

## Tai Chi Chuan and its Benefits

Sherry Zhang\*

Pacific College of Oriental Medicine, San Diego, California, United States

\*Corresponding author: Sherry Zhang, Pacific College of Oriental Medicine, San Diego, California, United States, Tel: 9175181504; E-mail: szhang@pacificcollege.edu

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### Abstract

Tai Chi Chuan is an ancient Chinese body-mind practice. People practice it for different perspectives. The benefits and potential of Tai Chi Chuan for general health, alternative treatments for chronic diseases, anti-aging and social wellbeing, have been recognized by extensive research. Tai Chi Chuan is an art of living pursuit for a healthy, harmonious and happy life.

**Keywords:** Tai Chi Chuan; Yin and Yang; Internal martial art; Moving meditation; Alternative medicine; Anti-aging solution; Lifestyle

- Wu Hao style of Wu Yu-hsiang (1812–1880).
- Wu style of Wu chuan-yu (1834–1902) and his son Wu Chien-chuan (1870–1942).
- Sun style of Sun Lu-t'ang (1861–1932) [1].

Initially people practiced Tai Chi Chuan for its martial purpose. By learning and practicing it, it was found that the entire body was strengthened and breathing became more regulated. Additional positive results included the calming of the mind, cultivating Qi, and lifting one's spirit. This encouraged more and more people to practice Tai Chi Chuan worldwide. More doctors and health professionals started recommending their patients practice Tai Chi.

In 1956 Simplified 24 Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan was created and promoted nationally and then worldwide by China Sports committee. It has gradually become a world renowned body-mind form of exercise which has led to numerous studies and clinical trials designed with one of two aims: either to assess physiological responses during the performance or to assess the impact of this exercise on general health and fitness.

## What is Tai Chi Chuan?

Tai Chi Chuan is a body and mind fitness regimen guided by Ancient Chinese wisdom - Yin and Yang, and Five Elements principles. It belongs to Chinese internal Martial Arts and has been practiced since 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Historical records show that Yang Luchan (1799-1872), the creator of Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan, trained with the Chen family for approximately 18 years before he started to teach the art in Beijing. This strongly suggests that his art was based on, or heavily influenced by, the Chen family art. The Chen family can trace the development of their art back to Chen Wangting in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Martial arts historian Xu Zhen believed that the Taiji of Chen Village had been influenced by the Taizu changquan style practiced at the nearby Shaolin Monastery, while Tang Hao, another martial arts historian, thought it was derived from a treatise by the Ming dynasty general Qi Jiguang, Jixiao Xinshu ("New Treatise on Military Efficiency"), written approximately 1561-1562, which discussed several martial arts styles including Taizu changquan [1].

There are five major styles of Tai Chi Chuan and each name of the style followed its creator's family:

- Chen style of Chen Wangting (1580–1660).
- Yang style of Yang Luchan (1799–1872).

## Tai Chi Chuan in the United States

"Choy Hok Pang, a disciple of Yang Chengfu, was the first known proponent of tàijíquán to openly teach in the United States in 1939. Subsequently, his son and student Choy Kam Man emigrated to San Francisco from Hong Kong in 1949 to teach t'ai-chi ch'uan in San Francisco's Chinatown. Choy Kam Man taught until he died in 1994" [1]. In the United States there is growing awareness of the benefits of Tai Chi Chuan. According to statistic it shows the number of participants, aged six and older, practicing Tai Chi in the United States in 2015 had reached 3.65 million [2].

## The Benefits of Tai Chi Chuan

The benefits of Tai Chi Chuan come from different perspectives:

**As a fitness routine:** It is considered a moderate intensity (doesn't exceed 55% of maximal oxygen intake), low impact, aerobic exercise. It is not restricted by age, sex, space or time. Many studies show regular Tai Chi Chuan exercise promotes general health including cardio-respiratory and

musculoskeletal function, posture control capacity, and the immune system. [3] When Tai Chi Chuan was compared to other moderate exercises performed at equal intensity, Tai Chi showed a significantly lower ventilatory equivalent ( $V_e/V_{O2MAX}$ ), meaning the exercise resulted in more efficient breathing than other moderate exercises [4].

The earliest medical research started from 1959 by Beijing Medical University Institute of Sports Medicine. By using the one-minute step test, ECGs, and blood pressure, they examined 31 participants, age from 50-89, who had practiced Tai Chi Chuan for over 40 years. Compared with a control group "Tai Chi Chuan practitioners showed significantly better cardiac function and lower blood pressure" [5].

