

Bruce Kum



Bruce Kumar Frantzis, author and lineage master in the Taoist arts, has been working since 1961 in Eastern healing systems, Qigong, martial arts and meditation, including sixteen years of training in Japan, India and China.

He is the founder of Energy Arts, Inc., based in Marin County, California. Energy Arts offers instructor certification programs, retreats and corporate and public seminars in North America and Europe. Frantzis teaches Energy Arts courses in meditation, breathing, Qigong, Taiji, Ba Gua, Xing-I and related subjects.

B. K. Frantzis is currently working on a new book about Taiji. For details of events, instructional materials and certified instructors, visit the Energy Arts website, www.energyarts.com.

Bruce will be teaching in Scotland at Tai Chi Caledonia from 7th - 14th June.

Full details at www.taichi-caledonia.co.uk or call 0141 810 3482 for a free programme.

You've been practising Internal Arts for almost 40 years and have gone through a range of different disciplines, could you tell me a little about what you are teaching now?

What I primarily teach now is a six-part Taoist Qigong system that contains within it all the building blocks. This Taoist Neigong seems to be the root from which all other qigong systems in China have obtained some, or the bulk of, their information and capacities. I also teach Taiji & Bagua and I teach them two in ways. I teach the Short Form for the vast majority of people, because that's about as much as they can do, and I also teach the Long Form. When I teach the Long Form I also teach the fighting part of it. I teach some applications in the Short Form but when people go into the Long Form I get more into the fighting applications and also the real meditation work that occurs in Taiji, along with Push Hands and stuff like that. I also teach a lot of Taoist meditation. I teach also Qigong Tuina which is the healing Qigong work. I worked with a Qigong doctor in China for 10 years and have taught this work very sporadically over the years but wanted to wait until I got the Qigong teachings really established before I worked with the very specific healing work.

Do these various disciplines you're using having similar connections but different end products?

Yes. The Qigong is very clearly building blocks. It's not martial arts. Instead, it just gives you the juice or the energy. Softness is the biggest thing about Taiji; it's softness and the use of Yin energy. The biggest thing about Bagua is its incredible degree of spiralling and its 'unpredictability' especially in terms of footsteps and movement. Energetically Bagua is really much more like a vortex and Taiji is like the waves of the ocean. That's the feel of it and the reality of its uses in fighting. Contrary to some people in the game I do think Qi exists, I think it's a very learnable subject and a very real subject and I just chuckle at people that don't believe in it. I find that to be somewhat of a humorous statement given the fact that for thousands of years all this stuff has been based upon it and the distinction in China between things that are physical and things that use energy is very clear. I devoted a couple of chapters on how qigong works and qigong theory in my book, 'Opening the Energy Gates of Your Body.'

That's interesting because in the main, when working with Qigong practitioners, they tend to focus on acupoints, meridians etc.

There are sixteen components to Qigong. Qigong is a modern term but if we go back more than 50 years ago the term Neigong was always used. If we talk about that, the whole thing about it is that the meridian lines are one of the components. Breath work is another, as is working with the core channels of the body, working with the secondary energies of the body, working with the opening and closing of the joints, the opening and closing of the spine, working with the movement of the internal organs.... all these are very distinct pieces. To try and learn all of them while you're doing either Taiji or Bagua is a virtually impossible task. In the old days you would just learn the Long Form because the pre-supposition is that you would be practising three-four hours per day, six-seven days a week. Now, even in China, since that time has become really short, Qigong sets are taught with a small number of movements that work on what the internal components are. The first stage of it, and this is what I teach the majority of people, is purely for making you healthy. If you have a disease, you can get well and if your health is so-so, it can get better. The goal is to take a person with a weak condition and give them a strong condition or help change an unhealthy condition to a healthy condition.

The second stage, training, which I teach occasionally, is much harder and much more intense. It's for martial arts. I sometimes teach that to professional athletes because those people are going to train the couple of hours a day to get very superior abilities and you don't get superior abilities just by doing something casually a couple of days a week for an hour.

