

楊氏老譜秘傳八法秘訣
Yang-style Old Family Manual:
8 Methods Oral Secrets

A New Translation, Summer 2016
Lee Fife

Dedicated to Helen Tartar
Grateful for your inspiration
Sorry you didn't get to see the final result

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Oral Secrets of the Eight Methods

This “manual” has short verses for each of the 8 core jins of taijiquan: wardoff, rollback, etc. Each verse begins with the same question: <name of jin>: how to explain its meaning? And then proceeds to answer the question in the following seven lines.

The poems all follow the *wulu* form of Classical Chinese poetry. *Wulu* poems are rigorously structured: they must have 8 lines, each of 5 characters, and follow specific rhyming and tonal patterns. (There are other forms in the same family with different numbers of characters, e.g., 8 lines of 6 characters or 8 lines of 7 characters.) Educated people were expected to be able to compose *wulu* poems and Confucian exams included questions that had to be answered in a variety of Classical Chinese poetry forms.

Some of the most famous poems in Chinese culture are in *wulu* form. Here’s one by the famous Tang dynasty poet Li Bai called *Seeing Off A Friend*.

李白 送友人	Li Bai Seeing Off A Friend
青山橫北郭 白水遶東城 此地一為別 孤蓬萬里征 浮雲游子意 揮手自茲去 蕭蕭班馬鳴	Green hills across the northern walls Pure water spirals east about the town This ground is the place of our departing A dandelion ... thousands of miles ... your journey Drifting as the clouds ... a wandering child I feel The sun is setting and I think of my old friend Waving hands as now you go Dejected, dejected - your team of horses cries

(translation by [Frank Watson](#), (c) 2013)

The form itself is challenging: it requires real skill to convey meaning in parallel phrases each of five characters that follow the rhyme and tone rules. Many of the original taijiquan family teachings were probably in simpler forms: something that could be easily memorized, chanted in groups, and didn’t require particular literary sophistication to create. The creation of these “oral secrets” in *wulu* form is, beyond the content itself, a political and cultural statement.

Yang Lucan, first generation founder, was born poor and lived as an indentured servant. Even as he achieved fame later in life, martial arts were still considered a lower class activity. The creation of these verses, even apart from details of the content, was intrinsically a statement conferring status and legitimacy, putting the oral traditions into a context reserved for high art

and profound spiritual and philosophical teaching.

Beyond the implied politics of these verses, the form itself poses challenges for understanding and translation. Much of the meaning has to be left implied beyond the five characters of each line. And there's the question of how to break up the verse: which lines go together? Clearly the first line stands by itself since each verse begins by asking what is the meaning of the relevant jin. But, the subsequent lines could be broken up various ways: e.g, the 2nd line might provide a summary answer and then the subsequent lines grouped in three sets of two giving additional detail. As I've worked thru these verses, I've chosen to break each verse into a 3+2+2 structure since that works well across all the verses.

As a result, the verses require considerable interpretation to render them intelligible in English. So, I haven't followed my normal, very literal and almost telegraphic style of translation. Instead, I've tried to render them all in a reasonably clear and readable format and then provided additional notes on each verse.

There's always discussion in taijiquan circles about the relationship of the 8 jins to the specific postures in the form. Particularly for the first four, there are corresponding postures in the form with the same names (wardoff, rollback, press, and push). I think of the postures as pre-eminent examples where we can apply the jins, but the postures are far from the only places where these jin appear. The verses help us understand the nature of the jins so we can find and apply them more broadly.

I'm not aware of many english translations of these verses: Douglas Wile has one rather idiosyncratic version in his *Tai Chi Touchstones*. Most of the other english translations I've seen are clearly derivative of Wile's version, unfortunately usually without credit.

