



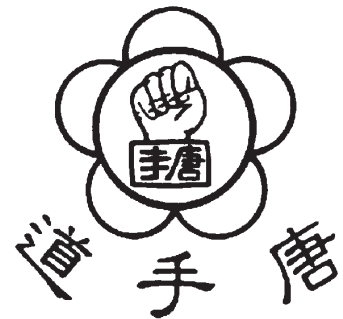
# *Pa Kua Chang*

JOURNAL

Vol. 5, No. 4

May/June 1995

## *The Tang Shou Tao System of Internal Martial Arts*



### *In this Issue*

*Tang Shou Tao Martial Arts*

*Interviews with:  
Mike Bingo*

*Tim Cartmell*

*Xu Zhen Wang*



## *Pa Kua Chang* JOURNAL

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### **About the Pa Kua Chang Journal**

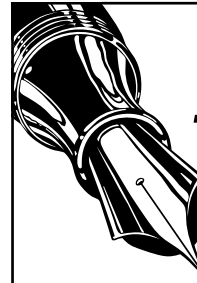
The *Pa Kua Chang Journal* is published six times a year. Each issue features an interview with, or article by, one or more Ba Gua Zhang instructor(s) from mainland China, Taiwan, the United States, and/or Canada. The interviews will report on each instructor's background, current program, training methods and teaching philosophy. By utilizing this format, the intention is to give students an opportunity to get to know prospective teachers and to let teachers possibly gain insights and ideas from learning about the activities of their colleagues.

Chinese names and terms will be romanized using the pinyin system of romanization except when an instructor prefers his name romanized differently. The title of the Journal appears in the Wade Giles system of romanization as it was the system we started with and we kept the original title. Whenever possible, Chinese characters will be listed in parentheses following the first appearance of Chinese terms and names in each article.

The ideas and opinions expressed in this journal are those of the instructors being interviewed and not necessarily the views of the publisher or editor.

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## *Editor's Corner*

### **Techniques vs. Principles**

Every month I receive one or two letters asking me to print more articles on Ba Gua Zhang fighting "techniques" or "applications." One problem with doing such a thing, besides the fact that it is difficult to learn from written word and photographs, is that Ba Gua Zhang is not a "technique" oriented art. The moves in Ba Gua Zhang forms, especially the circle walking forms, are not technique specific. In fact, many of them are far too complex to really be applied efficiently in a fighting situation. That is why most all lineages of Ba Gua developed straight-line fighting sets. These sets were based on the principles of the circle walking forms, but the moves were executed in a shorter, smaller, tighter, and faster fashion.

The Ba Gua moves in the circle walking forms were designed to train the body to develop certain principles of motion and mechanics of body usage, not be applied as specific techniques. Ba Gua movements train the body to be continuously coordinated, connected, aligned, and powerful to the left and right, inside and outside, up and down. There is a continuous, connected flow of motion which coordinates, connects, and harmonizes body, breath, and mind while moving in spiraling, twisting, and circular patterns in order to take advantage of the inherent power in these types of motions.

While one might certainly devise some specific kind of martial application based on these movements, the movements of most of the circle walking forms, because they are training principle and not technique, have literally hundreds of variations in application. Once the principle of motion that each movement is designed to portray is grasped, the practitioner then has an entire catalog of "techniques."

In the next issue, we will try to examine this idea of training principles of motion by examining Ba Gua's signature move, the Single Palm Change. We will examine the single palm change movement in its vast number of variations as practiced by various schools of Ba Gua and we will discuss the principles of motion and body mechanics that are being developed when one practices the Single Palm Change.

### ***On the Cover***

Shen Long Tang Shou Tao founder Xu Hong Ji

# An Introduction to Tang Shou Tao Internal Martial Arts

Investigating the history of Ba Gua and Xing Yi's instruction in the United States, one will find that during the 1960's and 1970's, when these arts were first being introduced in this country outside of small groups practicing in the Chinese communities, the majority of what was being taught in the United States was being brought back by servicemen, government employees, and various other martial arts enthusiasts who had studied in Taiwan. A large portion of these individuals (starting with Robert W. Smith, whose written work played a very important role in introducing these arts to the American martial arts community) gained knowledge from studying the Tang Shou Tao system of internal Chinese martial arts in Taipei. The majority of these practitioners were either taught by Tang Shou Tao's founder, Hong Yi Xiang (洪懿祥 - also romanized Hung I-Hsiang), or his student Xu Hong Ji (許鴻基 - also romanized Hsu Hung-Chi).

One need only look at a list of martial arts instructors, who have taught or are teaching in the United States, who have been influenced by this system of internal martial arts instruction to recognize how many internal martial artists in this country have been exposed to Hong Yi Xiang's system, or that of his teacher Zhang Jun Feng (張峻峰): Robert Smith, Ken Fish, Kumar Frantzis, Luo De Xiu, Robert Lin-I Yu, Allen Pittman, Mike Bingo, John Price, Vince Black, Tom Bisio, Tim Cartmell, Marc Brinkman, Daniel Reid, James MacNiel, and Mike Patterson, to name just a few. The catalog of written and videotaped material offered by many amongst this group of instructors, not to mention the personal instruction they have given to students over the years, has had a big influence on the way Americans think about the internal martial arts of Xing Yi Quan and Ba Gua Zhang.

As editor of the *Pa Kua Chang Journal*, I have received numerous letters over the years from subscribers who have wanted me to include more material about Xing Yi Quan and its relationship

with Ba Gua. I can think of no better way to discuss this relationship than to address the Tang Shou Tao system and how it was developed and taught. This system contains a very practical, step-by-step, pragmatic approach to learning internal martial arts and developing highly refined levels of skill. Although the system itself was formed and founded by Hong Yi Xiang during the 1950's and 1960's, the roots of using the commonalities of Ba Gua and Xing Yi in practice and application can easily be traced back through Zhang Jun Feng to his teachers, Li Cun Yi (李存義) and Gao Yi Sheng (高義盛).

The lineage and method we will be examining in this issue starts with Li Cun Yi (see *Pa Kua Chang Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 3) and Gao Yi Sheng (see *Pa Kua Chang Journal*, Vol 2, No. 3, Vol. 3, No. 5, and Vol. 4, No. 2). Although Li Cun Yi is primarily known as a Xing Yi man and Gao Yi Sheng is primarily known as a Ba Gua man, both of these gentlemen practiced and taught both Xing Yi Quan and Ba Gua Zhang. A close examination of the method and style of both the Ba Gua and Xing Yi taught by these gentlemen indicates that their instruction of one art was definitely influenced by the other.



**Hong Yi Xiang's Tang Shou Tao School in Taipei, Taiwan, 1993**

## The Lineage of Tang



Li Cun Yi (李存義) 1847 - 1921



Zhang Jun Feng (張峻峰) 1902 - 1974



Gao Yi Sheng (高義盛) 1866 - 1951

Before moving to Taiwan in the late 1940's, Zhang Jun Feng (see *Pa Kua Chang Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 5) studied Xing Yi Quan from Li Cun Yi and Ba Gua Zhang from Gao Yi Sheng in Tianjin, China. Zhang Jun Feng brought his martial arts to Taiwan and began teaching a group of ten students around 1949. Hong Yi Xiang was among the best of Zhang's original group of students, and was one of his best fighters. Prior to studying the internal arts with Zhang Jun Feng, Hong had also studied Shaolin and had been exposed to Japanese styles of martial arts during the Japanese occupation of Taiwan. This early training naturally influenced his teaching.

During the late 1950's to the mid-1960's, one of Hong's top students was Xu Hong Ji, who subsequently branched off from Hong's school and opened his own school in the mid-1960's under the name Shen Long (Spirit Dragon) Tang Shou Tao (神龍唐手道). Like Hong, Xu had also studied the Japanese style martial arts and some Shaolin before practicing Xing Yi. This lineage is depicted in the photographs above.

## Shou Tao Chinese Internal Style Martial Arts



**Hong Yi Xiang (洪懿祥) 1925 - 1993**



**Xu Hong Ji (許鴻基) 1934 - 1984**

### Tracing the Lineage

Over the past several years, Vince Black and I have traveled to Taiwan and mainland China on numerous occasions visiting with Xing Yi and Ba Gua instructors who are associated with this lineage of internal martial arts training in an effort to piece together its history, theory, method and practice. Vince Black was a ten year student of Xu Hong Ji and naturally had a deep interest in investigating the roots of this material.

During our investigations we have interviewed Xu Hong Ji's early students (including Mike Bingo, see page 9, and Xu Hong Ji's son, Xu Zhen Wang (許振旺), see page 28), we interviewed Hong Yi Xiang himself along with Hong Yi Xiang's sons and various other students of Hong, including one of Hong's top students during the early 1970's, Luo De Xiu (羅德修). We also interviewed Hong Yi Xiang's brother, Hong Yi Mian (洪懿綿), who was one of Zhang Jun Feng's top Ba Gua students, on several occasions. Additionally, I met with and interviewed Zhang Jun Feng's wife, Xu Bao Mei (徐抱妹), and Vince Black met with Robert Smith and his

