



## Shaolin Temple History

At the end of the 5th century, a monk named Ba Tuo, arrived in China from India. Emperor Xiao Wen of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534), a devout Buddhist, had deep respect for Ba Tuo and ordered the construction of the Shaolin Temple at the foot of the Shaoshi Mountain. Here, Monk Ba Tuo would disseminate Buddhism in the peaceful surroundings of lush forests to Buddhists who came from all over the country. Ba Tuo not only imparted and taught Buddhism, he also wanted his disciples to be intelligent, capable, and good at martial arts. His favorite disciples were Hui Guang and Seng Chou for their superior Kung-fu. Clearly, from its founding days, the monks at the Shaolin Temple practiced martial arts.

Later, Bodhidharma also a Buddhist monk, arrived at the Songshan Mountain and taught Zen at the Shaolin Temple. Facing the cliff on the peak behind the Temple, he sat in meditation for nine years. The monks grew weak from sitting in meditation for long periods so they created a series of martial arts to stimulate circulation and to limber up muscles and joints. *Yi jin Jing* (The Boxing of Limbering up Muscles and Joints), Arhat Boxing, Shiba Shou (18-Style Hand Exercises) were probably the earliest Shaolin Kung-fu.

By the end of the Sui Dynasty (581-618), the Imperial Court was tottering. In order to safeguard the Shaolin Temple, a guard monk army was organized. The Shaolin guard monks headed by Zhi Cao, Hui Xi and Tan Zong rescued Li Shimin (598-649), the Qin Prince, captured Wang Renze, and forced Wang Shichong to surrender. After taking the throne of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), Li Shimin offered official posts to the Shaolin monks, and issued an order that the Shaolin Temple would have guard monks. This is recorded in an inscription on a stone tablet at the Shaolin Temple.

From the end of the Tang Dynasty through the Five Dynasties (960-1127), the Shaolin Temple had a weak existence, but revived in the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279). During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), all monks at the Shaolin Temple practiced martial arts, and Shaolin Kung Fu became well known nationwide. The Shaolin guard monks also took part in the fight against the Japanese invaders, and won several victories.

According to the description of *Songshan Travel Notes* written by Wang Shining of the Ming Dynasty, "There are over 400 monks in the Shaolin Temple, and all of them are good at martial arts." During demonstration, "the wrestling with fists and cudgels are flying in clouds." The martial arts training of villagers near the Shaolin Temple became very popular and promoted the development of Shaolin Kung-fu. Over the years, the essence of various schools of Chinese martial arts was integrated in the Shaolin Temple, making the temple a center of martial arts. The Shaolin School of martial arts came into being from years of development and became well known far and wide.

Besides the 172 routines of Shaolin Boxing, there are 72 techniques including 36 external and 36 internal exercises. The original woodcut edition of *Shaolin Boxing Manual* was preserved at the Shaolin Temple. But in 1928, the Shaolin Temple was destroyed by a fire, and all of the ancient books and records burned into ash. However, Shaolin Martial Arts at that time had already formed into a system, so most of the skills of Shaolin Martial Arts have been

passed down to the present today. The new generations of Shaolin guard monks are unearthing the lost martial arts as they continue to inherit and develop Shaolin Kung-fu.

### **The World-Famous Shaolin Temple**

The Shaolin kungfu, following its originating in the Shaolin Temple, had been circulated for quite a long time among the monks of the Temple. It is after the event of 13 martial monks helping Prince Tang that the world began to know about the kungfu of Shaolin, and gradually a huge system of the Shaolin kungfu has taken shape in the society.

In the Tang and Song Dynasties and afterwards, a lot of non-monks entered the Shaolin Temple to learn kungfu and conduct kungfu exchange. By the mid-Ming dynasty, the Shaolin kungfu was already popular in the society. By the beginning of the Qing dynasty there were ten branch Temples of the Shaolin in China. And these branch Temples became the centers of the Shaolin kungfu. In the course of popularization the Shaolin kungfu itself has got enriched and developed. The result is that there are now many Shaolin kungfu schools, such as the Emei Shaolin, the Guandong Shaolin, the Fujian Shaolin, the Shandong Shaolin, etc.. As the spread is so fast and the scale is so large that in the present China "people cannot talk about martial arts without mentioning the Shaolin". Hence the saying: "All the kungfu in the world originate from the Shaolin Temple".

When China entered into the modern age, the recent century of wars and civil commotion has accelerated the spreading of the Shaolin kungfu. The Shaolin disciples live all over China. Since China adopted the policy of economic reform and opening up to the outside world, the central and local governments have been giving support to the Shaolin Temple kungfu, regarding it as an important aspect for prospering the national culture of China. There are now countless organizations specializing in learning and studying the Shaolin kungfu. In a sense the Shaolin kungfu has become popular wushu for the common people.

As a physical exercise for human beings, the Shaolin kungfu is also being extensively popularised in the world. Its overseas spreading can be dated back to the Yuan Dynasty. During the reign of the Emperor Taide of the Yuan Dynasty, a Japanese monk named Dazhi came to China to study the Zen. When he returned to Japan, he was the earliest one who introduced the Shaolin kungfu in Japan. During the reign of the Emperor Wanli of the Ming Dynasty, Chen Yuanding, a non-monk desciple in the Shaolin Temple, sailed eastward and reached Japan, where he spent many years embarking the boxing of the Shaolin Temple. In the 1930's a Japanese monk, Zong Daocheng, came to the Shaolin Temple to learn kungfu. When he returned to his motherland, he founded the world's first non-Chinese organization specializing in exercising the Shaolin Temple kungfu, "Japanese Shaolin Temple Boxing Kungfu Association", which has at present a membership of over a million. In the past years, along with the opening of China to the outside world, the Shaolin kungfu has been introduced to foreign countries at an even higher speed. At present special organizations for imparting the Shaolin kungfu have been set up in more than 30 countries including U.S., Holland, France, Belgium, Italy, Singapore, Switzerland etc.. In the recent years people from more than 30 countries and regions have come to the Shaolin Temple to get kungfu training. The Shaolin monks delegations consisting of monks and non-monks have visited many countries. With a view to accelerating the spreading of the Shaolin kungfu schools have been set up all over the world. In 1991, in order to promote the development and interflow of the Shaolin kungfu, in Zhengzhou, capital city of Henan province, the China Zhengzhou Shaolin Wushu Festival was established and was to be observed annually. This international Shaolin kungfu festival indicates that the Shaolin kungfu of China is sure to become a precious cultural heritage of the whole mankind.

