SIMPLIFIED "TAIJIQUAN"

REVISED EDITION



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Simplified "Taijiquan"

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The Development and Evolution of "Taijiquan"

AIJIQUAN is one of the rich cultural heritages of China. Many tales have been told about its origin, one of which says that about 800 years ago there was a certain elixir maker named Zhang Sanfeng who lived in the Wudang Mountains. One night he dreamt that he was taught Chinese boxing by Great Emperor Xuan Wu, after which he went about disseminating the art among the common people. Thus, taijiquan was said to have been presented by a deity and handed down by supernatural beings — a hardly plausible story.

What then is the real origin of taijiquan? From available historical data, it appears that taijiquan was first devised in Chenjiagou, Wenxian County in Henan Province, some 300 years ago in the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties. Among the representative figures who made outstanding contributions was Chen Wangting, a garrison commander in Wenxian County. In subsequent years foreign invasions and domestic peasant uprisings stimulated the diffusion of martial arts among the people, by which time a new form of boxing had evolved. While previous boxing styles emphasized quick movements and strong, vigorous punches, this new style followed the principles of "subduing the vigorous by the soft," "adapting oneself to the style of others" and

"overcoming a weight of 1,000 catties by four ounces." In general, some movements were energetic while others were gentle, some rapid while others slow, and one movement followed another in uninterrupted rhythmic harmony, like a flowing stream. As this style of boxing consisted of eight primary hand postures and five major changeable postures, it was initially called "13 Forms." Furthermore, as this series was also often very long, like an endless flow of the Changjiang (Yangtze) River, it was also called Changquan (Long Boxing). From the age - old boxing manuals of 13 Forms and Changguan, many of which have been well preserved, it can be seen that much of their contents was similar to the Quanjing (Boxing Text) written by Qi Jiguang (1528 - 1587), a famous general of the Ming Dynasty, who had collected and collated 16 boxing styles. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that this new boxing style was evolved by assimilating selected aspects of styles popular among the people.

Late in the 18th century, a teacher and great master of martial arts Wang Zongyue systematically summed up this new boxing style and related his findings to the classic Chinese philosophy of "yin" and "yang" (meaning the two opposing principles in nature, the former feminine and negative, the latter masculine and positive). In his book, boxing was given the formal name of "taijiquan." Up until 100 years ago, taijiquan was practised mainly in the countryside of Henan Province. In 1852, Yang Luchan (1799 – 1872) of Hebei Province brought taijiquan with him to Beijing and thereafter it spread rapidly throughout China.

In the past century, taijiquan underwent even more changes with its movements tending to be more relaxed, smooth, even and graceful like floating clouds and flowing streams. Many explosive strength moves disappeared, as did excessive foot stamping. As a result, taijiquan became popular with men and women, young and old alike. Increasing attention was also paid to the health building and therapeutic value of taijiquan during this period.

In the process of its development, taijiquan gradually evolved into many different styles. Among them the Yang school was most

popular. Systematized by Yang Chengfu (1883 – 1936), grandson of Yang Luchan, its main characteristic features were: extended and natural postures, slow and even motions, light and steady movements, and curved, flowing lines of performance. The Yang school was given the name "Da Jia" ("big frame").

The school with the longest history was the Chen. Retaining the old-styled practice which was popular in Chenjiagou, Henan Province, this style contained vigorous as well as gentle movements. With jumps, leaps and explosions of strength, the performance followed a circular path. The Chen school was known by the name "Lao Jia" ("old frame").

Yet another style — "Wu" (昊), known as "Zhong Jia" ("medium frame") — was popularized by Wu Jianquan (1870 – 1942), a follower of Yang Luchan. With moderate postures and well-knit lithe movements, its actions also followed a circular path.

A further Wu (武) school, also referred to as the Hao style, was established by Wu Yuxiang (1812 – 1880), a fellow villager of Yang Luchan. This branch of taijiquan was disseminated and popularized by Hao Weizhen (1849 – 1920), a follower of Wu Yuxiang. The main characteristic feature of the Hao style is that it consists of a well-knit series of forms, with simple, quick and short-range movements mostly involving the opening and closing of the arms — giving rise to the name "Xiao Jia" ("small frame").

