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Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey there thanks for coming by this is whistlekick martial arts radio and we're the traditional martial arts podcast comes to twice a week with different episodes, different people, different topics and today we have noted martial arts scholar author, Sifu Jonathan Bluestein. If you knew the show you may not know my voice I'm Jeremy Lesniak, I'm the founder here at whistlekick, I'm your host a martial arts radio. I have the best job in the world because I get to talk about martial arts with some of the world's most amazing people. If you want to check out the products we make head on over to whistlekick.com you can find shirts and other stuff like that for traditional martial artist, gear, training aids and links to all the other amazing products we've got going like martial Journal, martial arts calendar and honestly too many to name in an intro segment. Gets really annoying if I went on the whole list but check out whistlekick.com you can see all the stuff we got going on there. As I said our guest today is seafood Jonathan Bluestein although he's from Israel he's knowledgeable about Chinese culture and Chinese martial arts and that's just one of the many reasons that he's on the show today. While many of us have dreamed of traveling to the homeland of martial arts for training, he's done it. Shifu Bluestein talks about not only his love for martial arts, but the ways his kung Fu as impacted every aspect of his life all the way down to gardening. Let's hear from him.

Hey Shifu Bluestein, I'm doing great, how are you?

Jonathan Bluestein:



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I'm doing fantastic today it's sunny, it's springtime in Israel, [00:01:59.15] my garden it's just wonderful.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, cool awesome. What do you garden? What do you grow?

Jonathan Bluestein:

Fruits, vegetables, I got a mango tree and all trees and pitango, every nice tropical fruit, tomatoes, cucumbers, squash, whatnot.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow you got that is quite the garden, more than just a couple things on the patio.

Jonathan Bluestein:

Oh, sure sure. It's a small place but gardening is medicine and that in a way its intimately related to the martial arts in fact there's very nice video on YouTube somewhere showing the relationship between farming and one of the arts that I practice and teach, Xing Yi Quan. So, on yeah because that these this conversation at ancient and also not so ancient China borrowed a lot of the health movement concepts from their farming and delivered them into their martial arts both in in application and training methods. That makes a lot of sense because if you are farmer and you have to work with manual tools and mostly they didn't have any sophisticated technology up until very recently so you have to say plow the field for hours and hours a day and pull that thrice and that's a very hard work and if you're going to do this for many hours on in, then you gotta find a way that's not so tiring. You got the use your body as a single unit so you wouldn't waste too much power and also be able to generate a lot of power for various movements whether you want to pull out the roots or you want to move something that's heavy and unlike with say [00:03:50.16] the gym or you come and the exercise itself is the goal, right? You want to build your muscle, you want to build your strength, so you're gonna strain yourself for just 10 20 30 maybe 60 seconds and that's it and then you gotta have your rest and you're going to try again then in 45 minutes to maybe an hour you're done and then you get a day or two of res then you can go at it again. It's very different than having to generate power and do so continuously for hours so got to work with your body differently.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That makes a lot of sense yeah. And you know when we think about a lot of martial traditions they do tend to come out of farming communities. Lotta folks listening that are familiar with Okinawan martial arts. You know, whenever we think of the stereotypical Okinawan martial arts practice at its family lineage and its farmers.

Jonathan Bluestein:



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Yeah that's very true and also, we gotta get into the minds of these farmers. Who are they? They're people who are, they're community-based. They can't, there is individualism of course in any society, even in a dictatorship there is some form of individualism however, you are codependent you can just pick a fight with anyone. Nowadays, we have our democracies so cold.

Jeremy Lesniak:

We are not going down that rabbit hole today that's for sure.

Jonathan Bluestein:

Yeah sure sure. With our democracies, we can just go online and take up piss at anyone and be nasty towards anyone really, we wish to. Be we can even at times be are not so kind towards people who are our acquaintances, maybe even our friends in the name of truth and criticism and all that. But if you live in a farming community and you know that you're going to be someone off you're going to have a fight and then the next day, maybe both of your bruised and can't work and you not going to have food and it's a lose lose situation or maybe you need to work together in the field and he's not going to work with you that's also a lose lose situation. So, if you live in such a community, there is a different perspective to things and this brings forth a different perspective in Okinawan and Chinese martial arts and then it is may be in in some Western martial arts because their community-based and you see that, you know some people that might look at this from the outside, if they could practice this art or they don't like what they do and they say all of this is like this is a socialist mindset or something like that. This is not something I would like to to get into or like to do, but not all I mean, these people been create their stuff because their influence by Karl Marx and the that are more community oriented because of historical necessity and still proves very effective in at traditional martial arts communities to this day.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Truly interesting stuff. Now you alluded to some things as you are just talking that make a great transition into why we brought you on the show. You've spent a considerable amount of time and and have some, expertise I guess is really the word, on training in China and even I think we can take a step back from the specifics of training in China and talk about training elsewhere. You know destination training going to the home of your arts if you want to look at it that way and I'd love for us to talk some more about that, about what people can expect, why people would want to go there, so we really just and had a good primer completely unplanned listeners, we weren't planning to talk about gardening it all but you know, here we see yet again the martial arts is everywhere.

Jonathan Bluestein:

So, and going back to gardening for just two seconds, I use my martial arts and gardening all the time. I mean, if you work at Gardening you find out very quickly that your martial arts stances and the way you use your body is unified whole is very useful and effective for a whole lot of things. Especially if you have



