

# BEI SHAOLIN SI (NORTHERN SHAOLIN MONASTERY)

“The martial arts under heaven arose out of Shaolin” - a popular Chinese aphorism. Chinese Martial Arts, or Wushu, as it is known in the Chinese language, is more than just a fighting art - it is a way of life. “One 'is' or one 'becomes' Gong Fu; it is not something one 'does'” - Long Ching Gang. Chinese Wushu encompasses a philosophy in the art of living, much of which is based upon the ancient philosophies of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism.

## HISTORY

Buddhism travelled to China from India during the Eastern Han Ming emperor period (58-76 A.D.). Several hundred years after this, as several emperors became sincere Buddhists, Buddhism became very respected and popular in China. Shaolin Wushu originated at the Song Shan Shaolin Temple, located in Denfeng County of Henan Province, China during the Northern Wei Dynasty (495 AD). According to one of the oldest books Deng Feng County Recording (Deng Feng Xian Zhi), a Buddhist monk name Batuo, came to China for Buddhist preaching in 464 A.D. Deng Feng was the county where the Shaolin Temple was eventually located. Thirty-one years later, the Shaolin Temple was built in 495 A.D., by the order of Wei Xiao Wen emperor (471-500A.D.), during the 19th year of his reign, for Batuo's preaching. Therefore, Batuo can be considered the first chief monk of the Shaolin Temple; this occurred 30 years before the arrival of Da Mo. However, there is no record regarding how and what Batuo passed down by way of religious Qigong practice. There is also no record of how or when Batuo died. Pu Ti Da Mo, whose last name was Sardili was also known as Bodhidharma, was once the prince of a small tribe in southern India. He was of the Mahayana school of Buddhism, and was considered by many to have been a bodhisattva, or an enlightened being, who had renounced nirvana in order to save others. From the fragments of historical records, it is believed that he was born about 483 A.D.. When Damo arrived at the temple, he was refused admittance, probably being thought of as an upstart or foreign meddler by the head abbot (Fang Chang). Rejected by the monks, Da mo went to a nearby cave and meditated until the monks recognized his religious prowess and admitted him. Legend has it that he bored a hole through one side of the cave with his constant gaze; in fact, the accomplishment that earned his recognition is lost to history.

As time went on, this Buddhist sect became more and more distinct because of the martial arts being studied. This is not to say that Damo “invented” martial arts. Martial arts had existed in China for centuries. But within confines of the temple, it was possible to develop and codify these martial arts into the new and different styles that would become distinctly Shaolin.

One of the problems faced by many western historians is the supposed contraindication of Buddhist principles of non-violence coupled with Shaolin's legendary martial skills. In fact, the Shaolin practitioner is never an attacker, nor does he or she dispatch the most devastating defences in any situation. Rather, the study of Gong fu leads to better understanding of violence, and consequently how to avoid conflict. Failing that, a Buddhist who refuses to accept an offering of violence (i.e. and attack) merely returns it to the sender. Initially, the Gong fu expert may choose to party an attack, but if an assailant is both skilled and determined to cause harm, a more definitive and concluding solution may be required, from a joint-lock hold to a knockout, to death. The more sophisticated and violent an assault, the more devastating the return of the attack to the attacker. Buddhists are not, therefore, hurting anyone; they merely refuse delivery of intended harm.

Da Mo was invited to China to preach by the Liang Wu emperor. He arrived in Canton, China in 527 A.D. during the reign of the Wei Xiao Ming emperor (516-528 A.D.) or the Liang Wu emperor (502-550 A.D.). When the emperor decided he did not like Da Mo's Buddhist theory, the monk withdrew to the Shaolin Temple. When Da Mo arrived, he saw that the priests were weak and sickly, so he shut himself away to ponder the problem. When he emerged after nine years of seclusion, he wrote two classics: Yi Jin Jing (Muscle/Tendon Changing Classic) and Xi Sui Jin (Marrow/Brain

Washing Classic. The Yi Jin Jing taught the priests how to build their Qi to an abundant level and use it to improve health and change their physical bodies from weak to strong. After the priests practiced the Yi Jin Jing exercises, they found that not only did they improve their health, but they also greatly increased their strength. When this training was integrated into the martial arts forms, it increased the effectiveness of their martial techniques. This change marked one more step in the growth of the Chinese martial arts: Martial Arts Qigong.

