

## **What is Chen style Taijiquan?**

According to available records and extensive research, Chen Taiji is the original form of Taijiquan. It was once quite rare, but is increasing in popularity. Other versions of Taiji, such as Yang and one of the Wu versions, were derived from the Chen family boxing, which later came to be known as Taijiquan. Created in the late Ming dynasty (1600s) by the respected general, Chen Wangting, (based on Chinese medicinal theories and on boxing methods identified by the famous general, Qi Jiguang), Chen boxing features a balance of fast and slow and hard and soft movements that are extremely health-building and excellent for self-defense. Chen Taiji is known for its use of “coiling” or “twining” energy – the Chen Wangting innovation known as “silk reeling energy” or chan szu jin – which is based on moving with an internal torsion quality that breeds enormous power through relaxed, precisely aligned technique.

## **There are so many styles of Taijiquan. Are there different Chen Taiji styles?**

According to most, yes. While there are at least five versions of Chen Taiji, three are the most widely established. The most enduring version was compiled by Chen Chanxing (Yang Lu Chan’s Taiji teacher) and is known today as the Lao Jia or “Old Frame”. The Lao Jia exhibits the long, flowing technique characteristic of Northern Chinese boxing. Chen Fake, the genius Chen family grandmaster from the middle of the last century created the Xin Jia or “New Frame” version of the Lao Jia forms. While very popular today, Xin Jia is considered more detailed and difficult to execute because of its increased use of twining movement and the addition of more obvious chin na. The third, Xiao Jia or “Small Frame” style, is an early version that features more compact movements and is gaining in popularity. Regardless of style, each version of Chen style strictly adheres to the original concepts of chan szu jin. As such, all three versions of Chen Taiji exhibit the style’s unique twining/coiling movement and execution of relaxed power-issuing known as fa jing.

## **I’m not familiar with how Chen Taiji differs from other styles. Is it more “martial” than “meditative”?**

While it can be argued that Chen style is more “martial” than “meditative” – due to its unique type of power-issuing, inclusion of explosive, fast movements, and a progressive approach to realistic combat training – some of the concepts pioneered by Chen Wangting, are exhibited in all established Taiji styles.

## **Is there a “spirituality” side to Chen Taiji, or is that strictly up to the individual?**

There is no concerted “spiritual” side to Chen Taiji. Chen style’s distinct balance of slow and fast movement, combined with internal coiling and sensitivity drills such as tui shou or “push hands” training, does instill a powerful focus and sense of well-being that are often interpreted as “spiritual”.

**Would Chen Taiji be appropriate for someone interested in self-defense applications, as opposed to more stretching/flexibility/exercise applications? It appears to have its roots in purely martial applications.**

Yes. Chen Tai Chi is a pure boxing art that offers a comprehensive, progressive self-defense system, taught in a healthy, well-rounded manner.

**Does Chen Taiji have a progression of achievement, belts, levels?**

Traditional Chinese martial arts don't utilize the decidedly modern, originally Japanese belt system. There are, however, specific stages of progression that students must undergo. Some Chen masters have identified five discernible skill levels that are pursued by the long-term student.

**What is the Chen Taiji curriculum?**

As standardized in Chenjiagou today, the curriculum comprises:

*Basics:*

Silk Reeling exercises  
Standing exercises ("zhan zhaung")  
Supplementary basic technique drills

*Forms:*

19 Movement Short Form  
38 Movement Short Form  
Lao Jia Yi Lu (Old Frame 1st Form, also known as the "Long Form")  
Lao Jia Er Lu (Old Frame 2nd Form, known as "Cannon Fist" or Pao Chui)  
Xin Jia Yi Lu (New Frame 1st Form)  
Xin Jia Er Lu (New Frame 2nd Form)

*Weapons:*

Broadsword  
Double Broadsword  
Straight sword  
Double Straight sword  
Spear  
Halberd  
Staff

(Other traditional weapons common to the region can be seen in Chenjiagou, but are not widely practiced. These include double short staff, double mace, and the two-sectional staff.)

