

Yin–Yang

and its relevance to Taijiquan

An investigation into its meaning, its relevance to the practice of Taijiquan and a way of discovering how it works within applications by the use of basic push hands techniques.

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*Let him come and strike with great force
Lead his movement using four ounces to deflect a thousand pounds*

Extract from *The Song of Pushing Hands*

What exactly is Yin and Yang? Its symbolic representation (figure 1) is common enough but it would be a reasonable bet that few who observe it will know much about its meaning, beyond thinking that it has something to do with opposites or duality.

One approach to a truer meaning, is to consider what it is not. It is neither a force nor an energy. You cannot see it, feel it, breath it or hear it. It has no physical presence but as the Chinese might say, it exists.

It is in essence a philosophical concept, a means by which one can reach an understanding as to the nature of existence without having recourse to science or theoretical physics.

To think of Yin and Yang in terms of opposites is misleading. To term one thing as opposite to another is to imply that they are fixed and unchanging but the idea that anything can be so situated is contrary to what is implied by the segments within the circle.

What it depicts is the totality of existence (the outer circle—tai chi, the grand ultimate in Taoist thinking) inside which all things at all times are in a constant state of increase (Yin—the dark segment, to Yang—the light segment) followed by decrease (Yang to Yin). The small circles at the centre of each segment represent the ever present potential for change, that which increases will ultimately decrease and visa-versa. There are no absolutes and therefore there can be no opposites—only maximum and minimum potentials.

Historical Background

The origins of Yin and Yang are (so far) unknown. One could speculate that they came about through observations of a changing natural environment but in reality only two things are certain—one, that the origins lie a long way back in time, and two, its impact was significant enough for it to form the foundation stone of classical Chinese science, religion, philosophy and medicine (see Table 1).

It is interesting to note, if only for academic reasons, that while the concept of yin-yang dates back to China's ancient history, the taijitu diagram as shown in figure 1 is no more than a few hundred years old (if that). Other versions predate it, for instance that of Zhou Dun-yi (1017–1073) shown in figure 2, and that of La Zhide (1525–1604). More intriguing perhaps is that other ancient cultures have used emblems that resemble the taijitu, in particular the Romans, who used it on their shields (figure 3) as far back as the 3rd century CE.



Figure 1. The Taijitu ("diagram of the supreme ultimate") commonly called the Tai Chi symbol in western countries.

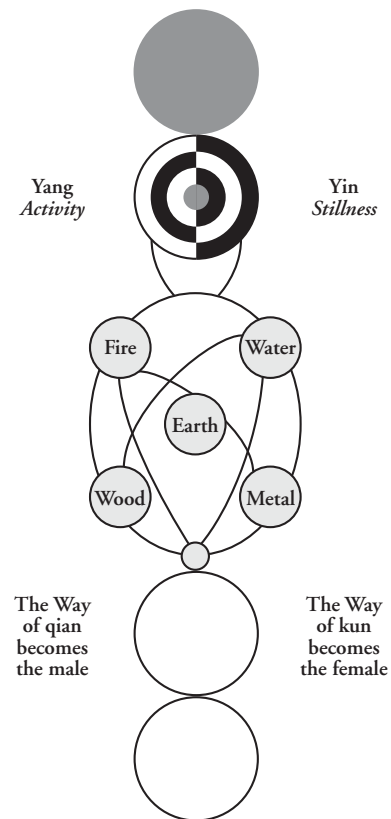


Figure 2. The Taijitu of Zhou Dun-yi (1017–1073 CE).



Figure 3. Shield pattern of the Western Roman infantry unit armigeri defensores seniores (ca. CE 430), the earliest known classical yin yang emblem.

What then has yin-yang theory got to do with martial arts and in particular, Taijiquan?

Chinese martial arts have been practised for many centuries. The earliest references can be found in the *Spring and Autumn Annals* which dates back to at least 500 BCE.⁽¹⁾ Since then, fighting forms have been changed and modified, largely as a result of changes and developments in Chinese society.

In the late 17th century CE the concept of internal and external styles was introduced, or at least, that was when it was first mentioned in writing.⁽²⁾ External (wajia) was applied to any style that focused on physical strength, speed and agility. It was often associated with Buddhism as many of these styles originated in Buddhist temples. Internal (nejia) applied to any style that focused on spirit, the mind, the manipulation of chi (qi) and achieving results by *harnessing an opponents' force rather than fighting against it*. Its philosophical foundation is/was or has become, Taoism.

