

Yong Nian Taijiquan

and Fu Qing Quan by Kevin McQuaid



Introduction

In May 2005, I travelled to Shanghai with a U.K. team to compete in the Lian Gong Shi Ba Fa Conference and to take part in their coaching course (See Issue No:22). The following year, I decided to return on my own for a month for further coaching and training. While I was there, I was also keen to discover more about my own Taijiquan hero Great Grandmaster Fu Zhongwen and his heirs.

Great Grandmaster Fu Zhong Wen (1903-1994) was born in the village of Guanfu in the Yong Nian County of Hebei Province. The province is renowned as the birth-place of Yang Lu-Chan and thus the cradle of Taijiquan.

From an early age Great Grandmaster Fu studied Taijiquan with Yang Lu-Chan's Grandson, Yang Chen Fu and later became one of his leading disciples, travelling widely within China assisting his master with his teaching and accepting challenges on his behalf. He even married into the Yang family and fathered a son, Fu Sheng Yuan, with the great granddaughter of Yang Jian Hou.

Following his masters' death in 1936, Great Grandmaster Fu continued to transmit the authentic Taijiquan and, in order to advance this mission, he created the Yong Nian Taijiquan Association in 1944.

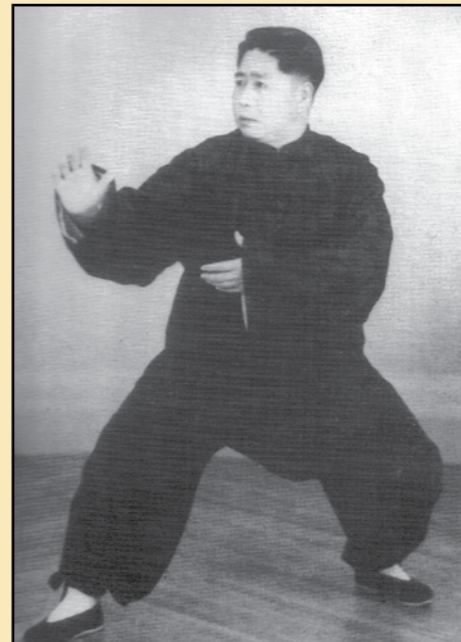
The name "Yong Nian" derives from the county of his birth and the home of three generations of Yang family practitioners. Yong Nian also means "always developing, never stopping", always strengthening your health and developing yourself through the practice of Taijiquan. During the time of the Yong Nian Associations formation, the morale of the Chinese people was very low because of the civil war and the Japanese occupation. Great Grandmaster Fu hoped to strengthen the individual and thus the country. The final reason for choosing the name was because the Chinese characters for Yong Nian can also be read as "long Life" and this is a testament to the life enhancing qualities of the exercise.

Ten years after the Yong Nian Taijiquan Associations foundation, Chen Wei Ming, first disciple of Yang Chen Fu, paid tribute to Grandmaster Fu's efforts as follows:

"Mr. Fu Zhong Wen of Yong Nian has received the teachings and guidance from his relative, Yang Chen Fu Lao Shi. Mr. Fu has learnt accurately to a very high standard and has made no alterations, which is why people say that it is authentic...When it comes to continuing the legacy of Yang Style Taiji, who else can compare with Fu Zhongwen?"

In 1958 Great Grandmaster Fu was appointed the Coach of the Shanghai Wu Shu team and his students gained many Wu Shu honours throughout the 1950's and 1960's. Like many others of his generation, he was not well treated during the Cultural Revolution, but things improved for him from 1979 when he was appointed vice-chairman of the Shanghai Wu Shu Association. From then until his death in 1994, he travelled widely with his son and grandson (Fu Qing Quan) including one memorable trip to the US for an international Kuoshu tournament were, at the age of 91, he was seen roaming the hotel corridors in the early hours of the morning searching for a tuishou opponent.

After Great Grandmaster Fu died, the Yong Nian tradition passed into the hands of his son, Grandmaster Fu Sheng Yuan, and grandson, Master Fu Qing Quan. At this point, I should explain the reason why I am so (rudely)



interested in the grandson rather than the current incumbent of Great Grandmaster Fu's heritage, Grand Master Fu Sheng Yuan (8th Duan Wushu ranking).

