

TAIJIQUAN HISTORY

from The Tao of Taijiquan by Grandmaster Jou, Tsung Hwa

ITS ROOTS--

After careful and intensive study of the world around them, the ancient Chinese philosophers developed the concept of taiji, often translated as “the spiral”, “the cosmos”, and “the grand ultimate or terminus”, graphically represented by the taiji diagram. Understanding this taiji philosophy provides a necessary foundation for the study of the exercise of taijiquan. Unlike fragmented and apparently unrelated branches of knowledge, taiji is essentially the root of the tree of wisdom in its ability to enrich every branch of knowledge.

Taiji principles describe practical approaches to solving problems in natural as well as human realms. For example, during the Yin Dynasty (1200BC), these concepts were used to create the Chinese calendar and to predict lunar and solar eclipses. Additionally, acupuncture was invented during the Zhou Dynasty (696BC) and applied taiji philosophy to cure illness and maintain health. Taijiquan is another practical application of taiji philosophy.

Taijiquan is translated as “Great Extremes Fist”, an exercise that makes available to us the principles in the yin-yang balancing act seen in nature and life: in particular the aspects of fast and slow, hard and soft, tense and relaxed. Therefore, what we find in taijiquan is an exercise in which we can experience the advantages of when to move fast, be firm, and hold on; and when to use softness, slowness, and be relaxed. These principles guide us to efficient use of our energy to support a life of clarity of mind and good health. These are very subtle lessons of the taijiquan form and the result of practice often becomes a life-long study.

Through the constant practice of taijiquan, one will comprehend more fully some of the profound concepts of taiji philosophy, which are otherwise impossible to explain in words. The objectives of taijiquan practice include harmony of the mind, promotion of health, and the attainment of rejuvenation and longevity. .

Next: SHAOLINQUAN-- the forebearer of taijiquan all of the martial arts

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SHAOLINQUAN--

The famous Shaolin Buddhist temple, built in the third century in northern China, was visited in 527AD by an Indian Bodhidharma ‘Damo’ who lectured there for many years. Finding the monks in poor health, he introduced the concept of exercise being necessary for a sound body, and a sound body being necessary for the spiritual quest of the mind. Shaolin boxing was thus founded and it is considered the root of all styles, clans, and families of the Chinese martial arts.

These exercises became considered the treasures of the Shoalin Temple and were called the five quan, each named for an animal best exemplifying it’s attributes--**Dragon:** lightness, stillness, spirit; **Tiger:** strength in fighting; **Leopard:** agility in fighting; **Snake:** vitality, acute senses; **Crane:** concentration, accuracy, stability.

Kept to the Temples, Shaolin filled the need for body health for the Monks, and was persued by some to such an extent to begin a path toward immortality. Lidaozi, a monk accomplished in the shaolinquan arts, is said to have lived from the Tang Dynasty through to the Ming dynasty (618-1644AD) and himself developed a form of inner exercises similar to taijiquan. Of it he said to his students...

“Taiji is so subtle,
to embody it you must be as empty as air

It’s movements are innate,
as the chime is to the bell hanging from the ridgepole of an old temple

Natural,
as a tiger’s growl or a monkey’s cry

Sometimes like the current whirling deep in a still pool,
sometimes rising like waves at sea!

It makes the body sound, and also it makes resonant the mind.”

Next: TAIJIQUAN - combining Shaolin with Daoist qigong and Yijing thereby transcending all the martial arts, being the “way of nature” or The Dao. ©2009

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Zhangsanfeng is perhaps our greatest teacher ever of taijiquan and is given credit for its creation. Born April 9, 1247, to a wealthy family, and having an opportunity to work in a high government position for the Emperor Taizong of the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368AD), he soon pursued interests devoid of worldly ambition that lead him to many years of visiting Chinese temples. He mastered the well-known shoalinquan then being practiced at Baozhi Mountains. At age sixty-seven he met Huolong, the Daoist who taught "immortality", yet after four years of practice he felt he achieved little. Then after nine years at Wudang Mountain he is said to have become aware of "the truth and the Dao". With the Yuan Dynasty ending and the Ming Dynasty beginning he chose to become a hermit to avoid the search by officials who desired his mastery of immortal Daoism. It is recorded that in 1407 government officials returned to Wudang Mountain to once again search for Zhang who had returned to visit with his friend Wanpuzi. Finally, in 1459, Emperor Yiuchung officially bestowed a title of immortality on Zhang, for his life had spanned the Sang Dynasty, Yuan Dynasty, and to the reign of Dingzong in the Ming Dynasty, a period of over two hundred years.

One story of how Zhangsanfeng created taijichuan is that Zhang observed a magpie and snake on Wudang Mountain sparring, with the serpent lifting its head and watching upward and the magpie spreading its wings and descended to attack the serpent. The serpent then moved slightly to escape attack, but maintained its usual circular shape. The contest continued, up and down, back and forth, with each seeming to absorb and then redirect and return the attacker's energy effortlessly. Zhang then realized the truth of softness over firmness and created taijiquan.

Another legend states that Zhangsanfeng saw monks boxing on Wudang Mountain and observed that they used too much force and outer strength and therefore lacked balance. Reasoning that if yin and yang were balanced inside the body one would be less clumsy. Accordingly, he used principles from Dao, the taiji diagram, and the Yijing to develop taijiquan. The purpose of the movements being to transfer intrinsic energy to the spirit and use inner rather than outer force.

After Zhangsanfeng, the famous taiji masters included Wangzong, Chentongzhou, Zhangsongxi, Yejimei, Wangzongyue, and Jiangfa. Finally, Jiangfa taught taijiquan to Chen's family and from this family we have the modern recorded lineage. ©2009

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