This broad classification of styles can be confusing as they all have aspects which are internal and external but it does help when considering Yin-Yang theory and the part it plays in Taijiquan, the most prominent and well known of all styles classed as internal.

Taijiquan's history is a subject that is much debated and disputed, particularly within China. Reliable historical records are, to say the least, scarce and its link with Taoism may well be a much later development than some commentators suggest. That is, no earlier than the beginnings of the 19th Century. Taoism however is most definitely much older than Taijiquan.

Originally inspired by the *Taodejing*⁽³⁾ (late 4th to 3rd century BCE) Taoism gradually developed to become one of three prominent philosophies to hold sway over China's emperors and people alike. While it embraced many aspects of Chinese folk religion, its primary focus was on nature, wu-wei (action through non-action) and living life according to The Way.

During the Warring States period the theories of the School of Naturalists, which synthesized the concepts of Yin-Yang and the Five Elements, were incorporated into Taoist thinking and became its cosmological foundation. Written in the same historical period, the Taoist classic *Zhuangzi* introduced the concept of **Taiji** (grand ultimate—among various interpretations) which has become symbolically represented in the **Taijitu** (Figure 1). Taiji can be described as follows:

Tao is the first-cause of the universe. It regulates natural processes and nourishes balance. It embodies the

Table 1. Yin-Yang historical timeline

Period	Term	Years	Events of significance to Tai chi chuan
Ancient China: 3 Sovereigns & 5 Emperors	2850–2194 BCE This era forms part of Chinese mythology.	656	The concept of Yin–Yang may well have originated from this period (or even earlier) The origins of the I Ching (being an interpretation of Yin–Yang) probably date the Shang Dynasty.
Xia Dynasty	2194–1675 BCE	519	
Shang Dynasty	1675–1034 BCE	571	
Western Zhou Dynasty	1034–770 BCE	264	The I Ching is formalised by approximately 1000 BC.
Eastern Zhou Dynasty:	770–221 BCE	549	Oldest known text of the Daodejing, which forms the foundation stone of Taoism. The theories of the School of Naturalists (School of Yin–Yang) were absorbed into Taoist thinking and into Chinese medical theory during the Warring States period.
Spring & Autumn Period	722–476 BCE	246	
Warring States Period	475–221 BCE	254	
Qin Dynasty	221–206 BCE	15	
Western Han Dynasty	206 BC–09 CE	215	
Xin Dynasty	09–23 CE	14	
Eastern Han Dynasty	25–220 CE	195	The Tianshi Dao, the first formalised Taoist movement founded in 142 CE
3 Kingdoms Dynasty	220–265 CE	45	
Western Jin Dynasty	265–317 CE	52	
Eastern Jin Dynasty	317–420 CE	103	
Southern & Northern	420–589 CE	169	Establishment of the Shaolin Monastery 477–499 CE. Introduced the first formalised version of external style martial arts with Chan Buddhism as the philosophical foundation.
Sui Dynasty	581–618 CE	37	
Tang Dynasty	618–907 CE	289	
5 Dynasties & 10 Kingdoms	907–960 CE	53	At some point between then and 1600 CE, a person or persons unknown develop internal styles of martial arts. These internal styles form the origins of Taijiquan.
Northern Song Dynasty	960–1127 CE	167	
Southern Song Dynasty	1127–1279 CE	152	
Liao Dynasty	916–1125 CE	209	
Jin Dynasty	1115–1234 CE	119	
Yuan Dynasty	1271–1368 CE	97	
Ming Dynasty	1368–1644 CE	276	Earliest verifiable versions of Taijiquan (Chen style) – approximately 1600 onwards. Not formally known as Taijiquan (Tai Chi) until time of Yang Lu Chang (1799–1872)
Qing Dynasty	1644–1911 CE	268	

Note: The I Ching is included to illustrate how far back in history the use of Yin–Yang theory can be reliably dated (most dates are approximate).

harmony of opposites—Yin and Yang. The interaction of Yin and Yang, ever changing, ever evolving one into the other, produces chi the power which envelopes, surrounds and flows through all things, living and non-living. It is the duty of all individuals to follow a path which leads towards the Tao and become one with it.⁽⁴⁾

In Taoist thinking, existence is brought about and maintained by chi, and that being one with the Tao can be achieved by harmonizing Yin and Yang. Therefore an individual's actions can be helpful or harmful to the flow of chi. If chi is the very substance of life then it makes sense to act in ways that improve its effects, both to the one's body and the environment. If it is indeed true⁽⁵⁾ that Taoist devotees practiced Dao Yin (an internal style exercise to promote good health) as far back as the Warring States period then it is not too difficult to see where the development of internal style martial arts sprang from.

