

太極拳釋義

Taijiquan Explained
Part II

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Great Grand Master
Tung (Dong) Ying Jie



Grand Master
Tung (Dong) Hu Ling



Master
Dong (Tung) Zeng Chen



Master
Alex Da De Dong (Tung)

CHAPTER

1

INTRODUCTION

My 2003 partial translation of my Great-grandfather Tung Ying Jie's book *Taijiquan Explained*, the 'Red Book' has become a guide for many practitioners of Taiji. Teachers as well as students read it over and over and each time they learn more. If you have not picked it up for a while, please do, because we can only take in what we are ready for at any given point in time.

This new volume, more of the 'Red Book', translates the step-by-step instructions on each posture, their martial applications and the health benefits that they bring. I have replaced the pictures of my Great-grandfather with my own for two reasons, one is that many of you already have the original 'Red Book' in its Chinese version, with the pictures of my Great-grandfather, the other is that I can only speak for what I do.

The descriptions of the postures are basic and the applications are straightforward. What is fascinating is how Tung Ying Jie relates each move to the internal organs. He did not go into detail for each and every move but what he does say is enough to see why Taiji is an internal art. Apart from the fact that very few books from the old days are published, it is these features that make the 'Red Book' a treasure. We all appreciate good work and all the more so when it can benefit many people for generations to come.

I have added some of my own thoughts too. Just whatever came to mind at the time and in no particular sequence. I like to share what I have experienced and I feel that I can contribute a different viewpoint. I believe that this makes the book more practical to the average reader and shows what I teach to my students. Moreover, I think that people often misunderstand the true essence of Taiji. I hope that what I share may lead others to consider matters in a new light and to open their minds rather than short-changing themselves by listening only to one person and or one explanation.

My approach to all things is simple, direct and effective. Take the time to learn things gradually. Don't try to race ahead.

Remember that to achieve high quality in anything takes time and effort.

The sun, moon and stars are the three treasures of nature. We are all born

with three treasures, Jing, Qi and Shen. Treasures that we are blessed with and that we can build on by practicing Taiji, a wonder of the world.

CHAPTER

2

PROPER CONDUCT

THE TEACHER

For a teacher, the first and foremost consideration is to be fair to all the students. In class, you can't have favorites. A male instructor has to be especially careful not to favor a selected group of female students and vice versa. Do not favor individual students even if they deserve it. In time and the right place, everyone will get what they put in.

Do not take personal advantage of the respect, efforts and trust students give you. Use it for the good of everybody. If all respect each other, trust and are trusted, our efforts will only bring good to the group, Taiji and society. A true artist should promote the art, not himself. Naturally there is a balance, in promoting the art, one promotes oneself but no-one should be above the art. The art comes first, the lineage and the organization.

A teacher should get satisfaction from teaching. Helping others should be just as important as making money. A teacher who is too business-minded or whose only satisfaction is money, can't be a good teacher. Keeping alive the tradition and sharing something that you personally believe is good for people, should be the focus. I have taught groups of as many as fifty to sixty students or as few as five or six. A large group is good for me financially and because of it, I am able to only focus my life on Taiji. On the other hand, I have taught many workshops and classes that were attended by only a few people and I am just as happy and always give my best effort. I believe that just being there with people who made great efforts to come is special. The important thing is that we all come together, whether in a large or small group to do our Taiji.

A few years back, a violent storm hit Hawaii. I considered not going to class that night because I thought that no one would venture out in such bad weather but I decided to go just in case anyone did. Sure enough, one student appeared. He said he really didn't mind if I cancelled the class but I said, 'We are here, let's do it.' After we got started, another student arrived and I taught the two of them for the full two hours. Their commitment was rewarded with private instruction. I also taught in Maui bi-weekly for sev-

eral years when there were only six to eight students and more than once, only four showed up. I continued going because they were good people and as shown by the fact that they came, they were serious students.

As a teacher, learning becomes more important. Although teaching is itself a good learning tool, it's not enough. Many people who teach don't spend enough time improving their own Taiji and this is why we lose quality. Even a master who truly understands the principles should keep an open mind, there is always more to learn.

Teach with clarity

Keep things simple and direct

Carefully observe each student, the group and everything that's happening
Teach each student or group with a personal touch and be specific on how each student or group can improve.

Traditionally, there are eight types of people to whom teachers won't transmit their skills,

People with no loyalty or dedication,

People who are physically or mentally incapable (everyone is capable of doing Taiji, except in some very rare cases.),

People with ulterior motives,

People who are violent and with harmful intent,

People who look down on others and have no respect,

People who show no politeness or kindness,

People who are indecisive and capricious,

People who are quick to display great enthusiasm and just as quickly disappear.

THE STUDENT

As a student, always be respectful to your teacher and classmates. Do not nurture too many doubts about the teacher or especially the art. If you can't help but have those thoughts, you should probably look for another teacher. Having the right attitude helps one learn.

