

Taiji Philosophy of Taiji 37

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Introduction

Taiji philosophy¹ developed from the ancient belief that the universe existed due to the combination of two elements called Yin and Yang. Over a long period of time this idea was refined until a complete system of thought had evolved. The basic idea was that any whole could be divided into two opposing elements and that it was only the combination of and the interaction between these opposites that created the basis for change.

This philosophy became the foundation of Taijiquan². Ancient Taiji masters liked to use the principles of Taiji philosophy to analyse different aspects of Taijiquan such as fights between two people; the link between body and mind (their positions and movement); breathing techniques; and different kinds of bodily forces. This helped them to discover how to develop Taiji forces and how to defeat an opponent who used a large amount of force by using only a minimal amount of power.

Using the Taiji philosophy can lead to a very profound analysis of all things and a continuous development of ideas. It is for this reason that the study of Taijiquan never ends.

History

It is difficult to be sure as to when the YinYang theory came into existence. Its seeds lie in China's ancient past and some historic records suggest that it emerged as a philosophy during the Western Zhou dynasty (西周 11th century-771BC). All we can be certain about is that it definitely existed during the 'Spring & Autumn' and 'Warring States' periods (春秋战国 770-221BC).

¹ Taiji philosophy is known by many different names. These include YinYang philosophy (due to its basis upon the idea of Yin and Yang (two elements representing opposing principles); YinYang WuXing philosophy (due to its later combination with the WuXing (five element) theory); or Yi Li. Yi Li means theory of the Yi Jing (I Ching) and refers to the fact that elements of Taiji theory can be found in the Yi Jing and that both Taiji philosophy and the Yi Jing offer an approach to the law of change and development of all things. In fact the Yi Ching is a dictionary of the Gua (the first Chinese characters). Today, most people use it for practising divination.

² Taijiquan means the Quan (or fighting system) based upon Taiji philosophy.

During this period different ideas began to be separated into different schools of thought; the Confucius school represented by Confucius and Mencius; the Legalist school; the Daoist school represented by LaoZi 老子; and the YinYang school³.

The next major landmark in its development took place in the Song dynasty (宋 960-1279AD). During this time Zhou DunYi (周敦颐 1017-1073AD) wrote a book explaining the Taiji symbol⁴. This led to Taiji philosophy becoming very fashionable. His thoughts were developed further by his students and this lineage later became known as the Li Xue Pai⁵ 理学派 which was also very active during the Ming dynasty (明 1368-1644 AD).

In the middle of the Jin dynasty (金 1115-1234AD), 'Explanation of the Taiji picture' was published and Taiji philosophy again became fashionable with its ideas forming the basis for the well-known book 'Story of the Stone' 石头记 (also known as 'Dreams of the Red Chambers' 红楼梦).

This renewed popularity of Taiji philosophy also influenced Taijiquan poetry. This not only heightened the level of Taijiquan theory, but it also raised the level of practice and Taijiquan became well-known.

During the second world war Mao ZeDong 毛泽东 wrote the book 'Discussion about Contradiction' in which he focused upon the essence of the Taiji philosophy. He analysed the law of change and development of opposing aspects and it is possible to say that, nowadays, this book is the standard work on Taiji philosophy.

³ People often think that the YinYang school is part of the Daoist school. This is because elements of the YinYang theory can be found in the DaoDeJing. They can, however, be found in many other schools of thought, even the SunZi BingFa (Master Sun's Art of War). People also confuse Daoist philosophy with Daoist religion. During the last moment of the Western Han dynasty 206BCE-24CE there was a revolutionary group called the YiDouMi Dao (YiDouMi means '1 decalitre of rice'; during this revolution every member of the group had to pay this to the organisation). They were quickly suppressed and became a secret society. Over a long period of time, however, the movement developed into a major religion known as DaoJiao (or Daoism). In the Jin dynasty (1115-1234CE) DaoJiao claimed LaoZi as its head and made the 'LaoZi' its canon. Therefore, people often confuse DaoJia (Daoist philosophy) with DaoJiao (Daoist religion).

