



Xin Qi Shen Dojo

WUJI.COM
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Seattle, WA 98117

Spring 2008

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Thank You Five Willow Tai Chi Association

February 23rd the members of Xin Qi Shen Dojo were invited to celebrate the Chinese New Year (Year of the Earth Rat) by the Five Willow Tai Chi Association. The Five Willows group has been around in an informal way since the early 1970s. They've made great efforts over the years to host Chinese New Year celebrations and demonstrations with the various clubs in Seattle. They were instrumental in setting up a demonstration for Master Gao Fu at the Nipponkan Theatre when she arrived so everyone would have the opportunity to see her.

The Five Willow Association was the result of Shan-Tung Hsu's (Sandy Hsu) students forming this association so they could bring Sandy's teacher professor Tao Ping Siang to Seattle. Professor Tao was a disciple of the great Zhen Manjing. Sandy was teaching Tai Chi in Seattle in the early 1970's at the same time Master Tchoung was here.

During the summer the Five Willow Tai Chi group holds a practice session, welcome to all, in Capitol Hill's Volunteer park.

Shan-Tung Hsu's Speech

Sandy made a very good point at the New Year's celebration. One I think is extremely important for everyone to keep in mind as they study with various teachers.

I wasn't lucky enough to meet or study with Professor Tao but from Bob Iden and others I heard his Gong Fu was very high. The video clip we have of him doing Tuishou is excellent (you should watch it). Anyhow, Sandy mentioned that master Tao didn't believe in Qi Gong or that it was not needed to practice Taiji. (I've heard this about several masters)

Sandy went on to point out that Tao did Qi Gong only he either didn't know it or called it by something else. But, he was doing Qi Gong all the time. I've seen this with many teachers in various arts. They would down-talk something yet if you watched them they were doing it. An example was Aikijitsu Soke Don Angier who said he didn't believe in Ki Ai and it wasn't real, yet during the workshops I witnessed he used it all the time!

My suspicion was that Master Tao was at a level where everything was natural, thus nothing special. He was used to a level of higher sensitivity and that was his awareness. It was just everyday to him.

Another point Sandy made was that it wasn't enough to just perform and go through the movements of the forms. Research them, study them, and try to understand them. Practice, practice, practice, but with intent and mindfulness. That's the way not only to increase our skill level but also our mental and physical health.

Chen Taiji Quan

Saturdays

9-10 am Chan Si Gong
10-11 am 96 Form Work
11-12 Advanced session
Starting May:

Chen Taiji Broadsword
11-11:30 am

Yang Taiji Quan

Tuesdays

6-7 Emei Qi Gong
7-8 Form & Partner
8-9 Advanced
Starting May:

Taiji Spear
8-8:30 pm

Bagua Zhang

Thursdays

6-7 24 Animal Palms
7-8 8 Palm Changes
8-9 Roushou
Starting May:

Bagua 8 Sword
Changes
6:45-7:15 pm

Aikido

Wednesdays

6-8 basics
8-9 advanced

Qi Gong

Saturday 9-10 am
Tuesdays 6-7 pm

KEEPING THE DOJO TRADITION ALIVE

DO: (Tao) the way, JO: place. A place to study the Dao. A place to study a tradition and forge one's mind, body, and spirit.

The idea of the traditional dojo seems to be dying. I don't consider commercial schools dojos since those schools are there primarily to make money. The Japanese traditional dojo was to train apprentices and was usually in someone's home, backyard, or an alley. In China you met in the park, regardless of weather. No overhead (literally), sessions were year round due the teacher's sincerity. (Frankly, on cold snowy days I'd stay home!)

The traditional dojo or teaching method had three components: A tradition of the art that was being passed on, a sincere skilled teacher, and a dedicated student. It wasn't a matter of money but sincerity on all sides.

Master Gao Fu told me about her first lesson with Master Feng. After her teacher Master Tian died, Feng had accepted her as a student. They had arranged lessons in a particular park. The first day of the lessons it was below freezing and snowing. It took Master Gao two buses to get to the park but she didn't think twice about it. She went. There, in the snow, under a tree was Master Feng. They found a partially covered space and began the lesson in the freezing cold. Afterward they went for tea. Now-a-days we're told not to practice in the cold, heat, wind, etc. These arts would be lost by now if that was the case.

