Mastering Yang Style

Tai Chi Chuan

by

Zen. Mind. Sword
The Path to
Mastering Yang Style
Tai Chi Chuan

Standard Copyright Licence 2016

All rights reserved, including the right to
reproduce this book or portions thereof,
in any form, except for the inclusion
of brief quotations in a review
Disclaimer

Before attempting any of the physical movements mentioned in this book, you are urged to consult a physician or doctor to check if your current health will allow you to safely practice the techniques described within.

The reader is urged to seek out a proper instructor for the purpose of learning the contents presented within as you may be injured if you apply or train in the techniques shown in this book. The author will not be responsible for any such injury that may arise from attempting to perform the techniques within.

Furthermore, the author makes neither representation, warranty or guarantee that the techniques illustrated within will be safe or effective in any self defence scenarios or otherwise.
PART 1

So It Began
A special transmission outside the scriptures; not dependent on words or letters; by direct pointing to the mind of man, seeing into one's true nature and attaining Buddhahood.

Bodhidharma on Zen
Introduction

In the practice of Tai Chi Chuan Grandmaster Wei Shuren said that the intention must precede what we do. It is with this in mind that we have termed our approach TaijiKinesis (意运太极) in regards to the practice of forms, weapons and push hands within our school Singapore Tai Chi Yang Style (新加坡杨式秘传太极拳).

The Path to Mastering Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan acts as handbook to introduce the TaijiKinesis path - the general background of how this approach came into being, the influencers and sources from which we drew from, our objectives and aspirations, what we teach and the method in our madness.
A quick word on titles :-

i) Immediate major influencers on our approach going back three generations will be indicated with the honorific of Master, Grandmaster and Great Grandmaster. Those who go back further in time before Great Grandmaster will be denoted as Master or by full name.

ii) The lesser influencers will be denoted simply by the honorific of Master.
Yang Style

It began with the Yangs; specifically Yang style Tai Chi Chuan.

Tai Chi Chuan is of course a very popular form of Northern Chinese combative art characterized by soft, rhythmic and gentle movements as expressed through a long form (108-Form). Today Yang style Tai Chi Chuan is typically practiced more for health than combat.

True Tai Chi Chuan is not a matter of styles or forms. It goes beyond just mere training of the physical. To discover the essence of Tai Chi Chuan we have to detach ourselves from that which enslaves our body and mind with the mundane. Mastery of the art as dictated by the principles of the Tai Chi Classics requires that we seek that which utilizes the mind to train the body to optimize its own movements with minimal outer motions.

The Yang style Tai Chi Chuan legacy as transmitted from Yang Jianhou to Wang Yongquan to Wei Shuren to my teacher and to me was previously a secret method of using the intention to train the body to express the principles of Tai Chi Chuan for health and combat. Great Grandmaster Wang opened the doors cautiously to the public but Grandmaster Wei was the one who made the art truly accessible to the Chinese public through his books and DVD, and by taking on a number of disciples.
Though there are more students of this lesser known method of the Yang style Tai Chi Chuan today, nevertheless, those with understanding that go beyond mere waving of hands remain few. As the art spreads further we can expect to see external deviations in terms of movements but that is fine as long as the internal characteristics are there. However, it would not surprise me should even the essence be forgotten as in the rush to mint money the unprepared anoint themselves as teachers.

For example today many refer to this style as Imperial Tai Chi even though this lineage of Yang style Tai Chi Chuan has nothing to do with the imperial family. As far as I know neither Great Grandmaster Wang or Grandmaster Wei has ever referred to the art as such. The only connection to the Imperial family was that Master Yang Jianhou taught the art to the oldest grandson of emperor Xuanzong, Pu Lun Bei Zi.

In fact, at one time someone asked Great Grandmaster Wang why he did not call this art Wang style Tai Chi given its uniqueness. Great Grandmaster Wang angrily replied that this is the art of the Yang family and not something he concocted hence it would be misleading to call it Wang style Tai Chi Chuan. Sometimes I cannot help but wonder that perhaps it would have been better if Great Grandmaster Wang had indeed given the art a different name.

In this way, the art would not have been sidelined and given the short shrift by those with vested interests in their own style of Tai Chi Chuan. Normal people fear the unknown and we can expect the same even with master practitioners particularly when quizzed by curious students after they have read books on this style and the master finds himself unable to shed light on the true meaning of the methodology described. It's not fair to ask one master to explain the methods of another even within the same perceived style; perhaps students just expect too much.

In this handbook I would like to summarize and share with readers some stories, insights and experiences I have collected from pursuing a path for mastering Yang style Tai Chi Chuan. This handbook does not set out to present a complete picture as this would be a complex task that could potentially distract from the core theme. Perhaps one day I will expand on the contents here if only to leave my students with more information to round off their understanding of where certain approaches came from.
PART 2

Once Upon the Yangs
The Tao is perfect like unto vast space, with nothing wanting, nothing superfluous: it is indeed due to making choice, that suchness is lost sight of.

Jianzhi Sengcan
Believing Mind Inscription
Prodigal Son

Yang Chengfu.

Son of Yang Jianhou.

Prodigal son.

Wastrel.

And later third generation Yang family Tai Chi Chuan successor.

Despite his less than auspicious start in the family art Yang Chengfu did eventually become the most prolific Yang family master since his lineage has spread far and wide.

This was in spite of the fact that he did not want anything to do with the family art in the beginning, preferring to take up another outside northern art.

However, the lure of being the head of a well known style of martial art probably proved to be the tipping point in getting Yang Chengfu back into the family fold.
Closed Door Art

Before Yang Chengfu assumed the mantle of responsibility for the family art's propagation it was his father, Yang Jianhou, who steered the transmission of the art.

