

Ch'i

Development

*If the road to hell is paved with good intentions,
the road to heaven is paved with Ch 'i.*

Chi cannot always fit within the bounds of human logic and is therefore undefinable. Any limitations on the word negate its definition. It has no definition nor any limitation. If Chi is beginning to sound like the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tsu's notion of the Tao, then **incredibly**, we are still too limited. It is much more than this, for every ancient culture revered the universal principle of Chi. "Chi" is a Chinese word. The Japanese call it "**Ki**," in Sanskrit it is "**Prana**," to the Greeks it was "Pneuma," to the Romans 'Spiritus,' in Hebrew 'Ruakh,' and for the Egyptians 'Ka.' "

When you read the Bible in the original Greek, the term "Agion Pneuma" refers to the Holy Spirit, the breath of God. Chi, and its cultural equivalents in other ancient languages, could mean far more: the sustaining principle of life in the whole universe, the life force, internal energy, our breath, the electrical pulsations of our nervous systems. It is the Universal Chi that acts in us through love, understanding, compassion, sincerity, truth, and justice. It is the Universal Chi that sustains life.

Chi is free, but it is a pearl of great price. We all have it, but very few of us find it. We all see it, but very few of us know it is there. We all hear it, but very few of us listen. We all want it, but very few of us get it.

Einstein showed with his theory of relativity that matter and **energy** are equatable and differ only by a numerical constant, **E = mc²**.

Scientists, in understanding part of the vast implications of this theory, took matter in the form of uranium and transformed it into our first atomic bomb, energy. Now we have nuclear power plants all over. Yet, it is readily apparent even to a layman, that if with our primitive capacities we can transform matter into energy and energy into matter, the probabilities for future transformations are endless.

Chi is energy, but it is also more than energy. It is also matter, animate and inanimate. We should realize the different forms that energy can assume. As human beings we are concerned with the transformation and realization of our own energy, our Chi and matter, just as scientists realized the awesome strength found in a naturally occurring element. This is the Chi development, the Chi Kung of T'ai Chi. It is the essence of the art, the cultivation of not only our personal life force, but harmony with the Universal Life Force. This is T'ai Chi.

In T'ai Chi we subscribe to the Chi theory, not on faith or belief alone, but in understanding. To have this understanding, we must eliminate doubt.

Though faith and belief are important to each human being, the words "faith" and "belief" imply that there is not a total understanding. To believe is not necessarily to know. To have understanding means to know while eliminating all doubts. In T'ai Chi understanding comes as a personal experience. Therefore, T'ai Chi is often considered to be personalized in form.

There are many approaches for developing the Chi, but we will discuss only four of them.

Breath

The most common technique for Chi development in T'ai Chi Ch'uan is through the coordination of breath and movement. Each and every move is totally correlated with a well-defined breathing pattern that integrates form and movement. Most T'ai Chi books attempt to explain this in the simple terms of expansion and contraction, opening and closing, raising and lowering. However, these are only general guides since they can not completely integrate the breath with each part of the form, nor with the whole of the form itself.

There are two components within each breath, Yin and Yang, inhale and exhale. In T'ai Chi, "our emphasis lies not in the movement of form, but in the movement and coordination of breath; not in external aspects, but in the internal situation; not in the physical form, but in the breath that guides the form." The student understands breath in terms of form. The teacher understands breath in terms of Breath.

