



Freya and Martin Boedicker are the authors of **The Philosophy of Tai Chi Chuan**, published this month by Blue Snake. Freya and Martin run the Forum for Traditional Wu Tai Chi Chuan and teach Tai Chi in Germany, England, Holland, Poland, Belgium, Spain, and South Africa. Both have published articles on Tai Chi theory and application in Tai Chi journals across Europe. They live in Willich, Germany.

For further information on Tai Chi Chuan and Chinese philosophy, please visit the authors' **blog** and check out their YouTube videos, available **here**.

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### **1. What drew you to the study of Chinese philosophy?**

At a young age we both became interested in philosophy. Contact with Asian martial arts deepened this interest, and prompted us to concentrate more fully on Chinese philosophy.

### **2. How does an understanding of Chinese philosophy add to one's practice of Tai Chi Chuan?**

The Philosophy of Tai Chi Chuan introduces one to twelve different texts. Each text has an introduction, which explains the connection between the text and Tai Chi Chuan. For example, the core concept of Tai Chi Chuan like "The soft overcomes the hard" is not an invention of the old Tai Chi Chuan masters. It is a main idea of Chinese philosophy and found, for example, in the Lao Tzu and the Huainanzi. Entering the world of Chinese philosophy one can have a look at the original, which often means wider explanations. This will certainly deepen for one's practice of Tai Chi Chuan.

### **3. In the Introduction of The Philosophy of Tai Chi Chuan you mention that the movements of Tai Chi Chuan express certain concepts of Chinese philosophy. Can you elaborate on this?**

The movements of the martial art Tai Chi Chuan are soft and tender, but the goal is to win against a stronger opponent. It is as Laozi advises: "The soft overcomes the hard." This is known by everyone, but not everyone practices it." Chinese philosophy is practical philosophy. It provides you also with a

lot of knowledge about how to use your body. E.g. a requirement to the movements of Tai Chi Chuan is to develop stability through a good body structure. The Inner Training states: “Only if one is aligned and still, one can be stable.” If you watch the performance of a Tai Chi Chuan master you will find this idea expressed in a beautiful way—you see Chinese philosophy in action.

#### **4. What do you think contemporary westerners can gain from the study of Chinese philosophy?**

Chinese philosophy teaches you to look at yourself and to get into the process of self-cultivation. The process of self-cultivation involves many very interesting ideas. We want to give two examples:

a) One of the main topics of Chinese philosophy and Tai Chi Chuan is the non-acting (wuwei). It means not to interfere or act against naturalness. We think this special idea of relaxation in action is a goal worthy of achieving.

b) Also of great interest for the Chinese philosopher is the right timing. Only with the right timing non-acting (wuwei) is possible. In the Huainanzi it is stated: “The one who is too early has easily done too much. The one who is too late has difficulty acting at all.” How true. Easy to understand, hard to bring into practice. Tai Chi Chuan is the perfect tool to learn it.

#### **5. Do your students’ often ask about Chinese philosophy? Is it difficult for western students to understand?**

Yes, they do and we always taught Tai Chi Chuan in addition with Chinese philosophy. It is quite easy to understand if it is explained to you. So students naturally ask for books about it. There are many books about Chinese philosophy, but they are not written specifically for the Tai Chi Chuan student. Thus we wrote The Philosophy of Tai Chi Chuan, which was already a success in Germany.

#### **6. What are your thoughts on the study and practice of Tai Chi Chuan in Germany? Is there a great difference in the perceptions and practices of countries throughout Europe? Between Europe and the U.S.?**

We have been following the development now for more than 20 years, and we think that Tai Chi Chuan is on the right path. It became very popular all over the world. Of course there is always the fear of a ‘watered down’ Tai Chi Chuan, but more and more original knowledge is coming from China and western teachers are becoming better and better. The U.S. was always at the forefront of this development, but Europe is also on the way. We do not see many differences between continents or countries. It is more the presence of a good teacher (who are often traveling around the world) that produces the quality.

#### **7. In The Philosophy of Tai Chi Chuan you draw from many texts and many philosophers. Is it difficult to find copies of some of these texts?**

The passages in The Philosophy of Tai Chi Chuan can be found in other books as well. But in those books they are incorporated in the full work of the author. It can thus be hard for the Tai Chi Chuan student to find passages, which fit to his/her art.

#### **8. Do either of you have a favorite Chinese philosopher?**

No, all philosophers have something specific, which is interesting. It is the sum of the knowledge that is so exciting. We are sure that we can show this in *The Philosophy of Tai Chi Chuan*.

**9. What are some of the differences between the five major styles of Tai Chi Chuan? Do you think it is important to have an understanding of all five styles or to focus solely on one?**

It is impossible to explain in short the differences between the five major styles, but we are sure that it is fruitful to concentrate on one style. It is like playing a classical instrument. To learn violin and cello at the same time is very difficult. This does not mean that one should not be open for exchange, especially if one is more advanced. Like playing instruments together.

**10. Can you suggest other books for those who would like to continue reading about Tai Chi Chuan and Chinese philosophy?**

We are sorry to say, but there are not many books which focus only on that topic. But some books look at the cultural background of Tai Chi Chuan and they are always a good read:

Barbara Davis, *The Taijiquan Classics*

Douglas Wile, *Lost T'ai-chi Classics from the Late Ching Dynasty*

Arieh Lev Breslow, *Beyond the Closed Door: Chinese Culture and the Creation of T'ai Chi Ch'uan*