

# The Ideographic Image of *Tai Chi Chuan*<sup>1</sup> Movement score as a *training* resource for the actor

## Abstract

The conception of the actor as a living being who keeps his body engaged in a fictional time to create a scenic truth, is related to the real, present and above all trained body. This body, generator of signals meant to be understood by the observer, involves an inner understanding of signs and images that originate beyond its boundaries. The objective of this reflexive article is to propose a “form”<sup>2</sup> type of *Tai Chi Chuan* as a limited and instinctive process, using its ideographic imagery as a guide for the creation of a “movement score”<sup>3</sup>, a resource for the actor to scrutinize the action that this imagery engenders and the relationship it establishes with his or her body language. The methodology is premised on an initial consideration that fans out into different possible analyses, until finally culminating in a “meta-reflection”<sup>4</sup>, based on prior knowledge and experience in both theater and *Tai Chi Chuan*. The above includes theoretical and practical aspects that allow dealing with the analysis of *Tai Chi Chuan* ideograms as images for their representation, to create a movement score from them. The didactics discovers those elements which might potentially help capture *Tai Chi Chuan* through its calligraphy and vice versa, adapting and reinterpreting understood aspects to the actor’s physical training, which will be evaluated and implemented in the future in the stage environment.

<sup>1</sup> This phonetic form has been adopted because it is the most widespread in the West; it differs from that of Taijiquan (Romanized form), which will only be used in respect to the text of a citation.

<sup>2</sup> Sequence of preset movements with martial significance that are executed in a slow and harmonious way alone.

<sup>3</sup> Structure made up of sequences of movements, fixed in progression and articulated in a linked and continuous way over time, to later be drawn in the stage space.

<sup>4</sup> Constant and continuous process of meditating, thinking, analyzing, observing, and reinterpreting physical and intellectual activities.

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## La imagen ideográfica del *Tai Chi Chuan*<sup>5</sup> Partitura de movimiento como recurso de training para el actor

### Resumen

La concepción del actor como un ser vivo que opera su cuerpo desde un tiempo de ficción en el que sustenta una verdad escénica, está relacionada con el cuerpo real, presente y sobre todo entrenado. Ese cuerpo, generador de señales que busca ser entendido desde quien observa, implica la comprensión interna de signos e imágenes que tienen su origen fuera de él. El objetivo de este artículo de reflexión es proponer una “forma”<sup>6</sup> tipo *Tai Chi Chuan* como proceso acotado e instintivo, usando su imagen ideográfica como guía para la creación de una “partitura de movimiento”<sup>7</sup>, recurso para que el actor escudriñe la acción que genera dicho símbolo y la relación que se establece con su gestualidad. La metodología parte de una consideración inicial que desemboca luego como perspectiva de análisis hasta convertirse en una “meta-reflexión”<sup>8</sup>, fruto del conocimiento previo y de la experiencia tanto en teatro como en *Tai Chi Chuan*. Lo anterior incluye aspectos teóricos y prácticos que permitieron ocuparse del análisis del ideograma del *tai chi chuan* como imagen que lo representa, para crear desde ella dicha partitura. La metodología descubre componentes factibles de ser extrapolados tanto de la caligrafía al *Tai Chi Chuan* y viceversa, refiriendo aspectos reinterpretados y adaptados al *training* físico del actor, los cuales serán evaluados e implementados a futuro en el ámbito escénico.

Palabras clave:

*Tai Chi Chuan*, ideograma, *training*, actor, partitura de movimiento.

<sup>5</sup> Se ha adoptado esta forma fonética por ser la más difundida en Occidente, se diferencia de la de *Taijiquan* (forma romanizada), la cual solo se usará respetando lo textual de una cita.

<sup>6</sup> Secuencia de movimientos preestablecidos con significación y aplicación marcial que se ejecutan en solitario de manera lenta y armoniosa

<sup>7</sup> Estructura constituida por secuencias de movimientos, que se fija en progresión y se articula de forma ligada y continua en el tiempo, para luego ser dibujadas en el espacio escénico.

<sup>8</sup> Proceso constante y continuo de meditar, pensar, analizar, observar y reinterpretar las actividades físicas e intelectuales.

## Introduction

From a particular pedagogical interest, there is an urgent need to propose dynamics that include adaptations and interpretations as an integral and diverse renovating resource (Patiño, 2012; Lähdesmäki, 2012). The proposal and the guidelines presented through this reflection article are the result of many years of empirical experience practicing, teaching and applying oriental martial disciplines to different fields (recreational, sports and artistic) such as the Chinese discipline of *Tai Chi Chuan*; all of this is supported by the research and legacy, similarly by many masters who represent the thought, tradition and methods of that culture in this kind of practice.

The analysis of *Tai Chi Chuan* is connected to its condition as a martial discipline that seeks to realign the body through self-awareness using a slow sequence of movements known as “forms”. The objective of this reflection focuses precisely on proposing *Tai Chi Chuan*-type forms, using the ideographic imagery that represents them, as a guide to create a movement score through a limited and instinctive process, as a pretext for the actor to scrutinize the action that this imagery generates in his or her body and the direct relationship that it establishes with their body language.

For this purpose and supported by the traditional forms that already exist, this study contemplates the design of a teaching-learning procedure that can be included as part of the personal training of actors and performing artists in general, taking as a reference the ideographic representation of *Tai Chi Chuan* in its calligraphy, conceived as a drawing that represents an idea, which then triggers an action. Thus, as artistic research within the performing arts, the possibility arises that action, guided by practice, is precisely the site for reflection as an object of study, resorting in this case to a particular form of *Tai Chi Chuan* as a movement structure.

The methodology of this research is premised on an initial consideration that fans out into different possible analyses, until finally culminating in a meta-reflection, understood as a process that insistently involves analytical thinking, fueled by observation and meant to reinterpret, in this case, the ideogram of *Tai Chi Chuan*, making it possible to understand aspects that were studied previously. This process, the product of previous knowledge both in the performing arts and in *Tai Chi Chuan*, knowledge that circumscribes and contributes both theoretical and practical aspects, allowed for dealing with the analysis of those ideograms as images for their representation and to be able to create a movement score from them.

