

Kung Fu Canton: Culture of Martial Arts in Guangdong, China

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Abstract

Kung Fu is a word borrowed from the Chinese word gongfu, which translates as accomplished or cultivated skill. Wushu would be a more accurate word to have borrowed, but it's still just an umbrella term for a whole myraid of Chinese martial art, ranging from drunken boxing to the Fujian white crane. Perhaps the most famous style in Guangdong is Wing Chun, which was taken by the now legendary Ip Man to HongKong, from where it spread out across the world via Hongkong Kung fu flicks. Religion beliefs , traditional moral, legend of Kung Fu hero, even Lingnan architectural style and Hongkong Kung Fu film, multiple elements contribute to the unique culture of Guangdong martial art.

Keywords: Kung Fu, Culture of Martial Art, Guangdong

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Introduction

Guangdong Province is located in the south of China, north of Nanling Mountains, northeast of the Wuyi Mountains, faces to the South China Sea with coastline of 4114 km. It was an important trade route along the ancient maritime Silk Road of China. In early Tang Dynasty, Emperor Longshuo (A.D.662), Guangzhou port was the first establishment to manage sea trade, in a role that is the same as Customs today. In the Qing Dynasty Emperor Kangxi, Guangdong, Fujian, Zhejiang, Jiangsu were called four large customs, to A.D.1757, the Qing Dynasty emperor Qianlong closed other three customs, leaving only Guangdong customs. Guangzhou has thus become the only port of entry where foreigners could freely access the city. "Canton" original meaning was capital in English. At the time Guangzhou was the capital of Guangdong and Guangxi regions, therefore was later named "Canton" by foreigners. In modern era, Canton gradually refers to China Guangdong region.

Kung fu is a Chinese term referring to any study, learning or practice that requires patience, energy, and time to complete, often used in the West to refer to Chinese martial arts, also known as Wu shu.[1]The word Wu is translated as "martial" in English, however in terms of etymology, this word has a slightly different meaning. In Chinese, "Wu" is made of two parts, the first meaning "stop" and the second meaning "invaders lance". This implies that "Wu" is a defensive use of combat. The term "wushu" meaning "martial arts" goes back as far as the Liang Dynasty (502-557). Those Chinese martial arts that originated Guangdong region also are called "southern fist".

Martial art sects

Guangdong original styles

During early Qing Dynasty, traditional Cantonese family styles had formed, including Hong, Liu, Cai, Li and Mo. Along with the development of southern sects, more contemporary Kung Fu variants like Choi Lei Fut, Hung Ga and Wing Chun were getting popular. Southern sects features vigorous, athletic movements with very stable, low stances, extensive hand techniques and a vocal articulation called fasheng ("release shout"). They specially emphasis on fast stance transition to generate power and speed in the arms.

Indigenized styles

During Qin Dynasty to the Southern Song Dynasty, there were four period of large-scale migration from northern China into southern China of war and civil unrest. About after Tang Dynasty, these northern migrator were collectively called Hakka which means "guest families". Northern style martial arts were also brought into Guangdong region by Hakka people. During the adaption to southern environment, these hakka kung fu formed their indigenized styles like Zhujia quan, Zhongjia quan, Nanzhi quan, etc.

North traditional styles

The Guangdong and Guangxi Guoshu Academy were established by the National Government in 1929. Five masters of north kung fu, including Gu ruzhang, Li xianwu, Wan laisheng, Wang shaozhou, Fu zhensong, were hired to be the martial art coaches. They brought classic north kung fu like Shaolin fist, wudang Chuan, Taichi chuan, Hsing-i Chuan, Eagle Claw Fist, etc.

Cantonese kong fu legends

Fong Sai-yunk

Fong Sai-yunk was born in Zhaoqing. It was said that he was living in early Qing Dynasty, and was a young Shaolin hero. When he was a teenager, he already excelled in martial art. In legend, whenever he saw anything unfair, he would draw out his sword to help.

Wong Feihung

Wong Feihung (1847–1924) was born in Foshan. He was considered a folk hero and moral kung fu master, and in the meantime, he was also a famous doctor. He sorted Hong fist comprehensively, and rejected old Nanquan's disadvantages such as the repetition of the movement, and developed the expression of power and speed in Hong fist.

Leung Jan

Leung Jan (1826-1901) lived in Foshan. He was a master, and meanwhile a Chinese traditional medicine doctor. Because of numerous victories in fighting challenges he was considered by many as a true master. He was also an experienced teacher that concluded three practicing modes of Wing Chun Kung which contained hand action, leg action and foot action. It greatly developed the Kung fu teaching system, and accelerated the transmission of Wing Chun Kung.

