



Journal homepage:

[www.jcimjournal.com/jim](http://www.jcimjournal.com/jim)

[www.elsevier.com/locate/issn/20954964](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/issn/20954964)

Available also online at [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com).

Copyright © 2016, Journal of Integrative Medicine Editorial Office.

E-edition published by Elsevier (Singapore) Pte Ltd. All rights reserved.

## • Global Views

# Dr. William Prensky: The birth of the acupuncture profession in the United States (1969–1979) — the Institute for Taoist Studies and the National Acupuncture Association

Arthur Yin Fan

McLean Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, PLC. Vienna, VA 22182, USA

**Keywords:** acupuncture; United States; history of medicine; Gim Shek Ju; Tin Yau So; William Prensky; School

**Citation:** Fan AY. Dr. William Prensky: The birth of the acupuncture profession in the United States (1969–1979) — the Institute for Taoist Studies and the National Acupuncture Association. *J Integr Med*. 2016; 14(1): 5–11.

Acupuncture is one important part of traditional Chinese medicine (here after, the author will only use the term “acupuncture” to denote both acupuncture and Chinese medicine) and is a fast growing profession in recent years<sup>[1,2]</sup>. Many patients have benefited from acupuncture therapy because acupuncture is a safe, effective and natural therapy<sup>[3]</sup>. Several articles and interviews published in recent years have described the history of the establishment of acupuncture and Chinese medicine on the east and west coasts of the United States (U.S.) of America<sup>[4–11]</sup>. Currently there are three professions related to acupuncture that have been and are practiced in the U.S.: “acupuncture” for acupuncture and Oriental medicine (AOM) practitioners; medical acupuncture for Western-trained medical doctors; and “animal acupuncture” for AOM practitioners and veterinary medical doctors<sup>[11]</sup>. In order to more accurately document the history of acupuncture in the U.S., Dr. Arthur Yin Fan interviewed Dr. William Prensky, who was involved in the beginnings of these three professions.

Dr. Prensky is one of the earliest non-Asian acupuncturists in the U.S., and has been a major player in AOM developments

since its very beginning<sup>[10–12]</sup>.

**Dr. Arthur Yin Fan (Fan):** *Dr. Prensky, I know you are a pioneer who started acupuncture in the United States — there were a lot of other pioneers too—but you were a leader, as I understand. I am very interested in the history of acupuncture in the U.S.—how did acupuncture start in the U.S.? I know you learned acupuncture very early and I have a few questions. The first one is when, where and why you started to learn acupuncture?*

**Dr. William Prensky (Prensky):** Well, when, where and why are interesting questions. Let’s first talk about the “when”. We started to learn acupuncture in 1969 as students at the Institute for Taoist Studies (ITS), in Los Angeles. At that time, our class was the first and the only organized class in acupuncture in the country.

Now we need to point out that there have always been people in the U.S. interested in acupuncture; William Osler wrote about acupuncture and was interested in it about 150 years before we began our classes. But, in terms of organized study—a formal class looking to produce graduated, traditionally trained practitioners—ours was, so

[http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S2095-4964\(16\)60236-4](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S2095-4964(16)60236-4)

Received April 27, 2015; accepted June 24, 2015.

**Correspondence:** Arthur Yin Fan, CMD, PhD, LAc; Tel: +1-703-499-4428; E-mail: [ArthurFan@ChineseMedicineDoctor.US](mailto:ArthurFan@ChineseMedicineDoctor.US)



far as anybody knows, the first formal class in acupuncture conducted in the U.S. It was also the first formal class in acupuncture to be conducted traditionally—that is taught by a traditional acupuncturist, not taught as a novelty in medical schools, or an area of interest in medical schools which happened later. This was taught as a course for people going to practice acupuncture in a traditional way despite that fact that there was no legal status for acupuncturists at that time.

