

CHINESE
KUNG FU

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SHAOLIN
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中国

少林功夫

China Pictorial Publishing House

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A Brief Introduction

I Shaolin Temple, Origin of All Martial Arts

The Chinese martial art known to Westerners as “kung fu,” is one of the world’s great cultural treasures. “All kung fu was created under the sun of the Shaolin Temple” has long been said when explaining the origin of all martial arts in China. Nobody knows how many legends are told about Shaolin and kung fu, but one thing is certain: throughout the world the Shaolin Temple remains a prized destination for all kung fu aficionados.

There would have been no Shaolin legend were it not for Bodhidharma, an Indian monk known as Da Mo to the Chinese, who founded the Mahayana Sect of Buddhism, more popularly known as Chinese Chan (or Zen) Buddhism.



Shaolin kung fu has long enjoyed a great reputation for profoundness, tremendous variety, and superb techniques. Today it has evolved into a very popular competitive sport in China.

Here, we’d like to showcase the mystical legend and the unique art the Shaolin kung fu.



created under the sun of the Shaolin Temple,” though Shaolin kung fu is not the origin of Chinese martial arts.

Bodhidharma is gone, but his legend remains and, most important, his Chan Sect has been carried on by generations of monks. Today, Shaolin kung fu enjoys a worldwide reputation; having become the most popular form of martial arts in the world.

III The Monk Soldiers

The original purpose of the monk soldiers was to protect the temple against banditry. During the late Sui and early Tang dynasties General Wang Shichong gathered a large army in an attempt to oust the Tang emperor from the imperial throne, establishing his own kingdom, which he named Zheng. He titled his nephew “general” and sent his men to Baigu Village to battle Li Shimin, the emperor’s son. In 620, the third year of Emperor Wudi’s reign, Li Shimin, now in great danger, called upon 13 monks to come to his aid, after hearing of their prowess. The monks, including Zhi Cao, Hui Yang, and Tan Zong, responded, and they captured General Wang Renze, thus making a remarkable contribution to the unification of the Tang regime. Prince Li was enthroned as the Tang emperor, and he awarded the Shaolin monks handsomely, conferring the title of Great General on monk Tan Zong and granting the Shaolin Temple 40 hectares of land.

Shaolin kung fu became considerably more mature and refined after the wars.

overcoming adversaries with surprise and changeable moves. Monkey boxing is agile for both defense and attack; crane boxing is quick as lightning; dragon boxing forestalls the enemy with an imposing manner; snake boxing is quick-witted and to the point; tiger boxing is arrogant and of great power; and lion boxing is irresistible with its ferociousness. There are other well-known forms, such as the hawk boxing, rooster boxing, dog boxing, and mantis boxing.



Reaching new heights is what imitative Shaolin boxing is particularly about. During the performance, the performer reaches the destiny of what he imitates: a dragon or a crane, feeling the natural desire of the creature. Each of his movements must resemble that of the creature: like a snake or a dog. No wonder other martial art practitioners sigh with emotion when they admit: “None but the Chan devotees can make it!”

V The Eighteen Types of Shaolin Martial Arts

Shaolin kung fu didn't come into being until the monks began boxing. It is said that there were only 18 movements, known as the “Eighteen Routines of *Luohan* Boxing,” which were followed by Shaolin kung fu using weapons, such as cudgels. During the Five Dynasties and Ten States (907-965), Fu Ju, abbot of Shaolin Temple, invited experts from 18 martial art schools to

Shaolin for an exchange of skills. They remained for three years and ultimately edited the *Shaolin Boxing Manual*. During the Jin (1115-1234) and Yuan (1279-1227) dynasties, experts Bai Yufeng and Li Sou also came to Shaolin to exchange skills. Subsequently, more than 70 routines of Shaolin boxing were created on the basis of the 18 routines of *Luohan* Boxing, along with the imitative boxing of five animals, including the dragon, leopard, snake, tiger, and crane.



The practice of Shaolin boxing is not subject to the size of the arena; it can give play to its power within a few paces. “Room enough for an ox to lie down will suffice.” All movements – up and down, forward and backward, withdrawing and advancing and sidestepping – proceed along a straight line. Hand movement should be neither entirely crooked, nor entirely straight, but must be flexible. When attacking, the fists must produce whirling, elastic power. The eyes should be fixed on the enemy, observing his intentions. The body should be pliant and well balanced. In footwork, maintain a low posture in advance and high posture in retreat. When kicking out, the foot should be as light as a feather or as heavy as Taishan Mountain.

