

# TAI-CHI CHUAN

## in Theory and Practice



# 太 極 拳

Kuo Lien-Ying 郭連蔭

Presented by Simmone Kuo

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North Atlantic Books  
Berkeley, California

*Tai-Chi Chuan in Theory and Practice*

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郭連蔭太極

拳譜 于右任



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# Dedication

This is the third edition of Sifu Kuo Lien-Ying's English version of *Tai-Chi Chuan in Theory and Practice*. The first edition appeared before his "journey to the west" while Master Kuo was still living in China; the second edition came out in 1966, soon after his immigration to the United States.

Master Kuo studied and practiced the martial arts throughout his long life; and, of these, his favorite was Tai-Chi Chuan. Sifu was a dedicated student of Sifu Wang Chiao-Yu. He remembered and respected his vow to transmit Tai-Chi Chuan as he had received it from Grand Master Wang. Every morning before practicing he recited the 13 Tai-Chi stances from the mnemonic poem in 144 characters which hung from his wall.\* Knowing that this was important to him, I also follow his method and want to share it with the public. Sifu's experience, knowledge and perseverance are a legacy to be treasured.

I have appended some basic material on Tai-Chi philosophy and the *I-Ching* to Sifu's original text, in hopes that modern students of Tai-Chi Chuan will be inspired to reflect upon the historical and philosophical sources of the art. In addition, I have included a small selection of some of Sifu's favorite literature to inspire further reading.

Since the Lien-Ying Tai-Chi Chuan Academy opened in August of 1965, we have been blessed to receive and teach thousands of students. Late in his life, in 1980, Sifu was happy to see the dream he had carried

\*See page 17, "A Mnemonic of Thirteen Tai-Chi Chuan Movements" for English translation of this text.



to the west come true—Tai-Chi Chuan being studied and taught as physical education in the Department of Kinesiology at San Francisco State University, and thus being integrated into American culture as a whole.

It is a joy for me to see the treasured art of Tai-Chi Chuan flourishing throughout the modern world. My hope is that the method embodied in this book will guide its development in the best of all possible directions.

Simu Kuo  
1998, Year of the Tiger



*Simonne Kuo with Kuo family appreciation plaque at Chinese-Americans for Affirmative Action, San Francisco*

以心行氣神運無方  
 若鶴之躍猶龍之翔  
 連陰大師正  
 溥儒




when the mind  
 is still  
 in the heart

vital energy flows  
 and the spirit expands  
 permeating all creation

like ten thousand birds  
 soaring and wheeling  
 in the form of a great dragon<sup>1</sup>

yin and yang  
soft and hard  
balance

達  
陰  
代  
表  
太  
極  
拳  
譜  
剛  
柔  
極  
致  
嚴  
家  
淦  
題



Calligraphy by Yen Jia-Gan, vice-president, Taipei, Taiwan Province, 1960.

# Foreword

**S**ome years ago I wandered into Professor Kuo Lien-Ying's Tai-Chi Chuan studio in San Francisco. At the time, I did not comprehend the nature of the journey I was about to embark upon. Yet in some uncanny way I felt compelled to begin the practice of Tai-Chi Chuan under the guidance of Professor Kuo and his wife. Perhaps it was the profound sense of peace and tranquillity emanating from the students that enticed me to study Tai-Chi Chuan. At the time I was a psychologist, a profession demanding an intense emotional and intellectual response, requiring no involvement whatsoever of the physical side of one's being. It is ironic that psychotherapy's design to enhance levels of health and well-being rarely mentions the importance of physical exercise in treatment programs. The daily practice of Tai-Chi Chuan was soon to teach me that to attain balance in life—which in the ancient Chinese medical treatise, *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*, is synonymous with good health—one must partake of exercises designed to enhance both the mind and the body. To place undue emphasis on one dimension at the expense of the other is foolhardy, leading to conditions of ill health and disease, as is the case in contemporary Western society with its exaggerated concern with the mind. The physical activity expressed in the Tai-Chi Chuan form is a “Yang” phenomenon associated with improved circulation, muscle tonus, and respiration, while thinking is essentially a “Yin” phenomenon, passive and non-assertive in nature. It is as a result of excessive thinking and

ruminative behavior that all manner of pathological conditions arise. The activity inherent in the Tai-Chi Chuan form is a proven remedy for such maladies.

