

Contradictory philosophies seem to be associated with taijiquan styles taught in North America. The majority of schools appear to employ techniques requiring a high level of skill and strength for their Push Hands training. Other groups are more focused on subtle internal changes in both themselves and their partners. The sensitivity developed in this type of training enables them to eventually be sensitive enough to softly follow and then control the movements of their opponent with merely a touch. This ability to softly 'match' while staying slightly ahead of their partner's centre is called 'Shyun Chung Dao' (Search Centre) by Wang Hui Juin (Henry Wang). The art of Shyun Chung Dao seems to embody much of what is associated with the true nature of taijiquan described in the Classics.

While taking a one year sabbatical to Taiwan Dr. Peter Uhlmann was introduced to Shifu Wang Hui Juin in Taipei. Shifu Wang, a young man in his thirties with a reputation for being one of the best instructors in Taipei, began his taijiquan quest after leaving the Army at twenty two. He wanted to find a balance for the hard techniques he had learned while instructing Tae Kwon Do in the Taiwanese Military. His dedication to taijiquan eventually led to Push Hands competitions where his 'hard' Kung Fu skills became useful in helping him win National and eventually International awards. During one of the competitions he met Huang Sheng-Shyan (Huang Xingxian) from Malaysia who demonstrated the incredible 'soft' power of qi. The young champion was incredulous when he discovered he was powerless to defend himself. Convinced he had been on the wrong path, Wang made a decision to pursue Huang as his Shifu. On Huang's subsequent visits to Taiwan, Wang continued to earn the respect of his new Shifu who eventually acknowledged him as one of his primary disciples.

At the conclusion of Uhlmann's sabbatical, Peter's wife, Ronny, respectfully asked Shifu Wang if he would be interested in coming to Canada to teach Taijiquan. Wang realized leaving Taiwan would allow him to drastically change his focus from the 'hard' to the 'softer' approach introduced to him by Huang. To be successful he felt he had to break away from the traditional Chinese taijiquan with its Push Hands competitions and be prepared to start from the beginning with a different emphasis on what he called 'Shyun Chung Dao'. Wang believed he had to rediscover for himself how all movements in the form could be related to seven basic principles: relaxation, balance, proportion, centre, concentration, circle, and coordination. Eventually, understanding how these principles related to movement and to his root enabled him to begin teaching a new method of moving through the Yang/Zheng Manqing form. Teaching and demonstrating how this new style of moving related to the art of Shyun Chung Dao became his secondary quest. Living in Canada gave him the opportunity to study and teach without the added stress of managing a fitness centre which had been his primary source of income while in Taipei.

In August 1986 Wang arrived in Vancouver and discovered that Powell River was an isolated town, North of Vancouver, accessed by two ferries and 70 miles of winding road. The isolation and opportunity to teach beginners while practicing and focusing on his seven principles without distraction, appealed to Wang. He successfully spent the next ten years of his life learning to master the incredible skills demonstrated by his Shifu Huang.

In 1987, to increase his income from taijiquan, Shifu Wang found it necessary to move across the Strait of Georgia to Comox on Vancouver Island where he could draw on a larger base of interested students. My introduction to Shifu Wang happened soon after his move to the Comox Valley. A severe back injury left me unable to run distances to relieve stress and to remain fit. Thirty years of playing and coaching both high school rugby and men's rugby had taken a toll on my body. Shifu Wang's taijiquan classes became a welcome substitute to the joint jarring running and the grinding contact in rugby. After learning the basic form I became encouraged with my success in local Push Hands competitions where I unconsciously continued to apply my aggressive rugby training. Initially, I looked forward to improving my techniques and skills by learning from the more experienced Push Hands competitors until I was firmly reprimanded by Wang that pushing was not allowed if I expected to improve my Shyun Chung Dao skills. He would continually remind us the first step to understanding Shyun Chung Dao was learning how to yield to become softer and therefore more sensitive.

