

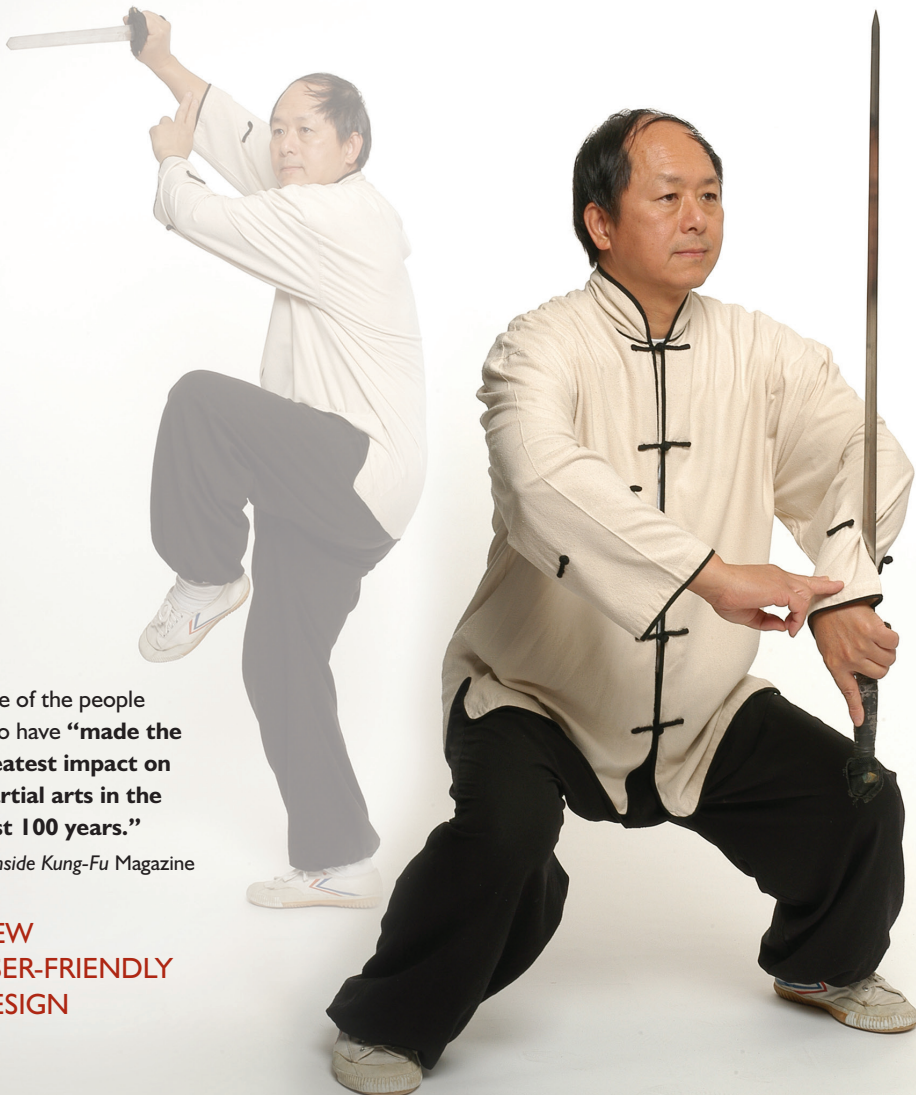
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF BOOKS AND VIDEOS ON TAI CHI, MARTIAL ARTS, AND QIGONG

DR. YANG, JWING-MING

Tai Chi Sword

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Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming, PhD is a world-renowned author, scholar, and teacher of tai chi chuan. He has been involved in Chinese martial arts since 1961 and maintains over 55 schools in 18 countries. Dr. Yang’s writing and teaching include the subjects of kung fu, tai chi chuan, massage, meditation, and chin na, and he is a leading authority on qigong. Dr. Yang is the author of over 35 books and 80 videos.

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Chapter 1: General Introduction

1-1. About the Sword

Many martial artists, even those who have studied Chinese martial arts for many years, still have a number of questions about the structure, use, history, and geographical background of the Chinese straight sword (*jian*, 劍). This is because most students of Chinese martial arts have not also studied Chinese culture. Very little of the available martial literature has been translated into European languages and the number of qualified and knowledgeable masters is steadily diminishing. This section will discuss general information about the sword. The history and structure of the sword itself, as well as the spirit of *taiji* sword, will be discussed in sections 1-2, 1-3, 1-4, and 1-5 respectively.

