

Tai Chi Chuan

The earth is not divided, and the primordial energy are combined, namely “Tai Chi”. According to Xici of Zhou Yi (Book of Changes), “In the Changes there is the Tai Chi that generates the two primary forces. The two primary forces generate the four images, the four images generate the eight trigrams.” Combining the changes of the five elements within Yin-Yang, the theory of Channels and Collaterals of traditional Chinese medicine, ancient Daoyin (Exercise of Taoism) and Tuna Exercise (Taoist Breathing). Cultivating both internal mind and external body, being gentle and skilful, complementing strength and gentleness, together with mind, breathe, shape and spirit, a traditional martial art in Hang ethnic group is formed, namely Tai Chi Chuan.

Story is going around that Tai Chi is originated from Zhang Zhenren in late Song Dynasty. Zhenren is from Yizhou of Liaodong, also known as Sanfeng. He once happened to see a bird fighting with a snake, and it bent likes Tai Chi to overcome the strength with gentleness, Zhenren thus came to realise that, countering a force rising upward, you become higher; confronting a force sinking downward you become lower. The more your opponent advances the more he feels the distance to be incredibly long; the more your opponent retreats the more he feels the distance to be desperately short. There is Yang within Yin, and Yin within Yang; Yin and Yang are interchangeable and mutually complemented. As a result, Tai Chi Chuan is formed.

According to history, in the mid-seventeen century, Chen Wangtin of Chenjiagou from Wen county in Jiaozuo of Henan, who took the merits of others based on his own family boxing style, integrated Yi Xue and traditional Chinese Medicine, and established a new boxing style following the mechanism of expansion and contraction within the Ying-Yang, strength and gentleness coordination as well as internal and external cultivation. After being passed on for a century to Chen Changxing (1771-1853) and Chen Youben (1780-1858), the 14 generation descendants of the Chen family, it was consolidated and summarised as a systemic theory, and became an orthodox Tai Chi Chuan, generally named “Chen style Tai Chi Chuan.”

During the period from the middle and late Qing Dynasty to Republic of China, Tai Chi Chuan was spread out rapidly, consequently Yang style, Wu style, Wu style, Sun style, He style and other branches were derived. All of them were passed on, and they learnt from each other to form their own characteristic, flourishing a diversified development of Tai Chi Chuan in different style.

Yang style: Established by Yang Luchan (1799-1872) from Yongnian in Hebei, who is the disciple of Chen Changxin, the 14 generation descendant of Chen style Tai Chi Chuan. The boxing style is soft and moderate, stretching elegantly with steady speed, integrating both strength and tenderness, remaining hidden in order not to be shown, combining both lightness and immersion, which is the most refined style amongst all.

Wu style: Established by Wu Yuxiang (1825-1893) from Yongnian in Hebei. It is well known by its small and concise circle movement, being compact and skilful, with simple posture but profound technique; every tactic is distinctive, which is simple and elegant, solemn and unrestrained.

Wu style: Created by Quan You (1834-1902), the disciple of Yang Banhou who is a famous person of Yang style Tai Chi. It is widely known by its unique style of being relaxing and natural, the movement is compact, slow and consistent; it does not involve any vertical nor jumping movement, and it is good at softening.

Sun style: Established by Sun Lutang (1860-1933), who is from Wan County in Heibei. The movement is delicate and agile, with the leg raising high in order to make wider step; it is gentle and smooth, the changes of every move is weightless, and its direction is diversified; both advancement and retreat go one after another, every opening and shutting posture are connected, forming its own style.

He style: Created by Zhaoyuan (1810-1890), who is from Zhao Bao town in Wen County. It incorporates boxing frame, pushing hands and free hand operation; combining material art, body cultivation and well-being together, which is well known by being a practical technique.

No matter which style or branch, Tai Chi Chuan is diversified yet it follows the original principles. Suspending the head without tension and lifting the inner strength, to enable one's internal energy to sink into lower abdominal. Relaxing the breast and stretching out the back; dropping the shoulders and sinking the elbows; loosening the waist and dropping in the hip; centring of tailbone; both upper and lower part work in harmony, with the use of mental mind but not exertion, as if the moving clouds and flowing water; starting from the feet, developing through the leg, dominating at the waist, and expressing through the fingers.

In 2006, Tai Chi Chuan was elected to be listed in the first group of international non-materialised cultural heritage directory.

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