

The Way to Personal Empowerment

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In the early nineteen sixties, Chinese martial artists and academicians were becoming increasingly alarmed by what they deemed to be T'ai Chi Ch'üan's accelerated degeneration from the epitome of Kung Fu excellence to a counter culture group exercise for hippies and pensioners. There was general concern that contemporary politics would cause the loss of many of the cultural treasures of China, including Peking Opera, but T'ai Chi Ch'üan was special, because it best demonstrates a fundamental principle "the harmony of opposites".

Chinese scholars and historians insist that T'ai Chi is the philosophical conclusion reached by a whole culture, a conclusion that is intuitively clear to most Chinese. Often translated as "the Grand Ultimate" T'ai Chi was also a Western linguist and philosophers' worst nightmare, because it is a basis for thought that defies language. Nevertheless, its power could be both understood and dramatically demonstrated by someone skillful in the art of T'ai Chi Ch'üan—even if *the practitioner was totally illiterate*. Monopolized and kept secret for centuries, the true meaning and power of the art was threatened with extinction because old masters were dying, taking their secrets with them, while the new generations of Chinese were modifying traditional arts so that contemporary forms no longer generated the fighting skills that made T'ai Chi Ch'üan feared by martial artists and revered by all who where knowledgeable in philosophy, religion and Kung Fu.

Much had already been lost. Only a shadow of the original art would be left if something drastic was not done immediately. In desperation a few specialists broke an ancient taboo and began teaching the art to non Chinese. Professor Hu was one of these specialists.

Dr. William C.C. Hu (historian, actor and Professor at Michigan University) was one who decided to experiment by breaking the taboo against teaching non-Chinese the classical principles of Taoist Kung Fu. Thus preservation of T'ai Chi Ch'üan as a martial art and the spread of appreciation for Chinese culture might both be achieved by the same strategy. Hu selected a psychopharmacology lab assistant William S. Dockens III, "Bill", as a pupil to learn Hu style T'ai Chi Ch'üan. Despite origins from cultures on two opposite sides of the globe as well as opposite ends of a political spectrum, this choice began a relationship that was to span two continents and three nations over more than four decades.

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Bill was inspired by modern skyscrapers in Shanghai to use Chinese architecture as a metaphor for translating Dr. Hu's exacting standards into a program that would give Scandinavians an advanced understanding of the Tai Chi concept. Like their academic counterparts, Shanghai architects strive to achieve a harmonious balance between continuity with the past, projections as to future use and optimal use of local environments. A guided, in depth, comparative study of

Chinese and Western culture, history, philosophy, mathematics, as well as martial arts led to a rapid evolution and upgrading of Bill's personal style and the foundation of the Tao Circle of T'ai Chi Chuan. Landmarks in the development are listed chronologically in the following Table A.

Date	Event	Location	Comments
1968	Bill taught first courses that introduced T'ai Chi to Sweden.	Stockholm, Gerhard Gosen's club	Dutchman Gerhard Gosen was the father of martial arts in Sweden. Gosen taught Judo, jujitsu, Karate and Aikido. Gosen and Bill became close friends almost immediately. Impressed by Bill's combat abilities in T'ai Chi Chuan, Gosen invited Bill to teach at his club. Their relationship ended with Gosen's untimely death about a year later.
1970	Bill continued teaching the students who started T'ai Chi at Gosen's club	KFMU	There were few students, but they were dedicated.
1974	Founding the Tao Circle of Tai Chi Ch'üan.	Adolf Fredriks Skola	Dr. Hu visited Bill's T'ai Chi class and suggested that it be changed from the strict martial arts methods to a study circle that taught all aspects of T'ai Chi.
1975	Bill started teaching Shadow of Amber Style	Adolf Fredriks Skola	After a year to digest Hu's lessons, the "new" very light style featured shadowing the opponent's every move and taking advantage of any errors or weaknesses.
1978	Swedish Wu shu Federation	Louis Lin	Bill supported Louis Lin in the foundation.
1982	Bill started teaching classes in Denmark.	Teater og Bevægelse	Arranged by Brazilian dancer Diana Toxværd who taught T'ai Chi to Denmark.
1982	Started classes in Uppsala	Uppsala University Gymnastic Hall	An enthusiastic Bose Johansson gathered a group of interested students and invited Bill to teach them.
1983	First Summer Camp	?	Saul Tekeste organized Tao Circle's first summer camp.
1985	Summer Camp tradition established.	Tollare	Veikko Hartikainen & Björn Lindell began what was to become a tradition.
1993-	Dr. Hu visited Summer Camp	Tollare and Sigtuna	Advanced Kung Fu aspects of Tai Chi were introduced. These were developed into weapon styles.

