

Tung – A Family Of Masters

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(Translated in English by Magali Gravier)

One day, Tung Kai-Ying was travelling in Italy. He was in a crowded train station carrying his suitcase on his shoulder, when a common looking woman walked by him, and stole his wallet from his pocket. Students who were travelling with the master report: “He immediately noticed it because of the weight difference! The woman, apparently a professional pickpocket, was walking quickly in order to hand over the wallet to her accomplice. Without changing pace, he calmly caught up with her, then put his suitcase on the floor, and witnesses say that using the movement Lan Ch’ieh I (“Grasp and Tuck In The Gown”), also called as “scissors hands”, he grabbed the wallet that she was holding firmly. The women, surprised, quickly disappeared in the crowd without her booty. The incident just made Tung laugh and he continued his way.

Tung Kai-Ying was born in Hebei, under the sign of the Little Dragon. The signs: Kai meaning “to succeed, to continue” and Ying meaning “brave”, the first name, given by his grand-father can be interpreted as meaning “He who succeeds the Brave” or “The continuity of the Brave”. Tung is Tung Ying-Chieh’s grandson. More precisely, he is the eldest son of the eldest son.

Together with the Yang family, the Tung family represents one of the two most famous lineages for the transmission of the Yang style; yet at the same time, it has kept its originality. Even if unfolding the history of a family, the names of places, and the dates can seem a bit bleak, I seek to

contribute, to the best of my ability of course, to a better knowledge of the history of Tai Chi Chuan. For, as Master Tung Kai-Ying says: “Many students do not know which Tai Chi Chuan set they are learning and who their teacher is! This changes the relation to the set, even if the principles seem identical. In the traditional Chinese view, the authenticity of the teaching and its lineage are important. In fact, the art was not taught publicly until a little more than a century ago. The knowledge of the sets was kept by some families. Therefore, the correct way consists in knowing the teacher, the teacher of the teacher and the whole lineage.”

The founding ancestor, the setting...

In the big village of Xingtai, in Renxian County, Hebei (or Hopeh) Province, north of the Yellow River, about 400km south of Beijing, the Tung held a coaching inn, "A bit like in Western movies!" says Tung Kai-Ying, as he walked us through the place. "One would stop there to feed horses, eat and sleep... Anyways, in those days, every family farmed its land, sewed its clothes and shoes... Everything was done in the village." In those days, cities were protected by thick walls. One can still see some, surrounding old villages, in the remote countryside of Hebei. They are in ochre color unless they have been destroyed and rebuilt in concrete.

First, there was the grand-father, Tung Ying-Kiai, whose name is at times transcribed from the Cantonese as Tung Ying-Kit, or from the more recent Pinyin as Dong Ying-Jie¹. He came from a peasant family. Having heard of the power of Tai Chi Chuan and attracted by the art of the fist very early on, despite a frail health in his youth, the very young Tung Ying-Kiai once answered to a visitor of the family that he wished "to become a martial artist, improve his health, be able to defend himself and make Tai Chi Chuan known around the world". The visitor, Liu Ying-Zhou, who admired very much this determination, was an expert and a friend of Yang Lao-Zhen. Thus, he taught Tung Ying-Kiai the basics. Since he was himself an old man, he asked another disciple of Yang Lao-Zhen, Li Zeng-Kui to help him in this task.

One year later, he took Tung to Huining, to visit Master Li Xiang-Yuan (Bao-Yui), a very discrete student of Hao Weizhen (also

known as Guo Wei-Zheng). And to learn the "Kai He" Tai Chi: a style called "hard" or "open and closed". This style is part of the Wu/Hao school². It was founded in the early 19th century in Guangfu, in Yongnian County, by Wu Yuxiang who created it from an old set of the Chen family. The old Wu house still stands, very beautiful, with its small brown beams, its roofs with dragons, even if it is neglected...

