Expert brings world of tai chi to Lincoln

Calm, relaxation are important to many martial arts, she says

By Bryan Peterson
Staff Reporter

Using soft, expressive hand gestures as she spoke in Chinese, Di Ma watched her husband, Jim Chen. Chen began to translate, then broke into Chinese to discuss the philosophical details of the translation of a particular term. The two continued in their native tongue for a moment; then Chen went on in English.

Because she does not consider her English to be adequate, Ma spoke sometimes on her own and sometimes through her husband while explaining her practice and teaching of tai chi. It was soon clear that her personality and her practice of tai chi are nearly inseparable.

Tai chi is a traditional Chinese martial art that is practiced more widely as a form of exercise or meditation today. Performed in sequences consisting of 24, 48 or more motions, the tai chi form suggests beauty, power and control brought forth through an intense union of mental and physical concentration.

"Modern tai chi is about 400 years old," Ma said. "It was previously more oriented toward fighting. The turning point was the introduction of weapons."

After that time, it became less practical to defend oneself against armed attackers.

Although contemporary tai chi emphasizes exercise and meditation more than self-defense applications, Ma stressed the seriousness of practice.

"Tai chi is different from sports," Ma said. "You should become calm and relaxed before practicing, then breathe with each movement."

The emphasis on calmness and relaxation is what draws many people to practice the art of tai chi.

> ***"In China I had more time to practice. It is harder to calm down in the United States before practicing. You need to practice every day. Then you feel good."***
>
> *— Di Ma, tai chi instructor*

"It is gaining more popularity and awareness in the United States now," said Chen, a doctoral student in management. "That is a good thing in modern society, with the fast pace and many stresses."

Coming from a family steeped in the Chinese martial arts, Ma began her studies at age 11. Both her father and her grandfather were serious practicers of the arts. Two of Ma's three brothers were trained by her father and now act in Chinese martial arts movies.

Ma was not often able to train with her father because she spent nine years at a special school for children who show special aptitude in the martial arts. There she studied wu shu, a term encompassing such practices as that of tai chi; the use of weapons such as the staff, spear and sword; the breathing exercises known as qi gong; and chuan, or "fist way."

Therrese Goodlett/DN

Di Ma has been practicing tai chi since she was 7 years old. She learned it from her father, who learned it from his father.

After nine years of wu shu training, Ma was hospitalized for a slipped disc in her back. A doctor told her she likely would not be an athlete again.

"But I practiced tai chi and qi gong every day, and now I feel much better," Ma said.

"Qi gong promotes the functions of internal organs by clearing channels, improving blood circulation and assisting the exchange of energy between the self and the world," said Chen.

Ma continues to practice tai chi, though not as often as she would like.

"In China I had more time to practice. It is harder to calm down in the United States before practicing," said Ma. "You need to practice every day. Then you feel good."

Ma is currently offering instruction in tai chi and tai chi sword through the F Street Recreation Center (1225 F St.). A new session will begin April 4 and will last "eight or 10 weeks for $12 or $15," Ma said.

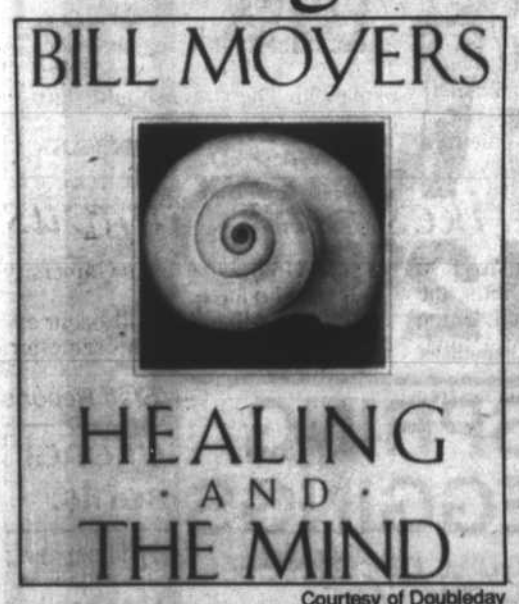
Tai chi sword, as the name suggests, adds the use of a sword to a form similar to those of tai chi.

"It is my favorite," Ma said. "When I was 14 I won second place in a national competition with the sword." However, that competition was in wu shu sword, which uses the same weapon but has much faster motions than the tai chi sword she now teaches, Ma added.

