

# TAI CHI



**Tai Chi** has been practiced in China for centuries as a martial art, as exercise, and as a means of improving the flow of internal energy within the body. Because of Tai Chi's emphasis on correct form and feeling each movement, it is practiced very slowly and gently. Completely non-impact, yet involving the entire body, Tai Chi promotes strength, stamina, and flexibility, while tempering the joints of practitioners. Because the whole body moves as one, Tai Chi cultivates the link between mind and body, enhancing balance and coordination. Practitioners develop confident ease of movement.

The Taoists felt that stagnation was the cause of disease and aging. Nature moves unceasingly, and movement prevents stagnation.

**Tai Chi** was developed as a martial art/movement and breathing system that exercised all the joints and major muscle groups while circulating the chi, the internal energy. It is this circulation of the chi that prevents or mitigates disease and debility.



**Tai Chi** is performed slowly, evenly, and thoughtfully, with the emphasis on continuity of movement without break or pause. The Chinese use the metaphor of pulling silk from a cocoon: pull steadily, and the strand unravels; pull too fast or too slow, and it breaks.

Throughout the form, the body remains soft and relaxed, as if suspended from the top of the head and the joints like a puppet. The mind is centred on each movement, assessing the alignment and correctness of the form, focusing on feeling the flow from substantial to insubstantial in each movement, fending

off distractions. Breathing is through the nose, slow and even, inhaling during contractions, exhaling during expansions of the form.

In **Tai Chi** you're always moving, but always under complete control. There's no overextension, no wasted effort. The whole body moves as one, with the body parts balanced in circular movement. Always moving, always rotating, always transforming into the opposite--the leg that bears the weight becomes "hollow" (weightless), the hand that was above circles below, while the other hand circles up to take its place. It's not just hand, arm, and leg motions: the movement is controlled by the waist, and the hand, arm, and leg motions lead or follow the turning of the body. The weight shifts continuously, evenly and under complete control throughout the form, coming to rest briefly but completely on one leg or the other as the next element of the form unfolds.

As a martial art, **Tai Chi** uses the theory of "four ounces of strength against a ton of force" to repel the opponent without the need of force against force. Tai Chi uses the opponent's own energy against him, while the Tai Chi practitioner exerts little or no force controlling the opponent. Where the opponent attacks, you become "insubstantial"; where the opponent is weak you attack.