



# *Stanford Medical Tai Chi*

*Spring 2025*

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## Welcome to Stanford Medical Tai Chi

Dear Spring 2025 Tai Chi Participants,

Welcome!

Taiji and qigong teach you how to relax, reduce stress, and increase *agency* (self-determination, self-control and integrity) in all aspects of your life. This class will introduce you to the physical, intellectual, and psychospiritual aspects of these ancient arts. Our emphasis is on cultivating the union of breath and vital energy (qi or ch'i—"chee") in coordination with flowing muscular movements that will carry into other activities and endeavors.

Format:                   Journal Club (see next page)  
                                Opening meditation  
                                Silk reeling standing qigong  
                                Guo Lin and Shaolin walking qigong  
                                Taiji set with Chen, Yang, and Sun style movements

Resources:               The recommended reference is the Harvard Medical School Guide to Tai Chi, which includes history, by Peter Wayne and Mark Fuerst available through [Kepler's Books](#) in Menlo Park. Please support your local independent bookstore!

The set that we learn in class is an evolved version of the [teaching video](#). You are encouraged to use this video as a practice aid or video me in class.

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## Journal Club

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In keeping with the intellectual and academic mission of Stanford Medical School, Medical Tai Chi includes the study of the peer-reviewed literature on the health benefits of and qigong. To receive credit for the course, students are required to attend the majority of journal club sessions and present an article of their choice for one session, 4:30 – 5:00 p.m., preceding the practice portion of the class. Articles can be drawn from Dr. Kane’s archives of popular studies from previous years or from the [National Library of Medicine’s PubMed database](#) of world medical literature.

The first Journal Club session, presented by Dr. Kane, will introduce the gold-standard methodological criteria for conventional medical research and present alternative methodologies that are more appropriate for integrative medicine, including taiji.

We will develop the critical thinking needed to assess claims for both “objective” models and subjective, phenomenological models as they apply to current controversies in healthcare, health policy, and international health.

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## 1 Introduction—A Taiji POV

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Taiji (anglicized to “tai chi”—see [Appendix](#)) has a long and controverted history, as documented in [Wikipedia](#) and in our text for the course, *The Harvard Medical School Guide to Tai Chi*. Various sources vie for establishing the origins of taiji in the 12<sup>th</sup> or the 17<sup>th</sup> century, with roots in military training and in philosophical movements such as Confucianism and Buddhism.



Qigong is provably older than taiji, deriving from shamanistic practices an estimated 5,000 years ago. (See [Chapter 7](#), Qigong.) Qigong breathing and energy practices inform all taiji styles. It is said, “You can have qigong without taiji, but you cannot have taiji without qigong.”

From the middle ages until the early twentieth century, the secrets of taiji were zealously guarded by a few founding families such as Chen, Yang, Sun, and Wu. Originally, only direct disciples of family members were initiated into the teachings. Gradually, the practices were shared among (or smuggled into) a wider population, although still through appointed, anointed lineage holders. Even today, much prestige and authority accrue to those with pedigrees reaching back to the first families.

While there is something to be said for honoring the rich history and the traditional values, it has been my experience that many schools and masters continue to foster a doctrinaire “lineage correctness.” There is insistence on rigid discipline, allegiance to the master, and a narrow, often anatomically untenable (especially for adult Westerners) interpretation of prescribed movements. Yet present day taiji has also nicely evolved into a hybrid of martial artistry, moving meditation, aerobic exercise, and dance. Modern schools offer styles ranging from the Zumba-like, high-energy Flow Tai Chi to more sedate forms and new interpretations such as the ones I have created from my own masters and certifications.

My teaching emphasizes both ancient and modern principles. The form I developed, which I call [Ch'ai Ch'i Taiji](#) (Life Energy Taiji), is an eclectic mix of traditional taiji, Reiki, sports medicine, and new physics cosmology. These are its principles:

- **Your own body is your authority and guide.** Taiji is often taught by those who learned it in early childhood in China. Your body will not be able to duplicate the postures and energy dynamics of these masters. Your body will not look or act like mine or like any other body in class.
- **Coordinated breathing is more important than correctness of form.** Traditional taiji instruction insists on picture-perfect, correct movements. In my classes, form follows function. We learn coordinated breathing and muscle motion in the simplest gesture of Open and Close, then we add more complex forms.
- **Safety first.** Many forms, when performed in traditional ways, put us at risk for injuries to knees, hips, back, and ankles. I will always offer modified forms that protect joints and muscles. However, for all movements, listen to your body!
- **Yin and yang theory and the Dao.** The Daoist philosophy of yin and yang, and the oneness of all things, informs taiji and its application to everything in life. The yang of inhaling, filling, and the yin of exhaling, emptying, underlies every living moment until we breathe no more.
- **Dan tien theory.** The dan tien energy center in the lower abdomen acts as both a physiologic organ and the symbolic center of one's agency and integrity. See [Chapter 4](#), Dan Tien.
- **Life as a taiji form.** Everything you do—cooking, cleaning, texting, driving, sports—can be performed as a moving meditation. When you can conduct every action and non-action with yin-yang dan tien breathing, you will have achieved ideal balance and harmony.

