

Is Julia Fairchild the 5th Generation Lineage Holder for Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan?

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Abstract: Authors of recent articles assert that Wang Yen-nien did not appoint a successor for Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan (YMT). I explore an alternate assertion that Wang Yen-nien did choose Julia Fairchild to succeed him. To understand this assertion, “lineage holder” and “lineage transmitter,” two key terms related to YMT succession, are carefully defined and consistently used. Evidence related to Julia Fairchild being chosen as Wang Yen-nien’s successor is then presented and assessed. Leaders and teachers of YMT are encouraged to study what is written here and elsewhere, combine the information with their own personal experience, and discern for themselves “the truth” about YMT succession.

Is Julia Fairchild the 5th Generation Lineage Holder for Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan?

By Robert E. Burt
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Everything that is thought and expressed in words is one-sided, only half the truth; it all lacks totality, completeness, unity.” Hermann Hesse, 1877-1962.

Recent articles published in the *American Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan Association (AYMTA) Newsletter* include statements that Wang Yen-nien did not appoint a successor. Consider these excerpts:

- “Wang Laoshi specifically did not appoint a Zhangménrén to succeed him; he stated many times that there was not going to be one person to carry on the lineage but that ... all those who teach and transmit the tradition as passed on by him may be termed lineage transmitters (傳人 Chuánrén).” (Lin & Klein, 2010).
- “From ancient times, the inheritance of Zhangménrén in martial art schools generally go through a sacrifice ritual, a passing of chops and a formal declaration to recognize the lineage transmitting. The procedure ... is commonly recognized for inheritance ceremony in Chinese culture... Master Wang Yen-nien inherited both YMT and Golden Mountain Daoism Sect lineages. He never officially appointed a successor for either of the two sects before he passed away in 2008.” (Wang R. S., 2010)

Yet, Julia Fairchild is described as “Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan, 5th Generation Lineage Holder” at ymti.org, the Yen-nien Daoguan, Taipei website.

At least two views about the truth of Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan (YMT) succession appear to exist, but only one is written about and published. I expressed my concern about this to Don Klein, who is publisher of the *AYMTA Newsletter* and coauthor of one of the articles.

He responded, in a principled and supportive way, by encouraging me to learn more and write about what I learned.

I initially resisted because the authors of the published articles are highly respected leaders of YMT who have contributed significantly to YMT for many decades. I am a beginning student at a local community center with less than one year of instruction in YMT. After some deliberation, I decided to further explore YMT succession and take the unusual step of contacting Ms. Fairchild to understand her perspective.

So, with large amounts of both curiosity and ignorance about the subject (call it “beginners mind” if you prefer), I sent an email to Ms. Fairchild. What resulted was a fascinating correspondence, supplemented by some independent research. I will share what I learned so that more information about YMT succession is available to those who are interested. This article is divided into three sections, each addressing a different question:

- What are lineage transmitters and lineage holders, and how are they different?
- Did Wang Yen-nien identify a successor to be YMT lineage holder?
- Why has this information not been communicated previously?

What are lineage transmitters and lineage holders, and how are they different?

Lineage transmitters are teachers. Lineage transmitters are people who develop in others an understanding of YMT as they learned it from Wang Yen-nien or one of his students. If you teach YMT, you could be called a lineage transmitter. Because there are many YMT

lineage transmitters who strictly adhere to the YMT practice as defined by Wang Yen-nien, many people throughout the world have had the opportunity to learn YMT without it becoming diluted or transformed into something else.

Lineage holder is a teacher and much more.

Although many lineage transmitters can spread the tradition, the lineage holder is the one person with an overarching responsibility for the whole of YMT. Ms. Fairchild (2010) explained that the lineage holder is responsible for maintaining the tradition as received from the previous lineage holder. The lineage holder is also responsible for identifying a successor to preserve the tradition for future generations. The process for passing on the tradition to the next lineage holder is called “transmission,” even though this is something that only the lineage holder can do; “ordinary” lineage transmitters cannot “transmit” the lineage to the next lineage holder. And, to add to the possible confusion, the lineage holder is also a lineage transmitter in the general sense that he or she teaches others.

