

A Taste of China

Presents

Traditional Yang Family Style Taijiquan

by

Yang Zhen-duo

4th Generation Yang Family

and

Yang Jun

6th Generation Yang Family

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This book accompanies the video "Traditional Yang Family Style Taijiquan"

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Video Part I, Traditional Yang Family Long Form

Demonstration by Yang Jun, 6th Generation Yang Family

Yang Jun performs the Yang family long form (103 movements). This set of movements was taught to him by his grandfather, Yang Zhen-duo, with whom he has lived and studied since he was a child.

Video Part II, Introduction to Traditional Yang Family Style Taijiquan

History and Principles, by Yang Zhen-duo, 4th Generation Yang Family

Master Yang lectures on the history of Yang family taijiquan. He explains and demonstrates the principles of taijiquan which were formalized by his father, Yang Cheng-fu.

Introduction

Earlier we had Yang Jun demonstrate the whole complete set of traditional taijiquan. Now I will explain Yang Style Taijiquan's basic "Ten Essentials of Taijiquan."

There is an old Chinese saying: "Without following dimension and specification, one cannot build anything with precision." In other words, "Follow the guidelines to attain high achievement." Learning Yang's taijiquan is no different from doing other things, so we practice taijiquan in the same way. The rules of taijiquan are to follow the "Ten Essentials" of taijiquan. If you follow the ten points in Chinese you may not have very many characters, but the meaning is quite deep. These ten points are the principles of practice for Yang's taijiquan. They are a crystallization of the essence of taijiquan by the masters of the past.

Origin of the "Ten Essentials"

Yang's taijiquan started from our grandmaster, Yang Lu-chan, who is my great-grandfather, then went to my grandfather, Yang Jian-hou, and grand-uncle Yang Ban-hou, and to my uncle Yang Shao-hou, and my father, Yang Cheng-fu, passing through three generations and molding gradually to the present form of Yang's taijiquan. These "Ten Essentials" are the result of their diligent practice. These are the rules that must be followed as you practice the Yang style taijiquan. If you follow the principles—the rules and guidelines—you will accomplish something worthwhile.

As you practice Yang's taijiquan, the "Ten Essentials" become the guidelines for you. These ten principles deal with some common areas as we practice Yang style taijiquan.

First Essential

Xu ling ding jin—An insubstantial energy leads to the top

Straightening the head

The first point deals with the requirements for the head. It says: "An insubstantial energy leads to the top of the head." The Chinese call it *xu ling ding jin*. If we examine the Chinese characters literally, it means "the insubstantial [empty] spirit extending the energy to the top." The idea is that the head remains empty but extends upward.

The primary purpose of this principle is to deal with problems that happen in the head area. When practicing taijiquan, some people tend to roll the head or let incline it upward or lean to one side. In order to correct those problems, the requirement is that the head is level and neck is straight. One should not look down or look upward; the eyes should be level. By doing this, the spirit can be raised. It's as if you have something balanced on the top of your head. In this way, the spirit of vitality can be lifted up. In practicing Yang's taijiquan, because the head is lifted up, the spirit of vitality is raised.

If you lower your head, you no longer have an “energetic” look. The posture also doesn’t look very pleasing. If you are leaning your head upward or inclining it downward, or if your head is swayed to one side or the other, it all looks very inelegant. Additionally, it does not improve circulation in the head area. If you have these faults, you cannot raise the spirit upward. So Yang’s taijiquan not only emphasizes good posture, it also very much emphasizes the spirit as it is manifested in the head area. If you follow these rules, the eyes look straight ahead and you look very energetic. If your eyes look downward, you no longer look energetic and no longer are able to raise the spirit upward.

In summary, as you practice taijiquan, the requirement for the head is *level and extended upward*. Then the posture looks very elegant.

The eyes

When we talk about the head, we also must talk about the two eyes. The requirement for the eyes is *looking straight ahead*. For instance, if I do “Brush Right Knee And Twist Step” with my right hand, then my eyes look straight forward, in the direction where the right hand is striking. If the arm is moving to the side, the eyes naturally follow the direction where my arm is—to the side. In a movement like “Needle At Sea Bottom,” where my hand is pointing downward, my eyes look to the downward position. Therefore whether moving straight, moving to the side, moving down, or moving up, the eyes must always follow the direction where the hand is pointing.

Generally speaking, our eyes are looking toward the front. But we must also be aware of one point: even though we look forward, the eyes should not stare. They should not be stiff and “dead” looking, by which I mean just staring to the front but without any spirit. The requirement includes a certain amount of change of spirit in the eyes as the movement changes. In doing so, you avoid that dead look.

The mouth and tongue

Another important point to observe deals with the mouth. The requirement in taijiquan says that *the tongue should be curled up to touch the tip to the palate*. As you do this, do not overdo it. Use just a very gentle and natural effort in putting the tongue lightly on the roof of the mouth. The purpose of that is to prevent the mouth and tongue from getting dry. One reason for your mouth getting dry is having your mouth open during your practice. If you do have your mouth open, pretty soon you notice your mouth and tongue getting very dry. Therefore hold your mouth “closed but not closed” [closed but not tightly closed] and your tongue naturally curled up to the top. When you practice taijiquan, don’t open your mouth; this is not correct. But don’t forcefully close your mouth; this is not natural, either. Therefore stress naturalness.

