

CHI FLOW

NEWSLETTER

Moving from the Waist

We continue a debate with George Xu started in T'ai Chi magazine.

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Yiquan

A Web page is up and an instructional video is now available through chiflow.com.

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Chian Chuan Association August Meeting

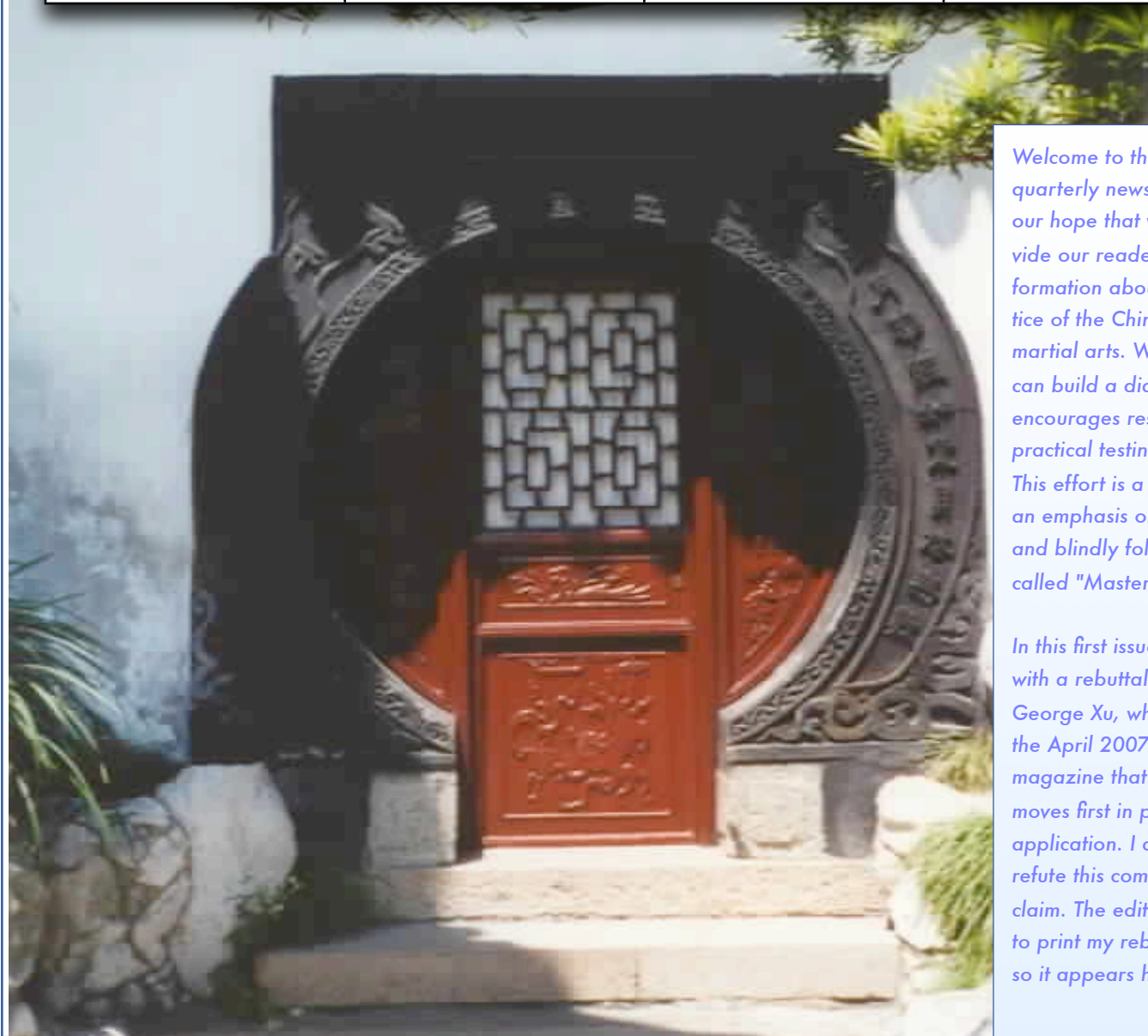
Pictures from Shanghai's Wu style Taijiquan organization.

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Q&A Mailbag

E-mail questions and the best answers we can come up with at the moment.

