

Quo vadis Taiji?

By Axel Dreyer

translated into English by Leslie Strickland

Abstract

In the course of its history Taijiquan has undergone many transformations in response to the social circumstances of the day. A highly refined martial art has been turned into a mass sport for improving public health; a path for personal development has morphed into a competitive sport, one which China is hoping will be established as an Olympics discipline. The author reflects on whether the current developments aren't causing the true art and wisdom of Taijiquan to be lost. Here he also takes a critical look at standardized training programs which in their brevity can hardly offer participants the means to explore deeper aspects of Taijiquan.

Robert Smith, an expert in Asian martial arts, lamented in his 1991 foreword to Wolfe Lowenthal's *There Are No Secrets* (North Atlantic Books, 1991) (German edition: *Es gibt keine Geheimnisse*, Kolibri, 1993) the way Taijiquan was being commercialized and turned into a sport in the USA. Already at that time competitions awarding trophies were being organized, and Push Hands events devolved into wrestling or boxing matches.

17 years after the publication of the German edition of *There Are No Secrets*, the German daily *Handelsblatt* published a report about Taiji teacher Siao Weijia from Peking, who belonged to the inner circle of disciples of the renowned Taiji Master Shi Ming. The article reported that many Chinese were now of the opinion that Taijiquan was only for old people. Young people and people in tune with the Zeitgeist preferred Yoga or an athletic version of Taiji. (By Shanghai is known to me topically (2018) that some Yoga schools attract hundreds, even thousands of students.) Siao Weijia assessed the situation in the Peoples Republic of China in the following words: "I'm worried whether modern China will be able to preserve this wisdom teaching [Taiji] at all. Traditional Tai Chi Chuan is like a gravely ill patient. We must be very careful not to let him die." (*Handelsblatt*, April 23, 2008/ No. 79)

And how are things with Taijiquan in 2018 in the German speaking world? A short excursion into my own background will hopefully make my appraisal of the situation more comprehensible.

The youth movements of the Sixties and Seventies, the Love and Peace movement which peaked in the Woodstock Festival, and the new humanistic and transpersonal psychology with its spiritual orientation and interest in exploring new realms of consciousness all strongly shaped my view of the world at the time. Taiji was still considered exotic and was imbued with an aura of the mysterious when, in 1978 at Prof. Karlfried Count Dürckheim's therapy and meditation center, I met my first Taiji teacher, Gia-Fu Feng, who lived in Colorado (USA) but frequently taught in Europe. Alan Watt's *Tao: The Watercourse Way* provided me with a fascinating introduction to Daoism. This was followed by Laozi's *Daodejing*, Zhuangzi's *True Book from the Southern Land of Blossoming*. Later on I read John Blofeld, who presented the Daoist sages as unorthodox, freedom-loving mavericks, who reminded me in ways of the hippies of our day.

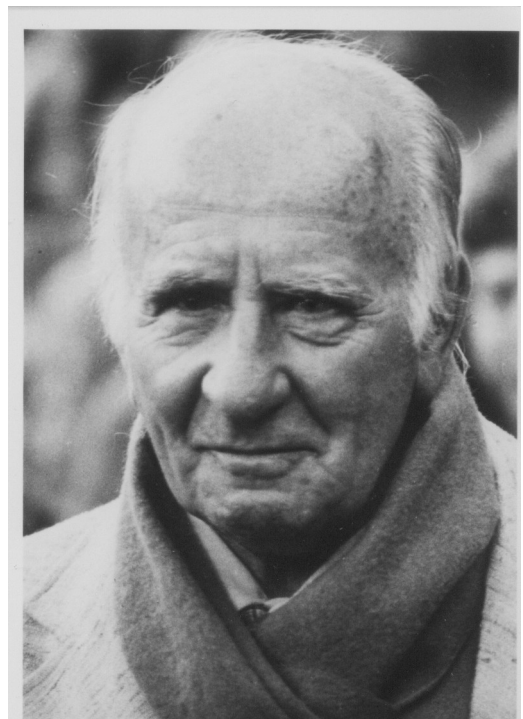
At the beginning of the Taiji movement in Germany there was still a good deal

of Daoist carefreeness. Christa Proksch, one of the first Taiji teachers in Northern Germany, was a free spirit and I remember Toyo Kobayashi in Munich being undogmatic, straight-forward and clear. One learned Taijiquan simply because one was fascinated by this art of movement, and not because one believed having a teaching certificate from some training program would put one at an advantage in the market. (Of course I do not presuppose that everyone who participated in such trainings was motivated by nothing but commercial interests!)

