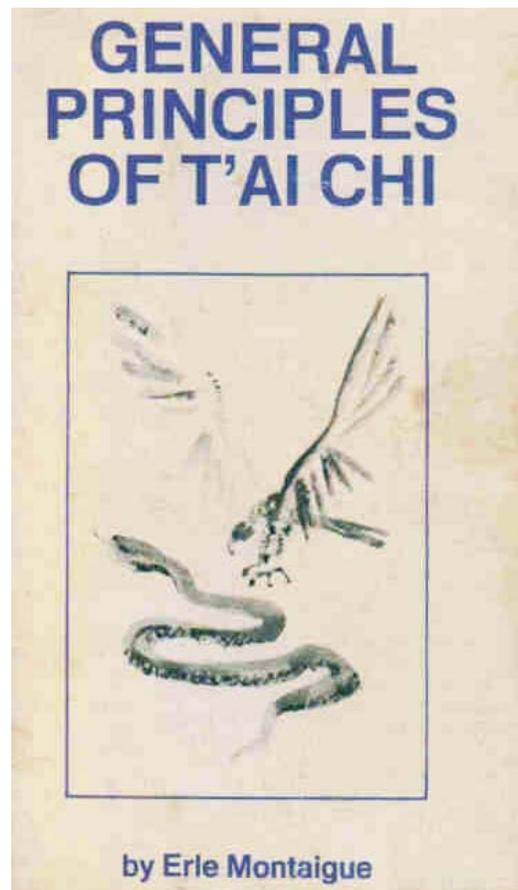


GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF TAI CHI



ERLE MONTAIGUE: 1984

P U B L I S H I N G

This was Erle Montaigne's first professionally published book. However, Erle had published under his own publishing Company, Moontagu Books, 3 previous books called Power Taiji Volumes 1, 2 & 3.

We have left out much of the beginning pages as they are repeated in other works on this site, like history etc.. We have only included the 'General Principles' of Taijiquan.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF T'AI CHI

by Erle Montaigne

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First published in 1984 by Boobook Publications Pty. Ltd., P0 Box 238, Balgowlah, NSW 2093, Australia

U.S. distribution: china Books and Periodicals, 2929 24th Street, San Francisco, CA 94110

N.Z. distribution: Lindon Publishing, P0 Box 39-225, Auckland west, New Zealand

Typeset by Everysize Typeart Services, Frenchs Forest, NSW Printed by South-wood Press, Marrickville, NSW National Library of Australia

ISBN 0908121 09 1

GENERAL POINTS

Hold the head as if suspended from above

Do not tilt the head from side to side, nor up or **down**. **The head must not turn away from the** central axis. Your eyes must do the looking for you.

In order to avoid a rigid posture imagine a string is holding you up from above — this will avoid tension in the neck.

The mouth is closed but open

When you are relaxed your lips are lightly closed, but the teeth are naturally slightly open. If saliva should gather then swallow on the out breath — this ensures that the “vital elixir” is sent to the tan-tien.

Breath in through the nose, and out

This is what the nose is for. In on the Yin movement, and out on the Yang movement; slow and deep, but not forced.

Keep the backbone straight

The spine should always be held with the sac-rum vertical to the ground. The coccyx should always point to the direction you are facing i.e. where your centre is pointing. Special attention should be given to keeping the backbone vertical, especially in the forward and backsitting bow stance. The upper thigh will feel stressed at first — this is most important for the looseness of the waist. The legs only do their specific job of holding up your body, and this allows the waist to do its specific job of directing the power. (This can be reversed i.e. the legs and waist are able to swap jobs — this will be dealt with later).

Relax the arms and palms

The arm joints should remain relaxed with only the mind moving the palms to flex gently.

Relax the shoulders, sink the elbows

The shoulders should be relaxed and dropped down. The elbow should be dropped under the level of the shoulder to further help in relaxing the shoulders. Even when the palms are raised above the head, the shoulders should remain relaxed. This allows the whole chest area to relax and so the Ch'i can be sunk to the tantien.

Distinguish between full and empty

This is probably the most important point in t'ai chi. Many people only think of full and empty in terms of weight i.e. the leg that has the weight placed upon it is the Yang leg and the weight-less leg is Yin. But Yin and Yang only exist in a state of change. If one leg has all the weight placed upon it and the other is weightless, they are in a state of no-change.

