

Balancing mind and body

Peking University requires students to practice tai chi as it improves coordination and flexibility

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May the best warrior win. That was the ethos as college students from different tai chi teams prepared to compete on a recent Saturday morning. They struck powerful poses while regulating their breathing.

Traditional music served as their soundtrack. The competition was organized by Peking University's Center for Wushu Research.

It was meant to advance students' understanding of traditional martial arts, or *wushu*, after a month-long training session.

Peking University boasts a long tradition of tai chi instruction. Classes have been compulsory since the 1970s.

The art of tai chi ranges from practice routines to sparring, said Wang Dongmin, director of the Center for Wushu Research and associate professor of the university's physical education department.

It enables students to understand their bodies and become resilient.

They learn defense in a way that goes beyond foreseeing opponents' movements.

It is said to balance the body and mind.

Tai chi is often described as "meditation in motion". It focuses on the entire body's coordination and flexibility.

And it has been found to improve practitioners' balance, leg strength and flexibility. That is not to mention sleep.

It is also believed to help elderly people by strengthening their knees, hearts and minds, Wang said.

The Healthy China 2030 blueprint released by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council in 2016 also supports the promotion of tai chi and other traditional martial arts to improve public health.

Some students say it does more.

Peking University PhD student Lai Zhuoyuan began practicing traditional Chinese martial arts in middle school. He started comprehensively studying tai chi and other Chinese martial arts, including *bagua zhang* (Eight-Trigram Palm), in his freshman year.

Lai practices martial arts at least twice a week.

It is energizing yet relaxing, he said. And it helps him improve his technique.

"Tai chi requires core muscles to exert force. That's a fundamental of kungfu, too," the 24-year-old biochemistry major said.

"It helps me to progress in martial arts."

Peking University's PE director Li Ning said tai chi is not just physical exercise. It is also philosophical and possesses connotations of traditional Chinese civilization.



More than 140 students from Peking University take part in a tai chi competition at the campus in Beijing on Dec 23.

PHOTOS BY WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

The university has perpetuated traditional culture since its founding in 1898, Li said. Many of its social science subjects rank highly, both nationally and internationally.

"Tai chi is embedded in our culture," Li said.

Taking Wang's tai chi class has taught sophomore Zhang Wenjun a lot about ancient culture, ranging from medicine to philosophy. It has also helped him to find peace this semester.

Zhang even teaches tai chi to family members to help boost their health. The 19-year-old electrical engi-

neering major admits that traditional culture may seem increasingly irrelevant to young people.

"But we young people should pass down traditions like tai chi. They may otherwise disappear."

Li points to the reasons that young people may be less likely to take up the martial art.

"It requires a solid foundation, unlike other more entertaining

sports like soccer. Beginners may have a hard time buckling down to repeat the slow movements."

Peking University stages an annual martial arts event and encourages students to enroll in the school's *wushu* association.

Wang said the university also employs martial arts masters, including a successor of Chen-style tai chi from Chenjiagou, the village in Central China's Henan province where tai chi originated.

The university plans to found a tai chi club to teach international students and visiting scholars this year.

"Those practitioners will get the chance to showcase their skills in our international cultural festivals on campus and among embassies," Wang said.

"They can also pass along what they learn when they return home. That's a great way to promote tai chi."

