What is wu dang taiji quan?

To begin with, we have to explain who the creator of this first internal martial art was.

Zhang San Feng (張三丰) was a daoist from Yi Zhou of Lao Dong (southwest of present-day Zhangwu in Liaoning province) in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties, whose name was Quan Yi, whose other name was Jun Shi and Jun Bao, and was also called San Feng. He lived from ca.1314~1320 to 1417. San Feng, in Chinese 三丰looking like the trigrams Qian and Kun heaven and earth of the Bagua, was the name he has given himself after becoming a daoist. He has practiced Shaolin Gong Fu and was an expert in White Crane and Snake style as well as in the use of the Chinese straight sword. Most of the written material about him is very mythical and suspect. Zhang San Feng was called 'Sloppy Zhang' ( 張邋遢 Zhang Lata ) since he was careless about his appearance. It was said that Zhang San Feng was well built, with a tortoise-shaped figure and a crane-shaped back, big ears and round eyes, and a thick and long beard and whiskers and being able to cover 1000 li in a day (roughly 580 km).He always wore a daoist cassock with a palm-bark rain cape. When he had a meal, he could eat a lot, but sometimes he ate only once every few days, or ate nothing for a few months. He was very learned, capable of remembering whatever books he read, and of writing poems and essays. He was very casual and free from restraint, with the manner of immortals. There were quite a few legends about his life experience and his background. One of them said that he was born in the Jin Dynasty. There was a story which said that at the end of the Song Dynasty, there was a rebellion, so Emperor Hui Zong called him, and Zhang San Feng once beat one hundred rebels with one of his fists. Another story said that he could survive by abstaining from grains, move as fast as immortals, and come back to life after death. All his life he was immune to reputation and wealth, and fond of pure cultivation in seclusion. According to his testimony, he was once a county magistrate, quit his position and left his family some time later, and then became a daoist of the Complete Perfection Tradition ( 全真道 Quanzhen Dao ). Once he ran into the Perfect Man of the Fire Dragon ( 火龍真人 Huolong Zhenren ), who offered him an elixir formula. Wandering through the whole country, he spent several years on the Hua Mountain before settling in the Wu Dang Mountains with his disciples. Zhang built a cottage for cultivation of Dao after cutting down the bushes and disposing debris and rubble. He predicted: 'The mount will be flourishing some day" and told his disciples 'to carefully preserve the transmission of Dao carefully'. Soon he left Mt. Wu Dang and wandered to Sichuan to visit the Perfect Men and the historical sites of Mt.Qing Cheng and Mt.He Ming.

In Jin Yong's book “The Heavenly Sword and Dragon Saber” , Zhang San Feng was a former Shaolin disciple in the late Song Dynasty, and born on April 9, 1247 at midnight (Day 9 of month 3 in the Lunar calendar). Every year on this date, there are big festivals everywhere in the Wu Dang Mountains and the people worshiping their patriarch. He later left the Shaolin Temple and established the daoist monasteries in Wu Dang Mountains. In the book he had seven disciples, and was alive at least until the late Yuan Dynasty. Zhang San Feng was seen at the end year of Tian Shun reign (1457–1464), having lived for more than 200 years. According to relatively late 19th century documents preserved within the Yang and Wu family's archives, the name of Zhang San Feng's master was Xu Xuan Ping (許宣平) and its said he was a daoist hermit, great poet and an expert in Dao Yin and lived in the Tang dynasty. Zhang San Feng's legend is that of indifference to fame and wealth. It is said that on one occasion Zhang San Feng observed a bird attacking a snake on Wu Dang Mountain and was inspired by the snake's defensive tactics. Zhang San Feng found a way to focus the mind, even when the whole body is moving. If mind leads the motion, breath follows it naturally. A continues transformation of yin and yang. With principles of You Wei and Wu Wei (action and non-action), the Taiji and the Bagua (eight trigrams) he created a form of martial art based on daoist philosophy, internal cultivation, softness instead of hardness. First, his martial art was called “School of birds and snakes”, later generations started using the name Taiji Quan. Zhang San Feng transmitted his knowledge to Lu Qiu Yun, Liu Gu Quan, Yang San Cheng, Zhou Zhen De, Li Xing Zhi, Qiu Xuan Qing. Li Xing Zhi also transferred his learning to Zhi Dao Ren, Shu Fu Chu; Qiu Xuan Qing to Yan Shan Ming, Pu Shan Yuan, Ma Shan Ning, etc.

In some writings, Wang Zong Yue, a legendary figure in the history Taiji Quan was a famous student of the legendary Zhang San Feng. Two who are said to be Wang's disciples, Chen Zou Ting (Chen Wang Ting), the founder of Chen Style Taiji Quan and Jiang Fa, the founder of Zhao Bao Taiji Quan, went on to make important contributions to the development of modern Taiji Quan in the 16th century. Chen, Zhao Bao, Yang, Wu, Sun, Wu/Hao and all other Taiji Quan Styles of modern times are based on Patriarch Zhang San Feng’s the principles and theories of Nei Jia Quan (internal boxing). He authored a treatise on Taiji Quan as a method to cultivate Dao and keep fit. The following text is the translation of the theories.

Every movement is with the whole body and is light and agile,

Qi should be full and stimulated, Shen (Spirit) should be retained internally.

Move in a continuous, even and smooth manner, no part should be disconnected.

The energy is rooted in the feet, issued through the legs, directed by the waist, and appears in the hands and fingers. The feet, legs, and waist must act as one unit. Failure to obtain a superior position and create a good opportunity results from the body being in a state of disorder and confusion. To correct this disorder, adjust the waist and legs. Up and down, forward and backward, left and right, it's all the same. All of this is done with the Yi (Mind), not externally.

When you move upward, the mind must be aware of down; when moving forward, the mind also thinks of moving back; when shifting to the left side, the mind should simultaneously notice the right side. Then the root will be severed, it will be immediately and certainly toppled. One must distinguish substantiality from insubstantiality. Where there is substantiality, there must be insubstantiality. In all ways, one has to distinguish one from the other.

Taiji Quan is like a long river flowing without interruption.

-Patriarch Zhang San Feng’s Theory of Taiji Quan

Zhang San Feng had five hobbies

1) Sword fencing in moonlight – to bring qi (chi) energy.

2) Practice Taiji Quan on dark nights – to bring energy and strengthen the mind.

3) Climbing mountains on windy nights – to lengthen the breath.

4) Reading classics on rainy nights – to cleanse the mind.

5) Meditating every night at midnight – to brighten his own nature.

Every technique has one or more applications. Some are for Self-Defense, some are Qi Gong moves and some are Nei Gong postures. The knowledge of the applications is essential.

At the beginning every movement is simple and becomes more complex after the practitioner is making progress. Reaching an advanced level, the movements become simple again but now they are filled with life and the qi flows into every part of the body. The whole body structure is stable, well balanced and rooted into the ground.

The practice of Wu Dang Taiji Quan has several benefits. The health exercise and self-defense applications, the spiritual practice and cultivation of Dao, the balance between yin and yang, the compensation of emotions, self-awareness and contemplation and many more.

More daoist References: <http://en.daoinfo.org>