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Kim Poffenberger of Albion, far left, joins a group of traveling Americans for a tai chi workout in Shanghai, China, last month.

## Finding the birthplace of tai chi

Local practitioners travel to China, Taiwan

*“When you can do tai chi in a natural setting, you’ve got double goodness.”*

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Local tai chi practitioners found the roots of their martial art on a two-week trip to China last month.

“We got to see the origins of our family tree,” said Greg Vick of Auburn, a sifu, or teacher, at the Hall of the Changing Dragon tai chi school in Auburn.

Vick, his wife, Cathy, and Kim and Deb Poffenberger of rural Albion traveled in a group of 50 Americans from the American Center for Chinese Studies.

They visited the gravesite of their tai chi school’s founder, in Taiwan, and the birthplace of tai chi in the Wudang Mountains of mainland China.

“This is the heart of what they

call the internal kung fu, the internal martial arts,” Vick said about the Wudang Mountains. They spent five hours training with a tai chi master there.

Four years ago, Vick and other local tai chi students traveled to China to visit the Shaolin Temple, home of Zen Buddhism and the “hard” martial arts.

As a “soft” martial art, tai chi finds its basis in Taoism, a philosophy of following a way or path through life, Vick said. Taoism emphasizes understanding nature, its cycles and its laws.

“Tai chi is all natural to the body. ... We expect our bodies to be as relaxed as possible” in tai chi, Vick said.

On their journey, the Americans

Greg Vick  
Tai chi sifu

worked out every day in scenic parks. In Shanghai, between 200 and 300 people watched them.

“We were the center attraction. ... People came and watched us and tried to do the same moves we were doing,” Kim Poffenberger said.

“When you can do tai chi in a natural setting, you’ve got double goodness,” Vick said.

## TAI CHI: Practitioners say Shanghai was ‘fast, furious, impressive’

Cathy Vick said she enjoyed those times “when we were doing tai chi ... and I could just see everybody moving in one accord.”

Tai chi master Eric Sborge of Charlotte, N.C., led the American group and its daily workouts. Sborge’s late father, Robert, brought tai chi to Auburn. Vick began studying under Robert Sborge in 1998 and became a sifu three years ago.

Kim Poffenberger took tai chi classes in Minnesota more than 20 years ago. Four years ago, after returning to his home state of Indiana, he resumed his training in Auburn.

“It has definitely improved my flexibility,” Kim Poffenberger said. “I really like the connectedness that tai chi gives me with my surroundings.”

“Kim has been a very dedicated student,” Vick said.

Deb Poffenberger does not practice tai chi, but the trip gave her a better understanding of her husband’s martial art. She said she learned, “In tai chi, they teach you to think, then they teach you to fight,” while kung fu is the opposite.

“The thing about tai chi is, it’s not a competition. Everybody’s working at their own level, but you can still all work together,” Cathy



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Accompanied by grandmaster Soo Chen, foreground, local tai chi practitioners visit the gravesite of their school’s founder, great-grandmaster Chang Tung Sheng, in Taipei, Taiwan. Behind Soo

Chen, from left, are Cathy Vick, Kim Poffenberger, Deb Poffenberger, Greg Vick and master Eric Sborge of North Carolina.

Vick said.

Deb Poffenberger also marveled at one of the stops on their trip known as Purple Heaven Palace. Before seeing the centuries-old temple in the Wudang Mountains, “I used to have a different place on Earth,” she said.

The American tourists also stopped in Hong Kong,

and they saw the contrasts between that semi-independent city, mainland China and independent Taiwan.

“It was fast, it was furious, it was impressive,” Kim Poffenberger said about the pace of growth in Shanghai, China.

Tai chi may be a slow, internal form of martial arts,

but its practitioners carry themselves with confidence and know how to protect themselves, Deb Poffenberger said.

No matter where they traveled, she said, “I knew if I yelled, there would be all these warriors coming to my aid,” quickly adding, “but they’re pretty peaceful.”