



Compiled by the Chinese
Wushu Association

Taiji Quan: 48 Forms

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS BEIJING

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I. Characteristics

For centuries, Taiji Quan has been popular among the Chinese people for its tonic effects and as an aid to improved physical fitness. It is a treasured cultural legacy created by the working people of China.

These 48 Forms of Taiji Quan have all the special features of the traditional schools of Taiji Quan—the spirit of relaxation, softness, smoothness, circularity and continuity. Their practice calls for a quiet mind, a relaxed body, consciousness-guided movements, and combination of hardness and softness. These forms are mainly based on the Yang Style Taiji Quan, but also draw upon the strong points and techniques of other styles. The exercises are smooth, circular, balanced, complete, lively and simple.

The 48 Forms of Taiji Quan have the following characteristics:

(I) Essentials

The entire set has 48 forms of movements, including the three hand forms: fist, palm and hook; nine stances: bow step, empty step, crouch step, cross-legged resting stance, T-step, semi-horse stance step, one-leg stance, standing stance with feet apart, and side bow stance; four leg techniques: toe kick, heel kick, slap kick, and lotus kick; and various hand techniques and different kinds of footwork. These movements represent the main contents of Taiji Quan, and omit repetitions of movements in the traditional routines. Generally speaking, a single movement is used once each in the left and right forms.

(II) Circular Movements

The 48 Forms include not only the vertical circular movements of Yang Style Taiji Quan, but also the horizontal circular

movements of the traditional routines of Wu Style and Sun Style Taiji Quan. These include the single whip, the waving of hands like cloud, piercing and rubbing movements in the stroking and pushing forms, and the circular connecting movements for downward striking with a forward step, shuttling to the left and to the right, and the right heel kick. All these movements are circular, smooth, and well coordinated. In the footwork, the 48 Forms include the backward step and follow-up step of the Wu and Sun schools of Taiji Quan to make the footwork more flexible on the basis of the steady, light and nimble movements of the Yang Style. In forming patterns, the set calls for the full extension of the parts of the body in an integrated manner. In the forms of Leaning Obliquely, Standing on One Leg to Mount Tiger, White Snake Sticks out Its Tongue, and Turning Body with Big Strokes, for example, the movements both demonstrate the characteristics of Wushu and present excellent artistic patterns.

(III) Balance and Completeness

In the 48 Forms attention is paid to the completeness and balance of the movements. In the forms of Single Whip, Waving Hands like Clouds, and Strike, Parry and Punch, the symmetrical right forms have been added, based on the left forms, thus correcting the imbalance of movements in some traditional routines. For the legs, the set includes 29 bow steps (15 left bow steps and 14 right bow steps), 12 empty steps (seven left empty steps and five right empty steps), six crouch steps, and six one-leg stances (three for each leg). This helps balance the weight on the legs. Also, many fist techniques are used and account for one third of the hand movements, thus exceeding the limit of "five fist strikes in Taiji Quan" of many traditional routines.

(IV) Rational Arrangement

The whole set is divided into six parts with two climaxes. The first part includes seven forms with stress on the basic hand forms, hand techniques, stances and footwork. The principal form is Stroke and Push. The second part includes the eighth through the 13th forms, in which changeovers in footwork and body

techniques are more flexible. The principal form is Turn to Push Palms. The third part includes the 14th through the 19th forms, which make up the first climax of the set of exercises. The principal form is Pat Foot to Subdue Tiger. The fourth part includes the 20th through the 28th forms and the principal form is Kick with Left and Right Foot. The fifth part includes the 29th through the 36th forms and the principal form is Work at Shuttles on Both Sides. The fourth and fifth parts lay stress on balance, pliability and toughness, and the coordination of the movements. The movements in the Kick with Right and Left Feet, Kick with Heel, Waving Hands Like Clouds and Works at Shuttles forms, for example, all set high standards for correct bodily execution. The sixth part includes the last 12 forms when the final climax of the entire set is reached. It includes three hand forms, seven stances, one outside kick, and various hand techniques, footwork and body techniques. The key forms in this part are Turn Body with Big Strokes and Turn Body for Lotus Leg Swing. The set begins with the White Crane Spreads Its Wings and closes with Warding off, Stroking, Pushing and Pressing, and Cross Hands.

(V) User-Friendly

The 48 Forms are linked up with the well-known 24 simplified forms of Taiji Quan, both in content and style. The 48 Forms include as many familiar movements and positions as possible. Some of the forms and movements have a higher degree of difficulty and include movements that release force, such as the Pat Foot to Subdue Tiger and Strike with Hidden Fist. Different methods of practice and ranges of movement are specified for people of different physiques and preferences. We hope this will create conditions favorable for popularizing the 48 Forms.

II. Basic Technical Essentials

(I) Hand Movements

1. **Fist:** The fingers are doubled into the palm and the thumb doubled inward across the forefinger and the middle finger.

