



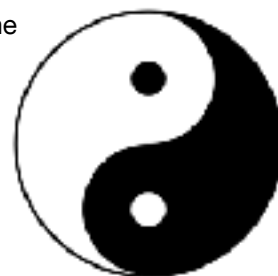
## Session Three Yin and Yang

**Taijiquan Core Principles** are descriptions of the essential criteria for practice based on natural laws governing human structure, movement, and function. They are trainable concepts meant to be integrated into any and all *taijiquan* solo and partner practices. Core-principles exercises can be used in form-practice sessions as warmups or they can be trained independently. One's experience of the art is enhanced when one practices according to *taijiquan* core principles.

### 1. *Taiji* and 'yin-yang' are synonymous

*Taijiquan* is a martial, health, and self-cultivation art named for the philosophical concept '*taiji*' (太極), meaning 'great extremes.' The term *taiji* refers to the binary pair known as 'yin' and 'yang' (陰陽). The *yin-yang* concept has ancient roots, and many Chinese cultural traditions have adopted its hypothesis of complementary opposites in order to explain ideas and organize information. The art of *taijiquan*, which is often referred to simply as '*taiji*'—'*quan*' (拳) means 'fist' or 'boxing'—espouses *yin-yang* logic throughout its literature and practices.

The universally recognized *taiji* diagram (*taiji tu* 太極圖), commonly referred to as the 'yin-yang symbol,' or the 'yin-yang circle,' provides a graphic depiction of the concept and is used emblematically to represent the martial art *taijiquan*. Primary applications of the *yin-yang* concept have to do with the relationships between such phenomenon as shade-and-light, depth-and-height, cold-and-hot, internal-and-external, and the idea of binary gender where 'yin' (--) is understood as representing the 'feminine' principle and 'yang' (—) the 'masculine' principle.



Through the interplay of *yin-yang*-like pair concepts—passive-and-active, insubstantial-and-substantial, unweighted-and-weighted, bending-and-extending, hypo-and-hyper, disorder-and-order—the art has its transformative effect. The theory holds as well that any phenomenon that can be characterized as dominantly either *yin* or *yang* possesses some measure of the other—there is always some *yang* within *yin* and there is always some *yin* within *yang* and that if this is not the case the thing being described can not continue to exist as it's current self. Further, the same phenomenon can be described as either *yin* or *yang*, depending on the aspect being discussed, for example, the weighted leg in a stance could be described as *yang* because it is 'full' but it could also be described as *yin* because it has received (passively) the weight of the driving (active) leg.

The commonly used *taijiquan* phrase, 'stillness in movement,' exemplifies this idea—the idea that movement has within it, a still centre, and that the search for stillness necessarily involves ongoing movement.

## 2. Yin-yang so far

In this Taijiquan Core Principles level one course so far, we have looked at several subjects to which the *yin-yang* concept can be applied.

### *Joints and segments*

Joints can be thought of a *yin* because they are mutable and soft, whereas segments are unchanging, firm structures.

### *Five Words of Self Composure*

'Breath' and 'calm' can be seen as *yin* qualities that destructure 'hyper' energy, while 'root' and 'energy' can be seen as examples of *yang* having to do with the solidity and movement that can overcome 'hypo' conditions.

The study of the 'Five Words of Self-composure' alongside 'Joints and segments' can be seen, in itself, as a *yin-yang* pairing: inner 'self' considerations in relation to outer 'body' considerations.

### *How to stand*

The idea of sinking energy downward while maintaining suspension from the headtop is a practice grounded in *yin-yang* pairing.

### *How to sink down and rise up*

Sinking down is, essentially, a *yin* activity, while standing up is *yang*. Notice also the *yang* within *yin* (suspension within sinking) and the *yin* within *yang* maintaining relaxed joints (*yin*) as we drive (*yang*) through the leg.

### *Stance*

Stances create the solid foundation (*yin*) in the base for positioning and movement of the upper body (*yang*).

### *The hip track*

The hip-track is characterized by it's centre (*yin*) and it's outer, extreme positions (*yang*).

### *Stance and the hip-track*

Stances are understood as relatively concrete forms (*yang*) but movement through a stance is mediated by the hip-track (*yin*).

### *Properties of stance*

*Yin* and *yang* can be used in describing the degree or percentage of width (*yin*) versus length (*yang*) in stance or the weight distribution ratio between back leg (*yin*) and front leg (*yang*).