That concludes the description of the requirement for the head.

I’d like to mention something about *xu ling ding jin*. Extending the head upward should be done in a very natural way. I mentioned that the tongue touching the top of the mouth forcefully is not very natural and therefore not correct; pushing the head upward in a forceful way is not correct, either. As you practice taijiquan, be aware that the position of the head as well as the tongue is a natural one.

Second Essential

Dong zhong qiu jing—Tranquility in movement

Qi sinks to the dantian

Next I'd like to describe "Let the qi sink to the dantian."

For the Chinese word "qi," there are many explanations having to do with this word. But with regard to taijiquan practice and health, qi is described as follows. One kind of qi we talk about is "yuan qi," which is pre-natal or primordial qi, inherited by you from your parents. Another qi is the air we breathe.

As we practice taijiquan, the primordial qi is sinking down and the postnatal qi, or breathing, is smoothly flowing (or regulating). This idea coincides with taijiquan's requirement that your qi sinks to the dantian and our breathing is smooth and easy. Allow your *yuan qi* to sink and stabilize in the dantian. Allow your breathing to be smooth and easy, and then your taijiquan movements become flowing and comfortable. Again I remind you that this must be done in a natural way.

As far as the coordination of the breath with the movement, I also emphasize a natural combination of the two. A natural combination is like this. For example, as I *fajin* (release energy and strike), because I am pushing forward and striking something at the front, I never would be breathing in. If I shift forward and at the same time I inhale, it doesn't make sense, it does not follow smoothly. If I sink downward, I really cannot inhale at the same time. Sinking and inhaling together doesn't feel comfortable. Likewise, if I do a movement that lifts upward and at the same time I exhale, it feels unnatural. Therefore the combination of the movement with the breath must follow the natural way of the movement.

Of course there are exceptions. Let's talk about walking, for instance. As you walk, your arms are swinging. It feels very unnatural if you raise your left hand at the same time as you step with your left foot. It does not follow the natural rhythm, but there are people who walk this way; there are exceptions. But in taiji, combine the movements and the breathing in a natural way.

Now especially for people just starting to learn the taijiquan movements, who are not quite familiar with or clear about the ten principles, the common difficulty is that you cannot even coordinate all the movements. If you start thinking about the foot, you neglect the hand. During that stage, matching the inhalation and exhalation with the postures isn't going to be very correct, because you cannot think about coordinating everything. Taijiquan is really a movement for the whole body. The movement of taijiquan all starts from the waist and hip region. It is not localized movement in the arms and legs but is considered movement for the whole body. So if you cannot yet coordinate your body movement and you also try to worry about your breathing, you will feel very uncomfortable as you practice postures. Therefore, be patient. Get the movements all done correctly, and in time the breathing becomes naturally coordinated with your extension and contraction movements.

As you practice taijiquan, try to be aware that the qi sinks to the dantian and the breathing is natural. When I talk about "dantian," I am referring to the area below the navel. I'm not talking about a specific location, but rather the whole general abdominal region. This area should have a sense of fullness. If that part is firm, you find you can use abdominal breathing and it can become natural. If you tighten the stomach or become conscious of it, then your breathing becomes uncomfortable, unnatural. Not only will your body feel uncomfortable, but you increase the chance of your body swaying from side to side. Therefore, make sure that "qi sinks to the dantian" is done in a very natural way. That concludes the explanation of this point.

Third Essential

Chen jian zhui zhou—Sink the shoulders, drop the elbows, settle the wrist, extend the fingers

Now let's talk about the upper limbs. In the "Ten Essentials," it says that you must sink the shoulders, drop the elbows, bend or settle the wrists, and extend the fingers. Sometimes we say "comfortably stretch" or "extend" the fingers. "Drop" the elbows and "bend" the elbows means the same thing.

This principle also deals with a primary problem. Many people who don't know these principles tend to extend their shoulders upwards. It's very awkward to do it this way. To raise the elbows up is not correct, and if the elbows are collapsed or sticking out and stiff, it's not correct either. If the fingers are bent, it is not comfortable. Limp arms and hands are not correct in Yang's taijiquan. There's another requirement about the palms during the practice of taijiquan. Not only should you sink the shoulders, drop the elbows, settle the wrist and extend the fingers, the palms should be slightly extended forward. The fingers are extended but still slightly bent, and there's a slight separation between the fingers. Not only does it look elegant, but also it follows a comfortable way, physiologically.

It is also a natural posture for applying the palm as a weapon in self-defense. If the fingers are pinched together, they become very stiff. It doesn't look natural; it looks tense. If you overextend and separate the fingers, it doesn't look very elegant. If the fingers are over-relaxed and bending forward, it looks like you have no energy. If your hand is stiff, your whole posture will look very stiff and tense. With the fingers slightly separated and relaxed, it looks elegant and feels comfortable.

