything for him but Dan, partly because he was working as a full time police officer and partly because of his own sense of integrity, made up his own mind. "If you do bad things, you'll attract bad karma," he said

Nor does Dan demand blind respect from his own students. "You can't," he said. "They have to give it to you. We all make mistakes. Mistakes you learn from if you have some intelligence. I sort of see myself as one of the Chinese errant knights, the *youxia*, who travelled around trying to avoid talking to people, meeting friends but making



The knock out (KO) of Roy Pink at the Chinese martial art full contact championship enemies.”

As Cheng Tin Hung gave Dan more and more of his time, using him for demonstrations, making him an inner door student and developing his skills, the two authored a book, which Dan published, simply called *Wutan Tai Chi Chuan*, which illustrated and explained the moves in the hand form as well as putting tai chi into historical and cultural perspective.

International

Dan was not the first Scot to train under Cheng Tin Hung – Ian Cameron had been a student three years earlier and by this time had a school in the Edinburgh area under the name Five Winds. While the two didn't always see eye to eye, Dan always regarded Ian as his older brother.

After nine years, Dan felt the time was coming when he could return to the UK and follow his dream of setting up an International School. Eschewing his hometown of Glasgow, Dan went to the biggest city in Europe which happened to be London. He took the name given by Hong Kong journalists to Cheng Tin Hung's school – Practical Tai Chi Chuan.

Cheng Tin Hung himself taught in a chaotic fashion and was never seen to do the form from beginning to end. As many students were illiterate, and as nothing was written down anyway, classes were taught using mnemonics, like chanting, with stories that were not necessarily relevant to the movement but were memorable. Hence also the square form with the yat yi san count. Dan decided something more orderly was necessary when he started his own school.

“There was a South London newspaper where I read about a centre that was looking for martial arts teachers, so I went along. The area was full of ethnic people, Middle Eastern, Indian, West Indian, it was a really interesting place. The school was an illegally occupied school building, which would have been empty otherwise. They had nothing so I taught the manager, my first student, Michael Jacques for nothing.”

Michael knew a lot of people so word of mouth, as well as leaflets and posters, brought more and more students. Dan's first invitation to teach overseas came from Ilpo Jalamo in Finland. His reputation was further enhanced following an eight page full colour interview with Terry O'Neill in *Fighting Arts Magazine*. People had never seen photographs of Chinese full contact fighting before – and the rest is history.

Dan's plans to be an internationally renowned and respected teacher of tai chi chuan came to fruition and many of his students have also achieved competitive success. He was instrumental in founding the Tai Chi Union and the Tai Chi Federation for Europe to ensure quality teaching and fair judging of competitions, though sometimes found himself at odds with fellow committee members. He never suffered fools gladly.

So what now?

Dan's answer was to quote the poet Li Bai who said, “Going up or going down is predestined. There is no point consulting a fortune teller.”

Asked whether he himself was as fatalistic he replied, “You can change things.”

Things certainly changed 15 years ago when Dan was diagnosed with Parkinson's. Remembering that his sifu had often been debilitated by diabetes, but just got on with it without complaining or feeling sorry for himself, he chose to do the same, to adopt the daoist principle of wuwei and 'go with the flow'.

“But,” he said, “things became a bit more serious.” He began writing even more. He recently added a collection of stories about his time in Hong Kong, entitled *Wild Colonial Boy*, to his books and translations of tai chi and the classics. When he died, he had been planning to publish a revision of the classics. “The longer you live, if you keep your eyes open and your ears to the door, you learn things and you see more connections,” he explained.

Tai chi chuan was a great help in dealing with his condition. Dan practised four sessions a day, neigung, qigong, form and whatever he was teaching, not necessarily slowing down or conceding anything. “The form is like a river,” he said. “The speed changes, it's not always fast or always slow; it's fast at the right time and



Dan karate

TAI CHI JOURNEY

slow at the right time.” Pre Covid, Dan and some of his students taught falls prevention classes to elderly people, which is quite a humbling thought. “It’s important to maintain your physicality,” he said. “And your mentality. But tai chi is good for that. We can learn a lot from the Chinese.”

Zoom

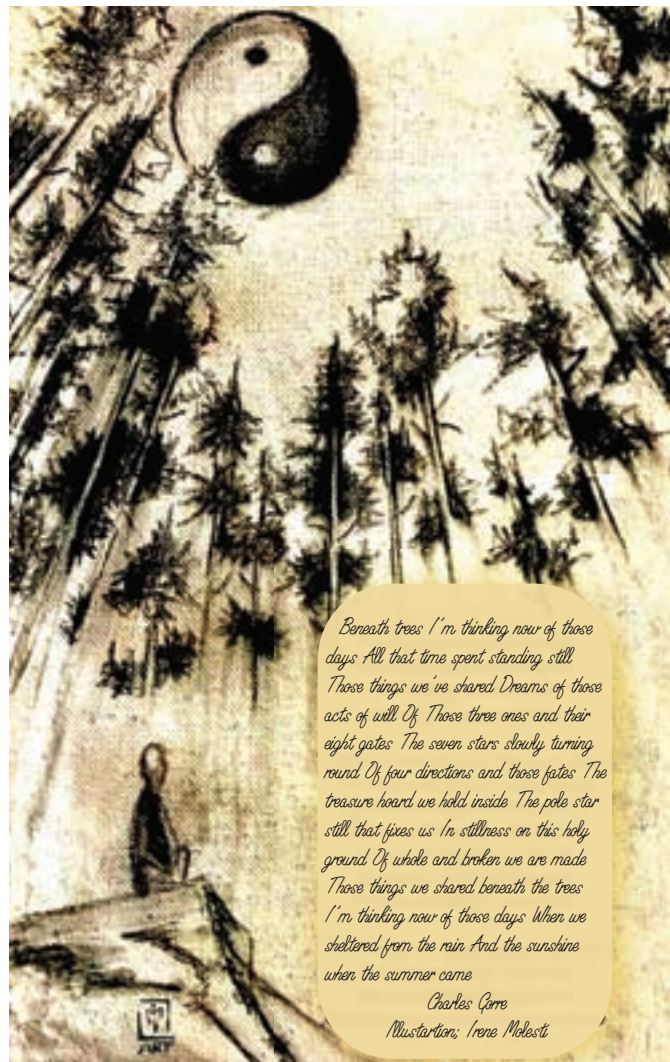
As for the future, “Zoom is the way forward,” he predicted. “It’s too expensive and dangerous to do anything in person just now. And climate change is going to affect our lifestyle. The days of travelling around to classes and festivals are over for now at least.” (And will be missed by those attendees who loved the open air classes and home cooking that accompanied them.) “Maybe people are doing their own practice. I hope so. People think they attend classes to learn but the best way to learn is one on one and you can still do that to some extent on zoom.”

Workshops planned

While Dan continued to teach in person at workshops, he had planned a series of workshops on hand and sword forms for 2022, from his home 'Docherty Towers' in London.

“Things could be worse,” he told me. “There are bad days and good days. Life is about a balance of time, energy and money. I just do the best I can each day.”

And that seemed a good place to close the interview. Dan requested a couple of changes and said there were more to come but never forwarded them. I am indebted to Caroline Izzard and Charles Gorrie for their help in improving and clarifying these words.



*Beneath trees I'm thinking now of those days
All that time spent standing still
Those things we've shared Dreams of those
acts of will Of Those three ones and their
eight gates The seven stars slowly turning
round Of four directions and those fates The
treasure hoard we hold inside The pole star
still that fixes us In stillness on this holy
ground Of whole and broken we are made
Those things we shared beneath the trees
I'm thinking now of those days When we
sheltered from the rain And the sunshine
when the summer came*

Charles Gorrie

Illustration: Irene Molesti

Caroline Izzard, organiser of the camp celebrating Dan Docherty's 50 years in martial arts.

Previously, Weedon in Northants had seen several one-day workshops with Dan Docherty. It was decided to turn the August 2021 workshop into a three day camp. In the run-up to this, Dan announced August marked his 50th anniversary of being in martial arts. How were PTCCI practitioners to acknowledge this occasion – at the same time as respecting that there were still Covid guidelines to follow – and Dan kept telling us he didn't really want a fuss?

Around 40 people attended over the three days, including some highly respected practitioners from as far afield as Orkney and the Isle of Wight.

Most of the training was done outdoors, with a strong emphasis on applications and advanced training with, of course form work, drills, partner work and weapons. Being safely back together again in a training space felt good.

We planned that those who wished, both Saturday and Sunday – could stay on for food and drink in the hall – a much needed time to be together after lockdowns. It was also decided that both Saturday and Sunday evenings, a live zoom link would be another way to include people who couldn't make it to the camp, and a few people from different countries were able to connect and participate in this way.

Zoom gave a chance to share stories and experiences from the years, and show our gratitude to Dan – and to consider the future. In addition, reflecting Dan's international teaching and the PTCCI community, an online space for PTCCI practitioners was created on Dan's website for those who wished to contribute a story, memory or similar from Dan's 50 years in martial arts. Thank you to all those who helped to make this event what it was, whether that was organisational help, food and drink contributions, or generally being supportive and attending.

Thanks also go to Weedon village community for their support but most of all, thanks go to Dan for having been who you were and making PTCCI what it is.



Dan Docherty: a tai chi journey

A selection of the many tributes to Dan from friends and colleagues

It was a great shock to hear of Dan Docherty's passing.

I first met Dan during my time in London in the late 1970s. We became friends and, later, colleagues when I joined the Tai Chi Union and started to attend his yearly Oxford Tai Chi competition with my students.

He was a controversial figure in the tai chi world then, and remained so during the turbulent events in 2018/19. He was always his own man and went about things his own way. Something to be admired. After Dan invited me to onto the TCUGB executive/board I came to understand how passionate he felt about our Tai Chi Union acting as a uniting force for the UK/Ireland/ Europe teachers and instructors. Going back more than 20 years, he had a built-in radar for influence and possible moves that in the future were likely to emanate from China central Wu Shu organisations. The pressure to link up with Beijing Tai Chi/QiGong rule makers and gradually become an outpost open to control was an absolute no no. I shared that sentiment.

Some saw Dan as a bit of a wolf. In reality he was more the opposite, a sheep in wolf's clothing. I will remember him with affection. He will be missed.

Shelagh Grandpierre

Marnix Wells

Dan was a man of action, of few words and no nonsense. He was intensely loyal to his Wu-style taiji teacher in Kowloon (Hong Kong) Cheng Tinhong (Zheng Tianxiong) and refused to question the latter's faith in the legendary Zhang Sanfeng as the art's founder. I found him a faithful friend but very private person. His enormous legacy in the world of taijiquan through his school and writings lives on.