“One teacher, one student” no longer applies to lineage transmitters. As cited in Volume One (Wang Y. N., 1993), Wang Yen-nien said, “I take special pains to teach everyone who comes to learn, regardless of their station.” In an interview with Sam Tomarchio (1995), Wang Yen-nien talked about Zhang Qinlin, the lineage holder from whom he received the transmission: “Up until my time, this form has been taught ‘one teacher, one student.’ To prevent this teaching from becoming extinct, I have, as Zhang Laoshi counseled, sought to share this precious art with anyone who wants to learn, regardless of race, color, or anything else.”

“One teacher, one student” still applies to lineage holder succession. Because Wang Yen-nien changed the “one teacher, one student” rule about instructing others in YMT, many people (including you and me) have the opportunity to learn this “secret” or “hidden” tradition as it is sometimes called. However, he did not change the “one teacher, one student” rule regarding lineage holders. When describing the transmission of YMT from one lineage holder to the next, Wang Yen-nien specifically told Ms.

Fairchild that YMT is to be transmitted to “one, not two.” He privately emphasized this to Ms. Fairchild many times by repeating, “Remember what I say, one, not two.” (Fairchild, 2010)

Exact prerequisites are required to be considered as lineage holder.

To be recognized as a teacher (i.e., lineage transmitter) of YMT, a person must demonstrate a high level of proficiency in the practice of YMT. To become lineage holder, even more is expected. Based on what she learned from many conversations with Wang Yen-nien, Ms. Fairchild (2010) shared a partial list about what is required of the lineage holder:

“The lineage holder has:

1. Given up practicing or teaching other styles of taijiquan and other styles of martial arts, yoga, qigong, etc. [Zhang Qinlin asked if he, Master Wang, was able to do this. He replied, yes, and did.]; and
2. Learned and taught the entire Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan curriculum as defined by the previous lineage holder; and
3. Studied directly with the previous lineage holder for an honest period of time; and
4. Become an initiate in a Gold Mountain Daoist School of Internal Alchemy, practiced Daoist Gongfu and taught Neigong, the foundation of Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan; and
5. Received permission (“Tian Ming”) from the previous lineage holder to transmit Daoist Meditation and Daoist Gongfu, and is currently a practicing Internal Alchemist.”

In summary, “lineage transmitter” and “lineage holder” have distinct meanings that must be used precisely when discussing succession. Wang Yen-nien broke with the tradition of “one teacher, one student” by teaching anyone with a genuine interest and by encouraging them to teach others (i.e., multiple lineage transmitters). Regarding lineage holders, Wang Yen-nien consistently said that YMT is to be transmitted to “one, not two.” The lineage holder is responsible for maintaining the tradition and for identifying a successor so that the tradition will be available for future generations.

Did Wang Yen-nien identify a successor to be YMT lineage holder?

Last Will and Testament of Wang Yen-nien formally identifies Julia Fairchild as his successor. On January 26, 2006, Wang Yen-nien signed his will that was prepared, at his request, by Yeh Yunwu, a retired corporate executive familiar with Taiwanese law. Yeh Yunwu is also a senior YMT student and current president of the ROC National Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan Association. The will has three parts: (1) identification of his successor, (2) identification of who would be responsible for his funeral, and (3) statement of his wish that Yen-nien Daoguan continue forever. Four people observed the signing of the will, all of whom are still living and can verify its legitimacy. The will names Julia Fairchild as the lineage holder for YMT. Here is a rough English translation of the will (Fairchild, 2010):

“On my behalf (Teacher [Wang Yang-nien], Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan, 4th Generation Zushi), after I die, from this moment on, Fei Sihua [Julia Fairchild’s name in Chinese] will succeed me, becoming Chuánrén; all [my] in-the-door initiated disciples and all [my] students, please devote all your efforts, stand by [her], and give [her] assistance.”

In simple and unambiguous words, Wang Yen-nien plainly states that, “after I die, from this moment on, Fei Sihua [Julia Fairchild] will succeed me.” This one statement answers most, if not all, questions about whether he identified a successor.