When you apply the hands and fingers, this configuration is very convenient. For instance, if I use them in an application such as striking forward, this is the hand posture. This posture is also good for grabbing. The hand posture is perfectly natural for grabbing the other person's wrist. [Yang Jun and Master Yang demonstrate this movement.] If we have "Slant Flying" or chopping down to the hip joint, the palm and hand position is done the same way. In all these applications, the same palm position is used. It is comfortable and appropriate, and this position of the palm is comfortable and applicable in many self-defense situations.

Therefore during the practice of taijiquan, be sure to avoid raising the shoulders upward; avoid extending the elbows sideways, but don't let them totally relax; and keep the hands in a natural posture. As you do a posture, your mind is on the hands. Not only will the hands look natural and elegant, they will be useful for application purposes. Keep aware of the position of the hands, along with the shoulders and elbows and wrists.

There is also a problem when some people are too aware of their hands and make the hands very stiff. This doesn't look very pleasing.

Fourth and Fifth Essentials

Han xiong ba bei—Sink the chest, lift the back

Song yao—Relax the waist

Now let's talk about other points. Sink the chest and lift the back. Loosen the waist and relax the hip joints. These two points deal with the trunk of the body. One must use the waist as an axis. Relax the waist, relax the hips, relax the chest and extend the back.

Correct position of chest and back

If you relax or sink (*han*) the chest, you can extend (*ba*) the back. (*Han xiong ba bei* literally means "contain the chest, lift up or raise up the back.") If you can extend the back, you can discharge energy through the spine. In Yang's taijiquan, when we speak of relaxing the chest, it must be done in a very natural way. The requirement is that whether we are practicing taijiquan or are just in a standing position, we must maintain the relaxed chest posture. This means you must not extend the chest forward. If you extend the chest forward, the shoulders feel stiff and not able to move freely. If you relax the chest, the shoulders become free. Nor do we overdo it by overextending the curvature of the chest inward; then the shoulders again become stiff, and that's not right either. So again, the important point is not to violate the rule of naturalness. Therefore, we say relax the chest; we do not extend the chest forward nor do we cave the chest inward, in order to achieve a natural posture. It is said that if you sink your chest, you can lift your back. Again, extend the back and the qi can adhere to the back.

Relaxation of waist and hips

Along with that, you must also be involved with relaxing the hip joint and relaxing the waist.

[Yang Jun and Master Yang illustrate this point. Yang Jun holds the posture and tries to prevent Master Yang from pushing his arms downward.]

The strength of the back is illustrated by trying to prevent the arm from being pushed down. Now if the hips and waist are not relaxed, it is easy to be controlled by other people pushing or pulling forward, because the foundation is not stable.

How do we do this? The requirement is "sink the chest and lift the back." When we say "the back," we are talking about starting from the waist as the dividing point: going downwards, sinking and dropping downward; going upward, expanding the energy from the waist upward, all the way to the fingers. Feel a sense of separating energy, separating upward and downward, using the waist as the dividing point. You can feel the energy, the strength, is moving upward from the waist all the way to the fingers. The shoulder blades and shoulder muscles are relaxed. As you discharge energy, use the spine as your axis. Energy can be very quickly discharged from the waist to the fingers. You cannot do this with the chest expanded. Project the energy from the waist upward. You must relax the chest, extend the back.

Earlier we talked about *han* the chest and *ba* the back. You must be able to *han* (the action of containing the organs gently in the chest) your chest in order to *ba* (a rounded and extended feeling) your back. When you are able to *ba* your back, then you will be able to emit power from your spine. Thus the phrase "emit *jin* from your spine" arises.

In order to understand "emit *jin* from your spine," another very important point must be clarified. The point is "loosen the waist and loosen the hips" (*song yao song kua*, which literally means loose waist, loose hips). The waist and hip area must be loose. If the waist and the hip area aren't loose, but instead tense, like this, it's not possible to do the posture correctly. Therefore, the waist and hip

area must be loose. When they are loose and sunken, then the power can be transferred. If you only sink the chest and raise the back without loosening the waist and hips, it is incorrect.

From this you can see that taijiquan is an exercise that integrates the entire body. It especially emphasizes the coordination of the waist. The waist is at the center of the body. In front of the waist is the abdomen. When the waist moves, the abdomen will naturally follow.

Evolution of taijiquan from martial art to exercise system

Yang Style taijiquan started as a martial art. A long time ago, before the advent of modern weaponry, people used martial arts to settle their differences. Today its defensive and offensive characteristics remain from its martial origin. But most importantly, following the need of changing society, taijiquan has become a health-improving and sickness-curing exercise. The fighting aspect of this art, due to changes in society, has not been so influential in its recent development.

Yang style taijiquan, then, following the changes in society, evolved into being slow moving, soft, integrated, and evenly paced. This way it is highly adaptable. Men, women, old, young, strong, weak, even people with illnesses, can all participate in this exercise. This is because it is even, steady, slow, and integrated. Everyone can participate in this kind of workout. Moreover, if you follow the essential principles in your practice, it is an excellent physical exercise system.

