



## Level Two, Session Two The Five Stance-phases

**Taijiquan Core Principles** are descriptions of the essential criteria for *taijiquan* 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. Taijiquan Core-principles—Level Two concepts use traditional formulations to describe the basic principles that guide our study and practice. They are directly related to the ideas and practices found in Taijiquan Core-principles—Level One.

### 1. The five stance-phases

The ‘five stance-phases’ (*wubu* 五步) are five of ‘thirteen powers’ (*shisanshi* 十三勢) in *taijiquan* (太極拳). They are ‘advance step’ (*jinbu* 進步), ‘retreat step’ (*tuibu* 退步), ‘left-side gaze’ (*zuogu* 左顧), ‘right-side look’ (*youpan* 右盼), and ‘centre settle’ (*zhongding* 中定).

## Bu 步

*Bu* (步) is a complex term with several layers of meaning. In Chinese martial arts, *bu* is a general term referring to both stance, stepping, and related related movement such as waist turning. Its ingenious use in the term ‘*wubu*’ arises from its multiple subtle meanings in Chinese *taijiquan* parlance. English writers have most often rendered *bu* accurately as ‘steps’ or ‘stances,’ but *bu* can also be reasonably translated as ‘paces,’ ‘stages,’ or ‘phases’ and additionally means the ‘condition,’ ‘situation,’ or ‘state’ of things. Common translations for ‘*wubu*’ found in *taijiquan* literature include ‘five steps,’ ‘five stages,’ ‘five directions,’ and ‘five stances.’

All ‘stances’ involve a degree of knee flexion that causes shallow to deep squatting often understood as high, medium, and low stance. While ‘stances’ are commonly identified with postural forms the *wubu* idea deals with ‘the stance’ out of which all stance variations emerge.

### 2. Forward and back: ‘advance step’ and ‘retreat step’

*Jin* (進) means to ‘advance,’ to ‘move forward,’ or to ‘enter.’ ‘*Jinbu*’ is a common expression in Chinese that means to ‘progress’ or ‘improve a situation.’ All of these translations describe *jinbu* in the sense it is used in *taijiquan* studies, referring to a quality in the stance and stepping which ‘enters’ and ‘advances’ in order to claim territory from the opponent. Advance step improves the situation as one progresses toward control of the opponent’s centre.

*Tui* (退) means to ‘step back,’ ‘move back,’ ‘retreat,’ ‘withdraw from,’ and also to ‘cause to retreat.’ ‘*Tuibu*’ as a daily-use verb also means ‘leave room to manoeuvre.’ As a noun it means ‘leeway.’ These are helpful clues as to how *tuibu* functions in *taijiquan* practice. One retreats to give oneself leeway. *Tui* also means ‘return,’ suggesting a return toward the centre, having previously advanced.

### 3. Side to side: ‘left-side gaze’ and ‘right-side look’

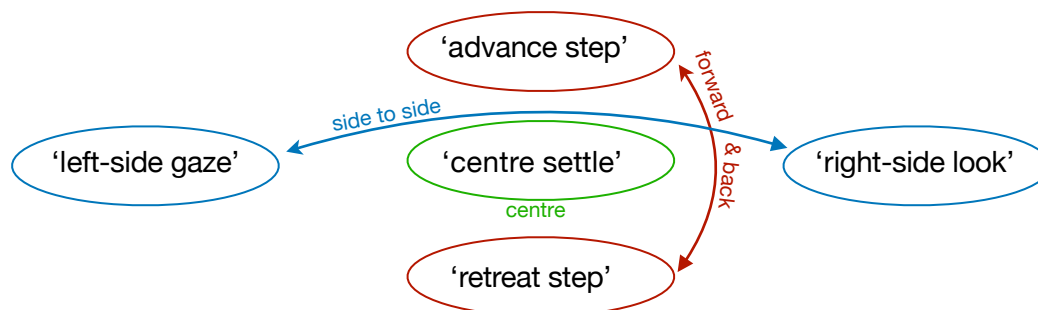
Before the next two of the five stance-phases—‘left-side gaze’ (*zuogu*) and ‘right-side look’ (*youpan*)—are detailed, an explanation is in order regarding the odd terminology used to describe them. *Gu* and *pan* together form a daily-use expression ‘*gùpàn*’ (顧盼), which means to ‘look around’ as in ‘to browse.’ Just as in English, where ‘gaze’ and ‘look’ are at times be used interchangeably, *gu* and *pan* sometimes stand for one another in Chinese. But *gu* and *pan*, taken individually, are quite distinct from each other and it is this qualitative difference that explains why actions undertaken by the eyes are used metaphorically to explain characteristics of the stance.

By studying *zuogu*, it becomes clearer that the *wubu* refer not simply to positions, postures or stances but to the conditions, strengths and proclivities of the legs and waist. Assuming the right foot is forward, rotation to the left (*zuo* 左) takes place naturally when retreating toward the back left hip.

Understanding *youpan* makes possible the mastery of ‘perceptual movement’ (*zhijue yundong*) and allows players a chance to experience *taijiquan*’s full potential. *Youpan* can therefore be seen as the lynchpin of the thirteen-powers theory.

### 4. The centre: ‘centre settle’

*Zhong* (中) means ‘centre’ or ‘middle’ and has the implication of an arrow hitting a target. *Ding* means to ‘set,’ ‘settle,’ ‘fix’ or ‘calm down.’ Descriptive interpretations include ‘settling between extremes’ or ‘settling to the centre.’ Considering the two medial extremes of *jinbu* and *tuibu*, and the two lateral extremes of *zuogu* and *youpan*, one could also think of *zhongding* as ‘the fixed axis between two sets of extremes.’



## 5. Primary Stance review

In 'Taijiquan Core Principles level one,' the following primary stances were studied. Here we review the material and add an another stance and additional layer of understanding.

### Primary stances

1. horse stance (*mabu* 馬步)
2. bow stance (*gongbu* 弓步)
  - wide bow stance, medium bow stance, narrow bow stance

A somewhat more complex stance, the 'half-horse stance' (*banmabu* 半馬步), combines features of the horse stance and bow stance. It appears in forms such as 'hit tiger' (left-style) (*dahu zuoshi* 打虎左式) and 'ward'—left-style (*zuo peng* 棚左式).

Depending on stance proportion, the location of the centre of the stance or '*tai-yin*' point can vary. For example, in a long narrow bow stance such as supports 'single whip' the *tai-yin* point is closer to the front of the stance. In a short wide bow stance such as supports 'part the wild horse's mane,' the centre point can be found nearer the back part of the stance. In any case, however, the centre of the stance will be found somewhere in the hip-track.

## 6. Secondary stance review

In 'Taijiquan Core Principles level one' the following secondary stances were studied. Here, we review the material and add an another stance and additional layer of understanding.

### Secondary stances

1. empty stance (*xubu* 虛步)
  - on heel
  - on toe
2. one-legged stance (*dulibu* 獨立步)

Adding the 'squatting stance' (*pūbù* 仆步) to these creates a bridge between secondary stances, such as the empty stance, and primary stances, such as the bow stance.

### Taijiquan Core Principles: Level One

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