

The 37 Essential Forms of Taijiquan (level one)

Master Class

with Master Sam Masich
on ZOOM



Level One, Session Three 'Raise Hands' & 'Cross Hands'

The 37 Essential Forms of Taijiquan

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. 'The River Post'

Chuanzishi Zhanzhuang

One basic 'standing post' method is called 'River Post-standing' (*chuanzishi zhanzhuang* 川字式站樁). This practice trains the 'empty stance' (*xubu* 虛步) in which the weight is mostly on one leg, evocative of a person standing on the bank beside a river and touching the water with the foot of the free leg. The 'river-step' can be seen in the 'Raise Hands, Step-up' and 'Hand Plays the *Pipa*' forms in the traditional Yang-style long form. In this exercise, the supporting left-leg is bent with the foot turned out about 45 degrees from the direction one is facing. The right foot is placed on the heel in the facing direction at a distance determined by the unforced, natural extension of the leg. While sinking into the stance, the two arms extend outward with the right hand slightly further away from the body. The palms face inward in a manner suggesting the 'Raise Hands, Step-up' or 'Hand Plays the *Pipa*' form and with gently 'sitting' wrists. The same breath and postural guidelines apply from the *mabu* exercise with special care not to let the buttocks protrude. Once in the pose, the practitioner settles the breath and contemplates the connection between hips and shoulders, knees and elbows and, wrists and feet. After holding the position for a period of time, one can shift from the right-side posture to the left-side variation.

2. 'Raise Hands, Step-up'

The form 'raise-hands, step up' (*ti shou shang shi* 提手上式) is performed in an 'empty stance' (*xubu* 虛步) and can be employed as both an offensive and a defensive form. The raise-hands, step-up form presents itself with the same-side arm and leg, meaning that the upper hand and the forward empty leg are on the same side while the lower hand and the rear weighted leg are the same.



Yang Chengfu in 'Raise Hands, Step-up' and 'Hand Plays the *Pipa*'

While 'ti shou' as an 'energy' (*jīn* 勁) can be expressed from several positions, in Yang-style Taijiquan is typically expressed in empty-stance forms that have the *same-side-forward arm and leg*; for example right-leg and right-arm forward 'Raise Hands' or left-leg and left-arm forward 'Hand Plays the Pipa.'

Three of the 37 Essential Forms possess these basic raise-hands characteristics.

Ti shou family	Ti Shou jia (提手家)
Raise Hands, Step-up	<i>ti shou shang shi</i> (提手上式)
Hand Plays the Pipa	<i>shou hui pipa</i> (手揮琵琶)
Fist Under Elbow	<i>zhou di chui</i> (肘底捶)

3. 'Cross Hands'

The form 'cross hands' (*shizi shou* 十字手) is not really a set posture but more represents an important transitional moment as conditions change laterally from one side to the other. From a stance perspective, cross hands can be understood as the middle, or *taiyin*-point in a side-to-side transitioning horse stance.

Three other cross-hands family members share a 'this-side-then-that-side' quality.

Shizishou family (Shizi Shou jia 十字手家)

Apparent Closure (& Counter with Push)	(<i>ru feng si bi</i> 如封似閉)
Cross Hands	(<i>shizi shou</i> 十字手)
Step-up, Form Seven Stars	(<i>shang bu qi xing</i> 上步七星)
Squeeze	(<i>ji</i> 擠)



Yang Chengfu in 'Cross Hands' and 'Step-up, Form Seven Stars'

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