The Xi Sui Jing taught the priests how to use Qi to clean their bone marrow and strengthen their immune system, as well as how to nourish and energize the brain, helping them to attain Buddhahood. Because the Xi Sui Jing was hard to understand and practice, the training methods were passed down secretly to only a very few disciples in each generation. Da Mo died in the Shaolin Temple in 536 A.D. and was buried on Xiong Er mountain.

During the revolutionary period between the Sui dynasty and the Tang dynasty, in the 4th year of Tang Gao Zu Wu De (621 A.D.), Qin King Li Shi-Ming had a serious battle with Zheng King Wang Shi-Chong. When the situation was urgent for Qin King, 13 Shaolin Monks with cudgels assisted him in defeating the Zheng army. Later, Li Shi-Ming became the first emperor of the Tang dynasty (618-907 A.D.), and he rewarded the Shaolin Temple with 40 Qing (about 600 acres) of land donated to the temple. He also permitted the Temple to own and train its own soldiers. At that time, in order to protect the wealthy property of the Shaolin Temple from bandits, martial arts training was a necessity for the monks. The priest martial artists in the temple were called "monk soldiers" (Seng Bing). Their responsibility, other than studying Buddhism, was training martial arts to protect the property of the Shaolin Temple.

For nearly three hundred years, the Shaolin Temple legally owned its own martial arts training organization, and continued to absorb martial skill from outside the temple into its training system. During the Song dynasty (960-1278 A.D.) Shaolin continued to gather more martial skills from outside of the Temple. They blended these arts into the Shaolin training. During this period, one of the most famous Shaolin martial monks, Jueyuan travelled around the country in order to learn and absorb high levels of martial skill into Shaolin. He went to Lan Zhou to meet one of the most famous martial artists, Li Sou. From Li Sou, he met Li Sou's friend, Bai Yu-Feng and his son. Later, all four returned to the Shaolin temple and studied together. After ten years of mutual study and research, Li Sou left Shaolin; Bai Yu-Feng and his son decided to stay in Shaolin and became monks. Bai Yu-Feng's monk name was Qiu Yue Chan Shi. Qiu Yue Chan Shi is known for his bare-hand fighting and narrow blade sword techniques. According to the book Shaolin Temple Record, he developed the then existing 18 Buddha Hands techniques into 173 techniques. Not only that, he also compiled the existing techniques contained within Shaolin and wrote the book "The Essence of Five Fist". This book included and discussed the practice methods and applications of the Five Fist (Animal) Patterns. The five animals included: Dragon, Tiger, Snake, Panther, and Crane. This record confirms that the Five Animal Patterns martial skills already existed for some time in the Shaolin Temple. From the same source, it is recorded that in the Yuan dynasty, in the year 1312 A.D., the monk Da Zhi came to the Shaolin Temple from Japan. After he studied Shaolin martial arts (bare hands and staff for nearly 13 years (1324 A.D.)), he returned to Japan and spread Shaolin Gongfu to Japanese martial arts society. Later, in 1335 A.D. another Buddhist monk named Shao Yuan came to Shaolin from Japan. He mastered calligraphy, painting, Chan theory (i.e. Ren), and Shaolin Gongfu during his stay. He returned to Japan in 1347 A.D., and was considered and regarded a "Country Spirit" by the Japanese people. This confirms that Shaolin martial techniques were imported into Japan for at least seven hundred years.

In the Ming dynasty, 1552, 40 Monks with 7', 15 lb. staves defeated Japanese pirates. Later, when Manchuria took over China and became the Qing dynasty, in order to prevent the Han race (pre-Manchurian) Chinese from rebelling against the government, martial arts training was forbidden for a long period of time (1644-1911 A.D.). In order to preserve the arts, Shaolin martial techniques spread to layman society. All martial arts training in the Shaolin Temple was carried out secretly during this time. Moreover, the Shaolin monk soldiers had decreased in number from thousands to only a couple of hundred, all trained secretly.

