ANDREW LUM: THE DRAGON AND THE PHOENIX

by Bill Danks

Bill Danks was captain of the Temple University karate team for three years and has studied Korean tae gyun and aikido. He currently practices Yang style tai chi chuan and is a graduate student in the Department of Drama and Theatre at the University of Hawaii where he is training to be a screenwriter.

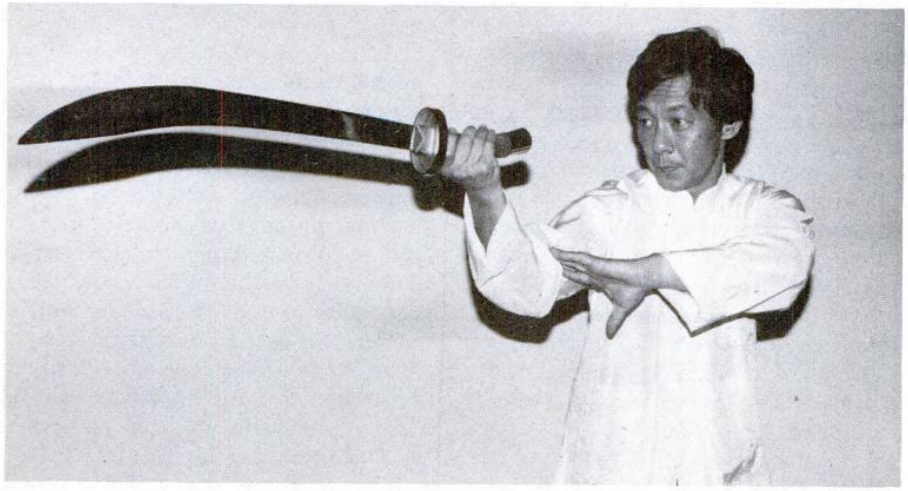
It's an often-heard story in the martial arts—the sickly young child who begins to study a fighting system under a renowned expert and who then emerges years later as a master in his own right. Such a theme appears again and again in legends. In the case of Hawaiian Andrew Lum, however, the story is a true one. It's his autobiography.

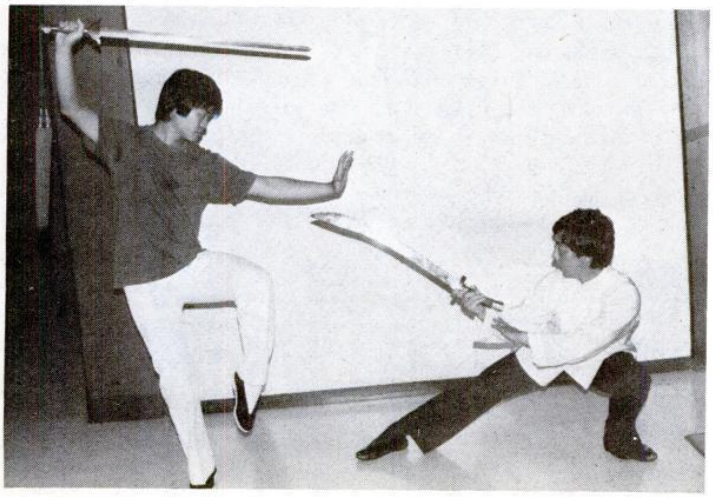
"At the age of six," he relates, "my health was very poor. My godfather Lum Tai Yung was a master in the Tao style of kung fu, so my family had me start training under him."

By the age of 12, the younger Lum's health had not only improved, but he had developed such skill in the art that he was named an assistant instructor. Ten years later, he also began the study of tai chi chuan under Tung Fu-ling. The latter's father, Tung Ying-kit, had been the chief disciple of the legendary Yang Chan-po who was a direct descendant of the classical Yang style's founder. Lum mastered the internal system and was given permission to teach by Professor Tung.

