

# T'ai Chi River

# 太極川

## Introductory Package

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Tai Chi River is a Nashville-based school dedicated to bringing this ancient art to the community for the benefit of all.

## Guidelines for Health Tai Chi Practice

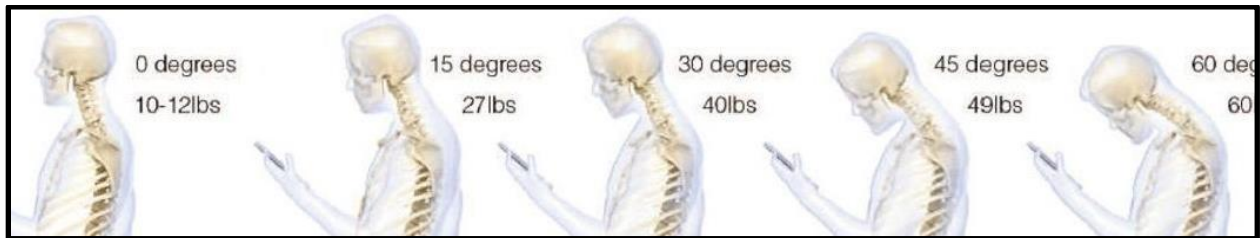
Tai Chi Ch'uan is an internal Chinese martial art practiced for both its defense training and its health benefits. Originally a martial art, it is now typically practiced for a variety of reasons including injury rehabilitation, balance training, mental relaxation, and achieving greater longevity. Tai Chi River promotes these benefits and is dedicated to spreading the 'soft' Yang-style Tai Chi as proliferated in the U.S. by Professor Cheng Man-ch'ing. This 'soft' style is very low impact and is therefore appropriate for people of all ages and levels of strength and endurance.



1. **I am NOT a Doctor** – For almost 30 years, I have learned and practiced Tai Chi with significant reading and research. I LIKE to talk about Tai Chi and its relationship with traditional Chinese medicine and our healthy bodies. But... I am NOT a doctor or trained in any medical field. If you have any concerns, please check with your medical providers.
2. **70% Effort** – During Tai Chi practice, we do NOT give 110%. We do NOT 'give it all we have'. In all moves, only push yourself to approximately 70% of your capacity. Don't stretch too far and don't try too hard. This prevents over-extension and injury.
3. **Take a Break** – Believe it or not, Tai Chi can be physically demanding when practiced correctly and with persistence. Especially in the beginning, your legs and hips may be weak and become fatigued. Take a break at anytime during class, for a few seconds or even to sit quietly and focus on breathing until the end. If you begin to sweat, you are supposed to sit down and rest.
4. **NO Pain** – Tai Chi should never hurt. Pain is your body talking to you and we all have old injuries and tight places. If any motions or exercises cause you ANY pain, then do not do that motion. Back-off and experiment doing the exercise within the pain-free range of motion.
5. **Not a Competition** – In Tai Chi, we only compete against ourselves. Practice will make us healthier and stronger than we were the day before. Pay attention to yourself without comparison to others. Don't overdo it... Tai Chi is a marathon and not a sprint!!
6. **Shoes Might Matter** – You can wear any comfortable clothes for Tai Chi. The Professor said "come as you are". But different shoes may be better or worse for you. Some even like to do Tai Chi barefoot. The best shoes will be comfortable and stable with a very flat sole and minimal arches. We want a direct connection between the sole of your foot and the ground below.

## 10 Commandments for Better Health and Balance

Though Tai Chi appears slow and somehow easy, you will quickly realize the complexities involved with re-aligning your body correctly with gravity. With this proactive re-alignment, you will begin to understand your internal tensions and learn ways to consciously relax and loosen these joints, muscles and tendons. As you learn the basic form postures and continue practicing, focus on the following primary lessons and do not worry about much else.



