

A Daoist Master's Search for his Chinese Ancestry

Chungliang Al Huang



Chungliang with relatives at Confucius Temple in Hainan

Chungliang Al Huang recently made a pilgrimage in search of his parents' ancestral homes and tombs in Fujian and Hainan provinces in China. What he found, after 60 years in exile was heartbreaking and encouraging at the same time. His mother's ancestry is from the Imperial Manchu Dynasty. The family tombs were badly destroyed during the cultural revolution by the Red Guards. His father, who rose to be one of the highest ranking generals in the Nationalist Taiwan, also had his family tombs devastated, but recently re-instated because of the changing political climate of the Beijing government towards the Taiwan Chinese. A recent reversal of acknowledgment honoring Huang's father with a Gold Medal of Heroism during the Sino-Japanese War from the People's Republic of China's president Hu Jintao brought Master Huang back to his father's ancestral home, to receive the gold medal and to reinstate the general's place in the Huang Family shrine. Here are a few early excerpts from Master Huang's Family Memoir in progress:

Massacre, Air raid, Typhoon, Shipwreck, Rescue---- **How Life began for Chungliang Al Huang**

Summer of 1937, I was a fetus of eight months in my mother's womb in Nanjing, the capitol city of China; my father was sent by the Chinese government as an envoy to warn America of the imminent Japanese global ambition. My mother, the reluctant head of a household of three generations barely managed to escape the horrendous "Nanking (Nanjing) Massacre". Waiting in the port city of Shanghai with scurrying refugees, on the day of my birth, the Japanese launched a full force air raid. The hospital staffs where my mother stayed were evacuated; she managed somehow on her own with my grandmother, a Mandarin lady with bound feet and women relatives, to deliver me in the empty, collapsing hospital.

Twelve days later, our entire household of thirty with grandmother, uncles and aunts, our five siblings and cous-

ins and household staffs, boarded the refugee boat, S.S. Hunan for safety. We were hit by typhoon on the South China Sea, killing most of the passengers on board. By some divine grace, our entire family was rescued to the temporary refugee camp in Hong Kong, and eventually went in hiding from the Japanese in the villages of Fujian province for eight long years.

Although I was merely a newborn, hardly able to have fully experienced the horrific journey of our family's hairsbreadth escape, I have managed to re-enact these vivid scenes in my imagination, through retellings of our dramatic saga from our elders:

Scene 1: Mother tied ropes around all the children in a chain gang as we pushed through the refugee crowd to the Shanghai ship dock, with grandma being carried high on a sedan chair, trailing along, waving and howling desperately to stay connected.

Scene 2: Surviving the typhoon, how mother gathered all the family members hovering atop the ship captain's quarter when the boat hit a giant rock and perched there till the rescue came. During the wait, not being able to produce milk for me, mother bit her fingers for me to suck on them. (Did I really suckle my mother's blood to survive? Or was she, just like mother could be, being intentionally melodramatic, had laid that "guilt trip" heavily on me?) But this I can visualize--Mother told me that she used bundles of money to wipe me in place of insufficient diaper supply--since wartime inflation had caused paper currency worthless!

Scene 3: During rescue, young women and children were first to board the lifeboats. Grandmother, still waiting with others perched above, was concerned about mother lacking milk to nurse me, threw down a tin can of condensed milk on the lifeboat, and accidentally hit another passenger on the head. Until her dying day, in her nightly meditation, grandma pleaded to the all-compassionate Guan Yin (Boddhisattva) to forgive her innocent trespass, and prayed for the health and well-being of that unfortunate unknown victim.

Scene 4: At the temporary refugee quarter in Hong Kong where our family huddled, our grandma, in her "Three inches golden lily bound feet", valiantly, showing her Manchurian royal tenacity, single-handedly warded off drunken British sailors knocking on the door, looking for a good time.

The family eventually settled at a small village, hosted in the community hostel, formerly an ancestral shrine. It was dark and spooky, especially at night when candles were lit for illumination. Ghost stories were told to the shrieking delight of children. We would plead for more, and were scared to death to get out at night to return to our quarters to sleep. Grandma wisely told



One of Huang family's ancestral tombstones in Hainan Island

us that on both of every person's shoulders, there were spirit candles ready to be lit by brave and courageous children. All we needed to do before going into the dark was simply snap our fingers just under our earlobes to light these candles, and with these imaginary halos around us, we all walked into the night heroically.