Dr Alex Ryan

Many tributes to Dan will honour his unusual skill in taijiquan. He was an exemplar of how to unify the martial, medical and meditative dimensions of our art. Like so many, I benefited hugely from his wise, forthright and authentic training – he was simply one of the best teachers I've known, in any field.

But I would like to pay tribute to another aspect – his scholarship and this aspect of his legacy. I started a PhD on the British taijiquan movement in the late 90s. I reviewed all the available books and was stuck for making sense of the history until I found Dan's work. He was clearly a controversial character but from his writing it was obvious he was extremely witty and highly intelligent with an impulse for truth-seeking and for cutting through delusions and ignorance for the sake of protecting quality. All key attributes for any scholar – particularly in the contested world of martial arts history.

I went to interview him for my PhD. I didn't know what to expect from this feared fighter – but Dan invited me to his home, cooked me supper and mad eme welcome. He challenged me to get his stories out of him – we talked for hours and became friends.

As well as his involvements in the TCUGB and TCFE, and the development of his own school, Dan dedicated himself to writing several books. This continued through the last decade or so of his life, despite illness compromising his ability to work and to type. I was privileged to help him with these productions, notably the trilogy of the *Tai Chi Bible*, *The Complete Tai Chi Tutor* and *Tai Chi Chuan: Decoding the Classics for the Modern Martial*



Dan Docherty

Artist. I told him I reckoned these were in turn his undergraduate textbook, masters dissertation, and his doctoral thesis. He cared deeply about making these books as good as he could, so the wider community of current and future practitioners could learn from them, no matter what style they practised.

Richard and Simon Watson

To Daniel Docherty's family and friends. We are at a loss for words. We know there is nothing to say that will make your loss easier but know that you are in our thoughts and prayers, we are sending you our love.

We hope you can understand what we can't put into words. RIP Daniel Docherty.

Dan Docherty: a tai chi journey

A selection of the many tributes to Dan from friends and colleagues

Bob Lowey

It is challenging to witness one's friends and colleagues slowly being robbed of their health and vitality. Dan's vocation in life was slowly curbed by Parkinson's disease an infirmity which, whether you liked him or not, you would not wish on anyone.

I met Dan a year prior the conception of the TCUGB and admired him for his forthright attitude when engaging with people. He openly voiced his opinions and demonstrated great organisational skills.

There is no doubt; Dan was a resolute, sometimes enigmatic character, who will be preserved in the chronicles of Taijiquan. ☪

Catherine Birkinhead Tai Chi in the Chilterns

Only ever knew Dan after he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. They say when the student's ready the teacher appears, and after at least 10 years or so of tai chi practice in another style, our paths aligned.

Dan became my sifu. He was the right sort of person to get the best out of me as a student.

He was a generous, loyal, reliable, supportive teacher and friend. So many moments I cherish, whether it be one-to-one tuition or small group seminars with him or having the privilege of him teaching at seminars for my own students.

He would be the first to admit he was no saint, but he made up for that in spades in so many ways.

A true master of their art inspires beyond their earthly existence, and since his sudden passing (only one week ago at time of writing this tribute) it has already become apparent how many people he has inspired and continues to inspire. ☪

Nick Singh

I was raised in a military boarding school from the age of six and lived with mum in London from 12yr of age. I bumped into Dan age 14 at Michael Sobells – I had no concept of payment or classes or why I was there – just instinct and a voice in my head telling me I needed to protect myself.

This man taught me 4hrs for free for the first few years. I have never been bullied, badly pushed or even lost a real fight since.

You were an amazing guy, Dan. I always had and will continue to have a lot of respect and gratitude for you.

You literally gave me the tools to help protect myself and others around me. ☪

“ A lovely man. Very supportive in my development as a tai chi instructor. My thoughts are with his family ☪ ”

Jan Gardner



Bob Lowey (L) with Dan

Stephen Wooster, Canvey Island Essex

I first heard about Dan Docherty in 1986 and having a previous background in Japanese MA, I went along with some friends to learn the hand form and improve my karate. Little did I know that this man would change my life. I embarked on my tai chi chuan journey under his stewardship; it would take me around the world to visit some fantastic places and meet interesting people. I have many wonderful memories, one of which was in my first lesson I was introduced to a something called pushing hands. Let's just say I thought I knew a few things and was very strong but after being bounced around the church hall and getting to know the floor really well, I knew this man had the goods.

Lastly from me, it is a great testament to Mr Docherty that he has truly created an international family with people from all colours, creeds and various, religious denominations all working together under his practical tai chi chuan clan. ☪

Heidi Tordrup

I met Dan in 1999 in Cranbrook, where I received my teacher's certificate. Shortly after that I went for my initiation at his home in London. This was the beginning of a long friendship, and a lot of travelling.

I helped him many times sorting his house and garden. I taught him to cycle, I often drove for him. He was extremely interesting to talk to, and an inspiring master.

I went to China and Macao with Dan together with Geert Van Loo and Tony on Dan's last visit to see his master and have been to many sacred sites with him over the years. I am eternally grateful for all he has taught me and for his support and inspiration. He was truly one of a kind. ☪

If you would like to pay tribute to Dan you can do so on the website here:

www.taichiunion.com/dan-docherty-1954-2021/

Where are we heading?



What does the future hold for tai chi? Robert Agar-Hutton offers some thoughts on the future of our art...

TAI CHI – THE FUTURE

What does the future hold for tai chi? Let's start with some questions:

- Is the art of tai chi going to improve or be reduced to a shadow of its former self?
- Will 'Wave hands like spaghetti' - tai chi that is so soft that it becomes a meaningless uber-easy 'exercise' - become the norm?
- Will lineage become more and more meaningless as the number of instructors increase, and is lineage actually of any importance anyway?
- Is the fighting art relevant in a modern society where either 'knife-fu', 'gun-fu' or 'car-fu' (an attack with a knife, gun, or even running someone down with your car) will beat kung-fu pretty much every time?
- Should tai chi be developed into a mode of physical exercise based on sports and exercise physiology and medicine and not on old wives tales and dubious pseudoscience?

Of course, there are other questions and some may even be more important than those above, but let's start with those.

Improving tai chi

Is tai chi going to improve? I think that the answer is a big YES. On a daily basis there is more and more information about tai chi released via the internet and published in books. I am old enough to remember when the 'words of wisdom' from an instructor were almost always believed, and there was no way at all to check their truth or worth. Those days have gone, as long as students are inquisitive and willing to do a bit of research. Of course, not all information is good or worthwhile, but an informed and widely-researched audience is better than an uninformed one.

There is also the pressure of market forces. The majority of tai chi is taught for money and consumers are more aware and more demanding than their forebears. The internet (and other advertising mediums) coupled with a more mobile population means that if you are the only instructor in a town, you cannot guarantee to dominate the local market as would have been the case a generation or so ago.



Robert Agar-Hutton

The coronavirus pandemic has broadened the marketplace for many instructors as they have learned to teach via zoom, and has also educated consumers as they realise that their potential tai chi instructor can be 'virtually' anywhere in the world.

Will it become too soft? Here there is a real and ongoing concern. We live in an age where 'quick and easy' seems to be the mantra that every advertisement is selling. Easy tai chi that does not require any work or straining of muscles seems to meet the requirements of 'be relaxed' and so is an easy trap for students and less experienced instructors to fall in to.

Hard and easy

I teach mainly an older demographic and strive to get them (and myself) to constantly push the boundaries of what is possible for our bodies to do. Obviously, there are limits and especially with older students, safety must come first. However, throughout life the human body is capable of developing and improving and a good instructor should be showing how the correct practice and application of tai chi can allow growth to continue. Sadly this is not always the case.

One of the things that needs to be done is for good instructors to articulate the fact that learning tai chi is not 'hard' but neither is it 'easy' – it requires work and commitment and there will be the occasional ache as the body is encouraged to develop and grow. It is very easy to get caught up in the marketing of the art.

Perhaps the most interesting thing that I have observed is that generally students who are older seem to be more willing to put in the work than the younger ones... Maybe because life has taught them that hard work is necessary to gain rewards.

The importance of lineage.

I have been taught by people of impeccable lineage and by people with either dubious lineage or indeed no lineage at all (they learned from someone without lineage, or learned from books, or made it up) and in my experience



lineage is absolutely NOT an indication that an instructor will be capable of teaching the art.

Further, I learned years ago, that as a beginner you often learn more from a new or intermediate instructor than from a 'grandmaster'. This is because many teachers who are very experienced have lost the ability to frame information in a simple way. You don't get many university maths professors also teaching maths at preschool. It requires a different skill set.

Lineage is also often an excuse for poor teaching methodology – I have met people who could do amazing things and had undeniable skill, but used their lineage as a certificate of competence rather than taking the time to develop teaching skills.

Teaching safely

For a beginner, who is starting to learn tai chi, lineage is of little to no importance. The important issues are: can the instructor teach, and can they teach skills that are fit for purpose. If I go to a tai chi class, I don't expect to be taught either Muay Thai or interpretive dance, and I expect to be taught safely by someone who understands good body mechanics – simple things like keeping the knee from being torqued by incorrect posture or movement, to ensure the long-term physical wellbeing. And yes, I have been to classes that would fail both of those tests.

Where lineage is useful, is for an intermediate or experienced student who specifically wants to learn tai chi of a particular style or from a specific branch of that style. Here is where being aware of an instructor's lineage will allow the student to be more certain that they are actually learning the style or sub-style that they want.

Another instance where lineage is important is where a student wants to be a teacher, then learning from a lineage holder can lead to that student also becoming a recognised lineage holder. However, that said, out of the hundreds of students that I have taught, only a handful have ever wanted to instruct, so for most students this is not

important.

One thing that does worry me is that a few people who are (or claim to be) lineage holders, use it as a way to climb onto the 'My tai chi is the only real tai chi' soapbox. This is both sad and patently untrue. Equivalent to someone who drives a Volvo (or any make of car) saying that only Volvos (or whatever) are the only true car.

Tai chi for fighting. I love the practical aspects of the art. I had studied the art (a couple of different versions of Yang style, and Lee style) for a number of years and my instructors had taught me 'tai chi dance' – i.e. the form without application. I then came across a teacher who had disassembled the 24 move modern Yang form (What I originally learned in Malaysia as the 'Peking form') and was able to show me how EVERY move could be utilised to either maim or kill an opponent. Wow was I surprised at the extreme violence that was hidden (pretty much in plain sight) in the form.

Self improvement

Now, I am not a fighter and don't want to be. My interest is in martial arts for self improvement and self defence. Further, I do not think, for one moment, that the art that most students learn once or twice a week will give practical self defence skills. Self defence requires much more than knowing how to wave hands like clouds. But, I also think that every instructor should know and understand the fighting principles of the art and should teach some of those principles and applications – Covid-19 protocols allowing – because the understanding of the body mechanics necessary for efficient fighting underpins the mechanics needed for health and wellness.

Science or pseudoscience?

