

## Pao Cui Insights

By David Gaffney  
Tai Chi magazine

At a recent training camp, in the Chenjiagou Taijiquan School in Henan China, organised by Chenjiagou Taijiquan GB (CTGB), principle instructor of the school Chen Xiaoxing offered some interesting background to the Chen family Pao Cui (Cannon Fist) form and why its practise is still relevant today. Chen Xiaoxing is a nineteenth generation master of Chen style Taijiquan who learned from Chen Zhaopei and his brother Chen Xiaowang.



**2006 CTGB group in Chenjiagou**

Chen Xiaoxing first offered a brief outline of how the routine came into being. He said that Taijiquan was created by Chen Wangting(1600-1680) of the ninth generation of the Chen family. The original art was made up of five boxing routines. These were handed down over the next five generations until the fourteenth generation, when Chen Changxing (1771-1853) synthesized the five routines into the two routines we know today, namely the Yilu (First Routine) and the Erlu (Second Routine) also known as the Pao Cui or Cannon Fist form.

Sometimes it is said that what Chen Wangting taught was lost. However, according to Chen Xiaoxing this is not the case. He suggested that the synthesis of the five routines was not a matter of losing the old forms but of putting the five together, absorbing the essence of each. The Yilu and Pao

Cui contain the same essence as the original routines, preserving many of the movements and all of the movement principles. Chen style Taijiquan can be divided into two main frames today: Old and New (*Laojia* and *Xinjia*, respectively), each consisting of a First Routine and Cannon Fist.

Within the Chen style Taijiquan forms there are many *fajing* (explosive release of force) movements, particularly in the second routine. This provides a quandary for many people in the West who appreciate Taijiquan only in terms of slow, gentle, contemplative movement. While there is no doubt Taijiquan can be very helpful for improving health, fitness and quality of life, its training syllabus was developed around the ultimate goal of martial skill.

Chen Taijiquan can be pigeonholed by neither hardness nor softness. Rather it seeks to alternate hardness and softness until a middle path is reached. At this stage it can be said that the *yin-yang* principle has been realized. The necessary path of training that all practitioners must go through is first relaxation (*song*) leading to softness (*rou*). From the resulting soft and relaxed state hardness (*gang*) develops. Through the correct use of the silk-reeling or spiral energy (*chan ssu jing*), the softness can be highly concentrated, so that it is focused on one particular point. During rapid release it becomes hard. At the extreme of hardness, softness again follows, completing the cycle. The practitioner smoothly and naturally interchanges and coordinates the two forces so that, in practice, the form should be relaxed and balanced, regardless of whether the particular movement is performed rapidly or slowly. This coordination of hardness and softness is expressed in the saying: "Delicate like a virgin seeing a man, unbridled like a fierce tiger descending a mountain."

Why do we practise Pao Cui? According to Chen Xiaoxing, the Yilu uses predominantly *rou* or softness as the main feature. The Cannon Fist form on the other hand incorporates *gang* of hardness as the main principle. Taijiquan is built upon the concept of *gang* and *rou* complementing and alternating with each other. Consequently, with the two forms there is a complete balanced system of hardness and softness. Pao Cui is characterised by combat techniques expressing numerous *fajing*, fast movements, sweeps, elbow and shoulder techniques and sudden changes of attack and defense. The form is physically very demanding and

## Chen Xiaoxing on Cannon Fist

By David Galtrey

The following article is based on a stay at the Chen family village by a British group that trained intensively in the Chen Village in November 2008. It includes participants from Israel, Portugal and Italy.

Translation by David Galtrey

The challenge of the Chen style Cannon Fist is to increase speed, strength and chin jin into combat techniques, without losing the essence of Taijiquan's softness and fluidity.

At a recent training camp at the Chen family village school in Henan, China, Chen Xiaoxing, principal instructor of the school, revealed interesting background about the Cannon Fist (Pao Cui) for and why its practice is still relevant today.