The Japanese dojo was a special place to practice, train, learn from a master and pursue the art sincerely. Lessons were not paid for, any fee was to keep the space open and available, students paid what they could. You also had to prove you deserved to stay there with your dedicated practice. Also students were expected to conduct themselves honorably outside the dojo. You also have to have character references to be accepted in a traditional dojo. It wasn't business or income oriented but art and tradition based. Members who weren't able to show up often would pay token dues to keep the place going. There were

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no testing or promotion fees either. Not being a business, any extra money at the end of the year was used for a banquet or to start a scholarship fund.

The times are different and things have changed. Now-a-days, there is rent and overhead, prospective students look at what they can buy and what they get for their money.

They want to buy the art instead of becoming a student or apprentice of the art. There is a thought that if you pay for it you'll get it, regardless of whether you practice or not. The art, tradition, or lineage isn't as much a concern. Though this has a lot to do with diminishing income and very much the modern shopping mentality. The traditional dojo, its teaching, lineage, and wealth of information is no longer the objective. Also schools are judged on how nice the place looks instead of the teachings.

Now the bottom line is; can I pay just for one class this month? Or, the class is too early can I come late? It's "I want to buy a form (instead of learning the art). This is what I want to learn, I don't care about your experience, teach me this."

Did you know many of the schools in town are keeping their doors open by subletting the space or having school auctions several times a year? Some schools closed last year due to not being commercial enough, rent is going up. The integrity of the traditional dojo can't stay open unless the teacher is independently wealthy. To have a school now your gong fu has to be in promotion and marketing instead of the art or teaching.

The traditional Dojo is dying. It costs too much for teachers to share their art, train apprentices, or focus *solely* on their students. On the other hand would-be, dedicated students don't have time or can't afford to study.

The modern dojo consists of a professional teacher trying to make a living or pay for the space and overhead. Dedicated students carve out a day or two to practice and train. Amidst this, there are many lookyloos and shoppers visiting the dojo which help keep the bills paid.



What's Happening?

First, a big 'Thank You' for supporting the opening of Emerald City Gardens.

It's been quite a winter with the planning, painting, and set up. I'm sure many of you noticed my exhaustion and fatigue at some of the classes.

Now that the nursery is up and running I'm working on coming back to the dojo as much as I can. To start with I'll be back leading the Saturday Chen Taiji continuing session as Tom and Brian teach the 96 form. I will continue to teach the basic Bagua Session on Thursdays 6-7. Once we move outside I'll be leading the Yang Long form once in a while on Tuesdays. I'm still trying to figure out the most efficient use of my time and teaching at the dojo. As the nursery succeeds I look forward to offering sessions (I teach) as quarterly training courses instead of the monthly beginning sessions.

As usual, and with weather permitting, most classes starting May will be moving to lower Woodland Park. Morning sessions may move earlier if the weather decides to warm up a bit.

This spring/summer I'll be teaching different weapons to different classes. Monday's will be Bagua and Aikido short staff followed by the advanced class. Yang Taiji people will be learning the Pear-Flowering Spear also known as the White Ape Staff, while the Chen Taiji group will be learning broadsword. Thursday Bagua will start learning the Sun style sword 8 changes. I will be continuing to teach the advanced classes of Sanshou, Tuishou, and Dalu. We've make quite a lot of progress over the winter and we have lots to work on for the summer. Presently I've decided not to offer weekend workshops unless there is a request for a topic by 4 or more. As I work the ECG Sundays I need to find someone to cover for me when I teach.



Myths, Legends, Reality

We need to see past the wrapping and examine what's real, what could be real, what isn't real, what makes sense, and what matters.

I recently got an email update from Sonny. Sonny is one of the advanced members who is now working in Beijing. He's been fortunate to find and be accepted as a student to a couple of highly skilled instructors. I asked him about the level of practitioners and teachers he's met so far. Similar to what Gao Fu said, he mentioned that the most noticeable ones in the park really aren't the good ones. He mentioned there is an abundance of Chen family cousins etc. in the park, nice silk jammies, with a sign stating their official lineage and family connection. When asked to do push hands or application they don't do that. He noted that many of them look like they are doing Shaolin instead of Taiji.

I wrote about this before and here goes again:

Anyone (regardless of official certification or secret documents) studying Taiji, no matter how shallow, are descendent somehow from the great Taiji Masters. All Yang Taiji practitioners are in the lineage of Yang Lu Chan. All Chen Taiji students descend from the lineage of Chen Chanxin. And actually all Taiji practitioners are descendent from Chen Chanxin! Bagua people are from Dong Hai Quan and whatever lineage of Daoist Qi Gong that inspired him to create Bagua Zhang. Whether you have the paperwork or not, you're on the list and lineage (maybe not in the will).

