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TAIJI 37 with DR. SHEN HONGXUN

When I first met Dr. Shen in March 1994 I was studying acupuncture at the College of Integrated Chinese Medicine (C.I.C.M) in Reading. The college invited him to teach Qigong exercises for controlling and directing qi through the needles. I was fascinated by him when he walked into the room, attracted by his presence before I even knew who he was. Although his English was erratic I found his lecture highly informative and his practical Qigong exercises extraordinary in both their power and effect on myself and my fellow students. At the end of the day I went up to speak with him, sure in the knowledge that he could impart something of value regarding Taijiquan. Whilst I was still about six feet away from the desk where he stood he turned his attention to me, causing me to stop. "Ah, yes," he spoke and smiled, "we do pushing hands". I was unable to speak. He, (still holding his briefcase in his other hand), pointed his index finger at the ground where I was standing and made a quiet laughing sound. My feet left the ground entirely involuntarily and I found myself some four feet further away, unharmed but in a state of considerable confusion. I should mention that I had been studying Taijiquan for ten years and that I had some prior experience of being uprooted without contact: not, however, with such relaxed and effortless power and control. He chuckled and beckoned me towards him and we spoke (somewhat nervously on my part). He showed me some simple push hands before inviting me to come to one of his Taiji lessons. It was as a result of this meeting that I attended his Taiji 37 course in Newport, Shropshire, in July 1994, residential Qigong courses in Brussels and Ghent in August 1994/5, and the Taiji 37 course in August 1995 that is the prime subject of this article.

The course was held at the Harper Adams agricultural college in Shropshire. The quiet, spacious yet



well-equipped location added greatly to my enjoyment of the five days away. We arrived in time for lunch on Saturday and then kicked off in the afternoon with the first postures; Wujizhangzhuang and Taijizhangzhang

These postures give an example of how Dr. Shen's teaching works. In the Wuji posture the internal focus is on finding the centre of the mind and activating the "Sensing" function. Wuji (oneness or nothingness) separates into Taiji through the activity of Yin and Yang: thus moving the mind's concentration from the upper dantian only and sending it to the lower Dantian, changes one's internal state and triggers the movement from Wuji (first posture) to Taiji (second posture). The Zhanghuang part of the posture's names means "Standing on a pole" and refers to the protective technique adopted by Chinese villages in past times of digging a ditch around the village and setting upright poles, in it that one could walk across to gain access. Different families or clans adopted differing patterns of arranging or setting the poles so that only family members could walk them in the dark. Failure to stand or step accurately on the poles resulted in falling into the ditch (lined with pointed sticks or upturned knives to discourage the unwelcome).

This information was initially presented in lecture form by Dr. Shen and then taken into the gym for practice by us under his guidance. There were 76 of us on the course, (43 men and 33 women, Kate Lazier please note), ranging from well-known Taiji instructors such as Alan Peck, Adriaan van Schaik and Ranald McDonald with over 20 years experience apiece to people who had never done any Taiji before. Our competence or lack thereof seemed entirely irrelevant to Dr. Shen and his assistants, who moved around the room helping to correct postures and imparting information where required. Supper at six was followed by pushing hands from 7.00 - 9.00pm, with relaxed discussions in the bar before bed.

The next day sets the pattern for the course. In the heat it is easy to rise early for Yang Long Form tuition with the guidance of Dr. Shen and his daughter Shen Jin from 8.00 - 8.30. Breakfast at 9.00: Taiji 37 lectures and practice from 10.00 - 1.00. Lunch 1.00 - 2.00. Wuxi (lying) meditation with Spontaneous Movement from 2.00 - 3.15, with afternoon tea followed by more lectures and practice till 5.30, dinner at 6, push hands 7 - 9, etc.....

