

A Brief History of Hung Gar Kuen

The evolution of Kung Fu is very closely related to the development of Buddhism practised by monks all over China. Buddhism wasn't native to China, but introduced from India (between 58-76 A.D during the Eastern Han Ming Dynasty) where it originates. Over the following Centuries, many Chinese Emperors embraced Buddhism slowly becoming China's most practised religion and with it was the introduction of Thousands of Buddhist Temples.

In around 540 A.D, an Indian priest named Bodhidharma travelled to China to spread what would later be named Zen Buddhism. On his journey he came across a temple called Shaolin, at the time famous for translating Buddhist writings into Chinese. Bodhidharma observed that the monks were in poor physical shape as they spent lots of their time writing and meditating, so exercises were introduced to enhance bodily strength and the energy flow. These exercises were developed from Indian Yoga and were based on the movements of both real and mythical animals.

Fighting styles had existed in China for many Centuries before Shaolin started to develop any form of martial arts. Monks at the temple were very peaceful but in the remote areas of the countryside they would often encounter bandits or wild animals. Not all monks would study martial arts, but as time passed many retired soldiers of all ranks converted to Buddhism and joined the temple. This meant that the soldiers could accompany fellow monks making dangerous journeys to provide protection, and with there skills combined with the daily exercise, Shaolin kung fu started to develop. Monks studied and imitated animal movements realising that they possessed natural self defence and killing techniques in order to survive which the monks refined into there own fighting systems.

As time went on, the Shaolin sect began to divert from the other Buddhist sects as there focus became ever more conditioned toward the study of martial arts which appeared to be somewhat of a contradiction of Buddhist principles. The monks replied simply stating along the lines of "To understand something such as violence makes you better equipped to resolve a conflict".

In the mid 17th Century, Manchurian invaders led by the Ching family ended the Ming Dynasty and eventually conquered China. Those fleeing from the Chings sought refuge in the Shaolin temple, initially only passive residence was permitted but due to the injustice that the Chinese people suffered, Shaolin soon became the centre of the resistance. At this time Shaolin had five elders:

Jee Shin Sim See- Founder of Shaolin Iron Cloth, creator of Wing Chun and founder of Hung Gar Kuen.

Bai Mei – Founder of Golden Bell Iron Body Chi Gong

Fong Sai Yuk- Famous Swordsman, Founder of White Tiger Kung Fu.

Miu Hin- Founder of Five Shapes Boxing and helped to develop Wing Chun.

Ng Mui- Buddhist Nun and Dim Mak expert, helped to develop Wing Chun, founder of Dragon Shape Boxing and Wu Mei.

In 1647 A.D, the original Shaolin temple in Henan province was burnt to the ground by the Ching. Many of the monks were slaughtered and the rest fled, going into hiding, seeking refuge in other temples and monasteries. The five elders are said to have escaped helping to form other rebel groups and training the people up using there expert fighting knowledge. Fong Sai Yuk, took refuge at Wudan mountain in the Hubei province (home of the internal martial arts), with the aid of his fellow elders he organised a following of up to a million strong called the Heaven and Earth Society.

The Buddhist Nun Ng Mui is later said to have taught Yim Wing Chun, one of her close friends a close range fighting system later to adopt her name (wing chun) , so that she may publicly challenge her husband from a forced marriage to win back her freedom.

Fong Wing Chun, relative of Fong Sai Yuk, was a master of White Crane Kung Fu. She married Hung Hei Goon and it was he using his expertise in Tiger kung fu, combined it with his wife's knowledge of the White Crane system developed Southern Hung Gar Keun. Hung Hei Goon developed a reputation for being a fighter of great skill and was known as "The Southern Fist". The essence of Hung Gar can be found in its name. "Hung" means to "stand tall with integrity".

Hung Hei Goon was a disciple of Jee Shin Sim See. As Hung's master he usually appears at the top of most Hung Gar lineages, placing the origins directly back to the Shaolin temple.

