

An Interview with Chen Zhenglei

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Chen Zhenglei is no stranger to Tai Chi practitioners. Chen hails from Chenjiagou (Chen Village), Wenxian County, Henan Province, China, (the birthplace of Chen style Taijiquan). He is the 19th generation descendent of the Chen family and the 11th generation inheritor of Chen style Taijiquan. Chen Zhenglei has held



numerous important positions in the martial arts community and he is also one of China's official Top Ten Foremost Martial Artists. Chen was in Singapore in early September 2006 at the invitation of Madam Wong Yong, Taijiquan Group Leader for the Singapore National Wushu Federation, to attend a series of activities (performances, teaching classes and seminars) on Chen style Taijiquan, which was organized by the Chong Pang Tai Chi Club. Traveling with Master Chen were his wife, his son, Chen Bin, and his disciple, Zhang Dongwu, both of whom are senior instructors and vice-directors of the Chenjiagou Taijiquan School.

AY (Alex Yeo): There are many people who are learning and practicing Taijiquan today, but most of

them are actually practicing Taiji exercises, rather than Taiji "Quan," which by definition is a martial art. If these Taijiquan students wish er level [of skill]?

CZL (Chen Zhenglei): This problem is a very common problem both in and outside China [i.e. around the world]. One aspect is that so many people like Taijiquan. This is because of its attraction [i.e.] its culture, essences and effects in strengthening the body. For hundreds of years, these effects have attracted the attention and love of many people, but this in turn has caused some problems. What problems? It is the problem of a good teacher and a good instructor [i.e., the problem of a lack of such]. There was a discussion in 1998 on the development of Taijiquan in the 21st century and about what job needs to be done. Among these is the need to develop a large number of good calibre instructors. By "good calibre" we mean they must be good in their techniques and skill, accomplished in the Taijiquan culture, as well as know some foreign languages and what the outside work is like in order to be able to adapt and be a worldwide, international talent. So right now in the world, there are easily millions of Taijiquan practitioners, but those who have actually received the proper traditional instruction from a teacher are very rare indeed.

That's why Chen Jia Gou [the Chen Village] has this traditional saying, "Those who practice number thousands and tens of thousands. Those who succeed number only one or half. Those who practice are as many as the [number of] hairs in an ox's tail. Those who succeed are fewer than the [number of] hooves [the ox has]." And there's another traditional wushu saying, "Three years a small achievement," "Nine years a big achievement" and "Ten years without leaving the door."

These sayings, although [they] are popular folk sayings, they prove that the study of Taijiquan is such an immense effort; there are so many things to learn and it is just not realistic to expect [a person] to be able to master it in two or three years. That's why one requires a systematic method to learn it. So the usual person nowadays does not prepare [i.e., is not prepared for] this kind of requirements, or he is unable to. There are the modern commitments of finances, family, time and career; he is just not able to follow a good teacher for 10 or 20 years [at one go]. So people like us who are born into this kind of martial arts family, with its many generations worth of culture, traditions and influences, actually live with the teacher for 10, 20 or even 30 years. Our family is a large family. It doesn't mean that you'll automatically learn the art well. It depends on how diligent and hardworking you are. Even with a good teacher you still have to be diligent.

So in summary, to master Taijiquan well one must meet three conditions:

First is that you must have a good teacher. This teacher must have learned the art properly himself, must be able to teach, and must be knowledgeable. He must be a *ming shi*. You know which *ming* [i.e., "understand"] I am referring to right? [Sounding exactly the same but are actually two different characters. One is "*ming*," which means understand or "knowledge," the other "*ming*" means famous.] Nowadays, there are far too many famous and wellknown *ming* [i.e. "famous"] *shi* [teacher] around. They are very famous indeed. But those who really know what is Taijiquan, able to understand what is Taijiquan, this is very important. So this *ming shi* [referring to "*ming*" i.e. the teacher who understands] will have a very professional skill and he will have a very complete, scientific and systematic teaching method. This is a good teacher, and this teacher is much sought after by students, though not many would actually find them.

Some teachers are not well known; they may not even be known by many. They don't want to be well known, but they are very good teachers. These teachers exist. It's not that they don't exist; they are just not easy to find. These teachers teach correctly [in Master Chen's words, "scientifically and systematically"] and they guide students on the correct path and prevent them from going astray. If the student can find such a teacher, he will not go astray and will improve much faster. So many people today are doing aimless moving, shaking and twisting. Then 20, 30 years later they still don't even know what is qi. Taijiquan is an internal martial art. By "internal" this means we are training the qi. If there is no sense of qi, then we cannot call it an internal martial art. It is [then] not Taiji "Quan" [fist]; it is Taiji "*cao*" [calisthenics]. It is no different from the usual physical exercises, lots of movements, looks good and flowery. Some even think that they are doing it so well, in such a lively manner.

