

# Shaolin Temple Kung Fu History

## History of Shaolin Temple

"All martial arts under heaven arose out of Shaolin", is a popular saying in China's Wu Shu world. Chinese Martial Arts also known, as Kung Fu, Gung Fu or Wu Shu as it is known in Mainland China, is more than just a fighting art, it is considered a way of life. There are many schools of Kung Fu found within China but none are better known and more influential than Shaolin Kung Fu.

Shaolin Temple and its legendary Shaolin warrior monks have given birth and inspiration to world renowned styles like Hung Gar, Choy Li Fut and Wing Chun to name a few. Shaolin Temple and its legendary skills can also be found within our pop culture today as inspiration for movie stars like Jet Li and Jackie Chan and for movies like Shaolin Soccer, the Matrix and Kill Bill. Shaolin Kung Fu is considered to be one of China's cultural treasures and its presence can be felt worldwide.

As a form of self-defence it has had over 1500 years of realistic and practical application. Shaolin Kung Fu and its fusion with Chan (Zen) Buddhism creates a holistic art form that promotes balance within ones self. To truly understand the true essence of Shaolin Kung Fu you must go to the beginning.

## HISTORY

Shaolin Wu Shu originated at the Shaolin Temple located in the Dengfeng County, of China's Henan province, Built in 495 AD during the Northern Wei Dynasty. The temple is situated in the Song Yue Shi Mountain range. Because the temple was erected in the forests at the foot of Shao Shi Mountain it was named Shaolin, which means "Young Forest" The temple was erected during the 19th year of Emperor Xiao Wens reign for the Indian Buddhist monk BaTuo (also known as Fo Tuo). During the Zhou, Yuan, Sui and Tang Dynasty Shaolin Temple rode a turbulent existence at its height commanding over 1000 warrior monks and 600 hectares of land but like the dynasty's around them that rose and fell so did Shaolin Temple. Throughout these dynasties Shaolin Temple was burned and attacked on several occasions. It wasn't until the Ming and Qing Dynasty's that Shaolin Temple began to prosper once more. Emperor Kangxi (1662-1723) of the Qing Dynasty wrote the title plaque that still hangs above the Shaolin Temple Mountain Gate today.

Towards the end of the Sui Dynasty (581-618) Li Shi Min, Prince of Qin, was leading his troops against Wang Shi Chong at Luoyang. Li, having heard of Shaolin Temples famous warrior monks asked them to help. The monks responded and captured Wang's nephew thus, resulting in the defeat of Wang and the founding of the Tang Dynasty by Li Shi Min. Li Shi Min rewarded Shaolin handsomely and inscribed a stele (Inscribed stone pillar) stating the achievements, which is housed today within the temple grounds.

Shaolin monks received many summons for help from the emperors throughout its history. They also fought the Japanese pirates, who plundered the Chinese coastline. During the Ming Dynasty the Shaolin Monks led by Yue Kong and Da Zaohua fought the Japanese pirates in what is known as Shanghai today. They fought bravely wielding iron staffs and relieving the siege on Shanghai. In 1928 during a battle between feuding Warlords over Shaolin Temple's strategic position, Shi Yousan, a junior officer to warlord Feng Yu Xiang set fire to Shaolin. The fire burned for 40 days and destroyed most of Shaolins great halls that housed both historical artefacts and volumes of martial arts texts. Many of the monks fled but those who stayed maintained Shaolin history, culture and skills to the present day. Such Shaolin monks where, Shi De Chan, Shi Su Xi, Shi Su Yun, Shi Xing Zheng, Shi Wan Heng and a few others.

## SHAOLIN KUNG FU AND ITS PROGRESSION

The Shaolin Temple is the birthplace of Chan (Zen) Buddhism and Shaolin Kung Fu. The temple is a centre foremost for the study of Buddhism and is secondly for the study and development of Wushu, quite unlike what is portrayed in previous media about Shaolin Temple. Chan Buddhism was founded by Bodhidharma (Puti Damo), the 28th generation disciple of Buddha Shi Jia Mo Ni. Damo arrived at Shaolin Temple in 527 AD and is said to have sat facing the wall of a cave on Wu Ru Peak for nine years behind shaolin temple, before founding the Chan (Zen) sect of Buddhism. Bodhidharma is accredited with passing on the treasures of Yi Jin Jing, Xi Sui Jing and Lohan Shi Ba Shou to the monks of Shaolin Temple. Many go as far to say that Damo was the founder of Shaolin Kung Fu but this remains a point of contention between many historians.

