

So Tai Chi is really a martial art?

Tai Chi Chuan, which means supreme ultimate boxing or fist, or simply "Tai Chi" as it is commonly known, is at its most advanced level, a true martial art.

How can this be, you ask? How is it possible that such a slow-moving exercise can be a martial art? One answer is, moving slowly trains you to move quickly. Tai Chi is a very precise art, involving highly coordinated movement. Doing the form quickly is not helpful in achieving the level of coordination necessary to perform Tai Chi in a martial context. Crucial details get lost.

Another answer is that all the postures have martial applications. All that is needed is a teacher who knows them and can explain them well. Some of them are obvious, like a punch or push. Some of them are not, like "prepare for ward off left", or the "withdraw after punch". A skilled teacher can give you a wide assortment of attacks and defenses, some obvious, some not, from the Tai Chi form regardless of the tai chi style.

Simply practicing Tai Chi does not make one a martial artist, even though the fundamental principles are there. One needs to study it for its martial aspects with an instructor that understands and applies the martial aspect. With an appropriate teacher you can learn things in Tai Chi form that are developed and showcased in the Push Hands: softness, yielding, pushing, pressing, rooting and neutralizing to name a few. Then these attributes will become a potent martial art when applied.

Also remember that the tai chi of martial arts is supposed to be an integrated system of self-defense and healing. In learning healing we learn 'body management' and by learning, then applying 'body management' in its martial tai chi application we then a basic classical style into a street survival system. But this is not done overnight or in a six week tai chi program or off a video, nor can one do it an hour a week without practice on non-class days.

The survival skills come in time with consistent training and practice and over time we learn all about 'the no mind state, to see without looking, reptile brain, and fa-jing' and their applications. In time we "own" tai chi chuan, making it our own with the flow of own natural movements, different in every body/mind. For instance, someone's most natural movement to a simple attack from the front may be to throw up his or her hands in front of the face. So here we turn this movement into a more devastating fa-jing/dim-mak strike, and eventually, this movement, which was always this person's most natural movement, becomes the sub-conscious movement to any type of frontal attack by hand.

But if you don't have the basics, then you've got nothing! And the classic forms from tai chi martial arts and their forms (dance like string of the flow of postures) are your basics, they teach you how to move. It's not the fact that we learn really low stances and exaggerated movements so that we can then use them to fight. It's far from that; we do these dances which involve much discipline, so that we are able not to use them when some real trouble is coming our way. If you see a classical martial artist in a serious scrap, who simply knocks someone's head off and leaves, then this is a martial artist who has done the basics. However, if you see a martial artist who goes into some sort of stance and on guard position, low stances etc, and who gets his head knocked off, then this is the classical martial artist who has never taken his basics beyond the basics.

As we become more and more advanced in our survival skills, we tend to use less and less techniques, rather preferring to stick with the tried and proven one or two in order to survive. But it's the years of classical work that gives us this ability.

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