

Chinese Science in Relaxation: Piano Playing Technique Redefined

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Abstract: This study first explores the issue of muscular contraction and relaxation in piano playing from a Chinese science perspective. The main aim of this article is to examine the classic Chinese concept of *yin* and *yang* and how it forms the movement principle in *taijiquan*, then goes on to investigate this further as applied to the concept of relaxation in piano playing. Relaxation itself can be contentious especially when it is *employed* as a technique of movement which contradict its original character of passivity. In this paper, views about relaxation from piano pedagogues will be discussed. The research took on a practice-led approach. This article highlights motion analysis in a philosophical perspective. The character of relaxation is redefined using the concept of *yin* and *yang* as an analytical tool.

Key words: Motion analysis, relaxation, taijiquan, yin and yang.

INTRODUCTION

Taijiquan has been studied as a topic of research by historians of Chinese culture, by medical scholars and, of course, by practitioners themselves. A survey from the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine revealed that between 2.3 million and 3 million people practise *taijiquan* in the United States; a growth in scientific study has shown the effects of this martial art on cardiovascular disease, fall prevention, bone health, osteoporosis, chronic heart failure, rheumatoid arthritis and cancer survivors (Brown, 2010).

A growing literature that takes on an interdisciplinary approach in studying the application of *taijiquan* to the area of health research has proven various positive effects, for example, on stress management (Sandlund and Norlander, 2000), improving vestibulopathy gate (McGibbon *et al.*, 2005), improving functional limitation and improving immunity from shingles (Irwin *et al.*, 2004), delivering impact on decreasing tension-type headaches (Abbott *et al.*, 2007), on blood pressure (Yeh *et al.*, 2008) and in a study of *taijiquan* on osteopenic women (Wayne *et al.*, 2010). Researcher Catherine Kerr of Harvard's Osher Research Center explains:

Tai chi [*taijiquan*] is a very interesting form of training because it combines a low-intensity aerobic exercise with a complex, learned, motor sequence. Meditation, motor learning and attentional focus have all been shown in numerous studies to be associated with training-related changes – including, in some cases, changes in actual brain structure – in specific cortical regions (Brown, 2010).

Towards the end of the last century, the association of *taijiquan* with the arts appeared such as in acting (Delza, 1978) and piano playing (David, 1996; Zhao, 1999). Both Catherine David (1996) and the pianist and composer Zhao Xiaosheng (1999) found significant similarities between piano playing and *taijiquan* without being aware of each other's discovery. David (1996), a French journalist and author, drew analogies between the two arts in a philosophical and literary manner. On the other hand Zhao (1999), who authored a manual guide for pianists, *The Tao of Piano Playing*, emphasized the state of *qigong* in pianists, firmly believing that such a condition in piano playing is exactly analogous to the playing of *taijiquan*. *Qigong* is another internal form of Chinese healing and health practice that involves breathing, imagery and sometimes movement (see Chen, 2003 and Ni, 2006). Zhao highlighted three key factors in the acquisition of *qigong* in piano playing: relaxation; preparation; and awareness, where each is confided in certain law that matches the practice of *qigong* (see Zhao, p. 33). He makes it clear that the acquisition of a *qigong* condition can eliminate two flaws, relaxation or nervousness that is without control, where the former results in an absence of force and the latter delivers the consequences of stiffness, fatigue and harsh keyboard 'hitting' (*ibid.*). Although *qigong* and *taijiquan* are in some ways similar, piano playing can be better related to *taijiquan* which is movement oriented, rather than *qigong*, which focuses on meditation.

