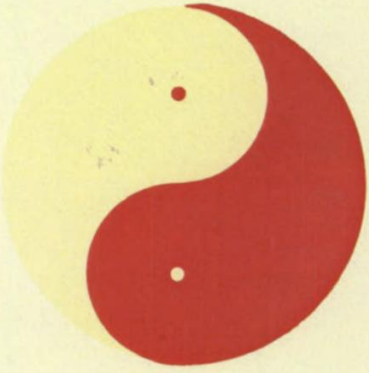
Reflections and Perceptions
on Body-Mind Harmony



THE T'AI-CHI CH'UAN EXPERIENCE

SOPHIA DELZA

Edited with a Foreword by Robert Cummings Neville

The T'ai-Chi Ch'uan Experience

Reflections and Perceptions on Body-Mind Harmony

Collected Essays
Form—Spirit
Philosophy—Structure

Sophia Delza

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Chinese Theater is aimed to define the space it is in. It does not create a "virtual" environment (to use computer jargon) as a work of art in a Western museum might, but engages its real environment. Or rather, the Chinese sensibility about art looks to how a work engages its real environment, whereas the Western sensibility looks to how a work of art creates a virtual environment for itself in tension with its actual moral implications. The Chinese moral sensibility is folded into the aesthetic consideration of how to harmonize, and harmonize with, the real environing world. For the classical Chinese, filial family practice, political practice, ritual practice, and the practices of personal accomplishment and excellence such as T'ai-Chi Ch'uan interpenetrate on a continuum of public and private life. The practice of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan as an exercise-art is thus a personal work of harmonization that has effects throughout one's life and community. Because all art is moral art for the Chinese, the exercise-art of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan is the recreating of part of oneself as a work of art with moral force.

These high-minded considerations of Eastern and Western aesthetic sensibilities should not mislead us into pompous exaggeration of the claims of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan, as Ms Delza warns so frequently. One should not groove on the Tao when playing T'ai-Chi Ch'uan but concentrate on moving correctly and settling the mind perfectly in the movement. Forget spiritual ecstasies and just try not to fall over. The perfect movement will capture your thoughts and set them at ease. It will center the attention and tune the emotions to respond correctly to appropriate objects. T'ai-Chi Ch'uan will not bulk up your muscles but will give you the strength and flexibility to act harmoniously with the forces of your life's environment. It will not give you mystic visions but only clarity and flexibility of spirit. A little proficiency will amaze your Western friends and amuse your Chinese ones; much proficiency will baffle the Westerners and make the Chinese proud. But in all cases of taking pleasure in the responses of others, the ego can distract attention from the movement and you are in danger of tipping over. T'ai-Chi Ch'uan

should be played for its own sake; it then gets better and better and its effects spread far beyond itself.

I had the pleasure of introducing Sophia Delza in a foreword to her 1985 *T'ai-Chi Ch'uan: Body and Mind in Harmony*. There I pointed out her accomplishments as a dancer, a performer in Chinese Theater, and a player of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan. I cited her breadth of publications, many of which are reprinted here or revised for this volume. Now I want to focus on her skill as a teacher, with special reference to her most modestly gifted student, myself.

One day in 1973 I was sitting next to William Bales, then dean of the School of Dance at the State University of New York College at Purchase, through an apparently interminable meeting. I asked him *sotto voce* whether he had any dance courses that could help an out-of-shape person in his mid-thirties endure such meetings. Looking me over, he sadly shook his head No, but said the best T'ai-Chi Ch'uan teacher in the Western world was teaching at Purchase and that she would give me a "philosophical exercise." So I went to Sophia Delza's evening class just once and knew that my life had taken a new direction. After two semesters in the Purchase classes, I began attending her intermediate and advanced classes at Carnegie Hall, where I studied at least once a week for twelve years. You might well ask why it took me so long. Most people learn much faster than I. The answer is that my out-of-shape body also had no grace or natural ability and that for the longest time I couldn't tell where my elbows were except by looking. I doubt that Ms Delza ever had a student with such difficulty who didn't give up. I presented her with more wrong ways to move than she had ever seen before. But she didn't give up either, and for twelve years she corrected my form, my movement, and my spirit, until finally I got it right. During a sabbatical I went to her studio an extra day a week to watch her teach, and then taught T'ai-Chi Ch'uan myself for ten years at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. I sent my better students to her for advanced study, and she continued to teach me through them.

I am especially grateful for this book of essays and poems because they are the distillations of a long career of transcendently good teaching. Teaching too is an exercise-art that harmonizes, and harmonizes with, its environment of students. Many, many students of Sophia Delza join me in gratitude.