I'm going to deliberately ignore the bigger part of this debate that centres around the science of the traditional Chinese medicine model versus the modern western medicine one. I am also going to sideline the conversation

TAI CHI – THE FUTURE

that we could have about, is ‘chi’ a manipulable esoteric force that is currently unproven by modern science or is it just a handy metaphor that allows people to discuss things they don’t actually understand?

How much ‘chi’ in a bag of tai chi?

Seriously, should instructors continue to spout the words that they heard from their instructors who in turn either heard it from theirs, or just made it up as they didn’t have an accurate answer, or should we all demand that what we teach has an empirical basis?

I am a bit of a science geek – blame it on the schooling I suffered through as a youngster – and I do like to know that what I am being told by my instructors and what I am teaching my students is verifiable. That is, are there a number of peer-reviewed papers that are published in reputable scientific journals, that validate the claims made? All too often the stories and instruction that teachers give, sadly fail this test.

Recently, one of my instructors mentioned nitric oxide and nose breathing. Now I have taught nose breathing for years, but had never heard about nitric oxide. So, I went and did some research – and OK it was a bit of a deep rabbit hole to go down – but it was verifiable factual information that explained the beneficial effects nitric oxide has on the body and how it is produced when you nose breathe – it was great to be able to absolutely confirm something so interesting.

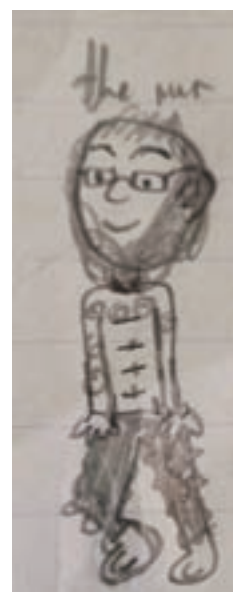
Unscientific?

Now, I will admit that I also occasionally, very occasionally, will use non proven, unscientific, stories, jargon, or explanations too. An example, when doing the qigong standing resting posture I may say: “Men place your right hand over the left and ladies the left over the right” – and yes, I know it is a binary definition in a non-binary gendered world, but nothing is perfect... Anyway, for years and years and years, instructors would say to do

that (or the reverse – which is very confusing!) and I just considered it a bit of tai chi folklore. I had asked various instructors ‘why’, but never received a satisfactory answer. However a few years ago, an instructor from Shanghai who was over in the UK on a tour answered with a logical and internally consistent answer based on Chinese yin yang theory and I thought to myself, well it may not be hard evidence but it certainly makes sense and (more importantly) will do no harm if I put it into practice.

So, I guess I am issuing an appeal for instructors to veer towards science but acknowledging that a little bit of hearsay and magical thinking may be what gives tai chi some of its appeal.

Going forward. You can’t do tai chi for over 40 years (as I have) without becoming biased and opinionated and probably more than just slightly crazy... but I do hope that I have at least 20 more years of teaching tai chi and maybe more... So I am invested in the idea that tai chi should be taught to ‘everyone’ and that the tai chi that is taught should be the very best it can be. I hope that open and honest discussion is the way forward. 🧘



Fan art of Robert Agar-Hutton drawn by the granddaughter of a member of a WI group Robert was giving a talk to

Note: This article is intended as a thought piece to start discussion. Of course, I have my own thoughts but the world of tai chi is so vast, and there are so many different viewpoints, that your thoughts and opinions matter at least as much as mine



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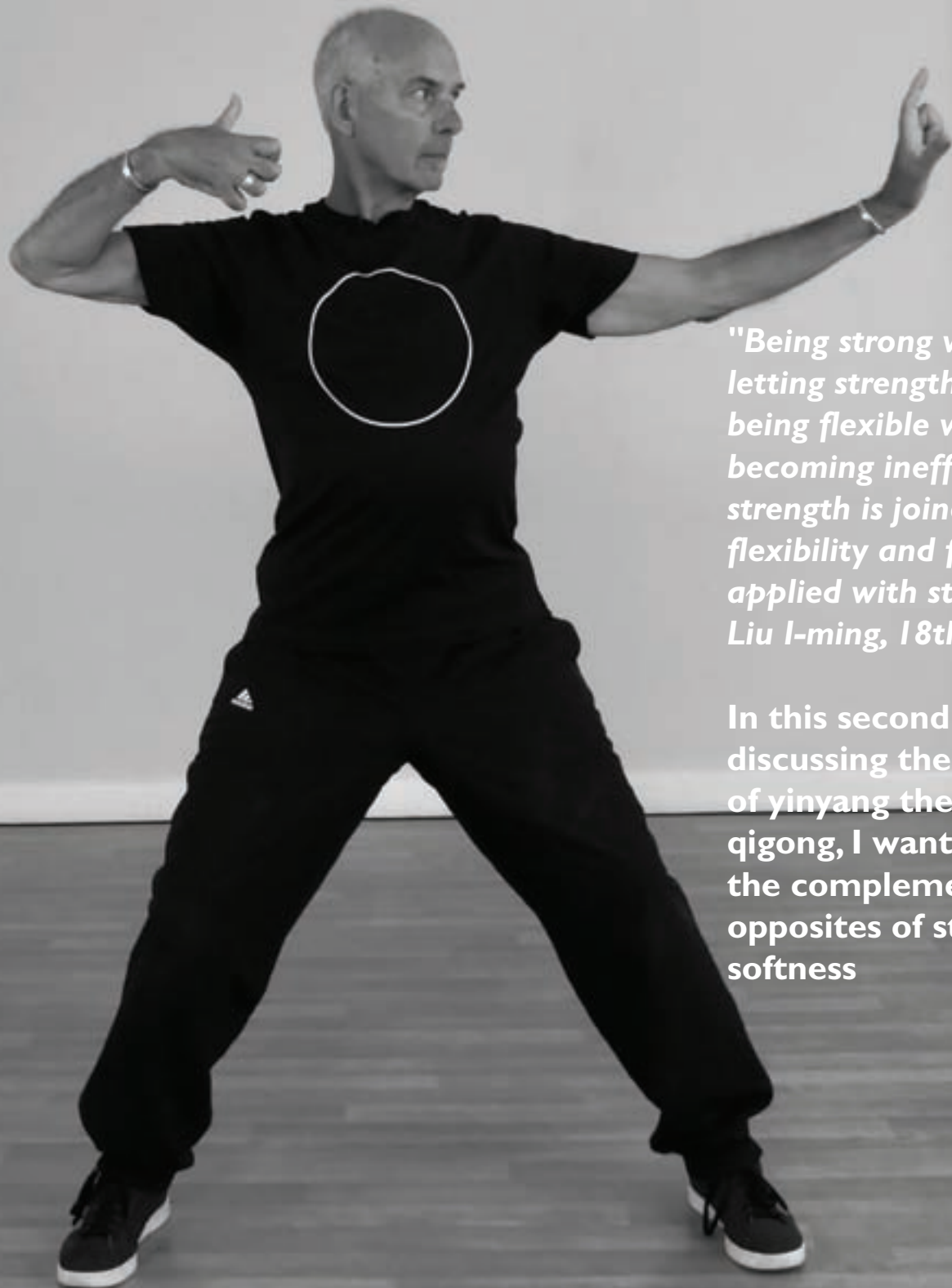


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The yin yang in qigong

Peter Deadman



*"Being strong without letting strength go too far, being flexible without becoming ineffective, strength is joined to flexibility and flexibility is applied with strength."
Liu I-ming, 18th century CE*

In this second article discussing the application of yinyang theory to qigong, I want to discuss the complementary opposites of strength and softness

Strength is yang. We all need to build and maintain sufficient strength to accomplish whatever we want to do in life. For most of us that doesn't involve anything heroic. In a varied and 'natural' life, we probably want to carry all kinds of things – children, shopping, a heavy rucksack – climb hills and stairs, push baby buggies, wheelchairs or occasionally cars, paint ceilings, dig the earth, chop wood, twist lids off jars and so on. And we want to be able to carry on doing these things well into old age.

However, without dedicated application, time is not on our side. 'Sarcopenia' (from the Greek 'sarx' = flesh and 'penia' = poverty) is the term used to describe the loss of muscle that characterises ageing – estimated at about one per cent a year after the age of 30 and accelerating with each passing decade – in the untended body. And as lean muscle mass diminishes, it is replaced by fat which uses less energy. The result is that if we continue to eat as we always did, most of us steadily put on weight.

The good news, however, is that appropriate exercise can significantly slow the rate of sarcopenia, maintain strong and effective muscles and reduce the decline in metabolic activity. In fact we can build muscle at any age – right into our 80s.

It is not only muscle strength that we need to maintain. We also want strong sinews, strong bones and strong internal organs. The two thousand year old *Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic* spells it out clearly:

“As for the back, it is the palace of that which is in the chest (i.e. heart and lungs). When the back is curved and the shoulders drop, the palace will soon be destroyed. As for the lower back, it is the palace of the kidneys. When a person is unable to turn and to sway, his kidneys will soon be worn out. As for the knees, they are the palaces of the sinews. When a person cannot bend and stretch and if while walking he is bent forward and leans on a stick, his sinews will soon be worn out. As for the bones, they are the palace of marrow. When a person cannot stand for long and if while walking he staggers back and forth, his bones will soon be worn out. Those who are able to maintain strength, they live. Those who fail to maintain strength, they die.”

Perhaps because I have grown vegetables for decades, I



Peter Deadman

powerful way to achieve this. By practising a range of qigong styles (for example baduanjin, tai chi qigong, five animal forms etc.) we mobilise and strengthen every joint, bone, blood vessel, nerve, fascial sheath, muscle, sinew and organ in the body.

It is especially important to strengthen the waist, lower back and legs. These are considered the domain of the kidneys in Chinese medicine, and the vigour of the kidneys and their stored essence (jing) is the ultimate determinant of how well we age and how long we live. Without cultivation, the lower back and legs usually weaken first as the body ages. Our balance deteriorates, we are more likely to stumble and fall, and we lose the effortless trust in the leg agility and sure-footedness we had when we were young.

Softness – yin

“Human beings in life are soft and weak, in death are always stretched, stiff, and rigid. The myriad things, grass and plants, in life are soft and pliant, in death are withered and dry. Therefore it is said, ‘Stiffness and rigidity are indicators of death; softness, weakness, are indicators of life’.”

Daodejing, 4th century BCE

There are many unique features of the traditional Chinese self-cultivation tradition, and one of these is the emphasis on softness. This dates back at least as far as the 2,500 year old *Tao Te Ching*. Written during the chaotic warring states period of Chinese history, it has been interpreted both as a profound philosophical work and a manual on how to survive dangerous times (go with the flow, keep a quiet mind, maintain a humble position etc.), taking as its model

“The body needs to be cultivated regularly to maintain strength”

am fond of the term ‘cultivation’. In the same way a garden needs constant care, the body needs to be cultivated regularly to maintain strength (alongside all the other body skills such as balance, integrated movement, flexibility, joint alignment and so on). My experience is that qigong which has its roots in the internal martial arts (even if we have no interest in the martial arts themselves) is a



the reed which bends with the wind rather than the mighty oak.

