

Heikki Nousiainen

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# What is Pushing Hands in Tai Chi



Tai chi´s tui sou, pushing hands

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## About the author

I met the author of this book, Heikki Nousiainen, in the beginning of the nineties, when we both trained Kyukushinkai karate. I trained this style under couple of years as an extra training to my own karate style, Motobu-ha Shitoryu. I had started my training in the age of twelve.

Heikki has been working with many different martial arts such as Tai Chi, which he has taught, as a professional martial artist, for the longest period of time. He has also studied and instructed in many different Chinese martial arts as well as martial arts from Philippines and even other South-East Asian martial arts. I have studied Chinese martial arts under his guidance.

We have exchanged knowledge about martial arts from the beginning of the nineties and we also have become good friends, above our shared interest in the world of martial arts.

Heikki is a professional teacher who has trained the most of the martial arts still existing today. He has also worked in many of them more deeply and he has got the possibility to train the fine parts of different arts and the special techniques of these arts.

I wish him the best of luck with the book. I think it is good that he shares his knowledge and it is something he should continue to do. Our joined venture will continue also for many years to come, this is my



sincerely hope at least.

Fight greetings

Renshi Johan Backteman

6.dan Motobu-ha shitoryu karate-do,

Goshindo, Kobudo, laido

## **Heikki**

I met Heikki for the first time in Stockholm. We were both attending William C. Chen's Tai Chi seminar 1990. We learned to know each other training self-defense applications of Tai Chi. Heikki invited me to come to Umeå and have a training camp at his dojo/gym.

This was the beginning of a joined venture among martial arts that has lasted for years. I was staying at Heikki's home and we exchanged our views about fighting. Heikki visited Turku to attend seminars and he also taught Chinese martial arts in Turku. I changed my style of tai chi from Yang to Wudang because I liked its approach and its focus on the martial side of the art. I suggested Heikki to check this style and the European head coach Dan Docherty. Heikki was as always interested and open for new things, so for this practical Tai Chi also. He started to train the syllabus and its secrets with great intensity.

I sometimes envy Heikki his capacity to get so excited and to put all his effort in new things, I, myself, am very slow to start to like every kind of changes and I really could not keep up to Heikki's tempo. Heikki has also travelled a lot around the world to be able to train different martial arts. He is familiar with many styles and is always eager to learn new things.

Seen in the retrospective he has done a great career among martial arts and it is also great that he can share his knowledge and teaching by writing.



Tommi Halsvaha is born 1958 and has been a practitioner and teacher in Turku Finland. He has 3 dan black belt in Yushinkai karatejutsu and Ryukyu kempo and he has been training tai chi under many years. Tommi started a karate and tai chi association in Kaarina 1992 which is still active. Tommi Halsvaha is also known as a teacher in social and health care institutions and schools. He is teaching Controlled Physical Restriction, which is a system planned and

formed for personal working within social and health care. The aim or goal of the system is to restrict safely and without, or so little pain, as possible, un aggressive person, not to forget verbal and non-verbal communication. Halsvaha has a special level of psychotherapy education and he has a license to teach relaxation and hypnosis.

Tommi Halsvaha

## Foreword

This is the first book in English about the method/methods of pushing hands, used in the martial art of tai chi chuan (taiji), that covers the many aspects of the phenomena. It is not meant to be a teaching tool, as my first book about tai chi was, but a deeper analysis what pushing hands is, why you practice it and what is its role in the art of tai chi.

When I started to practice tai chi more than thirty years ago, pushing hands or tui shou usually was referred in tai chi books as a secret and mysterious method only reserved the very advanced hard core practitioners. I hope that this book can clarify and make sense of this method of practice. It is actually only an aid, tool of practice, although very functional and intelligent way to practice the things needed in tai chi and in self-defense in general. I will in this book use PH instead of pushing hands.