"I have practiced and taught both styles for many years now," says the still very youthful looking instructor. "While tai chi chuan seems to have become a very familiar art to many people, Tao style is something rarely seen these days. The name of the system refers to its *natural* way of fighting without any preconceived notions or

Andrew Lum (in white) demonstrates the Tao style with senior Francis Pang (left). Top: "Wang"—circle; middle: "Com"—hold; bottom: "Hoi"—release end sequence.





plans. There's no strict form in Tao style. It's like water that flows wherever it can. You just respond naturally to whatever it is that your opponent does."

Does that make it as "soft" a style as tai chi?

"No, Tao style is a bit harder than tai chi, yet much softer than say most of the Shaolin forms."

Lum's classes are conducted four nights a week at the beautiful Chinese Buddhist Temple in Honolulu's serene Nuuanu Valley. The temple is a local landmark and quite conducive of the relaxed atmosphere that permeates Lum's teaching style.

At a typical session, a group of 20 or 30 students follow senior assistant Francis Pang as he leads them through breathing exercises and the long solo form of Yang style tai chi chuan.

New students form another smaller group that receives more individualized instruction from another one of Lum's assistants. Here and there on the temple floor are occasional lone students practicing specialized techniques by themselves.

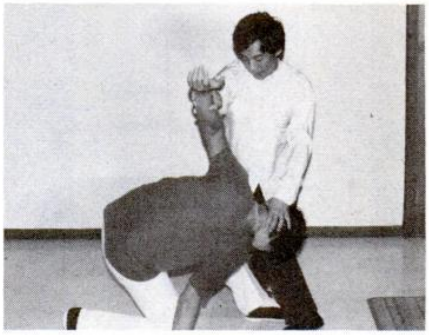
Lum walks around the hall observing and correcting as he goes. His manner is always interested and friendly. The students respond in kind.

When Lum has an advanced student demonstrate the Tao style's basic "16 Steps" pattern, the observer is immediately impressed with the form's simple and direct no-nonsense approach to movement. The impression is further strengthened when Lum himself joins the student for a demonstration of the Tao style combat applications.

Standing with his hands held loosely at his sides, Lum faces his opponent in an attitude of relaxed readiness but without any indication of being in a

Lum performs tai chi sword's "Three Stars" (top left); top right: tai chi knife's "Grasp Bird's Tail;" middle: tai chi knife; bottom: "Heaven and Earth" —sword vs. knife.

Lum begins the sequence of "16 steps" with his assistant Pang. The form is a swift, simple and direct Tao combat style which Lum says is harder than tai chi. Lum faces his opponent with relaxed attitude enabling him to counter easily.



fighting "stance" as such. The student charges him with fast boxing-like combinations—left jab, right uppercut, left cross.

Lum's reaction is incredibly swift. From his stationary position he moves *into* the attack, quickly blocking the first two punches and then striking the opponent's own arm on the third. The opponent's arm drops in obvious pain.

But why counter to the arm rather than a more vital target?

Lum smiles. "There are two reasons. First, the arm is right there waiting to be hit. It requires the shortest movement and the least energy. Secondly, if you hit the nerves right, the arm *is* a vital spot."

To satisfy those who are still unconvinced, he runs through it again—this time blocking all three attacks with such blurring speed that it appears as a single movement, and then countering with a back-fist to the opponent's temple. Though all of Lum's punches and blocks are pulled in order to prevent injury, his quickness and power are still evident, as are the great economy and directness of his moves.

"Tao style," he says, "doesn't believe in any wasted time or movement, no fancy techniques, just quick precise attack and defense."

Questioned about his speed in being able to alternately block or counterpunch the quickly moving hands of an attacker, Lum modestly answers that here is a trick involved, a harmony that transcends mere physical speed.

"If," he explains, "you are totally aware of your situation and face your attacker with a calm mind, your body will be much better able to respond more quickly to whatever move he makes. The worst thing to do is to *anticipate.* If you do, then you are that much more easily fooled and put off balance. You will need so much more speed, then, just to catch up with the attacker, if he does that which you were not prepared for.

"By leaving your mind open and sensitive to *whatever* might happen, you already have a speed advantage in not having to correct the negative effects of a wrong preconception."

