Overlapping Steps:
Traditional Training Methods in Chen Village Taijiquan

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Abstract
Practicing Taijiquan in Chenjiagou Village, the place where the art was born, allows one to cut through many misunderstandings and to taste the time-honored manners of acquiring skill that have been passed down from generation to generation since Chen Wangting (1600-1680) founded the system some 350 years ago. This article will consider the traditional training curriculum handed down through generations of Chenjiagou Taijiquan exponents. It aims to place each of the diverse training methods within the framework of a systematic means of acquiring high-level combat proficiency. Also included is an examination of weapons training and its continued significance for the modern day practitioner.

Introduction
Though many people can quote the requirements of Taijiquan and verses from the Taijiquan classics, real understanding, it is said, can only come through training these into one’s body. According to Chen Fa-ke, the seventeenth generation standard-bearer of Chen Taijiquan, those learning Taijiquan must not only appreciate the theories (li) intellectually; they must also train the methods (fa) into their body. Theoretical knowledge should be accompanied by practical action: “how much you accomplish depends entirely on how much effort you put in.” (Ma Hong, 1988: 13). Chen Xin, in his Illustrated Explanation of Chen Family Taijiquan goes further, suggesting that “all that idle talk does is to create a tide of black ink; actually putting it into practice is the real thing (Gaffney and Sim, 2000: 94)”

Chen Taijiquan requires the body to be used in a unique disciplined way and has a wide-ranging training curriculum encompassing standing-pole exercise, single-movement exercises, barehand forms, push hands, weapons and supplementary equipment training. In common with other sports or martial arts, it is essential to begin with the basics. With time and conscientious practice, the body is strengthened and one discovers a new way of moving.
Each of the different training methods should be viewed within the framework of a larger system. Each facet of the training method, from the standing exercises to advanced push hands drills, is interconnected and necessary. Considered in its entirety, the training process can be likened to a series of overlapping steps, each laid upon the underpinning foundation of the preceding one.

In Chenjiagou, it is commonly stated that all practice must be done “according to the principles” (an zhe gui ju) (Gu Liuxin and Shen Jiazhen, 1998: 306). The principles start with the fundamental requirements and progress incrementally to the highest levels of skill. The task of developing correct habits is a gradual process, and the key to traditional training is to have patience en route to acquiring competence.

In the West, people often equate Taijiquan as an easy option; however, villagers in Chenjiagou have long understood that the task of learning Taijiquan is often painstaking and arduous. Chen Taijiquan does not require that students begin with complex techniques. Rather, the new learner begins by seeking to understand and manage essential body requirements and execute basic body movements. Training is focused upon developing sufficient internal as well as external strength to carry out these actions, rather than being impatient for more complex techniques.

**Standing Pole – Entering the Door**

Chen Xin’s *Illustrated Explanation of Chen Family Taijiquan* (1986) suggests that: “To train Taiji one must begin at Wuji.” This phrase provides the guideline for entering the door of Chen Taijiquan’s traditional training curriculum. Standing pole or zhan zhuang is the most basic exercise of Taijiquan and is an exercise common to many Chinese martial arts. Typically, the arms are held in front of the body as if holding a large ball, as the practitioner stands and quietly observes the natural ebb and flow of the breath. However, the zhan zhuang exercise can be practiced using any of the end postures from the Taiji form. During “standing” practice, a static posture is maintained for a period of time, with emphasis upon developing awareness of and maintaining the most efficient and relaxed structural alignment necessary to hold the position.

To the casual observer, it may appear as if little is happening; the experienced practitioner, though, is intensely engaged in a variety of actions and sensations. Prolonged practice of this ostensibly uncomplicated exercise, along with enhancing postural awareness and calmness of mind, significantly
increases the strength of the legs. When the legs are strong and can bear weight securely, then the upper body can relax and sink down into them, making the top more flexible. If the legs do not have sufficient strength, the top is “afraid” to sink down, and the body remains top-heavy and tense. All the training methods of Taijiquan look to developing extreme lightness and sensitivity in the upper body. Simultaneously the lower body should exhibit a feeling of extreme heaviness and connection to the ground. At this stage, the practitioner can be said to be putting down roots. The importance of this is reflected in the verse “cultivate the roots and the branches and leaves will be abundant” (Gaffney and Sim, 2000: 132).