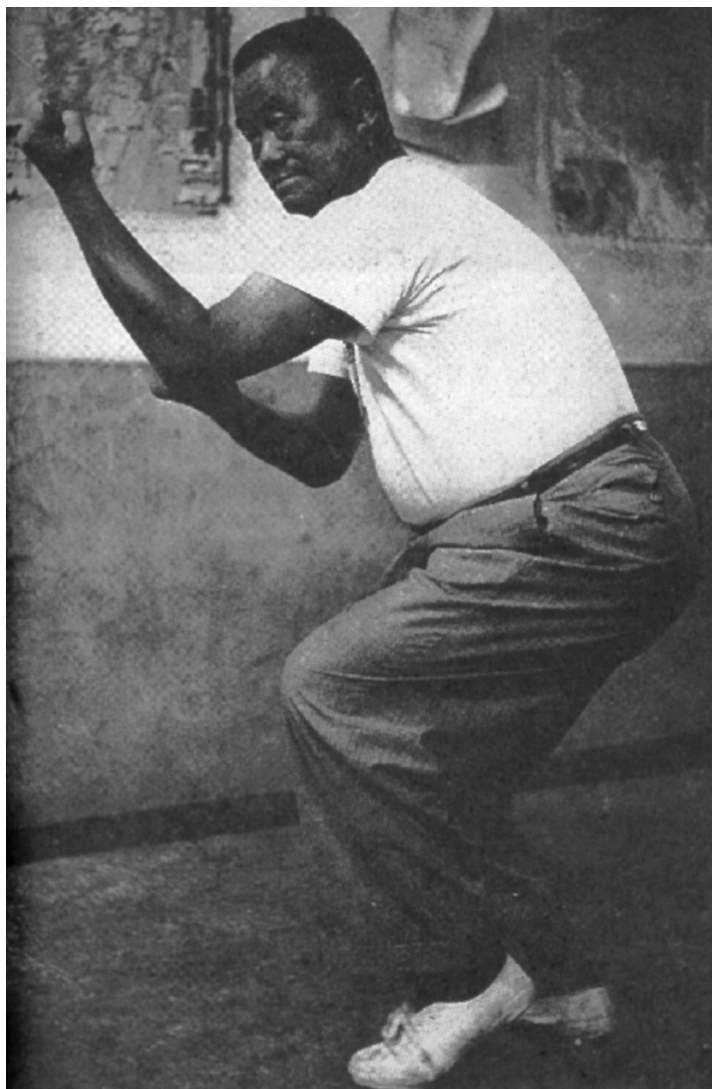
student Allen Pittman, who was also a student of Hong Yi Mian (Pittman was also interviewed for the *Pa Kua Chang Newsletter*, Vol. 1, No. 2). We have also received information and advice from one of Zhang Jun Feng's only American students, Ken Fish.

Tracing this lineage back farther, we have also explored other branches of Gao Yi Sheng's Ba Gua and Li Cun Yi's Xing Yi in order to get a feel for how other branches were teaching and practicing the same system. Two of Gao Yi Sheng's other noted disciples who passed on his Ba Gua were He Ke Cai (何可才 - see *Pa Kua Chang Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 3) and Liu Feng Cai (劉鳳彩 - see *Pa Kua Chang Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 2). In Hong Kong, I met with He Ke Cai's student Deng Chang Cheng (鄧昌成) and He Ke Cai's son, He Yuk Chuen. In Tianjin, both Vince Black and I have met with Liu Feng Cai's students Wang Shu Sheng (王書聲) and Liu Shu Hang (劉樹行 - see *Pa Kua Chang Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 2) on several occasions and we took a group to Tianjin in April of 1994 to study with them. Most recently (April 1995) the North American

Tang Shou Tao name was added to the tombstone of Liu Feng Cai as a contributing force in the proliferation of Gao style Ba Gua Zhang.

While conducting our research into Zhang Jun Feng's branch of Xing Yi Quan, we have also interviewed and studied with two elder generation Li Cun Yi style Xing Yi lineage holders on numerous occasions, Liang Ke Quan (梁克權 - see *Pa Kua Chang Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 4) in Beijing, and Liu Wan Fu (劉萬福 - see *Pa Kua Chang Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 3) in Tianjin.

The extensive investigation we have conducted into this lineage of Ba Gua Zhang and Xing Yi Quan has revealed interesting perspectives on the background and development of the systematic approach to internal martial arts instruction which was developed by Hong Yi Xiang and further modified by Xu Hong Ji. These instructors masterfully blended teaching methods and styles in a manner which suits modern day study and has produced students who could actually use their internal martial arts effectively in a fighting situation after studying a relatively short period of time. The Tang Shou Tao method of developing Xing Yi and Ba Gua practitioners has become well known because it works, it is practical, and it is time tested.



**Ba Gua and Xing Yi instructor Zhang Jun Feng at his school in Taipei, Taiwan**

## **Background**

In order to fully appreciate the method and progression of study developed by Hong Yi Xiang, it is necessary to look at the backgrounds of both of Zhang Jun Feng's teachers, Li Cun Yi and Gao Yi Sheng, and gain an understanding of how other Xing Yi/Ba Gua practitioners of their generation were brought up in the martial arts. The first fact to consider is that the large majority of the Xing Yi and Ba Gua practitioners of this generation grew up in rural farming villages. This fact tells us that these individuals were naturally strong from working in the fields and performing other manual chores in the village. The strength and stamina these individuals naturally developed when they were young is considerable compared to that gained by modern day practitioners growing up in an urban or suburban environment. So, when they began their martial arts training they already had a base of physical strength, stamina, flexibility, and coordination.

The second important fact to consider is that almost all of the well known Ba Gua and Xing Yi practitioners who were of Li Cun Yi and Gao Yi Sheng's generation started their martial arts training with some form of Shaolin or "family style" martial art. This means that by the time they studied Ba Gua and/or Xing Yi, these gentlemen had also developed a foundation of strength, balance, coordination, and flexibility in the martial arts context. They had also worked out other various fundamental martial arts concepts such as timing, rhythm, distance, and angles in fighting situations, as well as learning to develop martial bravery and fighting spirit. Therefore, for these practitioners, Ba Gua and Xing Yi became arts practiced to refine and polish the fundamental skills and strengths they had already acquired.

## **The Integration of Ba Gua and Xing Yi**

As we discussed in detail in *Pa Kua Chang Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 3, the fusion of Ba Gua and Xing Yi began with the friendship between Li Cun Yi and Cheng Ting Hua (程庭華). Research indicates that Cheng Ting Hua was probably the first Ba Gua man to study Xing Yi and Li Cun Yi was probably the first Xing Yi man to study Ba Gua. Cheng Ting Hua and Li Cun Yi had been good friends since they were very young and they shared their martial arts training as well as their martial arts students. Many of Cheng Ting Hua's Ba Gua students, including his two sons, studied Xing Yi from Li Cun Yi, and many of Li Cun Yi's Xing Yi students studied Ba Gua from Cheng Ting Hua. Li Cun Yi, although usually listed as Dong Hai Chuan's Ba Gua student, actually studied the majority of his Ba Gua with Cheng Ting Hua. It was natural that the training and execution of the two arts began to influence each other at this point in time and has continued to do so in these lineages.

Gao Yi Sheng was a Ba Gua Zhang student of Zhou Yu Xiang (周玉祥). Zhou had been a Ba Gua student of Cheng Ting Hua and a Xing Yi student of Li Cun Yi. Zhou later took Gao to meet both his teachers and Gao studied some Ba Gua with Cheng Ting Hua and some Xing Yi with Li Cun Yi. Additionally, Gao Yi Sheng's



**Hong Yi Xiang with his second and third sons Hong Ze Han (right) and Hong Ze Pei in March 1993**

book on Ba Gua includes a whole chapter on Xing Yi's five element fists. So, although Gao was primarily known as a Ba Gua man, he definitely had a Xing Yi influence, and that influence is predominant in the 64 straight line forms of his style.

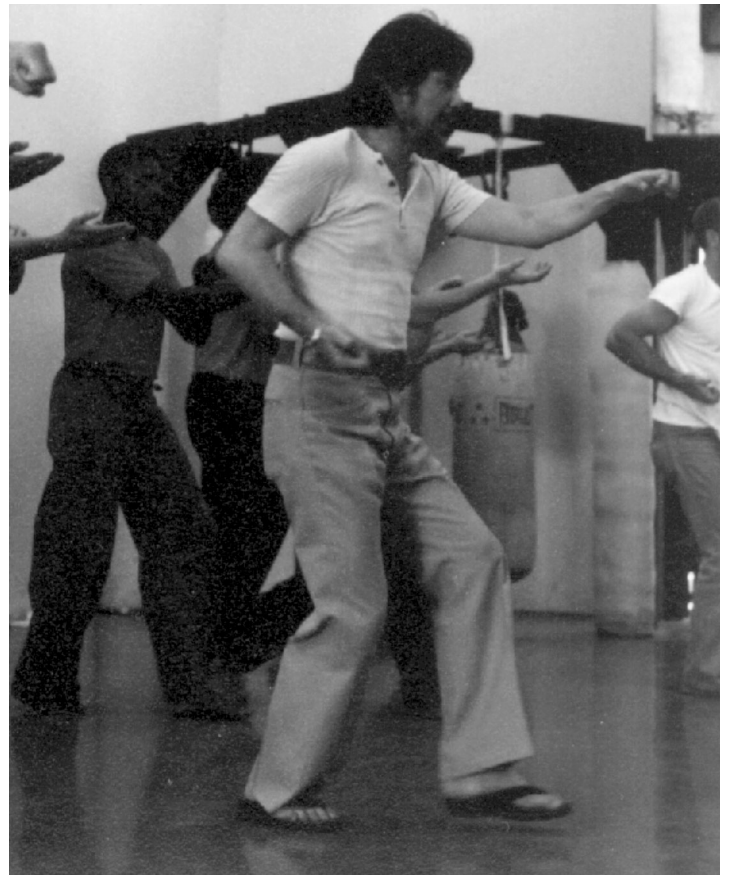
Although Gao Yi Sheng claimed that he learned his 64 straight line forms from a mysterious Daoist, most Ba Gua researchers have concluded that Gao devised these forms himself based on his background in Hong Quan, Ba Gua, and Xing Yi, and the straight line Ba Gua sets he learned from his teacher Zhou Yu Xiang (see *Pa Kua Chang Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 2, page 17).

In both the Hebei style Xing Yi that was taught by Li Cun Yi and the Cheng style Ba Gua taught by Gao Yi Sheng, there are elements and characteristics of one in the other, particularly in Gao's linear Ba Gua. It could also be said that many of the predominant characteristics of the Hebei style of Xing Yi in general, which differentiate it from the Shanxi style, can partially be attributed to the fact that the large majority of the Hebei stylists also practiced Ba Gua and thus this was a contributing factor which may have influenced the stylistic differences. Very few of the Shanxi Xing Yi stylists studied Ba Gua, but most all of the famous Hebei stylists of Li Cun Yi's generation studied Ba Gua (Li Cun Yi, Zhang Zhao Dong (張兆東), Geng Ji Shan (耿繼善), Liu De Kuan (劉德寬), Sun Lu Tang (孫祿堂), and Liu Feng Chun (劉鳳春), to name a few). Almost all of the Hebei style Xing Yi being practiced today can be traced back to someone who also studied Ba Gua. However, the predominant influence Xing Yi had on Ba Gua and Ba Gua on Xing Yi was probably not in the forms or solo practice sets, but in the fighting applications and two-person exercises.

