

T'ai Chi, Wu Style

by John Hury

The Wu style of the t'ai chi form is said to have originated in the Shou Lin School at Wu Mountain in China. This is where people from all over China would go to learn Kung Fu. Sometime around 500 BC, one of the teachers at the Wu Mountain School was sitting in his office thinking about the value and benefits of meditation. He was idly wishing (or praying) that he could somehow come up with a type of meditation focused on the energy meridians in one's own body. He was looking out the window of his office with this subject on his mind, when he saw a snake in a fight with a bird. He saw and admired the birds's agility in the way it flapped its wings to stay just out of reach of the snake's attacks. Then the bird would attack the snake, and the snake would coil its body just enough to avoid the bird's strike. Then the snake would come back to attack the bird again, and so on, back and forth. The story goes that this Kung Fu master was so inspired by the agile and supple movements of the snake and the bird that he went on to invent all of the movements of the t'ai chi form.

The Kung Fu students would do the series of movements of the form mindfully meditating on their body, its balance, the muscles used while consciously relaxing the tension in any muscles which are not needed to move and balance. They believe this practice increases their Chi energy, balances it, and removes blocks that impede its flow along the meridians of the body. This is also the basis for the theory of Acupuncture. The theory is that illness and disease (dis-ease) occur when our Chi energy is weak and unbalanced, and massage or needles are used on certain "points" along the meridians to strengthen and balance the flow. The benefits we get from regular practice of the t'ai chi form include improved balance, better muscle tone and flexibility, and in general less aches and pains and occurrences of illness. It generally takes about 45 minutes to an hour to do the whole form, depending on how slow a pace you set. Serious practice would have one do the t'ai chi form every day, but most people I know do it 2 or 3 times per week.