

Newsletter Jan/Feb 1999

Welcome...

To the first edition of the Zhong Ding newsletter for 1999.

I hope you enjoyed the previous two editions and apologies for not publishing a third newsletter at the end of last year. However, publication was postponed in order to confirm a number of exciting ZD news items that broke in late 1998.

This is also the first newsletter with a cover charge. Sadly, we have taken this step to cover the cost of reproduction, that is photocopying! We will ensure the price remains at a reasonable level. I'm sure you will agree it is still excellent value even at 40p for ZD members and 60p for non-members.

1999 marks Zhong Ding's eleventh year of providing outstanding Taijiquan tuition to the public. There are a number of exciting new developments for this year, including the first ZD Grand Championships which will be held in Birmingham at the end of February

So, read on for all the latest news from ZD and here's to an even brighter future for Zhong Ding instructors and students everywhere.

John Gardiner

Editor, Zhong Ding Newsletter

Zhong Ding Grand Championships set for Feb. 28th

The Zhong Ding Grand Championships will be staged at the Stockland Green Leisure Centre, Slade Road, Birmingham, from 10:00am on Sunday, 28th February.

The championships are a celebration of the multi-faceted art of Taijiquan. Participants will have the opportunity to demonstrate their skills in the main competitive aspects of the art.

There will be four key areas of competition empty hand forms, weapons forms, moving step pushing hands and full contact.

The empty hand forms competition will include categories for beginner, intermediate and advanced students, and will be divided between Cheng Man-ch'ing and other internal hand forms. There will also be an external style hands form category, too.

The weapons competition will be divided into internal and external styles. There will also be hand and weapon forms competition for the under 10 and under 16 year olds.

The moving step pushing hands competition will be classified by weight. This will include classes for the under 60 kg, 65 kg, 70 kg, 75 kg, 80 kg, 85 kg and over 85 kg for men; women will compete in under 60 kg and over 60 kg weight classes.

For the first time in a ZD event, full contact fighting will be a main feature of the championships.

There will also be a "Grand Championship" event for competitors willing to demonstrate their ability in all four events - hand form, weapon form, pushing hands and full-contact fighting.

Entry fees are £4 for one event and £6 for two events in the junior category. Grand Championship competitors pay £15 for BCCMA, TCUGB, ZD or Kuoshu Institute members, £20 all others.

All the other events are charged at £6 per event for up to three events, or £5 per event for four or more events for ZD, BCCMA and TCUGB members - all others pay £8 and £7 an event respectively.

With the exception of the Grand Championship class which is pre-entry only, the above entry fees are for applications received by the 21st February. Entries received after this date, or on the day of the competition, will be subject to an additional £1 per event entered. No entries will be accepted after 9:45 am on the day of the competition.

For more information on exact location, competition rules and any other information, contact your ZD instructor, check out the ZD home page on the WWW, or call Brian Woodruff on 0181-841-1054.

Even if you do not want to take part in competition, please come along to the competition to support your club members. Volunteers are also required to help out on the day, so please offer assistance if you can before the competition so that tasks can be allocated sensibly.

Oh yes, spectators will pay £3 each - a pretty small sum for a full day's worth of entertainment.

ZD has a new chairman in the UK

John Gardiner, Nigel Sutton's senior student, has stepped down from the post of chairman of ZD in the UK and has been succeeded by Vinnie Jones.

Speaking about the change at the top John Gardiner said. "I'm delighted that Vinnie is taking over as chairman. He is very well respected not only within ZD but also by the larger Taiji community in Britain and by our own technical experts in Malaysia and Singapore. Vinnie's appointment will help to further strengthen ZD as we approach the next millennium."

"Though I will continue to act as membership secretary and compile the newsletter until October 1999, I want to spend more time just practising and also writing about Taiji.

"I especially want to develop new ways of practising Taiji to make it more relevant as a truly practical martial art for contemporary students," commented John.

Vinnie Jones has been practicing Taiji for over twenty years and currently lives and teaches in Pembrokeshire, Wales. He has been a member of ZD for almost a decade.

"I am very pleased to take on this important role in Zhong Ding," stated Vinnie. "I have a great deal of respect for our instructors and students, and I look forward to working with them all to build an even stronger Zhong Ding for the future."

"Taiji is growing in prominence in the UK and I want Zhong Ding to take a leading role in providing top quality tuition to as many people as possible," said Vinnie.

Vinnie takes over as chairman with immediate effect. All BCCMA-related actions (memberships, instructors' insurance, etc.) should still be sent to John Gardiner. Any copy for the newsletter should also continue to still be directed to John for the present.