### **The Roots of Tang Shou Tao**

When Zhang Jun Feng taught Hong Yi Xiang, he primarily taught him Xing Yi Quan. Later when Hong opened his own school, Xing Yi is primarily what Hong taught. Hong Yi Xiang never taught much Ba Gua in the sense of teaching many of the traditional Gao style Ba Gua forms. Hong Yi Xiang's physical build, character, and temperament were ideal for Xing Yi and Zhang Jun Feng, recognizing this, concentrated Hong's training on the Xing Yi. However, much of what Hong taught and practiced in the context of free fighting came from Zhang Jun Feng's Gao style Ba Gua. Hong was a master at *San Shou* (散手) and in talking with his students, they feel that most of the techniques Hong used when practicing or teaching free fighting techniques came from the Gao style Ba Gua.

Zhang Jun Feng spent time with Hong teaching him how to fight because Hong liked to go out and test his skills against students from other schools and he also took some trips to the Philippines and Japan. Zhang Jun Feng did not want to "lose face" if one of his students lost in a fight, so he spent extra time with Hong teaching him how to fight. In an interview with Zhang Jun Feng's wife, she said that much of the fighting skill Zhang had acquired came from working Gao Yi Sheng's Ba Gua with his older *gong fu* brother Wu Meng Xia (吳孟俠). So it stands to reason that much of Zhang's fighting ability came from



**Xu Hong Ji teaching students in the United States**

Ba Gua and when he taught fighting skills, the Ba Gua techniques were there.

Shortly before he split from Zhang and started his own school, Hong Yi Xiang took a trip to Japan and was very impressed with the way martial arts instruction was organized there. He liked the uniforms, the belt system, and the systematic approach to training. Subsequently, he adopted many of the Japanese style martial arts school characteristics when he opened his own school. They had belt ranks, wore Japanese style uniforms, and Hong devised a more systematic approach to martial arts instruction than what was typical of most Chinese style schools. Hong said that he came up with the name "Tang Shou Tao" for his school because the name *Guo Shu* (國術 - or National Arts), which most schools used at the time, did not suit his school as he had many foreigners studying there. He thought the name *Tang Shou Tao*, "Chinese Hand Way" or "The Way of China Hand" ("Tang" referring the Tang Dynasty) had a more international flavor.

When talking of the martial arts training process, Hong felt that before a student was ready to learn Xing Yi, they first had to acquire body strength and basic martial arts skill. In an interview I conducted with Hong in March of 1993 (see *Pa Kua Chang Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 5), he said that it was important that beginning students learned to develop power at the *ming jing* (明勁 - or obvious power) level before they could understand high levels of refined skill or technique. The system of training he developed reflects this philosophy.

Hong devised his system such that the beginning student executed many basic exercises which would develop body strength, flexibility, coordination, and balance at the rudimentary level. Many of these exercises were taken from Japanese styles such as Judo. The basic curriculum also included simple forms which Hong had put together by combining Shaolin with basic Xing Yi and Ba Gua movements and techniques. These forms gave the student a foundation in the execution of martial arts movements and technique application before they tried something as subtle as traditional Xing Yi. Hong said that he wanted students to have a basic understanding of blocking, kicking, punching, and throwing before they began to study the more refined internal arts. Hong also taught all of these basic sets with a fighting emphasis so that the student could develop courage and discover things about martial arts application and martial spirit. Without developing this martial bravery and courage, it would always be difficult for the student's mind to graduate to the more refined mental aspects of the internal arts and apply them in combat. So the basic training in Hong's school prepared both the mind and body for training in the internal arts.

The core of the basic sets taught in Hong's school consisted of various sets of eight straight line techniques. These have been known in the Tang Shou Tao schools as "eight step sets" or "fist sets." The basic sets were *Ba Bu Da* (八步打 - Eight Step Striking), *Ba Lian Shou* (八連手 - Eight Linked Hands), *Mei Hua Tui* (梅花腿 - Plum Blossom Kicking), and *Ba Shou* (八手 - Eight Hands). Later Xu Hong Ji added another set, *Ba*

*Tang Quan* (八唐拳 - Eight Tang Fist) to the basic sets taught at his school. These sets formed the foundation for the most rudimentary of blocking, kicking, and striking techniques. Much of what is in these sets are a combination of Ba Gua techniques from the Gao style straight line sets, Shaolin techniques, and Xing Yi's five elements. In fact, the set *Ba Shou* is almost entirely made up of Gao style Ba Gua techniques.

In addition to these basic "eight step" sets, there were also a number of "Shaolin" forms that were taught as part of the basic training. These sets also included techniques from Ba Gua and Xing Yi, but have more of a Shaolin flavor than the other sets.

It was only after students had gained experience at practicing all of these basic sets that they began the practice of Xing Yi Quan's five elements. When Xu Hong Ji left Hong Yi Xiang, he taught in very much the same manner, however, he added some things that he had picked up from other teachers along the way. Xu always had a thirst for knowledge and would learn about and teach any technique or method which proved effective in the context of internal martial arts development. However, his basic curriculum was very similar to Hong's.

Whether he did it intentionally or not, by devising his system of martial arts training, Hong was bringing the training back to a progression which was similar to the way the older generation practitioners practiced in China. Hong had basic strength exercises to give present day practitioners the kind of natural body strength that the old practitioners developed working on the farms and performing manual labor. He started students gaining a martial arts foundation by learning basic sets similar to the Shaolin foundation which the older practitioners, like Li Cun Yi and Gao Yi Sheng had. Only after that foundation was gained did he allow students to progress to the practice of Xing Yi Quan. In this way, his system became very complete and it developed skill much faster than those who started out day one with pure, traditional Xing Yi Quan or Ba Gua Zhang.

Arts such as Ba Gua Zhang and Xing Yi Quan are designed to refine basic strengths and skills. Without foundation training which is designed to develop basic internal body alignments, connections, and strengths, it is very difficult to practice the traditional forms of Ba Gua and Xing Yi and develop internal skill. This does not mean that one needs to study Shaolin before Ba Gua or Xing Yi because any complete system of study, such as the Tang Shou Tao method, will contain exercises and practice sets which serve to develop the foundational skills necessary to develop in the internal arts.

*Those interested in finding a Tang Shou Tao instructor in the United States should contact Mike Bingo, the President of the United States Tang Shou Tao Association, at (303) 680-0592 (see article on next page), or Vince Black, President of the North American Tang Shou Tao Association, at (520) 544-4838. Black and Bingo are currently working together to openly teach and promote the Tang Shou Tao system of martial arts in this country.*



# The Teaching of Xu Hong Ji: An Interview with Mike Bingo

*The following interview was conducted with Mike Bingo in February at the 1995 North American Tang Shou Tao instructor's conference in St. Louis. Mike Bingo, a thirty-three year veteran of Army Special Forces, was one of Xu Hong Ji's first American black belts, having studied with him starting in 1968. Mike Bingo was appointed by Xu Hong Ji to be the President of the United States Tang Shou Tao Association, however, due to his military career and frequent travel overseas he has kept a low profile in the past. This April, Mike Bingo will retire from military service and begin teaching martial arts full time in Denver. He is also making an effort to bring together the various Tang Shou Tao students of Xu Hong Ji in order to help fulfill Xu's dream of passing on the Tang Shou Tao art in this country.*

## **How did you originally meet Xu Hong Ji?**

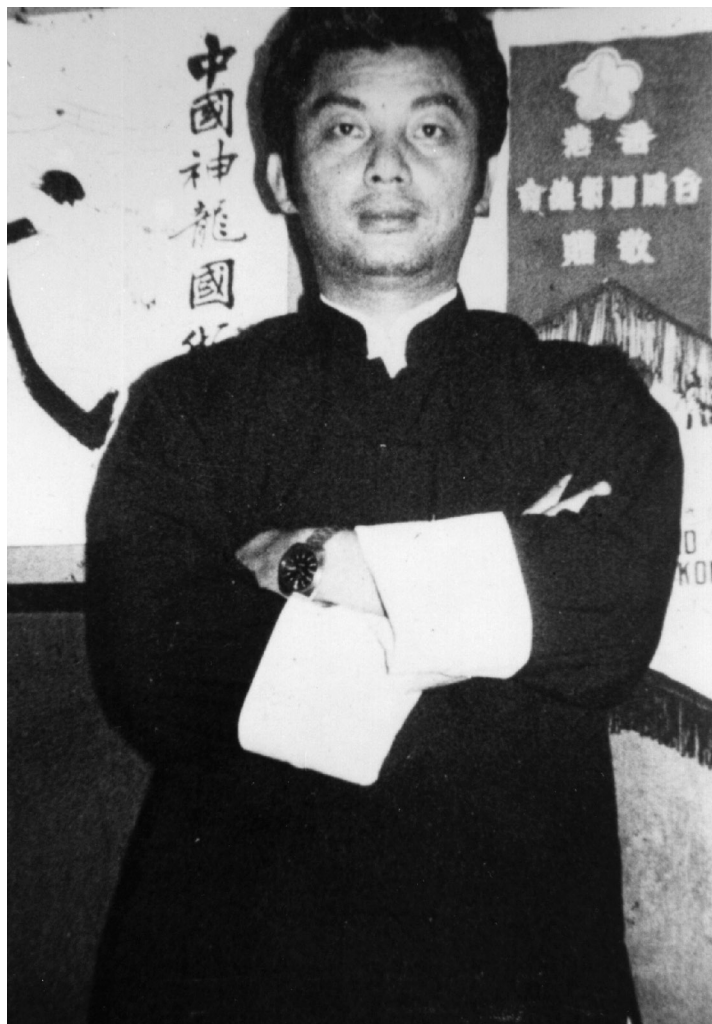
It was in June, 1968. By virtue of what I did working with Special Forces in Vietnam, Studies Observation Group, I was able to go to Taiwan with the Chinese Blackbirds. These were classified missions. On that particular occasion, we had just executed an NVA prisoner snatch behind enemy lines, a successful one I might add, and we flew down and dropped off the POW in Saigon. Then we stayed on the plane and flew to the base in Taiwan.

