



PREMIER FORUM/COMPETITION EUROPEEN DE TAI CHI CHUAN CHENG MAN CH'ING



In celebration of the centenary of Grandmaster Professor Cheng Man-Ching an international gathering of Cheng stylists travelled from many countries to attend this unique event in the south of France. Organised by William Nelson and a team of volunteers from his tai chi school, 'Association Le Meridien' it was a highly courageous and mammoth undertaking to bring legendary Grandmasters, Cheng family members and practitioners of Cheng style from so many backgrounds and geographical locations.

On arrival, mid Friday afternoon my colleague, Bob Lowey and I located the registration office to find out where we were to stay for the duration of the event. A queue of

people waited patiently in line to collect meal tickets, register for the competition and find out where they were to live. The staff on hand were under pressure dealing with far in excess of the anticipated numbers of people attending. Despite the request for early registration and advice on not being able to participate if not pre-registered, many people arrived 'on spec' hoping to participate. The workshops were over subscribed and a reserve list was created in the hope they could create work space for some of the unexpected arrivals. Accommodation was in one of the local colleges and was clean and fresh with three to a room.

The event was supported by the city council together with local and national businesses including France Telecom. Throughout the city one could find information and advertising with local bookshops allowing prominent window space to the Professor's works and related material. The city square was also to be the venue for the Afro/Cuban concert party on Sunday evening.

On gathering at the designated restaurant on Friday evening we engaged in conversation with

participants from the USA, Holland, Germany, France and Malaysia before being joined by a bus full with the Taiwanese delegation. To have so many people travelling so far gave an indication of the

importance of this occasion.

On Saturday morning we made the 15 minute journey to the gymnasium by car to see the huge posters of the Professor being attached to the trees outside. With over 150 competitors and a further 300 spectators expected the staff were on hand from 8.30 preparing for the busy day ahead. The gym was well lit, well ventilated and perfectly suited for the competition. Judges were selected with care, trying to get a balance of the various nationalities involved and clearly identifiable in red T shirts. At the top table sat our illustrious guests: Grandmaster Hung Ping Chu, (who studied with CMC from 1949, Grandmaster William CC Chen since early 50's, Katy and Elen Cheng, the Professor's daughters. Epi Van de Pol from Holland, who assisted William Nelson in an advisory capacity, also sat with the Masters, many of whom he had a long-standing relationship with.

From early morning until late afternoon the hand form and Tui Shou contests took place. Standards were variable but it was good to see many novices as well as highly experienced practitioners competing. The age range varied greatly with young students competing alongside veterans in forms competitions. The standard of judging was efficient and fair with no disputes arising. For aficionados of this style it was interesting to see representatives from the Taiwanese delegation perform alongside Americans, Europeans and fellow Asians. The Tui Shou bouts were lively and energetic and interesting to observe. Results of the competition were as follows:



AUGUST 2002 PERAGEAUX, FRANCE

BY RONNIE ROBINSON



FEMALE TUI SHOU

Fixed Step

< 60 KG
1st LARITZ GABRIELLE
Austria Tao Kung Fu
2nd GUILLOUX ANNE LISE
France Lomapai
> 60 KG
1st CHEN TIFFANY
USA William C.C Chen School
2nd VAN DROOGE JUDITH
Netherlands Julian Webbst

Moving Step

< 60 KG
1st LARITZ GABRIELLE
Austria Tao Kung Fu
2nd LEVRAUT AURELIE
France La Grande Ourse
> 60 KG
1st VAN DROOGE JUDITH
Netherlands Julian Webbst
2nd PARISOT LINE
France Le Méridien

MALE TUI SHOU

Fixed Step

< 70 KG
1st SCHNEISTAVI
Germany Three Treasures Tai Chi
2nd SIEGRIST MANFRED
Austria Tao Kung Fu
71 - 80 KG
1st LARITZ ROLAND
Austria Tao Kung Fu
2nd ZYSKOWSKI KARL
Germany Tai Chi Chuan Louis Molsta
81 - 90 KG
1st CUESTA PABLO
Spain TCC Louis Molera
2nd CASSUM SYLVESTST
USA William C.C Chen School
> 90 KG
1st SCHEELE LEE
USA Benjamin Lo & Tony Ho
2nd ZWAART RICHARD
Netherlands STN

