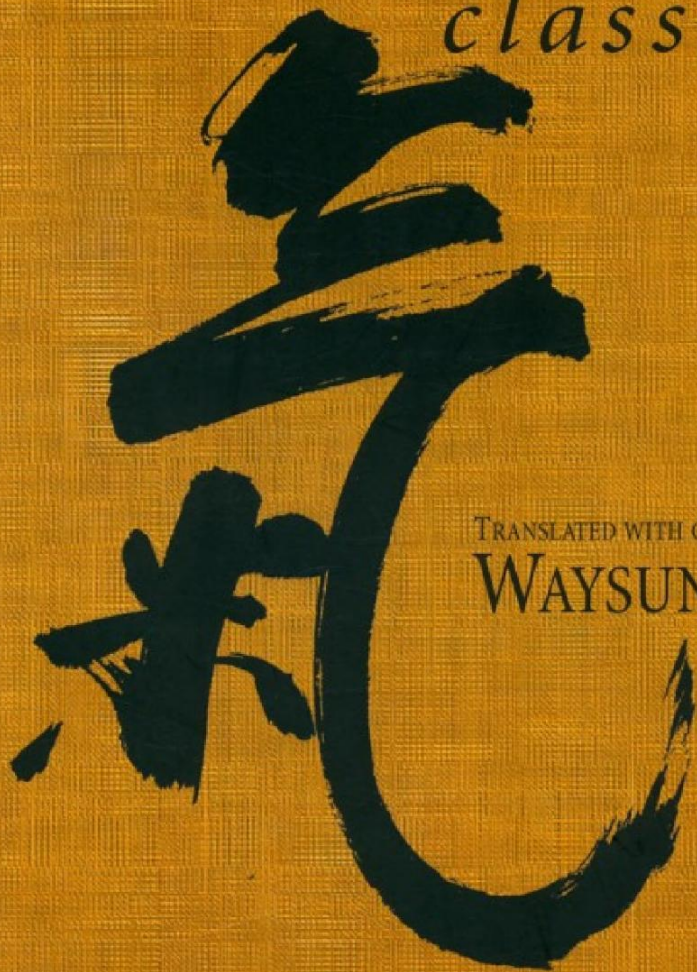


T'AI CHI

classics



TRANSLATED WITH COMMENTARY BY
WAYSUN LIAO

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Contents

Preface

1 Historical and Philosophical Background

WHAT IS T'AI CHI?

THE SYSTEMATIZATION OF T'AI CHI

2 Ch'i: The Internal Energy of Tai Chi

HOW TO CULTIVATE CH'I

CONDENSING BREATHING: THE PROCESS THAT TURNS CH'I INTO JING

HOW TO INCREASE CH'I AWARENESS

3 Jing: Developing and Transferring Internal Power

DRUMMING AND VIBRATING THE CH'I

YIN/YANG MOTION THEORY

THE ROLE OF THE MIND

HOW TO TRANSFER (PROJECT) INTERNAL POWER

TWO-PERSON PRACTICE AND INTERNAL POWER TRANSFER

APPLICATION OF INTERNAL POWER TRANSFER TO THE MARTIAL ARTS

THE SIXTEEN STEPS AND FOUR SECRET PROCEDURES FOR TRANSFERRING POWER

CONCLUSION

4 Tai Chi Classics I: Treatise by Master Chang San-feng

5 Tai Chi Classics II: Treatise by Master Wong Chung-yua

6 Tai Chi Classics III: Treatise by Master Wu Yu-hsiang

7 The Tai Chi Meditative Movement

THE FIVE VIRTUES AND THE EIGHT TRUTHS OF T'AI CHI

KEY POINTS TO OBSERVE IN T'AI CHI PRACTICE

T'AI CHI MEDITATIVE MOVEMENT: THE FORM

E-mail Sign-Up

Preface

IF YOU ASK THE QUESTION “How can I study T'ai Chi correctly?” those knowledgeable in this complicated, sophisticated, and sometimes mysterious field will probably smile and give you a less than satisfactory answer: “Go to a qualified teacher.”

This answer will undoubtedly lead you to the next query: “What determines a qualified teacher, and are such people available?” The answer in this case is guaranteed to disappoint you: “Read a good T'ai Chi book.”

Thoroughly frustrated by this time, you will probably ask, “Do I have to read every available T'ai Chi book in order to decide which contain authentic information and which instructors possess the proper background and abilities to qualify them in this discipline?” You most likely won't even get an answer to this question.

The above series of pertinent questions is commonly asked not only by Westerners, but by the Chinese themselves. Unfortunately, there is no clear-cut solution to the dilemma of the prospective student. There is only a limited selection of T'ai Chi books available, whether in English or in Chinese. Further, more often than not, the most famous instructors are not necessarily the most qualified, and a qualified master may not be in a position to teach his skills to others.

Traditionally, T'ai Chi instruction was carried out either in a temple or in the master's home, and training was conducted on a personal basis. The principles were transmitted mainly by word of mouth, rather than through the more permanent method of the

written record. T'ai Chi was thus passed down verbally from generation to generation, more in the style of a folk art than as a structured system.

The few attempts that were made to commit T'ai Chi principles to writing were hampered by the limitations of a primitive printing process, which depended on the use of carved wooden blocks and presses. As this method was costly and time-consuming, articles to be published tended to be as condensed as possible. In addition, the language was often cryptic, and the use of one word for multiple meanings was common. Lastly, the tendency of T'ai Chi practitioners to monopolize instructional materials further reduced the availability of written texts.

As a result of these factors, there exist today only several brief pages of early manuscripts that stand as the authentic source for the correct study and practice of the art of T'ai Chi. These texts, which were written in a type of martial arts code, are known as the T'ai Chi Classics I, II, and III and are also commonly referred to as the T'ai Chi Bible.

Because of the T'ai Chi Classics' archaic language, complicated concepts, and use of certain technical terms and forms of sentence structure, the many attempts to translate them into modern English or Chinese have given rise to a great deal of controversy. The present book, rather than merely presenting yet another literal translation of the T'ai Chi Classics, has included in its pages precise explanations of such basic T'ai Chi principles as ch'i, jing, and internal energy cultivation. In this way, it is hoped that the student will develop a deeper, more complete understanding of both the philosophy of T'ai Chi and its application to the art. Also included are fresh translations of the three T'ai Chi Classics, with commentary on each aphorism, as well as translations of four short works from collections by unknown masters: "The Sixteen Steps of Transferring Power," "The Four Secret Procedures for Transferring Power" (both at the end of [chapter 3](#)), "The Five Virtues of T'ai Chi," and "The Eight Truths of T'ai Chi" (at the beginning of [chapter 7](#)). The T'ai Chi Meditative Movement is described in detail in [chapter 7](#).

T'ai Chi has a heritage that spans more than four thousand

years. In putting this book together I have stayed as close to the traditional style as possible, in order that the text might serve as a continuous reminder to the student of the cultural wealth that is such an integral part of this art.

The material presented in this book is based on ideas that have been handed down in the legends and folk arts of the Chinese culture for thousands of years. The theories and hypotheses advanced generally have little empirical backing, as scientific research has not yet been successful in proving, or disproving, their validity. Some of the information presented here may even seem to be paradoxical or to contradict modern science. It is possible, however, that in the future, as has happened many times before, these ancient theories will prove sound. Recent developments in Western medicine, such as the application of Chinese acupuncture techniques to modern anesthesia, have already tended to support these theories.

The historical data included in this book is not given in terms of genealogical tables or chronological events, but rather as an outline of the development of a specific philosophy within an entire culture. The terminology used is both technical and practical, in order to be of use to students on many levels.

This is an introductory text rather than a complete training manual. A complete discussion of any one form or special technique described in these pages would generate an entire book. Further, due to the limits of space, specialties such as T'ai Chi Sword, Knife, and Staff could not be included in this volume; these will have to be dealt with at a later time.

