

Tai Chi lineage

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In Chinese [martial arts](#), lineage is important, some even considered essential. From a practitioner's lineage, you can understand what he studies and possibly how good his skill and knowledge may be. On the other hand, if you are well versed in Chinese martial arts, you maybe able to recognize what a practitioner studies or even from whom he studies just by looking at his movements, without asking for his lineage. Nonetheless, figuring out one's own lineage can be interesting as well as challenging.



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Tai Chi (Taiji) is one type of Chinese martial arts and belongs to the internal style. Its cultural roots date back thousands of years ago. Legendary Wudang Taoist monk **Zhang Sanfeng** was credited for creating the internal style of martial arts in the 12th century. General **Chen Wangting** (1600–1680 per Cui Chun Dong’s “Taiji Mecca: Chenjiagou”) was the founding father of modern Tai Chi. Chen Wangting distilled various forms of Chinese martial arts and integrated it with Traditional Chinese Medicine, especially the theory of the meridian systems, and further infused it with the philosophies of Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism.

Chen is one of the most popular family names in China. Chen families have resided all over China for thousands years. According to “Taiji Mecca: Chenjiagou”, 600 years ago, Chen Pu along with other people were ordered by the emperor of the Ming Dynasty to migrate from Shan Xi province to Henan province after population of many Henan villages was wiped out during war time. Chen settled down in a location currently known as Chen Village or Chenjiagou and became the first generation Chen family living there. Even though Chen Pu and some of his descendants were brave skillful fighters, Chen Style Tai Chi was not crafted until much later by a 9th generation descendant named Chen Wangting. From the perspective of martial art lineage, Chen Wangting was the 1st generation of Chen Style Tai Chi. Like most Chinese martial arts, Chen Style Tai Chi was taught secretly within the Chen family and passed down from generation to generation.

Zhang Men Ren, or lineage holder, is the most prestigious position in any martial art family. Normally, a lineage holder will appoint one of his best students to inherit the lineage and as the family secret holder. In some cases, a competition may be held and the winning disciple will be crowned as the next lineage holder. In the past, a lineage holder held absolute power over disciples, similar to the authority

a father had over his children and family.

Yang Luchang (1799-1872) was from Hebei Province and learned about the power of Chen Style Tai Chi. Grandmaster Chen Changxin, a 14th generation Chen family descendant and the 6th generation Lineage Holder, accepted Yang as a disciple due to Yang's sincerity, persistence, and diligence. After studying for more than ten years at Chen Village, Yang moved to Beijing and started teaching others. Yang later modified the Chen Style and created **Yang Style Tai Chi**. Other styles, i.e. **Wu**, Sun, **Wu-Hao**, Lee, Zhao Bao, Hun Yuan, are derived directly or indirectly from Chen Style.

Grandmaster Yang Luchan was the first person teaching Tai Chi to all walks of life, regardless of whether they were family members or not. After Yang, other styles opened their doors to interested individuals. In the past century, modern Tai Chi styles have spread around the globe. Many Tai Chi masters migrated from China to Southeast Asia, Europe, North and South America, among other places. Masters and grandmasters have traveled around the world to teach millions. The relationship between a teacher and a student has changed. In the past, a student or a disciple respectfully addressed his teacher as *Sifu* (a teaching father). Based on Confucianism, there are responsibilities that come with discipleship or simply being a student. Nowadays, learning/teaching Tai Chi has been commercialized. Most students behave like clients and consumers and they pick and choose whom they want to study with. Some practitioners study with multiple instructors. Therefore, students can no longer be equated to disciples.

One thing that has not been lost during this transition is discipleship. Once a master reaches a certain stature and is highly respected by his peers in the community, he will start accepting disciples. It was a significant event in the Tai Chi community when Master Yang Jun, a 6th generation Yang family descendant and the future bearer of the Yang Family heritage, accepted his first disciples in 2012. (You can read a report here <http://www.examiner.com/article/master-yang-jun-accepted-his-first-disciples>). Needless to say, it is a huge honor for a student to be accepted as a disciple, indicating not just skill level but also the knowledge and dedication.

It is not necessary for the lineage holder to be a family member. Grandmaster Sun Yongtain is the *Zhang Men Ren* of Sun Style Tai Chi. Even though he carries the same last name, he is not a descendant of the Sun Style creator **Sun Lutang**. Due to the change in family structure in China in the few decades, sometimes it is hard to have just one family member as the *Zhang Men Ren*. For Chen Style Tai Chi, Grandmasters Zu Tiancai, Wang Xi'an, Chen Xiaowang, and Chen Zhenglie are all lineage holders.

It is important for a serious Tai Chi practitioner to know his heritage just like who his ancestors are. It is imperative that an instructor correctly identifies his lineage or training background if he is trained in an authentic method. However, we have seen instructors and some self-proclaimed masters present inaccurate info about their legacy. There are few reasons. Ignorance and confusion play a role. For

example, Grandmaster [Yang Chenfu](#) (1883-1936), one of the most prominent Yang Style masters, was a 3rd generation Yang family descendant and 3rd generation Yang Style Tai Chi lineage holder. He taught many students. It is possible that you are learning from Yang Chenfu's disciple's disciple and you may be qualified to be accepted as a 6th generation inheritor. But you cannot be a 6th generation Yang family descendant unless you are related to Grandmaster Yang Chenfu through blood or marriage.

In recent years, new Tai Chi styles, or training methods, have been created, i.e. [Tai Chi for Arthritis](#) by [Dr. Paul Lam](#), [Tai Chi Easy](#) by Dr. [Roger Jahnke](#), [Taiji Zen](#) influenced by movie star Jet Li and Wang Xi'an, [TaijiFit](#) by [David-Dorian Ross](#). Instructors who are certified through these organizations or methods, should identify his training credentials or certification so people who are interested in the art can get the necessary information.

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