It's hard to figure out exactly who created these verses. Wile attributes the verses to "Tan Meng-hsien". I've only been able to find a little out about 譚夢賢 (譚梦贤 in simplified characters) or Tan Mengxian as his name would be written in pinyin. He was apparently a student of Yang Shouhou (eldest son of Jianhou), and was a martial arts advisor in the Chinese military in the 1930s. Here's a picture from the 1930s of him (far right, front row) together with other martial artists serving in the military in various martial-arts related advisory roles.



(picture from Huang Yuanxiu, Skills and Essentials of Yang Style Taijiquan, via Paul Brennan)

Tan also wrote a preface for Huang's book from which this picture was taken, including key points about practice purportedly from his teacher Yang Shouhou.

Per personal communication, the verses themselves are part of the indoor manuals still handed down in one of the Yang Jianhou lines. Shouhou, despite being Jianhou's elder son, studied primarily with Banhou -- the story is that he was "given" to Banhou since Banhou was the elder of two brothers and lacked a male heir. Tan Mengxian's publishing of the verses shows that they were present in both the Banhou and Jianhuo lines. Tan's publishing may have been a result of the national resurgence of interest in Chinese martial arts that took place in the 1920s as part of an effort to find and rely on inherently Chinese skills in the face of increasing western domination. He may have composed the verses himself then, or he may have simply recorded and published them, possibly with some cleanup, based on a version passed down in the indoor manuals.

If Tan himself composed them, it's unlikely they would also be present in manuals passed down in the Jianhou line. Further, the verses, being in *wulu* form, use a classical Chinese form. Writing such verses in the 1920s or 1930s could have been an explicit reference back to old "authentic" Chinese thought, although it would be somewhat surprising for someone with a military position in the modern Chinese republic to do so.

If the verses had already been composed and were passed down in the family, then the original creation would probably have been during the second generation of the Yangs (Banhou and Jianhou). By all accounts, only Jianhou would have had the educational attainment necessary to do such a composition.

It's rather a mystery. Tan Mengxian like any good student attributes everything he produced to his teacher Yang Shouhou. These verses appear in manuals passed down by both the Banhou and Jianhou lines, suggesting an origin in the later part of the 1800s. This is also consistent with the use of the *wulu* form. They contain some phrasing, e.g. *zhongxin*, which could be modern in origin (referring a mechanical center of gravity) or could just reflect pre-modern usage. They have some departures from pure *wulu* form (e.g. the rhyming scheme isn't perfect) which also suggests either a more modern date or creation by a less than perfectly educated person, e.g. Jianhou, in the 1800s.

In any case, I've found these verses useful to contemplate over the years and so am sharing them here.

Wardoff (*Peng*)

棚勁：義何解

Peng jin: how to explain its meaning?

如水負行舟

先實丹田氣

次要頂頭懸

It is like water supporting a moving boat.

First, make the *qi* substantial in the *dantian*,

next, you must suspend the headtop.

全體彈簧力

開合一定間

The whole body has spring power.

Opening and closing are separated by one stable point.

任有千斤重

飄浮亦不難

Even with a thousand pounds of weight

floating is still not difficult.

Discussion

Peng is not a word in normal Chinese usage: you won't find it in standard dictionaries. Instead, it's a specific term of art: taijiquan jargon, as it were. The character 棚 shows a hand holding a quiver of arrows or a woven cover made of reeds. It's not clear that we can draw many inferences from the picture.

In my understanding, wardoff represents an expansive use of force caused by sinking and relaxing and resulting in floating the opponent. We often say that wardoff represents "the skin of your qi balloon": it marks the boundary of your space. Used defensively, wardoff meets an incoming force and floats it so that you are not impacted by the force. Used offensively, wardoff expands into and takes over the opponent's space.

Make qi substantial in dantian: *Xu* and *Shi*, insubstantial and substantial, are one of the famous polarities in taijiquan. At a basic level, *Xu* and *Shi* refer to the weighting in the feet and legs: the weighted leg is substantial and the unweighted leg insubstantial. Beyond the weighting, they also have philosophical and metaphorical meanings: *Xu* / *Shi* can be insubstantial or intangible vs. substantial or solid; fake or unreal vs. true or real; vacuous vs. replete; insufficient vs. in excess; potential vs. manifest. In some Daoist teachings, *Xu* represents the highest level of

transformation, as we refine raw vitality (*jing*) into internal energy (*qi*) into spirit (*shen*) and then spirit is refined into emptiness or the void (*xu*).