The Sun school of taijiquan was developed by Sun Lutang (1861 – 1932). Originally a pupil of Hao Weizhen, Sun created a style of his own with dexterous and nimble movements performed at a quick tempo and with lively footwork — which gave rise to the name "Huobu Jia" ("lively pace frame").

These five schools are the major forms of taijiquan (naturally there are subdivisions under each school). Although each of the five has characteristic features of its own, they share the following essentials:

First, the body is naturally extended and relaxed, giving priority to lissomness. While exercising, performers must keep their

trunks straight, move them with ease and lightness, and hold them steady throughout. Some classic treatises have described their motions thus: "While making a stride, it is as quietly as a cat walks," and "while putting forth strength, the exertion is so mild that it looks like reeling off raw silk from a cocoon." The movements, like clouds floating in the sky, are spry and light, but well balanced and steady. Motion is even and fluid, the muscles neither stiff nor rigid. Breathing should be deep and even, and well coordinated with opening and closing movements. While practising taijiquan, the requirement of litheness and naturalness does not mean that the performance can be loose and lifeless. Rather, it is vital to combine vigour and gentleness, and properly put forth strength — neither inertness nor rigidity is allowed.

Secondly, the mind is tranquil but alert, with consciousness commanding the body. In practising taijiquan, it is essential that movements be guided by consciousness and that there be stillness in movement — a unity of stillness and motion. So, taijiquan requires a combination of training one's physique, one's will and one's breathing. As a high degree of concentration is emphasized, quality movements are ensured and physiological functions are regulated. That is why some people liken taijiquan to "physical exercises of consciousness" or "therapeutic barehand exercises."

Thirdly, body movements are well coordinated throughout the entire exercise period. *Taijiquan* requires that the hands, eyes, body and limbs perform as a whole, with the legs as a base and the waist as the axis. Though the movements are gentle and slow, each part of the body is in constant motion. Performers should never act like a puppet; they must never focus their attention only on the hands while neglecting the movements of the waist and legs. In fact, while practising *taijiquan*, the main weight-bearing parts are the waist and legs. The chief characteristic feature of *taijiquan* is that movement is initiated from a half squatting position throughout the exercise.

After the founding of New China, taijiquan has undergone unprecedented development. Physical culture workers and medical

personnel in China have collected and studied various schools of taijiquan and special hanging charts, books and musical compositions have been published. In 1956, a simplified set of taijiquan based on the most popular sequences of the Yang school was issued. This series consists of 24 forms which progress logically from the easy to the difficult, and take five minutes to complete. This "Simplified Taijiquan" has proved to be a great stimulus to the popularization of the sport. Not long ago, the specialists compiled a comprehensive "48 Forms" and a "66 Forms" to suit different individuals. More demanding and varied in content, these new sets of taijiquan include several traditional items of dual training, such as hand pushing and counter-pushing, sword fencing and combat with other weapons. All these have brought about a resurgent interest in taijiquan both in China and abroad.

"Taijiquan"— A Medical Assessment

Prof Qu Mianyu

T AIJIQUAN is a branch of the traditional sport of wushu. As a means of keeping fit and preventing and curing diseases, it has been widely practised among the people since the 16th century. Its popularity has further increased with the adoption of a simplified set of exercises in 1956. Forming an important part of the treatment ofter prescribed in hospitals and sanatoriums, taijiquan has proved its efficacy in treating chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, neurasthenia and pulmonary tuberculosis.

The salubrious effects of taijiquan have much to do with its characteristic features, namely: 1) the exercises require a high degree of concentration, with the mind free from distractions; 2) the movements are slow and uninterrupted like a flowing stream; and 3) breathing is natural, sometimes involving abdominal respiration, and is performed in rhythmic harmony with body movements. From the viewpoint of sports medicine, these characteristics are important factors contributing to the prevention and treatment of diseases.

The high degree of concentration required in taijiquan exercises also benefits the function of the central nervous system.

