

Dan Docherty: Tai Chi Gladiator



Dan Docherty at Sky Pillar Peak on Wutan Mountain in 1984.

Dan Docherty's forthright and often iconoclastic views on Tai Chi have angered and shocked members of the Tai Chi community in Britain, leading many of them to regard him as a heretic. After a background in Karate he went to Hong Kong in 1975 to serve as an inspector in the Royal Hong Kong Police. While there he trained in Tai Chi Chuan under **Master Cheng Tin-hung**. He represented Hong Kong in both the 1976 and 1980 South East Asian Martial Arts Championships: placing second in the Heavyweight Division in 1976 and winning the Open Weight Championship in 1980. He is a scholar as well as a fighter, having a law degree and a postgraduate diploma in Chinese. In 1983 he published '*Wutan Tai Chi Chuan*', which he co-wrote with Cheng Tin-hung. Dan has travelled extensively in South East Asia and has visited both the Shaolin Temple and Wutan Mountain, where Tai Chi originated. He now teaches Tai Chi in London.

What first got you interested in martial arts?

I had read a little on the subject and knew a few people who had done Judo, then in 1971 when I first saw a karate class at Bellahouston Sports Centre in Glasgow, I jumped at the chance of learning some of the intriguing skills I'd heard of and I signed up the same week.

What style and who were your instructors?

The style at that time was Shotokan karate and my instructor was **Sensei Al Doran**. He was a very competent and enterprising instructor and I owe a lot to the sound basic grounding he gave me. He also brought a lot of Japanese masters up to Glasgow to give courses. Of these **Senseis Enoeda** and **Kato** of Shotokan and later **Sensei Nanbu** of Sankukai particularly impressed me. **Enoeda**, though strict, did not dispense the kind of gratuitous violence that was **Kato's** trademark. We greatly admired them for the power

and precision of their technique. **Nanbu** inspired as much animosity as he did admiration. His unorthodox Sankukai style contained elements of Aikido and Kendo as well as Karate. It was very different to what we'd been doing up to then with lots of sidesteps, spinning techniques and subtle counter-attacks. He'd walk around wearing his tinted glasses and a big smile – very much 'Mr. Nice Guy'. Though he'd beaten **Valera** in competition and coached the French national team he was unacceptable to the Shotokan diehards and this led to a split in our organisation – I stayed with **Al Doran** and Sankukai. **Nanbu** didn't have much English, but one word he used a lot comes back to haunt me from time to time, '*Escape!*'

How far did you get with Karate?

I was awarded my 1st Dan by **Sensei Nanbu** in 1974. Immediately after that I went to Paris on a trip arranged by **Al Doran** and stayed at **Henri Plée's** dojo. At that time **Sensei Toguchi** was giving a course there in Okinawan Goju. In its way his training was as different from Shotokan as **Nanbu's**. Some of the training was very gymnastic and it struck me as a very powerful and practical style.

Did you see any other masters whilst in Paris?

I also trained in **Sensei Nanbu's** dojo with his assistants **Tsukada** and **Kamohara**. There and at **Dominique Valera's** dojo, which I later visited, I was amazed at how fast people were in *kumite* (sparring) compared to what I'd been used to in Glasgow. I also visited the dojo of **Sensei Kase**; I much admired his approach to teaching *Kata* (form).

How did you get interested in Tai Chi?

When reading about the historical background of Karate I often came across references to Tai Chi. Also some of the French karate boys I'd met had learned some. I started to read Tai Chi books, but the problem with the majority of them

Interview by A. D. Davies



During their 1984 visit to Wutan Mountain, Dan and his teacher Cheng Tin Hung (with stick) pose for a photo at the Golden Temple with some colleagues.

was and still is that though they were full of great stories about the feats performed by the masters of antiquity, the self defence techniques shown and the explanations given seemed incredibly ineffective. I then had a couple of Tai Chi lessons from a dancer in Glasgow. She hadn't a clue how to apply the movements for self defence purposes and I couldn't work it out either. I was intrigued but baffled! Given that the movements must have self defence applications, where did the power come from? I knew there must be a missing link.

Is that the reason you went to Hong Kong?

One of the reasons. By that time I'd got my LL.B from Glasgow University, but I'd become far more interested in martial arts than in a legal career and I felt I had to go to the Far East to find what I was looking for. When I saw an ad in the paper for inspectors in the Royal Hong Kong Police I successfully applied and in June '75 flew out to Hong Kong.

How did you get into martial arts in Hong Kong?

