The Taijiquan Classics

太極拳經

An Annotated Translation

Including a commentary by Chen Weiming

Barbara Davis

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Acknowledgments

Writing a book is a lesson in both patience and practice. This particular book began as a short seminar paper at the University of Minnesota more than a dozen years ago and then gradually gathered momentum, creating mountains of papers, notes, dictionaries, books, and articles, along with my naïve expectations that it would all be wrapped up shortly.

Almost any book relies on the help of others. When I haltingly first made my way through the original Chinese of the Taijiquan Classics, Richard Mather, professor *emeritus* of Chinese at Minnesota, patiently guided me. As we read the texts, Professor Mather, a Chinese-born American thoroughly educated in both the Chinese and Western classics, pointed out numerous literary allusions and structures in the Taijiquan Classics that opened up new depths to the texts. His exquisitely thorough scholarship and kindness forever remain a model for me. His help, and that of Nanxiu Qian, now of Rice University, was crucial to my forming an understanding of the Taijiquan Classics as a part of China's literary heritage. Qian and my friend Chen Zhiyuan did much to remind me of the realities of Chinese life that lay behind the words.

As the book developed, I came into contact with a number of Western taijiquan scholar-practitioners, and each generously shared ideas, materials, and critiques. They include Greg Bissell, Michael DeMarco, Stanley Henning, Robert W. Smith, Louis Swaim, and Douglas Wile. It is through efforts such as theirs that a framework, methodology, and body of taijiquan research are gradually being built in the West, encompassing history, text translation, textual analysis, and social context. Others who have helped me interpret difficult Chinese documents and grapple with intellectual thorny

points include Alexei Ditter, Marta Hanson, Sally Hart, M. Hennessy, Paul Lin, Liu Cheoc Seng, Michael Schnapp, Liping Wang, and Weiming Yuan. Much of the source material for this book would have remained impenetrable had I not received training at the University of Minnesota from historians Romeyn Taylor (who has since become a taijiquan adept himself), Edward Farmer, Ann Waltner, and librarians Zhou Yuan and Wang Yuh-shiow.

Foreign friends have often reminded me of the great privilege we have in the United States of unfettered access to information. In fact, many items used in this book were literally stumbled across by wandering through the library stacks at the University of Minnesota's East Asian and Borchart Map Libraries, Columbia University's Starr Library, the Harvard-Yenching Library, and the Princeton Gest Oriental Library. In Taiwan, the National Central Library, the libraries of the National Palace Museum and the Academia Sinica Institute of Philology and History, and the Lianhe Bao Genealogical Foundation all provided access to their collections. Special thanks to Professor Zhao Shiyu of the Beijing Normal University Department of History for helping me obtain copies of rare materials. Technical support at different times was provided by the Minnesota Institute of Acupuncture and Herbal Studies, and the University of Minnesota's Compleat Scholar Program and Department of History. The Minneapolis Public Libraries have been a home away from home throughout my life, particularly the Hosmer Branch Library, which my family has frequented for three generations over almost five decades. I humbly offer this book as an addition to the library's "Minnesota Authors" collection.

Numerous people read drafts of the book manuscript and gave valuable feedback. Others, including family, friends, colleagues, and my students at Great River T'ai Chi Ch'uan, helped me fashion it into something that would be readable for a wider audience. Two of my long-term students, Elwood Holmberg and Carolyn McNeill, passed away just before the manuscript was completed. Among Elwood's papers was a 1993 draft of part of the book. It was not only a reminder of how long it took to develop the book, but how important the interchange of ideas is in shaping one's work.

A number of people thoroughly critiqued the entire manuscript; I owe a particular thanks to Louis Swaim and Weiming Yuan for their meticulous and thoughtful comments on detailed aspects of the manuscript. Cletus Dalglish-Schommer, Colette Hyman of Winona State University, Mary Lukas, Cheryl Schwichtenberg, and Douglas Wile of Brooklyn College made important suggestions for its improvement. Marguerite Krause, Edith Davis, and Kathy Glass helped to smooth out the writing and make it presentable. Jess O'Brien at North Atlantic Books was always ready with encouragement and patience. Robert W. Schmitt, my collaborator at *Taijiquan Journal,* prepared the graphics, and artist Hong Zhang graciously provided the cover calligraphy. Su Chen of the University of Minnesota's East Asian Library took time to help with the Chinese characters.

All this intellectual work *about* taijiquan was predicated on having a foundation *in* taijiquan practice and ideas. My taijiquan teachers—senior students of the late Professor Cheng Man-ch'ing—have been kind enough to open the door for me and my classmates to the splendid richness of taijiquan practice and its theories. My primary teacher of recent years, Liu Hsi-heng of Taipei, has constantly demonstrated to me the embodiment of the principles found in the Taijiquan Classics. He has repeatedly admonished me that these are not just words on paper, but that they are meant to be mulled over and worked on over decades. Ed Young, with whom I was fortunate to have been able to study for several summers, not only helped to ground my taijiquan practice, but also gave me my first taste of the Chinese language, the discipline of calligraphy, and the fascinating study of Chinese character etymology. Maggie Newman has continually counseled me to keep a fresh outlook on practice and endeavor to maintain a balanced life. The late Jane Faigao was always ready with probing, challenging questions that cut through any unclear thinking on my part. Benjamin Lo, Bataan Faigao, and others have always been ready with advice. I feel I owe thanks to Professor Cheng himself, who passed away just before I began my studies, not only for having trained such an interesting and creative group of students, but for his unique contribution to taijiquan's intellectual tradition.

Books such as this would never come to fruition without family and friends. I am fortunate to have come from a home that was filled with love, encouragement, learning, reading, and questioning. My deepest appreciation and love go to my parents Lionel and Edith; to Peggy, Joe, Julian, Saul, Aaron, and Kayla, and to my aunt Naomi Replansky. Finally, Cheryl Schwichtenberg has been a friend, colleague, and study partner for over twenty years, and I could not have done this work without her unflagging support.

I am indebted to all who have helped me on the way; however, I alone am responsible for any errors in these pages.

Preface

Taijiquan now needs almost no introduction. Since its modest beginnings as a family-held martial art in northern China, it has traveled in the hands of immigrants, refugees, emissaries, cultural ambassadors, and exchange students across national boundaries, finding dedicated followers in all corners of the world.

Taijiquan drew from the rich tapestry of China's culture. It used evocative images from ancient military practices, Chinese legends, the animal kingdom, and the natural world. It brought together methods of fighting arts, of medicine, and of qigong. It borrowed ideas from the *Yijing* and from the great Daoist and Confucian philosophers.

From at least the nineteenth century, taijiquan practice was supplemented by oral and written literature. Essays, poems, and ditties created a means of communication and dissemination. A group of those early works—now known as the Taijiquan Classics—laid a foundation of theory and practice that has nourished the millions of people who have taken up its study. But while the Taijiquan Classics have served as touchstones for practitioners for well over a century, the authors, origins, and their exact contents remain mysterious and disputed.

The Taijiquan Classics: An Annotated Translation explores taijiquan's textual tradition from the vantage points of seasoned practitioners, novices, and scholars alike. The book is divided into three parts, the first of which includes an overview of the history of taijiquan, and the development, transmission, language, and ideas of the Taijiquan Classics. The second part of the book contains the five core texts of the Taijiquan Classics as handed down within the Yang Family taijiquan lineage, which was first commercially

published in the 1920s by Chen Weiming, a leading disciple of Yang Chengfu.

Part Three takes a look at deeper layers of the five texts, using a commentary by Chen Weiming as a springboard. His commentary is translated here for the first time in English. An assortment of annotations is included in an effort to open a window into the Chinese world-view of the Classics. Detailed notes and a bibliography are supplied for those who wish to read further.

Though short in length, the Taijiquan Classics have inspired generations to higher levels of accomplishment. Like any truly great literature, they are multilayered. The longer we practice taijiquan, the more we can glean from the Classics. The more often we read the Classics, the greater their influence on our practice.

In the mid-1970s when I first began to study taijiquan, there were precious few taijiquan books in English. When *The Essence of T'ai Chi Ch'uan* was published in 1979—one of the first translations of the Taijiquan Classics—I became as fascinated with the Classics as I was with taijiquan itself. Each time I read through the book, I found new insights about practice and theory. Finally, like Confucius' copy of the *Yijing*, my copy's binding broke.

When I later first read the Classics in the original Chinese, yet another awareness surfaced—that taijiquan and the Classics were firmly rooted in Chinese culture. Without learning more about China, about the world of taijiquan's early practitioners and their ways of thinking, some aspects of taijiquan would remain elusive and beyond my grasp.

My curiosity got the best of me. I soon found myself immersed in a wide array of material that encompassed Chinese literature, social history, literacy, book production, textual analysis, family records, and government documents, all of which described parts of the world of late imperial China from which taijiquan and its practitioners arose. With the help of my professors, I studied the meanings of specific words and phrases of the Classics, and searched for imagery

and allusions. I noticed that the Chinese versions did not necessarily match each other exactly. Whole texts and authors appeared and disappeared, sentences were reversed, titles and words were changed, and paragraphs were added or omitted.

