

The Origins of Tai Chi.

Tai Chi Chuan is an ancient Chinese form of exercise originally created as a fighting art. Tai Chi is thought to be accredited to a Taoist Monk called Zhang San Feng. Its origins date back over 700 years and incorporated principles of the Tao, such as using the Chi flow and the Yin and Yang in their movements.

Zhang San Feng is given credit for the development of a Taoist "internal martial arts" style, as opposed to the "external" style of the Shaolin martial arts tradition. His observations of nature led him to incorporate many of the movements of animals such as the 'white crane battles snake'. He lived in the second half of his life in Wudang Mountain, in Hubei Province.

Until the beginning of the 20th century Tai Chi was considered a secret practice, passed down only within the family and loyal disciples. Changes in the Chinese government and culture have brought Tai Chi to the populace. There are non-family Tai Chi styles as well – 24-form and 48-form.

The Wu family style is derived from both Chen family and Yang family style in the nineteenth century by Master Wu Chian-Chuan. He omitted some of the repetitions, jumping and stamping movements of the old-style so as to make the whole set of Tai Chi Chuan more structured, smooth, even and continuous. This is now known as Wu Style Tai Chi, and is known in many countries of the world.

- Helen Lee.