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SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING:  
AN INVESTIGATION OF TAIJIQUAN  
AS A SYSTEM FOR INTEGRATING  
THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL ASPECTS  
OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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"In his every movement a man of great virtue  
Follows the way and the way only.  
As a thing the way is Shadowy, indistinct.  
Indistinct and shadowy,  
Yet within it is an image;  
Shadowy and indistinct,  
Yet within it is a substance.  
Dim and dark,  
Yet within it is an essence.  
This essence is quite genuine  
And within it is something that can be tested."

DAODEJING

## ABSTRACT

Taijiquan is an ancient Chinese martial art and health system which grew out of the large body of psychosomatic techniques and practices which are part of Daoist physiological alchemy. Through the ages Taijiquan has been used as a system of personal development. In recent years there has been a growing interest in Taijiquan by an increasing number of individuals in the West. Disciplines such as dance and movement studies, humanistic psychology, postural integration and bodymind systems have shown interest in certain aspects of Taijiquan.

This study aims at examining the usefulness of Taijiquan as a system for integrating the physical and mental aspects of personal development in the context of self-directed learning in the West. It also deals with the problems the Western student will face in taking up Taijiquan as a system of personal development.

The study is done in two parts: Part I deals with Taijiquan as a system and looks at its historic and philosophical development. Part II examines traditional teaching and learning methods, and strategies and principles of Taijiquan in the context of integrating the physical and mental aspects of personal development.

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## INTRODUCTION

Taijiquan is a Chinese martial art with Daoist influences, practised by the Chinese as a system of health and personal development. It arrived in the West about the early 1960's and has since gained in popularity as a health and relaxation system (and a martial art system to a small group of martial arts enthusiasts). Modern Dancers have been fascinated by the movements and philosophy of movement in Taijiquan (Redfern 1982). Humanistic psychologists have been interested in concepts and techniques in Taijiquan that contribute to integrating the physical and mental aspects of the individual (Payne 1981).

All of these factors suggest a need for the examination of Taijiquan as a possible system of personal development for the West. This study, therefore, is an attempt to assess the value of Taijiquan as a system of bodymind re-education in the context of self-directed learning.

The concept of the self-directed mode of learning has been utilised here for two reasons. First, the traditional modes of learning in the Chinese martial arts (of which Taijiquan is a part) are closest in nature to what we in the West would now term self-inquiry or self-development. Although the teacher-pupil

relationship was important, the emphasis was on the student discovering himself through the techniques of the system he was studying. Second, the idea of self-directed learning, which is now generally understood and accepted in the West, is a useful organizing construct in attempting to understand the nature of Taijiquan as a system of re-education. Such a construct is necessary since Taijiquan belongs to the tradition of a culture which, although now gaining familiarity, is essentially alien to the Western mind. The model of self-directed learning can assist us in understanding this cultural difference because of its similarity to the Eastern systems.

Knowles has offered the following definition:

"In its broadest meaning, "self-directed learning" describes a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes. Other labels found in the literature to describe this process are "self-planned learning," "inquiry method," "independent learning," "self-education," "self-instruction," "self-teaching", "self-study", and "autonomous learning." The trouble with most of these

labels is that they seem to imply learning in isolation, whereas self-directed learning usually takes place in association with various kinds of helpers, such as teachers, tutors, mentors, resource people, and peers."

(Knowles, 1975, p.18)

When one undertakes a programme of personal development, probably the most appropriate mode of education is 'self-directed learning'. This is especially true since 'self-directed learning' is more in tune with our natural processes of psychological development (Knowles, 1975). Examining the tradition of education in the Chinese martial arts, one can see the relevance of the above definition in studying these systems. This will be discussed in Chapter 5.

In conducting the study I was faced with a number of difficulties. Probably the most significant of these is the serious lack of scholarly literature in the English language. Considering the fact that only recently has Taijiquan become popular in the West, very few literary works of any significance have been written, although there is a growing body of popular literature. Thus I have had to resort to relatively few books in establishing background material. Due to the nebulous nature of Chinese historiography, and the Chinese love for legends and stories as a means of transmitting information, many misconceptions and

inaccuracies have crept into popular beliefs about Taijiquan. In order to unravel these I had to depend on the excellent works of martial arts historians such as Robert Smith and Jou Tsung Hwa.

In order to facilitate handling of material I have divided the study into two parts. The first part examines the historical and philosophical background of Taijiquan, and traditional Chinese, modern Chinese and Western attitudes towards Taijiquan. I have organised the body of this section as an extensive and fairly comprehensive description of Taijiquan and largely confined critical analysis and discussion of the material to the conclusion. This was done in order to facilitate the handling of the material and to establish in a reasonably congruous whole a body of descriptive information on Taijiquan which I hope will contribute towards rectifying the marked lack of scholarly material in the literature.

The second part deals with bodymind techniques and strategies of Taijiquan and their value if any, in integrating the mental and physical aspects of personal development of the Western student.

Although I am aware of the danger of confusing two systems of thought (the Cartesian and the holistic) by using terms such as 'body', 'mind', 'mental' and 'physical', interchangeably with others such as 'bodymind', to some extent this has been unavoidable. Our standard usage of the English language involves

certain assumptions about the world. Terms like 'mental' and 'physical' imply a Cartesian world view which presupposes the separation of the realms of mind and body (Ryle 1973). The Chinese language contains no such presuppositions, their concepts and language being inherently holistic. However, to express such a mode of thought accurately in English involves either tortuous philosophical argument (which I have tried to avoid here), or the tolerant acceptance of the difficulties of expressing in words concepts which can, ultimately, only be understood experientially. Such a tolerance is of course characteristically Chinese or Daoist in itself. I would therefore ask the reader to also adopt such an attitude of tolerance towards these difficulties, and to understand that no bias is intended in the use of either Cartesian or holistic terminology.

Since most writers seem to use various systems of romanization of Chinese names and technical words, some official and some unofficial, in order to standardize the romanization I have used the official Chinese Pinyin system, whenever possible. Thus Tai Chi Chuan (Wade Giles system) is now rendered Taijiquan and chi (vital force) is now rendered qi.

In regards to dates I have used + and - after Joseph Needham rather than BC and AD.

## PART I

"Softness triumphs over hardness, -  
feebleness over strength. What is more  
malleable is always superior over that which is  
immoveable. This is the principle of  
controlling things by going along with them,  
of mastery through adaptation."

(LAOZE)

## CHAPTER ONE

# TAIJIQUAN IN CHINA AND IN THE WEST

Even as little as a decade ago, if one were to ask the average Westerner what Taijiquan was, one was likely to get one of two answers: "I don't know" or "Isn't it that slow motion dance the Chinese do in the parks in the morning?" Today, after much television exposure, people have come to believe that Taijiquan is a system of health related exercise whose primary purpose is promoting relaxation.

With the growing interest in Eastern philosophies, religions and medicine, many Westerners have taken up Taijiquan for various reasons: some out of curiosity and an interest in things Eastern, others out of a need for gentle exercise in order to preserve or restore health, and still others who see it as a means of achieving personal development (Huang 1982).

But what really is Taijiquan and will it meet all these needs? Taijiquan is usually referred to as Tai Chi (using the Wade Giles system of romanization) in the West. Taijiquan, translated from the Chinese, gives us the following: *Taiji* translates as



"Supreme Pole" (Reid and Croucher 1983) or "Grand Terminus" (Jou 1980) or "Supreme Ultimate" (Cheng and Smith 1967), and *quan* is translated literally as "fist" but means boxing system (Cheng and Smith, 1967), thus suggesting a martial arts system. This adds to the confusion for how can a martial art be a system of health and relaxation and provide enough meaning and direction in our life to be seen as a system of personal development?

In order to answer all these questions let us examine how the Chinese, who originated it, saw Taijiquan and what it has come to be seen as in modern times.

#### HOW THE CHINESE SEE TAIJIQUAN

Traditionally, the Chinese saw Taijiquan as a martial art. This is borne out clearly, and without any room for doubt, by statements by Chinese writers such as the following:

"Primordial pugalism (Tai chi chuan) is an ancient and famous martial art of China."

(Tseng 1976 p.1)

"Tai chi chuan was originally created for martial purposes, and every form has its special martial applications."

(Yang 1986 p.1)

"Tai'chi chuan is a branch of pugilism with an outer form of sparring but based upon the theories of the Grand Terminus."

(Chen 1979 p.3)

"There is a good reason to use the title *Tai chi* for this martial art. Tai chi chuan can not only destroy hardness but can also be used to control movement. It is the premier martial art."

(Cheng 1985, p.23)

Yet it is when the Chinese talk of Taijiquan as a system of exercise and sometimes as a system of meditation, and sometimes suggesting that it is more than these: "Tai chi chuan, an ancient Chinese exercise or art for the harmony of the mind and body..." (Huang 1982, p.23), that the Westerner is confused. For to practise a martial art for the purpose of health is easy to understand, but a martial art as a system of meditation (Jou 1982) and personal growth is harder to understand.

The Chinese of course didn't have this problem. For martial arts to the Chinese were and are a major part of physical education (Chang 1985). The Chinese also saw the martial arts as 'ways' of gaining spiritual development (Leggett 1978). Thus they had no difficulty in seeing Taijiquan as a system of martial arts: a system of movement education, meditation and a system of personal growth since it harmonizes mind and body.

Perhaps the Chinese view would be more clear if one had some idea of the origins and scope of Taijiquan. As we shall see in much more detail in a later chapter, Taijiquan probably grew out of an enormous body of Daoist psychosomatic techniques that were designed for promoting health, prolonging life and creating states of heightened physical and mental awareness (Needham 1983). As a martial art it belonged to a school of martial arts known as the Internal Martial Arts which seem to have developed in and around a Daoist temple complex situated on Wudang mountain range in Hebei province in China. One of the reasons this school of martial arts was known as the Internal School<sup>1</sup> was that it specialized in developing the 'inner' aspects of the person; the mind, spirit and *qi* (intrinsic energy) (Draeger and Smith 1969).

The Internal School stressed the harmonious development of *Yi* (mind, intention, spirit), *Li* (muscle, sinew and bone) and *Qi* (intrinsic energy) (Smith 1974). This probably gave rise to the idea of Taijiquan being a system of personal development.

The Chinese also saw Taijiquan as a system of *qigong* (literally *qi* - internal energy, *gong* - cultivation) (Jou 1980). Since the concept of *qi* is foreign to the Western

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<sup>1</sup>Cheng Manjing, a Taijiquan master of this century and a very popular teacher, suggests that the used of the terms 'internal' and 'external' in regards to the martial arts is that the 'internal' school was based on Daoism, a religion or philosophy that originated in China (thus internal) and the external systems like Shaolin Kung-Fu grew out of Buddhism, a religion 'imported' into China from India (Cheng 1985).

world, Westerners find it difficult to see this attitude to Taijiquan. Thus Taijiquan as a *qigong* system is almost exclusively a Chinese attitude. Since, to the Chinese mind, the cultivation of *qi* is fundamental to good health, the notion that Taijiquan is a health system and a *qigong* system is fundamentally the same thing. Thus the Chinese who is uninterested in the martial arts aspects of Taijiquan, will still practise it as a means of promoting his health and prolonging his life by cultivating his *qi* .

Since the closest concept to *qigong* in the West is aerobic fitness training, and since this is not associated with slow motion activities, the Westerner finds it difficult to see how Taijiquan can contribute to any physiological changes that would mean an improvement in his cardio-vascular system. This is not to say he doesn't believe in good old-fashioned breathing exercises - but these were seen to simply increase lung capacity. The Chinese on the other hand saw increased rates of respiration as a result of physical activity as a symptom of the lungs labouring to provide the body with *qi* and thus a strain on the system. For they rightly observed that the healthy person was not short of breath when engaging in strenuous physical activity. They also observed that this type of fitness was built up over a long period of time through controlled breathing exercises (Yang 1987).

Thus they saw strenuous physical activity which produced laboured breathing and profuse sweating as undesirable and even dangerous.

The correct way to train was seen as breathing in a controlled fashion while engaging in slow but sustained physical movement, and stopping when one was sweating lightly (Bian 1987).

These differences in attitude explains why the Chinese see Taijiquan as a system of *qigong* for building fitness and prolonging life, while the West does not see it as a serious form of exercise in terms of aerobic fitness training but rather as a system of exercises that relaxes and reduces the effects of stress.

The Chinese saw Taijiquan as a serious martial art. Cheng Manjing was of the opinion that all Chinese soldiers should be taught Taijiquan in order to improve their level of health and to improve their self-defence skills (Cheng 1985). William C. C. Chen, a student of Cheng Manjing's and now a teacher in his own right, entered a number of Kung Fu tournaments and did well. In 1958 he entered the all Taipei Open Kung Fu Championships and took second place. This was no mean feat since he had to fight all comers from all styles (Rodell 1985). Many other Taijiquan boxers fought in these championships as well as the All Taiwan Championships and have done well (Smith 1980). We are also told of the stories of the great masters, Yang Luchan, Yang Cheng Pu, and Chen Wuming, who are a few of the great fighters, not to mention the great Chen boxers from the Chen village (Smith 1980). Their exploits quite clearly demonstrate that Taijiquan is a martial art and a very

effective one at that (Ibid.). One only has to read the *Taijiquan Classics* (a collection of short works by various authors which were first published as a collection around the turn of the century and have since come to be called the Taijiquan Classics. They are seen to contain invaluable advice and information to the student of Taijiquan (Wile 1983). They shall hereafter be referred to simply as 'The Classics') to see that they are primarily concerned with boxing skills and only briefly mention health benefits (Lo, Inn, Amacker and Foe 1979).

Again we find differences in attitude. The West finds it hard to see Taijiquan as a fighting art. This is probably due to the fact that the average Westerner finds it hard to believe that the slow-moving dance-like form of Taijiquan can really be a fighting system, and due to the fact that they are unaware of the scope of Taijiquan. For what the average Westerner is unaware of is that the Taijiquan solo form (which is seen as almost all of Taijiquan) is only a small part of Taijiquan as a martial art.

The following is a list (according to Yang 1986) of the different aspects of Taijiquan that are available today:

1. Barehand
  - a. Taijiquan solo sequence
  - b. Applications from the solo sequence

- c. Fast Taijiquan training
- d. Still meditation
- e. *Qi* circulation training
- f. *Jing*<sup>2</sup> Training
- g. Pushing hands<sup>3</sup> and its application
- h. Taijiquan fighting set and deeper martial applications
- i. Taijiquan pushing hands and sparring

## 2. Taijiquan Sword

- a. Taijiquan solo sword sequence
- b. *Qi* enhancement and extension training
- c. Martial applications
- d. Taijiquan sword two-man form
- e. Taijiquan sword sparring

## 3. Taijiquan Saber (broad sword)

- a. Taijiquan saber solo sequence
- b. Martial applications
- c. Taijiquan saber two-man form
- d. Taijiquan saber sparring

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<sup>2</sup>*Jing* is best translated 'attitude of strength'. In Taijiquan there are over 40 different kinds of *jing*.

<sup>3</sup>Pushing hands is a form of two-man training where one person pushes and the other leans to neutralise the attack.

#### 4. Taijiquan Spear and Staff

- a. Individual spear and staff applications
- b. Spear and staff sticking-matching practice
- c. Long weapons sparring

#### 5. Taijiquan Ball

- a. 'Listening' and understanding jing training
- b. Adhere-stick jing training
- c. Two-person Taijiquan ball training

#### 6. Taijiquan Ruler (baton)

What is taught by most Taijiquan schools and teachers today are the solo forms and the pushing hands forms. A few teachers teach the sword forms but the saber and staff forms are lost and only a few techniques are taught. In mainland China a number of weapon forms are taught, but these are not traditional forms but are modern forms that have been developed by various Taijiquan teachers. There are extremely few masters anywhere who train with the Taijiquan ruler and ball. Yet even with the abridged list of Taijiquan activity available today, it has been estimated that it would take the average student twenty years to learn them all. Such is the complexity and the scope of Taijiquan as a martial art.



There is another school of thought regarding Taijiquan as a martial art. Some Chinese Taijiquan experts feel that strictly speaking Taijiquan must not be seen as a martial art but rather as a movement system that builds martial skills. Thus Taijiquan re-educates the bodymind to function in the most natural possible manner and to teach it to generate awesome power by learning to unleash some of the untapped resources of the mind (Yang 1986).

Chen Weiming, one of the great masters of the Yang School of Taijiquan, was of this opinion. He felt that one should learn to move and use one's body correctly by practising Taijiquan forms but when it came to matters of self-defence it would be futile to attempt to extract techniques from the form, for this would be being a slave to technique. Rather, one should be able to transcend technique and respond to the demands of the situations in a natural and appropriate manner (Chen 1929).

Rose Li, a modern day master of Hsing yi quan and a teacher of Taijiquan and Bagua chang (according to Robert Smith she is one of the greatest internal martial artists to come West, Smith 1974), told me in discussion that she preferred to call Taijiquan 'Taiji' since the use of the word 'quan' would mislead one into believing that 'Taiji' was a martial art. In her opinion 'Taiji' was a system of movement education which not only prepared the 'bodymind' to learn martial arts (or any other art for that matter) but also resulted in better health and a sense of inner calm.

However, one must remember that her opinion of Taijiquan is biased by the fact that she is a martial artist of the famous Beijing school of Boxers (Smith 1974) and being primarily a Hsing yi boxer she would have been taught Taijiquan as a supplementary system that contributed to improving her boxing skills. In fact, she told me that she required her Hsing yi students to have studied Taijiquan with her for a minimum of two years before they are allowed to take up Hsing yi, and she insists that they continue studying Taijiquan as long as they study Hsing Yi.

An interesting analogy that Rose Li uses in describing the Taijiquan form is that the form is like a 'dictionary' of movement. When one was thoroughly familiar with all the 'movement words' in the form one could move in an educated fashion, be it in a combat situation, sport or everyday life.

In the light of these observations Wen-Shan Huang's definition of Taijiquan seems appropriate:

"Tai chi chuan is a Chinese system of exercise or an art of life, the practice of which provides valuable help in extending man's life span, eliminating tension and increasing opportunities of physical, spiritual, and mental well-being and equilibrium".

(Huang 1982 p.37)

These definitions of Taijiquan were true if one were to limit the scope of Taijiquan to the study of primarily the solo form. For if one were to see Taijiquan in its broadest sense, there would be no mistaking its distinctly martial flavour and attitudes.

Thus we could conclude that from a Chinese point of view Taijiquan is primarily a martial art but is practised as a *qigong* system, an exercise system and a system of personal development.

No discussion of Chinese attitudes to Taijiquan will be complete without some mention of the effect the Cultural Revolution had on these attitudes. The Chinese communists saw the value of Taijiquan in terms of its contribution to the fields of health education and medicine (Draeger and Smith 1969). They instituted several scientific studies of Taijiquan. Before the rupture of relations with the Soviet Union in the early 1960's, several Russians were involved in the research. Professors I. Baichenko and G. I. Krasnoselsky found the art worthy of medical investigation (Smith 1980). As a result of these joint Sino-Russian papers have been published and a Russian text on Taijiquan has been issued (Draeger and Smith 1969). The communists who studied Taijiquan particularly for medical use have shortened and synthesised the long traditional forms (over one hundred forms which took from 20 minutes to an hour to do) to a short form having elements from all the major schools and consisting of

twenty four postures that take approximately five minutes (Chang 1985).

*China Sports* magazine (No. 2 1963) reported that two doctors of the Shanghai College of Medicine conducted experiments for a year in an effort to evaluate Taijiquan. Using 220 elderly people, they split them into two groups: one (Group A) practised Taijiquan regularly while the other (Group B) did not. Some of the results of these tests are as follows:

TEST	Group A	Group B
Average pulling strength	86.2 kg	63.4 kg
Ability to touch ground without bending knees	87.2%	15.6%
Reaction time	0.205 seconds	0.268 seconds

The Taijiquan group also excelled in average thigh measurement and the depth of subcutaneous tissue. Overall, the Taijiquan group's performance clearly approximated that of young adults (Smith 1980).<sup>4</sup> There are other reports of tests done but details of these, when available, are at best sketchy.

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<sup>4</sup>Note:- Since detailed reports are not available it is hard to determine the veracity of these tests. It is quite probable that they were subject to methodological bias.

In spite of the government's interest in Taijiquan's relations to medical matters, it was by no means happy with it. In the Beijing monthly *Xin Diyu* (New Physical Culture) magazine in April 1965, several articles appeared calling for the eradication of feudal remnants still present in Chinese boxing, especially Taijiquan. Workmen in the new China, they claimed, should study Taijiquan not for self-defence but rather to improve physical fitness, to raise productivity, and to increase their ability to defend the fatherland. This put the art squarely into the utilitarian context so necessary for the survival of any institution in the People's Republic of China.

Happily Taijiquan survived the Cultural Revolution and has since gained in popularity. In a recent report on the state of Taijiquan in China, Mary Smalheiser (1985) reported that China was experiencing a Taiji renaissance. In Shanghai, China's largest city, with a population of 11 million, one official estimated that 100,000 persons practise Taijiquan on a daily basis. Another official put the number as high as one million. Regardless of numbers all officials agreed that throughout China qigong and Taijiquan were the most popular sports. According to Smalheiser, all the old Taijiquan masters who were severely restrained by the Cultural Revolution were now encouraged to teach in the government sponsored training facilities and programmes. Major government programmes also exist to train young people in Taijiquan and other

forms of martial arts in colleges, special institutes and what are termed "spare-time" schools (Smalheiser 1985).

Attitudes towards Taijiquan have of course changed. The majority of Chinese today see Taijiquan as a martial art that is practised as a sport and a system of physical fitness. The inner developmental aspects of Taijiquan do not seem to be stressed although officially the Chinese accept that it has great developmental value.

#### HOW THE WEST SEES TAIJIQUAN

Taijiquan first caught the public eye in the West about the early 1960's. It was a time when young people in the West showed great interest in what have come to be known as "alternative" religions and philosophies. Although there was some interest in Taijiquan it was not till later that it grew in popularity.

Taijiquan probably first arrived in America with the refugees who fled to the United States in order to escape the Cultural Revolution.

Wen Shang Huang is credited with popularizing Taijiquan in America. According to his chief disciple, Marshall Hoo, he organized the National Tai Chi Chuan Institute in 1962 (which was later changed to the National Tai Chi Association). During these

formative times a decision was taken to teach Taijiquan openly and to use all available media to popularize it in America, instead of teaching just a small group of 'disciples' even if it meant simplifying Taijiquan (Hoo 1986).

Huang was in a unique position to publicize Taijiquan. In China he had been Professor of Economics at Nan King University - he held a chair in Carlon Province in culturology (a discipline composed of history, archeology, sociology, psychology, anthropology and paleontology). He was also a translator of Joseph Needham's *Science and Society in China, Vol. 4*, and was considered the foremost totemic scholar in China. He spoke a number of European languages and lectured evidently in many colleges and universities in America (Hoo 1986).

With Huang's backing, Taijiquan's Western history began to unfold in the sixties. Demonstrations were given (Huang and Hoo did over one hundred demonstrations in the sixties) and television programmes were made and books written and published (Hoo 1986). Luckily for Taijiquan, America was also seeing a boom in interest in the martial arts. *Judo* and *karate* had already arrived and 'Kung Fu', as the Americans pronounced it (it should be pronounced Gong Fu) was becoming popular with the arrival of martial arts movies by Run Run Shaw starring the charismatic Bruce Lee (Hallander 1985).

With all this interest in martial arts, Taijiquan grew in popularity. But curiously Taijiquan was not seen as a serious martial art. This was probably due to the fact that Huang emphasized the health and developmental aspects of Taijiquan rather than its martial aspects. Thus Taijiquan became popular with those interested in alternative philosophies, health 'buffs' and those interested in dance and movement studies who were fascinated by the grace and power of Taijiquan movement. In fact both Martha Graham, the originator of Graham technique of modern dance, and Rudolf Laban, famous for his analysis of movement, were very strongly influenced by Taijiquan philosophy and movement (Redfern 1982). Some areas of Humanistic Psychology adopted some concepts such as 'grounding' and 'rooting' (see chapter 4) (Lowen 1958).

Partly due to the way Huang presented Taijiquan to the West and partly due to the influences of the different groups who took up Taijiquan, the image changed in the West until most Westerners who were aware of its existence thought of Taijiquan as a Chinese exercise system that was dance-like and as a moving meditation. One often hears of it described as 'moving yoga'.

In recent years, however, there has been a growing interest in Taijiquan among the martial arts communities in the West. More and more Western martial arts students are getting interested in Taijiquan as a martial art. This in turn is changing the image of



Taijiquan. In fact as China is beginning to treat Taijiquan as an exercise system and a sport and is actually encouraging Taijiquan competitions (how one can make a competition of a Daoist art is hard to imagine) (Taylor 1985/86), the West is starting to see it as a martial art (Phillips and Stehlik 1984).

Probably the strongest criticism that can be levelled at Taijiquan in the West is that the standards of performance are low. This is probably due to the fact that many of the so-called Chinese masters of Taijiquan teaching in the West were either refugees who discovered they could be 'masters' in a land where no-one knew what good Taijiquan was, or they were of not sufficient skill to be successful in mainland China or in the New Territories. But happily, with more Westerners travelling to China to study and getting a better perspective of the scope of Taijiquan, attitudes and standards are changing.

Rose Li once told me that she was asked by a group of beginning students to demonstrate her Taijiquan. She refused. Her reason: it was a waste of her time to demonstrate to anyone who did not know enough about Taijiquan to appreciate what they were seeing.

Robert Smith recounts a similar experience concerning the difficulties the uninitiated have in appreciating the subtleties of Taijiquan:

"Simply observing the art without participating in it can be misleading. I once made the mistake of taking an American *nidan*<sup>5</sup> in Okinawan Karate to meet Cheng<sup>6</sup>. The American was singularly unimpressed by what he saw. He wanted a test. So Cheng signalled to a student, who then faced the Karateka. He faked a high kick, the student's arm started up; the foot flashed down, the student slapped it lightly while stepping inside and touching the American's heart. Dead<sup>7</sup>, he failed to realize it, for he went away scoffing at Tai-chi. I apologized to Cheng later and he waved it aside: "One must be kind to blind men." The inevitable sequel: I took the lad to a Shaolin friend of mine and left him to his ministrations. A week later I saw him. He had discontinued. Why? "Damn it, those guys wanted to fight!" Unappreciative of the soft, afraid of the hard, this one doubtless is still thrilling them at cocktail parties with his dance. Fighting it is not."

(Smith 1980 p.32)

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<sup>5</sup>Second degree, black belt

<sup>6</sup>Cheng Manjing, Smith's teacher and a popular master of this century.

<sup>7</sup>Smith is referring here to the fact that, had it been a real fight, the 'touch' would have been a finger strike to the vital point above the heart which, when struck vigorously is said to induce death.

Happily, things have changed and standards are raising as the Westerner's awareness and appreciation is growing.

\* \* \* \* \*

We have discussed the similarities and dissimilarities of the Western and Chinese attitudes towards Taijiquan. We have also seen that modern-day Chinese have changed their attitudes about Taijiquan. Does this then mean that there is an 'ideal' or 'real' form of Taijiquan that is not distorted by modifications or an incorrect understanding of the principles of Taijiquan?

Some authorities do think this. Jou believes that none of the modern-day masters is any good compared to other 'older ones'<sup>8</sup> (Jou 1980). Chen Weiming, writing probably in the late 1920's, was concerned about the standard of Taijiquan in those days. He said:

"Many practise *tai-chi* nowadays but it is not the *real tai-chi*. The real has different taste and is easily distinguished. With *real tai chi* your arm is like iron wrapped in cotton. It is very soft and yet feels heavy to someone trying to support it. In *tui-shou* ("pushing hands practice") you can feel

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<sup>8</sup>Fortunately there are still some Taijiquan masters who are now in their eighties and nineties who studied under the great masters of the past and now, with their new-found freedom, are doing much to ensure that standards are of the highest order (Smalheiser 1985).

this. When you touch your opponent, your hands are soft and light, but he cannot get rid of them. When you attack it is like a bullet penetrating neatly (*kan-tsui* - clean and sharp) without recourse to force. When he is pushed ten feet away, he feels a little movement but no strength. And he feels no pain. Your hands lightly adhere to him and he cannot escape: soon his arms become so sore he cannot stand it. This is *real tai chi*. If you use force you may move him, but it will not be *kan-tsui*. If he tries to use force to control or push you, it is like catching the wind or shadows. Everything is empty.... *Real tai-chi* is very wonderful".

(Draeger and Smith 1980 p.38)

Chen suggests that distinguishing between 'real' Taijiquan and the false is possible. He then proceeds to list a number of points which he sees as characteristics of real Taijiquan. Although these points may be valid they are still descriptions of Taijiquan and we are still left with the original question: what really is Taijiquan?

Perhaps the problem is that Taijiquan, like Daoism from which it derives its fundamental principles, defies objective and precise definition. Perhaps the difficulty lies in the question itself and the problem is that the Western mind with its well ordered world-view of cause and effect does not allow room for experiential

phenomena that defy precise definition and reassuring classification. Perhaps the answer lies in the need for an altered world-view that recognises the importance of experiential phenomena and the need for body-learning.

In any event, Taijiquan does seem to defy simple definition and in order to ascertain what it really is one needs to gain a broad understanding of the various components of Taijiquan while remembering that the whole is more than the sum of its parts and that in the final analysis the definition itself is dynamic and grows with one's understanding.

Let us now examine some of the major aspects of Taijiquan.

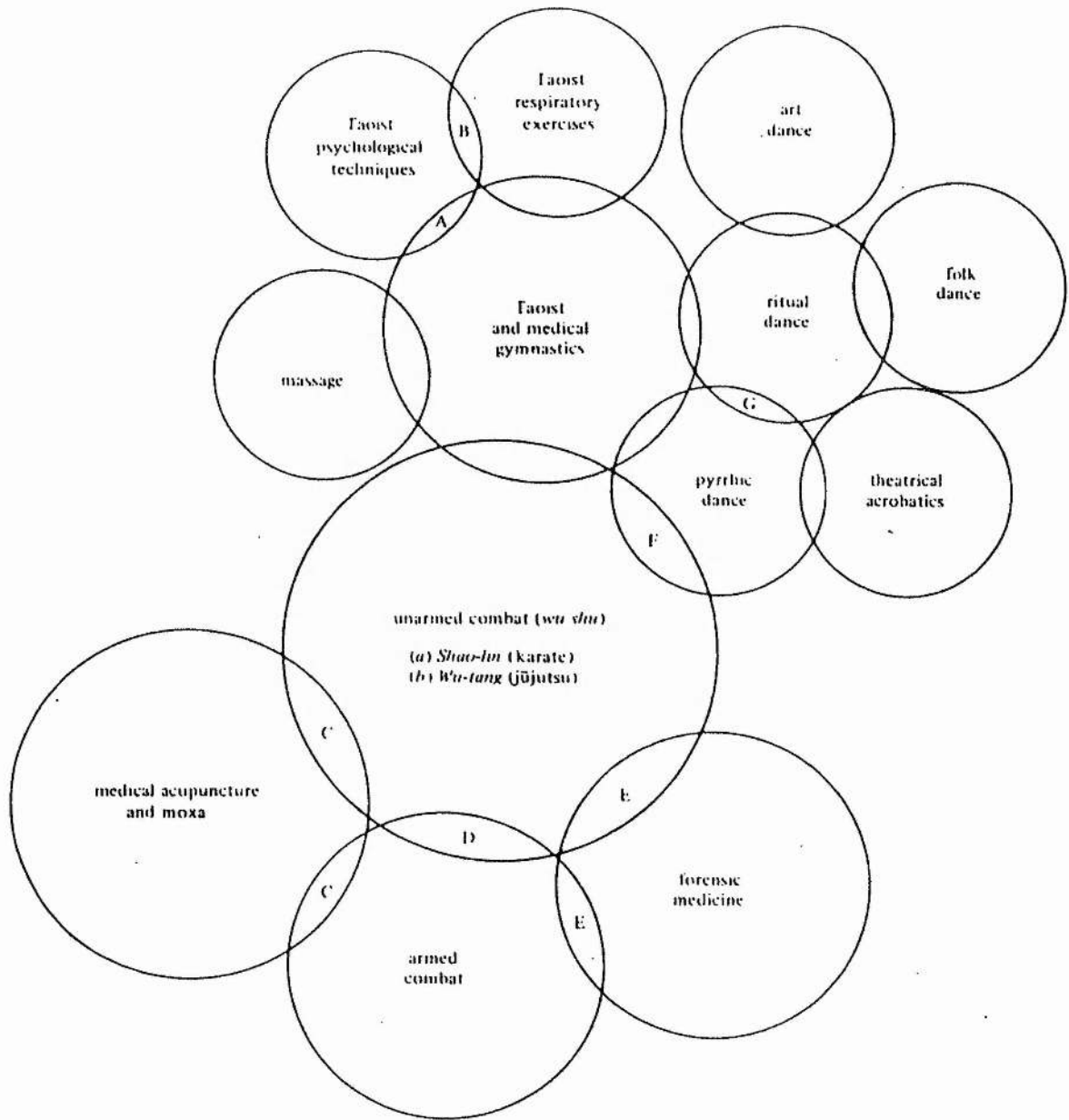
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## CHAPTER TWO

# THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF TAIJIQUAN

In tracing the origins of Taijiquan, it is necessary to look at it in the context of a wide range of Daoist psychosomatic practices for achieving health and longevity. This is necessary since Taijiquan is not purely a martial art or a system of calisthenics, but a combination of these and influenced, to a greater or lesser degree, by many of these psychosomatic practices. These range from psychological techniques of meditation through respiratory exercises (*nei kung*) and massage (*an mo*) to physio-therapeutic gymnastics (*dao yin*) and so to unarmed combat. This again shades off into armed combat and pyrrhic dance which again is related to ritual dance, entertainment dance forms, folk dance and theatrical acrobatics (Lu and Needham 1980). Figure 1 shows the relationship between these and other Chinese psychosomatic practices.

For the purpose of establishing a factual historical perspective, it is necessary to look at Taijiquan's martial and exercise origins separately yet as parallel disciplines influencing one another.



- A asanā, quasi-yogistic positions
- B anoxaemic states
- C vital spots or danger points
- D spike and chains, thrown darts, etc.
- E practice of coroners
- F Taijiquan
- G Confucian temple dances

Fig 1: Chart to show relationships between the many Chinese psycho-somatic practices (after Needham)

## THE MARTIAL ORIGINS OF TAIJIQUAN

Taijiquan as a martial art has its origins deep in the traditional Chinese unarmed combat systems. These were rugged forms of exercise involving punching, kicking and grappling that no doubt provided beneficial exercise. They were subsequently influenced by Daoist meditative-respiratory techniques which become an important and integral part of the Chinese combat systems, both armed and unarmed. Buddhism also had an influence on the philosophical, mental and physical conditioning aspects of these systems (Draeger and Smith 1980).

Although details are few and often ambiguous, there are reliable records of martial arts as early as the Chou dynasty (-1122 to -255). *The Book of Rites* of that dynasty, *The Spring and Autumn Annals* (-722 to -481) and the books of the Warring States Period (-403 to -221) record competitions and displays of fencing, archery and wrestling (Draeger and Smith 1983). One of the earliest records of a martial art in China is that of *chio ti* 'butting with horns' in which two wrestlers dressed in ox hides and horns fought each other. This martial art, also called *xiangpu* 'mutual assault', was popular at least as early as the -3rd century, when it was the favourite sport of the second Chin Emperor. A famous tournament was organised in the court of Emperor Han Wu Ti in 108 BC and it was still widely practised in the +10th century. To this day in Japan, the art of wrestling is called *sumo*, an expression which in Chinese characters is written



in just the same way as *chio ti* or *xiangpu*. When Buddhist sutras translated in the Lio Ckhao period speak of unarmed combats with bare hands and feet, they use the expression *xiangja xiangpu* (Lu and Needham 1980).

