8 Methods, 5 Steps
Bafa Wubu

By Gene Ching

China's New Taiji Standard

A new simplified Tai Chi form has just emerged from the People's Republic of China. In recent decades, China has used simplified forms in order promote Tai Chi, or Taiji (太極) as it is spelled in PRC-endorsed *pinyin* romanization. Traditional Taijiquan is a complex and sophisticated art that requires years of discipline to master. That's often too daunting for newbies, especially those unfamiliar with Taiji culture. These simplified Taiji forms are intended to be introductory; however, they can also stand on their own as a simple health practice for those who seek the benefits of Taiji but aren't looking to dedicate the time that the complete discipline requires.

The new form is *Bafa Wubu* (八法五步). This literally means "Eight Methods, Five Steps." For experienced Taiji practitioners, these are also known as the 13 Postures (*shi san shi* 十三勢). The last character, *shi* (勢), has been conventionally translated as "posture" because within the context of Taiji it refers to a particular body action. But taken on its own, it can mean "power," "force" or "tendancy." These thirteen powers are considered the essential core of all Taiji. The 13 Postures, or 13 Powers, are discussed in the *Taijiquan Classics* (*Taijiquan Jing* 太極拳經), a collection of essays regarded as the canon of the art. Some of these writings are attributed to as early as the 12th century while several of them are dated much later, towards the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

A New Form from a Revered Classic

According to the *Taijiquan Classics*, the *Bafa*



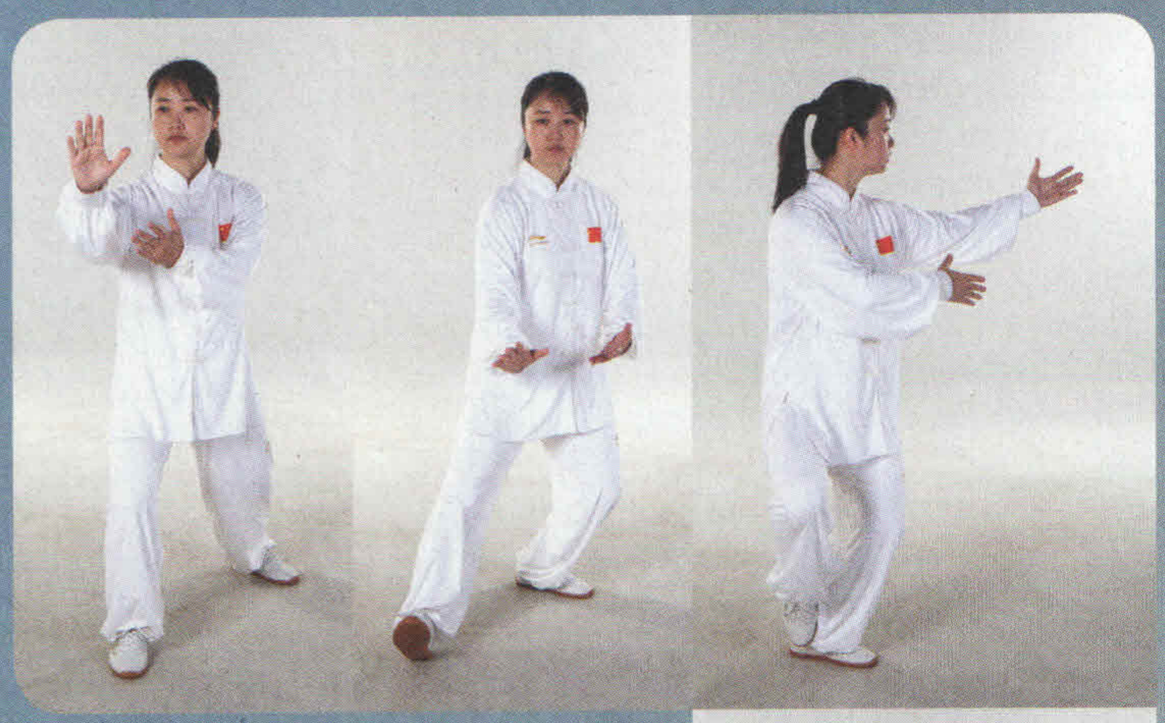
***Peng* (ward off)**



are also known as the Eight Gates (*bamen* 八门). There are four straight or proper methods (*sizheng* 四正) and four corner or nook methods (*siyu* 四隅). The straight methods are *Peng* (ward off 掤), *Lu* (roll back 捋), *Ji* (press 挤), and *An* (push 按). The corner methods are *Cai* (pluck 採), *Lie* (split 挒), *Zhou* (elbow 肘), and *Kao* (bump 靠). The *Wubu* refer to the five directions for stepping. These are Advancing (*qianjin* 前进), Retreating (*houtui* 后退), Left Step (*zuogu* 左顾), Right Step (*youpan* 右盼), and Central Equilibrium (*zhongding* 中定). Eight methods plus five steps add up to thirteen powers.