Among all the material I read about China, there was a curious gap: there was little information about taijiquan or other martial arts. This was puzzling, as the martial arts were clearly such a colorful and celebrated part of China's culture—and still are, as evidenced by the ever-increasing popularity of martial arts films and books.

As I learned more about the field of sinology—Chinese studies—I found a number of reasons for this situation. The martial arts had, for the most part, been linked with a rougher, nonliterate, lower class of men; thus, written records were sparse. Elite, literate culture had dominated the Chinese society for thousands of years. That heavily documented culture—politics, government, literature, philosophy, organized religion, and history—only occasionally touched on the lives of the average person or the lower classes. Research on China quite naturally focused almost exclusively on the elite culture. Only recently had sinologists begun to turn their attention to the study of what was called "popular culture," including everything from food to fortune-telling to almanacs to martial arts.

At the same time, research on the martial arts was made difficult by martial artists themselves. The secrecy, clannishness, and myth-making crucial to preservation of lineages, particularly during adverse political and social climates, worked against creating clear and verifiable histories. The interweaving of fact and fiction that existed within the martial arts community about its own history created contradictory stories about each martial art, its texts, its personalities, and their feats. By sheer repetition, some of these legends took on the aura of fact. While these stories were inspirational, they did little to tell about actual circumstances. The Chinese label this kind of history "*yeshi*" (wild history). While acceptable in its original context, it is not allowed by "modern scholarship."

For these reasons, the history of taijiquan is a field fraught with many dead ends, factional politics, and unavailable or nonexistent sources. Future researchers may be able to expand our understanding

of taijiquan's past by utilizing sources such as archives, interviews, movement analysis, and surviving documents, perhaps in the form of correspondence, photographs, and school records. There is also much research still to be done on other old taijiquan texts, and on those from other martial arts such as xingyiquan, shaolinquan, and baguaquan. Such research will help place taijiquan and its companion martial arts within a clearer historical and social context.

Thus, the ideas and research in this book will be successful if they raise just as many questions as they answer. They should be taken as pieces of a puzzle, the details of which may become clearer over time. The questions and ideas presented in this book are not meant to detract from a rich mythological sense we may have of taijiquan history. Instead, my hope is that they add to our understanding by illuminating the obscure and explaining the puzzling.

At the time of this writing, the world is caught up in the age-old battle of good and evil, right and wrong, and us against them. Our study of taijiquan ideally helps us to see the continuum of yin and yang rather than only the polarity of black and white.

MINNEAPOLIS, 2003

Tools for Using This Book

- Two versions of the Classics are discussed in this book, the Yang lineage version and the Wu/Li lineage version. These are labeled clearly. The Yang version is translated in Parts Two and Three.
- There are many editions of the Yang lineage Classics; all contain variations in titles, authors, and exact contents. In this book, we will follow the text version found in Chen Weiming's *Art of Taijiquan (Taijiquan shu)* as reprinted in Taiwan as *Taijiquan jiangyi*, with some exceptions that are noted in the introduction to Part Three. Text titling and order follow those found in *The Essence of T'ai Chi Ch'uan* (Lo, et al.). Chen's original text (in its original order) is included in the appendix.
- Western dates are used in the text. Chinese dates, where relevant, are given in the notes.
- Chinese names are written family name first. Many of the people mentioned herein had alternate names for use in different contexts (e.g. public use, family use, pen-names). These names will be indicated where relevant.
- When other classics are mentioned (e.g. the Confucian classics), "classics" is written lowercase.
- A list of book titles abbreviated in the notes can be found at the beginning of the bibliography.
- Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
- There are several names that can lead to confusion:

  Chen Weiming, our main commentator in Part Three, is not related to the Chen Family of Chen-style taijiquan.

  Chen Weiming's book, and that of the taijiquan researcher Gu Liuxin, are both titled *The Art of Taijiquan (Taijiquan shu)*. These will be distinguished as needed, in the notes, as I have relied on both books extensively.

  There are two distinct Wu styles of taijiquan, the characters for which are written differently in Chinese. First, Wu 武 is named for Wu Yuxiang (1812–1880), whose pivotal role in early taijiquan is discussed in Part One. His

style and lineage are often referred to as Wu/Hao, after himself and Hao Weizhen, one of his main disciples. The version of the Taijiquan Classics handed down in that lineage is referred to as the Wu/Li version. Second, Wu 吳 is named for Wu Jianquan (1870–1942), a later Yang lineage practitioner. This style will not be discussed in this book.

- The notes follow styling commonly used in Chinese studies in regard to dates, book titles, names of governmental positions, etc. Page numbering for old Chinese books is by folio pages, for which one page number refers to both sides, designated a or b. *Juan* refers to a section of a book, more or less equivalent to a chapter.
- Chinese words in common usage in English (such as yin and yang) are not italicized. The following terms are left in Chinese throughout the book:

jin—the "internal power" or "intrinsic strength" that is cultivated in taijiquan practice.

qi—the body's energy or life-force; can also refer to the breath.

xin—often translated as heart-mind; encompasses the English-language concepts of emotions, spirit, and thoughts.

yi—refers to the mental processes, thoughts, and intention.

yao—commonly translated as "waist." However, *yao* refers to a broader area of the body than does the English-language concept of "waist." "Waist" refers only to the waistband area and the circumference of the body along that line. *Yao,* on the other hand, includes the lower torso, the waist, *dantian,* and *mingmen*/kidney area, and by extension, the hip and the sacrum/*weilü* point.

Pronunciation Guide

Pinyin romanization is the international standard for transcribing the sounds of Chinese. It is used throughout this book, except for published titles or names where common usage dictates otherwise.

A simplified and approximate pinyin system is given in the chart below, matched with the older Wade-Giles system in the second column, and an approximate pronunciation in the third column. Apostrophes in Wade-Giles indicate an aspirated sound. If a letter is not listed in this chart, it should be pronounced more or less the same as in American English. For a complete, detailed chart of the almost four hundred possible combinations of sounds, readers can consult a Chinese-English dictionary or the *Chicago Manual of Style* (pp. 272–273).

PINYIN	WADE-GILES	PRONUNCIATION
a	a	f*a*ther
b	p	*b*at
c (before vowels)	ts', tz'	ne*ts*
ch	ch'	*ch*urch
d	t	*d*og
e	e	sp*u*n
g	k	*g*et
i	i	p*ee*p
j	ch	*j*ig
k	k'	*c*at
o	o, ou	l*o*w
p	p'	*p*op
q	ch'	*ch*eek
r	j	*r*ound
sh	sh	*s*ure
t	t'	*t*all
u	u	sh*oe*
u (after j, q, y)	ü	ü
yi	i	*ee*
x	hs	*sh*e
z (before vowels)	ts, tz	a*ds*
zh	ch	*j*udge

The following list contains many of the terms and names that are found in this book.

Chinese	Pinyin	Wade-Giles	Pronunciation
陳	Chen	Ch'en	chun
陳微明	Chen Weiming	Ch'en Wei-ming	chun way ming
挫	*cuo* (breaking force)	*ts'o*	tswo
丹田	*dantian*	*tan-t'ien*	don-tyen
道德經	*Daodejing*	*Tao-te ching*	dow-duh-jing
導引	*daoyin*	*tao-yin*	dow-inn
打手歌	*Dashou ge*	*Ta-shou ke*	dah show geh
關百益	Guan Baiyi	Kuan Pai-i	gwan bye-ee
廣平	Guangping	Kuang-p'ing	gwang-ping
郝為真	Hao Weizhen	Hao Wei-chen	how wei-juhn
勁	*jin* (internal force)	*chin*	gin
經	*jing* (classic; quiet)	*ching*	ging
李亦畬(經綸)	Li Yiyu (Jinglun)	Li I-yü	lee ee-you
馬同文	Ma Tongwen	Ma T'ung-wen	ma tong when
氣	*qi*	*ch'i*	chee
氣功	*qigong*	*ch'i-kung*	chee-gung
戚繼光	Qi Jiguang	Ch'i Chi-Kuang	chee gee-gwaang
清	Qing Dynasty	Ch'ing	ching
身,神	*shen* (body; spirit)	*shen*	shun
十三勢	*Shisan shi*	*Shih-san shi*	sure-saann sure
十三式歌	*Shisan shi ge*	*Shih-san shih ke*	sure-saann sure geh
十三勢行功心解	*Shisan shi xinggong xin jie*	*Shih-san shih hsin-kung hsin chieh*	sure-saann sure shin-gung shin geeyeeh
太極	*taiji*	*t'ai chi*	tie-gee
太極拳	*taijiquan*	*t'ai-chi ch'üan*	tie-gee chwan
太極拳經	*Taijiquan jing*	*T'ai-chi ch'üan ching*	tie-gee chwan jing
太極拳論	*Taijiquan lun*	*T'ai-chi ch'üan lun*	tie-gee chwan loown
太極拳術	*Taijiquan shu*	*T'ai-chi ch'üan shu*	tie-gee chwan shoe