Hsun Tzu (C -320 to -235) records the existence of boxing systems when he writes of the men of chi who were very skilled in the art of personal combat *chichi*, 'adroit striking'. Some one hundred and fifty years later the historian Ssuma Chien referred to the same fact when he wrote "The people of chi ... are timid in group warfare but brave in single combat." (Draeger and Smith 1983).

One of the earliest and probably the first descriptions in literature of boxing is found in the *Han Xu Yi Wen Ji* (Han Book of Arts) where *Six Chapters of Hand Fighting (Xoupo)* are mentioned. Unfortunately, parts of this Han dynasty (-206 to +220) book were lost and with them the six chapters were lost and nothing is known about their contents (Draeger and Smith 1983).

In the later Han dynasty (-206 to -220) Hua To, the famous surgeon, originated a series of exercises based on the movements of five animals - the tiger, deer, bear, monkey and bird. These were adopted by different boxing systems and subsequently became complete fighting systems in their own right (Reid and Croucher 1983).

Shaolin Ssu is a famous Buddhist temple on the slopes of Sung Shan in Honan province, and if the date of its foundation in +494 is right it must indeed have been in the lifetime of Damo, the famous monk and patriarch who is credited with bringing Chan (Zen) Buddhism to China (Galante 1981). According to tradition, Damo, sometimes referred to by his Indian name, Bodhidharma (Putitamo), is said to have introduced unarmed combat techniques as a part of the monks' physical education. These movements are believed to be the beginnings of that great tradition of martial arts that grew around the Shaolin temple. At some early stage these were crystallised into 18 distinct movements, the *Xipa Lohan Xou*, known today as the '18 Lohan hands'. At later dates, these were increased, first to 72, then finally systematized at 173. This system is known today as "Shaolin Kung Fu" (Lu and Needham 1980).

Parallel to the growth of the Shaolin fighting systems another school of martial arts was reputedly developing in a mountain temple complex on Wudang Shan, a peak on the Wudang mountain range in Hebei Province. This was a Daoist temple and the martial arts systems that were developed there were strongly influenced by Daoist philosophy and Daoist gymnastic and breathing systems (Draeger and Smith 1980).

During the Tang (+618 to +907) and Song (+960 to +1279) periods these two schools came to be known as the nine northern or 'exoteric' traditions (*neijia*) called Wu Dang Bai (Lu and Needham 1980). The Shaolin system is sometimes described as the 'hard' or

'external' school because muscular strength and power were stressed. The Wu Dang school is described as the 'soft' or 'internal' school because breathing systems, yielding and neutralizing opposing force and the use of 'intrinsic energy' were stressed (Draeger and Smith 1980). Another explanation for the terms 'internal' and 'external' as applied to the martial arts has been suggested by Cheng Manjing (1985), who states that the terms refer to the origins of the two systems. The 'external' schools were from outside China - Buddhistic in origin - whilst the 'internal' schools were native to China and Daoist in character.

The *Neijia* school as we know it today, is made up of three separate but inter-relating disciplines: *Xingyiquan*, *Baguachan* and *Taijiquan*. They differ in movement patterns, technique and mental attitude. Xing yi quan is characterised by extremely fast, direct linear attacks. Baguajan depends on rapidly changing circular movements that confuse the opponent. Taijiquan stresses soft, subtle yielding movements that are a combination of straight line and circular techniques that neutralize and control the opponent's attacks. Yet all three are similar in that they use Daoist breathing techniques and stress the use of intrinsic energy (qi) rather than muscular strength and power. Since about the middle of the +19th century a martial artist of the internal school began his education with the simple direct movements of Xing yi quan in order to develop strength, agility and power. Later he would be taught Baguajan with its extremely complex changes of circular movement to improve his balance and flexibility. With this

foundation he would take up the study of Taijiquan where he would learn the subtle and intricate movements of the art and develop his 'intrinsic' energy by breathing exercises (Reid and Croucher 1983).

Although there is no doubt that Taijiquan grew out of Wu Dang tradition with some influence from the Shaolin tradition, it is virtually impossible to determine who originated it and at what precise date it became a form as we know it today.

#### THE EXERCISE ORIGINS OF TAIJIQUAN

Since it would be correct to say that the *neijia* school of 'soft' martial arts grew out of ancient Daoist psycho-physiological techniques for cultivating and developing qi (internal or intrinsic energy) a brief look at the history of *qigong* (cultivation of qi) exercises and Daoist physio-therapeutic exercises is important for our present purpose. Although the concept of qi would seem to go back to some early unrecorded time in the history of China, traditionally the qi theory begins with the birth of Chinese medicine during the reign of the legendary Yellow Emperor Huang Ti (-2690? to -2590?). The *neijing Xuwen*, the classic of internal medicine, is attributed to him. This is a very important, if not the most important, early Chinese medical work. In it one finds a theory of man in health and disease and the theory of man as a 'microcosm' reflecting the 'macrocosm' of the universe. The qi theory expounded in the *Neijing Xuwen* has

remained the dominating theory of Chinese medicine to the present day (Veith 1972).

In the -4th century Laoze, the first great Daoist master, is credited with the authorship of the *Daodejing* (the classic on the virtue of the Way), the foremost book of Daoism. In the *Daodejing* Laoze describes actual breathing techniques meant to increase one's life span. This is the first surviving record of the use of breathing techniques to increase qi circulation and life span (Yang 1985).

Although the ancient Chinese recognised the connection between breathing and health, it was after Laoze that we see the development of that great body of psycho-physiological and physio-therapeutic techniques, all geared towards achieving that cherished Daoist goal, longevity (Lu and Needham, 1980).

The *Xiji* (records of the historian) a Han dynasty work, indicates that by the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (-770 to -221) sophisticated breathing methods had evolved. Quangze, the second great Daoist master, writing in the -4th century, criticizes the Daoists of his day for their obsessive beliefs in techniques of longevity. In so doing he provides us with a valuable description of some of these methods and a clear link between respiratory practices and those aimed at a much wider exercise of all the muscles of the whole body. This is clearly seen in the following passage from the *Quangze* book:

"As for blowing and exhaling with open mouth (*chhui hu*), breathing out and breathing in (*hu hsi*), expelling the old (*chhi*) and taking in the new (*thu ku na hsin*), going through the motion of bears and stretching and twisting (one's neck) like a bird - all this simply shows the desire for longevity. This is the cherished aim of those scholars who practise gymnastics and massage (*tao yin*), those men who (believe in) nourishing the bodily form, and those who make it all their study to find out how Pheng Tsu achieved his longevity."

(Needham 1980 p.138)

The *Huai Nan Tzu* of the great commentator Kao Yu, gives further recognition of these methods.

In the recent finds at the Mawangdui tomb no. 3 (-168) an untitled text written on silk and dealing with therapeutic calisthenics (*tao yin*) was found. It shows both men and women, young and old, doing a series of exercises. Although the original text is damaged it seems to have contained about 40 drawings, each with a short caption, only 28 have survived. Among these one can clearly see the exercises described by Quangze, i.e. the 'bear rambling' and the 'bird stretching'. The manuscript clearly demonstrates that physiotherapeutic gymnastics mentioned in the Quangze book were well known in the -2nd century (Needham 1983).

Another interesting aspect of the Mawangdui manuscript is that it shows the kind of movements that must certainly have been the forerunner of *Wujingxi* ("five animal frolic") exercises devised by the famous surgeon Huato (+141 to +203) of the later Han dynasty. These were a series of exercises based on the movements of five animals: the tiger, bear, deer, monkey and bird. Some of these movements can be seen clearly in the Mawangdui manuscript (Needham, 1983). These exercises were to have a lasting influence on the Chinese martial arts. This influence can be seen in the postures and groups of techniques found in a number of Chinese boxing systems today (Reid and Croucher, 1983). This is a clear example of the interaction that has always existed between the Chinese health systems and martial arts.

With the creation of a truly imperial state during the Qin and Han dynasties, several works relating to *qigong* or breathing exercises were written. In the *Nanjing* or classic on disorders by the famous physician Bian Qiu, methods of increasing qi and qi circulation are described. The *Han Shu I Wen Qi* also describes *qigong* (chi gung - movement and breathing exercises to cultivate the chi or vital energy) exercises. The *Gin Guey Yao Liue* of Chang Chungkien focusses on the use of breathing exercises and acupuncture to promote and maintain a good flow of qi and health. The *Chou Yi Chan Ton Qi*, by Wei Boyang sets down the relationship between man, natural forces and qi. During the Qin period the physician Gar Hang in his book *Bao Poh Tzu* mentions using the mind

to guide the increase of qi<sup>9</sup> (Yang 1985).

Damo (+506 to +556) an Indian Buddhist monk is said to have come to the Shaolin temple (founded c. +494) in Honan Province in Northern China bringing with him a number of breathing and gymnastic type exercises. He is credited with the authorship of the *Yi Qingjing* (manual of exercising the muscles and tendons) and the *Hsi Sui Jing* (manual of the purification of the marrow), books that list a series of exercises he is said to have taught the monks in order to improve their health (Needham 1980). These were exercises that emphasised rhythmic breathing and stretching movements probably carried over from Indian Avedic Medical Practices (Galante 1981).

During the Sui and Tang dynasties (+581 to +907) qigong methods increased and improved. Chow Yunfan compiled the *Chubin Yun Hou Lou*, a veritable encyclopedia of qigong practices. He lists 260 different methods of increasing the qi alone. The *Chen Gin Fan* of Sun Xumao describes a method for guiding the qi and introduced six vocal sounds<sup>10</sup> which were related to the function of the internal organs. He also made a collection of daoist massage techniques he called "Laoze's 49 Massage Techniques". The *Wa Tai Mi Yao* of Wang To discusses the methods of combining herbal remedies with breathing exercises for treating internal conditions (Yang 1985).

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<sup>9</sup>This principle is a central concept in the internal martial arts and especially in Taijiquan.

<sup>10</sup>Some of these breathing methods incorporating vocal sounds are still used by some Taiji schools (Jou 1981).



From the Song to the Yuan dynasties (+960 to +1368) several works of interest were written. Among these were the *Yang Shen Je* of Chang Andao which discussed qigong exercises. The *Zu Men Xi Xi* of Chang Zuhua suggested the use of breathing exercises to cure external injuries such as cuts and sprains. The *Lan Xi Mi Chan* of Li Guo used qigong and herbal remedies for internal disorders. Qu Tanxi's *Ge Zu Ya Lun* was a text on the role of qigong practice in curing the sick (Yang 1985).

The focal point of the literature on Daoist gymnastics is the *Tai Qing Dao Yin Yang Sheng Jing* (manual of nourishing the life force by physical exercise and self massage), a collection of writings compiled about the late Tang (+618 to +907) to Song (+960 to +1279) period. There is no doubt that some of the material is much older and some of it goes back to at least the later Han period (-220 to -207). Most of the exercises listed were done seated in a cross-legged position, though a few were done standing. Some of the movements were quite rigorous but the practiser was instructed to stop as soon as he began to perspire<sup>11</sup>. In all the exercises directions were given on the proper type of breathing (Needham 1983).

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<sup>11</sup>This instruction has come down through the years and is still followed by modern day practitioners of Taijiquan and some other Chinese martial arts.

Although there is no doubt that early martial arts borrowed from the Daoist psycho-physiological techniques it is not until the late Song to the early Qing that we see a wider acceptance of these exercises by the Chinese martial arts. For example, General Yuei Fei during the Southern Song Dynasty of +1177 to +1279, displeased with the physical condition of his troops used Damo's *Yi Qing Jing* (manual of exercising muscles and tendons) as the basis of a physical conditioning programme. He later modified the exercises into what was called *Xi Er-Dir-Jong* on the "twelve pieces of brocade". This was later simplified into *Ba Donjing* on the "eight pieces of brocade" exercises, both of which survive to this day (Yang 1985).

It was during the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368 - 1911) we see wide spread acceptance of qigong exercises by most of the Chinese martial arts. It was during this period also that the martial arts started to make a contribution to the large body of health practices (Yang 1985).

Today, when the need for most martial arts as a means of military or personal defence is minimal, one of their main uses is to provide beneficial exercise. The Health Education Council of the Peoples' Republic of China strongly recommends the use of martial arts or martial art movements in promoting the health of the people. These are taught at work places and schools. Thus we see in their early days martial arts, especially those of the internal school, borrowed from the exercise systems but today they have

become almost entirely exercise systems themselves. This is particularly true of Taijiquan.

#### THEORIES AND CONSIDERATIONS ON THE ORIGINS OF TAIJIQUAN

The Chinese favour two approaches to the origins of Taijiquan: the myth-centred approach and the man-centred approach. The myth-centred approach involves an inspired sage conceiving the art, while the man-centred approach has the art evolving by the painstaking process of cultural evolution.

The mythic approach is centred around the figure of Chang Sanfeng, while the humanistic approach traces lines of transmission from the Daoist techniques of the Tang dynasty, or from the Ming General, Chen Wangting and his descendents. Even modern scholars differ strongly in their opinions as Chen Kung who says:

"Whether Chang San-feng or someone else, whoever invented this subtle and profound martial art must have been an ancient Taoist possessed of the highest wisdom and could not possibly have been a common man".

(Wile 1983 p.12)

and Tang Hao who claims:

"Historical records and investigations in the fields prove that Tai chi Chuan was created during the later Ming and early Ching, or approximately 300 years ago. It combined and developed the various boxing styles which were popular among the people and the army during the Ming and added to this ancient *tao-yin* and breathing techniques, absorbing classical materialist philosophy, *yin-yang* theory, and medical knowledge concerning circulation of the blood and *chi* to form a martial art which trains both the external and internal".

(Ibid.)

Other writers simply combine these two approaches and in the manner of traditional Chinese historiography freely grafting fact onto legend.

Professor Douglas Wile of Brooklyn College in his recent book *Tai Chi Touch Stones: Yang Form Secret Transmissions* (1983) suggests the following considerations in tracing the genesis of Taijiquan:

I It is virtually impossible to establish the origins of Taijiquan for the following reasons:

(a) Most existing written documents are grossly contradictory.

(b) There is not a single record or detail that is not subject to bitter scholarly debate.

(c) No two geneologies are congruent.

(d) Even the dates and activities of twentieth century characters are inconsistent in different sources.

II The bitterness of scholarly debate in this area should alert us to the fact that this is yet another area of political axe-grinding. Traditionalists' presumption of the historicity of Taijiquan and their omissions of critical research, and the sceptics' failure to extract what is useful from the myth and legend does little to preserve and enrich the art. In the enrichment of human experience legend is as important as history.

III Most Chinese martial arts boast mythopoetic beginnings and Chinese students of Taijiquan would feel cheated if they were deprived of a legendary founder. Thus if Chang Sanfeng did not exist as the father of Taijiquan, in order to keep with convention it would be necessary to invent him. The legends surrounding these arts were as enlightening as "objective" history since they were often meant to communicate the inner essence of experience.

With these considerations in mind let us look at Chou Qichun's views on the origins of Taijiquan as recorded by Robert Smith in

his book *Chinese Boxing, Masters and Methods* (1980). Chou Qichun's views in particular were chosen because they cover all the main theories on Taijiquan. According to Chou there are four basic claims regarding the origins of Taijiquan. They are as follows:-

#### I Chang Sanfeng as Creator

According to this theory Chang Sanfeng, an alchemist of mount Wudang during the reign of Emperor Huizong in the 12th century is believed to be the founder of Taijiquan. This theory was strongly pushed by Yang Luchan, the founder of the Yang school of Taijiquan and subsequently many writers uncritically accepted it (Smith 1980). Some others believe that another Chang Sanfeng, an itinerant Daoist priest also of Mount Wudang in the 15th century, around the time of the conquest of the Yuan Dynasty by the Ming Dynasty was the founder of Taijiquan (Giu Liuxin 1984). Some confused the two which gave rise to the legend that Chang Sanfeng of the 12th century achieved immortality and made periodic appearances, and it is the same Chang Sanfeng who appears on the Wudang Mountain in the 15th century. Others believe that he achieved longevity and simply lived from the end of the Song dynasty through the whole Yuan dynasty into the Ming dynasty, a period of more than 200 years (Jou 1981).

Traditionally Chang Sanfeng of the Yuan dynasty (+1286 - +1368) is accepted as the founder of Taijiquan. According to more than ten

of Chang's biographers, he was a native of Lidoyang Province. He was a scholar, a gifted calligrapher, painter and poet. He was also a magistrate of the district in Hebei province but he aspired to a secluded life and had little love for official promotion. The record states that he once made a tour of the Wudang Mountains. This seems to have made a strong impression on him since he changed his name, from Chang Xi to San Fengze after three peaks on mount Paoqi and later retired and lived as a hermit and priest in these mountains (Smith 1980).

A translation of the complete text of the biography of Chang Sanfeng in the volume on artisans of the Ming Dynasty History (+1368 to +1644) by Wu Daye and Mu Ding Xuxien (1983) says:

"Chang Sanfeng was born in Yichou of Leotung (South Manchuria). His given name is Chuan-yi, alias Chun-po. San-feng is his courtesy name. Because of his untidiness, he was also called 'Dirty Chang'.

"Tall and well built, he had large ears and round eyes, with prickly moustache. Whether in winter or summer, his garments were confined to one jacket and one raincoat made of straws. He ate plenty, but might eat only one meal every few days, or go several months without eating. He memorized books after one reading,

and travelled or rested without definite schedule. Some people said that he travelled a thousand li (about 300 miles) a day. He liked humour, and behaved as if there were nobody around.

"On travelling at Wutang Mountain (Hupei Province), he told people that this mountain would become prosperous. At that time, many constructions had been destroyed by war. San-feng and his disciples cleared the debris and built straw houses for their living. Then he left.

"Emperor Taichu (Ming Dynasty) heard of his name, and in the first year of Hung-wu's reign (1391) sent a messenger to summon him. But they could not find him.

"Later, he lived in Paochi (Shansi Province). One day, he said that he would die, and passed away after having left a written note. People in the county laid him in a coffin. Upon burial, sounds were heard inside the coffin. When it was opened, he was alive again.

"After that, he went to Szechuan Province, returned to Wutang, and travelled around. The stories about him were even more unreal and chimerical.



"During the Yung-lo's reign (1403 - 1424), the Emperor sent official Hu Ying and Eunuch Chu Shiang to summon him, bringing along the imperial decree, incense, and gifts. After having travelled several years to many deserted and wild areas, they could not find him. Then the Emperor mobilized 300,000 workers to build the Wutang Temple, which cost millions of ounces of silver. Upon completion, the Emperor named it the Sacred Mountain of Taiho, and assigned government officials to manage it. This development confirmed San-feng's prediction.

"There is another story that San-feng was born in the time of Chin (1115 - 1234), and studied together with Lu Ping-chung at the beginning of the Yuan Dynasty (1277 - 1367). Then he learned Taoism and Taichinghuang in Luyi (Honan Province). But all these cannot be verified.

"In the third year of Tienshuan (1459), Emperor Ying-chung granted him the title of the Immortal Tung-wei. But no one knows whether he was alive or dead at that time."

(Smalheiser, 1985 pp. 76-81)

This biography or any other biography of Chang Sanfeng does not record whether Chang Sanfeng knew any kind of martial art. Yet tradition has it that in the early part of the Hung Wu reign (+1368 to +1398) of the Ming dynasty he formulated Taijiquan. According to the legend he was summoned by the Emperor but was delayed by bandits. This boxing was named Wudang School or Inner Boxing. This system consisted of Pa Men (Eight directions) and Wu Pu (five steps). Thus it was also named Xi Xi (Thirteen operations).

Another story claims he observed a snake and a bird (according to one account a crane, according to another, a magpie) fighting and learned the principles of yielding and circular movement from this experience (Galante 1981). A third legend is that when Chang Sanfeng saw the monks at the Wudang mountain temple practising boxing, he thought they used too much force and strength, and lacked balance. Therefore he formulated a soft system using the principles of Daoism and the teaching of the *Yi Jing* (Jou 1981).

The claim that Chang Sanfeng was the creator of Taijiquan is probably the most popular claim. This is probably because the Yang school, which is the most popular form of Taijiquan, subscribes to it. Robert Smith summarizes this claim thus:

"Chang San-feng of the Song dynasty was the first to teach Tai Chi. Many years later Chang Sung-Ch'i, native of Hai-yen, Chekiang Province, in the Chia-ching reign (1522 - 66) of the Ming dynasty was the most famous Tai-Chi boxer. Later, Wang Chung-yuek, native of the T'ai-Lang mountains of Shansi Province, received the art. He taught Chiang Fa, and Chiang passed the method to Ch'en Ch'ang-hsing, native of Ch'inh Chia Kou, Honan. Yang Lu-ch'an and his relative Li Po-K'uei of Kuang-P'ing went together to Ch'en to learn the art, and Yang finally became proficient in it. This is how Yang came to learn T'ai-chi. His school still has many supporters."

(Smith, 1980 p. 113)

This claim was actually originated by Li-chou of the Ming dynasty. In his *Nanlei Anthology* is a record of the inscription on the tomb of Wang Changman, which says:

"The boxing prowess of the Shao-lin school is widely known throughout the world. Since it is essentially an offensive system, however, it is possible to counter its methods. There has arisen a certain school, the so called Inner School, which controls the enemy's action by calmness. When he attacks he is immediately unearthed by a counter. Thus, people call the Shao-lin method the Outer School and the latter method the Inner

School. The founder of the Inner School was Chang San-feng of the Song dynasty. Chang was a Taoist living on Mount Wudang in Hupeh Province. Emperor Hui Chung summoned him but he could not go because of bandits. One night he dreamed of being taught a special kind of boxing by Emperor Hsuan Wu the Great. The next morning Chang killed over one hundred bandits by himself. A century later Chang's art prevailed in Shensi Province and Wang Chung was its most famous promoter. Ch'en Chou-t'ung, a native of Wen-Chow, Chekiang, learned the art from Wang and then taught it in his hometown. During the Chi-ching reign of the Ming dynasty, Chang Sung-Ch'i was the most famed advocate of this art."

(Smith, 1980 pp. 113-114)

We find a similar record in the biography of Chang Sungqi in the *Ningpo Chronicle* of the Qing dynasty, compiled by Tsao Pinjen, a governor of Ning Po. Nevertheless, neither the chronicle nor the tomb inscription state that Chang Sanfeng was the founder of Taijiquan. Chang's biography has survived the years. It doesn't give any indication that he was either skilled in Taijiquan or founded it. Secondly, while the fact that Yang Luchan learned Taijiquan from Chen Changxing, the Chen family do not accept Chang Sanfeng. Thirdly, the so-called Inner boxing mentioned in Huang Lichou's *Nanlei Anthology* bears no resemblance to the Taijiquan of today.

The Chang Sanfeng theory pushed by the Yang School was first published as recently as 1931 in the book *Application of Taichichuan* co-authored by Yang Chengfu (grandson of Yang Luchan) and Tung Yingchich. No source was given (Wu and Mu 1983). The manuscript says:

"Taichichuan was handed down from the Immortal Chang. Born towards the end of the Sung Dynasty, he was a native of Yichou, Leotung, with the Taoist name Sanfeng.

"In the 27th year of Hung-wu's reign (1395, Ming Dynasty), he again entered the Wutang Mountain of Hupei... one day, when the Immortal was reading the bible, he heard some unusual squawks of a magpie in the yard. When he observed it from the window, he saw the magpie on a pine tree, looking down like an eagle. On the ground was a coiled, long snake, which raised its head. The two were fighting. The magpie squawked and flew down, flapping its wings to strike. The snake slightly shook its head to evade it. Then the magpie returned to the tree. After a while, the magpie became impatient and flew down again to strike with its wings. The snake twisted its body to evade it, still coiled. They repeated this many times, but the magpie failed in attacking the snake. when the Immortal came out, both the magpie and the snake were gone.

"From the fight, the Immortal discovered the techniques of coiling like tai chi and of conquering hardness with softness. Based on the principle of change in tai chi, he designed the tai chi chuan."

(Horwitz, Kimmelman and Lui, 1976 p.47)

Lin Qingtang wrote the latest version of this story and published it in the Taijiquan Development Committee News Letter, June 6, 1979. It is an adaptation of Sung Qijin's story in his book *A Study of Taijiquan*, 1970. Although the relevant parts of the snake bird fight are virtually the same, this being a work of fiction rather than a history, the story was modified and elaborated. For example:

1. The supposed date of Chang witnessing the snake bird fight was changed from +1395 in the Ming Dynasty to +1359 in the Yuan Dynasty. The new date is exactly 100 years before the Emperor Yingqung gave him the title Immortal Tungwei.
2. The magpie was changed to a hawk.
3. The site of the snake bird fight was changed from Wudang Mountain in Hubei Province to Paochi in Shaanxi Province.
4. The story claimed that Chang personally named the art "Taijiquan". The fact is that the term was created when an

article by Wang Qungyueh (+1736 to +1795) was posthumously titled *A Treatise of Tai-chi Chuan*.

From these facts we are forced to conclude that the claim that Chang Sanfeng created Taijiquan is not supportable. However, Robert Smith offers the following explanation as to how the claim might have arisen: Wang Qungyuen, the author of "*Theory of T'ai-chi*", was a native of Shensi Province, and his name has just one more character than that of the founder of the School of Inner Boxing (according to the *Nanlei Anthology*) Wang Qung, a native of Shanxi Province. The similarity of the names and in the names of the provinces could have caused the confusion. Since Yang Luchan was not well educated, his promotion of the Chang Sanfeng claim and his combining Taijiquan with "Inner Boxing" was probably done in conjunction with some of his better educated students, such as Hsu Lunghou and Chen Weiming, both of whom would have read the *Ningpo Chronicle* and the *Nanlei Anthology*. The uncertainty surrounding the founder of Taiji is complicated further by claims made by the various schools, which we will now examine in detail.

## II The Four Schools of Taijiquan

According to the theory of the four schools of Taijiquan, there were four major schools, the Xu, Yu, Chen and Yin School. This theory claims that there were four separate schools of Taijiquan each with its own founder. Song Xuming is responsible for this thesis. Wang Xinwu in his book *Orthodox T'ai-chi Boxing* records

that Song Xuming was an old man of seventy when the republic came into being, and that he was versed in the *Book of Changes* and skilful at Taijiquan. Song claimed that he was the seventeenth generation linear successor of Song Yuanqiao who is reputed to have learned his art from Xuanbing of the Tang dynasty (+618 to +908). Famous and capable boxers such as Qi Te, Wu Taichien, Lin Enxou, Qiang Dienjin and Wu Qienquan (who were teachers at the Beijing Athletic Research Society established by Xu Yushen for the promotion of Taijiquan) hearing of Song Xuming went to try their skills and were defeated and subsequently became his students. He told them that what he taught was from Song Yuanqiao's own work *Song's Taijiquan and its Offshoots*, in which the four schools are recorded in some detail. Hsu Lunghou in his book *Illustrated Explanations of T'ai-chi Boxing* records these details as follows:

#### A The Xu School

The Xu School was founded by Xu Xuanbing. He was a hermit who lived in Anhwei province. He was a giant of a man with a beard dangling to his navel and hair reaching his feet. He is supposed to have only eaten uncooked food and had the ability to run as fast as a horse. He was often seen in the market place selling firewood and chanting.

The great poet Li Pai of the Xuan dynasty is said to have gone in search of him and not finding him wrote a poem at the Unxing Hill Bridge. The Taijiquan handed down by Xu was called *Sanqi*, as it



was made up of thirty-seven movements. Unlike Taiji of today the movements were practised individually and when all were learned the student linked them together into what came to be called *Long Boxing*. The secret transmissions of this school were titled *Eight-Word Song*, *Theory of Understanding*, *Powerful Functions of the Whole Body*, *Sixteen Essentials*, and *Song on Functions*.

Xu taught Sung Yuanqiao. Thus the Song family continued the tradition of the Xu School (Smith, 1981).

#### B The Yu School

The Yu family is said to have learned it's Taijiquan from Li Taizu of the Tang dynasty. This system was called Long Boxing or *Xiendienquan*. Li is said to have lived at Anayet Temple on Mount Wudang. He is supposed to have lived only on several pints of bran a day and was called Saint Li. Yu Qinglui, Yu Yiqing, Yu Lunqou and Yu Daiyen inherited the teaching of this school.

#### C The Cheng School

Qing Lingxi founded the Cheng Schol of Taijiquan. Emperor Yuan Ti of the Southern Liang dynasty (+502 to +557) appointed him the governor of Huichow district in Anhwei Province. It was due to his efforts that the Haichow district remained undisturbed during the period of Houqing's rebellion. Cheng is said to have learned his art from Han Kungyue. Later this art was transmitted to Cheng

Bi. Xu Lunghu says that Cheng Bi wrote a book titled *Loshui Anthology* and also wrote *Yung Kung Wu Qi* (Five Principles of Training) and the Song *Szu Hsin Kuei Yuan Ke* (Song on Return of the four Instincts). Xu Lungha further states that Qing changed the name of his boxing system, which comprised only fourteen movements, to Xiaoqindien.

#### D The Yin School

Yin Liheng founded the Yin school. This Taijiquan was called *Hou Tienfa*. He taught Hu Qindzu, a native of Yangchou, Kiangxu and Sung Qungxi, a native of Anchou. Yin's art consisted of seventeen movements, most of them employing the elbow for striking. Although the movements bore different names, they were identical with those previous Taijiquan schools.

Professor Xu Chen in his book *Distinguishing the False from the True in T'ai-chi Boxing* (n.d.) disproves the aforementioned claims concerning the Xu, Yu, Cheng and Yin schools of Taijiquan. He says the following:

"The book *Beginning and End of Tales of Poems of the Tang Dynasty* written by Qi Yukung of the Sung dynasty records the life of Xu Xuanbing. But there is no mention of the fact that Xu taught Taijiquan. Cheng Linxi's life is recorded in the two historical books *Chen's Book* and the *South History*. The record

says that Cheng as a young man was famed for his prowess and that he could travel more than sixty-five miles a day on foot and was a brilliant horseman. Nothing was said, however, of his acquiring Taijiquan from Han Kungyueh. Chengbi was high official candidate in the Song dynasty and wrote a book titled *Ming Xui Anthology*. Xu Lungkou's claim that he wrote the *Loxi Anthology* is incorrect. No old records indicate that Cheng Pi was adept at fighting. The stories about Yu, and Yin Liking are untrue and the claims that they started Taijiquan schools are absurd."

(Smith 1980 p. 117)

Concerning the credibility of Sung Xuming who promoted the thesis of the four schools of Taijiquan, Professor Xucheng says:

"The forms and postures of Song Xuming's Taijiquan are very similar to those of Yang Taijiquan and the titles are nearly the same. The main difference being that many repetitions of a given movement were eliminated. Further, Song's method of pushing hands practice was nearly identical with Yang's. Some of the main points in Song's book *Song's Taijiquan and it's Offshoots* were copied from Wang Qungyue and Yuxiang. Thus it is quite evident that Song's Taijiquan was learned from the Yangs.

(Smith 1980 p. 119)

### III The Chen Qiagou Boxers

Chen Qiagou is a village in Ulen County in Honan Province. It is famous for its long tradition of Taijiquan and its long line of great boxers. There are claims that two of these Chen Qiagou boxers created Taijiquan. They are as follows:

#### A Chenpu as Originator

Chen Xin, a boxer from Chen Qiagou, pushed this claim. In the preface to his book *Illustrated Explanations of Chen's Taijiquan* he says the following: "In the seventh year of the Hung Wu reign of the Ming dynasty, founder Chenpu in his spare time from farming and studying invented certain techniques based on the principles of Tai-chi to teach his sons and grandsons how to acquire and maintain good health." Tang Kao later refutes this claim in his book *Investigations of the Origin of Taijiquan* he said: "Chen's tombstone was set up by his decedents in the fiftieth year of Kang Hsi reign (+1662 to +1722), Ching dynasty. The inscription was written by his tenth lineal successor, Chen Kung, but there was not one word mentioned about Chen's invention of Tai chi." Had Chen Xin's claim been valid, this would have been too significant a fact to be neglected. This is especially true since the Chen family was famed in boxing for many generations. Therefore Chen Xin's claim loses its credibility" (Smith 1983).

## B Chen Wangting as Creator

This claim was put forward by Tang Hao (+1897 to +1959), a master of martial arts and a historian. Writing in the 1930's he claimed that Chen Wangting of Chen Qiagou originated Taijiquan in the mid 17th century when the Ming dynasty was about to be replaced by the Qing dynasty. Tang based his claim on the following facts:

- (1) Qi Jiquang (+1528 to +1587), a famous general made a study of all the martial arts of his day and synthesized 32 movements for the use of his troops. These were listed in his famous book the *Canon of Boxing*. But it makes no mention of shadow boxing.
- (2) The five sets of shadow boxing, the one set of long boxing containing 108 forms and the one set of *Paocui* (combat boxing) created by Chen Wangting contained 29 of the 32 movements from Qi Jiquang's *Canon of Boxing*.
- (3) Qi Jiquang's *Canon of Boxing* starts with the two movements "Lazily belting the clothes" and "Single whip", so do the seven sets of routines of Chen Taijiquan.
- (4) In the book of the genealogies of the Chen families on page 12, the following note is found under the name of Chen Wangting, the ninth ancestor: "Wangting, alias Thouting, was

knight at the end of the Ming dynasty and scholar on the early years of the Qing dynasty. Known in Shandong province as a master of martial arts defeating once more than 1,000 'bandits', was originator of the bear-handed and armed combat boxing of the Chen school. [He] was born a warrior, as can be proved by the sword he used in combat."

- (5) The words of Chen Wangting's "Song of the Canon of Boxing" were copied from Qi Jiquang's *Canon of boxing*.
- (6) Some of the techniques designed by Chen Wangting such as the "push hands" sets of Taijiquan seem to be new and unique, as evidenced by their absence in major works on martial arts by such late Ming authors as Yu Dayu, Qi Jiquang, Tang Shunzhui and Cheng Chong Chondou.
- (7) It is possible to trace the origins of all the major schools of Taijiquan of today directly back to the Chen School and from there to Chen Wangting.
- (8) As Qi Jiquang died in +1597, and since Chen Taijiquan as taught by Chen Wanting contained most of the movements of 32 movements of Qi's Canon of Boxing it would seem that Taijiquan started after Qi Jiquang.

From these facts Tang Hao concluded that Cheng Wangting created Taijiquan (Giu Liuxin 1984). Professor Xu Chen in his book

*Distinguishing the False from the True in Tai Chi Boxing* disproves Tang's claim. He states that the Chen family's book mentions boxing but does not specify Taijiquan. Thus what Chen Wangting taught was not Taijiquan. Even references made later in the same geneology to Chen Changsing (fourteenth generation) as "boxing teacher" are not specific. Tang's claim that the Chen family refused to learn boxing from outside the family thus maintaining a pure form of boxing is groundless. Professor Xu Chen claimed that he possessed an old manuscript of the Chen's combat arts that has several chapters on weapon use, in which one note mentioned an origin in the Yu family, also other club and spear techniques were said to have come from the techniques of Wang Plitsun of Hubei province. This would clearly indicate that the Chen family's arts were influenced by outside combat techniques (Smith 1983).

Thus while there is evidence to show that Chen Wangting strongly influenced the growth and development of Taiji there is insufficient evidence to claim he created it.

#### IV That the Founder is Unknown

This theory was originated by Li Iyu as stated in his *Brief Preface to Tai-chi Boxing*, written in +1881. Li had studied Taijiquan from Wu Yuxiang since the third year of the Xien Feng reign (+1851 to +1861) in the Cheng dynasty. Wu first studied Taijiquan from Yang Luchan (the founder of the Yang School of

Taijiquan) and later with Chen Qingming of Henan. Wu Yuxiang subsequently founded the Wu school of Taijiquan. Thus Li Iyu was studying Taijiquan at a very important time of its growth and had a first hand experience of the art. This fact makes his observations very significant. This was a very important time since it was a time when most of the major schools of Taijiquan as we know them today were being formed. Li believed, as did most other important Taijiquan personalities of his day, that the founder of Taijiquan is unknown (Smith 1983).

After considering the four aforementioned theories concerning the origin of Taijiquan and the evidence to support each claim, one would have to admit that Li Iyu's theory is the most acceptable.

