

The Tai Chi Chuan Classic – Zhang San-feng

**These words are a translation of the original classic text as written by the late Zhang San-feng who hoped to pass on the deeper aspects of Tai Chi Chuan to future practitioners.*

Tai Chi (Taiji) means infinity, the absolute. It comes from ‘wuji’ which means limitless. It is based upon motion and stillness, the mother of Yin and Yang. In movement, it separates, in stillness it combines. There must be neither excess nor deficiency. Stretching is found in bending. To meet hardness with softness is to follow, or go along with. When you have the advantage, you are to stick to your opponent. Have a rapid response to a rapid attack and slow response to a slow attack. The variations of application are endless but the basic principles remain constant.

Your skill in the mastery of your strength will be obtained only through practise. From the mastery of your strength you will advance step by step to understand the deeper, mysterious aspects of Tai Chi. But unless you practise long enough, there will be no sudden enlightenment.

Lift the head and straighten the neck, sink the Qi to the lower abdomen. Do not lean the body, remain balanced. Your strength is to remain hidden, ready to suddenly appear. If your weight is on your left side you are ready to change the weight to the right and vice versa. You should appear to be taller than your opponent when your strength is drawn upwards and shorter when your strength is drawn downwards. Your strength reaches further than your opponent when reaching out and remains closer to your opponent when retreating. A feather cannot land upon you without you needing to adjust your balance.

Your strength and intention remain hidden from the opponent but you must anticipate your opponent’s next move. This is why a master of Tai Chi Chuan is unbeatable. There are many parts of Tai Chi Chuan that are unusual to other martial arts. Whilst there are many different movements, Tai Chi Chuan never uses force to beat the weaker person, or speed to beat the slower person. These are usually base instincts, not learned skills. Consider the expression ‘using four ounces to deflect one thousand pounds’ – excess strength is not required for victory. This is how an old man can easily ward off the younger ‘stronger’ one.

When standing you must be like a balanced scale and move smoothly like a wheel. Leaning to one side causes loss of balance and double weightedness causes stagnation. Those who fail to understand double weightedness are easily overcome by others. To avoid this you must understand Yin and Yang. “Sticking to” and “going along with” complement each other. Yin and Yang are always together. Mastery of your strength is based upon your understanding of the interaction of Yin and Yang. If mastery of strength is reached, the more you practise the greater your skill will become.

Continue to practise, study and think until you can do anything at will. Instead of following your opponent without your own initiative, the mistake is often made of ignoring what is right in front of you and instead seeking far and wide. One small mistake may lead you to practise the wrong way by 1000 miles. Beginners should remember these words.

Long-Chuan (The whole form) flows like water in a great river without end. The thirteen key movements within the form are: **peng (ward off), lu (divert), ji (press), an (push), zai (pluck), li (twist), zhou (elbow), koa (lean)** which are connected with the eight trigrams and **jin (step forward), tui (step back), ku (look left), pan (look right) and zhongdin (central balance)**. These relate to the five elements metal, wood, water, fire and earth. Peng, lu, ji and an are called the four straight direction movements to the south, west, east and north. Zai, li, zhou and koa are the four diagonal direction movements.

[Translation by Dr. Sam Li and Rachel Addison of the Australian College of Tai Chi and Qi Gong]