

## Newsletter June/July 1998

### Welcome...

To the second...if somewhat late!... edition of the Zhong Ding newsletter.

In this edition we will be providing you with all the latest news from the Zhong ding Traditional Chinese Martial Arts Association, plus some features to help you get the most out of your training.

In this - our tenth anniversary year - we have already staged a highly successful seminar tour with Nigel Sutton, our chief instructor, and Master Liang He Ching, one of Zhong Ding's most senior technical advisors.

Nigel also returned in May for a few weeks and he will also return in the Autumn with Master Lau Kim Hong. Master Lau's visit in 1997 was a great success and he will again be teaching the practical application of Taijiquan as a martial art. So start practicing your nei gong now!

Master Lau's visit will coincide with a new Zhong Ding national competition, but more of that in the next edition.

Don't forget too that places are still available for the Zhong Ding tenth anniversary 'Train With The Masters' spectacular in Malaysia during September, but hurry because they're going fast.

Until next time, keep training.

John Gardiner

Chairman, Zhong Ding

### Higgo Flies The Zhong Ding Flag In Espana

John Higginson, Zhong Ding's leading figure in the north of England, paid his second visit to Spain during May at the invitation of David Rodruigez, Eduardo Monteiro and Javier Mesa, the founder members of the Tai Chi Chuan Y Artes Asociades, a sister organisation of ZD.

During a lively three-week tour around the northern half of Spain, workshops were held in Oviedo, Mieres, Burgog, Aviles, Leon, Vailadolid and Madrid. The workshops covered a wide range of the ZD curriculum, including hand form and applications, sabre, the eight pushing hands methods and the Taiji Classics.

Along the way we made friends in many other martial arts, among them tai jutsu, choy le fut, judo and karate practitioners who attended seminars along with their instructors in a spirit of friendship, Joint seminars with some of these other disciplines were suggested and may be possible on future visits.

Interestingly, we came across Cheng Man-ch'ing style Taiji which looked somewhat familiar: not surprisingly, as it turned out, since it was introduced to Spain by Master Li of Taiwan, a student of one of ZD's technical advisers, Master Tan Ching Ngee of Singapore. What a small world!

Since Master Li has not visited Spain for several years there is a great deal of interest among Cheng stylists in studying with others of a similar lineage, and a course was suggested for John Higginson's return visit to Spain later this year.

David, Eduardo and Javier deserve much praise for their hard work in organising this extremely demanding tour which included an open conference on Taiji at the Periodico La Nueva Espana in Oviedo, a radio interview, two appearances on local TV and extensive newspaper coverage in its hectic schedule.

Special thanks also are due to Cristina Monteiro for making us so welcome and for taking so much time out of her already busy schedule to look after us, and to Carmen Rodriguez and Crux Mesa for patiently accepting the loss of their husbands for such long periods.

The enthusiasm and commitment of the students in Spain is extremely impressive and surely augurs well for the continued growth of authentic Taiji across the world in the spirit of Zhong Ding envisaged by Nigel Sutton ten years ago when he founded the association.

So here's to the next ten years!

Vicky Holden

## London pushing hands seminar

ZD teachers in the West London area are planning to stage a one-day, pushing hands seminar on 16th August.

The time the seminar will concentrate on various aspects of pushing hands, from sensitivity training and patterns, through to freestyle and the bridge between pushing hands and san shou.

Though the date still has to be fixed, the venue will be The Avenue Centre, Normansfield Avenue, Teddington, Middlesex, just a few miles from KingstonUpon-Thames.

Cost is £30 on the day (ZD members £25), or £25 in advance (ZD members £20).

This should be an intensive day covering all aspects of pushing hands practice and will be suitable to both recent beginners and more advanced students.

Call Tony on 0181-755 0285 or John Gardiner on 0181-567 1088 for further details.

## ZD anniversary fun in Malaysia

The tenth anniversary Zhong Ding "Train With The Masters" tour is to be staged from the 3-18 September in Malaysia.

This promises to be a unique opportunity to train with many of ZD's leading technical advisers and masters, including Masters Lau Kim Hong, Liang He Qing, Tan Swoh Theng and Wu Chiang Hsiang and Nigel himself.

Daily training will take place in a Daoist temple, with auxiliary training in meditation and Qigong tuition available in one of the numerous Buddhist temples.