Masters & Lineage

Hung Hei Goon

Hung was born in Kwuntong province, Southern China (his real name being Jyu). whilst the country was under the rule of the Ching (Manchu). Being a Ming patriot, Jyu disliked the Manchu's and spent much of his life fighting to overthrow the foreign invaders. He soon became one of China's most wanted rebels when he got into trouble with some Ching officials which resulted with a price on his head and was forced to change his name to go into hiding.

Hung made a living as a travelling Tea merchant up until he joined the Shaolin temple as a layman. Abbott Jee Shim Sim See took Hung in and trained him in the Shaolin Tiger system. It is said that Hung further developed the Shaolin Gung Gee Fook Fu Kuen (Taming the Tiger Fist) and is considered the creator of the form.

After fleeing another attack on Shaolin, Hung and the Abbott Jee Shin went into hiding once again, this time on the red junk boats of the Chinese Opera Troupes. At the time kung fu was banned in China so the two travelled the country teaching in secret locations including the Big Buddha Temple in Kwuntong. The art was taught as Hung Gar (Hung Family Fist) to hide it's connections to the Shaolin temple from the Manchus. Hung eventually died at the age of 90.

Luk Ah Choi (1740-1845)

Luk Ah Choi, class mate of Hung Hei Goon, was a manchu descendant who has been praised for his efforts to spread the art of Hung Gar. As a young boy, it is said that Luk Ah Choi started his kung fu training in Fa Kuen or Flower Fist, a northern style taught to him by a monk called Li Bak Fu.

Hung Hei Goon being the top student of abbott Jee Shim Sim See, passed all his skills on to Luk Ah Choi, teaching him everything he knew including the original famous Fu Hok Seung Ying Kuen (Tiger and Crane Fist Form) which he had developed. Luk Ah Choi was later send to Canton by Hung Hei Goon to help spread the art in Canton.

One of Luk Ah Choi's best students was Wong Tai and later Wong Kei Ying, who learned the complete system under his sifu instructions and became an expert in the Hung style. It is believed that Luk Ah Choi died at the age of 68. (There are two main lineages of Hung Gar Kuen, this one that follows and another that follows through the Wong family, covering such masters as Wong Fei Hung and Lam Sai Wing. The second lineage will be covered in a later edition).

Leung Kwan aka "Tid Kiu Sam"(1815-1888)

Tid Kiu Sam, student of Luk Ah Choi, is regarded as one of the best Chinese Martial Artist in China's history. Leung Kwan was born into a wealthy family in Nam Hai, Kwantung province. According to legend he started his Gung fu training at a young age under the famous master Lee Hu Si who was nicknamed Bearded Li, also known as Golden Hook.

Gwok Yan, a shaolin monk and a famous master of Gung fu, took Leung Kwan as his disciple and taught him everything he knew. Some sources indicate that Gwok Yan taught Leung the "Gung Gee Fook Fu Kuen" and "Fu Hok Seung Ying Kuen". Leung Kwan developed extremely strong, iron like arms and solid stances through his dedication towards training and went on to create a form that is still regarded as today to be the highest level of Hung Gar Kuen, Tid Sin Kuen - Iron Wire Fist.

Leung kwan became an extremely well known and respected figure and because of his skills and being the third son in his family ,he was given the nickname "Tid Kiu Sam" - Iron Bridge Three. He was also one of the Ten Tigers Of Kwungtung-Kwungtang Sup Fu. Ten tigers were the most famous and respected gung fu masters of the time. It is said that at a latter stage of his life Leung became addicted to opium and slowly fell ill. It is believed that he died at about the age of 73 and according to some sources he was buried near Wanshan, Cloud Mountain.

Ng Hei Kwoon

Ng Hei Kwoon came to Canton in the 1860's. It was here where he began his studies under Tid Kiu Sam. Not a great deal is known about Ng Hei Kwoon as he was actually an indoor disciple of Tid Kiu Sam. It is believed that Kwoon trained with his teacher until the passing of Tid Kiu Sam in 1888. After this time, Ng Hei Kwoon took on the name 'Yan Gong Sim Si' and turned to Buddhism. Now an ordained Monk Yan Gong Sim Si took on a disciple, a 13 year old boy named Hang Yat Siu.

