

The 37 Essential Forms of Taijiquan (level one)

Master Class

with Master Sam Masich
on ZOOM



Level One, Session Four 'Single Whip' and 'White Crane'

The 37 Essential Forms of Taijiquan

'Essential forms' one of the essential foundations for understanding *taijiquan* as an energetic and martial art. Yang Chengfu, in his 1931 book, 'Taijiquan Method and Application' (*Taijiquan Shiyongfa* 太極拳使用法), states that, "the full long-form sequence above is comprised entirely of thirty-seven distinct forms." He indicates that a more exhaustive explanation would be forthcoming in a later volume. Yang died in 1936 and no such book is known to have been written. This course is intended to provide such an explanation.

1. 'Single Whip'

This is one of the art's most recognizable forms and often the shape that comes into the mind of the average person when he or she thinks about *taijiquan*. Like many of the thirty-seven essential forms, 'single-whip' derives from the *Shaolin* monastery (*Shaolinsi* 少林寺) martial arts tradition which, in turn, draws from earlier *gongfu* (功夫) systems. The unusual right hand 'whip-hand' shape is used for attack and defence and is, sometimes executed with both hands to for a 'double whip.'

It is not the 'whip-hand,' however, that defines the single-whip family, but rather the left side 'edged hand'-on-the-same-side-as-the-advanced-leg.



Yang Chengfu in 'Single Whip' and
'Snake Creeps Down'

Dan Bian family

Single Whip

Fan Through the Back

Snake Creeps Down

Dan Bian jia

dan bian (單鞭)

shan tong bei (扇通背)

she shen xia shi (蛇身下勢)

2. 'White Crane'

Poetic in name and gesture, White Crane Spreads its Wings is another elegant and characteristic *taijiquan* form. The arms expand expressively while the body sits back into the on-toe empty-stance.

It is the on-toe empty-stance with same-side-as-empty-leg-active-edge-hand that characterizes the white-crane family members.



Yang Chengfu in 'White Crane Spreads
its Wings' and 'High Pat on Horse'

Bai He family

White Crane Spreads Its Wings

Bai He jia

bai he liang chi (白鶴亮翅)

High Pat on Horse
Retreat to Ride the Tiger

gao tan ma (高探馬)
tui bu kua hu (退步跨虎)

3. Developing power and flow

At the outset, movement between individual forms can feel slow and laborious. One must keep mental focus at all times if principled form and transition is to be maintained. As with the learning of a musical instrument, the early stages are characterized by blockiness and instability as one struggles to remember and embody the principles. Much thoughtful repetition is required for progress to occur.

Essential Forms improvisation differs from regular sequenced-routine practice in that the practitioner is constantly attending to the changing conditions. It is not possible to lapse into complacency without paying a price. One must take the attitude of a composer who is performing the composition in real time.



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