

别程序
Distinct Sequence of the Journey

*Treatise Eleven of
Zhengzi's Thirteen Treatises
On Taijiquan*

By Zheng Manqing (Cheng Man-ching)

Translation by Lee Fife, Summer 2016

In hopes that this can further us
all along our journeys

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程序第十一

Treatise 11: Distinct Sequence of the Journey

Introduction

太极拳运动之大纲

有三。分天地人为三阶。

人阶为舒筋活血之运动。

地阶为开关达节之运动。

天阶为知觉作用之运动。

The outline of progress in Taijiquan is as follows.

The sequence has three parts: consisting of 3 ranks divided into Heaven, Earth, and Human

The Human Rank's development is to smooth the sinews and vitalize the blood;

The Earth Rank's development is to open the passes and reach the joints;

The Heaven Rank's development is to know and become aware and work on the application.

Discussion

Distinct Sequence of the Journey, an outline of progress:

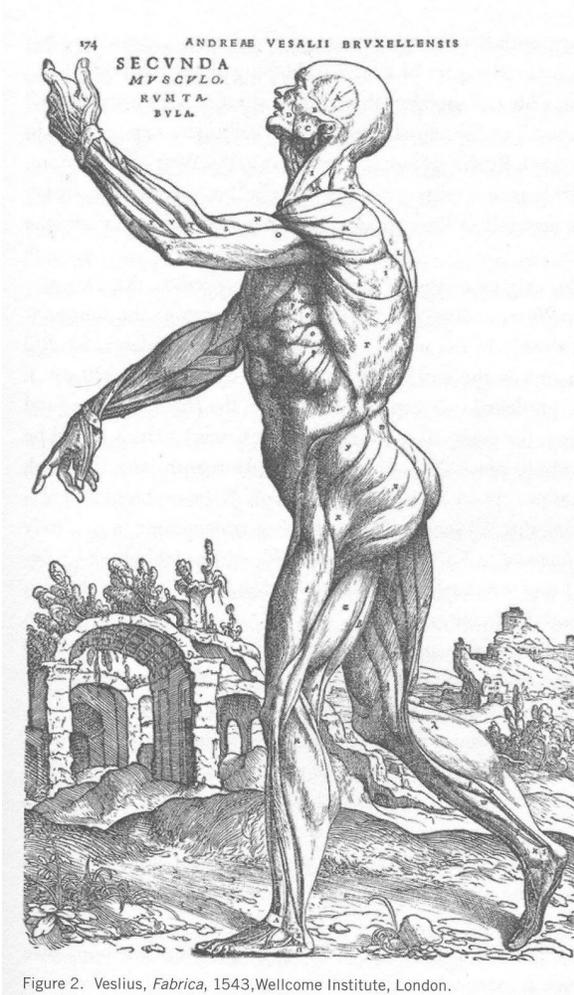
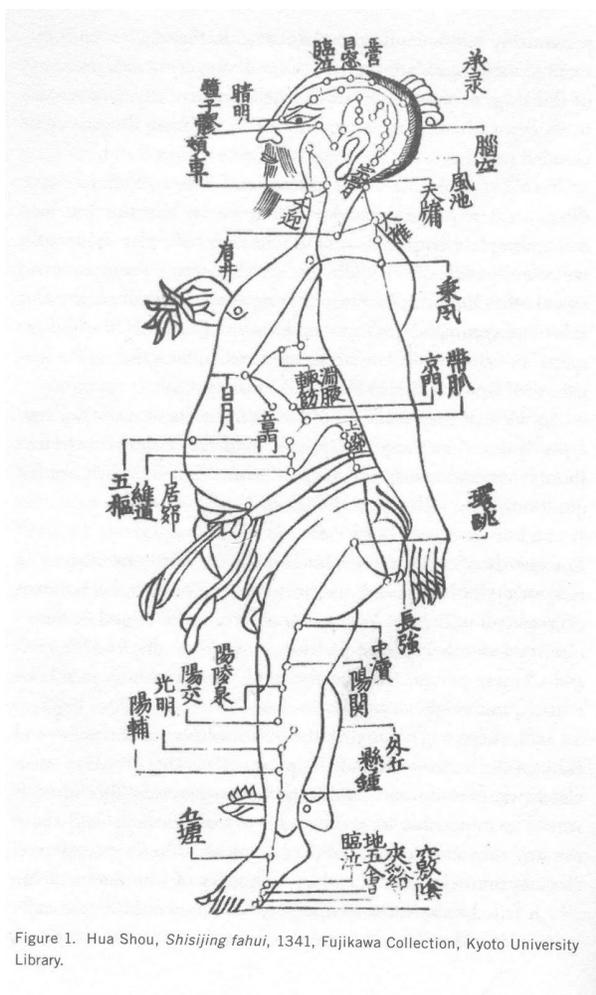
In this chapter, Zheng lays out a roadmap or program for progress in taijiquan. The program is actually quite concrete and explicit: the challenge is that understanding Zheng's words requires reaching deep into Daoist and Internal Alchemy Theory. Zheng emphasizes that the program should be followed literally and in order, not jumping ahead or skipping over steps. Of course, as a student works on any given step, that student may well need to revisit, possibly multiple times, some or all of the previous steps.

I've attempted to show the program Zheng describes as clearly as I can, given my understanding and skill. In the process of doing that, I've chased down many of the references that Zheng makes. In the end, I've actually written quite a bit more than Zheng did. Hopefully, my comments and research are useful to fellow students.

Understanding the Body

In the Chinese worldview, the body is perceived very differently from in the western worldview. And it's really easy to mislead ourselves when trying to map between the two systems. Given the importance of the body and its components to Zheng's discussion in this chapter, we need to be careful and precise as we read the chapter.

To illustrate the difference in worldviews, consider the following two pictures of canonically healthy individuals:



(Images from Kuriyama)

Neither of these pictures is actually a realistic depiction of a body, although with our western biases, we will tend to see the Vesalius drawing as more “accurate” even if when we look at anyone except an extreme bodybuilder, we don’t see that kind of precise definition of muscle groups.

And the perception of muscles is one of the main differences in worldviews: in the Chinese worldview, muscles are just part of the flesh or meat and not particularly privileged. In fact, they don’t even represent one of the main “organs”. Instead, the “organs” of the body are divided into two sets: the *zang* organs which are solid and *yin*, and the *fu* organs which are hollow and *yang*. The names of the organs get correlated to western organs and their names translated into terms

such as liver, heart, gallbladder, spleen, and stomach. But, the Chinese organs are not co-located with or identical to the corresponding Western organs.

In Chinese thought, muscles are part of a category of the flesh that also includes the connective tissue (tendons, ligaments, and fascia) and sometimes the blood vessels and is called 筋 *jin*. It's tempting to read this chapter and try to figure out what Zheng "really meant" when he wrote *jin*: deciding that sometimes he was referencing the ligaments, other times the muscles, and occasionally the blood vessels; meanwhile rolling one's eyes at his conflating all these different things. And in fact, other translators have done exactly this, perhaps without rolling their eyes.

However, I believe this would be to make a serious error: it's not the case that "our" view of the body is correct and we're right about the components of the body and the Chinese are just inconsistent and for some reason use the same word to describe different "things". Instead, I believe that one can clearly perceive the world and discover that the body includes an entity consisting of the flesh that contains all the bits directly involved in movement. This is what 筋 *jin* references as a broad category: all the parts of the flesh directly involved in movement. And if we zoom in on *jin*, we find that it's centered on what we'd call the connective tissue, specifically the tendons and ligaments.

For the sake of consistency and readability, I've used "sinews" for 筋 *jin*. This works well in general, although especially when reading the Human level instructions on "smoothing the sinews", we should remember that *jin* also includes the muscles. And so smoothing the sinews also means that we have to relax the muscles.

Note that 筋 *jin* is different from the term for refined power 勁 *jin*. In this translation, I have consistently used the term "sinews" for the first *jin*, while leaving the second *jin* (refined power) as an untranslated bit of jargon.

There are also three important energetic components of the body. These are sometimes thought of as three separate "substances" but in Internal Alchemy theory, they represent three different aspects of an integrated energetic substrate for body and mind. The alchemical process consists of vitalizing and then refining these components to return them to their primal states of purity. As a group, they're known as the *sanbao* or Three Treasures and include:

- *Jing* 精: fundamental vitality. The essence that enables life and is primarily derived from food. It is often connected to sexuality and thus sometimes (misleadingly) translated as "semen" or "seminal essence".
- *Qi* 氣: breath or internal energy, the energy that connects matter and awareness. *Qi* is present within ourselves and also permeates and supports the universe.
- *Shen* 神: spirit, soul, and internal psychic energy, representing all non-material aspects of human beings and of the universe as a whole. In the body, the home of *shen* is in the heart, not the head, even as *shen* includes thoughts and mental processes.

Another area of possible confusion is around the location of some of the specific features referenced. Some, such as the tip of the middle finger, are fairly clear and unambiguous. Others are much less explicit. These tend to be important points in Daoist and Internal Alchemy practices and in Chinese Medicine, and their precise location varies from school to school and between practices. It's tempting to assume that the locations defined in modern Traditional Medicine must be the locations Zheng was using, but actually it is not at all clear that the modern definitions of the locations are what Zheng meant. Zheng, while a doctor in the Chinese tradition, was not a practitioner of what we now call Traditional Chinese Medicine. For example, he relied much more on herbs than acupuncture and is said to have learned his "bonesetting" skills from his grandmother while growing up in rural China. Further, he's said to have been involved in a Daoist practice or sect, which is given strong support by the depth of reference to Internal Alchemy teachings in this chapter, and that school may well have used slightly different locations than Traditional Chinese Medicine uses. So, we have to be careful and allow for some uncertainty in resolving the locations of these points.