"Train With The Masters" includes 15 nights accommodation in a comfortable, fully air-conditioned hotel in Batu Pahat, all training costs, transport from and to Kuala Lumpur, plus free tickets to the spectacular tenth anniversary banquet and celebrations.

Cost per person, based on two sharing a room, are: £700 for non-members, £650 for ZD members, £550 for 1st Duan Assistant Instructors and £500 for 2nd Duan full instructors.

Senior instructors, 3rd Duan and above, price available on application.

If you or your students are interested, do register for the trip at the earliest opportunity as Nigel needs to have a good idea of the number of people to expect by the end of February. Also, be aware that the Commonwealth Games are being staged in Malaysia at this time so flights need to be booked now.

Brian Woodruff in London is helping to organize the tour from the UK, so if you want to find out more give him a call on 0181-841 1054.

## The value of form training

In most Chinese martial arts it is not uncommon to learn 10, 15 or even 20 specific forms or sets of movements. Each form teaches one or two specific skills, whether it's a certain way to punch, a kick or an evasive movement.

The situation is somewhat different in most schools of Taijiquan where there usually exists just one or two main empty hand forms, and possibly a few other hand forms that are regarded as being of lesser importance. In Zhong Ding, the emphasis is on the 37-movement Cheng Man-ch'ing form with other hand forms, such as the san shou and the fast Taiji form, in a secondary role.

One negative impact of Taiji's reliance on a primary empty hand form is that the true value of the form is often misunderstood. In many schools (thankfully, not ZD ones!), the form is regarded as an end in itself. That is, it is regarded as being Taiji incarnate rather than being seen as a means to an end -- just one training aid to acquiring Taiji skills (albeit a very important one).

There is no one correct way to practice the 37-movement form. Different body shapes and sizes, differing emphasis on movements and so on means that every student and instructor performs the form in a slightly different way to anyone else.

What is important though is that the principles of Taiji are thoroughly applied in the practice of form (i.e., being "sung", developing root, differentiating substantial from insubstantial, the heightened state of inner and outer awareness, being suspended from the head top", sinking the hips, etc.)

However, this does not mean you should tackle the form in exactly the same way every time you practice.

The form should be viewed as a tool for the acquisition of core Taiji skills, and as such it can be practiced with a different emphasis if you are particularly concerned with training a specific aspect at any given time.

For example, if relaxation of the waist is something you want to especially train, then emphasize this as you practice the form. If root development is what you want to master, then even try going through the form's leg movements while leaving your arms by your side.

You must certainly make time to practice the form with all the relevant Taiji skills in place. But don't be afraid to practice specific Taiji skills using the form as a medium of movement. Make it work for you. All of the great Taiji masters of the past not only used their forms in this way but went further and created their own form structure.

Also, don't let the form become the Holy Grail of your Taiji studies. Other aspects of training, such as the fast forms, weapons, nei gong, pushing hands and san shou, build upon many of the core principles of the basic hand form but develop them to a higher level.

Dan Docherty is quoted as saying that if he had to choose, he would practice nei gong over the form. Likewise, in all the years of studying with Grandmaster Cheng, Benjamin Lo, one of his top students, never saw his teacher perform the whole of the form in person.

Master Lau Kim Hong from Malaysia also states that the form is primarily a basic tool for developing root and relaxation -by itself, practice of the form will not develop fighting skills.

So, once you have a good basic understanding of the 37-movement form, experiment with it and use it to fulfil your own personal training needs. If you practice in this way, you'll be following in the footsteps of some of the greatest Taiji's teachers, such as Grandmaster Cheng.

by John Gardiner

## Weapons bags

Carrying weapons around from class to class can be tricky sometimes, especially if you're using public transport. However, Tony Skito has been in touch to say that he has a student who can make top quality weapons bags at an extremely competitive price.

The bags come in a variety of sizes and can be custom made to cater for your individual weapons needs.

So if you need an inconspicuous carry case for everything from a Taiji sword or cane, to a SCUD missile, call Tony Skito on 0181-755 0285 for more details.

Don't forget, if anyone else out there has access to good quality weapons, training equipment, etc., at a reasonable price, let us know at the newsletter and web site so we can spread the news

## The journey to becoming a teacher

Some students think about their future as a teacher fairly early on in their training -so early on one occasion during a phone enquiry that the question of how long would it take to become a Taiji teacher was asked before the caller had even had a single lesson!

My response to the question on that occasion was the same as it has always been: the time required will be different for each individual. Some people may acquire large amounts of knowledge and skill in the art over many years but may never gain the ability to pass it on. Others can find themselves teaching in a comparatively short period of time.