Loo (2007) found similarities between the *taijiquan* foot stance and the pianist's fingers and examined the laws governing finger motion from a *Taiji* perspective. More recent research (Loo, 2010) studies the principle of *taijiquan* 'total body involvement' as a concept for the pianist's kinetic movement. Loo (*ibid.*) examines the philosophical concept of *taiji* 'when one entity moves, everything else moves with it' and refers to the pianist's waist (or more specifically the *dantian*) as a centre that transfers movement to the outer periphery of the body. In this article, we aim to explore *taijiquan* and its philosophy of *yin* and *yang* in delivering a new vocabulary in a pedagogical sense by focusing on redefining the technique of relaxation. This will be achieved by looking into the figurative word 'emptiness' (*yin*) that represents relaxation from a *taijiquan* perspective and how its

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underlying tenets can be applied to the technique of relaxation in piano playing. However, discussion of its opposite entity 'solidity,' which here refers to muscular contraction, cannot be excluded. Hence, a thorough study of both in the principles of motion is crucial in the process of learning *taijiquan*; shall demonstrate that the same comprehension is obligatory in employing the technique of relaxation in piano playing.

When this philosophical view of emptiness is considered in terms of physiology, it is not as simple as inactivity. Sim and Gaffney (2002, p. 68) explain relaxation as 'the first difficult gate' to pass through before beginning to learn *taijiquan*. Similarly, 'relaxation' plays an important role in piano playing too, but the meaning of the term is a contentious issue among piano pedagogues; it can refer either to passivity or the absence of motion, or to a method for generating movement. Before arriving at this debate, we shall first discuss the technique of relaxation from a piano pedagogical perspective.

Relaxation in Piano Playing:

In view of the piano pedagogical literature regarding relaxation, the shift from the finger action schools to the romantic performance era is marked by greater attention to arm weight and relaxation techniques, mainly due to the introduction of more heavily weighted piano keys. The concept of the physiological school of piano playing began with the pioneering Ludwig Depp (1828-90), Tobias Matthay (1858-1945) and Rudolph Breithaupt (1873-1945) in the late nineteenth century (Huang n.d.). Since then, many famous pianists such as Weyman Weyman (1918), Walter Giesecking (Leimer and Giesecking 1972) and Douglas Bomberger (1991) have placed strong emphasis on relaxation as the most important element in piano playing and the basis of all techniques.

Defining relaxation in terms of piano playing, Matthay (1923, p. 4) listed three important aspects: 'a) elimination of all unnecessary exertions b) the cessation of the needed impulses at the right moment and c) weight-release – the cessation of limb-support and hence weight-manifestation where and when needed.' Such is the importance of the relationship between muscle contraction and relaxation, that Orrey (1943) considers any study that neglects this area to be incomplete.

To Giesecking, relaxation is also seen as an important factor in delivering smooth, even execution and equality of tone 'with the help of a well trained ear' (Leimer and Giesecking, 1972, p. 56). Famous pianist Claudio Arrau believes that a relaxed body is crucial in piano playing because tension will inhibit the expression communicated by the pianist (see Horowitz, 1999, p. 99). A study of Farnol (1941, p. 73) on physiology in music playing describes the function of relaxation as the production of 'flexibility,' 'that which the muscles come to understand as freeness of movement.' From an eastern viewpoint, Zhao (see 1999, p. 33) perceives piano playing as a mutual act of combining force and relaxation in movement and states that the attainment of such a stage in playing is an acquisition of the condition of *qigong*.

Pianist Russell Sherman explains that piano playing is a process of action and reaction and tension and relaxation (see Grindea, 2008, p. 39). Closely related to the philosophy of nature, Ortiz (1997, p. 93) believes that relaxation enables one to reach 'a natural state of attunement and harmony with nature.' These statements mirror very much to the teaching of the compulsory presence of the opposites *yin* and *yang*.

It is evident from these remarks that relaxation plays an important role in the pursuit of piano performance and training. However, this requires qualification in light of the paradoxical idea that opposing approaches, relaxation and force, must both be present in piano playing. In the course of relaxation, it is equally important to understand that it can never bring about individual finger strength, which is a pre-requisite for advanced repertory (Woodhouse, 1928, p. 141). Fielden (1927, p. 87) observed that fallacious piano teaching occurs when these 'advocates of relaxation' overlook their earlier training (belonging to the traditional finger method) and pass on the relaxation approach to those who are still lacking finger muscle strength.