Some studies have focused on the impact of Tai Chi Chuan on immunological capacity on those without and with prior Tai Chi Chuan training. One study on those without prior training was done by Zhang [6] who studied the effect of Tai Chi on human immunoglobulin, IgA, IgG, IgM, and IgE, on thirty subjects (15 male, 15 Female, ages 50-65) after two months of Tai Chi Chuan training. The training included learning the 48 form for one hour of practice each day. Before the study was started baseline blood samples were drawn. Results after two months showed that Tai Chi significantly increased IgG in men and significantly decreased the level of IgM in woman, all within the normal range. This showed that Tai Chi may enhance the capacity of the immune system.

Another study by Li and Shen [7] studied changes in the number and activity of natural killer cells in peripheral blood of eight male Tai Chi Masters, average age 68-69, who had practiced Tai Chi Chuan every day for one to two hours for approx. nineteen years. For the study and after a twenty-minute Tai Chi session, blood samples were taken of each Master. It was found that the numbers and activity of natural killer cells in the peripheral blood had significantly increased. Also, this study found a concomitant increase in the level of cortisone in the blood. This indicates that Tai Chi Chuan may moderate the capacity of the immune system.

As an internal Martial Art, its philosophy is based on Yin and Yang principles "When the opponent is hard, I am soft", "If the opponent's is quick, then quickly respond; if his movement is slow. Then follow slowly" [8]. It emphasizes on maintaining your balance meanwhile neutralizing the opponent's force against you and destroying his or her balance.

As a sport, intense competition involves high level of skills, strength, balance, flexibility, coordination etc. Tai Chi athletes need comprehensive training to keep body, mind and energy level in greatest shape. It also has become the complement training for other sports. For example, Tom Brady, one of the greatest NFL quarterbacks in the history of the game, with five Super Bowl wins, practices Tai Chi. He practices it for his defense training and promotion of inner peace and to alleviate stress and anxiety [9]. Recently NBA's Stephen Curry has started incorporating Tai Chi into his pre-game routine with other teammates joining him as well [10].

As a meditation, the circular and rhythmic motion guided by focusing one's mind leads the body into a meditative stage

which people call "moving meditation". It is apparent then that it will benefit the parasympathetic nerve system which helps reduce stress and improve concentration.

As complementary and alternative medicine, Tai Chi has six interdependent therapeutic elements which include:

- 1) Tai Chi is a moderately aerobic exercise.
- 2) Tai Chi trains agility and mobility.
- 3) Tai Chi involves learning and memorization of new skills and movement patterns.
- 4) Tai Chi includes training in sustained attentional focus, shifting, and multi-tasking.
- 5) the meditative and relaxation training of Tai Chi.
- 6) Greater time allocated to leisure activities and social support [11].

Existing science evidences has proven its benefit for people who suffer from chronic disease. "A recent report in the British Journal of Sports Medicine looked at 33 articles and 24 studies featuring nearly 1,600 participants. The report concluded that tai chi is an effective relief treatment for people suffering from breast cancer, heart failure, osteoarthritis, and chronic obstructive respiratory disease (COPD). Furthermore, it was found to help people with one or more of these conditions and did not cause any additional pain or breathlessness" [12]. Medical school offer Tai Chi Chuan class to students as a requirement is trendy.

As Anti – aging solution, the growing evidence shows that Tai Chi Chuan can help slow down the aging process. A new study found that those who practiced Tai Chi enjoyed a significantly higher number of CD34 cells than those in the other groups. CD34+, known as the stem cells, is "markers for hematopoietic stem cells (blood stem cells) involved in cell self-renewal, differentiation and proliferation" [13]. Other evidence indicates "Tai Chi may be an effective, safe, and practical intervention for maintaining BMD in postmenopausal women" and can positively impact other risk factors associated with low BMD such as reduced fall frequency, increased musculoskeletal strength and reduced fracture risk [14]. Also Tai Chi may afford greater effectiveness in enhancing cognitive function based on its six interdependent therapeutic elements [11].

When people get older, many with less physical exercise options can choose Tai Chi as a safe lifelong practice offering tremendous benefits in many ways.

As a lifestyle, Tai Chi performance is not just a simple exercise but an art of living. It deeply connects the Chinese cultures of Taoism, Confucianism and Traditional Chinese Medicine, among others. By understanding and applying the Yin-Yang principle we pursuit a life with balance, inner peace and happiness as well as longevity.

## Conclusion

Tai Chi Chuan is an ancient Chinese body-mind practice. It came to the United States in 1939. People practice it for different perspectives. The benefits and potential of Tai Chi

Chuan for general health, alternative treatments for chronic diseases, anti-aging and social wellbeing, have been recognized by extensive research. Tai Chi Chuan is an art of living pursuit for a healthy, harmonious and happy life.

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