The third level is about how Qigong is done in terms of meditation. This is what the Chinese refer to as Shen Gong. I'm not really teaching this a lot. I teach it sometimes when I teach meditation but I don't teach it in general because I simply don't have people with enough background. That's all it really comes down to. You can't go to university if you can't do your A levels. You have to have the foundation.

With reference to Qigong and Neigong, would you say that Taiji as an art is ineffectual without it?

Yes. Well ineffectual in what way? There's a thousand ways in which you could be ineffectual.

Well let's say Taiji as a fighting art?

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An Interview with Ronnie Robinson

Without the application of real Neigong principles you will find that your Taiji will have barriers at each point and without Neigong you won't go past them. Then the question becomes, "Can I learn the movements of a Taiji form and not really be doing Taiji but make it work for fighting?" Sure you can, because Taiji comes out of Shaolin and as long as you are able to move in such a way, to parry a punch and make them go down, you'll be fine. By the same token, a good street fighter can make up his own Taiji form, in the pub when he's drunk, as long as he can slam the guy in the head and knock him out, then he's got an effective martial art. However if you're talking about what Taiji can really do...?

That's what I mean, the original creation of the art.

Well if you're talking about the original creation of the art then there's no way of being effective in fighting without the Neigong. It's like trying to buy a plane ticket without money; it's not going to work.

One thing that interests me is that in the three official books on Taiji from Mainland China only one of them contains detailed information on acupoints and that's the one on the Wu Style. However, I know that many Wu, and other stylists have neither a knowledge nor an interest in these points.

The acupuncture points are not really so necessary, they come up purely as focus points of what to do. Wang Peisheng, the author of that book was talking about everything that has to do with the principle of lengthening and how you actually pull energy out of your spine and he's breaking it down in that sort of a sense. However, the fact is that you don't focus on the acupoints or meridians when you are doing Taiji.

But is it important to even be aware of them?

It's important to be aware of the Yin & Yang meridians of your body because when you move your meridians, the tissue starts moving. It's important to know how Taiji is done properly so the meridian action line happens, but if you're going to go, "Oh! Now I'm moving energy up my back and down my

arm and coming back in," then it's nonsense. It's too much, there's no way in which your mind can remain still, calm and concentrated and still do that – that's a mental gymnastic exercise. You can do that sitting, but you can't do that moving.

Out of all the teaching you are doing are there common themes that you feel people should be aware of but are perhaps missing?

I run instructor's training courses regularly and I find that the vast majority of people studying Taiji do not understand their body alignments; The majority don't know how to do the breathing work and the majority, in the West, do not know how to do the opening and

Of the sixteen parts of Neigong, which are all part of Taiji, most people in the west maybe do one or two at best. The whole method is not understood. What gave it such a reputation, which allows these incredible people do the amazing stuff they do, is rarely available in the West. I'm trying to open up those doors for people, but what makes it very difficult is that, it's like a computer; you cannot tell from the box what's inside.

So, in accepting what you say, that most of what is really happening can't be seen from the outside, can you relate to me, a little about what it is, you

feel people are missing?

Well I can tell you how I've tried, and what I've done is not really a lot different from what a lot of other people are doing.

50 years ago virtually nobody would have you do a small Qigong set to get the Neigong part of it. They would have you do the Qigong set, to get the principle, which you could practise as a warm up, for maybe an hour, and then everything that you are learning in that warm up, is what you put into your form. However all this presupposes that you had a lot of hours to practice. Nowadays most people have enough trouble finding the time simply to learn the movements.