Though I was good with words and skilled in my profession, having undergone years of therapy, I was nonetheless unhappy, and lacking vitality. Something seemed to be missing in my life. That something, I was soon to learn, was the expression of “intrinsic energy,” a latent source of vitality that could be awakened by the form. Mrs. Kuo explained the benefits of Tai-Chi Chuan and chided me that my body would not benefit from her verbal description, only by daily practice. The tendency of the Tai-Chi Chuan Master to say little about his or her art has its origins in Taoist thought, where verbal rhetoric is considered to be of lesser importance to the health of the organism than the silent, concentrated, physical expression of the form. The *I-Ching*, the most ancient compendium of Chinese wisdom, reflects upon the deceptive use of language in Hexagram 31, line 6, as follows:

Six at the top means: one's influence shows itself in the jaws, cheeks, and tongue.<sup>2</sup>

The explanation of these lines is as follows:

The most superficial way of trying to influence others is through talk that has nothing real behind it. The influence produced by such mere tongue wagging must necessarily remain insignificant.

In Hexagram 37 of the *I-Ching*, entitled “The Family,” the correct use of words is alluded to as follows:

The superior man is said to have substance in his words, and if words and conduct are not in accord they will have no effect.

In Tai-Chi Chuan, skill is manifest in the form, not in one's description of how proficient he is. One might say the form speaks for itself. My

teacher's tendency to de-emphasize rhetoric in favor of vital action stands in direct contrast to contemporary Western man's intellectual approach to phenomena, where words and verbal gymnastics are meant to mystify, and creative physical activity is viewed as a lesser vehicle of expression. Our preoccupation with the faculties of the mind and minimal concern with motor functioning accounts for the prevalence of psychosomatic disorders in our culture. Numerous times I've observed Master Kuo walk among his students mimicking with his lips their too-lengthy verbal discourses, pointing out to them through his mime-like gestures how much more important it is to practice Tai-Chi Chuan than to discuss it. The development of a daily practice routine is essential if one is to really commune with the essence of the form. By performing the movements each morning one learns to apply himself more diligently and creatively to all of life's undertakings. Gradually any tendency toward laziness and lethargy is replaced by a renewed sense of vigor and increased energy output.

The development of a mature disciplined character capable of withstanding frustration was seen by Carl Jung as one goal of the therapeutic process. Jung and his student, Marie Von Franz, developed the concept of the "*puer aeternus*," the "eternal child," to describe that being who is forever living in fantasy, preferring inaction and lassitude to worldly demands. Though the *puer* is ready at a moment's notice to work himself twenty-four hours at a stretch on an exciting, lofty project, he has no patience whatsoever for anything resembling an ordinary way of life. Jung saw the cure for the *puer's* weakness in "work," in activity demanding a practical response that would gradually develop this immature aspect of his personality. Von Franz comments on the psychology of the *puer* as follows:

When he [the *puer*] has to take something seriously, either in the outer or inner world, he makes a few poor attempts and then impatiently gives up. My experience is that it does not matter, if you analyze a man of the type, whether you force him to take the outer or the inner world seriously; that is really

unimportant . . . The important thing is that he should stick something out . . . do something through, but the great danger, or the neurotic problem, is that the *puer*, or the man caught in this problem, just puts it in a box and shuts the lid on it in a gesture of impatience . . . and they always do it at the moment when things become difficult.<sup>3</sup>

For those of us possessing some degree of the *puer's* nature, Tai-Chi Chuan poses an excellent remedy. Through daily practice of the form we develop a positive mental outlook, while our body is energized to take on even the most boring of activities from a new perspective. By persevering and refining each move we learn what it is to develop patience.

In my first lesson Mrs. Kuo familiarized me with the six warm-up exercises that serve as a sound foundation for performing the sixty-four movements that make up the form. These exercises are designed to enhance flexibility, strengthen the musculature, tendons and bones, and improve circulation. Wholistic medicine recognizes the human need to expel accumulated gases and noxious wastes from the organism. The warm-up exercises facilitate this process in a gentle yet dynamic manner. Tai-Chi Chuan adepts claim that "long tendons lead to a long life." The warm-up stretches are designed to increase flexibility while strengthening the organism down to its deepest level, "the marrow of the bones." Each of the stretches presents the student with a difficult task, and only diligent and regular practice will lead to attainment of the goal. At the time I began practice my body was tense, rigid, and uncoordinated. My teacher, on the other hand, could perform the stretches in a relaxed manner. I watched as Mrs. Kuo placed her chin to her toe from a forward bending position.

