

The Shoulders

Contributed by Todd Elihu
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Using startling language like this is one of Master Chen's hallmarks, intended to drive his point home so that the student will not easily forget it. But, what else does he say about the requirements of the shoulders?

During the Tang dynasty, women with softly sloping shoulders were considered to be the most beautiful of all... Nowadays, however, fashions have changed and some women wear shoulder pads. Master Chen says that we should therefore recruit women at department stores and clothiers who are going for the squarer look of shoulder pads as they already possess a physical trait that is highly desirable in the practice of Taiji. Master Chen once recalled that when he first started learning from Hong Junsheng, Hong looked at the relative squareness of his shoulders and shook his head. He was told that the angles of his shoulders were too sharp and he needed to learn how to make them round over and slope. After this incident, the young Chen started actively pulling his shoulders down by constantly engaging his abdominal muscles. Determined to round over his shoulders, his persistent practice gave way to intense pain and spasm in his abdominal muscles. He felt as if these muscles were permanently contracted and wondered if this is what muscular dystrophy might feel like. Fortunately, the discomfort subsided and he was able to round his shoulders satisfactorily. So for those of you with the naturally sloping shoulders of a Tang dynasty beauty, do not delay your Taiji training. For those of us who are lacking such shoulders, either start pulling those buggers down or go looking for a hungry dog!