

# Taiji Moving Step

## *Principles and Practices*

### **I. Some Principles of Taiji Moving Step**

\* Taiji moving step enhances the balance and *stability* from prior study and begins to cultivate nimble, responsive, and well-controlled *mobility*. Stability and mobility support and rely upon each other as one progresses through the Taiji curriculum in true yin/yang fashion.

\* *Regarding Advance*: In Taiji moving step, we want to avoid pushing *against* our partner but rather sense how to claim space appropriately without crudely forcing our way forward. Much of this has to do with using good structure/body mechanics and the quality of supporting the point-of-contact as previously studied in fixed step pushing hands.

\* *Regarding "Retreat"*: Note that "retreat" here refers to a quality of "creating space" between oneself and one's partner when that is needed or desired. It is generally not an attempt to disengage. Note also that stepping backward is done in such a way as to enable an easy advance should that become appropriate. The step "back" is not *fixated* on backward movement alone. This will be consistent throughout our approach to Taiji moving step. "In backward there is forward."

\* *Regarding Volume*: Note that in partner work, your buddy can give you light or heavy weight to work with while you are advancing or retreating, and vice versa. Working along the spectrum of light to heavy is beneficial. With lighter weight, we learn to become more sensitive to subtle pressure. With heavier weight, we learn to use better structure and connection and train *ling gong* in the process. A good practice is to combine the two by having your partner offer heavy volume, but respond with a lighter connection. This is a great way to learn how to use appropriate lightness and good technique to deal with strength.

\* *Arm Position in Moving Step*: In these partner drills, we will begin with the arms in a neutral position: One person will rest their right forearm on the left forearm of the other, and vice versa. Through the course of movement, this basic position is consistent, though the interaction is dynamic. With more experience, partners' arms can "roll" with advancing and retreating, much like in the fixed-step sticking drills. With still more experience, four hands is introduced complete with circle changes making moving step a far more sophisticated practice.

\* *Solo/Partner Practice of Moving Step*: Note that the drills presented below can be done both with or without a partner. Solo practice of these drills is less common, but is encouraged as it helps learn the coordination and is also a good approach to qigong when done with proper breathing, posture, and focus.

\* *Angles in Practice*: The walking practices below are initially done with a standard forward-backward orientation. With experience, begin to alter the angles that are practiced. Experiment with the basic 8 angles (north, south, east, west, and their corners) and everything in between. Playing with angles makes for more responsive footwork.

### **II. Moving Step Practices**

#### **1. Advance/Retreat: Single Step**

##### The Practice:

In Single Step we are practicing taking a single step forward, claiming space, while moving our partner backward. Our partner responds by "retreating" a single step with good balance and control. We then switch roles in a back and forth study. A single step advance commonly occurs in free play pushing hands making it a good preliminary study. You can also practice advancing and retreating with a single shuffle-step which is even more common in pushing hands.

### Stance Orientation:

In this practice, players mirror each other's stance, i.e. both have right foot forward. The basic open/closed stance orientation changes as one advances or retreats. This means that the hip position will change requiring good use of the legs and kua to avoid bobbing up and down.

### How this relates to the Taiji walking set:

In the basic solo Taiji walking set, one shifts their weight into the rear leg, changes the angle of the lead foot, and then takes a step forward with the back leg. With this partner drill, we are not shifting all the way back, but rather just enough to facilitate the movement of the front foot. It's therefore a faster step. In another version, the lead foot need not change angle until after the step has been taken. It depends on what is required to support the connection with one's partner.

## **2. Advance/Retreat: Double Step**

### The Practice:

In this practice, we are advancing with two steps while our partner retreats with two steps, then reversing roles.

### Stance Orientation:

Players' stance mirror each other. This time our basic open/closed stance orientation will remain the same *almost* giving this drill a feeling of side stepping. Note we are not changing the angle of the lead foot before advancing.

