

A Short History of the Yang Family That Created, and Continues to Advance, Yang Family Taijiquan (Tai Chi Chuan)

Taijiquan (Tai Chi Chuan) is known throughout the world and practiced in almost every country. This is largely due to the efforts of the Yang Family to promote the skills, and the benefits it brings, which are what causes it to blossom across the continents to this day.

Once known primarily in China, over the past 70 years Taijiquan has become recognized throughout the world and practiced in almost every country. This expansion is largely due to the efforts of the Yang Family to promote the benefits and teach the skills of Yang Family Taijiquan in a systematic and accessible manner. Taijiquan was created in China, and its roots can be traced back to Chang Sanfeng, a Daoist monk who lived in the Wudang Mountains, many centuries ago, and it has branched into a number of distinctive family styles over time. Among the various family styles, the Yang Style is the most widely practiced today and its evolution is known to us partly through history and partly through legend.

In 1799 Yang Fukui was born in Yongnian County, Hebei Province, China. His literary name was Yang Luchan. The exact details of Yang Luchan's birth family, his early life are not well documented. All accounts portray him as studying martial arts with Chen Changxing at Chen Village, but not having family access to the teaching. There was a novel published in the early 1920's by Gong Beiyu, titled *Taiji Yang Shenming Touquan*. Yang Luchan is portrayed as a young martial artist who wanted to study at Chen Village but was not accepted into training. The story describes Yang as returning later and pretending to be a beggar in order to get a job as a servant in Chen Changxing's household. He eavesdropped on classes every day to learn Chen's art and then practiced by himself to master the skills. Eventually, Master Chen finds out that Yang is stealing his art, but instead of punishing him, he is impressed with Yang's skills and innate talent and accepts Yang Luchan as a disciple. In this version, Yang stayed another 18 years and then, feeling he had mastered the art, he traveled to Beijing and taught his version of the Taijiquan he had learned. This novel was very popular and the story is commonly retold as true history.

An alternate version that is supported by some documents is that that Yang Luchan's family wanted to afford him the most promising future, so when he was 10 years old, he was apprenticed to a wealthy and powerful Qing government official, Chen Dehu.

Chen Dehu owned a very successful herb shop called *Taihetang* in Yongnian, but was originally from Chen Village. Chen Dehu loved martial arts and invited the great Chen Master, Chen

Changxing, to teach in his home. Yang Luchan was present and assisted Master Chen with whatever he needed. During the daytime, Master Chen would teach Chen Dehu's children and Yang Luchan would be the demonstration partner. In this way, Yang Luchan began to understand this unique martial art, and Master Chen became fond of Yang Luchan. Chen Changxing accepted Yang Luchan as a disciple, and because he was very gifted and trained very diligently, he became Master Chen's best student. Yang Luchan remained in Chen Village almost thirty years, working for Chen Dehu and training with Chen Changxing, until the death of Chen Dehu. Yang Luchan then returned to Yongnian in the late 1840's or early 1850's and began teaching what is now known as Taijiquan. His skill and natural talent was far above all challengers. He taught Taijiquan in the same building as Chen Dehu's herb shop in Yongnian, and the owner of the building had three sons who trained with Yang Luchan – one of whom, Wu Yuxiang, who went on to create the Wu/Hao Style of Taijiquan and was a great scholar of Taijiquan.

In the 1850's Yang Luchan moved to Beijing. The reasons are unclear and there are many possible stories. The result is undisputed, however. He made Taijiquan famous with his talents and skills. He became the martial arts instructor to King Duanwang, a close relative of the Emperor, and to the Emperor's Elite Capital Guards. Yang Luchan was so successful with this new art of Taijiquan that he became known as Yang Wudi, (Yang the Unbeatable). The reputation of Taijiquan was now established as a consummate martial art.

Yang Luchan had three sons, two of whom became highly skilled in Taijiquan. Yang Banhou and Yang Jianhou both studied with their father and became famous.

Yang Banhou, the second-oldest son, was born in 1837. When he was young, he studied academics and martial arts with Wu Yuxiang, with his father Yang Luchan's goal that he become a scholar. He excelled in the martial arts and Yang Luchan changed the focus of his son's education to Taijiquan. Like his father, he also became an instructor to the Emperor's security guards. Although his Gongfu was at very high level, his personality prevented him from having many students and he died in 1892 without passing on his high level skills to any disciples. Reportedly, one of his contributions to the Yang Family Taijiquan system was a two-person fighting set, known as Sanshou, comprised of 88 movements, 44 for each partner to match with the other. It is said that his favorite movement was "deflect, parry and punch" (banianchui).

