

Yang Style T'ai Chi

Posture Names and Meanings

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Introduction

T'ai Chi Ch'uan is an ancient martial art and also a modern health practice simply called T'ai Chi. Millions of people of all ages all over the world practice some version of T'ai Chi, or T'ai Chi Ch'uan and the numbers keep growing, especially in the western world. T'ai Chi's many health benefits are well documented in eastern medicine literature and gaining evermore attention in western health, philosophy, and medical journals. In Chinese martial arts, T'ai Chi Ch'uan is considered to represent the highest skill level, at least for those who can attain it.

The roots of T'ai Chi date back thousands of years in China, originating from Indian influences, Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Shaolin martial arts. T'ai Chi is an expression of human survival, the need for health, spiritual awareness and a desire for personal growth in understanding the human condition on earth and in the universe. Today, the need for such discovery seems even more compelling in our hurried and rapidly changing modern world.

Of the many T'ai Chi styles, Yang style is the most popular. There are many reasons for this, but accessibility to the practice, particularly from Yang Chen Fu's moving to Beijing and teaching his style more widely, coupled with the traditional Chinese conservative family model of not teaching outside of a family, allowed Yang style to flourish. The Yang style of Yang Chen Fu is basis for the majority of this article.

In the various styles of T'ai Chi, there are some that seem quite expansive, with large movements, while other styles, like the Chen, Wu or Sun, appear very compact with small movements. Which is the "correct" T'ai Chi? The answer is that within the goals of any true T'ai Chi style – with some focused more on health, others more on martial application – the important underlying internal work of T'ai Chi, as written by myriad masters throughout history, must always be present. These writings are often referred to as the *T'ai Chi Classics*.

T'ai Chi is ultimately based on the *I Ching* or Book of Changes, the foundation upon which Taoism and much of traditional Chinese culture and medicine is based. The fundamental premise of the *I Ching* is predicting continual change based on the idea of opposites, Yin and Yang, moving constantly in dynamic interplay, leading to the "10,000 things" (all possible things). When Yin and Yang are fully balanced and in harmony in a human it is known as a state of stillness called *Wu Ji*. **T'ai Chi begins (and ends) with *Wu Ji* and then differentiates Yin and Yang.** T'ai Chi is ultimately a process of fully engaging with the mind and body to assist in learning to differentiate, blend and flow opposing energies, in harmony.

Eight Energies – Five Directions

The T'ai Chi concept of "Eight Energies", each called a *Jin* (internal energy), originates directly from the *Ba Gua*, or the eight trigrams of the *I Ching*. T'ai Chi's eight primary energies are;

1. Ward-off (*Peng*)
2. Roll back (*Lu*)
3. Press (*Ji*)
4. Push (*An*)
5. Pluck (*Cai*)
6. Splitting or Rending (*Lie*)
7. Elbowing (*Zhou*)
8. Shouldering (*Kao*)

The ancient Taoists also viewed the physical world based on natural elements and translated them into T'ai Chi's "Five Activities", which pertain to T'ai Chi's foot work and directional movements. The five activities are;

1. Moving forward (*Jinn Bu* - Metal)
2. Moving backward (*Twe Bu* - Wood)
3. Beware of left (*Dsao Gu*- Water)
4. Look right (*Yu Pan* – Fire)
5. Central equilibrium (*Dsung Dien* – Earth).

Together, the Eight Energies and Five Activities create the original thirteen attributes of T'ai Chi upon which all further operations are based. All of the postures of a T'ai Chi form employ and express one or more of the 13 energies and activities. And more.

T'ai Chi Forms

A T'ai Chi form is a flow of changing energies, usually performed at a very slow pace, although it may be performed very quickly, and even explosively when emitting energy (*Fa Jin*). It is also a simulated encounter with an opponent, and will contain deeply seated energetic and martial attributes, even if not overtly apparent.

Generally, a form is a combination of movements to simulate fighting "techniques" or, in T'ai Chi parlance, "postures", that reflect and ultimately help train intrinsic energy flow and martial application. Each posture in a T'ai Chi form has many potential martial applications - In the long form of Yang style T'ai Chi, there are as many as 250 embedded fighting techniques. It is helpful to get a "sense of other" (or "sense of enemy") when doing the form to help visualize the martial applications and intrinsic energies being applied.

As one spends time exploring each posture, common movements and energies begin to appear again and again. The different postures in a T'ai Chi form, although perhaps bringing out seemingly similar energies, each present a somewhat unique practical use of the internal energies and external movements in different fighting scenarios.