The art extension

Cantonese Opera

Cantonese opera is one of the mainstream in Chinese opera. It is the important content in the culture of Guangdong region, and also closely connected with the culture of Kung fu. Comparing with northern opera, southern opera features martial art. Many famous Cantonese opera artists were also good at Kung Fu. Zhang Wu who was known as the grandmaster of Cantonese Opera, adopted the martial actions with Wing Chun Kung in Cantonese Opera performance. Since then, kungfu action became a necessary element in Cantonese Opera.

Lion dance and Dragon dance

Lion dance and Dragon dance are forms of traditional performance which mixed dance art and kung fu skill. These dances are usually performed during the traditional festivals, special celebrations and ceremonies. Until now, Guangdong region still well

preserve the tradition. In general, the dance performers come from local kung fu school. Kung fu masters teach their students not only kung fu skill but also dragon and lion dance. The most adopted lion dance style is called Foshan (most famous Kung fu city in Guangdong) style,

Kung fu movie

Because of the Canton culture origin and open art environment, Hong Kong's Kung Fu movie achieved great success. "Wong feihung" series was the most successful movie in early Hong Kong movie history. From 1949 to 1960's, there were almost 100 films portrayed the folk hero Wong feihung. Nowadays, the Chinese Kung Fu have spawned the genre of prevalent martial arts film. The films of Bruce Lee contributed to the popularity of Chinese martial arts around the world in the 1970s. Other experts in Chinese Kung Fu, such as Jackie Chan and Jet Li responded later the public demand for such films actors. In the West, kung fu performances have become popular in the action scenes, and appear in many films that are generally not considered martial arts films. These films include, for example Matrix or Kill Bill trilogy.

Architecture heritage

During the development history of Kung Fu in Guangdong, Martial club was the important platform for each Kung Fu sects to transmit their martial art. Most of the martial architectures was built in Qing Dynasty. Today A large number of Martial club building survived war and rioting.

Choi Lei Fut Guan was built in Qing Dynasty (A.D. 1848) by Chen Xiang who was the grandmaster of Choi Lei Fut Quan, located at Xinhui. With wide spread of Choi Lei Fut Quan, its martial clubs were opened around Guangdong and Guangxi regions. Hong Sheng Guan maybe the most famous among these club. This classic Guangdong temple style building was built in 1851 in Foshan. It inherited the layout structure of ancient buildings, with complete front, centre and back areas. Along the central axis, the whole building revealed symmetrical aesthetic feature.

Related Traditional Chinese medicine

Health care

The primary functional entities used by traditional Chinese medicine are Qi, Xue, the five Zang organs, the six Fu organs, and the meridians which extend through the organ systems.[2] Chinese Kung Fu was traced to the same origin of traditional Chinese. Jing, Qi and Shen are the key words of Kung Fu action. It includes figure training, spirit training and breath training during the practicing of Kung Fu routines. Figure training is aiming to strengthen muscles and the metabolic function of body organs; Spirit training could help practitioner concentrating mind and release pressure; Breath training is good at developing the function of respiratory system. In modern Guangdong, Canton Kung Fu presented by Wing Chun Kung already become a popular viable option to improve health level.

Die-da therapy

Die-da or bone-setting is one of therapy treatment of traditional Chinese medicine, and it was usually practiced by martial artists before. Reviewing the history, with the exception to be a Kung Fu coach, martial artists would also consider to be bodyguard. It decided they should understand medicine knowledge in case of injury. Therefore most of clinics run by martial artist were primarily trauma and orthopaedic surgery. "Bao Zhi Lin" clinic was the most famous among them. Since "Bao Zhi Lin" opened by Kung Fu master Wong feiHung in 1869, until now it is the symbol of superb medical skills among Cantonese society.

Summation

This study shows that Chinese Kung Fu plays an integral part into shaping cultural, artistic and medicinal landscape in southern China. Indeed cultural events such as opera and lion dance draw their inspiration from Kung Fu. Kung Fu movement and terms are also transposed to Chinese traditional medicine because of the deep understanding of human body and medians it requires.

Because Kung Fu draws from social and historical sources, it never stops evolving while still remaining deeply anchored in Chinese cultural heritage. We can conclude that Kung Fu is a sustainable martial art and in many aspects a valuable and healthy way of life.

References

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