Under Yang Jianhou the family art did not spread far and wide. It was not unusual for a family art to be transmitted in a limited manner. The norm in feudal China was for many family arts to be taught to sons only as the first tier of transmission.

Second tier transmission was to relatives and third tier to close friends and outsiders vouched for by someone on the inside. If the master had no son to pass the skills to then he would adopt a son who may take the family surname to continue the art under the family name.

For the rest i.e. the ordinary disciples and students it was normal that they will not be taught the complete syllabus nor offered explanations of the keys to developing their skills to the highest level.

For the story of our Yang style we are fortunate that Yang Jianhou decided to teach the secrets of his family’s art to Wang Conglu who worked as the head of housekeeping for Pu Lun Bei Zi, a Manchurian Prince. In addition, the old master also taught Wang Conglu’s son, Yongquan, the art. In Chinese culture a master is like a father figure. As such, a father and son cannot have the same master as it is would be like having the same father. In view of this, Yang Jianhou directed Great Grandmaster Wang Yongquan to accept Yang Chengfu as his teacher instead. This would prove to be somewhat of an argumentative point later.
The Elder Brother

The elderly Master Yang was assisted by the elder son Yang Shaohou. Yang Shaohou was said to be an adept of the small frame form.

The art of Yang Shaohou, the elder brother of Yang Chengfu, is lesser known today due to its limited transmission.

This was because Yang Shaohou was a teacher of short temperament, wont to dishing out beatings. Plus he had little patience for teaching.

Hence, the scarcity of practitioners of his lineage today.

Yang Shaohou assisted his father in teaching Tai Chi Chuan at the residence of Pu Lun Bei Zi. Great Grandmaster Wang had the privilege to be demonstrated on by Yang Shaohou whenever the latter wanted to demonstrate a point to Yang Jianhou.
The Path Diverges

It was said that the family agreed to let Yang Chengfu to be the family art's standard bearer if he were to return to the fold, take up the family art and spread it. This was preferable to letting him run around practicing another art and bringing shame to the family name for not practicing the family art. In this aspect Yang Chengfu performed admirably and cultivated many disciples who went on to spread his art inside and outside of China.

Yang Chengfu propagated a version of the family art that is best described as large frame. There have been suspicion that this version of the Yang family 108-Form is a watered down version of what was practiced behind closed doors.

Some have also put forward the theory that the Yang family masters actually practiced what is today known as Chen style forms, particularly the 2nd routine known as Cannon Fist, behind closed doors. Conspiracy theorists have claimed that the Yang family purposely created watered down, less complex and physically demanding forms to teach to outsiders particularly the royal family members.

Without concrete proof or knowing the true circumstances of the times it is difficult to say which claim or theory is more plausible. As such, we can only examine the facts and art before us and reach our own conclusions, believing what we want to believe.

Ultimately, fate and luck will lead us to where it will lead us. It is up to us to grasp and embrace what we are offered and make the best of it. If it is to be, it is up to us.
PART 3

The Ipoh Years
Try and fail, but don’t fail to try.

Stephen Kaggwa
Beginning the Journey

For me the path to mastering Yang style Tai Chi Chuan began when I started my learning of Yang style Tai Chi Chuan. This was via the Cheng Man Ching lineage. I learned this from Master Hui See Lim who was a teacher of Chinese language in a school I attended in the mid-70s.

I didn’t know it then but this style was very popular in my country of birth, Malaysia. At that time though I began my learning journey in the Yang style by not knowing or understanding the style or lineage of Tai Chi Chuan.

It was only years later when I had access to martial arts literature that I had a grasp of this lineage's position in the story of the Yang style Tai Chi Chuan and its transmission outside of China.

In particular, there is a hint that the Cheng Man Ching lineage was not entirely Yang Chengfu-centric but that is another story for another time.
My next stop in the learning of Yang style Tai Chi Chuan was in the late 80s in the lineage of Grandmaster Nip Chee Fei who was also well known as a master of Buk Sing Choy Li Fut.

Grandmaster Nip fled China after the communists overran the country. He was invited to Malaysia to teach Tai Chi Chuan. My teacher, Master Leong Lin Heng is the 2nd disciple of Nip.

I met Master Leong in a park in my hometown after returning from overseas education. Again I was not so much into lineage then so I never really asked in-depth questions about Master Leong's line.

Later from what I found out in brief was that Grandmaster Nip had invited Yang Chengfu to go to his home to instruct him in Tai Chi Chuan. Grandmaster Nip had learned and mastered enough to teach, and later even earned a doctorate degree by writing a thesis on the art.

Master Leong was a teacher who could explain how to use the techniques of the Yang Chengfu long form of self defense. He could also hold his own in push hands against outsiders. I mentally took notes on the applications and later typed them up into a draft manuscript which I have yet to publish to date.
Yang Sau Chung

Whilst training with Master Leong I got to know of an elderly gentleman, Mr Wong, who practiced the Cheng Man Ching style of Tai Chi Chuan.

Mr Wong's son, Richard, had furthered his tertiary studies in the Queen's country. Whilst there he had lived with and later studied Tai Chi Chuan with Master Chu Kin Hung. Master Chu is one of the only three disciples of Yang Sau Chung, the eldest son of Yang Chengfu.

Prior to learning from Master Yang, Chu was learning Yiquan from the famed Master Han Xingyuan, a senior student of Wang Xiangzhai who created Yiquan. Richard said that Master Chu went to try out Yang Sau Chung, lost and asked to learn.

I knew who Master Chu was as I first heard about him as the teacher of Erle Montaigue, a noted columnist for a martial arts magazine in Australia. Later Richard mentioned that Erle had left Master Chu before he started his learning so he only knew him by name. I missed meeting Master Chu when he flew over to Malaysia to attend Richard's wedding. By then I had already moved to the Lion City.

