

# Zhang San Feng: Treatise on Taijiquan

Even though Zhang San Feng probably did not write this, it is often ascribed to him, and I choose to honor that tradition.

The Brennan translation is titled **The Taiji Boxing Treatise** 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 translation concludes with these words: An original note says: “This relates to the writings of Zhang Sanfeng of Mt. Wudang. He wanted all the heroes in the world to live long and not merely gain skill.”

The Wile translation is from the book **Yang Family Secret Transmissions** (1983). It is titled **Yang Lu-ch’an’s Commentary to the T’ai-chi ch’üan Classic**. You will not find the commentaries here, for those you will have to buy the book. Before the actual translation it says: “This is a transmission of Master Chang San-feng of the Wutang Mountains. He desired longevity for all the worthy men of the world and not simply that they practice the superficial techniques of the martial arts”.

The Christensen translation is from the book **Tai Chi – The True History and Principles** (2016). It is actually two texts titled **Treatise of the Thirteen Movements**, and **Explaining the name of the thirteen movements**. They are from the Li family manual, dated 1632 and in part attributed to Li Chunmao. For further details you need to 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 **T’ai Chi Ch’uan Classic - Chang San Feng 13<sup>th</sup> Century**.

The Liao translation is from the book **T’ai Chi Classics** (1977,1990). It is titled **Treatise by Master Chang San-feng (ca. 1200 C.E.)**

I have copied the original Chinese text from Brennans website and put it at the end of this document. It is in two parts, same as the division found in Christensen’s translation. Wile’s translation does not have the second part as a classic as such, but its content and ideas are still extensively covered in the book.

<b>Paul Brennan: The Taiji Boxing Treatise</b>	<b>Douglas Wile: The T’ai-chi ch’üan Classic</b>	<b>Lars Bo Christensen: Treatise of the Thirteen Movements</b>	<b>TT Liang: T’ai Chi Ch’uan Classic</b>	<b>Waysun Liao Treatise by Master Chang San-feng</b>
Once there is any movement, your entire body should be nimble and alert. There especially needs to be connection from movement to movement.	As soon as one moves, the entire body should be light and sensitive and all its parts connected.	Once you start to move the whole body must be nimble and agile and in particular the moves must be connected and continuous	In every movement the entire body should be light and agile and all of its parts connected like a string of pearls	Once you begin to move, the entire body must be light and limber. Each part of your body should be connected to every other part.

Energy should be roused and spirit should be collected within.	The Ch'i should be roused and the spirit gathered within	The qi should surge and the spirit should work inside	The ch'i should be stimulated and the spirit of vitality should be retained internally	The internal energy should be extended, vibrated like the beat of a drum. The spirit should be condensed in toward the center of your body.
Do not allow there to be cracks or gaps anywhere, pits or protrusions anywhere, breaks in the flow anywhere.	Do not allow gaps; do not allow bulges or hollows; do not allow discontinuities.	Do not allow there to be imperfections anywhere. Do not allow there to be high and low anywhere Do not allow there to be intermittencies anywhere.	There should be neither deficiency nor excess, neither hollows nor projection, neither severance nor splice	When performing T'ai Chi, it should be perfect; allow no defect. The form should be smooth, with no unevenness, and continuous, allowing no interruptions.
Starting from your foot, issue through your leg, directing it at your waist, and expressing it at your fingers. From foot through leg through waist, it must be a fully continuous process, and whether advancing or retreating, you will then be able to catch the opportunity and gain the upper hand.	The root is in the feet, energy issues up through the legs, is controlled by the waist and is expressed in the hands and fingers. From the feet to the legs to the waist should be one complete flow of ch'i. One will then be able to seize the opportunities and occupy the superior position	The root is in the feet. Issue from the legs. Direct in the waist, apply in the hands and fingers. From the feet to the waist all must be one continuous qi. By moving back and forth you gain the [forward flowing] momentum [of a movement] in the pivotal point.	The energy is rooted in the feet, develops in the legs, is directed by the waist and moves up to the fingers. The feet, legs and waist must act as one so that when advancing and retreating you will obtain a good opportunity and a superior position	The internal energy, ch'i, roots at the feet, then transfers through the legs and is controlled from the waist, moving eventually through the back to the arms and fingertips. When transferring the ch'i from your feet to your waist, your body must operate as if all the parts were one; this allows you to move forward and backward freely with control of balance and position.
If your body easily falls into disorder, the problem must be in your waist and legs, so look for it there.	If one is unable to seize opportunities and gain the superior position, the body will be scattered and in confusion. Look for the weakness in the waist and the legs.	When the momentum is not achieved in the pivotal point the body is scattered and disordered. The mistake is to be found in the waist and legs.	If you fail to gain these advantages, your body will be in a state of disorder and confusion. The only way to correct this fault is by adjusting your legs and waist.	Failure to do this causes loss of control of the entire body system. The only cure for such a problem is an examination of the stance.