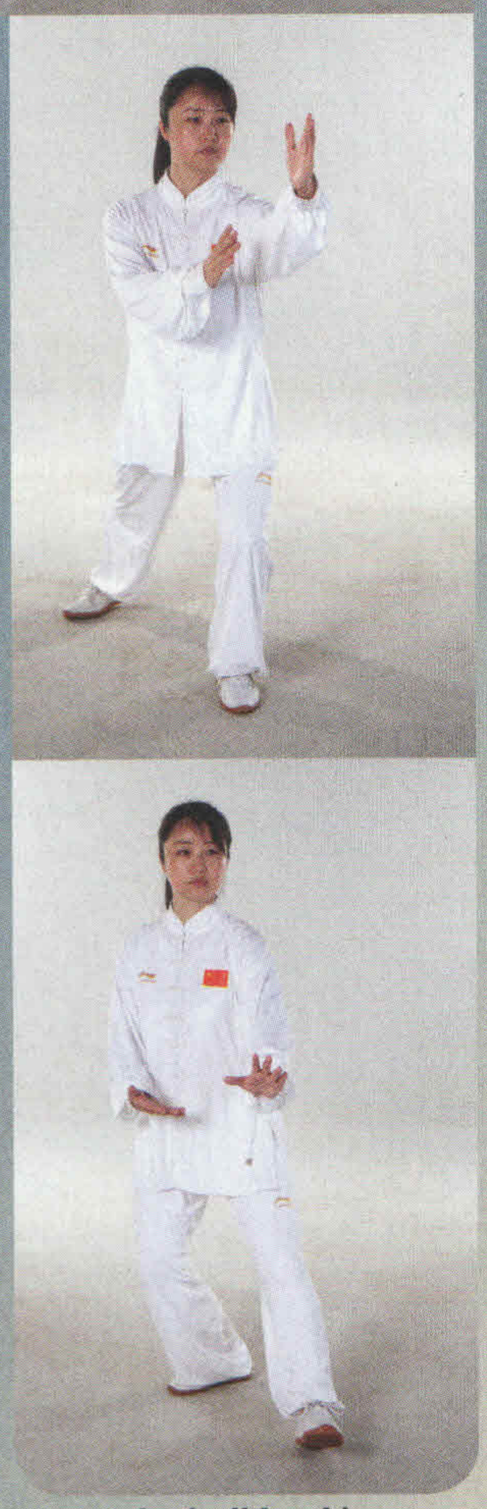
Bafa Wubu has been launched by the China General Administration of Sport (国家体育总局). Beyond being an introductory form and a basic exercise, it is being considered as a competition event. Movie star Vincent Zhao Wenzhou is featured in an official video that promotes the form. It was the central component in the recent The Belt and Road China Tai Chi Culture World Tour which disseminated *Bafa Wubu* across Europe last year and in the United States early this year (see The Belt and Road China Tai Chi Culture World Tour on page 20). *Kung Fu Tai Chi* and the Tiger Claw Foundation supported the U.S. tour.

Master Qiu Huifang (邱慧芳), a Chinese Taiji champion, served as the chief instructor for the *Bafa Wubu* workshops during their San Francisco Bay Area stop. A highly decorated champion, Qiu swept all the individual and team Taiji events for the China National Championships and the World Wushu Championship in 1999. Originally from Hubei Province, she represented the Beijing Wushu Team in 2001. Master Qiu demonstrated the basic *Bafa Wubu* techniques for this article.



Do We Really Need Another Simplified Form?

The most prominent precedent for a Simplified Taiji Form is the Simplified 24 Taijiquan (*ershisi shi taijiquan* 二十四式太极拳). This form was also developed by the China General Administration of Sport back in 1954. It was designed by an esteemed team of Taiji Grandmasters: Chu Guiting (1982–1977 褚桂亭), Cai Longyun (November+December 2005 Cover master 1928–2015 蔡龍雲), Fu Zhongwen (1903–1994 傅鈡文) and Zhang Yu (張宇). The form is based predominantly on Yang Taijiquan (楊氏太极拳), mirroring the opening to the traditional form, and then cherry-picking some select movements from the rest of the form.



***Lu* (roll back)**

***Ji* (press)**



***An* (push)**



Simplified 24 Taijiquan is quite possibly the most popular Taiji form in the world. It has been heavily promoted by China for decades, both domestically and abroad. It is taught at senior centers for fall prevention, at care facilities for rehabilitation, and through community centers and colleges as an introductory form all around the world. For many who are not martial artists, this is the only form they might know or have experienced. Anyone proficient in Taijiquan can pick it up rather easily. Other simplified forms followed. These have been mostly specific to individual lineages, often with the same intention to entice beginners into the practice. The notion is that if a beginner can gain the benefit of Taiji with a minimal investment, they are more apt to pursue it further, sort of a "first one's free" marketing strategy. Given the global success of Simplified 24 Taijiquan, the scheme seems to work.