王宗岳	Wang Zongyue	Wang Ts'ung-yüeh	waang ts'ong-yweh
武澄清 (秋瀛)	Wu Chengqing (Qiuying) (Ch'iu-ying)	Wu Ch'eng-ch'ing	woo chung-ching (chyoo-ing)
武汝清 (酌堂)	Wu Ruqing (Zhuotang)	Wu Ju-ch'ing (Cho-t'ang)	woo rue-ching (jwo-tang)
武禹襄 (河清)	Wu Yuxiang (Heqing)	Wu Yü-hsiang (Ho-ch'ing)	woo you-syaang (huh-ching)
武陽	Wuyang	Wu-yang	woo-yang
心	*xin*	*hsin*	shin
許龍厚 (禹生)	Xu Longhou (Yusheng)	Hsü Long-hou (Yü-sheng)	shoe lung-hoe (you sheng)
陽	*yang*	*yang*	yaang
養生	*yangsheng*	*yang-sheng*	yaang-shung
腰	*yao*	*yao*	yow
意	*yi*	*i*	ee
陰	*yin*	*yin*	yiin
易經	*Yijing*	*I Ching*	ee-jing
永年	Yongnian	Yung-nian	yung nyan
張三豐	Zhang Sanfeng	Chang San-feng	jaang saan-fung

Part One

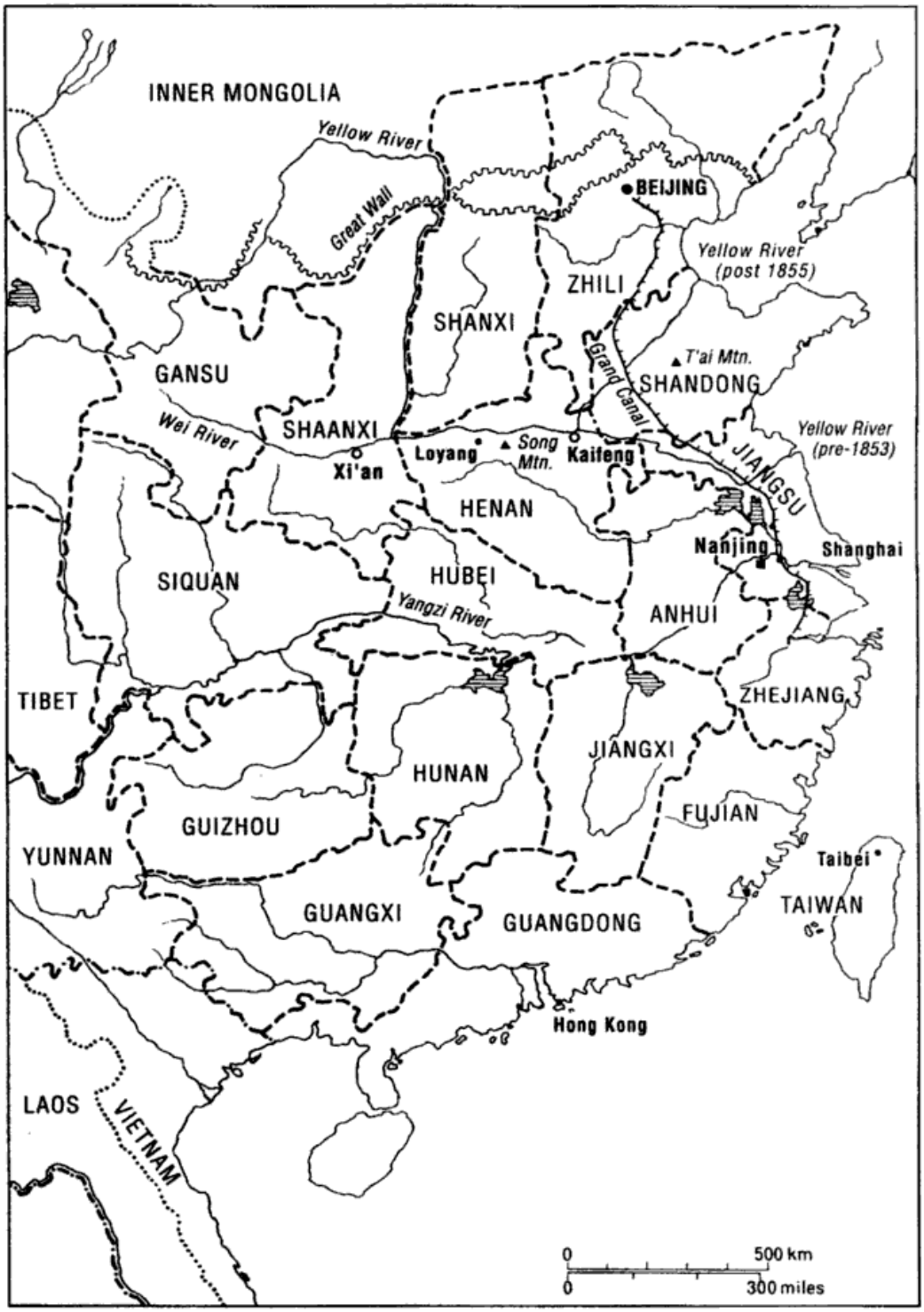

FIGURE 1: Qing Dynasty China.

Chapter One
A Brief History of Taijiquan

Nineteenth-century China was in severe crisis. Buffeted by disasters, difficulties, and forces of change from within and without its borders, the Manchurian rule of two centuries over China was slipping. Foreign powers took advantage of the country's problems and wrested trade agreements and treaties in their own favor from the Chinese. The government itself decayed from the inside out, plagued by corruption, weak leadership, poor decisions, and power struggles.

China's small villages and towns were faced with dramatic population increases, and more and more people fell into poverty. Floods, famine, locusts, earthquakes, and epidemics took their toll, while opium addiction ravaged many citizens. The heavily silted Yellow River shifted its course northward, devastating a large area. The imperial government provided insufficient protection against the numerous bands of rebels and bandits, so the local people, often led by the gentry, stepped in to fill the gap by organizing, implementing, and financing militias, crop-watching societies, and maintenance of defensive city walls.

Within families, impoverished peasants were drawn into rebel movements such as the Taiping and the Nian. Among the educated classes, Chinese literati who would normally have pursued government careers vented their frustrations with the Manchu rulers through withdrawal from civil service, and expressed their opinions disguised within poetry and artwork.

It was from this time of turmoil that taijiquan arose.

Northern China gave birth to many martial arts—including the unique system that became known as taijiquan.[1] From an early time, martial arts had been used for both fighting and entertainment. Skilled fighters were hired to guard convoys carrying important travelers or valuable goods. Martial arts bouts and demonstrations served as amusement at town fairs and marketplaces. Chinese operas, whether performed in a big city theater or in a local village square, were not complete without their intricately choreographed fight scenes—precursors to today's Chinese martial arts films. Other martial artists honed their skills for less savory uses, whether for personal gain, illegal acts, or as part of a rebellion.

Chinese martial arts have never served simply as physical training, but have consistently and purposefully drawn from the wellspring of the culture's philosophical, medical, and contemplative disciplines. Concepts such as yin and yang and the Five Phases were adopted into the vocabulary of the fighting systems and became an important part of their theoretical framework. Methods from the "life-nourishing" traditions (i.e., *yangsheng, daoyin, qigong,* and meditation) were often incorporated, giving the Chinese martial arts their particular thrust. This, in itself, demonstrates a characteristic of Chinese philosophy: that it has always been application-oriented. It even occasionally made use of the martial arts to make moral, practical, and ethical points.[2]

The martial arts were quite naturally linked to the theories of China's ancient military thinkers such as Sunzi. His *Art of War (Sunzi bingfa)* was written in approximately the sixth century B.C.E.[3] Sunzi's ideas have influenced leaders around the world as applied in such diverse venues as warfare, politics, business, and martial arts. Later military treatises built on Sunzi's ideas, and by the Song Dynasty in the seventh century, C.E., the most significant ones were collected into a book called *Seven Military Classics (Wujing qi shu).*[4] The Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) saw publication of *A New Treatise on Disciplined Service (Jixiao xinshu)* by General Qi Jiguang (1528–1587). Qi's book included a chapter called the "Boxing Classic" *(Quanjing).*[5] In that chapter, Qi listed more than a dozen boxing styles. He selected thirty-two moves from them and constructed an

amalgamated routine. The chapter includes pictures of the moves and mnemonic rhymes about their applications (see FIGURE 2). Qi noted that boxing was not of use against superior arms, but was still useful for its discipline. The book also included an excerpt of Yu Dayou's (1503–1580) treatise on weapons called the "Sword Classic" *(Jianjing)*, which exhibited concepts such as softness, listening, and sticking that we now associate with taijiquan.

