

FOREWORD

His hands firmly on his hips at the centre of his body, the hero – as heroes do – goes fearlessly on his way. Not so manly-dignified, the light-footed, gliding fairy's appearance is more feminine and graceful.

'The Hero's Journey' or the 'Fairy Gliding Back and Forth' are two descriptions for one and the same Qi Gong movement, in which both the figure of the hero and the fairy are expressed in a balance of Yang and Yin.

When the term 'hero' is used in the following text, it will also always include the 'heroine' who has to stand up for herself.

In the above-mentioned Qi Gong movement, the 'hero' and the fairy take two steps forward and two steps back. The 'hero', to whom we are now referring, must not take more than two or three steps backwards or forwards. It takes approximately two or three steps to get up out of the crowded circle of seated seminar participants and walk into the centre of the circle.

It is here, in the centre of this circle that the hero has to pass his tests. Let us return to the fairy that is said to glide back and forth, how does she, who is also being tested, transform herself?

THE HERO'S JOURNEY **or** **THE FAIRY GLIDES BACK AND FORTH**

Dear Friends,

We need to ask ourselves what is really happening when Chungliang, our Tai Ji master, starts sculpting away at the 'building of the human form'. As we know, for him as both dancer and architect, the greatest work of art is the awakening human being.

Chungliang, our Tai Ji master, is frequently willing to participate in the building of the human form and help clear away all the obstructions that an ego tends to build up for its so-called own self-protection and smugness. Once these worst obstructions or encrustations have been removed from the building of the human form, chances are that it might come to life – yes, that it might even become a work of art.

Although this wrenching free of masks, old, tight-fitting encasements and veneers (Dürckheim) may have healing qualities it is, compared to other pick-me-ups or tonics, a bitter pill to swallow. A pill our hero unfortunately has to swallow.

I. The hero begins his journey

“Who would like to come into the centre of the circle? It is an opportunity,” asks Chungliang, our Tai Ji master. You – who correspond to the ‘noble personality’, which is how the “Book of Changes” refers to The People of the Way, who either prove themselves or fail in the world – follow his invitation to publicly reveal yourself in the middle of the circle of seminar participants.

Our now lonely hero knows what it means to come into the centre of the circle.

The first thing ‘coming into the centre’ means is submitting yourself and being unimpressed by how those now sitting around you are looking at you. However, it also means that you now have to focus on your own physical centre, so that you are able, trusting in your own strength, to take up your journey courageously.

What is more, ‘coming into the centre or middle of the circle’ also means entering ‘The Middle Kingdom’, where one takes leave of telescopic – let us say, rational – behaviour in order to take on customary eastern situational behaviour.

On his quest, our hero now has to prove his steadfastness in avoiding the rational and taking up the situational path. With this in mind, he would be well-advised to tactically orientate his behaviour according to the principles of SUN ZI (the great strategist) with which he is acquainted and not rely on the well-trying sandpit and previously planned strategies, (based on CLAUSEWITZ) as is usually the case in the West.

One will see
whether it is ‘tea drinking’
when you sit down
to drink tea.

One will see
whether you are a bear
when you slip into its skin
to mimic it.

One will see
whether you are the bamboo

One will see
whether IT is you.

when you pick up the brush
in order to paint it.

II. The hero has to pass his test

“Do something.” Your teacher says. “Do your best.”

You know what unspoken words lie hidden in this request.

When dealing with any movement motif, you should not follow your concept, but in your performance, employ the calculated potential of the situation. At the same time, your gestures have to communicate how you are feeling in this situation. What is expected of you above and beyond this can be read in Chuangtse, Book VI, verse 1. Here, it is written that it is a joy in itself to be cast in human form. If your performance were carried by this joy of being alive – as China teaches us – then even things that we are not able to master would still have their certain charm and would find approval in our school which is also a ‘School of Laughter’.

However, our hero all too easily succumbs to the pressure of wanting to do well. In his desire to give his best, he loses faith in the potential of the moment – in the flow of the Qi and in how own Dantian. He fails because he slips into the formal – fails because he is thinking about what he looks like and fails miserably because he makes himself the subject of a method.

“I don’t want to see what you know about Tai Ji. I want you to show us what is going on inside you when you practise your Tai Ji!” is the Tai Ji master’s clear order.

A new attempt by our hero reveals no real difference.

“You are following the ‘form’, you are not following the Qi”, is the new criticism.

