
Volume 4

Number 1 *Voices of Notators: Approaches to Creating
a Score*

Article 3

2018

White Crane Spreads its Wings and Snow Rabbit Digs the Earth: Kinetograms of Contrasting Styles within Chinese Martial and Meditative Arts of Taijiquan (T'ai Chi Ch'uan, 太极拳) and Qigong (Chi Gong, 气功)

Keith McEwing


National Library of New Zealand, keithmcewing@gmail.com

Author Credentials

Keith McEwing, BMus, MA

Editor-in-Chief: Teresa Heiland

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.uncg.edu/jmal>

 Part of the [Alternative and Complementary Medicine Commons](#), [Sports Sciences Commons](#),
and the [Sports Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McEwing, Keith (2018) "White Crane Spreads its Wings and Snow Rabbit Digs the Earth: Kinetograms of Contrasting Styles within Chinese Martial and Meditative Arts of Taijiquan (T'ai Chi Ch'uan, 太极拳) and Qigong (Chi Gong, 气功)," *Journal of Movement Arts Literacy*: Vol. 4 : No. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.uncg.edu/jmal/vol4/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Dance at Digital Commons @ University of North Carolina at Greensboro. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Movement Arts Literacy by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@University of North Carolina at Greensboro. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@uncg.edu.

White Crane Spreads its Wings and Snow Rabbit Digs the Earth: Kinetograms of Contrasting Styles within Chinese Martial and Meditative Arts of Taijiquan (T'ai Chi Ch'uan, 太极拳) and Qigong (Chi Gong, 气功)

Abstract

Taijiquan is a Chinese martial art that developed in the 17th century from a base of traditional forms from earlier centuries. Now widely practiced internationally, it is promoted as gentle exercise, as self-defense and as movement meditation with significant health benefits. Qigong, consisting of similar movement but intended entirely as a health benefit, has been practiced for considerably longer. This paper discusses the advantages of having Taijiquan sequences or forms recorded with Kinetography Laban/Labanotation over other various memory aids for learning the martial art. It explains the basic principles of Taijiquan and how these can be best captured in the notation system, addressing some major challenges and providing excerpts of the Yang Style 24 Hand Form. It also covers the five family styles of Taijiquan (Chen, Yang, Wu (Hao), Wu and Sun) and how Kinetography Laban/Labanotation can be used for the comparison of these styles. It mentions identifying variation in different practitioners of the same style or form and recording Qigong into movement notation.

Keywords

Taijiquan, Qigong, Martial Arts, Kinetography Laban, Labanotation

Taijiquan (太极拳) is a Chinese martial art that developed in the early seventeenth century—at the end of the Ming Dynasty. It evolved from a base of earlier traditional forms of martial arts.¹ Now widely practiced internationally, it is promoted as gentle exercise, as self-defense and as movement meditation with significant health benefits. The slowness at which it is practiced allows for both perfected precision in the movement as well as a calming effect on the practitioner. It is, however, necessary for the practitioner to first be very familiar with the moves or “forms”² and their sequence to then be able to start experiencing these benefits. There are several existing learning and memory aids to assist the practitioner and notations in an internationally recognized schema could be of equal benefit if not greater.

Traditional memory aids consist of descriptive names and pictograms, both of which require some experience of the form to be able to use them effectively. This paper will look at one such learning aid that to date has not been largely used. Kinetography Laban/Labanotation is a movement notation system devised by Rudolf Laban in the 1920s that has been used extensively for recording dances and in dance practice ever since, but it can also be applied to the much wider field of movement. Using an existing notation schema to record Taijiquan, such as Kinetography Laban/Labanotation, has many advantages over other more conventional memory aids and methods for the Taiji teacher and practitioner, as will be discussed.

Broadly speaking, there are five recognized family styles of Taijiquan. While knowledge of the origin and history of Taijiquan is not necessary for the average Taiji practitioner, it is these distinct and yet related styles and their origins that prove interesting to movement ethnologists. Chen style is the oldest, dating back to the seventeenth century. This style was then followed by Yang style a

1. There is much debate around the origins of Taijiquan. For more detailed descriptions see Wong Kiew Kit, *The Complete Book of Tai Chi Chuan: A Comprehensive Guide to the Principles and Practice* (North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 2002), 18–28; and Yang Jwing-Ming, *Advanced Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan: Tai Chi Theory and Tai Chi Jing* (vol 1) (Boston, MA: Yang’s Martial Arts Academy, 1986), 2–7. A counter argument to the generally accepted origin being from Chenjiagou is presented by Tang Yu-Shiun, *Traditional Yang Style Tai Ji Quan: A Detailed Explanation in Chinese and English* (Christchurch, New Zealand: International Cultural and Publishing Ltd, 2007), 184–185.

2. The term “form” in Taijiquan is used to refer to both a complete sequence as well as the individual components of a sequence. To help avoid confusion the individual components are sometimes called postures. It is important to realize, however, that the movement resulting in the final position of the individual forms is what is of significance, more than the final postures themselves. Hence herein I have chosen “moves” as an alternative to “forms” in identifying the individual components, regarding it a more accurate description.

century later. Next came Wu (Hao), Wu, and finally Sun, all developing in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As well, there is much variation evident within those styles between Taiji schools and practitioners. And it is through being able to notate the movement that significant study and comparisons can be made. This benefit to the ethnologist will also be discussed.

Taijiquan is generally practiced through numerous sequences of varying lengths, made up of moves or forms. Some sequences can include the use of weapons such as the sword, sabre, spear, or staff and even the fan. There are similar exercises intended to be practiced purely for their health benefits, stimulating circulation of energy or *qi* (气). Known as Qigong (气功), these exercises have been practiced for a lot longer than Taijiquan as we know it today. Recording all of these sequences and exercises in a movement notation system would be of considerable benefit to the teacher, practitioner, and scholar alike.

Memory Aids to Learning Taijiquan

As with any sequenced movement—be it artistic, productive, or combative—form and order are an important part of remembering and being able to repeat the sequence. Therefore memory aids that capture not just the what but the how are invaluable, both to the students beginning to learn their art or craft as well as to the experienced practitioners.

Precision of movement in Taijiquan is very important. This precision is obvious when considering the effectiveness of a move in terms of its martial application,³ but it is also important in respect to the health benefits for certain movements. Touching different parts of the body—relating to specific points on the twelve meridians as identified in Traditional Chinese Medicine—stimulates energy flow or *qi*. This is particularly relevant to Qigong as well.⁴

In Taijiquan, as in dance, individual components of a sequence are given names to help the practitioner learn their art. In Taijiquan these forms are given names that are either descriptive, such as *Brush Knee and Twist, Fan through the Back*, or poetic, such as *White Crane Spreads its Wings, Snow Rabbit Digs the Earth*. This nomenclature has been the most common memory aid for teaching and remembering the sequences of moves for many centuries.