Thus it would seem that Taijiquan grew out of Daoism and became a distinct system of exercise and a martial art at some unknown date in the long tradition of the Wudang temple martial arts. It was transmitted to the Chen family in Chen Qiagou in Henan province in the 17th century and thus a "family tree" of Taijiquan was established. This "family tree" later branched into the major schools of Taijiquan popular today such as the Chen, Yang and Wu schools. One must not make the mistake of thinking that the transmission of Taijiquan was confined to this "family tree" only. There are very reliable records of great Taijiquan boxers who, due to lack of written records, do not fit neatly on to the "family tree". There are also recorded incidents where mysterious Daoist



monks show up from time to time demonstrating and sometimes teaching Taijiquan to important Taijiquan personalities and then disappearing leaving no trace of whence they came and where they went to. One of the more recent and important "appearances" of a Daoist monk is the incident involving Chen Wei Ming, a famous master of the Yang school. Smith records in his book *Chinese Boxers, Masters and Methods* (1983) that Chen claimed that when he was travelling through Szechwan Province he met an old Daoist who criticized his techniques, whereupon Chen challenged the old man and was easily defeated. He then studied with the man for some time and said he learned a new way of doing the postures (although when further questioned refused to comment and said he learned all he knew from Yang Changpu, thus adding more mystery to the incident).

Cheng Manjing modified the old Yang form and shortened it to 37 postures which he believed were the most important and basic postures of Taijiquan (Cheng Manjing and Smith 1980). The fact that he chose 37 gives rise to some interesting speculations: Tsung Hwa Jou, a modern authority on Taijiquan claims there was a Tang Dynasty (+618 to +905) martial art called *San Xi Qi* which was made up of 37 basic movements. Although these postures were practised separately and then linked together at random, Jou believes this was an earlier form of Taijiquan (Jou 1983). Was Cheng Manjing aware of this fact (assuming it is a fact and Jou is right) or is it coincidental that his careful choice of basic postures should number 37? These are interesting questions but

one can only speculate. But one must recognise the fact that besides the main Taijiquan "family tree" other transmissions exist and how far back they go we will never know.

\* \* \* \* \*

The problem of the authorship of Taijiquan is one that will probably never be resolved. But it is worth examining the need to establish authorship. To the Chinese mind it seems important to attribute the origination of all systems to some illustrious and legendary figure. The greater the stature of the character, the greater the importance of the system. Thus, who better than Chan Sanfeng, one of the eight Daoists who is believed to have attained immortality by the practice of Daoist techniques of longevity.

The Western student does not have the great urge to have links with legendary characters from China's past, and feels nothing of the sense of belonging and pride that the Chinese feel of these cultural links. Yet the Western student, like his Chinese counterpart, is fascinated by the antiquity of Taijiquan and gains some sense of assurance and permanence by being associated with such an old system. Perhaps these very needs provoke and sustain the debates on authorship.

Another aspect of thinking that one encounters in all Chinese martial arts is that in the past the systems were better and the martial arts were far superior to the modern ones. This kind of

thinking presupposes that systems like Taijiquan were complete and perfect at some point in history and have steadily deteriorated since then with the exception of a few outstanding individuals who were a light unto their day. This kind of thinking also favours the idea of a legendary character with supernormal abilities who founded the system in its entirety and ignores the possibility of cultural development.

In a sense using it is providing a critique of the present, for the present is a degenerate form of the past but it is also stating that by following the right techniques and practices we can again obtain near perfection. In that sense it is subversive of the present but offers hopes of a new future in accordance with antiquity. Presumably when antiquity has been reborn future degeneration can be prevented by strict adherence to the right techniques, practices and attitudes (an idea remarkably similar to Plato's argument in the Republic, where he sees society as degenerating from a golden past but as one that can be reborn by a tremendous moral effort.) Under this argument the followers of Taijiquan become a spiritual and physical elite, forerunners of a new utopia. The movement thereby acquires a socio-political dimension.

Although this approach causes great problems for the historian, it does have one great value. Each generation of teachers challenges their generation of students by tales of the prowess of their teachers and heroes that have gone before them. Thus the students

have standards to strive for and the teachers feel they belong to a finer, nobler and greater race that is now dying out. In practice this is a good system and one that is used at some time by every generation of teachers. Perhaps it is this very phenomenon that gives rise to the creators and the founders.

Another aspect that the exponents of theories of authorship ignore is the multi-faceted nature of Taijiquan. For the question may be asked - what exactly did Chan Sanfeng (or Chen Wanting or any other founder for that matter) invent; a system of combat? New fighting techniques? A new strategy of fighting based on Daoism? A set of slow motion shadow boxing that enhances health and well being and personal development? Or all of the above?

Thus we have to conclude that what came to be called Taijiquan in the 18th Century was a system of Daoist developmental technology that grew out of a process of cultural evolution over a period of at least two thousand years.

#### THE SCHOOLS OF TAIJIQUAN

Through the ages, like any other art form, Taijiquan divided into different 'styles' or 'schools'. In the last chapter some references were made to the various schools of Taijiquan and the fact that the Chen style is the oldest of these was established.

The Chen school split into the so-called 'old' (orthodox) and the 'new' (innovative) schools. Chen Changxing (+1771 to +1858) represented the 'old' school (Laojia) and Chen Youben (N.D.) the 'new' xinjia. The division, however, was not conclusive in its effect on style. There is no great dissimilarity in the movements and postures of the 'old' and 'new' schools and in fact the basic principles are identical. About the same time another important change took place in the evolution of Taijiquan. Wu Yuxiang (+1812 to +1880) who learned the 'old' style of Yang Luchan (+1780 to +1873) around +1851 and the new system from Chen Qingping (+1795 to +1868) in +1852 formulated his own style which was called the Wu system of Taijiquan. Wu's system embraced the 'old' and the 'new' of Chen Taijiquan and 'big' and 'small' methods of Yang Luchan. Yang Luchan in the meanwhile was formulating Yang Taijiquan. Yang changed the 'old' Chen system by deleting the more vigorous and hard techniques thus forming a more even, graceful form. Because the movements of the Yang form were extended and continuous, it was sometimes called the 'Big Style' or Large Frame (Smith 1980). This designation 'Big Style' was used after further modifications were made to the Yang form by Yang Chengfu (+1883 to +1936), the grandson of Yang Luchan. Before this it was sometimes referred to as the 'middle-style' since it was between the 'old' and the 'new' Chen styles. Yang Luchan and his second son, Yang Banhou (+1837 to +1892), taught a 'small' set of Taijiquan in which the postures were done with small movements instead of the large sweeping movements of the Big-style. This 'small' mode of movement was adopted by the Wu School (Giu 1984).

Wu Yuxing of the Wu School transmitted his method to Li Yiyu (+1832 to +1892) who passed it on to Hao Weizheng (+1949 to +1920), who in turn taught Sun Lutang (+1861 to +1932). Sun was a great boxer and was proficient in *Xing yi quan* and *Bagua quang*. Combining the strong points of the three systems, Sun created yet another school of Taijiquan (Giu 1984).

In recent times there have been many other claims made for new 'schools' of Taijiquan but these claims cannot be justified since slight changes to existing systems cannot be recognized as new schools. Some of these claims will be mentioned or discussed in the following discussion on the major schools of Taijiquan, namely, the Chen, Yang, Wu and Sun schools.

#### The Chen School of Taijiquan

According to the records Wang Zongyue of Shansi Province is credited with introducing Taijiquan to the Chen family during the Ienhung period (+1736 to +1795) of the Qing dynasty. He was travelling through Chen Quiagou village when he saw the Chen family members practising their distinctive type of martial art called *Paocui*. Not being impressed with their boxing skill, he is said to have made some derogatory comments on their ability. The Chens, being displeased, challenged him and were soundly beaten. The elders of the village, impressed with the effortless way he dealt with the challengers, asked him to remain and teach them his

style of 'soft' boxing. He did, and this was the beginning of Taijiquan in Chen Quiagou. This also marked the beginning of the Taijiquan family tree or at least the time from which reasonably accurate records were kept (Smith 1980).

Incidentally, Wang Zongqui's name is associated with the term "Taijiquan". Some authorities claim that he named the "thirteen sections" (the first of the five sets of Chen Wangting's boxing) "Taijiquan", "Grand Ultimate Boxing" (Yang 1985). Others claim that he called the art he taught the Chen family "Taijiquan" (Smith 1980). He wrote one of the major books in the collection of writings that have come to be known as the *Taijiquan Classics*. The book was called *Taijiquan Lun* and is the second major book in the *Taijiquan Classics*.

Any discussion on Chen style Taijiquan would be incomplete without mentioning the influence and contribution of Chen Wangting, alias Zhouting. Although it was established that Chen Wangting did not create Taijiquan, there is no doubt that he had a strong influence on it. Chen was an important figure in the boxing tradition of the Chen village. He formulated five sets of Shadow Boxing, one set of Long Boxing containing 108 forms and one set of *Paocui* ('cannon fist') combat boxing. That Chen was strongly influenced by Qi Jiquang's *Canon of Boxing* is clearly demonstrated by the fact that Chen's seven sets of boxing contain 29 of the 32 movements of the *Canon of Boxing*. Qi Jiquang (+1528 to +1587) was a general who had a keen interest in the martial arts. He

compiled a set of what he believed to be the most effective martial techniques, drawing techniques from the various boxing systems of his day. The 32 techniques he chose were called the *Canon of Boxing* and it became the handbook on unarmed combat for his troops. Two examples of the strong influence this book had on Chen Wangting can be seen in the following facts: (a) Qi Jiquang's *Canon of Boxing* starts with two forms called "Lazily Belting the Clothes" and "Single Whip". So do the seven sets designed by Cheng Wangting. (b) The words of Chen's *Song of the Canon of Boxing* were copied from Qi Jiquang's *Canon of Boxing* (Gia 1984).

Chen Taijiquan as we know it today contains most of the movements of Chen Wangting's boxing system. In fact the second set of 'old' Chen Taijiquan is still called the *Paocui* set. Chen Changxing (+1771 to +1853) is credited with formulating the two sets of 'old' Chen style. Wang Zongyue's influence is quite obvious in that the movements are done slowly and are connected together. Yet some of the movements of the *Paocui* set are still done in a powerful explosive manner as they were probably done in the time of Chen Wangting (Jou 1981).

Another very significant contribution made by Chen Wangting to Taijiquan is the "pushing hands sets". This was a method of training where two boxers attempted to push each other using either one or both hands or forearms. The idea was to absorb the opponent's attack by moving the body in the direction of force and at the same time discover the opponent's weak point of balance and



push him down with a minimum amount of force. The system was a very efficient method of sharpening up boxers' combat skills in a realistic manner. It also prevented injury and disposed of the need for protective clothing. Besides catching, pulling, pushing and striking, Chen's original "pushing hands" method contained kicking techniques. These were subsequently deleted since they could cause serious injury. There is some evidence to suggest that this "pushing hands" method of Chen's was unique in that no other martial art up till then had anything similar to it. Records of similar techniques are absent from the literature of the times. Even such famous martial arts authors as Yu Dayu, Qi Jiquang, Tan Shunzhi and Cheng Chongdon of the late Ming Dynasty fail to mention the pushing hands method. This in itself would seem to be sufficient evidence to conclude that Chen Wangting invented the "pushing hands" system. Thus Taijiquan inherited the "pushing hands" method of training (Giu 1984).

Chen Youheng, a contemporary of Chen Changxing, modified Chen Changxing's Taijiquan by dispensing with some of the more difficult movements. This came to be known as the "new school" (*xinjia*) and Chen Changxing's Taijiquan was referred to as the "old school" (*Laojia*) (Giu 1984).

Chen Qingping (+1795 to +1868), Chen Youbeng's nephew and pupil, further modified the 'new' form by making the movements more compact and reducing the depth of the postures. Since Chen Qingping moved to a town called Zhaobao, not far from the village

of Chen Quiagou, his Taijiquan is sometimes called Zhaobao-style. Present day practitioners of Chen Taijiquan consider Zhaobao-style Taijiquan the "new school" and the terms are used interchangeably (Yang 1985).

Although in principle Chen Taijiquan is very similar to other schools of Taijiquan, it is unique in some aspects. Mary Smalheiser reports in *Inside Kung-Fu Magazine* (May 1985) that according to Chen Xiaoqang, who is considered one of the leading Chen stylists in China today, these are:-

- (1) Chen Taijiquan is done in such a manner that the strength and power of the movement is apparent to an observer, whereas in Yang Taijiquan the strength is internal, and is not easily visible externally.
- (2) The Chen school is the only system that has a set where jumps and energetic movements are used.
- (3) Chen Taijiquan uses movements with many different types of self-defence applications. The Yang style, on the other hand, usually has one self defence application per posture.
- (4) The Chen style might have as many as seven or eight small actions that make up one posture whereas the Yang style postures might contain only three or four actions.

- (5) Another difference is in how the Chen style uses force through the hands. The attitude of the hand movements is described as resembling winding a string, while the Yang school describes this as unwinding a string from off a ball of string or pulling silk from a cocoon. This turning or corkscrew strength is called *chanxujing* and is a hallmark of Chen Taijiquan.
- (6) The rhythm and flow of the movements in the Chen routine varies while other schools stress slowness and smoothness in executing the forms.

In recent times two other Chen style routines have been developed which are noteworthy. The first, and officially recognized form was created by the aforementioned Chen Xiaowang (+1946 - ). This is a form made up of four sections containing nine movements in each section. With the addition of a beginning and closing posture the whole form contains thirty-eight movements. This is a form that is gaining popularity because of its shortness and accurate portrayal of the spirit of the older Chen forms (Giu 1984).

The second is a Chen synthetic form compiled by Chen Panling (+1890 to +1967) of Taiwan. This form is referred to as being a "synthetic form" because it includes elements of Xing yi quan and Bagua chang. While it contains many of the characteristics of the old Chen form, it has a few important differences. These are:

- (1) The sequence pattern of the form is more similar to the Yang style rather than the Chen.
- (2) The form is very obviously defence and attack oriented containing blocking, punching, kicking as well as grappling, grasping and twisting techniques.
- (3) The "natural" breath is used in performing the routine rather than "Taiji breathing".
- (4) The footwork incorporates Bagua chang and Xing yi quan movements such as "follow stepping" of Xing yi quan, when the rear leg steps up to conclude a movement.
- (5) As regards footwork and stance work, in some of the postures of the synthetic Chen style, the pivoting action of the rear leg in forming a front stance is done on the ball of the foot. All other forms of Taijiquan use the heel of the foot as the pivoting axis.
- (6) This form advocates the open palm position, which is similar to the "tile palm" wherein the fingers are kept erect. Emphasis is placed on the first finger which is held slightly spaced away, and more upright than the others. This is similar to the old Chen style but other forms of Taijiquan

use the "natural palm" where the fingers are held in a naturally relaxed and slightly curved manner.

- (7) While this form does not emphasize the hard, explosive movements like the old Chen style does, there is a difference in execution between soft movements and the more vigorous execution of strikes and kicks.
  
- (8) The Chen synthetic style uses a slightly rounder and forward inclined back position as opposed to the plumb erect back position of the Yang schools.

This 'school' of Taijiquan has had some popularity in Taiwan and at present there is some interest in it in the United States of America (Meeham and Shavers 1985).

With China recognizing Taijiquan as a valuable national resource as well as a bridge to good relations with other countries, Taijiquan is gaining greater interest. This is particularly true of Chen Taijiquan. In Chen Quiagou, the home of the Chen school, 70% of the villagers - over 1,000 people - practice Taijiquan. In recent times it has become a kind of 'Mecca' for Taijiquan practitioners the world over. At present the Chen village is expanding its training programme on a large plot of land which already houses a combination meeting hall and training room and dormitory.

Residential courses are held for students from all over China and one month courses are offered to foreign students. The curriculum at the school includes Chen style forms, 'push hands', and form applications. The classes, taught by three instructors are held for eight hours a day for teaching, learning and practice. The school emphasizes theory as well as practice. Special classes are offered for people who cannot study full-time at the school and are on part-time courses. The authorities, encouraged by the growing interest in Chen Taijiquan, are making plans to expand the facilities at the Chen village (Smalheiser 1985).

#### The Yang School of Taijiquan

The Yang School is the most popular school of Taijiquan today. It was founded by Yang Luchan. Yang Luchan (+1799 to +1872) was born in Hebei province in northern China. There is some evidence that he had some martial arts background in the Shaolin Temple Boxing tradition (Jou 1981). He is said to have approached Chen Changxing in an attempt to learn Taijiquan and at first was refused. He then stayed on as a farmhand (according to some records as a family servant) until Chen Changxing was convinced of his sincerity. He was then taught the Chen Taijiquan form but since he was not a member of the family the secrets of the form and the martial applications of the postures were withheld. Thus his progress was slow but he persevered. Then one fateful night he heard the vocal sounds made by martial arts students practising specialized breathing exercises, and upon investigating discovered

Chen Changxing conducting a secret class for his advanced students. From then on he watched these nightly classes from a hidden position and practised the things he learned from observation. His Taijiquan improved to the extent that he started defeating all Chen's advanced students. A very surprised Chen Changxing questioned him about his source of knowledge and upon discovering the truth decided that Yang was truly a worthy student and proceeded to teach him the family style in earnest (Yang 1981). Yang Luchan was proud to be one of Chen's best students, and became his best known student. Besides Yang, Chen only taught Taijiquan to one other non-family member, and that was Li Pokuei (Draeger and Smith 1980).

Later Yang moved to Beijing where he taught Taijiquan and made a great name for himself. His fame as a boxer was such that he was given the nick-name "Yang Wudi" (Yang the Unsurpassed). Many stories are told about the fighting prowess of Yang the Unsurpassed and these included not only his skills at Taijiquan, but also his skill with the spear (Jou 1981).

While in Beijing he came to the attention of a certain Duke Pai who employed him as a bodyguard and became his mentor (Crompton 1986).

Yang Luchan had three sons. The eldest of these died quite young, but the other two continued to study with their father.

Yang's second son Yang Banhou (+1837 to +1892) taught a set of "small-frame" Taijiquan to Wu Quan You whose son Wu Jianquan modified the form and founded the Wu School of Taijiquan. Wu's style, which is second only to the Yang School in popularity, is especially popular in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia (Yang 1981).

Yang Luchan's third son, Yang Jianhuo (+1839 to +1917) adapted his father's version which he taught to his sons. He had three sons: Yang Jawshyong (+1862 to +1929), Yang Jawyuan and Yang Jawcheng (Yang 1986). It is said of Yang Jianhuo that he was the most skilled of Yang Luchan's sons and since he was kinder and more friendly than his brother Yang Banhuo, he had many more followers. He taught three forms - long, medium and small - although he specialized in the medium form. Many legends are told of his great prowess and one of them is particularly noteworthy since it is one of the best known Taijiquan stories and is used by almost every teacher of the art to illustrate the incredibly lengths to which the art of 'neutralization' can be taken. It is said that Yang Jianhuo could place a sparrow in the middle of his palm and prevent it from flying off by 'neutralizing' the downward thrust the sparrow makes with its feet in order to take off. Such was his ability to react and relax his palm that the bird was unable to fly off (Yang 1986). This story is recorded by a number of Taijiquan historians and for once they all agree.



Yang Jianhuo's first son, Yang Jawshyong, alias Shaohuo, started studying Taijiquan under his father at the age of six and became a great boxer. Like his uncle, Yang Banhuo, he too was of a surly and mean disposition. Chen Manjing - a student of his younger brother, Yang Chenpu, and probably the best known master of Yang Taijiquan in this century - told how Yang Shaohuo's students were so afraid of him they did not dare to speak to him. On the two occasions that Chen Manjing attempted to do 'pushing hands' - a supposedly non-aggressive form of combat training - with Yang Shaohuo, he knocked Chen senseless. On one occasion he pushed him so violently into a nearby wall that he was knocked-out, and on the other occasion he rendered Chen unconscious by striking him on a vital point under the chin with two fingers. Chen also relates how in his time there were rumours that Yang Shaohuo had killed a number of men in unarmed combat (Smith 1980). All this would explain his unpopularity and his lack of followers. Nonetheless he was greatly respected as a complete master of the art.

Yang Chinghuo's second son died in childhood and his third Yang Jawching alias Chengfu was uninterested in Taijiquan until he was in his teens. After his father's death he developed a renewed interest in Taijiquan and studied diligently (Jou 1980). Probably because of his experience of independently researching Taijiquan he modified his father's form by deleting the more difficult postures and emphasizing the more upright, open and relaxed large movements. He also emphasized smoothness and slowness in executing the form. The result of his modifications was a well-

balanced elegantly upright form of great beauty. It was made up of 108 movements and came to be known as the Yang 'Long' form (Smith 1980).

Yang Chengfu's form has become the most popular Taijiquan form. There are a number of possible reasons for this. One reason was the man himself. Chengfu was a gentle giant and laughed a lot. He was also a brilliant teacher and produced a large number of peerless boxers. Although he emphasized the health aspects of Taijiquan he himself was never beaten in combat (Jou 1980). The fact that Yang Chengfu was the first Taijiquan master to be willing to share family secrets with the public made him very popular. Secondly, when the Nanking Wushu (martial art) Institute was founded in 1926 he was invited to be the head Taijiquan teacher, further popularizing him and Yang Taijiquan (Yang 1986). Thirdly, Chengfu's form with its beautiful movement and grand postures was the easiest of the forms to learn and perform, and with its emphasis on health and exercise as opposed to combat skills it gained popularity rapidly (Jou 1980). Fortunately, Yang Chengfu's students, like their teacher, were quite open with their teaching. As a result of this Yang Taijiquan is the most popular form of Taijiquan today.

Yang Chengfu had four sons. They all practised Taijiquan, yet none of them even approached the level of skill of their father (Jou 1980).

Two of Yang Chengfu's students became great masters of the art. These were Chen Weiming, the author of the *Taijiquan Ta Wen* and Cheng Manjing (+1900 to +1975) the author of the *Song of Form and Function* which is now included in the *Taijiquan Classics*. Other students of Yang's that are worthy of some note are Tung Yingchich (+1889 to +1962), Choy Hokpeng (+1886 to +1957) and Wu Huichung (N.D. - +1937) (Huang 1982).

Most noteworthy of all these students was Cheng Manjing. Cheng Manjing, known as the "Master of the Five Excellences" (philosophy, medicine, poetry, painting and Taijiquan) took up Taijiquan because he was weakened from rheumatism and tuberculosis which he contracted when he was twenty. He claimed in a book he wrote in 1946 that he was completely cured of these as a result of diligently practising Taijiquan (Jou 1980). During the cultural revolution he moved to Taiwan where he taught Taijiquan and gained considerable recognition. He subsequently moved to the United States where he was recognised as one of the greatest Taijiquan practitioners of this century (Smith 1980). Cheng Manjing shortened Yang Chengfu's form of 108 postures to 37 postures by deleting the repetitions and some of the more classically martial postures (Cheng and Smith 1980). The result was a compact form and that now took seven to fifteen minutes to complete as opposed to forty to sixty minutes that the long form would take to complete, and probably half the floor space necessary to perform

the long form - a very important consideration for the modern-day Western lifestyle. Furthermore, since the form is usually performed with a higher body position than the long form - although Yang Chengfu taught that the long form could be performed in three positions, high, medium and low (Yang 1986) - it is much easier for Westerners with less flexible ankle joints to learn and perform. These facts along with the fact that the Cheng Manjing form faithfully represents the principles and the spirit of Yang Chengfu's form have made it the most popular form of Taijiquan in the West.

Thus the Yang School of Taijiquan is made up of two forms the 'long' and 'short' forms.

#### The Wu School of Taijiquan

Yang Luchan had a student Wu Yuxiang (+1812 to +1880) who decided he wanted to study the older forms of the Chen Schools with Chen Changxin. On his way to Chen Changxin he met Chen Chengping, who taught a 'small frame' version of Taijiquan. Wu stayed with him until he was proficient and he in turn started to teach the small frame Taijiquan. Wu was somewhat of a theoretician and researched Taijiquan thoroughly. His research was enhanced by acquiring a copy of the Wang Tungyue's (+1736 to +1795) treatise on Taijiquan; the *Taijiquan Lun* (which has subsequently become the second book in the *Classics*). He was said to have been given this by his

brother who claimed he found it in a salt cellar. Wu later wrote a book of his own - "*Expositions of Insights into the Practice of the Thirteen Postures*" which he sent along with Wang Zangyue's treatise to his old teacher Yang Luchan. Yang published them and they have both become a part of the Yang family 'transmissions' and a part of the *Classics* too.

Wu Youxing had only a few students and of them Li Yiyu (+1833 to +1892) became the most famous. Two of his books have become a part of the *Classics: The Five Character Secret* and the *Essentials of the Practice of Form and Push-Hands* (Jou 1982). Li Yiyu taught Hao Weichen (+1849 to +1920) who in turn taught Sun Lutang (+1861 to +1932) who founded the Sun School (Draeger and Smith 1980).

According to Robert Smith (1980) and Tsung Hwa Jou (1981), both recognised as modern-day authorities on the history, the above mentioned transmission is what is considered the original Wu School. Its main characteristics were the fact that the postures were done in a very upright position and the forms were small with the emphasis placed on inner development. The most important difference was the fact that each had four stages - start, correct, open and close. (1) Start represented the change from Wuji (formless) to Taiji (the beginning of form and movement) stages in the creation of the world according to Chinese cosmology, and represented the point when initiation was actualized. (2) Correct - described moving from Taiji to Yin-

Yang, again alluding to the beginnings of the fundamental duality according to Chinese cosmology, and representing the stage of differentiating every part of the body into solid (substantial) and empty (insubstantial). (3) Open - describes initiating attack or retreat. (4) Close - describes the completion of the attack or retreat.

There is another, far more modern tradition of Taijiquan claiming to be the Wu School. This was started by Chuan You, a student of Yang Panhou (+1839 to +1892) who in turn was a student of Yang Luchan. Chuan You later adopted a Han name, Wu. He modified his Yang taijiquan. He taught Wu Chienguan who moved to Hong Kong and taught there, thus forming the Wu School formed in Hong Kong. Wang Peisheng (+1919 - ) is this form's chief exponent in mainland China. Although this school has produced many excellent Taijiquan boxers, according to Smith (1980) and Jou (1981), from a historical point of view this school must be seen as a branch of the Yang School. They argue that except for some stylistic differences and leaning the torso slightly when doing the forms these forms are still 'large frame' and still very much like the Yang Schools.

In spite of this it is worth noting that the older Wu Taijiquan started by Wu Yuxiang is practised by such small numbers that it is virtually extinct, while the Hong Kong School has a growing following and is getting popular in the West.

## The Sun School of Taijiquan

This again is a form of Taijiquan that has a very small number of practitioners but is worth mentioning since it is so markedly different from all other forms. It was started by Sun Lutang (+1861 to +1932) who was student of Hao Weichen (+1849 to +1920) a practitioner of the older Wu School. Sun Lutang was a peerless boxer of the internal school and was an expert in Hsing yi quan and Bagua chang. He is said to have been undefeated and was one of the most illustrious figures in that great tradition of internal boxers now known as the Beijing School of Internal Martial Arts (Draeger and Smith 1980). Sun modified Wu Taijiquan and added Bagua chang techniques and Hsing yi quan techniques and synthesized a new form which moves in a circle as opposed to the traditional straight lines and includes many foot stomping movements and follow-stepping (stepping up the rear leg as a technique is being completed) from Hsing yi quan (Huang 1982).

Because of the addition of non Taijiquan forms, Jou (1981) suggests that this should be considered a variation rather than a new school.

In my opinion, judging from the respect that Sun Lutang is accorded by martial arts writers and considering the apparent disregard Sun had for Schools and traditional forms (he modified traditional Bagua chang and Hsing yi quan forms - Smith 1967, 1974) it is quite possible that Sun merely formulated this

sequence to teach the training of fundamental movements of the internal school, and did not intend it to be a 'school' of taijiquan at all. History, however, tells us that his system came to be known as the Sun School.

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There are a number of other claims made for other schools of Taijiquan such as the Lee School, the Fu School and numerous so-called synthetic forms (Huang 1982). All these have to be seen as variations of the Chen, Yang and Wu Schools (Smith 1980).

Although exponents of each school of Taijiquan would claim that their school was markedly different from the others, close examination will show that indeed there are no major differences and the only differences are stylistic in nature and in the differences of emphasis. The rapid movements of the foot stamping that takes place in the Sun style may be seen as atypical until one remembers that these were commonplace in the old Chen routines and were excluded in later sets of the Yang style by Yang Luchan and Yang Chenfu in the interest of smoothness and continuity.

What the student of Taijiquan must remember is that the development of the four schools of Taijiquan only represents the development of one branch of the family-tree of Taijiquan - a branch which began with the coming of Taijiquan to the Chen Village. Because of the popularity and the publicity that these



schools received, and since most writers on the subject write on one or more of these schools, the rest of the branches of the family tree are forgotten. From time to time one comes across someone practising what seems like an unrecognizable (in terms of the four schools) form of Taijiquan and is told that it was taught to the practitioner by a Chinese monk.

Considering the vast numbers of Chinese practising Taijiquan (an estimated 200 million) on the mainland, I am convinced that many different sets of Taijiquan must exist as a result of the natural evolution of Taijiquan. With restrictions to travel into the interior of China being lifted, a search for the little known and forgotten forms of Taijiquan that could exist in the mountain temples could form the basis of a fascinating study. Perhaps such a study would unearth older sets than the Chen sets that may give us more insight into some of the various aspects of Taijiquan.

In order to get a better picture of the *essence* of Taijiquan, let us now look at the development of the Philosophical and 'Spiritual' dimensions of Taijiquan.

### CHAPTER THREE

## THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF TAIJIQUAN

The *Internal School* (nei chia) of martial arts saw martial arts not so much as a system or group of techniques for defeating an aggressor, but rather as a means of dealing with violence and death in the universe. Since they understood that death could not be prevented and violence was a real and inevitable aspect in the scheme of things all that one could really do was to cultivate the correct response to these phenomena. Thus fear, confusion, anxiety, indecisiveness, ill health, physical debility etc. were seen as the real enemies. Good health, longevity, directness in action and calmness and the absence of fear when faced with violence and death were considered qualities worth cultivating. Thus the internal school of martial arts developed a philosophy that allowed its practitioners to deal with violence and death. The fighting techniques of the system were seen to have little significance and the emphasis was placed on the cultivation of the body, mind and spirit in order to achieve a state of being that was harmonious with the movement and change in the universe (Payne 1981).

This concept is clearly expressed by Master O-Sensei Uyeshiha the founder of modern Aikido<sup>12</sup> who says:

"You are mistaken if you think that *budo* [spiritually oriented martial arts] means to have opponents and enemies and to be strong and to fell them. There are neither opponents nor enemies for true *budo*. True *budo* is to be one with the universe; that is, to be united with the centre of the universe....

The secret of aikido is to harmonize ourselves with the movement of the universe and bring ourselves into accord with the universe itself. He who has gained the secret of aikido has the universe in himself and can say, 'I am the universe.'

I am never defeated, however fast the enemy may attack. It is not because my technique is faster than that of the enemy. It is not a question of speed. The fight is finished before it is begun.

When the enemy tries to fight with me, the universe itself, he has to break the harmony of the universe.

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<sup>12</sup>Aikido is an advanced 'soft' Japanese martial art seen by many authorities to be similar to Taijiquan in philosophy and the circular nature of its movements (Drager and Smith 1969).

Hence at the moment he has the mind to fight with me, he is already defeated. There is no measure of time - fast or slow.

Aikido is non resistant, it is always victorious"

(Payne 1981 p.36)

Since Taijiquan evolved out of Daoist systems it is only natural that most of its philosophical principles come from the Daoist philosophies. Older ideas and concepts such as those laid down in the *Yi Jing*, China's oldest book and probably the oldest surviving book on the planet, were also used in formulating basic principles. Let us now examine in more detail the contributions made by Daoism and the *Yi Jing* to the philosophical aspects of Taijiquan which helped formulate the principles of movement and practice as we understand them today.

#### TAIJIQUAN AND DAOISM

No study or discussion on Taijiquan would be complete without some attention being paid to Daoism. Indeed a Daoistic understanding of the natural world and man and the inter-relationship between the two forms the philosophical basis of Taijiquan. Thus the Westerner seeking to gain an insight into the essence of Taijiquan must first gain some understanding of Daoism.

Certain Chinese philosophers writing in, perhaps, the -5th and -4th centuries explained ideas and a way of life that has come to be known as Daoism - the way of man's cooperation with the laws of the natural world, principles to be discovered in such natural phenomena as wind, water and fire etc. The better known writings of this period were the works of *Laoze*, *Quanze* and *Lieh-tzu*. These philosophers set down thoughts and ideas not all of which were their own. Some of the concepts they expounded reached far back into Chinese history and had become deeply ingrained in Chinese culture. Yet their works gave rise to Daoism as we know it today. Of these philosophers Laoze was to be traditionally accepted as the 'father' of Daoism and his book the *Daodejing* is recognised as the fundamental work of Daoism.

Until relatively recent times it was generally believed that Laoze was an individual (also known as *Lao Tan* or *Li Erh*) who lived at the time of Confucius (*Kang Fu-tzu*) that is to say the -6th and -5th centuries, the assumed dates of Confucius being -552 to -479. This date is based on a much disputed passage from the historian *Xumaqien* (-145 to -79) who records that Laoze was curator of the royal library at the capital of *Lo-Yong* when Confucius visited him in -517. According to *Xumaqien*, Confucius interviewed Laoze and afterwards said:

'I know birds fly, fishes swim, and animals run. But the runner may be snared, the swimmer hooked, and the flyer shot by the arrow. But there is the dragon:- I cannot tell how he mounts on the wind through the clouds, and rises to heaven. Today I have seen Lao-tzu, and can only compare him to the dragon.'

To this Xumaqien adds:

'Lao-tzu cultivated the Tao and its attributes, the chief aim of his studies being how to keep himself concealed and remain unknown. He continued to reside at the capital of Chou, but after a long time, seeing the decay of the dynasty, he left it and went away to the barrier-gate, leading out of the kingdom on the north-west. Yin Hsi, the warden of the gate, said to him, "You are about to withdraw yourself out of sight. Let me insist on your (first) composing for me a book." On this, Lao-tzu wrote a book in two parts, setting forth his views on the Tao and its attributes in more than 5000 characters. He then went away, and it is not known where he died. He was a superior man, who liked to keep himself unknown.'

(Legge 1891 pp. 80-81)

In the last fifty years, Chinese, Japanese and European scholars have, by minute textual criticism, come to contest the Laoze

authorship of the *Daodejing*. The name Laoze means Old Boy, and was traditionally believed to have been derived from the legend that he was born with white hair. Modern-day scholars, however, have come more or less to the consensus that the Laoze book is a compilation of Daoist sayings by several hands originating in the -4th century, during, and even after, the time of Quanze, who according to Fung Yu-Lan must have lived somewhere between -369 and -286 (Fung Yu-Lan, 1966).

Since the name Laoze can be translated 'old man', and there were at least two other works of the period with the titles which mean 'elder' and 'old man of mature wisdom', scholars argue that there seemed to be a genre of literature in this period to which such titles were given, and this is probably because these works consisted of sayings which embody a kind of wisdom that is associated with old age. They also believe that there is no reason to suppose that the titles imply that these works were written by individuals. They are best looked upon as anthologies which were compiled from short passages by an editor or a series of editors. Most of these passages reflect the doctrines of the time but some represent material of considerable antiquity (Lau, 1963). What is more important than who the author of the Laoze work is, is the fact that the concepts expounded in it formed the basis of Daoism.