Bafa Wubu, despite its somewhat awkward Mandarin title, is a more general approach to a simplified form. The form recites all of the eight powers from a standing position first, repeating each method on the right and left side. Then it repeats all of the eight, again on the left and right, but with the five stepping directions, ending with two single leg stances – the position known in Yang Taiji as Golden Rooster Stands on One Leg (*jin ji du li* 金鸡独立). It's a very basic form, but also very equal and balanced, simple enough for a rank beginner, but built on a foundation that bears repeating by a more seasoned practitioner. For a Chinese martial arts form, it's notably symmetric.

The potential for *Bafa Wubu* feels more promising. Perhaps this is because it has a sound theoretical foundation. Many seasoned practitioners disregarded Simplified 24 Taijiquan because it was little more that a snippet of Yang Taiji, and the preference of more dedicated students was to just do the complete form like it should be done. However, *Bafa Wubu* is recital of universal basics, and like basic punching

1. Raise Power
Qi shi (起势)
2. Left *Peng* Power, Right *Lu* Power, Left *Ji* Power, Double *An* Power
Zuo peng shi, you lu shi, zuo ji shi, shuang an shi (左棚势 右捋势 左挤势 双按势)
3. Right *Cai* Power, Left *Lie* Power, Left *Zhou* Power, Right *Kao* Power
You cai shi, zuo lie shi, zuo zhou shi, you kao shi (右採势 左挒势 左肘势 右靠势)
4. Right *Peng* Power, Left *Lu* Power, Right *Ji* Power, Double *An* Power
You peng shi, zuo lu shi, you ji shi, shuang an shi (右棚势 左捋势 右挤势 双按势)
5. Left *Cai* Power, Right *Lie* Power, Right *Zhou* Power, Left *Kao* Power
Zuo cai shi, you lie shi, you zhou shi, zuo kao shi (左採势 右挒势 右肘势 左靠势)
6. Advance Step, Left Right *Peng* Power
Jinbu zuo you peng shi (进步左右棚势)
7. Retreating Step, Left Right *Lu* Power
Tuibu zuo you lu shi (退步左右捋势)
8. Left Shift Step, Left *Ji* Power, Left Shift Step, Double *An* Power
Zuo yi bu, zuo ji shi, zuo yi bu, shuang an shi (左移步左挤势 左移步双按势)
9. Right Shift Step, Right *Ji* Power, Right Shift Step, Double *An* Power
You yi bu you ji shi you yi bu shuang an shi (右移步右挤势 右移步双按势)
10. Retreating Step, Left Right *Cai* Power
Tuibu zuo you cai shi (退步左右採势)
11. Advancing Step, Left Right *Lie* Power
Jinbu zuo you lie shi (进步左右挒势)
12. Right Shift Step, Right *Zhou* Power, Right Shift Step, Right *Kao* Power
You yi bu, you zhou shi, you yi bu, you kao shi (右移步右肘势 右移步右靠势)
13. Left Shift Step, Left *Zhou* Power, Left Shift Step, Left *Kao* Power
Zuo yi bu zuo zhou shi zuo yi bu zuo kao shi (左移步左肘势 左移步左靠势)
14. Central Equilibrium, Left Right Single Stand Power
Zhongding, zuo you duli shi (中定左右独立势)
15. Cross Hands
Shizi shou (十字手)
16. Gather Power
Shou shi (收势)

***Cai* (pluck)**



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***Lie* (split)**



drills, it bears repeating by even the most advanced practitioners. The beginning of the form still reflects Yang style, but the expression of some of the movements, specifically *Ji, Zhou* and *Kao,* have more *fajin* (power emission 發勁) than Simplified 24 Taijiquan. This broadens the appeal of *Bafa Wubu* across the different Taiji styles. So far, the initial consensus on *Bafa Wubu* amongst experienced Taiji practitioners tends to be positive because this is something that can work as a basic daily practice or for a warm-up or cool-down regimen. Time will tell if it succeeds. Someday, it may



***Zhou* (elbow)**



***Kao* (bump)**



Single Stand Power (a.k.a. Golden Rooster Stands on One Leg)



eventually outshine Simplified 24 Taijiquan. As another expression of China's rising portentous "soft power" campaign, *Bafa Wubu* is poised to conquer the world.☯

To see Master Qiu Huifang perform *Bafa Wubu*, visit our KungFuMagazine.com YouTube channel. The author gratefully acknowledges Emilio Alpanseque for acquiring the lyrics and Taiji Classics reference.



Raise Power and Gather Power