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Welcome to the CHI FLOW quarterly newsletter! It is our hope that we can provide our readers with information about the practice of the Chinese Internal martial arts. We hope we can build a dialogue that encourages research and practical testing of ideas. This effort is a reaction to an emphasis on mysticism and blindly following so called "Masters..."

In this first issue, we begin with a rebuttal letter to George Xu, who claimed in the April 2007 T'ai Chi magazine that the body moves first in practice and application. I continue to refute this commonly held claim. The editor chose not to print my rebuttal letter - so it appears here.

MOVING FROM THE WAIST

If you want to start a heated discussion in the T'ai Chi Ch'uan community, suggest (as I did) that the waist is not where movement should start. There is a pervasive argument that the waist is where movement starts. You hear this over and over again, but it is inconsistent with my training, good practice and even a careful reading of the classics.

In April, 2007, George Xu published an article in Tai Chi magazine on the wave-like energy of Tai Chi practice and claimed that the body moves first. I disputed this claim in a June letter, and later Mr. Xu responded by further claiming that for the advanced level the whole body moves at once. He further claimed to have "several" conversations with Ma Yueh Liang, who supported his assertion that the body moves first. This is my rebuttal:

August 22, 2007

Dear Mr. Xu,

Thank you for an interesting, well thought out response to my letter regarding the article you wrote in the April issue concerning the wave like movements of T'ai Chi. However, I still have to disagree with the original point you made in the article about moving the body first, and your interpretation of what you term as "several stages" in your response letter. The first stage you discuss in your letter, is that the lowest (stage) being the arm moving independent of the body and not moving. This sort of practice of moving parts without being connected to the rest of the system is not discussed anywhere in the Taiji-

Pictures from the August 2007 monthly meeting of the Chian Chuan Association – the central society for the advancement of Wu style T'ai Chi Ch'uan was founded by Wu Chian Chuan and continued by his daughter Wu Ying Hua and son-in-law Ma Yueh Liang, who was also the most renown of Wu Chian Chuan's students. While there are questions about the future, there are still many skilled members in the group.



quan Classics. Hopefully, I've made it clear, that just because the hand moves first, that doesn't mean the hand arrives first without the body and the feet coming together like the action of a whip.

The next stage you discuss is how the dantian and arm move together but without harmony. Again, this is another personal training choice, as far as I can tell but not one that's feasible or connected in my opinion. In the book, "**Mastering Yang Style Taijiquan**," by Fu Zhong Wen, Fu discusses the 10 Essential Points of Taijiquan practice. In the Seventh point, "The Upper and Lower Follow One Another", Fu quotes the Taijiquan Classic as follows, "*It is rooted in the feet, issued by the legs, governed by the waist, and expressed in the fingers. Always there must be one complete integration, and into one qi. With the movements of the hands, waist, and feet, the focus of the eyes also follows along with the movements. When it is like this, then can it be called the upper and lower follow one another. If one part does not move, then the form is scattered and confused.*"

So this would suggest to me that movements ought to be sequential, and not done effectively unless with connectivity. So the stages you discuss seem to be without practicality or function, and what I was suggesting is that movements ought to be sequential with the waist kept at the center of all movements.

You go on to discuss how finally the body moves as one unit led by the dantian. Yet in the classic the "**Internal Explanation of the Practice of the Thirteen Postures**," by Wu Yuxiang, he states, "*The waist is to be kept at the center of all movements like an axle, the four limbs act in succession, as if spokes on a wheel.*"

You went on to say you had several discussions with Ma Yueh Liang: this is news to me and anyone else that I am acquainted with in the Chian Chuan Association. In all of my interaction with the Chian Chuan Association, I



never heard your name mentioned by Teacher Ma Yueh Liang, his family, or any of his close students. I had many discussions and training sessions with Teacher Ma, and studied with him for over 8 years from 1990 through 1998. Ma granted myself different personal certificates of training over that period of time and since 1990 have remained an active member of the Chian Chuan Association, which he and Madame Wu were the Presidents after Wu Chian Chuan's death in 1942. The idea of "four limbs become one" is an abbreviation of a more complete point Ma made a number of times during my time with him. I recall the complete sentence that Ma told me when we were playing Ma Jang together



once, as follows: ***“Four limbs become one, as if spokes on a wheel.”*** Not moving at once, as you suggest, but rather instead, as he added, ***“...and move sequentially with one path or goal.”***