So in many regards you can say, without any contradiction that I know of, that this was the origin of the profession, and the origin of the educational system in acupuncture for professional acupuncturists in the U.S. The movement that is now fully underway began with that first group which organized the first class in Los Angeles in 1969. You can also make the case that the major part of the medical interest in acupuncture, if not the entirety of the interest, also grew from that first class, because as that group matured and developed, its members also taught dentists and physicians throughout North America.

Over the next four to five years (**Dr. Fan notes:** around 1972–1975) we held educational programs all over the country that grew not only at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), which is well-known, but also at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC), at the University of Oregon Medical School, at Tufts University, at Harvard Medical School, at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and at the University of Southern California, just to name a few. Many of the early interest groups, which eventually led to the development of medical acupuncture, began with these classes, so there were many programs that grew out of this. But this was the very first time when anyone studied acupuncture for itself, seriously and directly.

The question “Where”—this all was rooted in Los Angeles.

The question “Why”, is a much bigger question. I can come at it from two different directions. The first group was formed through the organization which, to us, was known as the ITS, and was formed in order to host the first acupuncture classes. The first class started in 1969, and the second in 1970. The founders of the ITS were three people—myself, Steven Rosenblatt, who is now a physician, practicing in California and in Hawaii, and Lewis Prince who died many years ago. The organizers of the school were myself, and Steven Rosenblatt. I was a graduate student in psychology at UCLA and Steven was a fellow graduate student in the same program. David Bresler, who later became the Research Director of the UCLA Acupuncture Research Project, was also a doctoral student in the same program.

I was a research fellow at the UCLA Brain Research Institute, working on projects aimed at understanding cortical structures and their relationship to motivated behavior. We began the study looking at the effects of removing all cortical

structures above the level of the hypothalamus in rats, and progressed to studying cats, dogs and then monkeys. In fact, the results of the study were intuitively obvious before it began—that animals with their higher cortical structures removed were unable to learn simple tasks such as finding and remembering the location of their food. This surprised no one. It led one of our fellow researchers to coin the phrase “proving the intuitively obvious to the hopelessly dimwitted”.

By the time (at the end of 1968 and beginning of 1969) the study had sacrificed dozens of lab animals, a fellow student and I looked at each other and said: “We can’t do this anymore.”

We started looking for something else to do that was not destructive but could bring help to people, and a good friend at UCLA said to me “Why don’t you study Tai Chi? There’s a guy teaching Tai Chi in the park on Saturdays and he’s very traditional and you might find something that helps to give you direction.” We had by that time become incredibly disenchanted with what we were doing, so off we went to study Tai Chi, and met a man who became our first teacher, Marshall Ho’o (**Dr. Fan notes:** also spelled as “Marshall Hoo”), who at that time was one of the most well-known Tai Chi teachers in Los Angeles. Steven Rosenblatt and I began to study with him, and about 2 or 3 months later another student said to us “If you’re looking for something completely different, why don’t you study acupuncture?”

We approached Marshall Ho’o who said to us that he knew a traditional and excellent acupuncturist with whom we could study. What we needed to do was to get a group together large enough to constitute a class, and then raise some money.

The acupuncturist that Marshall knew turned out to be Dr. Ju Gim Shek (**Dr. Fan notes:** This may also be written “Gim Shek Ju”, as “Ju” is his family name), who had a small private practice operating from his apartment in Chinatown. While Dr. Kim (as we came to call him) did not speak English (he later learned from us as we worked together over the next five years), Marshall agreed to translate for us if we could put together a class. So we put together the first group. The first class consisted of 10 people, who were prepared to meet once a week to start with. Each of us had to come up with \$20 a week in order to pay him \$200 per session.

At that time, \$20 a week was a lot of money to us, but we pressed forward and we got together a group of friends and colleagues from UCLA, and we formed the first class. That class began meeting at the beginning of 1969 in Marshall Ho’o’s studio, which was in the Crossroads of the World office mall in West Hollywood.

The first class started meeting on Saturday afternoons, right after the Tai Chi class that Marshall used to give us

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/3099512>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/3099512>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)