Forms and Frames

The spatial differences in form styles can be understood in the idea of a "frame", much like a picture frame surrounds and contains the size of a picture. As one views T'ai Chi forms with similar postures performed in different sized frames, it is really the health, energy and martial arts goals of the work that are being nuanced. Prior to Yang Chen Fu, the style of Chen Fu's grandfather Yang Luchan utilized a much smaller frame, as does the Chen style from which it is derived. It is possible that Yang Chen Fu expanded the frame of Yang style to bring out its health benefits more and to make it easier for people to learn when he moved to Beijing and began spreading the style more widely.

Certainly, extending the body's range of motion to a larger frame leads to more stretching and strengthening of the muscles, tendons, vessels, central nervous system, and viscera, something very good for health and perhaps why the Yang style is so popular. Having such extended range is also beneficial in fighting. Still, as Yang Chen Fu aged, later pictures of his form show a much more compact style, indicating a more internal art. In general, smaller frame styles create a deeper interplay of the body's energies to create internal power and are more efficient for fighting, especially at close range, due to the reduced time needed to perform a successful action like a block, punch, or kick.

Imagery

Imagery in T'ai Chi perhaps begins with a creation story. About a snake and a bird. One story goes that San Feng Chang, the purported founder of T'ai Chi, was sipping tea and observed a crane fighting a snake. If the snake attacked the birds head, the bird responded with wings. If the snake attacked the body, the bird struck with its beak. In return, if the bird struck at the snake's head, it responded with its tail and vice-versa. If the bird struck the snakes middle, it responded with both ends. As a Taoist imbued with the ideas of nature and perhaps the *I Ching*, San Feng Chang recognized the need for not only external strength, but also internal strength and yin / yang balance, even in fighting.

The art and language of T'ai Chi encourages a practitioner to use their imagination in creating personalized internal pictures and sensations that connect one to nature and to the work at hand. One can think of birds flying, leaves falling, clouds floating, snakes slithering, tigers being carried, monkeys being pushed, and ladies working ancient looms, just to name a few.

The creative imagery of the energies and movements available to any T'ai Chi student are only limited by one's imagination.

Imagination of the heart (*Hsin*) stimulates the mind (*Yi*) and in conjunction leads the Ch'i, the pervasive underlying human bioelectric power in all internal martial arts, and life. Where the heart/mind go the Ch'i follows. The ancient Taoists masters who created T'ai Chi understood this and imbued their art with metaphors and beautifully powerful imagery, as they structured an internally focused martial art that was much more complete than existing fighting systems of the time.

Unlike external martial arts like Shaolin Kung Fu or Karate, an internal martial art like T'ai Chi focuses on the mental skill of creating a natural internal awareness, to enhance both Ch'i flow and combat efficacy. Such use of the mind to direct the body's energy instead of using simple muscular effort is expressed in the phrase *Yong Yi Bu Yong Li* (use the mind not the muscles). Using the mind to lead the body's physical movement is especially helpful when practicing the various forms, which are intended to slow down the mind and allow for physical, energetic, mental, emotional and martially pragmatic integration to occur.

Simply put, doing form work slowly with focused internal awareness allows the time for one to get fully in touch with their body, mind and spirit. It is a meditation in motion leading to better physical, energetic, emotional and spiritual states. Mental imagery, whether seen or felt, is an excellent way to connect all these things together when practicing movement skills.

It is only after calm slowness and precision is accomplished that a master will encourage a student to speed up movements, as using speed before physical and mental integration occurs can gloss over and hide many damaging deficiencies. T'ai Chi masters believe that if you simply watch for and remove such deficiencies, like imprecise alignments, awkward movements and timing, or energy imbalances, a much more natural and capable art will emerge on its own; a "happy accident" if you will. The enduring nature of T'ai Chi, even beyond its martial application, proves that this approach has broad appeal and value to many.

Posture Names and Meanings are Important

While the deeper purpose of imagination, internal sensing, or visualization, in form practice is to help teach the student to become more sensitive to their internal energies and to enable the physical and practical movement of Ch'i in combat, the creative imagery present in traditional T'ai Chi posture names, which can vary subtly or greatly depending on the style, primes visualization and ties each posture to proper application and meaning. Serious T'ai Chi students will benefit greatly from understanding what the various posture names mean (or imply) leading one to growth and ultimately, mastery of the art.

Each system has its own approach in how a form is taught and what it contains. Keep in mind that different T'ai Chi styles – or even different schools of the same style – may use the same name for different postures, do a named posture in a moderately similar manner, do a posture exceedingly different, or have a completely different name altogether. This is due, in part, to a style's intent; a given instructors learning, experience, interpretation and goals; a desire to define one style differently from another; or perhaps simply an unfortunate loss or diminution of the original names and their meanings over time.