Male Moving Step

< 70 KG
1st SIEGRIST MANFRED
Austria Tao Kung Fu
2nd PINTO FRANCOIS
France Le Méridien
71 - 80 KG
1st 1st LARITZ ROLAND
Austria Tao Kung Fu
2nd LOPEZ ALVAREZ DAVID
Spain Escuela Ma Tsun Kwen
81 - 90 KG
1st MEAD KEN
England Zhong Ding

2nd CASSUN SYLVESTST
USA William C.C Chen School
> 90 KG
1st HSTSCH JESSE
USA New York Punsh Hand
Club
2nd SCHEELE LEE
USA Benjamin Lo & Tony Ho

Sword Form

1st CHEN DAVID
USA Wuwei Tai Chi Studio
2nd COINTREL BRUNO
France Le Méridien
3rd HEARN CAROLYN
USA William C.C Chen School

37 Step Hand Form

1st LIU PING CHU
Taiwan Equipe Nationale
2nd GARRETT CHINN
USA Universal Tai Chi
3rd TANA FRANSWORTH
USA Universal Tai Chi

At the end of the first day's competition, which ran approximately two hours late, due to the volume of entries, the demonstrations began. Katy Cheng, the late Professor's daughter, treated us to a very nice sword demonstration to the tune of what sounded like Chinese military music. She was followed by the Grenoble Tai Chi Union who performed an interesting set with half the group doing a mirror form opposite those showing the conventional way. A group of four of their members displayed a sabre routine in a circle. This provided some discussion for those in attendance as the Professor never taught a Sabre Form.

As an event the Competition/Forum was very successful and



extremely worthwhile. To stage it in a more remote region of France which took some time to travel to, one would have thought it would be difficult to get many to attend. However the support of the local council and businesses made it financially possible for the organisers who worked long and hard to make it happen. Not only were those in attendance benefiting from the shared knowledge of many highly skilled practitioners of this style but, with the eminent lineaged Masters sharing their knowledge through workshops, lectures and conversations the continuation and future development of Cheng Man-Ching style Tai Chi Chuan will surely continue for at least another 100 years.





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During the course of the Cheng Man-ching Competition/Forum I wanted to arrange interviews with the special guests who were the lineaged Grandmasters that had been very close students of Professor Cheng Man-ching. The Gentlemen concerned were: William CC Chen, Benjamin Lo, Hsu Yee Chung & Hung Ping Chu. As they were attending the event as honoured guests it proved very difficult to find the quiet space that would provide the desired conviviality for our conversations. We did, however, manage to find a spare hour where we went to the back of the hall where the competition was taking place. Two of the Grandmasters required translations (via William CC Chen and Benjamin Lo. I recorded the conversations amid the cheering and general noise of the competition which made it difficult to really catch all that was being said, and even who said exactly what. I do hope, however, that the end result proves to be interesting to the reader.

My thanks for their invaluable assistance go to my good friend and colleague, Bob Lowey for the renewed contact with William CC Chen (which, in turn included the other Grandmasters) and particular thanks to Epi van de Pol (who originally introduced Bob to William CC Chen, whom he had known since 1979 & Ben Lo, whom he had met some 20 years earlier) for making the conversations not only possible, but as relaxed and as open as they could be, under the very difficult circumstances.



Perhaps a good place for us to begin is to look at what made you, obviously very busy gentlemen, take the time and trouble to travel such a great and arduous distance to attend this event.

Ben Lo: Actually it's very simple; we just wanted to help people to spread our style of Taijiquan. We try to help to spread it across the whole world, but we are only a few in number, so we feel it is important to attend such an event, that brings so many practitioners of this style together.