I first heard of Fu Qing Quan as a student of The Classical Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Society in the UK. This society was founded by Tony Henrys who studied with Great Grandmaster Fu. During this period, I saw a video of Great Grandmaster Fu, performing the 85 Form during which a sixteen-year old Fu Qing Quan performed the lower postures and the kicks under his Grandfather's tutelage.

Another reason was that I was aware that the Fu's emigrated to Australia in 1989 and that Grandmaster Fu Sheng Yuan had established himself in Perth and had students throughout Australia and New Zealand. After many e-mails and much begging I eventually found out that Master Fu Qing Quan aka Master James Fu was in China endeavouring to improve Taiji to its former glories. Because I was already committed to travelling to Shanghai to continue my training in Lian Gong Shi Ba Fa, Master James Fu (7th Duan Wushu Ranking) was the obvious "target" for me so I travelled to Shanghai to find out more about him, the latest in Yong Nian story and, hopefully, a new teacher.



Shanghai, April 2007

Unfortunately, a case of "Chinese Whispers" rudely intervened. As I travelled to Shanghai, Master James and his father were on their way to Spain. Grandmaster Fu Sheng Yuan has taught there for the last nine or ten years and Master James was joining him for the first time. His father is now 78 years old and values his sons' assistance.

Fortunately, Master James now has a base in Shanghai and runs some classes and his own school in the city as well as travelling widely within China to pass on his Grandfathers teachings. Before he left Shanghai, James arranged for me to train with his students including two very helpful Kiwis living in Shanghai – Aaran Church and Stuart Laurance - I received excellent tuition from one of Master James' lead instructors whose name translated as "Dragon" – dragon by name.....

One of the things I noticed was that the form work was very much more open and expansive than I had been used to during my training in the U.K.. The reasons for this would become evident later.

I spent a month in Shanghai training with Master James' students, trying to find other evidence of Yong Nian Taiji in the parks (Fuxing park has a "master" on every corner – and as previously mentioned in this magazine – none of any quality. I also continued with my Lian Gong Shi Ba Fa training with Sifu Zhuang Jian Shen.

Fortunately for me, Master James returned to Shanghai whilst I was still there. The day before I left, I was invited to his home where I was to meet James, his father, mother and wife. This was a completely unexpected bonus.

Master James was not there when I arrived. I did not have to wait long before he literally exploded into the room in a wave of energy and enthusiasm. I had a lot of questions to ask, he had a lot of statements / clarifications to make about his art. He speaks with great passion and energy particularly when discussing his Grandfather for whom, understandably, he retains a massive affection. In particular, and before long, he recounted how angry his Grandfather had been when he discovered what had happened to Taijiquan after it had been introduced to the West by, in particular, Chen Man Ching who, as far as the Fu's are concerned was a person who could write and was allowed to transcribe Yang Chen Fu's teachings but was never a close student of his. Meanwhile Grandmaster Fu had to accept that he was secluded in China during this period and had kept quiet about his feelings because, at the very least, Taijiquan had been promoted. Later, I was to learn that Great Grandmaster Fu was at the border with Hong Kong when it was closed in 1949 – who knows what would have happened to Taijiquan in the west if he had managed to cross. With these insights, it is not difficult to see the source of Master James' passion and enthusiasm.

During my stay in their home, we watched a DVD together of the Canadian 7 Masters event which was accompanied by much hilarity on behalf of the Fu's – Master James himself attended and performed a sabre form on behalf of the Yang family represented by Yang Zhendou. In their opinion, the standard of Taijiquan coming out of China and being promoted in the West is very poor.

Similar honesty and forthrightness was exhibited by Master James when he discussed the difference in styles between Yang Zhendou and himself and he puts this down to the fact

that Yang Zhenduo was never taught by his own father and received limited tuition from Great Grandmaster Fu Zhongwen. He agreed that the end postures were correct but the transitions were problematical – authentic Taijiquan involves moving on the weighted foot. He accepts that Yang Zhenduo carries the family name and is therefore head of the family. The Yang bloodline and authentic form, however, will continue through Fu Qing Quan (as previously noted, his Grandfather married within the Yang family).

Master James' had a lot to say about the origins of Taijiquan. He quoted one of his Grandfather's sayings "Taiji is only one" – by this he meant that what Yang Lu Chan learned in Chen Jiagou, from Chen Changxing is the same form that the Yang family still practices, he said that it was not the Chen style that Yang Lu Chan learned. Before the communists took over, nobody had heard of the Chen style – it was only after 1949 that the Pao Tui form was resurrected and combined with Taijiquan. Master James insists that the stamping and fa jing movements in the modern Chen form are unhealthy on the joints. He also pointed out that fa jing was used in the Yang style in the application of individual postures but not practised during the form (he was to return to this subject later).