Since that time there have been many changes within the Taiji world. Organizational structures have evolved with functionaries who are motivated by market and socio-political considerations. Taijiquan has especially taken root within the relaxation and health sector. The number of Taiji docents has constantly grown, there being hardly a school for adult education (*VHS - Volkshochschule*) or rehab clinic which does not offer Taiji or Qigong. It seems to me that the market is saturated, not only but also because competitors such as Yoga, Pilates, Feldenkrais and others are also bidding energetically for their place. On the one hand, the rapid spread of Taiji has led to the overall level of training at times leaving much to be desired. On the other hand, growing interest in Taiji has also meant that ever more highly qualified teachers from around the world have shared their expertise, thus enabling those with persistent and deeper motives to learn a practice of substance.

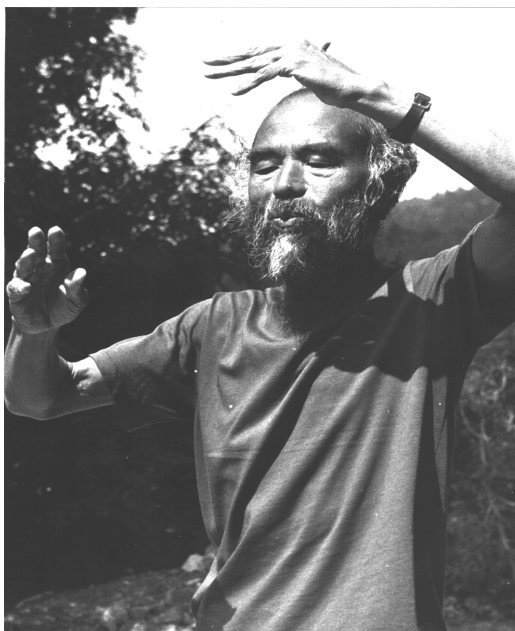
Taiji Light

The way in which Taijiquan has spread and taken root in society has perhaps been most significantly affected by the rising popularity of Qigong. About 8 to 10 years after Taijiquan became more widely known in Germany interest in Qigong began to grow as well. Today, as it seems to me, there is more interest in Qigong than in Taijiquan. One of the main reasons for this shift is the frequently repeated claim that, "Qigong is easier" -- whether this is true or not does not stand to debate here. At any rate I find this argument odd. Of course it's possible to regard Qigong and Taijiquan as a kind of Chinese therapeutic exercise or as a method of relaxation with an aura of Far Eastern charm. And indeed, relaxation is an important aspect of Taijiquan and Qigong. However even relaxation does not just appear on its own but must be learned. And learning is always accompanied by change, which is to say, also by discomfort. Thus it is said, when learning a Chinese movement art you have to be able to '*eat bitter*'.



Karlfried Count Dürckheim (1896-1988) - The Existential Psychology Training and Conference Center founded by Karlfried Count Dürckheim and Maria Hippus in Todtmoos-Rütte was an important germ cell for Eastern spirituality in the German speaking world. (Photo: Archive Center Todtmoos-Rütte)

Some Taiji course descriptions suggest that one can make progress without much effort, patience, and persistence. But even if it is more demanding, is it not much more enriching to explore a path which plumbs the depths and has much to offer? A comfortable path is rarely suited to bringing about sustained transformation. We all tend to choose what we have a certain talent for, what comes easily; yet for balanced development it is mostly those areas in which we have deficits and which do not come easily which help us advance.



