



Taijiquan
(T'ai Chi Ch'uan)

Linda's T'ai Chi Ch'uan Weekly Handout June 27, 2021

Empty and Full

The concept of weight shifting, first stepping with an empty step before shifting weight has been a part of my teaching, conversations and discussions since the first class you ever attended. This concept is one of 10 foundational principles of T'ai Chi.

This past week my goal was to take you beyond the physical application and understanding of shifting weight to the internal world of T'ai Chi.

The internal components, shen (spirit), yi (mind) and qi (life energy) take time to grow. Good T'ai Chi is a result of making the internal and the external world work together and bringing out the best of each other.

Master Tung Kai Ying, Master Chen Wei and Clifton Gore (The LA Academy of T'ai Chi Ch'uan, the school where I was taught) use these words to convey this concept- "Place your mind in the foot that is not moving."

To make your T'ai Chi more smooth, continuous, graceful, light and nimble, understanding and implementing the concept of Empty and Full is necessary. Without this concept, our footwork can be clumsy and wobbly. Master Yang Chengfu (1883-1936) called empty and full the First Fundamental of Taijiquan. Yang Chengfu is historically considered the best known teacher of the soft style martial art of Yang-style t'ai chi ch'uan and was the grandson of Yang Lu Chen.

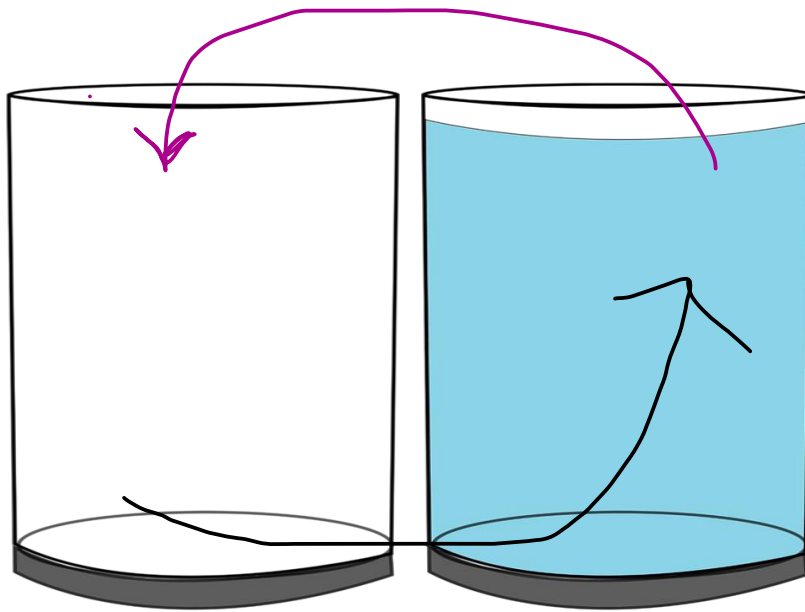


Master Yang Chengfu



Master Yang Chengfu performs Golden Rooster Stands on One Foot

Empty to Full (As Water fills an empty glass and empties a full one)



Empty to full is like water being poured from a full glass of water into an empty glass, continuously. The full glass becomes empty, the empty glass becomes full. In the understanding of yin and yang, the full foot is considered Yin, because it is solid, stable and unmoving. It is also rooted into the Earth. The empty foot is Yang, because it is active and able to move freely like the air. The Dantian (belly button) should always be over the full foot when the other is empty. Once you are clear on this important principle, and conscious of how one becomes the other and vice versa, you will (hopefully) never again move on a full leg or balance on an empty one. (At times, we do pivot on the heavy foot like at the end of each section but this is a slow shift to both feet full.)

**The lower dantian is in the area a few fingers below your navel, and in Japanese traditions is the area of the Hara. It houses your vital energy, power and essence.

The lower dantian holds primary importance as it nourishes the other two. It is a central area of focus in meditation practices, martial arts and Oriental medicine. **

This is what Master refers to as “placing your mind in the foot that is not moving.” As you have the intent to move, you pour water from your full leg into the empty leg. Start by shifting your weight back and forth slowly, from one foot to the other, with one foot slightly in front of the other (bow step). Feel the sensation of weight pouring, like sand, from the full leg to the other, as one leg empties and the other fills. As you shift your Dantian from the full foot to the empty one, sink your body weight, and your Qi, into the full leg until the empty foot has no weight on it. This is what I call the empty step.

Of course, you do this all of the time when you walk, you just don't notice but when you slow it down to “walking like a cat” you feel the full foot empty into the empty one. This is continuous. Everything above the waist should feel light and fluid while everything below the waist should feel full and perhaps heavy. As the foot becomes full, you sink your qi that promotes blood flow and energy circulation. Every step is intentional.

Of course, in Tai Chi, you are constantly [shifting between empty and full](#). For example, in bow stance, the front leg is 70% full and the back leg is 30% full. When using a T step, 100% of your weight is on the stable foot, the T step foot is empty,



This sculpture of a mobius strip is a great visual of continuous motion. No beginning no end. One continuous motion. The underside becomes the top, the top becomes the underside and so on and so on. I often use the expression silk reeling which is a similar concept of continuous motion. Silk reeling is actually a term in the Chen style but is applicable in all forms and styles. Taijiquan, silk reeling is the method used to coordinate the parts of the body to achieve whole-body movement: when one-part moves, all parts move, or, when the dantian moves, the whole body moves.

As you practice your T'ai Chi or walking or simple weight shifting, place your mind in the foot that is not moving. Pour water or sand or whatever imagery you use from the full to the empty to create a smooth, balanced and stable transition from one posture to another.

Your balance and posture can improve as you focus on full and empty.

Peace,

Linda



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