

Way of the Tai Chi Sword - Yang Style Taijijian by Sam Masich

Apparatus training is an essential part of the Yang Style Taijiquan curriculum. Of the two short weapons, Dao, or Sabre and Jian, or Straight sword used in Taijiquan's syllabus, the latter is by far the most intricate and developed in its method. In martial lore the Straight sword is commonly respected as The King of Short Weapons. Known also as the narrow blade, or double-edged sword, the Straight sword was often seen in traditional Chinese culture as a way to cut through veils of illusion, ego and attachment and is associated with spiritual refinement as much as with martial efficacy. Straight sword masters, male and female, are frequently revered in Chinese history as both highly skilled martial heroes and illuminated people.

A command of the tradition Taijiquan weapons, Sabre, Straight sword and Qiang, or Spear, enables practitioners to take the early concepts from barehand solo and partner work much further, bringing the work to higher levels of skill. This in turn matures the understanding of the early stages of the curriculum. For example, in the barehand work we come to understand the basic structure of the Gong Bu, or Bow Stance. This enables us to learn solo form and Push Hands drills correctly and progress to weapons training. But when we begin to study Sabre or Straight sword, we see that the Bow Stance behaves quite differently than in barehand circumstances. It often needs to be longer and narrower to support the use of the blade. Having learned and corporealized this we can then explore the stance variations in a barehand context which in turn enables us to develop new sword-like barehand skills. Thus in order to deepen understanding of barehand work, apparatus training is used.

It is also commonly taught that a main significance to studying weapons is to develop in the practitioner a greater ability to extend Qi. This idea of using the weapon as a vehicle to extend Qi has often led to erroneous concepts regarding the sword and it is common to see practitioners having experiences with the blade while possessing little in the way of real sword expertise. The phenomenon of extending Qi into the weapon is a really byproduct of the development of thousands of subtle sword skills resulting from subtle mind-body control abilities.

In contemporary Tai Chi training it is most common to see Straight sword learned and practiced before, or even instead, of Sabre training. A decided preference amongst teachers and players in preference of the sword can in fact be seen in Tai Chi society. There is however, much evidence to suggest that in Chinese martial arts in general, the training of the Sabre would ideally precede the training of the Straight sword. Sabre teaches basic blocking angles, power training, new but simple stepping patterns, and the most basic use of a short weapon. Technically speaking, this provides a prerequisite for the more advanced skills of the Straight sword such as Sticking, Sliding, Sealing etc. The problem is however that the Sabre is comparatively graceless and holds little aesthetic appeal for many practitioners. Therefore, Straight sword technique remains by and large one of the most misunderstood areas of the Taijiquan curriculum. It is important therefore to either regain the tradition of Sabre before Sword or, for instructors that know the difference, to teach the basics of short, single edged weapon use alongside the unique techniques of the straight sword.

In the *Song of the Tai Chi Sword* it is said,

*The Way of the Sword is from the beginning difficult to learn.
Like a Dragon or Rainbow it is subtle and mysterious.
Should it be used like a hacking Sabre, the immortal Zhang Sanfeng die of laughter.*

This reinforces the argument for clear technique and for distinguishing between the Sabre and Straightword methods. Taijijian, or Tai Chi sword is often called Tai Chi Thirteen Sword referring both to the structure of the blade and to 13 basic blade use methods.

The sword's structure is delineated as follows:

- 1) Pommel (Head)
- 2) Handle
- 3) Guard
- 4) Rear Inner Edge
- 5) Middle Inner Edge
- 6) Front Inner Edge
- 7) Rear Outer Edge
- 8) Middle Outer Edge
- 9) Front Outer Edge
- 10) Inner Tip
- 11) Outer Tip
- 12) Spine (Inner & Outer)
- 13) Point.

The 13 sword energies are:

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

Thus Taijijian is more than just a sequence of movements. It is a total study of the weapon including efforts to master its structure, use and behavior.

While the blade will never again reign supreme in an age of technological weaponry, it retains a place deep in our psyches imaginings of honor, courage and discipline. In this sense its study is more relevant than ever. Even when we train traditional martial skills with the blade we know that our primary purpose for brandishing the weapon is for self-cultivation rather than actual battlefield use.

To follow are the names of the 54 postures of Yang Style Taijijian.

