

The 37 Essential Forms of Taijiquan (level one)

Master Class

with Master Sam Masich
on ZOOM



Level Two, Session Four 'Fair Maiden' and 'White Snake'

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. 'Fair Maiden'

Fair Maiden Weaves at Shuttles is one of the most challenging forms in the traditional Yang-style Taijiquan Long Form, both because of its complex footwork and because of its method of application. Actually, the correct translation of 'yu nu' (玉女) is 'jade maiden,' a commonly used reference to loveliness, elegance, and a subtle *yin*-like approach. An image used to describe this form is that of a maiden toiling away at one or more weaving looms. She turns this way toward one loom and the that way toward another as she tends to her various projects, lifting the already-woven threads to apply the next ones.

In earlier iterations of 37 Essential Forms work, I have described this family of forms as the 'Turn Body' family as some of the family members—'Turn and Chop Opponent with Fist,' for example—are named this way. The turning body aspect of each of these forms is what holds this family together.

Yu Nü family

Fair Maiden Weaves at Shuttles

Cross Hands

Turn & Chop Opponent with Fist

Turn Body, White Snake Spits out Tongue

Turn to Sweep the Lotus

Single Whip

Yu Nü jia

yu nü chuan suo (玉女穿梭)

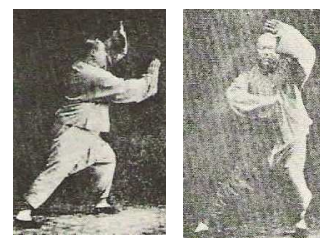
shizi shou (十子手)

zhuan shen pie chui (轉身撇身捶)

zhuan shen bai she tu xin (轉身白蛇吐信)

zhuan shen bai lian tui (轉身擺蓮腿)

dan bian (單鞭)



Yang Chengfu in 'Fair Maiden at Shuttles' and 'Turn Chop with Fist'

2. 'White Snake'

The eponymous 'White Snake Puts Out Tongue' features a finger-tip strike used to attack weak points on the opponent. This approach, called 'dian mai' (點脈) in Chinese, refers to points along the blood vessels and *qi* meridians and, more generally, to sensitive nerve plexuses such as those found in the eyes, the

temples, behind the ears, or under the arms. Due to the highly dangerous potential of these attacks, the secret application of these methods is generally reserved for advanced students.

Bai She family

White Snake Puts Out Tongue

Golden Rooster Stands on One Leg

Palm Thrust

Needle at Sea Bottom

Snake Creeps Down

Bai She jia

bai she tu xin (白蛇吐信)

jin ji du li (金雞獨)

shi zi zhang (十子掌)

hai di zhen (海底針)

she shen xia shi (蛇身下勢)



Yang Chengfu in 'Snake Creeps Down' and 'Needle at Seas Bottom'

3. Stance and transition Substitutions

Stance substitutions

Because of the repeated use of stances in so many forms it is possible to find a connection between otherwise-unrelated forms. This is like building an entirely new house on an old foundation.

As a simple example, by maintaining the bow stance that defines members of the *an* family and also members of the *peng* family, it is possible to shift from any *an* family member to any *peng* family member. Another example can be seen with empty-stances: by maintaining the empty stance nature of, for example, a 'White Crane' family member, one can change the empty leg foot to an on-heel variation and instantly generate members of the 'Raise Hands' or even the 'Repulse Monkey' family.

A caution however, the method is so simple that resorting to it can become an automatic go-to habit. Use this idea sparingly so that laziness and lack of imagination do not set in.

Transition substitutions

Just as stances can provide the common ground for transformation of forms and form families, so too can transitions. The stepping forward transition found in 'Brush Knee' is nearly identical to that found in 'Part Wild Horse's Mane. In using this substitution, a change from *an* family to *peng* family forms also takes place.

'Half-way' transition substitutions

Midway during the transition from almost any form to another—for example, during 'part the horse's mane,' there is a step that closely resembles an empty stance. At this moment it is possible to enter into an empty-stance family or into the kick family. A certain amount of discretion should be used here so that the transformation make sound sense.