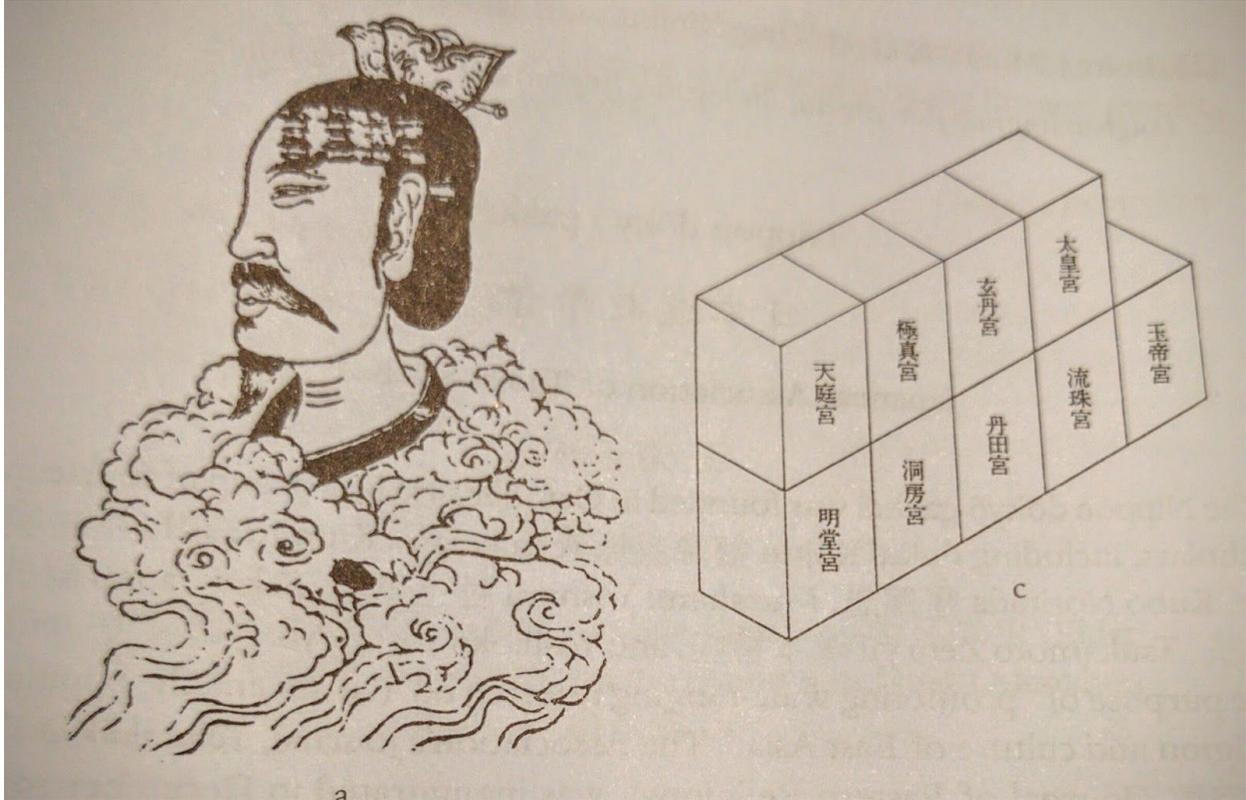
In any case, some of the important locations referenced include
Yongquan 涌泉: the "bubbling well", located in the heart of the sole of the foot.

Weilu 尾閭: the "gate of the tail", located at the base of the spine. Various schools place it in various exact points in or just above the sacrum. This is the place where "Fire and Water meet". In Internal Alchemy, the channel of fire is up the back and the channel of water is down the front and the *weilu* is at or near their junction at the bottom of the body. It's referenced in Zhuangzi chapter 16 *Autumn Floods*:

Of all the waters of the world, none is as great as the sea. Ten thousand streams flow into it -- I have never heard of a time when they stopped -- and yet it is never full. The water leaks away at *Weilu* -- I have never heard of a time when it didn't -- and yet the sea is never empty. Spring or autumn, it never changes. Flood or drought, it takes no notice ... I take my place between Heaven and Earth and receive *Qi* from yin and yang.
(Watson translation)

Dantian 丹田: the "field of elixir or cinnabar". In Internal Alchemy theory, there are a set of three *dantians* which serve as cauldrons where the alchemical process takes place. One, the lower *dantian*, is located in the abdomen, slightly below the navel and interior to the body. This is the location where *jing* is refined into *qi*. When the *dantian* is referenced without a modifier, the lower *dantian* is intended. A second, the middle *dantian*, is in the solar plexus and heart area and is the location where *qi* is refined into *shen*. And the third, the upper *dantian* is in the center of the head. This is where *shen* is refined to return to Emptiness (*xu* or *kong*).

Niwan 泥丸: the "clay pill", located in the head. Various schools place it at different places in the head, including on the crown and in the center of the skull. The *niwan* is also sometimes called the Nine Palaces (or defined as a single one of the palaces). The following illustration shows the nine palaces centered in an adept's head:



(photo from Encyclopedia of Taoism, entry on *niwan*)

In this illustration, the upper *dantian* is located in the middle “palace” in the lower row.

Jiaji 夾脊: the “spinal clip”, or the place where the spine squeezes between two sides. The *jiaji* is located on the back between the two shoulder blades. Presumably, the shoulder blades serve as the “clip” holding the spine in that location, and are the “two sides” that the spine squeezes between.

Yuzhen 玉枕: the “jade pillow”, located at the base of the skull, by the occipital bone.

Open the Passes

In the Earth level, the work is “open the passes and reach the joints”. The passes are 關 *guan* and are an important construct in Internal Alchemy. They are also known as 門 *men* or gates. The passes are the *weilu*, *jiaji*, and *yuzhen* described above and correspond to the three *dantians* on the front of the body.

Know and become aware and work on the application.

In Heaven rank, the process is to 覺作用之 *zhijue zuoyong*. *Zhijue* as a compound means consciousness or awareness; individually the two words *zhi* and *jue* mean knowing or understanding and feeling. *Zuoyong* as a compound means application or function; individually the two words *zuo* and *yong* mean working on or performing and function or application. I chose

to translate the words separately to keep the parallelism with the Human and Earth levels. I could also have translated the Heaven summary as “The Heaven Rank’s process concerns awareness and its application.”

次目有九。

每阶下各系三级。

The secondary items are nine:

Each rank contains three steps

一阶一级。为舒筋自肩至手指。

二级。自胯至涌泉。

三级。自尾闾至泥丸。

(Human level)

First Rank First Step: Smoothing the sinews from shoulder to finger.

Second Step: From *kua* (hip joint) to *yongquan* (bubbling well).

Third Step: From *weilu* (base of spine) to *niwan* (crown of head)

二阶一级。为气沉丹田。

二级。气达涌泉。

三级。气达泥丸。

(Earth level)

Second Rank First Step: *Qi* sinks to *dantian*.

Second Step: *Qi* reaches *yongquan*.

Third Step: *Qi* reaches *niwan*.

三阶一级。为听劲。

二级。为懂劲。

三级。为阶及神明。

(Heaven level)

Third Rank First Step: *Ting Jin* (listening *jin*)

Second Step: *Dong Jin* (understanding *jin*)

Third Step: Reaching *Shenming* (spiritual brightness)

是为三阶九级。

胪述如次

There are three ranks and nine steps

These are detailed in the following.

Human Level: Smoothing the Sinews and Vitalizing the Blood

Discussion

This level concerns “smoothing the sinews”. Smooth is 舒 *shu* and means to smooth something out (like smoothing out a piece of cloth), unfold something (e.g. a blossom unfolding), to stretch, and to relax. *Shu* is used in compounds like *shufu* (to be comfortable), *shushi* (cozy or snug), *shuchang* (happy, free from worry), and *shuzhan* (limber up, stretch). I could have translated *shu* as “relax” but I wanted to avoid any confusion with the term *song* which we typically translate as “relax”.

And recall that *jin* includes the muscles, tendons, and ligaments even as I translate it as sinews. To smooth the sinews thus necessarily includes relaxing the muscles so they don't put excess tension on the sinews and breaking up any adhesions or knots that keep the sinews from moving freely and smoothly. Hence smoothing the sinews includes all the work typically covered under the taijiquan directives of relax, let go, and loosen.

Human Level 1.1

一、为自肩至腕之舒筋法。

筋既能舒。则自然血活。

其法以舒腕为先。

肘次之。肩又次之。

毫不用力。

First Step: the method is to smooth the sinews from the shoulder to the wrist.

As the sinews are able to relax, then the blood is naturally (*ziran*) vitalized (*huo*).

The method is to smooth the wrist first,

The elbow is next; the shoulder is next (after the elbow).

Not using force in the least.

由至柔而渐进。

皆以曲中求直。

厥形为圆。曲既不宜。直亦不可。

有缺陷有凹凸亦不可。

终以舒筋至申指尖为止。

Use extreme softness (*rou*) and gradual advance.

All via the curve's center seeking straightness.

Your shape must be round (*yuan*). Curved is not suitable; straight is also not appropriate.

Having any vacancies or defects, having any hollows or protrusions is also not appropriate.

The completion of smoothing the sinews to the tip of the middle finger is correct (*zheng*, upright).

此为一阶一级。

This is the First Rank, First Step.

Discussion

The method: Method is 法 *fa*. *Fa* is method, law, standard. It's used for dharma.

Extreme Softness: The pair of opposites 柔 剛 *rou* and *gang* appear frequently in taiji literature. *Rou* is soft, supple, gentle, and flexible. *Gang* is hard, firm, and strong. Perhaps the most famous occurrence of this pair is from the Wu Yuxiang text in the Taijiquan Classics, the 十三勢行功心解 sometimes translated as the *Mental Elucidation of the 13 Postures*. This text says 極柔軟然後極堅剛, or “the extreme of softness leads to the extreme of hardness” and is one of the central characteristics of taijiquan practice: that, rather than trying to develop hardness and strength directly, these appear by going to the limit of softness.

This notion of softness leading to hardness also appears in the Daodejing, Ch 43:

天下之至柔、馳騁天下之至堅。
無有入無間。
吾是以知無爲之有益。
不言之教、無爲之益、
天下希及之。

The softest things In the world [things at the extreme of softness] ride roughshod over those at the extreme of hardness
Non-being enters even where there is non-opening
Thus, I know the benefit of non-action (*wu wei*).
Teaching without words and the benefit of non-action:
These are rarely attained.

Roger Ames in his commentary on this chapter observes

The way to optimize the creative possibilities of all the elements in any particular situation is to allow them to collaborate in doing what they do without coercion (*wuwei*)... It is thus that the “softest” are in fact the hardest, and the thing that offers the least resistance penetrates the deepest.

In Zheng's introduction to his teacher Yang Chengfu's 1933 book *The Essence and Application of Taijiquan* (much of which was actually ghostwritten by Zheng based on Chengfu's instruction), Zheng says

It is the natural order of events that not only does extreme hardness control extreme softness, but also that extreme softness can overcome extreme hardness. The *Yijing* (Book of Changes) says, "The firm and yielding interact with each other, the eight trigrams succeed one another." The *Book of Documents* says "The reserved and retiring are led by strength, the lofty and intelligent are ruled by coercion." The *Book of Songs* says "The virtuous man does not devour the soft nor spit out the hard." The application of hard and soft are universally evident.

What then did Laozi mean when he said "The softest thing on earth can overcome the hardest thing on earth"? Or "The soft and weak overcome the hard and fierce"?

[Following study of taijiquan, Zheng realized that] softness subdues the hard gradually; hardness devours the soft voraciously. Voraciousness is easily sensed, and so, easily defeated. Gradual movement is difficult to detect and so, often victorious.

(Hennessy translation, *Master of Five Excellences*)

Zheng clearly positions his thoughts in the context of these sayings.

Shape must be round: Round is 圓 *yuan* and is one of the [Yang Family Eight Words](#). *Yuan* is paired there with 活 *huo* lively/vitalized. The outcome of the Earth level is to enliven or vitalize (*huo*) the blood.

