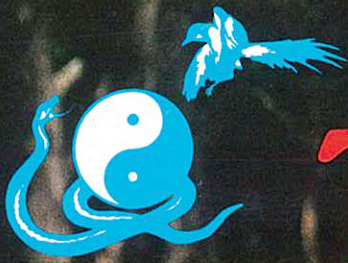


THE LEADING INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF T'AI CHI CH'UAN



# T'AI CHI

Vol. 19, No. 3

**Ma Hong on  
The 3 Harmonies**

**Wu Style  
Masters on  
Teaching**

**Healing Effects  
of the Yang Style**



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# A look at Wu Style Teaching Methods

By Margaret Philip-Simpson

During a recent family gathering in Hong Kong, fourth generation Wu Ta-Sin, Wu Yan-Hsia, her husband Kwok Hsiao-Jong, and Wu Kwong-Yu (Eddie) of Toronto, Canada, discussed the teaching history and style development of Wu style T'ai Chi Ch'uan.

Their comments focused on events and issues following the years of Wu Chuan-Yo, founder and first master of Wu style, who learned the forms from Yang Lu-Chan and his son, Yang Pan-Hou. Sifu Eddie Wu, fifth generation Wu stylist, taped and translated their comments.

Their discussion begins with the years when their grandfather Wu Chien-Chuan and both of his sons trained and taught with the Yang family masters at the prestigious Beijing Sports Association. This historic teaching relationship started the process of offering instruction in T'ai Chi Ch'uan to the public for the first time.

Before, fewer people learned and there was no teaching system. But, during the Kuomintang and after 1911, lots of people were able to learn because of the openness of the teaching



Wu Chien Chuan, 2nd generation.

and as a result, there was a change in the approach to instruction. At this time, Wu Chien-Chuan's form was closer to the Yang style and it looked more smooth and rounded.

In 1928, Wu Chien-Chuan moved from Beijing to Shanghai and became a highly-respected teacher, supervisor, and director in the Martial Arts and Ching Wu Sports Associations.

In Shanghai, the teachings were public, but still not on a big scale. The only people who were interested or knew about it were at a high level. However, in 1935, Wu Chien-Chuan established the first Wu's T'ai Chi Ch'uan Academy and his teachings started to become more well-known.

During these early years of teaching, Wu Chien-Chuan started to emphasize and develop certain aspects of T'ai Chi Ch'uan in the forms.

He utilized a smaller circle, more subtle movement, and created new ways to apply the forms in a practical manner. In the traditional slow forms, he omitted some of the repetitions, jumping, and stamping movements. He created a smoother, even, more structured, and continuous set.

While Wu Chien-Chuan is credited with the early development of Wu style, as distinct from Yang style, his family also refers to the contribution of the students towards the development of this distinction.

"It was the students who began to define what they were learning from the instructors who taught it to them while they studied with the masters of both families. We didn't say the styles were different; the students said they were different because of the form instruction."

The early Shanghai years also started to provide for his eldest son, Wu Kung-Yi, both an opportunity and a challenge to respond to the rapidly changing open learning environment.

"In the old way, teaching was on a



Wu Kwong Yu (Eddie), 5th generation.

one-to-one basis and any discussion was like a father to son and daughter—very close. With the individual you could teach according to the personality and mentality. It was very direct. If you were to learn, you had to have the applications applied until you could feel them.

For Wu Kung-Yi, the third generation Wu stylist, the growing numbers of students and filled training areas meant a new teaching approach had to be created.

He initiated a method of teaching by heightening, "the awareness of the 3 parts and 9 sections of the body." The result of teaching this awareness is that movement in the Wu style can appear more sectional.

"This is called 'sectional movement teaching'. If you use sectional movement to teach, it is easier for the students to learn and easier for them to understand the principles of T'ai Chi Ch'uan."

For the best description of Wu Kung-Yi's "sectional teaching method," the family suggests reading the classic book on Wu technique written by his younger brother, Wu Kung-Jo, who was an intellectual, scholar, and writer. This book was first pub-

lished in 1935 and reprinted in 1980. It is referred to as, "The Gold Book."

The book states that "the body is divided into three parts, each having three sections.

The three parts are: the spinal region, the two arms, and the two legs. The spinal region includes the top of the head, the chest, and the trunk of the body. The two arms include the hands, elbows, and the shoulders. The two legs consist of the hips, the knees, and the feet."

Today, this system of teaching continues to be developed and utilized by contemporary Wu family teachers of the 4th and 5th generations.

Teaching disciples learn a method of verbal commands with key words that give the students the name of the joint involved in the movement. Also, this instruction signals to the learner the connection to the next move.

Disciple Nora Mathe explains, "Using the 3 parts, 9 sections method gives students an in-depth understanding of how the movement comes from the joints and then they begin to see the intent of the applications."

The method of "3 parts and 9 sections" also encourages all levels, from beginners up, to "maintain a low stance and concentrate on remaining relaxed while fully unfolding from move to move."

Taking steps in a slow and relaxed way, "the muscles will gradually become firmer, and the tendons will strengthen.

"After a long while of this kind of practice, of extending and contracting the joints, elasticity will begin to develop. This elasticity is known as



Wu Kung Yi and Wu Tah Kwei push hands

the softness which contains the hardness."

The emphasis on the joints prepares the student for further development at all levels.

First, the student is taught to understand that the key to power generation in T'ai Chi Ch'uan is found in the opening and closing of the hip.

This can only be achieved by the correct tucking of the pelvis. This concept is introduced to beginners during the teaching of the form.

At the intermediate level, through basic push hands training, the student learns the beginnings of power generation and neutralization through the opening and closing of the hip.

At the senior level, the student can be introduced to a more advanced realization that there are three different positions of tucking in the pelvis.

