

The Newsletter of the
Twin Cities T'ai-Chi Ch'uan Studio
2242 University Ave
St Paul, MN 55114
(651) 767-0267

Wu-Dang

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www.tctaichi.com
email: tctaichi@minn.net

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

NEW SCHEDULE

Our Winter Spring schedule starts January 15. The Monday night Weapons class-7:30 to 8:30-will move to Cycle II and will cover T'ai-Chi Saber, Saber Fencing, and Double Saber. If you are in the T'ai-Chi Solo Form Refinement classes you are eligible to join this class. The rest of the schedule remains the same.

TAMO SWORD SEMINAR-PART II

For those who took the Tamo Sword class in the fall, there will be a Tamo Sword-Part II class the evening of January 13 - 6:00 to 8:00. You must have completed the first class to attend.

CHINESE NEW YEAR 2007

We will be celebrating Chinese New Year early this year by having our annual demonstration and banquet on Saturday, February 3. This is the year of the Boar who is chivalrous yet likes to indulge in the good things of this life. More information to follow.

THANK YOU SO MUCH

I just successfully completed my year as Master of my Lodge, Braden 168. It took me six years to get there and I could never have done it without the help of many people at the studio, both filling in for some of my classes and for demonstrating at some of my installations. I would especially like to thank Julie Cisler and Micah Lopez. -Ray

SOME REMINISCENCES OF 30 YEARS OF PRACTICING T'AI-CHI CH'UAN By Ray Hayward

2007 marks my 30-year anniversary of learning and practicing T'ai-Chi. Although my exact date is July 31st, I am taking this year to look back on 30 years, celebrate and share, and to project and dream about another 30 years.

I began my T'ai-Chi journey in 1977 after practicing Kenpo Karate for four years. I had read many books about martial arts and T'ai-Chi interested me. I began looking around for a T'ai-Chi instructor and first began practicing a style called Hwa Yu T'ai-Chi. I had read that a famous T'ai-Chi master, Master T.T. Liang was teaching in Boston but he did not advertise and I couldn't find him. At the Hwa Yu School the instructor lent me a book by T.T. Liang and it had photographs of him in it. While walking down the street one day I actually met Master Liang on the sidewalk and asked if I could study with him. He told me to come next week and that began my great good fortune.

I learned the complete system of Yang Style T'ai-Chi Ch'uan from Master Liang as well as Praying Mantis, Ch'in-Na, and various weapons. Not only did I study at various studios in Boston-all of which I was provided keys as a sign of responsibility and trust-but I practiced in two parks with Master Liang, the Rose Garden at Fenway Park and the Public Gardens next to the Boston Common. I also followed Master Liang to Minnesota, and I visited and studied with him in

Florida and in California. I met many classmates and friends while studying with Master Liang, most notably my three Pauls; Paul Parrotta, Paul Gallagher and Paul Abdella.

I also studied and compared T'ai-Chi with many teachers and friends so I could deepen and broaden the art I was learning from Master Liang. I learned Yang style T'ai-Chi and studied the T'ai-Chi classics with my senior classmate Paul Gallagher. I learned Chen style T'ai-Chi with Dr. Leung Kay-Chi and for the last few years I have been learning the combined style of T'ai-Chi from Grandmaster Wai-lun Choi.