Having any vacancies or defects, having any hollows or protrusions: this is a reference to the line 毋使有缺陷處，毋使有凸凹處 "Do not allow any defects or deficiencies; do not allow any protrusions or hollows" from the Taijiquan Jing attributed to Zhang Sanfeng. Zheng, as a classically educated scholar, frequently includes references to the Taiji Classics as well as to other classical Chinese works. His quotations were typically included from memory and as a result often contain slight differences from the received texts. In this case, he swapped the order of hollows and protrusions, writing 凹凸 instead of 凸凹 as it appears in the received Zhang Sanfeng text.

Human Level 1.2

二、为自胯至踵。
其致亦然。其不同者。
有轻重虚实之别。
足为能载全身重量。
与手之举动轻便异。

Second Step: from the *kua* (hip) to the heel.

Its method is just as above (in step 1), although there is a difference:

The difference is in the separation of light (*qing*) and heavy (*zhong*), empty (*xu*) and full (*shi*).

The leg must carry the whole body's weight

And so is different from the light (*qing*) and easy (*bian*) motion of the hand.

常人之足。从不注意虚实。

普通拳技家。亦听便而已。

惟习太极拳者。

将体重付于一足。

两足时互易之。又不许用力。

Common people do not pay attention to empty and full in their legs.

Ordinary schools of martial arts also ignore this.

But, for those who practice taijiquan,

You must commit the body's weight to a single leg,

Allowing the legs to mutually change (alternating which leg carries the weight) at the proper time

And ensuring you do not use force (*li*).

自胯至膝至踵。具要松柔。

其力量在足心。而受于地。

This skill (of step two) requires relaxing (*song*) and softening (*rou*) from *kua* to knee to heel.

The power is located in the heart of the foot, which receives the ground.

足要分虚实。手亦然。

其不同者。

如右足实。左手要实。

为一贯之劲。

反此为双重。

The legs must separate empty and full, just like the hands.
There is a difference though:
If the right foot is full, the left hand must be full.
This is the *jin* of unified linking
The left foot (and right hand) are just the same.
To go against this is double-weighting.

此为一阶二級。

This is the First Rank, Second Step.

Discussion

Light and Heavy, Empty and Full: These are also archetypal oppositional pairs in taijiquan theory. Light and Heavy are 轻 *qing* and 重 *zhong* and typically refer to the physical body. Lightness of the body together with spiritedness and agility of the mind are described by the favorable pair 轻灵 *qing-ling* from the [Yang Family Eight Words](#).

Empty and Full are 虚 *xu* and 实 *shi*. These terms can also be translated as insubstantial and substantial, vacuous and replete, potential and manifest. Separating Empty and Full is one of the core taijiquan principles (see [Yang Chengfu's 10 Essentials](#), point #4)

Jin of Unified Linking: this connection from foot to opposite hand is often called “cross-balance” or “cross-substantiality” and is a key skill for increasing stability and generating power. Zheng names it 一贯之劲 *yi guan zhi jin* which I’ve rendered as the *Jin* of Unified Linking. The character for *guan* shows a linked string of coins or shells, threaded together through the holes in their centers. *Guan* is commonly used in taijiquan theory to represent the quality of threading and connection throughout the entire body. It appears in the first line of the Taijiquan Jing attributed to Zhang Sanfeng

一舉動周身俱要輕靈，尤須貫串

In motion, the entire body must be *qing-ling*,
and most importantly, strung together (*guan chuan*)

Double-weighting: The error of double-weighting, here described as occurring whenever the cross-balance between legs and arms is missing, is one of the primary errors in taijiquan. In the Taijiquan Lun attributed to Wong Zongyue, double-weighting is described as:

雙重則滯。

每見數年純功。不能運化者。

率皆自為人制。雙重之病未悟耳

If one is double-weighted, then one is stagnant.

Whenever one see those who have practiced for many years who cannot handle neutralizing and are controlled by the opponent, it is simply that they have not yet apprehended the fault of double-weightedness.

(Davis trans, *Taijiquan Classics*)

Double-weighting is also discussed in the manual attributed to Yang Banhou 太極法說 *Explanation of the Taiji Method*, also informally called “the 40 chapters”. Chapter 22 discusses lightness (*qing*), heaviness (*zhong* also translated as weight), floating (*fu*), and sinking (*chen*) and the problems with double weight and double floating. In taijiquan discussions, double weighting is sometimes thought of in terms of the individual practitioner, e.g., having weight in both legs, and other times in terms of a relationship between two people, e.g., meeting another’s force with your own force. This chapter does not explicitly indicate which meaning is meant. An excerpt from Chapter 22 follows:

太極輕重浮沉解

Taiji Qing Zhong Fu Chen Formula

雙重為病

干於填寔與沉不同也

Double weight is a disease [*bing* or disease is used to describe faults] being over-full and solid. It is not the same as sinking!

雙沉不為病

自爾騰虛與重不易也

Double sinking is not a disease:

Since it lets you make room with emptiness. It is not as easy as heaviness!

雙浮為病

祇如漂渺與輕不例也

Double floating is a disease

Because it drifts and is vague. It is not the rule [i.e. not desired], unlike lightness!

雙輕不為病

天然清靈與浮不等也

Double lightness is not a disease:

It is naturally clear and nimble (*ling*). It is not equal to floating!

[clear here is 清 *qing*, a quality prized in Daoism and indicating clarity and purity of being]

夫雙輕不近於浮則為輕靈

雙沉不近於重則為離虛故

Double lightness is not at all close to floating thus it is *qingling* (light and nimble)

Double sinking is not at all close to heaviness thus it is *xu* (empty)

Human Level 1.3

三、为自尾闾至顶。

其致亦然。

惟脊为多节之主骨。

所谓柔腰百折若无骨者。

脊之要柔可见矣。

Third Step: from the *weilu* (base of spine) to the headtop

Its method is just as above.

Consider that the spine is the primary bone in the skeleton and contains a multitude of joints

This is the so-called “soft waist with a hundred folds as if it had no bones”.

Thus it is plain to see that the spine must be soft and pliable!

脊柔筋使然。

其要在尾闾中正。

及顶头悬耳。

The softness of the spine is enabled by the sinews

The requirements (for the spine to be soft) is that the base of the spine must be centered and upright

And the headtop must be suspended, that is all!

此为一阶三级。

This is the First Rank, Third Step.

Discussion

From the weilu to the headtop: In the original listing at the beginning of the treatise, Zheng describes it as being “from the *weilu* to the *niwan*”. Here he has changed *niwan* to be the headtop (*ding*). Since the *niwan* is an internal energetic location and this section discusses smoothing the sinews, it seems that headtop is actually correct.

Soft waist with one hundred folds as if it had no bones: This quote is attributed to Yang Chengfu and is positioned as a traditional saying. I haven’t been able to find an original source for Chengfu saying this and I haven’t been able to find use of this as a classical quote or traditional saying. Most of the sources I find seem to actually derive from Zheng’s writing where he claims this saying as coming from his teacher Yang Chengfu. It is often associated with the first level of *song* or relaxing:

杨澄甫说：“松，要全身筋骨松开，
不可有丝毫紧张，
所谓柔腰百折若无骨，
只有筋耳，筋能松开，
其余尚有不松之理乎！”

Yang Chenfu said: *Song* (Relax), Must make it so the whole body is *song kai* [relaxed and open; as a compound *songkai* is loosened or released]
You cannot have even the slightest amount of tension or straining
This is known as “the soft waist with one hundred fold as if it had no bones”
(relying on) only the sinews, which are completely *song kai*
Anything else goes against the natural-law of *Song* !

Base of the spine must be centered and upright: “base of the spine” is 尾闾 *weige*, literally the side-door or gate of the tail. Centered and upright is 中正 *zhong zheng*. This is one of the pairs from the [Yang Family Eight Words](#) and could also be interpreted as meaning balanced and correct.

Earth Level: Clearing the Passes

While connections to Internal Alchemy and Daoism are often implicit in taijiquan theory and Zheng’s writings, this section lays out those connections in surprisingly explicit detail. From a 21st century perspective, it’s easy to think that esoteric traditions in China were divided into clearly defined separate traditions and we often find ourselves trying to place a practice, such as Internal Alchemy or Taijiquan, into a particular category, spawning debates like whether Taijiquan is a Daoist practice or not. This is further muddled by current political currents such as the government-sponsored positioning of Wudang Mountain as the home of Daoism and thus the spiritual mother of Taijiquan.

In reality, the historical record tells us a much more complex story. Daoism itself has had many threads and competing lineages. Some died out centuries ago. Other times, Daoism reinvented itself based on inspiration of new spiritual leaders who often had no previous experience with Daoism and on contact with the other major traditions in China. For example, Daoism incorporated a belief in rebirth and karma after coming in contact with Buddhism as Buddhism became established in China. Similarly, Daoist monasteries and residential spiritual communities developed only after Buddhist monasteries were established. Daoism and Confucianism share texts and considerable overlap of philosophical ideas. For example, the *Yijing* (*I Ching* or Book of Changes), often considered to be a pre-eminent Daoist work, is typically attributed to Confucius.

This rich historical matrix produced what we today often see as separate religions and spiritual paths. In that matrix were numerous other disciplines and practices, including those that developed into modern Taijiquan and Qigong, the practices of External and Internal Alchemy, and healing arts providing the basis for modern Traditional Chinese Medicine. Just as the lines between spiritual practices such as Daoism and Buddhism and even among the multiple schools and lineages of Daoism were less clear than we might imagine looking back, so we cannot really claim that Taijiquan or Internal Alchemy are purely Daoist any more than we should ascribe Traditional Chinese Medicine to being Confucian. Rather, over centuries, many practitioners grappled with similar questions in terms of personal growth, self-cultivation, and fundamental issues of being, and they shared practices, ideas, and theories with each other.

In the later part of the 20th century and continuing into the 21st century, there's been an effort for certain schools and lineages, especially those supported by the Chinese government, to assert ownership and control over the range of practices, defining themselves and their teaching as the arbiters and markers of legitimacy. We see this in the positioning of the Quanzhen (Complete Reality) school as the pre-eminent Daoist practice and in the rivalry between Wudang Mountain and Chen Village to claim primacy over taijiquan. These efforts can obscure the details and complexity of the actual development of these arts and can encourage us to overlook important detail and texture.

In this section, Zheng makes explicit parallels between taijiquan development and Internal Alchemy practices. In many cases, he uses the exact same terminology found in current Daoist manuals and teaching. Sometimes, he uses older terminology that we know from older writings. And sometimes, he uses language that is clearly parallel to but slightly different from standard terminology. This might reflect Zheng's involvement in variant alchemical and Daoist practices that did not become the accepted versions codified in the late 20th century; it could be the result of his own study and conclusions; or it could reflect the kind of terminology drift and slight misquotations that we see elsewhere in his references to classic writings.

