

NOT FOR SALE



**TAI CHI WISDOM
FROM THE MASTERS**

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THE TAI CHI CLASSICS

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TAO TE CHING

Lao Tzu

2
Under heaven all can see beauty as beauty only because there is ugliness.
All can know good as good only because there is evil.
Therefore having and not having arise together.
Difficult and easy complement each other.
Long and short contrast each other:
High and low rest upon each other;
Voice and sound harmonize each other;
Front and back follow one another.
Therefore the sage goes about doing nothing, teaching no-talking.
The ten thousand things rise and fall without cease,
Creating, yet not.
Working, yet not taking credit.
Work is done, then forgotten.
Therefore it lasts forever.

4
The Tao is an empty vessel; it is used, but never filled.
Oh, unfathomable source of ten thousand things!
Blunt the sharpness,
Untangle the knot,
Soften the glare,
Merge with dust.
Oh, hidden deep but ever present!
I do not know from whence it comes.
It is the forefather of the gods.

9
Better to stop short than fill to the brim.
Over sharpen the blade, and the edge will soon blunt.
Amass a store of gold and jade, and no one can protect it.
Claim wealth and titles, and disaster will follow.
Retire when the work is done.
This is the way of heaven.

16
Empty yourself of everything.
Let the mind become still.
The ten thousand things rise and fall while the Self watches their return.
They grow and flourish and then return to the source.
Returning to the source is stillness, which is the way of nature.
The way of nature is unchanging.
Knowing constancy is insight.
Not knowing constancy leads to disaster.
Knowing constancy, the mind is open.



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WHAT IS TAIJIQUAN?

Let us see what is Taijiquan, as it was written down in the past. First, we must define what we mean by “taiji.” It is stated in Wang, Zong-yue’s Taijiquan Classic:

“What is taiji? It is generated from wuji and is a pivotal function of movement and stillness. It is the mother of yin and yang. When it moves, it divides. At rest it reunites.”

According to Chinese Daoist scripture, the universe was initially without life. The world had just cooled down from its fiery creation and all was foggy and blurry, without differentiation or separation, with no extremities or ends. This state was called “wuji” that literally means no extremity, no dividing, or no discrimination. Later, the existing natural energy divided into two extremities, known as yin and yang. This polarity, or tendency to divide, is called taiji, which means grand ultimate or grand extremity, and also means very ultimate or very extreme. It is this initial separation that allows and causes all other separations and changes. From the above, you can see that taiji, which is derived from wuji, is not yin and yang but is instead the mother of yin and yang. How then do we interpret and define “grand ultimate” as the characters for which taiji is usually translated? And how can we apply this concept to taijiquan practice? Let us turn to the beginning movement of the taijiquan form for an illustration that reveals the answers to these questions.

TAIJIQUAN IS ART OF THE MIND

When you stand still, before you start the sequence, you are in a state of wuji, that is, a state of formlessness. Your mind should be calm, quiet, peaceful, and centered. Your mind, and hence your qi, should focus at your energetic and physical center, i.e., your lower dan tian or center of gravity. Your body is relaxed, with no intention. Your weight is evenly distributed on both legs.

However, once you generate the intention to start the sequence and you begin to move, you are in a state of taiji (i.e., yin and yang start to be differentiated to perception). As the form continues, you shift from side to side, from foot to foot, and each part of your body becomes at times alternately substantial and insubstantial. The taiji in the taijiquan form is thus actually the intention or the motivation generated from the mind that causes the yin and yang to be discriminated. It is this mind that shapes reality. It is this mind that guides us to a deeper and more profound understanding.

And it is this living and active mind that continues to achieve further perceptions of yin and yang. From this, you can see why taiji is called “grand ultimate,” and why the mind is the Dao in taijiquan practice. Therefore, taijiquan is primarily an art of the mind.

Through the mind’s action, the entire art becomes alive. Once you start a motion it is possible to modify or redirect it, but this modification is possible only after the motion has been started. If one change is made, others can be made, and each change opens up other possibilities for variation. Each factor in the situation introduces other factors as possible influences. The initial motion made all other motions possible, and in a sense “created” the other motions. The Chinese express this by saying that taiji is the mother of yin and yang: “Taiji begets two poles, two poles produce four phases, four phases generate eight trigrams (gates), and eight trigrams initiate sixty-four hexagrams”

YIN AND YANG THEORY

The yin and yang theory is used to classify everything, whether ideas, spirit, strategy, or force. For example, female is yin and male is yang, night is yin and day is yang, weak is yin and strong is yang. It is from the interaction of all the yin and yang that life was created and grew. Taijiquan is based on this theory and applies it to form, motion, force, and fighting strategy. In the thousands of years since the taiji theory was first stated, many taiji symbols have been designed. The best one for both theory and application is a circle that contains yin and yang. In this figure, the circle and the curved dividing line between yin and yang imply that both yin and yang are generated and contained in roundness. The smooth dividing line between yin and yang means that they interact smoothly and efficiently.

Extreme yang weakens and evolves into yin, first weak and then extreme yin. Extreme yin, in turn, evolves into yang. One evolves into the other and back again, continuously and without stopping. The diagram also shows a small dot of yin in the center of the greatest concentration of yang, and a little bit of yang inside the greatest concentration of yin. This means that there is no absolute yin or yang.