Two years after Wang Yen-nien’s death, Lin and Klein (2010) and Wang R. S. (2010), with George Lin providing translations for both, published articles that defined Chuánrén as lineage transmitter and Zhangménrén as lineage holder. Based on their distinction, it seems peculiar that Wang Yen-nien would describe his successor as Chuánrén instead of Zhangménrén. Was he identifying Julia Fairchild as the next lineage holder, or was he just acknowledging her to be one of many lineage transmitters? His direct statement about Ms. Fairchild succeeding him and the fact that she is the only person named in the succession part of the will would

seem to make his intent clear. Also, Ms. Fairchild (2010) told me that she cannot recall Wang Yen-nien ever using the word “Zhangménrén” during their many conversations. Given this, it would be unexpected for the word to appear in his will.

Why would Wang Yen-nien use Chuánrén (傳人) to describe his successor if, as stated by Lin and Klein (2010) and Wang R. S. (2010), the word is used exclusively to mean lineage transmitter? Further research shows that Chuánrén (傳人) has two well-documented definitions; it can be translated as either lineage transmitter or lineage holder, depending on the context. One translation website (worldlingo.com) translates the Chinese characters for Chuánrén (傳人) as “teaching other people,” consistent with the interpretation of the word as lineage transmitter. Another website (translate.google.com) translates the characters as “successor,” consistent with its use as the lineage holder. The translator built into Microsoft Office 2007 provides both definitions for the Chinese characters: “(1) pass on a special skill, etc.; teach” (i.e., lineage transmitter) and “(2) a person who can inherit and pass on a special branch of learning” (i.e., lineage holder). Ms. Fairchild (2010) said that a commonly used standard Chinese reference dictionary (Zheng Lizu, 1978) defines “Chuánrén /傳人” = “可繼承遺志的人”= “suitable/worthy/able to/carry on/the will, aspirations, the heart’s desires//of the ancients.” This definition of Chuánrén is a beautiful way of describing the role of the lineage holder.

Because Chuánrén has two definitions, let’s look at its use relative to other words in the will.

Note that Wang Yen-nien did not refer to himself as either Chuánrén or Zhangménrén. Instead, he used the word Zushi, which translates as “founder” or “founder of a school of learning.” Wang R. S. (2010) also used “Zushi” in describing the process for lineage transmission from one lineage holder to the next (remember that Wang R. S. uses Zhangménrén to mean lineage holder): “The current Zhangménrén will then host a sacrifice ritual at the altar of the founders (祖師Zushi).”

When Zushi is used as a title, such as in Wang Yen-nien's will, Ms. Fairchild (2010) says it could mean founder in the sense of "the one who gave us our art." As mentioned earlier, Wang Yen-nien referred to YMT as "this precious art" during an interview with Sam Tomarchio (1995). With these definitions in mind, it appears very natural that the "the one who gave us our art" (Zushi) would name his successor and describe her as the "worthy person to carry on the will, aspirations, and heart's desires of the ancients" (Chuánrén). I find this to be an eloquent and unambiguous way for Wang Yen-nien to identify the next lineage holder.

The person who prepared the will, Yeh Yunwu, was one of the four people present at its signing. He was also responsible for reading Wang Yen-nien's will after his death. Because I recognized the importance of his insights about these issues, I contacted him with some questions. Here are excerpts from our exchange:

Question: When Wang Yen-nien spoke with you about preparing his will, was he clear and unambiguous about wanting Julia Fairchild to succeed him as *the* lineage holder for YMT (versus being just one of many lineage transmitters)?

Yeh Yunwu's answer: "Yes, he was clear. If he had not been clear about wanting Julia Fairchild to be the lineage holder, he would not have needed to have written this in his will. If Julia was to be one of many he would have used the word 'dizi,' of which Master Wang has many. You would just need to look in the back of his book to see a list of the names of his many students."

Question: Do you know why it was decided to not publicly announce Wang Yen-nien's choice as successor while Master Wang was still alive?

Yeh Yunwu's answer: "Master Wang knew that many people would object to Julia as his successor. As an old man, he would not want to have all the trouble that this would bring."

Question: Do you think that Wang Yen-nien intended for the reading of the will to serve as the public announcement regarding the succession?

Yeh Yunwu's answer: "Yes. It was my obligation to read the will aloud and I fulfilled my responsibility. Whether or not someone accepts what is written is their choice."