Initially I went round some of the clubs. It's very difficult to find someone who is both of good character and possesses a high level of ability in the martial arts. Many martial arts clubs are recruiting grounds for the *Triad* Societies and being in the Police I didn't want to be involved with these types. I did some Goju Ryu and Wing Chun, but I didn't feel either of these systems was right for me personally. Luckily, **George Button**, the Chief Physical Training Instructor at the Police Training School and one of Hong Kong's top Aikido men told me he'd learned some fighting Tai Chi under **Cheng Tin-hung** in Kowloon. I then went to see **Cheng Tin-hung**.

What were your first impressions of Cheng Tin-hung and his training?

He was very cordial, very polite, but very alert. As he had no English and my Cantonese at that time was very limited, he spoke through an interpreter. He took us up to the rooftop where his students were training. No grades, no uniforms; all doing different things – weapons, pushing hands, hand form, self defence techniques – while some were just chatting. **Sifu Cheng** showed us some self defence applications from the hand form after which he invited me to hit him as hard as I could in the stomach to demonstrate

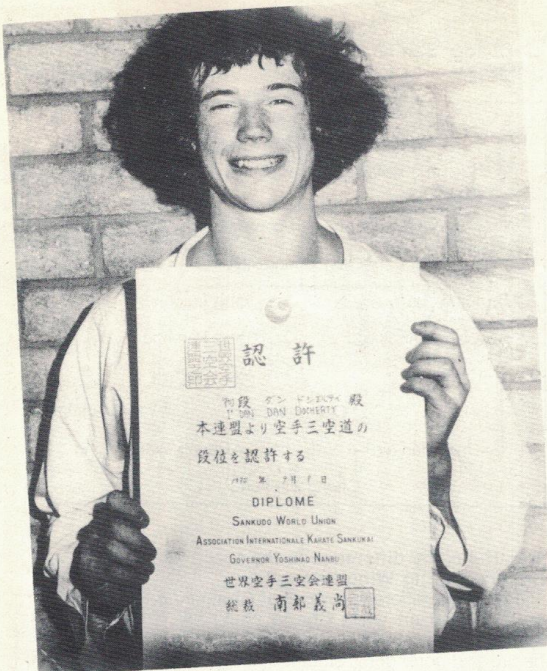
Tai Chi *Nei Gung* (internal strength). He absorbed some of my best *gyaku-tsukis* (karate reverse punches) with no sign of tension or pain. It was then that I began to suspect I had found the missing link that I mentioned earlier. A week later I had totally given up Karate and Wing Chun. In the 12 years since then he has been my only master and his Tai Chi has been my only method.

Tell us a bit more about this Nei Gung method.

This is a secret side of Tai Chi, only taught after the student has gone through a ritual ceremony. We do not use the term *Chi Gung*, because *Chi Gung* tends to suggest that the *Chi* is deliberately directed to different parts of the body; we *never* try to direct the *Chi*. Instead we use the term *Nei Gung*. *Nei* means internal and refers to the fact that the 12 *Yin* and 12 *Yang* internal strength exercises are designed to strengthen the body internally by enhancing the function of the internal organs and the *Chi* and blood circulation. Furthermore they stimulate the central nervous system, forge the will and make the mind more tranquil. The internal strengthening process trains the ability of the body to both withstand the blows of the opponent and to strike the opponent with what the Cantonese call '*Ging*' – focused power. The *Yin* exercises are also particularly effective in improving health and easing cases of insomnia, muscle and bone injuries, nervous tension etc. The *Yang* exercises are mainly for power. Some of the exercises have a self defence application. After about 3 months' internal strength training, when all the *Yin* exercises have been learned, the average student should be able to withstand someone jumping on his abdomen from head height. *I must stress that this kind of training and demonstration should only be learned from a competent and suitably experienced teacher.* Even if you practise other so-called Tai Chi *Chi-Kung* such as 'Holding a Jug' for 40 years you will still be unable to do this. I might add that my teacher has been much sought after by teachers of other styles of both Tai Chi and other martial arts for this very reason.

Is there anything else that distinguished Cheng Tin-hung's method from other styles of Tai Chi?

Two things. Firstly the heavy emphasis he placed on footwork and evasion when using either striking or grappling techniques. The footwork is largely trained in the 'Seven Stars', 'Nine Castles' and 'Da Lu' pushing hands exercises.



Flashback to 1974: Dan proudly displays his shodan certificate awarded him by Master Nanbu.

