

Taiji Morning

By Kathryn Ferrazzo

If you can find your way to the harbour of Thunder Bay on any fine Wednesday morning, you can experience a wonderful transformation. The challenge, for me, is rising bleary-eyed and leaving my warm bed for the chilly car ride across town to greet the sunrise at the waterfront. As I draw near Marina Park, a dim outline of the old red brick train station emerges from the mist and an ancient art gallery appears like watercolours on canvas. The car bounces over the train tracks into the paved parking area near the newly cemented skateboard park, now soft as chalk in the dim morning light. The historic Prince Arthur Hotel and the once polka-dotted Pagoda are mere flickers of green and gold in the rear view mirror. A few more cars creep in from the east entrance past the big open field where later in the day the "Summer in the Parks" concert will draw crowds of lawn-chair-laden fans. Past the yellow bandstand tent, the cautious convoy rolls to a stop neatly between the lines of the parking spaces. One by one, our gentle company plods from the tarmac through the passageway between the berms to collect around the sign that officially designates this small green plot as International Taiji Park. Master Peng rubs his hands together and greets us with a hearty Hello! Hello! The Canadian geese honk begrudgingly and waddle away to drift and bob on the sparkling waves. The ducks still doze by the pond. Facing the deep waters of Lake Superior, we "wave hands like clouds" while the Giant sleeps on the horizon. Perhaps, across the waters in China, Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei is gathering "chi" with us. Swirling our energies like fish in a yin-yang symbol, our slow dance is warming our hearts and minds. Weightless, we drift and float while the sunlight dries the damp from our caps like steam from tea. Alive! Alive! Master Peng erupts in song booming that the Sleeping Giant is so pleased he will get up to join us! Ho! Ho! Ho! We shake our bellies and the exotic spell is broken. We thank the teacher; we thank the spirits. We awake to a beautiful day.

TAIJI POST



Newsletter of the Peng You Taiji Quan Association

Volume 16, No. 1 - November 2012



International Taiji Park

(see update on page 4)



Why I Love Taiji, Especially Chen Style

By Brian Nieminen

In my humble opinion Taiji has two very unique and special traits that set it apart and above any other form of exercise:

Ease of entry

Something for everyone – any age, any level of fitness or ability

Ease of entry refers to the fact that virtually anyone can ease into the forms, very safely and at their own speed. This includes people with any level of physical ability. Great emphasis is placed on correct postures and controlled movements so that the risk of injury is virtually eliminated. Each individual can gradually increase the challenge to mind and body.

Something for everyone refers to the extraordinary scope of the discipline. For older folk who are not too mobile there are gentle exercises that gradually improve balance, strength and coordination. For those with knee and back problems the routines can be modified to therapeutically strengthen problem areas and improve range of motion. For young people or more actively able individuals there are full-speed forms and martial applications.

Not everyone is aware that Taiji is a full-fledged martial art. The slow rhythmic movements that are commonly seen are only one limited part of the discipline. The actual purpose of slow practice is to get fast – to perfect internal power, neutralize any attack and project controlled strength.

For those looking for more intensity, there is the whole other side of the art, which works on fast movements that are cardio in nature. However slow movements are often more difficult to do than fast ones. There is also plenty of evidence that shows that these slow movements improve blood flow and also strengthen the heart.

Taiji also includes meditation, weapons training and one-on-one combat training called 'push hands.' Unlike many repetitive mindless exercises, there is a constant mental challenge to learning the choreographies and intricacies of the many forms. There is truly something for everyone.

Chen Taiji

All styles of Taiji contain the same basic elements but Chen Taiji emphasizes the development of internal power and the application of it to all the forms.

Through our Western adaptations of Taiji, many people misunderstand the way Taiji is meant to

be done. They try to do the movements perfectly evenly, more like a dance. This we affectionately call 'playing at Taiji.' It is often a reflection of limited interest or opportunity. It still benefits the practitioner. However going deeper into it means greatly increased health benefits. It becomes a long and patient process which requires constant self-examination and adjustments, a lifelong study.