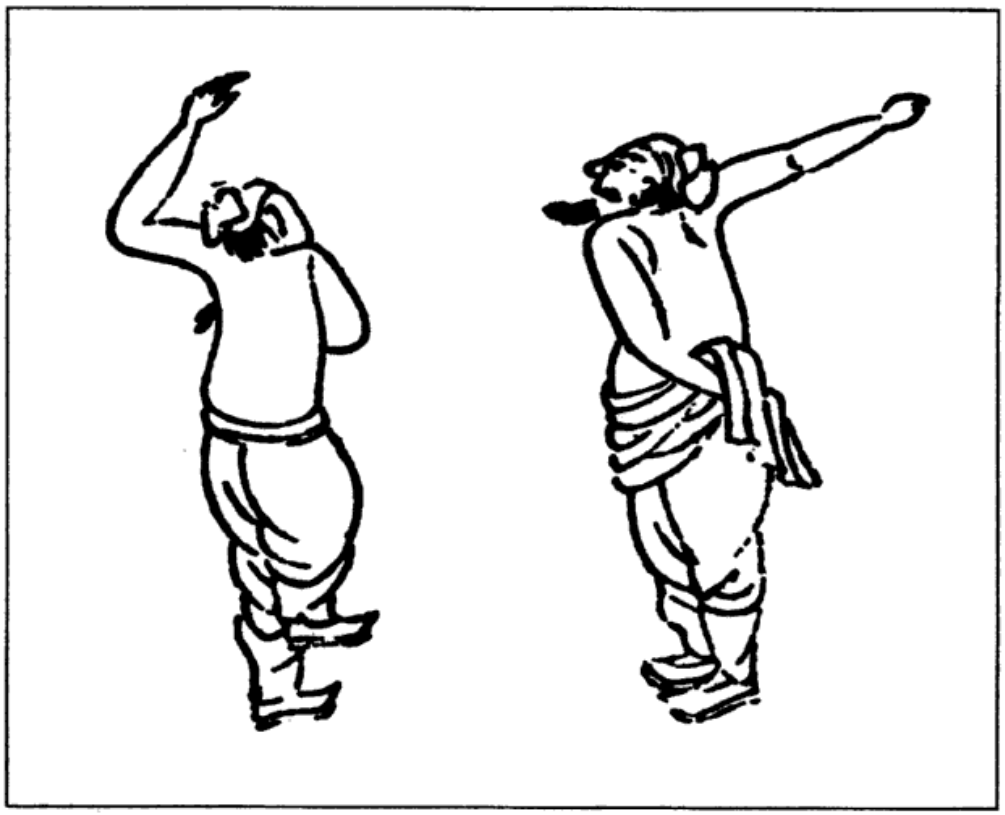

FIGURE 2: "Golden Cock Stands on One Leg" and "Leisurely Tucking in the Garments" (Qi, *Jixiao xinshu, juan* 14/3a).

Over the centuries, numerous Chinese martial arts styles evolved, matured, cross-fertilized, and spread. Two distinct branches have been noted since the seventeenth century: "outer styles" *(waijia)*, which rely on physical strength and speed, and "inner styles" *(neijia)*, which focus on the use of *jin* (internal force) and *qi*. Though this

paradigm is disputed by some scholars, it nevertheless has been used for many years.[6] Examples of the so-called outer styles are the various schools of Shaolin boxing (shaolinquan), named for the Shaolin Monastery in Henan Province where these styles were practiced. These are often generically, though incorrectly, called "kungfu" in English.[7] The inner styles are sometimes called Wudang style *(Wudang pai)*, after the Daoist enclave in the Wudang Mountains in the north of Hubei Province, where legend says they originated. Taijiquan, baguaquan, and xingyiquan are all examples of the so-called inner styles.

Martial arts were nurtured by local traditions, by transmission through family bonds, and by the equally close master-disciple relationship. Various fighting styles were often particular to certain regions or villages, handed down within clans and kept secret from outsiders. Daughters were not generally taught, as they were expected to marry out into other clans.

In their boxing lessons, students drilled on sequences of moves, specific techniques, and sparring. They used mnemonic devices such as ditties to help remember the sequences, applications, and theories. These easy-to-memorize poems were essential to transmission of knowledge, particularly for those teachers and students who were not literate. Those with literary skills were sometimes tapped to record a master's words, compose essays, write more complex poems, or to copy lineage manuscripts. Handwritten manuscripts were valued treasures within a lineage, and when the time was right, a disciple might be presented with a copy or be given the opportunity to copy them by hand. These manuscripts became the subject of contention if stolen or appropriated by untrustworthy students.

As taijiquan developed its own identity and drew in increasing numbers of followers, it also acquired a body of oral teachings and written literature. One set of these was grouped together, ultimately becoming known as the Taijiquan Classics.

The Early Days of Taijiquan

Though taijiquan is now one of the most well-known and widely practiced styles of Chinese boxing, its exact origin is "lost in the mists of antiquity." Historically speaking, we know that taijiquan

existed under that name in the Henan-Hebei area of northern China by the latter part of the nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century it was being taught in the Beijing area.

There are numerous theories about taijiquan's genesis—some mythological, some historical. The Chen family, the Yangs, and the Wu family are at the center of most accepted histories of taijiquan. The predominant school of thought is that taijiquan—or rather its precursor—originated with members of the Chen family, or at least passed through their hands. It then was disseminated by the Yang family, while the Wu family developed taijiquan's literary tradition. What follows is a brief survey of taijiquan history, with an emphasis on its literature.

FIGURE 3: Zhili (present-day Hebei) and Henan Provinces during the Qing Dynasty.

The Chen Family

According to the Chen family records, many generations of their family had practiced boxing.[8] The Chens were from a village that bore their name, Chen Family Village (Chenjiagou), in Wen District, Huaiqing Prefecture, Henan Province, just north of the Yellow River. They hold that taijiquan, or more properly, proto-taijiquan, was invented by Chen Wangting in the mid-seventeenth century. This new boxing style combined military and popular boxing techniques with health and qigong-type exercises.[9] It utilized softness, circularity, and *jin*, a type of internal force. Successive generations of the Chen family further refined the boxing routines based on these principles.

Many of the Chen-style moves are similar in name and appearance to martial arts moves depicted in Qi Jiguang's book, *A New Treatise on Disciplined Service*, mentioned above. In view of the overlap between Chen-style moves and Qi's moves, some have speculated that Chen Wangting studied Qi's manual and derived his system of boxing from it.[10]

FIGURE 4: Grasping and Brushing Clothes *(lan ca yi)*, from Chen Xin's *Chen shi taijiquan tujie*, p. 164.

The Chens kept their boxing within the family until the time of Chen Changxing (1771–1853), who accepted Yang Luchan as a student. The Chen family continued to keep a low profile until Chen Fake (1887–1957) began to teach in Beijing in 1928, decades after the Yangs had begun spreading taijiquan to the general public. It is unclear if the Chens adopted the name taijiquan at that time, since the name seems to have originated among the Yang and Wu/Li lineage circles in the mid-1800s.

Printed material on Chen-style taijiquan did not appear until the 1930s. The first book to be published was *Chen Family Taijiquan Illustrated (Chenshi taijiquan tujie)* by family member Chen Xin (1849–1929), who reportedly was a scholar but not a taijiquan practitioner.[11] The book was completed in 1919 but not published until 1933, several years after his death. Chen's book has not yet been thoroughly analyzed. It is an eclectic and fascinating compendium of esoteric diagrams and explanations of *Yijing* theory, acupuncture ditties, charts of acupuncture meridians and points, boxing ditties, taijiquan form moves with line drawings and descriptions of postures, as well as essays on taijiquan concepts and biographies of family members.[12] One of Chen's nephews, Chen Zhaopi (1893–1973), wrote a number of taijiquan books beginning in 1935 that borrowed heavily from Chen Xin's material.

The Yang Family

Yang Luchan (1799–1872) was from Yongnian County, Guangping Prefecture, in Hebei, the province directly to the northeast of Henan.[13] It is commonly thought that Yang was from an impoverished family and went to Chen Family Village around the age of nine as an indentured servant to one Chen Dehu, who owned a pharmacy in Yongnian. According to most sources, Yang lived there about thirty years. During this time, he became intrigued with the Chen family's boxing, and managed to win the confidence of Chen Changxing, who ultimately accepted him as the first outsider to study boxing with the Chen family. When Yang was released from his position after Chen Dehu's death, he was about forty years old. He returned home to Yongnian and lived in Chen's Taihe Pharmacy.[14]

The building in which the pharmacy was located was owned by the Wu family, a Yongnian gentry family. Yang began to teach martial arts there, calling his style "Soft Boxing" *(ruanquan)* or "Cotton Boxing" *(mianquan)*. It was there that he taught Wu Yuxiang, the youngest son of the Wu family.[15]