1998	Bill started teaching Fire Cloud Style	Stockholm and Uppsala	The “new” style emphasized mastery of forces using the clouded hands movement as its base.
2005	Launching of Fire and Thunder Style	Stockholm/ Uppsala/ Tollare	Emphasis on controlling movement with stillness. Explosive lightning and tornado forces coming from dynamic movement of a storm cloud.

Table A: Highlights in the evolution of Fire and Thunder Style T'ai Chi Chuan.

Fire and Thunder

Named after the fierce Midwestern thunder storms that spawn tornados, heavy rains, hail and dangerous flashes of lightning in the United States, the Fire and Thunder Style emphasizes the contrast between the clear, calm “eye” in the center of the storm and relentless rain and sometimes terrifying, events that happen under the clouds. Historical elements are, with the exception of one Chen movement, derived mostly from various branches of the Yang school of T'ai Chi Chuan. These are reviewed in the Table B.

Combat Styles	Master	Technique Characteristics	Advantage
Hu	William C.C. Hu	Variations on a single movement	The compact efficiency, the essence of Hu Style
Yang	Yang Chen-Fu	Large circles	Floor speed and economy
Yang	Yang Sou-Hou	Small circles	Flexible footwork
Wu	Wu Kung Yi	Compact	Balance between Yang schools
Sun	Sun Lu-Tang	Ball forms	Continuity of movement
Cheng	Cheng Man Ch'ing	Middle postures	Bill's introduction to T'ai Chi combat

Table B: Combat elements incorporated in the evolution of Fire and Thunder Style T'ai Chi Chuan.

All of the reading and research in the world would not be enough to understand the practical applications of T'ai Chi. Excellent instructors are essential. Without professional boxing, it is doubtful that Bill's, father one of a family of thirteen children, could ever have raised enough money to send himself to the university to study engineering. Bill's father's father and all of Bill's father's brothers were also boxers. Bill's brother and several of Bill's cousins also won prizes professional boxing.

Son of a professional champion boxer, Bill does not recall his first lesson at the age of three. Bill really enjoyed training and working out but unlike his relatives, he could not separate the ugliness of fighting for survival in the streets of Cleveland Ohio from the serious competition of organized boxing. Worst he secretly enjoyed training wrestling even better than boxing. Commando wrestling in high school and saber fencing with Ohio State University's Big Ten Champions fencing team added two more combat dimensions. In concert they prepared him for George Westerman, his first T'ai Chi teacher and ultimately for Dr. Hu. Westerman was both an excellent teacher and essential, because Dr. Hu would not have accepted Bill as a beginner.

Fire and Thunder was created under the guidance of Dr. Hu and is a branch of the Hu school. Nevertheless, there were others who contributed generously to what would eventually become Bill's personal style. Table C summarizes their contributions.