I come from the United States and I know that so many people in the US have problems with the health care system because it costs so much money, and I'm sure it's the same situation in many other countries too. By practising Taijiquan people can become very healthy, live a longer and happier life and also reduce the costs of the health care budgets.

Hsu Yee Chung: Taiji can improve your health, prevent illness and can also be a good system of self defence, so it is important that we come to an event like this to help to promote the art.

Ben Lo: A lot of people practice meditation. Taiji is also a very good system of moving meditation which can also change your temperament. If you are hot tempered, you won't be able to do the slow, meditative movements well, but by practising in this way you can change your temperament. By doing this one thing many results can be achieved.

We have all been here for around 3 – 4 hours today and we've seen many interpretations of the style which we all practice. We call it the Cheng Man-ching style but there seems to be so, so many variations, I'm interested to know what you feel about this?

Ben Lo: Frankly, if we learn it from the Professor, then everybody should follow his way.

But they don't do they?

Ben Lo: No they don't. The reason why is because people are different. If you learn a painting from one teacher and have several classmates learning at the same time, then there will always be differences. Generally the spirit is the same but there are always differences. Everybody's character is different. Some people may do it a little higher, some a little lower but that doesn't really matter, the main thing is the principle. You have to follow the principles. You have to emphasis relaxation, if you use force, then that's completely wrong. It's not only what's going on in the outside. You know Taiji is an internal school and you have to pay attention to what's going on in the inside too. In the beginning you have to learn from the outside to the inside.

Hsu Yee Chung: If the family have 10 children, then they all do things differently, but the principles are still the same. Things like relaxation should still be the same. There are no differences in the way people are practising as long as they follow the main principles. Nowadays we think about how Taiji can make you healthier and more good-natured.

Hung Ping Chu: It's down to two things, the student and the teacher. The teacher may want to teach it really well and the student may want to learn it really well but the IQ can be different and he may not have the ability to learn it well. The opposite can also be true.

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE GRANDMASTERS

BY RONNIE ROBINSON



Ben Lo: In the old days they talked about secrets, but today nothing is secret. People always ask me, "What's the secret?" I say, "Relax." They may not really know the meaning of the word relax. Not only do they have to understand what it means, but they also have to show it, in what they do.

Hsu Yee Chung: Many things can happen with the teaching of the form: where the attention is placed in the learning and what aspects are most focussed on. Professor Cheng taught things in a very particular way but it's not only the learning of the form that we have to consider but also the whole attitude of the teacher and the students. Taiji has made us all very strong and healthy. William is 60, Ben is 76, I am 81 and Chu is 86.

In the CMC style sometimes it's not so clear what is going on. In other styles it seems clearer that this is here, and it's doing this, and this is here, doing that, but it's not often the case in this system.

Ben Lo: (*getting animated*) Excuse me for interrupting. Can you show me which parts aren't clear? What style do you do? How long have you been practising?

Well the reason that I'm so interested is that when I started doing Taiji 22 years ago, my teacher told me that we were learning CMC style. Now I'm not so sure that what I do can really be called the CMC style.

Ben Lo: Who was your teacher?

Well I worked with someone in the UK who was taught by John Kells and Dr Chi Chiang Tao.

Ben Lo: Dr Chi I know, he was a classmate of mine.

You're right to say that. I'll tell you one simple way. If you really want to know that what you're doing is right then study Professor Cheng's videos. We're very lucky to have a visual record of his work that you can refer to. If I say that I learn from you but my posture is different from yours, what do you think? It can't be right.

Yes, but what you see in the video is only the external shape and form. You can't really see what is going on.

Yes you're right, inside there's no way to see. For the inside we have to talk about it, not only talk, but you have to practice. Not only practice, but practice long and hard, and this is why only very few people can really do it well.

Epi: I would like to ask all four of you what Professor Cheng stressed to be the main internal principle.

Ben Lo: Relax.

