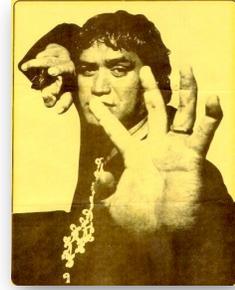


Meeting the Masters: Nick Cerio (1936-1998) & Daniel Pai (1930-1993)

Over 50 years of training in budo, I have been lucky enough to meet or train under many notable martial artists. This year, I want to share my impressions, some deep set, some fleeting, about the men and women I met on the way.



Having studied only Judo at the time, I was working as a traveling salesman and whenever I had a night off, would try to visit a local dojo. Stationed in Hartford, CT for the weekend, I looked up a nearby school and strolled in, explaining my situation and asking if I could watch a class.

I did not know a thing about Daniel Pai or the Pai Lum organization. A proud student told me that Danny was here to clean up the phony martial arts in the Hartford area. Sounded good, of course, but also sounded like pie-in-the-sky, if you will excuse the pun.

Master Pai was cordial and, once I explained my training in Judo and Hakkoryu under Larry Garron, he was happy for me to watch from a seat by his desk. “Sensei [I did not know if he preferred ‘Sifu’ or not, but I took a chance], I noticed you are on a cane. What happened?” He explained that he had a standing rule that any of his students could attack him at any time and that the night before, one did. “Unfortunately, he is in the hospital now.”

I saw a couple of brown-belt students practicing an interesting pre-arranged engagement in which the defender climbs up the stance of the attacker and attacks him from above. Little did I know that The Black Widow would use the same technique in an *Iron Man* movie. What shocked me, however, was that the students were making light and sometimes not-so-light contact for which the practice session had to be stopped to make sure first aid was not necessary. Certainly, brown belts are not known for their self-control and certainly injuries are always a risk when training in a fighting art, but I felt that these students were just over the edge of acceptability. However, I was not as yet a karate-ka and I was not about to challenge Master Pai on the subject. To be frank, they made me see Chinese-based systems in a different light, and also peeked my interest in Kempo.

Nick Cerio who began his own style of Kenpo in 1974, was a friend and former Hakkoryu student of one of my prime instructors, Larry Garron. At the time, most of the students attending Master Cerio’s class were from karate systems, so he tried to emphasize the aspects of kempo that were different from Okinawan-Japanese methods. He had us practice a simple angular avoidance using a cat-stance and a hook block. This was not a problem for the Goju guys, but the Shotokan guys wanted to take back-stances and use knife-hands. I saw the movement as a variation of the block from middle of Bassai-dai and had no problem. Then he had us do the block without moving to the angle. Fewer people

caught on, but because the block was like half a roundhouse block (*mawashi-uke*), and since I knew the kata in which Goju and Shotokan karate employ such a block, it felt comfortable to me.

“Okay,” Sensei said, “now try to use the block against a low punch.” Uh-oh. People were trying to scoop under it or get lower in their cat stances.

“Any ideas?” he asked. Rather than raise my hand I went through the motions of the block parrying low first and then doing a circular down-block, in other words, I simply inverted the shape. He pointed to me to acknowledge that I had the right idea, and then went on to explain more about the movement. It was one of my first introductions to using movement shapes rather than making small adjustments to orthodox movements. The concept turned out to be especially useful in aiki training, something Master Cerio certainly hadn’t considered, but something that, with reflection, might have been evident in his own Hakkoryu training.

Getting an insight into aiki from a kempo master was a validation of the broad approach I had decided to take in the martial arts. Before me, Master Cerio, who had trained under masters such as Ed Parker, William Chow, George Pesare, and Tadashi Yamashita, had done the same thing.