This book is therefore intended only to serve as a source of reference for the beginner and as a guide in the understanding and practice of the art for the advanced student. Although a student may attempt to learn the Meditative Movement by copying the diagrams, T'ai Chi is best learned first-hand from a competent instructor. As an alternative, a video tape giving detailed instructions on the movements is available on the Web at <http://www.taichitaocenter.com> or by writing to:

The T'ai Chi Center

433 South Boulevard
Oak Park, IL 60302

To the beginning student who is looking for a source of reference and information, and to the advanced student hoping to find a practical guide to the path of understanding, I present this book, along with my most sincere good wishes.

正氣

“Eternal Energy”

1

Historical and Philosophical Background

WHAT IS T'AI CHI?

T'ai Chi is a way of life that has been practiced by the Chinese for thousands of years. We should look into three areas in order to fully understand the historical background of T'ai Chi: (1) its philosophical foundation, (2) how it developed as a martial art, and (3) how T'ai Chi instruction has been passed on from generation to generation.

For those who are interested in the vivid, rich heritage of Chinese culture, and especially those who wish to communicate with and understand those persons from the other side of the globe, it is necessary to study the philosophy of T'ai Chi: that invisible, immense, and most powerful thought that threads its way undiminished through the entirety of oriental history. We are able to do so thanks to a few good individuals in each of countless generations who were unselfishly dedicated to keeping the spirit of T'ai Chi alive.

First, we may need to shed some of the beliefs and assumptions

we have inherited. Human beings, knowing that they are not perfect, desire perfection and search for a better life. Historically, people have always made mistakes in this search because they have misunderstood the nature and potential of human life. Each generation has interpreted this potential differently; some have made religious assumptions while others have ignored or even denied the value of human life. As various social and organizational hierarchies develop and evolve into traditions, fundamental mistakes continue to be made. These accumulate and are often themselves perpetuated as tradition. If we naively follow our own tradition we may someday find out that we have made yet another mistake—the mistake of not questioning our traditions.

Even though our modern technology has brought us into the space age, the motivation of human life remains mysterious. Human achievements seem very small in the light of the historical progress of civilization. Yet even our theories of evolution are still in doubt; in spite of all our technology we still look up at the immense sky and wonder how it all started.

When we watch with pride and enjoyment the flight of a jumbo jet shrinking the earth beneath its wings, it is all too easy to forget that its flight is an imitation of the birds—merely the use of aerodynamic principles that were thousands of years old before humans first walked the earth. Our advanced medical technology has rocketed us to the super-sophisticated level of organ transplants, but we still have to succumb to the most basic and primitive needs: we must breathe air and eat food to survive.

We, the human inhabitants of this earth, may come to realize that fundamentally we have not progressed very far from the original inhabitants of this planet. We may come to see that we cannot change very much about ourselves.

A close look at our world's history reveals obvious cycles in which the development of the total person was either emphasized or ignored. When idealized human nature was emphasized, this yielded a very strong, creative civilization, one in which society progressed and people became spiritualized. Yet many mistakes still took place during this journey.

Several thousands of years ago, such idealism emerged in China. The Chinese of this period were searching for the highest form of life of the human mind and body. In their own unique manner, they achieved their goal—unlike Western civilizations, which separated body from mind and allowed spiritual development only in terms of religious, mystical ecstasy.

The Chinese conceived the human mind to be an unlimited dimension, but the scope of human activity to be moderate. The focus of their goal was a unified philosophy of human life and a simplification of beliefs. This was the birth of what we know today as T'ai Chi thought. T'ai Chi became the invisible power that guided the movements of Chinese history for thousands of years. It gave tremendous impetus to that fabulous culture, showing its influence in areas ranging from medicine to diet, from art to economics. Even the order of human relations was designed according to T'ai Chi ideals.

T'ai Chi means “the ultimate.” It means improving, and progressing toward the unlimited; it means the immense existence and the great eternal. All of the various directions in which T'ai Chi influence was felt were guided by the theory of opposites: the *Yin* and the *Yang*, the negative and the positive. This is sometimes called the *original principle*. It was also believed that all of the various influences of T'ai Chi point in one direction: toward the ultimate.

According to T'ai Chi theory, the abilities of the human body are capable of being developed beyond their commonly conceived potential. Civilization can be improved to the highest levels of achievement. Creativity has no boundaries whatsoever, and the human mind should have no restrictions or barriers placed upon its capabilities.

One reaches the ultimate level, or develops in that direction, by means of the ladder of balanced powers and their natural motions—Yin, the negative power (yielding), and Yang, the positive power (action). From the viewpoint of this theory, it is the interplay of constructive and destructive forces that causes the essence of life to materialize, the material world to manifest. And the spiraling movements of these forces seems endless.

That the two equal powers, Yin and Yang, oppose and yet complement each other has confused many throughout history. Explanations of the meaning of life have ranged from the theory that humans were born with sin already a part of their nature, through the hypothesis that it is not education but the fear of punishment that creates a good person, down to the view that if there were no civilization at all there would be no evil in the world.

The very fact that there is argument reveals the truth of the concept that two balanced powers exist. Our universe is programmed in such a way that the two powers exchange their essence, and existence comes from this. This natural law, obvious as it is, is ignored by most humans. We can easily rationalize our ignorance with the excuse that we ourselves are programmed to possess only one of the two powers—either male or female, for example.

This human tendency to ignore all other aspects and focus on only one side of an issue brought Western civilization into religious worship. Western religions did, as a matter of fact, stabilize civilization and the social order for thousands of years, but they also gave rise to a series of tragic and bloody wars between differing religious factions. Formal religions were often guilty of extreme and dogmatic attitudes. They sought to dominate by force rather than to promote harmony. They wielded influence so strong that humans could not easily shake it off, thus causing a wave of thought pollution whose effects still persist today.

In the sixteenth century, there were many free thinkers, such as Galileo, who tried to enlighten people, but religion held the reins. Talking and thinking were not enough; lifestyle changes were needed. So the cultural darkness of the Middle Ages was only finally broken by the Industrial Revolution, which in turn brought about dogmatism. This dogmatism is now being eclipsed by the free-minded, educated generations of today. The women's equal rights movement is an indication of the fact that women's power—the negative, the Yin—has been ignored, abused, deprived, oppressed, and misunderstood for centuries. The contributions of the negative power are as important as those of the positive

power, just as the function of electricity consists of two opposite powers.

The Chinese have long realized that the two T'ai Chi elemental powers must interact, and the harmonious result could bring progress and unlimited development. Yet they have had no better luck at utilizing their knowledge than Westerners. While people in the West are freeing themselves from the shadows of religious idealism and creating the opportunity to experience the realities of the T'ai Chi principle, the Chinese have not yet been able to release themselves from the mental pollution of their own T'ai Chi-influenced culture.

About two thousand years ago in China, following the Spring and Autumn Age, the T'ai Chi principle began to be misused, or ignored. There then followed several hundred years of Dark Ages, during which time the development of human relations and political power took place in a very familiar fashion.

T'ai Chi encourages the fulfillment of the individual person, yet also emphasizes that this goal should be achieved through moderate, natural ways of living. Examinations of Chinese history shows that at a certain point this idea began to be applied only in terms of political power struggles: to be the ultimate person was to be the most powerful ruler. The idea of a simple, natural human nature was ignored.

The Ch'ing Dynasty cast the mold of authoritarian control and slavery that was to become the tradition throughout ensuing Chinese history. To the rulers—the Yang, aggressive powers—went the benefits, the ultimate power; while those who were yielding, cooperative, obedient, and who encouraged harmony—those possessing the Yin power—were forced to become the subjects. Women were educated to be weak and helpless, the designated slaves, and men were trained to be followers of the ultimate power who was, of course, the king. To become the ultimate power oneself, one merely had to resort to the use of violence—extreme Yang power. Competitiveness and aggressiveness were encouraged but moderated, all for the benefit of the rulers. Ironically, it was this social tradition that carried on the T'ai Chi principle for hundreds of years. As a consequence, even though

T'ai Chi was discovered and initiated in China so early, it followed the same sad destiny as did Western philosophy.

