

Tai Chi

胡秀娟 尹博 编著

太极



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中国的太极文化，源远流长，博大精深，是中华文明五千年的智慧结晶。在中国传统文化中，太极既代表宇宙的本原，也暗含了天地万物产生、演变的过程，是中国古代哲学思想的重要观念和根源。

纵观中国数千年历史，太极文化影响着儒家、道家等中华文化的主要流派，几乎存在于养生、武术、兵法、体育等每一个领域。



Tai Chi plays an immensely important role in Chinese culture, and is the crystallization of wisdom in the past 5,000 years of the Chinese civilization. An integral part and also a significant source of ancient Chinese philosophy, it not only stands for the origin of the universe, but also implies the process of birth and evolvement of everything in the universe.

Throughout thousands of years' history of China, Tai Chi has profoundly influenced Confucianism, Taoism and other major schools of culture, and is omnipresent in fields such as regimen, martial art, art of war and sports.

Therefore, only by understanding Tai Chi, can one understand radically the Chinese culture and appreciate the great wisdom of ancient Chinese people.

Both Tai Chi regimen and Tai Chi

所以，了解太极，才能从根本上了解中华文化，领略古代中国人伟大的智慧。

近年来非常流行的太极养生、太极拳术都是太极文化现象，均体现了中国人崇尚“天人合一”、“物我合一”的世界观。尤其是受到很多人喜爱的太极拳，如行云流水一般的动作，刚柔并济，能够调养生息，平衡阴阳，使人达到一个平和的状态。

现在，就请走进太极亦阴亦阳、亦刚亦柔、亦动亦静、亦虚亦实的世界中，去感受它的无穷魅力吧！

Boxing, which have been of great popularity in recent years, are phenomena of the Tai Chi culture. They embody traditional Chinese views on the world and harmony, i.e., “unity of man and nature” and “identity of object and self”. Tai Chi Boxing, favored by many people, offers relaxation and balances *yin-yang* through its natural and smooth, soft and hard movements, allowing one to reach a state of peace.

Now, let's get into the Tai Chi realm of *yin-yang*, softness and hardness, movement and stillness, emptiness and solidness, and feel the endless charm of it.



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博大精深的太极文化

Profound Tai Chi Culture

在中国的传统文化中，太极文化具有高度的概括性和深邃的内涵，它不但代表了宇宙的本原，也包含着天地万物产生、演变的过程。太极图通过直观形象的演示，揭示了万物矛盾对立统一的辩证关系。

In traditional Chinese culture, Tai Chi is of high generality and has profound connotations; not only stands for the origin of the universe, but also implies the process of birth and evolvement of everything in the universe. The visual Tai Chi Diagram unveils the dialectical relations between diversity and unity of all things in the universe.



> 太极的内涵

太极文化是数千年中华文明的宝贵财富，它既是关于宇宙万物的理论思想，也是解释天地万物演化模式的形象图形，将八卦、阴阳五行融会贯通。那么，究竟什么是太极？它所代表的深刻内涵又是什么呢？

何为太极

什么是“太极”？从字面上理解，“太”即代表大，大之最；

“极”则代表极端，是最初的意思。所谓“太极”，古人解释为“太有至”、“极有限”，即达到极限，没有相匹之意，也包含了至大、至小的时空极限的道理；大到无穷之大，但不会超过一定的空间；小到无穷之小，却不等于零或没有，这就是“太极”的根本含

> Connotations of Tai Chi

A treasure of the Chinese civilization in the past thousands of years, Tai Chi is not only a theoretical thought about all things in the universe, but also a visual symbol used to explain the evolving modes of everything in the universe, which is a perfect fusion of *Bagua* (the Eight Trigrams), *Yin-yang* and *Wuxing* (Five Elements). So, what on earth is Tai Chi, and what are profound connotations of it?

What is Tai Chi?

