

EPILOGUE: A HUNDRED FLOWERS

“Let a hundred flowers [bloom], let a hundred schools of thought contend”...
—how did these slogans come to be put forward? ...Different forms and styles...
should develop freely and different schools... should contend freely.

We think that it is harmful to the growth of art and science... to impose one particular style
of art or school of thought and to ban another.

Questions of right and wrong in the arts and sciences should be settled through free
discussion in artistic and scientific circles and through practical work in these fields...

Words and actions should help to unite, and not divide...

--Mao Tsetung, (1971, pp. 462 & 467)

published version of a speech delivered in February 1957

How did this study of Taijiquan instruction in America come to adopt
the slogan “let a hundred flowers bloom”? Goldman (in MacFarquhar, et al.
(Eds.), 1989) says

The Hundred Flowers policy of relaxing the party’s control over
intellectual life in 1956 and the first half of 1957 was China’s first major
liberalization since the establishment of the People’s Republic in 1949...
[The aim of the policy was] to encourage a degree of intellectual
freedom (p. 39).

Mao, acknowledging that “contradictions” did exist in Chinese society,
believed in the early part of this period that toleration and openness was the
best way to handle opposing views. Its use in this study of Taijiquan in

America is meant to suggest the best and broadest associations. The slogan is a vibrant image of the beauty, variety, and transience inherent in living things. It is a call to honor all perspectives, to listen to all voices, to recognize that unity is only achieved—not when conformity is imposed—but when diversity is accepted.

This study does not intend to suggest to those well-versed in modern Chinese history an exact analogy between the idea put forward here and its use by Mao during the "Hundred Flowers" episode. As Goldman says, "Mao, along with the party, switched from a policy of tolerance and moderation to one of persecution and intransigence" when the criticism he had encouraged began to turn against him (p. 56).

Just as flowers of various forms and hues may bloom from the soil of a single garden, embodiment takes as many forms as there are players in the garden of Taijiquan. The slogan might remind us that Taijiquan is the embodiment of the law of the unity of opposites, which is the heart of both ancient Chinese cosmology and Mao's dialectical materialism. Taijiquan is the study of "the particularity and relativity of contradiction" (Mao, 1971, p. 128), the harmony, the complementarity, the identity of opposites struggling with one another even as they constantly become one another. Even though his government became obsessed with identifying "poisonous weeds," Mao recognized that a policy of allowing the expression of divergent views, of fostering multiplicity, was the most natural way toward unity and the flourishing of culture.

The companion slogan to “let a hundred flowers bloom” is “let a hundred schools of thought contend.” This slogan is only implied in this study, but it is an important extension of the meaning of the first. It is a reference to what is known as the Period of the Hundred Schools, the “golden age” of Chinese philosophy, which occurred 22—25 centuries ago. This was the age of Lao Zi, Zhuang Zi, Confucius, and Mencius; the age of an unprecedented flowering of philosophical schools whose thinking crystallized much of early Chinese belief and mores into traditions which would influence cultural development in China for the next twenty-five hundred years.

We are fortunate to have passed through a time in this country when it was widely believed that Taijiquan could be defined by only one school, and was best exemplified by only one style, to a time in which “a hundred schools” and styles contend under the name Taijiquan. Rather than seeing that as a weakening or dilution, Taijiquan teachers are challenged to savor the rich complexity of the art as it has sprung up in the fertile soil of so many new bodies and minds. Variety is a strength: a sign of vitality.

Mao says “Use words and actions to unite, rather than to divide.” Everyone is engaged in telling others what is true, and in criticizing others or belittling them; but truth cannot be spoken, for it is internal. Truth is Dao, and must be discovered within; it cannot be transferred from one to another. To me, truth appears as a *vision*; but to you, my vision will appear to be only a *version*. You will have your own vision of truth—though to me, your vision will seem only a version. No matter how hard we try, we can come no closer to one another. Dao offers us a choice: we can either let *aversion* cloud our vision, or we can accept differences within the Dao with wonder at its

diversity. If I insist that you should see my vision as a vision, I will only alienate you. If I accept that, to you, my vision can never seem more than a version, we can be friends. Let the ideas be put forth: let all versions contend—but let us remain friends.

Have you ever met with other Taijiquan teachers in an informal atmosphere of sharing and exchange? Perhaps at a Chinese restaurant over soup, steamed rice, eggplant, garlic sauce, hot tea? Perhaps in a gym or park to show the various forms you have studied, discuss the lessons you are working on currently, or to push-hands? Isn't it grand to discuss with other players, fellow enthusiasts, colleagues, the art that is your mutual passion—the study that never ceases to be new no matter how long you've been at it? Some have had this experience. Many, teaching on their own in isolated areas or even in metropolitan areas where the next Taijiquan class is around the block, have not. This study concludes with a recommendation: try to get together with other teachers or players in your area. Have a party: a *symposium*. Meet for dinner. Use this report as a basis of your discussion, or as an excuse to get together. Let it be a conversation piece: an ice-breaker that leads to other topics. Make the symbolic symposium that occurs through the medium of these pages a reality in your area. For Taijiquan players have much to share.

It is ironic that there should be such factionalism among those who profess a supremely unitive art. Perhaps this is just the embodiment within the community of players of the opposites of *yin* and *yang*. If this is so, then players can accept their differences without vindictiveness or disquiet. For harmony to exist in the Taijiquan community, it is not necessary for

disagreement to disappear; it is only necessary that individuals on all sides begin to push-hands with one another. Just as the view of Taijiquan presented in this study was constructed from the contributions of 216 teachers, it is essential to realize that no point of view can be excluded. No single approach to Taijiquan is wholly correct or wholly incorrect: each depends on the presence of all others for completeness.