

Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei's awesome workshops

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Highlights of the workshops

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As a journalist, often time I face two extreme cases of either too little information or too much information. Actually, the first scenario is not that terrible. I just have to dig deeper and work harder to seek out more data. The second scenario can bring upon a real headache. Since I am not writing a book, it is always a battle within to decide which topic to choose and what material to use. There were instances that I ended up sitting on a story for a while before I was able to hone in on an angle. Recently, I attended Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei's *Tai Chi Light* workshops. I am still in awe of what I witnessed and learned during the four days of training. What was demonstrated and taught by Grandmaster Chen was so profound that it is extremely challenging to articulate the level of mastery he possesses and the supremacy of the art of Tai Chi (Taiji). Additionally, there was massive amount of information presented during the workshops.



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Grandmaster Chen, a 19th generation of Chen family descendent and lineage holder, 9th Duan marital artist, and one of the Top Ten Martial Artists in China, has been teaching Tai Chi to millions in the world directly or indirectly more than thirty years. He has over 500 disciples and has trained thousands of instructors. As the origin of the modern Tai Chi, Chen style is the most complete system with at least four basic bare-hand forms, 19 weapons forms, and five Push Hands forms. To continue his effort of passing on the art and elevating the knowledge and skill levels, Grandmaster Chen decided to host International *Tai Chi Light* workshops for his disciples and senior instructors overseas. At invitation, sixty disciples, senior instructors and practitioners from China, U.S., U.K., Canada, Peru, and Iran attended the second International *Tai Chi Light* held on June 15 – 19 in Las Vegas, Nevada.

At the opening ceremony, Grandmaster Chen reminded students that Tai Chi is not just a martial art. Practitioners should internalize the philosophy of Yin and Yang and learn how to seek tranquility among surrounding chaos or noises. Training in Las Vegas could be a literal application.

The four-day workshops started with [Chen's Tai Chi for Health and Wellness](#). Aside from Joint Flexion, Spiral Rotation (or Silk Reeling), Qi (internal energy) Nurturing, attendees refreshed their knowledge and skill of *Essential Chen Tai Chi 18 Form for Health*, which is the most popular form worldwide and is practiced by people of all ages with various physical conditions. Even though Grandmaster Chen created this form to promote health, this short form can be used as a gateway to serious Tai Chi study since the form adheres to Tai Chi fundamentals and embodies several martial art applications. Grandmaster Chen thoroughly reviewed some of the key movements like “Lazy about Tucking the Robe” and “Fair Lady Works in the Shuttles”.

Chen Style's Old Frame Routine One, or *Lao Jia Yi Lu*, is the foundation of all Tai Chi forms.

Grandmaster Chen learned it from his late uncle Grandmaster Chen Zhaopi, who made Chen Zhenglei and others practice it daily for 15 years before teaching them a second form. Chen Zhenglei said with a solid foundation of *Lao Jia Yi Lu*, he learned all other forms in 2 years. In 2002, Grandmaster Chen started to collaborate with Dr. Shin Lin, Professor of University of California-Irvine, for eight years to conduct multiple bio-medical studies on Tai Chi's health benefit. It is proven that *Lao Jia Yi Lu* can deliver amazing health effects. But if you think Tai Chi Chuan is only good for health, you may be deadly wrong.

Lao Jia Yi Lu is known for its expansive frame with deep rooting. Practitioners need to make sure that their upper body moves in sync with the lower body, the external actions unify with the internal energy, or *Qi* circulation. *Qi* flows through the entire body in a sequential manner, and ultimately the intent, or *Yi*, leads *Qi*, which in turn directs the body movements. The form seems smooth and flows like a running creek but looks can be deceiving. "Single Whip" alone has over 20 different martial art applications. Grandmaster Chen first demonstrated it in a slow motion to clearly depict the complicated applications one by one. Students were totally intrigued by the subtle movements of the various body parts. In other words, Grandmaster Chen employed his fingers, hands, palms, fists, wrists, elbows, shoulders, back, waist, Kua (hip joints), legs, knees, and feet so freely and effortlessly in a coordinated spiraling fashion to generate exceptional power. Later when he summoned his internal energy, or *Jing*, and demonstrated various applications fast, his body acted at a speed of light with explosive moves, which caused jaws to drop followed by loud applause.

New Frame Routine One, or *Xin Jia Yi Lu*, was created by a 17th generation Grandmaster Chen Fa-Ke using *Lao Jia Yi Lu* as the base. The most visible feature of the form is its richness of internal and external spiraling motion of the hands, wrists, arms, elbows, shoulders, trunk, *kuas*, legs, and *Dan Tian*. Some of the reeling movements are continuous folding and unfolding to unleash explosive power. *Song* (relaxation), *Huo* (flexibility or agility), *Dan* (springiness), and *Dou* (shakability) are the requirements of this form. According to Tai Chi theory, every body part can be maneuvered as a fist, and the *Xin Jia* training provides the best how-to. Grandmaster Chen bent his body like a rubber band and delivered fists like a pistol. It is crucial to totally relax the body before practicing *Xin Jia*. With that in mind, Chen taught students a series of basic drills to soften and calm the body. Due to time constraints, only two segments of New Frame were reviewed and taught in detail.

Aside from bare-hand form training, students had opportunities to learn Push Hands and practiced with partners. Grandmaster Chen stated that hand form practice is a means in which we learn about our body and skill, while Push Hands is a way to learn or sense an opponent's strength and energy. According to the quintessential battle strategy [the Art of War](#), only a person knowing himself and others cannot be defeated.

Aside from the instruction of Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei, his in-chamber disciples Masters Chen Juan

of China, Chen Bin of China, Jack Yan of Canada, and Hai Jun Wang of England were on site to assist teaching and made the workshops more effective.

In the Tai Chi learning process, there are roughly three stages: *Xin Ming*, *Ti Ming*, and *Sheng Ming*. *Ming* denotes understanding. *Xin* denotes the heart, or the brain in this case, and *Xin Ming* means a practitioner has a good understanding of a movement and memorizes the details. *Ti* denotes the body, and *Ti Ming* means the body has a good understanding how to move and muscle memory has developed through long diligent practice. *Sheng* denotes the spirit, and *Sheng Ming* means a practitioner understands the art of Tai Chi at a spiritual and philosophical level. After the workshops, participants felt that they had a much deeper understanding of the art and grasped how some of the intricate movements should be executed. They admitted that it would take them a long time to fully reach a stage of *Xin Ming* and completely understand all nuances of Tai Chi principles and movements; needless to say, it will take some of them decades to practice in order to ascend to the stage of *Ti Ming*. But this reality does not scare the students away because they all recognize that learning Tai Chi is a lifetime effort.

Disclaimer: I am a disciple of Grandmaster Chen, and as such, this article may include biases.

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