Another of Grandmother's wisdom stories during our Fujian village days....

Children found playgrounds wherever we could manage outside the shrine compound. While playing our hide and seek and other boisterous games, one of our favorite spots was around the abandoned old tombs nearby. When grandmother found this out, she taught us lessons about ancestral respect by telling us her dreams. She told us that a venerable old man appeared to her to tell her that he and his family of "ghosts" were most disturbed with those rowdy children playing on their tombs, especially annoyed with the naughty ones who urinated under the ancient pine trees shading the sites. In very gentle ways, grandmother put the terror in us, insinuating vindictive actions from these spirits. We immediately re-invented new games, shifting from unruly disrespect to graceful ancestral worship when we pretended that those tombs belonged to our own



Chungliang with relatives, receiving the President Hu Jintao's Gold Medal for his father's Heroism during the Sino-Japanese War

ancestors. We began sweeping and weeding at the sites, built altars for incense burning and lit candles to kowtow and pray for the health and wellbeing for the entire family.

Premier Zhou En-lai, the Cupid

My teenage years, from 1949 to 1955, were spent in exile from mainland China with my family, alongside the Nationalist government who had retreated to the Island of Taiwan. We harbored the optimism of making a glorious early comeback, returning to Nanjing, the pre-Communist Nationalist Capitol City where my father was the Chief of Police. Steeped in anti-Communist language jargon, including using metaphors turning Mao and most of his chief cohorts into hateful animals, we shouted slogans such as, "Sa Ju Ba Mao", which literally means, "Slaughter the pig, and pull its hair out!" (The Ju referred to Ju De, one of the Mao's top generals and has the same pronunciation as Ju, the pig; and, Mao, literally sounds and means hair!) But, in our household, another of these demonized Communist big shots, Premier Chou En-lai, was never the butt for derogatory abuse. He was always treated with great respect and affection. Indeed, it was very unlikely and abnormal behavior for a household of the then, Chief of Military Police in the Nationalist Taiwan.

A simple human reason for this: Zhou En-lai, many years earlier, was the matchmaker for my parents

at Huang-Pu Military Academy (the Chinese equivalent of West Point, the elitist academy founded by the Father of the Republic of China, Dr. Sun Yet-sen, which had its first commanding president, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek.)

My father, Huang Chen-wu, graduated in the first class of this historically renowned academy, where Zhou En-lai was Dean. My mother, Lee Jen-Ying, was one of the very few women later admitted to the academy, and graduated cum Laude in the 6th class. To be prepped for her audience with Generalissimo Chiang Zhou, sent my mother to be briefed by my father, then president of the Alumni association. It was love at the first sight for them. Zhou was their cupid and would forever receive their gratitude.

Father was born in a small village in Hainan Island on the southernmost tip of China. His ancestors had migrated from the Han Dynasty clan in the North; Very likely, his family was one of many outspoken literati who were banished to the place farthest from the Imperial Capitol. (The most famous of these exiles was the Sung Dynasty poet Su Tung-po, who also spent years on this, then, desolate island.) A young bright child, the village elders, on account of his gifts, saw it that he would continue with his education. As a young man, he ventured further south to Malaysia, and became the principal of a high school in Malacca. He also served for a time as editor-in-chief of a progressive newspaper, supporting overseas Chinese, who in their support to Dr. Sun Yet-sen, were ready to overthrow the deteriorating Manchu Dynasty.

On the other side, my mother was born in the Imperial household. Several generations back, her ancestors included an official in charge of the palatial compound of the wet nurses for the hundreds of imperial children. Others were sent to southern Chinese seaports in Fujian Province attempting to build a Navy to ward off foreign invasions. Ironically, after these Mandarins from Beijing had set up households and training ground in Fujian, the major funding for the Navy building stopped. Instead, that Navy money was re-allocated for building the Summer Palace in Beijing for the pleasure of the decadent Dowager Empress Tse-She.

