

Master Huang Xingxian's 100th Birthday Commemoration, K.L.

Taiji – Daoist Principles in Practice.

By Patrick A Kelly, September 2010

In remembrance of Master Huang Xingxian on the occasion of the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of his birth, in response to the lifelong obligation I feel towards him as my teacher to pass on his teaching, I would like to write something of what he personally explained and taught to me some decades ago. Master Huang was both a martial artist and a Daoist. In time he was first a martial artist, then was gradually introduced to Daoism by his main Fujian Baihe (White Crane) teacher, Grand Master Xie Zhongxian, then later led deeper by Grand Master Zheng Manqing. But by the time I came to know Master Huang, inside he was first a Daoist and second a martial artist. Once when sitting outside eating, late at night in Kuala Lumpur, he looked up at the stars then gesturing to the expanse of the night sky he turned to me and said, "That is the big Taiji, inside us is the small Taiji", then after a moment's pause added quietly, "Now I teach Taiji, not Taijiquan." The depth and sincerity of expression behind his words, I have never forgotten. From that time I subtitled my practice and teaching of Master Huang's methods, "Taiji – Daoist Principles in Practice". The best remembrance of Master Huang is to practice and teach as accurately as possible the subtle expression of the deep art of Taiji that he left to the world. I offer this article with that aim.

Of all aspects of Taiji perhaps the most well known, most talked about, yet least understood on a deep level, is Qi or energy. Only now, at 60 years of age and approaching my 40th anniversary of training Taiji within Master Huang's system do I feel more or less qualified to attempt this obscure subject. There are many who aim to explain the physical side of Master Huang's Taiji, illustrating their attempts – as did Master Huang himself – with great skill in the Free Pushing-hands. I leave that task to them as, following another side of my teacher, I also teach Taiji, not Taijiquan.

To begin with a literal dictionary translation of the character Qi may not be helpful as modern Chinese has deviated so much from the classical meanings and those in turn varied according to the discipline involved, so that medical, may differ from martial, may differ from Daoist interpretations. As the modern medical idea of Qi has been reduced to not much more than some physiological symptoms in its attempt to be scientific, I will only discuss the martial and Daoist concept of Qi. While the true internal training of Taiji concerns Qi, it is necessary to understand that there are different grades of Qi, humans are a mixture of these grades and it is possible to refine the gross Qi inside ourselves transmuting it into something much higher.

Cosmologically, Dao in its most subtle form descends from Heaven (perhaps better called the Celestial level to avoid religious connotations). Humans are based on Earth and Taiji is a method of raising a Human from the Earth level to the Celestial level, to merge with the Dao. The medium is the Qi. For these practices it is not enough to know the theory, the precise method must be known. Both Master Huang Xingxian and Grandmaster Zheng Manqing – and there is cause to believe, also Great Grandmaster Yang Zhengfu along with his father and grandfather – were members of a Daoist school "The Sacred Society", originally based in China but now headquartered in Taiwan with a large branch in Singapore still active today, where these forms of meditation were taught. Grandmaster Zheng Manqing explained that the 3 energy levels, Earth, Man and Heaven, were each further divided into 3, giving 9 stages through which we pass as we refine our internal energy within the 3 worlds. At that time he stated that he had reached the 7th stage, but it appears he later achieved the 9th before his death. Master Huang also talked at times about these 9 stages of inner refinement and it is my observation that he also reached the 9th and beyond by the time of his death. The tradition is not to speak openly of the inner training, but if that continues then practitioners with a deeper interest will waste many years on outer forms without access to the methods and explanations they need to refine their inner energy. So, I describe something of these methods here in the hope that it may help those who wish to follow the more subtle side of Master Huang's teaching.

Theoretically and practically, Qi – when considered in the light of Earth, Human and Celestial levels – can be divided into Jing (Essence), Qi (Energy) and Shen (Spirit-Mind). Jing is the basic energy of the body (Earth) and centres itself in the Lower Dantian which envelops the pelvic region and extends from the perineum (Huiyin) to the navel. Qi is the central energy of a person (Human) and centres itself in the Middle Dantian which envelops the thoracic region and extends from the solar plexus to the base of the neck. Shen is the most refined energy (Celestial) centred

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deep within our mind in the Upper Dantian which envelops the head. Each of the 3 Dantians has 3 levels, e.g. the 3 levels within the Lower Dantian are the Hui Yin (perineum), the point in the centre of the abdomen and the point just below the navel. The 3 Dantians are not really in the body but are energy concentrations within the large energy field (Great Dantian or Personal Energy Sphere) extending out to arms length in all directions that envelops the body and within which the body exists.