Secondly, you must have the qualities of a good student. The teacher is also looking for this kind of student. [He is] good in comprehension skills. He can see once and know immediately [i.e. explain a movement or concept once and he will be able to understand it]. This kind of person is a very intelligent person. The person the teacher wants to find is intelligent, has common sense, [is] goodhearted, and has the attitude to work hard and take on hard work.

Once you have a good teacher and have the necessary qualities of a good student, the most important is the third requirement—having the spirit of working hard and enduring hardships. Even if you are taught the correct transmissions, if you do not work hard, you will still not succeed. [These are the] three qualities, prerequisites and conditions, to do well in Taijiquan.

[Elaborating further] Sometimes an intelligent person can be too intelligent for his own good. What do I mean? A student can be intelligent, he can immediately grasp whatever the teacher tells him. He may think, this is so simple, what else is there to learn? And then he doesn't ponder carefully what he has learned. Some people do not depend on intelligence or cleverness. They think they are stupid, not as clever as others. And then that person ponders diligently what he has learned. Even after class when the teacher has gone home, he continues to put in effort to practice and try to understand what he was just taught. Three or five days later, [it will end up that] the intelligent person has failed to perform as well as the "stupid" one. That is his flaw. He thinks it's too easy. In the classics handed down by my ancestors, there is the saying, "Through familiarity we gain understanding" and "From big circles to medium circles, from medium circles to small circles."

In Chen Village we talk about five stages of gongfu, five types of expression [of skill], and in my book I mentioned ten steps to take. There are also three phases:

The first one is familiarity of the routine and accuracy of postures. Once you are familiar with the routine and can get the postures accurate, and you can understand what they mean, then you will also express it correctly through your body—such as your stances are stable, your upper body is nimble, the whole body moves as a unit, and so on. Sometimes a student can "see" the expression. He can watch a good teacher perform and know what to look out for, but he himself is unable to do it. This stage is called the "*xin ming*" [understanding of the heart] phase.

You can see, you can understand [in the mind], but you still cannot express it yourself. This is also called the "eyes high, hands low" phase. [It is] the same. You can see and understand, but you cannot express it yourself. This is a process. You just cannot look at a form and duplicate it straight away. It has to come from within and is expressed without. Applicationwise, they learn (through push hands) about how to use *peng, lu, ji, an, cai, lie, zou, kao, and zhan, nian, Han, shui* [and] how to neutralize the opponent's force under the correct conditions, and not forcefully pulling each other. So, you know all these, just that you cannot express it. And the reason is that your gongfu is not there yet. Your body has not developed the ability yet. This is what we call the "*xin ming*" phase.

The second phase is the "*ti ming*" [understanding of the body] phase [i.e., the body understands]. After knowledge gained through the first phase, your mind knows and understands very well what is required, and after a suitable period of hard work and practice, your body is able to express what your mind first understood. Your body is able to express the theoretical requirements, the actions and the applications. This then is the "*ti ming*" phase.

Third is the "*shen ming*" phase [understanding of the spirit]. Put in one part of gongfu and you get back one part of secret. You don't put in the effort; you won't get any revelation. This is what we call "one level after another level, levels with endless wonders." Every part of effort put in gives you a certain feeling, and this feeling gives you a certain part of understanding. It's like climbing up Huangshan [Mount Huang, a famous mountain in China]. When you climb over one peak, you go, "Wow, what beautiful scenery and what fantastic feeling [to have come this far]." When you go up another peak, you go, "Wow, what beautiful scenery and what fantastic feeling, and so different from the experience of the previous peak." [Like the famous Wudang Mountains, Huangshan also has multiple peaks.] Attainment of gongfu is like that. You reach one peak after another. You thought you have reached the peak, but there is another one just in front. You reach a peak and it feels so good. You reach a peak and you realize, "Oh, so this is what it is all about." You reach the next peak and then you realize again, "Oh, so this is what it is all about."

Then, what you have heard from your teacher, what you have read in the old books, you will slowly start to understand what they mean. Previously, you understood what you read, but on a reading level. You knew the theories, but you had to translate the theories into practical understanding, to be proved by practical experience, to prove what the theories say are true or not. This is the "*shen ming*" phase. Remember, "One level after another level, levels with endless wonders."

