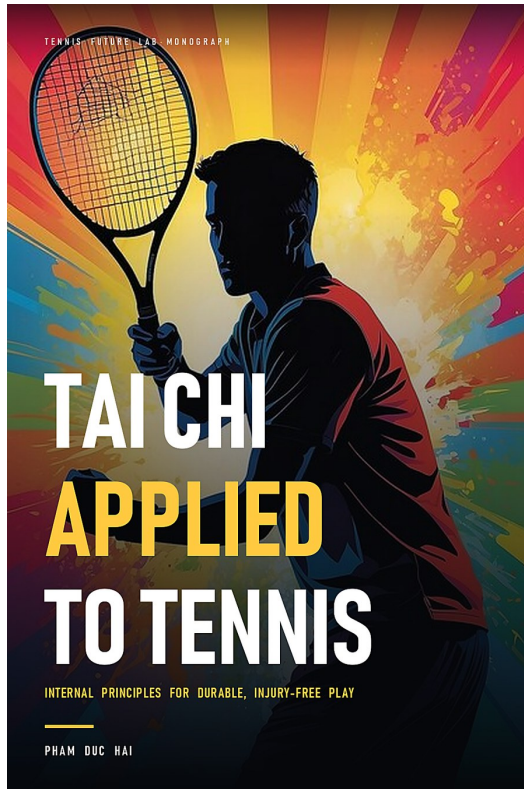


TENNIS FUTURE LAB · MONOGRAPH



Tai Chi Applied to Tennis — The Art of Healthy Living

Pham Duc Hai · Tennis Future Lab

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CHAPTER 1	

Introduction — A book written to practice, not to finish reading

There is a little story I often tell my students who are just starting to play tennis. One afternoon, I stood next to the practice net and watched a boy about twelve years old play forehand. He is strong, runs fast, swings the

racket so hard that the sound of the ball exploding throughout the court. But after each blow, he staggered, had to take two steps to stand, and near the end of the session his shoulder began to hurt. He wins the ball thanks to his youth, then loses to his own body when tired.

I didn't teach him any new techniques that day. I just said, "Stand still for a moment, close your eyes, and feel the ground under your feet." He laughed, complied, then opened his eyes and looked at me as if I had just asked for a silly game. But as we continued to play, his forehand started to flow smoother, and he stopped wobbling. What I just showed him is, in fact, the first lesson of Tai Chi: stay rooted.

This book stems from a simple belief. Tai Chi — a martial art that people often imagine as elderly grandparents swinging their arms slowly in the park — is by no means a soft ritual. It is an extremely strict system for how people move: how to stand, how to rotate, how to transfer force from the ground to the racket head, and most importantly, how to keep the mind from crumbling when the pressure hits. These principles do not require a dojo to be used. They can be used on the tennis court, in the office, when driving in traffic, and when you're awake in the middle of the night and can't sleep.

I wrote this book after many years of practicing Tai Chi, coaching and playing tennis myself, and observing how the busiest people—businessmen, doctors, managers—burn out simply because of the way they use their bodies and heads. I used to be one of them: making hundreds of decisions every day until I could no longer tell what was important, then carrying that tension onto the court and missing the simplest shots. Tai Chi did not magically heal me. It gave me a way to stand, a way to breathe, and a different perspective on strength — and from there things slowly changed.

What I want to make clear from the beginning: what you are about to read is not spirit uncle. When I say "rooted," I'm not telling you to imagine

yourself as a tree. I'm talking about distributing weight down into the balls of your feet so that feedback from the ground goes straight up the axis of your body. When I say "relax", I'm not telling you to be lethargic. I'm talking about letting go of unnecessary muscles so that the working muscles are free. The human body is a power transmission machine, and Tai Chi is just an instruction manual that few people are taught.

Perhaps you've read self-help books about Tai Chi that say "relax and the universe will arrange everything". I don't write that way. This book will be so specific that you can take it down to the court and practice right away: how you should place your feet in the split-step, what order your shoulders and hips should rotate when hitting the forehand, why "lag" wrists create speed, and how to keep your shoulders from tearing on the serve year after year. But I'll also go beyond the court, because a healthy tennis player isn't just someone who has good technique — they're someone who sits correctly, sleeps well, and doesn't explode with anger when they're broken.

I divided the book into three parts. Part one lays the foundation: the four core principles on which everything else rests — rootedness, axis and balance, relaxation with kinetic chain, and stillness in movement. Part two brings those principles to the tennis court, through footwork, forehand, backhand, volley, smash, serve, then injury prevention, competition psychology, reading the match and doubles. Part three brings Tai Chi into everyday life — work, driving, family, sleep, art, communication and emotions.

Each chapter here is a perspective, not a goal to be accomplished. You can read in order, or jump straight to the section you need most. If you are a tennis player, start from part two. If you're a burned-out manager, part three might save you first. If you're just curious, read the prologue and part one, then decide for yourself.

Finally, something honest. Tai Chi teaches that understanding does not lie

in the head but in the feeling. You can read this book and nod to all the ideas in it, then go down to the field and still play the same. That's normal. Change only comes when you stop, close your eyes, and feel the ground beneath your feet — like the boy in the opening story. I hope this book is a reminder to you to do that, not once but every day, until it becomes second nature.

We start where every shot begins: at your feet.

CHAPTER 2

Part I — Core principles

These four principles are not for memorization. They are four body habits you will practice over and over again throughout the book, until you don't need to think about them anymore.

CHAPTER 3

Chapter 1 — Rooted: strength starts from the soles of the feet

I once asked an experienced tennis coach: "What distinguishes a good tennis player from an outstanding tennis player?" He answered without hesitation: "Excellent people stand firm even when moving. Good people stagger." That answer sounds simple, but it touches on the very core of Tai Chi: rooting.

In Tai Chi, "rooting" does not mean standing still like a tree planted in the ground. A tree with deep roots still sways with the wind, but it does not fall. Rooting is the ability to maintain a solid connection to the ground in every position — even when you're walking, turning, jumping. This is the foundation of everything that will follow, for if you have no roots, every force you create leaks into the void.

The difference between "standing" and "rooting"

Most of us "stand" not "root". When standing, the body's weight rests on the heels or on the stiff knee joints, and the mind is somewhere far away—on tomorrow morning's meeting, on the grade, on something that just happened. Rooting is different. Rooting is when you actually feel the three contact points of your foot: the heel, the ball of the foot, and especially the ball of the foot between the toes. In Tai Chi, people call the area between the soles of the feet "Yongquan" — the Yongquan point, where energy is said to travel up the body. Whether you believe in chi or not, the physiological truth is clear: when you actively push down through the soles of your feet, your calf and thigh muscles are activated in a way that transmits force much more effectively than if you just "stand" on your joints.

Try something right now, wherever you're sitting reading. Stand up. Close

your eyes. Put your weight lightly on the soles of your feet, then lift your toes slightly without leaning back. Do you feel a new steadiness, as if someone had pulled you slightly to the ground? That's the roots. A grounded player can never be knocked down by a diving ball, because their center of gravity is in the ground, not in the air.

Low center of gravity and force distribution

One secret about taking root is focus. The human body moves best when the center of gravity — essentially the pelvic area — is low and stable. When you stiffen your knees and stand too straight, your center of gravity is pushed up and you easily fall in all directions. When you bend your knees slightly, your pelvis lowers a bit, your thighs join the force, you become as stable as a four-legged table.

In tennis, this low center of gravity is the reason professional players are always in a semi-sitting position, rather than standing upright like television viewers. They don't do it because it looks cool. They do this because it helps them sprint in all directions in a few hundredths of a second, and helps them absorb feedback from the ground instead of having it bounce back to their knees and lower back.

There's an exercise I call "three-point sensing." Stand shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent. Close your eyes and spend thirty seconds just feeling your heels, balls of your feet, and soles of your feet. Then, open your eyes and walk around the room, trying to keep that feeling under your feet. At first you will feel silly. After a week, you will notice that you move much more smoothly, and people around you will start to ask why you walk so "firmly".

Illusion and Reality — two legs, two roles

Tai Chi divides stances into "empty" (empty, light) and "real" (full, heavy). At any given time, one leg bears most of the weight — the "real" leg — and the other is lighter — the "damaged" leg. This division is not rigid; it transforms continuously. When you step from one foot to the other, the "real" becomes "unreal" and vice versa, as smoothly as flowing water.

