

CHAPTER VII: CONCLUSION

How many Taijiquan players does it take to change a lightbulb?

A hundred: one to change the bulb and 99 others to say

"That's good, but in our style we do it a little differently."

Summary

The purpose of this study was to sketch out a general profile of the profession of Taijiquan teaching in America. An extensive survey instrument was sent to 380 teachers, and returned by 216. The plan of analysis and interpretation was primarily qualitative; that is, considerable attention was paid to what respondents *said*, not merely to which way they might have gone on binary items. Holistic, inductive analysis of quotive data led to most of what comprises the body of this dissertation, including discernment of categories within a definition of Taijiquan and the taxonomy of effective teaching practices. In addition, selected survey items were aggregated to form composite variables, or indexes, which provided some measure of respondents' relative positions along thematically derived continua. These indexes, together with groups defined by responses to categorical items such as gender or income level, served as the basis for statistical comparisons.

Three questions organized the inquiry and the design of the survey instrument. They will be repeated here so that the findings of the study may be viewed in summary form as having provided at least tentative answers to the original research questions:

1. Who is teaching?

Specifically, can we characterize the population of Taijiquan teachers in the United States according to experience, training, and various demographic measures?

Chapter IV offered a general profile of the respondents to this study. The researcher believes that they were as representative of the general population of Taijiquan teachers as possible, given the limitations of time and resources. Possible biasing factors include the length of the survey instrument, the lack of ethnographic triangulation in the form of follow-up interviews and observations, and the necessity of building the initial mailing list from a core of contacts in the eastern region of the country. Nevertheless, this study constitutes at least a prologue to qualitative research on Taijiquan instruction. Extrapolating from respondents, therefore, it might be ventured that Taijiquan teachers in America in 1988 tended to be well-educated men between 30 and 50. Women comprised 21% of the original mailing list. Instructors with Chinese names comprised 13% of the original pool. Fifteen percent were educators; nearly 10% worked in some aspect of social services (counselor, psychologist, etc.), 6% were artists, designers, photographers, etc., 5% were in skilled crafts, 5% in mathematics or scientific professions; 5% were in management. Taijiquan teachers in this country do not seem to come at present from the ranks of blue collar workers.

Just under 20% listed their primary occupation as martial arts or Taijiquan instructor, although only 9% are supporting themselves solely with Taijiquan instruction. Eighteen percent make more than \$10,000 a year, but 40% teach for less than \$1,000 a year, and some of those teach free. So, though they may have a “professional” approach, most teachers are not professionals.

Respondents taught an average of 2.5 sessions per week, had an average of 10–30 students, and charged an average of \$5.30 per hour. Only 13 of 216 respondents had studied with only one teacher. Seventy-three percent had studied with one or more teachers outside their primary teacher’s lineage, and the remainder studied with teachers within their teacher’s immediate lineage. One fourth of all respondents said the concept of lineage was of no importance to them. Only one third said it was personally important. Forty-two percent had studied only one style of Taijiquan, and 23% had studied only one form. On the other end of the spectrum, 18% had studied more than three main forms.

If respondents are representative, Yang style was taught in 76% of all classes for beginners in America in 1988; a Yang short form in 54% of beginner’s classes. Nearly one third of all respondents taught *only* a Yang style short form (30%); another 29% taught it in addition to another form or forms. Forty-five percent taught a traditional Yang style form; Chen style was taught by 14%, and Wu, Hao, and/or Sun were taught by 8%. The average respondent had studied 13 years and had been teaching for 8 years.

2. What is Taijiquan in America?

That is, how do teachers in this country view Taijiquan, and by extension, present it to others? Does it seem to be something other than what it is in the culture to which it is indigenous?

Chapter I provided background for this study, including a brief history of Taijiquan in China, highlights of its exponential growth in America over the last three decades, an introductory discussion of issues facing the American Taijiquan community, and a synopsis of previous research on Taijiquan.

Major points related to the view of Taijiquan by teachers in America were:

- In China, Taijiquan is classified as an internal or soft style martial art in which expertise is based on relaxation and the ability to cultivate and direct *qi* with the mind. While there is a consensus (58%) that practice of applications is essential to mastery, one in four respondents disagreed. One in four also does not teach push-hands, and 20% percent of the respondents to this study said they never practice self-defense applications in their classes.