### *Primary versus secondary stances and transitions*

In *taijiquan* legwork, primary stances can be understood as the building blocks (*yang*) while secondary stances and transitions can be understood as the facilitators (*yin*) of the movement process. Notice the similarity here to the 'joints and segments' concept.



### 3. The *yin-yang* continuum

Yin and yang relate to one another as set of complimentary opposites but, importantly, they are capable of becoming one another. The *yin-yang* continuum demonstrates this process by describing a series of 'phase transformations.' Here, it must be understood that both *yin* and *yang* can reach extreme limits beyond which they cease to exist as measurements standards. The point of limitation is described in by the term '*tai*' (太), or 'extreme'—the same word as is used in the name '*taijiquan*' (太極拳). *Taiyin* (太陰) describes a condition in which the *yin* tendency can no longer continue; like the winter solstice, it has reached the extreme of *yin* and must transform into *yang*. *Taiyang* (太陽) refers to the extreme *yang* condition where, just as high noon gives way to the evening, *yang* must relinquish and become *yin*.

If we map this process from the point of extreme *yin*, it looks like this:

*tai-yin* becomes *yang* which extends to *tai-yang* which releases to *yin* which returns to *tai-yin*

*taiyin* → *yang* → *taiyang* ← *yin* ← *tai-yin*

#### *The yin-yang movement continuum*

The *yin-yang* movement continuum follows exactly the sequence of the *yin-yang* continuum. Here is an example using extension and flexion movements of the arm:

From a relaxed position (*taiyin*) one's extends one's arm outward (*yang*) until it has reached its limit (*taiyang*). From here, it must relax (*yin*) and return to it's original starting point (*taiyin*). This notion can be applied to virtually any analysis of movement.

#### *The yin-yang hip-track continuum*

The *yin-yang* continuum exists within the hip-track and is one of the most important early *taijiquan* core-principles considerations. The hip-track continuum, which can be applied to all primary stances, involves movement from the centre of the stance to both ends of the stance.

Here is how to move through the stance:

From the centre of the stance (*taiyin*), one's drives one left leg into the ground causing the weight to be shifted to the right leg (*yang*) until reaching the natural end of the stance (*taiyang*). From here, one ceases the driving action (*yin*) and allows the stance to return to it's original starting point (*taiyin*). This can then be repeated on the other leg.

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#### 4. Relative and carried movement

To mobilize body parts deliberately and in relation to one another demands an understanding of two distinct types of movement—‘relative’ and ‘carried.’ Being able to distinguish ‘relative movement’ from ‘carried movement’ requires not only sufficient body awareness to control the parts of the body involved in the movement, but also a thorough understanding of the concepts of relative movement and carried movement.

##### *Relative movement*

‘Relative movement’ describes the changing relationship between two body parts that results from the articulation within the joint between them. For example, when the elbow flexes or extends, the positions of the upper arm and the forearm change relative to one another. During walking, the positions of the lower leg and the upper leg change relative to one another as the knee flexes or extends. Relative movement can also be called ‘direct movement’ because it describes action that occurs in the joint immediately (directly) adjacent to the part being moved.

##### *Carried movement*

‘Carried movement’ describes the relationship between body parts that move in space but whose position in relationship to one another remains static. Carried movement occurs as a result of relative movement that takes place elsewhere. In the example of simple elbow flexion, the upper arm and the forearm change relative to one another and, at the same time, this action carries the hand and the fingers along with it. Carried movement also happens when one or more parts of the body are transported passively because of the complex actions of several body parts—for instance, during walking where the entire upper body, which includes the waist, is carried by the legs. Carried movement can also be called ‘indirect movement’ because the carried element is not in and of itself acting but is being transported (indirectly) by direct-movement actions elsewhere.

#### 5. ‘The Five Helpful Points’ and ‘The Five Avoidances’

To improve, one must follow positive guidelines (*yang*) and avoid negative errors (*yin*). Here are core-principles considerations regarding what to do and what not to do when practicing *taijiquan*.

##### **The Five Helpful Points**

1. Sink into the stance while suspending from the head-top
2. Be mindful of the hip-track
3. Distinguish *yin* and *yang* in the stance
4. Coordinate the hip-track and waist movement
5. Generate movement from relaxation

##### **The Five Avoidances**

1. Do not twist the ankles
2. Do not fall into the step
3. Do not reach
4. Do not collapse
5. Do not force movement



Do not twist in the ankles