

## Some symbolism in the Tai Chi Chu'uan

There is no beginning ...



Gerda Geddes 1917-2006 Tai Chi pioneer

### Three major philosophies of China :

**Taoism** The way

**I Ching : Book of Changes 10,000-750 BC**

**Tao te ching : Lao Tsu 604 BC**

Metaphysical psychology – It helps us to see how the fundamental forces of the cosmos are mirrored in our own individual lives. The tao is sensed, felt and thought

Ch 1: The tao that can be spoken is not the eternal tao..

Ch 14: Look it cannot be seen- it is beyond form.

Listen, it cannot be heard – it is beyond sound

Grasp, it cannot be held – it is intangible

Stand before it and there is no beginning

Follow it, and there is no end

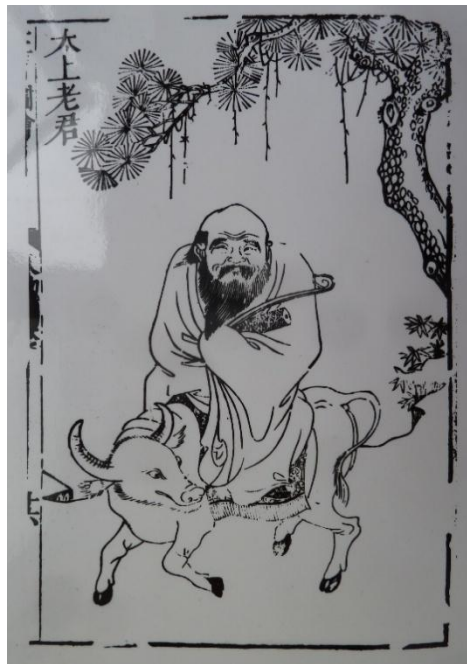
Ch 16: Empty yourself of everything.

## Some symbolism in the Tai Chi Chu'uan

Let the mind become still  
The ten thousand things rise and fall while the Self watches their return.  
They grow and flourish and then return to the source.  
Returning to the source is stillness, which is the way of nature.  
Ch 25: Man follows the earth, Earth follows heaven  
Heaven follows the Tao'Tao flows what is natural

*'He who knows does not speak; he who speaks does not know'*

*When I let go of what I am,  
I become what I might be.*



**Confucianism** Confucius 551BC Social responsibilities of man

Let the Will be set on the path (Tao)  
Hold to Virtue (Te)  
Rest in Love ( Jen)  
Move in Art (Yi)

' If I give my students one corner of a subject, and he cannot find the other three corners for himself- I do not repeat the lesson'

**Bhuddhism** – c 1<sup>st</sup> century AD Release from suffering

**Tai Chi Chu'uan** Chang San-feng 1279-1368

Internal school of boxing - softness and yielding

'When a human being is born there is a ripple on a still pond. We go on our journey and when our life is over, there is another ripple on the pond, and the spirit returns.'

## Some symbolism in the Tai Chi Chu'uan

### There is no beginning: TIGER (hu 虎)

In Chinese culture, tigers symbolize bravery, strength, and power, often referred to as



the "king of beasts". They are also seen as protective figures, capable of warding off evil spirits and image of the tiger often decorated bringing good luck. The image of a tiger was used as a military emblem and frequently decorated weapons and military dress.

#### **Strength and Bravery:**

Tigers are naturally strong and fierce animals, making them a natural symbol of these qualities.

#### **Protection:**

Tigers are believed to ward off evil spirits and negative influences, making them popular protective talismans.

#### **Power and Authority:**

In Chinese art, the tiger's imagery often represents power and authority, particularly in military contexts.

#### **The King of Beasts:**

The tiger's status as the king of the animals in Chinese culture emphasizes its dominance and leadership qualities.

#### **Yin and Yang:**

In some contexts, the tiger is associated with the yang (masculine) energy, while the dragon represents the yin (feminine) energy, highlighting their complementary roles in the universe.



# Some symbolism in the Tai Chi Chu'uan

## There is no end..... Mountain

In Chinese culture, mountains are powerful symbols representing stability, longevity, and the connection between heaven and earth. They are also seen as sacred places, homes of immortals, and gateways to other worlds.

### *Stability and Endurance:*

Mountains, due to their immovability and permanence, symbolize strength, resilience, and the enduring nature of the earth.

### *Connection between Heaven and Earth:*

Mountains are often seen as cosmic pillars, acting as a bridge between the earthly realm and the celestial world.

### *Sacredness and Spiritual Significance:*

Many mountains in China are considered sacred, housing temples and serving as places of worship and pilgrimage. They are believed to be residences of gods and immortals.

### *Journey of Self-Discovery:*

Mountains can also symbolize a spiritual journey and the pursuit of enlightenment, as seen in Daoist practices.

### *Natural Power and Energy:*

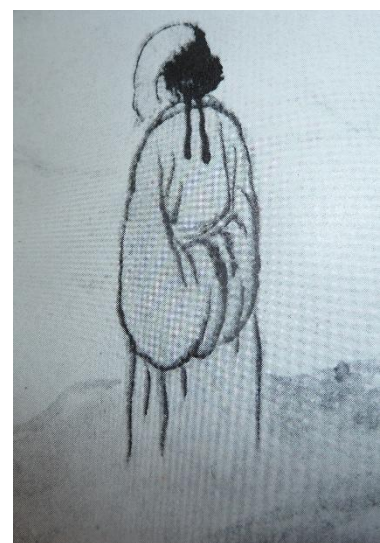
Mountains are seen as manifestations of nature's vital energy (qi), and their presence can evoke a sense of awe and reverence.