Taijiquan is an internal martial art, entailing internal energy (nei jing) training in addition to external physical training. The power and strength of internal energy are manifested in external actions. To train internal skill, one must first train the body’s intrinsic energy (qi). This includes cultivation of qi, storage of qi and circulation of qi. Standing Pole practice provides a means of increasing internal feeling and the circulation of qi. Regular standing for extended periods of time gives rise to acute body awareness as the practitioner learns to relax and sink their qi. By reducing the level of external stimulation, one can focus more closely upon sensations within the body. While the external body is still, internally the breath, blood and qi are circulating. This represents a state of balance, or “motion in stillness.”

Through prolonged training qi becomes fuller and stronger, filling the energy center in the lower abdomen (dantien), breaking through blockages in the energy paths (jingluo) and then saturating the whole body. The body is like an inflated ball, full of elasticity and overflowing with a physical sensation of inward to outward expansion and strength (peng jing). With the spiraling “silk-reeling” movement of Chen Taijiquan, this energy can be circulated throughout the body.
The training requirements of zhan zhuang are carried over to the Taiji form, i.e., head erect, shoulders relaxed, elbows sunk down, chest relaxed, hips sunk, knees bent, etc. To correctly follow these basic and seemingly simple principles requires deep concentration. As one develops competence in the different aspects during standing, the feelings and sensations that arise can be transferred to the Taiji form and push hands.

**Barehand Forms – The Foundation of Chen Taijiquan Skills**

Form training has long provided the foundation of Chen Taijiquan’s step-by-step training method. Chen Wangting’s original art comprised of five barehand boxing routines that were passed down the next five generations. Chen Changxing (1771-1853), the fourteenth generation standard bearer amalgamated the five routines into the two routines still practiced today. These are the First Routine (Yilu) and the Second Routine (Erlu), also known as the Pao Cui or Cannon Fist form.

It has been suggested that some of Chen Wangting’s unique art was lost. In response to this, Chen Xiaoxing, Principle of the Chenjiaou Taijiquan School, refuted the suggestion. He stated that “the synthesis of the five routines was not a matter of losing the old forms but of putting the five together, absorbing the essence of each. The First Routine and the Cannon Fist contain the same essence as the original routines, preserving many of the movements and all of the movement principles” (Chen Xiaoxing, 2004). Today, Chen style Taijiquan barehand forms consist of two main frames: Old and New (Laojia and Xinjia, respectively). The Old Frame has been handed down relatively unchanged since the time of Chen Changxing, while famous seventeenth generation master Chen Fa-ke developed the New Frame. The New Frame incorporates more obvious silk-reeling movement, more power releasing actions and greater emphasis on qinna (joint-locking) techniques. Each consists of a First Routine and Cannon Fist. Where the First Routine is characterized by slow soft movements, the second is predominantly fast and powerful.

It is important to understand form training within the context of a larger system. Nowadays, people often equate knowing many forms with martial expertise. Adam Hsu (1998: 93) cautions that we should not confuse quantity with quality arguing, “students who spend their time learning multitudes of forms are wasting their time. This kind of practice, void of a true foundation, is no more than folk dance” and that “each form has its own purpose and each form is one step in a clear progression of training”.

At the beginning the student should seek to standardize movement as far as possible in accordance to Chen style Taijiquan’s basic requirements for each part of the body. Each of the requirements has practical implications for maintaining good health, for maximizing the efficiency of movements, for qi circulation, and for heightening the effectiveness of martial applications.

