

John Chow bai shi with Master Lau Kim Hong

In Chinese tradition of martial arts, formal admission to the master's inner circle, and hence to the Tai Chi Chuan family, is via the 'bai shi' ceremony.

On the appointed day (7 July 2005), Master Lau Kim Hong brought me to his house. His wife had kindly bought offerings for the deities, and placed them on the family altar. The deities are Guan Yin, Guan Gong, and Chang San Feng.

Ideally, witnesses, preferably the master's circle of disciples, or his own peers, all of whom have undergone a 'bai shi' ceremony, are required to witness the ritual of a formal "bai shi" ceremony. This is the usual tradition. Unless, it is done in emergency (as was my case with the late Master Chok Kam Seng of Penang in 1987). Master Lau Kim Hong had arranged for 2 of his disciples to come to act as witnesses for the ceremony. They were also requested to help Master Lau teach me and translate for me since they speak English, and they understand Hakka.

In a "bai shi" ceremony in Yang and Wu styles of Tai Chi Chuan, admission to the Tai Chi Chuan family, and student-master relationship is via praying respects to the founder Chang San Feng, and then to the master. This tradition was lost to the Chen Style Tai Chi Chuan, but has recently been re-introduced in China.

The 2 witnesses, David Khoo and Pang helped me fill out the application for 'bai shi'. Basically, it addresses the founder Chang San Feng and past masters, requesting to be a disciple of Master Lau Kim Hong to learn Tai Chi Chuan, and to be obedient to the master, and not to divulge the secret teachings of Tai Chi Chuan to those who have not undergone the 'bai shi' ceremony under the same master. And we vow to keep this oath at the cost of our life, and accept the responsibility of this oath, willing to bear punishment if we break the oath.

The 'bai shi' ceremony then starts.

One pays respects to Chang San Feng by making offerings of fruits and incense. A portrait of Chang San Feng acts as the anchor or receiver. Then one pays respects to Chang San Feng by kneeling down on the right knee, and then prostrates, 3 times. One rises, and does it a second and then a third time.

Then one pays respects to the master by doing the same. Then one presents one's application and oath of discipleship to the master. A "red packet" containing money is enclosed with the application. Lastly, one presents a cup of tea to the master.

Usually, after the 'bai shi' ceremony, the new member would be given some teachings and shown some secrets. Also, students are not allowed to be taught 'higher secrets' such as Nei Gong without having undergone a 'bai shi'. Therefore, some teaching or documentation may be given at this stage.

After the 'bai shi' ceremony, David and Pang had a chat with me, and then proceeded to do Push Hands with me, explaining their understanding of Tai Chi Chuan and Push Hands, such as relaxing and rooting to the ground. One thing is

clear:- they emphasise diligent practise of the exercise form. They had only practised for 2 years, but they were excellent! They also demonstrated “fa Jing” of long jing and short jing. For 2 year’s work, they were very impressive.

Master Lau Kim Hong sat and watched and listened as his 2 disciples taught me. Occasionally, he would assist them and elaborate on what they taught.

After that, they asked me about my Arnis / Eskrima, and I showed them. David and Pand were quite interested so we had a good discussion about it and went for dinner, still continuing the discussion. Their comments and analysis of the subject indicated that even after only 2 years of Tai Chi Chuan, they have very good understanding of martial arts. Master Lau Kim Hong must have taught them properly. I enjoyed the evening’s dinner with my master and shi xionsg.



John Chow prostrating to Guan Yin, Guan Gong and Chang San Feng.
A chair is placed in front of the altar, ready for Master Lau Kim Hong to take his seat.



John Chow prostrating to Guan Yin, Guan Gong and Chang San Feng



John Chow presenting 'bai shi' application and red packet to Master Lau Kim Hong. Master Lau Kim Hong is seated, and accepts the application as the current generation of Tai Chi Chuan masters descended in an unbroken line from Chang San Feng. He is an authentic authority to accept a new member into the Tai Chi Chuan family, because he is an authentic master who also received his discipleship from the previous generation of masters in the same way.



John Chow presenting cup of tea to Master Lau Kim Hong



John Chow with Master Lau Kim Hong after "Bai Shi"



John Chow with Master Lau Kim Hong and Pang after “Bai Shi”



John Chow with Master Lau Kim Hong, David Khoo and Pang after “Bai Shi”



John Chow with Master Lau Kim Hong and David Khoo after “Bai Shi”

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