

Taijiquan Energies: Peng, Lu, Jee and An

The Tai Chi Classics admonish the practitioner to clearly distinguish “Peng”, “Lu”, “Jee” and “An”. To many these terms only refer to “postures” such as “Ward Off”, “Roll Back”, “Press” (or “squeeze”) and “Push”, which are found in their form. In fact, these refer to kinetic energies, rather than isolated postures. Not many understand that almost every movement will contain elements of “Peng”, “Lu”, “Jee” and “An”. Any circle will contain all 4 energies.

For many the practice of Taijiquan involves learning the form correctly and then trying to make the movements slow, smooth, relaxed and circular, while keeping the body properly aligned and shifting weight and alignment between left and right legs. It has only been within the past decade or so that high level teachers from China, such as Master Zhang Xue Xin have been able to focus our attention to the proper practice of “Peng”, “Lu”, “Jee” and “An”.

Master Zhang Xue Xin is the senior U.S. disciple of Grand Master Feng Zhiqiang, who is the leading living disciple of Grand Master Chen Fake, 17th generation lineage descendant of the Chen family style of Taijiquan. Besides being the 18th generation descendant of the Chen style, Grand Master Feng is also the originator of what is now known as Hun Yuan Chen Style Xinyi Taijiquan.

Master Zhang Xue Xin is the President of the USA Chen Style Association under Grand Master Feng Zhiqiang, who he recently hosted during his 2001 summer workshop in California. Master Zhang Xue Xin believes that leaving out the practice of Peng, Lu, Jee and An deprives the Taijiquan form of its functional aspects. “Form and functional should be combined” he often reminds students.

At the risk of over simplifying, the easiest way to understand the energies of Peng, Lu, Jee and An maybe in their directional aspects both in both movement and practical applications. The 4 basic directions are up, down, out (or forward) and back.

“Peng” would refer to movements that rise upward and outward. It has the ability to meet, intercept and deflect an opponent’s push or attack in an upward and/or outward direction.

“Lu” energy draws and then leads the opponent’s energy both back toward oneself and at the same time away as well. It has the ability to draw in, lead and to redirect an opponent’s oncoming force without opposing it.

“Jee” energy is any forward type of energy going outward toward one’s opponent. It can also be used as a combined energy to compress, squeeze and to augment.

“An” in the Chen system is a downward direction of energy. While it has often been translated as “Push” its directional energy in the Chen style system is downward.

The practice of these 4 essential energies, are the primary focus of the Chen style first routine known as the “YiLu” or “First Routine”. This is the same form from which all other Taijiquan forms are derived. These 4 energies are considered the cardinal energies and are as essential as North, South, East and West are to geographical orientation. At the risk of over simplification, these 4 energies are up (Peng), down (An), forward (Jee) and backward (Lu).

These directions are better understood when analyzing application, especially in the context of “Push Hand” practice. They operate in an interrelated fashion somewhat analogous to the game of “rock, paper and scissors.” “Peng” can uplift and deflect the opponent’s incoming force. “L” can blend with and misdirect the opponent’s attack. “An” can depress and smother an incoming force and “Jee” can attack a withdrawing force or strike out on its own in order to hit the opponent.

The 2 handed Push Hands practice drill illustrates the interconnectedness and versatility of these 4 essential kinetic responses. First, both Push Hands partners cross their arms and express outward and upward Peng deflection readiness. Rather than allowing unnecessary force to build up, one of the practitioners (A’s) draws the opponent (B) force into a horizontal deflection (Lu). Rather than being drawn into the deflection, the opponent (B’s) attempts to augment and reinforce force directed forward toward the opponents (A’s) center (Jee). Feeling the expansion of Jee towards oneself, the proper response for (A) would be “An” to push or press it downward. Then the cycle repeats.

In this regard, Master Zhang Xue points out “that practicing form correctly, helps to improve push hands skills; while the proper practice of push hands helps to improve the practice of form.” Form and function are interrelated through the practice of form and push hands, especially in the Hun Yuan Taijiquan of Grand Master Feng Zhiqiang.

Hun Yuan Taijiquan is the physical practice of creating circles and spirals everywhere, according to Grand Master Feng Zhiqiang. This concept is contained in the words of Hun Yuan, which refers to a complete state of potential where everything is contained, interrelated, moving and balanced. But in every movement, the Taiji classics advise us to clearly distinguish the energies of Peng, Lu, Jee and An. To further illustrate this point, the Hun Yuan practice of Taijiquan form begins with the practice of Peng, Lu, Jee and An. Raising the wrist and arms exhibits ‘Peng’. Drawing the hands back to the sides of the chest demonstrates “Lu”, pushing palms downward exhibits “An” and extending the hands forward exhibits “Jee”.

In addition to practicing these movements in the form Master Zhang Xue Xin also encourages the individual repetition of movements designed to express these 4 energies. Practicing these energies individually is a repetitive sequence helps the student to better understand the way in which the mind and body must work together to express the energies correctly.