Primary importance is placed upon understanding the underlying movement principles and then progression to standardized movement. As this is accomplished, the next goal is to search for further realization of the internal
circulation of energy. Initially when you come to the fixed postures, for example, Lazily Tying Coat (Lan Zha Yee) or Single Whip (Dan Bian), in your mind you must very stringently adjust yourself according to the requirements for each part of the body. Everyone knows the requirements as they have been widely written about, it is the degree that is hard to realize. For instance, all experienced Taijiquan practitioners are familiar with the requirement to store the chest (han xiong), but how do you store? If you store too much, the waist collapses, but what is too much? It is not like carpentry where someone just gives you the measurements and you can do it accordingly.

“Only through persistent practice and strict adherence to correct principles can one achieve a stage where one is able to produce just the right amount of jing, change at will, and rotate with ease. One has to train hard in form practice so that the body becomes one single unit, which enables one movement activating all movements”. (Chen Xiaowang, 1990: 29)

In this context we can understand the logic behind Chen Taijiquan’s traditional emphasis upon the First Routine as the foundation form. The slower nature of the form permits the practitioner to pay attention to details; to make certain postures are precise; to test stability and balance during movements; to enhance lower body strength; and to become conscious of the circulation of qi throughout the body.

The benefits of this great attention to detail during form practice is summed up succinctly by Kauz (1989: 80): “Individual training of this nature enables the student to grow accustomed to the body mechanics involved in the performance of his techniques. He is not distracted by an opponents shifting about evasively or attempting to counterattack. He has time in which to work on problems concerned with correct foot placement, body position or pulling direction. In an actual match, the opportunity to perform a throw appears only briefly, allowing insufficient time to give attention to the many factors involved. Certain optimum patterns of movement must be established, and these can only become set if they are repeated almost endlessly”.

As the practitioner’s level of skill increases they may begin training the Cannon Fist routine to develop the explosive release of strength (bao fali) as well as their endurance and stamina (nai li). Taijiquan is built upon the model of hardness and softness complementing and alternating with each other. Consequently, the two forms represent a complete balanced system of...
hardness and softness. The Cannon Fist routine is physically very demanding with many instances of energy release (fajing), fast movements, sweeps, elbow and shoulder techniques and sudden changes of attack and defense. Where the first routine provides the means of developing internal energy, the second routine is said to consolidate and express this energy (Chen Xiaoxing, 2004).

**Push Hands – To Know One's Opponent**
Push hands is a two-person training drill created by Chen Wangting, the objective of which is to attain sensitivity to the movement and intention of an adversary while masking one’s own intention and energy. Attaining this heightened level of sensitivity has long been the goal of Chen Taiji exponents. In the “Song of the Canon of Boxing”, Chen Wangting states that one should seek to accomplish a level of ability where: “Nobody knows me, while I know everybody” (Chen Zhenglei, 1992 Vol 3: 1).

Harmonizing with the movements of an opponent, the practitioner works towards eliminating all tension and resistance within his own responses. In contrast to most external martial arts, the intention is not just to block an incoming force with greater force, but to “listen” to and “borrow” the opponent’s energy to defend oneself.

This listening skill is not solely dependent upon the sense of touch but of whole body awareness. Many people make the mistake of turning their heads to one side or closing their eyes while pushing hands. In actual fact, there must be a combination and coordination of sight, hearing and touch, and one is not exclusive of the others.
According to Chen Xiaowang (1990: 29), push hands and form practice are inseparable. “Whatever shortcomings one has in the form will certainly show up as weaknesses during push hands, giving an opponent the opportunity to take advantage. To this end, one needs to practice push hands; check on the forms; understand the internal force (jing); and learn how to express the force (fajing) as well as how to neutralize the force (hua-jing). If one is able to withstand confrontational push hands, then it is an indication that one has understood the underlying Taiji principles. Continuous training will lead to increased confidence. At this point one can step up one’s training and bring in supplementary training such as shaking the long pole; practicing with weapons such as the sabre, spear, sword, and staff; and doing single-posture training such as fajing.”