In relation to Taiji practice Master Huang asserted that the Taiji Form was to gather Qi, while the Pushing-hands were to learn how to use that energy in combination with the forces that develop between our partner and ourselves. He explained that concentrating in outer life through the external senses disperses energy into the world around us while, conversely, concentrating through the internal senses within the body (Tingjin) conserves and accumulates that energy which would otherwise be lost. Similarly, he cautioned, while practising the Taiji Form accumulates energy in the body, practising the Pushing-hands may cause it to dissipate. This is because when practising the Pushing-hands people usually shift back to an external level of concentration, then energy is lost as it is in normal life. This is especially true of the Free Pushing-hands which Master Huang discouraged in his classes. Rather Master Huang assembled 18 basic fixed pattern Pushing-hands within which students could train the Pushing-hands skills while concentrating on a deep level as in the Taiji Form. Only at a much later stage, such as Master Huang's in his later life, can the practice of the Free Pushing-hands also be used to gather energy.

That reserve of energy, generated through practicing the Taiji Form deeply and later perhaps also generated in the Pushing-hands, can be drawn up to a higher level within us through certain practices, often kept secret but more correctly the property of all. The truly higher practices have their own natural protection through the inability of unrefined people to perceive and understand their subtlety. Master Huang taught that initially when practising Taiji, the circulation of the Qi in the body should be light and natural. Maintaining this light, relaxed, awareness of the body allows the Energies to circulate freely while accumulating where necessary in their natural power centres. At this early stage gentle warmth will be felt occasionally around the Body.

However privately, when students had reached a more advanced stage, he advised sinking the mind to a deeper level and using the Yi (mind intention or will) to drive the energies through the body stimulating an increased flow of Qi, strengthening the energy field and training the body to increase its capacity to handle the increased energy. Strong heat is usually felt in the body at this stage as the increased energy flow burns away the gross restrictions in the energy pathways of the body. This intense heat occurs sometimes at random places in the body and can be accompanied by very cold areas. In reply to my detailed questioning on the subject, Master Huang suggested that it may not be correct to simply concentrate on the Lower Dantian during the Taiji Form, as is often written in the books. Better, he explained, was to spread your awareness through and around the whole body while simultaneously releasing the mind's hold on the body.

Long practice on that level, accompanied by further emptying towards a still deeper level of the mind, allows the now stimulated energy flows to become natural and circulate freely with no impediments from the coarse physical body. There exists a refined natural intelligence connected with the deeper levels of the body and its energy circulation throughout the meridians. This intelligence now manages the enhanced energy flow with no further deliberate interference. At this stage the heat settles into a gentle overall glow felt both inside and surrounding the body – once described by Master Huang as “the sensation that someone is walking beside you holding a large bowl of steaming water”.

When Master Huang felt that the energy circulations, within the Taiji Form, were at a sufficient level – typically he suggested after about 7 years Taiji practice – then he might teach the “quiet sitting”, which was never intended to replace the Taiji Form but rather augment it. He taught 2 basic meditations – one to concentrate on the energy centre of the Lower Dantian within the pelvic region and another to concentrate on the energy centre of the Upper Dantian within the head. These are for 2 different but connected purposes. The Lower Dantian was to connect into the lowest aspect of Qi - that is, Jing. The Upper Dantian was to connect in to the highest aspect of Qi – that is, Shen. At a later stage these two are merged in the Middle Dantian where Jing is gradually transformed and accumulated as Qi. Later again the Qi is lifted to the Upper Dantian

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when the completion of the final 3 levels of the 9 stages can be accomplished. To begin these internal exercises before a student was ready, Master Huang felt was a waste of time. If the mind was not sufficiently settled then the superficial thoughts would circle endlessly in the students minds, who would then struggle to watch or arrest these thoughts and might at most obtain moments of a blank thoughtless state, which in itself may be of little help for inner refinement. In fact to concentrate within the Upper Dantian at this early stage would almost certainly strengthen the superficial aspect of the mind, either stimulating more thoughts or fixing a person in the blank thoughtless state, locking the gate to further progress.

The training Master Huang gave, to the students he felt were ready and who showed an interest in more than the body oriented health or martial aspects, was as follows. Sit or lie quietly while concentrating the mind internally on the centre of the Lower Dantian. Then allow the mind to sink deeper until heat is felt at this point. If the student was not already sensing something of this in the Taiji Form, then this may take years during which the thoughts would arise again and again to assail the person's concentration and all but the most determined would give up the seemingly hopeless task. On detecting the sensation of heat the other students, with whom I discussed these matters, generally believed that this was the Qi but when I talked directly to Master Huang concerning my experience of heat he corrected this assumption, explaining clearly, "You can't say that is the Qi, rather it is a sign that the mind is going deeper." Though I didn't understand this at the time, I now know that the superficial aspect of the mind concentrates out to the external world through the 5 external senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste) while the deeper mind – Daoists refer to it as the mind within the mind – on the first of its 3 levels looks inwards through the 5 groups of internal sensors (joint sensors, muscle sensors, pressure sensors, pain sensors and heat sensors). While moving in the Taiji Form, joint, muscle and pressure sensors are most active, pain sensors only activate on gross mistakes, while the heat sensors function quietly in the background. While sitting quietly however, the joint, muscle and pressure sensors have limited activity and the heat sensors may move to the foreground.