To understand the process Zheng describes in this Earth level, it's useful to summarize some of the core concepts and process of Internal Alchemy. The details, of course, vary from school to school and teaching to teaching, but the broad outline is as follows.

In the normal course of life, the three energetic components of a human being are gradually worn down resulting in old age, sickness, and ultimately death. These components are *jing* or essence and vitality, *qi* or breath and internal energy, and *shen* or spirit. In the process of life, the original pure essences of these components, *yuanjing*, *yuanqi*, and *yuanshen* (original vitality, original breath, original spirit) are gradually corrupted and dissipated.

The core of the alchemical process is to refine and revitalize the energetic components, returning them to their original pure state, and vitalizing the practitioner, giving him or her long life or "immortality".

The stages of this process of revitalization and alchemical transformation broadly include:

- 1) 築基 *Zhuji*, Laying The Foundation: strengthening each of the *jing*, *qi*, and *shen* through nutrition and practices including meditation and movement. In this way, the 三元 *sanyuan*, Three Originals, are revitalized.
- 2) 通三關 *Tong Sanguan*, Clearing the Three Passes: dredging out blockages to open the gates of the body so that there can be continual circulation of the *jing* and *qi* through the body.
- 3) 顛倒 *Diandao*, Reversing the Course or 逆流 *Niliu*, Going Against the Current: circulating the internal energy in the opposite direction that it circulates in normal life. The normal path, which leads to corruption and dissipation, is for the energy to rise up the front of the body and drop down the spine. The reverse path involves sending the energy up the spine and down the front.
- 4) 火候 *Huohou*, Firing Time or Alchemical Cooking: as the path is reversed, there are multiple opportunities to “cook” or “refine” the internal energy. This refinement process takes places in “cauldrons” located in the body, such as the *dantian*. As multiple rounds of the reversed current and the cooking process are undertaken, the internal energy is gradually refined and vitalized. This takes time, known as the Firing Time. Among the various steps are:
 - 煉精化氣 *Lianjing Huaqi*: refining the *jing*, transforming into *qi*
 - 煉氣化神 *Lianqi Huashen*: refining the *qi*, transforming into *shen*
 - 煉神還虛 *Lianshen Huanxu*: refining the *shen*, returning to emptiness
- 5) 還元 *Huanyuan*, Returning to the Origin: transcending physical limitations and achieving perfection.

(The Encyclopedia of Taoism entry on *neidan* and Wang Mu's *Foundations of Internal Alchemy* are good starting points for further research on this process.)

Clearing or dredging the three passes, sometimes also called “opening the passes”, is critical to this process. The three passes are located along the *Du Mai* (the Governing Vessel or Meridian) that runs near the spine and are the *weilu* at the base of the spine, the *jiaji* between the shoulder blades, and the *yuzhen* where the neck enters the skull. Wang Mu describes the points, referencing alchemical works from the 1200s, in the following:

Xiao Tingzhi (fl. 1260– 64) wrote in his *Jindan Wenda* (Questions and Answers on the Golden Elixir):

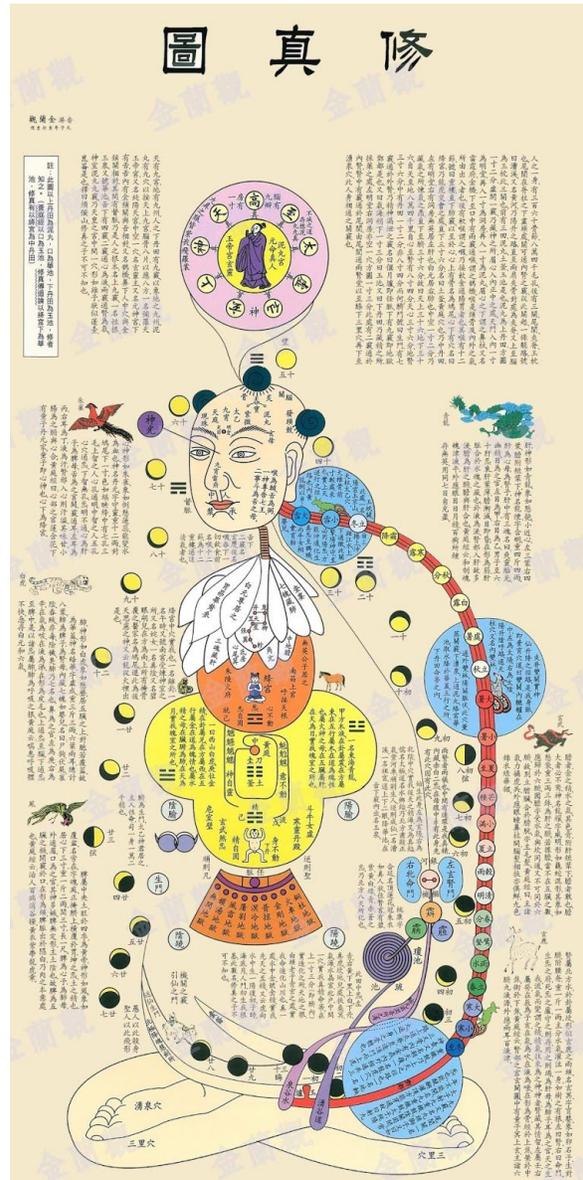
問背後三關。答曰。腦後曰玉枕關，夾脊曰轆轤關，水火之際曰尾閭關。

Someone asks what are the three Passes on the back. The one behind the brain is called Pass of the Jade Pillow (*yuzhen*). The one in the Spinal Handle (*jiaji*) is called Pass of the Pulley (*lulu*). The one at the junction of Water and Fire is called Barrier of the Caudal Funnel (*weilü*).

The *weilu* is located in the lowest section of the spine. The *jiaji* is in the back, across from the heart. The *yuzhen* is behind the head, below the identically -named acupuncture point, across from the mouth... The three Barriers are three sectors of the *du mai* (control vessel) , which forms the first half of the cyclical route of the River Chariot (*heche*) in the alchemical practice.

(Wang Mu, *Foundations of Internal Alchemy*, translation by Pregadio with minor edits)

The Passes are illustrated in two classic charts, the *Neijing Tu* (Diagram of the Internal Landscape) and the *Xiuzhen Tu* (Diagram of the Cultivation of Perfection) that show the internal geography of the body and the various flows through the body. These diagrams are found multiple places and date back to the tenth century. The most well-known versions are found as carvings on limestone stele at the *Baiyun Guan* (White Cloud Monastery) in Beijing. The versions below have been colored and enhanced for readability.



L: *Neijing Tu*, Diagram of the Inner Landscape ([fullsize image](#))
 R: *Xiuzhen Tu* Diagram of Cultivating Perfection ([fullsize image](#))
 (Both from Kamloonkoon Press)

For our purposes, important details include the three passes and the river chariots. In the *Neijing Tu* on the left, the three passes are shown as temples along the river running up the spine: one at the base of the spine, one part way up above the flames of the heart center, and one at the top of the spine behind the white circle representing the inner moon. In the *Xiuzhen Tu* on the right, the passes are shown as three large blue circles, at the bottom, middle, and top of the spine.

As the current is reversed, the alchemical process is carried on via a “river chariot” that runs up the reversed stream. The first step is to dredge the passes and begin the reverse flow. Then, in the Fire Time, the refined essence is carried through the passes by a set of three chariots. In the *Xiuzhen Tu*, the three carts are shown, each drawn by a different animal: a goat or sheep, a deer, and an ox.

Wang Mu describes the River Chariot, the alchemical firing, and the three carts as follows:

The River Chariot (*heche* 河車): When the Control vessel (*du mai*) —which runs from the *weilu* to the *niwan* — is used to circulate the internal essences, the alchemical texts refer to it as the route of the River Chariot. The *weilu*, *jiuji*, and *yuzhen* are the “three Barriers” that mark its ascending route. The *niwan*, *huangting* (“yellow court” or middle *dantian*) and the lower *dantian* (“cinnabar field”) are the three Cinnabar Fields that mark its descending route. The ascent is called “advancing the Fire” (*jinhuo*); the descent is called “withdrawing in response” (*tuifu*).

The Fire Times (*huohou* 火候, firing time or alchemical cooking): In the alchemical texts, Fire is a metaphor of Original Spirit (*yuanshen*). When Original Spirit coalesces with Vitality (*jing*) and Breath (*qi*), they circulate along the path of the *ren* and *du* vessels (Conception and Control Vessels). The operation of heating them as they begin to circulate is called Fire Times (*huohou*). The word “times” (*hou*, lit. “periods, spans of time”) means “stages,” and refers to the stages of advancement and withdrawal, slow and fast pace, and ascent and descent in the circulation...

The Three Carts: When the alchemical practice advances, the firing (refinement) goes through three stages, called the “sheep cart” (*yangche*), the “deer cart” (*luche*), and the “ox cart” (*niuche*). From the *weilu* to the *jiuji*, one should proceed carefully and with a short pace, similar to the lightness of a cart drawn by a sheep. From the *jiuji* to the *yuzhen*, one should proceed quickly and in large steps, similar to the nimbleness of a cart drawn by a deer. From the *yuzhen* to the *niwan*, since the Barrier of the Jade Pillow (*yuzhen*) is extremely fine and subtle, one should charge forward with much power, similar to the strength of a cart drawn by an ox.

(translation by Pregadio with minor edits)

With all of this as background, we can proceed to Zheng’s description of the stages in the Earth Level.

Earth Level 2.1

一、气沉丹田。
为炼气之初基。
丹田位于腹中。
低于脐一寸三分。
近脐去脊较远。

First Step: sink *qi* to *dantian*

This is the initial foundation for refining (*lian*) the *qi*
The *dantian* is located in the center of the belly,
Below the navel 1 *cun* and 3 *fen* [between 1 and 1.5 inches],
Closer to the navel than to the spine.

气以细长静慢为主。
缓缓吸入丹田。
与心相守。
稍使逗留。

The main point is that the *qi* must be fine, long, quiet, and slow.
Slowly slowly inhale into the *dantian*,
Allow the *xin* (and *qi*) to mutually guard each other
And gently make them linger there [in the *dantian*].

久之渐能宿气。
日积月累。直养无害。
未可量也。纯任自然。
不可有丝毫牵强。

Over a long time, this process allows the *qi* to gradually accumulate.
Over days and months, it accumulates; directly cultivating without harm.
You cannot measure it; skillfully undertake (the process) naturally (*ziran*).
You must not use even the slightest striving or force.

初学沉气不易。
肩稍沉。肘稍垂。
则气可引至胃脘。
胸微陷。背微弓。
则气可沉至丹田矣。

In the beginning of practice, sinking the *qi* is not easy.
The shoulders slightly sink; the elbows slightly hang.

Then the *qi* can be lead to the abdomen [stomach cavity].
The chest falls a little bit; the back arches a little bit.
Then the *qi* can sink to the *dantian*!