Why is this important on the tennis court? Because if both legs are "real" — both carrying the same weight — you're locked in, unable to move away quickly. If both are "bad", you drift away. A good tennis player always knows which foot is "real" at each moment of the shot, and uses that foot as a fulcrum to rotate. When you play forehand, the front foot (left for forehanders) becomes "real"; The entire rotation force of the hip is pushed through that leg to the ground. Understanding the illusion-reality transition is understanding why some people hit the ball with "weight" and others hit it with their bare hands.

Connect the pin and head — the shaft does not break

Rooting does not end at the feet. It is an imaginary straight line that runs from the soles of the feet, through the knees (unlocked), through the hips, through the spine, and up to the neck and top of the head. Tai Chi calls this axis the "middle axis" — and the principle is that it must always be clear. If you tense your neck, tilt your head, or twist your shoulders away from your hips, the shaft breaks, and the force from your legs cannot reach your arms.

I often tell my students to imagine a light rope from the top of their head pulling straight up into the sky, while the roots pull down to the ground. Your body is slightly stretched in opposite directions — but not tensely, but like a steady reed. That rope keeps your head in line, keeps your spine straight, and keeps your mind focused on one point instead of wandering around.

Once you have roots and shafts, the power of every shot will come not from the biceps — which are fragile and easily fatigued — but from the ground, which is infinite. That's why a small person who has practiced Tai Chi for many years can push someone twice his size: they don't use strength, they use dirt.

A note before moving on to the next chapter

Rooting is the only principle you can practice all the time, without a racket, without a court. Waiting for the elevator? Feel the soles of your feet. Sitting in meetings? Consciously lower your weight into the chair. Walk? Keep the shaft straight. Those small minutes accumulate into a completely different body after a few months. The next chapter will talk about what anchors protect: balance and how that axis works when you're actually moving.

CHAPTER 4

Chapter 2 — Axis and dynamic balance: how to stay steady when everything is moving

One of the most common misunderstandings about balance is thinking of it as static. We tell children to "balance" when they are not moving. But on the tennis court, balance is never static. You're running, spinning, jumping, and still have to maintain stability to hit the ball. Tai Chi calls this state "dynamic balance" — and it's what separates players who look like they're struggling with their bodies from those who never seem to lose their rhythm.

The spine is an axis, not a lamppost

Imagine your spine is the axis of a spinning top. A spinning top only stands steady when its axis is straight and the point of contact with the ground is small. If you tilt the shaft, the spinner staggers and falls. The same goes for the human body: when the head and chest are pushed forward too much — a very familiar position for office workers and even tired tennis players — the axis is tilted, and you have to use your muscles to "hardly" keep yourself from falling, instead of using your bones and gravity.

The principle of "Void Spirit Peak Strength" in Tai Chi Quan talks about this: the top of the head gently points up (emptiness peak), while the pelvis and legs play an anchoring role (peak strength). When the two ends of this axis are aligned, the spine naturally lengthens, the discs are less pressured, and you can rotate around that axis like a door rotating around a hinge. The door never "tightens" when opened; it just rotates. Your body should be too.

Dynamic balance and ability to instantly restore center of gravity

On the field, you will always be pulled off your axis — by the force of the shot itself, by the inertia of the breakaway, by an unexpected play. Dynamic balance is not about never being off, but about being able to return axis immediately. Tai Chi calls this mechanism "concentric" and "centrifugal" coordination: when you swing the racket to the side, the center of gravity is pulled outward (centrifugal), and the body automatically corrects by pushing the opposite leg against the ground to pull you toward the center (concentric).

A tennis player who lacks this skill often has the "swing and then fall" pattern - hitting a strong shot and then having to take two steps to collect it. A player with dynamic balance, as soon as the racket passes the ball, his feet begin to pull the center of gravity back, ready for the next step. This difference determines how quickly you counterattack, and also determines the lifespan of your knee.

Manage the "falling point" of focus

Every difficult shot — a shoulder-high burn, a deep lob, a ball that comes in too fast — pulls your center of mass in a different direction. Newbies often "fall" by inertia: when the ball hits the left, they lean to the left, lose their axis, and then miss. Tai Chi practitioners learn to anticipate that falling point and prepare the "real" leg exactly where it will be needed.

There's a simple exercise I call the "balance circle." Stand rooted, slightly bending your knees. Imagine a tennis ball flying around you in a circle at chest level. Don't use a racket, just rotate your hips and move between your legs to "follow" the ball, keeping your head straight and your eyes always looking at the ball. Slow down. When you can follow an imaginary circle without shaking your head, you have begun to understand what dynamic balance is.

When balance becomes instinctive

What's interesting — and what puts many people off — is that dynamic balance cannot be learned by reading. You can understand it completely in theory, then go down to the field and still fall. It just comes through thousands of slow repetitions, until your body automatically adjusts before you even realize it. That's why Tai Chi practice is slow: it's rewriting your spirit reflexes. A player who practices slow properly for six months will have better balance than a player who practices fast incorrectly for six years.

In part two, when we get down on the court and talk about each shot in detail, you'll see rooting (chapter 1) and balance-axis (this chapter) appearing in every corner. They are the background. But foundation alone does not create power. To make the ball go fast, you need to know how to relax and let the force flow through you — the content of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Chapter 3 — Relaxation and kinetic chain: why stiffness is weak

There is a paradox that every Tai Chi master repeats: the weak can defeat the strong. Don't get me wrong — it's not weakness that overcomes strength, but useless tension that is the enemy. When you tense your muscles unnecessarily, you block the very path of force. True relaxation, on the other hand, is to open a path for power to flow from the ground, through the shaft, to the head of the racket.

"Song" — relaxed, not lethargic

The word "Song" (relaxation) in Tai Chi is often misunderstood as letting go or loosening up. Not. Imagine a rope hanging from a dumbbell: the rope is soft, doesn't strain a single muscle, but it still holds the dumbbell because the tension is in the right place. But that is the state — the joints are open, the muscles are not contracting in vain, but the entire structure is still ready. A "single" wrist is not a limp wrist; it is a wrist that does not tense, so that when it needs to tighten, it tightens much faster and stronger than a wrist that has been tense before.

This is extremely important for tennis, as the wrist is where force is ultimately amplified. A stiff wrist from before contact is like a bent whip — when you swing, it can't straighten to deliver power. A relaxed wrist is like a straight whip; The tip of the whip (head of the racket) will exceed the speed of your hand thanks to the flicking effect.

The whip effect — speed from "delay"

This is one of the best concepts of this chapter. When a good forehand player swings the racket, their arms go first, and the racket head "lags" behind for a moment — like a whip being pulled back before it strikes. The

moment the arm stops to change direction, the racket head snaps forward, surpassing hand speed, and throws all the kinetic energy into the ball. In English it is called "lag and snap"; In Tai Chi, it is part of the silk thread principle.

"Silk reeling" — the name sounds soft but the description is very accurate. Imagine you are reeling silk: a continuous, smooth, uninterrupted spiral movement. When you swing the racket according to the silk swing principle, the force does not go in a straight line from the shoulder to the hand, but twists along the body axis like a spring being compressed and then released. It is this spiral force that creates spin and speed that a "hand push" shot could never achieve.

Kinetic chain — from the foot to the head of the racket

Athletics calls it the "kinetic chain" — kinetic chain. The idea is simple: the power of a blow is not generated in one place, but is transmitted sequentially through the joints, from large to small. In a technically correct forehand, the force starts from the feet pushing into the ground, up through the rotating hips, up into the shoulders, down the arms, and explodes into the wrists and racket head. Each joint contributes a little acceleration, and because they add up in sequence, racket head speed can be many times greater than shoulder speed.

The problem is: if one link in the chain is locked — say you brace your wrists, or don't rotate your hips — the whole chain collapses, and the force has to be compensated by the arm muscles. That's when your hands get tired after three games, and that's when tennis elbow starts knocking at the door. Tai Chi, from this perspective, is just training to keep kinetic chain smooth and never compensate with arm muscles.