In the history of the Shaolin Temple generation after generation of monk generals and soldiers have demonstrated their paramount feats of arm, and waged glorious battles for the Chinese nation and for the historic justice. Their meritorious feats constitute a glorious page in the Chinese history. The cudgel-monks who once helped the Prince Tang, are now historical figures in a legend. And a solemn and stirring story has been passed down about, the eminent monks, Biancheng and Yuekong, who went to the frontier and fought against the Japanese pirates. It is such

marvellous records that render Shaolin Temple a place summoning the admiration of the heroes all over the world. The monk soldiers were at first an armed group set up by the Shaolin Temple for protecting the temple from wars and riots of the society. By the end of the Sui Dynasty and beginning of the Tang Dynasty, Wang Shichong, a Sui general, made himself an emperor with armed forces as the foundation. He named his reign, the "Zheng". He appointed his nephew, Wang Renzhe, the senior general, who stationed massive forces and built fortresses at a place called Baigu Village with which to stand the eastward drive of Li Shinmin, the Prince of Qin. In the 3rd year of the reign of Wude during the Tang Dynasty (620AD), Li Yuan, the emperor Gaozu, issued an order to his son, Li Shimin, that the latter was to command armed forces on a punitive expedition against Wang Shichong. At the initial battles of the campaign Li sustained some drawbacks. At that time there were 13 Shaolin armed monks stationed at Baigu Village. They were angry with Wang Shichong as the latter invaded the appointed fief of the Shaolin Temple. The armed monks led the local people in an attack on the Sui army. Their battle turned out a victory and they captured Wang Renzhi and sent the POW to Li Shimin. This was no doubt a splendid meritorious service to prince Qin's cause in unifying China. Following Li Shimin's enthronement, he granted rewards and titles extravagantly. 40 Qin (about 266 hectares), of land was given to the Shaolin Temple together with a water-driven mill. The 13 cudgel monks were unexpectedly granted prizes and titles. The monk Tanzong was appointed a senior general.

After that event, the Shaolin Temple has for many times gone through the baptisms of war; and the kungfu of Shaolin got gradually matured in the course. By the mid-Ming Dynasty, foreign pirates kept bringing troubles along the coastline of China. The Ming court deployed a massive force to suppress the pirates. The Shaolin armed monks were among the army and again contributed outstanding feats in the battles. During the reign of Emperor Zhengde of the Ming Dynasty, an armed monk, Blanched, from the Shaolin Temple fought against the foreign pirates in many brilliant battles. Once, in a fight against the pirates, he brandished the unique Shaolin kungfu and, in a stroke, beat down a dozen or so swords and spears of the enemy. He then displayed the "light-body" feat with which he jumped out of the surrounding circle of the enemy while at the same time succeeded in capturing two POW's. The pirates were so frightened that they began taking a defensive posture. During the reign of the Emperor Jiaojing of the Ming Dynasty, Yuekong, another armed monk from the Shaolin Temple, responding to an order issued by the local governor, led more than 30 monk soldiers to Songjiang to fight against the pirates. With their paramount martial arts, the monk soldiers led by Yuekong won victory. The pirates were panic-stricken. Later, when rescuing the local people, Yuekong and others fell into an ambush laid by the Japanese pirates. After a fierce battle, the 30-odd armed monks including Yuekong were outnumbered by the enemy and finally sacrificed their lives. It is believed that during the reign of Emperor Wanli of the Ming Dynasty the Reverend Xiaoshan led an army and for three times fought against the foreign pirates. And Sanqi and Changong, another two monks from the Shaolin, went to the borders for many times in guard against enemy.

**The eighteen Shaolin martial arts** The Shaolin kungfu is famous for its wide range and profound attainment. Take boxing alone for example, it has hundreds of varieties. When people say "the 18 Shaolin martial arts" the numeral 18 is a generalizing notion for all the Shaolin martial arts.

Of all the martial arts of the Shaolin Temple, boxing is the oldest art. Tradition has it that at the very beginning, the Shaolin boxing had only 18 actions, which were named "the 18 moves of arhat". Later, based on boxing, the martial art for using cudgel was developed. After many centuries, with the growth of the Shaolin kungfu, the boxing manoeuvres were greatly expanded. By the time of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms, a senior monk of the Shaolin Temple, named Fujiu, invited the kungfu masters all over China, belonging to 18 schools, to the Shaolin Temple, where they studied martial arts for three years. The result was that the strong points of all the kungfu schools were collected, and a boxing book, Shaolin boxing, was compiled. During the Jin-Yuan dynasties, two armed monks, Bai Yufeng and Li Shou, came to the Shaolin Temple, where they studied boxing art together with the monks of the Temple. The 18 moves of arhat were then developed into 72 moves. Moreover, "Five Boxing Arts" were created based on the moves of five animals, i.e. dragon, tiger, leopard, snake and cock.