1. Sink your weight into the ground through the “bubbling well” – the point just behind the ball of the foot.
2. Always keep your knees bent and never locked. Your knees are your natural shock absorbers.
3. Drop your tailbone and sink the hips downward. Remember “the Waist is the Commander”.
4. Your spine is the “Pillar of Heaven” and it needs to be straight and erect and plumb.
5. Your head is suspended from above by a golden thread. This pulls the spine upward and creates a feeling of “lightness” throughout the body.
6. Tuck your chin slightly and touch your tongue to the roof of the mouth where the teeth meet the gums.
7. Relax your shoulders and roll them slightly forward to “depress the chest and pluck up the back”.
8. Bend your elbows slightly at all times and create “round-ness” with the arms.
9. Activate your hands and fingers with “Beautiful Lady’s Wrist”. The fingers are not together and not far apart with the wrist curved and the fingers pulled back slightly to create a tingling sensation.
10. Take continuous deep deep breaths initiated from the abdomen and NOT the nose. The diaphragm engages and pulls the lungs down and open.

## Relax, Relax, Relax

In Chinese, the term “Sung” is usually translated as “relax” but it is a very different concept than normal America relaxing in front of the TV. Sung has the connotation of “looseness” that is critical to good Tai Chi. We must all look at ourselves critically and confront our tensions and blockages. By concentrating on relaxing these areas, you will expend less energy while at the same time allowing greater blood flow to the entire body. Both Professor Cheng and his teacher, Yang Cheng-fu, said “Relax” all the time as one of the most important lessons for both Tai Chi and for life in general. “As you grow more relaxed, you become less afraid. As you become less afraid, you grow more relaxed.”



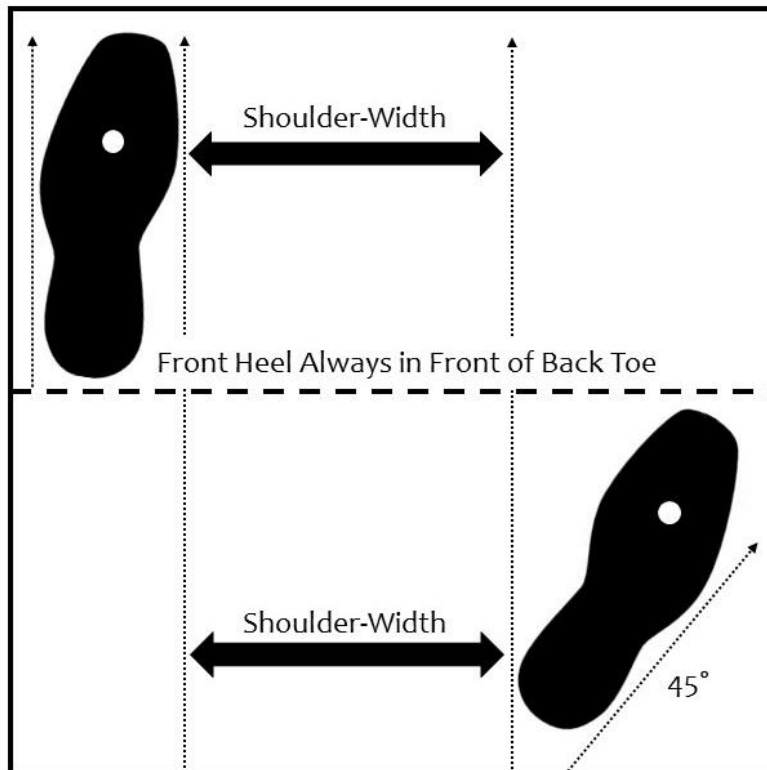
## **Eight Pieces of Brocade – Warm-up Exercises**

It is recommended that you do each exercise eight times, with the exception of #7. Please remember that there should be no muscle tension at any time. Breathing should be relaxed, gentle, even and quiet. Inhale and exhale through the nose. The tip of your tongue should rest gently on the roof of the mouth, behind the front teeth.