Training the mind and the body at the same time, these exercises stimulate the cerebral cortex, causing excitation in certain regions and protective inhibition in others. This enables the cerebrum to rest and relieves the cerebral cortex of the pathological excitation caused by ailments, thus helping to cure certain nervous and mental diseases.

The results of recently completed testing and examination involving taijiquan practitioners are of particular interest to medical and sport personnel. In the project, healthy subjects aged 50-89 were divided into two groups and given a battery of tests. Group A contained 32 persons who practised taijiquan regularly, while Group B (the control group) was composed of 56 individuals who did not engage in taijiquan training. In general, those in Group A were found to have stronger physiques characterized by more efficiently functioning cardiovascular, respiratory, osseous and metabolic systems.

Specific Findings

In regard to cardiovascular efficiency, the two groups underwent a functional test of stepping up and down a 40-cm-high bench 15 times within a minute. All but one person in Group A could bear this workload with normal type responses in blood pressure and pulses. In the control group, however, capability of bearing this workload decreased and abnormal responses (such as step reaction and dystonia reaction) increased with the age of the subjects. The difference was also evident in electrocardiograms. Abnormal patterns such as the prolongation of the P-R interval, the complex QRS and the QT duration, the reduction of the RV5 amplitude, the depression of ST and the inversion of T, were found in 28.2 per cent of the subjects in Group A and 41.3 per cent in Group B. These findings suggest that regular practice of taijiquan results, in an increased supply of blood to the coronary arteries, more forceful heart contractions and improved hemodynamic processes. Moreover, taijiquan may enhance the regulatory function of the central nervous system, improve the coordination of the various organs in the human body, increase the tension of the vagus nerves, ensure adequate supplies of blood and oxygen to the tissues of the various organs and facilitate substance metabolism — all of which contribute to a lower rate of incidence of hypertension and arteriosclerosis. The average blood pressure was 134.1/80.8 mmHg for Group A and 154.5/82.7 mmHg for Group B, while the rate of incidence of arteriosclerosis was 39.5 and 46.4 per cent respectively.

Regular practice of taijiquan exercises can increase the elasticity of the lung tissues, the respiratory magnitude of the chest (which helps to retard the ossification of the rib cartilages) and ventilatory capacity of the lungs, and improves the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide. Experiments showed Group A to be superior in both the respiratory discrepancy of the chest and vital capacity. The greater vital capacity results from a stronger diaphragm and muscles of the thoracic walls, greater lung tissue elasticity and a lower rate of ossification of rib cartilages. For those whose breathing is already limited by ossification of rib cartilages, abdominal respiration accompanying taijiquan exercises will help ventilation of the lungs and, through rhythmic change of abdominal pressure, speed up blood flow and gas exchange in the alveoli pulmonum. This explains why, when completing the functional test, Group A subjects breathed more easily and recovered more quickly than those in the control group.

Taijiquan exercises can also strengthen bones, muscles and joints. Take the spine for instance. Since many taijiquan movements hinge on the waist and involve a great deal of lumbar movement, systematic exercise can be beneficial to the form and structure of the lumbar vertebral and indeed the spinal column as a whole. Researchers noted that only 25.8 per cent of the subjects in Group A suffered from spinal column deformities, whereas in the control group the percentage was 47.2. Furthermore, fewer Group A subjects were victims of common, age-related hunchback deformities. Individuals in this group had more flexible spines, as evi-

denced by the fact that 77.4 per cent of them were able to do touch-toes, as against 16.6 per cent in the control group. X-ray examination indicated that the rate of incidence of senile osteoporosis was 36.6 per cent for Group A and 63.8 per cent for Group B. Senile osteoporosis, which often leads to deformity and inflexibility of joints, is a degenerative affliction mainly caused by inactivity of the osteoblasts resulting in their inability to produce sufficient matrices so that more bone is resorbed than formed. It may also be caused by such factors as reduced blood supply to bones owing to arteriosclerosis and poor absorption of calcium and potassium from food due to the lack of hydrochloric acid in the gastric juices. Insofar as taijiquan can prevent or lessen such disorders, its role in retarding the aging process is noteworthy.