Hsu Yee Chung:
Sung

Ben Lo: It's easy to talk. One second you may understand Sung but perhaps for the rest of your life you don't. You have to practice and practice very, very hard.



So what should we practice? We practice the form, Tui Shou, weapons.....?

Ben Lo: The form is the first. If I want to learn a language I have to begin with the basic structure. It's like doing calligraphy. You do a character and 10 years later you do the same character and look at it, you will see very different things. It is an art. There are no limits; it's developing all the time. We can't say if we are good or not, we just do it. Who dares to say, "I am good."

Hsu Yee Chung: You have 'Sung' and 'Chen', 'Chen' means 'sink'. You need to have both aspects and once you have these you are healthy. I believe that Taiji helps the blood circulation and the Qi flow which helps you to live a long life and be healthy.

William CC Chen: What I say is that besides 'Sung' you should also 'let go.'

Epi: How was it to do push hands with Professor Cheng?

Ben Lo: I can't describe it because you never saw it. Sometimes you watch people do push hands you don't see anything. Only when you touch them do you find it. I have the videos but you can't see it. You see someone bouncing and it looks like it's fake. How can you describe it, you can't. You touch the Professor and then you'll know. Maybe you've had the experience when you touch power you feel a shock. When the Professor discharged energy it felt just like that.





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How do you think the Professor would like to see the Tui Shou competitions that are happening here right now? How would he feel about it?

Ben Lo: We don't do competitions; we just reach for each other. This is a modern way, not a Chinese way.

How do you feel about it?

It's good. If you follow the rules. At least it's better than boxing right? Do you see anybody bleeding or losing teeth? No. We do Taiji mainly for health today and to keep everybody healthy and to live longer. Enjoy your life. The martial art part is not so important today. It was more important in the old days. We think about the principles of stick and follow, but sometimes they're against it. We want to neutralise.

Hsu Yee Chung: If the Professor looked at these competitions he would be very disappointed.

William CC Chen: Without this kind of push hands you can never go to a higher level. It's good to have the experience to help you to develop further.

Hung Ping Chu: They should be exercising the principles of stick, follow, yielding and neutralise and that doesn't seem to be so evident here.

You've all said, and I think you all agree that the priority for Taiji is health. What would the purpose of Tui Shou be with respect to health?

Ben Lo: Push Hands is a training exercise which helps you to understand the principles. It can also be a bridge to training for fighting. If you just practice the form you may think that you are relaxed but in push hands you can get a better idea if you are relaxed or not. In the US I teach classes for the elderly and I don't teach them push hands. They just do the form for the health benefits.

But do you not feel that by practising Push Hands students can get a better understanding of the form and therefore gain better health benefits from their practice?



Ben Lo: Of course, they connect with each other. It's like a bicycle, it has two wheels. You can get by with one wheel but two wheels are better. The both help each other. Push Hands helps you to train to relax and to neutralise which also makes your form better. You can't just practice Push Hands either because you will become tense. That's why you must practice the form too. You learn to calm down and concentrate.

Hsu Yee Chung: Push Hands firstly is for health. It trains you to

build up balance, flexibility and relaxation. Once you have developed this you are able to see people's force coming towards you and you are more able to deal with it. It trains you how to balance your energy and how to allow the mind to let go. If you can't achieve this state when someone pushes you, you are unable to relax and are easily overcome. If you are really relaxed then you can train your mind to be flexible and better able ready to react. If not you can easily lose your balance.

If you are not healthy, you can't think about doing push hands. First you have to get yourself healthy, by practising the form then you can develop further through push hands. You should also consider the aspects of investing in loss. Don't take advantage. Give as much as you can. That's the most important thing.

Ben Lo: By investing in loss you gain. That's Lao Tzu. Taiji comes from the Book of Changes and from Lao Tzu. Not the whole book, just the principles. You have to have knowledge of the philosophy and background.

