

# 太極推手淺說

拳氣的秘密



## Taiji Push Hands

The Secret of Qi in Taiji Quan



陶炳祥 著

Ping-Siang Tao

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## **Appendix 1 – Masters and Colleagues**

### **My Teachers**

Lin Runsheng (Zhejiang Ningbo)  
Qiao Jianxi (Shanxi Qixian)  
Xu Maoting (Hebei Wuqing)  
He Yuanbin (Zhejiang Ningbo)  
Guo Yuqi (Shanxi Qixian)  
Wang Yannian (Shanxi Gujin)  
Zhang Shengjiang (Shandong Boshan)  
Zheng Manqing (Zhejiang Yongjia)  
Wang Zhuanghong (Zhejiang Cixi)  
Wu Yihui (Liaoning Tieling)  
Liu Chenlin (Shandong Rizhao)  
Zhang Jinling (Hebei Ningjin)  
Xiong Yanghe (Jiangsu Funing)

### **Mentors and Friends**

Zhang Jiuxiang (Zhejiang Nanxun)  
Yang Xikun (Jiangsu Fengxian)  
Zhou Depei (Zhejiang Shaoxing)  
Wang Gongji (Jiangsu Wuxian)  
Lin Xijing (Fujian Jinjiang)  
Li Changqin (Taiwan Miaoli)  
Pan Yangshan (Zhejiang Hangxian)  
Chen Zhicheng (Zhejiang Yongjia)

## Appendix 2 – Student's Experiences

### The Remarkable Dr. Tao

by David Pace

Eight pairs of people, standing face to face, each reaching out to feel the movements of his or her partner. An arm presses gently on a shoulder to exploit a perceived shift of weight, and a body shifts smoothly back and to the side to allow the push to dissipate in space. All in slow motion. The faces show intense concentration, but there is a lightness in these explorations. Snatches of conversations can be heard, as the players try to help one another: "Softer," "Try turning the hand in," "Go lower," "No you're not really yielding."

Two sharp claps, and the room instantly falls silent. The pairs break up, and a circle is formed. In its midst, a frail and elderly Chinese gentleman is dwarfed by the Americans around him. He asks an experienced martial artist, who is twice his weight and half his age to push him over. Once, twice, three times, the younger man pushes to his partner's center; each time the older man has twisted out of the way and left his partner stretched out so awkwardly that a tap with a single finger causes him to collapse in a heap. "You must yield," the old man says in the softest of voices.



What happened in that circle was of enormous interest to the 27 people who had come from all over the country to a four-day workshop in Bloomington to learn from Dr. Tao Ping-Siang, one of the greatest living masters of the Chinese art of T'ai Chi Ch'uan. But it may also be of great importance to rest of us, for, although the teaching in this magic circle focuses on the body, the learning ripples out into the world of the family, relationships, the work place, the nation, and the international scene. This is a space in which habitual patterns, both mental and physical, individual and collective are challenged. It may be one of the most productive theaters for learning the kind of new responses we will need in the decades to come.

In Bloomington T'ai Chi usually begins above the White Rabbit on Indiana Avenue at the T'ai Chi Ch'uan Association of Indiana, where students learn the slow and smooth repetition of the basic Form. The Form, a fixed sequence of some 60 motions and postures, began as training for the martial arts, and its kicks and strikes and blocks still prepare the body for combat. But, to most beginning students, nothing could seem more pacifistic than the flowing Form. It is a centering, meditative experience, which offers flexibility and relaxation.

Once the fundamentals of the Form are mastered students often move on to the sword form or T'ai Chi boxing or, most

commonly, to push hands. At first push hands seems like a simple game: keep your balance while "encouraging" your partner to lose his/hers. No kicking or punching is allowed, and the practice can be fast or slow, languid or vigorous. Then, the reprogramming begins. Yes, your normal responses will bring some success, but try this and see if it does not bring more. Try being soft, not hard. See, if you can let go of your shoulder, not resist. Let your fingers relax enough feel the subtle movements at the core of your partner's body.

