

# Huang Xing Xian Answers 13 Questions

## 1. Are there different schools or sects of Taijiquan?

**Huang Xing Xian (Huang Sheng-Shyan):** Taiji embodies a comprehensive set of knowledge, developed and handed down by our learned predecessor with mystifying principles and profound philosophical learnings. The Taiji movements are scientific, as the principles are based on scientific fundamentals.

Our predecessors developed the art for improving human health, warding off sickness, slowing down the aging process, achieving longevity and defending oneself. All this benefits mankind and society. Good character formation is promoted.

An adherent imbibed with the Dao (or philosophy as a way of life) of Taiji would contribute towards proper governance of the country and universal peace. Taiji is not a martial art meant for bragging and antagonistic purposes.

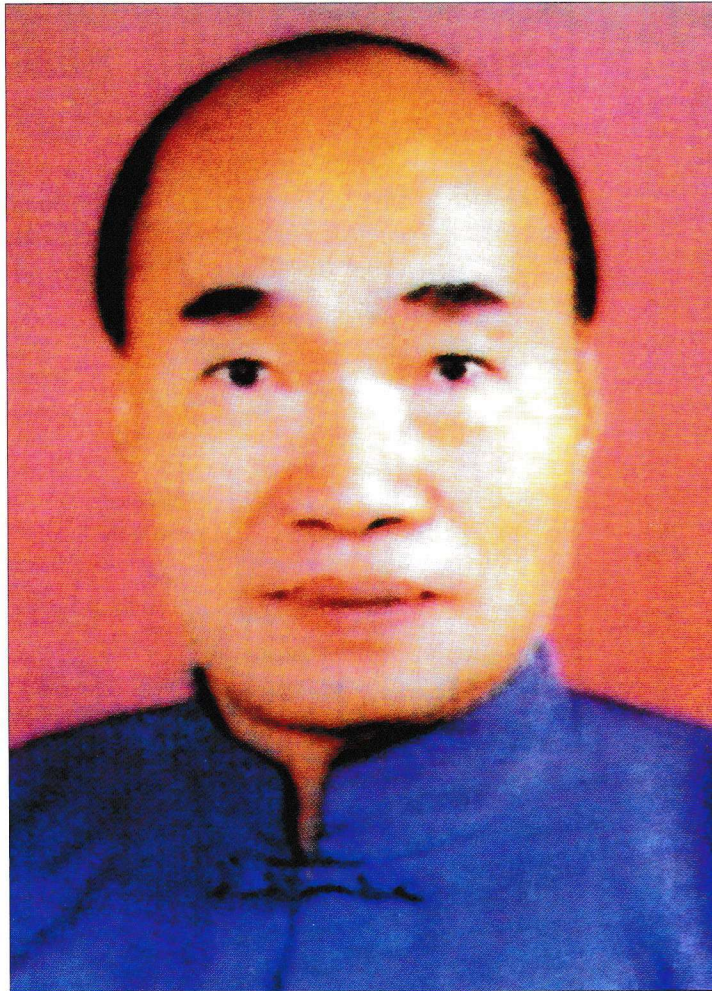
A Taiji exponent would need to understand the principles and philosophy of Taiji. No one should deviate from these principles and philosophy. The movements can be developed and modified but the principles are eternal.

The external forms may differ from person to person, but the principles are standard and unvarying. Because of

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This article was first published in 1985 in conjunction with the 10th anniversary celebration of Huang Xing Xian's Malaysian school. It has been submitted by Tiziano Grandi of La Spezia, Italy, who represents Huang's school in Italy.

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Huang Xing Xian

this, there is no basis for differentiation by schools. Instead, a spirit of a single family should prevail.

Common interest of the art should take precedence over personal interest. An open attitude should emerge, bearing in mind the spirit of the founder and predecessors to propagate the philosophy of Taiji throughout the world, so as to improve the health of mankind.

Huang Xing Xian (1910-1992) was a famous disciple of Cheng Man-ch'ing. He established Huang's Taiji Association of Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei and Italy. Huang was famous for defeating a wrestler 25 kilograms heavier and 20 years younger in Singapore in 1972. Huang won 26 points to zero.