In Chen we work towards a rhythm between Yin and Yang elements. Hence the movements will alternate between Yin (softening, withdrawing, often inhaling) and Yang (expanding, exhaling, showing some strength, firmness or even explosive power at the finish).

When you've learned to control your movements in this manner it is quite easy to speed up and do a whole routine quickly. Your balance and coordination are established so you never throw yourself off. However, you never need to do the movements fast to get the major health benefits of the exercise.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of it is the meditative, calming effect on the mind while the body simultaneously gets physical exercise; for example, just learning to drop one's shoulders alone can greatly reduce stress and tension.

Some folks are a little intimidated because Chen Taiji looks more difficult than the more common Yang Style. It's true that to do it physically the way some masters do it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible for most of us. However all the movements can be modified to accommodate the level of ability of the practitioner. Going low in the postures is good for increasing the degree of physical difficulty of the workout but as Master Peng You explains using a modest posture while achieving correct internal movements is far more important.

In Thunder Bay we are extremely fortunate to have a true master to teach us. On top of that our Master Peng You is an elite student of Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei, one of the greatest masters in the world, so in effect we have a direct pipeline to the best instruction possible.

My own experience with Chen Taiji has been that the further I progress the more I enjoy it and the more I appreciate how much more there is to learn. As students we are all only scratching the surface of the art. Taiji embraces an all-encompassing philosophy of life based on the Yin Yang principles of constantly changing balance. Theoretically all our movements can become Taiji movements with coordination of mind and body – a higher state that few actually achieve. But working towards that goal is highly rewarding and beneficial.



Taiji workshop participants with Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei and Master Peng, flanked by their spouses in the front row.



Taiji workshop participants in the Boys and Girls Club gym.



Summer mornings in International Taiji Park





BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Executive

President:
Peng Youlian
628-4305

Chair:
Wayne Bilbrough
345-2626

Vice-Chair:
Brian Nieminen

Treasurer:
Adele Crowley

Members at Large:

- Bruce Adderley
- Roberta Adderley
- Olivia Breton
- Janine Brusset
- Bill Climie
- Wendy Huang
- Betty Anne Nurse
- Sandy MacKenzie

Regional Representatives:

- Chuck & Danielle Stone, Bemidji, MN
- Tom Reiersen, Duluth, MN
- Duncan MacKay, Terrace Bay, ON
- Jean Wong, Ottawa, ON
- Tat Lui, Toronto, ON

Editors Taiji Post:

- Doug Rabb
- Oliver Reimer

Taiji Christmas Party

Saturday December 8, 6:00 p.m.

Polish Alliance Hall, 102 Court St. South

Traditional Christmas Dinner: Roast turkey with dressing, mashed potatoes and gravy, cranberry sauce, steamed vegetables, perogies with sour cream, cabbage rolls, tossed salad, dinner rolls, fresh fruit and choice of cake, coffee and tea.

Tickets \$25 members (\$30 nonmembers)

Order from Wayne Bilbrough 345-2626, and from instructors



International Taiji Park - update

The Yin Yang sixty foot pad and the Moongate with calligraphy by Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei are now in place. This spring the city will landscape the park in keeping with the moongate and pad, redoing the entrance, relocating some of the walkways and benches, and so forth. The city will also build the base for our donor's appreciation sign. The sign will also contain a short history of the Park. If anyone still wants their name to appear on the sign the last date donations can be accepted will be the end of January. We will be sending a final list of names to all donors. Please watch for it and make sure that your name appears the way you want it.



Left photo: Taiji players at the Thunder Bay 55 Plus Centre.

Right photo: Doug Rabb and Mike Richardson demonstrate Taiji as part of a Conference paper on Taiji in popular culture presented at the Slayage 5 Conference on the Whedonverses held this past summer at the University of British Columbia. The TV screens above show Buffy the Vampire Slayer and her 250 year old vampire-with-a-soul boyfriend, Angel, doing Taiji together.