

# THE ORIGIN & EVOLUTION OF TAIJIQUAN

by Michael A. DeMarco, M.A.

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*Taijiquan enthusiasts arrive in Taipei's New Park before sunrise, benefiting from their practice in an atmosphere of fresh air and tranquility. Later in the morning, disco-style exercisers arrive to gyrate in beat with blaring disco music. Somehow, all seems to blend harmoniously in the typical fashion of Chinese yin-yang sociology. Small surprise that there is also quite a stylistic variety in Taijiquan as well.*

*Photo by M. DeMarco*

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# THE ORIGIN & EVOLUTION OF TAIJIQUAN

by Michael A. DeMarco, M.A.

History, according to the Chinese tradition, is not to be understood as a passage of time toward a perfect human state. On the contrary, it is seen as a regression away from a splendid "Golden Age" when their ancestors lived in a utopian state more than four thousand years ago. All things wise and good were believed to have existed during this period. It represented a period which held secrets for proper living, supreme health and happiness. Even for the martial arts, what is deemed most worthy is held to be the creation of sagacious warriors of antiquity.

The Chinese fanatical respect for antiquity presents some formidable barriers for any student of their culture. It was a common practice for many Chinese writers to falsely assign their works to an earlier time in order to gain greater respect and fame for their works. Sometimes, besides placing their works in an earlier period, writers would credit a work as being "brushed" (they did not use pens yet!) by an earlier figure of prestige. Oftentimes the work would be anonymous, not dated, not punctuated, and filled with incomprehensible symbolic jargon. This certainly occurred in martial art literature as well. Trying to trace the origin of a boxing system can cause a researcher to perform a wonderful assortment of kicks and punches simply out of academic frustration!

Taijiquan, as part of the cultural history of China, is encrusted in a confusing maze of facts and fiction. This is a reality which needs constant attention in studying the history of any martial art. The following theories on the origin of Taijiquan show how myth and legend are blended within the Chinese cultural heritage. Fortunately, with a critical eye for reliable data, we can present a sound overview regarding the evolution of Taijiquan.

## THEORIES OF EARLY DYNASTIC ORIGIN

One theory states that Taijiquan originated during the end of the Liang Dynasty (502-557 AD) and the beginning of the Ch'en Dynasty (557-589 AD). These dynasties had their capital at Nanjing in present-day Jiangsu Province on the Yangtze River.

Another theory holds that the creation of Taijiquan came slightly later, during the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD). The Tang capital is situated in present-day Shaanxi Province. Then called Changan, the city is now referred to as Xi'an. It is the place where the famed life-sized terra cotta warriors, which marked the grave site of China's First Emperor of Qin, were recently unearthed.

In placing the origin of Taijiquan at such early periods, the two theories stated above lack solid verification. These seem to be attempts to place the time of origin to an early era simply for added prestige. If these theories were accepted, a period in the history of Taijiquan representing hundreds of years would be left vacant.

There is no doubt that many boxing schools existed during these early dynastic times, but their connection to the creation of Taijiquan remains a remote root of the evolutionary tree of boxing. Taijiquan clearly comes into being as a later branch in the development of martial arts.

*I am not one  
who was born in  
the possession of  
knowledge;  
I am one who is  
fond of antiquity,  
and earnest in  
seeking it there.*

Confucian Analects, 7:19



*Ink rubbing of the legendary founder of Taijiquan, Chang San-feng.*

## CHANG SAN-FENG AS POSSIBLE INVENTOR

Many of today's Taijiquan teachers will state that their art is derived from the system of Chang San-feng. According to popular belief, he was a famous Daoist living on Mount Wudang in Hebei Province, a master of internal alchemy, and a boxer of the highest grade. Because of his fame, he was invited to the Imperial court by three different Emperors. Although he never did appear after numerous attempts to find him, he was canonized in 1459 by the Emperor Ying-tsung. There is a shrine in Beijing dedicated to "the Immortal San-feng" in the well-known White Cloud Monastery of the Ch'uan-chen Daoist sect.

Most writings describe Chang San-feng, alias Chun Shih, as an extraordinarily tall bearded figure, with large eyes. His feats of magic included riding through the air on a crane, and he could be at different places at the same time. It is even believed that after he died in the 1390's, he miraculously came back to life once again.

All of these accounts regarding Chang San-feng serve to add an aura of semi-religious awe for the god-like creator of Taijiquan. There are Chang San-feng spirit-medium cults in China, particularly in the province of Sichuan. Nonetheless, in official bibliographies there is no mention of him even practicing Taijiquan. Perhaps the most scholarly article in the English language on this subject was written by respected sinologist Anna Seidel, who states:

*His biographies and legends lack even the faintest allusion to his being a boxing master . . . We know next to nothing about Chang San-feng's historical existence and his thought. (484)*

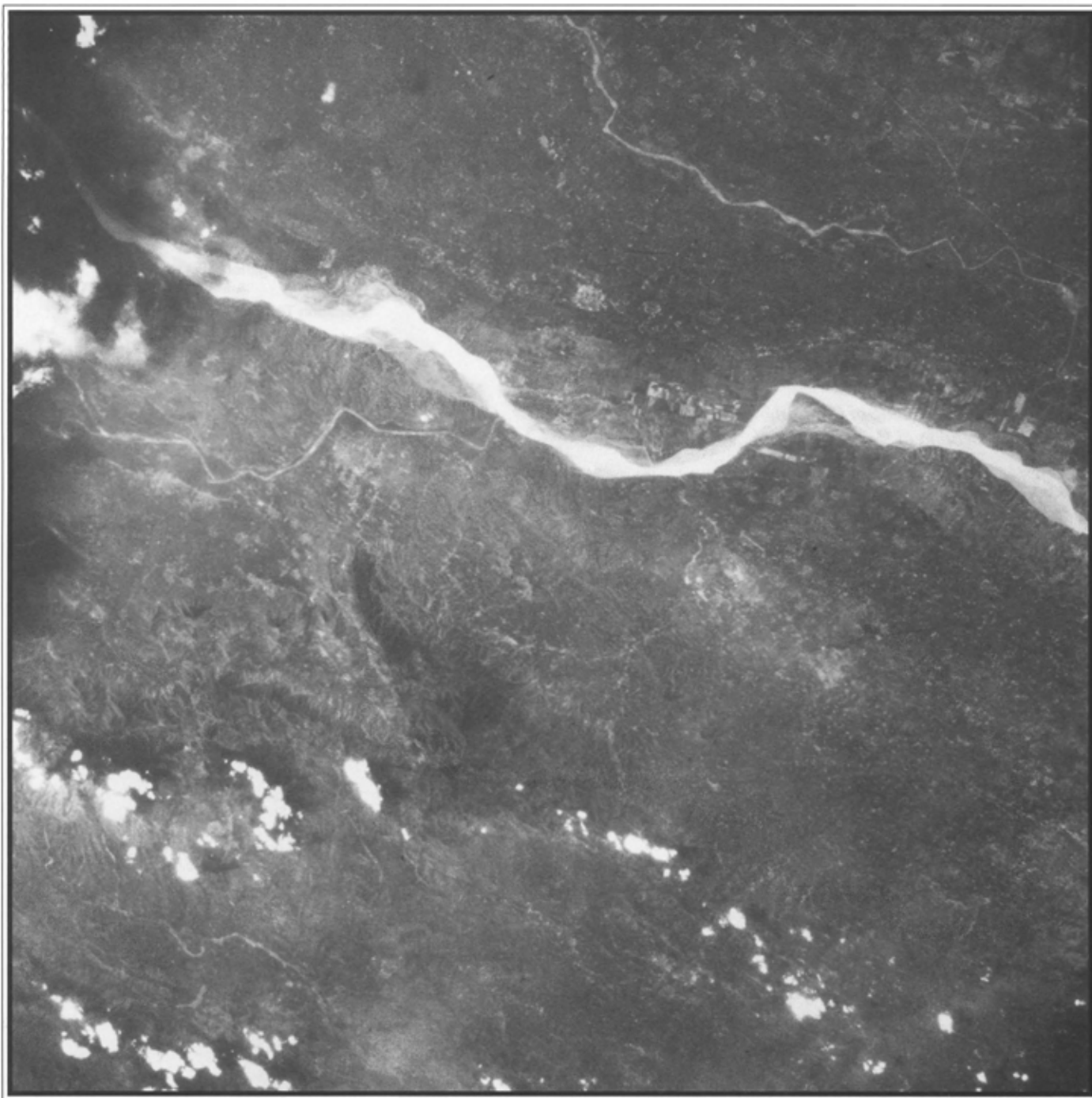
Once faced with the facts, the story of Chang San-feng turns into a symbolic legend which represents the unknown influences that have contributed to the birth of Taijiquan. As the patron of this style, the Daoist Chang San-feng parallels the role Bodhidharma plays as the Buddhist patron of the Shaolin Boxing School. The Daoist sanctuary on Mount Wudang was dedicated to the God of War named Chen-wu. This god was of supreme importance in war-ridden China during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Despite the contradicting facts, many continue to believe that it was this god who revealed the art of Taijiquan to Chang San-feng in a dream.

