

CULTURE AND AESTHETIC: ON THE TRANDITIONAL MARTIAL ART ZHAOBAO T'AI CHI CHU

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Abstract

ZhaobaoT'ai chi chu'uan(ZT), a variety of the intangible heritage of Kung Fu, which has flourished for five hundred yearsabsorbing cultural nutrition from five thousands years of ancient history in China,is an embodiment of the whole awareness attuning body, mind, and self-nature. The present article attempts to offer a substantial and systematic interpretation of its inherent mechanism from a few of aspects. Firstly, it introduces ZT's historical and cultural background. Secondly, it fully discusses ZT's origin and essence refer to the ralationship between T'ai chi and Qi in Chinese tranditionalculture.Thirdly, three typical aesthetic characteristics are described and their corresponding psychological forms are revealed. Finally, the article is concerned with the reconciliation of the diverse academic community's desire to understand ZT from the point of view of the fourth world, and its significance within the common area of cultural study.

Key words: ZhaobaoT'ai chi chu'uan. Intangible heritage.Culture.Aesthetic. Somaesthetic.

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Introduction:

T'ai chi chu'uan, a variety of the intangible heritage, Kung Fu (martial art), has flourished for five hundred years giving rise to several factions such as Chenshi, Yangshi, Sunshi, Wushi, Wudang, and Zhaobao. Among them, ZhaobaoT'ai chi chu'uan (ZT) is the most distinguished one due to its unique characteristics.

Historically speaking, during the Ming Dynasty(1368-1644), JiangFa蔣發(1574-?) had learned this artistic skill while studying for seven years with Wang ZhongYue王宗嶽(?-?) integrating it with Chinese philosophy and traditional morality. In order that more people could profit from it, he began spreading it in Zhaobao town, Henan province on the condition that the qualification of the candidate who would become his disciple was tested. It is noteworthy that ZT had seldom been taught to others outside the town so that few people could grasp it until the Republic of China period (1912-1949). Some descendants passed it on to common people for their survival in that turbulent era. Gradually, ZT was found in more places in the southern part of China, and has been inherited for more than thirteen Generations.(Fig.1)



Fig.1 a transmission from the founder, JiangFa, to ninth patriarch He QingXi.

By the end of 2013, ZT had been listed in the intangible cultural heritage roster by Shanxi Province. The main factor of being cherished is ZT's distinctive cultural connotation which is drawn from Taoism. It is also the most able to represent the ethos of Confucianism, Buddhism, I-ching and Traditional Chinese Medicine as well as Zen. It follows that ZT goes beyond the representation of a competitive sport but aims to a high level of human being by following the way of nature and stressing the quality of peaceful life.

Moreover, a renewed interest for overcoming the anthropocentrism and dualism has emerged in recent decades. Some scholars have started to pay attention to traditional orientations that claim knowledge of the historical, transcultural, universal and in particular, the objective self. Thereby, Richard Shusterman introduced his "Somaesthetics" as a concept from "Pragmatist Aesthetics"; it was provisionally defined as "the critical ameliorative study of one's experience and use of one's body as locus of sensory aesthetic appreciation (aesthesis) and creative self-fashioning"(Shusterman 354). Simultaneously, as he said, bodywork is a rubric for a variety of practices that "promote heightened somatic consciousness and body-mind attunement: from yoga and T'ai chi chu'uan to Zazen and Alexander Technique."(Shusterman 31)

Based on this fundamental introduction, I shall explore ZT with the origin of the "T'ai chi" concept, because on the one hand the act of living or sensing, on a dynamic, perceptive body, is all embodied in ZT; on the other hand, it is a necessary access to recognizing the psychological phenomenon behind traditional Chinese culture.

The basic relationships between "T'ai chi "and "Qi "

In the Chinese language the term "T'ai chi", refers usually to the ultimate supreme. Its first interpretation, as a philosophical concept, dates back to *Great Commentary to change* written by Confucius(551-479BC) "The changes have the T'ai chi, which generated the two models. The two models generated the four symbols; the four symbols generated the eight trigrams." (Confucius 327)

Zhou DunYi周敦頤(1017-1073), developed this notion in his *Explanation of the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate*, considering T'ai chi as the origin for Yin-Yang(two models) and for the five agents-elements (water, fire, wood, metal and earth) which are the common basis of all things.(Zhou Dunyi 368)All of the above concur with the fact that T'ai chi is the ultimate supreme as a metaphysical principle.