## **3. Advance/Retreat: Traditional Follow-Step (aka 3-3 step)**

### The Practice:

This is the familiar Tai Chi walking practice often taught at the beginning of moving step practice. Players mirror stance. One player will advance with three steps while their partner retreats with three then vice versa. Counting the steps is beneficial in the beginning to create a good sense of forward and backward and proper timing and sensitivity.

### Lead-leg changes:

Changing the lead leg in this practice can be accomplished in the following ways:

- 1) As you advance, encourage your partner to take an extra step back.
- 2) As you retreat, entice your partner to take an extra step forward.
- 3) Hinder your partner from going forward or backward on the 2<sup>nd</sup> step to change the lead leg as well.

### Helpful Note:

When practicing changes, initiate your change and then return to the 3-3 count to keep the practice orderly. With more experience, patterns and counts dissolve and it becomes free-stepping.

## **4. Advance/Retreat: Traditional Cover-Step (aka 3-2 step)**

### The Practice:

In this practice, players begin in opposite stances - player A has left-foot lead, player B has right-foot lead with their foot to the outside of Player A's left foot. Typically, player B will step to the inside of player A's foot then advance two more steps forward. After Player B's initial step, player A will retreat two steps backward in time with B's advance. B has thus taken 3 steps while A has retreated with 2. Part of the objective here is to study stepping to the inside of your partner's stance. Where before, the stance matched, there is now the opportunity to gain an inside positional advantage. This practice also adds to the complexity and hence skill development of timing, connection, and orientation to your partner in space.

### Changes:

It soon becomes apparent that while 3-3 moves forward and backward in roughly a straight line, the trajectory of the 3-2 drill is sideways along the floor. We can change that trajectory by stopping our partner on their second step or by encouraging an extra step in either direction. We'll flesh out the

details on these as we go.

## **5. Changes Between 3-3 and 3-2 Stepping**

### Overview:

Again, to gain greater versatility and skill in stepping, we can study moving from 3-3 to 3-2 orientations. We might look at these changes as belonging to two general categories:

1) *Shuffle-Step Changes*: The shuffle-step is perhaps the easiest of the changes to accomplish. They occur at the end of a sequence and simply involve moving your forward leg back and your back leg forward while your partner remains stationary. Doing so will change your orientation with your partner from 3-3 to 3-2 and vice versa.

2) *Different-Step Changes*: I call this category "different-step" simply because they require a different kind of step to make the change. See below:

### 3-3 to 3-2 (different-step):

Player A is advancing, player B is retreating. When Player B gets to their 2nd step back, they step further than usual giving A room to advance with their 3rd step, player B then steps down to the inside of B's forward foot thus creating a 3-2 orientation.

### 3-2 to 3-3 (different step):

Player A is advancing, player B is retreating. B hinders A on his second step forward, then B steps back with his front leg, then forward again, moving A back while doing so and taking them into 3-3 orientation. Note that the moment where hindering occurs here is the same moment where the 3-2 directional change occurs as noted above.

## **6. Circle Walking**

This is the practice of walking in a circle with your partner in either simple arm connection or with the more advanced use of 4-Hands patterns. In the beginning, study each step for precision before taking it faster and with more creative angles.

## **7. Exchange Step**

Exchange step is a gateway to developing more dynamic martial techniques and free play.

Level One: Begin without physical connection in matching stances. Player A can take one, two, or three steps to achieve positional advantage with B. Then B responds in kind. Each player allows time for the other to complete. With more experience, B can begin to respond a little before A completes his last step with a more "real-time" feel.

Level Two: Next, add simple arm connection and let the point of contact inform you how to move relative to your partner.

Level Three: This is like Level Two, only with more overt techniques – strikes, locks, kicks, etc.

Initially A lets B perform his technique, then responds to neutralize. It can be useful to decide who is doing techniques and who is simply returning to neutral at first.

Level Four: As above, only now we are moving more freely focusing on good connection both attacking and defending but slowly enough for it to be clean and meaningful practice for both players.

Level Five: Experiment with more than two players...