Also, in view of relaxation, Whiteside (1961, p. 54) strongly opposed to a 'lax or loose' approach to piano playing. The fact that the acquisition of velocity in piano playing is inextricably linked to the correct use of activity probes her to question: 'Is relaxation the basis of easy speed?' She claims that the approach is a highly critical one by clarifying that 'speed is the result of an alert blended balance in activity – not of relaxation' (*ibid.*). Here, Whiteside reveals an important factor in the motor process of a pianist, 'balance,' which we believe can be better explained through the theory of *yin* and *yang*.

Berman (2002, p. 51) notes the fallacy of applying relaxation as a technique in situations where 'achieving a state of sustained relaxation is both impossible and unnecessary.' He opposes the idea of relaxation as a method in piano playing and emphasises that it is a dilemmatic approach of carrying out physical work without physical effort. Moreover, when discussing the motor processes involved, Berman prefers to use the term 'active relaxation' the joints not currently engaged in playing should always be ready for action and never tensed (*ibid.*, p. 28), which is in way similar to *taijiquan* expert Jou's (1980, p. 207) idea of 'conscious relaxation.'

The above account of the literature on relaxation has highlighted some key differences in defining relaxation and its function in piano playing. Such differences provoke lively debate on the definition and application of relaxation and it is the task of this paper to scrutinise the subject from the perspective of *taijiquan* and piano playing. we will argue that the concept of 'relaxation', which we refer to as *yin*, can be understood at

a deeper and more meaningful level by applying the principles of *taijiquan* and that, as one of the dual *taiji* entities.

Methodology:

This research took on an interdisciplinary approach between the learning of the internal martial art *taijiquan*, the philosophical study of *yin* and *yang* and piano playing. The method is practice-led and is divided to three phases.

In the first phase, the philosophy of *yin* and *yang* is studied to provide a theoretical framework for the hypothetical assumption of its relation to relaxation in piano playing. In the second phase, an ethnographic study with participation observation to both *taijiquan* and piano playing is carried out. Theories of *taijiquan* are tested and analyzed. The final phase revealed a conclusion of findings that reflected the researchers' experiences and new theories were formed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The literal meaning of relaxation does not seem at all complex yet when the term is used to denote an instructional method during motor processes, it can appear contradictory. The main problem concerns the lay definition of relaxation, which is associated with passivity. An important aim here is to look at two questions formulated with the objective of defining relaxation as a *method of motion*.

The first question to be addressed concerns the limits of the definition of relaxation. This will involve questioning the assumption that it is a term of passivity. The second question surrounding relaxation is a methodological problem. This refers to the perception of how, when and why a function of passivity is important in the course of motor processes.

As a first step in redefining relaxation within the context of motor process, the term will be considered according to the theory of *yin* and *yang*. The definition of this multi-faceted term applied more specifically to piano playing will be analysed by studying the concept of *song rou* (relax, pliability) in *taijiquan*, by looking at how relaxation is used as an instructional method.

Defining Relaxation in Taijiquan Song Rou:

Relaxation often included three common Chinese word and phrases in *taijiquan*: 1) *fangsong*, 2) *song rou* and 3) *rou zhong dai gang*. *Song* literally means 'loose' while the term *fangsong* is a directive to relax and loosen up. *Song rou* according to Xiong (2004) is a precise term to define this requirement of relaxation while *rou zhong dai gang* translated as 'carrying hardness in gentleness' reveals the philosophical perspective in the *taijiquan* technique of relaxation. All these will be explored in this article for comprehension of the technique of relaxation in piano playing.

In terms of relaxation, *taijiquan* practitioners are instructed to relax by applying the terms *song*, meaning loose and *rou*, meaning gentleness with pliancy (*ibid.*). To further elaborate, Zhang (1995) explains that the intention of *song* or looseness in *taijiquan* is not to achieve a result of *ruan* (softness and weakness), but to acquire flexibility through eliminating the stagnancy arising from stiffness and tension. Sim and Gaffney (2002, p. 68) emphasise that it is important to distinguish between being relaxed and being floppy and caution that floppiness, like tension, can result in blocked *qi* (vital force).