Understanding the trained energies of the body (jing) lies at the heart of push hands practice. Fundamental to achieving this is a careful study of Taijiquan’s Eight Methods or Ba Fa. From these eight methods or energies all skills and techniques are generated. The eight energies comprise four frontal methods (si zheng), which are quite familiar to most Taiji practitioners: warding (peng); diverting (lu); squeezing (ji) and pressing down (an).

The next four skills, also known as the four diagonal methods (si yu), are less familiar: plucking (cai); splitting (lie); elbowing (zhou) and bumping (kao). Mastering these four skills is important if one is to acquire a true understanding of the throwing and striking skills that Chen Taijiquan is famous for. Unlike the first four methods, cai, lie, zhou and kao are typically instilled when the student begins practicing at higher speeds and with more force (Berwick, 2000: 191-2).

Taiji push hands is built upon the foundation of forms practice. At this stage the practitioner should have a good understanding of how to use their body in accordance to Taijiquan’s strict movement principles. Training centers on the interchange of energies between the two participants. For example, when a partner uses press down, you ward off. When he uses squeeze in, you divert away. Chen Changxing stresses the importance of painstakingly studying the different energy methods in his “Song of Pushing Hands”: “Be conscientious about peng, lu, ji, an. Following each other above and below, difficult for people to enter”. (Zhu Tiancai, 1994: 281)

For generations, Chen Taiji boxers have sought to fulfil the push hands principles of “connecting, joining, sticking and following”; “neither letting go nor resisting.” (Wang Xian, 1998: 10) Push Hands allows the practitioner to put to the test the body postures trained in the forms. Correct body alignment enables one to control others and yet prevent others from entering one’s boundary.

Chen style Taijiquan traditionally uses five methods of Push Hands:

- **Wuan Hua** - fixed step - single- and double-handed exercises
- **Ding Bu** - fixed step - double-handed
Beyond these is the practice of free pushing or san tui.

Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904), chair of English literature at the Imperial University of Tokyo, eloquently expressed his fascination of certain Asian martial arts ideal of using sensitivity to overcome superior strength. Although he had probably never seen Taiji Push Hands, his description of the approach to training he saw in late eighteenth century Japan could have been written with it in mind: “What Western brain could have elaborated this strange teaching – never to oppose force to force, but only to direct and utilize the power of attack; to overthrow the enemy solely by his own effort? Surely none! The occidental mind appears to work in straight lines; the oriental in wonderful curves and circles. Yet how fine a symbolism of intelligence as a means to foil brute force!” (Hearn, 1989: 57-8)

Single-Posture Training

Once the theories underpinning the Taijiquan forms and push hands methods have been realized and trained until they are very familiar, then practice can be taken a stage further with the introduction of single-posture training. At this stage, the form is taken apart as selected movements are trained over and over again. By dismantling the form and drawing out the most efficient application and fajing movements, the practitioner can develop essential combat requirements for instance speed and accuracy.

For generations, Chen Taijiquan practitioners in Chenjiagou have followed an integrated system designed to increase martial ability. The process involves form, push hands and single-posture training and each has its unique part to play. While trained separately, the three are closely interconnected: “push hands is the means by which the accuracy of the form can be tested; form training is the foundation upon which effective push hands skills are built; single-posture training is the means by which martial skill is brought out”. (Gaffney and Sim, 2000: 136)

Chen Zhaokui outlined some of the reasons why single-posture practice must be included alongside the more widely seen form and push hands training, saying that:

- **Huang Bu (jin yi tui yi)** - single backward/forward step - double-handed
- **Da Lu** - moving step - low stance - double-handed
- **Luang Cai Hua** - free steps - double-handed
“Some applications of the movement cannot be used in push hands. For example elbow strikes, leg methods and also attacking vital points of an opponent, or *qinna*. Also some very fast *fajing* movements in the form cannot be done successively, as it would be too exhausting”. (Ma Hong, 1998: 21)