[As for] the five levels of gongfu, five types of expression, [they are]:

The first level - one yin and nine yang, *gen tou hui* - White Crane Spreads Its Wings

One yin nine yang means that you have learned the routine already, and after the teacher gave you corrections, and tells you to "*song, song and song* again" ["*song*" - relaxed, loose]. You then manage to achieve one part "*rou*" [suppleness] and nine parts "*gang*" [stiffness]. At this stage, when you push hands, you are still easily pushed down. Why is this so? You know that you are now already practicing Taijiquan, and you don't want to use brute strength, but your body has not yet been aligned, that is why you are easily pushed down.

After another period of practice, you have achieved another part of "*rou*"—this is the stage two yin and eight yang, *shi san shou*. Here, you have loosened a little more, and your root is a little more stable, it is more difficult to be pushed down. This may not necessarily be a good thing. When you are not easily pushed down, and your opponent is also not easily pushed down, a certain resistance is built,

then "you push me, I push you." It is easy for the two of you to end up wrestling with each other.

After another period of more practice and more corrections by the teacher, your body is more aligned, more relaxed and loose, more united, more connected, more nimble, and you achieve a certain amount of feeling of qi, your internal qi is able to connect your body, you then achieve another part of *rou*, and now you have three *rou* and seven *gang*. This is the three yin and seven yang, *you jue ying*. At this stage when you push hands, you are able to send the other person off, push him down, but this is not done as easily as you intended. You feel that you are still using some brute strength.

Under these conditions, he is not satisfied, and he will put in even more effort into practice, and this time, he gains another one part of *rou*, and now he is at the four yin and six yang stage. He is now a *lei si hao shou* (like a "Good Hand"). When he contacts with a person, *yi de ren wei zun, bu jian xing wei miao*. What is this? Grasp a person's posture, grasp the opportunity, the moment he [the opponent] moves, he [i.e. you] hits the person away. *Bu jian xing*, (cannot see the form)—the person who is hit away will know how he was hit. A bystander however, will only see "two persons contact, bam, and one person gets hit away" and he [the onlooker] has no idea what happened or how the hit took place. This gongfu is called *yi de ren wei zun, bu jian xing wei miao*.

The highest stage in Taijiquan is five yin and five yang, *cheng miao shou* (become a "Fantastic Hand.") Once you reached this stage, what does this mean? The body is like a Taiji ball, filled with internal qi, [the] whole body is alive and agile. He can use any part of his body. It does not necessarily have to be his fist or elbow or shoulder. It can be any part of the body. There is no part of the body that is not Taiji. This is the highest stage of Taijiquan. But if you tell this to people outside [i.e. non-practitioners] they will just think that it's a little strange [i.e. makes no sense].

Actually, I wrote about this in an essay titled, "Discourse of Chen Style Taijiquan Silk Reeling Energy." This essay states it very clearly. "What is Chen Style Silk Reeling Energy? The requirement of the entire routine is that there is no flat surface, there is no straight line, no broken links or points [in the energy line], the whole body is round [and] it moves in arcs and spirals." Whether it is the hand, the leg, the waist, the body, whatever, it moves in spirals, when the force comes in like this (demonstrating a hand movement), just turn, spiral and the force is neutralized. So, the whole body is a spiral. There is no part of the body that is not Taiji. There is no part of the body that is not round. There is no part of the body that is not a fist. This is the expression of a Taiji that is practiced to the highest level. The whole body is in unity.

Spiral the wrist [and it will] rotate the shoulder, spiral the waist [and it will] rotate the hip, spiral the ankle [and it will] rotate the knee, so the whole body from head to toe is a spiraling exercise. There is no straight line, no flat surface. If it is not spiraling it is circling. That is why we say that the external form moves in arcs and curves, while the internal energy moves in spirals. So when your body has reached such a level, whatever force contacts your body will not find a place to land. After a long time of *song*, loosening up, sinking, breathing naturally, you will develop a "very full" kind of internal energy.

This "very full" kind of energy is very beneficial. Healthwise, it is good for the internal systems, such as the nervous system, digestive systems and the respiratory system. So you don't have to go for other types of physical exercises. When you reach this stage your body will automatically be strong and healthy. Your blood and qi will also flow very smoothly and abundant; Chinese medicine tells us that when the qi and blood are not stagnant, i.e., when they are flowing smoothly, there will be no illness. So this kind of spiralling and circling can promote the flow of qi and blood. When you relax, still your mind, these are all very good for the nervous system.

When you have reached this stage you will then have three kinds of strength. The first kind of strength is "*xuan guan*" strength [meaning "revolving and piercing" strength]. What is *xuan guan* strength? Let me give an example. Consider the car wheel. When it is spinning hard, it generates a strong centrifugal force. You can use a stick, stone or even a knife hit it but it's no use. The moment you make contact,

the object is hit away. This is *xuan guan* strength. Wherever you hit the body, that part will just hit you back right away.

