**1.1 Ontology of Taiji 太極 (Supreme Ultimate)**

According to Zhu Xi (朱熹), the interconnection of li (理), which exists as a cosmic principle, and qi (氣), as life-force energy, forms his fundamental monistic framework (Makeham, 2018; Gallinaro, 2017). Taiji (太極) serves as the foundation for dualistic interpretation because it combines all principles—including motion and stillness, as well as substance and function—into a unified metaphysical system (Ott, 2020). According to Yü (2016) and Gallinaro (2017), scholars have noted that Taiji demonstrates an essential function in Neo-Confucian metaphysics, as it presents an ontological framework that creates harmony between opposing forces (Chun-Feng, 2010). Scholarly analysis of Taiji principles in practical bodily movements remains scarce at present due to insufficient investigation of these philosophical applications (Dorter, 2009; Tan, 2019). The framework of Taiji receives a metaphysical interpretation in traditional contexts but requires a qualitative investigation into its effects on physical practices, such as martial arts. Zhu's monistic philosophy presents new opportunities to explore Taiji's concepts of equilibrium in physical exercises, particularly for martial artists who require qigong knowledge (Makeham, 2018; Yuan et al., 2022). Some philosophical explanations that focus on pure intellectual reasoning fail to capture the physical sensations experienced during the Taiji practice (Ying, 2018). The discussions provide an essential foundation for rethinking how Zhu Xi’s philosophical concepts can influence modern practical martial arts by combining intellectual and physical aspects.

**1.2 Epistemology of Gewu Zhizhi 格物致知 (Investigation of Things)**

Zhu Xi presents gewu zhizhi (格物致知) in his commentary on the Great Learning as an investigative method that includes both gradual inquiry (gewu) and instantaneous intellectual awakening (dunwu 頓悟) (Silius, 2010; Jørgensen, 2018). His epistemological double system presents a transformative process that involves acquiring knowledge through observation of the natural world, as well as sudden experiential understanding. The investigative approach Zhu supports aligns with Western empirical methods by encouraging researchers to integrate moral principles into their knowledge-acquisition processes (Choi, 2022; Ziporyn, 2018). The connection between gewu zhizhi and somatic disciplines, such as martial arts, remains unclear, as physical practice may serve as a method of inquiry (Chang, 2023; Ott, 2021). This oversight necessitates critical engagement with both traditional interpretations of gewu and their contemporary relevance in martial arts contexts. Once past cognitive limitations, gewu zhizhi demonstrates physiological engagement with learning discovery, which serves martial arts training well. Martial artists who integrate religious mindfulness elements with a philosophical approach, as outlined by Zhu Xi, achieve a deeper understanding of both their physical technique development and moral refinement (Tiwald, 2020; Thompson, 2021). An examination of gewu in martial arts contexts reveals insights into how bodily practices convey philosophical ideas, thereby enriching both the training process and philosophical depth (Tang & Shen, 2022). The connections between Zhu Xi's philosophy and other traditional beliefs facilitate a deeper understanding of his thought system and reveal how knowledge processes interact with bodily activities.

**1.3 Li-Qi Monism and Ethical Cultivation**

Zhu Xi establishes li and qi as central guiding principles in his teachings about moral and personal development. The concepts of li and qi play a central role in establishing an extensive ethical system for virtue cultivation, as outlined by researchers De Bary (1981) and Elman (2000) (Zhang, 2023; Guo, 2007). Students must engage in bodily discipline (gongfu 功夫) to practice Neo-Confucianism, as ethical life requires both mental and physical exertion, according to Song et al. (2020) and Morales et al. (2021). Giving birth to virtuous behavior requires discipline, along with practical application, to embody it in our lives. Li-qi monism associates ethical cultivation with an advanced understanding of morality, which is cultivated through physical methods and philosophical teachings. Practitioners who engage with vital energy, or qi, through its philosophical teachings are provided a tapestry of moral embodiment, according to Rassovsky et al. (2019) and DeBernardi & Wu (2024). The strategy emphasizes the comprehensive nature of self-improvement, as outlined by Zhu Xi, while encouraging people to unite their minds and body during their journey toward excellence. An in-depth study of these core principles facilitates new academic perspectives on Neo-Confucian education methods for martial arts structures and teaching practices (Lipowski et al., 2019; Croom, 2022).

**2. Martial Arts as Neo-Confucian Praxis**

**2.1 Historical Context of Tai Chi Chuan 太極拳**

Tai Chi Chuan (太極拳) has incorporated elements of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism into its historical development, reflecting the philosophical syncretism prevalent in late imperial China (Moenig et al., 2023; Zhao, 2023). The philosophical convergence of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism shapes the fundamental principles of Tai Chi according to scholars Shahar (2008) and Lorge (2012), as analyzed in Wang Zongyue's (王宗岳) Treatise, which establishes the conceptual connection between Taiji principles and actual combat expressions (Gubbels et al., 2016; García, 2018). Through the Treatise, readers learn how Taiji serves two essential functions: both as martial arts training and as a means of ethical development, providing evidence that bodily and moral improvement always follow a connected path. Academics often overlook studies on Neo-Confucian contributions to martial arts, which hinders a comprehensive understanding of these practices (Liu et al., 2021; Penglin & Yinhang, 2023). Technical mastery has become the predominant focus in discussions about Tai Chi Chuan's history, as academics often overlook essential ethical components that should be integral to these practices (Agoff et al., 2024). We need to examine how philosophical foundations from Tai Chi Chuan affect its moral implications to create a better understanding of this practice.