## 2. How should we practice Taiji in order to reach accuracy?

**Huang:** The gap between accurate and non-accurate achievement is wide. Remember the words of the old master, Wang Tsung Yueh, that the body must be naturally and vertically balanced, bearing in mind the principles of being relaxed, rounded and with an awareness of the various parts of the body. During practice of the set movements, one must be careful, conscious or alert, observant and must feel where one is moving. Otherwise, there is form without substance and deception to people.

To achieve accuracy, the principles of Taiji must be followed in addition to correct methods of practicing. A good master is necessary, coupled with one's own constant research. The art must be learned progressively, having to be on firm ground first before advancing to the next step. Personal requirements are also important.

One must be determined, confident, persevering and motivated. A secure means of livelihood and having a normal environment coupled with single-mindedness, constant learning and practice and clear understanding of the principles thoroughly—all this will lead to achievement of accuracy.

This is in contrast to those who want to learn fast, who concern themselves with the external forms and who learn to practice sporadically. These hope to learn first and be corrected later, not realizing that it is worse than having a new person learning from scratch.

Others take the principles of Taiji lightly or superficially and liken the art to a common exercise, drill or dance. All this has form but no substance. One's body must be likened to a perfect machine, where a wrong spare part

will affect the operation of the machine.

The founder of Taiji has said, "Achieving the Dao is important, acquiring the skill in the art is secondary; not learning my Dao, he is not my student."

Therefore, also important would be honesty and righteousness or a good moral character.

### 3. There are different forms of Taiji? Are the principles different?

**Huang:** The founder created the art. But through the years, the forms of Taiji have differed: some have 24 basic movements while others have 37; some have 64 set movements and some have 72; while others have 108 movements or even 124.

There are long sets and short sets. Movements have been large and expansive and have been small and compact. Some emphasized high postures; others opt for low ones. Some practice slowly; others practice at a faster pace. All this divergence is written by men.

What is important is that the principles remain the same. Different masters with different temperaments have been following the basic principles through the ages.

They have engaged in continuous research and training. They have reviewed and improved the art until the ultimate objective is achieved where form becomes formless, limbs are no more important, brute force becomes nonexistent and stiffness has given way to being fully relaxed.

Character formation has advanced to the stage of "non-self" and of non-resistance so that the whole body is used and hands are no longer used as hands. Youthfulness and longevity are attained.

It is easy to master correct forms as the qi and the principles of the art are internally harmonized. Harmonization is also to be achieved between the upper, middle and lower parts and



Cheng Man-ch'ing, left, with Huang Xing Xian.

between the left and the right side of the body.

Even though difficult, it is relatively easier to master correct forms compared to acquiring skill in the art. This is so as in training or practicing there are a number of normally undetectable parts of the body that are difficult to keep under control from the aspects of speed, timing, rhythm and balance. Because of this, skill in the art is difficult to acquire.

But then as the founder says, "Understanding one portion of the art would mean being enlightened on all portions or parts. Then all schools and sects become one."

### 4. Is it better to practice Taiji more frequently or less frequently?

**Huang:** There are no extremes in Taiji. The essence is in the training method. If the method is not correct, it is no different from ordinary drills with a lot of time spent but relatively little achievement. So it is not a question of practicing more or less frequently but

practicing correctly. That is, the central equilibrium must be vertically maintained.

Every movement must be disciplined such that the posture is vertically balanced. The principles remain unchanged: there is straightness in a curve and vice versa.

There must be constant learning and practice, understanding the principles and the less obvious points. Mastery of this will produce skill naturally. There is no question, therefore, of practicing too much or too little but rather of practicing correctly.

### 5. Is it correct to practice the art fast or to practice it slow?

**Huang:** The earth rotates at a constant and specific rate. Similarly, Taiji should not be practiced too slowly or too fast but should be practiced comfortably. The human body must be moved naturally; otherwise, there would be weaknesses.

If the practice is too fast, breathing is affected, resulting in uneven respiration, breathlessness and the heart pulsating too fast.

If the practice is too slow, the limbs and the joints become stiff. Qi is blocked and is locally stagnant: intent or consciousness is employed but the qi is not flowing. Internal force and qi must be synchronized.