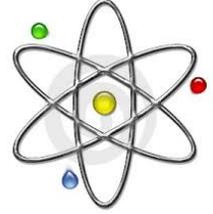
*Photo: Dr. Bev and Basia. Parting the Wild Horse's Mane*

*Photo credit: Ruben Kleiman*

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## 2 Energy

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In , we emphasize the cultivation of ch'i, a form of *bioenergy*. We will use the word *energy* as shorthand for the somewhat mysterious notion of *ch'i* (also spelled *qi* and pronounced *chee*), the Chinese word that is often translated as life force. *Ch'i*, the Japanese *ki and reiki*, the Sanskrit *prana* and *kundalini*, are terms used in the martial, healing, and meditative arts to refer to a force that is not measurable in the way that physical energies such as electricity, gravity, and calories are measurable.

Ch'i may be sensed as heat, pressure or weight, light, colors, itching, or tingling. These sensations represent *transformations* of ch'i into physical qualities rather than ch'i itself.

Analogously, we can see the electrical changes that thoughts produce on the EEG (electroencephalogram). We can see the electrical changes that love produces on the electrocardiogram—an elevated heart rate, a “skipped” beat (premature contraction). But these *effects* are not the *thought* or the *love*.

The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (previously called the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine), one of 27 agencies that make up the U.S. National Institutes of Health, has validated qigong as a modality of *energy medicine*. The NCCAM recognized two types of energy, *veritable*, which can be measured, like heat and electricity, and *putative*, including ch'i, which has not yet been measurable.

Ch'i creates internal conditions that we describe in energetic terms. Some days we have good energy, some days nervous energy, and some days we are low energy, though physicists would be at a loss to measure these quantities. When the needle on our energy gauge is hovering around Empty, we may resort to jump starting our bodies with foreign substances. We toss down sugary, caffeinated “energy” drinks like Monster, Kickstart, and Starbucks Doubleshot. On the other side of Alice’s mushroom are beverages marketed as “anti-energy,” “chill out,” or “relaxation” drinks. These preparations contain calm-down chemicals such as gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), melatonin, and California poppy. In the yin and yang of imbibed ch'i manipulation, you can produce your desired energy state with your choice of archetypal bovine—Red Bull® or Slow Cow™.

### **The Dao—Emptiness before Energy**

In Taoist cosmology, the universe first existed in a state of nothingness or “undifferentiated wholeness”—the Dao (“dow,” also spelled *Tao*). Many philosophies and religions tell the same

story of a primordial condition of no actualities and infinite possibilities. In the Hebrew Kabbalah, the Great Nothingness is called the *Ain Sof* (No Thing). In Greek mythology, this state was called Chaos. In theistic terms, the Dao can be imagined as the mind of God before the Creation.



Another name for the Dao is the *wu ji*, literally “pole,” the formless infinite, represented by the empty the left. From the unformed, unpolarized *wu ji* came the “great pole-arity,”<sup>1</sup> represented by the yin-yang diagram



“no circle on , the on the

right. (See also the [Appendix](#), Chi, Ch’i, Ji, and Qi.)

With polarization came the emergence of energy and substance and their differentiation into opposites, like the north and south poles of a magnet. These opposites, yin and yang, are associated respectively with complementary qualities such as cold and hot, dark and light, wet and dry, contraction and expansion, feminine and masculine.<sup>2</sup> Ch’i is the organizing principle within the Dao that directed the Nothingness to form the Somethingness that in turn differentiates into yin and yang. The equivalent astrophysical event is the Big Bang.

The concept of the *wu ji* is important in our and qigong exercises. Frequently throughout the forms, we assume the **wu ji position**, a relaxed upright stance. Breathing deeply and slowly in this position, we return to the primordial condition of emptiness and unity with all things. In the *wu ji* posture, we *somaticize* (express through the body) the state of no contrasts, no conflicts, and complete harmony.

### The Interface of Ch’i and Breath

The often-elusive ch’i is most accessible through the simple process of breathing and observing, fully sensing, the breath. In the beginning, it is easier to *feel* breath and *imagine* ch’i. At first, you will feel your breath, and ch’i, simply as the air that goes in and out of your mouth and nose. Gradually, you will learn to imagine, and then feel, breath filling the lungs and every part of the body. Breathing like this may create a sense of heat, light, tingling, colors, or other sensations. Now you are sensing ch’i. (See also [Chapter 5](#), The Yin and Yang of Breathing.)

In all somatic arts and athletic activities, and in activities of daily living, proper breathing produces an unimpeded flow of ch’i. Sending breath and ch’i into both the furthest and

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<sup>1</sup> The *ji* in *t’ai ji* (usually spelled *tai chi*) is not *ch’i* or *chi*—confusing!

<sup>2</sup> Note that *feminine* and *masculine* do not refer to gender in biological terms like male and female, man and woman, but to opposite qualities such as aggression/passivity, hardness/softness, advancing/retreating, etc.

innermost reaches of your body allows you to relax when you're tense or over-stimulated, energizes you when you need a lift, and makes your moods less extreme, more balanced. Breathing "into" tight muscles is cleansing and invigorating like wind blowing through freshly washed sheets on a clothesline. Invigoration is the yang to the yin of relaxation. Both are important for stress reduction and emotional self-regulation.

