The Connection Between Taoism and the Taoist Tai Chi Society

What is the connection between Taoism and the Taoist Tai Chi™ internal arts of health that we practice? Are we offering religious or spiritual training? These are questions that we often get from instructors, other members of the Society, and members of the public.

TTCSA is registered as an income tax exempt charity with the Australian Taxation Office under the heading of the 'advancement of religion', as per the objects in the TTCSA constitution. This registration was done in 2008.

We are a religious charity. More specifically, we are a temple tradition of tai chi which, through the Fung Loy Kok Institute of Taoism, honours the three teachings of Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. As the phrase ‘Taoist Tai Chi’ indicates, Master Moy Lin-shin’s teachings were developed as a way to recover the linkage between tai chi and Taoist 'dual cultivation' training of body, mind and spirit. This linkage existed when tai chi was first developed many hundreds of years ago, but it gradually dissipated over the past two centuries or so. Master Moy aimed to re-establish that linkage, drawing upon the three religions tradition in which he was trained.

Taoism as a religion is unique in that it focuses on methods of ‘internal alchemy' to cultivate physical health as well as mental and spiritual development. This has led to some to refer to Taoism as a 'biospiritual' tradition, to acknowledge its equal emphasis on both body and mind. Master Moy has made these once esoteric techniques more accessible in the teachings offered through the Society. The Taoist tradition (including all Three Teachings) provides a rich framework within which to understand and develop our tai chi and the other arts that we practice.

In the words of Russell Kirkland, a noted scholar of Taoism: “The Taoist life requires dedication to an ongoing process of selfless personal refinement, which constitutes one’s contribution to the health and well-being of nature as well as society. To live the Taoist life is thus to accept personal responsibility for taking part in a universal healing, doing one’s full part to restore the health and wholeness of all individuals, as well as society and the natural cosmos.”

The path of spiritual training which the Society offers is there for members who are interested in following it. For example, opportunities are provided to practice chanting and meditation at specialised workshops. An even simpler way to begin this training is to help others (the fourth Aim and Objective) through helping with the activities of the Society, becoming an instructor, or in other ways. Another avenue is to study and apply the Eight Virtues in daily life. All of these methods help to ‘tame the heart', cultivate peace of mind, and ultimately harmonize with Tao within oneself and the cosmos.

There is absolutely no requirement or pressure for individual members to pursue the spiritual training offered through the Society. It is perfectly acceptable for a member to attend Taoist Tai Chi™ classes and workshops solely for the purpose of health improvement, without any overlay of Taoist ‘belief'. After all, this is the gist of the first two of our Aims and Objectives (to make TTC available to all, and to promote the health-improving qualities). However, each member should also respect the fact that we are a temple tradition of tai chi and that spiritual training is a foundational part of the teachings we offer – even if he or she does not particularly want to pursue the spiritual aspect.

One image we use to express the relationship between the various teachings we offer, is the idea of the ‘full banquet’. All of the teachings, such as tai chi, lok hup, chanting, sword, meditation, the Three Teachings (Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism), are like items on the menu for a banquet, and members are free to choose which items they wish to partake in. It is the instructor’s role to ensure that members are made aware that the full banquet menu exists as a path of training.

Instructors and other members sometimes ask how they can learn more about the Taoist training that we offer. The most important way is to attend Fung Loy Kok workshops and other workshops that the Society offers. In addition there are useful reading materials, including the following:

- *Tao Te Ching* (see reading list for recommended translations)
- *A Path of Dual Cultivation* (on sale at some branches)
- *Seven Taoist Masters* (Shambhala)
- *Notes on Taoism* (a link to some notes on the basics of Taoism)
- *Interesting web site on Taoism* maintained by the Fung Ying Seen Koon Taoist Cultural and Information Centre in Hong Kong
- *Taoism reading list* (some of these books available for sale at Bayswater and Brisbane, others best ordered by special order or via Amazon)

Taoist Tai Chi Society of Australia, 2 May 2013