The value of scenario training

It's 2.00am in the morning and you're suddenly awoken by a loud and unfamiliar sound emanating from the kitchen. Without a second thought you jump out of bed, step into those neat little pink fluffy slippers Auntie Flo bought you last Xmas, rush down the stairs and into the kitchen. There, you find the cause of the commotion - a five-inch-wide cat caught in a four-inch-wide cat flap.

As you stand there trying to coerce Tiddies back into the garden via a swift toe punt, it suddenly dawns on you that you've acted in a pretty stupid manner.

What if instead of Tiddies the cause of the fuss had been a seven-foot Neanderthal high on crack cocaine whose sole purpose in life was to rob you of your worldly possessions, including your life. Somehow, a kick in the rump with a fluffy slipper probably wouldn't have encouraged him to crawl back out through the cat flap!

In case you're starting to wonder where all this talk of late night disturbances, catflaps and slippers is heading, its to emphasise the need to give scenario training more thought in our Taiji self defence training.

Scenario training

What do I mean by "scenario training"? It's taking what we learn in class and applying it in as close to real world situations as possible. For example, in class we might practice self-defence techniques against a punch or kick. Usually, we'll have quite a bit of space to move around, plenty of light, smooth floor, familiar surroundings, lots of vegetarians being nice to each other, not too many disturbances around us, etc...

However, the chances of finding oneself in such an ideal environment in a real world "punch up" is highly unlikely.

Usually, the threat of physical violence rears its head when we're out at night, in badly lit streets with poor pavements, or at a night club where there's not enough space to swing a mouse let alone a cat. Or, maybe we encounter this threat in our own home when we awake at 2:00am to find some drugged crazy with a carving knife trying to come through the bedroom window.

It's exactly these kinds of scenarios we need to consider when we train Taiji as a practical martial art for today. We all need to think about how we can make our training more "real world" realistic.

Here are a few examples you might like to consider as possible training scenarios. Try setting up a bar scenario with a few tables and chairs placed in a confined area; dim the lights when you train techniques; go outside on rough terrain in mid-winter and train self-defence applications wearing a heavy coat and gloves; try fighting in a confined space like a narrow hallway. I'm sure you can come up with plenty of other "real world" scenarios that would make useful, practical fighting exercises.

What you achieve through this kind of scenario training is a better idea of what to expect. It's like throwing a hundred punches in the air, then throwing a single punch that actually connects with something or someone. The feel of the impact gives a qualitatively different dimension to your training that can't be achieved by just punching the air no matter how many times.

While you can never prepare for every possible fighting scenario at least you'll have a rough idea and expectations of what it's like to fight, for example, on a cold, dark winter night in the street.

Know the unexpected

Scenario training can reduce the level of the unexpected. As Sun Tzu states: "Know yourself and your enemy and you will be victorious every time." In this case we want to turn the fighting environment into our "friend" rather than regarding it as an "enemy". After all, you will be busy enough fighting off an attacker without feeling you're fighting the environment, too.

It's this kind general self-defence knowledge and practice that is so useful to the martial artist. We're especially lucky in Zhong Ding that many of our teachers have direct experience of real world fighting.

Masterly advice

I always remember Master Tan Ching Ngee going into great depths about where to sit in unfamiliar circumstances, and how to be prepared if you expected trouble. He told Nigel and I to always wear a groin guard if we expected a problem, and to always sit forward in a chair so that you're always ready to propel yourself upwards and forwards in an instant. (Look at most pictures of Chinese masters at Bai Shi

ceremonies with their students and you'll see what I mean by this seating position - one foot slightly under the chair ready to push off from the ground.)

Master Lau Kim Hong of Malaysia is another great teacher full of this kind of information gained from experience. His skill with the stick and staff is testament to the fact that Chinese are not allowed to keep bladed weapons in Malaysia, hence the need to specialise in another form of weapons training that is practical yet legal and unobtrusive.

Talking of which, in the next newsletter I want to focus more on the issue of weapons training as I feel it is very much the backbone of self-defence training.

Oh, yes, and about rushing downstairs when you hear an unusual noise at night, that really is not a very sensible idea. Much better to stay in the bedroom with the door locked, call the police, yell out

the window and prepare yourself with an appropriate weapon. True, your neighbours might think you've gone a little crazy if the noise turns out just to be Tiddies on the prowl. But if it's something more sinister, this course of action might just save your life.

John Gardiner

Disclaimer: Neither Tiddies nor any other animals were injured during the writing of this article, save for the cow in the beef and horseradish sandwich which I ate during its writing!

Competition in Nanchang, China

Nanchang is a major city in Jiangxi Province, renowned as the birthplace of Daoism. It is thus fitting that the First Neijia Invitational should be held here in the shadow of Ziyangshan (Mount Ziyang) where the Daoist Immortal, Lu Tong Bin, had his hermit's cave.