The Shaolin boxing lays emphasis on skill. Its practicing is not limited by space. The saying goes, a boxer can practice where only one ox can lie down". That is to say, a Shaolin boxer can beat his opponent with a space of several steps. Another saying "boxing goes along a line", indicates that when practising boxing including raising,

falling, turning sidling, huddling and jumping, all these moves should be conducted along a straight line. As to the specific moves, they should be neither "absolutely bent nor absolutely straight". Too much bending would miss the target; while too much straightness would lack manoeuvre. When attacking with boxing, both forward and backward actions are done in a "turning manner". In other words, a rotation is necessary when attacking, and elasticity is reached. As to the eyes, they should look up when raising and further at the sky when falling. Your eyes should gaze at the opponent's eyes so as to know what position the opponent is in. As to the body manoeuvre, the stress is laid on swiftness and an absolute mastery of the gravity centre so that a perfect and kinetic balance is kept. As to the manoeuvre of stepping, low steps are used when forging ahead and high steps used when backing. They should be light, graceful, and steady. As to the kicking manoeuvre, the requirement is that, when lifting a leg, it should be as light as a feather, and when kicking, the leg should be as heavy as the Mount Tai.

Internally tranquil and outwardly fierce, Shaolin boxer should be "as calm as a virgin when defending" and "as fierce as a tiger when attacking". Meanwhile perfect skill should be employed to take advantage of the opponent's force and momentum. Each move, each punch and kick, embodies an organic combination of attack and defence. The attack is contained in defence. The force attack and real manoeuvre are integrated with the sole purpose of surprising the opponent. The Shaolin boxing art, as a whole, stresses the integration of the internal with the external and the figure similarity with spiritual identification. When practising, a close coordination of the eyes, hands, steps is required. The boxing formula emphasizes six coordinations, i.e. "the coordination of shoulders with loins, elbows with knees, hands with feet, mind with intention, intention with breath, and breath with force". By the Ming Dynasty, the traditional kungfu got a great lap forward. Kungfu adopted weapons. There were even books concerning the weapons. Reverend hongzhuan, a senior monk of the Shaolin Temple in the Ming Dynasty, wrote a book, "Spearmanship in Menlu Hall". During the reign of the Emperor Wanli, Cheng Zongqiu, a mundane disciple learned cudgelship for more than ten years in the Shaolin Temple. As a result he wrote the famous book, "Summary of Shaolin Cudgelship". Secondly, in the Ming Dynasty, the martial arts used in actual battles were gradually combined with the Shaolin kungfu. During the reign of the Emperor Jiajing, Yu Dayu, a famous general in resisting against the pirates, used the martial art of cudgel which he had learned in the Shaolin in actual battles. The cudgelship was thus carried forward. He later returned to the Shaolin Temple. nggang, another Ming personality, wrote in his "Travel in the Mount Song": "In the old temple there are sixty monks who are practicing boxing, swords, iron staff, and jie". This record indicated that in the Shaolin Temple at that time were not only boxing, but also sword, iron staff, jie and other weapons. Of all the weapons of the Shaolin, sword is eulogized as "the marshal of all weapons". The saying goes, "the sword is like a fierce tiger". Most Shaolin swords are brandished closely around the user's head. When slashing with the sword, the qi is concentrated in the two arms and goes along with the sword. Among the different swords of the Shaolin, the variety of the shapes lead to the variety of characteristics. Tradition has it "manoeuvre of a single sword stresses the hands", "manoeuvre of double swords stresses the steps", and "manoeuvre of broadsword stresses the stability of hands". The spear in the Shaolin repertory is praised as the "king of weapons". It is characterized by "forging ahead like a dragon in a straight line". That is to say, the spear should be wielded up and down swiftly and with no definite patterns. And the performance of the spear should be along a straight line. The Shaolin sabre has long earned its reputation as the "monarch of the weapons". The Shaolin sabre is graceful and unconstrained in performance, Henan the saying "sabre goes like a meandering dragon". The sabre formula has the following secret teaching: "This is a blue-dragon sabre and should be performed steadily on a plane line. Your qi should go along with your sabre with both eyes gazing at its point. When wielding the sabre it should be as swift as a flying swallow. When you stop the performance, it fall as gently as the wind ebbs. When taking back the sabre it is as light as a petal. When stabbing forward, the sabre head is a steel nail". The Shaolin cudgel is the most reputed among all the weapons used in the Temple. It is also the oldest arm of the Temple. Hence the reputation of "the ancestor of all weapons". And the legend goes that the 13 Shaolin monks using cudgels once helped the Prince Tang and established their brilliant martial feats. The Shaolin cudgel is characterized by attacking a broad range with the cudgel". When performing the cudgel, all over the body is the source of momentum. The wielding of cudgel is accompanied by the whistling of the air. The rhythm should be fast and the moves should following one another closely.

The Shaolin kungfu is a kungfu treasury of very profound and wide-rant nature. In the terms of boxing arts, there integrates power with flexibility. Included in the bold and powerful traditional boxing arts are the Shaolin arhat

boxing, chain boxing, plum-blossom boxing, and warrior boxing. Belonging to the category of mimic boxing are monkey boxing, leopard boxing, snake boxing, etc.. And the internal-kungfu boxing arts include intention boxing, Changhu intention boxing and Seven-star boxing, etc.. As to pair-practice boxing, the number of variety is still larger, including kick-punch six-in-one boxing, ear-handle six-in-one boxing, and hand-biting six-in-one boxing.

If you fight the enemy, the mind is the emperor, the gall bladder is the general, limbs are the soldiers, the eyes and ears are banners. In combat patience leads to victory. Prepare properly in order to observe the enemy closely. Before attacking you must know what you will sacrifice and what you will achieve. In the movements where the conflict pauses, you must decide whether to attack or retreat. Reveal your intentions in order to set a trap for your enemies. You must know your enemies and your own strengths and weaknesses, attack his weak points with your strengths, "always" hit your enemy before he can strike you. If you are stronger than your enemy, crush him with direct and forceful attacks. If you are weaker than your opponent, use gentle defence to drain and redirect his strength against him. The mind and the body must be perfectly coordinated.

