

Grandmaster Ma Hai-long on Wu Style Tai Chi

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Grandmaster Ma Hai-Long (center) performed Tai Chi.

Li Ping

During recent International [Tai Chi](#) (Taiji) Symposium hosted in Louisville, KY, Grandmaster Ma Hai-long earned much respect from the world Tai Chi community.



Li Ping

As a lineage holder of Wu Style Tai Chi, Grandmaster Ma was invited to the Symposium to teach Wu Style Tai Chi as well as speak about Wu Tai Chi. He flew directly from China to New Jersey. After an almost fifteen-hour flight, he found out his connecting flight to Louisville was cancelled due to [Hurricane Arthur](#). At the arrangement of the Symposium organizers, he took a car ride for more than ten hours to reach Louisville late on 7/4.

Despite the jet lag and fatigue, 81-year-old Grandmaster Ma Hai-long joined other much younger Grandmasters to attend a week-long activities which included workshops, seminars, panel discussion, key note speech delivery, Sun Rise practice, Grand Showcase performance, and other events without showing sign of tiring and won respect from the hundreds of symposium attendees.

Born to a renowned Tai Chi family, Grandmaster Ma started his Tai Chi training at age 6. Different than most Tai Chi masters, he was trained as a scientist, earned a doctorate in chemistry, worked in medical labs, and also taught at university. Even though he has concentrated on other areas of expertise, he is equally dedicated to promoting his family treasure of Wu Style Tai Chi.

His great-grandfather Quan You (1834-1902) was an officer of the Imperial Guards Brigade in Forbidden City. He learned Tai Chi from Yang Style creator Yang Lu-chan (1799-1872) when Yang was hired to teach there. Grandmaster Ma's grandfather Wu Jiang-quan (1870-1942) learned from his dad and made significant modifications to create Wu Style Tai Chi.

During the Symposium, Grandmaster Ma's keynote speech focused on the features of Wu Style Tai Chi. He emphasized that Wu Style adhered to Tai Chi principles highlighted by Wang Zhon-Yue's Tai Chi

Chuan Classics, which are the movement needs to be light and agile, the Qi needs to be abundant, and the Shen (spirit) needs to be concentrated.

The foremost element of Wu Tai Chi is keeping the body straight, but not necessary upright as other Tai Chi styles. In other words, the upper body can lean forward or sideways but it forms a straight line with the tailbone and the sloped back leg. “Ding Tou Xuan” is a unique term in Wu Tai Chi. *Ding* means pushing in Chinese, *Tou* means the head, and *Xuan* means suspension. “Ding Tou Xuan” means keeping the head suspended while tucking the chin slightly, and pulling the spine upwards. Ma said from the western medicine viewpoint, it is essential to keep the spine straight and aligned so the central nerve system can work well and send commands from the brain to any party of the body without any barrier.

Ma is known for opposing the use of music during Tai Chi practice. Per him, our body needs to be totally relaxed during practice, the mind needs to be absolutely quiet, and the spirit needs to be focused. Music can interfere with the tranquility of the mind.

Grandmaster Ma argued that lightness and agility did not mean prohibit exerting force during Tai Chi practice, just that the force has to be done internally. Another way to exhibit lightness and agility is through sensitivity training or “Dong Jin” (understand the energy of oneself and other’s). Through diligent practice, one can be highly sensitive and reach a stage that not a single feather can land on one’s body or a fly.

Smoothness is very important. It is not just that each move needs to be circular not rigid, but all the transitions among movements need to be smooth without any interruption. The synchronicity of the hands, eyes, body, legs, and feet has to be perfect. He did a wonderful performance during the Grand Showcase illustrating Wu Style features and won warm applause.

Ma said when one performed Tai Chi with agility and smoothness, his Qi became abundant, the oxygen level in his body went up and his metabolism sped up. Tai Chi Chuan is a good aerobic exercise offering more health benefits than regular exercises.

According to Ma, Tai Chi chuan is heavily influenced by Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Focusing or concentrating the spirit during practice is a must to get a better result.

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