



Season's Greetings!

As we celebrate the holiday season, I'd like to wish all of you happiness and joy with your family and friends. And I pray for harmony within our communities and peace between peoples.

This is the last newsletter of 2023. As I begin to plan for next year's newsletter articles, I'd like to solicit your inputs. What would you like to read about? Would

you like more tips for beginners? Are there specific topics that you are curious to learn more about? Please drop me a note and I will try my best to accommodate.

Insight Sharing - *Jing* (勁) and Force Management

In this issue, I discuss the concept of *jing*. The Chinese character for *jing* is made up of the character for experience on the left and the character for force on the right – 勁. It connotes intelligent force, as opposed to clumsy or awkward force – 拙力.

Understanding *jing* is considered a higher level skill in tai chi. One pursues it after proficiency in playing one or more forms and the ability to sink one's weight toward the ground. It requires a good degree of interoception for sensing the propagation of forces through the body and controlling the progressive activation of muscles along the path.

Simply stated, *jing* is a form of functional force management, i.e., the management of internal forces of the body, from force initiation, force propagation, force distribution, to force exiting the body. Understanding *jing* in tai chi is thus the knowledge and practice of managing internal forces throughout the body and their interaction with the ground and the opponent/partner, by deftly activating muscles in timed coordination to achieve an efficient propagation and accentuation of power along the desired pathway. The word *jing* is also used to describe the actual forces being managed.

Let's use the Yang style brush knee as an example. In the header photo above, I initiate a force from the dan tian (near the belly button in the middle control zone) down my right leg, and into the ground, to increase the ground reaction force (more than the contribution from my weight alone). In Fig. 2 below, the created force travels up the right leg and is then directed (by middle control zone muscles) to push my pelvis forward with rotation towards the left. At the same time, part of the force is directed down my left leg as weight is shifted onto the left foot and I prepare to root onto that foot.

In Fig. 3, the force continues to travel upwards with the rotating torso, through the shoulders, elbows and reaching the two hands. The downward force on the left foot continues pressing downward to root firmly into the ground. Fig. 4 shows the final position when *jing* has reached the hands and front foot and has left the body.



Fig. 2. Directing ground reaction force



Fig. 3. *Jing* propagating to hands and foot



Fig. 4. *Jing* leaves body at form completion

In everyday movements, force management is mostly carried out instinctively by the body. But in many sports, like figure skating, the understanding of effective and efficient force management strategies can make a difference in performance. For example, in an instructional video featuring skating coach Natalia Dubova, she instructs her skaters to "sit, and sit again" to begin a stroking push. The first "sit" is to bend the skating knee to prepare for the push. The second "sit" is to initiate force from the middle control zone into the ice to create a large reaction force from the ice surface, propelling the skater forward. This second "sit" is imperceptible to the external observer because it is more about muscle activation than about body movements. Indeed, in tai chi, *jing* is considered an "internal movement". There are many skating elements for which the appropriate use of force management makes a significant difference, more so than just the external placement or movement of body parts. Can you think of some?

In summary, *jing* in tai chi is about how we manage internal forces and their external interactions (with the ground and the opponent/partner). Explicit understanding of these force management techniques can improve performance and increase satisfaction in our chosen sport.

With Warmest Regards,

Vincent Chun, PhD

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