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to dig things out of the ground or dig into the ground that's very useful. So, you said an expert on training in China maybe I'm an expert on Chinese martial arts but I have not spent enough time of my life to be considered a Chinese culture aspects even though I'm very familiar with it. And I'm saying this because Chinese culture is very very different to ours Westerners and to really gain serious expertise in that kind of cultural setting, maybe someone to spend ought to spend a number of years 5 to 7 years in China and speak fluent Chinese to get the grips of it. I was therefore less, those still for a considerable amount of time. So first of all, what brings me to China, I practice and teach free traditional Chinese martial arts. They are seen in Xing Yi Quan, pigua zhang, that come from northern China and also [00:09:14.14] lineage which comes which comes from southern china. Now my teacher here Israel Shifu Ni San Oren studied in the city of tian jin n China for many years. The city of Tianjin has been central location in China for centuries and that he did have even been that the capital city of China for a while and its major major center for commerce, innovations, trade, culture you name it. There are over 50 million people living there so it is it's the size of many small countries, its actually my country of Israel is smaller population size that the city of Tianjin. Now this is very advanced, some people who haven't been to China who perhaps have seen images of the countryside and place like that, if they take China to be a backward place at times but actually if you go to Tianjin, in some respects it's as advanced or even more advanced than New York city because you take a city like New York and it's old in its infrastructure relatively speaking, the amount of new construction taking place is not that large. Over in China with that government can do with the type of power it has over the country and pver its citizens, if it wants to build something new it just flags in several neighborhoods and build a whole section off the city [00:10:49.52]. So, if they built something new, it's big and slow to be the newest thing that technology and money can afford and they spare no expense. So, when I went there in last 2014, the new subway just opened, they already had a subway for a long while, and I went down that subway didn't have even have currency they had this like, plastic coin system which was very innovative and then in you went down the subway and you are traveling underground of course you can see anything for that windows, so the windows turned into 3D hologram advertisements. The likes of which I have not seen in subways and trains elsewhere in the world and I'm quite well-traveled so that just gives you an example of how advanced some of the things they have on. So, I got to a Tianjin to study with my [00:11:46.04] my teachers teacher. His name is master Zhou zhing quan and he's recently deceased, he suddenly passed away two years ago from complications of the stroke and master Zhou had lived and studied and trained and taught in the city of Tianjin all his life. He also came to Israel for a month-long seminar and he lived in my house, that's how I get to know him personally and then I traveled to study with him in Tianjin. So that's what got me there and unlike the other people who go to China and they're not quite sure what they're going to study who they're gonna study with. Or they're going to be at the temple or elsewhere or anything like that. I knew from the get-go because of my teacher, that I'm going to see his teacher it's gonna be in a city where I'm going to see him etc. So, the path was clearer for me. And Master Zhou used to teach in at [00:12:42.44] Park. [00:12:43.45] park is very big nice-looking park at the center of Tianjin and it's a meeting ground for whole lot of martial artists of different styles and he'd been training and another parts since the age of nine and had studied there was many teachers and taught



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several martial arts and was really martial arts prodigy. So that's what brought me to China and would you like to ask something?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Just said yeah let's so were kinda gonna go in and I think two parallel tracks here as we talk about this. Were to talk about your specific journey why you went to China and things that happen there but I'd also like us to kinda back out some general knowledge for folks that are listening. Because you know, there may be some folks listening who train in your styles or similar styles it might want to go to the same places and have a similar trip, but I'm going to guess that most of the listeners are not and they're gonna be interested in okay, what would it be like what thing should I consider if I'm going to go to Japan or to the Philippines or you know wherever the recognized home of the art or arts that they practice and what to expect and what their mindset should be. You know there's culture shock I think whenever we go from one place to another but what makes that hardest is expectations. I want to go back even more, you know we talked about I guess that the very general why you went to train with specific people but what was it about your training that made you want to seek those folks out?

Jonathan Bluestein:

Okay so just several questions here and I'll give you several answers. First of all, if anyone wishes to train abroad or just train out of where they're living I think that the first thing to be aware of is what do you want to study and who do you want to study with? So, I'll give you two examples. First if you don't know what you want to study, there was one Israeli guy he went to Master Zhou in China my teacher's teacher, and he kinda didn't quiet to figure out what he wants to study so he came to master Zhou and told him I want to study your Xing Yi Quan master Zhou said okay, so what you want to study with the Xing Yi Quan? He said everything. I just want to study everything and master asked him okay how come how much time you got, he said 2 and a half months okay, you got 2 and a half months, I give you everything I can because a lot of the traditional Chinese teachers what they believe is I'm just gonna give you what you ask for. It's a thing in China and Chinese culture. A lot of people, if you want something badly then a Chinese person would often assume that you have good judgment even if your request is ridiculous if and even if your request is not what he thinks is right it would respect your opinion and your judgment. Unlike perhaps in the United States or Israel or Europe. Take the restaurant example, maybe you want to take something out of a [00:16:07.18] you know, you think you don't like one ingredient, so in China if they even agree to your request and then they just say okay they take you out and they give what you ask for its more likely than not even if they agree because often they don't like to change that the way the dishes are structured. But you know, in the west, if you're in United States or Europe or Israel then it's very common for the way to tell you oh you but these ingredients it's really good tasting maybe you'd like it. Maybe it makes the dish better, maybe you should give it a go so they actually try to bargain it with you and they be sort of slightly very gentle way argue with you over it. So that something a Chinese person traditionalist Chinese person would often not do. So that guy came to Master Zhou, he told him I want to study everything in two and a half months he said okay. And he taught them most of



