

Ma Jiangbao

Translated by J.R. Raynal and D. McGiff

### About the principles of wu-style taichichuan (Taiji Yuanli)

Taichi is a Chinese martial art based on taoistic principles. It can prevent illness and prolong lifespan. It reinforces the bones and muscles and regulates blood pressure. It is a means to promote health.

There are three aspects to consider whilst studying Taichi.

### The first aspect is the form (Taijiquan) .

The form exercises the body and reinforces the constitution.

The movements of the form must expand naturally through the joints without strength and in a calm manner. They must also be correct and precise. The spirit must be relaxed and natural, without forcing oneself, it must be naturally at ease. The breathing should be calm and even. It should, however not be consciously controlled, but instead be left unrestrained, “completely natural”.

Only with correct body posture can the movements and breathing be in harmony. During every movement the coccyx, the back, the neck and the head have to be in one line, the line being not bent to the side, forwards or backwards.

The movements of the form must be alive and fluid. They must be linked together without a break whether moving forwards, backwards, or turning. One must first learn the 5 basic stepping methods (pingxingbu, xubu, gongbu, mabu, dingzibu). When turning, the hand moves first, then waist, hips, feet. When playing the form, the back must be slightly rounded with shoulders and elbows relaxed down and the chest depressed slightly inward. Only when practiced this way can the chi sink to the dantian. The eyes must be directed forward (at around 15 meters) looking straight ahead or at the hands. Only when directing the eyes can the centre be maintained. Otherwise one can easily lose his/her equilibrium.

After long practice one can reach a high state of concentration.

For this concentration it is important that whilst practicing the form you should not think. If you think about how you should be performing the movement or the application of the movement, your concentration will be poor, leading to disharmony and breaks in the form.

I have felt through my own experience that all these are very important points.

## The second aspect is pushhands (Tuishou)

Pushhands relates to applications of the form.

It follows the taichi way of stillness and quietness using the subtle change between empty and full for its applications. It is concerned with both psychology and mechanics. In pushhands the movements must be soft and fluid. The spirit must be relaxed and the postures correct, being straight and always centred no matter in which position. Only with a stable centre it is possible to expand or contract and advance or retreat correctly. When you start to learn pushhands, you learn how to neutralize. Never let the intention of attack enter your mind.

Characteristics in pushhands:

### 1. Overcome hardness with softness (Yi Rou Ke Gang).

In Taichi you should not use force against force contending for the first offensive move. This way only the one with greater strength can beat the weaker one and where speed dominates the slower one. To try to use force is in contradiction to the principles of taichi. The important thing for the beginner is to learn neutralizing and avoid unnecessary conflict.

### 2. Meet the offensive with calmness (Yi Jing Dai Dong).

One of the principal strategies of taichichuan is to meet your opponent with calmness. Calmness is essential, because without calmness effective tingjin (listening) will not be possible.

Without tingjin your actions will not be effective. The classics say: he doesn't move, I don't move, he starts to move, I move beforehand. To do this is to meet the offensive with calmness.

### 3. Beat the opponent with less strength but more skill (Yi Xiao Sheng Da).

One method to be used is to neutralize first and then follow and adhere to the opponent until he moves into a "dead" point. Because of his loss of centre of gravity he manifests broken-strength and distorted posture and he will fall even with a single touch.

### 4. Retreat in order to advance (Yi Tui Wei Jin).

In pushhands the feature of prime importance is to adapt and move with the changing conditions of your counterpart. The circular movements in Taichi are the image of the symbol of taichi, which is evolving, comprising the changes of moving and adhering within a circle.

### 5. The circular movements (Dong Zuo Zou Hu Xian).

The patterns of interchange between yin and yang are all based on circular movements and connected by "sticking" to the partner's intension. Because there is no interruption in a circular movement, it is easier to reach the partner than in a forward or backward straight line. Another benefit is that it is easier to change your acting force or direction at any point of the circular line.

Only through long and sustained practice can these principles be felt and brought to life.

Because pushhands can be applied for fighting purposes, the attitude of the taichi student must be concentrated and peaceful.

### The third aspect is the theory (Lilun).

Those who study taichi must also consider its theory. The theory of taichi is a method to guide us in our taichi practice. Only when the method is correct, can one study taichi properly. Every kind of academic subject poses a theory. For instance when one studies medicine one must learn physiology, pathology, pharmacology etc. Therefore those of us who study taichi must also consider the taichi classics, the records of taichi, the theory of taichi and the taichi songs. Because these different theories have all been passed to us through the accumulated experiences of former generations, we must not only research, but also absorb their meanings.

By bringing one's experiences from practice together with the study of the theories from the old texts, one can improve his/her taichi faster. By bringing together the outside form and the inside feelings one can experience the theories through the form and feel them. One must go through these experiences to put taichi into application. This means, if you are only able to do taichi, but you haven't understood the theory well, this is only an exercise, conversely if you only know about the theory, but are not practising taichi, you are just showing off. Both people are not practising good Taichi. You have to combine theory and practise.