

Feng Zhiqiang's Chansi Gong Exercises

By Feng Zhiqiang

Translated by Yan Shufan. Photos by Zhou Lishang.

BEIJING—Chansi gong (chan si gong) is unique Taijiquan (T'ai Chi Ch'uan), belonging to Chen family style. It refers to skill in chansi gong, which is the practice of moving the body and energy. In practicing Chansi gong, each part of the practitioner's body turns, reels and twists as a silk-worm does when it is making a cocoon.

Furthermore, these actions are not only simple posture exercises but are also combined with the flow of internal qi (ch'i), which is directed by the practitioner's will.

By practicing Chansi gong, one can make the vital qi in the body pass through the Eight Extra Channels (1), with the result that qi and blood circulate unobstructively through the body and the balance between Yin and Yang is maintained. The exercise animates both the qi within and the body posture without.

In practicing Chansi gong, the shoulders and wrists turn and reel; the chest, waist, abdomen and buttocks twist spirally. Hence, the main joints of the body (shoulders, elbows, wrists and knees) as well as other parts (the neck, chest, waist, hips and buttocks) gradually relax.

Step by step, the flow of the internal qi and the actions of the body posture are combined into one, and the movements of the upper and lower parts of the body become harmonious. At last, the whole body forms an invulnerable Taiji (T'ai Chi) ball. The practitioner then enters into a superb realm in which every action accords with the

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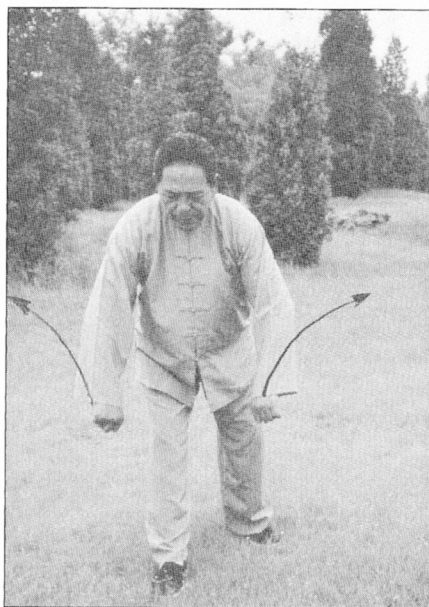


Fig. 1

principle and rule of Yin and Yang.

In practicing Chansi gong, every part of the body rotates. The action, however, is controlled by the idea, or mind, proceeding steadily from the inside to the outside. Moreover, the movements of twisting, rotating and rolling are connected with each other, instead of being simple and useless acts.

For example, in practicing a single form of Chansi gong, the idea from the center runs from the inside to the outside and distributes qi in certain parts of the body.

At that time, the outside action coordinates with the qi in the mind and this qi runs to its destination by coiling and flowing, so as to make qi and blood circulate throughout the body.

As a result, the channels are unobstructed, and the tendons and ligaments become flexible. Continuous practice leads to a natural, instinctive response of the body. Such is the essential way of practicing Taijiquan.

The exercise begins with a standing posture—standing naturally and focusing the mind on Dantian (10 cm under the navel) (2) for 30 minutes and ends with a movement of rubbing the face and abdomen.

The practitioner may do the whole of the following actions of Chansi gong, from beginning to the end, or just a part of it, or only a single action

chosen according to his or her own special purpose. In doing the whole sequence, every single form should be done at least 9 times.

I. Chansi gong of the shoulders, elbows and wrists

1. Twisting of the shoulders

Movements

(1) Stand naturally with two feet separated. Then clench your fists, with the toes clutching the ground, and contract the anus and perineum.

(2) Twist Clockwise: The shoulders twist forward and downward with the chest and abdomen closed, the back open and the trunk sunk slightly.

(3) Then, twist upward, backward and outward with the chest and abdomen open and the back closed; and raise the trunk slightly. Do this 9 times.

(4) Twist Counterclockwise: The shoulders twist upward, then backward with the chest and the abdomen open and the back closed; and raise the trunk slightly. Afterward, twist downward and forward with the chest and abdomen closed and the back open. Sink the trunk slightly. Do this 9 times.