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the curriculum in two and a half months, the guy train train train and he's gifted movement wise and he had a lot of experience martial arts prior so when he taught him the movements he kinda got the movements but it's all empty because you gotta build up your basics and that takes years and you can't just throw the curriculum at someone. He can be maybe the most excellent ballet dancer so he can take in all the movements. Doesn't mean that he has the art he just has empty movements and he would forget most of it and that's what happened. The guy came back to Israel, forgot most of what he'd learned and figured out that actually hasn't got that got the basics so he went to my teacher and asked him to teach him the basics from the very beginning and very slowly this time. And he had the most wonderful experience in China training [00:17:55.08] but he wasted his time essentially because he could have focused on far fewer things and got them than right then studying the whole curriculum and get next to nothing. So that's why it's very important to know what you want to study and you also want to know who you want to study with and you want to figure this out before you make your travels because otherwise you can be taken advantage of. Think of a tourist in your country whichever country the listener's from, anyone who's a tourist can easily fall into financial trap or can be easily lied to because they don't know the culture and the environmental setting it's very common you notice the newly immigrated people fall victim to all sorts of financial schemes and cons and whatever. It's the same for you don't think you can't fall for it because if you're westerner and you come into Japan or China or to Philippines or whatever, if you don't know the people and you don't know the culture then you can be easily manipulated by people to believe that what they're selling you is authentic, it's legit, it's what you want and then spend anywhere between a week to several years doing something that's just wasting your time and you wouldn't be able to figure it out quickly and unless someone else tells you that or you know oftentimes people would just think, oh it's just what he wants so no one would say anything and then suddenly you waste the five years of your life with a teacher who's you so called lesser product not the martial arts you know, I don't like to think of martial arts as a business or product but as an analogy and then you figure out what of you had studied with five years of training, you could've gotten three months with another teacher who's far more skilled and who also, you like better personally on a personal level.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure. So, let's go back because you gave the example of the individual who went to China and really didn't get what he had wanted. Didn't come back with I guess we could say didn't come back with knowledge, he had experiences but didn't retain that information. Is it fair to say that you are discouraging folks from learning the basics of an art in travel that they should have a foundation and that it is to improve the art that you would travel and train with folks?

Jonathan Bluestein:

I would say this, if you are a complete beginner at the said martial arts and you wish to travel abroad and then do so for a very minimum of three months and he needs better, if you can stay for at least two years that's best. If you are a complete beginner, you don't know anything or next to nothing about this



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certain martial arts you want to study. But otherwise if you already have the basics nailed down, you've been practicing for a while in their qualified teacher and you gonna study with someone who's associated affiliated with your teacher or and teaches something that similar and you been trying for a while then maybe you can go for as little as maybe two or three weeks, that would also be useful period of time for training for you. But especially if you're going to train for a shorter period of time it's very important that you do so intensely, that you practice for several hours a day because if you're already travelled and spend so much money and effort and time on this then at least you know push ourselves to training a very minimum of two or three hours a day so you can get the most you want out of that experience and ask as many questions as you can and also it's very good if possible, if it's allowed to take as many pictures and videos as you can to get back with you to reflect upon once you're back in your home land and all of these things will be very helpful. I see a lot of people to come to China they have this fantasy, they train half-an-hour, an hour day and the rest of the day just go about eating good food and visiting tourist attractions which is makes for fantastic experiences but you came for the martial arts right so go for it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's a great delineation and I like the words that we're using here and experiencing, it's a travel experience, a vacation I guess some would call it that has some training component versus I'm going to go, I'm going to study, it's an intensive experience and I can't speak to other parts the world but I know here in the US I have a number of friends who have been on intensive academic tours. You know, they go to Peru and lived there for two weeks speaking nothing but Spanish in an effort to learn Spanish or to you know, to travel to other cultural centers to invest that time to come away with some well-founded knowledge and I guess if we're going to look at martial arts travel in the same way you really have to jump in with both feet and invest as much of the time as possible into taking those experiences away as you're saying. So that makes a lot of sense but admittedly it wasn't something I'd considered when we started talking about it, I've always had this dream of you know going to Japan or to Okinawa and spending a couple weeks there may be training two or three times in a week as I would hear but I'm realizing now that, that's not really worth all of that investment maybe I'll have some fun, maybe I'll meet some people but if I want to learn as much as I can, that has to be the top priority.

Jonathan Bluestein:

Yeah. Another aspect to be taken into account here is that Asian peoples, in my experience often are not so quick to trust as western peoples because I know perhaps it's assumed in the Judeo-Christian culture that we come from the same foundation's especially among Jews you know, if you, I'm a Jewish Israeli if you meet another Jew, they just randomly expect you to be a part of their extended family most often, but in Asia you have to establish something called guan xi in Chinese. Guan xi literally translates as relationship so it's a relationship of trust and is graded when one side in their relationship provides a favor for the other side. A favor can be something you do for someone or small gift or just being forthcoming in a very specific way so let's say I'm on the streets and I seemed baffled, I don't know



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where to go and some Chinese guy sees me and he's been interested in becoming friends with some Western people because he maybe needs to improve his English, may be businesswise made some connections with which individuals which are difficult to get sometimes if you're native Chinese and you can speak English well, so he sees me all baffled in the street and he comes to me and he helps me out and he is being very kind and he doesn't ask for anything in return and he would show me the way maybe he even its very common he even take me where I need to go. And then in the end we we talk a little bit maybe for five minutes and he gives me his business card and I give him mine and then he was in the cultural context that he lives in, that now we sorta have guan xi, that relationship. Now he has my business card may be a week later you would like to meet with some British guy and he needs to explain something to that British guy that he cannot quite put into words English. So, he knows that maybe you can give me a call and I would explain it to the British guy for him. Because now kind I owe him a favor that relationship in that guan xi and now this we have exchanged two favors, he gave me one, I gave him one, now the relationship they strengthen and now maybe if we want to we can become friends, we are more trusting eventually, this favor exchanges can can get pretty serious for instance, people have strong guan xi with each other and maybe one person has a daughter and his daughter needs to get into university but she doesn't have good enough grades, his friend with whom he had guan xi since their kids is a professor at the University, its expected of his friend the professor to pull some string to get that that guy's daughter into the University even if it's certainly illegal, even if she doesn't have the best of grades because they had guan xi and in China oftentimes guanchi triumphs over law. It triumphs over most things because the power of relationships is very strong but to set up that relationship that takes time, that can take days, weeks, months also oftentimes if you go to a traditionalist teacher in China or Okinawa especially Japan too, it's very different if you just enter the school, enter the dojo and you say, here and I want to train. They say fine then maybe takes you months to get into their one she had and be trusted but if you come with a letter of recommendation from someone they have guan xi with already maybe it's someone they knew for many years, maybe it's one of their kung Fu brothers someone, person who trained with them under the same teacher people like that. It could be even their neighbor whom they've known for 10 years. More likely better would be to have someone from the martial arts family, you come with a letter like that or even better if that person brings you and attests for your good character, this is a prime entry ticket, this is much better than just coming in. Because it's not it's not, school might be commercial but it doesn't mean that because you have the money and you can pay and they're gonna teach you that you are gonna have that guan xi, that relationship that has to be built but you can bypass that, if someone introduces you then this is very powerful so this is also very good for consideration, if you're going to see a teacher and he's a traditionalist teacher, in the East to have an introduction by someone is very important and it's going to save you time and the money and that teachers is gonna take you far more seriously. Imagine you have a childhood friend you knew for 40 years, you met the guy almost every day for 10 years than you getting that for 20 years you trust him completely. Maybe he's the godfather of your children even and then that person tells you all you don't have this guy I really like him his bright, he's dedicated this guy can study with you I'm sending him your way, please take care of him. So, you're gonna take this seriously more seriously than if someone just



