

The Test of Tai Chi is in the Fighting

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Master Tiffany Chen and Grandmaster William CC Chen

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For [Grandmaster William C. C. Chen](#), the test of [Tai Chi](#) is in the winning, specifically the fighting.

As a protégé of Grandmaster [Cheng Man Ch'ing](#), Grandmaster Chen started to teach Tai Chi at age 18. He came to the U.S. and opened one of the first Tai Chi studios in Manhattan in 1965. He has trained tens of thousands of Tai Chi lovers from all over the country and around the world. Many of the Tai Chi instructors have studied with him. He has also trained Tai Chi Champions year after year. William C. C. Chen was [Inside Kung-Fu Magazine's](#) choice of the first "Man of the Year", for its Hall of Fame of the millennium, received Lifetime Achievement Award presented by the United Kung Fu Federation of North America, Chin-Woo 2002 Hall of Fame, 2006 Hall of Fame Award by World Professional [Martial Arts](#) Organization, and many other honors.

In September, I visited Grandmaster Chen in his New York studio and witnessed his classes. Unlike

most Tai Chi studios, in his studio, one side of walls has heavy pads bolted onto the wall which is very much like a hard style martial art studio or a boxing studio. When Grandmaster demonstrated how to throw punches, he punched right into the wall.

His Push-hands class starts with a short form practice. Afterwards, they started the Push-hands practice. Their Push-hands are unique. They still have two people paired up. But instead of two people standing side-way facing each other with a front foot lined up with the opponent's, Grandmaster Chen's students stood exactly opposite of each other. The two opponents used their hands pushed the opponent, almost like kids in the playground pushing each other. I was very curious about this training method.

Master Tiffany Chen, daughter of Grandmaster Chen and multiple National and International Push-hands Champions, explained that in real fighting situation, people do not stand like traditional Push-hands, touch the opponent's forearm, and do circular movements. Grandmaster Chen's training method is more similar to a street fight. You may wonder whether if it is Tai Chi.

For CC Chen's students, they first learn the Yang Style short form for one year. Then, they start the Push-hands course. Even though they are not experts on the form yet, they are constantly reminded how they should use the form techniques in doing Push-hands, which helps to re-enforce their form practice. Grandmaster William Chen urged students to use his famous Three Nails theory to root themselves. A Practitioner needs to imagine his big toe, the inner part of the ball area of the foot, and the inner part of the heel have been nailed down to the ground so they are firm (see the slide show for a drawing). Once the feet are stable and firm, the whole body can relax. Tiffany Chen assisted with the class and told a female student from Hawaii that she should not "be prepared" for attack. She told the student to relax her body and focus on the opponent's reaction to seize the moment.

To Grandmaster, there are two kinds of strength: one is muscle force and the other is internal energy or Qi. While pushing, he told the students to use Qi not muscle power. To sense how Qi moves, he told them to lock the knees, not to move the shoulders, and use the Qi generated from the front foot to push an opponent forward and use the back foot Qi if they were going to drag an opponent backwards. He also emphasizes that the front foot should be nailed down while pushing forward and the back foot nailed down when dragging an opponent back. He also told them to relax their hands and use Qi, not muscle to throw punches. He also explained the twining of a hand in combat has the magic power, similar to topspin in Tennis.

Grandmaster Chen places great value on how a Kao (hip joint) should be utilized during Tai Chi practice. While properly relaxing, the Kao can function as a gear that helps the upper body move and turn in relationship with leg movements. It is crucial to keep the Kao flexible. He showed students a drawing of a gear to give them a mental picture how the Kao should work while a leg is advancing or retreating.

In the past ten years, Grandmaster Chen's students, including Tiffany Chen and his son **Max Chen** have

won more than **260** titles, mostly in Push-hands and San-Shou categories. [Joshua Waitzkin](#), the chess champion and subject of the well-known movie [Searching For Bobby Fischer](#), is a student of Grandmaster Chen and a Push-hands champion of a few tournaments.

Grandmaster Chen and Master Max Chen offer a wide range of classes: traditional Yang Stort Form, 60 Movement Form, Form Refinement, Form Application for self-defense, Push-hands, Free Style San-Shou, and Conditioning classes. In the self-defense class, students use a few different kinds of protective gloves learning punches as well as self-defense techniques.

To Grandmaster Chen, the only way to prove that one has learned Tai Chi is to win. Without being able to fight, one's Tai Chi skill may not be truly substantiated. During my visit in Grandmaster Chen's studio, Master Tiffany Chen rivaed another Push-hands champ Jordan Forth - you can see the video clip on the left hand side. You can also see Master Tiffany Chen and Grandmaster Chen's boxing via <http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/9575679>.

SUGGESTED LINKS

- **Shifu Meehan on the Yang Style Taichi and Cheng Man-Ch'ing**



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