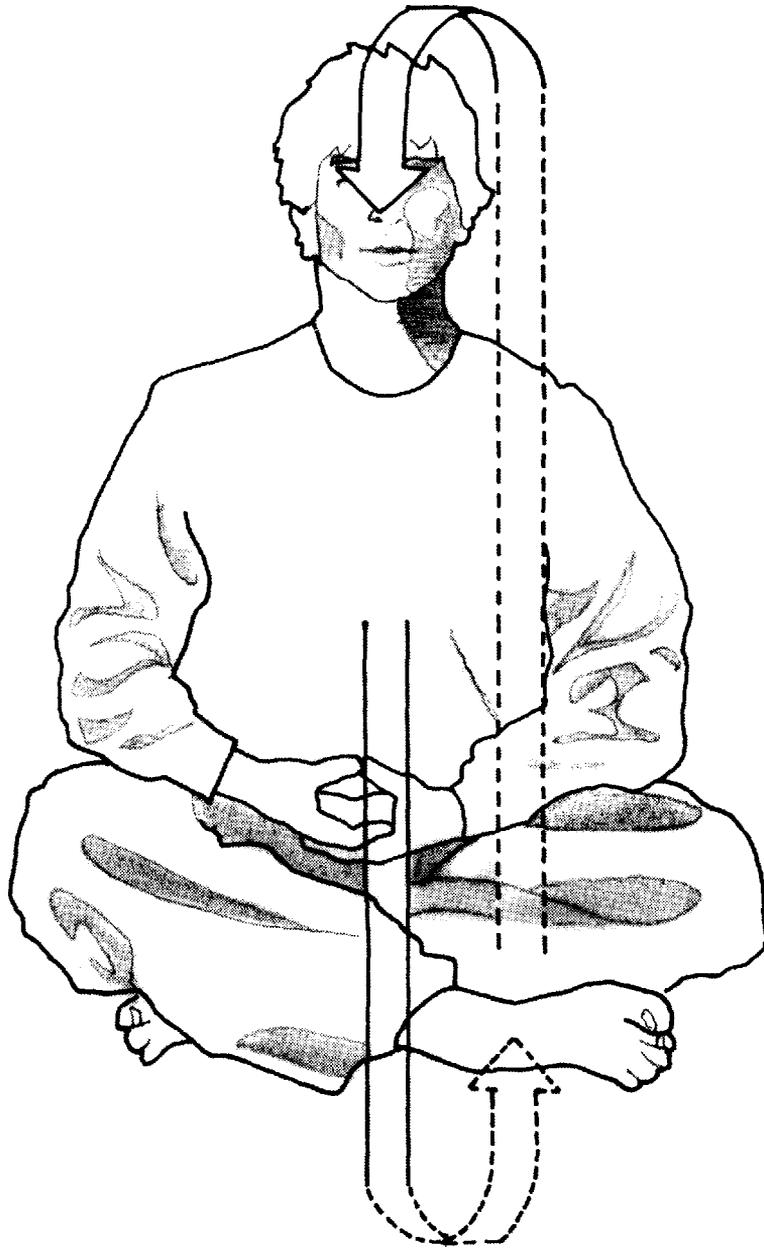


Figure 1: Microcosmic Orbit of Ch'i

Tsao Li Ming's approach to T'ai Chi Ch'uan was wholly intertwined with the processes of Taoist Yoga and that of alchemy, or transubstantiation. Often before practicing he would sit quietly on the ground or a chair and practice a breathing exercise known in T'ai Chi as the microcosmic orbit. It is depicted in more detail in the diagram above. (For other diagrams, see Wen Shang Huang's work, *Fundamentals of T'ai Chi Ch'uan*.)

During other sessions, Tsao would stand erect and practice what is known as the macrocosmic orbit, first on the right side, and then on the left.