Whereas religion was to become the core of Western civilization, it was either ignored or abused in China. Although the Buddhist religion was imported from India and then absorbed by the Chinese culture, its spiritual philosophy was de-emphasized, while its ceremonies and rites became fashionable. In Chinese Buddhism, the ideal of self-control was emphasized. The emperor used this ideal to suppress the common people, so that religion became known as "the ruler's favorite tool." T'ai Chi philosophy, however, offered beliefs that fulfilled human needs, even though its ideals were also abused by generations of the powerful and greedy.

For the Chinese, who have received all of the influence of T'ai Chi culture but also, sadly, all of the pollution of a social system abused by power, there is much to be learned from Western culture. Westerners have already been released from the bondage of religious influence yet are still trying to put their ideals into actuality. Really, all people search for the ultimate today; we seek a peaceful way, a natural way, a way to motivate our civilization toward the ultimate. Coincidentally, our ideals perfectly match those of the T'ai Chi way.

Hundreds of years ago, those who searched for a way to elevate the human body and spirit to their ultimate level developed an ingenious system known as the T'ai Chi Exercise. This system, which was inspired by the T'ai Chi outlook and which was based on principles not clearly known or understood by its founders, has since proved to be the most advanced system of body exercise and mind conditioning ever to be created.

While the Chinese ruling class was interested only in T'ai Chi's productive benefits, those who cared nothing about authority were adapting the philosophy to their personal lifestyles. They were applying the idea of a natural harmony to the development of the body and mind. Since this was of relatively little interest to the rulers, there is no real historical evidence of just when T'ai Chi as a mind and body system actually began.

All of the traditional Chinese arts, such as brush painting,

calligraphy, literature, poetry, and cooking, emphasized the Yin/Yang principle as the means of reaching the ultimate. The complete philosophy of T'ai Chi therefore became an integral aspect of these arts. However, the T'ai Chi system of mind and body discipline was unique in that it explicitly applied the original T'ai Chi principles in a progressive, organized manner. Therefore, it has become the only complete system to preserve this great philosophy for hundreds of years—all the way down to today's complicated world.



THE SYSTEMATIZATION OF T'AI CHI

For thousands of years, the system of political rule in China was based on brutality and corruption. Those who were dedicated to the truth called themselves Taoists or “mountain men,” and they lived a life similar to that of the monk. They carried on the spirit of T'ai Chi philosophy and in no way interfered with the ruling authorities. Since T'ai Chi formed its own independent system and had nothing to do with political structures, it was able to enjoy growth and freedom of development, even if only in small, isolated communities of dedicated men.

While these groups had no ties with the governing authorities, their studies were nonetheless respected by the rulers, first as a body of accumulated knowledge and later as a form of religion. Gradually T'ai Chi came to be considered a highly advanced form of folk art, to be studied exclusively by intellectuals and to be passed on from generation to generation.

Approximately 1700 years ago, a famous Chinese medical doctor, Hua-Tuo, emphasized physical and mental exercise as a means of improving health. He believed that human beings should exercise and imitate the movements of animals, such as birds, tigers, snakes, and bears, to recover original life abilities that had been lost. He therefore organized the folk fighting arts into a fighting art called the Five Animals Games. This was the first systematized martial art in China. Since then, the Five Animal Games have been popular with the Chinese, who practice them for health and exercise.

Around 475 C.E., Ta-Mo (Bodhidharma) came to China from India to spread his religious teachings, and he resided in the Shaolin Temple in the Tang Fung area of North China. Besides religious worship and meditation, he included physical training in the daily routine. He used the Five Animal Games to develop in his followers a balanced mental and physical discipline. Dedication toward Buddhism, combined with an abundance of time for practice, allowed the Five Animal Games to develop in this context to a very high level of achievement as a martial art.

When the followers of Ta-Mo spread their religious beliefs throughout China they also carried with them their martial art achievement. The system developed by the monks from the Shaolin Temple came to be known as the Shaolin martial art system. It emphasized physical toughening and strengthening, as well as spiritual development. This was the dawn of the systematic development of the *external* martial arts in China.

The mental discipline aspect of the Shaolin system was based mainly on Buddhist meditation. To those Chinese steeped in sophisticated Taoism and Yin/Yang philosophy, it was, and is still, considered to be simply a physical fighting system.

In 1200 C.E., the Taoist monk Chang San-feng founded a temple

in Wu-tang Mountain for the practice of Taoism, for the ultimate development of human life. Master Chang emphasized Yin/Yang harmony as a means to advance the development of mental and physical ability, natural meditation, as well as natural body movements propelled by an internal energy which would be developed at a certain level of achievement.

Since the Shaolin system had already been spreading throughout China for hundreds of years, the idea of adapting Taoist theory to everyday life instead of making it into a form of religious worship was readily accepted by Chinese society. T'ai Chi thought and its Yin/Yang philosophy soon developed as a temple-style organization based on the model of the Shaolin Temple. A modified form of monastic training was adopted in order to promote the sophisticated system in missionary fashion.

From its inception, the temple system at Wu-tang Mountain emphasized internal power and the development of wisdom. Thus, the Chinese have commonly referred to the T'ai Chi system as the *internal* system, to distinguish it from the Shaolin fighting art system.

Through the years, there have also been systems that combine elements of both the T'ai Chi and Shaolin arts into moderately developed martial arts. These are known today as *Hsing-I*, the Form and Mind system, and *Pakua*, the Eight Diagram martial art system.

Since a great deal of effort and concentration, as well as firm dedication, were required in order to reach even a fair level of achievement in T'ai Chi, a monastic system soon developed, and enrollment became an exclusive privilege. Those who reached high degrees of achievement became the leaders of the system, and, followed by their enthusiasts, they evolved a unique training relationship between master and disciple.

This tradition played an important role in passing on T'ai Chi knowledge and wisdom to society, and the immense power of its influence was able to pour deeply into all social classes. Supported by the common people, and at times even by the emperors (as when Master Chang San-feng was summoned to advise the rulers on Taoist philosophy), the temple-style T'ai Chi system shaped the

strong image that T'ai Chi was the ultimate art of life. Masters of T'ai Chi were regarded as the symbol of wisdom. They received great respect, especially since they practiced justice, charity, education, and the medicinal arts as part of their lifestyle.

Those who practiced T'ai Chi at times played a role in the enforcement of China's codes of human morality. For hundreds of years, the Chinese depended on only these codes as the law of the land. They were obeyed by everyone, even the emperors, and they were the foundation of the peace and social order of the Chinese civilization. Rules of basic human conduct—kindness, respect for one's elders, fidelity to parents, and love of one's kin—were enforced as strictly as written laws. Whereas the laws of today's industrial society say nothing, for example, about the immorality of deserting an elderly and needy parent, in the Chinese society of several hundred years ago such an act would have been considered a serious offense and would have been severely punished.

Followers of T'ai Chi believed that people should discipline themselves to be spiritual, healthy, kind, and intelligent; to be responsible for assisting others to reach the same levels of achievement; to enjoy the truth; to fight fearlessly against immorality and injustice; and to protect the needy and the weak. It was with these goals in mind that the martial art aspect of T'ai Chi came to be developed and emphasized.

T'ai Chi theories were easily applied to the martial arts. Mind and body harmony, in tune with the natural order of things, was at the core of T'ai Chi. This offered a direction of development completely different from that of other forms of fighting techniques. It also yielded awesome results in terms of human abilities coming from the power of the mind. Thus T'ai Chi Ch'uan became the most powerful martial art ever known.