However, if we think of Yang as being when we use power to push from one leg to the other, then this is true Yang. If we think of Yin as when we use one leg to receive that power, then this is true Yin. When our legs are just holding us up, they are doing their job and are neither Yin or Yang, but when one leg issues power and the other receives it, then this is the true meaning of distinguishing between substantial and insubstantial.

We must know exactly which part of our body is issuing power and which part is receiving it. There are times when the waist is in a changing state of Yin and the legs are Yang, and there are times when the waist is Yang and the legs are Yin. In other words, the waist is sometimes directing and issuing power, and it is important to know when this is happening. If the body is unbalanced then always look for the fault in the waist and legs.

The position of the knees

The most structurally sound position for the knee is when the patella of the weighted leg is directly over the second or ring toe. This allows for maximum power with no weak links, and serves to

protect the knee. You must train your waist and hips to turn without moving the knee from its central position — this is especially important in Push Hands.

Distinguish between waist and hips

When the hips turn, the whole backbone, including the sacrum, turns and the rotation is in the hip ball joint. When the waist turns, the sacrum stays still and the vertebrae above the sacrum turn. There are times when the waist turns by itself but at no time do the hips turn without the waist. These postures are dealt with in the section on form and Push Hands.

On kicking

The leg joints should always be relaxed so that centrifugal movement will naturally occur. In other martial arts, the muscles of the legs are used in a tense manner and cause blockages and all kinds of joint injuries. In t'ai chi we loosen the joints so that when a kick is being performed, only the waist revolves and because the leg is relaxed it just flicks out with great speed and power like a whip cracking. The same principle applies to punching.

Sink the chest, raise the back

The shoulders should be naturally rounded. This will also allow the chest to be naturally slightly hollowed, which allows the Ch'i to sink to the tan-tien. If there is strength and expanding of the chest you will become top heavy.

To raise the back has two meanings; the first is a little esoteric, meaning the Ch'i sticks to the back and one is able to use this Ch'i to issue great power. (If the chest is sunk then the back will naturally rise — this does not have to be thought about, it just happens). The second meaning comes from the practice of Push Hands when a certain technique is used and the scapula is raised to stop the technique having its full effect — this is a purely physical meaning. All the raise back techniques will come with practice.

Unity of upper and lower

This means that the upper body must not issue strength before or after the lower body. The whole body must come to the point of contact at exactly the same time otherwise our energy will be scattered and useless. The essence of unity is timing — this can only be gained from experience. This is the meaning of “the power is rooted in the feet, controlled by the waist and expressed in the fingers”.

Unity of internal and external

The breath is internal but has an external physical property. We are able to use this principle to gain complete harmony internally as well as externally. If we cause our breath to be in harmony with the movements, the Yang breath with the Yang movement etc., then this is one internal property harmonising with an external property. When the outer breath mixes with the inner breath, Ch'i, then a fully external property is harmonising with a fully internal property; so our internal is now said to be in harmony with the external. In order for this to happen we must of course practice using the right breath for the right movement.

No interruptions

This means that all the movements must be circular even if they look straight. Even when we use fa-jing movements as in the Chen style or the old Yang style, the attack must be circular, never straight out with a stop at the end then back. With circular movements we are said to be moving like a river.

Stillness in movement

In t'ai chi we try to use less energy rather than great shows of strength which waste the Ch'i. Even when we are moving the mind is still and to this end we must perform the slower movements as slowly as possible. The fa-jing postures of the old Yang and Chen styles should not break this rule; the movements are done with such speed and explosive power that it seems as if they haven't been done at all and haven't used up any energy. The fa-jing movement should only be there for a split second and then

it relaxes straight back into the very slow and soft movements. Only in this way when we come to practice the pauchui form are we able to remain quiet and still within when performing the fast movements.

Times for practice

The traditional times to practice t'ai chi were at noon and mid-night but we now use the early morning and late evening, before retiring to bed. The form is practiced three times at each session — the first time for the bones and muscles, the second time for the mind, and the third time for the spirit.

THE ORIGINAL YANG FORMS

GUIDELINES FOR MOVEMENTS FROM THE YANG CHENG-FU STYLE & THE YANG LU-CH'AN STYLE

Preparation

Keep the small movements as flowing as the larger, sweeping ones.

