

Synopsis

The publication in 1934 of Yang Chengfu's book, *Essence and Applications of Taijiquan* (Taijiquan Tiyong Quanshu) marked a milestone in the modern evolution of the art of taijiquan. Using what is best-termed demonstration narrative, the author presents form postures and suggested applications from his own perspective, as he performed them. This methodology renders Yang Chengfu's direct, hands-on teaching of the art with such immediacy and liveliness that the reader experiences the master's teaching much as his students did. This English translation finally makes Yang Chengfu's classic work available to taijiquan enthusiasts in the West. It includes notes and commentary that clarify the author's frequent classical and literary turns of phrase and elucidate the philosophical and political underpinnings that shape the text. The translator investigates and compares several early taijiquan books in order to help explain the roles played by two of Yang Chengfu's students, Dong Yingjie and Zheng Manqing, in bringing Yang Chengfu's words and teachings into print. Serious students of taijiquan, and those wishing to deepen their knowledge of taijiquan history and theory, will find this seminal work indispensable to their study and practice.

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Customer Reviews

The Essence and Applications of Taijiquan, which was written by Yang Chengfu, was published in 1923, but despite its importance for taiji practitioners in the west, it was available only in Chinese. I knew about it because my taiji's master; Dr. Qi Ke Bao, used it as one of his main sources for studying and, of course, teaching it. This book is for advance students who already are acquainted with Yang style long forms and with pushing hands exercises. The emphasis of the author is in functional features and in applications. It is written, as the translator points out, as "demonstration narrative"; when I was reading it, I felt as if receiving specific instructions for the important points in each movement. I think that the translation is precise and that Louis Swaim, the translator, was able to make Yang Chengfu's ideas accessible to an English reader (Qi Tiang Shu, my master's son and a Taiji master himself compared some random paragraphs with the original Chinese version and concluded that the translation kept the original sense). I found the translator's comments appropriate and very useful. He explains the meaning of some words, which are difficult to grasp, in such a way that they become more intelligible for a western reader. I think that for someone interested in Taiji, mainly in Yang style, the reading of this book is as necessary as the reading of the Taiji Classics.

I have only been taking Yang Style TaiJi 108 form classes for 8 months now. This book reinforces the basics and fundamentals that I have been repeatedly taught all this time. But the book goes beyond that because it helps me to visualize the "opponent" against whom the form is applied. I highly recommend the book to Yang Style TaiJi students who already have taken classes under a coach who teaches and stresses the need for a solid foundation in form; e.g., upright posture, breathing to the dantien, relax the shoulders and sink the elbows, etc.

This book is the second, and the most complete book written by the founder of Yang style taichi chuan, Yang Cheng Fu. The form is explained from the application point of view, with large and clear photos of Yang Cheng Fu performing the form (one image per posture). This is the historical record of the great master, and a must have for every Yang style practitioner.

I've been studying the Yang long form for 2+ years now with a teacher who studied under Yang Zhen Duo. This book is a thoroughly annotated translation from the original Chinese; itself based on notes by earlier lineage holder in the Yang family and probably written by Zheng Man-q'ing/Cheng Man-ch'ing, pick your transliteration. Essence covers the Yang form as a series of responses to one or more attackers, in the format "suppose I'm in this stance and the opponent does X". Each

response gives reasons and expected results. The translator includes notes on the response, changes from earlier books and photographs on the form, and elaborates on the classical Chinese mindset and references used in the original. He himself is an experienced practitioner of the form. The book has changed both the way I view many of the elements and how I practice the form itself. Essence is essential if you're studying Yang form, or interested in any of the Tai Chi schools.

This book is a wonderful time capsule, an attempt by two of Yang Chengfu's senior students to bring some of an oral transmission into written form. As such, it illuminates a transitional and dangerous period in the Chinese martial arts: the war with Japan was about to begin, followed by the repression of post-Revolution China. The translator has done a wonderful job in explaining the complexities of translating Classical Chinese into modern English, as well as making connections to the Taiji Classics which are interesting to read in parallel with this book. No, a beginner won't learn Taiji from reading this book, that is not its purpose. It serves as an inspiration for more experienced students, as a means of illuminating practice and study of the Classics, and as a glimpse back in time to the end of imperial China and its climate of martial arts.

Unfortunately most Tai Chi books are written as supplements to training already received by the Masters students. The translator for this book points out several instances where there are questions of interpretation and he cross references other works to try and arrive to a meaning as close as possible to what Yang Chen Fu intended. Very informative and enlightening. It has improved my Tai Chi practice and understanding. Based on the text alone I would give this 5 stars. The quality of the pictures is why I only gave it 4 stars. That's not the publishers or the translators fault but it distracts from an otherwise outstanding book.

While a complete beginner would find little within this book due to complete lack of transitional instructions (shifting between postures, directional indicators, weight distribution diagrams, etc.) the text that accompanies the photographs provides sufficient information to someone already familiar with the form, wishing to expand their knowledge directly from the source. Yang Chengfu attempts to describe the applications to techniques, giving the reader some idea of what the intention of the movements are. However, knowing that real applications were traditionally reserved for in-door (rumen) students, I am a bit skeptical about the descriptions being provided. A few of the Taiji classics are listed at the end, which is a plus for any Taiji Quan book. Overall, a good source of reference to the long form, originating directly from the source (although I still prefer Fu Zhongwen's

version.)

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