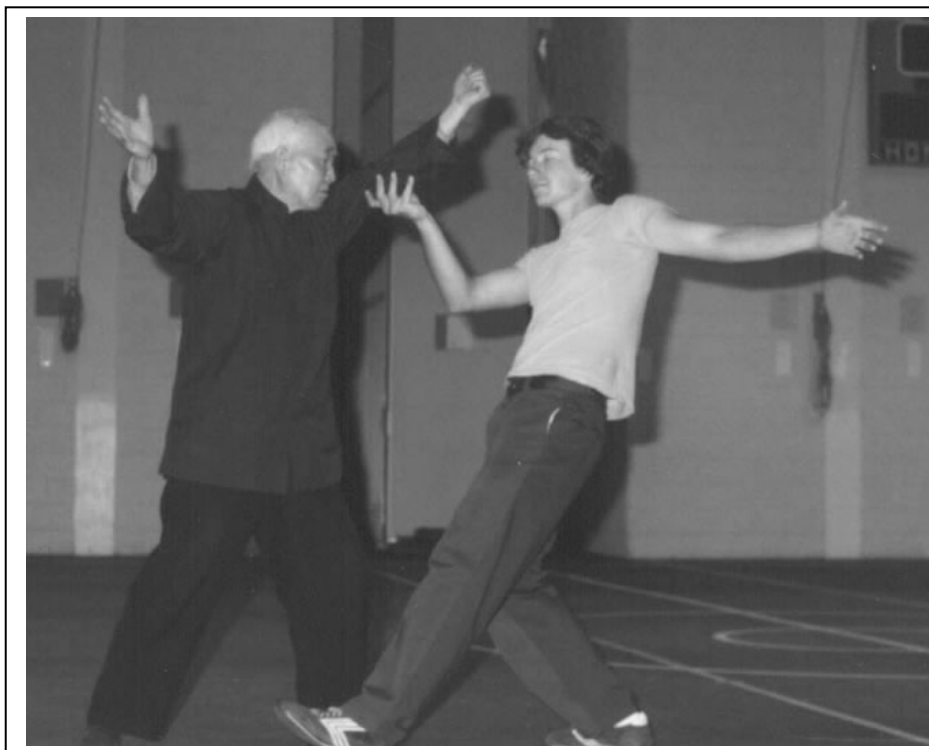
To give you an idea of what it's like to study with more than one teacher, I'd like to share with you my two main teachers emphasis on the tucking of the hips alignment. Master Liang taught us to tuck our hips, but to be careful not to tuck too much. Master Choi on the other hand stressed that you can't tuck your hips enough.

Teaching has been an integral part of my journey. First as a helper in Master Liang's classes, then by being given my first teaching assignment by Master Liang, and teaching around the Boston area. I was a guest instructor at the first five Deer Mountain Taoist Academy retreats in Vermont. I've taught T'ai-Chi in Massachusetts, Vermont, Delaware, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Florida, New York, Manitoba, and even a short course in London, as well as many places in Minnesota.

I am truly lucky for I found the art that I wanted to practice for my whole life early on. I've tried to quit T'ai-Chi, yet it never quit me. I spent the last 30 years learning, practicing, and researching the entire system as well as exploring other systems. I heard from many sources that T'ai-Chi as a system was missing parts and that the self-defense and higher levels of meditation have been lost. Master Liang always told us, "everything is in it (T'ai-Chi), all the practical use, health maintenance and Taoist meditation." Because Master Liang's focus had been on health and well-being, the self-defense

and fighting aspects were not emphasized. Although Master Liang knew them, and taught us many of the advanced theories, techniques and principles, he was more concerned with health and the "changing of temperament".

After studying with Grandmaster Wai-lun Choi I was able to see that T'ai-Chi indeed is a complete system and has all the components and levels. Through Master Choi's guidance I was able to see the training methods necessary to bring these out.



I would like to conclude with one thought and one summation. Here is my thought I would like to share with you; if speed, power, youth, aggression, and arrogance are the secrets of T'ai-Chi, then it is no better than any other Martial Art. What makes T'ai-Chi the "supreme ultimate" martial art is slow motion, softness, yielding, non-action, and humility. I believe these are the real secrets and they are not hidden, or lost, but are out in the open for anyone brave enough to embrace them. The T'ai-Chi Classics say, "From the most soft and yielding you will arrival at the most powerful and unyielding." After 30 years I feel I can use four words to sum up T'ai-Chi; relax, sink, unify, enjoy.

LEARNING TO STAND ON MY FEET

By Margaret Bridge

When I was about 9 or 10, my brother Erik and I would take our bikes down to the local park on Saturday mornings during the summer. Occasionally, we would share the park with an older man who would use the smooth concrete skating rink for his Tai Chi practice. Sometimes we would watch him go through the movements, mesmerized by his grace. These small moments, watching him practice, planted the seeds of interest in my mind. Tai Chi was a lingering idea in the back of my head for years; I just never knew where I could go to study.

