

Explanation of the Thirteen Movements

The Brennan translation is titled **Understanding how to practice the thirteen dynamics** and is from a group of texts headlined **An Outline of Taiji Theory**. It is an appendix to a compilation on Taiji by Chen Yanlin published in 1943. Link [here](#).

The Wile translation is from the book **Yang Family Secret Transmissions** (1983). It is titled **An explanation of Wang Tsung Yüeh's original introduction**.

The Christensen translation is from the book **Tai Chi – The True History and Principles** (2016). It is actually three separate texts titled **Explaining the mind-set of the practice of the thirteen movements**, **Poem of sparring** (the last five lines), and **A discussion of the mind-set of practicing** They are from the Li family manual, in part attributed to Li Helin and Li Zhong. For further details, I suggest you buy the book.

The Liang translation is from the book **T'ai Chi Ch'uan For Health and Self-Defense** (1974,1977). It is titled **The Mental Elucidation of the Thirteen Postures**. He attributes it to Wang Chung Yueh of the Ming Dynasty

The Liao translation is from the book **T'ai Chi Classics** (1977,1990). It is titled **Treatise by Master Wu Yu-hsiang (1812-80)**.

I have copied the Chinese text from Brennans website and put it at the end of this document. It is in three parts, same as the division found in Christensen's translation.

Wile's translation has the short part about sparring at the end. I moved it up and put it next to the corresponding passages of the other translations for easier comparison.

Paul Brennan: Understanding how to practice the thirteen dynamics	Douglas Wile: An explanation of Wang Tsung Yüeh's original introduction	Lars Bo Christensen: Explaining the mind-set of the practice of the thirteen movements	TT Liang: The Mental Elucidation of the Thirteen Postures	Waysun Liao Treatise by Master Wu Yu-hsiang
Use mind to move the energy. You must get the energy to sink. It is then able to collect in the bones.	By moving the ch'i with the mind and directing it to sink, it is able to permeate the bones.	Move qi with the mind, be sure to make it sink down. Then it can be gathered into the bones.	Let the mind direct the ch'i so that it sinks deeply and steadily and can permeate the bones.	Use your mind to exercise your internal energy. Let the internal energy sink and be attached to your body. Eventually, the internal energy can be condensed into the bone marrow.

Use energy to move your body. You must get the energy to be smooth. Your body can then easily obey your mind.	Let ch'i circulate throughout the body freely and the body will be obedient to the mind	Let qi move the body, this will make all well Then you can easily follow your mind.	Let the ch'i circulate through the entire body freely and without hindrance so that the body will follow the dictates of the mind.	Drive the internal energy to move your entire body; make certain that the internal energy circulates smoothly and completely. Eventually, the internal energy can follow the direction of your will.
If you can raise your spirit, then you will be without worry of being slow or weighed down. Thus it is said [in the Thirteen Dynamics Song]: "Your whole body will be nimble and your headtop will be pulled up as if suspended."	If you can raise your spirit, there need be no fear of sluggishness or heaviness. This is what is meant by holding the head as if suspended from above	If the spirit can rise up, then there will be no mistakes due to being slow or heavy. This is called "carry the head as if suspended from above"	When you feel as if your head were suspended by a thread from above, your spirit of vitality will be raised and the effects of obtuseness and clumsiness will be no more.	If essence and spirit can be raised, then there is no need for concern with being slow and awkward; this is called extending and suspending the crown point.
The mind must perform alternations nimbly, and then you will have the qualities of roundness and liveliness. Thus it is said [also in the Song]: "Pay attention to the alternation of empty and full."	Our feelings must become supremely sensitive in order for there to be complete and lively enjoyment. This is what is meant by the transformations of full and empty.	The intention and qi must interact swiftly, then there will be delightfully round and lively movements. This is what we call "alternating movements between empty and full".	The mind and the ch'i must respond ingeniously and efficaciously to the exchange of substantial and insubstantial so as to develop an active and harmonious tendency.	If mind and internal energy can be freely exchanged, then there is much satisfaction in performing smoothly and dynamically; this is called exchanging negative and positive.
When issuing power, you must sink and relax, concentrating it in one direction.	When issuing energy one must sink, relax, be calm and concentrated in one direction.	When issuing power, you must be relaxed and calm, focusing on the opponent.	When attacking, the energy should be sunk deeply, completely relaxed, and concentrated in one direction.	When transferring internal power, it should be sunk, attached, relaxed, and completed. The power should also be concentrated in one direction.
Your posture must be upright and comfortable, bracing in all directions.	Our posture should be erect and relaxed, able to	When standing you must be centered and upright, calm and relaxed, being the	When standing, the body should be erect and	When performing, you should be centered, balanced, stable, and