Nowhere is this principle found more clearly than in the principle of ‘song’* in the practice of tai chi chuan and qigong. Song means soft, loose, relaxed etc. and applies not only to the body but to the mind as well. Those who practise song know how difficult it is, indeed it is much much easier to tense up than to stay soft – especially when we are facing a difficult task or an opponent. We could say that developing song is a lifetime task but its benefits are immense and apply to every aspect of life.

“Working with strength and softness in qigong is a constant”

It is hard to think of any activity – singing, talking, hitting a tennis ball, running for Olympic gold, writing, brushing teeth – that goes better with tense muscles or a tense mind. Tension impairs integrated and aligned flowing movement (the secret of seemingly effortless strength), unnecessarily activates ‘parasitic’ muscles (i.e. those that are not needed in the task, like clenching the teeth when trying to thread a needle), and reduces free flow of qi, blood and body fluids through soft and elastic tissue and blood vessels. The simple fact is that it is much easier to activate muscle activity than to inhibit it.

Integrating yin and yang – strength and softness

As Liu I-ming’s quote at the start of this blog emphasises, we need to combine strength with softness, and that becomes one of the most interesting challenges in

practice. We can take qigong standing meditation as an example. It is practised in a variety of postures, several of which could be described as stress positions. The knees stay bent, loading the thigh muscles, and the arms are often raised, soon revealing any habitual tightness in the shoulders. We have to find a way to maintain our posture (strong, open, rooted, aligned) while constantly practising release and softness, even when the position becomes uncomfortable or painful. If we relax too much, we lose postural integrity. If we over-tighten our muscles to maintain the posture, we worsen the discomfort.

False strength

The same principle applies right through qigong practice. When we pull the bow in the second baduanjin movement, or punch in the seventh, have we gone for a kind of false strength by tightening muscles throughout the body, or on the other hand have we failed to commit to the movement and become flaccid and ineffectual?

I would say that working with strength and softness in qigong is a constant (but welcome) challenge and one that feeds through into many other aspects of our lives. In work, in relationships, in self-cultivation are we pushing too hard or not enough?

Daoism teaches the art of wu wei or non-action. Often (mis)understood as complete disengagement from human affairs it is better understood (in the words of sinologist Jean François Billeter) as a "state of perfect knowledge of the reality of the situation, perfect efficaciousness and the realisation of a perfect economy of energy", or as is written in the 3rd century BCE Annals of Lu Buwei, “Were the strongman Wuhuo to pull the tail of an ox so hard that the tail broke off and he exhausted all his strength, he would not be able to move the ox because he would be contravening the natural direction of the ox. But were a lad a metre five cubits tall to pull the ox by its nose ring, the ox would follow where he led because he would be according with the natural direction of the ox.”

In my own practice I like to contemplate and learn from water. Powerful enough to overcome almost any obstacle, when we try to grasp it – to feel its strength – we find only softness. ☯

* See page 4 of this issue. Chen Man’ching’s essay on song.

Taking the tai chi knee

Bob Price of Lincoln says: “My daily dose of tai chi has been interrupted by a long-overdue knee replacement so I have been asked to share a few thoughts on how I see this panning out over the next few weeks and months”

Up until the day of the operation I was persevering with a more-or-less daily routine of tai chi, qigong, riding my bike and (with a lesser frequency) a bit of pilates. Fortunately, I have always enjoyed exercise (55 years ago I trained as a PE teacher) and, even now, just a few weeks shy of my 74th birthday, exercising is a normal part of daily life. However, during recent months with knee surgery pending, there was the added incentive of a hope and belief that the fitter and stronger my leg was when the surgeon attacked it with hammer and saw, the quicker and easier might be the rehabilitation process.

Modern medicine still amazes me: surgery in the morning, physiotherapy during the afternoon and back home in the evening with my new knee protected by nothing more than a crepe bandage.

But, at this point, I should probably interject a word or two about pain: as my son explained (he is a GP and emergency medicine specialist), you can't subject a part of the body to the sort of trauma associated with joint replacement and not expect it to hurt. However, when they allow you home on the same day as the surgery it doesn't hurt at all, because all that lovely anaesthetic is still swimming around inside you. It is the day after (when the anaesthetic has worn off) that you discover what pain really is, and, boy, is it intense!

Happily, with a two-week supply of a whole cocktail of painkillers, every subsequent day is just a little bit better than the day before and, guided by the hospital's physiotherapy programme, the process of rehabilitation can be described as measured, incremental and effective. Apparently, for some people of my age, a 'successful' joint replacement is one which permits a gentle and more or less pain-free stroll. In my case, the bar was set slightly higher: my wife wants me back on the dance floor and I want to get back to my daily tai chi routine.

Now it must be said (lest the reader be misled into believing otherwise) that I am not a tai chi master. I had never even practised the art until retirement and, even then, it took me a few years to find a teacher to shine some light upon my tai chi darkness. Nowadays, I run a weekly tai-chi-in-the-park session for my neighbours and I have evolved a daily routine which, with some variation according to mood, time and the weather, includes:

- Master Huang's five loosening exercises
- A home made set of weight transfer/balance exercises
- A qigong routine (usually ba duan jin)
- Cheng Man-ch'ing's 37-step form5
- A few minutes of standing post

Of course, since my knee replacement this has all gone out the window. For the first two weeks after the operation, the focus was on pain management and the first tentative steps towards re-mobilising my knee. The hospital had provided a really useful physio guide, simple exercises, carefully graduated, and supplemented by brief periods of walking on sticks ... but nothing even remotely resembling tai chi.

During weeks three and four, the physio routine was extended and intensified, the walking was increased in both time and distance and, whilst tai chi was still a step too far, I found a brief qigong session to be a really useful adjunct to at least one part of the physio.

By this time, my new knee had improved daily in terms of reduced swelling, less pain and good extension

but bending the knee was still a problem. The solution was to sit on an upright chair with my new knee flexed as far as pain/swelling/etc would allow and then to divert the mind from the obvious discomfort by focusing on a few minutes of seated qigong, for which the wu xing routine (which I found in Damo Mitchell's *Heavenly Streams: Meridian Theory in Nei Gong*) was just about perfect.

Weeks five and six involved more of the same, although I had dispensed altogether with the elbow crutches and could begin to focus more on quality of movement instead of the anything is better than nothing. About 18 months ago, when I was recovering from a total hip replacement, a physio friend saw me walking in the grounds where I live (and, then too, I had just abandoned crutches) and she offered the following advice: “Stop waddling like a duck and start marching like a soldier.” I also added some of the simpler weight transfer/balance exercises to my daily routine and this, I think, will be the key to my eventual return to tai chi. It seems to me that, when I can comfortably and confidently, slowly and smoothly, transfer my weight from one foot to the other (forwards, backwards and sideways), I should also be able to re-engage both with my qigong routine and the Cheng Man-ch'ing 37-step form even if, initially, it is all performed within a more limited range of movement than previously.

Although progress is slow and sometimes painful, it is at least progress that I can see and feel on a day-to-day basis so, I guess, the mantra has to be along the lines of ‘slowly, slowly, catchee monkey’. As Cheng Man-ch'ing might have said (but almost certainly did not): “Tai chi is an effortless and rhythmical art that stresses slow breathing, balanced and relaxed postures, and absolute calmness of mind.” As Mark Peters delights in reminding me, if I had found tai chi earlier in my life, I probably wouldn't have needed all these joint replacements in the first place. Happy days. 🍀



Bob Price

Getting back to form

The editor is not immune: in the middle of last year the John Roper found himself, unexpectedly, in the clutches of the NHS. Daily tai chi practice gave him the tools for a swift recovery...

Suddenly I can see daylight, my eyes open, I made it! I am on the recovery ward. Up above I can see bags and bottles of fluids plumbed into my arm. It turns out I am mainlining paracetamol. Didn't know you could do that.

Four hours earlier I was flat on my back with the anaesthetist setting me up for the operation. The surgeon joins us and enquires after my well being: "How are you feeling? I am OK. "Now," she asks, "tell me in your own words what you think is going to happen." You are going to disembowel me, I say. We all laughed.

And that is the last thing I remember of that Monday morning.

Two months previous, a CT scan had revealed a 'mass' on my bowel. It turned out to be a large polyp, if not cancer then at risk. It had to come out.

What friends are for

They say at times like this you find out who your friends are. When I said that I was in for a serious operation the markers started to go on my stuff: "I hope it all goes OK, but got any decent whisky?" That's Frank, single malt fan and my first tai chi student. Still with me after 15 years. Then it's, "Oh, well, can you put my name on that antique rifle you have, just in case." Colin, my shooting buddy, we have a mutual interest in historic firearms. And then there are my hand-built, split cane fishing rods. Not that I fish these days But my pal Fred does.

When it comes to recovery the NHS doesn't hang about. I have an 'advanced recovery plan' and the day after the operation I woke from a doze to find a young lady kneeling by my bed. She is the physiotherapist she tells me and starts giving me the sales talk: "It is important to get moving as soon as you can, going for walks, at least sitting I say, "I teach tai chi. "Well no worries here then," she says and suddenly I am half way down the ward, feeling like my feet haven't touched the ground.

Starting again

I had had visions of being able to start tai chi straight away. I had no idea how stiff I would feel and how limited my movements would be. Not to mention the exhaustion. So, as well as walking several times a day, I started with a few exercises. Ji ben qigong I took from Damo Mitchell's book *Daoist Nei Gong*. Not the whole set, just 'compressing the pearl', 'flying hands' and 'swimming dragon' to start with, no lateral movement or twisting, all of these are standing straight. Plus threading the nine-holed pearl and a set of breathing exercises we use in the class. This is going to be the core from which I build back over the next four weeks.

And out

They don't like keeping you in these days and I soon went home. Surgery Monday and home in time for dinner on Thursday.

There was no way I could do the Yang 108 long form so



John Roper (R) teaching an application

I continued the ji ben qigong and the exercises trying to add a bit every morning. We practise zhang zhuo which I have always found to be a powerful meditation. When I started tai chi I had been practising Buddhist meditation for some 20 years. The first time I stood in zhang zhuo I felt my skin tingle and my pores open. I sweated. The form we use, seven hand positions, was devised by John Ding, my first master. I have on occasion stood for an hour. Right now 15 minutes is all I can manage.

Building back

But by the end of a week I had added the first part of the Yang form and 'up-lifting the moon' and 'opening the chest' to the ji ben qigong set. I also managed to take my class. In fact I only missed one class; the week I was in hospital, my daughter and a senior student ran things.