Gia-Fu Feng (1919-1985) - As a translator of Daoist literature and as teacher of Dao Gia-Fu Feng was an important trail blazer in uniting Eastern wisdom paths and Western depth psychology in the USA. Among other things he, together with Alan Watts, was involved in the spiritual movement in California and helped build up the Esalen Institute there. Later he founded the Daoist community Stillpoint Foundation, which moved to Colorado in 1977. He regularly visited Europe until 1982 and was one of the first Taiji teachers here. (Photo: Archive A. Dreyer)

Questions which a student of Taijiquan should be asking, I believe, are: which training system holds the greatest potential for myself for personal development, and which teacher can transmit this potential authentically. The best method is useless if the person teaching it cannot transmit the practice convincingly. In China there is a saying: "When the wrong man uses the right means, then the right means feel wrong." And C. G. Jung has said: "*In these things all depends, in reality, on the people involved and little or nothing on the method.*" Responsible teachers offer their students something that motivates them to grow and develop more deeply. They do not feel bound to make things as easy as possible for them. On the contrary they are in the right to demand something of their students.

Anyone not ready to train intelligently and with a certain regularity will achieve little in Taijiquan. "Taiji Made Easy" courses claim you can learn in just a short time what it takes others many years to internalize. Of course one can sell ping-pong as table tennis, but how long will interest last and how serious is it? It is also perplexing to me why teachers so often like to combine Taijiquan with other methods, as if it were not enough in its own right.

When I observe the Taiji market in Germany I have the impression that some who advertise courses are asking themselves: where's the niche, the gap in the market I can fill with my tailor-fit Taiji program? Here commercial interests clearly dominate, which leads to Taijiquan losing much of its essential, original substance and degenerating into one of the many products which follow the rules of supply and demand.

It appears to me that consumerism and high expectations in society have tended to grow while a willingness to invest time and energy has diminished. I can only speculate about the reasons for this, but I believe that a central

ingredient is the intensified pressure in all aspects of our lives. Expectations placed on us in our workplaces are constantly increasing; after work we're engaged in a tightly scheduled leisure-time program - *jogging, fitness studio, choir practice, theater subscription* -- and on top of it all we strive to be the best possible parents and marriage partners. There is something driven and restless in all of this which inevitably leads to an overload with all its familiar consequences.

Of course under these circumstances it's obvious that people would prefer consuming to achieving yet more and would choose the simple over the complex. Many course participants feel overly challenged if they get the sense they're supposed to be concentrating on so many things simultaneously. In reality, though, this is not what's called for at all. Teachers should indeed open their treasure chest wide saying, "Look - Taiji has all this to offer", but that by no means implies that participants need to take it all in or try to apply it all at once. It's often wiser to concentrate on one or two aspects for some time until they become halfway natural and the body understands them, and only then choose a further aspect. It's better to advance step by step, not take on too much, but also not too little. Teachers and students alike should let go of all false ambition to avoid overload.

One can compare learning the individual postures or movements of the Taiji Form with learning ones ABC's. After a while one can string several movements together, which is to say - continuing the parallel with the ABC's - one can combine letters into meaningful words. No one spends years just learning the ABC's. No one who wants to learn how to read and write will be satisfied with just combining words with one another. Rather, in time, one develops a more flowing, skillful, elegant style; one creates sentences, writes whole paragraphs, composes a letter and may even try their hand at writing a poem. Like the ABC's, the individual movements of the Taiji Form are the tools and obligatory exercises necessary for learning the art. Only after much practice can a freestyle emerge and the art become really interesting. Taijiquan then becomes a gateway to our internal human world existence, which is at least as rich and multifaceted as the external world.

Taiji Teacher Training Programs

In most cases teachers serve both Taijiquan and their proteges poorly by telling them too early on that they're ready to start teaching. Overly zealous students don't even await a go-ahead from their teachers, deciding rather on their own when they're advanced enough. During the pioneer-era of Taijiquan in Germany in the early Eighties of the last century almost no one had a deeper understanding of the art. Docents simply passed on what they found so inspiring, whereby they themselves learned the most in the process. At least this is how it was for me. In 1983, after five years of practice, I began with my first efforts at teaching. At least I had some pedagogical training to back me up, as I was at the time a school teacher.

At that time there were no guidelines for Taijiquan training programs or other means of orienting oneself. Since then, 35 years have passed and the situation has fundamentally changed. We now know about the important significance of Taijiquan for physical, emotional and spiritual development. Today, to begin

teaching before having thoroughly studied the available body of knowledge is to act more than irresponsibly.