2. Move shoulders forward and backward

Movements

(1) After standing naturally, put the

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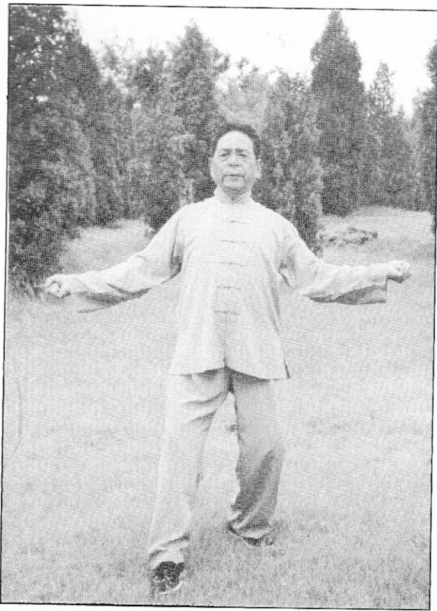


Fig. 2

right foot forward, and shift the weight onto the left leg. Clench your fists, with the chest and abdomen slightly open, and let the arms twist outward. At the same time, the shoulders move backward slightly with the palms facing forward, and look ahead.

(2) The shoulders twist inward and forward. The chest and abdomen bend simultaneously. The arms twist centrifugally and swing upward naturally with the palms facing backward. Shift the weight onto the right leg with the trunk slanting forward (Fig. 1)

(3) The arms twist outward. Then the shoulders move backward, with the chest and abdomen open. The arms

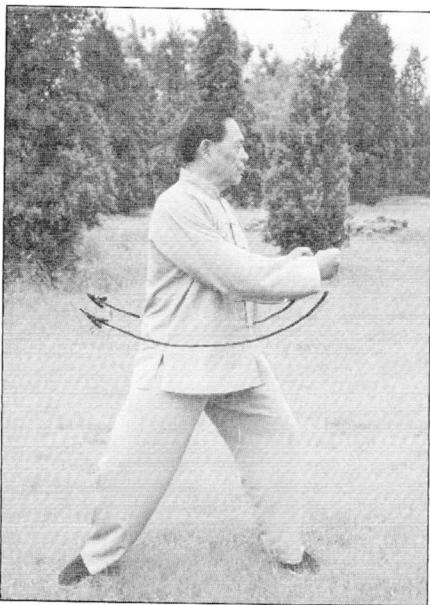


Fig. 3

twist centripetally from the front outward, with the palm facing forward. Shift the weight onto the left leg. Throw out the chest (Fig. 2) with the trunk backward. Move the shoulders forward and backward, opening and closing 9 times.

Do this 9 times. Then breathe out, relax and let qi go back to Dantian. This ends the exercise.

II. Twisting the waist and buttocks

By rotating abdomen and buttocks, the essential qi in the body becomes more vigorous and the body fluid more abundant. As a result, qi and body fluid are sublimated and cover the whole body; the chest, abdomen, back, ribs and buttocks are strengthened, enabling them to move for avoidance, approach and attack. As soon as the trunk becomes flexible, the upper and lower parts will be connected together.

1. Twisting the waist

Movements

(1) Stand naturally, then step out sideways about a foot with the right foot. Bend the knees to a half-squatting position. Clench your fists and raise them to the chest level and keep them shoulder-width apart. Look ahead. Their inner parts of the fists should be opposite to each other. The toes clutch the ground. Contract the anus and the perineum.

(2) Turn to the left with the waist as the axis. Meanwhile, turn the spine, shoulders and arms. The eyes look downward to the left. (Fig. 3).

(3) The upper part of the body keeps on moving. Then the waist makes a 180-degree turn to the right and so does the spine, shoulders and arms. It is like the grinding of a millstone. The eyes look to the right. (Fig. 4).

In doing the twisting, the practitioner may also do other forms of rotating the waist.

