

Chinese Martial Arts

By Miss Rose Li

SUPERFICIALLY, Chinese Wu-Shu is classified into two systems, namely *Wai-Chia* 外家 *The External School* and *Nei-Chia* 内家 *The Internal School*. The former emphasizes more or less the perfection of the acrobatic movements, and the latter, the effectiveness of the Martial quality. *Yi* 意 *The Mind*, is at the centre of the Internal School, and *Ch'i* 氣 *Breathing*, is the vital pursuit of the External School. Both embody martial techniques, but differ in execution.

The Internal School has three main Streams; *Hsing-Yi* 形意 *Ba-Kua* 八卦 and *Tai-Chi* 太極. Three in one make the System complete. Meanwhile, the External School has branched out in many sub-systems, under numerous titles; one cannot possibly name them all. However, there are really only *Five* of them and these are called the External Main Streams: *Ch'a-Ch'uan* 查拳, *Hung-Ch'uan* 洪拳, *Hua-Ch'uan* 華拳, *Pao-Ch'uan* 炮拳 and *Ch'ang-Ch'uan* 長拳. The last one, *Ch'ang-Ch'uan* has been quite widespread in the last century in China, especially in the North. Due to its graceful gymnastic movements and postures (see the illustrations) it earned renown and prestige, particularly since *Ch'ang-Ch'uan* forms have been adopted by many other *Ch'uan* schools of different names.

The External System

I select *Ch'ang-Ch'uan* as a representative of the External School here.

Ch'ang-Ch'uan: "*Ch'ang*" 長 means "long", long in the sense of Chinese Martial Arts, means "many forms". Originally, there were twenty-four sets of forms. It was too long for any one to be able to complete learning it. So gradually, the Fourth set became popular. The rest of the sets have either been lost or have deteriorated or have been modified to an unrecognizable extent, and other titles are given. Some of them to me sound absurd and weird, indeed! The one which we see nowadays in practice is also a modified *Ch'ang-Ch'uan* as the traditional parts of rolling, and tumbling are no longer included. The graceful leg techniques,

such as *Double Swinging* — *Erch ti chia* 二踢脚 and *Tornado Sweeping* — *Hsuan fung twai* 旋風腿 still remain in the set. (I used to watch my uncle do them, in my childhood, with awesome admiration). These movements display the most delightful acrobatic agility, and they are very attractive and much appreciated by observers. I saw a group of youngsters demonstrating this set in a film recently made in China — Peking Wu-Shu Institute, I believe — which earned favourable comments from the audience in the West. This demonstration helps me to explain to the West that even in the so called Chinese External School of *Wu-Shu* (or *kung-fu* if you prefer to call it), one does not find any violent punching, kicking or shouting; and the fierce and painful facial expressions most definitely are inconsistent with the principle of "*Wu*" 武 "*Martial*" because one's vigour or courage is one's inward *reservoir*! Stamina and agility are both expressed in a dignified, calm and graceful way. Sometimes, it looks like dancing in the observer's eyes. Finally, I would like to repeat what I said in this article before, that Chinese *Wu-Shu* is classified into two systems *Wai-Chia* and *Nei-Chia*, *Superficially*. Actually these two are one; they are inter-related. *Kung-fu* 功夫 (in Chinese concept) is one, but it is expressed in various forms. The real masters see one's *kung-fu* whatever the forms are. If we prefer to think of Chinese Martial Arts as *Self-defence* instead of merely health-builders, then "self-defence"

means to protect, to avoid from being attacked or injured, but not to attack or injure others. Real Chinese Martial Arts are not violent, dangerous sports.

The Internal System

Ba-Kua 八卦, *Tai-Chi* 太極, and *Hsing-Yi* 形意 are the Chinese *Nei-Chia Ch'uan*. *Hsing-Yi* is the one here to be introduced.

... The first step in studying *Hsing-Yi* is to learn to calm one's mind. The *Yi* 意 *Mind*, is the inward motive force and *Hsing* 形 *Form* is the outward expression. If one can relax and control the body in total and in minute sensitivity, then one can use one's will rather than one's physical power to move the body, and move with flexibility and in good co-ordination. One's central nervous system therefore functions harmoniously and efficiently.

Fa 法 *Method or Technique*: We are all biologically limited and any specific movement can be described by mechanical natural laws, yet, without good mental control one would never be able to effect *Rapid Changes*. These rapid changes are obtained only by *Shu* 術 *The Art* developing sensitivity to an infinite degree. It takes *Time* and *Determined Practice* with intelligence, to mature.

The *Forms* 形 *Hsing* of *Hsing-Yi* are incredibly simple, yet The *Yi* 意 is most complex. Honestly speaking, there are no illustrations, no photographs to be able to show the readers the *Yi* 意 which is the important part of *Hsing-Yi*. Because of the extreme simplicity of the movements, one can not afford the slightest mis-interpretation (any mis-information or wrong instruction only causes harm to the learners). My late teacher, *Teng*, used to tell us, many

Mind-Hsin 心 (神) which must be attained after *Years* of intelligent practice and interpretation, and above all *Sound Instruction and Guidance*, before one can react instantaneously to any kind of attack, without any effort and in perfect ease. This is so called "Self-defence" in Chinese Martial Arts. When two people play (or fight) it



The author, Miss Rose Li and friend 'Nickie'.

Wai-Chia — The External School: *Ch'ang-Ch'uan* forms illustrate its graceful gymnastic movements.



years ago, in Peking: "You say, you know *Hsing-Yi*, do it, show me — If it's *Hsing-Yi*, I will say it is. If it isn't, it isn't, don't argue!" Because it is so simple, it has the chance to remain unspoiled, and can continue developing toward the right direction, and can never actually deteriorate. Many "masters" in the West, I heard, have already been teaching *Hsing-yi*, they call it "*Hsing-Yi*" — let them call it! I have seen many practising... Since the forms are so *Simple* to the observer, only the trained eye can see the grandeur of the technique of "*Hsing-Yi*". The correct training is very difficult but challenging, and it requires much care and attention, discipline and perseverance. Minute precision is important. During practice, the two unseen forces of *Mind* and *Will* are very active.

The Exercise 功夫 Only solo exercise cultivates *kung-fu*. If it is done effectively, it mobilizes all parts of the body. Indeed an *integral person* is involved! Many competent athletic persons cannot do *Nei-Chia*, because their *Mind* and *Will* are not there. Breathing and *Will* must be under strict control and care. The daily task of practice strengthens one's *character* and the physical power is the last thing of concern!

Precision, timing, stamina and speed, in total plays a major role in *Hsing-yi*. An accomplished master of *Hsing-yi*, even after a long hour of practising (very strenuous indeed to the observer) shows no sign of exhaustion, but on the contrary, he radiates vitality and tranquility and fitness. When body and mind can function in such a rhythmical harmony this is *kung-fu*, a term which Chinese people with a Chinese cultural background (born and raised in China) use to measure the students' achievement in Martial Arts. It is the Harmonization of *Form-Hsing* 形 (精) *Will-Yi* 意 (氣) and

is sport. *Hsing-Yi* is not a sport.

Finally, I hope the recent visit of the Chinese *Wu-Shu* Troupe from Peking in the United States, has helped to dispel some of the mystification and myth surrounding Chinese Martial Arts in the West. Let us share the Chinese ancient arts with sincerity and generosity

and promote the Arts for Arts' Sake. Let us not abuse them for any personal gain, or ego or power, please! Those who do not have a genuine interest and love for these Arts should leave them alone. Because to mislead only invites disaster to the Arts. So, the first requirement for a good *Hsing-Yi* candidate is that he is of sound, integral character.

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