Throughout Chinese history, periods of unrest always led to local power formations and the use of force. In some cases, even T'ai Chi practitioners became involved in the enforcement of peace in their areas, with the result that instruction in the martial art aspect of T'ai Chi was urgently needed. The philosophical and meditation aspects of the art were gradually ignored by most

people, with instruction in T'ai Chi becoming almost completely limited to its martial art aspect.

The true, dedicated masters of T'ai Chi remained in the mountains, and, along with their followers, they led a monastic life in order to carry on the pure art. They meditated and practiced daily in order to attune the spirit, condition the mind, discipline the body, and elevate the essence. In this way the original system was preserved more or less intact, with both mind and body discipline still being included in the training.

During the times when peace was re-established and the need for self-defense training faded away, those who had taught the art professionally carried on their dedicated careers as a type of family business. They taught only those who were most seriously interested, especially any of their own children who wanted to study the art as their profession. Herbal medicine and acupuncture were also offered to the local community on a charitable basis. Financial support depended on contributions by the local people whom they served, and by their students.

Family surnames came to be associated with the different styles of T'ai Chi that were being passed on, mouth to ear, from generation to generation—for example, the Ch'en style, the Yang style, and the Wu style. Many of these are still known today. Each style was distinctive, but all followed the classic T'ai Chi principles. Today, temple-style T'ai Chi is still considered the most authentic system, but since the rapid changes of industrial society allow little space for such a sophisticated system to grow, it has declined and is disappearing. Family-style T'ai Chi is also diminishing.

About 350 years ago, in 1644 C.E., the Manchurians invaded the Chinese empire and established the Ch'ing Dynasty. Although the dynasty was founded by force and for the benefit of the rulers, the Manchus were soon absorbed into the Chinese culture. They adopted a Chinese lifestyle, reconstructed a peaceful order of society, and started a period of corrupt rule that was to last for centuries.

In the early stages of the dynasty, episodes of hostility and conflict between the Chinese and their Manchurian rulers were

serious and often brutal. Even though the Manchus tried very hard to learn the culture and adapt themselves to the Chinese ways, native Chinese still regarded them as barbarians. The people's feelings of responsibility toward their nation diminished; passive resistance and refusal to cooperate with the "outsiders" resulted in the stagnation of the country's economic development.

As soon as the Ch'ing empire builders heard about the sophisticated art of T'ai Chi, they drafted the most famous master of the times, Yang Lu-chang (1799–1872), founder of the Yang style or Yang family system, into royal service. Unwilling to teach the Manchus, Master Yang deliberately modified the T'ai Chi meditation forms, converting them into a kind of slow-moving, outer exercise and completely ignoring the inner philosophy and mental discipline which is the key to T'ai Chi.

Master Yang knew that if the royal family learned of his unwillingness to teach them, and of his modifications, the emperor would take retribution for this offense and appease his anger by murdering not only him, but his entire family. Since Master Yang felt he could trust no one except his own sons, it was to them and to no one else that he taught the genuine art of T'ai Chi. In this way he avoided implicating anyone else in his personal decision to deceive the royalty.

From that time on, the family style of T'ai Chi became more restricted, with masters teaching the art only to their own kin. It was said that some masters would not even dare to teach the art to their daughters; when the girl married, a new relative could be linked with the Imperial Family, or could be someone whom the master felt should not be allowed into the art.

While the family style of T'ai Chi decreased, the exercise style was encouraged and practiced by members of the Imperial Family. It soon became the fad of the leisure class throughout China, and it remained so until the end of the Ch'ing Dynasty.

When the revolution of 1900–1910 succeeded in overthrowing the corrupt rulers, the noble families, deprived of their power, scattered throughout the country. T'ai Chi, of course, traveled with them. Practitioners claimed the authenticity of their art, stating that it had been taught to them by masters of the Yang family, or

of other T'ai Chi families, and the public naturally accepted their claims.

In this way, the modified form of T'ai Chi became today's T'ai Chi Ch'uan, or the so-called T'ai Chi Exercise. This is the T'ai Chi practiced publicly in China today; it is the T'ai Chi Dance, also called the Chinese Ballet by some Westerners. In these modern times, a person may receive instruction in and practice the art of T'ai Chi for years, and, regardless of which style is being taught, still stand a very good chance of learning only "public T'ai Chi." In other words, most of the T'ai Chi practiced today is not the original T'ai Chi, and it is devoid of meaning.

However, Master Yang Lu-chan's forced instruction did serve a useful purpose. Although public T'ai Chi is merely a shadow of the original, classical, temple-style T'ai Chi, it offers the greatest opportunity for the Chinese people and for others of the world to be introduced to the art. As a matter of fact, if the Ch'ing Dynasty's rulers had not become interested in T'ai Chi, it might have disappeared altogether under the rising tide of industrialization.

It is when a person becomes serious in the study of T'ai Chi that the search for the authentic art, the temple style, begins. One can only then appreciate the courage and dedication of the masters who have preserved the line of temple T'ai Chi down through the centuries. This is our heritage.

正氣浩然
大道千秋

*“The eternal energy is all-powerful and omnipresent. The eternal
Tao is everlasting.”*

2

CH'I

The Internal Energy of T'ai Chi

THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO, Chinese Taoists, whether from scientific observation, by mere hypothesis, or by obtaining information from sources unknown to us today, formulated the theory that there is an eternal power that moves the universe. They called this ultimate power *ch'i*. According to the legendary theory of Yin and Yang, *ch'i* exercises its powers ceaselessly, moving in a balanced manner between the positive (constructive) and negative (destructive) powers.

Because the Yin and Yang powers originate from the ultimate power, *ch'i*, they are able to move freely without any external limitation, immune from the restrictions of space, time, and even the material manifestations of existence. Because the two powers are always conflicting yet balancing each other, our universe is constantly and indefinitely changing. Everything, even unfilled space, derives its existence from the balanced interaction of these two contrasting forces. Since the powers of Yin and Yang are the origin of everything, they are the ultimate nature of every object in this universe.

The human being, also a part of the universe, is powered by the same source of energy—ch'i. The process of human life is based on the interaction of Yin and Yang forces. Our life increases and changes, and for reasons that are still mysterious to us, it follows a natural cycle and eventually dies. Ancient Chinese explain this cycle as the growth and fading of ch'i. It is ch'i that determines human mental and physical conditions. The way in which ch'i is expressed is commonly known as the *nature* of things.

It is the development of ch'i in the human body, along with the theory of the contrasting powers of Yin and Yang, that makes the art of T'ai Chi such a unique mental and physical system of discipline. Without correct training, or at least a full and clear understanding of the concept of ch'i, the true meaning of T'ai Chi will be lost. A simple analogy should help to explain this: ch'i is to T'ai Chi what gasoline is to a gas-powered engine. Just as without gasoline the engine could not have been invented, if there had been no concept of ch'i development, the art of T'ai Chi would never have come to be.

In order to be able to practice T'ai Chi in the correct manner and thus receive the true benefit of the art, there are several terms that should first be fully understood.

Ch'i. The Chinese word *ch'i* literally means “air,” “power,” “motion,” “energy,” or “life.” According to T'ai Chi theory, the correct meaning of *ch'i* is “intrinsic energy,” “internal energy,” or “original, eternal, and ultimate energy.” The way in which ch'i expresses itself, going always to the nearest position of balance and harmony, is called *T'ai Chi*—“the grand ultimate.”

Yin Ch'i or Yang Ch'i. Ch'i that is in a process of changing from one formation to another, or from one self-balancing situation to another, is termed either *Yin ch'i* or *Yang ch'i*.

Shen. T'ai Chi is based on the principle of three levels of energy. The base level, the essence or life energy, is inherent in the living organism. The next stage or level, ch'i, is a higher-than-normal manifestation of life energy. It supports the essence and is related to the function of mind. When ch'i is purified it elevates to the third stage: *shen*, or spirit. Shen is a much higher form of energy than ch'i and feels very different from ch'i.