Afterwards, the final score can be integrated into the actor's training, as a source of their own images through a dynamic involving "thinking what was thought", an exercise known as metacognition, "... a term used to assign a series of operations, activities and cognitive functions carried out by a person, through an inner set of intellectual mechanisms that allow them to collect, produce and evaluate information, while making it possible for each person to know, control and self-regulate their own intellectual functioning" (González, 1996), taking into account the relationship between knowledge and learning, between learning and cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies and between these elements and the learning approach (Ausubel et al., 1973).

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If desired, the structure of the article seems to be a bit eclectic in the sense of sweeping through the different topics involved, where calligraphy is linked through ideography with *Tai Chi Chuan*; the concept of form as a movement score in the context of the scenic; the observation of nature as the meeting point and origin of these two oriental disciplines (calligraphy and *Tai Chi Chuan*); the corporal and writing as dramaturgy and specific aspects related to *Tai Chi Chuan*, to unleash the ideographic image of this martial art as a guide

and development of a form-type movement score as a training resource for the actor, which is the central proposal of the article.

### **The ideogram as a sign and the form as a movement score**

An example of the ideogram as a graphic representation of a concept is found precisely in Chinese ideographic writing. Bringing a symbol of this nature to the body of the stage performer (actor, dancer, mime, or performance artist), the theme of this article, implies a process of acquisition of broad dimensions. Precisely because it involves the performer in the development of codes, symbols and signs through their own bodily nature, which, in turn, will serve as a resource when establishing a dialogue with the observer. It is precisely the grouping and accumulation of these signs that will allow the construction of a *Tai Chi Chuan* like sequence-form. According to Borja Ruiz: "The actor must turn into a sign, into form, creations that have come forth spontaneously from the most personal motivations. In this respect, as a form that contains information, Grotowski considers signs to be ideograms" (Ruiz, 2008, p.377).

On the other hand, it must be said that the score as a general concept is associated with the inherent nature of stage practice, as defined by Sánchez at the beginning of the 20th century, when he says that the idea of score will work explicitly or implicitly in the stage creations of the avant-garde artists (Sánchez, 1994:29). His conception begins to develop with masters such as Stanislavski and his theory of physical actions (Stanislavski, 1993), Meyerhold and biomechanics, summarized in the concept of "Raccourci" as a precise bodily shape (Gladkov, 1997), Decroux and his codified system of Corporeal Mime, the repertoire of movements he created, extending to others such as Grotowski, who takes them on as a set of signs, not to mention Barba, who makes it central to his productions with actors contributing autonomous physical creations, or the American stage director Anne Bogart and her model known

as “Viewpoints”, where she refers to shape of the body as the outline the body makes in space (Bogart and Landau, 2005), in this generous frame of reference, we must not forget to mention the outstanding analysis of movement proposed by Rudolph Laban, where it is possible to understand, observe, describe and learn all forms of movement and their respective annotation (Laban, 1987).

To understand the concept of body or movement score in the stage environment as conceived of in this article, it is necessary to clarify what is being offered to the stage performer through this new form of *Tai Chi Chuan*. First, to enhance the personal perceptions involved in theatrical creation from the physicality itself, and second, to locate the technique in the exact place of this creation, by establishing it as: a resource for the bodily construction of actions that will find their expression on stage. “You work this way, not because you are ultimately most interested in form but, paradoxically, because you are most interested in the human experience” (Bogart and Luque, 2008, pp.114-115).

In this regard, the body score helps the performer transform sensations the sensations into specific actions from the creation of images, in this case derived from the ideogram in question. “For practical purposes, the complementarity between spontaneity and discipline is transferred both to training and to representation” (Ruiz, 2008:377). According to Laban, the work of the actor and the dancer consists of conveying thoughts, feelings and experiences through bodily actions, for this reason, they not only have to understand the movement but also to find its meaning, this will allow the enrichment of their imagination and development of their expressive level (Laban, 1987:130).

On the other hand, *Tai Chi Chuan* used as practice to influence the expressive power of the actor (Marcu, 2003) is correlated with the firmness with which Grotowski insisted that the actor constantly investigate his or her gestures without allowing separateness or duality between thought and action; in this

way, he encouraged the textual search for new bodily ideograms as a mode of genuine and direct expression (Grotowsky, 2008). In the same vein, his *training* proposals were aimed at drawing from each actor primitive human reactions, based on the search for forms motivated by real impulses, which revealed and made available a wide range of psychophysical resources, which consequently unblocked the actor, allowing him or her access to lively and total expression. *Tai Chi Chuan* is used in the performing arts as a nonroutine technique not only to train the body of the actor but also to influence the mind. This art is also in line with the concept proposed by Eugenio Barba, which consists of the actor reacting through guided physical actions, for which he or she formulates a network of external stimuli in relation to nature (Barba, 2005). As he himself defines it: "The extra-daily techniques of the body consist of physical procedures that appear based on the reality that is known, but according to a logic that is not immediately recognizable" (Barba et al., 1990, p.34)

### **Calligraphy and the relation with *Tai Chi Chuan***

Calligraphy is an art that derives from the particular form of East Asian writing and offers a clear example of how exotic this type of expression is for Westerners (Chen, 2013). Both *Tai Chi Chuan* and calligraphy are accepted and recognized art forms in China; the evident link between these two expressions is revealed through the movement contained in the aforementioned *Yin-Yang* principle, which will refer later, based on which it is possible to explain such a relationship (Gazi, 2005).

Like *Tai Chi Chuan*, the Chinese people appreciate calligraphy as a true art and consider it among the most popular; when these arts are compared, approximations and coincidences stand out. Firstly, in both, the spiritual aspect has more relevance than the technical, which by analogy makes calligraphy an internal art. This nature is evidenced in that both provide a form of balance and

internal cultivation through concentration and fluid and precise movement. “Tai chi is a way of making calligraphy and drawing in the vacuum of space, in an invisible and ephemeral way” (Pérez, 2016:291).