One of my goals as a tai chi teacher has been to unclot the mysterious coverage over the phenomena of tai chi chuan without making things too simple. I want not that the complexity and many aspects of tai chi should be left away. Tai chi is so complicated and interesting phenomena that it does not need beautiful words to be exotic, esoteric and very exciting. In the matter of fact it is an art and to master it and its theory does need effort and time. As my late Chinese Kung Fu teacher, Lawrence Leong (1940-1999) often repeated the saying, "Kung Fu is easy to learn but hard to master". I would like to say as -if acting in theater- oh so true, so true. When I started to practice tai chi as a very young but self-confident, self-secure person I was sure that I could in somehow solve the problem or phenomena called tai chi. I collected all the newspaper articles, University studies and papers written about tai chi, all the books in the market at that time in English, Finnish, Swedish and

Germany (although my German is not so good), even French books about tai chi. After reading all the material I noticed that it was not the right way. I left the books for many years and concentrated in training.

This is my second book I have written about tai chi. The first one includes no tai chi theory, not hardly any text to mention. It is the tai chi hand form shown with photos that makes it possible to study it on your own. I want in my books to follow the same path that the tai chi classics recommend; first comes practice or "doing", after that comes analysis and reflection. This book starts to handle with tai chi theory and tai chi classics, especially concerning the strategy and tactics of close quarter combat needed in PH.

My goal is to dig deeper and deeper in tai chi theory book by book, until there is only simple doing left, in that way we have closed the circle and have come back to unity.

I hope that I have been able to clarify the concept of PH both for beginners and advanced students. Only the reader can decide whether or not I have succeeded. I also hope that the reader will follow the recommendation of tai chi chuan classics " just do it" and practice well and not only in an armchair. This being said I hope you will have enjoyable moments with this book in the armchair!

## Introduction

I still remember the feeling, excited curiosity and eagerness, when I read about a course in tai chi for beginners on the information wall in library more than thirty years ago. An old, ancient martial art that combined philosophy, health, meditation and combat. I could not imagine any other subject that was so interesting and fascinating and it still is. My interest and passion for the art are still there although there had been doubts, even worse things about after every decade that has passed by but I do not worry about that. In a good relationship it is only natural to have and express even negative feelings. I think that it is your duty to question your doings every now and then, people change and so do situations and it is not good to end up in a situation you do something you do not like. You will not be comfortable and if you are a professional teacher in tai chi, people will notice it. It is totally another thing to feel the desire not to train just like at this moment I am writing this book in Catania, Sicily. Outside there is beautiful weather and all the sounds and exciting odors of food etc. I have decided to do my Nei Kung (Internal strength) exercises after I finish writing and then go out. I feel that I could do without training BUT I know also that I will enjoy more my outgoing after exercising. I am more relaxed and open for what I will see and experience today. Training should although not become something like a heavy back bag you carry around, on the contrary it should be something you get more energy and joy of. More about this subject ( the art of joy in training) in oncoming books, it is important!

My first tai chi teacher was a Chinese man, who was an artistic person, a great musician as well. He weighted little, only 46 kg and he did the tai chi hand form so well that I will never reach that level or at least not the artistic expression. It is good someone sets the standard that high so you have to always try to improve. He had been trained since three years age. His base was tremendously strong, a proof of the hard training as a kid he had got a muscle that grew over his shinbone protecting that. I did not believe that before I got the possibility to see and touch the muscle myself, there was a muscle! Unfortunately the hard training had

