

# Peng Jin in Tai Chi

**Peng Jin is one of the applied principles in Tai Chi training.** It is a whole body quality that takes time, effort and patience to develop within your structure. Once established, it should always be present in all of your Tai Chi practice. It is best explored in person with an instructor who can guide you through the physical skills and sensitivity needed. This article explores Peng Jin in Tai Chi in detail.

## Rough Translation

- **Peng:** Ward off - outward from the centre.
- **Jin:** Educated / cultivated / trained / skilled - strength / power / force.
- **Peng Jin:** Expansive, spiralling, elastic, spring-like, rebounding, lengthening, stretching, resilient, supporting, flexible, buoyant, loosening, balloon-like structure and outward force.

## Peng Jin in Tai Chi

**What is it?** An elastic spiralling internal quality / applied principle in Tai Chi practice.

**How to develop the skill?** Lots of practice through partner work / push hands. Taking time to develop body sensitivity and inward listening skills (Ting Jin). Silk reeling and the form alone does not develop Peng Jin.

**How does it feel to touch?** Quiet! Until it's not, and you have suddenly lost your centre. An unassuming soft, heavy and expansive quality in the limbs and body. Like a volume of flowing water that gathers momentum.

**How does it feel in your body?** Whole body aligned, soft and relaxed. Whilst expanding out in all directions everywhere at once with an elastic, springy, rebounding, and spiralling quality.

**What does it do to your opponent?** Neutralise / deflect an incoming force. To uproot and destabilise your opponent by getting under their centre (centre of gravity) to take control of their centre.

**What does it do to your structure?** Stops your soft and relaxed structure collapsing when receiving force. By being responsive and adaptive to the incoming force point and direction. Changing from full to empty in a rolling sphere.

**What is it not?** Resisting, withstanding, or gripping onto incoming force.

**What is counter productive?** Any physical tension in the body. Any forced muscular strength. Poor alignment. Too much relaxation and softness that collapses your structure.

**What is it like?** Pushing on a beach ball in water, the force spins the ball.

**What other skills need to be present?** Pliability in the soft tissues, loose joints, appropriate muscle use, a well aligned posture, good structure, stable and resilient rooting.

**How long does it take to develop?** A very long time, years and years.

**Goal?** To be softly sprung without any tension across your whole structure, like a flexible sphere. To maintain your centre even when facing someone who is bigger and stronger than you are.

**Where to start?** With an expansive quality in the whole body that is maintained through every movement. A rounded, soft, relaxed, elastic, pliable, buoyant, spiralling and rebounding quality within your structure.

**Is it the same as Peng?** Peng in Tai Chi has a slightly different meaning or expression, as it is one of the direct martial applications. Read my article on [peng, lu, ji, an](#) for more information.

**Where can you see an example?** Ken Gullette from [www.internalfightingarts.com](http://www.internalfightingarts.com) has a youtube video on peng jin, which is a the best visual explanation I have seen of the peng jin principle and the rubber ball theory.



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**Peng Jin in Tai Chi**

## **Peng Jin + Alignment + Relaxation = Three principles that work together**

An important note is that your structure must be aligned correctly for peng jin to work. read my article on how to hold yourself in [stillness](#) and [motion](#) in Chen Tai Chi. None of the principles work without good alignment. A poor alignment can go two ways, either by over extending the joints and limbs or being too relaxed and floppy.

Expanding, stretching and lengthening does not mean straightening or locking the joints or limbs, as this also drops the alignment and peng jin. The majority of people have residual tension in the four major joints of the body, the two hips and the two shoulders, both ball and socket joints. If the body is too tight and wooden, you can never establish peng jin.

Loosening must be worked on before / and in tandem with the principle peng jin. This principle is called [fang song](#) which must be maintained for peng jin to work. [Fang song](#) means applied relaxation, loosening of the joints, release of inappropriate muscle contraction and release of physical tension. This type of relaxation does not mean a collapsed, loose or floppy structure, as this drops peng jin. None of the principles work without fang song.

There is a fine balance between a collapsed and floppy structure, and an over-expanded and over-lengthened structure. This can be tested in person with a Tai Chi teacher. When peng jin is lost, it is easily apparent in stability, rooting and centre of gravity. Without peng jin, any force applied to your structure will uproot and destabilise you.

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[Chen Style Tai Chi](#) | [Chen Taiji Silk Reeling](#) | [Posture](#) | [Zhan Zhuang](#)

# Tai Chi Stillness Principles

By [admin](#) 05/11/2010

**Physical body alignment.**

**FIXED STEP & STANDING POST TRAINING.**

As beginners Tai Chi can be seen as simple, yet aligning the correct posture whilst relaxing the body and breathing deeply can be quite difficult. As soon as you concentrate on dropping your shoulders, your lower back closes. Ok, try again.... as you drop your shoulders your breathing reverts to upper chest breathing. Hmmm, try again..... Concentrate on deep belly breathing and your shoulder muscles become tense. The focus on details can be immense and a bit overwhelming. The goal is to have your body, mind and breathing as one unit, working together naturally and smoothly.

Whether you are practicing the various Tai Chi static stances used with Qi Gong breathing or are practicing moves within the form, focus on one aspect at a time. An example would be in your standing practice, for 2-3 minutes focus just on your shoulders. What are they doing, how can you relax them, can you adapt your posture gently, are they getting tired early, can you move them slightly to get a better connection? Use a mirror if you need to initially, until your body learns instinctively where to put itself.

Over time the more training you do, these moves will become natural, meaning your body has built a memory from practice. This is how you progress. Over time the principles you have trained begin to merge together. Any pose from your Chen style Tai chi form can be help as a static stance. This is a great way to check in on the principles and alignment to develop your form.

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# Zhan Zhuang - Taiji Posture



[www.earthbalance-taichi.com](http://www.earthbalance-taichi.com)

## Neutral Alignment Principles

Principle	Focus
Feet	There are many different ways to balance the weight on your feet. Overall aim for a solid equal connection on the three balls of the feet; two at the front and one at the heel. Weight centred or weight slightly back.
Ankles	Central and straight. Avoid the ankles rolling in, remedy this by opening outwardly without changing the feet position.
<u>Knees</u>	Knees bent slightly with a springiness, sitting over the centre of the foot / shoe laces (sometimes called over the arch). Not past the toes, nor locked straight.