Working with my teacher, Liu Hung Chieh, in Beijing then thinking about this for 20 years, and watching what was going on in the West, what I did was find a number of basic Qigong sets that had been used in Taoism for almost 3,000 years. My philosophy was very simple – people have trouble learning external movements, so find the forms where the external movements are the least and the internal

closing techniques which are essential to how Taiji is done. When I was living in Beijing, China in the early eighties, Men Hui Feng, who was the Head Instructor and teacher certifier at the Beijing Institute of Physical Education said, "Without opening and closing, there is no Taiji."

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content is the most. Then people wouldn't have to undergo the difficulty of just keeping all those forms together. The aim is to use a few movements which really allow you to connect with the basic energetic principles. Then, when you teach Taiji or Xing-I or Ba Gua, you are able to guide students to learn body alignments very specifically. In my instructor training courses I show exactly what should go where. Sometimes the specifics of what is done in Taiji or Ba Gua does not directly relate to how the internal principles are practiced in Qigong. You have to learn how to adapt these principles to specific requirements. That's important.

You teach primarily Qigong, Taiji and Ba Gua, are all these different courses, for different students, or do you find much of a crossover with the students?

Well, everybody does Qigong as it's like the foundation, and everybody wants to be healthy. I find some people want to do Taiji but they don't want to study Ba Gua and some Ba Gua but no Taiji. As a general rule I try to have every student who learns Ba Gua to at least learn a Short Form of Taiji. Sometimes the energy of Ba Gua can get too steel-like inside you and it's good to practise something to soften it up. I also find that lots of the people who learn Taiji don't learn Ba Gua. Ba Gua does things fast almost from the beginning. When I teach Ba Gua I always teach it with the martial tradition except when I teach the 1st movement, the single palm change and that's only in the 1st initial course to make sure students understand the principles of energetics. After that I always teach applications because, being

a lineage holder in Ba Gua, I have a responsibility to see high class Ba Gua survive and not die off.

With Taiji I don't always insist that students learn fighting but I do encourage it so that they can understand where their intention is, and where their energy is going with the movements. They are not just waving their hands in the air. You don't have to know that the energy is going along a particular meridian line but it is helpful to know that you're pressing energy downward, or you're making it go out to your hand, and that you're pulling it back into you, because in all those movements of Taiji, this is an aspect that many people just aren't aware of.

In Medical Qigong there's a whole Taoist principle of how it very specifically affects your health. All those movements have very specific health benefits and if you don't use your intention to promote the energy along the required pathways, you may not get the health benefits. It's not like I'm telling people that they have to learn martial arts, but if they want to learn how energy moves, the martial part is the easiest way to remember it. Every other way is dramatically more difficult.

Let's talk about Push Hands. There are a myriad of approaches to this side of the art, and some methods work for some people, while others do not. My feeling is that the majority of people who practice Push Hands are not necessarily practicing Taiji principles.

That's pretty accurate.

For me, this is a big loss and a big shame.

One problem you have with a lot of people who do Taiji, is that they have never done an external martial art like say Karate or Kung Fu. One of the things that you can learn from Karate or Kung Fu is how to allow your aggression to happen and meet a challenge without becoming collapsed or paralysed. Once you know how to do this, you can really start letting your force go, so that you can start using these principles. What's really hard is that a lot of middle class people start taking up Taiji and they've never had a fight in their lives. Somebody can frighten them just by moving at them too fast. They're not relaxed within their personal space. When they start doing Taiji, as soon as any pressure is put on them, they tense up and can't do anything. One of the things that I think is important is that, in Push

Hands, there has to be an initial period, where besides learning how to do the basic turning of the waist and fundamental movements like weight shifting, there

also needs to be something where you're working with some sort of exercise which gets them over the initial shock of working with someone who's invading their personal space. It's very important yet rarely taught. It's always a problem because when you initially teach this you get a certain degree of dropout, but if anybody is actually going to be able to learn Push Hands, they're going to have to go through this stage.