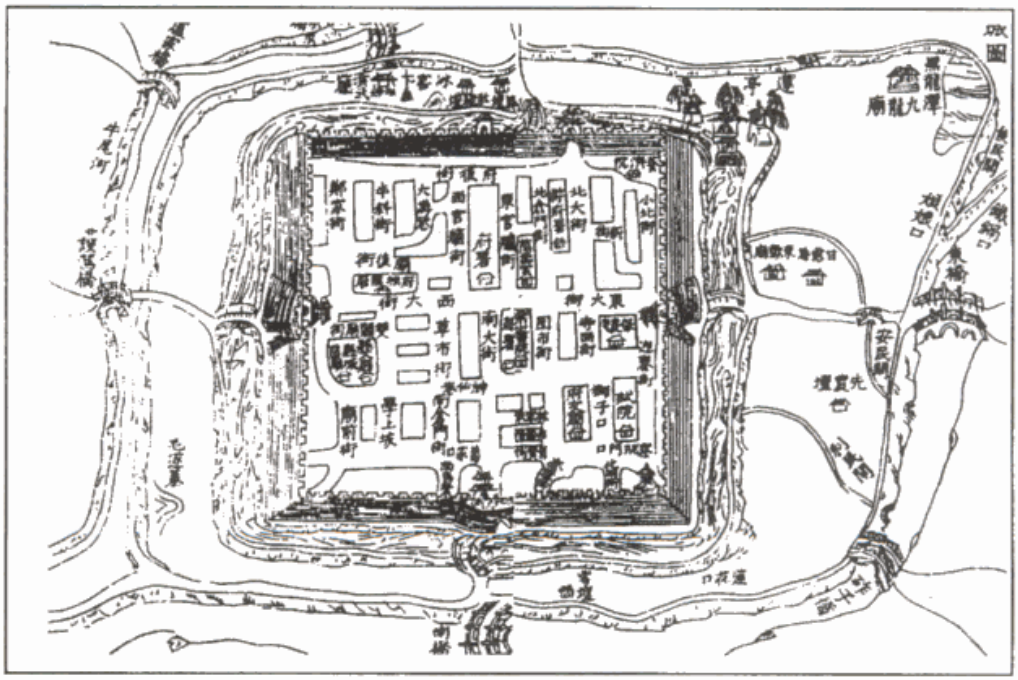

FIGURE 5: Yongnian, the walled city that served as seat of both Yongnian County and Guangping Prefecture. Visible are the main streets, and larger buildings such as government offices *(yamen)* and temples. North is at the top *(YNXZ, juan shou,* pp. 2b–3a).

Legend has it that through the Wu family, Yang Luchan received introductions to people in Beijing.[16] Yang relocated there and began to teach the martial arts more widely, determined to make them public. It is said that among his early students in Beijing were members of the Manchu Imperial Guards.[17] Yang soon began the process of adapting taijiquan to a broader audience that his sons and grandsons later continued. Training was modified, moves that were overly strenuous for nonathletic students were eliminated, and a new emphasis on taijiquan's health benefits emerged. These changes in

taijiquan dovetailed with the then-current interest in national "self-strengthening," a movement that sought to improve Chinese society and its self-image by preserving traditional Chinese values yet adopting, when appropriate, ideas and technology from the West.[18]

Yang Luchan had three sons. Two of them, Jianhou (1839–1917) and Banhou (1837–1892), survived into adulthood and became taijiquan masters themselves. Two of Jianhou's three sons, Shaohou (1862–1929) and Chengfu (1883–1936), continued the Yang family's taijiquan legacy. Yang Chengfu became the leading figure in the popularization of taijiquan as we know it today. He not only trained his family members and students in the martial aspects of taijiquan, but also modified the family's form so that it would appeal to a wider audience who would be interested in practicing for health reasons. Among his students were Chen Weiming (Ch'en Wei-ming, 1881–1958), Dong Yingjie (Tung Ying-chieh, 1888–1961), Zheng Manqing (Cheng Man-ch'ing, 1902–1975), and Fu Zhongwen (1903–1994).[19]

The Yang lineage produced a wide range of literature that included ditties, poems, sayings, form instruction, and short essays.[20] These materials were published in two books by Yang Chengfu in the 1930s. His students, particularly those listed above, also produced a number of books of far-reaching influence, which are listed in the bibliography. Yang lineage publications also included the earliest publication of the Taijiquan Classics, discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

The Wu Lineage

Wu-style taijiquan is an offshoot of the Yang family lineage and is named for Wu Yuxiang (1812–1880), who was also known by the name Wu Heqing. Like Yang Luchan, Wu was a native of Yongnian County, Hebei Province. However, unlike Yang, he was from a well-connected gentry family. His two brothers, father, grandfather, mother, and one grandson were all noted in local or dynastic histories for their scholastic, professional, moral, and civic accomplishments.[21]

Wu and his family became connected to Yang Luchan when Yang returned to Yongnian in the 1840s and stayed at Chen Dehu's Taihe Pharmacy; that building was owned by the Wus. Wu Yuxiang,

according to sources, befriended Yang and studied with him, for possibly up to a decade.[22]

The five Wu children, Chengqing (1800–1884), Ruqing (1805–1885?), First Sister (unnamed in records, 1806–?), Second Sister (unnamed, 1809–1892), and Yuxiang (Heqing), lost their father, Lie, in 1814.[23] While studying for his exams, Wu Lie took ill during an epidemic. Despite valiant efforts by his wife, who risked her own health to try to save him, he succumbed at the age of thirty-two. And so, the three young boys and two sisters were raised by their mother (nee Zhao, c. 1778–1872) and their paternal grandfather Wu Dayong (c. 1857–1820).

Lore has it that though the Wu brothers studied a family tradition of boxing (which some say was a style called *hongquan),* their grandfather discouraged them from following military careers. He and their mother directed the three boys towards literary studies that could bring them success in the civil service system and prestige to the family. The two older brothers passed the highest-level government exams *(jinshi)*—Chengqing in 1852, preceded by Ruqing in 1840—and spent many years at government posts.

Yuxiang, on the other hand, ran into some problems just at the point of taking his middle-level exam *(juren).*[24] In 1849, according to the inscription on Yuxiang's memorial tablet, an incident occurred that changed the course of his life—robbers destroyed the Wu family graves. The officials did not handle the situation to Yuxiang's liking. He complained vehemently, and because of this, he was black-balled: his name was cut from the list of exam-passers. Yuxiang reacted by walking away from a future of study, exams, and civil service to which his family had committed itself. "Whether one succeeds or not is a question of fate," his memorial tablet quotes him saying. "You can spend a lifetime exhausting your senses and thoughts, imprisoning your spirit, and deforming your body [in pursuit of success]. But you cannot know your fate."[25]

Regardless of his decision, Wu Yuxiang must have had some desirable skills, because in 1852 (and later in 1860–61) he was called upon by officials to help against rebel incursions. On both occasions he declined, using the socially acceptable excuse of his mother's age.[26]

During this same period, his elder brothers retired from government service and returned home to Yongnian—Ruqing in 1853, bringing their mother back with him; Chengqing in approximately 1859. They involved themselves with activities common to gentry of the late Qing dynasty: managing family affairs, directing civic projects such as establishing a charitable school in honor of their mother, helping organize the local militia, and arranging for repairs of local city structures.[27] In 1853, Yuxiang began teaching taijiquan to his nephew Li Yiyu. It now appears that the two older Wu brothers Chengqing and Ruqing also studied taijiquan, as several taijiquan texts attributed to the two have surfaced in recent years.[28] One would presume that they did so after retiring from office and returning to Yongnian.

The only mention of martial arts in early Wu family documents is found in a postscript to eldest brother Wu Chengqing's autobiographical account *(Qiuying nianpu)*. His descendants who edited the account after his death wrote in the postscript that because Chengqing took good care of his health and did not easily anger, he was able to enjoy a long life. They said that "when he had spare time he would practice martial arts."[29]

Ironically, even though Wu Yuxiang abandoned the civil service track, his sons and grandsons pursued it and excelled in it, bringing even more status to Yuxiang. Apparently none of his descendants took up taijiquan.[30] His involvement with taijiquan was later described by one of his grandsons, Wu Laixu:

> In the beginning, during the Daoguang reign period (1821–1850), the Chen clan of Chen Family Village in Henan, Wenxian County, were skilled in these techniques, so [Grandfather] was eager to go study with them ... it was not convenient [for him to go there], so he sent fellow villager Yang [Luchan] to go there first to study. After this, Grandfather [Yuxiang] went to Henan on official business *(gong)*, and it was convenient to pass through Chen Village and to pay his respects to Chen Qingping of Zhaobao Village [near Chen Village].[31] Qingping was also skilled in these techniques. [Wu] studied for over a month and

> obtained the mysteries. After he returned home, he refined it, and consequently his technique was wonderful! One time he did a staff form while surrounded by people throwing water at him, but his body had no trace of wetness.[32]

Wu Yuxiang ultimately developed his own style of taijiquan (often described in English as the Wu/Hao style, so as to avoid confusion with the much later Wu Jianquan style), which he passed down to his nephew Li Yiyu (Li Jinglun, 1832–1892) and fellow townsman, Hao Weizhen (1849–1920). This style has not enjoyed the widespread popularity of the Yang or Chen styles. Wu Yuxiang's ascribed writings include a number of texts contained within the Wu/Li version of the Classics, and one text, the Exposition, in the Yang version of the Classics.

Li Yiyu was a nephew of the Wu brothers via his mother, their second sister. Like the Wu family, the Li family was a highly educated, respectable Yongnian clan, with whom the Wu family had many bonds by marriage.[33] Li, like many of his relatives and his uncle Yuxiang, was a lower-level graduate. According to the *Li Family Genealogy,* Li attained the level of "Added Student" at a prefectural level.[34] He achieved the status of "awaiting appointment as a Police Official," a town authority under the direction of the district magistrate.[35] Li briefly served as a governmental military advisor in Henan Province, after which he set up a smallpox clinic that he ran for more than twenty years.

