



Guelph Tai Chi for Health

## What are the "Tai Chi Classics"?

We have periodically referred to the "Tai Chi Classics" during our weekly practice sessions. What are they? Why should you read them?

This is the easiest way to describe the "Tai Chi Classics" - the collected body of written texts that comprise the guidelines for the study and practice of tai chi. They have been transmitted through family lines, such as the Chen and Yang families, dating from at least the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present time. Throughout the last two centuries they have been translated in different ways by several tai chi masters and Chinese literary scholars into English. With the simplicity of the poetic format we lose the nuance that comes from longer, explanatory texts. Thus these "classics" are considered guidelines to practice, not detailed, step-by-step manuals. They are regarded as supplementary to instruction by a qualified teacher, and hours of personal practice. But most important, they contain the fundamental principles of proper tai chi movement, and should be a touchstone for all tai chi practitioners aiming for continuous improvement.

Here is an example of one of the "classics":

### **SONG OF THE THIRTEEN POSTURES**

By - Unknown Author  
as researched by Lee N. Scheele

<http://www.scheele.org/lee/classics.html#songof13>

The Thirteen Postures should not be taken lightly;  
the source of the postures is in the waist.

Be mindful of the interchange between insubstantial and substantial;  
The *ch'i* circulates throughout the body without hindrance.

Be still,  
when touched by the opponent,  
be tranquil and move in stillness;  
changes caused by my opponent fill him with wonder.

Study the function of each posture carefully and with deliberation;  
to achieve the goal is very easy.

Pay attention to the waist at all times;  
completely relax the abdomen  
and the *ch'i* rises up.

When the tailbone is centered and straight,  
the *shen* [spirit of vitality] goes through to the headtop.

To make the whole body light and agile  
suspend the headtop.

Carefully study.

Extension and contraction, opening and closing, should be natural.

To enter the door and be shown the way,  
you must be orally taught.  
Practice should be uninterrupted,  
and technique achieved by self study.

Speaking of the body and its function, what is the standard?

The *I* [mind-intent] and *ch'i* are king,  
and the bones and muscles are the court.

Think over carefully what the final purpose is:  
to lengthen life and maintain youth.

The Song consists of 140 characters;  
each character is true and the meaning is complete.

If you do not study in this manner,  
then you will waste your time and sigh with regret.

For some of us summer is a time to take a break from our weekly tai chi practice. It is also a time to get caught up on reading. If you want to stay in touch with tai chi while indulging your passion for summer reading try some of these excellent texts to learn more about the historical origins of tai chi and the principles we use to guide our practice.

- Davis, Barbara, "The Taijiquan Classics: An Annotated Translation" (Berkeley: North Atlantic, 2004)
- Fu, Zhongwen, "Mastering Yang Style Taijiquan". (Louis Swaim. Berkeley, California: Blue Snake Books, 1996, 2006).
- Jou, Tsung-hwa, "The Tao of T'ai Chi Ch'uan" (Rutland: Tuttle, 1980)
- Lo, Benjamin, Martin Inn, Robert Amacker, Susan Foe, "The Essence of T'ai Chi Ch'uan: The Literary Tradition" (Berkeley: North Atlantic, 1979)
- Wile, Doug, "Tai Chi Touchstones: *Yang Family Secret Transmissions*" (Sweet Ch'i Press 1983)
- Wile, Doug, "Lost T'ai-chi Classics from the Late Ch'ing Dynasty" (Albany: SUNY, 1996)

For those of you with less time for reading, this website has an excellent collection of the Tai Chi Classics: <http://www.scheele.org/lee/classics.html>