In fact, Shaolin boxing accentuates soft tactics, combining both “hard” and “soft.” “In defense, like a virgin; in attack, like a tiger.” It makes good use of the enemy’s own strength to fight back. Every movement contains either an attack, defense, or



birth to the 12th style of *Yijinjing*, which tempers toughness with gentleness. More unique skills were born after the Ming Dynasty, including the internal and external exercises, hard exercise, light exercise, child's exercise, walking and fighting on top of stakes set

into the ground, the *Luohan* exercise, freezing an enemy by jabbing his acu-points, fire exercise, and the heart-and-mind stake exercise, to name only a few.

The unique skills of the Shaolin kung fu give full play to a human being's potential by integrating the wisdom and spirit of the Chan Sect. Imagine these: he is still alive even though he is strangled; his throat remains unhurt after being stung by a spear; his fingers penetrate wood; ~~the stone is broken on top of his head~~; the stick is broken after heating his chest; ~~he headstands on two fingers~~; and he breaks the stone with his "flying" foot.

Shaolin breath control can be ~~divided into the internal and external~~, or the soft and hard exercises. Internal breath control exercise is practiced either as a means to keep fit and cultivate moral conduct by ~~regulating the internal qi~~ (breath). They include *baduanjin*, *yijinjing*, *yinyang qi*, and sitting Chan. The external breath control stresses directing the internal *qi*, through concentration, to a certain part of the body, thus endowing it with extraordinary strength, so powerful and incredible that it is beyond people's imagination. The best examples are *tiebushan* (iron jacket), *zhushazhang* (red sand palm), *tietougong* (iron head exercise, or hanging from a tree with a rope round the neck), *gangdugong* (iron stomach



exercise), fire exercise, and *tieshazhang* (iron sand palm).

Shaolin kung fu on stakes can be divided into the *Meihua* (Plum Blossom) and *Xinyi* (Heart-and-Mind). The *Meihua* stakes stand some two meters above the ground and each is set at a specific distance from the others. Shaolin devotees are able to fight on top of the stakes as if they were moving on solid

ground. The *Xinyi* stake exercise is one of the oldest exercises of Shaolin kung fu. An internal work, it sends out the power through integrating the internal breath and strength. Skillful devotees can stamp their feet into a pit and break the stone with their feet. The 48 pits in the Ten-Thousand-Buddha Hall of the Shaolin Temple evidence this power.

The child's exercise, the most amazing and difficult of all Shaolin kung fu, is a kind of breath control. Anyone who has mastered the skills will feel rejuvenated, with limbs as soft as cotton, light as a swallow, and hard as steel. There are routines such as *Luohan Shuijiao* (the Sleeping Arhat), *Erzhichan* (headstand on two fingers), *Daozaibei* (headstand without support), and *Baofojiao* (forward bend).

VII Mastery Derives from Hard Training

As a matter of fact, the majestic Shaolin kung fu only can be mastered through extreme, almost unimaginably difficult training. What is the secret? The answer lies in years of perseverance. The devotees persist

in training year-round, even during the hottest days of summer and the coldest days of winter. They awake before dawn and finish training when the moon hangs high. They race up and climb down stairs a thousand meters high, naked to the waist in winter, and practice on stakes, and in robes in the summer they lift the “stone lock” each weighing as much as 50 kilos,. They hang themselves upside down with perfect composure. They turn their heads into “iron” by hitting against wood. Light exercise can be trained on the edge of a cauldron or a bamboo basket; and beating water in a vat or a pool is part of the basic training for the iron sand palm exercise. They do not stop training even while eating, walking, sleeping, and offering tea to guests. They rise early in the morning, do the iron broom exercise while sweeping the ground. They practice the skill of iron fan while fanning in hot summer. They use their stomach as a chopping board when cooking, and they crush walnuts on their head.

In the depth of Mt. Songshan there are secret training grounds equipped with wooden stakes, sand bags, and sand pits – the cradle of many masters of Shaolin kung fu. These are located by brooks surrounded by beautiful scenery, thus favoring the tough training.