Martial arts were already in practice at Shaolin before Damo's arrival. BaTuo's disciples Seng Chou and Hui Guang are said to have exhibited impressive skills. Seng Chou was known be able to "walk a wall and leap up onto a rooftop with one bound and Hui Guang was said to have been able to keep a shuttlecock in the air by kicking it over 500 times in a row while balancing on the rails around a well. It is also known that Jin Na Lou Wang was also considered to be a martial arts practitioner after the humble Shaolin cook defended Shaolin Temple with his staff techniques against bandits that had tried to loot the temple in the mid 13th century.

It is from Damo's presence at Shaolin Temple however that Shaolin Kung Fu began to further develop and refine itself into one of the worlds most sought after arts. During the Song Dynasty, The Abbot Fu Yu, invited experts from 18 Wu Shu schools to exchange and teach each other skills at Shaolin. They remained for 3 years and edited the Shaolin Boxing manual, which described 280 routines.

During the Yuan dynasty, monk Jue Yuan travelled to Luoyang and Lanzhou where he met experts Bai Yu Feng and Li Sou, and with them went to Shaolin to further exchange Wu Shu skills. Subsequently more than 70 routines of Shaolin Boxing were created. Jue Yuan also created the famous five animal style.

Although Shaolin was known for its martial techniques it originally was known for its amazing staff techniques. It is well documented that Shaolin Temple and its staff-wielding monks were the best at staff in China.

Today Shaolin Temple has between 300-400 individual routines within its curriculum. Although many forms of Shaolin Kung Fu have been lost many still remain today.

#### SHAOLIN TRAINING

Shaolin Wu Shu is a complex art that has evolved over the last 1500 years. It utilises all aspects of martial practice: punching, kicking, striking, throwing, grappling, weaponry, point striking and qi cultivation. Unlike many reports Shaolin is not just a kicking style from the north, as is commonly misunderstood. It contains both Wai Gong (External skill) and Nei Gong (Internal skill) in its methodology, which is another common misunderstanding that labels Shaolin Kung Fu as only an external style of Kung Fu. Shaolin Kung Fu cultivates Qi, Jing and Shen and promotes the development of the muscle, bones and skin. Shaolin practice is also a pathway to Chan (Zen). Shaolin Kung Fu consists of Ji Ben Gong (Basics), routines, application analysis, selected combinations, sparring, conditioning, Qi Gong, and meditation (Chan (Zen) practice as well). Shaolin can be described as fast, agile, unpredictable and effective. With its blend of Chan (Zen) Buddhist philosophies Shaolin Kung Fu is unique in its execution. When practising Shaolin Kung Fu you must keep in mind the following:

Have no stance but every stance  
Exist like the wind and be unpredictable  
In defence be like the virgin in attack be fierce like the tiger  
The outside is fierce the inside is calm  
Make noise in the east and attack from the west  
Show up and hit down  
Be as hard as iron yet soft as silk  
Be heavy like iron and light as a leaf

Shaolin Kung Fu is most famous for its animal styles and imitation styles. The most famous of the Shaolin techniques is the five animals. The Snake, Dragon, Crane, Tiger and Leopard make up this system. Each animal displays a certain characteristic throughout the forms.

The Dragon develops spirit, the Tiger develops the bones and tendons, the Snake develops internal energy, the Crane develops the essence and the Leopard develops strength. Although these are well known Shaolin Temple has such animal styles as Praying Mantis, Eagle Claw, Duck fist, Toad, Monkey, Dog and also Scorpion to name a few. Shaolin Kung Fu's imitation styles are quite elaborate, the most well known being Drunken boxing. It is a style of kung fu depicted in many movies by famous stars but the true Shaolin Drunken style consists of fist, sword and staff. It is difficult and very deadly in its usage. It utilises many Qin Na techniques and takedowns. It is a style that is for more advanced students.