What are the movements and positions of Shaolin style? Shaolin style is composed of movements up and down, left and right at angles, as well as advance or retreat, attacks or defences. Upward movements should be like raising a heavy stone. Downward movements should be like breaking a brick. When enemy strikes forcefully, break his attack at an angle. When opponent locks you into a trap, slip from his grasp. Advance and Retreat must be complete science. Strikes must twist as they attack and withdraw. Strikes should snap like a whip.

All elements of the human body and soul are united in Shaolin style. The eyes unify the mind, the mind unifies the spirit, the spirit unifies the breath, the breath unifies the force, the force unifies the hands, the hand unifies the feet, the elbow unifies the knee, the shoulder unifies the hip, the unification of all these parts creates power which will vanquish all enemies.

When facing an enemy, eyes observe all parts of his body. The enemies eyes will telegraph his intention by the direction of his gaze. Before your enemy's hand can connect with you, his shoulder will move first. All kicks will be telegraphed by movements of his hips. Gnashing of teeth means a head attack. Shrinking of the body reveals an elbow enpi. When close up, strike with the knee. If the fist does not quite reach enemy, use the fingers to jab. In close quarters, the shoulders and hips are excellent defences.

Shaolin style is as vast and complex as the universe. This site will barely scratch the surface of its depths. For our readers we can end with a saying from an ancient Shaolin Master: "Study Shaolin style in great depth, then absorb the special qualities of other styles. Set for your high ideals. Study for wisdom and train the body. Never fear evil. Always fight for Justice."

## **COMBAT SKILL**

What is Shaolin combat-skill? It's basically the strategy that you use to expose your opponent's weakness in order to make the weak win against the strong.

In most combats, the situation is generally that the enemy is strong and you are the weak; the combat can't be finished with one stroke, therefore strategies must be devised for overcoming your opponent. Every one has primitive instincts but cannot always rely on these. The combat-skill is used precisely when there is no alternative but to react. The movements come from ancient martial experience. The strategy is used according to the different situation from each time or fight. It is what comes from the movements but doesn't adhere to them. And it's the ingenuity which depends on the character and nature of both protagonists. The movements are useful to the amateur enemy but invalid to the skill full opponent. The person who has the necessary skill can see the weakness in dangerous situations and find the opportunity to crush the enemy.

How to find the weakness? The enemy will come forward if he thinks he will win;

if not, he will go away. So, set tricks which will bring him forward and that he can not see through.

How to create the opportunity? Cunningly lead the enemy's action astray according to the circumstances and dodge his movements to attack his weak points. Gradually drain his strength and let him become tired. A man, who is tired, will have his defences weakened and down, his mind will be alarmed, his determination will be shaken, and the weakness in his action will be revealed for your tricks to be carried out.

A skill full master knows when, where and how to use the softness, firmness, weakness and power. Fast in order and slowly in flow. The enemy will not be able to determine between what is false and what is true. When the force is extended, it shoots like lightning so quickly that it can never be detected, when withdrawn, it bends like a wind so fast that it can never be caught. Go to the essential point no matter what the strategy is. The twelve words (see new update) below are not always used accordingly to the rules but accordingly to the circumstances. The victory should be won before the fight. Your intention should not be revealed until the enemy is defeated. It is not easy for the one who wants to master the strategy unless he study intensively, practice hard, learn extensively to take in the good, and understand what he has had to such a degree that he can use it well.

The victory is won, not because the opponent is weak, but relies on the strategies you have used. Therefore; with strong moral principles always fight for Justice; doubt the payments and cut the incomes so that saved strength can be accessed to deal with various changes; in your mind you have all kinds of considering well-thought-out plans and in body you can achieve the most consummate of skills; as well as never losing the golden opportunity; all these things are the absolute truth for people to win all combats that are placed before them.

### **A - Basics**

This is where you will learn the fundamentals of Shaolin Kung Fu. The fundamentals are very important in that it is the key to learning and understanding the more advanced movements. The fundamentals include:

Stances, horse stance, bow stance, and many more.

Basic motions of the hands, feet, and legs.

Combined motions of the feet and leg, which are used for balancing, jumping, falling, flipping, and rolling techniques.

Flexibility of the shoulders and arms, the waist, and the legs.

Basic forms, which includes Five-Stance Form, Continuous Fist, Xiao Hong Fist, and Lohan Fist forms.

### **B) Intermediate**

Once a student has trained at the temple for at least six months, they are eligible to take a scheduled test of the basics.

Once the student passes the test, he/she will move on to more advanced movements, forms, and weapons.

Weapon forms include: staff, spear, broadsword, straight sword, and many other long, short, soft and hard weapon forms.

Sparring forms include: empty hand, weapons, and empty hand against weapons practicing methods.

Advanced movements include many jumping and tumbling techniques.

### **C) Internal Energy**

Study of internal training is open to all students, basic, intermediate, or advanced. Keep in mind that internal exercise is very important and is considered the essence of Shaolin Kung Fu by many practitioners and instructors alike.

Fundamental techniques include the circulation of qi, together with physical motions that facilitate the circulation of qi.