While each style has its own names, rituals, strengths and weaknesses Remember, no matter the name or style, all T'ai Chi postures boil down to the eight energies and five activities .

Note: The order and number of the postures strung together in a Yang style long form can vary depending on the specific system being taught. For reference, Table 1 lists the order and the English names the from Tung Family 87 posture slow set, divided into 3 Sections.

TABLE 1

Tung Family 87 Posture Slow Set

First Section

1. Preparation (Opening the Door)
2. Embrace Peacocks Tail Left/Right
3. Single Whip
4. Close Hands
5. White Crane spreads its wings
6. Brush left knee and push
7. Right hand strums the lute (the *pi'pa*)
8. Brush left knee and push
9. Brush right knee and push
10. Brush left knee and push
11. Right hand strums the lute
12. Brush left knee and push
13. Step forward and punch
14. Retreat and seal
15. Cross hands

Second Section

16. Carry tiger and return to mountain
17. Fist under the elbow
18. Step back to repulse monkey Right/Left/Right
19. Slanted Flying
20. Close Hands
21. White Crane spreads its wings
22. Brush left knee and push
23. Needle to the bottom of the sea
24. Raise arm and push
25. Fist near the waist
26. Step forward and punch
27. Embrace peacocks tail
28. Single whip
29. Cloud hands
30. Single whip
31. High pat on horse
32. Parting kick right
33. Parting kick left
34. Turn and kick with left heel
35. Brush left knee and push
36. Brush right knee and push
37. Step forward and punch down
38. Fist near the waist
39. Step forward and punch
40. Twist body and right heel kick
41. Strike the tiger Left/Right
42. Sit back and right heel kick
43. Double winds through ears
44. Left heel kick
45. Turn around and right heel kick
46. Step forward and punch
47. Retreat and seal
48. Cross Hands

Third Section

49. Carry tiger and return to mountain
50. Diagonal single whip
51. Part the horse's mane (3X)
52. Embrace peacocks tail
53. Single whip
54. Fair lady weaves shuttles – 4 corners
55. Embrace peacocks tail
56. Single whip
57. Cloud hands
58. Single whip
59. Single whip lower posture
60. Golden Rooster stands on leg – Left/Right
61. Step back to repulse monkey
62. Slanted flying
63. Close Hands
64. White Crane spreads its wings
65. Brush left knee and push
66. Needle at the bottom of the sea
67. Raise arm and push
68. White snake flicks tongue
69. Step forward and punch
70. Embrace peacocks tail
71. Single whip
72. Cloud hands
73. Single whip
74. High-pat the horse
75. Thrust out palm
76. Turn around and cross kick
77. Step forward and punch groin
78. Embrace peacocks tail with pull back
79. Single whip
80. Single whip lower posture
81. Step forward to 7-star punch
82. Step over tiger
83. Turn around and slap kick (lotus blossom kick)
84. Draw the bow to shoot the tiger
85. Step forward and punch
86. Retreat and seal

87. Cross hands

While the given names in the above Tung Family long form may not exactly match the posture names below, a student should be able to correlate between them with a little study. Any repetitive postures are explained only once.

Yang style T'ai Chi Posture Names

Here are common English names of each posture in the Yang style long form, the Chinese names, and a brief English translation of what the Chinese name means, along with some application or energetic descriptions. Some of the translated Chinese names are quite flowery, others are direct, even blunt. All have meaning toward understanding the work and outcomes. Think of San Feng Chang.

Commencing (*Qishi*) or Opening (Opening the Door and Lifting Water are other common names). This preparatory pattern is performed in most T'ai Chi styles, but not all. In Yang and other styles it can be performed in different ways by different schools. The simple movement of raising the arms is designed to begin a differentiation of Yin/Yang energies from the emptiness of Wuji. As such, it could also be considered a Ch'i Gung movement. In application, the raising of the hands can move an opponent's arms up and out of the way to allow for a strike as the hands lower.

Grasp Sparrows Tail (often also called, Grasp Bird's Tail or Grasp Peacock's Tail); The Chinese name for this technique is *Lan Ch'iao Wei*. The image is of holding a bird, one hand on the breast, the other hand on the tail and implies that you not only intercept an opponent's strike but also "grasp" him. Using the word grasp, instead of "grab", reveals the need for delicacy, precision and softness in the process. A sparrow's tail - or any bird's tail – is light and fragile, so one must be cautious, sensitive and nimble, using your mind intent (*Yong Yi*) when doing the technique and avoiding the use of muscle strength (*Bu Yong Li*). Once attached to the opponent, you can then lead his energy into a disadvantageous position and counter the attack.

