

# Several Ways of Working Movements of the Waist, According to Each Student's Progress

Alix Helme-Guizon

From discussions with Celine Davière and Lionel Descamps, KunLun Association, Angers.

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Translated by Don Klein



The taijiquan classics emphasize the mobility of *Yao*, the “waist,” which actually corresponds to the pelvic area. “To achieve the agility and lightness, you first need to pay attention to the regulation of your waist (*Yao*) and your groin (*Kua*).” (*Quoted* and translated by Yang Jwing-Ming, *The theory of taijiquan*, Budo editions)

Yet our habits are generally quite different when we start learning taijiquan. We must therefore first (re)discover that this part of the body is moving, and moves, no matter what! After a few years, when such mobility is achieved, then we can go further and investigate the finer movements of the pelvis, without moving the legs.

What is summarized here in a few sentences is, in fact, a long exploration and each step takes several years. To each according to his own pace; do not try to rush things: it is counterproductive. This work on the movement of the pelvis requires perseverance because the pelvis is generally an area in which there is low awareness of difficult movement. Just try again and again, every day for several years before succeeding. Each test reinforces our sensitivity and our coordination. So every failure is preparation for success, as the Shadock proverb “The more that is missed, the more that succeeds.”

Our intention is to show why a teacher gives necessarily “false” instructions because “what is simple is wrong, that which is not is unusable,” said Paul Valéry. The teacher must adapt to what is possible at this point for each listener. He can give two very different instructions working with two students in the same course. Allow your teachers to guide you and tell you when to change goals.

## 1 - Move the pelvis, no matter how!

To begin, one must discover that one can move one's pelvis, no matter by what means it occurs. This produces large movements, created by strong contractions of the superficial muscles. Our form will little resemble that of our teachers, but it is a necessary step. Do not attempt to copy the shape of the body of the teacher at this point.

**Start each movement by moving the pelvis creating a new representation of the body,** where the largest area is no longer the torso and head, but the pelvis. In our Western culture, the pelvis is an area often filled with viscera and sex organs, a rather “shameful” area. Gradually it becomes the center of being, the *Dantian*, the starting point of any movement.



Building a new scheme where the body becomes your lower *Dantian* is the central most important step, and you will return to it over and over. There are two basic movements of the pelvis, and it is easier to work one after the other. In the first, the movement of anteversion and retroversion is in the vertical plane; in the second the movement of rotation around the vertical axis of the spine is in the horizontal plane. For each type of work, a typical exercise is described, with success criteria and its application in the form--hand form, weapons and tuishou . You are already familiar with many of these exercises.

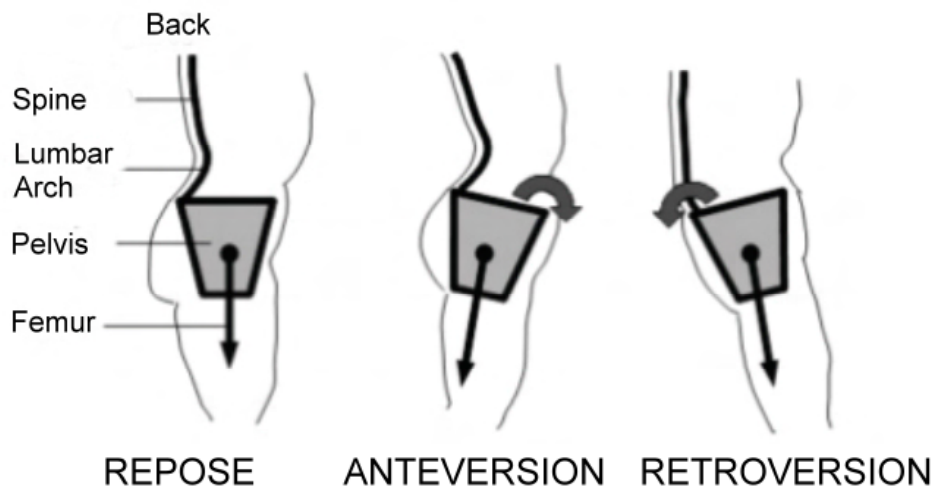
### 1.1 Movement in the Vertical Plane of Anteversion and Retroversion

*Inspired by the work of Marie-Christine Moulant*

1. Purpose: retroversion of the pelvis creates the position of rooting, which can link the upper and lower body. The retroversion should be light, the coccyx (*weilu*) should be vertical.