And so it went: daily practise, gradually building what I did. Not all plain sailing. It took a long time before I could do turning exercises. My movements were quite restricted by pain. I felt stiff, lifting my legs was a problem. But after four weeks I was able to add the third part of the Yang form. Caveat: take it easy plucking needles from sea bottom and definitely don't let the snake creep down too low!

Not for every one

So OK for me. Nineteen years of tai chi gave me the tools to recover quickly. But not everyone is so lucky. I became aware of the man in the bed opposite mine. He had a different problem to me and I thought he was unconscious. During my last day he was visited by a stream of doctors, at least two of them consultants. Their message was the same: "You have to get out of bed. We can help you but you must also help yourself." As long as I was there he never moved. He is younger than me. I can't help wondering what happened and, if I had felt more agile myself at that point, whether I should have staggered over and tried to persuade him... 🐍

The power of song

Cheng Man-ch'ing said that song is tai chi's greatest value. His essay on the positive application of song explains how the simple act of being relaxed is hard to learn but has great benefits once you 'get it'. He admits that it took him almost 50 years of practice. His essay on song is translated by James Chan, Ph.D

Tai chi is not only the best exercise in China but also in the world today. No other forms of exercise or martial art can compare with it. Why?

There exists in tai chi a most exquisite philosophy. First and foremost, tai chi focuses on song. I have been practising tai chi for 50 years and, not until two years ago, did I fully realise the essence of song.

What is it about this ability to be song that makes it so immensely useful? I learned and preached relentlessly for decades about the importance of achieving song in practising tai chi. But what did song mean? How does one get to be perfectly song? I found it extremely difficult to explain it to people.

It wasn't until two years ago that I had my eureka moment. I recalled what my teacher, master Yang Chengfu, used to say to me. Master Yang was not much into talking. He could sit there all day and not speak a word. Unless I said something to him, he would not bother to talk. On the other hand, when it came to the concept of song, he would repeat and repeat himself ad infinitum even if my ears were full. Not only that, but he also said something quite odd: "I must repeat myself about the importance of song. Otherwise, you'll never get it even if you could live three times as long."

The sacks we carry

I doubted what he had said. I wondered why such a concept should be so hard to grasp.

Now it is clear to me. Frankly, I might not have understood song even if my life were six times as long. I hope that once I put it in the following manner, you'll find it easier to grasp its meaning and essence.

Imagine visiting a Buddhist temple. In the first hall, you see a Maitreya Buddha with a large paunch and wearing a big smile. The Buddha holds a cloth bag. Above the statue are the words: "I carry the sack when I sit, and I carry it when I walk. It feels so good to be able to put the sack down." What does this metaphor mean?

It means that we humans are loaded with sacks. We



James Chan

carry all kinds of sacks all the time – our children, our spouses, success, fame, fortune, and power. Every one of these sacks is baggage. And the hardest baggage to release is the baggage called me.

Letting go

People talk about how difficult it is to achieve enlightenment in Buddhist practice (like achieving song in tai chi). They refer to ethereal moments of revelations such as "I put down my weapon and became a Buddha" or "I suddenly became a Bodhisattva (one who became enlightened but remained on earth to help others)". Both mental pictures point to the difficulty in realising an abrupt mental breakthrough after years of training – a willingness to let go of one's preconceptions. Achieving song is indeed easier said than done.

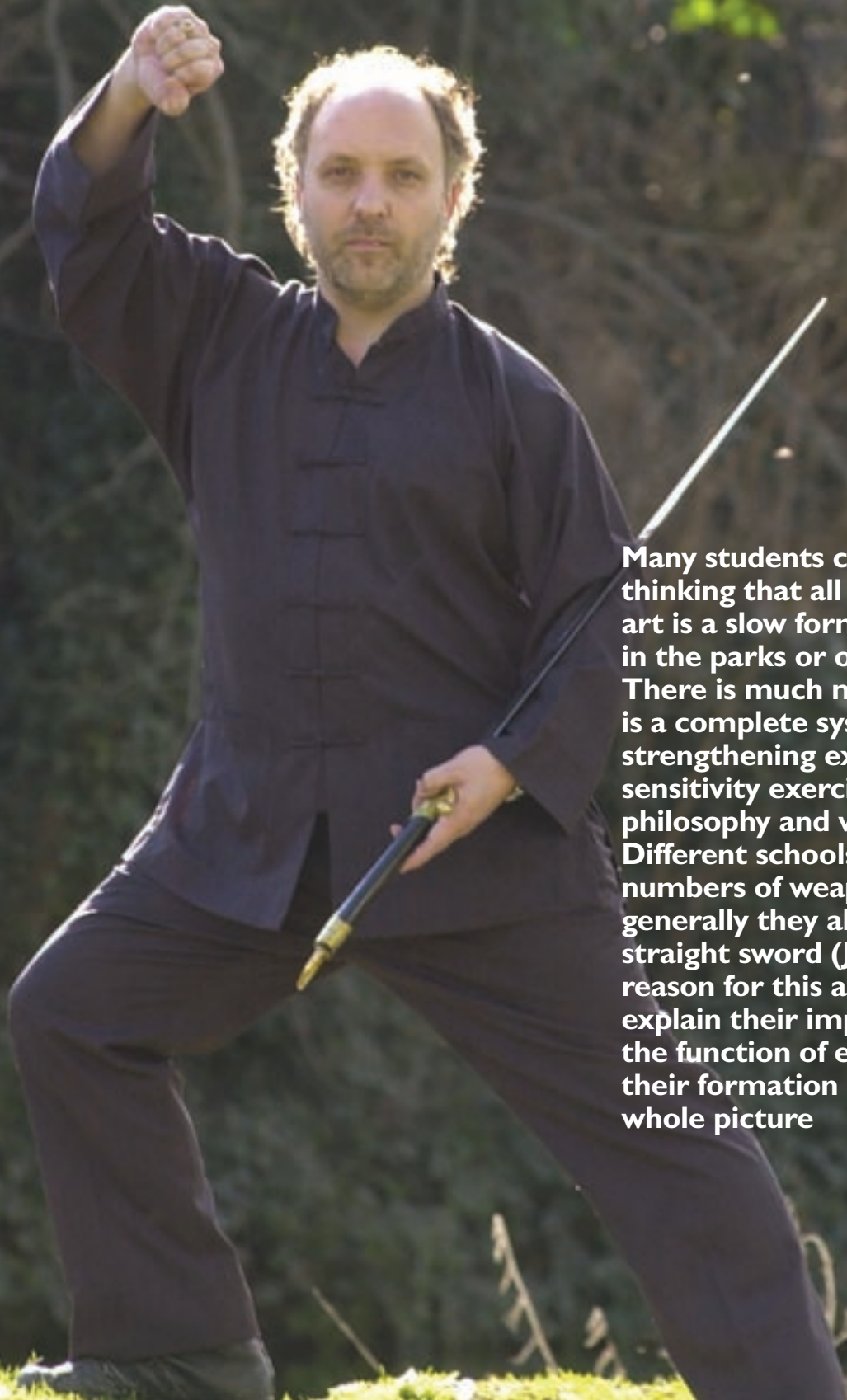
Tai chi is hard to learn. The difficulty resides in our inability to let go of preconceptions. If I cannot advance in my tai chi chuan training, it is probably because I cannot let go of my own preconceptions. Transcending our own mental barriers is key to achieving song. 🧘

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“I must repeat myself about the importance of song. Otherwise, you'll never get it even if you could live three times as long.”
 Yang Chenfu

The weapons advantage

Mark Peters



Many students come to tai chi thinking that all there is to the art is a slow form they've seen in the parks or on the TV. There is much much more. It is a complete system including strengthening exercises, sensitivity exercises, philosophy and weapons. Different schools have various numbers of weapons but generally they all teach the straight sword (Jian). The reason for this article is to explain their importance and the function of each weapon in their formation of the tai chi whole picture

TAI CHI WEAPONS

I have known schools that teach weapons as a kind of dance; an extra bolt-on to make their system more interesting and lucrative. Let's consider the dictionary definition for weapon: an instrument of offence or defence (the Wordsworth concise English dictionary). I suppose an extremely bad dance could be construed as 'offensive' but I don't think they're quite the same thing.

Different weapons develop different skills or areas of tai chi chuan. Although our school practises straight sword, broad sword, walking stick, staff, spear and fan, I will focus on the most popular three to give a common ground. These are broad sword, spear and straight sword. These are sometimes referred to as the 100 day, 1,000 day and 10,000 day weapons respectively due to their level of complexity to master. I will explore each in turn.

Broad-sword or sabre (dao)

We practise the 32 step Yang style form as described in *Weapons of Primordial Pugilism* by Dr. Tseng Ju-Pai. The blade is curved and single edge thereby making it a hacking and slashing weapon. There are two types readily available: a light flimsy one used by wu shu stylists and a more robust one favoured by tai chi chuan (plus other northern Chinese martial art styles) and made in China by Dragon Well. the blade is usually approx. 28" long. As well as the solo form, individual training exercises are used along with partner work for application practice. This weapon uses coiling and extensively trains the waist as the power is needed to draw the blade through flesh or body (please try not to kill any partners in class). This was ostensibly a battlefield weapon but this does not mean it was designed to be wielded and applied as if you are in an Errol Flynn swash-buckling movie. It is important to use the skill of tai chi i.e. sticking, neutralising, redirecting and applying. When blocking a strike this should be done in a sweeping action and with the side of the blade to prevent damage to the cutting edge (the steel wasn't very good quality) in addition to the use of force against force. The circular and spiralling power developed by this weapon is excellent for use in fixed step push-hands, grappling or throwing.

In terms of modern application, the methodology could be applied to almost anything from the new police batons



to an umbrella, walking stick or rolled up newspaper. The techniques can be applied empty hand against empty hand, or empty hand against a weapon to allow resistance training. In addition to this, heavy weapons improve strength and stamina. Yang Cheng Fu is quoted as saying: "The heavier the weapons the more energies are gained." This is probably the most apt weapon to modern day as it



Mark demonstrates spear technique

is a close quarters weapon and includes seizing your opponent. It is extremely useful in developing peng jing (ward-off energy), the first and most important underlying energy used in tai chi chuan. It is imperative that awareness of the weapon is developed, as both an extension of the body and improvement of focus. Be aware of the cutting edge as it slices through the air, of the hilt and pommel as striking implements in their own right. Hitting with the butt of the weapon (pommel) is a very painful point strike as well as a method of creating space for the blade to cut through. Wrist locks can also be practised with this section of the weapon and applied to everyday items, even a coke bottle (most likely not a three litre plastic one). We only have to look at aikido to witness the effectiveness of weapons awareness applied effectively in empty hand techniques.