In China Taijiquan was considered one of the arts alongside painting, music, calligraphy and poetry - a cultural good which cannot be esteemed too highly. In Germany if someone wants to become a music teacher he or she will begin to learn an instrument at an early age, will mostly likely practice on a daily basis and then eventually apply for admission to a music academy. Only at the end of fulltime advanced study lasting 6 to 8 semesters and covering pedagogy, music theory, and history as well as practical competence can a student rightfully call him or herself a music teacher. Why are the requirements for future Taiji teachers set so much lower? It is not that I wish to see Taijiquan turned into a field of academic study and higher education, but I do believe that a curriculum for training Taijiquan should above all delve far deeper.

Of course I can easily understand the motivation for offering a teacher training program in Taijiquan. It's lucrative and good for the teacher's reputation; the framework of a training program makes more intensive, more concentrated learning possible, which is more satisfying for both the student and teacher; the teacher has to develop a coherent curriculum, and so forth. But when a training program primarily follows a business model I seriously question its meaningfulness. Most training programs take place on weekends since not all participants live nearby. A modular training program allows for a great deal of flexibility but at the same time has the disadvantage that the composition of the group is seldom homogeneous. What are the advantages of a teacher training program for participants? Today someone wishing to offer Taiji courses at an organisation or institution will inevitably be asked to present certification of their own training background. Health insurance agencies subsidize Taiji courses in recognition of their preventative health benefits, but only if the teacher is registered at the Central Certifying Agency which is only possible if he or she has proof of qualification.

A desire to teach Taijiquan -- whether full - or parttime -- which derives from discontentment with one's current employment or from primarily financial considerations does not, to my mind, constitute a sufficient reason for participating in a teacher training program. A more substantial reason is that the training setting significantly intensifies and enriches the learning process. People who want to learn Judo, Aikido or a comparable art normally attend classes 2 to 3 times a week. This has never become the rule with Taijiquan. Although I offer my students the opportunity to attend classes twice weekly unfortunately not all of them take advantage of this possibility.

A number of my longterm students have asked me repeatedly if I wouldn't offer a teacher-training program because they would like to deepen their Taiji understanding and skills. It took quite some time before I even began to take the idea under serious consideration. But gradually I began to think about how a solid training program might be constituted. Finally I specifically addressed individual students whom I believed to be ready for such an intensive process, on the basis of both their outer life circumstances and their inner attitudes. One of the conditions I set for prospective participants was attendance in two advanced classes per week in addition to 6 weekend-

seminars and a 6-day seminar during each year of the training. In total, a three-year program would involve 740 class-hours, equivalent to 555 hours of 60-minutes each. Preceding the official training program I met with potential participants both to discuss details of the program and to stress once again that I was not interested in working with people whose primary interest was in earning a teaching certificate. All of the potential participants had already engaged in many years of Taiji practice ranging from 7 to 25 years, with an average of 17 years of experience. For me it was very important that each participant commit for the entire three-year program in order to assure reliability and continuity. As a result, the sense of belonging within the group developed quickly for the thirteen participants - eight men and five women - and after just a few weeks a homogeneous collective had formed. For the success of such a project it is extremely important for all participants to feel comfortable in the group and build harmonious relationships. This makes both learning and teaching all the easier. These three years were a great gift for me, among other reasons because I believe I was able to pass on something of real substance which fell on fertile soil with these students.

Another student of mine, a musician, had gained the competency necessary for teaching Taijiquan over the course of many years, without participating in the three-year training program. In order to give some publicity to his course offerings, he asked a local newspaper if they would interview him. I quote his answer to the newspaper's questions about why he was beginning to teach just now because I share his views:

Newspaper: *"How does a musician come to Taiji?"*

Teacher: *". . . The possibilities for internal development that lie within Taiji fascinated me. Far Eastern wisdom, the possibility of delving into deeper layers of consciousness."*

Newspaper: *"But why do you want to teach Taiji now?"*

Teacher: *"Wanting to teach is not the right way to put it. Taiji has become important for me. Through Taiji practice much energy flows through and to me and I feel gratitude towards the Taiji system and the lineage of teachers - after 22 years it's time for me to pass it on."*

Naturally everyone hopes that their choice of a teacher is the right one and that they've found a competent guide. But how to know who the right teacher is? Will it be a Grand Master from China? Someone everyone is talking about? A teacher with an impressive Taiji biography? To become a student of an acknowledged Master almost inevitably involves assuming a great responsibility oneself. One can't just adorn oneself with the teacher's name; the intensity of training increases significantly.