Definition of the Sword. There are two kinds of weapons commonly called a sword by the Western world. One is the double-edged, straight, and narrow-bladed weapon, which is called a “jian” (劍) in Chinese. The other is the single-edged weapon with a slightly curving, wide blade, which in China is called a *dao* (刀). This second weapon will, in this book, be referred to as a saber. If either of these two types of weapon is shorter than the forearm, it is referred to as a dagger (*bi shou*, 匕首). Daggers can easily be hidden in one’s boot or sleeve.

Names of Swords. Chinese swords were often given names. These names usually indicated either the sword’s origin or its owner. The origin could be the name of the mountain where the ore used to make the sword was found (e.g., Kun Wu jian, 崑崙劍), the place where the sword was forged (e.g., Long Quan jian, 龍泉劍), or the smith who forged the sword (e.g., Gan Jiang, 干將 and Mo Xie, 莫邪). Of course, the sword could also be named by its owner as he or she pleased (e.g., Judge Dee’s sword, Rain Dragon, 雨龍). The sword could also be named for the style of the sequence for which it was designed to be used (e.g., taiji jian, 太極劍).

Names of Sword Sequences. Sword sequences are commonly named for mountains near where the sequence was created, such as Wudang jian (武當劍); for a division or style of *gongfu* (功夫), such as taiji jian (太極劍); or for the person who composed the sequence, such as Qi’s family sword (Qi men jian, 戚門劍). They can also be named by the creator of the sequence as he pleases, such as Three Power sword (San Cai jian, 三才劍).

Functions of the Sword. More than most weapons, the sword serves a variety of purposes. Its length and structure made the sword an effective and portable defensive weapon, and it was used most often as a defensive, rather than an offensive, weapon. Because the

sword is shorter than the spear, the halberd, and many of the other large battle weapons, the sword lacks long-range killing potential. Thus, in battle, the sword was used when the soldier's main weapon was lost or broken. In peacetime, the sword was carried by scholars and magistrates, as well as by soldiers. The sword came to symbolize the bearer's status. This function of the sword developed to the point that some swords carried by scholars (*wen jian*, 文劍) were so ornate they could not easily be used for fighting, although this was unusual before the advent of firearms. Lastly, the sword was an integral part of many dances.

Why the Sword is Respected. The sword art has been respected in China not only because the techniques and skills needed to wield it are hard to learn, but more importantly because the morality and spirit of the practitioner have to be of a very high order to reach the highest levels of the art. The training is long and arduous, and most people first learn to use other short weapons, such as the saber, in order to build a foundation.

In addition, the sword provides both scholars and martial artists with an elegant feeling and self-respect. It often comes to represent the morality and profound accomplishments in Chinese martial arts that its bearer has achieved. Moreover, since many Chinese emperors in the past specially favored the sword, it has come to symbolize both power and authority in Chinese culture, much as it does in the rest of the world.

Carrying the Sword. In China, the sword was either slung from a belt around the waist or hung on the back with shoulder straps.



Sword worn from a waist belt.



Sword worn from shoulder straps.

The sword could be either carried over the shoulder in a soft scabbard for easy drawing, or a hard scabbard that could be quickly untied from the back for quick access. The way a person carried his sword depended on the weight and length of the sword—double swords and martial swords (*wu jian*, 武劍) were ordinarily carried on the back—as well as personal preference.

How to Inspect a Sword. There are two occasions upon which a sword will be inspected: by the swordsman after using the sword, and by an admirer of the weapon (possibly for purchase). There are several very important conventions to be observed when one inspects a sword, and they should be communicated to the neophyte prior to allowing him to handle the weapon. First, the sword is always passed from person to person hilt first. This minimizes the danger of accidental injury, which is always a possibility when dealing with any weapon. Second, the sword handler never touches the blade with bare skin because the sweat-salt and oils from the skin will result in corrosion. Third, the blade is always kept at least eight inches (20–30 cm) away from the nose and mouth, since moisture from the breath can also result in corrosion of the blade. Fourth, the sword handler never points the sword at another person, both for safety and out of courtesy. Fifth, the edge of the blade is inspected by holding the sword by its hilt in one hand and resting the other end against the scabbard.