### **and the New Physics**

With the arrival of quantum mechanics, many physicists in the mid-twentieth century noted the parallels between the mysteries and paradoxes of the sub-atomic world and those of pan-theistic mysticism. Suddenly the ephemeral world of the Tao modeled the ephemeral world of the waveicle and vice versa. Many books were written in the ensuing years about the connections between quantum theory and the ideas of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism. UC Berkeley physicist Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics* has stood the test of time as the foundation text. [Chapter 8](#), Taiji Cosmology, in this syllabus relates these ideas to our taiji practice.

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### 3 Ch'i and Reiki Compared

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靈  
氣  
功

In 1975, while a medical student, I began to practice sitting meditation. I especially worked at meditating without thinking about dinner, spring break, or romance. But it was somewhere between boring and impossible to sit still, watch my breath, and empty my mind.

Many years later, I was delighted to discover moving meditation in the form of and kung fu.

Then, in the Year of the Horse 2014, I suffered ill effects from improper use of ch'i after overexerting myself in kung fu: several times a day, I had been practicing the strenuous Small Red Fist form in hopes of making the Shaolin Temple team for the San Francisco Chinese New Year parade.

As someone who has always had what Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) calls excess head ch'i—a quick, active mind; frequent headaches, dental and ophthalmic issues, and wild, frizzy hair—the excess ch'i from overzealous practice went straight to my head. Thus, in bed one night around 3:00 a.m., while mentally rehearsing my kung fu audition, I rolled over and felt the room spin violently. My medical knowledge and objectivity were lost in the throes of half-asleep panic.

*What is happening to me?!*

In Western medical terms, I was experiencing a classic attack of benign paroxysmal positional vertigo, attributed to displacement of small crystals in the inner ear. In TCM, this symptom is a rare pathological extreme of the normal ch'i awakening of 搖風擺柳 Flowing Breeze, Swaying Willow.

In the years following the initial occurrence, I have had a few milder episodes. (I prefer to call them *episodes* rather than *attacks*. It's not psychologically healthy to think the body is assaulting us, as in a heart "attack.") In between episodes, I had lingering sensations of movement, like ocean waves, in my head. Acupuncture, medical qigong, the Stanford neurology and vestibular physical therapy clinics, low-impact jogging, and horseback riding helped enormously. On a good day, I reckoned I was 88 percent back to normal. However, I was on a quest to be symptom free.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I have since regained near normality with the addition of craniosacral therapy, which has proven the ear-crystal model incorrect, or at least not the full story, in my case.

## Enter Reiki

### Reiki Principles

Just for today,  
do not anger,  
do not worry.

Be filled with gratitude  
Be honest in your work  
and be kind to everyone.

—Mikao Usui, *Reiki Founder*

I had been peripherally aware of Reiki (“ray kee”) for thirty years. It was on my list of Things Probably Too Vague or Far-Fetched to Relate To.

Then just when I was looking to leave no stone unturned in my quest for complete resolution of vertigo, I received a notice about a Reiki attunement with our beloved animal communicator and gifted healer, [Nancy Windheart](#). Attunement is the teaching of, blessing for, and initiation into Reiki.

Reiki was developed in 1922 by Japanese Zen Buddhist monk Mikao Usui. In addition to practicing Buddhism, Usui is also reported to have been influenced by Christian studies. One version of his story says he was ordained as a Protestant minister. Reiki has since been passed down through many lineages all over the world. In sharing Reiki, the practitioner draws *ki* (“kee”) to herself and then may send it on to another person or animal, or to situations like wars and hurricanes, for healing. The uppermost ideogram of the three Chinese words at the top of this chapter is the character for the *rei* of reiki. The bottom of the rei character contains the character meaning wu shaman 巫. Above that, there are three small squares that each mean *kou*, a mouth. . They seem related to the ch’i gulping seen on the ancient pottery at the beginning of [Chapter 7](#), Qigong.

*Rei* is translated as *spirit*, and *ki* is the same as ch’i. So reiki is spiritual energy. The practice of Reiki is akin to the laying on of hands with prayer. Although there are no gold-standard medical studies proving the efficacy of Reiki in healing, there are many anecdotal

reports of beneficial effects. (There are a few studies showing the efficacy of intercessory prayer. See [Byrd, Reference 1](#) and [Dossey, Reference 5](#).)

As I began my Reiki attunement, I was blown away by the difference between how I sensed reiki and how I sensed ch'i.<sup>4</sup> The nature of ch'i is taught, and feels to me, as inert, unconscious, unfeeling, finite, and exhaustible when used for martial arts and moving meditation. The nature of reiki for healing is taught, and feels to me, as alive, sentient, compassionate, and infinitely flowing through the body, never to be depleted. With self-reiki and reiki from a massage therapist directed at my vertigo, I felt better than at any time since the symptoms began.

Now more than forty years into my personal evolution, I practice and teach qigong and taiji as a synthesis of these two powerful traditions, Chinese and Japanese, in mindfulness, moving meditation, energy cultivation, and healing. As I thought about how to integrate all I have learned, I created this comparison of the ch'i of qigong, taiji, kung fu, and aikido on one hand and reiki, literally, on the other (two) hands. My practice of taiji and qigong now includes the gathering and circulation of reiki and sharing reiki with horses.