- The historical record shows that the forms of Taijiquan trace back only to the mid-17th century of the modern era. The Chen family arranged and preserved the forms and invented push-hands, and the Yang family popularized the art in the 19th and 20th centuries. In all likelihood, the name “Taijiquan” was devised by Wu Yuxiang (1812-1880), who also articulated its fundamental principles. Many American instructors seem to hold a more mythologized view of the history of the art.

- Taijiquan in America began with Chinese teachers teaching Chinese students in Chinese enclaves. Among these was Choy Hok Peng (1886-1957). The first American exponent of the art was Sophia Delza, who began teaching in New York in 1960. Cheng Man-ch'ing has had the most profound influence on American Taijiquan. His Yang short form is still more widely practiced in this country than any other form.

- In its early years in America, students were at the mercy of the few available teachers, and from some of them inherited biases against other styles of Taijiquan as well as political prejudices arising out of the split of China into the PRC and ROC (Taiwan). Even today, those prejudices exert a divisive influence in the American Taijiquan community among players who are largely unconscious of the origins of the views they espouse.

- Today, a climate of exchange between mainland China and the United States has led many Taijiquan players to visit the mainland, and encouraged many Chinese players to visit or remain here. Ties between the flourishing *wushu* community in its native land and the fledgling community in America are growing stronger, especially through gatherings of players for tournaments and seminars.

Chapter III was a systematic, inductive content analysis of definitions of Taijiquan offered by respondents. All elements of all definitions were included in the analysis; the contributions of single voices were seen as potentially representative of a like proportion in the population of teachers, as a whole. Six descriptors emerged from the analysis as *placeholders* in a comprehensive formula for defining Taijiquan:

- Taijiquan is **unitive**: 70% of all definitions referred to the harmony of body, mind, spirit, nature, etc., to meditation, inner awareness and self-development or related terms. This aspect of the art must be regarded as the primary descriptor in America. One respondent, at the end of the questionnaire, summarized the unitive approach in the following way:

I am meeting so many people who are hungry for a sense of sacred connection with something which transcends the mundanity of daily life. People are seeking spiritual growth. Trying to “get home.” Taijiquan is a beautiful vehicle for this. To me it is a way of embodying the quest for integration. I think it can be a profoundly life-changing, deepening, expansive study. I think it can help people to perceive their own strength, power, peace, and beauty. I think it helps people to live their lives more consciously and this is the most inspirational thing I know of: to get more conscious, more authentic, more genuine, less afraid (280).

- Taijiquan is **martial**: 48% of all definitions used terms related to martiality or self-defense.
- Taijiquan is **healthful**: 45% of all definitions refer to the benefits of health, exercise, fitness, therapy and related terms. In Chapter IV, a list of the top 25 health conditions which respondents reported as having been helped by Taijiquan was tabulated. The top five were:
 1. relief of back or spinal conditions (reported by 93 respondents)
 2. high blood pressure, hypertension (47)
 3. stress-related disorders (41)
 4. arthritis, rheumatism (40)
 5. knee problems (34)

Such a consensual listing might be potentially useful as an aid in focusing subsequent research on Taijiquan's health benefits.

- Taijiquan is **mentative**: 28% of all definitions contained references to philosophical concepts such as *yin* and *yang*, the eight trigrams and five phases of change, Daoism, etc. "Mentative" was coined as an adjectival form of "mentation," implying the application of mental or philosophical constructs to physical action. Taijiquan is a system of applied philosophy. Eighty-one percent of all respondents said they introduce students to the *Taijiquan Classics*. Yet the complement of that same statistic is the 18% who said they do not introduce students to the *Classics*.

- Taijiquan is **relaxational**: 23% of all definitions used terms related to relaxation. In addition, relaxation was listed by 87% as the benefit of practice most emphasized in instruction. Relaxation (*sung*, softness, non-resistance, etc.) was also the classical principle respondents said they emphasize most with beginners. Methods for inducing relaxation were mentioned as the most effective teaching techniques by the greatest number of respondents, and "Receptivity" (alternate term for "relaxation") thus became the first category in the taxonomy of effective Taijiquan teaching outlined in Chapter V.