There have been many schools and cults that have called themselves Daoist. They flourished at different times in

various parts of China, and generated many variant doctrines. They produced a vast body of literature that no Westerner, and probably no Oriental, has ever read entirely. The *Dao zang* is a Ming printed collection of these (+1445), and contains 1,464 individual works (Rawson and Legeza, 1973). Yet all the schools of Daoism can be broadly divided into two main schools. These are (a) what Creel calls "Hsien Taoism" and (b) "Contemplative Taoism" (Creel, 1970). The Hsien Daoist seeks immortality and supernatural powers through the gymnosophic and "yogic" practices which seem to have arisen among Daoists in the -2nd and -1st centuries. A *Hsien* is an immortal - one who has purified his flesh from decay by special forms of breathing, diet, drugs and exercises for preserving semen comparable to those of Tantric Yoga (Needham, 1983).

Even in the early stages of the development of Daoism, Hsien Daoism was strongly criticized by a number of major philosophers. Among these Quanze was the greatest. H.G. Creel says of his work: "The *Chuang-tzu* is in my estimation the finest philosophical work known to me in any language." (Creel 1970, p.55). Quanze strongly criticized the gymnosophic and psychosomatic practices of the Hsien Daoist. It is interesting to note that this would indicate that these techniques were quite prevalent and well developed in Quanze's time (-4th century). Since Daoism was very young at this time it is not unreasonable to assume that some of these techniques predated Daoism (Needham, 1983).



The *Lieh-tzu* book, traditionally assigned to the -3rd century also criticizes Hsien Daoism, although some scholars believe it shows the influence of Buddhist ideas, which would suggest a date early in the Christian era, the +1st or +2nd century (Watts, 1975).

The *Huai Nan Tzu* book, which also takes issue with Hsien Daoism, was written under the sponsorship of the Prince of Huai Nan, a relative and vassal of the Emperor Ulu, named Liu An, and may fairly safely be dated at c. -120. Of this Creel says:

'A book written under the patronage of various scholars, called the *Huai Nan Tzu*, is eclectic but predominantly Taoist in tone. It contains a good deal of mention of techniques for seeking immortality but never, I believe, recommends them. On the contrary, it insists repeatedly that death and life are just the same, and neither should be sought or feared. It ridicules breath control and gymnastics, which are designed to perpetuate the body but in fact confuse the mind.'

(Creel 1970, p.19)

The focus of this book was on Contemplative Daoism which emphasized a state of mind and being which was in accord with the ebb and flow patterns of change and the natural rhythms of the universe. Contemplative Daoism was not unlike Chan (Zen)

Buddhism and indeed it did contribute to the development of Zen Buddhism (Watts, 1975).

Taijiquan was strongly influenced by these two schools of Daoism. From Hsien Daoism came the postures and movements which were to develop into Taijiquan as we know it today. We followed this progression in some detail in chapter two. From Contemplative Daoism Taijiquan got its principle of slowness, naturalness in movement, and its martial strategy. It is these influences on Taijiquan that we shall examine in this chapter for a detailed examination of Daoism is well beyond the scope of this paper.

#### The Concept of the Dao

This word Dao has no single correct translation. Its meaning goes beyond words, even in Chinese. The great Chinese texts devoted to it - especially the *Daodejing* and the *Quanze* - do not attempt to define it but are rather collections of sayings, stories and allegories that point at its meaning from many different directions. In fact they admonish against attempting to define the Dao. For example the *Daodejing* opens with the enigmatic words which are usually translated, 'The Tao that can be expressed is not the eternal Tao' (Tr. Ch'u Ta-Kao, 1937). Many of the passages in these books are so ambiguous as to defy translation. This ambiguity could be partly due to accidents of

history and confusions that have crept into the texts; but the Chinese have come to accept them as a vital feature. For like so much in Chinese culture these passages do not mean one thing alone, but several things at once; none contains the whole meaning on its own. Chinese philosophers through the ages have used the word Dao in different ways, but what is important is that the concept of the Dao is a fundamental notion that is deeply rooted in the Chinese mind, with its customs, beliefs, languages and unspoken assumptions (Rawson and Legaza, 1973).

A Ming dynasty rock inscription dated Spring 1556 has the following quotation:

'Vast indeed is the Ultimate Tao,  
Spontaneously itself, apparently without acting,  
End of all ages and beginning of all ages,  
Existing before Earth and existing before Heaven,  
Silently embracing the whole of time,  
Continuing uninterrupted through all eons,  
In the East it taught Father Confucius,  
In the West it converted the 'Golden Man' [the Buddha]  
Taken as pattern by a hundred Kings,  
Transmitted by generations of Sages,  
It is the ancestor of all doctrines,  
The mystery of all mysteries.'

(Rawson and Legezo, 1979, p.8)

It demonstrates that Confucians, Buddhists, Mohists, as well as Daoists, who all use the term Dao in one way or another to indicate their chief principle, are talking, for all their differences, about the same fundamental Chinese notion (Rawson and Legezo, 1979).

R.L. Wing suggests that this concept of the Dao grew out of the ancient Chinese need for a solution to the mystery underlying the constant motion and change in the universe. The search for the solution to this mystery has spanned both the science of physics and the companion science of metaphysics. According to Wing, physics attempts to express mathematically the physical laws governing the universe, metaphysics attempts to express the effects of these physical laws on human affairs. Although the definitions and concepts quoted by Wing are not correct in a strict scientific sense, I have deliberately chosen to use this example from popular literature to illustrate the ways in which the Dao is described in non-academic sources. Since the Dao, by definition, is beyond definition, these attempts at description are as valid in approaching what cannot be approached as any other, academic or otherwise. In Chinese philosophy we arrive at two fundamental laws underlying physical change in the universe. One is the law of *Polar Reversal*. In all things are seen the seeds of their opposites just as new life carries in its genetic code the signal for its own decomposition, so too in every human affair lies the germ of a subtle but exacting change. The other

law is the law of periodicity. This law manifests in cycles and rhythms, like the changing seasons, the growth cycles of plants, and the stages of the development of the individual life and character. Wing goes on to state:

'The whole of all that is changing according to these physical laws of the universe, from the life forms on earth to the stars above, is referred to herein as the cosmos. The path of life through the changing cosmos is the *tao*. The *tao* is the only reasonable and harmonious path for the individual through the cosmos, given his nature and the nature of the cosmic forces at a given moment in time. Hence, the great concern of following the *tao* in Chinese philosophical thought.'

(R.L. Wing, 1979, p.12)

Thus we arrive at the most commonly used, though wholly inadequate definition of the word Dao; the 'Way'.

In early times the ideogram for *Dao* shows the moving sign enclosing a head            in which the radical was *hsing*, to walk or to march (Watts 1975). Here the experts disagree. Wieger sees *hsing* as derived from the pictogram of the left and right feet (1965), whereas Needham (1983) takes it to mean crossroads. In any case *hsing* denotes action. In later times the radical becomes *cho*, moving step by step. Wieger (1965 p. 789) renders *cho* as "going and pausing" and "rhythmic movement" where going is

yang and pausing is yin. Thus in the ideogram for Dao *cho* is combined with *shou*, the head, to produce the character , having, according to Wieger (1965 p. 326) the basic meaning of "to go ahead". One could also think of it as intelligent rhythm.

Wieger's definition of "to go ahead" would seem to be supported by the Chan (Zen) Master Yun men, who when asked "What is the Dao?" answered with the single word *chu*: go, go on, walk on, go away. *Chu* also has the sense of going right along without tardiness or hesitation (Watts 1979).

The idea of movement, rhythm and flow are fundamental to the idea of the Dao. The Chinese philosopher liked to compare the Dao to water or more correctly to the nature and behaviour of water. It flows onwards always, it penetrates the crevices, it wears down resistance, it stops to fill the deep places and then flows on. Above all it always holds to its true nature and always flows with the forces of the cosmos because it is the force (Wing 1979). Watts says:

'...the Tao is the course, the flow, the drift, on the process of nature, and I call it the Watercourse Way because both Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu use the flow of water as the principal metaphor. But it is of the essence of their philosophy that the Tao cannot be defined in words and is not an idea or concept. As

Chuang-tzu says "It may be attained but not seen," or, in other words, felt but not conceived, intuited but not categorized, divined but not explained. In a similar way, air and water cannot be cut or clutched, and their flow ceases where they are enclosed. There is no way of putting a stream in a bucket or the wind in a bag."

(Watts, 1975, p.42)

Thus we are left with attempting to understand the Dao as the ancient Daoist did; by an intuitive 'knowledge' gained-by- observing the manifestations of the Dao in nature. There is a relevant story told in the *Quantze* book. One day Confucius and his pupils were walking by a turbulent river, which rushed over rocks causing rapids and waterfalls. They saw an old man swimming in the river. As they watched he played in the raging water. Suddenly he went under and disappeared. Confucius sent his pupils rushing down river to try and save the old man. However, to their surprise the old man beached safely and stood up unharmed. The pupils brought him to Confucius who asked him how he managed to survive in the raging torrent among the rocks. He answered, "I know how to go in with a descending vortex, and come out with an ascending one. He was, of course, a man of Tao." (Quoted in *Tao* by Rawson and Legazo, 1979).

The point of the story is that the Dao is like the river with its flowing and changing vortices; and the ideal Daoist is the

one who has learned to use all his senses and faculties to intuit the shapes of the currents in the Dao, in order to completely harmonize himself with them.

The movements of the Taijiquan form have been likened to the movements of a river. In fact Taijiquan was called *Chan Quan*, Long Boxing, after the Yang Ze, the long river (Horwitz, Kimmelman and Lui, 1976). The *Taijiquan Classics* use this imagery quite clearly. In the first of the Classics attributed to Chang Sanfeng, the legendary founder of Taijiquan we read, 'Chang Chuan (Tai Chi Chuan) is like a great river rolling on unceasingly.' (Trans. Lo, Inn, Amacker and Foe. 1979, p. 25).

In the *Expositions of Insights into the Practice of the Thirteen Postures* by Wu Yusiang (1812-1880) the third of the *Taijiquan Classics*, we read:

"Be as still as a mountain, move like a great river."

(Lo, Inn, Amacker and Foe 1979, p.54)

Or another translation says:

"In quietude be as still as a mountain  
In movement go like the current of a river."

(Horwitz, Kimmelman and Lui, 1976)



The comparison between the Dao and the movement of water and the comparison of Taijiquan to the river are no mere coincidence. In fact it would not in any sense be an exaggeration to say that Taijiquan has become the most important exercise or movement system in what Needham calls the art of Daoist physiological alchemy (Needham 1983). Although Chen Sanfeng (a Daoist Immortal) is considered the founder of Taijiquan it is in the works of Laoze that we find its philosophical and tactical foundations. This is evident by the *Taijiquan Classics* which without doubt are Daoist by nature and not only apply Daoist concepts to practice and strategy of Taijiquan but also use Daoistic imagery liberally. Horwitz, Kimmelman and Lui, authors of the book *Tai Chi Chuan The Technique of Power* in which they translated and commented on the 'classics' have this to say:

'Lao Tzu is very much the spiritual foundation of Tai Chi, guiding us to the way in which Tai chi should be practised, and offering insights into the physical aspects as well. Stressed are those principles which lead to suppleness, endurance, softness, centredness, and longevity. Thus, the image of the bow which bends without breaking, the baby who is soft and durable, water which yields, flows continuously, and overcomes the hardest opponent, plants which are soft and tender, and the sage who works without doing and knows what it "enough". For those who follow the "Way" of Tai Chi

there is a growing ease and softness in movement, and finally the development of real and enduring strength."

(Horwitz, Kimmelman and Liu, 1976, p.107).

Taijiquan is seen by its exponents as a means of practising and experiencing the 'Dao' through the tangible and substantial which are the perfectly natural movements of the Taijiquan form, which by its long evolution has reached a point of naturalness and perfection where its movement are 'just right' for the human organism. Thus the practitioner achieves a state of meditative consciousness of such harmony with the rhythms of the universe that he or she is able to perceive the Dao, or experience a state of reality whereby the essence of the Dao may be intuited (Huang 1982).

In the following section we shall examine the relationship between Taijiquan and more specific aspects of Daoism.

#### The Concepts of Wuji and Taiji and Their Relevance to Taijiquan

According to ancient Chinese cosmology, in the beginning was the great void, Wuji, the 'Void Terminus' (Horwitz, Kimminian and Lui 1979, p.97) also rendered 'void limit', (Sohn, 1978 p.8) empty and without form or boundary, the ultimate nothingness, the ultimate emptiness (Huang, 1982 p.89). The Buddhists call it *Sunyatha*,

the Void, the Hindus call it *Nirguna Brahman*. 'Nir' means devoid or empty and 'guna' means quality or nature, *Brahman* means the absolute. Thus *Nirguna Brahman* means the 'qualitiless absolute' (Sohn 1978 p.2).

The *Taijiquan Classics* tell us that:

"*Tai chi* comes from *Wu chi* and it is the mother of *Yin* and *Yang*"

(Lo, Inn, Amaker and Foe, 1979 p.31)

or:

"*Tai chi* has evolved from *Wu chi* (The Void Terminus). It is the source of activity and inactivity and the mother of *Yang* and *Yin*".

(Horwitz, Kimmelman and Lui, 1976 p.77)

Thus *Taiji* (the Grand Terminus, The supreme Ultimate; trans. Huang 1982) is seen to come from *Wuji*. This happens we are told because somehow from the Void comes movement, from non-motion comes motion. The motion is the first manifestation. This is called *Yang*. As the motion evolves to its next limit, to the point where there is no possibility of moving it reverses its nature and becomes non-motion or quiescence. The quiescence, which is the limit of action, is called *Yin*. The motion and quiescence constantly interact. There is motion in quiescence and quiescence

in motion. They are relative. They are the same for they are extremes of what is. And what 'is' is called Taiji, the Grand Ultimate, the Grand Limit (Sohn 1978). Thus the manifestation of the universe through movement with its polarities of *Yin* and *Yang* is Taiji. When motion stops, yin and yang cease to be, the universe ceases to be, and all is Wuji.

### Yin and Yang and Taijiquan

Perhaps the best known symbol of the far East is the *yin-yang* also known as *Ti* and *Tien*, Earth and Heaven, which represents the principle of dualism in the manifest universe. Although not Taoistic in origin it was adopted from an older Chinese philosophy and is seen as the primary symbol of Daoism Fig 2 (Cooper, 1972). It has since been adopted by Taijiquan practitioners as the symbol of Taijiquan and in fact is often referred to in chinese literature as the *Taiji Symbol* (Jou 1980).

In Daoism the Taiji symbol was seen as the symbol of primordial unity and harmony and manifest phenomenal duality, or, as Chuang Tzu calls it the symbol of 'The Two Powers of Nature'; the two great regulating forces of cosmic order in the phenomenal world (Cooper 1972). The symbol shows two great forces of the universe, the light and dark, negative and positive, female and male pulling apart as into the black and white fields yet held in complete

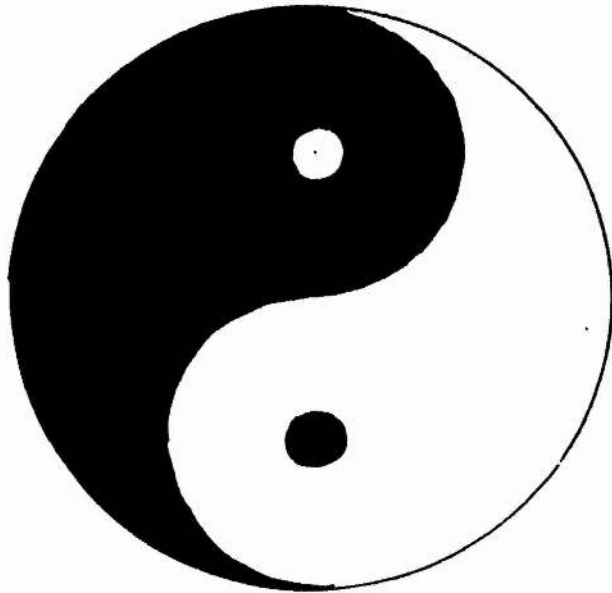


Fig 2: Taiji symbol also known as 'Yin-Yang' symbol  
said to have been invented by Fu Xi.

balance and quality within the circle. As the *Yi Jing* (Book of Changes) relates it, the cosmos, desiring to manifest itself, divided its nature into two opposing forces (Wing 1979). The curved line dividing the dark yin and light yang represents the face that maximum yin will change to yang and maximum yang will change to yin (Yang 1986). The dots in the centres of the white and black fields represent the seeds of change as polar reversal and periodicity occurs. This constant changing is seen as the interplay of forces that creates life, while life, in turn, generates the creative energy that manifests the cosmos (Wing 1984).

Originally, the ideograms for yang ( ) and yin ( ) indicated the sunny and shady sides of a hill, *fou* ( or ). They have since come to represent masculine and feminine, form and yielding, strong and weak, light and dark, the rising and falling, heaven and earth, and they are even seen in such everyday matters as cooking as the spicy (yang) and bland (yin). The Chinese saw the art of life as keeping the balance of the yin and yang (Watts 1979).

It must be understood from the beginning that the yin and yang are not contradictory. Although sometimes referred to as "The Great Extremes", any opposition is merely apparent; the actuality is a 'harmonious unity'.



This is a difficult concept for the western mind with linear thinking to fathom. For yin and yang are never separate and out of one arises the other and one is always a part of the other. Watts says that they are like:

"...the different, but inseparable, sides of a coin, the poles of a magnet, or pulse and interval in any vibration. There is never the ultimate possibility that either one will win over the other, for they are more like lovers wrestling than enemies fighting. But it is difficult in our logic to see that being and nonbeing are mutually generative and mutually supportive, for it is the great and imaginary terror of western man that nothingness will be the permanent end of the universe. We do not easily grasp the point that the void is creative, and that being comes from non being as sound from silence and light from space."

(Watts, 1975 p.23)

Watts goes on to say:

"The yin-yang principle is not therefore what we would ordinarily call a dualism, but rather an explicit duality expressing an implicit unity."

(Ibid. p.26)



Thus the two principles are seen to oppose not in enmity but in love, as is represented by the traditional emblem, the Taiji symbol, with its double helix which is at once the pattern of 'sexual communication and of the spiral galaxies' (Watts 1975).

Quanze says:

"One yin and one yang is called the Tao. The passionate union of yin and yang and the copulation of husband and wife is the eternal pattern of the universe. If heaven and earth did not mingle, whence would everything receive life?"

(Quoted by Watts 1975, p.26)

Thus the practical problem of life is seen by the Daoists is to not let the conflict of yin and yang to get out of hand.

In the practice of Taijiquan this interrelationship of yin and yang can be clearly experienced. Every 'posture'<sup>13</sup> is made up of carefully balanced areas of muscular tension and relaxation which are in constant flux in order to maintain its shape as the form changes into a different 'posture'. In order for movement to be smooth no area of 'tension' should be too tense and no area of

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<sup>13</sup>The word 'posture' is used here since it is commonly used in translations of Taijiquan literature and has become part of the jargon. The word is used in its dynamic sense and is used in order to facilitate teaching. 'Postures' are said to begin and end and are given names and the form is said to be made up of a number of 'postures', but all Taijiquan practitioners know that the form does not really have 'postures' but is one long series of movement from the beginning to the end.

relaxation should be too relaxed but the minimum possible amount of effort has to be used in order to make natural movements that are 'just right' and the hallmark of Taijiquan. For example: in order to advance one leg has to bear the body weight (yang) when the other is said to be 'Empty' or yin as it moves forward and in turn change to yang or 'full' when the body weight is transferred. Thus the whole body can be seen to have yin or yang aspects at any point of movement. The Taijiquan Classics tell us:

One place has insubstantiality and substantiality;  
Every place has the same insubstantiality and  
substantiality.

(Lo, Inn, Amacker and Foe, 1979, p.38)

The classics also go on to point out that the body weight must be held unequally distributed on the legs (a principle known as 'single weighting') in order to facilitate rapid and even movement. Whereas being 'double weighted' or having the body weight equally on both legs is not conducive to rapid changes and makes movements sluggish (Jou 1980). The *Classics* warn against this fault of double-weightedness and offer the following correction:

"To avoid this fault one must know *yin* and *yang*.  
*Yin* and *yang* mutually aid and change each other."

(Lo, Inn, Amacker and Foe, 1979 p.38)

The interrelationship of yin and yang in Taijiquan can be clearly seen in one of Taijiquan's combat strategies: the opponent's strong attack is seen as being yang in nature and the 'correct' response to this would be to yield or neutralize (yin) by moving backwards at the exact same speed of the attack and the same distance the attack travelled. This not only neutralizes the opponent's attack by not providing a substantial (yang) target for the attack to land on, it also effectively changes the yang nature of the attack into yin as it runs out of velocity and power. Now by the law of polar reversal, (Wing 1979) the attacker is vulnerable and the Taijiquan practitioner with his acute understanding of yin and yang can defeat his opponent by either acting faster than the other can neutralize or by upsetting the opponent's balance by pulling him forward (Yang Vol I, 1986).

Another way in which the yin and yang principles apply to Taijiquan is in the way the Taijiquan exercise affects the health of the body. The Chinese see the 'outsides' or the muscles, bones, joints and sinews of the body as being yang in relationship to the 'insides' or the internal organs of the body. Vigorous and strenuous exercise is seen to develop the muscles or the yang aspects of the body and not necessarily develop the yin aspects of the body. In some cases the yin aspects could suffer from too much 'external', yang, or muscle building activity. Yet Taijiquan with its well balanced movements and gentle exercises is seen to

improve the internal organs as well as the muscles thus achieving a balance of yin and yang (Jou 1980).

An extension of this concept comes from Chinese medicine. According to the theory of Chinese medicine, all functions of the body are dominated by qi (vital energy). The qi that circulates on the body's surface (muscles, skin, tendons etc.) is known as *wei qi* (protecting energy), and the qi that circulates deep in the body and dominates the organs is known as *ying qi* (nourishing energy) (*Huangti Nei Ching Ling Shu. The Canon of Acupuncture* (trans. Sunu and Lee 1985)). Physical exercise is seen to develop the *wei qi* (yang) as is clearly demonstrated by practitioners of the external martial arts, who show remarkable levels of pain tolerance and seem to be less susceptible to injury. Breathing exercises (*qigong*) are seen to develop *ying qi* and benefit internal organs (Drager and Smith 1980). Taijiquan with its emphasis on correct breathing develops both the *wei qi* and the *ying qi*, thus maintaining a yin-yang balance.

In fact the practitioner of Taijiquan attempts to balance yin and yang in his every action for in the final analysis the *dao* of Taijiquan is to achieve a state of harmony with the rhythms of the universe which is fundamentally a state of balance of the yin and yang.

### The Concept of the Five Elements

The concept of the Five Elements was developed by the Naturalist School of Philosophy (*Ying-Yang Chia*) about two thousand years ago. The five elements, Wu Xing (Sunu and Lee 1985), also known as the five celestial elements - water, fire, wood, metal and earth - were seen as the fundamental elements that made up the natural world. Unfortunately the English translation of *Xing*, 'element', fails to convey the idea of movement implied. The five elements must not be seen as literal elements in the usual sense but as 'qualities' of different phenomena and metaphors for a variety of dynamically interrelated processes in nature (Jou 1980). Each *Xing* or element had characteristic qualities that were derived from careful observation of natural events. Thus water has the quality of quenching and descending, fire has the quality of heating, melting and rising upwards, metal has the ability to cut, be moulded and hardened, wood has the quality of extracting and growth and earth has the qualities of absorbing and nourishing (Sherrill and Chu 1977).

By observing the processes of change in the natural world the Naturalistic Philosophers arrived at two major cycles whereby the five elements interacted with each other. These were the cycles of mutual creation and mutual destruction. Thus the creative cycle is as follows:

Earth generates (gives birth to) metal  
Metal generates (gives birth to) water  
Water generates (gives birth to) wood  
Wood generates (gives birth to) fire  
Fire generates (gives birth to) earth

The destructive cycle is:

Earth conquers water (absorbtion)  
Water conquers fire (quenching)  
Fire conquers metal (metal)  
Metal conquers wood (wetting)  
Wood conquers earth (extracting)

(Sherrill and Chu, 1977 p. 21)

The two cycles can also be represented by the diagram shown in Fig 3 (After Jou 1980 p.27).

Applying the yin-yang principle to the creative and destructive cycles of the five elements makes the creative cycle yang and the

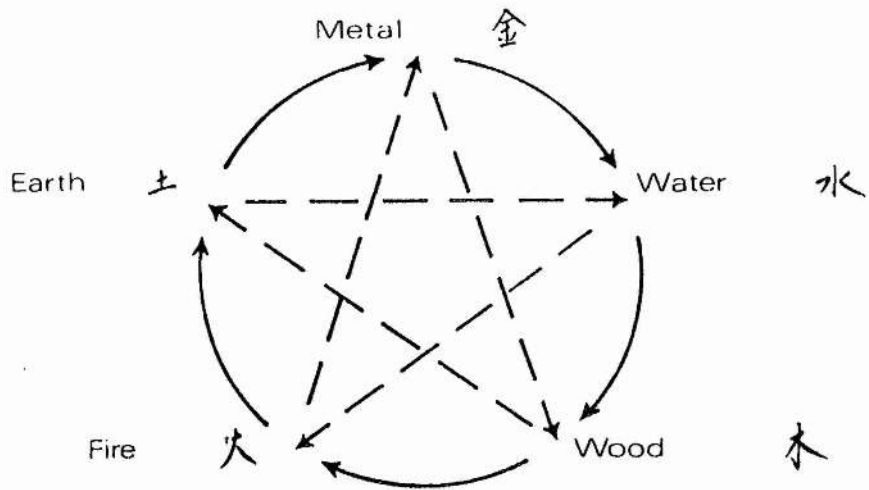


Fig 3: The creative and destructive cycles of the 5 Elements.

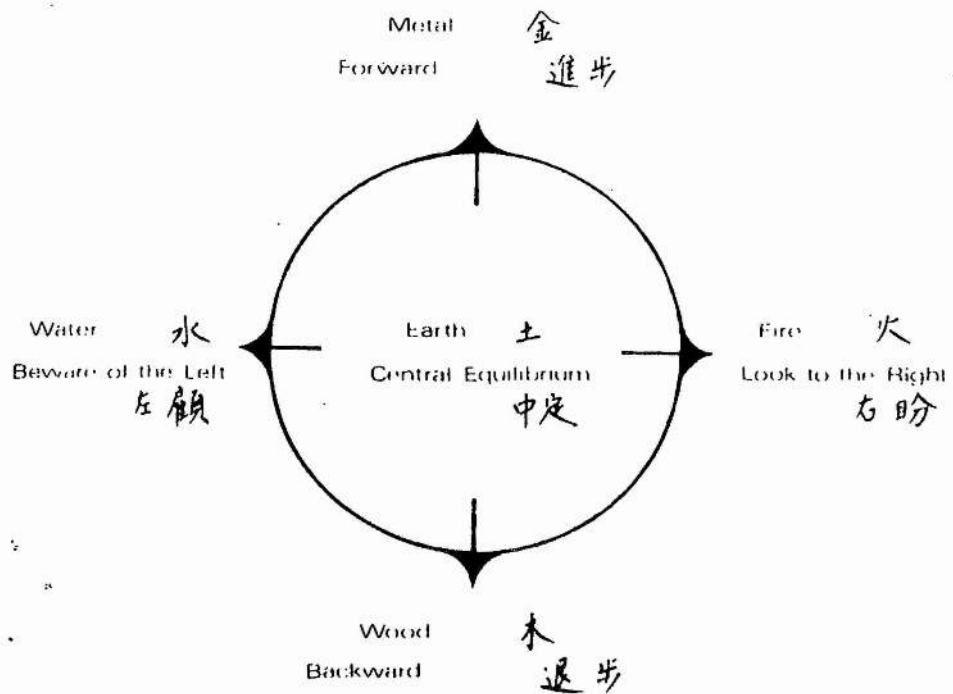


Fig 4: The direction of the Five Elements according to Chang Sang Feng.

destructive cycle yin. Thus each element has a yin and yang aspect (Jou 1980).

The sequences represented in the creative and destructive cycles form the basis to many of the fundamental concepts in Chinese astrology, divination, geomancy, medical science, meditation and philosophy (Sherrill and Chu, 1977).

The relevance of the five elements to Taijiquan can be seen in the association made by the Classics between the first five of the thirteen basic postures of Taijiquan and the five elements. The first of the Taijiquan Classics, the *Taijiquan Ching* attributed to Chang Sanfeng says:

"Step forward, step back,  
Look left, look right,  
and central equilibrium  
are the five elements."

and again:

"Step forward, step back,  
Look left, look right  
and central equilibrium  
are metal, wood, water, fire and earth."

(Lo, Inn, Amacker and Foe, 1979, p.27)



No explanation is given save that these five with the eight remaining postures correspond to the eight compass directions make up the thirteen postures. What is quite clear is that the five postures central equilibrium, advance, retreat, look right and look left (sometimes translated turn right and turn left or 'Look to the right, Beware of the left', Yang 1986) are fundamental to movement. Yet the Classics give no hint as to their application or importance. Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming in his excellent book *Advanced Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Vol. I* (1986) offers the following explanation:

"Water conquering fire corresponds to Beware to the left defeating Look to the Right. This means that if the opponent attacks from your right, you go to the left to avoid his attack and at the same time you can attack his right from your left. Fire conquering metal matches Look to the Right defending against an attack from the front. That means if your opponent attacks from your front, you can defend against him by sticking to his hand and pulling to the right to immobilize him. Metal conquering wood matches Forward defeating Backward. This means that when your opponent withdraws, you want to move forward and use Adhere-Connect and Stick-Follow to follow his retreat and immobilize him aggressively. Wood subdividing Earth corresponds to using Backward to defeat Central

Equilibrium. This refers to using backward pulling power to destroy the opponent's stability of root. Finally, Earth conquering Water matches Central Equilibrium defeating Beware to the Left. This means that in order to defend against force from the left, you have to find your centre and stability."

(Yang 1986 p.13)

Dr. Yang goes on to point out:

"As one can see, trying to fit the five directions into the pattern of the five elements can be even more frustrating and unsatisfactory than is the case with the eight trigrams."

(Ibid. p.13)

The whole issue is further complicated by the fact that different authors match the five directions to different elements. The *Taijiquan Classics* suggest the arrangement in Fig 4<sup>14</sup>.

Douglas Wile in his book *Tai Chi Touchstones: Yang Family Secret Transmissions* (1983) offers the arrangement in Fig 5.

J.J. Soong in his book *Study of Tai Chi Chuan* (1970) suggests yet another arrangement (Fig 6).

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<sup>14</sup>All diagrams after Yang (1986).

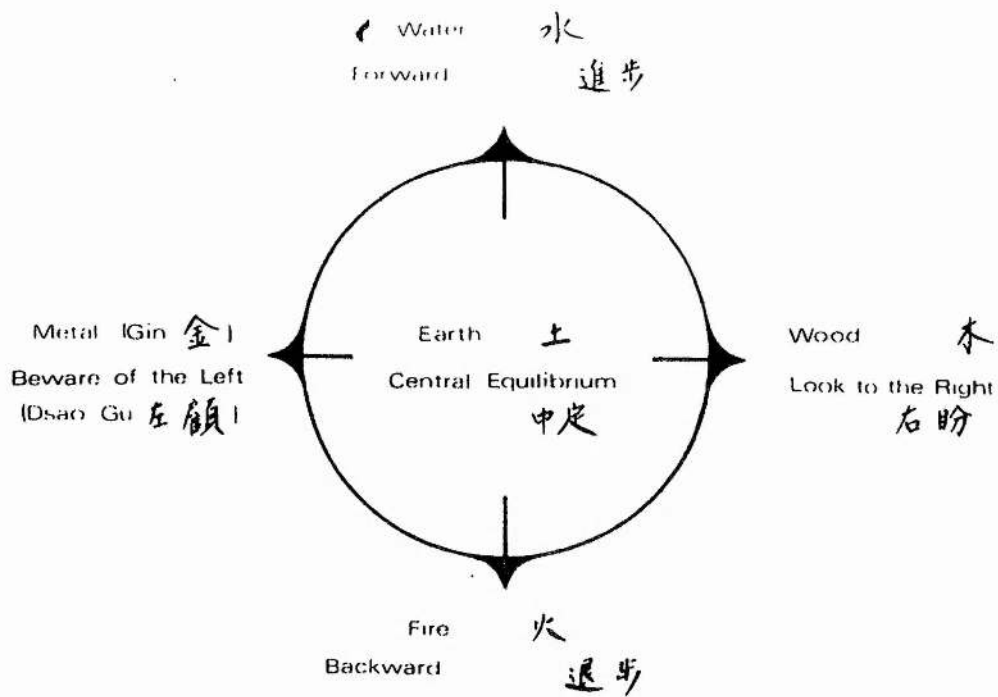


Fig. 5: The directions of the Five Elements according to "Tai Chi Touchstones" (See Bibliography).

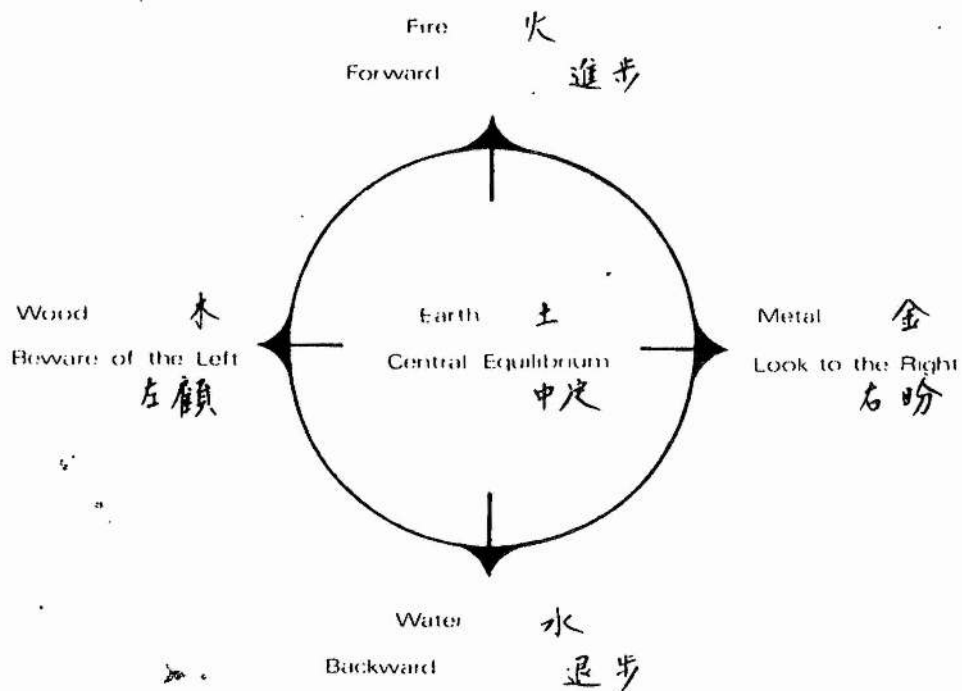


Fig. 6: The directions of the Five Elements according to J.J. Soong (See Bibliography).

None of them offers any explanation for their choice of arrangement. Thus we are left with a number of possible speculations:

- (a) was the comparison of the five elements to the five postures simply the need for the Chinese mind to link basic movement to what were seen as cosmic laws in order to maintain a cyclic wholeness?
- (b) were the comparisons made to demonstrate the holistic nature of Taijiquan, or
- (c) did they have some practical value to the Taijiquan student such as emphasizing the need to develop his movement and combat skills in all directions or help him understand his relationship with his opponent in terms of the creative and destructive cycles?

Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming sums it up thus:

"It may very well be that the masters of old did not ever intend these philosophical explanations to be taken literally. If you train yourself to always respond in certain ways to a certain attack, you are depriving yourself of flexibility and perhaps setting yourself up to be countered. The key point which this

philosophy teaches is probably that one must always remain mobile and flexible in both hands and footwork. There are many ways to respond to every attack, and the more thinking and research you do, the better off you are. The various interpretations of the philosophy reflect different points of view and give the practitioner different ways to train. The philosophy may give ideas, but all ideas must be tested out. In the final analysis, it is not the philosophy but the practical expressions which are the foundation of Tai Chi Chuan".

(Yang 1986 pp 13-16)

Thus the five directions and the five elements contribute to the Dao of Taijiquan.