Hardness and Softness — hardness and softness at the right time

Tai Chi never tells you to "always be soft" or "always be hard". It teaches a coordination called "hardness and softness" — alternating hardness and softness. You relax throughout the swing, then tighten slightly at the moment of contact with the ball, then relax again immediately after. A person who hits "hard all the time" gets tired and injured; A person who is "soft throughout" will walk lightly. The virtuosity lies in the rhythm: soft - hard - soft, fast as the blink of an eye.

I often tell my students to imagine they are swinging a feather first, then an actual whip, then holding a racket. The feel of the three is very different, but the "smoothness" of the feather and the "pop" of the whip are what you want to bring into the stroke. When you hit a shot without tension in your shoulders, and the ball still goes deep and spins, you understand what this chapter is about.

The next chapter will encapsulate the four core principles by talking about the most difficult one: keeping the mind calm even while the body is exploding. That's where Tai Chi really separates itself from a bodyweight workout.

CHAPTER 6

Chapter 4 — Stillness in motion: when the mind does not crumble

The first four principles — rootedness, axis, relaxation, kinetic chain — are all located in the body. This fourth principle lies in a harder place: in your head. Tai Chi has a maxim: "Calm like a mountain, moving like a river" — still like a mountain, moving like a river. Meaning the body can explode, but the mind is still a lake without ripples. This is the line between a "technical" athlete and a "hard to beat" athlete.

Why does the head matter?

When the pressure comes — a break point, a ball coming too fast, a decision that needs to be made in two seconds — the primitive part of our brain reacts in two ways: fight or flight. Heart beats fast, breathing is shallow, muscles tense, and the "over-analyzing" head starts running hundreds of disaster scenarios. In Tai Chi, this state is called "disorder" — a disturbed mind — and it ruins every technique you've ever learned. Have you seen good tennis players suddenly miss the simplest shots at the decisive moment? It's not the limbs; It's due to mental disorder.

Return to Dan Dien — an anchor for the mind

Tai Chi Quan has an extremely practical tool called "returning to Dan Dien". Dantian is the area below the navel, considered the energy center, but physiologically, it is where you lower your center of gravity and breathe deeply into your belly. When your mind starts to panic, you can't "command" it to calm down — that's often counterproductive. But you can bring your attention down to the Dantian: take a deep breath into your belly, feel your belly expand, and pull your mind down with that breath. Within seconds, the heartbeat slowed, and the mind stopped racing.

I've used this trick thousands of times, not only on the field but in the most stressful meetings of my career. When someone asks a difficult question and I feel like I'm about to react emotionally instead of intellectually, I lower my weight in the chair slightly, breathe in, and "return to Dan Dien." It doesn't make the problem easy, but it gives me back the power to choose how to react.

"Ting" — listening instead of reflecting

Another concept I will use a lot in part two is "Ting" (hearing, or "listening"). In martial arts, Ting is the ability to sense an opponent's intention before it becomes an action — through the pressure of the hands, through the change of center of gravity, through the rhythm of breathing. On the tennis court, Ting translates to the ability to "read" your opponent: you don't wait for the ball to cross the net before reacting, you read their shoulders and hips as soon as they swing, and you've started moving before the ball even leaves the racket strings.

The prerequisite for Ting is the relaxation of the spirit essence. A tight head is like an over-stressed drum — a light tap is noisy, and you can't hear anything else. A calm head is like the surface of a lake — even a dropped pebble causes ripples. Ting is not a superpower; it is undisturbed attention.

The state of "Infinity" and flow

Tai Chi starts from "Infinity" — a state of emptiness, no bias, no judgment. When you stand in front of a ball with no expectations ("I have to serve this point"), no fear ("I often miss here"), you are in Infinity. From there, every reaction is fresh, adaptive, not stuck in habits.

Westerners call this state "flow". You've experienced it: at your best, time slows down, your body automatically does the right thing, and you don't "think" about each shot. Tai Chi is one of the world's oldest training

systems for proactively entering that state, rather than waiting for it to happen by chance. And the key, again, is stillness in the head — built from the previous four principles, because a body that is not rooted, not balanced, not relaxed can never allow the mind to be still.

With these four principles in hand, we are ready to take to the field. Part two will apply them to each tennis technique in turn — starting with the seemingly simplest but where most people fail: footwork.

CHAPTER 7

Part II — Tai Chi on the tennis court

Every shot starts from the feet. This section brings four core principles to the ground, from the way you step to the way you keep your head when the score is 30-40.

CHAPTER 8

Chapter 5 — Footwork: the feet are where the stroke begins

People often think of tennis as an arm sport, because the arms are what hold the racket and touch the ball. Wrong. Consider a professional match slowed down: most of the time, the players don't touch the ball at all. They are running, walking, aligning. The strike is just the conclusion of a sequence of moves that started two seconds ago. In Tai Chi, we say "the mind leads the qi, the qi leads the body" — the thoughts lead the breath, the breath leads the body. On the field, your feet are where that intention becomes reality.

Stay rooted even while running

Chapter 1 talks about rooting while standing. But footwork requires a different kind of rooting: rooting on the move. A bad player runs by lifting both feet off the ground and "jumping" to the ball — leaving them floating, with no control of their center of gravity. A good tennis player always keeps one foot in contact with the court, always knows which foot is about to go "real", and always keeps the center of gravity low when changing direction. That is dynamic rooting — and it allows them to move in all directions without slipping or falling.

I often tell my students to imagine the field is a thin sheet of glass. If you run too hard and jump too high, the glass will break. You must glide, not step. That feeling — of someone always having three points of their feet touching the ground — is the foundation of all good footwork.

Split-step — the heartbeat of the match

Split-step is a small jump that a tennis player makes as soon as his opponent touches the ball. It looks simple but is what separates the high level from the movement level. In terms of Tai Chi, a split-step is the moment you "cool down" — lower your center of gravity, shifting both legs into a ready state, with your roots suspended but steady. From that position, you can move in any direction in a few milliseconds.

A common mistake is to split-step too early (you fall to the ground before your opponent hits, then freeze) or too late (you get caught in a running position). The correct rhythm is: the opponent swings the racket → you jump slightly, lower your center of gravity, legs a little wider than your shoulders → as soon as the ball leaves the string of the opponent's racket, you break away. Split-step is not a step; it is a breathing of the whole body.

Horizontal movement — a glide, not a step

When the ball flies horizontally, most beginners "shuffle" or "crossover" stiffly, then stop suddenly to hit. Each sudden stop was a shock to the knees. Tai Chi teaches a smoother way of moving: you glide, shifting reality between your legs continuously, and when you get into position, the front leg becomes "real" smoothly — there's no "braking" at all. You stop by weight distribution, not by shoe friction.

The exercise I call "listening to the ground" is very effective here: stand on the court, close your eyes, and walk sideways in a slow rhythm, trying to feel every millimeter of your soles touching the ground. When you open your eyes, you will find yourself moving more smoothly, and your knees will forgive you.

Deepen and recover — the art of coming back to center

After each shot, you are pulled away from the center of the court. Good players don't stay in place to celebrate their shots; they immediately "recover" — walk toward the center, return to the ready position. Tai Chi calls this "circular return": every strike is an arc, and you must close that arc by returning to the axis. A player who does not know how to recover will always be passive in the next phase, because they are never truly ready.

Synchronize breathing and steps

One thing that few people pay attention to: good footwork goes hand in hand with breathing. Tai Chi has the process "Inhale - Step - Breathe". As you step forward, you inhale; When you strike or step back, you exhale. Continuous breathing keeps the body from "kinking" — a state in which a tennis player holds his breath while concentrating, then quickly exhausts himself. I once trained a student just by making him count his breaths while moving, and he got better just because he stopped holding his breath.

A one-year roadmap for your feet

If you're serious, here's how I break down five footwork workouts:

Quarter 1 — Identification and calibration. The first three months just pay attention. Record yourself playing, see if you're walking stiffly, if you're holding your breath, if you're stopping suddenly. Practice split-stepping slowly until it becomes reflexive.

Quarter 2 — Coordination and flexibility. Add a balance exercise with a tennis ball (toss the ball up, move in a circle to maintain balance). Incorporate "Tai Chi walking" into shadow tennis — play without the ball, just practice moving and turning.

