

Wudang

A MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER



5/21



From Sifu Paul

Greetings, everyone,

The month of May is nearly finished. It's been a beautiful month that began with a chill and is ending with a sizzle. The early wash of citrus greens has ripened to a rich viridian, and the blossoming trees have released their petals in fragrant flurries that ride a breeze downward to sunlit grass. Can summer be very far away?

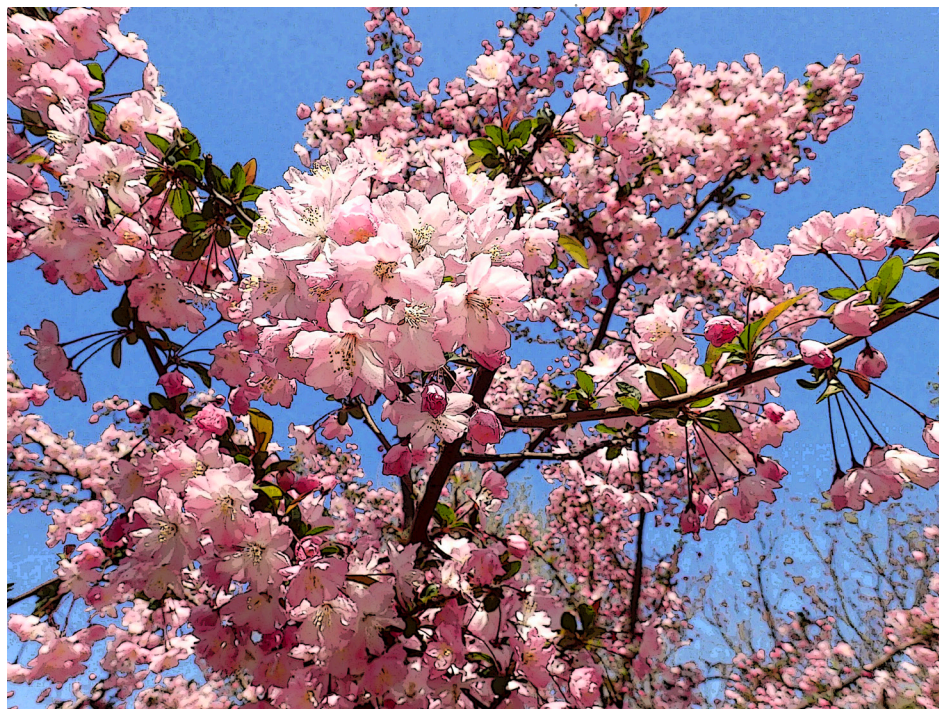
As plant life opens to the season, a new time of reduced social restrictions is opening in the Twin Cities. The studio will monitor and adapt to new guidelines as they emerge—with a regard for what's sensible and safe.

In this issue: an update on my surgery and return to teaching; a bow of gratitude to Kim and Christopher for their wonderful classes; an article by studio member Stephen May on shifting our perceptions of failure; an overview of the stances of T'ai Chi Ch'uan, with illustrations by studio member Todd Nesser; the new summer class schedule; and more. Enjoy the bounty of springtime.

Hip Hip Hooray

Synergy: An interaction or cooperation giving rise to a whole that is greater than the simple sum of its parts; from the Greek word *synergia*, meaning “working together.”

On April 22, I had hip-replacement surgery on my right hip. I managed to put this off for six years with alternative therapies until they were no longer effective. My surgery went extremely well. I spent a night in the hospital and was released the following day. My experience in the hospital brought back a memory of one of my early teachers, who



often used the word “synergy” to describe how the various parts of the body should work together to produce harmonious and powerful movement.

I've not had much interaction with Western medicine in my life. This was a deep immersion for me to say the least, and I was impressed and grateful for the people, their expertise, and the symphony-like synergy of a system that could replace the largest joint in my body and send me home the next day.

My social support system was the healing agent that lifted me up before, during, and after the surgery. My wife and family, and my extended family of friends, who offered love, care, and support in every way possible, made this a milestone for me, and I'm grateful beyond words.

The one constant for me throughout my six-year effort to avoid surgery was my practice of T'ai Chi Ch'uan and Qigong. As

< Energy work has been key to Sifu Paul's recovery from hip-replacement surgery.

my hip function declined, it was really all that was left for me in my once-full repertoire of martial arts and movement practices. I believe my decades-long devotion to these arts has built up within me a Qi-full vital energy body that came through to restore and heal my physical body more rapidly than it would have without the practices. There's still work to do to rebuild strength and range of motion, but four weeks out, I'm moving well, often, and without pain. It's going to be a good summer.