Students must be willing to pay a fair price. One way or another they will get what they put in. Extra efforts are needed for the betterment of the art and the future of Taiji. If every student tries to take more than what they give, then no one succeeds, the art can't succeed.

Learn the art with earnest, diligent practice and apply it to all aspects of life.

Promote the art.

Keep an open mind, be receptive to everything. Every person knows something that you do not. Wise people are good listeners and take in the information others are giving.

Don't shy away from criticism.

Do not let the little things bother you. Whether someone unintentionally offended you or if a certain type of person is not who you want to be best friends with, always give the other person the benefit of the doubt. Learn to put yourself in their shoes. Consider both sides and see things from all angles. Turn big problems into small problems and small problem into no problems. Not the other way around.

Most importantly, do not be self-centered or egoistic. Be humble and receptive to others and the universe.

CHAPTER

3

THE FUNDAMENTALS

FULL STANCE

Weight is sixty to seventy percent on the front leg. Open the Kua (hip joint), divide energy evenly and sink to both sides with both feet rooted. The back leg pushes but the knee remains slightly bent. Do not over commit yourself to the forward shift. The front knee is more bent but must not pass beyond the toes. It absorbs the forward movement to keep the body balanced, helping release energy (Fajin) and holds the body in position. The outer edge of the front foot should be straight or the inside slightly inward. The back foot turned about eighty to ninety degrees, both feet gripping the ground slightly. The buttocks dropped as if you were sitting, the upper body erect. The legs should have some spring to them. Don't let them become hard. There should be a channel of two to four inches between the heels.

FORWARD STEP

Turn the front foot eighty to ninety degrees. Push off with the ball of the back foot, slowly peeling off the foot. Establish balance on the front foot and bring the back leg forward by bending and lifting the knee. Bring the back foot past the front heel to about a foot in front and after a slight hesitation. This firms up balance and settles the energy. Step forward and a few inches to the side to create a channel between the two feet. Touch the heel to the ground first and gradually bring the toes down, pushing with the back leg. Straighten the back and lift the crown. Sink and shift forward into a full stance.

SIT BACK

Push off with the front foot. Stay sunken and sit into the back leg. The weight is ninety percent back but do not let your weight go past the back foot. Open the Kua so that the weight of the front leg is forward and energy is spread to both sides. The front foot does not leave the ground. The chest is slightly hollowed. Sink into the back leg and make sure it's stable before picking up the front foot. Sit back and lift the toes, then the heel. The knees must be bent and the toes point down.

STEP BACK

Sit back and pick up the front foot by bringing the toes back toward the back

leg with the knees bent. Then turn the body and hips to step back. Align the heels as the weight shifts ninety percent to the back. The front foot pushes back but remains connected to the ground. The knee is still bent and the Kua open to balance the energy. The back leg absorbs the weight like a spring. The back leg can't be weak or hard. You don't want a broken spring.

HALF STEP

The front foot is aligned with the back heel. Weight is ninety nine percent to the back but there is still intent in the front leg. Sink and open the Kua to keep connected to the ground. In a half-step on the heel, feet should be shoulder width apart. For a half-step on the toe, front foot should be a few inches farther on the ball of the foot with the heel just about two inches off the ground.

LOWER BODY

The lower body is like a coiled spring. When pressed, the spring will bend but its power will rebound. The legs bend but the energy springs back up or forward, its power combined with softness. Drop the buttocks as if constantly sitting on the spring. The reaction is that energy bounces off the ground into the body to create more power. The legs are bent but do not collapse, especially the knees. To bend is to gather power.

UPPER BODY

The upper body is upright, the crown lightly lifted. Weight is sunk into the legs, energy sunk into the Dantian. The spirit is up and the inside is relaxed. The upper body should be straight but not stiff. Use softness and agility when moving. The upper body is supported by the lower body, so it must be in the right position to receive the right support. Drop your shoulders and elbows to establish a good connection with the lower body. Do not lean back or too far forward. The upper body would lose support from the lower body. Details must be incorporated while learning the form.

TAIJI PALM

The fingers are ninety five percent full and straight when pushing. The fingers are kept apart, the thumb slightly open to stretch the palm. Push with the heel of the palm and bend the elbow slightly to release tension in the wrist. The palm must not be too loose or soft when pushing. Fingers can't push. The focus must be on the heel of the palm, which is best connected to the wrist for a solid push. Being careless or misplacing the hand could result in injury. When moving, the palms are softer but not empty. The fingers are still eighty percent straight and thirty percent full in energy. If they are too empty they become disconnected from the rest of the body. The hands

and the feet are the farthest from the center. Some energy and intent are needed to maintain a constant flow of energy. The hands guide the movement. Keeping some energy in the hands gives you a better feel of the direction in which you are turning. Being too soft is like using a feather to move pebbles. The hands are one's main weapon They must not have "too much Yin and not enough Yang." Too soft is like a spear with a metal handle and a plastic tip You would rather have a wooden spear with a sharp metal tip.