Groin	Legs rounded from knee to knee, open, arched, relaxed groin and thighs.
<a href="#">Relax the Hips</a>	Relax the inguinal crease and area around the hip joint, out towards the buttocks. This helps the hip muscles and psoas to relax.
<a href="#">Hips</a>	Sit back and down into your hip crease, a mini squat that you hold with relaxed suspended and aligned power.
Tailbone	Relaxed sacrum and tailbone, with the tailbone aligned behind the heels.
<a href="#">Pelvis</a>	<p>The physical alignment of the hip and pelvis to stabilise the spine and torso. Don't tilt the pelvis forward or back, keep the pelvis in neutral in the middle. For those who exaggerate the S curve in the lower back in the daily life, lengthen the tailbone down.</p> <p>Imagine the pelvis is a bowl with water, don't spill the water. This opening is both vertically and laterally as the pelvis spreads from left to right. Avoid over exaggerating this to create the principle.</p> <p>Everyone holds their spine through habit differently, this will need to be looked at by your instructor.</p>
<a href="#">Pelvic Floor &amp; Diaphragm</a>	The two plates are coordinated in movement and breath work.

Lower Back	Open the lower back by relaxing and lengthening the lumbar and sacrum. Bring dantian towards mingmen to fill the lower back to protect your spine.
Dantian	Concentrate the mind on the Dantian (approx 2 inches below your navel, and approx 2 inches into the body, the Dantian is your energy storage centre). <a href="#">Breathe</a> into the Dantian area, slow circular abdominal breathing ( <a href="#">full diaphragm breath</a> ).
Waist	Relax the soft tissue around the waist and side body, without collapsing your structure. The flesh of the waist must be released and lengthened.
Elbows	Ground the elbows through the body. Place a gently relaxed expanding weight in the elbows to create space in the joint. Keep a slight bend in the elbows. In wuji stance the elbows are slightly away from the body.
Hollow Chest	Chest relaxed. Avoid sticking the chest out in the typical military or Western puffing up the chest posture as this closes the lower back and the shoulder blades. Avoid sinking and slumping the chest inwardly or down. The hollow chest is a neutral alignment.

Shoulders	<p>Root the arms into the shoulders. External rotation of the shoulder, rotating the humerus bone outwardly within the joint. This brings the shoulder blades down over to the ribs, lengthens around the collarbone area and seats the shoulder crests. Relax and drop the shoulder blades down with gentle weight. Avoid having your trap muscles hunched up by your ears. Align the shoulders in profile as close to the line between the crown, ear, central shoulder joint and hip joint. Shoulders carry a lot of tension, align correctly and work to release and relax.</p>
<a href="#">Central Spine</a>	<p>The spine is centred, straight and erect. Imagine it like a rope rather than a solid pole. Avoid swaying back and the military posture. The natural curves are maintained in the spine, not over exaggerated (see pelvis).</p>
<a href="#">Suspended Spine</a>	<p>Lengthening the <a href="#">spine</a> by heavying the hips, aligning the lower back correctly and gently expanding the spine upwards to the crown. Creating equal opposing relaxed force, to open and create space in the spine.</p>
<a href="#">Neck/Head/Crown (Ding)</a>	<p>Head erect, chin gently withdrawn. Feel the spine gently lengthen and open at the back of the neck, allowing the weight of the head to travel down the spine. Relax and release the muscles around the neck.</p>
<a href="#">Centred</a>	<p>Central equilibrium, stable and balanced. Balancing the 6 directions (left, right, forwards, backwards, up, down).</p>

Mouth	Cross the magpie bridge to connect the microcosmic orbit (ren and du mai channels). The tongue gently touches the roof of the mouth, by the top front teeth. This sets the body up for nasal breathing.
<a href="#">Peng Jin</a>	Expanded, rebounding, resilient, spiralling, balloon-like structure and motion. None of the principles work without peng jin.
<a href="#">Fang Song</a>	The absence of resistance. None of the principles work without fang song. The most important principle of all that can be applied to your posture whether in stillness or movement. Letting go of the muscles whilst maintaining and aligned body and an elastic stretch. Active relaxation of the muscles, loosening of the joints and the release of physical tension, without collapsing your skeleton. A release and letting go of unnecessary holding. The joints/bones are open with space around them. Not slouched or floppy, or slumping into the joints. Muscles use appropriate muscular contraction. The principle fang song can be applied to any muscle, any part of the body or any joint.
<a href="#">Rooting</a>	Grounding and rooting in the lower body.
<a href="#">Ground Path</a>	A heaviness of the lower body pressing into the ground through the feet, paired with an opposing elastic expanding connection to the opposing hand, wrist, elbows or shoulder.

<a href="#">Silk Reeling</a>	The silk reeling principle: Chan Si Jin. A spiralling and coiling quality within the physical structure. This includes the principles Ni Chan and Shun Chan, yin yang directional spiralling in the limbs and torso.
Open the Joints	Opening the joints with relaxation. Creating space in the joints by releasing physical tension and actively relaxing the joints through a gentle expansion. Not locking any of the joints in the skeleton. You want your body to be completely connected without blocking the meridians.
Intention	Mind intention / <a href="#">awareness</a> : Yi. Focus on your breathing to calm the mind and release mental distraction. Become aware of sensations in the body and follow them e.g. hot, cold, pulse, tension, tingles. Mentally scan your body from the crown to your toes for areas of tension, and mentally drop these areas of tension away.
Use the Mind not Force	Use the mind/intent, not strength/force. This means to avoid straining your mind and body when following the principles. Train stances from the inside, working to the outside. This could be using your imagination of a principle, before this becomes a reality in the physical body. Physically you may be doing less, mentally you are doing more. Over time the balance shifts to the body doing more. Train with grace not force.

