



## Yang Chengfu's Discussion of Taijiquan Practice

Although Chinese martial arts are divided into numerous factions, it is important to know that they all contain techniques that are based on philosophical principles. Those of our forefathers who exhausted their whole life's energies, yet were still unable to fathom its mysteries, can be seen throughout time. If students expend a day's efforts, they will obtain a day's results. As the days and months accumulate, success will come.

*Taijiquan* is the art of softness containing hardness, of a needle concealed in cotton. Its technique, physiology, and mechanics are imbued with considerable philosophical principles. Therefore, those who would study this method must go through definite stages and appropriate duration of time. Although the guidance of an excellent master and diligent training with friends must not be under-emphasized, most important is individual daily practice. Otherwise, one can discuss it till the end of time, or think longingly for years, but once you are engaged in a fight, there is a total absence of substance, and you remain a novice without days' accomplishment. The ancients said: "You can think all day with no outcome – it is not as good as practice." If you are able to train all seasons, cold and hot days, morning and night, practice whenever you think of Taiji, then you will succeed no matter you are old or young, male or female.

Recently those studying *Taijiquan* have been spreading from the North to the South, and enthusiasts are increasing daily. I'm really glad to see such a prospective future for the martial arts. While, amongst enthusiasts, those who are devoted and sincere will certainly have a future without limits, however, there are those who also falls into the following two categories. In the first instance are those already possessing talent, who are young and strong, can draw inferences easily, and are clever beyond the averages. What a pity that they barely accomplish anything, yet are satisfied and will suddenly stop studying, unable to endure a great undertaking. In the second instance are those who impatiently seek quick results, yet who are careless in their development. Before a whole year has passed they have already studied the hand, sword, broadsword, and spear forms. Although able to imitate in rote fashion, they in fact never master the secrets. As soon as one checks their directions and movements, upper, lower, inner, and outer, all come up short. If you want to make corrections, then you must amend each and every posture. Moreover, corrections made in the morning have already been forgotten by nightfall. This is why one often hears the saying, "It's easier to learn from scratch properly than correction of bad habits." This saying comes

from the seeking of quick results. Such people would also pass on their in-correct knowledge to future generations. That is my most concern for the future of our arts.

When initially learning Taijiquan, one must first study the form. Studying the form means to learn each of the postures named within the syllabus, each posture as taught by a master. The student must, with resolute mind, memorize and ponder, and practice accordingly. This is called studying the form. At this time the student should concentrate on the Inner, Outer, Upper, and Lower aspects. Inner means: using the mind rather than strength. Lower means one must sink the *qi* to the *dantian*. Upper means one must experience a light and insubstantial energy at the top of the head. Outer means the entire body is light and agile, “the joints are threaded together,” from the feet to the legs to the waist. Sink the shoulders, bend the elbows, and so forth. When you begin to study Taijiquan, ponder these few sentences morning and night, memorize them until you intuitively understand them. Each posture and gesture must always be carefully analysed; one’s deportment in practice must seek what is correct. When you’ve completed one movement correctly, then work on the next. Then gradually you will complete your form properly. If you proceed in this manner, over the time you will not be deviated from Taiji’s essential principles.

When practicing the movements, all the joints of the entire body must be relaxed, open, and natural. First, one must not inhibit the *qi* in the mouth or abdomen; second, do not allow force to gather up in the limbs, the waist, or the legs. These two ideas are expressed by various practitioners of *nei quan* (internal martial arts). However, once they commence movement, with one turn of the body or kick of the legs or swing of the waist, they gasp for air, and their bodies become agitated. These flaws come from holding the breath and adding force to the movements.

1. When practicing, the head must not incline, slant, or bend. This is what is called “The top of the head is suspended,” or the idea of carrying an object on the top of one’s head. Guard against rigid straightness. This is the meaning of “being suspended.” Although the gaze is extended forward evenly, there are times when following the body’s changes of position that the line of sight, while directed to emptiness, plays a crucial role in the transformations and supplements the insufficiencies of body and hand techniques. The mouth seems open yet not open, closed yet not closed.

