

# Concerning Cheng Man-ch'ing Moving his Chin Back with his Finger

If the chin is forward it creates a misalignment with the head and neck causing tension particularly in the back of the neck. It is not necessary to use one muscle against another to force it back into alignment. It takes more muscle energy to hold a misalignment than it does to realign, so we need to release the muscles that have been holding the chin and neck forward for them to realign naturally.

Misalignments develop as bad habits and are difficult to remedy. Many times, I have informed a student that they are leaning backward, and that they should be straight. I see them a week later and they are still leaning backward. If I straighten them manually, they feel as if they are leaning forward, so they eventually lean backward again to feel straight. I then tell them to do the form leaning forward, which works sometimes and sometimes not.

Misalignments usually cause problems in other parts of the body as well. For example, if our head is hanging forward it will put extra weight on the knees. If the toes are pointed out to the side while walking, the knees and hips will be somewhat damaged. Even small tensions like the “concern muscles” between the eyebrows, biting the lip, tensing the thumb, not to mention grinding the teeth, will cause tensions in other areas.

Any misalignment will cause tension and will cut off our natural energy flow to the degree that the alignment is off.

## Walking and Swimming

Walking is our homo erectus principal exercise. We are bipedal animals and like other animals, our method of locomotion is our exercise. Walking is

most beneficially done with bare feet on earth, sand, grass, or any other soft, uneven surface. Walking on hard even surfaces such as cement, jars the body to a degree and is somewhat less beneficial.

In our modern world we must wear shoes to protect our feet on various unfriendly surfaces. Shoes on flat hard surfaces make every step we take use the muscles and bones in the same way, whereas walking on uneven ground requires the muscles of the ankles and legs to work multi-directionally.

An example of a similar problem is with weightlifting machines, where the athlete pushes a weight up in channels that only allow up and down movement. The athlete develops strong muscles that push up (pectorals, triceps etc.) but if the athlete then lifts a free weight, the muscles that keep it from falling to the front, back or sides are not as strong, and injury may result. However, free weightlifting and walking on uneven ground exercise all the relevant muscles.

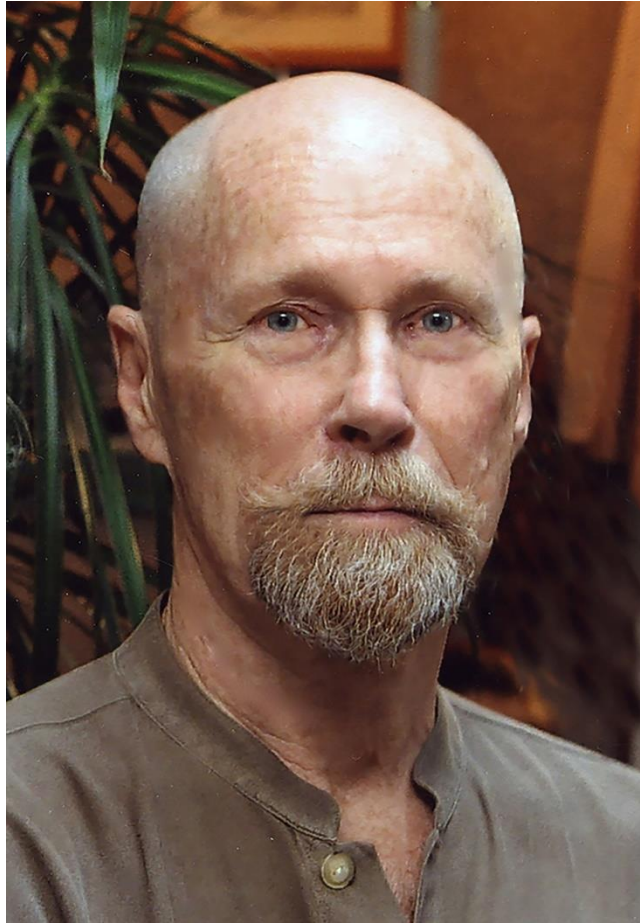
Cheng Man-ch'ing said that tai chi is like "swimming in air." Our feet are on the earth, but our bodies are in the air—the bottom of the sky.

Air is much like water. Water is denser than air, but it keeps battleships afloat. Air is denser than space, but it keeps 747s afloat. The only reason most people do not feel the air's density is that they are accustomed to it.

After a few years of study, tai chi students are encouraged to feel the air they are moving in, to experience the displacement of air as they move their bodies and limbs through it.

As we do this the air begins to feel denser, heavier, resulting in the body becoming lighter. In this way we can feel as if we are "swimming in air."

We may even soar.



Ken Van Sickle studied Tai Chi Form, Push Hands, and Tai Chi Sword with Grand Master Cheng Man-ch'ing for eight years from 1967 until 1975.

Over the last twenty plus years, Ken has taught Tai Chi Sword workshops in nine cities across Europe, Great Britain, and Israel, as well as in nine cities across the United States.

Ken is also a professional photographer, well-known for his stunning black and white photography of New York and Paris in the 1950s and 60s.

During his eight years of study with Cheng Man-ch'ing, Ken chose to turn the focus of his photography to documenting Cheng Man-ch'ing's many classes.

Ken has authored two books, *Tai Chi Sword* and with Terry Marks, *NYC T'ai Chi in black and white*. He was the cinematographer of the documentary feature, *The Professor: Tai Chi's Journey West*.

Ken's photographs can be found in the Metropolitan Museums of Art's permanent collection.

Photos by Ken Van Sickle