On the other side, some people teach Push Hands techniques that are specific to their body type; long arms, long legs, short arms, short legs, heavy, thin etc. When I learned Taiji in China, if you were being trained to be an instructor in Push Hands or in fighting, you were very specifically taught that there are variations that are possible, for example if your partner's long, you're short, they're heavier, when you're lighter, whatever the body type is. After that everybody develops his or her own Push Hands style. They create their own based upon their own unique physical and mental make up. There are however, a number of very basic principles, which you don't violate, because experience has shown that when you do, you get thrown backwards or you fall on the floor. Within that, the difficulty you have is that when lots of students try to mimic their teacher, rather than adapt what their teachers are doing, for their own body type. They don't ask questions that have to do with things like someone having arms as long as King Kong when they only have short arms. Problems occur when movements are not taught with the theory and principles clearly behind them. You then get people going off on all sorts of directions. Then the final thing is that they may feel that it works because they can slam you. Well that may say that you're better than the other person, but it doesn't necessarily give them an insight as to how it happens. Pushing Hands is a training exercise that is a bridge between formwork and actual fighting.

I feel that a lot of these problems regarding personal space problems stem from psychological and emotional situations or problems.

First of all you have the innate animal instinct of competition or not giving your ground. If the ego responds then the attitude is that I want to be right, and I want to win, or I'd lose face or be embarrassed. You then have the other condition where the person is just thinking too much. Everything you're asking about here, the 16 components of Neigong and the relationship of qigong training to form training, is in the book I wrote, "The Power of Internal Martial Arts." The first chapter contains a whole discussion about the animal and the human approaches to martial arts.

The animal approach is that when you're confronted the muscles tense up and your adrenalin kicks in. The human approach is that when you're confronted with something you just become completely relaxed. You move effectively, you move from your mind, but you

don't kick in the adrenalin response or the animal, glandular response, that would stiffen up your muscles. This is one of the real places where the rubber meets the road in Taiji. You have to get through that in Push Hands. So how can it be achieved? It's often done through exercises like training the turning of the waist, then moving your arms and legs, then progressively having your opponent lean on you more and more heavily. Something must also be done to unlink your natural emotional response and your natural tendency towards adrenalin pumping and your muscles stiffening up. Different teachers do different things.

On the other side you have people who are practising Push Hands and what they're actually doing is Sumo. They're digging in and working real strong, but on that basis they're really going to have problems, when they encounter a good wrestler. When I was first training in Taiwan, the people who worked in that way would have the Judo practitioners just pick them up and throw them on their heads every time. If you're going to play that game you're going to have real trouble with a Judo or wrestling guy because that's what they do. So what we really have to think about is if there is a very deliberate method of training in Push Hands? I once had a student who was always losing in competitions. So I got a Push Hands team together for one year and put him in with a bunch of guys who really wanted to do it. Then he started winning national tournaments and went to Taiwan and won at internationals. The real question is, do the teachers know the principles of Taiji and are they willing to exercise them? Some people just like to focus on the hard side of Taiji and some just the soft side. The fact is that it's both.

You talked about Push Hands being a bridge between formwork and training for fighting, how does it train for this middle area?

What you're learning in Push Hands are a couple of things. How to develop your root, which is very important because when you fight, if someone smashes into your arms, and you can't hold your root, you can't yield to their force, or turn their force. It's just a question of who's the bigger brute or who's stronger. The second thing it teaches you is sensitivity and the timing to be able to, at a touch, move and do things. It's very different than a boxer just punching. Those things are invaluable because when you get into fighting you're going to do what you do in Push Hands plus more! You're going to be dealing with timing and distance and you're going to ratchet the speed up four or five times.

You've studied a number of different Taiji styles; do you have any preference, for a particular style?

My experience is that for the health of the body and for meditation the Wu style that I teach is the best and that's why I do it. If my interest were in just stretching my body out I'd probably do the Long Yang Form. The Yang

style does that well but the Wu style does different things for your health that the Yang style doesn't do.

What kind of things?