At first sight, single-posture training may seem tiresome and repetitive. Nonetheless, going over individual movements many times significantly increases the capacity to use them practically. Often single-posture practice focuses on building effective *fajing* ability. Even so, there should be no departure from the core principles of Taijiquan. Any movement where force is emitted must be characterized by looseness, pliability and elasticity, rather than rigidity and stiffness. Just because a movement is fast and powerful, the practitioner should not lose sight of the need for following the silk-reeling spiral path rather than straight-line movement (Ma Hong, 1998: 400).

Single-movement practice can be divided into several different groups, beginning with those actions performed while stationary. Examples in the Old Frame First Routine (*Laojia Yilu*) include the stamping movement that concludes the Buddha’s Warrior Attendant Pounds Mortar (*Jin Gang Dao Dui*), the Hidden Thrust Punch (*Yan Shou Hong Quan*) and the Green Dragon Out of the Water (*Qing Long Cu Shui*). Other single movements embrace those that entail stepping, for instance, stepping forward using *fajing* while training the energy methods of Taijiquan (e.g. *cai, lie, zhou, kao*), and retreating movements, as in the posture Step Back and Whirl Arms (*Dao Juan Hong*).

**Weapons Training – Short Weapons**

Weapons training has always played an important part in the Chen training curriculum. At the time of its creation, Chen style Taijiquan was practiced essentially to develop the martial and military skills of the villagers of Chenjiagou. Without a doubt the training would have greatly enhanced the health of the Taiji boxers but this did not provide the main reason for practicing the skill. In Chen Wangting’s day guns had yet to make an appearance; traditional weapons were still being carried onto the battlefield and used in actual combat.
In the present day, the weapon routines of the assorted Chinese martial arts are considered by most people only from the perspective of demonstrating or exercising in the park. Viewing the Chen weapon forms in this way shows a superficial appreciation of their fundamental nature. Preserved within each of the Chen weapons routine is a complex martial training manual. As well as the flexible sinuous movements, the forms include numerous dynamic actions, swift changes in tempo, and fierce chopping, slicing or thrusting movements.

Viewed in the light of the whole system, weapons training add to the barehand training of the Chen Taijiquan exponent by magnifying certain requirements. For instance, the mind and intention must be extended all the way through the length of the weapon; movements must stay relaxed, agile and efficient at the same time as controlling a weighty object; and footwork must be lively and responsive to permit rapid changes in the actual fighting sequence. Within the training curriculum of Chen style Taijiquan numerous weapons are still practiced today, including sword (jian), broadsword (dao), spear (qiang), halberd (guandao), pole, double-sword, double-broadsword and double iron mace.

The sword is one of the most ancient weapons in Chinese martial arts history. Archaeologists have uncovered swords from as far back as the Bronze Age. When the Terracotta Army was unearthed in the early Chinese capital Xian, a find dating back to the Qin dynasty more than two thousand years ago, the officers and generals were found carrying swords (Tian and Zhen, 2004: 102).

In Chen Taijiquan, the sword used is generally light in weight, with a flexible blade. For the Chen Taiji swordsman, success on the battlefield depended more upon skill, precision and speed. Chen Taijiquan contains one single straight sword form consisting of forty-nine postures. In his book *Chen Family Taiji*, Chen Zhenglei (1997: 217) explains: “The forty-nine postures can be sub-divided into thirteen basic techniques: thrusting downwards (zha); level or upward thrust (ci); pointing by flicking the wrist (dian); chopping (pi); slicing levelly or obliquely upwards (mo); sweeping (sao); neutralizing in a circular path (hua); circular deflection with point uppermost (liao); hanging (gua); pushing up (tuo); pushing (tui); intercepting (jie); and raising opponent’s weapon overhead (jia)”.

