

The Empty Vessel

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Chuang Tzu
The Way of Nourishing Life

Nudan Practice and
the Modern Woman

Taoists, Doctors and
Shamans

Nourishing Woman

A Taoist Master's Search
for His Chinese Ancestry



A Taoist Master's Search For His Chinese Ancestry

Part Three

Chungliang Al Huang



Master Huang demonstrating taiji at Bubbling Springs Temple at Drum Mountain in Fuzhou, his old childhood friend, the abbot Pu Yu, stands in brown Buddhist robe with a cane, on the left.

"Women Hold Up Half of the Sky!" This proclamation by the late Chairman Mao Ze Dong 毛澤東 at the beginning of the inauguration of the People's Republic of China, dramatically changed the fate of a whole generation of new women in China. But for the past thousands of years, women in China, as well as women all over the world, have suffered unjust human rights with many tragic stories to tell. Here are a few stories from my own family history.

My New-found Auntie Yu Zhi **Who was she?**

My father's way of seeing and dealing with things was to always focus on the present and look forward; he seldom talked about his birthplace, nor reminisced on his youth during his life time. So, it was quite a shock when I discovered in the Huang family association's book during my summer pilgrimage in 2009 back to father's village in Hainan Island 海南島 that he had a sister named Yu-Zhi, who had committed suicide at the tender age of seventeen, drowning herself in the lake after unhappily submitting

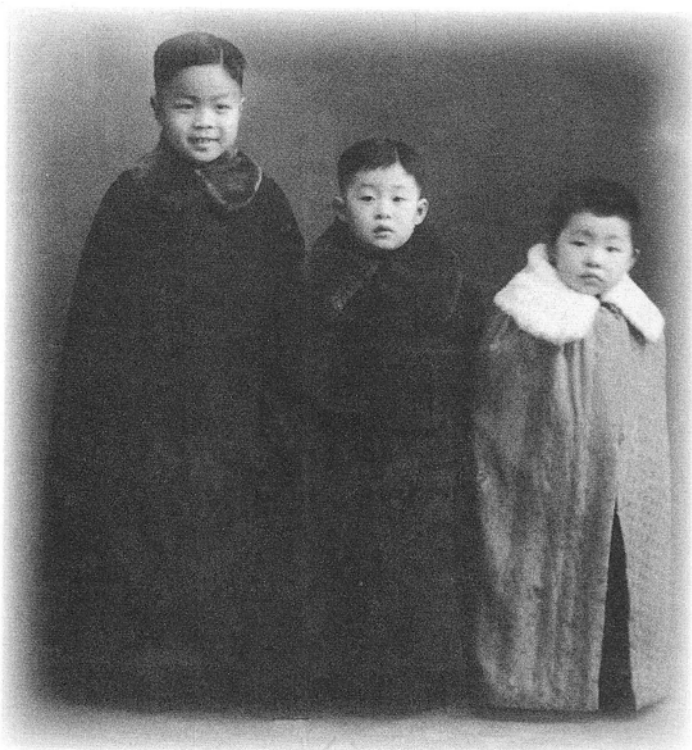
to an arranged marriage to an older man. Obviously it brought shame to the family at the time, and she became a non-person, never to be mentioned again. Sadly, in the old-fashioned Chinese thinking, "Marrying a daughter away, is like pouring water from a bowl, never can it be retrieved!" It became an affair of the husband's family. Of course I tried to find out all I could about this aunt who was clearly a tragic heroine in our Huang family saga. Expectedly, the younger generation of the family had no idea such a person existed; and I could not get any answers from the few elders, who clearly wished to put this sad and shameful incident behind. But I persisted until one of my nephews volunteered that there was a son born to our aunt before her suicide. Perhaps he could locate and arrange for him to come see me at my hotel before my departure the following day. I waited with hope to meet this long lost relative but in vain. He was not around to be found. Since my return, this missing link has tied a knot in my heart, desperately needing to be unraveled. I have vowed not to rest until I can find more clues to reconstruct this



