

# Famous Chen Style Master Tu Yi Che Dies at 95

By Adam Hsu

On March 16, 1990 at 10:30 a.m. Sifu Tu Yi Che passed away in Veteran's Hospital, Taipei, Taiwan, at the age of 95. His death closed the chapter on the oldest masters who span the 19th and 20th centuries.

Master Tu not only is listed in the same generation as Master Chen Fa-ke but he also learned from the same teacher, Chen Fa-ke's father, Master Chen Yen Hsi.

In spite of this, the way they both did T'ai Chi Ch'uan was very different. Chen Fa-ke trained under his own father from an early age. When Tu Yi Chi had an opportunity to learn, it was in Chen Yen Hsi's later years.

At that point in the 19th century, during the late Ch'ing dynasty, T'ai Chi was still kept secret in Chen Village.

Very, very few outsiders had the rare opportunity for exposure to the art. Among those lucky few, the most

famous, without doubt, is the Yang style founder, first generation Yang Lu-ch'an. He later actively promoted T'ai Chi through his sons, grandsons, and many disciples, making it world renowned and benefiting the health of millions of people.

Of course, his era came earlier. Peeking through a hole in the fence, Yang Lu-Ch'an first stole lessons and later on was instructed by Chen Fa-ke's great grandfather, Chen Ch'ang Hsing. We don't know if Chen Ch'ang Hsing's son, Chen Kung Yuen had ever taught outsiders. But his son, Chen Yen Hsi, had a famous "foreign" student, my teacher Tu Yi Che.

The story went this way: Sifu Tu's father, Mr. Tu Yen, was a government officer in charge of the Chung Chou Fu region in the late Ch'ing Dynasty. Because of this, Wen County was under his jurisdiction and Chen Village is situated in that county.

In other words, Tu Yen, as a local official, deserved the best protection and Chen Yen Hsi served as his personal bodyguard and security officer guarding his residence.

Under this special relationship, the young master Tu Yi Che had the opportunity to learn from Chen Yen Hsi even though, at that time, Chen T'ai Chi was hidden from outsiders.

From his master, Sifu Tu inherited the T'ai Chi system most famous even till today—the Lao Chia system. It contains two forms: First Form, and the Second Form (also known as Cannon Fist—P'ao Chuei).

In 1969 when I first began to learn from Sifu Tu



Tu Yi Che, center, wearing glasses, is shown at his residence with other Chen style teachers and students.

in Taipei, I had no idea what Chen T'ai Chi should look like. Later on, I met one teacher who learned from Chen Fa-ke in Chen Village and the way he did Lao chia was pretty much the same.

But I also saw two Chen style teachers in Taiwan, who learned from Chen Fa-ke when he started to promote Chen T'ai Chi in Beijing, teaching outsiders openly.

I could see obvious differences even though the form was the same. After I studied with Sifu Tu for 10



Tu Yi Che performs in All Asia Kung-Fu tournament in Taipei, Taiwan.



Adam Hsu in Thunderstyle's Planting Double Fists. Photos of Adam Hsu are by Marie Anthony

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clear to me. Sifu Tu's P'ao Chuei is "bi-racial"—a mixture of both the Lao Chia System and Thunder Style—and no one else in the history of T'ai Chi practices P'ao Chuei this way.

Therefore, his students need the fundamental training of both sides, the First Forms of both Lao Chia and Thunder Style, before they can receive the higher level training of this P'ao Chuei.

Sifu Tu has made several valuable contributions to T'ai Chi. As mentioned earlier in this article, he practiced, preserved, and taught the old way of doing the Lao Chia.

This can be used as comparative material with today's most popular way of performing it.

Secondly, he also preserved the rare Thunder Style which is still highly respected by the old folks in Chen Vil-

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lage, though today's young masters have never heard of it.

Thirdly, he was not only the lucky son of a wealthy family but also a well trained scientist from the world famous Krupp German armaments factory.

He went on to become one of the pioneers of China's armaments industry serving as Second Commander at the time of his retirement. When he taught T'ai Chi to his students, he constantly brought up scientific formulation along with the Yin-Yang T'ai Chi theory.

He was very open-minded and did not discriminate against any other system in the Chen family. He, himself, mixed the two Cannon Fists he learned, melding the physical forms into a new organic entity.

Though I have tried very hard, it's difficult to distinguish which parts come from Lao Chia and which from

It isn't necessary that everyone agree that his way of doing P'ao Chui is the best. But I do admire him for standing up under the weight of tradition to create a new direction. He set a true example to give us courage not to treat T'ai Chi as a religion.

He didn't need disciples to worship the master, and didn't have to rely on fairy tales. Actually, his T'ai Chi is nothing but a fine amalgam of science and art.

Some people can be performers, interpreting the art in their unique ways just as 100 people playing Beethoven's Appassionata Piano Sonata will all sound different. Others maybe would prefer to be composers, creating their own sonatas for music lovers to enjoy.

Nowadays, because we are promoting the art, we need to have tournaments. It is thus necessary to set up standardized ways of performance in order to make fair judgments possible.

But we shouldn't mistakenly treat standardized forms as the best and only way.

In fact, the form is constantly changing. The most recent example will be exhibited and judged in the upcoming Beijing Asia Games in September, 1990. The newly arranged T'ai Chi competition form is out already.

After all, the importance lies in the principles as soul, not the form as beautiful appearance. When a master gains in age, you cannot expect to see a young and strong body but the important thing is to learn and get inspiration from his interpretation of the art.

A real master is not afraid to openly discuss his art with his students, admit his weak points, admire his students' progress, always hope that their achievements will surpass his level, and then celebrate with them as they break through to new records.

If that master not only teaches but also still pushes himself to improve, one could say that such a master is still earning money, not just living off social security.

In all these aspects, Sifu Tu was the perfect example for us to emulate. Until the very day he finally was rushed to the hospital emergency room, he still awakened early each morning and practiced his beloved T'ai Chi. •



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