Internal energy forms include Yi Jin Jing, Eight-Section Exposition, I-Jin (Tendon Exchange) Procedure, the Twelve Great Energy Method, Jin-Gang (Diamond) Fist, Soft Fist, Marrow-Cleansing Procedure, and many other internal

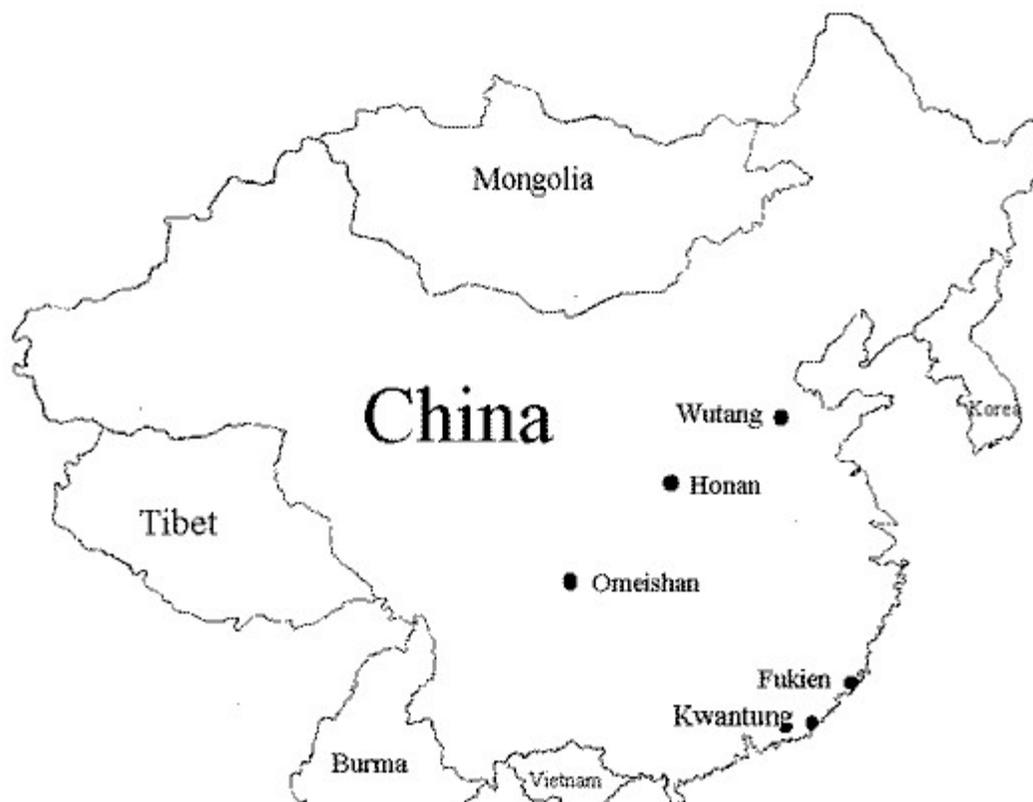
forms.

#### **D) Advanced Training**

The benefits derived from Shaolin Martial Arts teaching are based on individual student's talents, and the comprehension is based on their individual maturity. Those students who are specially talented in Shaolin Martial Arts will receive special training to fully realize their potential

## **Description of the Temples**

There were 5 main temples at the height of the Shaolin order, though all 5 temples were rarely active at the same time.



**Henan:** This is "the" Shaolin temple seen in Chinese kung fu movies, and the one portrayed in the ABC-TV "Kung Fu" series of the 1970s. The physical premises, located in Loyang, a small mountain town southwest of Beijing, have been restored by the Chinese government in the mid 1970s (the temple was destroyed as a result of the Boxer Rebellion of 1901, but probably not until the late 1920s), and subsequently become a tourist/martial arts Mecca. Most of the resident "monks" seen today are actors, similar to the people you would meet in Colonial Williamsburg and other historical sites. During most of its history, Henan Temple was the seat of the most senior monks in the Shaolin Order.

**Fukien:** Probably built around the same time as Henan Temple, but originally a mainstream Buddhist temple until the early 1600s. This temple was integrated into the Shaolin order around 1650. Larger than the

Henan Temple, Fukien served as the "headquarters" during times when Henan was either destroyed or under threat. The southern styles of praying mantis, snake, dragon, and Wing Chun were all developed in Fukien Temple, or by its masters. The temple was burned during the Boxer Rebellion, and its remains were rediscovered in the early 1980s.

**Kwangtung:** southern school, taught many great warriors, snake temple. Temple was built in late 1700's as a Shaolin temple, built in a mountain area overlooking the ocean near the city of Canton in Canton Province. This Cantonese temple was close to (ca. 150 miles southwest) Fukien, and was home to many southern styles, including Choy Li Fut and dragon (styles often originated in one location and were modified at others). Shelled during the civil warring following the Boxer Rebellion.

**Wutang:** Tiger temple. Located near the town of Wutang. Built in a politically unstable area (near Manchuria and the Korean peninsula). Probably the temple most involved with temporal concerns, and consequently often besieged by one army or another. Mercenary monks, including Bok Lei, Hung Si Kuan, and Bok Mei all came from Wutang, eventually moving to Henan (and thus involving Shaolin in its biggest political incursion). Very old temple, integrated into the Shaolin order around AD 800.

**O Mei Shan:** (literally, "Great White Mountain"), northern, library and medical temple. This temple was located in an inaccessible area of the Szechuan province and imported monks much like research institutions do today. The temple itself was very old, probably Taoist in origin. Integrated into Shaolin order around AD 1500. Was in close contact with Tibet. Crane temple. This was a major medical "school" for four centuries, the libraries filled with tomes from East and West. The buildings were used for artillery practice by the armies of both Shang Kai Shek and Mao Tze Tung, but restored in the early 1970s. Today, the "temple" serves as the conservation service headquarters for the bamboo forests of Szechuan and research center for the pandas.

The first four temples had the brands of the tiger and dragon on the left and right forearms respectively. The O mei shan temple had the mantis and the crane on the right and left forearms.

## Structure of the Temples

### Description of Ranks

The Shaolin had a limited class structure with three major levels: students, disciples, and masters. At the base was the student class, which held the most individuals. Members of this group cooked all the meals, washed clothes and performed all other menial or manual labor. Their station was such in order to teach them humility and respect, but also to provide the masters with an opportunity to observe potential protégés before entrusting them with martial arts skills. One who entered before you and was still in your class was an older brother or sister.

