

Yang Cheng Fu's 10 Essential Points

1. Xu Ling Ding Jin - Elevate the Crown to Lift the Spirit

Emptying the thoughts and raising the head as if the crown of the head is pressed up against the heavens. The neck must be straightened to allow the head to be raised and vertical. This allows the spirit and chi to arrive at the crown of the head. No physical strength should be used, as physical force will cause stiffness and also hinder the blood and chi circulation. One must have natural intention of emptiness in the mind.

2. Han Xiong Ba Bei - Hollowing the chest to raise the back

Hollowing the chest will help to sink the Chi down to the Dan Tian point. It is imperative not to expand the chest as this will raise the Chi to the chest, causing top heaviness and the heels to lift. To raise the back is to allow the Chi to adhere to the back. If one hollows the chest the back will rise naturally. With the back raised, one can project the Chi from the spine.

3. Song Yao - Loosening up the waist

The waist is the commander of the body. When one is able to loosen up the waist, this will increase Chi energy in both legs and thus provide a stable base for firm rooting. Changes from substantial to insubstantial or vice-versa are derived from the movement of the waist. There is a saying that the source of Chi energy is from the waist, therefore if one lacks strength, one should pay more attention to the waist and the lower limbs.

4. Fen Xu Shi - Distinguishing between substantial and insubstantial

When one's weight is on the right, the right leg becomes substantial and the left leg insubstantial, or vice versa. When one is able to distinguish the difference, one will be able to turn and move with lightness and effortlessness. If not, any steps will be sluggish and unstable and can easily be unbalanced by others.

5. Chen Lian Zhu Zhou - Sinking the shoulder and weighting down the elbow

Sinking the shoulder is to let the shoulder loosen up and drop downwards. If not, both shoulders will rise causing Chi to rise with them. No strength can be exerted from the body if this happens. Weighting down the elbow is to let the elbow drop and hang loose. If the elbow is raised, the shoulders will have great difficulty in sinking, thus affecting the strength of your internal power, and you will not be able to throw the opponent away. This is similar to what is known as 'stifling the power' in external martial arts.

6. Yong Yi Bu Yong Li - Using Yi, or intention, and not physical strength (Li)

For practitioners of Tai Chi Chuan, the whole body must be relaxed so that no physical strength remains within the sinews and bones to restrict one's power. Only then will one be light and flexible, and move accordingly. One might doubt how one could develop such power without using physical strength. It is because the human body contains meridians, which enable the flow of Chi. When physical strength is used, this will cause the blockage of Chi in these meridians and result in sluggish movements. Any movement in a small part of the body will affect the whole body. Using the mind or Yi, Chi will flow to where it is directed. It also helps the flow of both blood and Chi circulation and strengthens the body.

7. Shang Xia Xiang Sui - Co-ordination of both the upper and lower body

In accordance to Tai Chi Chuan theory, rooting is from the legs, the command from the waist, and expression through the hands. From legs to waist, there needs to be unison of movement. The movements of hands, waist and legs will also be followed by the intention in the eyes. This is regarded as the complete co-ordination of above and below. If one of these is missing, the move becomes fragmented.

8. Nei Wai Xiang Ge - Internal and external in togetherness

The training of Tai Chi Chuan is in the spirit, hence spirit is the commander-in-chief and the body will move as directed. When the spirit is raised and movements become light, the form consists of open and close - open means not only opening the hands and legs but also includes the mind within it. When closing, it should be the same. Therefore, there is no gap between the external and internal and they should be in unison.

9. Xiang Lian Bu Duan - Continuity without breakage

In external martial arts, the power used is only physical strength and therefore there is a start and finish to it. In between is the break where the strength from the previous move is finished and before new force is issued, which is the weakest point and can be easily exploited by the opponent. Tai Chi Chuan uses Yi and not physical strength, hence the move becomes continuous without ending, like a roaring river without ceasing. When in circulation, the Chi is described as like drawing silk from a cocoon, to signify the continuous flow of movement.

10. Dong Zhong Qiu Jing - Seeking stillness within movement

In external martial arts, power is generated by jumping, punching and kicking as hard as possible. Hence after prolonged practice, one is panting for breath and at times the blood vessels are enlarged. By contrast, Tai Chi Chuan emphasises stillness over movement. Even though in motion, the form appears to be tranquil. Therefore when practising, the slower the better, with long deep breathing, to allow the Chi to sink to the Dan Tian point and thus prevent one from over-exerting oneself physically.