As a concluding note, it is important to remember that the term 'Taijiquan' (or 'Tai Chi Chuan') and Taiji (or Tai Chi) have distinct meanings. Taiji (Tai Chi) means 'grand ultimate' and is a philosophy, Taijiquan (Tai Chi Chuan) means 'grand ultimate fist' and is a martial art.

Before the mid 1800's Taijiquan had no defining name, it was only after the scholar Ong Tong witnessed a performance of Yang Luchan's martial art and declared that it was the physical manifestation of the Taiji philosophy that it became known as Taijiquan. Somehow, over time and mainly in Western countries it seems, the name has been shortened to Tai Chi. That maybe one reason amongst many why so many people who practice it do not know that it is a martial art.

Yin-Yang in Taijiquan practice

To understand the way Yin-Yang is played out in Taijiquan, a practitioner needs to examine the forms and the applications that lie behind them. Applications provide the intent and are the reason why Taijiquan is performed the way it is.

It's within the applications that one can best see both Yin-Yang and energy exchange in action.

Table 2 lists some relative characteristics of Yin and Yang which can be looked for in any given Taijiquan movement. This is not a reversion to opposites, it is simply a list of relative qualities that can be observed when studied in conjunction with a chosen move or posture.

Table 2. Some relative characteristics of Yin-Yang

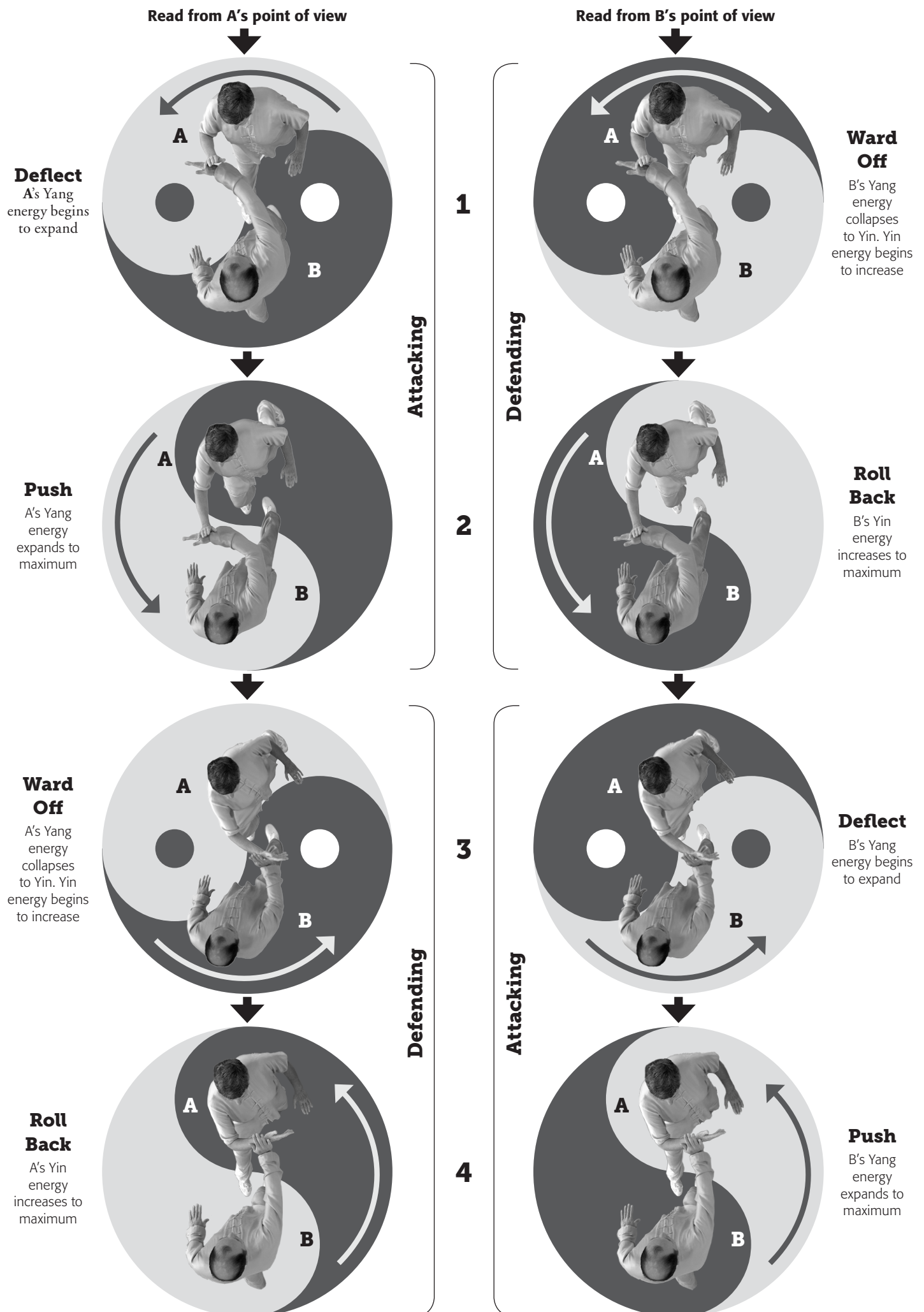
Yin	Yang
Reaction	Action
Yielding	Firming
Insustantial	Substantial
Stillness	Movement
Contracting	Expanding
Absorbing	Releasing
Retreating	Advancing
Defending	Attacking
Hidding	Revealing
Following	Leading

