

# Tung Ying Chieh on the Mastery of Taijiquan

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## **Preface**

In line with the balance of the martial and the civil sides of Taijiquan, many people have turned to the teachings of the old masters that were prominent at the turn of the century. They often represented a balance of the civil and martial aspects of the art... a balance brought about by the lessening need for self defense in a modern era of more stable government and more modern weaponry. Although not exactly turn-of-the-century, one source of the old teachings is the 1948 book by Tung Ying Chieh, "**Tai Chi Ch'uan Explained.**"

In his book, Master Tung typically states that "the purpose of the book is to show the quintessence of Chinese culture and reveal its true heritage." It was his intention, he states, to share his experience after a lifetime of diligent practice with one of the most creative and well known teaching families of Taijiquan. The book details a form he developed after a lifetime of practicing with outstanding teaching masters and fellow learners.

Of absorbing interest is his description of the modern slow form. Master Tung indicated forty years prior to writing the book that he observed the form performed by Master Yang Soa Lin, the son of Yang Feng Hou (*Note: Feng Hou was the eldest son of Yang LuChan, but other sources indicate that he died young. L.C.*). Yang Soa Lin was taught by his uncle Yang Ban Hou. This form was described by Tung as being compact and well knit. It was neither quick nor slow when compared to the then current forms. The form of Yang Shao Hou (Yang ChengFu's older brother) was compact and quick. He described the form of Master Yang Cheng Fu as being extensive, soft, and slow.

Master Tung, in his maturity, said that he consolidated the good points from these three masters and created his own form. He describes his form as being condensed and as being neither quick nor slow when compared to the forms of others. Neophytes are counseled to learn the form of Master Yang ChengFu for basic training (Tung Ying Chieh was a student of Yang ChengFu for over 15 years). Interestingly enough, he was also a disciple of Master Li Xiang Yuang prior to and during the period he was with Cheng Fu.

After Yang Cheng Fu died in 1936, Tung stayed in Canton, where he continued teaching Taiji, at times with Yang Sau Chung, the eldest son of Yang Cheng Fu. In his 1948 book, Tung shared 24 Yang family classics. From this group we have selected the following specific classics, or in the case of some already well-known classics, interesting excerpts.

## **Selected Yang Family Classics**

**1. The Eight Directions and the Five Steps. Excerpt.** "Thus, with the hands one has the eight divinatory symbols diagram and with the feet one may step according to the dynamic theory of the five elements. Since the eight symbols diagram and the five element theory were created by ancient philosophers who based their theories on observations of the signs of the universe, Taijiquan also coincides dynamically with nature. Five plus eight equals thirteen. Thus, in its early history T'ai Chi Chuan was known as the thirteen postures of martial arts."

## **4. Sticking, Joining, Adhering, and Following.**

Sticking is to lift or raise the opponent's strength as if it were sticking to your hand. Joining means one's hands never separate from the hand of the opponent and your hand follows his movements without your own initiative. Adhering means reluctance to leave or separate. Following means adjusting your body to the opponent's movements. These are important because without sticking, joining, adhering, and following one is unable to attain the abilities of motion, action, sensing, and comprehension.

## **5. Withstanding, Shrinking, Losing, and Resisting.**

Withstanding is overuse of your own strength to counteract the strength of the opponent. Shrinking is insufficient use of your warding strength. Losing is lost contact with the opponent, allowing escape. Resisting is to oppose the opponent with force.

These are the main drawbacks, in the push-hand exercise, that are caused by ignorance of the methods of sticking, joining, adhering, and following, as well as insufficiency in the functions of motion, action, sensing, and comprehension. It is very difficult for the learner to do the above four manipulations without the drawbacks of withstanding, shrinking, losing, and resisting.

## **6. The Cause of the Drawbacks**

Withstanding, shrinking, losing, and resisting are the drawbacks in push-hands. They defy the rules of sticking, joining, adhering, and following. Consequently, these drawbacks will also decrease the abilities of motion, action, sensing, and comprehension. How can one confront an opponent without even knowing oneself? The learner should deal with the opponent with sticking, joining, adhering, and following; and abandon the drawbacks of withstanding, shrinking, losing, and resisting. If so, the functions of motion, action, sensing, and comprehension will work naturally. Then the learner will be able to gradually reach the stage of strength perception.

## **14. The Civil and Military Practice of Taijiquan**

The civil aspect of Taijiquan is the Body (the Form). The military aspect is the Application. The civil aspect of Taijiquan may be described as a kind of calisthenics. It has the effect of promoting the jing, chi, and shen. The military aspect is based on the civil method which uses both the mind and the body. However, there are varieties in the degree of attainment. For the civil purpose it is always soft. For the military purpose it is often hard because it is used for combat. If one learns the civil aspect and ignores the military aspect, it is the body with no function. If the military aspect is not based on the civil aspect, it is a tree with no root.

Thus, as the old Chinese adage states: it is difficult to clap with one hand, also, it is impossible to support a house with a single piece of wood. Training in the civil aspect is learning about yourself. The military aspect is needed for confrontation. To fight without the foundation of the civil aspect is only foolishness. On the other hand, learning the civil aspect and ignoring the military aspect is like a man with no eyes and ears when confronted with an opponent.

## **24. The Scale, the Waist, and the Head**

The head is like the fulcrum of a pair of scales. It has been commonly called the hanging head, because the top of the head is like hanging from the sky by a string. The head serves as the fulcrum and the hands serve as the discs at both sides of the scale. The waist is the stand, its base is the tail bone and the anus. When you are standing you are like a pair of scales. The so-called lightness and weighting, floating and sinking can all be measured with this scales.

From the top of the head to the spine, the tail-bone and the anus form a straight line and the changing is managed by the two hands. It is possible for one to determine the changings in a foot, an inch, a centimeter, a millimeter, or any of the slight variations in the movements according to the attainments of his skill. The mind is the flag which gives order to all parts of the body, and the ming-men is the center of the cartwheel. Thus the movements can be made with lightness and agility according to the will of the mind. Launching an attack can be naturally made when the two sources of the strength meet and coincide, and no other special measures are needed. The secrets of the methods should be learned through oral teaching. Enlightenment can be attained when you become an inside-door student.

Notes: The reader may appreciate some part of the above descriptions that are easy to understand, while the more difficult parts need the explanation of a good master.

All the descriptions are the original work of the ancient masters, not a single word has been changed.