Jing or Nei Jing. The power that is generated by ch'i is called *jing*, commonly known as *nei jing*, the internal power. In our analogy of the gasoline engine, *jing* would be equivalent to the horsepower generated by the gasoline's energy. If a person studies T'ai Chi for a number of years, he may generate a considerable amount of ch'i but may not necessarily be able to convert this ch'i into internal power, *jing*. Experientially, you can only feel another person's *jing* and not his ch'i; but you can only feel your own ch'i and not your *jing*. When practicing T'ai Chi as a martial art, you utilize your ch'i by projecting *jing* directly into your opponent.

Jing operates outside the parameters of space and time. Initially one uses imaging power, or imagination, to identify and direct the energy flow in the body, and then one accelerates it. These theories, or principles, are on the horizon of today's physical and medical sciences. In the medical field, treatments are already being used that have the patient imagine or visualize his immune system moving to search out cancer cells and destroy them. Success varies according to each individual's power and control of his imagination.

Li. The physical strength resulting from body movement is called *li*, the physical force. A simple way to describe the difference between *li* and *jing* is to say that *li* requires direct physical motion whereas *jing* comes only from indirect motion. If you bring your hand back and throw a punch forward, the result of the accumulated physical energy is called *li*. If no drawing-back motion is required, and yet power can be transferred with the same effect, then *jing*, the vibration power of converted ch'i, has been applied. Whereas ch'i is controlled by the mind, *li* is operated by the physical mechanism.

HOW TO CULTIVATE CH'I

Everyone possesses ch'i and has possessed it since birth. Ch'i remains with the individual throughout life, dispersing only after death. There are two main steps involved in cultivating ch'i within

your body: meditation and movement.

Meditation

In T'ai Chi practice, meditation is the only way to become aware of one's ch'i. After assuming either a simple sitting posture or an upright stance, the beginner can easily achieve success in T'ai Chi meditation by following these procedures:

1. Relax the entire body, as if you were asleep, making sure that there is no physical tension at all.
2. Calm your mind and concentrate on the total body, listening to its breath, sensing its pulse, and so on, until you can feel the body's natural rhythm.
3. Bring up your spirit by pushing up your crown point. Imagine an invisible string pulling your crown point from above. Gradually apply deeper breathing and inhale directly into the *tan t'ien* (an area located approximately three inches below the navel and two and one-half inches inward).

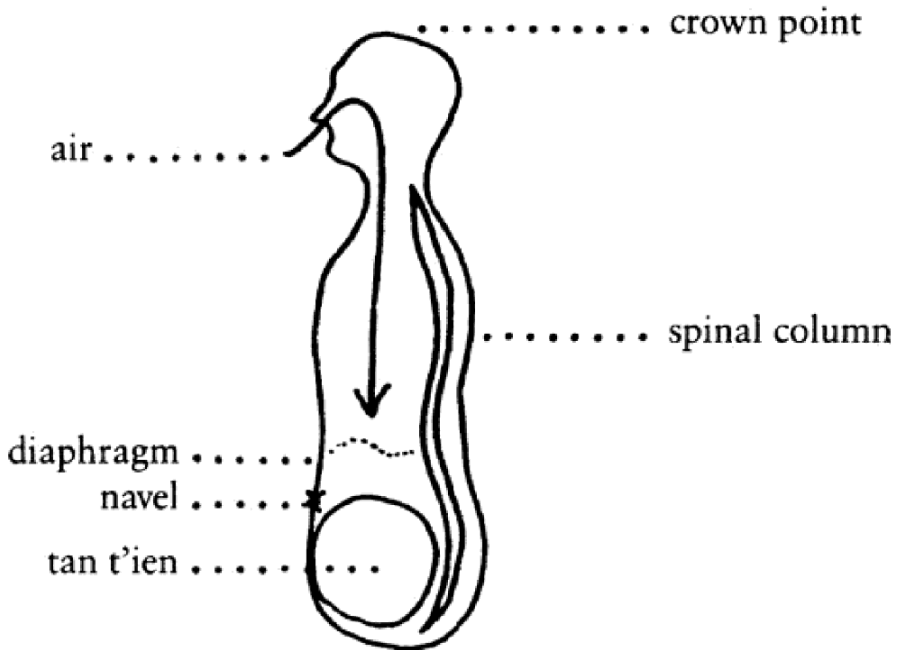


Fig. 2-1

After weeks or months of practice, you may start to sense a feeling that flows with the rhythm of deep meditation breathing. This is ch'i, the internal energy. As you progress, this feeling grows stronger, and you can begin to sense and control the flow of this energy without the assistance of deep breathing. At this stage, you can use your mind to guide your chi's path of travel inside your body.

T'ai Chi Meditative Movement

After you are able to sense the flow of your ch'i, you can begin to practice the T'ai Chi Form in a meditative manner, allowing your ch'i to flow in accordance with your mind and body. With repeated practice, the sense of ch'i gradually increases. Your form also improves, becoming more graceful and harmonious and developing into a natural state which cannot be achieved by merely copying an instructor's form.

At this stage, your mind can guide your ch'i; it flows freely, directing your body and its movements at will. In this way your mind and body will reach harmony. If you wish to develop a strong internal energy, then you should practice the T'ai Chi Meditative Movement intensively. Exercising in the T'ai Chi manner is the only way to eventually generate immense internal energy and allow it to flow.

Many practitioners of T'ai Chi who claim to have been in the art for years still have developed no feeling of ch'i. This is because they neither practice correctly nor combine any meditative techniques with the T'ai Chi movements.

CONDENSING BREATHING: THE PROCESS THAT TURNS CH'I INTO JING

Once you are able to feel the intrinsic energy flowing freely throughout the body, you can introduce these feelings into each meditative movement in order to cultivate your ch'i, so that it

grows stronger within you. However, without any further training process, the ch'i will remain within the body and will offer no greater benefits than a heightened awareness of your own body.

To further utilize ch'i it is necessary to practice a more advanced T'ai Chi meditation technique: *condensing breathing*. When you utilize this process, your internal energy will be generated into internal power, and this will be beneficial in many areas of your life.

Recalling the previous analogy of the gasoline engine, in order to generate horsepower, it is necessary to have a process that will burn the gasoline and so convert the fuel into a different, more functional form of power. Similarly, unless you "burn" your internal energy (ch'i) you cannot generate internal power (jing). The student must therefore take several steps to achieve this transformation. This process, known as T'ai Chi condensing breathing, is described below.

How to Practice Condensing Breathing

1. PREPARATION

In a stance that is somewhere between preparation and beginning form, relax your entire body, calm the mind, and gradually begin to do T'ai Chi meditation.

The eyes look into infinity, the crown point is pushed up and suspended, ears are listening inward, the tongue is rolled toward the back of the mouth with the teeth and lips lightly touching together, the ch'i is concentrated downward into the tan t'ien and flows smoothly, circulating throughout the body. Breathing is long, slow, smooth, rhythmic, and continuous.



Fig. 2-2

2. PROCEDURE

After experiencing the free flow of ch'i within your body, begin to pay extra attention to both of your arms. Try to sense and locate the bone structure while ignoring the existence of the surrounding muscles. In other words, imagine that only the skeleton is suspended there. As you inhale, imagine that your breath forces the bone to condense inward toward the bone marrow, as if the bone structure itself were being condensed and shrunk each time you inhaled. Repeat this exercise many times, and you will experience unusual feelings around your arms, such as cold, tingling, trembling, heat, or other sensations that will vary according to the individual.