The decisive question which needs to be clarified, however, is this: does one's own personality structure match with the character of the teacher? If the chemistry isn't right, if the specific circumstances of one's life hinder engaging deeply in the training process, or if one's own attitude towards Taijiquan overlaps very little with the teacher's, it makes no difference how famous or good the teacher is, one will profit little from his or her instruction. What does a rather corpulent elderly man from Germany actually hope to learn from a Taiji teacher from the Peoples Republic of China who was trained as Wushu-acrobat in a school for Communist cadres?

Taiji for Sport and Internal Development



Morihei Ueshiba (1883-1969) - Morihei Ueshiba developed the Japanese martial art of Aikido. Over the course of his lifetime he placed ever more emphasis on the spiritual and personality development aspects of the art. (Photo: Archiv Australian Aikido Ki Society)

Arguments for and against Taijiquan as a competitive sport have repeatedly flamed up over the years and will surely continue to create controversy in the future. I do not, of course, claim to present an extensive treatment of this topic here and I'm aware that my reflections will not sway any advocates. However in light of the recent increased publication of the pro-position I feel it's important to let the opposing position also be heard as well and to present at least a partial exposition of my own view of things. In the end it comes down to the question of: What does Taijiquan mean for me; where do I set my priorities? Some greet the transformation of Taijiquan into a sport - as is promoted by the Chinese government - and enjoy Taiji tournaments complete with competitions and judges. They are pleased when Taijiquan is made measurable and quantifiable by means of outer rules and regulations. But by contrast, there are eminent Taiji authorities who have expressed the opposite view. To quote but a few examples:

- Shi Ming/Siao Weijia: *"By refining and expanding ones consciousness one approaches the ultimate goal of all Taiji*

practice - becoming one with the Dao. It is not physical victory over another person but rather the cultivation of the mind and energy that are of consequence." (Shi/Ming/Siao Weijia: *How the Soft Overcomes the Hard*, Aurum 1998.)

- Huang Xingxian: *"Taijiquan bushi wushu"*, *"Taijiquan is not a martial art"* was a saying with which Huang Xingxian (1910-1992) often began his classes in later years - and this despite the fact that fighting played a central role for him for many years of his life. And another saying of his: *"Taiji is not important. Dao is important."*

This list could be expanded by similar remarks by Ma Yueliang (1901-1998), Grandmaster of the Wu-Style; by Zheng Manqing (1900-1975), by Ni Hua-Ching* (um 1900 - ?), and others. In the Taiji Classics, the absolute authority of which is universally acknowledged in the Taiji world, there are also a number of passages indicating that in Taiji it is not a question of using external force.

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* Ni Hua-Ching is a fascinating personality but among Taiji practitioners perhaps less well-known than the others. In his youth he studied internal Daoist cultivation and gongfu. He knew Yang Chengfu and learned Taijiquan from Yang Shaohou, the elder brother of Yang Chengfu. He was lifelong friends with Zheng Manqing. When the latter founded a Taiji school in Northern Taiwan, Ni Hua-Ching opened his school in Southern Taiwan. Later both emigrated to the USA and Ni Hua-Ching continued his teaching in Los Angeles.

Other martial arts such as Aikido, for instance, similarly emphasize the outstanding significance of the mind and of harmonizing with universal energy. In the words of Morihei Ueshiba, founder of Aikido: *“The secret of Aikido lies in uniting ourselves with the universe by purifying ourselves.”*

(A.D.: Unfortunately I was unable to find the source of this quote.) A further statement by Morihei Ueshiba which I found on the internet: *“True martial art knows no defeat. To never be defeated means never to fight. To win means to conquer the spirit of discord within oneself.”* (Here I should like to recommend *The Spirit of Aikido* by Kisshomaru Ueshiba, which anyone interested in Taijiquan will profit from reading.)