#### TAIJIQUAN AND THE YI JING

To undertake a study of the *Yi Jing*, even a brief one, is no mean task and to attempt one within the confines of a paper such as this is probably downright foolish. Yet, in order to establish some of the basic concepts of Taijiquan such a study is mandatory. Therefore what follows is a very brief look at the history and development of the *Yi Jing* in regards to its relevance to Taijiquan.

The *Yi Jing*, usually translated as *The Book of Changes*, may be the oldest book on the planet. Like the Bible it was a co-operative effort spanning many centuries. The oldest concepts and ideas in the book were probably passed down by the nomadic Siberian tribes who were the forerunners of the Oriental and early American civilizations. These early authors of the *Yi Jing* studied the stars and tides, plant and animal life and the cycles in nature. They also observed the patterns of relationship in the affairs of man with its eternal human dramas of love, conflict, government and warfare. From these observations they evolved a guide to the way things change, a marvellously fluid interconnected system of relations, which they expressed in the series of symbols using solid and broken lines, known today as the eight trigrams and the sixty-four hexagrams (Wing 1979).

The Chinese with their love for authors, founding fathers and legendary figures, attribute the authorship of the *Yi Jing* to Fu Hsi, a legendary ruler of China during the -third millenium. He is said to have discovered the arrangements of the eight trigrams and the sixty-four hexagrams in the patterns on the back of a tortoise (Sherill and Chu 1977).

From the days of Fu Hsi the *Yi Jing* was used as a farming, fishing and hunting almanac until the time of King Wen, the founder of the Chou Dynasty (-1150 to -249). When he was a prisoner of the tyrannical Emperor Chou Hsin he is said to have seen a vision of the hexagrams on the wall of his cell, and he

spent the rest of his sentence translating the images into words. This was a major addition to the already ancient hexagrams and he brought the worlds of commerce, politics and social relations into relation with the elemental forces of nature (Wing 1979).

King Wen was rescued by his son Wu who led a rebellion which overthrew Chou Hsin. King Wen took the throne, and his son, now the Duke of Chou, completed his father's work. It was he who wrote the explanation of the moving lines (Wing 1979). Both these efforts must be seen as masterpieces of correlation of the total action of the sixty-four hexagrams. To do this and develop a useful work without contradictions and conflict was definitely a magnificent piece of scholarly workmanship (Sherrill and Chu 1977).

Around the -6th century Confucius wrote commentaries on the *Yi Jing*. He was greatly impressed by the *Yi Jing* and is said to have regretted not having enough years of his life to devote to the study of it. The Confucius commentaries are quoted in part in Book II of the Richard Wilhelm translation of the *Yi Jing* (Sherrill and Chu 1977).

The period of roughly between -500 and -229 was known as the era of the Warring States and the 100 Schools of Philosophy. These schools produced a wide range of works (both favourable and hostile) interpreting the *Yi Jing*, commenting on Laoze and Quanze works on Daoism, on Confucius' and Mencius' concepts

and on many other philosophies. But most of these perished in the Great Burning of books ordered by the Emperor Qin, of the Qin Dynasty (-229 to -207), in an attempt to change the thinking of the people. Many philosophies were lost. Yet curiously the *Yi Jing* survived as it has survived the cultural revolution (Wing 1979). Since the days of Confucius many other scholars have studied and commented on the *Yi Jing*, probably the most noteworthy of these being Chiao Sun, a scholar of the Qing dynasty (+1644 to +1912) who wrote fourteen volumes on it known as the *I Tung Xi* (Wing 1979).

With this brief historical background as an introduction let us examine the nature of the trigrams and the hexagrams.

A trigram is a structure composed of three parallel lines. The trigrams were formed symbolically to represent the evolution of things from the duality of yin and yang. The following diagram (Fig 7) shows the evolution of the eight trigrams emerging from the Supreme Ultimate.

The upper lines stand for yin and yang or heaven and earth. The middle row shows how heaven and earth come together to form the four seasons. In the bottom row a third set of lines was added to represent man as a synthesis of heaven and earth, thus creating the eight trigrams. These trigrams are meant to represent symbolically all the cosmic and physical conditions on earth (Wilhelm 1951).



Each trigram has certain attributes and these are used in the book of changes as follows:

CHIEN: (Heaven) firmness, certainty, strength, power, force.

TUI: (Lake) joy, openness, pleasure, satisfaction, excess.

LI: (Fire) illumination, clarity, intelligence, dependence, attachment, clinging.

CHEN: (Thunder) arousing, movement, activity, shock, growth.

SUN: (Wind) gentle effects, small efforts, penetrating work.

KAN: (Water) mysterious, profound, meaningful, dangerous, difficult.

KEN: (Mountain) stillness, rooting, meditation, tranquil, immobile.

KUN: (Earth) yielding, receptive, responsive, devoted, submission.

The eight trigrams known as the *Ba Gua*, eight symbols were arranged in a circle corresponding to the eight compass directions

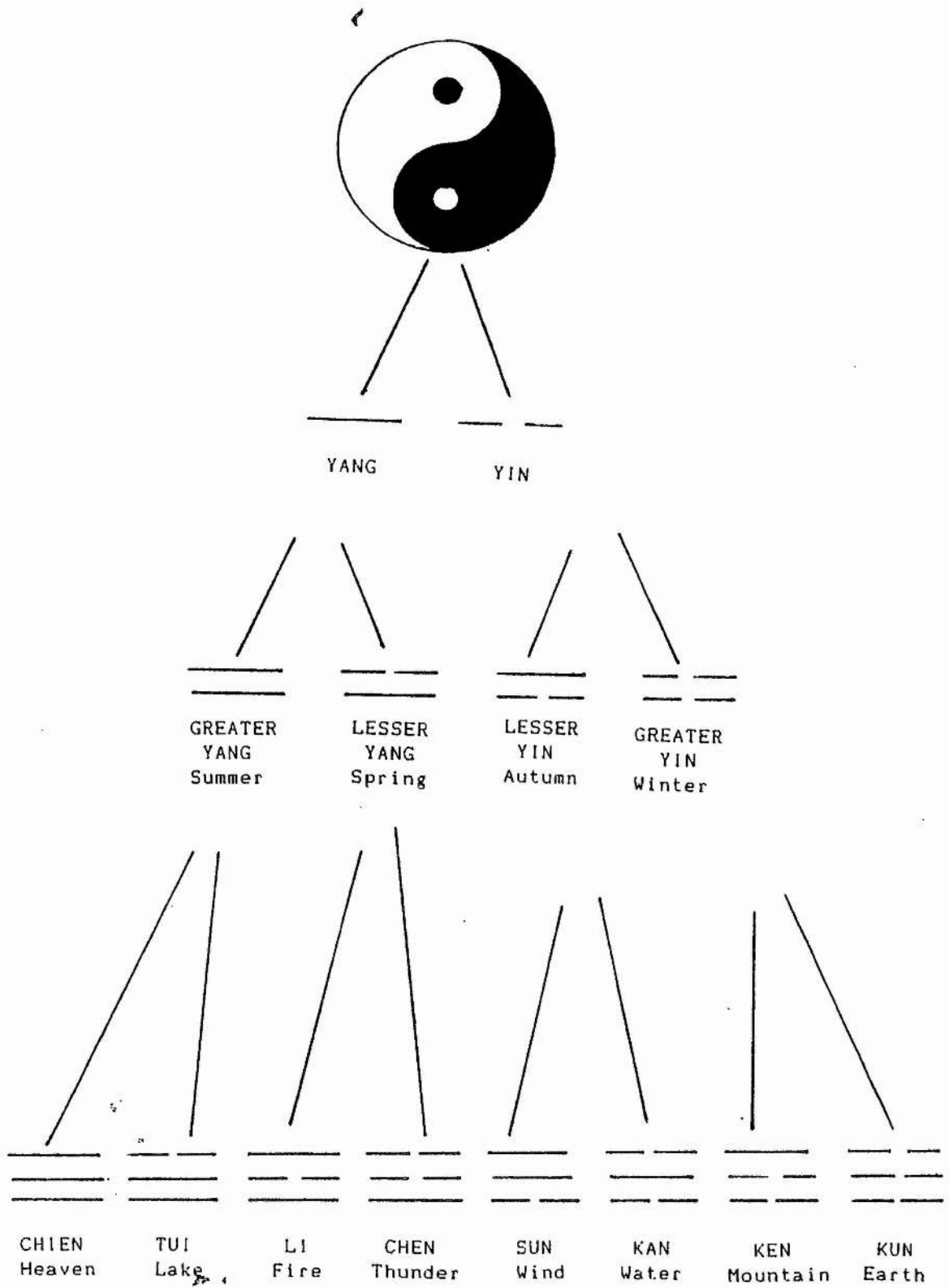


Fig. 7: The eight trigrams emerging from the Supreme Ultimate.

and were used for divination long before the hexagrams were invented (Jou 1984). The arrangement in Fig 8 is attributed to Fu Xi (Wing 1979).

Eight of the thirteen basic postures<sup>15</sup> of Taijiquan are said to be represented by these eight symbols and the eight directions. The Taijiquan Classics say:

*"Peng* (ward off), *Lu* (rollback),  
*Chi* (press), *an* (push),  
*Ts'ai* (pull), *Lieh* (split),  
*tsou* (elbow), *k'ao* (shoulder),  
are the eight trigrams.

Step forward, step back,  
Look left, look right,  
and central equilibrium  
are the five elements.

*Peng, lu, chi, an*, are *chien, kun, kan, li*  
and are the four cardinal directions.  
*Ts'ai, lieh, tsou, k'ao* are *sun, chen, tui, ken*  
and are the four diagonal directions."

(Lo, Inn, Amacker and Foe, 1979, p.27)

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<sup>15</sup>For a more complete description of the thirteen postures see Appendix B.

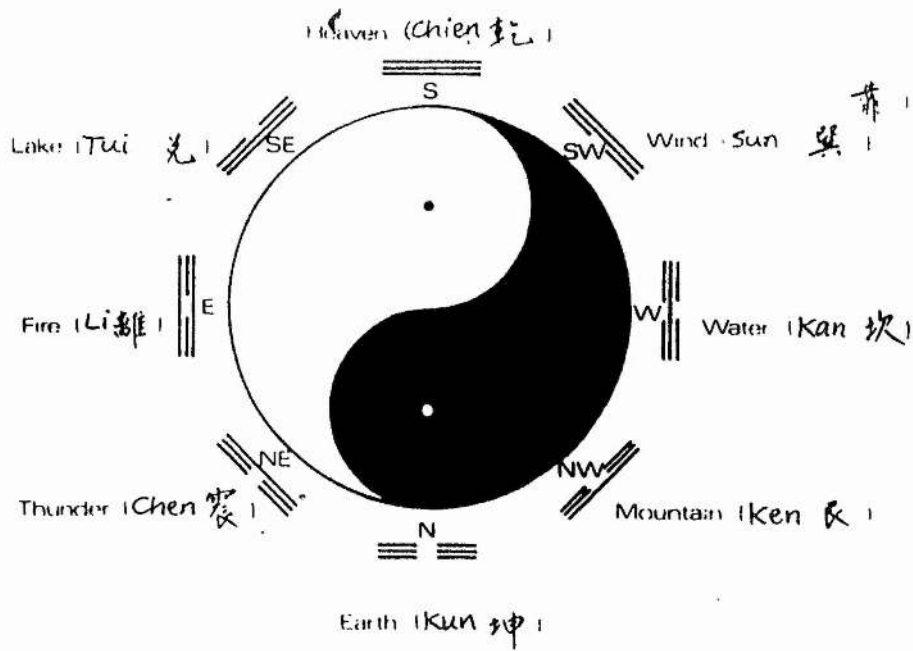


Fig. 8: The Ba Gua Symbol attributed to Fu Xi.

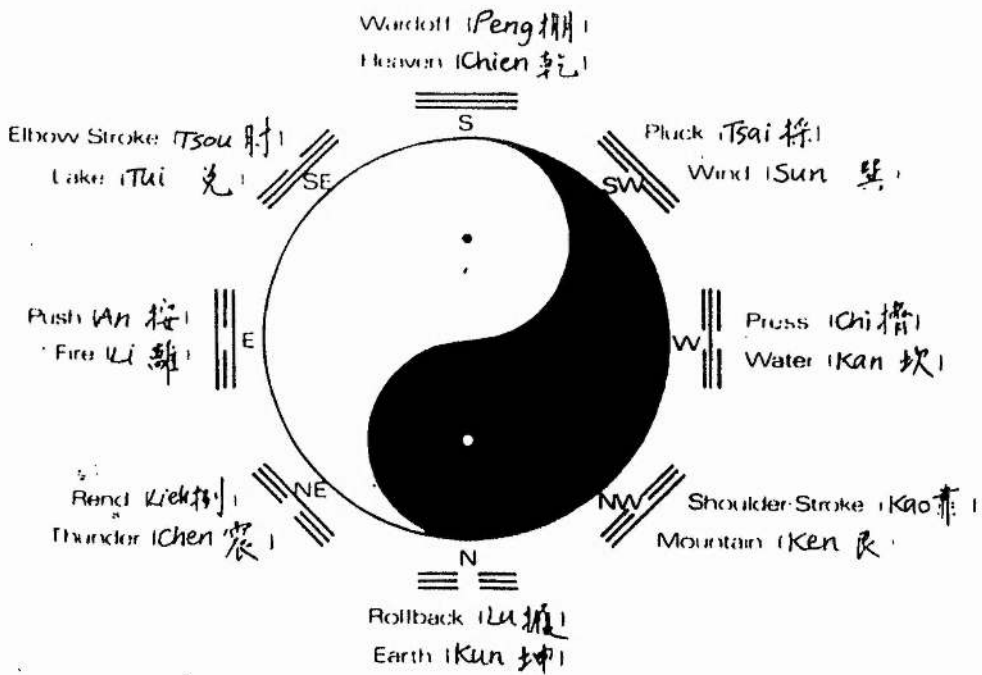


Fig. 9: The directions of the eight basic techniques according to Chang San-Feng.

This can be illustrated by the diagram in Fig 9 .

The same questions that were raised about the relevance of the first five postures to the five elements could be raised about the relevance of the eight postures to the eight trigrams. Yet the Chinese seem to be quite content that there are five basic attitudes of movement and eight basic techniques and they compare in number to the five basic elements and the eight trigrams. The Chinese seem to take this as an indication of 'rightness' and 'wholeness' and by implication a 'proof' of the superiority of Taijiquan. This attitude is seen in statements like the following:

"The Eight Gates plus the Five Steps are termed the Tai-Chi Chuan thirteen postures, the basics for the different styles of Tai-Chi Chuan. Thus Tai-Chi Chuan applies ideas from the Tai-Chi diagrams, the five elements and the *I Ching*. Total in concept, it is a synthesis of movement and function."

(Jou, 1980, p.116)

Yet before this sort of criticism is made using linear process of Western logic, it must be remembered that what is important to the Chinese mind is the cyclic nature of things and the interrelationship that exists between all things in the universe (Payne 1981).

As was the case with the five elements and the five directions, confusion is caused by different authorities suggesting differing arrangements. Compare the following three arrangements: the first from the *Taijiquan Classics* (Fig 9), the second suggested by Douglas Wile in *Tai Chi Touchstones: the Verbal Transmission of the Yang Family*, 1983 (Fig 10), and the third by J.J. Soong in *Study of Tai Chi Chuan*, 1970 (Fig 11).

As Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming puts it:

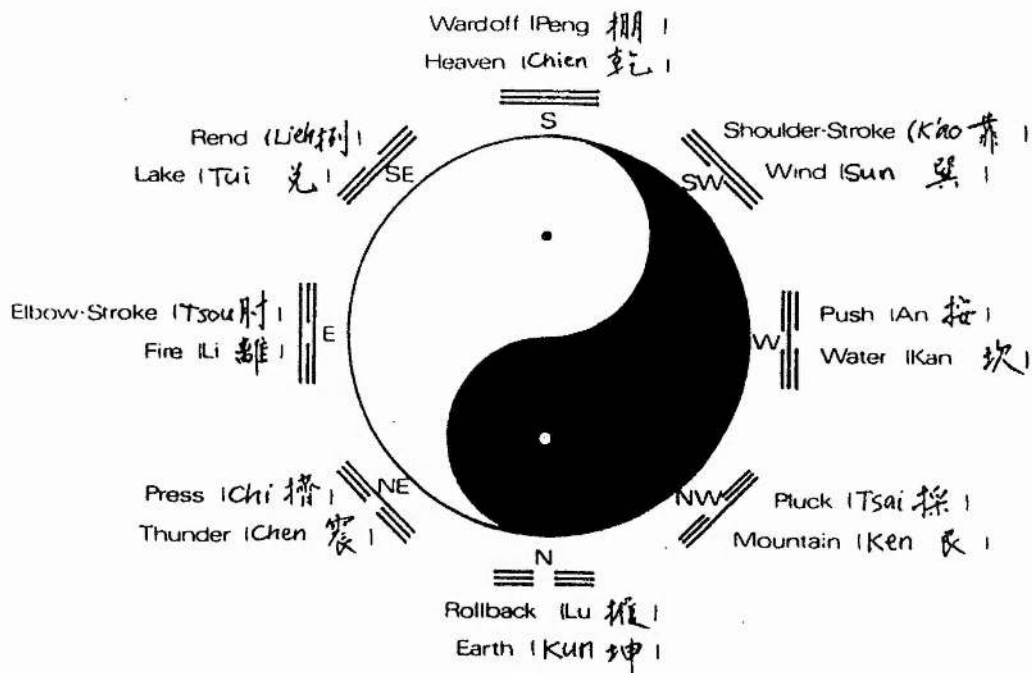


Fig. 10 : The directions of the eight basic techniques according to "Tai Chi Touchstones" (See Bibliography).

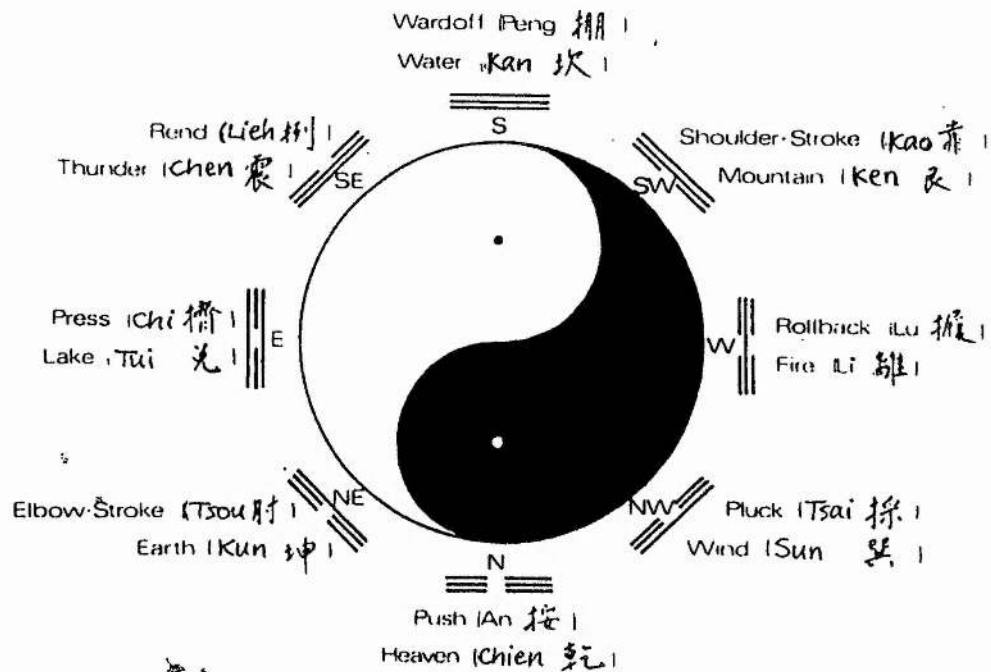


Fig. 11 : The directions of the eight basic techniques according to J.J. Soong (See Bibliography).

"None of the above three diagrams gives a satisfactory explanation of the connection between the Ba Kua eight "gates" and the eight techniques. However from the view points of the Yin and the Yang one can obtain a more or less satisfactory explanation.... In a trigram the ; a straight line expresses Yang and a broken line implies Yin. Therefore when two straight lines are put together it means strong Yang and when three straight lines are put together it means very strong Yang. The same can be applied to Yin."

(Yang, 1986, p. 10)

Thus the amount of force or 'softness' one should use in the execution of the technique may be seen from its relevant trigram. That is of course assuming one can decide which arrangement to use. The task may be simplified by casting one's lot with the majority and accepting the arrangement of the *Classics*.

Jou offers a further insight into the connection between the Ba Gua and the eight techniques. He says:

"The Eight Gates, constituting a regular octant, has four directions and four corners, which are both squares. This square or octant generates the hand and



upper torso movements. The five steps form a circle, generating the leg and foot movements. The square or octant and the circle are connected by the body.

In fact, the circle and square may be interchanged. That is, the circle may generate the square and vice versa. According to the *I Ching* theory, there is unlimited interaction. Yet all these changes are confined to the domain of the changing eight trigrams, which themselves derive from four symbols. The four symbols, however, come from two forms which, in turn, return to the Tai Chi. The development from nothing to something or the return from something to nothing describes a basic concept in Tai Chi Chuan and Taoist Philosophy. Everything in the world is involved in a cyclic process, from Wu-chi to Tai-chi and back to Wu-chi."

(Jou 1980, p. 116)

The sixty-four hexagrams are generated by combining two of the trigrams. Mathematically the possible combinations of trigrams are expressed as  $8 \times 8 = 64$  thus giving sixty four hexagrams. The coming together of the two trigrams represents the coming together of heaven (upper) and earth (lower), while their interaction and dynamism represents the cosmic forces as they effect human affairs (Wing 1979). This coming together is also seen as the duality

within the self; the subconscious versus conscious or instinct versus persona. They are also seen as the coming together of the higher and lower minds. (Wilhelm 1950).

Only one author, Da Liu, attempts to apply the meanings of the hexagrams to Taijiquan postures (Da Liu, 1972). This work cannot be taken seriously by any serious Taijiquan student, since Da Liu offers no logical process by which he chose the hexagrams that are meant to correspond to the postures. Furthermore his explanation of the essence of each posture is by and large inconsistent with that of other authorities. For example, of the posture 'single whip' he says:

"The single whip comes from hexagram 49, *Ko*, which means revolution. According to the commentary on the Decision, "Heaven and earth bring about revolution, and the four seasons complete themselves thereby." The nuclear trigrams *Chien* (which means turning) and *Sun* (which means gentle wind) suggest the essence of the movement; the body turning with hands parallel almost 120 degrees from the termination of Push Forward, the previous movement, *Chien* and *Sun* combined give the picture of the body rotating in a gentle flowing motion like a light wind."

(Da Liu, 1972 p.54)

Da Liu suggests that the essence of the movement is "the body turning with the hands held still parallel almost 120 degrees..." This turning movement is only found in the modified yang form as taught by Cheng Manjing (Cheng and Smith 1967). Older Chen forms and yang forms have a much smaller turn and the hands begin to change at the beginning of the movement and are not held parallel (Yang 1981, Jou 1980, Cheng 1979). Furthermore all authors are agreed that the essence of the posture 'single whip' is *expansion* not turning with parallel arms (Jou 1980, Yang 1980,1986, Cheng 1979, Wile 1983, Cheng and Smith 1967).

Since none of the experts attempts to demonstrate the relevance of the sixty-four hexagrams to the Taijiquan postures, we could draw the following conclusions:

- (a) It is impossible to compare the hexagrams to the postures.
- (b) The task would be of such complexity that its practical application and value could not justify the effort.
- (c) Even if it were possible such detailed analysis would detract from the essence of the experience of doing Taijiquan.

Thus we return to the essence of the practice of Taijiquan, which is not the development of rational processes but the experience that develops that intuitive understanding of the Dao.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES OF THE 'INTERNAL SCHOOL' OF  
MARTIAL ARTS

One of the greatest contrasts between Western and traditional Eastern cultures is their different attitudes to the body. In the West, a fundamental split is posited between the mind and the body. Although there is general agreement that the mind affects the body (psychosomatic) and body affects the mind (somatopsychic) the two are seen as separate but interrelated entities. Partly due to the effects of traditional Christian dogma the mind and 'spirit' have come to be seen as more important than the body. Western physical education helped redress the balance by emphasizing the value of the body but it failed to reconcile the split. A number of modern systems growing out of psychology and related fields have attempted to promote a truly wholistic attitude to the body. Some of these are: 'Rolfing' designed by Ida Rolf (Rolf 1977) an American psychiatrist, 'Reichian' therapy (Reich, 1950) developed by Wilhelm Reich, an Austrian psychiatrist, the Feldenkrais Technique (Felderkrais, 1973), Postural Integration etc. (Painter, 1986). These and others have attempted with varying success to reconcile the body mind split. Yet by and large the Western mind believes that there is a fundamental difference between the body and the mind. This is true to such an extent that the English language does not have a

word that would express the idea that the body and mind are one entity. The best it can do is 'Bodymind' a word that has come into use in some of the above mentioned systems (Dychwald, 1977).

The Chinese mind does not have this problem. The Chinese have always seen man as a 'microcosm' which existed within the 'macrocosm' which is the universe, and were primarily interested in how the two interrelated and how harmony was maintained between the two (Needham 1983).

Thus in the Internal School of martial arts emphasis was placed on the development of the whole person. No one aspect was seen as more important or separate from another. Martial arts training was for the whole person. Western writers writing about Eastern martial arts described the Westerner as a 'head person' who sought a rational and logical reality, while the Easterner was seen as a 'belly person' whose reality sensed and intuited, who reacted to stimuli from a 'gut reaction' (Payne 1981). Peter Payne in his excellent book *Martial Arts, the Spiritual Dimension* says:

"In terms of the person, this sensed reality is the life process, which flows within, around and beyond them to interact with other felt beings and things. It is not internal as opposed to external, because it is not confined by any impermeable boundaries; it is, rather, a different view of the world from that

favoured in our culture, a view which may even be denied all validity by those whose sensitivity has deteriorated to the point where they can no longer perceive in this way and are like a blind person who denies that colour exists because they cannot see it.

In terms of the martial arts, this point of view emphasizes the sensing and liberating of one's internal energy flows, the intuitive sensitivity to one's environment, and the capacity to harmonize with one's 'attacker' to the point where combat is transformed into a dance of moving feelings."

(Payne 1981, p.10)

For the Western mind to understand this, three basic concepts from the internal school of martial arts must be understood. These are the concepts of *Li*, *Yi* and *Qi*.

#### The Concept of *Li*

*Li* (pronounced 'Lee') is translated as body, physical strength and muscular force, external power (Jou 1980). It has to do with what the West would call 'physical' in terms of the body. The Shaolin School of martial arts (*Wai chia*, external school) stressed the cultivation of *Li*. In Taijiquan the physical aspects of the form are seen as the cultivation of *Li*. In

fact the Taijiquan form is seen not so much as a collection of fighting techniques but as a comprehensive collection of physical movements not unlike a dictionary. When doing the form the practitioner is seen as practicing a 'vocabulary' of movement, proficiency at which gives him the ability to react in a perfectly natural and spontaneous way in a combat situation (Huang 1973). The ability to generate maximum power in any movement is seen as the object of cultivating *Li*. Thus *Li* is not just muscular development, but the coordination of muscle, sinew and bone in order to produce force (Smith 1980).

#### The Concept of *Yi*

*Yi* (pronounced 'Ee') is usually translated 'mind', will and intuition (Payne 1981). Perhaps a better translation would be 'mind-intent' (Smith 1980). *Yi* is the focussed will which gives intention and purpose to the functions of *Li*. The Taijiquan practitioner trains his *I* by 'shadow boxing' as he performs the form. In other words he trains the concentration of the will in executing movements.

#### The Concept of *Qi*

*Qi* (pronounced 'chee') has been translated 'breath', life-force, 'internal energy' (Reid and Croucher, 1983). Perhaps the best translation is 'intrinsic energy' offered by Robert Smith

(Draeger and Smith 1983). The Chinese concept of *Qi* is the same as the Hindu *prana* and the Polonesian *mana* and similar to the Hebrew *Ruach* and the Greek *pneuma* (Payne 1981). This is a very ancient concept in China and it forms the chief concept in Chinese medicine since life is sustained by *qi* which flows through the body along 'meridians' and disease is seen to be caused by the interruptions of this flow of *qi*. When *qi* ceases to flow through the body death occurs (Sunu and Lee 1985).

In the West various people have developed this concept, though none has been accepted into mainstream Western thinking. Anton Mesmer's 'magnetic fluid', Von Reichenbach's 'Odic force', and Wilhelm Reich's 'Orgone energy', all deal with *qi* (Payne 1981). Peter Payne in his book *Martial Arts, the Spiritual Dimension* (1981) gives a good description of *qi*:

*Ki*<sup>16</sup> is an entity that is inherently linked with life and consciousness, and which can produce direct effects on physical energies and matter. Indeed, the action of *Ki* is often associated with electrical and magnetic effects, which seem to be side effects rather than the main active principle. *Ki* can be directed by conscious intention. *Ki* moves like smoke, like water, it flows, has coherence and pattern, yet is

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<sup>16</sup>Note *Ki* is Japanese for *Qi*.



unfixed and formless. It is generated and accumulated in the body to increase overall capacity for all forms of action and experience. Its effects can be felt in the body as sensations of heat and cold, lightness and heaviness, smoothness and roughness, expansion and contraction, and so on... When being consciously developed, it is often first felt in the hands as warmth, tingling and heaviness... One's own *Ki* can be felt and consciously directed within and around the body; it will normally influence the flow of *Ki* in and around other people or things; and when powerfully developed it can strongly affect mental states and physical movement at a distance, enabling psychokinesis and telepathic hypnosis."

(Payne 1981 pp. 44,45)

The Chinese do not attempt such precise explanation. Since it was a part of the culture it was taken for granted that one knew what *qi* meant. It was spoken of in terms of developing strength and power and in its relevance to martial and health systems. It was never described in concrete terms. It was always hinted at and the practitioner had to learn about it from personal experience. This is clearly illustrated by a passage from the book *Secrets of Shaolin Temple Boxing* (1964) an old Chinese manuscript which Robert Smith had translated and edited, in which Monk Chueh Yuan (presumably a Shaolin fighting monk) says:

"Strength turns from soft to strong and *chi*<sup>17</sup> becomes substantial from cultivation. Strength originates from *chi* and acts as *chi* sinks. Without *chi* there is no strength. A quack boxer shoots out a hand ferociously, but there is no true strength in his strikes. A real boxer is not so flamboyant but his touch is heavy as a mountain. This is because he possesses *chi*. Through long practice all the *chi* can be focussed on the attacking point. The will commands the *chi* which can be focussed on any given point instantaneously."

(Smith 1964 p.32)

*Qi* is developed by breathing techniques. This was a very old idea and from very early times breathing exercises were done to cultivate the *qi* (known as *qigong*, *gong* meaning cultivation). The Taijiquan form with its prescribed breathing techniques is seen as an advanced *qigong* form. Correctly positioning the body and stretching it is seen to improve the flow of *qi* through the meridians, thus Taijiquan is seen to be superior to other *qigong* forms that use static postures (Jou 1980). Indeed it is this aspect of developing *qi*, combined with developing *Li* by exercising all parts of the body that makes Taijiquan the most popular form of exercise in China today (Horwitz, Kimmelman and Lui 1976).

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<sup>17</sup>*chi* is *qi* in the Wade Giles system of Romanisation.

Thus in the Internal Martial Arts and in Taijiquan in particular, the cultivation of *Yi*, *Li* and *Qi* are seen as basic. *Yi* directs *Li* and yet one would be useless without the other. Cultivated together they develop the whole 'bodymind'.

### The Concept of *Wu-wei*

This is another important concept in understanding and practicing Taijiquan. This is a concept that came to the martial arts from Daoism and very strongly influenced the Internal School of Martial Arts. Literally translated 'nonaction' (Jou 1980) it can at first be misleading. As Alan Watts in his book *Tao, the Watercourse Way* (1975) puts it:

"...the principle of 'nonaction' (*wu-wei*) is not to be considered inertia, laziness, *laissez-faire*, or mere passivity. Among the several meanings of *wei* are to be, to do, to make, to practice, to act out; ... But in the context of Taoist writings it quite clearly means forcing, meddling, and artifice ... Thus *wu-wei* as 'not forcing' is what we mean by going with the grain, rolling with the punch, swimming with the current, trimming the sails to the wind, taking the tide at its flood, and stooping to conquer."

(Watts 1975 pp. 75,76)

He goes on to say that the principle of *wu-wei* is best exemplified in the martial arts of *judo* and *aikido* (both 'soft' arts) when the opponent is defeated by the force of his own attack. He further states:

"*Wu-wei* is the life-style of one who follows the Tao, and must be understood primarily as a form of intelligence - that is, of knowing the principles, structures, and trends of human and natural affairs so well that one uses the least amount of energy in dealing with them. But this intelligence is,... not simply intellectual; it is also the 'unconscious' intelligence of the whole organism and in particular, the innate wisdom of the nervous system. *Wu-wei* is a combination of this wisdom with taking the line of least resistance in all one's actions. It is not the mere avoidance of effort."

(Ibid. p.76)

Reaching a state of *wu-wei* is seen as one of the ultimate achievements in the martial arts; the mark of the true master. This is achieved through the long and careful cultivation of *Yi*, *Li* and *Qi* (Chow and Spangler 1982).

Thus we see the influence of Daoism and the *Yi Jing* on the holistic nature of Taijiquan. One can also see how

understanding the philosophical background of Taijiquan enables the Westerner to understand how Taijiquan can be a martial art, a system of physical education, health system and system of meditation all at once. One might even forgive the Chinese the grandiose title of "Supreme Ultimate Boxing System".

In attempting to understand the philosophical nature of Taijiquan, the Western student will have to undertake a study of the vast cultural heritage of China, a prospect so enormous that the mind boggles. Thus, to keep things in perspective, certain areas of study should be identified. In my opinion this study should be designed around the concept of naturalness and natural movement which is an underlying concept in all the major concepts that have been discussed. For gaining a working understanding of the concept of naturalness is fundamental to the understanding and recognizing the essence of Taijiquan movement.

The concept of naturalness is not an easy one to explain due to its nebulous and abstract nature. Yet it is possible to gain a 'body knowledge' or gut perception of the concept. This sort of knowing is fundamental to the Chinese world-view and once cultivated, it makes the understanding of the essence of Taijiquan simple.

## CONCLUSION

We have examined the Chinese and Western views of Taijiquan, its long history and its philosophical foundations in the roots of Chinese culture and Daoist belief systems.

Although the preceding chapters may seem to be an exhaustive treatment of the subject, many aspects of Taijiquan have been left untouched, for example the many legends and myths which are used as a means of transmitting various truths, which otherwise could be inaccessible to the student. Also supplementary practices of Taijiquan such as breathing exercises and combat training methods - two man forms, pushing hands, sticking hands and Taijiquan weapons systems etc. have only been alluded to since they would require detailed and lengthy treatment beyond the scope of this study.

As we have seen, there are a number of attitudes towards Taijiquan prevalent in China and the West. These may be summarised as follows:

### (a) Traditional Chinese View

This is a holistic view of Taijiquan, fundamentally Daoist in essence, and does not emphasize any one aspect of Taijiquan, but

rather sees it as an experiential technique of gaining an understanding of oneself and one's world.

This view could be seen from a Western standpoint as portraying Taijiquan as 'Daoist technology' in the phrase of Bruce Frantzis, a modern Western teacher of Taijiquan who has studied in China (Abel 1988). This technology produced a fully integrated person in tune with himself and his surroundings, or to the Chinese, 'a man of the Dao'.

(b) The Modern Official Chinese Attitude

This sees Taijiquan purely as an exercise system and sport for producing physical fitness and enhancing health. This attitude arose as a result of the Chinese communist party's pragmatic approach and its condemnation of what it described in the 1960's as "feudal beliefs and superstitions" (Draeger and Smith 1980). This was an attempt to undermine one of the mainstays of traditional Chinese culture, namely Daoism, which in practice probably had little effect on the attitudes of the people (Draeger and Smith 1980).