For the next seventeen years learning to replace the hardness of my rugby training with the true softness of properly taught taijiquan became an ongoing challenge for both myself and Shifu Wang. The change has dramatically altered my life both mentally and physically. Teaching students to give up their natural instinct to meet hardness with hardness required a Shifu with a strong belief in himself and his principles. To achieve this goal, Wang encouraged us to replace the aggressive 'Push Hands' training with the non-competitive, collaborative, 'Shyun Chung Dao'. Wang realized that by continuing to take his students to competitions with other groups, he only enabled his students to return to physical 'jousting' where the hardest and fastest with the most effective technique usually won.

Wang regularly reminded his students that physical pushing had to be replaced with movement that is initiated by qi. Students were expected to invest in the practice of yielding and loss, until they could appreciate the difference of a subtle 'soft' push from qi compared to a physical push. The practice of yielding eventually enabled the students to understand the subtle nature of 'sticking' to their partners centre. Students who persevered with yielding while taking turns sensitively pushing each other began to understand the nature of their qi globe and how it related to Wang's seven principles. Deeper levels of softness led to more sensitivity enabling the players to begin to sense the presence, shape and density of their partner's qi globe. The shape and size of a persons qi globe appears to be directly related to the depth of their root and their ability to master

the seven principles while moving about from this deeply rooted place. Since one can not easily feel the shape of your own globe it becomes necessary to rely on your partners to give you continual feed back in the early part of this communal stage of awareness.

The qi globe refers to an envelope of energy that surrounds our bodies. The shape and density of the energy globe varies considerably in different individuals. Relaxed, confident athletic individuals who have danced or sparred with a partner seem to have significant qi globes. The density and size of the qi globe grows considerably as one learns to root and relax further. Qigong or properly taught form have a significant affect on increasing the size, shape and density of this qi globe.

Shifu Wang uses the words 'catch', 'yield', 'stick', and 'follow' to describe the process of Shyun Chung Dao. The word 'matching' covers all of these phases including clearly sensing the degree of 'root' your partner has achieved. To 'catch' you must be able to 'match' the pressure of your partner's qi globe with just the right amount of force by condensing your globe at the same time as you increase the depth of your root. An example often used by Shifu is that of a volleyball approaching at full speed towards the setter who must reach out and receive the ball without losing control: too much force and the ball bounces off the fingers, while too little pressure causes you to disconnect losing control as well. Once the ball meets the fingers, the objective is to 'yield' while being firmly in control, so the ball can be redirected with precision without force. As your partner approaches with his qi globe extended, the 'catch' is initiated by condensing the size of your qi globe to match the incoming pressure from the attacker's globe. If the attacking person is not as rooted or if the globe is not uniform, the sensing partner will experience the weakness immediately allowing them to extend their qi at the weak zone of the partner's qi globe. If done properly the partner becomes uprooted the moment his vulnerability is detected. Condensed qi is now ready for discharge resulting in 'fajing' that can control the speed and direction of the partners retreating body without the need of any physical force.

For the partners who have the skill to avoid becoming vulnerable or do not easily lose their root as they advance, the appropriate response is to 'follow' as they retreat to the safety of a deep root. Being sensitive enough to feel the connection of two globes while the partner retreats allows one to 'follow' without being detected. 'Sticking' and then 'following' implies you are still 'matched' and able to react to any change in the amount of root, the slightest change in the direction of movement, or the partner's next intention. Sensitive and reactive 'matching' means you are aware of the contact between the globes and their centres. A momentary loss of contact with your partner's globe and centre means you will be immediately vulnerable to a sensitive partner.

Loss of concentration becomes apparent because your movement no longer quite matches the movement of their dantian. Losing contact leaves you

unprepared for their next action or intention because there is not enough time to react to their action. Keeping the connection of the globes is the key to understanding the partners next intention. New intentions usually change the pressure or shape of their globe.

