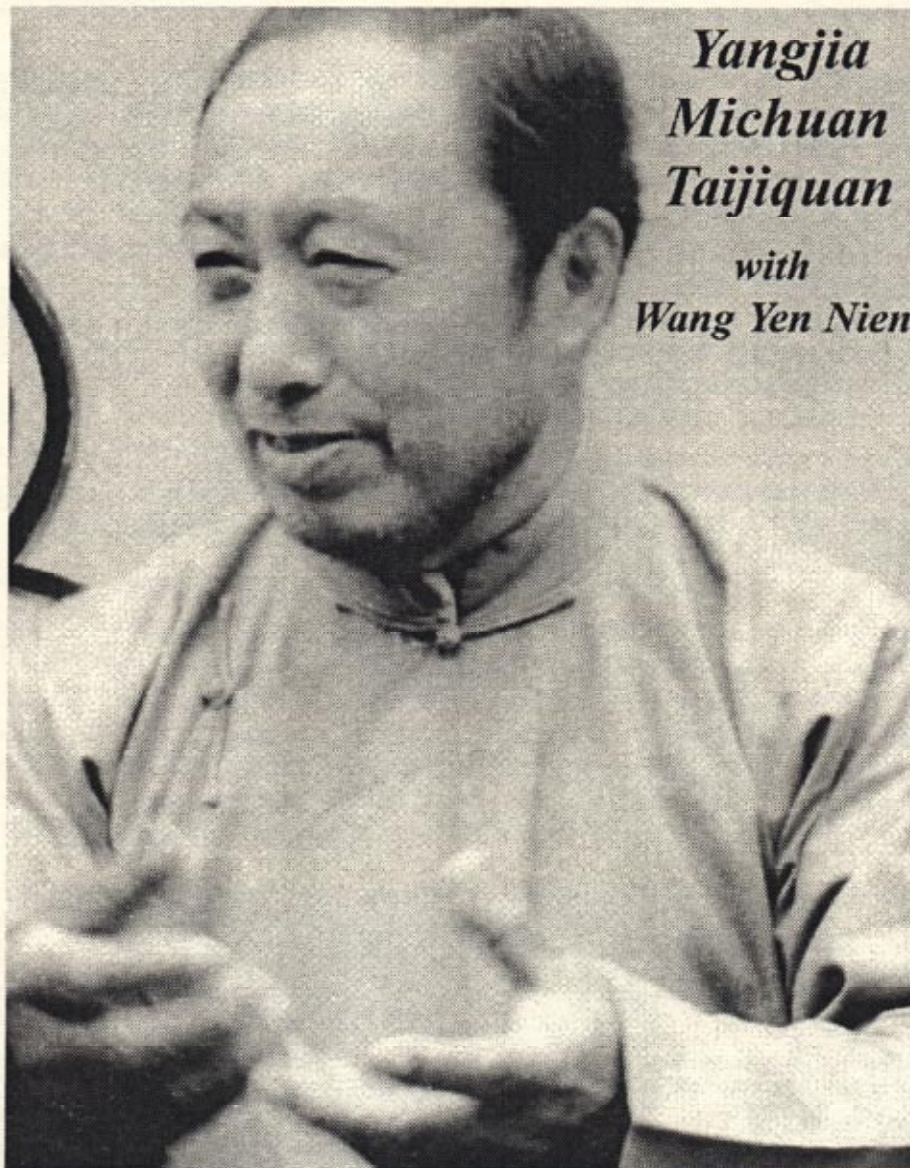


# Internal Martial Arts



*Modern Journal Coverage of Traditional Taiji, Xingyi, Bagua, Aikido and Related Arts*



*Yangjia  
Michuan  
Taijiquan  
with  
Wang Yen Nien*

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## NEIJIA SPOTLIGHT

### WANG YEN NIEN AND YANGJIA MICHUAN TAIJIQUAN: FORM, APPLICATION AND INTERNAL PRACTICE

by Thomas W. Campbell\*

Madison, Wisconsin July 6-12, 2002

"Once there were many Taiji elders, serious teachers," explained **Wang Yen Nien**. "Now we look around and they are almost all gone. I am one of those who is left. Where before people would question the authenticity, now Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan has outlasted them and people realize that we are doing something that is healthy and good."

Wang Yen Nien spoke to teachers and early arrivals to the Yangjia Michuan International Festival recently in Madison, Wisconsin. His hosts, **Donald** and **Kathryn Coleman**, sat with about twenty others, sharing stories and a meal.

"The thing that is most important is that what we do makes us healthy; that it is good for us."

#### History and Characteristics of Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan

There are two purposes for this article: First, to give a brief but detailed introduction to Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan as taught by Wang Yen Nien (born 1914, Taiyaun, Shanxi, China). Second, to examine both the internal aspect, neigong breathing, and the practical; the relationship of form to application practice.

Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan (Yang Family Hidden Tradition) began with **Yang Lu Chan** and was passed to his son **Yang**

**Jian Hou**, then to **Zhang Qin Lin**. (See **Sam Tomarchio's** interview with Wang Yen Nien, reprinted in *AYMTA* journal, Fall 2000, Vol.8, No.2) Zhang Qin Lin brought his experiences with the Gold Mountain Daoist School of Internal Alchemy to the practice and passed his knowledge to Wang Yen Nien, who became Zhang's vowed student and practiced with him from 1945 to 1949. Wang Yen Nien fought in the war as a Colonel, and went with the Nationalists to Taiwan in 1949. He began to teach Yangjia Michuan openly, as Zhang Qin Lin had instructed him to do.

The Yangjia Michuan form contains three parts and, together, takes about an hour to practice. Section one, which introduces the eight upper hand movements, is about 10 minutes in duration. Section two introduces numerous low squats and spins and takes about twenty minutes to perform. Section three, which introduces opposite-sided versions of some of the forms (both sides of the body benefit the same from a full practice of the form), takes thirty minutes.

Some of the movements that are introduced in each section of the long form include:

**Section One** - "Brush knee, twist step," "Wield the Pipa," and "the eight-hands movements" (*peng, lu, an, ji, zhao, kao, cai, lie*).

\* *Thomas Campbell is a Yangjia Michuan practitioner located in New York City. Form and application images by Howard Ekman.*

**Section Two** - "Straddle the Tiger, Climb the Mountain," "The Green Dragon Emerges from the Water," "Cloud Hands 1," "A Double-Blow Pierces the Ears."

**Section Three** - "Part the Wild Horse's Mane," "The Fair Maiden Weaves to and Fro," "Cloud Hands 2 & 3," "The Dragon Explores with Its Talons," "100 Practices with the Legs."

There is much to this practice; "The Thirteen Postures," the long form, the full system of weapons practice, *tui shou* exercises, and neigong training. This can be daunting, especially to students who want to learn something "in a hurry." But any Taiji teacher who cares about his or her practice is going to tell you the same thing; that Taiji is a long term proposition. I have benefited from studying Yangjia Michuan for nine years with a teacher who spent many years himself learning from Wang Yen Nien in Taipei and Europe, beginning in the early 1980's. I have also had the benefit of studying with Wang Yen Nien five times since 1995 and have learned, through him, the value of Taiji study and practice.

"Investigate your practice," Wang Yen Nien has said many times during workshops and practice. "Seek the quintessential in everything you do. Remain open to discovery."

If you encounter someone practicing Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan, and you are familiar with any style of Taiji, you would note a few immediate observations :

1) There are a series of basic exercises which are practiced in preparation for form, weapons and *tui shou*.

2) The spiraling nature of postures in this form is one of its most fundamental

characteristics: opening and closing, rising and sinking, spiraling down on the back leg, then back up. Weight is usually kept back, onto the rooted leg, and energy is generally released by rising on the back leg, spiraling with the waist as you do so ("The waist is the commander"). If weight is shifted forward, movements are usually in half steps, wherein the non-weighted foot, for instance, comes forward, toe near the heel of the front (full) foot.

3) Large, expansive movements, full spiraling of the hips, but no over-extensions or double-weightedness. *Baihui* (top) and *huiyin* (bottom) points remain in alignment. Tailbone slightly tucked in. Snake-steps forward, circle steps back. And in "Monkey retreats, left and right," snake-steps backwards.

4) You might also notice that there are a number of apparent applications within nearly every movement of the form. At least one deflection and one strike. Neutralize energy, release energy.

5) You would notice the slow and even regulation of the breath; breathing in through the nose to the *dantian*, and releasing breath slowly through the mouth. Generally releasing breath while rising (releasing energy) and inhaling when sinking (gathering energy). The circular nature of the breathing works in unison with the circular movements of the form.

The "Thirteen Postures" is an introductory form and generally takes 12-15 minutes to perform. In addition to the one-hour full form, the Yangjia Michuan school includes two sword forms, a staff form and a fan form. The "old" (Kunlun) sword form was passed down through the Yang lineage. The "new" (Wudang) sword form, and the Yen Nien fan form, were created by Wang Yen Nien for his students. Wang

Yen Nien has stated that the Kunlun sword form, with its long slow deflections and precise strikes and spins, is meant for the cultivation of *qi*, and the building of *gongfu*. The Wudang form works more on various technique, and includes more movements within relatively the same amount of time.