- Taijiquan is **energetic**: 17% of all definitions used the terms *qi* or energy, and related concepts.

The logical synthesis of the foregoing analysis was to present a comprehensive definition of Taijiquan, derived from 191 definitions:

Taijiquan is an energetic, relaxational, mentative, healthful, martial, and unitive art of movement .

Actually, comprehensiveness in definitions was the exception, rather than the rule. No definitions included concepts from all categories, even though some respondents went on at length. Only five definitions contained five of the six categories, and the mode (63 definitions) was to include concepts from only two categories.

3. How is Taijiquan taught in this country?

Specifically, to what extent do teachers pay attention to the design, delivery and evaluation of instruction? Is the art of teaching practiced in conjunction with this art of movement?

Chapter V, "A Taxonomy of Effective Teaching," was the result of a systematic, inductive content analysis of responses to an item that asked respondents to describe the most effective thing they did with beginners. The responses showed how the best of instructional moments touch and thereby reveal the presence of a theoretical model of effective teaching. The model is proposed as a comprehensive categorization of Taijiquan teaching strategies. It incorporates the conditions of psycho-motor learning: perception of a model, instruction, practice, and correction. Its primary categories are Receptivity, Demonstration, Repetition (Practice), Individualization, Creative Delivery ("Three Vs": Verbalization, Visualization, and Variety), Empowerment, and Mutuality.

The art of teaching is practiced by many instructors in conjunction with the art of movement they profess. But some Taijiquan teachers seem to have adopted what they believe to be a traditional attitude that deprecates intellectual activity or anything associated with it. In response to items asking about whether they assign readings in their classes and which books they recommended, there was an undertone suggesting that books were not important, or that they didn't read books anymore, or that one should just "do it." Paradoxically, respondents reported owning on the average 22 books apiece on Taijiquan. In response to an item concerned with instructional planning, only 24% said they plan a series of lessons out in advance; 55% come to class with only a general idea of what they plan to cover, and two-thirds never give their students a written course description or syllabus of what they might expect to learn in each class.

As this research was conducted without a narrow focus, but was broadly directed at describing a profile of Taijiquan instruction and outlining issues of concern to the Taijiquan community, a relatively large number of statistical comparisons were run on various groups defined by selected survey items and the indexes described in Chapter VI. Briefly, the most significant findings of the quantitative analysis of data were:

- teachers who are more open to variety and diversity know that *teaching* as well as Taijiquan requires the application of personal energy and hard work.
- those whose orientation tends to be more martial tend to be more diverse in their approach to the community of players and to the art: less martial players tend to reach out less toward the larger community or toward

diversity. It is likely that many in this latter group stick with a single form, for example. They also practice less than those who are more martially oriented.

- reflective teachers, those who think about the requirements of the teaching process, tend also to be realistic about the work it takes to make progress in Taijiquan.

- Twenty-five percent of all respondents did not teach push-hands. Since push-hands is the primary way to develop sensitivity and refinement of the ability to read and interpret energy, this should be a major concern to the community. It means that the students of those teachers are also not necessarily getting an exposure to that essential part of the art.

- the proportion of women to men among Taijiquan teachers is probably increasing. The community has a responsibility to be sensitive to the needs of particular groups, and to consider carefully what might be done to improve the delivery of instruction so as to encourage all students.

- Chen stylists scored higher than Yang stylists on a measure of martiality, and lower on a measure of dependence on lineage.

Judging from responses, individual teachers are for the most part warm, generous, open, deeply devoted to the art and interested in anything that would further it. Their teaching approach, however, tends to be narrowed in one way or another. Some are vociferously martial, some are exclusively unitive, some stress the mentative (philosophical) to the detriment of the fundamental physical aspect of the art. The total population of teachers, however, is just the opposite. Though divided by politics, stylistic biases, and differing points of view, taken together, teachers, such as the 216 in this study, present a comprehensive view of the art. Through exchange,

Taijiquan teachers might heal the divisiveness that comes from too much insistence on the correctness of single vantage points.

