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Date: Wed, 5 Oct 1994 08:16:12 -0500

From: mcain@nwu.edu (Barry Cain)

Subject: Richard Langlois

This is in reply to your request for information in Rev. Langlois. Should you require further information please e-mail to the above address.

The following is the most complete document which we have on Kongo Langlois Roshi. Please feel free to edit it as you see fit for your purposes.

Kongo Langlois Roshi is the current Abbot of the Zen Buddhist Temple of Chicago. He also serves as the Director/Head Instructor of the Chinese Cultural Academy in Evanston, Illinois. Kongo Roshi, as an American, uniquely brings a deep and rich experience to bear in transmitting those most refined and precious arts that have their basis in oriental culture including Zen and Taoism. He has inherited, through direct transmission, many traditions and arts based on his decades of study with his Zen teacher, Rev. Soyu Matsuoka, Roshi, and with Prof. Huo Chi-kwang, the founder and the former head of the Chinese Cultural Academy.

The Zen Buddhist Temple of Chicago is the oldest, practicing Zen meditation center in the United States, having been founded in 1949 by Rev. Soyu Matsuoka, Roshi, (to whom we all refer as Sensei). Ultimately succeeding Sensei as Abbot, Kongo Roshi is heir to a six hundred year tradition of Zen priesthood in Sensei's family. The Zen Buddhist Temple of Chicago is in direct affiliation with the Soto Sect of Zen Buddhism through Kongo Roshi's registration with Sojiji Temple and Monastery, one of the two head temples of the Soto Sect in Japan.

The Chinese Cultural Academy was founded by another of Kongo Roshi's teachers, Professor Huo Chi-kwang, in 1966. Prof. Huo is a master in the 5 styles of Chinese calligraphy, painting and poetry; and a scholar of Chinese literature, history and philosophy; as well as a great boxing master, renowned wherever Chinese culture flourishes. Prof. Huo is the 16th generation of calligraphers in his family which has produced noted scholars since the Ming Dynasty. Kongo Langlois, Roshi also succeeded Prof. Huo as the Director of the Academy.

Given the significance of the above achievements, it is pertinent to recount the background that Roshi brings to his teaching. Kongo Roshi was born Richard Valentine Langlois in Chicago, Illinois. His

`first love' is the piano which he began studying at ten years of age. Although his training consisted entirely of rigorous classical piano studies, he nevertheless discovered an inherent talent for improvisation. Subsequently, he worked professionally as a jazz musician while vigorously pursuing the formal study of music.

Soon after Richard entered his teens, he experienced a profound intellectual and emotional cataclysm: "Everywhere I looked I could see only a condition of desperation, degeneration, and hypocrisy. The depth of this perspective was amplified, because at so young an age I was unprepared to resolve experiences of such magnitude: I 'imploded'." Richard's friends in need at this time were primarily the philosophers Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. "I was especially attracted to Nietzsche and the Bhagavad Gita; these two, Zarathustra and Krishna, helped maintain some semblance of sanity. Though, indeed, the repercussions lasted several years, perhaps interminably, for Nietzsche remains alongside Dogen Zenji, at my bedside within arm's reach."

Richard Langlois served two years in the Army from 1954 to 1956. Following military service he enrolled under the G.I. Bill in the American Conservatory of Music, majoring in piano, where he completed his studies in 1962. As his interest in philosophy grew, besides studying and playing piano, Richard Langlois became increasingly interested in the study and practice of Eastern Philosophy. He began his spiritual study in 1956 under the guidance of Swami Vishwananda, of the Vedanta Society and continued through the study and practice of Yoga as a disciple of Sri Nerode. Although this training involved a great deal of intellectual study, the main work with Sri Nerode was intense meditation practice. This included the study of all yogas with emphasis on Kundalini Yoga, an esoteric meditation practice.