The basic principle (as already noted) is that Yin and Yang are forever changing, one into the other in a continuous cycle. It follows then that the one will ultimately be overcome by the other simply because whatever increases or expands (Yang) will run out of energy and collapses into its opposite (Yin). Therefore, while Yang energy can overwhelm Yin energy, Yin can overcome Yang by the action of yielding and allowing Yang to exhaust itself. It is the way of yielding and what one does next that underpins Taijiquan applications.

Page 6 shows a series of diagrams depicting the first four stages of the first single hand movement of Push Hands, overlaid on the Yin-Yang symbol. Shown in this fashion, it is as concise a way as any other to demonstrate how Yin-Yang energy exchange actually works. The reason for choosing push hands over any other form or application is (to quote from Yang Chengfu's *The Essence and Applications of Taijiquan*) as follows:

Taijiquan uses the practice of push hands (tuishou) to convey the meaning of its applications. Studying push hands is learning how to sense energy (jue jin). Once one can sense energy, it will not be difficult to understand energy (dong jin).

That just leaves the question of defining what is meant by the term 'energy.' In traditional Chinese martial arts terms it usually means 'chi' (*qi*). In strict Western scientific terms there are many types of energy but chi is not one of them—its existence being denied by lack of (scientific) evidence. The whole subject of chi, its existence or non-existence is much written about and discussed elsewhere but whichever way the term 'energy' is understood, be it Eastern traditional or Western scientific, the principles of Yin-Yang and the manipulation of energy are equally applicable.



Push Hands sequence explanation:

(Note that this is not a set of instructions on how to perform push hands so the sequence listed for 'A' differs from convention viz; ward off, roll back, deflect and push. What is described below is solely intended to illustrate how Yin–Yang can be observed in a practical, rather than theoretical, way).

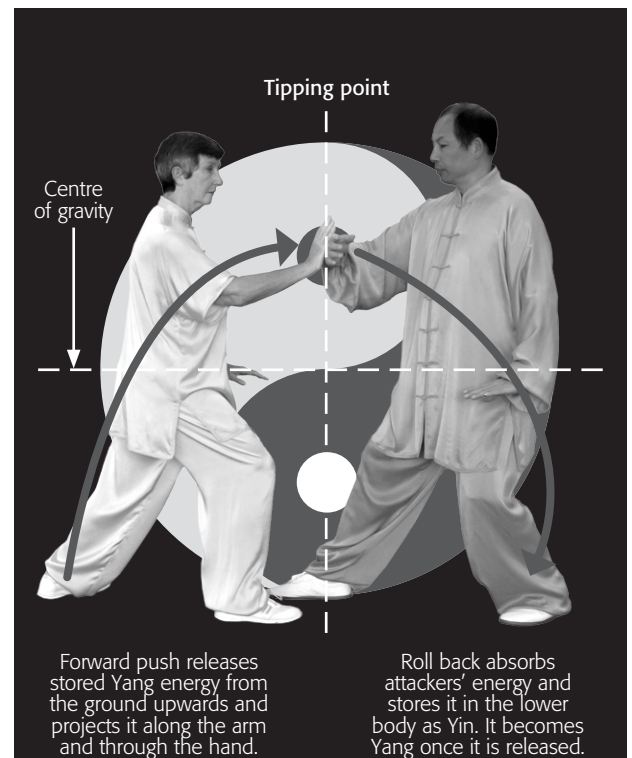
1. **Deflect.** After the initial midway starting point (the neutral position) B elects to attack A by pushing forward. Any move coming towards you is going to be Yang in nature and A can deflect this attack because B's Yang has quickly collapsed (gone past the point of maximum effectiveness—*see opposite*). As there is now nothing left in terms of energy in the attack, very little effort—a simple turn of the waist—is all that is required to deflect it. A is now **attacking** B. A's Yang energy begins to **firm, expand and advance**. A's stored and **hidden** energy has been **revealed**.

