



T'AI CHI

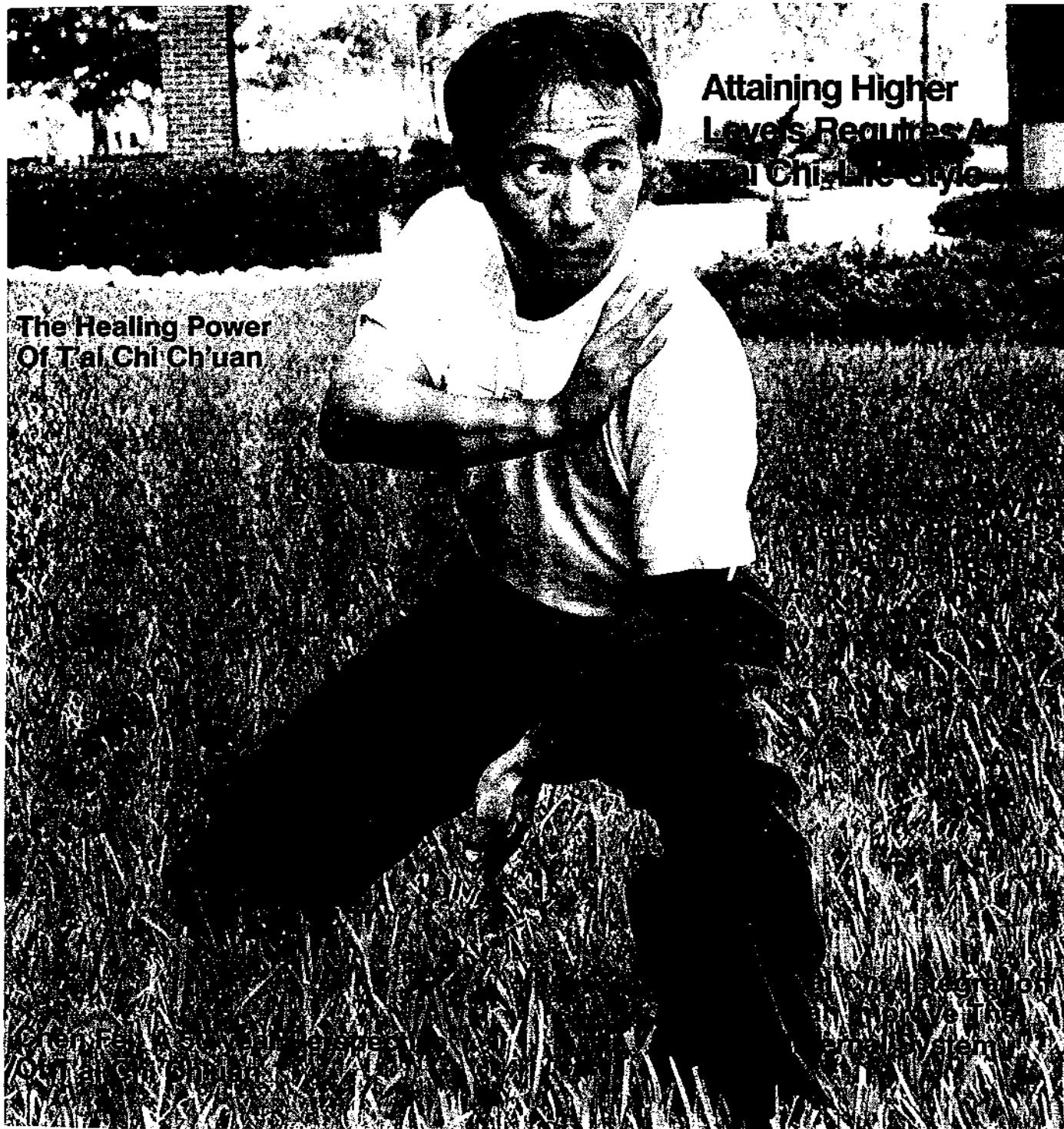
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Attaining Higher
Levels Requires A
Tai Chi Life Style

The Healing Power
Of T'ai Chi Ch'uan

Ever Feared A Snake Or A Bird?