反此。必驟进即逆上。
势必耸肩掀肺。
易致病。

Going against this will cause a precipitous stop to your advancement.
You're certain to raise the shoulders and lift the lungs
Which will naturally cause harm (*bing*, disease)

此为二阶一级。
This is the Second Rank, First Step.

Discussion

This is the initial foundation for refining the qi: Refining is 炼 *lian*: to refine, cultivate, smelt, transform with fire as in the alchemical firing. And 初基 *chu ji*, "Initial Foundation" is a clear parallel to *zhu ji*, "Laying the Foundation".

The dantian is located below the navel 1 cun and 3 fen: *cun* and *fen* are body centric measurements. A *fen* is one tenth of a *cun* and a *cun* is often translated as one inch. However, these measurements are determined on your own body using features of your body (e.g. the size of your thumb) rather than being measured using an external standard. In 1915, following the establishment of the Republic, Chinese units of measure were standardized and one *cun* was defined as being equal to 32mm. This was revised in 1930, when one *cun* became 1/30th of a meter, or 33-1/3mm. If we used these definitions, 1.3 *cun* would be about 43mm or 1.7 inches.

However, I'm sure Zheng would have meant *cun* and *fen* in the "body inch" sense, not a standardized measurement. Of course, like all details in the traditional Chinese systems, there's a fair amount of variation in the definitions that different schools give. *Cun* is always determined by measurements on your own body. In some instances, the *cun* measurement differs depending on which part of the body is being measured. For example, in the head, one *cun* is the distance between the inner corners of the eyes, while for the torso, the *cun* is defined such that the distance between the nipples is 8 *cun*. The *cun* can also be defined using the hand and fingers (ideally your own hand and fingers, not someone else's).

According to typical definitions,

- The width of the thumb at the last (most distal) joint is one *cun*,
- The length of the middle segment of the middle finger (left middle finger for men, right middle finger for women) is one *cun*,
- The width of the index and middle fingers when held together is 1.5 *cun*,
- The width of the four fingers of the hand when held together is 3 *cun*.

However, these definitions might not all give the same result, even when applied just to oneself. For example, on my hands, the width of my index and middle fingers held together is indeed about 1.5 times the width of my last thumb joint. But the length of the middle segment of my middle finger, defined as one *cun*, is about twice the width of the last thumb joint, also defined as one *cun*. And the width of my four fingers, specified as 3 *cun*, is about 1-1/2 times the length of the middle segment of my middle finger, and slightly less than three times the width of the last thumb joint.

In any case, we were taught that the *dantian* is located either two or three finger widths below the belly button. Which, regardless of which system you use is going to be between one and two *cun*. And with practice, the location of the *dantian* becomes very clear and distinct to the inner perception.

The qi must be fine, long, quiet, and slow: this set of attributes, 细长静慢 *xi chang jing man*, is known as the four breath words and Zheng includes this formula in several of his written works and also used it in oral teaching with our teachers. These attributes describe both the physical breathing and the state of flow in the internal energy. They are also each rich in allusions to body-mind development.

- 细 *xi* is thin, fine, delicate, meticulous. As a meditation instruction, 細心 (*xi xin*) describes a state of awareness characterized by careful, detailed, unbroken attention.
- 长 *chang* means long, great in extent in either space or time, steady, regular, strong, proficient. It's used in the phrase 長壽 *chang shou* meaning longevity and long life.
- 靜 *jing* is still, quiet, peaceful, calm. It is part of the duality 驚動 *jing dong*, quiescence and activity. In internal practices and self-cultivation, *dong* practices are moving practices that use the body, *jing* practices are quiescent still practices such as sitting meditation.
- 慢 *man* is slow, leisurely, taking it easy, getting to it eventually, gradually. The character itself has two components, heart-mind and length or stretch, thus suggesting lengthening or stretching the mind.

The xin and qi mutually guard each other: Guarding is 守 *shou*, meaning guard, defend, observe, abide. Zheng actually only says “*xin* mutually guard each other”, leaving out the word *qi*. This is one of the issues with translating classical Chinese: important words, such as the subject of a sentence, can be implied, with the expectation that the reader will know what the subject is and so it need not be explicitly mentioned.

In Zheng's New Method of Taijiquan Self-Cultivation, he expands on this phrase, explicitly referencing both *xin* and *qi*, saying:

是要以心與氣。
相守於丹田。
如雞之孵卵態。
此所謂知止。
止於至善之地
道也者，不可須臾離也。
可離非道也

Thus the *qi* should be supported by the *xin*
And they mutually guard each other in the *dantian*
Like a hen broods over her eggs.
This is what is called *knowing where to rest*:
“The place of coming to rest at ultimate good” (and)
“Dao is that which cannot be separated from for an instant.
What can be separated from is not Dao.”

Here, Zheng further explains “mutually guarding” with the image of a hen incubating her eggs and then adds two quotes from the opening lines of two Confucian classics, *The Great Learning* and *The Zhong Yong* (often translated as The Doctrine of the Mean, more literally The Application of the Center). He prefaces the quotations claiming they describe the state known as “knowing where to rest”. As usual, Zheng's quotes are slightly different from the received texts and he has rearranged some of the words.

The first quote is from the *Da Xue*, *The Great Learning* which begins:

大學之道，在明明德，在親民，在止於至善。
知止而后有定，定而后能靜，靜而后能安，安而后能慮，慮而后能得。
物有本末，事有終始，知所先後，則近道矣。

The Dao of Great Learning lies in making bright virtue brilliant; in treating the people like family; in coming to rest at the limit of the good.

Only after wisdom comes to rest does one possess certainty; only after one possesses certainty can one become tranquil; only after one becomes tranquil can one become secure; only after one becomes secure can one contemplate alternatives; only after one can contemplate alternatives can one comprehend.

Affairs have their roots and branches, situations have their ends and beginnings. To know what comes first and what comes after is to be near the Dao.

(translation from Robert Eno with slight modifications)

The second quote is from the *Zhong Yong* which begins:

天命之謂性。率性之謂道。修道之謂教。

What Heaven confers is called “nature (character, quality, shape).” Accordance with this nature is called Dao. Cultivating Dao is called “education.”

道也者、不可須臾離也、可離非道也。是故君子戒慎乎其所不睹、恐懼乎其所不聞。

That which is Dao cannot be separated from for an instant. What **can** be separated from is not Dao. Therefore the Superior Man is cautious in the place where he is not seen, and apprehensive in the place where he is not heard.

(translation by AC Muller with slight modifications)

The *Zhong Yong* also includes commentary attributed to Confucius. The commentary for this verse reads:

子曰。道之不行也、我知之矣。知者過之、愚者不及也。道之不明也、我知之矣。賢者過之、不肖者不及也。人莫不飲食也、鮮能知味也。

The Master said: “I know why Dao is not practiced. The intelligent go beyond it and the dull do not reach it. I know why Dao is not disclosed. The ‘good’ go beyond it and the unworthy do not reach it. There is no one who does not eat or drink, but there are few who really have ‘taste.’”

子曰。道其不行矣夫。

The Master said: “What a pity! Dao is not followed.”

(translation by AC Muller with slight modifications)

While these quotations are certainly worth study and display Zheng’s erudition, it’s not clear, to me at least, what they mean in the context of the *xin* and *qi* mutually guarding in the *dantian*.

Shoulders slightly sink; elbows slightly hang; chest a-little-bit falls; back a-little-bit arches: These four instructions are given to help us create the conditions for the *qi* sinking to the *dantian*. They appear in Zheng’s text as parallel phrases:

肩稍沉。肘稍垂。

(shoulders slightly sink; elbows slightly hang)

胸微陷。背微弓。

(chest a-little-bit falls; back-a-little-bit arches)

And they are almost quotes from Yang Chengfu’s [10 Essential Points](#). The primary difference is the description of the chest and back: In the 10 Essential Points, the chest is contained and the back is raised. Here the chest falls or drops, and the back bows or arches. The inclusion of *wei*, a-little-bit, is important since neither the falling nor the arching should be overdone.

Earth Level 2.2

二、气达乎四肢。

气沉丹田后。

似可由心驱遣。

便使气至胯至膝至踵。

此即所谓至人之息以踵。

复至肩至肘至腕。

Second step: the *qi* reaches the four limbs.

After the *qi* sinks to the *dantian*,

The *xin* acts to dispatch it

Thus sending the *qi* to the leg, then the knee, then the heel.

This is similar to the saying “the authentic person breathes with the heel”.

Doing the same, send *qi* to the shoulder, then the elbow, then the wrist.

四肢关节俱开。

然后下可达乎涌泉。

上可行乎劳宫。

以止于中指尖。

The joints and gates in the four limbs are all open (*kai*)

Thus, going down, the *qi* can reach the *yongquan* (bubbling well)

Going up, the *qi* can reach the *laogong* (heart of the palm)

And arrive at the tip of the middle finger.

则拳论所为。

以心行气。以气运身。

可以从事矣。

This is what the Boxing Manual describes as

“With the *xin* moving the *qi*; with the *qi* mobilizing the body”

In this way, the business gets done!

此为二阶二级。

This is the Second Rank, Second Step.

Discussion

The xin acts to dispatch the qi: dispatch is 驅遣 *quqian* meaning dispatch, expel, drive-away, order-about. Often, motion of the qi is described as being “led” by the mind. Here, the image is more of the mind pushing or directing the qi.

The Authentic Person breathes with the heel: This is a reference to a passage in the Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu) that describes the 真人 *zhenren*, the Authentic Person, Realized Person, Sage, or True Man. In Zheng’s text, he slightly misquotes the original Zhuangzi, leaving out the *zhen* (Authentic) modifier and so just saying “a person breaths with the heel”. Of course, as educated readers, we’re expected to recognize the quote and know that he meant *zhen ren* not just *ren*. These kinds of minor errors are widespread in Chinese texts, not just in Zheng’s, and are likely a result of quoting from memory coupled with the difficulty of creating texts. When all texts are written by hand using formal calligraphy ideally performed in a meditative state, looking up references interrupts the meditative process of calligraphy and writing, making drafts is difficult, and revising final texts is near impossible.

The referenced Zhuangzi quote is

古之真人，其寢不夢，其覺無憂，其食不甘，其息深深。
真人之息以踵，眾人之息以喉。
屈服者，其喑言若哇。其耆欲深者，其天機淺。

The True Man of ancient times slept without dreaming and woke without cares; ate without savoring; and his breath came from deep inside. The True Man breathes with his heels; the common people breathe with their throats. Crushed and bound down, they gasp out their words as though they were retching. Deep in their passions and desires, they are shallow in the workings of Heaven.