<p>This is always so, regardless of the direction of the movement, be it up, down, forward, back, left, right. And in all of these cases, the problem is a matter of your intent and does not lie outside of you.</p>	<p>The same is true for above and below, front and back, left and right. All of this has to do with the mind and not with externals.</p>	<p>Whether above or below, front or back, left or right this is all so. All this is intention and not external.</p>	<p>The same principle applies to upward and downward, forward and backward, left and right. All the movements are to be directed by the consciousness within rather than the appearance without.</p>	<p>Application of these principles promotes the flowing T'ai Chi movement in any direction: forward, backward, right side, and left side. In all of this, you must emphasize the use of your mind in controlling your movements, rather than the mere use of external muscles</p>
<p>With an upward comes a downward, with a forward comes a backward, and with a left comes a right. If your intention wants to go upward, then harbor a downward intention, like when you reach down to lift up an object. You thereby add a setback to the opponent's own intention, thus he cuts his own root and is defeated quickly and certainly.</p>	<p>If there is an above, there must be a below; if there is a fore, there must be a rear and if there is a left, there must be a right. If the intention is to rise one must pay attention to below. If you want to lift something, you must apply the root will be severed, and its destruction will be swift and inevitable</p>	<p>There is up and down, there is left and right. If you want to go up, then place a downwards intention. If you want to make someone come up then you must also have an intention to make them come down, this will certainly make themselves break and ruin their root at once.</p>	<p>When attacking from above you must not forget below; when striking from the left you must pay attention to the right; and when advancing you must have regard for retreating. If an attack is proposed upward, the initial intent must be downward. If you want to pull something upward, you must first push downward, causing the root to be severed and the object immediately toppled.</p>	<p>You should also follow the T'ai Chi principle of opposites: when you move upward, the mind must be aware of down; when moving forward, the mind also thinks of moving back; when shifting to the left side, the mind should simultaneously notice the right side – so that if the mind is going up, it is also going down Such principles relate to T'ai Chi movement in the same way that uprooting an object, and thereby destroying its foundation, will make the object fall sooner.</p>

<p>Empty and full must be distinguished clearly. In each part there is a part that is empty and a part that is full.</p>	<p>Full and Empty should be clearly distinguished. Any given point has the potential for full or empty and the whole body has this dual aspect: full and empty.</p>	<p>Empty and full should be clearly distinguished. Each movement has both empty and full in it. In all the movements there is always this; both empty and full.</p>	<p>The insubstantial and the substantial should be clearly discriminated. Each single part of the body has both a substantial and insubstantial aspect at any given time and the body in its entirety also has an insubstantial and a substantial aspect.</p>	<p>Besides clearly separating the positive and negative from one another, you should also clearly locate the substantial and insubstantial. When the entire body is integrated with all parts connected together, it becomes a vast connection of positive and negative energy units.</p>
<p>Throughout your body, as the movement goes from one section to another there has to be connection. Do not allow the slightest break in the connection.</p>	<p>All the joints of the body should be connected without permitting the slightest break</p>	<p>The joints of the whole body are linked together, let there not be the slightest disconnection</p>	<p>All the joints in the body are to be threaded together without the slightest severance.</p>	<p>Each positive and negative unit of energy should be connected to every other unit and permit no interruption among them.</p>
<p>Long Boxing: it is like a long river flowing into the wide ocean, on and on ceaselessly...</p>		<p>One name for the Long [set of] Boxing[movements] is The Thirteen Movements Long Boxing is continuously moving like a long river or the great ocean.</p>	<p>T'ai Chi Ch'uan is also called Cnang Ch'uan (Long Boxing) because its consecutive movements resemble the stream of a long river which rolls on ceaselessly.</p>	<p>In Long Forms your body should move like the rhythmic flow of water on a river or like the rolling waves of the ocean</p>
<p>[The thirteen dynamics are:] warding off, rolling back, pressing, pushing, plucking, rending, elbowing, and bumping – which relate to the eight trigrams:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">☰☷☱☴</p> <p style="text-align: center;">☵☶☳☴</p> <p style="text-align: center;">☰☷☱☴</p> <p>and advancing, retreating,</p>		<p>The Thirteen Movements are: Ward Off, Step, press, Push, Pull Down, Break, Elbow and Shoulder – these are the Eight Trigrams. Step forward, step back, look left, gaze right and stand still in the centre – these are the Five Phases, together they make up the thirteen movements.</p>	<p>Ward Off, Roll Back, Press, Push, Pull, Split, Elbow-Stroke, and Shoulder-Stroke in T'ai Chi Ch'uan are equivalent to <i>Chien, Kun, K'an, Li, Hsun, Chen, Tui, and Ken</i> in the "Eight Trigrams". The four first postures represent the four cardinal points [i.e. South, North, West, and East]. The second four postures</p>	<p>In the Long Form, Ward Off, Rollback, Press, Push, Roll-Pull, Split, Elbow, and Lean Forward are called <i>the forms of the Eight Diagram (Pakua)</i>, the movements encompassing the directions. In stance, moving forward, backward, to the right side, to the left side, and staying in the center are called the Five-</p>

