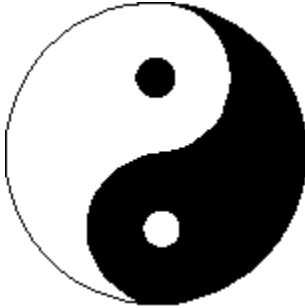


The T'ai Chi and the Cycle of Chinese Months

by Mark Shackelford, author of *Software for Feng Shui*

1. The T'ai Chi



The T'ai Chi symbol represents the endless cycle of Yin and Yang, and how each contains the seed of the other. The T'ai Chi and Yin/Yang are one of the central ideas of Taoist philosophy, symbolic of the Eastern view of opposites being two halves on the one entity, such as Heaven and Earth, Light and Dark, Male and Female, Good and Evil.

The White part of the symbol represents Yang, with a small circle of Yin within it, whilst the Black section represents Yin. The symbol shows how the strength of Yang increases only to be replaced by the growth of Yin. This symbology is used within Taoism to reflect the cycles of Seasons, Months, Hours, as well as how opposites are not in opposition, but are merely two parts of the one thing.

2. The Trigrams

The Taoist universe is described by a wide range of symbols, including 5 elements, 5 planets, 8 trigrams, 10 Heavenly Stems, 12 Earthly Branches, 60 year cycles and the 64 Hexagrams of the I Ching. Everything is linked to everything else in elegant numerological formulae.

The Trigrams are developed from the Yin and the Yang which are represented as lines - Yin consisting of two broken lines, Yang as a single unbroken line. The Yin and the Yang are combined in pairs to produce 4 items, and these are then combined again to create the Trigrams - all the possible combinations of three lines of Yin and Yang.

Each trigram is related to various aspects of the Taoist world, such as the Elements, the Seasons and Compass Directions. They also each have an Archetype or link to a natural phenomena.

Trigram	Icon	Archetype	Element	Compass	Season
Ch'ien		Heaven	Metal	North West	Early Winter
K'un		Earth	Earth	South West	Early Autumn
Chen		Thunder	Wood	East	Spring
Hsun		Wind	Wood	South East	Early Summer
K'an		Moon	Water	North	Winter
Li		Sun	Fire	South	Summer
Ken		Mountain	Earth	North East	Early Spring
Tui		Lake	Metal	West	Autumn

3. The Hexagrams

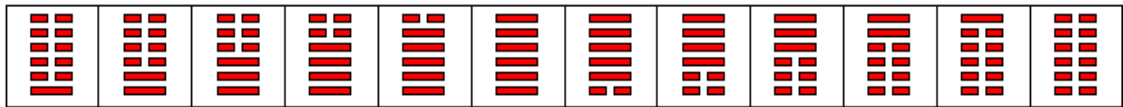
The next stage in the development of the Taoist philosophy is the I Ching, or Book of Changes, used for Divination. This develops 64 Hexagrams (sets of 6 lines of Yin and Yang) made up from all the possible combinations of pairs of the Trigrams. Each Hexagram has a specific interpretation which is used to determine the likely effect of different choices and changes in the life of the diviner.

In particular the Chinese link 12 of the Hexagrams (The Sovereign Hexagrams) to the 12 months of the year. These hexagrams reflect the cycle of Yin and Yang as they increase and decrease during the year. The hexagrams are as follows (numbers in brackets are from the I Ching) :

Icon	Hexagram	Name	Character	Trigrams	Number	Month
	24	Fu	Returning	Kun (Earth) Chen (Thunder)	11	December
	19	Lin	Advance	Kun (Earth) Tui (Lake)	12	January
	11	T'ai	Tranquility	Kun (Earth) Ch'ien (Heaven)	1	February
	34	Ta Chuang	Great Strength	Chen (Thunder) Ch'ien (Heaven)	2	March
	43	Kuai	New Outcome	Tui (Lake) Ch'ien (Heaven)	3	April
	1	Ch'ien	The Creative	Ch'ien (Heaven) Ch'ien (Heaven)	4	May
	44	Kou	Meeting	Ch'ien (Heaven) Sun (Wind)	5	June
	33	Tun	Withdrawal	Ch'ien (Heaven) Ken (Mountain)	6	July
	12	P'i	Stagnation	Ch'ien (Heaven) K'un (Earth)	7	August
	20	Kuan	Contemplation	Sun (Wind) K'un (Earth)	8	September
	23	Po	Splitting Apart	Ken (Mountain) K'un (Earth)	9	October
	2	K'un	The Receptive	K'un (Earth) K'un (Earth)	10	November