	control the eight directions.	strong centre of the eight directions.	relaxed able to sustain an attack from any direction.	comfortable. You should also control the eight directions.
Move energy as though through a winding-path pearl, penetrating even the smallest nook (meaning that the energy is everywhere in the body).	Directing the ch'i is like threading a pearl with nine bends in the hole. There is nowhere it does not penetrate.	Move qi like in a nine swirled pearl – let there be no part it does not reach. Meaning that it reaches the entire body	To direct the ch'i is like threading a pearl with nine crooked paths; there is no hollow that it does not penetrate.	Circulating your internal energy is just like guiding a thread through a nine-channeled pearl. Then nothing can block the circulation
Wield power like tempered steel, so strong there is nothing tough enough to stand up against it.	When energy is set in motion it is like steel tempered a hundred times. What resistance will it fail to defeat?	Move the energy like folding steel a hundred times [such steel] is tough and will not break, will it?	The energy when mobilized is like steel refined a hundred times over. There is no stiff adversary who cannot be overthrown.	Exercising your internal power is just like refining metal into the purest steel. Then nothing can <i>not</i> be destroyed.
The shape is like a falcon capturing a rabbit. The spirit is like a cat pouncing on a mouse.	You should appear like a falcon seizing a hare, with the spirit of a cat catching a rat.	Your body has the appearance of an eagle seizing a rabbit. Your spirit must be like a cat catching a mouse.	The appearance is like a hawk seizing a rabbit; the spiritual insight is like a cat catching a rat.	In performing the forms, you should be like the eagle which glides serenely on the wind, but which can swoop instantly to pluck a rabbit from the ground. Your mind should be centered like the placid cat – peaceful but able to respond instantly to the scurrying mouse.
In stillness, be like a mountain, and in movement, be like a river.	In stillness be like a great mountain; in movement like a mighty river	Be still like a mountain peak and move like a flowing river.	In resting, be still as a mountain peak; in moving, act like the current of a great river.	When in stillness you should be as the mountain. When in motion you should move like the water of the river.
Store power like drawing a bow. Issue power like loosing an arrow.	Store energy like drawing a bow; release it like shooting an arrow.	Store the energy like bending a bow. Release the energy like releasing an arrow.	To store up energy is like drawing a bow; to release energy is like shooting an arrow.	When condensing the internal power, it should be like the pulling of a bow; when projecting the internal power, it should be

				like the shooting of an arrow.
Within curving, seek to be straightening. Store and then issue.	Seek the straight in the curved; store first and then issue.	Aim straight in the middle of the arch, build up and let go.	Seek the straight from the curved; reserve energy before releasing it.	In T'ai Chi movement, follow the curve to be aware of the straight line. In internal exercise, reserve the energy for transferring the power
Power comes from the spine. Step according to your body's adjustments.	Power issues from the back; our steps must follow the body.	The force releases from the back, the steps follow when the body shifts.	The energy is released from the spine. The changing of steps must be in accordance with the movements of the body.	Transfer of power comes from the spine. Change of position follows the movement of your body.
To gather is to release. Disconnect but stay connected.	To withdraw is to attack and to attack is to withdraw. After withdrawing reconnect again.	Gather then release it, reconnect when connection is broken.	To withdraw is to attack; to attack is to withdraw. The energy is severed and again rejoined.	Therefore, in T'ai Chi "drawing in" leads to "projecting out"; "interruption" leads to "connection"
In the back and forth [of the arms], there must be folding. In the advance and retreat [of the feet], there must be variation.	In moving to and fro use "fold up"; in advancing and retreating use turns and changes.	When moving back and forth there must be a continuous connection. When advancing and retreating there must be constant shifts.	When moving to and fro, "folding up" technique is to be applied; when advancing and retreating, it is necessary to turn the body and change the steps.	When you move in and out, your entire body acts like an accordion, folding and unfolding. When you move forward and backward, your stance changes in a varied, dynamic manner.
Extreme softness begets extreme hardness. Your ability to be nimble lies in your ability to breathe.	From the greatest softness comes the greatest hardness. From proper breathing comes sensitivity and liveliness.	First be extremely soft then extremely hard. If you are able to breathe freely then you can be agile.	From the flexible and yielding you will arrive at the most in flexible and unyielding. If you can breathe correctly, your body will become active and alert.	In T'ai Ci, being very soft and pliable leads to being extremely hard and strong. Command of proper breathing techniques leads to command of free and flexible movement.
		The Master replied: "It is difficult to explain. This is		

