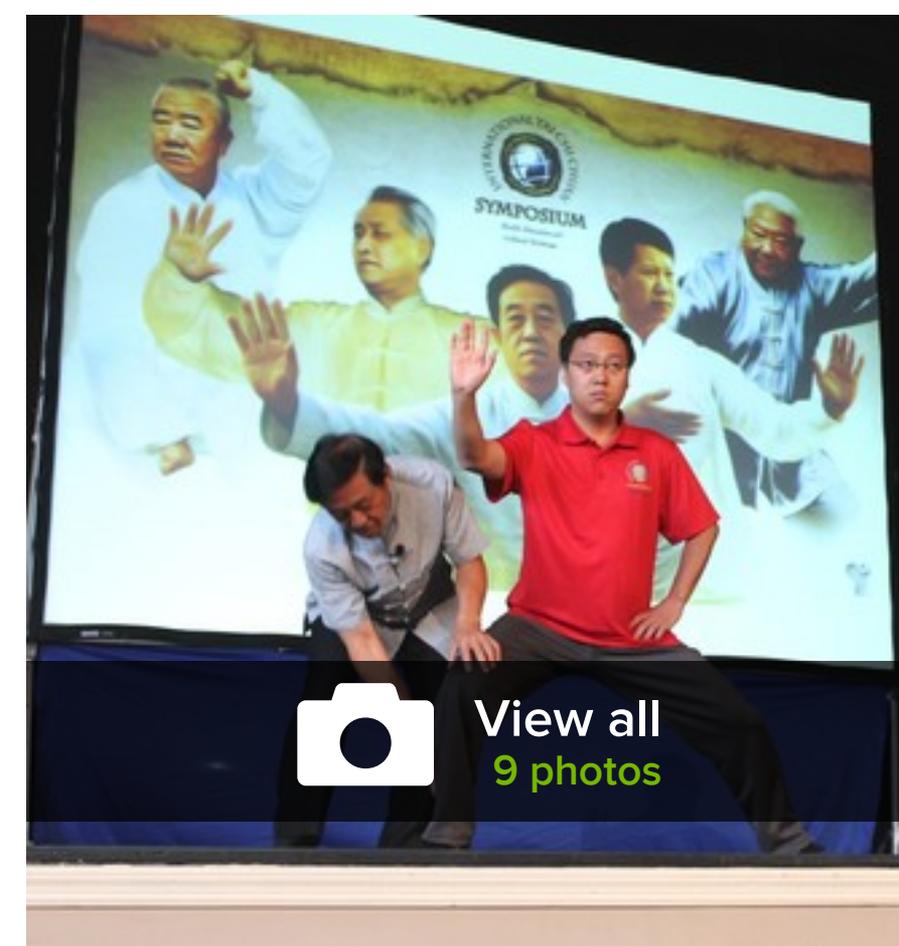


Chen Style Tai Chi body requirements

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During the recent 2014 International Tai Chi Symposium, Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei shared the secrets of authentic Chen style Tai Chi (Taiji) by describing the detailed body requirements.



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Grandmaster Chen is a 19th Generation Chen Family descendent and 11th Generation Chen Style Tai Chi Lineage Holder. He was sanctioned as the 9th Duan by the Chinese Martial Art Association that means he reached the highest level in the [martial arts](#). He was selected as one of the Top Ten Martial Art Masters in China for his superb Tai Chi skills and in-depth knowledge. He has authored a complete set of books on Chen Style Tai Chi bare hand forms and weapons, which have been translated into dozens of languages.

During the symposium, Grandmaster Chen divided a body into three (*San*) sections (*Jies*) to discuss the Tai Chi fundamentals: the top, the middle and the lower sections.

The top section includes the head and the neck. Grandmaster Chen said that it is essential to keep the head suspended or lifted without tilting it forward, backward or sideways during any movement. The head turns only as the body turns. It is imperative to keep the head naturally hung without stiffening it. It is called "*Xu Ling Ding Jing*" because the pressure point *Baihui* near the top of the head is the confluence of all energy pathways and only through the head suspension the Qi can flow smoothly to *Baihui*. Chen cautioned beginners against using muscle strength to push the head up, which will cause stiffness in the neck and block Qi from traveling.

In general, the eyes look straight ahead and move according to the head movement with the peripheral vision focusing on the leading hand. A common mistake is a practitioner bobbing his head up and down or circling it simply because his eyes are fixating on the leading hand as the latter moves.

The middle section includes the trunk and two arms. The trunk area is comprised of the shoulders, the

arms, the hands, the collarbones, the chest, the waist, the hips and the buttocks. It houses our vital organs. It is essential to pay attention to this section for health and self-defense purposes. Grandmaster Chen mentioned if a practitioner cannot correctly execute the middle section requirements, he is really not doing Tai Chi chuan.

The fundamentals of proper body alignment (*Sheng Fa*) include keeping the spine upright but with a slight natural curve, tucking the chest, relaxing the waist, loosening the shoulders and sinking the elbows. Chen declared that Tai Chi is scientific and its movements follow the human body's physique and kinetics. Beginners tend to raise the shoulders, lean sideways, bend forward at the waist, push the backside out, or lift the elbows above the shoulders. Chen warned practitioners not to stick the chest out or pull back the shoulder blades too much. In Chinese, "*Han Xiong*" means tucking the chest; but some misunderstand the meaning and bring the shoulders forward too much, forcing the chest to be concave and putting unnecessary pressure on the lungs and the heart. "*Ba Bei*" means pulling the back; again some misinterpret it as pulling the back out instead of up. He also mentioned that tilting forward pelvis is wrong. During the arm movement, he cautioned practitioners to make any linear movement. The spiraling techniques of Silk Reeling should be applied to hand rotation and arm movement to create the maximum health benefits as well as self-defense mechanism.

Chen stated that if the lower section movements are not clearly executed, it would cause the instability of the entire body. The lower section includes the *Kuas* (hip joints), the groin area, the knees and the feet. Precise footwork and stances are critical to ensure flexibility and agility in a Tai Chi form. Relaxing or sinking Kaos is similar to sitting on a high stool. Pivoting the empty foot inward can help to form a rounded groin area, which makes body movement flexible and powerful.

It does not matter if a Tai Chi stance is high or low especially when one is practicing the art for a health purpose. What matters is that all stances have a solid foot and an empty foot clearly distinguished; the body weight needs to be distributed unevenly and transferred from one foot to another smoothly during the movement in an arc fashion or S line as the center line of the Tai Chi symbol.

For knee protection and greater martial art power, it is crucial to align the knee with the direction of the toes. Unlike the external martial art styles, Chen Style Tai Chi always keeps the knees bent and never locked even in a bow stance. Bent knees also facilitate the groin area to be rounded and provide extra protection of the legs for self-defense. He alerted practitioners not to let their knees surpass the toes. He advised people to start with a high stance and gradually lower it as the leg muscles developed further.

To make the teaching more comprehensible, Master Bin Chen appeared on the stage and collaborated with Grandmaster Chen on proper body alignment and also performed *Chen Style 18 Form for Health* to demonstrate the body requirements in motion.

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