Robert Cummings Neville
Boston
December 1994

Notes

1. For an exact description of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan, with detailed instructions, diagrams, and photographs for the practice of the Wu style of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan, see Sophia Delza's *T'ai-Chi Ch'uan: Body and Mind in Harmony: The Integration of Meaning and Method* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985). That volume also contains a bibliography of writings in English and Chinese.

2. A beautiful book has been produced by the Zhaohua Publishing House in Beijing (no author listed) entitled *Chinese Martial Arts* (1983), which describes and illustrates many of them as arts rather than as fighting techniques.

3. The distinction between the aesthetic and ethical sensibilities is very nicely described by David Hall in his *Eros and Irony* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1982; I have discussed Hall's distinction in *The Puritan Smile* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987).

Preface

Depending on the nature of the individual, experiences of various kinds accumulate almost from the very beginning of study of the Chinese exercise-art of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan (pronounced Tye Jee Chwan), a system of activating the body for mental, physical, and emotional well-being.

Revealed and sensed in gradual stages are the physicality and kinesthetic sensitivity of the organic body movements, accompanied by heightened perceptivity as to how mental and emotional attributes are awakened. A growing harmony of the coordination of the formed action with the personality will at first be taken for granted; but as more and more "body-mind" information develops in extent and depth, and as detailed intricacies in the composition unfold, the relationship of the objective action to the self—that of being aware of *being in* the process itself of creating harmony—becomes a vital experience, consciously appreciated, never to be lost.

It is then that curiosity arises as to what the "means"—the method and the material—can be which evokes the harmony of calmness, ease, and physical prowess at one and the same time. Such inherent interest stirs up insights as to the constructive value of the structured organizations.

The fundamental aim of this collection of selected essays is to present, in an analytical way, the causes and the means that compose and bring to life the final "effects," this intricately designed composition, where every unit is intrinsically planned,

where every segment possesses its own individualized balances, where the sum of every detailed moment comprises the unique content of the masterful whole.

To know the construction, grammatical or aesthetic, of a sentence is not to erase its impact and sense. To follow mentally, to be part of and recognize the intrinsic logic of how form, movement, and spirit "tally" and link all aspects of the structure—the yin-yang dynamics, the patterned positions and forms, the "spirit" of the substance, and space-time diversity—is not to shatter mind-body unity.

Knowledge of the content, varying from the down-to-earth physicality and the equilibrium of energetic outlay, to the abstract sensation of responding to the "equilibrium" of space-time formations adds to and intensifies the experience of feeling the presence of harmonious action, as well as understanding *how* it arose.

The intellectualized knowledge of the way and the why of how the body-mind elements (the machinery) integrate and function to become ingrained eventually into the bodily activity. When the vibrations of inner "knowing" permeate the system and one feels at one with oneself, newer experiences arise, enabling one to envision as a possibility further not yet revealed sensations: the more the comprehension, the more the receptivity and acknowledgment of heightened experiences.

With shallow mental concentration, however, and carelessness in rendering the minutiae of the composition as composed, the goals of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan will only barely touch the spirit, and give the physical body only enough power to exist, but not to "endure."

As a collection of concepts, these essays may be useful to anyone who can be touched by and appreciate certain philosophical principles which can be universally applied to personal needs in a variety of situations. As a useful guide for the player of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan, the ideas can be helpful to further more profound participation in the realities of the formal content; as well as to clarify the "way" to attain, without being self-conscious, a higher level of consciousness with calmness and containment.

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the resulting feeling-sensation is one of unity and wholeness—not of differentiation. At this time, the player has reached another level (and layer) of discernment, an awareness of interconnectedness (of many elements) which appears continually attainable.

Further experience is *never not* expected. The player is awakened to every possibility, as each "trifle" of perceptivity brings to light some other phase of activity. And the "true" player will know that there is more to come even though each step of the way brings satisfaction.

The closer the relationship to T'ai-Chi Ch'uan's essence, the deeper is the understanding of how its complexity regulates the complete nature of the "self."

Those of you who are not familiar with T'ai-Chi Ch'uan, having read this far, must be asking, what *is* this T'ai-Chi Ch'uan? Give us a definition, please—a simple one!

T'ai-Chi Ch'uan is an ancient Chinese exercise-art, a system of activating the body for the simultaneous development of physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Each aspect as defined, does not exist by its individual self. Each employs the other; that is, if the body must move, the mind is there to make it work—the action reflects the mind's power of concentration. With mind centered and the physical action synchronized with the mind's "orders," there is no necessity to worry about the emotions. The feeling will be pleasant because body and mind are not in conflict.