After 1911, the Qing dynasty fell in a revolution led by Dr. Sun Yat-Sen. At this time, the value of traditional Chinese martial arts was re-evacuated, and the secrets of Chinese martial arts were revealed to the public. From the 1920's to the 1930's, many martial arts books were published. However, this was also the Chinese Civil War period, during which Chiang Kai-Shek tried to unify the country. In 1928, there was a battle in the area of the Shaolin Temple. The Temple was burned for the last time by Warlord Shi You-San's military. The fire lasted for more than 40 days, and all the major buildings were destroyed. The most priceless books and records on martial arts were also burned and lost. It was also during this period that, in order to preserve Chinese martial arts, President Chiang Kai-Shek order ed the establishment of the Nanking Central Guoshu Institute at Nanking in 1928. For this institute, many fatuous masters and practitioners were recruited. The traditional name "Wushu" (martial techniques) was renamed "Zhong Guo Wushu" (Chinese martial techniques) or simply "Guoshu" (country techniques). This was the first time in Chinese history that under the government's power, all the different styles of Chinese martial arts sat down and shared knowledge together. Unfortunately, after only three generations, World War II started in 1937 A.D., and all training was discontinued due to

the war. After the Second World War in 1945, mainland China was taken over by communists. Under communist rule, all religions were forbidden. Naturally, all Shaolin training was also prohibited. Later, under the communist party, Wushu training was established at the National Athletics Institute. In this organization, the communist party purposely deleted portions of the martial training and applications in order to discourage possible unification of martial artists against the government. Performance was the goal of this organization. This situation was not changed until the late 1980's. After the communist government realized that the essence of the arts - martial training and applications - started to die out following the death of many traditional masters, the traditional training was once again encouraged. Unfortunately, many masters had already been killed during the so-called cultural revolution, and many others had lost their trust of the communist party, and were not willing to share their knowledge. In order to bring Chinese Wushu into Olympic competition, China had expended a great deal of effort to promote Wushu. With this motivation, the Shaolin Temple again received attention from the government. New buildings were constructed and a grand hotel was built. The Shaolin Temple became an important tourist location. In addition, many training activities and programs were created for interested martial artists around the world. Moreover, in order to preserve the dying martial arts, a team called the "Martial Arts Investigation Team" was organized by the government. The mission of this team is to search for surviving old traditional masters and to put their knowledge in book or videotape form.

This situation was different in Taiwan. When Chiang Kai-Shek retreated from mainland China to Taiwan, he brought with him many well known masters, who passed down the Chinese martial arts there. Traditional methods of training were maintained and the arts were preserved in the traditional way. Unfortunately, due to modern new life styles, not too many youngsters were willing to dedicate the necessary time and patience for the training. The level of the arts has therefore reached the lowest level in Chinese martial history. Many secrets of the arts, which were the accumulation of thousand years of human experience, have rapidly died out. In order to preserve the arts, the remaining secrets began to be revealed to the general public, and even to western society. It is good that books and videotapes have been widely used both in mainland China and Taiwan to preserve the arts.

## **TOPOGRAPHY**

The temple is situated in the Song Yue Shi Mountain range, and because it was erected in the forests of Shao Shi Mountain, it was named Shaolin, which means "young forest". The site of the temple is approximately 30,000 square meters of land. The various building and halls within the temple were constructed during different time periods in China's past.

