



## 2009 A Year of Progress for Zhong Ding

2009 proved to be an excellent year for Zhong Ding in a several areas. As well as an increase in membership numbers, a number of initiatives were launched to highlight the diverse strengths of the Association. The Perfect Balance Healing Arts and Therapies Initiative, focussing on the development and promotion of the healing arts taught and practised by Zhong Ding Instructors has seen the drawing up of a syllabus for qigong work and a full curriculum aimed at taking students from beginner to advanced and instructor levels. Zhong Ding Master instructor Miles Craig has worked extremely hard to coordinate and compile the programme with the help of Tony Ulatowski, Don Harradine, Ken Mead, Paul Gitsham, Adam Lammiman and Jan Simpson. In the latter part of the year Miles and the other instructors conducted several Qigong courses and Training Programmes and 2010 will see an expansion of their efforts aimed at reaching a wider market.



At the same time that the Perfect Balance initiative was showcasing the Yin aspects of the Association, under the guidance of Master Instructor Don Harradine, Zhong Ding's first National Competition Squad was being selected and starting the training process. Initial selection and training was held at the national camp at the end of October with Suzie Tsoi, Sam Casey, Mike Crane, Paul Gitsham, Chris Sims, Marc Burton, Jan Simpson and Vincenzo Leo being selected. The squad is now embarking on an intensive training programme which will see them participating in a number of competitions at both national and international level in 2010.



The first National Camp for a number of years was held at Walesby Activities Centre in the East Midlands. Zhong Ding members from all over the UK, Ireland and France attended. A big thank you must be extended to all who went to make this camp such a success: the catering team of Mr and Mrs Graham Ball; Admin organisers Sam Casey and Don Harradine; and the teaching team, Andy Norman, Ken Mead, Miles Craig, Don Harradine and Tony Ulatowski.



The same venue has been booked for October 2010 and this time numbers will be limited to fifty persons so book early to ensure your place.

During the course of the year more than ten exponents from the UK and Europe came to stay and train at the Penang Training Centre. In addition a number of weekend courses were held for local students.



In December Zhong Ding France held their tenth anniversary celebrations which I was fortunate enough to attend. Practitioners from Spain, the UK and France all attended. Congratulations to William Nelson and Jean Richard Grondin for all the hard work that they have put in over the years promoting taijiquan in France.



The Zhong Ding headquarters in Malaysia continues to prosper and Fong now has several hundred students ranging in age from four years old to sixty years young. 2010 will see the first ever Zhong Ding Malaysia Youth Competition as well as a series of seminars on Applied Taijiquan.

At all levels, from Club to Area to National Zhong Ding students and instructors have been working hard and this has served to build a strong foundation upon which to build further success in 2010.

Nigel Sutton

### Keep the Date

Silat Camp 2010	26-28 Mar 2010
Master Liang He Qing Championship	04 Jul 2010
Autumn Camp 2010	29-31 Oct 2010

## Taijiquan for Kickboxers!

I used to think that I was a Taiji purist having never trained in any other martial art, apart from practicing reverse spinning kicks like every other teenager, after seeing a Bruce Lee film. My martial arts study has only been in Taiji and this had led to an infatuation with why and how it works.

Then there is the enjoyment of training with different weapons, sticks long and short, staffs, spears and always there are swords. Training in all these different aspects by putting the Taiji principles to work, as well as push hands, open hand sparring and contact work, then always back to form work for reflection of the Taiji principles; this has been my journey for the past more than a few years

I firmly believe that you learn more by teaching rather than just being a Taiji academic. Teaching taiji for self-defence is just one part of the journey of exploration, the fear of the unknown, the first step. But when you train with other martial arts disciplines it opens up a Pandora's Box, with a learning curve that no one can teach you.

I inquired at a martial arts academy to see if I could hire mat space to start a push hands club. The club promotes mixed martial arts mainly working on kickboxing for all aspects of competitions. The main man asked if I could do a fifteen minute micro teach, I thought this was fair enough as I would be running the club under his umbrella.