**2.2 Taiji 太極 in Tai Chi Chuan’s Philosophy**

Tai Chi Chuan’s philosophical core, which Wang describes in his Treatise, presents two essential aspects of Yin-Yang duality and how static and dynamic forces should exist in balance (Hui 2023 Seok 2018). The “neutralizing force” (Hua jin 化勁) corresponds to the cosmic balance of Neo-Confucian thought, as described by Zhu Xi (Sun et al., 2023; Wong, 2019). Researchers who study the application of these teaching approaches in practice observe both the theoretical compatibility with philosophical principles and the challenges faced by trainees attempting to implement them (Jiang, 2012). Present-day studies often overlook the moral aspects of Tai Chi training despite practitioners being expected to develop moral values through their forms, as noted by Moore et al. (2023). During Tai Chi practice, practitioners participate in philosophical discussions that enhance their moral development and embodiment (Ahmad et al., 2023). Future research must address this deficiency, as it enables scholars to demonstrate that Tai Chi Chuan extends beyond bodily learning by offering philosophical exploration into ethical life practices.

**2.3 Gewu Zhizhi 格物致知 in Martial Pedagogy**

The martial education of Tai Chi shows strong connections to the gewu zhizhi philosophical principles through its current training approaches. Martial training processes repetitive practice (jinxing 漸行) and enlightenment (dunwu) function as essential principles that produce intricate relationships between actual movements and mental comprehension (Cynarski, 2012; Bicknell, 2021). Practitioners who strengthen their cognitive experiences by mastering breath control (tiao xi 調息) and posture (Zhuang 桩) techniques create an important link between physical practice and philosophical teachings, according to Kim (2015) and Qian (2023). The potential for using gewu zhizhi to enhance martial arts training exists, but we lack comprehensive research that links the teachings of Zhu Xi to the practice systems of Tai Chi. Scholarly development of this integration is needed to understand how philosophical investigation improves physical training practices. Additional research is needed to bridge the gap between philosophical teachings and bodily practices, as it would have a positive impact on both Neo-Confucian studies and the education of martial arts.

**3. Synthesis and Research Gaps**

**3.1 Bridging Philosophy and Embodiment**

The Neo-Confucian ideas highlight a complete organic relation between physical and mental aspects (shenti 身體) that martial arts performances demonstrate. Through Tai Chi Chuan, you can experience li-qi monism because it teaches practical martial virtues that embody this philosophical theory. Through martial arts, the movement provides a platform for philosophical principles to be both discussed and practiced, demonstrating how philosophical understanding motivates more effective execution of martial arts. The essential link for grasping Neo-Confucian holistic self-cultivation remains unknown because scholars fail to examine Zhu Xi's philosophical insights about the physical dynamics of martial arts. The exchange between theoretical philosophy and practical execution fosters a deeper understanding of both disciplines, paving the way for potential interdisciplinary work that could define new research directions.

**3.2 Scholarly Oversights**

A theoretical gap exists in the existing literature since authors have neglected to develop comprehensive connections between Wang Zongyue’s Treatise with Cheng-Zhu's philosophical foundations. The insufficient attention to philosophical analysis in martial arts texts highlights a need for in-depth philosophical studies on martial arts literature, as the development of Neo-Confucian intellectual thought remains underexplored within these discussions. The methodological approaches used in current analyses prioritize historical explanations over philosophical conjunctions, which hinder the development of a multifaceted interpretation of martial practice through a Neo-Confucian perspective. More scholarly attention should be given to social-cultural elements and the impact that civil examinations had on the development of Tai Chi principles. Modern interpretations of Tai Chi as a Neo-Confucian practice benefit significantly when socio-cultural elements are incorporated, as these elements demonstrate the development of practice alongside philosophical maturation.

**3.3 Contributions to Interdisciplinary Scholarship**

Recasting Tai Chi Chuan as a discipline that embodies Neo-Confucian ideals provides fertile ground for interdisciplinary scholarship, which can enhance both philosophical and martial dialogue. The advancement of embodiment theories through the combined lenses of gewu zhizhi and Taiji synthesis offers a promising avenue for future research, propelling discussions on how these disciplines not only align theoretically but also enrich practical applications in modern contexts. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the virtues inherent in Tai Chi can be more comprehensively understood as actions that promote ethical living and cognitive clarity, aligning with Zhu Xi’s philosophical insights. In conclusion, expanding the conversation around Tai Chi and its philosophical roots not only contributes to the field of martial arts studies but also advances the discourse on embodiment and ethical cultivation within the broader context of Neo-Confucian thought.

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