There is also the practice of *neigong* (*tuna*) in both Taiji and sitting meditation, a process that is cultivated from the beginning of one's Taiji experience. The complete practice of tui shou begins with single person spiraling exercises for building a strong lower body (root) and flexibility throughout the body. Next, a student would begin the practice of the fifteen two-person tui shou exercises, developing "feel," coordination, and various tui shou techniques and abilities.

### Yangjia Michuan Form and Application

The relationship of the form and applications in Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan is intimate. One does not exist without the other. You can practice both at the same time by simply focusing your intent on the practice of the form and imagining that you are working with a partner.

The following series of images illustrate the movements as they appear in the form. The lines represent the four cardinal directions and show how much of this series of movements takes place towards the diagonal direction.

**Below: Robert Politzer** demonstrates "Left, Single Arm Sweep" and "Jab" from Section One of the long form.

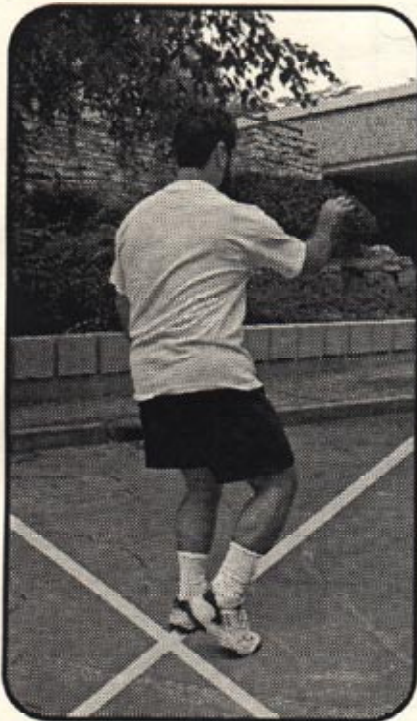


Figure 1

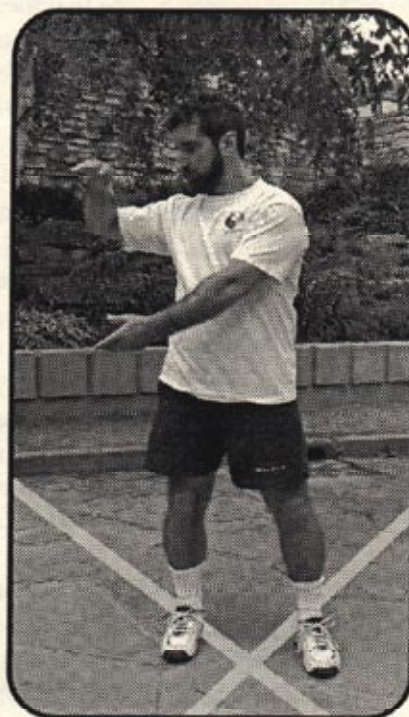
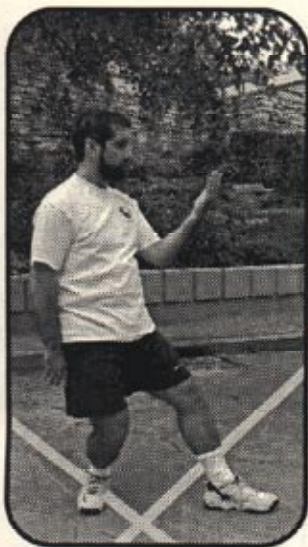


Figure 2

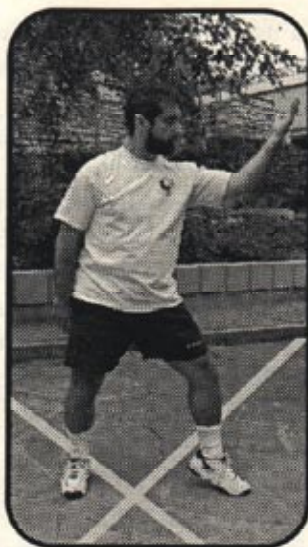


Figure 3

From **Figure 1**, inhale, keeping your weight on the left foot, turn the body to the right, circling from the waist. The right arm and the lower leg follow back in a big circle. (**Figure 2**) Your feet face the front/left diagonal and your intent is to the front/right diagonal. Shift your weight to the right/rear leg and sink down on the right leg. As you do so, the right hand sinks and the left rises (left arm is on the inside, between right arm and body). (**Figure 3**)



**Figure 4**



**Figure 5**



**Figure 6**



**Figure 7**

Step, turn the waist to the left, the left arm follows, rise on the back leg, extending the left arm. (Figure 4-5) The intent is to the front/right diagonal, the left foot points to this diagonal. This is performed on an exhale. Inhale. Sink down, turning the waist, left arm and foot (Raise the ball, pivot on the heel of left foot), to the right. (Figure 6) Then shift the weight to the left leg as you half-step in to the left foot and spiral up, jabbing beneath your left arm. This is an exhale. (Figure 7)

**Form application sequence: (Donald Coleman assists as the aggressor)**

The series of images below illustrate the movements as they appear in the form and some of the applications (there are sometimes more than one) that are revealed within these movements.

