

Master Huang Xingxian accomplished a great work in establishing and evolving his Taiji teaching within South-East Asia and congratulations are due to the Singapore Taiji Society for successfully reaching its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This success is not independent of the great contributions of Sia Mok-Tai and Samuel Kuah, head instructors over those years during which I have had contact with the Society. Though to manage such a society involves difficulties, these fade into the past and lose their importance in light of the overall success the Singapore Taiji Society has had in helping the citizens of Singapore through teaching of the refined and genuine methods of Master Huang's Taijiquan.

My first visit to the Singapore Taiji Society was 32 years ago in 1977. The members of the Society were most welcoming and in the following years of living with and visiting Master Huang in Kuala Lumpur and later in Kuching, I enjoyed passing through Singapore when arriving and departing Asia, staying to practice with the Singapore students. Since that time, with the establishment of my schools in New Zealand, Australia and Europe I, and occasionally my students, have regularly passed through Singapore and been received warmly on visiting the Singapore Taiji Society.

Learning personally from Master Huang was a great opportunity and given that he has been dead for more than 17 years, consequently most students in the Singapore and Malaysian schools never having known him, I would like to pass on my impressions of his teaching style and some details of the most important aspects of his Taiji methods. He constantly refined and evolved his methods – like his teacher Grandmaster Zheng Manqing who described himself as “The Old Child who never tires of Learning”. Having worked so hard to achieve his own understanding, Master Huang did not give away his methods easily, but preferred to give hints, then leaving people to succeed or fail according to their own intelligent practice. While initially suspicious of westerners he gradually warmed to my presence, later emphasising to all that success at Taiji was completely independent of race. He strongly believed in the importance of personal effort saying, “Life is difficult and even when we become older it does not necessarily get any easier, but effort and the progress that comes from it is always fully worthwhile.”

Though Master Huang was very much a martial artist in his younger days, he listened to his teacher Grandmaster Zheng Manqing who having explained that Taijiquan has both a martial side and an internal cultivation side, pronounced, “The martial art aspect of Taijiquan is useful but not important”. In his later years Master Huang predictably often began his long talks to the students with, “Taijiquan, bu shi wushu (Taijiquan is not a martial art)”, at other times stating, “I teach Taiji, not Taijiquan.” Privately to myself he went further declaring over supper one evening, “Taiji is not important – the Dao is important.” Set enigmatically against this leaning towards internal cultivation was his remarkable, fully tested seldom matched, martial arts skill. It was particularly for the quality and strength of his internal power (Taiji Jin) that master Huang was known and respected throughout the martial art world. In fact I travelled the world widely meeting many Taiji teachers but none compared in martial skill to Master Huang, except perhaps the Wu style master Ma Yueliang of Shanghai, son-in-law of Wu Jianquan. Even then, while on the more important level of the mind and beyond their ability was similar, on the level of the body Master Huang's movement was distinctly softer and more subtle.

What is internal power as opposed to external power? This can be understood in two ways. Firstly external power is simply the superficial mind contracting the muscles with some effort where the subtle processes that occur, between the thought of moving and the movement actually appearing, are strengthened and refined by repetition but remain on an unconscious level. Conversely internal power involves consciously strengthening and refining these intermediate mind and energy processes, while paying only minimal attention to the strengthening of the muscles themselves. That is, external power involves using awareness and intention (generated by the desire to achieve) on the level of external body movement, while internal power involves using awareness and intention (generated by a deep and clear effort of will) on the level of the energy field and subtle body processes (which themselves produce the external movement).

But further, the internal power that may be developed in say, Fujian White Crane, is different from the internal power developed through the correct training of Taiji. This may be compared to the difference between throwing a spear (White Crane) and shooting an arrow (Taiji). When throwing a spear with internal power, while the forces and

energy are listened to and directed with a clear effort of the mind, the end result is a strong contraction of the muscles to extend the arm and push out the spear. However in shooting an arrow (here the analogy is of the body acting like the bow) the body is pressed against the ground by a combination of momentum (from any previous movement), inertia (of our body's mass and the partner's mass) and that component of the partner's forces which we accept (intercept). During this process the muscles stretch like the fibres of the bow and the forces and energies are stored for a short moment within this elastic condition, then released like the shooting of an arrow. Using subtle awareness to perceive and direct this process will ultimately lead to deep understanding of the Taiji-elastic-Jin.