Wardoff* in Chinese is *Peng*. The word itself is a made-up one specific to the Yang style of T'ai Chi as the word doesn't appear in most Chinese dictionaries and is not used in the Chen style, predecessor to Yang Luchan's Yang style. In older works,

the word translates to mean “collide”, but the image is more that of an expansion, like a beach ball bouncing away. *Peng* means to push something away or how one would move people out of the way when walking through a crowd, using the arc the arms. It is used in expressions like *Peng Kai* (push open or push away) and the energy is purely yang. When doing wardoff, think three dimensionally, allowing the Ch’i to fully expand in the body in all directions, even though a primary direction may be the focus.

Roll Back* in Chinese is called *Lu*. Like *Peng*, it is a made-up Yang style word which does not appear in Chinese dictionaries. In older works, *Lu* translates as “pull” (or guide) back, but is commonly used in expressions like *Lu Kai* (pull open) or *Lu Dao* (to pull down). *Lu* comes in two forms; *Shao Lu* (small roll back) and *Da Lu* (large roll back), with the difference being that large roll back allows for more turning of the waist and sitting back further while allowing the hand to circle in either direction. *Lu* energy is purely yin.

Press* is *Ji* in Chinese and means to “squeeze” or press together. The Chinese character for *Ji* consists of two figures meaning “hand” and “even” and imply using your hands to level something off; something one might do to press against an opponent’s substantial spot to move them. In practice, *Ji* uses the energy of a hand attached to the other forearm, and generally is performed a bit obliquely as opposed to a straight on push. *Ji* is a yin energy with some yang energy.

Push* is *An* in Chinese. The character is made up of two figures meaning “hand” and “peace” and implies using your hands to hold someone down and restrict their motion. In everyday Chinese *An* means to press or push down. *An* technique can be used both offensively and defensively and generally defensively has a downward attribute into the opponent, although the technique can be used in any direction, including upward with a rising energy to break the opponents' root. The technique can be either long, or short, and is typically done with both hands, although a single hand is primary, with the left hand usually guiding and the right hand issuing the energy. Push is yang with some yin and is ultimately powered by the feet and legs, connected solidly to the earth.

*** When the postures Wardoff (*Peng*), Rollback (*Lu*), Press (*Ji*), and Push (*An*) are performed together in sequence, the combined result is sometimes referred to**

as “Step Forward to Ward Off, Rollback, Press and Push” (*Shang Bu Peng Lu Ji An*)

Single Whip, or *Dan Bian* in Chinese, simply means “Alone Whip”. The technique is used to move the opponent's hand or weapon past your body as well as striking, done either like a soft whip or with a firmer whip action. The idea is of the action of whip where the whip is soft as the energy extends from the feet and accelerates through the body, but ends at the tip of the hands like the cracking of a whip. There are three whip-like elements in *Dan Bian*:

- (1) When the hook is initially formed after the spread of the hands.
- (2) When the body completes its turn with the blocking arm extended.
- (3) When the forward hand and body are dropped slightly at the very end.

Lifting Hands is translated from the Chinese name *T'i Sou Shang Shih*. *T'i* means to raise up, pull up, or pick up. *Sou* means hands, so *T'i Sou* simply means to raise your hands. *Shang* means up and *shih* means posture, so the whole translation is “raise hands to the up posture”. Functionally, you intercept the opponents punch so that opponent's wrist is pulled while the other hand presses upward on the elbow, creating a joint lock seize and control (*Chin Na*) technique. Lifting hands is a defensive technique with an offensive outcome.

White Crane Spreads its Wings is translated in Chinese as *Bai He Liang Ch'ih*. When a crane fights it usually attacks with both its beak and wings. When the wings are used, a powerful shaking and jerking of the body and wings occur, just as it does when it shakes off water, which can allow a fragile crane to break branches. While the external form is flowing and elegant, the intrinsic energy is like a crane using its wings in a fight, initiated from and supported by a firm root. After an initial protective posture to thwart an attack, the technique is used to spread the opponent's arms to the sides, opening up his body to attack. The technique is defensive and yin, with some offensive yang energy.

Brush Knee and Twist Step (often called Brush Knee and Push) is *Lou Hsi Au Bu*. In Chinese *Lou* means to “embrace”, *Hsi* means “knee”. *Au* means to “twist”, or twist

off and *Bu* means “step”, so *Au Bu* means step with a twisting motion. In movement, embracing the knee employs a sweeping blocking motion past the knee and the forward hand ends in a push, leading to the different naming, but the Chinese name really means “Embrace Knee and Twist Step”. In application the forward leg can either be used to kick, or planted forward to step behind the opponent, blocking retreat, as you push him down with the lead hand.

