The history of Tai-Chi

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Tai-Chi is an internal Chinese martial art mainly practiced for health benefits. In the 5000 years history of China, the origin of Tai-Chi is a combination of Chinese national thinking, martial arts, Chinese medicine, and art authentication. It absorbs the traditional Chinese Taoism philosophy of Tai-Chi and Yin-Yang. Tai-Chi mainly focus on the training of temperament and body fitness. Unlike other martial art, which underscore the skill of fighting, Tai-Chi seems to be a more suit for the high-level human culture. It is a symbol of East world form of exercise, which trains people’s thought, breath, body shape, and soul spirits. It is a perfect tool to both strengthen body and purify spirits.

From the origins of Taoism in 6th century BC, Lao Tsu reflects the central philosophy of Tai-Chi, which is yield and overcome; bend and be straight. It is just like the position of Tai-Chi Chuan, which seems to be soft but contains power of strength. Later, in the period of three Kingdoms, one of the most famous physician Hua-tuo, ask his patient not only relied on the traditional Chinese medicine but also some body-fit movement to keep health. These body movements are the earlier precursor of Tai-Chi Chuan. Hua-tuo believes that the human body need exercise in order to keep the metabolism better. Only by doing exercise can people live a long and healthy lives.

When I was a little kid in China, I always heard the story about a Tai-Chi master called Chang San-feng. Even though there is no solid evidence, people believe that Chang San-feng is the founder of Tai-Chi. People believe that it is Chang who link some of the forms with notion of yin-yang from Taoism with his internal aspect of exercise. He created the fundamental thirteen postures of Tai Chi corresponding to the eight basic trigrams. Chang’s exercise emphasize the elasticity against the hardness and force. The exercise incorporate the philosophy, physiology, psychology and the laws of dynamics.

After Chang San-feng created the theories of Tai-Chi. Wang Chung-yueh and his student Chiang Fa made some improvement on Chang’s previous work. Wang refered to the postures of Chang and combined them together into a continuous sequences, which more like today’s form of Tai-Chi. His student Chiang Fa began the first family school of Tai Chi Chuan in Chen village.

Another Wang’s student was Chen Chou-tung who had disagreement with Chiang Fa. Chen established another Tai Chi school called southern School of Tai Chi. It was an interesting and vivid branch of Tai Chi but disappear with the time. Chiang Fa’s northern school of Tai Chi is the mainstream of Tai Chi and it survives today. Chiang Fa and the Chen villagers keep taught Tai-Chi to the later generation. In the process of development, there emerged plenty of the surviving branches of Tai Chi Chuan.

In the history records, the first appearance of the name of Tai Chi is in mid- 1800s. The name Tai-Chi is said by a scholar in the Imperial Court by the name of Ong Tone He, who see the demonstration of Yang Luchan’s performance. Yang Luchan trained with the Chen family for 18 years before he started to teach the Tai Chi in Beijing. After Ong witnessed the demonstration of Yang, Ong wrote "hands holding Taiji shakes the whole world, a chest containing ultimate skill defeats a gathering of heroes." Before that time, the art of Tai-Chi may have had a number of different names.

In the history China, Tai Chi is always categorized under the Wudang group of martial arts which is the arts applied with internal power. Although Wudang is a falsely suggests that these arts is originated at WuDang Mountain, it distinguishes the skill from Shaolin which is another school of Chinese martial art with core value of strenghth.

Tai Chi’s first widespread promotion is in the early 20th century. Yang Shaohou, Yang Chenfu, Wu Chien-chuan and Sun Lutang are the 4 most important active people who accelerate the development of Tai Chi worldwide. After years of development, Tai Chi becomes a popular martial training with benefit to health and health maintenance. Its focus of concentrating of the form of movements helps people to bring about a state of mental calm and clarity. Besides general health benefits, it is also a perfect way to release the stress.