When William and I were both around the age of 20 we both got sick. I couldn't pick up this chair at the age of 20. My teacher sent me to take Chinese Herbs from the Professor. He said that by just taking the medicine it wouldn't be enough. You have to learn to stand up by yourself. You have to learn the martial art. I didn't know anything about Taiji and I could barely walk. How could I practice a martial art? He said no, you practice this art by not using physical force. I'm Chinese but I didn't believe it was possible. How can you practice a martial art without using force? He told me, "You will learn." I said, "Okay, you're my doctor, I'll do what you tell me." Then I started to learn Taiji. After I started learning I found it really difficult. In my school I have students who are really strong who do weight lifting and their legs start shaking when standing in postures.



CONVERSATIONS WITH THE GRANDMASTERS

BY RONNIE ROBINSON



I had a liver transplant two years ago and six months later I asked my doctor if I could travel to Taiwan. He said I was very healthy and able to travel. "What have you been doing to aid such a quick recovery," he asked. I told him that I had been doing Taiji. For me that is twice that Taiji has saved my life. At 72 I got this liver transplant and now I'm 75. That's why I think that Taiji can really help people.

When you started with the Professor at the age of 20 how much practice were you doing?

I was very weak at the time and the Professor told me to go home and practice one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening. If I were like you are now I wouldn't need to have practiced so much but I needed to get stronger so had to work harder. However it's not just the time you practice. It's how you are doing it. It's a question of quality, not quantity.

William CC Chen: Before I forget. Earlier you asked about everybody doing Taiji differently. I have an answer. It doesn't have to look alike but inside the principles must be applied. The second thing is that although he said I was very sick, I did also learn Taiji for self defence.

We talked about the many differences and interpretations of this style. Some other styles have a very clear training syllabus with a clearly defined lineage. How do you feel about the continuation of the CMC style of Taijiquan?

Ben Lo: Any kind of art, when it develops, will go through changes and that's why we have so many schools. We try to keep the traditional way of the Professor.

Yes, I know you do but there are many people who are not doing it in the correct way.

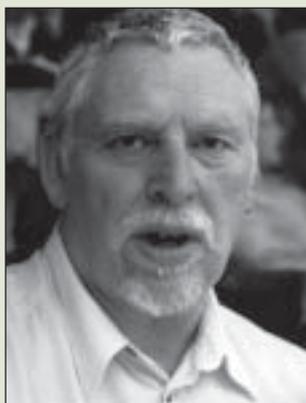
Hsu Yee Chung: People have different purposes. They use the Taiji in different ways for different things and create different things. Everybody say's they are doing Professor Cheng's style but they are only doing their own interpretation of his style.

The style of Cheng Man-ching could well have begun and ended with him if it wasn't for the work of you gentlemen. You have all done many, many years in continuing the tradition of the Professor and if we are able to go even half as far as you have all gone, then it will also do something to preserve the style.

Ben Lo: The next generation is the responsibility of you people. We want to share with all the people. We have to do our best and that is all we can do. When we pass on it's up to people like you. If you teach with care and responsibility then things will carry on. That's the history.

William CC Chen: Now we ask you to carry on with the continuation.

Thank you all very much for the time you have given today.



**WILLIAM
NELSON**

**THE
EVENT
ORGANISER**

To quote Professor Cheng Man Ching's Daughter, Katy Cheng, on her Father's life:

"Through deeds of merit, through his moral ethics, and through his writings – he left footprints in history".

And indeed, through his relentless lifelong activities, Professor Cheng has reached world - wide acclaim in the promotion of Tai Chi Chuan.

Willie Nelson, former Tai Chi Chuan Instructor at Cambridge University now living in Perigueux, Southern France, embarked upon the Professor Cheng Man Ching Centenary Celebrations following from the first Celebration in Taipei in 2000 that was repeated in the USA in 2001. The planning of this colossal task began some 18 months previous to the event on the 3rd – 7th August. Not with standing the political disagreements between teachers that were provisionally booked for the occasion, the arrangement of flights and accommodation for the dignitaries, the venue, entertainment and meals, not forgetting the many sleepless nights and strains, with a small team of assistants that included his wife, Line Parisot and students, Willie succeeded in the appropriation of financial grants from major companies in the, and backing from the town of Perigueux to create the memorable event.