(from Zhuangzi Chapter 6, translation by Watson)

Louis Komjathy, academic and Daoist initiate, writes on Daoist Heel Breathing, saying One breathes down to and up from the heels. In certain Daoist Yangsheng [life strengthening] and internal alchemy contexts, this is often associated with a qi-ingestion practice that focuses on the Yongquan (Bubbling Well), the center of the balls of the feet, and on terrestrial qi (*diqui* -- *earth qi*). That is, one inhales the qi of the earth through the soles of the feet, the primary entry-point of terrestrial qi... The physical breath, and thus the qi, penetrates throughout the limbs, even to the fingertips and toes. For Daoists, heel-breathing is thus one way to complete embodiment, to total presence.

(Taoist Tradition, pg 193)

It's interesting that Zheng includes this reference to breathing from the heel, associated with earth qi by Komjathy, in his Earth Level discussion.

Also note that the *yin qiao mai* and the *yang qiao mai* (the Yin and Yang Heel or Springing Vessels) are paired, respectively, with the *ren mai* and *du mai* (the Conception and Governing Vessels) involved in the alchemical process of Reversing the Stream described above. Heel breathing is thus involved in that alchemical process.

What the boxing manual describes as xin moving the qi, qi mobilizing the body: This quote is from the Taijiquan classic attributed to Wu Yuxiang titled *Mental Elucidation of the 13 Postures*:

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。

By using the *xin* to move the *qi* and make it sink, it can then gather and permeate into the bones.

By using the *qi* to move the body and make it compliant, it can then easily follow the *xin*.
(Davis translation)

In this quote, the relationships between *xin* and *qi* and between *qi* and body are slightly different. Davis translates both as moving, but in the original text, the *xin* 行 *xings* the *qi*, while the *qi* 運 *yuns* the body. *Xing* means to go, walk, travel, perform, carry out. *Yun* has more of a flavor of carrying something or moving something, as in a cargo being shipped or transported.

Earth Level 2.3

三、越尾闕达乎泥丸。
此谓通三关。
亦即河车倒运之嚆矢。

Third step: passing through the *weilu* (base of the spine) and reaching the *niwan* (upper *dantian*).

This is called “clearing the three passes” (*tong sanguan*).

Thus (the clearing of the three passes) is the harbinger of the river chariot travelling the reverse stream.

然越尾闕。为最难。
餘较易耳。

However, passing through the *weilu* is the most difficult of the steps,
The remaining steps (the other two passes) are easier.

气沉丹田。

待功纯。火候到。

Qi sinks to the dantian.

Abide in the genuine work; attain the completion of the alchemical cooking
(*huohou*)

不期然而然。

自然越过尾闾。

After time, the result occurs unexpectedly

Naturally, crossing through the *weilu*.

不可丝毫勉强。

不然便落虚妄。

致病。慎之慎之。

须证诸师友。

为妥。

You must not use even the slightest striving or force.

Otherwise, the process is certain to fail and the results will be empty and
fabricated,

Causing disease. Be careful, be careful!

You must get direct instruction from teachers and senior students.

Only this is proper.

越过尾闾。

复冲开夹脊。

度玉枕。达泥丸。

亦若是。

After crossing through the *weilu*,

Repeat, dredging and opening the *jiaji* (gate between shoulder blades).

And extend on through the *yuzhen* (jade pillow), finally reaching the *niwan*.

All the steps happen in the same way.

此为入门。

则骎骎进乎道矣。

延年祛病末事矣。

This is called “entering the gate”

Then you advance swiftly, like a galloping horse, towards the Dao!

Prolonging life and banishing disease is the result upon completion.

此为二阶三级。

This is the Second Rank, Third Step.

Discussion

Clearing the three passes, river chariot, reverse stream, alchemical cooking: All of these are clear, explicit references to Internal Alchemy practices. See the discussion above for more details.

Passing through the weilu is the most difficult: most alchemical texts describe the passage through the *yuzhen* (jade pillow) as the most difficult. Zheng differs from standard Internal Alchemy theory here.

You must get direct instruction: the details of Internal Alchemy have long been shrouded in secrecy. And texts emphasize the dangers of going about the process incorrectly. Some texts are deliberately deceptive, some omit important details, others speak of the process only using metaphor and allegory. Zheng is actually rather specific here, but remains consistent with alchemical teaching in insisting on the importance of direct instruction.

Advancing swiftly, like a galloping horse: In the Wang Mu text quoted above, he also describes the final stages of clearing the passes as involving speed and power: “From the *yuzhen* to the *niwan*, one should charge forward with much power”.

Heaven Level: Awareness and its Application

Heaven Level 3.1

一、听劲。

何谓劲。又何能听。

须细审之。

First step: *ting jin* (listening to *jin*).

What does *jin* mean? And how can one *ting*?

We must examine this in detail.

劲与力大异。

秘传谓劲由于筋。力由于骨。

至哉言乎。

There is a big difference between *jin* and *li*:

The secret transmission says: *jin* results from the sinews; *li* results from the bones.

This saying is extremely important!

近世学者。盲从至死。

而终不知劲之为用。

可为浩叹。

Modern students practice blindly till death

And at the end, they don't know the use of *jin*.

One can only sigh with regret for this.

劲之为劲。

气由于筋致柔。

有弹力已耳。

The essential characteristic of *jin* is

The *qi*'s function is enabled by the sinews being fine and soft.

The sinews are elastic and have spring force!

惟柔乃能与对手黏连相随。

能黏连。

则我之气与彼气相接触。

欲测其气之动静。

故曰听。

Only via this softness can you touch hands with another and have *nian lian* (stick and connect) while mutually following (*sui*)

If you can stick and connect

Then your *qi* and the other's *qi* make contact

And you are able to measure the motion and stillness (*dong* and *jing*) of the *qi*

This is what is known as *ting*.

则拳论所谓。

彼微动。我先动之机。

亦在于此。

This is according to the saying from the boxing manual:

If the other moves even slightly, I move first at the moment of opportunity.

This skill is also described by *ting*.

此为三阶一级。

This is the Third Rank, First Step.

Discussion

Ting Jin: Heaven level has to do with awareness and consciousness and how we apply that.

The first step Zheng describes is *ting jin*. *Jin* is 勁 and represents a type of refined and skilled force or power that a practitioner can generate and is unlike the “crude and clumsy” force, 力 *li*, used by untrained people.

We can understand *ting jin* as either a kind of *jin*, the *jin* that involves listening, or as an activity we do that involves *jin*, namely, listening **to** *jin*. There has been considerable debate about this question in taijiquan circles. In this section, it appears to me that Zheng understands *ting jin* in the second sense: listening to *jin*. He first discussed the essential characteristics of *jin* and then covers the skills that are enabled by skill at listening. So, this first section is describing the skill or ability to listen to *jin*.

Modern students practice and at the end, don't understand the use of jin: “Use” is *yong*, use, function or application. The Heaven level has to do with awareness and its application (*yong*).

The essential characteristic of jin is that: The text literally says *jin zhī wèi jin*, or “*jin* is *jin* (because)”, meaning “the thing that makes *jin jin* is (the following phrase)”.

Stick and connect while mutually following: This is a reference to a famous formula sometimes translated as “stick adhere connect and follow without butting or disconnecting”. It appears

multiple places including the *Pushing Hands Song* included in the Taijiquan Classics and early in the *Explanation of the Taiji Method* (the “40 Chapters”). There is considerable textual variation in the various versions of this phrase and continued controversy and discussion about the precise wording and the precise meaning of the terms. Zheng coins yet another, slightly different, version of the formula here.

A few of the versions of the last line of the *Pushing Hands Song* include

粘連黏隨不丟頂	<i>Zhān lián nián suí bù diū dǐng</i>
沾連粘隨不丟頂	<i>Zhān lián zhān suí bù diū dǐng</i>
粘黏連隨不丟頂	<i>Zhān nián lián suí bù diū dǐng</i>

Zheng’s version here is: 黏連相隨 *Nián lián xiāng suí*, using three of the four words from the start of the formula and replacing *zhan* with *xiang* or “mutual”. In the translation, I’ve applied *xiang* to following, getting “Stick and Connect while mutually Following”.

In the 40 chapters, the desirable skills of *zhan nian lian sui* are contrasted to the four diseases of *ding bian diu kang*, or butting, falling-short, disconnecting, and resisting. I understand *ding* and *bian* as errors in advancing: pushing too far with excess firmness (butting), and failing to follow the opponent and falling short; and *diu* and *kang* as errors in moving back: retreating too far and disconnecting from the other, and bracing or resisting against the other’s movement. In the *Pushing Hands Song*, these four diseases are shortened to just two errors that can apply to either advance or receiving: excess force and resistance (butting) and insufficiency and running away (disconnecting).

The exact meaning of *zhan nian lian sui* is difficult to express in English: the words end up sounding like synonyms rather than different skills. Sticking, adhering, being-glued-to, being-joined-with all seem very similar in meaning. Various traditions have different explanations for these skills including directional (e.g. *zhan* applies sticking in a vertical direction, *nian* sticking in a horizontal plane), levels of increased skill (*sui* is the initial level of sticking and following, *lian* advances the skill, *nian* and *zhan* represent still higher levels), and relational (I apply *lian* and *zhan* to the opponent whereas in *nian* the opponent is unable to disconnect from me and must follow/*sui* me).

In the 40 chapters, the four skills and the four errors are described as:

粘黏連隨

粘者提上拔高之謂也

黏者留戀纏綿之謂也

連者舍己無離之謂也

隨者彼走此應之謂也

Zhan Nian Lian Sui

Zhan (stick, glued-to) is that which involves lifting up and uprooting;

Nian (adhere, sticky) is that which involves remaining attached and inseparable;
Lian (join, connect) is that which involves giving up the self without separation;
Sui (follow, comply with) is that which involves responding to the other by going-with the other.

(In the description for *Nian*, both of the two character phrases used (留戀 and 纏綿) imply romantic love and attachment and being inseparable from the loved one.)

頂匾丟抗
頂者出頭之謂也
匾者不及之謂也
丟者離開之謂也
抗者太過之謂也

Ding Bian Diu Kang

Ding (butting, going against) is that which involves pushing forward and leading with the head;

Bian (martial arts meaning: awkward, insufficient) is that which involves falling short;

Diu (losing hold of, misplacing, discarding) is that which involves departing from (the other);

Kang (resist, defy) is that which involves excess.

要知于此四字之病
不但粘黏連隨斷
不明知覺運動也

One should know that the diseases described by the four words

Not only break *zhan nian lian sui*

But also prevent awareness (*zhujie*) and movement (*yundong*).

(*Zhujie*, awareness, and its application is the topic of the Heaven level; *Yundong* is movement and mobilization.)

Measure the motion and stillness of the qi: motion and stillness is *dong-jing*, one of the pre-eminent yin yang pairs.

If the other moves even the slightest bit, I move first at the moment of opportunity: Zheng describes this line as coming from the Boxing Manual and then slightly misquotes the *Mental Elucidation of the Thirteen Postures*. The slight misquote is typical of the use by Zheng and others of classical references, quoting from memory as they wrote. His misquote is interesting in itself since he adds “moment of opportunity”.

