

中國近百年螳螂拳術史述論稿

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**A DISCOURSE ON THE HISTORY OF
PRAYING MANTIS BOXING IN CHINA
FOR THE LAST ONE HUNDRED YEARS**

BY

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TO THE MEMORY
OF
LO KUANG-YÜ 羅光玉 (1889-1944)
AND
WONG HON-FAN 黃漢勛 (1915-1974)
TWO GREAT MASTERS WHO TAUGHT PRAY-
ING MANTIS BOXING ALL THEIR LIVES AT
THE CHIN WOO ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION,
CHINA

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SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

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I have chosen as my subject the last hundred years in the historical development of the Praying Mantis school of Chinese boxing, simply because the most reliable written materials and individual achievements still can be traced today. So I have chosen 1919 as the critical year when Mr. Lo Kuang-yü was invited to teach Praying Mantis at the Chin Woo Athletic Association, Shanghai, China. As a result of his efforts, and those of his disciples, Praying Mantis boxing has spread widely in southern China, especially Hong Kong, and throughout Southeast Asia. By the time of Lo's death in 1944, Praying Mantis boxing had established a solid foundation in the society of China. However, it was not until Mr. Wong Hon-fan assumed responsibility for completing Lo's unfinished work, by publishing numerous books and articles to expound the theories and detail the history of Praying Mantis boxing, that the school emerged into international renown. This book is dedicated to the memory of these two towering figures. I will deal chiefly with the efforts of these two great masters in teaching Praying Mantis boxing, and briefly with some great masters of other schools of martial arts.

At the outset of the book, I discuss the earliest history of Praying Mantis boxing, which can be traced to about the last three hundred years. Manuscripts on Praying Mantis boxing, handed down from masters of earlier generations, touch on the traditions of the school, which imitated the movements of praying mantises, and which incorporated the techniques of seventeen other famous martial artists who were legends of the Sung dynasty (960-1279). According to Mr. Wong Hon-fan, based on counting the known generations, and investigating the background of the seventeen known martial artists, Wang Lang 王朗, the creator of the school,

was a genius of the later years of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). I have examined materials from the *Chi-hsiao hsin-shu* 紀效新書 (A *New Treatise on Disciplined Service*), composed by Ch'i Chi-kuang 戚繼光 (1528-1587)^①, and discovered some main themes of Praying Mantis boxing that were evident in the text. Specific terms such as *Pa-kang* 八剛, or eight hardness, and *Shi-er jou* 十二柔, or twelve softness, techniques of Praying Mantis boxing, are mentioned there. But the most important element is the ideal of creating a perfect martial arts school. Ch'i Chi-kung pointed out that one must learn, and practice and study fully, the most distinguished techniques of the most famous ancient and contemporary martial artists, together with one's own intelligence. Only then can one contemplate the creation of a perfect school. It is quite obvious that Wang Lang, the creator of Praying Mantis boxing, drew some inspirations from Ch'i Chi-kuang. This point of view, I think, strongly indicates that Wang Lang was an important figure in the later years of the Ming dynasty, as proposed by Mr. Wong Hon-fan.

The second chapter mainly concerns Lo Kuang-yü's teaching of Praying Mantis boxing at the Chin Woo Athletic Association (精武體育會) in Shanghai and Hong Kong. Lo was a native of Shantung province. He was allowed to teach in Mukden (Shenyang) by his instructor Fan Yu-tung 范旭東 (1841-1935) when he was about twenty-five years old. However it was not until he was thirty-one that he was invited to teach at the Chin Woo Athletic Association at Shanghai in 1919. This private athletic association had been established for a decade, and the number of

① For Ch'i Chi-kuang's biography and works, see J. F. Millinger and Chaoying Fang, "Ch'i Chi-kuang," in *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, eds. L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), Vol. 1, pp. 220-224.