The second kind is "*chuan tou*" [i.e., penetrating] strength. This is the spiralling force that blasts out and penetrates like a fired bullet. Telling you to *song*, relax, is to get rid of the tension that is a hindrance to the penetrator force. It's like the children's toy, the catapult. You load the bullet and fire away. Why is it so fast? Since there is nothing in between the bullet and target (except air) there is nothing to stop, hinder or the slow the bullet's force. When you use strength to hit, you create stiff energy in your arms. This is no elasticity or resilience, and thus your speed is affected. In Taijiquan, we train a "nimble and agile velocity" kind of strength, and not the "strength" kind of strength [i.e., the usual "use the muscle" type].

The third kind of strength is the "*hua jie*" [i.e. neutralizing and releasing] strength. When the body is filled with qi, you are aware of what's going on around you without visually having to see it or look at it. It's a kind of sensitivity. When something touches you, you have an immediate whole body reaction — the amount of force used (heavy or light), the direction it's coming from — up, down, left, right, front and back. When you touch the opponent, you can immediately "see" where he is going—up, down, left, right, forward, backward. Your qi can go into his empty spots. This is like water. Water always flows into empty spots. Wherever you [referring to the opponent now] are *xu* (insubstantial), wherever you are *kong* (empty), there it will flow into. Where the force is large, you avoid it. You can immediately tell the concentration and depth of his energy, the direction it is heading, where is the flow and where is it broken. Incoming, and you neutralize it. It's a kind of light strength, a light touch sort of strength. Your physical strength to huge proportions; however, this kind of strength is brute, hard and stiff, not nimble or agile at all [and] Taijiquan practitioners should not dare [i.e. meaning to say that Taijiquan practitioners should stay away from this kind of strength].

What is *lian ben bu lian biao* [train the foundation, not the specific]?

"Ben" refers to the root, the foundation, and the kidney essence and the base [i.e. lower part of the body] gongfu. The kidneys store the energy essences; it is also the source of energy release. When the kidney essence is This is what is meant by *Han shen bu lian zhao*. You train the body, not the physical techniques. energy, nimble reflexes and overall healthy body. This is one.

Secondly, when the whole body is relaxed, the dantian is filled with qi which sinks to the yongquan, allowing the upper body to be nimble, the middle body to be lively, the lower body to be stable, and [when you step you are rooted to the ground]. [When] your base is stable, you cannot be moved no matter how someone pushes you. You neutralize his force away. "*Biao*" refers to training specific body parts [or what is commonly known as spot training]. Taijiquan is an internal martial art, focusing on training the internal. When the root is nourished, the branches and the leaves will automatically flourish.

What is *lian shen bu lian zhao* [train the body, not the technique]?

Training the body is to train the gongfu of the entire body. Training the [martial art] technique is self-explanatory. Taijiquan beginners are often drawn to learning the applications of the postures. If we just use posture applications to explain and understand Taijiquan, then we will never grasp the essence of the art. [In] learning Taijiquan, [one] must necessarily go through the process of becoming very familiar with the routine, getting the postures to be totally accurate, getting rid of stiffness to replace it with suppleness, so that the whole body is connected and aligned and the internal qi is full. This is basically to get the gongfu on the body.

The focus of Taijiquan is to train the whole body such that when the need to use it arises, then, depending on the conditions and the situation, it will adapt and change as needed and respond accordingly. We cannot be stuck in a "this technique for this attack" thinking. When the internal qi is full, when the whole body is like a fully filled energy ball, when I feel a touch I immediately know how to counterattack. As the classics say, [paraphrasing it] "When the gongfu is attained, no matter how the enemy attacks, I don't have to think about it, I naturally have a way to deal with it." Training the [second] "*li*" is to train the physical strength. You can increase. It is not easy to train Taiji gongfu. This is why I have three principles for my students who train the Taiji Gong. One, you must train the *li* (theory) not the *li* (stiff, muscular strength). You must understand what the Taijiquan theory is

all about. You must know it. Then, you will have a direction when you walk, instead of walking with aimless doubt that Taijiquan cannot be used? You no longer have to wonder if this posture can be used or ask how to use this posture.

With training in focus of the mind, intention guiding the qi, qi moving the body [and] qi arriving when the intention arrives, until when one part moves the whole body moves, the whole body is connected and aligned, and the internal and external are harmonized. When training, observe the rules, train naturally, let nature takes its course, do not rush and do not force the attainment [of gongfu] ...rest o your life and still end up nowhere ne; the destination) [last part of sentence is not clear]

So you must get the theory correct you must get the direction correct.