A big thanks too for the courtesy he extended to the TCUGB for this reportage.

Bob Lowey

Katy Cheng

Professor Cheng's Daughter talks with Ronnie Robinson

Could you tell me how it feels for you being the daughter of the great Grandmaster Cheng Man-ching?

I really appreciate the legacy of my father. He was a master of many different disciplines: Art, Poetry, Medicine, Calligraphy and Taiji. He really liked to teach Taiji most of all, to bring good health to the world.

How old were you when you first became aware of Taiji?

I first began to do Taiji when I was three years old. At this age my father said that I was too young to learn but I said, "No, I'd like to learn right now." I saw all those people doing Taiji and I became interested in learning it too. My father said that he wasn't going to wake me up, but if I was there in morning, he would take me up to the mountain to learn with the other students. Every morning I would climb up the mountain with the others before daybreak to learn.

What did you start learning at three years old?

I would just follow my father.

When did he start to do some corrections with you?

He always corrected me and my elder sister who also came along too.

When I was in junior high school I started teaching Taiji. I would help to teach the boy scouts and girl scouts.

When did you move to the USA?

About 1970.

How was it for you, moving there?

I was happy to be there. We would still go back and forth to Taiwan too. At the weekends I would work with my father in the Taiji studio, helping with the corrections.

Did your father find much difference to how people in the West and people in Taiwan were with learning Taiji?

Yes, very different. My father was very happy teaching in the US. Americans were much stronger and very eager to work to learn. Many of the people that he taught in Taiwan had come to learn Taiji because they were sick and wanted to get healthy. That was the main reason people in Taiwan came to the classes. In America people were very keen to learn the martial arts. They were very healthy people who were keen to work hard. He was also able to teach them about Lao Tzu and the philosophy of the art which they were very open to.

I still find the same thing today, even more so. Chinese people think it can come easy to them and they are not so prepared to work so hard to learn, often they are lazy and don't practice so much.

How precise was your father with his teachings of the Hand Form? Was he very particular about where people put their hands, placed their feet etc.?

Yes, he was. It was important to him that people learned it properly.

So do we have a definitive version of the CMC style which we can refer to?

Each form has its principles and if the principles are adhered to, then it's good. If you know how to apply those principles then it's correct. If you don't know how to use them, then there are problems.



So you work with the applications of the postures too?

Yes. But you have to connect the outside with the inside to. If you learn art, you first start from the outline and later go on to create the whole picture. In Taiji you begin with the external form and then connect with the inside. It's like building a house, there are many aspects to consider; the external shape, the internal work, the character and the spirit. You also should also have high moral standards. It changes your personality when you do Taiji.

In the CMC style it's often said that it's sometimes difficult to see where the applications are. Is there anything you'd like to say about this feeling?

If you look at the two films of my father; one is when he is younger and the other is when he is older. He was doing very different things in these two films. When he was older he was teaching in a different way, using a different body with a different understanding, so things were not so evident.

How often do you teach classes?

Every weekend I teach classes but I don't advertise and only work with a few students.

How do you feel about competitions?

Well when people compete they are nervous and their energy is high so it can give them something to work with to practice their relaxation but often it's like a bullfight and I don't like it much.

Well often at Tui Shou competitions you don't see very much Taiji being applied.

That's true. The teacher is teaching the principles correctly, and the student is learning them correctly but often under the pressure of competing, in push hands bouts, the Taiji skills disappear. Firstly you have to mentally trust that Taiji will be an effective way of self defence but they end up trying to use their own strength and that doesn't work for them.

How do you feel about this celebration of 100 years and the development of your father's work with Taiji?

I think it's very good and I'm very proud. It's nice to see so many people from so many countries continuing with his work.

Katy Cheng will be teaching Cheng Man-Ching Sword Form at Tai Chi Caledonia 6 - 13 June 2003.