Video clip: <https://youtu.be/zgvZh4ZUZSU>

Spear (qiang)

The spear is an excellent strength building weapon and I remember being told stories of practitioners thrusting the tip into heavy sacks and attempting to throw them away to build this power. A tale regarding the spear was told of Yang Ban Hou, Yang Cheng Fu's brother, who it was said, ordered the heads be removed from spears after his daughter was killed during spear play.

The most simple and common introduction to spear training is that purported to have been taught by Yang Cheng Fu and is commonly known as shaking. This involves three or four movements, dependant on how you count. (1) Swing the head and tassel of the spear anti-



Yang Chenfu – Spear

clockwise by turning your waist and wrist and draw a circle. (2) Swing the head and tassel of the spear clockwise by turning your waist and wrist and draw a circle. (3) Thrust the spear forwards sliding it through your left hand. (4) Pull back and press down. The first two movements are blocks and the third a strike. Although simple these movements are fundamental to correct use of the spear.

From here you can build on to two-person spear work and form training. I have been taught a form developed by my teacher, Master Tan Ching Ngee of Singapore, which I find quite aerobic. The extended focus and footwork is ideal for developing advancing and entering skills. The use of ting jing and Fa Jing are apparent and the feeling of energy extension can be compared to form postures such as double push, single whip or left and right toe kick. Two-person practice should have the flavour of push hands not of Friar Tuck and Robin Hood. Techniques to consider are thrusting, controlled deflection and redirection to enter.

The use of same weapon and mixed weapon

training/sparring will develop empty hand skills as well as weapons awareness. The ability to coil through an opponent's attack and strike at their 'very heart' is a skill especially developed by the extension quality of the spear.

It is said that the red horse hair is used to distract an attacker or their horse (it probably doesn't have the same effect with a car so don't try). It is also said that the hair is to stop blood dripping down the spear shaft and making the user lose grip; I've never put this to the test as you tend to lose students when you stab them.

Video clip (Tan Ching Ngee)

<https://youtu.be/9UkeTVxhZB4>

Straight sword (jian)

'Alive hold the sword, dead hold the sabre'. This Chinese idiom means that the broad-sword is rigid and inflexible whereas the straight sword is lively and flowing.

We practise the 54 step form as taught by Professor Cheng Man Ching. This is my teacher's favourite weapon.



Tai chi sabre (dao)

TAI CHI WEAPONS

We also practice the 13 sword secrets form, developed by Master Tan Ching Ngee, to allow us to focus on the essential methods and hand grips used in proper jian practice. This has long been considered the gentleman's weapon and it has been said that a scholar has to be well-read, and well-versed in fencing. The flavour of sword application is similar to that used in calligraphy. The smooth flow and sweeps require a skilful and light, sensitive grip. It is apparent this weapon requires the highest level of skill and as such is often referred to in Chinese mythology highlighting its importance in their culture. Nigel Sutton referred to this in his book *Applied Tai Chi* where he compares it to the legend of Excalibur. These swords were often called 'bao jian' (precious sword). He stated that Professor Cheng is said to have owned such a sword and was able to pierce holes in coins.

Robert Smith quotes Professor Cheng as saying: "Never put more than four ounces on your opponent and never allow them to put more than four ounces on you." This principle is essential for proper Jian use. To sense your opponents intentions and to offer them nothing is the highest skill in tai chi chuan. Cheng, as with my teacher, lit up at the thought of sword sparring. This sparring is not swash buckling, it has the flavour of free push hands. The combination of ting jing and swift footwork are devastating in action.

The double edge sword is designed to be razor sharp at the tip and be progressively blunter towards the hilt as the blade thickens. This tapered thickness allows for a spring like quality, as with peng, and reduces the risk of the opponent finding your centre. It is designed to stick and deflect lightly then slash swiftly at vulnerable areas e.g. ankle tendons or thumbs. Sparring brings a new life to the weapon and in turn your empty hand techniques. The most apparent skill developed would be fast effective footwork which is essential for quick and effective combat. Moving from standard push hands to striking is a natural progression developed by straight sword methodology.

A notable characteristic of the straight sword is the form of the free hand. This is held with the index and middle finger extended and the ring and little fingers bent and held by the thumb. This is commonly known as 'secret sword hand' and some say is used for striking vital points, in fact; one exponent states that it is used to conceal a knife. A more practical interpretation is that it is used to balance the body and focus the chi; the whole body must have yin and yang, full and empty, and therefore no life in the other hand would brake the principles of tai chi chuan.

Video clips: https://youtu.be/8TjI5OxjO_Q and <https://youtu.be/CGAG8MF89mo>

Essential skills

Each weapon develops essential tai chi skills and highlights them for correct use in all areas of this wondrous, multi-faceted art. The many energies including sticking, neutralising, understanding, redirecting and applying, find their place. Search out a teacher that knows and can apply their weapons, not just hang them on a wall. Here are a few simple rules to follow if you are talking to a potential teacher:

1. research the art
2. ask their background, teachers etc.
3. check if they are members of the relevant governing body – for tai chi it is the BCCMA and TCUGB
4. test their knowledge and application.
5. Or just pay me..!



Mark Peters demonstrates broad sword (dao)

This article is an extract from the book: The view from the back of the class available from the TCUGB shop and Amazon.

Mark Peters is the principle instructor for Kai Ming Association for tai chi chuan in the Midlands. He is the regional representative for the BCCMA, and World Tai Chi Federation (based in Taiwan); he is also the chairman of the TCUGB. Kai Ming can be contacted on:
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A stab in the dark

The problem with governments – all governments – is their obsession with being seen to do things. Call it WMDS: 'We must do something'. This frequently results in ill-thought-out, poorly drafted legislation, probably introducing a ban of something in an attempt to prevent criminal use. This kind of legislation rarely affects criminals – if you are committing a crime anyway' so what? And it almost always causes inconvenience for and potentially criminalises otherwise law-abiding citizens writes John Roper

The paranoia around knife crime has resulted in the latest 'ban' on dangerous weapons which sets out to ban the ownership of certain knives. When I say that this kind of legislation is ill-thought-out, I could add opportunistic. In its original form, the Home Office slipped a couple of rifles into the mix. Both are only used for target shooting and neither has ever been used in a crime. They are too specialised, and of one type there are only about 500 in private ownership. Both the rifle and the ammunition are VERY expensive, (think £10 for a single cartridge). So not the kind of thing a criminal is going to turn up with.

The main point for us is, of course, bladed weapons. When this was first mooted the Vintage Arms Association became concerned that it might affect shooters who also collect bayonets. There are a lot of old military rifles around and some people like to have the pointy things that go on the end. However the act seems very specific on the weapons that are banned from ownership.

A 1953 act of parliament made it an offence to carry an offensive weapon in public. The 1988 Criminal Justice Act, in section 141, made it illegal to 'manufacture, sell, hire, offer to sell or hire, possess for the purposes of sale or hire, import, lend, or give' the weapons to which the section



applies – see illustration. The 2019 Offensive Weapons Act act specifically amends section 141 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 and makes it an offence to 'possess in private' any weapon set out in that act. Though one reading of the 1988 act seems to make 'possession' illegal anyway.

A pretty comprehensive ban you might think but it has done nothing to reduce knife crime. First of all, as I understand it, the humble kitchen knife is often weapon of choice in many of the incidents we read about. The list published in connection with the 1988 act seems pretty specific and based, largely, on fantasy martial art weapons. No mention of tai chi swords, or fencing

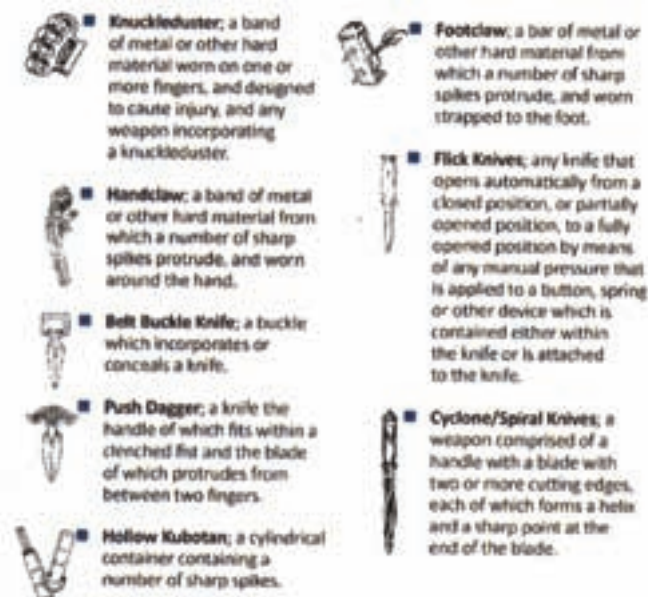
swords or antiques such as military swords.

The ban states that a 'defence' would be that the weapon is used for sport. Otherwise the British fencing team would be flying to Geneva to practise along with the pistol team. And yes, that actually happens. It also mentions re-enactment as a get-out. So I think that we can feel safe as far as straight swords are concerned. My only question is the sabre, as curved blade weapons are specifically mentioned – another problem for Team GB – though, again, there is the 'sporting use' get out. And whilst some over enthusiastic coppers sometimes put their own interpretation on this kind of thing I think in general we should be OK. And we have to bear in mind that it is not us they are after - I don't think the home office knows we exist, if they did they would probably have banned martial arts totally, what with all those violent movies around; apart, of course, from taekwondo, that's a cuddly Olympic event and we tend to do not badly at that.

Ronnie Robinson, organiser of Tai Chi Caledonia, used to advise the local police that Tai Chi Caledonia was taking place and there would be a number of people in the Stirling area carrying various weapons. Anticipation and explanation ahead of the event averted any difficulties.

So the watchword is 'caution'. This is an opinion piece, I am not telling you what the law is and indeed the police admit that they don't know either. I would advise you not to practise sword form in the local park. Even before this it would have got you into trouble under the 1953 act. I would just add that a retired police officer that I know thinks that the 1953 act covered it all: what constitutes an offensive weapon was based on use and intent.

So don't rush down to the local nick to hand in your jian or dao. Better to write to your MP and complain. As I said at the beginning it is really about WMDS. ☯



Some of the specifically banned weapons, on a list published by the home office

Learning to go slow

Jan Dickson

I'm 63, born on the Ayrshire coast but have lived in a glorious red sandstone tenement flat in Glasgow's east end for 40 years. I've worked in the fashion industry, as a steward on car ferries and played bass guitar / keyboards in various punk bands which never got anywhere but were fun to be in. Screenwriter and playwright by trade, these days – which means I spend endless hours alone at a laptop.



How long have you been practising tai chi?

I have been practising t'ai chi for 12 years or so.

What stimulated your interest?