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## Zhan Zhuang Video Course

A [twelve step video programme](#) for beginner [Zhan Zhuang](#) students is available to view for free on YouTube. Follow along with individual points of focus to develop your standing practice techniques. Learn how to re-wire your habitual posture, integrate strength, ground the mind, open the tissues in the body, loosen the joints, release physical tension, and develop body sensitivity. Take your learning step by step, slowly increasing the time you are standing for over the duration of the course. [Standing still](#) is a powerful practice for both mind and body.

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## Movement Principles

Alongside the alignment principles, the principles of movement teach you the body mechanics of Chen Tai Chi as a martial art. The companion article to this is called '[Doing One Thing Correctly](#)'. From your feet to your crown, how you stand still matters and how you move matters. To develop martial power and to improve health, aligning the movement and alignment principles are key to both. Learn them in stillness is the easiest to begin with, then develop them in your moving drills and forms. Learn the three fundamental principles: [fang song / applied relaxation](#), [rooting and grounding](#), and [peng jin / expansive](#).

[Chen Style Tai Chi](#) | [Chen Taiji Silk Reeling](#) | [Posture](#) | [Relaxation](#)

By [admin](#) 05/11/2010

# Doing One Thing Correctly

# Applying the Principles in Chen Tai Chi Practice

## Tai Chi Drills & Form Training.

When learning the Tai Chi form and training drills, it is important to have a single point of focus, to do one thing correctly. This is active mindfulness. There are many principles and layers of learning, and it is impossible to focus on them all at once. By training the principles separately, over time they all start to mould together in your performance, as muscle memory develops. Noted below are a few of the examples of what your single point of focus can be in your form practice. Before you practice, set out the goal of the session, or change focus each routine or form you perform. Anytime your mind gets distracted, re-focus on the principle or goal. Bring the mind back to that single point of focus.

Qigong follows the same [principles of movement](#), with the exception that the physical body moves through a greater range of motion and then returns to the core principles.

Your Tai Chi [instructor](#) will guide you through the principles at the right time in your training. It's important to avoid being overloaded with information. Beginners will work on their posture followed by the first few principles below.

## Movement Principles

Principle	Principle	Focus
Expansive	<a href="#">Peng Jin</a>	Expanded, rebounding, resilient, spiralling, balloon-like structure and motion. None of the principles work without peng jin.

Applied relaxation	<a href="#">Fang Song</a>	<a href="#">The absence of resistance.</a> None of the principles work without fang song. The most important principle of all that can be applied to your posture whether in stillness or movement. Letting go of the muscles whilst maintaining and aligned body and an elastic stretch. Active relaxation of the muscles, loosening of the joints and the release of physical tension, without collapsing your skeleton. A release and letting go of unnecessary holding. The joints/bones are open with space around them. Not slouched or floppy, or slumping into the joints. Muscles use appropriate muscular contraction. The principle fang song can be applied to any muscle, any part of the body or any joint.
Central equilibrium	<a href="#">Zhong Ding</a>	Stable and balanced from the ground upwards. Maintaining a centralised structure especially when absorbing incoming pressure.
Rooting	<a href="#">Chen</a>	Grounding in the lower body.
<a href="#">Ground path</a>		A heaviness of the lower body pressing into the ground through the feet, paired with an opposing elastic expanding connection to the opposing hand, wrist, elbows or shoulder.

Straight spine	<a href="#">Ding</a>	An upright <a href="#">spine</a> , neck and head. An upward lengthening quality in the spine paired with opposing <a href="#">rooting</a> .
Open rounded groin	Dang	Rounded, open, arched, relaxed groin and thighs, including the knees.
Hip crease area	Kua	An area around the inguinal crease and hip including the internal hip socket, part of the buttock and lower back. An internal function/quality responsible for the Tai Chi squat, sinking and turning.
Weight shifting	Fen Xu Shi	The difference between empty and full when shifting weight onto each leg. Training single leg balancing drills, empty stances and 70% - 30% weight shifting.
Backward arc	Hou Hu	The silk reeling lower body movement, arching through the front/rear of the pelvis, which establishes the figure 8 motion.

<p>The 13 energies and 5 directions</p>		<p><u>Peng (Outward - Straight direction)</u></p> <p>Lu (Roll back - Straight direction)</p> <p>Ji (Squeeze press - Straight direction)</p> <p>An (Push down - Straight direction)</p> <p>Cai (Pluck - Diagonal direction)</p> <p>Lieh (Split - Diagonal direction)</p> <p>Zhou (Elbow - Diagonal direction)</p> <p>Cao (Shoulder - Diagonal direction)</p> <p>Advancing</p> <p>Retreating</p> <p>Step to the left</p> <p>Step to the right</p> <p>Centre</p> <p>Zhan (Flash)</p> <p>Teng (Rise)</p> <p>Zhe (Break)</p> <p>Kong (Empty)</p> <p>Huo (Change)</p>
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3 External Harmonies	San Wai He	Shoulders in harmony with hips, elbows in harmony with knees, palms in harmony with feet.
Arms		Wrists not passing the centre line, nor extending further than 45 degrees from the centre line. Limbs not hyper-extending to a locked position.
Waist	Yao	The waist loosening and turning in the movements. Song yao is applying active relaxation to the waist.
Navel	Dantian	Rotation of the dantian through the movements.
Open / close chest		Also called folding the chest, storing the chest, hollowing the chest, emptying the chest and arcing the chest. A motion in the centre of the chest used in fajin body mechanics to store and release power e.g. in the ' <a href="#">An</a> ' direct martial application when pushing with the heels of both palms. The hollow chest is a neutral alignment not a collapsed chest.
Open / close lower back		Also called filling the lower back, opening the lower back, bringing dantian towards ming men. A motion in the spine, forming a bow shape, then releasing. Used in fajin body mechanics to store and release power.