For years, since the Manchu Dynasty was overthrown, the Chinese have continued to curse that "evil" woman for all the wrongs she had done to the country and the humiliations we had suffered, due to her closed mind and shortsightedness. But, the further irony, in retrospect, is this. If that Navy money was actually used for the Chinese Navy, the wars would probably still have occurred and all would have been wasted and lost by now. Instead, we have this symbolic "token" stone boat in the Summer Palace in Beijing for generations to come, for all tourists (including all the foreigners) to enjoy forever!

My grandfather, Lee He-Yun was in charge of transportation on the Ming River in Fujian Province, an official position in the last days of the Manchu Dynasty. Together with his own generation of younger and more enlightened Mandarins, he was keenly aware of the dying Imperialists, and began to secretly join in and support the revolution led by Dr. Sun. For a short period, grandfather worked with Dr. Sun's son, Sun Keh, writing and distributing many propaganda leaflets to the Chinese populace.

My mother, Jen-Ying, was born during this turbulent transition between dynasties. As the revolutionary crowd stormed the Mandarin households, grandmother had to be sheltered in the nearby British Consulate to deliver her baby girl safely. Mother, being the youngest born in a new era, was spared the cruel custom of foot-binding, whereas her older sister was a victim. (Although unbound later, she continued to suffer the injury, and was semi-crippled for the rest of her life.) The Lee household was split with this ambivalence. One side totally liberated to be citizens of the New Republic, the other, nostalgic with Imperial honor and all the privileged trimmings. My grandmother, an elegant and traditional Mandarin lady, maintained that my mother, at her birth, had received the "Huang Ma Gua", the golden threaded yellow jacket bestowed to all Manchu Imperial off-spring. As a member of its glorious lineage; traditionally, she would also receive a lifelong allowance from the Imperial Palace. In other words, she was born a little princess. The Manchus called these imperial female children, Geh Geh. Alas, all the benefits accompanying this imperial honor evaporated along with the birth of

the New Republic.

This little Geh Geh was distinctly a "tomboy" since childhood, bright, smart and unruly, spoiled by my grandfather. Unlike her elder sister who coiffed long braided hair, dressed in the old-fashioned way and walked daintily with her unbound, wounded feet, mother sported pageboy short hair, played outside the boudoir with servant kids on the street, and had a liberated good old time. She was treated as a little genius, a quick learner with whatever classical studies required for her education. She had instant recall, and could memorize long passages from the classics and ancient poetry with just a few first glances. Grandfather was proud and pleased with his baby daughter, and was protective in pampering her unruly indulgence, ignoring the protests from grandma and other womenfolk in the family.

Instead of keeping up her studies within the household with tutors, mother went to a Westernized missionary high school, later entered the Jing Ling Women's College to absorb progressive education for young women. Still she was dissatisfied, and continued to venture away from confined studies. She told us about her climbing out of the dormitory windows to join the protest rallies, and broke stained glassed windows of several Christian churches.

Upon her dismissal from the college — she joined the Northern Expedition to fight the warlords — she was wounded in her right knee, and was decorated for her valor. Due to the celebrated heroism of these few young women patriots leaving their privileged families to join the revolution in the front line, they were recruited by the propaganda unit to be the first women cadets to join the Huang Pu Military Academy.

While father laid down his writing brush to pick up a gun, joining the military to serve his country, mother also left her bourgeois family to become a woman warrior. Their lives would intertwine as alumni of this historic military academy, the Huang Pu, named after the tributary of the Yangtze River flowing in and out of Shanghai to and from the Eastern China Sea.

The mutual attraction was palpable at the briefing session while Chen-wu coached the bright-eyed young cadet Jen-Ying for her audience with the Generalissimo. Unfortunately, the fact that Chen-wu was already a married man with two small children made it necessary for them to maintain their relationship on the spiritual and platonic level. They shared their dedication and patriotic passion for the new China. They discussed their love for the classics, especially poetry. They wrote heroic poems to each other to disguise and sublimate their human desires. It was the worst and the best of times for both during this period of their closeted courtship. When mother finally was free to share this with me in her late seventies, one evening after we had much wine and shed a few tears remembering father, she confessed

that it was impossible for both of them to refrain from trespassing that taboo line, the moment they found the excuse when father's wife left him when he was in house arrest to settle a diplomatic dispute.