Dates	Teacher	Styles taught	Styles learned	Pragmatic Characteristics
1960-1962	George Westerman	Cheng Tai Chi, Pak-Kua, Hsing-I, Shao Lin	Cheng Tai Chi	Strategic/quasi-literati/martial
1962	James Chang	Monkey Shao Lin	Chi Na and <i>tien-hsueh</i>	Martial
1964-	William C.C. Hu	Hu	Hu	Neo-Taoist/Classical/literati/martial
1965-1967	Stone Lin	Yang Chen-Fu	Yang Chen Fu	Artistic
1968-	Da Liu	Yang and I Ching	Yang style and I Ching	Taoist/ literati
1978-1984	Jolan Chang	Su Nü/Tsai Nü/P'êng Tsu	Su Nü/Tsai Nü/P'êng Tsu	Erotic/literati

Table C: Instructors who contributed directly to the creation of Fire and Thunder Style T'ai Chi Chuan.

County Folks and City Folks and Literati Dudes

Communication, or lack of it, is the key to any type of instruction. Communication of a deeply personal bio psychological discipline across national, cultural, racial and cognitive psychological barriers presents a special problems, only some of which T'ai Chi shares with Yoga, Aikido, Shaolin boxing and the two other inner forms of Kung Fu (HsingI and Pa Kua). The Tao Circle of T'ai Chi Chuan allows T'ai Chi Chuan to solve the problem.

Beginners who make it to the advance classes usually take one of three separate paths to arrive eventually at the same point. They think they are three different kinds of students when actually they are experiencing the same principle from three different views. The Tao Circle approaches the problem from three angles, simultaneously. Bill named the approaches "County Folks", "City Folks" and "Literati Dudes". The lessons are the same. The results are the same. Only the attitudes and perspectives are different.

Country Folk

The “country folk” attitude follows the path of the Yang Lu Chan (1799-1872) and his sons, illiterate farmers who developed a fighting style that still dominates the Kung Fu world. Martial artists from other schools, boxers, wrestlers and people who have been attacked or sexually violated often take a country folk attitude. Very little talking, less reading and a whole lot of action, country folk learn about the forces of Yin and Yang by being pushed through the air and getting up off the floor. They have to spend their early training first accepting then exploring the dark side of their emotions before they are able to accept T'ai Chi's dynamic balance between the dark side and the light side. Frustration in combat teaches them the futility of attempting to dominate others. Only after they discover that they can neither dominate nor be dominated are they ready to accept the superiority of the more subtle personal strategies of their T'ai Chi form. At that point they leave the stark world of “Wushu”, the strenuous external martial arts of soldiers, and enter the gentle world of Nei Kung, the breathing meditative world discovered by Taoist monks. Only then are they are ready for advanced courses.

City Folk

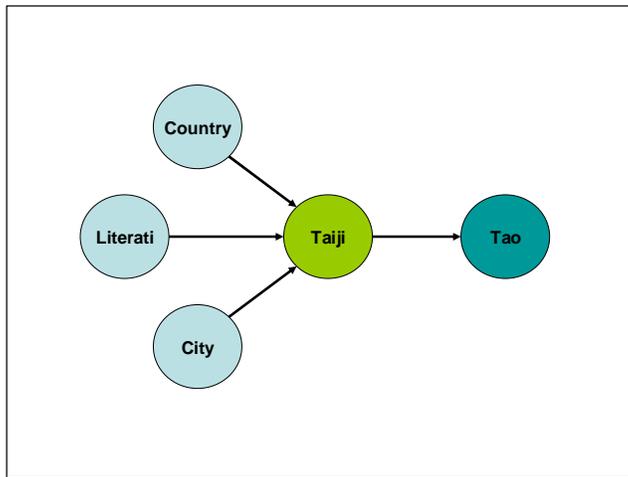
The “city folk” attitude follows the path of Taoist Monk Chang San-Feng (960-1279) and his followers, alchemists who developed a Yoga type meditation style that featured methods that could produce motion from apparent stillness and peace in the midst of continual change. Dancers, hippies, stressed executives from other IT industries, counter culture dropouts, teachers, doctors and pensioners who lack the strength and ability to stay in good physical condition by means of hard exercise often take a city folk attitude. Short conversations, light reading and a focus on meditative exercises, city folk learn about the forces of Yin and Yang by experiencing T'ai Chi's altered mental states. City folk are often amazed to learn that they, like country folk, have to spend their early training accepting then exploring the dark side of their emotions before they are able to accept T'ai Chi's dynamic balance between the dark side and the light side. Introduction to combat teaches them the ability to avoid being dominated by others. Only after they discover that unity of mind and body are they ready to accept the superiority of the more subtle psychological strategies of their T'ai Chi form. At that point they leave the conformist world of routine and habits and enter the gentle world of Nei Kung, the breathing meditative world discovered by Taoist monks. At that point they become advanced students.