For example *fang song* (let loose). We often say that taijiquan is *rou* (gentle) but *gang* (firm). *Gang* (firm) has what we describe as *jin*. On the surface, it looks gentle and natural, but inside it is full of *jin*.

Taijiquan uses the waist to move the limbs. All the organs of the body are exercised when the waist moves. This is because when the waist moves, the abdomen also moves. When the abdomen moves, it naturally affects the organs. Internal organs are very fragile. People who are sick and weak with heart or liver problems especially need clean blood, as well as smooth circulation of qi and blood. Taijiquan has the ability to help the body to correct any problems in the body.

Other present day sports, such as jogging, playing ball, or field and track, are very physically demanding. The physically demanding exercises are not suitable for ill individuals. These individuals are not in good enough physical condition to handle this kind of exercise. On the other hand, taijiquan, with its slow and steady movements, can be handled by everyone, and it gives ill individuals a way to improve their health with self-exercise.

The liver filters the blood in our body. The liver itself needs a clean, fresh blood supply. This is especially so when the liver is infected. Through taijiquan exercise, the liver function can be improved with cleaner blood. The liver needs exercise to improve circulation and achieve proper metabolism.

Self-exercising improves the function of the organs and flushes out blood stagnation in the liver, and whether it is the heart, the liver, or any other fragile organ, the function of the organs can be improved. This is apparent in people who have practiced taijiquan.

Taijiquan is also an excellent way to regulate the human nervous system.

The development of taijiquan has been affected by people who did not do physically demanding exercises. There are many people who are not suited for highly intensive and physically demanding

exercise. These people often want to exercise even though they cannot handle physically demanding exercise. Why? Because the body knows it needs exercise [to regulate itself]. Exercise is very important to our health. There are many physically demanding exercises that are not suitable for many people. Other people, due to personal preferences, don't like to do exercises that are extremely active.

It is often better to practice taijiquan. Everyone can do taijiquan. The physical exercise of taijiquan practice can be long or short, depending on the person's physical condition. Men, women, old, young—all can practice.

The waist as center

Looking from the martial angle of taijiquan, the waist is at the center of our body. It is also in our torso. Moving it will exercise our hips and our back as well as the limbs. When the waist moves, the entire body, from top to bottom, moves. It allows for fast reactions. The waist movement is especially emphasized.

Of the Ten Essentials, the waist requirement is the most important. It places emphasis on having a loose waist and loose hips. The waist is compared to an axle, which indicates its importance.

In offensive and defensive training, taijiquan has been of vital importance. Today, as a health-improving and life-prolonging exercise, it is still very important. It is, therefore, very important to emphasize the waist. I cannot overemphasize its significance. All practitioners should pay special attention to this. Use the waist to move the hips, back, and limbs, to achieve a unity in the movements.

Earlier we briefly introduced the head and the torso. We briefly described the need for the torso to be straight, to sink the chest and lift the back, to loosen the waist and loosen the hips, as well as sinking the qi to the dantian. We must pay attention to these points when we practice.

Sixth Essential

Fen xu shi—Distinguish substantial and insubstantial

Next we will discuss the lower body requirements. Generally speaking, the lower body supports the upper body weight, movements, and balance.

Solid and empty stance

The requirement of the lower body, besides having loose waist and loose hips, is proper stance work. In a stance, substantial and insubstantial transition is very important. We must clearly distinguish between the different stances and distinguish the substantiality of each stance. Of course, substantiality must not be limited to only the lower body.

When we describe the lower body, the right leg is substantial when the weight is on the right leg; the left leg is insubstantial. When the weight is on the left leg, then the left leg is substantial and the right leg is insubstantial.

From the beginning, taijiquan practice has followed the philosophy of "yin and yang." Today we are concerned with the same in weight transfers. It is imperative that we pay attention to weight transfer when we practice. There is insubstantial within substantial and substantial within insubstantial. There must be insubstantial within substantial, otherwise the movement will be rigid. There must be substantial within insubstantial, otherwise the movement will be hollow or empty.

In striking, for example, the back is required to be expanded. Within the expanded movement, there is a bend. Within the straight there is also a feeling of containing something within. There is expansion within closing, and closing within expansion, just as there is substantial within insubstantial, and insubstantial within substantial. Contract and extend. Extend and contract. The transitions are like this.

When we practice, we must pay attention to the relative changes. We must “distinguish the substantial and the insubstantial.” [*Fen xu shi* literally means “separate insubstantial, substantial.”] But in these, insubstantial should not be hollow or empty. Substantial should not be rigid.

Foot movements

Next we will discuss the movements of the feet. We should pay attention to the following.

For example, the requirements in horse stance are that the feet point forward, and the body is centered and straight.

When moving, in order to step forward with my [left] leg, I first turn to my right, then to my left. When I want to step to the right, I first turn to the left. When I want to step to the left, I first turn to the right. When I decide to step with my left leg, I first turn to my right. Then I step forward with my left leg. If I decide to step with my right leg, I first turn my body 45 degrees to my left. Then bend my [left] knee to squat down and lift my [right] leg to step forward. If you don't do what I just mentioned, and you simply step forward, it's not smooth.