In any case, this instruction is telling us that the *qi* in the *dantian* must be real and solid: you can't just imagine that your *qi* is gathered in the *dantian*. This must be something real!

Whole body has spring power: Body here is 體, *ti*, a central concept in Chinese thought and part of the core analytical framework of *ti-yong*, 體用, form and function, substance and application, essence and manifestation, system and use. I chose to use "body" in this translation to emphasize that spring power should be throughout the body. But, I could have said "the entire essence (of peng jin) is spring power".

Any of these formulations should lead the reader to consider the implied follow-up question: if the body or substance of *peng jin* is spring power, what's the application or usage? What is the *yong* that goes with the *ti* of spring power?

Floating is not difficult: Presumably this phrase refers to floating the opponent rather than yourself. Float is *fu* and is often contrasted to *qing* or lightness in taiji theory. *Qing* is a desirable quality, *fu* floating is an error. The result of correct *peng jin* is that the opponent floats and thus is unable to manifest force.

Rollback (*Lu*)

捋勁：義何解

Lǚ jìn: how to explain its meaning?

引導使之前

順其來勢力

輕靈不丟頂

Apply leading just in advance,

going along with the opponent's incoming force.

Remain *qing ling* (light and nimble) while not disconnecting or butting.

力盡自然空

丟擊任自然

The opponent's force is exhausted, while you are naturally empty.

When the opponent disconnects, you naturally respond and strike

重心自維持

莫為他人乘

Your weight maintains itself in your center

Thus no other can take advantage of you.

Discussion

Lu, typically translated as rollback, literally means to smooth or arrange something with the fingers, and to stroke or rub something. In taijiquan, *lu* is used to divert incoming energy away from you, not allowing it to impact you while also not causing a sudden change in the direction of the incoming energy. Ideally, the opponent does not even notice that the attack was diverted until the attack is spent.

Remain qing-ling and while not disconnecting or butting: This line references a number of core taijiquan concepts described in the various classics. *Qing-ling* is a pair of concepts referenced in the [Yang Family Eight Words](#): *qing* refers to physical lightness. Unlike *fu* or floating, *qing* is a goal and pairs positively with weightedness and connection to the ground. *Ling* refers to mental nimbleness and vitality. In Daoism, *ling* describes the numinous: spiritual light and illumination.

Not disconnecting or butting is *bu diu ding* and directs us to avoid the core errors of “disconnection” and “butting”. This admonition appears as the last line of the Song of Pushing Hands: 沾連粘隨不丟頂, *zhan nian zhan sui bu diu ding*, Stick, Connect, Adhere, Follow, Not Disconnecting or Butting. The first four words (*zhan nian zhan sui*) are qualities of the touch; the last two (*diu ding*) identify errors that prevent the correct touch.

Diu is to disconnect: this can show up either in retreating when you run away or in advancing when you fall short as your opponent withdraws. *Ding* is to butt or resist. Literally, *ding* refers to the head top, so it can mean leading with your head: butting forward towards the opponent beyond what's appropriate. It also refers to resisting and bracing when moving back. Both *diu* and *ding* are core errors in taijiquan.

Going along with the opponent's force: Going along is 順, *shun* and is part of yet another polarity: *shun* and *ni*. *Shun* is to go with something, *ni* is to oppose. These terms also appear in other arts such as calligraphy: a brushstroke where the brush moves in the direction of the stroke is *shun*; one where the stroke goes against the brush to create a dot or stop is *ni*.

