



The Newsletter of the
Twin Cities T'ai-Chi Ch'uan Studio
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Wu-Dang

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Complimentary for studio members.
\$6.00 subscription for others.
Please send requests to address at left.

CHINESE NEW YEAR

The Year of the Dog will kick off with our annual Chinese New Year Demonstration and Banquet. We will celebrate the new year on Saturday, February 4 beginning at 6pm. The Banquet will be at U Garden following the demonstration at about 8:30. Please sign up at the studio, or email tctaichi@minn.net and let us know how many meat/vegetarians are in your party.

2006 SUMMER RETREAT

This summer we will be shifting the retreat one week later. We will drift off to Faribault on Friday, August 18 this year. The rest of the timing will be the same. Sign-ups will begin in May, a deposit by July 1 and the remaining fees by August 1. The studio will be closed August 19-26.

TCTCC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

When the studio became a non-profit organization we formed a board of directors. That board consisted of Joanne Von Blon, Sally Polk, James Postiglione, Paul Abdella, and Ray and Kim Hayward. Some years later we added Julie Cisler. In late 2004 it was decided that we would have term-limits to board positions and increase to six board members, with three year terms. So, last year we welcomed Morgan Willow and Patrick Jarvis to the board rounding out the six: Von Blon as Chairman, Polk as Vice Chairman, Postiglione as Secretary and Jarvis as Treasurer, with Cisler and Willow as the remaining board members.

With the coming of our new fiscal year, Sally Polk and James Postiglione leave the board after over a decade of hard work, faithful service and patient care. The entire membership of TCTCC thanks you both.

Filling those large boots are Loc Truong and Val DiEuliis. We welcome you and thank you for undertaking these jobs.

Sword Form

—for Sifu Ray

The sword in its scabbard –
iron and carbon refined to purest steel –
holds a promise of deep reward:
to those who practice, insight revealed.

Hand cherishes the sword it holds
in firm, yet gentle, three-finger grip.
Sword clarifies mind and heart, molds
through eye-gaze focused solely on the tip.

Sword brings whole body to its form.
To cut or slice, the waist must turn.
A stab or thrust is *chi* through legs transformed.
Before issue, one must first the target earn.

With tassel, waist and legs propel the movement,
while wrist directs to hit, block or disarm.
In two-person, sword targets the opponent,
not mere sword-on-sword-play charm.

Thirteen energies lay the foundation
for T'ai-Chi and Wu-Tang sword.
Each posture names a specific station
along the Taoist journey forward.

Steel is crafted to sword, its temper
a blending of heat, coolness, and time.
So, Sword Form refines its practitioner,
infusing self with self's paradigm.

—by Morgan Grayce Willow

REFLECTIONS ON GRANDMASTER CHOI

By Paul Abdella

In the fall of 1994 Ray told me he was traveling to Chicago the following weekend to meet a Pa Kua and Hsing-I teacher living there. His name was Wai-lun Choi. Ray had recently read an interview and article about him in a martial arts publication. He liked what he read and called Master Choi to arrange a meeting at his school in Chicago. Ray had spent many years studying these two martial arts and hoped that master Choi would help him deepen his practice of them.

Ray has always been a student of history, especially the history of martial arts and particularly the arts of China. When he researched Master Choi's lineage in Pa Kua, Hsing-I, Tai-chi and Liu Ho Pa Fa, the so called "fourth internal style" of China, the call of Chicago became loud and clear. After I listened to the highlights of his conversation with Choi I wished Ray luck on his trip and asked to hear all about it upon his return.

The next time I saw Ray after his return from the windy city he made a short summation of the trip by saying "I found what I've been looking for." Then he added, "You have to come to Chicago with me." Ray, of course, provided a detailed account of the weekend, but the essential story had been told and before parting that day we planned a trip to Chicago around the first of the year. In those days we seemed to have more time than money, so Ray and I packed up a car and drove the 800 miles or so to Chicago to meet with Choi.

