

What is Taijiquan (Tai Chi Chuan)?

According to ancient Chinese philosophy the universe was once an undivided whole in a state of Wuji (no extremities). Then the force known as Taiji (the Supreme Ultimate) divided the universe into Yin and Yang and initiated a natural cycle of constant change between Yin and Yang. Quan (Chuan) is a word used to denote empty hand fighting. It is often translated by the English words boxing or fist. Taijiquan therefore is the boxing style based on the philosophical principles of Taiji and Yin and Yang.

What is Qigong (Chi Kung) and How Does It Relate to Taijiquan?

Qigong is any form of activity that is aimed at the cultivation of internal energy (Qi). Qigong is divided into two categories: Nei Dan, which involves internal exercises such as meditation, and Wai Dan, which is external exercise involving physical movements. Qigong is divided into several types, including Medical Qigong aimed at improving health and treating illnesses, Religious Qigong aimed at achieving enlightenment or Buddhahood, Scholar Qigong aimed at achieving longevity, and Martial Qigong aimed at cultivating Qi for fighting ability. Taijiquan falls into the category of Martial Qigong.

Yang Style Taijiquan

Yang Style is one of five major styles of Taijiquan. The others are Chen, Wu, Hao, and Sun. Yang style was developed from Chen style in the 19th Century by Yang Luchan (1771-1853). Knowledge of Taijiquan, like most martial arts at this time, was regarded as a life and death secret, and the techniques were closely guarded, taught only to one's family and a few trusted, non-relatives.

Yang style developed several variations as it descended from Yang Luchan. His son Yang Jianhou (1839-1917) developed the so-called "medium frame" of the style, while another son, Yang Banhou (1837-1892), developed the "small frame." Yang Chengfu (1883-1936), the third son of Yang Jianhou, noticed that Taijiquan had many beneficial effects in treating chronic illnesses and in improving people's overall health. He developed the "large frame" and began teaching it widely. The "large frame" was easier to practice than the other variations, and it allowed many more people to learn and practice the art and thereby improve their overall health. The "large frame" is the most widely practiced of the Yang-style variations, and the form we practice and teach at Qi Elements.

Yang Zhenduo, a son of Yang Chengfu, continued to teach his father's "large frame" and brought it to the United States in the late 20th Century. Yang Zhenduo's grandson, Yang Jun, continues to teach this style in the US and is now headquartered in Seattle, Washington. His website is <http://www.yangfamilytaichi.com/>. Other variations of the "large frame" Yang style include a slightly different style developed by Cheng Man-ching, the first of Yang Chengfu's students to bring Taijiquan to the United States.