How Integration
Of The Five
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Attaining Higher Levels Requires a New Life-style

By Marvin Smalheiser

To reach higher levels of training, a serious student has to do more than train hard, he has to also try to understand and live in a T'ai Chi way.

Adam Hsu, who has taught the Chen style in the San Francisco Bay area for many years, said there comes a time when just the physical training is not enough.

"If you are really trying to improve your T'ai Chi training, you have to live in a T'ai Chi style of life," said Hsu, who believes in preserving traditional values in every day life and in martial arts practice.

"Maybe this sounds funny and too philosophical, but this is the truth and right now lots of students agree with me."

He said the students feel the pain, born of love of the art, of reaching certain limits in their development. "They cannot surpass that limitation and that limitation is not physical. They are strong, some of them quite strong. And it is not because they are too busy. They put in lots of time, practic-

ing every single day, even on vacations and holidays."

He said the students are beginning to understand that to improve their understanding and skill requires changing their thinking and life style.

Part of this change, Hsu said, is understanding the T'ai Chi symbol, and having it in their hearts, and being able to apply it to almost any happening in life.

Another important factor, according to Hsu, is the cultural differences between contemporary Western society and the society that fostered the martial arts in China. Surmounting this cul-

tural difference is no easy task because it involves revising the entire approach to learning, accomplishment, and satisfaction.

An important practical aspect of bringing the T'ai Chi principle into play, he said, is always remembering that there are two ways for every situation and that everything is "switchable." No matter how pleasant or bad a situation is, he said, it has the potential to change into something else.

"Always thinking this way," he said, "you will be able to develop foresight about the future development of the situation. It is not only the near sight — this is what I have — that is true. There is also the possibility to change to the good."

Knowing that potentials for change exist, he said, you don't just sit waiting for a situation to improve. "Of course, you have to do something."



Adam Hsu, in this and accompanying photos, is shown in a variety of Chen style postures.

And this certainly applies to the martial aspect, he said.

When someone throws a punch at you, he said, that is a bad situation. "Of course, you shouldn't just stay there. You can duck or block to change the situation."

In fundamental training, he said, this is receiving, which is a higher level. Receiving such a punch, he said, does not necessarily make you a defender because receiving can actually be part of an attack. "Not understanding this is why some students cannot improve." At a higher level, he said, "everything is round, it is not a straight line. This is a basic principle to the Chinese."

Chan-ssu jing, or silk reeling energy, is an important principle involved in how responses are made to attacks, Hsu said. Using twisting movement the opponent's energy is redirected and led into a wrong position or angle that can open the door to an attack.

"Blocking is always twisting and rolling. That's the way you move to let it happen and lead it to its end."

Hsu, born in Shanghai, grew up in





Taiwan and studied Kung-Fu for many years before learning the Chen style from Gu Yu-tse. Hsu learned the old routine; a new routine, Hsin Jya; and the second old routine, or Pau Chui. He teaches all three.

The new routine, Hsin Jya, is different from that usually practiced as part of the Chen style. It is a newer form learned by his teacher from Chen Mien-biao. "It is a very small, lateral system. Very few people practice this. Now there is nobody doing it any more in the Chen village. When I visited them, they wanted me to show them the Hsin Jya. It is different and it is difficult."

His Hsin Jya form, Hsu said, is not really suitable for beginning students of the Chen style because it has lots of twisting and small movements. His own teacher used it as a second level of the Chen style between the old routine and the Pao Chui. "Before I could qualify to start Pao Chui, I had to go through the Hsin Jya. That's done to reinforce the fundamental training."

That fundamental training, he said, means lots of work to strengthen the legs. "In China there is an old saying that aging starts from the legs. Once a person's legs start to feel weak, they feel difficulty walking, jumping, or kicking. So Chen T'ai Chi does lots of leg training as the foundation. And the movement itself emphasizes the chan-ssu jing.