3. See the 13 techniques of Taijiquan as outlined by Wong (2002), 40–41.

4. For further reading on the health benefits of Taijiquan and Qigong see: Wong, *The Art of Chi Kung: Making the Most of Your Vital Energy* (Rockport, MA: Element Books, 1993), and Peter M. Wayne, *The Harvard Medical School Guide to Tai Chi: 12 Weeks to a Healthy Body, Strong Heart and Sharp Mind* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2013).

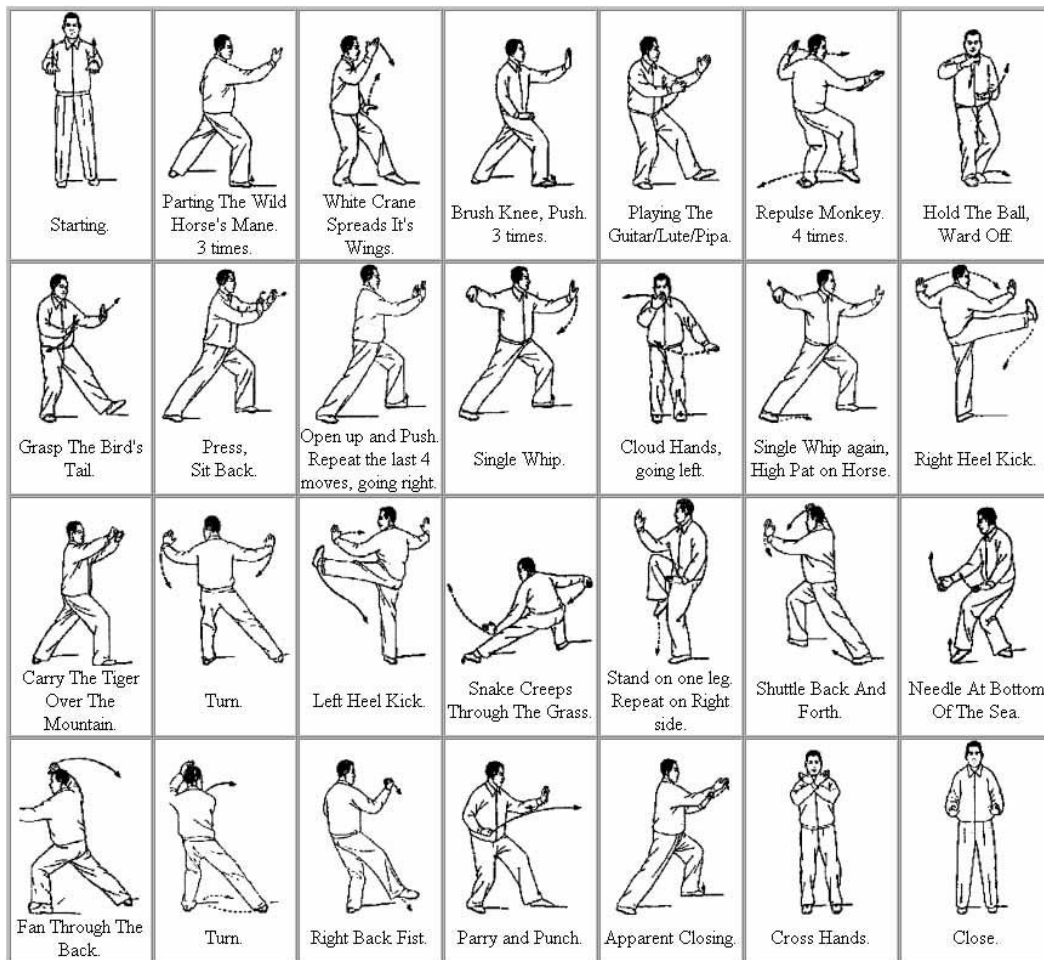


Figure 1. Pictograms showing the Yang Style 24 Hand Form. Note that to compensate for the static positions shown arrows are used in some cases to indicate movement. This memory aid does not provide enough information, however, to support performance of the sequence, without some prior knowledge and experience of the form.⁵

Pictograms, offering visual clues to what the name represents, have also been used to help the practitioner, providing more detail of what each move might entail or the transition between each move. See figure 1. But some knowledge of the art is still essential to be able to string the pictures together into a seamless, flowing sequence of movement.

5. Image from *Tai Chi Chuan*, accessed 22 Nov 2017. http://www.crystalinks.com/tai_chi.html.

In the twentieth century, ready access to video equipment, and the even more recent dissemination of the resulting recordings via the internet, seemingly offer students a plethora of resources for learning and remembering sequences, yet there are limitations to the usefulness of these videos. There are the generic limitations of recording movement as discussed in numerous articles on or about dance notation,⁶ These limitations include movements hidden by other people, obstacles or parts of the body, inability to distinguish between improvisations, mistakes and personal styling from the specified movement in any given performance, and spatial relationships made ambiguous by changes in camera angles and editing. One limitation specific to Taijiquan relates to the art generally being practiced in loose clothing, most typically the Tai Chi suit. This clothing obscures specific amount of flexion and rotation of shoulders and hips. Another limitation is that the resulting two-dimensional nature of video means that detail, such as the placement of the feet, their relationship to the hips and shoulders, and the action of the arms and hands is not accurately captured. This particularly significant for Taijiquan as much of it is done facing the side walls and corners. All of these details are essential for both correct martial application as well as prevention of causing injury to oneself. Furthermore, video does not capture the unseen elements of Taijiquan, such as the breathing, the flow of *qi* being harnessed and redirected, and the contrast of *yin* and *yang* within the movement. All of these aspects are indispensable for effective Taijiquan practice.

Advantages of a Written Notation

Having been made aware of these shortcomings, one might then turn to consider a movement notation system that will capture all of the movement concepts, details, and qualities. The addition of this capture being relative to time could also be

6. See Libby Smigel, *Documenting Dance: A Practical Guide*. (Washington, DC: Dance Heritage Coalition, 2006). For related articles of comparing and contrasting video recordings with notation see also: János Fügedi, "Dance Notation as a Cognitive Aid: Experimental Labanotation Research for Dance Education," in the *ICKL Proceedings of the Twenty-second Biennial Conference July 26-August 2, 2001*, 101–110 for a comparison of accuracy in recreating dance from notation and video; Pino Mlakar in "Thoughts of a Choreographer on the Importance of Kinetography Laban," in the preface to *A Dictionary of Kinetography Laban (Labanotation)* (Instytut Choreologii: Poznan, Poland, 1997) recounting telling Ninette de Valois the benefits of using notation over recording on film; and Juliette Kando, "What is Choreology?" (blog) *Owlcation* owlcation.com/humanities/what-is-choreology on the benefits of having both notation and video as a dance record. Similarly, Julie Brodie and Balinda Craig-Quijada in *ICKL Proceedings 2015*, 182–187, discuss how notation can combine several interpretations of one dance into a single score.

beneficial. More than names or pictograms, Kinetography Laban/Labanotation records the sequence of postures of each form as well as detail of the transitional movements from one position to another. Thus, the reader is informed of the patterns of movements and the intentions in the connections and qualities. As well, timing and emphasis can be described more accurately. This is in contrast to figure 1, which although it describes the 24 Hand Form shows 28 frames. Four frames are transitional movement and therefore of lesser importance but this is not obvious to the inexperienced reader.