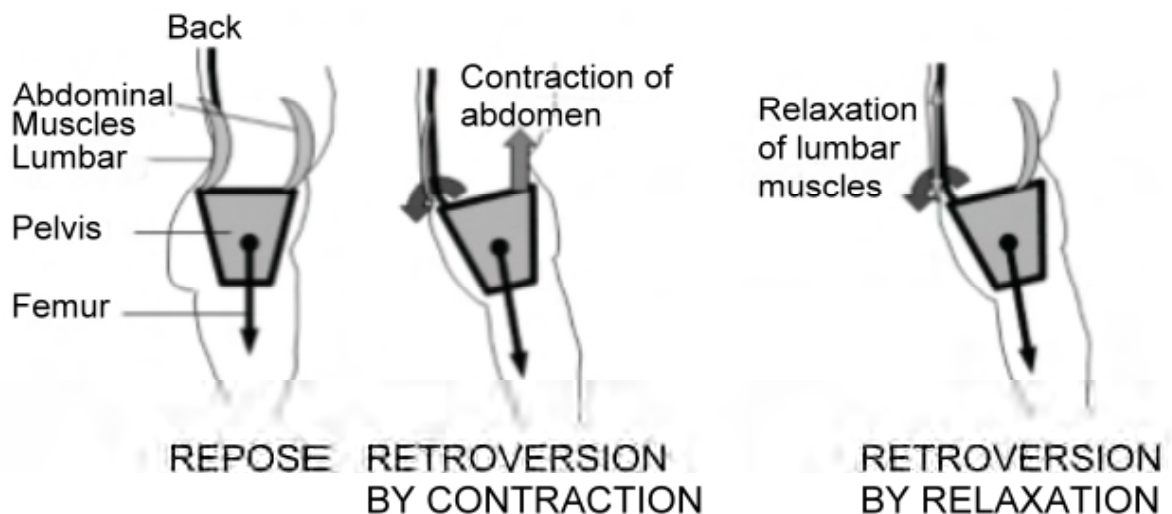
2. Instructions: To create a retroversion, decrease the lumbar curve, moving the bottom of the pelvis forward and the top of the pelvis backwards.

Initially, seek only to make this movement at will. In doing so, observe that it takes a large contraction of the abdominal muscles (abdominal rectus) and the gluts for retroversion. Then, try a second time to get the same result, not by contraction of abdominal muscles, but by loosening the back muscles.



### 3. Criteria for success of retroversion:

- In the beginning, the success criterion is to observe the loss of lumbar curve (a Chinese saying: “Open the Ming Men, the door of life,” which is at the heart of this curve). We may be aware by standing against a wall, one hand between the wall and the hollow of the back. The retro movement must press the hand that is against the wall. During warm-ups or tuishou, you can put one hand on your lower back and feel if there is a decrease in the lumbar curve during rooting.
- Criteria for success upon release of retroversion: place one hand on the belly and one on the back, and try to feel which muscles contract and which relax in retroversion. We develop the sensation of the muscles, and little by little we can learn to control them. Neither the abdominals nor the buttocks should be contracted.



- Criteria for success of retroversion when working in pairs: the retroversion of the pelvis, any rise in the upper body can be absorbed and transmitted to the lower body to the feet. You can experiment with this by working in during basic tuishou exercises and then in free pushing hands.

4. Point to watch: from the time we manage to make a retro movement at will, be careful not to exaggerate this movement. The movement produced by contraction of the abdominals is of very high amplitude, but this is not what we seek. **A too intensive retroversion blocks the other joints of the pelvis too much, and there is loss of mobility.** One rather wishes to obtain a very small movement by loosening, giving the impression that the coccyx is vertical under the effect of its own weight (even if this is not a picture!). “When the Weilu (tailbone) is straight, the body is balanced without leaning.”

