
T'ai Chi

T'ai Chi teaches a body to sustain *li*. T'ai Chi fosters a clear sense of fluid self-carriage and provides tools to integrate the understanding by cultivating and sustaining body awareness from the inside out.

Alignment cannot be imposed or forced; it has to be invoked and nurtured internally through mindfulness. It's not a matter of can or can't, doing or not. It's *a matter of how well you embody* the notions. True uprightiness emerges from an innate sense of a body arranged neatly upon itself by releasing all tension and bracing into balance and comfort to find the most efficient structural integrity. Then *li* enables natural grace to shine.

In one aspect, T'ai Chi is about freeing up your body so that you do not interfere with yourself; training to use your body according to its biological design, its *li*. T'ai Chi is also a way of taming the associative monkey mind by using curiosity to explore and embody *Li*. Confucian and Taoist origins instill T'ai Chi with natural humanism - humanity's *li*.



理 LI

“Li,” is the force that directs organic patterns. One of the earliest symbols for *li* is wood grain and a Chinese friend says that hair has *li*. *Li* is the natural way. A body with *li* acts in accord with its essential nature; in harmony with its natural way and according to its organic design.

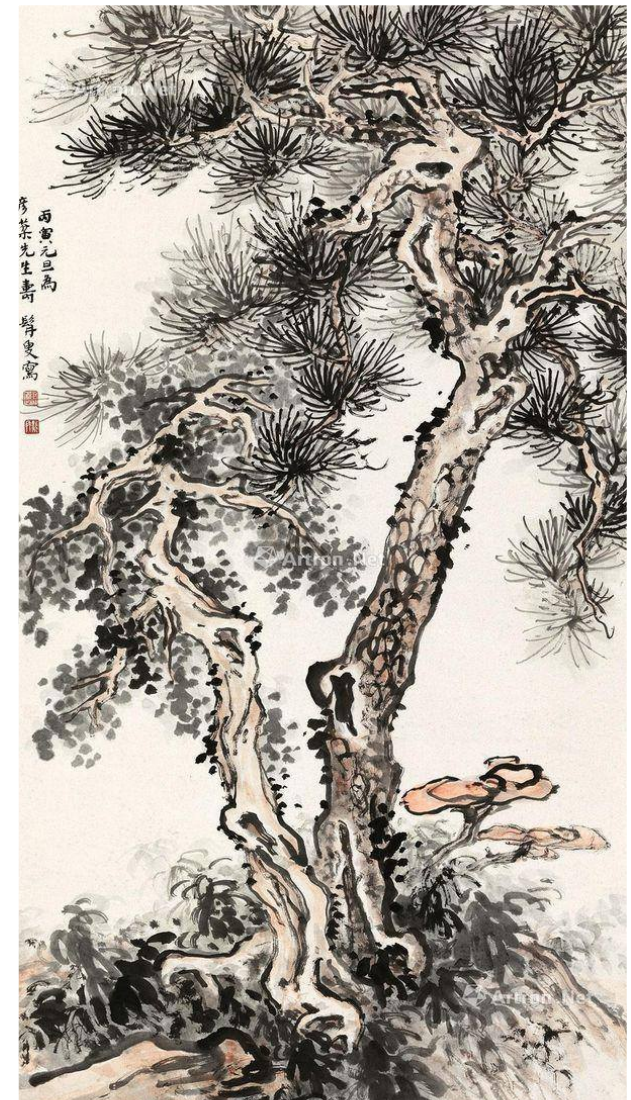
SHEN TAO T'AI CHI CH'UAN
shentaotaichi.com 970.219.3926

contact@shentaotaichi.com

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GRACE, POWER & EASE



Alignment and balance are dynamic results of millions of second-to-second adjustments a body makes to gravity and motion. Clenching muscles across joints reduces the range of motion and impedes the free circulation of vital energy so there is less resilience - less life. Bracing also impairs a joint's ability to make fine adjustments and creates hard lines of resistance.

Natural alignment within a body appears when all traces of bracing are gone and the body arranges with ease on the subtle, dynamic balance of muscles. At rest, an ordered body is calm and ready for anything. In motion, it is fluid, powerful, and vital. When every joint moves freely the entire body adjusts to gravity with grace, power, and ease. Poise, gracefulness, balance, and sensitivity are hallmarks of natural self-carriage.

Movement amplifies alignment problems. Misaligned bodies wear parts out quickly, waste energy, and function poorly. Instead of traveling smoothly along the path designed to handle movement, energy gets stuck and scatters throughout the frame so bodies appear confused, awkward, and uncoordinated.

MOVE WITH GRACE, POWER, & EASE

Two things spoil li: misalignment and movement that does not originate from the center. For a body to move with li it must align dynamically in motion, and the impetus for movement must be coordinated from a central point. These two aspects work interdependently such that losing either results in multiple levels of indirection. Energy ricochets haphazardly along hard lines of bracing. Uncoordinated movements disrupt dynamic alignment. It's not so much an either/or as a continuum from optimal to catastrophic.

To harmonize alignment and movement the impetus to act emanates from the center of gravity. Moving from the center coordinates timing, smoothes transitions, and maintains balanced alignment so that a body moves as a whole without breaks in continuity, compensations, or disorder.

Principles to Sustain Li

- ❖ *Plumb Your Spine:* suspend your tailbone from the top of your head.
- ❖ *Inhale into your back and soften your sternum exhaling.*
- ❖ *Release shoulders, suspend elbows, and seat your wrists.*
- ❖ *Draw your breath and attention to your tan tien.*
- ❖ *Supple your pelvis:* loosen your buttocks, perineum, and core.
- ❖ *Root:* unlock knees, balance paired thigh and calf muscles, and open your bubbling wells to the earth.
- ❖ *Move from your tan tien:* initiate shifting and turning from your waist.
- ❖ *Separate yin & yang:* Shift your weight mindfully so that knees follow toes and bubbling wells remain connected.
- ❖ *Relax:* Master Yang Cheng Fu said to assess the quality of T'ai Chi notice if a body is upright, balanced, and comfortable.