Quarter 3 — Acceleration and integration. Speed it up, but keep it smooth. If you start to stagger, go back to Q2.

Quarter 4 — Instinctiveization. Now footwork is no longer something you think about; it just happens. You can focus on tactics instead of legs.

Footwork is the most boring foundation of tennis — no one watches a match because of footwork. But ask any tennis player who has been playing long enough, and they'll tell you: every big rise they've had has started with their feet. The next chapter will talk about the first shot you make with those feet — your forehand.

CHAPTER 9

Chapter 6 — Forehand: when power flows from the ground to the head of the racket

The forehand is the shot most of us learn first, and it's also the shot people get wrong the most — because it's so "natural" that everyone thinks they got it right. But observe: a technically correct Tai Chi forehand looks completely different. It wasn't the arm swinging strongly forward, but the whole body twisting like a spring, then releasing. Strength does not lie in the hands. It's on the ground, and your hand is just the conduit.

Feedback force from the ground

Every powerful blow begins with a downward thrust. When you step into the ball and put your weight on your "real" foot, the ground pushes back — ground reaction force. This is the first force of kinetic chain. If you stand on your heels or hover, you waste this force, forcing your arms to compensate. A Tai Chi forehand always has an invisible "stomp": the feet push the ground, the hips rotate, and the force goes up.

Translating Illusion - Reality through blows

Remember the illusion-reality principle from chapter 1? In forehand, it works like this: before hitting, the center of gravity is on the back foot (the "real" foot in preparation). As you rotate your hips forward, the center of gravity shifts to the front leg — the front leg becomes "real" right at the point of contact. The shot is not the hand pushing the ball; it's your body "shifting" the weight from the back leg to the front leg, and the arms just follow. People who hit "with their hands" keep their weight on the back foot throughout the swing — that's why they're weak and tired.

Spinal axis — hinge should not break

When the hips rotate, the head and chest must rotate in the same rhythm, not tilted. If you twist your shoulders while still looking back at the ball behind you, the shaft breaks, and force leaks. Tai Chi calls this straight axis the "Void Spirit Peak" - the top of the head is slightly upward, the pelvis is anchored down, the spine is a straight line that can be rotated around. Hold that shaft and your shots will be deep and controlled, no matter how hard you hit.

Torsional force and hip-shoulder misalignment

This is the biggest secret of strong forehand. To create spiral force, the hips and shoulders must rotate in sequence — hips first, shoulders next, with a slight delay called "out of phase." As you prepare, you twist your hips and shoulders together as far back as you can (springing). When hitting, the hips shoot forward first, then the shoulders follow. That lag creates torque like a whip. If the hips and shoulders rotate at the same time (as beginners often do), there is no torque — you just push straight, and the ball goes flat and weak.

The principle of "silk reeling" here is that continuous spiral: from the legs, through the hips, over the shoulders, down to the arms, like a silk thread being reeled - no breaks, no jerks. I call the exercise "swing without the ball": stand rooted, swing your forehand slowly without holding the racket, focus on turning your hips in front of your shoulders. Do it hundreds of times in front of a mirror, until that phase difference becomes a memory muscle, not a memory memory.

Relax your wrists — the whip

We talked about the whip effect in chapter 3. In forehand, it is most evident at the wrist. The wrist must be relaxed throughout the swing, allowing the racket head to "lag" behind the arm, then "pop" forward at the

point of contact. If you tighten your wrists in advance, the racket head will be pulled along with your arm and will never be able to exceed speed. The exercise of "swinging the racket like a silk dance" — swinging slowly, imagining the head of the racket is a strip of silk following the arm — helps build this feeling. When you finish a shot and your wrist doesn't get tired, you've done it right.

Point of contact — front of the body

The ball needs to be touching the front of your body, not close to your side or behind your back. When you stand rooted and rotate correctly, the ideal contact point is at hip level, a moderate arm's length away from your body. Touching too early (before the rotation is complete) is weak; If you touch too late (behind your back), you will lose control. Eye sight and touch point must be synchronized: look at the ball at that exact point, not looking at the opponent, not looking at the net.

Follow-through and joint protection

After touching the ball, do not stop the racket suddenly. Tai Chi is called "the never-ending circle" — the racket continues in a smooth arc, releasing excess energy instead of bouncing back into the shoulders. A hard follow-through will jerk the shoulder joint; One smooth stroke will bring you back to a ready position for the next step. And as soon as the racket passes the ball, the center of gravity begins to return to the center.

Three classic mistakes

Arm-hitting: is a sign that the shoulders are tired after a few games and the ball lacks weight. Cause: forgot to connect leg — hip. Correct it with the exercise "rotate without the ball", telling yourself the force of going Legs → Hips → Shoulders → Racket.

Loss of balance: sign is leaning back after the blow. Cause: shifting the center of gravity at the wrong rhythm. Correct it by playing slowly

(slow-motion), clearly feeling the moment the front leg becomes "real" and maintaining that position until the end of the racket arc.

Wrist stiffness: the sign is that the sound of the ball hitting the racket sounds "clunk", the ball goes straight without spin. Cause: holding the racket too tightly for fear of breaking it. Fix it by "swinging the racket like silk dancing", completely relaxing, only tightening slightly at the right moment of contact with the ball.

The forehand is the shot you will use the most. Practice it according to the principles of Tai Chi, and after a while you will notice: you hit harder without getting more tired. The next chapter will look at its more difficult cousin — the backhand.

CHAPTER 10

Chapter 7 — Backhand: the art of symmetry

If the forehand is a shot of favorable strength, then the backhand is a shot of knowing one's weakness. Most tennis players — even professionals — have their backhand as their weaker point. The reason is not because the backhand is inherently difficult, but because we practice it less often, and because the human body is naturally asymmetrical: the dominant shoulder is stronger, the hip rotates more easily to one side. Tai Chi approaches the backhand with the philosophy of "symmetrical balance" — closing the gap between the two sides of your body.

Biomechanics and asymmetry

When playing forehand, you naturally rotate your hips forward; body axis responds. When playing a backhand, especially a one-handed backhand, you have to rotate your hips backwards — a move that most beginners do incorrectly by just swinging their arms across, leaving their hips stationary. The result: a "waving" backhand, weak and error-prone. Tai Chi calls the chest-opening position ("Hang bai bai") — open chest, relaxed shoulders, straight back — as the foundation for both sides of the body to rotate. A person with a hunchback and hunched shoulders will never have a good backhand.

Kinetic chain reverse

The backhand is a "reverse kinetic chain" — kinetic chain goes in the opposite direction of the forehand, but the principle is still the same: force from legs → hips → shoulders → hands. The difference is that the hips must rotate in the opposite direction, and with a one-handed backhand, the arm is longer (without the other hand supporting it) so greater axial stability is required. With a two-handed backhand, you get more support from both arms, but at the expense of a shorter reach and limited hip

rotation — each of which comes at a cost.

Management of Vanity - Real for backhand

Whether one-handed or two-handed, the principle of illusion-reality is the same as in chapter 6: the center of gravity shifts from the back foot to the front foot at the point of contact. With two-handed backhands, many people make the mistake of "playing with the top hand" — the dominant arm (lower hand) pulls the entire stroke, while the left hand (top hand) just does it. Fix it with the "balancing scale" exercise: imagine both hands pushing the racket together, and your body weight, not your arm muscles, creating the force. With a one-handed backhand, the challenge is to keep the shaft from pulling out of the way with only one hand resisting the ball's force — that's where the "rooting" from chapter 1 comes in, because your right foot holds you back.

Rotate the shaft and the shaft to create spin

To get topspin (degrees topspin) on the backhand, you still need spiral force. The "torsion" mechanism from the hip to the head of the racket operates like a forehand, just in the opposite direction. "String" helps you pull the racket up in a spiral when hitting the ball, creating spin without having to swing hard. Two-handed backhand players often generate spin more easily than one-handed players, because two hands allow for more precise control of the racket face angle — a pure biomechanical advantage.

Wrist relaxation and "lag"

Just like forehand, the wrist in the backhand must relax so that the racket head "lags" and then "pops". With a one-handed backhand, if you brace your wrists, the shot will be stiff and the ball will flutter. Coordinating the racket face angle through relaxation — not muscle compression — is the only way to control the ball with only one hand. The exercise is still

"swinging the racket like silk dancing", but this time with the left hand.