Chen, who studied with Chen Zhaoyan and his brother Chen Xiaowang, first offered a brief outline of how the routine came into being. He said the Taijiquan was created by Chen Wangping (1600-1680) of the sixth generation of the Chen family.

The original was made up of five training routines. These were handed down over the next four generations until the nineteenth generation, when Chen Changyong (1771-1875) combined the five routines into the two routines we know today, namely the Yilu (Second Routine) and the Cannon Fist form.

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Chen Xiaoxing at the entrance to the Chen Jiaojiao Taijiquan School with the Chen Taijiquan GB.

was not a matter of being the old forms but of putting the five together, absorbing the essence of each. The Yilu and Pao Cui contain the same essence as the original routines, but said, preserving many of the movements and all of the movement principles. Chen style Taijiquan can be divided into two main frames today: Old and New (*Laojia* and *Xinjia*, respectively), each consisting of a First Routine and Cannon Fist.

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David Galtrey teaches in Manchester, UK

Chen Xiaoxing admits David Galtrey's Punch to Cui.

Chen Xiaoxing in Hidden Thrust Punch.

Taijiquan's traditional emphasis upon Yilu as a foundation for the Pao Cui.

Slow practice enables the practitioner to be aware of details to ensure that posture are accurate to check stability.

Chen Xiaoxing requires the practitioner to be prepared to alternate power with whichever part of the body comes into contact with an opponent. Chen's theory stresses the importance of being able to issue energy, whether it is through strike or qin (joint locking) movement, without any pre-tension or resistance held within the body.

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and balance throughout movements, to augment lower body strength, to co-ordinate internal and external actions, and to realize the circulation of qi throughout the body.

All these are not possible if one performs the movements rapidly at the beginning and then disperses each time a movement is performed. Initially, as one's level of skill improves, movements should be a combination of slow and fast, without any loss of detail. At this stage the practitioner is ready to begin training the Pao Cui.

Chen Xiaoxing explained that a distinctive feature of the Cannon Fist form is the speed. It is faster; the practitioner being required to perform it rapidly, but without the form being softened or dispersed.

"You should maintain your movement requirements without losing the chin suo jin. Although the movements are fast, you still need the fast and slow alternating rhythm."

The form can also be characterized by the frequent employment of a variety of different parts of the body. Alongside the fist, elbow, shoulder and foot used in the external martial art.

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He also mentioned that students should pay attention to Chen style requirements such as looseness, flexibility, springiness and elasticity. When issuing power, the movement must be spontaneous and natural.

Facing the movement increases the stiffness and resistance held within the body.

Light like scattered flowers. Solid like tempered metal.

Neil Baker in Walk Objectively.

ward expression should be slow but not sluggish, light but not floating, heavy but not stiff; fast but not scattered. This is reflected in an old Chinese saying, which describes Taijiquan as being "Light like scattered flowers, solid like tempered metal."

Through both forms the jin is not of energy, it is also different. Although both use rounded arms (noting movement), the Pao Cui movements are slightly straighter. Even though the roots is still spread and round, the circle is smaller and the speed is faster.

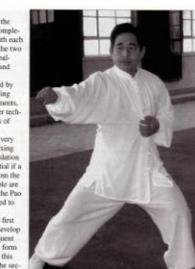
While teaching the Pao Cui, Chen Xiaoxing stressed the importance of being aware of the implications behind the alternating of fast and slow movements.

For instance, during fast in the jin fist, the jin is or intention, continues. After each explosive movement is completed this serves to connect the jin to the next movement.

Before releasing force, he said, energy must be used by allowing the jin to sink and collect fully in the dantian. Releasing energy before this point will result in a movement powered largely by the upper body. Immediately releasing after an explosive movement causes the body to recoil, collecting the energy in readiness for the next movement.

Contained within the movements there are numerous training methods and martial techniques, too. During our group's stay in Chenjiaojiao, Chen Xiaoxing's teaching was characterized by many repetitions of each movement, much progress posture correction and

Please see page 10



Chen Xiaoxing in Hidden Thrust Punch.