Internally, there is the harmony of the libido energy, qi and spirit while externally, the mind, consciousness (or intent) and body are also harmonized and in turn both the internal and external harmonies are synchronized. Muscles must be relaxed and all parts of the body are naturally without tension.

It is not possible, therefore, to say practicing fast is correct or practicing slowly is correct, as this has to be based on the standard or level of achievement of the student. One must practice until the whole body is relaxed and comfortably balanced.

Once there is internal and external

synchronization, then the question of slow and fast in practice is unimportant. At this stage, one gets the feeling that the upper portion of the body is like the drifting of clouds and the lower portion is like the flowing of water.

Consciousness is continuous and is harmonized with movement. All parts of the body are natural and are unified. There is, then, no question of being fast or slow.

#### **6. Is it correct to have either high or low postures in the set movements of Taiji?**

**Huang:** The art of Taiji does not distinguish high and low postures but is rather based on the idea of four "balances" or equilibriums:

1. Balance in the magnitude of the posture or movement, such as both sides of the body must have a "balanced" amount of spatial displacement when moving;

2. Accuracy or precision achieved simultaneously by all parts of the body;

3. Bodily balance when moving or turning;

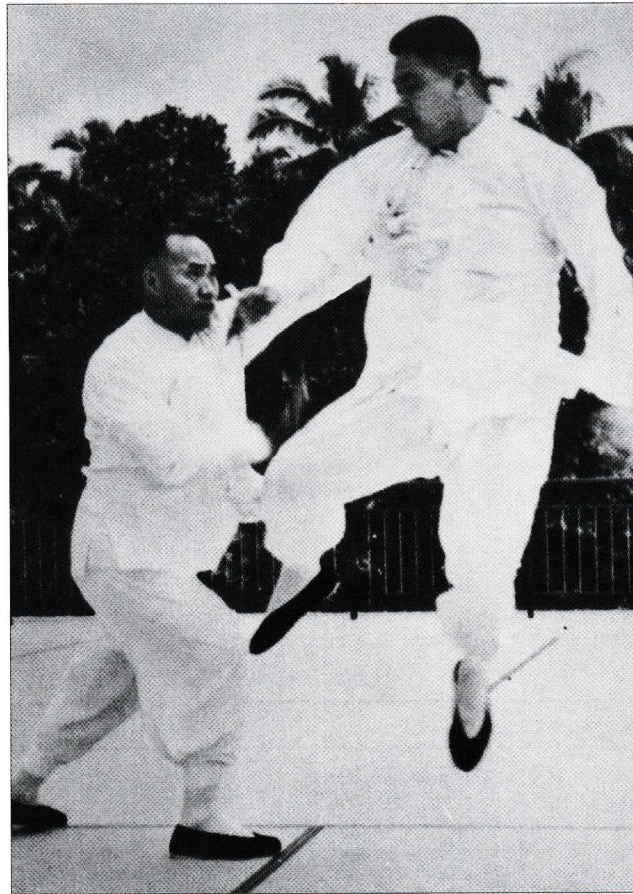
4. Steadiness, particularly when moving.

External and internal balance or harmony must be cultivated where there is no slanting of the central axis of the body. When hind force is invoked, the hind (back) knee being bent will move up or straighten slightly, though the height of the body remains unchanged.

This is so as consciousness (or intent) and qi would "close" centrally, instead of coming up, while the bent knee is used to adjust accordingly.

Consciousness is used to lead the muscles in relaxing. Joints, muscles and ligaments must then be loosened, relaxed and "thrown" open but are still linked. The body is then erect and comfortable.

Consciousness is also used to "move" Taiji principles to parts of the body. Having achieved "four balances and eight steadiness," the question of high and low postures is then answered individually.



Huang demonstrating uprooting power.

#### **7. How can substantiality and insubstantiality be distinguished between left and right or between top and bottom parts of the body?**

**Huang:** The muscles, the skeleton and the nerves are parts of the body system. When practicing the movements, the use of consciousness to sink and relax the body is most important.

The center of gravity is moved while preserving the uprightness of the central axis of the body. It is important to focus on steadiness, tranquility, relaxation and rootedness.