The opponent's force is exhausted, you are naturally empty ... naturally respond and strike: These lines are very telegraphic and open to multiple interpretation. Literally, they say

力盡自然空	Lì jìn zìrán kōng	Force exhausted/finished natural empty
丟擊任自然	Diū jí rèn zìrán	Disconnect strike let naturally/natural-order

Whether these are actions taken by you, your opponent, or both is left unspecified, which allows for multiple possible interpretations. For example, I've translated the first line as
(The opponent's) force is exhausted, (while you are) naturally empty.

You could also read this line as
(When my) force is exhausted, (I become) empty as a result of natural-order.

Similarly, the 2nd line could be read as
(If I) disconnect, (my) natural recovery is attack; or
(If I) disconnect, (the other will) naturally launch an attack.

I prefer the translation I chose because it conveys the interaction between you and the other person and it serves as a positive instruction rather than a warning, e.g., about the consequences of disconnecting or becoming exhausted.

Ziran 自然 is a Daoist term of art related to *wu-wei* or non-action. We naturally allow things to happen, doing nothing, and nothing is left undone.

Kong 空 empty or void is not the same empty / insubstantial in *xu* / *shi*, although in some Daoist traditions they are treated almost as synonyms. In other traditions, *Kong* is treated as representing a higher level of void.

So, these lines are telling us to align with the natural order, easily letting things unfold. As we do that, the opponent's attack exhausts itself while we maintain a core of emptiness and if the opponent disconnects, we naturally flow into an attack.

Your weight maintains itself in your center. This line could also be read as to refer to your physical center of gravity, saying something like “Your center of gravity maintains itself”. *Zhong xin* 重心 is literally *weight+heart*. As a compound, in modern usage, it references the center-of-gravity. In [Buddhist texts](#), it’s used to mean *respectful attitude* or *reverential mind*. I’ve chosen to interpret the characters separately rather than as a compound, resulting in “weight heart/center self maintains/preserves” or “your weight maintains itself in your center”.

Press (*Ji*)

擠勁：義何解

Ji jin: how to explain its meaning?

用時有兩方

直接單純意

迎合一動中

At the moment of use, there are two directions of motion each of which continues straight, while they connect under a single pure *yi*, meeting and combining into one movement to hit the target.

間接反應力

如球撞壁還

The power comes from an indirect reaction like the rebound of a ball thrown against a wall

又如錢投鼓

躍然擊鏗鏘

It is also like tossing a coin at a drum so it bounces up and makes a sound like hitting a gong [as opposed to casually dropping it on the drum with a muffled thud].

Discussion

Ji is typically translated as press, but equally means squeeze and push or force your way in. For example, *ji* describes squeezing a seed out of an orange segment, squeezing or forcing your way into a crowded subway car, pushing (*ji*) against someone when everyone is crammed (also *ji*) together.

In my understanding, *ji* is present when I generate two vectors of force that are aimed towards each other and converge (this is the squeeze portion of *ji*). *Ji* is also present when two vectors of force meet and generate a single indirect outgoing force.

The indirect reaction or response that characterizes *ji* is illustrated in two ways in this verse: a ball bouncing off a wall, coin bouncing off a drumhead with a sharp sound. Note that in each case, there's inflation and elasticity: an un-inflated ball won't bounce off the wall, a coin won't bounce and make a gong-like sound off a slack drumhead. And the doing (throwing ball towards wall, tossing coin) is separate from the (indirect) result.

Push (*An*)

按勁：義何解

An jin: how to explain its meaning?

運用如水行

柔中寓剛強

急流勢難當

Apply it like flowing water.

Soft with firmness contained in the center.

The irresistible power of a rushing current.

遇高則膨滿

逢窪向下潛

Meeting the high, expand and fill.

Coming upon the low, face downwards and submerge.