(c) The Modern Popular Chinese Attitude

This attitude lies somewhere between those of the traditional (a) and the official (b) attitudes of the Chinese. The Chinese people

see Taijiquan as a martial art practised for its benefits, not only for the physical fitness, but of the total health and well being of the bodymind.

(d) The Modern Western Attitude

This attitude grew out of the entrancement of some sections of Western society with Eastern cultures, but in adapting Taijiquan to its needs, the West has ignored the larger perspective and ended up with a limited and fragmented version of the art.

According to this view, Taijiquan is seen by some as a panacea for all ills, or various aspects of it have been adapted by different groups to satisfy their individual needs.

In order to understand Taijiquan as a system, it must be viewed from a traditional Daoist world-view, which by nature is expansive, and endeavours to take a view of the wider perspective. This attitude is in sharp contrast to the Western world-view which is influenced by Cartesian thinking and tends to focus inwards towards a detailed analysis of parts, rather than an understanding of the whole (Capra 1982).

Thus, if the West is to understand and benefit from Taijiquan, it must adapt its way of thinking to become more expansive and holistic, as in Daoism, since by its present limited perspective



it is losing much which is of value in Taijiquan. Perhaps merely adopting a holistic attitude is insufficient. Rather, what may be necessary is the development of areas of the bodymind that are now conveniently classified under the areas of intuition, instinct and 'hunches', which are not seen as worthy of serious consideration since they defy logical processes and are impossible to quantify.

It is interesting to note that the very aspects of knowing that are necessary for the understanding and appreciation of Taijiquan are the very areas of the bodymind that the practice of Taijiquan improves.

The next section will give a more detailed understanding of the holistic nature of Taijiquan and focus on the effects of Taijiquan on the bodymind.

## PART II

"Flow with whatever may happen  
and let your mind be free: Stay centered  
by accepting whatever you are doing.  
This is the ultimate."

(QUANZE)

## PART II INTRODUCTION

In this part I shall deal with various common themes from Taijiquan and examine the relevance of these to bodymind integration. In chapter four I have extracted various principles of posture, movement, and awareness from Taijiquan and compared them briefly to Western sport, movement and learning. No attempt has been made to be exhaustive in this treatment of the principles of Taijiquan. Concepts such as 'sinking' and 'rooting' have been chosen because of their pertinence to this study, and their representativeness of Taijiquan in general. Thus martial art techniques and applications have been largely ignored.

In chapter five I have dealt with strategies and traditional methods of bodymind integration. I have included in this chapter a particularly esoteric and complex transmission from the Yang School in order to demonstrate the mode of teaching used in the traditional systems. Since this passage is attempting to explain rationally an experiential process, it seems more complex than it probably is in real life. For example: if one were shown how to throw or catch a ball, it is a relatively simple matter to learn this skill. Yet if the process of learning to catch the ball were explained in kinesiological and neurological terms, it would seem incredibly complex.

The passage selected demonstrates how traditional teaching method overcame these problems by never stating things objectively or even directly. Things were pointed to from different angles and when the necessary ingredient of actually doing the moves was added, the mental and physical aspects of the individual were integrated by some deep process and the person was 'enlightened'.

Whenever possible I have drawn analogies from Western sport and life. This is done not only as a means of explaining but also to illustrate how these principles may be used.

In recent years much interest has been aroused by the fact that Japanese businessmen are known to use strategies from the martial arts in planning business campaigns and personnel management. The work of Miyamoto Musashi, one of Japan's greatest swordsmen, has been used for years as a standard text by Japanese businessmen (Hyams 1979). In a similar fashion, Taijiquan strategy may be adopted and used in all aspects of education, sport, management, business etc. These will be examined briefly.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### BASIC PRINCIPLES OF TAIJIQUAN

It would be impossible to list and explain all the principles of Taijiquan in a paper of this nature. Therefore a few of the most basic and fundamental principles have been chosen in order to give some idea of the uniquely holistic principles of movement found in Taijiquan. These principles have been taken from the *Taijiquan Classics* and from the verbal transmissions of the various Taijiquan Schools. Through most of taijiquan's long history its principles were passed down from teacher to student and were treated as secrets of the family or school. For the proper understanding of these could mean the difference between life and death at a time when an element of surprise and strategy - in the form of an unknown martial art - was needed in dealing with robbers, bandits and other lawless elements. The Chinese love for secrecy and the knowledge that a secret that was recorded was less safe had something to do with the fact that these principles were not recorded in written form until about the early part of the 19th century. We are told that the Chen School kept records that predate this period (Giu 1984). Whether these were merely family records or actual records of training principles we will never know since no-one except members of the Chen family seems to know what they contained.

Probably the oldest of the written transmissions is the first of the Taijiquan classics the *Taijiquan Ching* attributed to Chang Sanfeng, the legendary founder of the art. This belief arose from the fact that the original manuscript was found in a salt cellar and passed on to the Yang family who claimed that there was a note in this that said: "This classic was left by the patriarch Chang Sanfeng of the Wu Tang Mountain. He desired the whole world to attain longevity, and not only martial techniques." (Lo, Inn, Amacker, Foe, 1979, p.9). Like the Yang family claim that Chang Sanfeng created Taijiquan, this claim is not taken seriously by most Taijiquan authorities (ibid.). This does not of course reduce the value of the manuscript and the pertinence of the material.

The collection of writings we know as the *Classics* were first published about the turn of the century and have grown since. Most of the material is contributed by the followers of the Yang School of Taijiquan (Wile 1983). The classics are seen as the final authority on questions of form and technique. Wang Kiu-yu, a Taijiquan master of this century, says:

"In the practice of Tai Chi Chuan it matters little from what school or what master one learns, the number of movements in a version, a few movements more or a few movements less; and the type of form or circle, high form or low form, big circle or small circle.

These are all up to the individual. As long as one does not deviate from the basic principles set forth in the classics, one can reap the same benefits from the exercise and become a successful performer."

(Horwitz, Kimmelman, Lui, 1979, p.72)

Cheng Manjing, an extremely popular master of recent times observed:

"The Classics are our best link with the past of Tai Chi: they are the basics of the art. By their nature they are discursive and redundant, but, at the same time, profound. In the present era, when Tai Chi has proliferated into many schools, The Classics can be used as a model. If these systems violate The Classics, the systems are wrong".

(Cheng, 1962 p. 17)

Chen Wei-Ming, an important teacher of Yang Taijiquan, in his book *Tai Chi Chuan Ta Wen (Questions and Answers on Tai Chi Chuan*, first published in 1929), repeatedly refers to the *Classics* in answering questions on Taijiquan, thus stressing their importance (Cheng, 1929).

Besides the *Classics* there are a number of 'verbal transmissions' that have been handed down from teacher to student

and from time to time are recorded in various Taijiquan books. Again a large bulk of the material has come down from the Yang School. This is probably due to the fact that the Yang School was the first to teach Taijiquan to persons outside the family and Yang Chen-pu in particular is credited with recording the oral transmissions of the Yang School. Yang Chen-pu was not a scholar and his first book *Self-Defence Methods of Tai-Chi Chuan* (1931) is generally assumed to have been compiled by Tung Yingchien and the second, *Complete Principles and Applications of Tai-Chi Chuan* (1934) by Cheng Manjing. These works contain, in addition to form and self-defence instructions, transcriptions of oral teachings, mnemonic training songs, essays, biographies, commentaries, and stories of Yang masters. In spite of occasional anomalies, such as Yang Chen-pu describing a dialogue with his grandfather, when according to universally accepted dates the man died eleven years before the birth of his grandson, all the material is seen to be of great importance from a point of view of recording important principles and transmitting the essence of Taijiquan (Wile 1983).

One of the most recent compilations is *Tai-chi Touchstones: Yang Family Secret Transmissions* (1983) which was translated and compiled by Professor Douglas Wile of Brooklyn College, U.S.A. This book contained much of the above mentioned material plus other Yang family material published later by students and a number of anonymous pieces. This is probably one of the best



pieces of work added to the growing volume of Taijiquan literature available in the English Language.

Let us now examine some of the fundamental concepts in Taijiquan.

### The Importance of Breathing and the Cultivation of Qi

In the Chinese martial arts and health systems the most important process is considered to be the cultivation of *qi* through various breathing techniques. For to the Chinese mind *qi* was the 'substance' which gave and supported life and to cultivate it was the fundamental purpose of physical exercise (Yang 1985). This is similar to the idea in modern, western physical education that the development of cardio-vascular fitness is the most important aspect of 'Health Related' physical education (Astrand 1967), since cardiovascular fitness is now believed to ward-off the effects of degenerative disease caused by the stress of modern living and to promote more efficient functioning of body and mind (De Vries, 1983). There were two major differences, however: (i) the cultivation of *qi* is seen as much more than improved gas transport and was the basis of developing strength, power, endurance and even flexibility (Yang 1985) whereas in Western Physical education developing cardio-vascular endurance is a specialized activity related to promoting the function of the cardio-vascular systems and developing endurance fitness (De Vries 1983). (ii) The process of cultivating *qi* was different to the

development of cardio-vascular fitness in that cardio-vascular fitness is developed by subjecting the body to stress in the form of repetitious and sustained activity over a period of time which results in the body making anatomical and physiological adaptations (De Vries, 1983) while in the Chinese systems *qi* was cultivated by doing breathing techniques in static position or while going through a series of prescribed moves (Yang 1985).

This seemingly voluntary control of *qi* is stressed in the *Classics*. For example in the *Expositions into the Practice of the Thirteen Postures* by Wu Yu-Xian we read:

"The *hsin* (mind) mobilizes the chi (breath)  
Make the chi sink calmly; ...  
The chi mobilizes the body  
Make it move smoothly,  
then it easily follows  
(the direction) of *hsin*.

(Lo, Inn, Amacker, Foe, 1979 p.43)

Thus the *qi* and breath are related concepts, often used interchangeably by the Chinese.

In an old manual of Chinese boxing entitled *Secrets of Shaolin Temple Boxing* (N.A.) edited by Robert Smith (1964) we read:

"The lungs are reservoirs of air, and air is the lord of strength. Whoever speaks of strength must know air - this is universal truth. Good lungs equal good strength; weak lungs, weak strength. You must learn to breathe properly."

(Smith 1964 p. 34)

A hallmark of the internal martial arts is Daoist breathing which has come to be known as 'Taiji breathing' (Jou). This differs from what is known as 'Buddhistic breathing' - normal abdominal breathing, wherein the abdomen expands on inhalation and contracts on exhalation. In Daoist breathing - also called 'Reverse' breathing - on the other hand the lower abdomen is contracted in and up and the upper abdomen is expanded on inhalation and the lower abdomen is 'dropped' downward on exhalation. This process is said to draw *qi* from the air down through the body on inhalation and on exhalation 'sinks' *qi* to the *Dan Tien* - an important psychic centre located three finger-widths below the navel and mid-way through the body from front to back (Yang 1985). Through repeated practice of breathing *qi* is said to accumulate in the *Dan Tien* and at more advanced levels *qi* is moved along the acupuncture meridians (*qi* pathways) to enhance health or strengthen physical actions (ibid.).

Progress is said to come from learning to breathe slower and slower while performing movements in slow motion - thus learning to

harmonize breathing and movement. An important aspect of this mind, body and breath was seen as learning to breathe with movement, particularly, exhaling while applying strength or force (Jou 1980).

In performing the Taijiquan form each 'posture' was executed while inhaling and exhaling. Thus as the practitioner got more advanced he slowed down his movements and breathing. One can appreciate the difficulty of performing a long Taijiquan form which could take the advanced practitioner as much as forty-five minutes to an hour, during which he is breathing approximately two to three breath cycles a minute, all the while moving in slow motion with his legs in a half 'squat' position (Huang 1973).

This form of *qi* cultivation seems to produce amazing levels of cardio-vascular fitness. Galante (1981) reports some studies done which seemed to indicate that if Taijiquan was practised with the body held low (a fact stressed by traditional teachers) exercise heart rates could be achieved (a fundamental requirement in cardio-vascular endurance training - De Vries 1983) and sustained for desired periods of time (usually 15 minutes or more - Astrand 1967). Unfortunately little scientific study seems to have been done into this fascinating area. This is probably due to the pragmatic nature of the Chinese mind which would see investigations into these areas as a waste of time since the value of these systems of *qi* cultivation have been

'proved' by the very fact that they have survived for over 2500 years (Sunu and Lee, 1985).

### THE PRINCIPLES OF SINKING AND ROOTING

The concepts of 'sinking' and 'rooting' - sometimes referred to collectively as 'grounding', implying both a firm contact with the earth and a good sense of one's physical body - is a fundamental concept in all Eastern Martial Arts. In the Internal School of martial arts great emphasis is placed on this principle. In fact it is seen as a prerequisite to correct technique and powerful physical movement (Payne 1981). An old manuscript on Chinese boxing says:

'An old saying goes: "Before you can learn to defeat others you must first learn to stand." After you have learned how to stand firmly, your *chi* is always kept just below the navel enabling you to achieve a strong foothold at any time or place. Then and only then are you ready to learn boxing.'

(Smith, 1964 p. 63)

In many schools of Chinese boxing this process of learning to 'sink one's qi' and to root the feet was achieved by the practice of an exercise called the 'Horse-Riding Posture' or the 'Foothold Exercise'. In fact some schools started the students' training with this exercise and the student was expected to spend three

months of daily practice after which period he was expected to be able to hold the position for well over an hour (Yang 1981).

The exercise itself is simple: the student adopted a stance with feet wider than shoulder-width and bending his knees 'sits down' until he reached the position one would be in if one sat in a saddle with one's feet in the stirrups. The feet are placed firmly on the floor with the weight distributed between the heel, the ball of the foot and the fifth metatarsal head, and with all the toes touching the ground. The hip joint, the knee-cap and the second toe are held in a straight line in order to ensure correct biomechanical alignment of the leg. The waist is held relaxed with the pelvis level, and the lumbar spine straight. The spine is held in a relaxed upright position with a feeling of the head being suspended from above. The shoulders are relaxed with the arms hanging directly to the sides. From the waist up the body is held with a light 'floating' feeling. From the waist downward the body is to feel as if it is 'sinking' downward and heavy, not unlike the image of an hour-glass with all the sand in the lower half. The student is instructed to visualize his centre of gravity being at a point three finger widths below his navel (the '*Dan Tien, Hara* to the Japanese) on which he is to concentrate his mind. He is also instructed to extend his energy (*qi*) downward and outward into the ground as a tree would extend its roots into the ground (Huang 1982). 'Sinking' the *qi* was considered of vital importance as illustrated by the following extract from an old text on Chinese boxing:

"After assuming this posture you should direct the chi to your lower torso. Do not let it float in the chest. If you do, your upper part will be heavy and you cannot root your feet to the ground. Many there are who will fall at the slightest push. This is because they have not practised the hold exercise."

(Smith 1964, p. 33)

Although assuming the 'Horse-riding posture' was easy, holding it for extended periods of time was another matter. However, this was seen as a necessary process in gaining correct head and back posture, and developing the strength of the legs in keeping with sound biomechanical principles and in developing a correct state of relaxed strength in which breathing was natural and not affected by the effort exerted by the arms and legs in vigorous action. For a lack of strength in the legs would result in great discomfort in the low positions of Taijiquan, leading to tension which in turn would affect breathing.

Besides building healthy discipline the exercise is also said to improve the endurance of the legs:

"This posture is excellent in that it makes the loins and legs durable and the entire body stable. With it you can stand firmly even on a precipice."

(Smith 1964, p.33)

This exercise in 'durability' and endurance is probably because of an increase in vascularization which is known to result from the body opening up new capillary beds as a response to the stress caused by sustaining load on the muscles for prolonged periods of time (de Vries, 1983). Whatever the case may be, the traditional systems learned from experience that this exercise provided the necessary foundation for the learning of martial arts skills. For beginners is offered the following advice:

"At first in foot-hold training you may feel some ache in the loins and legs. It is like riding a horse after a long interval. You may also feel a weakening of your strength. But do not worry. This merely means a washout of the old. All worthless air and useless strength a novice possesses before training have to be replaced by the new. Thus, when you feel pain initially, do not flinch but, instead, endure the pain and continue practising. In order to learn the foothold you must increase the standing time each day. For example, if you practise two hours the first night, add several minutes the next. Progress must come every day. If the leg pains are unbearable you must rest a short while, but then return to the posture. You must stand every day until pain vanishes naturally with the sinking of your chi to your lower navel and the onset of strength to your legs. Only then can the hands be trained."

(Smith 1964 p.32)



In reference to the 'two hours' of practice on the first day an editor's note says:- "The author here reveals the rigorousness of the practice in those times. Two hours of foothold practice for a beginner would be killing. Nowadays, 15 minutes would be considered more realistic." (Ibid.).

Most modern practitioners of Taijiquan do not practise the foothold exercise except for the most dedicated. Yet the concepts of sinking and rooting are discussed and taught and practised as fundamental concepts of Taijiquan.

#### PRINCIPLES OF POSTURE IN TAIJIQUAN

There are many principles of posture in Taijiquan. It is impossible to talk of some of these as purely physical attitudes since they are always described in terms of *Yi*, intention, *Li*, body position and *qi*, intrinsic energy. Thus these rules and principles have to be used in terms of attitudes of the 'bodymind' as opposed to purely biomechanical positions. Once again a few of the more important principles have been picked in order to give the reader some insight into the *essence* of these rules, rather than attempting to compile comprehensive lists of principles.

## The use of the spine and head in Taijiquan

Great emphasis is placed on the use of the spine, and the position of the head in Taijiquan. The spine is *always* held straight and the head is treated as a part of this central structure. In fact it would be quite correct to say that the aspect of the skeleton known to Western anatomists as the 'axial skeleton' - skull, vertebral column, rib cage, sacrum and coccyx (Gray 1980) is treated as one 'piece'. Except for a slight movement of the lower ribs during breathing there is almost no movement at all in the axial skeleton. This provides a 'solid base' or a 'rigid framework' from which the moving parts of the skeleton, the appendicular skeleton, can work in order to effect powerful and efficient movement. If the axial skeleton were to move at the same time as the limbs were to extend, part of the force generated would be absorbed or neutralized thus reducing the power of the movement.

In Taijiquan the axial skeleton is held straight, 'still' and in 'one piece' in movement. A 'straight spine' does not, however, mean a still spine. The practitioner is cautioned against stiffness. The *Classics* say:

'In motion  
all parts of the body must be  
light

nimble  
and strung together'.

(Lo, Inn, Amacker, Foe, 1979 p.19)

'The upright body  
must be stable and comfortable  
to be able to support (force from)  
the eight directions.

(Ibid. p.55)

The written and oral transmissions of Taijiquan do not talk of this concept in terms of the axial skeleton and the appendicular skeleton. Rather, the practitioner is given a number of maxims or metaphoric statements and is expected to work things out. This seems to be a typical characteristic of the teaching method in the martial arts. In practice it seems to work well since using this method helps keep a larger and more holistic viewpoint, enabling the student to comprehend the physical (li), mental (I) and energetic (qi) aspects of the principles. Thus, instead of saying the axial skeleton is held still in order to produce efficient movement, the *Classics* would point at the principle from many different angles. The following are a sample:

'All parts of the body are strung together without the slightest break'

(Lo, Inn, Amacker, Foe, 1979, p.24)

'Don't lean in any direction'.

(Ibid. p.33)

'In moving

The chi sticks to the back

and permeates the spine.'

(Ibid. p.45)

'When the *Ching Shen* (spirit) is raised,

There is no fault

of stagnancy and heaviness.

This is called suspended headtop.

'Power is emitted from the spine;

Steps change following the body.'

(Yang, 1986 p.225)

'The *Li* is released by the back'.

(Lo, Inn, Amacker, Foe, 1979 p.52)

'When the coccyx is straight,

the *shen* (spirit) goes through to the head-top.

To make the whole body light and agile

suspend the head-top.'

(Ibid. p. 64)

Holding the spine still in movement fulfills another requirement or rule of Taijiquan; the principle of "stillness in movement". According to this rule the mind must be still in movement, the central core of the body must be still in movement, and some part of the body must be *relatively* still for the movement to be productive and without confusion (Liang 1977).

This use of the erect spine and still head in movement is a hallmark of the more advanced martial arts and is in strong contrast to the bobbing and weaving head movements of Western boxing. On the other hand the use of the 'still' head and spine in movement is very much in evidence among top athletes in sports such as sprinting and weight lifting.

When the axial skeleton is held still in movement turning is accomplished by the waist and the legs moving. Turning movements are initiated by the waist and accomplished by the legs. Or, more correctly, the movement is initiated in the mind (I) and accomplished by the waist and legs with no turning movement of the head (Cheng 1985).

It is worth noting that the way the spine is used in Taijiquan is almost exactly the same way it is used in the Alexander Technique, developed by F. Matthias Alexander (Payne 1987). Possibly the only difference is that in taiji the lumbar curve is reduced by bending the knees. This is done for two reasons: one, bending the knees lowers the centre of gravity (thus enhancing sinking and

rooting) and permits a longer and wider stance thus improving stability; two, reducing the lumbar curve facilitates the transmission of power, generated by the extension of the legs through the waist and to the arms and hands (Huang 1982).

### The use of the waist in Taijiquan

The waist and hips are particularly important in Taijiquan. The waist is seen as a "steering wheel" which is used to direct movement (Yang 1986). The *Classics* have a lot to say about the use of the waist. The following are a sample:

"The motion should be rooted in the feet,  
released through the legs,  
controlled by the waist,  
and manifest through the fingers.

The feet, legs and waist  
must act together simultaneously,  
so that while stepping forward or back  
the timing and positions are correct.

If the timing and positions are not correct,  
the body becomes disordered,  
and the defect must be sought  
in the legs and waist."

(Lo, Inn, Amacker, Foe, 1979 p.21)

"The hsin (mind) is the commander,  
The chi (breath) the flag,  
and the waist the harness.  
The waist is like the axle  
and the chi is like the wheel".

(Ibid. p.44)

"Pay attention to the waist at all times."

(Ibid. p.64)

Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming has the following to say about the use of the waist:

"The waist must be relaxed and the hips should be as if sitting, so that the pelvis is level and the lower back straight. This will let your movements be agile and alive. As you move, your waist should generally stay the same distance from the floor - unnecessary up and down movement will disturb your root."

(Yang 1986 pp. 64,65)

Thus the use of the waist is stressed for besides directing movement it has the added function of stabilising movement and linking the lower body and the upper body.

### The use of the arms and legs in Taijiquan

There are some specific rules as to the use of the arms and legs in Taijiquan. For example: the arms and legs are never locked out (i.e. fully extended or hyperextended). This is because of the fact that the locked arm is stiff and cannot respond rapidly to change and because a locked elbow or knee joint is easily broken or damaged by external force (as in punches, kicks, blocks and joint locks). Thus the arms and legs are never fully extended. This also allows them to be used as 'springs' to absorb and deliver force (Huang 1982).

Another set of rules apply to the arms and legs. These are part of a set of rules known as the "three coordinations". What these say in reference to arms and legs is that the shoulder, elbow and wrist joint should be lined up when delivering force in order to be biomechanically correct, and the hip joint, the knee-cap and the second toe should be lined up at all times in order to prevent injury to the knee and to facilitate the most efficient functioning of the legs. Dropping the knee inwards (incidental) was considered a serious fault and was known by the derogatory term "chicken leg" (Huang 1982).

The shoulders and the elbows were held down in a natural position, since raising a shoulder or an elbow decreased stability. The shoulders in particular are held level in order to preserve the uprightness of the spine (Liang 1977).



Another fascinating principle that is unique to Taijiquan applies to the use of the arms and legs. This is known as "*Chan Szu Jing*" (silk coiling strength). This is a process of moving the whole body through a complex series of spirals which allows the body to generate great power. More correctly this is recognizing the natural spirals the body and limbs move in during the process of extension and contraction of the limbs, and using this knowledge to generate strength in more than one direction (Jou 1981). The increase in power when using *Chan Szu Jing* is easily demonstrated by extending the arm in a pushing or punching action. If the arm is extended without any rotation the pushing or punching force is less than if the arms are extended from a palm-up position through medial rotation to end in a palm-down position. When this spiralling movement is coordinated with a similar spiralling movement of the legs, this is *Chan Szu Jing* or 'silk coiling strength' (Yang 1986).

This action is clearly seen in the technique of throwing the shot wherein the shot-putter delivers the shot with a spiral action that starts with his right leg and ends up with a medial rotation of the arm (Rasch and Burke, 1978). Similarly, the increase in height potential in the 'Fosbury Flop' technique of high jumping as opposed to the scissor technique is partly due to the use of spirals in movement (Ibid.). These are excellent examples of the use of *Chan Szu Jing* as a principle of efficient movement in Western sports.

In Taijiquan, however, the principle is used in a slightly more complex manner since force is received and neutralized by using the spiral during flexion (Jou 1981).

We have already seen how the principle of the "three coordinations" applies to the use of the arms and legs. It is also worth mentioning the remaining coordinations since they have a direct bearing on the use of the spine and the waist. They are as follows:

1. The shoulder is always over the hip joint. For if the shoulder was pushed forward beyond perpendicular with the hip, the spine would be twisted and the stability of the 'root' would be reduced thus enabling an opponent to push one forward quite easily. In the 'internal' martial arts this is known as overextending and is considered a serious fault (Cheng 1985).
2. The elbow and knee are usually above each other and are extended at the same speed, thus preserving the integrity of unified movement (Yang 1981).
3. The hand and foot are coordinated in extending force since they counterbalance each other and they facilitate the extension of force (Yang 1986).

These few examples from the principles of posture and movement show how the principles are interrelated and how they contribute to natural and efficient movement. They also provide some insight into the depth of understanding the taijiquan practitioner has of the principles of movement.

The Taijiquan *Classics* and the records of the 'oral transmissions' together with the growing body of literature is a veritable gold-mine to the student of movement who is aware of their existence. For example in his excellent book *Advanced Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan Vol. 1* (1986), Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming lists over fifty different kinds of *Jing* - literally, force or flow of energy - and how they are developed. *Jing* is a difficult word to translate, there being no equivalent in the English language, but it could be defined "kind of strength" or "attitude of force". For example *An Jing* can be translated "pushing strength" or the attitude of "pushing-out force", and *Peng Jing* could be translated as "bumping force" (Tseng 1976).

But "bumping" is a poor translation for there isn't an English word for *Peng*. If one were to squeeze a tennis ball and suddenly let go, the quality of energy of the ball returning to its usual shape would be *Peng*. Another image would be that of a large Chinese bell which is struck by a log suspended by chains and swung so it strikes the outside of the bell. What the bell does to the striker is *Peng Jing* (see Appendix A). Thus a

martial arts expert of the internal school could strike an opponent with *Peng Jing* or *An Jing* and to the casual observer both the strikes would seem the same, but because of the attitude (*Yi*) in which the strike is delivered and because the striking energy (*qi*) is different, both punches are quite different in 'attitude' (*jing*). Thus results of the strikes would be very different. The strike done with *An Jing* would drive the opponent backwards and off his feet whereas the strike done with *Peng Jing* would not only bounce the opponent out but it would cause serious internal damage due to the percussive nature of the strike.

To a lesser extent this kind of *Jing* can be observed in the quality of kicks of a skilled football player. When passing the ball he would kick with *An Jing* (which would have the quality of a fast push) so that his team-mate could receive it with the least difficulty. But when he is kicking for a goal the kick would be with the quality of *Peng Jing* which would be a focussed, percussive kick to create maximum difficulty for the goal keeper.

Since Taijiquan principles are really principles of natural movement, they would be applicable to all sports and movement systems. Many martial artists are turning to Taijiquan in order to gain a better understanding of principles of movement. One noted Japanese teacher of Karate, Kanazana Sensei, insists that all his senior students study Taijiquan in order to gain a better

understanding of the use of the bodymind in movement (Logan, 1985).

It is quite obvious that Western physical education and movement systems could gain much from the study of the principles of Taijiquan.

### PRINCIPLES OF TAIJIQUAN STRATEGY

Strategy in Taijiquan and other martial arts is a combination of dynamic attitudes of body and mind performed with full mental and physical awareness. Although it is recognized in the martial arts that mental attitudes and the mind have primacy over the body, yet the two may not be separated. One of the most important maxims of the martial arts states: "To think is to act" (Kim 1982). So although it is not possible to separate the 'mental' from the 'physical', yet we can talk of the *essence* of strategy. This essential understanding may then be applied to various other endeavours such as sport, business, education, politics etc. In fact the Taoists saw Taijiquan not only as a technique for gaining health and longevity but also as a technique for increasing awareness and learning life skills (Chen 1985).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>The classic of 15th century Samurai strategy 'A book of Five Rings' by Miyamoto Musashi, the great swordsman, has successfully been applied to business and commerce and many other areas of 20th century life. As Musashi himself states: "From one thing understand ten thousand things" (Musashi 1974).

The most important strategy of Taijiquan is the principle of neutralization. This is an excellent example of a strategy that is fundamentally an attitude of mind, yet within the context of Taijiquan as a martial art it is a pure response devoid of intellectualization and resulting from incredibly acute mental and physical awareness combined with highly trained mental and physical reactions that come from long practice (Smith 1980). The *Classics* say that the bodymind is so aware that: "(So light an object as) a feather cannot be placed, and (so small an insect as) a fly cannot alight on any part of the body" (Lo, Inn, Amacker, Foe, 1979 p.35) without the expert neutralizing it.

Stated simply the principle of neutralization is not "Clashing into or against another person's force" or not meeting force with force (Westbrook and Patti 1970). This is the essence of *wu-wei* in practice as we saw in the previous chapter. The strategy of neutralization depends on three principles. These are:

- (i) Softness or yielding. The *Classics* say "When the opponent is hard and I am soft, it is called *tsou* (yielding)" (Lo, Inn, Amacker, Foe, 1979 p.32).
- (ii) Sticking or adherence. The *Classics* say: "When I follow the opponent and he becomes backed up, it is called *pien* (adherence)". (Ibid.).

(iii) Following. The *Classics* say: "If the opponent's movement is quick, then quickly respond; if his movement is slow, then follow slowly." (Ibid.).

Thus when the opponent attacks, the Taijiquan practitioner neutralizes the attack, not contending it with force (thus being soft and yielding), a confrontation in which the stronger will prevail, moving backward at the same speed as the opponent's attack (following), yet all the time staying in contact with the opponent (sticking or adherence). Now a number of interesting things have happened:

1. The situation of conflict has ceased to be a conflict since the object of aggression has 'disappeared'.
2. The Taijiquan expert's person has been saved from injury and by applying the principles of *wu-wei* he has changed with change, and maintained a sense of inner calm.
3. The Taijiquan expert has turned the tables on his opponent, for having followed the attack until it runs out of force he can now pull his opponent forward with a minimum amount of force and allow him to start winding up for his next attack and pushing him in the direction of his wind-up. Thus following the Taijiquan maxim "a force of four ounces can overcome a thousand pounds" (Wile 1983). This also

illustrates 'polar reversal' in that that attack (yang) is neutralized (changing to yin) changes into attack again (yang).

Strictly speaking the concept of 'opponent' has no place in a Taoist martial art such as Taijiquan. For to see the initiator of aggressive action as an opponent is to acknowledge conflict, thus admitting to the possibility of winning or losing. Thus the practitioner of Taijiquan sees an attack or an action of aggression by another person merely as a situation of change demanding an appropriate response. The response on the other hand must not be greater or lesser than the situation demands or the Taijiquan expert is now out of tune with the *Dao* and is in danger of being injured or becoming an aggressor (Huang 1973).

This process of *wu-wei* was not achieved by merely taking a philosophical stand but by diligent practice. The *classics* say:

"There are many boxing arts. Although they use different forms for the most part they don't go beyond the strong oppressing the weak, and the slow resigning to the swift.

The strong defeating the weak and the slow hands ceding to swift hands are all results of the physical instinctive



capacity and not of well trained techniques."

(Lo, Inn, Amacker, Foe 1979 p.36)

Westbrook and Ratti (1970) say of training in the strategy of neutralization:

"... the purpose of this practical training is to replace certain instinctive responses (such as clashing into or against another person's force) with other more subtle and refined instinctive responses (such as evading a direct attack almost as soon as it is launched and either directing or guiding it away from you)".

(pp. 24, 25)

This process of replacing instinctive action with refined actions (in keeping with the principle of *wu-wei*) which in turn become instinctive is seen as one of the most important objects of Taijiquan training (Huang 1973).

An extension of the idea of neutralization is the strategy of *investing in loss*. The process of neutralization is seen as an 'investment'. The 'investment' bears fruit in that the Taijiquan practitioner is now in a position of power and control which was a direct result of 'investing in loss'. When the emphasis is in gaining a position of power by seeming to be in a position of weakness the strategy is known as 'investing in loss' (Cheng 1985).

## SOME PRINCIPLES GOVERNING MENTAL ATTITUDES IN TAIJIQUAN

Once again remembering that nothing in Taijiquan can be seen as merely 'mental', let us examine some bodymind principles that proceed from mental attitudes.

### The principle of centering

This is a concept closely linked with the concepts of sinking and grounding. 'Centering' is primarily a mental<sup>19</sup> process. The objective or physical aspects of centering involve 'sinking' one's body weight to the *Dan Tien* (psychic centre) being more aware of the lower abdomen and relaxing the muscles of the lower abdomen. The subjective or mental aspects of centralization, on the other hand, are much harder to describe. But the effects of subjective centralization are easier to describe. According to Westbrook and Patti (1970):

"In the mental dimension, all your powers of perception, evaluation and decision, and of reaction will be heightened and sharpened... You will find yourself seeing, understanding, responding, with extraordinary clarity and intensity.

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<sup>19</sup>According to the theory of Chinese medicine the 'heart houses the mind' (Sunu and Lee 1985). Thus the mind was seen as residing not in the head but in the chest and along with instinctive 'gut' feelings formed the Chinese concept of 'mind'.

This clear vision is possible because effective centralization acts as a screen between you and the often confusing, disturbing sequence of events accompanying any form of combat..."

(pp. 73, 74)

Centralization can therefore be seen as a means of adopting a new point of reference, a new platform, from which one can exercise a more objective form of control over events and over oneself.

Although centering involves concentrating the mind, the mind is not focused on one thing only - as in the usual understanding of the word concentrating - but rather the mind is "free floating", yet in a state of total awareness (Payne 1981). Centering involves maintaining a sense of 'stillness' and 'calmness' in the very centre of the bodymind. This is very dependent on correct breathing and proper alignment of the body and balance (Jou 1980). The *Classics* say:

"Inwardly  
make the *ching shen*<sup>20</sup> firm,  
and outwardly  
exhibit calmness and peace.

(p. 47)

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<sup>20</sup>*ching shen* (spirit)

Be still as a mountain,  
move like a great river."

(p. 54)

(Lo, Inn, Amacker, Foe 1979)

Thus cultivating calmness and stillness is seen as an important aspect of Taijiquan training. A primary consideration in combat is to preserve one's centre in a physical sense as well as a mental sense, and upset the opponent's centre by angering, frustrating, surprising, frightening (mental) him as well as upsetting his balance (physical). Thus another aspect of centering is being able to maintain a state that is devoid of emotion, detached, and objective, when faced with violence, danger or confusion (Payne 1981).

### The Taijiquan Sphere

This is a concept of space in movement. The Taijiquan practitioner visualizes a space around him which is spherical and possessing a diameter that is equal to his height when he is in a Taijiquan posture (with bent knees). This is his 'world' in which he moves when doing the form and in a combat situation this space must be practised in order to be safe from injury. The sphere is also seen not merely as a space but as an extension of the practitioner himself. This is the 'microcosm' which is within the macrocosm' (the universe) and is patterned on the rules of the

'macrocosm'. Thus the Taijiquan practitioner moving in his little world is attempting to move in tune with the rhythms of the 'macrocosm'. This is an extremely subjective experience and is said to have to be experienced in order to be understood (Huang 1973).