However, for B the opposite is happening, A's deflection is B's ward off. Because B chooses to stick with the deflection, B's Yang energy has become Yin and starts to increase. B is now defending.

2. **Push.** A now continues the attack with a direct push, increasing Yang energy to point where it will soon reach its maximum potential. B yields to it by **retreating** (roll back). B is defending.
3. **Ward off.** Up to this point A has been attacking B, but now A's store of Yang has gone past its point of maximum effectiveness and has collapsed into Yin. B has been able to deflect the attack for the same reason as for A in the 1st move. A is now defending and B is attacking.
4. **Roll back.** In rolling back, or **yielding**, A's own store of Yin energy (what will be used to retaliate) increases. This is known as '**absorbing**.' Retreating also **hides** A's intention, it gives nothing away as to the kind of response that will be made to B's push. B is attacking.

Observations

When Push Hands is performed correctly, the hand of defender doing roll back is moving very slightly ahead of the hand of the attacker doing push, but without losing contact. This is called **following**. In addition, the waist of the defender is acting like a wheel in a horizontal plane. The net result is that the attacker meets with no apparent resistance but is being deceived, because the defender is actually absorbing the attacker's energy before **deflecting** it.



The tipping point

There is a point in any attack where its effectiveness reaches maximum (Yang on the point of collapse to Yin). If the defender can sense it then they can use their stored Yin energy to neutralise it—either leading that Yang energy away from them or by deflecting it to one side. If they do not, the attacker gets an advantage and can or will, defeat their opponent by, for instance, stepping forwards and continuing to push so that their Yang energy continues to expand directly towards their opponent, taking them beyond the point where they can effectively respond. The attack will have “broken the trees root,” that is, broken the defenders connection with the earth.

To put Yin and Yang to work, a solid grounding (feet planted firmly on the floor, a balanced and stable posture, centre of gravity at dantian level) is required. It is from this grounding or root (as its often referred to) that energy originates. Break it and the defender will be floating. Their stored Yang will just rise up and dissipate in the top half of the body instead of being used to retaliate. They will be top heavy and easy to defeat.

Newton's Third Law of Motion states that every action has an equal and opposite reaction but in push hands this seems to be defied because the force of an attack finds nothing to act on—the target has moved away as fast or as slowly as the attack proceeds. Hence the statement:

If my opponent does not move, I do not move.

If my opponent moves, I move quicker.

The consequence of this that a **practitioner of Taijiquan never initiates an attack, only respond to one**. That will then accord to the principle of Yin overcoming Yang since Yang energy coming towards the defender is absorbed by rolling back and stored as Yin in the lower body and legs. Assuming that all the basic principles of Taijiquan are being applied by the defender (see section to the right) they will then be able to respond with a counter attack, releasing stored Yin energy as Yang and be able to do so with minimal effort since the attacker's force will have been dissipated.

The direction in which the response is made should always follow the direction of the attack. For instance, if a punch is driven upwards towards the defenders face then the deflection would take that punch away from them in the same upwards direction. Attempting to alter it—for example, from upwards to downwards—would require force (Yang fights Yang) whereas maintaining direction requires minimal effort (Yin defeats Yang). This can be seen in the Push Hands routine on page 7 where the attack direction is horizontal and slightly curved, therefore the deflection is also horizontal and curved. Push Hands routines are many and varied but always the same principle concerning deflection is maintained, no matter what angle or direction an attack comes from.

Push Hands it is said, teaches an understanding of energy, therefore it must also teach an understanding of Yin-Yang. To understand energy and Yin-Yang a practitioner will have to learn how to sense it—when it is one, and when it becomes the other. He or she have to be conscious of where energy is stored, when and how it should be released, in what direction and when it has reached the point of change where a defence can become an attack (Yin becomes Yang) or visa versa, an attack ceases and has to change to a defence (Yang has become Yin).

