

# Lesson 15 — The Original Engine

Chen Style Tai Chi: where the soft art was still hard — silk-reeling, fa-jin, and the grappling root our whole system was reaching for.

We have treated Tai Chi as the **taiji** of the entire art — the soft↔hard flip that governs every other discipline (see the Manual). But the Tai Chi we drilled so far (Lesson 12) was principle-based and soft-leaning. **Chen** is the source family — the oldest, and the only major style that never put the hard half down. Studying it isn't adding a new sauce. It's tasting the original stock the whole soup was reduced from.

## Part I — What Chen Actually Is

Forget the slow park Tai Chi. Chen was born on a battlefield. Its creator **Chen Wangting** (陳王廷, 1600–1680) was a Ming-dynasty general; his family in **Chenjiagou** (陳家溝) village made their living for generations as armed bodyguards (**biaoshi** 鏢師) on China's lawless caravan roads. As the Chenjiagou source puts it bluntly: "most of what now passes for Taiji is so diluted from the original battlefield system."

Two facts reset everything we thought "Tai Chi" meant:

- **It is, in essence, a close-range throwing & grappling system.** Kicks and strikes are in the arsenal, but the core is **qinna** (擒拿) **joint-locking, throws, and takedowns** — all built on a unique coiling, spiralling energy.
- **It alternates soft and explosive in the same form.** Long slow silk-reeling, then a sudden crack of **fa-jin** 發勁. Chen is the flip made into a form — the oldest family already lives in the transition we call the whole point of the art.

## Part II — The 80/20 Engine

Five principles run all of Chen. Drill these and the postures take care of themselves.

### ① Chan Si Jin 纏絲勁 — Silk-Reeling Energy

The signature. Power travels as a **continuous spiral** — never a straight line — winding from the ground, through the dantian, out to the fingertips and back. Every Chen movement is a coil tightening or unwinding. Trained directly with the **Taiji ball** (in Chenjiagou today, a basketball filled with sand): you circle it until the dantian leads the ball, not the arms.

### ② The Dantian Engine 丹田 — "the hand is only the hook"

Master Chen Ziqiang's own words: "Your hand is like the hook you use when towing a car... your strength is coming from the waist and how you push into the ground. The

hook only connects the two." Power is generated at the waist and the ground; the hand merely delivers it. This is our **Universal Core** stated by the source itself.

### ③ Fa-Jin 發勁 — Explosive Release

Accumulate in the soft, relaxed coil; **discharge in a single instant** — the cannon fist. The hard pole of the Taiji, made into a strike. The Chenjiagou text even likens the fast, explosive sabre work to "**plyometrics in modern athletic training**" — the source naming our Yang Engine for us.

### ④ Song 鬆 + Root + Peng 棚 — the soft container

Relaxed (song), heavily rooted, yet always carrying an outward, expansive ward-off pressure (peng). This is the loaded spring that fa-jin discharges. Without the soft container there is no explosion — only tension. (Carries over directly from Lesson 12's Four Hands.)

### ⑤ Ting 聽 + Push Hands 推手 — Listening

Close-range contact sensitivity. **Push hands** trains you to feel the opponent's force and balance through the point of contact — the sense organ that feeds every joint-lock and throw. You don't see the takedown; you feel it. (= our Lesson 5 "listening.")

## Part III — The Core Postures (from the 18-Form)

Grounded in the canonical Chen 18-Form. The highest-value handful, with their fighting meaning:

### Buddha's Warrior Pounds Mortar 金剛搗碓 **THE ROOT-STAMP**

The signature opening, and the single best feel for the whole style. Hands circle (silk-reeling), one fist drops into the opposite palm as the foot **stomps** — a downward fa-jin that drives the dantian down and the root into the earth. If you learn one Chen move to feel the engine, it's this.

### Covered (Hidden) Thrust Punch 掩手肱拳 **THE CANNON FIST**

Chen's signature strike and the clearest fa-jin. The hand "hides," the body coils back soft and loaded — then the whole spiral unwinds and the fist **explodes** straight out, waist-driven, ground-fed. This is our Dragon Punch / Shoryuken written in the oldest hand: load the coil, release the crack.