波浪有起伏

有孔無不入

Waves have the nature of rising and falling,

thus wherever there is an opening, you can enter

Discussion

An means to press something (e.g., pressing a button), to push down or into (e.g., a thumbtack into a bulletin board), restrain or control something, or keep a grip on something (e.g. your hand on a control lever). In my understanding, *An* represents the use of jin to generate an outgoing force in single unified direction. Aimed down, *an* can deflect an opponent's force. Aimed up, *an* can break an opponent's connection to ground ("uprooting"). Aimed out, *an* can discharge and throw an opponent.

Some theories associate each of the four initial jins with a specific direction: wardoff is up, push is down, rollback is back, press is forward. The verses for *an jin* describe a different understanding and aren't really consistent with the four-directions view. For example, as the verses describe *an*, it is not limited to just pushing down but instead has both rising and falling characteristics, expanding up and plunging down.

Apply it like flowing water, soft with firm in the center: Soft is *rou*, a characteristic associated with yang taijiquan and often paired with *song*, or relax. Firm is *gangqiang*. *Gang* and *rou*

represent a polarity. This verse describes the trigram *Kan* (☵) whose image is water. In Daoist thought, Kan represents the pure or true yang (the solid line in the middle) that has been hidden in the world (by the two yin lines surrounding it). The path of age and decay takes pure yang and muddles it creating hidden yang. The path of rejuvenation refines the essence of yang in the middle of Kan to once again return to pure yang.

Pluck (*Cai*)

採勁：義何解

Cǎi jìn: how to explain its meaning?

如權之引衡

任爾力巨細

權後知輕重

It is like using a balance scale to weigh something: you slide the scale's balance-weight along the arm to match the item you're weighing.

You measure the opponent's *li*, whether big or small.

After weighing it, you will know its lightness and heaviness.

轉移只四兩

千斤亦可平

Turn and change using only 4 ounces

In this way, you can be equal to 1000 lbs.

若問理何在

杠杆之作用

To know *cai*, ask what its intrinsic nature is:

It is the function of the lever.

Discussion

Cai means to pick, pluck, or gather. It's used in phrases such as picking tea, plucking fruit off a branch, gathering herbs. *Cai* has often been translated as "pull down", but while you might pluck a fruit using a downward pull, pull-down doesn't convey the sharpness or suddenness of the pluck. It is interesting that this verse does not focus on the plucking aspect of *cai*, instead emphasizing the role of a lever or the balance arm in a scale.

Measuring the opponent's li, big or small, light or heavy: Lightness and heaviness are *qing* and *zhong*; *qing* as in the famous pair *qing-ling* and *zhong* as in center of gravity or weightedness in the your center. And notice the parallelism in the phrases with big or small followed by light or heavy.

Turn and change using only 4 ounces ... equal to 1000 lbs: Comparing four ounces (*liang* -- a measure slightly more than an ounce) to 1000 pounds (*jin* -- approximately half a kilogram) is a common trope in taijiquan theory. It appears in the Song of Pushing Hands: 牽動四兩撥千斤, apply a leading force of 4 ounces to move 1000 pounds. Cheng Manching has a [lengthy discussion](#) of this idea in his 13 Treatises. In this verse, the idea is presented in a different light:

the 4 ounces is used to match the 1000 pounds, similar to how a small weight can balance a larger weight in a balance scale. *Ping* (平) which I translated as “equal to” means level, be equal to, be on a par with. Balance scales are *ping* when the two sides match each other -- the weights don't have to be the same, but they balance by being different distances from the fulcrum point. Similarly, using *cai*, one can balance 1000 lbs with 4 oz.

The intrinsic nature of cai is the lever: Intrinsic nature is 理 *li*. *Li* is the pattern, texture or grain of existence; it represents natural order, the laws of reality, and intrinsic nature. *Li* is that which we perceive and align ourselves with in order to follow the Dao. In this case, it represents the essence of *cai* as the application of a lever.

Split (*Lie*)

捌勁：義何解

Liè jin: how to explain its meaning?

旋轉若飛輪

投物於其上

脫然擲丈尋

Rotating like a flywheel,
if you fling an object at it,
the wheel effortlessly throws the object far away.

