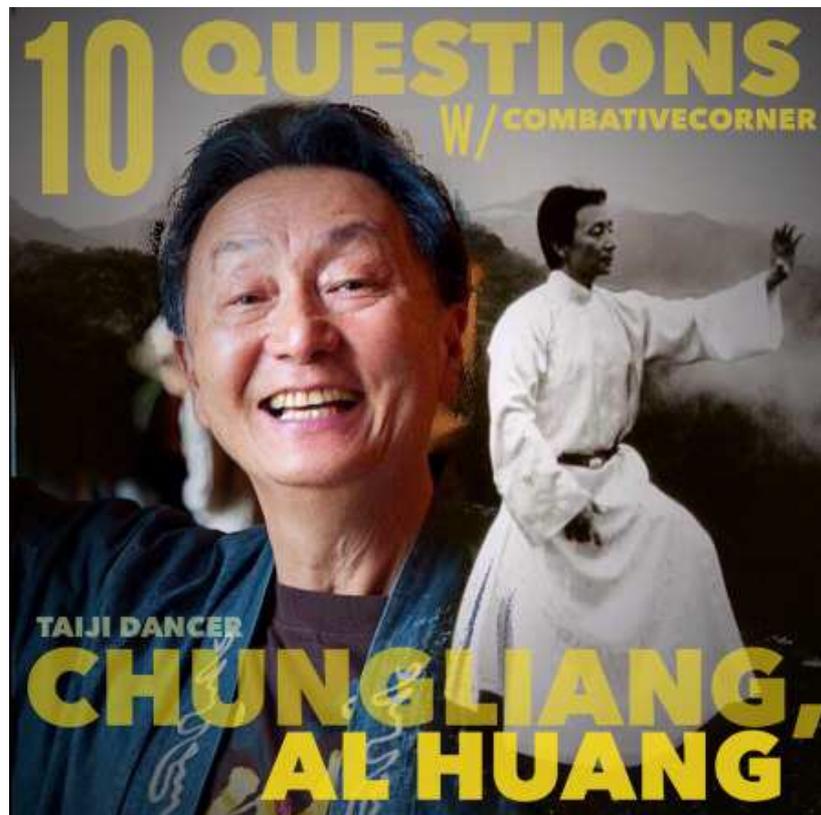


« [10 Questions with Samir "Sandman" Seif](#)

## 10 Questions with Chungliang Al Huang



*Chungliang, Al Huang was one of my earliest experiences in Taijiquan with his book, [Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain](#). I read it again when I decided I was going to teach the art form. His philosophy and playfulness in what is often an "atmosphere of seriousness," a breath of fresh air. Allowing music, nature, and dance to enhance and revitalize the spirit and influence the direction of your practice – these are just a few things that I took from his example. But here are some of the questions that both myself, my students and our CombativeCorner readers had to ask Master Chungliang...*

**How did you come to first play taijiquan?**

As a child in Chinese villages hiding from the war, observing nature's flowing movement, and inspired by EveryMen and Women of China, believing in waking up the bodies first thing in the morning, in the "Watercourse Way" of organic Tai Ji moves, cultivating the Body-Mind-Spirit entity. I embodied my Tai Ji playful-ness through osmosis naturally.

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What did your friendship with the philosopher Alan Watts entail, and did he have any influence on your teachings of the Tao, Taijiquan, etc?

We met by destiny, Chinese call it Yuan 緣。 Mutually appreciating the opposites in each other for personal inner growth and outer balance. As he wrote in the Foreword of my first book, "Embrace Tiger, Return To Mountain", "For us, the East and West have truly met." He was my mentor, colleague, and kindred spirit; he helped instilling self-awareness, confidence in myself of my unique potential and integrity, to become a lifelong student and teacher of TAO. He put me at ease to be an intellect, the scholar/philosopher, and I helped him to trust his spontaneous dancing self. His words made my dance more sublime; my dance helped his words to soar. We were blessed to be partners when we taught together—but sadly for such a short few years before he passed on. Now, more than ever, his writings, words continue to grow in me and in my teaching. His legacy lives in me and will perpetuate on and on for everyone who reads him and still can hear his voices on recordings he made. I feel blessed to have known him and learned from him, and shared our explorations of "TAO: The Watercourse Way" together.

As taijiquan players we seek for balance and rhythm in our lives. How does music shape (and/or enhance) your taijiquan practice?

Tai Ji resonates with the Music of the Spheres, especially the rhythm and the organic patterns, Li 理 in nature. When we dance Tai Ji, we reverberate the "Silent Sound of CHI/QI". We also have such vast repertoire of great Music from all around the world and all ages, to play with and find inspirations in. Music is a great guiding force to dance to and flow with, allowing structured sound and natural rhythms to fine tune us in our movement practice. But the best and the most inspiring music is in the Sound of Nature, such as the roars of Ocean waves, the soft quietude of changing tides in the River, the bird songs and its ethereal silence in the forests and woods... on and on... Music is everywhere, shaping and forming our Tai Ji dances of Living.

Most masters of taijiquan that I've come across are very self-controlled, unmoved in a sense. Especially those teachers who teach taijiquan with an emphasis on form, application and pushing-hands, tend to have a unemotional response to their artform. If you agree with this, could you answer why might this be? If you disagree with this statement, could you answer why? (Part 1)

Studying forms is a necessary discipline, nothing wrong with this emphasis, but it can also be very dry, even robotic in fixing our practice too rigidly. We must not forget we are human beings made of flesh and blood, filled with raw emotions and feelings. We cannot ignore this multi-dimensional consciousness of being a Whole Human Person when we focus on the discipline of forms and structures. Both form and genuine expression of human emotions are important. They are inseparable as Yin/Yang can never be separately regarded as only Yin or Yang with the "and" in-between the two integral, embracing halves. Simply meditate on this marvelous "YinYang Tai Ji" sign and you will be instantly transported, to embody this never-ending, ever-changing transformative Polar Dance, to realize the ultimate ONENESS in yourself, to be Fully Human.