### Lazily Tying the Coat 懶扎衣 & Six Sealing Four Closing 六封四閉 OPEN / CLOSE

The breathing pair. Lazily Tying the Coat reels **open** to a wide, rooted stance (the outward spiral); Six Sealing Four Closing **seals shut** with a double-palm press/push (Àn). Open and close (開合) is the lung of the form — every technique is one or the other.

### Cloud Hands 雲手 & Single Whip 單鞭 FAMILIAR FRIENDS

We already met these in Lesson 12 — but Chen runs them with visible silk-reeling. **Cloud Hands** is continuous waist-driven horizontal coiling (the parent of our Cyclone Hand); **Single Whip** is the long extended spiral ending in the hook hand — a coil stretched to full range.

### Double Cannon Fists 雙炮捶 DOUBLE CRACK

Two explosive fa-jin strikes fired in close succession — pao chui, "cannon pounding." The proof that fa-jin isn't a one-off party trick but a **repeatable rhythm**: coil-crack-coil-crack. (Also in the form: White Crane Spreads Wings, Walking Obliquely, Fair Lady Works the Shuttles, the Lotus Kicks — speed, direction-change, and kicking spokes around this hub.)

**If you drill only three:** ① **Silk-Reeling** (the principle — spiral everything), ② **Buddha's Warrior Pounds Mortar** (root + dantian drop — the soft container), ③ **Covered Thrust Punch** (the fa-jin flip — soft load to hard crack). Principle, container, release. That's Chen in three.

## Part IV — How Chen Relates to Our System

This is the part that matters. Chen isn't new to us — it's the thing we kept rediscovering, finally named at its source. Six bridges back into the canon:

① **Chen IS the Taiji thesis — pre-proven.** → Our whole Manual claims mastery = the soft→hard flip, with fa-jin as the exemplar. Chen alternates slow silk-reeling and explosive fa-jin in a single form. We didn't invent the flip; the oldest family has lived in it for 350 years. **THE MANUAL · THE TAIJI**

② **Silk-Reeling is the parent of the Cyclone Hand.** → Our Lesson 14 Cyclone Hand — always turning, never starting from stillness, blocking by turning — is **chan si jin** applied to the two hands. And Read #3 (answer the hook with Cloud Hands) literally is silk-reeling. We found it in flow; Chen had the system.

**LESSON 14**

③ **The Dantian Engine is our Universal Core.** → "The hand is only the hook; strength comes from the waist and the ground" is the master-quote version of our "the waist is the engine" (Lesson 12) and the hip-rotation Universal Core we said underlies every discipline. Same truth, older tongue. **LESSON 12**

④ **Chen fills the Grapple Gap — from inside the soft arts.** → Lesson 4 said don't bolt on BJJ; fill the grapple hole from within. Chen is that fill: a native soft-art throwing/qinna engine — push-hands listening → joint-lock → takedown. The Grabbing Hikite (L13) and Roll-Back/Lǚ (L12) were sketches; Chen is the finished blueprint. **LESSON 4 · 12 · 13**

⑤ **The Cannon Fist is our Dragon Punch / Yang Engine.** → Covered Thrust Punch = coil-load then explode = exactly our crouch-load → Shoryuken and the plyometric stretch-shortening crack (Lesson 9). The source itself compares explosive Chen work to plyometrics — independent convergence, again.

**LESSON 9**

⑥ **The Chen Forge trains the spiral, not brute strength.** → Pole-shaking, stone weights, the sand-filled Taiji ball — Chen's strength work is our Plyometric Forge (Lesson 2/9) with a twist: it conditions the waist and the coil, "not stupid strength." Strength exists to feed the spiral, never to replace it. **LESSON 2 · 9**

Chen is not another ingredient in the pantry. It is the chicken's chicken — the original stock every later style was reduced from, and the original engine our

synthesis kept reaching for in six dialects. We thought we were building the machine. Chen shows it was always running.

## Sources & Lab Notes

Grounded in two texts now in our database (mcp-sport.db): the **Chenjiagou strength-training article** (David Gaffney) and the **canonical Chen 18-Form** list. A third source — a 16-page Jerry Cheng Chen handout — is a **scanned image with no text layer**, so it can't be read by the engine yet; it's queued for OCR if we want its detail.

Fei Kune Do 飛拳道 · Lesson 15 — the original engine, 2026. The soft art was always hard; we just had to go back far enough to see it.