Once in Chicago we drove down Irving Park Road, a long and congested street on Chicago's North side where the school was located. We spotted the address and turned down a side street to park the car. A hand painted sign, faded by the sun, above the small storefront read: *Wai-lun Choi's Kung-fu Academy*. Ray pulled open the door and we walked inside.

Once inside, a cursory glance around revealed a no-frills practice space that had an atmosphere befitting the urban environment outside. The walls in the front area were covered with photographs, certificates, plaques, calligraphies, and other memorabilia of Choi's illustrious martial arts career. Just beyond the entrance area, on the left side, sat a large weapons rack with an array of swords, staffs, spears, and several handmade variations of traditional Chinese long weapons. Beyond the weapons rack, chains from an improvised metal stand suspended two heavy bags of different weights and densities. Master Choi stood in the center of the room performing a few stretches as he awaited our arrival.

"Ah, Ray Hay, you've come already!" Choi exclaimed. For some reason he never produced the last syllable in Ray's name.

"What would you guys like to do?" he asked. We inquired about the Hsing-I five fists, Pa-Kua's single and double palm changes and getting an introduction to Liu Ho Pa Fa. "Well, O.K. but you must understand the *Principles*-don't talk style, only one style-*human style!* You must analyze and understand the physics and physiology of movement." As my ear adjusted to the heavy Cantonese accent Ray had warned me about, Master Choi launched into a lecture that I was to hear dozens of times over the next ten years. Each time it was delivered with a different emphasis and point of view much like one would walk around a sculpture to see it in a slightly different way. He began to describe how the body must always move as a unified whole-with all of its parts in harmony. If one's movement was disconnected in any way the consequences would be immediate, and a person would "bother their breathing."

This would be a phrase he would often use to describe any stressors applied to the body, either from an external or an internal source, that diminish the flow of oxygen into the body. The breath is the primary source of energy in the body and when it is compromised, the body is immediately weakened. Choi saw this compromised breathing as emanating from three primary sources: 1. A body that maintains a high level of tension that is sustained over a period of time-and for Choi that is anytime longer than a half second. 2. A body that works against, rather than with the force of gravity. This idea is connected to principles of leverage but goes deeper than simple body mechanics in Choi's application of it. 3. A mind that is overly focused, confused or overwrought with anticipation instead of a mind that is calm, empty and clear. This harmony of thought and movement, relaxed control of tension in the body, and proper use of gravity and leverage must be studied and refined in solo practices before partner work may be learned and correctly applied.

The word relax is used often by practitioners of internal martial arts with its meaning and application being highly subjective. Choi is specific in his meaning of the term and detailed in his description of how to develop this state of awareness in the body. Choi describes a tension scale numbered from 0 to 10 with zero being a state so relaxed it is difficult to maintain an upright posture and ten being maximum muscular tension in the body. The ideal state of "relaxation" for Choi would be one or two on the scale. This is just enough tension to maintain a posture such as a

fighting stance and guard. Choi called this state of relaxation “standby” or “ready” position since the body was ready to explode and deliver a technique with maximum force. This explosive release of energy would last no longer than a half second, then the body would immediately relax back to one. The body is able to continuously receive an adequate supply of oxygen if this level of relaxation is maintained. The ebb and flow of this tense/release cycle Choi would call *wave power*. Since waves on the ocean never cease, it is an apt metaphor for the development and use of energy in internal styles. I was rapidly trying to process everything he was saying. I had heard some of the concepts before from other teachers and my own reading, but Master Choi had distilled and presented his ideas in a way that was comprehensive, original and accessible. Perhaps more importantly, he was able to *do* what he talked about.