The idea of relaxation in the Chinese tradition is also emphasised in the pianist Zhao's (1999) writing. He highlights the contributing factor of *qigong* condition (*qigong tai*) in piano playing, which is described as a result of 'extreme relaxation with a preservation of control.' However, this seems to differ slightly from the law of *yin* and *yang* which advocates avoiding the extreme at all times while Jou's (1980) 'conscious relaxation' may better describe the required condition. Jou's definition highlights the involvement of awareness and consciousness when employing relaxation as a method of movement.

Before elaborating further on the concepts of *song* and *rou*, it is important to clarify how *rou* (gentleness) can be characterised as passive *y et al.*, so as an impetus for movement. To rule out this apparent contradiction, Xiong (2004) explains that *rou* in relaxation should not be perceived as an outcome of *taijiquan* – such would be to misconstrue this internal martial art based on viewing it as equal to exercise routines that consist only of gentle movement; rather, the emphasis should be on attaining a balance between *yin* and *yang*. Xiong (*ibid.*) describes two extreme, faulty, results that occur when the concept of *rou* is misconstrued. *Rouquan* (literally, 'the soft fist') is a method of fighting in which only gentle movements are used. There is no sense of solidity and thus strength is absent. On the other hand, *gangquan* (literally, 'steel fist') involves using only brute force. Such a condition is characterized by the absence of emptiness and high tension of muscular power. Practitioners of martial arts of this kind, such as boxing, tend to have developed enlarged muscles; *taijiquan* successors of this generation such as Zhu Tiancai, Chen Zhenglei and Chen Xiaowang, do not display a physical appearance of this nature. Thus, *song rou* is neither the case of extreme *yin* (softness) nor extreme *yang* (hardness) but can instead be viewed as a condition in which there is less *yang* in great *yin*.

During our exploration and practice, we have become aware that the concept of relaxation is an important concept in this self-defence martial art. Although *taijiquan* practitioners do not have a powerful physical presence and their movements have graceful dance-like qualities, they possess substantial inner strength. This is in a way similar to a pianist who portrays gracefulness in the gesture while executing virtuosic passages. Practitioners of *taijiquan* clearly do not display strong, muscular appearance that characterises practitioners of external martial arts and weight training activities. Although the training in external martial arts may seem to involve more hard work in building the muscles, that often more easily leads to injury. Mark (2003) who is an expert in piano teaching and body mapping explains that static muscular activity is one of the causes of injury. Thus the practice of complementing the *yin* and *yang* in relaxation and muscular contraction is important. However, Zhang (1995) asserts that the attainment of *song rou* is more difficult compared to static muscular contraction. This is because it requires an awareness and understanding of its more complicated theory.

We found that participating personally in *taijiquan* movement helped me to appreciate the sensation of strength underlying the graceful motions of the martial arts and we found this experience very similar to piano playing. Moreover, in the same way that the control of *song rou* differentiates *taijiquan* from external martial arts, it allows a distinction to be made between piano playing and other manual activities such as typing. Reflecting on our participation in *taijiquan*, we feel that the sensation of *song rou* is best described as:

- maintaining a high level of awareness until the expression of *song rou* occurs naturally (non-perceptually guided); this can only be achieved through extensive practice
- exercising a certain amount of control and strength within the relaxed body
- being mindful of the 'linking effect': a form of control that facilitates a smooth and continuous 'link' between sequences of movement that contributes to the character of pliancy in motion

While participating in a *taijiquan* class, the instructor explained to us that even when there seems to be a pause between movements, a continuous flow or a link must be evident to proceed to the next movement. This could be related to piano playing. When a passage is in *cantabile* or *staccato*, all notes executed on the keyboard can be well phrased. The act of doing so delivers the flow of the overall musical idea even when there are breaks between phrases or sections in the form of a rest or pause. When movements are connected in this way, it is possible to perceive smooth, pliant and continuously flowing motion from the muscles and joints, a sensation that we call the 'linking effect' which is a crucial factor in the acquisition of balanced motor processes in piano playing.

