

## Chen Taijiquan Push Hands

**Tui shou**, or “pushing hands,” marks a turning point in training that begins the path to combative usage and deeper health benefits of partner contact training. Usually taught over five sequential levels, Chen Taiji push hands instill the requirements of balanced forces in the body important to health and crucial for self-defense.

While push hands training is well known as a tool to build touch and sensitivity of the limbs, it is actually most useful for building stance, step, and whole-body movement, expressed in the four core *jings*, or skills, of Taijiquan. At the first stages of push hands, the closed/fixed step - **He Bu** - refers to partners touching arms in a fixed stance facing each other, to instill the four primary jings known as *Peng, Lu, Ji, Ahn*. When stepping is introduced, **Xun Bu** refers to partners stepping forward and backward, drawing each other into lower stances to later extend one’s overall jing with **Da Lu**. This evolves into **Hua Bu**, free-stepping that combine hand technique with active footwork, so as to “randomly pluck flowers” in a free-form expression of Taiji’s core jings. Thus Chen Taiji push hands are usually taught around five levels or techniques, largely distinguished by the use of footwork.

Working with a partner, practitioners begin perfecting the basic requirements of relaxation and correct stance use with versions of the single arm, circular **dan tui shou**. At this preliminary stage sunk shoulders, harmony with the partner, and stance control are the goals. Soon thereafter, five distinct variations of push hands are practiced to train whole-body movement, refining limb contact with footwork.

1. In the first level, **huang kua**, the shoulders open and close the arms in three vertical directions while maintaining fluid partner contact with both the arms and stance. Remaining in one place, this stationary pushing builds a greater awareness of posture, leg usage, sensitivity and torso-focused technical application, which sometimes utilize shoulder striking. The health benefits unique to *tui shou* become most evident at this stage, when the improvement of leg strength, correct posture, relaxation and increased motor skills emerge.
2. Stage two increases the physical contact between the practitioners by introducing a combination of smaller circular movements utilizing the hands to cover the wrists and elbows of the partners. Called **ding bu**, and the most recognizable of the routines, this stage hints at the unique *qinna* that is highly developed in Chen Taijiquan. Shifting weight without stepping, the arms circle on a vertical plane, opening and closing contact at close range.
3. Moving back and forth with one step, **hua bu**, introduces stepping. Beginning with the unique movement of stage two, one partner drags the other’s arm down and sideward with a rear step, while the other, whose arm is being held and dragged, steps forward. This important stage in tui shou introduces sinking, stepping, and arm coiling which is health-giving and crucial to combat application.

4. Stage four advances the previous stage to a demanding level that utilizing double circular pushing and dragging in and out of very deep stances, with one step. Called **da lu**, this level of *tui shou* conditions the legs and accustoms the boxer to pushing and locking with both the legs and arms to train rootedness in application. The health benefits of vigorous leg training are obvious, but the importance of *da lu* to combat is enormous.
5. After perfecting this fourth difficult stage of *tui shou*, stages two to four combine in stage five. In this free-form stage, **huang jiao bu**, multiple stepping in varied directions is combined with the covering and dragging of early levels of *tui shou*. Utilizing specific movements in freely expressed patterns bridges the gap between application practice and free-fighting in Chen Taijiquan. At this Level, the practitioners are free to move in rapidly changing techniques that involve sensitivity, complex stepping, dragging, locking, and finally, neutralization. Throughout, the importance of lively, decisive footwork becomes the focus. Upon mastery of this stage, the combat oriented stylist is then ready for usage - he is ready to practice fighting.

After perfecting the fifth level of *tui shou*, Chen stylists practice free fighting from the base of free push-hands practice. This includes a fluid use of *qinna*, neutralizing throws, and body strikes. Practicing in pairs, Chen pupils work to maintain firm rootedness while adhering being sensitive to the opponent's movements and intentions.

Maintaining constant limb and bodily contact at close range, the trainees attempt to dislodge, throw, lock, and (body) strike each other with relaxed power. This type of sparring advances the neutralization technique and powerful root vital to Taiji usage. Firm stances with lively stepping de-emphasizes muscular strength and permits Chen Taiji's natural relaxed power to emerge.