The technique of attributing the origin of Taijiquan to Chang San-feng is just one illustration of the Chinese use of antedating. In so doing, Taijiquan is given the respect of antiquity and the sacredness of a para-normal manifestation. Chang represents an ideal boxing master with super-normal abilities. Believed to have lived for at least two centuries, he is often credited with creating the most efficient boxing system known.

Chang San-feng's story fits in well with the popular beliefs prevalent during the Ming Dynasty. The thought of the time was influenced by Daoism, particularly the beliefs in Immortals and esoteric techniques for self-cultivation. Through all the uncertainty, we eventually arrive at a point in time when Taijiquan is taught and practiced. It is beyond all doubt that Taijiquan was practiced in a Henan village more than 200 years ago. In this small commune, known as Chenjiagou, it is still practiced today. The known masters living there give no mention of Chang San-feng as part of the Taijiquan tradition, but present their own theory of origin.

## ORIGINATION AT CHEN VILLAGE

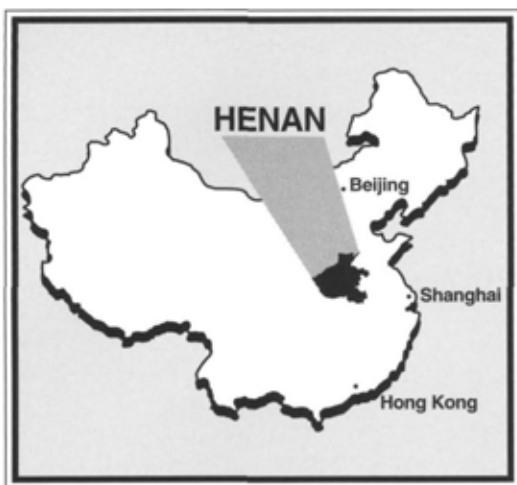
For those who have not been swayed by the emotional attraction of placing the origination of Taijiquan in either the early dynastic periods or at the time of Chang San-feng, the theory that it originated in the Chen villages seems a more likely alternative. Here we find an exact location, verified dates, known boxing masters, and a clearly applicable historic setting for its origin.



**SPACE SHUTTLE PHOTO  
TAKEN OVER THE YELLOW RIVER AUGUST 11, 1989.**

*Compare with map on page 12. Photograph available from the U.S.  
Department of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey EROS Data Center.*

The Chen village obtained its name for the sake of convenience: the majority of the approximately 1,800 people living there are surnamed Chen. It is actually a small commune, roughly 400 miles south of Beijing in the province of Henan. Just a few miles north of the Yellow River, the Chen commune is in Xin Prefecture under the Wen administrative unit. This is less than one hundred miles from the city of Luoyang, which was previously a dynastic capital and a great cultural center.

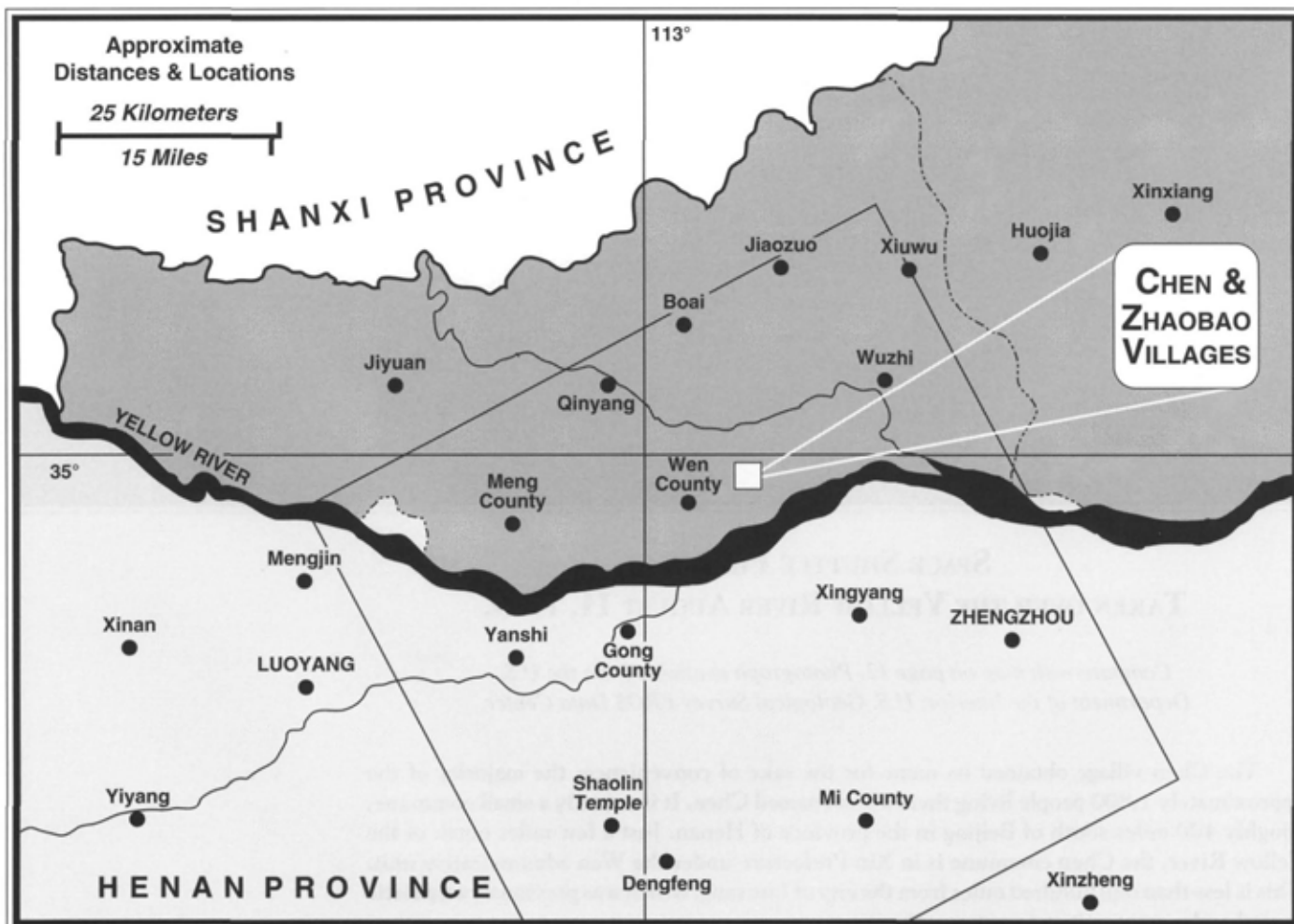


*Above: Peoples Republic of China showing the central location of Henan Province.*