<p>stepping to the left, stepping to the right, and staying in the center – which relate to metal, wood, water, fire, and earth: the five elements. Warding off, rolling back, pressing, and pushing correspond to ☴, ☳, ☱, and ☶ in the four principle compass directions [meaning simply that these are the primary techniques]. Plucking, rending, elbowing, and bumping correspond to ☱, ☳, ☱, and ☶ in the four corner directions [i.e. are the secondary techniques]. Advancing, retreating, stepping to the left, stepping to the right, and staying in the center correspond to the five elements of metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. These combined [8+5] are called the Thirteen Dynamics.</p>		<p>Ward Off, Step, Press and Push refer to the trigrams The Pit, Light, Thunder and Happiness, and these are the four directions. Pull Down, Break, Elbow and Shoulder refer to the trigrams The Masculine, The Feminine, Stillness and Yielding, and these are the four diagonals. Forward, backward, left and right and the centre refer to Metal, Wood, Water, Fire and Earth.</p>	<p>represent the four corners [i.e. Southwest, Northeast, Southeast, and Northwest]. The Five Attitudes – Advance, Retreat, Look to the Left, Gaze to the Right, and Central Equilibrium – in T'ai Chi Ch'uan are equivalent to the Five Elements of Chinese philosophy: Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth. Thus, the Eight Postures plus the Five Attitudes are generally termed the T'ai Chi Thirteen Postures.</p>	<p>Style Steps. Ward Off, Rollback, Press and Push are called <i>the four cardinal directions</i>. Roll-Pull, Split, Elbow, and Lean Forward are called <i>the four diagonals</i>. Forward, backward, to the left side, to the right side, and center are called <i>metal, wood, fire, water, and earth</i>, respectively. When combined, these forms are called <i>the thirteen original styles of T'ai Chi</i>.</p>
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一舉動周身俱要輕靈。尤須貫串。氣宜鼓盪。神宜內斂。無使有缺陷處。無使有凸凹處。無使有斷續處。其根在脚。發於腿。主宰於腰。形於手指。由脚而腿而腰。總須完整一氣。向前退後。乃能得機得勢。身便散亂。其病必於腰腿求之。上下前後左右皆然。凡此皆是意。不在外面。有上即有下。有前則有後。有左則有右。如意要向上。即寓下意。若將物掀起而加以挫之之意。斯其根自斷。乃壞之速而無疑。虛實宜分清楚。一處有一處虛實。周身節節貫串。無令絲毫間斷耳。

長拳者。如長江大海。滔滔不絕也。搯、捋、擠、按、採、捌、肘、靠。此八卦也。進步、退步、左顧、右盼、中定。此五行也。搯、捋、擠、按。即乾、坤、坎、離。四正方也。採、捌、肘、靠。即巽、震、兌、艮。四斜角也。進、退、顧、盼、定。即金、木、水、火、土、也。合之則為十三勢也。

原注云。此係武當山張三丰祖師遺論。欲天下豪傑延年益壽。不徒作技藝之末也。