⁴ There are different opinions about who designed the Taiji Picture. Zhu Zhen (Song dynasty) says that it is from Chen Zuan. In his book 'Taiji Tu Shu Bian', Huang Zhong Yu (Ching dynasty) thinks that the Taiji picture is from Heshan gong.

⁵ One branch of the theory system of Confucius active during the Song and Ming dynasty.

Throughout Chinese history, the Taiji philosophy has been used in many different fields, such as; medicine; chemistry; physiology; and many different kinds of art. There are many examples where the insightful use of this philosophy has led to great achievements.

Fu Xi⁶ 伏羲 4 designs of Gua 卦

The idea of Yin-Yang 阴阳 is very ancient. The book GuanZi⁷ 管子 writes that 'Fu Xi developed the idea of using hexagrams based on Yin and Yang'. This indicates that the Yin-Yang idea was already in existence at the time of Fu Xi and from Xue XueChuan's⁸ research we know that the content of the Fu Xi BaGua pictures must have been designed about 7000 years ago⁹.

The tradition says that Fu Xi formed characters by making knots in cords. The method for expressing the characters changed in time, starting with knots in cords, it evolved into carving in tortoise-shells, in bones of animals or on stones or bamboo slips, later being written on silk and finally on paper.

From the original meaning of Yang as 'sunny' and 'Yin' as 'without sun' it is possible to imagine that Fu Xi used these knots to record meteorological phenomena. He used a double knot to represent a Yin symbol when there was no sunshine and a single knot or Yang symbol when it was sunny.



Yin symbol



Yang symbol

The Yin and Yang symbol

The existence of more meteorological phenomena than two, led to the development of four symbols, Tai Yin 太阴, Shao Yin 少阴, Shao Yang 少阳 and Tai Yang 太阳. They are called Sixian 四相 symbols. The

⁶ FuXi lived about 7000 years ago and was an emir of what is today's central China.

⁷ GuanZi's first name is YiWu, his family name Guan. Because he was the second son, he also was called Chong. During the Spring and Autumn period, he was the Prime Minister of a country called Qi. His writings were brought together in a book called GuanZi.

⁸ A scientific approach to the I Ching. Shanghai, 1948.

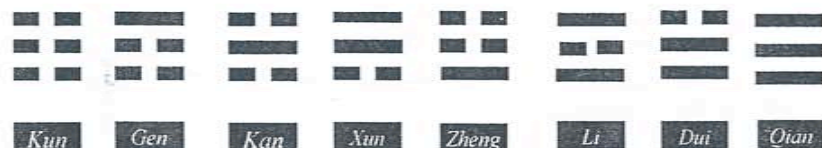
⁹ The tradition says that Fu Xi is one of the founders of the earliest Chinese culture.

SiXian symbols indicate four kinds of phenomena of the climate. Tai Yang means 'sunny', Shao Yang, means light cloud., Shao Yin means cloudy and Tai Yin means dark.



The SiXian symbol

This further developed into the eight symbols Qian 乾, Kun 坤, Zheng 震, Gen 艮, Li 离, Kan 坎, Dui 兑 and Xun 巽. Chinese Called BaGua 八卦 symbols.



The BaGua symbols

BaGua symbols indicate different things such as eight directions, family members and natural phenomena.

<i>Kun</i>	<i>Gen</i>	<i>Kan</i>	<i>Xun</i>	<i>Zheng</i>	<i>Li</i>	<i>Dui</i>	<i>Qian</i>
earth	mountain	water, rain	wind, wood	thunder	fire, sun lightning	lake	heaven
south-west	north-east	north	south-east	east	south	west	north-west
mother	youngest son	middle son	eldest daughter	eldest son	middle daughter	youngest daughter	father
belly	hand	ear	tight	foot	eye	mouth	head

Three different designs of BaGua pictures have been found. One is called Fu Xi's BaGua 伏羲八卦 as tradition says that Fu Xi was the designer. Another is called Wen Wang BaGua 文王八卦. This is

traditionally said to have been designed by Zhuo Wen Wang¹⁰ 周文王 (11th century B.C.). It is Fu Xi's BaGua modified to reflect the change in the location of the stars and constellations to which they are related. The third is called Confucius' BaGua as it is said that Confucius (孔夫子 551-479 B.C.) designed it.