The evasion is trained in the 'Foo Yang', 'Four Direction', 'Chin Si' (Reeling Silk) and 'Choi Long' (Gather The Wave) pushing hands exercises. I must emphasise pushing hands is *not* self defence, but only a method of training skills that are useful in self defence.

The second difference is that both his own and his student's abilities have been successfully tested in full contact competition and in 'duels'. He has produced many South East Asian Martial Arts Champions. I am talking now about Tai Chi fighters, training only in Tai Chi, fighting opponents from other styles of Chinese kung fu as well as other martial arts. No other Tai Chi master has produced a S.E. Asian Champion. This is why, a few years ago, when they were thinking about introducing this type of contest to China, the Chinese authorities invited **Cheng Tin-hung** to Peking to advise them on rules, training and holding tournaments.

It's also why the Hong Kong Government asked **Cheng Tin-hung** to examine Tai Chi teachers for the Government's Tai Chi morning classes.

Over the past 12 years of Tai Chi practise I have come across many students and teachers of other styles of Tai and have found them able to talk good Tai Chi — stories about their teacher or their teacher's teacher, but when it came down to it they had only a rudimentary knowledge of basic pushing hands and self defence. No internal strength, no evasion, no ability to 'Faai Ging' — strike with focused power. They do not in fact practise Tai Chi Chuan; they practise Dou Fu Chuan — Beancurd Boxing. In other words, because they have only *Yin* and no *Yang*, their fists are like beancurd; soft and soggy.

Is internal strength training enough by itself for fighting purposes?

Although internal strength training is the fundamental prerequisite for practising Tai Chi Chuan as a martial art, it is certainly not enough in itself. Once you've trained an ability you have to learn how and when to use it, so regular practise of the hand form, pushing hands and self defence techniques is essential. Furthermore, like most styles of Kung Fu, Tai Chi Chuan has many punching techniques. If your fist is not tempered, you will injure the hand when punching any of the hard bones of the face. This is as true for Tai Chi as it is for hard style martial arts. So you must restrict yourself

to open hand strikes or you temper the fist by punching sandbags etc. It is also necessary to do some stamina training — this is particularly important when training for full contact competitions where you choice of techniques and targets are limited and you are facing a powerful, trained opponent rather than some beer-bellied loudmouth. The softness of the hand form and of the *Yin* styles of internal strength balance this kind of *Yang* training. If you only do *Yang* training, you are not doing Tai Chi Chuan and may as well go and practise Shaolin boxing.

The essential combat theory of Tai Chi Chuan is to use softness or *Yin* to overcome hardness or *Yang* and to use hardness or *Yang* to overcome softness or *Yin*. So rather than blocking the opponent's attacks we divert or redirect them using evasion and/or footwork at the same time. This is using softness to overcome hardness. The attack has then become 'dead' force and has changed from *Yang* to *Yin*. At this point we must also change from *Yin* to *Yang* by striking (*Yang*) the vital points of our opponent (*Yin*). This is using hardness against softness. In order to train this evasion it is necessary to do a lot of practise on the pushing hands exercises I mentioned earlier.

Most martial artists and all the Tai Chi people I have met would describe Tai Chi as a 'soft' internal martial art. I know a number of Tai Chi practitioners who would regard you as a heretic.

They're only partly correct — on both counts. The term 'Tai Chi' refers to the concept of the universe being composed of the complementary forces of *Yin* and *Yang*. Tai Chi Chuan is therefore a 'Chuan' or martial art which employs this concept. There should therefore be *Yang* training to complement the *Yin* training. If the art is only *Yin*, it is only half an art. If anyone can show me how to hit someone softly sending them flying across the room with a flick of the fingers, I'd willingly pay them a lot of money! During my teacher's visit to the UK in 1986 many teachers of other styles of Tai Chi and of other martial arts took part in the seminars. These Tai Chi teachers had for the most part a high degree of softness — but that was all. One in particular had learned for more than 10 years from the so-called Master of the Five Excellences, **Cheng Man-ching**. This gentleman had been practising Tai Chi for more than 20 years. During one of the seminars he pushed hands with a tall, skinny 17 year old called **Kevin White** who had been learning from me for about nine months. **Kevin** pushed him all over the place. Later this gentleman contacted me with a view to learning internal strength. This indicates that either **Cheng Man-ching** did not know internal strength or, if he did, he didn't teach it to even his long-term students.

As for being a heretic, so at one time was Galileo. The heresy of today is the orthodoxy of tomorrow. If they believe I'm wrong, let them show they can do better.

You don't seem to have a high opinion of Cheng Man-ching; also you seem to be suggesting that a lot of people who are generally accepted as Tai Chi masters have an imperfect knowledge of the art.