### **Ten Points of Comparison of Ch'i and Reiki**

1. Ch'i is unconscious, impersonal, value-free, and emotionally neutral. There is no feeling that one is engaged with a sentient being. Ch'i can be cultivated for spiritual enlightenment, but is not itself spiritually enlightened.

Reiki is conscious and sentient. It has wisdom, compassion, ethics, healing intent, and grace. Some view it as a God-like essence, archangel, or Divine Love.

2. Ch'i is infinite throughout the universe but finite when downloaded to the human body. It can be depleted from one's energy centers with overuse or improper use in advanced practices. The taiji or qigong practitioner is like a battery storing and discharging electricity. The battery must be constantly recharged.

Reiki energy is infinite throughout the universe and in the human body. It flows to and

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<sup>4</sup> I use Reiki, capital "R," to mean the lineage-based practice and reiki, small "r," to mean the energy itself.

through the practitioner, and even when emitted from a person's energy centers, can never be depleted. The Reiki practitioner is like a garden hose channeling water or a water wheel using some energy for its mill and passing the rest on down the river.

3. With emitted qi therapy (EQT), the healer sends out her own ch'i and not, directly, universal ch'i. (See [Korahais, Reference 7.](#))

In Reiki healing, the Reiki practitioner transmits the infinite, universal reiki. We say we are "sharing" reiki, not "giving" reiki.

4. Ch'i used in EQT is directed by the intentions of the healer's ego to cure or fix a person according to the healer's value system, prejudices, biases, and assumptions.

The reiki used in healing is self-directing for the higher good of the recipient. The ego and wishes of the Reiki practitioner do not enter into where or how the energy will be used. The Reiki practitioner cultivates an attitude of "Let go and let God."<sup>5</sup>

5. Ch'i can be used in hand-to-hand combat and to throw or defeat an opponent at a distance.

Reiki always does good, can never be used to oppose, fight, or harm.

6. Extreme overexertion during martial practices can cause significant mental or physical problems. Improperly performed EQT can drain the practitioner and make her ill.<sup>6</sup>

Reiki is self-regulating and self-replenishing. It cannot be overused, nor can its use cause illness in the practitioner.

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<sup>5</sup> The Western medical practitioner aims to cure the disease; the Traditional Eastern Medicine practitioner aims to cure the person; the Reiki practitioner aims simply to transmit Divine Love.

<sup>6</sup> The chance of experiencing the ill effects I described earlier is effectively zero for the beginning practitioner and for those not venturing into strenuous practices like kung fu.

7. Taiji and qigong practices are done mostly upright, with locomotion of the whole body in patterned forms.

Reiki practice is done lying, sitting, or standing, with small hand gestures and sometimes movement around a treatment table, but no patterned locomotion.

8. In taiji and qigong, locomotion and in-place limb movements are coordinated with the breath to augment the amount and quality of ch'i.

Reiki gestures are not typically taught in coordination with the breath.

9. Taiji and qigong have long traditions of study and training. Practitioners, teachers, and healers spend several years, even decades, learning to become proficient at the master level. Taiji includes competitions, standardization of styles, and oversight by international regulating bodies.

Although rooted in Buddhism, Reiki is a modern tradition. Students are often attuned in weekend courses and set out at once to become practitioners. There are no competitions or inter-lineage regulating bodies and no universally accepted standards.

10. Hundreds of credible, peer-reviewed medical studies, some gold standard<sup>7</sup>, have proven the efficacy of taiji and qigong in healing cancer, arthritis, depression, anxiety, balance impairment, diabetes, high blood pressure, Parkinson's disease, back pain, and other conditions.

There is no body of gold-standard medical studies conclusively proving the efficacy of Reiki.

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<sup>7</sup> The gold standard for medical research includes criteria for a study design that is prospective, randomized, objective, quantitative, and long term. Such a study has control groups and a enough subjects in all groups to test for the statistical significance of differences between the groups and for the strength of the results.



Qigong, taiji, and Reiki are complementary to each other. Qigong and taiji excel in whole-body coordination of movement, breath, balance, grounding, and energy cultivation. Taiji can additionally be more active—even explosive—and vigorous. Reiki excels in quiet meditation, the transmission of wisdom and compassion, and the self-replenishing flow of energy for healing. Reiki also emphasizes receiving and transmitting love and gratitude.

Think of the heart. It is both a physical and a metaphysical organ. As a physical organ, it generates electricity. As a metaphysical organ, it generates love. Ch'i is more like the electricity of the heart. Reiki is more like the love.

### **Reiki and Ch'i in Qigong and Taiji**

In each person's individual practice, there might not be a felt distinction between ch'i and reiki. In my practices, I feel ch'i primarily as a force within the body and reiki as primarily received from all across the universe. Both forms of energy circulate inside and outside of us. To get the best of both worlds:

1. Imagine reiki as a loving intelligence that comes from the outside in and cannot be depleted.
2. Imagine ch'i as energy that originates in your body, mainly from the lower dan tien.
3. Coordinate your intake and circulation of both reiki and ch'i with movement and breath.

4. Do not be concerned with whether the energies are coming from or going to the right places. Trust that they will direct and cultivate themselves in your body in the way that is optimal for you.
5. Imagine feeling the flow of wise, compassionate, and healing reiki between you and others.