After reading of Master Chu through Erle's writings I was interested to learn from Richard. Class was in the morning at his father's home where he was then living the life of a bachelor. There were only the three to four of us in class depending on the schedule.

We practiced in the porch area. Each session would commence with half an hour of zhanzhuang. Thereafter, we would move to practicing the form before ending with a short session of push hands.
During the time I was there I got to hear of the fantastic skills of Master Chu, some of which Richard had witnessed personally. There was the story of how Master Chu could drop students on the ground leaving them spinning like a top.

The other one I can recall is the one whereby Master Chu jumped onto a stage to land on a stick balanced on two objects without breaking them. I must admit that if I were the one reading this I would be skeptical because it sounds too fantastic to be true. Anyway, who was I to doubt Richard.

Now if all Richard could do was to tell the tales of the prowess of Master Chu then it would have been too bad. But Richard had some interesting things to show. There weren't demonstrations of fighting skills but could be considered as factors that could assist one's combat skills.

I stayed with Richard for a little over a year when economic factors pushed me to leave Malaysia for Singapore in search for work.
PART 4

Enter the Dong Style
You who seek the mystery,
In daylight or in the shadows of night,
Don’t throw away your time.

Shitou Xiqian
Loh Chong Chai

Life can take strange turns. The early years of the start of a new life in Singapore was also the period following the 80s when famous Chen style Tai Chi Chuan masters visited for the Lion City to give seminars and to spread the art.

Some of the schools teaching Chen style were located in Geylang which was about half an hour's drive away. To someone jobless and without wheels the schools might be an eternity away. Nevertheless, I managed to visit a school but economics-wise the time was wrong so I left it at that.

For the next few years the idea of learning Tai Chi Chuan remained on the shelf. It was only after I attained some measure of job stability that I revisited the notion. I knew there would be a number of schools out there but which was right for me? Then I had an idea.

A young Mr Loh Chong Chai demonstrating halberd applications
In 1987 during transit in Singapore I had found a book store specializing in the sales of martial arts books and magazines. The Tong Lian Bookshop was then the place to go to for martial arts books and training weapons. Back then the founder of Tong Lian, Mr Loh Chong Chai, was helming the shop and assisted by Ms Koh.

Years later when I came back to Singapore to work I spent many fruitful weekends in Tong Lian browsing and eventually over the years acquiring a large collection of books and China martial arts magazines. Many of these old print media had good, solid information that is lacking in today's offering.

Granted the quality of the pictures weren't great. However, a number of the authors were acknowledged masters in their chosen field so this more than made up for the poor quality of photos. A number of these books and magazines are today out of print.
Tong Lian was to many more than a book shop. It was a place for locals and overseas martial artists and masters to visit to make friends. Just look at the many happy visitors below in the picture montage. Can you recognize the world famous masters Dong Zhenchen (Dong family Tai Chi Chuan), Chen Xiaowang, Zhu Tiancai, Feng Zhiqiang (Hun Yuan Tai Chi Chuan) and Zhou Shu Sheng (famous master of Eagle Claw and Liu He Ba Fa styles)?

Many practitioners including overseas visitors and famous masters who have visited Tong Lian
Back then I knew that Mr Loh was teaching Tai Chi at the West Coast Community Centre. However, it was only in 2015 that I found out that Mr Loh was a disciple of the famous Master Lin Bo Yan. Master Lin was a very famous preying mantis master who also learned the Yang style Tai Chi Chuan from Dong Yingjie. After mastering the art, Master Lin taught the art out of the Nine Dragon Hall in Cantonment Road.

Mr Loh was amongst the cohort of disciples of Master Lin’s known as the 18 Lohan. Master Lin’s own daughter was the only female disciple in the 18 Lohan. Above is a picture of the 18 Lohan’s discipleship ceremony. Mr Loh is the first person in the row beside the pillar on the left side of the picture. Also in the picture is Master Yap who would eventually become my Dong style teacher.

Mr Loh was not just a practitioner of Tai Chi. When I knew him he was already a master, a teacher, a practitioner, a researcher, an artist and a friend to those seeking the way of the martial arts.
Below is a picture montage of Mr Loh in his various roles. At the centre is a picture of Mr Loh holding a scroll written for him as a gift by Master Chen Xiaowang.

At that time Mr Loh knew me as a Wing Chun practitioner, a style I was focused on then rather than for Tai Chi Chuan which I actually took up way before Wing Chun.
Mr Loh was a source of information to many. Foreign practitioners of Tai Chi Chuan looking for Dong Yingjie's red book found it in his shop and after getting back to the United States happily posed with the book and mailed a photo to Mr Loh.

When I posed the question of where to learn Tai Chi Chuan that was combat oriented Mr Loh had two recommendations. The first was for Master Lin’s school and the second was for his classmate, Master Yap, one of the 18 Lohans under Master Lin. Master Yap later pledged allegiance to Grandmaster Dong Huling who is the son of the famous Dong Yingjie. This was after touching hands with Grandmaster Dong Huling and experiencing a world of difference in the skills of Grandmaster Dong.
I made plans to visit the Nine Dragon Hall school and also contacted the second recommended teacher for a meeting. I went to visit the school which was in a clan association on a week night. The class was on the rooftop and quite packed. I did not feel that it was what I was looking for and left.

Discouraged by the visit to the school I did not feel like meeting up with the other teacher, Master Yap, the next day. After all the second teacher was also from the same style as the school I just visited.

I assumed incorrectly that the quality of one would be similar to the other just because they are of the same style. As it would eventually turned out I was wrong. In the meantime I decided to press on with the appointment since it would have been rude to cancel at the last minute.