### *Symbol of China:*

Mountains are deeply ingrained in Chinese culture, appearing in art, literature, and mythology, and are sometimes even seen as symbols of the nation itself.

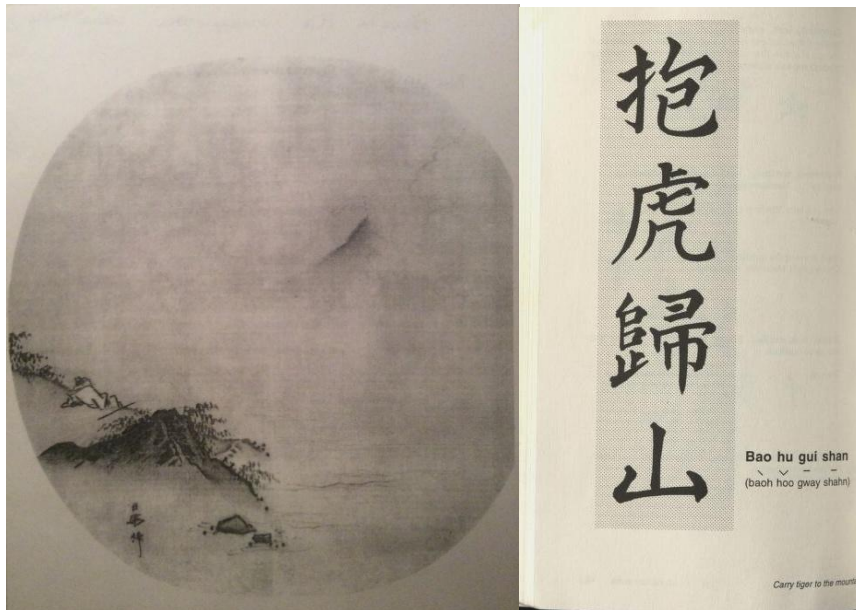
## **'Be still as a mountain, move like a great river**

**Wu Yu-hsiang 1812-1880**





## Some symbolism in the Tai Chi Chu'uan



### Carry tiger to the mountain

Each of the characters of *Bao hu gui shan* is rich in imagery. We begin with *Bao*, which shows a hand and a foetus in the womb. This suggests a special use of the hand, of holding something very precious that offers a promise for a new beginning. And then we learn that what we are holding in this way is Tiger, of all things!

Tiger is one of those beings resonating with the human spirit in such a way that it carries with it a tremendous wealth of ambivalent symbol and metaphor. It can represent danger and the power of darkness, but at the same time can be a protector against evil. In either capacity it stands for authority, courage and ferocity, and it is always a symbol of power and energy. For our purposes here we are considering Tiger as a symbol of the Taiji yin/yang energy, because its very essence is the unity of great power and strength with feline softness and grace.

The imagery of *gui* could be read as the return of the borrowed broom. But we will choose to overlook the implications here and focus on the idea of marriage – another instance of yin/yang unity – as a return to a place of belonging as well as a beginning.

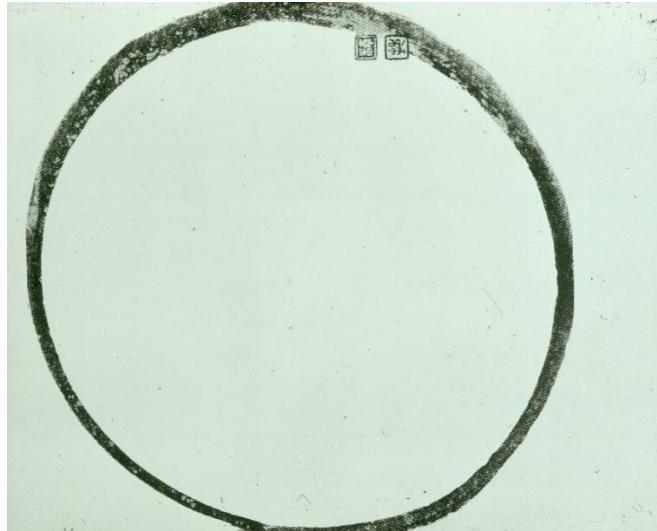
And this place of belonging and beginning is Mountain – symbol of the Sacred Center, of stillness and paradise – yet another image of yin/yang wholeness. It is where heaven and earth come together in a pivot point of equilibrium.

So, read this way, *Bao hu gui shan* could be about embracing the Taiji energy, perhaps even as a foetus in the womb, and returning to the stillness of the center, or the stillness of before the beginning. We keep returning to this movement at the end of each section of the form. In the end is the beginning.

Hu calligraphy, Liu Yung-Fu (18th century)  
Courtesy, Tseng Yu-Hsi



## Some symbolism in the Tai Chi Chu'uan



Tiger is a symbol of Tai Chi energy and as a metaphor – the tiger is YOU

1. We embrace the tiger – we take it to the mountain to show us our way
2. We struggle with the tiger – in the kicking section we twist the tigers' ears
3. We ride the tiger – we no longer need to control it – we are one at peace with our tiger
4. We shoot the tiger – we ARE the tiger
5. We embrace the tiger again and return to the mountain.

‘When a human being is born there is a ripple on a still pond. We go on our journey and when our life is over, there is another ripple on the pond, and the spirit returns.’