

# Standardization of Tai Chi teaching

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Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei (in green) led the Tai Chi Sword practice.

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Tai Chi seems simple and easy. However, once people try it, they find it complex and difficult. Many people search online, read books, watch DVDs, and exchange information with fellow practitioners hoping to gain better understanding but some end up with confusion. Someone once complained to me why Tai Chi is so inconsistent and even the most common Tai Chi movement, Single Whip, is done so differently from one person to the other. It is perplexing for beginners to know which way to follow. This frustration represents a few difficulties in learning Tai Chi.



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First, there are a few different Tai Chi styles (mainly Chen, Yang, Wu, Wu-Hao, Sun, **Cheng Man-Ch'ing**, Hun Yuan, and Wudang). Each style has its own features and uniqueness. Even though the Yang, Wu, Wu-Hao, Cheng Man-Ch'ing, Hun Yuan, and Sun styles are directly or indirectly derived from the Chen style and have kept many of the movement names, but the actual movements and postures are different based on their own philosophy. Furthermore, even in the Chen Style, Single Whip is performed differently between Old Frame (Lao Jia) and New Frame (Xing Jia). It is important for a practitioner to know exactly which style and form he is studying.

This leads to a second issue. I was told that there was an instructor who took a couple of Tai Chi lessons before starting her own class. When asked which style she was teaching, the answer was "what do you mean by that". Due to the growing awareness of the health benefits of practicing Tai Chi, the interest of learning Tai Chi also increases. In many cities across the U.S., some fitness centers cannot find qualified Tai Chi instructors. **Master Jesse Tsao**, founder of **Tai Chi Healthways** and an indoor disciple of **Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei**, had a deep concern over the quality of instructors and started a Tai Chi instructor certification program to ensure that people who want to teach not only reach certain skill level but also possess some knowledge of Tai Chi history and principles.

Modern Tai Chi, which originated about 300 years ago by the legendary **Chen Wangting**, has been passed down mostly through face-to-face teaching with verbal explanation. A few Tai Chi masters and scholars wrote classics illustrating the movements and explaining the theory. However, the majority of the practitioners learned Tai Chi without reading any written material. Even in China, the Tai Chi books and teaching DVDs were not popularized and accessible to the general population until recent 10 - 15 years.

Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei has been travelling around the world teaching Tai Chi for more than 20 years. With his effort along with other Chen Style Grandmasters Chen Xiao-wang, Zhu TianCai, [Chen Xiao-Xing](#), [Wang Xi'an](#), [Ren Guangyi](#), and many others, Chen Style Tai Chi becomes more popular. More and more people learn the authentic Chen Style Tai Chi and appreciate the profound Tai Chi theory. In the North America, there are many Chen Style instructors.

To further raise the bar and make the teaching more standardized, Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei hosted a senior instructor training camp in LA in early April this year for his advanced students in the Americas. Five in-chamber disciples/Masters [Chen Bin](#), [Kao Dong-Xiang](#), [Fu Neng Bin](#), [Wang Hai Jun](#), and Jack Yan along with 23 in-door disciples came from China, South Korea, Britain, Peru, Canada, and the U.S. also participated in the event. In-door disciple Master Chen Huixian, born and trained in the Chen Village, stated that Grandmaster's knowledge is utterly deep and she continues to benefit from his teaching. Newly inducted in-door disciple Swen An Jun of Los Angeles said that it was truly a great experience to "play" with masters and learn from other senior instructors. The dynamics and synergy among students was marvelous.

Most people who meet Grandmaster Chen enjoy his gentle persona. He is patient with his students and never displays any unpleasant look in classes. But during the LA workshop, Grandmaster Chen sternly demanded one student to put down a camera and pay close attention to details while he was teaching. After all, Grandmaster Chen has very high expectation of this group. He hopes through the advance training, Chen Style Tai Chi can be taught in a more standardized way. Tai Chi will become less confusing and more comprehensible to students. Ultimately, the traditional Chen Style Tai Chi can be properly promoted and more people can enjoy health benefits from it.

Aside from the form correction, Grandmaster Chen also elaborated the Tai Chi applications and energy movement in LA workshop. Once a student understands the Tai Chi applications, he will realize why for certain movement the palm should face outward instead of inward, how high the arm should be, the knee direction, the body weight distribution, the toes disposition, etc. In-door disciple [Dr. Shin Lin](#) of University of California, Irvine presented the scientific study on Tai Chi to enhance students' knowledge. In-door disciple [Master Leon Xu](#) of Canada introduced the Chinese "Duan Wai" system that certifies martial artists' level by numbers 1 thru 9, with 9 as the highest level.

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## **SUGGESTED LINKS**

- **Eyes on the LA Tai Chi Summit by Grandmaster Chen Zhenglei**
- **Are you practicing Taichi Chuan or Taichi Cao?**
- **A Valuable Tai Chi Training Experiment**
- **Taichi Ba Fa by Master Chen Huixian**



## **Violet Li**

Tai Chi Examiner

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