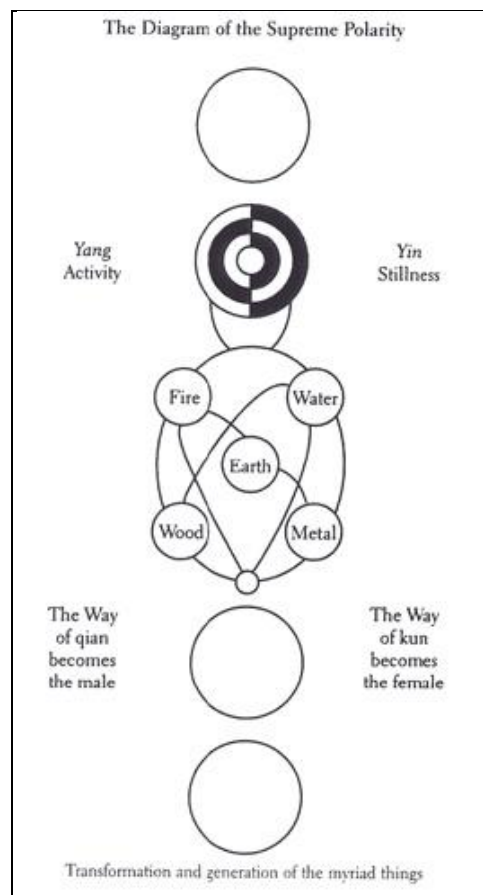


Tai Chi Chuan and Taoism (Daoism)

This is a very simplified summary of a complex topic. Many people are (rightly or wrongly- depending on your own position) drawn to Tai Chi for its potency as a philosophical, mystical or meditative practice as much as, or more than, as a martial art. It certainly has its origins in both, since ancient Taoists practiced `internal alchemy` - ritual physical exercises and breathing techniques designed to transform the adept and bring enlightenment about the Tao or `the way of all things`. This is the origin behind Chi Gung exercises, the practicing of the Tai Chi forms, and the Tai Chi Nei Gung (`internal strength`) exercises that more advanced Tai Chi students can ask to learn.

But also on a cosmological level there is a connection between Tai Chi Chuan and early Taoist ideas about the creation of the universe and the purpose of mankind. The 11th century diagram of the Taoist Zhou Dun-yi pictures this five-stage process:



Based on Dan Docherty's [Complete Tai Chi Chuan](#) and [Decoding the Classics for the Modern Martial Artist](#)

And we also need this extract from Zhou`s verse explanation:

Wu Chi yet Tai Chi

Tai Chi moves to produce Yang-

Movement to the limit then still.

Stillness then produces Yin-

Stillness to the limit then returns to movement.

.....

Yang changes with Yin and they unite to produce water, fire, wood, metal and earth

[these five elements and two principles combine to....]

Give birth to the 10,000 things.

The 10,000 things repeatedly give birth and transform without end.

The first empty circle in the diagram is *Wu Chi yet Tai Chi* (No ultimate yet Supreme ultimate). This is a state of nothingness, yet full with potential. It has it`s parallel in the form position `Tai Chi at rest`, with the arms relaxed, but the hands raised and at right-angle to the wrist, so we are, in a sense, doing `nothing yet with potential energy`. The verse and the diagram then go on to show how from this pre-big bang state, the forces of Yin and Yang are released, which in turn generate the five elements and these generate the multitude of things in the universe.

In this way, performing the Tai Chi forms, with their stillness and motion, their gentleness and force, their palm-up and palm-down, their up and down, their left and right- the forms enact this Taoist understanding of the origin of the universe and the forces that keep it in balance.

The verse goes on to declare that the balance of Yin and Yang principles is behind the nature of Heaven and of Earth. In between them, the right-minded human being will likewise live and be in this harmony and balance. And in this way, the performing of the Tai Chi forms, with their balance and harmony, enacts the most moral way to be.

David Sanderson

Based on Dan Docherty`s Complete Tai Chi Chuan and Decoding the Classics for the Modern Martial Artist