

Interview with Ma Jiangbao

Forum: In what way does Taijiquan strengthen the body and the mind?

Ma Jiangbao: Today in Taijiquan health is the main concern. The body is trained softly and through quiet and slow movements a meditative effect will be developed. Taijiquan is the harmony of yin and yang. Taijiquan is a martial art based on this concept, movement, which is yang, and stillness, which is yin.

Forum: Does this mean that you can use Taijiquan as a self-defence?

Ma Jiangbao: If your skills are very good, yes. In the partner exercises you learn not to resist the movements of the opponent. So you can divert the attack to a new direction and it will not reach you. This neutralizing is one of the main ideas within the Wu-style. But today most people are attracted to Taijiquan by the health benefits.

Forum: Which response do you get from your students in the West?

Ma Jiangbao: Many, who were tired by their work, now feel better. I have a student who is a pianist, but he was not able to work any more because of arthritis in the fingers. After two years of Taijiquan practise he was able to play again. Taijiquan is relaxing the body. This is also very useful for people who work in the office. It relieves stress and has a calming effect. These are things which I am often seeing in the West.

Forum: What kind of physical, financial or other considerations should you have for Taijiquan?

Ma Jiangbao: Nothing special. You will develop fitness quite naturally. We start very slowly but will increase training after some time. My father trained a lot till his death at the age of 97. For the training you just need loose comfortable clothes, light shoes and some space. Of course it is important to have a good teacher.

Forum: What cultural differences do you see between China and Europe in Taijiquan?

Ma Jiangbao: Europeans like Taijiquan very much, but they often only do it at the lessons, so sometimes only practice one or two hours a week. But they should train more. This is very different in China. There you find people training every day in the park. Taijiquan is part of daily life. However when western people become more involved with Taijiquan they will train hard and are disciplined.