

GRANDMASTER CHEN ZHENGLEI VISITS THE PENG YOU TAIJI QUAN ASSOCIATION

By Brian Nieminen

Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei, 11th generation Taiji Grandmaster, this past September graced us with another weeklong visit to present a workshop on Chen style Taiji .

This visit, his 2nd in the last 2 years and 5th overall, was a tribute to the



Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei leading taiji in Taiji Park

respect he has for our Taiji community here in Thunder Bay

Chen style Taiji is rapidly growing in popularity worldwide because of its emphasis on internal components and the amazing results that it produces.

On his recent trip to Thunder Bay Grandmaster Chen brought his wife, affectionately known in China as Shimu, who is also a Taiji practitioner. During their stay they were impressed by local sights, restaurants, the Prince Arthur Hotel, the Thunder Bay waterfront and the hospitality of the people of Thunder Bay.

A special highlight this year was a trip to the Gull Bay Reserve where Master Peng You and Grandmaster Chen led a large group of elementary school children through a number of Taiji routines. Then, to the delight of the kids, Grandmaster Chen did a jaw



Top left: Wayne & Peng make presentation to Gary Huff, Grandmaster Chen's disciple from Kansas City.

Top right: Wayne presenting Taiji Park tshirt to Master Chen. Mrs. Chen on the left.

Bottom left: Grandmaster Chen & disciple Master Peng.

TAIJI POST



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dropping demonstration of the Chen style which even in China few have ever seen. It was a beautiful rhythm between the meditative calm of smooth, slow movements and the raw power of (intensely controlled) fast release movements, a personification of the yin – yang principles of Taiji and Chinese philosophy in general.

Master Peng is hoping in the future to bring a group of Aboriginal children to China to have a powwow and do Taiji on the Great Wall!

Grandmaster Chen is a generous supporter and promoter of the International Taiji Park at the Marina with its soon-to-be-built Moongate and Taiji pad (construction to begin in the spring, 2011). On his final day in Thunder Bay at 7:30 a.m. he led about 30 hardy locals in a cool but beautiful last edition of our Wednesday morning "Taiji in the Park."

To see Grandmaster Chen's own photos of his visit go to his official website: www.czl.cn



FINDING THE DEPTH IN TAIJI FOR ARTHRITIS: A WORKSHOP WITH DR. PAUL LAM

Story by Doug Rabb

From October 1st to the 5th Mary Lou and I visited Chicago to participate in a Taiji workshop conducted by Australian physician Dr. Paul Lam who developed the famous Taiji for Arthritis Program. Ten years ago we took our first instructors course with him in Minneapolis/St. Paul. Many of you will remember that, at the invitation of Peng, he later visited Thunder Bay on two occasions to conduct instructor workshops in Taiji for Arthritis and Taiji for Diabetes. It was fun seeing him again in Chicago. Paul spoke fondly of his visits to our Association and told the almost 50 participants of the Chicago workshop that they all should visit Thunder Bay if they get the chance. Though the Chicago workshop had many participants Paul had ten of his Master Trainers to help him conduct it. We were broken down into small groups of four or five and Paul and his assistants moved around visiting each of the groups in turn. So we all remained in the same small group



but the instructors changed. Then we would gather together, as a single large group led by Paul himself, to practice and perform what we had learned.

We did not learn any new forms, though as many of you will have

noticed we now do the Taiji for Arthritis brush knee starting in a different direction. The purpose of this workshop was to go into more depth in our Taiji practice. We spent much time learning to perfect Dantian breathing. This involves expanding the lower abdomen on the in-breath and contracting it (raising the abdominal floor) on the out-breath. This helps us to use the entire lung and also to sink the Qi to the Dantian. We were told that during the Form concentrate on the out-breath at the end of each move. So for example in play pipa as you turn your waist driving your arms into position at the very end you complete the exhale by pulling in your abdomen (raising the abdominal floor toward the navel). We do the same with, for example the punch, an exhale and tightening the abdomen at the point of impact (when the fist stops). So with all the forms. If you try this, do not worry about trying to breath deeply on the inhale during the Form. Just concentrate on exhaling from the abdomen. The in-breath will take care of itself. The purpose of this exercise is to learn to sink the Qi to the Dantian and to complete each move before flow-

ing into the next. This in turn helps us to achieve what is called the Jing State while doing the Form. Jing is a kind of internal calmness, stillness, or "mental quietness." As Paul explains in his 2006 book, *Teaching Tai Chi Effectively: How to Attract and Retain More Students and Get More Fulfillment from Your Teaching*, (which I bought at the workshop) "The mental quietness of tai chi is different from that of some forms of meditation where people are placed in a secluded environment and are oblivious to their surroundings" (180). Taijiquan, is after all still a martial art. When facing an opponent you have to be very aware of your surroundings. But in the Jing State you do so with an internal calmness (like that of a deep, still ocean). According to Paul "Using the jing state will help you deal not only with a martial arts fight but also with various crises in real life" (180). I think Peng is getting at this Jing State when he tells us at the beginning of each session to be "calm and alert."