Breathe out through the mouth and in through the nose in a natural way. If saliva is produced beneath the tongue, just swallow it, do not spit it out.

2. The body should be centered and upwardly aligned, not leaning. The spine with the *weilu* (coccyx) hangs straight down without inclining. However, when encountering the changes of opening and closing, the activities of containing the chest and pulling up the back, sinking the shoulders and turning the waist, beginning students must pay attention. Otherwise, after a period of time corrections will be difficult and one will tend toward stiffness. Even if one has put in a great deal of effort, it will be difficult to attain any benefit or use.
3. The joints in the two arms must be loosened (*song*) and open. The shoulders must hang down, the elbows must bend down, and the palms must slightly extend, with the fingertips slightly bent. Use consciousness to move the arms, use the *qi* to thread to the fin-gers. With the accumulation of days and months, the internal energy will be penetrating and refined; its subtlety will arise on its own.
4. You must distinguish insubstantial and substantial in the two legs, lifting and lowering them like the movements of a cat. When the body's weight shifts to the left, then the left is substantial, and the right leg is called empty. When shifted to the right, then the right leg is substantial and the left leg is called empty. What is here called empty is not void, for its power is not yet disconnected, but reserved and retained in the intention of the changes of expansion and contraction. What is called substantial is simply that it is sound and real—without excessive use of energy, which would mean use of fierce strength. Therefore, the legs bend according to the standard of vertical alignment [of the front leg's knee with the toes]. To exceed this is called excessive force, and in striking forward the body then loses its central equilibrium.
5. With regard to kicking, one must distinguish between the two kicking methods. One is using instep and called Left and Right Separate Feet, and the other kicks with heel called Left and Right Lift Feet. In the former, concentrate on the toes. In the latter, concentrate on the entire sole. Where the intention reaches, the *qi* reaches; where the *qi* reaches, the *jin* will certainly follow. However, the joints of the legs must also be relaxed (*song*), open, and smooth and stable in issuing energy. At these times, it is most easy to allow a build-up of stiff energy, for the body to twist and turn in an unstable way, and the leg's kick will have no power.

The Taijiquan curriculum begins with practicing the Taiji form, Taiji Long Fist form, followed by single-hand push hands, fixed-step push hands, moving-step



push hands, *dalu*, and *sanshou*, then move on to weapon training, such as Taiji sword (*jian*), broadsword (*dao*), spear (*qiang*), and so forth.

Regarding practice time, each day practice twice upon getting up from bed. If there is no time in the morning, then practice twice before sleeping. Within the course of a day, one should practice seven to eight times, but at least one in the morning and one in the night. However, avoid practicing after drinking alcohol or immediately after a meal.

As for the place of practice, a garden courtyard or large hall with good air circulation and plenty of light is suitable. Avoid direct facing strong wind and places that are cold, damp, and musty. Since the breathing deepens as the body undergoes exercise, strong wind and damp air may harm your internal organs and causing serious illness. As for practice clothing, most appropriate are roomy, simply-cut clothes and broad-toed cloth shoes. If, after practice, you have been perspiring, avoid removing your cloth and exposing your skin, or washing with cold water. Otherwise you may fall ill.

— Dictated by Yang Chengfu, recorded by Zhang Hongkui

### 《太极拳之练习谈》，杨澄甫口述，张鸿逵笔录。

中国之拳术，虽派别繁多，要知皆寓有哲理之技术，历来古人穷毕生之精力，而不能尽其玄妙者，比比皆是，学者若费一日之功力，即得有一日之成效，日积月累，水到渠成。

太极拳，乃柔中寓刚，绵里藏针之艺术，于技术上、生理上、力学上，有相当之哲理存焉。故研究此道者，须经过一定之程序与相当之时日，虽然良师之指导、好友之切磋，固不可少，而最紧要者，是在逐日自身之锻炼。否则谈论终日，思慕经年，一朝交手，空洞无物，依然是门外汉者，未有逐日功夫。古人所谓，终思无益，不如学也。若能晨昏无间，寒暑不易，一经动念，即举摹练，无论老幼男女，及其成功则一也。