1. Heels together, toes apart, knees relaxed. Clasp hands together at the waist, palms up. INHALE as you raise your hands above your head; palms rotating outward. When arms are stretched all the way, palms should be up. EXHALE as you lower your arms and palms to their original position.
2. Heels together, toes apart, knees relaxed. EXHALE as you bend over and touch your toes. INHALE as you straighten up. EXHALE, back straight, bend at the knees, hands out, palms down. INHALE as you stand to the original position.
3. Heels together, toes apart, back straight, knees bent. Hands crossed in front of your chest, palms facing your chest. Left hand inside. INHALE as you straighten your legs and simultaneously raise your left hand and lower your right hand. EXHALE as you bend your knees and simultaneously draw your hands back to your chest, crossed with the right hand inside. Repeat with right hand going up, left hand going down.
4. Heels together, toes apart, knees relaxed. Cup your left hand inside your right hand (palms up) at your waist. INHALE as you turn your head to the left. EXHALE as you turn your head back to the center. INHALE as you turn your head to the right. EXHALE as you turn your head back to the center.
5. Body in “horse stance”. Feet shoulder length apart, toes facing forward. Knees slightly bent, back straight. (As if riding a horse.) Turn head and shoulders to the left. Left arm up, horizontal to ground, first finger pointing out at 45° angle. Right arm in position to “pull back a bow string.” INHALE as you draw the bow string and simultaneously face forward. Continue to pull the string until your right arm is extended all the way to the right. (Imagine yourself holding a giant beachball.) EXHALE as you bring both arms in front of your chest. (Imagine yourself holding a soccer ball.) Repeat on other side.
6. Body in “horse stance”. Hands resting gently on your thighs. With back straight, bend slightly forward. INHALE as you rotate your body in a circle toward the left. Continue inhaling until you are 3/4 of the way around. EXHALE the remainder of the circle. Repeat in opposite direction.
7. Heels together, toes apart, knees relaxed. INHALE as you raise your hands, palms up, shoulder height and come up on toes. EXHALE as you drop hands and land on your heels.
8. Body in “horse stance”. INHALE as you bring your arms up over your head (embrace the sky) EXHALE as you bend at the knees, squat down and take water from the stream. INHALE as you stand, palms up with water dripping from your fingers. EXHALE as you turn palms down, bend at the knees and lower hands slightly.

## The 70/30 Front Stance

As we continue to practice Tai Chi, we will come back over and over again to this Front Stance. Begin to think about your foot placement, your direction, and the space between your heels.



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### 70/30 Front Stance

“Bubbling Well” – Drop weight through this point behind the ball of the foot

Knees in line with toes

Hips square to the front

Tailbone hanging

Spine elongated with head “Suspended from Heaven” by a string

## Tai Chi History and Lineage

All styles of Tai Chi trace their historical origins to Chen Village in the Henan Province of China. According to family history, Chen Bu was the skilled martial artist who founded Chen Village and began the long history of the secret Chen-style Tai Chi. In the early 1800's, 14th generation master Chen Chang-hsing broke with the long-standing family tradition of secrecy and taught his poor servant, Yang Lu-ch'an.



Yang Lu-ch'an became famous for never losing a match and was known throughout China as "Unbeatable Yang". Because of his fame and skill, he was invited to live in Beijing's Forbidden City and instruct members the Imperial family and the Imperial Guard. This was the beginning of the spread of Tai Chi from a secret family art to an international phenomenon.

Yang Cheng-fu, the grandson of Unbeatable Yang, was a fearsome fighter and a prolific teacher. Following his grandfather's lead, Cheng-fu broke with tradition and shared the secrets of Tai Chi with the general population. He strongly believed in the health benefits of Tai Chi and taught many weak and ill students. This is how he met Professor Cheng Man-ch'ing.

Cheng Man-ch'ing was a refined gentleman, a college professor, a poet, an artist, and a traditional herbalist... but always sickly since a brick had fallen on his head during childhood. Faced with advanced tuberculosis, this well-known college professor began studying with Yang Cheng-fu in hopes of beating this life-threatening illness. Professor Cheng survived to the age of 72 thanks to his Tai Chi.

Cheng Man-ch'ing single-handedly brought Tai Chi to the United States. Originally from mainland China, he escaped the communists in 1949, lived in Taiwan, and then descended on New York City in 1964 in the middle of the 60's counter-culture movement. Today, practically all Tai Chi in the United States springs from this one man, his small school, and his willingness to teach. Professor Cheng had many students including the late Dr. Tao Ping-siang of Taiwan and Saul Krotki of Seattle. Tai Chi River owes all skills and insights to these two remarkable teachers as well as Sifu Tom Wang of Nashville, Omar Jutte of Nashville and Jay Boyle of Shanghai.