The Yang style is really excellent for healing the middle and upper back and joints but it doesn't really reach the lower back that well. The Yang style is good for repairing organs that have become weak, or if the reason for an imbalance is essential weakness, then the Yang style is good at getting rid of it. If, however, an organ has been traumatised, like poisoned or in an accident, then, my experience has been that the Wu style takes care of those things much better.

Would you say that any particular style has a more effective fighting training system?

No I wouldn't say that. The Chen style people like to say that their system is better for fighting but what I would say is that they overtly show a lot more techniques. Honestly and truly, having been a fairly serious fighter in Taiji I think that each style has speciality areas where certain things are done better than in other styles.

But it would also be down to individuals working with these styles?

I think you have to distinguish three things here and are all of equal importance. The first is 70% of what anybody in fighting does is going to be exactly the same, whatever the style. Then there's going to be a 30% area of real specialisation. This guy does this, this guy does that. This car brakes in 10 seconds from 150 miles an hour to 10 miles an hour. This car can accelerate from zero to 150 miles in nine seconds. You have these high performance things right? That's one thing and that's inherent inside the style. You can't expect the Fiat to do the same thing a Maserati can. A Land Rover can drive straight up the side of a mountain but don't try that with a Rolls Royce. They do different things but what do all cars have in common? They have engines, they have a box, they have seats and they roll on the ground and go places. Then you have these very specific areas of specification. The main reason that I don't teach the Chen style is that it's so hard on the body for most Westerners because of the degree of twisting and it's hard on their lower backs and knees. Because they don't squat, because of the diets Westerners eat and because of all those things, there is a much greater tendency for injury in the Chen style. Not so much because of the Taiji but because of the nature of how stiff the average Westerner's ligaments and tendons in the joints are. The Yang and the Wu styles are more popular because they're easier on the body.

The third condition is that if we're talking martial arts, we're talking war. If one person has a 22 calibre gun and another has a 45, there's absolutely no doubt that a 45 will put a bigger hole into you than a 22 will. Then we have the



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Neigong were fused with martial arts, which were entirely separate. People did Qigong and meditation in one place and the martial arts in another and then they met together and it become something else. It's true that in the Chen village Taiji was a martial art and the same principles are in other Taoist martial arts like Ba Gua. All the internal principles were there but not the fighting principles. That didn't come in until the 1600 or 1700's. Nobody really knows the exact date. It's within the past 500 years.

Given that the internal practices are an essential component of these arts, why are they not taught freely and openly to all?

Some of the Chinese teachers, teaching it in the west didn't want to give this material out, and some were also teaching it quite openly, but the students weren't smart enough to understand it. Some of the material never got here to begin with. There were also language problems. There was one very famous Chinese Taiji teacher who I thought was ripping people off until I saw how his translators were interpreting and that they didn't know what he was saying. There were a lot of things that came from the Chinese that were interpreted through Chinese metaphor and you can have radically different metaphors between one place and another and you can still be talking about the same thing. This often caused people not to fully understand something that was critically important.

question of who's shooting that gun and how much experience they have. In any martial art you can talk about their techniques but at the end of the day it is a human being that is doing the technique. Even if the technique is superior, if the human being is inferior, then you have an inferior product. A superior human being can make an inferior technique work better than an inferior human being can make a superior technique work. If you get two Grand Prix racing drivers, some might say it's the car that wins the race more often than the driver. The egoist says that it's just the person and the technician says it's just the car; the fact is that it's both.

Do you believe that the original creation of this art is in fighting?