As the lesson progressed from the conceptual to the physical, we began working on the material we had requested. Choi’s instruction was precise and detailed, and his demonstration of the movements showed the principles in action. When it came time to teach the martial applications of the form movements Choi became animated and visibly excited when demonstrating the techniques. He presented multiple uses for any movement as well as strategies for their use and his execution of them was formidable. The energy and excitement he put forth when teaching combat skills reinforced his reputation as a champion fighter. Before we knew it four hours had passed and our time was almost over.

We invited Master Choi out for a meal and afterward came back to the school for a few last minute questions and corrections. We packed our things, said our goodbyes, and then Ray and I hit the road for home. We had a lot to talk about on the ride home, and we both agreed the trip had exceeded our expectations. Yet we were both unaware of the door that had just opened up for us and what was to unfold over the next ten years.

In the ensuing years Ray and I built our practices and our relationship with Choi one step at a time. Two or three times a year we would invite master Choi up to the studio to conduct workshops in addition to our trips to Chicago. In the early years most of his time would be spent teaching with little time for socializing, except at mealtimes and traveling to and from the school.

After a few years Ray started to work some open time into the schedule. This allowed us to spend longer periods together away from the workshop environment. We would always try to incorporate two of Master Choi’s favorite things into our adventures: nature and science. At first we kept it simple and stayed pretty close to home—a walk through a city park, a trip to the zoo, a hike along the river. Once we were outside, Master Choi’s senses went on high alert, and his power to observe something in nature and relate it to martial arts was always a source of surprise.

On one occasion we had hiked along Minnehaha creek where it led to the waterfall. As we sat and looked at the falls, Choi tapped my arm and said, “See that?” pointing at the falls. “That is just like martial arts.” He went on to point out that if you fixed your gaze on a single focal point, the rush of water seemed to flow extremely fast. If you allowed your eyes to follow the water as it flowed over the edge, it would appear to slow down. The way you see an opponent directly affects your ability to perceive his intent or neutralize his attacks.

On another trip we drove to Red Wing, Minnesota along the Mississippi river. We decided to take an afternoon hike up the highest peak called Barn Bluff. The hike was beautiful and invigorating. As we neared the summit we ascended a long steep stairway that led to the overlook. As Ray and I worked our way up the stairs Master Choi remarked, “You guys work too hard to climb stairs.” He proceeded to show us a way to tuck and release the pelvis while climbing, and to move in a zigzag pattern that, to my surprise, reduced my energy expenditure of the climb significantly. Once at the top the view of the Mississippi River made the hour long climb worth the effort. Again I felt Choi tap my arm. “See that?” He pointed to the expanse of nature below, “That makes most people feel really small. Use your mind to imagine you are larger than a mountain. When you are fighting, you must use this technique to make yourself feel larger and more powerful and confident than your opponent, even if he is bigger than you.” After awhile Ray and I almost felt guilty going on these little excursions since we weren’t paying for what turned out to be a continuous private lesson.

Master Choi would often quote the classics of T’ai-Chi, Hsing-I, and Liu Ho Pa Fa when discussing and demonstrating martial arts. He often surprised us with an unorthodox application of a line from one of the texts. It was a few years however, before we began a formal study of these writings. Choi’s skill as a martial artist had, for me, always overshadowed his literary accomplishments until our formal study began.

It was then that I began to see another facet of his personality—that of the scholar. After scrutinizing the various translations we brought in for accuracy, he would line by line expound on the deeper meaning of each statement in the classic. This was often a liberating experience, since we brought with us certain preconceived notions of their meaning and attachment to conventional wisdom. Choi was never afraid to challenge the standard interpretations, and even the classics themselves, as he drew upon his experience in history, philosophy, the study of nature and science, and especially his fighting experience. He made a point that people with limited literary experience, but

Reflections on Grandmaster Choi cont. on pg. 4

extensive fighting experience, would understand the classics better than scholars with no fighting experience, since it was high level fighting strategies and training methods that were being described. Choi had a way of simplifying the ideas-really getting at their essence-and making them understandable and useful for one's long term training and development.

