

Traditional Tai Chi Elements

By Stanwood Chang

1. Raising The Power

Begin with the feet at approximately shoulder-width distance, toes pointing forward, knees just slightly bent, body upright. As the knees and ankles flex just slightly a little more, the arms come away from the body with very soft hands and wrists. They come up to the shoulder height. The palms then turn to face out and as you straighten your legs, your palms come down gently stretching. Never lock the joints. Repeat.

2. Wave Hands Like Clouds

I. Pouring Weight

Place the feet parallel, comfortable shoulder width apart. Begin with bending one ankle and knee and just letting the weight pour there, and then pouring to the other side. Repeat a few times to get the flow.

II. Shifting Weight and Fold

Next, shift the weight to one leg and pause, keep the knee where it is and slightly turn the belly in the direction, you're bearing weight. Then pour your weight to the other side and when that knee is aligned over the foot and feels stable, turn your belly without shifting weight. Continue shifting from side to side, creating a very gently massage deep in the hip area. Repeat a few times.

III. One Arm Movement

Begin to add an arm. The leg that's bearing the weight on, bring that same side arm up in front of your belly as if it's a paintbrush and as you shift across, you're painting with the brush, passing the belly area, flipping the brush over, bringing it up to your chest height and then painting with the back of the hand across the chest. You complete this movement by letting the arm drop. Imagine yourself coordinating the shaping of an oval painting or calligraphy as you shift back and forth with modest turn of the waist. Repeat a few times.

IV. Second Arm Movement

Begin on the opposite arm. Shift the weight, the hand crosses low, cross the navel painting, then the hand floats up. The back of the hand paints as it crosses your heart and then flows back down. Coordinate the weight shift and turn with the arm movements. Repeat a few times.

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V. Merging all Movements as One

Finish this exercise by doing both hands together. The lower hand is always going to cross over in front of the naval and the other hand is going to cross the chest. Combine the hands with the shifting and folding. Enjoy the feeling of this movement as the hands wave like clouds. Repeat.

3. Withdraw and Push

Begin by shifting all the weight to one leg. When the opposite leg is empty, turn the heel out about 30 or 45 degrees. Next shift the weight to be supported in the turned-out stance. The other foot steps forward maintaining the width between the heels as if there's a railroad track between the heels (shoulder width).

Make sure the front leg has about 60% or 70% of the weight and the knee is aligned over the foot. The back foot remains in an angle with about 40% or 30% of the weight giving you a nice stable stance also called the Tai Chi Stance or Bow Stance. Next, bring the hands up in front of the chest similar to a push gesture, not too far forward and not too close hands. Then shift the weight back and let the hands float down while all the weight shifts back without turning the pelvis. Next, the hands find a circular loop up. As you begin to shift your weight forward the hands turn out and before you get to 60% or 70% the hands are back in the push position. Repeat.

Finally, drop the arms and bring the front foot back and place it parallel to the other foot, both feet straight. Repeat the exercise on the opposite side.

4. Grasp The Sparrow's Tail

I. Leg Movement

Shift weight to one side, turn the empty toes out to the corner, slightly shift back onto that leg, advance with the bow stance (Tai Chi Stance) 70% forward, knee over the foot shoulder-width stance, back leg 30% with the back foot at 25 or 30 degrees, your belly button pointing north. With your weight staying forward, turn your direction slightly in the direction that you're bearing most of the weight, then shift your weight back without turning your waist, next turn all the way to the side that you're standing on without shifting weight, then shift laterally putting your knee back over the center of your foot stable frame and turn all the way to the corner back to the original bow stance (Tai Chi Stance). Repeat.

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II. Arms Movement

Now let's add the arms. Raise the arm that's on the same side as the front weighted leg. Place the other hand behind as if you're grasping a little bird with the front palm on the breastbone, and the back palm stroking the of the tail or the back of the sparrow. Turn your body in the same direction of the weighted leg. Shift the weight back as you lower the arms. Both arms swing all the way out at chest height. Return to the original position as you shift back to the front leg and place the hands in the grasping the bird gesture. Repeat.

III. Final Movement

Repeat the whole movement on the other side. Repeat.

5. Brush Knee, Twist, Step, Push

I. Leg Movements

Begin in the 70%/30% stance. Shift your weight completely forward, bring your back toes in alongside your front foot, balance the best you can. Next, place your foot back where it was, shoulder-width, toes slightly out. Shift back without turning the waist, then turn your waist to the side you're bearing weight. Bring the empty foot in and you're facing slightly to the corner. Next, put your foot back where it was flat on the ground. Without turning slide your weight across and put your knee back in the safe position. Finally square the hips to the front back into the 70%/30% (Tai Chi Stance). Repeat.

II. One Arm Movement

Now let's add the arms. Raise the arm on the side that has 30% weight. Set that hand in the push position, the opposite arm is resting on the side. Shift forward from 70% to 100%. Bring the back foot in, next to the front weighted foot, then place the foot back where it was before. The arms remain in the same position as before. As you shift the weight back, the front arm starts to fall. When you turn the waist the dropped arm swings to the side up to shoulder height, the palm is facing out. Bring the front foot in. As you put the foot back where it was, the side arm bends, the wrist relaxes and the elbow sinks. Begin shift weight to the front leg. When you turn the torso continue moving the arm as you push forward. Repeat.

III. Both Arms Movement

Start by standing in part's II stance with one hand up in the push position. This time the opposite arm is placed on the side at hip height slightly forward for counterbalance, the palm is facing back. Continue with the same leg movements as part II keeping both arms in place, shifting weight forward, bringing the foot in then putting it back. Next, as you shift the weight back, drop the push arm down. Swing both arms to the side. The one on side with the weight leg is stretched to the side with the palm facing out. The second arm is front of the chest. As you step out, then arm was in front of the chest comes down to hip height, the other stretched arm bends. As you shift and turn your waist, brush with the lower arm and push with the higher arm. Repeat.

Finish this exercise by switching sides and repeat each movement on the opposite side a few times.

6. Golden Rooster Stands on One Leg

I. Leg Movement

Start in the 70%/30%, Bow Stance (Tai Chi Stance). Shift to the front leg completely drawing the back foot in and balance on one leg, then put the foot back where it was. Next, shift your weight back bringing the front foot in, then step forward with the same foot without shifting weight. Once the foot placed flat on the ground, shift the weight forward. Throughout this whole movement keep your torso straight facing forward. Repeat a few times.

II. Arms Movement

Now let's add the arms. Shift your weight forward, bring the toes in. Next float the knee up at the same time lift the arm on the same side bending the elbow and align it over the knee. The opposite arm goes out to the side. As you step back both arms relax.

III. Final Movement

Repeat the same movement on the other side.

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