My own initiation as a teacher was far from one of choice. I had joined an adult education class at a local school and was leaning Taiji. It was about five weeks into the course and my fellow students and I were waiting patiently for the teacher to arrive.

After about twenty minutes the school secretary came into the hall. She explained to the class that the teacher was unable to attend that night. Then she asked who David was. I stepped forward and said it was me. She then went on to explain that Nigel I think it only fair to mention his name! had requested her to ask if I could take the class. The term "baptism by fire.. came immediately to mind!

I could not say anything and my legs started to buckle. I think they call it panic! After what seemed like an eternity I managed to get out the word "Yes". Several questions racing through my brain, the first being what had I ever done to Nigel!?! The next being how do I start and will the class actually follow me?

Well I did what Nigel did or what little I could remember. I was feeling a multitude of emotions the most prominent being embarrassment as I stuttered through the lesson.

I have had to stand at the front of many classes since that night and I still feel uncomfortable with the responsibilities of giving the student something useful to take away, value for money and a enjoyable few hours.

just recently I have been present at a couple of new classes where fellow instructors have had to face a fresh batch of students. During these classes I observed the different ways in which my very experienced colleagues dealt with the pressure. One who is particularly versed in Taiji history was able to control the situation by talking. The other demonstrated what the students would be learning in the lessons. Both sticking to what they felt secure with.

Money can sometimes be the motivation for a person to start teaching, treating Taiji as a commodity to be marketed. I am sure that if you worked at it hard enough a reasonable return could be had for your efforts, though I personally do not know anyone who has made a real killing financially when teaching.

Is the process of passing on knowledge more important than financial reward? I personally have continued as I started and have never taken any payment for teaching.

Now in saying this I am not suggesting that everyone else should follow in my foot steps. I just feel more comfortable teaching in this way and hope that it does not bear any reflection on the standard of the instruction I give!

During each class I discover something new about the leaning process. Tricks of the trade you might say. Things like not talking to much so that the class are focus on what they are doing rather than you. Always

having a basic exercise up your sleeve for the moment when I have to gather my thoughts. This also is beneficial for the students as their attention span begins to waiver. Methods like this allow for a more comfortable environment for both teacher and student.

There are many problems associated with teaching. One that I find the most difficult to contend with is gaining the trust of the class

Now some teachers are lucky in this area as their reputation precedes them. Others of us will have to try build a trusting relationship up with the students. Over the years I would have hoped to have developed a sure fire way to get the class eating out of my hand. No chance. Every class is different; some require you to show your skill and impress them. Others want you to give them something I suppose so they can impress you. I have discovered no magic fix to deal with this problem, only a little experience in assessing the needs of a class. These needs come in varying shapes and sizes. Some will need a bright, warm place to train; others may need a slightly more personal type of tuition. You must make yourself aware of these requirements while not losing sight of your lesson goals.

I remember when one of my senior colleagues left me in charge of his class while he was out of the country, one young lady was struggling to pick up what was being taught, I sat down and wrote out the moves of the form as I spoke them in the class. It was a painstaking process but a worthwhile one as she stuck at learning Taiji becoming an excellent instructor in her own right and a good friend.

You cannot measure the satisfaction and pleasure this can bring. It only happens once in a while it justifies the effort. However, In saying this you must avoid the danger of focusing on one student's needs and forget the rest of the class.

You sometimes get certain students who try to hijack the class and manipulate it for their own needs. In keeping everyone happy you will sometimes have to fall short of teaching a complete lesson in case you alienate some of the class.

I have recently been attending a course to gain a NVQ qualification in adult education. One of the things they enforce is having a lesson plan. Sometimes I will spend all day considering what to teach at the class that night only to find that on arrival the mix of student does not lend itself to what I wanted to teach and then have to come up with something totally different to suit.

Finally I would like to offer any of You budding teachers out there one last word of advice. Never forget your experiences as a student in the early days of your training because you'll probably find your hopes and fears at that time reflected in your students today.

by David Spencer

And finally ...

Don't forget this is YOUR newsletter. It needs you to provide stories, training tips, event reports and updates to the calendar.

Also, if you have access, do use the ZD web site. It can be reached on:  
[http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/zhong\\_ding](http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/zhong_ding).

If you want to place anything in the newsletter write to me, John Gardiner, at the following address:

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The next ZD newsletter will be published in September 1998.