More than can easily be achieved in video, notation can simultaneously capture both intricate specifics, such as foot placement, and a general overall movement. As well, notation can capture non-visual elements, such as breathing and dynamics of strength. As will be discussed later, these qualities are important to Taijiquan and are in keeping with the *yin* and *yang* that forms the basis for Taijiquan.

Furthermore, notation can be applied more generically. A video recording captures only one or a few practitioners' interpretation. A notation score can offer a wide range of variation to accommodate different practitioners' abilities and preferences. This accommodation can apply to the height of kicks or alternative executions. These alternatives could even be written alongside passages in the score for a quick comparison. Notating alternatives accommodates subtle differences in execution of the same identified move, but with a different martial application intended. For example, a strike to one's imagined opponent, as required by a particular move, can be aimed at the chest, throat, or face. This would not only change the height of the hand as the arm extends, but also the way the hand is held, depending on which part of the hand is impacting the strike.

Although not discussed here in depth, another advantage of putting Taijiquan and Qigong into an existing notation system is the increased audience in the literacy of Kinetography Laban/Labanotation. Taijiquan students learning to read notation as part of their Taiji experience could then go on to learn not only other Taijiquan forms that have been notated but have an appreciation for various movement disciplines that have been documented in notation.

Transcribing Taijiquan into Notation

Taijiquan is referred to as a soft, or internal, martial art. Distinctive from other hard or external martial arts that are primarily on the attack, Taijiquan observes passive moments and stances—waiting for the best opportunity to be active or on the offensive. This is aptly described in the legend of the originator of Taijiquan,

Zhang Sanfeng (张三丰) (13th century CE), a Daoist priest who retreated to the mountains and there observed a crane sweeping down on a snake. The snake waited until the crane was close and then lurched at the crane, which, in turn, retreated.⁷ This waiting for opportunity is often referred to in Taijiquan as the yielding principle.

Hard martial arts are done at speed, with definite articulated movements, and are more identifiable when notating because of the rhythm that develops with them. With the slowness of execution in Taijiquan, however, there is no obvious rhythm to the uninformed observer. This lack of rhythm poses a problem to the notator. Notating using real time, in seconds, would be one solution,⁸ but I believe there is a better way. The method I am proposing is in keeping with the essence of the art itself.

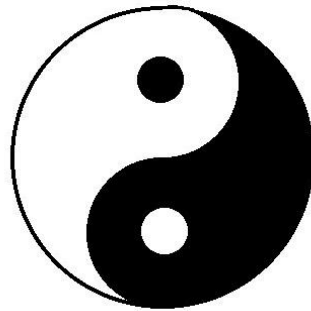


Figure 2. The familiar Tai Chi symbol, showing *yin* and *yang*—the passive and active—in balance. Both halves complement and encompass each other equally.⁹

The yielding principle is what brings Taijiquan into line with the very familiar Tai Chi symbol (see figure 2) depicting *yin* (阴) and *yang* (阳). In Taijiquan terms, *yin*, the passive, is waiting for the opportunity to strike and *yang*, the active, is making the attack. It is important to have these two parts in balance.¹⁰ These two components of each move are generally coordinated with the breath. The passive, which is *yin*, is on the in-breath; the active, *yang*, happens

7. Wong (2002), 19.

8 This method has been used at least twice before for notating martial arts. See “T’ai Chi Ch’uan (Yang Style): Workshop presented by Billie Mahoney” in *ICKL Proceedings of the 23rd Biennial Conference, July 23–29, 2004*, 157–163, and “Ba Gua Zhang: Basic Walking and Fixed Eight Palm Set. Reading Session by Wendy Chu” in *ICKL Proceedings of the 22nd Biennial Conference, Jul 26–August 2, 2001*, 141–143.

9. Image from *Wikimedia Commons*, accessed 22 Nov 2017. http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yin_yang.svg.

10. For more detail of the correlation between the Tai Chi symbol and the martial art, see Yang (1985). 8–16.

with the out-breath. This is most obvious in the form *Grasp the Bird's Tail*, which is notated in full in figure 6 but first here is an explanation of how I represent these components using Kinetography Laban.

In *Grasp the Bird's Tail*, and typical of Taijiquan although not always so, the active moves are executed in what is known as the Bow Stance, and the passive moves in the Empty Stance. See figure 3.

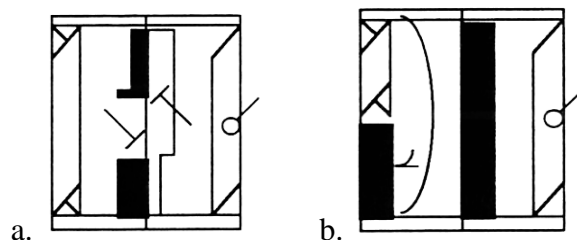


Figure 3. The Bow Stance (a) is generally for active movements, and the Empty Stance (b) is generally for passive movements. The Bow Stance is so named, being the stance for shooting a bow and arrow. The Empty Stance refers to one foot (in this notation, the left foot) being non-weight bearing or “empty”.

Taijiquan is usually practiced in silence, or, if accompanied by music, it is not synchronized with the musical beat. Because of the coordination of movement with the breathing, however, a natural rhythm evolves. It is this coordination of the practitioner’s movement with the breath that allows for the movement to be notated fairly consistently between practitioners the world over. Breath, in other words, provides the so-called meter for Taijiquan notation.

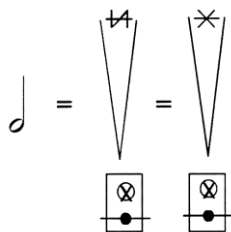


Figure 4. The coordinated movement and breathing in the execution of Taijiquan gives it regularity. Being in balance, the in-breath and out-breath are generally of equal duration.

For consistency I have notated each in-breath and each out-breath as taking two counts, taking one bar (i.e., four counts) for a complete breath (as shown in figure 4). *Grasp the Bird's Tail* is made up of six components, taking three complete breaths, thus the notation takes three bars for this form.

There is much flexibility in timing around this, however, in as much as the practitioner feels is appropriate for the breathing and the movements required. This flexibility is indicated (see figure 5) by the inclusion of the *ad libitum* symbol in the key signature graph.

In keeping with the *yin* and *yang*, the passive movements will generally be softer or weak, and the active movements will be stronger, requiring more *qi*. This contrast is indicated by dynamic signs here, and should be applied generally to each bar of the notation, incorporating both the movement and the breathing.