Fig. 2-3

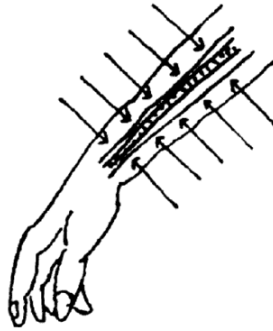


Fig. 2-4

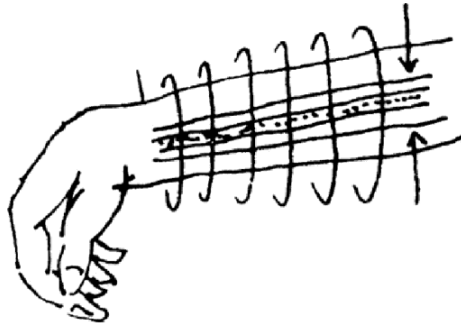


Fig. 2-5

3. EXPANDING YOUR PRACTICE

After successfully practicing condensing breathing in both arms, apply the same technique to other areas of the body: spinal column, head, legs, and so on. For example, concentrate on the spinal column, imagining that it is absolutely erect, and try to use your feeling to locate first the total column and then each individual vertebra. Practice the condensing technique until you start to get a substantial feeling of the result.

Some areas may appear to be more sensitive to this type of practice, yielding feelings much faster than others. For example, the collar bone can be very slow in showing positive results. But consistent, faithful practice will eventually lead to success. You will need to consult with a qualified instructor in order to differentiate between genuine feelings and imagination.

It is recommended that the student follow the proper sequence of practice: hands, arms, spinal column, head, legs, and finally all

the remaining parts of the body. Generally, a beginner can start to feel the transformation of ch'i into jing (a sensation similar to an electric shock) within several months.



Fig. 2-6

Generating Jing from Ch'i

After the above steps have been practiced over a reasonable period of time, you can begin to experience authentic T'ai Chi working internally, generating the original life energy, ch'i, into the high-frequency vibration power, jing. This is what makes T'ai Chi, as its name suggests, the grand ultimate art. You should now practice as follows.

First, stand with a relaxed and natural posture in a stance that is somewhere between beginning and preparation. Be sure to bear all of the important T'ai Chi principles in mind: upward suspension of the crown point; listening inwardly; eyes looking to infinity; breathing through the nose with a slow, smooth, continuous rhythm; tongue rolled upward, toward the back of the mouth; ch'i sunk downward to the tan t'ien; and so forth.



Fig. 2-7

Slowly raise both hands as you inhale; meditate while applying the principles of condensing breathing to the entire body. You should feel that the skeletal structure is suspended, without any muscles holding it. As you inhale and meditate, contract and squeeze the muscles around the bones toward the bone marrow. Relax the whole body as you exhale.



Fig. 2-8

You should feel as if you are gathering all the energy of the body into the bone marrow on each inhale, and then relaxing yourself totally with each exhale. Repeat this exercise as often as possible, but stop immediately if your concentration weakens or fatigue occurs.

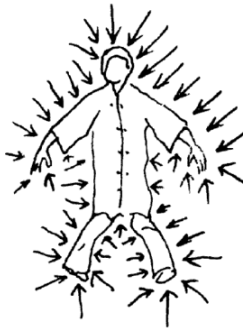


Fig. 2-9

In this process you should treat the entire body and mind as one integrated unit. Use your mind to control the feeling of the ch'i

and then “squeeze” the ch’i into the very center of the bone marrow each time you inhale. This will finally yield a trembling feeling similar to that caused by an electric shock. In later stages of practice, this sensation will get stronger and the feelings become more substantial, clearly separating themselves from imagination.

As illustrated in [figure 2-10](#), ch’i flows through the body constantly (A). As you use your mind to squeeze the ch’i toward your bone marrow (B), a strong wave-like current of energy similar to electricity is produced (C). The vibrations of this current are accelerated drastically during the periods when the work of squeezing persists (D).

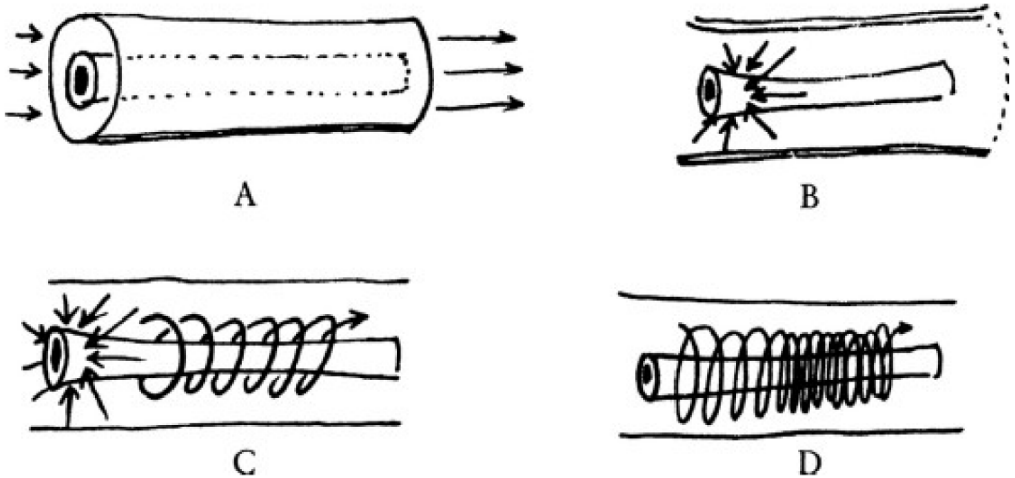


Fig. 2-10

In the advanced stages of this type of practice, you can accumulate the kind of feelings that will allow you to guide the direction in which the ch’i flows and circulates. As ch’i flows along the path down which you have sent it, it feels as if an electric current is flowing as a wave from one area to another. This current eventually becomes so strong that it yields a tremendous amount of vibration, accumulating in wave after wave and at a speed that only the mind is capable of generating. This creates the awesome power known as jing.

When someone is generating his jing and transmitting it to an area of his body, another person can sense the vibrations through

mere physical contact. When two people are simultaneously experiencing jing within their bodies, they become more sensitive to the jing in each other. Martial artists of ancient China claimed they could judge how good another martial artist's fighting ability was by mere feeling or sensation. They were able to gauge another's skill by the amount and speed of their internal power, rather than by assessing their physical condition.

Once again using the analogy of the gasoline engine, the size of the engine does not necessarily determine the horsepower that it produces.

What makes the practice of T'ai Chi the "grand ultimate" of all the arts is the *internal work* involved, as illustrated in the accompanying diagram, [figure 2-11](#). Internal work (*nei kong*) means the use of internal exercises to bring total control, harmony, and awareness to the mind and body. This diagram illustrates that, as discussed earlier, after rousing the awareness of ch'i within your body, you transform this energy into jing, the substantial power, by the condensing breathing exercise. Jing can be recycled when it is not transmitted or used. This means that you can guide the vibrations of jing to cause your ch'i to move vigorously within your body and so strengthen your ch'i, the vital energy of life. In turn, the stronger the flow of ch'i, the greater the amount of jing that can be produced.