The hotel/safe house, that we were staying at was right down the road from Xu Hong Ji's home. I was checking out the area and seeing what kind of martial arts were around and the Chinese crew chief told me about this guy he knew who was a kung fu master. We went over and he introduced me to him. He told him that I was one of these CIA guys, which was not true, I was Special Forces and didn't work for the CIA. But as far as he knew, the Blackbirds flying out of Taiwan with the Chinese crew were working for us as our allies and it was a SOG operation. If that is what he understood, I wasn't going to tell him different, it was sensitive material and he didn't have the need to know. They automatically knew that they had a guy who was working covert operations and needed to get some special training. So that is how I met him. He was impressed with what I was doing, and I was there because anything I could learn to keep me alive when I went back to Vietnam was my number one priority. He knew that I was not there for bullshit and that I was going to use whatever I got in order to enhance my combat survivability.

First thing that happened is that he showed me what he could do - I got my ass whipped. Then he asked me what I thought of the war, martial arts, and the Communists and I said, "Hey, I get paid to kill

Commies, that is what I do for a living. I like martial arts because it helps me stay alive." Then we spent a few days talking, practicing techniques which were useful in my line of work and he also taught me Xing Yi's standing practice. Then I had to get back to Vietnam.

We reunited again in 1969. I was out of Okinawa, and I continued the standing and the breathing and the stretching and several moves that he had shown me to use for when I went in for a prisoner snatch. These techniques proved to be very effective. When you go in for a prisoner snatch, as soon as you get your hands on the enemy you got to take him down fast. That is what he showed me, and the moves worked. Up to that point in time in the Special Forces we had studied Okinawan Karate and the hand-to-hand combat that came out of World War II and Korea. It wasn't bad, but this was a lot better. So I knew that



**Xu Hong Ji at his school in Taipei, circa 1971**



**Xu Hong Ji (center) with Chin Ming Shan (left), a black belt at Hong Yi Xiang school who followed Xu when Xu broke from Hong, and Mike Bingo (right), in Taipei, 1971.**

this was the guy I wanted to train with and when I could get to Taiwan and live there full time, I was going to study with him. And that happened at the end of 1969. I got assigned to the resident team. We were the advisors to the Chinese Special Forces. So at that point in time I moved to Taiwan and studied with Xu Hong Ji full time until the later part of 1972.

**So when you first met him, you had not only had a background in martial arts, but you had just come out of the war zone, were getting ready to go back, and, as you said earlier, literally "still had blood on your hands." I would imagine that you were looking for someone who could really show you how to use martial arts to save your life.**

Oh, yea. I was very impressed with what he showed me. Everything was very practical and also there was another added dimension to his martial arts that I had heard people talk of, but I had never seen. Everyone talked about it, but no one was doing it. I wanted to find someone who was doing it and, more importantly, would teach it.

My background had been studying martial arts from Americans who had been in Japan and Korea in

the 40's and 50's and studying over there. It was good stuff, part of my training, but I kept hearing about this "mind" or "meditation" ability. Basically, your attitude has to be that when you walk through the valley of death, you fear no evil because you know you are the baddest son of a bitch in the valley. For that to be the case, you have to have a different kind of brain. Where does the mind come from? I could find a little bit of it in the "rha-rha" airborne military. But when you are out in the bush and you are the only American with an indigenous team and there are hundreds of bad guys all around the ant hill, that "rha-rha" shit don't cut it. So, what is it that you learn in the spiritual and mental context that gives you this strength and this tranquility and this peace and this ability? It wasn't coming from Karate, I'm here to tell you. That is only punch, block, kick, bang-bang, and pain, as we know. So this mental aspect is what I was looking for. By virtue of my work in Vietnam, I needed to find a martial arts teacher who had that. And that is what Xu Hong Ji had to offer.

Besides the mental aspect, he also had another thing I was looking for, which was subtle power. It is one thing to cock back and travel for thirty-eight inches and put your weight behind it and hit hard. That is

great. But when a guy puts his finger on you and all of the sudden, Pow!, your ass is on the ground, that is something different. Not having any knowledge of that, when he showed it to me, I said, hey, this is good. This is what the man had to offer and he was willing to teach it.

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***He knew that I was not there for bullshit and that I was going to use whatever I got in order to enhance my combat survivability.***

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**Were you the only foreigner at the school?**

No. One thing you have to understand, Xu Hong Ji's attitude at that time, starting in 1967-68, was that he felt if a person, no matter what race, wanted to study, then he would be the guy that would teach him, even though he was falling out of grace with the other Chinese. This is one of the reasons he fell out of grace with Hong Yi Xiang. He took that path and said, "This is what I'm going to do." When he did that, we had a large military Signal contingent in Taiwan from the Army and a big contingent from the Air Force which had been around there for quite some time, along with the Navy guys who ran the island. So there was a lot of Americans stationed right there in Taipei. Xu Hong Ji, because he liked Americans and was working on his English, made contacts and eventually got invited to teach on the various bases. That is where guys like John Price and Dale Shiganaga linked up with him. So around 67-68, he began teaching Americans.

**When you moved to Taiwan and started studying full time with him, what was the progression in how he taught you?**

The basic program of instruction at the school consisted of the Shaolin Quan (少林拳), the Shuai Jiao (摔角) moves, the Qin Na (擒拿), the basic "eight step" forms, and these kind of basic drills. Then, depending upon the individual, he would then integrate the progression in Xing Yi starting with the Wu Xing (五行 - five elements) and progress through the animals. Everyone, for the most part, was on the same program, but because I was taught on a special basis, because of the job I had, I was given special instruction. All my Chinese classmates over there knew that, "All the Americans get this training, but Bingo got that training." So I'm not reflective of

what he taught everybody. Therefore, I'm very fortunate.

For the most part, I went through the Shaolin Quan, I didn't get all of it because I already had a background. I could fight without any problem. The reason why we have the Shaolin, Shuai Jiao, and the Qin Na in Tang Shou Tao, for the most part, is to take the "rabbits" of the world and teach them how to get hurt, how to stand up, how to hit somebody and develop fighting spirit.

Once a person understands that it is not so bad to hit someone, or break their face, or to get knocked out, or whatever happens after that, you can begin to clear your mind and relax your heart so that you can then begin to study the internal arts. Up until that time you can't do it because you are scared all the time and you cannot fight. So, we had to go through that. It was good for individuals based on their nature, disposition, personality, and their background, and he would modify the training for everybody. As you moved up through the ranks, and he had a belt system - white, green, brown, and black - there were certain programs you would have had to have learned and become proficient at.

**Could you talk a little bit about why you think the step-by-step progression in training is necessary and what kind of teacher Xu Hong Ji was?**

Xu Hong Ji was a traditional Chinese teacher. People have to realize that even though he was more liberal in his expression and in giving out the information than most, his methodology of teaching was the same as most of the Chinese instructors. That is that basically, "you will crawl before you learn to walk." The closed fist forms were practiced first before the Wu Xing because there is something to be gleaned from hardening the



**Xu Hong Ji's first school in Taipei. The Chinese on the sign reads: "Chinese Spirit Dragon Tang Shou Tao School," circa 1969**



**Xu Hong Ji at his school in Taipei wearing his Japanese style uniform**

body and being a little more rigid and using the fist form techniques. He thought that was important for people to grasp and understand. Then they can understand and appreciate when the hand and the body changed.

Foundation training was important. You have to understand that Xu Hong Ji was brought up in Taiwan at the time of Japanese occupation. The Japanese had been on the island since about 1910, or so. His family was very prominent and somewhat wealthy and they learned to speak Japanese. They were the Taiwanese people who, in a sense, might have looked pro-Japanese, but they were in the middle. They learned the language and the culture because, "you have to live with the victors." Xu Hong Ji became very fluent in Japanese culture. He trained in Judo and Kendo and some of the other Japanese arts, as well as his family's Chinese arts.

At the time of Japanese occupation, the Japanese were not allowing any of the Chinese to teach their martial arts. Everything that was being taught was behind closed doors because if the Japanese found out there was a Chinese teaching martial, they would get their head cut off. Nobody practiced kung fu out in the open.

At any rate, the foundation you gathered in the

martial arts would always contribute to your pursuits as you evolved. He believed in the evolution of classes. At that time very little knowledge of the internal arts could be found in Taiwan. It wasn't until the Japanese were defeated and the Guo Min Dang guys from Mainland China came to Taiwan that some of these ideas were incorporated. At that time Xu Hong Ji saw what Zhang Jun Feng was doing and thought their might be something to it. That is when he decided to leave the solid foundation he had built in the external styles and grow from there. As the bamboo grows, it weathers all the storms. So, he taught that way.

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***He considered himself a teacher,  
he didn't want to be called  
a "master."***

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If you really wanted to learn and you worked hard, he would teach you. But if you would come there, paid the money, work a little bit, take a break, didn't sweat, and he told you something once and you did not capture what he said and go work it, you didn't learn a thing after that. It was the traditional Chinese way. He taught everything a little at a time. You can only eat a mouthful at a time. Savor that, chew it, digest it, and then you'd get the next one. People, whether they were Chinese or foreigners, if they understood the method, they would be the benefactors.

The first level of learning anything is "style/skin," or form. He taught everyone style first. If you work hard at that and begin to actualize through your efforts, and you follow the correct protocol with your teacher, you are then fortunate enough to get "muscle." "Muscle" is style with some technique added to it, so we have application. It is kind of a technical application for some usage, but it is not at a high level of refinement. If you were fortunate enough to get that level of training, that was good. The last level of training is called "bone;" this is pure application. Whoever Xu Hong Ji trained in that was only known to him and that person, plus the classmates around him at that time. This level is what I received after I paid my dues. I was also the recipient of this specialized training because it was specific to my profession.