With Gratitude

Kim Husband and Christopher Knutson stepped in to teach all the classes at the studio while I was on medical leave for a month. They each brought their own unique style and perspective to each class with a fluid ease and skill grounded in the principles of T'ai Chi Ch'uan and showcased their combined 40 years of experience. I appreciate your skill, dedication, and support. A heartfelt thanks to you both. —Paul



Bottom of the Second

The month of June marks the end of the second quarter. Thanks to all who have paid dues and made donations during this quarter. Your support sustains us as we move into the summer season. Consider gifting someone with a membership or making a donation. Join us for classes in any of our current options: in-studio, online, or outdoors in Hampden Park.

A New Beginning

Summer Class Schedule

We are pleased to announce the return of Beginning T'ai Chi Solo Form classes at the studio starting **Saturday, June 5, at 11:00 a.m.** at the Studio. Register online. Class is limited to 15 people.

Monday

6:00 p.m. T'ai Chi Solo Form on Zoom

Wednesday

6:00 p.m. T'ai Chi Solo Form live in the studio and simulcast on Zoom

Thursday—live in Hampden Park

5:00 p.m. Informal practice and corrections for people learning the T'ai Chi Solo Form

6:00 p.m. T'ai Chi Solo Form

7:15 p.m. Informal weapons and other styles practice

Saturday

11:00 a.m. Beginning T'ai Chi Solo Form

12:30 p.m. T'ai Chi Solo Form

There will be no classes on Monday, May 31, Memorial Day.

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Class returns to
Hampden Park on
Thursdays!

Contact Us

For timely updates, follow Twin Cities T'ai Chi Ch'uan on **Facebook**.

Email: mail@tctaichi.org

Website: tctaichi.org

Phone: 651.767.0267

On Failure

By Stephen May

It's a word we try to avoid. We can easily feel shamed when it is applied to ourselves and perhaps even a bit smug hearing it applied to others. But is success always what it is made out to be? It may be the early bird that catches the worm, but it is the second mouse that gets the cheese.

In his book *Work as a Spiritual Practice*, Lewis Richmond mentions a panel reviewing applications for a CEO position. On one application, they noted "has never failed." While at first glance, that may seem to be a recommendation, it was in fact a caveat. The panel had no idea how the applicant would respond to a significant setback, perhaps because he had always set his achievement goals so low as to avoid that risk.

For a quarter century, I performed in a Javanese gamelan ensemble originally sponsored by the Schubert Club. At one point, they had organized a master class with cellist Yo-Yo Ma, and I was asked, as a professional musician, to talk about my gamelan experience. I mentioned that Western musicians will make numerous takes of a given piece to edit together into a flawless, nonexistent performance. In recordings of Javanese musicians, it is possible to hear the occasional mistake. Their attitude is that what they do is an offering, not a test, and that is simply what happened that time. Ma took that as his theme for the rest of the afternoon. He first spoke of his own epiphany, preparing a recital so carefully polished that he was boring himself. He then challenged the gifted cellists on the stage: "I dare you to make a mistake!" He did everything he could to distract them, and they doggedly resisted.

Years later, I realized that the challenge was misleading. It was not a question of adding errors for the sake of errors, but of taking that piece so carefully prepared over weeks and months and then reaching for something greater—and risking coming up short. Our self-images can be strongly bound up in cautious perfection, but that is not necessari-



ly the attitude of some of our most famous role models.

Almost anyone could tell you that for decades, Babe Ruth held the record for home runs in baseball. Fewer could tell you that his total strikeouts while at bat were nearly double the number of his home runs. There is a famous story of Ruth stepping up to the plate, pointing to a spot in the outfield, and then hitting a home run to the same spot. Had he failed, the gesture would have simply been forgotten. But in order to succeed at all, he first had to open up to the possibility of failure.

But failure (or success) does not need to be so dramatic in order to be fruitful. In Chinese martial arts, there is the expression "eat the bitter." It refers to the process of gaining experience and knowledge by going up against those who are more skilled (and who went through the same process themselves). Cheng Man-Ching realized that such a concept would not go over well with a Western mindset, so he encouraged his students to "invest in loss," to try something not with the expectation that it will succeed but simply

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Cheng Man-Ching's
(right) view of failure:
"Invest in loss."

with the intention of learning what works and what does not.