Therefore, when stepping to your left, the requirements are: turn 45 degrees to the right, bend the [right] knee and squat down, then step [left leg] forward. All the movements must be smooth; that way it's more appropriate. You must pay attention to this point.

Stability

In addition, in the transitional movements, we should also pay attention to stability. To achieve stability, we look to the sole of the feet for the answer. In general, it is done this way: when I step with my left leg, I first turn to my right, bend my [right] knee and squat down. At this point we need to pay attention to the knee, making sure that it is pointing in the same direction as the toes. If the knee is not pointing in the same direction as the toes, like this, it is not smooth. The knee should be pointing in the same direction as the toes as you bend your knee and squat down. This way you will be stable.

When practicing, make sure that the knee is bent in the direction of the toes. It doesn't matter whether it is in the final posture or during transition, the knee and toes align to each other.

For example, when we do two handed “Push” changing to “Single Whip,” as we turn, we turn from this direction to the other direction. It is exactly half a circle, or 180 degrees. Therefore, when we turn, this leg must turn in to here, the knee pointing in the direction of the toe. This way it will be smooth to lift your leg and step forward. This step is more comfortable.

If you turn only to here, the step will not be comfortable. Therefore, the knee must point in the direction of the toes. Knee bent in the direction of the toes is more appropriate.

For example, from a left Ward Off, turning to right Ward Off, if you do not move your foot and step, the movement appears very rigid. That's because it is not smooth. By turning the toes in to

here, the movement becomes very smooth. The stepping becomes comfortable. Pay attention to this when you practice.

In the lower body, generally, we need to “distinguish the insubstantial and the substantial. When stepping, follow the rules. That is following the proper balancing rule.

Seventh and Eighth Essentials

Nei wai xiang he—Combine the internal and external

Yong yi bu yong li—Use the mind instead of force

Next we will discuss the coordination of the body movement with yi (mind and intention), that is, combining or harmonizing internal and external. [*Nei wai xiang he* literally means “inner and outer mutually combine.”] If the internal and the external can combine, that is, the physical movement combines with the intention (yi), it will be appropriate and harmonious.

In simplified terms, and from taijiquan’s *wushu* (martial arts) point of view, *wu* means two people fighting, and *shu* are the techniques. That’s just a very basic definition. The techniques contain offensive and defensive movements. From the *wu shu* point of view, taijiquan has both offensive and defensive movements. It is better to practice with this in mind.

For example, when we practice a certain posture, what are we doing? If we express the intent in the posture, the spirit will be manifested.

It’s like an actor in a play. If I am an actor, I will follow the script. First I distinguish whether it is a traditional setting or a modern setting. Then I determine whether I’m acting as a youngster or an old man. Take for example, the play “Dan Jiao.” “Dan Jiao” is divided into many different stages of Mr. Dan’s life. He goes from adolescence to old age. People who are involved in Chinese opera are familiar with this. When Mr. Dan was young, he was a country boy. He could not be compared to a gentleman. The actor must distinguish and express the behavior of a country boy.

In practicing taijiquan, the intention is similar. If you express it properly, that’s when your intent and expression are realistic and people will see that they make sense. If your expression is not realistic, then the content is not realistic, and it appears unreal, like an unrealistic play. When it is not realistic it won’t engage the audience. When you can catch the audience’s attention, it means that the performance is realistic. A laugh must be like a natural laugh and a cry must be like a natural cry. Whatever the mood of the play may be, the performer should express that feeling. When practicing martial arts it is the same.

Martial applications

In addition, the martial applications must also be expressed. Besides the basic essentials, the intent must be expressed when practicing. To express intention, one must know the applications. Without the application, the movement will appear unrealistic; with the application, the movement will be more real.

For example, in “Grasp The Bird’s Tail,” why must it be done this way? Why must a right “Ward Off” be done this way? “Pull Back” this way? “Press” this way? and “Push”? Why? Let me explain.

[Master Yang and Yang Jun demonstrate.]

Within the posture of the taijiquan form “Grasp The Bird’s Tail,” “Ward Off” has its own specific applications and principles. For example, let us say two uncivilized persons have a conflict and they get into an argument. One person punches the other. He punches toward me. I intercept. What I did was “Ward Off.” In terms of martial arts, what is the proper way of applying “Ward Off”? If someone punches at you, you ask, “why are you punching at me?” This way is better.

Why must we follow “Ward Off” with a “Pull Back”? In the form, “Ward Off” is followed by “Pull Back.” *[They demonstrate this application.]*

There are right “Ward Off,” left “Ward Off,” and single hand “Ward Off.” “Later there is another “Ward Off” like this. This “Ward Off” is done this way. If I step forward and do this, it is called a two-handed “Ward Off”. I ward off here. This is what we call a two-handed “Ward Off.” You see it is simply like this.

For example, when we are here, it is completed this way. From here, we do this. This is called “Pull Back.”

Let us change direction for a better camera view.

From here. I do this, and “Pull Back” to here. When doing it slowly, I complete the movement here. If I were to put power into the movement, I could break his elbow here.

If I do it this way, from here, I emit *jin*. This is another way of doing “Pull Back.” This is also an application.