*Right: Location of Xin Prefecture and adjoining provinces around Henan.*

*Below: Details of western Xin Prefecture. For the area outlined in the slanted square below, compare with Space Shuttle photo on page 11.*





The Chen village plays a unique role along with Henan province in China's historical development. In the most remote times, this area spawned one of China's earliest Stone Age cultures. By the 11th century, Luoyang was one of two metropolitan areas with a population of over one million people. Because of its riches, the area was often subject to barbaric invasions as well as internal rebellion.

In contrast to the external threats, internal problems were usually caused by peasant dissatisfaction resulting from natural and political disasters. The rapid increase in population during the later dynasties placed greater burdens on the Henan people. They had to face floods and food shortages, as well as exploitation by those holding political power. By 1600, about half of the provincial lands had been given to friends and relatives of the Imperial house as gifts or rewards. This abusive practice uprooted many peasants from their land.

The social structure of the Chen clan illustrates many features prominent among other small communes attempting to solve similar problems. One result of the insecure political situation during the Ming/Qing dynasties is that small groups of related people would bind themselves together into their own social unit. They organized themselves around a village leader and set up a communal system which would provide for their every need. Their major concern was focused on having sufficient amounts of food and water. But in a time of incessant warfare, rebellion and banditry, knowledge of the martial arts became a necessity for the protection of one's farm, home and family.

It is not surprising that the Shaolin Monastery, like the Chen village, is located in Henan Province. The monastery is about fifty miles southeast of the former capital of Luoyang. Other clans became noted for their own styles of boxing, but the Shaolin Temple and the Chen clan became the most famous for their superior systems. The monastery was also a social unit which had need of protecting its agricultural lands and religious art treasures. Likewise, the Chen village formed its own small protective group within society. In doing so, it placed emphasis on developing a martial art useful for the defense of its inhabitants against any outsiders, regardless of their boxing system.

Numerous theories have been stated which attempt to tie the Chen village in with the creation of Taijiquan. By trying to find the earliest point in time when Taijiquan was formed, we are presented with the scantiest of facts. One figure we find with substantial documentation is Wang Tsung-yueh.

Wang Tsung-yueh was a native of Shanxi, the province just north of Henan. It is said that he introduced a new form of boxing to the people of Chenjiagou when he stopped for a while in the village during his travels. This was said to have occurred during Emperor Ch'ien Lung's reign (1736-1795). A school teacher by profession, Wang was a learned man, credited with linking the original thirteen postures into a continuous sequence. In so doing, he applied the Daoist philosophy and concepts of Yin/Yang to the new style. One book, the *Taijiquan Lun*, is reputedly his work. In it is found the first mention of Taijiquan as the formal name given to this system.

Wang Tsung from Shaanxi Province is often confused with Wang Tsung-yueh from Shanxi. The former is believed to be a disciple of the legendary Chang San-feng. Because of the similarity of names and as an attempt to push the Taijiquan lineage back further in time, Wang Tsung-yueh is sometimes said to have learned his art from Chang San-feng. Wang, living during a much later period, could not have been a student of Chang.

Regardless of the confusion surrounding Wang Tsung-yueh, there is little doubt about his influence at Chenjiagou. Since the village was already famed for its boxing, there is the greatest probability that a synthesis of styles took place. This seems to be the case because Wang only affected a Chen style that had been previously developed.

Although Wang Tsung-yueh is credited with the first mention of the name Taijiquan, we are primarily concerned with the evolution of the boxing form itself. Formerly it was known as *Chang Chuan*, or Long Fist. By tracing the style prevalent at Chenjiagou during the time when Wang Tsung-yueh was visiting, we find that a particular style had already been in existence there for a number of years.

Chen Wang-ting, alias Tsou Ting, is credited as the true founder of the Chen style Taijiquan. It is estimated that he lived from 1597 to 1664 and was a garrison commander in the Wen county where the Chen village is located. A military man, Chen absorbed many noted

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styles during his travels. Later he created his own style.

According to significant historical data and fables, Chen Wang-ting has received recognition as the true inventor of Taijiquan and the “push hands” exercises. Adopting and modifying movements from many martial art styles, plus tempering these movements with his own wisdom, he created the Chen system. Chen’s new syncretic forms were to be performed in a fashion compatible with the then prevalent theories of Daoism.

Chen Wang-ting was the ninth generation heir of the Chen family, which was to carry on his unique boxing style to the present day. About 95% of the villagers living there today practice at least one of the forms originally taught by Chen himself. But this Chen style, originally so secretive, has moved outward from its place of origin with the passing of years. Until roughly one hundred years ago, Taijiquan was largely practiced only in Henan province. Since then, it has swept to the four quarters of China and then into overseas areas where Chinese have immigrated.

Although it is the more modern Yang Style that is popular throughout the world, the Chen Style is also making its move into other areas outside of China proper. But this is on a much less noticeable scale, for the Chen Style of Taijiquan was always a rare style, even in China. It was a style reserved only for a select few. For this reason, the Chen Style will remain an uncommon martial art system whose exceptional traits are known more from hearsay than from actual experience.

## MASTERS AND EVOLUTION

In tracing the lineage of Taijiquan, we can take an analytical approach by starting with the present-day masters and work our way back through time. By doing this, we amass an overpowering list of teachers and students. Many of the teachers are mediocre, to mention nothing of the students. There are only a few teachers of major significance. These are the Masters who have truly developed the art of Taijiquan.

The following chronology illustrates just how the various styles emerged from the original in light of the historic setting. It also presents the preservation of the Chen style through the direct lineage.

There is a confusing array of Taijiquan styles including the Yang, Chen, Woo, Hao, Sun and Wu. Plus there are additional distinguishing adjectives such as the new, old, big frame, simplified, small frame, and an assortment of newly imagined styles. Like a substitute for a Chinese “water torture,” we are supposed to bear the burden of figuring out how all these styles are related. As an additional hindrance, many of the names are found presented only in the Chinese rendering.

A unifying feature regarding the evolution of this martial system is that the variations are all called “Taijiquan.” This is the connecting thread which we can follow from beginning to end. Another interesting feature is that all the styles trace their heritage to the original Chen system. The Chen system, as we have noted, began at the Chen Village in Henan Province.

## CHEN WANG-TING

In a temple at Chenjiagou there is a painting of Chen Wang-ting, honoring him as the founder of the system. It is logical that the founder would not be a “Chang” as Chang San-feng, or a “Wang” as Wang Tsung-yueh. As a rule, Chen Wang-ting’s system was to be handed down only to descendants of the Chen family. While his original forms have largely been preserved through direct lineage, variations have occurred with time, some becoming separate styles in their own right.

