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MAK YING PO: A MASTER AND HIS ART

Forty-five years ago Mak Ying Po, a student of economics at Shanghai University, was introduced to the art of T'ai Chi. Living in the home of a friend whose family was able to afford the luxury of having a teacher of T'ai Chi Chuan come into their house and instruct the children, he would often see the family practicing the slow, flowing movements. Thinking them strange, the young Mak was not inclined to take part though often prodded by his friend and even invited by the instructor to join in.

After several months had passed, members of the family graduated into a more advanced stage of the art and learnt to "push hands", an exercise done in pairs which involves one partner pushing while the other absorbs the force of the push, wards it off and then returns with a push himself while the other absorbs the force. And so it goes.

In order to show the folly of trying to resist such a push and also to demonstrate the great internal strength developed through the persistent practice of T'ai Chi, the instructor, one day uprooted a student and effortlessly pushed him clear across the large room. Young Mak, who happened to be watching, was astonished. Previously having had no interest whatsoever in the martial or fighting arts, the gracefulness and the power that the teacher portrayed in this manoeuvre finally won him over. The instructor, Tung Ying Kit, was to become one of the most highly acknowledged masters in all of China.

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Probably the two best-known students of Yang Ching Po are Cheng Man Ching, who came to America to spread the art of T'ai Chi and who died there recently and Mak Ying Po's master, Tung Ying Kit, who apprenticed with Yang Ching Po for twenty years and died in Hong Kong in 1965.

A MASTER COMES TO EDMONTON

Mak Ying Po, who after seeing Tung Ying Kit's demonstration at his friend's home in Shanghai, stayed with him for thirty years, learning T'ai Chi in the traditional way while supporting himself as a banker. Separated from his teacher during the war, he was reunited with him in Hong Kong in 1946 where he helped teach at his new school. In 1964, although continuing to assist Tung Ying Kit until his death, Master Mak began to teach on his own. He left for Canada in 1968, settling first in Saskatoon. In 1970, he moved to Edmonton.

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Master Mak's humble and vital manner gives to his students and all who meet him inspiration towards a more noble quality of human existence. The Chinese population of Edmonton see in him one of their most outstanding citizens and through the classes he has offered at the Edmonton Art Gallery, University of Alberta, Dickinsfield Library, Chinese Elder's Mansion, and the Unitarian Church, many Edmontonians from all walks of life have been introduced to T'ai Chi. It is his hope that that T'ai Chi might come to be practiced as widely here as in his native country and to this end he initiated the Alberta T'ai Chi Chuan Association in 1975 and with the help of Chinese Businessmen, the Alberta T'ai Chi Chuan Culture and Recreation Club in 1977.

When asked what advice he could give to an aspiring student, Master Mak's consistent reply is: "Determination, humility, practice and patience create greater

interest, greater health and a long life". T'ai Chi requires very little space, no special dress code and can be practiced by people of all ages. Could it possibly, then, come to replace coffee and gossip as our traditional break at the office? It's rising popularity in North America indicates this possibility and if the youthfulness possessed by Master Mak Ying Po in his sixty-fifth year is an indication of its merit, then our society has much to gain by looking into this ancient system of movement for relief from our anxiety-ridden environment.