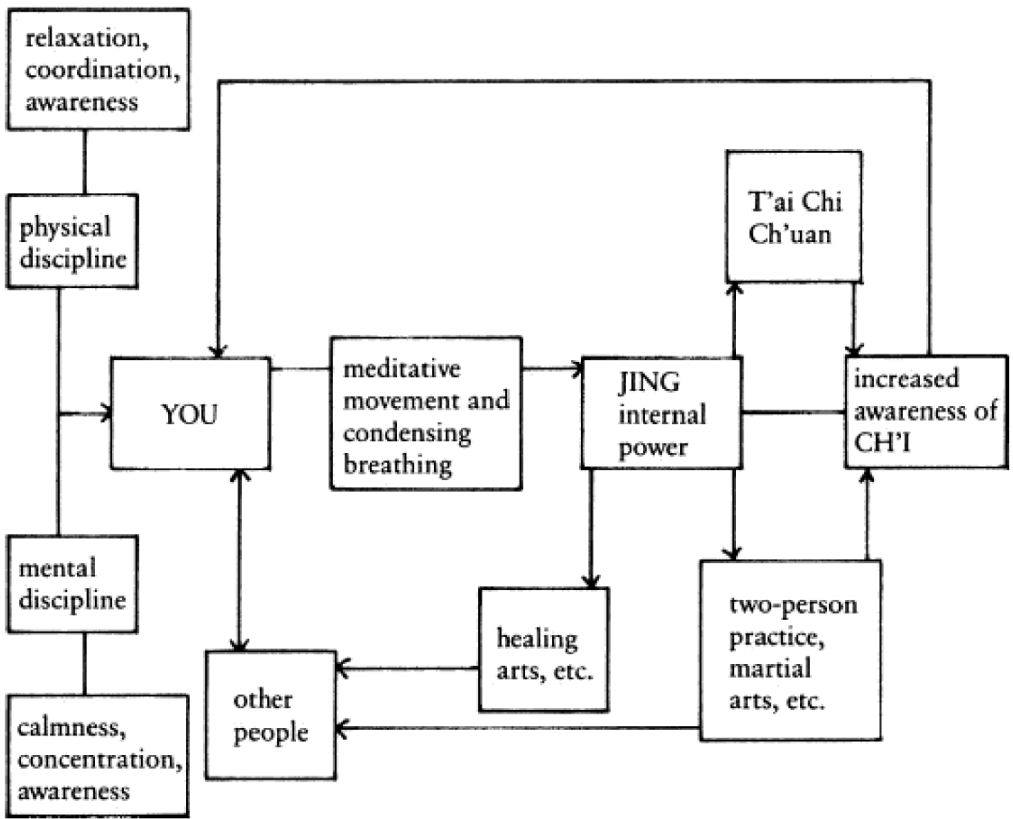


Fig. 2-11

HOW TO INCREASE CH'I AWARENESS

Ch'i is the origin of our life energy; in other words, our life is determined by ch'i. Consequently, a stronger flow of ch'i will ensure stronger life energy. Chinese tradition holds that ch'i flows ceaselessly in the human body. Whenever there is an interference of the flow, or the path is blocked, sickness occurs.

Chinese doctors have always strongly believed that cultivating and strengthening the body's ch'i can cure disease and correct malfunctions of every kind. Such concepts present a complex puzzle to even the most pioneering of Western scientists, who are at a loss to come up with a testing device that would either verify or disprove the existence of ch'i.

This lack of empirical proof has given rise to many debates between those who would embrace the concept of ch'i and those who would insist that it cannot possibly exist. Those who insist that there is no ch'i base their view on today's scientific knowledge, especially that of anatomy, electronics, and chemical analysis. Their argument is that if ch'i cannot be demonstrated then it must not exist. The exponents of ch'i, however, say that if it does not exist, why has it dominated the philosophy of Chinese medicine and the practice of T'ai Chi for so many centuries?

Ch'i is not an element of any kind, but rather it is the origin of everything. Ch'i does not even create itself because, being immune to the laws of creation and destruction, it merely continues to exist. Those who would deny the existence of ch'i, therefore, find that no matter what their arguments are, their understanding of ch'i is far distant from its true meaning.

Setting aside all arguments and opinions about the existence or nonexistence of ch'i, let us examine this phenomenon, with the hope of providing some clues that will help us better understand it. Since ch'i is not an element of matter, it cannot be directly examined by any instrument at this time. Since it is the ultimate energy from which the entire universe and the essence of all existence is derived, ch'i is even immune to the limitations of time and space. This means that because there is ch'i, so there is space. From the T'ai Chi viewpoint, space is not merely emptiness nor just an imaginary concept; rather it is something that is formed by, and subsequently filled with, ch'i.

The assumption that there is an ultimate formation of energy which is beyond the conventional interpretations of existence, and which can thus escape the limitations of time and space, would seem to be self-contradictory and so unacceptable to human reason. Yet this assumption is the foundation of T'ai Chi, the beginning force of Taoism, and the cornerstone of the Chinese cultural pattern.

Skepticism about the existence of ch'i can easily lead to the rationalization that ch'i is a product of the imagination. For example, many people try to explain ch'i as a miracle, as the result of a religious belief of the kind usually associated with some form

of church worship. This attitude is of course an oversimplification. For if ch'i were merely the result of faith and human belief, then it would of necessity disappear if one did not believe in it. The feeling of ch'i circulating within the body can be felt, however, whether or not one has a fertile imagination. In contrast, no matter how hard you try, imagining that you are growing a pair of horns on your head won't cause you to wake up one day to find them substantially manifested for all the world to see. Placing ch'i in the realm of the imagination is thus merely another futile attempt to rationalize it out of existence.

Although in the beginning a certain amount of imagination is needed in order to sharpen your awareness of your own internal energy, the feeling of ch'i flow will, with consistent practice, become substantial enough to convince you that the force flowing within you is real, and not just the product of an overactive imagination.

Since ch'i is what forms our life energy, it follows that everyone has ch'i. But before you try to discipline your ch'i, you must first become aware of its flow within the body. A simple analogy may clarify this: gasoline is produced by refining oil, an element that occurs naturally underground. Before gasoline can be obtained, the oil must first be located, collected from its natural source, and put through the refining process. In the same way, the body already has ch'i; you do not produce it. It is, however, up to you to accumulate your ch'i, reorganize it, and use it to generate the internal power, jing.

The T'ai Chi practitioner can increase the awareness of ch'i by means of the following steps:

1. Relaxation practice
2. Breath control
3. Concentration development
4. Coordination practice
5. Meditation and imagination
6. T'ai Chi meditative movement practice
7. Two-person practice

8. Auxiliary training

By following these steps, which are described in detail in the following pages, the T'ai Chi practitioner, whether beginning or advanced, will gain increased awareness of the ch'i within.

Relaxation Practice: Shoong

Shoong means “to relax,” “to lose,” “to give up,” “to yield.” It is a term that has been adapted and incorporated into the specialized terminology traditionally used by T'ai Chi masters. It is said that when the famous T'ai Chi master Yang Chen-fu was training the late master Cheng Man-ch'ing, Master Yang reminded his student daily to “be shoong, be really, really shoong.” “If you are not shoong,” Master Yang would say, “even just a little bit not shoong, you are not in the *stage* of shoong. You are then in the stage of a loser of T'ai Chi; you will be defeated.”

Since T'ai Chi masters have always emphasized relaxation, shoong has been a subject of interest to T'ai Chi practitioners for centuries. Many have tried to interpret the true meaning of shoong. Indeed, many explanations of what shoong really is have been offered, but little effort has been made to define it authentically, in the classical way. As a result, T'ai Chi students have frequently been misled.

Years ago, as I chatted and had tea with Master Cheng Manch'ing in his attic study (a room he had named the Long Evening Library), he pointed out that, as babies, human beings are relaxed and totally yielding. But after they grow and become “civilized,” they are no longer shoong at all. I was shocked by his words, for they showed that, after having taught T'ai Chi for almost half a century, Master Cheng was feeling frustrated by his teaching experiences.

Master Cheng asked me how I would explain the true meaning of relaxation to my own students in the Chicago area. I told him that I had to use a great many analogies to describe it. I then asked him about his own method of explaining shoong. “Are you still telling your advanced students that you once dreamed that

you lost both arms and since then you have realized the true meaning of shoong?" I asked jokingly. We both laughed. Master Cheng used to tell his students that after he had had that dream his T'ai Chi practice had improved and his ch'i flowed smoothly.

Master Cheng's dream, described partly in seriousness and partly in jest, does help to explain the true meaning of relaxation. Because we use our hands to do most of our work, they are the main source of tension in our body. A beginning T'ai Chi practitioner uses only his hands to perform the movements, without involving the rest of his body. This is why the body appears so stiff. How can a person truly relax if his body is stiff?