Figure 5. In the notation each total breath represents a bar. The in-breath, being passive, and the out-breath, being active, are thus described with the corresponding dynamic signs. Although the in- and out-breaths are generally equal in duration, this is at the practitioner's discretion, as noted by the *ad libitum* sign.

Having resolved how to indicate timing, the second challenge is to determine how specific the detail of the notation should be. In 1956, the Yang Style 24 Hand Form was devised from moves out of the traditional Taijiquan Yang Style Long Form by the Chinese Sports Committee as a general exercise. Since then it has been promoted widely, first in China and then around the world. It is also sometimes called the Beijing Form after where the Chinese Sports Committee is based. It is arguably the most widely practiced sequence of Taijiquan. With sixty years of international practice, a lot of variation and subtle differences in opinion have developed about how it should be executed, yet all expressions have remained recognizably the same form.

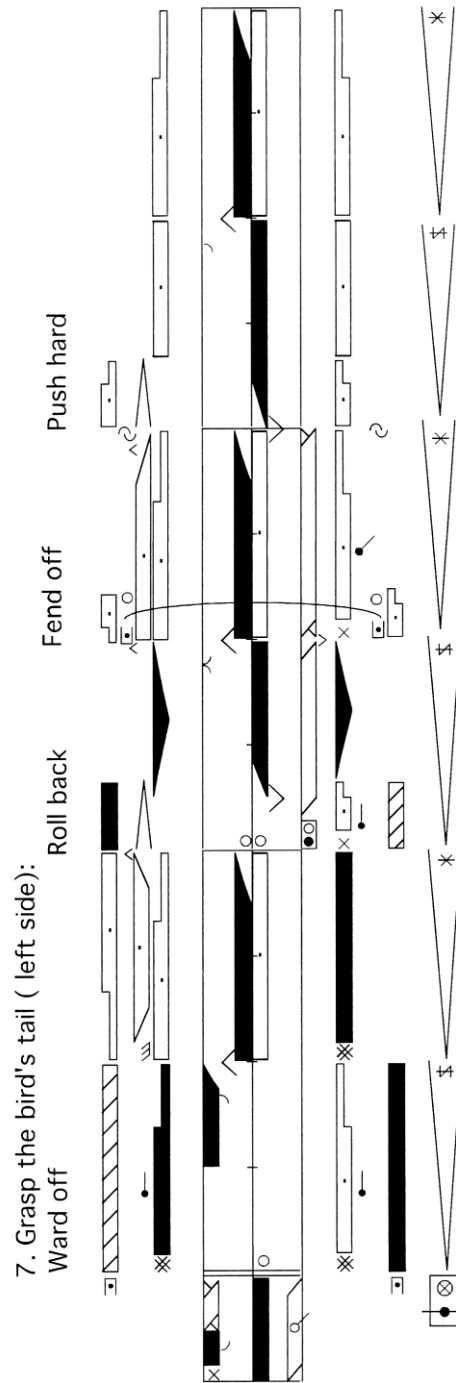


Figure 6. The move *Grasp the Bird's Tail* (the 7th form in the Yang Style 24 Hand Form) showing Empty Stances on the passive (in-breath) and Bow Stances on the active (out-breath). The breathing is notated only for the purpose of illustration.

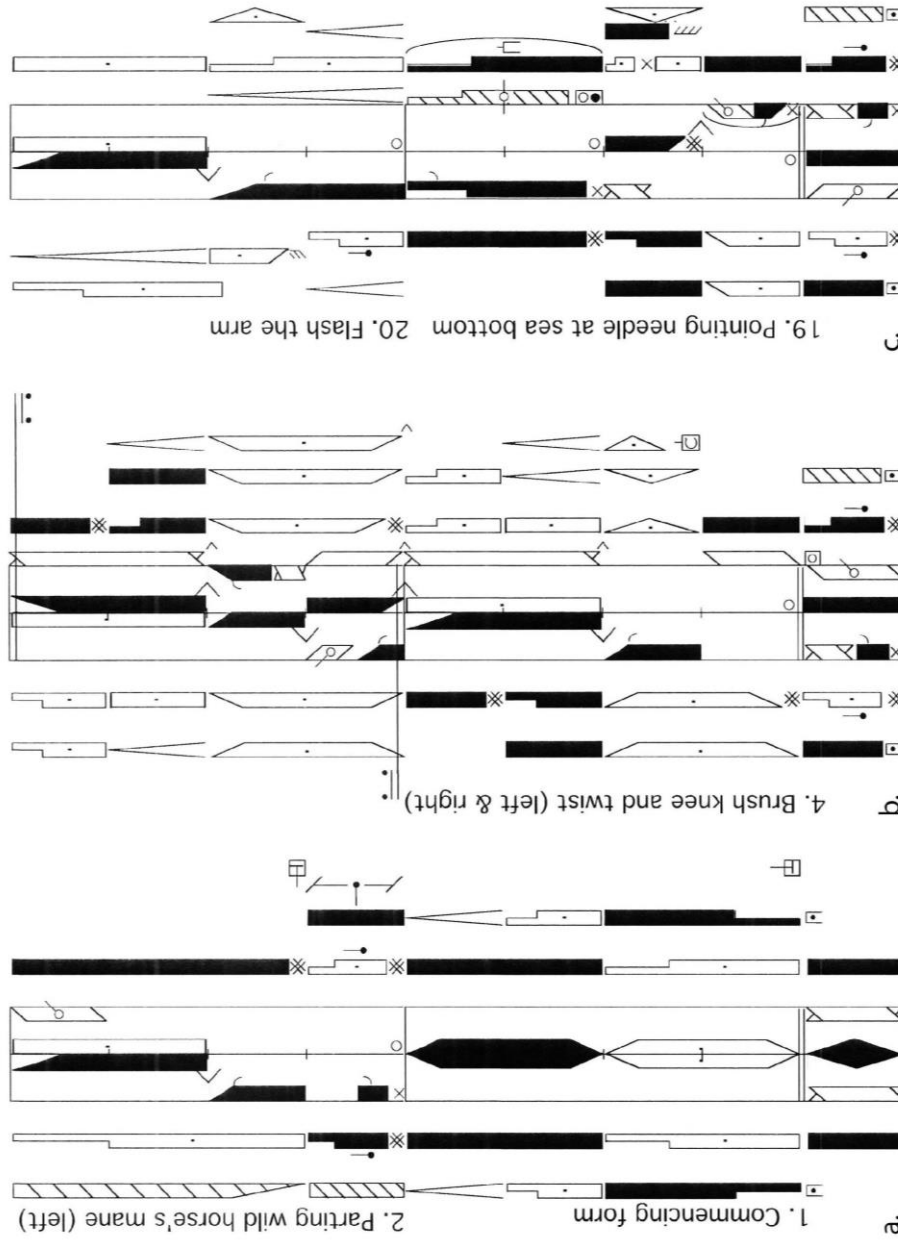


Figure 7a-c. Excerpts of the Yang Style 24 Hand Form, each move with its correlating name and number in the sequence. For clarity, 7b and 7c are shown with a starting position of Empty Stance with arms “holding the Taiji ball.” This eliminates transitional moves resulting from the previous form that are not specific to the forms notated.