As for Tong Lian Bookshop since Mr Loh’s passing his assistant Ms Koh has taken over the running of the store. Tong Lian Bookshop is a true Singapore original; a heritage of the local martial arts scene which has been around for a long time. Do pay a visit and offer support while it is still in business.
One of the first books I bought in Singapore was this book with a red cover written by Dong Yingjie. Little did I realize that I would soon step into the Tai Chi Chuan world of the Dong family.
The meeting with Master Yap who was Mr Loh's second recommendation took place in an unusual setting - a legal beagle's office in the business district on a warm week day afternoon.

Most visits to view a prospective teacher typically starts with them offering information on lineage, what I could expect to learn and class information. However, that was not to be the case here.

Master Yap is the only Singapore disciple of Grandmaster Dong Huling, the son of Dong Yingjie. Master Yap opening salvo was to pose a question to me about a Tai Chi Chuan movement, a movement which I had done many times and should know well.

But the question confounded me. In retrospect it was like the Tai Chi Chuan equivalent of a Zen koan. It should not be that difficult to answer. Yet, I had the faintest suspicion that this was a trick question of sorts.

I took a stab at answering, carefully phrasing my sentences. But as soon as the words were out of my mouth I earned a smile from Master Yap. He had gotten me. My ignorance was plain for him to see. He said that real Tai Chi Chuan was not only a rare sight but also a rare scent!

I was intrigued but what he said didn't really enlighten me further other than to let me know that I had dived into a deep lake. At the end of the short meeting Master Yap invited me to meet with his senior, Master Dong Zhenchen, who was then in town on a visit.
Meeting Master Dong Zhenchen

Shenton Way at night is a quiet place, more so on the fringe area where the YMCA is. This was where I was meeting Master Dong Zhenchen, 3rd generation master of the Dong family style of Tai Chi Chuan which was founded by his grandfather, the very same Dong Yingjie whose red book I mentioned earlier.

I was taken to a guest room by Master Yap. I forgot which floor it was since two decades must have gone by. I do remember that the room was gloomy but Master Dong welcomed me with a smile that could well lit it up.

My perception of high level, famous masters was that they are aloof, stern and unsmiling but here was Master Dong really friendly and approachable.

Master Dong was in the midst of playing push hands with his students in the small room when I entered. He went back to it, giving me a close look at how a top master did it against resisting partners and boy were some of them really putting up a strong resistance.

One slim, dark and tough looking gentleman (later I found out he was working as a contractor) tried his best to resist Master Dong's strokes. In one instance Master Dong took advantage of his resistance to apply a powerful Pluck which sent the training partner hurling forward. Fortunately, they were pushing hands next to the bed (that's how small the room was) and the dark chap crashed headlong into it.
In the learning of Tai Chi Chuan there are certain moments that would made such an impression that it's impossible to ever forget them. Touching Master Dong's hands was one such memorable encounter. Master Dong held out his right arm and I moved to connect with my right arm. The very next moment I found myself sailing backwards into the wall. I didn't see nor felt how Master Dong had done what he just did. It was truly magical to the then ignorant me.

Next Master Dong asked me to try out Master Yap. I was more prepared the second time. Or at least I thought I was. It was a wrong assumption because the moment our arms contacted Master Yap neutralized my resistance quickly and counterattacked. Tried as I did I could not get away from Master Yap's attack and found myself being backpedalling and pushed against the wall.

The night ended with Master Dong performing the Fast Form which his grandfather had created. No words could truly capture the performance I witnessed. Master Dong's movements was hypnotic like a cobra gently swaying its body to mesmerize its prey before suddenly lunging with its deadly fangs.
Learning the Dong Method

I was excited to have discovered the Dong style and would have loved to jump right in and start my learning. Alas, the heart was willing but the pocket empty. The economics of demand and supply is that a good teacher does not come cheap. With a lowly paid job lessons were temporarily out of the question.

I would hook up with Master Yap now and then to see if I can get some free information. But seriously, whatever information he gave freely was pretty useless without having the method to cultivate the skills. In Tai Chi Chuan the primary method for the training of skills lies in the long form. Until I took up formal lessons I was simply not going to be taught the form. So I waited until my financial situation improved.

A year later, a new job and I could at least barely afford to pay for lessons. This took place by the swimming pool in a condominium in Tanglin, an area where the well off lived. A typical lesson revolved around learning form and push hands. I spent the first three months learning the first section of the form. The way of practicing the long form was different from the methods I had learned previously. For more information the reader can refer to the TaijiKinesis Vol 2 : Learning the Taijiquan Form which introduces a very important training method I learned from Master Yap that allowed me to make my first real progress.
For push hands training since I was taking private lessons Master Yap worked with me personally. Each session we would easily have spent up to an hour doing just push hands. Instead of going through fixed patterns we worked on flow, responses, tactics, etc in an informal manner. In this way my push hands improved faster in a much shorter period of time.

Later lessons moved over to the lobby of the condominium where Master Yap was living. This was in the Cairnhill area. The condominium was later sold to a developer and demolished. By then I had begun the next stage in my Tai Chi Chuan learning journey.

Before the learning journey was over I also spent a little time at the Dong Yingjie association in at the Pearl Centre Shopping Centre in Chinatown. Lessons were held at a level which had an open space – I have forgotten which floor it was (indicated by red arrow in the picture below). In 2015 the Pearl Centre was designated to be torn down to make way for the new Thomson Line MRT station.
Master Yap was the president of the association but having problems with some of the senior members who weren’t giving him due respect. I supposed I was there as an example that Master Yap’s approach was the correct one. Not that it matters as the senior members who were also instructors wouldn’t push hands with me. I guess they didn’t relish getting pushed around by a junior as this would cause them to lose face.

Soon I stopped going for lessons as politics was not my cup of tea. Years later, I saw in a magazine that they took part in a Tai Chi demonstration by acting as Master Yap’s attackers. I guess they have come around to respecting Master Yap in the end.

