

THE FUNDAMENTALS AND BENEFITS OF SLOW TAI CHI CHUAN



Tai Chi Chuan is practiced by literally hundreds of millions of people in mainland China and has recently attracted the interest of tens of thousands of Americans. Tai Chi means “Supreme Ultimate,” and Chuan, when translated from the Chinese ideographs means “First,” symbolic of struggle. And in the case of human life, it is the struggle of the attainment of an inner and outer balance.

Tai Chi Chuan’s objectives are to teach one to know oneself through a complete system of psycho-physical development. It consists of 108 movements which from the solo meditative exercise, Tai Chi Chuan is also an oriental form of martial arts, it is one of the inner, or “soft,” schools, based on yielding and cultivating inner power. It avoids the use of external strength.

The solo exercise is performed as a Taoist meditative art form, the movements being executed in slow time prevents the body from becoming tense or stiff and makes muscles

resilient and pliable. Strength cannot be wasted or falsely propelled because slow movement requires attentive control. In a deeper sense, the way of movement is related to the “movement of the mind,” the mind must direct the body movement; the mind wills and the body behaves. This is truly an exercise of the mind, training it to function consistently and harmoniously with the will.

Tai Chi Chuan differs entirely from other forms of exercise. Regarding health, it improves the circulation of the blood, tones up the muscles and relaxes tense nerves. It can also heal so-called incurable diseases and chronic ailments such as hypertension, gastric disturbances, heart disease, tuberculosis, anemia, and many other illnesses.

Besides exercising every muscle and joint, every movement harmonizes with natural and deep diaphragmatic breathing, requiring tranquility and concentration of the mind in its practice. Since the movements of this exercise are in coordination with the function of the mind, they produce beneficial effects on the nervous center by revitalizing the entire system. The entire system is gradually warmed as the action accumulates. Patterns and movements in subtle succession activate the different parts of the body, and never at any time repeat themselves in over concentrated units. This enables the body to do more without making the heart beat faster to keep up with the body changes.

Tai Chi Chuan is often referred to as the circular exercise because all patterns and designs are composed of circles, curves, arcs, parabolas, and spirals of all sizes, which go in many directions: horizontal, vertical, or slanted. Circular motion, which allows no break in the flow of gestures, nor any corners to the designs, creates evenness, which is an important factor in relaxing the tenseness of body and mind. All diverse circular units in the exercise are balanced by evenly-paced action and by the center of gravity. This combination resembles the symbol for Tai Chi, in which the outer circle equalizes the movement within.

The progression of development in Tai Chi Chuan begins with bodily reconstruction, the development of a relaxed body posture, a deepened state of breath, increased concentration, and acceptance of a calm and quiet mind. This leads to perfect control.