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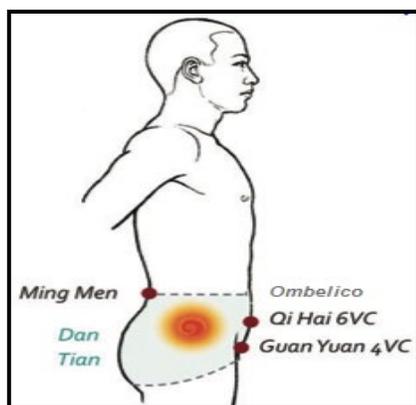
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## 4 The Dan Tien – the Central Bank of Ch’i

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*People spend years searching for the dan tian, but never find it. Many give up, convinced that the dan tian is either mystical mumbo jumbo, or a metaphor. I was one of them. For years, I was thinking, “Where in the world is the dantian?” Even after I met [my Master] and learned the real secrets of energy cultivation, and practiced for a few years, I still didn’t feel anything.*

*—Sifu Anthony Korahais, Taiji and Qigong Master*



On a Sunday morning in October of 2013, the Shaolin Cultural Exposition at the Los Angeles Convention Center was literally a 24-ring circus. A flurry of unarmed martial artists, as well as those wielding swords, staffs, and whips, whirled around in twenty-four 15-foot squares. Standing with me just outside the masking tape perimeter of Box TC106 was my qigong classmate, George Liu. At 77, George had the strength, flexibility, and stamina of someone 30 years younger. Using emitted ch’i from

his hands, George had been a lay practitioner of medical qigong until his wife complained of getting telepathic headaches during his sessions with clients.

Inside Box TC106, men and women of all ages, wearing classic silk pajama-style attire, took turns competing in a 106-form taiji set. Given their closely matched demeanors of intense concentration and deftly executed movements, it was hard to predict the winner. I asked George, who has been practicing these arts since his boyhood in China, “How can you tell who is the best?”

He replied, “Best ones, they have ch’i that make my dan tien feel purr like cat.”

Ch’i is concentrated in three main centers called upper, middle, and lower *dan tien* (dahn t’yen). The lower dan tien is the main store of energy for directing physical motion. In martial arts and in Traditional Chinese Medicine, when ch’i is emitted from combatants or healers, sensitive bystanders may describe sensations received in their own bodies. Purring or humming perceived in one’s lower dan tien from emitted ch’i is called *cháng míng* 腸鳴, *chang* meaning intestine and *ming* being the vibration made by a flying beetle in summer. At the L.A. Exposition, the only two artists who thrummed my dan tien did indeed win gold medals.

*Dan tien* means *cinnabar*, or *elixir field*. “Field” refers to a geographical field, like a pasture, rather than an energy field. Cinnabar has the chemical formula HgS, mercury sulfide. In Daoist alchemy, mercury is the quintessential yang, masculine element. Sulfur is the

corresponding yin, feminine element. The combination of mercury and sulfur in cinnabar, which was used as a medicinal elixir, represents the unification of yin and yang in the One, the Dao. Both Eastern and Western alchemy used physical processes, such as turning quicksilver into gold, to represent spiritual transformation. The dan tien elixir fields, therefore, are not just the anatomical or energetic hearths of the body, but the corporal seat of the immortal soul.

In qigong practice, energy manipulations in the dan tien are used to repatriate us to the wu ji, the Original Wholeness that some religions call, and may require death to achieve, the return to the Godhead. (As cinnabar is extremely toxic, its administration as a medicinal tonic often did send poisoned patients to the Godhead!)

In our qigong practice, as in most martial, healing, and meditative arts, we will use *dan tien* to refer to the lower dan tien as shown in the drawing. (The tree gong exercise, which we learn in the sixth week of class, uses all three dan tien.) This dan tien corresponds to the core in Pilates and the swadhisthana chakra in yoga. It is the foundation of energy, balance, and *agency*—your personal power. Imagine or feel your dan tien by placing two fingers flat on the skin below your navel. Imagine a ball of energy that starts at your lower finger and fills your whole abdomen and lower back. Think of the dan tien as a battery that feeds many strings of holiday lights—the acupuncture points in channels running up and down the body. Further imagine the ch'i lighting up all of your 37 trillion cells.

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## 5 The Yin and Yang of Breathing—Life in Balance

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Taiji, qigong, yoga and other moving meditation practices share a fundamental principle: the coordination of muscle activity and the flow of ch'i with breathing. All our bodily motions can be synchronized with the breath. Deep, rhythmic breathing restores the balance we lose when daily demands push and pull us out of alignment with our inner selves.

In Daoist philosophy, balance is depicted in the black and white swirls of the taiji *tuo*.<sup>8</sup> The feminine yin principle in the black swirl is instinctive, soft, slow, receptive, passive, yielding, receding, contracting, in-facing, ethereal, diffuse, cold, wet, and dark. The masculine yang principle in the white swirl is rational, hard, fast, generative, active, projectile, advancing, expanding, out-going, solid, concentrated, hot, dry, and light. The terms *masculine* and *feminine* do not refer to males and females but describe polarities existing in all things.