In traditional Push Hands training, “success” is simply nudging your partner off balance, and part of the learning process is putting yourself in the most vulnerable positions, unable to step away or use your hands.

“Success” or “failure” is simply learning “If I do this, then this is probably what will happen.” The terms can just as easily be reversed: “success” is not losing your balance, and “failure” is an ineffective push.

Failure plays a crucial part in all of the two-person forms, which are ironically predicated on failure. I may try this particular technique in our mock conflict: if I succeed, the game is over. But my partner is also learning how to counter the technique, not entirely successfully, and so we continue. I tried this and it failed, so now I try that, and if that fails, I try something else. I learn an application, its counter, and, perhaps most important, how to carry on from there. Without those built-in failures, the two-person forms would be very short indeed.

The concepts of success and failure may be clearest when two people are facing each other, such as in a competition. But it is not necessary for anyone else even to be in the room for a fear of failure to govern us. An arts performance would be one example, where the notation for an artistic expression is mistaken for the art itself and becomes the only goal—the work of art has then been reduced to a mere test (Yo-Yo Ma’s com-

plaint). This is particularly problematic when we try to use the same standard every time. A dancer who feels a little stiff today may risk actual physical injury trying to kick this high simply because she has kicked that high before: an informed “failure” would allow her to try again comfortably tomorrow.

*“The opposite of courage is not
cowardice, it’s conformity.”*

—Rollo May

We do not even need to be doing anything flashy for our fear of failure to take over and limit us. One of the oft-mentioned benefits of T’ai Chi is improving balance among the elderly. But that does not happen by itself. Rather, one must practice enough to recognize when one is losing one’s balance and why and what can be done to avoid or correct the problem. (Someone once asked Ueshiba Morihei, the founder of aikido, how he managed never to lose his balance; he replied that he often lost his balance but had learned to recover so quickly that you did not notice.)

Take the sweep kick in the third section of the Solo Form. It is a difficult balancing act, standing on one leg while drawing a circle in the air with the other. It is tempting to get it over with as quickly as possible, but that can actually make it harder. Imagine taking a 30-pound weight and whipping it around, and you can also imagine the havoc that would

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play with your internal balance. Instead, start from where you yourself are, not from where others seem to be, perhaps by moving slowly through a small circle low to the ground, and only gradually increase the height, the size, or the speed. Everyone falls, and it may take a while to get the hang of it. But falling does not mean you cannot try again. (Coincidentally, there is also a type of sailor's dance called a hornpipe. It may be done either fast or slow, but fast is typically reserved for the younger dancers—because it requires more skill to perform it more slowly.)

It was even in an openness to failure that this essay was submitted: I have no idea how others might respond to it or if anyone will bother to read it. In the same spirit, you are also invited to be open to the possibility of failure as you continue to master T'ai chi. After all, how can we learn from our mistakes if we never make them?

The Stances of the T'ai Chi Solo Form and Their Function

Illustrations by Todd Nesser

There's a famous passage in the Tao Te Ching that states: The journey of a thousand miles begins beneath your feet. In T'ai Chi Ch'uan, the journey of learning the Solo Form start to finish begins with the patterns of movement made by the feet, called footwork. The individual movements that make up the Solo Form are called postures; the positions of the feet at the beginning and end of each posture are called stances. There are eight stances in the Yang-Style T'ai Chi Solo Form taught at Twin Cities T'ai Chi, four primary and four secondary stances.

The Four Primary Stances

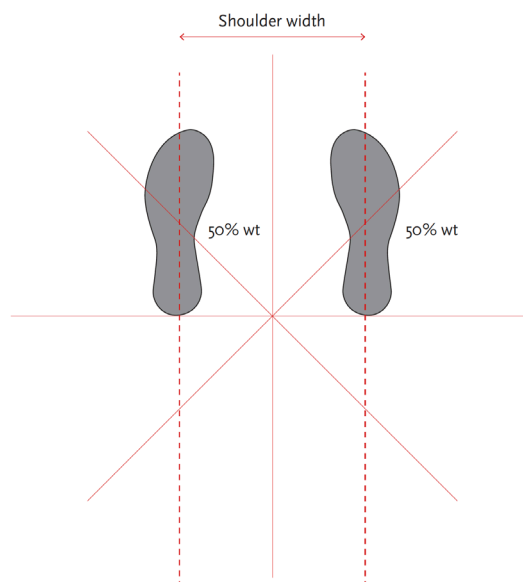
1. Wuji Stance

The Wuji stance has the feet shoulder width and parallel and in line with the shoulders. It has a weight distribution of 50/50. This stance marks the beginning of each of the three sections of the Solo Form. It is also found at the midpoint of the Cloud Hands posture. It is strong from

Plot Your Course With a Compass

In order for the footwork in your form to be smooth, stable, and able to support the activity of the waist and arms while moving through the sequence, it's useful to think of the forward foot in a stance as a compass needle that marks the precise direction of the completed posture. If the direction of the needle is off course, the integrity of the posture and form will be compromised. The rear foot at 45° adds stability to the structure of the stance and posture.

