

The Traditional Chinese Cultural Choosing of a *Zhangmenren* as Gatekeeper

By Wang Rong-Shen, President TYMTA

Translated by George C. Lin

There are various forms of inheritance for sects of traditional Chinese culture including religions, martial arts, fine arts and philosophy. The appointment of a Zhangmenren or gatekeeper is solemn and dignified because it is vital to the history and future of an art form. A special initiation ceremony is performed to formally declare a Zhangmenren. For example, in Daoism the inheritance of Chang Ten-Shi (張天師) can be traced back with complete and full documentation to the Han Dynasty for the establishment of its authority to general public. From ancient times, the inheritance of Zhangmenren 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 as follows:

1. First, the current Zhangmenren will select a candidate whom he has observed many years to show his moral character, strong physical ability, outstanding martial art skill and a well-rounded personality. If this candidate meets all the above criteria and passes the test, he is ready to be initiated as the next Zhangmenren.
2. Once a candidate has been selected, a ceremony, witnessed by high-ranking members, senior teachers and senior disciples will be held on an auspicious date and time. The current Zhangmenren will then host a sacrifice ritual at the altar of the founders (祖師 Zushi). By

following the established tradition, he passes the official chops, keepsake(信物 Sinwu) and honorable symbol (令符 Lingfu) to the new Zhangmenren and makes a declaration to all members of the school.

3. The last step is a formal notification to all other schools and sects, announcing a new Zhangmenren

The above procedure, often unwritten, 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. He did initiate disciples (lineage transmitter or Chuanren) for Golden Mountain Daoism Sect several times in Taiwan and abroad. As to YMT, Laoshi never held any ceremony to formally initiate disciples. I recall a time when Laoshi came to Tainan. At the welcome reception in a restaurant, my students respectfully addressed Laoshi as either Grand Master(師祖) or Shigong(師公). Laoshi said with a smile "My students teach their students. No matter who is teaching who, you all call me Laoshi. I am a fourth generation YMT (note: he did not say Zhangmenren) and you are all fifth generations YMT." From then on, I address all of Laoshi's students as brothers and sisters.