Yes and no. The Neigong came from Taoist meditation, which is the subject of two volumes I wrote, *Relaxing Into Your Being* and *The Great Stillness*. I was fortunate enough to have learned Lao Tzu's Water Method from my teacher in Beijing, Taoist Lineage Master Liu Hung Chieh. People did Neigong to keep their bodies healthy. To create Taiji, meditation and

I think it's somewhat irrelevant why a lot of this hasn't been passed on. There are also some teachers who are generous of spirit and some who are not. Some teachers have the patience to go through the painstaking, unstinting effort it takes until things can be fully transmitted. These are very human things that have happened. Many people think that teachers were very deliberately screwing people when it's simply not true. The first 100 years of cross-cultural transference are going to be fraught with confusion, misinterpretation and a lot of



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nonsense. It's simply because the context of what's going on no longer exists. Maybe 100 years on when all these problems are overcome, there's a context to fit into. When Chinese people came to the west 30 – 40 years ago to teach there was very little culture of understanding. Now we have a generation of people who at least have some idea of the background and who are able to grasp things a lot easier because they have some context to put it in.

So where do you see things going in 100 years time?

I think that that's a much larger question and I think we have to even think about whether human beings will even remain on the face of the earth given population growth and given the human capacity for mass destruction. Now that we have the capacity to do it, this is a very interesting cultural period. We will have to see whether wisdom dawns or whether the natural self-destructive influences win-out. If all that doesn't happen over the next 100 years, I hope, from what I'm doing, there will be a real thread of something that will exist here in the West that, if they lose it in China, they can go back and get it in the West. These are treasures for human beings, to improve the human condition and they're not Chinese and they're not Western. They will, by necessity, be translated by different cultures in very different ways.

How do you feel about the creation of Competition Routines that are there for aesthetic quality?

One of the biggest insults you can give to someone in China, who's a serious Taiji player, is to call it dance. If you have form competitions participants really should be judged on how well they are doing the internal material in it. But since most of the people, and most of the judges, don't know what the internal material is, then you're not exactly going to get a very clear read. I can generally tell who's going to win a competition in the United States from the very first moment they come on the floor. I simply look at their uniform. The best silks win – that's it! It's useful to have that kind of



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thing because it gives people the opportunity to get up in front of the public. They can demonstrate their form which gives them immense self-confidence and a sense that they're progressing. All that is fine as long as you're not foolish enough to think that that necessarily measures anything.

Push Hands competitions are nice to have but honestly and truly if you're going to talk about martial arts, at the end of the day there is only one form of competition that is definitive and that is "two men enter, one man leaves." In Push Hands you don't have a clear, definable, unmistakable who won or who lost result. In fighting you can do that, a knockout is a knockout. Push Hands does satisfy people's competitive instincts and gives them a chance to get out there and do something they really like. It forms some kind of a training ground for the next generation of instructors to cut their teeth on.

Taking away the aesthetic appearance, how nice the silk is or how nice the form looks, what else can you look for to ascertain if someone is doing 'good' Taiji?

What I look for, and what my teachers look for, and what real Taiji masters look for, is a checklist of about 1,000 things. To list them all would simply be absurd. They first check how much are you doing and how much aren't you doing. Then they look at what you're doing and what level of quality it is. They are looking at, if it is really full, really strong, are you really

connected? is the Qi really moving? When a good teacher corrects somebody they look for the one thing that is causing everything else that is attached to it to become weak. Once they identify what that is then they can direct the student where to go from there.



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1. Portrait of B.K. Frantzis - Ken Van Sickle
2. Wu Style Slanted Flying - Ken Van Sickle
3. Meditating - Craig Barnes
4. The late Wang Shu Jin demonstrates standing methods of basic power training. - B.K. Frantzis
5. Taoist Master Liu Hung Chieh working with B.K. Frantzis - Caroline Frantzis
6. Liu Hung Chieh with his disciple B.K. Frantzis in Beijing 1986 - Caroline Frantzis
7. The 3rd swing from Opening the Energy Gates of Your Body - Caroline Frantzis
8. Form correction with a student in Crete - Caroline Frantzis
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B. K. Frantzis draws on forty years experience in Eastern healing, martial arts and meditation to teach Taoist Arts worldwide. He is the author of four books on Taoism.



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