

HELLO ALL!

First of all, a very happy and healthy New Year!

The past year was a momentous one for Master Hwa. He celebrated his 75th Birthday and had the opportunity to meet and work with students from around the country at the workshop and ensuing banquet . I am attaching pictures from those events.



MASTER HWA AND STUDENTS AT HIS BIRTHDAY BANQUET, JULY 2008



WORKSHOP, JULY 2008



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Master Hwa continues to analyze and refine his teaching techniques to give you, his students, the ultimate benefits of practicing Classical Tai Chi. This Forum is the product of his thoughts on square form practice and discussion of turning at the hip/waist.

Included in this Forum are the work and commentary of two of his dedicated students, Joe Milne and Sifu Jim Roach.

We hope you are continuing your journey of classical tai chi and would love to hear from you regarding your progress.

Also, remember that Master Hwa will be happy to provide critique if you send him video of your form playing when you feel ready.

Classical Tai Chi

Forum 17

January, 2009

Emphasis on Square Form

My experience with distant learning students and in-class students

I have had the opportunity to assess the progress of quite few distant learning students. I am very pleased with the progress they made by following the curriculum on the DVD. In fact, their learning efficiency appeared to be surpassing that of my earlier in-class students when my video was not yet available. Without the video, my in-class students had trouble practicing at home since in-class observation was fleeting, not easy to remember. This problem was much more serious with Square Form due to the exact nature of the moves and more numerous distinctive moves compare to that of the Round Form. That is the reason that my early in-class teaching starts with round form which is also reflected in the curriculum organization of my DVDs. As a result, both these groups learned Round Form first.

There are students within both these groups who have learned the Round Form very well. But, I can see that in order for them to progress to the next level, the more efficient way is for them to be proficient in Square Form. Learning and drilling with the square form with clear delineation of the postures and yin-yang separation of the movements can lift their performance to the next level quicker than just practicing the Round Form alone.

A few years ago, when my DVDs were completed and available to my students, I started to change my teaching methodology in my class by shifting emphasis to begin with the square form with new students. At the same time, I exposed them to simple internal moves or silk reeling exercises as shown in Forum 15 & 16 and a

few corresponding round forms. It was a very successful experiment. When these students compared square to the round form, they fully appreciated the clear definition and relative ease of learning the square form. I do feel the exposure to those internal moves and round form, knowing what their future goals are, is another great motivation factor in maintaining their enthusiasm toward square form.

Because of the above experiences, I have outlined the following paths for distant learning students.

Learning path for Distant Learning Students

Now that you have my DVDs and the Classical Tai Chi Forum at your disposal, what will be the preferable way to utilize this vast information to advance your learning process and, at the same time, reap the health benefits along the way?

I am listing two slightly different recommended paths below:

1. Both paths starts with Lesson 1, Tai Chi Walk (also see Forum 16 Youtube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tu8ptvmm6hA>). Proper Walking technique is essential to Square and Round Form. This lesson has great health benefits for the lower body including the lower back. It is not easy to master. Be patient, give it time and many repetitions. One way is to start every lesson with some Walking before proceeding to learn other movements.

2. In this path, you follow the lesson sequence in Vol. II, Tai Chi Form Instruction to Lesson 9 including the first Cloud Hand. You have learned primarily the Round Form so far. Then, switch over to learn Square Form from Vol. II, Lesson 15 and the free DVD set on Square Form (see below). Start from the beginning until you reach and complete the first Cloud Hand Form and from then on, you could learn each lesson, both the square form and the round form together.

2a. Opposite to the above path (2), start from the Square Form to the first Cloud Hand and then switch over to learn the Round Form to the first Cloud Hand. Then, each following lesson, learn both the Square form and the Round Form together. Since detailed verbal instructions and discussions are contained in Vol. II Lesson 1-13. when you are learning the first eight lessons of Square Form, you will need to look at Vol. II Lesson 1-8 to understand the discussions on that lesson.

3. Early in the learning process, you could start practicing the internal moves such as the “turning move” and those moves and silk reeling exercises in the Youtube video shown in Forum 15 and 16. They illustrate fundamentally important concepts in Classical Tai Chi. Practicing these movements gives typical health benefits from internal movements similar to qi gong exercise. Some of these may appear simple, but are quite advanced moves. Extended practice will be needed to master these moves.

All elements described above are synergistic with each other. Practicing one improves the other. Practicing these elements in turn, repeatedly, can bring you from time to time, the exhilaration of discovery that you can do certain moves correctly in addition to a sense of well being. The eventual goal is that you can play the entire Round Form using “internal” and that the internal energy will circulate in your body without break from beginning to end of the Form.

