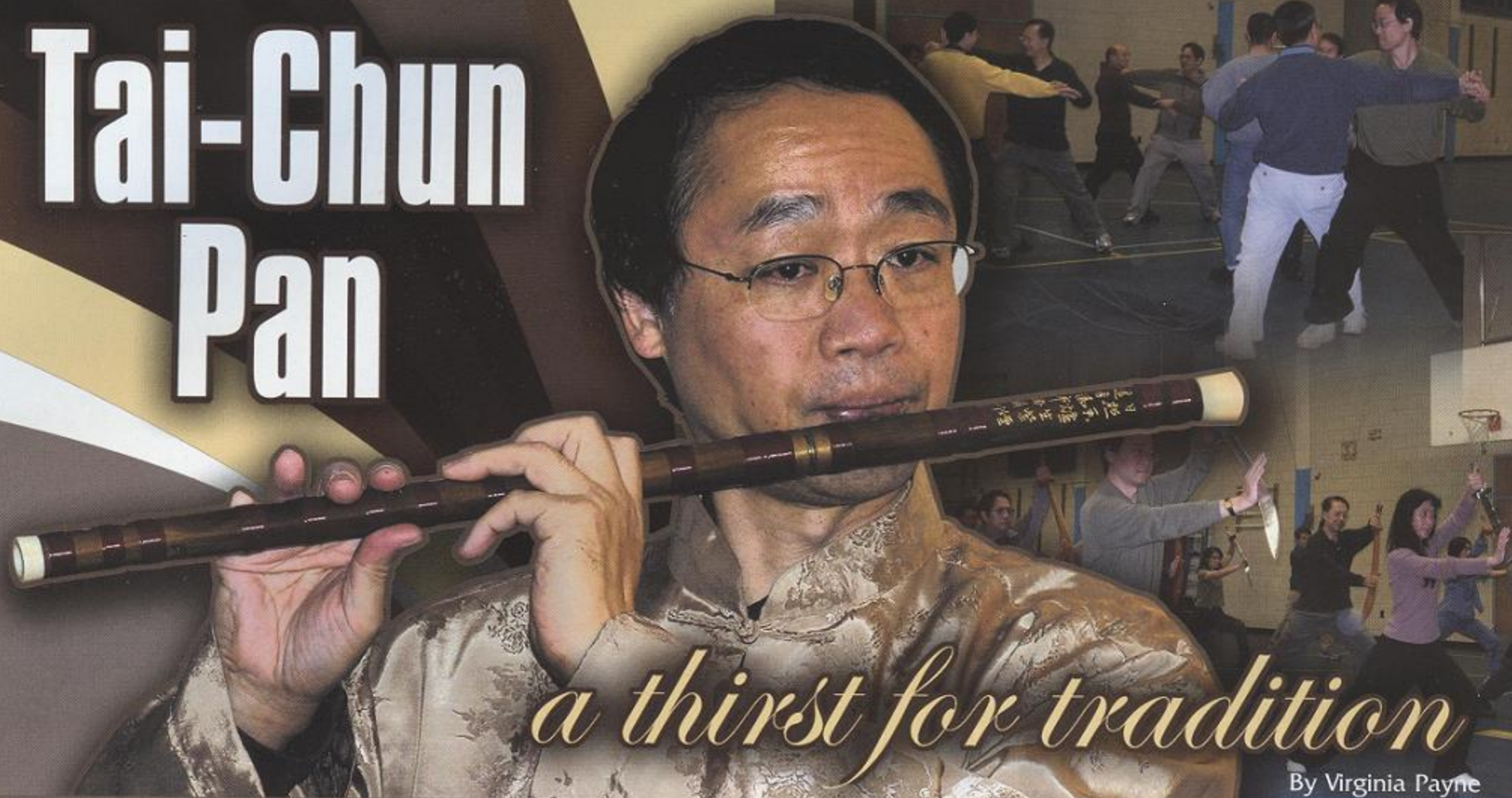


Tai-Chun Pan



a thirst for tradition

By Virginia Payne

I first met Tai-Chun Pan in 1991 at Digital Equipment Corp., in Littleton, MA. My immediate impression was that he carried a friendly and relaxed demeanor. I remember a colleague nicknamed him 'The Zen Master.' Come to find out, Tai-Chun was not only a Taiji practitioner, but also a teacher of this moving meditation.

