

About Taijiquan

From a lecture by Prof. Ma Hailong on the occasion of his visit to Düsseldorf 2002

Ma Hailong
(* 1935)



Prof. Ma Hailong is the eldest son of Ma Yueliang and Wu Yinghua. He is President of the Jianquan Taijiquan Association in Shanghai.

On his third visit to Europe he held a lecture in the Forum for Traditional Wu Tai Chi Chuan to promote Wu-style Taijiquan. The following are excerpts from his lecture.

Thank you very much for the kind invitation to hold a lecture here in Düsseldorf. Taijiquan is a system which has been tradition in China for many centuries. The development of Taijiquan has spanned a long period of time. It is said that Zhang Sanfeng from the Wudang Mountains founded Taijiquan during the Tang Dynasty. In Taijiquan he refined the culture of his country. Today one speaks of the five Taijiquan families: Chen, Yang, Wu, Wu (Hao) and Sun. In the time of the Qing Dynasty the practising of martial arts was very popular. Rich people of these times trained in private circles and invited great masters, such as Yang Luchan (founder of the Yang-style), into their homes to train with them.

Yang Luchan was very famous in his time and was often challenged to fight. Later he gave lessons in the Emperor's court. One day the Emperor asked Yang Luchan which of his students he could recommend. Yang Luchan said: "There are three who excel." Each of the three had his own particular skills. "The first, Wan Chun, has particularly hard power (*gangjin*). Lin Shan is best at exerting power (*fajin*). Wu

Quanyou, however, is the best at gently neutralising energy (*rouhua*)". Wu Quanyou, my great-grandfather, became the founder of the Wu-style. It was he who made neutralisation a particular quality in the Taijiquan of our family. The aim of Taijiquan is to manipulate the power of the opponent in order to defeat him/her. That is in fact the essence of Taijiquan. Wu Quanyou's son, Wu Jianquan, gave Wu-style Taijiquan its slow form. His daughter Wu Yinghua married his accomplished student Ma Yueliang. These were my own and Ma Jiangbao's parents. They developed and fostered Wu-style Taijiquan in Shanghai.

Ma Jiangbao brought Wu-style Taijiquan to Europe. Thanks to his work and that of his students the popularity of Wu-style Taijiquan is developing very quickly. Meanwhile the students are from many different European countries and one student is now even teaching in South Africa. This is very gratifying, for although it is true that Taijiquan is a cultural treasure of China, it is meant for everybody. Learning Taijiquan is not only about learning to defend yourself but also an insight into a certain philosophy. The idea of Taijiquan is not to attack in an uncontrolled manner, but rather the attempt to hold back. This often has some affect on the entire character. My grandparents, Uncle and parents, for example, never claimed to be masters. This is part of the philosophy of Taijiquan. Taijiquan is not something for pretentious people.

In many aspects the theory of Taijiquan follows the symbolism of traditional Chinese thinking. In China, for example, it is said that the square is the symbol of the earth. It represents strength and stability. The circle is the symbol of the sky. It signifies softness. Human beings stand between the two and therefore in Taijiquan the positioning of the feet is also based on a square and is an expression of stability. The

movement of the arms and the upper part of the body are based on the circle and are soft and flexible. In this way while practising Taijiquan you can simultaneously unite both aspects in yourself.

The knowledge of the theory and practice of Taijiquan should not be confined to the Chinese culture. It should also be established in foreign countries. Three things are necessary to do so:

1. A very good teacher
2. A good learning environment
3. A cooperative team spirit

After this it all depends on hard work. In Taijiquan there is a saying: The teacher only guides you through the door, i.e. he/she teaches only the basics. Then it is all down to practice. The first three prerequisites already exist in Europe. Now all you must do is further develop this and practice a lot.

An important point in the theory and practice of Taijiquan is understanding the jin-power (*dongjin*). This really is difficult. It is necessary to be aware of how both you and your opponent exert energy. For this purpose you must focus entirely on Feeling (*tingjin*). It is like reading a poem. To begin with perhaps, you read only superficially. It is only after in-depth study of the poem that it can be understood in its complexity. Or it is like listening to classical music. One concentrates entirely on the music. That is why you shouldn't listen to music when practising Taijiquan. When I practice Taijiquan, I practice Taijiquan. When I listen to music, I listen to music. It is the only way I can be completely focussed. This is also called "Heaven and human being are

united (*tianren heyi*)". I am in complete harmony with my environment and don't allow myself to be distracted.

Taijiquan is the connection of stillness and movement. When practising Taijiquan you should pay particular attention to the five aspects of my father; stillness, lightness, slowness, conscientiousness and perseverance. It is not possible to make progress without them. If you can put these aspects into action, you will have much pleasure in practising Taijiquan and you will achieve a long and happy life. Thank you once again for taking the time to listen to me for so long.