We want "*xian tian*" qi, not "*hou tian*." What is *xian tian*? It is like when we were still in the mother's womb where everything is natural, supple, smooth, and all natural—no tension, stress, no stiffness. That is the feeling that we want to achieve - all natural, all calm. No stiffness. *Hou tian* is, after we have left the womb, in order to survive in this hard world, we start to learn the ways of the world, we start to eat unnatural food and we start to become unnatural. Just observe an innocent baby or toddler. Everything is so relaxed, yet his grip is strong, and when he starts to hit, it hurts! And through it all, the tie, one is still so relaxed and calm about everything. This *hou tian* strength is stiff strength, everyone has it. Taijiquan requires softness in hardness, hardness in softness, hard and soft in harmony; insubstantial giving birth to substantial, substantial giving birth to insubstantial, substantial and insubstantial constantly changing.

How many people today have an idea of what is qi? How many people are practicing in whichever way they like? Without [following the] theory and principles? This is why so many today are walking in the wrong direction? They do not have the right teacher to show them where to walk, what direction head toward. They can practice for or 20 years and still not get the feel of qi. Some people think that Taijiquan entirely light and flowing, something an old man or old woman would do The other idea people have is that Taijiquan is a *neijia* (internal) martial art. "Wow, gongfu is very good, can beat up people," but how to hit someone without strength? So he trains in a very stiff and hard manner. These are the two common, inaccurate preconceptions.

The *peng* character is used exclusively by Taijiquan. It's not found even in the dictionary. As for *lu*, they also always use the wrong character. I have written so many books in so many years and every publisher always prints the wrong character. Those who do not know Taijiquan will not know the mistake. I told them, if you want to publish my books you have to use the correct character. If you use the incorrect one then the whole thing becomes meaningless. This is why it is quite common for the printing of my books to always be delayed by two months or so for them to correct the mistakes they made. This *peng* character, it is most difficult to understand. It is not you raise your hand this way (demonstrating) and then say this is *peng*. No, *peng* is present in every movement, every angle; everywhere, *peng jin* (energy) is present. How to understand this *peng*? It is *ba mian zhi cheng* [supporting eight sides] [i.e.] the whole thing is a sphere. No matter [the presence of energies such as] *lu, ji, an, cai, lie, zou, kao, peng* are there. The whole body must have *peng jin*. *Li shen zhong zhen* [straight, upright body and centered].

The classics say it clearly, but many are not doing it. The classics say you don't lean here and there. You don't do it excessively; you also don't fall short of it. Not too much, not too little. It must be just nice. This is Taijiquan's requirement. No matter what you are doing, physical movements [or] qi (energy), it must be just nice. Although this is Taijiquan's training method, it is also a way of living. When you speak, don't talk too much, but also don't leave things unsaid. When you do things, don't cross the line, but also don't leave things half done. And all the other principles we all know about. If you can grasp all these principles, then you are a Taijiquan expert. A lot of people cannot understand these. It is easy to say, but to do it is difficult. A lot of teachers are writing books. In the past, these materials on Taijiquan cannot be bought. Now you can find books on these everywhere.

But take a closer look and you can see that [in] a lot of these books, they can say it, they can write it, but look at their movements [i.e. the photos in the books], their actions don't match their words. Why? Because they are just copying what others have written. They copy here and copy there and do they even know if the

information they copied are correct or not? They can talk, but can they use their bodies to express it?

AY: So, based on what you have just said, what then is Taijiquan?

CZL: Taijiquan is a manifestation of the Taiji culture.

The movements have to be very natural, very comfortable. When done correctly, it will automatically be expressed in a very beautiful and aesthetic way, in contrast to what some people do in deliberately trying to make a movement look nice.

Substantial will give birth to insubstantial, and insubstantial will give birth to substantial.

Let's take this for example (demonstrating weight shifting between the legs). This is going into substantial (shifting into weighted leg); this is maximum substantial. If I go any further I will become stiff, my balance will be off, my energy will be stuck. So at this maximum substantial point the only way to go is to go into insubstantial. Now look at my other leg. It is at maximum insubstantial. To go any further will mean I [i.e. the posture, the joint] will collapse. The only way I can go now is to go into substantial. Now look at the two legs, one is at the maximum substantial point and it has nowhere to go but into insubstantial. At the same time the other leg is at maximum insubstantial and it has nowhere to go but into substantial. So both will reach their maximum points at the same time, and both will start moving into the other form at the same time.