Touchpoints and the art of navigation

The ideal contact point is still the front of the body. But with the backhand, the "front" is a bit different: the ball needs to touch the left chest area, not the armpit. The art of navigation here is imbued with spirit Tai Chi: "borrow force" and "neutralize". When your opponent hits a heavy shot to your backhand, don't fight back — use the racket face angle and hip rotation to "borrow" some of that force, redirecting it elsewhere. This is the principle of "using the opponent's force" that Tai Chi is famous for.

Three-stage roadmap for backhand

Phase 1 — Foundation: practice the "Hung rattling" position and reverse hip rotation properly, no need for a fast ball. Use the "balancing scale" exercise.

Phase 2 — Integration: adds suspension and wrist relaxation, creating stable topspin at medium speed.

Stage 3 — Instinct: put into real matches, handle the ball quickly and unexpectedly without panic.

The backhand will never be as "natural" as the forehand, because your body is asymmetrical from birth. But that asymmetry is an opportunity: when you narrow it with Tai Chi, you don't just have a better backhand — you have a much more balanced body. The next chapter comes to shots close to the net, where peace of mind is more important than muscle strength.

CHAPTER 11

Chapter 8 — Volley: quick reflexes from a quiet mind

Catching the net — volley — is where tennis and Tai Chi meet most clearly. Why? Because a volley is a shot so fast that you don't have time to "think". You have to react within milliseconds. And according to Tai Chi, quick reactions don't come from fast muscles, but from an undisturbed mind—what we call "stillness within movement."

Static in dynamic — the prerequisite of speed

There is a paradox: to react quickly, you must be still. A tense, anxious, "over-analyzing" head will be much slower than a calm head. Think about it: when you're startled by a noise, your body reacts before your brain can even "understand" what the noise is. It is a reflex without analysis. Volley requires the same state. Tai Chi calls this relaxation of spirit essence "Sōng" — a calm lake surface where even a pebble ripples.

The "Infinity" mindset — empty, unbiased — is what you need when standing at the net. If you've decided "I'm going to hit this shot hard," you're stuck in expectations and will be slow to react when the ball comes your way. Standing at the net with the mind of Infinity, you are ready for all possibilities.

Suspended roots attached to the net

At the net, you can't stay rooted as deep as the back of the court, because you need to move short and fast. Tai Chi has the concept of "floating root" — you still have roots, but those roots are light, ready to break out in all directions. The legs are slightly bent, the center of gravity is low, but not completely concentrated on one leg. The distinction between reality and reality in short moves at the right grid is extremely sensitive: you glide left

by shifting the "real" to your left foot for a split second, then return to the center again.

The "balancing dance at the net" exercise is very good: stand at the net, let your partner toss the ball lightly in different directions, and you only move your small feet, keep your balance, don't swing your arms big. The goal is not to play well, but to maintain that steady suspension.

"Ting" — listen to get ahead

We met Ting in chapter 4. At the net, it is most alive. Instead of "reacting" to the ball after it passes the net, you "anticipate" it: read your opponent's shoulders and hips as they swing, using your peripheral vision to feel the entire court instead of just looking at the ball. A good player at the net seems to "know" where the ball is going — but really, they just listen better.

"Reading intent" exercise: stand opposite someone who is practicing, not holding a racket, just guessing the direction of the ball from their shoulder movements. Do it until you guess correctly eight times out of ten from just the shoulders and hips. That's Ting.

Nhu and Cuong in the volley

Tai Chi distinguishes between "Soft" (soft, yielding) and "Hard" (hard, decisive). In volley, you need both:

Nhu — Block volley: when the ball comes fast and hard, don't swing it. Let the racket "receive" the ball, using racket angle and relaxation to redirect it away — like water flowing away from a rock. This is "neutralization".

Cuong — Punch volley: when the ball comes slowly and you want to finish, squeeze lightly and push firmly. But this "erection" still comes from the axis and center of gravity, not from swinging big arms.

The flexible transformation between Soft and Hard - soft when you need

to yield, hard when you need to stop - is the essence of Volley as well as Tai Chi. A person who only knows how to "hit" will fail on fast balls; A person who only knows how to "receive" will never score points.

Jump — Glide — Touch process and recovery

Footwork at the net is encapsulated in three rhythms: Jump (split-step slightly when the opponent hits), Glide (short step to the ball), Touch (catch the ball with a static racket surface). Breathing synchronized with footsteps: breathe when jumping, breathe when touching. After each volley, "return" in a circle — return to the center, ready for the next phase. A player standing dead at the net (not returning) will be caught immediately.

Two common mistakes

Over-swinging: volley without swinging. Swinging loudly at the net is suicide, because the ball comes too fast. Corrected by using a static racket head, only adjusting the angle.

Static feet: is a sign that you are caught in one place. Correct it with the Jump — Glide — Touch process and the "balancing dance" exercise.

Volley teaches a lesson bigger than tennis: in the moments when quick reactions are needed, a still head is the sharpest weapon. The next chapter comes with the most explosive shot on the court — the smash.

CHAPTER 12

Chapter 9 — Smash: explosive power from relaxation

Smash — smashing the ball — is the only shot on the court where you are in the air at contact. There is no ground underfoot. For most players, that means losing roots, losing shafts, and hitting by hand. But a Tai Chi smash originates from the ground more than any other stroke, because you have to "compress" the force from the ground before bouncing. The paradox of smash is: the more relaxed you are, the stronger the smash.

Kinetic chain four stages

A technically correct smash transmits force through four stages: (1) legs push off the ground, (2) hips rotate and compress, (3) shoulders and arms extend, (4) wrists pop. Like any other shot, in the smash, phase one — the foot pushing the ground — is vital, as it is the only thing that gets you in the air and creates ground force. If you jump without "stomping" (without compressing the ground), you are just jumping, not smashing.

The paradox of stiffness

This is the most important lesson of this chapter. When people try to hit hard, they tense their whole body — stiff shoulders, stiff arms, stiff wrists. But that stiffness locks kinetic chain: the force cannot run smoothly from the legs to the racket head, but gets stuck in the shoulders. The result is a "stiff" blow that sounds pitted, and the shoulder experiences recoil. Tai Chi calls this the "paradox of stiffness": the harder you try, the weaker you become. Explosive power only comes when you relax as much as possible, let the force run freely, and then pop out at the top of the racket.

Strength from the vertical direction

Unlike horizontal shots, smash takes advantage of vertical force — the force you create when jumping. The principle of "controlled sinking" says that before you bounce up, you "sink" slightly — bend your knees, lower your center of gravity — like a spring being compressed. The deeper the fall (within the control limit), the greater the rebound force. When turned on, the spinal axis must be stable — the head is straight, not tilted — so that the vertical force is not dissipated horizontally.

The "Inhale — Jump — Breathe" rhythm is important: inhale deeply when collapsing (compression), exhale when rebounding and pulsing (release). I call the exercise "static jumping": stand rooted, practice the rhythm of collapsing - jumping - lowering the center of gravity smoothly, without the ball, just so that the body remembers the vertical thrust.

Torsional force and shoulder-hip coordination

When bouncing, the upper body is still twisted: the hips and shoulders are out of phase, creating a torque like a rotating spring. When you stretch your arm to strike, that twisting force turns into a straight downward thrust. The combination of "hardness - softness" in this rotation phase is identical to chapter 6: relax when twisting, gently tighten when releasing. A person who is stiff when rotating will not be able to create torque, and the smash will lack "twist".

Relax your wrists to achieve maximum speed

In the air, the wrists must be even more relaxed, because the racket head "lags" more when you stretch your arms down. This "lagging", when turned on at the right time, gives the maximum racket head speed across the court. The combination of "loose" (relaxed when stretched) and "tight" (slightly tightened when touched) is all that prevents a smash from being a harmless swing. The "invisible wrist" exercise — swinging your arms in

the air, imagining the wrist as the loosest joint — helps build sensation.

Follow-through and shoulder protection

After contact with the ball, the racket continues in a circular arc ("never-ending circle"), releasing excess energy instead of bouncing back into the shoulder. Then you "recover" - land smoothly, center of gravity stable, ready for the next ball. A smash where you land wobbly is a failed smash, no matter how fast the ball goes.

