

A Short Account of my Training by Tony Henrys.

Although I had been involved in Karate and Judo training since the age of sixteen, it was not until the late 1970's that I became truly interested in the arts of Taijiquan and Qigong. I suppose, like many people, I was always looking for something more:- that 'Spirit' or certain something that is always talked about in the Martial arts, but rarely found. My profession at that time was that of a Detective in the 'Crime Intelligence and Interrogation Squad' (now known as the Serious Crime Squad) within the C.I.D. As I had been involved in scores of 'real-life' fight situations, quite naturally I was initially very interested in the self defence side of the arts, but I was still seeking a further dimension to what I was doing. I searched around locally for a period, and after visiting several Taijiquan schools which were beginning to appear in the Midlands, I travelled to London with a view to finding someone who could 'authentically transmit' all aspects of the art of Taijiquan without deviation.

In the early eighties I commenced training in the art of Yang style Taijiquan with Master Chu King Hung, who was the European representative of the late Grandmaster Yang Sau Chung, the eldest son of the late Grandmaster Yang Cheng Fu (1880-1936). I was initially impressed by the presence and power of Master Chu. I had thought of myself as being quite proficient in the fighting arts, but at that time, I found myself completely incapable of dealing with the prodigious and overwhelming power of this art. I became immediately hooked on studying the art and regularly travelled to London and later to Leicester where there was a local branch of the International Tai Chi Chuan Association of which Grandmaster Yang Sau Chung was President until his death in Hong Kong in 1985.

I trained like this for about four years and always attended the monthly advanced classes at the London Headquarters of the International Tai Chi Chuan Association. At that time, I was keen to learn all the secrets of Taijiquan and was spending the equivalent of a week's wages per month for the privilege. I was appointed Assistant Instructor of the Leicester branch of the International Tai Chi Chuan Association, and after a year of asking Master Chu, I was given permission to be allowed private tuition with his Chief Instructor, Mr. John Solagobade, for whom I have the highest regard.

I continued intense training in Taijiquan and Qigong and later made contact with Master Erle Montague, head of the World Taiji Boxing Association, based in Australia. Mr. Stephen Hurst and I, who had been long time students of Master Chu, had for some time been questioning the 'completeness' of the tuition we were receiving, as well as the excessively high fees. Mr. Hurst eventually became Master Montague's Chief Instructor in the United Kingdom. I trained with some of Master Montague's Instructors in this country, and was appointed an Instructor with the World Taiji Boxing Association. I was awarded my Instructor's certificate through visiting Australian Instructors with whom I trained.

My own intense training continued in Leicester and London, and also, I trained with a number of other Instructors in other styles of Taijiquan. Mr. Stephen Hurst and I decided to seek out as much knowledge of the arts as possible and we met regularly to train together. Mr Hurst travelled to the United States where he trained with Master Jou Tsung Hwa and students of Yang Jwing Ming, and also to Australia where he studied with Master Montague. I had planned to study with Grandmaster Yang Sau Chung, but following his death, I decided to visit Asia to seek further knowledge of my chosen style of Taijiquan.

I travelled to Singapore, where I remember being in a park watching hundreds of people practising Taijiquan and Qigong. There was one man in particular who stood out from all the rest because of his outstanding grace and ability when performing Yang style Taijiquan. I found out his name was Lo Kim Swee, a professional Instructor, and to my great surprise, a student of the late Grandmaster Yang Sau Chung's younger brother Yang Zhenduo. I had long discussions with Lo Kim Swee on the subject of Yang style Taijiquan, and at the end of my journey, which included Thailand and Hong Kong, both of which have large 'Taiji' populations, I decided I would have to go back to where Taijiquan began; into mainland China itself.

I persevered in my training with Mr. John Solagobade. Also for several months, I trained with the excellent Mr. John Ding, the European representative of Master Chu Gin Soon of Boston, U.S.A, who like his namesake in London had been a disciple of the late Grandmaster Yang Sau Chung. I became more and more convinced of the necessity to visit mainland China, and my research led me to believe that the highest living authority on the art was Grandmaster Fu Zhongwen, Head of the Yong Nian

Taijiquan Association. He was the nephew and sole surviving disciple of the great Master Yang Cheng Fu (third generation Yang family) and a teacher of Yang Zhenduo.

My first attempt to study with Grandmaster Fu in June 1989 almost ended in disaster since my arrival in China was four days before the Tianenmen Square massacre, during which ten thousand people were killed by the armed forces. I was in the square shortly after martial law was imposed, and I managed to get myself arrested at gunpoint by armed soldiers. I was interrogated within the confines of 'The Forbidden City' and accused of spying for several hours before being released and having to take the next available flight back to England. I had managed to practice with some other Masters of Taijiquan and Qigong, but on the whole I was very disappointed.