Now our hero is suffering and his circle of friends around him is suffering with him, perhaps even more, because they are passive onlookers and are unable to help him. But their empathy towards him, friends who offer themselves up for one another, blends together the unity of the whole group.

Everyone knows what happens in the story of “The Hero’s Journey.” One knows that the same thing always happens in the myth. No one expects anything other than that the hero initially fails. It is a

human feeling and a deep desire to keep wanting to reassure yourself that you are not alone with your fears, doubts and weaknesses.

Thanks to your master, you, the stumbler, are immediately caught, supported and rebuilt. But the master will not rest as long as this 'building in human form' does not show what is going on inside him. It is expected that *INIEN*, the resonance of the inner bell, totally fills him and determines his gestures. Everyone waits until he finds the pose that lies rooted in his reality. When this finally takes shape and is confirmed by the master, then he – now the hero of the day, who has finally passed the test – is applauded by his circle of friends.

III. The hero is celebrated; he thanks everyone and returns to his circle of friends.

So far you have been tested, now the time has come to ask yourself whether you expected your applause – which a good actor generally does not – or whether you are surprised, which means that you managed to successfully slip into the role you played. Just now, while you were performing, you needed help. If you are a person with character, then now, after your success, you should not crave recognition. Wanting to win applause is not acceptable because it was your master who was responsible for guiding you to your artistic performance in the first place, so that now, in hindsight, you don't know how you did 'it'.

One good reason to be humble is connected with the sense of tradition. How can you present yourself if you are unable to relate to the wealth of forms from China's spiritual and cultural traditions? At the moment you are the briefly shining 'star of your own show', but, if you pardon my saying so, you should be surprised that you are applauded at all.

Before our hero – now confirmed as an 'insider' – returns to his circle of friends, he thanks his master in a seemly way. With a bow, he steps down from the level that is not yet really his and by folding his hands further testifies to his continued willingness to both learn and be instructed.

We should all be thankful that we belong to a school in which each and every one of us is continually supported as a personal subject and not as the subject of a method. Although, as Westerners, we might be able to understand the difference between these two, we do in public, due to our culture of 'mistake avoidance', tend to want to prove our true control of the 'form' by means of the 'Tai Ji Look'.

However, we should be pleased when we make mistakes! We should embody what we do! Of course it is not easy to live up to these artistic demands, but it is not easy for the master to represent them so consistently, either.

Indeed, everyone has to confront their own continual process of self-renewal: the return to the proverbial first grains of sand that, when placed one on top of the other, will one day become a pagoda. You cannot achieve everything on your own. The master is aware of this acute problem and offers a helping hand when things come to a standstill.

IV. The Claim to Originality

There is a lot of rubble when Chungliang, our Tai Ji master, takes the building of the human form in hand. The broken pieces of what remains of the mask, the tight-fitting encasements and veneers now lie at your feet – you are now responsible for the recycling – and you gather them up and start constructing a new path to growth. You have created a lot of this rubbish yourself. All this garbage will help you shape the heart of the form, which means that you need to understand it and adopt it so that it will contribute to your growth. (Dürckheim)

China also teaches us to heed the darkness, the gloom and the worn out and to re-use them. Body excretions are utilised. Seen this way, one might casually formulate the question about originality as follows: Did your 'form' thrive on your own rubbish?

A picture passed down in western alchemist records, shows a farmer in the foreground dancing on his dung heap. A farmer is someone who, like no other, keeps in time with the rhythms of nature. The fact that he is dancing on his dung heap proves that he feels part of the process of becoming and passing. A tower nearby represents the opus, the work of his self-renewal, and is the trademark of the alchemist.

A man is falling head first from the top of the tower. One always runs the risk of wanting to adopt the work of others whose 'height' outdoes one's own. Yes, generally speaking, there is always the danger that one will fail if one relies too much on a predetermined form.

This is precisely the danger our hero of the day in our story is confronted with. But this should not prevent us from jumping up and going into the centre of the circle when the invitation is offered: "Who would like to come into the middle of the circle? It's an opportunity."

It is indeed our opportunity.

-- Johannes Pfeil, Innsbruck, Austria, 2010

NB: 'The Hero's Journey' is a story that incorporates the teaching of our Tai Ji master Chungliang Al Huang. The text was written for and read out at a meeting of friends in Stillshagen (Germany) in 2005. In 2010, excerpts were read out in the form of an open lecture during a Tai Ji training course in Winterthur. In the interests of the reader, the above text is a slightly modified and more precise revised version of the original lecture.