He introduced me to two students both of them black belts, one a 40 year old female and the other a 20 year old strong healthy-looking guy. I started with solo moving step, progressing into two person moving step, showing how the applications work and how they don't work if you do not adhere to the principles of Taiji. I also showed them some straight sword sparring, anything but the slow open hand form. To my surprise he offered me a class, one hour a week. I said yes but stated that I would not be teaching form work, only push hands and applications. He was fine with this, so I agreed.

Excited at the prospect of teaching non Taiji people, I also felt it would be challenging. I had a couple of black belts and on average about six others, a good mixture of male and female with most of them having experience in semi-contact. The first thing that became apparent was their stances, which were very weak with no understanding of alignment of knee to ankle. No wonder some of them were thinking of giving martial arts because of knee problems.

That then became a focal point, using low Chen silk reeling exercises to help them have ideas about rooting skills, along with some standing post and any other hard working stance training work I could think of. The standing post didn't work too well because the club's elite fighting squad, trained at the same time. Working on the foundations seemed to puzzle them but I made it relative to their training and sparring. Some of the other things that become clear to work on, were close in work, i.e. push hands with sweeps, kicks, knees and elbows, training slowly at first then building up timing and speed with open hand, controlled contact.

What most of them found hard to understand, at first, was two person moving step working with a set pattern, before going into free style. They were absolutely amazed that Taiji had so many harmful techniques. When teaching applications, their lack of fluidity and agility with footwork led to us having to do extra work on side stepping around and moving in to close down the opponent. Training them in this area I was trying to stop them being caught on the back foot and losing points in competitions. Peter a black belt student commented: "It's become apparent to me that all the applications in Taiji are hidden, just not visible, unlike all the other styles that I have trained in" It was more challenging to me but in a totally different way. I had to teach them the fundamental basics of Taiji, without form work. I was concerned that I would not come up with the goods and did not have the ability to teach them, what fun I had!

Taiji is not the be all and end all, in the martial arts, but within Z/D I feel that it is a very, very high standard. So much so we can go out into any health club or martial art school, anywhere and hold our own. We even contribute to the skill sets of other arts. It is through the knowledge that our teachers have passed down, past and present, in Z/D that gives us these exceptional standards.

In writing this I don't wish you to think I am being sycophantic (brown nosing) to Nigel but I am singing the praises of what he has built and continues to build and like any good student, we should show respect for the knowledge acquired; showing respect by putting ourselves about more, getting out there, in the public eye promoting Taiji and passing on the oral knowledge that has been our good fortune to receive from our Masters in Z/D, if you don't do it, it will be lost. It is your responsibility to use this art and, to the best of your abilities, to make sure the art is not lost.

I know it sounds like I'm selling Taiji as the one and only art but it is the only art that I have given all my attention too. And in return it has given me so much. I never ever thought, that I, a 51 year old hairdresser would be teaching Taiji martial applications to external martial artists. So all you Z/D Taiji players get out there, spread your wings and spread the word.



Tony Ulatowski  
Fourth Duan Master Instructor

### Autumn Camp 2009



One wet weekend at the end of October I attended my first Zhong Ding taijiquan training camp somewhere in the Nottinghamshire forest.

After a brief supper on the Friday night, training started in zeal and continued in that spirit until the close of Sunday afternoon. In the rain sodden hours between, a diverse series of seminars was given that reflected a depth of experience and approach to the art. There were seminars on different forms of qigong, aspects of the Cheng Man Ching hand form, the broadsword, pushing hands, traditional Shaolin exercises and the opportunity for some hard training.

In spite of the diverse choice of seminar I attended, all seemed by a perverse twist of fate to be outside, and having spent the majority of my time holding postures in a light coating of rain and dead leaves, I began to feel, after awhile, like a mushroom - albeit a mushroom imbued with some of the spirit of the art. A deadly one to boot.

Facetiousness aside, the Zhong Ding Autumn training camp was a rare opportunity for intense study and friendships and is one that I would want to take again. Many thanks to Nigel Sutton, Don Harradine, Andy Norman, Junior Mead, Tony Ulatowski and Miles Craig for their patient instruction; and a special thanks to Sam Casey for the care and diligence she gave to the finer details of the occasion that made it such an exceptional weekend.