Apparently this was the most difficult of the warm-ups and had to be attained if one were to reap the full psychological and physical benefits of the Tai-Chi Chuan practice. Over the years I've heard it said that before the Tai-Chi Chuan form was taught to Professor Kuo in China, he

first had to achieve this difficult stretch. Westerners on the other hand might not have the patience to persevere at this task unless they were given the rudiments of the Tai-Chi Chuan form while they were whittling away at the distance between chin and toe. So a compromise was reached and they were taught the moves even before they could perform "chin to toe." The gradual attainment of this goal has provided me with numerous insights into the structure and function of my anatomical parts as well as psychological insights into various aspects of my personality pertaining to patience and pain thresholds. One experiences a certain amount of discomfort and pain during the execution of the stretch as different parts of the body respond. During certain periods plateaus are reached. Further progress is temporarily halted, no matter how forcefully one strives towards the goal. At such times one immediately gets in touch with any tendency towards impatience and bullheadedness. When the body says "no" and the mind says "yes," a battle ensues which only a "yielding" to gentleness can remedy. The principle of "yielding" is firmly embedded in Taoist philosophy, and expressed in the Tai-Chi Chuan form not as an intellectual abstraction but as a physical reality from the inside of the body out.

Experiences such as the above affect the student at all levels and can't help but generalize to his everyday life. One is forced to remember in times of crisis that just as the "chin to toe" exercise cannot be attained by indiscriminate use of force applied to one's own body, such force applied to an outside adversary or conflicted situation will also prove futile. Here one is reminded of Hexagram 33 in the *I-Ching*, "Retreat," whose psychology of conflict resolution is as follows:

... it is through retreat that success is achieved ... retreat is not to be confused with flight. Flight means saving oneself under any circumstances, whereas retreat is a sign of strength.

The psychotherapeutic corollary of the "yielding" principle expressed philosophically in Taoism and physically in Tai-Chi Chuan



is seen in Victor Frankl, M.D.'s logotherapy with its technique of "paradoxical intention." Instead of conducting a lengthy study into the motivational determinants directing his patient's dysfunctional behavior, Frankl encourages them to practice their symptoms. The obsessional who asks a never-ending stream of questions of himself and others is asked to spend more time engaging in such behavior than he is already doing. The pitifully shy, anxious individual is asked to visualize all the people in the room he is about to enter looking only at him. By repeatedly practicing these behaviors in fantasy and/or in action patients are freed from their compelling influence. By flowing with the behavior rather than opposing it, peace and tranquillity are attained. Frankl writes:

This treatment consists of a reversal of the patient's attitude, inasmuch as his fear is replaced by a paradoxical wish. In other words, the wind is taken out of the sails of the phobia. This brings about a change of attitude toward the phobia. According to logotherapeutic teaching, the pathogenesis in phobias and obsessive-compulsive neuroses is partially due to the increase of anxieties, obsessions, and compulsions that is caused by the attempt to avoid anxieties or fight obsessions and compulsions. A phobic person usually tries to avoid the situation in which his anxiety arises, while the obsessive-compulsive tries to suppress and thus to fight his threatening ideas. In either case the result is a strengthening of the symptom. Conversely, if we succeed in bringing the patient to the point where he ceases to flee from or to fight his symptoms, but, on the contrary, even exaggerates them, then we may observe that the symptoms diminish and that the patient is no longer haunted by them.<sup>4</sup>

The Tai-Chi Chuan form taught by the Kuos is a beautiful sequence of meaningful movements coordinated into a synchronized flow of energy. One's physical health and sense of well-being are enhanced from the

first moment's practice, while balance, poise, and the essence of spirit as expressed in the hands, take years to perfect. Performance of the movements over and over again leaves one feeling calm and relaxed, in accord with nature. No matter what calamities befall the student, the Tai-Chi Chuan practice is unimpaired and remains resilient in response to the aging process. Tai-Chi Chuan is both natural remedy and preventative medicine for much of what assails him. In today's chaotic times people often reach outside themselves for a panacea to their physical and emotional dilemmas. This tendency to look outside oneself to resolve problems is eschewed in the Chinese medical treatises and is referred to specifically in Hexagram 25 of the *I-Ching*, entitled "Innocence," as follows:

Use no medicine in an illness incurred through no fault of your own. It will pass of itself.

The attitude alluded to here suggests that we take responsibility for our level of health and well-being, and not place our minds and bodies in the hands of the pharmaceutical industry.

In his book *Medical Nemesis*, Ivan Illich states that "the new burden of disease of the last fifteen years is itself the result of medical intervention in favor of people who are or who might become sick." It is doctor-made, or "iatrogenic." Illich cites statistics that illustrate the consequences to society of becoming overly dependent on medications and physicians. He states that "every 24 to 30 hours from 50 to 80% of adults in the U.S. swallow a medically prescribed drug, and that such drugs are addictive. In some patients antibiotics alter the normal bacterial flora and induce a superinfection permitting more resistant organisms to proliferate and invade the host. Other drugs contribute to the breeding of drug-resistant strains of bacteria." Illich summarizes his position with the following statement:

A professional and physician-based health care system tends to mystify and to expropriate the power of the individual to heal himself and to shape his or her environment.<sup>5</sup>

Exercise may prove to be a partial solution to this dilemma, a means by which Americans can assume responsibility for their health and well-being.

