

# Taijiquan Treatise<sup>1</sup> 太極拳論

Translated and interpreted by Sam Masich (馬希奇)

*Taiji*<sup>2</sup> is born of *wuji*<sup>3</sup> and is the mother of *yin* and *yang*.<sup>4</sup>

In motion it separates. In stillness it combines.

Without excess, no urgency, follow while bending, engage while extending.

When the opponent is hard, I am yielding; it is called *zou*.<sup>5</sup>

When I adhere to the opponent, it is called *nian*.<sup>6</sup>

If the opponent's movement is quick, then I am quick.

If the opponent's movement is slow, then I follow slowly.

Though transformation produces ten thousand outcomes, the principle is unchanging.

By martial proficiency, one gradually awakens *dong jin*.<sup>7</sup>

From *dong jin*, one progresses toward *shen ming*.<sup>8</sup>

Without long, persistent and arduous practice,<sup>9</sup> one cannot pass through to deeper knowledge.

Empty the neck to lead energy to the head-top.<sup>10</sup>

Sink *qi* to the *dantian*.<sup>11</sup>

No leaning or leaning-on.

Suddenly hide, now appear.

If the left-side is weighted upon, the left-side empties.

If there is pressure on the right-side, the right-side disappears.

Facing up, it becomes even higher. Looking down, it becomes even deeper.

Advancing, it further lengthens. Retreating, it becomes increasingly urgent.

One feather cannot be added, and a fly cannot alight.

The opponent does not know me—only I know him.

A hero moving toward invincibility—thus prevailing over all.

There are many paths to skillfulness but although they use different powers,

for the most part they don't go beyond the strong bullying the weak, and the slow resigning to the swift.

The powerful hitting the weak and slow hands submitting to swift hands:

theses are all the results of natural advantages and not of well-trained power.

Consider the saying, 'Four ounces turns<sup>12</sup> a thousand pounds.'

Obviously this cannot be a victory through strength.

Witness an old person<sup>13</sup> resisting numerous people: how can it be due to swiftness?

Stand precisely balanced. Resemble a cart-wheel.

Sinking to one side allows following<sup>14</sup>. Symmetrical force<sup>15</sup> is stagnant.

If one has spent years practicing skills but still cannot neutralize,

and is rather, always governed by the opponent,

one has not apprehended the fault of symmetrical weightedness.

If one desires to avoid this defect, one must know *yin* and *yang*.

To adhere means to receive<sup>16</sup>. To yield means to adhere.

*Yin* cannot leave<sup>17</sup> *yang*; *yang* cannot leave *yin*.

*Yin* and *yang* mutually aid and change each other.

Grasping this aspect, one can arrive at *dong jin*.

After *dong jin* is acquired, more practice will improve the essence.<sup>18</sup>

Silently memorize and deeply ponder and gradually<sup>19</sup> one can accomplish anything one pleases.

Fundamentally, 'give up self-centeredness and accept others'.<sup>20</sup>

Many mistakenly 'give up the near to seek the far'.<sup>21</sup>

It is said, 'A slight deviation will lead one thousands of paces astray.'

The pupil must clearly distinguish, hence this treatise.

- <sup>1</sup> Attributed variously to Zhang Sanfeng (張三丰), Wang Zhongyue (王宗岳) and Wu Yixiang (武禹襄 1812-1880). A footnote sometimes appended to both *Taijiquan Jing* and *Taijiquan Lun* is attributed to *Yang Luchan* (1799-1872) and reads: “This treatise was left by the patriarch *Zhang Sanfeng* of *Wudang Mountain*, with a desire toward helping able people everywhere to achieve longevity, and not merely as a means to martial skill.”
- <sup>2</sup> tàijí (太極) the ‘great extremes’; ‘complementary duality’.
- <sup>3</sup> wújí (無極) ‘no extremes’; ‘absolute void’.
- <sup>4</sup> yīn and yáng (陰陽) are the two components of tàijí (太極) and are expressed in the taiji diagram (☯ tàijí tú 太極圖)
- <sup>5</sup> zǒu (走) literally means ‘run’ or ‘go’. It is usually translated as ‘receive’ as in: allow the energy or force to ‘run’ or ‘go’ through the structure.
- <sup>6</sup> nián (黏 or 粘) ‘adhere’ or ‘stick’. Usually in taijiquan writings combined with zhān (沾 or 粘) to form either zhān-nián (沾黏)—sometimes spelled (粘黏).
- <sup>7</sup> dǒng jìn (懂勁) ‘comprehending’, ‘understanding’ or sometimes ‘interpreting’ energy.
- <sup>8</sup> shén míng (神明) ‘spiritual illumination’, ‘enlightenment’. ‘Shénmíng’ as a single word refers to ‘gods’, ‘deities’ and ‘divinities’. The implications have to do with either reaching an extraordinary or even esoteric level of development or—since ‘shenming’ were thought to be spiritually ‘channeled’—the idea of mediating subtle energies.
- <sup>9</sup> gōng lì zhī jiǔ (功力之久). Some renderings use yòng’ lì zhī jiǔ (用力之久). Both express the idea of developing skill by materially exerting oneself over a long period of time. This idea is also summed up well by the expression ‘gōngfū’ (功夫) which has to do with ability or craftsmanship developed through persevering effort.
- <sup>10</sup> xū lǐng dǐng jìn (虛領頂勁) ‘emptiness led to the top’ energy.
- <sup>11</sup> qì chén dān tián (氣沉丹田) ‘vital energy’ sinks to the body’s ‘energy centre’.
- <sup>12</sup> sì liǎng bō qiān jīn (四兩撥千斤) ‘Accomplish a great task with little effort by clever maneuvers’ is a common Chinese expression. bō (撥) is often translated as ‘deflect’, or ‘repel’.
- <sup>13</sup> mào dié (耄耋) ‘aged person’ (above 70 years).
- <sup>14</sup> suí (隨) ‘following’. Yijing Hexagram #17: ‘following’ 隨 (suí 隨).
- <sup>15</sup> shuāng chóng (雙重) Often translated as ‘double weighted’. This has led many practitioners to mistakenly believe that body-weight should never be distributed evenly in the stance. ‘Shuāngchóng’ as a single word also means, ‘two-fold’, ‘dual’ or ‘split’ as in a ‘split’ personality. The implication is that one must avoid expressing force in an unfocused fashion.
- <sup>16</sup> nián (黏) adhere—as in ‘sticking-adhering energy’ (zhān-nián 粘黏勁) zǒu (走)—as in ‘receiving energy’ (zǒu jìn 走勁). This is probably the key phrase in the ‘Taijiquan Lun’ (黏即是走, 走即是黏). It implies that an understanding of the taijiquan theory hinges entirely on an understanding of these two terms.
- <sup>17</sup> lí (離) ‘leave’—stems from Hexagram #30 of the ‘yijing’; ‘clinging’ 離 (lí 離) 離 over 離. Yin and yang cling to one another like flames.
- <sup>18</sup> yù jīng (愈精) ‘improve’ or ‘heal’ the ‘spirit’ or ‘life essence’ (精神).
- <sup>19</sup> jiàn (漸) ‘gradual’ Hexagram #17 of the ‘yijing’; ‘gradual progress’ 漸 (jiàn 漸).
- <sup>20</sup> shě jǐ cóng rén (捨己從人) a popular expression: ‘drop one’s own opinion and accept views held by others.’ Leave one’s ego aside to learn from others.
- <sup>21</sup> shě jìn qiú yuǎn (捨近求遠) a popular expression: ‘forget the obvious while looking for the esoteric.’