

Introduction

Many years ago, I was introduced to the ideas of Taijiquan performed in accordance with the Eight Trigrams (八掛, Ba Gua) and 64 Hexagrams of the I Ching (*Book of Changes*, Yi). I first read about this correlation of Taijiquan movement with the Yi in a verse at the end of the *Tai Ji Quan Treatise* (太極拳論, Tai Ji Quan Lun) attributed to Zhang Sanfeng (張三豐) of the Song dynasty (960–1279 CE), the creator of Taijiquan itself.

At the end of the discourse, Zhang states that the Eight Postures of Taijiquan (see *Foundation of Yi Tai Chi* in the Appendices) are each related to one of the Ba Gua. The posture of *Warding-Off*, for example, is correlated to Heaven (☰ 乾, Qian), *Rolling-Back* with Earth (☷ 坤, Kun), *Pressing* with Water (☵ 坎, Kan), and *Pushing* with Fire (☲ 離, Li). Furthermore, *Pulling* is correlated with Wind (☴ 巽, Xun), *Splitting* with Thunder (☳ 震, Zhen), *Elbowing* with Valley (☱ 兌, Dui), and *Shouldering* with Mountain (☶ 艮, Gen).¹ From this section of the treatise, I found myself on a journey in trying to understand this connection between Taijiquan and the I Ching. Little did I know it would consume decades of my interest and attention.

In 1988, I was introduced to Taiji Master Syoung Jyh Jian in Taipei, Taiwan. His Taiji form was constructed on the 64 hexagrams of the I Ching—thus he taught and practiced a 64-posture Taijiquan form. Much was omitted in his outline of this form, as he simply made the correlations. I took it upon myself to fill in many of the gaps.

Master Syoung claimed that he learned the form from his teacher, who likewise learned it from his teacher, and so on back into antiquity. Needless to say, I really liked performing Tai Chi in this 64-posture structure (not that I think doing so is superior to any other Taijiquan form). It's just that I've always had an interest in the I Ching and since Zhang Sanfeng stated that Taijiquan was created in accordance with the Yi, it only seemed logical to perform it with 64 postures.

At some point in 1993, I began to change over from doing my teacher's 150-posture Taijiquan form to the Yi Tai Chi 16- and 64-posture arrangements I created, but I maintained the manner of performing each posture the same way Master T.T. Liang had taught me. Thus, the postures themselves didn't feel different to me, but the order of performing them was unique. When I told Master Liang that I was switching over from his 150-posture form to a 64-posture arrangement, he chuckled and said, "You are a rebel like me. Only rebels can really get something. I stopped doing my teacher's form (37 postures) to do my 150-posture form, so we are birds of a feather. Just do your best, young man."

¹ See *Tai Ji Quan Treatise: Attributed to the Song Dynasty Daoist Priest Zhang Sanfeng*, Daoist Immortal Three Peaks Zhang Series (Valley Spirit Arts, 2011) and also *T'ai Chi According to the I Ching: Embodying the Principles of the Book of Changes* (Healing Arts Press, 2001).

The manner in which I have structured and correlated this 64-posture form, to be in accordance with the principles of the I Ching, was in the use of an arrangement created by the very accomplished Chinese scholar Shaoyong (1011–? CE). He divided the 64 hexagrams into eight houses (or sections)—and, in this way, eight sections of eight postures completes a 64-posture form.² I further divided the form into what I call the “Before Heaven Yi Tai Chi Form,” which is basically the first 12 postures as counted in the longer After Heaven Form but as 16 postures in the short form, so that those first learning Taijiquan would not find it too daunting, and then the “After Heaven Yi Tai Chi Form” presents the full 64-posture arrangement.

Traditionally, in Chinese culture, nothing has ever been accepted or considered worthy unless it can be correlated to the Eight Trigrams of the I Ching and the Five Element activities. Taijiquan is very much aligned with these two theories.

In Zhou Dunyi’s Illustration on Tai Ji (see below), Wu Ji (無極, the Illimitable) is shown as creating Tai Ji (太極, the Supreme Ultimate, first circle), then developing it into the Ba Gua (Eight Trigrams, second circle), and thus into the Five Activities of Earth, Metal, Water, Wood, and Fire (the five squares in the middle of the illustration). These are correlated with the Taijiquan principles of Advancing, Withdrawing, Looking-Left, Gazing-Right, and Central Equilibrium (again, see Appendices for more information).

Zhou Dunyi’s Illustration on Tai Ji

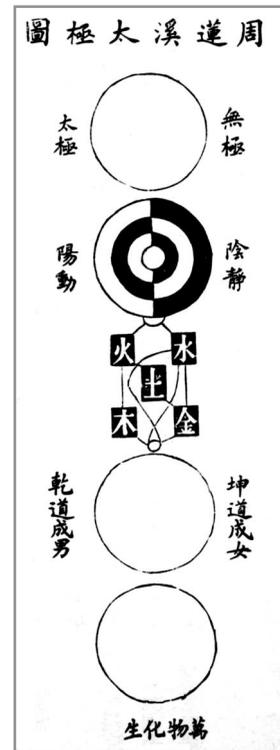
First Circle: Left side, *Tai Ji*, “Supreme Ultimate.”
Right side, *Wu Ji*, “The Illimitable.”

Second Circle: Left side, “Yang/Movement.” Right side, “Yin/Tranquility.” Left side of the circle is *Li* (☲ Fire). Right side is *Kan* (☵ Water). The four divisions in each half of the circle represent the Eight Trigrams.

The Five Elements: Earth (Tu) in the middle. Upper left is *Hou* (Fire). Upper right is *Shui* (Water). Lower left is *Mu* (Wood). Lower right is *Jin* (Metal).

Third Circle: Left side, “Completion of the male,” *Qian Dao* (the Tao of the *Creativity of Heaven* ☰). Right side, “Completion of the female, *Kun Dao* (the Tao of the *Receptivity of Earth* ☷).

Fourth Circle: “Creation of the Myriad Things,” all phenomena, the Ten Thousand Things (萬物, Wan Wu).



² See Appendices for graphics of this process.

After having taught and practiced the Yi Tai Chi forms for eight years, I published *Tai Chi According to the I Ching* and began calling this system Yi Tai Chi (易太極, Tai Chi Changes). Since then I've taught the forms to a few hundred students (of which Patrick was one of the very first) and, from sales of the book, I imagine many others are also performing the Before Heaven Yi Tai Chi form. Even more have been clamoring for this book on the full 64 postures.

I can honestly say this present book is as much for beginners as it is for the more advanced students of Taijiquan. All readers will find a great deal of information to digest. Normally, I would say the world has too many Tai Chi books, as just about every teacher of any renown has published their version of the practice. That being so, I was reluctant to add just another typical work to the pile—unless it were to have elements and information previously not presented anywhere else.

Thankfully to that end, this work is unlike any other book on Tai Chi that I've ever seen and it should prove to be an invaluable edition to the ever-growing literature of Taijiquan.

It is my fervent hope that all readers of this work acquire some new insight or motivation in learning and practicing the incredible art of Taijiquan.

—Stuart Alve Olson