The Mountain Gate, the temple's main gate, was erected in the 13th year of Emperor Yong Zheng (1735) during the Qing Dynasty. Above the gateway are the characters, "Shaolin Temple", which were written by Master Xuan Hua in the Qing Dynasty. On both sides of the gateway is a pair of stone lions to protect the temple. Inside the temple are various halls, such as the Hall of the Celestial Kings, which was burnt in 1928, and the Hall of the Great Heroes, which is in the main hall of the temple. It was originally constructed in 1735 and then repaired in the 10th year of Emperor Qian Lung (1745) in the Qing Dynasty. During a fire in 1928, many relics within the hall were destroyed. West of the Hall of the Great Heroes is the Hall of the Six Ancestors. In this hall are the images of the six famous ancestors who lived at the temple: Da Mo, Hui Ke, Zeng Can, Dao Xin, Hong Ren, and Hui Neng. East of the Hall of Great Heroes is the Hall of Jin Na Luo which houses an image of the possible founder of Shaolin Wushu. The Drum Tower that was erected during the Yuan Dynasty is located south of the Hall of Jin Na Luo. The Drum Tower rose approximately 30 meters and housed a bell weighing approximately 5,500 kilograms. The bell could be heard over 30 miles when struck. The Drum Tower was burnt 1928. In front of the tower is the rock inscription of the Emperor Li Shi Min of the Tang Dynasty. Another famous hall is the Hall of the White Robe, or Hall of the Martial Texts, which is located next to the Hall of Thousand Buddhas. This hall was also constructed in the Qing Dynasty. The northern and southern walls of the hall contain drawings of fighting Shaolin monks performing such styles as Six Harmony Fist, Six Harmony Spear, spear versus broadsword, and Qin Na joint Locking Skills. The rear Wall has a drawing of the 13 Shaolin Monks who saved the life of Emperor Li Shi Min, the founder of the Tang Dynasty. On the northeastern and southwestern walls are drawings of various Buddha images. Approximately 300 meters west of the temple is the Pagoda Forest, which has historically been the cemetery for the Shaolin monks. There are more than 250 ancient pagodas erected on this plot of land which have housed the remains of monks – the largest conglomeration of pagodas within China. The pagodas' ages range from the Tang Dynasty (791 AD) to the Qing Dynasty (1803 AD), and they range from 1 to 7 levels, rising in height to 15 meters. The more numerous the pagoda levels, the higher the status of the monk who was buried within. On the side of the mountain of Song Shan is the Cave of Da Mo, said to have been the place where Da Mo stayed for 9 years facing a wall. The newest addition to the area is the Shaolin Temple Martial Arts School located east of the

temple. The total area of the school is approximately 4,470 square meters. The school houses a performance arena, a practice hall, fighting stage, offices for the coaches, a guesthouse, cafeteria, and an exhibition hall. This school is presently the largest martial arts school in Asia.

## TRAINING SCHEDULE OF SHAOLIN SI

Based on historical records of the Shaolin monks and the experience of famous martial arts masters, the training schedule for practice is a key to success in martial arts mastery. There is a Shaolin proverb which states that “If a beginner does not arrange the proper training schedule, not only will there be no success in martial arts but it will also influence the mood of practice, leading to injury.”

“The Complete Volume of Shaolin Martial Arts” written by the Shaolin monk Master De Qian, recorded the training schedule of Shaolin monks as follows:

**MORNING PRACTICE:** In general the monks rise from bed at 5 in the morning and begin endurance training by running from 15 to 30 minutes; afterwards, they practice basics for 1 to 2 hours. An hour break is taken before breakfast is served.

**MIDMORNING PRACTICE:** Martial art theory is studied from 9 till noon.

**AFTERNOON PRACTISE:** After eating lunch, various routines are practiced from 2:30 to 5:30.

**EVENING PRACTICE:** 1 hour after eating dinner, the monks review the basics and the routines that were learned during the afternoon session for about 2 hours.

## TRAINING SEQUENCE

The training sequence of Shaolin martial arts consists of basics, routines, application analysis, selected combinations, sparring, and qigong.

**BASICS:** Each day after rising from bed, the monks conduct endurance exercises such as long distance running for approximately 30 minutes. Afterwards, they practice various stretching exercises, stance training, and kicking sets, such as inside kicks, outside kicks, double kicks, tornado kicks, side kicks, butterflies, and aerial cartwheels. Each of these basics is practiced until mastered. In general, each type of movement is conducted from 3 to 5 repetitions per set for a total of 1 to 3 sets.

**ROUTINES:** After practicing the basics, the monks perform various Martial Arts routines. They rest in between for approximately 15 to 20 minutes. Practice of routines continues for approximately 3 hours. Only after mastering 1 routine will the next routine be taught. In general, most martial monks eventually study from 15 to 30 different routines.

**APPLICATION ANALYSIS:** After mastering the various forms each monk wishes to learn, he will ask his teacher to discuss the self-defence application for each technique. A total understanding of the applications is required for proper mastery of the routines.

**SELECTED COMBINATIONS:** After learning the traditional routines, the monk can ask his teacher to devise various combinations based of the individual monks basic knowledge and character. The monks endure the pain of training to gradually improve their fighting level and performance capabilities.

**SPARRING:** After the monk has totally mastered the various aspects of the material described previously, he can ask his teacher to gradually introduce the art of sparring. This will improve his abilities in combat and develop his skills in Lei Tai boxing.