For the past few years, Master Choi had been talking about closing his school and retiring from commercial teaching. He had always held the view that devoting most of your energy to attracting large numbers of students was good for business, but bad for the art-both the students' and his own. Even though Choi attracted students from Asia, Europe, and across North America, his day-to-day volume of students was modest compared to large commercial schools. He preferred the control of small numbers of dedicated students to whom he could impart the subtleties of the difficult arts that he taught.

Eventually Master Choi set a date to close his school-May of 2005. He said he wanted time to practice, research and write about the higher levels of the arts to which he's been devoted to the past forty years.

Master Choi had been complaining of fatigue and some related health problems for a few months. As a result we had a dark and disappointing session in the fall of 2004. It was with some trepidation that Ray and I scheduled our

last class in the old school in April. When spring arrived, to our surprise, Choi seemed to be himself again.

We had a spirited class full of laughter and high energy. At that time I began to see Master Choi in a new light—that of an artist. At one point during the class Choi, who was working with Ray and demonstrating close quarter sensitivity, was moving fluidly from Pa Kua, Hsing-I, Liu Ho Pa Fa and T'ai-Chi techniques like a jazz musician improvising on a theme. I've always felt a little uncomfortable that the word art was included in the term used to describe the study of fighting systems-not that art is never achieved-it's just that it seldom is. The term martial artist implies a high level of achievement simply by participating in the activity. Occasionally, however, the shoe fits. As the saying goes—"the greatest art conceals effort." That day Master Choi was effortless.

It has been said that when walking a path it is important to occasionally look behind to see how far you've come. And so it was with our time with Master Choi, as ten weeks turned into ten months, which turned into ten years and beyond. Master Choi is retired now, with his future plans still in transition. He provided Ray and me a past rich in knowledge and experience so that now, the future is ours to create.

Three Questions About T'ai Chi Ch'uan

By Julie Cisler

Recently, I was asked to answer an inquiry from a college student for her research paper on T'ai Chi Ch'uan. I was honored to have this task, and even more honored when my answers were slated to be included in this newsletter. Maybe you will find something of interest in the following:

Dear Sir or Ma'am,

I am a senior at the University of Missouri-Rolla and am currently writing a research paper on T'ai Chi Ch'uan. I need a personal interview to complete the paper and was wondering if I could get some questions answered. Please direct these questions to Master T.T. Liang if possible. If he were unavailable, then anyone else who could answer them for me would be perfect as well. Thank you very much for your time.

-Jessica Mueller

- 1. How many students come to your center to learn T'ai Chi Ch'uan for health reasons or to learn the art for its martial arts aspect?*
- 2. Overall is the art in decline or is it gaining more popularity as time goes on?*
- 3. What, in your opinion, would be the most common misconception about T'ai Chi Ch'uan?*

Hello Jessica-

My name is Julie Cisler. I'm a senior student at Twin Cities T'ai Chi Ch'uan, and I've been asked by my teacher, Ray Hayward (Shu Kuang) to answer your questions. In case you're wondering, Master T.T. Liang passed away in August of 2002 at the age of 102. Here are the best answers I can provide you.

1. We have about 120 students paying monthly tuition to study T'ai Chi Ch'uan. This includes new students as well as people who have studied here for as long as 20 years. I would estimate that at least two thirds of new students initially join to gain the health and relaxation benefits of T'ai Chi Ch'uan. The smaller proportions of students who join our Studio specifically to study T'ai Chi Ch'uan for self-defense have usually studied this art elsewhere, or have studied another martial art style.

I am part of the latter group: I studied T'ai Chi with a teacher who had not been taught any T'ai Chi self-defense principles, but he encouraged me to find a teacher who could when I moved to Minnesota. Because our instructors teach T'ai Chi Ch'uan in a way that integrates both the health and self-defense aspects of the art, even students who are mostly interested in the health aspects of this Art will eventually pick up important self-defense strategies and principles, and those who are drawn in because of T'ai Chi's reputation as a Martial Art gain immediate health benefits.