Analyzing Relaxation Through the Yin and Yang:

Applying the concept of *yin* and *yang* to motion analysis and the disputable method of relaxation in piano playing, contradictory interpretations of the approach appear to be a result of a perception of extremity. For instance, Xiong's description of the extreme conditions *rouquan* and *gangquan* is equally applicable to states that should be avoided in piano playing. When relaxation is viewed as a condition that only consists of the entity of *yin* without the presence of *yang*, the outcome will be what Eisenberg (1929, p. 101) describes as 'drooping and ambitionless performances, accompanied by tones lacking in desired crispness and attack.' Similarly, Fielden (1927) criticises the excessive use of relaxation in piano playing by stating:

Students are taught to move in so relaxed and flabby a manner that their playing is bound to lack edge and snap and the superb nervous force and dynamic energy, even in softer passages, so characteristic in the playing of great artists of the type mentioned [Anton Rubinstein, Paderewski, Rosenthal, Rachmaninoff and Carreno], is almost completely absent (p. 83).

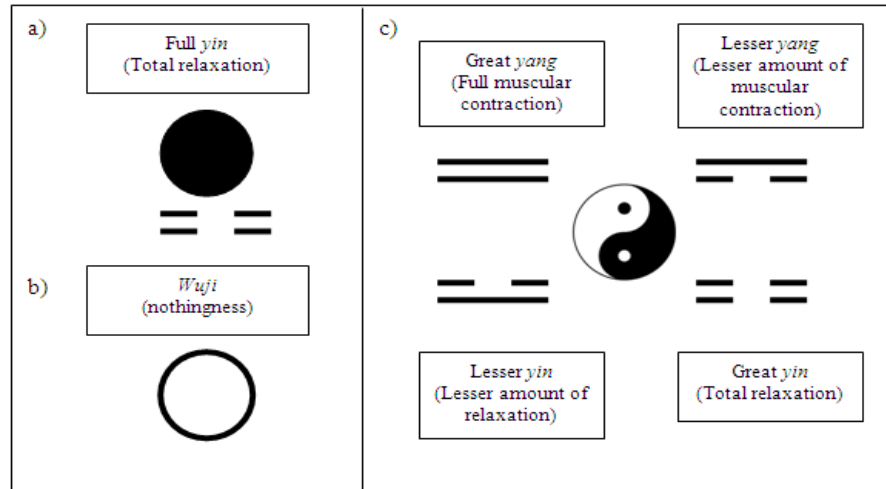
Such observations by Eisenberg and Fielden are similar to what Sim and Gaffney (2002) refer to as misunderstanding *song rou* as floppiness. Conversely, Eisenberg (1929, p. 101) also emphasises that a lack of relaxation will produce 'hard, harsh and uninteresting tones' with muscular stiffness and fatigue. The extreme conditions described by Eisenberg and Fielden mirror Xiong's example of *gangquan* and *rouquan*, which involve only one of the entities *yin* and *yang*.

When employing relaxation as a pedagogical instruction for piano playing, it is difficult to quantify how much relaxation is being used and the extent to which this usage is effective or destructive. Nevertheless, we have found that analysing *taijiquan song rou* from the *yin* and *yang* perspective can provide a new insight into using relaxation in movement. Considering the theory of *yin* and *yang* and the *taiji* diagram as a model, we divide relaxation to two categories: functional and non-functional (see Table 1). By categorising relaxation in terms of the various states of *yin*, we shall review its functional and non-functional characteristics. Further illustration is provided by the *taiji* diagram (see Fig. 1).

We found that the character and role of functional and non-functional relaxation within *taijiquan's song rou* become more apparent when it is analysed using the *yin* and *yang* model. When relaxation is seen as repose, it is in the condition of full *yin* (the absence of *yang*; see Fig. 1a) or *wuji* (Fig. 1b) which is extreme passivity in a non-functional stage and without intention.

Table 1: Functional and non-functional relaxation.