Michael Crane Zhong Ding York

## Establishing a Practice Discipline

During my early years of training in martial arts I often felt guilty that I was unable to train for as many hours a week or a day as some of my peers claimed to be doing. I had one senior whose claim of four hours of daily training put my own half an hour, once in a while, to shame. I had another classmate who claimed an hour a day. Again I was ashamed that I could not measure up. Looking back, however, I suspect that my fellow students were maybe exaggerating a little. As a postscript both of these people quit the arts in the next few years while here I am, as the song goes, "still standing".



Several years later when I had started practising taijiquan with Mr. Huang Jifu I had a classmate who really did practise for several hours a day. His work enabled him to spend long periods of unsupervised time in places where he could conveniently practice and he took advantage of the opportunity. During this time of intensive training, however, he was in a constant state of frustration for, rather than progressing, he seemed to be standing still

At the same time I was doing very little practice outside class and yet seemed to be improving in leaps and bounds. I later observed both in my own training and that of my students that such a process was quite natural and just like the yin yang theory which our art embodies, training must go through cycles, and it is often during seeming "down time" that real progress starts to manifest. This does not, however, mean that we do not need to put in the requisite effort and "eating bitter"; just that we sometimes need to slacken off and rest. This is the nature of the art.

But these early experiences are not what this article is about. Unfortunately at that time I had not thought to ask my teachers about how to go about establishing a practice discipline. Nor was this a subject they talked about - it was merely understood that we should practise outside of class.

Indeed my own experience has taught me that practise outside of class is of vital importance. For, at the end of the day, none of us practise the art to make our teacher and classmates look good, or to make them rich and famous. No we practise the art for our own reasons; maybe for our health or to be able to protect ourselves, or just simply because we enjoy it. Thus it follows that while our teachers and our peers are an important part of the process, ultimately the responsibility for learning the art falls on us. This is why Chinese Martial Art tradition teaches that the students should steal the art from the teacher.



So now let us get down to the nitty gritty, how do we ensure that we do enough training and just what constitutes enough training?



Let us examine the latter question first and the answer is that there is no correct or easy answer. How much training you need to do will depend on your stage of progress and requirements at that stage. Sometimes when faced with areas of training where we need to improve, hours and hours of hard work are required and, often as not, these will lead to a state of staleness, such that you will be forced to just stop bashing at the problem, maybe

even stop practising for a while. At this point, when you give up trying, is often when a breakthrough occurs.

The problem is, that in order to be able to determine just how much training is necessary, you must first establish a daily discipline. This is necessary so that you are able to make informed decisions about your own training and progress. If you train hard at times and then do nothing simply because this is what you feel like doing, there will come a point where you cease to make progress. Instead you must give yourself time to come to an understanding of your own strengths and weakness

In order to establish a practice discipline you must first adopt a gentle yet firm attitude. Start small and then add on more training in small yet steady increments. This might mean at first spending a few minutes every day just running through your form mentally. Then add on a few minutes a day of actual physical practice. The main thing is to be consistent. Make sure that if it is only "mental training" that you do, still you must do it every day.

As your practice grows from mental training to more physical work you can reinforce your practice habit by choosing to practise in a specific place at a specific time. As you persist in this training you will find that the location in which you have chosen to train will begin to have a special feeling about it. This is why training areas in Chinese were originally referred to as Dao Chang or field where the Dao (The Way) is practised; that is it is a "sacred" place. This does not mean that taijiquan is a religion or that we are practising a religion in our training space. What it does mean is that we approach our training with reverence and respect for this practice has the potential to be life-transforming

By training at the same time each day we educate ourselves mentally and physically and after a time you may well find that if you do miss a training session your body will remind you. A few days without training might well result in aches and pains or a vague feeling that things are not quite right. If this sounds like an addiction you're right but this is a positive addiction; one that costs you nothing but benefits you a great deal.