Master Li Xiang Yuan

All these counties, cantons, big villages and small cities, most of which are fortified, lie fairly close to one another, all on the north side of the very big Yellow River in Hebei. The main Tai Chi styles all came from there, with the exception of the Chen style, which came from the south side of the river, from a village close to Shaolin, Changyang Cun, recently renamed Chenjiagou! The big roads on which corn grains are spread to dry did not exist yet... but the countryside we discover has remained very peaceful and bucolic despite its industrialization.

Before accepting him as a student, Master Li asked Tung for a demonstration. He nodded, then did some partner exercises with this new student. In order to show him an application, he hurt his arm deep into the bone using only one finger, which instilled great admiration from his new recruit! Tung Kay-Ying, his grandson, explains: "In the old days in China, there were of course regular students who just came to learn, paid and then left. But the disciple lived with the master. The daily interaction created a bond between them. The master was responsible for the actions of his student. If he did not approve of his behavior, he rebuked him. And as the master aged, the disciple would start taking care of him. Of course, the relation

between a master and his disciple is no longer as ritualized as it used to be, but it can still exist from the heart and from the spirit". Tung tells further that when his training was finished, Li sent his disciple back home, offering him to come back occasionally: Ying-Kiai's health had become excellent, his body was strong, and his talent had grown.

From then on, many martial artists came to see Ying-Kiai in Xingtai. They were hosted in the coaching inn. He made many new friends, became famous and everybody who had some degree of martial talent came to him to converse and exchange about their passion and understandings. For Master Tung was trying to understand more deeply the boxing art.

A student of Yang Cheng-Fu

Since he admired very much the Yang family, which, in those days lived in Beijing, he went there to study. People tried to discourage him; people told him that Yang only taught his Kung Fu to family members. To this, Tung answered: "Determination can move heaven and earth. Sword bearing knights, men of arms of the old days, treated with regard and great respect their teachers in order to learn their art. It is not impossible to learn if you treat them well", he would say. "I shall do all that is in my power to learn from Master Yang."

Yang Cheng-Fu was the greatest Tai Chi Master in those times. He immediately accepted Tung as disciple in Beijing, who soon became an assistant, then a friend. Tung trained assiduously, from morning to evening. When Yang travelled to the south, he always asked Tung to come along. They travelled in different regions of China, where they were invited by the Province authorities. They taught together in

Nanking, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Suzhou and in many other historical or beautiful places... Tung Kai-Ying, his grandson, says: "As he was staying in Suzhou, about 30 minutes away from Shanghai, Li Xiang-Yuan, his first teacher, came to see him and offered him to progress further, with a very compact internal work and a special way of using the Jing". Yet, Yang and Tung were of very different ages! A 15 years difference. They co-authored Yang's last book: *Tai Chi Chuan applications*, published in Shanghai. Their friendship lasted more than 17 years, until the death of the one who was called "The Venerable". Both Tung and Yang Sau-Chung (or Shou-Zhong), the eldest son of Yang, officially inherited the style. Tung had gained quite a lot of experience; he stayed some time in Canton, then left the country in which he was born for Hong-Kong after the outbreak of the Chinese-Japanese war in 1937, to continue his project, as he had already done with Yang Cheng-Fu: introduce Tai Chi Chuan to the rest of Asia. From Hong-Kong, then Macao, centers were established in Singapore, in Kuala Lumpur... He was the first to introduce Shadow Boxing in Thailand, in Bangkok. There still exists a short film where one can see the one whom students of the style now call, both informally and respectfully, "the grand-father". After being greeted with flower necklaces as he disembarks from a boat, he presents, calmly and with flexibility, Tai Chi, the hand set and Tui Shou, at the opening of a big boxing match, where people fought hard, without gloves, without protections, on a ring, surrounded by an attentive crowd that shouted to encourage its champions!

Pure tradition

He was able to transmit the original version, complete, subtle and martial at a

time, of the purest tradition of the Yang school and of the Hao school. In search of perfection for his art, Master Tung Ying-Kiai created his own style over time. Flexible and stable, rooted, strong while remaining elastic. He proposed various methods to exert a tenacious energy that would project people several meters away and to neutralize a very powerful attack, making it suddenly inefficient. He also developed a “quick” set, very pedagogical, a “family” set with both quick and slow movements. Tung Ying-Kiai also wrote in 1948 *Tai Chi Chuan Explained* and a book on the martial applications of the Yang Style.