Since the training has left the physical plane, you realize the impediments, which hinder your success at push hands, are with you always. That rigidity in your shoulders has its analogue in your personal relationships. That the unwillingness to yield shows up at work. That desire to exert force follows you into the voting booth. But here is a different way of doing things, a different set of responses, which can be added to the old ones, providing new choices, new freedoms. Here is a safe place to experiment with the possibilities of life.

T'ai Chi is often called the gentlest of the martial arts, and Dr. Tao has the reputation of being the softest of all its masters. Born in China seventy-four years ago, he became an acupuncturist and practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine. In 1949 he moved to Taiwan, where he became a student of Cheng Man-ching, whom many consider the



greatest teacher of T'ai Chi in this century. Professor Cheng advised Tao that as a small man he would be well advised to focus particularly on becoming soft and yielding, and he has come to embody those qualities to a startling extent.

The word "embody" is not a metaphor. Tao's body is his teaching. He begins his class with a warm up, which Fred Astaire in his prime would have found challenging. Most of us only use a small portion of our possibilities for motion, and the others slowly atrophy. In his mid-seventies Tao still has access to the flexibility of an infant. When he swings his leg, every anatomical possibility of movement from his toes to his head is available to him. This flexibility gives him the ability to yield, where others would be inextricably trapped, and to flow into the gaps in his partner's defenses.

Yet, the connotation of these words in English can betray Tao's teaching. His softness is never weakness; his flexibility never apathy; his yielding never capitulation. He is light but he is always deeply rooted in the earth. As the Chinese classics say, he feels like cotton, but there is an unbreakable rod of steel buried deep in his interior.

Moreover, his art is mental, as much as physical. He is constantly recontextualizing situations, giving them new meanings. His shoulder seems trapped by an incoming push. Then, suddenly the entire system of arm and push and shoulder becomes part of a larger configuration of movement,

which encompasses both players. A touch to his partner's hip produces an alteration within the larger system which makes the original push irrelevant and sends the other player flying through the air.

This flexibility gives Tao the ability to be patient. He knows he always has yet another way to withdraw and, therefore, can wait for the perfect moment, "Get out of the way," he advises a student, "and then you can decide whether you want to fight." "Take thirty pushes," he tells another, "until you get the opportunity you are waiting for. Don't waste your time until the moment is right."

Tao's message is not always easy to receive. His softness has shaped his voice into a whisper. Concepts, strange to us, are expressed in a language which is alien to him, and there is ample room for misunderstanding. He turns unexpectedly to face a large, muscular biker-type and says: "You're not a virgin." Then, after a pause, which has left the entire room, stunned, he adds: "I'm no virgin. But act like a virgin. Don't let your partner touch your chest. Withdraw." At another moment, he asks a tall, thin television producer from New York, which direction she combs her hair. After she stands flabbergasted for several moments, he tells her: "You comb it in the direction that the hair goes not against it. Do the same when you are pushing."

Yet, the message slowly gets through. Yield, yield, yield, and yield again. His students fall back into their old patterns,



resisting from fear that they will be uprooted, pushing back, when they lose patience. But Tao moves through the room, gently shaking a finger, when someone begins to harden, touching an elbow or hip and smiling as a student suddenly discovers a new way to move.

And, the motions in the room change. The bodies move slowly, more smoothly. The concentration builds, as the students focus more and more on the new data coming through their hands and feet and shoulders. Pushing and being pushed becomes part of a complex puzzle. Moves are replayed, as the players explore all the possibilities present in a particular configuration of arms and hips and legs. The lessons begin to sink in. It will be years before the new possibilities ripen completely, but the seeds have been panted.

"Follow the principles [of the classic works on t'ai chi], and you can't go wrong," repeats Bernie [Tony] Zayner, Dr. Tao's assistant in the workshop. "Ignore the principles, and you aren't doing t'ai chi, no matter how successful you are." Zayner should know. A muscular man of great speed, he is a former national push-hands champion, and a man who was widely known for explosive pushes, which would send 250-pound men flying across the room. "But, I wasn't doing t'ai chi," he informs his listeners. Then, he met Dr. Tao. He closed his school, sold his possessions and followed his new



teacher to Taiwan. For most of the first year, Tao would just look at him and shake his head. And, then Zayner began to soften. He stopped trying to win. He entered tournaments with the sole intention of remaining calm, and not breaking a sweat, no matter what his opponents did. Today, after his second year studying with Tao, he looks more like a dancer than the traditional image of a martial artist. He is soft, he yields, his movements have a great smoothness. But, it would appear that he has only begun. Soon he will follow his teacher back to Taiwan, deepening his practice, studying the classics, altering the patterns of his life,