君不見漩渦

卷浪若螺紋

Don't you see the whirlpool?
Rolling up the waves in a spiral.

落葉墮其上

倏爾便沉淪

Autumn leaves fall on the whirlpool's surface.
In just an instant, the whirlpool easily makes them sink into oblivion.

Discussion

Lie is another word that's specific taijiquan jargon and isn't in common usage. The character 捌 consists of the hand radical 手 plus 列, *lie* meaning arrange in order, classify, or line up. As a term of art, it's translated as splay, split, or rend, and often described as a shearing force: deforming something by applying contradictory or offset forces to it, like twisting a piece of rubber or ripping cloth. The imagery in this verse emphasize the use of rotational energy.

In my understanding, *lie* represents situations where my rotational energy enables me to generate two different directions of force, e.g. in White Crane Spreads Wings where the rotation of the body sends the two hands in different directions, or when I apply rotational energy to an opponent to shear across the opponent.

Elbow (*Zhou*)

肘勁：義何解

Zhǒu jìn: how to explain its meaning?

方法有五行

陰陽分上下

虛實須辨清

The method contains the five phases.

Yin and yang are separated above and below.

Empty and full must be clearly distinguished.

連環勢莫當

開花捶更凶

The power of linking the rings has no equal.

Blossoming like a flower, the strike appears suddenly, even more fiercely.

六勁融通後

運用始無窮

Once you have the six previous jin circulating,
the unlimited uses of zhou begin.

Discussion

Zhou literally means “elbow” and references a sudden, powerful strike with the elbow. These strikes usually appear in the middle of a transition between two other positions.

The method contains the five phases: the five phases are the *Wu Xing*: translated as Five phases, five agents, five elements. *Wu Xing* represents five fundamental modes of being and transformation, called earth, metal, wood, water, and fire. The five phases and yin-yang polarity are the fundamental organizing principles of the universe in Chinese thought. In taijiquan, the eight jin are correlated to the eight trigrams and the five steps are correlated to the five phases. So, this line could reference the way that *zhou* appears in motion and transitions as the five steps move the body.

The power of linking the rings has no equal: Power here is 勢, *shi*. *Shi* is one of the beautifully complex terms that really illustrates the challenges of translation since it represents a whole cluster of related concepts. Frequently, when translating, we encounter the idea that a given word in Chinese represents multiple different meanings in English and the job of translation is to choose the “correct” meaning in the given context. So, *Shi* is taken to mean power, advantage, influence, or posture. And the translator’s job is to figure out which of those meanings was

intended in the specific circumstance. This way of thinking fundamentally assumes that our concepts and terms that break up the universe are the “correct” ones and that for some reason, the Chinese were confused about the underlying nature of reality and somehow mixed up basically different ideas and gave those ideas a single label.

Instead, I think we should accept the Chinese terms on their own. *Shi* is telling us that there is a way of seeing the world that unifies what we see as a whole cluster of similar concepts into one. Roger Ames, in discussing *shi*, says

The key idea, *shi*, is as complex as *shen*, “spirituality/divinity,” and, fortunately for our grasp of the tradition, as revealing of the underlying sense of order. We must [consider] how *shi* can combine in one idea the following cluster of meanings:

1. “aspect,” “situation,” “circumstances,” “conditions”
2. “disposition,” “configuration,” “outward shape”
3. “force,” “influence,” “momentum,” “authority”
4. “strategic advantage,” “purchase”

...

If we allow that there are several different ways in which we can look at *shi*, it enables us to bring its cluster of meanings together. When looked at spatially from outside of one’s own “skin,” *shi* is that set of conditions that is defining of one’s situation. It is one’s context in relationship to oneself. When looked at from an internal perspective, *shi* is one’s own place and posture relative to one’s context. When looked at temporally, taking into account the full calculus of dispositions, *shi* is the tension of forces and the momentum that brings one position in immediate contact with another.