Two serious errors

Arm-hitting: is a sign of shoulder pain and lack of power on the ball. Correct using a four-stage process, telling yourself the force is from Legs → Hips → Shoulders → Arms.

Axis collapse: sign is leaning when turned on, hitting and slipping. Correct it with the "static jumping" exercise and keep your head straight while flying.

Smash is the flashiest shot, but also the most injury-prone if it goes wrong. The next step — serving — also requires extreme stillness, as it's the only shot you have complete control over. And a serve with poor technique is the shortest path to a damaged shoulder.

CHAPTER 13

Chapter 10 — Serve: precision and power from stillness

The serve is the strangest shot in tennis. It's the only time you have complete control of the ball — no opponents, no surprises. In theory, it's the easiest shot. In fact, it is the one that scares people the most, because all the pressure is created by you. Tai Chi approaches serving not as a "smash," but as a process of "energy transmission" — from the ground, through the shaft, to the top of the head, then to the ball.

Preparation phase — establishing stillness

Before tossing the ball, there is a moment that few players pay attention to: the "concentration" moment. Tai Chi teaches that every great movement must begin with stillness. When you're behind the service line, take two seconds to return to Dan Dien — take a deep breath, lower your center of gravity, and clear your head of expectations ("I have to win this point"). A calm mind allows the body to coordinate correctly; A chaotic mind will make your hands shake when tossing the ball.

Next is rooting: feet shoulder-width apart, center of gravity low, clearly distinguishing reality from reality (light front legs, slightly heavier back legs). The preparation position is not standing up straight, but a state of "ready to explode" — like a fierce beast shuddering before a jump, not a person waiting.

Toss the ball — the "forceless" technique

Most serving errors come from tossing the ball. People toss by "throwing" the ball up, causing it to spin and fall in the wrong place. Tai Chi teaches "forceless" tossing: the left hand simply places the ball lightly in the air, as if you were placing it on an invisible shelf, rather than throwing it. The ball

falls straight down quietly, and you have a consistent point of contact every time. Symmetry and counter-balance between the left hand swinging and the right hand swinging is key: when the left hand comes up, the hips and shoulders automatically balance, keeping the axis straight.

The "toss the ball in silence" exercise is very simple but transforms serve: stand still, just practice tossing the ball so that it lands in the exact same spot in front of you ten times in a row, without holding the racket. When you roll standard, serve naturally corrects by half.

Kinetic chain from the foot to the head of the racket

When swinging the racket, the force starts from the feet pushing the ground (ground-up force), to the rotating hips (torsion effect - spring effect), to the shoulders, and explodes in the wrists. The role of "wrist lag" - wrist lag - here is extremely large: the racket head lags behind when you stretch your arms up, then bounces forward at the highest point. That's why a professional serve can reach more than 200 km/h even though the player's hands are not big. The exercise "swinging the racket in the chain" helps you feel that kinetic chain is like a continuous, unbroken chain.

Three types of serves

Flat (straight): pure power, low spin, high risk. Use when you need to score points directly and are confident in accuracy.

Slice (horizontal spin): the racket cuts across the ball, creating deflection spin, making the ball safer and harder to hit. This is the serve "dexterity" of Tai Chi — not the strongest but the hardest to punish.

Kick (vortex changes direction): the ball bounces high and deflects, very difficult to block. Requires delicate spiral coordination.

The "three serves in one beat" drill helps you switch between them without changing your position — a sign of self-control.

Follow-through and protect the shoulder joint

After touching the ball, the racket moves in a "continuous circle", without stopping suddenly. The center of gravity is stable upon landing — you step into the field, not fall back. A stiff follow-through is the leading cause of shoulder injuries in heavy hitters.

Three errors and the route

Double fault frequently: The root is often a wrong throw and a confused mind. Correct by "tossing the ball in silence" and two seconds of contemplation before each shot.

Loss of strength in the third set: sign of serving using biceps instead of kinetic chain. Correct it with the "swing the racket in the chain" exercise to transfer force to the legs.

Three-phase roadmap: foundation (toss the ball + calm) → integration (kinetic chain + three styles) → instinct (serve under pressure).

Serving is where you talk to yourself before each point. Get it right, and you don't just have a weapon — you have a ritual that calms your mind every time you step up to the line. But every shot on the court requires a stable body. The next chapter talks about how Tai Chi keeps that body from breaking.

CHAPTER 14

Chapter 11 — Injury prevention: playing harder is playing harder

There's a saying among athletes: "Sports doesn't end when you win, it ends when you get hurt." Tennis is especially cruel in a quiet way — it rarely breaks a bone right away, but accumulates small amounts of damage until one day the shoulder or elbow refuses to cooperate. Tai Chi doesn't turn you into an invulnerable superman, but it does get at the root cause: accumulated micro-stress.

Enemy number one: cumulative micro-stress

The core principle here is very Tai Chi: injury does not come from one big blow, but from thousands of small blows with the wrong position. Every time you flex your wrists, twist your shoulders out of alignment, or land on your heels, you send "microscopic" stress into your tendons and joints. Alone it is harmless. Added up thousands of times, it becomes tennis elbow, a torn rotator cuff. Tai Chi prevents it by immediately correcting that "microcosm" — relaxation, alignment, rooting — so there is nothing to accumulate.

The three most common damaged areas

Tennis elbow: tendons on the outside of the elbow become inflamed due to the wrist straining upon contact. Correct this with a "wrist spiral" — gently rotating the wrist in a circular motion to soften the tendons — and with the wrist relaxation principle from chapter 3.

Shoulder (rotator cuff): shoulder rotator cuff tendons are overloaded when serving and smashing incorrectly kinetic chain. The "shoulder groove" exercise — gently rolling the shoulders, relaxing the shoulder girdle — keeps this area smooth.

Wrist (De Quervain): thumb tendonitis caused by holding the racket too tightly. The "cloud hands" exercise — the floating cloud movement of Tai Chi — both relaxes the wrist and lubricates the fingers.

Root your arms and open your chest

Two exercises I especially recommend: "arm rooting" — connecting leg strength to the arm through the shaft, so the shoulder doesn't carry the load alone; and "Ham haphazard" (open chest, straight back) — prevents hunchback, opens the chest, helping the shoulders naturally position themselves instead of leaning forward. A hunchback will never have strong shoulders.

Protect your lower back

The lower back is the silent victim of tennis — every swing to get to the deep ball exhausts it. The mechanism that causes pain lies in rotating the wrong axis (twisting the spine instead of rotating the hips). Tai Chi's version of the "cat-cow" exercise — slow spinal waves — and the "hip spiral" — rotating the hips independently of the back — disperse force away from the spine. The "Void Spirit Peak Power" principle from chapter 2 comes into play here: the head is light, the pelvis is anchored, the mid-back is relaxed.

Warm-up "Happiness" and cool-down "Revival"

Before practicing, spend 15 minutes on the "Hanh Phuc" warm-up process: relax joints, align the axis, and do a few slow Tai Chi positions to help blood rush to the muscles. After exercising, 15 minutes of "Revival" cool-down: lower breathing rate, gentle stretching, a few minutes of calm so that the spirit nervous system goes into recovery mode. Skipping these two procedures is giving up half of your athletic lifespan.

Nutrition and recovery

Tai Chi views the body as a garden that needs tending, not like a machine that needs gas. A few pillars:

Omega-3 and healthy fats — naturally reduces inflammation in tendons and joints.

Vitamin C and Collagen — ingredients that rebuild tendons and connective tissue, especially useful after heavy training sessions.

Magnesium — mineral relaxes muscles and protects spirit menstrual flow, helping you avoid cramps and sleep deeply.

Turmeric (curcumin) — a natural anti-inflammatory, this old man takes it every day.

Sleep — the ultimate recovery "medicine". Without deep sleep, all the above nutrition becomes meaningless, because the body only truly repairs when you sleep.

Roadmap to building a "trauma-free" body

My "70/30" rule: never practice tennis at 100% capacity. Keep 70% intensity, spend 30% on control and relaxation — you will play many times longer than someone who trains 100% and then gets injured. "Four big" exercises — the four pillars of the body (legs, hips, shoulders, wrists) — maintain balanced strength. Between matches, apply "micro-recovery": a few minutes of relaxation and deep breathing after each set. And a six-month roadmap to build a sustainable foundation: the first month is just alignment, the next three months build shaft strength, the last two months integrate into competition.

