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# Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei brought Tai Chi to “Forbidden City”

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Grandmaster Chen's led Tai Chi workshop in the Chinese Central Government

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[Tai Chi](#) is an ancient Chinese martial art as well as a healing art. Its philosophical root dates back thousands years in [the Book of Changes\(Yi Jing or I Ching\)](#). Tai Chi is the quintessential internal martial art focusing on the internal life force Qi cultivation and seeking the balance of Yin and Yang. The creation of the modern Tai Chi was credited to General [Chen Wangting](#) (1600-1680 CE) of Henan Province, China.

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Originally, the Chen family used Tai Chi Chuan (boxing) to protect their village against warlords and bandits, and escorted merchants and their properties against robbery during transportation from city to city. They did not teach the art to any non-family individuals. Due to the sincerity and hard work of **Yang Lu-Ch'an** (1799 – 1872), Grandmaster Chen Chang-Hsing made an exception and accepted Yang as a student. Yang returned to Beijing after learning the art for more than 10 years and became famous owing to his formidable fighting skills. He was nicknamed “Yang Wu Dee” (or Unbeatable Yang). Yang was hired by the **Imperial family** to teach Tai Chi to them and several of the **Manchu Imperial Guards Brigade** units in the **Forbidden City** in 1850. Yang taught his revised version of Tai Chi (or Yang Style), which is slower, even-paced, and less rigorous in comparison to Chen Style. But it is focused more on the health aspect. That was the first time Tai Chi entered the Forbidden City.

Located in the middle of Beijing, the Forbidden City was first built as the imperial palace by the Ming Dynasty in 1406 – 1420. It continued to serve as the home and central office for the Manchuria family once the Qing Dynasty took over the power. The Forbidden City was declared a **World Heritage Site** in 1987 and is listed by **UNESCO** as the largest collection of preserved ancient wooden structures in the world. It now houses countless Chinese treasures as a museum. With its historical importance, the term Forbidden City has become the synonym for the central government in China.

After the Qing Dynasty, the new democratic government **Republic of China** moved its central offices to **Nanjing** in the hope of breaking away from the old guards and the corruptive tradition.

In 1929, Chen Style Grandmaster **Chen Zhao-Pei** gave up his teaching positions at Beijing city government and several universities in Beijing and accepted the chairmanship of the National **Wushu**

Association and started teaching Tai Chi to the central government offices in Nanjing until the city fell into the hands of Japanese soldiers, who invaded China before World War II started. That marked the second time that Tai Chi entered Forbidden City almost 80 years after Yang Lu-Ch'an's enterprise.

After his retirement, Zhao-Pei went back to the Tai Chi birthplace Chen Village and started teaching Chen family youngsters. But he was prosecuted and almost died during the **Cultural Revolution** when Tai Chi practice was banned in China. He trained a new generation of Chen family Tai Chi warriors and his nephew Chen Zhenglei was one of the protégées.

This Fall another 80 some years later, the 11th generation Chen Style Tai Chi lineage holder Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei, taught a simplified Chen Style 18 Form at the Central Government offices in Beijing. That was the third time that Tai Chi entered Forbidden City. The 18 Form was created by Chen Zhenglei and based off Chen Style Old Frame Routine One. It is designed mainly for health and longevity. It was a huge honor for Grandmaster Chen to be invited to teach the one-month workshop. Attendance was high and enthusiastic. This signified that Chinese leadership recognized the contribution of Tai Chi to its employees' health. Actually Premier **Wen Jia-Bao** practices Tai Chi himself. There was a first annual Mayor Cup Tai Chi competition in China this year and a few dozens of mayors participated in the tournament.

In the past 161 years, Mainland China evolved from an imperial dynasty, to a short-lived democratic society, to a tightly controlled communist dictatorship by **Chairman Mao Ze-Dong**, to a now world-envied economy. In the same period, Tai Chi Chuan has experienced ups and downs. After **Eight Nation Alliance** crushed Chinese martial boxers in 1901 with guns and cannons, Tai Chi along with other **martial arts** were considered totally impractical from a defense perspective. Even people in Chen Village stopped learning Tai Chi until Chen Zhao-Pei's return. However, the true Tai Chi artists gain benefits in health and spiritual growth. They keep studying it and teaching it to others. The art has been preserved and enriched. Political systems can come and go but Tai Chi survives and flourishes. Tai Chi is now practiced by millions around the world, regardless of race, religion, gender, age and political beliefs. Tai Chi has elevated itself from a Chinese culture to a global health regimen.

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