Harmony is the result of doing and *minding* every moment of the complex variety in this *long* structure. To this is added a very special way of movement—which is flowing, continuous—connecting the subtle links of differing transitions, from the first second to the last, some twenty-five minutes later, ideally done with a clarity and calmness which, even though not planned for consciously, come of their own accord in an unruffled temperament.

These essays are concerned with aspects of experiences which arise out of some awakening situation while one practices.

Layers of feeling or physical accuracy or mind and heart calmness may dart into the player's mind, who might find a word for the sensations—this means that T'ai-Chi Ch'uan is beginning to reveal itself inch by inch on a higher level of perceptivity.

We hope that the reader can "succumb" to the spirit of the ideas as elaborated in the various chapters; and that a personalized kindred spirit will blossom from working with T'ai-Chi Ch'uan.

The T'ai-Chi Ch'uan practitioner, newly learning or mature and experienced, may recognize many of the ideas analyzed, may be aroused to a fresh point of view, may be completely creative, releasing *new* perceptions and "ingredients," or may reasonably adjust in mental/spiritual/physical terms to some of its concepts.

I naturally hope that the player will absorb the diverse thoughts—philosophical, aesthetic, physiological—as part of the spirit of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan's universal quality; that he/she will have some inner experience with the "heart" of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan in relation to the harmony of one's SELF and will continue to do so "endlessly"—since the ending is a new beginning on a much higher level.

Classified Chapters

The Classified Sections are so organized that the grouped essays will arouse a mental-wave of correspondence among them in thought, feelings and concepts.

T'ai-Chi Ch'uan is an integrated Art-Exercise, the Body-Mind condition of which makes simultaneous harmony of *all* the individual elements as arranged in these Sections. However, the reader may wish that one or another of them had been placed in a different category—but that is certainly valid: for example, an idea that is included under *The Tangible Spirit* may, in another context, rationally fit under *The Ever Present Substance*. The interrelationships are interchangeable because T'ai-Chi Ch'uan is a unity of multiplicities.

The classification as prepared may stimulate the mind and the comprehension of the T'ai-Chi Ch'uan player as well as, I hope, those who, though ignorant of the presence of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan, can relate and apply certain perceptions to other disciplines of thought, action and daily living.

CHAPTER 1

THE CENTERED MIND

Soft and smooth, slow in time, needful
Of man's needs and nature's laws.
An art-in-movement T'ai-Chi Ch'uan
Creates a being integrated
With itself—an active, thinking,
Feeling man, engenders heart-mind
Ease, develops wondrous stamina
Beyond the age of ordinary
Retrogression and decay
The exercise evolves, centered, quiet,
With mind-awareness animating
All the body's actions—from patterns
Simple and symmetrical to complex
Weaving of relationships in
Intricate variety. Forms arise.
Taking shape with myriad subtleties
Each instant balanced and secure
A unity of multiplicities.

The Centered Mind

1. The Mind Must Be Willing

The mind must be willing to enact the structure of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan in order to achieve a feeling of equanimity and ease. If the mind is reluctant, it is due to an emotional state (of mind) and the result will be half-heartedly experienced and un-unified.

To appreciate and to begin to understand the process of the movement and the progress of the developing forms, it is necessary to accept this fact—that the mind must be present at all times of the physical activity. To keep the mind alert and present, the determination to do so—exercising the will—is essential. This is the nature of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan discipline. The mind of the player must be willing to be brought to the stage of willingness, to participate in the action continually. When the mind is *not* willing, then we can say there is *no* exercising.

Though the structure of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan is intriguing, it nevertheless is a mental challenge to move arms and legs in differing varying formations or to go from one place to another, since there are *many* aspects which involve and demand attention. The one which is supremely necessary to attend to is that of coordination—never simple even on an elementary level. The mind that is aware of the coordinated and changing situations can function fully—even without an effort of will in some cases. All the elements of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan composition *employ* the mind.

The progress of the mind retentiveness keeps in step with the body's ability to function with increasing complexities

of space-form-time dynamics. The balanced way of mind and body channels the spirit (the feelings) *away* from negative emotions as well as creating heart-ease and composure. Nothing can be done without the *mind's* instigation. Even from the beginning, one realizes that the exercise is physically based and mentally directed. With deeper perception, it also can be seen that the exercise is physically directed and mentally based.