In 1949, he wrote these words, which have not aged: “The practice of Tai Chi Chuan can be an exercise and at the same time an art of self-defense, but most students only scratch the surface of it. They do not try to understand what lies more deeply... It is not for those who are insufficiently trained or experienced to say that Tai Chi Chuan is not a martial art!” Tung Ying-Kiai’s martial art was through and through agile, round, soft and at the same time full of intelligence, rooted power and liveliness.

When he died in Hong-Kong, 25 years after his friend Yang Cheng-Fu, with whom he had spent 17 years, his eldest son, Hu-Ling, succeeded him together with his grandson Kai-Ying, our current master. Both are competent and talented masters. He had trained them since they were children; they had followed him and assisted him during his trips.

His eldest son, Tung Hu-Ling

The oldest of six children, Tung Hu-Ling (Hu: tiger; Ling: Mountain) was born in China in 1918. It is told that he practiced the set during eight years before learning

Tui Shou. Only two years later could he start learning the sword, which became his favorite weapon. We met one of his old students, in Paris, where he had been living for some thirty years. The tall and solid old Chinese man was more than surprised when, in 1990, he saw on the occasion of a federal event of the FTCCG* practitioners of the Tung style demonstrating various sequences with weapons, slow and quick sets, some Tui Lien and San Shou: “In my days, we did not even show the basic Yang set in public... And up until now, I have kept my promise of never showing any of it! One started learning a weapon only after ten years of practice of the set, and one did not choose, the master chose.”, he said to Tung Kai-Ying when he came to visit him. This offered the opportunity to exchange views on recent teaching methods, and to enhance patience, which necessary for true learning.

Tung Hu-Ling had studied at a young age not only with his father but also with Yang Cheng-Fu. He taught in Hebei, in Guangzhou (Canton), in Shanghai and in other villages of the continent.

In 1947, together with his son Kai-Ying, he went to Hong-Kong to join Tung Ying-Kiai. The latter had opened the “Tung Ying-Kit Taichichuan Gymnasium”. Thus, in the 50s, the Tung Family taught part-time on the island of Hong-Kong itself and part-time in Kowloon. Tung Hu-Ling published *Applications of Taichichuan** in 1956. In China, he is considered as one of the big Tai Chi Chuan artists, and his texts are studied by “martial arts graduates” at the University of Physical Education in Beijing – the biggest of its kind in China.

Then Hu-Ling walked in the footsteps of his father and travelled to teach across Asia:

Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore... Early 1967, a group of students from Honolulu (Hawaii) invited him, he also visited San Francisco and Los Angeles and did Tai Chi Chuan demonstrations there. In July 1967, *Black Belt* published an important article on him and already in 1968, Hawaii became his home base until his death, on 29 November 1992 at the age of 75 years³. He would travel back to Asia regularly to teach there. His sister, Jasmine Tung**, still lives in Hong Kong, with her husband, Mr. Chan. She dedicates her life to the family art! And Tung Jy-Bo, his brother, who looks very much like his father Tung Ying-Kiai, lives together with his family in the Renxian County where he was born.

The current grand master, Tung Kai-Ying

After having taught as the senior instructor in the family gym in Hong Kong, Kai-Ying was invited in 1962 to teach in Malaysia, in Kuala-Lumpur and in Singapore. Then in Bangkok. He also went to Hawaii, in 1969, taught there for some time next to his father, then left for Los Angeles in order to open his own school, the “Kai-Ying Tung Academy of T'ai Chi Ch'uan”, which became his home base in 1971, and still is today. Yet he goes regularly in Asia and in Europe, among others in France, Italy, Sicily, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Greece, to supervise the practice of the style. There are also students of his style in Germany, Spain, Russia... Everywhere, he is highly esteemed for his art and his inexhaustible devotion to his teachings. His students value the cohesion of his style, which encompasses all the aspects of this martial practice. Along with the long Yang and Hao sets, the fast set and the family set, fast and slow, the Hu-Ling Taichi-Gong, Tung teaches wonderful Tui Shou, Tui Lien and San Shou codified in face-to-face setting,

various sets with the long knife, the sword, the two sticks and exercises with a long pole (about 2m80), not to be confused with the spear, which is lighter and shorter.