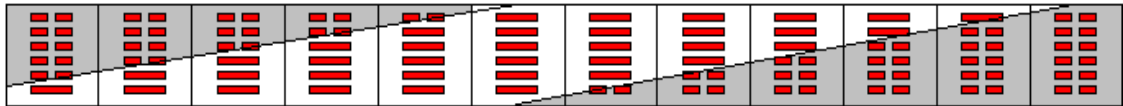
4. The Months

When the hexagrams are laid out in order of their associated months, we can begin to see the sequence of increase and decrease of Yin and Yang through the year:



Note: The Chinese consider that this sequence starts with month 11 (the Winter Solstice), when the roots of the trees (Wood) are beginning to start their growth beneath the ground (Earth).

The sequence of hexagrams represents the increase of Yang (solid lines) up to the 4th month when it is full, and then the increase of Yin up to the 10th month when the Yin is full.



This sequence of increasing Yang and Yin can be shown in outline as below:

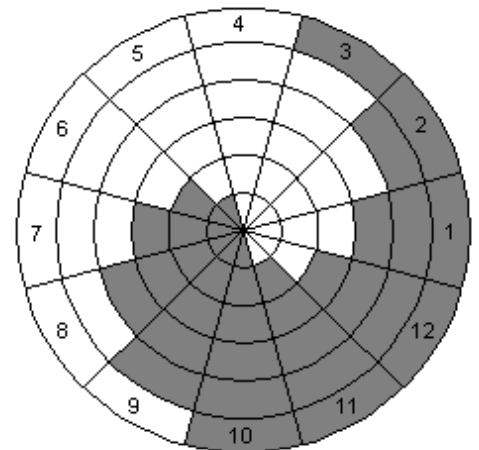
The shading indicates the areas of increasing Yin. Yin represents the cold, wet, Winter months whilst Yang is associated with the warm, dry, sunny Summer.

5. The Cycle

The horizontal lines shown above only represent a single year. As with all things to do with Yin and Yang, the months are really part of an endless cycle of the seasons and years. This is much better represented by a circle, as shown in the diagram on the right:

In the diagram, the hexagrams are shown in sequence going round the circle. The Yang lines are shown as White boxes, the Yin lines as shaded (Grey) boxes.

I have chosen the 4th Month (full Yang) to be placed at the top of the circle and the 10th month (full Yin) to appear at the bottom of the circle.

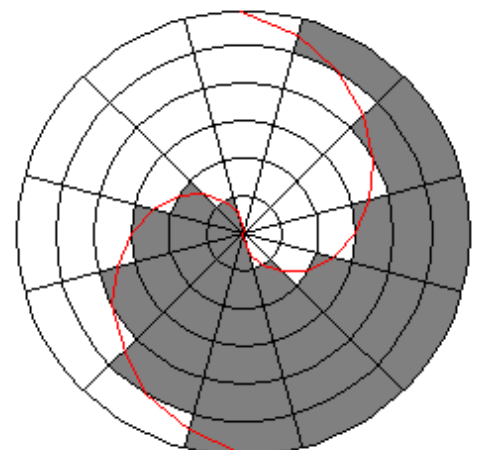


I have also chosen to draw the cycle in an anti-clockwise direction, which concurs with the Taoist idea that Earthly things are only a mirror of the perfection of the Heavens, and therefore are a mirror image of "Reality".