In Sunzi’s *Art of War*, *shi* or strategic advantage is the key goal of a commander. *Shi* appears out of the exact circumstances of the moment and relies on the commander’s skill in perceiving the moment and aligning with the Dao. Describing *shi* and connecting it to the use of a ring, Sunzi says (Sunzi 5.3)

For gaining strategic advantage (*shi*) in battle, there is nothing more than “surprising” (奇 *qi*, odd, strange, unorthodox) and “straightforward” (正 *zheng*, upright as in body upright, orthodox, standard) operations, yet in combination they produce inexhaustible possibilities. “Surprise” and “straightforward” operations give rise to each other endlessly just like a ring without beginning or end. (translation after Ames with minor edits)

The “linked rings” could be a single ring whose end and beginning are linked, as in the Sunzi reference above. (Chinese does not distinguish singular nouns from plural, so *lian huan* could be a single linked ring or multiple linked rings.) In taijiquan theory, the torso and surrounding energy field are described as being made up of *three rings*: one around the hip / waist area, another mid-torso, and a third at the level of the shoulders. Power can be generated by the interplay of these rings against each other: as the rings move differentially, tautness is developed between them that can then be released to issue power. Given this image, I’ve translated the term for a linked ring or set of rings to refer to the three linked rings.

Blossoming like a flower, the strike appears suddenly: The text here contains 開花捶 *kaihua chui*. This phrase can be read multiple ways. *Chui* is to punch (with a fist) or beat (e.g. with a stick or mallet). Here, it would be the elbow that is doing the beating. *Kaihua* is an opening flower, a blossom or bloom. It also means something that bursts open or rises up suddenly. I've used both meanings here since part of *zhou* is its sudden appearance in the midst of other techniques and movements. *Kaihua chui* is sometimes used to name a particular type of punch in southern Chinese martial arts, but I'm not aware of any specific technique in taijiquan with that name. As a result, I believe the phrase here describes the way an elbow strike can appear suddenly and fiercely rather than to name a specific technique not involving the elbow.

Once you have the six previous jin circulating: The reference to six jin seems strange in a document about the eight core jin. However, other yang family writings give primary position to the first six jin (*peng, lu, ji, an, cai, and lie*): *zhou* and *kao* are treated as transitional jin, used by less skilled practitioners. So, I believe the six jin are those already described in the verses and this phrase describes the way that *zhou* appears suddenly from within one or more of the other techniques. In the form, *zhou* always appears in transitions, not as a final posture.

Shoulder (*Kao*)

靠勁：義何解

Kào jin: how to explain its meaning?

其法分肩背

斜飛勢用肩

肩中還有背

Its method separates the use of the shoulder and the back.

Slant Flying Posture uses the shoulder.

The shoulder hits the target, but in addition *kao* also uses the back.

一旦得機勢

轟然如搗碓

In one instant, you must catch the opportunity and thus gain the advantage.

In that moment, crash in like pounding a pestle into a mortar.

仔細維重心

失中徒無功

Be very careful to preserve the weightedness at your center.

If you lose the center, all is in vain and without any success

Discussion:

Kao doesn't really mean shoulder at all, despite being consistently translated that way in English versions of taijiquan literature. Rather *kao* means leaning or bumping and implies a short, shocking hit with the body rather than with one of the extremities (hand, elbow, foot, knee). *Kao* can be delivered with the shoulder, upper arm, back, chest, side, hips, etc. Similar to *zhou*, *kao* most often appears in transitions and not in the final postures. Note that posture we know as Shoulder-strike or *kao* in Cheng Manching's rendition of the form appears in the same place (between Lift Hands and White Crane Spreads Wings) in the standardized yang long form, but is treated there as a transition rather than a final posture.

Slant Flying Posture uses the shoulder: Slant Flying is also sometimes called Diagonal Flying. Note that *kao* appears in the transition into Slant Flying.