Key points on practicing Square Form:

1. To achieve internal movements, the body must have yin(stationary part) and yang(moving part) paired at the right place of the body. Learning to set the yin-yang pair correctly, the first task is to learn how to set the yin part of the body

correctly. That is why Square Form looks robotic-when one part of body moves the other parts of body remain completely still. Therefore, when practicing Square Form, the more robotic look, the better. If you do not maintain the stillness while other parts of the body are moving, the objective of doing Square Form is compromised. You need to know that these yin-yang pairs practiced in the Square Form are imbedded in the Round Form, dynamically transforming from one yin-yang pair to another to give the effect of constant motion and continuity.

2. Round Form should be played with continuity; while the Square Form should have a pause between each move. Make sure you make the most of this pause: Examine your body structure, is everything in the right place? Enjoy the sensation of stretching, rooting and energy. Prepare the next move so that the move is carried out with intent and conviction. Below you will see an interesting article from Joe Milne on incorporating **Wuji** (無極) Positions and **Zhan Zhuang** (站桩) Applications in the square form to take full advantage of the “pause” in the square form.

3. Be patient, pay attention to every little detail in the Form shown on the DVDs and try to play it accordingly. Pay special attention to the footwork. Square form is a golden opportunity to get these choreographic details right. Remember you are not just learning new movements, you are also correcting whatever undesirable habitual movements you have.

Free DVD Set on Square Form

While I was thinking about how to impress my distant learning students of the importance of learning square form, one of my distant-learning students, Joe

Milne, was embarking on an ambitious project of slowing down the square form included in Vol. II to isolate the individual movement, listing each movement's name (both Chinese and English), and giving voiceover instructions of how to make the move. I realized that this was an ideal tool to accentuate the learning of square form, and therefore, encouraged and assisted him to complete this project.

Unfortunately, Joe found out that voiceover instruction took too long to fit into an acceptable video format. So the voice part is removed. The step by step instruction file and the name list of the 108 moves are available at <http://www.classicaltaichi.com/squareform.pdf>.

Even without the voiceover, the discs with slow motion have been well received by new and experienced students alike. I find, with the slow motion, I can see my own movements with much more clarity. It is also very easy to search out a specific movement on the DVD. (In the meantime, Joe is working on a voice instruction only DVD. The purpose of this DVD is to provide a voice cue when the student is practicing the Square Form. Since the student may not be able to look at the video DVD during Form playing, the voice instruction could provide a cross check.)

This set of two slow-motion DVDs are distributed free to those who have ordered Volume II - TAI CHI FORM INSTRUCTION DVD set. The only cost is shipping. If you are interested, please go to Paypal, using their "send money" feature and fill out the form:

To email: info@classicaltaichi.com

Shipping cost amount is the same as those listed on mail order form: USA & Canada-\$9 Other countries-\$12.

Send money: for "Goods"

In the comments dialog box: "square form DVD"

Wuji (無極) Positions & Zhan Zhuang (站桩) Applications .

J. B. Milne

Wuji Positions used with Zhan Zhuang Training are the least understood and yet one of the most important aspects of Taijiquan Practice. The Wuji Positions allows the practitioner to relax the mind, while, adjusting, aligning, and balancing the body to produce correct postures. Zhan Zhuang Training, on the other hand, strengthens the tendons and ligaments, aids in balancing, teaches the muscles to relax, and identifies weaknesses not noticed while practicing the Form. This is important in helping to identify the proper placement of the heel and weighting of the empty foot.

The Square Form is being used to illustrate how Wuji and Zhan Zhuang can be applied at those stopping points for each position. Applying these training methods in addition to form practice will help the student in developing strength and proper form.

Wuji/Wu-ji/Wuchi/Wu-chi is defined as nothingness, the beginning before intention and movement.

Wuji is discussed in many Taijiquan Books written by both practitioners and masters alike. These writers mainly address Wuji in the Preparation Posture and/or the Closing Posture of the Taijiquan Form. As such, most readers are left to believe Wuji is only accomplished at the beginning and ending of the Taijiquan Form. However, this is not so. Wuji is practiced during every posture, that is, every posture begins with Wuji, moves into Taiji, and returns to Wuji.

