

# In Memory Of David C. Chen

—by students and friends of David C. Chen

***“Taiji is not ‘The Way’ but a means to help people realize their own way.”***

***“A master teaches us to be a student of Taiji, not his.”***

—David C. Chen

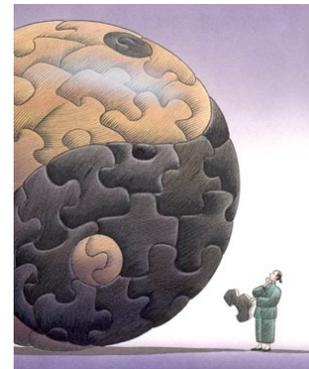
The passing of David C. Chen on December 25, 2005 is a tragic loss. David’s joyful spirit embodied the principles of Taiji. He tirelessly cultivated his Taijiquan and made many contributions to the Taijiquan community. His enthusiasm and intelligence in learning as well as his gentle personality inspired those around him. For David, the ultimate goal of Taiji practice was “for us to blend it into our everyday life” and “become a ‘better me’ not a ‘better than you.’” His life was a beautiful example to us all.



David C. Chen was well known for his talents as a graphic designer, an artist, and a Taijiquan enthusiast. Born on October 27, 1955 in Taipei, Taiwan, he came to the United States in 1979 to study Visual Communications at Southern Illinois University. David moved to Maryland in 1983 to take a position as senior designer for a graphic arts firm and later began his own successful freelance commercial art business in the Greater Washington D.C. area. His death was due to complications following surgery to remove a large benign brain tumor. He is survived by his wife Joanne Chang, two sons Hank and Sean, father Fu-Chi, and sister Nicole Liu.

David began studying Cheng Man-Ch'ing style Taijiquan with Arnold Lee in 1992 and later worked on push hands with T. Julian Chu, both senior students of Grandmaster Benjamin Lo. He soon became a fixture at Master Lo’s workshops and camps. A dedicated and humble student of the art, David was quickly recognized as an accomplished Taijiquan practitioner and teacher. His Wu Wei Tai Chi Club established a Taiji curriculum based on that of Professor Cheng and provided a platform for the expression of his Wu Wei philosophy. David also won many awards and competitions throughout his life, including First Place in the Sword competition at the Cheng Man-Ch'ing European Tai Chi Championships in 2002 in Périgueux, France.

David was a man of vision. It was his dream to link the art and practice of Taijiquan to the Western way of life. He became fascinated with the underlying principles of Taijiquan that unify seemingly complex movements with internal strength. He built his Wu Wei Tai Chi Club website ([www.wuweitaichi.com](http://www.wuweitaichi.com)) to promote this understanding and to introduce Taoist philosophy and its concept of the opposing principles of *yin* and *yang*.



David translated and authored a number of articles on Taiji principles, sword, and push hands, which, along with more of his wonderful artwork, can be found on this website. He also recently completed a book, which he wrote and illustrated, entitled *When Yin Meets Yang*, a beautifully executed and light-hearted compendium on Taiji philosophy that demonstrates his outstanding craftsmanship and conceptual brilliance.

David was extremely generous with his time, encouraging the practice of Taijiquan through his ideas, his writing, and his artwork. He published a monthly email newsletter on Taijiquan activities in the Greater Washington D.C. area. He also frequently contributed art to *Taijiquan Journal*. He served on the Board of Directors for the Taijiquan Club, an independent organization of Taijiquan enthusiasts of all styles, donating his artwork to the organization and designing their logo and the t-shirts for their annual festival. He helped organize the quarterly Greater Washington D.C. Area Push Hands events for many years and also helped arrange Master Ben Lo's workshops in Salisbury, Maryland. These are but a few examples of David's many contributions to the world of Taijiquan.

He often told his friends that the art of Taijiquan involves no graduation and no mastery but is a joyful journey of learning, refining, and cultivating. David was an able guide for those on this journey. The power of his personality, the depth of his commitment, and the scope of his vision will be sorely missed by all who shared his passion for making Taiji a better tool for both physical and spiritual health.

