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Abstract: Reviewing different views and definitions labelling the psychological state of ‘being’ when a musician reaches peak performance, this study examines the hypothetical assumption that theories and movement from taichi’s qi flow (the Chinese medical term for vital force) may be a factor in contributing to what various scholars in psychological study as ‘flow,’ ‘peak experience,’ ‘heightened arousal,’ ‘becoming’ and so forth. The phenomenon and existence of the Chinese traditional scientific belief in qi flow is examined and applied to piano playing. Whether qi is just an experience similar to blood circulation in a Western viewpoint is considered. As a result of taichi motion analysis and practice-led research, three major factors contributing to qi flow are identified. The concept of yin and yang in taichi together with circular motion and the attainment of qi flow are highlighted. The article exemplifies a new mind-body concept from a taichi perspective and its application to the kinematic process of piano playing.

Key words: Qi · Taichi · Blood circulation · Mind-body · Yin and Yang

INTRODUCTION

A considerable amount of research in music psychology has focused on mental technique and management in performance anxiety [1]. Suggestions among practitioners of the use of Eastern principles of physical relaxation and mental power are common, such as in the Chinese internal martial art taichi (or taijiquan in Chinese Romanisation defined as ‘taichi boxing’) and the Indian meditative and physical practice of yoga. However, a deeper intellectual teaching of bodily movement – for instance, how the philosophy of yin and yang is epitomised in each and every structure and the shape of taichi movement in application to piano playing – is rarely investigated. In our practice-led research, we found that the aforementioned Chinese internal martial art has more to offer than its relaxation technique. Thus, a deeper study into taichi, especially looking into its bodily movement, movement principles and philosophy may furnish more details in the study of enactment, such as in the kinematic process of music performance.

In contrast, the study of taichi and its effect on health as an alternative medicine has been growing rapidly in recent years. For example, Irwin [2], McGibbon et al. [3], Yeh et al. [4] and Tekin et al. [5] provide studies that prove taichi’s efficiency with regard to mind-body intervention in various health conditions such as shingles, tension type headache, high blood pressure and preventing the loss of physical function in elderly. However, similar to the study of music performance in anxiety management, the literature in these interdisciplinary studies seldom looked into the actual enactment of taichi and its philosophy, instead, only its effect on participants in a particular chosen experiment has been studied.

Taichi itself is a martial art that involves both psychological and physiological input according to its underlying theory of yin and yang, that is often termed in philosophical study as Chinese science. According to Bennett [6], Chinese sciences can be depicted as a system of applied cosmology. This article brings attention to one of taichi’s component, qi which is difficult to verify scientifically but which at the same time...