outstanding martial arts instructors, starting from Huo Yuan-chia 霍元甲 (1868-1909), the founder of the association, reached about twenty. However only twelve instructors, some of them old, others new, were carrying on their jobs in 1919. Some of them served the Chin Woo for their whole lives, and Lo Kuang-yü was among them. From their enthusiasm and tireless teaching, experts in various martial arts schools were produced, and the Chin Woo Athletic Association expanded from the chief one in Shanghai to more than 70 branches over the important cities in China and Southeast Asia. It is not exaggerated at all to say that the Chin Woo Athletic Association, a well-organized private organization, earned its highest reputation in the martial arts world during the first part of the twentieth century. Of course, we do not forget about the Chung-yang kuo-shu-kuan 中央國術館, established by the government in 1928, twenty years later than the Chin Woo Athletic Association, which also had tremendous success in transmitting martial arts teaching to schools in China, and in demonstrating the skills and value of martial arts to the world. Martial arts historians never forget that both private and governmental organizations have been influential in the development of traditional martial arts in modern times.

Lo Kuang-yü spent half of his adult life in teaching Praying Mantis boxing at Chin Woo in Shanghai, from 1919 to 1932, and the other half at Chin Woo in Hong Kong, 1932 to 1942. In between, he taught about half a year at the Chin Woo in Canton in 1929. His successful training inspired numerous disciples, some of whom became either national or provincial winners in martial arts contests. Ma Ch'eng-hsien 馬成鑫 was one of them. Mr. Wong Hon-fan recalled that the number of Lo's disciples reached more than eighty thousands, and that the number who became instructors of Praying Mantis boxing during Lo's time were counted to

more than two hundred.

Lo Kuang-yü's teaching methods can be divided into three groups. They are (1) forms of practicing and free sparring, (2) energy training, and (3) strength increasing.

First of all, free forms include empty-handed exercises, and exercises with weapons—from simple to complicated. Once the practitioner can perform solo exercises well, the two-person forms come next. From this training one can learn the way to protect oneself. And there is a feature in the forms of Praying Mantis boxing named *Ling-ch'uan* 領拳 or understanding empty-handed forms. Most of these forms can be practiced by two persons, with one of them using the aggressive form, and the other providing a series of movements against it. By this method, practitioners can totally understand and master the use of all movements in the original forms. Once equipped with form training, students can enter the territory of free sparring, which is the ultimate aim of martial arts training. Lo gave full instructions and demonstrations on the techniques of sparring at Chin Woo once or twice every month. His disciples who were engaged in teaching Praying Mantis boxing usually carried out this legacy.

Secondly, for the purpose of helping the development of energy, Lo Kuang-yü taught *Lo-han kung* 羅漢功 or works of the eighteen Arhats, in order to increase bodily power. This system includes about six hundred movements in a series, supplemented with the rhythm of breathing, and can steadily strengthen the internal system, lubricate joints, and expand flexibility. This long form needs an hour to practice, and comprises the excellent points of *Wu-chin hsi* 五禽戲 or five animals' actions (i.e., the tiger, deer, bear, monkey, and bird), *Pa-tuan chin* 八段錦 or eight sections of brocade (commonly known as Eight Daily Graceful Exercises), and *I-chin ching* 易筋經, or tendons-change classic,

which has been widely used by Chinese to prolong life.^②

Thirdly, for increasing of strength, Lo Kuang-yü taught *T'ieh-sha chang* 鐵沙掌, or iron-sand palm, at the Chin Woo Athletic Association by the request of the most ambitious students. To learn iron-sand palm is quite a hardship. The learner must first soak his hands in a very hot soup of herbal medicine in order to speed up the blood circulation well, then stick his fingers into a big pot which has been filled up with about two hundred pounds of iron sand, and then grabs a handful of iron sand and, after withdrawing his hands from the pot, punches both fists back into the pot with a horse-riding step. After repeating these movements for about half an hour, the trainee has to slap a canvas bag which has been filled with about forty pounds of iron sand, in order to increase the power of his palms. The purpose of iron-sand palm is to exercise the fingers, fists and palms, and takes three to six years to finish the whole course. Readers may find its full description in the first appendix to this book.

Lo Kuang-yü retired from the Chin Woo Athletic Association in 1939. In December of 1941, Hong Kong was occupied by Japanese troops. Lo left Hong Kong for Shanghai in 1942, and died there in 1944. From then on, the duty of extending the glory of Praying Mantis boxing fell to his disciples. Among them, Mr. Wong Hon-fan, like Mr. Lo, taught Praying Mantis boxing at the Chin Woo Athletic Association all his life, and kept Lo's name alive forever.