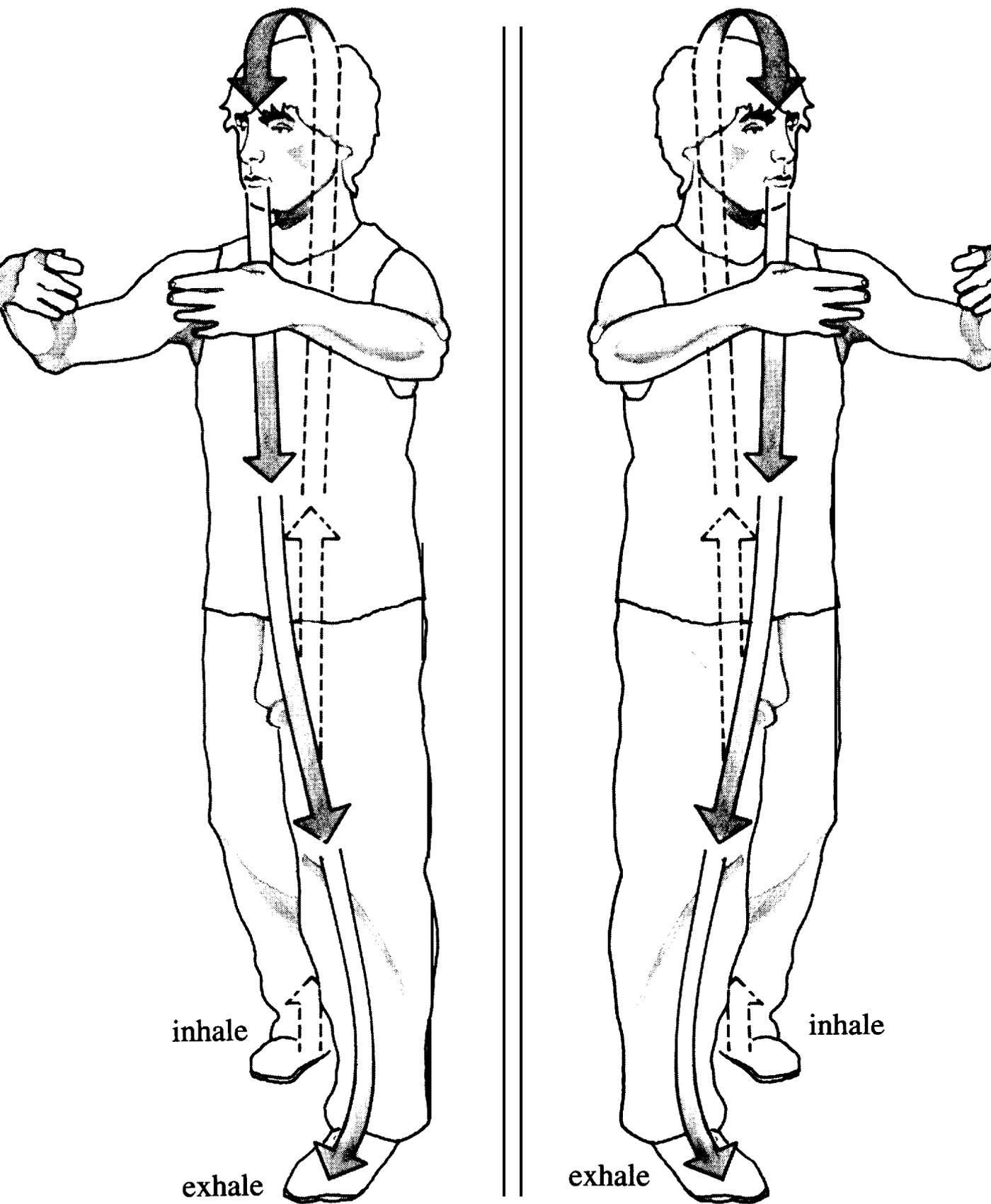


Figure 2: Macrocosmic Orbit of Chi

Although these auxiliary breathing exercises are both useful and effective, it is within the T'ai Chi Ch'uan exercise itself that the true cultivation of Chi and breath is at its zenith; movement and breath in harmonious oneness.

Mind/Body Coordination

Today some cults and occult practices are aimed at separating mind and body: astral projection, hallucinogens, and certain types of yoga are all examples of this. For those who wish to do this, I can recommend a very simple and very effective way to separate mind and body: Die!

If we want to be healthy human beings, it is a good idea to coordinate mind and body. These other techniques that serve to separate mind and body often do so because they consider the body inferior to the mind. In T'ai Chi we are not concerned with the issue of superiority. We have a mind and we have a body and we feel much better when they are working in harmony.

The simplest approach to mind/body coordination is that taught by Koichi Tohei. He often relates the story of a Karate instructor who invited him to his office. As the instructor sat behind his desk, he pulled out a bottle of ink and placed it on the desk. He stared at the bottle very intensely with a long, drawn face. He continued to stare at it harder and harder, deeper and deeper, until Professor Tohei asked him what he was doing. The Karate instructor replied, "I am trying to use my **Ki** to move the ink bottle." Tohei asked, "Any success?" The Karate instructor retorted in a very low gruff voice, "Not yet." Then he looked at Tohei and asked, "Can you do it, Teacher?" Tohei responded, "Certainly I can!" He then promptly extended his arm, grabbed the ink bottle and brought it across the desk to the Karate instructor's amazement. The instructor complained, "That's not fair. You used your arm." Professor Tohei calmly responded: "But I used my Ki to move my arm!"