2. **Palm:** The fingers are slightly bent and apart, the palm slightly cupped, and the radial between the thumb and forefinger curved.

3. **Hook:** The tips of the fingers are held together, wrist bent.

All hand movements must be kept natural, avoiding stiffness. The fist must not be clenched too tightly, the fingers not too stiff or bent too softly, and the wrist should be relaxed.

(II) Hand Techniques

1. **Ward off:** Curve the arm, move the forearm forward from below to block and ward off, and place it in front of the body, palm inside at shoulder level. Focus the force on the outside of the forearm.

2. **Stroke:** Bend both arms slightly, palms obliquely facing each other, and curve the palms while turning the waist, from in front of the body backward to the sides of the body, or to behind the sides of the body.

3. **Push:** Push both arms forward together, with the rear hand close to the inside of the front hand. After pushing, form the arms into a circle to a height between the shoulder and the chest. Focus the force on the palm fingers of the rear hand and the forearm of the front hand.

4. **Press:** Push and press both palms forward from behind. After pressing, keep the wrists at a height between the shoulder and the chest, palm forward, fingers up, arms slightly bent and elbows relaxed and dropped. The pressing should be coordinated with the bowing of the legs and the relaxing of the waist.

5. **Thrust fist(s):** Turn and thrust the fist(s) forward from the

waist. After thrusting, keep the fist eye and the thumb at a height between the shoulder and the crotch, arm slightly bent and elbow not too stiff. Focus the force on the fist face.

6. Plunge downward: Plunge the fist from above forward and downward. After plunging, keep the fist face forward down, with the thumb to one side. Focus the force on the fist face.

7. Sweep the fist inward: Sweep the fist horizontally from sideways below obliquely upward. Bend the arm slightly, fist eye obliquely up. Focus the force on the fist face.

8. Chop the fist: Chop the fist from above forward, fist center obliquely up at head level. Focus the force on the fist back.

9. Thread the fist: Extend the fist forward from the inner side of the other hand or the thigh.

10. Swing the fist with bent arm: First bend the arm and stretch it to raise the fist from below forward or forward down to strike. After striking, keep the fist center down, not higher than shoulder level, or lower than crotch level.

11. Hold the palms: Keep the palms facing each other or stagger them slightly as if holding a ball in front of the body or by the side of the body, upper hand not higher than the shoulder and lower hand about waist level. Keep the palms in a round shape and arms curved. Relax the shoulders and drop the elbows.

12. Part palms: Move the palms obliquely apart, one forward and the other backward, or one up and the other down. After parting, put the front hand in front of the head or the body, and press the rear hand to the hips. Bend the arms in a slight curve.

13. Circle palm: Circle the palms horizontally in front of the knees to the hips, palm down.

14. Push palm: Push the palms forward from above the shoulders or in front of the chest, palm forward and fingers up, fingers not higher than the eyebrows or lower than the shoulders. Bend the arms in a slight curve. The elbows should not be stiff or straight.

15. Thread palm: Thrust the palm forward over the inner side of the other arm, or the thigh.

16. Wave hands like clouds: Cross palms in front of the body to draw vertical circles to both sides, fingers not higher than the

head or lower than the crotch. Wave the palms like clouds.

17. Swing the palms: Swing the palms from below forward or forward down, palm upward or forward, not higher than the chest or lower than the crotch.

18. Palm block: Bend the arm and lift it up to block obliquely in front of the forehead, palm obliquely outward.

19. Open palms: Open the palms, move them apart, one upward and the other down, and prop them up powerfully and symmetrically.

20. Press palm: Press the palm downward, with the thumb inward and the palm down.

21. Hold up palm: Hold the palm up from below.

22. Pluck palm: Pull and stroke the palm obliquely from front downward.

23. Beat: Use the palm to beat obliquely outward.

24. Lean. The shoulders, back, or upper arms release the force outward obliquely.

All hand techniques should be executed in curved lines, with forearms turned correspondingly, not straight or stiff. They should be coordinated with the body techniques and footwork. After the arms are stretched out, the shoulders and elbows should be relaxed and dropped, wrists relaxed and flexible, and palms fully extended. Nothing should be stiff or soft. The force points of the hand techniques are mainly for attack and defense. Attention should be paid to consciousness rather than to force. Stiff force should not be used intentionally.

(III) Stances

1. Bow step: With feet apart, bend the front leg, knee and toes almost on a vertical line, toes straight forward. Straighten the rear leg naturally, toes obliquely forward at 45°-60°. Keep both feet on the floor.

2. Empty step: Squat with bent knees, heel and hips forming a vertical line. Tiptoe obliquely forward with the foot entirely on the floor. Bend the front leg slightly, ball, heel or entire foot on the floor.