Functional Relaxation (great <i>yin</i> with lesser <i>yang</i>)	Non-functional relaxation (full <i>yin</i> or <i>wuji</i>)
Passivity with the presence of activity	Extreme passivity or static state
Transitional	Static
Ancillary to movement (occurs before, during and after a movement is executed)	No relation to movement
Involving <i>yi</i> (mental intent)	No involvement of <i>yi</i>

**Fig. 1:** Taiji diagram analysis of relaxation.

Jou (1980, p. 88) gives an example of the transition from *wuji* to *taiji*, by depicting the stage before one has the intention to play the piano as *wuji* and the stage when intention begins and action come together as *taiji*; this is when *yin* and *yang* emerge. The character of full *yin* (total emptiness) in the absence of *yang* (solidity) and mental intent bears no relation to movement and is therefore functionless. From this point of view, 'sustained relaxation' as labelled by Berman (2002, p. 51), or 'lax or loose' relaxation as described by Whiteside, both fall into the category of non-functional relaxation. They each have the quality of extreme *yin* or *wuji* which is undoubtedly a misguided theory in any moving activity.

On the other hand, when considering relaxation as an approach for motor processes, the underlying principle 'solidity in emptiness' is important. As outlined in the table, functional relaxation is seen as the condition of the *yin* portion in the *taiji* diagram – the emergence of great *yin* with the presence of lesser *yang* – which is in accordance with the principle of 'in *yin* there is *yang*' (see Fig. 1c). Therefore, the relaxation element in the teaching of *taijiquan song rou* is comprised of solidity within emptiness (Jou, 1980), so that the latter does not become complete looseness. Similarly, in piano playing, Berman's 'active relaxation' can be seen as an example of 'in *yin* there is *yang*' combining the two opposing entities 'activity' and 'relaxation' with careful measurement.

The fact that relaxation is not an extreme, static condition such as extreme *yin* or *wuji*, makes it a transitional state that can be applied to movement. In addition, its transitional value depends on the extent to which the practitioner is actively engaged in and aware of the changes in *yin* and *yang* (*bianyi*). As Xiong (2004) observes, when relaxation is regarded as a method for motion, it is a part of the interaction of *yin* and *yang* in which awareness of changes of *yi* (*bianyi*) is important.

Conclusion:

The above analysis reveals that confusion over the approach of relaxation is due to a narrow interpretation of the term as extreme passivity. Opposing views towards relaxation as a method in piano playing tend to draw attention to the basic meaning of the term as repose (full *yin*). Therefore, prior to applying relaxation as a method, it is crucial to understand the theory of 'in *yin* there is *yang*; in *yang* there is *yin*' to avoid the absolute extremes of emptiness or solidity and the extremes of *gang* (hardness) or *rou* (softness). This means that the method of relaxation is complementary to motion, *yin* (emptiness – relaxation) is always related to *yang* (solidity – force) in the *taiji* system. Each entity in the theory of *yin* and *yang*, which we refer to as 'relaxation' and 'muscular contraction' should not present in their absolute state. Each condition brings about a negative response and from the point of view of *taijiquan*, the result is stagnancy in movement. Stagnancy here points to

either the condition of extremes looseness (full *yin*) which results in lack of strength, unprepared motion and the absence of mental intent while hardness or stiffness (full *yang*) forms tension and obstructs movement.

The notion of relaxation must therefore not represent the meaning of softness or weakness but contribute to the objective of *taijiquan* in ‘complimenting hardness and softness’ (*gang rou xiang ji*) that originates from the ancient Chinese theory of *Yijing* (Xiong 2004). ‘Complementing hardness and softness’ is an interaction between the two opposite entities of hardness and gentleness at different level; a *taijiquan* practitioner aims to balance the *yin* and *yang* by making continual adjustments and ensuring that both entities are present at all times (refer to Fig. 1c). It is this principle that we found significant in understanding the underlying ‘solidity’ in the graceful appearance of movements in both *taijiquan*’s and piano playing.

The character of *yin* and *yang* that forms the backbone of different *taijiquan taolu* is referred to as ‘carrying gentleness in hardness and carrying hardness in gentleness’ (*rou zhong dai gang* and *gang zhong dai rou*) which echoes the notion of ‘complimenting hardness and softness’ (Jou, 1980). In ‘carrying hardness in gentleness’ the major characteristic is gentleness (great *yin*), while hardness (less *yang*) forms the minor component of the movement; and vice versa for ‘carrying gentleness in hardness.’ Learning *taijiquan* ourselves helped us to realize that in the vast genres of piano repertoires, the same characteristics of ‘carrying gentleness in hardness and carrying hardness in gentleness’ apply in the physicality of piano playing, by revealing that relaxation (*song rou*) always plays an important role regardless of whether it is present to a greater or lesser extent.