Ma sometimes practices outdoors with her sword and also reviews tai

See **DIMA** on 9

In-depth book explores meditation techniques, healing ability of mind



Courtesy of Doubleday

By Heather Sinor
Staff Reporter

Can meditation cure chronic illness?

Bill Moyers, PBS journalist, former White House press secretary, and author of the book, "Healing and the Mind," interviewed professionals who say it can.

Moyers's book, arranged as a collection of interviews with physicians, scientists, therapists and patients, gives a fascinating insight into the realm of mind/body healing.

He begins by examining the effects meditation (more popularly referred to as "stress-reduction") techniques have had on patients who are participating in newly developed self-help programs.

Award-winning professor of Medicine at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, John Zawacki, M.D., told Moyers that although he didn't know where the source of energy from meditation comes from, he believes it is partly learning to love oneself.

He says chronically ill patients on a meditation program for only eight weeks undergo a self-awareness that is part of the healing process.

"They have come to an understanding that they can adapt, and that they can carry out their daily activities despite discomforts, and that they can enjoy life more," Zawacki said.

The most intriguing part of the book comes when Moyers probes into exactly what the mediation process involves. He examines the procedures of Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D., a mindful meditation professor, who teaches his students how to "scan" their bodies using yoga techniques.

Moyers describes a room with 25 people sitting in a circle on the floor, with their eyes closed, eating raisins—three of them. "S-L-O-W-L-Y," says the man in the center. "Lift one raisin slowly to your mouth. Chew it v-e-r-y s-l-o-w-l-y..." This begins the session.

Kabat tells Moyers that most of us live with our minds on auto-pilot. He says, "Without really realizing it, every one of the people in this circle is actually practicing an 'eating' meditation, mindful of the raisin, living in the moment, becoming aware of something other than their pain."

But Moyers doesn't stop with Western Culture. He travels to the People's Republic of China, where he interviews Chinese medical authorities and patients on effective medical therapies like acupuncture and traditional herbal remedies that have been around for centuries.

He interviews a Chinese pharmacist who explains how elaborate mixtures of specific Chinese herbs are boiled in copper pots for about an hour and a half and then administered to the patients like a kind of tea every day.

See **MIND** on 9

'Master of Horror' shakes supernatural, rattles reader with modern murder instead

Stephen King
"Dolores Claiborne"
Viking

Courtesy of Viking Penguin

Stephen King, proclaimed the "Master of Horror," has recently taken a stab at contemporary fiction.

His last two novels have been almost completely devoid of supernatural happenings—and they have both been written from a woman's perspective, something that King said he thought he was incapable of just a few years ago.

The latest, "Dolores Claiborne," is set in rural Maine (no surprise) and written entirely from the perspective of an older woman.

The woman is the title character, Dolores Claiborne. She gives her account of two murders, both in which she was a key suspect. The first murder victim was her husband, Joe, who was killed 29 years ago. There were lots of suspicions regarding her involvement, but nothing was proven.

The second death is Dolores' employer Vera Donovan, an eccentric woman who died mysteriously, again with heavy evidence pointing toward Dolores.

Dolores admits to the murder of her husband in order to convince the town sheriff that she is innocent of Vera Donovan's homicide. She tells her audience what her husband did to their daughter and why she felt justified in killing him.

King develops her character as she tells her tale. She changes from a subservient housewife into a calculating murderer.

Dolores is a solid, believable character and the reader is swayed to her side after hearing her tragic experiences.

King is still his old self, building up suspense at crucial points and graphically describing Joe's murder. Joe doesn't die cleanly or easily, and King includes some surprises.

The first-person perspective of the book and Dolores' colorful slang take some getting used to. The New England, backwoods language interferes at first, but it is essential to the story and Dolores' character. Her cynical humor makes the story flow better and adds some levity to an otherwise serious tale.

King proves he is still the "Master of Horror." He makes the reader feel a little anxiety with his description of Vera Donovan's insane terror of the dust bunnies in her room.

"Duh-lorrr-isss! It's dust bunnies! They're everywhere! Oh-dear-God! Oh-dear-God! Duh-lorrr-iss, help! Help me!"

"Dolores Claiborne" is an entertaining read, a must for King fans and enjoyable for anyone.

— Joel Strauch