The Chen style has been carried on through private instruction, passing from teacher to student over the past two centuries. This style is rarely presented in public. Literature regarding the subject has likewise been scanty. It was a highly secretive art form, requiring oral instructions from a Master.

Today, the seclusive tradition which surrounds the Chen Style continues to exist. People may think that because there is some literature and demonstrations of Chen Taijiquan that it is now openly presented to the public. Upon closer examination, what was written is found to present only a limited view of the system as a whole. Visual presentations usually consist



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of the basic form which, impressive in itself, is only an introduction to other sets.

Chen Wang-ting, previous to developing his own style, was influenced by a general Qi Jiguang, who reputedly designed a routine consisting of 32 movements which he synthesized from sixteen boxing styles. Chen, in turn, combined 29 of these movements with others and used them to form a total of seven different routines. Five of these were rudimentary from which one remains as a standard routine for junior students.

Movements in the first routine are practiced with the feet leading the hands. The second routine is characterized with hand movements leading. Another noted feature is that there is a greater percentage of harder movements in the second routine. A later development, a third routine, attempts to perfectly blend the hard and soft movements in harmonious physical orchestration.

The style that Chen Wang-ting created was a physical embodiment of Daoist philosophy, particularly the concept of Yin/Yang. His system is a harmonious blending of hard/soft, fast/slow, passive and active. Within the Yin there is potential Yang, and vice versa. One of the Chen routines is called Paochui, or the "Cannon Fist." This term describes the intrinsic power present in Chen Wang-ting's system. The cannonball sitting in a stationary barrel becomes an active, hard-hitting projectile due to the explosive power inherent in its design. Chen Wang-ting developed such a system for his martial art, always potent with power.

Compared to all other styles of Taijiquan, the Chen Style is also the most strenuous to practice. It includes very difficult leg work, utilizing squats, leaps and various kicks. Often there are changes in tempo. Movements include a circling and twisting of the waist known for producing "cork-screw strength" and "twisting energy." A hand strike, for example, actually starts from the heels allowing energy to move through the legs, waist, torso, shoulders, arms, and then into the hands. The end result is a blow stemming from the whole body, not just muscular power from one arm.

There are many features common to all Taijiquan styles. However, a distinguishing feature of the Chen Style is its unique employment of physical laws to ensure maximum power for boxing. This is illustrated, for example, in the perfect alignment of the index finger to the elbow. The hand and arm form a straight line. Whether the hand formation is open or closed, the wrist should not be bent in any way. This plum line straightness is paramount in the Chen Style's use of the hands and can also be seen in the upright posture of the spine. It provides maximum power and safety from possible injury which could otherwise result during combat.

Regarding footwork, there is also a difference from other styles. In the posture called "Rooster Stands on One Leg," for example, the foot of the raised leg points directly forward with the sole parallel to the ground. This movement differs from the Yang Style where the toe points downwards. This simple variance is utilized for additional power as when used for a knee strike to an opponents mid-section.

The examples above show some of the unique features embodied in Chen Taijiquan. These movements include a large spectrum of fighting techniques: numerous open and closed hand strikes, *chin-na* holds, jumping kicks, kicking from low postures, throws, and a wide assortment of blocks. During each set, special attention is given to one's technique, including the duration of the routine, strength developed, changes in rhythm and use of breathing.

Chen Wang-ting's system of Taijiquan has been preserved through direct lineage from his time to the present day. In order to distinguish his original style from later branches of Taijiquan, it is simply referred to as Lao Jia, or the "Old Family" system. A few other major schools which branched out from this direct lineage will be discussed later.

## THE CHEN LINEAGE

The next major figure of the Lao Jia is Chen Chang-xing (1771-1853). He was the 14th generation Grandmaster who lived in Chenjiagou and was directly descended from the founder. Because of his upright posture and revered character, he was referred to as "Mr. Name Board" (comparing him to a board which listed ancestors names, an object of great respect). Chen Chang-xing is also remembered as the teacher of Yang Lu-chan, who later founded the now popular style associated with his family name. Although this new-found branch began at this time, the mainstream of Lao Jia continued in its own familial succession.

We can see how selective Lao Jia masters are by observing the style's lineage. Chen Chang-xing was the direct descendant of the founder. He, in turn, as the 14th generation Grandmaster, passed his knowledge on to his son, Chen Geng-yun. This 15th generation Grandmaster served as a military guard for the gentry class in Shandong Province. He became well-known for providing security for the Chinese upperclass, while his name became a symbol of law and order. The law was enforced through his superior martial prowess, or simply through the fear of it.

The son of Chen Geng-yun, who became the 16th generation Grandmaster, was Chen Yen-xi. Following in his father's footsteps was no easy task. Chen Geng-yun was held in such prominence that a monument was dedicated to him along a Shandong road that was used to transport the rich cargo he protected for the gentry. The governor of the province, upon seeing this monument, decided to seek out Chen Geng-yun to ask him to teach his children the Old Chen Style. Since Chen Geng-yun had already died a few years previous, Chen Yen-xi was commissioned for the task.

One significant aspect of Chen Yen-xi giving instruction to the children of Shandong's governor is that the governor was to become a famous figure in China's history. His name was Yuan Shih-k'ai, a political-military man having great influence in the events which were to shape China's future.

Yuan was a pivot in the power struggles in the Beijing capital. He was the leading military figure in north China who at one time declared himself Emperor and also became the President of the new republic. Yuan met Chen during the final days of the Qing Dynasty. In this period of tragic disunity, China was plagued by revolutions, rebellions, and foreign intervention. Shortly after the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, warlords carved up the land in proportion to their own military strength and political cunning.

The significance of Yuan Shih-k'ai's asking Chen Yen-xi to teach his family reinforces the belief that the Lao Jia Chen Style had gained a reputation as the most fearsome of all fighting systems. The Chen family name was already legend in places far distant from Henan Province.

There is another interesting note regarding a student of Chen Yen-xi named Du Yu-tse (1896-1990). Du was the son of Du Yueh, the leading official in charge of the Henan country where the Chen village is located. Du, originally from Boai city located north of Chenjiagou, later moved to Taiwan. From among his list of students, he selected a few to become his adopted "sons" to carry on his inherited Taijiquan tradition. More details regarding Du's life can be found in a booklet written by his "number one adopted son," Wang Jia-xiang, dedicated to Master Du for his 82nd birthday. (An excerpt is translated in this issue of the *Journal of Asian Martial Arts*.)