Suggestions

The intended audience of this research was the population of Taijiquan teachers in this country. Those who participated in it will be sent a summary of its findings. The complete dissertation will of course be available through the services of University Microfilms, Inc. (UMI), and segments will undoubtedly be submitted to various journals in circulation in the Taijiquan community.. In whatever form it reaches its intended audience, it will have two broad areas of application: first, in assisting teachers as they think about their teaching and as they participate in the continuing evolution of the art; and second, in assisting subsequent researchers. These two areas will be addressed separately in this section.

Recommendations for Taijiquan Teachers.

Balance.

It might be said that many respondents “approach the universal through an emphasis on the particular:” there seems to be a tendency to focus on a *partial art*. This is apparent not just in those who choose to be non-martial, but also in those who are so martially inclined that they neglect the relaxational, the mentative, and the unitive. This research suggests that a balanced approach would be the most desirable, particularly within each category of a comprehensive definition of Taijiquan: an approach that goes to no extreme, yet leaves out nothing. Table VII-1, illustrates the value of finding this middle way. The same concept of balance applies also to the

indexes in Chapter IV. Those who strike a balance—whose scores on the indexes (other than the Magical Thinking Index) place them near the middle of the range—probably present the least skewed picture of Taijiquan.

Table VII-1

The Middle Way and the Risks of Extremism in Approaches to Taijiquan

Too Little	Balanced	Too Much
mechanistic	Energic	magic
inflexible	Relaxational	anemic
calisthenic	Mentative	cerebral
deficient	Healthful	pseudo-scientific
sophistic	Martial	pugilistic
superficial	Unitive	religiose

Underqualified Teachers.

One third of all respondents independently mentioned the problem of the proliferation of unqualified teachers. There is much that individual teachers can do to come to the assistance of players who are teaching with insufficient experience:

- avoid criticizing them. Instead, invite them to a class as a guest, and introduce them to more experienced players: not as a way of humiliating them, but as a way of gently bringing them into community with others who are enthusiastic about the art and devoted to practice;
- discuss issues of concern with other teachers;
- begin considering the need for tacit if not implicit standards for Taijiquan teachers;
- encourage players who are not in communication with others to come to gatherings where they can feel the sense of community, fellowship, and commitment to the art. The need for education can perhaps be satisfied by connection.

Also, teachers would help alleviate the problem of underqualified teachers in the future if they supervised their own students in their first teaching experiences, offering guidance and feedback.

Study the Body.

The lowest rating of the importance of a benefit to instruction (see Figure III-2) was given to sports/performance. This is not unexpected, but it could be disquieting. If teachers choose not to see Taijiquan as a sport, or at least in the category of exercise or “physical education,” and there is sufficient reason to suspect that a fair number do not, then it is probable that they will also not be making use of the body of practical knowledge available in the fields of athletic training, exercise physiology, sport psychology, injury

prevention and rehabilitation, and related sciences. They will most likely be teaching students with a mix of techniques gleaned from their own teachers, who also in all likelihood had no specific contemporary training in exercise science, and from their high school gym classes. This is a somewhat frightening prospect. One respondent commented extensively in this regard:

Typically, the standout performers of most physical activities have vague or highly erroneous notions of the psycho-physical processes which underlay their skill. Few standout performers surface as standout teachers or coaches. A look at the great teachers in sports shows that the teaching “greats” and the coaching “greats” were only better than average performers who worked very long and hard for their skill.

It is my opinion that if Taijiquan is to be widely and permanently accepted in the West, its spokespeople must include those who are soundly educated in the life sciences and psychology. This is certainly true if Taijiquan is to be acknowledged by the medical, educational, and scientific communities. Those who hope to foster the growth of Taijiquan may be well-advised to spend less time chasing the old masters around the world, and more time training themselves in the above mentioned disciplines (156).

