

Queen Anne Internal Arts

Blake Emery's Taiji History

Not long ago, a student asked me about my taiji lineage. That is, who was my teacher? Who was my teacher's teacher? It's a good question. For those who are interested in my instructors as I studied martial arts, here they are.

I have been interested in the martial arts for as long as I can remember. An early influence may have been my cousin Jim, who studied Judo. I began to study Shitoryu karate while in high school. Although I started with an interest in self defense, I soon became enamored with the class rituals, and the manifestation of spirit through the forms, or kata. As much as I enjoyed karate, the real fun began when I visited a karate school to find a taiji class in session.

I was blessed by being in on the ground floor of the taiji movement in Seattle. Master Raymond Chung was the pioneer instructor of taiji in both Seattle and Vancouver BC. I took private lessons from him in 1971-1972, learning the "Yang Long Form". Many of the best taiji players in Seattle today got their start from Master Chung in 1969-1972. Last I heard, Master Chung, although no longer teaching and in his 90's, is healthy and still practicing.

Master Chung stopped coming to Seattle in 1972. A lot of students "hooked" on taiji had to decide what to do. Harrison Moritz and I began working out with Roger Tung. Roger was a very energetic and colorful personality. Born in Shanghai not many years prior to the Cultural Revolution, he showed a lot of prowess in martial arts and attended schools that specialized in those arts. He was able to get out of China at a time when that was very difficult and eventually ended up in Seattle. He was teaching Tae Kwon Do, Northern Shaolin kung fu (longfist), and taiji close to the University of Washington. I studied both longfist and taiji with Roger.

Given our background with Master Chung, Harrison and I quickly became the senior taiji students. In those days (1972-1975) we worked mostly on the long form, saber, straightsword, and various two person drills.

The next 20 years of my life were primarily about graduate school, family, and career...but martial arts were always there as a main hobby. I taught Yang long form to a number of martial artist friends, including Joe Clarke and Rick Fernandez, local Kajukembo (Wun Hop Kuen Do) black belts.

In the early 80's, I had the opportunity to study with T.Y. Pang. Here is where we get into some real "lineage" because Master Pang is one of the most accomplished students of Dong (Tung) Yingjie. Dong Yingjie was himself a very accomplished student of one of the most famous grandmasters of the Yang lineage, Yang Chenfu. Initially, I traveled to Bellingham once a week to study bagua with Master Pang. I

can remember driving back to Renton late at night after those bagua workouts. It seemed as if I could feel each of my internal organs, and that each one had received its own individual yoga workout. It was great! Later I studied the long form from him during a time when he taught in Seattle. I remember how he would stop the class at various points during the form, sometimes while we were on one leg. We would have to stand in that position as he circulated to each student. Sometimes it seemed like it took hours! Sometimes he would hold us and physically move our body to help us understand a specific feeling or energy associated with a move.

One time, as he was demonstrating how a kick would be executed at application speed, he kicked the front of the stage at the old Eagles auditorium where we were working out. I thought there was an earthquake! Master Pang, who lives on Orcas Island, is still going strong, as demonstrated in a wonderful performance in October of 2006.

After about a seven year interim, I was re-united with Roger Tung. Roger had returned to mainland China and become quite accomplished in the martial arts as now practiced in China. Called “Modern Competitive Wushu”, it took the prominent Chinese martial arts and created standard judging criteria. Combined with standardized competition routines, these rules allowed fair competitions to be staged. Modern wushu is the national sport of modern China. Roger has been called “the father of wushu in America” by Black Belt Magazine.

Although wushu has been criticized by some, my personal belief is that it has advanced the art in several ways and has incorporated the “traditional” families into the program well. Over the next several years I studied wushu and helped coach my oldest son, Matthew, in the art. During this time-frame, Matthew was pretty much undefeated in forms competition in the Pacific Northwest, and was two time National Champion for his age group. Matthew is currently a martial arts instructor and filmmaker in California.

1995 marks my re-dedication to the internal martial arts. That was the year Alan Chin invited me to teach taiji at the Queen Anne Community Center. I began teaching a group of students the Yang long form in January of that year and truly rediscovered my love for the internal arts.

After studying in 1997 with Coach Eric Chen (Matthew’s wushu coach) in L.A., I switched from teaching the long form to teaching 24 posture or simplified taijiquan. Compiled in 1956, the 24 posture derived from the Yang long form. Many taijiquan masters worked to standardize and simplify a taiji form by deleting some of the repetitive and complicated movements, and to provide movement to both sides, unlike the long form. This made the form easier for students to learn and practice.

Shortly after working with Coach Eric on the 24 form, I had the pleasure of meeting and beginning to study with Yijiao Hong. Sifu Hong had recently moved from China, where she was a wushu/taiji coach at the college level. I continue to work

with her today, and I consider her my primary instructor. Under her guidance, I first refined my simplified taijiquan, explored Sun style, and learned the international competition straight sword form. Later I studied the Yang competition form; bagua; xing-yi; taiji spear; and Chen style. I currently study Chen style, considered the original taiji, at her school, the “Chinese Wushu and Tai Chi Academy.” I have worked on silk reeling; the international Chen competition form; the “essential 18” form; and Old Frame one. Our Chen grandmaster, Chen Zhenlei, visits our school annually. He is truly the embodiment of the “exhilarating spirit of taiji”.

In 1998 I had a rare opportunity to travel to Beijing, China for intense martial arts Study. The Chinese Wushu Association was teaching their new standardized curriculum to top wushu instructors from all over the world. Coach Eric managed to get me into the taiji section, and my son Matthew into the changquan (longfist) section. I was in a class with some of the top players of modern taiji. The class included *as participants* masters from traditional taiji families, including a master of Sun style, and the son (Fu Sheng Yuan) and grandson of Fu Zhongwen. Fu Zhongwen was a famous student of Yang Chenfu.

We worked morning noon and night for ten days learning forms in the curriculum. (during the entire trip we had only one afternoon off!) I was the only person from the United States in the taiji curriculum, and the only one who did not speak Chinese. (I quickly befriended those in the class from Australia for translations!) My weapons instructor was Professor Kan Guixiang, one of the creators of today’s Chen competition form. Another instructor was Li Bing Ci, an acknowledged master of Northern Wu style taiji and creator of today’s Wu competition form. We had to perform before a panel of experts to receive a final ranking. I’m happy to say Matthew and I “graduated” with flying colors.

Shortly thereafter, I learned that Yang Jun, the future lineage holder of Yang Family Taijiquan, was actually moving to, and setting up headquarters in Seattle. I jumped at the chance to really get into Yang style as eventually standardized by Yang Chenfu. (I was literally the first person to sign up...my membership number was #001). Yang Jun is a very friendly person and a very competent practitioner and teacher. We hit it off well. I spent about a year with him and renewed my study of the long form and the Yang Family straight sword.

Over the last ten years, I have also spent considerable time with Chris Luth, where I studied his specialty, freestyle push hands. Two really important things came from Chris. The first is the idea that it very difficult to fully understand taiji without experiencing it *in relation to* a partner/opponent. This is why there is an emphasis in our classes on tui shou or interactive taiji. The second contribution from Chris is that through Chris I met our dear friend Ken Wright, the push hands instructor for our class.

The Pacific Northwest is blessed with many excellent taiji instructors, whom I am happy to call colleagues and friends. In this list I include my friend for 30 years, Harrison Moritz, along with Ken Wright, Yijiao Hong, Kim Ivy, Andy Dale, Darryl Willis, Martin Melish, Michael Gilman and Sam Masich. I encourage my students to experience these fine taiji players/instructors.

In Taiji,

Blake