Although, as Master Huang explained, the sensation of warmth experienced in the meditation was not the Qi, still it is true that the heat sensors are somewhat sensitive to the body's energy field – so that for example strong bad energies may cause a feeling of coldness and strong good ones can cause a feeling of warmth. The full truth is that the warmth felt in the meditation is both a result of increased Qi activating the heat sensors more strongly and simultaneously a result of the deepening level of the mind becoming more strongly aware of the heat sensors which are already lightly active on the subconscious level of every person.

When the mind had turned inward to this degree, Master Huang would then instruct the student in the micro-cosmic circulation. The Yi is used to lead the energy down the front of the abdomen to the Huiyin or perineum, then on up the back to the top of the head while breathing in and then down the front of the face and torso back to the Huiyin while breathing out. Actually the microcosmic orbit is only the first 2 paths of the 8 special channels or meridians in the body. As soon as the micro-cosmic circuit is established you may move on to the full 8 paths as outlined below. Little harm can come from this exercise. If the student is not ready then it will only be imagination with no energy response.

8 Paths. *Basic body energy (Jing) is based in the perineum (Hui Yin) between the legs, expanding during the process of refinement to fill the abdomen (Lower Dantian). This energy circulates throughout the body in a network of 8 special channels. Follow the paths with the Mind visualising a stream of golden light, while listening to the resulting body sensations.*

1. *Inhale; lift energy up the spine from perineum to top of head.*
2. *Exhale; sink energy down the front of the body and return it to perineum.*
3. *Inhale; lift energy up the spine, divide at the belt then 2 streams rise to shoulders.*
4. *Exhale; sink energy down the outer arms, along the middle fingers to the palms.*
5. *Inhale; lift energy up the inner arms on to each side of the chest.*
6. *Exhale; sink energy down across the nipples, join at the waist and return to perineum.*
7. *Inhale; lift energy up in the central channel to the solar plexus.*
8. *Exhale; drop energy back to perineum, divide down front of the legs to middle toes and soles.*
9. *Inhale; raise energy via rear of the legs, join at perineum then rise in central channel to navel.*
10. *Exhale; return the energy to its base in the perineum, completing one round of 5 breaths.*

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After several rounds of the 8 paths a further simple step can be practiced to promote the transmutation of Jing into Qi as follows.

Expand the Light.

Qi is based in the solar-plexus, expanding during the process of refinement to fill the thorax (Middle Dantian). The Personal Energy Sphere (field of Qi or Great Dantian) is centred on the (Middle Dantian), extends out to arms length in all directions and encompasses the Lower and the Upper Dantians.

- 1. Take 3 deep breaths. Each inhale lift the light from the Hui Yin up through the centre of the body via the solar-plexus to fill the Middle Dantian. Each exhale intensify then expand this light out around the body forming a cloud of golden light extending to arms length in all directions.*
- 2. Breathe deeply, each inhale condense the sphere of light slightly towards the centre. Each exhale re-expand and intensify the cloud of golden light around the body, while taking the mind deeper until the mind is lost in the light. Then forget the breathing, gradually allowing the mind to sink even deeper while maintaining awareness of the light.*

In that deeply harmonised state the following exercise, based on the 5 elements, may be added if people have the time and inclination to further strengthen and refine the Qi.

5 Elements.

- 1. (Earth) Centre the Mind in the cloud of golden light in the solar plexus. Each out breath, intensify and expand the light taking the Mind deeper until the body and breath are lost in the light.*
 - 2. (Metal) Allow the cloud to drift up to cover the lungs where it becomes white like the clouds. With each out breath, intensify and expand the light as the Mind goes deeper.*
 - 3. (Water) The cloud moves down to cover the lower abdomen and turns a deep blue like the ocean. With each out breath, intensify and expand the light as the Mind goes deeper.*
 - 4. (Wood) The cloud moves to the region of the liver on the right side of the body and becomes a deep green like the forest. Intensify and expand the light as the Mind goes deeper.*
 - 5. (Fire) The cloud floats across to surround the heart and turns deep red like a ruby. With each out breath, intensify and expand the light as the Mind goes deeper.*
- After one or more cycles, return the cloud to the solar plexus, re-expand out to arms length, then rest in the golden light that surrounds the body.*

The above exercises may be practiced without further guidance but it is safer and more efficient, if possible, to have an experienced guide. The effect of these practices and the resulting inner growth will gradually appear in your outer life. Moments of remembrance of the deep-body sensations, the body's energy flow and later the energies of the Great Dantian should occur increasingly over time, while your strengthened internal Being will assist in the management of difficult situations. Then arises the possibility of the highest of Daoist aims – immortality, not of the body but of your inner Being, within the 3 energy worlds and beyond.

Shortly before Master Huang's death, while visiting New Zealand in preparation for his emigrating there (we had already obtained him 'permanent residence' status), he spoke again of his deepest aims, saying, "To teach Taijiquan is not too difficult, but to teach the heart of Taiji...", then he just shook his head. I hope the above article serves to commemorate and contribute to the understanding of this deepest aspect of Master Huang's life and teaching.