"To perform this kind of chan-ssu

jing, you have to motivate your whole body. Every part of your body has to move as a single unit. It is not only waving your arms and moving your legs. Once you move, the whole body moves."

Hsu feels that the principle of circularity evident in the T'ai Chi symbol and the chan-ssu jing, can be applied to daily life and can help change a person's personality to a T'ai Chi personality. "If a student can do that, then that's a success, especially for a youngster.

He also feels that traditional T'ai Chi values can help strengthen a person's insight into life. "We emphasize harmony, balance, peace and calm."

Hsu said that the principles of Yin and Yang include a dark side and a bright side.

"But we always try to develop the bright side, to have the old values, and a more peaceful life.

"I feel that in today's society, everything has to be quick and fast and fast means good and new means good. We throw away too many old, valuable things, education, exercise, and family life.

"If people can slow down a little bit and do some real thinking, I think that people can make the right choice.

"But sometimes, they are not really thinking. They just accept modern influences without any judgments and sometimes they just hurry to make a profit. To be rich is to be a success."

"Of course," he said, "you cannot change people's thinking in one single day. You have to do it gradually, step-by-step. In this modern society, you have to divide things into certain steps.

"In my school, we do basics for three months, even before the students start

doing the first movement of the Chen style. And I feel that three months is too short. But most of the students feel it is much too long. So we compromise with three months.

During the three months, the basic training involves a lot of kicking, punching, and stance training. There is also standing meditation with eight different postures.

Then Hsu follows his teacher's manual, teaching the Chen style old routine, then the Hsin Jya, or new routine; and then Pao Chui, second routine. He also teaches ch'i kung, meditation and lots of zhan zhuang, or standing meditation.

"Hopefully, in the future I can stretch out the fundamental training to five months or seven months. In this contemporary society, we live by modern convenience. People get education from a machine. They learn something that can be done real quick and that even the oven is not quick enough.

"The oven is quicker than building a fire to cook, but it is still not quick enough so now we have the microwave. And when we go to a restaurant we want service immediately so we go to MacDonalds.

"So we have all gotten educated to this life-style. We have to rush. Fast is good. New is good. I do have a hard time sometimes. Sometimes it is even painful, to see a student quit the class.

"I feel he does have a potential but





he simply is not patient enough. He is almost there. He is one step too short and then he quits. We have to be more patient. It has to take a while to learn. Why hurry? This is a lifetime practice."

"There is a big, big difference between the East and West, a cultural difference. There is a Pacific Ocean between us. It is certainly not easy to get across. You cannot just buy a ticket and fly a 747."

As an example of the lack of understanding, Hsu said that people in the West think more about being straight forward and honest and concentrate on one thing at a time.

"But the Eastern philosophy always teaches us that we have to think about both sides, the Yin and Yang. You might want to put it this way: In one single movement there always contains lots of possibilities. I am talking about usage training.

"The students always ask me how to use this movement, this technique. I tell them, 'You can do it this way, or you can do it that way, and you can use it some other ways.' Beginners, especially, feel very confused. They don't like it. And then they ask, which is the best way, which is the standardized way.

"There is no such thing as the standardized way. In T'ai Chi Ch'uan we have lots of different possibilities. In one single movement, you can change to a different ending. So this is all related to people's basic thinking.

"Most of the time we need to expand our mind, no matter what kind of situation we are facing. In one single, simple situation, we have to train to believe there are still lots of different possibilities and that it can change to different directions."

This involves, he said, mental flexibility. In lots of T'ai Chi movements, he said, people wonder how it can be used for fighting, since it may look incomplete or uncertain and they can't accept that.

"They like something to be black and white. Tell me yes or no, right or wrong, good or bad. That's very innocent thinking. The world is not like that, always good or bad. It is mixed."

He feels that T'ai Chi can teach a lot, including the ability to tolerate uncertainty.