Arn left

In Push Left, make sure the left wrist is firstly in the centre, then the right wrist is in the centre. Block to the right

Keep the eyes to the front even though the head turns to the North East. This posture is used to block attacks of great force to the right lower abdomen.

P'eng

Place the heel before executing the movement. Keep the eyes to the North, keep shoulder width laterally between the feet. The left wrist is in the centre. This posture is used to ward off a strong fist attack from the front or to attack the opponent's face with a back-fist while holding his left wrist.

Block left

This posture is the same as Block Right. Turn the head to the North East, but the eyes look to the East.

Double p'eng

Keep the elbows below the shoulders but level. Drag the left toe toward you — don't push the left heel out. Issue the energy from the left leg with the right leg being Yin. This posture is used as a guard and downward back-fist to the chin.

Lu or pull backward

Keep the right wrist in the centre by turning the waist. The left knee is over the left toe and the power comes from the right leg. The waist controls the direction.

Chee or squeeze forward

The power must come from the left foot which must be in a direct energy line with the right wrist. Some power is derived from the waist —this makes the posture a spiral movement, not just a flat circle. The waist also directs the movement.

Sit back like a monkey

The power comes from the right leg only and is used to block either a strangle attack or straight face attack; also to re-attack.

Arn or press

The power comes from the left leg and the mind alone flexes the hand while trying to breathe out of the centre of the palm. The power in the palms should not be even — the power should come from the right palm in direct connection with the rear foot.

Sit back ready

Power comes from the right leg and is used to take the punch from the left fist and grab it with the left palm. The right fingers are then free to stab the eyes.

Fishes in eight

The power for this posture comes from the waist and is the first time in the form where the functions of the waist and legs are reversed. The legs direct and the waist issues the power, which is used to throw the attacker many feet away.

Single whip

The power comes from the right leg with the waist performing its usual function. The left foot must not be placed down before the whole body is in the position of attack — this breaks the energy. Use this posture for blocking and to attack the axila or chest.

Attack front, attack-rear (old Yang style)

The power comes from the waist and the legs direct. This is a fa-jing movement and is used to block and then attack with both palms, with great force. USE THE BREATH. Relaxation is of the utmost importance. Twist the body across the centre.

Lift hands (Yang Ching-Po style)

The power comes from the waist and the arms are used to crush the opponent's attacking arm. The previous arm movement is used to attack two opponents with the backs of the palms. No weight on the right foot — the right heel is used to kick at the knee cap or shin.

Pull down and shoulder press

Don't move the knees from their position over the toes, or turn the right foot. The right foot and the left palm must work in perfect harmony before the strike. The left palm protects the right elbow and

the right palm protects the groin. The shoulder attacks the chest when the opponent is pulled down.

Stork spreads wings

Power comes from the waist and right leg simultaneously. The obvious technique is to grab with the left hand and block to the right side with the right ulna, while kicking to the groin with the right toe. The main technique of Stork is a most powerful punch to the temple with the right fist, and block with hand trap by the left one. The right foot is used to trip or kick. Brush knee and twist step

Power comes from the rear leg as well as the waist and hips. This is not a push but rather a snap attack to the point of C.V. 14, used to block a lower attack, either foot or fist, and brush it aside then re-attack. (Conceptor Vessel 1 4 is a heart point).

Play guitar

Power comes from the left leg and is used to glance block a right fist and either attack with a left fist or kick to the knee cap or shin.

Step forward, parry and punch

In each case the power comes from the rear e.g.. The right fist blocks downward while the left palm is used to attack the chest. Then the left palm blocks while the right fist attacks to the heart. The right fist must snap up at the end.

Pull back

The power comes from the left leg and the waist directs. This movement is used to break a wrist hold and then re-attack with a push.

Push

This is the only REAL push in the whole form —power comes from the rear leg.

Apparent close up

Power comes from the waist and the legs. Used to feint a withdrawal, but always ready to attack. Can be used to particularly great advantage in Push Hands.

Fists under elbow (old Yang style)

Power comes from the waist only on the first snap punch and from the left foot on the second. Used to block face punches and hand trap to re-attack with a very fast snap upper cut. This is a fa-jing movement.

Step back and repulse monkey

Power comes from the front leg and must be a push-pull sort of attack. Used to block downward a low punch and to simultaneously attack to the chest area. Keep the feet a little less than shoulder width apart.