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comes up the street and says I want to train today. You say okay fine maybe he comes, maybe he comes back or not and maybe he pays, maybe he doesn't. I don't know how serious he is, very different.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Interesting. This is all great stuff and I'm sure that just as you're doing so with me, some of the listeners are kinda having their perceptions blown up and that's why we had talked about what we were to talk about today and that's why I'm glad we settled on this because, I think a lot of times and I've talked to people who've done this people will go and they'll go somewhere to train and they don't get what they were hoping for. So, the goal here today listeners, is to give you some things to think about so you can better plan out any kind of international destination training or honestly even domestically. Training you know going anywhere to train on a temporary basis carry some pitfalls with it, if you think back to the first time you went to train somewhere, maybe that I'm assuming that was China,

Jonathan Bluestein:

Yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

What myths I guess can we blow up for people?

Jonathan Bluestein:

Well just about everything.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow okay that's a long list.

Jonathan Bluestein:

Yeah, I'll tell you why. If culture is very different to ours what are your expectations built upon? I mean, you've seen some movies, you've read some books maybe, you heard some stories, you never really get it until you get there, until you physically landing the place. You see the people you smell the smells, you see, you view the sites, you can touch everything. Everything is different especially in China you're like an alien. I mean, when I was in the city of Tianjin, maybe now it's a bit different that you could walk for entire day in that city and not see another Caucasian. Not a single person and not only that, it's not only that there are no Caucasians around and I don't mind that racially or ethnically at all, I like the Chinese people a lot, it's just that your you're like an alien among them because you're only person who looks like you do and then on top of that there is barely anyone the entire city who can speak your language. Hebrew, forget about it of course in English, well you'd be hard-pressed to find any Chinese person who can converse more than three or four sentences fluently in English. In the city of Tianjin, maybe one in a thousand, you can find them but it's quite difficult and this the standard of English spoken in China is still



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very low unfortunately, they're working on that, the people in government are working hard at it but they got a billion and a half people to teach English to and that takes a whole lot of time. So, the level which, an English language professor from the universities that have spoken with such people in China is about the level of an Israeli high school graduates who speaks English. So that ain't too high. Yeah and as a professor so you land there and everything is different every single thing you see you experience, the food incredibly different, it's not even like the Chinese food you eat at Chinese restaurants because if you maybe not notice, but Chinese food that we think of in the west, usually more often than not, is Chinese-Americans food. It's Chinese food, first of all, usually from southern China because China only open up fully to the west gradually during the 1980s and then the early 1990s and that means most of the Chinese folks that people are encountering for instance the Europe or United States were immigrants from southern China in place like Hong Kong which are more open or Taiwan and so you're used to southern Chinese cuisine and southern Chinese dialects when you hear them and which sound very different to what you encounter in northern China the Mandarin which is that the prominent dialect today in China and that the theory is what they did was in the United States they mix their native cuisines place that American taste buds because they had to sell that food to Americans and Americans weren't so fan, weren't so fond of that native Chinese cuisine so they changed it a little and now what you got is Chinese-American cuisine, you go to china its very different, the people the way they behave, you go to the restroom when I went to Chinatown my trips, you and still squat to do your stuff in the hole, unless you're at an airport or fancy hotel you're gonna have to squat and sit down and even the eighty year olds do it what which is a shock and and you know it's dirty and it's not as hygienic or comfortable as what you're used to. You're at the airport, you go off the plane, you go for these detectors that detect if you have the flu that's crazy, they have machines you have to pass through and then if you have the flu they supposedly detain you. That's crazy. And that the entire airport if anyone had been to the airport in Beijing, just the capital, they're now building a new one so there's going to be an even more impressive one soon, the entire airport ties this dome, one roof covering the entire airport and the and is just a very impressive and ends very different, the smells are different, culture is everywhere in China which is also different. So in in the United States are you go through a city so maybe, you see a sculpture here and there maybe there's an art museum, in China you set foot out the plane and everywhere there is art. If there is gardening at the airport or in the city at which is also everywhere then every small trees a bonsai tree a bonsai is just regular trees are kept small and trimmed in artistic fashion so the people think that that you buy special seeds, no its regular trees just kept small and trimmed artistically over many years but every single small tree in the city is well trimmed and often in various interesting shapes and they have statues everywhere and images and murals that the airport, in the train stations they have huge murals and they have these massive tree logs which they carved into hundreds and thousands of tiny sculptures of people in the village or something and there's music everywhere and you get to the street and you see people playing which is very unusual, in the west we forgot about playing a when we become adults we don't play as much anymore. In China after five or 6 PM people just are already home from work and they go out in the street and the they just play with each other whatever to be at chess, checkers just tennis even on the