In Push Hands the sensing (often referred to as *listening*) is performed by the hands. With the legs pushing backwards and forwards and the waist performing the turning motion, the two participants

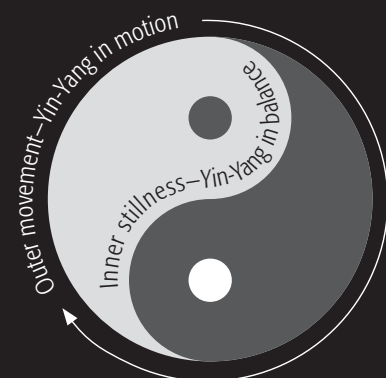
Yin-Yang & the 10 principles of Taijiquan

(See page 12 for a list of the principles)

Broadly speaking 1, 2, 3 and 5 are more to do with correct posture and 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9 are more to do with correct method. N^o 10 seems to relate more closely to Yin-Yang than the others. However, for Taijiquan applications to be effective and for Yin-Yang to function properly, all 10 must be utilised—fail one and the application will be compromised.

For instance, if the posture is not correctly aligned and relaxed then some or all of it will be tense. Tension creates resistance which will impede the practitioner's ability to yield to an attack. Failing to distinguish between substantial and insubstantial (that is, not knowing where your centre of gravity is at all times) and the problem of 'double weighting' will likely occur. That would result in Yang energy going up one leg and straight down the other with nothing left above the waist with which to respond to an attack. Fail to relax the waist and it will not perform its role of transmitting energy from below to above and will therefore stop any defensive or attacking action from working at all.

Just possibly, it could be said that principle 10 is more important than the others where applications are concerned. An untrained person being attacked will most likely panic and be unable to focus on what to do about it. Attaining stillness in movement means that an inner calm and clarity will prevail over any outer movement. Inwardly, Yin and Yang will be held still and in balance while outwardly they will be in motion. Judgement will be focused and the right response will be made.



use their lightly connecting hands to judge what their opponent is doing or might be attempting to do. Has their opponent's push reached its limit so that they can be safely deflected or are they bluffing; has their own roll back reached a point where going further would result in a loss of balance or can that be used to advantage to make their opponent think they have an advantage—albeit a false one? The permutations and possibilities are many but the intention of the routine is always the same—to create an understanding of energy transfer and when and how to use it in a combat situation.

The final aspects to consider concern curves and circles. Carefully observe someone performing Push Hands correctly and it should be obvious that while the torso and head are upright, the limbs are always off-lock and therefore never straight (see figure 4).

Energy, either Yin or Yang, can be stored in, and released from, curves but is nonexistent in straight lines. A limb held straight will have no potential. It could be said that its energy has either evaporated or, has become locked in place so that it cannot be released to any effect. In the Push Hands routine, if a leg becomes straight it can cause the foot to break contact with the floor and result in a loss of balance. If an arm becomes straight it becomes weak and of no use for either defence or attack. It is also a strange truth that a curved limb has strength but is relaxed at the same time. Straightened limbs are neither.

The most important curve and circle of all lies in the waist. The waist governs and directs all movements. Without proper implementation, Push Hands for instance would just be two people rocking backwards and forwards, learning nothing and gaining nothing other than sore knees.

Turning the waist creates a circular motion (as already mentioned above) and that circular motion is the second most important component after yielding, in understanding why Taijiquan applications work. Yielding and waist turning go together like the proverbial hand and glove. It is the waist that drives energy from its source in the lower body and delivers it to where it is needed, or conversely, allows energy to be absorbed and stored. Not using the waist will effectively break contact between upper and lower and disrupt coordination between the inner and outer body. Yielding without waist turning will mean that any Yang energy in the lower body will stay there leaving the upper body weakened and having to rely on muscular strength alone. Using the waist correctly



Figure 4. Curves should be seen in the hands, arms and legs and the pelvis should be tilted forwards. Tilting the pelvis will allow the waist to rotate. Not doing so will cause the buttocks to protrude and make it difficult, if not impossible, for the waist to turn.

will make the difference between and application working or failing and mark the difference between a routine being Taijiquan or just an interesting exercise.