I think **Cheng Man-ching** is extremely overrated. He firstly became famous because, as a long-term member of the Kuomintang, he was the tutor to **Soong Mei-ling**, the wife of the then President of Taiwan, **Chiang Kai-shek**. This naturally was of great advantage in making him famous as a Tai Chi teacher. Looking at his books on Tai Chi, I find them verbose and unimpressive; they don't mention internal strength and I believe he had little if any practical fighting experience. In any event his own teacher, **Yang Cheng-fu** was defeated in Peking in the mid-1930s by **Wan Lai-sheng**, a hard stylist. (*Wan is listed in 'Asian Fighting Arts' by Draeger and Smith as practising Tzu-jan Men — Spontaneous Boxing*). I should point out that, as soon as he heard of **Yang's** defeat, **Wu Jin-chuan** of Wu style Tai Chi sought out and defeated **Wan**. At that time **Yang** was about 50 years of age while **Wu** was 13 years older! Funnily enough **Wan** still lives in Peking — teaching Tai Chi!

Yang Cheng-fu died in his early fifties. Looking at surviving pictures of him it is obvious that he was grossly

obese. I believe that this led to him changing the Tai Chi he had learned from his father to suit his lack of mobility. I believe this is why Yang family Tai Chi is deficient in footwork and evasion training. It was feasible for a huge man like **Yang Cheng-fu** to meet opponents head-on without sidestepping, but sooner or later this method was bound to fail.

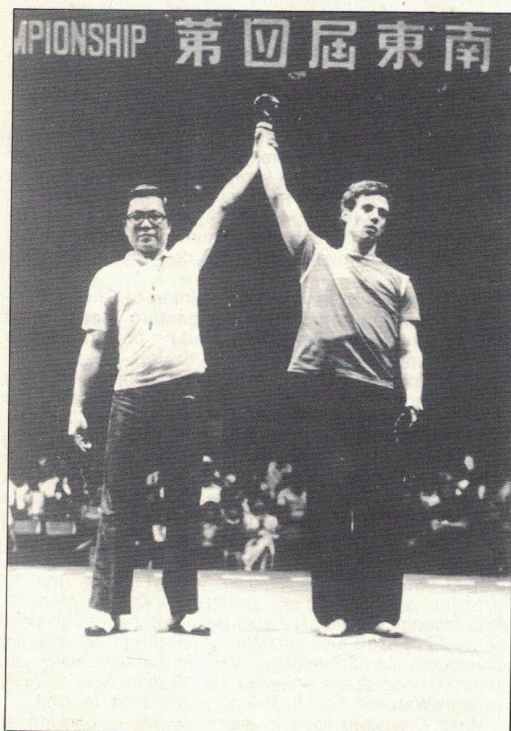
Unfortunately the Wu family system is not what it was either. As the above anecdote shows, **Wu Jin-chuan** maintained a high degree of fighting ability well into his sixties. His son **Wu Kung-yi** was a different case. A few years ago the Wu family unwisely published a book in Chinese on Wu style Tai Chi. As well as including some esoteric writing advocating sexual congress with male and female virgins, the book also contained photos of **Wu Jin-chuan** and his son. It is obvious from the father's deep stances and precise posture that he possessed excellent technique. The postures demonstrated by **Wu King-yi** are high and stilted and really he looks like a sick man.

Tai Chi is not some precious heirloom that has been handed down unchanged from father to son, from generation to generation. To be good at Tai Chi, to be good at anything you must have the commitment to watch, to think and above all to train. Without this no matter whose son you are you just won't have it. I believe later generations of the Yang and Wu lacked this commitment and so the Tai Chi handed down by them is inferior.

Is this why you use the name 'Wutan Tai Chi Chuan' rather than a family name?

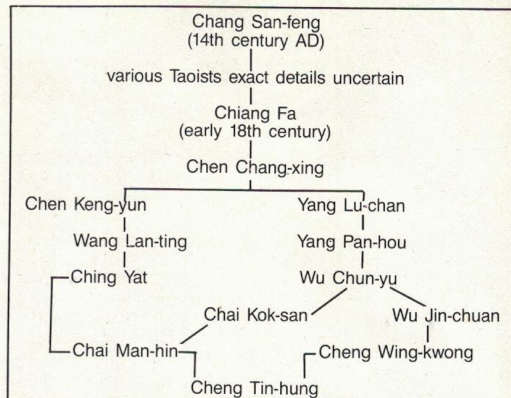
Wutan (or Wudang) Mountain in Hubei Province is the spiritual and historical home of Tai Chi Chuan because that is where the Taoist **Chang San-feng** formulated the art. So in using this name we were trying to get away from the myths and conventions perpetuated by the **Yang, Chen** and **Wu** families and to state that our Tai Chi is the original Tai Chi

Dan was runner-up in the Heavyweight Division of the 1976 South East Asian Martial Arts championship, held in Singapore.