This point, of connectivity and sequential movement, is further evidenced in the book by Ma Yueh Liang and Wu Ying Hua, **“Wu Style Taichichuan”** where on page 14 it is stated, ***“As the classic states: ‘At the start of any movement, all parts of the body are called upon to move and act agilely. They should be functionally and sequentially linked throughout the body—action.’ Relaxation of the muscles and joints are important, and breathing should be natural and in harmony with the movements. The flow of the movements should be even and continuous, there should be no deficiency or pitfalls; no concavity or convexity; no disconnection or extension.”***

On the following page, page 15 under the section heading “The Mental Preparations,” and subtitled 1. Stillness, Ma and Wu go on to directly discuss the action of hand, body, foot as follows: ***“In our experience, the best way to achieve calmness is to concentrate the thoughts on doing the correct postures, and always try to keep the mind in harmony with the movements of the hands, eyes, body, and steps.”***



Additionally, this idea of sequential movement is substantiated in the classic text the “**Internal Explanation of the Practice of the Thirteen Postures**,” by Wu Yuxiang, in which he states, “*Remember that when one part of the body moves, all other parts should move sequentially. When one part of the body becomes still, all other parts follow.*”

Concerning the practice of sequential movement in Xingyiquan, in the book, "Li Tianji's Skill of Xingyiquan," in the section entitled, "The Characteristics of Xingyiquan," and subtitled, "Coordinated and integrated," it states, "*Xingyi is not the coordination of foot and hand, but rather of hand, eye, body, and steps--if one branch moves, a hundred branches follow. When hitting, the three tips--fingertips, toes, and nose--align, and the three segments are synchronized as follows: the tip segment starts, the middle segment follows, and the root segment follows and closes.*" This point is further echoed in the book, “**Henan Orthodox Xingyi Quan**,” by Pei Xi Rong and Li Ying ‘ang, under Section II: Necessary Songs, 1. Three Tips.

Furthermore, I verified this concept of sequential movement in both Xingyiquan and Baguazhang personally with teachers Zou Shuxian, Jiang Rong Qiao's daughter, and Cheng Jie Feng and Huan De Hai, who are Nei Jia Kung Fu Practitioners in Shanghai.

As for people without limbs who practice martial arts, I am acquainted with some, and some of them have very advanced skills. They use what part of a limb they have that “normal” people might perceive as less, because it doesn't appear to be "longer." Others, who have no outward limb, may utilize the limb’s connector such as a shoulder or a hip with great flexibility. I have not seen any of them lead with their body, to make up for the fact that they don’t have a “longer” limb. In fact, what they have, in many instances, is much more effective, flexible, and penetrating than what might be surmised on the surface by any "longer limbed" person who may not have fully explored moving sequentially.

So while I appreciate your detailed reply, I still feel that the article you originally wrote for the April 2007 issue of *T'ai Chi* magazine makes a point about moving the body first, which I still do not agree with, and feel further that the Classics do not bear it out either.

Gerald A. Sharp

In my opinion, the choice to not print my rebuttal letter is likely based on a variety of factors. Certainly, this point of "what part moves first" is a controversial one with many people that disagree with my position. I was told that I was calling George Xu a liar, when I questioned his attribution of the ideas he was espousing to be direct quotes from Ma Yueh Liang. Well, those might not have been my words, but I certainly feel George Xu was being disingenuous about what Ma Yueh Liang taught and his relationship -- if any -- to Ma Yueh Liang.



Yiquan Web Page

There is finally a Yiquan web page on the Chiflow website. This has proven to be one of the more divisive parts of all of the material up on the site. One reason is that the concept of “Empty Force” is so poorly defined. Some people use this term to refer to high level applications that are so soft as to be almost undetectable. There are also people - who are either self-deluded or unscrupulous - use chi and “empty force” to introduce mysticism into almost all aspects of their kungfu teachings to the detriment of gullible students. Yet another aspect of this is that Chi ties in with the traditional description of Nei Jia Kungfu as manipulating chi, but this presents its own problems. But how do you tell the difference in text that is intended to be read by novices and casual observers? Think about explaining how you maintain dynamic balance while riding a bicycle in words: it is not always easy to explain how to do something - even when it clearly works: it is not mysticism, but it can sound that way.