In his art, in his person, in his teaching, Master Tung Kai-Ying combines Wen and Wu. Did not his grandfather used to say: “For Wen, one needs to be soft, fluid and internally calm. For Wu, one needs courage, thrust, physical strength and rooting”? His sensibility clearly appears during his classes. Several of his students noted: “One is sometimes surprised by the insight and the precision of his teaching. When he walks past a student who is complacent, satisfied by his/her movement, and as if he had read in the student's thoughts, Master Tung turns away, staring at the ceiling or at his shoe laces... Or he comes closer and improves the posture of the student because... one can never know all there is to know about Tai Chi Chuan!”

Penetrate the wood

An International Celebration took place in September 1999 in China to celebrate the end of the millennium, with 230 students and teachers of Master Tung Kai-Ying's Academy: California, Colorado, Arizona... for the USA; for Europe: Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Italy, Norway, Ireland, Greece, France... and many Asian countries: Singapore, Thailand... Workshops and demonstrations. The places: Beijing, Shijiazhuang, Xingtai, Renxian, visit of the birthplace and of the homeland of the Tung family, neighboring the Yongnian, birthplace of the Yang Style and of the Wu/Hao style. Of course, we too had visited those places (for the third time), in order to get to know better the atmosphere of the region, the countryside,

the food and the Tung family. Jasmine Tung also took part in the trip to Renxian. She told us that her brother, Hu-Ling, said that Tai Chi teachings must combine both tradition and adaptation to the world and to circumstances. The Tung have transmitted the very complete tradition of Tai Chi Chuan, with a rare ease and simplicity.

Tung Kai Ying comments: “The practice of a martial art is a lot like the study of calligraphy. A famous calligrapher, Wang Shi-Zer, spent so many years writing that the ink of his brush penetrated an inch deep into his table that was made of hard wood. The expression ‘Ju Mu San Fen’ stems from this story. It literally means “penetrate an inch deep into the wood”. It is used to refer to a student who has studied rigorously and has achieved a high level. It is said that to reach such a level, one needs patience, dedicated fellow students, and a teacher with great knowledge. His son, Tung Chen-Wei, has put on the hard work too. It is really this Ju Me San Fen, which has crafted over several generations of experience and teaching the style of this family, which practitioners admire so much. They dream of letting a little bit of ink penetrate into their own hard wood.

1. Or Dong Ji-Ying in Pinyin. The part of the family that bears on its passport Tung, is the diaspora of the Sino-Japanese war, the elders of the family. The younger, who traveled later, bear on their passport the name Dong, in Pinyin transcription, like for instance Dong Zheng-Cheng and Alex Dong, respectively youngest brother and nephew of Tung Kai-Ying. Recent books tend to indicate Dong, rather than Tung. Not all countries have adopted the new transcription, which sounds less phonetic. (*Translator’s note: the article is written by a francophone author for francophone readers.*)
2. Sun Lu-Tang (1860-1933) studied with Hao Wei-Zheng (1842-1920) before founding the Sun style.
3. 3. After his death, Wu Ta-Yeh (1907-1994) wrote a splendid article, which was published and translated in *Karaté Bushido* in May/June 1993, nr. 202/203.

* Translator’s note: The Fédération des Arts Énergétiques et Martiaux Chinois (FAEMC) was created in 1989. Over the years, it has taken several names. The current label (FAEMC) was adopted in 2014. It was known as the Fédération de Taïchi Chuan Chi Gong (FTCCG) from 1997 to 2006.

** Translator’s note: The book was translated by Paul Brennan under the title *Methods of Applying Taiji Boxing* (original title: 太極拳使用法) in 2017. It can be found online at <https://brennantranslation.wordpress.com/2017/01/27/dong-hulings-applications/>

*** Translator’s note: 1940-2009.

INTERVIEW WITH TUNG KAI YING.