VIII International Exchanges

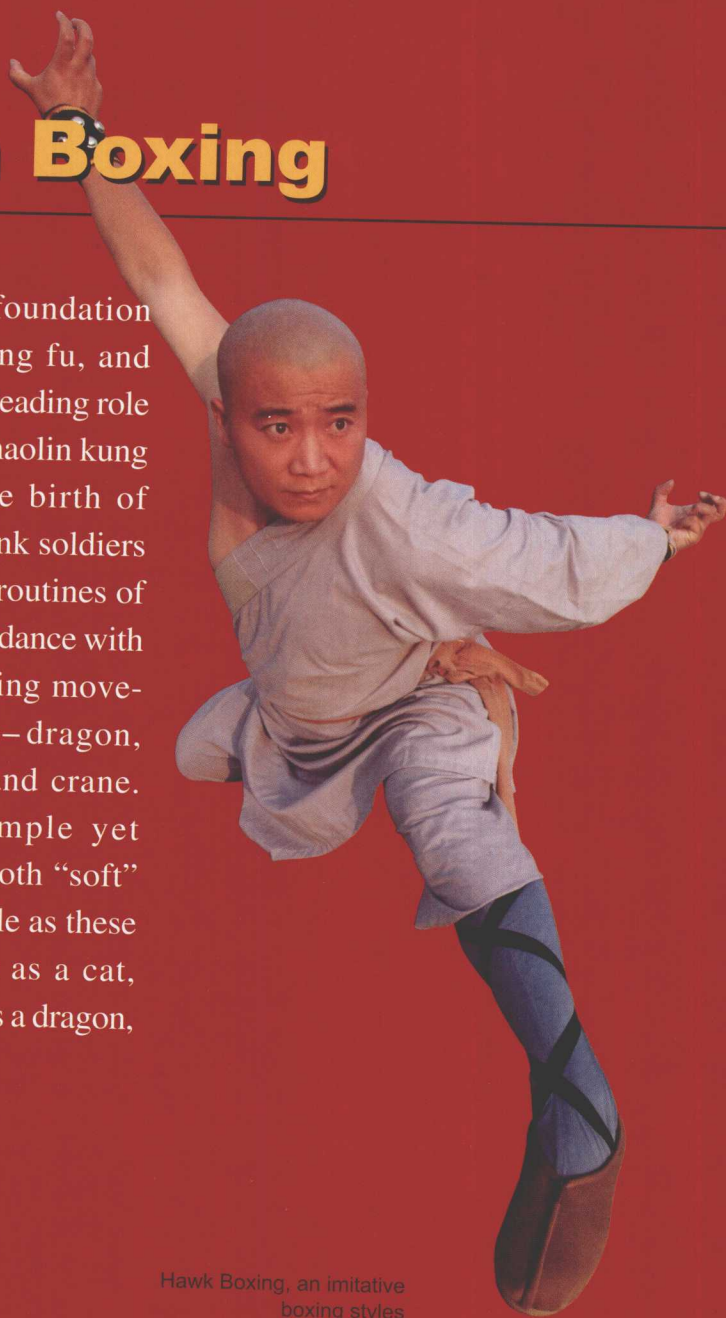
For a long period of time, Shaolin kung fu was only popular among the monks in the temple. It was shown to the rest of the world soon after the 13 monks saved the Tang emperor and gradually became an extensive martial arts system.

During the Tang and Song dynasties, many seculars went to the temple to practice and exchange the skills of the martial arts. Shaolin kung fu thus became very