The edge of the blade is inspected by holding the sword by its hilt and resting the other end on the scabbard.



If there is no scabbard, the thumbnail of the free hand may be used.



If there is no scabbard, the sleeve may be used so that the blade is protected from corrosion.

Finally, although it is not a traditional observance, experience has shown that it is generally not a good idea to flourish the sword while inspecting it. This sort of cavalier treatment of the weapon can often result in accidental injury, especially in crowded areas, and most especially if there are children about. The sword is a dangerous weapon. It should be wielded only for practice or defense, and safety must always be your first priority.

How to Select a Taiji Sword. Because of the success of modern metallurgical techniques, there is no longer a need for the student to forge his own sword, as was sometimes necessary in ancient times. Excellent swords can be bought at most martial arts supply stores. A modern sword made from spring steel is the equal of or superior to most common swords of antiquity. Plated, nontempered swords are also available and are considerably cheaper than the spring steel variety; however, these are definitely only practice swords. Selection criteria for a taiji sword are as follows:

1. The length from the tip of the sword to the handle should be as long as the height from your feet to the base of your sternum.
2. The taper of the blade from hilt to tip should be smooth and steady, with no abrupt changes in width or thickness.
3. The blade must be straight when viewed down the edge.
4. The blade must be firmly mounted in the handle. It should not rattle when you shake it.
5. Spring steel blades must be flexible enough to bend 30 degrees and not retain any bow.
6. The sword should be balanced at a point one-third of its length up from the hilt end. If it is not, the balance must be altered or the sword will not handle properly.
7. The tang of the blade (the part of the blade that extends down into the handle) should be as long and as wide as possible. Often, cheaper swords are merely bolted into the handle and will break easily at this point.

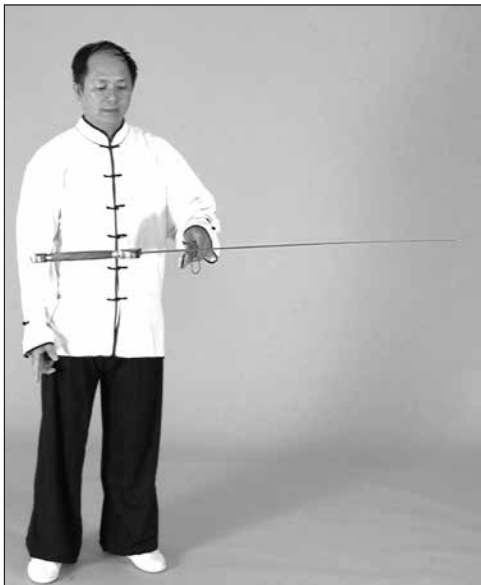
The quality and finish of the wood and fittings used to construct the sword's handle and scabbard must be adequate. Traditionally, the fittings would be made from brass. Stainless steel might also be a good choice, but I have never seen it used. Cheap wood in the handle and scabbard will quickly crack, rendering the sword useless, no matter how strong its blade.



The length from the tip of the sword to the handle should be as long as the height from your feet to the base of your sternum.



The blade must be straight when viewed down the edge.



The sword should be balanced at a point one-third of its length up from the hilt end.

Sheathing the Sword. Sword and scabbard were formerly created as one interlocking assembly. Many of these units were spring loaded, so that the sword leaped from the sheath when the latch was released. Even when not spring loaded, swords would frequently latch to the scabbard to ensure their protection, and these latching scabbards would have a stud at the open end. If you have such a sword, put it away by resting the hilt end of the blade on the stud, drawing the blade out to the tip, and letting the blade slide easily into the sheath. If the scabbard does not have this stud, your thumbnail must serve in its place.



The first step in sheathing the sword is to place the thumb over the open end of the sheath so that it is half covered.



Then bring the sword around, resting the part of the blade closest to the hilt on the thumb and sheath.



The second step is to slide the sword back along your thumbnail to the tip of the sword so that the tip will then fall into the end of the sheath.



Move your thumb out of the way and slide the sword into the sheath. Practice carefully until sheathing the sword becomes natural.