I walked away not just with a much better understanding of Tai Chi Chuan but also an instructor license for which Master Yap had sponsored me to take. At that time anyone who wanted to teach martial arts in Singapore has to be sponsored by his teacher and the respective style’s governing association. This was on top of taking part in an examination overseen by a panel of masters appointed by the Martial Arts Control Unit which was under the purview of the Singapore Police Force.

It was an honor to be the first student put forward by Master Yap for instructor status. Who knows how my learning path would have turned out if I had stayed on.
PART 5

Hidden Lineage
Do not go where the path may lead,
Go instead where there is no path
And leave a trail.

Ralph Waldo Emerson
4 Aug 1993. That is the postmark of a letter from my senior from Down Under. This is the letter in which I first heard about Great Grandmaster Wang Yongquan and his student, Grandmaster Wei Shuren.

I didn't know it at that time but Master Xie Shoude, the 8th disciple of Grandmaster Wei Shuren was teaching in Australia. Through Xie the art and subsequently Grandmaster Wei was introduced to the public. It was also Xie's doing that led to Grandmaster Wei accepting students directly when Xie failed to teach the art properly and created an aura of secrecy to benefit himself financially. Years later Xie was declared to be formally expelled from the lineage on the occasion of Grandmaster Wei's retirement ceremony.

You can say that one thing led to another and I ended up having the opportunity to learn the art from my senior. In the interim he had the opportunity to meet and touch Grandmaster Wei's hands and was extremely impressed with the power of authentic Yang style Tai Chi Chuan.

As the wheel of fate continued to spin Grandmaster Wei started to accept disciples in this art in later years, one of whom turned out to be my teacher. My teacher invited Grandmaster Wei to live with him for three months whilst transmitting the art closely on a daily basis.

My teacher trained very hard and upon Grandmaster Wei's retirement was named the school's gatekeeper and Yang style 6th generation transmitter; being one of only two persons authorized in writing by Grandmaster Wei to pass on the art.
Letting the Cat Out

The Yang family particularly Yang Jianhou kept their treasure close to the chest. When Yang Jianhou was teaching at the residence of Pu Lun Bei Zi it was said that any discussion of the art during rest period with his son, Yang Shaohou, was carried out when there were no outsiders around. They talked in a hushed manner, never writing anything in ink. Instead, they used tea to write out the strokes of the Chinese characters so that no trace remained after the tea dried out.

Due to the Prince's generosity and sincerity Yang Jianhou imparted certain information and skills to him. However, the Yang family didn’t exactly become wealthy from teaching Tai Chi Chuan to the Prince. On the contrary, they were still far from financially well off.

Wang Chonglu, the father of Great Grandmaster Wang Yongquan, was the chief steward in the Prince’s dwelling and took an interest in the Yang's art. He showed his sincerity by selling his property and giving the proceeds to Yang Jianhou who moved by Wang's gesture agreed to teach the secrets of this art to the elder Wang and his son.
There was one very important condition though which was that under no circumstances was the Wang family revealed what they had learned to anyone or suffer a tragic demise. The other thing was that the young Wang had to call Yang Chengfu his teacher since father and son cannot share the same teacher as was the custom then.

In later years Great Grandmaster Wang Yongquan would teach Tai Chi Chuan to the public but he only taught the Yang Chengfu version of the long form. He was careful not to divulge his knowledge of the secret side of the Yang family's art. Hence, Wang's early disciples never got to learn this art.
When the information was finally revealed with the publication of the book on the secret 108-Form some went to ask Great Grandmaster Wang's most senior disciple, Master Chu Haiyuan, about it. Master Chu was dumbfounded as he had never heard Great Grandmaster Wang mention nor taught the hidden skill of using intention through this very different version of the Yang style 108-Form. The genie was out of the bottle and not about to be put back in.

It was not surprising that many Yang style masters could not make sense of the information revealed by Great Grandmaster Wang. They were even more confounded when Grandmaster Wei revealed more extensive information in the book on the 22-Form. I can imagine that a number of masters were caught out when their own students asked them about the information in the books.

Rather than own up on their lack of knowledge, rumors were spread to discredit Grandmaster Wei (note - Great Grandmaster Wang had passed on by the time of the publication of the book on the 108-Form). The rumor alleged that Grandmaster Wei took a secret manuscript detailing the skills from Great Grandmaster Wang and learned from it.

The people who created this rumor are silly and ignorant because it is impossible to learn the Yang family secret art from books. Anyone who has attempted to learn it this way will know the difficulties. I have personally seen people who have learned from the 22-Form book play the set. The mistakes they made were obvious to those of us who have gone through the training. I will say that even for those of us who have access to teachers the learning is not any easier. This is because many of the principles are profound and not understood easily unless one has put in extensive practice and received corrections.
When the initial rumor failed to take off another allegation was started. This allegation asked how Grandmaster Wei could have learned the secret art if he was not a formal disciple of Great Grandmaster Wang.

It is true that Grandmaster Wei was not a formal disciple of Great Grandmaster Wang. However, this had not stopped Great Grandmaster Wang from teaching him. As we can see in the video of Great Grandmaster Wang demonstrating fajing in the park in 1987 there were others students who being contemporaries of Grandmaster Master Wei who could be questioned to set the record straight.

Thus, in the last stage of his teaching career Great Grandmaster Wang would begin to teach the Yang family's secret skill through the 108-Form known as Lao Liu Lu or Old 6 Routines. This was despite Great Grandmaster Wang having taken a terrible vow in his youth not to teach the art.

The concern over losing the art made Great Grandmaster Wang renounced his oath, more so since his son did not want to learn it and perhaps the old master sensed that his days were numbered. His sacrifice saved the art for now. However, it exacted a terrible payback to Great Grandmaster Wang reminiscent of the tale of Mademoiselle Victorine Lafourcade. I have been told the details but will keep it private.