The next class of the Shaolin was composed of disciples. They were students who had demonstrated that they were worthy of learning the martial arts of the temple. Upon entrance into this class, they spent from two to four years in the exclusive study of the Shaolin arts of war and medicine, having already received their basic philosophical training as students. As students they learned the principles of Shaolin ethics; as disciples, their time had come to live those ethics, posing as examples for others to follow.

Above the disciples were the masters, who were accorded status as full monks of the temple. The title of master had been bestowed upon them because they had learned completely a system of martial arts from their temple and perfected it, thus achieving technical mastery. Also, they had succeeded in learning the philosophy of the temple well enough to teach what they had learned. Indeed, this was their function in the temple. They were the dispensers of knowledge to the student classes. Among themselves, they had levels of excellence which indicated their martial arts prowess and their grasp of the Shaolin philosophy.

The title "grandmaster" is not a traditional rank, but a modified term to indicate that the master had also been a teacher of other students who had attained master rank. There was no test or formal requirement for the use of this title, and grandmasters rarely use the term in reference to themselves.

## Titles

These titles are in Mandarin

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	
Junior Student	shidi	shimui	White Sash
Senior Student	shihing	shimei	White Sash
Disciple	shisuk	shigoo mei	Black Sash, 1st-2nd
Instructor	shifu	shimoo	Black Sash, 3rd-4th
Senior Instructor	sibok	shidigoo	Black Sash, 5th
Master	sigung	shipoo	Gold Sash, 5th-7th
Grandmaster	shidaigong	shidaipoo	Red Sash, 8th and up

These titles are in Cantonese

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	
Junior Student	sidi	simui	White Sash
Senior Student	sihing	sije	White Sash
Disciple	sisuk	sigoo mui	Black Sash, 1st-2nd
Instructor	sifu	simoo	Black Sash, 3rd-4th
Senior Instructor	sibok	sidigoo	Black Sash, 5th
Master	sigung	sipoo	Gold Sash, 5th-7th
Grandmaster	sitaigung	sitaipoo	Red Sash, 8th and up

## Ranking

There are four traditional sash colours in Shaolin (master ranks are divided into a lower gold and higher red levels):

- white sash: student
- black sash: disciple

- gold sash: weapons master, basic unarmed master
- red sash: unarmed master, pries/monk level

The standard uniform is white with the colors used below as trim:

- Choy Li Fut: tan stripe, symbolic of horses
- Crane: white stripe, symbolic of the crane
- Tibetan white crane: pale blue stripe
- Cobra: emerald stripe, origin unknown
- Dragon: color of style of dragon studied
- Snake: very dark green stripe
- Tiger: red stripe, symbolic of healthy muscle

## What is a disciple?

The young student was curious about why some wore the black sash and others didn't, though both showed similar martial prowess. The Master was approached, and the questions presented to him. His answer was lucid.

"What is a black sash? By now you know that it means entry into discipleship, one who has proven himself over a period of rigorous training. He is dedicated, loyal, knowledgeable and above all, trustworthy. So trustworthy, in fact, that they alone in the organization have a rank which automatically expires annually unless they prove they are still worthy.

"It is not an automatic award; there are no specific physical requirements to met for all. The number of forms is irrelevant. Intangible elements are the most important elements in this promotion. Taking responsibility for one's life and actions; the ability to respect a trust; the ability to be friend, counselor, sibling, or training companion. Out of the nearly 3000 students in this pai, only a very few have been the black sash.

"They do more than what is asked of them, seeing tasks not as duties but as challenges to learn from. They sacrifice time and effort. Rather than neglect work or school, they learn to cultivate each with their Kung Fu. They are competent in their chosen field, and use this knowledge to enhance that competence. They do not forget the philosophical principles after each class; they LIVE them. And they persevere, even-ESPECIALLY-when things get rough.

"They lead, not through intimidation or rank, but through compassion and respect. They are models, and people openly and genuinely respect them. And they learn, always."

The student pondered this answer for some time. He watched the senior students and new disciples work out, then he watched them during non-training time. In time he saw the difference in action between those who acted in full knowledge of their actions, and those desperately fighting a flow from outside

Finally he understood the whole point of the structure of Shaolin ranking, as it were. You could not be made into a worthy one, but rather you acknowledge that you are by being one. How subtle! How appropriate. How Shaolin.

# LIFE IN THE TEMPLE

## Part 1

It would be as difficult to describe an "average" day in the life of an "average" Shaolin monk because, as with almost all other human activities, each day and each life was different. What we shall attempt is a guided tour through a temple (based on oral history from Canton's temple) as it existed until about 1915. The features are generalized, but intended to give a vicarious feel for what the reality was like.

The grounds outside the temple contain a variety of agricultural gardens, where most of the monk's food is grown. The front walls, however, are landscaped to reflect Shaolin concepts of peace and harmony. Pine and bamboo are carefully tended to line the approachway, but a grassy area separates the front gates from the trees. This "moat" is about 40 feet wide, and provides an area of no cover for potential intruders to hide behind. It is also out here where most of the weapons practice takes place (only Hollywood could afford a temple so large that all its functions were contained within walls). The main entrance is barred by two huge, wooden gates, that close at right angles to each other; one swings like conventional doors, the other slides laterally from one wall to the other, providing extra protection against battering ram assaults. Normally, the front gates are used for ceremonial occasions, such as the exiting of a recently promoted monk. For today, the gate is secured, and we must enter by a smaller gate on one of the side walls.