T'ai-Chi Ch'uan, it is to be remembered, is a "from the mind" exercise for physical, emotional, and mental well-being. There is nothing in the complex structure of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan that cannot be done by the natural human body. But it is the mind that must be willing to induce the body to remain on the road to self-development.

Since the physiological laws of nature are embodied in T'ai-Chi Ch'uan, the entire exercise is objective and impersonal, not colored by individualized sentiment or background. And so it can become, paradoxically, a personal, life-long activity for all people who have "willing minds."

develops with proficiency. Mindfulness—un-forced attention—accompanies awareness and recognition that a mind-body connection creates a unity that can be felt physically.

The willing mind becomes a natural, spontaneous part of behavior, and it almost goes without saying that the means and the ends are one.

The many technical methods, created to keep the mind steadily alert, are distinct and richly varied and are also surprising (in intricate ways). Since they are diversified, they rarely repeat the same series of patterns, never, however, deviating from the harmonious essence, but instead adding to it, aesthetically, philosophically, and physiologically. The essential qualities lie in the choreographed details that are added to or changed from an already known combination: certain units will always seem a "surprise" as if to shock one out of complacency.

The regular, organic process of sequential movements follows through without added mental pressure, flowing, connected in space-time relationships with no undue effort of body or mind, except of course for the tasks of coordination and physical stamina. The movement connectiveness of organization is intrinsic, and the player seems to move and take in the form with quiet mind and spirit. In order to prevent the mind and body from automatically expecting and accepting this steady, easy, and agreeable flow, the facts of inattention and automatic behavior already suggested above, will appear at unexpected times and are often missed at first.

We are concerned in this essay with those moments of special activity when the mind must act with greater agility, when the player becomes sensitive to an unusual state of mind, when it has "evaporated" for a second or has settled in a groove of habit.

The following analysis of a few places in T'ai-Chi Ch'uan's structure, though necessarily limited, will, I hope, illuminate the understanding of the player and prove how far beyond the ordinary T'ai-Chi Ch'uan is as a powerful subject of thought and action, mind and spirit.

How the Structure Alerts the Mind

It is to be understood that the analysis that follows merely skims the surface of the profoundly varied ways the structure manipulates the mind's attention at crucial times.

I. The Element of "Surprise" units come after a serene flow of movements which, feeling familiar, tend to become automatic.

1. The placement of the Hand Strums the Lute Form (left side) arrives early in T'ai-Chi Ch'uan structure as a surprise after a similar Form has already been done on the right side, with just enough changes (leg stance, for instance) to make the person attentive.

2. Variations of tempo are added to the basic tempo which is always "present" as done by "some" part of the body (as by a single hand movement).

(*a*) *Quickened tempo.* After about eleven minutes, during which time the basic tempo is easily kept, the placement of the entire body changes with a single speedy action. Mind must prepare itself to do this, as well as to be alert to resume the basic tempo in the gesture immediately following. In Wu style, there are nine incidents of speedy action, each totally different from the others; and they never seem to arrive expectantly, the ninth being the most difficult in the final series.

(*b*) *Slowed-up tempos in coordination with the basic tempo.* In the third series (Wu style), a position to be achieved requires that one arm move in a large arc, and the other in a smaller one. The basic tempo is kept in the larger space; the slowed-up tempo (relative to its size) in the smaller arc; the arms finish the Form simultaneously. This indeed takes concentration of a special kind.

(*c*) *Similar Forms arriving by way of different transitions.* The Parry Form appears in the first and third series (Wu style). The transitions which connect each to the preceding formation are totally dissimilar, alerting mind to a different place and space in the evolution of the structure's mental development.

II. Repetition of Long Sequences of Forms and Transitions.

1. In the fifth series (Wu style), a passage of twenty-one Forms and Transitions which has already appeared in the second series (twelve minutes earlier) is to be repeated exactly. The player can become less centered when familiar Form follows familiar Form for a comparatively long period of time, almost moving automatically, and is therefore apt to miss the subtle point of change. The ingrained process of being with oneself, no matter how customary the action is, is part of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan's philosophy of the diversity of mind-presence. The connections of the composition are "astute" in ways to stimulate attention and awareness, whatever the occasion. This example is but one of many. The player, as a result, is accustomed to being "woken up," and so learns to stay awake, whether mind is lightly present (Yin) or deeply involved (Yang).

