

Interview mit Meister Li Enjiu vom 15. und 16. März 2006

Master Li Enjiu could you please point out the particularities of Grandmaster Hong's Version of Chen Stile Taiji Quan?

Hong Junsheng was born in 1906 in Henan/China. His family moved to Jinan/Shandong when he was very little.

In 1924 they moved again, this time to Peking.

In 1930 Grandmaster Hong asked Chen Fake to accept him as a Student and studied until 1944 with Grandmaster Chen Fake without a break. Following his teacher very dedicated he achieved a very high Level in *Gongfu* and Chinese Culture.

In 1944 he went back to Jinan, where he was working on his *Tuishou* skills and his Form.

In 1956 he went to Peking again, to work on *Tuishou* and discuss applications of *Tuishou* moves to the *Taiji*-Form with Grandmaster Chen Fake.

1956 is the year of the beginning of the "*Hong Version of Chen Stile Taiji Quan*".

To understand the first "Particularity" of the *Hong Version*, the time from 1944 to 1956 is important to know. Hong Junsheng found that the Chen Stile Form and the Pushhand movements did not match. Therefore, Hong made a big effort to integrate the Pushhand movements into the Form itself. When he went back to see his Master in 1956, he showed him the Form he had changed for the reason of greater use. Chen Fake was very pleased about his student's effort and the result. So he allowed Hong to teach the Chen Form according to the developments he made. Therefore the first "Particularity" may be named as "The essence of Pushhands is reviewed in Hong's Form."

In practising the Hong Version on Chen Stile, the focus is therefore not to much on explaining through words, but more on learning the form movements. Experiencing the own equilibrium, understanding the constant change between the two extremes and finally manage the force of the opponent, can be seen as the second "Particularity".

A further focus lies on the twisting movement. If you look at the movements of the form, you will find a big movement, like you find it in the orbit, and smaller ones, which would resemble the earth turning around its own axis. In human bodies the twisting movement of the hip and the limbs is created by combining the big and the small movement. For these movements the hip is serving as an axis and the middle finger is serving as the leader of the force. Special attention should be paid to the close collaboration of the direction and the angle of the movement.

Practising Hong's Chen Style you will find, that learning the technique as well as learning about the force, is included. Both fields request each other and cannot be separated. Learning just one of them will make the training incomplete. Throughout adapting the Pushhand movements into the form, Hong did more than just creating a new name - his branch is actually a further step of development in the *Taiji* Chen Style.

Which kind of abilities does Hong's Version of the Chen Style Taiji Quan develop?

A practiser will find improvements in three different fields: his body health, his way of thinking and within his daily life. His health will mainly profit by a better circulation of blood, a better working heart and a better way of breathing. The thinking that one should breath into the abdomen, is actually not right. However, this imagination helps to learn how to use the diaphragm for breathing. One of the advantages of this way of breathing is that the internal organs are kind of massaged. The brain will also profit from the better blood circulation, but apart from that there will be two other ways. As you have to think about the form and the movements you are learning. Constantly using your brain has the same effect than running does have for the body. This is a type of training, your brain can also get throughout reading or any other activity where you have to think. Apart from that, *Taiji* will affect your brain in an other way. At a certain level, when you don't have to think about the movements anymore, you will start to free yourself from thinking. The form will be practiced more freely and more naturally, so that the brain will be very relaxed. This kind of relaxed state is also very helpful when it comes to human relationships. Pressure will be handled more easily,

breathing will be more freely, the heard will feel lighter and the mind will be more open.

Could you explain what is meant by “internal” and “external” martial arts?

Internal styles are the kind of martial arts which try to build up inner *Qi* to reach outer strength in the end. external styles focus more on building up muscle which will affect the inner organs positively in the end. The first is going from the inside to the outside, and the second from the outside to the inside, but, to be honest, I don't think you can draw a clear line between these two styles.

It is also very common to judge styles by their speed. Slow styles will be put to the group of inner styles, whereas fast ones belong to the external group. *Taiji*, especially the Chen Style, mostly contains slow and soft motions, but can suddenly change into fast and hard ones - especially in the applications. Therefore, you could say that internal styles contain the external aspect, whereas external styles always contain the internal aspect. (As yin always contains yang and yang always contains yin.)