In T'ai Chi meditative movement practice, relaxation means to give yourself up completely, both mentally and physically. It means to yield: yield totally to the entire universe, yield to the infinite. When you are able to yield yourself totally to the infinite, you will be able to relax and merge into the unity which the Taoist philosophy describes as the "integration of sky and human."

In other words, if you remain yourself, you will be excluded from the totality of the universe. (see [figure 2-12](#)). If, however, you can give up yourself, then you will truly become part of the universe (as in [figure 2-13](#)).

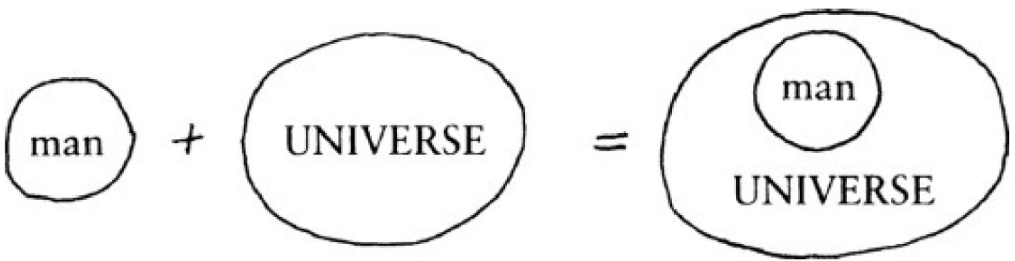
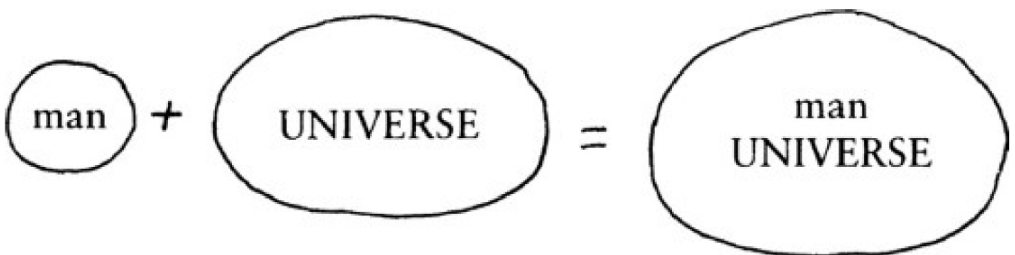


Fig. 2-12



When a cup of water is placed on the surface of a lake, the water is not lake water because it is held away from the larger body by the rigid walls of its container, and so it is unable to yield to the greater force. So, using your imagination, feel that you are as pliable as water, totally flexible, yielding to the shape of the container. When the water that is you is poured into the lake, you are the lake.

If the analogy of the water doesn't work for you, another approach is to meditate that you are floating in the air. As you float, allow your body to become transparent so that the air can circulate through.

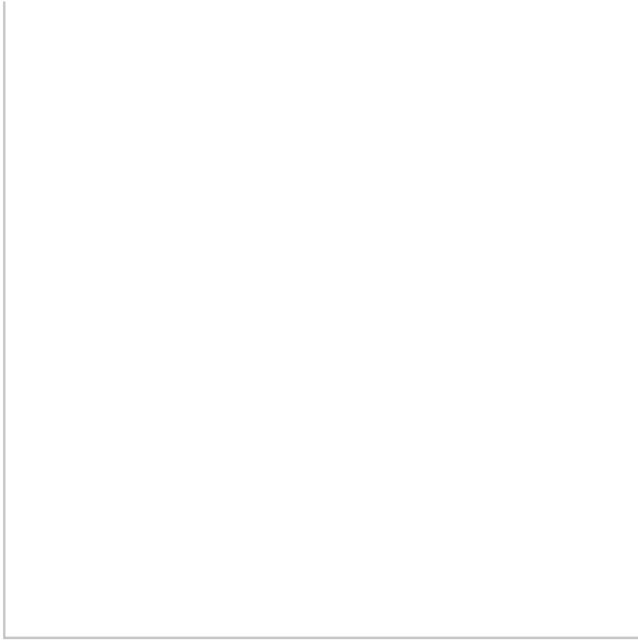
The T'ai Chi practitioner should do a great deal of meditation to relax body and mind, in order to be able to combine with the universe. When you achieve this level, you will flow as the universe flows, move as the universe moves. It is then that you will really appreciate the true meaning of *shoong* in T'ai Chi.

As Master Yang reminded his students constantly, "*Relax; relax completely, as if the body is transparent.*" And Master Cheng advised, "*Relax; each joint, each part of your body should open up and be loose.*" Unless you reach a state of total mental and physical relaxation (*shoong*), the flow of *ch'i* cannot be felt. Therefore, the T'ai Chi practitioner should spend a great deal of time meditating in order to gain awareness of *ch'i*.

Mental relaxation is much more important than physical relaxation, because mental tension will undoubtedly cause physical stiffness. Beginners should start with a calmed mind, progress to a totally relaxed body, and then meditate with the universe. This will allow the practitioner to sense the rhythmic power waves of the universe and to eventually increase the awareness of the *ch'i* circulation within the body, as if it circulated with the entire universe.

Breath Control

In ancient China, T'ai Chi followers and Taoists adopted



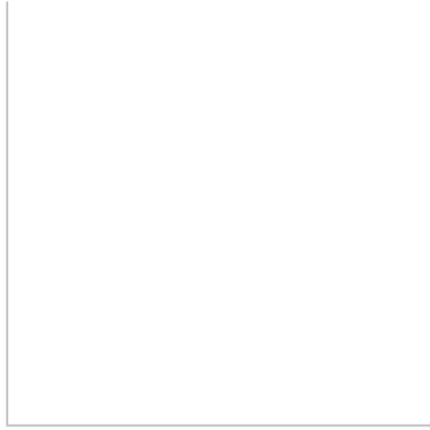
- Exhale, stepping forward with the left foot, and bring up the left hand with the palm facing you.



Hands Attaching Form

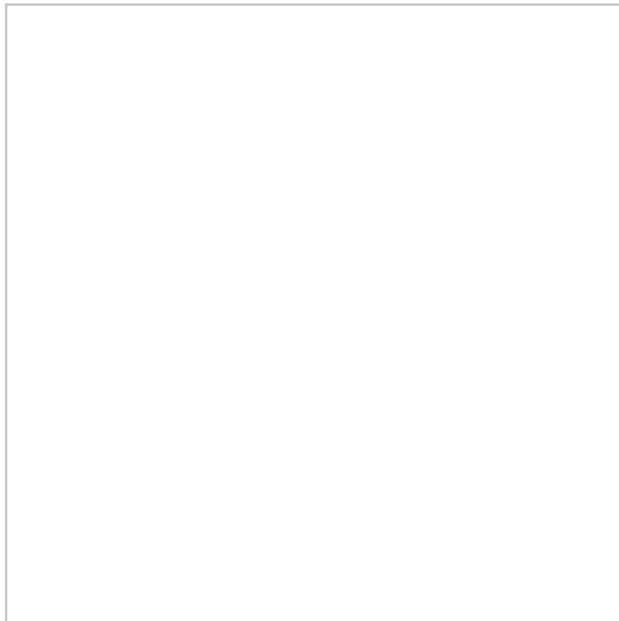


- The forearm is at a forty-five-degree angle to the body.
- The right hand is held at the side of the body.
- Inhale, bringing the right hand under the left elbow and turning the palm of the left hand downward. Perform the Apparent Close-up Form. (See [this page](#)).



Apparent Close-up Form

- Turn to the front. (See [this page](#)–[this page](#)).



- Inhale, shifting your weight to the left foot, and perform a Right Side Inward Carry Tiger movement.
- Shift your weight to the right foot, allowing the right arm to drop down and bringing the left arm across the body. Place the left hand lightly on the right forearm. The right arm is gently curved,