Before the publication of Great Grandmaster Wang's book I was not aware of any other Yang style master from the Yang Chengfu line calling their long form by the name of Old 6 Routines. Some two decades later this name is used more for forms and by lineages that have no business using this name in the first place.
Prior to meeting Great Grandmaster Wang Yongquan, Grandmaster Wei was a contented master of Chen style Tai Chi Chuan. A friend told him of an old master with superlative skill that he must meet. Grandmaster Wei famously said that there was nothing more for him to learn in Tai Chi Chuan since he had attained a high level of skill.

The friend persisted. Some two years later a reluctant Grandmaster Wei stood before Great Grandmaster Wang who was sitting down in a rattan chair. Grandmaster Wei was skeptical and it must have shown on his face.

Great Grandmaster Wang waved Grandmaster Wei over. Leaning back in his chair Great Grandmaster Wang asked Grandmaster Wei to extend his middle fingers. Great Grandmaster Wang grasped both of Grandmaster Wei's middle fingers by the tips, showed Grandmaster Wei that it would not be easy if not impossible to fajing him in this manner.

In the next instance Grandmaster Wei was thrown back, an expression of surprise on his face. He had not expected this and in his heart knew that for all his Chen style attainment he just did not have anything close to what Great Grandmaster Wang just demonstrated on him.

So on the wrong side of fifty Grandmaster Wei set aside all that he had learned before and began to learn afresh from Great Grandmaster Wang.
In the attainment of enlightenment a Zen Buddhist student is led to awakening by his teacher. The teacher would confirm if the student had gotten it. Three years before Great Grandmaster Wang's passing Grandmaster Wei broke through the gate of mastery and had it confirmed by Great Grandmaster Wang.

If you take a look at the posture of Grandmaster Wei in the first and second book you will no doubt notice a startling difference.

The photos in the first book showed Grandmaster Wei as having attained the characteristics of the art. However, the photos in the sequel showed that he had broken through the constraints of the form into the realm of true formlessness.
The Legacy Continues

11 June 2013.

On this day Grandmaster Wei Shuren passed on.

It is fortunate that his art lives on. A number of his disciples have emerged to teach what they know.

Though I know but little I too realized the importance of not losing the skills that Great Grandmaster Wang and now Grandmaster Wei have left as their legacy. If we do not pass on the art it will die out, too easily too if I may add. We must realize that the lineage, principles and forms are means to an end and not turn them into things to blindly worship.

Grandmaster Wei must have realized this when instead of relying on using the 108-Form to teach the skill he decided to create a shorter form to cater to today's fast paced society.
PART 6

The Art of Intention
Emptiness is unborn
Emptiness does not die
If you know emptiness
You and emptiness do not differ.

Wumen Huikai
Overview of the Art

In this section I will introduce the once secret art of Tai Chi Chuan of the Yang family. The art as taught in Great Grandmaster Wang Yongquan's time focused only on the learning of 108-Form.

Yes, you read correctly.

The system is the one long form!

However, when Grandmaster Wei started to take on more disciples he created a shorter 22 movement form that could be practiced in a much shorter time by the modern, busy practitioner.

Towards the end of his life the 22-Form was categorized as the beginner's level form and a new 37-Form created to cater for intermediate level students.
Whilst this would make the art seemingly more organized it may instead make practitioners hung up on learning forms and chasing the learning levels rather than focused on mastering the principles.

It was said in the early days of the 22-Form that to practice this form is the same as practicing the essence of the 108-Form which was passed down by Yang Jianhou and now relegated to the status of advanced level form.

In summary, the learning of the Yang style Tai Chi Chuan revolves around the practice of the 108-Form as a means to understand and master the principles.

From there the practitioner can progress to learning the different methods of fajing, Rou Shou (kneading hands which is this style's method of push hands) and combat usage.
Learning Principles

The learning of Yang style Tai Chi Chuan involves the copious use of intention to create certain imagery in the mind to guide the body to move in compliance to the principles of the Tai Chi Classics.

The practice of the form requires that intention must govern each and every movement. Many of the principles cannot be performed physically, the intention has to be in place to get the body to obey what the mind is dictating in order to truly perform the principle to the required standard. Below I will introduce five of these principles.

Principle 1: Wrist Elongation
This principle requires the forearm-wrist-hand to be aligned such that the wrist feels as if it is elongated. This is to optimize the flow of force. Some who see this forearm-wrist-hand alignment the first time associate it with the well known fair maiden’s hand made popular by the Cheng Man Ching lineage.
However, there is a substantial difference between the principle of Wrist Elongation and the fair maiden's hand. As mentioned in the chapter on force method the hand must also be holding an imaginary sphere.

Using the imagery of a sphere to generate force

Hence, the Wrist Elongation is a necessary but not sufficient condition for force issuance. To do so one must also utilize the hand sphere.

Great Grandmaster Wang using the Wrist Elongation principle to fajing
If you are unable to master the principle of Wrist Elongation how then will you be able to fulfil the requirement of “when intercepting strength do pass wrists, when issuing force instantly penetrate” – this saying can be found on page 184 of Great Grandmaster Wang Yongquan’s book on the 108-Form (see below).

In the above picture you can view an example of a practitioner of Grandmaster Wei’s Yang style performing the 22-Form but did not strictly observe the requirements for Wrist Elongation. The performance for this practitioner begins at 5:10 in the YouTube video which can be viewed at the following link: -

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85d5cAgBuo4
**Principle 2: Elbow-Waist Ring**
This principle is important as it teaches us to keep the arms connected and coordinated to the body using the idea of an imaginary ring to link the elbows to the waist which is an important prime mover.

![Application of the Elbow-Waist Ring to generate Inner Elbow Force](image1)

**Principle 3: 3-Qi Rings**
The use of 3-Qi Rings is a unique characteristic of the Yang style Tai Chi Chuan of Grandmaster Wei’s lineage.