Whether you practice T'ai Chi for health, meditation, or martial arts, understanding the construction and use of each of the stances will help build a strong root and foundation so you can develop balance, power, and fluid movement in your postures and Solo Form.



either side. In a Wuji Stance, it is easy to lower your center downward along your midline. Think of a squat to clarify this concept.

Sample posture: Cross Hands

< 1. Wuji Stance

2. **Bow-and-Arrow Stance**

The Bow-and-Arrow Stance, commonly called a Bow Stance, is a shoulder-width stance with either the right or left foot forward. The forward foot points straight ahead, while the rear foot's toes are turned out 45°. The heel of the front foot should be forward of the toes of the rear foot by 1/2 to 1 of your own foot lengths. This will be a medium-frame Bow Stance. There are two weight distributions: front weighted and back weighted. Front weighted is 70/30 front to back and is used to issue power in a forward direction; back weighted is 30/70 front to back and is used to neutralize power in a rearward direction or to pull. At our studio, we've adjusted the back-weighted Bow Stance to be 40/60. This allows for more downward rather than backward movement and is a very stable stance.

Sample postures: front weighted: Single Whip; back weighted: Roll Back

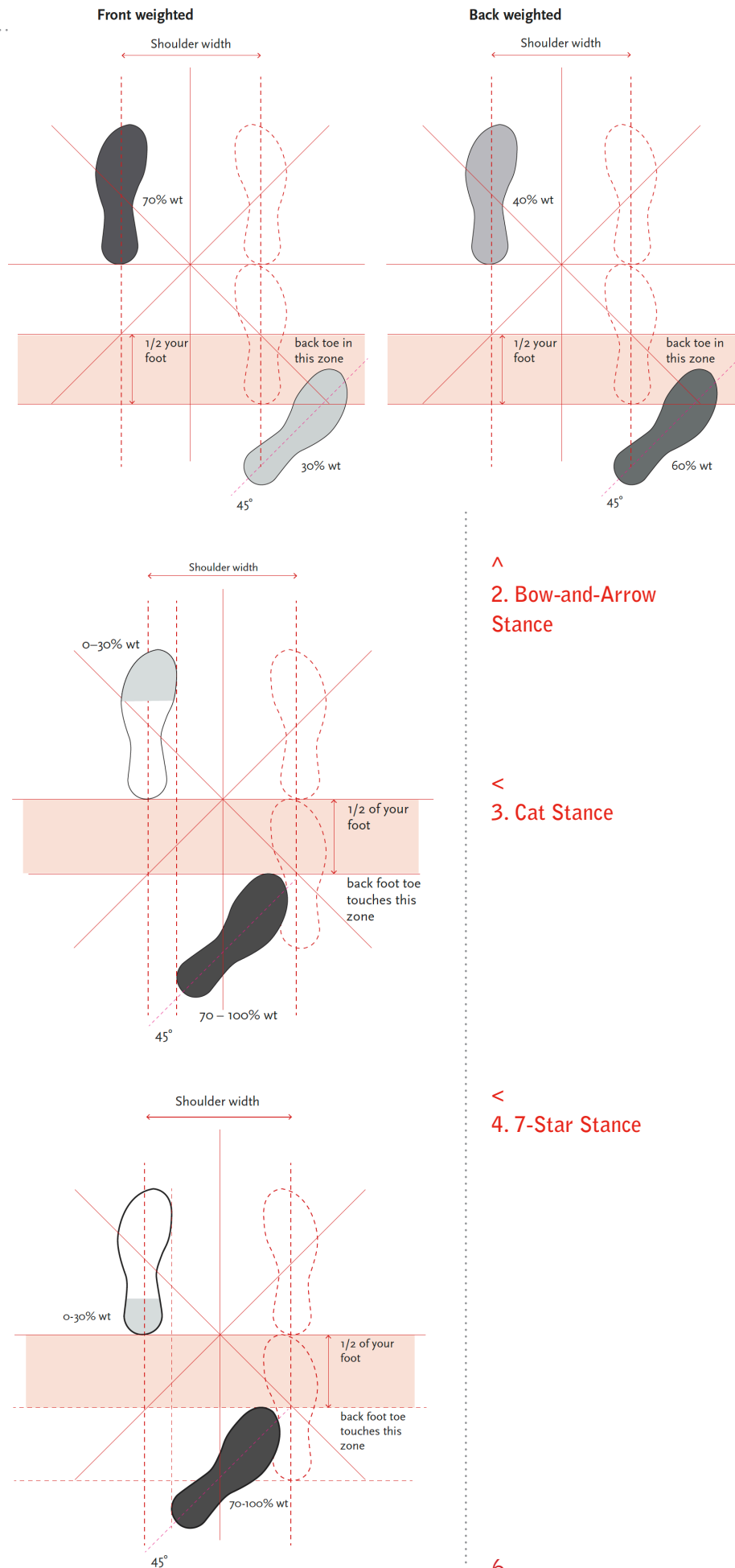
3. **Cat Stance, also called an Empty Stance; called a Toe Stance at the studio**