Growing up, riding my bike was one of the few physical activities I could do. I was born with a triple rotated clubfoot with neurological complications. From my right hip to my knee, I have about 90% of my muscles nerves. From my knee to my foot it drops to 45%. I have had two surgeries, one at 10 months and another before my 3rd birthday. From early on, I knew I would wear a series of plastic braces, but this was something that the doctors wouldn't be able to cure. I was going to have to learn to deal with this for the rest of my life. I would never be able to run as fast as the other kids so sports like soccer and baseball were tedious and frustrating. I couldn't walk long distances because the stress on my leg was just too great after a while. Simple activities would never be simple for me.

I'm a bit like the fish from "Finding Nemo." My mom gave me the movie for a Christmas present a few years ago and, even though it's for a much younger audience, I have always enjoyed it. He has a gimp right fin, I have a gimp right foot. It's like we're soul....somethings. In the movie, Nemo never wanted to be treated differently because he couldn't swim faster or longer than the other fish. Likewise, I never wanted my own deformity to hold me back, even though I knew what my limitations were.

Last winter I learned of the Twin Cities Tai Chi studio through friends of friends. At the start of January I decided to start going to classes. The memories I had of watching the old man in the park had never left and now was an opportunity to learn. I had no idea then what an impact it would have on my life and my physical being. Despite

limited muscle control and flexibility in my foot, this was an activity I could enjoy. When I started, I could barely balance at all on my right leg. It was hard at first; even the standing meditation was stressful for my ankle. Slowly and consistently, I asked my leg and foot to do more, move more, bend more. Movements I was learning in class I would practice at home, even if it was just shifting my weight in the bow stance while I washed my dishes or stood in the grocery line. I was happy and excited to see myself progressing.

In May, right after we started the kick section, too much standing at a new job was the final straw for the camel that is my ankle's back. The stress was great, the pain severe, and I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to continue with Tai Chi. I didn't want to give up something that had been bringing such a wonderful feeling of joy and accomplishment to my life. I brought my concerns to Sifu Ray, and he suggested I take it one day at a time, bit by bit, and if I needed to slow down, an older student would be glad to help me. Luckily I was able to continue and I worked my way through the kick section, which is something I never had even imagined I could do.

Ever since I was a little girl I had never known what it felt like to succeed at something like this—to own an activity and rejoice in the progress I was making. I know that my leg will always be weaker. I know that it will always be shorter and nerves that were never there aren't going to magically appear. But in the past nine months, I've learned that I can do more with my leg than I ever thought was possible. I have learned all 150 moves of the long form and I am now starting to learn the sword form. I've learned that I can be successful at something that gives me so much joy and a sense of wellbeing. Most importantly, I've learned that I can enjoy my whole body when I never thought I could.

A few months ago I was talking with Erik, who now lives in Washington. I told him that I was studying Tai Chi and he thought that it was amazing.

"What made you want to learn?" he asked me.

"Do you remember when we were young," I said, "and we would go down to the park?"

"The old man," he said before I could finish. After almost 15 years, he remembered him too.

Standards for the Practice of Chinese Internal Martial Arts: T'ai-Chi, Hsing-Yi and Pa-Kua

By Grandmaster Wai-Lun Choi

Part 1: T'ai-Chi

Level 1: At this level the principles of the Classics must be understood as the foundation of the form, that is, as a method for coordination of the hand, body, leg and eye, and for use of the proper footwork, stance and division of body weight.

The sequence (form) must be performed with freedom, undistracted by any undue focus, strain or tension.

All movements must be stable, relaxed and harmonious.

Level 2: At this level the rhythm of the movement must be under control and movement must combine soft with hard, yin with yang.

The mind must be able to control the body through the use of visualization, for example, the mind moves the body as if "swimming in the air."

The upper and lower body must be connected in motion so as to achieve a greater degree of harmony, smoothness and flexibility.

Level 3: At this level the foundation laid in the previous two levels is used to mobilize internal power with the mind, without using muscle power.

The breathing must be coordinated with the technique—in and out, hard and soft, are opposite but not separated. In other words, the form is done showing the total integration of inner (breathing) and outer (body motion).

A high level of sensitivity in motion must be demonstrated—the body is light and sensitive, soft and flexible, but at the same time there is great stability, a sinking to the ch'i to achieve rootedness.