Chapter 1

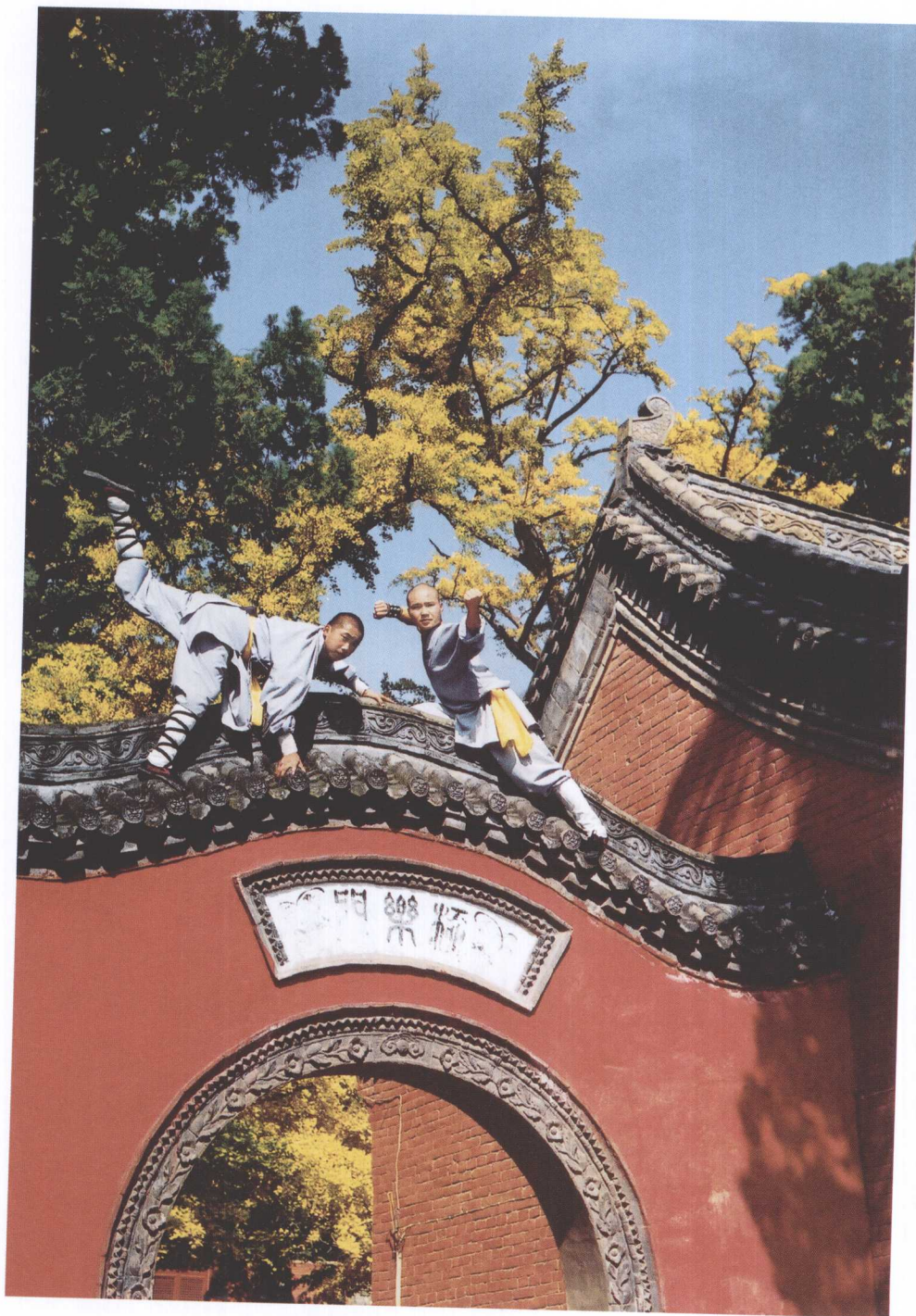
Shaolin Boxing

Boxing is the foundation of Shaolin kung fu, and it has played a leading role in the development of Shaolin kung fu. Dating back to the birth of Shaolin kung fu, the monk soldiers were practicing the “18 routines of Luohan Boxing” in accordance with the galloping and jumping movements of five animals—dragon, leopard, snake, tiger, and crane. Shaolin boxing is simple yet powerful. It integrates both “soft” and “hard.” As changeable as these animals, they are quiet as a cat, fierce as a tiger, dashing as a dragon, and quick as lightning.



Hawk Boxing, an imitative
boxing styles

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Scorpion Boxing, a combative art.

