

Tai chi: a practical face of taoism? essay sample



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INTRODUCTION

Even as the ancient marshal art Tai Chi continues to grow in popularity, its genesis and evolution point at its strong connection with many nuances of Chinese philosophy. This paper probes on that to find the truth about this wonderful, multi-beneficial martial art.

Origin

It's full name is Tai Chi Chuan, meaning "Grand ultimate fist" (Tai Chi). The story which has gained maximum ground as to how Tai Chi came into being, narrates about a fight between a snake and a Crane in a tree, which was closely observed by Chang San-Feng a monk. In that fight, the movement of the snake, the eventual winner, provided San-Feng a new food for thought and he went on to observe other animals' movements too, before devising Tai Chi Chuan. While one estimation of this happening points [...] at the period between 1279-1368 A. D., another brackets it within the period 1391-1459 A. D. Whatever it be, Tai Chi got further polished and is believed to be passed on to the Chen family in Honan province of China, who guarded its secret for 14 generations by being the sole teacher of this martial art. Finally that tradition of four hundred years was broken when an old Master from the family was impressed by the keenness and talent of a man named Yang Lu-Chan and allowed him to practice this secret art freely (History of Tai Chi, The History of Tai Chi).

What is Tai Chi

It is a form of a martial art with more dimensions in it. It was first evolved into five styles, viz., *Chen*, *Yang*, *Old Wu*, *Wu*, and *Sun*. With passage of time

those styles also ramified and remodeled themselves. However, all of them focus on creating a total balance in body, mind and action, supplemented by calm concentration and fine flexibility – all to develop and sustain good body [...] and mind, while keeping oneself equipped for self-defense (What is Tai Chi).

Yin-Yang, Taoism & Tai Chi

While the word ‘*Chi*’ in Tai Chi has a connotation in Chinese philosophy and medicine (there it is known as ‘life force’), the Yin and Yang theory, one of the prime components of Chinese philosophy, also has some bearing over the Tai Chi movements (Allen). While the ‘cool’ Yin (the dark and the symbol of night) and the ‘warm’ Yang (the White and the symbol of the day) are the two halves of one fuller object, Tai Chi is also poised to meet either dark side or the clear side of the life, and through its circular [...] or semicircular movements it is bound to remind the ‘dynamic duality’ of Yin-Yang duo, who forms the ‘circle of life’ (History, The History).

Taoism, the ancient philosophy of China, which preaches about humility, self-control and integrity of mind and body, has a telling influence on Tai Chi. “To return to the root is the rest”, is the famous proverb of Taoism, which talks about the ground reality, while the aim of a Tai Chi student is to develop and sustain balance in his/her every move, which is considered as a ground reality in its truest form.

The relationship between Tai Chi and Taoism is better observed when the idea expressed in the verses of Lao Tsu, the founder of Taoism, is echoed in the movements of Tai Chi. As for example:

“ Stiff and unbending is the principle of death.

Gentle and yielding is the principle of life.”

The Tai Chi movements are all about smooth and gentle flexibility. Lao Tsu goes on to write:

“ Thus an army without flexibility never wins a battle.

A tree that is unbending is easily broken.”

This is one of the many instances where the advices in Taoism took exemplary shapes in the practice of Tai Chi.

On the other hand, the practice of martial art was also very common among the Taoists (around 122 B. C), which later passed on to the Buddhists (sixth century A. D). It was their style of movements, which were [...] undoubtedly aligned with Taoism, has remarkable resemblance with Tai Chi movements. Altogether it seems as if the whole movement philosophy of Taoism (' path' or the ' way') is being interpreted by Tai Chi in its rhythmic steps and movements (Tai Chi & Taoism).

And there is more. The various names of Tai Chi movements bear connotations from Taoist philosophy of softness and effortlessness, such as

' Cloud Hands'

' Wind Rolls the Lotus Leaves'

' Brush Dust Against the Wind'

' Push the Boat with the Current'

' Winds Sweeps the Plum Blossoms. '

Even the various contemplative phrases, which form the basement of Taoism, find their way as the titles of various Tai Chi movements, such as,

' Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain'

' Wild Horse Leaps the Ravine', and so on (Tai Chi & Taoism).

Finally, it is worthy to [...] mention here that the special significance of the number ' 5' in Taoism in its symbolic representation of certain elements (five colors, five emotions, etc.), is also reflected in Tai Chi's certain movements (Five Cloud Hands' or ' Five Repulse Monkeys', etc.), not to mention about its main attitudes, which are also five – viz ., *advance, retreat, look left, gaze right* and *central* equilibrium (History of Tai Chi, Tai Chi & Taoism).

CONCLUSION

All factors cited above culminate into one truth that Tai Chi is governed, guided and nourished by the ancient Chinese philosophy, Taoism. While Taoism tells about finding the ' real path' of life, Tai Chi interprets those sayings into its various movements. Hence it is the practical face of Taoism.

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