The movements propel the external movements in a continuous or uninterrupted fashion. Internal force is generated with turning movements. After a long time, the whole body is in balance. When left and right is distinguished, one is substantial and the other insubstantial along the pattern of "cross alignment."

For instance, together with the distinction between top and bottom parts of the body, when the left upper part of the body is substantial, the left

lower part is insubstantial and similarly when the right upper part of the body is substantial, the right lower part is insubstantial.

This pattern of cross alignment is used in shifts of the center of gravity from one leg to the other. This is similar to the "crossroads" of the nervous system.

When moving qi, therefore, one must separate substantial from insubstantial, move the step without moving the body or moving the body and not the hand.

If in moving a step the body also moves, then it is not separating substantial from insubstantial. If in moving the body the hand also moves, then the shoulder and the hands are not relaxed.

It is important to follow the principles of using consciousness to propel movement. The top and bottom, left and right portions of the body, must be coordinated. A rounded grinding stone may move but the center is not moving.

All parts of the body become one system characterized by lightness and agility, roundness and smoothness, even respiration, and alternate opening and closing like that of the sea where with movement from one part of the sea, all parts are also moved.

The movements are guided by consciousness and are properly regulated like the regular movements of the waves in the sea.

#### **8. How could the movements be practiced in order that they can be usefully applied?**

**Huang:** Take the five loosening (or relaxing) exercises as an illustration. These exercises are based on Taiji principles. During practice there must be full concentration since any distraction will nullify any effects.

Bear in mind the three points of non-mobility: the head, which must be locked onto the body; the hands, which must not move of their own volition; and the soles of the feet, which must be still and rooted to the ground.

Consciousness (or intent) will lead the qi along. Steps are made without affecting or moving the body. Turning

movements start from the waist and hips with hands propelled from the waist and hips in accordance with the principle that all movements originate from the waist.

Principles must be understood and no movements are separated from the principles. Once you make it internally you are also "through" externally.

Once you are fully relaxed, you can change according to circumstances and can, therefore, neutralize an oncoming force. You would have reached that position of "non-self," where the whole body is the weapon and the hands are no longer used as hands.

If you are not able to usefully apply your movements, then you still have not understood the basics of the five relaxing exercises. If you have not mastered the essentials, then there is no point of talking about application of the movements.

#### **9. What is the rationale for relaxing the abdomen and withdrawing the coccyx (or tailbone)?**

**Huang:** Qi is stored in the dantian as a result of using consciousness to sink the qi to this point. From here qi should circulate to the whole body. If qi just remains in the dantian, then the abdomen will have the sensation of being stuffed. Only when qi circulates throughout the body will the abdomen be relaxed and pliable.

After a time, the abdomen will acquire some "bouncy," or "springy"

effect, and qi would have been circulating to the whole body. Qi can be occluded, or absorbed, into the backbone. The Song of the Thirteen Postures says, "If the abdomen is thoroughly relaxed, then the qi will rise." So do not just store the qi in the abdomen; otherwise, it will simply bloat.

Having the coccyx withdrawn means there is no protrusion of the buttocks while making sure at the same time that the hip joints are not "sliding" forward.

This must be combined with relaxing the abdomen and both requirements must be met at the same time. Otherwise, there is no rootness while the waist is stiff, resulting in vertical imbalance or disequilibrium.

It is important to maintain the uprightness of the central axis of the body in order to achieve central equilibrium. A test can be made as follows to see whether all this has been done correctly all along:

Use one thumb to press the abdomen and release the thumb suddenly. There should be a bouncing or springy effect of the abdomen. At the same time, the seat of the buttocks behind should be very soft to the touch.

#### **10. What is true spirit of Taiji?**

**Huang:** Good and famous masters of Taiji teach the same things but students will learn differently. This is because students differ in natural

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endowment and physical make-up.

The real acquisition of the art is not in just mastering the external forms but also in mastering the principles and philosophy. The learner must be a person of reason having learned, practiced and understood the art successfully.

