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SHAOLIN
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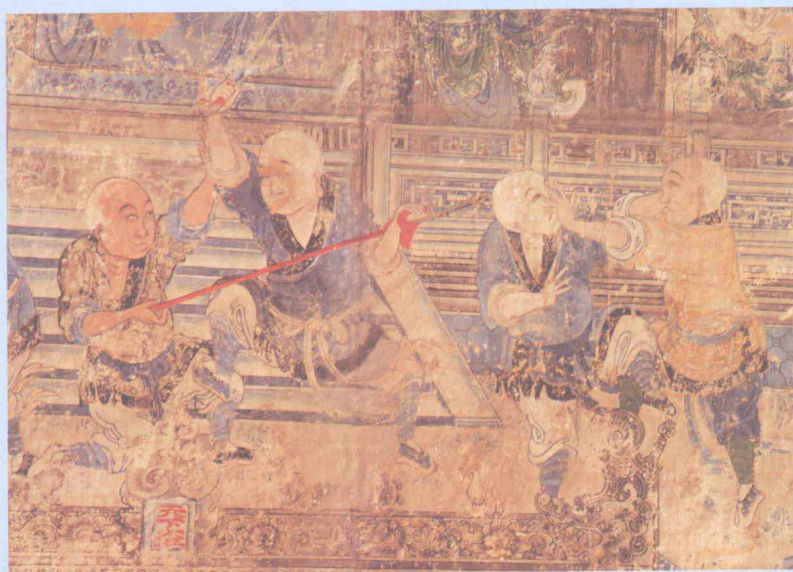
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A Brief Introduction

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.

II Where the Story Began

Mt. Songshan on China's hinterland consists of two parts: Taishi and Shaoshi, which embrace the Shaolin Temple. Here there are beautiful scenic areas and many places of historical and cultural interests.



In the Chinese language, “shao” is taken from the mountain Shaoshi, and “lin” means “trees.” During the Northern Wei period (386-534), the temple was built in 495 under the instruction of Emperor Wendi of the Northern Dynasties (386-581), to create a home for Ba Tuo, who came to China from India 30 years before Bodhidharma to spread Hinayana Buddhism. Bodhidharma may have been attracted by the beautiful landscape or the brilliant culture there; and he settled at the Shaolin Temple on Mt. Songshan. It is said that Bodhidharma sat facing the wall in a cave for nine years, and his shadow was cast deep into the rock face.

Perhaps this is exaggeration, but his perseverance provided stimulus to the rise and development of Shaolin kung fu, and this is a matter of historical record. Since the day Bodhidharma came out of the cave, the Shaolin Temple has become sacred for the Chan Sect.

Bodhidharma preached a new school of Buddhism – the Chan Sect – by combining the essence of traditional Chinese philosophy. The Chan Sect advocates self-cultivation through seated meditation. The daily routine for monks in the temple consisted of “sitting cross-legged in front of the wall” in perfect composure, in order to stifle all distracting thoughts, as preached by Bodhidharma. There were no written instructions to follow; and for a Chan Sect devotee, “instant awaken-



ing” is of primary importance. The Chan Sect thus transformed the abstruse, over-elaborate Indian Buddhist tenet into a synthesized form of Buddhism that was adapted to the traditional Chinese psychology. This partially explains why it remained popular for centuries while other sects experienced rise and fall. The Chan Sect reached its zenith during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), when the majority of monastery inhabitants were Chan devotees. Thus was laid a solid foundation

for its introduction to the rest of the world.

Self-cultivation for devotee’s “instant awakening” through understanding required a remote area far from the worldly distractions; but how did it happen that the Shaolin kung fu style of fighting came to be? There are many theories and legends concerning the origin of the martial art, because there was no written evidence set down by Bodhidharma. Some believe that long periods of sitting caused great discomfort and cramped limbs; and a devotee needed to limber up to restore circulation. Thus the “18 forms of Shaolin kung fu were invented. Others hold that kung fu was conceived for self defense from animal attacks. Some say that it was a way of making friends, to stay fit, or to protect the temple.

Irrespective of which theory is true, it is clear that the red walls of the Shaolin Temple never completely separated the monks from events occurring outside the enclave. This remote refuge was always impacted by what was going on in the outside world. As traditional Chinese philosophy holds, tranquility contains

movement. Silent self-cultivation in an age of turmoil requires moveable supplements or supports so that the cultivator could reach the destiny of “true tranquility.” The Chan Sect held that this inner state could never be fully developed without the practice of martial arts. Survival is the main motivator for mankind, with no exception for the Chan devotees. Master Bodhidharma did not leave the cave until the moment he realized the truth of “maintaining emotional tranquility with movements and controlling movements with emotional tranquility. Tranquility and movements benefit and complement each other.”

Chinese martial arts had been well developed prior to Bodhidharma’s arrival, but were only practiced for war. Hui Guang and Seng Chou, the disciples of Ba Tuo, were armed with consummate kung fu skills, but this was a style not well presented to the rest of the world. Historical records show that Hui Guang could kick a shuttlecock five times in a row while standing on the rails rounding a well. And Seng Chou drove away two tigers in a fight with his cudgel headed with a tin ring (used in Buddhist services). Bodhidharma and his Chan Sect have contributed to the combination of kung fu and the individual, and the perfection of Chinese martial arts by formalization and systemization, thus making Shaolin kung fu world famous and assuring its smooth development. Hence the saying, “All kung fu was





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.