From observations to applications

There are many ways that a person can be attacked and many ways to respond. Put together all the forms from all the Taijiquan routines and what one has is a catalogue of possibilities. Just because a routine is taught in a particular sequence it does not mean that in defending oneself, the use of *Part Wild Horse's Mane* for instance, has to be followed immediately by *White Crane Spreads Wings* (as is found in the Beijing 24 routine). Any appropriate form can be used either by itself or combined with any other in providing a defensive response. As this makes the number of possible responses almost limitless the following examples use a single form from two different routines—one barehands, one weapons—to illustrate how lessons learned from Push Hands about Yin–Yang can be incorporated into applications.

1. Beijing 24 Bare Hands routine

Suppose an attacker aims a right handed punch upwards and towards a defenders head. The trajectory

of this punch being upwards and most likely, slightly curved as well, means that it can be countered by using—*Part Wild Horse's Mane (form #2—left side)*.

In the routine this form proceeds with holding the ball 45° to the right side, followed by stepping out with the left heel while keeping the weight centred on the bent right leg. Then and all at the same time, the waist is rotated left, arcing the left arm to the front (palm up) while the right leg straightens out, transferring the weight to the left leg, 60/40 fashion.

To use this form as a defence against a punch as described above, the first requirement is always central equilibrium—**stillness in movement, Yin-Yang in balance**—so that one can focus on what to do without panicking, raising stress levels and inducing tension.

As the punch is travelling upwards and coming from the left towards the centre the defender would immediately transfer their weight to the right leg while turning the waist to their right side as well. This action will increase Yang energy and concentrate it in the curve of the right leg (which will now be regarded as **substantial**) rather in the same way as a spring stores energy when compressed. Concurrently, the turning waist is used to push the left heel forwards, placing it to the left of the opponents right foot (which may well be forward at this point). The left leg is now Yin (**insubstantial**).

While all that is happening the right hand has reached up to make contact with (**stick to**) the attacker's right arm, preferably just above the elbow. The left arm also swings to the right, driven by the turning waist, with the left hand being kept at waist level. If this is all achieved, then the turn of the waist will very easily (*4 ounces*) act to **ward off** and **deflect** the energy of the punch (*one thousand pounds*) upwards, outwards, away from the defenders face and past the tipping point where incoming Yang energy deflates into Yin.

The complete action of weight shifting and waist turning is the **yielding** component that is so important to Taijiquan applications and equates to performing **roll back** in Push Hands.

If done correctly, deflecting the punch may also off-balance the opponent to some degree. It is at this point that the counter attack happens. All that is now required is to maintain the deflection and release the stored Yang energy in the right leg, transferring it up through the waist and into the left arm. This is accomplished by straightening the right leg to an off-lock state and transferring the weight back to the left

leg. As that transfer happens the waist turns to the left, driving the left arm upwards to connect (**join**) with the opponents chest—toppling them backwards over the defenders left leg. This equates to **push** in Push Hands.

It is an interesting exercise to try this move without using the waist turn. It will quickly be discovered that it either does not work or a lot of force will have to be applied by the left arm to try and push the opponent over. *It will be rather like using one thousands pounds to defeat 4 ounces.*

2. Yang 32 Sword Routine

The principles and methods that apply to bare hands applications apply also to the use of weapons—in this case, the Jian sword. The main difference is that energy transmitted from the lower body, through the waist and into the arms and hands does not stop there but should continue on into the sword blade—or into whichever weapon is being used.

In sword routines and applications, the sword is acting as an extension of the hand and arm. Consequently, the correct method applied to the point where hand and sword join together becomes vitally important. The grip must be correct at all times. If it is loose or incorrect, it will break the energy flow in the same way that not turning the waist will do in bare hands and the effectiveness of the sword stroke will be severely compromised—even if the practitioner has taken care to get other aspects of their sword play correct.

In the context of the form being described here it is also important to pay attention to where the sword blade makes contact the attacker's weapon. Defensive moves such as this one make use of the strongest section of the blade. Jian swords are thinnest, sharpest and weakest at the tip graduating to thickest, bluntest and strongest at the hilt. The ideal point is not too near the defender's sword grip (to avoid possible injury) but not too far from it either (see figure 6) as the ability of a sword to absorb energy and to take control of an attack decreases the further that point gets from the hilt. It would be foolhardy to mount a defence by using the part of the sword that is intended for attacking.

Suppose then that an attacker has aimed a sword stroke from their right side, waist level, towards the defenders upper body, neck or head. The trajectory being upwards and from the opponents right will allow it to be countered by using—*Swing Up Sword In Left Empty Stance (form #16)*.