Open / close	Kai-He	Open means internal lengthening / expanding in the physical body and close means internal contracting / compressing. Some movements like single whip can have two qualities, an external opening and internal closing. Expressions of yin yang.
Two plates		<a href="#">The pelvic floor and diaphragm connection.</a>
Silk reeling principle	<a href="#">Chan Si</a> <a href="#">Jin</a>	A spiralling and coiling quality / skill within the whole physical structure. This includes the principles Ni Chan and Shun Chan, yin yang directional spiralling in the limbs, torso and extremities.
Connective tissue		Lengthening and stretching the connective tissue, tendons, sinews, fascia with elastic expansion, compression and coiling.
Muscles	Cotton	Releasing, relaxing and softening the muscles, whilst surrounded by lengthening and stretching connective tissue. See fang song above.
Aligned posture	Iron	An aligned skeleton with open joints. See static stance training list as above. <a href="#">Symmetry in the body.</a>
Co-ordination		"One part moves, all parts move". The lower and upper body are integrated in movement.

Reboundin g		Flowing elastic connected, rebounding and rooted movements. Avoiding wooden / awkward motion.
Continuity in movement		Unity and connection between different limbs and parts of the body that are moving fast and slow simultaneously, including large and small movements.
Transitions		Not dropping the body mechanics at the end of each movement, keeping the principles 'rolling' and rebounding motion throughout the form.
<u>Abdominal breathing</u>	Tu-Na	Combining diaphragmatic breathing with store/release, expand/compress, yin/yang in the movements.
<u>Expansion and compressio n</u>		Hydraulic motion in all of the joints.
Store and release		Finding yin and yang in movement, and fajin.
Water and fire	Kan and Li	Lower body like water, upper body like fire.

Martial intent		Playing out the key martial applications in the mind through the form.
<u>Awareness</u>	Yi	Intention. Being present in the moment with focused concentration.
Use intention not force	Yi Bu Li	Not using muscular strength.
Tactile listening	Ting Jin	The skill of tactile listening to your opponent. Training in partner work e.g. push hands to be able to sense and understand and react to your opponents strength or force.
3 internal Harmonies	San Nei He	Heart in harmony with intention, intention in harmony with Qi, Qi in harmony with movement.

## Alignment Principles

Alongside the movement principles, the principles of alignment teach you how to hold your physical posture. Whether training Zhan Zhuang standing like a tree, silk reeling drills or the form, foster a neutral alignment.

The companion article to this is called '[Static Stance Training in Tai Chi](#)'. From your feet to your crown, how you hold yourself matters. To develop martial power and to improve health, aligning the movement and alignment principles are key to both. Learn them in stillness is the easiest to begin with, then develop them in your moving drills and forms.

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[Chen Style Tai Chi](#) | [Chen Taiji Silk Reeling](#) | [Posts](#)

# Peng Lu Ji An

By [admin](#) 04/07/2013

## Chen Tai Chi - Silk Reeling Practice

This foundation drill of Chen style Tai Chi covers the four primary martial movements of Peng (ward-off), Lu (rollback), Ji (squeeze press), An (push down). Read more on the [Eight Basic Movements of Chen Style Tai Chi](#) and the [Development of Chen Tai Chi](#). The following article on the trigrams looks at the 8 martial applications relating to the 8 trigrams and the I Ching.

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## Peng / Ward Off

- Expanding, up direction, moving energy, outward, upward, rebounding, spring like elastic force.
- To open, offensive attack, push, strike.
- Different to the [peng jin](#) principle.



## Lu / Roll Back

- Follow back and redirect, inward direction, collecting energy, absorb an incoming force.
- Divert, deflection, lead into emptiness, to yield, defensive.



## Ji / Squeeze Press

- Squeezing out of space, forwards direction, compressing motion, receiving energy, displace momentum.
- To neutralise incoming force, to advance, strike.



## An / Push Down

- Downward direction, striking energy, sinking, outward.
- To release, two handed strike.