In practice the spirit is used to direct the mind to utilize the ch'i to create power. At this level one pays more attention to the use of the mind in the mobilization of power.

Part 2: Hsing-Yi

Level 1 (Visible Power-Ming Ging): The principles must be applied in practice with a steadfast devotion—the body must be able to move and turn with comfort and smoothness, without awkwardness or the slightest loss of balance.

The hand and foot must move together and never separate; technique must be fast and stable, the body must twist and turn with speed and agility.

Footwork must be contained and precise, and the waist must be used to move efficiently, as from the hub of a wheel.

In any technique the body must move in a coiling, spiraling motion, like the repeated circles of a rope swung with a flick of the wrist.

In addition to coiling, the body has the power to initiate movement like a spring.

If the above-principles are carefully applied in practice, a smooth, connected strength will manifest itself.

Level 2 (Stealth Power: Nam-Ging): At this level softness must be combined with strength while both spirit and ch'i are free of any blockages or obstacles.

Each technique is connected to the next by circular motion. This allows smooth changes of direction, without jerkiness or abruptness. The breathing becomes part and parcel of these circular changes in direction and thus all movement soon becomes smooth and flexible, without awkwardness or interruption.

To the observer, the whole body seems to be filled with a soft, relaxed, almost "floating" internal power within which there is strength, speed and flexibility.

The faults of excessive softness and excessive rigidity must be avoided.

The pull of gravity on the body weight is used to root the body solidly. At the same time, spirit and ch'i are used to produce a continuous natural circling motion coordinated with the breath so that internal power is expressed without any obstruction.

Level 3 (Transformation of Power: Faah-Ging):

Using only spirit and mind to move the body, all changes (up and down, forward and backward, right and left) are accomplished without the interference of muscular tension.

The technique and principles mastered at the previous two levels remain the same. Without the interference of muscular tension, and without a dependence on muscle—initiated power, the body can move and turn as the mind wills.

The outer body moves in harmony with the inner—mind, ch'i and power work in harmony. But at this advanced level one moves beyond the outer harmony with the breathing. The mind controls the coordination of technique and breath naturally and completely and enables one to force sudden explosions of power with no visible preparation.

It makes no difference if any particular technique is a closing or opening motion, every movement must demonstrate the complete harmony of the inner and outer with a high degree of naturalness.

Part 3: Pa-Kua

Level 1: This is a dependably superior training method, one which will provide sustenance to the serious practitioner for a lifetime. The training produces great smoothness and flexibility in the transition of technique and great agility of both hand and footwork.

The first requirement is an understanding of the principles of movement. Basic to this style is the use of the footwork; therefore leg and foot training is particularly important. The beginner must master a bended knee walk, as if walking in the mud. There must be correct alignment between the curvature of the knees and the body to allow the centering of the body weight on the ground. The weight and power descend to the leg and foot and the insides of the feet touch as they pass. The foot slides smoothly forward over the floor. In walking, the toes grasp the ground as the heel makes contact, but the center of the sole of the foot remains empty. This walk makes the movement stable and strong, grounded, but also light and quick.

At the same time the palms turn and twist in a coiling fashion, like a swinging rope, and the waist, elbow, arm and neck turn as well. Collectively, they are known as the “four coils.”

The body should coil sideward toward the center of the circle, supported by the coiling motion of agile footwork in advancing forward, backward, left and right. The body coils and uncoils in unison with the footwork to produce a steady flow of coiling power. This coiling power is controlled by a centralized dynamic that is both strong and soft.

You must learn how to chase your opponent, that is, to follow and never lose contact. When the body twists and the palm changes, you are like an eagle turning in the air, flexible and smooth, never rigid. The body twists toward the center as you step in a tight circle, producing a twisting power.

Level 2: At this level it is necessary to learn the importance of hard and soft, fast and slow, solid and fake. A common mistake of the beginner is to focus too much on speed and muscular tension, trying to learn too fast, forgetting the structure of the training method. Time must be taken to learn and understand that the foot and the palm and the power all partake of the opposition of solid (the punch) and fake (the not-punch). Great care must be taken to include these opposites within one another and to avoid the common mistake of practicing one opposite without the other. Pa-Kua cannot be mastered in this way.