The subject of the course, as it's name suggests, is the original 37

- A Residential Workshop To Challenge Your Ideas About What Taijiquan Is

Report by Paul Brewer

standing postures that are the basis for the development of Taiji forces. Correct practice of the standing postures quickly enables students to experience spontaneous movements, vibrations and internal forces. Each of the 37 postures has its own specific spontaneous movement, which can manifest as a result of correct mental attitude, concentration and posture. Each posture also has its own special function; opening certain channels in the body and creating a specific Qi circulation. Spontaneous movements increase the amount of Qi in the body, improve its circulation and are highly effective in expelling sick or pathogenic Qi. Gradually the Spontaneous movements can with practice become more refined and internal until you can guide the forces with the mind. At least, that's what the publicity handout says! Frankly, the reality is even more stunning than the blurb. The most inspired words on this page can do little justice to the experience of working with this man who began studying Taiji with his grandfather when he was 9 (about 48 years ago), who studied with Tian Zhaoling and Yao Huanzhi and who carries a full Lamaic spiritual lineage. If I tell you that he made me turn a full back somersault with a twist by releasing my internal energy from the standing posture "press" you might be surprised. When I tell you that I weigh nigh on 15 stone and I've never done a back somersault in my life (although I always wanted to) and that although surprised I was completely unharmed you may wonder a bit. When I tell you that he had his hands clasped behind his back and just nodded his head to trigger it and that I had no idea how it happened you may begin to think that perhaps I landed on my head and it sent me a bit funny, but all of these statements are true and accurate and this and other extraordinary events during the week were witnessed and experienced by many people.

Everyone has differing kinds of problems caused by energetic block-

ages, some physical, some emotional. For those of you in doubt about this assertion any acupuncturist will confirm for you the links between emotional troubles and illness at an organic level. During the course Dr. Shen uses his Taiji forces to heal the students whilst they are practising the various postures, inducing profound changes and reactions in people by unblocking their energies. The scientifically researched methods he uses are those he teaches to healers at the BUQI Institute courses. In London and Bristol, but in his hands we are talking here about the extraordinary and the magical. Forget the politics that demeans modern Taiji in Britain, the arguments over minute technicalities, the claims and counter claims of historical correctness, of who learnt what from whom and when. Taiji is by definition the study of change; it is alive. Yin and Yang constantly move and shift just as unstoppably as day and night change into each other. If you're like me you took up Taiji to change your life, to make it better. If you teach it, like me, you do it to enable others around you to change and improve their lives. Most people have enough of a struggle in their daily lives already. They don't want to come to an evening class and have to fight some more. They want to be taught in relaxed and comfortable circumstances how to improve their health and cope better with the everyday business of living in a modern environment which any doctor or acupuncturist will tell you is generally polluted, stressed, overhurred, difficult and decidedly unhealthy. It is entirely correct to argue that the martial aspects of Taiji must not be neglected. Combat has provided the laboratory in which its capabilities have been most rigorously tested; if it were not for the historically documented facts regarding its success as a martial art then we in the west would never have heard of it. It is missing the point, however, to put combat skills and competition results ahead of the foundation of good health and happiness that even moderate competence in Taiji can



Dr Shen Hongxun

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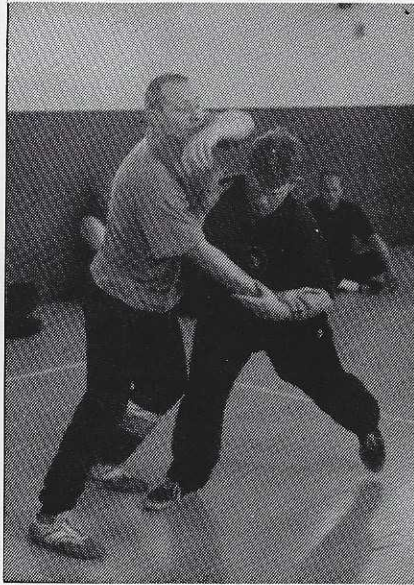
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provide for so many people. That is what we as a Union should be purveying to the public (and indeed to the Medical profession), and what brings me conveniently to the most important thing about Dr. Shen. It is not just the vast ocean of knowledge that he carries and freely gives of, nor the shocking power of his energetic abilities (I was present when he asked a student to run full speed towards him and then knocked him backwards from about 20 feet away with a wave of his hand), it is the childlike innocence of his smile, the infectious joy of his laughter, his unmistakable kindness and compassion that make him such a great teacher and such a joy to learn from. Even when he's skipping round the room laughing and shouting " No weak postures in Taiji, all postures make people die!" he is so obviously doing it for our benefit rather than his. With nearly 50 years of practice under his belt he still speaks quietly of how much better his teachers (especially Professor Yao) were than him, of how he regards himself as still an apprentice after all this time. He is by example a living model of the results of a lifetime of practising Taiji and personally I can't wait to get old enough to get in as much practice as he has!