Inevitably, Richard Langlois' innate tendencies led him to Zen Buddhism that satisfied an inner urge for a spiritual practice which was more direct, less intellectual, more intuitive and directly related to everyday life. He began studying with Matsuoka Roshi in 1960 and officially became his disciple in 1963. Richard Langlois was given the Buddhist name Kongo, meaning `Diamond'. This name signifies more than just a sparkling gem. Its spiritual essence is that of enduring brilliance, dignity and strength. But, more significantly, it signifies the Diamond Sutra and its teaching of the Diamond Sword of Discriminating Wisdom, which cuts away all doubts. Thus began Kongo Langlois' training for the Zen priesthood. Richard Langlois' previous experience as a disciple provided an excellent foundation for his relationship with Matsuoka Roshi. However, this turned out to be an experience of another kind entirely. Although discipleship is always on a one-to-one basis, the training in Soto Zen is of a unique and peculiar kind; there is no room for esoteric philosophizing. One's every move, word, act, and response is unremittingly scrutinized and corrected. The feeling is somewhat like being under a microscope. As a result of this smelting process, one's true nature is allowed to shine through spontaneously. This process is much like a sculptor, not one who models clay, but one who chips away at the superfluous and superficial so that only the truly essential remains. Zen meditation (zazen) is the central practice in Zen Buddhism for cultivating the awakening of our true nature.

From Matsuoka Roshi he obtained training in zazen practice and then in Soto Zen Buddhism, becoming the first American to be ordained a Zen

priest in 1967. In 1970 when Matsuoka Roshi left Chicago to found another Zen Center in Long Beach, California, Reverend Kongo Langlois was appointed his Dharma Successor and became Abbot of the Zen Buddhist Temple of Chicago. He also was the first American to receive the Roshi degree. In 1974, Matsuoka Roshi bestowed the degree upon Reverend Langlois. The title Roshi is not, as many believe, synonymous with 'priest'; it is bestowed upon a Zen priest by another who holds the Roshi degree, as an indication and acknowledgement of a high level of understanding or realization. Hence all Roshis are priests, but not all priests are Roshis. Those of us, who remember Rev. Matsuoka when he taught in Chicago, know the extremely powerful impression that Sensei made as a Zen priest. Many were impressed and astounded by one who could teach so much, so often by mere gesture or inflection. Certainly the student needed to be willing to look, but if one did look, students came away with hands full to overflowing. All of us recognize this as a unique and powerful characteristic of both Sensei and Roshi. Although their personalities are in many ways vastly different, they nevertheless share in this ability to mindfully, consistently, flexibly, and powerfully project their teachings and indeed their very essence directly from the spiritual center.

In 1987, Kongo Roshi was presented with the 'Inka Shomei' (seal of transmission) from the line of Asahina Sogen, Primate of the Rinzaï branch of Zen Buddhism. Thus Kongo Roshi is recognized as a master by both the Soto and Rinzaï schools of Zen Buddhism.

Roshi's training with Professor Huo Chi-kwang began in 1966. He began studying privately with Prof. Huo, who was someone we all came to know from his attendance at the Temple, as well as directly through his association with Roshi. Prof. Huo imparted a thorough grounding in the internal connections and spirit of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and the Chinese Ch'an and Taoist meditation traditions.

During his 22 years of study with Prof. Huo Chi-kwang, Kongo Roshi first mastered the Yang Family (Secret) Style of Tai Chi Chuan, the esoteric martial art. The Yang Style is commonly taught in the so called 'public' style, which originated when the foreign Manchu (Ch'ing) dynasty compelled the Yang family to provide instruction for those demanding it. Thus the Yang family, while under this great duress, was nevertheless unwilling to give away the essence of the tradition to 'outsiders', devised a considerably debased 'public' style in order to satisfy the rulers. Prof. Huo was most fortunate in that he learned the original and 'true' style directly from Yang Shao-hou. He was the elder brother of and superior martial artist to Yang Ch'eng-fu, developer of the 'public' style. It is this original, undiluted Yang style which Roshi teaches.

Also while studying under Prof. Huo, Roshi mastered the Chen Style of Tai Chi Chuan, which historically was antecedent to the Yang. Six years was then spent in learning both script and cursive styles of Chinese calligraphy using traditional philosophic texts. Additional martial arts from Prof. Huo's large repertoire were similarly absorbed by Roshi during many years of study with Professor. These include the Wu Style of Tai Chi Chuan, Tai Chi Push Hands, Pa Kua, Hsing Yi, and Tai Chi Sword.

Also transmitted were the Chinese Health Methods. The Chinese Health Methods consist of approximately fifty exercises (only counting once those performed on both the right and left side). It is a course

suitable for all ages, but of especial value to the middle aged, elderly, or infirm due to the physical ease with which they are performed. Involving gentle self massage that acts internally, every facet of body function is engaged, from head to toe, including the internal organs.