The forward foot points straight ahead, with the ball of the foot touching and the heel raised slightly; the rear-foot toes are turned out 45°. The heels are in line with each other front to back so that the front foot can pull straight back and just graze the rear heel. There is a distance between the front heel and rear toe of 1/2 of one of your foot lengths. The weighting: 0/100 front to back. The front foot can be weighted up to 30% depending on the use of the stance. The Cat Stance is used to throw a front kick, to assume a narrow protective guard, and as a transitional stance, creating mobility.

Sample posture: White Crane Spreads Its Wings

4. **7-Star Stance, also called a T'ai Chi Stance; called a Heel Stance at the studio**

The forward foot points straight ahead, with the heel of the foot touching and the toes raised slightly; the rear-foot toes are turned out 45°. The heels are in line with each other front to back so that the front foot can pull straight back and just graze



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2. Bow-and-Arrow Stance

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3. Cat Stance

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4. 7-Star Stance

the rear heel. Like the Cat Stance, there is a distance between the front heel and rear toe of $\frac{1}{2}$ of one of your foot lengths. The weighting: 0/100 front to back. The front foot can be weighted up to 30% depending on the use of the stance. The 7-Star Stance is used to trap an opponent's foot or to hook behind an opponent's heel.

Sample posture: *Lifting Hands*

The Four Secondary Stances

5. The Rooster Stance, sometimes called a Chicken Stance or a Crane Stance

The front leg is elevated so that the upper leg is parallel to the ground or slightly higher or lower. The knee is centered and faces forward; the foot is relaxed, with the toes aligned with the knee and not touching the ground. The rear-foot toes are turned out 45° and bear all of the weight: 0/100. The Rooster Stance is used to strike with the knee, throw a kick, or block a kick.