Marketing seems to outshine any sense of credibility and skill. Now, if I tell you that this particular form is over 4 thousand years old there is this assumption that it must be the best! If I tell you that this form is the original form the family practiced and hasn't changed, there seems to be a sense that it must be the best. How un-Daoist, no change? Painting by numbers. Or better yet have you heard the story of a child asking her mom why she cut the roast a certain way before putting it in the pan? She answered that was the way her mother taught her. Finally she asked her mother, why it was cut that way and her mom reminded her that they only had a small pan and they had to cut the roast in order to fit into it.

This particular movement was practiced by the old Daoist sages 3000 years ago. Wow. Well how nice, how do we really know this? Why is it important that they did this and we're copying them? Hasn't anyone improved upon it yet? Maybe it wasn't the qi gong that lengthened their life, maybe it's because they didn't have to inhale car fumes? Maybe it was because they didn't bathe. Maybe because they had to hunt for whatever they ate (no grocery stores or cars). Maybe our information is skewed by folklore, tradition, cultural outlook, and fantasies.

One of Master Gao's classmates had a good take on this. He said it was important to know the teacher has the whole package of the art and perhaps comes from a good lineage. However he said most people stop there instead of doing more research. Wow, you're from a famous master. Was he a good teacher? What was he famous for? Could he teach his skill? Were you a good student? Were you his top student? Did you learn the entire art? Were you learning in a group or individually? Old doesn't cut it, pureblood doesn't cut it. (Haven't you ready Harry Potter?)

It's important to look at the teacher and the students. Are they any good? Do they exhibit traits that you'd like from the art? Kindness, health, skill? I think these requirements are more important. They need to walk the talk instead of talk the walk.

What saddens me is that many are being given misinformation and made-up histories, or lineage to get people in the door. If you can't afford to pay for a particular yearly membership, training, or test, then there's no hope of your becoming a certified teacher. Only the wealthy can afford certification. Your skill and commitment doesn't matter, your wallet does. I knew several excellent Aikido instructors with years of experience beyond the rest not able to fly to the summer camps for testing. Their skill level is much higher than many of the high rankers. I see this happening with all the arts. Pay \$2000 and you can be certified as a master; skill level doesn't matter.

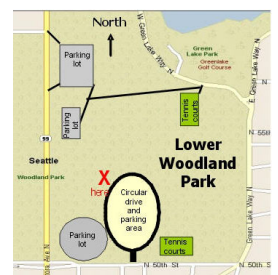
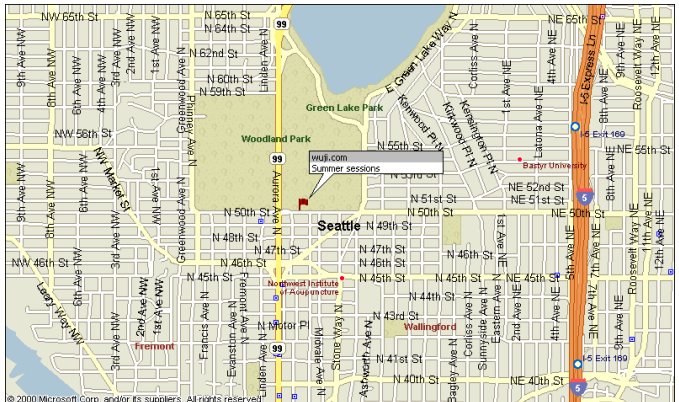


*Andy's
Qi Gong
Introduction
June 15th
10-noon
\$35*

*May Classes:
Bagua & Aiki Short Staff
Bagua Circling Sword
Taiji Spear
Chen Saber*

*Bandon Retreat
August 15,16,17th
book your room asap*

Advanced Members
We have 2 advanced sessions per week.
Tuesday 8-9 pm
Saturday 11-noon
If able, attend all. These are sessions devoted to 7&8 sanshou, Tuishou, and Da Lu. It's my goal, over the next year, to advance the level of our senior members and instructors by learning to mix the various partner sets and then move into free style and free sparring/play.
Advanced means that, advanced. Members in these classes are held to a higher standard and expected to work harder and catch up to the more advanced members. These are not learning session but training sessions. Participants must know the Da Lu and 7&8 sanshou.



Classes moving outside May

When not raining
We will be in lower Woodland Park
50th & Woodland Park Ave. N
Due to popular request we will be holding classes further in the park, away from the street noise. This is where we held classes two years ago.