

TAIJIQUAN

Taken from *Tai Chi Chuan* by
Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming

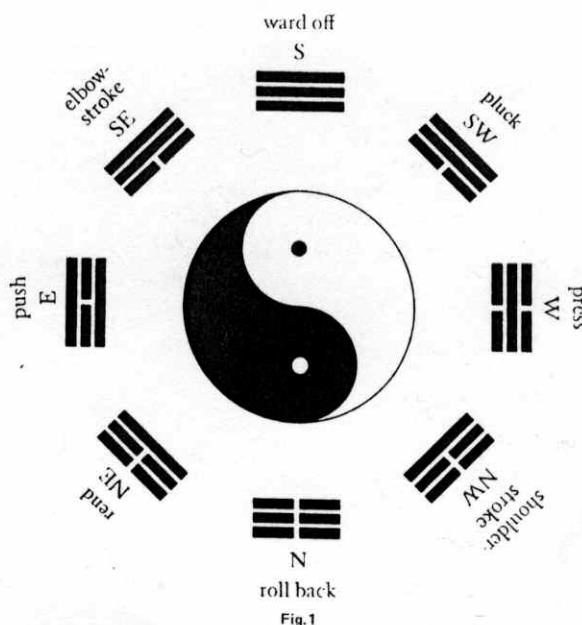
Philosophically, the major concepts of Taijijuan are rooted in Taoism. In particular, two major Taoist texts were, and are still today, important for the Taiji practitioner: the *Tao Te Ching* and the *I Ching*. While neither book is in any way a martial manual, both books firmly establish a way of thinking about the world which affected every aspect of Taijijuan from breathing techniques to power development.

In the *Tao Te Ching*, a book of poems reputedly written by Li Erh or Lao Tzu about the fourth century B.C., one of its major themes which has come to dominate and influence Taiji is the idea of Tao. As presented by Lao Tzu, Tao is the ultimate reality from which all things evolved. Therefore, the goal of life is to follow, without contention, the natural order of the manifestations of Tao, and eventually Tao itself. The emphasis on doing the natural according to the laws of the universe, versus the forced or artificial, was very important to Lao Tzu. The scholar Fung Yu-Lan has stated that, "If one understands these laws and regulates one's actions in conformity with them, one can then turn everything to one's advantage."* It is out of this basic idea that Taiji received its name, which means the Grand Ultimate. The basic goal inherent in the idea of Taiji, or the Grand Ultimate, is to return to the original source of the universe. The closer one can get to the first principle or cause, the more one completes himself. Thus, Taiji practitioners have taken this idea of the Grand Ultimate and have applied it to their martial system. For fighting or for health, the Taiji artist will follow the natural inclination of things.

From the *I Ching*, a book over two thousand years older than Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*, Taiji martial artists took the concept of Yin and Yang. In the natural flow of events, the operating principle that drives the universe is the interplay of two polar forces - Yin and Yang. The Yin is considered the passive force while Yang is considered the active force. Between the dynamic tension of Yin and Yang, all things find their nature.

From the important and fundamental trigrams, (of the *I Ching*), Taijijuan evolved its basic martial strategies. First, by looking at the arrangement of the Bagua, the eight original trigrams, two systems can be separated (Figure 1): the trigrams that are perpendicular to the center, and those that are diagonal to the center. For easier reference, these positions can be represented by a compass system as N, NE, E, SE, S, SW, W, and NW. The early Taiji practitioners came to believe that the eight trigrams represented all the basic directions to which a martial artist could move during a fight.

Along with representing the eight fundamental directions of movement, the trigrams correspond to the eight basic techniques of Taiji. Each of the eight techniques was assigned a direction and a trigram to describe its fundamental nature, as shown in Figure 1. For example, the technique of Ward-Off is composed of three lines which are symbolic of the Yang principle; therefore, this particular technique contains extreme energy and is used with great explosions of power. The three Yang lines indicate that its explosiveness requires exhalation to bring out the full power of the practitioner. On the other hand, the technique of Roll Back contains three Yin lines; therefore, this technique is purely defensive and requires inhalation; it absorbs rather than attacks. A technique such as Push is a mixture of offensive and defensive, although the offensive will dominate because there are two Yang lines to the one Yin line.



In addition to the various directions of movement, the Taiji theorists added active movements which represented the five basic elements which compose the universe: Metal (Gin), Wood (Moo), Water (Sui), Fire (Fou), and Earth (Tu). The five elements are called the Wu Shing and correspond to the movements of *advance, retreat, dodge and beware of the left, dodge and beware of the right, and holding the center*. Taken together, these thirteen elements are formally known as the Thirteen Postures (Shih Shan Shih). The Thirteen Postures are one of the foundation stones for Taiji as a martial art. In fact, many people have called the art Shih Shan Shih in reference to its fundamental principles.

The *I Ching* also influenced Taijijuan in other different and subtle ways. For example, in terms of the overall style, Taiji has two types of meditation that are considered Yin and Yang: conventional sitting meditation and the moving meditation of the Taiji sequence. Taken together, both are needed to fully develop the Yin and Yang aspects of health and martial defense. On a smaller scale, the act of breathing has been broken down into a Yin and Yang relationship: inhaling is Yin and exhaling is Yang.

With this short introduction, the reader can hopefully have a general idea of the philosophical background of Taiji. For a more complete discussion on the *Tao Te Ching* and the *I Ching*, the reader can consult many good scholarly books on this subject. Once the reader has fully acquainted himself with the principles of the two books, he can more clearly see the underlying general theory behind Taijijuan.