Young general Huang was in charge of Nanjing's military police patrolling the railroad route that Generalissimo Chiang often traveled. One of his subsidiaries mistakenly shot a British derelict bumming along the rail, taken for an assassin. It caused a major international incident. To appease the British, Chen-wu, the commanding superior, was put in house arrest. His wife, an illiterate woman betrothed to him since childhood from Hainan Island was shaken and taking their older child, a daughter, fled back to the South, leaving her two-year old brother Hwei-liang behind. Jen-Ying suddenly became the caretaker of this child, and took full charge of father's household.

Out of frustration of this unfair sacrifice, father took ill in his "Soft" jail. When his condition worsened, and not being able to leave to receive proper treatment at a clinic, mother journeyed to Lu Shan, the summer retreat for the Generalissimo to plead father's case. With special permission, father was secretly allowed to take the cure in a nearby hospital. Still he had to return to his house jail for one more year until the British embassy was satisfied. As soon as the period of legal acceptance to annul father's marriage, based on abandonment was fulfilled, Jen-Yin married Chen-wu, "in Jail"! Seven months later, their first son, our second brother was born.

Genius, rebel, victim, martyr Eldest Half-brother, Hwei-Liang

He was eight years older, our half-brother, the eldest of six Huang siblings. He played the violin divinely, sang beautifully; his brush calligraphy and artistic skills were awe-inspiring. From our adoring eyes he could do everything brilliantly. He was a genius.

All through our childhood years, he seemed to be always away, in boarding schools elsewhere. Only occasionally he was home, and then, he was gone again. He was the mysterious, aloof eldest brother all of us younger siblings admired and longed to get to know better.

In 1948, father was the Chief of Police in the Capitol City of Nanjing. Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government, conceding to the imminent victory of Mao Tse-tong's Communist Army, began its retreat. One by one, we children withdrew from our respective schools to avoid public panic; gradually we began our family's journey south. We took refuge in grandmother's big house on Lantern Alley in the heart of Fuzhou, the southern city directly across the Taiwan Strait from the Island of Formosa. Eldest brother was attending the

progressive Yin-Hwa University, while we younger ones were enrolled in the subsidiary middle and grade schools.

Grandmother's house was a traditional grand mansion with separate living quarters, divided by formal gateways and open courtyards. Eldest brother requested to live by himself in the farthest front entrance quarter, with most privacy. He had his own study and studio, and a meeting room where many of his friends congregated. Only occasionally, with his permission, the younger ones were allowed to visit him. It all seemed very innocent at the time.

I remember sneaking over secretly, to hear him practice his violin; often I could hear murmuring of heated discussions out of his meeting room; and watched many of his friends come and go with weighted gait and very serious expressions. Only after eldest brother's sudden disappearance in 1949, shortly before the Nationalist retreat to Taiwan, the family realized that he was actually holding secret meetings with all his Communist Party friends, strategizing and coordinating with the People's Republic of China for the final takeover.

Mother was devastated, feeling greatly responsible and not able to report the truth to father, who until his dying days refused to believe that his eldest son had betrayed him to join the other side. After we had all evacuated to Taiwan, and through all his remaining years with the Nationalist government, father insisted that our eldest brother had been captured by the communist against his will. He would continue to search for him and wait for his eventual homecoming. Father insisted that because eldest brother's name, Hwei-liang literally meant "returning to being good and righteous", he would certainly come home one day, and all would be well.

Soon after eldest brother's disappearance, our family at grandma's house in Fujian were alerted by father, still in command dutifully in the Nanjing Capitol in the north, that the Nationalist government was losing ground fast. We began to prepare for our escape to Taiwan, waiting for a boat big enough to take all our family members to safety, including grandmother's entire household and her priceless antique art treasures, all packed in large crates ready to be shipped.

One fateful night before any such vessel for retreat was available, our entire household was awakened to get organized immediately, ready to escape. We were rushed to the nearby military airfield, boarded a plane only equipped with parachute jumping gears. All of us, including grandmother, were strapped along the sides of the plane taking off across the Taiwan Strait for the Island of Formosa. The following day, Fuzhou City was "liberated" by the Communist Red Army. If we had not managed that hasty midnight escape, the entire family of the Nationalist Commanding General Huang would have been captured and executed.