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street, jumping rope and then in the early mornings that they do this also usually between 4 and 7 AM they wake up very early to go to the park and the all play. They play martial arts, they play instruments, they sing, they dance, a lot of people dance, they have these giant yo-yos which they move about in the air, they have all of these skills it's like an entire culture devoted to play and to art. And it's not new, it's something it was even more impressive back in the day, it suppressed was to an extent by the party for a few decades and now it's coming back, but they all have what we call the Chinese gung fu. Gung fu is a high level of skill acquired through hard work so essentially almost, probably over 95% of the Chinese population at least that I've seen that have at least one hobby often more, that they have gone is to a high-level relative to a regular person who can do it or can just do it in limited extent and they go about in street or in the park and they do it. And all of these things are very different and that when I was sitting across the world and Israel and reading about China, there is nothing about this, no one was telling me about this. Rather my impression of time that came from the classic text like the Tao te ching often mistakenly called the Tao te ching and [00:38:49.38] and the Confucian analects, the sayings of Confucius and Buddhist texts and things like that and what comes across from these texts is that the Chinese are just so enlightened. That this society is so special because this text brings out the best of people, the highest virtues, they talk about always being a good person, there's nothing there it's not like the Bible which is history mixed with values and hearing the Chinese classical texts they mostly talk about and meditation enlightenment and how to be a better person and that the best type of society and the benevolent person the benevolent ruler and stuff like that. And then you get a fantasy up in your head specially they're movies and stories you hear and of course we're all bias so we hear the best stories. We always neglect remember the wars and before he came to China I thought oh my God I'm gonna just travel there I'm seated I'm liking this so much I'm gonna come back and then just to stay for a few years with Master Zhou. Just gonna study with him for a few years. I'm telling you within 24 hours off when I landed the first time in China, I realized to my dismay that this is not going to happen. I saw that, although I like a lot about China this was not enough to my liking to stay there for many years on in. Just not, too far from what I was used to what I was willing to tolerate. It's a wonderful country it's just so very different to what we're used. The most trivial things you can imagine for instance, still in China is very difficult to get your hands-on chocolate, bread and cheese. You just can't get a chocolate bread and cheese and it's crazy but that they don't traditionally consume these foods so much, they them but the it's not frequent for them to consume such things so they're not on sale, you can't find them anywhere you go to huge mall, no chocolate and breads of any kind or cheese and that's incredible and for me someone who likes for instance, Italian cuisine that's just culinary insult right?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Wow. So you know, were talking about context kind of the things around martial arts and one of the things we don't talk about too often either on the show or admittedly conversations I haven't had often with other martial artist is the context from which the arts spring up and these are things that can be quite relevant especially if you're someone who is a fan of history or appreciates the history of their arts which I know you are, listeners, some of you may know she flew from his books which will talk about is



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as we wrap up, you know we have a different format today but I do still want to give them some time to talk about the things that he's done because they're amazing. But how I don't know how to ask this, how important is it for you as a martial artist to understand the culture and the heritage from where your martial arts came?

Jonathan Bluestein:

I think this is extremely important in a way you're already doing this. Anyone who's practicing traditional martial arts is doing this by just going through the motions because you're literally walking in the footsteps of your Marshall ancestors that's exactly what you're doing. What they have laid out their footsteps for you that's the steps and the stances and the movements and you just walk through them so you take a walk through the forest of their minds. You take a walk through further manner of thinking, you take a walk through their life for their personal development and for that your body and your mind intuitively understand where did these people come from. What were they about and if you do this long enough for many years, for decades even then you come to embody that person which predated you and your martial arts lineage this part of the power and strength of traditional martial arts because you maintain the continuity of course traditional martial arts should evolve and change with every single teacher who's worthy of teaching but still because there is this continuity, then there is a losing core within the arts that is passed on from one generation to another. That being said, you will never fully comprehend not even at 30% what these people, your marshal ancestor had truly meant unless you studied their culture deeply. To study their culture is important to engulf yourself in that culture the best way possible is to live where they lived in and eat what they did and smell what smell and be with the kind of society they had been with that's not always feasible it's just the best way you can do it doesn't mean that's the only way. Another way which is very important is to pursue scholarly study of not just a martial art but the culture that surrounds it. So these people they don't just come with these motions and these training methods and these movements and these abilities for power generation, routines and billing up there so will the internal power in their structure out of thin air, they have inherited a lot of it's from their martial ancestors but there also very much influenced by the culture they live in and if we're talking about the Chinese people then they are influenced by three schools of thought primarily and these are Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Confucianism Taoism, Buddhism, they work together in China nowadays at least each fills in a niche in Chinese culture. So, Buddhism deals with individual psychology, so the concept of Buddha, the Buddha was a person, a historical person by the word Buddha means just the enlightened one, okay? So, Buddhism deals with how do I enlighten myself, a person, not a lot of people become enlightened but just be more enlightened relatively speaking [00:45:52.38] or 10 years ago that's good enough but that pertains to person working with himself you know. How do I improve, how do I avoid illusions that's a big thing in Buddhism, so their illusions in society we tell ourselves also supplies and things like that in society creates an image for us of reality which is not the true image so how do I work on myself for instance meditational martial arts practice to get into the source, to find what in Zen Buddhism is called the manner in which I looked before I was born, not to mean how it looks when I was a fetus, but how did