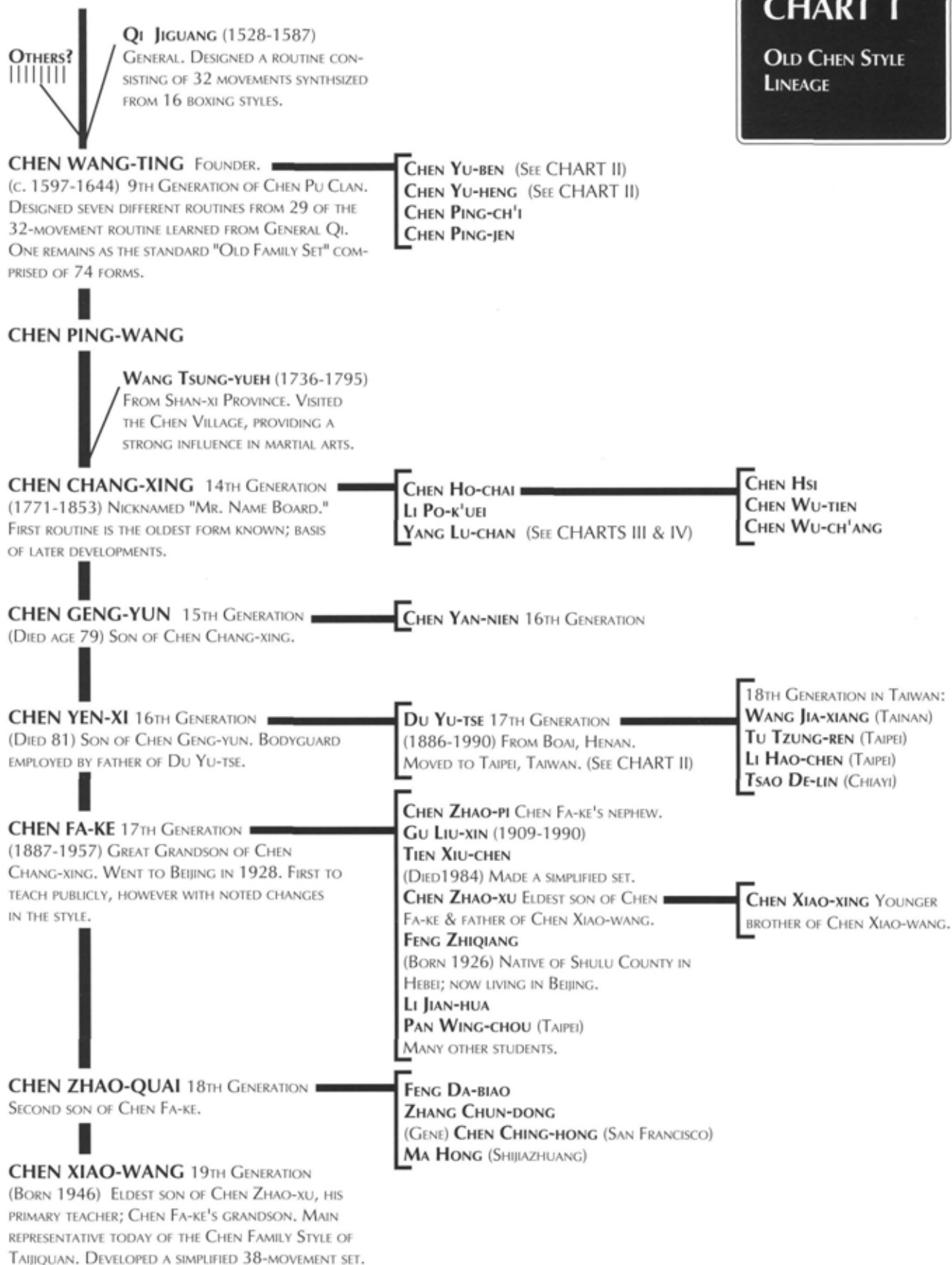
Next in the family lineage was Chen Fa-ke (1887-1957), the son of Chen Yen-xi. Chen Fa-ke, the 17th generation Grandmaster, went to Beijing in 1920 on personal business. There he became the first Master of the Chen system to teach publicly. It was noticed, however, that he had changed the content and way of practicing the routines. It is most probable that his instruction to university classes differed from what he presented in private.

In Beijing, Chen Fa-ke was often confronted with challenges from noted masters of various styles. Although he himself was a gentleman of great self-control, in instances of persistent antagonism, the fierceness of his system would prove overwhelming once unleashed. Defeated masters, such as Hsu Yu-sun, would acknowledge Chen Fa-ke's superiority and sometimes humble themselves enough to become his students. Chen could defend himself with ease, but refrained from hurting his opponents.

Chen Fa-ke's public teachings have continued in their changed form under such teachers as T'ien Xiuchen and Kan Guixiang in Beijing. The Lao Jia system has been retained hereditarily. Chen Zhao-quai inherited the system, becoming the 18th generation Grandmaster. He was Chen Fa-ke's second son who carried on the tradition until his death in May, 1981.

The current Grandmaster and, therefore, the 19th in order is Chen Xiao-wang. As the grandson of Chen Fa-ke, he is the living embodiment of the Lao Jia system. He recently developed a simplified Chen exercise comprised of 38 forms which is gaining popularity in the People's Republic of China. The present Chen Style influence has also reached the United States. A student under Chen Zhao-quai, Gene (Ching Hong) Chen, presently teaches in San