Li obviously enjoyed a close relationship with his maternal uncle Wu Yuxiang, in part through taijiquan. Like Wu, Li did not teach taijiquan widely, but he had at least one main student, Hao Weizhen. Li's first younger brother, Chenglun, studied taijiquan as well.[36] Li later collated an edition of the Classics (referred to here as the Wu/Li version) and wrote a number of his own essays and poems on taijiquan, some of which are included in the Wu/Li Classics, others of which can be found translated in various books.[37]

Other Origin Theories

Chinese tradition dictated that great discoveries, inventions, books, or ideas were to be attributed to ancient and illustrious sage-figures. Agriculture was invented by the legendary Emperor Shen Nong; medicine by the Yellow Emperor; the martial art of shaolinquan by Bodhidharma.[38] These sorts of attributions were made for reasons of deference and humility. Modesty was the rule; one was to follow Confucius' dictum, "I transmit, not create."[39] Realistically, attributions were made in order to gain acceptance and create a respectable lineage. Less scrupulous people did so for purely promotional interests. In some cases, an attribution might even be made to a more contemporary person.[40]

Taijiquan was no exception to this custom. Since at least the early 1900s, legends popular within the Yang family lineage honored the Daoist sage Zhang Sanfeng as the founder of taijiquan.[41] This attribution is taken seriously by many and has been concretized via lineage records, ceremonies, altars, and iconography.

Zhang is said to have lived sometime between the late Northern Song (c. 1100) and early Ming dynasties (c. 1368). He was a master of esoteric Daoist methods. He was associated with the Wudang Mountains in Henan, just over a hundred miles southwest of Chen Family Village, an area that has long been linked with martial arts lore.

Zhang's name first became associated with inner-style boxing in 1669, when it was mentioned in a memorial inscription written for a boxer named Wang Zhengnan.[42] This memorial included a lineage of inner-style boxing:

> The Internal School was founded by Zhang Sanfeng of the Song Dynasty. Sanfeng was a Daoist alchemist of the Wudang Mountains. He was summoned by Emperor Huizong of the Song [r. 1101–1126], but the road was impassible. That night he dreamt that the God of War transmitted the art of boxing to him and the following morning single-handedly killed over a hundred bandits.

FIGURE 6: Zhang Sanfeng *(Sancai tuhui, renwu juan* 11, p. 47a).

A hundred years later, Sanfeng's art spread to Shaanxi [sic] Province, where Wang Zong was its most noteworthy exponent. Chen Zhoutong received the art from Wang Zong and taught it to his fellow villagers. In this way it spread to Wenzhou [in Zhejiang Province].[43]

By the early twentieth century, Zhang had been firmly linked to taijiquan in the several books published within the Yang lineage. This link relied on taking Wang Zong, of the memorial, and Wang Zongyue, of taijiquan, as one and the same man. How long the Zhang myth existed before appearing in print is unknown to us at this time.

Zhang Sanfeng's presence helped to antiquate taijiquan and to connect it to the older tradition of Daoist-associated *qi*-nourishing exercises. The importance of this connection becomes clearer in view of how the Yang family lineage during this same period reshaped taijiquan into a gentler, more health-oriented exercise for wider consumption.

By the 1930s, the legend of Zhang Sanfeng had become greatly embellished and included the now-famous story of Zhang's inspiration for the creation of taijiquan: one day, while in his room chanting scriptures, Zhang looked out his window and witnessed a struggle between a snake and a bird. When the bird attacked, the snake slithered away. Coiling and uncoiling, the snake evaded the bird. Zhang, from these observations of animal behavior, created taijiquan, basing it on the *taiji* symbol, the "changes" of *taiji* (in other words, of yin and yang), and the principle of the "soft overcoming hard."[44] Books from this period included descriptions of the transmission of taijiquan from Zhang Sanfeng on down to Yang Chengfu and his own disciples; Yang's *Methods of Application of Taijiquan* includes a chart showing this. Most taijiquan books since have repeated these stories about Zhang, some embracing even more elaborate stories.[45] In these books, Zhang is usually attributed with the authorship of the essay "Taijiquan Jing" that opens the Yang version of the Classics. The genesis of that essay, however, is equally questionable, as will be examined below in Chapter Two.

Some argue that Zhang was promoted as founder of taijiquan so as to compete with shaolinquan's mythic founder, Bodhidharma. In remarkably parallel stories, both men were said to have created their arts in response to the health problems of monks (Buddhist monks, in the case of Bodhidharma, and Daoist monks in Zhang's). Too much meditation and not enough exercise had made the monks' *qi* stagnant and damaged their health.

Twentieth-century martial arts historians Tang Hao and Xu Zhen in independent efforts disputed the role of Zhang Sanfeng as founder of taijiquan, as have others since. We can see that not only does the internal evidence of the Taijiquan Classics contradict Zhang's role, but Chen family material, ostensibly earlier and closer to the source, has no record of Zhang, regardless of the assertion that the founder of Chen style is said to have incorporated "Daoist ideas" into his proto-taijiquan style. Moreover, if Zhang had invented taijiquan, we would expect to find traces of Zhang in Chen Family Village, or to find traces of taijiquan in other locales in which Zhang and his followers may have been. Additionally, neither Zhang's official biographies nor his attributed writings on Daoist topics mention boxing. Portraits of Zhang, no matter how far removed in time from when he lived, or how generic the style of painting, always depict Zhang in a contemplative stance, with no hint of boxing in the picture.[46] Douglas Wile also makes tantalizing note of a "cave of the Immortal Chang [Zhang Sanfeng] at West Pass" in Wuyang County, and wonders if the legends of the Classics and Zhang were "discovered" in the same place, that is, Wuyang.[47] This is certainly an area for more investigation.

Regardless of the "authenticity" of Zhang or his writings, the link to this famous Daoist master plays an important role in the lives of many taijiquan players. Zhang's status has helped to reinforce the notion that taijiquan is a "Daoist" martial art, one that relies on ideas from the *Daodejing* and on the cultivation of *jing*, *qi*, and *shen* (essence, *qi*, and spirit) so fundamental to Daoist meditative practices. Zhang continues to be venerated in shrines and art, and honored on his birthday and the day of his death in observances at many taijiquan schools.

Wang Zongyue

Who was Wang Zongyue?[48] Opinions vary widely: he was the link between Zhang Sanfeng and Chen Village, he was the author of the earliest layer of the Classics, or, he was an invented figure. But Wang is even more puzzling than Zhang Sanfeng, as we know virtually nothing about him.

In the 1930s, martial arts historian Tang Hao discovered a text called *Yinfu Spear* at a Beijing bookstall.[49] It was bound with a Yang lineage version of the Classics, and the "pamphlet" had a preface that described a Master Wang of Shanxi. According to the preface, Wang was an itinerant teacher from Shanxi Province during the Qing Dynasty Qianlong reign period (1736–1795), who worked in the Loyang-Kaifeng area in Henan Province, not far from Chen Family Village. Tang surmised that this Master Wang was the same man as Wang Zongyue. Tang's reasoning was that the texts were bound together, the surname and province on both were identical, and the "principles and elegance" were the same.[50]

Tang's opinions were not universally accepted. Still others appeared to confuse Wang Zongyue with a man named Wang Zong mentioned in the seventeenth-century memorial to Wang Zhengnan. One school of thought holds that Wang went to Chen Village and taught taijiquan to members of the Chen Family; another asserts that Wang learned from the Chens. In either case, Chen family material does not mention Wang, nor does it transmit the Classics, except for a short ditty appended to the end of Chen Xin's book that is labeled "Passed down from the Master from Shanxi to Jiang Fa."[51] Jiang Fa, however, was yet another mysterious figure in taijiquan history; he was said by Chen family members to have been a servant or disciple of Chen Wanting. Some Chen family and Yang lineage members said he studied with Wang Zongyue and then transmitted the teachings to Chen Changxing.[52]

Even more problematic is the fact that there has never been a "Wang lineage" in taijiquan. This begs the question: did Wang really exist? Unfortunately, tracking down accurate historical material about him is next to impossible. The surname Wang is very common, and we do not know if Zongyue was a given name or an assumed name. Without knowing his exact name and birthplace it is unlikely that we will ever be able to know more about him.[53]

If Wang was not an actual person but was created, we must ask, why? Unlike Zhang Sanfeng, Wang was an unknown and could serve no mythic purposes. Or perhaps, as Douglas Wile wonders, was it possible that Wang "Zongyue"—literally "Revering Yue," Yue Fei

being the famous Chinese general of the Song Dynasty who battled the ancestors of the Manchus—was created as a symbol of anti-Manchu sentiment among the gentry taijiquan practitioners of Yongnian?[54] Or could the Wu and Li family practitioners have invented him as a mask for their own identities, or to disguise teachings received from Chen Qingping? However, a comparison of other Wu and Li texts with the Taijiquan Treatise attributed to Wang shows a difference in styling and vocabulary as well as the Wu and Li texts' tell-tale usage of "taijiquan" as the name of the art in both titles and text, where the Treatise has none except in the title (which could easily have been added later).[55]