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of **Chang San-feng** from Wutan Mountain. Our own genealogy is as follows:-



Was there any difference in the teaching of Chai Man-hin and Cheng Wing-kwong?

The major difference was that **Chai** could teach Tai Chi as a fighting art while **Cheng** could not. **Cheng Wing-kwong** was a businessman who learned Tai Chi mainly for health and none of his students attained the fighting ability that **Cheng Tin-hung** and his students had. In fact it was **Cheng Wing-kwong** who brought **Chai** to Hong Kong in the first place! On the recommendation of another Tai Chi master he invited **Chai** to Hong Kong to teach his own sons and his nephew, **Cheng Tin-hung**. **Chai's** methods were harsh so only **Cheng Tin-hung** managed to stay the course with him.

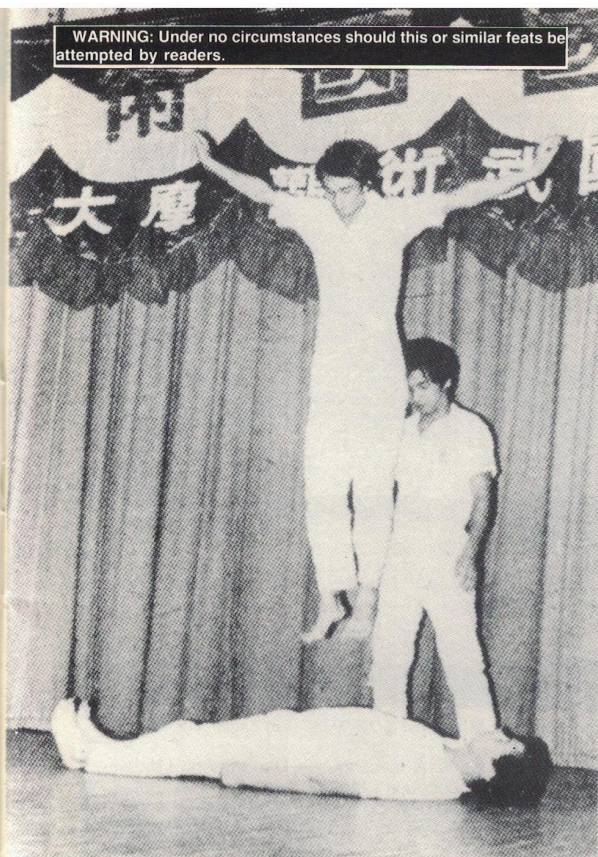
Also **Cheng Wing-kwong** sometimes used to deliberately mislead students. Where he didn't want to teach them a particular technique, rather than simply refusing to teach them, he would either teach them wrongly or teach them something else entirely. As **Cheng Wing-kwong** didn't know the correct names for some of the *Nei Kung* styles and knew few self defence applications, he would get **Cheng Tin-hung** to teach him what he had learned from **Chai**. As a result some of the late **Cheng Wing-kwong's** students have had to ask **Cheng Tin-hung** to show them the real stuff. In general the hand form and basic pushing hands that **Chai** and **Cheng Wing-kwong** taught **Cheng Tin-hung** was similar. Because their transmission of the art came down from two different lines, this is further evidence to show that it was **Yang Cheng-fu** who changed the Yang style.

To be honest though, students of **Cheng Tin-hung** have also been guilty of corrupting what they've been taught. One of his former students who teaches in Australia has made a complete mess of the system. He's not got the weapon forms; the hand form doesn't flow because it is linear like a basic Karate form; the internal strength techniques are wrong and taught in the wrong order; he only teaches very basic pushing hands and incorrect self defence applications. I was told by one of his students that he is regarded as one of Australia's top Tai Chi men! He's even had the temerity to tell his students that he regularly goes back to Hong Kong to visit and learn from **Cheng Tin-hung**! The truth is **Cheng Tin-hung** hasn't seen or heard from him in more than twenty years.

What about Chen style Tai Chi?