# Chen Tai Chi

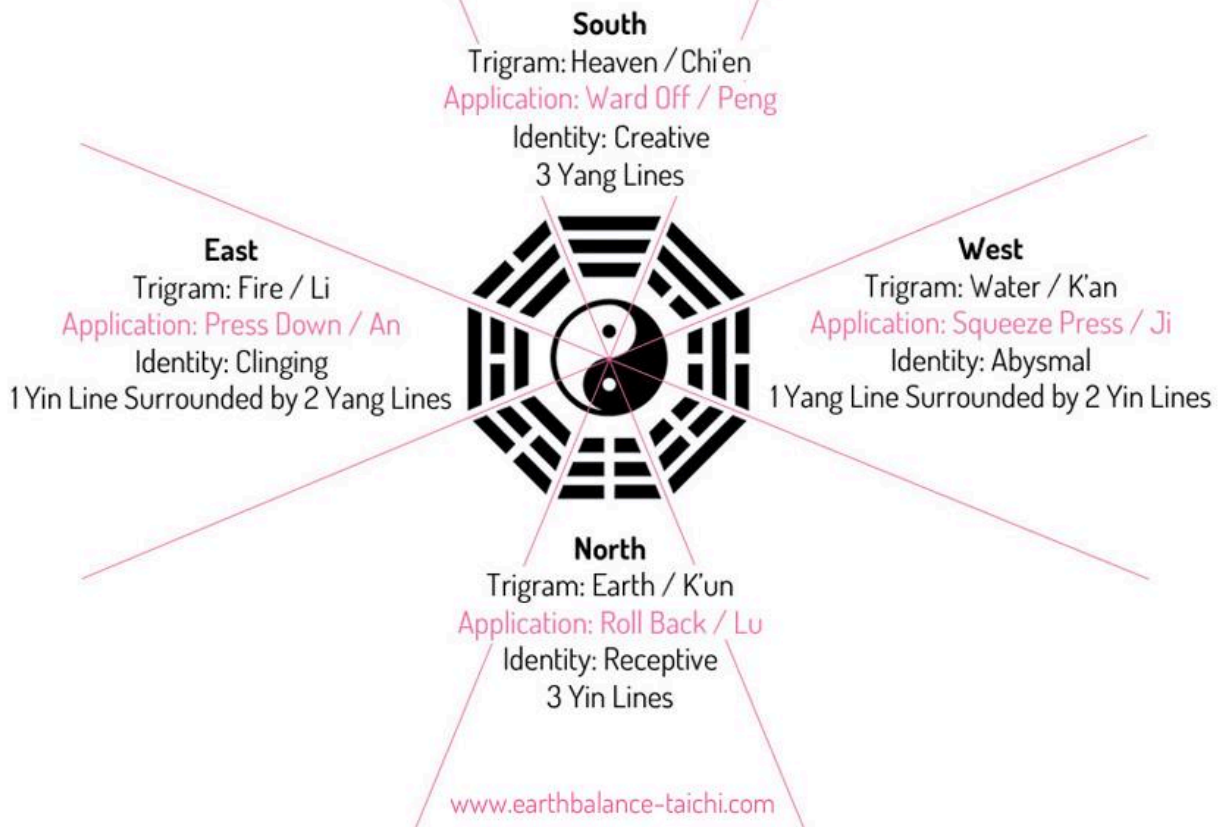
## Peng Lu Ji An Silk Reeling



Join as a [student on Patreon](#) and view over the Peng Lu Ji An silk reeling video.

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# Tai Chi - Peng Lu Ji An - 4 Direct Applications



The following youtube video clips demonstrates Chen style Tai Chi Peng Lu Ji An by Grand Master Chen Xiaowang:

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[Chen Style Tai Chi](#) | [Chen Taiji Silk Reeling](#) | [Posts](#) | [Posture](#) | [Relaxation](#) | [Tai Chi Form](#) | [Zhan Zhuang](#)

## Fang Song in Tai Chi

Byadmin 10/07/2021

One of the most important Tai Chi principles is fang song = applied relaxation. To use the least amount of muscular contraction to perform a movement. Which means to release inappropriate muscle contraction, to loosen the joints and to reduce physical tension. I describe it to my students as the [absence of resistance](#). Over the years my teachers have passed on their knowledge and understanding of fang song. This article titled "Fang Song in Tai Chi" gives insight into how I have digested this and apply it to my form.

It is also known as fangsong, song or sung. It is a whole body skill that takes time, effort and patience to develop within your structure. It should always be present, although it is easily lost and hard to maintain. The caveat is that relaxation does not mean collapsed or floppy. Instead the body is seen as iron wrapped in cotton.

*“A person who is skilled with taijiquan gongfu has arms like cotton wrapped around iron, with extreme heaviness (zhong) and sinking (chen)” - Yang Chengfu’s Taijiquan Theory*

- Iron = skeleton, a well aligned and rooted posture covering the 6 directions.
- Iron = martial power, the ability to absorb and create force via body mechanics.
- Cotton = muscles, free of tension, being appropriately contracted to maintain the posture.
- Cotton = joints, free of tension, loosened, mobile and open.
- Connected by = connective tissue, free of tension, elastic, expansive, spiralling and rebounding quality.

[Chen Tai Chi Chuan](#) is an internal martial art where brute force and muscular strength are not used. Instead the martial power comes from the internal body mechanics. Without releasing tension the body-mechanics do not work, the person will not be able to absorb, create or rebound force. When fang song is present, in performance the person looks fluid and connected, and in martial application the person no matter of their stature can generate or deflect power.

Fang song is also a major principle in Qi Gong training, as moving deliberately and slowly with relaxed joints enables the meridian channels to open, aiding appropriate qi and blood flow. Chronically-contracted muscles and physical tension hinders this, as they cause areas of stagnation and blockages.

*Appropriate muscle use / loosened joints = martial power through body mechanics*

*Martial power through body mechanics = improved health*

*As health follows the power lines*

None of the [principles in Tai Chi](#) are effective without fang song. Fang song goes hand in hand with the primary principle [peng jin](#). Peng jin helps to avoid the body from becoming too soft, too relaxed, floppy and collapsed, by adding an expansive quality.



## Fang Song in Tai Chi - How to develop

- **Skeleton**
- Well aligned & rooted posture covering the 6 directions.
- **Muscles**
- Free of tension, appropriate contraction to maintain posture.
- **Joints**
- Free of tension, loosened, relaxed, mobile & open.
- **Connective tissue**
- Free of tension, elastic, expansive, spiralling.
- **Mind**

- Follows the same principles of song, to be relaxed, calm and present.

## **Relaxation of physical tension**

The majority of people carry chronic muscular tension somewhere in their body. If they have been sedentary in their routine prior to joining a Tai Chi class, they may have little awareness of their body, and may not know how tight they are or how this hinders their posture or movements. It can be difficult as a beginner Tai Chi student to move slowly and smoothly whilst their body is tight, tense and inflexible. Students may be using their muscles disproportionality, with some switched off and some over used. New students may be overloading the muscles by trying to mimic the shape of the instructor's movements, when their muscles don't yet have the integrated strength to hold themselves that way. Typical areas of tension are the shoulders, the hips and the lower back. Students who come to class with previous injuries, tend to hold tension in these areas, to protect and withdraw the injury by hyper-contracting the surrounding muscles. It takes time, patience and focused movement to unpack this type of tension. By practising body awareness to know where muscular tension and hyper-contraction resides, you can take steps to learn how to release and let go. This helps you to equalize muscle use which levels out the load of the weight of your body.

The aim in fang song is to release unnecessary muscular contraction and physical tension. This does not mean all of the muscles are soft, uncontracted and inactive, as this is a popular misconception in the Tai Chi world. This would be impossible to achieve as you need muscle contraction / activation to hold your posture up. When your Tai Chi teacher tells you to 'relax' over and over again, consider the depth of what they mean. Tai Chi is not a muscular strength martial art, it is how you use your muscles that matters. The muscles must function efficiently through whole body connection. Consider the aim of fang song is to have the physique of a cat, fluid, nimble, flexible and agile, rather than pure muscle like a cow, rigid, bulky and inflexible.