**MARTIAL QIGONG:** Martial qigong is the study of the basic techniques to be applied in hitting vital points, joint locking, and other forms of defence. This stage must be learned gradually. Otherwise, injury to the body may occur.

## **SHAOLIN SI STUDIES**

Shaolin Wushu is one of the oldest fighting systems in China with a history of over 1000 years. Shaolin Wushu was created during the Wei Dynasty approximately 1400 years ago, and its content is abundant and colourful. However, during the process of history, many styles have been lost or filtered to the outside martial art community. Based on current research to organize the martial arts from within the temple, the following list introduces the various routines found in the Shaolin Temple Wushu:

**OPEN HAND ROUTINES:** First routines include Eighteen Luohan Hand, Eighteen Luohan Fist, Eighteen Luohan Palm, Big Hong Fist, Small Hong Fist, Continuous Fist, Six Harmony Continuous Fist, Five Animal Fist, Snake Fist, Tiger Fist, Dragon Fist, Panther Fist, Crane Fist, Chao Yang Fist, Plum Blossom Fist, Nine Fists, Luohan fist, Cannon Fist, Tong Bei Fist, Tong Bei Continuous Fist, Long Fist, Eagle Fist, Chang Chui Fist, Jin Gang Fist, Six Harmony Fist, Black Tiger Fist, Seven Star Fist, Shaolin Short Hitting, Five Harmony Fist, Chuo Jiao Fist, Tian Gang Fist, Rock Fist, Xin Yi Fist, Eight Extreme Fist, Hungry Tiger Fist, Fire Dragon Fist, Golden Rock Fist, Fierce Tiger Fist, Kan Jia Fist, Eight Step Continuous Legs, Exiting Mountain Fist, Scissor Fist, Reverse Arm Fist, Six Ancestor Fist, Soft Fist, Monkey Fist, Shaolin Taijiquan, and others.

**TWO-PERSON FIGHTING ROUTINES:** Eight Extreme Boxing, Eighteen Luohan Hand Boxing, Eighteen Luohan Pulling, Hand Boxing, Smashing Step Boxing, etc.

**BROADSWORD:** Plum Blossom single broadsword, Bei Yang single broadsword, Separate the Heart Piercing single broadsword, Shaolin single broadsword, Green Dragon broadsword, Black Tiger broadsword, Sparrow Shape broadsword, Four Door broadsword, Coiling Head broadsword, and others.

**STRAIGHT SWORD:** Da Mo broadsword, Two Halls straight sword, Dragon Shape straight sword, Sweeping Wind straight sword, Eight Immortal straight sword, Fire Dragon straight sword, Green Dragon straight sword, Dragon Well straight sword, Seven Star straight sword, Tong Zi straight sword and others.

**SPEAR:** Thirteen Form spear, Eighteen Form spear, Twenty Seven Form spear, Twenty-One Form spear, Thirty-One Form spear, Fire Cracker spear, Plum Blossom spear, Flower Spear, Large Flower spear, Black Dragon spear, Large spear, etc.

**STAFF:** Burning Fire staff, Negative Palm staff, Eyebrow staff, Eight Immortal staff, Great Saint staff, Tornado staff, Flying Dragon staff, Small Six Harmony staff, Thunder Mountain staff, Shaolin staff, Wind and Wave staff, Crazy Ghost staff, Single Frame staff, Double Frame Dragon staff, Splitting Mountain staff, Monkey staff and others.

Other weapons include the monks spade, large knife, pu knife, Spring and Autumn knife, broadsword with nine sectional whip, Fanf Tian halberd, Moon Teeth knife, Tian Gang Splitting Water fan, single ball, double ball, Golden Flower ball, nine sectional steel whip, Monkey Hand whip, leather whip, rope dart, flying dart, Mete or Ball whip, Double Meteors, Iron Broom, Arm Crutches, Turning Hall Crutches, Da Mo Crutches, three sectional staff, Tiger Head hooks, double hooks, Tiger Forks, Jin Gang Circles, double daggers, double axes, Monks Shoes, Striding Tiger Basket, Double Bamboo Chopsticks, Buddhas Horses Tail, Iron Flute and others.

