

On lineage 太極精神代代傳

The spirit of Taiji moves from one generation to the next

Ken Rose*

What does it mean to study and learn within a traditional lineage in arts such as Taijiquan and the many styles of so-called qi gong? Meaning derives from context. This is particularly true of meaning in Chinese, where context consists of complicated layers or dimensions. Among these is the dimension of time, a subject that is far too complicated to treat in a short essay such as this. Suffice it to say that whereas our modern sense of time is well symbolized as an arrow, the only symbol that conveys the ancient Chinese time sense is a circle. The time and timing that concerned the ancient Chinese was cyclical time. For before they were philosophers, the ancients in China were farmers. Time was a tool for farming, a way of helping those who devised it to act according to the changes of nature.

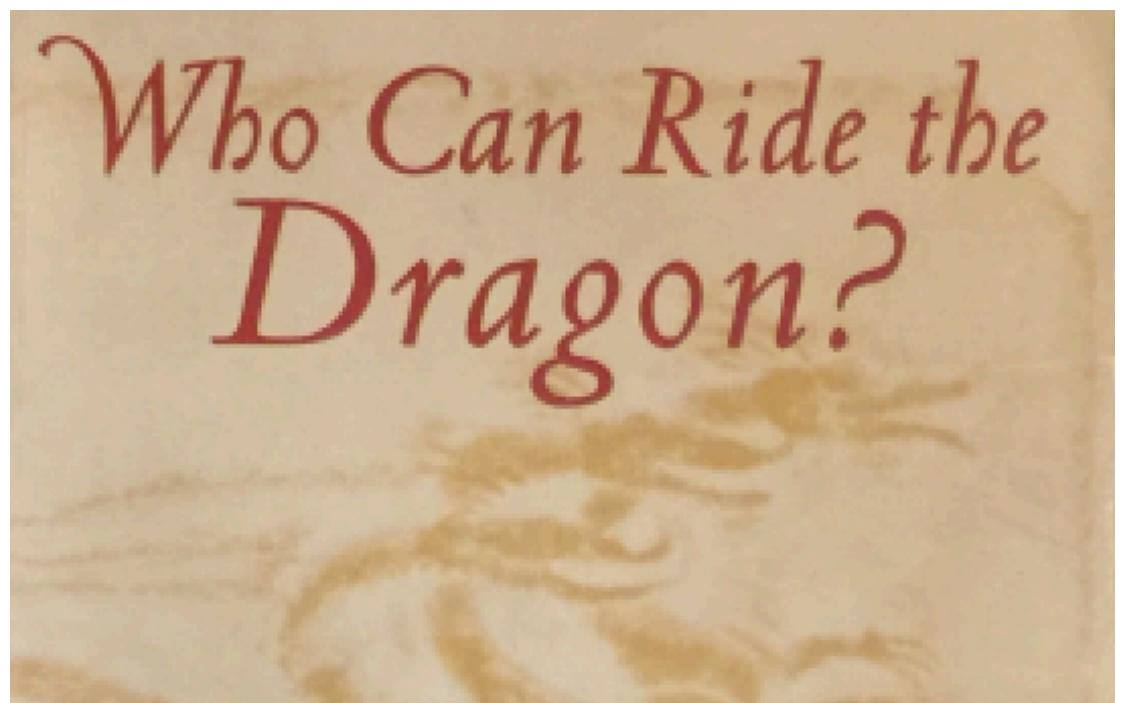
Nature insists that farmers act at the right time, and living under this constant insistence, ancient farmers learned to keep track of nature's timing in ways that enabled them to comply. Living in compliance with observable laws of nature, these people created a civilization concerned first and foremost with the transmission of information from one generation to the next. They recognized the galling limitations of human life and embodied their hopes of overcoming these limits in a body of classical literature that came to contain and convey the vital essence of the knowledge they possessed. These classical texts constitute one set of primary channels along which the trans-generational transmission of knowledge took place. They served as a précis, an outline of study. Each generation maintained them, redacted,

amended, corrected, and recorrected them. Accompanying commentary came to be appended by scholars and scribes of successive eras. By the end of the imperial era in 1911 the classical

Ho conosciuto Ken Rose una quindicina di anni or sono. L'avevo invitato a tenere alcune lezioni nella Scuola Matteo Ricci di medicina cinese. Lo ringrazio di cuore per questo suo prezioso contributo sullo spirito del qi gong che si trasmette attraverso le generazioni tramite gli aspetti più profondi del vero rapporto tra maestro e discepolo. Perché - come lui afferma - «Thus have I come to understand the nature of studying within a traditional lineage. Together students and teachers link together across generations, fashioning a way to care for one another and transcend the limits of their individual lives»