The progression was always there, you had to do what needed to be done in order to get the training. He left it up to people. He always used to say, "I give people free." And his meaning was that "I am open." If you didn't like the way he taught, you were free to go see another teacher and see what you learn over there. He was very open, but if you took his methods lightly, you were not taking advantage of the situation. Consequently a lot of Americans who studied over there lost the opportunity. But there are some who did capture it and are now the benefactors.

The bottom line is that if Xu Hong Ji was not the kind of person that he was, no one would have

this stuff. Xing Yi would still be closely held by the Chinese or to those individuals who lived with them and subscribed to their code. People have to realize that all the foreigners were very fortunate that the transmitter, the guide, the teacher was Xu Hong Ji. He was a teacher, and that is what *Lao Shi* means. That is what we all called him. There wasn't anyone who called him *Shi Fu*. He considered himself a teacher, he didn't want to be called a "master." For Chinese that is kind of unheard of, he was a man ahead of his time. He was the transmitter for Tang Shou Tao because he was willing to teach to everyone who earned the teaching regardless of race. You have to put that in proper perspective.

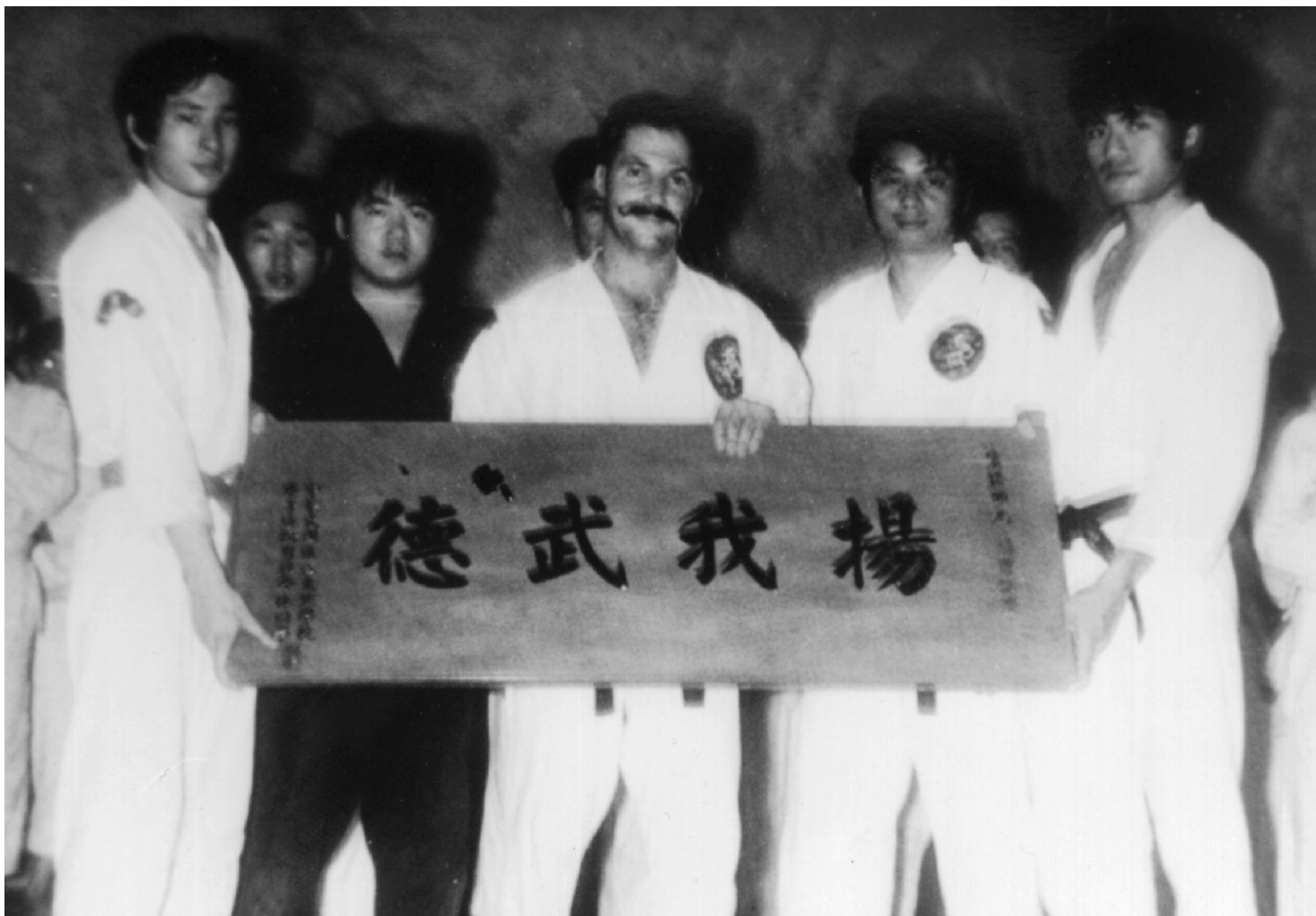
When he would come to the United States later, there were people who got too hung up on what to call him and what generation student they were and that kind of thing. He taught that the lineage-family system was important so the American students knew where they fit in. Many, however, confused his way of expressing this Chinese concept and got hung up on status, position, title, etc. He said that none of that matters, the thing that matters is the "real training." He said that everyone should forget about the title stuff and call him *Lao Shi*, and leave it at that. He said, "I

am just a teacher and so *Lao Shi* is good enough for me." The term "master" never even came up. That was one of his reasons to downplay the silliness of titles and generations that some of these people get into. To him the filiality of the family was students working together in the spirit of brotherhood. You developed a heart-to-heart connection with him and you practiced and worked hard. "Younger brother," "older brother" and these generational things were not that important.

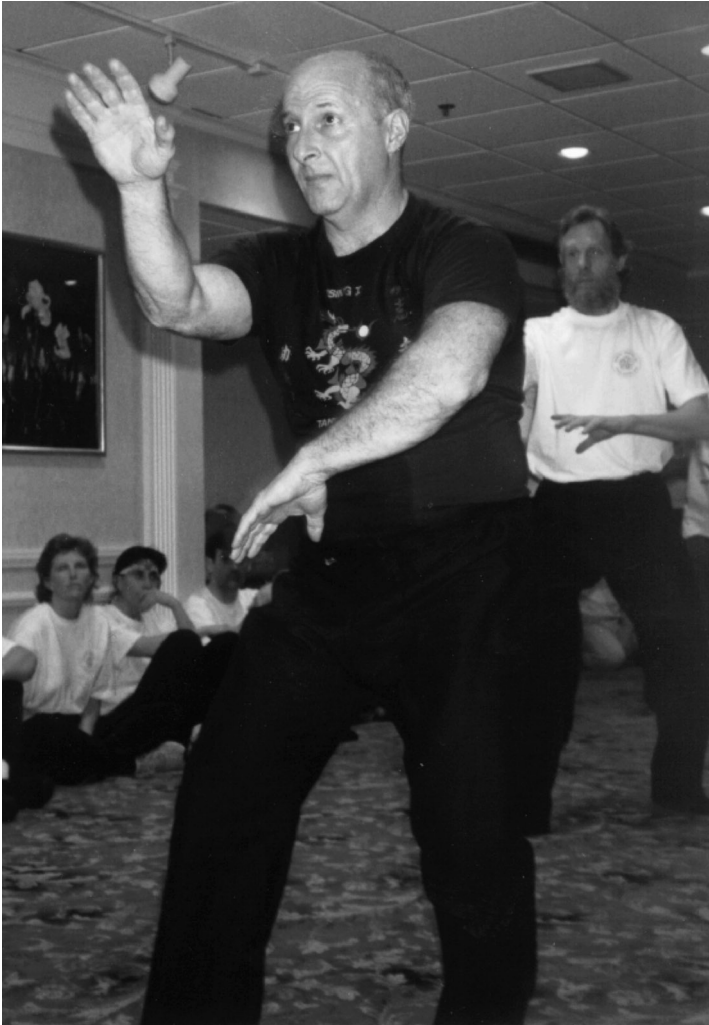
What you have to understand though is that to him, the senior students and the guys with the heart-to-heart connection and the guys that were the hard workers had a responsibility to him to be truthful and to teach, to stand up, protect the honor, kick ass and take names, and pass on the art. That was their job. The rabbits of the world who couldn't accept the responsibility were shown the door. When it is time to be the tiger, the tiger has got to come forth.

**Do you know why Xu left Hong's school to go out on his own and teach?**

Xu Hong Ji was not a fall guy, or a light weight, or someone who was on the outside trying to get in, as those from Hong's school tried to make people believe



**Mike Bingo (center) with Chin Ming Shan (to his right) and Xu Hong Ji (to his left) and other students from the Shen Long Tang Shou Tao school, circa 1971**



**Mike Bingo teaching pi quan form at the 1995 North American Tang Shou Tao instructor's conference**

after Hong and Xu had a falling out. Hong taught more traditional than most, because he knew he had something good and he was looking to have a lot of people, but he was very judicious in giving out instruction to people. He showed something one time. If you were not paying attention, didn't pick it up the first time, or you turned the other way for a second, you missed it. It wasn't shown again. Hence a lot of people from Hong's school took a long time to pick up anything.

When Xu Hong Ji was at Hong's school, by his nature, he became as sly as a fox. At the end, before the split, he was Hong's most senior student. Learning from Hong through those years he would always take care of the old man. Hong felt that he had a really good student that was always there for him. He'd get him food, he'd clean up, he'd open the door, everything. The reason he did that was that he was always watching Hong. Whatever Hong did, he saw. He knew he had to eat shit in order to learn something because he knew it was the only way Hong would reveal himself. It was through accidents. By virtue of doing that, of always being there, he acquired Hong's knowledge. He used to say that the skill of kung fu was in catching something the first time, without missing a lick. That is what

makes your kung fu good. If you don't have that quality, your kung fu will never be complete. There are too many things that only happen once.

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***Number one, you have to have a teacher who is willing to teach. Number two, you have to be willing to work hard and practice. And the last thing is that you have to be smart, you have to be a fox.***

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After he got all he thought he would get from Hong, he confronted Hong with the idea of being open and teaching the Japanese and Americans, and Hong said, "No this is strictly Chinese, and that is it." So then they parted. He got a bad rap out of the Hong crowd because he had the courage to do his own thing. He would say, "If a person wants to do something special, they have to get off the beaten path, or make their own path." And that is what he had to do with Hong. Someone had to break the mold and do it their own way.

