

# Wing Chun a History

*There is a saying some people use, “North Taiji, South Wing Chun” and this is quite right. In Chinese martial arts, Taijiquan and Wing Chun Kuen are the most popular styles in the world. Some people often wonder why this is.*

**T**aijiquan, often just referred to as Tai Chi or Taiji, is the most popular health exercises in the West and the East. When people practise they find it, they find very beneficial, because the slow movements help them to relax. This makes circulation stronger and their metabolism faster. With practice it can even make a weak and tired body into a healthy and calm one.

Taijiquan is very good for your health and does not cause any side effects. However, Western doctors still do not really understand how it works. Once you find a good teacher and follow him and practise daily, then you will get healthier. Taiji is generally popular because of its health benefits, not because it is a martial art. Actually, it is a very serious martial art that has techniques that can cause an attacker serious injury. Most people, though, do not even know this or train it as a martial art.

Wing Chun Kuen is different. People who study it know that it is a martial art and learn it in order to be able to defend themselves. They do not necessarily have much consideration about their health. Once you start, you begin to learn about fighting and when you reach a high level, you can defend

yourself without too much effort you can defeat a bigger, stronger opponent. Many martial arts require a lot of physical training but not Wing Chun. This is because it was created by a woman whose name was Wing Chun.

Of course, Wing Chun is popular because of Bruce Lee as well. He studied under the famous Wing Chun Sifu, Ip Man. Bruce Lee became famous and so did Wing Chun. However, Bruce Lee only taught Wing Chun in the beginning and the rest of his life he taught his own style of martial art, Jeet Kune Do. Bruce Lee was and is the best Jeet Kune Do man. None of those who have followed him, including his own students, are better than him. This is because he trained in a way that fitted him. If you train the same way as him, you will not get the same result. It is like wearing clothes. Something might look good on one person, but when you try it might not be so good on you.

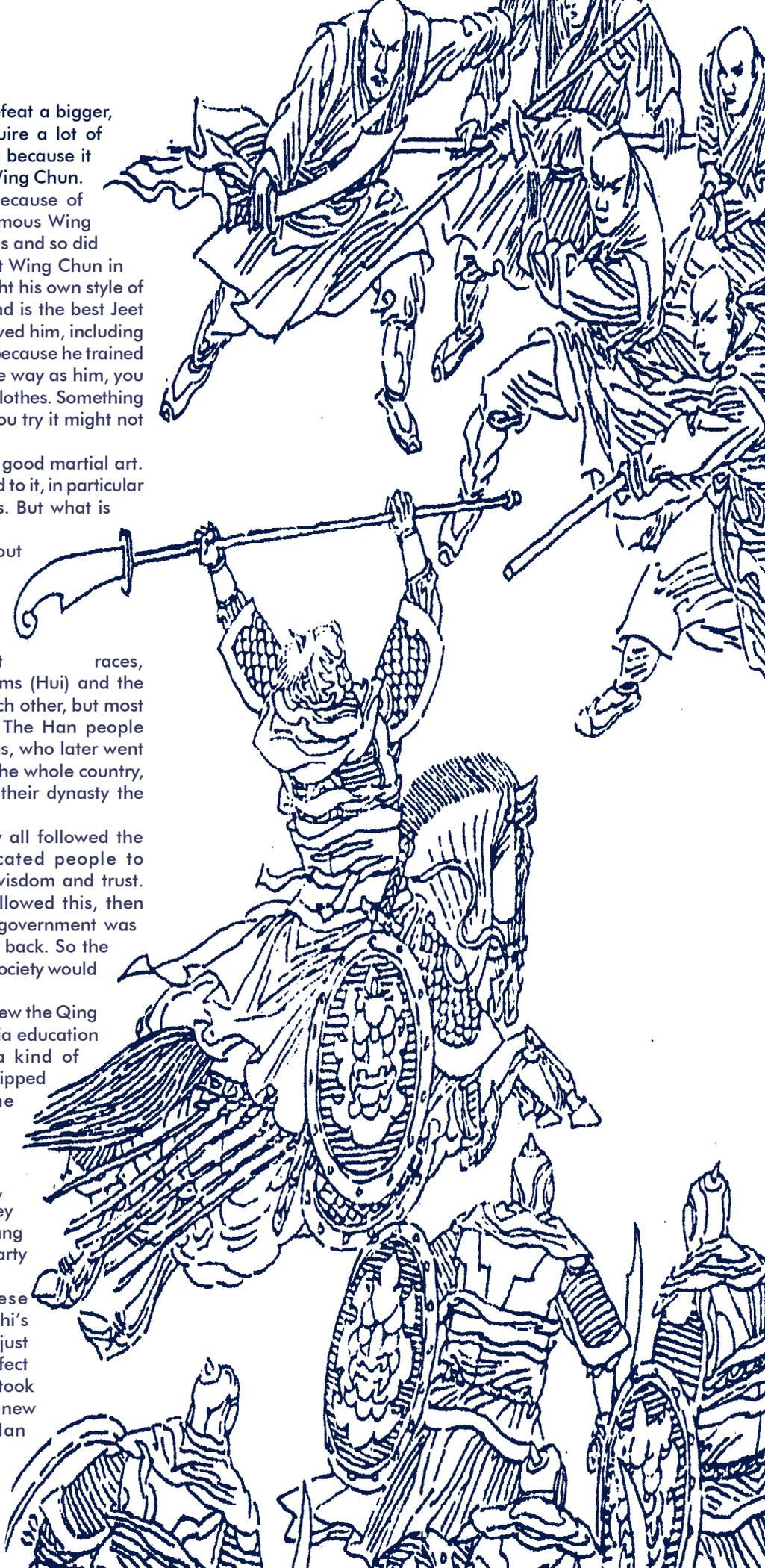
Wing Chun is popular because it is a good martial art. Once you learn it, it is easy to become addicted to it, in particular Chi Sau which is also called Sticking Hands. But what is the history of Wing Chun?