FuXi BaGua



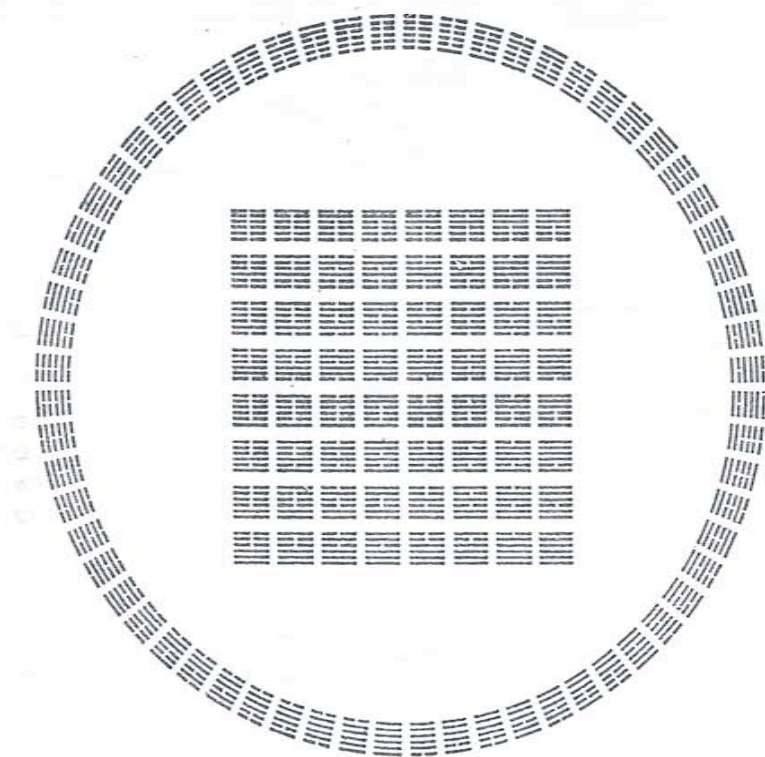
Wen Wang BaGua



KongZiBaGua

¹⁰ King Wen was the first king of the Zhou dynasty. He was the revolutionary leader against the Sun dynasty and therefore the king of Sun put him into jail. In jail he wrote some comments on the I Ching, called I Zuang. In the I Ching as it is currently used his comments form an integrated part of the I Ching.

People then combined each two BaGua symbols, thus forming the sixty-four symbols whose meaning has been compiled in the I Ching 易经. The I Ching is effectively a dictionary explaining these 64 symbols which are traditionally called Zhou Yi Gua 周易卦 or I Gua 易卦¹¹ and which were the first Chinese characters.

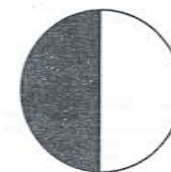


two regular arrangements of the 64 hexagrams

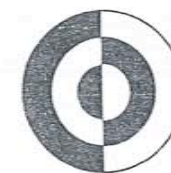
¹¹ Nowadays we can only find back one kind of Gua, Zhou Yi Gua. It is hard to imagine that in ancient China there was only one kind of Gua. History books also mention the Lian San Gua, attributed to Shennong, and the Guai Zhong Gua, attributed to Huang Di (Yellow Emperor).