"In addition, I would like to say that in the Buddhist tradition, when a master names his successor, he does so in private (one on one). This is to protect the new successor, for very often the others would kill the newly named successor." (Yeh, 2010)

Wang Yen-nien chose Julia Fairchild to safeguard his intellectual property and YMT legacy. In addition to naming Julia Fairchild as successor in his will, Wang Yen-nien also made her legally responsible for his intellectual property while he was still alive. On January 3, 2007, about one year after signing his will, Wang Yen-nien transferred ownership of his intellectual property (e.g., books, CDs, DVDs) to Ms. Fairchild, who formed the Yen-nien Shanghai Publishing Company. This formal transfer required that a notary public, assigned by the Taipei City government, meet personally and privately with Wang Yen-nien to verify that the legal document accurately reflected his wishes. When asked why he was selling his intellectual rights to Ms. Fairchild, Wang Yen-nien responded that he was old, didn't see very well, and needed someone to carry on his work. After asking Wang Yen-nien several challenging questions, the notary attested that he was of "sound mind" and authorized the transfer. At that moment, Ms. Fairchild became legally responsible for safeguarding Wang Yen-nien's YMT intellectual property and legacy.

Julia Fairchild did not go through the traditional Chinese succession process for lineage holders, but neither did any of the preceding YMT lineage holders. Wang R. S. (2010) describes the three steps involved in the "traditional Chinese cultural choosing of a Zhangménrén as gatekeeper." As mentioned earlier, Zhangménrén is used by Wang R. S. as a synonym for lineage holder. The fact that Wang Yen-nien did not conduct such a ceremony appears to suggest that he did not name a successor. That is, until you learn Wang Yen-nien did not go through the described process, nor did Zhang Qinlin, nor did Yang Jianhou. Not one of the previous YMT lineage

holders followed these three steps when he became lineage holder (Fairchild, 2010).

Lineage Holder transmission is of the Mind via the Heart. In our correspondence, Ms. Fairchild (2010) said, “Transmission is of the Mind via the Heart.” When asked to explain further, she said, “To me this means that unless someone was of one heart and mind with Master Wang, it would not be possible to have received this transmission.” I asked her, “Over your many years of working directly with Master Wang, did you receive this transmission of the Mind via the Heart, and did Master Wang intend for you to be the 5th Generation YMT Lineage holder?” Her simple response was, “Yes.”

In summary, Wang Yen-nien explicitly named Julia Fairchild as his successor in his will. No one else was mentioned in the successor portion of his will. He referred to himself as Zushi (founder) and to her as Chuánrén. Given the context, Chuánrén is defined as lineage holder. The person who prepared the will confirmed that Wang Yen-nien intended for Julia Fairchild to succeed him as lineage holder. While still living, Wang Yen-nien transferred legal ownership of his intellectual property to the same person he identified to be his successor in his will.

Why has this information not been communicated previously?

I asked Ms. Fairchild why she has not publicly announced this information, particularly when people are writing that Wang Yen-nien did not name a successor. She said,

“It is traditional (in pre-1949 China) for the son or inheritor to build a small hut near the grave of the person who had died and live there for three months or a year or three years, whatever could be afforded, and during this time contemplate one’s bad points, meditate on how to become a better person, and get ready to take on the mantle of your new position when you emerge from this time of introspection and contemplation. I chose to observe this three-year mourning

period where I do not come down from the mountains. In May, 2011, this three year period ends.” (Fairchild, 2010)

The words “5th generation lineage holder” appear at the ymti.org website and in the signature line of Ms. Fairchild’s letters. Otherwise, Ms. Fairchild has not initiated communication about this topic because she is still in the three year mourning period while she is preparing herself internally for her role as lineage holder.

If she has not actively distributed this information, you may ask why she was willing to correspond with me about this subject. I believe that the answer is simple: I respectfully asked her.

In the practice of YMT, we are encouraged to connect, listen, and engage. Much can be gained by applying this principle to life. My interactions with Julia Fairchild have ranged from the personal to the profound, and I greatly appreciate her willingness to share so openly about this topic.

When I started this inquiry, my intent was to just report my findings without judgment. As I learned more, I became personally convinced that Wang Yen-nien did name Julia Fairchild to be his successor as lineage holder. I encourage leaders and teachers of Yangjia Michuan Taijiquan to study what is written here and elsewhere, combine the information with their own personal experience, and discern for themselves “the truth” about YMT succession.

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