In creating the kinetogram for the Yang Style 24 Hand Form (see figure 7), it was important for me to keep in mind the purpose for which it was intended. Here the purpose was primarily as a memory aid, although not only for my own students but for anyone interested in Taijiquan who might wish to use it for their own practice. I therefore opted to record only the essential movement in this notation. I could choose to produce a more detailed notation specific to how I was taught and now practice the form, but giving this to a student might inhibit them from developing his or her own style. It might also be discouraging for a beginner with less physical ability and yet who is still able to effectively execute the martial application of each move. With being specific enough to just capture the general movements and their martial intent this approach to notating would have a wider appeal and application for the student practitioner.

When a student questions whether or not they are doing the movement right, I am quick to point out that there is no right and wrong way of doing Taijiquan. I tell them that they should, instead, look to see what movement has the most effective martial application. The notation written with practitioners in mind should have a similar intent—not to illustrate the right from wrong way of doing the form but rather the most effective martial application.

Each move/posture has its own martial application, and sometimes more than one. It is in part this variety of martial applications for a posture that has resulted in some differences in execution. Having a companion notation to capture these alternatives and variations would be of further value to the Taijiquan teacher and his or her student.

Comparison of the Five Family Styles of Taijiquan through Notation

A further advantage of written notations is that they allow for scholarly study and research in comparing the varied methods of Taijiquan, particularly that of the five recognized family styles.

Chen style is the oldest and originated in the Chen family village Chenjiagou (陳家溝) in Henan Province. The techniques and practice of the martial art was a closely guarded secret, shared only amongst the family and passed down through the generations. Although much more widely practiced now, it is from this origin that the association of styles with certain families has evolved.¹¹ Taijiquan, as we recognize it today, is attributed to originating from Chen Wangting (陳王庭) (1600–1680).¹²

11. Wong (2002), 24.

12. Mark Chen, *Old Frame Chen Family Taijiquan* (Berkeley, CA: Blue Snake Books, 2004), 15–16.

Yang style followed this, developed by Yang Luchan (杨露禅) (1799–1872). Yang Luchan was initially a servant to the Chen family and keenly observed in secret their practice of martial arts. When discovered, he proved himself well-skilled and was from then on formally trained by the Chen family master of the time.¹³

With permission from his teacher, Yang Luchan went to Beijing to teach. His students eventually included bureaucracy officials, members of the Imperial Guards Brigade, and also the Imperial Family. Yang Luchan's teaching has since been the most widely disseminated style and has influenced the remaining three Taijiquan family styles. One of the Imperial Guard students was Wu Quanyou (吴全佑) (1834–1902), who went on to develop the Wu style. This style is the second most internationally practiced after Yang Style.¹⁴

Preceding Wu style, however, was a style devised by one government official who was also Yang Luchan's student, Wu Yuxiang (武禹襄) (1812–1880). Wu Yuxiang then studied with the Chen family and, with his nephew Li Yiyu (李亦畬) (1832–1892), also researched historic texts¹⁵ on martial arts to inform their own family style. This style was adopted and disseminated by a student of Li Yiyu, Hao Weizhen (郝為真) (1842–1920), and his family, thus the style becoming known as Wu (Hao) style.¹⁶

Hao Weizhen, in turn, taught Sun Lutang (孙禄堂) (1861–1932). Sun Lutang was also a practitioner of the other martial arts based on the yielding principle, namely Xingyiquan (形意拳) and Baguazhang (八卦掌). Incorporating

13. Many elaborate versions exist of how Yang Luchan learnt Chen Style Taijiquan. Two contrasting versions are told by Wong (2002), 25–26, and Chia Siew Pang and Goh Ewe Hock, *Tai Chi: Ten Minutes to Health* (Reno, NV: CRCS Publications, 1985), 6–7. Interestingly, both authors admit that their own account is probably untrue,

14. Ta-lu Lu, "Our History," *International Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan Federation* (website). Patricia N. H. Leong (trans.) www.wustyle.com/index.php/about-us/our-history. Accessed 9 Dec 2017.

15. These historic texts are believed to have been the *Taijiquan Jing* (*Tai Chi Chuan Classic*, 太极拳经, ca. 12th–14th century CE) attributed to Zhang Sanfeng, and *Taijiquan Lun* (*Treatise on Tai Chi Chuan*, 太极拳论, ca. 13th century CE) attributed to Wang Zongyue. Wang Zongyue is thought to have been a student of Zhang Sanfeng. Many modern English translations exist of these classics, including excerpts in Wong (2002), and by Barbara Davis in *The Taijiquan Classics: An Annotated Translation* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2004). Wu Yuxiang and Li Yiyu went on to also write many texts of their own.

16. Wong (2002), 26–28, 228.

these with Tajichuan, Sun Lutang devised the Sun family style, which is the most recently evolving of the five recognized family styles.¹⁷

With such close links between the different styles as they have evolved and developed over the past four centuries, different ways to represent these similarities and differences, other than by demonstration, are of great interest to martial arts scholars and historians.

Many of the styles have moves with the same, or similar names, and yet are executed with distinctive differences. While it is easy to demonstrate these differences, to describe the differences purely in prose is not so easy. Being able to notate them, however, not only allows readers to see the differences and

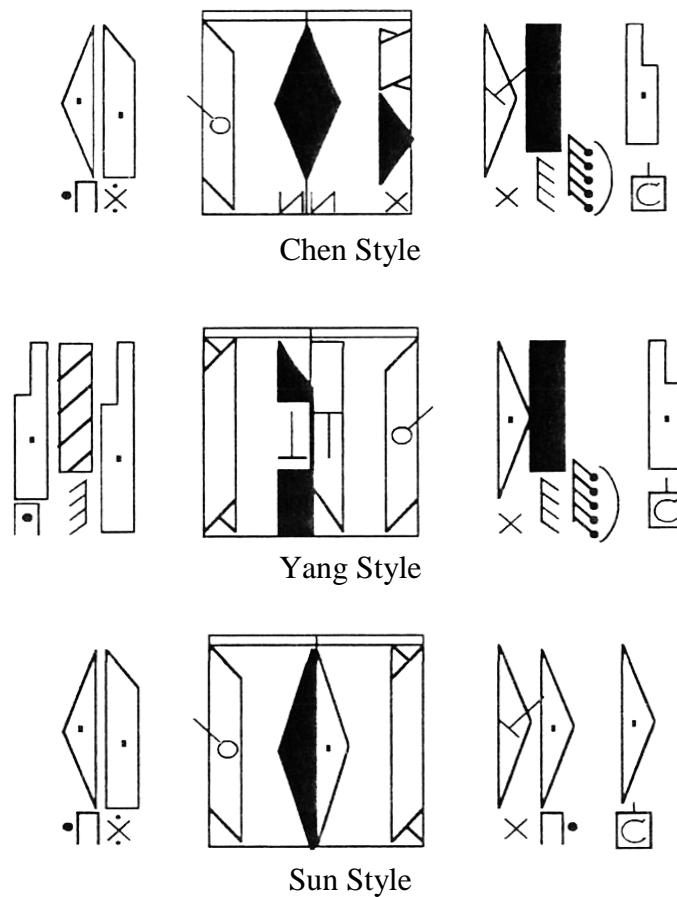


Figure 8. The final position of the form known as *Single Whip* in Chen, Yang, and Sun styles.