This is the yin/yang, yin in yang, yang in yin, yin at maximum will change to yang, and yang at maximum will change to yin, and both are constantly changing, both are changing at the same time, one never changes without the other changing as well.

Now look at the knees, when I shift (demonstrating) it automatically rounds and turns. Notice the S shape that it is tracing? It just comes naturally; you don't do it deliberately. So now you have the yin/yang and the S-curve, what do you have?

Now [look at] the hands. We have the *shun* [go with the flow] silk reeling, and *ni* [go in the opposite direction] silk reeling. When the hand moves in the *shun* manner (demonstrating), at its maximum point it has to change to *ni*, or I'll become stiff, and my hand will be locked or grabbed easily. If you don't change, you are effectively moving yourself off-balance and easily knocked down by the opponent with hardly any effort. The same goes for the *ni* silk reeling.

Substantial/insubstantial is more than that, and definitely beyond mere physical movements.

The external movements move in an arc, the internal energy moves in a spiral. This is what we mean by Taiji. Taijiquan is called Taijiquan because it follows the principle of Taiji. Taiji is not the *quan* (the fist). It is the *quan* that follows Taiji theory that is called Taijiquan.

Xingyi Quan (Hsing Yi) is called Xingyi because it follows the theory the Five Elements - Metal, Wood, Water, Fire and Earth. Baguazhang : called Bagua because it follows the Bagua, the eight trigrams. Taijiquan is called Taiji because it follows the changes of yin yang.

This is why the three arts are termed the internal martial arts.

For some people, once "Taiji" is mentioned, they will immediately think of Wudang and Zhang Sanfeng.

Actually, Taiji and Bag have nothing to do with Wudang Mountains. Some people mistake that, because Taoists use the Taiji diagram and Taijiquan also uses the Taiji diagram, therefore Taijiquan came from the Taoists.

Just think, the Taiji diagram and Taiji culture, for how many years have they existed? They have been around for 5,000 to 6,000 years. They are our cultural heritage; anyone can use them. You can use them, I can use them; anyone can use them.

The whole Taiji culture, our forefathers' culture. Taiji culture gave birth to Kong Zi's (Confucius) *ru xue* (Confucianism), Lao Zi's (Lao Tze) *dao xue* (Taoism), *yi xue* (medical science), *i xue* (martial science) [*xue* means study, learning or science]. These studies are all Taiji culture. They are our traditional Chinese culture. They are all from the same source, why can't they be interlinked? If they are not interlinked, then that is wrong. So you see, Confucianism, it has more than 2,000 years of history. Medical science, from the time of E Tuo (a very famous Chinese physic) until now, also more than 2,000 years of history. Martial science has even longer history. Their theories are from the same family.

AY: Master Chen, what is Taiji *neigong* (internal gongfu)? How do train it?

CZL: We must distinguish the *neijia* and *waijia* method of training. *Waijia* (the external school) emphasizes the external, the external appearance. *Neijia* (the internal school) emphasizes the internal.

When your internal qi is full, that is *neigong*. This kind of *neigong*, what is it? If you use Western medicine it is hard to explain. In Chinese medicine we have the meridians. Western medicine cannot find anything and says it doesn't exist. However, nowadays we have some Western researchers who are researching into the meridians and feeling/sensing the qi.

Assistant Professor XXX at an American university [name given in Chinese which I do not recognize and is not stated here to prevent misidentification] is doing some research involving using some instruments to measure the body as I practice. The readings are then translated into computer readings, which can measure the changes in the body's meridians. How the internal energy moves is thus plotted onto the graph.

When you practice, the heat, light and electricity that are produced, all can be measured out by these latest scientific instruments. These readings, once they are completely analyzed, can be used as a reference for Western scientists researching into Chinese medicine.

This Chinese meridian study, together with our martial arts study, talk about internal qi.

Now, this *neigong* is very difficult to explain in words.

When we practice, we cause the qi to flow, to clear the meridians, to flow inside the body non-stop. When the *neigong* is there in the body, first we will know it in the hands. The fingers have a swelling and numbing feeling; the wrists have a hot feeling.

The next feeling is in the dantian. It has a full and heavy feeling. This is not enough. We want to make it fuller. When the dantian qi is fuller, then it can spill over to the limbs and extremities.

Third is when, after the above is achieved, it will sink to the feet. At this moment, when the dantian qi is full and can sink to the feet, then we say we have achieved the *da zhou tian* (Big Heavenly Circulation).

AY: So the routine (the form) is used to train the *neigong*?

