

The 8 gates and 13 Postures

Ba Men Shi San Shi

The thirteen postures, found on many classic taoist texts, are the ground material in all schools, are the practical essence, philosophy and cosmogony of classical tai chi chuan.

Its mythical creator was Chang San Feng, when he saw a battle between a crane and a snake.

The 8 gates and 13 postures are the combination of 8 hand movements or "energies", corresponding to the 8 trigrams (or 8 celestial signs or energies) (Ba Gua) from the I-Ching, the book of transformations. They include the 5 main steps, corresponding to the 5 elements or moves (Wu Xing) from the Chinese cosmogony.
8 energies + 5 elements = 13 postures

The 5 Terrestrial Elements are :

WATER back backwards
WOOD move left (towards the Yang)
FIRE move forward
EARTH be in the center
METAL move right (towards the Yin)

The 8 Celestial Energies are :

CLARITY CALMNESS
SERENITY REASON
BEAUTY PERMANENCE
POTENCY RECEPTIVITY

"The 8 trigrams guide what is spiritual, which comes from the sky, while the body and its material form comes from the earth and depends from the 5 terrestrial movements.

When the 5 terrestrial movements meet the 8 celestial energies, the sky and the earth, through Yin and Yang, come together and unite in the body of the man /woman who is complete.

The 13 postures represent the origin and the unity of Tai Chi Chuan and are linked to the sky and to the earth. They let the individual become a whole, taking in consideration the 4 directions and the 5 moves, which are at the origin of the 6 energies that let him/her reach the 7 stars perfection (Tsi Sing, the Great Bear) and understand the usefulness of the 8 trigrams. With this, the individual will obtain the wholeness from the 3 worlds after having reached the 9 stages that can let him/her reach the unlimited, bringing on supreme creativity, manifested in time and space.

- 1 The Tao
- 2 Yin and Yang
- 3 The sky, the person and the earth
- 4 The four directions (south, west, north, east)
- 5 The 5 energies (water, wood, fire, earth, metal)
- 6 The 6 energies (drought-metal, cold-water, wind-wood, heat-imperial fire, clarity-ministerial fire, humidity-earth)
- 7 The seven planets, 7 stars from the Great Bear, 7 days of the week, 7 holes of the body
- 8 The 8 trigrams or celestial energies : Sky, earth, thunder, wind, water, fire, mountains, clouds
- 9 The 9 celestial powers, the 9 levels of the cinnabar field (low, middle and high places of the cinnabar field, linked to the individual and to the earth)
- 10 The 10 ideograms : Spring : Pine, bambu ; Summer : Fire, flame ; Center : Mound, valley ; Autumn : Weapons, metal pot ; Winter : Waves, creek
- 11 Perfection, the unity that encompasses the even and the non, the sky and the earth. This number constitutes the perfection of Tao, the sky and the earth
- 12 Macrocosm and microcosm, corresponding to the 12 months of the year, 12 double hours of the day, the 12 body organs (lungs, heart, pericardium, liver, spleen, kidneys, gallbladder, stomach, bladder, big intestine, small intestine, triple heater) and the 12 meridians of acupuncture
- 13 Return to earth.