17. Wong (2002), 262.

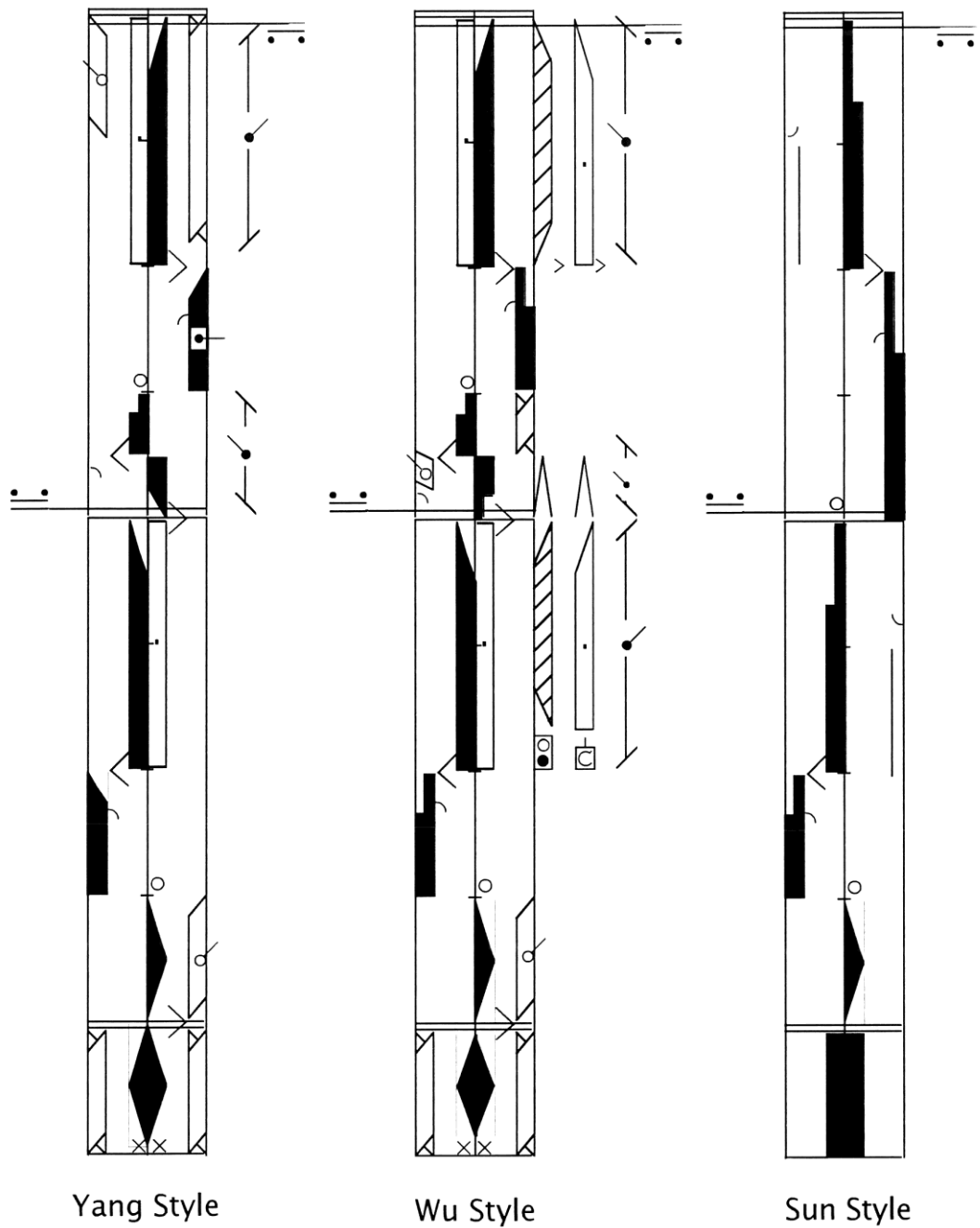


Figure 9. Locomotion within different Taijiquan styles.

similarities. It also can present the evolution of a particular posture, as seen here with the final position of the *Single Whip* in Chen, Yang, and Sun styles (see figure 8).

You will see the right hand of Chen and Yang styles is similar, as is left arm and hand of Chen and Sun styles. It can also be seen from the stances the influence of Chen style upon Sun style.

Similarly, the differences in the general techniques within each style can also be shown, such as in these walking exercises for the Yang, Wu, and Sun styles (see figure 9). In Yang style the torso remains very erect, contrasting with Wu style that turns and inclines the torso. In contrast, the Sun style, taking its influences from the stepping of Baguazhang, makes very little use of the Bow Stance, instead transferring all of the weight with each step.

Comparisons and Analysis of Qigong

Qigong, as already mentioned, is movement or exercise intended for health benefits. More specifically expressed, it is movement for the cultivating and mastering of *qi*.¹⁸ This rather all-encompassing definition can be applied to a focus on health and spirituality, through breathing and meditation exercises, or by contrast to a more martial focus, such as that of Taijiquan. This concept has existed in Chinese thinking for many centuries. Exercises to restore the balance of *qi* have been a longstanding form of treatment as part of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Daoist philosophical writings *Daodejing* (*Tao Te Ching*, 道德经), written around the sixth-century BCE, and *Zhuangzi* (*Chuang-Tzu*, 庄子) written around the third-century BCE both speak of breathing exercises to improve *qi* and increase health and longevity. The Buddhist monk Bodhidharma (fifth or sixth century CE) taught Qigong exercises at the Shaolin Temple to improve the monks' physical fitness,¹⁹ and Confucian scholars wrote of regulating *qi* for the wellbeing of heart and mind.²⁰ *Yijing* (*I Ching*, 易经), being dated from about 1122 BCE and regarded the oldest Chinese text, also acknowledges the concept of *qi* and its importance in the relationship of the three powers—Heaven, Earth and man.²¹

18. Wayne, 15.

19. Yang Jwing-Ming, *A Brief History of Qigong*, in legacy.ymaa.com/articles/history/history-qigong. Accessed 14 Apr 2018

20. Peimin Ni, "A *Qigong* Interpretation of Confucianism" in *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* v.23:1 (1996). 79-97.