BY ANYA MÉOT

Question: Master Tung, a Chinese proverb says: "If you wish to know the way you must ask someone who has followed it". Therefore, given your great experience, we would like to ask you for a piece of advice intended to our readers. If one wishes to progress, how should one train?

Master Tung: Train seriously. Concentrate on your movements and do not allow your mind to wander. Such a degree of concentration is difficult to reach, but it is very important... Train with your whole self, body and mind.

Keep three points in memory: attention, concentration and correct postures. When these three points are observed, quick progress can be made. Every day brings different sensations. If postures are not correct, if attention and concentration fail, practice is as futile as trying to light a fire under an empty cooking pot. Nothing good will come out of it. Consciousness is the master of all things. It supervises all activities. When it is present, progress is quick. When it is absent,

activity stops. When practicing Tai Chi Chuan, one must elevate one's consciousness.

Question: What would you say about breathing?

Master Tung: When it occurs naturally, breathing adapts to all action speeds, to all situations. Do not be pretentious. For instance, lowering the Chi to the dantian (a zone below the navel) cannot be reached by force. When you reach good level, movements foster breathing; enhance breathing and the Chi flows naturally to the dantian zone.

Question: How do you explain the expression "Relax the shoulders and let the elbows sink down"?

Master Tung: It means: do not keep the strength in the shoulders, bring it in the forearms.

Question: Must all postures be correct?

Master Tung: The slightest error can trigger a major mistake that will make techniques inefficient!

Whether you practice alone or with an opponent, you must be careful not to put your foot too close or too far, because you would risk losing your balance and your grounding. It is also better to have movements that are round and that flow rather having angular and jerky movements! All of this can be trained; it takes time...

Question: Can you say something about Tui Shou?

Master Tung: If you want to develop your sensitivity and understand better how to interpret the force, you need to practice Tui Shou. If you do not have a partner, you need to increase your daily practice, train more, feel with your hands, and imagine how you would do with a partner. All these methods contribute to the knowledge you have acquired to help understand ultimately how to interpret the force.

Whether you train alone or with a partner, if the position is not firm, the posture will be dislocated, hand and feet will not be orderly. Mistakes stem from incorrect postures

of feet and waist. Hence, feet and waist must be the object of the greatest attention...

During the first months, you should not use force. You should practice circular movements with one hand. Then, the four basic methods for pushing the opponent can be learned. Peng, Lu, Ji, An. In China, Tai Chi is sometimes called "Peng Lu Ji An". This is how the student learns the art of deflecting pushes. First by using the elbow, which is the easiest but the least efficient. Then by turning the waist, to deviate the opponent's force. Finally, the shoulder movement so that the opponent's force meets no resistance. Once these methods have been learned, they can be combined in free exercises that use the whole body. After having trained defensive methods during several months, offensives

Tui Shou methods can be learned. Thus, the student learns not only how to block an attack but also how to counter-attack. Focusing on relaxing and flexibility, the student learns how to use Tai Chi Chuan movements with the whole body, to respond to all kinds of attacks...

Tai Chi Chuan belongs to internal arts. It requires that an elastic force be kept in the tendons. All movements are commanded by the will. This does not require a hard skin and callous hands! Neither wounds, not bumps will come from it, not even muscular elongations. Thus, it is done without exhausting effort.

Question: Is it important to know well the theory?

Master Tung: When practicing, it is best not to get too much lost in theory,

because this can interfere badly. To say the truth, when theory interferes with the concentration on the exercise progress is slower. Along those lines, talks without practice will bring no success. The more one practices, the more one is competent, just like water flowing on the ground will, with time, dig a bed. The best thing is therefore to practice more. In boxing, you should rather look for the right attitude. The student must respect the master and observe his principles. If you honor the master, he will be sensitive to your sincerity and will dedicate all his efforts to guide you. This is a part of human nature. It should not be ignored by the one who really wishes to become capable.