During the mid-Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the government was antagonized by foreign invaders and several dozen times the monk soldiers were dispatched on expeditions to border areas. During Emperor Jiajing's reign, Bian Cheng became widely known for his power – once succeeding in escaping with his light skills and capturing two enemies barehanded.

During Emperor Jiajing's reign of the Ming Dynasty, Yue Kong led 30 monk soldiers in a victorious battle against the government's enemies in Songjiang. Later, Yue Kong and his men were set up by foreign invaders when they attempted to save civilians and none of his men returned alive. It is said that Xiao Shan, the abbot of Shaolin Temple, on behalf of the government, also led his monks to fight against foreign invaders on three occasions. And San Qi, a head monk soldier of the Shaolin Temple, was sent to the border area to safeguard the country.

IV The Imitative Boxing

Every creature, as big as lions and tigers or as small as ants and mantis, has its own way of survival. The Chan Sect has crystallized and incorporated the law of existence for the world's myriad living forms into the routines of Shaolin boxing.

Unlike other styles of boxing, imitative Shaolin boxing has absorbed the essence of living creatures:



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

both. Feinting or for real, it constantly changes and is highly unpredictable.

Genuine Shaolin boxing includes both internal and external exercises. The basic elements of Shaolin boxing involve the hand, eye, body, and foot. It requires the collaboration of the shoulder-and-thigh, the elbow-and-knee, the hand-and-foot, the heart-and-mind, the mind-and-qi (breath), and the qi-and-strength.

The Ming Dynasty witnessed a rapid development of traditional martial arts in not only weapons, but also books concerning the weapons. These included the *Art of Weapons* by the eminent monk, Hong Chuanzeng. After training at cudgel-



ing for more than 10 years, secular Cheng Zongyou wrote the book, *A Brief Introduction to the Arts of Shaolin Cudgeling*, during the reign of Emperor Wanli of the Ming Dynasty. Many of the Shaolin combat arts were used during wars. General Yu Dayou, noted for battling foreign invasions during the reign of Emperor Jiajing of the Ming Dynasty, made good use of, and even improved upon, the cudgeling skills he had learned at the Shaolin Temple, skills which were fed back to Shaolin. After visiting the Shaolin Temple, Wen Xiangfen of the Ming Dynasty wrote, “Sixty monks are practicing kung fu: some combating unarmed, others using swords, whips, or halberds...”

Broadsword, reputed as being “powerful as a tiger,” is one of the most famous of the 18 types

of Shaolin weapons. The strength is maintained in the arms and sent while attacking. The broadsword varies in shape; and it can be used singly or doubly.

The Shaolin spear is known as the “king of all weapons.” When feinting with an enemy, the monk is able to send his strength straight through to the spear tip.



Famed as the “empire of all weapons, the sword exercises look graceful and uninhibited. The sword continuously moves like a writhing dragon from one routine to another, “quick as a flying swallow and hard as a nail.”

The cudgel is the oldest of the Shaolin weapons, hence its nickname the “ancestral weapon.” It became famous after the 13 cudgeling monks saved the Tang king. It is so powerful that its use can beat the enemy as a group. Practicing cudgeling, one must use the strength of the entire body and attack as fast as the wind.

Shaolin kung fu is a profound treasure in Chinese martial arts. Take boxing, which consists of traditional boxing, such as *Luohan*, *Lianhuan* (Chain), *Meihua* (Plum Blossom), and *Jingang*; imitative boxing, such as *Hou* (Monkey), *Bao* (Leopard), and *She* (Snake); and that of internal exercises, such as *Xinyi* (Heart-and-Mind), *Changhu Xinyi* (Long Defense of the Heart-and-Mind), and *Qixing* (Seven Stars). These are rigorous, hard-hitting, quick, and fierce, combining both “hard” and

“soft.” There are many ways for sparring, such as the kicking six-harmony, the ear-holding six-harmony, and the hand-biting six-harmony.

There were originally 18 types of weapons used by Shaolin monks, divided equally among the long, short, soft, rare, and hidden, which were eventually increased in number to include the long-handle broadsword, spear, sword, cudgel, dagger, shooting star, nine-section whip, sickle, heaven-and-earth ring, Bodhidharma cudgel, dart, and flying dagger. There are many styles of weapon sparring, such as hand-to-hand, single broadsword, and cudgel-to-spear.

Despite the art of boxing and weapons, there are also wrestling, such as free sparring, the art of attack and defense, and grappling and throwing, as well as the internal strength, such as *qigong*, or breathing control exercise, toughening exercises, child’s exercise, the *yin* and *yang* exercises, and walking and fighting on top of stakes set into the ground.

Shaolin kung fu is powerful, simple, practical, and changeable. “Sleep with the body bent like a bow, sit cross-legged like a bell, stand firmly like a pine, walk swiftly like the dragon.” It is as quiet as the cat, as powerful as the tiger, and as fast as lightning.

VI The Best of Shaolin Kung Fu

The internal work of Shaolin kung fu is derived from the exercises of cross-legged sitting in meditation of the Chan Sect, the foundation of the utmost mastery in all styles of kung fu. It requires the practitioner to close his eyes, place the tongue to the upper jaw, and breathe evenly to release the *qi* go throughout the internal organs. The development of the Chan exercises gave



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