If, when I am at this point, he does not allow me to “Pull Back” and he pulls away, I follow his backward movement and I do “Press.” This is called “Press.”

We were at this point. When I practice the form to here, I “Press” forward. In an application, if he bends his elbow, then I “Press” forward like before.

Now for “Push,” going from the previous movements. When I try to “Press,” he neutralizes to the side. What should I do? I simply follow the direction of his movements and sit down on my leg and “Push” forward into him.

The foregoing are also called “Ward Off,” Pull Back,” Press,” and Push” [instead of grouping them together under one name, “Grasp The Bird’s Tail”]. If done properly, it appears realistic. It is also very pleasing to the eye.

If the hand is placed here, or there, it is not good. Placing it here is better. Why must we put this hand here? Placing this hand here looks better. Placing it here is not as pleasing. This is a “Ward Off.” Not a strike, like this.

When practicing with the intention expressed, it is very pleasing to the eye. If you cannot express the intention [application or meaning], then the spirit cannot be shown. It is, therefore, not as accurate. Pay attention to this when you practice. The arm should be extended.

What we discussed earlier is what we called “combining internal and external,” or combining the intention with the movements. Therefore, *yi* implies offensive and defensive applications in martial arts (*wushu*).

For example, in "Brush Knee And Twist Step," the intent is expressed in the movements. The spirit of vitality appears very high. The spirit of the eyes is shown with high vitality. In "Slant Flying," I extend the arms, complete the movements. This way it appears with a high spirit of vitality.

Without the intent, and simply placing the arms like this, it does not combine the internal and external. The eyes must open wide. Why? Because this displays a higher spirit of vitality. The arms naturally extend, and the spirit will follow.

Therefore, the concept of *yi* contains the inner characteristics. Doing it this way is more appropriate.

This is what is meant by "combining internal and external." When practicing, it's best if you adhere to this essential point. With this essential point, the content of your movements will be more realistic.

Ninth Essential

Shang xia xiang sui—Integrate upper and lower body

[*Shang xia xiang sui* literally means "up and down mutually follow."] Another one of the Ten Essential Points is to integrate the upper and lower parts of the body. From the waist up is considered the upper body, from the waist down is considered the lower body. This essential point stresses the coordination of the entire body.

For example, when we do this movement [*Brush Knee*], in coordinating the upper and the lower body, in this movement, the back foot presses down (*deng*) and the front foot actively supports (*cheng*). At this point, as my leg is moving forward, my arms follow. The legs move and the arms move; the motions are coordinated. Doing it this way is more appropriate. If my arms are placed here, it appears that the upper body and lower body aren't coordinated. It is therefore not appropriate.

{End of Tape #1.}

The legs and feet

Earlier we spoke about combining internal and external and integrating the upper and lower body. What we need to pay attention to is what we discussed earlier. We must pay attention to the leg. What about the leg? After stepping forward, the *deng* of the back leg must be accompanied by *cheng* of the front leg. Without the front leg actively supporting, the motion will be empty. Therefore, the back leg *deng* must be accompanied by *cheng* of the front leg, the support for the front of the body. With *deng* accompanied by *cheng*, the foundation is firmer.

If the front leg is empty, it will be easy to lose your center. If I *cheng*, I will have balance in the transition. The front and back are corresponding to each other.

During practice, after stepping out and touching down with your heel, to shift your weight forward, the whole foot touches down, and toes grab the floor, then bow your front knee forward.

You must be sure not to force the movement forward. Forcing the movement forward is incorrect.

You must be coordinated in the movements. This way, they are corresponding to each other. When the back foot presses down, the front foot must actively support. If the front foot is doing *deng*, then the back foot should do *cheng*. One does *deng*, the other does *cheng*.

Doing it this way is more comfortable. The lower body will not be hollow this way. For example, in a “Brush Knee And Twist Step” posture, when I step forward, after touching down, I do *deng* with the back foot and *cheng* with front foot. You see that the lower limbs and the upper limbs corresponded. You see my legs and arms both moving, no stops. Continue moving, moving, moving—you see that both hands are completed and so is the front knee. The upper and the lower body correspond. When practicing, pay special attention to “integrating upper and lower body.”

Tenth Essential

Xiang lian bu duan—Continuous without interruption

[*Xiang lian bu duan*, literally “mutual, connected, no interruption,” the importance of continuity, is implied in this discussion of stances and footwork.]

Next we shall discuss the stance in more detail. Earlier we briefly mentioned the basics.

Stances

In a horse stance, generally the feet are shoulder width apart. If one foot is slanted and the other is straight, it is called a *ding ba* stance. *Ding ba* stance is done this way. The slanted foot is pointing at a 45 degree angle.

If we do it this way, it is called a *ba zi* stance. [*Ba* is the Chinese way of writing the number 8. The word is written like an arrow with the connecting point separated.] What we are doing is not this. What we’re doing is placing one foot slanted in [one half of] the *ba* shape, the other straight. The straight foot is called *ding* because it resembles the Chinese word “*ding*.” In this stance, the front foot is straight as in *ding* and the back foot is slanted as in *ba*. This way it’s very firm. Today many call this stance “bow stance” or “bow and arrow stance.”