Mother and Elder Sister

tragic short life of my aunt Yu-zhi. The thought of my unhappy young aunt will continue to haunt me until I can find a way to reconstruct her existence to be reckoned in our family tree. Until then, I must find solace through other means, to connect, somehow, these missing links, hoping to make sense, and learn more about this tragedy through other women's lives of that era in China. To begin, a similar tragedy was the story of my other aunt. My mother's elder sister, who was married to a weak man, a mama's boy, died young from melancholia turning to consumption. This was a typical story of many young Chinese daughters-in-law who were unfortunate to marry into households with abusive mothers-in-law. According to the stories we heard, auntie Lee's husband was a sweet, sensitive man, but totally submissive to his overpowering mother, never able to stand by his wife when things went wrong. Auntie Lee was quite a few years older than our mother. When she was born, during the final years of the Manchu dynasty, she had her feet bound, being the daughter of a Manchu official with Han lineage. Her feet were unbound after the fall of Manchu, but the bones never quite recovered to allow her to have a normal gait. She continued to wobble and walked as if her feet were still bound all through her adult life. Mother remembered her elder sister with great affection. She often talked about how beautiful and graceful she was; but always, added, "how tragic" to conclude her lamenting remembrance. Once our aunt married into the Xu family, she was no longer a Lee family member. Her unhappiness in her new family made it impossible for the Lee family to intervene. Luckily for mother, born at the beginning of

the Republic, a modern young woman, she was rebelliously righteous, she would endeavor to campaign for new rights for women, especially for unfortunate "daughters-in-law" under the tyranny of vicious "mothers-in-law". Ironically, her effort only exacerbated further abuse from auntie's mother-in-law and the cowardly submission of her weak husband. Divorce was out of the question at that time. So, mother and all the Lee family members simply had to suffer alongside, their hands tied, helplessly submitting to our aunt's fate and destiny; until finally, they gathered to mourn her untimely early death. They shed tears in the same way they would from reading the novels of their time, particularly of the popular saga, "Jia" 家 (The Family) — often referred to as the Chinese "Gone With The Wind" by the celebrated author Ba Jin 巴金. In this novel, the most tragic episode was of the forbidden love of the young master for a pretty maid servant, who was not able to seek support from him in time to prevent her from being forced to marry a rich old widower. Out of despair she drowned herself, plunging into the garden well. So like the fate of our recent discovery of our non-existent auntie Yu-zhi! Of somewhat happier fate and a balance to the tragic reality of females of that era, we did have the success stories of mother's cousins from her maternal side of the Family. The three sisters, daughters of our grand-uncle Zhang, were all beautiful, bright and intelligent. They were, like our mother, born after the birth of the New Republic, to become the New Women who eventually were able to "hold up half the sky", just like their male siblings. By choice, each of the three sisters entered Bei Da 北大, Yen Jing 燕京 and Qing



Three elder siblings, Hui-liang, Chao-liang and Yu-liang in Nanjing

Hua 青華 Universities respectively — three of Beijing's best known, and most difficult to enter, "Ivy League" style universities. They all became known as each college's "Xiao Hwa" 校花 (the Flower of the School) — a title bestowed with the same adulation and popularity, equivalent to a "Homecoming Queen" or "Sweetheart of Sigma Chi" in American colleges. They also jointly shared the reputation of breaking the hearts of all the handsome suitors while they reigned on campus, and ended up marrying the least popular but most intelligent men on campus, often considered homely and nerdy, absent-minded genius scholars/scientists. We heard often of this gossiping lament, describing all three marriages of our beautiful aunts to be the cases of "planting beautiful flowers on cow dung!" The eldest of our three aunts married a prominent scholar/professor Jiang Zi Ying 蔣子英 from Beijing University, who had unruly long hair and a shaggy beard, and donned a pair of thick eyeglasses which looked like the bottoms of bottles. "A Thousand Degrees" (of myopia) was one of his nicknames, the other, affectionately used by all, was Lao Wuzi, 老鬍子 The Old Beard. During 1948-49, while most of the country was fleeing and wondering which government, Nationalist or Communist to follow, we managed to get further acquainted with our eldest cousin-auntie and family. They stayed with us at grandma's big house in Fuzhou for a couple of months before they made the decision to return to Beijing. I remember Da Biao Yi 大表姨, mother's eldest cousin, especially well. She was in her late-30s then, still very beautiful but in a ruffled way from lack of self-care. She possessed