THE FOOT

When the foot is lifted the toes point down. When stepping forward, the heel pushes ahead and connects to the ground first. When stepping back, the toes must be put down first. When the foot is off the ground, it's not totally relaxed. It moves through the air as if meeting a slight resistance. When the foot is down, the sole must feel the ground and stick to it, the toes slightly gripping. Use the feet to feel the ground as if you were on an unstable surface. Like being on a train or boat, use the same mindfulness.

TAIJI FIST

It must be firm but not tight. Grip (the amount of energy) as if you were holding a lightweight briefcase. Bend the thumb and place it on top of the index finger, by the middle joint to form a square fist. When striking, apply energy to the punch but do not try to grip tightly. Applying energy to the punch will naturally give the right amount of grip to the fist but doing it intentionally will create tension.

STRIKE FORWARD

When the hand comes from behind the body, it generally passes by the ear and above the shoulder (as in Brush Knees). If coming from below, by the waist (as in Grasp the Peacock's Tail). By bringing the hands by the ear or the waist, they come closer to the center, which is where the power comes from. Other benefits are more softness and fulfilling the principle that "after bending there must be an extension". Taiji generally uses a straight line when striking and moves in a circle to deflect and block. When the hands are too far from the body, energy can only come from the waist. A more direct strike uses the back leg and the waist.

EYES

The eyes generally follow the hands when moving and then look forward toward the direction of your strike. If the hands are apart, follow the one that has an application, the front hand or the inside hand if hands are split. Do not look toward one direction or area for too long. Do not look around when there is no reason to. Do not over focus. The eyes must be balanced. Like

the movements and the energy, eyes could disconnect and scatter like your energy or your mind. You should know where your eyes should be looking at all times. Don't look all around like you are lost.

BREATHING

Breathing should be natural, relaxed when moving and sinking Qi to the Dantian when still. From the Dantian, Qi flows with your movements to the other parts of the body. Improving the flow of Qi is to condition yourself internally. Internal energy follows your intent. Always be mindful and focus on where the energy is going. As a beginner be more open, take bigger steps and make bigger circles. Strive for softness and comfort, don't be too intense in the mind. Do not apply too much energy. In Taiji, learn not to use energy first. From softness comes power.

LIPS

The lips should remain closed throughout the form, the tongue touching the front of the upper palate. This will allow saliva to flow easily and ensure that you don't breathe through your mouth. Feel every muscle, bone and joint in your body. Feel your energy, spirit and Qi. Feel when you are still, in every movement and every change. Feel the entire body, everything that is happening in and to the body. By feeling, you'll learn what is happening. Control it and use it for health and in martial applications.

DANTIAN

The Dantian is located just below your navel. It's where your Qi is stored and released from. You can find your Dantian by pressing on your stomach with two fingers. While the Dantian is tense and Qi sunk, the area where it is soft, like above the navel is not part of the Dantian, the hard area is. Even if you press immediately below your navel, you will find that it's soft, because the Dantian is located about an inch below the navel. Do not forcefully sink your Qi during practice, this will come with practice. Everything is natural in Taiji, as natural as nature itself, interference only brings problems.

MIND

The mind should be calm and relaxed. Focus on your practice, yet do not block everything out. Do not let your mind wander. If it does, refocus, with practice, the mind will wander less. If you have too much going on in the mind before practice, do lots of warm-ups or do some fast forms first. The mind has to focus on everything you are doing, not on anything in particular, that would block things out. You can work on a specific correction or focus on things like relaxing the shoulder or sinking but do not focus on things like breathing or what each of the five elements represents. It's im-

portant to know the applications well but do not think of each application while practicing the form. Focus on general things, in details.

PRACTICE

Practice one to one-and-a-half hours to maintain your skills and condition. Practice two or more hours to improve. Nowadays it's hard to practice many hours a day, every day. Taiji should be a lifelong practice. Over working yourself in a short time is not good. It's very difficult to maintain two or more hours of practice for ten, twenty or even thirty years, even if you could, it may not be beneficial. Your body needs rest. When you are recuperated, training is more effective and you will improve faster. If your training is the same every day, it becomes too routine and your focus and desire lessens. It's like people taking people closest to them for granted but a break will show how much you need and miss them. Too many days without training hinders improvement. You'll yo-yo up and down between two points and won't be able to make the leap to the next level.

I suggest you do your maintenance practice regularly, then once or twice a week practice intensively, two to three hours of forms, plus one to two hours of serious Push Hands. It's good to have something specific to work on and have a partner sometimes. A partner can keep you motivated at times when you are slack. Intensive training periods of five days or longer are great, three or more a year and you should see progress. Two is not bad if you practice hard in between or attend a weekly class. Weekend workshops are good for learning and serve as a reminder but not enough time to really train hard and go deep. Self practice becomes more essential. Dedicating a couple of years to intensive learning and training will pave the road for the future.

Ten thousand is the magic number, There is a saying in martial arts, "to master a form, you must practice it at least ten thousand times". If you do anything ten thousand times, you will get very good at it. If you practice the slow form twice a day every day, that will take about fifteen years. If you only practice once a day, it will take twenty eight years.