Play the Guitar is called *Sou Hui P’I P’a*. *Sou* means “hands” and *Hui* means “strum”. The *P’I P’a* is a stringed Chinese instrument, like a guitar, which is held somewhat vertically and away from the body when played, with the left hand extended outward to work the frets on the neck and the right hand held back, strumming the strings. In application, the technique uses splitting (rending) energy (*lie*) where the opponent’s wrist is pushed to the left, while the elbow is pushed to the right. The intrinsic energy (*jin*) is yin with some yang.

Twist Body and Circle Fist (alternately, Swipe Across the Body and Chop). This form name in Chinese is *P’ieh Shen Ch’ui*. *P’ieh* which means to twist or swing aside. In common Chinese, the term *P’ieh Kai* means to set something aside or push it away. *Shen* means body, and *Ch’ui* means to strike or punch. So, this technique could accurately be called “Twist Your Body and Strike”. This technique is usually done before, and as part of, “Step Forward, Deflect Downward, Parry and Punch” and is preparatory to that in that one turns the body defensively to evade attack and then uses the fist to strike the opponent’s striking hand or body, before continuing on around to the next posture. *P’ieh Shen Ch’ui*. *P’ieh* utilizes a “swiping” motion intended to carry an opponent’s arm downwards diagonally to unbalance them.

Step Forward, Deflect Downward, Parry and Punch (or Step Forward, Remove, Parry and Punch). Called *Jinn Bu Ban Lan Ch’ui* in Chinese. *Jinn Bu* means to move forward; *Ban* means to “move” or shift; *Lan* means to hinder, obstruct, intercept, block or cut off; *Ch’ui* means to punch. So, this technique could also be called “Step Forward, Remove, Intercept and Punch”. You continue from the previous posture (Twist Body and Circle Fist) by stepping forward, parrying (moving) the opponent’s punch to the side and then punching him. Together, the two techniques protect you from initial attack, remove the offensive potential of further attack, and allow you to connect and adhere to the opponent by stepping

forward to maintain contact throughout, finishing with a punch. The passive, purely yin intrinsic energies of “*Chan Nien Jin*” (sticking and adhering energy) are utilized when contacting the opponent during the technique.

Sealing as if Closing (sometimes called Sealed as if Closed, Apparent Closure, or Withdraw and Push). The Chinese name for this posture is *Ju Feng Ssu Bi*. *Ju* means like, if, or as; *Feng* means to seal up or blockade. Therefore, *Ju Feng* means “As if Sealing Up”. *Ssu* in Chinese means like, as if, or seems to be and *Bi* means close up, making *Ssu Bi* mean “As if Closing Up”. A direct translation of the full name could be more like “As if Sealing, As if Closing up”. The sometimes-used name of Withdraw and Push comes from the actual circling and redirecting (sealing) of the opponent’s strike, which is then followed with a sinking energy (*Chen Jin*) and finally a pushing action (*An*) against the opponent.

Embrace Tiger Return to Mountain is *Bao Fu Guei Shan* in Chinese. The tiger (*Fu*) is a powerful animal and to suggest you are embracing one means cautiously embracing an enemy tightly, to either smother his offensive potential, like smothering a tiger so he can’t claw you, or to throw him to the ground. Return to the Mountain implies it’s a long way home and indicates the use of a soft, gradual and elongated energy, or *Ch’ang Jin* (long energy). To bring a tiger home one has to carry him, thusly this technique is intended to break the opponent’s root.

In the transition between “sections” of the Yang long form, a “crossing” of the hands defensive type of technique is often performed along with a settling of the Ch’i and an active full body relaxation (*Fang Song*).

Although there is no formal name for this transition, there is a technique called **Cross Hands**, which is explained later below. The action is also quite similar to the beginning of another posture, “White Snake Turns Body and Spits Venom”, with a difference that in moving through the transition posture the right foot lightly touches the floor, only balancing the weight evenly at the end, while both feet are generally on the floor in White Snake. The ending position of the transition is actually the beginning of Embrace Tiger Return to Mountain, as the image of the crossed hands is one of holding something close (like a tiger).

Diagonal Single Whip, or *Xie Dan Bian* is the same as Single Whip, only done at an oblique (diagonal) angle.

Punch Under Elbow. The Chinese name is *Zhou Di K'an Ch'ui*. *Zhou* is elbow; *Di* is bottom; *K'an* is look and *Ch'ui* is punch. Which means "Look at the Punch Under the Elbow", informing one to beware of the hidden punch. The punch is a potential, concealed beneath the elbow so the opponent cannot see it. The movement starts with a defensive, yielding action by stepping to the side, using your hands to neutralize and trap the opponent's hands. The left hand can attack the opponent's face, while the right hand is available to punch the chest. The unweighted, or empty (false), front leg stance allows for the front leg to be available for a kick.