## **Loosening and relaxing the joints**

Where there is soft tissue tension, the joints become tight and inflexible. This means the joints may not be able to perform a complete range of motion, which hinders posture and movement, creating sticking points and awkwardness. With a sedentary routine, someone may not realise how tight their joints are, as they do not perform movements that challenge their routine. Over time the range of motion will keep reducing down. If this state occurs over years, it can be very difficult to regain function. The aim of fang song is to deeply relax, loosen and create space and opening in the joints. To foster a 'neutral' state where there is no resistance to movement.

## **Aligning the body**

Learning how to correctly align your posture in stillness and movement in your Tai Chi training will aid loosening of the joints and relaxation of the muscles. When the body is aligned well, there isn't anything out of position. This enables the muscles to work well in unity. An example is, if your head is pushed forwards the muscles of the neck and shoulders are working over time to hold the weight of the head up.

## **Engaging the connective tissue**

Fang song is supported by engaging and lengthening the connective tissue; the fascia, ligaments, tendons and sinews. These have an elastic quality that work along side fang song to suspend the structure whilst softening. Fang song is lost if the connective tissue becomes over taught, to maximum stretch.

## **Balance**

With many elements to consider, it's a fine balance between tension and collapsed. To maintain an aligned and upright structure, muscles need to contract and the connective tissue needs to engage. Yet too much makes you tight and wooden, and too little collapses your posture. With either extreme you drop all the other principles too. Finding balance is the key.

## **Fang Song in Tai Chi - A beginner's journey**

Part of the journey as a beginner is to train regularly to learn how to release the body from historical and habitual tension, to reduce inappropriate muscular contraction, to equalize muscle use, to loosen and relax the joints and to start re-aligning the posture.

When the muscles are used appropriately in Tai Chi, this can reduce fatigue. Muscles use energy to contract, if your muscles are chronically contracted this is draining your energy. By learning how to hold your body and move your body without tension, this helps restore the body's energy levels.

When moving in tension, the body will feel and look differently to when moving without tension. The body never lies, tension cannot be hidden in Tai Chi, it comes to the surface easily and drops the other principles. When moving in tension, the weight of the body above the tension will become stuck in a tense joint instead of transferring to the ground. This generally causes more tension, tightness, discomfort and sometimes pain (whether in that moment or later on). The joint the weight gets stuck in may not be a weight bearing joint, which means over time this will damage the joint e.g. lower back and knees.

When that tension is released through an adjustment to your posture and the application of fang song, the weight of the body transfers through the soft tissue to the ground. This means the physical load on the muscles is greater, as it is no longer stuck in a joint. This creates a heavier feeling in the lower body, most noticeably in the leg muscles, with a lighter feeling in the upper body. Over time the lower body muscles grow stronger as they become used to this new way of moving.

With my students I instil the importance of frequent loosening exercises, [warm ups](#), flexibility and mobility drills and [Qigong](#). Movements that take you through a complete range of motion, expanding and compressing the joints, lengthening and stretching the connective tissue, whilst elasticizing the fascia. I also encourage [diaphragmatic breathing practice](#) to release physical tension around the diaphragm muscle, connective tissue and organs, and externally around the abdomen, waist, ribs and spine. This also steps into the world of releasing [mental tension](#), which is a by product of fang song practice. My suggestion is a quarter of your training time should be dedicated to loosening. My perspective is that your Tai Chi practice alone is not effective in developing fang song.

Fang song can be trained in traditional standing practice ([Zhang Zhuang](#)), which can help students focus their intention without the distraction of movement. I focus on the four major joints of the body in fang song practice, as these areas are the most difficult to release, those being the hips and shoulders. Learning how to release them in stillness and movement is key to progress. It's a kinaesthetic process involving the right 'feeling' brain, where the student has to be able to identify what it feels like internally, so they can replicate that in the future. Students may need physical adjustment to guide them into the right position to aid loosening.

In all of the training I have done, the most important message from my teachers is to relax, and relax more. Understanding what relaxation means is the key to progress. The aim is a neutral body = the absence of resistance.

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# Internal Power - The Peng Jin Explanation

The following article is written by Master Kam Lau to explain Peng Jin.

## The Mysterious "Spring-like"/Elastic Internal Power (Peng Jin) [神秘的彈簧勁內勁 (棚勁)]

You may have read in many Tai Chi textbooks the following statements:

- Externally soft but internally hard
- Firmness within softness

You may have wondered what it means or how can it be achieved? Another popular question is how a person of small stature is able uproot/overcome a person much larger than themselves?

- So how can this be achieved or explained?
- What exactly is this mysterious power?

The key to begin to understand the above statement lies in the understanding of the "effectiveness of Peng-Jin".

In traditional Tai Chi exercises of push hands, there are 8 techniques named Peng, Lu, Ji, Au, Cai, Lei, Zhou and Kao (mandarin pronunciations). These are the actual methods or skills applied and must not be mistaken for the unseen force behind the strength exhibited by masters of Peng-Jin.

The old saying "four ounces can deflect a thousand pounds" is always associated with Tai Chi. However, this concept is not unique to Tai Chi as other Kung Fu disciplines have similar quotations depicting the same concept. More significantly, Tai Chi is not just the use of yielding and/or evasion techniques. It can also be used to resist and overpower external physical (brute) force as well.

The uses of a Question & Answer format may well bring further explanation of Peng-Jin and add clarification: -

**Q. How do we differentiate between the strength used in Kung Fu and that applied in Tai Chi?**

A. In most Kung Fu systems the power used can be described as being of a physical force or muscular strength, while Tai Chi relies upon Peng-Jin (internal power), better described as a spring-like/elastic force.

Peng-Jin can be described as a special type of strength in our forearms and it can only be achieved through proper training in Tai Chi. It is strong, flexible and slightly different to most martial art systems where the martial artist's forearm can be very strong but stiff (i.e. tension in the joints).