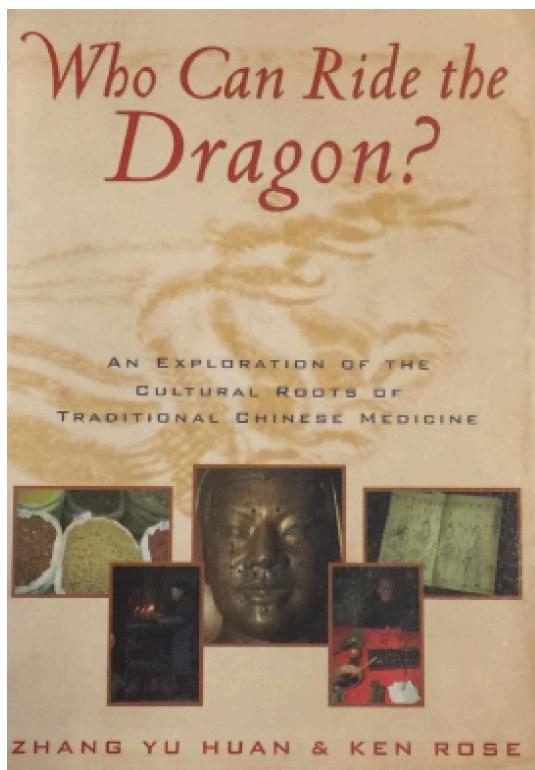


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generations. Someone needs to tend the family altar and maintain ancestral sites. For thousands of years prior to the arrival of Buddhism and other religions in China, the folks who lived there had well established patterns of beliefs and practices swirling around the spirits of the ancestors. And it is within this context of the absolutely fundamental importance of generational development that we come across the notion of lineage transmission. And it is here we must begin our journey of 1,000 miles with the single step of recognizing the august authority and respect the status of lineage holder came to have in traditional Chinese life.

*Who can ride the dragon
uno dei volumi scritti da Ken Rose sul pensiero cinese tradizionale*



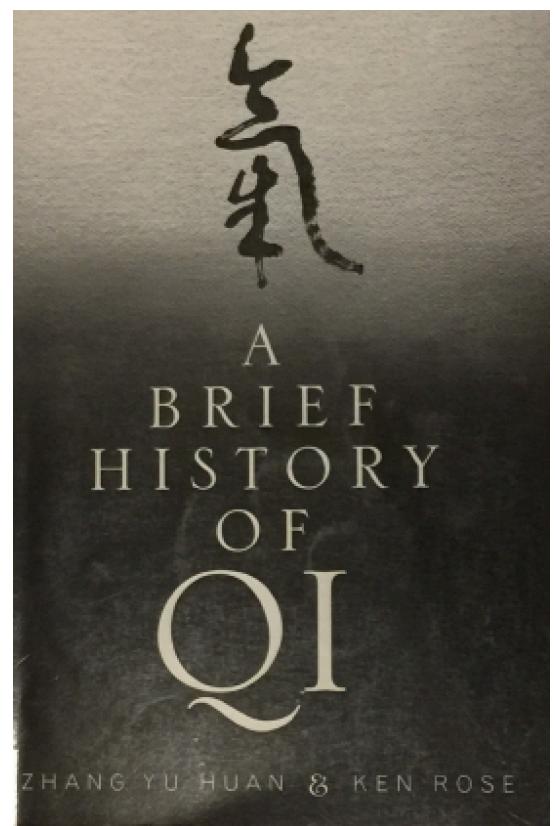
My first lesson on the character of lineage came from my Taiji teacher, Martin Inn. The year was 1972. I was doing push hands with my classmate, Eric. Martin watched quietly for several minutes. Then he stepped in and stood beside us. "In the classics it says 'to enter the door and be shown the way, you must be orally taught.' What does it mean to be orally taught? To hear someone's voice you must be close...close enough to touch. And when you read the classics you need to find these meanings that lie within what is written. 'Orally taught' here also means tactilely taught. The wordless teaching. This is what it means to be in touch with tradition. Your touch is too heavy," he said placing his hand on mine, which was still touching Eric.

In that moment I recognized the fact of the connectedness, i.e., the qi of Martin's lineage...of my lineage and of the network of touch that came before us and delivered this teaching and this art to us. The presence and power of this network

was immediate and available to me. And in this realization I came into possession of the potential to provide this connection to those who seek it. Some twenty years later I received another teaching on the topic of lineage.

This time my teacher was Dr. Chen Wan Chuan with whom I studied throughout the 1990's in Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province. My meeting with Dr. Chen was all but miraculous and is a story I'll tell another time. But we became close as student and teacher at once the day I wandered into Dr. Chen's clinic around the corner from Wen Hua Gong, the old Cultural Palace in downtown Chengdu. Dr. Chen was one of four surviving senior students of the famous Taiji boxer Li Ya Xuan, himself the leading disciple of Yang Cheng Fu, the man who made Taiji popular in New China in the first half of the 20th century.

*A brief history of qi
una introduzione al concetto di qi del pensiero cinese analizzato a 360 gradi dal punto di vista filologico, letterario, ideografico, filosofico, storico, biologico, medico, scientifico*



In my first year in Chengdu I met all four. But it was Dr. Chen who accepted me as his 徒弟 tu di or disciple as we say in English.

He never tired of explaining the significance of our status with respect to one another, but nothing he said in later years really amplified the significance he placed upon what he first described as the foundation of the relationship between student and teacher. "我們互相學習 [we will study one another]," he said after I'd bowed nine times. He looked at me as if he expected me to have some witty rejoinder. When I offered none he

continued, “我關心你；你關心我。[I care for you; you care for me.]”

Thus have I come to understand the nature of studying within a traditional lineage. Together students and teachers link together across generations, fashioning a way to care for one another and transcend the limits of their individual lives. This aspiration resonates throughout the Taiji classics and can be found, clearly expressed for example in the final lines of one anonymous 19th century text that read, “Think over carefully what the final purpose is: to lengthen life and maintain youth.”