Chapter three deals with Mr. Wong Hon-fan's achievements in

② For the reference to *Pa-tuan chin*, I strongly recommend *physical Education in China*, by Gunsun Hoh 郝更生 (Shanghai, the Commercial Press, 1926), pp. 40-61. Graceful movements of the whole form were demonstrated by Wang Huai-ch'i 王懷琪. Besides these pictures, this book also contains some rare and valuable photos, especially those of the instructors of the Chin Woo Athletic Association on pages 14 and 15.

the development of Praying Mantis boxing, and Wong's contributions to the circle of martial arts. As a Cantonese, he started to practice martial arts under the guidance of his uncle, who taught the Southern boxing. Upon turning seventeen, he followed Lo Kuang-yü to learn Praying Mantis boxing at the Chin Woo Athletic Association in Hong Kong. His daily exercises usually reached eighty forms. Two years later, Lo allowed this promising disciple to open a studio in Macao. Wong was the first one who obtained the teacher's sanction to run a private studio after Lo had taught at the Chin Woo in Hong Kong. More opportunity was to come. In 1935, Wong was employed by the Chin Woo Athletic Association in Hankow, Hupei province. He trained students in the skills of Praying Mantis boxing as well as, by the request of students, the iron-sand palm work. Wong Hon-fan greatly enjoyed his teaching in Hankow. However, in the face of Japan's aggression, the National Government had to disperse the civilians of Hankow in October of 1938. Wong got back to Hong Kong promptly, and had another chance to follow Lo Kuang-yü to complete his education in all aspects of Praying Mantis boxing, knowledge of traditional herbal medicine, and the techniques of *Tui-na shu* 推拿術 or ancient massage methods.

I have used a large space in the book to show Wong's contributions to Praying Mantis boxing and to the martial artist territories. Here I simply describe his work by dividing it into two periods. The first period is the ending of the Second World War in 1945, and the second is right after the Communists came to power in 1949.

We know that the building used by the Chin Woo Athletic Association was confiscated during the occupation of Hong Kong by Japanese troops. All activities of the Chin Woo collapsed. The Association was not restored until the end of World War Two as a

result of the efforts of Wong Hon-fan and some enthusiastic members. And Wong was the one to reorganize the Department of Martial Arts. In 1946 he succeeded Lo Kuang-yü as department head to teach Praying Mantis boxing. In the same year, he published a book entitled *T'ang-lang ch'uan-shu ch'an-pi* 螳螂拳術闡秘 (*Explanations of the Secrets of Praying Mantis Boxing*). As far as I know, this is the first systematic book in China which explores the whole territory of Praying Mantis boxing, historically and theoretically. Furthermore, it also contains a sequential register of all names of both empty-handed and weapons forms. Indeed this book has laid down most of the fundamental specifications of Praying Mantis boxing, and became a classic.

During the late 1940's, the martial arts center of southern China was in Canton. Due to the political situation, however, the center was shifted from Canton to Hong Kong from 1950 onward. A considerable number of remarkable older martial artists of various schools left China and crowded into Hong Kong. For more than a decade or two, Hong Kong turned out to be a world paradise of martial arts. With his vigor, Wong Hon-fan launched into a new scheme to elaborate his study and teaching of Praying Mantis boxing. He had new columns in influential newspapers and magazines, and produced two to three books yearly. At the same time, he arranged more martial arts classes in the Chin Woo Athletic Association for those instructors who just came to Hong Kong from China. His masterpieces like *T'ang-lang ch'uan Chiang-tsoo* 螳螂拳講座 (*The Forum on Praying Mantis Boxing*), *Wu-lin chi-wen lu* 武林知聞錄 (*Records of What was Known and Heard from the Martial Arts Circle*), and *San-shi nien Chin Woo Chien-wen lu* 三十年精武見聞錄 (*Records of What Was Seen and Heard from the Chin Woo Athletic Association Within Thirty Years*), stirred up people to foster the existence of traditional

martial arts. Also, by observing martial arts in Japan, Korea, Thailand and boxing in the Western world, he showed their excellent points and shortcomings, and praised their governments' assistance to the sport, in order to stimulate the greater public to renew and restore traditional Chinese martial arts. His passion is due our highest respect.