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they look before I was born in the sense of how do they look before society poured its ideas into me. So that's individual psychology with Buddhism. Then Confucianism deals with sociology. Confucius was about how do we create a proper society where people respect each other or people can agree upon the rules and preferably with as few rules as possible because in a just and benevolent society we don't need as many rules because people just behave, they don't need to be told oh you need to do this, you do that. It's just a more upright society and upright society according to Confucius is being maintained or create through having upright people. Confucius calls this concept [00:47:37.31] the gentleman, the virtuous person, the benevolent person so if every single one of us if society is benevolent, then all of society becomes benevolent and virtuous and he also says if that is the leaders are virtuous and benevolent then the people would also like to be the same and if people are so then through the people would rise virtuous and benevolent leaders. So, you see, he talks about society rather than individual psychology and he also talks about doing. How do I change that the practical stuff in everyday reality not the shape or the thinking within my own month so that's different? And then you got Taoism and Taoism deals with so called metaphysics Taoism deals with the relationship between man and the universe. So, Taoism asks what are the guiding principles of the universe it's like dealing with many compared Taoism nowadays to quantum mechanics, if I can understand how things work, what are the guiding principles of things then I can understand how everything works and for this, you don't really need learning, you need understanding so Confucius tells you all you need to study, all the books. You need to be very scholarly and highly educated then the Buddha tells you need to dig very deep into your own mind, into the minds and hearts of other people and you need to really understand the human psyche and then Taoism says all it's all nonsense. If you understand how the universe works then you can understand how people work and how gardening work, how martial arts work and then from Taoism we get things like the five elements called the wushing in Chinese which is a system off explaining five changes going in a circular manner from one to another and also that the relationships between them some creates one another, some destroy or interfere with one another that's used very heavily in traditional Chinese medicine. And also, tai ji. Tai ji is the symbol containing yin and yang, the two-fish chasing each other the white white dog in the black, the black in the white so yin and yang and the five elements are basic tenants of Taoism. What are these things about? Yin and yang is about how the universe works, so you got male and female, high and low and inside and outside, strong and weak, night and day. So, if you understand these sorts of relationships you can understand a lot so if you are a traditional Chinese martial artist you have to understand these things. You gotta understand basic tenants of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism to figure out what these people which probably meant. So, to give a practical example now, if I make a move with someone else in [00:50:44.25] practice, I have to be aware off where's the yin and yang in that, so if doing so called exercise push hands, it's very common in [00:50:55.44] and many traditional Chinese martial arts and the very basic variation we just stand in front of each other and we push each other's hands back and forth and circle. I push towards the other person is chest then he diverts, he pushes towards me, I divert, and we go into circle with our hands pushing against one another trying to not use too much power, just be soft and flow with each other while still maintaining our structure and keeping our routine. So, an equivalent practice in



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Okinawan karate, would be kaki practice, right? The one when you go back and forth with your hands very similar. So, when you do this sort of practice when my palm faces towards my partner, palm faces towards your partner, then my palm is young okay, yang is male, it's more aggressive okay and it's trying to get at him. When my palm faces towards me this is yin. So, it's more feminine its more yielding. Right? So, what I wanted to do in that sort of movement I want to create a bond between yin yang. If the person is coming at me with yang so there's someone standing in front of me and he pushes against my hand and his palm is facing me, so his palms towards me. If I put my palm facing against him so, my palm faces him, his palm faces me then this creates a scenario of strength against strength, right? We're kinda clashing. However, if I turned my palm towards me, my Palm is towards me, his palm is also towards me, so my palm is yin facing towards me and his palm is yang, is facing away from me, I use my yin to divert his yang and that's more effective and takes less effort especially in a circular manner to absorb his movements so I can come back at him. And such as [00:52:57.56] because the palm, it doesn't just flip to one side and the other side in a moment, but I continuously rotate the palm back and forth towards him and towards me and continuously keep rotating it throughout the movement the more yang he is the more yin I am. The more yang I am the more yin he is. This is the Taoist influence movement relationship and this exists within the traditional Chinese martial arts to a very prominent degree especially in the internal martial arts of China and this is a basic tenant of Taoism which I teach in actual movements to beginners often times during their first class. If you understand then you have much better instruments for comprehending what your martial ancestors had meant.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Nice. Cool. As you're talking about those three philosophies, I was kind of struck that to be a complete martial artist, I want to look at what I'm doing in and I don't know if you had this intention but I want to look at my training, my practice, the techniques that I'm doing through all of those lenses. Through the Taoist lens through the Buddhist lens, because I think it gives me different insight into not only how I would practice but how I would apply and how I would develop as a martial artist and that wasn't you know, this is a thought that is new to me so it it's a little unformed but and I like having those doors open. So that's pretty cool thank you.

Jonathan Bluestein:

Sure, you're welcome and I think each of them fits them in a different spot on your martial arts training and [00:54:47.07]. So, for instance I just gave an example of how Taoism would be applied to an actual movement practice maybe Buddhism is something you'd like to work on when you walk on meditation because but it is Buddhism asks the difficult questions about who you are and did something that maybe that's difficult to get into while you're trying to hit somebody or defend yourself but it's very good paradigm to use in meditation. And then for instance, if you manage to reach a very important conclusion about your life and who you are for meditation, then that inevitably helps your martial arts because if you're lost if you don't know who you are, you you're going to be a stiffer person, that's just the fact. If you're at ease with yourself if you have more self-respect, self-esteem things like that, then



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you're gonna have an easier time to relax to breathe better and then your movement improves even though that came from your mind so that comes from meditation training. So, use the Buddhism for meditation then Taoism you use in actual movement and the Confucianism you can use to better manage a martial arts community. So, Confucianism talks of virtues, who's a benevolent person, who's worthy of being a leader, of teaching, for instance Confucius said that person worthy of being a leader is one continuously goes back to the materials he'd already studied to be able to extract even more from them. And that's very wise because what we do often, we would have videos of our teachers, we watch that video ones that we forget about it for 20 years or we read as very important book, not just any book, but a book that's fundamental for understanding of the world or of martial arts then we just forget it exists for the next 30 years. But actually, if you go back to these things in a year or two or maybe after even six months then because of your renewed understanding of the world and of your martial arts, you'd be able to extract more from these things. And a person who does this can become a far better teacher, so I think one of the roles we have as teachers is to go back and revisit and review the stuff that we think we already know to extract more from them and that's known, you know this and I know this and everyone who's been teaching for a while knows this, that once you begin teaching then you actually learn more by teaching often that you had learned from your own teacher because by teaching the art you can get more because you review what you thought you're already knew, but when you teach it to others and you review it again and again and again, then you can extract more from it so that's one example. Another example is just that creating the proper relationship and hierarchy between people at your martial arts Academy. So in in Japanese Okinawan martial arts that can be maybe by [00:58:01.04] in Chinese martial arts that's more keen to have family relationships where you gotta, the teacher and in a very traditional martial arts school like mine, and the teachers like a father figure and then the students initially they're more like customers, but are still treated like family friends and then later on throughout the years when they get closer and quan qi is developed, teacher can trust you more than the teacher may accept you as in an entered the gate ceremony and to be disciple. Once you a disciple it's like you are an adopted son of teachers so you become family and this also sets the correct types of relationships within those types of traditions and schools and martial arts and that keeps the entire school in line is everyone knows their place. What happens at MMA school or Krav Maga school oftentimes, you want realism okay you got it, but part of realism is everyone challenges everyone else and you get people challenging their teachers and people challenging each other in the name of truth, people step out of line, they cross social boundaries and the community is very easily disturbed and then what happens you know, every few years that someone steps out of the school and creates his own organization or his own martial art or his own thing and then there is no tradition, if there is no tradition, you can't learn from tradition, so you have to re-create everything in you and no one is wise enough to create everything in you and in a single generation so there we go. This is the reason we have traditional martial arts part of tradition is having social harmony and community and you need to have that sort of community if you want to have tradition, otherwise just a bunch of folks having fun coming to train, fighting each other all right but that's not necessarily a community.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Let's take a step aside now I said earlier I wanted to make sure that folks had a chance to know about your writing and some of the things that you've accomplished. You've put together some wonderful stuff over the years and you know, listeners, sometimes we get folks on the show who I knew about quite a while ago and this is one of those cases so this is been a lot of fun for me. Talk to listeners about your books and the other things that you've done and where they might be able to find them.