This style has a unique softness in its power that makes it possible to change, to block and to punch, and to soften when necessary for defense.

At this level the strongest power is called “exploding” power. It comes from within and explodes without warning to the opponent or the observer. To master this one must include softness in hardness and hardness in softness. In the same way attack and defense are part of one whole.

Basic Pa-Kua method can be divided into internal and external power and can also be thought of as three kinds of power—1. hard power, 2. inch (exploding) power, 3. soft, changing power.

Muscular exercises are used to develop speed and hard power. This is the basis for the second level, exploding power. The third level, soft, transforming power, is completely internal. The mind is used to move the ch'i. The nervous system is trained to control muscles with ease so as to achieve soft, flexible, changing power that is sensitive and infinitely adjustable.

In summary, the use of soft and exploding power characterizes Pa-Kua and to master this, the training must be followed with the utmost respect and starting at the most basic level.

Level 3: The body and footwork must be supremely flexible. The attention must be concentrated so as to connect power with footwork and turning and twisting to both left and right. During palm changes, the body should not sway nor should it go up and down. The footwork should be light and smooth as running water.

On this level movement and stillness are contained within each other. One is still and strong as a mountain, in stillness, but quick as lightning in movement.

All movements are linked—nothing is separate: forward and backward, up and down, left and right, turning and twisting, holding and bending. Mind, ch'i and power are united in perfect harmony.

During palm changes the mind knows how to change and combine movement with breathing. One is always alert, flexible and grounded. Breathing is deep, smooth and natural. There is a focus of attention which brings forth the unique character of a quiet, imposing power.

GRADUATION NEWS

Solo Form

Charles Blilie
Shelly Blilie
Margaret Bridge
Martin Ebelhardt
Marven Ewen
Daniel Griffin
Sean Kelly
Tori Low
Michael Lyoutskanov-
Lewis
Pat O'Halloran
Andreas Ostenso
Zack Ruff
Kurt Swanson
Paul Thompson
Jason Tomalia
Michael Wetteland
Barbara Wildes
Gerry Wildes

T'ai-Chi Sabre

Douglas Allchin
Dwayne Collis
Nick Cronin
Martin Ebelhardt
Ruth Ann Godollei
Daniel Griffin
Randi Hellman
Sean Kelly
Bob Modaff
Rich Palmer
Paul Thompson

T'ai-Chi Sword

Angela Amado
Tom Crable
Nick Cronin
Bob Dietz
Jason Eaton
Dan Miller
Theresa Strike
Karen Taylor

San-Tsai Sword

Fencing
Angela Amado
Alan Blair
LaVonne Bunt
Liz Carlson
Jeffrey Christianson
Tom Crable
Nick Cronin
Lynn Dennis
Tim Dennis
Bob Dietz
Jason Eaton
Dan Frederick
Tom Hautman
Pat Hemmis
Patrick Jarvis
Ralph Jerndal
Christopher Knudtson
Tim Kurth
Diane Lefty
Steve Leinen
Micah Lopez
Marcos Lopez-Carlson
Josh Lynch
Paul Magee
Peytie McCandless

Dan Miller
Dan Nan-Tie
Todd Nesser
Rich Palmer
Karin San Juan
Mike Sauters
Chris Sorman
John Stitely
Theresa Strike
Lisa Strong
Karen Taylor
Loc Truong
Dominick Veldman
Morgan Willow
Woody Wolston

Tamo Sword w/Tassel

Alan Blair
Liz Carlson
Micah Lopez
Marcos Lopez-Carlson
Josh Lynch
Peytie McCandless
Dan Nan-tie
Mike Sauters

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Class Schedule for January 15 – June 15, 2007

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 T'ai-Chi Review & Practice
7:30-8:30 Weapons Cycle 2: Saber	7:00-8:00 2 Person San-Shou	7:30-8:30 Hsing-Yi Ch'uan Level II: 12 Animals & 8 Styles	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	8:00-9:00 Praying Mantis Level I	8:30-9:30 Pa-Kua Basics		

NOTE: The Studio will be closed Monday, May 28.