

Eastern Sun Western Moon

BY VALERIE LEE



Photo: Fey Aldelstein

L'auteure discute de ses expériences comme entraîneuse dans les arts martiaux et les techniques qu'elle utilise pour motiver et inspirer ses élèves.

When the student is ready the teacher will appear. This saying could be how I've lived for decades. Each appearance of excellent teachers has guided my fortunate path. After decades of being a student, the transition from being the dutiful apprentice to the truth of my own role as a teacher is challenging and enlightening. Life can be defined by whom you're surrounded by. When the teacher is ready the student will appear.

Shifu Adam Hsu is my principle kung fu teacher and the one who encouraged me to teach on my own. He is a traditional martial artist and a professor of classical Chinese literature. Classes were three to four hours long and held in Golden Gate Park and at his home. Training was

thorough, challenging, and influenced the basis of how I currently teach. A wonderful teacher and mentor, he continues to advise and support me through my journey.

As a female instructor one of my challenges in teaching is the transition from one who listens to one who is heard. Shifu displays a certain gruffness while teaching, barking out corrections like a military general. When I first started, I tried teaching the way I was taught. I thought how I learned was the only correct way. Shifu was an incredible teacher. The confused response from students not only surprised me, but also further exposed my need to unlock my own style of teaching.

When I first began teaching I thought that as a woman I would attract mainly female students. In fact, my class in the park is made up of male students. Women can especially excel in our kung fu style because a considerable amount of physical strength is developed from the legs and



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hips. Given their ability to give birth, their hips are about the strongest part of their bodies; therefore they are likely to have the fortitude to thrive with this training.

Instructing kung fu basics at San Francisco State University has been another avenue for me to explore teaching. The classes are evenly coed and many of the students are totally new to kung fu. Initially the college students are energetic and enthused. A few out of hundreds have stayed with me long term. Interestingly enough, most of them lasted as long as the semester did. Although I saw many students with potential to develop further, I learned that all too often a teacher's role is to plant seeds and move on.

Most of my opportunities to teach and train with other women have come thanks to organizations such as the Pacific Association of Women Martial Artist, the National Women's Martial Art Federation, and Feminist International Special Training. They support the need for the self-empowerment of women of all ages and backgrounds and enable them to experience martial arts without intimidation. Many of the pioneer women who have attended these camps broke the barriers of what was once male-dominated genre. Women-owned schools are flourishing and are inspirations and models for me to follow.

Historically it is understood that tradition, through the

hard work and experience of those centuries before us, refined the art that we practice today. Lives of skillful predecessors and other ancestors were sacrificed for the traditional kung fu we presently practice. They cultivated kung fu for survival and the consequence of death was a highly motivating factor. Since I am from a Chinese-American background, accepting this traditional aspect is inherent in me.

As a student I was motivated to maintain a four-to-six-hour daily training regimen in order to constantly refine the highly sophisticated movements that had been taught to me by a very gifted teacher. As a contemporary teacher I also use a variety of motivating factors and opportunities for students to participate in without fear or judgment. They are encouraged to creatively learn from their peers with different interactions including one-on-one and small and large groups. Teaching is a precious gift. It enables me to express and share attitudes, perceptions and feelings with students and learn the truth of ourselves from one to another.

Valerie Lee currently teaches kung fu at San Francisco State University and in Golden Gate Park. She has a private acupuncture practice and can be reached at kungfu.sfsu.edu.