Yang Style Taijijian

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| Taijijian Commencement (Taijijian Qi Shi) | |
| 1) Step Up and Enclose With Sword | (Shang Bu He Jian) |
| 2) Immortal Deity Points the Way | (Xianren Zhi Lu) |
| 3) Three Rings Envelope the Moon | (San Huan Tao Yue) |
| 4) Major Polestar | (Da Kuixing) |
| 5) Swallow Skims the Water | (Yanzi Chao Shui) |
| 6) Right and Left Block and Sweep | (You Zou Lan Sao) |
| 7) Minor Polestar | (Xiao Kuixing) |
| 8) Swallow Enters the Nest | (Yanzi Ru Chao) |
| 9) Clever Cat Catches a Rat | (Ling Mao Bu Shu) |
| 10) Dragonfly Touches the Water | (Qingting Dian Shui) |
| 11) Yellow Wasp Enters the Hive | (Huangfeng Ru Dong) |
| | (Feng Huang Shuang Zhan Chi) |
| 12) Phoenix Spreads Double Wings | |
| 13) Left Whirlwind | (Zhou Xuanfeng) |
| 14) Minor Polestar | (Xiao Kui Xing) |
| 15) Right Whirlwind | (You Xuanfeng) |
| 16) Waiting for the Fish | (Deng Yu Shi) |
| 17) Parting the Grass to Search for the Snake | (Bo Cao Xun She) |
| 18) Embrace Moon to Bosoms Centre | (Huai Zhong Bao Yue) |
| 19) Send the Bird to the Woods | (Song Niao Shang Lin) |
| 20) Black Dragon Waves Its Tail | (Wulong Bai Wei) |
| 21) Green Dragon Comes Out of the Water | (Qing Long Chu Shui) |
| 22) Wind Swirls the Lotus Leaves | (Feng Juan Heye) |
| 23) Lion Shakes Its Head | (Shizi Yao Tou) |
| 24) Tiger Holds Its Head | (Hu Bao Tou) |
| 25) Wild Horse Leaps Over the Stream | (Yema Tiao Jian) |
| 26) Turn the Body and Rein in the Horse | (Fan Shen Le Ma) |
| 27) The Compass | (Zhinanzhen) |
| 28) Wind Flicks the Dust | (Yingfeng Fu Chen) |
| 29) Follow the Waters Current to Push the Boat | (Shun Shui Tui Zhou) |
| 30) Shooting Star Reaches the Moon | (Liuxing Gan Yue) |
| 31) Celestial Bird Flies Over the Waterfall | (Tian Niao Fei Pu) |
| 32) Lift the Curtain | (Tiao Lan Shi) |
| 33) Left and Right Whirling Sword | (Zou You Chelun Jian) |
| 34) Swallow Pecks the Mud | (Yanzi Shen Ni) |
| 35) Great Peng Spreads One Wing | (Da Peng Dan Zhan Chi) |
| 36) Fish for the Moon at Sea Bottom | (Hai Di Lao Yue) |
| 37) Embrace Moon to Bosoms Centre | (Huai Zhong Bao Yue) |
| 38) Night Demon Explores the Sea | (Yecha Tan Hai) |
| 39) Rhinoceros Looks at the Moon | (Xiniu Wang Yue) |
| 40) Shoot the Wild Geese | (She Yan Shi) |
| 41) Green Dragon Explores With Claws | (Qing Long Tan Zhao) |
| | (Feng Huang Shuang Zhan Chi) |
| 42) Phoenix Spreads Double Wings | |
| 43) Left and Right Straddle and Block | (Zou You Kua Lan) |

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| 44) Shoot the Wild Geese | (She Yan Shi) |
| 45) White Ape Presents Fruit | (Baiyuan Xian Guo) |
| 46) Left and Right Falling Flowers | (Zou You Luo Hua) |
| 47) Jade Maiden Weaves at Shuttles | (Yunü Chuan Suo) |
| 48) White Tiger Wags Its Tail | (Baihu Jiaowei) |
| 49) Carp Jumps Over the Dragons Gate | (Liyu Tiao Longmen) |
| 50) Black Dragon Twists Around the Column | (Wulong Jiao Zhu) |
| 51) Immortal Points Out the Road | (Xianren Zhi Lu) |
| 52) Wind Sweeps the Plum Blossoms | (Feng Sao Meihua) |
| 53) Hands Exalt the Ivory Scroll | (Shou Peng Ya Fu) |
| 54) Embrace Sword Return to the Beginning | (Bao Jian Gui Yuan) |