When speaking of the Taiji Form Master Huang especially emphasised relaxing the body, listening deeply and using the Yi to direct the subtle processes and internal forces within the body and energy field (Qi). When discussing the Taiji Pushing-hands he linked these with the concept of timing. Timing was the one English word that Master Huang used regularly in his teaching. There is timing in our own body as the subtle movements, forces, energy and mind move through the body. There is also timing in the interrelation of these processes in our partner and our self.

The process of relaxing Master Huang explained more deeply as having 3 phases, loosening, sinking and emptying (Sung, Chen and Kung) – loosening concerns the removal of the external force of the body, sinking concerns the arising of the internal forces, while emptying concerns the directing of these internal forces from a deep part of the mind itself. To understand loosening of the body is easy enough although to achieve it to a high level requires many years practice. After the muscles have contracted to initiate a movement they then relax and the body moves on under its own momentum, falling slightly to the ground in the process. To understand the second phase, that of sinking, is more difficult. It does not simply mean a settling of the energy field and body as it presses onto the ground, but perhaps the exact opposite – the intensifying and arising of elastic forces and energy on a deeper level replacing the external strength which is simultaneously drained away by the loosening of the body. The third phase, the emptying of the mind, is even more difficult to understand. Again this does not mean the quietening down of the automatic superficial thoughts that habitually invade an untrained person's mind, though this does represent an early stage of the external training. Remember the Daoist phrase: "The Void that is empty is not the real Void. The Void that is full is the real Void." Just as the loosening of the body allows forces and energies to grow and work within it, so the concentration on these forces and energies gives rise to the strengthening of a deeper part of the mind (the Deep Mind, Empty Mind or 'Mind within the Mind') that arises gradually over the years with correct training. Then the Yi that issues forth from this deeper aspect of the mind takes control of the energies and subtle forces along with the body itself.

To understand and practice the 3 phase process of relaxing is to understand and practice the mind. To initiate the practice of the mind Master Huang, in his later life, talked explicitly of closing down the superficial daily awareness just as when we go to sleep at night, then using the deeper consciousness that arises to manage the internal training. The mind simultaneously functions on the external level of normal life (superficial mind within the physical world) and on each of its 3 internal levels (Deep Mind within the levels of Man, Earth and Heaven). During the process of internal training initially the mind is turned inwards and stabilised on a deeper sense of the body. Later it is tuned in to the intermediate level of the forces that operate in the body (Taiji-elastic-jin). Finally it is tuned to the personal energy field with its 3 levels – Jing, Qi and Shen. Further, mind has a triple aspect – awareness (Dingjin), intention (Yi) and intelligence – which operate on each of the above levels. This is reflected externally in the nervous system where it is understood that there are sensory nerves (awareness), motor nerves (intention) and processing neurons (intelligence), all working together to control the physical body.

To further understand awareness (Dingjin) both in the sense of listening on the first level of body movement and the intermediate level of internal forces, it is necessary to know that just as we have 5 external senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch) for perceiving the external world, so we have internal senses (which can be conveniently grouped into 5) for perceiving our internal world. These physically existing sensors or nerve ending types are – pain sensors, joint-position sensors, muscle-state sensors, pressure sensors and temperature sensors. Temperature sensors and pain sensors are not directly involved in normal movements, leaving all actions to be regulated (on a subconscious level for untrained people) by the joint-position, muscle-state and pressure sensors. So to train Dingjin means to slowly redirect awareness from the 5 external senses to these 3 internal sensors. The effort to train the

accurate positions in the Taiji Form focuses on the joint-position sensors. To train the muscle changes of, initially contracting and releasing then later stretching and un-stretching, focuses on the muscle-state sensors. To train initially the pressure of the feet against the ground and the pressure of the hands against the partner, then later the pressures that develop deeply inside the body but especially in and around the pelvic bowl and waist, focuses on the pressure sensors. Training these 3 will inevitably lead also to awareness of the heat field of the body (often mistaken for the Qi itself).