When practicing, after setting the foot in a 45 degree angle, press down and actively support very firmly. If the angle is too wide, it’s easy to slip, especially if the ground is slippery. Doing it this way is more appropriate. This stance is called bow stance.

We need to pay attention to the bow stance when stepping forward. The [side to side] width of the feet should be shoulder width apart. Move the right foot out. Bend your knee and squat down. When stepping, step linearly forward. Do it this way—it is more comfortable.

If you place your foot here, it will not be stable. If the side-to-side width is too wide, it will appear lopsided. The best width is shoulder width distance. Step forward and make sure that the side-to-side width is shoulder width; that is best.

This is what we generally call bow stance. Its side width is the same as the shoulder width.

Next we shall discuss the insubstantial-substantial stance. In this back stance, for instance in the “White Crane Spreads its Wings” posture, or in “Raise Hands And Step Up,” one foot is substantial and the other foot is insubstantial. In this type of stance, the side width should *not* be the same as shoulder width. If shoulder width apart, the foot has to be placed here. In “White Crane Spreads Its Wings” it will not be smooth. Therefore, generally speaking, the feet are placed on either side of a center line. That is, if drawing a line in the center, the right foot is on the right side of the center line and the left foot is on the left side of the center line. Standing this way is more appropriate.

In another example, "Hand Strums The Lute," it is also this way, on the sides of the line. If I place my foot here, it is not smooth, or here, it also is not appropriate. In other similar postures, it is the same, for example, from "High Pat On Horse" into "Thrusting Palm." When we do "High Pat On Horse," with the foot placed here, it is more comfortable and smooth. In the "Spearing Palm," the foot cannot be here. "Thrusting Palm" is in bow stance, so the foot must move out. This way the posture is stable.

If I place my foot here, it is not smooth.

Therefore, whenever we are in insubstantial-substantial stance [also called "back stance], whether it's the heel or the toe touching the floor, the feet are on the sides of the center line. Doing it this way is more appropriate. Pay special attention to this in this stance. Generally speaking, in the entire form, it is the basic rule. It doesn't matter which posture we are doing.

For example, from the "Commencing" posture, do left "Ward Off." Turn right foot out. Do left "Ward Off." Weight shifts back, waist turns the left foot in, and set up for right "Ward Off." Next "Pull Back," "Press," and "Push"; when completed and doing "Single Whip," this foot should turn in 135 degrees. Turn in and then step. Doing it this way is smooth.

In "Raise Hands And Step Up," the feet are like this. In "White Crane Spreads Its Wings," the feet are like this. All the movements are very structured. Pay special attention to the posture before and after the one you are doing, and set up for the next posture.

For example, in "Brush Knee And Twist Step," the previous "Brush Knee And Twist Step" sets up for the next one. Shift your weight back slightly; waist turns the left foot out. After setting up the stance, then step. This side is the same. Always set up for the stance of the next posture. Therefore, when practicing, pay special attention to this rule. Doing it this way is very comfortable. We shall conclude the discussion on this subject here. Generally, this is how it is done.

Training Approach

The Essential Points were stated above. Next we shall discuss the approach for training. One of the approaches of training is *fang song* (let loose or relax). From this fundamental approach, we begin our practice.

"Let loose" in everyday life is easy to explain. It's not so simple in taijiquan training. This is because taijiquan uses the philosophy of yin and yang and is concerned with the transformation and changes in these two concepts.

Fang song is an approach of training. It is a strategy; it is not something tangible. Today there are many practitioners of Yang style taijiquan, and unfortunately many have not fully comprehended the meaning of *fang song*, and they misinterpret its meaning. This is because *song* (relax or loosen) and *ruan* (soft) were put into the same category. Many think that *song* is *ruan*. What we consider as *song* is not *ruan*. *Song* requires that the joints and the muscles be intentionally letting loose, and extended. This is loosened up and extended out. Extended. [He illustrates.] It is not *ruan*. It is not this way nor this way. If it is this way, it will be difficult to express the *jin*.

When we practice it's called training the *gong*. From training we know that there is a distinction between *gong li* and *gong fa*. *Gong li* is training for strength to attain *jin*, and *gong fa* is the training

in techniques. Generally speaking, after training for a few years, one should have some *gong fu* (degree of skill). Having attained some *gong fu*, one shall have some *jin*.

Or, in health terms, people with poor health become healthy and regain some strength.

Techniques represent one's level of martial fighting ability. That is, one can use what one has learned. That is a matter of technical achievement, whereas *jin* can be attained only after a period of time. Having *jin* means having strength. Generally speaking, this is so. Taijiquan also follows this principle in its training.

What we meant by "use *yi* (mind or intention) not *li* (muscular strength)," was not using forceful muscular strength.

By following the idea of "using your mind to relax," you will attain power naturally. You should intentionally let loose. Similarly to what I mentioned in the Ten Essentials—sink the chest and lift the back; sink the shoulder, drop the elbow, settle the wrist, and extend the fingers—it is not necessary to use forceful muscular strength. When you can sink the shoulder, drop the elbow, settle the wrist, and extend the fingers, you will have power without the need to exert forceful muscular strength. You simply let loose—relax and extend. You will have power without the need to exert forceful muscular strength. You will attain power naturally. Without having to think about it, you will have *jin*.