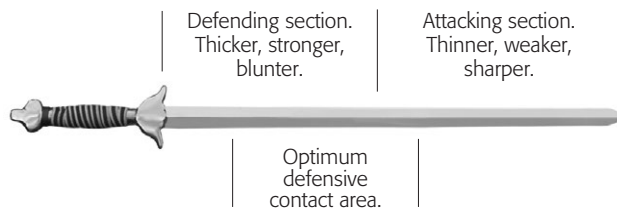


Figure 5. Best defensive contact area of the Jian sword.

In the routine and at the end of form #15, the practitioner is in a right sided bow stance. The sword is thrust forwards at about shoulder level, the left hand and arm are raised and weight is on the right leg—60/40.

Form #16 commences with a waist turn to the left and a transfer of weight back to the left leg by moving through a horse stance. While that happens the sword arcs upwards and is kept parallel to the floor. The right palm faces inwards and the left hand sword fingers make contact with the right hand wrist. As the left leg receives the body's weight (becomes **substantial**) the sword continues in a circular motion, from parallel to the floor to vertical and then down to parallel again.

Concurrent with the transfer of weight, the right foot (now **insubstantial**) is slightly raised then, as soon as the sword has reached the second parallel to the floor position, is placed down, heel first. As the sword continues its circular path, weight is transferred back to the right leg, making it **substantial** again. The waist turns to the right and the left leg steps forward into an empty (**insubstantial**) stance, driving the sword upward up in an arc to finish above the head with the sword tip pointing towards the opponent.

To apply this defence to an attack such as the one described, the first essential is to make contact with the opponents weapon (which in this case is a sword but could be any other type of weapon with a long blade) and divert its trajectory out of harms way. This is accomplished by stepping the left foot back, turning the waist to the left while sinking to a horse stance and raising the sword upward to a parallel to the floor position with palm facing inwards.

At this point the flat side of defender's sword blade should contact (**join**) the blade of the attacker's sword and by continuing the circular momentum as described, divert the **Yang** force of the attacker's blade away to the l thereby neutralizing its effect. By moving through the horse stance and transferring the bodies

weight, **Yang** energy is accumulated in the left leg in much the same way as happens in the aforementioned bare hands form. This effectively combines **ward off**, **roll back** and **deflect** into one and is also the vital **yielding** component.

All that remains is the counter attack which will happen if the defender completes the move in the same way as described for the routine. The waist turn to the right, the shift of weight to the right leg etc. and the resulting circular path of the sword will serve to drive it straight up the middle of the attacker's body. If performed correctly, all the defender's **Yang energy** will have been delivered to the sharp end of the blade and will complete the transition from defence to attack, equating to **push** in Push Hands.

NB: The counter attack will have to be performed very quickly for as soon as the defender's sword reaches the initial vertical position it will quite likely lose contact with that of the attacker and leave the defender unprotected and vulnerable.

Conclusions

A deceptively simple routine like the Push Hands exercise described in this article has all the necessary components to teach and understand Yin-Yang. It can be learned by any practitioner once they have reached a reasonable level of competence and can be understood by using either Western or traditional Eastern terminology.

It can teach how understand energy, distinguish Yin from Yang, how to relax and focus, how to be light and nimble, why the waist is so important, plus many other qualities—all of which can be applied to regular Taijiquan practice and applications training. The key to it being a profitable exercise is that students learn what to look for and then make use of that knowledge.

By using the principles of Yin and Yang as a kind of metaphor for the way that physical energy can be manipulated, one can get that little bit closer to discovering why Taijiquan was once (and maybe still is) considered to be the ultimate martial art, providing that is, one is prepared to dig a bit deeper and not succumb to the need for quick results. Patient practice can lead to a meaningful understanding of that often quoted but obscure saying:

Four ounces can deflect a thousand pounds.

The 10 principles

(referred to from page 9)

1. *Keep the head up;*
2. *Round the back and sink the chest;*
3. *Relax the waist;*
4. *Distinguish between substantial and insubstantial;*
5. *Drop the elbows and keep the shoulders down;*
6. *Use the mind, not force;*
7. *Co-ordinate above the waist and below the waist;*
8. *Harmonise inner and outer;*
9. *Maintain continuity;*
10. *Seek stillness in movement.*

Article references:

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_martial_arts

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Styles_of_Chinese_martial_arts#section_2

³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taoism>

⁴ <http://www.jungtao.edu/school> (page no longer available)

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_martial_arts

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