

Taijiquan ('Tai Chi') for Shiatsu Therapists / TCM Practitioners (and others)

Looking for more from your qi maintenance practices?

Whether you are a student or practitioner of tcm/shiatsu, or you simply want to enrich your life, taijiquan is the 'grand ultimate' toolbox to assist you in this. Stated simply: The 'Old Yang Style' of Taijiquan is a work of genius. It is a complete, comprehensive and integrated system of combat and healing.

Modern Taiji

Modern "Tai Chi" is very different from what it once was – far removed from the 'Beijing 24' and other simplified/shortened forms sanctioned by the Chinese government. Additionally the 'new age' and 'hippy' movements were attracted to taiji for obvious reasons, and although well meaning may have contributed to some loss of substance in taiji. In the 1920's Yang, Cheng-Fu first simplified his grandfathers form taking out the obvious fa-jin (explosive) movements, physically difficult movements such as low squats and leaping kicks, and the very small intricate movements between postures. Cheng Fu was the first to teach taiji publicly, and his simplifications made the form accessible to a wide range of people - which was his aim – but his relatively easy form was modified as much as it could be without losing its essence.

The 'Old Yang Style' of Yang, Lu Chan

Depending on the history you follow, and where the lines of history and legend blur together, Yang, Lu Chan learned his art 'hao chuan' (loose boxing) with the Chen family from Wang, Zongyue, who learned from Chang, San Feng (legendary / mythical(?) figure). The Yang, Lu Chan form is the pinnacle of taiji. It is split into energetic thirds, which contain increasingly numerous and more difficult postures. Right from the beginning, you will feel your energy system being tweaked as yin and yang return to balance... net result: you're going to be relaxed, buzzing and feel great!

How long does it take to learn?

The short answer: a lifetime. A longer answer: A dedicated student could learn the sequence of postures from the form (choreography) in 12-18 months without too much difficulty. However, a realistic expectation would be around 6 years to learn the basic form well, with regular and consistent practice.

Don't enrol in a 10 week course and expect to 'know taiji!' Conversely, don't be put off by the amount of study involved (because there is enormous healing potential in the learning journey), nor obsessed with trying to learn it all perfectly the first time through (as time itself is a major requirement for the practice to seep into you).

So why bother learning taijiquan?

As healers we are always looking to improving our qi, for our practice and lives in general. Taiji can do this as it is literally the embodiment of TCM principles.

With a pre-existing knowledge (or current study) of TCM, you might as well be learning a comprehensive system of taiji, rather than something that has been watered down or simplified.

Without making too many big claims through taiji you will experience more body(body/mind) awareness and a concrete understanding of TCM principles through the body. You will have more qi, more sensitivity and awareness of qi, and increased ability to transmit qi. We will also look at qi activation and manifestation, alchemical qi practices, and the transformation of qi into jing. The beauty of taiji is that you don't have to do anything extra – 'just do it' and it will do it for you! We also use taiji to get into 'no mind' / 'higher mind' states, for pineal gland activation and 'eagle vision', as well as subconscious and intuitive training – again this is not something separate, but integrated into the practice.

Foundations of Taijiquan

Taiji requires self directed learning. Taiji is *internal*... which means it is very difficult, impossible actually, to 'teach' taiji – you can only have someone 'show you' how to do the form: qi is universal – you already know it!. That is not to say there is no value in having a quality teacher to follow and seek corrections from. But you must be willing to teach yourself and find your own way based on 'feelings' and following correct principles. So in the beginning we will spend a lot of time working on the principles and foundations.

Qigong Qigong (means 'breathwork' or 'energy skill'). There are '10,000' branches of qigong covering many different specialised areas. Taiji *is* qigong. However it can take some time to get the qigong to really switch on an 'work' during your form, so in the meantime we will practice some other qigong methods to help with this and get you used to going into a 'qigong state', as well as looking at static postures and qi development tools taken from the form itself.

Yin-Yang This is a great example of how taiji can help you experience something in your body, rather than abstract. Starting with the wrists/hands, we will learn to differentiate yin from yang in many ways, and allow relaxation and easy flow from one to the other and back again.

Structure Postural alignment leads to better qi flow. Correct structure adds substance to your practice, as well as guiding the form. We will spend a lot of time getting this right from the beginning, in this way you will learn much more easily, and at a higher level, if you know whether your posture 'feels right' or not.

Body Mechanics Based in good structure, better body mechanics lead to more efficient and natural movement, and better therefore qi flow.

Fa-jing Fa-jing (explosive energy release) is the 'motor' of taiji, and relies on all of the above foundations to make it work. It is often said that taiji is like a great river, sometimes it flows smoothly along, and sometimes there are rapids. We learn to build up and release energy in the form. To experience fa-jing is really something else! As the qi is released, you experience a tremendous rush (of blood, qi, endorphins and other 'feel good' chemicals) as you move from and return to stillness.

The Three Main Areas of Taiji

In each and every class we will cover the three main areas of taiji, namely the self-healing, martial, and medical areas:

The Self Healing Area

At its heart, taiji is about balancing yin/ying to create harmonious flow of qi. In many subtle ways you will notice that your life begins to flow, and you will adapt more easily to situations that would have otherwise been difficult, and generally feel more 'whole'.

Each posture in taiji works to heal a particular organ/channel, whether that be on a physical, energetic, emotional, or metaphysical level. The form does this by sending qi to particular areas of the body in each posture, via the various different attitude, intent and feeling states induced by each posture.

The composition of the form is such that, when done in sequence, each section (third) moves the qi around the body in particular sequence, which follows the natural diurnal qi-cycle

The Medical Area

Each posture can be used working with partners/clients to treat particular ailments through integrated 'qi massage' techniques. Although we'll play with these separately, the medical aspects of taiji are so well built into the form that when doing partnered work, say to practice martial applications for instance, we will naturally be working to heal each other. Of course, if you're already working as a healer, I have no doubt that know you'll experience for yourself how taiji can improve your practice of your chosen modality.

The Martial Area

You may be saying to yourself "but I'm a healer, why would I want to learn a martial art?" To move the energy to different parts of the body when practising the form, it is extremely useful to have some idea of martial application (energy follows thought/intent). Actually, it is impossible to do the form correctly without this – you would just be doing some kind of abstract dance. As a product of the violent times when real and effective self-defence was a necessary for survival, rather than as a sport or hobby, martial arts became the medium through which taijiquan expresses itself.

What you will cover in the first 5 weeks -

- Foundation practices: qigong, standing meditation,
- Principles of movement: chan su jin (silk reeling), moving from the centre, yin-yang in movement, opening-closing of the spine
- Old Yang Style Form: Learn up until half way through the first section of the form. Covering in detail approx. 3 movements per week

What you will cover in the weeks 5 through 10 -

- Progress with Qigong and Push Hands
- Introduce the Small San Sau and Chi Sao
- Martial drills for better body mechanics
- Old Yang Style Form: Complete the first section.

Wow this sounds like a serious study, how will I remember it all?

There are many (free) online resources such as e-books, video clips, etc, which are wonderful learning tools. There are also subscription-based learning and a wide range of dvds available to purchase if you wish.

We'll also try and avoid being too serious! Classes will be fun and play based, fairly casual and filled with good (and bad) humour, and also be as non-hierarchical as possible (no bowing, silk pyjamas, prefixed titles, etc are required!)

“Learning is finding out what you already know, Doing is demonstrating that you know it, Teaching is reminding others that they know it as well as you do. We are all learners, doers, and teachers.” - Richard Bach