As to his contributions to Praying Mantis boxing, I have mentioned in detail that he had written about seventy books, either published or in manuscript form, describing almost all forms of Praying Mantis boxing, and the techniques and knowledge of traditional Chinese medicine. The compilation of *T'ang-lang chuan-pu* 螳螂拳譜 (*A List of Names of the Movements in Forms of Praying Mantis Boxing*), which contains thirty eight forms, has given practitioners a great convenience in the sequence and structure of each form. His definitions and illustrations of twelve principal methods for attack and defense in Praying Mantis boxing has long been adopted by martial artists. They are *kou* 勾 or to hook, *lou* 樓 or to grasp, *t'sai* 採 or to capture (a quick snatch right after the last two actions), *kua* 掛 or an upward block, *tiao* 刁 (the same hooking action as *kou*, but it is followed by techniques other than *lou* and *t'sai*), *chin* 進 or to advance, *peng* 崩 or to collapse (a blow with the back of the fist on the head or face), *ta* 打 or to beat (a technique for sparring or self defense), *chan* 沾 or to adhere, *nien* 黏 or to paste, *t'ieh* 貼 or to attach, and *k'ao* 靠 or to lean on (the last four are the techniques for close-contact fighting).^③ I have fully introduced Mr. Wong Hon-fan's unique explanations of the twelve technical words in the text, and I also

^③ For the twelve principal methods for attack and defense see Wong Hon-fan, *T'ang-lang ch'uan-shu ch'i-yuan yu hsi-tung* 螳螂拳術起源與系統, first published in *T'ang-lang ch'uan-shu ch'an-pi* 螳螂拳術闡秘 (Hong Kong, 1946), pp. 6-8. Translated into English as "The Invention and Development of the Northern Style Praying Mantis

express some of my humble opinions there.

When Lo Kuang-yü started his teaching career at the Chin Woo Athletic Association at Shanghai in 1919, he labeled his subject as *T'ang-lang men* 螳螂門 or Praying Mantis School. As time went on, a complicated system of derivative forms appeared, as many as ten of them, and each bears a particular name of Praying Mantis. Here, I try to point out that Wong Hon-fan is definitely correct in his exalted view that Lo Kuang-yü's Praying Mantis boxing included *Ch'i-hsing t'ang-lang* 七星螳螂 or seven-star Praying Mantis, *Mei-hua t'ang-lang* 梅花螳螂 or plum-blossom Praying Mantis, and *Kung-pan t'ang-lang* 光班螳螂 or blank belly Praying Mantis. Wong's crystal-clear explanation was handed down from Lo Kuang-yü, and Lo's from his teacher Fan Yu-tung. I have followed Wong's text, and luckily obtained more than enough evidence from several authorized martial arts monographs to support his arguments. By comparing and analyzing all forms that Lo taught with others bearing the names seven-star Praying Mantis and plum-blossom Praying Mantis, I deeply believe that Lo Kuang-yü was quite right to single out his school as *T'ang-lang men* when he taught at the Chin Woo Athletic Association at Shanghai in 1919. I therefore devote nearly one third of the space in Chapter three to deal with this old problem which has existed in the circle of martial arts in China since a hundred years ago.

At the end of Chapter three, I list all forms, including empty-handed, weapons, two persons, three persons, energy work, and others, from which one can visualize the whole picture of traditional martial arts, and may understand why the legacy left us by

School of Chinese Boxing" by Wong Pang-ying, and published in *New Martial Hero*, Vol. 66 (Hong Kong, 1972). The article was also in Wong Ngai-ying, ed. *T'ang-lang ch'uan-shu yuan-liu lun-ts'ung* 螳螂拳術源流論叢 (*Discussions on the Source and History of Praying Mantis Boxing*), Hong Kong, 1980, pp. 70-71.