III. Rotating the feet and knees

Try it a few times. After that, six imagined balls and air films are formed around the joints of the hips, knees and ankles. The functions of the joints and ligaments are also improved.

Rotating knees and feet and make the joints of the hips flexible and the feet dexterous.

As a result, the internal qi flows more easily through the body. As a result, the force of the hips, knees and feet can be increased, and so can the

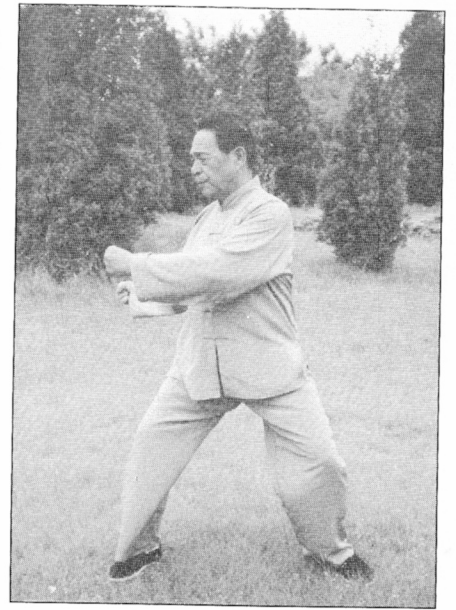


Fig. 4

skill of the legs. This helps to prevent the early appearance of senescence. A Chinese saying is that aging is first shown by weakness of the knees.

Other practices for the knees may be taken up, such as twisting the knees with the two feet close, rotating the knees clockwise and counterclockwise with a foot put forward, and rotating and twisting the ankles.

IV. Twisting of the arms

1. Twisting clockwise and counterclockwise in a forward-looking posture

Movements

(1) Twisting leftward. Stand naturally, then turn the right toe tip to the right and step a half-step leftward with

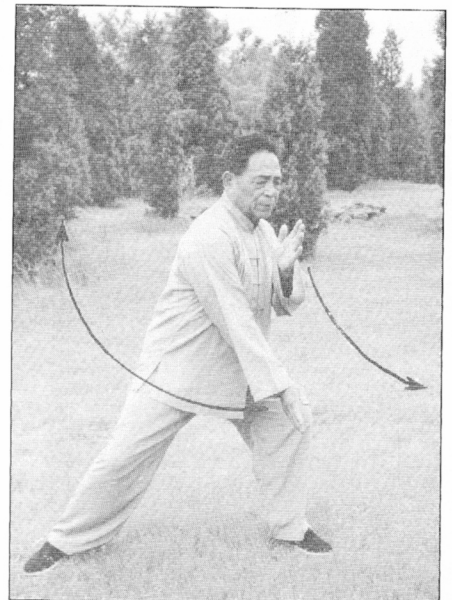


Fig. 5

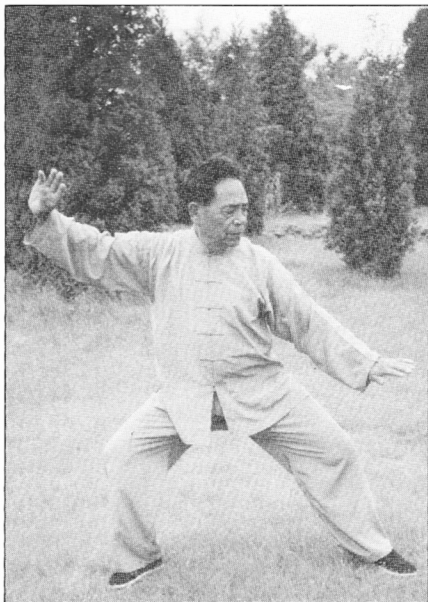


Fig. 6

the left foot. The left knee bends slightly. Put two palms together on the left side of the body. Then put the right hand down over the front of the left knee, with the palm facing left; the left elbow bends toward the right and closes to the chest slightly with the palm facing to the right. The finger tips point upward, and the eyes fall to the lower left. (Fig. 5).