2. Structure also alerts the mind when Forms and Transitions are repeated in different directions. The fourth series can be a perfect tangle of confusion because the "Parting the Wild Horse's Mane" Form and the "Angel Works at the Shuttle" Form are repeated in the eight direction-changes. Actually, this series is the high point of consciousness and mind-presence. It is interesting to note here that, even after decades of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan practice, if there is a mistake to be made, it will occur in the fourth series. Coming as it does after 15 to 18 minutes of action, the player is often soothed by the flow of repeated Forms and, unless aware and attentive, will succumb to the motion of the Forms and so will miss the significant changes in direction.

III. Repeated Basic Forms Leading into Different Forms with Changing Transitions Each Time.

1. The Single Whip Form appears nine times (Wu style), six of which connect with different Forms. The mind is

alerted to a new situation, the transitions of which give the clue to the next Form. It is almost more difficult to remember the repeated connections than to follow through to the new ones.

2. High Pat the Horse Form appears five times, two of which lead to new formations during the last (sixth) series. In this case, the mind is alerted to the subtle new changes, which cannot be taken for granted.

IV. Basic Form Which Follows a Different Transition Several Times.

1. Grasping the Bird's Tail Form appears seven times, in six of which the transition connecting it to a preceding Form are different. This Form always leads to the Single Whip. This moving Form itself always has different details in its structure as it moves from place to place. This Form is a high point in the symbolism of the spirit of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan, and therefore requires "more mind."

This outline, meager in terms of what T'ai-Chi Ch'uan contains, will perhaps suffice to illustrate the play of mind—how essential it is to use the mind to enhance perceptiveness, to develop quick reflexes of thought and action.

David Darling says in his enticing book, *Equations of Eternity*: "Nature's strength is in the physical, Man's strength is in his Mind."

T'ai-Chi Ch'uan's structural harmony is in its physical strength (nature), and in the strength of man's mind.

Equanimity

4. The Unifying Principles

The thought of self-exercise seems to arouse two negative reactions in the Westerner—the first, that it is a thoroughly boring business, and the other, that one exercises to slim down. Too often I am asked no question other than whether this or that movement will make one thin. The thought of developing strength, stamina, suppleness, or flexibility, never arises nor does the idea of improving the circulation, to mention only some of the *physical* reasons for exercising. It rarely occurs to people that there is also an emotional aspect connected to correct movement, or that the mind, too, must be engaged and stimulated in order to feel truly and agreeably well.

Actually, most people underestimate themselves. When they find exercising boring, they are really looking for something to interest their minds and, although they are not aware of it, they are unconsciously criticizing the nature of the exercise to which they have been exposed—repetitious, unvaried movements which do not have enough complexity to arouse and sustain interest, and which soon become automatic and are done without thinking. Boredom sets in when the heart and mind are not engaged.

A Philosophy

In the Chinese exercise-art of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan, the approach to exercise is completely different, the opposite of what is described above. It is a *philosophy* of body-action, a total exercise, so called

because it incorporates a way of making the mind direct the action and a technique that stabilizes the emotions while exercising the complete physical body externally and internally.

It was in Beijing that I first saw this exercise in action, at dawn in the T'ai Mizo park. Dozens of people, young and old, were each doing his exercise, each clearly centered on himself. No outside sound of voice or instrument directed the movement. The slow, continuous flow of form and the impeccably even tempo seemed to come not only from some mastery within each one but also from the intrinsic nature of the action itself. Complex patterns followed one after the other in an unimpeded sequence. There appeared to be a variety of unrepeated designs which balanced themselves at every fraction of a second. It was as if gravity did not exist. Looking amazingly light and stable at the same time, each person's movements seemed effortless. It was apparent that a distinct and formal structure existed, with every movement a clear consequence of what had preceded.

This was indeed a fresh experience for me. I soon realized that it was not dance that I was seeing, although the elements were those contained in a dance-art. As a dancer myself, I could see the designed body and space structure and the movement quality that are significant in any fine body-movement art. What gradually became clear to me was that the *intention* inherent in the exercise—the spirit, the psychic energy, the psychological attitude—differed from that of any performing art, directed as the latter art is to the spectator, who is the recipient of the content of the dance-expression. In this case, no audience was needed, although to me, looking in on it, there was no doubt that a spirit of containment emanated from the action, however unintended. The "doer" was the sole recipient of the beneficial content—emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual—from what I came to know as "T'ai-Chi Ch'uan."

Awareness

The distinctiveness of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan as an exercise lies in the mastery of the *material* of the body—thought, feeling, and physi-

cal mechanisms. The integration and harmonious relationship of these centers—body, mind, and emotion—frees the personality and makes possible further development of awareness and a higher level of consciousness with the awakening of latent faculties.