Xu Hong Ji said that there were three prerequisites before you can learn kung fu. Number one, you have to have a teacher who is willing to teach. Number two, you have to be willing to work hard and practice. There is no magic pill, there are no secrets, you don't read it from a book. That is why there was no literature at the school to trouble your mind with someone else's ideas and verbiage. If you do not practice, you will never get it. And the last thing is that you have to be smart, you have to be a fox.

Xu Hong Ji was truly a teacher. A lot of Chinese teachers get up there and exercise themselves and the students follow them. That ain't teaching shit. Or you got the other guy who sits up there on his throne and eyeballs everybody and has a couple of assistants out there and they teach. He barks out a few corrections from his throne and everyone brings him money and pays homage and he is taking the money to the bank. He is not truly teaching. Somewhere between those two right and left limits, a true teacher of Chinese martial arts is in the middle. That is where Xu Hong Ji was.

**When did Xu Hong Ji split from Hong's school and start teaching on his own?**

I don't know exactly. It had to have been in the mid-sixties. I would say as early as 1966 and possibly as late as early 1968. I don't know. When he split he brought a couple of Hong Yi Xiang's other black belts with him, Chin Ming Shan and Li Ching Xiang (also known as "Black Snake" to the Americans). There may have been a couple other guys too.

After he left Hong, he was on the shitlist of a lot of people, but the old guys around Taiwan who really

had a lot of good kung fu would still teach him. I remember being in class and he would have to leave to meet some old guy in the park who was going to show him something. He did that to keep learning from these old guys before they died. He learned a lot of his medicine this way. Once he learned it, he felt like he had the obligation to pass it on. He thought of himself as just a conduit. He said he had to keep learning so he could teach us more.

He used to tell us that you could be a fighter and a champion and reach the top, but once you get there, there is no where else to go but down. But if you are a teacher, you are forced to learn, to pay attention, to think, to research. As you do that, you get better and you grow. He said that when you are a true teacher, you are always seeking the knowledge and pursuing the way.

Xu Hong Ji was unique in that he wanted to train all of his students to be better than he was. Where other people were trying to tear individuals down to keep them under their thumb and below them, Xu tried to build people up. He said that if his students teach and go out and look good, then they look good and he looked better, because he was their teacher. From common knowledge of oriental culture, you would recognize that this guy was different.

**Did you study any Ba Gua when you were at the school other than that which is incorporated in the**

**eight step sets such as Ba Shou?**

Technically, no, as far as the specific Ba Gua sets. There were a couple of reasons for that. One was that Xu Hong Ji told me that Xing Yi was for me. He was my teacher, so I did what he said - empty my cup. A good Chinese teacher evaluates the individual and there are various factors to evaluate. There is the physical factor, the mind set, the personality, the experience, the background, the orientation, and all of these things. He said that I should learn the Xing Yi to do what I needed to do, and I did what he told me to do. So he didn't teach me the Ba Gua forms as Ba Gua forms.

But the Ba Gua was in the Xing Yi, especially when you look at the variations he taught in the animal forms. After watching the group here today practicing the Gao style straight-line Ba Gua sets, I could see many of the movements which Xu Hong Ji taught me as variations on the 12 animal styles. So while I did not formally learn the Ba Gua, I think that the concepts had been adapted into the Xing Yi.

**When did he first start traveling to teach in the United States?**

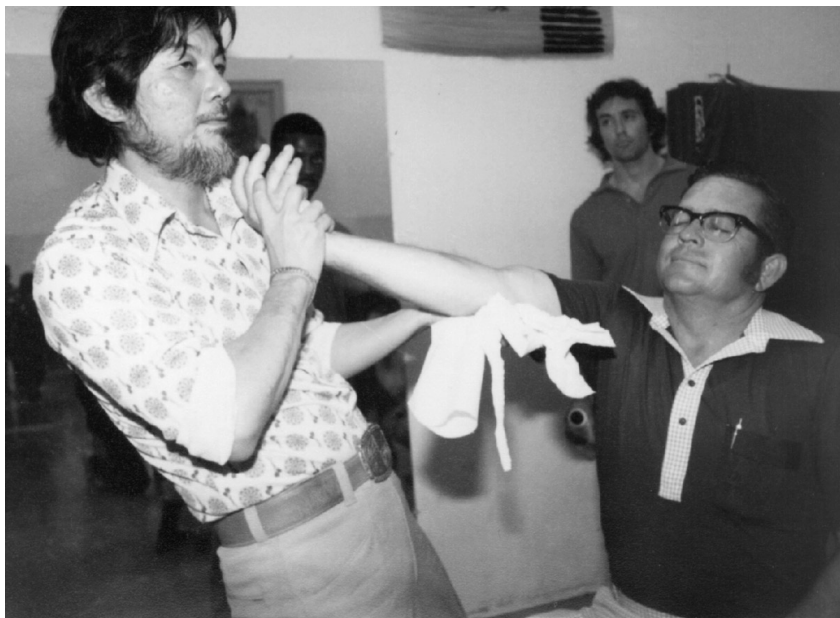
Around 1972 John Price had been gone about a year or so and he started writing back and asking Xu Hong Ji to come visit California because he was starting to teach. Xu responded and said that he couldn't go



**David Nicoletti, Vince Black, Mike Bingo, and Tom Bisio (left to right), all students of Xu Hong Ji, posed together at the 1995 North American Tang Shou Tao instructor's conference**

because he had a lot going on there in Taiwan. He was working to develop his credibility at the time and the covey of top students he had were gaining a reputation for being about to "kick ass and take names." He couldn't just take off.

I think that in 1974 or 1975 he was able to take his first trip. That was primarily to go to Price's location and bolster him. He wanted to see what he could do to get something rooted in the States. After Vietnam, I had returned to Colorado, but by the time Xu Hong Ji first came to the United States I was back on active duty again and back in that submersed world. He had to rely on the others that were over there. Shiganaga was in the Air Force and he had left Taiwan. So looking for outposts in the United States, he went to Price's school. The probability at that juncture was that this could go, I mean, Xing Yi could grow outside



**Xu Hong Ji teaches his skill at Chinese bone setting at Vince Black's school in Yuma, Arizona. All of Xu's students were required to study Chinese bonesetting and manipulation.**

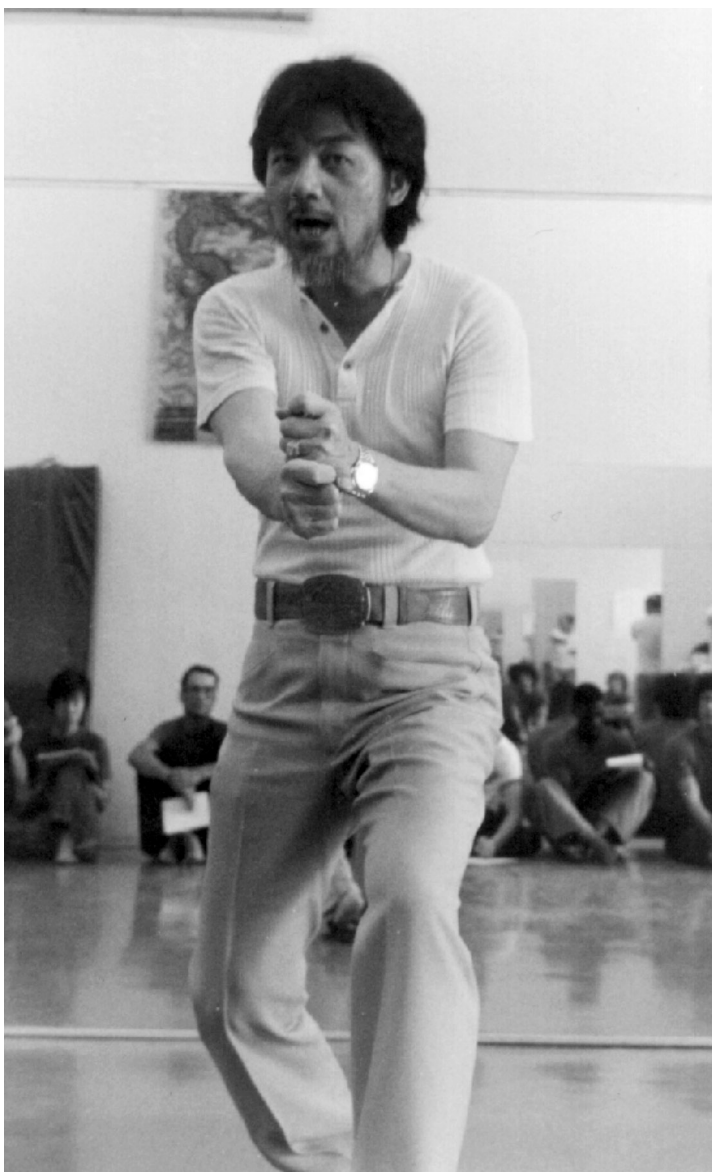
of Taiwan, He wanted the school to grow up, and be many. So he began to set up schools in Japan, Hong Kong, and the United States.

Xu Hong Ji came to the United States, predominantly the West coast, on a number of occasions to teach here, but he was never going to immigrate here and never spent a lot of time here. There may be a thought or conception out there among the Americans, because of what has been said by those that did not know him, the prejudice from Hong's school, or simply because of the fact that he was not well known here, that Xu Hong Ji's name doesn't stand in high eyes. If that perception is out there, I would want to dissuade anyone from even thinking about that. If there is a populace out there, be they from the United States, Canada, or Red China, that thinks for a moment that Xu Hong Ji was any less than a superlative teacher and master of his art, they are definitely wrong!

**Now that you are ready to retire from the military, what are your plans?**

I'm going to set up a Tang Shou Tao Kwoon in Denver and pass on what I was taught and take an active role in bringing together those of us who had the opportunity to study with Xu Hong Ji. I would like to say that for all of the other folks that studied with him through the years, whoever they are, that times are changing and it is time to pursue Xu Hong Ji's dream that the American students get their butts together and get on line and start putting together the teaching and passing it on to worthy and willing students who are out there and ready to learn. We owe him that!