Learning about the Jing State at the workshop had an exciting impact on my other (to some of you secret) life as a philosopher of popular culture. With colleague, professor of English literature Mike Richardson we have discussed, among other things, the works of television and film screenwriter and director Joss Whedon. We have noted Whedon not only shows people doing taiji, but the taiji is not just irrelevant background ambiance. It is rather often essential to plot development and/or character portrayal. (Just check the index under taiji in our book *The Existential Joss Whedon: Evil and Human Freedom in Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel, Firefly and Serenity*, [McFarland 2007]). But one thing has always puzzled us. The television series *Firefly* and its big screen full-length movie spinoff, *Serenity*, portray a kind of frontier like future in which the Earth has been destroyed. The government of the day calls itself "the Alliance." It seems to be an alliance of the two surviving superpowers from Earth-That-Was, China and the USA. Its flag, for example, consists of the red star from China's flag and the stripes from America's stars and stripes. We see Chinese billboards and other advertising everywhere and there seem to be Chinese people wandering in the background of many shots. Everyone speaks English with a smattering of Chinese (Mandarin), usually as expletives. In other words those that are not Chinese speak Mandarin the way in which many Canadians, especially those raised West of Manitoba, speak French. Now what puzzled us was that with all the emphasis on Chinese (half the government is Chinese, a combination of the worst of Chinese bureaucracy and American capitalism) one would think that of all Whedon's productions, here we would find folks doing taiji, China's gift to the world. But no. There seems to be no evidence of taiji anywhere, not even in the background, nowhere. The heroes of this narrative are the crew of a *Firefly* class spaceship called "Serenity," hence the titles of the TV series and the movie. Their ship, whose back

end glows like a firefly when flying, is named after the battle of Serenity Valley where the Rebels (the browncoats) were finally defeated by the government, by the Alliance. Even the name of the spaceship is painted on its fuselage in both Chinese and English. The movie *Serenity*, by the way, is no ordinary SciFi movie. It has been classed as one of the best science fiction movies ever produce. In 2007 the NASA astronaut Steven Swanson took DVDs of this movie and the TV series *Firefly* on which it was based, with him to the International Space Station where they reside to this day offering a bizarre form of entertainment for the station's crew. (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0379786/trivia>).

Until I attended Paul Lam's Taiji workshop in Chicago I could not find any reference to Taiji in the movie *Serenity*. The evening after the first day of the workshop, I was sitting in my hotel room reading Paul's book on teaching taiji, which I had just purchased, when I came across the following definition of Jing, an essential taiji concept we had been trying to come to grips with the entire day: "Jing, roughly translated, means 'mental quietness' or 'serenity.' Think of the quietness in your mind from within" (179). Serenity? No one has mentioned "serenity" the entire day when we had been trying to experience the Jing State with no clear idea what we were looking for! I immediately ran down to the hotel lobby where they had several computers for our use. I went on line and printed out the logo for the movie *Serenity* which is, like the name of the spaceship, written in both Chinese characters and English. I had to wait until morning to take the printout to Paul and ask him what the characters said. "Jing" he said, "serenity." There it was, an essential taiji concept, hiding in plain sight right at the beginning of the movie, and throughout, written on the side of the spaceship "Serenity."



YOU'RE STUDYING WHAT?

by *Oliver Reimer*

I spent the month of October in Chicago studying the Feldenkrais Method of Somatic Education. "What's that?" Generally people whose careers involve movement know about it, but for others its just an odd name.

I first learned about this practice in a week-long taiji workshop led by Dr. Yang Yang, in Champaign, Illinois. The lying down qigong that we practiced was heavily influenced by Feldenkrais approaches to body awareness. That experience led me to invite an instructor from Duluth last year to do a Saturday workshop. Sharon O'Conner is a physical therapist who does taiji. I asked her what got her interested in learning the method. She said it was because she hated the amount of pain that she put her patients through. Physiotherapy without pain - interesting.