If you practice for *jin* and are overly concerned with *jin*, you may let *jin* bind you in a continuous loop and be restricted by it. Taijiquan is a whole body exercise and involves extending the entire body. It is like this when you follow the principles. If your mind is on only *jin*, then you pay too much attention to the hands and forget about the rest of the body. This is not appropriate. Therefore, we should pay attention to the principles when we practice. Pay attention to all the keys in training. It is better this way. If when you train, you are bound by only trying for *jin*, that's not appropriate.

The requirement is to use your *yi* as much as you can to let loose, so you will attain power naturally.

What is meant by *song* is not the *song* that means "slack and soft," it is the *song* that means "loosen and extend."

Now let's discuss the differences between *rou* (gentle yielding) and *ruan* (soft). *Ruan* is generally defined as empty, that is, hollow. *Rou*, on the other hand, is ductile. For example, when we practice, if we do it this way, it appears hollow (empty). Therefore, the extension is done this way. It should be this way. But not like this. Not this way.

One must be extended. If we extend this way, the blood circulation is smooth and the body is comfortable. In this strike, the body is comfortable and smooth. All these movements are smooth.

When the waist moves, the hips and the torso move, then express to the fingers. This way is smoother.

Everyone should comprehend fully the meaning of *fang song*, let loose, in practice. One should be loose and extended, not loose and soft. I hope you will pay attention to this during practice. We require this kind of *song*: loose and extended. Not this one.

Extended, you see. When done this way, it will be more comfortable. "Press" is also very comfortable. But it doesn't matter which posture you are doing, it should all be like this. You should let loose in "Fist under the Elbow" and in "Repulse Monkey." Extend, settle the palm, lift leg, and step backward. Fast or slow, the same principle is the same. When doing it faster it's still the same. Strike forward with speed. We do it slowly, we do it with *jin*.

It doesn't matter whether it is "Slant Flying" or "Part The Wild Horse's Mane." Of course the physical movements are not the same. "Slant Flying" requires a large step, to here. "Part The Wild Horse's Mane" is primarily a ward off, which steps forward. However, they both need the waist movement and both need to be extended.

Power reaches the four extremities of the legs and arms. Doing it this way is more appropriate.

The training approach of *fang song* is to let loose; once we can distinguish it clearly, that is good.

Li [physical strength] everyone has. When a baby is born, it has *li*. Without *li*, the limbs cannot extend. *Jin* is different in that *jin* is the result of *li* after the refining processes. Like raw iron, after high temperature has melted it, and a thousand times of hammering, and smelting, and other required processes, it finally becomes steel. Steel and iron are both solid. They are both hard. Iron has a rougher surface, with low ductility. Steel has a smoother surface and is more ductile.

The difference between *li* and *jin* is that *jin* is *li* after it has been refined. Generally, *li* is expressed locally. On the other hand, *jin* is expressed as an integrated whole. That is, it is a combined effort of the entire body.

For example, an average person would throw a punch like this. A martial artist will use his or her whole body to punch. This is the distinction between a wushu trained person and an untrained person. One uses local generated power, the other uses the entire body.

We should understand these distinctions to be the differences between *li* and *jin*. After refining *li*, it becomes *jin*.

In *rou* and *ruan*, the distinction is this: *ruan* (soft) is hollow or empty, whereas *rou* (gentle yielding), is ductile.

Fang song can be explained with the iron and steel analogy. Raw iron is processed under high temperature melting and other processes, then converted into steel. If we compare the raw iron to *li*, then the high temperature melting (refinement process) is analogous to *fang song*. High temperature melting turns the raw iron into liquid. It is then refined until it becomes steel. This refining process is an approach to make steel; likewise, *fang song* is an approach, a method, analogous to the high temperature melting refinement process, required in turning iron into steel.

We compared localized *li* (forceful muscular strength) to raw iron. After high temperature melting or refinement processes, the *fang song* process, it is converted into steel, into what we call *jin*. The distinction can be explained this way: the *fang song* approach is analogous to the high temperature melting (and refining processes) to make steel. The goal was to turn iron into steel.

We conclude this topic here.

Conclusion

What we explained were the ten essential points and training approaches, primarily *fang song*, in taijiquan training. This will give practitioners a general idea.

In training martial arts, it is said, “Follow the guidelines to attain high achievements.” If I don’t have any clue about what I am doing, and I simply follow everyone else’s movements, that’s no good. I must have an understanding of what I am doing. I should know whether or not what I am doing is appropriate or not, accurate or not. I must be aware of the requirements. I must know what I am aiming for—that is, know what guidelines to follow. “Follow the guidelines to high achievements.” This way you will not be led astray.

Next we shall explain the entire traditional Yang Style Taijiquan sequence, one posture at a time, starting from the commencing posture, with key points and the approaches or methods, and the overall requirements in doing each posture.

We will start now.