Taiji symbol

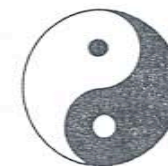
There existed three different designs of the Taiji symbol:



Xiantian Taiji symbol (prenatal Taiji symbol)



Houtian Taiji symbol (postnatal Taiji symbol) 1



Houtian Taiji (postnatal Taiji) symbol 2

The WuXing 五行 Theory

Ancient Chinese believed that everything of the cosmos is subordinate to one of five elements. These consist of wood, fire, earth, metal and water. The elements are organically interrelated and follow an order of mutual promotion or control upon each other. All aspects of the same groups of elements also follow the same order of mutual promotion or control upon the other.

Five elements	Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal	Water
Zhang-organs ¹²	liver	heart	spleen	lungs	kidney
Fu-organs ¹³	gallbladder	small intestine	stomach	large intestine	bladder
five senses	eyes	tongue	mouth	nose	ears
five body constituents	tendons	vessels	muscles	skin, hair	bones
five emotions	anger	joy	worries	sadness	anxious
five seasons	spring	summer	late summer	autumn	winter
development phase	birth	growing	changing	reaping	storing
weather type	windy	hot	damp	dry	cold
five colours	green	red	yellow	white	black
five flavours	sour	bitter	sweet	pungent	salty
five directions	East	South	central	West	North
five times	morning	noon	after noon	evening	night

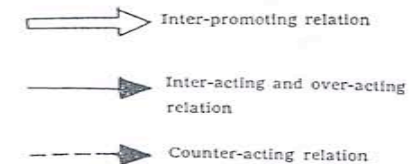
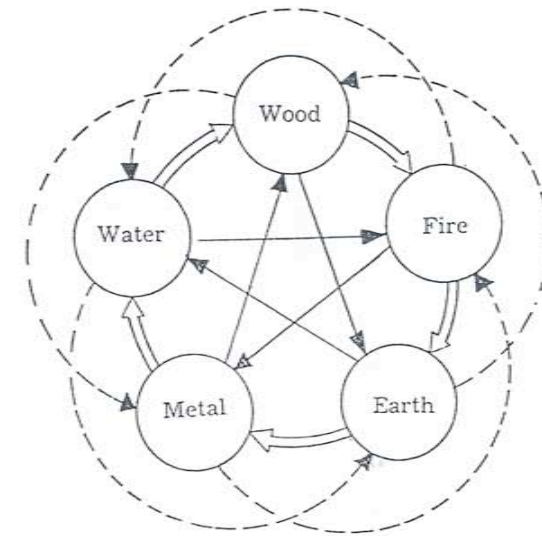
The WuXing theory developed in the Han Dynasty (汉 206BC-220AC). It began as a way of choosing the colour of a new emperor's clothes. This changed, however, when certain revolutionary elements began to use the theory to show that the power could pass to people outside of the emperor's family lineage. They used the example of the ancient rulers who would pass power onto people of ability rather than within the family group. After the Tang dynasty (唐 618-907AC) the WuXing theory became part of the Taiji philosophy as people used this theory as an explanation of how to practice Dan exercises. This followed Chen Zhuan's diagram which was the subject of Zhou Dun Yi's later explanation.

¹² Zhang-organ = solid organ.

¹³ Fu-organ = hollow organ.

In Taijiquan the WuXing's importance is in indicating the four directions and their centre.

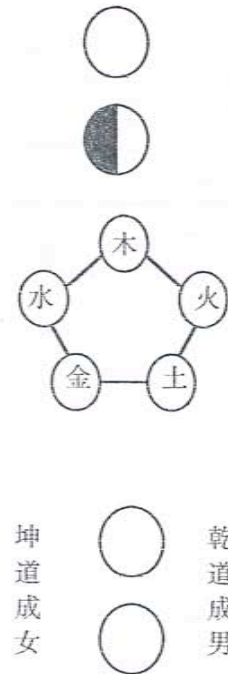
This is possibly from Zhang SanFeng 张三丰.



The Five Element relationships in the body and nature

The Taiji picture

The Taiji picture includes the Wuji symbol, the Taiji symbol, the Wuxing symbol, and two other circles indicating the qi of men and women. Originally this picture shows us how to practise the Dan technique¹⁴.