The Saga continued from both sides of the Taiwan Strait, while the Nationalist government was re-situated on the Island, temporarily safe from further victories of the Liberation Army, protected by the Seventh Fleet dispatched from the USA.

Separated by the Taiwan Strait through the years, we had no news at all of what could have happened to eldest brother. When he left in the middle of that night in Fuzhou, the only item he took with him was his violin. The unanswered question of his sudden disappearance would continue to haunt us.

Soon after Nixon/Kissinger resumed cordial diplomacy with China, thirty-three years since we fled the mainland China, in 1982, I finally could return to Fuzhou. My search to find our brother Hwei-liang began.

And here is the sad and heroic story of our eldest brother.

Abandoned by his own mother at age two, Hwei-liang was a moody and introverted child. Nevertheless, he was relatively happy and trusting until his adolescent year, when gossips and typical large family disputes began to taint his innocence and trust. He grew distant, and voluntarily requested to study and live in boarding schools away from home.

After that, eldest brother's infrequent homecoming became a family event. Since father was usually away at the frontline fighting the Japanese, grandma and mother would consciously lavish special treats to welcome his return. He became more a special guest instead of a regular member of the family. For us younger siblings, eldest brother was bigger than life, an enigma.

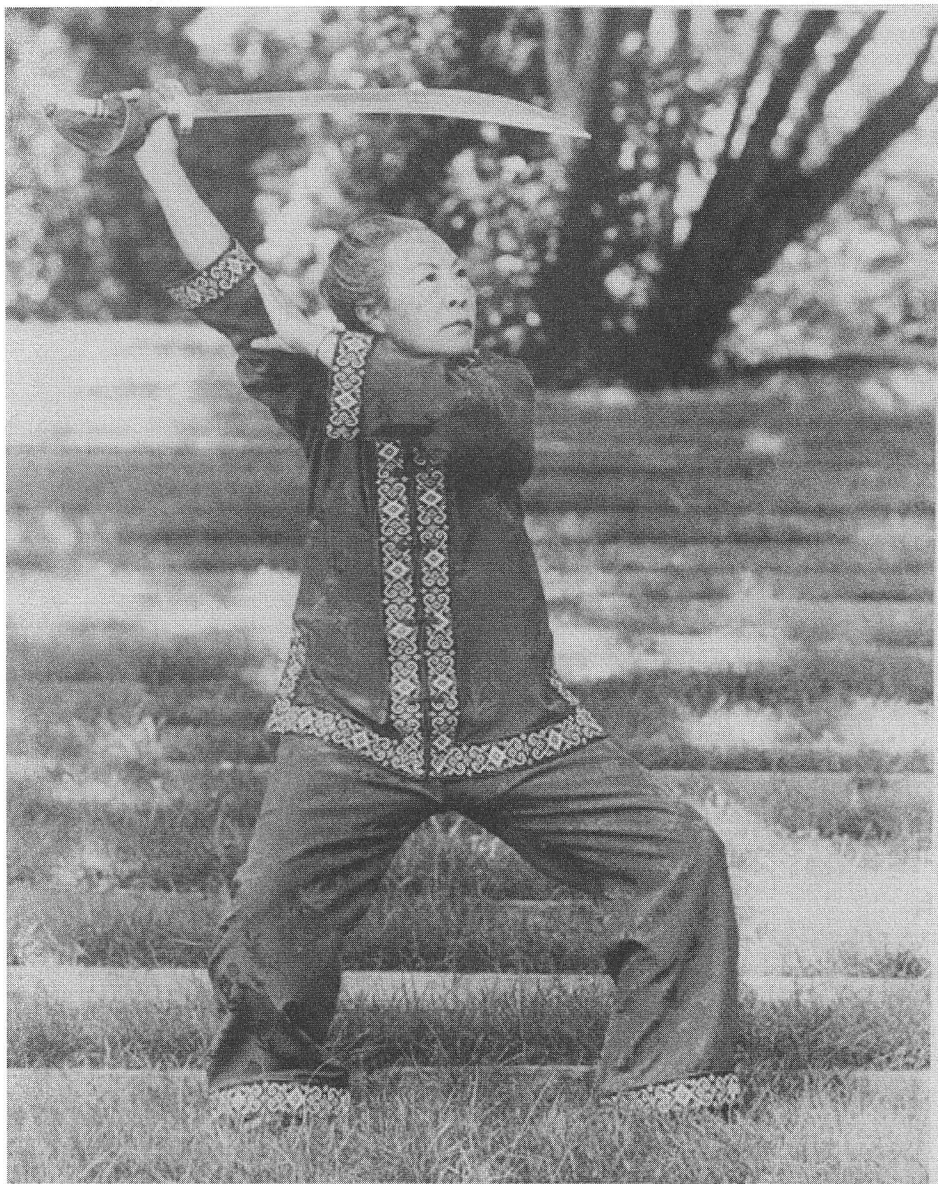
Always a thoughtful youth, keenly aware of the corruption and imminent defeat of the Nationalist government, Hwei-liang was a perfect candidate to be recruited by the Communist Party. He was passionate and politically savvy, a natural leader. Soon he was in charge of organizing propaganda activities with secret meetings and special missions in the Fujian Province. Being discreet and distant from the family's watch, he was able to continue his anti-Nationalist work right at home, without any suspicion.