When Brenda and I joined that taiji workshop in the States, neither of us knew anything about "lying down qigong". From my yoga experience I expected that we would be coached to relax and that I would soon be snoring. So we lay on our mats and relaxed - paying attention to the sensation of weight and the parts of our bodies that were supported by the floor and to those parts that didn't touch. Soon we were turning our heads gently from side to side and noting what our eyes were doing. "How are you breathing? Now turn your eyes in the opposite direction that you turn your head. Now turn your feet in the same direction, now in the opposite direction." It seemed kind of silly to me, and what did it have to do with taiji?

"Look at me!", Brenda whispered when we stood up. I was amazed because she was suddenly tall and standing with an ease I hadn't seen for many years. My own experience was that I began to have a greater awareness of how to organize my body better and I felt able to perform taiji movements in a way that is easier and involves my whole body more. The internal aspect of taiji was becoming clearer and more enjoyable. Those silly exercises did have an effect after all.

So, to Chicago to the classes led by Paul Rubin and Julie Casson Rubin, who studied with the late Moshe Feldenkrais, the founder of the method. He was a martial artist, physicist and engineer who applied his knowledge to figuring out how to rehabilitate a badly injured knee. He reasoned that the problem was not in the muscles

continued on page 4



Oliver after a month of Feldenkrais lessons. Serenity or lethargy?

Picture taken inside the Unity Temple, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.



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Taiji Christmas Party

Saturday December 4, 6:00 p.m.

Polish Alliance Hall, 102 Court St. South

Traditional Christmas Dinner: Roast turkey with dressing, mashed potatoes and gravy, cranberry sauce, steamed vegetables, perogies with sour cream, tossed salad, dinner rolls, and choice of white cake and black forest cake, coffee and tea.

Tickets \$25 members (\$30 nonmembers)

Order from Wayne Bilbrough 345-2626, also available from instructors



continued from page 3

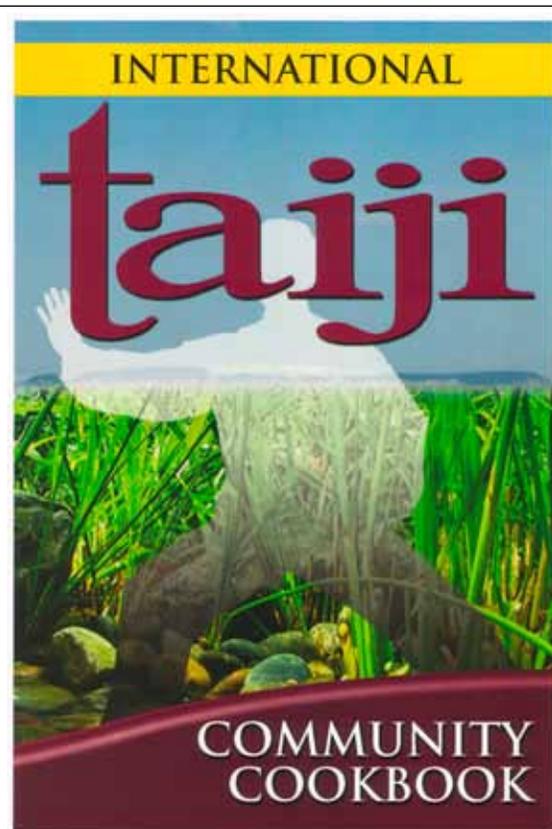
but in the brain, not strengthening or stretching, but learning to move with greater efficiency. Sounds a bit like taiji, doesn't it? He figured out ways that you can trick the brain into abandoning long held notions about pain and limitations, about how to recognize actions which result in repetitive strain injuries and which prevent us from moving with grace and ease.

Some of my fellow students were people trying to deal with problem like hips, knees or shoulders in an intense learning environment. Most were people like me who were also trying to develop more finesse in movement as teachers or performers. There were actors, dancers and musicians - all very accomplished in their respective arts. Everyone was learning to be a teacher of Feldenkrais, but mostly we were learning to do the things we already do well, even better.

I began with the notion that I just wanted to learn more about it for personal growth, but after a month of intense study I know that I want to become a certified instructor.

I will be continuing in the learning process by self study and I'll be going to Chicago every June and October till 2012. If you want to learn more about Feldenkrais, I recommend starting with a brief article by Norman Doidge, who wrote "The Brain that Changes Itself."

<http://wakeup-feldenkrais.blogspot.com/2008/01/norman-dodge-doidge-on-feldenkrais.html>



Hot off the press! The International taiji Community Cookbook. \$15 tax included.

The cookbooks are beautiful and full of great recipes. They will be a great addition to your cookbook library and make a marvellous Christmas gift. The money raised will be for the Taiji Park.

We expect to begin this spring with laying the yin-yang pad and the foundations for the moongate.

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