Limited data were uncovered relative to the effects of taiji-quan exercises on substance metabolism in the human body. However, judging from the difference between the two groups of oldsters in skeletal changes and in the incidence of arteriosclerosis, the beneficial effects of exercise appear significant as far as the metabolism of fats, proteins and calcium and potassium salts is concerned. In recent years, several researchers in other countries have studied the role of physical exercises in delaying senescence. Cholesterol levels have dropped substantially for those engaged in regular exercises. Experiments conducted on elderly people inflicted with arteriosclerosis reveal that after five or six months' training there has been an increase of albumin and a marked decrease of globulin and cholesterol in their blood, while symptoms of arteriosclerosis have greatly diminished.

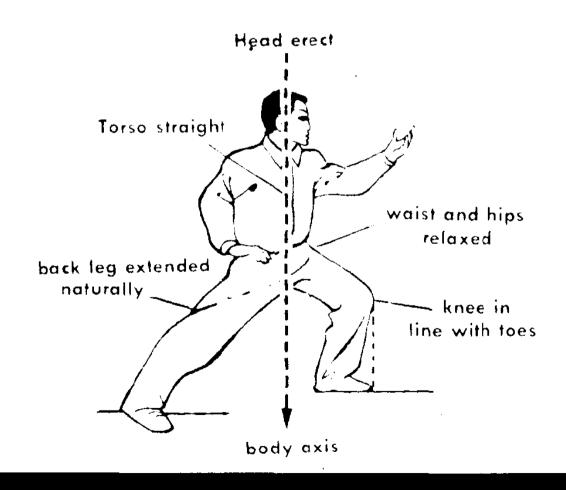
Conclusion

These findings, though preliminary and superficial, suggest that a regular programme of taijiquan exercises can be of benefit to one's physical well-being.

Simplified "Taijiquan"

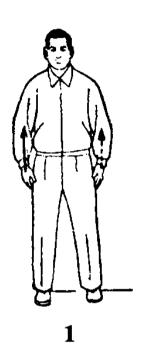


Directions are given in terms of the 12 hours of the clock. Begin by facing 12 o'clock, with 6 o'clock behind you. 9 o'clock at your left and 3 o'clock at your right. Thus a turn to 1 o'clock is one of 30° to the right, and a turn to 1-2 o'clock is one of 45°



SECTION I

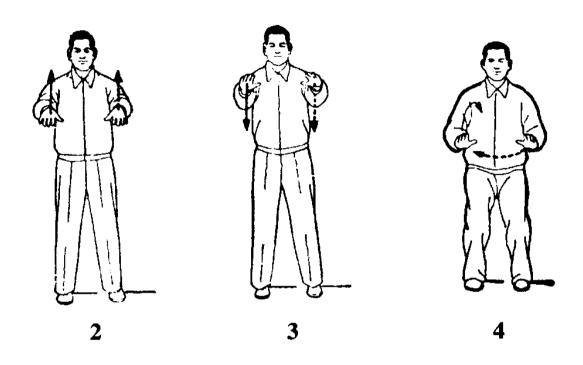
Form 1 Commencing Form



Note: In the illustrations, the paths of the movements to be executed are indicated by arrows drawn in solid lines for the right hand and left foot, and dotted lines for the left hand and right foot.

1) Stand upright with feet shoulder-width apart, toes pointing forward, arms hanging naturally at sides. Look straight ahead (Fig 1).

Points to remember: Hold head and neck erect, with chin drawn slightly inward. Do not protrude chest or draw abdomen in.



- 2) Raise arms slowly forward to shoulder level, palms down (Figs 2-3).
- 3) Bend knees as you press palms down gently, with elbows dropping towards knees. Look straight ahead (Fig 4).

Points to remember: Keep torso erect and hold shoulders and elbows down. Fingers are slightly curved. Body weight is equally distributed between legs. While bending knees, keep waist relaxed and buttocks slightly pulled in. The lowering of arms should be coordinated with the bending of knees.