Tripping repulse monkey (old Yang style)

Power comes from the waist alone with the legs just propping up the waist. Keep the centres in a straight line. This posture is used to block to the rear, then throw the opponent towards the front while using the rear foot to trip.

Parting the horse's mane

The power comes from the waist and the thumb is used to attack the axilla (right thumb in new Yang style, left thumb (in old Yang style). Swivel both toes in the new Yang style.

Needle at sea bottom

The power comes from the waist. This posture is used either to attack L3 or pull the opponent down, causing him to pull up. (*Liver 3 is between the large and second toes*). Then use Fan through the Back.

Fan through the back

The power of the waist as well as the leg power is used here. As the opponent's arm is lifted up by the right palm, the tips of the left fingers are used to stab at the nodes under the arm.

Turn around and chop with fist

The power for the chop with fist comes from the waist. The power for the palm attack comes from the leg.

Wave hands like clouds

Keep the hips facing the front and let your waist do the turning. The power comes from the waist when turning to the right and from the leg when turning to the left. Block down with the outside palm then attack to the face with the other palm. Or, block up with the upper forearm and attack to the vital lower parts with the other palm.

Lift heavens

The power comes from the front foot and is a blocking technique.

High pat on horse

The power is in the waist — a simultaneous block down to the left with an attack to the face.

Drawing the bow (new Yang style)

The power comes from the right foot. Block with one palm and the other attacks to the face; or the left palm grabs the opponent's wrist while the right one takes the left elbow and throws the opponent to the ground.

Sitting like a duck (Old Yang and Chen styles)

The power comes from the waist in a twisting movement downward and is used to pull the opponent down to the ground. If the opponent retreats, attack with right or left toe kick.

Separation of right and left feet

One palm grabs the wrist while the foot kicks to the knee or shin area.

Heel kick

The power comes from the waist and is a snap front heel kick to the lower abdomen. The power must not come from the kicking leg.

Punch to groin (old Yang and Chen styles)

The power comes from the waist, the left hooking fingers lift the attacker's kicking leg high over the head causing the attacker to fall to the ground. At this point the right fist attacks the groin.

Punch to knee (new Yang style)

The power comes from the rear leg and the right fist is aimed at the on-coming knee.

Double leaping kick (old Yang and Chen styles)

The power is centrifugal with both feet kicking with power. The knee snaps upwards. This is a fa-jing posture.

Hit tiger left and right

The power comes from the rear foot. In the new Yang style one fist is used as a feint while the other punches the kidney area. In the old Yang and Chen styles the posture was a fa-jing movement and was a block upward with one arm while the other attacked the heart or face. Penetration punch (old Yang and Chen styles)

This punch is extremely fast and is between the two hit tiger techniques. The power comes from the waist and is centrifugal in action combining the block and punch in one movement.

Double wind through ears, or phoenix punch

The power comes from the rear foot and is used to crush the opponent's head down onto the knee. Then as the opponent moves backwards, both fists crash down onto the temples.

Side kick (old Yang and Chen styles)

The power comes from the right leg; after evading to the ground, kick to the knee cap or shin area.

Double knife finger (old Yang style)

The power comes from the waist and is a block and attack with the same position of palms to the C.V.14 point and also to the lower abdomen or the groin.

Play guitar No. 2 Old Yang style)

The power comes from lifting the waist and is used to break the arm of the attacker upwards. Single phoenix punch and block (old Yang style)

The power comes from the waist and is centrifugal. The posture is a punch to the right or left temple, and is circular in execution. Use both forearms to block a low kick.

Slant flying

There is a shoulder stroke before each Slant Flying, so the power for this posture comes from the rear leg. The power for the Slant Flying comes from the waist and is used to push the opponent over (there are many uses for Slant Flying).

Fair lady works at shuttles

The power comes from the waist for the block, and from the rear foot for the attack. Attack is to the chest area.

Artful snakehand creeps down No.1

The power comes from the waist and is used as an attack to the groin and for evasion. No. 2 Snake Creeps Down is used to pull the opponent down with great power that comes from the front leg.

Cock stands on one leg

The power comes from the rear leg and is used to block an attack then re-attack with palm or knee. The second time it is used to grab the throat and attack the groin.

Natural repulse monkey (old and new Yang styles)

The power comes from the front foot. The posture is used to block downwards and at the same time attack the chest or face.

Inspection of horse's mouth

The power comes from the rear leg and is used to block downwards and at the same time attack to the throat with the tips of the fingers.

