

# The 4th European Taijiquan



For those who are unfamiliar with the Congress, it is a biannual weeklong session of workshops, lectures and presentations with a little politics mixed in for luck. On this occasion it took place near Prague, capital of the new-old country of the Czech Republic, part of what was the Eastern Block. It is normally held in an Eastern European country so that attendance is economically possible for those that were under the communists. The general attitude of attendees is 'Work hard, play hard' with one of tolerance towards differences in style and approach to the Arts practiced.

This year's meeting was normal with representatives of ten or so countries (ignoring the tribal differences within the U.K.) covering a range of styles. France was the country with the largest representation and Yang, in all its variants, was the most common style. Age and sex distribution was as normal for the Soft Arts, mainly older and female.

The week started on the Sunday night with a 'welcome meeting' followed by a buffet meal prepared by the organising groups, with traditional fiddle and pipe music, with singing, for entertainment. For those with a technical bent the pipes were in the North Umbrian tradition not the Scottish. This was followed by a six day schedule of workshops starting at 7.30, breakfast at 9.00, lecture at 10.15, lunch at 12.30, more workshops at 15.00 and 17.00, dinner at 19.00, culminating at 20.00 with a presentation which tended to degenerate into light entertainment which finished sometime later. A few people would be up and practicing, outside when dry, at 6.30 the next morning. Some of the lectures were accompanied by demonstrations. In one case the whole thing took place out of doors, as it was mainly practical. The Congress meeting took the place of one of the lectures; the voting at this meeting is on the principle of 'one country, one vote'. All the workshops took place over four days, except for 'Our Ronnie' who got caught to do five days of work. The afternoon of the last day was given over to demonstrations by the instructors and was followed in the evening by yet another lovely buffet meal prepared by the organisers as part of the 'closing party' (which ended up continuing after the bar closed in a local disco). The final workshop at 7.30 the next morn-

ing was not well attended! After breakfast it was time to say goodbye to friends, old and new, and start making our ways home, and back to work.

Those are the basic facts behind what was a very educational, entertaining but wearing week. What follows are opinion – mine. The food was good and plentiful, although the idea of 'Danish pastries' for breakfast, on the day it happened, was not to my taste. The accommodation was simple, rather Spartan but with enough room to be comfortable in, not that you were in it for long. The beer was good and cheap, even if they did close the bar too early – there were others. The instructors were, as usual, very good indeed and approachable in and out of class. I will not comment further on individual instructors as I did not sample all of them as there was just not enough time, given that there was one who was teaching some principles that I wanted to get off-pat and another who was teaching a form that took my fancy. The weather was hot, for me, with some rain, although on the night of our arrival we were treated to a spectacular firework display by Mother Nature that lasted from about 9.00 p.m. 'till 3.00 a.m. On the Wednesday afternoon there were a couple of tours available. One was a pub-crawl and the other was a visit to the Old City to 'see the sights'. I was told the next morning that the pub tour had been very much appreciated by those who went on it, even if it did cramp their training the next morning. Jena, one of the locals, gave us a very interesting tour of all the normal sights, when we saw just how beautiful a city Prague is, and then left us to our own devices to do some shopping. At least we made the next day's workshops!

What follows is not strictly part of this review but an explanation of my views on these matters so feel free to skip this. I see this event, and similar events such as 'Tai Chi Caledonia', as a means to both widen and deepen my understanding of Tai Chi. This happens not by learning a form, but by watching how teachers and students of all styles and schools apply the basic principles of Tai Chi, not just in the workshops, but also in their private practice and 'one-to-one's. This also applies to teaching methodology. The only valid reason that I can think of for a teacher not permitting their students to attend would be a 'junior' student who might be confused because the student's grasp of the basics was not yet consolidated enough.

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# European & Qigong Congress Forum



METAMORPHOSIS - Dan Docherty

Prague still retains some of the mystery and Old World flavour of the days of Franz Kafka (some crazy guy; "Metamorphosis" has the all time great opening line where the protagonist wakes up to find he has turned into a giant bug; we've all been there, right?) and Hasek (anarchist and creator of "The Good Soldier Svejk") and this was the venue of the 4th European Forum & Congress. TCUGB instructors selected to teach at the Forum included our esteemed editor, Eva & Karel Koskuba, and me, while members Peter Ballam (with friends) and Peter Ellis participated in the workshops.

This time round there were a lot of Chen style teachers, including organiser, Vit Vojta, and his wife, Song Feng-yun, who gave a knockout performance of Chinese folk songs at the farewell party with a Czech rock band called Gong Bao who sing most of their stuff in Chinese. Other old colleagues like Anya Meot, Marianne Plouvier and Antoine Lee from France, Georgi Denichin from Bulgaria and Roswitha Flucher from Austria (by no means the worse dancer in Europe) were also teaching. Fortunately the food was military and not prison standard, though naturally not the kind of stuff you'd make at home or order in a restaurant.

It took a few days, but after a slow start the ice began to melt between the great nations of Europe.

As well as workshops we also had demos from the teachers, including individual approaches and applications of techniques such as Single Whip and Parting Wild Horse's Mane we used a similar approach in Hannover at Nils Klug's push-hands event – next one will be in February 2002. It was refreshing to see that we have in Europe today some individuals who can give "Chinese" demonstrations complete with reference to the nebulous concept of energy and meridians. I guess some of them even believe all that stuff. We also did form demos on the Saturday and I particularly enjoyed doing mirror image long form demo with Roswitha who performed Yang Cheng Fu long form. At times we were close enough to touch at others twenty metres apart, but we finished at the same moment.

A new Executive was elected at the Congress on the 21<sup>st</sup> July after the Forum. Details at [www.tcfe.org](http://www.tcfe.org), as I don't want to bore you with them. The next event will be the 2<sup>nd</sup> European TCC and Internal Arts Championships and Qi Gong Exhibition in Vejle, Denmark, in October next year, which will include fixed, restricted step and moving pushing hands, forms, demos veteran and junior events, and workshops in Qi Gong and Internal Arts. Details will be posted on the web. At the moment Bulgaria is the sole bidder for the next Forum in 2003 and Georgi has a couple of venues in the Balkans in mind. I can recommend the wine, be there or be square.