The sword’s flexibility allows the proficient swordsman to inflict injury from a great range of angles utilizing many diverse techniques. Its great versatility has led to the saying that there is “no gap the sword cannot enter, and no gap that another can enter.” (Chen Zhenglei, 1992 Vol 1: 180)"
The different weapons help to train the many diverse qualities essential in honing a “Taijiquan physique.” Practicing the Chen sword form allows an exponent to develop the ability to project energy in a relaxed manner to the tip of the sword. It also helps to create an efficient Taiji body, with repeated practice loosening the large joints such as the hips and shoulders, as well as helping to increase the suppleness of the wrists and hands.

Another of Chen Taijiquan’s short weapons is the Broadsword. Easily distinguishable from the sword, which is double-edged and light, the broadsword is single-edged and heavy. The resultant strength of the broadsword led to cutting movements that are large, expansive and powerful in nature. In appearance, using the broadsword is said to be “like splitting a mountain.” In character, the Broadsword is traditionally compared to a ferocious tiger, with each movement being more direct and easily understandable than the straight sword. This is reflected in the Chinese martial arts saying “Dao like a fierce tiger, jian like a swimming dragon.” (Chen Zhenglei, 1997 Vol 1: 217)

The Chen Taijiquan Broadsword form is short in length and dynamic in nature. Although classified as one of the system’s short weapons, the broadsword can cover a surprisingly long distance by utilizing explosive leaping and jumping movements. Movements can be performed in different ways depending upon the ultimate objective of practice. Often the routine is executed with long, low stances as a way of conditioning the body, increasing one’s power and speed.

As a means of overall body training, the explosive leaping and jumping movements have much in common with modern plyometric training exercises used by many of today’s elite sports performers. Simply put the combination of speed and strength is power. For many years coaches and athletes have sought to improve power in order to enhance performance. Throughout the last century and no doubt long before, jumping, bounding and hopping exercises have
been used in various ways to enhance athletic performance. In recent years this distinct method of training for power or explosiveness has been termed plyometrics (Flach, 2005: 14). In Chenjiagou, Taijiquan exponents have long understood this method of training to enhance the explosive reaction of the individual.

When training for combat use, however, using very low stances, prevents the dexterity and fleetness of footwork required in a real conflict. The Taiji boxer focusing on training the applications within the broadsword routine would usually practice in a higher posture to enhance mobility. Consequently, to achieve both martial and conditioning benefits, practitioners in Chenjiagou have traditionally trained over a range of heights.

**Long Weapons**

As well as its short weapons, Chen Taijiquan also has a number of weapons for long range combat, including the halberd, long pole and the “King of Weapons” – the spear. An often-cited phrase -“one hundred days to practice broadsword, one thousand days to practice spear” - reflects the intricacy and level of difficulty contained within the form (Chen Zhenglei, 1992 Vol 2: 52).

Also known as the “Pear-Flower Spear and White Ape Staff” (Li Hua Qiang Jia Bai Yuan Kun), the Chen Taijiquan spear is trained through a form that includes the functions of both spear and staff. The routine dates back to Chen Wangting, making it one of the earliest Taiji forms. In his comprehensive review of Taijiquan, *The Origin, Evolution and Development of Shadow Boxing*, Gu Liuxin cites the evidence gathered by historian Tang Hao, who came to the conclusion that the texts of the famous Ming general Qi Jiguang had a profound influence on Chen Wangting’s creation of Taijiquan. Qi’s military training text, in turn, documented the spear techniques of the Yang Family 24-Spear Form. The Yang family in question refers to a renowned female warrior of the Song dynasty, who used the form to avenge the slaying of her male relatives, so should not be confused with the Yang Taijiquan family (Gu Liuxin, 1996).