The Taiji picture

Taiji philosophy in the field of Taijiquan

Ancient Taiji masters liked to use the principles of the Taiji philosophy to analyse different aspects of Taijiquan such as: fights between two people; the link between body and mind (their positions and movement); breathing techniques; and different kinds of bodily forces. This helped to discover how to develop Taiji forces and how to defeat an opponent who used a lot of force by using only a minimal amount of power. Using the Taiji philosophy can lead to a very profound analysis of things and a continuous development of ideas and the study of Taijiquan; therefore, it never ends.

Yin 阴	Yang 阳
Mind (Shen 神)	Body (Xin 形)
Light or soft force (rou 柔)	Strong or hard force (gang 刚)
Suppleness (rou 柔)	Strength (gang 刚)
Emptiness, weakness, no force (Xu 虚)	Fullness, strength, force (Shi 实)
Relaxation (Xu 虚)	Stretching (Ding 顶)
Quiet or has no movement (Jing 静)	Moving (Dong 动)
Not enough (Buji 不及)	Too much (Guo 过)
Bend (Qu 屈)	Stretching (Shen 伸)
Closing (He 合)	Opening (Kai 开)
Bad chance (Bei 背)	Good chance (Sun 顺)
Slow (man 慢)	Quick (Kuai 快)
Downwards downstairs (Xia 下)	Upwards, upstairs (Shang 上)

Different Yin-Yang concepts frequently used in Taijiquan

Yin-Yang philosophy applied to the fight between two people

In Taijiquan the positions of two people fighting can be represented by the Taiji symbol. One person represents the Yin 'fish', the other the Yang 'fish'. The relationship between the two people is totally interchangeable. Which person relates to which element depends upon the respective use of strong and soft force. In general the person using soft force represents Yin and the person using strong force represents Yang. The Taiji theory explains how to use soft (or minimal) force to respond to the opponent's hard force, to make the opponent lose balance.

¹⁴ It refers to a Taoist technique of the Jindan Pai (golden ball faction). They thought that body energy can gather in the Dantian and that once the volume passes a certain limit that it changes into a ball. This ball remains in the dantian and could make people immortal. They called this ball Dan or Jindan (Golden ball).

Use of the Bagua and WuXing (5 elements) to indicate changes in direction

Originally, the Bagua symbol referred to eight directions. In Taijiquan they apply these eight directions to different fighting situations.

During the time of Zhan San Feng Taijiquan was called the '13 positions'. This in fact consisted of eight offensive positions combined with movement in four directions and a central position.

The eight offensive positions were Peng, Lu, Ji, An, Cai, Lie, Zhou and Kao. These eight postures corresponded with the eight different Gua of the Bagua. Peng with Qian ((Chien)), Lu with Kun, Ji with Kan, An with Li, Cai with Sun, Lie with Zhen ((Zhang, Chen)), Zhou with Dui ((Tuan, Tui)) and Kao with Gen ((Ken)). Originally they were applied to the Fu Xi Bagua, but later they were also applied to the Wen Wang Bagua and the Confucius Bagua with the correspondence between direction and position changing. This original Taijiquan practice is now almost lost.

In the traditional Yang style the Bagua can be applied to most of the movements allowing them to be broken down into partial movements. This allows a single movement to have different parts of the body releasing forces in different directions in response to different attacks.

In Taijiquan the WuXing symbol relates to moving forwards, backwards, to the left, to the right and standing in the middle. It illustrates how the practitioner, starting from a standing position, can practise responding to an opponent attacking from different directions.

Yin-Yang philosophy applied to the use of minimal force and strong force

Xu-Shi, Rou-Gang are Yin-Yang dualities. Xu can be translated as empty, weak, relaxed or without force while Shi means full, strong, tense or applying force. Usually Rou means supple, but it can also refer to light or soft force, while Gang means strength, but also refers to strong or hard force. With different nuances available for different Chinese characters and the fact that Taiji theory stems for a large part from poems, it is very easy for people to misunderstand their meaning.