The 3-Qi Rings does not exist outside of the mind. You use your intention to visualize it.

However, if one assiduously train the method daily in time to come the rings will feel real and can be used for force generation.
Principle 4: Chest Cross
The Chest Cross is a mental mechanism for adjusting the body's balance by imagining that a cross on the chest is leveling horizontally and stretching out vertically.

The prolonged practice of this mechanism can train your body to achieve delicate internal balance which is important to support the ability to fajing with minimal outer movement.

Principle 5: 3-Passes
The 3-Passes involves the use of intention to connect the tailbone to the back and back of the head so as to unify the body as a coordinated whole. There are four variations as shown below of the 3-Passes which are trained in the forms.

![3-Passes Variations](image-url)
The 3-Passes is a critical part of the principle of the Ancient Bell Body, another crucial principle which arose from observing the 3-Qi Rings.

In the absence of an Ancient Bell Body you will not be able to develop strong, springy power through the principle of what is normally referred to as Peng Zhang but often mistakenly called Peng Jing.

Thus, each requirement is for a purpose. You can think of them as pieces that make up the entire puzzle.
Force Generation Models

In this section I introduced five of the unique internal body work of Yang style Tai Chi Chuan with brief explanation.

A unique aspect of Yang style Tai Chi Chuan is the use of intention to guide the body to generate force with optimal movements. In this section I will highlight three examples.

**Force Model No. 1**
The first force generation model, Horizontal Spiral Force, uses a combination of clockwise and anti-clockwise spirals.
**Force Model No. 2**

The Light Tube Drilling force generation is one of the easier models to pick up once students have a good grasp of the Wrist Elongation principle.

The key is to be relaxed enough to project your force through the opponent's arm as if it was a hollow tube. To achieve this you must be able to maintain strong and precise focus when letting your force go through the opponent's arm.
**Force Model No. 3**
The Large Sphere force method is an advanced model of power generation that utilizes the imagery of a sphere in front of your body to neutralize or dissipate your opponent’s force. Mastery of this model would require an integrated understanding of the 6 fundamental and 2 supplementary powers.

For example the use of the Large Sphere model to dissipate the opponent’s power through your Energy Source point would require you to master the Rollback force. Otherwise, the opponent’s power will bounce you off balance upon contact.
There are many more force models in the Yang style Tai Chi Chuan of Grandmaster Wei Shuren. I have given brief explanations for three models because others such as the Fan Surface Force model (see below) would be beyond the understanding of practitioners of other styles of Tai Chi even if they are of the Yang style.

This is because one of the basic requirements to being able to utilize the force models is the mastery of the Ancient Bell Body structure on top of the Wrist Elongation principle. As far as I can ascertain this body structure is only found in Grandmaster Wei’s lineage.

In summary, like any other good martial arts system Tai Chi Chuan requires each and every fundamental principles to be mastered in order to realize the true import and depth of the system. Speculation cannot replace dedicated practice.
PART 7

A New Path
Long seeking it through others,
I was far from reaching it.
Now I go by myself;
I meet it everywhere.

Dongshan Liangjie
The TaijiKinesis Approach

I have taken the insights gained from learning under different teachers to create the TaijiKinesis teaching model for Tai Chi Chuan. The objective is to teach the art’s principles through a mixture of forms and weaponry solo practice, and push hands learning. The learning path is outlined below :-
Living Textbooks

In most academic fields of learning textbooks are used. In the learning of Tai Chi the solo forms are our textbooks. We use them to teach students various topics such as:

i) What is intention; how to use it?

ii) How to align the body mentally rather than force the alignment

iii) How to balance the body dynamically

iv) How to power the body and generate force

v) How to use techniques and apply strategies

vi) Understanding and applying change

The following forms are taught, amongst others:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 5</th>
<th>Level 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yang Long Form</td>
<td>Kai - He Form</td>
<td>Dong Fast Form</td>
<td>22-Form O6R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reconciliation of Knowledge**

**Depth of Knowledge**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
<th>Level 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Straight Sword</td>
<td>Long Pole</td>
<td>Broadsword</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Push Hands Game

The practice of push hands complements the learning of forms as it affords us a training partner to practice with and tests the limits of our understanding.

The focus of our push hands is not to go round and round aimlessly in a circle nor to engage in bulldozing strength contests. Instead, the objective of our learning is on how to use techniques and refined strength to achieve various study objectives.

The study begins with understanding geometry, structure, posture, gate control, power lines, balance, mobility, tactics, positions and strategies.

For example Game 1 : GSP - Rollback (Quadrant 3 Defence) is a study of the use of Rollback. As a movement Rollback can be applied as a technique or neutralization principle. As a neutralization principle Rollback can be applied widely in many of the movements in the Yang 108 long form. However, as a technique it tends to be applied against the opponent’s opposing side. In Game 1 we examine the alternative of a right side versus right side facing application.
In a right side versus right side facing Rollback can be used to neutralize the opponent’s right arm. The follow up can then be used to open up his front door. Upon entry into his front door space we can choose whether to strike him with a chopping body fist (撇身锤), apply an elbow lock or throw him to the ground depending on the opponent’s reaction.

In the example below a throw is applied :-

In Game 1 the learner studies :-

i) ..... the application of the use of circle and spiral to neutralize the opponent’s strength

ii) ..... how to open up the opponent’s front door and move swiftly to enter the opponent’s space

iii) ..... where to position himself, how his posture plays a role in the successful application of the technique, how to position his arms to apply the technique and crank out the power
The study of push hands game also covers the study of change. The reason for this is because every opponent reacts differently so a technique that works well against some may fail against others.