Mike Bingo can be reached at (303) 680-0592.



**Xu Hong Ji demonstrates Xing Yi's Beng Quan (Smashing Fist) during a visit to the United States**



# Ten Years in Asia: Tim Cartmell's Martial Arts Journey

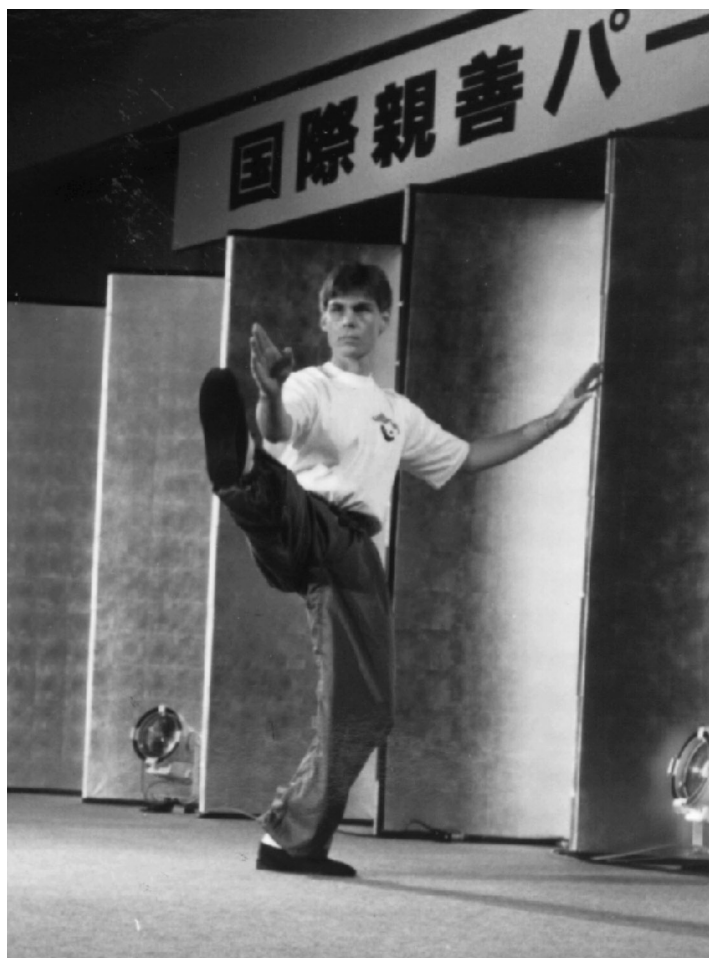
Tim Cartmell has lived what, for many of us, would be the martial artist's dream. Starting at a young age, Tim had the opportunity to study one of the most practical styles of Chinese martial arts for street fighting ever taught in this country, Kung Fu San Soo. After twelve years of intense study in this art, Tim moved to Taiwan and spent another ten years refining his skill in the internal martial arts. During his time in Taiwan Tim had the opportunity to study Xing Yi, Ba Gua, Tai Ji, and Yi Quan with some of the most highly skilled instructors Taiwan and mainland China had to offer.

Those that have met Tim know that he is not a martial arts hobbyist, he is a martial arts enthusiast to the highest degree. He will talk, share, demonstrate and compare martial arts with anyone, no matter what style, what background, or what their experience might be. Although his background is extensive, he does not have the martial arts prejudice or ego that many who train in China tend to develop. He loves to explore what every style and every system has to offer and his keen sense of practicality in martial arts sees the virtue in all styles and training methods that work effectively in the combat scenario.

Tim's depth of knowledge and skill, good nature, openness, fighting experience and ability, and his skill at explaining the principles of martial arts to students, make him one of the most talented martial arts teachers in this country. In late 1994, Tim moved back to the United States with his wife, Gu Feng Mei, after spending just over ten years practicing and teaching in Taiwan. He now lives and teaches in Westminister, California. This interview was conducted in Pacific Grove, CA, February, 1995.

## How did you get started in martial arts?

When I was young, I can't remember where I first heard of martial arts, but I always wanted to study, so when I was eight years old I started asking and about the time I was eleven my parents finally took me to a Tae Kwon Do school and I practiced Tae Kwon Do and Hapkido for less than one year. I liked it, but it seemed a little simplistic and repetitive. It was about that time that the Kung Fu series came on TV. I became interested in this and so I started looking for Kung Fu schools. I started practicing at a Kung Fu San Soo School. I studied at that school for a couple of years. I enjoyed the San Soo because it was a very practical, street fight oriented Kung Fu. About two years after that, one of the teacher's at that school, Ted Sias, left and opened his own school. Ted's kung fu was first rate. He was my first instructor and an excellent teacher so I followed him when he opened his own



**Tim Cartmell demonstrating Tai Ji Quan in  
Tokyo, Japan, 1990**

school. I subsequently studied with Ted for about twelve years. The last three years I also studied in the instructor's class with Jimmy Woo. So I stayed with San Soo from the time I was 12 until I went to the orient when I was about 23.

## What can you tell us about San Soo in general?

I was looking for a style of martial arts which was street self-defense oriented. At the time I noticed that in a lot of styles, especially the Chinese styles, people did a lot of forms and exercises and prearranged drills, but when it came down to it, they didn't have much practical fighting ability. That kind of thing didn't interest me. I found San Soo to be a very practical style and the method of training was 100% geared towards street combat effectiveness. That appealed to me and that is why I stayed with it. Jimmy Woo produced a large number of very proficient fighters, so that was



**Ted Sias, Jimmy H. Woo, and Tim Cartmell (left to right), 1984. Jimmy Woo was the instructor who brought San Soo to the United States. Ted Sias was Tim Cartmell's San Soo instructor.**

my attraction.

Over the years I had worked out with people from other styles and I've tried to absorb some things, but I stuck with San Soo until I got my 8th degree black belt in 1983.

**Because Jimmy Woo did not like to be in the public eye and he only taught in Southern California, many of the readers may not have heard of Kung Fu San Soo. Can you give us a brief history of the style?**

Kung Fu San Soo is a Southern Chinese combat art that was introduced to the United States by Jimmy H. Woo. "San Soo" (散手 - San Shou in Mandarin) refers to the "free fighting" or combat efficient orientation of the art. The full name of the traditional style is Choy Lay Ho Fut Hung in Cantonese, or Cai Li He Fuo Xiong (蔡李何佛雄) in Mandarin. The first three characters, Cai Li He, are names of three families which contributed major categories of theory and technique to the style. The "Fut" or "Fuo" refers to Buddhism (the art was practiced in the Guan Yin, or "Goddess of Mercy" monastery in China), and the Xiong refers to a family from which the art incorporated its power exercises. San Soo includes a very broad base of techniques, including all manner of strikes and kicks, leverages, throws and ground techniques.

Jimmy H. Woo (this is a name he adopted when he came to the United States, his Chinese name was Chin Siu Dek in Cantonese or Chen Shou Jue (陳壽爵

), in Mandarin) is the fifth generation inheritor of the style, having trained with his great-uncle from early childhood. Jimmy Woo's great-great-great-grandfather was a monk in the above mentioned Guan Yin monastery. After mastering the Choy Lay Ho Fut Hung methods of combat, he left the order and returned to teach the art to his family. The art was passed down from generation to generation and finally to Jimmy, who brought the style to the United States as a young man. Jimmy Woo was one of the first Chinese teachers to begin openly teaching martial arts to non-Chinese and has taught thousands of students over his lifetime. Jimmy Woo passed away in 1991.

**When did you go to Taiwan?**

Since I was in High School I had wanted to go to China somewhere and study. I had read a lot of books about martial arts and had become interested in the so-called "internal" styles. When I graduated from college I wanted to go to the orient and study some internal style martial art. It was hard to find a teacher locally, so I thought I'd go straight to the source in China. I wanted to go to the orient and so I applied to the National Chinese Normal University in the Chinese Language program and got accepted, so I decided to go to Taiwan to study Chinese and find a martial arts teacher. Just before I left, a friend of mine introduced me to one of Xu Hong Ji's students and I got a letter of introduction to meet Xu Hong Ji (許鴻基). I had heard

of Xu Hong Ji and had read articles about him, so I was excited to travel to Taiwan and study with him.

When I got to Taiwan, I went directly to Xu Hong Ji to ask him to teach me. By that time Xu had retired and said he was no longer accepting students. I was persistent and after a couple of weeks he told me I could follow him up the mountain where he went to exercise. For several weeks after that I would just follow him as he went up the mountain and sit all day while he talked with his friends. After several weeks of that he decided that I was sincere so he had me train with a friend of his, Mr. Fan. Mr. Fan taught me Shaolin Qi Gong. I woke up early every morning, climbed the mountain, and studied *qi gong* with Mr. Fan. In the meantime, Xu Hong Ji had gone to Japan to teach Xing Yi and when he came back he started actually instructing me in Xing Yi Quan.

After Xu started teaching me, I continued to climb the mountain every morning and practice *qi gong*. For the first two months all I did was practice *pi quan* (劈拳 - splitting fist) with Xu. That's all I did for hours. After a few months of *pi quan*, Xu started teaching me the rest of the elements and shortly after that Xu passed away.

After Xu Hong Ji passed away, I started studying with his son, Xu Zhen Wang (許振旺). I stayed with him for about another three years. He taught me privately for the first year and after that he reopened his father's school so that I would get experience teaching. He also taught classes at several of the Universities. The university students would come and I would help Xu Zhen Wang lead classes and teach students. I eventually got my black belt in the Tang Shou Tao system of Xing Yi from Xu Hong Ji's son, Xu Zhen Wang.

### **After studying San Soo for so many years, what was it that attracted you to the internal arts?**

San Soo is an excellent combat oriented style, but I was hearing stories about "*qi*" (氣) and other kinds of "internal power" and that interested me. I studied a lot of "external" and I wanted to see what that "internal" was like. I could see the eventual limitations of something that was more externally oriented as you got older. I wanted to understand more about the internal and one of the things that attracted me to Xu Hong Ji's school when I learned about it was that they were very combat oriented. A lot of the people I ran across that taught the internal, especially Tai Ji Quan, did a lot of form, *qi gong*, breathing, and pushing hands, but when it came to actual fighting, they weren't very proficient. In the Tang Shou Tao schools, there was a great emphasis on practical combat ability. The students at these schools were all very proficient fighters. I was very happy that the Tang Shou Tao school emphasized practicality in martial arts. Although the Xing Yi was quite a bit different than the San Soo, it was based on the same principles I was looking for in studying a combat efficient martial art.