Chapter 1

Shaolin Boxing

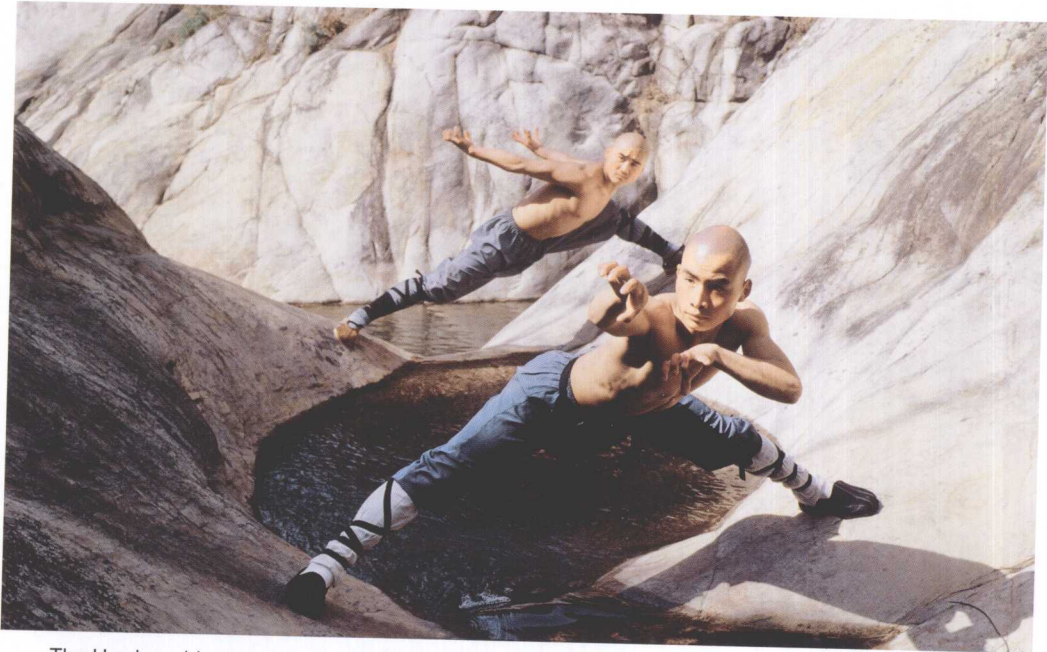


Combat in the Air, a routine to attack and defend with legs

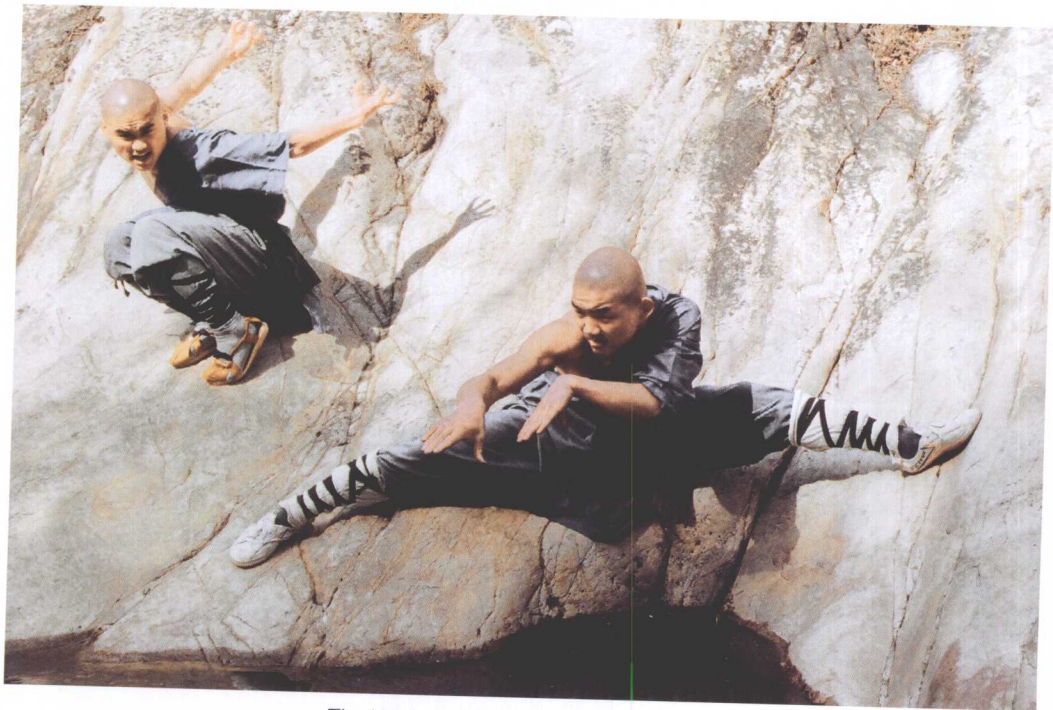


The Flying Feet, an art for attack

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The Hawk-and-Leopard over the Dangerous Pool, a combating skill to deal with extreme situations



The Hawk-and-Snake, an integrating art



The Leopard Climbing the Tree



Chapter 2

The Basic Skills of Shaolin Kung Fu

There is a saying among the monks in Shaolin Temple, “Three years of kicking and two years of boxing” for basic training. That shows the importance attached to the basic training of Shaolin kung fu. The monks usually practice toughly in the snow in winter and race up and climb down hundreds of stone stairs in summer to reinforce their bodies.

Climbing down the stairs in the burning sun,
an exercise to enhance the limbs