Dragon flips tail (old Yang and Chen styles)

The power is centrifugal and is a right crescent kick. The knee must remain relaxed.

Spear hand thrust (old Yang style)

The power comes from the waist and is used to simultaneously attack to the front with spear hand and to the rear with punch.

Evade and bend backwards (old Yang and Chen styles)

The power comes from the waist; used to evade by lowering the body and either blocks or attacks with elbow.

Double wrist lock (old Yang style)

The power comes from the waist in bending down and is used to lock the wrist while your left elbow attacks the opponent's right elbow.

Clown acting (old Yang and Chen styles)

Hidden hand punch is used to trap the palm and then attack with a punch. The power comes from the waist.

Sleeves dancing like plum blossoms (old Yang and Chen styles)

The movement is totally centrifugal with the whole body spinning round like a windmill. The left arm blocks as the right arm attacks.

Step forward to seven stars

The power comes from the rear leg and is used to block high, while the right foot is used to kick to the groin or shins.

Ride tiger back to mountain

In the new Yang style this is the same as for Stork Spreads Wings, but in the old Yang style it is used to block a kick with the left palm while stepping out of the way. The same applies for the Wu style.

Lotus kick

The power comes from the waist and is used to firstly block and then “break the lotus root” by kicking and attacking with the arms in opposite directions.

PUSH HANDS

SINGLE PUSH HANDS

First, start with the legs and work up. Without strong legs you can forget the Push Hands practice. The knees must always stay over the second toe on the Yang or heavy leg; this is the most structurally sound position for the leg. Even when turning the waist the knee must not move from this position. The light knee may move, but only backwards and forwards. Power comes from the front leg when moving back, and from the rear leg when moving forward. There must be a constant pressure between the two players.

Loosen the waist

The waist must be so loose that when the P'eng arm is pushed, the waist and hips just move with the push to either side like a bicycle wheel on its axis — the P'eng arm is the wheel and the head is the axis. Never allow your wheel to buckle.

Listen with the wrist

Your wrists are your ears in combat. The direction of force, and how much power to use is determined by the wrists, which are your centre. Never change direction in mid-stream otherwise you will be defeated. Make up your mind and then stick to it. When using a certain martial technique ask yourself, “If I used this technique against a master, would it work?”.

Never break contact; this may work when executed very quickly while playing with someone less experienced than yourself, but you must think as if pushing with a master.

Sink

Probably the most important thing to remember is 'sink'. Every time you move from rear to front, or from front to rear, sink and aim for the opposite foot. In this way you won't be caught off balance with a pull. When attacking, curl the rear toes under to bring more Ch'i into the rear leg. Feel a line between the rear foot and the attacking palm. Sink your shoulders and be strong in your stance.

Push with the legs, pull & strike with the waist

The power for the push comes from the rear leg while the power for the pull down comes from the waist. However, we practice pushing hands to develop great power in our attacks, instantly from very short distances. So with this in mind, using centrifugal force, the power for these movements at an advanced level comes from the waist only.

Keep the wrist in the centre as you push or pull, by turning the waist into it. Keep the back straight and the buttocks turned under at all times — in this way the power in the waist is not lost but connected directly to the palms from the rear foot.

If the attack is to the left of your centre then turn your waist to the left, keeping your wrist in the centre. If the attack is to the right of your centre then turn your waist to the right. If the power comes directly into the centre then turn to your "closed" side. Right leg forward, right side is closed and left is open.

Keep the unbendable arm and the immovable elbow

Never allow your wrist to come any more than 90 degrees into your chest. BUT only use the right muscle for the job — no tension must be used in any other muscle. The fingers must always be relaxed. In this way we route the oncoming energy straight back to the rear foot.

Be wary at each change

The time for caution comes just between the opponent's change from Yin to Yang.

Use constant energy

When changing feet, and the punch to the face or stomach is used, be certain not to use a jerking step. Place the heel down easily with complete control.

Keep the back straight and vertical

The waist and hips will not turn in the correct manner if the back is not vertical to the ground. This gives you complete grounding.

The head is straight

The head should not move, the chin is tucked in to keep all your centres in line.

DOUBLE PUSH HANDS

Use the same guidelines for Single Push Hands, especially those related to the feet and waist. I have not covered the advanced method of 'P'eng/Hinge' Push Hands here.