#### FUNDAMENTAL SHAOLIN FORMS:

&#65533; Xiao Lohan Quan  
&#65533; Xiao Hong Quan  
&#65533; Da Hong Quan  
&#65533; Chang hu xingyi men Quan  
&#65533; Xiao Pao Quan  
&#65533; Da Pao Quan  
&#65533; Wu Xing Ba Fa

&#65533; QiXing Quan  
&#65533; Ba Bu Lian Huan Quan  
&#65533; Lian Hua Quan  
&#65533; TaiZu Chang Quan  
&#65533; XiaoTong bi Quan  
&#65533; DaTong Bi Quan  
&#65533; Zhao Yang Quan  
&#65533; Da Lohan Quan  
&#65533; Lohan Shi Ba Shou

Iron Palm, Tong Zi Gong (Youth Skill), Yi Zi Chan (One Finger Zen) and Iron Shirt are a sample of the famous skills Shaolin holds true today. The Shaolin Temple is known for its rigorous body training, both externally and internally. Originally Shaolin temple had 32 hard arts and 32 soft arts. The practice of the 72 arts is under strict supervision and usually a student will only practice a select few techniques, as desired by their Sifu. The arts have different levels of skill requirements but it is important that the practice is conducted precisely and throughout the year. The understanding of breath and Qi is a must for the correct application and practice of the 72 arts. Shaolin Kung Fu is a form or manifestation of Chan. For those entering the realm of Wu (Martial Arts) with a mind on Chan, the silent smile awaits them. When Chan and Wu are in Harmony, Chan and Quan is nowhere to be found. Shaolin Martial arts are then, an integral part of spiritual practice from China's Shaolin Temple. The idea is that by following a strict martial arts discipline, the gap between the body and the mind is bridged.

#### PRESENT DAY SHAOLIN

Shaolin Temple has had in the last 20 years a meteoric rise once again. In 1981 the movie Shaolin Temple that starred many of Chinas national champions (Jet Li, Yu Hai, Yu Chenghui, Pan Qin Fu and many more), once again shone light onto the marvels of Shaolin Temple. In the wake of this, almost overnight it instantly became a hot tourist spot for martial artists, Buddhists and the general public. It currently receives approximately two million visitors every year.

Shi Yong Xin is the abbot of Shaolin Temple and the 29th patriarch of Chan (Zen) Buddhism. In 1999, he became the first official abbot in 12 years. Shi Yong Xin is a disciple of the previous abbot, Shi Xing Zheng. Shi Yong Xin has a vision to restore Shaolin Temple and promote its unique cultural heritage. The work is almost complete with the relocation of many of the schools, villagers and shops that where once surrounding Shaolin Temple and restoration work being conducted to the temple buildings. Shi Yong Xin has been very active in his vision and has met with many world leaders such as Queen Elizabeth the 2nd and US Congress to discuss such matters. The Shaolin Temple at this very moment is working towards UNESCO World Heritage listing, to ensure Shaolin's heritage and culture is preserved.

Shaolin Worldwide is known as the birthplace of martial arts. Through the 'Shaolin Warriors' and 'Wheel of life' tours Shaolin has been brought to the world and the seeds of Shaolin planted in the hearts of all. Such seeds have been planted here in Australia in the form of the Shaolin Kung Fu Guan and its founder and head coach, Ramesh Patel

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ramesh Patel (Shi Xing Zhong) is a 32nd generation Shaolin Temple disciple. With direct permission and guidance from the Abbot, Shi Yong Xin, the Shaolin Kung Fu Guan has been founded to pass on the skills, culture and philosophies of Shaolin Temple and Chinese Martial arts here in Australia.

Shi De Yang a 31 st generation warrior monk, known worldwide from countless documentaries and books on Shaolin Temple, accepted him as his disciple to pass on and share Shaolin Culture here in Australia. Shi De Yang is a disciple of Shaolin Temples Grandmaster Shi Su Xi, who is a link to Shaolin's illustrious past masters and the last of those who stayed at the temple in its darkest years.

Ramesh has been involved in Kung Fu, Tai Chi, Qi Gong and Lion and Dragon Dance for 13 years and has studied with many of Chinas most celebrated Sifu's. He has studied at Shaolin Temple, Wu Dang Shan, Beijing University of Physical Education and Chen Jia Gou to name a few of China's elite training institutions.

Shi De Yang, Shi Su Xi, Chen Zhen Lei, Professor Men Hui Feng, Pan Qing Fu, Wu Dong, Liu Yu Ping, Zhang Bin, Mei Li Min, are amongst some of the Sifu's he has studied under. Ramesh Patel is an advocate for authentic Chinese Martial arts here in Australia. K.FS

#### About the Author

<http://www.martialarm.com/history/shaolin.html>