Step Back and Repulse Monkey is *Dao Nien Hou* in Chinese. *Dao* means to move backward; *Nien* means to repel or drive away; *Hou* is monkey. Since monkeys specialize in grabbing, the name suggests someone grabbing your hands or arms and you are moving backwards while fending them off. This technique is the opposite of Brush Knee and Twist Step, in that rather than moving forward into the opponent, you are pulling them back into a push. The front hand turns to "reverse the grip" on the opponent's grab - the rear hand utilizes a plucking (*cai*) energy to pull the opponent into a push.

Diagonal Flying. The Chinese name is *Xie Fei Shi*. *Xie* means slanted, inclined or oblique. *Fei* simply means to fly. *Shi* means posture. So, a more complete translation is "Oblique Flying posture". The name directs one to move out diagonally as if flying. The image is of an *Immortal* (a traditional name used for ancient Taoist martial artists made popular in Chinese culture and movies) taking flight. In application the technique is used to knock an opponent off balance with one foot behind their leg and the extending arm coming across their chest, using a Wardoff type of energy.

Pick up Needle from Sea Bottom, or *Hai Di Lao Jenn* in Chinese. *Hai Di* means sea bottom, *Lao* means to scoop up and *Jenn* means needle. The translation of this name is more accurately "Scoop up Needle from the Sea Bottom". The image is of

one reaching into the water to retrieve a needle. The perineum (the diaphragm surrounding the anus) is called *Hai Di*, and the action is one of attacking the groin after drawing the opponents arm down using a plucking (*cai*) motion. When doing the Yang long form, the final upward hand action (groin strike) leads into the next posture, Fan Through Back.

Fan Through Back. The Chinese name for this posture is *Shan T'ung Bei*. *Shan* means fan, *T'ung* means through or reachable, and *Bei* means back. There is a monkey in China with very long arms that are able to reach around and scratch the monkey's back. They are called *T'ung Bi Yuan*, which means Reachable Arm Apes. This suggests to stretch the arms long, meaning a long energy (*Ch'ang Jin*) is used. In the initial stage of the posture, one should arc the back to accumulate energy before extending out the arms like opening a Chinese fan.

Wave Hands Like Clouds (Cloud Hands). In Chinese the posture is called *Yun Sou*. *Yun* is clouds and *Sou* is hand, with the image of moving your hands like carrying floating clouds across the sky. The movement of clouds may be slow or fast, but they are always continuous and the name implies using a long range, continuous long energy (*Ch'an jin*). In application one remains upright and stable, turning from the waist and using a twisting energy in the body, more than simply moving the hands and arms across the front of the body.

High Pat on Horse (also, Stand High to Search Out the Horse). The Chinese name is *Kao T'an Ma*. *Kao* means high, *T'an* means to try or search out and *Ma* means horse. To search for your horse in a field, you shade your eyes to block the sun and see further. This implies that the hands are used for blocking. Since a horse fights mainly by kicking, the name suggests the use of the front leg for kicking. Also, there is a slight straightening and rising of the body in the posture, and such standing higher is a reminder that when you stand tall, the lower body can be exposed to a kicking attack.

Separate Foot (left and right). This technique is called *Fen Jiao*. *Fen* means thrust, so the meaning is to thrust the foot for kicking, usually using the outer side of the foot to make contact. The posture is done first with the right foot (*You Fen Jiao*)

followed with the left foot (*Zuo Fen Jiao*) in the form. In application, most T'ai Chi kicks are performed low to the feet, ankles, legs, knees, groin, or waist area. High kicks are slower and allow a defender time to evade or even seize the kicking leg to throw an opponent. Performers in form competitions many times demonstrate impressive looking high kicks that are not used in a practical fight and they do require greater strength, flexibility and balance to execute. Working towards higher kicks over time is laudable, but in keeping with the pragmatic moderation present in T'ai Chi, they are not required, or even desired. The standalone exercises of *Cai Tui*, where pulling techniques are practiced coupled with kicks, form the training basis for all T'ai Chi kicks.

Turn Body and Kick with Heel is *Zhuan Shen Deng Jiao* in Chinese. *Deng* is heel and means to use the heel to kick or step, usually forward.

Step Forward and Punch Down. In Chinese the name is *Jinn Bu Tzai Ch'ui*. *Jinn Bu* means to step forward, *Tzai* means to fall and *Ch'ui* means punch. The falling or downward action of the punch implies aiming at the relatively few lower body targets available for a punch; the *Dan Tien* Ch'i vessel, groin, or upper thigh.