2. Considering the population growth at our studio, and the increase on the number of T'ai Chi teachers of various styles, I would say that it is growing in popularity. I wouldn't say the growth is "booming," but it has been steady.

3. There are two common misconceptions about T'ai Chi Ch'uan. The first misconception assumes that because it is practiced slowly, it is useless for self-defense. The people who make this assumption have never seen anyone using T'ai Chi Ch'uan for self-defense, and do not realize that T'ai Chi Ch'uan is practiced slowly to develop relaxation, smoothness, and power. It also takes many years of practice to develop this power, because the practitioner must be relaxed to properly practice T'ai Chi Ch'uan either for health or self-defense. The advanced practitioner who understands the principles of T'ai Chi Ch'uan and has developed these abilities can easily use T'ai Chi for self-defense. From what I've personally witnessed, these practitioners seem to move incredibly fast without getting winded or breaking a sweat.

The second misconception I frequently hear is that T'ai Chi Ch'uan uses some sort of "magic" called "internal power," and that this magical "Ch'i" power makes T'ai Chi effective. Unfortunately, some people who teach and practice T'ai Chi and other similar exercises perpetuate this myth, either for personal gain or out of ignorance. Master T.T. Liang's number one T'ai Chi Ch'uan teacher, Cheng Man-ching, made it one of his life's efforts to demystify T'ai Chi Ch'uan. He explained and demonstrated that T'ai Chi Ch'uan simply uses a deep understanding of body mechanics and simple geometry paired with relaxation, strategy and cultivated physical sensitivity to make it effective as both a health practice and Martial Art. His main point, which was also strongly emphasized by Master Liang, was that anyone could master this Art.

I hope this answers your questions sufficiently.

Julie Cisler
7th-generation Yang-style lineage disciple

From The Importance of Living by Lin Yu-tang
Chapter 7: The Importance of Loafing
Section 3: The Cult of the Idle Life

The Chinese romanticists were, on the whole, people gifted with a high sensibility and a vagabond nature, poor in their worldly possessions, but rich in sentiment. They had an intense love of life which showed itself in their abhorrence of all official life and a stern refusal to make the soul serf to the body. The idle life, so far from being the prerogative of the rich and powerful and successful (how busy the successful Americans are!) was in China an achievement of *highmindedness*, a highmindedness very near to the Western conception of the dignity of the tramp who is too proud to ask favors, too independent to go to work, and too wise to take the world's successes too seriously. This highmindedness came from, and was inevitably associated with, a certain sense of *detachment* toward to drama of life; it came from the quality of being able to see through life's ambitions and follies and the temptations of fame and wealth. Somehow the highminded scholar who valued their character more than achievements, their soul more than fame or wealth, became by common consent the highest ideal of Chinese literature. Inevitably they were people with great simplicity of living and a proud contempt for worldly success as the world understands it.

Class Schedule for January 15 – June 15, 2006

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Saturday
12:30-2:30 Solo Form			12:30-2:30 Solo Form	10:00-11:30 Eclectsis
6:00-7:30 Solo Form Refinement	6:00-7:00 Pushing-Hands: Drills/Methods	6:00-7:30 Solo Form Instruction	6:00-7:30 Solo Form Refinement	11:30-12:30 Liu Ho Pa Fa Level II
7:30-8:30 Weapons Cycle 1: Sword	7:00-8:00 2 Person San-Shou	7:30-9:00 Hsing-Yi Ch'uan Level I: 5 Elements	7:30-9:00 Praying Mantis Level III	12:30-2:00 Solo Form Instruction
8:30-9:30 Pa-Kua Basics / Liu Ho Pa Fa 12 Animals	8:00-9:00 Praying Mantis Level I			

NOTE: The Studio will be closed Monday, May 29 in observance of Memorial Day.

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FIRST CLASS MAIL