As you walk along the side wall, you may observe a few monks playing traditional musical instruments, or attending a philosophical discussion with a senior monk. Though movies portray Shaolin as testosterone-enhanced mega-jocks, the temples were actually cultural centers, something like modern universities. It was believed that mastery could only come from attaining a harmony of body, mind, and spirit. Each monk, therefore, was versed in more than martial arts, which were actually considered among the lower levels of accomplishment. (Here we must digress; Shaolin did not belittle their kung fu, but saw it and the practitioner incomplete and rather wasted if fighting was all he could do well. Kung fu proved a peace of mind through superior firepower, but was mainly used for physical discipline. That discipline was expected to be used to improve the holistic person.)

You enter through a narrow stone portal, and pass into another garden, possibly planted with a variety of flowers. In a small adjacent courtyard some disciples are training in kung fu. Along the walls are benches, where younger students are mending clothes, making baskets, or practicing calligraphy. A stone building on the left is the granary, and just beyond are more monks making flour. All around you are people doing rather mundane activities, for this is the guts area, where food is stored and prepared, students study, and daily business with the outside world transacted. A large structure twenty yards to the right looks like a temple; you enter to find a small temple area, with an altar, statues, and burning joss sticks at the far end. This is not the main temple, but a disciple and student area for daily meditation. It is here where they receive morning and evening instructions in meditation and visualization, and during the daytime disciples are taught other aspects of coordination.

It is here where you may first notice that not all the inhabitants are men; nor are men the only monk trainees. Shaolin was dedicated to the universality of human experience, and denied no one with qualifications admittance (again, contrary to television). Among the most famous Shaolin were some of the "nuns", including southern green dragon co-founder Ng Mui, Wing Chun founder Ng Mui (separated by about ten generations, and probably no relation), and others. The chauvinistic idea that Shaolin was for men only is

loudly declaimed by the very existence of two of the Temple's most famous and prestigious styles. As for the term "nun," a sad choice, but, like "priest," was taken from the familiar structure of Christian missionaries to name their "heathen" counterparts. Women in the temple had the same rights, privileges, responsibilities, and offices as the men. All were addressed as (loose translation) "monk." Only titles of specific address were gender-related (see RANKING), such that senior women were called "older sister", training masters called "aunt", and so on.

Moving out the far door and continuing to the left, you walk through a beautifully manicured garden. The path meanders among short islands of grass and carefully raked sand and gravel. Small trees are dotted among the islands. A pool of fish is on one side, and sitting near it is a monk in meditation. At the far end are some students, also meditating. Your walk ends abruptly at another wall, and you may go either left or right; going right, you eventually come to the end of the wall, which is the south face of the main and ceremonial temple building. Ahead some 200 feet is the main gate again, but instead we turn left and proceed across the barren courtyard towards the temple's entrance. We climb three sets of stone stairs and pass through an intricate door, each side supported by a column carved to resemble upwardly-flying dragons, their scale edges colored with gold, their bodies painted dark green. Across the entrance is a red plaque with gold characters that translate into "Shaolin Temple." Huge wooden doors would normally be closed, except when the temple is in ceremonial use; for now, they are open and we proceed inside.

Our eyes slowly adjust to the dark interior, illuminated today by a minimum number of candles along each wall. Above and behind the candles are statues, each 2-3 feet in height; along the left wall are various incarnations of the Buddha, Bodhidharma, and important Shaolin patriarchs from history. Along the right are depictions of the classical animals in a variety of fighting stances, each posed as if defending its human counterpart across the aisle. At the far end of the long hall is a giant statue of the Buddha.

As you leave by a small rear door from the main temple, you can again see the food area to the far left; ahead are the kitchens, eating, and sleeping areas; and to the far right a string of low buildings that house the common rooms, library, and writing areas. You walk through the dining hall into another narrow courtyard bordered by a low wall. At intervals along the wall are narrow entrances, each with a wooden door. Beyond each door is an area for the training and instruction of kung fu-these are the legendary chambers.

The training chambers of Shaolin have assumed a nearly mythical status among martial artists, probably because of the legendary results of their successful students. In reality, the chambers were simply training areas for different aspects of kung fu. Some were style-specific, that is, where you would learn the kuen (formwork) of tiger or dragon. Others were places for muscular development, such as horse-training and water-carrying chambers. Some taught coordination and reflex drills; combat and sparring; weapons use; and meditation and visualization techniques. The actual number of chambers varied, depending upon which temple you were in, the combination of skills taught as a "core" by particular training masters, and, naturally, the size of the temple. In Canton, for example, many chambers served double or triple functions. You might study a crane form in chamber 4 at 8 a.m., practice sparring there at 12, and return for coordination drills at 5.

### **Part 3**

It is important to stress that more myth surrounds our general beliefs about Shaolin monks than is warranted. Among the readily dismissed fallacies are: Shaolin were all male, were celibate, were primarily warriors,

studied primarily kung fu, were all trained physicians, were different somehow from other people. Myths place real people on pedestals, and this does nothing for potential students. After all, who could possibly and realistically expect to attain demi-godhood? Shaolin had their heroes and villains, ascetic priests and political rebels, devout celibates and prolific parents.

The most universally held belief seems to be that Shaolin was a place to study, first and foremost, kung fu. China has a history of hundreds of martial arts, only a small fraction being true "Shaolin" practices, so it was virtually never necessary to get thee to a convent to learn pugilism. In fact, the combat side of kung fu was taught to Shaolin disciples as a means of combating the self, to restrain ego and develop physical domain over your own body. Consider how little true control people generally have over themselves; we are never far from a "pathological" klutz, or people who revv their physical energies to little avail. When Bodhidharma instituted the practices that evolved into kung fu, his primary concern was to make the monks physically strong enough to withstand both the isolated lifestyle and the deceptively demanding training that meditation would require. In fact, it is one of the oldest Shaolin axioms that "one who engages in combat has already lost the battle." Such philosophies, alas, make for terrible movie plots...