In one instant, catch the opportunity and gain the advantage: "catch the opportunity, gain the advantage" is 得機得勢 *de ji de shi*. In this verse, the 2nd *de* is omitted in order to fit the five character scheme. *Shi* is advantage or power as discussed above. *Ji* means opportunity, chance, occasion, pivot point, and crucial point. *De* means to achieve something, to gain, to embody.

The taijiquan “classic” attributed to Zhang Sanfeng includes this phrase, *de ji de shi*, in the passage on achieving advantage (*shi*) via correct timing and integration:

“The foot, leg, and *yao* must always be integrated by one *qi*

Then stepping forward or back you catch the opportunity and gain the advantage (*de ji de shi*)

Failing to catch the opportunity and gain the advantage, the body becomes scattered and disordered

Seek the error in the *yao* and legs. “ (my translation)

Cheng Manching reports oral instruction from his teacher emphasizing the role of achieving timing and advantage (*de ji de shi*) in issuing energy.

(<http://www.rockymountaintaichi.com/zmq-13-13-9>)

Preserve weightedness at your center: weightedness at center is *zhong xin*, center of gravity, weight at the heart, and reverential mind as discussed above.

All is vain and without any success: success is *gong* as in *gongfu*. *Gong* means merit, achievement, result, success, skill.

The Eight Methods

八法為 棚勁、掙勁、擠勁、按勁、採勁、捌勁、肘勁、靠勁

These are the methods for using the eight *jin*:

peng jin, lu jin, ji jin, an jin, cai jin, lie jin, zhou jin, and kao jin.

等四正四隅八種勁。

The eight types of *jin* divide into the four sides and the four corners.

勁是太極拳術語，

不是八種勁力

These *jin* are taijiquan terms of art for using force,
not eight fundamentally different kinds of force.

Discussion

Eight jin divide into four sides and four corners: The *jin* are typically broken up into two sets, known as the four sides hands or techniques and the four corners hands or techniques. The four sides are *peng, lu, ji, and an*. The four corners are *cai, lie, zhou, and kao*. The four sides techniques are typically applied facing directly towards the opponent, and the four corners techniques applied at an oblique angle.

This division is described in the document sometimes called “the 40 chapters” (formally 太極法說, The Explanation of the Taiji Method / Theory) and attributed to Yang Banhou. Chapter 23 says, in part (my translation)

初不知方能使圓方圓復

始之理無已焉能出隅之手矣

Initially, the practitioner does not know that the square can create the round and in turn, the round (can create) the square.

Because of this, the natural order requires developing skill in the corner hands.

緣人外之肢體內之神氣

弗緝輕靈方圓四正之功

始出輕重浮沉之病則有隅矣

The problem is in the practitioner’s outer limbs and body and inner *shen* and *qi*

He does not have sufficient skill to preserve *qing-ling* and squareness and roundness in the four sides.

Thus, the practitioner develops errors (disease) in lightness and heaviness, floating and sinking. As a result, the four corners hands appear.

病多之手不得已以隅手
扶之而歸圓中方正之手

With an excess of error in the four hands techniques, the practitioner has no choice but to use the corner hands.

And use them (corner hands) to return to centered roundness and upright squareness

雖然至底者肘靠亦及此以補其所以云爾
春後功夫能致上乘者亦須獲採捌而仍歸大中至正矣
是四隅之所用者因失體而補缺云云

One with lower achievement needs *zhou* and *kao* to make up for errors.

However, even one who has developed high level skills will frequently apply *cai* and *lie* to return to uprightness (the 4 sides hands).

Because you lose the essence and need to correct for a deficiency, you become one who applies the four corners hands.

Not eight fundamentally different kinds of force: I think this is one of the most interesting ideas in these verses. We've just worked through detailed descriptions of each of the jin and their unique characteristics. And now we're invited to see that they all form a unity and that any real interaction must use elements of multiple jins.

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The source Chinese version of this manual was retrieved from a dodgy Chinese website. It is in circulation on multiple sites, all without copyright or attribution. The text does appear to be pretty stable.

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