The Classics have only a handful of references to Wang. In the Wu/Li Classics, their over-arching title is "Wang Zongyue's Taijiquan Treatise."[56] The Treatise essay itself is then titled "The Taijiquan Treatise of Wang Zongyue of Shanxi."[57] Finally, Li Yiyu's "Short Preface" to the Wu/Li Classics praised Wang's Treatise, saying that it captured the essence and mysteries of taijiquan, and that after Wang, it was transmitted to the Chen family in Chenjiagou, Henan.[58] In addition to these mentions of Wang, Wu Yuxiang's brother Chengqing wrote a commentary on the Treatise. In a postscript to his commentary he noted, "The art of taijiquan has been described most brilliantly by Wang Zongyue."[59]

In the Yang version of the Classics, Wang is only mentioned in the title to the Treatise (when a title is present), or elsewhere in lineage descriptions.[60] Yang lineage members offered little more on Wang. Xu Longhou wrote in 1921 that Wang was from Xi'an, in Shaanxi Province, in the early part of the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368). He wrote that Wang received the "true transmission" and was known far and wide. People from Wenzhou and Chenzhou were among his students.[61]

Wang remains a mystery to us. The highest praise for him was that of Chen Weiming, who, obviously accepting Wang's historicity, thought Wang may have been the person responsible for connecting the single movements of taijiquan into a flowing, continuous form. Chen said, "His work was extraordinary, for had he not connected them into 'one *qi*,' the transmission would probably have been lost."[62]

Taijiquan in Early Republican China

The Qing Dynasty, the foreign rule of China that existed during much of taijiquan's developmental years, collapsed in 1911. Control of China became fragmented among warlords, republicans, communists, and anarchists, all of whom vied for power. Society underwent rapid and often traumatic changes: student and labor protests grew, and emancipation of women was promoted. Language reform, abolition of the civil service examination system, and establishment of universal education with reforms were key parts of these changes. In search of answers to these national dilemmas, the Chinese examined many avenues: Western ideas, radical politics, science, modernization, or a return to traditionalism and imperial rule.

In this tumultuous period, taijiquan and other Chinese martial arts offered attractive methods of health and self-improvement that were intrinsically Chinese. In the process of improving health, people could also reaffirm Chinese identity. And, true to an age-old ideal, cultivating one's self in both mind and body was to be simply the first step towards saving family and country.[63]

Martial arts associations were established that for the first time provided public venues for study, cementing the trend that allowed free access to training. One of the earliest of these organizations was the Beijing Physical Education Research Association, whose taijiquan teachers included Xu Longhou and Wu Jianquan (1870–1942).[64]

The shift towards public venues of instruction and the concomitant increase in number of students directly affected taijiquan literature. The1920s saw the publication of some of the first books on taijiquan; at least one dozen were published between 1921 and 1931. Many of these books were instructional, aimed at readers who did not have ready access to teachers. Xu Longhou wrote *An Illustrated Explanation of the Taijiquan Postures* (*Taijiquan shi tujie,* 1921), which was apparently the first of these books. Chen Weiming's *The Art of Taijiquan* (*Taijiquan shu,* 1925) recorded Yang Chengfu's teachings. The earliest printed mass-circulation taijiquan books were thus generated from the Yang family lineage.

Taijiquan in the Mid- to Late Twentieth Century

The Communists took control of Mainland China in 1949, establishing the People's Republic of China. Martial arts, with their lineage allegiances and perceived ties to secret societies and uprisings, were seen as a threat to government authority. They were considered to be remnants of the feudal past, embodying hierarchies, master-disciple loyalty, and in some cases magic and superstition. Yet these same martial arts were undeniably an established part of the social fabric, whether people treated them as self-cultivation, combat, entertainment, or exercise.

The government established commissions to create a standardized, synthesized style. The goal was to better serve the masses by using the martial arts as a health exercise and a sport for national competitions; in the process, lineages were forced out of the picture.[65] A simplified taijiquan form was created, drawing influences from the lineage-based Chen, Yang, and Sun styles. Taijiquan soon became the ultimate health exercise for the masses and a leisure activity for the retired. It found currency as an exotic spectacle for foreign visitors to view, and has now become a recognizable icon of Chinese culture and wholistic health.

Numerous martial artists fled Mainland China at the end of the civil war in 1949, moving to Hong Kong, Taiwan, and to foreign countries where they developed followings. Others stayed in the mainland, working within the new political system, or quietly keeping their teachings to themselves. With the Yang lineage still predominating, taijiquan spread to overseas Chinese communities including Singapore and the United States. By the 1960s, masters such as Zheng Manqing began teaching Western students who, following their own societal trends, had become interested in Eastern traditions. When the P.R.C. opened its doors to the outer world in the 1970s, taijiquan was poised to spread even further.

In the 1850s, the 150-mile distance between what are generally thought to be the two centers of early taijiquan, Chen Family Village

and Yongnian, was perhaps a week's journey. Since then, the changes in transportation, mass culture, media, and education have helped to propel taijiquan into an international arena. Taijiquan has become as commonly known as yoga, its sister import, and is found in cities and towns around the world. It is now so thoroughly modernized that its practitioners make full use of new technologies such as books, magazines, photography, videos, television, and computers to help with instruction.

Taijiquan has continually absorbed new influences as it has grown. It has flourished through the centuries, whether practiced as martial art, health exercise, moving meditation, or relaxation regimen; whether at the hands of Chinese or non-Chinese, in its native Chinese context, or on the opposite side of the globe. Taijiquan has survived these changes, and perhaps even benefited from them. While there is still no lack of controversy and argument about what "true" taijiquan is or how it should be done, practitioners everywhere rely on the wellspring of the Taijiquan Classics, to whose history we now turn.

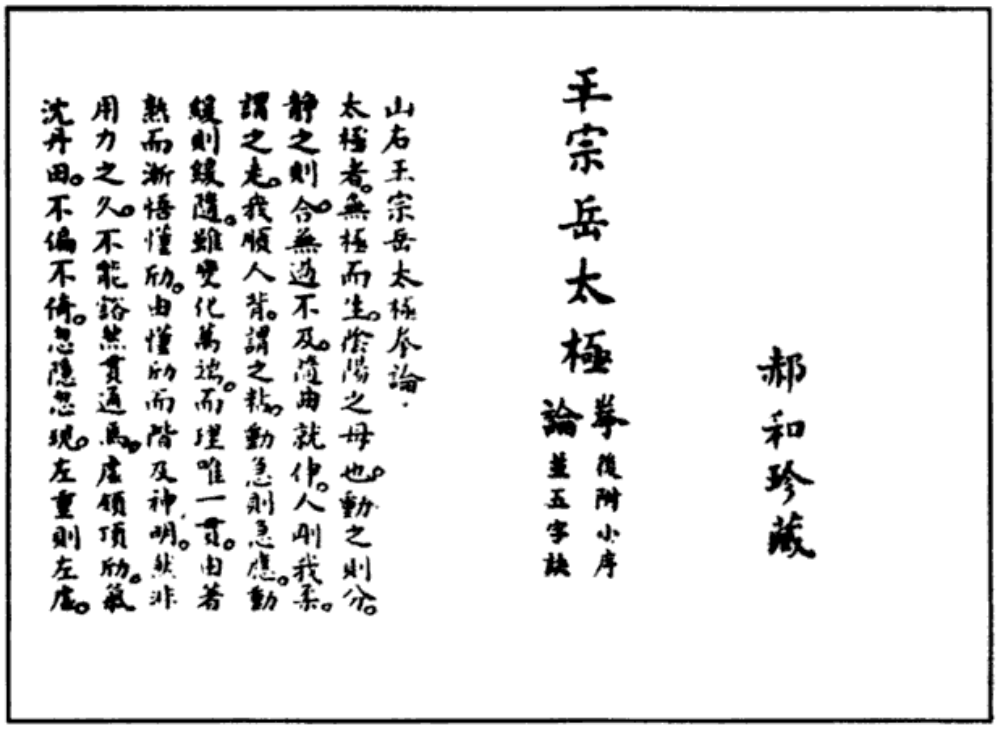

FIGURE 7: The front cover and first page of "Wang Zongyue's Taijiquan Treatise" from the Wu/Li Taijiquan Classics (Gu, *Taijiquan shu*, p. 371).

Chapter Two
The History of the Taijiquan Classics

The Taijiquan Classics transcend time, place, and lineage—and capture the essence of taijiquan. They are practical, inspirational, theoretical, and in turn, are given status and legitimacy by taijiquan practitioners. They have always been held in high esteem, whether as a private, hand-copied, lineage-held document, or as a publicly available printed resource. Thus, they can be considered true "classics."[1]

Classics of all sorts, however, whether literary, religious, or historical, invariably present controversy in regard to origins, content, authorship, and authenticity. Who really wrote the works of Shakespeare? Where did the Bible originate? Did Laozi exist—and did he write the *Daodejing?* Even the Taijiquan Classics, though relatively recent in origin, are perplexing on these same counts. Who wrote the Classics and when? Where were they found, and how were they circulated? These are some of the questions—and controversies—that we will examine in this chapter, using evidence previously unavailable or overlooked. We should note that the originals of the Classics have been lost, hidden, destroyed, or are otherwise unavailable for direct examination. For our discussion, we will assume the authenticity of the Yang and Wu/Li versions of the Classics as transmitted.