Chapter 4: Taiji Sword Matching Practice

4-1. Introduction

After the taiji martial artist has learned the narrow-blade sword sequence, he or she will go on to sword exercises that serve the same function as pushing hands. These drills are called fighting forms or matching drills. The fighting forms develop all the important abilities needed for free fighting: smooth qi flow into the sword, fluid and lively movement, an understanding of the opponent's power, an ability to adhere, expertise in sword techniques, and proper defense. In this book, ten sword-fighting forms will be shown and explained: six left neutralization and right-side attack, and four right neutralization and left-side attack. Later, experienced taiji practitioners can develop their own fighting forms. Once all the requirements are met, the student proceeds to unrestricted fighting.

4-2. Matching Practice

In this section, we will introduce ten examples of taiji sword matching practice. I have chosen these basic drills as a foundation for your practice. Once you have learned and mastered the entire taiji sword solo sequence, you should try to pick up the movements inside the sequence and create some other fighting matching sets. Remember, without practicing with a partner, you will never develop a correct feeling and learn how to handle different situations. When you practice, you and your partner should start with wooden swords. Only until you have mastered the skills should you use real swords for practice.

For ease of reference, the performer in white pants will be referred to as W, while the performer in black pants will be referred to as B.

1. Coil Left and Stab Horizontally (Zuo Chan Ping Ci, 左纏平刺)



W steps forward and stabs toward B's throat. B steps backward and uses his sword to block and neutralize W's sword to his left.



B then coils his sword downward to stick with W's sword to open W's upper body and immediately steps forward to stab toward W's throat. Just before B's sword reaches the halfway point of attack, W steps back and blocks the sword to his left and neutralizes B's attack.



Continue to practice until the matching feels natural and comfortable.

2. Left Neutralizing and Stab Forward (Zuo Hua Qian Ci, 左化前刺)

This matching is very similar to the previous one but adds stepping to the right.



W steps his right leg forward and uses his sword to stab B's throat. B moves his left leg in to the side of his right leg while using his sword to block W's attack.



B steps to his right while stabbing his sword to W's throat. W steps his left leg in to the side of his right leg and uses his sword to block the attack.



Continue the practice until the stepping and the matching feel natural and comfortable.

3. Left Neutralize and Right Stab (Zuo Hua You Ci, 左化右刺)

This matching is very similar to the previous one, except this time, B stabs to W's chest with the sword blade vertical. The blocking is lower and the neutralization is slightly different.



W stabs at B's stomach area. B slides the attack away to his left while stepping his left leg to the side of his right leg.



B steps to the side with his right leg and stabs at B's stomach area. W moves his left leg in to the side of his right leg while using his sword to neutralize B's attack to his left.



Continue to practice until the stepping and the matching feel natural and comfortable.

4. Left Neutralize and Right Pull (Zuo Hua You Dan, 左化右帶)



W steps his right leg to his right and at the same time uses the sword to cut at B's neck with a horizontal slash. B dodges the attack by turning his body slightly to the left, stepping his left leg in to the side of his right leg while using his sword to stick with the incoming sword and lead it to his left.



B steps his right leg to his right and uses his sword to slide to W's neck. W turns his body slightly to his left and steps his left leg in to the side of his right leg while using his sword to stick with the incoming sword and lead it to his left hand side.



Continue the practice until the stepping and the matching feel natural and comfortable.

5. Left Whirlwind (Zuo Xuan Feng, 左旋風)

This is a mutual wrist cut chasing practice (wrist coiling training) between both B and W. First, practice stationary, until both sides are smooth and natural. Only then should you advance to the stepping practice.



Both B and W start by facing each other.



W circles the tip section of the sword clockwise and tries to cut B's wrist. B circles his wrist away while also using the tip section of his sword to try to cut W's wrist with a clockwise circular motion. Though both B's and W's swords chase each other's wrist, neither one should actually cut the other. You should practice slowly at first, until it feels smooth and natural. Then you should speed up the practice.

About the Author

Yang, Jwing-Ming, PhD (楊俊敏博士)

Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming was born on August 11, 1946, in Xinzhu Xian (新竹縣), Taiwan (台灣), Republic of China (中華民國). He started his *wushu* (武術) (*gongfu* or *kung fu*, 功夫) training at the age of fifteen under Shaolin White Crane (Shaolin Bai He, 少林白鶴) Master Cheng, Gin-Gsao (曾金灶). Master Cheng originally learned Taizuquan (太祖拳) from his grandfather when he was a child. When Master Cheng was fifteen years old, he started learning White Crane from Master Jin, Shao-Feng (金紹峰) and followed him for twenty-three years until Master Jin's death.