Wong Hon-fan and Lo Kuang-yü is so rich and valuable.

Finally, I wish to thank Dr. William L. Abler, a distinguished linguist and an expert of dinosaur study, for suggesting that I publish "the whole book in Chinese and English, with one language on the left page, and the other on the right". His idea coincides with James Legge's (1815-1897) translation of Chinese classics, and I have appreciated that very much. However, the book has to be finished this year (2000) in order to dedicate it to the memory of Mr. Lo Kuang-yü and Mr. Wong Hon-fan, the latter being my respected teacher, who died twenty-five years ago. Both of them served Chinese martial arts and the Praying Mantis school all their lives. So instead of translating the whole book, I wrote this summary for my English-speaking readers.

Hon-chiu Wong
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San Francisco.

序

此書之作，實蓄志於一九五四年春，時余從先師順德黃漢勛先生習螳螂拳已二年餘，適九龍總商會擴辦義學，舉行武術表演籌款於荔園，特商請香港精武體育會負責節目，漢勛先生任國術部部長，應諾之。會員廿二人出演，余入門最淺，亦在列焉。會後，余思螳螂拳自羅光玉先生於一九一九年任上海精武總會技擊教員，二十餘年傳藝不輟，螳螂拳聲名大行於世，惜因八年全面抗戰而停頓，幸賴其及門弟子之奮力，使不絕如縷之螳螂拳術得以不墜；而武學之道德精神，又得漢勛先生為之發揮，余讀之而深心體會。同時於舊書肆獲得羅氏於一九三二年來港任教精武會，於《香港精武會籌建會所第二屆徵求大會特刊》中所刊之拳照及螳螂拳之傳流系統與拳法要義，大有感發我心，因是而於螳螂拳之拳史與拳理，冀有以探討焉。嗣是十餘年，余隨師習練螳螂拳不懈，所習拳械愈多，所會亦愈深，始覺著寫拳術史之不易，著一翔實完整之拳術史尤難。漢勛先生費九牛二虎之力，於螳螂拳術之器械拳理，闡發淋漓盡致，可謂前無古人，而於螳螂拳世系，猶有史料不全之慨歎。一九六六年，余留學東瀛，繼則負笈北美，往昔所蓄之志，亦遂一時擱置，然從師請益問難，書物往還，數年未嘗中斷。其間余因寫作論文：*Government Expenditures in Northern Sung China (960—1127)*（《北宋政

府支出》），趁研覽之便，見有關中國古代武術史料則剗錄之，並旁及中西武術史籍，有幸遍讀戰後罕見之《精武本紀》、《精武外傳》諸書，兼重溫舊藏精武體育會出版之技擊叢刊，擬於拳術史有所論列，而漢勛先生遽逝矣。忽忽數十年，人事世變，不知凡幾，自顧整理螳螂拳術史之念未泯。於是乃就舊聞、取證所學，發篋陳書，從容論列。自知孤陋，疏闕難免；然亦自信有詳人之所略，略人之所詳者。若夫習練拳術與著作拳術之史，本為二事，然要以合一為上上。何則？拳術技藝之成，多在少壯之年，世所謂老當益壯者，指心志而言耳。而著作拳術之史者，苟能以具體之拳術藝能，鎔鑄於所寫之史中，使之如水乳交融，則可大增滋味。拳藝貴功力，而歷史貴識見，以武術史中之家數，每及其源起與流傳，多駁雜不純，甚或真偽參半，披沙揀金，便需識見，兼資閱歷。故史識之養成，非若少年練藝入悟進境之速，此寫史之所以難也。至於余所精習者，螳螂拳而已，余所詳寫者，中國近百年之螳螂拳術史而已。自惟學愧遽密，未窺拳術史之大道，此猶酌中衢之罇，隨性適分耳。夫日將月邁，余書之草就，遠去少年習藝已五十年，晚學無成，汗顏無已。然明末大儒黃梨洲不云乎：「書到老來方可著。」十九世紀德國史家 Leopold von Ranke 則曰「An historian must be old.」（史家須多歷世變）二語可釋余懷矣。

二〇〇〇年十月一日黃漢超識於舊金山