21. Lee Holden, *History of Qigong* www.leeholden.com/announcements/history-of-qigong. Accessed 14 Apr 2018.

Qigong exercise as it is internationally recognized today has been greatly influenced by the social and political events that occurred in China throughout the twentieth century.²² While there are some traditional sets of exercises still recognized and performed, many new sequences intended for general wellbeing have evolved in recent years.²³

While it is a rather fanciful notion to be prescribed a movement notation by a Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioner, it has merit that the practitioner may wish to use notation to record exercises to then demonstrate to his or her clients. Also, as demonstrated here with Taijiquan, notation is a useful tool in comparing and analyzing Qigong sequences.

Depicted in Kinetography Laban, figure 10 is one example of how notation can be used to make a comparison in what is essentially the same sequence but demonstrated with distinctive differences. These notations show the beginning of the Qigong sequence known as the *Lotus* (also called the *Golden Lotus* and the *Lotus Blossom*) as executed in three different recordings found on YouTube. All three performances of the sequence are well executed. Although they are recognizably the same sequence by having the same general movements, each one shows distinctive styling differences and emphasis in their movement.

The first recording I have notated is by Theresa Perry. The description says she learned the form in a weekend workshop in 2013.²⁴ The video was posted on YouTube (and possibly recorded) the following year.²⁵ The second is by Cheryl Lee Player, a senior master at the Australian Tai Chi Institute.²⁶ The third is by Simon Robins, from the School of Tai Chi Chuan and Internal Arts in Sussex, United Kingdom.²⁷

As for my Taijiquan, I have used the breathing to dictate the timing in these examples. How the person is breathing is not obvious from watching the videos, however, so I have used my own Taiji experience of what would seem to be the most natural rate to breathe as each person executes her or his Qigong. *Yin*

22. Utiraruto Otehode and Benjamin Penny, "Qigong Therapy in 1950s China." *East Asian History*. 40, Aug 2016. 69–84.

23. Examples of both old and new forms of Qigong are the *Baduanjin Qigong* (Eight Section Brocade, 八段锦气功) with origins traced back to the eighth century CE, and *Taiji Qigong Shibashi* (Eighteen movements, 太极气功十八式), the first of now four sets, devised by Professor Lin Housheng in 1979.

24. There are no details of where the workshop took place, who Perry's instructor was, nor where Perry is based.

25. Theresa Perry, *Lotus Qi Gong*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=_G_m6kX6_SE. Accessed 9 Dec 2017.

26. Australian Tai Chi Institute, *Qi Gong Lotus Blossom*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgMJjY1qj3c&t=5s. Accessed 9 Dec 2017.

27. The School of Tai Chi Chuan and Internal Arts, *Lotus Qigong*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=HdPtKIDEx8o&t=32s. Accessed 9 Dec 2017.

and *yang* principles also apply to Qigong, as indicated by the key signature graphs, even though there is no martial application intended in this sequence.

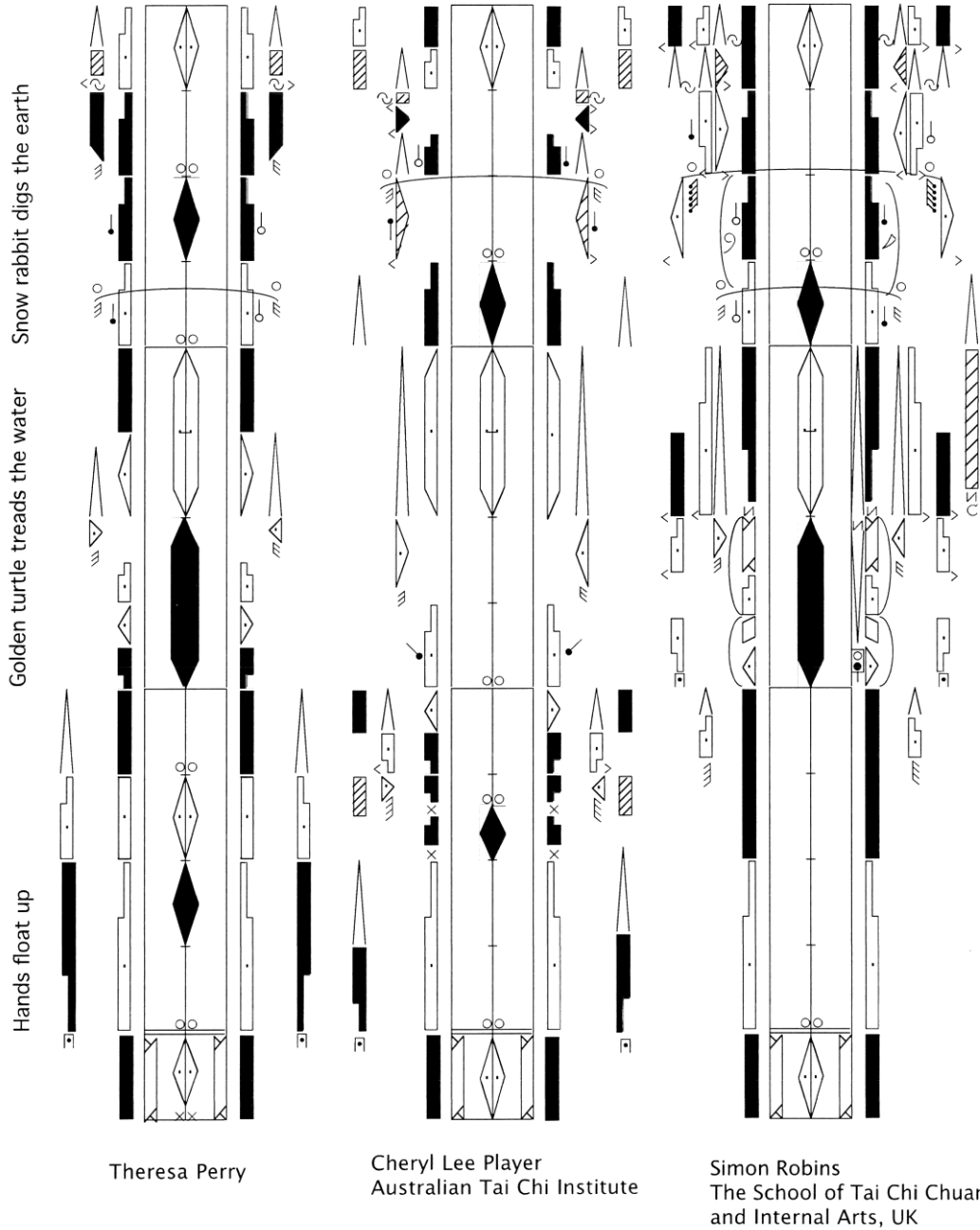


Figure 10. The opening three moves of *The Lotus* as demonstrated by three different practitioners.

With the exception of bending at the wrist, the gesture “Hands float up” is basically the same in all three instances, which is essentially *Commencing Form* of a Taijiquan sequence (see figure 7a). It is how the hands are then lowered that is distinctively different: Robins returns along the same path he has lifted them, Perry brings her hands in to the shoulder to lower them, and Player circles the arms to prepare for the next move. All three are consistent in straightening their legs as the *Golden Turtle Treads the Water* although Robins’ arm movements are quite different to those of Perry and Player at this point.