Sample posture: *Golden Rooster Stands on One Leg*

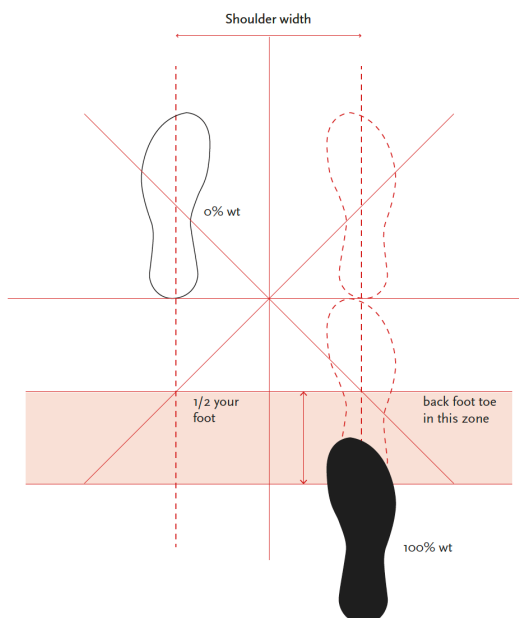
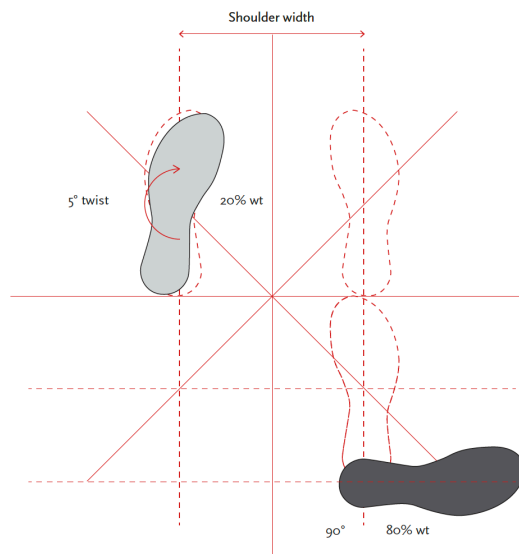
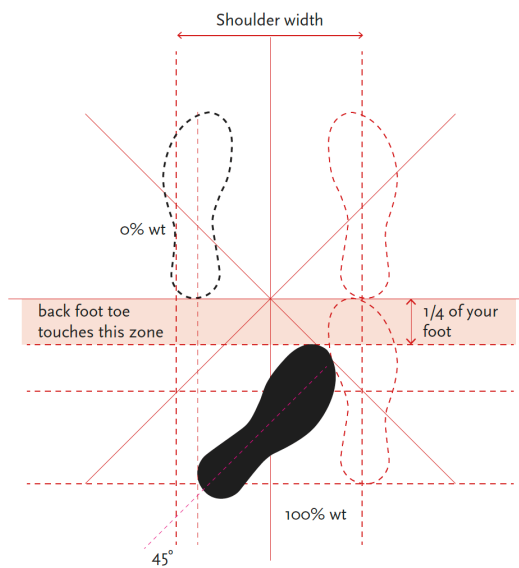
6. Taming Tiger Stance

The Taming Tiger Stance is a shoulder-width stance with either the right or left foot forward. The rear foot is turned toes out to a rear-corner direction (if facing north with the left foot forward, the right foot would face southeast), but it is modified in our form to turn out 90° (east) to the front-leg direction. The weight is shifted to the rear leg bearing 80% of the weight; the front toes turn inward slightly. The weighting: 20/80 front to back. The stance is used to duck under something/someone and set up a strike or throw.

Sample posture: *Squatting Single Whip (the back-weighted part of the posture)*

7. Repulse Monkey Stance

The Repulse Monkey Stance is a shoulder-width stance with the feet parallel and one foot forward. The distance between the forward heel and rear toes is $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 of your own foot lengths. This is a backward-moving stance that could be compared to walking backward on railroad tracks if the



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5. Rooster Stance

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6. Taming Tiger Stance

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7. Repulse Monkey Stance

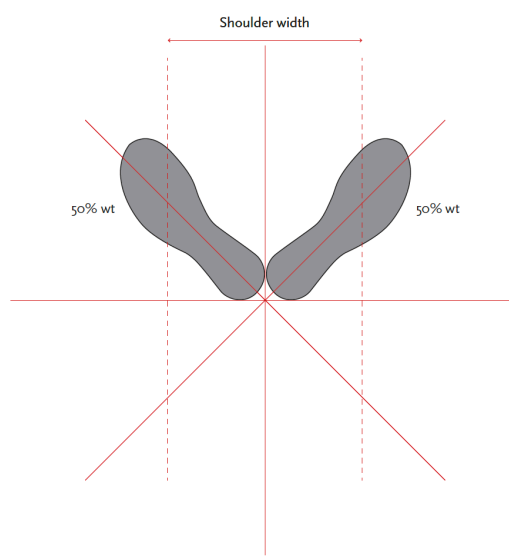
rails were shoulder width apart. The weighting: 0/100 front to back. The stance is used to keep the perineum/tip of the sacrum area open as an energy pathway to connect the front and back channels. The arms move the Qi in a Fire Path microcosmic orbit. For martial applications, the rear foot turns out 45° to a rear Bow Stance, and the hand pattern simulates a simultaneous pull and strike.

Sample posture: Repulse Monkey

8. Ready Stance, also called a Natural Stance

The Ready Stance brings the heels together with the toes of each foot angled out 45°. Weighting: 50/50. This is a traditional stance used to begin and end forms in Chinese martial arts. In T'ai Chi Ch'uan, the heels touching together represent the undifferentiated unity of Tai Yi: the Great Oneness. The form emanates from and is returned to this unified state.

Sample postures: beginning and end of the Solo Form



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8. Ready/Natural
Stance