My martial background is traditional boxing then into kick-boxing (jeet kun do / savate / muay thai). I got into t'ai chi while battling depression due to work-pressures and following a boxing shoulder injury that took a long time to heal. I tried meditation but could not sit still so when I saw a notice for Mari Graham's t'ai chi classes, described as a moving mediation, at the now-closed Healthy Living Centre in Crownpoint Street, I thought: What the hell... Initially I admit I was sceptical: t'ai chi seemed WAY too slow, a bit airy fairy and the class mainly consisted of older people. But I got over myself, kept going back, practised every day (cos that's the kid of driven, over-achiever I was, back then) and slowly, insidiously, t'ai chi worked its magic.

What does tai chi mean to you?

To me, t'ai chi is the best all-round fitness activity ever – physically, mentally and emotionally. There's personal discipline involved in learning the sequences and the forms, which ticks my martial arts' box. In turn leading into that wonderful mental uplift and sense of community, neither of which I have found in any other physical activity.

Who or what inspired you, both in the beginning and now?

I'm too cynical to really do the inspirational figure thing but what DOES inspire me is witnessing the ways in which t'ai chi can change the lives of others. I teach in Dennistoun, Bridgeton and Barlanark in Glasgow's East End, including an open air class in Alexandra Park, provided free to participants and financially supported by local housing association Milnbank. In parts of the East End, average life span is something horrifying like 59 and we remain one of the most economically and socially deprived parts of Scotland. Many of our class participants are living with complex physical and mental

health issues. Witnessing their dedication to the challenges of t'ai chi on a weekly, monthly and yearly basis and seeing the changes this dedication engenders in these individuals is my real inspiration. Deep down, we all want to make a difference, don't we?

What is the most important aspect to you?

The 'slowing down' for me is key. In an increasingly frantic world, with all the time pressures of modern life, the ability to slow down one's movements – and to FEEL the clarity and focus which flows from that is so valuable. Learning to move more slowly, through t'ai chi, has literally changed my life for the better.

Do you have any personal goals?

As a life-long over-achiever whose very existence was once ruled – for the worse – by the concept of having goals, these days I am a lot more relaxed in this area: something I feel both stems from and helps me in my role as a teacher. I will, however, admit, if pressed, to harbouring a burning desire to learn one of the fan forms.

What do you make of tai chi's current popularity?

I think it can only be a good thing. Regardless of age or ability, there's so much benefit in coming together for an hour a week with others to move slowly and mindfully, with grace. The more people who discover this, the better. Will there be issues, in some quarters, over maintaining the purity of the art if this happens? Undoubtedly. But everything changes: one man's watered-down is another man's accessibility.

What are your views on competition?

As a former willing professional rat racer who bowed out before the finish line and a regular participant in kick-boxing sparring sessions and the grading system (I still have a current ring licence) I initially moved from all that stress-inducing malarkey to taking a very anti-competition stance. These days I'm more ambivalent. I still believe any form of competition fosters ego and, for me, t'ai chi practice engenders a healthy loss of ego so there will always be a contradiction there. On the other hand, t'ai chi is all about working with the opposites so if competing helps us grow in any way, go for it.

What direction would you like to see tai chi taking in the future?

I'd like to see t'ai chi in hospitals – for patients AND staff. I'd like to see t'ai chi in schools, playgroups, care homes and addiction recovery organisations. And I'd like to see more practitioners of the art opting to teach t'ai chi cos I've learned more about myself and those with whom I share this world from teaching than I ever thought possible.

www.facebook.com/East-End-Tai-Chi-229920254602382
email: jdic101769@aol.com

Tai chi was a life saver

Marion Copeland

Biog: A bit of personal background

I'm a 75 year-old former steamstress and now very active in my local community: mum, gran and great-gran – born and bred in Glasgow's East End.

How long have you been practising tai chi? 15 years

What stimulated your interest?

In 2005 I lost my mum and was very down. I saw a class for t'ai chi in a local health club and went to have a look. The rest is history.

What does tai chi mean to you?

T'ai chi was a lifesaver for me and through the years I have helped a lot of my friends by urging them along to classes, to try t'ai chi. They liked it and still come.

Who or what inspired you, both in the beginning and now?

Just going along for the first time to that first class. I loved it. Something about t'ai chi just spoke to me and I have never looked back. I recently gained my TCUGB basic instructor's qualification. I would never have thought of applying had my teacher not suggested it but am loving taking our beginners' class at Reidvale Community Centre. The buzz from seeing other people enjoy t'ai chi is unbelievable.

What is the most important aspect to you?

Meeting new friends. T'ai chi is hugely social for me. The ageing process can be isolating for many of us. Our t'ai chi classes have become an additional support system for us all – AND we have an annual class Christmas lunch in the community centre where our classes are held.

Do you have any personal goals?

Not really as I'm 75 yrs old. My life is happy.

What do you make of tai chi's current popularity?

I think it's great. I have new ladies starting my class and it's really great to hear their feedback about the difference



it makes. Our oldest class member is 87. We can all get something from t'ai chi.

What are your views on competition?

I have none – while it's not really competitive as such, being filmed doing my 24-step form for my basic instructor's exam was a bit daunting, felt like performing a bit. But I knew it had to be done so just buckled down, did what was necessary and am very pleased to now be a member of the TCUGB .

What direction would you like to see tai chi taking in the future?

Oh I don't know! I can only say it's been great to have t'ai chi in my life for 15 years. It would be fantastic to see it growing further.



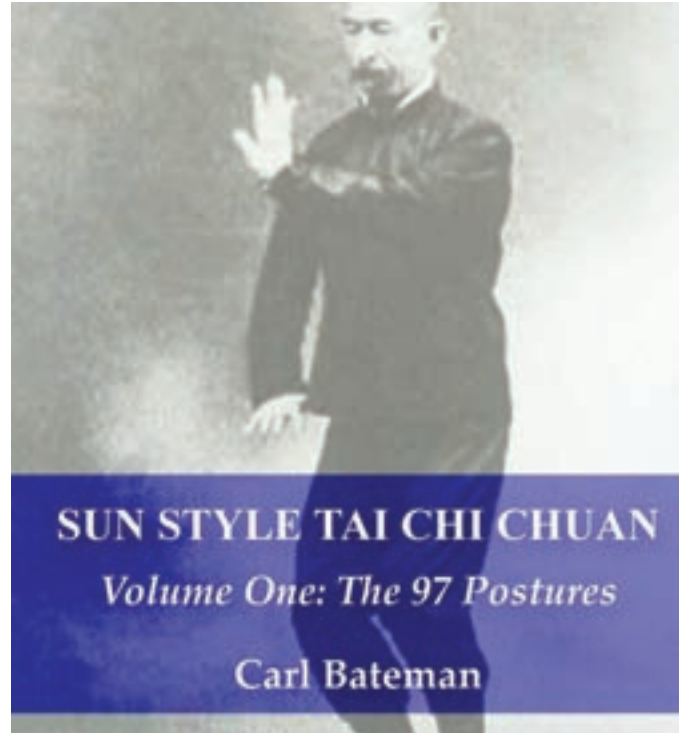
Sun Style Tai Chi Chuan: Volume One:

The 97 Postures by Carl Michael Bateman

Review by Jenny Peters

I write from my observations within our club and tai chi in general. If you have read any of my articles or our books you will know I am not a very technical person, but I appreciate the passion and knowledge of the art in the books Carl Bateman, the author, has written. I have limited knowledge of Carl's style of tai chi (Sun), and with that in mind, I asked Mark (Peters) if he would review the 2nd volume as he is far better equipped for this than I, and I would take a look at the first volume, regarding the description of the 97 Postures of Sun style. For me, who likes a short light introduction I felt there were too many acknowledgements and notes before I got to the real beginning of the book. Carl explained that the work was originally intended for one book, but became two volumes as it evolved. I believe it would be excellent for students already on what would be the right journey to gain the true essence of the real Sun Style. Carl has done an amazing in-depth presentation that would really benefit and engross players of Sun Style tai chi chuan the world over. It is a much-needed book.

Mark has said that he really enjoyed the 2nd volume that he feels inspired to read the 1st volume now.



Sun Style Tai Chi Chuan: Volume Two:

The Companion Guide by Carl Michael Bateman

Review by Mark Peters

Although this is a companion guide, I feel that it also stands on its own. The training history of the author and Sun style family is fascinating. As an engineer, I also really appreciated this use of Kolb's experiential learning discussed and explained. I have never been a fan of learning by rote as repeating is not really learning.

I'm definitely taking on some of the terms used, e.g. notional space, as I really connected with them so thank you Carl.

The discussion on mindfulness is refreshing. It has become such a trendy word that it often loses its true value as a tool for non-judgmental learning. Tim Galway calls it self-one and self-two in his book *The Inner Game*. Tai chi is not a mindful exercise but should be practised with mindful awareness to truly benefit from all it has to offer.

Although some elements e.g. si xiang (the four resemblances) are specific to Sun style, much of the book is applicable to all styles e.g. joint traps.

I enjoyed the mix of applicable theory and anecdotes from the author own training experiences. The section discussing san ti shi was especially of interest to me as it brought back fond and achey memories of my hsing-i days.

To sum it up, this book is heaving with wisdom shared freely and will continue to give insights to the reader over many reads. I plan to keep it as a book to unstick me when stuck in one mode of thinking that is limiting my own development.

Thank you Carl for sharing so freely.





ZHAN ZHUANG

The internal athlete

by Sam Moor

Many years ago, a teacher said that, to truly understand movement one must get to grips with stillness. I have certainly found this to be true: for stillness is to movement as silence is to sound

Overleaf 

ZHAN ZHUAN

If, for some strange reason, I were restricted to choose just one thing to share with people from the trove of body/mind arts that I have trained in and taught for many years it would undoubtedly be zhan zhuang, the art of standing still and more commonly known as standing meditation. For no matter how unlikely a contender for developing oneself the simple act of standing still might seem, for me it would be quite an easy choice. Out of the many training methods that I have enjoyed, endured and taught over the years, including the more orthodox systems of exercise of my early days, no other ticks quite as many boxes as Standing. Nor have I come across any other practise that illustrates how all those very boxes that we might want to tick, but usually assume to be separate, are in fact inextricably linked.

I have spent many hours standing still and, although somewhat challenging, a large proportion of that time has been rather wonderful and, on many levels, quite liberating. In terms of improving all other aspects of my training it has been invaluable and deeply informative in terms of accruing fundamental ‘body knowledge’ for myself from myself.

Easy to miss

A large part of the motivation for my choice would be inspired by the fact that it is very common for us to completely miss the simplest treasures of physical reality that are only tangible in the present moment of the here and now because our minds are almost permanently distracted by the constant buzz of habitual busyness; a discursive noise completely unrelated to what is happening in and around us in real time. To be able to do anything well, and I mean that in the most genuine sense, this issue is something that we must first recognise and then get to grips with. For if we do not, which is all too often the case, we live at the mercy of a top-down dictatorship comprised of our thoughts and one that impels us on a constant search for a better experience than the one we are currently having.