(2) Turning the waist and spine to the right. Keep the legs upright, turn the chest and spine to the right, and twist the left arm counterclockwise and the right arm clockwise and separate them (the right arm turns inward and upward), with the right palm facing

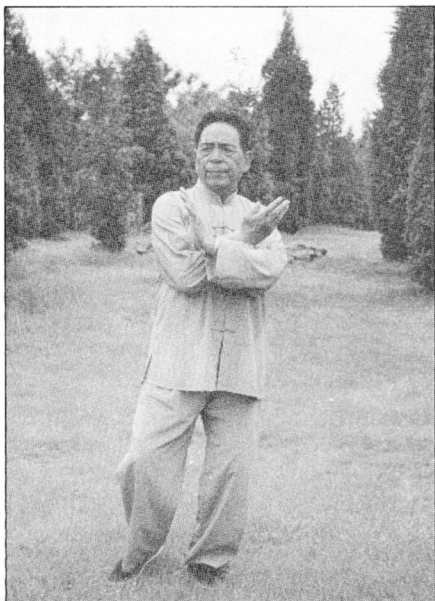


Fig. 7

outward and the finger tips upward. Place the left hand near the left hip after making a curve with the left hand toward the right elbow, when the palm turns downward, and the finger tips point to the left. Fix the eyes on the middle finger of the left hand, and shift the weight to the right leg. (Fig. 6).

For steps (3) and (4), do the same actions as those in (1) and (2), but turn the waist and body leftward, and put the weight on the left leg. Do the actions 9 times, leftward and rightward.

Breathe naturally, and the mind follows the actions.

2. Twisting clockwise and counterclockwise laterally

Movements

(1) Rotate, inclining to the right side: Stand naturally, put the left foot forward about half a step, and let the right sole touch the ground slightly. Put two hands together in front of the chest (the right hand closer to it) with the finger tips upward, put the palm of the right hand inward and that of the left hand toward the right. Keep the body upright, and the eyes fall on the right front. (Fig. 7).

(2) Turn the waist and spine to the right, and keep the legs upright. Turn the right arm counterclockwise and the left hand clockwise and separate them, i.e., turn the right arm upward and rightward slowly, with the palm outward. Place the left hand near the left hip after making a curve of the left hand toward the right elbow, when the palm turns downward. Look ahead. Shift the weight to the left leg and raise the right knee. (Fig. 8).

For steps (3) and (4), keep the upper part of the body on the move. Turn the waist and body leftward. The two arms do the counter-actions of (1) and (2). Do these actions 9 times, leftward and rightward.

V. Spiral movement of two arms

The flowing of the internal qi goes around inside, which is why it is called coiling silk. The posture movement that is done outside is called spiral movement.

By doing these two aspects, the internal qi flows unobstructively, going into the marrow and out of the cracks between the bones. Thus the whole body is full of energy.

The spiral movement is character-

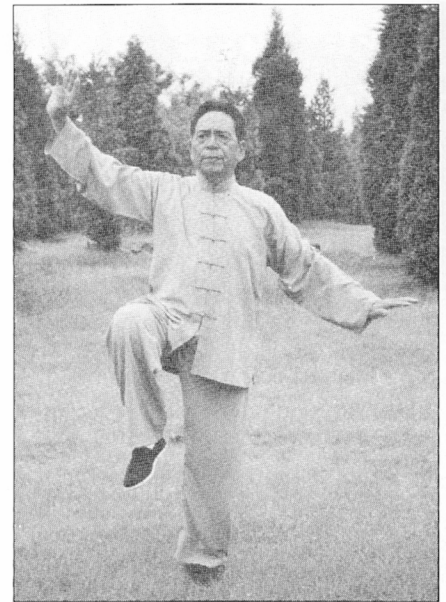


Fig. 8

ized by what includes simultaneous turning and pulling, advancing and changing, as well as storing and releasing.

What is more, the force, being weak, meets with little resistance, and is of great penetration and goes very far. Good results can be easily achieved by a little spiral movement, just as a small force can be artfully used to overcome a large force.