(Only Christensen has this passage)	<i>(Only Christensen has this passage)</i>	the nature of qi: It is exceedingly great and exceedingly strong. You cultivate it by being honest and fair, and harming no one. It is in everything between heaven and earth. That is what qi is.	<i>(Only Christensen has this passage)</i>	<i>(Only Christensen has this passage)</i>
By nurturing energy with integrity, it will not be corrupted. By storing power in crooked parts, it will be in abundant supply.	The ch'i should be properly cultivated and not damaged. Energy should be stored by rounding and there will always be surplus.	Qi is cultivated by being honest and fair and harming no one. There will be a surplus of strength if it is stored in the curve.	The ch'i should be cultivated naturally and harmoniously so as to avoid ill effects. The energy should be reserved slightly [by bowing the limbs somewhat] so that there is a surplus in order to avoid exhaustion	Cultivate internal energy in a direct way only, and you will do yourself no harm. Store internal power in an indirect way only, and you will build great reserves.
The mind makes the command, the energy is its flag, and the waist is its banner.	The mind is the commander, the ch'i a flag and the waist a banner.	The mind is the commander, qi is the banner.	The mind is the commander; the ch'i is the flag; the waist is the banner.	In transferring power, your mind acts like a banner, internal energy acts like a flag, and your waist acts like a pennant
First strive to open up, then strive to close up, and from there you will be able to attain a refined subtlety.	First seek expansion and later contraction; then you will arrive at impeccable technique.	First strive to be open and extended, later strive to be more compact, Then you can reach a high level where every detail is integrated	At first seek open and expanded postures, later seek to make them close and compact so that a perfectly delicate and fine status will be attained.	In perfecting your forms, begin with large and extended movements, which, with time, will become compact and concentrated,
It is also said: If he takes no action, I take no action, but once he takes even the slightest action, I have already acted.	It is also said that if the opponent does not move, you do not move. When the opponent makes the slightest move, you move first	If the other does not move, I do not move. If the other moves the slightest, I move first.	If your opponent does not move, you do not move. At his slightest stir, you have already anticipated it and moved beforehand.	Also it is said: If there is no motion, you will remain still. If there is even a slight change, you have already moved accordingly.

<p>The power seems to be relaxed but not relaxed, about to express but not yet expressing. Although the power finishes, the intent of it continues</p>	<p>Your energy seems relaxed but is not relaxed, about to expand but not yet expanded. Even when energy is released, mental continuity is maintained.</p>	<p>The strength seems relaxed but it is not. It seems about to extend, but it is not. The strength is held back but the intention is not.</p>	<p>The energy appears relaxed and slackened but is in reality powerful and firmly rooted. The arms are ready to stretch but not to their fullest extent. The energy may be broken off [i.e. discharged], but the mind-intent remains.</p>	<p>Internal power should remain in a state of equilibrium between relaxed and not-yet-relaxed. Even if internal power is interrupted, the mind should remain in continuous action</p>
<p>It is also said: First in the mind, then in the body.</p>	<p>It is also said that things are first in the mind and later in the body.</p>	<p>It is also said: In the mind first, then in the body.</p>	<p>[It is also said] The mind is the leader and the body the follower.</p>	<p>Also is it said: First you should exercise your mind, then discipline your body.</p>
<p>With your abdomen relaxed, energy sinks into your bones. Spirit comfortable, body calm – at every moment be mindful of this.</p>	<p>The body should be relaxed and the ch’i will permeate the bones. The spirit should be open and the body calm.</p>	<p>Relax the belly and gather qi into the bones. The spirit can extend when the body is quiet. Carve this into your mind.</p>	<p>The abdomen is completely relaxed, enabling the ch’i to penetrate the bones; the spirit of vitality is at rest and the body is tranquil, permitting you to heed the intent of your mind.</p>	<p>Relax your abdomen and let internal energy condense into your bone marrow. Make your spirit peaceful and your body calm. Pay attention to your mind at all times.</p>
<p>Always remember: if one part moves, every part moves, and if one part is still, every part is still.</p>	<p>At all times bear in mind and consciously remember that as soon as one part of the body moves the whole body moves; and as soon as one part is still the whole body is still.</p>	<p>Be sure to remember that as soon as you start moving, the whole body moves, and once you are still all is still.</p>	<p>Always remember that once you act, everything moves, and once you stand still, all is tranquil.</p>	<p>Bear in mind that once you move, everything should be in motion; When you are still, everything should be in stillness.</p>
<p>As the movement leads back and forth, energy sticks to your back and gathers in your spine. Inwardly bolster spirit and outwardly show ease.</p>	<p>Pushing and pulling, back and forth, the ch’i adheres to the back and permeates the spine. Inwardly strengthen your vital spirit and outwardly give the appearance of calm and ease.</p>	<p>Moving back and forth the qi gathers in the back, store it in the bones. Inside make the spirit firm, outside appear easy and relaxed.</p>	<p>When you push and pull, withdraw and attack, your ch’i adheres to the back of your body and is gathered into the spine. Inwardly you strengthen your spirit of vitality; outwardly you appear peaceful and quiet.</p>	<p>When practicing Push Hands, as you move forward and backward the internal energy should attach to your back and condense into your spinal column. Your spirit should be controlled internally; externally you should</p>