The early phases of Shaolin training involved a lot of what we would call grammar school (for most students, entry was made when under the age of ten). Long days were spent learning to read and write, and quality calligraphy was seen as proof of a good education. Students also learned math, history, manners and customs, Taoist and Buddhist philosophies, painting, music, textile work, agriculture, pottery, and cooking. To be anything less than self-sufficient was seen as a failing of the training regimen. Older students and disciples would often write books of history, poetry, or natural history, while others would form musical ensembles (often with a master or two), paint, or learn medicine. It was one's development of the cultural side of life that mainly marked one's standing in the Shaolin community.

Hence the rather large amount of building space for housing a library, art materials, a music area, and other life-skills. Such interests were actively encouraged, and to again draw a parallel to modern American universities, such monks often taught "outreach" sessions to the local community. Wandering monks brought art, reading, medicine, and agriculture to remote villages, while people near a temple could come for sessions in all these topics. Mainly, however, they came for farming and medical assistance, as most Chinese villagers were not as intellectually active as some "New Agers" would have us believe.

### **A controversial note:**

our instructors, all products of the old temples, taught that if a person study Shaolin and learn little more than kung fu, he was not Shaolin. All the arts of the temple were aimed at leading one closer to enlightenment by providing tools to make a whole person, or what we often call Renaissance people. A jack of many trades, master of one or two, those are qualities that define a priest, according to those who long made such designations in China. If you are a young person in school, do not sacrifice studies for martial arts; even if you learn skill, a tool with a dull edge is a dull tool of limited use.

### 3. Why the different spellings, "Gung Fu" and "kung fu?"

This is yet another result of western linguists confusing both eastern and western speakers. In the once near-universal Wade-Giles spelling, a Chinese "G" sound was written in English as "K", while what the Chinese pronounced as "K" was transcribed as "K' ". Thus if kung fu were supposed to be pronounced with a "k"

sound, it would have been written as "k'ung fu." When Bruce Lee introduced American audiences to his martial arts, he both spoke and wrote the American "G", hence "gung fu." Confused? Don't worry about it, so is everyone else....

#### 4. How is kung fu different from Karate, Judo, or Tae Kwon Do?

Judo is a sport that involves primarily throwing and grappling. It is very similar to western wrestling, and was invented in the late 1800s by Jigoro Kano, in Japan, specifically as a sport. Karate was originally an Okinawan method of combat that almost completely dispenses with throws. Its blocks are hard and it is a power oriented style. Tae Kwon Do is a Korean art, similar to karate, that emphasizes the feet as weapons and is also very power oriented.

Kung Fu has both hard and soft [styles](#). All styles teach the use of throws, grappling holds, weapons, and self defense. It is therefore a more broad and complex system of combat than many other styles. Similar non-Chinese martial arts include Jiu Jitsu (Japan) and Hapkido (Korea)

#### 5. What's the difference between northern and southern styles?

There are no unique differences. Northern styles are typically more foot/leg technique-oriented than southern styles, but there are many notable exceptions. For example, the south's White Crane is more acrobatic, aerial, and kick-oriented than most northern styles.

#### 6. What is the philosophical basis of Shaolin kung fu?

The Shaolin philosophy is a combination of philosophical [Taoism](#) and [Buddhism](#). The primary aim was to follow the Tao, the way of Nature. Only thus could the practitioner be in harmony with the Universe, and himself.

#### 7. What is ch'i?

Ch'i is a basic concept in most Asian arts, martial and otherwise. It is also known as prana (India) and ki (Japan), words which generally translate into "breath." At the most simple level, ch'i is described as the life force, or "electricity" of living things. It is analogous to the energy that makes something alive, rather than inanimate, and death is described as a body devoid of ch'i. It's cultivation is taken almost on faith, via such arts as Dragon kung fu, Ch'i Kung, and T'ai Chi Ch'uan. Thus, though difficult to define, measure, or explain, [ch'i](#) lies at the root of martial and meditative arts practices.

#### 18. I want to study at the Shaolin Temple in China. Can you give me more information?

Unfortunately, the Shaolin temples were destroyed in the 1920's. Recently, the Chinese government decided to refurbish the temple at Honan. While martial arts are studied there today, this is a recent re-emergence into the arts. Our contacts who have visited the Honan Temple (1985, 1988, and 1999) report that what is taught is mostly Wushu and T'ai Chi Ch'uan. Most of our contacts who have visited the Temple believe it is

more a trendy tourist point (and, yes, a good place to learn wu shu-but NOT kung fu) than a real effort to restore the arts outlawed by successive Chinese governments from 1901 until 1990.

Jon Funk (*Black Belt*, March, 1996:21) has written a controversial article entitled "The Shaolin Temple Hoax." Because of the number of letters we receive about "the return of Shaolin Masters" to the tourist-dedicated, refurbished Honan Temple, we felt obliged to publicize Mr. Funk's laudatory effort. Our primary sources for this Web-Page are exiled Shaolin monks (or the diaries left behind by those who passed away in the 1970s), who assure us that Mr. Funk is right-on-the-mark about the complete absence of anything even remotely akin to *bona fide* Shaolin arts being taught at the Honan Temple today.

Because so many of our letters are written by people who believe that the Temple is now offering genuine Shaolin arts (despite our protestations about "who do you think expelled/killed the old Shaolin in the early twentieth century?"), we quote a short, but important, part of Mr. Funk's article:

"The Chinese government, it should be remembered, is communist, and doesn't want a religious group generating any ideas that don't conform to the party line."

There is always going to be a gullible audience for "too-good-to-be-true" claimants. We are delighted that a source who is completely independent of our own, has come forward in such a prestigious and public forum as *Black Belt* magazine to substantiate our caveat.

Although the Chinese government believes that the mere presence of martial arts instructors at