Beyond all these many facets, Roshi also received a thorough grounding in the essence of Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian philosophy through a study of the classics in the original Chinese language.

Kongo Roshi served as Assistant Instructor at the Chinese Cultural Academy for 8 years. Then in May 1988, Kongo Roshi became Prof. Huo's successor and was appointed Director of the Chinese Cultural Academy where he continues to teach.

During an extensive visit to Chicago, Prof. Tao Zhang, Head of Orthopedic Surgery at the China Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Guang An Men Hospital, Beijing, taught Roshi the I Jin Jing. This is the most highly regarded set of Chi Kung exercises and they are attributed to Bodhidharma, founder of Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism in China 1400 years ago. I Jin Jing demands great intensity of concentration. Prospective students must be made aware that the practice of Tai Chi Chuan has definitely been made a prerequisite for this particular course of study, due to the profound and subtle nature of these exercises which require great awareness required for their comprehension. In I Jin Jing the student learns by simultaneously performing the exercise and by closely observing the instructor, with great awareness. The interaction is quite intense. Given Kongo Roshi's uniquely prolific accomplishments, it is almost unfathomable that one individual could absorb and indeed embody the essence of so many diverse and deeply spiritual teachings. However, we may perhaps begin to get a taste for the degree of intensive preparation it took to amass this impressive array of mastered arts. In this way Kongo Roshi most resembled Prof. Huo, in that he was always engaged in study. Professor often remarked that only Roshi, among all of his many students, displayed the assiduous application and possessed the tenacious spirit that distinguishes disciple from student. In fact, as Roshi learned from a number of Prof. Huo's closest Chinese friends, Professor considered Roshi to be his only true disciple. It thus becomes easy to understand why Prof. Huo, the quintessential and imposing Chinese gentleman, artist, scholar, and philosopher of China's 'old school', would only entrust the Academy to Roshi. Thus the fact of Roshi's American origin became completely outweighed by Roshi's intense application to all forms of study and practice grounded in meditation. Perhaps in now knowing or recalling these facts, we can all better appreciate some of the incredible demands for Roshi's time over the years. One dares to say that there may well be no American, and probably only a handful of Orientals who have sacrificed so much of themselves and their lives to preserve the treasures of the Oriental, meditatively based arts.

Now we can begin to understand the excitement shared among many associated with Roshi, especially his old time students, given that his schedule is expanding at both the Temple and Academy. One may truly say: "The reservoir has been filled and now we can all take a deeper drink."

As Abbot of the Zen Buddhist Temple of Chicago, Kongo Langlois, Roshi directs services, the instruction of lay practitioners, and the discipleships of candidates for the Zen Buddhist priesthood. In

this he is assisted by a number of disciples, several of whom are ordained priests. Private zazen instruction (dokusan) is available by appointment. Regular services are held at 10 A.M. on Sundays and 7 P.M. on Wednesdays. One or three day retreats for intensive meditation are held monthly. Lectures and demonstrations are also made available to any interested organizations. These have already been given at churches, Buddhist temples, schools, zen groups, colleges, and universities.

Under Academy auspices Roshi teaches Chen and Yang (Secret) Styles of Tai Chi Chuan, I Jin Jing, and Chinese Health Methods. These accomplishments and classes themselves offer the most profound indication of Roshi's dedication to the preservation and dissemination of the great spiritual treasures of Asia. They also concretely express his hope that his students may find the time and determination to master these arts and continue their transmission and dissemination. As we take these classes offered and taught by Roshi, we may hope eventually to acquire what most, all too often, fail to gain after a lifetime and what Roshi has most remarkably achieved in over three decades of intense study.

Kongo Roshi's expanded teaching schedule now permits him to take on private students. Many have personally felt the profound benefits of private instruction from Roshi. It is always intense and indeed most rewarding. For those ambitious enough to make the commitment to accelerate and solidify their progress leading toward mastery, it is to be highly recommended. In fact, private lessons and encounters played a vital role in enabling Roshi to acquire so much from Prof. Huo and Sensei.

It is to be hoped that this biography provides you with some idea of the intense work involved in this life of multiple discipleships. Only if you have had some training of this sort can you begin to really appreciate the extent to which Kongo Langlois Roshi has lived up to the promise of his Dharma name, Diamond. For a recorded message giving current activities of the Temple and the Academy, please call (708) 869-0554. To make arrangements for any of the above services call (708) 272-2070.

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