What are taiji and wuji?

Taiji is most often translated as "supreme ultimate", the origin, the great primal beginning that gave birth to the two primal forces, yin and yang.\(^1\) Wuji is the stillness before movement, the nothing before there is something.

Look at the taiji diagram -below, left - developed by philosopher Zhou Dunyi (AD 1017-1073), and beside it an English translation of the symbols.

\(^1\) We will explore yin-yang theory, Taoism and the five elements in upcoming papers. A wonderful book that explains much of this theory is Barbara Davis’ *The Taijiquan Classics: An Annotated Translation*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2004. (It is available in paperback from Amazon.ca).
From Barbara Davis’ book, *The Taijiquan Classics*... we get this translation of the text that accompanies this diagram:

Wuji, then *taiji*. *Taiji* moves and give rise to *yang*. When movement is at its ultimate (*ji*), it then is still. Stillness then gives rise to *yin*. When stillness is at its ultimate (*ji*), it returns to movement. Movement and stillness are at each other’s root (*gen*).²

If we examine this diagram in terms of our tai chi practice, the large ring at the top is the opening, where we rest and gather from nothing our intention to move (wuji, then *taiji*). Throughout our movement in the form we alternate between movement and stillness. In the second circle we see the yin-yang cycle. (*Taiji* moves and give rise to *yang*. When movement is at its ultimate (*ji*), it then is still. Stillness then gives rise to *yin*. When stillness is at its ultimate (*ji*), it returns to movement.) The result of *taiji* movement is the production and balance of energy – depicted in the diagram of the five elements. When the five elements are balanced they form pure *yin* and *yang* – heaven and earth (the 4th circle), and pure *yin* and *yang* produce the supreme ultimate – *taiji*. The goal of *taiji* practice is to refine the body so that the mind and soul may reach a heavenly state independent of the body. As we reach the end of our *taiji* practice we return to wuji, stillness, and then the cycle begins all over again with the commencement of a new *taiji* practice. In life we complete our *taiji* practice at death and return to stillness, hopefully having reached a divine or heavenly state where our liberated soul/spirit is free to begin life again in a new body.

At one level, practicing the tai chi form can be compared to a method of repeatedly re-enacting the formation of our universe or the human life cycle. For this reason, the tai chi form is considered by many who practice it more than just an exercise form. It becomes not just a method for realizing good health and sense of physical well-being, but also the way (the *Tao*) to personal enlightenment and spiritual fulfillment.

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