Zhan Zhuang (“standing like a stake” or “standing like a tree”) Training is a way to relax both the nervous and muscular systems simultaneously. This is accomplished by combining exertion and relaxation simultaneously. Breathing is done by inhaling and exhaling gently through the nose while keeping the mouth closed and relaxed. The chest, stomach, and hips are in a relaxed state. Zhan

Zhuang helps with the identification of the energy flow in the different positions and trains to keep the localized nerve activity dormant (Forum 6); as well as, strengthening the yin side of the posture for strong rooting and building power (Forum 7). There is no set time limit in Zhan Zhuang Training; however, the seasoned practitioner has been known to hold the positions in excess of twenty minutes. Some have claimed to be able to hold the positions for hours.

It is important to remember, that as the tension builds in different parts of the body, to tell yourself to relax. (RELAX, RELAX, RELAX) Start with short time frames and increase the holding time slowly.

The Wuji Form and application of Zhan Zhuang for “Brush Knee Push Step Posture” of the Square Form will now be presented. Breathing will be done naturally.

1) Beginning of Brush Knee Push Step



The right foot is flat on the ground supporting the body's weight completely with the right knee bent slightly.

The left leg is straight without any pressure on the knee or left heel, left toes are extended as high as they will go, giving a slight stretch to the back of the leg.

The tailbone is tucked-in and the head is stretch up by the neck muscles.

The shoulders are relaxed and the elbows are pointing down.

The palms are facing each other at shoulder width, with the right fingers pointing to the front and the left fingers pointing up.

Notice that a straight line could be drawn between the crown of the head, passing through the ear and knee to the right foot.

2) Transition one



In transition one, the only change to the beginning position is the left arm is held across the body with the palm facing down.

3) Transition two



In transition two, the only change to transition one is the left toes are touching the ground. All the weight is still maintained on the right foot.

4) End of Brush Knee Push Step



In the end posture of Brush Knee Push Step, both feet are flat on the ground with the left leg supporting the body.

The right leg is straight with a stretch between the Achilles Heel and the back of the neck.

The right palm has rotated to face front, thumb in line with the nose, and the left palm has moved across the left thigh.

Notice that a straight line could be drawn between the crown of the head, passing through the ear and knee to the left foot, as well as, between the right ear, right shoulder, and right knee to the right foot.

Turning at the waist vs. turning using Kua/Hip

When you teach or demonstrate the internal move “turning at the waist” in Classical Tai Chi, you likely will encounter questions “why not using kua/hip”. Most external martial arts and large number of tai chi school practice the use of kua or hip for that turning motion. One example of such discussion can be seen at this link

<http://emptyflower.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=3&t=1091&st=0&sk=t&sd=a&start=315>

Jim Roach, our first certified instructor, spent his early years of martial art training using “turn with Kuo/hip”, then he switched over to learn Classical Tai chi using “turn at the waist”. He has good insight to the discussions in the above link. The following is his comments regarding such discussion.

Jim Roach on Turning at the waist vs. turning using Kua/Hip

It is said nowadays in certain segments of Wu Style that one cannot develop any power (to do such things as punch) from just turning at the waist, that one must “use the hips”. However, it is also said in another part of the Wu Style that one must “turn the body around the waist”, not “using the hips.” That commentary goes on to say that one will lose their balance if they turn in those postures from the hip.

If I may humbly submit, I may be as accessible as anyone can be to having direct knowledge of that apparent conundrum. I have studied with “both sides” of that question with the Wu Family.

It would seem the only thing that is not said is “you will lose your balance” IF “you turn in these postures from the hip” IF you are in a “small frame” Tai Chi stance. I partially agree with “only turn the hip” side of the Family based on what I experienced. What is not stated by them and not seen is how “frame size” has such bearing on whether hip turning causes the feet to move. One can indeed turn such amounts of hip in the large stances that side of the Family teaches.

Also what both sides seem to miss is the proper use of the hips via such things as timing. For instance one can turn the waist, THEN turn the hips in a follow up

movement. We see this in the cooperative push hands training of Tao of Martial Applications DVD. This is indicative that turning the hips is not eschewed, it just means that it should be done at the right situation. For example, one could offset an opponent's balance in a close up confrontation using internal discipline (internal movement) then a much larger step (stance) could be taken whereby the opponent is thrown to the ground using motion of the hips in the process (external movement). The motions of the "repulse Monkey" section of the form come to mind there as an example.

Certainly "boxers know this" and other martial artists as well, about turning the hips, but one only has to look at the large stance boxers take when this is done. I heard the same refrain from a "boxer" at the University of Buffalo when I went to teach Classical Tai chi there..."I know what you are doing, boxers do it by having to turn the hips, the punching arm is also tensed up. Yet how much I am able to generate such power with internal discipline with no arm tension when the rear end is seated in a chair, AND I am not able to turn my hips?"

I think one should be willing to try stuff for themselves to see the veracity or not.