David touched many, many lives. Well liked by his students, he was both a master and a friend. He was always open to questions, comments, and reflections on the art and philosophy of Taijiquan. David brought an exceptional energy and presence to his classes. His "soft" critiques and gentle teaching style allowed students to forget ego and concentrate on improving their Taiji skills. The enthusiastic atmosphere of mutual encouragement and sharing of knowledge in David's Wu Wei Tai Chi Club continues today under the direction of his wife Joanne Chang. A fellow student of David's in the classes of Arnold Lee, Joanne has been an active and talented partner in the full range of his Taijiquan activities. From co-teacher to co-organizer to partner in a host of public Taijiquan demonstrations, Joanne's clear vision, steady talent and ready heart provided an added dimension to the range of David's projects, and she will continue to develop their shared vision.



David promoted Taiji with missionary zeal. He taught many classes in many places, often traveling many miles for little or no monetary compensation. He was equally generous to all his students with his knowledge and experience. David said, "I dream of the day when I enroll in my student's class and re-learn Taiji from him." Such words only come from a great master and a great teacher with a great heart. The Taiji world has lost a talented, enthusiastic, passionate, and insightful soul. Those who knew him can honor him most by rededicating themselves to the principles by which he lived.

*“Taijiquan is like a bright mirror – it reflects our physical and mental weakness; we need to polish it constantly in order to see our true self.”*

*“Don’t find excuses not to practice, instead, find every opportunity to practice.”*

—David C. Chen

## David Remembered....

David has left a powerful and profound impression on those who knew him. The following is a short collection of memories from a few of his students....

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*David was everybody’s friend. It’s as simple as that. He was everyone’s colleague in Tai Chi, he knew no boundaries between us. Students of Tai Chi are faced with many difficulties and uncertainties in trying to achieve their full potential. David had a very simple and very effective solution: let’s get together. Let’s practice together, share what we learn, talk about it, maybe argue sometimes, and let’s keep doing it. Let’s keep in touch. He knew that Tai Chi is too vast to be swallowed by a single person, or a handful of people, or a particular school, or even a nation or culture. He was uniquely American in that way, and he was uniquely Chinese at the same time. Many people have tried and failed to bridge the two cultures. With David, I don’t know if there was ever a gap to bridge in the first place.*

*We are taught that we will win in the long run by losing in the short run. David was never afraid of losing. He was never afraid to be humble. He never drew attention to himself. All he wanted was to serve the art of Tai Chi, and he did that through serving us. He knew there could be no boundless Chi without a boundless heart. Tai Chi, like love, demands serious risk and strong faith in order to succeed. David didn’t just succeed: he flourished, because he was not afraid.*

*So if we didn’t realize it before, we certainly know it now: David was truly fearless. Fate has dealt us a terrible shock. It didn’t just take out one of us on the periphery, but a man at the center. It’s ironic that in David’s relentless pursuit of softness, his sudden departure makes it suddenly clear that he was our rock.*

*Inevitably, many of us will drift apart, some of us will move away, memories will fade. But the space David fills in our hearts will keep growing. He pulled us all together, and he’s not about to let us go. Let us rejoice in that, even as we grieve, keep him safe in our hearts, and keep giving each other what he was always giving us.*

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*People say that Taiji as an art was built on ancient Taoist teaching. They quote Lao-tzu saying that the softest things in the world will overcome the hardest. But how many*

people actually live by these teachings? David did. When we see records of great Taiji masters with their students we are accustomed to visions of students flying through space from an effortless shrug of their master. Not in our class. David offered his big body as, in his own words, a 'pushing dummy.' He focused on capturing every ounce of force which a student could muster in the proper fashion, and assured that it sent him stumbling back across the room as if he had been pushed by the massive Yang Chen-fu himself. His delighted laughter only reinforced the point.

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When I first met David I referred to him as Master Chen. David quickly told me that he was not a master, "just an experienced tour guide" helping others find their way. He respected every student as an individual and was sensitive to his or her needs, goals and abilities. David had an uncanny talent for knowing just when and how to offer his instructions and corrections and when to allow me to work though something on my own. He taught that the true practice of Taijiquan was about a lifestyle choice; it was not some compartmentalized part of your life, but the very foundation of living life to its fullest. That is how David lived his life. He let go of his ego and invested himself fully in his Taijiquan, his artwork, and his relationships with family, friends, and students. David was a very special person — an exceptional Taijiquan practitioner, a great teacher, and a dear friend. He was truly a master in the art of living, applying the Taiji principles in everything he did. He will always remain with me in my heart, ever my tour guide, helping me to find my way.