The First Neijia invitational is planned for the 18th September, 1999, and - as well as form, pushing hands and sparring there will be seminars and master classes with many world-renowned experts in the internal martial arts.

The event is in part sponsored and supported by Zhong Ding, and represents an unprecedented opportunity to showcase the Taiji of Cheng Man-ch'ing in his native China.

In November of last year, I visited Nanchang and climbed Ziyangshan. I also met many of the local Taiji exponents. They were all extremely welcoming, and Taijiquan, Yiquan (dachenquan) and many other martial arts are all well in evidence in the local parks. There were also lots of opportunities for pushing hands.

More details of the First Neijia Invitational in Nanchang, China will follow in early 1999.

Best wishes to all ZD students and instructors for the new year.

Nigel Sutton

Chief Instructor

From warm ups to Standing post

I would like to start this article by passing on a piece of advice my teacher gave to me: "Treat everything you are taught as if it was the only thing you are ever going to learn about Taiji."

When starting a class the instructor will give you exercises which are referred to as warm ups. Most students will treat as just something to get the blood moving. Do not! You should think about each exercise physically and mentally because each one of them has an important lesson within it.

Take the first warm up you are given to do say just turning the waist and shifting the weight from one leg to the other. Then imagine that it is going to be the only thing your instructor is ever going to teach you. This way, you should approach each thing you are taught with an equal amount of importance.

In this first exercise, consider what is happening to your body and mind. First, your mind is sending signals to your body. "Turn the waist, relax the shoulders, let the arms follow, head suspended from above, shift the weight from one leg to the other." Now consider what should be happen in the opposite direction. What is the body telling the mind?

Check from the ground up. Are you sitting on your heels? As you shift the weight feel your root. Make sure your knees are in line with your toes, fold in at the hip and turn the waist. Don't just think about what is going on with your waist in the area where you wear a belt. Think about the feeling from your dantian, try to make the movement come from there. Feel the way the body aligns itself, make sure you have swing and return.

These are just a few examples of some of the things that are going on in one very simple exercise and which you must never take for granted. These basic principles are the foundation of your art. This basic type of exercise is a very useful tool in our Taiji training because we can it and similar exercises to identify and train these basic principles.

Although the main Taiji form practised in our school is Cheng Man-ch'ing style, we have been lucky enough to train with teachers of other styles of the art. Quite often I use Chen style warm ups because I find they are very good exercises to give that feeling of silk reeling energy. They also have a longer stance than we would normally practice which helps the student with feeling the substantial and insubstantial.

Now onto the subject of standing post exercises. Most martial arts have this type of exercise in some kind of form or another whether it be standing on one leg or in a horse stance. What are the reasons for doing this type of exercise? One main reason which is clear from the start is they are a very good way of strengthening you legs without putting undue pressure on joints and soft tissue. They are also easily adjusted to suite build and ability.

I have found that as my training has progressed the standing post exercises I practice have become a integral part of my Taiji and not something separate. I have found that I am able to focus on centring, body alignment and, when incorporating movement, a greater feeling of root, energy and moving around my centre.

Some, if not all, of the standing post exercises have an element of Qigong in them. A few are easier to practice than others. For instance "Heaven, Earth and Man" will have you holding each of the three postures for five minuets each. Most students can with a little practice get to a point in a fairly short time where they can begin to enjoy this exercise. However, "Heart Calming" or "Swimming Dragon" can be quite difficult if not practised regularly.

David Spencer

Wanted new newsletter editor

Are you young, handsome, intelligent, brilliant at Taiji and have a way with words? No, neither do I but don't let that stop you from becoming the next editor of the ZD newsletter.

John Gardiner is stepping down from the position of newsletter editor in October and so we need someone willing to take his place.

The role requires common sense more than anything else, though previous writing or publication skills would be useful.

Budding media hacks interested in taking up the gauntlet should contact John Gardiner at the ZD Newsletter address.

And finally

It's been said before but we will say it again that all ZD instructors and students are welcome to place stories, letters, training tips, etc., in the newsletter. In fact, if the newsletter is to have any value it needs your input - please!

We would encourage you all to share your Taiji experiences in the newsletter so that others can benefit. So please start sending those articles in.

Don't forget, too, to check out the latest ZD news on our web site:
http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/zhong_ding

ZD EVENTS CALENDAR

February:

13: Pushing hands course in morning and sword in afternoon in Manchester with John Higginson. Contact John on 0161-860 4111.

14: Slow hand form in the morning and san shou: solo and two-person in the afternoon in Birmingham. John Higginson, 0161-860 4111.

28: ZD Grand Championships in Birmingham.

March:

20: Taiji long weapons course in Manchester. Call John on 0161-860-4111.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE: More news from the world of Zhong Ding; full ZD Grand Championships report; plus much more.

Next issue out in April/May - hopefully!