				appear calm and comfortable.
Step like a cat and move energy as if drawing silk.	Step like a cat; move the energy like reeling silk from a cocoon.	Step like a cat walking, move energy like reeling silk.	Take steps like a cat walking; mobilize the energy as if reeling silk from a cocoon.	When changing position, you should move like a cat. Exercising the internal power is like the gentle reeling of silk.
Throughout your body, your mind should be on the spirit rather than on the energy, for if you are fixated on the energy, your movement will become sluggish. Whenever your mind is on the energy, there will be no power, whereas if you ignore the energy and let it take care of itself, there will be pure strength.	The attention of you whole being should be on the spirit and not on the ch'i. If it is on the ch'i there will be blocks. Those whose attention is on the ch'i have no power; those whose attention is not on the ch'i achieve essential hardness.	Have your complete attention on the spirit, not on the qi. If it is on the qi it will stagnate. When there is qi there is no need to use force. If there is no qi there is only hardness.	If you pay full attention to your spirit and vitality and ignore your breathing, your striking force will be as strong as pure steel. If you pay attention only to your breathing, your blood circulation will be impeded and your striking force will be inactive and ineffective.	Your entire body should be controlled by the mind and spirit. Do not attempt to control your body solely by breathing, because this will make your movements slow and plodding. Controlling the body by breathing yields no internal power; it is only by avoiding such error that you can develop the purest and strongest internal power.
The energy is like a wheel and the waist is like an axle.	Ch'i is like a wheel and the waist like an axletree.	Qi is like a wheel, the waist is the axle.	The ch'i is like a cartwheel; the waist is like an axletree.	Internal power should be likened to the spinning of a wheel. The waist turns like the axle of a wheel in motion.

十三勢行功心解

以心行氣。務令沉着。乃能收斂入骨。以氣運身。務令順遂。乃能便利從心。精神能提得起。則無遲重之虞。所謂頂頭懸也。意氣須換得靈。乃有圓活之妙。所謂變轉虛實也。發勁須沉着鬆淨。專主一方。立身須中正安舒。支撐八面。行氣如九曲珠。無往不利。（氣遍身軀之謂）運勁如百煉鋼。無堅不摧。形如搏兔之鵠。神如捕鼠之貓。靜如山岳。動如江河。蓄勁如開弓。發勁如放箭。曲中求直。蓄而後發。力由脊發。步隨身換。收即是放。斷而復連。往復須有摺疊。進退須有轉換。極柔軟。然後極堅剛。能呼吸。然後能靈活。氣以直養而無害。勁以曲蓄而有餘。心為令。氣為旗。腰為纛。先求開展。後求緊湊。乃可臻於縝密矣。

又曰。彼不動。己不動。彼微動。己先動。勁似鬆非鬆。將展未展。勁斷意不斷。

又曰。先在心。後在身。腹鬆氣沉入骨。神舒體靜。刻刻在心。切記一動無有不動。一靜無有不靜。牽動往來氣貼背。而斂入脊骨。內固精神。外示安逸。邁步如貓行。運勁如抽絲。全身意在精神。不在氣。在氣則滯。有氣者無力。無氣者純剛。氣若車輪。腰如車軸。