Chungliang and his father

Only on my second trip back to Fuzhou in 1984, I was able to trace eldest brother's fateful final days. From the local elders, I discovered an underground street theater play, depicting the martyrdom of a group of university students soon after the Communist liberation. To my shock and sadness, the main character in the play was Huang Hwei-liang.

The drama unfolds first describing Hwei-liang's misfortune to be born in a bourgeois family, with a villainous father serving a corrupt government and executing the dirty work for the Nationalist leader. The drama praises Hwei-liang's righteousness and fortitude for rejecting his family for the glory of the Communist Party. The twist of fate came one night, during the chaotic first months of takeover. With many fractions of the Liberation Army vying for power control, a secret



Chungliang's mother as "The Woman Warrior"

meeting was called at a secluded hilltop house. Eagerly, Hwei-liang led two dozen idealist college friends, all with similar Nationalist family background, to attend the victory gathering. On their way approaching the hilltop, Hwei-liang had a premonition of something afool. Intuitively, he alerted those following him to halt when he forged ahead testing the ground. Before he approached the designated meeting place, he was gunned down. Only years later, was the Communist Party willing to acknowledge this disgraceful incident; while the power controlling rivals used the excuse of distrust for all members with questionable background. Hwei-liang was one their first victims selected to be

liquidated.

This tragic incident was dramatized in folk stories and street theater for years in the Fuzhou countryside before the government finally took responsibility and publicly expressed regret for sacrificing all those brilliant and patriotic young men. A monument was eventually erected on the spot, listing all the victims of that fateful night as martyrs for the Party. Among the fallen, the name, Huang Hwei-liang was etched into the marble, gilt with gold. Our eldest brother Huang Hwei-liang was not quite twenty years old. ☯

Chungliang Al Huang began practicing Tai Ji and studying the Taoist classics as a child in China. His seminal book, *Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain: The Essence of Tai Ji*, published in 1973, a transcription of his teaching during the early days of Esalen Institute, has become a classic in 14 languages. His unique style of teaching his students to fulfill their "human potentials" has garnered accolades and nurtured students of life around the world. Thirty seven years later, this enlivening body of knowledge/wisdom, accumulated and crystallized into gems of structure guiding forces, are ready to be transmitted to those who truly wish to gain knowledge, wisdom and expertise to become what Chuangliang calls the "Living Tao

Practitioners", the perpetual students of lifelong learning who have and will become mentors to others. For the very first time since the inception of the Living Tao Foundation 33 years ago, Master Huang is committed to continue with his teaching, to include a training program to be held in August of 2010 at the River House, the home base of Living Tao's Foundation's Lan Ting Institute in Gold Beach, Oregon. He will personally offer his lifelong learning, guiding those who are ready to be inspired by his work, to truly commit to concentrated in-depth studies, worthy to receive and take responsibility with this "Living Tao" legacy into their lives. Contact: www.livingtao.org or info@livingtao.org.