Consequently, a series of physical and movement conditions can be extrapolated in both directions. With regard to the use of the body, in both arts, the visible expression makes use of the upper extremities, but the participation of the lower extremities is also required, since their correct placement and use will allow an adequate rooting that will lead to energy (*Chi*) taken from the earth (*Yin*) flowing toward the energy center (Tassinari, 2002). From that point, this energy will be distributed to the upper extremities in succession, allowing that energy to reach the tips of the fingers to become a creative expression: for *Tai Chi Chuan* in martial action and for calligraphy in pure gesture, energetic gestures that complement one another extending toward the sky (*Yang*) by means of spirals, a movement pattern recognized as essential in the manifestations of nature. “This circular movement is a concrete link between calligraphy and Taiji, and contributes to the host of gestures and sequences” (Telias and Amenábar, 2011, p.22).

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In that same relationship, one of the special features of the implementation of the forms of *Tai Chi Chuan* is that its movements can include changes in rhythms and different energetic qualities, moving from a slow and soft movement to a faster and more vigorous movement. This characteristic is also found within calligraphy, where after moments of stillness (*Wu Chi*) as prior preparation, there are also moments in which the stroke must be strong, fast, and determined. Both in *Tai Chi Chuan* and in calligraphy, it becomes necessary to master all such states.



Moreover, some forms of *Tai Chi Chuan* involve weapons (swords and canes) (Berwick, 2009) and objects such as fans, which should be conceived not as an appendix of the body but as an extension of it. In calligraphy, the brush plays the same role as the sword or the fan. There is a metaphor for how to approach holding this instrument: *it is as if a live bird is taken in the hand; if it is held too loosely, the bird will fly, but if it is squeezed too much, the bird will die.* In calligraphy, the main rule is that no line can be corrected or reworked. “If you hesitate, you hold the brush for a long time in the same place, you hurry or try to correct what you have already written, the mistakes will become too obvious” (Susitaichi, 2015, p.55). Similarly, when a *Tai Chi Chuan* movement is executed, it must be fluid and precise in its path.

*Tai Chi Chuan* is considered the art of meditation in movement; in calligraphy, the very act of writing following the path of the strokes allows entering into that meditative state, much like a river follows its course and invites meditation through the constant movement of water. That path that runs from the technical and aesthetic, through the philosophical and spiritual, allows for enjoying a deep sense of calm and inner peace.

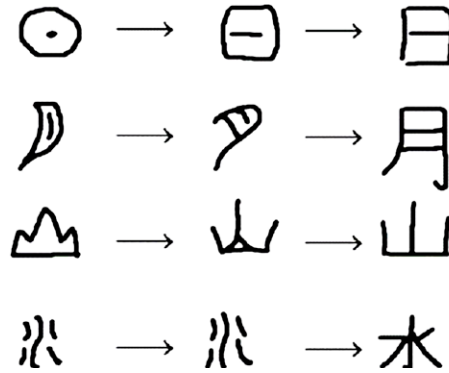
### **Binding and observation of nature, meeting point and origin**

The source of both *Tai Chi Chuan* and Chinese calligraphy, artistic expressions that are supported by allegorical and poetic images referring to animals and events of nature in continuous interaction, can be observed in both, the movements that give rise to *Tai Chi Chuan* (Figure 1) and in the most primitive characters of Chinese calligraphy (Figure 2): the close binding and the strict observation of nature is an unquestionable and causal meeting point of their origins.



**Figure 1.** Illustration of the founding legend of Tai Chi Chuan.  
Taken from: <https://www.almazen.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/serpiente-y-grulla.jpg>

Like the movements described in the *Tai Chi Chuan's* forms, ideograms relate the human-creator with nature, clearly involving the first with the latter (Von Mentz, 2012). "Thus, for example, the characters that represented concepts as basic as the sun or the moon consisted of drawings that tried to evoke the image of these concrete realities of nature." (Susitaichi, 2015, p.55). The manner of Chinese writing, perhaps due to being extremely ancient and not having changed much in thousands of years of existence, is mysterious and incomprehensible. First, it does not use an ordered set of letters in the linear manner of the Latin alphabet but is composed of characters or ideograms (pictographic or demonstrative) which essentially represent the evolution of conventional drawings or signs. "The ideogram provides more information at a glance and in less space than the linear and alphabetic writing form..." (Watts, 1979, p.44).



**Figure 2.** Primitive characters of Chinese calligraphy and their evolution. This image shows the historical evolution of four simple characters, with the meanings of sun, moon, mountains and water from the most archaic forms in the left column to the current forms in the right column. Taken from: (Susitaichi, 2015).

## Body and writing as dramaturgy

The written word is the transmitting element of culture, and the art of Chinese calligraphy is related to more than two thousand years of history for that ancestral language that embodies, by means of signs, the evocation of the sensory world. Although many characters are now in disuse, the language consists of approximately fifty thousand characters (Cortés, 2002), categorized into pictograms that represent objects or actions. Ink, rice paper and the brush are the elements used for the creation of calligraphy which is why Watts describes it “as the dance of the brush and the ink on an absorbent paper” (Watts, 1979, p.55). Each of the characters speaks of the energy or “vital breath” (*Chi*) of those who perform the act of calligraphy, of the energy that must flow through the movement of the hand-guided brush, which determines the shape of the stroke that becomes tangible through ink. Touching the paper with the brush implies the commitment to start and finish the stroke, for which a fluid and precise gesture is required (Chen, 2013).

Extrapolating from the above, this proposal is presented as a new resource that generates different, simultaneous meanings and that adds to the extant traditional forms of classical *Tai Chi Chuan*, where “corporality itself, in its actualizing function, works with scriptural logic, building layers of texts, capable of being read in a hermeneutical approach, asking ourselves about the meaning and identity of a cultural — and aesthetic — phenomenon based on the very experience of its execution”(Telias and Amenábar, 2011, p.5). This proposal is the result of a set of distinct elements, created based on an undeniable mainstreaming and cultural hybridization, which activates a constant mutation that one is wise to recognize to expand one’s senses.