Kick with Right Foot is *You Ti Jiao*. *You* means right and *Ti Jiao* means a toe kick, usually done in a quick jabbing type of motion.

Strike the Tiger, or *Da Fu* in Chinese, means strike the tiger (*Fu*). The name comes from the squatting stance called Tame the Tiger Stance as popularized by the Sung Dynasty (420 A.D.) hero Wu Shong who, as the story goes, was walking drunk when he encountered a tiger. When the tiger attacked, Wu dropped low and killed the tiger with a dagger to its belly as the tiger passed over him. The image is of both fists coming across to strike each side of the tiger's head. In another application, one pulls the opponent down with one hand to break his balance and uses the other hand to strike. A strong root and a waist turning energy (*Jin*) is important in this technique.

Double Winds in Both Ears (other names are Double Winds Fists, Bee's Buzzing Both Ears, Attack the Ears with the Fists). In Chinese this technique is called *Shuang Feng Guan Er*. *Shuang* means a pair, double, or both. *Feng* means the wind. *Guan* means to go pass through. Considering the translation, the technique

could be called “Two Winds Pass Through The Ears”. The technique is usually done quickly in application, with a protective block prior to the downward/outward arcing motion of both arms that clears the opponent’s arms to the sides and follows them around to strike the body or head. The front leg is also available for a kick.

Kick with Left Foot *Zuo Ti Jiao* (performed same as before Strike the Tiger only done with the left (*Zuo*) foot).

Turn Body and Kick with Sole is *Zhuan Shen Ding Jiao*. This kick, is usually performed with a turn of direction in the form and uses the sole of the right foot as the kicking surface.

Horizontal Single Whip *Heng Dan Bian* (performed same as Single Whip, only to a diagonal angle).

Wild Horse Parting its Mane Left/Right (Parting Wild Horses Mane) The Chinese name is *Yeh Ma Fen Tsung*. *Yeh* means wild. *Ma* means horse. *Fen* means to shear, or divide (*Lie Jin*). *Tsung* means mane. The horse is a strong animal and when it moves forward it does with power and vigor. The image is like a horse tossing his head and shaking his mane. The arm movements are shearing (*Lie Jin*) actions with the image of parting the horse’s mane into two parts. The movements are continuous, extended and move forward powerfully.

Fair Lady Works the Shuttles (Jade Maiden Weaves at Shuttles) or *Yu Nu Ch’uan Suo* in Chinese. *Yu* is jade. *Nu* is girl or lady, which translates as a beautiful, or fair lady. *Ch’uan* means to thread or pass through and *Suo* is weaver’s hand. Jade is considered a very precious and beautiful stone in China and also the name of the Jade Emperor of China who, in Taoist philosophy is the assistant of Yuanshi Tianzun, one of the Three Pure Ones - the three primordial emanations of the Tao. His daughter *zhī nǚ* or Chih'nü, (literally “weaver girl”) is most often represented as responsible for weaving colorful clouds in the heavens. The image is of a woman working a shuttle to make cloth, with one hand on the lower bar and the other on an upper bar. In application, the technique consists of an upward blocking motion, along with a strike using the other hand. The posture is done sequentially at four directions in the form, usually towards the angular corners.

Snake Lowering its Body (sometimes called Squatting Single Whip, or Lower Single Whip, or more directly translated, Snake Creeps Down). The Chinese name is *Sher Shen Hsia Shih*. *Sher* means snake. *Shen* means body. *Hsia* means down or to lower and *Shih* means aspect or manner. The image is of a snake coiled around a branch, lowering its head as if about to strike and slithering down a boulder or tree to the ground. This implies wrapping, sticking and adhering to an opponent on the top before lowering your body to attack, or to defend from a kick, at the bottom.

Golden Rooster Stands on One Leg is *Jin Ji Tu Li* in Chinese and is performed on both the right side (*You Shi*) and the Left side (*Zuo Shi*). The English name is an accurate translation. The image is of a rooster or crane standing strong and perfectly balanced on one leg. In application, the rising knee can be a strike and the front leg is available for a kick.

Turn Body, White Snake Spits out Tongue (White Snake Spits Venom). The Chinese name for this posture is *Bai Sher T'u Hsin*. *Bai Sher* means white snake. *T'u* means spits and *Hsin* means truth or pledge and can mean poison. The speed and surprise of a snake striking is considered important in executing the technique effectively. This posture has been eliminated in some styles as being a duplicate of Turn Body and Chop, but the difference is that the striking hand, instead of being a chop, is a finger thrust to the throat, much like a snake darting out its tongue.