an innate intelligence and quick wit, very natural in her expressiveness of ease and confidence. The mutual respect and affection between her and the absentminded professor husband was palpable. Watching them together with their family intact, made us children miss our father even more; he was still at the capital Nanjing dealing with the last minute crisis of a government about to dissolve in retreat. One of father's duties as the Chief of Police of the Capital City was to oversee transporting all movable national treasures from the museums in the old cities of Nanjing and Beijing, by jumbo jets, trucks and boats to safety in Taiwan, to be housed in what is now the National Palace Museum in Taiwan. Again, our mother was the one to hold the 3-generation family together, getting organized for retreat at a moment's notice. As children, we were unaware of the realistic danger of our fate, and how seriously our lives would be altered forever when the time came to make our final escape from the Communists. Gradually, piece by piece, our family treasures and antique relics were carefully packed and crated, ready to follow us on the next scheduled passenger ship across the Taiwan Strait to Taipei. A vivid remembrance was watching the meticulous way the movers packed grandma's white porcelain Guan Yin 觀音 (the Chinese female Bodhisattva) into the crate. This 5-foot tall exquisitely made Guan Yin was an artwork from the legendary Jing De Zhen 景德鎮 Village in Jiang Xi 江西 province where the most beautifully crafted porcelain utensils and figurines were produced. Alas, all our family treasures, including our white porcelain Guan Yin had to be left behind when our family was summoned in the middle of the night, rushed to the military



Three generations with Grandma

airport for immediate escape from the onslaught of the Communist Red Army, which was approaching Fuzhou City much sooner than we anticipated. That night, we were awakened from deep slumber, told to carry what we could in small carry-ons, and herded into several jeeps headed straight to the airport. We were literally shoved into a small aircraft, normally used for parachuters, strapped in along the sides (including our grandma with bound feet) for immediate take off for the airfield across the narrow Taiwan Strait. Only months later, when a few of the family staff left behind had managed to escape to join us in Taipei, did we learn how the "liberation army" soldiers, as well as the looters during that chaotic time, came upon our family treasures, hoarding, stealing and destroying them all. One of our most faithful family retainers, Chen De Fa 陳德發, a former detective from the local police, tried valiantly to protect our household and was beaten so badly that he was reduced to half his former self, never quite recovering from the abuse.

We knew her as Ah Yee 阿姨 — "auntie."

As children we knew her as Ah Yee, meaning Auntie in our Manchurian dialect. She was our housekeeper, servant, our nanny, and mother's right hand helper-companion. She was a small woman with short cropped hair, and a kind smiling face already lined with age while still young. She was strong and energetic, always running about in our large 3-generation household, taking care of everything and everyone, serving grandmother, mother and all the children's needs. Mother called her Er-Jie 二姐, meaning "number two" sister, we call her Ah Yee, affectionately, auntie. Ah Yee was sold to the Lee household when she was only five years old as a maid and playmate to our mother, the younger mistress. She was merely two years older than mother; and

her job was to play with and care for mother. Grandma took pity on this orphan girl and emotionally adopted her in a place between her own two daughters. Therefore, she was mother's number two sister, Er-Jie. But, in those days, a servant girl was always a servant girl. She lived and ate with the servants in the servants' quarter when she was not playing and caring for our mother. They grew up together as sisters, yet a world apart in their separate social status. Grandmother's family was the only family Ah-Yee ever had. She was grateful to belong and to be in service. She loved my mother as her own sister, also her younger mistress. She was aware of her position and always maintained her proper place in our household. Although Ah Yee never officially went to school, she was a bright girl; she learned through exposure, vicariously, as she picked up knowledge along the way. She was smart. She managed to read and write, and was literate in her practical ways. In her late teens, grandmother arranged a marriage for her with a good man, who was also employed in our household as gardener and all-around caretaker. They had 3 boys and one girl. Grandmother saw to it that the three boys all went to school to be educated. The girl was betrothed early to a nice young farmer in the village and was sent away with respectable dowry to give her family a good start. It was a charitable thing to do for a servant's daughter. The folks around called grandmother Guan Yin, the compassionate Bodhisattva, because of her kind heart and thoughtful deeds for the poor and those in need. We the Huang children addressed their three sons as cousins; but, again, they stayed in their appropriate social places, lived and ate with servants. Between them and us, there was a world apart in social standing. We all knew and accepted it as the norm. We got along well, played together



