

INTRODUCTION

What are the origins of Tai Chi Chuan? The answers to this question vary. The "Physical Alchemists" section of the Ming History states: "In the seventeenth year of the Hong Wu reign (1368-1398), the Emperor summoned Chang San Feng to serve at court, but he refused to go. In the twenty fifth year, San Feng went into retreat in Yunnan. At the beginning of the Chien Wen reign, Wan Puzi visited Wudang after returning from Pingyue. The two were extremely happy to meet." Later, in the fourth year of the Yongle reign, a reader at the Hanlin Academy, Hu Kuang Tsou, stated: "Master Chang San Feng has a thorough mastery of Taoist methods as well as unparalleled martial skills." This record is probably reliable. And so Tai Chi Chuan has existed for six hundred years. During the Ch'ing Dynasty Tongchih reign (1862-74), the founder of Wu style Tai Chi Chuan, Wu Chuan You, studied under father and son Masters Yang Lu Chan and Yang Ban Hou. On Yang Lu Chan's order, he became a disciple of Yang Ban Hou. Wu style has been handed down for five generations now, over more than one hundred years. Throughout this period, it has flourished, and since World War Two has made inroads into South East Asia and North America. Below is a brief summary of the main features of Wu style Tai Chi Chuan:

1. The form is the essence. Regular practice strengthens bones and muscles, and moderates the circulatory system. This is confirmed by the principles of modern biology and pathology. Tai Chi Chuan not only prevents disease, but is an effective treatment for existing illness. Preventing disease and prolonging life, Tai Chi Chuan nourishes one's vitality.
2. Push Hands is the application. The methodology follows the Tai Chi principle of movement and stillness. Applications are expressed through the subtle transformations that occur between fullness and emptiness. Applications use the principles of psychology and physics. Softness overcomes hardness, and hardness reinforces softness. In these ways, Tai Chi Chuan is a practical, effective martial art.
3. When responding to the opponent, closely follow as he contracts, and stay with him as he extends. Tenaciously stick without losing contact. During contact with your opponent, seize the opportunity and defeat the opponent by borrowing his force. This is to out-wit, not out-muscle, the opponent.
4. Tai Chi Chuan is a Taoist practice emphasizing cultivation of martial ethics. Each stance and posture is centred and comfortable. Every motion must be agile, with light circularity. Never harbour violent intentions that could cause the opponent's death. This is considered to be a kindness.
5. Nurture Qi and cultivate Jin energy. There is hard within soft. Let your mind concentrate inwards and intention be stored in the dantien. Then, by practicing and refining, you will gradually become more and more subtle, eventually reaching sublime levels and spiritual clarity. Then mind and body act as one. You will attain the ultimate stage of courageousness and fearlessness. Do not use force because it is too crude and clumsy. Tai Chi Chuan does not employ techniques, for they have a beginning and an ending, with inevitable breaks in continuity. (Only beginners should focus on technique. They must know that there are initial rules; later, the square and circle will form. Eventually technique is transcended. This is to attain the highest level.) The key skills of softness are studied in motion. In movement there is no part of the body not moving, in stillness, no part of the body not still. As well, in movement there is stillness, and in stillness there is movement. Avoid awkwardness while alternating between movement and stillness. Anyone can study Tai Chi Chuan. Movements of the form are purely natural. Respond to the opponent by moving with the flow of his incoming force. Tai Chi Chuan is not difficult to learn. Long-term perseverance eventually brings profound benefits.