Although it is centered on the self, it is not self-centered, not narcissistic. It does not isolate one from the world of activity and thought; ethical teachings of Chinese philosophy pervade all aspects of art, culture, and self-development techniques. Through the application of the principles of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan, one becomes more adept at handling one's experiences and environment with the equanimity of a stable disposition and an alert mind, lasting effects from the persevering practice of this exercise.

Appreciating these concepts of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan will not and cannot construct the visual picture of its Forms any more than knowing the values and qualities of a musical composition can make us hear it. Nevertheless, because T'ai-Chi Ch'uan is a way of believing, as well as a philosophy of behavior incorporated into a system of activating the body, it is not misleading to speak of its content. We should, however, never forget that "true knowledge originates in *direct* experience," since T'ai-Chi Ch'uan is not an intellectual exercise.

Book of References

T'ai-Chi Ch'uan did not emerge full blown out of one man's mind. It took hundreds of centuries to become what in the Ming dynasty (fourteenth century C.E.) was considered a complete entity, unified in structure and philosophy. At this time the *T'ai-Chi Ch'uan Ching* (Classic) was formulated, which has been and is today the vital manual of this ancient art.

Back of it were the constructive thought and experiments of ancient philosophers (fourth century B.C.E. Taoists) and the thinking and practices that developed in the ensuing centuries—thinking and practices designed to promote a sound body and an attentive mind. It involved an ethical attitude aimed at bringing about a more "realized" man.

T'ai-Chi Ch'uan had its early inspiration in the T'ang dynasty (c. seventh century C.E.), beginning as a slow, continuous, calming exercise called Ch'ang Ch'uan (Long Ch'uan). It took six hundred years or so more until Chang San-feng, called the "Father of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan," finally created its "universal" Forms. This took thirty years of concentrated effort in developing a comprehension of "the way of man" in relation to "the way of nature."

What the basic philosophy of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan is, which has been so well established over the ages, and which pervades Chinese thought, conduct, art, can merely be hinted at in an explanation of what T'ai-Chi and Ch'uan is.

Yin and Yang

T'ai-Chi is a concept of mutuality, comprised of two balanced "opposite and complementary" vital forces: the principle of duality which when in action "makes the world go round" and gives rise to the "10,000 things" (everything in the universe). The two vital reality energies are called *yin* and *yang*, and are in continuous movement. To give a few examples—in yin-yang order, they represent, night-day, moon-sun, cold-hot, negative-positive, female-male, space-time, square-circle, empty-solid, close-open, dark-bright, and so on.

The essence of T'ai-Chi is visualized by a symbolic "diagram" of a circle divided by a reverse S waveline into two spaces, the shadowed side being yin, the bright side yang. A light dot in yin and a dark dot in yang indicate that there is a perpetual interchange between the forces, and that one cannot exist without the other. The embracing circle holds the continuum of action in balanced wholeness and adds stillness to movement.

Ch'uan is literally a fist, metaphorically implying control, containment, defense of the self, as well as nonaggressive power, an exercise for activating the body for physical, emotional, and mental well-being. T'ai-Chi Ch'uan is then a Ch'uan according to the way of the T'ai-Chi, conforming to the spirit of duality with its ever-moving alternating changes in form and

(2) Wouldn't one feel breathless and have a quickened heartbeat? (3) With such ceaseless motion, doesn't one become bored and irritated? (4) Isn't the mind pretty well overworked at having to direct the body without an instant's rest? Answers to all of these questions are contained in the principles that lie at the heart of this unique exercise.

Vitality

The answer to the first question is that freshness and vitality result from doing this exercise, never exhaustion, despite its length and ceaselessness. The designed patterns are so devised that different parts of the body, at different times, have the burden, so called, of the action—one part is rested by using yin or light dynamics, while another part is activated with strength; or one part is still while another part moves, all alternating in a scientifically ordered sequence of changes. The process of this changing continuity on which the mind is centered creates endurance and profound vitality.

Yin-yang works without conscious exertion. Energy is never expended through superfluous and needless intensities. One learns to use only the amount of effort required by the act. All the Forms in the exercise are given only that amount of force "built in" to the movement. Thus, when the total body functions with minimal effort, then clearly it is not being drained of strength, and not being drained, stamina can be accumulated and stored up. We can therefore say that energy is used productively. To be able to behave in this way is to keep the body in untaxed equanimity.

Energy is kept from "seeping out" and "being employed extraneously by the circular, arcing, and spherical nature of the gestures and the curving path of the movement as it goes from place to place in space. A circle is "an urge to wholeness" (V. Dyson); a curve, an arc, a wave or spiral engenders a feeling of containment, lightness, and ease.