To further ensure that this time remains special try to switch your phone off, keep the time appointment free and make the decision that this will be your time for training and yours alone.

You might also find that keeping a training log will be of benefit to you. In it you should write down the training you have done, your feelings about it and any discoveries you might have made. If writing is not your thing keep an audio or even a video diary. The keeping of such a record will make you more reflective about your training and help you to realise that the main responsibility for progress and improvement in the art lies with yourself. By undertaking to train seriously in taijiquan you have become a cross between an explorer and a scientist. The journey you are making is an internal one and the laboratory where you are conducting your experiments is both yourself and your training area. Like an explorer or a scientist you should record both what you are looking for and what you find. Initially the things you need to look for, will be outlined by your teacher but as time goes on you will find that you seek guidance from the teachings of the "classic" writings and the experiences of those who have walked this path throughout history



There will probably come times, however, when you get stale and you might feel that you need some time away from the art; this is fine and a natural part of the training process

The important thing to remember when this does happen is to be gentle with yourself; do something else for a while, take a break and if this path is meant for you there will come a time when you feel drawn back to your practice. There is a Chinese saying to the effect that in martial arts your progress in the first few years is measured in miles but after that only in inches. Training an art such as taijiquan is a lifelong process and although the path is often difficult the rewards for the patient and persistent are enormous

**So to summarise:**

- 1/ Be consistent**
- 2/ Start in small increments**
- 3/ Find a place that is yours for training**
- 4/ Try to train at the same time**
- 5/ Do your best to cut out distractions**
- 6/ Keep a training diary**

**And FIRST, LAST and ALWAYS be kind to yourself while maintaining a patient and persevering attitude.**

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## A Year of Strength

In Malay numerology 2010 is a year of strength coming from new beginnings and balance, which is a good start for any new year and particularly one which starts with a Winter like this one: a good time for a new start when everything is wiped clean with a blanket of snow; the strength to get out of bed in the morning; and balance to stay upright on the ice. Like myself I suspect you are just shaking off the extra pounds from the excesses of the last month; forgetting the New Year resolutions; and gently building-up your training.

The main thrust of this year, however, as stated above, is strength, in whatever forms this may come. It is something that towards the end of last year and at the start of this year I have been meditating upon: in terms of my own approach to training and particularly the new competition squad's training programme. The programme for the squad has been, to date, predominantly designed by themselves to fit into their individual lifestyles and ambitions with guidance to improve their overall fitness and an aspect of this has been strength training. If for no other reason the fitter and stronger we are the more we can train and the better we can be at achieving whatever our goals might be. If we are going to move a large weight with a lever and a fulcrum it is better to have strong and sturdy equipment and the strength to pull the lever; and this is exactly what our Taiji training does.

"If your opponent is bigger than you or using strength it should be to your advantage. Use four ounces to deflect a thousand pounds and then borrow his strength."  
(Sutton, 1996 p72)

Our training develops strength to maintain our structure under pressure: indeed, from form training; standing post; weapons training, particularly long weapons; and our internal strength training.

The above physical aspects of strength are important but there are other manifestations of strength as martial artists that we should also consider, whatever level we perceive ourselves in our quest. I share below some forms of strength that I optimistically strive towards achieving and hopefully you are improving upon my efforts.

- The strength of friends – One of the important aspects of our training, and indeed being a human being, is the bond we develop with others who will support us, care for us when things go wrong and encourage us to be the best we can.
- The strength to persevere – Keep training; keep trying; knowing that it is just effort that is preventing us from achieving our goals.
- The strength that comes from failure – When things go wrong or we just make a mistake we need the strength to pull ourselves round, learn from events and move-on.
- The strength to say sorry when we are wrong.

- The strength to be in the now – Not to worry about the past or the future but be in the present: be aware and do our best now.
- The strength to face our fears – However small these might be they hold us back.
- The strength to give and share without reward.
- The strength not to worry what other people think.
- The strength to believe in our art and our spiritual path.
- The strength to do the right thing.

So best wishes to a happy and strong 2010



Don Harradine  
Fifth Duan Master Instructor