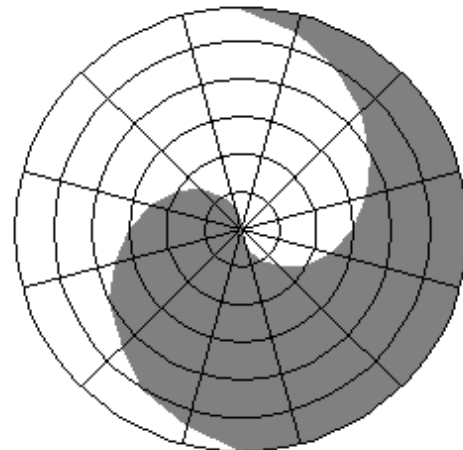
6. The Spiral

Where the White and Grey areas meet are the boundaries between Yin and Yang. These outlines can be traced to create a spiral from the centre of the circle to the outer edges at the position of maximum Yin and maximum Yang.

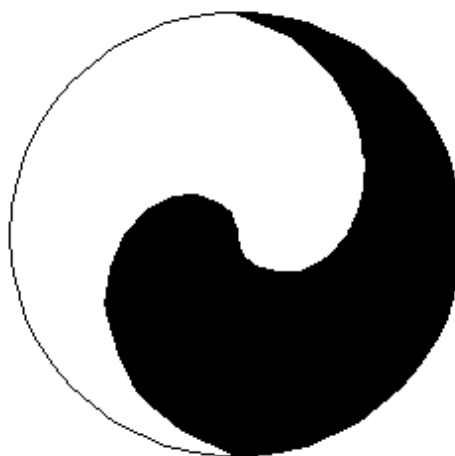
We now see the diagram shown on the right, with the spiral drawn in red:



If we now remove the shading of the Hexagrams, this leaves just the spiral outline against the 12 segments of the circle:



This can then be tidied up to give a new style T'ai Chi, already looking rather familiar:



7. The Missing Trigrams

In the Monthly Cycle only 6 of the 8 Trigrams are used to create the Sovereign Hexagrams - the two missing trigrams are Moon and Sun.



K'an - The Moon : Two Yin lines surrounding a Yang line

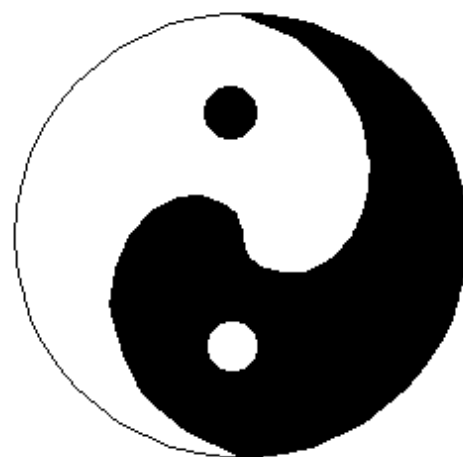


Li - The Sun : Two Yang lines surrounding a Yin line.

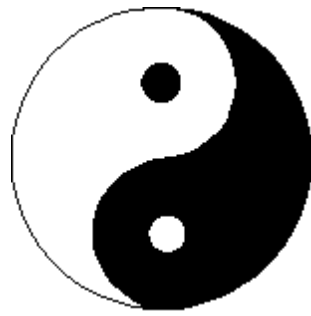
As the final piece of symbolism I have chosen to add these symbols to the new T'ai Chi.

The K'an (Moon) trigram represents Yang surrounded by Yin, so I will place it on the 4th Month - full Yang with Yin increasing on both sides. I will use a Black (Yin) circle for the Moon.

Similarly with the Li (Sun) trigram (Yin surrounded by Yang) which is placed within the 10th Month - full Yin. A White (Yang) circle is used for the Sun.



This completes the new version of the T'ai Chi - which looks remarkably similar to the original well-known version (two fishes).



8. Afterthought...

Perhaps the ancient Chinese philosophers 3000 years ago went through the same thought process to come up with the original T'ai Chi Who knows.