Using the same earlier example, when we have entered the opponent’s front gate and arrived at the Technique Change Hub we can proceed to execute the throw as shown in Technique Variation (1).

However, an opponent may react to our attempt to throw by sinking his right elbow as seen in Technique Variation (2) above. If so, then we can quickly change to strike him with our Shoulder Stroke technique.

As the learning progresses, the learner can ask his training partner to increase the resistance so that he can learn to handle pressure better by learning not to be fixated, relaxing to allow himself to flow and applying power using various principles.
PART 8

The Road Ahead
If you wish to practice, practice!
If you wish to sit zazen, sit zazen!

Shoushan Xingnian
Lessons Learned

What are the lessons that the reader can learn from my experience to master Tai Chi Chuan?

i) Learn from failure and knowledgeable masters who are willing to teach

ii) Keep an open mind when learning; try sincerely before dismissing a teaching

iii) It is never too late to learn as long as the heart is willing

iv) Be prepared to invest time to train

v) Learn the essential principles that define the chosen style

vi) Learn the health and combat aspects together

vii) Invest in long term progress rather than short term gains

viii) Learn less, master more

ix) Be willing to let go of practices that do not contribute to the objective of mastery

x) Initially learn deeply; later expand the breath of knowledge

You can regard these as generic keys that can help you to master not only Tai Chi Chuan but other styles of interest.
The Future

Easy to learn, difficult to practice - is a common refrain applied to the learning of many martial arts. However, I would say authentic Yang style Tai Chi Chuan principles are difficult to learn and practice, and even more difficult to master.

Mind you the art is not impossible to master otherwise how can it be transmitted. It is just not that straightforward or easy to master without a lot of sincere effort.

Proper learning means we must know firstly in mind and later in body what the forms are telling us in respect to the principles and strategies of the style in relation to the applications. This can only be discovered through consistent and constant practice to achieve the manifestation of the mysteries of Tai Chi Chuan.

Whether our style of Tai Chi Chuan will survive another generation intact is a good question. No one will really know. We can but try to each do our part to sincerely pass the art on. Just keep up the practice.
Conclusion

I hope that The Path to Mastering Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan has served its purpose to introduce our method of Tai Chi Chuan, known as TaijiKinesis, and its background story to the public.

My student Gregory Chen has been invaluable for assisting in the videos from which the pictures of applications are captured from.

Visit our website at mastertaichitoday.com for more information and my latest blog posts.

Mushin
29 Feb 2016
Lunar Year of the Fire Monkey
One in all
All in one ----
If only this is realized;
No more worry about your not being perfect!

Jianzhi Sengcan
Believing Mind Inscription
Appendix - Influencers

Note - This is a simplified, incomplete chart listing out the major influences on our approach to Tai Chi. In this respect some teachers have not been listed, at least not in this current version of the chart.

mastertaitchitoday.com
Learning TaijiKinesis

Lessons in TaijiKinesis is offered on a 1-to-1 basis in Singapore. The reason for this is because successful learning of Yang style Tai Chi Chuan requires the student to have an aptitude for learning, be prepared to invest the time to train, and hands-on corrections. The student can expect to learn the following:

i) The principles of Tai Chi that is in conformance to the Tai Chi Classics. For example everyone knows that relaxing is important. However, to what degree must one relax?

ii) The forms of Tai Chi Chuan as living textbooks to train the mind and body to achieve the Tai Chi Classics through intention, qualia and biomechanics. For example, what does it mean exactly to use intention? How is biomechanics used such that it conforms to the Tai Chi Classics?

iii) The use of forms to train the body to achieve no-mind, be able to flow and change, and use the techniques with strategies in push hands to explore usage in combat

iv) How to minimize hard impact on the joints during training of forms and push hands. For example, doing fajing by stomping the foot on the ground can lead to knee pain. How does one do stomping without incurring knee pain?

v) Force and mind extension through weapons training. For example, how do you train awareness in straight sword combat?

vi) Other topics of interest that contributes to skill development

For enquiries go to https://mastertaichitoday.com/lessons/
About the Author

Mushin is a practitioner and researcher for Yang style Tai Chi Chuan (including its variant Dong style) focusing on the learning of emptyhand forms, push hands, weapons and mind intent generation force.

Mushin is the founder and teacher of the TaijiKinesis method of Tai Chi Chuan. TaijiKinesis brings together the methods of Yang Tai Chi Chuan and the principles of the Tai Chi Classics for a more holistic learning of the art.
Also by Mushin:-

TaijiKinesis Vol 1 : Navigating the Taijiquan Maze

TaijiKinesis Vol 2 : Learning the Taijiquan Form

The Ip Man Koans : Seeking the Mastery of Wing Chun

The Ip Man Questions : Kicks, power & strategies in the martial art of Wing Chun

2-Dots : Six Learning Steps for Mastering Wing Chun’s Kicking Model

Learning Wing Chun Outside the Box : Vol 1 : Thinking Creatively About Wing Chun Force
The End
The Path to Mastering Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan is the handbook for Singapore Tai Chi Yang Style (TaijiKinesis).

TaijiKinesis is a learning method for Yang style Tai Chi Chuan that relies on the use of mind intent to control movements from the perspective of intention, qualia and biomechanics.

TaijiKinesis is a codified method based on the Tai Chi styles of Yang, Dong and Wu. The learning and practice of TaijiKinesis is governed by the principles of the Tai Chi Classics for traceability and referencing.

The genesis of TaijiKinesis is presented in this handbook. An overview of the learning syllabus is outlined for the serious student of Tai Chi Chuan particularly those who seek to master the use of intention in line with the principles of the Tai Chi Classics.

The Path to Mastering Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan is a companion volume to TaijiKinesis Vol 1 – Navigating the Taijiquan Maze (2012) and TaijiKinesis Vol 2 – Learning the Taijiquan Form (2013).