Specifically, Taijiquan teachers need to pay attention to the actual physical structure of the body, rather than to some abstract conception. The spine, for example, in its healthiest, most natural condition, is not straight. The knees, also, must not be permitted to rotate, but must be constrained by a process of *rehabilitation* to function as hinges in the translation of the body's axis, while the hips must be relaxed so as to be able to accept their rightful responsibility for rotation.

Study the Art of Teaching.

Taijiquan instructors would do well to familiarize themselves with sources on adult education (*andragogy*, or what Lenz, 1982 p. 23, prefers to call “anthropagogy”), and on instructional design. Because their experience is limited to their own schooling, many Taijiquan teachers may be basing their instructional approach on *pedagogy*: educational practices appropriate to children. Lenz (1982), for example, points out that adults have special needs and proclivities, such as a tendency to be self-directing, a tendency to be problem-oriented rather than subject-oriented, and a desire to rely on their own experience rather than on a teacher's knowledge or authority (p. 24). Since adults constitute the primary student population for Taijiquan, teachers should familiarize themselves with some of the strategies that work well with that population, such as:

- involving individuals in group processes,
- providing more written information,
- interactive teaching methods, such as projects, in-class group work, and individual correction or feedback sessions,
- enhancing memory through meaningful association, appropriate pacing, and frequent utilization (repetition and application),
- emphasizing personal practice and supporting it through, for instance, suggesting themes or exercises to concentrate on and encouraging discussion of individual difficulties and insights.

American teachers do not necessarily have exposure to learning theory or alternative models of instructional design. They may be relying on models gleaned from their own experiences of schooling, which do not guarantee

that they have seen models of teaching that work with any but elementary age students; nor have they necessarily seen ways to engage their students actively, and to step down from the position of authority. Their model of a teacher might be that of a highly intellectual and remote authority spouting footnotes from a dais. If one has only experienced the role of a student as "passive learner," one will probably be busily engaged in recreating that experience for one's own students. Taijiquan teachers could profit from an exposure to better teaching habits, and in this area, could learn much from one another.

There is an adage in Taijiquan that there are no shortcuts. This may be true regarding the development of personal *gongfu*, but there are definitely "long cuts" created by teachers who do not sequence or deliver instruction so as to enable the most effective and efficient course of learning in their students. Consciousness of the need for instructional sequencing, the need to structure learning hierarchies, and the need for documentation so as to empower students and heighten their motivation are among the considerations that go along with the ideal of a thoughtful, "Reflective Teacher."

Further Research.

- A theoretical investigation of the domain or domains of learning to which Taijiquan might belong would be an interesting focus for further research. The purpose of Taijiquan training is to transcend the physical dynamics inherent in the word "motor" as well as the simple application of

thought to movement. To which domain does this art belong? What is there between body and mind not implied in the term "psychomotor"? What is the "mechanism" through which Taijiquan attempts to lessen human reliance on *li* (purely physical, muscular, mechanical force) and to develop the subtle capacity to loosen the flow of *qi* and lead it with awareness?

- Harrow (1972) attempts a taxonomy of the psychomotor domain, but much of what she writes does not seem pertinent to Taijiquan, even at the fundamental level of basic motor activities. Another fertile field for speculation and research would be the component skills of Taijiquan. A respondent said "the teaching of the Thirteen Primary or Elemental Postures is perhaps a most effective thing in the beginning of the fundamental course and from time to time throughout thereafter" (316) The movements or energies associated with what are referred to as the 13 postures could be considered a basic vocabulary of Taijiquan motor skills. While Chapter V organized teaching strategies into a comprehensive and systematic scheme, another taxonomy is possible for the skills required to perform Taijiquan. What movements are fundamental, which stances, which attitudes, which sub-routines? This would be an intriguing focus for further research.