Information from the 'matching' enables you to gauge the amount of qi, the degree of root, and the position from which the qi is about to be directed. Sensitive 'matching' allows you to know whether the partner's qi ball extends to the ground or is only being projected from one shoulder or both shoulders. You are able to know whether your Partner's push is from the dantian or from the bottom of his feet, whether his globe is rooted and uniform or broken and disconnected. Your partner's vulnerability, or lack of it, is immediately apparent if you are 'matched' properly.

To reach a high level of 'matching' ability requires hours of 'catching', 'yielding', 'sticking' and 'following' your partners attempts to yield while they 'search' or 'match' you. Any time spent 'matching' or 'searching' with beginners, or more advanced players, will give you the further practice needed to develop the sensitivity required to reach a higher level of Shyun Chung Dao. Giving the beginners feed-back about the shape and size of their qi globe helps them in the learning process and enables them to realize how to discover the 'trail' between the postures of the form for themselves.

The 'trail' refers to the ability to maintain the uniform shape of the qi globe while moving between the postures of the form. The density of the qi globe is easier felt during the static positions of the form, but can be lost the moment the root is disturbed by shifting your weight from one foot to the other. Being able to move while maintaining the qi globe without losing the deep root becomes the challenge. The key to managing the deep root is related to the ability to turn one's core before transferring the root from 50-50 to 100-0. In the early stages of development, feedback from a partner becomes very useful with helping to maintain size and density of the qi globe. Shifu Wang compares a beginner's root to a small sapling while a person with a few years experience will likely have grown their root and qi globe to a considerable size in comparison. Understanding root and it's relation to the shape and density of the qi globe is difficult to comprehend without help from someone with experience and sensitivity.

Shifu Wang's guidance and intervention have been critical at all stages of our development. With more than 30 years of experience, Shifu is able to redirect us when we prematurely find ourselves believing we understand the latest concept. His reminds us that there are no limits or short cuts to the process of changing ones body and mind. Too often new students arrive with the dream that they will be able to make significant changes in a matter of months. We are reminded it took us a number of years to understand how to move our rooted bodies as a unit in the form and further time before we could feel and respond to each others qi globe in Shyun Chung Dao. New levels of sensitivity discovered while 'matching'

still continue to inspire with each year of practice. The awareness that other martial artists are often able to present dense qi globes at the moment of attack has become a fascinating discovery. The higher the level of the skill they possess, the more reactive they are to any attempts to take advantage of their qi globe. The experience usually leaves them intrigued with the encounter.

Newer players benefit from the feed-back of the advanced players who have mastered higher levels of sensitivity. Frustrated novices will spend hours lost in disconnected movement unable to give each other any useful feedback. Loss of focus results in harder pushes impeding the development of the sensitivity needed for 'matching'. The lack of pressure and size of the qi globe from a beginner can be particularly frustrating. Qigong exercises and properly taught form, over time, increase the qi level in the qi globe.

Awareness of the qi globe enables players to 'present' their qi globes to their partners while managing the shape, density and size. Willingness to trust and to cooperate with your partners is necessary in the early stages of growth. Feedback about the direction and strength of the qi push enables the partner to steadily learn how to control the size and density of their qi globe in response. Two players both able to 'present' a relatively dense qi globe can become very sensitive to each others movements and intentions. The 'bouncing' or 'fa jing' without any physical force becomes easier as the density, tension and shape of the globe can be controlled or manipulated. This heightened awareness seems directly related to the number of years of dedicated attention and practice to Wang's softer form and Shyun Chung Dao.

The process of practicing taijiquan on one's own can be slow and tedious without any guarantees of success. Encouragement and feedback from partners makes the daily challenge of learning easier and more meaningful. Shifu Wang's week long Summer Camp on Mount Washington intensifies the opportunity to share experiences with others who have made a leap of faith to begin a new style of moving and interacting with each other. Striving for the sensitivity to 'match' every move and intention becomes the primary goal for those who are able to persevere with this intriguing art of Shyun Chung Dao.