Chen (2002) strongly asserts that relaxation is a method that aims towards the objective of *taijiquan* movement and not vice versa. Applying Chen’s principle to piano playing, the misconstrued role of relaxation is clarified and scepticism can be avoided; that is the approach can be viewed as a method for achieving the objective of motor control, instead of resulting from it. Zhong (2004) asserts that emptiness is not merely a subject of force, but also serves as a basis for generating movement and coordinating energy. He explains that:

The teaching of *taijiquan* is the activity of emptiness and solidity, first there is emptiness and then there will be solidity. If the body is solid at the beginning, it means that the body cannot move, emptiness makes the body move in fast speed (*ibid.*).

From this perspective, the principle of emptiness enables agility; that is, movement is the outcome of the interaction between relaxation and force. we illustrate the process as emptiness – solidity – emptiness (ESE) (see Fig. 2).

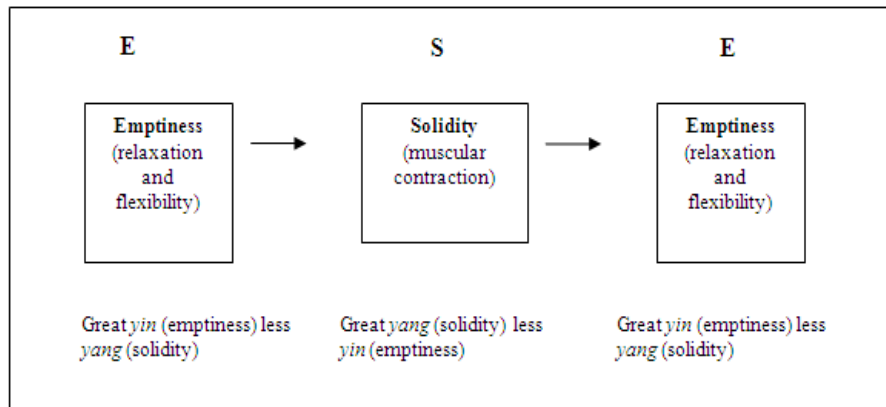


Fig. 2: The relationship between solidity and emptiness.

We draw attention to the concept of emptiness (E) as a prerequisite for generating ‘solidity’ (S). In terms of piano playing, emptiness serves as a prerequisite for attaining motion that consists of an alertness and flexibility that is ready to transfer its present state to solidity. Solidity involves muscular contraction delivering force through motion and should resolve back to emptiness, in other words, back to the state of relaxation after force is executed (which should prevent static muscular contraction). This shows that the ESE concept reflects the *yin* and *yang* as a cyclical process that yields movement.

Relaxation is seen as the means to the acquisition of emptiness (Xiong 2004) and is therefore a basic principle of *taijiquan*. Emptiness, the *yin* entity, is equally as important as solidity (*yang*) although bearing a negative nature. Since *taiji* (the ultimate absolute) emerges from *wuji* (the ultimate nothingness) or emptiness and therefore, *wuji* symbolize the ability of production.

We found that exploring the principles of *taijiquan* can explicate the contentious aspect of relaxation and help develop a better understanding of the term as a source of movement. To define emptiness, *taijiquan* takes a philosophical and physiological approach by relying once again on the principle of ‘in *yin* there is *yang*,’ emptiness is conceived as a passive (*yin*) state with active conscious processes (*yang*). Participation in *taijiquan*

and motion analysis help to deliver a further understanding of relaxation and we found that the character of internal martial art reveals some similarities to the bodily movements of piano playing. The conceptual and philosophical thoughts of *taijiquan* as a Chinese ancient science thus contribute new insights and mould the principles of relaxation in piano playing.

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