Its practical application, however, is easier to explain. For example when an opponent directs a linear attack, it is deflected by the simple process of turning the 'sphere' so as to make the line of attack a tangent. Thus as long as the Taijiquan practitioner keeps the sphere in constant motion, it is impossible to hit him<sup>21</sup> (Jou 1980).

The following passage from the work of Rudolf Laban, the pioneer of Western movement analysis, provides an interesting parallel from the world of Western dance and movement:

"Wherever the body moves or stands, it is surrounded by space. Around the body is the 'sphere of movement' of 'kinesphere', the circumference of which can be reached by normally extended limbs without changing one's stance... The imaginary inner wall of this sphere can

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<sup>21</sup>This is only one application of the concept of the sphere. There are many other strategies in which the concept of the sphere is used.

be touched by hands and feet, and all points of it can be reached."

(Laban, 1948 p.85)

The existence of this idea in the work of one of the foremost educators and analysts of movement in the West would seem to provide support for the hypothesis that all Taijiquan movement is based upon principles of 'natural' movement, and that it makes use of already existing patterns within the bodymind, rather than imposing forms from external sources.

All of the principles of Taijiquan can be said therefore to conform to this idea of 'natural movement', and the system of re-education involved in learning Taijiquan can more accurately be described as a process of 'unlearning' - of removing habits of movement, tensions and blockages which have accumulated throughout one's life (Dytchwald 1977), to arrive at a state of complete 'naturalness' in all movements of the bodymind complex.

This concept of natural movement could be of great value to the world of education, for by using a tangible medium like movement, the intangible and nebulous areas of the bodymind may be cultivated.

This is an area that could warrant much research since there is a growing awareness in the field of education for the need to develop

these more subjective and less tangible bodymind processes.

Anyone attempting such a study would find a wealth of material in the Eastern arts and in the martial arts, since these systems have long understood the nature of intuition and in fact place these bodymind processes higher on the scale of values than the mere acquisition of skills and knowledge. Thus over a long period of time workable techniques have evolved and are being used by Japanese businessmen, for example, to great effect.

Taijiquan, of course, is one such system that has had a long time to develop.

In the following chapter we shall see how some of the principles from Taijiquan may be used for these purposes.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE PROCESS OF INTEGRATING THE BODY AND MIND IN TAIJIQUAN

When the average Westerner sets out to study a martial art, he is often unaware of what he is letting himself in for. For the Easterner, taking up a traditional martial art has a completely different meaning than it has for the average Westerner. To the Eastern mind a martial art is one of the 'Ways'. That is to say, a way of personal growth, enlightenment and development, a path he will walk on in his search for meaning and which, he believes, will lead him to solutions to the problems that arise from life and living. To the Western way of thinking this would seem like a strange thing to do. For are not philosophies, belief systems and religions - activities of the mind and spirit - meant to deal with these problems? And what have martial arts, which are primarily physical and mental activities, to do with spiritual needs? The difficulty in understanding probably arises from two sources:

- (i) The concept that is known as the Cartesian Body Mind Split that has profoundly influenced Western attitudes and thinking
  
- (ii) The influence of the Christian ethic, or more specifically the Lutheran dogma of 'Salvation by faith and not works'.



The former contributes to the notion that although the mind affects the body and the body affects the mind, certain activities are primarily within the domain of the mind such as philosophies, belief systems, character, mental development etc. and some activities, though influenced by the mind, are primarily the function of the body, such as physical labour, sport and exercise and physical combat. According to the latter view, salvation is a matter of faith and due to man's sinful nature, it is impossible for him to be 'saved' without faith.

The Easterner, having been raised with the belief that the body and the mind were only different aspects of an integrated whole, and with the influence of Eastern philosophies and religions which saw man reaching 'salvation', *nirvana*, enlightenment, by striving mightily during the space of one or more lifetimes, saw the martial arts not merely as fighting techniques but as ways of developing. The Westerner's lack of understanding of Eastern languages adds to the confusion. For the differentiation between 'techniques' and 'arts' is quite clear if one understood the meaning of the names. For example, the average Westerner would see *Jujutsu* and *Judo* as separate martial arts. By definition this is probably true, but there is an important difference. *Ju* means soft or gentle, *jutsu* means techniques (as in practical combat skills) and *do* (the Japanese equivalent of *dao*) means way. Thus *Jujutsu* was the system of defeating the opponent with softness and was primarily concerned with what the

West would see as physical techniques, while *Judo* was the practice of the same techniques but with the emphasis placed on the personal development of the individual through an understanding of the self and the universe, gained through the diligent practice of these techniques. Similarly, *Kendo* and *Kenjutsu* (*Ken* meaning sword), *Kuydo* and *Kuyjutsu* (*Kuy* meaning bow), *Bujutsu* and *Budo* (*Bu* meaning war), were essentially the same techniques but practised with totally different attitudes and goals.

In the Chinese martial arts this distinction is less clear, but as a general rule they tend to be closer to the *do* systems. Taijiquan and the other internal martial arts with their Daoist influence are definitely closer to the spirit of the *do* systems. Yet if one were to make a strict comparison there is an important difference. The Japanese systems with their Shinto and Buddhist background saw one gaining 'enlightenment' by transcending the physical states through a process of extremely rigorous training, the Chinese internal systems were more concerned with the practitioner achieving his maximum potential by carefully cultivating the bodymind. Whatever the case may be the average Westerner taking up martial arts for the first time does not fully comprehend the degree of commitment necessary in order to achieve even a reasonable degree of skill. This could account for the large drop-out rate - estimated at about 80% - among Westerners who take up martial arts. This is not a situation unique to the West. Even among Easterners the drop-out rates are considerable.

Thus the first step for the Western student intending to take up Taijiquan as a system of personal development is to gain some understanding of the scope of the art and the nature of commitment necessary.

The second requirement is to find a teacher in order to facilitate learning of the Taijiquan form.

### THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP IN TAIJIQUAN

In order to learn the fundamentals of Taijiquan and the basic postures correctly it is important to have a competent teacher. Traditionally, before finding a teacher the student had to prove himself to be worthy. According to Confucius a worthy student was one who had a strong desire to learn, was able to learn, and one who had the discipline and fortitude to persevere (Huang 1982). Often long periods of 'testing' and waiting were necessary before the student was finally accepted by the teacher.<sup>22</sup>

In the martial arts a teacher was not seen as a teacher in the usual Western sense. The teacher was only a guide who pointed to the way. Although this is true of teachers in the Western tradition there is an important differences:- the Eastern guide or

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<sup>22</sup>Note: As an illustration of how this attitude persists even today in the East, see Robert Smith's experiences with the teacher of Tai Chi, Cheng Manjing (Smith, 1980) who, even after several courtesy visits, still insisted he study first with a senior student as a kind of probationary period.

teacher takes no responsibility for the student's learning or progress. For the student was solely responsible for his journey on his chosen path. It was not possible to pay for tuition, for that would make the teacher responsible for the student's learning<sup>23</sup>. The teacher was only responsible for his own journeying on his own path. Since the way of the teacher was to teach, the student benefitted - that is provided the teacher felt the student was worthy. This idea of the teacher as a guide who is not responsible for the student's progress is clearly seen in the Japanese martial art traditions when the word for teacher is *sensei*. Literally translated the word means 'born before', thus implying that the *sensei*, being 'born before', had more experience in the 'way' thus having valuable advice to offer the student. The student earned the right to this advice through demonstrating his worthiness by making progress or at the very least striving to make progress. When the student demonstrated his worthiness he was given some little advice which would help him make it to the next stage. Thus knowledge was given relative to progress made.

The underlying principle is, of course, that learning was a personal matter and one worked hard at it.

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<sup>23</sup>This of course was an ideal condition and more often than not good teachers were forced to charge for their teaching by the practical realities of life.

Traditional Chinese martial arts were taught to members of the family only. Usually the custom was for a father to send his son to his (the father's) brother to study. After he had gained basic skills he might then come back to his father to study further. When martial arts started to be taught to nonmembers of the family, this custom was carried over and the student became a member of a martial arts 'family' in which his first teacher was his *Sifu* (Uncle). In some schools of martial arts this custom is followed to this day (Chow and Spangler 1982).

To the Western student finding a good teacher could be a problem. Part of the problem is caused by the fact that only a few of the better teachers have come out to the West. However, due to the so called 'Cultural Revolution' in China a number of martial arts teachers moved to Hong Kong, Taiwan and the New Territories, and the United States of America which was seen as a land of opportunity. The Western student's apparent lack of respect (as the Westerner's casual attitudes to teaching and learning must seem to the orthodox Chinese raised in the tradition of Confucian teachings of respect and reverence for teachers), discipline, humility and perseverance; all seen as essential qualities of the worthy student, have also contributed to the dearth of superior teachers. This situation is clearly illustrated by the following account recounted by Robert Smith (1974):

"The greatest Hsing-i boxer to ever come to the United States was a woman who taught Chinese at a large

Midwestern university. A few years ago, she told me, that as an experiment she started a *Hsing-i* class on campus (for which she charged no fee). Only five persons enrolled. Within a month, one person remained. She, who on the mainland had sat at the knee of Teng Yun-feng, one of the greatest boxers China has produced, told me that never again would she teach the art - such students did not deserve it."

(p.24)

Fortunately for some worthy students in the West the teacher mentioned above by Smith, Rose S.C. Li (Smith 1967), changed her mind. She moved to England where she taught Chinese language and literature at the University of Durham for many years and has since retired and teaches Taijiquan, Xingyiquan (*Hsing-i chuan*) and Baguachan (*Pa-gua chang*) in the Kings Cross area of London. It is also interesting to note that although she is reasonably well known in martial arts circles, her classes rarely number more than a dozen students. This is probably due to the fact that they do not understand the traditional nature of her teaching, and due to the fact that she stresses the health and development aspects of these arts and ignores the martial applications of techniques as being irrelevant to life in this day and age.

In the absence of superior teachers the student would have to resort to studying with an inferior teacher, for even an inferior teacher has something to offer, and by diligently studying the

'classics' and the growing body of martial arts literature, he could find the necessary guidance. For once the student has committed himself to following the way he is solely responsible for seeking knowledge, and this responsibility may not be shirked with the excuse of the unavailability of a superior teacher. In fact in the process of diligently searching, the student may learn more than he might do if he took the teaching of a superior teacher for granted. Thus the process of seeking for knowledge was seen as being more important than competent teaching.

Although most authorities claim it is impossible to learn Taijiquan without the help of a good teacher, two modern-day teachers and authorities, Robert Smith and Cheng Manjing, believe that some individuals can teach themselves internal martial arts from a book and reach high levels of skill. This belief led Chang to write the book *A Self-Help Guide to Taichi Chuan* (1981). Robert Smith says, in the introduction to his book on Baguaquan (Pa Gua Chang):

"This book cannot teach you everything there is to know about Pa-Gua. In the absence of a qualified teacher - it can however serve as a substitute."

(Smith 1967 p.11)

However, there are no records of anyone learning an internal martial art only from a book. Therefore, in the absence of a competent teacher one could study the literature and later find a

teacher or one could study with an inferior teacher and study from the literature. Whatever the case may be, a good teacher is not mandatory.

Even with the help of a competent teacher, progress can only be made by the student having the right attitude and by training hard. Robert Smith, recounting his experiences of studying Chinese martial arts in Taiwan in the late fifties tells of how he would have a lesson once a week and by training for many hours daily he made rapid progress. Since his time was limited and the traditional teacher only taught you something new if you had mastered the techniques taught in previous sessions (Smith 1980). Bruce Frantzis (1985) a popular teacher of the internal martial arts, tells of how the great masters in teaching a movement would demonstrate it only once or twice. The student was expected to have developed his ability to discern the underlying principles of the movement, to be able to grasp the essence of the movement, in that brief exposure. This was only possible if the student had developed himself by constant and diligent practice of the internal aspects of the martial arts. In developing the internal aspects such as awareness, perception, concentration, focus, spatial awareness, internal energy etc., the student is his own teacher. For these are intangible aspects that cannot be taught but must be intuited. Thus a major part of the student's learning is self directed (Smith 1974).



## 'BEGINNER'S MIND' IN TRAINING

Training in Taijiquan is mostly confined to doing the form. The student works at learning a set of techniques and then works at it until he is perfect at it. This could take a lifetime. Thus one of the first things the student learns is that there are no limits to development. The student starts on the way and progresses diligently. Making progress is important. In order to make progress paradoxically the student must maintain the 'beginner's mind' at all times. This idea is expressed by the Zen saying:

"In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities,  
but in the expert's there are few."

(Suzuki 1970 p.21)

The idea is that when one does something for the first time it is fresh, interesting, and engages one's attention fully. But after it is repeated many times the attention is dulled it becomes habit and the possibilities are reduced. The Zen saying, as is often the case, has two meanings, the first is relevant to our discussion and is this: The beginner sees many possibilities since he has not shaped his mind and body to accomplish a fact, whereas the expert tends to see things the way he has trained his mind to see things. In the realms of development, the beginner's mind is by far the more desirable. The second meaning is that since the expert's mind has few possibilities it deals with situations more

efficiently than the beginner's mind which is rendered less efficient since it has too many options to choose from. Thus when it comes to development and learning the beginner's mind is better, yet when it comes to action the expert's mind is better (Suzuki 1970).

If progress is to be made the student must maintain the beginner's mind since Taijiquan, with its slow moving form which needs to be practised daily and repeated countless numbers of times, can soon become boring. Thus the many times the student does the form, he is advised to treat it as if it is the very first time he is doing it (Jou, 1980).

#### THE PROBLEMS OF 'INTERNAL' TRAINING

The whole object of various training regimes in the internal martial arts is to integrate the martial aspects of the bodymind with its physical aspects. Robert Smith says:

"The internal is dynamic training of mind-body. An old Taoist saying goes: "In standing, like a pine tree; in moving, like the wind; in sleeping, like a dead man". To which I would add, "In thinking, like a placid, slow-moving stream." Theoretically, many Asian martial arts promise this mind-body synthesis. Few achieve it."

(Smith 1974 p.22)

There are a number of problems with internal training. One of the first difficulties is that previous learning interferes with new learning. Thus prospective students who have trained hard in physical activities find it much harder to learn Taijiquan than those who have not done any sport seriously. Robert Smith says:

"In a relativistic world, one of the few absolutes is that it is more difficult to train external boxers in the internal than it is those who know no boxing at all. Previous boxing or highly competitiveness must be discarded if one is to enter into - much less make progress in - the halls of the internal. Although the internal is harder work and takes longer than the external, it has no limits. One has but to watch old *judoka* or *karateka* and to contrast them with an internal master to see the truth of this.

Because I have taught the external, I know the difficulties of the transition and I can tell the reader in advance his reactions to the internal. He will be vexed at the lack of tangible indices of progress, which are easily recognizable in the external. He will want to go faster... most of these reactions will be competitive, hence detrimental to the mind-body synthesis we are trying for."

(Smith 1974 pp. 23-124)

Thus the Western student who has trained in some sort of sport and is used to motivational systems based on competitive attitudes is greatly frustrated by the totally noncompetitive approaches to training in Taijiquan.

A number of Western writers compare Taijiquan to dance since the movements are slow and graceful and to the Western mind 'dancelike' (Horwitz, Kimmelman, Lui, 1976). Yet to the Chinese Taijiquan is a serious martial art to be practised for the purpose of self development and has nothing to do with dance. In fact in the opinion of Rose Li, one of the most eminent teachers of Taijiquan in the West, the students who found it the hardest to learn Taijiquan were the dancers. For when they saw a movement they saw it within the context of dance and tended to interpret the movement as dance.

The greatest difficulty that Western students have in learning Taijiquan is not having tangible indices of progress. For often the only evidence that the system works as a way of integrating body and mind is watching an expert perform and seeing the synthesis of body and mind demonstrated by movements that are wonderfully graceful and seem as effortless as inhaling and exhaling (Huang 1973). This problem is overcome by faith; faith that the traditional training methods work and if worked at diligently will produce results. Robert Smith once asked Cheng Manjing, his teacher and a modern-day master of Taijiquan, why

none of his students approached him in skill. His terse answer: "No faith" (Smith 1980 p.30).

Another problem Western students (and often Eastern students too) have in learning Taijiquan is a lack of flexibility and the ability to relax. They are often one and the same thing, for to relax is to be supple and flexible because tension in the bodymind causes a loss of flexibility (Dychwald 1977). A part of the problem is solved by doing stretching exercises. Mental relaxation is cultivated by learning calmness and stillness. I shall discuss these problems in more detail as we consider some of the more important aspects of internal training.

#### The Scope of Internal Training

As we have already seen it is very difficult for a non-practitioner of the internal arts to understand the potential of the internal martial arts. Not only is it difficult to understand, it is also difficult to explain to the Westerner using English idiom. Nevertheless some attempt has to be made.

The major difference between the internal and the external is that external martial arts deal primarily with the physical; strength, power, speed, techniques etc. This is not to say that external systems don't train the mind. They do, but to a much lesser degree than the internal. Thus by definition systems like Karate,

Shaolin Kung-fu, and even modern judo, plus all Western sport is seen as external (Smith 1974, 1980).

The internal systems, on the other hand, stress the development of heightened states of awareness, the development, control and focus of the internal energy (*qi*) and the mind (*yi*). This in turn is not to say the physical is not stressed, for the physical aspects (*li*) such as correct body positioning, suppleness, strength and correct technique are the prerequisites of internal training (Payne 1981).

After correct body position (this may be seen as good biomechanics) is achieved, *qi* is cultivated by breathing techniques, and *yi* is cultivated by meditation. The Taijiquan form is so designed that when one does it correctly all three of these aspects are trained simultaneously. The only difference being a change of emphasis. Thus the beginning student will concentrate on learning correct form and technique and will develop the necessary strength, flexibility and endurance to complete the form satisfactorily. The next stage is to pay attention to breathing and synchronizing the inhalation and the exhalation. This harmonizing the breath with movement tends to bind the mind and the body. Once this is accomplished the mind can be trained (Jou 1980). The end result is the ability to perform amazing and seemingly supernatural feats. The Chinese have a saying: "They say the martial arts need strength and speed.

But if one man defeats many men, how can it be a question of strength? And if an old man defeats a young man, how can it be a question of speed?" (Payne 1981 p.10). The classics say:

"The spectacle of an old person defeating a group of young people, how can it be due to swiftness?"

(Lo, Inn, Amacker, Foe 1979 p.37)

Indeed the martial arts are rife with authentic examples of one old man defeating many skilled young men, and of people of all ages performing the most incredible feats.

A good example of a person who possessed such abilities was Master Uyeshiba, the founder of Aikido. Fortunately there is some footage of 8mm film which corroborates eye-witness accounts of a demonstration done by him when he was in his early nineties. In one frame of the film, Master Uyeshiba is standing facing the camera while two advanced martial artists rush him from either side. In the next frame he has moved back a step and is standing calmly with his back to the camera. This would mean that the step back and turn around was accomplished in less than a sixteenth of a second (Payne 1981). Robert Smith recounts an incident from his days in Taiwan, involving Wang Shuchin. Wang, a large man, was primarily a Xingyi boxer. Smith was convinced that Wang, although seventy years of age at the time, was without exception the best Chinese boxer he had ever met. Wang had achieved such a state of

internal training that he could withstand a punch to almost any part of body. Smith relates:

"After ineffectually punching Wang's belly once, I asked if he could take a solar plexus strike. "Try it," he said. I did - several times with no effect. But beyond this skill Wang could do something beyond the ability of all fighters I saw. He could take any kick to the lower extremities (excluding, of course, the groin). I kicked him repeatedly on his knee, calf, and ankle until my feet ached, all with no effect.

"How do you do it?" I asked.

His answer: "Chi".

(Smith 1980, p.75)

Although this may seem amazing, other feats from the internal martial arts seem incredible. For example: Master Uyeshiba's ability to throw opponents without touching them in the classic 'no hands throw' of Aikido where the opponent's intention is controlled by the 'thrower' and the opponent is thrown by his own effort (Payne 1981). There are similar stories from other arts. A story is told of Master Yang Luchan the founder of Yang Taijiquan: once when he was seated on a river-bank fishing, he was attacked without warning by two martial arts experts. According to the story the two boxers were thrown over Yang's head and into the river although Yang was seen not to move (Jou 1980).



Yet these were not the real goals of internal training. The real goal was the continuous development of the body-mind. As Smith put it:

"I remain one striving to become like the Master Hsuch-chuch has written of:

He meditates when walking and when sitting, silent, speaking, moving, resting, his body is at peace. In the face of pointed swords he remains externally calm."

(Smith 1980 p.112)

#### THE PROCESS OF INTERNAL TRAINING THROUGH TAIJIQUAN

According to traditional teaching methods, once one had learned basic skills and had been taught the form by a competent teacher, one was ready to take up the serious task of cultivating the internal aspects. As we have already seen this was done in three stages. Certain guide-lines were offered to help the student organising this area of self directed learning. In this part of the student's training nobody could help him, for due to the experimental nature of the activity and due to the fact that progress could not be easily measured, no-one outside of himself could know what he was experiencing. Yet based on the experiences of past masters and exponents of the art some guidelines have been

drawn up to help the student not waste time and direct his physical and mental resources in the most efficient manner. Although there are a number of different sources that list these steps, I have chosen Master Chen Manjing's arrangement, since it is one of the most concise and clearest of them all. According to Cheng there are three levels of Taijiquan each with three steps within them. These are the Human, Earth and Heaven levels<sup>24</sup> (Cheng 1985).

### THE THREE LEVELS OF TAIJIQUAN

According to Cheng:

"There are three levels of Tai Chi Chuan - Heaven, Earth and Human. The Human level relaxes your sinews and vitalizes your blood; Earth level "opens the gates" so that the *chi* can reach the joints; the heaven level exercises the sensory function. Each level has three degrees. The first degree of the human level relaxes your tendons from the shoulder to the fingers. The second degree relaxes your tendons from hip joint to the "bubbling well" [point at the bottom of each foot]. The third degree relaxes your tendons from the sacrum to the top of the head (*ni wan*). The earth level first degree sinks *chi* to the *tan tien*. The

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<sup>24</sup>Cheng is using the three levels of the universe as seen in Chinese Cosmology.

second degree moves the *chi* into the bubbling well. The third degree circulates *chi* so that it reaches the top of the head. The first level first degree is *ting chin*. The second degree is *tung chin*. The third degree is omnipotent. These are the three levels and nine degrees."

(Cheng 1985 p.75)

### The Human Level

- (1) The technique of relaxing the ligament from the shoulder to the wrist

This is the first step. Cheng says:

"If the ligaments can relax the blood will circulate better. The sequence is first to relax the wrist, then the elbow and shoulders. Do not use any force. From softness alone will you gradually progress."

(Cheng 1985 p.76)

For the untrained person the arms are the easiest to relax since coordination is the best in the hands. Thus the Chinese used this natural understanding of physiology to best effect and the process of relaxing the body began with the hands and wrist and progressed to the shoulder. This relaxation caused the blood supply to the arms to increase and the hand and arm feel warm and 'tingly' when

done correctly. The student was expected to practice this while doing the form.

(2) "From the Hip to the Heel"

Cheng says:

"The technique is as above, the difference being in the separation of light and heavy, of insubstantial and substantial. The foot must take the weight of the whole body and is different from the hand that can move unimpeded. Most people do not pay attention to the substantially or insubstantially of the feet... But Tai chi chuan practitioners must place their weight on one foot and change from one foot to another without using force. From the hip joint through the knee to the heel - all three parts need to relax. The feet must be separated into *hsu* (insubstantial) and *shih* (substantial) as must the arms. However, there is an opposition between arms and feet. If the right foot is substantial, then the left arm is substantial and vice versa (this is referred to as "cross substantiality")... Imperfect separation of substantial and insubstantial is called "double weight".

(Ibid.)

Here Cheng is talking about the use of the relaxed legs and developing coordination between the arms and the legs. The term 'substantial' is used for denoting the leg that is weight bearing, and 'insubstantial' the less weight bearing or the 'empty' leg. What the student is trying to achieve is the link between the arms and the legs that would give him power by coordinating the strength of the legs and the arms.

(3) From Sacrum to the Headtop"

Cheng says:

"The spine with its many vertebrae is the major bone in the body. It is referred to as the "soft waist which can be folded up a hundred times as if it had no bones." From this description it is obvious that the spine must be pliable... The most important point is to keep the sacrum upright and the head suspended as if from a silk thread."

(Ibid. p.77)

As was discussed in a previous chapter the spine is the link between the arms and the legs and it must be held in the correct biomechanical positions in order to permit efficient movement.

## Earth Level

### (1) "Sinking chi to the tan tien"

Cheng says:

"This is the cornerstone of cultivating *chi*. The *tan tien* is located in the abdomen 1-3 inches below the navel, closer to the navel than to the spine. The requisite principle of sinking the *chi* is that the breathing must be fine, long, quiet, and slow. Gradually inhale into the *tan tien*. The *chi* stays with the mind, and, day after day, month after month, it accumulates. This must happen naturally and not be forced. In the beginning it is not easy to sink the *chi*. You must sink the shoulders and elbows slightly thus drawing the *chi* into the stomach. Relax the chest downward and slightly raise the back; then you lead the *chi* to the *tan tien*".

(Ibid p.77)

This is when the Western student has to have faith and simply do what he is told. By diligent practice this "sinking of qi" can be experienced.

(2) "The chi reaches the arms and legs"

Cheng says:

"After the *chi* sinks to the *tan tien*, it is commanded by the mind and led to the hip joint, then to the heel. This process is referred to as "the true man breathing down to the heels". The *chi* next reaches the shoulders, elbows, and wrists. All the joints of the four limbs become open. Then the *chi* can go down to the "bubbling well" point on the bottom of the foot and up to *lao kung* in the palm of the hand, extending to the tip of the middle finger. Then you can experience what the *Classics* refer to as "the mind mobilizes the *chi* and the *chi* mobilizes the body." This is Earth Level Second Degree."

(Ibid. p.77,78)

This is when the mind is used to direct *qi* to the arms and the legs. The bubbling well point located in the sole of the foot is seen as a very important point in Chinese medicine. It is the first point of the kidney meridian. According to the theory of Chinese medicine the kidneys are the only organs that are able to store *qi* and the energy of the kidneys is seen as the cornerstone of strength (Sunu and Lee 1985).

The point in the middle of the palm *Lao Kung* is seen as an important point since energy can be emitted from it (Yang 1987).

- (3) The chi moves through the sacrum (wei lu) to the top of the head (ni wen)

"This refers to the *chi* going through the "three gates". It is the beginning of the connection of the *Jen* and *Tu*<sup>25</sup> meridians. Getting the *chi* to go through the sacrum is the most difficult part. After a lengthy period of sinking the *chi* to the *tan tien*, you will reach a certain level where the *chi* will automatically go through the coccyx. You must not force it or the effort will be in vain and will cause problems. Be careful!"

(Ibid p.78)

The 'gates' were seen as psychic centres and energy passed through them. If the 'gates' were closed then the physical and mental health was seen to be effected (Payne 1981). Similar concepts can be seen in yoga where the gates were called *chakras* (Rawson 1979).

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<sup>25</sup>Accupuncture meridians situated on the midline of the body in the front and back (Wiseman, Ellis and Zimerwski 1985).



## Heaven Level

### (1) "Ting Jing, Listening to or Feeling Strength"

"What is *Chin* and how can we listen to it? This is a question which the practitioner must carefully study. *Chin* is different from *li* (strength). The secret transmission says, "*Chin* comes from the ligaments and *li* comes from the bones." This is a profound truth; yet today's students are blind to it. They will practice until they die and still never know what *chin* is. For them you can only sigh! *Chin* is *chin* because it comes from pliable veins which have a springlike force. It is only through pliability that you can stick to your opponent. When you stick to him, then your *chi* and his *chi* make contact. Through this contact of *chi* you begin to anticipate his attempts. This is called *ting*. The *Classics* say "If he moves a little I move first" on which *ting* is based. This is Heaven Level First Degree."

(Ibid. p.78,79)

'*Ching*' or *jing* (pinyin) is probably best described as a quality of strength. '*Ting* or *ding* (pinyin) is anticipating. Thus *dingjing* is a heightened sense of

awareness that allows the Taijiquan practitioner to feel the 'coiling' action at his opponent's body before he makes a move and be able to interpret the 'coiling' in order to be able to predict the nature of the next attack. Thus giving the Taijiquan practitioner an advantage. This would take many years of training for we are talking of action and reaction that take hundredths of a second. It is this *dingjing* which gives the expert what is known as a "sixth sense".

(2) Comprehension of Jing

Cheng says:

"There are different levels of *tung chin* and *ting chin*: deep and shallow, fine and rough. If my opponent moves even slightly, I can hear and comprehend him. When I comprehend his *chin*, then I can move first. Having the correct timing and position depends on me and not on him. This progression is from the shallow to the deep. But the dichotomy of fine and rough is more difficult to explain. The secret transmission says, "If my opponent moves slightly I can hear and understand him." Even the slightest movements are still easy to discern. If you can hear others before they move then you have reached the level of enlightenment. What happens at this level is merely this: the *chi* goes through the ligaments, the

vessels, the membranes, and the diaphragm, generating, respectively, four kinds of *chin*: defensive, concealing, ready to attack, attaching. The joints can extend and contract because of the ligaments. The blood circulates because of the blood vessels. The membranes lie between the ligaments and bones."

(Ibid. p.79,80)

This is an extension of the previous part in that the sense of awareness has been further heightened and the Taijiquan practitioner now seems to possess "precognition".

(3) The "Omnipotence Level"

Cheng says:

"This stage of enlightenment is difficult to describe. The end of the *Classics* say, "Throughout the body, the *i* (mind) relies on the *ching shen* (spirit, not on the *chi* (breath). If it relied on the *chi*, it would become stagnant. If there is *chi*, there is no *li* (external strength). If there is no *chi*, there is pure steel". These words are very strange. They imply that the *chi* is not important, and in fact, it is not. When the *chi* reaches the highest level and becomes mental energy, it is called spiritual power or "the power without

physical force." Wherever the eyes concentrate, the spirit reaches and the *chi* follows. The *chi* can mobilize the body, but you need not will the *chi* in order to move it. The spirit can carry the *chi* with it. This spiritual power is called "divine speed". In physics, speed is multiplied by force. The potentiation is unlimited."

(Ibid. p.80)

This is in the realm of the truly esoteric. Very few practitioners are said to ever reach this level of skill.

This then is the order of progress in learning Taijiquan. Experience has taught practitioners through the ages that the order of progress cannot be changed. For this has proved to be the best order (Jou 1980).

It can be seen from the above account that the depth and complexity of the system of internal training in Taijiquan is enormous. This is compounded, as already mentioned, by the difficulties for the Western student of understanding concepts (such as *qi*, *jing*, etc.) which to the Chinese are relatively commonplace and already a part of their world-view.

Many of the techniques described in this chapter may be found in most other martial arts with long histories. I have selected techniques from the simple to what may seem like the truly esoteric

and have identified a number of pitfalls and difficulties the Western student could encounter.

In the Eastern martial arts the process of integrating body and mind are legion. These are tried and tested techniques and could be of great value to Western educational systems. Thus a comparative study of the various bodymind techniques found in various martial arts would be of great value and in my opinion would do much to rectify weakness in Western educational and physical educational systems.

## CONCLUSIONS

In section II we have examined various principles and techniques of Taijiquan. Although these may be extracted and used in isolation to enhance various facets of personal development, it must be clearly understood that in dealing with the problem of integrating the physical and mental aspects of the person, what is needed is a system which is holistic in nature. This is necessary because the problem of cartesian dualism has created a split in the Western bodymind. Gilbert Ryle sees the influence of this doctrine on Western culture as being so strong as to be the "official theory":

"The official doctrine which hails chiefly from Descartes, is something like this. With the doubtful exception of idiots and infants in arms every human being has both a body and a mind. Some would prefer to say that every human being is both a body and a mind. His body and his mind are ordinarily harnessed together, but after the death of the body, his mind may continue to exist and function."

(Ryle 1973 p.13)

This is the problem, stated simply. This doctrine has influenced Western thinking in all areas of life, and indeed has dictated how

Westerners perceive themselves and their world. This view is clearly stated by the following quote from Fritjof Capra:

"The emphasis on rational thought in our culture is epitomized in Descartes' celebrated statement '*Cogito, ergo sum*' - 'I think, therefore I exist' - which forcefully encouraged Western individuals to equate their identity with their rational mind rather than with their whole organism. We shall see that the effects of this division between mind and body are felt throughout our culture. Retreating into our minds, we have forgotten how to 'think' with our bodies, how to use them as agents of knowing. In doing so we have also cut ourselves off from our natural environment and have forgotten how to commune and co-operate with its rich variety of living organisms."

(Capra 1982, p.23)

It is my proposition that the practice of Taijiquan may be useful to the West in attempting to heal this bodymind rift caused by Cartesian thinking. The problem, however, is not one to be solved by simply learning a few Eastern techniques of movement and breath control, to be applied as a kind of universal panacea to all our conceptual ills. Rather, it is necessary, in learning Taijiquan, to adopt the system of thinking and perceiving the world adopted by the ancient Daoists, a holistic and integrated world-view which

accepts no split in any of the aspects of the person, and which aims at producing a fully-functioning organism at one with itself and the universe - the Dao. To attempt to 'learn' Taijiquan as a system of health, martial arts, relaxation, exercise or any of the aspects described in part I, whilst ignoring its essential link with Daoist philosophy, is bound to fail in its objective. It is necessary primarily to see the 'split' between the mental and physical as the root of the problem and to accept an altered world-view which may then be tested and proven through the ongoing practice of Taijiquan.

There are, however, certain practical problems facing the Westerner who wishes to learn Taijiquan. These need to be surmounted before any progress can be made.

Firstly, the average Westerner faced with the prospect of learning Taijiquan perceives the movements as being Chinese in nature and somehow foreign to his appreciation of movement. Fortunately this is merely an error of perception derived from a cultural bias, since the movements of Taijiquan are perfectly natural to the bodymind since they are in accordance with biomechanical functioning as we have seen in Chapter 4. There is a need to approach the learning of Taijiquan as movements natural to the bodymind, or more correctly as a process of unlearning habitually incorrect postural attitudes and movement patterns.



Secondly, the physical problems of the Western bodymind which are a result of lifestyle, such as the lack of mobility of the hips and ankles, which comes from a lifetime of sitting in chairs. This can be contrasted with the flexibility of most Easterners who are more accustomed to squatting and sitting cross-legged. Although these problems would eventually be overcome through the process of learning Taijiquan, the learning process may be facilitated by undertaking a regime of stretching exercises.

Thirdly, the problem of competent teaching and the Westerner's attitudes towards traditional teaching, which have already been discussed in Chapter 5, needs to be taken into account.

If these difficulties are surmounted, the Western student will find learning the Taijiquan form reasonably straightforward, if requiring a degree of perseverance and application. After this stage, the student is truly in the realms of self-directed learning, and has embarked upon his journey of self-discovery with the aid of one of the oldest and most profound systems of self development in the world.

One of the dangers in borrowing techniques from Taijiquan or the other martial arts is that the technique may be lost in an existing system and more importantly the technique may lose its effectiveness within the framework of a different world-view.

The Western student attempting to 'use' Taijiquan as a means of self transformation must bear in mind that it is not the techniques but the approach that is more important.

The other important consideration in such a programme of self-directed learning is the time factor. The Western student with his usual sense of time would be greatly frustrated by the Eastern time scale inherent in these systems. This is not to say that learning has to be slow but rather the goal directed conditioning coupled with the need for quick results interferes with the learning process and is counterproductive.

Thus the learning of Taijiquan as personal development must not be undertaken as 'crash courses' but rather as an on-going process of self-directed learning where the emphasis is on the experience rather than on the results.

One of the major difficulties I faced in doing this study was in the difficulties I met in attempting to present the 'essence' of Taijiquan. I am now convinced that it is impossible to express it in words since much of it is in the realm of experience and it is impossible to present it in word-pictures.

It is also extremely difficult to criticize Taijiquan. For by its nature it uses the criticism itself as a means of strengthening its own position.