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Please see page 10



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Please see page 10

Chen Xiaoxing suggests that a strong foundation of skill in the Yilu is essential if a practitioner is to benefit from the Cannon Fist routine. "People are often too anxious to learn the Pao Cui before they have learned to do the Yilu well".

Diligent practice of the first routine is seen as vital to develop the internal energy. Subsequent training in the Cannon Fist form consolidates and expresses this energy. Before practising the second routine all movement must be refined, and all stiff, clumsy and uneven actions eliminated. "You have to practice Yilu well before you practise Erlu. Pao Cui is trained to develop your *bao fali* (explosive release of strength) and *nai li* (endurance and stamina). The two must go together. When you are doing the explosive movements it is no good if you are panting and out of breath". Chen Xiaoxing explained, "Pao Cui is easy to learn, but difficult to train". Easy in that if you already have the foundation of Yilu, there are many repeat movements. Also the form is much shorter in length. However, the difficulty level of the form is higher and the exercise intensity is greater. Performed with greater speed, more *fajing* and many leaping and stamping movements, it provides a demanding workout that rapidly increases the practitioner's martial strength.

In this context we can understand the logic behind Chen Taijiquan's traditional emphasis upon Yilu as a foundation for the Pao Cui. Slow practice enables the practitioner to be aware of details; to ensure that postures are accurate; to check stability and balance throughout movements; to augment lower body strength; to co-ordinate internal and external actions; and to realize the circulation of *qi* throughout the body. All these are not possible if one performs the movements rapidly at the beginning and energy is dispersed each time a movement is performed forcefully. As one's level of skill improves, movements should be a combination of slow and fast, without any loss of detail. At this stage the practitioner is ready to begin training the Pao Cui.

Chen Xiaoxing explained that a distinctive feature of the Cannon Fist form is the speed. It is faster, the practitioner being required to perform it rapidly, but without the form being scattered or dispersed. "You should maintain your movement requirements without losing the *chan ssu jing*. Although the movements are fast, you still need the fast and slow alternating rhythm". The form can also be characterized by the frequent



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employment of *fajing* by a variety of different parts of the body. Alongside the fist, elbow, shoulder, knee and foot used in the external martial arts, Chen Taijiquan requires the practitioner to be proficient in releasing power with whichever part of the body comes into contact with an opponent. Chen Xiaoxing stressed the importance of being able to issue energy, whether it is a throw, strike or *qinna* (joint-locking) movement, without any pre-warning to an opponent. He also cautioned that students should pay attention to Chen style requirements such as looseness, flexibility, springiness and elasticity. When issuing power, the movement must be spontaneous and natural. Forcing the movement increases the stiffness and resistance held within the body. Speed and power can be substantially amplified by lessening the level of energy lost en route to the end point. Any tension within the muscle (or joints that have not been fully opened) will provide resistive forces that pull the striking area back. This causes energy to be released through the trajectory of the motion, lessening the amount of energy getting through to the end point.

A common mistake is to over-emphasise the use of force when performing the Cannon Fist. Following the principle of yin and yang, Taijiquan combines the hard and soft energies smoothly and interchangeably regardless of whether one is practising the Yilu or Pao Cui. Not only can any part of the body *fajing*, but strength can be changed internally, blending attack into defense and vice versa. The key to efficiently releasing power lies in relaxing the body and mind and utilising the waist.

During the explosive movements of the Pao Cui, the ultimate aim is to harness one hundred percent of the body's strength. To accomplish this the energy from the feet is generated through the legs to the waist, where it is intensified by the spiral movement, then joined with the energy produced in the arm and fist. *Jing* or internal strength must start from both feet. Failing to apply a movement from a firmly rooted position denies that movement a source of power. Resistance from the floor allows energy to go through the body sectionally to form a complete integrated system. Without the rebounding energy from the ground, powerful whole-body strength is difficult to achieve.

