We have become familiar with the idea that Wu Yuxiang 武禹襄 (1812-1880) discovered the origins of Taijiquan by an individual named Wang Zongyue 王宗岳 in some papers his brother found in a salt store around 1852. However, if we look further back at the historical milieu that preceded the appearance of Taijiquan we might be prepared to change our view of the subject. To begin with, the name Wang Zongyue translates into Wang Who Honors Yue. In this case Yue was likely meant to be Yue Fei 岳飛 (1103-1142), the famous Song period general who resisted Jin (Jurchen) incursions until he was murdered as a result of court intrigues. In other words, Yuefei was a Chinese patriotic hero.

To begin with we should all be aware of The Story of the Maiden of Yue 越女故事 (200+/BC) in which she described the essence of martial arts skill as understanding the opposite attributes of Yin-Yang 雌雄 which actually combine to form Taiji 太極. However, it was not until the Manchus conquered China and restricted the practice of Chinese martial arts that the term Taiji, or Supreme Ultimate, began to appear in martial arts practices. Prior to this, and even later, a number of writings reveal the essence, if not the name, of the term Taiji. One example was Ming period General, Yu Dayou 俞大猷 (1503-1579) who, in his Sword Classic 劍經, emphasizes hard-soft and rotation of Yin-Yang and describes Yang Family Spear as reflecting Yin-Yang and Empty-Full.

Following the end of the Ming period there was the manual of recluse Wang Yuyou 王餘佑 (1516-1684) titled Thirteen Saber Methods 十三刀法, which contained a section titled Taiji Connected Saber Essentials 太極連環刀法. Founder of the School of Practical Learning, Yan Yuan 顏元 (1635-1704) and his partner Li Gong 李墟 (1659-1733), intellectual friends of Wang Yuyou, also practiced saber. Li Gong’s calendar (Nianpu) notes his mention of Yin-Yang, Wuxing (5 elements) and Taiji. Then there was Chang Naizhou 黃乃周 (1724-1783), who describes focused energy as martial preparedness or the balance that is Taiji and an ostensible 1784 boxing classic 張孔昭 拳經拳法備要 said to have come out of Shaolin Monastery describes the term Taiji as representing the concept of central focus in one’s maneuvering.

The fact is that the Taiji concept is applicable to all Chinese martial arts - it reflects the Chinese Taoist worldview of the interaction of opposites which is an essential element of Chinese martial arts theory, regardless of style. It appears that it was in this environment that Wu Yuxiang (1812-1880) chose to name his style of boxing Taijiquan in the early 1850’s. It is also interesting that, on the eve of the 20th Century, in the wake of the collapse of Qing rule, Sun Lutang 孫錄唐 1860-1933 chose to unite Taijiquan with Xingyiquan 形意拳 and Baguazhang 八卦掌 as branches of the so-called Internal School of Chinese boxing, thus giving them a patriotic flavor.