- The "Taxonomy of Effective Taijiquan Teaching" elaborated in Chapter V bears certain relationships to the relatively large body of literature on effective teaching, and teacher accountability and performance evaluation. The *Teaching Effectiveness Evaluation (TEE) Project: Final Report* by the Group for the Study of Effective Teaching at the School of Education, UNC-Chapel Hill (1983), for instance, even contains a "Taxonomy of Effective Classroom Teaching." There is little similarity between the two taxonomies,

however—perhaps because the TEE Project concentrated on pedagogy rather than anthropagogy (adult education); perhaps because it was generic rather than focused on a particular subject; perhaps because it focuses more on informational or intellectual rather than on psychomotor skills; perhaps because it was concerned with advocating an achievable average of teaching performance on an institutional level rather than superlative individual teaching. The present study does not owe its basis to this literature, however, but resulted from the inductive analysis of data provided by respondents. Further research might concentrate on the connections between the literature on teacher effectiveness and the approach taken in this study, as a contribution both to the literature on teacher effectiveness in general and to Taijiquan teaching in particular. Replication of the taxonomy presented here in another sample of the population of Taijiquan teachers might reinforce its claim to representativeness, comprehensiveness, and its consequent validity—or it might point to a reorganization of the model, or to an extension of it by the discovery of further taxonomic categories.

- Western players are not generally comfortable with the model of teaching familiar to Chinese players, involving more rote learning, less intellectualizing, and a greater emphasis on the family comprised of one's teacher, the teacher's lineal forebears, and one's fellow students. Westerners have difficulty with the injunction to "just do the movements." They are driven by their desire for extensive information regarding how Taijiquan works, what it is, and why it must be done a certain way. This is like the behavior of children: always asking questions, never content simply to do movements because a teacher says so. This could be viewed as a weakness. It could also be that the Western penchant for information and intellectual as

well as physical understanding is one of the strengths Westerners bring to the study of this art. The child that asks questions is showing the healthy curiosity of a growing mind. Whether Westerners do in fact require more or different information than Chinese students would be an interesting topic for research.

- It is generally believed in the Taijiquan community that Taijiquan is different than exercise. Much of the previous research seems to have focused on how Taijiquan is *like* other exercises or activities, and on how “aerobic” it is. What makes Taijiquan *different* from other exercise could be an alternative focus for new research.

- Taijiquan is often presented as an exercise for both body and mind. Research has focused on the body, and much more needs to be done in this area. But serious consideration might also be given to study of the mind and its role in this art. Research might be conducted into views of mind from various perspectives: philosophical, such as that elaborated by Ryle (1949) in *The Concept of Mind*, or theoretical approaches such as the “information-processing model” of mental operations; developmental, such as that elaborated by Piaget; or views represented by research into emerging fields such as psychoneuroimmunology—and how these views might contribute to an understanding of Taijiquan.

- This survey has provided a baseline of descriptive and demographic data on instructors and instruction. A more detailed ethnographic study of portions of the population or even single case studies using interviews and observations would be appropriate.

- Subsequent researchers might want to consider the comment of one of the respondents to this study: “the questions seem to indicate an American view of Taijiquan; not the questions, for instance, that a Chinese doctoral candidate would center on if he were exploring Taijiquan teaching in America” (383). A profile of Taijiquan instruction in China would provide a fascinating contrast to the present study.

- Other research possibilities might concentrate on single issues. The whole realm of diverse energies, or *jings*, for example, could be explored at length. The same might be done with any subject raised by this research. Researchers might consider investigating non-ordinary claims for Taijiquan, such as psychokinesis, and training methods that purportedly lead to them.

- The data generated by the survey instrument is extensive, and the various analyses and interpretive forays made by the researcher only began to hint at the dimensionality of the picture suggested. One possible use of the research data would be in secondary survey analyses by subsequent researchers.

Perhaps it would be appropriate to reiterate a few principles by way of conclusion:

- might does not necessarily make right: simply because a majority of American teachers hold a certain belief does not make that belief true or valid in any absolute sense;
- when a large number of teachers hold a certain belief or seem agree on some issue, this does say something worth attending to;

- because this study is only of a sample of the population, even single voices may represent a sizable number of teachers in the country as a whole;
- it is possible to disagree with the definition of Taijiquan espoused by the majority of teachers and still be teaching Taijiquan;
- there may be local, regional, or even national trends and characteristics which this survey has failed to discover.

If this study had no other value, it would at least represent the sense of conviviality, community, and collegiality among those who shared their ideas, their enthusiasm, their love of Taijiquan with other players through this medium.