So how was the course? I hear you ask after my little diversion. Well, it was excellent. In the 5 days of tuition we learnt the first 12 of the 37 standing postures, the Yang long form up to turn body, chop and push, double push hands and loads of fascinating background philosophical, historical and cultural information about Taiji and its development. We sweated buckets as we practised in the heat, ate as much as we could three times a day, tried (sometimes unsuccessfully) to stay awake in the lectures, laughed, screamed, shook and generally thrashed about in the Spontaneous Movement meditations and still managed to dance until 1.00am at the last night party. I've already booked my place for next year's course. See you there!

For further information about Dr. Shen contact The Buqi Institute on 0181 347 9862.

PUSHING HANDS



Push-hands has developed as a training method in various internal forms of Chinese Martial Arts, such as Taiji (Tai Chi), Ba Gua (Pa Kua), Xing Yi (Xin Yi), or the later developed form known as Yi Quan. Yong Chun (Wing Chun) as an external form from the South of China also uses similar techniques that they call 'sticking hands' that can coordinate with footwork for pushing as in some wooden dummy techniques. Yong Chun's sticking hands is sticking to the opponent's hand during contact, and to follow the movement of the opponent's hand. This is almost the same as the Taiji principle of 'Zhan Nian Lian Sui' (touching, sticking, joining, following). I was also told that a master in Long Xin (Lung Jing) or Dragon Form, has developed pushing and pulling techniques from working on a stone mill (grinder) that enables him to use his chest, back and abdominal muscles with an appropriate stand together with his hands in pushing and pulling.



Another similar feature of Yong Chun, Taiji, Xing Yi and Ba Gua, is their training methods. Yong Chun twisting one's hand with the elbow at the centre of the chest and stretching it forward and this will develop one's hand like a spring (if it is pushed to any direction it will come back to the original position). This is similar to 'Peng'in Tai Chi except Tai Chi movements consist of stretching and twisting of the total muscular system. Xing Yi also emphasizes keeping every part of the body under tension in their static posture, stretching and twisting in their punching techniques. Ba Gua even emphasizes stretching and twisting to such a point that it creates a rebounding force, and with such force, one can speed up the counter attack.

Push-hands can be a very effective fighting technique. When you throw a punch it may be blocked by your opponent's hand. He may also stick to your hand. If you pull your hand back your opponent will hit you; if you push forward your opponent will redirect your movement; if you hold your opponent's hand your wrist will be twisted; if you try to lift up your foot and kick, you will be pulled off balance; if you punch with your other hand, it will be pulled to block etc. The secret in doing this is to have very strong blocks and very flexible hands, and these can be developed by practicing Push-hands.

The whole idea of Push-hands is to substitute striking and holding in training, and this has developed into a very interesting contest of skill and power between martial artists. This was a very popular contest during the 1920's between martial artists in Beijing, and I think it can happen again as a sport in different parts of the World.

In terms of techniques, Taiji has developed the basic Thirteen Techniques (Shi San Shi) for Push-hands which can serve as a guideline, but Push-hands can develop further from these basics, together with other tech