近来研究太极拳者，由北而南，同志日增，不禁为武术前途而喜。然同志中，专心苦练，诚心向学，将来不可限量者，固不乏人，但普通不免入于两途，一则天才既具，年力又强，举一反三，颖悟出群，惜乎稍有小成，便是满足，遽迹中辍，未能大受；其次急求速效，忽略而成，未经一载，拳、剑、刀、枪皆已学全，虽能依样葫芦，而实际未得此中三昧，一经考究其方向动作，上下内外，皆未合度，如欲改正，则式式皆须修改，且朝经改正，而夕已忘却。故常闻人曰：“习拳容易改拳难”。此语之来，皆由速成而致此。如此辈者，以误传误，必致自误误人，最为技术前途忧者也。

太极拳开始，先练拳架。所谓拳架者，即照拳谱上各式名称，一式一式由师指教，学者悉心静气，默记揣摩，而照行之，谓之练架子。此时学者应注意内外上下：属于内者，

即所谓用意不用力，下则气沉丹田，上则虚灵顶劲；属于外者，周身轻灵，节节贯串，由脚而腿而腰，沉肩曲肘等是也。初学之时，先此数句，朝夕揣摩，而体会之，一式一手，总需仔细推求，举动练习，务求正确。习练既纯，再求二式，于是逐渐而至于习完。如是则毋事改正，日久亦不致更变要领也。

习练运行时，周身骨节，均须松开自然。其一，口腹不可闭气；其二，四肢腰腿，不可起强劲。此二句，学内家拳者，类能道之，但一举动，一转身，或踢腿摆腰，其气喘矣，其身摇矣，其病皆由闭气与起强劲也。

一、摹练时头部不可偏侧与俯仰，所谓要“头顶悬”，若有物顶于头上之意，切忌硬直，所谓悬字意义也。目光虽然向前平视，有时当随身法而转移，其视线虽属空虚，亦为变化中一紧要之动作，而补身手法之不足也。其口似开非开，似闭非闭，口呼鼻吸，任其自然。如舌下生津，当随时咽入，勿吐弃之。

二、身躯宜中正而不倚，脊梁与尾闾，宜垂直而不偏；但遇开合变化时，有含胸拔背、沉肩转腰之活动，初学时节须注意，否则日久难改，必流于板滞，功夫虽深，难以得益致用矣。

三、两臂骨节均须松开，肩应下垂，肘应下曲，掌宜微伸，指尖微曲，以意运臂，以气贯指，日积月累，内劲通灵，其玄妙自生矣。

四、两腿宜分虚实，起落犹似猫行。体重移于左者，则左实，而右脚谓之虚；移于右者，则右实，而左脚谓之虚。所谓虚者，非空，其势仍未断，而留有伸缩变化之余意存焉。所谓实者，确实而已，非用劲过分，用力过猛之谓。故腿曲至垂直为准，逾此谓之过劲。身躯前扑，即失中正姿势。

五、脚掌应分踢腿（谱上左右分脚或写左右起脚）与蹬脚二式。踢腿时注意脚尖，蹬腿时则注意全掌，意到而气到，气到而劲自到，但腿节均须松开平稳出之，此时最易起强劲，身躯波折而不稳，发腿亦无力矣。

太极拳之程序，先练拳架（属于徒手），如太极拳、太极长拳；其次单手推挽、原地推手，活步推手、大捋、散手；再次则器械，如太极剑、太极刀、太极枪（十三枪）等是也。

练习时间，每日起床后两遍，若晨起无暇，则睡前两遍。一日之中，应练七八次，至少晨昏各一遍。但醉后，饱食后，皆宜避忌。

练习地点，以庭园与厅堂，能通空气，多光线者为相宜。忌直射之烈风与有阴湿霉气之场所，因身体一经运动，呼吸定然深长，故烈风与霉气，如深入腹中，有害于肺脏，易致疾病也。练习之服装，宜宽大之中服短装与阔头之布鞋为相宜。习练经时，如遇出汗，切忌脱衣裸体，或行冷水楷抹，否则未有不罹疾病也。