

## **Yang Family Tai Chi Ch'uan - Rene Nararro**

*"The Tai Chi Chuan curriculum consists of hand forms first (i.e., empty hand), such as Tai Chi Chuan and Tai Chi Long Boxing. Next comes One Hand Push Hands, Fixed Position Push Hands, Push Hands with Active Steps, Ta Lu, and Free Sparring. Last comes the weapons, such as Tai Chi Double-Edged Sword, Tai Chi Broadsword, Tai Chi Spear (Thirteen Spear). And so forth."*

- Yang Cheng-Fu Douglas Wile, Tai Chi Touchstones: Yang Family Transmissions, p. 7

*When I was studying Tai Chi Chuan Yang Family Style in Manila's Chinatown in the late 1960's I saw only three "forms" - Solo Form which we later called the Long Form to distinguish it from the Short version; Sword Form; Push Hands (if we can call it a form). The master who taught Tai Chi Chuan at the school where I studied, Hua Eng Athletic Club, in Manila, was Han Ching-Tang, the famous teacher from Taiwan. Master Han wasn't around when I started studying, but Chan Bun Te, an impeccable stylist, who studied the form with him, was.*

*Master Han apparently taught only these three Tai chi chuan forms - the Solo Form and Push Hands (both of which I studied) and the Sword Form (which I did not). There were students who were practicing the Sword form when I was at Hua-Eng. I learned a few movements but the man whose name I can't remember now and was probably called Mr. Sy was teaching it left and nobody took his place. My Shaolin master Johnny Chiuten gave me a video of this talented man performing several forms – Solo tai chi form, Sword form (Han's also), a type of Chen style Solo form, and Pa-Kua Chang - apparently most of them, if not all, learned from Han Ching-Tang.*

*I understand that Master Han studied the Solo form from Yang Cheng-Fu in the Sports College in Nanjing in the early 30s. But Han had revised it in many ways. The opening, for instance, looked like the beginning of 5 Element Fist of Hsing-1. In other places, he had changed the movements too, but fortunately not the names. I learned another version of the Yang Family Solo Form from Grandmaster Lieu/Lao Yun Hsiao (also from Taiwan) later on, when the master was visiting the Philippines in 1970. He did not teach us any other Tai Chi Chuan form. At the time, like many people, I thought these three forms were what constituted the whole Tai chi chuan curriculum of the Yang Family. When I moved to the United States in August 1970, I saw a few teachers. Their curriculum covered the Solo Form plus Push Hands. Sometimes they taught a Sword form; often no I observed Tai chi chuan masters on both East and West Coasts.*

*From what I had seen at his school in New York City, the legendary Cheng Man-Ching taught his abbreviated 37-movement Solo form. Push hands/Sensing hands, and Sword. I haven't found any other evidence that he taught any other form. It is possible that he also taught Ta-Lu (translated at the Gin Soon Tai chi club as "great pulling"), which is really part of Push Hands, to a few students.*

*In 1986, Gunter Weil and Rylin Malone two friends from the Healing Tao, to the Gin Soon Tai chi Club in Boston's Chinatown district, took me. For the first time, I saw a more varied curriculum that included not only Push Hands, Solo form and Sword but also Staff-Spear and Chang-Chuan. It was quite a pleasant surprise not only to see a genuine master in Gin Soon Chu, the second disciple of Yang Sau-Chung, but also to come upon forms I had not seen before, and he was teaching them openly. There are two possible reasons why only one or two Tai chi chuan forms of the Yang Family became widely disseminated. One reason might be that the Yang family did not teach the other forms - or taught them to only a few people, mostly their close disciples or children. Another reason is that a majority of students are inclined - for lack of time or motivation or opportunity - to study only one or two forms.*

*When Yang Cheng-Fu was alive, it appeared that only two or three forms were taught in public - the Solo form; Push Hands; and the first Sword form. The other forms - like the Chang-chuan (Long Fist), 2-man sparring set (San-sou), staff-spear set, Knife/Broadsword, second Sword and perhaps others - were usually not taught. Which makes me wonder: What did the famous masters like Dong Ying Jie, Chen Weiming, Fu Xiaowen, Cheng Man-Ching learn from Yang Cheng-Fu?*