So what we’ve tried to present, and it is still evolving, is a more practical approach and application of Yi Quan. It is clear that its roots are in Xingyi, and that these roots should not be forgotten (as they have been so often in modern times). Yi Quan has a simple, yet profound place in many martial arts both external and internal.

Yiquan Instructional Videos

The instructional videos are out on the store site. This comprehensive series alters the myth that Yi Quan is an exclusive art that is open only to those willing to buy into the notion of empty force and mystical, esoteric practice.

Instead, Yi Quan is presented as a core practice of Xingyiquan, and in fact the standing meditation practice begins with the San Cai (or San Ti) posture and builds on ideas of flexibility and challenge from there in standing, sitting, and reclining.

Unique to the series is the healing sounds practice and form emphasis, which is simple, and helps to resonate and more fully direct sound as a tool for meditation.

Also useful are the chapters on Yi Quan in Push Hands and Grappling. There are videos on Yi Quan out there, but few profile how to apply Yi Quan in any phase of self-defense or fighting.

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The T-Shirts are here...

You can get them at the chiflow.com website.



Mailbox Q&A

Tucson Workshop, Practice & Zee Wen

QUESTION

Dear Gerald Sharp,

Thank you for your recent e-mail with its kind and encouraging words.

Your workshops in Tucson were excellent and I enjoyed them very much.

It may take me some time to assimilate even part of what you taught us but I intend to practice until I get it.

Your teaching about "the hand moving first" is transforming my practice of the form and push-hands. When doing the form I already feel much more relaxed. Nevertheless, I have more to learn about exactly how to connect the hand to the dantien and exactly how to move the hand first while still maintaining "whole body movement". I look forward to further teaching from you in this regard.

I will try to learn the 8 Methods Chi Kung that you taught us by referring to my notes and following your video. I am glad that I ordered the video. It is clear and precise and will help a lot.

Learning the Wu Style Fast Form from you is also a great opportunity.

Dr. Zee had held a special series of classes in the Fast Form but, for whatever reason, I did not learn the exact way to perform many of the moves. Your instruction is precise and I already feel a lot more confident about doing the form after learning from you.

Thank you again for coming to Tucson. Please do come back. There are number of us here who would like to learn the entire Wu Style T'ai Chi system (or as much of it as we can) and I feel good about learning it from you.

Name Withheld, Tucson, AZ, USA

Answer:

Thank you for your accolades. I enjoyed doing the series of workshops in Tucson. I have been a professional teacher for more than 20 years. I had the opportunity to study with Ma Yueh Liang privately for a combined total of 8 years gave me the chance to observe and learn from what may have been, at one time certainly, one of the oldest living representatives of Wu Style Taijiquan. Ma's teaching was specific, consistent, and clear, and I was even able to learn the most basic to the most advanced forms again and again when he taught his weekly group class at the Shanghai Music Center at 5:30 a.m. every Tuesday. While this group class was made up of senior students, he still reviewed the most basic of ideas and how they were the foundation of the most advanced.

I find that moving with "Hand, Body, Foot" leads to a real specificity in practice and changes the intent of all the movements. When I learned the Wu Style T'ai Chi Ch'uan system from Ma Yueh Liang, I made it a point to watch very closely, and to try to have clarify from him any point that confused me or that I knew I wasn't able to grasp at the time. To the best of my understanding, "Hand, Body, Foot," is exactly what Ma Yueh Liang was teaching. I think it is very strange that this traditional training directly from Wu Chian Chuan's principle disciple is viewed as being something like heresy by the editor of T'ai Chi magazine, numerous authors and a large part of the T'ai Chi community. When I questioned George Xu's attribution of the ideas within his magazine article to Ma Yueh Liang, I was told that

my followup letter would not be printed because I was calling George Xu a liar. Well, I certainly feel George Xu was being disingenuous about what Ma Yueh Liang taught and his relationship - if any - to Ma Yueh Liang.

