

Northern Shao lin, the 32nd Anniversary of Kuo Yu Chang's Death

By Chen Hsin Mon

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Note: Chen Hsin Mon was a disciple of Kuo Yu Chang and was rated as one of the top ten disciples. This article is very important because it contains some insight about the style and about Kuo Yu Chang from someone who directly learned from him. It also gives us some idea of what the status of Northern Shao lin is in China today.

Shao lin kung fu took root and grew in Southern China and Kuo Yu Chang played a major role in this. Kuo Yu Chang was from Huning Chiang Su. He was born in 1894 to a poor peasant family. At that time the country was in terrible shape. When he was 8 years old, Kuo Yu Chang started to learn kung fu from a Shangtung master, Yim Chi Wen. Yim Chi Wen was a man who lived during both the Ching dynasty and the beginning of the Republic. He was well verse in the Shao lin arts. People called him "Great Spear Yim". Kuo Yu Chang became well known for his Shao lin kung fu in several provinces such as Su Chiang, Che Chiang, Hunan, Hupei, etc.

In 1928, Nanking Central National Arts Institute held a national arts competition. Kuo Yu Chang came out with very high praise.

When Kuo Yu Chang was in his twenties, he no longer feared hardship. He traveled all over Chiang nan province, and spread the Shao lin arts. In the late 1920's, he and four other men , Wan Li Sheng, Li Hsien Wu, and Fu Chen Sheng, who were all famous northern style masters, went to Kwangtung province. This was noted in the book of Wu Lin Chen Ku:, "Five Tigers heading south of Chiang nan." In 1928, Kuo Yu Chang was appointed instructor for both of the Kungtung and Kwangsi National Arts schools. In 1929, Kuo Yu Chang formed the Kuang Chou National Arts Society with himself as the chief instructor. It was from here that Shao lin Kung fu began to spread into Southern China.

Kuo Yu Chang's kung fu was at a very high level. Anyone who saw him perform were really amazed. His kung fu was lively and people felt involved in the kung fu when they watched him perform. Because his iron palm was so good, he was nicknamed "Iron Palm Kuo Yu Chang". His hands were soft as cotton which was not unusual. But when he used his hands, it smashed rocks into many pieces and could bend raw iron. His palm strength reached a high level of development and it always amazed people when he demonstrated. When he used his Iron Palm, he could use different levels of force, that is, he had the ability to control the amount of force coming from his palms. Many Kwangchou people have seen him take ten tiles, one on top of another, strike the first tile, and the tiles between the top and the bottom tiles broke into pieces, but both the top and bottom tiles remained intact.

In 1931, a strong man from Russia came to Kwangchou at west Mellon Garden (now located at the People's Southern Road Kwangchou's Daily News Neighborhood), to demonstrate strength feats. We accompanied Kuo Yu Chang to see the strong man. When he came on stage, he pulled along a wild horse which no one could get near. If anyone could withstand a kick from the horse and not get killed, he would receive

\$200.00. Then someone in the audience shouted, "Russian, don't be so smug. Iron Palm Kuo is here to cut the strong man down to size and to show how proud Chinese are." Kuo Yu Chang went up on the stage.

The strong man observed that Kuo Yu Chang appeared to be an uncommon man. Since the Russian did not know Kuo Yu Chang's background, he demanded Kuo Yu Chang have an examination by a medical doctor to insure that he was a normal human. Finally Kuo Yu Chang went to confront the wild horse. He got near the horse and using his palm lightly slapped it on the back. Immediately the horse did not move. On the second day, the horse did not eat and died. The doctor autopsied the horse and found severe internal injuries. The Russian quietly packed and left. This event of the 1930's is still much talked about among the old Kwangchou people today.

In Kwangchou, Kuo Yu Chang taught the 10 Shao lin sets, 10 rows of Tan T'ui, Plum Blossom Double Sabres (This is not to be confused with Ti Tung Double Sabers...Editor), Raise Blocking Spear, Twenty-four Spear, Dragon Shape Sword, Ta Mor Sword (This sets was also taught at Ching Wu.School..Ed.), Five Tiger Catching the Sheep Staff (This set was also taught at Ching Wu.School..Ed.), Internal Hsiao Chin Chung Sixteen parts (Golden Bell Techniques..Ed) and some other styles.

Of all the above, the ten Shao lin sets are the most famous, and the mostly exemplifies the characteristics of Shao lin. The ten sets are arranged in ascending order. There names are:Open Door, Leading Road, Sitting on the Horse, Piercing Heart, Martial Skills, Short Strikes, Plum Flower, Eight Steps and Three Palms, Connecting Leg and Heart of Fist set. The Shao lin system is preserved in these ten sets. The sets are strong in attack forms,and are not flowery. Each move and form demonstrates attacks and defence. When doing the exercise, the legs and fists exhibit power. Shao lin Wu Shu is:

Steady as a nail,

Cocked like a bow,

Turns like a wheel,

Fast as the wind

Light as a leaf,

Heavy as metal iron

Moves like a wave

Quiet as a mountain.

The ten Shao lin sets are arranged and structured with deep meaning and the different parts are each specified. At the present time, these ten sets are the most popular and practiced northern style kung fu among the Southern Chinese. Kuo Yu Chang was a great teacher. He greatly emphasized the basic training of Shaolin and developed a complete training in the basics. His training program was extremely tough. Kuo Yu Chang created a group of basic exercises, and based on his personal experiences, trained the southern people properly. This was important because southerner people were shorter than northern people, and needed extra exercises to adapt to shao lin.

We are all old now, but we still teach the way Kuo Yu Chang taught us, which is emphasizing strenuous training in basics.

Kuo Yu Chang was famous in the kung fu world, but he didn't show off. In demonstrations, he would ask other people and students to demonstrate. He loved watching his students perform and even hoped that they would some day become better than him. When I (Chen Hsin Mon) was 16 years old, Kuo Yu Chang asked me to teach kung fu. Kuo Yu Chang taught me how to teach correctly. Because of Kuo Yu Chang's teaching back then, the current kung fu teaching is good. Kuo Yu Chang was very polite and never look down on anyone. Kuo Yu Chang lived in Kwangchou for six to seven years. Kuo Yu Chang even had a very good friend, a Southern style teacher. Kuo Yu Chang studied some southern styles and selected the good points to keep. In Kuo Yu Chang's time there was a Choy Li Fut teacher named Tam San. Kuo Yu Chang sent some of his students to learn from him. Tam San had a student who wanted to learn northern style and Kuo Yu Chang was happy to teach him. Kuo Yu Chang had many kung fu books and he let any of his students study them, unlike most teachers who keep books hidden away. Kuo Yu Chang was an honest man and helped anyone in need of help. In Kwangchou many kung fu people were given favors or helped by Kuo Yu Chang. In 1952, Kuo Yu Chang died a poor man with no possessions. But he left a great legacy in his kung fu students in the south. This is the 32nd anniversary of Kuo Yu Chang's death and many people are still learning Northern Shao lin. Kuo Yu Chang could never have imagined that so many people have learned Shao lin now. The seed Kuo Yu Chang planted in the south has now grown into a gigantic tree. Now in Hong Kong, Macao, and overseas, (many people are) all learning Shao lin and are Kuo Yu Chang's decedents.