The general crossing the wrists in *Snow Rabbit Digs the Earth* is similar in all three. Robins, in his spoken explanation emphasizes the weight of the left hand on the right, which I have recorded using movement dynamic signs. This is presumably the same for Perry and Player too but as it is not apparent from what is shown in the video I have not notated it. A notable distinction from the other two, Robins also touches the fingertips of left and right hands as well as the wrists as he circles the forearms in this move.

In many ways to notate purely from a video recording is only exacerbating the faults of relying just on video that I outlined at the beginning of this paper. It would be interesting to see how much discussing the notations with the practitioners would result in changes to these kinetograms. Equally, it would be interesting to see if the discussion of such detailed analysis of their Qigong and seeing it notated would have any influence on their performance.

Conclusion

In this paper I have demonstrated a way of notating Taijiquan and Qigong that not only captures the movement but also encompasses other important aspects of these movement forms, particularly the coordination of breathing with the movement, the representation of *yin* and *yang*, and for Taijiquan the important yielding principle. I then used this notation to compare both different styles of Taijiquan and different executions of Qigong.

Kinetograms created using this method and used in a class setting provide another tool to represent the movements and techniques of Taijiquan. Combined with demonstration and explanation these notations offer another means for students and practitioners to comprehend the complexity of the martial art. The notations can help illustrate concepts not so easily observed, particularly not just the movement but how one moves. Furthermore, providing students with copies of the notations offers a comprehensive description of each form for them to take home to practice from.

Using this method as a base, further kinetograms could be drawn illustrating various martial applications of each move within a Taijiquan sequence and for comparing the different interpretations a different martial application

would bring to the same move. In turn it could be used for comparing similarly named moves of the different family styles, and more generally the evolution of the soft martial arts. Further use of notation could be made recording Taijiquan forms involving weapons as both memory aid, and for research and comparison.

For the practitioner these notations become a teaching tool and a reference tool. For the ethnologist and historian it becomes a research tool, and for the health practitioner it becomes a means of recording treatments. As Taijiquan and Qigong is of benefit to the practitioner, the increased literacy of the art forms through notation could help spread and increase those benefits even more.

Kinetography Laban/Labanotation, with its ability to present varying levels of simple description through to complex analysis of movement, is an ideal tool for teaching a martial art, building on the ancient oral traditions and the pictograms that have been passed down through the centuries. As well, notation could greatly assist scholarly writing and in comparative research, making a new and significant contribution to the great wealth of historic writings of Taijiquan extant. If introduced with careful integration into Taijiquan and Qigong classes, there is enormous potential for its usefulness to teachers, students and practitioners alike. Equally, it could be an invaluable resource to researchers and scholars of all Taijiquan and Qigong styles and forms.

Bibliography

- Brodie, Julie, and Balinda Craig-Quijada. “*You Can’t Dress Me Up But You Can Take Me Anywhere: The Dynamic Process of Documentation, Preservation, and Dissemination of a Dance.*” *Proceedings of the 29th Biennial ICKL Conference*. Tours, France, July 24–30 2015. 182–187.
- Chia Siew Pang, and Goh Ewe Hock. *Tai Chi: Ten Minutes to Health*. Reno, NV: CRCS Publications, 1985.
- Chen, Mark. *Old Frame Chen Family Taijiquan*. Berkeley, CA: Blue Snake Books, 2004.
- Chu, Wendy. “*Ba Gua Zhang: Basic Walking and Fixed Eight Palm Set.*” (Reading session). *ICKL Proceedings of the 22nd Biennial Conference*, Ohio, July 26–August 2, 2001. 141–143.
- Davis, Barbara. *The Taijiquan Classics: An Annotated Translation*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2004.
- Fügedi, János. “Dance Notation as a Cognitive Aid: Experimental Labanotation Research for Dance Education.” *ICKL Proceedings of the 22nd Biennial Conference*, Ohio, July 26–August 2, 2001. 101–110.

- . “Notation on Film, Notation for Film.” *ICKL Proceedings of the 24th Biennial Conference*, London July 29–August 4, 2005. Vol. 2. 103–108.
- Garofalo, Michael P. *Eight Section Brocade*. Red Bluff, CA: Green Way Research, 2004.
- Holden, Lee. *History of Qigong*. www.leeholden.com/announcements/history-of-qigong. Accessed 14 Apr 2018.
- Kando, Juliette. “What is Choreology?” *Owlcation*. (blog) 31 Jul 2017. owlcation.com/humanities/what-is-choreology. Accessed 14 Apr 2018.
- Lu, Ta-lu. “Our History,” *International Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan Federation*. Patricia N. H. Leong (trans.). www.wustyle.com/index.php/about-us/our-history. Accessed 09 Dec 2017.
- Mahoney, Billie. “T’ai Chi Chuan (Yang Style)” (Workshop). *ICKL Proceedings of the 23rd Biennial Conference*, Beijing, July 23–29 2004. 157–163.
- Mlakar, Pino. “Thoughts of a Choreographer on the Importance of Kinetography Laban,” *A Dictionary of Kinetography Laban (Labanotation)*. Poznan, Poland: Instytut Choreologii, 1997. (Preface).
- Ni, Peimin. “A Qigong Interpretation of Confucianism.” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*. Vol 23, no.1 (1996). 79–97.
- Otehode, Utiraruto, and Benjamin Penny. “Qigong Therapy in 1950s China.” *East Asian History*. 40, Aug 2016. 69–84.
- Smigel, Libby. *Documenting Dance: A Practical Guide*. Washington, DC: Dance Heritage Coalition, 2006.
- Tang, Yu-Shiun. *Traditional Yang Style Tai Ji Quan: A Detailed Explanation in Chinese and English*. Christchurch, New Zealand: International Cultural and Publishing Ltd, 2007.
- Voigt, John. “Taiji Qigong: Shibashi and Lin Housheng.” *Qi: The Journal Traditional Eastern Health and Fitness*. Vol 21, no. 4, Winter 2011-2012.
- Wayne, Peter M. *The Harvard Medical School Guide to Tai Chi: 12 Weeks to a Healthy Body, Strong Heart and Sharp Mind*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2013.
- Wong, Kiew Kit. *The Art of Chi Kung: Making the Most of Your Vital Energy*. Rockport, MA: Element Books, 1993.
- . *The Complete Book of Tai Chi Chuan: A Comprehensive Guide to the Principles and Practice*. North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 2002.
- Yang, Jwing-Ming. *Advanced Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan: Tai Chi Theory and Tai Chi Jing* (Vol 1). Boston, MA: Yang’s Martial Arts Academy, 1986.
- . *A Brief History of Qigong*. legacy.ymaa.com/articles/history/history-qigong. Accessed 14 Apr 2018.