The explosive nature of the Pao Cui is nowhere more apparent than in the frequent leaping and jumping movements. Chen Xiaoxing instructed that it is vital that the practitioner maintains both a feeling of lightness and heaviness. For example, when your hand and leg go up during a movement, your centre of gravity or *zhongxin* should be sinking down. Otherwise the movement will be floating and without substance. "You must understand the reason why you are doing the jumping or stamping in order for the movement to be concentrated and focused and for the whole body strength to be coordinated".

Throughout the whole routine, the outward expression should be slow but not sluggish, light but not floating, heavy but not stiff, fast but not scattered. This is reflected in an old Chenjiagou verse, which describes Taijiquan as being:

***“Light like scattered flowers,  
Solid like tempered metal.  
Competing with the tiger for ferocity,  
Challenging the eagle for speed.  
In movement it is like a flowing river,  
In stillness it is like a solid mountain,  
The spirit concentrated at the brink before emitting”.***

According to Chen Xiaoxing, while all Taijiquan forms follow the same underlying principles, the expression of *bafa* (eight essential energies) within the Pao Cui is not the same as the Yilu. The Yilu uses *Peng, Lu, Ji* and *An* as the mainstay of the routine, supported by *Cai, Lie, Zhou* and *Kou*. The essence of Pao Cui is not the same; The form predominantly expresses the energies of *Cai, Lie, Zhou* and *Kou*, this time supported by *Peng, Lu, Ji* and *An*. Throughout both forms the *jinglu* or route of energy is also different. Although both use rounded arc movement based upon *chan ssu jing* (silk reeling) movement, the Pao Cui movements are slightly straighter. Even though the route is still spiral and round, the circle is smaller and the speed is faster.

While teaching the Pao Cui, Chen Xiaoxing stressed the importance of being aware of the implications behind the alternating of fast and slow movements. For instance, during *fajing* as the *jing* finishes, the *yi* or intention continues. After each explosive movement is completed this serves to connect the *jing* to the next movement. Before releasing force, energy must be stored by allowing the *qi* to sink and collect fully in the *dantian*. Releasing energy



Paocui

before this point will result in a movement powered largely by the upper body. Immediately relaxing after an explosive movement causes the body to recoil, collecting the energy in readiness for the next movement.

Contained within the movements there are numerous training methods and martial techniques. During the groups stay in Chenjiagou, Chen Xiao Xing's

teaching was characterised by many repetitions of each movement, much rigorous posture correction and an emphasis upon understanding through direct experience. The final aim is that, after thousands of repetitions, the form becomes second nature and whether the practitioner advances or retreats he can apply his skills spontaneously and at will.

Although the direct nature of the form means that the martial application of many movements appear to be more obvious than the first form, Chen Xiao Xing explained that the student still needs guidance from a knowledgeable teacher if they are to understand the complexities within the form. The form must be trained until it becomes continuous, with each movement flowing naturally into the next. The speed should be fast, but controlled and



contained. The breath must be co-ordinated with movements and should not be laboured and the *jing* should employ whole body strength.

Chen agreed that the dynamic and vigorous nature of the Cannon Fist made it more suitable for younger people, Chen agreed. However, he disagreed with the suggestion that as more people practise for health nowadays Pao Cui could lose its appeal and relevance over time. He explained that although today Taijiquan is practised mainly for making the body healthy, it is natural for serious people to want to achieve more, striving towards higher, better and more demanding levels of

accomplishment. Chen Xiaoxing used the example of a person who plays basketball. “Although they soon learn how to throw the ball through the hoop, this is not enough. Many people desire to do it better, more quickly and accurately with a superior execution of movement. When you are training Taijiquan, the psychology is the same. Although the starting interest might be to make the body stronger and healthier, once a person’s interest is engaged and their skill becomes higher they will naturally want to get the maximum from their participation”.