Hang Yat Sui

After his father's death, Hang Yat Siu returned with his family to Canton, to his mothers birthplace. At the age of 13 he left his family and followed a nomadic path. Hang Yat Suicame across a small temple near Canton where he worked in the kitchen in exchange for food and shelter. After a time Hang Yat Siu devoted himself to Buddhism and became a lay monk taking the name 'Lin Hung Sim Si'. He became a student of the Zen master Yan Gong who taught him traditional martial arts. During his travels he met and befriended the father of Lai Ng Sam and after Lai Ng Sam's father's death adopted Lai Ng Sam as his son. As Hang Yat Siu grew older and his eye sight deteriorated his wanderings came to an end and he settled down at a small temple near Changsha, Wunam.

Lai Ng Sam (1927-1995)

Lai Ng Sam was born in Futshan village in Kwantung in 1927. His father was an herbal doctor and Mok Ga kung fu teacher. During his travels Lai Ng Sams father met Hang Yat Siu in the village of Shen Tong. The two became good friends and made a living selling herbs and giving kung fu demonstrations. When Lai Ng Sam was seven his father passed away and he was adopted by Hang Yat Siu. From 1934 Lai Ng Sam was the adopted son and student of Hang Yat Siu being trained in the arts of herbal medicine and southern Chinese boxing.

In 1937 Japan invaded China with the intention of dominating the Asian mainland. It was a turbulent time for the Chinese people, and Hang Yat Sui and Lai Ng Sam were both actively involved in the resistance movement against the Japanese invaders.

After the Second World War the true nature of the Maoist regime became obvious and in 1949 Hang Yat Sui instructed each of his students to flee the country. Lai Ng Sam was lucky to have succeeded in escaping mainland China, many did not. He arrived in Hong Kong where he made a new life for himself continuing to teach martial arts. He taught at both the YMCA and in Victoria Park, and it was here during the 1970's, that Jeff Hasbrouck was introduced to Lai Ng Sam, during the following years Jeff lived and studied the now greatly developed system of Hung Gar Kuen under the supervision Lai Ng Sam.

Lai Ng Sam contracted cancer and during his final days appointed Jeff Hasbrouck as his successor to pass on the art. Sadly Lai Ng Sam passed away in November 1995.

Jeff Hasbrouck (1947 -)

Born in the USA, Jeff left for Europe in 1968. While in Amsterdam he studied Tai Ji Quan and was drawn to Asia to further his spiritual and martial art interests. In 1977 Jeff and his wife moved to Hong Kong.

Jeff was introduced to Yong Sek Yee a second generation teacher of Wu Style Tai Ji, and became a dedicated student. It was during this period of training that a kungfu brother CC Wong suggested that Jeff balanced his martial arts training by also studying southern shaolin Chinese boxing. CC Wong introduced Jeff to Lai Ng Sam and after months of gruelling training was accepted as a student.

Jeff was fortunate in being able to dedicated years of his life to studying with both of his teachers without many distractions. Jeff trained with Lai Ng Sam morning and evening, for several years. During this time Jeff also became a proficient acupuncturist, Chinese painter and studied Chinese arts and culture.

Jeff returned to Europe in the early 80's and began teaching Southern Chinese boxing and has continued to do so to the present day. Jeff visited his teacher in Hong Kong as often as he could and in 1995 was urgently called back to Hong Kong to be by the side of his teacher during his final days. Jeff was appointed by Lai Ng Sam as the successor to this lineage of southern Chinese Boxing.

Phil Dandridge (1962-)

Phil Dandridge began his Martial Arts Training at the age of 16 under Master Rex Jones of the Fei Lung Kwan and first formed an association to enable him to teach martial arts in 1995. This association was originally called the NKAGB (Northern Kung Fu Association of Great Britain) and taught the Elephant Form Fist system, or Chiong Hsing Chuan Fa, and Hung Gar Kuen kung fu, which he studied under Jeff Hasbrouck as a private student for 15 years.