Positions, forms, transition-connectives constantly alternate with differing degrees of complexity and simplicity, which

With such insistence on presence of mind, with every inducement to keep it alert, awake, and involved, the question of its becoming overworked is indeed apropos, this is *not* the case if we remember the principle of T'ai-Chi and its cyclic course of change. The mind, too, is affected by the philosophy of change and is sensitized to varying shades of effort and release, of deep concentrated activity and restful repose.

These opposite forces are put into play by the demands of the forms in terms of strength and power, by problems in complexity, by familiarity of theme, and by the length of the unit of structure. At strategic moments some Forms are repeated to alleviate the intensity of the mind's effort, after which released point a complexity in a new Form will arise requiring a greater degree of concentration to direct the multiple action.

The pressure on the mind's activity is greater for a complicated situation, obviously, than for an elementary one. When greater physical effort must be made, such as in the act of standing on one leg while at the same time intricate movements are being made by arms, hands, and trunk, the mind and body are fully engaged, but soon an easier combination will follow to "soothe" the mind.

The mind and body stay together like shadow and substance, synchronizing their activities to the minutest shade, producing ease and contentment.

Unified Action

The characteristics I have thus far enumerated and analyzed to allay the fears aroused by the thought of a long continuity of action, are also integral to T'ai-Chi Ch'uan as a whole. There is no one feature isolated from the other; they all are interrelated. Every Form is a complex aggregate of unified action.

In addition to these features, intrinsic to the essence of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan are the concepts of *balance* (physical, mental, and emotional), *totality* (the body as an organic unity), and *silence* (activity executed without sound accompaniment).

The adjustment of the mental-physical, spacial-dynamic forces of the body into a unity of stabilized equilibrium can be termed *balance*. Physical balance related to gravity is essentially the result of the mathematical structure of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan, which distributes weight, space-time, form, and dynamics in perfect proportion. So subtly and minutely are the forms and the transitive connections created that centered equilibrium exists at every point and *second* of this long exercise.

Mental Balance

The control of body-movement organized by such an infallible structure creates emotional and mental balance. The necessity to concentrate and direct the body in order to execute the form exactly and correctly, develops strength of mind and prevents the mind from straying. The mind, being centered, is balanced, and balance is a unity of action and thought. Action-thought unity creates feeling (a heart) which is not erratic or restless. Balance is a harmonized wholeness.

The symbol of T'ai-Chi (described above) represents the Great Balance where every cause is an effect and every effect a cause. T'ai-Chi Ch'uan is a unity within space and time and if stopped at any point of its unfolding evolution it still would be in perfect physical (structural) and yin-yang (philosophical) balance.

The physical, emotional, and mental aspects function simultaneously and mutually benefit each other. At every moment in every movement there exists a totality that is never diminished, lost or separated. This is even apparent in the experience of a beginning student who must concentrate on the "what to do" and is not yet cognizant of what goes into the making of the "*way* to do"; even he/she, despite the elementary nature of the disciplines, experiences a special kind of peaceful satisfaction, a glowing calmness from the activity, although the essence is not yet mentally comprehended. The personality digests—so to speak—objective elements and appreciates them subjectively.

Without Ego

T'ai-Chi Ch'uan is without ego since action is not inspired by temperament and self-expression (Gaiety, sadness, etc.). No personal interpretations color the Forms with free associations, as in children's play. Concepts are philosophical, psychological, poetical, moral-ethical, metaphysical, and, for some, mystical.

108 Forms

The names of the 108 Forms are each symbolic and signify concepts removed from the literal physicality of the object—horse, tiger, bird, and so forth. Each name has its separate allusion, and metaphorically may connote an aspiration, a philosophical attitude toward self and conduct, a turn of mind, a sense of being, some thought about life and spirit. The true meanings are revealed when the T'ai-Chi Ch'uan exponent has advanced to that stage of experience comprehension where he can utilize the implication of the philosophical intentions, and where the symbols can be part of his growing consciousness. This happens only when the mind and body have "changed" and absorbed the reasons for mental, emotional, and physical unity.

With profound and prolonged practice, the exercise becomes "second nature," and can be done easily and seemingly spontaneously. But no matter what the Form and action are, the mind's presence is indispensible.