Jonathan Bluestein:

Sure, so I've authored four books thus far one in Hebrew and three in English. My Hebrew book is an interesting project it's free for download so if you can read Hebrew you can go on our website that tianjin.co.il that's that TIANJIN.co.il and the website is in Hebrew, and they're on the books section, there is a link to the book and that's directly to my drobox and this is maybe 400-2400 30 page book in Hebrew about the martial arts and the reason, and I keep updating this book it's alive it's not something I published and then I let be, it's like a blog in the form of the book, it has chapters, there's table of contents its very structured but it's somewhere in between the book of blog and I don't know that anyone had done anything similar in the martial arts. And this book is about contains a lot of chapters and articles about traditional Chinese culture and Chinese martial arts and martial arts in general and even Chinese history of the martial arts and philosophy and I wrote this book essentially because I got tired of going for the same lectures over and over again with my students so every time at the end of class, I'll talk for 5-10 sometimes 40 minutes and I began to sound like a broken record and I thought oh my God I can't do this and the people want to go home also. So instead I just put this in book format all these lectures that I want to provide for my students for free and they can go online and just read downloaded to the computer, it's very convenient and it helped raise the scholarly standard at our Academy. As I tell my students, there is no way that I'm gonna let you be ignorant, there are just too many martial arts students who come to class once, twice, three times a week and then they read nothing at 30 years later they don't know anything beyond what their teacher said class and I think that that's very bad. It's like this, then they're never going to understand their martial arts anything seriously. So, after they're done with this book of mine I tell them we have a large library at our Academy, you have other venues for acquiring knowledge of their other books that I've written go read something, [01:02:56.28] something, maybe after a few years go start visiting some other school see what they're about, go expand your horizons because if you only listen to me then you're not gonna get anywhere, I'm giving you a lot but I ain't got no monopoly over truth. No one has, so you have to learn from other people as well from their writings, from their videos maybe from their classes if you'd like if you studied long enough, you can also go try do something else. I'm not the dictator in that respect, I think that either you begin studying another martial art with me if you like, or you go study another style that's all good. If the teacher is good and capable and worthy, then go for it. And I'd even recommend people if you'd like to. So that's my book in Hebrew. My books in English on our published-on Amazon, one is sort of a cross between a book and a booklet which covers a self-defense system for women, which have co-



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authored with my [01:04:01.03] so that might not be interest for most listeners but if you're still interested it's called Spikey: your edge in self-defense. Spikey is like the word spike with Y at the end, spikey: your edge in self-defense that's on Amazon, the other two books and which are of much greater interest to our listeners most probably are: research of martial arts and the martial arts teacher. These are works that I have given a lot of thought to. What I would like to provide people with my books is something that would be worth the time worth their money, would give them serious knowledge and information, you probably Jeremy, you've had the experience of reading books by very good martial artist who were not as good at putting what they know in writing, so you end up reading 300 pages and then there may be 30 really good pages but in the rest, is just you just gonna sift he rest to get to the good stuff.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I don't I don't usually spend much time sifting if a book doesn't grab me, if I'm not feeling like this is a, for me to read a martial arts book it has to be least as good for my martial arts as training would be. Otherwise I'm just gonna go training.

Jonathan Bluestein:

Yes, so you know, I'm a fast reader and I'm an author myself and in order to be a better author, I've sifted through hundreds of books to just get the vibe of what other people are up to, their ideas and I truly believe there are many good books where there just a few really good ideas covered by hundreds of pages of maybe not so good ideas or at times just talking about their life or other things which might be irrelevant. So, my books aren't like this, in my books I'm trying to convey really good information from the get go, with every single page you turn ought to be something to be learned or to be used. So, it has to be either interesting or actually technically useful for you in your training or your teaching so research of martial arts is a book about the theory of martial arts, it explains like in physics they work at a unifying theory that trying to come up with something that would explain about how all of physics work together, Newtonian physics with quantum physics and everything together and it's very difficult to do because you trying to bring together several different languages. So, we have the same thing in martial arts we all come from different cultures different lineages different languages we speak, so the research martial arts tries to do some order in this, make some order and bring together the theories and ideas from many different martial arts and explain what they really mean, how their similar how are they different and especially research martial arts explains what the internal martial arts of China mean. What are the about? What is structure? What is chi? Or when you generate explosive power what is meant by that in these internal martial arts what makes, there is no agreement whatsoever you know. If you go online or reading books of what internal powers or how you generated or if there is even one type of eternal power which there isn't. That's the thing because I got so many different lineages method styles so my thesis in this book, internal power, is many things combined and I explain what these things are for practical examples and stories and training methods and my books are by no means manuals. They are geared towards and being read by people who already train, who have training for a