As regards the different styles of performing "Yang" Taijiquan, Master James explained that, because Yang Chen Fu was a large man, his movements were larger. Because Yang Shou Hou was smaller, his movements were smaller but this does not make it "small frame". In Great Grandmaster Fu Zhongwens last interview, James translated his Grandfather in similar terms: "You can do low movements or with arms wider or with small steps and arms smaller. It depends on what level you are at. But



as long as the principles are followed, as long as the shoulder is relaxed, elbows dropped, body weight in front and relaxed, I can't say that you are wrong".

This is what I learnt in Shanghai under Dragons, Aarans and Stuarts tuition—suit the movements to your own body – begin expansively and condense / solidify with age.

In the Fu's company three hours passed very quickly and I left loaded with dvd's, books and various other gifts. Master James asked me to attend an instructor training course run by his father and himself to be held in Spain during October.

Cerdanyola De Valles, Spain – October 2007

This event was organised by Jose Gago and Fernando Llorente of the Yong Nian Taijiquan Association of Spain with the help of Albert Dembski and Javier Contreras. They had invited Grandmaster Fu Sheng Yuan and Master James to do a months tour of Spain and Portugal beginning with an advanced course for Taijiquan instructors involving the quan, dao, tuishou and fa jin training

From the very beginning of the course, Grandmaster Fu Sheng Yuan and Master James were very clear in their views and shared many valuable insights. They saw the Taiji system in its entirety and explained it as follows: the Taijiquan is practiced to build a healthy body and to improve the immune system (they even explained this boosting of immunity as one of the manifestations of "shen" or spirit). The sword forms were practiced to increase

lower-body stability and to improve footwork. Tuishou is used to discover ones own technical failings and to help others to discover theirs. The stick and sparring forms were used to develop fa jin. The use of fa jin itself is very destructive to the body of the practitioner but completes the cycle of creation / destruction when the practitioner returns to the quan to rebuild energy. Fa jin is not the ultimate end and should not be overemphasised.

Master James in particular was very critical about the standard of Yong Nian quan work that he saw. He explained his father's form work as being rounded – he has put in all the hard practice and now softens his form. Master James' movements are "square" and functional – for want of a better phrase, smoothly robotic. The body stays low throughout the form – sinking as the knee raises to step forward – there is no upward / downward movement... what Tsung Hwa Jou has described as a rolling ball of Chi. Master Fu's lesson was to follow the principles of Taijiquan via your teacher – never ever blindly copy.

Master James freely admits that, in his own teaching he has moved away from the more traditional methods of his Grandfather. In Australia the traditional 85 posture form is still the first thing that is taught. James' classes in China have been adapted to modern circumstances.

He teaches an 8 posture form as an introduction – basically the 85 form up to Brush Left Knee followed by an Advance Step into Grasp the Sparrows Tail repeated as many times as you

wish followed by a Cross Hands / Closing Posture.

The next stage in training would be Grandmaster Fu Sheng Yuan's 28 wushu competition form taught in two sections, introductory and advanced.

Then the 85 Form is practiced split into 4 Sections:

- 1) Up to the first Cross Hands (Posture 14).
- 2) From Cross Hands to Single Whip (Posture 27)
- 3) From Single Whip (Posture 27) to Single Whip (Posture 51) before Jade Maiden Threads Shuttle.
- 4) Jade Maiden Threads Shuttle to Closing Form.

Assuming two classes a week, each section takes ten weeks to complete and then a further 10 weeks is added putting the whole form together. Obviously, progression between the sections assumes a certain level of personal practice.

However modern this approach may appear to the dyed in the wool "Steal my Art" exponent, there is also a side to Master James' teaching which is deeply traditional. He made it very clear that anybody purporting to represent the Yong Nian Taijiquan tradition of his Grandfather would be expected to present the tradition in a certain way. His own introductory courses in China exemplify this approach.

The first thing he teaches is the Yang Family lineage, what "Taiji" is and isn't and to learn the formal salutes to Great Grandmaster Fu Zhongwen's image and to the teacher. Only after this as been introduced are any basic postures taught.