The psychiatry and medicine of the future could benefit from the inclusion of Tai-Chi Chuan in any exercise program designed to restore health, improve self-esteem, and buoy one's spirit, for as Professor Kuo Lien-Ying states:

The end purpose of these exercises is to prolong life, and to endow it with the youth of eternal spring.

Richard Vogel, Ph.D.

Continuous  
Self Discipline

連蔭先生屬題

自強不息

葉公超



Calligraphy by Yie Gong-Chow, Taipei, Taiwan Province, 1960.



*Taipei, 1966*



*Kuo family outing, San Francisco, 1967*



*Father and Son*

CHAPTER I

# Discoursing on Tai-Chi Chuan



## 太極論

一舉動周身俱要輕靈，尤須貫串，氣宜鼓盪，神宜內斂，無使有缺陷處，無使有凸凹處，無使有斷續處，其根在於脚，發於腿，主宰於腰，形於手指，由脚而腿而腰，總須完整一氣，前進後退得機得勢，如不得機得勢處，身便散亂。其病必於腰腿求之。上下左右前後皆然，凡此皆是意，不在外面，有上即有下，有前即有後，有左即有右，如意欲向上，即欲下意，若將物掀起，而加以挫之之意，斯其根自斷，乃壞之速而無疑。

虛實宜分清楚，一處有一次虛實，處處總此一虛實周身節節貫串，無令絲毫間斷耳。



In any single movement of whatever sort, the whole body must move lightly, nimbly, and in coordination. The *chi*\* should be active as the propellant power behind all movements and the spirit should be gathered internally so that there will be no defects, nor uneven distribution, nor any discontinuity anywhere. The exercise has its root in the feet, is controlled by the waist and expressed by the fingers. The movement from feet upward through legs to the waist should always be fully coordinated. Seize the opportunity and size the situation in stepping forward or backward, otherwise the bodily movement will be confused. (By "opportunity" and "situation" we mean the kind of dynamic situation conducive to situations advantageous to yourself.) When confusion of movements occurs (that is, when different parts of the body move or remain without unified purpose), the cause is to be found in the waist or the legs. This test applies to movements in any direction. Nevertheless, the prime mover is the mind, not anything outside.

Everything is relative: the upper to the lower, the front to the back, the right to the left. If you intend to spring upward, bend downward first. You mean to raise a thing, but what you are doing may be actually pressing it down, so hard that the thing itself may be crushed. This happens whenever you violate a principle of the Tai-Chi philosophy.

The distribution of blankness and substantives should be clearly distinguished. This distribution can be found everywhere. Since such a distribution is found in each place, it forms a connected system throughout the whole body without any discontinuity.

\**Chi is the flux of energy or vitality including but not limited to the breath.*

## CHAPTER 2

# Key to Understanding the Thirteen (Tai-Chi Chuan) Movements



### 十三勢行工心解

以心行氣，務令沉着，乃能收斂入骨，以氣運身，務令順遂，乃能便利從心，精神能提得起，則無遲重之虞，所謂頂頭懸也。意氣須換得靈，乃有圓活之趣，所謂變動虛實也。發勁須沈着鬆淨，專重一方，立身須中正安舒，支掌八面，行氣如九曲珠，無微不利，氣遍身軀之謂運動，勁如百練剛，何堅不摧，形如攬兔之鶴，神如捕鼠之貓，靜如山岳，動似江河，蓄勁如開弓，發勁如放箭，曲中求直，蓄而後發，力由脊發，步隨身換，收即是放，斷而復連，往復須有摺疊，進退須有轉換，極柔軟然後堅硬，能呼吸然後能靈活，氣以直奔而無害，動以曲蓄而有餘。心爲令，氣爲旗，腰爲纛，先求開展，後學緊湊，乃可臻於縝密矣！

又曰：先在心，後在身腹，鬆氣劍入骨，神舒體靜，刻刻在心，切記一動無有不動，一靜無有不靜，牽動往來，氣貼背斂入脊骨，內固精神，外示安逸，邁步如貓行，動勁如抽絲，全神意在精神，不在氣，氣在則滯，有氣者無力，無氣者純剛，氣若車輪，腰如車軸之謂也。

**B**e calm and steady in steering the *chi* with the mind, so that it can be absorbed and stored in the bones. Go easy and be natural in activating the body with the *chi*, so that it will coordinate with your mental command. When the spirit is fully aroused, there will be no fear of tardiness or clumsiness of movement. That is the meaning of holding up the head as if suspended from above. The change of aiming and breathing should be nimble enough to benefit itself from accommodating to the continually arising and changing situation. This is the meaning of transposition from one stance to another and the distribution of blankness and entities in a given movement.