In thirteen years of study (1961–1974) under Master Cheng, Dr. Yang became an expert in the White Crane style of Chinese martial arts, which includes both the use of bare hand and various weapons, such as saber, staff, spear, trident, two short rods, and many other weapons. With the same master he also studied White Crane Qigong (氣功), *qin na* or *chin na* (擒拿), *tui na* (推拿), and *dian xue* massages (點穴按摩) and herbal treatment.

At sixteen, Dr. Yang began the study of Yang Style Taijiquan (楊氏太極拳) under Master Kao, Tao (高濤). He later continued his study of taijiquan under Master Li, Mao-Ching (李茂清), and was also a student with Mr. Wilson Chen (陳威伸), in Taipei (台北). Master Li learned his taijiquan from the well-known Master Han, Ching-Tang (韓慶堂), and Mr. Chen learned his taijiquan from Master Chang, Xiang-San (張詳三). From this further practice, Dr. Yang was able to master the taiji bare hand sequence, pushing hands, the two-man fighting sequence, taiji sword, taiji saber, and taiji qigong.

When Dr. Yang was eighteen years old, he entered Tamkang College (淡江學院) in Taipei Xian to study physics. In college, he began the study of traditional Shaolin Long Fist (Changquan or Chang Chuan, 少林長拳) with Master Li, Mao-Ching at the Tamkang College Guoshu Club (淡江國術社), 1964–1968, and eventually became an assistant instructor under Master Li. In 1971, he completed his MS degree in physics at the National Taiwan University (台灣大學) and then served in the Chinese Air Force from 1971 to 1972. In the service, Dr. Yang taught physics at the Junior Academy of

the Chinese Air Force (空軍幼校) while also teaching wushu. After being honorably discharged in 1972, he returned to Tamkang College to teach physics and resumed study under Master Li, Mao-Ching. From Master Li, Dr. Yang learned Northern style wushu, which includes both bare hand and kicking techniques, and numerous weapons.

In 1974, Dr. Yang came to the United States to study mechanical engineering at Purdue University. At the request of a few students, Dr. Yang began to teach gongfu (kung fu), which resulted in the establishment of the Purdue University Chinese Kung Fu Research Club in the spring of 1975. While at Purdue, Dr. Yang also taught college-credit courses in taijiquan. In May of 1978, he was awarded a PhD in mechanical engineering by Purdue.

In 1980, Dr. Yang moved to Houston to work for Texas Instruments. While in Houston, he founded Yang's Shaolin Kung Fu Academy, which was eventually taken over by his disciple, Mr. Jeffery Bolt, after Dr. Yang moved to Boston in 1982. Dr. Yang founded Yang's Martial Arts Academy in Boston on October 1, 1982.

In January of 1984, he gave up his engineering career to devote more time to research, writing, and teaching. In March of 1986, he purchased property in the Jamaica Plain area of Boston to be used as the headquarters of the new organization, Yang's Martial Arts Association (YMAA). The organization expanded to become a division of Yang's Oriental Arts Association, Inc. (YOAA).

In 2008, Dr. Yang began the nonprofit YMAA California Retreat Center. This training facility in rural California is where selected students enroll in a five-year residency to learn Chinese martial arts.

Dr. Yang has been involved in traditional Chinese wushu since 1961, studying Shaolin White Crane (Bai He), Shaolin Long Fist (Changquan), and taijiquan under several different masters. He has taught for more than 46 years: 7 years in Taiwan, 5 years at Purdue University, 2 years in Houston, 26 years in Boston, and 6 years at the YMAA California Retreat Center. He has taught seminars all around the world, sharing his knowledge of Chinese martial arts and qigong in Argentina, Austria, Barbados, Botswana, Belgium, Bermuda, Brazil, Canada, China, Chile, England, Egypt, France, Germany, Holland, Hungary, Iceland, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Spain, South Africa, Switzerland, and Venezuela.

Since 1986, YMAA has become an international organization, which currently includes more than fifty schools located in Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Chile, France, Hungary, Iran, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, South Africa, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Venezuela, and the United States.

Many of Dr. Yang's books and videos have been translated into languages, such as French, Italian, Spanish, Polish, Czech, Bulgarian, Russian, German, and Hungarian.

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