Injuries are not a condition of age. It is a condition of neglect. A fifty-year-old tennis player who practices Tai Chi correctly is usually stronger than a twenty-year-old tennis player who practices incorrectly.

The next chapter will be about something even more cruel than injury: your head.

CHAPTER 15

Chapter 12 — Competitive psychology: when your biggest opponent is yourself

There are players who win every practice match and lose every important match. It's not because the technique is bad. That's because when pressure appears, their heads "freeze". In Tai Chi, we call that state "mental confusion," and we have a system of mind training that is older than any Western sports psychology book ever written.

Choking mechanism

When pressure is high, your body activates the "fight or flight" response: your heart races, your breathing becomes shallow, and — most importantly — the prefrontal cortex, where you make rational decisions, is "overridden" by the amygdala, the fear center. As a result, you play using panic instincts instead of practiced technique. Athletes also have the bad habit of "catastrophizing" — imagining all kinds of bad scenarios — which only makes the amygdala more aroused.

Mental Rooting

We had "rooting" the body in chapter 1. Here it is "rooting the mind" — a way to anchor the head when things shake. The first tool is "returning to Dan Dien" (chapter 4): when pressure comes, lower your center of gravity, breathe deeply into your belly, drawing your attention downward. It returns control to the prefrontal cortex.

The second tool is the "Hung Bau Bau" — open chest, dropped shoulders. Have you noticed that when you're scared, your shoulders automatically roll forward and your chest tightens? It is a physiological defense posture. Open your chest, and the mind automatically becomes less defensive. The third tool is the "neutral gaze" — looking at the ball or net with a

non-judgmental, no-expectation gaze, like the state of Infinity. The "letting go before big points" exercise: before each break-point or match-point, spend three seconds just breathing and letting go of any outcome, because you can't control the outcome — only the shot.

Warrior Mindset

Tai Chi defines a "warrior" not as someone who is aggressive, but someone who remains calm under fire. It combines "Softness - Hardness" in psychology: softness (accepting mistakes, not persistent) and firmness (decisiveness in the next shot). The daily warrior routine is very specific — not shouting slogans, but: every morning align your axis and take a deep breath, every time a mistake happens, let it go for three breaths instead of holding on. Those small habits build a mind that is not easily "frozen".

Handling special situations

Break-point (break point): this is when the mind is at its best. Apply "letting go before the critical point" and slow breathing.

Set-point and match-point: when you are in power, the pitfall is "tightening up because you want to finish". Play as if it were a normal point — as excessive effort will break kinetic chain.

When losing (comeback): "return to the present" mindset — don't count the score, just play one shot at a time. Tai Chi is called "letting go of the past, not worrying about the future".

While winning (maintaining lead): implicit danger is subjective. Keep calm as if you were losing; Don't change your pace just because you're ahead.

Sperm recovery spirit

Between sets, you have 90–120 seconds — enough for the spirit nervous system to cool down if you know how (take deep breaths, relax your shoulders, take sips). After a match, the "golden 24 hours" are the

recovery window: sleep early, eat well, and — importantly — don't "replay" the match in your head that night, as it prevents mental recovery. Gradually, build a "psychological library": moments when you have successfully overcome pressure, so that every time you are stressed, you can find an example to prove that you can do it.

A one-year roadmap for competition psychology

Quarter 1 — Platform: practice "returning to Dan Dien" and a neutral outlook in practice, not needing a match.

Quarter 2 — Experience: applied to friendly matches, learning to let go of mistakes.

Quarter 3 — Stable: maintains composure in competitive matches.

Quarter 4 — Proficiency: psychology becomes instinct; Pressure no longer makes you "freeze".

Competitive psychology cannot be learned by reading a chapter. It's practiced through every score, every painful loss, every time you choose to breathe instead of screaming. But once you get the hang of it, you realize: tennis was never really about the ball. The next chapter turns the attention beyond yourself — to your opponents.

CHAPTER 16

Chapter 13 — Reading the game: playing with your eyes before playing with your racket

A good tennis player sees the game; A great tennis player sees his opponent. The difference lies in where you direct your attention. Most players just look at the ball — and that's the bare minimum. Tai Chi, with its tradition of "passive observation", teaches a deeper way of seeing: one that is not quick to judge, is not caught up in expectations, and therefore sees what others miss.

The difference between "look" and "see"

There is a story in martial arts: a student bragged to his teacher that he "saw" his opponent attack. The teacher said: "You see with your eyes, but you don't see with your mind." "Looking" is noting the surface — where the ball is, where the opponent is. To "see" is to understand — what is the intention behind that movement. Tai Chi calls this state of seeing "No Mind" (Mushin): the mind is empty, without prejudice, so all information entering is not filtered through fear or hope. When you stand on the court with the belief that "he has a weak backhand", you have stopped seeing, because you are only waiting for what you believe, not observing what actually happens.

"Ting" — listening to intentions through the body

We met Ting in chapter 4 as the ability to sense force. When reading the game, Ting translates to reading your opponent's body language before the ball leaves their racket strings. The three most reliable signals:

Ready position: where your opponent places their feet and turns their shoulders while waiting for the ball tells you which direction they intend to play. A shoulder that has rotated halfway to the left promises a shot in that

direction.

Shoulders and hips: just before swinging, the hips are where the force originates. If your opponent's hips rotate to the right, the ball will go right, regardless of what their hands do. This is the earliest and most difficult signal to fake.

Psychology between points: The way your opponent holds the racket when they've just lost a point — slack, tight, or shaking their head — reveals their confidence level more than any statistic. A person who has just lost a point and still keeps his shoulders open is dangerous; A winner who curls his shoulders is someone who is about to collapse.

Find strengths and weaknesses

Each opponent is an asymmetrical set. Your job is to draw that map quickly: where their strong side is, where their weak side is, are they better at attacking than defending or vice versa, and the "hot spots" — the weakest shots they give out when the pressure increases. In Tai Chi, this is the reverse art of "Hung Hung and Bamboo": instead of opening your chest, you read how your opponent opens or contracts, thereby predicting confidence. Hot spots often appear in unexpected plays - at that time their technique has not yet "acted", and their true nature appears.

Neutralize — neutralize power instead of blocking it

Once you have read your opponent, Tai Chi does not teach you to "block" their power but to "neutralize" it. Three tools:

Borrow force (redirect): if your opponent hits you very hard, don't confront. Use racket face angle and hip rotation to redirect that force — like water avoiding a rock. You don't win with strength, you win by letting their strength take the ball where you want it to go.

Change of pace: Every opponent has a familiar rhythm. Sudden changes

in speed and spin cause them to break their rhythm, because they are guessing based on the old rhythm.

Change of direction: hits the space where the opponent can't move, based on the weakness map you just drew.

Build a tactical map in battle

You don't draw this map once and then quit. It evolves throughout the match:

Before the battle — tactical meditation: a few minutes of meditation, visualizing scenarios, but not sticking to a plan. Keep an open mind.

First 5 games — observe and build data: this is not the time to explode, but the time to collect. You try out directions, memorize your opponent's reactions, and begin to clearly see their weak side.

Mid-match — adjustments: applies the map, exploits hot spots, and is ready to change when the opponent is also adjusting.

Late game — let go and enjoy: When the map is clear, let go of calculation and let your instincts (infused with Tai Chi principles) work. Stressful calculations at the end of the game often ruin everything.

Six-month roadmap

January-February: build the habit of observing - each match, just focus on reading your opponent's shoulders/hips, don't need to win yet.

March-April: consciously analyze and map your strengths/weaknesses.

May-June: refine until reading the play becomes instinctive — you "know" the ball's direction before you see it, without being able to explain why.

Reading the game is the skill that turns tennis from a game of movement into a game of thinking. And when you've got that mindset on the court,

you're ready for the most difficult form of partnership: doubles.

CHAPTER 17

Chapter 14 — Doubles: when two bodies become one axis

Singles is a dialogue with your opponent. Doubles is a marriage with teammates. And like marriage, it fails not because of a lack of technique, but because of a lack of "unity." Tai Chi has a principle called "Unity of Mind" — unity of intention and action. In couples, it expands into unity between two people.