This process is followed by the teaching of the Thirteen Posture Warm-ups...a traditional Yang family routine as transmitted by Great Grandmaster Fu Zhongwen.

This routine has a martial emphasis not found in routines popular in the west such as Shiba Shi. It involves loosening the neck, shoulders, elbows, wrists, ulna/radius, strengthening the waist, opening/loosening the hips/kua, strengthening the knees and stretching the hamstrings to an extent sufficient to practice the toe and heel kicks contained in the quan accurately.

In addition, Master James is insistent on using the training uniforms developed by his Grandfather in 1944 when he started his Yong Nian Taijiquan Association in Shanghai and differentiating that worn by the teacher and those worn by his/her students. To emphasise this point, he always insists upon wearing a students uniform himself in any class run by his father even if he is assisting in teaching the class as he did so ably in Cerdanyola De Valles.

James' traditionalism also extends to his emphasis on the Yang family motto of Chin, Hen, Li and Chen:

Diligence

Hard work and effort is a prerequisite for skilled development. Daily practice on a regular basis will ultimately be rewarded by beneficial results.

Perseverance

It is important that a long enduring sense of purpose should be cultivated. A sense of purpose combined with regular daily practice will serve to achieve that purpose.

Respect

Respect for your master, teacher and fellow man is paramount. Deal with others taking

into consideration their backgrounds and in the light of their expectations. Mutual respect serves to enhance a sense of community and solidarity in a society where individuals treat each other with respect.

Sincerity

Sincerity in attitude or motivation is a prerequisite for learning Taijiquan. In order to achieve, a genuine resolve to pursue your goal must exist. Deal with others sincerely if you wish them to reciprocate. Maintain sincerity in the fore of your dealings with others and you will achieve a smooth flow in relationships.

During the training course in Cerdanyola De Valles, Master James told many anecdotes about his Grandfather amongst my favourites are:

In China, when Yang stylists came to him hoping to represent Yong Nian Taiji in other parts of China without putting in the effort, they were simply given one of his books and sent on their way. To this day, Master James often encounters such books, thinks of his Grandfather and knows the standard of achievement that he is dealing with.

When Great Grandmaster Fu Zhongwen (accompanied by Master James) visited America, he was often asked to give his opinion of somebody's Taijiquan. On one such occasion, a demonstrator performed the posture Snake Creeps Down during which he extended the lead arm forward imitating the "slythering" movement of a snake. Great Grandmaster Fu congratulated him on his form and told him to always remember the Ten Essentials of Taijiquan Theory and sent him on his way. Master James was infuriated by this and demanded of his Grandfather why he had said that "shit" was good. His Grandfather calmly replied: "because nobody can help him!"

Less humorous, but equally significant, Master James even now remembers his Grandfather's teaching very clearly. When he first heard the words, he thought he understood completely. As his own practice continues to develop, the true depth of the teaching that he received continues to reveal itself.

From a purely subjective point of view, I get the distinct impression that James is gearing-up to assume the mantle of Taijiquan in a very distinctive, authoritative and energetic fashion. In many ways this links neatly into what is already happening in this country as exemplified by the words of Dan Docherty when he recently declared "amateur time" over.

Master James tuishou teaching and fa jin demonstrations were very impressive. In particular, I admired his "learning to give definition" of tui shou – if you do not give correctly you will be vulnerable, if you don't accept correctly you will be "given" something that you really really do not want. Master James demonstrated his approach by liberal use of fist and elbow strikes to show correct offer and acceptance of moves. He was disparaging about tuishou practitioners who miss these points and treat the discipline as a form of wrestling.

Master James was very interested in how Master Chen Zhengli was creating teachers in the U.K., "franchising" his business and advertising his family style. James took great satisfaction in telling me that he was the Yang Taijiquan Chinese National Champion in 1988. In the same year he won the Combined Sword Competition (all styles). A certain Chen Zhengli came fourth in the same competition. James won the Jian Sword form in the following year and is now ranked as 7th Dan by the World Wushu association. His current mission is to ensure that anybody purporting to represent authentic Taiji as exemplified by the International Yong Nian Association will have to come up to his very exacting standards and this will not happen in a weekend.

Grandmaster Fu Sheng Yuan and Master Fu Qing Quan are dedicated to spreading authentic Taijiquan within Europe and, hopefully, will be appearing in a "dojo" near you before too long.