Practitioners of the Tao style also engage in the fascinating exercise of *sticking hands* where one's blocking hand stays in contact with the opponent, thereby enabling the defender to both confuse the attacker and to interpret the nature of his next movement. Unlike the related techniques in tai chi chaun, however, in the Tao style, sticking hands is part of real free-style combat training.

"In addition," Lum adds, "this maintaining of light adherence also serves to disguise any signals you may be giving out that could help your opponent interpret *your* next response. . .at least that's the ideal. In actual practice, both partners are constantly 'reading' each other."

When performed by Lum or his advanced students, the constant interaction of sticking hands attack and defense becomes a circular flow that softens even further the Tao style's inherent fluidity.

After so many years spent mastering the traditional forms of tai chi chuan and Tao style, Lum has shown great originality in developing a new set of *lu* of his own called *The Dragon and the Phoenix.* It combines elements from the other two arts, and his female students seem particularly adept in performing such moves from the set as "Picking Fruit for the Goddess Tin Po" and "Offering Tea to Ancestors."

Being Lum's own invention, the Dragon and the Phoenix is neither seen nor taught anywhere else at the present time except in Lum's classes.

To the casual visitor observing an Andrew Lum class, there are two aspects of the atmosphere that seem

Pang uses Yang style tai chi applications against two opponents. Tai chi is often referred to as "meditation in activity," and its origins stem from Confucian philosophy.

Lum's own teacher, Ming-I Tsao demonstrates hsing-i chuan, another internal art, to Lum's class. Right: Taking Lum's fist in his, Ming corrects the form. Below: Students practice tai chi.

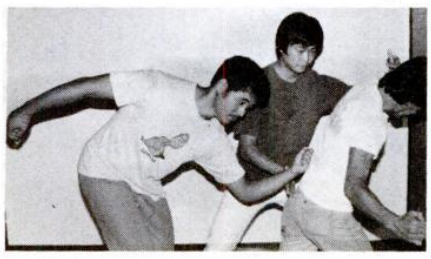
most untraditional. None of the students wear so-called "kung fu uniforms." There is no bowing. At the end of the class the students *applaud* each other as a sign of respect.

Yet there is no one sense in which Lum has remained a follower of the older cultural way in the martial arts.

"I believe very strongly," he states, "in a well-built foundation to the arts. In tai chi chuan practice this means that sufficient time must be put in on the development of the student's basic solo exercise. I don't believe in rushing one's learning. That can be very harmful. *Pushing hands, ta lu* or *long pullback,* knife, sword and all the other weapons must wait until later. Without a strong foundation the whole structure can collapse so the basic form must come first and must be learned really well before moving on to other sections."

Senior students do learn the complete range of techniques, but they are not taught in the regular class.

At the end of each session there is always a special correction given to the group, as a whole, on some important point of practice—be it breathing, relaxation, centering or whatever. With over two hundred classes given every year, students have a great opportunity to quickly perfect their form and progress in the art.



Lum has written a highly informative two-volume work titled *Combat T'ai Chi* which shows and describes in detail all the various postures, foot-weightings and self defense applications of the Yang form. In addition, the books also touch on the philosophical and psychological foundations of the martial arts.

Produced as large-sized paperbacks, both volumes serve as a ready reference for both the novice and advanced practitioner.

Lum was featured along with chi kung's Lily Siou and aikidoist Yukiso Yamamoto in Ira Lerner's unsual book, *Diary of the Way.* This work, with its imaginative photography and extensively quoted text, presents an in-depth look at Lum as both *sifu* and man.

There is great diversity of people in Lum's classes. They come from all races, young and old, male and female, tall and short, slim and heavy. Some move with grace of trained athletes while others look out-of-shape and awkward.

Lum himself disregards such differences, holding that anyone can practice the arts, yet he recognizes the fact that each person will bring his individual characteristcs into the form. The essence of the art will remain but will appear different.