To be lost in thoughts is to be truly lost when doing T'ai-Chi Ch'uan, for then the automatic mechanism of the body will take over and make one lose one's way. The structure fortunately is such that it is impossible to continue any sequence "blindly asleep" for more than a few seconds. An error will be made because the body-system will, out of habit, revert to a former pattern sequence, which will then jar the mind awake. The statement that "Habit is a great deadness" (Samuel Beckett) is definitely proved when we experience a situation where a habit-gesture (action without mind) has destroyed the form and killed the awareness—even for a moment.

The mind propelling the Form and the Form instigating the mind to aliveness exemplify the reciprocal interchange of yin-yang, in this instance mind (yang) affecting the Form (yin) and vice versa. The pleasurable advantage is in the fact that there is no separation of mind and body, from which totality everything seems "to come out right." As Chang Chung-Yuan says, "It is unification which achieves harmony."

I wish to elaborate on the extent to which the mind is present, having used the phrase "presence of mind" so often. When one knows T'ai-Chi Ch'uan thoroughly, even to the degree of understanding structure in terms of "space-self" and appreciating its most subtle intangibles, you might ask, fairly enough, whether the mind has still to be a "presence."

The Mind Process

There are different layers or levels to the mind process. In the learning stage the outer mind sends the messages and directs the thought or action. The inner mind, having accumulated the knowledge, "knows" and reacts speedily—a lightning flash between plan and execution, thought and act. Training and experience develop quick reflexes, but only if there has been close concentration in the repetition of the act. When the mind works well, it is *as if* the "inner" mind weren't there, *as if* there were no mind movement.

To illustrate the instantaneous performance of mind and body, let us take the example of stepping off a curb. We note the curb and the mind prepares the body for a change in movement, all *as if* it were happening without the mind's being involved, so immediate is the reaction, and at the same time thoughts or conversation have continued without interruption. It appears *as if* we were reacting without thinking, but how well we know the uncomfortable shock our body gets when we do *not* anticipate the curb because our mind message has not been sent.

is developed a true experience of movement relationships with the intrinsic necessity of activity and form.

Silence

The mind can concentrate on the moment and the *pre*-moment to prepare itself for subsequent action without cues from outside. The mind makes one self-sufficient in the silence of the act. In silence the mind can reject extraneous thoughts and can prod itself to be present when it has wandered. Silence helps one remember oneself, through which one reaches to a higher plane of consciousness.

Quiet is essential for awareness and attentiveness—to hear oneself from inside out, and so be able to call up to the surface of the mind deep-seated thoughts revealing an anxiety, a wish, a fact, a hope, which rises like a flash, pertinent and significant. With experience and control, silence helps to limit the mind to the subject at hand and the interference of irrelevant ideas diminishes with progressive experience. Just as the physical body (chemical, dynamic, mechanical) gradually acquires stamina, ease, and proficiency, so the ability to dissolve the flood of thoughts, which are destructive, progresses with experience, too. Being silent is far from being heavy or leaden. On the contrary, it is pleasurable and tranquil. Since it is beneficial, we can say that silence, in more ways than one, is golden.

T'ai-Chi Ch'uan is a lifelong exercise for a good long life, since physically it corrects and improves the health of the body in all aspects internally and externally; emotionally it relaxes the nervous temperament, "gives one a good disposition," and, "by ridding one of arrogance and conceit" (Ma Yueh-Liang's and Wu Chien-Ch'uan's *T'ai-Chi Ch'uan Manual*), produces calmness and serenity. Stability profoundly increases alertness and awareness necessary for "human faculties to display all their resources . . . enlightened by reason and sustained by knowledge" (*I-Ching*).

A mark of pure poise and self-control is the ability to move in multiple ways quietly, with the correct dynamics, with

THE T'AI-CHI CH'UAN EXPERIENCE

Reflections and Perceptions on Body-Mind Harmony

SOPHIA DELZA

Edited with a Foreword by Robert Cummings Neville

In her previous book, *T'ai-Chi Ch'uan: Body and Mind in Harmony: The Integration of Meaning and Method*, Sophia Delza describes the Wu Style with careful directions and illustrations for learning the practice of the exercise-art of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan. In this new book, Ms. Delza, the leading proponent in the United States of the Wu Style, offers succinct and illuminating comments from her viewpoint as both teacher and practitioner. She expresses the substance and function of T'ai-Chi Ch'uan that lie behind the movement and that are manifest in the movement to only the most discerning eye. She provides insight and inspiration for entering into a path, a way, a *dao*, that integrates body, mind, beauty, and goodness. Those students beginning to study T'ai-Chi Ch'uan and those who have studied it for a number of years will benefit from the guidance provided in this book.

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