T’ai Chi Ch’uan is one of the oldest Chinese martial arts, having its roots in the philosophy of Tao, which means “The Way” and refers to the primordial force that exists behind all phenomena.

T’ai Chi belongs to the “internal” martial arts of China, meaning that it provides the practitioners with the means and the ability to explore and cultivate their own ultimate human potential. In tai Chi there is no distinction between the internal, spiritual quality of the practice and the purely physical one, and for that reason it works at the same time on multiple levels: as a martial art, as a complete exercise system, as therapy, and as a spiritual practice.

**Historical and Philosophical Elements**

Tai Chi is deeply rooted in a perception and lifestyle which has been carried by the Chinese for millennia. Martial arts, like all exercise systems worldwide, did not emerge suddenly out of nowhere. They emerged from something that pre-existed. The term Tai Chi, as translated directly from the ideograms that describe it, it means "Grand Supreme" a double superlative that is beyond any accurate translation and description. It means the improvement and progress towards the ultimate, the perpetual existence and the great infinity. Tai Chi has its roots in the philosophy of Taoism and the notion of the equal but opposite and complementary, Yin and Yang, the negative and the positive, expansion and contraction shadow and light. This concept is depicted in the famous Taoist symbol of T’ai Chi. The circle depicts the condition of primal, fertile void, the One, while within it reside the two inherent qualities of the positive and the negative, light and shadow.
The early Taoists investigated all aspects of human existence, from morality and behavior, to political and social relations, and to the everyday mundane activities. According to Tai Chi theory, within the human body resides the capacity for a development beyond its normal acceptable potential. As the power of creation knows no limits, the human mind, likewise, should not be subjected to limitations or barriers to its capabilities.

In 1200 AD, during the Shang Dynasty (960-1278) the Taoist monk Chang San Feng, founded a temple on the Wu-Tang mountain, dedicated to the practice of Taoism and the ultimate development of human life. Master Chang highlighted the harmony between Yin and Yang, as a means for developing both mental and physical fitness, and for cultivating inner strength and wisdom. This is considered the beginning of T'ai Chi as a physical and mental exercise system and as a martial art.

The modern history of Tai Chi dates back to the 18th century and the Ch'en family, in the province of Hunan where one of its members, Ch'en Wang Ting, based on this pre-existing tradition, created a system that later became known as T'ai Chi Ch'ouan. The ideogram "Ch'ouan" means fist, and expresses the martial application of T'ai Chi. This art was kept strictly secret and excluded all who were not among Ch'en family members. The art of T'ai Chi would have remained secret if a man named Yang Lu Chang (1799-1872) had not convinced Ch'en Ch’ang Hsien from the Ch'en family, to teach him. Yang Lu Chang is the founder of the Yang school, one of the three main Chinese schools of T'ai Chi that remain popular to this day.

**Dimitra Zirou - Curriculum**

Dimitra Zirou was born in Athens. She studied film and photography at the *University of Illinois in Chicago* (Bachelor of Fine Arts), and completed her postgraduate studies at the *Université de Paris I*, in Ethnographic Cinema (DEA). In 2001 she completed a second postgraduate program in Interactive Multimedia / Virtual Reality, at the *University of Westminster* in London (Master of Science). She speaks English, French, Spanish and basic Japanese.
She taught Photography at the Photography department of Athens’ Technological Institute (TEI Athens) for eleven years and at the Aegean University in Syros, for one year. From 1993 to the present, she has published numerous articles and photographs on African cinema, the indigenous people of the European arctic, the Sámi and the Northern Lights. Her photographic work has been exhibited: at the Goulandris Museum of Natural History (2003), the Athens Metro (2004), the Athens Planetarium(2005), the Olympus Festival in ancient DION (2013), at Michalis Cacoyannis Foundation (2015) and IANOS gallery (2016).

She has directed numerous documentaries for ET1 and she is presently working on two new projects, in arctic Norway and in South America.

**Tai Chi Chuan**

She has been practicing T’ai Chi Ch’uan (Yang school) and Chi Kung since 1992, with Tew Bunnag, founder of the European School of T’ai Chi Ch’uan. She has attended T’ai Chi seminars and Chinese calligraphy with master Chen, as well as seminars on Chinese, Thai and Japanese shiatsu massage. She has been practicing meditation with Dhiravamsa. In 2002 she began to train in Aikido and Iaido. She has been teaching T’ai Chi Ch’uan, Chi Kung and meditation since 2001. At the present, she is teaching at Shantom ([www.shantala.gr](http://www.shantala.gr)) - since 2004, and at Aikido Academy / Vassilis Nykteris ([www.aikidoacademy.gr](http://www.aikidoacademy.gr)) - since 2014.

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