Oh yes, this amazing Taoist martial art with techniques such as 'Buddha's Warrior Attendant Pounding Mortar'! Basically it's Shaolin Boxing with a bit of Tai Chi thrown in. I've written on this elsewhere. In brief, some members of the **Chen** clan of Henan Province wanted to cash in on Tai Chi's popularity so they invented a false genealogy and put forward their mish-mash of Chen Family Pao Chui and Tai Chi as the original Tai Chi. China's leading Tai Chi historian

WARNING: Under no circumstances should this or similar feats be attempted by readers.



Dan withstands the force of an assistant jumping on his abdomen in a demonstration of internal strength at the City Hall, Hong Kong in 1976.

Wu Tu-nan exploded this myth in 'A Research into Tai Chi Chuan' (written in Chinese and published in 1986) which describes his visit to the Chen family village in 1917.

You've actually been to the Shaolin Temple and to Wutan Mountain haven't you?

I visited both locations with **Cheng Tin-hung** in May 1984. The Shaolin Temple is a bit of a disappointment. It is very small and, since the issue of a stream of kung fu movies in China, it has become something of a tourist trap. In fact when I was there there was a major refurbishing going on and the statues and murals were being repainted in gaudy colours. A couple of hours spent there is already more than enough. We were shown the imprint of Bodhidharma's shadow on the wall which he was reputed to have sat facing for years in unceasing meditation. This of course is absolute 'twaddle'. We were also shown the small training room where the mighty footstamps of the Shaolin monks had caused indentations in the stone floor. It would be more remarkable, if there were no indentations after so many years of use. The trip to Wutan Mountain was much more worthwhile.

What made it different?

Wutan Mountain is a remote range of 72 peaks in Hubei Province which has been a Taoist retreat since at least the early Tang dynasty (618-906AD). Dotted around these peaks are magnificent temples, nunneries, grottoes and palaces. Furthermore, most of them are in an excellent state of repair as the very remoteness of Wutan Mountain protected it from the depredations of China's turbulent history, up to and including the Cultural Revolution. For our own purposes the trip was made the more worthwhile as we found tablets inscribed by some of the early Ming (1368-1644AD) emperors honouring **Chang San-feng** as a master of the Tao.

Going back to training methods, how did you manage to adapt Tai Chi for competition fighting and how did the training you used for competition fighting differ from ordinary Tai Chi training?

The contests which I took part in were fought on raised platforms, with no ropes. Full contact was allowed to any part of the body except the groin. Throwing, punching, kicking, knee, elbow and head butting techniques were all perfectly legal. Each fight was scheduled for 3 two minute rounds with one minute between each round. The object was to either stop your opponent or outpoint him. In this type of contest you cannot afford to just wait for your opponent to attack as time is strictly limited. Furthermore, when we fought in the South East Asian Martial Arts Contests representing Hong Kong, you must consider that our opponents were highly trained champions representing their own countries and their own individual styles. Fitness and power therefore are vital in this type of competition. Also to become champion you must expect to fight a number of times within a few days.

In both the 1976 and the 1980 South East Asian Martial Arts contests I and one fellow student were the only Tai Chi fighters, not just in the Hong Kong team, but in the whole competition. In our training we used the type of gloves and rules that corresponded with those of the contest and only practised techniques, including throws, that were practical with those gloves on. When sparring one would adopt the methods of other styles such as White Crane, Thai Boxing, Choi Li Fat etc., while the other would counter. We also did a lot of Tai Chi stamina and internal strength training. Between times we'd do the hand form to balance the training and help massage our aching limbs. I also used to practise pushing hands and this came in useful when throwing an opponent from the platform.

