

References to philosophical classics in Western Taijiquan literature

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If you look closely at Western Taijiquan literature, you can easily find anecdotes or allusions which even a Western reader can identify as references to Chinese classical texts. Here are two examples and their sources:

1) When Zhang Sanfeng was asked by a student about the principles [of Taiji], he replied by sticking out his tongue. The student didn't understand. "Do you see my tongue?" The student replied: "Yes." "Did you see my teeth?" The student smiled and said: "You have none anymore!" "That's just it. The tongue is soft and supple, it always was there and will be there. The teeth are hard, they do not last and, in the end, they fall out." (Anders, p. 20 f)

This anecdote is surely inspired by the daoistic *Huainanzi* (from the pre-Christian times), where it is written: "Thus, a weapon that is unyielding will break; a piece of wood that is stiff will snap; a piece of leather that is hard will split. The teeth being harder than the tongue are the first to wear out." (Lau, Ames, p. 97)

2) As a tip for the beginner in Taijiquan you can find the following advice: "Even when you think that Taijiquan has its roots in the philosophy of Asia, you should be careful not to mystify or overemphasise the spiritual aspects. Taijiquan lives through its great naturalness and, as you would not pull a stalk to make it grow faster, you should take time to learn Taijiquan step by step." (Engel, p. 124)

This image of the stalk can also be found in the Confucian philosopher Mencius, where a farmer is blamed for being too impatient. This man "was sad that his grain was not growing and so he was pulling at it. In the evening he came home and said to his family: 'Today I am tired, I have been helping the grain grow.' His son ran out to the fields to have a look and saw that all plants were already withered." (Men 2A/2, p. 55)

These two examples show how ideas of the Chinese philosophical classics entered into Western Taijiquan literature. The authors were certainly not always conscious of the source. But that is not important, providing that, as in these examples, the meaning remains true to the source.

Anders Frieder, *Tai Chi Chuan*, Econ, Düsseldorf 1994

Engel Siegbert, *Tai Chi*, BLV Verlag, Munich 2004

Lau D.C., Ames Roger T, *Yuan Dao*, Ballantine Books, New York 1998