There is a difference on the one hand between organized Taiji competitions, Push Hands tournaments with their judges and whole slew of accompanying regulations, and, on the other hand, Taijiquan as a martial art. The ideal of true martial arts throughout the ages, whether in China, Japan or elsewhere, has always been to conquer without fighting. In addition, martial arts have always been a means to help one experience oneself as but a part of a greater whole. Through this experience many of our smaller and larger fears - fear of failure, fear of loss, fear of pain, and the fear of death - will be relativized. Feeling relaxed in a peaceful, quiet environment is not all that difficult. In true martial arts one trains retaining this state of mind even under pressure and in threatening situations. One trains maintaining calmness and composure, which in a Daoist context means that ego-desires no longer stand in the foreground; one has learned to let go of oneself and entrust oneself to the Dao.

While in the martial arts it is a question of dismantling ones ego, it seems to me, on the basis of all I have heard and seen, that in Taiji competitions exactly the opposite occurs: the ego is built up. Up until now I have never participated in a tournament but have attended numerous regional and supra-regional Push Hands gatherings, which were in general friendly and constructive in character. But even here the so-called Free Pushing Hands sessions devolved over and over again into wrestling matches. All of a sudden the Taiji principles are forgotten and my 80 to 90 kilo partner is hell bound on proving to me under all circumstances that he can unbalance me, and not the other way around. For a while I succeed in remaining soft, in yielding and neutralizing; but at some point I also fall back on old habits and become hard as well.



Zheng Manqing (1900-1975,) - Zheng Manqing was a student of Yang Chengfu and emigrated in 1949 to Taiwan. He developed a short form of Yang style Taijiquan, which he taught following his emigration first in Taiwan and later, from 1964 on, in New York City. He had a very significant influence on the development of Taijiquan outside of the Peoples Republic of China. (Photo: Archive Gilles Paris)

So is it just a myth that four ounces overcome a thousand pounds? No. I have just mentioned a number of people who do not issue power by means of contracting their muscles, by using their mass and weight or employing other such mechanical advantages as taking a deep long broad stance or using various leverages. On the contrary, the Taiji masters practice a mode of issuing force that combines a pointed mental movement or intention with elastic muscle force and energy.

Those who tend to value the results over the process of learning might well reflect on whether they are really doing themselves a favor by participating in a tournament which explicitly revolves around rankings and medals. Perhaps it could help to honestly ask oneself: What are my motives for participating in a tournament? If upon reflection I find myself above all concerned with my status then it's obvious that my decision is clearly informed by my ego. Measuring oneself against others, comparing oneself with others, and the often desperate attempt to win all contradict the fundamental principles. I do not believe that one learns much of value from a competition. I've sometimes heard: *“. . . if the soft overcomes the hard, as is said in the Daodejing, then actually one ought to be grateful for every hard opponent and be able to overcome the hardness with ease.”*

Taijiquan is a high art and only a very few achieve mastery, in my experience. Huang Xingxian, for instance, did achieve this level, as he most impressively demonstrated over and over again. Of particular fame was his 1970 fight with the worldwide renowned Asian Wrestling Master, Liao Kuang-cheng. Liao was extremely experienced and had the reputation of being a fighter who always won. The fight concluded with complete victory by Huang Xingxian, who didn't lose a single round. It is worth noting that both had agreed ahead of the fight to use only techniques and skills practiced in their own styles, Taijiquan and wrestling - that is to say they agreed to refrain from introducing Gongfu elements into their Taiji and Wrestling arts, although each would have been able to do so.

Even though legendary Taiji masters for the most part achieved fame as a result of their fighting skills, we cannot simply ignore the fact that in their mature years a number of them distanced themselves from and took a critical attitude towards competitions. What lay behind this? In Push Hands tournaments do we not fall back on patterns of behavior which we reject in a societal context: an ever more rabidly output-oriented society where everyone competes with everyone and the strongest always wins? Is this the identity



Huang Xingxian (1910-1992) - Huang Xingxian became a student of Zheng Manqing in Taiwan after having successfully trained in White Crane Boxing. Grounded in Zheng Manqing's teaching, he went on to develop his own system of Taiji practice. (Photo: Archive A. Dreyer)

we wish to present to the world? Is it really true that we achieve our goals only by being hard and opposing one another, or can we learn from the experience of the Old Masters and achieve more through communality, gentleness, empathy, intelligence and understanding? I find it difficult to understand why I should practice the qualities of softness, relaxation and flow in the Form and then turn around and practice the exact opposite in Push Hands, even if some argue that this is but an unavoidable phase which one moves beyond at some point.