**Q. Can brute force and internal Peng-Jin be compared in another way?**

A. Yes! Brute force can be compared to a rigid rod of iron while Peng-Jin can be compared to a flexible bamboo tree.

**Q. What is the advantage of developing Peng-Jin?**

A. Apart from building an individual's confidence the power of Peng-Jin can be used to absorb and/or control an opponent's brute force, thus improving ones ability to defend oneself and/or overcome the opponent.

### Q. Are there different levels of Peng-Jin?

A. Yes! However, these are dependent upon development by regular practice of form work, push hand exercises and other applications. If Peng-Jin is equated to an arrow then for it to be effective it has to be released from a bow. The more the practice the more powerful and the more effective the delivery.

### Q. Does the development of Peng-Jin make Tai Chi a superior or invincible martial art?

A. No! There is no such thing as an invincible martial art system (who would wish to train and study a lesser form?!?!). Regardless of the martial art system, be it Tai Chi, Yi Chuan, Kung Fu, Karate etc ... the individual's level or skill factor depends upon his/her ability and understanding of his/her chosen martial art. However the development/possession of Peng-Jin is an advantage.

### Q. Has Peng-Jin any limitations?

A. Yes! It cannot be applied in instances such as weight lifting or arm-wrestling etc ... where physical force is relied upon and can triumph.

### Q. How can the possession of Peng-Jin be identified?

A. By taking part in a simple basic double push hands exercise with right wrists (or left) in contact and touching elbows with free hands using a circular motion (without the use of Peng, Lu, Jie and Au techniques, etc ...). If you are strong but tense, the presence of Peng-Jin will be revealed by the opponent's arms feeling soft but strong and heavy and also they will feel like a spring (the more power you apply, the more it reacts). The application of brute force alone will cause you to struggle against this oncoming power of repeating waves of elastic power. Peng-Jin will triumph over a physical force when such is pitted against it (this is but one example).

## Q. How is Peng-Jin described?

A. Peng-Jin is an inner strength (internal force) and can be defined as the end result of the gradual process of neutralisation of an individual's physical force leading to the refinement and cultivation of tangible spring energy/strength.

This description is solely based on my own personal training and experience. Follow here if you wish to see a Fa-Jin and practical [Peng-Jin/Internal Power demonstration](#). Fa-Jin can be described as the issuing or release of power from the ground, through the body in a relax state and resulting in a punch, palm, elbow or shoulder strike, etc... This video was made possible because my opponent's joints was stiff, in other words, if his joints was soft and in a relaxed state then this demo would be impossible.

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Don't put power into the form, let  
it naturally arise from the form

August 24, 2018 / 6 Comments



*“Don’t put power into the form let it naturally arise from the form.”*

A guy on a discussion forum called Wayne Hansen uses that quote in his signature. I don’t know if this is a famous quote from an old master, or if it’s just something that Wayne thought of himself, but it’s such a great quote, because it’s absolutely true!

I was reviewing somebody's form recently and the big thing I noticed was that they were trying to put power into the movements, rather than just accepting that the movements on their own are powerful, and don't need anything extra to make them work. In fact, when you try and make Tai Chi movements powerful, it just messes them up, because you inevitably revert to tense, upper body muscle use, instead of a smooth flow of connected power, talked about in the Tai Chi classics.

(I think I should mention here that I'm not talking about the explosive bursts of power you typically see in Chen style forms. These are different. Instead, I'm talking about the general movements found in Tai Chi, typified by Yang style and its variations, which opt for a smooth form with an even pace throughout).

What that quote doesn't do however is explain *how* Tai Chi is done, which is pretty standard in Chinese martial arts. Tai Chi is full of these mysterious sayings, which have very little explanation, and are only useful for people who already understand what they mean. So let's break this one down and see where we get, starting with:

## 1. Fang song

In Tai Chi we are frequently admonished to fang song or "relax" as we would say in English. We all instinctively know that a relaxed body can be a powerful body. Think of how heavy a small child can make themselves if they don't want to be picked up by going all floppy. Similarly, a baby's grip is surprisingly powerful, but not tense.

Being too tense results in a kind of rigid and brittle strength. It's strong, but it sacrifices flexibility. This sort of force tends to lie on the surface, like ice on a lake, but break through the surface and it's nothing but water underneath. In contrast, relaxation can be more like thick sea ice – strong and solid all the way down.

But to be both powerful and relaxed a body also needs to be:

## 2. Coordinated

On a purely mechanical level that means moving so that the coordinated power of the body arrives together at the same place at the same time. If you can coordinate your body so the legs, hips, torso, and arm are all arriving together in a unified purpose then you can use relaxation to create a kind whole body power that doesn't rely much on tension at all. But that's still not the whole story. You also need:

## 3. Sinking

The next stage is to get used to sinking into the movements. This sinking, which can be described as dropping the weight of the body down into the ground through relaxing, enables power from the ground to rebound up into the hands. It generally moves in an upward and outwards manner, which is the Peng Jin that Tai Chi is famous for. All the movements of Tai Chi need to contain this Peng Jin.

I often read people who criticise sinking as merely “pushing from the legs”. They say that this will just be too slow. To that I'd say, go and ask a boxer if his punches are too slow, because that's what a boxer does. But more importantly, that's not what I'm talking about.

It's true, the legs are very much involved in generating power from the ground, but when you can effectively drop your weight down it's not a physical movement of pushing from the legs that matters. It's the internal movement of power that is important, the jin. And *the power of the ground arrives in your hands instantaneously*, so there's no delay. It's not going to be too slow to use.

Once you get used to doing this sinking you can feel it in your form. It requires practice, probably daily practice to get it. But that's why you do the form every day, right? Every day you are practicing movements where you drop the weight and put the power of the ground in your hands.

Remember, the movements themselves are powerful – you don't need to add power in. Instead you need to learn to relax, coordinate and sink your 'energy'.

Just look at that picture of the famous Yang style Tai Chi teacher, Yang Cheng Fu. You can see how relaxed he looks and how his weight is sinking down.

He's got it.