1. Forward Spiraling

Movements

Left "bow step"

(1) Stand naturally. Put forward the left foot with the left leg bent slightly. Open the arms wide and swing them to

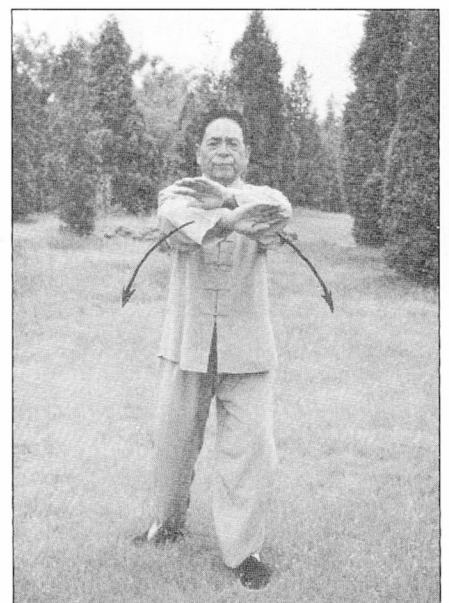


Fig. 9

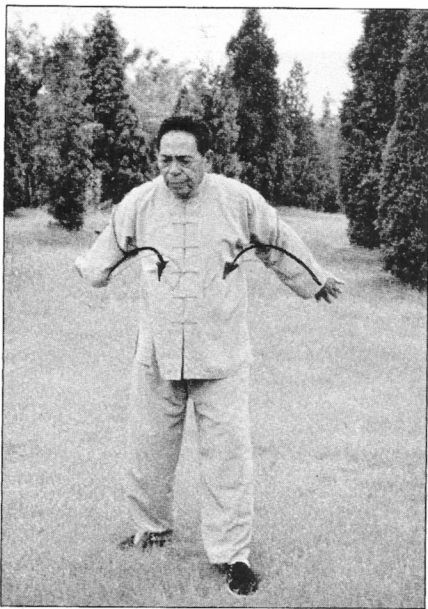


Fig. 10

the front with the right hand under the left one and the palms outward. (Fig. 9).

(2) The upper part of the body continues to move. The two arms separate horizontally, making a curve. Then move them to the ribs, with the fingertips pointing forward and the palm upward. Shift the weight to the left leg in the meantime. (Figs. 10 & 11).

(3) Again, the right hand spirals counterclockwise while the left hand spirals clockwise and move forward, with the left leg bent forward naturally. (Fig. 12). Do this 9 times.

Then do Forward Spiraling with right "bow step". The way is the same,

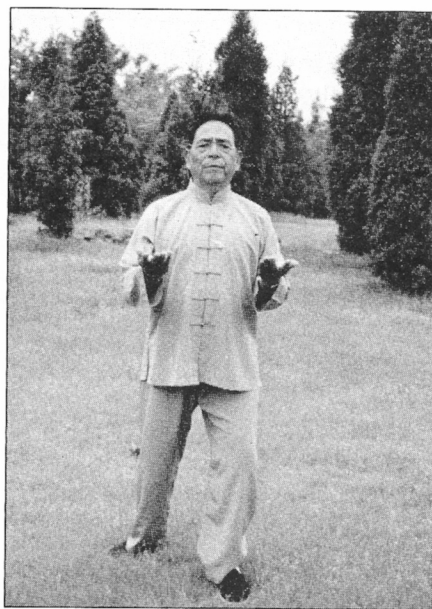


Fig. 11

but put forward the right foot with the right leg bent slightly.

2. Backward Spiraling Movements

Right "bow step"

(1) Stand naturally. Then, put the left leg backward and bend it. Raise two hands with the palms upward slantingly, and stretch the chest and abdomen (Fig. 13).

(2) Let the upper part of the body lean forward, bend the elbows and put the wrists over the shoulders, bend the left knee and shift the weight onto the left leg. (Fig. 14).