Relaxation and Health

In every Continuing Education Program Taijiquan is always listed under the heading of Relaxation and Health. Almost every rehab clinic now offers Taiji and medical insurance companies offer rebates to their clients for a portion of Taiji course fees. It's no wonder then that in public awareness Taijiquan is almost exclusively associated with the health sector. Unfortunately this is an extremely limited and foreshortened perspective. To quote Wolfe Lowenthal again regarding his teacher Zheng Manqing: "The self-defense aspects and even the health benefits of Taijiquan were not of primary importance in his teaching; rather he taught this art as a path of the Dao, a way of life." (Wolfe Lowenthal: *There Are No Secrets*, 1991, North Atlantic Books) Zheng Manqing was a Taiji-icon in Taiwan, in the USA, and somewhat later in Europe as well. Many thousands of people invoke him as an authority and practice his Yang Style Short Form. How is it possible that such an unequivocal statement about him should be disregarded to such an extent? To be sure the wellness-relaxation-health sector represents a huge, booming market. To disengage oneself as a Taijiquan teacher from this market would be neither possible nor reasonable. People who come to my Taiji beginners courses always come with the intention of learning to relax and with the expectation that Taiji is good for their health. I confirm their expectations but also add that these aspects do not play a central role in my teaching, explaining rather that Taiji, according to my understanding, is a movement art which through relaxation, concentration, and coordination brings body, mind and energy together into a well functioning unity.

Taijiquan invites us to move inside ourselves in order to explore our own beings, come into contact with the very center of our being. When Taiji and Qigong associations began cooperating with medical insurance agencies in the interest of their members, they found themselves face to face with a powerful, influential, and at times uncomfortable partner who proclaimed in no uncertain terms the exact prerequisites which instructors and teachers would need to fulfill in order to be approved. In the meantime I sometimes think - like Goethe's sorcerer's apprentice - if only we hadn't beckoned the spirits in the first place; now we'll never be rid of them.

Through the influence of the insurance companies Taijiquan is even more strongly reduced to the health sector. They reward the preventative efforts of their members by reimbursing them for a portion of the course fees, for one or a maximum of two courses per year. And what happens after that? A person who practices Taijiquan seriously will not stop just because his or her medical insurance won't reimburse further courses. I'm always willing - and here I

surely also speak for many of my colleagues - to reduce or forego a payment or arrange paying in installments when I learn that a student is currently short of funds. No one needs to renounce Taiji on account of sparse funds. By the same token I have little sympathy with someone who has just returned from a four-week Ayurveda cure and wants to bargain with me over the price of my Taiji course. In the end it comes down to the question of what Taiji means to me and what it's worth to me.

Taking Responsibility

For something to be embraced by a significant number of people it's often necessary to simplify it initially and reduce it to its lowest common denominator. This is in large measure what has happened with Taijiquan as well. Whereby we should recall that it is actually Daoist wisdom expressed in movement. Daoism delves into the innermost secret of life and addresses the most fundamental questions of human existence. One of the central impulses embodied in Taijiquan is openness to new beginnings and to change: breaking through encrusted old patterns of thought, changing unskillful habits of moving and also of behaving, diving confidently into the stream of life - because one knows that this is the only path to internal development.

If the further development of Taijiquan is to be a healthy and authentic one then its external development can only be an expression of the internal development of individual practitioners. Taijiquan, like many other Far Eastern paths (Archery, Aikido, Zen, etc.) is also a practice on the path inside to become more and more in tune with the Dao. Taijiquan as sport, as sponsored by China, makes Taijiquan measurable, quantifiable, rankable and has very little to do with the Daoist roots of the art. Taiji teachers should be conscious of their responsibility towards their students, themselves, and above all towards the Taiji-teachings. The profound and intensive efforts of many generations of Taiji teachers culminates in the teachings which have been handed down.

It is only possible to pay appropriate respect to the teachings when one makes a similar effort to deepen ones practice and to transmit it. Taiji students can rightfully expect their teachers to have trained in a well founded, solid program which adequately reflects the complexity of the subject. By the same token, Taiji teachers can justifiably place expectations on their students. Only teaching what the students want advances neither the students nor the teacher. In the past to be a teacher of Taiji was a calling rather than a career choice. It would certainly serve the further development of Taijiquan to remind oneself of this from time to time.