3. Crouch stance: Bend one leg and squat fully, with the foot

on the floor, toes slightly outward. Straighten the other leg naturally, close to the ground, foot on the floor and toes inward.

4. Stand on one leg: Stand on one leg, slightly bent. Bend the other leg and raise it in front of the body.

5. Stand with feet apart: Stand with feet apart to shoulder width, parallel to each other, legs straight or bent in the squatting position.

6. Cross-legged stance: Cross the legs to squat down, rear knee close to the back of the front knee. Keep the front foot on the floor, tiptoe outward, ball of the rear foot on the floor and toes forward.

7. Semi-horse stance: Keep the front foot straight forward, and the rear foot horizontally outward, two or three feet between them and both feet fully on the floor. Bend both legs, with body weight slightly on the rear leg.

8. Toe step: Squat with one leg, foot on the floor. Bend and withdraw the other leg, foot by the inner side of the supporting foot or 10 cm before or behind the foot side, with the ball of the front foot touching the floor.

9. Side bow step: Stand with feet apart to the width of the bow step with toes of both foot forward. Squat with one leg, knee and tiptoe forming a vertical line. Straighten the other leg.

All stances must be executed naturally and steadily. Combining emptiness and solidness. The hips should be drawn in, and the knees relaxed, buttocks held in and feet inward. The distance between the feet should be neither too big nor too small. Especially when executing the twist step, the feet should not be placed on the same line so that the waist and hips are relaxed, the energy flows, and the body weight is balanced.

(IV) Footwork

1. Forward step: Move the rear foot one step forward, or the front foot half a step forward.

2. Backward step: Move the front foot one step backward.

3. Withdrawing step: Move the front foot, or the rear foot, half a step backward.

4. Advance steps: Move both feet one step forward, one after

the other.

5. Follow-up step: Move the rear foot half a step forward.

6. Side step: Move one foot parallel and sideways continuously.

7. Front cross step: Move one foot across the supporting foot and land it on the other side.

8. Back cross step: Move the foot behind the supporting foot to the other side.

9. Grinding step: Pivot on the heel, toes outward or inward; and pivot on the ball of the front foot, heel out.

All steps should be light, nimble, and steady, and should combine emptiness with solidness. In advancing, land the heel first, and in retreating, land the ball first, moving in cat-like steps. The feet must not rise or fall clumsily, slowly, or heavily. They should be kept properly apart, whether longitudinally or latitudinally. The turning on the heel or ball of foot should be appropriate so that the body weight is balanced and the posture is natural. Straighten the legs naturally and avoid stiff knees.

(V) Leg Techniques

1. Kick with heel: Stand firmly with the supporting leg slightly bent, bend the other leg and raise it, and swing the shank upward, toes flexed, to kick out with the heel to above waist level.

2. Toe kick: Stand firmly with the supporting leg slightly bent, swing the shank upward, instep flat, and kick out with the toe to above waist level.

3. Slap kick: Stand firmly with the supporting leg slightly bent, swing the other leg to kick upward, instep flat, and pat the instep in front of the forehead with the palm.

4. Lotus kick: Stand firmly with the supporting leg slightly bent, kick upward with the other leg from the other side, swing it in the shape of a Chinese fan outside in front of the body, instep flat, and use both hands to pat the insteps, one after another, in front of the forehead.

In executing the leg techniques, the supporting leg must be firm, the knee must not be stiff, the hip joints must be relaxed, and the torso kept upright. Don't lower the head or bend the

body, and don't bend forward or backward, or to the right or to the left.

(VI) Body Form, Body Work, and Eye Techniques

1. Body form

(1) Head: Keep the neck straight and the head up. Do not slant or shake the head.

(2) Neck: Keep the neck upright naturally. Do not stiffen the muscles.

(3) Shoulders: Relax and drop the shoulders. Do not shrug, or stretch them backward, or hold them forward.

(4) Elbows: Drop and relax the elbows, and bend them naturally. Do not stiffen them or lift them up.

(5) Chest: Relax the chest and hold it in slightly. Do not thrust the chest out or hold it in too much.

(6) Back: Straighten the back. Don't be humpback.

(7) Waist: Keep the waist relaxed and natural. Do not arch it or hold it out.

(8) Backbone: Keep the backbone upright and straight. Do not twist it to either side.

(9) Buttocks: Keep the buttocks in. Do not thrust it out or sway it.

(10) Hips: Keep them relaxed, upright and in. Do not stiffen them or thrust them to either side.

(11) Knees: Bend, stretch and relax the knees naturally. Do not stiffen them.

2. Body work

Keep the body upright and comfortable, turn the body naturally, flexibly, evenly and steadily. The movements are executed with the waist as the pivot to move the limbs in unison. Body movements should not be stiff, stagnant, flighty or unsteady. The body should not be bent forward or backward, or rise or fall irregularly.