(3) The upper body continues to move. Two hands turn inside and back-

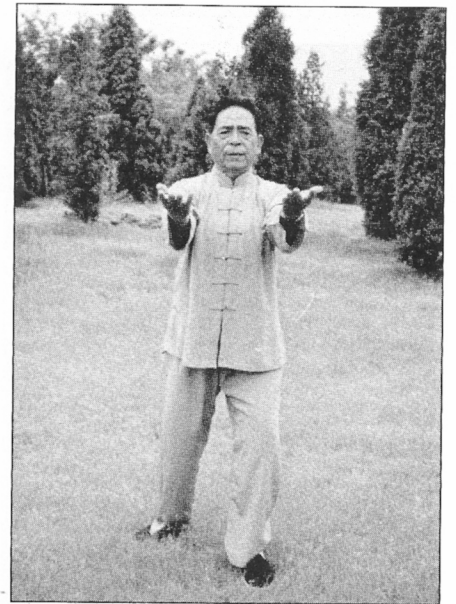


Fig. 12

ward, passing by the armpits with the palms upward. Bend the right knee, stick out the chest, raise the head, and look ahead. (Fig. 15). Do this 9 times to complete the exercise.

Then do Left "bow step" to complete the exercise. The movement is the same way as Right "bow step", but start by putting the right leg backward and bending it.

3. Spiraling Left and Right Movements

(1) Stand naturally. The right foot steps out horizontally. Bend the knees. Raise the right arm to the level of the elbow. Then turn the wrist, and let the back of the hand get in touch with the

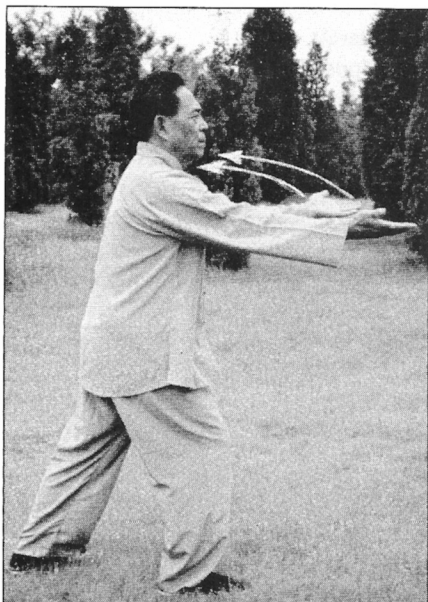


Fig. 13



Fig. 14

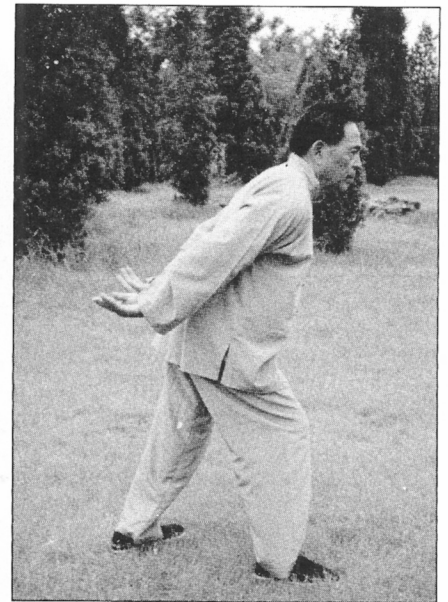


Fig. 15



Fig. 16

right ribs and the finger tips direct rightward. Raise the left arm to the left side of the head by turning it to the left, with the palm facing forward and finger tips upward. Turn the waist to the left. Shift the weight onto the left leg. The eyes fix downward on the right front. (Fig. 16).

(2) Move downward the right hand from the right ribs by way of the right hip, the palm facing back upward. Shift the weight onto the right leg slowly. (Fig. 17).