## DIRECT CHEN FAMILY LINEAGE



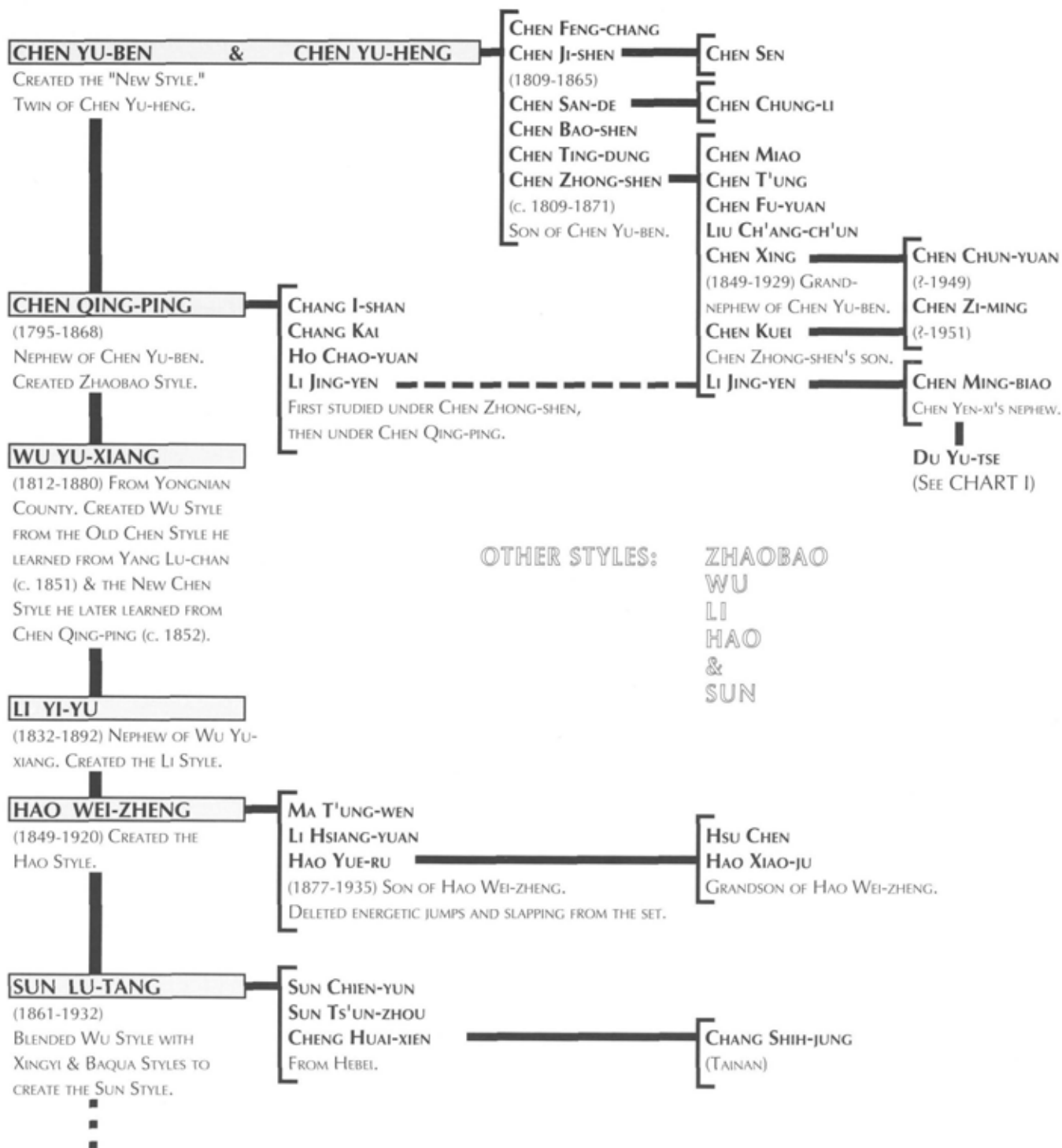
## CHART I

### OLD CHEN STYLE LINEAGE

## CHART II

### NEW CHEN STYLE LINEAGE & OTHERS

### NEW CHEN STYLE CONTINUED



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Francisco. Gene Chen is the Chairman of the Chen Taijiquan Association of America.

From the Taijiquan mainstream, representing the Chen lineage beginning with Chen Wang-ting, a clear picture can be drawn which illustrates where other styles emerged. In addition to the Lao Jia Chen system, the Xin Jia, or "New Family" system is among the earliest variants.

## THE XIN JIA, WU, HAO AND SUN STYLES

Chen Yu-ben and Chen Yu-heng were twins who inherited Taiji from the founder Chen Wang-ting. Chen Yu-ben is credited with changing the Lao Jia forms to make a "New Family" system, or Xin Jia, composed of 83 forms. Yu-ben passed this new style on to his son, Chen Zhong-shen (1809-1871). A long list of students followed this teaching, most bearing the Chen family name. This style, although differing from the Lao Jia, made the Chen style more available to the public. Chen Zi-ming and Chen Chun-yuan were the leading figures of the Xin Jia until the middle of this century.

Another student of Chen Yu-ben was Chen Qing-ping (1795-1868), who created a style characterized by small movements largely derived from Xin Jia. It is referred to as Xiao (Small) Jia, or Zaobao Jia, Zaobao being the village where Chen Qing-ping lived. Because a great portion of his students did not bear the Chen surname, we find later styles of Taijiquan classified under other surnames.

Immediately after Chen Qing-ping comes a series of newly formed schools. The founders of these schools modified the Taijiquan as taught by their teachers, re-naming their new methods according to their own surnames. The list of innovators includes Wu Yu-xiang, Hao Wei-zheng and Sun Lu-tang.

Wu Yu-xiang (1812-1880) was from a village in the southern part of Hebei Province, Hantan Prefecture. The founder of the Yang Style, Yang Lu-chan, was also from this village. A wealthy store owner, Wu Yu-xiang had employed Yang as an assistant. He also hired Chen Chang-xing to teach his sons the Chen style. Wu was fortunate to have studied the Lao Jia style from Chen Chang-xing and the the Xin Jia by Chen Qing-ping before his own Wu style took shape.

The brother of Wu Yu-xiang was Wu Ch'iu-ying, a magistrate in central Henan Province, who reportedly found a rare treatise on Taijiquan in a salt store and purchased it for his brother. The author was believed to be Wang Tsung-yueh, the martial art practitioner said to have visited Chenjiagou in the mid-18th century. Wu Yu-xiang himself wrote at least five articles regarding the practice of Taijiquan.

Some of the Chen style can be seen within the Wu system, incorporating energetic movements such as a forward jump kick executed while slapping ones toes. Wu taught Li Yi-yu (1883-1932), who was his sister's son. Another student of his was Hao Wei-zheng (1849-1920). Actually derived from the Wu School, the Hao style takes its name from Hao Wei-zheng who popularized this particular branch of Taijiquan. Hao Yueh-ju, Hao Wei-zheng's son, carried on this tradition but deleted some of the more strenuous movements derived from the Chen style.

Born in Baoding, Hebei Province, Sun Lu-tang (1861-1932) was a student of Hao Wei-zheng. Sun's style required much flexibility and was fairly fast paced, reminiscent of the Chen system. For some time Sun lived in Beijing. Approaching 70 years of age, he was made Chairman of the Jiangsu Province Boxing Association. The Sun Style is also known as the Huo Bu Jia, or the "Lively Pace" Style.

Thus, the major schools of Taijiquan classified under the surnames Wu, Hao and Sun were all derived from the Xin Jia Chen system as founded by Chen Yu-ben. In addition to this branch, two other styles have been recognized as major schools: the Yang and a Wu style which is not affiliated with the school of Wu Yu-xiang. Within the overall evolutionary development of Taijiquan, these schools emerge under special conditions which fostered their unique characteristics and popularity among the masses.

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## THE YANG SCHOOL LINEAGE AND BRANCHES

Why is the Yang Style the most popular of Taijiquan styles? Because of its superior fighting techniques? Greater health benefits? . . . Many such questions are answered with the understanding of who the style's founder actually was, how he gained his knowledge, and how he passed on this knowledge.

Yang Lu-chan (1799-1872), also known as Yang Fu-kui, was a native of Hebei Province, Hantan Prefecture, Yunglienxien administrative unit. Here, the founder of the Wu style, herbalist Wu Yu-xiang, also lived. As mentioned previously, Yang worked for Wu, and it was through this connection that Yang had the opportunity to learn the Chen style. Yang's relative, Li Po-k'uei, also was employed here.

Yang began to learn Taijiquan by practicing the movements he secretly observed while Chen Chang-xing taught Wu's sons. The discovery of Yang's ability to learn Taijiquan so well by simply watching the lessons encouraged Chen to accept him as a student. Yang was a natural. Under the tutelage of Master Chen, Yang became a Master in his own right. It is believed that Yang spent a total of 18 years at Chenjiagou. In later years, Yang went to the capital city of Beijing where he soon earned the nickname "Unbeatable Yang." This was due to Yang's defeating numerous famed boxers. Some stories say that after 18 masters had challenged him, Yang remained "untouchable."

When he went to Beijing, Yang gave public instruction in the art of Taijiquan. But, it must be remembered the style he taught was not the same as those systems he himself learned. Beijing was the capital of China, which during the Qing dynasty was ruled by the Manchus, not the Chinese themselves! The Manchurian Royalty, upon hearing of the famed boxer, asked for instruction. Yang taught Manchus and others, although he did not include the fast, powerful movements associated with his studies of the Old Chen system. He concentrated only on the Yin movements, which were slow and soft. In so doing, he created a new style which helped Taijiquan become known for its therapeutic benefits.

Although what Yang taught publicly was largely health oriented, his private teachings must have included his philosophy and techniques for self-defense. After all, he did teach the Emperor's guards! It would be hard to imagine such warriors wasting their time on a martial art without effective fighting techniques.

Proof that Yang Lu-chan had passed on a formidable fighting art is exemplified in the lives of his sons, Yang Jien-hou (c.1839-1917) and Yang Ban-hou (c.1837-1892). When Jien-hou was 80 years old, he was attacked from all sides by nine men. All nine were ineffective against Jien-hou's defense. Each attacker was knocked away by a smooth series of blows and ward-offs.

