

Origins of Hung Gar

Shaolin Kung fu is the most well known of the Chinese martial arts. Born in China's Hebei province on Songshan (The Pine Mountain), the Shaolin arts were originally a fusion of Indian yogic, martial practices from Kalarippayat and indigenous Chinese fighting techniques that were supposedly developed by watching animals. The patriarch of the Shaolin temple was an Indian monk, named Da Mo.

Throughout China's history the Shaolin Temple would be the site for controversy. Similar to western Christian traditions, many outlaws, bandits and subversive elements sought refuge there, along with soldiers seeking forgiveness for their killings on the battlefield. In each case, these men with their varied backgrounds brought new techniques, weaponry and fighting skills into the hallowed walls of the Shaolin Temple, and as the years passed, the curriculum evolved. Many times, the imperial court tried to suppress the temples activities or altogether destroy it, but the temple and its followers always managed to hold on until the Ch'ing Dynasty. The temple was burned down and some of the elder monks, including one named Master Gee Seen Sim See fled south to create a new Shaolin Temple in the Fukien province of Southern China.

It is said that Gee Seen Sim See became the abbot of the Fukien Shaolin Temple and trained many people in the art of Shaolin Kung fu. It was during this time when a young patriot named Hung Hei Goon took refuge at the Southern Shaolin Temple to hide from the Manchu officials. Legend has it that Hung Hei Goon trained under Gee Seen Sim See and eventually became his top disciple learning the Shaolin Tiger Style. Hung Hei Goon is considered as the founder of Hung Gar.

Hung Hei Goon disliked the Ch'ing rule like many other Chinese and spent most of his life fighting to overthrow the Ch'ing and restore the Ming rule. Hung's real surname was Jyu, however due to being one of the most wanted rebels of his time, he later changed his name to Hung to hide his real identity from the Ch'ing government. He chose the name Hung as a tribute to the first Ming Emperor Hung Mo (Hong Wu) who is widely considered as one of the best, if not the best emperor in the history of China.

The Ch'ing government well aware of what was happening at the Southern Shaolin Temple, felt threatened by the temple and its activities. They planned a full-scale attack and sent imperial troops to destroy the temple and kill all the monks and rebels. The monks were outnumbered largely and did not stand a chance against the army; the Shaolin temple was burned down to the ground. Hung Hei Goon and Gee Sim, Luk Ah Choy as well as some others managed to survive the attack and fled to the southern parts of China. These men swore to spread the art of Shaolin and fight to overthrow the Ch'ing.

At the time the Manchus banned Kung fu training. So Hung Hei Goon taught his art secretly at the Big Buddha Temple in Kwungtung, southern China. Once the ban was lifted, he began teaching openly and set up a school in the city of Kwungtung province.

He named his art Hung Gar Kuen (Hung family fist), mainly to hide its shaolin connections from the Manchus.

Hung Gar Style

According to legend, Master Gee See, a monk of the Fukien Shaolin Temple, taught Hung the Shaolin Tiger Style. Hung being a curious man, always sought to improve his skills. He added to his Tiger Style elements from his wife's White Crane system, movements from the Dragon, Snake and Leopard forms and techniques from the Five Elements Fist. He modified and expanded his Tiger Style to develop a system better balanced in long and short range application, a system which better reflected his own character and skills – Hung Gar.

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 Gar is well adapted to close quarter fighting in small, crowded alleyways or in wet, slippery rice fields. Hung Gar training emphasizes strong stances, iron hard blocks, low snapping kicks, ambidexterity, deceptive hand techniques and power all geared for close range techniques.

Hung Gar hand techniques stress ambidexterity and use simultaneous blocking and striking. The blocking maneuvers of Hung Gar were well known and feared. Opponents often thought twice before challenging a Hung Gar practitioner, for if a block could numb an attacker's limb, how much more painful must a strike be? The training is grueling and highly demanding. Legends depict of Hung Gar students who stood in horse stance the length of time an incense stick burned down completely, anywhere between one to three hours.