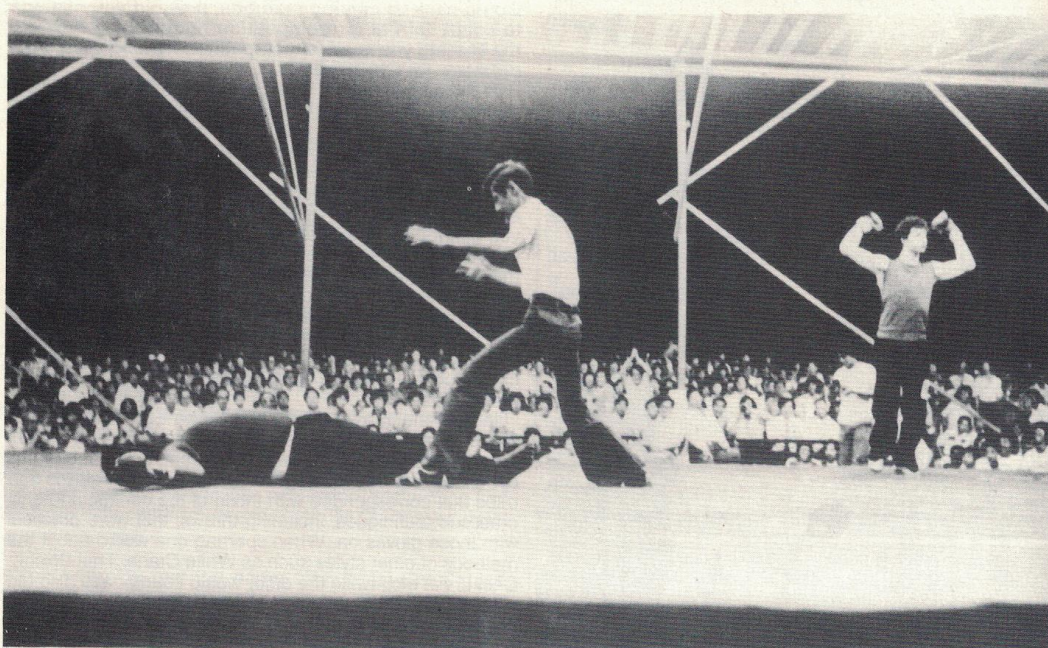
How useful did you find the four years' Karate training you'd done?

It wasn't that helpful. The first time I did full contact sparring - with a much smaller senior student, I got whacked in the face so hard that my nose was pouring with blood. My automatic reaction was to turn round to **Cheng Tin-hung** expecting him to stop the fight and warn my opponent. Instead I got hit again.

What differences did you find between the 1976 and the 1980 South East Asian Martial Arts Championships?

In 1976 I was very raw, with only one year of Tai Chi behind me and so my defence in particular was not that well developed. That was also a particularly vicious competition because the gloves we used were like driving gloves with the fingertips cut off. In my first fight against a hard stylist from Malaysia I got two black eyes, a bleeding nose, puffed lips and heavy bruising from the left hip down to the foot from Thai Boxing kicks. My left foot was so bad I couldn't get a shoe on and I had to have a tetanus shot followed by herbal mudpacks to reduce the swelling. I won the fight by the way! Four days later I stopped my next opponent as well, but lost on points the day after, in the final of the Heavyweight division, to **Lohandran** of Malaysia and **Chi Ke Chuan**. He was fully fit as he'd only had to fight one contest lasting one round before the final. I felt really frustrated because I was sure I could have taken him if I'd been uninjured.

The next South East Asian Martial Arts Championships was held in Malaysia in 1980. This time we used Thai Boxing gloves. In fact the Malaysians had been training with Thai Boxers and they had a top Thai Boxing coach as one of the corner men for their fighters. This time there was a Superheavyweight/Open Weight category for those over 220lbs. I weighed around 190lbs., but, against my teacher's advice, I opted to step up two weight categories to fight in this division as I figured there would be more 'face' to gain and in any case I'd be faster than my opponents. In my first fight against **Roy Pink** of England and **Five Ancestors**, who weighed over 300lbs., I knocked him out in the first round. Then I was in the final against my old friend, **Mr. Lohandran**. I beat him on points in front of his home crowd in Kuala Lumpur. The only other Hong Kong boy to emerge as a



Dan emerged the Open Weight winner at the S.E. Asian championships in 1980. Here he has just K.O'd Roy Pink of England in the first round of their semi-final match.

champion was my fellow student, **Tong Chi-kin** who won the Middleweight title. After all that, I decided not to fight in competition again.

Why would a well-educated man like yourself take part in this kind of bloodbath?

I felt that the only way to test the system and to have credibility as a practitioner of the system was to fight the best people from other styles in full contact competition. Apart from that my teacher asked me to fight . . . and I do come from Glasgow.

What do you think of the popular theory that it's best to start with the other internal martial arts of Hsing i and Pa Kua before going on to Tai Chi?

This is only a fairly recent idea. In the early 19th century, when **Yang Lu-chan** brought Tai Chi Chuan to Peking, Hsing I and Pa Kua were viable independent systems. Since that time, although more and more people learned the individual arts, fewer and fewer learned them in any depth. Partly this was because most teachers will not teach every student 100%. You can't trust all your students equally. Some are heavily involved in other systems so of course you don't want to give them your best stuff which they might later use against you. Also many students are too greedy; even if you could teach them all you know, they'd still want more – 'knowledge is power' is what they believe. This led to some students learning one art then switching to another. Some teachers also, wanting more 'tricks' to show their students, would learn the three arts then tell their students it was necessary to go through the three stages. Furthermore for many Tai Chi people it is necessary to supplement their ineffective Tai Chi with a 'harder' style such as Hsing-I.