When Yang Ban-hou's reputation also began to spread, he was challenged by a well-known boxer named Liu. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, came to view the event. During their encounter, Liu grabbed Ban-hao's arm but his grip was easily countered, resulting in Liu's defeat. Yang Lu-chan complimented his son's success in combat, but explained that he had not yet reached the true artistic pinnacle of Taijiquan. After all, Ban-hao's shirt sleeve was slightly torn in the contest.

Before Yang Lu-chan's sons became so formidable, they were forced into practice day and night under an almost reclusive spirit. Failures in learning their boxing lessons resulted in brow beatings at their father's hands. The psychological pressure was overwhelming for the sons. Ban-hao once tried to scale the family courtyard wall to freedom, but failed. His brother, Jien-hou, was unsuccessful in a suicide attempt.

Compulsory studies alone did not make the Yang brothers superior boxers. Upon the death of their father, many friends, family members, and students gathered at Yang Lu-chan's graveside. A senior student with extraordinary boxing skills proclaimed himself the only worthy heir of the Yang Style Taijiquan. Chen Hsiu-feng had reason to claim this honor. First of all, he was no doubt better skilled than either of the Yang brothers. He was noted for possessing great internal energies for defeating any opponent, even without making physical contact. An example of this power is illustrated by his lifting a heavy wooden chair with the "sticking energy" of his palm. This formidable reputation served to intimidate the Yang brothers.



# CHART III

## YANG STYLE LINEAGE

### DIRECT YANG FAMILY LINEAGE

#### YANG LU-CHAN [FU-KUI]

(1799-1872) NATIVE OF YONGNIAN COUNTY, HEBEI; TAUGHT IN BEIJING. NICKNAMED "YANG THE INVINCIBLE." MODIFIED THE OLD CHEN STYLE TO BETTER SUIT GOALS OF HEALTH. FOUNDER OF THE YANG STYLE.

#### YANG JIEN-HOU

(1839-1917) THIRD SON OF YANG LU-CHAN. FURTHER MODIFIED THE FORM FROM HIS FATHER INTO THE "MIDDLE STYLE."

#### YANG CHENG-FU [CHAO-QING]

(1883-1936) THIRD SON OF YANG JIEN-HOU. GREAT INFLUENCE IN SPREADING THE ART TO MANY PARTS OF CHINA. STANDARDIZED THE FORM OF TAIJQUAN WITH GRACEFUL, EXTENDED MOVEMENTS; KNOWN AS THE "BIG STYLE," IT BECAME THE MOST POPULAR STYLE.

#### YANG ZHEN-DUO

(TAIYUAN, HEBEI) THIRD SON OF YANG CHENG-FU, BORN IN 1926. MOST OF TRAINING WAS UNDER HIS BROTHERS, SHAOU-CHUNG AND ZHEN-JI. MAIN REPRESENTATIVE OF THE YANG FAMILY STYLE TODAY.

CHEN HSIU-FENG

WU HO-QING

LI RUI-DONG

WANG LAN-TING

WAN CHUN (Manchu Nobles' Athletic Camp)

LING SHAN (Manchu Nobles' Athletic Camp)

WU YU-XIANG

(1812-1880) (SEE CHART II)

QUAN YOU (SEE CHART IV)

YANG BAN-HOU (SEE CHART IV)

(1837-1892) Second son of Yang Lu-chan.

CHI DE

XU YU-SHENG (1879-1945)

YANG CHAO-YUAN

YANG SHAO-HOU [XIAO-HSIUNG]

(1862-1929) First son of Yang Jien-hou.

TUNG YING-CHIEH (1888-1961)

STUDIED UNDER YANG CHENG-FU FOR 20 YEARS.

FU ZHONG-WEN NEPHEW OF YANG CHENG-FU.

YANG SHOU-CHUNG [ZHEN-MING]

(HONG KONG) BORN IN 1909. ELDEST SON OF YANG CHENG-FU.

YANG ZHEN-JI (HANDAN, HEBEI)

SECOND SON OF YANG CHENG-FU.

YANG ZHEN-GUO (HANDAN, HEBEI)

FOURTH SON OF YANG CHENG-FU.

CHEN WEI-MING

LI YA-HSUAN

WU HUI-CHUN (?-1937)

WANG LAN-TING (died young)

CHOY HOK-PENG (1886-1957)

(SAN FRANCISCO)

CHENG MAN-CH'ING (1900-1975) (New York)

MANY OTHER STUDENTS.

YANG JUN (TAIYUAN, HEBEI)

GRANDSON OF YANG ZHEN-DUO.

LI PIN-FU

YANG CHEN-SHENG

T'IENT SHAO-HSIEN

JASMINE TUNG (HONG KONG)

DAUGHTER OF TUNG YING-CHIEH.

TUNG HU-LIN (HAWAII)

SON OF TUNG YING-CHIEH.

LI HUANG-TSE (SHANGHAI)

HUANG WEN-SHAN

(LOS ANGELES)

LIANG CHING-YU (HONG KONG)

CHIEF DISCIPLE OF CHEN WEI-MING.

CHOY KAM-MAN (SAN FRANCISCO)

LIANG TUNG-TSAI (BORN 1900)

WILLIAM C.C. CHEN (NEW YORK)

CHANG CHIH-KANG

HSIH SHU-FENG (TAICHUNG)

HUANG SHENG-HSIEN

(SINGAPORE)

MANY OTHER STUDENTS.

# CHART IV

## YANG & WU STYLE LINEAGES

### YANG LU-CHAN

[FU-K'UEI] (1799-1872) NATIVE OF YONGNIAN COUNTY, HEBEI; TAUGHT IN BEIJING. NICKNAMED "YANG THE INVINCIBLE." MODIFIED THE OLD CHEN STYLE TO BETTER SUIT GOALS OF HEALTH. FOUNDER OF THE YANG STYLE.

### YANG JIEN-HOU

(1839-1917) THIRD SON OF YANG LU-CHAN. FURTHER MODIFIED THE FORM FROM HIS FATHER INTO THE "MIDDLE STYLE." (SEE CHART III)

### YANG BAN-HOU

(SEE CHART III)  
(1837-1892) Second son of Yang Lu-chan.

CHEN HSUI-FENG  
LING SHAN (BEIJING)  
WAN CH'UN  
CHANG QING-LING  
YANG CHAO-P'ENG  
WANG CHIAO-YU (BEIJING)

WANG YEN-NIEN (TAIPEI)

KUO LIEN-YING (1895-?)  
(SAN FRANCISCO)

CHIANG YUN-CHUNG

### QUAN YOU

(1834-1902) Manchu Nobles' Athletic Camp. Also studied under Yang Lu-chan.

WANG MAO-ZHAI  
LIU FENG-SHAN

YANG YU-TING

WANG PEI-SHENG (BEIJING)  
BORN 1919.

### WU JIAN-QUAN

(1870-1942) Son of Quan You. Founder of the Wu Style that is second in popularity to the Yang Style. Often distinguished from Wu Yu-xiang's Wu Style by the spelling Woo.

WU TZU-CHEN  
WANG JUN-SHENG  
CHU-MIN-I  
BROTHER-IN-LAW OF WANG QING-WEI,  
POLITICAL LEADER.  
MA YUEH-LING (SHANGHAI)  
SON-IN-LAW OF WU JIAN-QUAN.