3. The Eyes

Taiji Quan requires concentration of the mind, the use of consciousness to guide the movements, and a natural look. In the fixed position, the eyes should look straight ahead or at the hands.

When changing positions, the eyes, hand techniques, and body work should be coordinated.

(VII) Essential Points for the Execution of Movements

1. Relax the body, keep calm, and breathe naturally. All parts of the body should be natural and relaxed, and no clumsy force should be used. Concentrate the mind and remain quiet to guide the movements. Breathe naturally, smoothly, deeply and evenly, in coordination with the movements and the application of force. The general rule is: inhale lightly and exhale solidly, inhale when the mouth opens, and exhale when the mouth closes. Do not hold the breath in a forced manner.

2. The movements should be curved with a clear distinction between emptiness and solidness. The change from movement to movement should be circular, not straight, and should not be stiff or rigid. The body weight should be shifted firmly and stably, with a clear difference between emptiness and solidness. The shift of weight should be smooth and decisive.

3. The upper and lower limbs should move in unison, circularly and fully. The movements must be executed with the waist as the pivot to move the limbs in unison. Avoid disharmony between the hands and feet and between the waist and the rest of the body. The movement of force should be uninterrupted.

4. Execute the movements evenly, continuously, smoothly and calmly. The movements should be closely connected, soft, continuous and flowing. The speed should be even. Be sure to avoid uneven movements of the several parts of the body. When the movements release force or involve the patting of the feet, the speed can be changed, but the connections should be natural, and the manner should be integral.

5. Keep the movements light and steady, and combine hardness with softness. The application of force should be light, flexible, firm and steady. It should be externally soft and internally solid. Hardness and softness should be combined. The release of power should originate from the waist and legs, and

should be focused on the hands. The movements are elastic and flexible, with softness dwelling in hardness.

III. Steps for Practice

To practice Taiji Quan, just as with any other sports, you must acquire a good foundation from the very beginning, gradually improve your skills, and finally perfect them.

Roughly speaking, learning to practice Taiji Quan may be divided into three stages. In the first stage you should lay a good foundation in the positions and movements. Beginners should first acquire a clear understanding of the basics including hand forms, hand techniques, stances, footwork, body form, body work, leg work and eye techniques. Make sure your positions are correct and the movements are smooth and soft. In the second stage, you should begin to grasp the correct method of how to change from movement to movement, and the characteristics of the movements. Make sure that the movements are continuous, well-connected, circular and coordinated, with the limbs moving in unison. In the third stage, emphasis should be put on the application of force, consciousness, and the combination of breathing and movements. Make sure that the movements are executed lightly and firmly, that hardness is combined with softness and the mind, and that energy and force are integrated both internally and externally.

A brief description of the essential points for learning the 48 Forms of Taiji Quan is as follows:

In the first stage, for the foundation work, attention should be paid to the following points:

(I) Correctness: In learning to practice Taiji Quan you must, first of all, keep your body upright and comfortable, and take the correct position. When raising the head and straightening the neck, dropping the shoulders and elbows, relaxing the waist and holding in the buttocks, special attention should be paid to keeping the spine straight and the shoulders and hips relaxed and flat to ensure an upright torso. The positions for the other parts

of the body should also be executed earnestly and correctly as required. As a matter of fact, ignorance of the essential points for any one part of the body will lead to a deformation in the positions of the other parts. For example, if the buttocks protrude, the waist will be affected, the chest will be thrust out, and the abdominal muscles will become tense, causing errors in the execution of the movements. Therefore, the beginners must not seek quick progress or learn hastily and carelessly.

(II) Stability: To ensure that the torso is upright and comfortable, it is first of all necessary to keep the lower limbs stable. The stances and footwork are the foundation of good positions and movements. If the steps are too small and too narrow or the positions and angles of the feet are not correct, and the distinction between emptiness and solidness is not clear while executing the movements, instability of the body will result. Therefore, beginners must first have a clear understanding of the stances and footwork. You can properly grasp the timing for the change of body weight by practicing the stances and different steps separately. Or you can practice the different leg techniques (heel, toe, and side kick) and do more exercises to improve the pliability of the waist. This can also increase lower-limb strength and improve the stability of the movements.

(III) Relaxation: Beginners should pay attention to relaxation when executing the movements. The body parts should be fully extended and the movements should be soft and natural. Beginners are likely to use clumsy force and become unnecessarily nervous. In laying the foundation, the body parts must be relaxed and the movements must be soft. Strive to overcome nervousness and stiff movement.

(IV) Lightness and softness: In order to acquire lightness, slowness, softness and gentleness required by Taiji Quan movements, beginners should do the exercises slowly and softly, and apply the force lightly and evenly. Generally speaking, slow movements and light force at the beginning help make correct movements at the right pace and avoid incorrect force application.

In the second stage, a firm grasp of the rules of Taiji Quan