Reunion with Ah-Yee and family in Fujian

and were devoted to one another with mutual affection. Ah Yee loved us all. She exuded warmth with her big heart, which we all cherished. She was industriously attentive, always the last person to retire. One of my sweet memories was her late night rounds checking in the children's quarter, to be sure we were all properly tucked in bed; in the summer, she would tie pieces of cozy small blankets (Du Bao, 肚包 literally, tummy wrap) around our bellies to keep our vital organs warm; and to be sure that our mosquito nets tucked around our beds had no gaps. Ah Yee and family members continued to serve our family through the last days in Fuzhou until we had to make a midnight hairbreadth escape to Taiwan in 1949. I remember vividly that frightful night at the military airfield, trying to squeeze on board as many people and belongings as possible. It was clear that only the Huang/Lee family members could manage on the small rescue airplane. The rest of the large household, including Ah Yee's entire family would have to stay behind. Tearful farewell at that final separation was heartbreakingly difficult. We wept all the way on the plane crossing the Taiwan Strait to safety. Although one of Ah Yee's sons, our cousin Zhang Hsing 占新, did eventually managed to join us in Taiwan, no further communication with Ah Yee was possible for thirty five years. In 1984 when I finally went back to Fujian with my Lan Ting Institute students, I searched for and found the other two cousins and learned that Ah Yee had been living

with her daughter, Bao Yin 寶英, in the village near the Fuzhou City. We arranged a long overdue reunion. On that day, my two cousins managed to travel from two different Chinese cities to fetch me at my hotel. Together with several of my senior students from America, we boarded the mini-bus to see auntie Ah Yee. Joyful tears began to flow from the moment of the reunion with our cousins in the hotel lobby; it would continue on the bus, and all through the day. As we got off the bus to begin our walk on the small trail along the rice fields toward the village, we could hear the sound of firecrackers exploding to announce this special occasion. And soon, we were surrounded by the cheering villagers crowding to witness our momentous reunion. From afar I caught the sight of a stooped over old woman scurrying towards me. It had to be Ah Yee. I ran toward her, kneeled down in front of her, embraced her, repeatedly kowtowing, pounding my head to the ground; both of us choking with emotion. As we finally propped up from the ground, gazing at and hugging each other incessantly, there was not a dry eye among all the onlookers surrounding us. All through the day, we reminisced, exchanging stories of the past 35 years and news of all the loved ones not present. Tape recordings were made, photos of all of us with red and puffy eyes were taken. Later, a big family feast at the local small restaurant where we toasted, "gun bei" 乾杯 (empty the cup!) with our warm rice wine all evening long. The last time I saw Ah Yee was a few years later in Beijing

when her eldest son insisted that she should live with them in the Capitol City. She was getting old, restless and lonely in the sterile concrete government assigned 5th floor apartment with no elevator, mostly alone while the others were busily working. We heard later she managed to return to the South to be with her daughter again, much happier with the village life. She died peacefully amongst her country folks.

Qing Ming 清明 Festival and The Bubbling Spring Temple 湧泉寺 on Drum Mountain 鼓山
Safely distanced from the frontline of the battle defending against the Japanese invasion, from 1937-45, our family managed to live in a relatively calm southern coast village in Fujian Province. Annually, around the Qing Ming 清明 (clear and bright) Spring Festival, all Chinese go on pilgrimages to pay homage at their ancestral shrines and tombs. Our family would hire a couple of fishing boats to take us to the foothill of our family tombs, nestled by a sloping mount around a meandering riverbed, next to a small nunnery. According to Chinese geomancy, our family's tombsites had the most auspicious Feng Shui Geomancy 風水 (Wind and Water Chi-energy) advantages to ensure continuing good fortune and prosperity for all our family clans for generations to come. Upon arrival, we would all go to work, weeding and sweeping the graves, then setting up altars on which to place bowls and cups of fruits, food and wine; we lit candles and incense sticks and burnt tons of paper Yin-Ding 銀錠, lotus shaped gold and silver plated old money. We bowed and kowtowed according to the proper order of lineage and age; silently meditating, paying homage to our ancestors and praying for their eternal peace in heaven, and for their protection from the other world. After the ritual, we would continue our river journey to the foothill of the famous Drum Mountain 鼓山, just outside of Fuzhou 福州 City, and take the day-long ascent to the Bubbling Spring Temple 湧泉寺 at the peak. The climb on narrow stone steps was steep and winding, with many rest stops along the way. It was always fun to stop at small kiosks selling snacks and Buddhist relics to sample and linger. Grandmother with her wobbly bound feet, was carried in a sedan chair by two footmen. We rambunctious children ran ahead, back and forth to annoy the adult entourage, urging a speedier arrival at our temple guest quarters. Our usual stay at this Buddhist mountain retreat was about a week. The whole family would join the monks in fasting rituals, eating only light portions of vegetarian meals. Adults attended lectures given by the abbot and senior monks. We children were turned loose to wander and play in the safe surroundings of the temple compound full of interesting nooks and crannies with hidden treasures to explore. One of our favorite games was feeding hundreds of golden-orange and color-speckled Koi fishes with the bagel-like Chinese dough rings at the large "salvation" pond 放生池 next to the main hall. Another fun pastime was drinking the natural spring water bubbling out of the source, and wading in the stream under the waterfalls cascading down the moss-covered stony cliffs.