*From the curriculum that he taught, Chen Weiming learned the Solo form, Sword, Spear, Push Hands, and Chang-chuan. What the others learned I wouldn't even bother to guess at. A sensitive subject this, and I don't like to step on anybody's toes. If anybody reads this article, s/he can tell me if they are privy to reliable information about what the masters learned.*

*It is possible that these masters learned some or all of their forms from Yang Cheng-fu's son Yang Sau-Chung, who from age 14 to 18 became his father's assistant.*

*I could be wrong because there are no eyewitnesses or films from that time. In the Yang Family tradition, except for the times when Grandmaster Yang Cheng-fu taught in public, usually he taught only one, perhaps two students at a time. As a result, a student may not know what other students were studying unless s/he talked to them. Moreover, one student can claim to have learned a form or everything from Yang Cheng-Fu himself and only Yang Cheng-Fu would know the truth, and he is dead. With Grandmaster Yang Sau-Chung (1909-1985), many of the lessons were taught in a*

*small apartment in Hong Kong. There was really no room for a big class. Each student took private lessons. As far as I know, there were no public announcements of workshops or classes, just private lessons. What Yang Cheng-Fu was talking about in the epigraph above is that there is indeed an extended curriculum of fist and weapons forms. It is not just one or two forms, there are several; apparently, some of them were secret forms taught only to a few disciples.*

*In the list, Yang Cheng-Fu mentioned the Tai chi chuan form. This probably refers to the Solo Form, the revised form - a large-frame, long, simplified form - that was popularized in China in an attempt to help the people improve their health. I said "probably" because there are really different versions of it and I won't presume to know what the great Yang was referring to.*

*Master Yang also referred to Tai chi Long Boxing. Was he being redundant here, since Tai Chi Chuan also refers to Long Boxing, or was he referring to another entirely different form? I conjecture that he was referring to another form, specifically the Chang Chuan form, which is often considered the Long form in the Yang Family Chang chuan is also sometimes referred to, rightly or wrongly, as the Fast Tai chi chuan form (because of its fast movements) or the Fa-jing form (because of its explosive techniques). I have not seen the Chang Chuan form mentioned in the literature. But, according to Vincent F. Chu, he heard that there are books in China about it written by students of Chen Wei-ming. Chen Weiming himself listed the moves of Chang-Chuan in his book on the Tai chi Sword published in the 30s. A translation of this book into English by Barbara Davis omits the list.*

*Tai chi chuan Chang Chuan is a beautiful and rare form characterized by alternately slow and sudden, dynamic and explosive movements. The movements are actually similar in name to the Solo Form but there are variations in the sequence and in the technique and execution.*

*There is also a complete form called 2-Man Sparring Set (San-Sou). It is a form that enables the practitioner to learn the deeper applications of the different movements in the Solo and Chang Chuan forms. The student has to study both sides (A and B) to learn the form.*

*Push Hands in the Yang Family tradition as transmitted by Yang Sau-chung is a complicated discipline. There are at least 7 different facets of it, some involving stationary postures with hand movements and positions that are intended to develop internal structure, sensitivity, receiving and explosive energy, softness and dynamism; others involving manipulations of the chi; still others involving movement of the hands and feet (like Ta-Lu). Basically, it was a training that incorporated the 36 or so techniques of fa-jing. From the curriculum offered by Master Gin Soon Chu, I learned there are indeed these fist and weapons forms handed down in the Yang Family. There are even three versions of the Knife/Broadsword form (one of them, a vigorous and fast version known as Yang Sau-Chung's favorite, another with a flying inside crescent kick like Shaolin) and two versions of the Sword form (one of them called Yang Cheng-fu's form).*

*Yang Cheng-Fu's "And so forth" in the quotation above leaves much to the imagination. He was obviously referring to other forms, but he did not elaborate. It is possible he was referring to the halberd, advance spear form and others, which Master Gin Soon Chu knows, but I can only guess what these forms are.*