One of the most famous Shaolin fighting styles is the Five Animal Fists, which consists of the dragon, tiger, snake, crane and panther. Each animal has its own characteristics. The dragon develops the spirit; the tiger develops the bones and tendons; the snake develops the internal energy; the crane develops the essence; and the panther develops the strength. There are several essential points to the practice of the five animals: When practising the dragon, the shoulders must sink and relax, the internal energy must reside in the dan tian, and one must use intent, not strength. When

practicing the tiger, the internal energy should be circulated throughout the entire body, the kidneys should be substantial, and the eyes should show intent. When practicing the snake, lead the internal energy to the fingers and the body should be rooted, relaxed, and soft in movement. When practicing the crane, congeal the essence and spirit, and lead the internal energy to the arms. Finally, when practicing the panther, strength should be in the entire body, and the fists are held tight.

## **THE 72 ARTS OF SHAOLIN SI**

The Shaolin Temple is popularly known for its “Seventy Two Arts” for body training. Originally the Shaolin Temple had 32 hard (external) arts and 32 soft (internal) arts. In the past, these arts were restricted to the inside walls of the temple. Consequently, stories of these arts spread throughout China, telling of the greatness of these skills. Typically, the martial monks would begin to learn these arts under the supervision of their teachers. The skills would be learned first from the basic and then proceed into the more advanced and difficult. For example, they would learn the Thousand Pound Foot, Meteor Leg, Wooden Men Hitting, and Iron Sand Palm. After building up this foundation of basic skills, they would learn hard and light abilities such as High Jumping, Golden Needle Finger, One Finger Buddha, Iron Head, Light Body, Buddhas Fist, and Iron Shirt.

Each of these skills must be followed in a strict progression to properly advance without injury. For example, in Iron Arm Skills, one must first learn breath control and the proper method for circulating internal energy; then one can begin to start hitting soft materials, earthen materials, wooden boards, and then slabs of rock. This is practiced until a rock slab can be crashed. Throughout the history of Shaolin, teachers always told their disciples that it did not matter which type of skill was to be learned; one must never be afraid to suffer the pains of training. When the weather is hot, do not be afraid to sweat; when the weather is cold, do not be afraid of frozen feet and hands; when sick with a common cold, bring the sickness to practice. No matter what the situation, this must be the way to train, day-by-day, year-by-year, and decade-by-decade in order to be successful in the art of Shaolin Wushu.

The training of the Seventy Two Arts can be divided into different levels of practice. The most basic level is to train and develop the skin and muscles; next would be to develop the tendons and bones; following is a gradual training of internal energy circulation. If one follows these prescribed levels of training, great rewards will result. In the practice of Shaolin Wushu, one must learn the hard and soft abilities, or gong, along with the open-hand and weapon routines. Gong fu or true abilities can be divided into four categories; soft abilities internal abilities, hard abilities, and external abilities. Soft abilities are considered the Dark Hand (Yin Hand); hard abilities are considered the Deadly Hand; internal abilities are for cultivating internal energy, and the external abilities are for developing strength. The practice of soft abilities is relatively difficult; there is no sign of achievement on the surface. The practice of hard abilities, however, is relatively easy. The ability can be used with knives and spears and used to withstand blows from iron poles.

The following is a partial list of the Seventy Two Arts from Shaolin Wushu:

Iron Arm Skills, Iron Foot Skills, Kicking Skills, Bamboo Leaf Hand, Snake Walking Skills, Lifting a Thousand Pounds Skills, Luohan Eye Skills, Iron Head Skills, Iron Shirt Skills, Whipping Force Skills, Jade Belt Skills, Separating Water Skills, Far Jumping Skills, Iron Elbow Skills, One Finger Buddha Skills, Plucking Nails Skills, Golden Bell Skills, Iron Cow Skills, Tornado Palm, Lying Tiger Skills, Golden Dragon Hand Skills, Pushing Mountain Palm Skills, Eagle Claw Skills, Golden Sand Palm Skills, Five Poison Hand Skills, Wall Climbing Skills, Plum Blossom Post Skills, Praying Mantis Claw Skills, Plank Running Skills, Light Body Skills, Iron Knee Skills, Soft Bone Skills, Iron Groin Skills, Acrobatic Skills, Thousand Layer Paper Skills, Chasing the Wind Palm Skills.