Cross Hands (or Crossing Hands) is *Shih T'zu Sou* in Chinese. *Shih* means ten. *T'zu* means word, and *Sou* means hands. An accurate translation would be "The Word '10' Hands". The Chinese character for ten is formed by two crossed lines, like a cross. This is how the hands look in the posture, which is at first defensive, but leads to the offensive ability of attack with the hand or the front leg.

Brush Knee and Punch Down in Chinese is *Lou Hsi Zhi Dang*. *Lou Hsi* means to embrace the knee *Zhi* means finger or to aim. *Dang* means the seat of a pair of pants, but here refers to the groin area. *Ch'ui* means to punch. This technique is very similar to Step Forward and Punch Down, with the difference being that this

technique uses a long-range energy (*Ch'ang jin*) while the other is performed at a shorter range.

Step Forward to Seven Stars. The Chinese name is *Shang Bu Ch'i Hsing*. *Shang Bu* means to step forward, and *Ch'i Hsing* means seven stars, which refers to the seven stars in the big dipper. The posture looks somewhat like the big dipper, in that your front leg forms the handle and your upper body and arms are the bowl. A seven stars concept was used for troop positioning and as footwork tactics in combat. *Ch'i Hsing* also refers to Ch'i vessels located in the chest and the technique is designed to strike the opponent in that area. A rising left hand leads the opponent's hand upward, allowing for the back hand to complete the strike. The knuckles allow for penetration into the Ch'i cavities (this is called a "Cavity Strike", one of three basic martial application categories in T'ai Chi, along with "Downing the Enemy" and "*Chin Na*", a seize and control skill set). Successful cavity strikes are highly skilled actions employed in conjunction with a deep understand of Ch'i movement; Ch'i's relationship with the internal organs, and the proper time of day or year to do the strike, which can lead to serious injury or death. Cavity strikes are sometimes referred to as *Dim Mak* or Death Touch.

Step Back to Ride the Tiger or *T'ui Bu K'ua Fu* in Chinese, usually follows Step Forward to Seven Stars and can appear as an extension of the former. But it is a distinct posture in the form. *T'ui Bu* means step back. *K'ua* means to straddle and *Fu* is tiger. The image is of moving back from an advancing tiger, which is a very powerful animal, in order to mount its back and hold on strongly to the hair of its back. In practice, the technique is used after a grab to the lapels and infers that when you hold on to the opponent in a response, your movements and steps must be careful and setup an advantageous position.

Turn Body and Sweep The Lotus Blossoms. The Chinese name for this posture is *Joan Shen Bai Lien*. *Joan Shen* means to turn the body and *Bai Lien* is to sweep the lotus, which is a common children's game in China. There are actually three kicks in this posture; one forward kick and two sweeping kicks, but, due the difficulty of

the multiple kicks, the movements are often simplified to a turn and a single sweeping “lotus” kick. The lotus can grow tall and the stem is flexible, so in order to break the stem, the sweeping kick needs to be fast, high and powerful.

Draw the Bow and Shoot the Tiger or *Wan Gong Sher Fu* in Chinese. *Wan Gong* means to bend a bow. *Sher Fu* means shoot a tiger. In this technique your right hand is like a bow and the left hand the arrow. The bow must have energy (*jin*) stored in the posture to release (*Fa*) and your left arm is then like an arrow that is fast and powerful.

About the translations

There are two main English translation systems from classical Chinese, Cantonese and Mandarin; *Wade Giles* and *Pin Yin*. *Pin Yin* has formally replaced *Wade Giles*, but the old translation style persists. This is why you will see T'ai Chi (*Wade Giles*) sometimes written as T'ai Ji (*Pin Yin*). The translators from the Chinese language that were studied here stayed with one format or the other, but since the author moved between multiple sources, some of the English translations, spelling and words may seem inconsistent. Any of these inconsistencies are solely the fault of the author.

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About the author

Steve Olszewski has over 45 years of experience and training in multiple martial arts styles and systems. He has trained to the senior instructor level in Wing Chun Do under *Sijo*, James W. Demille, (one of Bruce Lee's original students) and earned a black belt in Kenpo Karate under *Sifu* Rob Robertson (disciple of Ed Parker). He has studied under *Sigung* Bob Anderson (Kajukenbo / Jujitsu) and David-Dorian Ross (Yang style T'ai Chi / T'ai Ji Fit), as well as trained with such luminaries as Bill "Super Foot" Wallace, Sgt. John La Tourette, and Benny "The Jet" Urquidez. Steve currently studies Tung family style T'ai Chi Ch'uan under Linda Henderson. He lives in northwestern Washington State.