As we have seen Taijiquan does not merely provide a system of physical exercise but is also concerned with one's spiritual being. It caters for the whole man who is confident in the face of life's dangers. In that sense it has a socio-political element which not only relates man to man but man to nature, and man to tradition and authority. It is also non-reductionist for man cannot be reduced to his basic elements of physics and chemistry as he is also part of the spiritual and natural world: a world which itself cannot be reduced to its lowest elements. It is for this reason that we cannot approach taijiquan from a scientific point of view if we consider a scientific point of view to be concerned with reducing things to measurable elements (the physical and chemical components) and quantifying them in accordance with general laws of science. If we consider that modern science is neo-Kantian<sup>26</sup> in that it is concerned with the study of appearances and its explanation by general laws of nature then taijiquan has spiritual aspects that go beyond appearances. Its nature has a spiritual element which in Kantian language we would call things-in-themselves or more generally we would call 'essences'. It is interesting to note that it is non-scientific in two of Sir Karl Popper's<sup>27</sup> senses: a) it does not present hypotheses that can be tested, and b) a considerable part of it is concerned with areas beyond appearances (the spiritual nature of man) which by definition are beyond the scope of science.

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<sup>26</sup>I.Kant *Critique of Pure Reason*

<sup>27</sup>K.R.Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Hutchinson 1959

Analysing it in terms of its historical, philosophical and technical content was not difficult as long as that analysis was of a descriptive nature. For further analysis meets with the difficulty of expressing the experiential in words and one soon learns that the method used by the Chinese in the *classics* of creating images and letting intuition fill in the gaps, is by far the best method. The Western student will find that this is the method used by most Eastern systems. At first he will find it difficult to cope with the lack of precise definition and accurate statement of fact. But when he realises that to the Eastern mind expressing a truth accurately somehow limits truthfulness and compartmentalizes it, thereby limiting its relevance to and association with other universal truth, he begins to understand the language of Taijiquan. So what at first seems a collection of vague sayings suddenly takes on a meaning that is perceived by the whole bodymind.

The student interested in Taijiquan should not ignore the legends of Taijiquan and the training methods and the sensitivity training methods such as 'sticking hands' and 'pushing hands'. For these areas deserve further research and will have much to offer that would enhance a programme of self-directed learning.

Taijiquan has much to offer the disciplines of Dance and Movement Studies. Much can be gained by the analysis of movement and the approach to body learning taken by Taijiquan. Since the system

has had over two thousand years to refine its method of cultivating and using the body to its maximum potential, the system deserves closer investigation and more study.

Another area that I feel deserves closer scientific investigation are the claims of the beneficial effects of Taijiquan on health and well being. Fifty generations, and two hundred million Chinese cannot all be wrong.

These studies should be directed towards two areas: one, the content of these systems in terms of techniques and information; two, the approach taken by these systems. The success of these systems seems to depend on the second.

Thus the success of Taijiquan used as a system of integrating the physical and mental aspects of personal development depends on gaining an understanding of the essence of Taijiquan.

## APPENDIX A

### THE THIRTEEN POSTURES

The thirteen postures are the fundamental building blocks of all Taijiquan forms. Traditionally, the thirteen are subdivided into two groups - the eight directions and the five elements. Thus the eight directions (also sometimes associated with the eight trigrams of the *I Ching* - see Chapter 3) are: *Peng* (ward-off), *Lu* (Roll-back), *Ji* (Press), *An* (Push), *Lieh* (Split), *Tsai* (Pull), *Tsou* (Elbow stroke), *Kao* (Shoulder stroke).

The five elements are: advance, retreat, look right, look left, and central equilibrium. Taken quite literally, with no attempt to impose martial applications onto them, the five elements can be seen as simply the basic components of any whole body movement. That is, any movement which can be made by the whole body (not merely by isolating the movement of a limb) can be analysed and described in terms of any one or a combination of several of the five elements described above.

The five have also been traditionally associated with the five elements (*Wu Xing*) of Chinese thought, although such correspondances are questionable (see chapter 3). So, in essence, all Taijiquan movements may be described in terms of the five, as

pure movement. If we wish to look at Taijiquan forms as martial technique, however, we must look at the eight directions, which are more specific in their usage. The eight are, in fact, descriptions of certain types of '*Jing*', or qualities of strength and energy usage within a form. To use their Chinese name is more precise in this context than to adopt an English 'equivalent'. The Chinese words *Peng*, *Lu*, *Ji*, *An*, in fact have no direct equivalent in English - they are technical language specific to Taijiquan and therefore cannot be translated without distortion of meaning (Abel 1988). The English equivalents normally given are misleading since they imply a more concrete application of technique than is intended by the original, while at the same time being more vague about the use of energy in the form. To call the eight by the name 'postures' is also misleading, since they are, as qualities of strength (*jing*), found in various combinations throughout the forms of Taijiquan, not merely in one or two movements. According to the Chen school of Taijiquan, for instance, *Peng* is to be found in every posture (Abel, 1988). I will now give a brief description of the types of strength or *jing* in each of the eight directions, and where applicable a description of the movement usually associated.

#### 1. PENG ('ward-off')

The very sound of the Chinese name of this technique suggests the attitude of 'bouncing'. It is like a rubber ball which, when

compressed, will rebound and spring out with great force (Yang). The other image which could be applied is that of a large Chinese bell which is struck by a swinging log tied by two ropes to the roof. The log hits the bell and rebounds instantly. The bell is unmoved. That is the energy of *Peng*. The force of *Peng* when applied to an opponent will bounce the opponent up and out, destroying his root and propelling him backwards with the force of his own attack which 'rebounds' against him.

The energy of *Peng* is usually associated with the form or technique known as 'ward-off' which comes at the beginning of the Yang form (Fig 4 ) although *Peng* may be used in many ways, against various attacks, from varying directions, as 'attack' or 'defence'; so to associate *Peng* too closely with the form 'ward-off' implies a more limited conception than is intended. *Peng*, simply put, is 'bouncing strength'.

## 2. LU ('roll-back')

The energy of *Lu* expresses most clearly of any in Taijiquan the attitude of softness overcoming hardness, or yin overcoming yang. The energy of *Lu* is extreme yin. It possesses the qualities of absorbing, contracting, retreating, withdrawing, and neutralizing. In application, the opponent's yang attack is absorbed and neutralized. Finding nothing to connect with, the opponent can then either be led along the line of his attack, or



repelled by a Yang force as in *Peng*. The attitude of *Lu* can be compared to a spinning ball which turns away and neutralizes the incoming force, sending it off at a tangent to the direction of spin. In the Taijiquan form this attitude is achieved by moving the centre back and rotating the torso around the central axis, whilst still maintaining central equilibrium (Fig 5). In the Yang form, roll-back (*Lu*) merges into Press, or *Ji*, the next of the eight directions.

### 3. *Ji* ('press')

The essence of *Ji* is a strong and sharp energy applied directly to the opponent's body, often to vital points on the chest or back. *Ji jing* is sharp and sudden and very powerful (Yang). When applied directly to the opponent's chest it can easily be enough to "seal the breath" or disable him momentarily. The strength of *Ji* does not come from muscular strength, but from the relaxed and coordinated use of legs and waist. Whenever a triangular use of force is applied, this is *Ji* (Abel, 1988), three points of the body combining to give this *jing*. This is shown clearly in the Yang form Press (*Ji*) shown in Fig 6. Here press is produced by the left palm pressing against the inside of the right forearm - thus producing a triangle of strength with the torso.

In the Yang form, *Ji* dissolves into Push (*An*).

#### 4. AN ('push')

*An* is a smoother and more continuous energy than either *Ji* (press) or *Peng* (ward-off). It produces a smooth and upwardly-directed rush of force, but is not directed against the opponent 'head on' as *peng* would be. It also contains a yin element and therefore will take account of the opponent's direction of movement or force when applied.

*An* will seldom be straight or linear in direction, but will usually be stronger in one arm (although two arms are used to push, Fig 7) thus giving a curvature of force to the technique and taking advantage of the opponent's weak point of balance.

The next four of the eight directions are more specific in their technical applications than the above four, giving the following descriptions of technique.

#### 5. TSAI ('pull')

Pull can be used on the opponent by drawing his attack in the direction in which he is already moving. This is achieved with the application of *Lu* (roll-back) thus neutralizing the attack, and then pulling by turning the centre from a firm root. The opponent is pulled along the line in which his force is already moving (Fig 8).

## 6. LIEH ('split')

*Lieh* is applied by stepping across the opponent's stance and 'splitting' his posture. In the technique shown (Fig 9), the form 'diagonal flying' is used, which will grasp the opponent's attack with one hand and 'split' with the other which is placed against the chest. A scissors-like action is used to separate the opponent's arms.

## 7. KAO ('shoulder stroke')

This technique is very simply to strike the opponent with the shoulder. Usually used against the chest, the technique is a very powerful and direct use of force against a determined attacker. The attack will be used by first negating the opponent's attacks, and then stepping inside his guard to strike him forcefully with the shoulder (Fig 10). Musashi, the great swordsman and strategist, mentions the use of the technique against a sword attack (Musashi 1974).

## 8. TSOU ('elbow stroke')

A continuation of the attack with the shoulder. The elbow may be presented as an alternative to the shoulder in striking the opponent (Fig 11). The advantage is that the elbow is more

accurate and focussed against small targets such as vital points, whereas a shoulder attack is more forceful.

Thus, the eight directions can be seen as possessing qualities of force and technique used in Taijiquan fighting and containing the essence of martial skill in Taijiquan. Combined with the five elements they contain a potted description in essence, of all Taijiquan movement.

Thus a form such as the Yang style 'single whip' may be said to contain elements of *Tsai* (pull), *Peng* (ward-off), *An* (push), look right, look left, and *Lu* (roll-back). A detailed description of such an analysis of movement is beyond the scope of this paper.

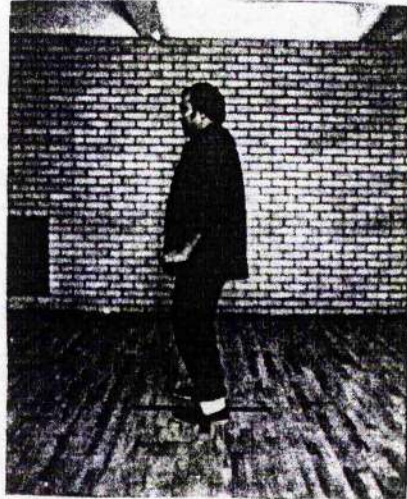
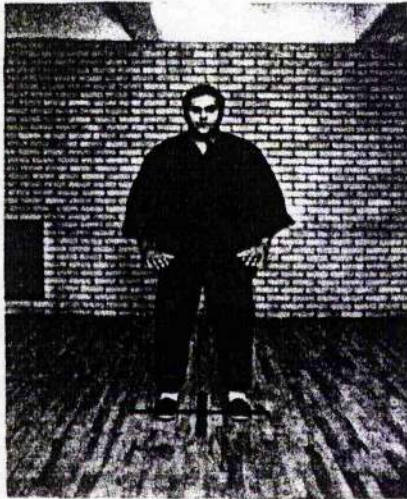


Fig 1: Central Equilibrium

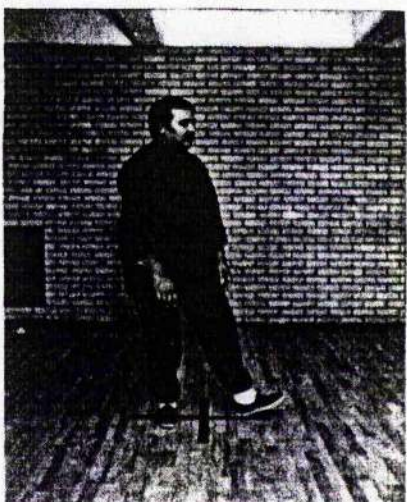
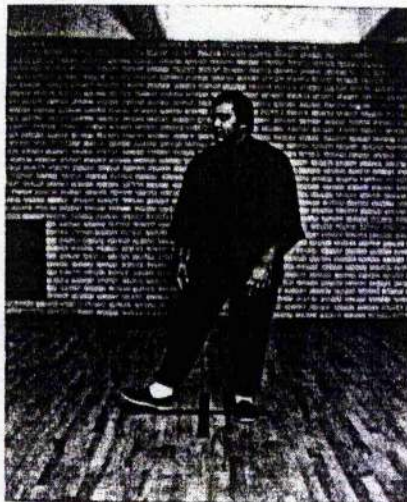


Fig 2: Look Right

Fig 3: Look Left

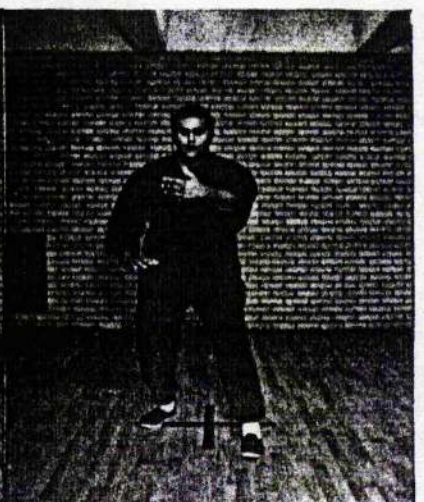
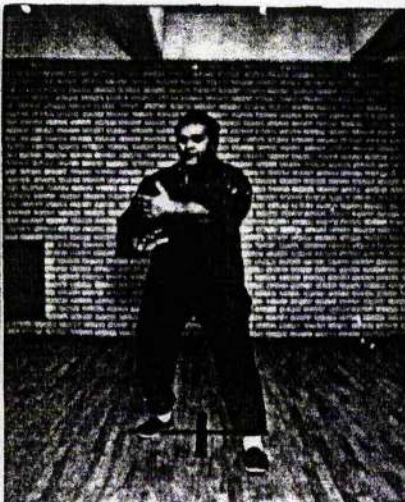
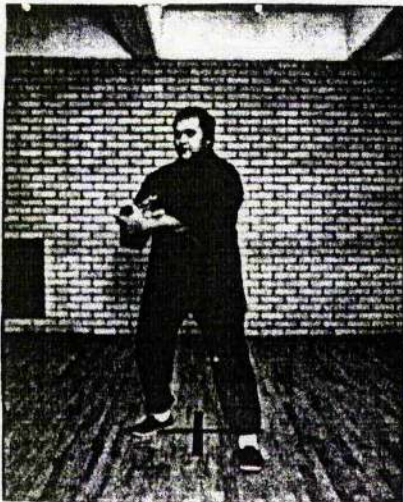
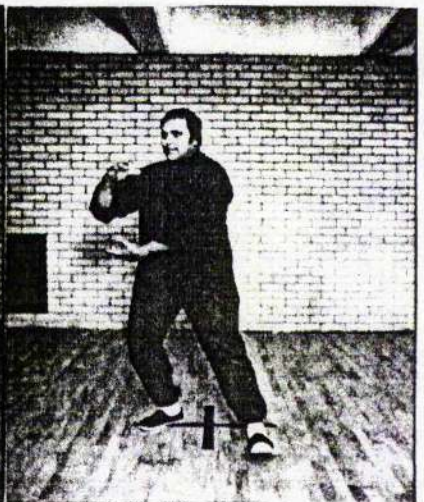
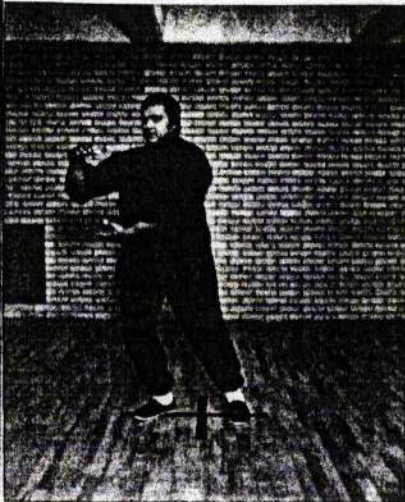
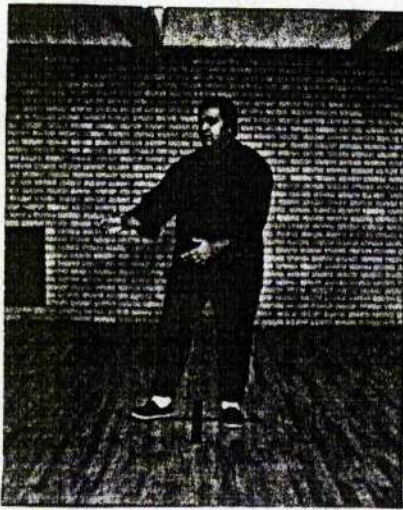
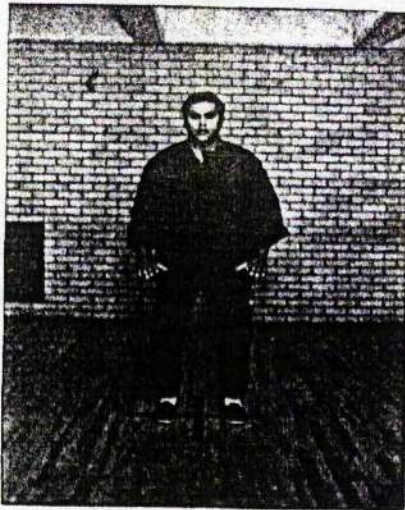


Fig 4: Ward-off

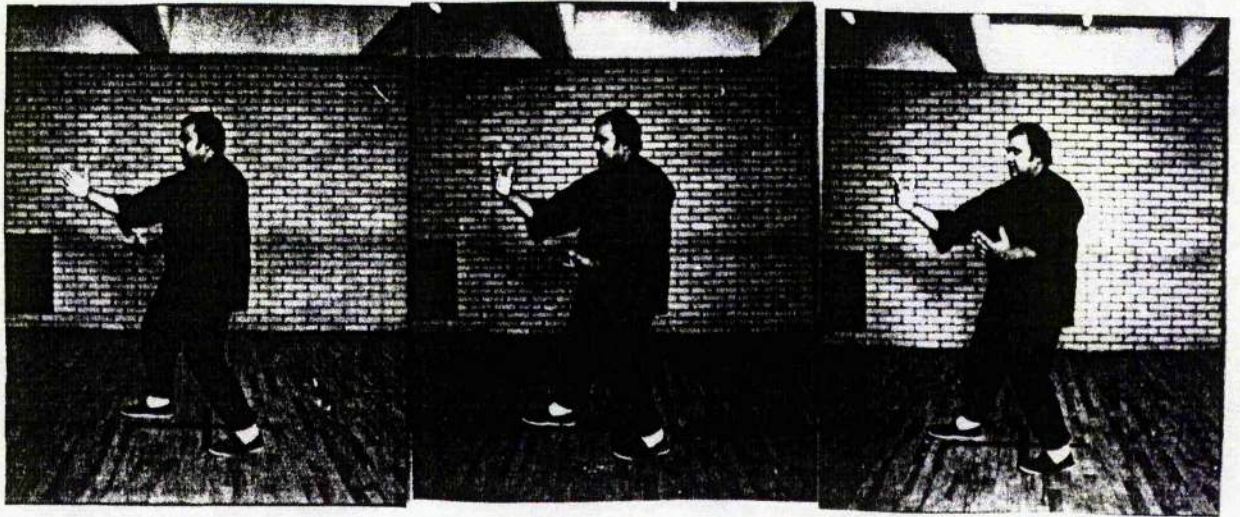
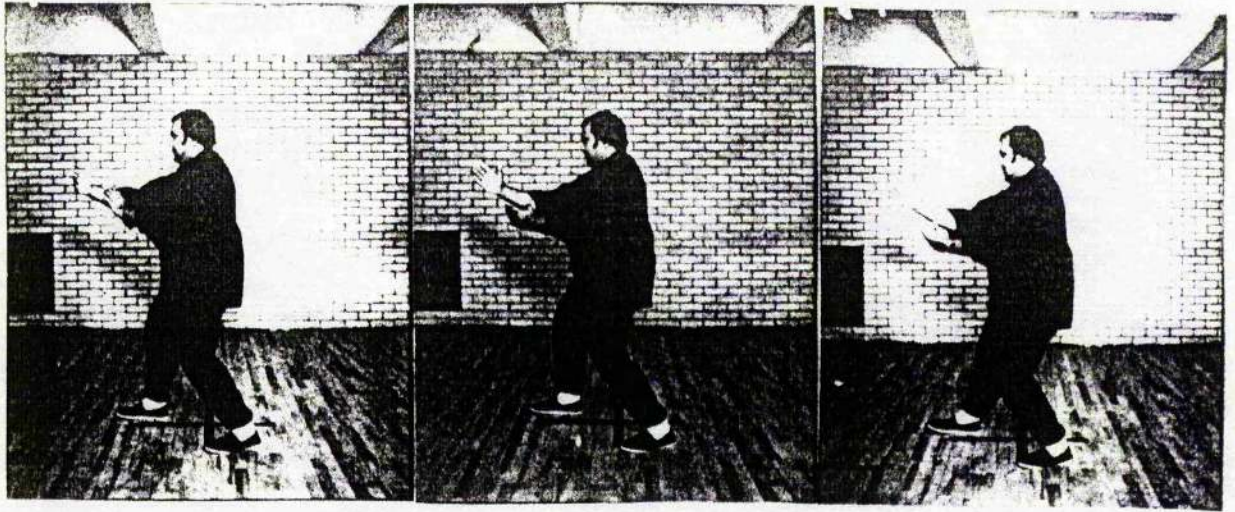


Fig 5: Roll-back

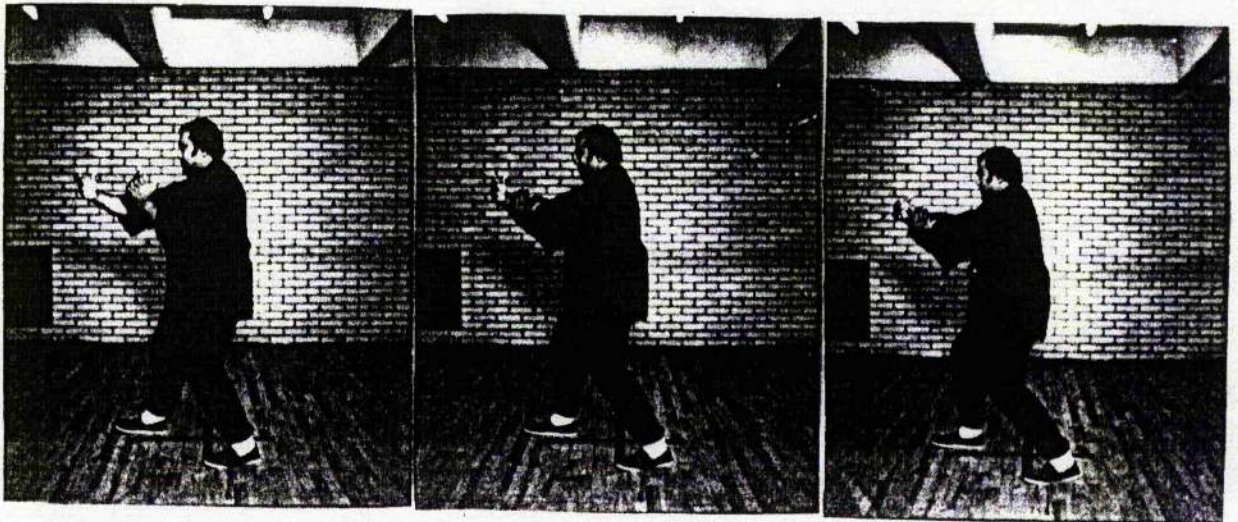


Fig 6: Press

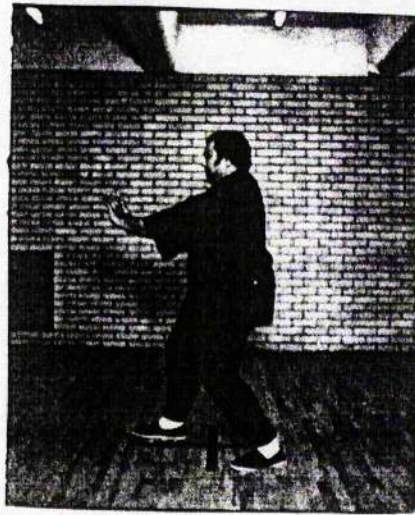
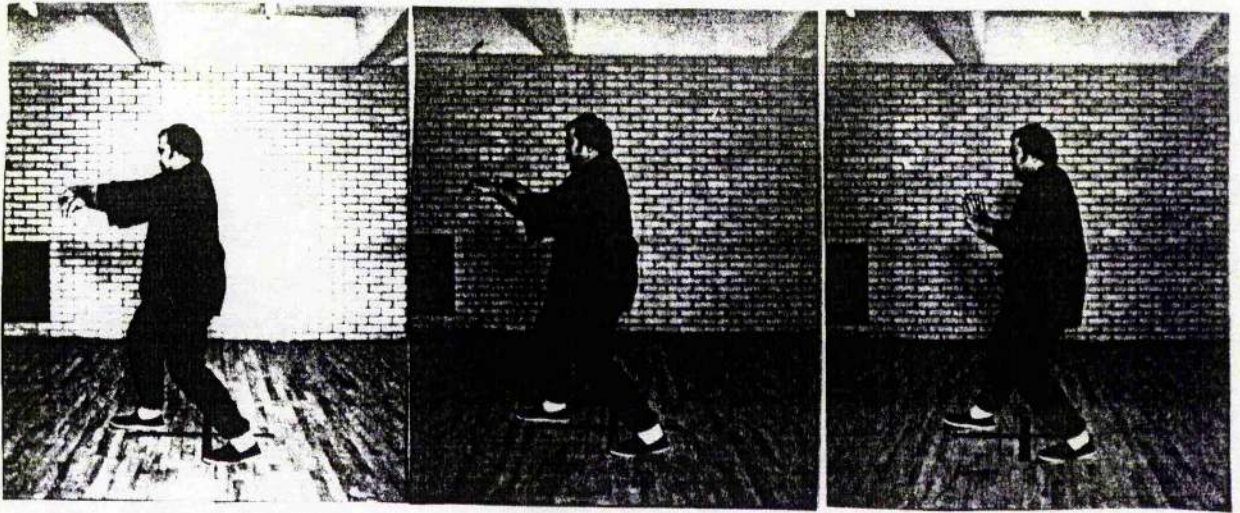


Fig 7: Roll-back and Push

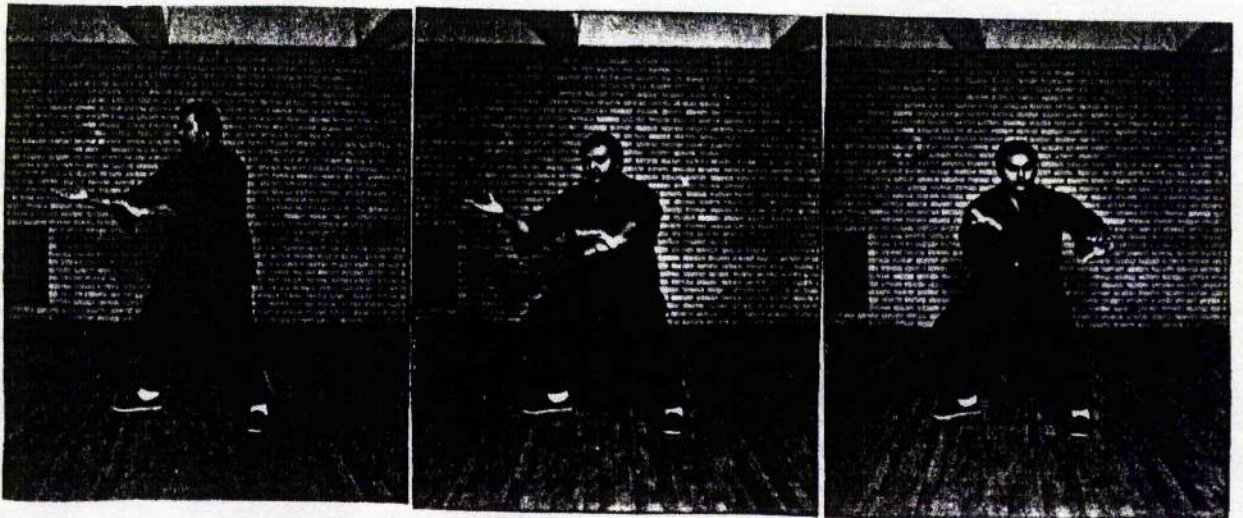


Fig 8: Pull



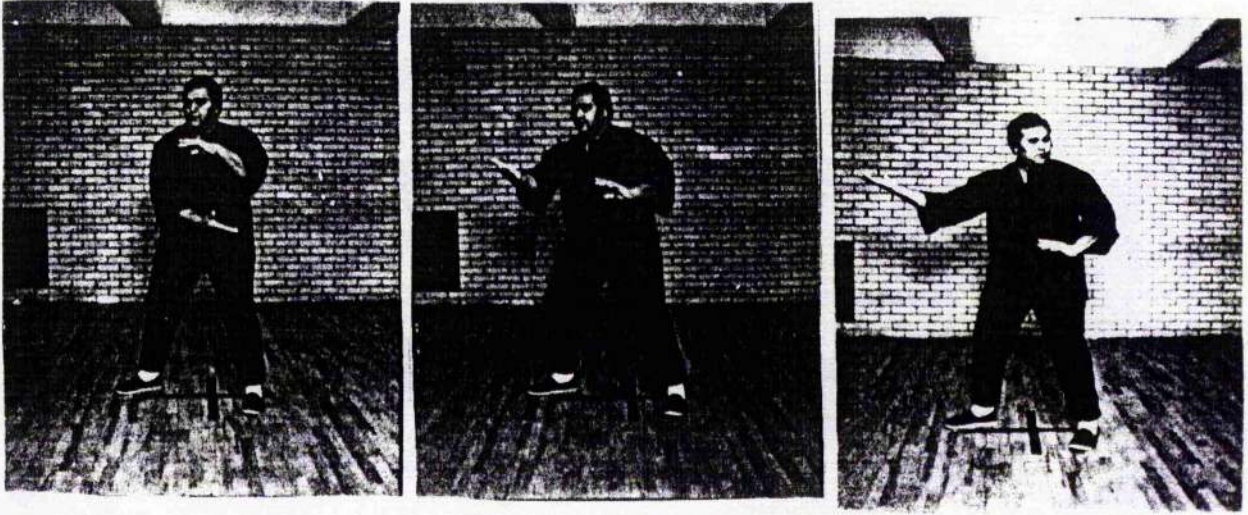


Fig 9: Split

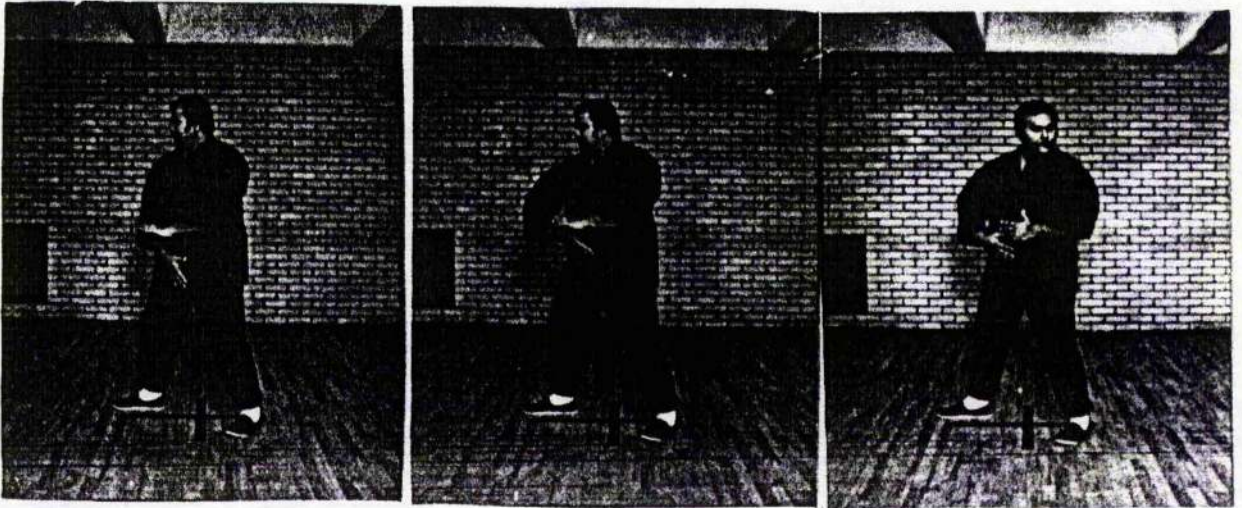


Fig 10: Shoulder-stroke

Fig 11: Elbow-stroke

## APPENDIX B

TABLE OF CHINESE DYNASTIES

夏	Hsia kingdom (legendary?)		c. - 2000 to c. - 1520
商	SHANG (YIN) kingdom		c. - 1520 to c. - 1030
周	CHOU dynasty (Feudal Age)	Early Chou period	c. - 1030 to - 722
		Chhun Chhiu period 春秋	- 722 to - 480
		Warring States (Chan Kuo) period 戰國	- 480 to - 221
First Unification	秦 CHHIN dynasty		- 221 to - 207
漢	HAN dynasty	Chhien Han (Earlier or Western)	- 202 to + 9
		Hsin interregnum	+ 9 to + 23
		Hou Han (Later or Eastern)	+ 25 to + 220
三國	SAN KUO (Three Kingdoms period)		+ 221 to + 265
First Partition	蜀 SHU (HAN)	+ 221 to + 264	
	魏 WEI	+ 220 to + 265	
	吳 WU	+ 222 to + 280	
Second Unification	晉 CHHIN dynasty: Western Eastern		+ 265 to + 317 + 317 to + 420
	劉宋 (Liu) SUNG dynasty		+ 420 to + 479
Second Partition	Northern and Southern Dynasties (Nan Pei chhao)		
	齊 CHHI dynasty		+ 479 to + 502
	梁 LIANG dynasty		+ 502 to + 557
	陳 CHHIN dynasty		+ 557 to + 589
	魏	Northern (Thopa) WEI dynasty	+ 386 to + 535
		Western (Thopa) WEI dynasty	+ 535 to + 556
		Eastern (Thopa) WEI dynasty	+ 534 to + 550
	北齊 Northern CHHI dynasty		+ 550 to + 577
	北周 Northern CHOU (Hsienpi) dynasty		+ 557 to + 581
Third Unification	隋 SUI dynasty		+ 581 to + 618
	唐 THANG dynasty		+ 618 to + 906
Third Partition	五代 WU TAI (Five Dynasty period) (Later Liang, Later Thang (Turkic), Later Chin (Turkic), Later Han (Turkic) and Later Chou)		
	遼 LIAO (Chhitan Tartar) dynasty		+ 907 to + 1124
	West LIAO dynasty (Qarā-Khitāi)		+ 1124 to + 1211
	西夏 Hsi Hsia (Tangut Tibetan) state		+ 986 to + 1227
Fourth Unification	宋 Northern SUNG dynasty		+ 960 to + 1126
	宋 Southern SUNG dynasty		+ 1127 to + 1279
	金 CHHIN (Jurchen Tartar) dynasty		+ 1115 to + 1234
	元 YUAN (Mongol) dynasty		+ 1260 to + 1368
	明 MING dynasty		+ 1368 to + 1644
	清 CHHING (Manchu) dynasty		+ 1644 to + 1911
	民國 Republic		+ 1912

N.B. When no modifying term in brackets is given, the dynasty was purely Chinese. Where the overlapping of dynasties and independent states becomes particularly confused, the tables of Wiegner (1) will be found useful. For such periods, especially the Second and Third Partitions, the best guide is Eberhard (9). During the Eastern Chin period there were no less than eighteen independent States (Hunnish, Tibetan, Hsienpi, Turkic, etc.) in the north. The term 'Liu chhao' (Six Dynasties) is often used by historians of literature. It refers to the south and covers the period from the beginning of the +3rd to the end of the +6th centuries, including (San Kuo) Wu, Chin, (Liu) Sung, Chhi, Liang and Chhen. For all details of reigns and rulers see Moule & Yetts (1).

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