efficiently killed the joy of training and the enthusiasm for the art. He told me that he is only teaching and training for money although the image he gave the people was the opposite. He even told me that people are not searching for a teacher but a guru and a father and he used this fact skillfully, as well as the image to be a mysterious china man with modern thoughts. He considered people to be too lazy to learn PH, self-defense, weapons of tai chi or the more heavy training which is also quite often monotonous, even boring from time to time. This is partly why I want to teach people to become their own instructors and I will start to teach PH, self-defense from day one. When a new tai chi book was published by a lady who had been a member of a Olympic team in gymnastic, with her ability to make really nice tai chi postures because of the flexibility training in gymnastics, my teachers comment was that it was not tai chi. It is not enough to have a superior capabilities in your body, that is true. It is first in movement you see the quality of each person's tai chi. The level of tai chi can be bad though the person has all the physical attributes needed. The lady did perfect postures, it was a fact but he did not want to see it. This attitude is unfortunately quite common in martial arts, only you and your instructor are capable, the rest are faking something. In my mind every instructor has something to give if you listen. Even of the bad things you can learn but please, do not repeat or copy your teacher's bad habits, everyone has got them. It is no use to spend all your time to search for a perfect teacher. There is though a point to try to find a good teacher for you.

My teacher noticed my eager to learn and he sent me to Asia to get that knowledge. I will always be grateful for that to my teacher and also for the fact that he showed me the beginning of a long path of martial arts. He was also skillful, at that time 99 percent of tai chi teachers would not have been near his level. I was lucky to have him as a teacher although I am a bit critical also. It was also a bit comical when we senior students asked when we could start to learn that and that and the answer was always after ten years. We calculated that we would end up being at least 200 years old before we can the whole system.....I think a martial system should be possible to learn in a quite short time if you put all your effort in it. Think about Chinese or Indian restaurant that have

hundreds of different courses on their menu. Do You think that You get fresh local produced food? I prefer a restaurant that has one or maximum three meals on their menu.

This is maybe beyond the frame of this book but of course a martial arts teacher must have also an academic interest in his/her own martial art, which means that he/she studies different arts and his own in depth but pay attention to this; nobody can have fresh knowledge about everything. The old masters used a lot of time to FORGET the patterns and drills they trained for years, in order not to become slaves under a system.

So, I am still on my way to new experiences, maybe the experiences nowadays happens more in my own body and mind. I still travel a lot to learn and teach martial arts. I have always been happy to take part of new beginner's courses in different arts but because my physical level is not the same anymore I prefer private lessons or seminars nowadays.

I met a Finnish tai chi and karate teacher from Turku in Sweden, Stockholm. We were at a seminar with William C Chen, maybe the teacher who at that time was most famous in the world. I will tell you more about Tommi in my later books but for now he was the one who told me about a teacher who had said in Combat magazine that the most tai chi teachers cannot use their art for fighting and so especially the ones who belong Yang family tai chi. I got very curious and called him to London and I dared to question his teachings. It was only his words, I could not know if he walks the walk. The teacher, Dan Docherty, made an offer. I could come to London and pay the same amount for his teaching what I charged for my own private students and If I was not satisfied after an week I would get all my money back. I travelled to London and I did not have to use my option. My teacher had newly moved from Hong Kong to London so he wanted to make a difference and he did. Actually the most of my knowledge in PH and especially in tai chi theory and classics comes from him. I have though done my homework and research even on my own like everybody else needs to do. My motto is: become your own teacher. When I have finished my work with teaching I am unemployed, many teachers, especially



This is the first book in English that covers the many aspects of pushing hands in tai chi. It is also trying to answer the question, in the book title, what is pushing hands?

The book also covers the strategy of close combat as it is an essential part of pushing hands. Although it contains some practical advice, how to train pushing hands, its focus is more to explain the whole phenomena than being a tool for training at home, as his first book in tai chi was. Tai chi classics and some theory is discussed, the idea being in these books is to start without theory (as the first book), dig in deeper in theory until pure “doing” is left again, back to tai chi unity and wu chi.

Heikki Nousiainen is a professional tai chi teacher (even other martial arts) who also arranges wellnessweeks with tai chi in Italy, Croatia, Spain and in Finland both for companies and private persons. He has created a physical training method and a method for teamwork.

He won international pushing hands competitions in the age of forty but a car accident made it impossible to continue. His biggest interest in tai chi lies in self-defense and philosophy, nowadays also in wellbeing.

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