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David's push was soft and sensitive, like his personality. He was determined to be humble. In a class with students of various levels, he would spend the most time with those receiving their first impressions of Taiji. To his advanced students, he taught that the control of Yi and the development of Neijing were the goal. After many trials and errors, students came to see threads of commonality, of ultimate truths. Each lesson became an exploration of the strengths and weaknesses of the mind. It wasn't enough to use internal power; that force had to be pure. The purity was judged by a softness which is the connection sensed through the mind, of a supreme ultimate force.

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To David, Taijiquan was the expression of a principle of nature. It was not something that anyone could own, and in a certain sense he believed that it was not anything that anyone could teach. His job as class leader was to guide, to nudge, to reinforce, to encourage questions and the larger quest for understanding. Taiji was one expression of principles fundamental to nature, and to us, as thinking beings living together, Taiji was an expression and investigation of social ideals. There were no real secrets in Taiji, not in the sense of a code or practice possessed by a cloistered guild. There were only avenues to discovery, better and worse understanding, expressions which were or were not consistent, in his finely honed spirit, with the expressions he saw in nature.

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It is hard to express in words the "energy" and "presence" that David brought to each one of his classes. I wanted to know and learn more, I could not explain it; I just

wanted to keep learning as much as possible about Tai Chi. Looking back at this part of my life I can now see that the reason was David Chen. David not only taught Tai Chi, he lived his life in a manner that was totally aligned with the principles of Tai Chi, and sensing this I knew this is the Tai Chi Master that I wanted to learn from and grow with during my pursuit of Tai Chi. David was a patient, firm, knowledgeable, and caring Tai Chi Master. I would be the first to admit that I do not take criticism very well, but when David corrected my form I never felt defensive, I only felt that he cared about helping me get better within my own physical limits.

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David's mind favored order. He loved the reward that he found in perfecting his sword form. He was not one to accomplish a task to an average level and then be satisfied. For his students he was a living example of the greater potentials of Tai Chi. David seemed to have realized that the advanced levels of experience to which he was leading his students could often not be put into words, so he would have to lead the way through being the best example he could. Guidance during class often came with a psychic connection. His comments and corrections were almost frightening in their accuracy about the student's ego or the tensions they were bringing to class from their day at work.

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As a man, David, as all others, struggled with his inner demons—with ambition perhaps, with anger. One of the many things that made David so remarkable is that his philosophy conquered the demons with regularity, instead of living side by side with them, or, worse, allowing them to color his core beliefs and teaching. His pragmatism was devoid of compromise with the core beliefs he so valued, the heart of his teaching.

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We say, "Tai-chi is a martial art" without usually putting too much thought to our use of the term "art." For David tai chi was Art and, as a real artist he would never compromise or cheapen his art for momentary success or recognition. Many times pushing with him I felt like he was about to push me and all of a sudden he withdrew. I asked him, "Why? You had me." And he replied, "It wouldn't have been a clean push." Even more amazing were the few times when I half-managed to push him. With his big frame and great root he could easily have managed to hold his balance against my push. But to "hold" means to violate the principles of "the Art". He never felt there was a choice between "saving face" and sticking to his tai chi principles. So he amiably stepped back and said "Good push" and came back to continue his never-ending search for perfection in his art.

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David didn't believe in absolutes, at least not in any that we as people could wholly grasp. His way of doing Taiji wasn't the only way, or even necessarily the right way. But it was his way, and in that, it was profoundly right for him. For many years he had been searching, ever refining his understanding of what tai chi was and meant for himself. As a teacher he was ready to give everything that he'd learned, but the highest truth he conveyed was that we had finally to find our answers for ourselves. This reflected no

*uncertainty or lack of conviction in his own ideas, but his more fundamental realization that knowledge, true knowledge, must come from within. By teaching us in this way, David at once increased the pain of his departure and gave us the foundation to go on without him.*

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*It is my hope that all of us who knew him and learned from him can keep him and his legacy alive by continuing to learn and share Tai Chi with others. While I am sad that I only knew David for a short time, I also feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to get to know and learn about not only Tai Chi but living life to its fullest each and every day. It is not often you meet a person that changes your life, but David was one of those few people I have known that I can say truly changed my life for the best.*

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*Often when our class was over, David, sweating and tired, bowed to the class and said, "Thank you guys, great class." Now it is our turn to say with regret, "Thank you, teacher, your life was itself the greatest class."*