Tohei's method of teaching Chi development with mind/body coordination utilizes four basic principles. These principles are indeed one in the same and are all different ways of looking at a singular truth. They are: (1) Keep one-point; (2) Relax completely; (3) Keep weight underside; and (4) Extend Ki.

Keeping One-Point

To someone who doesn't grasp English translations of Japanese concepts, the principles as stated make no sense at all. It's not the words that are important, but the feeling, and the feeling is universal. To keep one-point means that your mind is focused on your 'one-point,' the single point that lies two to three inches below the navel and which conspicuously accords with your center of mass. In T'ai Chi we may refer to this as our *Tan Tien*. It is not a question of finding the Tan Tien, but the feeling you get when the mind is focused on Tan Tien. "Tan Tien" translated into English means "Sea of Cinnabar." Hence, the Chinese term does not refer solely to the single point which Tohei refers to as the one-point, but also to the entire region which the Japanese refer to as 'Hara.'

Keeping one-point means centering, focusing, or even concentrating one's mind on the point of mind and body just below the navel. Remember, centering implies more than just balance. Keeping one-point and centering include the notion of balance and much more. It is a focused balance, a unified balance, a well-defined balance, a concentrated balance. It is a stabilizing effect on one's whole being. Keeping the mind centered on the one-point automatically unifies the mind and body. The whole of the Universe pours into the one point.

In acupuncture theory, Tan Tien falls within the meridian points at the back of the body labeled Governing Vessel 3, 4, and 5. Corresponding points on the front of the body are Conception Vessel 5, 6, and 7. There is disagreement on the question of which of these acupuncture points in fact correspond to the one-point, if any of them do. In any case, to keep one-point is to unify mind and body. To keep one-point is to exercise and develop the Chi.

Relax Completely

The idea of relaxing completely emphasizes 'completely.' To be complete, each and every muscle and joint must be relaxed. The mind must be equally calm. In this sense, if relaxation is not complete it is not relaxation. The Chinese term "Sung" encompasses the idea of complete relaxation. In fact, Tohei's English expression "Relax Completely" is identical to the Chinese term Sung.

It is interesting to note that there is great difficulty in translating the concept Sung into English. The Chinese character for Sung is compressed from many smaller characters. Etymologically, Sung means ‘‘hairy pine tree.’’ Now, it would be very easy to be mysterious and say that T’ai Chi is like a hairy pine tree. Instead, let’s consider the word Sung to be relaxation, looseness, softness, buoyancy, resiliency, and suppleness all put together. My good friend George Lee calls it looseness relaxation.

Keep Weight Underside

Keeping weight underside means to not fight gravity and let your weight follow its natural course downward. If we lift our arm, for example, we shouldn’t use our arm and shoulder muscles to resist gravity. Rather, use the muscles just enough to lift the arm while keeping the weight of the arm down. That is, the weight is in the underside of the arm.

Keeping the weight underside, though, does not mean surrendering to gravity, for then we would fall down. It means not to resist gravity.

There is a fine line between not resisting and surrendering that can be bridged if we consider the notion of sinking. As you lift your arm up its weight should naturally sink down. Your entire body must also be felt to be sinking its weight down to the ground. Analogously, your breathing should be low and diaphragmatic. Thus, keeping weight underside means letting your weight sink down naturally and continuously.

Extend Ki

To extend Ki or Chi means to direct your energy and spirit outwards. If you keep one-point, relax completely and have weight underside, you will naturally focus and direct your energies outward. Extending Chi allows us to have awareness not only of ourselves, but also of that which is around us. It is the natural flow of one’s energy outward, unimpeded, unobstructed, and continuous. Without the notion of extending, we cannot love or understand other people. It is a vitalization of mind and body that serves to coordinate mind and body.