For myself, from age five on, I remembered this annual pilgrimage well; and my favorite thing to do was joining the novice monks at their chanting rituals, morning, noon and night. I loved the musical tone of the chants, and the rhythm of the fish-faced woodblocks' beats. Every day I made my way into the midst of these young monks sitting in lotus positions in the temple. I was friendly with one particular monk, who also took a liking to me and helped me to join in smoothly. Without obvious knowledge or true understanding of any of these Buddhist sutras, I simply followed along, enjoying the sound and the rhymes, vicariously getting into my personal trance, joyfully participating in these daily musical/rhythmical spiritual rituals. In the beginning, the grownups regarded my choice innocent and harmless, and happily allowed my indulgence. But when the abbot sought mother and grandmother out to point out that perhaps there could be "Yuan Gen" 緣根 (root/origin of fate/destiny) in my potential to become a Buddhist monk some day, they grew concerned and immediately pulled me away to encourage more childlike games with the others. Heaven forbid, from our family's position and point of view; the thought of one of their male heirs becoming a monk was unthinkable! Forty odd years later, in 1984, when I revisited the Bubbling Spring Temple, the presiding abbot Pu Yu 普雨 方丈 greeted me with special fascination and unusual affection when he discovered my family's pre-Communist background. He proceeded to remind me that he was indeed the young novice monk with whom I so much enjoyed chanting on those annual family retreats during my pre-teen years in China. We reminisced of the good old days when the "bubbling spring" was still pure and flowing; and how immaculate the environment around sanctuaries used to be. That was before we produced plastic bottles and all the modern pollutants; the paved road allowed busloads of tourists to come and go day after day, to snap photos and leave more litter behind. Families and individuals who used to come for quiet retreats and stay for days were no more. Commercialism replaced spirituality; now, running this temple is, for him, just an administrative job. He longed to return to the olden days when we could chant for the sake of chanting in daily meditation, instead of being hired to chant as a tourist attraction. He did however tell me of one upbeat deed with distinct glee on his face. During the horrendous time of the "Cultural Revolution," when young Red Guards waved Mao's Red Books, shouting "Down with the Four Olds," burning classic books and sutras, and destroying temple arts and relics, he managed to salvage all their valuable old things, hidden behind the temple altars with fake walls. On the surface of these walls, he would copy Communist slogans and Mao's sayings to avoid destruction. He attributed this ingenious deterring method to the late Premier Zhou En-lai 周恩來, who, with similar tactics, also managed to save many old temple relics during this chaotic, mindless, regrettable period of modern Chinese history. To celebrate our historic reunion, I was invited by my old friend, the abbot 普雨, to conduct a Tai Ji

demonstration, and led the monks in a series of movement meditations to add to their daily sitting rituals. They promised me that they would keep up with this body-mind balanced spiritual exercise. I do hope they will.

Note: In the last issue regarding the story of my father making the recording for us children from the Empire State Building in America, the disk is called "bakelite disc;" — there was no "vinyl" disc in the late 30s yet!



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, is a transcription of his teaching during the early days of Esalen Institute, and 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 Chungliang 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, in addition to continuing with his teaching, to include a training program to be held at the River House, the home base of Living Tao 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, and willing to truly commit to concentrated in-depth studies, worthy to receive and take responsibility for this "Living Tao" legacy in their lives. Contact: www.livingtao.org or info@livingtao.org.