Open and closed are different

In Double Push Hands we have two different sides which can be used at anytime. If the right foot is forward the closed side is your right side and you must use more P'eng to that side. You use less P'eng to the open side because you are moving your centre away to the right. When using P'eng to the closed side make the forearm more to the diagonal upward; when using P'eng to the open side make the forearm more parallel to the ground.

In pull back use the waist

Never sit right back onto the rear leg before using Lu; the movement must come at exactly the same time as the posture comes into place. The right wrist (if Lu on the closed side) must be in the centre.

The power for Pull Back comes from the waist. The left fingers may be used to stab at the eyes so be ready for that to happen.

The right palm might be used to slap the face after a feint pull back (or the left if on the other side). Bend Backwards or Slant Flying might also be used at this point. Look at your opponent's whole body out of your peripheral vision (Seven Stars).

Chee (squeezing)

In using Chee (or press) be certain that the opponent does not suspect. Chee is used to great advantage to hurl your opponent many feet away.

Arn (press)

Some people call this 'push'. Make sure the power is not in both palms as this is double weighting. One palm is used to sense. This technique is used to send your opponent many feet away and is usually used after Chee. The movement sends the attacker spinning. Keep the buttocks tucked under. The power for Chee and Arn comes from the rear leg and is directed by the waist.

Central equilibrium

This is the most important position. Without it we are easily defeated. This is very important when neutralising after being attacked by Elbow or Chee.

Pull

Pull uses "inch energy" and is used instead of Pull Back or Lu. The one palm is used to jerk the opponent's wrist backwards. This is not used for pulling off balance but to dislocate the elbow or shoulder. The other palm can be used on top of the pulling palm.

Split

This is used to throw the attacker completely off balance in a spinning fashion. The power comes from the waist and legs and is used instead of Lu or Pull.

Kao or shoulder

This technique is used to great advantage just after P'eng and before Lu. The timing and the distance must be correct as Kao only works over a short distance. The power comes from the rear leg.

Elbow

If Kao is the cannon, then Elbow is the handgrenade. It is used on being pulled back, and is aimed at the mid-section. The power comes from the rear leg and waist.

Use Chee after pull back

After being pulled back, and if you are pulled onto to the opponent's open side, then use Chee into his mid-section for great advantage. Be certain that the timing is right.

Extra techniques

When using fast punches, always make sure that the opponent's other hand is trapped first. In kicking to the knee or shin, be certain that you use a feint to take the opponent off guard.

Follow up

Don't just leave a technique after it has been used — always have in mind the follow up and be careful that the opponent has not detected it.

Allow the opponent to move

Never attack first; allow the opponent to move first and use, stick to and follow to defeat. This means loosening the waist and having a solid foundation in the feet. The energy is rooted in the feet.

DA-LU OR MOVING PUSH HANDS

The four corners are practiced in Da-Lu and the mind must act very quickly.

In an advanced stage the Da-Lu becomes Push Hands and the Push Hands becomes Da Lu, so the same points apply as for Push Hands.

At a very advanced stage the Push Hands becomes totally free and any technique can be used at any time. Loose the shoulders, keep the chin in and sink the energy to the tan-tien. Know where the energy is coming from and how to use the whole and every part of the body to your advantage.

PAUCHUI FORM AND SAN-SAU

The fighting arts of t'ai chi ch'uan

PAUCHUI

In pauchui (old Yang and Chen styles), make sure that the fa-jing movements are totally subconscious, like sneezing. Use the technique as if your life depended upon being able to issue absolute and full power the moment that the technique is released. Never have any tension before or after the technique.

When executing the slower full techniques have internal power and breathe out with the technique. Always balance the fast with the slow — this way we use up less energy. In most cases, the attack is like a whip; there is a great deal of power behind it but it is concentrated in one small point of impact. RELAX. Whip the wrist. Whip the foot.

SAN-SAU

When we put the pauchui forms together in a two person sparring match we call it san-sau or free hands. In the beginning it is not totally free because we must first learn how to use the techniques. Keep it slow and see how each technique is used to either attack

or to defend. After some time speed up the movements and introduce some more power. This is not a contest so keep it easy.

After many years you may put some of the techniques out of sync until it becomes a free sparring match. The free fighting part must not come too soon as you will forget all about the technique and it will become a brawl.

You must have these techniques so imprinted on your sub-conscious that they can be called upon in any situation.