To gain a deeper understanding of intention (Yi) and the training involved in its strengthening and refinement is one step more difficult again. In speaking of the Yi Master Huang usually quoted the classical saying: “The heart (Xin = deep core of being, not emotional nature) generates the Yi (classical Chinese = intention or will). The Yi moves the Qi. When the Qi moves the body follows. Because of the increase in power arising from the correct development of the Yi, the methods of training Yi have historically been, as Master Ma Yueliang explained, “taught in secret to members of the inner-schools of the few masters who understood it.” Training the Yi involves more direct effort than training Dingjin, just as to activate the muscles requires more effort than to be aware of sensory information. Essentially we strengthen the Yi first by concentrating on a point either within the body or later outside, while directing our power towards that point. To refine this we replace the point with a line of light either straight or later curved. To refine it further we replace the line with the changing sphere, extending to arms length or a little beyond, which simultaneously includes all points and all lines. This final sphere is the unique space in which mind, energy and all possible body movements merge. In order to refine and deepen the emerging Yi, through the internal levels, it is important to remember that the Yi issues from the level on which the awareness is centred at that moment.

The result of the training of awareness and intention on each of the levels is the development of the third aspect of the mind, intelligence, on each of those levels. Just as a baby through making great (semi-conscious) efforts to walk while using (semi-conscious) awareness to monitor the results gradually develops the moving intelligence and consequent ability to walk and move externally in complex ways, so in Taiji the conscious efforts (intentions) combined with conscious awareness on each of the levels builds intelligence, on each of those levels. Intelligence (understanding, or inner being) cannot be worked on directly, neither does it grow satisfactorily simply by training awareness alone. Intelligence, the most important aspect of the mind, develops only through the conscious interaction of awareness and intention.

While training the Taiji Form develops internal strength. Training the Taiji Pushing-hands develops the sensitivity to apply that internal strength. At each stage and on every level, as the intelligence increases, whatever has been achieved inside yourself can be extended through your partner in the Taiji Pushing-hands. While discussing the Taiji Pushing-hands and the timing of the subtle processes and forces (Taiji-jin), Master Huang most often recalled the classical injunction: Chan, Lien, Nian, Sui – bu tui, bu ding. This can be translated as Touch, connect, merge and follow – don't resist, don't let go. While this is best learnt through physical practice with those who understand it themselves, I can point out that ‘Touch’ corresponds to movement and the muscle state of contracting, ‘Connect’ corresponds to loosening and the muscle state of relaxing, ‘Merge’ corresponds to sinking and the muscle state of stretching, while ‘Follow’ corresponds to ‘Empty’ and the muscle state of un-stretching. These 4 taken along with ‘bu tui, bu ding’ form the 5 elements (Wuxing).

The best thanks we can offer Master Huang for his tremendous effort in spreading and developing Taiji is to refine, evolve and spread his methods. I hope my small summary above of some of the deeper aspects of his teaching, which I have gathered especially for the Singapore Taiji Society's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, can help to stimulate that. Singapore is a bridge between the Asian and the European world and Singapore Huangs Taiji Society stands on that bridge. Taiji is a Daoist art of great refinement. Don't lose that deep tradition – whether as a physical art for self defence, as a health promoting art through the circulation of fluids and energy, or as a high art of spiritual development leading to immortality within the inner realms. If you ask me whether my 35 years of practice confirms this possibility of immortality then I must answer that it is completely true, theoretically accessible to all, but practically speaking available only to those prepared to make the lifelong effort while receiving the correct guidance – thereby following the disappearing footsteps of Master Huang's trodden Way.