He applies those principles and philosophy to his daily life. He will not take unfair advantage or be selfish. He is wholeheartedly devoted to Taiji. He shares the founder's spirit of striving for mankind to be physically and mentally healthy. This would be the true Taiji spirit.

**11. How many times must we practice the set movements every day?**

**Huang:** The important principle is moderation. The practicing technique must be correct in the first place. Some people say you must practice the whole set of movements ten times a day with one set lasting about 25 minutes.

This only focuses on quantity and is wasting energy. It is contrary to the basic principles of Taiji, succeeding in only making you sweat and reducing weight. It is not beneficial to the development of the internal force, internal organs or, generally, the body internally.

Grandmaster Cheng Man-Ch'ing has said, "I practice the mobilization of the internal force and qi using the 37 basic movements every day. One set of movements lasts only seven minutes." Practicing too much or too little is subject to whether it is practiced correctly or not.

Utilizing my experience and following my practicing technique, students are encouraged to practice every morning and evening using about five minutes to practice a particular movement or posture (dividing each of them into two parts) over and over again. Those students who do so are likely to succeed.

**12. Some students have been learning and practicing Taiji for several years and are yet unstable. Why is this so?**

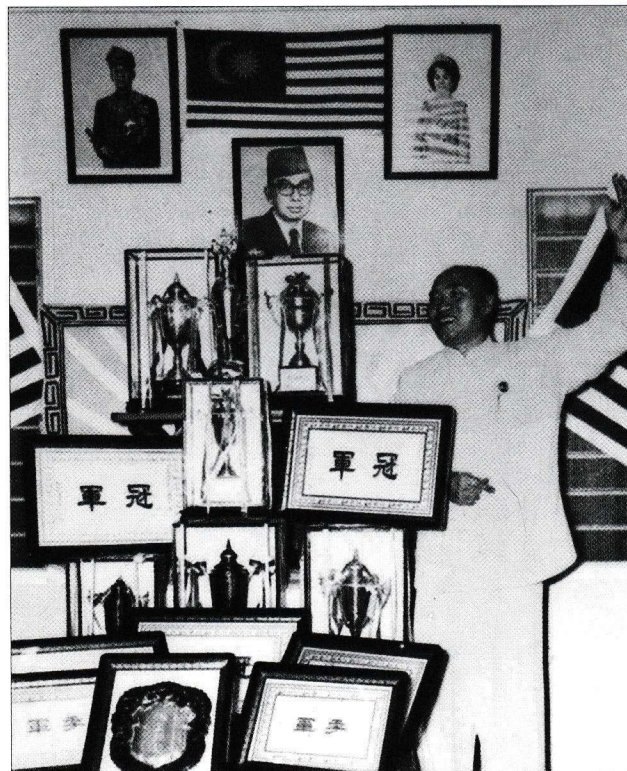
**Huang:** A lot of students are using wrong learning and practicing technique. Students must start with understanding the Dao philosophy, then the principles, then use the correct method and finally put in the effort.

They must understand the relationship of man and his surroundings or the universe and use the method of qi to practice. They must be humble and persistent in his practice.

Slowly, rootedness will



Huang's daughter, Chiew Mei, and her husband, Yek Giong, inheritor of Huang's school. Behind is Tiziano Grandi of Italy.



Huang is shown with his fighting trophies.

result and the method of practicing will be understood. Understand the principles and be aware of the less obvious and unnoticeable aspects in slowing acquiring skill.

Being rooted and having internal force can never be observed externally. They can be accomplished through correct method. In practicing the movements and developing the internal force, the joints of the body must be loosened and yet linked.

The whole body is relaxed and is not easily pushed over by an opponent. Substantiality is distinguished from insubstantiality.