If we consider the question, “Why is the Dead Sea dead?“, we will understand why we need to follow this principle always. The Dead Sea is dead because it only has tributaries leading in and none leading out. To extend our Chi means to replenish it.

We can see that keeping one-point and extending Chi are rules of mind that unify mind and body. To relax completely and keep weight underside are rules of the body that coordinate mind and body. In fact, they are each different facets of Chi development and mind/body unification. Thus, if you attain one you attain them all. If you lose one, you lose them all.

Meditation

Let us “meditate” on meditation. The idea of meditation contains the mental ingredients of calmness, stillness, union, peace, harmony, and the concentration of mental powers. But to try to define the situation known as meditation would annihilate it. ‘ ‘Annihilate” is a good word because it is more final than ending or destroying. To annihilate is to remove from reality and meditation must make us aware of reality.

Reality is such a wonderful thing. It is so wonderful that it has no opposite in the universe. We can think about what’s not real, but it will still not be real. Meditation is a union, a yoga if you will, since the Sanskrit word ‘ ‘yoga” means union or yoking. What are we yoked to? The answer, of course, is nothing and therefore we have a union with the whole.

Some cults fabricate a notion of the mysterious, the cosmic, the esoteric, when presenting meditation. Meditation has nothing to do with cults, although cults have fed on the idea like leeches. Once a group has incorporated their exclusive type of meditation by which they try to corner the market on truth, they have created a wall and it is this wall that excludes them from the whole.

This wall is their illusion and their illusion leads to annihilation. Therefore, the goal of meditation lies not in the technique, because there are many good techniques. Rather, meditation is in the situation and in the perpetuation of the mental practices that give us a healthy mind. The meditative mind is a meditative mind **twenty-four** hours a day. It cannot be described in the irregular and erratic behaviors that characterize the neurotic man. Nor is it visible in the zombie mind that is found in many cults. It is the Real mind and thus, the Real Man or Woman.

Any time you obtain this meditative frame of mind with **all** the ingredients I have mentioned, the serene composure of mind affects the **body** and your natural energy flows unimpeded. If the body is unrefined mind and the mind refined body, then the technique of meditation further refines both.

There is nothing mysterious or occult in meditation. It is our natural state. It is state of rapture, yet, it leads to ultimate awareness and totally transcends the conscious and subconscious mind. The walls between the conscious and subconscious mind break down. There is no separation.

As a technique, one needn't sit in a lotus posture unless one feels inclined to do so. One can meditate sitting down, lying down, standing up, running, walking, whirling around, sleeping, or any time at all. If you look around you and calmly observe life and your surroundings, this is also a meditation. But to quiet the mind is not a trivial endeavor. One must not resist any thought that comes into the mind, good or ill. Yet, neither should we be attached or hang on to them.

To meditate is also to reflect. Although meditation is a state, it is also an exercise in attaining that state. To attain the state, we must exercise the state. For most modern men who cannot maintain peace of mind, there is then a need to exercise the mind through meditation. The whole of T'ai Chi Ch'uan is a meditative exercise.

Physical Exercise

Anyone who does physical exercise of any kind will strengthen their vitality and spirit. Generally, people who exercise regularly are more full of life, more vibrant, and more at ease than those who do not. They have improved their physical condition and this automatically improves the mind. This is, indeed, the ancient Greek notion of sound mind and sound body. We see that any kind of physical exercise, especially when done regularly, develops the Chi. It was a natural step for man to design exercises that would specifically and effectively develop the Chi.

In T'ai Chi Ch'uan, **Hatha** Yoga, Aikido, and other Chi development exercise, the physical conditioning is geared to maximize Chi development. One must develop the T'ai Chi body. To develop the T'ai Chi body is to be like a child with all of the agility, suppleness, softness, and tenacious energy associated with a child. It is only

then that the inner organs will work completely and harmoniously, that the circulation of the blood will be free and unobstructed, that the breathing will be soft, low, and dynamic, that the joints open up and the muscles become supple and pliable, and that the bones have the suppleness and strength of refined steel. It is only then, when we become like children again, that the Chi takes its useful course in the body.

T'ai Chi Ch'uan is a very powerful tool in this regard. In developing our Chi we must immediately use it in good ways and with good means.