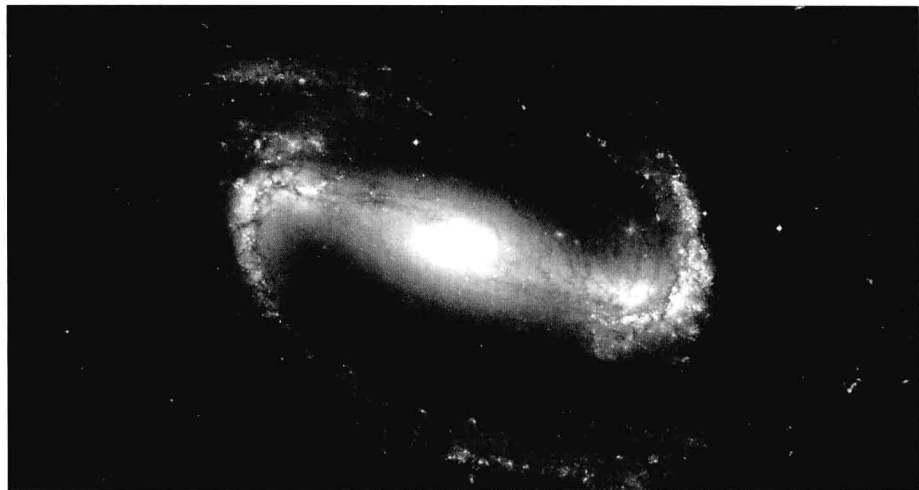
Literally, Tai means “great, supreme”, and Chi means “ultimate”. Explained by the ancients as “Tai has the end” and “Chi has the limit”, Tai Chi has the meaning of the arrival of the limit and having no match, which also means the truth of time-space limits of maximum and minimum. The fundamental implications of Tai Chi are infinity within

义。两字相合解释了宇宙的起源，天地万物产生、演变的过程。

中国古人早已对宇宙有了朦胧的认知与思辨，他们认为“太极”是天地混沌之气的原始状态，并将“太极”视为宇宙的本原，是易学研究的重要基础。

a certain space, and infinitesimal but not zero or nothing. And Tai Chi denotes the origin of the universe as well as the process of the birth and evolvement of all things in the universe.

The ancient Chinese had a hazy knowledge and speculation of the universe, believing Tai Chi to be the original state of the chaos of the universe and viewing it as the origin of the universe. This is an important foundation for *I Ching* (Book of Changes) studies.



• 宇宙中的旋涡星系

宇宙最初处于混沌状态，是具有阴阳之气的原始形状。太极图所表达的对立统一思想，与宇宙的根本存在方式相吻合。宇宙中的星系有三种运动模式，即棒旋星系、螺旋星系、椭圆星系。除后一种外，前两种星系就像是一个无限大的“太极图”。

A Spiral Galaxy in the Universe

The universe was originally in chaos with an original shape featuring *Yin-yang*. The thought of unity of opposites which is conveyed by the Tai Chi Diagram coincides with the universe's radical mode of existence. Galaxies in the universe are divided by their patterns of movement into barred spiral galaxies, spiral galaxies, and elliptical galaxies. Except for the third type, the other two look like an infinite "Tai Chi Diagram" respectively.

《周易》

中国有关太极学说最早的经典是《周易》。《周易》是一部中国古代研究宇宙运动变化发展规律的自然哲学典籍，又称为《易经》，它分为《经》和《传》两个部分。“太极”一词最早见于《易传》。中国古人用《周易》来预测未来，决策国家大事，反映当前现象。《周易》具有深厚的文化内涵，它讲究阴阳互应、刚柔相济，提倡自强不息、厚德载物，是中国传统文化的精髓。几千年来，《周易》的基本思想融入到中华民族的方方面面，包括天文、地理、历法、人事、医学、武术、军事、建筑等各个领域，构成了中国传统文化的基本格调。

Zhouyi

The earliest Chinese classic about Tai Chi theory is *Zhouyi*, also known as *I Ching*, an ancient Chinese classic of natural philosophy about the movement, change and development rules of the universe. *Zhouyi* comprises two parts, *Jing* and *Zhuan*. The term Tai Chi was earliest found in *Zhuan*. The ancient Chinese used *Zhouyi* to divine future events, decide on state affairs and mirror current phenomena. The essence of traditional Chinese culture, *Zhouyi* has profound cultural connotations, stressing the interplay between *yin* and *yang* and the tempering of force with grace, and advocating self-discipline and social commitment. In the past thousands of years, the basic thoughts of *Zhouyi* have been omnipresent in all aspects of the Chinese nation, such as astronomy and geography, calendar, occurrences in human life, medicine, martial art, military affairs, and architecture, forming the fundamental style of traditional Chinese culture.



