

Ch'i and Chi

The concepts of Ch'i and Chi are distinctly different and are represented by different Chinese characters.

氣

Ch'i or **Qi** is the “animating life force of the universe”, and this Chinese character for Qi also denotes “breath”. Qi is energy which manifests simultaneously on the physical and spiritual levels.

The lower section of the Chinese character represents the bowl of rice and the upper radical is the rising steam. It conveys a similar meaning to the “bread of life” concept. The Qi is also seen as the steam resulting from the transformative process of water - the element associated with the kidneys, reacting with fire - the element for heart energy. This transformation is from Jing to Qi which takes place in the Lower Dantian.

极

Chi or **Ji** is the character for “extreme”. The translation is often “ultimate”, however, this ultimate is in the context of polarity - having two, extreme, complementary yet equal aspects. It is not intended to imply “best achievable” or “better than” as the word “ultimate” sometimes suggests in our English language. We might say infinite possibilities exist between (and beyond) the absolutes of yin and yang.

So T'ai Chi Ch'uan (Taijiquan) means “supreme extreme/polarity fist” and T'ai Chi Chih can be translated as “supreme extreme/polarity, - knowledge of”. Note: it is T'ai Chi Chih not T'ai Ch'i Chih. It is this focus on polarity which points to T'ai Chi Chih being not only Qigong, but also a Taiji form.

Wuji literally means “no extreme” and is considered to be the mother of Taiji. In Wuji we align ourselves as the conduits connecting heaven and earth. We rest in this place of harmonious fusion, the infinite void which is the everything of nothingness.

As we begin to move from Wuji, energy arises and separates into yin and yang, the complementary poles of the Universe. In other words, our body manifests yin and yang throughout the Taiji form. The Lower Dantian initiates our weight shift, and we subsequently play with polarity in the “yinning and yanging” of our legs, the aspects of contraction and expansion in the major kua (hip crease) and minor kuas (elbows, wrists, and ankles) and the awareness of polarity between the Lao Gong points in our palms.

Polarity is integral to our T'ai Chi Chih practice. Yin corresponds to empty/insubstantial and storing energy. Yang corresponds to weighted/substantial and delivering energy. Throughout the form, our hands and feet continuously transition between yin and yang. We gather, cultivate, and circulate both the yin and yang aspects of energy. We move it to and from the network of yin and yang meridians and the Zang Fu organ (yin yang) systems.

From Taiji we return to Wuji, - neutral, the state of harmonious balance.