Experience allows us to state that the corporality generated in the execution of movements based on the codes established in *Tai Chi Chuan* resemble a mode of writing that can be reinterpreted, generating at the same time a form of dramaturgy, which is understood as the relationship established between the observer and the intertextuality that the movement produces and that directly refers to a contemporary body, producing a synchronous performativity. “In contrast to the body-image, the body-sense, or the body-organic, the contemporary body is a linguistic body. And this experience of the linguistic body along with the reflection on the linguistic body returns us [...], to the problem of dramaturgy understood in a primary sense based on the relationship between body and writing” (Sanchez, 2011, p.30).

For this case, and taking dance as a model where the trigger may be music, the dramaturgy is directly linked to movement as a non-textual strategy. “The displacement of the word towards sound and image has direct consequences in the relationship of the stage creators with writing” (Sánchez, 1999, p.29). In the proposed score, which acts as a stage model, the image converted into movement plays a rhythmic-spatial role that generates a conflict in the body of the performer, a conflict which creates tension in the score,

becoming an engine to itself, ever fueling the action produced by opposing forces. The principle of dynamism of the score is the contradiction that the movement itself creates, and it is this contradiction which generates the action.

In any case, the score must generate an action as a product of the movement sequence that it implies. The steps of the methodology that create the score are: The image of the ideogram as a starting point; the exploration of the movement in relation to an ideogram (order and direction of the lines); making sense of each of the movements involved (attack, defense, transition, etc.); setting the sequences of each part of the ideogram and, finally, defining the total structure of movement that corresponds to the complete ideogram (form).

### **About *Tai Chi Chuan***

*Tai Chi Chuan* is a martial discipline from the Far East and is linked as a philosophy of life to Taoism (doctrine created by Lao-Tse between the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.). The mystical intuition of *Tai Chi Chuan* is thus condensed in the theory of the *Tao*<sup>9</sup> and explains the reason why, in its practice, the spiritual aspect has more relevance and importance than the technical, since its particular worldview conceives of humankind as an integral part of nature and as a mediator between heaven and earth. “The *Tao* of man was the result of the interaction between the *Tao* of the earth and that of the sky, where the two ways were merged and realized. The sky, circular and splendid, corresponded to the mind, and the earth, square and mystical, to the body” (Telias and Amenábar, 2011, p.10).

Essentially, within the martial arts field, *Tai Chi Chuan* is considered one of the internal styles and is the most popular among them. Therefore, its practice is based on the development of energy or “vital breath” (*Chi* in Chinese, *ki* in

<sup>9</sup> In everyday use, *Tao* means path or way. At a higher level, it means the fundamental Law that governs every event in heaven and earth.

Japanese, and *prana* in Sanskrit) (Gómez, 2014), which involves the study of a polished procedure that leads to its proper management. Many examples could be cited to reiterate that this type of movement manifestation corresponds to an artistic-visual expression and serves as a support for the expression of *Chi*, but the subject is so vast that it would merit a study that treated it specifically, so reference to it will appear only tangentially here.

### ***Yin and Yang, expression of the Tao*** (Lao-Tsé, 2006)

In the Far East, in addition to martial arts, painting, calligraphy, and sculpture are arts that seek to establish a link between humankind and the cosmos; more than a simple physical or aesthetic exercise, they are ways of looking at life. Within these arts are appreciated and valued not only the visual beauty and expression of the artist's character but also one's level of harmony with one's surroundings. Moreover, within these arts it is assumed that the artist's relationship with art corresponds to that uninterrupted dynamic proposed by the universe expressed in the *Tao*, a relationship contained in the Taoist principle of *Yin* and *Yang* (Fang, 2011). Contrary to the light and insubstantial interpretation given in the West, where it is explained as a brief notion of opposition, the *Yin-Yang* concept must be understood as a polar system of relationship and complementarity, a concept that differs from the Judeo-Christian notion, which has nothing to do with that worldview of origin.

In *Tai Chi Chuan*, three inseparable aspects converge: the martial, the therapeutic and the meditative, aspects that are integrated into its movements and that operate in constant interrelation and dependence, making it work as a triptych system, where the purpose of each aspect is part of this unique system. The martial aspect is linked to its genesis; hence, its quintessential expression has combat as its main objective (García et al., 2021). The therapeutic aspect is revealed in the use made of the physical body to

harmonize the energetic body and beneficially influence health (Ping, 2013). Finally, the meditative aspect (Raposa, 2003) explores the self-regulation of mental activity, at the same time that the body is involved with movement in close correspondence with the breath, and this is why *Tai Chi Chuan* is known as “the art of meditation in motion.”

The connection through the umbilical cord is the purest memory of a tight breath; at the time of birth, this cord is literally cut. Due to unconscious life habits that generate tensions, the breath begins an upward path, ceasing to be abdominal and rising to the rib level. If this unconsciousness persists, the breath moves even further upwards, becoming clavicular and, in the worst case, even cerebral, considerably affecting body posture and therefore causing an energy imbalance. Only careful observation based on consciousness itself can explicitly identify the level of blockage and consequently take corrective measures.

Accordingly, one of the benefits that continuous practice of *Tai Chi Chuan* brings is directly related to recovering the original form of breathing (Bradley, 2006). To enable that recovery, during the execution of the movements involved in the practice itself, the recommendation is not to worry about defining and structuring a certain respiratory cycle or using a particular technique, as this worry would cause the intervention of the mind in a counterproductive manner; the movement itself will be responsible for connecting the body and breath. As each of these movements has a martial application, both in defense and in attack, it is the movement’s intention, and not the discursive aspect at the mental level, that will specify when inhalation occurs and when exhalation occurs, as well as when the diaphragm is to be supported to adjust the movement or relaxed to dilate it over time (*timing*). In this manner, the convergence of the martial, therapeutic, and meditative elements occurs in an interrelated manner within the unique system called *Tai Chi Chuan*, in which breathing is the fundamental pillar that brings these aspects together.