5. Link to practice: each **root** (in the form, warm up, weapons, and push hands) should be created by this slight retroversion of the pelvis. It is a movement that is found on almost every breath in the form. In pushing hands, it

is fundamental as the work of learning to receive pushes.

6. Learning time means: to succeed the retroversion of the pelvis by releasing often takes at least two years of regular practice. Indeed, this movement is possible only when the back muscles are sufficiently relaxed. That is why there are repeated stretches back at the beginning of the warm up. These stretches should be performed extensively and carefully in order to lengthen the posterior muscles. These are exercises that prepare or maintain the possibility of retroversion by relaxation.

## 1.2 Rotation around the spine

The second basic type of movement of the pelvis is rotation around the vertical central axis that runs (roughly) at the spine. We practice this work during warm-up exercises and tuishou.

During these exercises, the rotation is combined with a vertical motion (retroversion and anteversion).

1. Purpose: It serves to teach how to generate all the rotation from the pelvis.

2. Begin the rotation by rotating the pelvis. The shoulders and legs only follow the rotation of the pelvis.

3. Criterion of success: there is always a slight delay in movement of arms and legs relative to the movement of the pelvis; there is a sense of unity throughout the body. The Taijiquan Classics say, “When a body part moves, the body moves.”

4. Point to watch for: when the pelvis rotates, the knee of the supporting leg will follow the pelvis and twist. If the knee bends, the supporting foot raises on its outer edge. We must therefore make very small amplitude rotations and **always push the knee support in the direction opposite to the rotation, keeping the surface of the support foot in contact with the ground.** This point is crucial because knee pain can stop the practice, which would be a shame for “healthful practices”!

5. Link to practice: taijiquan is based entirely on spiral movements, which are rotations of the pelvis combined with vertical movement. A typical example is the movement *Grasp the bird's tail* (Lan Que Wei).

6. Learning time means: it is quick enough to learn to turn the pelvis, but it takes many years for the knee over the pelvis to not follow this rotation, with no twisting inwards. One should also be familiar with a sequence (duan) to its attention, not on memorization, but on the pelvis during practice. It is for this reason that the work of the pelvis in the form cannot really be mastered until after at least one or two years of regular practice.

When are we done with this first level of work? When there is no need to think when that will happen. One speaks of “**regulation without regulation.**” For example, if when you learn a new move, when the entire focus is on memorization, you make this new move spontaneously from the pelvis, or if, in your daily life how you open the doors, stand, move, part of the pelvis.

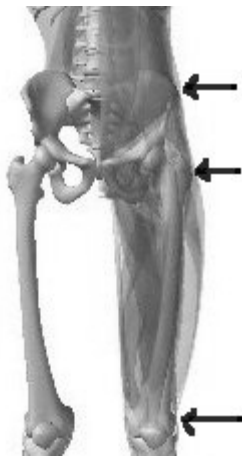
## 2 Become aware of the of the pelvic joints

During the first years of practice, you learn to move the pelvis, but it is perceived as a block. We move “the” pelvis, as though it were a sort of black box. This representation of the pelvis induces large movements to move this box. In order to reduce the motions and to move the pelvis using less muscular contractions, it is necessary to modify this representation.

### 2.1 Develop awareness of the parts of the pelvis by auto-massage

*(Inspired by the work of Céline Davière and Marc Appelmans)*

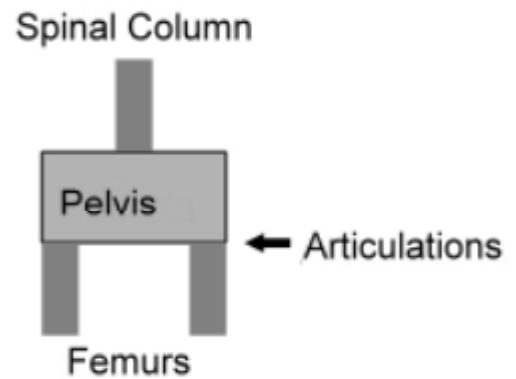
If you have never opened an anatomy book, you would construct a representation of the pelvis starting with your immediate experience: as you feel the bones below the waist (the iliac crest) and also on the side of the legs, and know that the pelvis is a big bone at the bottom of the belly, you are going to naturally imagine that the pelvis extends between these two zones where you feel bone.