(3) The upper body keeps on moving. Turn the waist as well as the spine to the right. Raise the right arm to the right side of the head by turning with

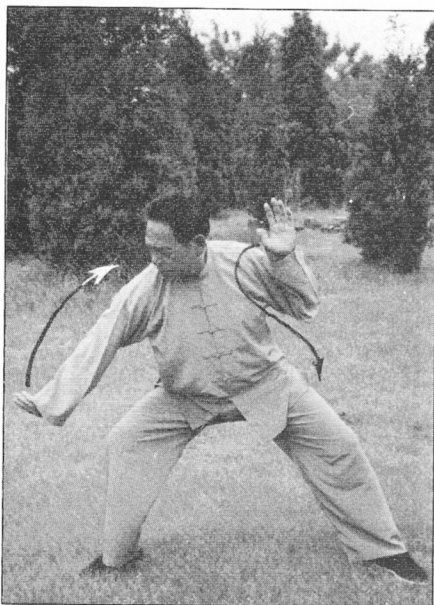


Fig. 17

the palm facing leftward.

Simultaneously, the left hand turns down clockwise and then bend the left wrist, and let the back of the hand touch the left ribs and the finger tips point rightward. (Fig. 18).

(4) Move the left hand downward from the left ribs by way of the left hip, the palm facing back upward. Shift the weight onto the left leg slowly.

Do this 9 times to complete the exercise.

Methods of Learning and Practicing

There are two phases of learning and practicing Chansi gong.

The first phase is to practice in posture. The practitioner should learn all the movements accurately and follow closely. The learner should read and study the instructions, and imitate the illustrations.

Attention must be paid to the body posture, or movements, but not too much on the idea, nor the channels of qi. Act naturally. It is essential to the practice. Frequent and serious repetition is necessary. In general, half a month is appropriate for this period.

The second phase involves the practice of practice qi. On the basis of the first phase, attention should be transferred to the coordination of the body posture and breath.

When practicing qi, the practitioner is required to breathe smoothly, deeply, quietly and long, with no suffocation but a comfortable feeling so as to develop the internal qi and arouse energy. Thus a good foundation is laid for the next phase. About one month is needed for this purpose.

NOTES

(1) The Eight Extra Channels

"The Eight Extra Channels" is a general term for the Du, Ren, Chong, Dai, Yinqiao, Yangqiao, Yinwei and Yangwei channels.

They are called "the Eight Extra Channels" because their courses are not as regular as those of Twelve Channels, because they have no direct relationship with any of the internal organs or exterior-interior coordination between them, and because their total number is eight.

The Eight Extra Channels criss-cross the regular twelve channels, and perform the functions of strengthening the ties between the channels and regulating the qi and blood inside the

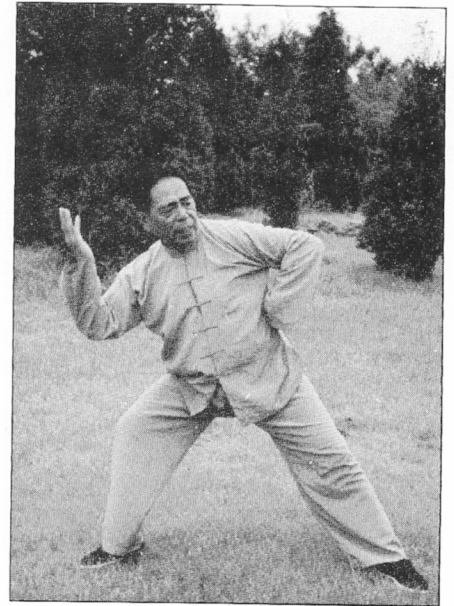


Fig. 18

twelve regular channels. The Eight Extra Channels are not only more closely related to the liver, kidney and other internal organs but also to the uterus, brain, marrow and extraordinary organs.

(2) Dantian: Dantian is the traditional center of attention for ancient Qigong practitioners. Generally the term referred to the Lower, the Middle and the Upper Dantian points.

Some practitioners included a fourth one, Rear Dantian, and others even included a fifth one, Front Dantian. All five dantian points are to be described here. Each of these points refers to an acupoint along a channel or collateral.

Upper Dantian is the Yintang point between the eyebrows; Lower Dantian is the Guanyuan acupoint below the umbilicus, which also serves as the midline.

Front Dantian is the Qizhong acupoint on the umbilicus; Rear Dantian is the Mingmen acupoint at the waist level on the back midline, and Middle Dantian is located between the Front and rear Dantian points where the Chong Channel travels through. •

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