Let the exertion of strength be steady, relaxed, neatly dosed, and all beamed to one focus at a time. Keep the body erect and comfortably occupying a central position, so poised as to be able to handle oncoming impact from all sides. Circulate the *chi* like threading pearls that have serpentine bores. The least crevice must suffice for passage. When the *chi* has circulated all through the body, call it a round of exercise.

Develop your strength until it is as resilient as highly tempered steel to which nothing is invulnerable. Poise your body like a hawk ready to pounce upon a rabbit, and alert your spirit like a cat ready to surprise a mouse. Where there is no motion, let it be as inert as the immobility of a mountain; where there is, let it be as fluid and adaptable to circumstances as rivers are to gradients. Store up your energy like the bending of a bow, and release it like shooting the arrow. Thus we see how the

tortuous begets the straightforward—the more the bow is bent, the straighter speeds the arrow. There can be no release of anything without first accumulating it.

Strength is developed from the vertebrae, while the feet adapt their positioning in little steps in accordance with the demands of the trunk. In short, (Tai-Chi in action is both relative and self-reversible), intake is output, and disparates add up to continuity.

The alternation of stances must be relieved with variation, e.g., the forward and backward steps should leave enough space for one to turn around. First of all, learn to be as pliable as possible, for only then can one become hard and strong. To be short of breath is to lose agility altogether, while knowing how to breathe at ease under all situations keeps one nimble and alert (the results of sufficient reserve energy). To avoid harm, let the *chi* have full nurture and enjoy unhindered straight runs; to assure yourself of reserve energy, let your movements be in curves only.

In comparison with a military system, the mind is the commander's order; the *chi* is the messenger's banner that transmits the order; and the waist is the ensign that directs detailed operation.

In patterning movements into integrated wholes, let the component motions and blanks be loosely spaced, and keep the tempo relaxed. Gradually tighten up the composition and raise its tempo to the required degree (while bearing in mind the need for reserve energy).

The exercise should have its most important emphasis fall on the mind, and the next important in the body and abdomen. Release the *chi* and let it penetrate like a sword into the bones. Always keep your spirit at ease and body in quietude. Always remember that all parts of the body must move in unison and coordination; or, alternatively, all rest in quietude. In alternating movements, concentrate the *chi* to areas near your back, so that it may be, so to speak, absorbed into the vertebrae. Strengthen your spirit internally while you remain visibly comfortable outward expressions. Make your steps supple like a cat's, and exude your energy as if drawing out a silk thread (neither too taut,

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Originally published before Kuo Lien-Ying left China and then again in 1966 soon after his arrival in the United States, *Tai-Chi Chuan in Theory and Practice* has now been edited and expanded by his widow and disciple, Simone Kuo. Her version includes new material on the philosophical origins of Tai-Chi Chuan, particularly how it relates to the *I Ching*, the most ancient text of Chinese wisdom. The book also provides explanations of the meaning of this ancient and elegant martial art—its name and history—the keys to understanding the Thirteen Movements, archival photographs of Lien-Ying performing the movements, and other supplementary literature.

*Tai-Chi Chuan in Theory and Practice* is the one book Kuo Lien-Ying published in English and its photographs of him performing the sixty-four movements of the original form of Tai-Chi Chuan are the only extant ones.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kuo Lien-Ying was one of the most distinguished and revered martial artists of the twentieth century. He was born in Sanyuan City, in northern China in 1890, and began training as a boy. He went on to study, practice, and teach a great array of Chinese martial arts throughout his life. In addition to martial arts, Kuo trained in various forms of physical therapy and traditional healing, as well as major religious traditions. He was also a Congressman to the National Assembly of China. Kuo Lien-Ying's life spanned the time of great upheaval and transition between the Ching dynasty and modern China. A great master of a traditional martial art, he continued to practice and teach in San Francisco until his death in 1984.

Editor Simone Kuo, the disciple and widow of Kuo Lien-Ying, is the master teacher of the Tai-Chi Chuan Academy, which she helped her husband to found after their immigration to San Francisco in 1966. She also teaches Tai-Chi Chuan at San Francisco State University, where she has been on the faculty of the Department of Kinesiology since 1980.



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