Legends of the Origins of the Classics

The Taijiquan Classics, according to oral history, had a rather mundane discovery, which is centered on Wu Yuxiang and his elder brother Chengqing. Legend has it that in the second year of the Xianfeng Emperor's reign (1852), Wu Chengqing passed the *jinshi*

exam, the highest level of the civil service exams. Afterwards, he was appointed district magistrate of Wuyang County in south-central Henan, about 225 miles south of Yongnian. That year, Yuxiang went to visit his brother in Wuyang. He had intended to stop en route at Chen Family Village and give his regards to Yang Luchan's teacher Chen Changxing. However, Yuxiang was passing through nearby Zhaobao Village, and was convinced by an innkeeper to instead stay in Zhaobao to study with Chen Qingping, a Chen relative. Yuxiang stayed one month, during which he received the essence of Chen Qingping's teachings, and then went on to Wuyang.

Meanwhile, someone found a manuscript about boxing in a salt-shop in Wuyang. The owner of the shop knew of the Wu brothers' interest in the martial arts and showed Chengqing the manuscript. Chengqing then gave it to his brother Yuxiang when he arrived. Yuxiang brought the manuscript back to Yongnian and showed it to his teacher and friend, Yang Luchan. Yang declared its importance, and thus began the journey of the Classics.

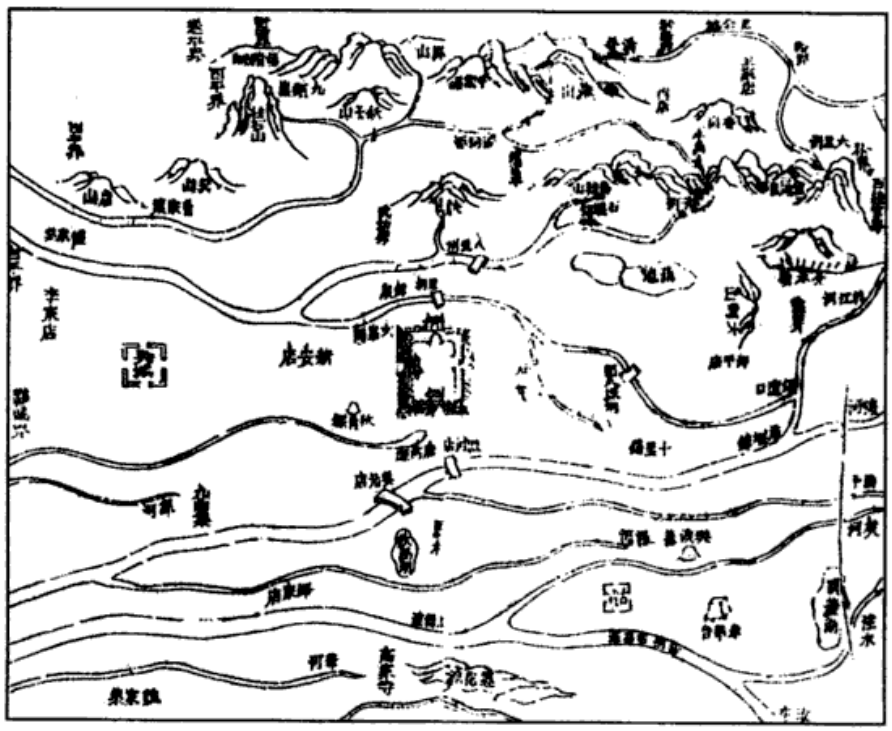

FIGURE 8: Wuyang County; south is at the top *(Wuyang xianzhi,* pp. 1b-2a).

Controversy Versus Tradition

Legend does not tell the whole story. For instance, why Wuyang County? If early taijiquan was geographically focused in Chen Family Village and Yongnian, why were the Classics found such a long distance away in Wuyang, a locale without a known taijiquan tradition, but where, coincidentally, the brother of a Yongnian taijiquan adept was working? How is it that there could have been no trace of the Classics in or near Chen Family Village, Yongnian, or even Zhaobao, which were presumably the only places where "taijiquan"—or its precursors—existed in the mid-nineteenth century?

Could the Classics have been discovered in 1852? Upon investigation, we find that Wu Chengqing was *not* in Wuyang that year. While he did pass his *jinshi* exam that year, he was not actually posted to Wuyang until the fall of 1854. Government, personal, and family documents alike show that in 1852, other than going to Beijing for his *jinshi* exam and travels related to family affairs, Chengqing was completing his seventh year as an instructor at the Confucian school in Leting, east of Beijing. He was not posted to Wuyang until late November 1854, almost two-and-a-half years later than taijiquan sources report.[2] Wu Chengqing's situation was not atypical because, during this period of the late Qing Dynasty, exam-passers greatly exceeded the number of government posts available. Even if a man were given a title or position upon passing the exam, positions were often in name only, and he might languish for years awaiting assignment, if ever, to an actual post. Wu Chengqing was in this exact situation.

Did Wu Yuxiang go to visit his brother Chengqing in Wuyang? It is puzzling that Yuxiang would have undertaken a trip, regardless of the exact year, for the purpose of studying boxing during such a tumultuous and dangerous time of much rebel activity, or whether such a trip would have been deemed appropriate for a member of the gentry. Yang's teacher Chen Changxing died in 1853, which confuses things even further by removing the presumed reason for Yuxiang's trip.[3]

Perhaps the story as handed down combined several events. Though Wu Chengqing was not in Wuyang in 1852, he did go to northern Henan in mid-1853 for several months. He was assigned to help interrogate Taiping rebels in Huaiqing Prefecture, which is the prefecture in which Chen Family Village and Zhaobao are located. They are about fifteen miles from the Huaiqing prefectural seat where the interrogations presumably took place. This raises the possibility that Wu Yuxiang's trip "to see his brother" was actually in 1853, to Huaiqing, not Wuyang.[4] Yuxiang's grandson later wrote that Yuxiang's trip was for official business *(gong)*, which could imply that it was to assist in his brother's work for the government.[5] This, too, is interesting as Yuxiang's memorial tablet informs us that by that time, he not only had decided to not pursue further exams or a career in government service, but had also in 1852 declined an official request to assist in putting down rebel incursions.[6]

Where is Yang Luchan in all of these stories—the man who brought taijiquan to the Wu family, and who later popularized taijiquan in Beijing? We can see that Yang plays a negligible role in relation to the Classics; indeed, there is little mention at all of him in Wu family literature. Conversely, early Yang lineage literature does not mention the salt-shop discovery of the Classics, the Wus, nor any datable information regarding the Classics.[7] This suggests that there could have been a natural drifting apart of the two lineages, a lack of memory, or purposeful breaking of connections; there is no clear indication of exactly what happened. This separation is demonstrated as well by the development of distinct Yang and Wu/Li versions of the Classics.

As for the Wuyang salt-shop locale of the discovery of the Classics: salt was a valuable government-protected trade, and many fortunes were made with it. The salt-shop owner would not only have been a business owner, but also a taxpayer, member of the Wuyang gentry, and apparent book-collector. Thus, the chances of he and Wu Chengqing, the new district magistrate, crossing paths were great. However, the only source for the salt-shop story is Li's Short Postscript to the Wu/Li version of the Classics. While we cannot ascertain the veracity of this information, it is lent credence by Li's close relationship

to the Wu brothers and by the extremely mundane nature of the story. There are many other possible scenarios: perhaps the salt-shop owner showed Chengqing a boxing manual about a different style, which then was shown to Yuxiang, who then could have drawn inspiration for a similar taijiquan manual.

Why, though, should taijiquan have such a mundane, nondescript story about the discovery of the Classics, yet have such a colorful founding myth of Daoist Zhang Sanfeng? Why does the story of the discovery of the Classics have no connection to Zhang Sanfeng or Wang Zongyue?

In striking contrast, a vivid story of the origins of taiji spear and its book of secrets reaches back to Zhang Sanfeng with a sense of awe and mystery. When in the mountains practicing the Daoist arts, Zhang

> ...saw a burst of golden light where the clouds meet the mist-shrouded peaks. A thousand rays of marvelous *qi* spun and danced in the Great Void. The Immortal [Zhang Sanfeng] hurried to the spot but saw nothing. He searched where the golden light had touched down and found a mountain stream and cave. Approaching the mouth of the cave, two golden snakes with flashing eyes emerged. The Immortal swished his duster and the golden light came down. He gazed upon it and realized that it was two long spears about seven feet five inches. They seemed to be made of rattan, but were not rattan; seemed of wood, but were not of wood. Their quality was such that swords could not harm them and they could be soft or hard at will. A rare glow emanated from within, and looking deeper, he found a book. Its title was *Taiji Stick-Adhere Spear* and its destiny was to be transmitted to the world. He grasped the principles in the book and analyzed all of its marvels. All of the words in the book were written in the form of poems and songs. Today we cannot understand all the principles and marvels of the spear, but Master Zhang extracted the essence of every word and transformed them

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