Not all of Ma Yueh Liang's students that are known in the west should be viewed as representing Ma's teachings very well. I had the chance to observe Ma Yueh Liang interact with Zee Wen. Of all the Chian Chuan Association, he had perhaps the best English skills. This allowed Zee Wen to fill a need in translating texts into English and in other ways, which was useful to Ma Yueh Liang. However, Zee Wen might be also be described as opportunistic, somewhat self-serving and he did not achieve very high level of T'ai Chi Ch'uan practice. Hence, later, when Zee Wen settled in Tucson his transmission of Wu style was incomplete and flawed in other ways.

Again, thank you for your kind words. I hope that the Wu style community in Tucson grows and prospers.

Wuji and the T'ai Chi preparation form

QUESTION

Dear Gerald Sharp:

In doing the form earlier I was paying particular attention to the part where the hands go out to the sides in preparation to Tai Chi and the beginning rotation into Tai Chi. It seemed to me that in that transition we go from double weighted no yin/yang (or yin/yang combined into a whole) to yin and yang -- being able to tell the difference but keeping them together.

Ezra

Answer:

Ezra,

You make a very good point. If you look at the orange book by Wu and Ma, when the hands are raised this is called the "Preparation Form," and reading further, it is during the "Beginning Form (when yin and yang palms are formed and the weight differentiated)" that T'ai Chi begins.



Another T-shirt



Records of many styles of T'ai Chi, other than "modern /government forms," indicate that the feet are shoulder-width apart or separated and that this position is often referred to as the void or preparation posture. This position is also the posture you return to after practice.

Many styles of T'ai Chi Ch'uan base the theory of beginning in wuji and progressing to T'ai Chi on the wuji diagram that dates back supposedly to the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and is ascribed to an internal stylist named Chen Tuan. It was later renamed by Zhou Duyi, "The Process of T'ai Chi." The latter in turn read it from top to bottom, whereas the originator read it from bottom to top. The diagram starts with the state of wuji (void, or emptiness), which in turn generates a state of T'ai Chi through yin-yang division. The opposites interact to create Wuxing (the five elements). The outcome of balance from T'ai Chi produces yang which leads to stillness. Stillness then results in yin. Yin then returns to the void.

Thanks for sharing your insight, and hopefully this is helpful,

Gerald

Jiang Rong Qiao's style preparation form

QUESTION

Greetings,

I am a serious and interested student of Jiang style of Bagua. I live in a rural part of US and have been studying for approximately four years. Can you suggest where I might be able to find additional materials about Master Jiang? I have the book featured on your website which describes Bagua... I would like to know more about about his philosophy, theory and applications.

Also, were you a student of Master Zhou Shuxian? If so, would you describe how a westerner was accepted? Thanks so much!

Name Withheld, SC, USA

Answer:

Thank you for your inquiry. We have some information up on our website at: www.chiflow.com under Pa Kua, Hsing I, and Nei Jia Kung Fu. We add new information regularly to the website. In the Store we do offer titles by Jiang Rong Qiao. In fact, we offer two translations of his work, "Bahuazhang Lianxi Fa," one translated by Joseph Crandall and one by Andrea Falk respectively. Both works, while similar, are worth having. The translations offer some variance, and both translators have trained with the Jiang Rong Qiao lineage.

We also offer Hsing I (Xingyi) titles by Jiang Rong Qiao as follows: Xingyi Mu Quan and Xingyi Za Shi Chui and Ba Shi Quan. These works profile insight into Jiang's views not only of Hsing I (Xingyi) but Nei Jia (Internal Shape) Kung Fu as well. Additionally, we offer demonstration videos (DVD & VHS) of Jiang's Bagua including: Old Eight Palms, 72 Leg Techniques, Sword, Broadsword, and Kuan Dao. Jiang's Hsing I (Xingyi) such as: A Complete 5 Tape Video Training Series on the Five Fists, Linking Sets, Basic Nei Kung, Push Hands, 12 Animals, and Applications; as well as demonstration videos of 12 Animals Linking, Sword, Broadsword, and Spear.





In addition to these items, we also offer a demonstration video of Jiang's T'ai Chi Set (T'ai Chi Chang Chuan). We have several carefully chosen items on Nei Jia Kung Fu at the store, where we constantly update items of interest.