"Tai chi chuan," Lum emphasizes, "as well as most of the other martial arts, ultimately has no strict form because people have different sizes and shapes. Besides, it's impossible to really tell what's going on *inside* a person. Some look clumsy and some don't, but the one who looks clumsy may actually

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be more relaxed internally. You can't just go by what you see."

A good example of this can be found in the history of tai chi chuan itself. The Yang style's founder, Yang Lu-chan, was quite short and thin. His grandson Yang Chan-po was tall and very heavy. Neither would strike the casual observer as being fighters at all, yet both were truly unbeatable masters.

Discussing *chi* (or *ki* in Japanese), that elusive life force or aura that so many martial arts seek to utilize, Lum gives a simple but interesting demonstration. Passing his hand lightly over a person's arm, he is able to project a wave of force and heat that can be felt on the skin.

"This is nothing spectacular," Lum says. "Nothing mystical or magical. It's all natural. Anyone can do it with practice. A lot of people misinterpret the word *chi* itself. It has its own five elements like in the Tao—that is fire, water, wood, metal and earth. Everyone has *chi*, but their aura only extends outwards maybe a quarter of an inch. The masters learn to extend and project a greater distance."

Lum's classes are held Monday through Thursday two hours each night. Formerly, he alternated each session between the Tao style and tai chi chuan, but has recently discontinued the practice of splitting the two styles.

Andrew Lum has his own view of the place of the martial arts in one's life. "They can be the *way* of one's life, the direction," he feels, "but not the life itself. There are no substitutes for the rest of living, for careers and for families. Kung fu is my hobby and great interest, but not my business or profession."

Practicing what he preaches, Lum is married and has two sons and a daughter. He works for an airline and is a graduate of the University of Hawaii. Despite the lifetime of training and the many hours each week that he still spends teaching, he is well-rounded, with interests and a life apart from tai chi chuan and the Tao style.

That doesn't mean, however, that the philosophy behind the arts isn't applicable to the rest of life. It certainly is.

"For instance," says Lum, "in tai chi's pushing hands practice, the idea is to move in harmony with opposing force, neither underacting or overacting, but always keeping balance and maintaining a well-centered position. It's the same with many of life's problems outside the training hall.

"There, too, it's essential to stay centered, but how many do this? Often people will wait until the problem hits them right in the face before acting on it. By then it's too late, and even the expenditure of huge amounts of energy fighting it will probably not solve the problem.

"Or on the other side of the same coin, people will anticipate trouble and act in such a way that will, in reality, *cause* a problem that might not have ever developed on its own.

"The tai chi type of response would be neither to deny a problem that exists nor to struggle with it when the struggle is clearly a waste of time and effort. Rather, acknowledge the problem and accept it for what it is, neither underestimating nor overestimating its seriousness. That way you can keep centered and be in a much better position to actually *solve* the problem."

Lum laughs at the oft-heard expression, "to fight fire *with* fire," and comments that this is precisely the reverse of the advice learned from the tai chi way.

"How much better and more effective," he says, "would be the suggestion to fight fire with *water.*"

At the end of a recent night's practice, Lum gave the class a special treat by presenting to them *his* current sifu, a Buddhist monk named Ming I-tsao. To expand his own knowledge of the internal arts, Lum has been studying hsing-i chuan under Ming. The latter gentleman is 73 years old but has both the unlined face and general demeanor of someone at least two decades younger.

The students watched carefully as Ming went through the basic hsing-i form for them, gliding effortlessly across the temple floor and executing the unique "cork-screwing" punches characteristic of this most esoteric of all the soft-style arts.

As with Tung Fu-line and Lum Tai Yung before, Andrew Lum has once more found a teacher with impeccable credentials. Ming is a philosopher, scholar, Chinese doctor and teacher, as well as a direct disciple in the main lineage of the hsing-i tradition.

Lum sees no conflict between the various arts he practices or in the way he has integrated different techniques into his own Dragon and Phoenix set.

"There is no contention," he explains. "only harmony, as the arts complement each other in the same way as the Yin and the Yang."