Wing Chun Kung Fu's story began about 400 years ago in the Southern Shaolin Temple in Fujian (which is very close to Taiwan and only separated from it by the sea). In 1644 the Manchurians conquered the Ming Dynasty. China is made up of five different races, the Hans, Manchurians, Mongolians, Muslims (Hui) and the Tibetans. Throughout history they fought each other, but most of the time the Han people ruled China. The Han people ruled the Ming Dynasty, but the Manchurians, who later went on to conquer the rest of China and united the whole country, overthrew them. The Manchurians named their dynasty the Qing Dynasty.

However, no matter who ruled, they all followed the Rujia system (Confucianism). This educated people to understand compassion, loyalty, courtesy, wisdom and trust. When the government understood and followed this, then society was more settled and safer. If the government was bad, then the people would rebel and fight back. So the dynasty would change, but the system of the society would not.

This was true until Sun Yat Sen overthrew the Qing government and that was the end of the Rujia education system. The system was replaced with a kind of democracy in 1911. However, the country slipped into civil war and at the same time the Japanese invaded China. After Sun Yat Sen, Jiang Jie Shi took over. At that time many warlords ruled China. At the same time, the Chinese Communist leader, Mao Ze Dong, gathered all the farmers together, and they joined forces with Russia to fight against Jiang Jie Shi's Gou Man - the National Peoples Party - which was supported by the USA.

At the end of 1949, the Chinese Communist Party won the war. Jiang Jie Shi's Gou Man party escaped to Taiwan. This is a just brief history of China, but how did this effect the history of Wing Chun? When the Qing took over, there was a lot of fighting between the new government and the Han people. The Han



people had many martial artists and a lot of these came from Shaolin Temple.

When the Qing army took Beijing and the Forbidden City, many Ming people moved south to continue their fight against the Qing army. Some of the Shaolin Temples became involved in the fight against the Qing government, and the Qing government reacted by burning down the temples. Many people think there is only one Shaolin Temple, the one in Songshan, Henan Province, but this is not correct. In China's history there were eleven Shaolin Temples. The most famous one is in the North on Songshan and the next most famous one was in the South in Fujian province, Quanzhou, Pu Tian.

When the Qing army burnt the Southern Shaolin Temple five seniors, four monks and a nun escaped. They were Ng Mui, Chi Sin, Fung Dao Dak (some people call him Lee Ba Shan), Bai Mei and Mei Hin.

Ng Mui (Wu Mei in Mandarin) was the nun and she had a very high level skill in martial arts. Her style was the White Crane Style. The White Crane Style is based on gentle and light movements, but is quick and attacks the weaker areas of the body such as the face, armpit, throat, ribs and groin area. The footwork is also very fast and sensitive. Ng Mui fled to Da Liang Shan (also called Qi Xia Shan), the White Crane Temple. However, this was a Daoist temple and not a Buddhist temple.

The monk Chi Sin (Zhi Shan in Mandarin) was strong and powerful, especially in his Ma Bo (horse stance). When he made his stance, no one could move him. Another skill he was very good at was the long pole, which was called the Six and a Half Point pole. After he escaped he hid himself in a Chinese Opera group. In China, an opera company is like a big family. Some people make music, some people sing and some people do martial arts. This is all on the performance side of the group. On the other side, some people did the cooking or the laundry. In this group, Chi Sin became a chef.

The opera company lived and travelled through China in big boats, which were called Red Boat or Hong Boat. Hong means red and this term also represented the Ming Dynasty. So the Hong Boat was basically against the Qing Government.

Later on, Chi Sin taught his Six and a Half Point pole to his student Leung Yee Tai. Leung Yee Tai taught his good friend, Wong Wah Bo. Wong Wah Bo knew Wing Chun and so he taught this to Leung Yee Tai. This is how the Wing Chun system gained the Six and a Half Point Pole. When you see the techniques, you can see that they are very different from the usual Wing Chun principles and requires more strength. Today

there is even a branch of Wing Chun called Chi Sin Wing Chun and so I believe there is a story about this as well.

The history of Fung Dao Dak (Feng Dao De in Mandarin) is not clear. According to one story that is even told in Chinese Shaolin Temple novels, Fung Dao Dak was a Daoist who came from Wudang Mountain. So I believe there was no such person. In the novel, he is even against Shaolin and so we cannot believe this person was a Shaolin Monk.

## *“When the Qing army burnt the Southern Shaolin Temple five seniors, escaped.”*



The other person, Li Bak Shan, (in Mandarin - Li Ba Shan) was another martial artist of high level skill. In the story of Fong Sai Yuk (this is another character from a Shaolin Temple novel), Fong beat the Northern Chinese martial artist, Lui Lo Fu. Lui had challenged all the Southern martial artists. When he was defeated, his father-in-law, Li Bak Shan, wanted to take revenge and fight Fong Sai Yuk. Fong lost and escaped to Shaolin Temple and became a student of Chi Sin, but this is just a novel and is not true. Actually, Li Bak Shan and Fong Sai Yuk never really existed.

*To be continued... by Michael Tse*