*Usage:*

Push Hands (Tui Shou):  
Single Arm  
Wide Two-Handed  
Two Hand  
Two-Handed with Step  
Two-Handed, Double Push with Step  
Two-Handed, Multiple Step

Wrestling  
Joint Locking  
Advanced Usage

**When are the applications of the techniques taught in Chen Taiji?**

It is standard practice to expose students to basic applications almost from the beginning to build an understanding of the movement and techniques. If a student seeks fighting ability, his/her training will progress through the aforementioned, levels of development. By about the second level, "live" application practice is introduced with partner training, push hands, and finally free-fighting training.

**How effective is Chen Taiji against other martial art styles?**

Effectiveness against other styles of combat depends on the individual more so than on the style. It is up to the aspiring student to find the martial art system that is both satisfying and well-suited to his or her individual needs. Chen Taiji can be considered a close-range, grappling art that usually requires about 2+ years of quality training to gain a base-level proficiency for live usage. Thus if a student seeks the realism of close-quarter combat training and can commit to a reasonable, yet somewhat extended time adhering to the curriculum, Chen Taiji offers highly effective self defense capabilities over the medium to long-term.

**How demanding is Chen Taiji on the knees, i.e. turning and twisting? I've had several knee operations, on both, and had to give-up wrestling. I've always been interested in martial arts, but being able to walk under my own power is rather important to me. My doctors told me one more injury to either knee and that particular leg is through. Would Chen style be too strenuous on the knees?**

Chen Taiji does emphasize lower body training, but is highly strengthening for the knees. Chen style or any style of Taiji could be just what you need. Correct Taijiquan movement will specifically align and strengthen the muscle and ligaments of the knee joint.

**Due to a pinched nerve in my neck and back, I have stayed away from martial arts training for 15 years. Can Chen Taiji aid in my flexibility, weight loss, cardiovascular, and strength training?**

Chen Taiji will aid you in all four attributes. In the beginning, practicing Chen style will dramatically improve your strength, coordination, posture, balance, and flexibility. As you progress to longer forms training, the cardiovascular and weight control benefits will emerge. One of the most valuable fitness benefits will be the increased lower body strength that you will experience in just a few weeks of practice. That alone will promote weight loss. Chen Taiji is enormously beneficial for anybody with back or neck problems. For example, one past student (age 60) suffered from a broken back. Chen Taiji has been the only thing that has brought feeling back to his toes.

**Although I've been studying Jiu Jitsu, with some success, for three years, I have cerebral palsy. Will Chen Taiji be suitable for me?**

Absolutely. Chen and the other styles of Taiji would be especially suitable for you. You'll gain much greater control of your limbs, dramatically improve your balance, and learn to control your nervous system. Those benefits will be invaluable to you. In fact, one past student who was over 65 and suffered from a rare version of Parkinson's for decades, now experiences very few, if any, tremors after just a few months of traditional Chen Taiji training.

**I do not have any formal martial arts training. However, during the past two years I completed two law enforcement related self-defense courses. Most of it was practical for law enforcement officers (blocks, boxing, ground fighting, pressure points, etc.) involving gross motor movements rather than the precise movements of many martial arts styles. I very much enjoyed the training and would like to continue with something along those lines. I am not the most flexible person so you will not see me doing any flying side kicks! Beyond the practical application of the training, I always felt afterwards that I had been through a good workout. My point is do you think I am suited to Chen Taiji and is it suited for me?**

Chen Taiji would be an excellent complement to what you've studied. While you will not be jumping around executing fancy kicks, Chen style does have a level of sophistication that is usually frustrating in the beginning. But the circular movement, leg training, and unique "coiling" or "twining" nature of Chen movement would be an ideal (and healthy) complement to the more basic/linear movement you've been taught. Practicing Chen Taiji will develop attributes that will strengthen what you've already learned.

**I'm really looking forward to start practicing Chen Taiji. My 8 year old son is about to test for his brown belt in Tae Kwon Do. Don't want him to be able to whip the old man someday. Just kidding, he's a good boy.**

With quality Chen Taiji training, you'll be able to impress him with your skills for quite awhile. The effects of Taijiquan training are accessible at any age and are long-lasting.