Zones where you feel the bones



Representation of the body starting with this sensation

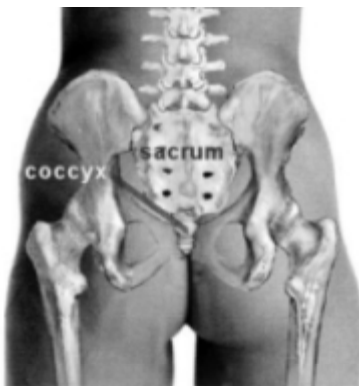
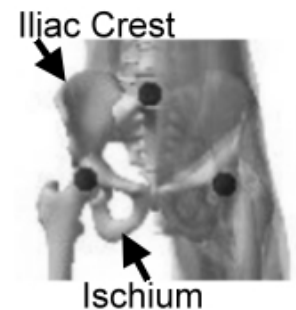


Simplified representation (www.visiblebody.com)

The hip joints will be therefore imagined to be at the bottom of the pelvis on an imaginary line that passes by the two bones which are felt on the sides of the legs (the two trochanters.) Also a joint between the pelvis and the rotational column is imagined. This body image will seem quite correct, because it seems to allow all of the *taijiquan* motions: A rotation around an axis—the spinal column, a flexion towards the front and the famous retroversion of the pelvis!

The representation of the body presented above—intuitive and apparently coherent—is actually entirely wrong! To clarify our bodily schema it is very efficient to feel oneself by pressing against the bones. In addition, when one has awareness of the length and of the shape of a bone, the muscles that are around them relax (this method is used by Marc Appelmans in the practice of Eutonie [a therapeutic relaxation and integration technique based on body and sensation self-awareness]).

To feel the ilium and the height of the pelvis, put one hand on an iliac crest and one on the ischium on the same side. The two hands are pressed towards one other to become aware of the length of the bone and of its shape. Repeat several times to be able to have a clear representation of this bone, then repeat on the other side.



On the back feel the sacrum delineating its shape as a triangle. On the extension of the sacrum feel the coccyx at its tip. It is this tip of the rotational column that becomes vertical in the retroversion of the pelvis.

To feel the width of the pelvis, press concurrently on the pubis and the sacrum several times. This auto-massage has to be done as often as possible until you have a clear image of your pelvis and then you can feel it without massaging.

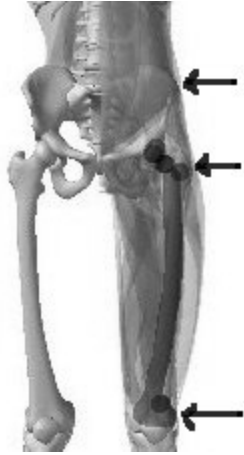
We can begin this auto-massage at the beginning of the practice, allowing clarification of the bodily schema. The awareness and the internal sensation of the pelvis take generally several years to establish.

## 2.2 Localize the major joints of the pelvis

(Inspired by Lionel Descamps)

For the rotational movements, the main source of error comes from the fact that the hip joint is not where the bone is felt on the side of the leg. Indeed, the femur is not rectilinear, it makes an angle between the place where it is felt and where it really articulates with the pelvis. The hip joint is thus not on the periphery of the body at the side of the hip but **at the hollowness of the groin!** This zone is it that the Chinese call the *internal Kua*.

*Kua*



**The joint of the hips are at mid-distance between the top of the iliac crest and the ischium.**

*The femur makes an angle before joining the pelvis (the femur is darkened between the two lower arrows)*

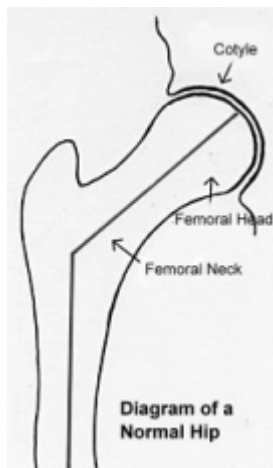
*There are three main joints that link the pelvis to the rest of the body*

You can press this area from either the front, or from the rear at the hollow of the glutes. In the front and the rear, the joint is encased in deep muscles and it is difficult to feel it move. For that you can stretch, bend the leg and rest the knee against an object (wall, furniture, and so on) in a manner to prevent all contraction of the glutes. With your fingers you can then press on the side and the rear. With the other hand move the knee to passively move the joint. At the same time be attentive to the internal sensation descending from the coxofemoral joint [hip joint] (for there are sensory endings in the joints!).