Internal rhythm and synchrony

Every person has an "internal rhythm" — the way they breathe, move, react. Two out of phase rhythms will create a double team that always stumbles, even though each individual is good. Synchronization starts with small things: breathing together while walking, lowering your center of gravity while waiting. When two bodies share a beat, they move like a two-headed creature.

Fantasy - Reality in double teams

The illusion-reality principle from chapter 1 is not just for one person. On a doubles court, you two are two halves of an axis. When one person is "real" — fighting, moving to attack — the other person naturally becomes "unreal," supporting and covering. If both compete "for real", the center field will be empty. If both are "bad", no one can finish. A good double team unconsciously divides reality and reality, like two parts of the same body.

Telepathy

This is the ultimate state of doubles: you know what your partner is going to do before they do. It is not a superpower, but the result of hundreds of hours of practice together and of keeping the mind still (chapter 12) enough to "read" your partner. When both of you are not panicking, not egoistic, the intention of one person naturally passes to the other. Champion couples often say they "don't need to talk" — that's the Mind Connectedness.

Non-verbal communication

The most important language in the pair is the non-verbal one:

Hand signals: The server raises his left hand behind his back to signal to his teammates the direction or type of serve (flat, slice). This is a form of "Ting" — transmitting information without turning around.

Body language: Shoulder direction, standing position, and eye contact are all signals. Turn your shoulders in one direction = "I will cross". Standing close to the net = "I will volley". Looking your teammates in the eye before each point = "I'm ready". Looking down = "I need assistance".

Absolute trust (blind trust): most important rule — don't interfere with your teammate's shot once they've made a decision. Yelling "Cross!" after they have swung it just makes them "freeze". Instead, trust that they see the situation, and focus on covering your position.

Some pragmatic tactical principles

Besides the merge, the pair has basic rules: when a teammate serves and net play, you (the last person standing) cover the deep corner; When your opponent return of serve crosses towards you, your teammates at the net should follow; and in defense, two people should maintain a balanced "wall" instead of both rushing to one side.

But all of those rules only work when two people trust each other. A doubles team that plays in fear — afraid of a teammate making a mistake, afraid of being blamed — will always lose to a doubles team that plays with abandon. That's why Tai Chi, with its emphasis on calmness and trust, is perfect for doubles play.

We've been all over the tennis court — from our feet, through each shot, to our minds and teammates. But Tai Chi doesn't end on the field. The last part brings it to where you spend most of your life: daily life.

CHAPTER 18

Part III — Tai Chi in daily life

The tennis court only takes up a few hours per week. Your body and head carry Tai Chi every other hour — working, driving, cooking, and even when you can't sleep.

CHAPTER 19

Chapter 15 — The body at work, in the car, and at home

One of the lies we tell ourselves is: "I will practice Tai Chi when I have time." The truth is you don't need free time. You need attention. The four core principles — rooted, grounded, relaxed, still — can be practiced while you're sitting in a meeting, driving in traffic, or washing the dishes. This is the most practical part of the book, because it doesn't ask you to change your schedule, just the way you show up for it.

Sitting posture — correct from the root

Office workers spend eight hours a day in the worst posture for their spines: hunched back, head tilted forward, shoulders rolled. The result is neck pain, back pain, and a sluggish mind. Tai Chi corrects it from the root with "Void Spirit Peak Strength" (chapter 2): consciously lower your center of gravity on the chair, open your chest ("The fierce jaw opens up"), and gently pull the top of your head up. You will see your shoulders naturally fall instead of leaning forward.

An exercise I call "three minutes of rooting": every hour of work, stop, lower your center of gravity, feel the soles of your feet on the floor (or thighs on the chair), drop your shoulders, breathe deeply into your belly. Those three minutes don't take away your time; it restores alertness for the next four hours. Many people think they are tired because of lack of coffee; Actually, they were tired from holding a stiff position for three hours.

Driving — keeping calm amid chaos

Traffic jams are the perfect laboratory for Tai Chi psychology. When stuck in traffic, the natural reaction is tense shoulders, gritted teeth, and simmering anger. Try the opposite: lower your weight in the driver's seat, rest your hands lightly on the steering wheel, and use your breathing as an anchor. Every time a car cuts you off, instead of getting upset, take a breath and "return to Dan Dien". You can't control traffic, but you can control your reactions — and staying calm through thirty minutes of traffic is a true form of competition skill.

A little tip: when stopping at a red light, relax your neck and shoulders, gently rotate your hips on the chair. These "micro-recoveries" accumulate into a body that does not wear out after long trips.

Family activities — Tai Chi in housework

Housework is often considered a burden. But try washing dishes with a rooted position and a straight shaft — you're practicing kung fu. Cook with your shoulders relaxed, your legs moving without turning your back — you're taking care of both your body and your meal. Play with your child down to their level, moving slowly and softly — you're teaching them (and yourself) presence.

I once told a busy mother, "You don't have thirty minutes to practice. But you do have thirty times to wash the dishes, clean up, and hold the baby. Make each one a minute of Tai Chi." She reports that not only did her back hurt less, but she began to see those moments as rest, not chores.

Integrating exercise for busy people

If you're an executive or parent who doesn't have time to play, the "movement integration" model is a lifesaver: morning kata (only fifteen minutes), a few stretches at your desk mid-day, and Dantian inhalation before bed. Added up, you have a body that is taken care of without

tearing up the calendar. And "walking meetings" — moving around during discussions instead of sitting — both generate better ideas and keep you moving.

Everyday life is where Tai Chi proves its true value: not to help you play better, but to help you live lighter. The next chapter delves into the invisible half of life — sleep, emotions, and how you talk to others.

CHAPTER 20

Chapter 16 — Sleep, art, communication, and emotions

There are things Tai Chi touches that tennis never touches: how you sleep, how you create, how you speak, and how you deal with anger. This is human software, and it operates according to the same principles — relaxation instead of tension, calmness instead of chaos.

Sleep — the ultimate recovery medicine

We talked about sleep as a lubricant for trauma in chapter 11. Here, it is the foundation of everything. A very simple exercise before bed: lie down, lower your center of gravity, and sweep your attention from your feet to the top of your head, relaxing each muscle area one by one. When your mind is chaotic, don't force it to stop thinking — bring your attention down to the Dantian and breathe deeply. Sleep doesn't come when you "decide" to sleep, it comes when you let go.

In the arts — Music, dance, painting

Tai Chi is itself a form of movement art. Good musicians and good Tai Chi practitioners share one thing: flow does not come from trying hard, but from letting the rhythm carry you. A painter who relaxes his wrist and lets his strokes follow the force of his wrist (the "whip" from chapter 3) will draw much more smoothly than someone who holds a key rigidly. The principle of stillness in motion applies directly to performance: complete presence on stage comes from a mind that is not vibrating before the lights.

Communication — stay calm and behave tactfully

Good communication is not the ability to speak, but the ability to remain calm when the other person is angry. When the conversation is tense, do as you would when facing a break-point (chapter 12): lower your weight, breathe deeply, and don't react from the amygdala. A person who knows how to "let go before the important point" in communication will not say words of regret. And "borrowing energy" — receiving another person's energy without confrontation — is also the true art of listening.

Managing emotions — controlling anger and cultivating joy

Anger is the "stiffness" of the mind. Tai Chi doesn't teach you to suppress anger — suppressing it only causes it to leak elsewhere. It teaches you to feel anger as a force running through your body, and to breathe to let it pass instead of getting stuck. When you realize anger is just a wave, you stop identifying with it.

And joy? It grows when you stop chasing distant results and start being fully present in what you're doing — a shot, a meal, a conversation. It is this "return to the present" that we repeat throughout the book. A person who lives in the present is never poor, no matter what their accounts are.

Part III shows that Tai Chi is not a sport, but a way of standing, breathing, and seeing. And what you just read isn't some wishful thinking — they're something researchers have begun to measure, from hip movements in Tai Chi to how muscle cells contract under lower loads. Tai Chi may be an ancient martial art, but your body responds to it in very modern ways.

Tai Chi Applied to Tennis — The Art of Healthy Living

Pham Duc Hai

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