The Chinese refer to this kind of person as 'One hundred knives – of which not even one is sharp!' Remember **Yang Lu-chan** was given the nickname 'Invincible Yang' and became chief combat instructor to the Manchu Imperial Guard and he practised and taught only Tai Chi Chuan. I spent nine years in Hong Kong and saw many of the top Kung Fu masters in South East Asia demonstrate their arts. I had the opportunity to learn from any of them. In particular any of those Hong Kong masters would have been delighted to have a police inspector for a student – especially when

I was in the Criminal Investigation Department. I didn't go to anyone else because I feel there is a lot of potential for me to improve and develop within the one complete system. I have neither the time nor the inclination to practice another.

As a practitioner of a Taoist martial art do you regard yourself as a Taoist?

No. I have desires, ambitions and responsibilities therefore I am not a Taoist. Mind you I've seen a Chinese doctor's business card on which is printed 'Dr. X (Taoist)'. I find this extremely funny. You must distinguish the crooks, opportunists and lechers involved in religious Taoism from the Taoist sages. I think many passages of **Lao Tzu** and **Chuang Tzu**, while interesting and entertaining, are not realistic. I'm particularly referring to the concept of *Wu Wei* or non-action. In addition to Taoist philosophy, I like the realism of the 3rd century BC Confucian philosopher **Hsun Tzu** (not to be confused with **Sun Tzu**, author of 'The Art of War').

How important is Tai Chi to you?

There's a Steve Goodman song where the woman asks which one he'd choose if she and B. B. King were both drowning; the answer is 'I ain't never heard you play no blues.' That's how I feel about Tai Chi.

You obviously enjoyed the nine years you spent in the Far East; what made you decide to come back?

In order to progress and fulfil my potential in Tai Chi Chuan, I needed the stimulus of teaching. **Cheng Tin-hung** observed several times that, unless fighters like myself taught the art, it would die as a fighting system. In any case, I never really enjoyed being a police officer in Hong Kong so it wasn't that hard to give it all up. The final factor influencing my decision was that I wanted to do a postgraduate diploma in Chinese at Ealing College in London.

There is no comparable course to this elsewhere and I found the environment in Hong Kong not very conducive to study. I felt I needed a deeper understanding of written Chinese, particularly the grammar, so that I could effectively do independent research and translation. It is an excellent course. In fact it's shown me that a major reason for the confusion surrounding the interpretation of the Tai Chi



Another demonstration of internal strength is performed by Dan Docherty at Cheng Tin-hung's rooftop studio in 1977.

Classics is the poor grammar or complete lack of knowledge of Chinese of those writing on the subject.

If Chinese is interpreted literally, it makes a complete nonsense of the language. For example 'Tai Chi Chuan' can be interpreted literally as 'Supreme Ultimate Fist'. This might suggest that we only use fist techniques and that these techniques are the most wonderful that exist in the martial arts! Sometimes though, the knowledge of Chinese may be very good, but the interpretation will still be wrong because the interpreter's knowledge of Tai Chi is inadequate. Some of the solecisms that have appeared in Tai Chi books and articles over the years must have **Chang San-feng** turning over in his grave!

How practical is Tai Chi Chuan in the street for self defence?

Our Wutan Tai Chi Chuan is effective both at long and short range; with or without weapons. However, as with any other system you must consider the respective abilities of defender and attacker. Certainly it has helped me – and some of my students – out of awkward situations.

You mention weapons; are ancient weapons like the sword, spear and sabre really practical nowadays?

Ancient they may be, but they are not an anachronism. A long umbrella or similar length of wood can be used as a spear, while a shorter piece of wood can be used as a sabre or sword. It's a nonsense if you've studied martial arts for years and are faced with an armed opponent and you can't use such everyday implements when they are to hand. Of the weapons, the spear is the most practical and is my personal favourite.

What are your hopes for the future?

I want to spread our Wutan Tai Chi Chuan around Britain and Europe so that Tai Chi Chuan once again has the reputation of a highly practical martial art and is no longer thought of as just some soft exercise for old ladies and ageing hippies. I want also to further my own and other people's understanding of Tai Chi by research and translation as well as by training and teaching. To that end I hope to be able to produce more books and articles on Tai Chi Chuan.

A. D. Davies is a freelance writer who has been practising martial arts, including various Chinese systems, for the past 15 years.