Yin and yang arose when the wu ji differentiated into the taiji. (See [Chapter 6](#), Postures and Gestures, and the [Appendix](#), Ch'i, Ji, and Qi.) The moment of separation corresponds to when the Judeo-Christian God commanded, “Let there be light,” bringing alternating day and night out of Timelessness. Yin and yang complement and transform into each other: as in Newton’s Third Law of physics, every action results in an equal and opposite reaction. Yin and yang are always in a state of dynamic balance, each gaining and yielding ascendancy to the other, like the ocean-sand boundary shifting as the tide goes in and out. Opposites changing into one another is the meaning of the black dot in the white swirl and the white dot in the black swirl.

We can sense yin and yang directly just by breathing. Inhalation is the filling, expanding yang. Exhalation is the emptying yin. The act of breathing restores the cyclic rhythms in our bodies and in our life activities, work-play, sleep-wake, give-take, rest-exertion, smile-frown.

Our Medical Tai Chi opening meditation teaches simple gestures with synchronized breathing as the basis for the taiji forms. The forms in turn are the foundation for creating physical and emotional balance in every state of activity or inactivity in daily life. Simple gestures like the Earth and Sky Cleanse and Open & Close are fundamental to every other action we take in taiji and throughout the day. You will notice these gestures as they appear in our silk reeling and in the taiji forms. When you can conduct every sequence of movements you perform in the course of your life as a variation of Open and Close, you will be in a state of peace, balance, and harmony.

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<sup>8</sup> Pronounced “twah,” meaning “diagram.”

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## 6 Postures and Gestures

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### The Wu Ji Position—Standing in Emptiness, Nothingness, and Peace



The *wu ji* is the great emptiness. It is the original state of the universe and the end state of the bodymind sought in spiritual enlightenment—or at least in the reduction of everyday stress. In the *wu ji* position, we empty ourselves of mental distractions and dismiss for the moment intrusive body sensations.

The posture for the *wu ji* position is upright and relaxed. In the *wu ji* posture, there is no effort and no tension. Imagine you are a sunflower growing up toward heaven and then a string of pearls hanging from the sky. Or feel yourself as a grape suspended in a Jell-O mold. Spine is stretched up and tall. Shoulders are relaxed, drawn down by the weight of your arms. Arms hang loosely by your sides. Knees are soft. Do not lock your knees. You can bend them slightly, or simply unlock them. Your spine is elongated so that the *ming men*, the life gate in the small of your back, feels stretched and open. Your buttocks are tucked in, not sticking out in a sway-backed frame. Stand barefoot or in flat heels. The higher the heels of your shoes, the harder it is to have soft knees while keeping your back straight.

Feel yourself firmly connected to the ground through the bubbling springs energy centers in the soles of your feet. The more you focus on where your feet touch the ground below your soft knees, the less top heavy you will feel from an overactive mind and a heavy heart. If you have a distracting thought or negative emotion, send it through your bubbling spring centers into the center of the earth. This technique is called *grounding*.

We will return to the *wu ji* posture several times during silk reeling.

## Gassho

Pressing the palms together in prayer or greeting is common in many religions and traditions. In yoga practice, this hand position (mudra) is called the *anjali* (AHN-jah-lee) *mudra*, often accompanied by the Hindi word *namaste*. The gesture and the greeting mean, “the Divine in me embraces the Divine in you.”



In Reiki practice, this gesture is called *gassho* (gah-show), which simply means “hands together.” Gassho clears the mind, opens the heart, and strengthens the reiki energy.

## Open and Close



Open and close is the most basic movement in many classical qigong, taiji, and kung fu forms. It is the simplest way to learn to experience reiki and ch’i and to coordinate muscle motion with breathing and energy flow.

In performing the Open and Close gesture, we concentrate reiki and ch’i in the *lao gong* (“palace of labor”) energy centers in the palms of the hands.

We begin in gassho, “charging” up the hands with energy. The palms may feel warm and tingly. We imagine taking the sun down from the sky and holding it like a ball in gassho at heart level. We imagine being unable to contain the little sun as it charges up the *lao gong* energy centers in the palms of the hands and expands outwards until it pushes our hands to shoulder width. We then push the energy back into a dense ball.

When the ball expands, we inhale. When we press the ball into higher density, we exhale. The palms of the hands may become warm and tingly as we perform multiple cycles of opening and closing.

Open and close is a wonderful gesture to use as a reset button to return to a state of calmness. It can be performed throughout the day, lying down, sitting, or standing up. It’s especially useful in lieu of impatient seething at prolonged red traffic lights. In using Open and Close to reduce stress, we also engage in an act of compassion and healing for ourselves and others.

## The Earth and Sky Reiki Cleanse

The earth and sky cleanse is another basic gesture for learning to coordinate breathing with muscle motion. Think of it as making a snow angel standing up. With its round, continuous, sweeping motion, imagine you are gathering reiki and ch'i from the earth, and then from the sky.<sup>9</sup> You are cleansing your mind and body with it, then draining the wash “water” back into the ground through your feet. Imagine that anything you wash from your bodymind gets taken up by the earth and transformed, like fertilizer for flowers.

