

[A Body in Harmony](#)

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Tai Chi classes come to Symphony Park

Each year, thousands of people go into Boston's famous Symphony Hall to leave the world behind and immerse themselves in the peace and serenity that only music can bring.

Lately, however, a growing group has been assembling just behind the Hall to find peace and serenity of another kind through a different but very compatible system.

As part of a new summer series, Huan Zhang of Huan's Tai Chi (www.huanstaichi.com) has been offering free outdoor classes in the Park for everyone from children to seniors (thanks in great part to the Mission Hill-Fenway Neighborhood Trust). The remaining classes, which are sponsored by The Berklee College of Music and the Mews Condo Trust, will be offered July 21 and 28 and August 4 and 11 at 9 AM.

Tai Chi Chuan (literally "Supreme Ultimate Fist") is what is known as an "[internal](#)" [martial art](#) from China that is practiced for both its defense training and also (and often more so) for its [health](#) benefits. Millions of people practice its flowing, dance-like moves daily to help center their minds and slow their breathing and heart rate to more healthful levels. Especially in a busy town like Boston, Tai Chi can be a great skill that can be taken and practiced almost anywhere.

"The Friends of Symphony Park called me in early June and discussed with me for a possibility of teaching a unique class there," Zhang recalls. As the class often includes Chinese residents from the nearby Morville House (where they are held in case of rain), Zhang guides his students in both English and Chinese, even though, he says, this took some adjustment for him.

"I usually teach in one language," he explains, admitting that it felt "a little strange: when he first went bi-lingual. "Students in Chinese culture and American culture seek different values and benefits from Tai Chi," Zhang observes. "To satisfy both and to make sure the class runs smoothly [and is] fun and to make sure people learn something from the class...I try to give them detailed information but not try to overwhelm them with details. I try to explain the move in a simple way instead of confuse them with big philosophy stories."

Another major difference between these classes and Zhang's earlier offerings is the venue.

"All my other classes are indoors [all the time]," Zhang explains, mentioning his regular classes at the YMCA in Central Square and the Deborah Mason School of Dance in Cambridge and two weekly classes at UMass, Boston. "This outdoor class gives a real environment that mimics how people in China do Tai Chi," he explains. "People can really breathe in fresh air and enjoy the environment and feel more relaxed."

And, as that is one of the main points of this ancient art, Zhang says it is a “special treat” to be able to study and practice in this special venue.

Having studied taught the ancient therapeutic marital art of Tai Chi since 1982 and taught it for almost 10 years in Cambridge (and for many more in China), Zhang is well familiar with the needs of the Greater Boston community and does what he can to support his neighbors.

“We teach Tai Chi and Qi Kung (breathing) in a unique way to make it easy on your joints, improve your balance and flexibility, energize your body, refresh your mind, increase your concentration, and enlighten your spirit,” Zhang says. “We are make every effort to make student's learning a fun, positive experience.”

As the classes are free and outdoors, they are also perfect for curious onlookers who may be inspired to join in with no obligation or concern about being “stuck” in something.

“People don't feel obligated here,” Zhang suggests. “They can come join the class any time or just watch to see if they like it. . . . There is no pressure they have to be good at the moves. Most people are beginners and start from movement one.”

As the class is so open, it is also a great arena for new or experienced practitioners to ask questions and to focus on their own needs.

“People also ask lot of questions,” Zhang explains. “[They] can be health related such as balance, flexibility, or help them to relax from a stressful life, or help them concentrate, or they have a weak body and want to stronger their legs, arms and body.”

As the park is open and airy, Zhang welcomes all comers and never worries about running out of space.

“People just enjoy the sunny, cool morning outdoors,” he says. “Neighbors come to practice and to meet other neighbors and socialize.”

Whatever their reasons, Zhang says that the class has not only changed how he teaches but also how many see his art and how they see themselves and their neighbors as well.

“We want to have the community involved,” he says, “and to make the community adopt a new health culture. “