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while and they want to understand their martial arts better. So, research martial arts is about that, it also includes many interviews with prominent masters off the Chinese internal martial arts and others and which are fascinating in their own rights and these just a most interesting book, I'm biased of course but you can go on Amazon read the reviews for research martial arts and you see for yourself. Then the martial arts teacher, is the book of written from my perspective as a martial arts teacher trying to convey what teaching is about for me and what teaching is about in the traditional Chinese sense. So, things like *guan qi* that I just explained on this podcast interview, this is something that seldom explain in the traditional Chinese martial arts even though it's there, it's instant deeply embedded in that sort of tradition and culture so, a lot of things like that like what does means to be a *shufu* or *Sifu* in Cantonese, a traditional Chinese martial arts teacher. How do you create virtuous, benevolent, positive, happy community of cooperative students? How do you keep those students? How does can you convey traditional teaching of any martial art not just and traditional Chinese martial arts to children and adolescents? What do you do when the challenges of everyday life and our modern reality that we're living tackle your traditional mindset the methods? How do you bring people into a state where they are your friends but they aren't too close also because you can't afford student being your friend go completely because there is some distance otherwise you cannot be his teacher as we teachers know it's nearly impossible to teach your own family members, its usually very difficult because the closest people to you a very difficult to teach for various reasons I won't get into right now? So, you want to keep bringing your students gradually over years and years closer to you, but you also cannot afford have them let be like you know your spouse. Speaking of which, how do you deal with if you're a male teacher how do you deal with female students, how do you prevent sexual harassment abuse, how do you deal with other teachers who might do such things? How do you deal with the naysayers, with politics in the martial arts as a teacher as someone who aspires to be above this, all of this and much more and relating all of this to traditional Chinese culture and history? This is all in the martial arts teacher, which is a book very different to other books about how to teach the martial arts. Because I've read quite a few books by other authors on this topic and most of them some of the really excellent books that deal with either technicalities, they tell you oh, this is how you follow advertising leads, this is how you get more students, this is how you sell those uniforms for more money, you throw kids pizza parties at your karate dojo to stuff like that. All of this you will not find in my book. My book is about the essence of maintaining, creating, supporting healthy traditional martial arts community and not about how to gain a buck. I do have some marketing and money stuff in there also but that's hardly the main point that makes for maybe 5% of the book. So, it's different my writing altogether is different. I represent something a bit out of the ordinary because I have a very eclectic background, I'm Jewish, I'm Israeli, I study traditional Chinese martial arts as spend a lot of time in Europe and the United States, I have at a degree in law, a degree in government studies that come from a family of lawyers, I actually, I spent three years of my life as an investigator for these really police force this was my obligatory service in Israel, men have to serve for three years so instead of serving in the Army, I serve mostly in the Israeli police force as investigator and been to China for a long while. So, all of these experiences combined have created sort of living philosophy of teaching philosophy which are quite different to those



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presented by other people and this just the kind of life that had the kind of conclusions arrived to and I hope that you would also enjoy what I have to share. Because after all of this book was written to the benefit of those who might read it, as they said about researcher martial arts are welcome to look up as the martial arts teacher on any Amazon affiliated website and just check the review to see what people have to say about it and see for yourself.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely on of course listeners were gonna have links to this as we always do to social media websites all the things that we've talked about today over whistlekickmartialartsradio.com and Shifu I really appreciate you being here, this was great

Jonathan Bluestein:

I would like to add one we haven't tackled, I think this is very important to a lot of people have a fantasy off their minds off going to study and some monastery with this bearded master as in a kill Bill movie or shaolin movie or something but actually I people ought to know that throughout the Orient most of the serious masters of the martial arts are everyday people. They are hidden in plain sight, they often times live in cities, not even villages or monasteries many of them will not charge large sums of money at all and doesn't mean they're no good down, they don't just don't have that sort of financial mindset that you have. In a place like the United States they have a day job and maybe they don't teach money at all, maybe they don't charge a lot because they're looking for good students, they're not looking to get rich. For them it's a part of their culture is like, you go to Rabbi and you think the rabbi that charges you a million bucks to teach you the Old Testament is the best rabbi, no actually you know, the best rabbis are often those who did you for free because they just want to teach you what they know, cause for them it's a cultural thing, it is also a religious thing for them. It's not a venue for making money, so do not be solely attracted to this fantasy of arriving at the mountain top study with that bearded master, often times, more often than not, that's just a fantasy and these are not the best teachers to study with. An actually if you do your research you will discover that places like wudang and shaolin nowadays where there are temples and they do teach the martial arts, I don't wanna get political here but they're not the best places to learn and at the best teachers aren't there due to various historical reasons. You do your research you get to someone who can share his or her experiences and give you a very important letter of recommendation or ever take you physically to see their teacher that would be the best way and really look into it if you're going to spend some time learning something abroad, then you might end up practicing that stuff for the rest of your life and if not the rest of your life, may be just ten five years three years maybe a year, that's still a whole lot of time a lot of effort and money you are going to put into it. Be absolutely certain that's what you're interested in not because you saw it on YouTube, not because someone told you because you felt it and that's what you want to do and also yes go and see several teachers, don't just stick with the first person is you found because it's like a romantic relationship. Sometimes the first person you everyday becomes your spouse and your happily ever after. More often than not, if you marry the first person you date, you're gonna be miserable because you



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haven't done your research, you haven't seen what other people have to offer. Get the perspective and then be more likely to be successful.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Thank you, Shifu Bluestein, for sharing your experience about culture and training in China. Your perspective on training overseas is incredibly valuable especially to those of us who have dying to do it. I appreciate your time, your books, and your wisdom. If you want to check out the show notes, head on over to whistlekickmartialartsradio.com you can find photos, videos, all the other episodes. It's all available for free, I just wanna help you build context around this episode and maybe at some depth to your martial arts lifestyle. While you're over there, sign up for the newsletter, we've always got a new episode, not episode, another issue, addition? Whatever you wanna call it, we have another round of that newsletter coming soon. We won't spam you, we send one or two a month that's it just let you know what's going on maybe I'll throw you a discount or two. You can follow whistlekick on social media @whistlekick. We're super creative with the way we name things and of course find the hub for whistlekick online at whistlekick.com. That's all I got for today until next time train hard, smile, and have a great day.