On the other hand, some extraordinary opinions believe that each person has his or her own T'ai chi. ZhuXi朱熹 (1130-1200) is a representative of this doctrine. He wrote that: "Speaking from the point of view of male and female each of them has their own T'ai chi; speaking from the point of view of the myriad things, each of them has its own T'ai chi.

Altogether, T'ai chi is a unity and the myriad things are from it. Hence each person and each thing does possess T'ai chi."(Zhuxi 188) Moreover, ShaoYong邵雍 (1011-1077) and LuJiuYuan陸九淵 (1139-1193) affirmed that a spotless heart is T'ai chi. (LJWIPSVT3) Similarly, the T'ai chi chu'uan classic *The Great and Small T'ai chi* 蔣發(1574-?) pointed out: "The universe is a great T'ai chi, the living body is a small T'ai chi. Therefore, T'ai chi chu'uan must be practiced."(LJIPSVT5)

As far as I am concerned, I agree with the opinion that the term "T'ai chi" and "original Qi氣" can be used as one and the same thing but may also be differentiated. Actually, in the course of history there were two main interpretations for "T'ai chi": Everything springs from T'ai chi (the supreme ultimate and Qi), and for each person there is a T'ai chi (spotless mind, living body as Qi.). I think it is obvious that Qi has the closer relationship with the human psychological phenomenon. For example, when a person is in T'ai chi status (the healthiest psychological state), he realizes that the Qi of himself is homologous with Qi of the universe. Conversely, influenced by the realization, his psychological state is more and more like an innocent infant's, going ahead in a glorious direction which is described as becoming one with the cosmos. At the same time, his body is full of internal vitality because the movement of Qi forms both the psychological and biological state, which is embodied in ZT's aesthetics experiences.

3. Aesthetics experiences in ZT

In general, there are thirteen quintessential and classical postures in ZT: Peng, Lou, Ji, An, Cai, Lie, Zhou, Kao, Jin, Tui, Gu, Pan, Ding. All of them are interlocked, flowing as successions or rotations, so as to cause all the body's movements to look like a gentle breeze blowing over the water, a sea swallowing the whale, a rapidly flowing wave, or a dancing colored ribbon. However, while observing these features in performance, what kind of psychological progress is the performer undergoing? Is there any connection between the physical, psychological or even parapsychological states? If the answer is positive, how can we identify the peculiarities while playing or admiring? With these inquiries, further analysis would become compelling and explicit, in which three aesthetic characteristics are contained to make the point.

3.1 Stillness and movement

In the first instance, ZT's extrinsic feature looks as if it were a tiger leaping, a dragon thundering, a large jade ring around a tree rippling and undulating in the wind, and a bamboo grove flicking. Indeed, In contrast with these dynamic states, the performer's inner state remains like the silent core of a tornado or the calm lake that reflects innumerable mountains. In this regard, ZT was called "meditation in motion". In fact, integration of stillness and movement is just a general principle which was put forward by the T'ai chi chu'uan master, WangZongYue王宗嶽 who lived during the Ming dynasty and who gave the following explanation :

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The extreme movement and the stillness gave birth to Yin and Yang. Movement proves separate. Stillness engenders the combination(Wang zongyue 323).

As the matter of fact, the term “stillness and movement”, are closely linked to the statement in “*Great commentary*” : Since movement and stillness are constant; hard and soft are determined.(Confucius 356)What’s more, a detailed description was announced by SengZhao僧肇(384-414):

If one keeps on searching for the purpose of stillness, how could he seek it without movement? It is necessary to find the stillness through the movement. All things reside in a constant state of stillness, despite that they are moving on the surface. Thus, they should seek stillness without shifting from movement; they should keep up with movement without deviating from stillness(Seng Zhao 5).

SengZhao obviously does not deny the movement but emphasizes how to experience it in stillness through the proper way. This point, he clarified by these examples:

The hurricane that blows down the high mountains is always static; the river is surging ceaselessly without flowing; the dust is floating everywhere without moving at all; the sun and the moon, following each other around are out of rise-fall. What is here to be surprised of?(Seng Zhao 6).

He is convinced that movement is never ending. Beneath its surface lays an unshakable stillness. Correspondingly, if enlightenment means direct insight into movement in the light of revealing stillness, it should be illustrated from two aspects.

On the one hand, once the deluded thoughts emerge, the awareness of the happenings is present. Gestures of the body, sensations, breaths, flux of the Qi as well, are able to take one back to whole consciousness. During this period, as soon as one is aware of his thought disorder, the real stillness can come out. For instance, when I practiced T'ai chi chu'uan , by being aware of thoughts rising and passing, I recognized the space between the reaction of body and direction of the mind, thus a peaceful stillness was revealed.