• 《周易》书影

A photograph sheet of *Zhouyi*

阴阳五行说

“太极”最初大都与阴阳五行学说联系在一起。此外，八卦学说也常常作为解释其义的手段。这些形成了中国古人最初的自然观念。

中国古人认为，太极就代表了宇宙，解释了万物演变、生化的过程，是天地混沌、阴阳未分之前的状态。《周易》中说，太极分阴、阳两仪，宇宙间的一切，都包含着

Yin-yang & Wuxing Theory

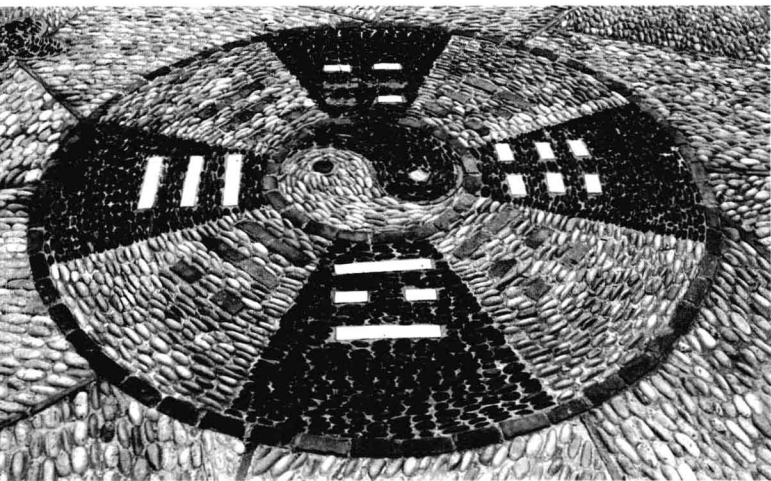
Tai Chi are largely connected with the Yin-yang & Wuxing theory originally. In addition, the Bagua theory is also usually used as a means to explain it. These formed the initial natural beliefs of the ancient Chinese.

The ancient Chinese believed that Tai Chi represented the universe, the process of the birth and evolvement of all things in the universe, and the state of chaos before the division of yin and yang.

According to *Zhouyi*, Tai Chi can be divided into *Liang Yi* (Two Instruments), namely *yin* and *yang*, and everything in the universe comprises two sides, namely *yin* and *yang*, outside and inside.

The ancient

Chinese believed that all things in the world arose from the interplay between yin and yang. The *Yin-yang* theory played a key role in ancient Chinese philosophy and blended with other



• 苏州木渎古镇的太极八卦纹石子铺地

太极文化对中国的影响十分深远，体现在人们生活中的很多方面。

A cobblestone pavement with a Tai Chi Diagram pattern in the ancient town of Mudu, Suzhou

The Tai Chi culture has a far-reaching influence in China and is embodied in many aspects of people's lives.

阴和阳、表和里两个方面。

中国古人认为，世间万物都是由阴阳互动产生的。阴阳学说是中国古代哲学理论的关键点，它与其他理论思想相互交融。古代哲人在观察世界的时候，发现万物总是生生不息、不断变化、轮回生长的，这一点与现代哲学中矛盾的对立统一观点极为相似。古代哲人还认为，万物由五种基本元素，即金、木、水、火、土组成，它们相生相克，往复不休，互相滋长、互相消亡。“相生”是指五种元素相互滋生和助长的关系，即金生水、水生木、木生火、火生土、土生金。

“相克”是指五种元素相互排斥和制约的关系，即金克木、木克土、土克水、水克火、火克金。

theories and thoughts. Ancient Chinese philosophers observed all things on earth as generative without ceasing, in constant flux, and growing in the eternal cycle of birth and death, a point quite similar to the unity of opposites in modern philosophy. They also believed that all things were comprised of five basic elements, namely Metal, Wood, Water, Fire and Earth, and that these elements generated and overcame each other and moved in ceaseless circles. “Generating each other” means that the five elements generate and promote each other, that is, Metal carries Water, Water nourishes Wood, Wood feeds Fire, Fire creates Earth, and Earth bears Metal. “Overcoming each other” means that the five elements exclude and restrict each other, that is, Metal chops Wood, Wood parts Earth, Earth absorbs Water, Water quenches Fire, and Fire melts Metal.

自然万物的五行归属表

Wuxing Matrix of All Things in the Universe

木	火	土	金	水
Wood	Fire	Earth	Metal	Water

五季
Five seasons

春
Spring

夏
Summer

长夏
Changxia(The 18
days at the turnings
of spring, summer,
autumn and winter)

