

## 42 Methods of Fajin

by David Gaffney

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In October 2003 Chenjiagou Taijiquan GB hosted the second UK visit of Chen Taijiquan luminary Zhu Tiancai. Following are some insights he presented on the correct development of fajin in Chen style Taijiquan.

A distinctive characteristic of Chen Taijiquan is the frequent use of fajin, that is explosively issuing energy with any part of the body. Along with the fist, elbow, shoulder and knee used in the external martial arts, Chen Taijiquan requires the practitioner to be able to fajin with any part that comes into contact with an opponent. This can be used to throw or strike an adversary. Alongside sensitivity, yielding and redirecting skills, a practitioner seeking martial efficiency should be capable of powerful aggressive movement. Chen Taijiquan fajin should be elastic in quality and forceful without being stiff. In the words of a Chen family saying, fajin must be performed as though "shaking cinders from the back of the hand" or akin to "a golden lion tossing its mane".

During his recent visit to England, Zhu Tiancai, for the first time, taught the 42 method of fajin that he has developed, based on the 32 fajin pattern devised by the famous Chen Zhaokui of the 18<sup>th</sup> generation of Chen Style Taijiquan. Zhu added 10 movements to

### Zhu Tiancai's 42 Methods of Fajin

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Sim Siu-Yuen was translator. Insights about the correct development of fajin in Chen style Taijiquan were described by Zhu Tiancai, a top Chen stylist, at a recent seminar held by Chenjiagou Taijiquan GB.

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Photo 1. Qian Jian Kao (Front Shoulder Bump).

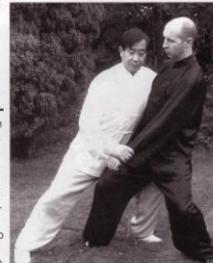


Photo 2. Zhu Tiancai shows application of Qian Jian Kao with David Gaffney.

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Zhu added 10 movements to the original 32 so that a comprehensive compendium of fajin possibilities can be demonstrated.

Chen Zhaokui devised the 32 pattern of fajin for the purpose of an exhibition in 1973 to demonstrate the dynamism of Chen style Taijiquan.

Chosen to perform were the then very young Four Buddha's Warriors of today, Chen Xiaowang, Zhu Tiancai, Wang Xian and Chen Zhenglei, together with their senior martial brother, Chen Dewang.

The occasion was the Xinxing (Wuxian) Wushu Tournament, where many renowned old masters were invited to demonstrate their skill, notably Chen Yunis (daughter of Chen Fa-ke), Lei Mengxi and Feng Zhiqiang.

In the process of the tournament, the five members moved in sequence, making square, rectangle and plum blossom (five circles) patterns on the stage. All who saw the demonstration were impressed by the vigor and energy of the display.

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The fajin methods reveal the martial applications and intent contained within the handforms of Chen Taijiquan. While the 42 methods can be practised as a continuous series, Zhu Tiancai suggested they could most effectively be trained as single-movement exercises.

Dismantling the pattern and drilling the 42 fajin methods individually will greatly develop the ability to use them practically. Taking out difficult movements, such as Ying Men Kao (Enticing Bump) where the chest is used as the striking area, or Wai Bai Li Shua (Outward Swing and Inward Throw) and practising them repeatedly can greatly help the practitioner to enhance their accuracy, speed and timing. Chen Zhaokui stressed the importance of single posture training as a means of enhancing martial skills that could not be practised safely with a partner, saying that "some applications of the movement cannot be used in push hands. For example elbow strikes... and also attacking vital points of an opponent, or qinna".

Throughout the seminar Zhu Tiancai emphasised a number of important points to be seriously considered when trying to develop effective fajin skills. Firstly there should be no deviation from the core principles of Taijiquan - relaxation, whole body movement etc..

Execution of the methods arises from a particular point within a circle, so the silk-reeling spiral path of a movement should always be sought.

He stressed that the practice of fajin should only be done after one has acquired the pliant energy (rou jin) of Taijiquan. They should be done within the principle of 'song' - letting loose or maximum relaxation of the muscles and joints - the idea of attaining forcefulness and power from softness was repeatedly emphasised. Zhu said that: "The whole body should be loose (song). The waist initiates all movements. The qi sinks down to the dantian, then descends into the yongquan, and finally surges into the four limbs. The springy elastic force of fajin is expressed in the outer section of the limb, which is followed by the middle section, which in turn is driven by the root section. Qi follows the intention (yi), and structure (xing) follows the qi. Therefore, yi, qi and xing become one entity."

When using fajin, Zhu said that exponents of Taijiquan should seek to harmonise internal and external movements; ensure that they co-ordinate the actions of the upper body and lower body; clearly differentiate weight distribution; and pay strict attention to timing. The ultimate aim in Chen Taijiquan, is to harness one hundred percent of the body's strength during a movement. Therefore, power emitted should be complete, the speed must be quick, the range should be short and the end point must be precise. While Chen Taijiquan makes use of rapid shaking movement of the waist and hips during fajin, this aspect is often over-emphasised. Shaking the body without having a fixed point of impact may appear impressive to the untrained eye, but is of little practical use against an opponent.

According to Zhu, reverse abdominal breathing is a prerequisite of correct practice. In performing fajin, the practitioner should inhale when gathering and exhale when executing. The abdomen contracts during inhalation and is distended during exhalation. Above all, breathing should be natural and spontaneous. If the breath has to be forced, then it is unnatural and detrimental to health. In fact, reversed breathing is used unconsciously whenever a person makes a sudden violent effort, even if they are completely unaware of it. Just as a person could not breathe in when pushing a car or lifting a heavy weight, one cannot inhale when performing fajin.

Zhu pointed out that only by following the above characteristics could one hope to properly develop fajin skills. True fajin is more than simple brute strength. Rather, it is a sudden, relaxed and fluid

explosion of power. Though many people understand Taijiquan only as a slow motion dance-like exercise, one's thoughts must constantly go back to the simple reality that it was created as a martial art. A cursory glance at tales of past masters reveals many references of superior strength and power alongside great softness and sensitivity. Fajin training is important in so much as the ultimate objective of Taiji practice is to reach a state of balance, fifty percent hard and fifty percent soft, yin and yang.



**The ever-enthusiastic Zhu Tiancai emphasising a point during a lecture at the CTGB school.**