I somewhat reluctantly returned to China in May 1990, and on that occasion I met Grandmaster Fu. It was everything I had hoped for and more. Fu, then eighty four years old, had a remarkable radiance about him, and embodied Taijiquan. Here was the man, who from the 1930s and onwards, was famed throughout China as a formidable exponent of his art and as one observer of the day commented, "No-one ever got past him". He was made aware of my previous attempts to see him, and in a typical Chinese fashion, he was impressed by the tenacity I had shown. I soon learned that there are three kinds of Taijiquan:- Simple (or Shortened) Taijiquan as performed in the parks by the masses; Performing Taijiquan practised by Wushu students in competitions; and Classical or Traditional Taijiquan practised by Masters, disciples and students of the few original great styles of Taijiquan which have been perfected through the generations. Grandmaster Fu had a zeal and passion for transmitting 'real' Taijiquan handed to him by his uncle, the great Yang Cheng Fu. He told me many remarkable stories of the feats of the Yang family which were never published and probably never will be. He passed on to me many of the 'secrets' of the art and taught me what Traditional Yang style Taijiquan was and what it was not in accordance with the definition and desire of his Master. Grandmaster Fu truly embodied the highest principles of the art of Taijiquan. He emphasised the health and well-being aspects of the art, but still remained exceptionally powerful. I was also fortunate enough to have met Professor Shang Ji, a seventy year old Master of Taijiquan, Hsing Yi and Baguaquan, who had been a long time student of Yang style Taijiquan through the lineage of another strain of the Yang family, namely the famous Yang Pan Hou (second generation Yang family 1837-1892). Pan Hou's martial abilities were truly formidable. However, he concerned himself more with the fighting aspects of Taijiquan and less with the underlying profundities of the art. Professor Shang Ji did much to improve my overall education of Traditional Yang style Taijiquan.

After my second visit to China, during which I had a 'realisation' of the art from the source, I dedicated myself to communicating authentic Yang style Taijiquan. I had always mistakenly believed that Yang Zhenduo was the current head of Yang style Taijiquan in China, but I can reveal that it was Grandmaster Fu who taught Yang Zhenduo the advanced aspects of his Taijiquan during the late 1950's, when for several years, he stayed at the Grandmaster's Shanghai home, polishing his art so that Yang Cheng Fu's son could carry on the family name and tradition. This fact was never revealed to the Chinese Taijiquan community at large.

I continued my training and research back in England. I began teaching a fellow Instructor, Mr. Russell Merryfield, of Leicester, some of the Taijiquan weapon forms and certain advanced techniques of the art. Mr. Merryfield is an Instructor with the World Taiji Boxing Association. He has practised the 'Internal Martial Arts' for twenty six years continuously running his own club at Leicester. He is the leading representative for the 'internal arts' on the Committee of the eight thousand member World Federation of Martial Arts, and he has studied with many of the world's leading authorities on the art of Taijiquan, including Den Changli, former head of China's International Martial Arts Committee. On 1st May 1991, after consulting a number of my peers in Taijiquan and the Committee of the World Federation of Martial Arts, Professor Moclair, head of the Federation, honoured me with the award of fifth degree following Mr. Merryfield's recommendation. This award effectively denotes the title of 'Master of Taijiquan' in accordance with the rules and grades of the Federation. I have however maintained a deepening interest in the study of Qigong for many years. I have practised with approximately fifteen Masters in China and had insights into some of the leading styles of Qigong. For like Taijiquan, there are many styles of Qigong, each having their own particular emphasis which may suit different people with different characteristics. Some styles of Qigong place great emphasis on healing, some on increasing power to aid martial skills, and some concentrate on all the varied aspects of our being.

My particular favourite style is Wudang Shen Quan Qigong. This style was originated by the legendary Taoist Immortal Zhong San Fong (Chang San Feng) who is also credited with the founding of Taijiquan in the fourteenth century. The art had been handed down from master to disciple through the centuries. It was taught to me by Master Wang Zhigang, Director of Wudang Shen Quan Qigong Scientific Research Association, Shanghai, China. Master Wang is truly a great Master of his art. Like Grandmaster Fu, his primary concern is with healing. Also similarly, his martial abilities are outstanding but considered by him to be of little consequence. Master Wang learned his art many years ago from an old Taoist called Zhong. At the time of writing, he still lives in seclusion with Master Wang's two brother disciples in the mountainous regions of Central China, and is over a hundred years old.

It is my desire to communicate these great arts as accurately as possible. The desires of my Teachers are that they be practised with elegance and with sung (looseness and emptiness of mind and body). This method of practice will cultivate the correct but formidable powers and forces for our highest benefit. These powers are everywhere present and in abundance in our bodies. They can only be realised through persistent yet unmotivated practice which should under no circumstances be harsh or aggressive. Their message is one of softness and gentleness which should never be mistaken for weakness. To "invest in loss" means to give up rather than to pursue. Only in this way may we truly know the vast richness, depth and marvellous subtleties as desired by the incomparable founder of the arts. I am now primarily concerned with the healing principles of the arts in all their varied aspects for now I know something of that certain 'Spirit' but am unable to talk about it. It would be impossible for me to describe in words my inner experiences and breakthroughs thus far. I can only do my best to honestly transmit to others that which has been taught to me, according to my limited ability, whilst furthering my own knowledge.

Tony Henrys

November 1991.