MA JIONG-POU (SHANGHAI)  
SON OF MA YUEH-LING.  
SOPHIA DELZA (NEW YORK)

SUN REN-ZHI

■  
■  
■

Yang Ban-hou and Yang Jien-hou were inspired to study in earnest, with the help of their father's secret manuals. Afterwards, Jien-hou was said to have attained the ability to levitate. So sensitive became his control over inner energy that a swallow could not take flight from his open palm. Such feats were not performed for amusement only. These abilities illustrate requirements for executing boxing techniques at the ultimate level of proficiency. Thus, both had finally reached a proficiency in the martial arts that their father had originally wished.

Chen Hsiu-feng later conceded the title back to the Yang brothers. He himself continued teaching in the Yen Ch'eng district of Henan Province. Mild-mannered Yang Jien-hou attracted many students. His irritable brother, Ban-hou, chose only a small number of disciples. Because of this, his particular teachings eventually became extinct.

There are some interesting aspects of Yang Ban-hou's following. Being taught by his father and also a little by Wu Yu-xiang, the found of the Wu style, Ban-hou passed on his acquired knowledge to a select few. One of his students was a farmer named Chang Qing-ling. Another Ban-hou student was a Manchurian whose Chinese name was Quan Yu (1834-1902). He was a dedicated student. After mastering the teachings of Ban-hou, Quan Yu carefully imparted what he had learned to his son Wu Jien-quan (1870-1942).

Wu Jien-quan perfected the teachings of his father. His way of practicing Taijiquan became known as the Wu Style. Sometimes his style and that of Wu Yu-xiang's are differentiated by rendering their names into "Wu" and "Woo." In Chinese, both characters are written differently. For anyone who can read the Chinese, the names are easily distinguished. Wu Jien-quan took his method to Shanghai. Later this Wu Style also became popular in Hong Kong and Singapore.

A student of Wu Jien-quan became very well known, not particularly for his martial art skills, but for his political standing. His name was Chu Min-i. Chu was the brother-in-law of Wang Qing-wei, once President of China's Nationalist Government. Chu himself was ambassador to Japan after 1937.

Wu Jien-quan's son-in-law, Ma Yueh-liang, is likewise a teacher of the Wu Style. In Shanghai, Master Ma taught Sophia Delza, who now teaches in New York city at her own studio as well as at the United Nations. She wrote one of the first books in English dealing with Taijiquan.

The above lineage stemming from Yang Ban-hou is only one branch of Yang Lu-chan's original style. The founder had other disciples. His student, Wu Ho-ying, is said to have written a book of Taijiquan but ascribed it to the earlier figure Wang Tsung-yueh. Forging Wang's name on the Taijiquan treatise helped make the book more popular.

Another student of Yang Lu-chan was Wang Lan-ting. Although Wang died at an early age, he possessed such great skills that he was a source of pride for his teacher. A student of Wang Lan-ting, Li Pin-fu, illustrates the effectiveness of Wang's teachings. Li was once challenged by a *qi-gong* specialist. As his antagonist spoke, Li remained calm, petting a pet dog that he was holding in his arms. The impatient challenger darted forward only to be easily rebuffed by Li, who tenderly held onto his pet during the short scuffle.

The most influential line to descend from Yang Lu-chan was to pass on to his younger son, Yang Jien-hou (1839-1917). Of pleasing disposition, Jien-hou attracted many students. He was very proficient with weapons as well as the open-hand techniques. Two of his sons studied with him: Yang Shao-hou (1862-1929) and Yang Cheng-fu (1883-1936).

Shao-hou, the eldest son, began his study of Taijiquan at the early age of seven. He learned much from his uncle Yang Ban-hou. In later years Shao-hou became a superb boxer, but because of his rough manner most disciples studied with him for only a short time. According to rumor, he killed some of his opponents in boxing matches. The most important aspects of his art, characterized by small, compact movements, were imparted to very few. As a result, Yang Shao-hou's particular style of Taijiquan is very rare. He committed suicide in Nanjing in 1929, leaving only one son, Yang Chen-sheng.

Yang Jien-hou had a second son, Chao-hou, who died young and, therefore, did not perpetuate the Yang Style. The third son on the other hand, Yang Cheng-fu, had great influence. He systematized the style into the form so familiar today: natural postures utilizing steady, slow, expansive movements, executed with tensionless ease. Yang was never defeated even though most of his skill was self-taught. Beginning studies at age twenty, he was not very

interested in Taijiquan while his father lived. A genius in his own right, we can only imagine what accomplishments Yang Cheng-fu would have made if he had studied more diligently with his father.

The Yang Style was spread by Yang Cheng-fu from Beijing where he taught, to other areas of China, including Nanjing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Hong Kong. Of Yang's four sons, it is Yang Zhen-duo (born 1926, in Yongnian county, Hebei) who inherited the family system. Zhen-duo has been very active in furthering interest in the art in China. He has also traveled overseas to share his special insights and knowledge. However, it is due to Yang Cheng-fu's senior disciples that the art was dispersed throughout the world. Part of his work includes a treatise on Taijiquan called *Yang's Ten Important Points*.

Among the many students of Yang Cheng-fu are such well-known masters as Tung Ying-chieh (1888-1961) and Cheng Man-ch'ing (1900-1975). The first mentioned studied under Yang for close to twenty years, beginning at age seventeen. Tung taught in Hong Kong and his son, Tung Hu-lin, now teaches in Hawaii.

It was in 1941 that Taijiquan was first formally introduced in the United States under the instruction of Choy Hok-peng (1886-1957). Choy was also a student of Yang Cheng-fu. He started an institute in San Francisco which eventually had branches in Los Angeles and New York. His son, Choy Kam-man, remains teaching in San Francisco. Another Yang Cheng-fu student also had great impact in the United States: Mr. Cheng Man-ch'ing.

Early in his career, Cheng Man-ch'ing was a professor living in Beijing. He began the study of Taijiquan under Yang Cheng-fu's guidance in order to better his health which had deteriorated from tuberculosis. The Taijiquan practice had a miraculous effect on his condition. As a result, his dedication to the art became a total commitment. After attaining a high level of boxing skills, Cheng traveled about China accepting and defeating a long line of challengers. On one occasion, while traveling through Sichuan Province, his talents were tested by a Daoist boxer surnamed Dzou. Cheng was quickly defeated. This incident inspired Cheng to accept tutelage from this learned master. Cheng then altered some of the Yang style postures accordingly and his skill increased. As his techniques were perfected, his power became awesome.

Later, Cheng taught in Hunan, Taiwan and then in New York. Many of his students became noted masters of which the best known are living in Taiwan or in the United States. William C.C. Chen is one such student, now master, who originally came to New York with Cheng. Hsih Shu-feng, another senior student, chose to remain in Taiwan. At times, both Chen and Hsih would illustrate their physical powers by letting students strike them anywhere on their bodies. Each time neither would suffer any ill effect.

Like many other sickly persons, Liang Tung-tsai sought Cheng Man-ch'ing's teachings with hopes that Taijiquan would cure a physical ailment. In his case, it was a liver ailment. That was in 1950. Born in 1900, Liang continues to teach to this day.

Cheng Man-ch'ing had many other students that became well qualified instructors throughout the world. Cheng himself has stated that although the martial arts on mainland China have deteriorated to some degree during this century, there are still quite a few masters left to carry on their boxing traditions. Cheng believed that one of his own students, Chang Chih-kang, is among the most skilled of instructors on the mainland.

Today, Taijiquan is truly international with representatives of various branches throughout the world. There remains a rich field of study for those interested in the extent of this influence. Hopefully future research will present in detail the state of this art as it exists in countries wherever it is represented.



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