1. Start in the wu ji position, arms at your sides.
2. Imagine you are drawing earth reiki or ch'i up into your hands.
3. As you inhale, sweep your arms out to your sides, elbows soft. Keep sweeping them to just above your head. Palms are facing up, gathering ch'i from the sky as you sweep.
4. When your hands are directly overhead, the palms face each other for a moment before pushing downward.
5. As you exhale, bend your forearms, face your palms down, and push the reiki or ch'i down to your dan tien.
6. In the same exhalation, continue pushing the reiki or ch'i down the front of your thighs, and out through the bubbling spring centers, into the earth, until your arms are hanging down again in wu ji position.
7. Repeat these circular sweeps a few times until you feel refreshed and relaxed.

Shi De Yang, one of the most venerated Shaolin masters alive today, explains these gestures as a way to gather and emit ch'i, which we further characterize as *ling ch'i* or *reiki* (spiritual energy). In his [YouTube video](#) @ 4:00, Master Yang says (paraphrased), “First I raise my hands slowly overhead. I gather all the air in the centers of both palms and bring them together above the head, like holding a ball. I compress the ball until the hands meet and put it in front of the chest. I exhale dispassionately.”

“This is not qigong as it is described, nor is it simply the greeting of Buddhism. It is really a way of gathering the ch'i in nature. I use it to give health to others and to all of you. Its most important sense is to give the ch'i in our body to others.”

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<sup>9</sup> Chapter 3 describes some differences between ch'i and reiki. You can imagine and sense either or both flowing to and through you.

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## 7 Qigong

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*Most people believe that physicists are explaining the world.  
Some physicists even believe that,  
but the Wu Li Masters know that they are only dancing with it.*

Gary Zukav, *Dancing Wu Li Masters*

*You can do qigong without taiji  
but you cannot do taiji without qigong.*

Master Alex Feng, PhD, OMD

The silk reeling exercises we learn in Medical Tai Chi are traditional qigong (“chee goong”) movements. Qigong is a moving meditation developed in China thousands of years ago as a health practice. It became, and still is, the basis of taiji and kung fu, which were created as martial arts to perfect skills for combat.

Archeological evidence supports the claim that the origins of qigong lie in the shamanic dances depicted in this vase from the Yang Shao culture of Northern China, 5,000-3,000 BCE. The late archeologist Kwang-chih Chang saw in its raised figure a hermaphroditic *wu* priest-shaman<sup>10</sup> Later observers interpreted the figure to be in a posture of qigong with ch’i gulping evidenced by the gaping mouth. Tradition says that the *wu* shamans choreographed qigong by imitating the self-healing behaviors of animals.



Several styles of qigong derive from the animal-like dances of China’s *wu li* shamans of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Twenty-first century qigong retains elements of shamanism, Daoism,

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<sup>10</sup> The Chinese word *wu* 巫, spirit medium, shaman, sorcerer, or doctor, was first recorded in 1600 BCE. This word is found in the character for reiki at the top of Chapter 3.

Confucianism, and Buddhism synthesized and syncretized with each practitioner's original interpretations. Like the philosophies themselves, each style of qigong varies in intent and emphasis, from meditative to medical to mortality-defying. The purpose of medical qigong, and a side effect of all styles, is to improve health, prevent and cure disease, support healthy aging, and promote longevity. In its most transcendental form as a spiritual practice, qigong seeks to effect the harmonious integration of the human body and soul with the Universe and its consciousness.

Modern qigong remains a health practice characterized by rhythmic motions coordinated with deep, slow breathing. Medical qigong is used to treat, adjunctively or by itself, many conditions, including heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, pain, cancer, and mental illness. The Guo Lin walking that we learn in Medical Tai Chi has been proven effective in cancer therapy at Beijing Miyun Capital Tumor Hospital, Beijing University of Chinese Medicine, and other medical centers in China and the U.S. Studies show that cancer patients who practice qigong have less depression, more social interaction, increased appetite, decreased pain, longer survival, and even higher remission rates when qigong is used alone or integrated with radiation and chemotherapy.

According to Chinese government health administration statistics, in parks across China, more than 100 million people congregate to practice qigong. In 2005, the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, one of 27 agencies that make up the National Institutes of Health, validated qigong as a modality of energy medicine.

Qigong can be performed standing, sitting, or lying down. You are free to try any of these positions in class.

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## 8 Taiji and Quantum Cosmology

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### The Human Body in a Universal Context

Taiji began as a martial art in medieval China to improve the fitness, agility, and discipline of horse-mounted warriors. Many of its forms derived from the practice of qigong born of observations of animals by the wu shamans thousands of years earlier. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the emphasis of taiji practice was as a moving meditation to improve health. However, taiji is more than a structured psychosomatic activity.



Indeed, taiji is part of a physical and metaphysical cosmology based on Daoism and other ancient wisdom (1). It places living organisms in the context of the quantum universe. “Quantum” here refers to models of infinite, multidimensional space in which time and matter are artifacts of the physical world, especially the brain (1,2, 3), and in which all matter, both living and inanimate, has consciousness. In Daoism, and in quantum theory as proposed by Dr. Goswami (3), consciousness arose from the emptiness, nothingness, and oneness of the wu ji. It is immaterial, universal, collective, and primary, and not an epiphenomenon of the neurophysiological brain.