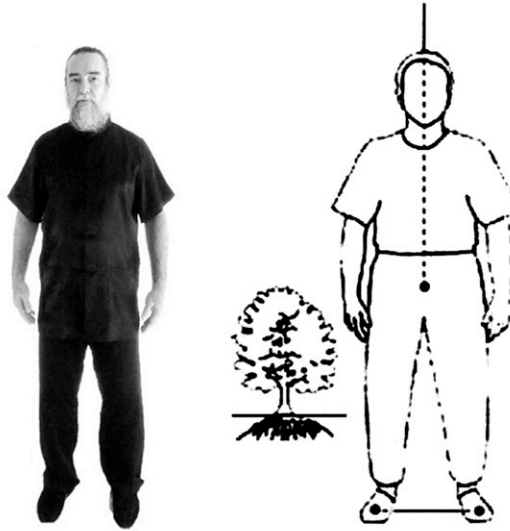
## **The ideographic image of *Tai Chi Chuan*, movement score as a *training resource for the actor***

Before entering into a discussion of the subject matter, it is worth highlighting the importance of remembering the notable aspects that harken to the source and essence of *Tai Chi Chuan*, which constitute, in most cases of the current intercultural context, the main motivation to consider its practice (Severino, 2019). *Tai Chi Chuan*, in its practice itself and due to its particular dynamics, refers in a clear, detailed, and direct manner to the *Yin-Yang* concept. This reference explains why, during the execution of a form, everything develops in an uninterrupted and constant manner. The sequence itself determines such development: everything that is above will then be below, what is on the right will go on the left, what is full will return to emptiness, and so on. Complementarity occurs precisely in that uninterrupted and continuous alternation of the poles that allows the movement to occur without stopping and in a perpetual flow (Tassinari, 2002:10).

### ***Wu Chi*, state of the absolute, starting point**

When *Tai Chi Chuan* is practiced, a progressive series of movements must be performed to guarantee a logical sequence in which the previous movement prepares for the next one. As a starting point for movement, even for practitioners with exceptionally advanced levels, a state of stillness is proposed through a specific stance called *Wu Chi* or primary energy stance (Figure 3).





**Figure 3.** Wu Chi posture or primary energy posture.  
Source: Left: Compiled by authors. Right: (Chuen, 1993, p.31).

Within Taoism, the concept of Wu Chi represents the state of the absolute and manifests itself through a particular stillness. This stillness is relative in the sense of its external expression because there is, potentially, internal movement, and such an interaction corresponds to the total movement, becoming what the Taoists call “unity of the unmanifested” and symbolized by a circle that has no distinctions in its content (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Representation of Wu Chi, “unity of the unmanifested”.  
Taken from <https://i.pinimg.com/736x/f4/15/6d/f4156d4da9e95efd2c54f188d1fff651.jpg>

The practice of the *Wu Chi* stance is explained with the understanding that if the goal is to learn to move with awareness, the first thing to do is to be consciously still (Milo, 2007) and in silence, (Nhat, 2016), which offers access to a state of emptiness and activates that “vital breath” as a generative spark. “The actor acts with his gestures, his movements, his voice and his silence, as something that generates the dramatic word, and parallel to this from immobility arises movement” (López, 2016, p.290). In this way, from stillness, movement begins, which is determined by the direction of origin and the concatenation of this variable within the limits of time and space. That dynamic is an expression of the manifest and what the Chinese call *Tai Chi*, symbolized by a circle that represents two specifics but perfectly coupled zones, one inside the other, and each with the seed of its opposite. This symbol represents the polarity of *Yin* and *Yang*, which generate each other in a dynamic complementary relationship (Figure 5), a concept that Taoists extend to all aspects of nature.

Collazos Vidal, A., Montoya Herrera, J., Peralbo Cano, R. / The Ideographic image of *Tai Chi Chuan*, movement score as a *training* resource for the actor.

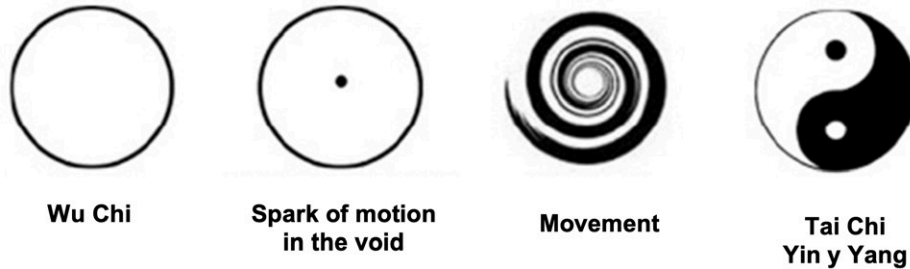


Figure 5. Genesis of tai chi (yin-yang) from Wu-Chi.

Compiled by authors from <https://tariktekman.com/tai-chi/> and <https://co.pinterest.com/pin/64950419606879288/>

With these considerations in mind, the proposal of a movement score based on the calligraphy that *Tai Chi Chuan* represents, which is expressed in three ideograms, is addressed (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Ideogram corresponding to *Tai Chi Chuan*.

Taken from: <https://zen.thisistruecs.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Tai-Chi-Chuan-Characters.jpg>

**Tai** represents: The supreme. A person or a point as a center. The focused, harmonious, and balanced person.

**Chi** represents: Energy. Left: A tree that must be felled and carved. Right: Heaven and Earth.

**Tai Chi:** Supreme integration of two poles, *Yin* and *Yang*  
**Chuan** represents: Fist. Body. Ordinary person.  
**Tai Chi Chuan:** Movement of the hands or supreme

**Generalities:** In the proposed score, there is no shifting: the legs have the only function of alternately changing the weight, drawing the symbol of infinity with the knees. The movement is located in the arms, which have the function of the brush and are in charge of drawing the characters, usually from right to left as in calligraphy. The hands represent the bristles through the use of the front and the back of the hand. The paper is represented by the air, and in that regard, the lines will be “a drawing in the vacuum of space, in an invisible and ephemeral manner.” The main rule is that no line can be corrected or reviewed, this principle forming the link between the two arts. In each character (pictogram), there is an established order for the strokes. Each stroke is harmonized with the others to create a complete idea, and the strokes of the ideogram appear fused in the general movement of the score.