CZL: The routine is one method to train the *neigong*. There are many other methods, like *zhan zhuang*, seated meditation. When walking, when sitting I also can train the *neigong*. The *quan* [fist] routine and the weapons routines, they train you to adopt the correct postures, the correct alignment. They are not the only methods.

The routines are one way to use the physical body to guide the internal qi, external movements to stimulate the internal qi. When the qi has been produced, the qi will coordinate and harmonize, and then integrate with the body.

Then, it will be the "intention that guides the qi, the qi moves the body" stage, [i.e., the intention starts, and when the qi arrives then the body moves].

Only after you reached these three stages can you then say you have mastered a complete system.

Even then, it is still not enough. When you have the complete system, you still need to train the qi that is already full and abundant to an even deeper level.

The method [to train *neigong*] then is not just practice the routine only. There are a lot of methods.

Haha... it's not easy to master a martial art to a high level. As the saying goes, "Taiji, ten years without leaving the door." Only after training for ten years then do you just step into the door.

AY: In this case, for modern people who are already so busy, how can they practice to expect a reasonable level of gongfu?

CZL: That's why nowadays people merely practice for health reasons only. It is simply impossible to achieve any reasonable level of skill without a lot of hard work. When you train for an hour, maybe practice the routine two or three times, this is just for health maintenance (or improvement) purposes only.

AY: Wow, then if practitioners of the past need ten years to "step out of the door," then wouldn't modern practitioners need 20 or 30 years?

CZL: Not entirely. In the past, students who meet the teacher's requirements are rare and few. Due to basic communication system [i.e., transport, letters, etc.], you meet the teacher maybe only once a month or once a year and he gives you maybe one or two pointers and one or two postures. How much can you learn like this?

But now you can "invite the teacher home." There are videos and books aplenty. You can learn much more in a shorter period of time. Time and conditions are no longer the same. Science and technology are more advanced now. Transport is so convenient, too. You want to see your teacher? Just buy an air ticket! However, although you can cut short your learning time by looking at the video or book every day, all you get from this is only just the external form. You won't get the inner essence. You still need the teacher's guidance.

AY: Some people have commented that no matter what style we practice and how good your gongfu is, if there is no 'use intention, not use strength' as the classics say, it is not Taijiquan; May I know your view on this? What exactly does this mean?

CZL: I have earlier mentioned about the various training methods the stages of progress. "Use intention do not use strength," you have to reach a certain point before you can achieve it, and there is a certain procedure to follow, too. It's like going to school. You have to go through primary school, secondary school, junior college, then university. At university, also have your Bachelors, then the Masters and then the PhD. Degrees. Even after the PhD you have to advance further before you can be professor.

A university graduate, after 12 years of study, he has only gotten the basic grasp of theories. Can he can this grasp of theories into the work world and get his job done? This is anybody's guess. This is what we call "only theory, no practical experience."

At the Masters and PhD level you have to decide which direction you want to go, which specialization you want to take.

Taijiquan is the same. After learning the routine, although you have qi feeling, your teacher has also told you some *neigong* method, and you can integrate your qi with your external movements, and you can perform the applications reasonably well and so this is only the university level.

When your external movement and internal qi can thoroughly integrate into each other, then you can manipulate "use intention, not use strength." It is not a method you start training in from the beginning.

It's like learning calligraphy. You must follow every rule and require to practice.

There is a rule for every stroke, and you must follow the rule. Can you imitate the calligraphy master straight away? The stroke he write; right now, can you follow his stroke immediately when you just start learning?

He has already mastered up to a certain level. He can turn his brush this way or that way and his qi will just follow. Can you imitate him when you have not even mastered the basic strokes of *heng*, *pie*, *dian* or *shu* [names of Chinese strokes]?

You can. Definitely you can, but nobody will recognize what you've just written.

Nowadays some people just anyhow stroke here or stroke there and they call it Chinese calligraphy. They call themselves a calligrapher. What a joke! You should know, right? The beginner has to practice the *heng*, *dian* or *shu* countless times before he even can even start to combine them into simple words [i.e., into Chinese characters].

At each stage, primary, secondary, university and so on, you train specifically for each level, even if what you train is the same [routine, methods etc.]. Like in calligraphy, you look at the master's strokes. They are the exact same strokes that a beginner will write.

There are no newly invented strokes. Yet, look at the strokes and we'll know if this is written by the master or the beginner. Why? The strokes are still the same, the brush is still held the same way, aren't they?

The difference is when you have the gongfu versus when you don't have the gongfu.

That's the problem. A lot of people just take what they have seen in books or demonstrated by teachers and then they try to imitate it. They fail to distinguish what level of theory is exhibited. Is it a basic university level or a Masters level [of theory]? Or maybe it's only a high school level?