Hsu said he looks at the meditative standing exercises in two ways. One is as a health exercise, a kind of "nui kung health exercise." "If you want to do T'ai Chi Ch'uan or any Kung-Fu training, you do need a healthy body."

Secondly, he sees them as very beneficial for martial arts train-

ing. At the beginning, the muscles start to feel sore and tired and that gives your minor muscles a chance to support your arm and maintain the posture.

"If you hold the posture a long enough time, you are training your minor muscles. Most of the time you don't even have a chance to exercise your minor muscle.

"Sometimes, in Kung-Fu training there is something lacking and we have to pay attention to it. In certain styles, they have a special form to particularly develop your minor muscles, which don't have as much a chance to develop as major muscles."

He said it comes back to the principle of Yin and Yang.

In the beginning, he said, students have to be patient during training and if it seems physically boring they should try to find something interesting there. Hsu also suggests that beginners should not only pay attention to basic techniques or the form but also to the philosophy. "You can't tell how important it will be in the future."

"In my school, lots of students in the beginning can conquer the physical difficulty and finally get into the door, so to speak. They improve day by day, year by year and when they reach a higher level, then they know it is very, very difficult.

"It is not that they are not physically strong enough, but the thinking, the basic philosophy, the cultural background is different. At the same time,



they realize, 'Oh, my God, from the very beginning I should have paid more attention to the philosophy.'

"In the beginning, it looks like it is not very necessary. But if you do not invest in the past, then you cannot have the harvest. So when they reach a higher level, they have a great deal of difficulty."

Hsu said he feels that T'ai Chi Ch'uan has the best name. T'ai Chi, he said, includes a lot of philosophy and the basic principle of the martial art.

"In a way, I tell my students quite often that I feel all the Chinese Kung-Fu I can call T'ai Chi Ch'uan because the basic principles are all the same."

The principle, he said, is that "always the Yin and Yang change to inter-react in harmony. To put it simply, the Yin and Yang have to work together, well-balanced."

And in the Chen style, he said, it is very important to emphasize the Yin and Yang changes. Initially, he said, it is important to tell the student that this kind of movement is Yang and another way is Yin. But it is not really clear cut like that, he said. They can switch with each other and Yang always contains some Yin and Yin always contains some Yang. They are not divided in a clear cut way into two parts."

The value of the martial arts, Hsu said, has changed. "Nowadays, people practice a martial art not solely for self-defense. It does have some value there. Sometimes you do need to use that skill to protect yourself or your friend or your loved one."

"But I feel we do not fight every day. Even if you are a professional bodyguard, you still don't use your martial art training like in the ancient time."

"But we do need exercise. Everybody needs it, no matter what your age is, or how old or young or strong or weak, or condition of your health. Men and women need exercise and you have to do it every day."

"I feel the Chinese martial arts are a very good exercise. They are very evenly developed and really can help. They exercise every part of your body, internally and externally."

Sports, he said, don't necessarily work well as exercise and can even result in injuries. But T'ai Chi and other kinds of Kung-Fu, he said, are really concerned about internal and external exercise.

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"When we say exercise in Chinese, we say yun ton. Ton means external movement. And yun means internal circulation. These two words should never be divided."

"In China, yun ton refers to any kind of exercise or sports. It does carry the idea of the ancient philosophy there, teaching us that in any kind of sports we should consider internal and external at the same time."

"If there is no external movement, that is the meditation, or nui kung. Generally, I think any Kung-Fu style considers internal and external, and, of course, T'ai Chi is famous for this kind of arrangement."

"If we can always have some time every day to do it once in the morning and once in the evening, that would be great. It is very beneficial. That's why I encourage people to practice this ancient art."

"I never feel funny doing this kind of old stuff in this 20th century, almost 21st century. The value is not decided by whether it is new or old. We have to look into it to see what is there." •



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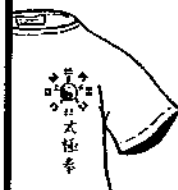
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