The use of minimal or soft force (rou) to beat an opponent who attacks by using a strong force(gang) is a special topic in Taijiquan.

One Taijiquan poem contains the following: 'To move an opponent weighing one thousand Jin (almost one thousand pounds) one must use only four Liang(almost fifty oz)'. This sentence means that a small amount of force can be used to overcome a strong force. This is achieved by using techniques that affect the centre of gravity of the opponent - even if the opponent weighs 1000 pounds. When studying Taijiquan the practice of pushing hands with sensing is the foundation of this. During pushing hands with sensing both people exercise to find, control and affect the opponent's centre of gravity.

We must not, however, forget that Taijiquan is about more than the technique of 'moving one thousand Jing by only using four Liang'. In Taijiquan the most important thing is the practise of receiving and creating a foundation of different kinds of Taijijin.

Being able to combine suppleness (rou) and strength (gang) in a good way is another principle of Taijiquan. Here suppleness refers to the body and strength refers to force.

The key to a supple body is the stretching of the ligaments and the opening of the joints of the whole body. Only then can you move with speed and accuracy.

Many people think that in Taijiquan you do not need to practise strong force and that you only have to practise relaxation while doing the form. They think that then, one day, the 'qi' will come (which is something similar to the special force their ancient masters had) and that they will be healthy. Practising Taijiquan in this way is like 'wanting to take the moon from a well' - you will receive 'nothing'.

The Taiji poem of Chen Xin says: 'the best way is 5 Yin and 5 Yang'. Here Yin means soft force and Yang means strong force. This means that you need to develop both, soft and strong force.

Yin-Yang philosophy applied to different kinds of forces

It is possible to discriminate between many different kinds of forces. Short force and long force refer to a quick or slow application of force. Straight and lateral force refers to the direction of the force in terms of forwards or sideways. Lifting force and sinking force refer to an upwards and downwards forces created as a result of the opening and closing of the dantian. Receiving force and striking force refers to the two phases while applying a force - the receiving phase and the striking phase.

Yin-Yang philosophy applied to negative abdominal breathing

The Taijiquan theory uses Yin-Yang concepts to analyse the link between breathing, the movement of the dantian and qi. Breathing consists of breathing in and breathing out. The dantian can close and open. Qi can go up and down. In this context the closing and opening of the dantian refers to contraction and relaxation of the straight abdominal muscles. The qi going up and down refers to the upwards and downwards movement of the diaphragm. The breathing leads the movement of the straight abdominal muscles and the diaphragm.

As the Yin-Yang concepts are used to analyse this connection between breathing, the dantian and qi it is easier to understand what negative abdominal breathing is. Mastering negative abdominal breathing is one of the important keys for developing Taiji forces.

Yin-Yang philosophy applied to the principles of Taijiquan

In Taijiquan the Yin-Yang principles are used to discuss the body movement. In 'Xu Ling Ting Jin 虚领顶劲', both Ling and Jin mean neck. Xu means to relax and Ting means to stretch. The full expression means that one has to relax the neck muscles and to stretch the neck joints at the same time.

Yin-Yang philosophy applied to the Jing Dong duality

Jing and Dong are another dualism. Jing means 'still, quiet, calm' and Dong means 'to move'. There is a line in a Taijiquan poem that is mostly translated as 'to find movement in stillness, to find stillness in movement'. The southern school explains these famous lines in a different way. It says 'to find movement in the absence of movement, to find the absence of movement in movement'. Or to put it another way 'while practising standing positions without movement finding a way to receive spontaneous movement', 'while having spontaneous movement finding a way to control the movement'. This is the essence of Taiji 37.

Afterword

To think that today you are the best is wrong, as tomorrow you can always be better.

Taiji means to be without limit, Taijiquan practice is also without limit.