Talking about specific styles, *Taiji*, *Xingyi* and *Bagua Quan* are regarded as the internal styles and for example *Shaolin*, *Chahua*, *Paohong* and *Chang Quan* are regarded as external styles. A third group contains animal forms. Here, also the Praying Mantis style is found, however a lot of people count it as a external style. If you practise the Praying Mantis right you will soon have the feeling that a lot of the movements tend more to be internal ones.

Putting the styles into these groups can just give a tendency but never be absolute. Often, it is not easy to tell where a style should belong to.

Does it make sense to practise styles of the two groups together?

External martial arts will pay the most intention on the appearance of the movements, whereas internal martial arts will work a lot with the imagination. However both will require

four kinds of abilities: flexibility, staying power, power and speed.

I think the best way for practising is to start with Longfist Form when you are very young and go on with *Taiji* when you get a little older. Training Longfist Form will teach you a lot of techniques, and fast movements you will be able to use in the *Taiji* training. The external styles are for *Taiji* what running is for basketball or football.

Usually, in Taiji, advanced practitioners often train with weapons. Is this just because of a nostalgic love, or are there any further benefits?

Taiji boxing without the knowledge of weapon forms is empty knowledge.

Learning a weapon helps to build up strength and force. If you never practise with weapons you might be able to hit the opponent, but your hit won't have the power it would have with the knowledge about the weapon forms.

What are the secrets to get a high level in martial arts, become an expert, or even a master?

The first thing you will need for this is a good teacher. He should be smart and know about the martial arts secrets. Fame does not necessary include these characteristics. The second very important thing is the student. First he should have a certain physical state which allows him to go through the expectations of this art and second he must bring a lot of inner strength which allows him to put a lot of effort over a long period of time. Sometimes people who have a good health and a strong body find the practise to easy and don't put any effort to go deeper. Some others might be not as strong but put a lot of effort and therefore reach a higher level.

According to you, what are the character qualities you can develop throughout martial arts?

Yes, I think there will be a change in your character if you practise *Taiji*, but you also have to be aware that everyone has

a certain education and faced different situations in his life which have already sharpened his character. Changes will be slowly and won't turn you into a totally different direction. Take a character that tends to be very furious for example, learning about the *Taiji* principles might teach him to relax more. "If the opponent does not move, I don't move either."

Is there any foreign martial art, that attracts you?

In my generation it was impossible to learn anything but Chinese martial arts. However, that doesn't mean, that other styles are not interesting. To study the advantages of these styles and adept it, might be good as well.

Do you have a specific moto?

Since I was very young, I love *Wushu*. You could say that making *Wushu* a part of my life was always a kind of motto of me.

Do you have a special message for the people practising Taiji all over Europe ;) ?

Taiji was founded in China but it is not something which just has to stay in China. *Taiji* is good for every one and should be offered to everyone. Learning and understanding the way of *Taiji* will be good for your health, will help you with your daily work and bring you success in a lot of aspects in life.

Thank you for the interview Master Li.

Facts about Master Li's school:

Sports college

Half a day (4 hours): Cultural lessons

Half a day (4 hours): Sports lessons

300 students from 4-14 years

Sports include: swimming, ping pong, physical education (gymnastics) and *Wushu*

Wushu includes *Taiji*: 20 Students

*You say 20 students is not so much. How would you describe their *Wushu* level?*

It has always been like that. I start teaching the kids when they are very young, they grow up, enter university and most of them get to teach *Wushu* themselves when they finish University. As I said, in the beginning (the facts I wrote in your book) two of them now teach at the best universities in China and many of them took gold medals in international and national tournaments.

Facts about Master Li:

Acknowledged by the Chinese government as a high level *Wushu* Trainer (8th Duan)

Vice president of the “*World Traditional Chen Style Taijiquan Association*”

Official representative of the “*Hong Version of Chen Style Taiji Quan*”

Training: every day about 2 hours

Teaching time: every day (!) 8 hours

“Yes you sometimes feel a little tired, but seeing my students getting better day by day makes me forget it very easily. They have always been a source of new power.”

Teaching and performing abroad since 1983: Japan, USA, Canada, several European and Asian countries