As far as my acceptance as Zou Shuxian's student: while this is personal, I will say that I had trained with her for nearly six years before I approached Chen Jun Yan of the Shanghai Wushu Association concerning the matter. Chen Jun Yan was a Vice-President at the time, and since Zou Shuxian was a senior member of the

Shanghai Wushu Association I thought it proper to seek Mr. Chen's advice. He helped me with my approach, and made it official 2 years later by securing the appropriate environment and certificates. Zou Shuxian had often invited me to her house for Won Ton, and whenever someone of the lineage showed up in Shanghai, she made sure I was notified and came to her house. She was an honored guest and speaker at my wedding in Shanghai in June of 2000. As was: Chen Jun Yan; Ma Yueh Liang and Wu Ying Hua's daughter, Ma Jiang Wen (accompanied by her daughter); Zhuang Yuan Ming, creator of Liangong, with his wife, son, and his son's family; Zhou Zhan Fang (a senior student of Ma Yueh Liang and Wu Ying Hua) and his wife, and my student Dave (the webmaster) and his wife.

It's rare to find teachers who don't talk about each other and have a broad perspective. Becoming an indoor student is not only a matter of being introduced by some well-regarded person or knowing the teacher. It's also important that you work hard and follow through with the teachings. My approach has been to try to always probe deeper into yourself and never accepting less of yourself – ever. Even on days when you rest, rest a little. A teacher will expect that your performance reflects on them, but you yourself will know when you're honestly advancing in your work. Your classmates, your teacher's friends, and most everyone else will know as well. It's a commitment to core values such as: respect, perseverance, precision, efficiency, and lasting honor. Honor is the most important of all. My experience is that egotism should be left at the door, or behind you, and you must embrace humility and kindness for all people—even your enemies.

I have found that superior teachers recognize the actions and behaviors that are exhibited by their students. It's also important to spend time with teachers and enjoy life with them. Ma Yueh Ling was fond of playing Ma Jong. I have found that other teachers generally want to know more about you and your journey through life, because they have chosen to invest time in you. Ultimately their teaching is about more than just martial arts.

Thanks so much for your inquiry. I welcome both your dialogue and patronage.

Sincerely,
Gerald A. Sharp



Concluding the Flummoxed Flow

In closing, it is my hope that my little newsletter gives some practical information about useful practice and perhaps a different take on authentic Nei Jia kung fu. I hope to avoid passing on silly, counterproductive nonsense that has been passed on as "unquestionable." I have been taken to the cleaners more than once in learning the martial arts. I have dealt with more than my share of egos, including my own. Many things are not what they seem.

Not all practitioners who come from China to the West are genuine. Zee Wen was a student of Ma Yueh Liang's and had good English skills. He helped Ma translate some documents and texts into English. He was known in the Chian Chuan Association for his scholarly work instead of for his skill in practice. Zee Wen received the royalties from Ma and Wu's books in English and I suspect that Ma Yueh Liang or his wife ever saw any of that money. There are many other examples. One of the things that most annoys me at the moment is a teacher (who claimed both Wu lineage and to have studied with some of Ma's students) was selling a copy of Ma's funeral CD which featured forms demos by Ma and Wu. This video was presented to attendees of Ma Yueh Liang's funeral and was meant as a memorial and not to be copied in its entirety on VHS and sold for profit. Not everyone behaves scrupulously.

Keep to the path, and never give up. Try to realize exactness, lightness, patience, perseverance, and stillness in your practice. As the Tao says, "Sticking to main road is easy, but people love to be sidetracked."

In the Next Issue of the Chiflow Newsletter:

Baguazhang's Heaven Palm

We will profile the Heaven palm and consider its place within the Pre-Heaven and Post-Heaven Trigram Symbols. Somehow, we hope to provide a link to a Quicktime video that helps to show you how to effectively apply the Heaven palm.

Mathematics as a Basis for the Practice of Nei Jia Kung Fu...?

Webmaster "Demented Dave" presents the first of a series of short articles on his musings on the mathematical and scientific underpinnings of the Internal styles of Chinese kung fu. Occasionally, these ramblings even reconnects with the classics and Chinese philosophy.

Using Practical and Effective Kung Fu Training Methods

Feeling trapped with the pervasive mysticism in the writings about Tai Chi Ch'uan and other Chinese internal martial arts in books and magazines? We will shun repeating legends in order to present more USEFUL information on the nuts and bolts of effective practice.



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