In quantum theory, the material world is an illusion (2, 4). All its components, down to the smallest subatomic unit, exist as both waves and particles in a state of probabilities that are created, and made into experienced reality, by consciousness.<sup>11</sup>

Our biological connection to this universe has been imagined by many mystical traditions as the energy contained in all things and in all spaces. In these world views, our body’s ch’i (qi), also known as ki, prana, and kundalini, connect us to the Ineffable known as God, Spirit, and All That Is. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, energy circulates in a network of channels called meridians, of which we are generally not aware, and concentrates in a series of centers that can be consciously sensed. When first learning energy cultivation, the most important of these centers is the lower dan tien found in a front-to-back spherical area of the abdomen below the navel.

The lower dan tien is the center of one’s power of self-determination. It is the seat and source of one’s agency, integrity, morality, and truth. Although our beliefs and perspectives will

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<sup>11</sup> Schrodinger’s wave equation

change as we become older and wiser, the sensations in the dan tien—one's “gut feelings”— of rightness, courage, and sacredness remain consistent.

Cultivating the power of the dan tien and its connection to all energies and consciousnesses inside and outside the human body is the essence of taiji and the key to living healthfully and harmoniously in a safe, benevolent, and loving You-niverse.

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## Appendix: Ch'i, Chi, Ji, and Qi – Wu Ji, Tai Ji

Non-Chinese speakers understandably confuse qi, ji, and ch'i. In the fractured (to English speakers) phonetics of the relatively recent pinyin Romanization instituted by the Chinese government in the 1950s, *ch'i*, meaning energy, is spelled *qi* and pronounced “chee.”<sup>12</sup>

*Ji* means *pole* and refers to the pole-less-ness of the *wu ji* (no polarity—The Great Nothingness) and to the yin-yang masculine-feminine polarities in the *taiji* (Great Polarity).

The *wu ji*, the *tai ji*, and yin and yang are important concepts in Daoist cosmology and in our practice of taiji. They describe the human body in relation to the origins and spacetime geometries of the universe and to the *ch'i* that permeates, some say composes, all things. I use the *ch'i* spelling for energy, as it's easier to pronounce for English speakers when reading it, and the *taiji* spelling for our practice.<sup>13</sup>

極

**Ji** means pole, roof, highest point, extreme, earth's (magnetic) pole, (anode or cathode electrical) pole. Composed of the root word for tree or wood 木.

無極

The **wu ji**, “no pole,” is the undifferentiated Great Nothingness. In Western cosmological terms, it is the Universe before the Big Bang. In theological terms it is the Mind of God before creation. In **tai ji** practice, we cultivate **ch'i** starting in the **wu ji** posture.

太極

The **tai ji** is the Ultimate Polarity. In the *tai ji*, the *wu ji* becomes differentiated and polarized into yin and yang.

氣

**Ch'i** means breath, air, or vital energy. The character is composed of the root words for rice 米 and steam 气. In ancient times, *ch'i* referred to steam rising from a bowl of rice.

<sup>12</sup> In the older Wade-Giles Romanization, *chi* without the apostrophe is pronounced “ji.”

<sup>13</sup> The course title *Medical Tai Chi* is used by the medical school as the more familiar term in English. It should be pronounced “tai ji.”



## *Ch'i*

Stress is ch'i.

Emotions of  
anger, grief, fear, guilt,  
love, joy, peace, gratitude  
are ch'i.

First learn to **sense** energy,  
then to **direct** energy  
to healing and happiness.

# *Silk Reeling*

Silk reeling exercises are qigong forms used to practice the basics of circulating ch'i and reiki. They consist of simple gestures to coordinate breathing and muscle movement. Breath is both a source and expression of ch'i and reiki, as oxygen creates energy in our cells. We use silk reeling motions to extend and retract limbs, expand and contract the torso, and shift weight side to side and forward and back. The motions are graceful and continuous.

You will recognize many silk reeling gestures in the taiji forms.

In the ancient craft of silk reeling pictured below, care had to be taken to spool the silk with just the right speed, rhythm, and tension. Too fast, jerky, or tight, the thread breaks; too loose or slow, the thread tangles.

Ch'i and reiki are like silk as they wind and circulate inside and outside the body.

In your silk reeling practice, imagine winding silk on a spool as you develop your rhythmic breathing, relaxed but firm muscle tone, and flowing ch'i and reiki.





气太極 Ch'ai Ch'i Tai Ji - T'ai Ch'i for Life Steps

See the [Stanford Medical Tai Chi with Horses video](#) for approximate movements. The forms in the current set differ somewhat from the video and are still evolving, with variations.

1. Opening form
2. Pivot to 3:00, Gassho
3. R arm, R leg come through to 12:00 into White Crane
4. Buddha's Warrior Assistant Pounds Mortar R
5. Lazy About Tying Coat
6. Six Sealing, Four Closing
7. Single Whip
8. Cloud Hands (Carry Butterflies) moving L
9. Gather and Punch R, White Crane
10. Gather and Punch L, White Crane
11. Clouds Hands (Carry Butterflies) moving R
12. Pivot to 9:00, Gassho
13. L arm, L leg come through to White Crane
14. Buddha's Warrior Assistant Pounds Mortar L
15. Snake Creeps Down L
16. Parting the Wild Horse's Mane R
17. Snake Creeps Down R
18. Closing form





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