On the other hand, concentrating on the stillness is requested in such a practical activity in order to penetrate the thoughts about the past. As to this matter, Sengzhao affirmed that: “Past events exist only in the past, and should not connect with the present moment. Present things exist only in the now, and do not last from the past. Since there is no relationship between past and present, is there any changing or moving?”(Seng Zhao 6).

3.2. Moderation in the center

ZT's signal representation is the circle, not only because most postures follow the trace of circles or curves, but also in spite of postures changing, as a kaleidoscope, they still remain linked to the fixed center of the circle. Therefore, the center of the circle has two references, one is a physical trait, and the other is a metaphysical trait. In either case, a concept of

moderation must be mentioned. So, the analysis of the interconnection between the “moderation” and the “center of being” in Chinese classic philosophy would be very useful.

Firstly, the expression of moderation in Confucianism means to grasp both the extremes and center (middle). As ZhuXi朱熹(1130-1200) said, moderation is the name for what does not go to excess nor fall short. In the same way, Confucius's grandson ZiSi子思(483-402)commented that:

The gentleman aims at moderation and harmony; the bad person is opposed to moderation and harmony. The moderation and harmony of the gentleman lies in that he always stays in the center (middle); the bad person's opposition to moderation and harmony lies in that he has no prudence.(Zisi 84)

The other Confucian philosopher YeShi葉適(1150-1223), asserted that moderation means uniting opposites and overcoming contradictions between things:

The way has its origin in unity and it becomes embodied in duality. Any forms that there are, whether Yin and Yang, hard and soft, going contrary to or going along with, going towards or away from, odd or even, separating or uniting, latitude or longitude, warp and woof are all dual. Moderation is that whereby one smoothes off the duality of things so as to make clear what the duality rests on and not that the pair is able to be present. Water comes to the lowest level and stops. The way comes to the moderation and then stops.(Yeshe 732)

He emphasized that relations between things may be expressed as a conflicting or complementary duality, but moderation is the harmonious way for what does not go to excess or fall short. This fundamental significance of moderation was widely accepted by scholars affecting the social main stream.

In this context of analytics of the notion, the question arises about the implication of “moderation” in ZT. Definitely, the four levels combining into a framework as a “moderation in the center ” shall be particularized.

3.2.1 Physical level.

An old Chinese saying says: “a chicken has three feet, a hawk has three wings”, which was mentioned by WangZhuangHong王壯弘(1931-2008) when he explained moderating invisible force while playing T'ai chi chu'uan(WangZhuangHong 193). For example, one who practices ZT is requested to make the upper part of the body erect, seldom keeping to the right or left in order to make energy go through the central channel. To promote base chakra, start rotating slowly, rising to one's kronen chakra. Additionally, the whole body should keep sinking and grounding on the gravity center not merely keep relaxing. Also, symmetry and balance are necessarily required, such as: opening and closing, expanding and gathering, showing and hiding, etc, (Fig.2, Fig.3). Essentially, any pair of them is contained in the other. For instance, sinking down contains the potential energy of floating up; going forward contains the kinetic

potential of going backward and vice versa, so that one could transform movements rapidly, flexibly and stably, fulfilling the infinite number of possibilities.



Fig.2 Opening arms while the body floating up. Demonstrator: PengLingLing



Fig.3 lifting arms while the body sinking down. Demonstrator: PengLingLing

3.2.2 Qi level. A T'ai chi chu'uan scholar, ChenXin陳鑫(1849-1929) affirmed that: "Generally speaking, the motion of the hand is Yang, the stillness of the hand is Yin, the back of the body is Yang, the chest is Yin, and Yang in Yin, Yin in Yang. Yin and Yang must be directed to a midpoint which is nothing but the Mid-Qi(中氣) in one's heart. So called Mid-Qi dominates in the center and runs outside of the body."(Chen Xin 166)

The other master, SunLuTang孫祿堂(1860-1933) shared a similar opinion: "Draw back the Qi scattering out of the body by using the movement of T'ai chi chu'uan, then mingle the Qi from outside with the Qi in the belly, gently and generally, making efforts to get the growth of the Qi from nothing to something, from less to more."(SunLuTang 34)

Most probably, both arguments stem from Lao Tzu sayings that: "All things bear the Yin on their backs and the Yang in their arms. By the blending of Qi, from Yin and Yang, the equilibrium comes to the world."(Lao Tzu 95) From this point of view, ZT could be deemed to integrate Yin and Yang by moderating Qi.