### **2.3 View a ball joint, capable of all of the motions**

*(Inspired by the work of Céline Davière, François Schoessler and Claudy Jeanmougin)*

It is very difficult to directly feel the hip joint. This leads to misrepresentation. Unconsciously, many represent this joint like the elbow or wrist, capable of limited movement, always in the same directions. But this is not the case. The femoral head is round and fits into a complementary shaped cavity (the glenoid) on the ilium. Virtually all movements are possible! To represent the femoral heads as spheres that can rotate in any direction frees the movement of these joints.



At this stage, we learned to move the basin as a whole block, with large-scale movements. But when studying anatomy, we discover that the pelvis does not form a box and relationships are not what we thought, and do not work as expected. There is a clear contradiction between our practice and anatomical knowledge. How to reconcile and use this knowledge?

### 3 Move the pelvis starting with the hip joints

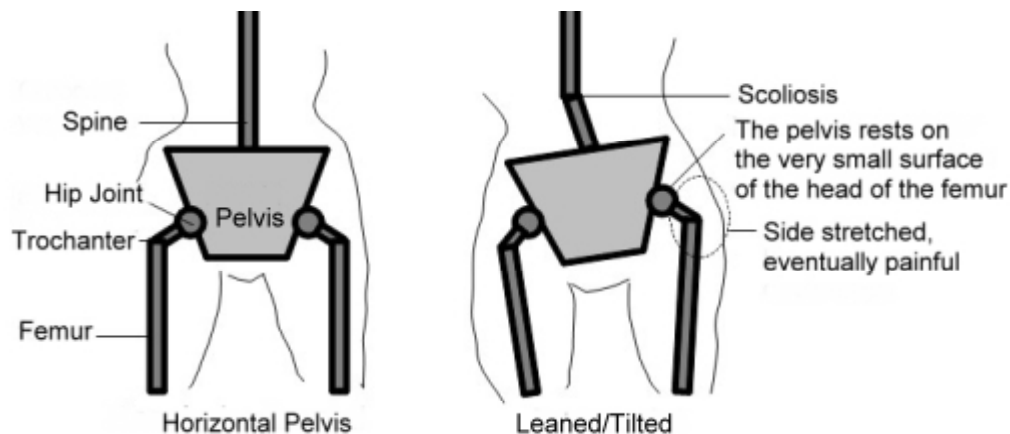
Since we view the pelvis represented as a block, it will be moved with the big superficial muscles that are attached to its edges (abdominal rectus, quadratus lumborum). These large muscles create large motions and easily fatigue. If instead we try not to move the pelvis but the coxofemoral joints; then we can use the small deep muscles of the hips and create small motions that require little effort. Moreover, we can turn the pelvis without carrying the leg in the rotation, since there is an articulation between the two.

#### 3.1 Rotation of the pelvis without moving the knees

(Inspired by the work of François Schoessler and Claudy Jeanmougin)

Exercises in rotation around the spine, but moving the coxofemoral joints and not the pelvis. **The big change is that the legs no longer move.**

- Goal: Carry out rotations without twisting the knee and without needing to monitor the knee.
- Instructions: Equal support on both legs, chest in the center. Rotate around the axis of the spine without moving the knees. The pelvis is released (retroversion), the motion takes place in the groins (*Kuas*). The chest stays in the center.
- Criterion of success: The knees do not move, there is no need to monitor them (thus contracting the [pelvic?] muscles so that the knees are not involved in the rotations.)
- Point to observe: Do the knees move? **Do not lean**, that is to say, push the trochanter of the femur to the exterior. Leaning limits mobility, and wears the joint prematurely. Indeed in leaning, the weight of the body, via the pelvis, rests on the very small surface of the head of the femur. This creates enormous pressure on the joint.