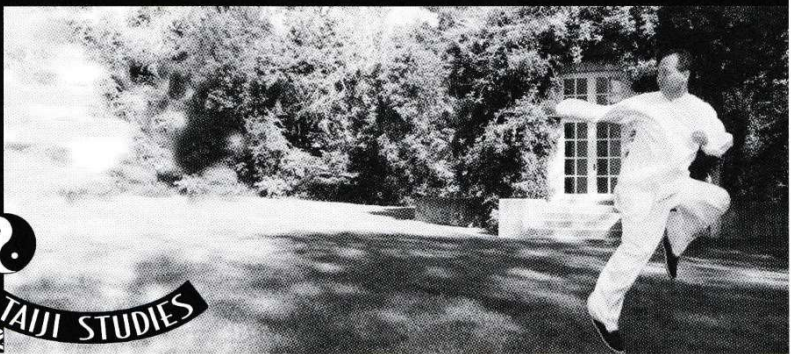
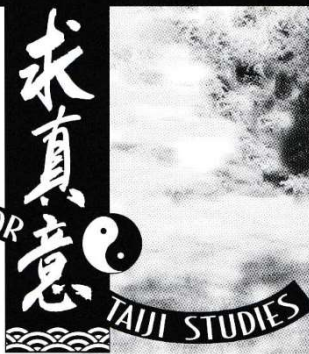
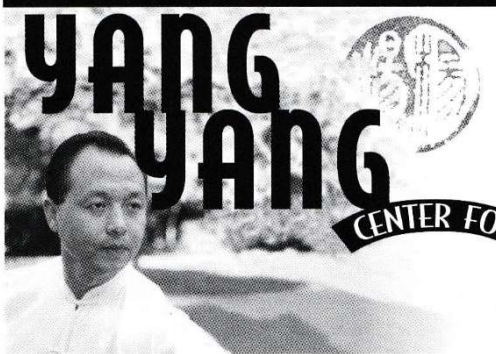
Aim to be flexible and pliable like a snake whose tail will come in to help if you attack the head, or vice versa, or whose tail and head will assist when the center is attacked.

Be responsive to consciousness (or intent), and then tranquility and pliability can be achieved. It is easier to lift off a 200 pound iron rod than to lift up a 100 pound iron chain. This illustrates the principles of thoroughly relaxed joints. Students must also understand the application of yin and yang in the movements and push hand exercises.

Yin and Yang principles are in Taiji which encompass the universe: all movements--whether divided according to upper and lower body, right and left, front and back, internal and external--must not deviate from the principles of substantiality and insubstantiality.

Moving and stillness alternate continuously: Yin does not depart from Yang and vice versa. When Yang moves, Yin also moves and vice versa. This principle must be understood when practicing the set movements.

The body and the character are trained together as is the acquisition of the Dao and the art. Dao is likened to Yin, while the art or skill is the Yang. Yang is evolved from Yin at Yin's completion. Being relaxed, still-



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ness and being rooted become yin components.

Neutralization of force forms the basic foundation where no strength is used. Stillness is like that of the mountain. No change is seen but it is capable of a lot of changes. The founder has said, "Dao is the basis, art is the consequence." One must therefore acquire Dao by learning not to resist, for only then will the body learn to be obedient.

In attacking and defending, one must understand the method and then acquire insubstantiality and quietude. Only then will the defense be solid. Attacking will also be successful as one is naturally comfortable.

In pushing hands exercise, one must learn to achieve non-resistance and stickiness. Having achieved stickiness, then one can achieve the ability to neutralize force. With adequate reserves, the neutralizing ability is applied with an invol-

untary exertion of internal force.

**13. How should a student relate to his teacher?**

**Huang:** In the present day, science is very advanced, affecting all aspects



Taken shortly after Cheng Man-ch'ing's death in 1975. Prof. Cheng's wife is in the center, first row, with Huang Xing Xian. Behind Cheng's wife is Ben Lo and Xu Ye Zhong, chairman of Cheng's school in Taiwan. In the third row is Patrick Kelly, a long time student of Huang.

of human endeavor day by day. This gives rise to stress and keen competition in business, having a telling effect on the spirit. This is a common malady.

This is why Taiji, an ancient art, is popular and a common practice. It has no secrets. It is equitable to all as it discriminates against no student. But students often commit errors in practicing the art.

- Students should bear in mind the following pointers:
1. Respect the teacher and accept the philosophy or Dao of the art;
  2. Be honest and do not take unfair advantage;
  3. Be conscientious and serious, think, observe and feel, or be aware during practice;
  4. Progress step by step;
  5. Be humble and practice constantly; and
  6. Follow all the principles mentioned earlier when practicing by themselves. •