3.2.3 Mental level. In the period of practicing ZT, (especially Zhan Zhuang, a basic ZT training method which requires one to stand like a tree), one should notice his mental state which includes sensations, attachments, delusions, and thoughts referring to judgments about good and evil, enemy and friend, saints and fools. All phenomena should be observed neutrally. It is

better to quote the fifth patriarch in Zen, HongRen 弘忍 (601-675) whose concrete description “on the supreme vehicle” has an echo here:

The mind is not inside, outside, or in the middle; just observe it in suchness and thusness, gradually and progressively. Thusly one will find the motion of thoughts like a stream flowing forever. The only demand is to continue to observe them as they are, then arising-and-perishing will become reversal and cessation. Finally, the flowing thoughts will go to extinction quietly (HongRen 276).

Although what HongRen said targets the beginners who practice meditation, it also applies to T'ai chi chu'uan for it is commonly known as moving-meditation. Actually, there are two mental states: positive and negative. The former are happiness, joy, ecstasy, nonviolence, etc; the latter are anger, regret, hatred, confusion, etc. The key lies in not tangling any states and in abandoning any subjective distinction or dualistic judgments observing the phenomenon that positive is predominating. In another such, the negative from which equilibrium and conciliation is admitted carries with it the equality of them. When one moderates consciously and looks deeply behind these mental phenomena, he will cease making distracting thoughts, thus the transformation toward the center of being is underway. This is a way that one leaves aside pure intellectual thought; theoretical or abstract and is not only concerned about actual psychology, but also metaphysical comprehension in which realization is attained and all irrational determinism is abolished.

3.2.4 Moral level. That which never departs from the center, cultivating the qualities of sincerity and personal rectitude, going with the heart, rather than the mind, is taken as a basis for ZT applied to life.

T'ai chi chu'uan Mi Zong has quite a clear statement: “On the surface T'ai chi chu'uan shows softness in action, however it contains a hard power. In the course of time, the hard power evolves accompanying softness which comes from heart. As a result, the hard power does not arise, instead, it surrenders to human-heartedness that could dismantle one's other hard powers soon afterwards.” (Li Jingwu 266)

It is quite important that one should moderate the power to a center that is neither soft nor hard. Otherwise, if human-heartedness is lacking, he is not worth practicing ZT. Depending on the master who chooses a disciple in line with his moral character, and by keeping pace with human-heartedness, he would do nothing to injure others, for he is full of compassion, perfectly attaches to the cosmic order, and his actions are loving and constructive without being based on hatred and destruction as the concept of good and evil is reconciled and integrated.

In a word, moderation is so important that the close relationships which exist between these dualistic concepts is becoming decomposed. This could also illustrate clearly why ZT's aesthetic experience has already gone beyond the conventional standard meaning of aesthetic sense which consists in perceiving the dualism; affirmation-negation in form tending towards the formless, at which man's mind arrives spontaneously, naturally, in the presence of a metaphysical initiation. Because of that, the man who has attained the center of being could, as

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long as circumstances allow, at every moment be in fact freed from conditioned reflexes. He no longer reacts, but is active, complying with the total being just as the fluent water benefits all living things without having partiality for any of them.

Conclusions

In summary, it appears that ZT, as the intangible heritage of Chinese culture, is the open approach to the true knowledge of self-nature because of its unique features. As a Japanese philosopher Yuasa Yusu insists, the concept of "personal cultivation" or "care of self" is presupposed in Eastern thought as "the philosophical foundation", since "True knowledge could not be obtained simply by means of theoretical thinking", but only "through bodily recognition or realization (tainin or taitoku)." (Yasuo Yuasa 25)

As far as ZT is concerned, to draw an analogy between body and a wooden board floating on the ocean might be perceived much more easily: when we are washed away by waves (representing the obsession of thoughts), the only way to survive is to come back on the board. ZT is used for training swimming back and forth, resting on the board, and no longer fearing the ocean as well. Someday, when we can move into oneness with the whole ocean, the seeking through the body is over. At this step, we are no longer the slaves of body and mind so that there are no longer afflictions from desire and no longer attachments from delusion, the salvation and the liberation is received through ZT. To this end, ZT needs to become a more popular body of work for its greatest advantage: to promote one's fragments of mind and senses of body to melt into the whole by unfolding self-nature which is none other than a common purview adopted by diversified cultures.

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