**Order of the score:**

Initial sequence > Tai Sequence > Chi Sequence > Chuan Sequence > Closing.  
To start the movement, the use of classical forms is resorted to, consecutively turning to the execution of the proposed score.

**Note:** The arrows that appear in the images indicate the movement that is about to occur.

### Initial sequence (seven strokes 1-7) (Figure 7)

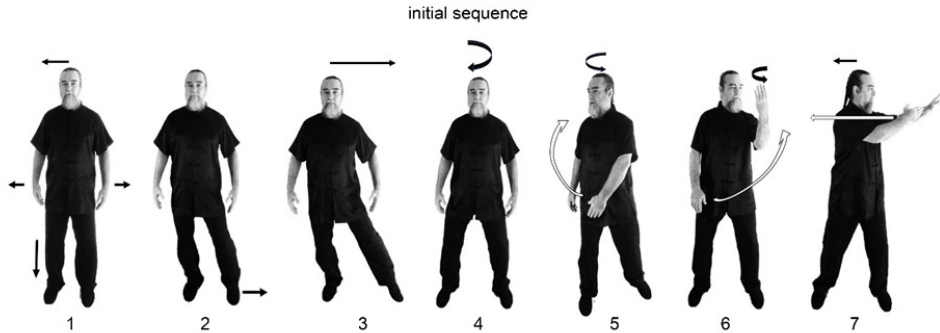


Figure 7. Initial sequence steps.  
Source: Compiled by authors.

**1:** The *Wu Chi* position. Feet are parallel to the width of the hips; the gaze is at the level of the horizon, letting the chin drop slightly, and the arms are hanging relaxed. One must ensure that the shoulders, elbows, and hands fall in the direction of gravity. The pelvis is relaxed and is located in retroversion until the lumbar curve disappears or is minimized and until the knees are unlocked, generating a small flexion. The breath is slow and deep through the nose, keeping the mouth closed without pressing the lips, teeth, or tongue; the latter gently touches the palate.

**2:** Keeping the verticality of the spine, weight is transferred to the right side by flexing the knee, which will determine the level of the body during the entire execution of the score.

**3:** The left leg and arms are separated. The support of the left leg is based on the front of the foot.

**4:** The weight is distributed to both legs in the same proportion by opening the heel of the left leg until it is parallel to the other foot. The final stance corresponds to that of the rider.

**5:** The knees and torso are directed to the right, transferring more weight to that side and connecting the left arm to the movement.

**6:** In the direction of movement, the knees return to their symmetry (weight distributed equally) until the left hand is placed at the level of the face with the palm facing it, while the right arm is activated (below the hip and the back of hand facing outwards).

**7:** The torso is turned to the left, transferring more weight to that side. The left arm is extended in the torso's direction of movement, and the right arm moves in connection until it is located at the level of the other arm.

### Tai sequence (four strokes 8-11) (Figure 8)

The first stroke is horizontal, the second stroke goes down to the left, the third stroke goes down to the right, and the fourth is a dot stroke.

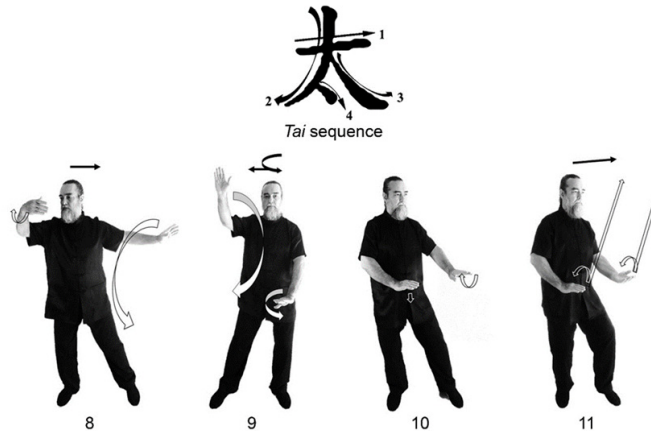


Figure 8. Tai sequence steps.  
Source: Compiled by authors.

**8:** Keeping the knees in the same position, weight is transferred to the right side, while the left arm is spreading outward. At the same time, the right arm, with the back of the hand facing outwards, draws the **first horizontal stroke**.

**9:** The body weight is transferred as the right arm rises by turning the wrist outward, at the same time that the left arm rotates toward the body and, with the palm facing the ground, draws the **second stroke descending down to the left**.

**10:** The body weight is transferred as the right arm rotates toward the body with the palm of the hand facing outwards, drawing the **third downward stroke to the right**.

**11:** The left hand makes an accent, drawing the **fourth stroke, a dot to the right**.

**Chi sequence** (eighth strokes 12-19) (Figure 9)

The first stroke is horizontal, the second stroke descends vertically down, the third stroke descends down to the left, the fourth is a dot stroke, the fifth stroke descends down to the left, the sixth stroke is a double descending hook down to the left, and the seventh stroke descends down to the right.