The world of Dr. Tao is a world of circles. We were raised with straight lines and right angles. We push forward, break through, remove obstacles. Our morality offers us right or wrong, and not very many degrees in between these polar opposites. When something comes at us - whether it be a challenge to our authority or an international crisis - we feel that we must immediately force the situation to change, lest we be overwhelmed.

Tao accepts the direction of an in-coming push and ever so gently redirects it along a curve that is so smooth that his partner does not even recognize that it has deviated from the original intention until it's much too late. Each challenge is an opportunity. There is a great potential in every moment of Tao's push-hands, and his role is to allow that potential to

emerge, not to impose the "right" solution from the outside. For this reason he refuses to teach fixed techniques. Every situation offers unique opportunities, and the t'ai chi player must allow them to ripen, not activate a pre-planned set of responses.

The world of Dr. Tao is a world of yielding. We live with action and will. We know how the world must be, and we act to make it match our intention. Resistance is a thing to be overcome, by muscle, and, if that is not sufficient, by technology.

The classics of T'ai Chi tell us to "invest in loss". Tao surrenders space. He allows his partner's will to set the process in motion. Again and again, he reminds his students, "Pay attention to your opponent's intention." It is that intention and the force which accompanies it which gives Tao his opportunity.

The world of Dr. Tao is a world of age and conservation of energy. We live in a youth-oriented culture, which assumes unlimited quantities of personal and collective energy. We achieve remarkable results by generating such enormous quantities of energy that obstacles are simply overwhelmed.

Such an option does not exist for this man of 74 or for the traditional Chinese culture, which produced him. Energy is carefully husbanded. It is not generated, so much as borrowed from the environment. "A force of a



thousand pounds,' the classics tell us, "can be deflected by four ounces," and Tao would never squander his energy. It is the intentions, the wills of others that power the system, even when those who have created the energy intended it to be put to quite different uses. Experience, sensitivity, and awareness are the crucial elements, not muscular strength.

The T'ai Chi Chuan Association is one of these quiet treasures which make Bloomington an extraordinary place to live. This school attracts students from as far away as Germany and the Netherlands, and each year its regular teachers lead workshops of their own in Europe and Mexico. Dr. Tao is only the latest of a long series of fine t'ai chi teachers, who have been brought to Bloomington. William C.C. Chen, a classmate of Dr. Tao and one of the greatest teachers of t'ai chi in the world, has provided the inspiration and the fundamental orientation of the local school and offers workshops here two or three times a year. Moreover, the school complements its instruction in t'ai chi with classes in hatha yoga, zen meditation, and Chinese painting.

The presence of an institution of this quality in a small Mid-Western city is a bit of an anomaly, a fact not missed by the recent visitors from the East Coast, who were amazed to find it in the midst of Indiana. In large part this is due to the enormous dedication of its founder and director, Laura Stone, and of her fellow teachers Charles Pearce and Jody Curley.

But the growth of the T'ai Chi Ch'uan Association of Indiana and of similar institutions across the country is also a response to a great need. The way of life captured in the practice of Dr. Tao and other great t'ai chi masters is in many ways the complete inverse of that of contemporary America. The quiet dignity of the Form is a perfect complement to the frantic chaos of our daily schedules. Our culture's obsession with a certain kind of rigid strength and the imposition of force finds its opposite in Dr Tao's softness and willingness to yield. And, our extraordinary creation and dissipation of energy finds its negation in t'ai chi's concentration on the minimization of force.

All of this can, of course, be found in the great Taoist classic, the Tao Te Ching. But, many of us live such noisy lives that we can no longer hear its quiet message. The slow motions of the form, the gentle yielding of push hands, and the incarnation of ancient principles in a master such as Dr. Tao, may be necessary to bring us back to its wisdom.