

A Valuable Tai Chi Training Experiment

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The Avitar of the Experiment Group

Kimberly Ivy

Michael Chritton of Swanee, Kansas, is a **Chen Village (Chenjiajou)** certified **Tai Chi** instructor. In mid October, he posted a status on Facebook (FB) and “whined” about his grueling training with his wife **Master Chen Huixian**. Michael normally uses 20 minutes to complete one set of **Chen Style Old Frame Routine One (Lao Jia Yi Lu)**. For a training purpose, Michael made his movements slow and completed it in 30 minutes. Right away, he got many feedbacks. Some posted similar experience when they practice a form slowly. These gave **Kimberly Ivy**, a 20th generation disciple of **Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang** and founder of **Embrace The Moon** in Seattle, Washington, a fun idea. She started a FB group named *The potentially famous 2010 Laojia Training Experiment* and invited some of her Facebook friends to join the experiment which the participants will do Lao Jia Yi Lu at a slow pace for a week and at a fast pace for a week to compare the results.

Kim wanted to provide an open “safe” place for friends to exchange ideas and personal experience so she made the group private but group members can invite friends to join. The FB group was created in late October, the Experiment started on Nov. 14 and ended on Nov. 28. At the highest, there were 77

members.

Chen Style Lao Jia Yi Lu is the foundation of all modern Tai Chi styles. Its extended form is practiced with a high/medium stance and some advanced practitioners prefer it to be low. According to Master Chen Huixian, for an advanced practitioner, a normal pace is about 12 to 18 minutes long. Anything beyond 18 minutes is considered slow and a fast pace practice is about 10 minutes or less and some do it in 7 or 8 minutes. Of course, beginners find it hard to do the form longer than 10 minutes simply because leg muscle is not strong enough to sustain a longer practice or missing too many details.

Most of the Experiment members are advanced Chen Style practitioners; many are Tai Chi instructors; few also practice [Yang Style Tai Chi](#), [Baqua](#) or external/internal [martial arts](#). They locate in different parts of the U.S.; a few join the group from Brazil: at least one person is from the Great Britain, Malaysia, and China. Over two dozen members shared their experimental results. Some brought the experiment to their own Tai Chi classes and tried it out. In general the experiment turned out to be a success for many reasons.

Most practitioners noticed that practicing the form slow allowed (or forced) them to care for more details. Lao Jia Yi Lu is extremely sophisticated. As the practice goes deeper, practitioners discover more rich details either in external movements (i.e. hand twining, Kao shifting, knee positioning), or internal exercise (i.e. breathing properly, Qi circulation, Dan Tian rotation), and further more in spiritual enlightenment (Shen). The general consensus about practicing slow are:

- Strengthen leg muscle
- Improve stability
- Sit Kao properly
- Distinguish Yin and Yang better
- Refine Silk Reeling and Dan Tian Rotation
- Smooth out rough spots in transitioning
- Relax body more
- Breathe more properly and gently
- Sink the Qi more easily
- Help settling and rooting each movement

- Improve focusing
- Listen to one's body better

One member wrote, "Slower was revealing even more to me about the deep connections not just with my body but with the interrelationships with my partners and increased my capacity to 'hear' what was going on," Others commented that the slow experience not only help them with Lao Jia Yi Lu practice, but also helped them with other styles or forms. One member utilized the slow approach with a Yang Style class (24 Movements in 24 minutes!) and the feedback was extremely favorable from the entire class regardless their Tai Chi level.

Some noticed negative results as well when doing the form slow like burning legs. Some had to alter breathing pattern to accommodate the slowness and felt unnatural. Couple of members recalled that the mind started to wonder especially when they were tired. Master Chen Huixian comments that practicing slow has many benefits but it should be a gradual process. She urges practitioners not to intentionally draw out the breathing unnaturally or holding the breath. She suggests practitioners slowly increase their form time as they progress, i.e. increasing form time by 2 minutes each week.

It became interesting when the experiment went from slow to fast. Kim's suggestion was to do the training at the speed of 15 minutes. A few ventured to do it less than 10 minutes. In most part, there was an adjustment issue. After all, it is quite different to breathe fast than slow. Some expressed there was not enough time moving the Qi around the body or to sink it. Some discovered they could not properly shift the body weight. The movement expression was getting "sloppy" and details were lost. One person said that he lost his place in the form when doing the form too fast. One member simply cried out that "things seem to fall apart and my forms feel uncomfortable."

Was it really the problem of doing it fast? Was it a natural outcome of changing pace drastically? Or was it simply because during the slow training, people learned the nuances of Lao Jia Yi Lu and now they realize what is missing when they speed up the practice? During the slow training, one member set [Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang's](#) DVD to a slow pace of 40 minutes and watched it while practicing. All members who posted about slow training admitted that they learned a lot more about the form.

"Working slowly made mistakes visible, working fast makes them tragically obvious," concluded one member.

Many stated that the slow training helped them with their faster practice. One person commented "moving fast through Lao Jia felt very connected even at the break neck speed. It felt like mercury flowing."

One member quoted a master's saying that "if you can do it slow, you can do it fast" which sparked a

little friendly debate. But there is one thing that most can agree is that “one cannot do it fast if he cannot do it slow.” Some practice Tai Chi for health reason while others for the martial arts thrill. People enjoying martial arts more expressed the preference for fast training.

Since this experiment was not in a control environment, it is hard to tell whether practice fast or slow is better. **However, the experiment is valuable which illustrated that the difficulties of doing a form either really slow or really fast which can help people improve their form practice.**

Aside from the benefits of the improving their understanding of Tai Chi principles, Lao Jia Yi Lu and their own practice, members built camaraderie among Tai Chi lovers beyond the geographic boundary. They encouraged and inspired others to practice. Many shared their thoughts and learning. Some quoted various master’s teaching. There were over 20,000 words posted in about six weeks. Some posted a photo of their practicing spot (some in snow and some in sun shine). They exchanged information of how to protect their knees as well self-taping (the practice) techniques. No wonder, after the experiment, 69 members still remain and continue to exchange ideas.

One member described Tai Chi practice is like “a string of pearls”. This metaphor can be used for this group of people who are proficient at their practice and selflessly offers their experience and knowledge with other. Hopefully, similar FB groups will be inspired or a scientific research can be established to do a control study on practicing Tai Chi fast and slow.

SUGGESTED LINKS

- **It was hard!!!**
- **Are you practicing Taichi Chuan or Taichi Cao?**
- **Master Chen Huixian on Push Hands**
- **Taichi Ba Fa by Master Chen Huixian**
- **Master Chen Huixian's workshops**



Violet Li

Tai Chi Examiner