The received version of the line from the *Mental Elucidation* is

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。

The other doesn't move; I don't move.
The other moves even slightly; I move first.
Jin seems to be relaxed (*song*) but is not relaxed;
Seems to be about to extend, but is not yet extended;
The *Jin* is broken; the *Yi* is not broken.

Zheng quotes the second line, adding 之机 *zhi ji*, at the pivot point, at the key moment. The emphasis on precise timing is important. And the use of *ji*, pivot point, opportunity, key moment is interesting as it also occurs in the famous phrase from the Zhang Sanfeng Taijiquan Classic *de ji de shi*, attaining the opportunity, attaining the advantage. Zheng references this phrase again in the following section on *dong jin*.

Heaven Level 3.2

二、懂勁。
懂勁与听勁。
有深淺精粗之別。
Second step: *dong jin* (understanding *jin*)
Dong jin and *ting jin*
Have distinctions of deep and shallow, fine and coarse.

彼微动。我可听而得之。
我先动则懂而后能之。
得机得势在我不在彼。
If the other moves even slightly, I use *ting* and achieve (the goal which is that)
I move first. With practice, this gives me the skill of *dong jin*.
De ji de shi (achieving the opportunity, achieving the advantage) depends on me;
it doesn't depend on the opponent.

此乃由浅入深矣。
至于精粗难言矣。
These statements cover the distinction from shallow to deep!
As for the distinction of fine and coarse, that is difficult to describe!

秘传谓彼微动。我听而知之。

微动易测。未动难知。

苟能于未动。听而知之。

其庶乎阶及神明矣。

The secret transmission says: the other moves even slightly, I use *ting* to know it. Doing this, the slightest movement is easy to perceive; but it is difficult to perceive when there isn't movement.

If you can perceive even with no movement, listening (*ting*) and knowing it, Then, this is how you reach the next level of *shenming* (spiritual brightness)!

曰。无他。

气由乎筋脉膜膈。

Specifically,

The *Qi* can result from the sinews, the pulse, the fascia, and the diaphragm.

其劲有四。

曰防御。

曰潜藏。

曰将发。

曰撤击之不同。

There are four categories of *jin*:

Namely, defensive;

Hidden and latent;

Ready to issue (*fa*);

Distinguishing withdrawing and attacking.

能收缩骨节。曰筋。

得循环血液。曰脉。

膜。在肌肉间。裹筋与骨。及脏腑皆有之。

膈。肝隔也。

The sinews hold the joints together;

The pulse achieves the circulation of the blood;

The fascia lies between the parts of the meat, wraps the sinews and bones, and contains the *zang* and *fu* organs;

The diaphragm forms a compartment above the liver.

气由于筋。不失常态。知其欲防御。

由于脉。知其欲潜藏。而生变化。

由于膜。将充溢于表。知其将发劲也。

由于膈。如其敛气。欲退而撤击矣。

If the *qi* depends on the sinews, then (the situation) doesn't depart from the norm and you know the opponent wants to defend;

If the *qi* depends on the pulse, then you know the opponent wants to conceal his latent changes and is about to give birth to those changes;

If the *qi* depends on the fascia, then it is about to overflow to the exterior, and you know the opponent is ready to *fa jin*;

If the *qi* depends on the diaphragm, then the opponent is gathering the *qi* and you know the opponent wants to retreat and withdraw in order to then attack!

此为懂劲之极致。

精矣。至矣。

蔑以加矣。

This is the ultimate achievement of *dong jin*.

Excellent! Sublime!

Nothing more can be said!

是为三阶二级。

This is the Third Rank, Second Step.

Discussion

This section describes how one moves from the level of *ting jin* through that of *dong jin* to advance to *shenming*, spiritual brightness. The first part tells us how to get from *ting* to *dong*, namely by practicing our *ting* skills till we can consistently move first when the opponent moves even the slightest and so that our ability to attain the opportunity and attain the advantage depends solely on us, not on what the opponent does.

The second part tells how to get from *dong* to *shenming*. To do this, we need to go beyond moving first when the opponent makes the slightest move and be able to know and understand the situation even when the opponent has not yet moved. The work consists of distinguishing the four kinds of *jin* that the opponents can have, each of which is distinguished based on *qi* relying on a particular organ or location and which indicate what the opponent's next action will be.

To understand the logic of this section -- how the four kinds of *jin* correlate to the four sources of *qi* and the four possible actions the opponent can take -- we have to rely on the parallel structure of the Chinese text.

In English, we'd add connective language, saying something like:

The *qi* has four different possible sources. As the opponent uses these four kinds of *qi*, there are four corresponding potential actions and four kinds of situations we can find ourselves in. So, if we can perceive the sources of the opponent's *qi*, we can understand the *jin* and know what the opponent is about to do before the opponent begins moving.

These four sources, situations, and intentions are: ...

Zheng leaves all these connections to be inferred by the reader based on the structural parallels between his sentences.

Distinctions of deep and shallow, fine and coarse: This is a typical construct for structuring a discourse: define a pair of distinctions and then expound on each. In this section, Zheng uses the distinction of deep and shallow to cover how one advances from *ting* to *dong* and the distinction of fine and coarse to cover advancing from *dong* to *shenming*. (For more discussion of the meaning of *shenming*, see the following section.) Presumably coarse describes the situation where we can *ting* the opponent at the slightest movement and fine the situation where we can *ting* even without any movement.

De ji de shi (achieving the opportunity, achieving the advantage): this is a quotation from the Taijiquan Classic attributed to Zhang Sanfeng. *Shi* means advantage, strategic superiority, power, influence. *Ji* means opportunity, key moment, pivot point. *De* means to achieve, attain, realize and implies a deeper level of attainment than simple possession.

At its simplest level, the formula reminds us not to focus on attaining the advantage; rather be alert to the opportunities and key moments where the situation can change and that by being precisely present in those pivotal moments, we naturally attain the advantage. The work thus focuses on the opportunity, not the advantage. Focusing on gaining the advantage and overlooking the pivotal moment of opportunity could be called “abandoning the near to seek the far”.

The full quote from the classic provides more detail on achieving the moment and the advantage:

由脚而腿而腰，總須完整一氣
向前退後，乃能得機得勢
有不得機得勢處，身便散亂
其病必於腰腿求之

From the feet to the legs and then the *yao*, there must always be one unified *qi*.

Then, stepping forward or back, you can achieve the opportunity and achieve the advantage (*de ji de shi*)

If you don't achieve the opportunity and advantage, then it's because your body is disordered.

You must seek the error in *yao* and legs.

The secret transmission says: the other moves even slightly, I use ting to know it: this is now the third version Zheng has given of this formula over the course of this and the previous sections. Each time, the formula is slightly changed. In the prior section, Zheng quoted it as “If the other moves even slightly, I move first at the moment of opportunity.” In this section, Zheng first gives the formula as “If the other moves even slightly, I use *ting* and achieve (the goal which is that) I move first.” And five lines later, he says “If the other moves even slightly, I use *ting* to know it”. Of course, all three of these depart in minor ways from the wording in the received classic.

The Qi can result from the sinews, pulse, fascia, and diaphragm: As discussed at the beginning of this translation, I’ve used the term sinews for 筋 *jin* (a different *jin* than the refined strength 劲 *jin*) even as the Chinese term encompasses what we’d distinguish as tendons, ligaments, and muscles. 筋 *Jin* broadly refers to all the parts of the body involved in generating movement as a whole and more precisely on the connective tissue between muscles and bones and between pairs of bones.

In current Chinese medical usage, 脉 *mai* references the pulse and by implication the blood vessels. Note that pulse is perceived very differently in Chinese medicine than in Western medicine. We primarily see the rhythm and tempo of the pulse; the Chinese perceive a much richer set of qualities such as texture, strength, and depth and don’t pay nearly as much attention to the literal tempo. The *mai* has always been tied to the flow of the blood, but was not associated directly with the blood vessels. Instead, those vessels were sometimes considered to be part of the *jin* along with tendons, ligaments, and muscles. I’ve used “pulse” for *mai*.

膜 *mo* literally means membrane and as Zheng describes it in this section (separating parts of the body’s meat, wrapping the sinews and the bones, and containing the internal organs) it is a very close match to our notion of “fascia”

Finally, the 膈 *ge* is just the same as what we label as the diaphragm.

This list of four sources for the *qi* is the beginning of the section with parallel construction. We need to read each line as matching the corresponding lines in the next groups. Thus *qi* from the sinews corresponds to defensive *jin*, the sinews hold the joints together, and when the opponent draws on *qi* from the sinews, just like people normally do, the opponent is intending to defend. Similarly, *qi* from the pulse corresponds to hidden *jin*, the pulse circulates the blood, and when the opponent draws on *qi* from the pulse, the opponent is hiding and about to unleash latent changes.

Zang and fu organs: Chinese medical theory describes the organs differently than Western theory does. We tend to perceive the organs as parts that the body can be decomposed into: each organ has a location and a structural integrity (it can be cut out of a body as a piece). Organs typically have a single function. None of these statements are true of the internal organs in Chinese medical theory: organs tend to spread through large areas of the body; they aren’t something one could cut out of a body; they serve multiple functions.

For a simple example, we tend to think of the eyes as an organ: they're located in a single place, each eye is an object in itself, and the eyes have the function of seeing. In Chinese medicine, while the eye as a whole is controlled by the liver, the portions of the eye are actually each part of different organs: the iris is associated with the liver; the corners of the eye with the heart; the eyelids with the spleen; the conjunctiva (the membrane that covers the eyeball and lines the inside of the eyelids) with the lung; and the pupil with the kidney.

The internal organs are divided into two sets of five, corresponding to Five Phase theory and Yin/Yang theory. The *Zang* organs are *yin* and solid; the *Fu* organs are *yang* and hollow. Originally, there were five *zang* organs and five *fu* organs, each corresponding to one of the Five Phases. As medical theory was elaborated, a sixth *fu* organ, the *sanjiao* or "triple burner", was added. Some theories also add a sixth *zang* organ, separating the pericardium (heart wrapping) from the heart proper. With six *zang* and six *fu* organs, the organs each correspond to one of the twelve primary meridians. In fact, the organ might be considered to include any part of the body touched or controlled by the corresponding meridian. Thereby, for example, making it possible for the kidney to encompass and actually include the pupil of the eye. (There is also a set of "extraordinary" vessels or meridians. These meridians include the *ren* and *du* vessels and the *yin* and *yang* heel vessels discussed above in the Earth level.)

Heaven Level 3.3

三、为阶及神明。
难言之矣。
拳论终之曰。
意在精神不在气。
在气则滞。
有气则无力。
无气则纯刚。

Third step is the rank of achieving *shenming* (Spirit Brightness)

This is difficult to describe!

The end of the boxing manual says:

The *yi* rests on the *jing-shen*, not on the *qi*.

If it rests on the *qi*, then there's stagnation.