Tai-Chun began his study of Taiji in Taiwan at an early age, and started teaching this art form soon after he came to the US in 1980 to pursue his master's degree in Computer Science at Northeastern University.

Taiji (a.k.a. Tai Chi) is an ancient internal martial arts form, consisting of a sequence of balanced, relaxed postures, connected by slow graceful movements, emphasizing body/mind coordination and relaxed breathing. Although there are many styles of Taiji, the one practiced by Tai-Chun is the "Older Form," which was passed down by Grandmaster Hsiung Yang-Ho.

The Yang family style is a longer form, which is the more traditional, but lesser known style. Tai-Chun chose this less popular style because it offers a more complete set of traditional forms that include San-Shou (the matching forms), sword, saber and staff.

In his teaching, he explains that one can apply the Taiji principle of staying relaxed and concentrating on body/mind coordination to help cope with the stresses in one's life as well as improve relationships with others.

Upon my modest request, Tai-Chun gracefully agreed in 1991 to teach his colleagues this meditative exercise at lunch time, which he has continued for the last 15 years accepting nothing in return. For the past 26 years, he has been tirelessly teaching Taiji

every Wednesday night in Arlington, and, along with his brother, Tai-Sheng, every Sunday afternoon at the Chinese Language School in Lexington.

Tai-Chun is not only a colleague, a friend and a Taiji teacher of mine; he's also my flute teacher! When he was nine, his older brother gave him a hand-made Chinese bamboo flute, and he has been playing it ever since. He was the first prize winner of the 1972 Taipei Chinese Music Instruments Competition, and has been a member of the Chinese music ensemble in the Boston area since 1981. He conducts a flute class every Sunday afternoon; and with the little spare time left, he also squeezes in private flute lessons for a selected few.

In addition to his many obligations, Tai-Chun is also the president of the Greater Boston Chinese Cultural Association (GBCCA) Chinese Music Ensemble of Newton, MA, for the past 20 years. The Ensemble was founded in 1984 by members and friends of the Chinese Music Ensemble of Boston. Tai-Chun took over the leadership of the Ensemble in 1986 with one main goal in mind: to promote Chinese music literacy and appreciation among the Chinese ethnic population as well as the general American public.

The Ensemble has achieved many accomplishments since its inception thanks to Tai-Chun's enthusiasm and the members' dedication. A couple of undertakings have been the tradition of giving yearly large-scale free concerts and frequently hosting visiting Chinese musicians, while performing regularly in various events all over New England.

The "promotion of Chinese music literacy and appreciation" under Tai-Chun's

direction has been so successful, especially among the ethnic Chinese youth that the GBCCA Youth Chinese Music Ensemble was created in 2000; its members are chosen through auditions every year thanks to overwhelming interest and talent.

However, Tai-Chun's musical interests could not be easily pursued without the unconditional support from his wife, Tung-Mei, who is equally active in the Chinese Music Ensemble, and has been the director of the Youth Ensemble for the past five years.

Musical talent definitely runs in the family: their son Jason practically grew up with the Ensemble, playing the lead Erhu (a Chinese bow & string instrument, similar to the violin). Currently a sophomore at Harvard University, he collaborated with a few of his college friends, and together they have recently founded the Harvard Chinese Music Ensemble.

Twenty-five years ago, perhaps only a handful of folks in Boston heard traditional Chinese music. Today, music halls are usually filled to capacity when such performances take place. Tai-Chun is elated to see this ever-growing appreciation of Chinese music among the American public.

He is equally delighted to pass down the more traditional form of Taiji to the greater Boston community and to see his students carry on this custom, which many of them are now in turn teaching to their own community.

Undoubtedly, Tai-Chun's enthusiastic efforts have helped spawn a growing cultural awareness.

Photos: Tai-Chun playing Chinese flute, teaching Sanshou (fighting form) class, and demonstrating the Saber form.