Chi sequence (seven strokes)

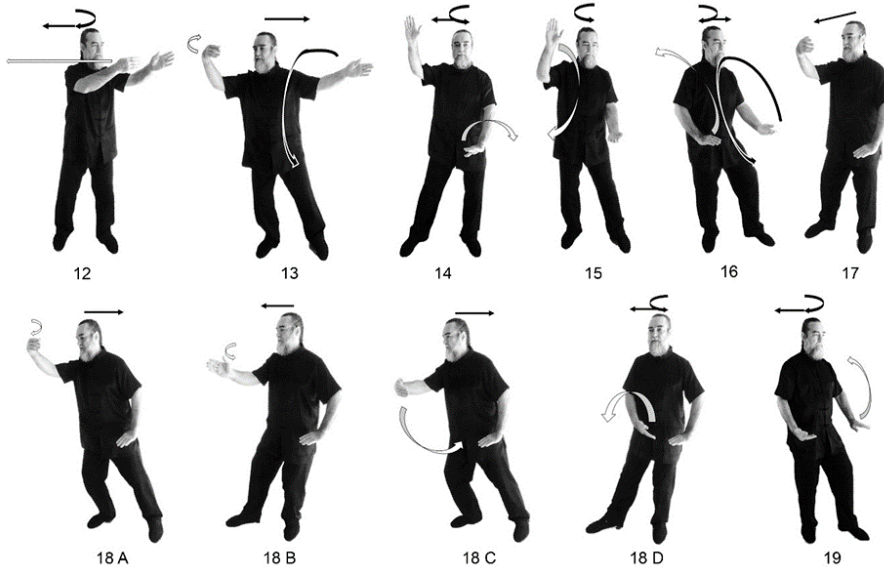


Figure 9. Chi sequence steps.  
Source: Compiled by authors.



**12:** (*Tai* to *Chi* connector) The body weight is transferred as the arms are raised while rotating the wrists.

**13:** The body weight is transferred as the left arm remains in its position, while the right arm with the back of the hand draws the **first horizontal stroke**.

**14:** The body weight is transferred as the wrist of the right hand turns, while the left arm draws with the palm of the hand the **second stroke vertically downward**.

**15:** The body is turned slightly to the right as the left arm goes up and, with the back of the hand, draws the **third downward stroke to the left**.

**16:** The body weight is transferred to the right as the right arm, using the palm of the hand, draws the **fourth stroke, a dot to the right**.

**17:** The body turns, and weight is transferred to the left as the right arm goes up, positioning the hand with its back facing outwards, while simultaneously the left arm rotates drawing with the palm of the hand to draw the **fifth downward stroke to the left**.

**18A, 18B, 18C, 18D:** Four successive weight changes occur, while the right arm with the back of the hand begins to draw the **sixth double-angled stroke descending to the left**.

**19:** The body weight is transferred to the right as the right arm ascends and, using the back of the hand, draws the **seventh descending stroke to the right**.

### Chuan sequence (ten strokes 20-29) (Figure 10)

The first is a dot stroke to the right, the second is a downward stroke to the left, the third is a horizontal stroke, the fourth is another horizontal stroke, the fifth stroke descends to the left, the sixth stroke descends to the right, the seventh stroke goes down to the left, the eighth stroke is horizontal, the ninth stroke is horizontal, and the tenth stroke descends vertically and is finished by a hook.



Chuan sequence (ten strokes)

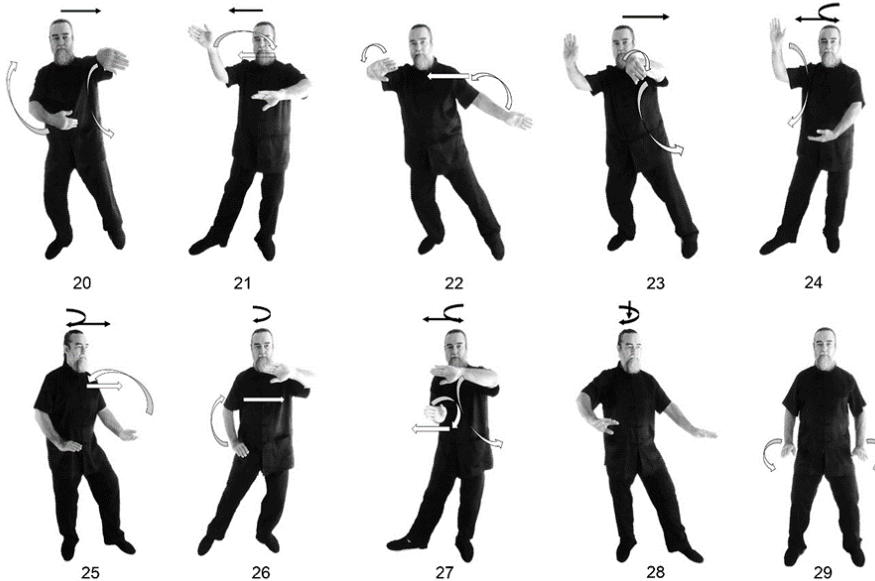


Figure 10. Chuan sequence steps.  
Source: Compiled by authors.

**20:** The body is turned to the right, and the left arm rises and, using the back of the hand, draws the **first dot stroke**.

**21:** The body weight is transferred, and the left arm descends while the right arm, using the palm of the hand, draws the **second downward stroke to the left**.

**22:** The body weight is transferred as the right arm is turned back and, using the palm of the hand, draws the **third horizontal stroke**.

**23:** Without transferring one's weight, the left arm with the back of the hand draws the **fourth horizontal stroke**.

**24:** The body weight is transferred as the left arm, using the back of the hand, draws the **fifth downward stroke to the left**.

**25:** The body weight is transferred as the right arm, using the palm of the hand, draws the **sixth downward stroke to the right**.

**26:** The body weight is transferred as the left arm, using the palm of the hand, draws the **seventh horizontal line**.

**27:** The right arm, using the palm of the hand, draws the **eighth horizontal stroke**.

**28:** The body weight is transferred as the right arm, using the palm of the hand, draws the **ninth horizontal stroke**.

**29:** The body weight is transferred as the left arm, using the palm of the hand, draws the **tenth horizontal stroke with a hook finish**.