Having *qi*, you can develop non-*li*,

Having non-*qi*, you can develop pure hardness.

此言甚奇。

似视气。犹若未足重耶。

其实不然。

气能得化境。而进乎精神之作用。

其所谓无力之力。神力也。

This statement is very strange.

Almost as if it's saying that, regarding *qi*, *qi* alone is not sufficiently important.

In fact, this is true.

When one's skill with *qi* achieves perfection, and advances to the application of *jingshen*,

This is what's known as the force of non-force (*li* of non-*li*). It's also called *shen-li* (Spirit Power).

目之所注。神之所到。气已随之。

气能运身。不待动心。

而神可以挟气而行。

是为神力。

(When you reach this stage), if your eyes focus on a place, the *shen* will reach that place, and the *qi* will also follow there.

The *qi* can mobilize the body and you don't need to disturb the *xin*;

Instead, the *shen* directs both the *qi* and the movement.

This is *shen-li*.

亦可谓之神速。

物理学。以速乘力。

其效能未可限量。

故神力即神速也。

It's also called *shen-su* (Miraculous Speed).

In Physics, with speed, you can multiply your force

And then its effectiveness is without limits.

Thus *shen-li* also achieves *shen-su*.

学者类多舍近求远。

不知丹田积气之妙用。

Many students abandon the near to seek the far

And thus fail to know the marvelous application of the *dantian* accumulating *qi*.

气犹风与水与云之类。

风与水与云。皆能有积力。

与天地之积气一是。

(Accumulating) *Qi* is similar to wind, water, clouds and the like:

Wind, water, and clouds all can store power,

This is the same as the accumulation of *qi* by Heaven and Earth.

孟子所谓养浩然气。至大至刚。

则塞乎天地之间。即是也。

Mengzi (Mencius) spoke of cultivating a vast *qi*, extremely great and extremely hard.

This (vast *qi*) also fills up all the space between Heaven and Earth.

风与水之积力易见。亦易知。

惟云与气之积力难见。亦难知。

The accumulated power of wind and water is easy to see and easy to know.

However, the accumulated power of clouds and *qi* is difficult to see and difficult to know.

有飞机后。始知黑云中有雷电。

触之必成齏粉。无幸免也。

可知矣。

After we had airplanes, we began to know that in the center of dark clouds, there are thunderbolts.

One touch of a thunderbolt and anything is ground into fragments and powder, without any escape!

Then we can know (the accumulated power of clouds and *qi*).

至积气能载天地。

更何论矣。

神力神速。诚有雷电之意。

存乎其间。

此之谓阶及神明。

Thus, when we see the how the accumulation of *qi* can support even Heaven and Earth,

We have even more to discuss!

Shen-li and *shen-su* truly have the *yi* (directed awareness) of the thunderbolt

And store *qi* in the spaces-between.

This is what is called the rank of achieving *shenming*.

是为三阶三级。

This is the Third Rank, Third Step.

Discussion

This section introduces three related notions all building on the word 神 *shen*, spirit. *Shen* is particularly challenging to translate since it encompasses a range of meaning that in English covers a number of disparate concepts including gods and spirits, an individual's spirit or soul, and mental processes. Catherine Despeux, in the *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, describes *shen* in the alchemical process saying

Shen evolved from the original sense of “divinity” and outer and inner “spirits” into the designation of a single force, whose connotations include those of psychic essence and even of “soul”. To some extent, *shen* applies to anything that exists within the cosmos but has no material aspect, such as deities and human thought...

In *neidan* (internal alchemy), the transition from postcelestial spirit to precelestial spirit (original spirit) occurs by means of precelestial breath, i.e., through the progressive development of a subtle and tenuous form of breathing that allows one to reach a luminous state. Thus, one progressively develops a “Yin spirit”, a process that is accompanied by a feeling of luminosity in the region of the head. The *shen* rises to the upper Cinnabar Field (the *niwan*)... [From there a state is realized] in which time, space, and material limits disappear, and the *shen* is transmuted into “Yang spirit”.

(Despeux, entry on *jing, qi, shen*)

The result of Heaven level 3.3 is reaching the state of *shenming*. 明 *Ming* means bright, brilliant, clarity, distinct, wise and the character shows the sun and moon next to each other. *Shenming* has a connotation of mastery and high level achievement. Possible translations include divine clarity, enlightenment, spiritual illumination, and brightness of spirit.

The other two *shen* related terms Zheng uses are *shen-li* (spirit + force) and *shen-su* (spirit + speed). We could try to translate these into phrases such as spiritual power, the force of the spirit, divine force, miraculous power and the speed of spirit, velocity of the gods, marvelous speed etc.

Specifically for *shen-su*, there is an idiom 兵贵神速 *bing gui shensu*, literally “(for) soldiers and nobles, spirit-speed”, colloquially, “in battle, it's speed that counts.” We might translate *shen-su* as the “speed of thought”.

I've thought it better to just leave the terms as is.

The end of the boxing manual: To describe what the level of achieving *shenming* means, Zheng quotes the *Mental Elucidation*. Unlike the other sections that include a fair amount of direct instructions, this is the only instructional content Zheng gives and the rest of the section is a discourse on the results of achieving *shenming*. Thus, it seems that the steps must be those described of putting the *yi* on the *jingshen* (spirit of vitality) and moving from the state of *qi* to that of non-*qi*.

The exact quote from the classic follows (as always, Zheng has minor textual differences from the received text):

全身意在精神。

不在氣。在氣則滯。

有氣者無力。

無氣者純剛。

In the whole body, the *yi* is on the *jingshen*.

(The *yi* should) not be on the *qi*. If it's on the *qi*, then there will be stagnation.

One who has *qi* can have non-*li*.

One who has non-*qi* can have pure hardness.

As Zheng says, these words are strange. To understand them, we should recall the use of 無 *wu* or no, not, non to mean more than simple negation. Examples we may be familiar with are *wuwei*, non-action and *wuxin* no-mind. Just as *wuwei* does not mean that one literally does nothing, so *wuqi*, non-*qi* represents a state beyond *qi* but one that nonetheless encompasses *qi*. And *wuli*, non-*li* or no force represents a state beyond force where force still occurs without influencing or perturbing the practitioner.

I suspect these lines are intended to represent the steps a practitioner takes suggesting that we should develop our *qi* to get beyond force; at that point, the awareness and intention now needs to focus on the *shen* not on the *qi*; as we are able to move beyond *qi*, our non-force becomes even stronger reaching pure hardness.

Chen Weiming in his commentary on these lines from the *Mental Elucidation* says

太極純以神行

不伺氣力

此氣言後天之氣力也

蓋養氣之氣。 霽先天之氣。

運氣之氣。 霽後天之氣。

後天之氣有盡。 先无之氣無窮

Taiji moves purely by the *shen*
And does not rely on *qi-li* (exertion)
Exertion (*qi-li*) is known as post-heaven (*houtian*) *qi*.
The *qi* developed by nourishing is pre-heaven (*xiantian*) *qi*.
Qi that gets moved around is also post-heaven *qi*.
Post-heaven *qi* gets used up; pre-heaven *qi* has no limit.

Skill with Qi achieves perfection: achieves perfection is 化境 *hua jing*, literally a state of continual transformation that colloquially means achieving perfection, sublime accomplishment.

In physics, with speed you can multiply your force: Some translators read this literally as though Zheng were writing down a physics equation, perhaps something like
= Speed x force

I suspect Zheng did not intend to suddenly transform into a western physicist performing calculations. I've read this sentence as language not an equation.

Abandon the near to seek the far: 舍近求远 *shejinqiuyuan* is a classic "four character phrase" known as a *chengyu* or literary idiom. Some *chengyu* are difficult to understand without knowing where they've been used in classical literature. This one literally means "abandon the near to seek the far" and references losing the path by failing to pay attention to details of the present in the pursuit of a distant goal.

Accumulation: several places Zheng talks about "accumulating *qi*" 积气 *ji qi*. *Ji* means to store up, accumulate, pile up. It's different than the notion of gathering or collecting 敛 *lian* mentioned above.

Mengzi (Mencius) spoke of cultivating a vast qi, extremely great and extremely hard: This is a reference to a famous quote from Mengzi (Mencius) talking about his ability to nourish his overwhelming and vast *qi*:

「敢問夫子惡乎長。」

Student: "May I ask in what it is that you are superior?"

曰、「我知言、我善養吾浩然之氣。」

Master says: "I understand language, and I am good at nourishing my vast *qi*."

「敢問何謂浩然之氣。」

Student: "What do you mean by 'vast *qi*'?"

曰、「難言也。」 「其爲氣也、至大至剛以直養而無害、則塞于天地之間。其爲氣也、配義與道無是、餒矣。是集義所生者、非義襲而取之也。行有不慊於心、則餒矣。我故曰、告子未嘗知義、以其外之也。必有事焉而勿正、心勿忘、勿助長也。無若宋人然。宋人有閔其苗之不長而揠之者芒芒然歸、謂其人曰、;

今日病矣、豫助苗長矣。其子趨而往視之、苗則槁矣。天下之不助苗長者寡矣。以爲無益而舍之者、不耘苗者也。助之長者、揠苗者也。非徒無益、而又害之。」

Master says: "That is difficult to explain. *Qi* can be developed to great levels of quantity and stability [extremely great, extremely hard] by correctly nourishing it and not damaging it, to the extent that it fills the space between Heaven and Earth. In developing *qi*, if you are connected with fairness [與 *yu*, fairness, reciprocity] and the Dao, you will never be in want of it. It is something that is produced by accumulating fairness, and is not something that you can grab from superficial attempts at fairness. If you act without mental composure, you will become *qi*-starved."

(Muller translation)

Conclusion

此为习太极拳之程序。
学者不可躐等。
拾级而上。
登峰造极。无难矣。
尔乃心三丰宗岳之心。
竟二公未竟之志。
强民族。兴国家之术。
舍此末由。
愿学者其勉旃。

This is the program for studying taijiquan.

Students must not skip steps.

Collect the ranks and advance.

Then you'll climb the mountain and reach the peak without difficulty!

Therefore, in my heart (*xin*), I hold the hearts of Sanfeng and Zongyue

And desire to complete their two unfinished ambitions:

Strengthening the people and encouraging the development of their skill.

This is the end-goal of my humble efforts;

I hope students will give it their best!

Climb the Mountain and Reach the Peak: 登峰造极 *Dēngfēngzàoji* is another *chengyu*. It means “reach the highest levels of achievement”. Translated literally, it means “ascend to the summit, reach limit (*ji* as in *taiji*)” which conveys the meaning in English too.

Sanfeng and Zongyue: legendary founders of taijiquan: Zhang Sanfeng and Wong Zongyue. They each have one of the taijiquan classics attributed to them and Zheng has quoted from each in this chapter.

Encourage development of skill: Skill is 术 *shu* as in *wushu*. *Shu* means art (hence martial art), skill, technique.

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