More stable

If we could slow down and stop for a time, we might give ourselves a chance to experience life from a clearer and more stable perspective and the futility of this rush would be more than obvious: there is no other time than now and it is in the omnipresence of the present moment that life unceasingly reveals itself.

“There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact” – Sherlock Holmes

Like seated meditation practice, standing meditation can be an excellent tool to address this serious impediment to the quality of lives. However, it comes with the major bonus that it serves as an excellent method for training the body at a deep level. Through the lens of physio-cognitive stillness, which standing builds in increasing acuity, we can access and develop qualities of the body that are always with us regardless of what we do, and that ‘normal’ exercise and movement frequently fail to give light to. As our experience changes so too does our understanding, if we can be open minded; and can you think of any genuinely valid reasons not to be open minded? The balanced body development and awareness skills we can build from standing practice can significantly alter our assumptions about how we use the body and mind for the better, and I mean better in every way.



Surprisingly difficult

Another reason for my choosing standing would stem from my fascinating experiences of having taught it to many people over the last two decades, if only for a class or two. That the more complex a skill the more difficulty we might experience in the learning of it. Yet although being incredibly simple, the majority of people found standing surprisingly difficult to do for more than a few minutes despite being proficient in other fields of training; and here I’m referring to standard fitness enthusiasts as well as practitioners and teachers from the realms of yoga, dance, Alexander Technique, pilates and numerous martial arts.

Through a lens of physio-cognitive stillness we can discover and develop the fundamental qualities of the body and mind that are with us whatever we do

That someone who can run a marathon, bench-press their own body weight, or easily perform a full backbend can fail to be able to stand still for more than a few minutes, without experiencing serious physical and mental discomfort, poses some fascinating questions about the ways in which we train our bodies and what we assume to be useful in doing so.

When beginning ‘stillness training’ this usually takes the form of sitting or lying down. While they can be meritorious, standing meditation is significantly more functional; for when we want to move in our lives it is usually when standing upright and balanced on either one or both feet.

Cultivating a clear sense of how your entire body is connected and balanced in all directions, all the time, and learning to let go of what impedes this process, naturally orients the way in which one moves and operates to be, simply put, more balanced.

To be able to actualise such a thing requires ongoing perceptive physical training, the systematic soothing of the nervous system and a calming of the mind. It then becomes quite possible to stand still for an hour or more and enjoy a deep sense of balance and ease, even in positions that are physically demanding.

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

A body of knowledge or ignorance?

It seems that people have complicated relationships with their bodies. We constantly adjust ourselves and modulate our experience to avoid discomfort, usually without even realising it, and yet we are more than content to sit in strange positions for hours on end while we watch flashing lights on a screen. When we are not sitting down, we assume it is a good idea to flagellate our bodies and contort ourselves into bizarre positions regardless of the intense discomfort such actions incur and their distinct lack of relevance to how we live the rest of our lives. We do not usually train to feel our bodies more, instead we usually train to feel them less as if to escape somehow, and as a result frequently impede or destroy the very body that we are meant to be training in a bid to achieve abstract goals – goals in fact which are just ideas in our head.

If our felt sense of how the body balances and functions as a single unit were clearer, then our subsequent training notions would be better. From such an experiential standpoint it would be obvious not to go to movement or exercise extremes frequently enough that they either compromise our internal organs, destroy our joints or fuel



neurosis. Indeed, we would be equipped to know how to come back to operating within a boundary of all-round balance as a most useful default setting. Discomfort is a natural part of life and there are many types of comfort and discomfort that we can experience.

Standing meditation is about the process; it does not require any beliefs or theoretical knowledge. All it requires is a willingness to regularly immerse oneself into the experiential study of one's own body and mind whilst doing something simple and quintessentially human

Funnily enough the challenges that people face when they incorporate standing into their training often mirror the amount of benefit they will be able to glean from doing it. However, there is something about stillness training that sometimes makes it hard for us not to take such challenges personally, especially if we are usually driven by aesthetics, external validation or competition. Once you take away the 'doing' aspect of movement you are left with the current state, for better or worse, of the raw form of your body and mind; it doesn't get much more personal than that. Indeed, many people can't sense their bodies at all unless there is a strong stimulus. This is analogous to being deaf to all but the loudest of noises – not particularly useful – but once one's hearing improves the vast nuances of sound can be surprisingly educational.

There are many common mind/body hurdles that we all face. Standing can help us overcome them and see them for what they are: myriad shifting natural phenomena within the broad range of our overall experience. With regular training, sensible guidance and the passage of time, much can be discovered about the essential mechanisms of the human body and mind and one's deeply engrained physical and cognitive habits; perceiving them more clearly offers us a chance to let go of the ones which do not serve us well – and cultivate the ones that do. 🧘



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Odds at the End

And the things people say...

TCUGB logo competition



After a record number of entries we are pleased to announce the winner of the 30th anniversary logo competition. Members were asked to select a logo to represent the union and celebrate its 30 years of maintaining standard in the tai chi community.

It was close but with 26 % and 22.5% of the votes respectively Michael D Smith and Abigail Galton were declared winners. The runner up was Ashley Cheeseman (14.4%).

The board would like to thank all members for their efforts and say congratulations to the winners. 🎉

Tai chi moves



Coming back after Covid

During lockdown some of us went online, some of us practised alone. Whatever you did I can guarantee it wasn't the same. Something was missing.

Here are some reflections from one student, Heather Lomas:

I am the student who began with absolutely no idea what tai chi was all about – perhaps people standing still, waving their arms about, trying to look transcendental.

I am the student who began tai chi because my friend asked me to – and loved it from the start. Family urge me to swap to pilates or yoga – but I say No. The slow, measured movements are somehow compelling.

I missed the classes, much more than I thought possible. I missed the regularity of twice weekly tai chi sessions filled with people who say “Hello” and “How are You?” I missed making a fool of myself as I forget a movement, yet again and it still being OK.

(Secretly, I enjoy the warm up exercises more than the form itself most of the time.) And I missed the challenge of trying to get through the form without errors or mistakes – which still doesn't really happen – one day maybe.

So, what did I do in this tai chi ‘void’? Should I try to go it alone? I started the first lockdown with lots of good intentions of continuing all the various exercise routines I was used to, but found motivation a problem when on my own.

I did do an outdoor class in the park for a time – when restrictions allowed last summer, but confused myself as some of the moves were slightly different to our style. Alas, even a YouTube backdrop of blue sky, wispy clouds and appropriate music wasn't the same.

Finally we are together again. Mixing our own cocktails; of plenty of smiles, tai chi exercise, trying to remember the form, and an evening of 100% enjoyment.

So — what words can I use to describe how I feel now that tai chi is back in my life? Relaxed – energised – motivated, getting back the balance of life. Focus – focus to balance – focus on posture – focus to breathe. Focus to be me again. 🎉

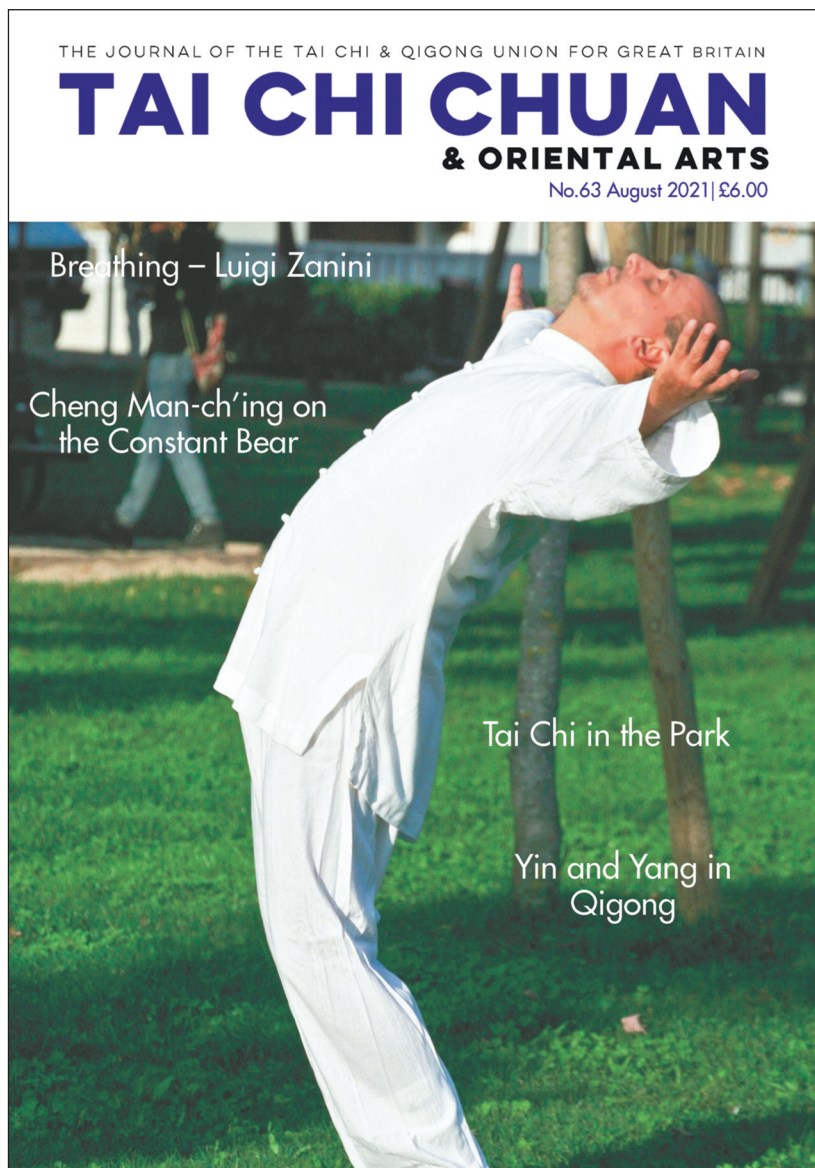
OOPS

As hard as we try I am afraid mistakes do get made. In the last issue, at the end of the *Tai chi in bagua* article we misspelled the authors name and got the email address wrong. Dov Weisberger wrote the article and can be reached at: wudangisrael@gmail.com

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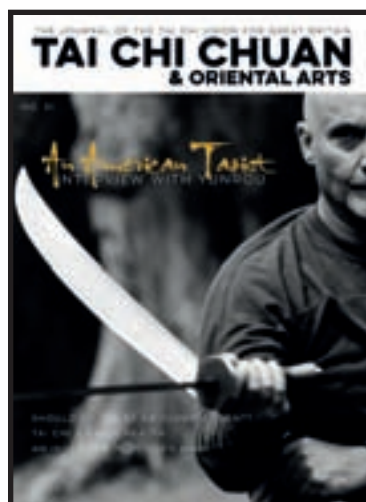
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