## Closing sequence (seven strokes 30-36) (Figure 11)

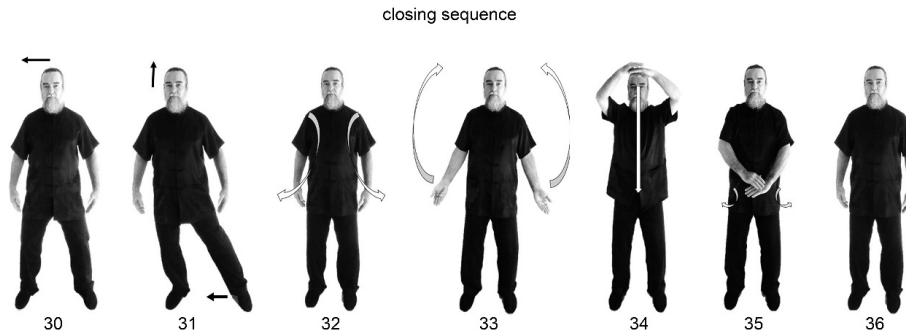


Figure 11. Closing sequence steps.  
Source: Compiled by authors.

**30:** The rider position is returned to, and the arms remain at the side of the body with palms facing toward it.

**31:** Maintaining the verticality of the spine, one transfers the body weight to the right side.

**32:** The *Wu Chi* position is returned to temporarily.

**33:** (Closing) As the arms turn from the shoulder girdle, they are elevated with the palms toward the sky, with one inhaling until the hands are above the head.

**34:** (Closing) The right hand is positioned on top of the left without contact, the arms are lowered, and one exhales throughout the entire movement.

**35:** (Closing) The arms are fully lowered.

**36:** *Wu Chi* final stance

## Final considerations

As it has already been repeatedly noted, this form is associated with the ideographic representation of *Tai Chi Chuan*, in which a constant interaction of the *Yin* and *Yang* principles is sought, the basis for its dynamics. Its ordering occurs sequentially in relation to its own calligraphic image. Its practice requires constant attention to all parts of the body, to breathing in a constant pattern of repetitions (breathing the form over and over again) and to the development of body awareness, deepening the connection with the here and now.

Taken as training for the performing artist, it implies constancy, systematicity and permanence through a strict rigor of repetitions in time, where the action must be a constant exploration, which will allow the development of stage capacities that can be put to the service of stage creation. Of course, the view of *Tai Chi Chuan* as a resource, when it comes to stage creation itself, demands a deeper connection to the interpretive work since this timeless discipline is a representation in itself, with its own cosmogony, the challenge is in the specific work that the actor must carry out and which would be the next step. (Villar, 2015).

Finally, a clear example of the application of *Tai Chi Chuan* in a large stage production is the Peking Opera, this is considered one of the highest expressions of Chinese culture, where *Tai Chi Chuan* is used as training for actors and dancers, but also as a stage language of creation. The same thing happens with oriental calligraphy, which also has a tradition of varied stage applications in various productions around the world. In any case, if there is one example of the full application of this process, involving both *Tai Chi Chuan* and calligraphy at the same time, it can be found in the production *Cursive II*, by choreographer Lin Hwai-Min, of the Cloud Gate Dance Company. Theater of Taiwan, where Asian tradition and contemporary dance merge in choreographic language,

the production evokes Chinese calligraphy through slow danced movement that involves arms and legs with overwhelming subtlety. The director augments and transmutes the *Tai Chi Chuan* movement into an expressive vocabulary inspired by Chinese calligraphy.

## Conclusions

In the context of the training of performing artists, it is necessary to approach the research from a meta-reflection as a methodology, this fact demanded to put the available theoretical and empirical approaches at its service and also to weigh and insist on the physical demand that this artistic practice implies beyond the mere physical training, to thus propose alternatives in that direction. The didactic motivations drawn from empirical experience and supported by studies and the transmission of different masters formed the starting point for the methodology presented here, which made it possible to extrapolate the image existing in the ideogram that represents *Tai Chi Chuan* and fix it as a physical score of movement. In correspondence with the subject discussed herein, relating the oldest writing of the East (Chinese calligraphy) with *Tai Chi Chuan* uncovers substantial components in both that can be extrapolated in one sense or another.

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Bringing a symbol of this nature to the body of the stage performer (actor, dancer, mime, or performance artist), the theme of this article, implies a process of acquisition of broad dimensions. Precisely because it involves the performer in the development of codes, symbols and signs through their own bodily nature, which, in turn, will serve as a resource when establishing a dialogue with the observer.

These observations support the conclusion that there is a relation among these two expressions, not only in the practical aspect of their implementation but

also in the energetic and spiritual realms, highlighting the length and complexity of both paths. As one delves into the practice of the *Tai Chi Chuan* or into the exercise of Chinese calligraphy, the depth that either offers as an art of self-knowledge and as a means of acquiring consciousness becomes apparent. In that regard, it is entirely feasible to try to relate them in an exchange dynamic that generates new knowledge that can be applied to the performing arts – arts that manifestly demand this type of vision.

Performing artists who train in a martial art, by disciplining their body and mind with pre-established forms that do not allow them to divert their attention on stage, manage to achieve the balance and control of themselves, necessary to adapt intuitively to any situation in an organic way.

The new score, in general relation to the classical *Tai Chi Chuan*, raises through these new bodily ideograms a way for the stage artist to investigate action in relation to its gestures without separating it from thought, since the action is motivated by real calligraphic impulses and generates a range of psychophysical resources. In the same way as *Tai Chi Chuan*, calligraphy can serve as a nonroutine technique for a training that integrates body and mind.

When dealing with the practice of *Tai Chi Chuan*, one must approach it with clarity, detaching it from the Western concept of physical exercise; the search for a proper management of internal energy through the balance of the complementary *Yin-Yang* polarity unveils *Tai Chi Chuan* as a psychophysical and emotional expression that provides both the stage artist as well as other types of practitioners with a special harmony. For this reason, this pedagogical exercise was based on aspects inherent to *Tai Chi Chuan*, which were related to the creation of the score, so that concepts such as *Chi*, *Wu Chi*, and *Yin* and *Yang* are included in that new proposal.

A relaxed body along with adequate breathing and a mind without any fixed intention allows for reconnecting body-mind-spirit as an integrated concept without separation. Knowing in what sense this exercise of reinterpretation and adaptation contributes to the training of actors and dancers must be evaluated, since the next step is to socialize practitioners and implement the proposal on stage; the experience with different practitioners who are interested in this type of proposals will also be acceptable.

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