- Link with practice: When the exercise in connection on the two feet is realized articulately, go back to it again supporting on the posterior foot. The knee of the supportive foot does not have to move from the rotations. One can then make all of the motions of the form of this manner; it will reduce the amplitude in the movements of the pelvis, and assure an always correct position of the knees.
- Time in apprenticeship: This type of practice concerns the advanced practitioners, who already have the bases (centering; steadiness; coordination; regular breathing, etc.), and a developed enough internal sensibility.

#### 3.2 Transfer weight without moving the chest

(Inspired by the work of François Schoessler)

Back to the previous exercise on the two legs. At the time of the rotation of the pelvis using the *Kua*, it is observed that the armature concealed a change of the supportive foot, without movement of the chest. This point is very useful in *tuishou*, for the other can no longer guess our supportive foot by looking at us. It is in addition much faster because the rooting and the rotation are realized concurrently.

### 3.3 Use each joint separately

*(Inspired by the work of François Schoessler)*

You can move right and left hip joints separately, helping to diversify the motions. Of course, you should always watch to prevent double weightedness, by intentionally pressing both feet, one at a time. However, all of motions are theoretically possible, the classics recommend wrapping or protecting the pubis. *“If your pubis is not wrapped (protected), then the lower parts can not be firm and the roots can only be superficial. In this case, the upper and the lower parts of the body have lost their means of communication,”* [cited and translated by Yang Jwing-Ming, *The Theory of Taijiquan*, Budo editions]. I understand this sentence, based on the commentary of Yang Jwing Ming, as having at least one groin “closed.”

### 3.4 Use only the deep muscles

*(Inspired by the work of Wang Rong-shan, Taiwanese guest at Rencontres de l'Amicale, 2009)*

*“To be firm in its roots, the upper thighs (Kua) must be relaxed.”* You must therefore move the groin using only the deep muscles. The buttocks must be soft and the muscles that cover the groin must be relaxed. You must learn to use these muscles the existence of which was not even suspected!

To move the pelvis as a block, large muscles such as the abdominals are used. These muscles are thus no longer available for their “normal” work, i.e., to be conscious of abdominal breathing.

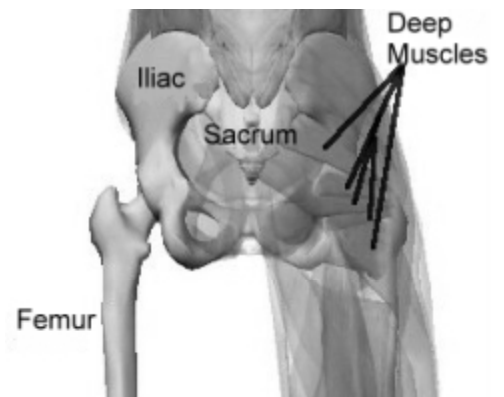
If we think of the hip joints at the heart of the groin, and try to move them (instead of moving the pelvis as a block), we will mobilize the **small deep muscles**. These muscles are shown in the diagram. The big muscles are thus available for other work.

Thanks to the numerous deep muscles, you can have precise control of the movement of the heads of the femurs.

To train, you can sit down on a seat. Thus no muscle of the pelvis is asked to maintain the upright posture. The coxofemoral (hip) joints are moved making very small figure eights in all directions. We will feel immediately if the glutes are used, as any contraction lifts us from the chair. Note also that the groins are relaxed.

In taijiquan, as in all martial arts, the center of the person is the lower abdomen, the lower Dantian. This requires modifying our body schema and our way of moving. This is necessarily long and patient work. As taijiquan is an internal martial art, we learn to develop not only our internal sensitivity (perception of the muscles, of the joints, the balance) but also their orientation in space. This internal sensitivity also allows us to feel each other when working in pairs (development of listening Jin) and enables us to perform martial gestures without relying on muscle strength.

Another work of the sensation of the pelvis is the work of the abdominal breathing (normal then reverse), and the work of meditation where the sensation of this zone is the means the most used to stabilize the mind.



*Seen from the rear, with the superficial muscles transparent.*