# Peng, Lu, Ji, An: Grasping the bird's tail

September 10, 2015 / 6 Comments

*Teaching using Trigrams*



Yesterday I taught the 'Grasp Bird's Tail' sequence in the form. I don't know why, but I drifted into talking about trigrams as I was teaching it. Trigrams are the series of three broken or unbroken lines that make up the Bagua and are usually associated with the ancient book of Chinese wisdom, the I-Ching, or "classic of changes", which contains 64 hexagrams (two trigrams on top of each other).

This diversion into ancient philosophy is somewhat unusual for me, but not unheard of, as I usually don't like to get sidetracked into theoretical discussions too much when I teach. I think theory has its place, but I've seen too many Tai Chi teachers who seem to need a whiteboard and marker pen to teach you how to throw a punch. The thing is, the trigrams aren't purely theoretical to me, and they do have relevance to teaching and practical application, as I will explain.

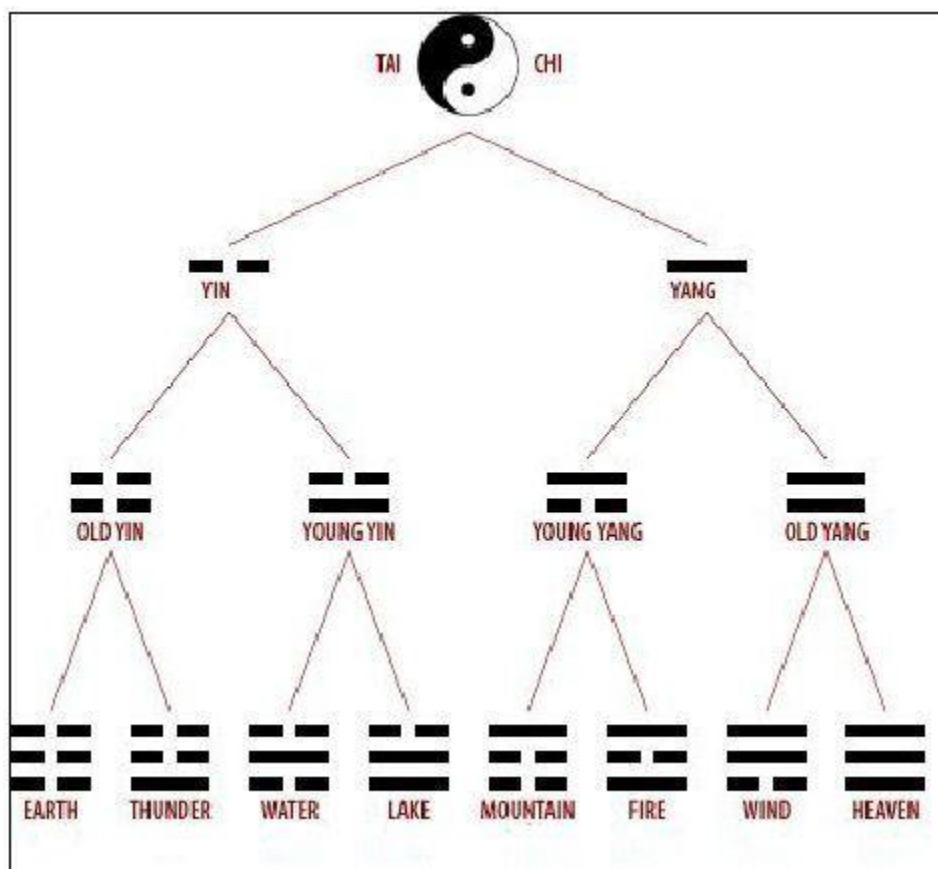
The four fundamental forces used in Tai Chi are Pung, Lu, Ji and An, (usually translated as Ward off, Rollback, Press and Push) and are most clearly expressed in Yang style-derived Tai Chi forms in the section known as Grasp Bird's Tail. Each of the energies has a trigram related to it for a specific reason.

Peng is three unbroken, or yang, lines: "heaven"

Lu is three broken, or yin, lines: "earth"

Ji is one solid, yang, line surrounded by two yin lines: "water"

An is "fire", a yin line surrounded by Yang lines."fire"



Heaven, earth, water and fire – four fundamental elemental forces.

Because of their symbolic makeup, the trigrams can help you understand what's 'inside' the postures, and what makes them different to each other – what makes a Peng a Peng, for instance, and not a Lu? And how is that different again to a Ji? And how is An different again?

It's about the *feel* of each movement.

For example: Peng is represented by three yang lines – this is maximum yang at its fullness. In this posture you should feel internally inflated – a positive, outward expression of energy at its maximum. That doesn't mean it is "hard" – it is actually more like a large rubber ball – a springy kind of energy on contact.

Lu is represented by three yin lines. This is the most empty a posture can be, but again, it's not lacking or depleted, it's just empty. There's still a structure, like the way a vase is empty in the middle. You are guiding force past you, without adding in your own force, but also without losing your own stability.

Then you get Ji and An, which mix both yin and yang lines. Ji is a solid yang line between two broken yin lines – the needle in the cotton. This is how the energy should be expressed in Ji – soft, but with a hard centre. Push is the opposite – it appears to be hard, but is open and empty inside, giving the push a warmer fire-like feel.

Again, we are talking about how each posture *feels* here, so words will always be inadequate, which is why the trigrams can be a useful visual symbol to represent the feeling of each energy and help you distinguish them.

The use of trigrams is not limited to Grasp Bird's Tail. (There are another four in use in Tai Chi, which are further mixtures of yin and yang balances, but I often feel like the theory is being shoehorned slightly into Tai Chi to accomodate them into a nice neat number 8, as there's no real reason to go as far as 8, and you could also go further.).

Once you can understand the feeling of the four energies in Grasp Bird's Tail you can see how it applies in other areas of the form. For example – what energy do you want to express at the very end of Brush Knee Twist Step? Is it a Ji or an An with the projecting hand?

Well, the interesting thing is, you could do it either way, so long as you know what you're doing and why you're doing it.

*Addendum: One of the joys of symbols is that you can interpret them in different ways. If what I've written goes directly against what your teacher has told you, then that's fine – you can interpret these things in different ways. This is just the way I do it.*