Literati Dudes

The “literati dudes” attitude follows the creative path of Wu Yu-Seong (1812-1880) and self-taught scholar and merchant Sun Lu-Tang (1860-1932). Sun after studying with masters in the three major internal styles (Hsing-I, Pa Kua and T'ai Chi) Sun developed an original style in each. His blending of Hsing-I and Pa Kua with Hou style T'ai Chi and his great knowledge of vital points distinguished his compact style. To many, it resembles a harlequin playing with a ball. Academicians, authors, actors, teachers, doctors, lawyers and others whose lives are greatly influenced by the printed or written word are apt to take a literati dude attitude. Long conversations, heavy reading and a focus on definitions of words, historical facts and profound philosophy, literati dudes learn about the forces of Yin and Yang by conflicts between the facts of T'ai Chi combat and the logical habits learned in conventional education. Like city folk, literati dudes are often surprised to learn that they, like country folk, have to spend their early training accepting then exploring the dark side of their emotions before they are able to accept T'ai Chi's dynamic balance between the dark side and the light side. Introduction to combat also teaches them not only the ability to avoid being dominated by others but to cease trying to dominate others—intellectually. Only after they discover the unity of mind and body are they ready to first accept the superiority of the more subtle personal strategies of their T'ai Chi form, then to

accept its “harmony of opposites” logic. At that point they leave a world ruled by the linear mathematics of artificial mechanical systems to enter an organic philosophical Taoist world of Nei Kung that is better described by chaos mathematics. This defines advanced for the literati.

Three Ways to One



It is no accident that each of the three attitudes described above represents an important aspect of T'ai Chi's long history. To avoid being trapped in one of the three the T'ai Chi student must think of T'ai Chi as a process rather than a goal. Fortunately for most, *the decision need **not** be conscious*. Because if the student is diligent and studies long enough, the superficialities of the three attitudes will disappear when goals are either exceeded or

proven to be trivial. At that point, what seemed like a rational idea will be replaced by a much stronger intuitive feeling, a feeling experienced while doing the T'ai Chi form.

Impossible to describe or explain to anyone not engaged in oriental arts, the T'ai Chi experience reveals a fact about your relationship to yourself and the potential for this relationship to determine your relationship to other people. Potential is a key word here, because when tested the potential appears practically limitless. Instead of asking the questions what or why, how becomes the central question. Tao (your way!) then becomes a constantly changing perspective for observing the relationships between who you are, how you do things and what the consequences are for you and your surroundings. Personal empowerment is then revealed as a subtle and gentle series of reactions to constantly changing natural forces.

The student has then reached the advanced stages of T'ai Chi where continued association with an instructor and fellow students may not be necessary, but may well shorten the time that it takes between stages of what amounts to personal evolution.

It has taken a little over two decades for the Tao Circle to experience the full effects of T'ai Chi's simplicity and to **feel** the answer of the essential question, what is T'ai Chi. Of course “simple” does not necessarily mean easy. One final sign, the intermediate student becomes an advanced student when it becomes apparent why it should take such a long time to understand such an amazingly simple concept. There is, unfortunately, no answer to this question. It has baffled the greatest Chinese minds for millennia.