

My experience with Taichi

By Tony Christodoulou:

I started following the long form of Wu-Style Taichichuan in August 2000, and was introduced to the form by Dan McGiff (a student of Ma Jiangbao, and with 20 years experience in Wu-Style). My first class began by learning some of Master Ma's basic preparatory exercises, which opens up every class. These consisted of repetitive movements, most of which are taken from the form. I then went on to practice the first part of the form which my teacher Dan was demonstrating. These consisted of 5 basic stepping methods (ping xing bu, xu bu, gong bu, ding zi bu and ma bu), hand movements (Play the Lute, Brush knee, single whip and straight fist punch).

It took a while to get used to some of the changes in the hand and foot positions, and I began to realize how much my sense of balance and posture had to do with this. I was fortunate enough to have gained some previous experience in Taichi back in 1980 - 81, combined with Fung Sao, a light form of Chinese kung-fu. So I knew a little bit about push hands and the use of chi.

About eight months later I had a new teacher at Holmes Place by the name of Kit Gerould, who trained under Dan McGiff. My Taichi continued and I progressed as I went along. A month or two later Kit introduced me to a blue book based on the slow form of Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan, which I bought and used for reference. I found it a very useful step by step guide for learning the form.

After my first year of studying the Wu-Style, it caused me to question its slow movements, unlike some fast and direct movements in martial arts. The process of inquiry and thought also caused me to read about its' theory and history to gain a better understanding of the form and its movements. Eventually through a lot of practice it became much clearer to me, and it gave me a better feel and appreciation.

Taichi was becoming more popular, and the classes started to get bigger. Having practiced for a few years now it has helped me a great deal. It gives me a great feel of energy and enlightenment. After each class that I attend, I find that it wakens my system and it gives me that extra energy like I'm ready for another class. I find that amazing. I don't find it at all stressful and at night it helps me to relax and sleep better.

I learnt that the movements must be done gracefully, with ease and without tension or force. It should be fluid so that it does not break the feeling of naturalness, and breathing should be calm and balanced. Through push hands, it enables you to test your tai chi skills or discover incorrect movements in your form. The movements of the hands are slow, with circular movements, pushing out and all the time keeping the continuity going, bending, stretching and flowing.

Personally, I find that it's a very calm and relaxing form of exercise, in comparison to some of the more strenuous exercises I've experienced at the gym. Not only does it help to relax the body, but it also

calms the mind. Relaxation of the mind and muscles in the form are important to allow the energy to flow smoothly. The slow movements help you enjoy the inner feelings, and it also gives you that wonderful feeling of naturalness when it's done correctly.

Now that I've completed the form, I revise it as much as I can. Be it at home, or at work during my lunch period. I attend classes for Taichi and also for the Broad Sword form. The difference being is that the movements in the sword form are a little faster, and the Xu Bu and Gong Bu foot positions are a little longer. The characteristics however are the same. This gives me an opportunity to test my knowledge in both avenues. I also attend the London seminars with Freya and Martin B_dicker from Dusseldorf, who are longtime students of Ma Jiangbao. On the overall, I have enjoyed doing Taichi very much and I know for sure that I will go on practicing. There is so much more to learn.