秋
Autumn

冬
Winter

五方
Five directions

东
East

南
South

中
Center

西
West

北
North

五化
Five energies

生
Generative

长
Expansive

化
Stabilizing

收
Contracting

藏
Conserving

五气
Five climates

风
Windy

暑
Hot

湿
Damp

燥
Dry

寒
Cold

五色
Five colors

青
Green

赤
Red

黄
Yellow

白
White

黑
Black

五味
Five flavors

酸
Sour

苦
Bitter

甜
Sweet

辣
Hot

咸
Salty

五谷
Five grains

麻
Hemp

麦
Wheat

稷
Millet

稻
Rice

菽
Beans

老子的“道”学说与太极

老子是春秋时期著名的思想家，提出了“道”的哲学理念。他认为，宇宙的根本是“道”，“道”广大无边，为天地之母，是永恒而又运行不息的。宇宙万物都由“道”衍生而来，“道”是宇宙万物的主宰。老子的“道”理论就是对太极理念的另一种理解。《老子》以“道”解释宇宙万物的演变，他指出：“道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物”。“道生一”，就是太极；“一生二”，就是太极生两仪；“二生三”，就是阴阳相互制约和影响；“三生万物”，就是万物皆由阴阳化生。宇宙万物的生化模式，以及万物由简单到复杂的演变过程，无疑与老子“道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物”的理念相一致。

Taoism and Tai Chi

Laozi, a distinguished thinker during the Spring and Autumn Period, developed the philosophy of Taoism. According to him, the essence of the universe is Tao, which is immeasurable, eternal and ceaseless, giving rise to both heaven and earth. All things in the universe derive from Tao, and Tao is the governor of all things in the universe. Laozi's Tao theory is an alternative explanation for Tai Chi theory. Laozi explained the evolvement of all things in the universe with Tao, saying "Tao begets the One; The One consists of Two in opposition; The Two begets the Three; The Three begets All things of the world." "Tao begets the One", meaning Tai Chi; "The One consists of Two in opposition", implying that Tai Chi gave rise to Liang Yi (Yin and Yang); "The Two begets the Three", implying the mutual restriction and interaction between yin and yang; "The Three begets All things of the world", meaning that all things derived from yin and yang. The generative and growth patterns of all things in the universe and the evolvement of them from simplicity to complexity undoubtedly coincide with Laozi's philosophy.



• 老子画像
Laozi

八卦学说

八卦是太极的延伸，同样产生于《周易》。《周易》中记载：

“易有太极，是生两仪，两仪生四象，四象生八卦。八卦定吉凶，吉凶生大业。”



• 中国古代的八卦轮盘

八卦轮盘是中国古代的一种算命用具，古人认为可以用它来预测吉凶。

An ancient Bagua board of China

The Bagua board was a device for fortunetelling in ancient China, which was used to predict future good and ill luck.

Bagua Theory

An extension of *Tai Chi*, *Bagua* originated in *Zhouyi*, too. It is recorded in *Zhouyi* that “Therefore there is in the Changes the Great Primal Beginning. This generates the two primary forces.

The two primary forces generate the four images. The four images generate the eight trigrams. The eight trigrams determine good fortune and misfortune. Good fortune and misfortune create the great field of action.”

“Therefore there is in the Changes the Great Primal Beginning” indicates that the essence of *Zhouyi* is *Tai Chi*, the initially chaotic state of the universe. “This generates the two primary forces” means *Tai Chi* divides into *yin* and *yang*, where *yang* is heaven and *yin* earth, with *yin* and *yang* being the unity of opposites. “The two primary forces generate the four images”

means that *yin* and *yang* further divide into great *yin*, lesser *yang*, lesser *yin* and great *yang*, which correspond to four directions, four seasons etc. In the

“易有太极”说的是《周易》的精髓是太极，是宇宙最初混沌的状态。“是生两仪”指的是太极分阴阳两仪，阳为天、阴为地，阴阳是对立统一的矛盾体。“两仪生四象”，说的是阴阳两仪又分为太阴、少阳、少阴、太阳，可分别对应四个方向、四季等。“四象生八卦”，“八卦”的含义比较抽象，可以简单地理解成八方，呈阴阳交错地排列着，即乾、兑、离、震、巽（xùn）、坎、艮（gèn）、坤，象征天、泽、火、雷、风、水、山、地等八种自然现象。“乾”和“坤”两卦在八卦中占有非常重要的地位，是自然界和人类社会一切现象的根源。

在中国古代，八卦相重相交，又产生了六十四卦，共三百八十四个交点，人们常以此判断事物的凶吉。

sentence “The four images generate the eight trigrams”, the eight trigrams, namely *Bagua*, are abstract in meaning, which can be simply understood as eight directions arranged in alternate *yin* and *yang* - *Qian*, *Dui*, *Li*, *Zhen*, *Xun*, *Kan*, *Gen* and *Kun*, corresponding to the eight natural phenomena of sky (heaven), lake, fire, thunder, wind, mountain and earth. Of the trigrams, *Qian* and *Kun* have very important places, which are the origins of all phenomena in nature and human society.

In ancient China, the eight trigrams overlapped and intersected into sixty-four trigrams with three hundred and eighty four points of intersection, on the basis of which good fortune and misfortune were determined.