If you are only at a secondary school level, then you should use the secondary school level [of theory] to know [i.e., understand]. If you're at the university level, then you use the university level to know. You can use university level knowledge to look at a secondary level skill (of performance) [but not the other way].

A lot of people ask a lot of strange questions. You have asked well. Yes, the theories have such a phrase, but your understanding level has not reached the required level yet.

AY: How does a student know which teacher is *ming* [one who understands], or *ming* [may be famous but may not be one who understands] ? If I have never learned before, how do I know if he is teaching correctly?

CZL: You have to look at the way he teaches. First, if he teaches the routine, he should be teaching some commonly accepted and standard routine. It's the same as calligraphy—step by step, follow the rules, etc. Some teachers however talk a lot of theories, but when you look at their physical form it is so far away from what he just said. For example, he talks a lot of "relax the shoulders and sink the elbows" but when you look at it, his shoulders are tensed and his elbows are everywhere. How much can you trust such a teacher? You just have to observe carefully.

Some Additional Notes from the Seminar

Addressing the Audience

Research has shown that the world's three most popular exercise types are: Slow and gentle exercises, Exercises that helps you to relax, and Whole body exercises that you can do from young till old. Taijiquan fits into all three categories. Western countries are very interested in this exercise. I have travelled through more than 30 countries in the last 20 years. Those who have invited me to learn, about 90 percent of them are Westerners. That's why today, in Singapore, I am very happy to see all of you. I can use our Chinese language to speak directly to all of you. This is the first time outside China that I am actually using Chinese to speak at a seminar. I'm so glad that everyone here will be able to understand what I say. I don't need someone to interpret or take up lots of time translating for the audience. The translation may also be able to completely convey the meaning of what I say. That's why I am so happy to be here today to teach you. Over there [i.e., overseas] we I take one hour just to speak on one topic. A few topics only and half I day will be gone. Here we don't r to waste this kind of time.

No Chen Style Leaders

In many martial arts schools, Taijiquan included, each school will have a *zhang men ren* [leader the style].

In Chen style, we have no *zha men ren*. Why is this so? The *zha men ren* is usually the one with the best gongfu or the best leadership skills. In Chen Village, we have so many exponents. Chen style is so.. - it is impossible for a person to know every skill. It is impossible to say this is better, much less the best.

Instead, we have exponents with outstanding skills and leadership abilities. They are each very skilled that are representative of Chen style Taijiquan.

We appoint these exponents as Chen style representatives to go and teach authentic and traditinal Chen style Taijiquan. We are, the Chen Village officially, appoints to teach Chen Village Taijiquan.

Now, this does not mean we are the best. There are better exponents back home, just that they have not been traveling around the world to teach.

Some Questions by Seminar Audience

Question: Will a teacher keep knowledge from his student?

Chen Zhenglei: When the teacher tells you to *fang song* (relax) aga again, do you do it? [i.e., why (the teacher keep telling you to do same thing again and again?)] When you meet a real Taijiqu teacher, he is not conservative an unwilling to teach. He doesn't want you to learn slowly; he wishes badly that you can learn quickly! If it is so easy to learn, why couldn't he learn everything when still a child? Why must he take 10, 20 years? It's not that he doesn't want to teach. There is a step-by-step procedure. You must learn the first step before going to the second step. For example: this is *peng*, this is *lu*, this is *ji* and so on. Step-by-step, you - imply you just cannot rush it. If not, what would end up with is going to be this, and this, and this (demonstrating). Is this *peng*, *lu*, *ji*, *an*?

Question: Some people think that when people reach a certain age they will face some restrictions in continuing the Chen style and think, for example, Yang style is more suitable for the elderly. What do you think?

CZL: Every style has its own flavour, its own characteristics, its own way of training and practice. Chen style has the empty hand sets, the weapon sets, the partner exercises and so on. Each one appeals to each specific interest and purpose. Depending on your aim, you can choose the appropriate set and practice it. In addition, slow can be practiced fast, fast can also be practiced slow. Explosive points can be muted; non-explosive movements can be done explosively. All the training methods are just that, methods. They are not absolutes. You train

according to your own level and goal. If health is your aim, then train appropriately for health. If gongfu is your aim, then train accordingly for gongfu. If you understand the whole spectrum, this kind of question will not come to mind.

Look at all the founders and past masters of the various styles. None of them trained in only one way from the beginning until the end [when they started on the art until their passing away]. They all trained in varying ways according to their individual requirements at each instance. There is no absolute one and only way to practice. That's why I say anyone can practice Taijiquan.