Yang Luchan's youngest son, Yang Jianhou, whose literary name was Yang Jinghu, was born in 1839. He trained very diligently with his father, and his skills and personality brought him many students. Many of his students became famous masters of Taijiquan. When Yang Luchan passed away in 1872, Yang Jianhou became the lineage bearer for the Second

Generation of Yang Family Taijiquan. He had three sons, two of whom became famous Taijiquan masters, Yang Zhaoxiong and Yang Zhaoqing.

Yang Zhaoxiong, born in 1862, whose literary name was Yang Shaohou, studied with his uncle, Yang Banhou, when he was young and was known for fighting like his uncle, and developed a similar personality. It was difficult to retain students long enough to pass on his skills. It is said he was known as Flying Lu Yang because his favorite technique was “Roll Back” (Lu) and he is said to have sent people flying with that move.

Yang Zhaoqing, more widely known as Yang Chengfu, was born in 1883 and was recognized as having especially strong internal power, like his grandfather. He studied with other masters in addition to Yang Jianhou, his father, and developed a style of Yang Family Taijiquan, different in expression from the “Old Frame” of his grandfather, while still using the very same principles. This is known as the “Large Frame” style. Yang Chengfu was very generous and friendly and he travelled the country to share his art. His students were the first to share Taijiquan outside of China. Yang Chengfu became the lineage bearer for the Third Generation of Yang Family Taijiquan. It is Yang Chengfu’s style of Taijiquan that is the most widely practiced around the world and it is the basis of the Yang Family Taijiquan we know today. Yang Chengfu published his book, *Taijiquan Shiyongfa* (The Application Method of Taijiquan) in 1931. Yang Chengfu had four sons, Yang Zhenming, Yang Zhenji, Yang Zhenduo and Yang Zhenguo, all of whom became highly skilled Taijiquan masters. Yang Chengfu died in 1936.

Yang Zhenming, Yang Zhenji and Yang Zhenguo all studied with their father, Yang Chengfu, and became very proficient in the art of Taijiquan. Yang Zhenming, whose literary name was Yang Shouzhong, born in 1911, carried the art to the south with his father, then remained in Guangzhou and then travelled to Hong Kong, where he opened his school. He had many disciples throughout Southeast Asia. He published a collection of his father’s pictures in a book describing the applications of Taijiquan. Yang Zhenming died in 1985. Yang Zhenji, born in 1921, carried Taijiquan north from Guangzhou to Beijing, Tianjin, Guangxi and settled in Handan, where he was Chairman of the Handan Wushu Association. Yang Zhenji died in 2007. Yang Zhenguo, born in 1928, lives in Handan City, Hebei Province and teaches Taijiquan there and in the surrounding areas. He studied Taijiquan from an early age and has made significant contributions to Yang Family Taijiquan.

Yang Zhenduo, born in 1926, studied Taijiquan with his father and his brothers, starting when he was 6 years old. He received the honor and responsibilities of the Fourth Generation Lineage-holder of Yang Family Taijiquan. Grandmaster Yang is the first of the Yang Family to travel the world promoting the benefits of Taijiquan and acting as an ambassador for Chinese culture, making friends of strangers everywhere he goes. His generosity, tolerance, poise and

openness are well matched to his consummate skills in all facets of the Yang Family Taijiquan system. His list of honors and professional appointments would take too much room to document here. He has also published many books and produced many instructional videos, which are the ultimate references for anyone interested in studying Yang Family Taijiquan. He is the finest living model of the benefits of Taijiquan for health of the body, mind and spirit, as he continues to teach well into his 90's. Yang Zhenduo has two sons, Yang Dao Fang and Yang De Fang.

Yang Dao Fang's eldest son is Yang Jun, born in 1968. Yang Jun began his Taijiquan studies at age 5 with his grandfather, Yang Zhen Duo, who raised him. Yang Jun is a sixth generation direct descendent of Yang Luchan. He assisted Yang Zhen Duo in his teaching and they travelled the world on their mission to promote the skills and benefits of Taijiquan. Their first international teaching was in France in 1985 and the first seminar in the United States was at "A Taste of China" hosted by Pat Rice in Winchester, Virginia in 1990. The International Yang Family Taijiquan Association was formed in 1998 and continues to promote Taijiquan and Chinese culture around the world, with Yang Jun as the president. In 2009 Yang Jun accepted the honor and responsibilities of being the Fifth Generation Lineage-holder of Yang Family Taijiquan. He has produced many instructional videos of the complete Yang Family Taijiquan system and produced the *Yang Family Taijiquan Essentials* handbook as well as Instructors and Directors handbooks for the association, which are all being translated into many languages. Under Yang Jun's leadership the international association has established accredited schools and Yang Chengfu Centers around the world, to promote the health benefits of Taijiquan and to act as cultural ambassadors for the Chinese people. Yang Jun shares his grandfather's qualities of diligence in the arts and generosity, tolerance, openness and high standards in his teaching. He now has many disciples around the world and he holds them to his high standards.