Don attacks Robert's center with his right fist. Robert circles back 90 degrees, turning his center away. His right hand bonds to the incoming arm at the wrist. (Figure 8) Robert sinks, using "cai" and Don is drawn down. (Figure 9) Positioning his left leg Robert uses another directional change, spirals up from the back leg, and bends Don back and away. (Figure 10) Don neutralizes the push, and pushes back. (Figure 11) Robert deflects energy down by turning his waist to the right and spiraling down. (Figure 12) Forming a flat hand he rises, shifts his weight, and steps towards Don. Shifting his weight fully onto the left leg, Robert uses his opponents falling energy, meeting him with the jab. (Figure 13)



**Figure 8**



**Figure 9**



**Figure 10**



**Figure 11**



**Figure 12**



**Figure 13**

Knowing the applications is a useful aid for learning and remembering the form. The applications themselves do not involve altering the form; they are "as is".

"For Taijiquan," explained Wang Yen Nien, "whether we are speaking of form, or weapons, or looking for gongfu, that the form looks good or not good is not important . . . . Because something that might be beautiful may not be of any particular use (in the development of gongfu) . . . . We need to think of developing gongfu, which occurs with effort over time . . . . Those who know how to look will be looking for gongfu, and not for what looks pretty . . . ."

When one spends the time to explore form applications we look deeper into the postures and movements of Taijiquan in general. And we are continually rewarded with the challenging but practical nature of Taijiquan.

#### **The Second Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan Festival**

Wang Yen Nien took part in the festival by teaching a two-hour *nei gong* class for five days and attending demos, where he would speak about Taiji concepts and give critique. Students and teachers felt fortunate to be studying (again) with him. After suffering a severe leg injury in a Taipei taxi accident in 1992 (from which he recovered to a much greater degree than doctors thought possible) – there has been much discussion about Wang Yen Nien giving up, for health reasons, overseas travel.

The festival provided a welcome and rare opportunity for teachers and students to gather and share information and questions about their practice. It is difficult enough for practitioners from the east coast to meet with those from the west; We were also able to spend time with students and teachers from Europe and

Taiwan. The advantage of having five or six days with such a group, with the chance to focus almost exclusively on Taiji form and practice, is self-evident.

I worked with other students and teachers of the Kunlun sword form and we had an instructive and fun five hours of study and practice. The support and interest of fellow practitioners, students and teachers played a large role in the success of the week.

When different schools get together there will be inevitable differences, often merely representing individual style, sometimes forgetfulness, and occasionally highlighting philosophical differences in the study and interpretation of the form. Because practitioners are spread out around the country (and the globe) it is common to find oneself working, not by choice, in isolation. So we listened to and observed closely the work of our peers, asked Wang Yen Nien questions, and practiced long hours of Taijiquan, *tui shou*, and *nei gong*.

Wang Yen Nien discussed the benefits of working with the entire Yangjia Michuan system:

"The overall benefit of practicing the entire system of Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan is, of course, for better health and happiness. Today, most other styles of Taiji that we see also have this as their goal; better health and happiness. But some other traditions miss this longevity aspect; the Daoist Internal element. They might find the health and happiness but the goal of longevity could still be missing. In Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan the emphasis is not only on health and happiness but also on longevity, and that is the daoist aspect.

Sometimes other forms will add in a practice of "*qi gong*." But what is already a

part of Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan is called "nei gong" . . .

The benefit of nei gong – it is an internal Daoist alchemist art. Those who are interested in continuing a practice of self-cultivation and internal alchemical arts begin with the practice of nei gong. The idea is to cultivate and nurture the internal organs, to strengthen the inner organs. We practice *tu na*, the Daoist art of breathing technique. And once we learn to use *tu na*, and the internal organs become stronger and healthier, then we are able to nourish the three treasures, our inner elixirs: *Jing*, *Qi*, and *Shen*. We all have these inner elixirs, but if they are not taken care of, cultured and nurtured, they will slowly dissipate over time. We practice an inter-

nal alchemical art, the Daoist art of breathing, and use neigong to develop and strengthen ourselves. Thus we will be able to strengthen and augment the three naturally occurring elixirs; Jing, Qi, and Shen."

I have included a lot of introductory information concerning the practice and history of Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan, but only in an attempt to clearly establish some basic characteristics of this style. I have stayed away from trying to describe the system in terms of other martial arts – or Yang/Chen family schools. This is where the reader brings his or her own knowledge and enthusiasm to investigate for themselves. ●

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