This opens up a fuller understanding of both the form and the martial applications found within.

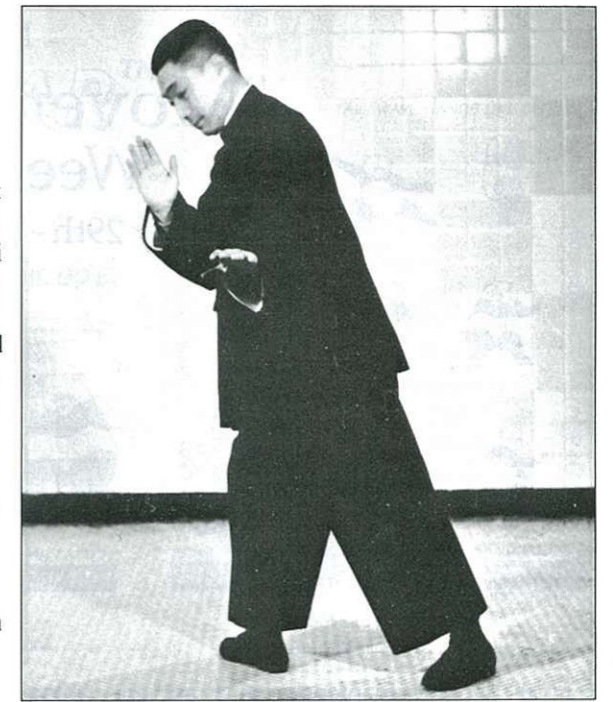
Information and expertise regarding this "sectional teaching method" and other training concerns is often shared and exchanged between the fourth and fifth generations as illustrated by their recent February meeting.

Collectively, they agree, "We know our training is very demanding and we still encourage the student to work hard before asking questions.

We say: 'Watch a lot, listen a lot, practice a lot, and then, ask. When you watch, you will see and understand the concepts of open and close; Yin and Yang separation; and sectional movements.'"

The masters continued their recent advice by adding: "It is wisest to ask questions only relative to the level you are at. If you try to go beyond, you will simply not benefit from any information your teacher gives.

"But, as teachers, if a student asks a question beyond their level, we will not slam the door and say wait 10 years. We will be diplomatic



Wu Kung Yi, 3rd generation.

and give them a bit, tease them, and leave the door open so they can ask later!"

Sifu Eddie Wu also recalls the important role played by his father, fourth generation Wu Tah-Kwei, as a teacher and in furthering the development of the distinctive Wu style.

"My grandfather, Wu Kung-Yi and my father worked together and standardized the entire form. Today, our form in Toronto is the same as the one in the Orient.

"My great-aunt Wu Ying-Hua, has a form like ours and she trained with her father, Wu Chien-Chuan, and her two brothers."

Now in her late eighties, she is currently the President of the Shanghai Academy and resides there with her husband, Vice-President, Ma Yue Liang.

Both of her brothers, Wu Kung-Yi and Wu Kung-Jo, displayed many strengths in the application of their art.

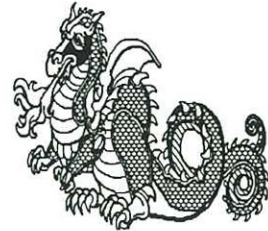
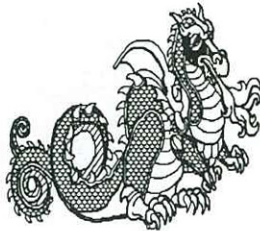
During the February discussion, family members noted the difference in "personality between the two." Although, both were skilled fighters, "Wu Kung-Jo was also good at writing and became the author of 'The Gold Book.'"

In his description of the his brother's "3 parts and 9 sections teaching method, Wu Kung-Jo gives an in-depth explanation of the applications.

Master Bob Klein

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"Every movement must be completely applied in a connected, unbroken way. A point, a line, or a two-dimensional plane all have their own manner of rotation.

"Even though the area of the hub differs from that of the wheel, they both rotate 360 degrees. Similarly, each practitioner must discover his or her



Wu Kung Yi

own proper limits of rotation."

Sifu Eddie Wu offers a further understanding of the martial applications.

"When you learn the applications, you learn what each move can be used for. Push hands is also very important. It helps you to use the hip, improves your balance, and improves your hand form. Training the hip is essential because the hip is the drive shaft and source of power.

"If you become interested in the martial aspect, you can then enter into the elements of stickiness, sensitivity, and neutralization."

The family members also emphasized the health benefits of improved circulation within the body. By "circulation" it is meant the flowing of both blood and ch'i (qi).

"The whole body is involved as it does the movements that encourage the stretching of all the muscles and tendons. The stretching lets the internal energy flow freely inside you and it relaxes mind and body."

The family masters feel that the most frequent correction they must tell students is to relax in order to lead

them to higher levels.

"A beautiful benefit of T'ai Chi Ch'uan is its effect on the mind. A relaxed mind is important for today's lifestyles. Control over the mind allows us to control stress and tension. When you do the forms, you relax. The mind has to be relaxed in order to be joyful and make progress to the other levels. To complete the moves of the form with a continuous flow is the hardest to achieve, even at the senior level. The form's continuous coordinated motion is beautiful. Coordination deteriorates with age. But with the practice of T'ai Chi Ch'uan, this won't happen."

When asked what role the practice of T'ai Chi Ch'uan has in today's world, a profound, powerful, and simple answer was given by fourth generation master Wu Tah-Sin.

The reply was a compound and old Chinese literary word: "Wang-Jie!" The word means the student should strive to become "the superior person" or attain the attributes of the Taoist "Sage." This ultimate goal permeates the Chinese way of life and is attainable through the practice and honoring of the principles of T'ai Chi Ch'uan. •