

The Taiji Sword

This weapon appeared rather late in the Taiji repertoire being first taught in Beijing. The manuals of Wu Yu Xiang do not record a sword form even though there is a sword form in the current Wu Yu Xiang style syllabus. The manual only records the sabre and the spear/staff, this would be in keeping with the times where the sword had already played a lesser role in combat having largely been replaced by the sabre.

The form that was handed down by the Yangs was recorded by in pictorial form by Chen Wei Ming who had studied under Yang Cheng Fu and by Chen Yan Ling who had studied under Tien Shao Ling who was a student of Yang Chien Hou and Yang Shao Hou. The form recorded by both are by and large identical and remains the most extent traditional form of Yang Taiji sword in practice today.

The Chinese government also created a shorter sword form based on this traditional 56 posture form of the Yang family and taught it as a health exercises to the masses. It is much shorter and the postures have been rearranged somewhat.

Also in the sword repertoire is the two person sticky sword practice which is akin to the pushing hands exercise. The 13 techniques of the Taiji sword are thus practiced actively with sensing the opponent's move and countering it using the principles of Taijiquan. The thirteen sword techniques commonly referred to are:

- 1) Whip (Chou)
- 2) Lead (Dai)
- 3) Lift (Ti)
- 4) Obstruct (Ge)
- 5) Strike (Ji)
- 6) Pierce (Ci)
- 7) Dot (Dian)
- 8) Burst (Beng)
- 9) Stir (Jiao)
- 10) Press Down (Ya)
- 11) Split (Pi)
- 12) Intercept (Jie)
- 13) Wash (Xi)

The sword used in Taiji Sword practice is a normal Chinese sword or chien. It is a straight sword with two edges but only the top 1/3 of the sword is sharpened to razor sharpness. For modern practice, an unsharpened sword is often used, in some cases a wooden one is used. The length of the sword should suit the individual and the old way of determining correct length is by reverse holding the sword with a straight arm so that the sword points upwards and is behind the arm, the sword tip should be at the same level as the ear lobe.

Though any kind of sword may be used, avoid soft swords which are too springy and swords that are too stiff, the sword should be slightly springy. Its weight should not be too light, it should feel like a natural extension of the arm. Too heavy and it may cause undue strain which is an impediment to relaxation. One



should not move to a heavy weapon straight away but start with one that is most comfortable and progress to a heavier weapon when one improves and finds the first weapon too light.

The finish of the traditional sword is smooth and one should be able to see the grain of the metal through the polish. Modern swords tend to be chromed with a layer of copper or brass underneath the chrome layer. The older swords were hand beaten and sometimes had the name of the maker inscribed or at least the seal of the place of manufacture. Modern swords tend to be cut from sheet metal and then shaped by machines. Hand made sword are preferable because of better balance, the better quality of the finish and the more compact grain of the beaten metal. The handle should be properly fixed and not lose, it should also not be too thin and narrow but have a large enough width for proper gripping. Check that the handle does not have cracks due to flaws in the wood or improper finishing or seasoning of the wood.

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