The earliest version of the Chen Taiji spear form followed the sequence of the Yang 24-movement form in both posture and name. Its uniqueness came as a result of the application of Taiji movement principles to the existing method. In the ensuing years, the Chen spear form has increased from 24 to 72 movements with the addition of a variety of staff movements.
Watching a skilled exponent performing the, its martial roots are immediately apparent. The overall tempo is forceful, direct and rapid with few movements being done slowly. Today it is highly unlikely that anyone would need to use the spear for its original combat purpose, yet the Chen family spear form remains a highly practical training tool. Spear practice enhances barehand skills by improving balance through the use of intricate and rapid stepping movements as well as developing upper body strength and overall flexibility.

Variously known as the “Spring and Autumn Broadsword,” the “Green Dragon Crescent Moon Broadsword” or simply the “Big Knife,” the halberd is one of the oldest weapons forms in the system. Characterized by strong and powerful movements, the halberd is a large and heavy weapon requiring a high degree of upper body strength and a stable root if it is to be manipulated freely. The Chen Taijiquan halberd trains the practitioner to move and be responsive in every direction. The halberd provides today’s practitioners with a tangible link to the earliest days of Chen Taijiquan. The favored weapon of Chen Wangting, it is recorded in the Genealogy of the Chen Family (Chen Zhenglei, 1999: 4), that:

Wangting, alias Zhouting, was a knight at the end of the Ming dynasty and a scholar in the early years of the Qing Dynasty. He was known in Shandong Province as a master of martial arts, once defeating more than a thousand bandits. He was the originator of the barehanded and armed combat boxing of the Chen school. He was a born warrior, as can be proved by the broadsword he used in combat.

While the individual names of the weapon or hand forms describe the movements, the halberd form is unique. Each of the thirty movements of this form is given a seven-character song or poem. When taken in their entirety,
they recount the story of General Guan, a famous warrior from the turbulent Three Kingdoms Period (A.D.25-220) of Chinese history. Consequently every time the form is practiced, his exploits are re-enacted. (Gaffney and Sim, 2000: 188)

Contemporary practitioners should not overlook the importance of the weapons routines as they offer a tangible link to past generations. “The forms are at once practical and aesthetic. Artistically pleasing to watch, the weapons routines are physically complex and demanding to complete. Many of the weapon forms have changed little since the time of Chen Wangting. Consequently they provide a window to the origins of Taijiquan and represent an important legacy to today’s Taijiquan practitioner” (Gaffney and Sim, 2000: 172).

Supplementary Equipment Training

_Zhan zhuang_, forms practice, silk-reeling exercises, push hands, etc., all lead to an increase in internal strength. As the practitioner reaches a more accomplished level, the use of supplementary exercises with a variety of training equipment can further amplify this energy. Skills such as neutralizing, yielding, _qinna_ and _fajing_ are more efficient when backed up by greater physical strength.

Past generations of masters placed great importance upon supplementary power training methods (_xing gong_). In Chenjiagou, in the garden where Yang Luchan, the founder of Yang style Taijiquan, is said to have learned from Chen Changxing, there is still a stone weight weighing about eighty kilogramic that they are reputed to have trained with to increase their hand strength.

Also popular, to this day, is the exercise of shaking a long pole as a means of increasing the amount of power that can be transmitted from the dantian out to the extremities. Cut from the baila tree, the long pole is typically in the region of four yards long and roughly an inch and a half in diameter. This type of wood is flexible and springy, allowing the practitioner to transmit force through it. It is said that Chen Fa-ke performed three hundred repetitions of this exercise daily, as well as at least thirty rounds of the handform.

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Conclusion
Chen Village Taijiquan is a unique example of Chinese martial culture, providing a tangible link to past generations of Taiji practitioners. Changed little through the passing generations, this art is today drawing increasing numbers of practitioners attracted by its characteristics of power, grace, and agility. To succeed, modern practitioners would be well advised to look to the appropriate method for their stage of development and not to be in a hurry to learn new things. Above all, practice must be patient, systematic, and persistent if an advanced level of ability is to be attained. To quote an old Chinese proverb: “One day’s chill does not result in three feet of ice”. (Gaffney and Sim, 2000: 148)

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