(Part 2) Being such a well-connected teacher (bridging music, dance, philosophy and taijiquan), have you encountered a lot of resistance within the taijiquan community (and even other taijiquan teachers) as to your approach to teaching and your emphasis on more "free", dance-like movements and creating emotion and a sense of "oneness"?

In the early years, perhaps my approach to the creative freedom of Tai Ji practice and teaching might have raised a few eyebrows from the traditional Tai Ji teaching community. In fact, a few even criticized me for using music, improvising the motifs, and just being too joyful—smiling too much! Their critical but gracious comments came with this, “Oh, he doesn’t do Real Tai Ji. He only Dances Tai Ji!”, which was the perfect description of what I was hoping to do in my philosophy of practice and teaching. I bowed to them with this compliment. Now, nearly half a century later, I think I have proved myself to have been actually Doing the Real Tai Ji after ALL. Time always tells the truth and reconfirms the real “Tao” Way in the end.

**Why hasn’t taijiquan been able to bring a younger crowd, like other exercise forms like dance and yoga?**

In our hyper-active youth oriented Western society, perhaps it was the superficial prejudice on the slow moving Tai ji which was thought to be only suited for seniors who couldn’t manage to pump their muscles anymore. Also, the subtlety of the practice and benefit can only be appreciated by thoughtful observations patiently. It grows on the person who is also maturing. It takes deeper understanding to find the practice gratifying in the long run. The youths who seek immediate results and instant gratifications, can be disappointed with the slow progress in Tai Ji. Since I often refer to my Tai Ji the Creative Dancing Moves, even “Tai Ji Boogie”, I haven’t had much trouble attracting younger people in my seminars. I trust the subtle learning will grow with these young people as they mature in themselves, gradually, in due time. As we say in China, “When the students are ready, the teaching appears!”

**What is your primary teaching message?**

Learn about The DANCE of LIFE and DANCE in the TAO with its perpetual FLOW in Time of Now and Space of Here. Stay open-minded, open-hearted and Be a perpetual Beginner in Lifelong learning, always have the ability to Be Amazed with the mystery of Life, and in what we are constantly discovering day by day. Become a TAI JI DANCER of LIVING!

**You’ve written some amazing books, and taught a lot of people over the years. What are a few things that you hope people will remember? (either about you, or your teachings)**

As I still keep on learning and exploring, I can hardly think in that way for a fixed legacy to be remembered. I have always empathized the fact that I have continued to transform and grow, therefore never the need for my students to copy me as if it is the ultimate. When my students blame me for changing my forms after a period of their absence, I would chide back to say to them, “Are you still doing the same Tai Ji I taught you so long ago. But in the meantime, I have transformed and improved. Are you still doing the same old Tai Ji from way back then, getting fixed and stuck?” It is the same about my teaching which will continue to grow and transform and become more in the Here and Now, as I grow and mature and, hopefully become wiser and purer— in the Tao sense of “returning to being a child again; to return being the ‘uncarved block 樸 and unbleached silk 素’ “. Don’t forget that the author of the classic, “Tao Te Ching”, called himself Lao Zi, the “Wise Old Child”.

**Is there a myth in Taijiquan, in Taiji/Tao, that you’d like de-mystified?**

Yes, do not fix on any ideas of how Tai Ji Quan was first invented in some legendary fantasies. Never put them into a box or on the altar to worship and imitate. The “original tai ji” is for all people, and for all times, needs to be re-invented every day, anew. Tao must not be “ismed” and be put into a box, the same way we cannot quantify and sectionalize the

Watercourse Way which is always flowing and changing. There is also no such a fixed person as a Taoist. Take the "ist" away and simply live as a human person, following the Tao in daily living. "Living our Tao" is not the same as Being stuck within TaoISM, and trapped by being a TaoIST.

Do not concretize metaphors literally. Learn to read and understand metaphoric symbols such as "Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain" and not literally naming the "tiger" as the wild beast, such as the "Dragon" needed to be slain by heroes in the West; or measure mountains with quantitative heights to climb. We embrace the symbol Tiger, our "Crisis" as both our "Danger and Opportunities" in our lives. What one must embrace is "My Life So Far" with courage, equanimity, honesty, completely and fearlessly; and Return to Where We ARE, Here and Now, as our current grounding, our personal Mountain Top. We shall endeavor to rise and elevate accordingly, timely, not to strive mindlessly for more height or attempt to fly higher. We need to learn how to land safely and properly before we take flight and soar, and wisely prepare for our soft "Happy Landings" every time in our "Heroic Journeys" by "Following our Bliss". For this important awareness, as I get older, continue to gain a little wisdom, my gratitude goes to two of my mentors/colleagues, Alan Watts and Joseph Campbell. And, of course to the sage-teacher Confucius, who happily claimed in his final years to be able to finally, "follow my heart's desire, without going astray!"

**What do you hope to accomplish in the upcoming 5-10 years?**

Keep on doing what i am inspired to do, keeping up with my joyful creativity and my Dance of Living. Life is much too ephemeral and brief. 5-10 years can slip by in an instant, or become suspended in the "Stillness in Motion" of the DANCE, in "The Eternal NOW", depending on how we live the years still given to us. Be grateful to being Truly Alive each day. It is not the goal in the end that counts; it is always what and how we experience the journey we are taking in everyday living. Each moment well lived with joy and gratitude is the ultimate accomplishment.

Interviewed by: [Michael Joyce](#)

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