### **After you left the Tang Shou Tao school, where did you go to study?**

Next I studied with a teacher named Chen Zuo Zhen (陳佐鎮). I met him through his senior student, Tom Harbough, who had been in Taiwan many years and lived in the same place that I did. Chen Zuo Zhen grew up in the central part of Taiwan and was an inner door disciple of a very famous White Crane teacher who invented his own branch of the White Crane called *Xu Xi Dao*, a combination of the Southern crane and Tai Ji Quan. Later on, when Chen moved to Taipei, he studied Xing Yi Quan with Cao Lian Fang (曹連舫), a famous Xing Yi teacher from Shanghai. He studied with Cao Lian Fang for 15 years and was one of his two main students. He practiced Xing Yi and Yang style Tai Ji. The Yang style Tai Ji came directly from the Yang family. Cao Lian Fang had studied with one of the Yang family members before he left the mainland. The Xing Yi was from Cao Lian Fang's teacher Jin Yun Ting (靳雲亭), who was one of Shang Yun Xiang's (尚雲祥) top students (see *Pa Kua Chang Journal*, Vol.



**Xu Hong Ji was Tim Cartmell's first teacher after he moved to Taiwan in 1984**



**Tim Cartmell studied White Crane and medium frame Yang Style Tai Ji Quan with Chen Zuo Zhen, shown above in Taipei**

4, No. 3, pg. 8). Shang Yun Xiang was Li Cun Yi's top Xing Yi student.

I studied White Crane and Yang style Tai Ji with Chen Zuo Zhen for about five years. His teaching was also very combat oriented. His Yang style Tai Ji was the medium frame, pre Yang Cheng Fu (楊澄甫) style of Yang Tai Ji. I learned the Yang form, various two-person exercises, and *fa jing* (發勁) exercises, these exercises were lacking with a lot of the other Tai Ji practitioners that I had come across. I studied with Chen for about five years.

#### **After studying with Chen, where do you go?**

After studying with Chen Zuo Zhen, I went to study with another Tai Ji teacher named Lin Ah Long (林阿龍). Lin is the best Tai Ji Quan fighter that I have ever met. The only thing he had ever studied was Tai Ji. A lot of people I met that did Tai Ji and knew how to fight had also done other things as well. Lin Ah Long had only practiced Tai Ji and had started that when he was in his teens. He was very soft and very relaxed. He changed a lot of my ideas about how to generate power and opened my eyes to the power of the "soft" martial arts. I studied with him for two years. He did a short version of the Yang form and a small frame version of the Chen form as well as some *qi gong*. His martial arts instruction was also very practically oriented.

Lin Ah Long was dead set against using set techniques so, besides the form, we practiced basic *fa jing* exercises and various kinds of push-hands, always with the underlying principles of softness and non-opposition of force. While I was with him, we went to Japan to a big health fair and demonstrated the Tai Ji form and various fighting applications.

#### **And then where did you go?**

After studying with Lin Ah Long, I met a man surnamed Xu. I was interested in studying with him because I wanted to learn more of the Chen style of Tai Ji. Xu was an older gentleman who had been a colonel in the Guo Min Dang Army. Near the end of the war he was in Hong Kong and through his connections had met a spy there who was a Chen from the Chen village. My teacher learned the old frame and *Pao Chui* (炮錘) forms of the Chen style from him. I studied with him for a year.

Next I went and studied with a teacher named Gao Liu De (高留德) who was very good friends with my Tai Ji teacher Lin Ah Long. Gao practiced all the internal styles, but his main style was Yi Quan. When he was young he'd gone to Hong Kong and studied Yi Quan with one of Wang Xiang Zhai's (王鄉齋) top students, Han Xing Heng, for seven years. He was also a big influence on my ideas about martial arts. Like Lin Ah Long, he was also extremely soft, but had incredible power. He was a minimalist in his martial arts. He talked a lot about simplicity in training and simplicity in movements. He was one of the few internal martial



**Tim is shown here with another of his Yang Style Tai Ji teachers, Lin Ah Long**

artists that I had met who had been in many knock-down drag-out street fights and every time he had knocked his opponent unconscious at first contact. He didn't teach publicly at the time, but because he was good friends with my Tai Ji teacher, I had the opportunity to study a little bit of Xing Yi in addition to the Yi Quan system with him.

After that, I was ready to go back to the states, but I was very interested in studying Ba gua. I had studied for a short period with a teacher who was primarily a Xing Yi teacher and I had learned some of Gong Bao Tian's (宮寶田) circle walking forms. I practiced with him for about a year, but he didn't have the complete system and all we did were forms, so I really didn't pursue that.

I looked around and went to visit Zhang Jun Feng's (張峻峰) wife, Xu Bao Mei (徐抱妹). I talked to her about teaching me Ba Gua, but she said she was retired from teaching. I visited her several times and brought gifts, but she just wouldn't teach. So I had to give up hope of studying with her.

Not long after that, a friend of mine, Marc Brinkman, called me and said he had a good Ba Gua teacher who was starting to open up a small class and he invited me to come. I went and met Luo De Xiu (羅德修). His Ba Gua was excellent and he was an open and enthusiastic teacher, so I started to study with him and stayed with him for almost five years. The last five years I was in Taiwan I primarily studied with him.

During that time I also made several trips to mainland China. I had been there twice on my own and met a few teachers. In 1992 I met Dan Miller in Taiwan and went to the mainland with him to act as an interpreter and I was able to make a lot of connections through working with Dan. Subsequent to our trips together I made two trips on my own specifically to study martial arts with some of the teachers I had met. I studied some Xing Yi with Liang Ke Quan (梁克權) in Beijing and I made a special trip to study Ba Gua with Sun Lu Tang's (孫祿堂) daughter, Sun Jian Yun (孫劍雲). I also studied Sun style Tai Ji with Sun Lu Tang's grandson, Sun Bao An (孫保安). That last trip occurred right before I moved back to the states.

**So, from the Kung Fu San Soo had did your ideas about practicing and studying martial arts change after you went to Taiwan?**

One of the most important concepts in San Soo is the element of surprise. This means that when you are confronted on the street, the opponent does not know that you know anything about martial arts. When the opponent moves, you quickly attack or counter-attack. San Soo has no sparring, San Soo practitioners don't go to tournaments, there is no sportive aspect whatsoever. When I went to the orient, I would often be challenged by other people who knew I was a martial artist and so they were "hands up" fights. You knew the opponent was a martial artist and he knew you were a martial artist and you both started with your hands up when



**Gao Liu De, shown above, taught Tim Wang Xiang Zhai's Yi Quan method and Xing Yi Quan**

fighting. San Soo does not have many hand trapping drills or things of that nature and the internal martial arts did. That was one major difference. When we fought, there was no element of surprise. Those experiences gave me a little more well rounded martial education.

Also, San Soo has a little bit broader base of technique. San Soo has a great number of fighting methods, including ground techniques and sacrifice throws, that most of the internal style don't have. Also San Soo had a lot of striking combinations whereas the internal styles were based more on the concept of finishing the encounter with one explosive movement. In other words, you trained the internal style with the idea that you didn't really issue your power until you got the advantageous angle and you knew that your strike was going to be 100% effective. There is a little bit different orientation there.



**Tim Cartmell with his Ba Gua teacher, Luo De Xiu, in Taipei, 1992**

Also, body mechanic wise, San Soo uses mainly a rotational energy and the blows are often circular in nature. However, for example, Xing Yi strikes are closer to the body and strike straight out, with a "shocking" kind of energy. That gave me a different perspective on the ways one can generate power.

In training, in San Soo you spend the greatest portion of your time practicing techniques with a partner. There are forms and solo training exercises, but they are not emphasized nearly as much as the partner work. In the internal arts, you spend a great amount of your time practicing on your own. There was a much greater variety of basic solo exercises, basic solo drills and forms practice. The forms practice is where all the power and technical ability comes from. Also, San Soo does not have any kind of two-person push hands drills. The techniques are based as closely as possible on a real fighting scenario. The internal has a lot of intermediate steps such as push-hands and other sensitivity drills. Those were new to me when I first started studying the internal arts.

**How about sharing some of your ideas about how power is generated in striking?**

One thing that I noticed while studying San Soo was in watching Jimmy Woo, I saw that he was very relaxed and moved very naturally, but there was not much talk about how he generated his power. When I learned the internal my teachers went into much greater detail about the actual mechanics of body alignment and relaxation. As I progressed and met

different teachers and got different ideas, I came to understand more and more about being able to generate power without effort and not opposing force with force. I think the keys are relaxation, correct anatomical alignment and using your mind to lead the movement of your body.

**You said that when you first went to Taiwan you wanted to discover something about "internal power" and "qi." What were your ideas about it before you went, and what did you discover after studying with your teachers there?**

In San Soo, there is no mention of concepts such as "qi" or "internal power," or "energy." It is pretty much about body mechanics and alignment used in hitting someone. There is no mention of anything "esoteric" or "mysterious." I had read a lot of books. I very much enjoyed Robert Smith's books when I was young and I had read books by other authors. I really had no opinion one way or the other before I went to Taiwan, I was just curious. I knew that you could learn to fight without any concept of qi because I had learned to fight with San Soo and the word was never mentioned. But, I was wondering what there really was to all these ideas and concepts of "qi" and "jing" and all of these different kinds of energies.

I was very open minded when I went and interestingly enough, I discovered that my teachers very rarely, or never, mentioned anything about "qi" when we trained. If someone would asked a question about "qi" they would say, "Yea, well, qi is an energy in the body and it flows through the meridians," or something like that. But they never talked about it in training. In fact, my first Tai Ji teacher, Chen Zuo Zhen, never mentioned the word "qi" the first three years I was with him. I finally asked him, "What about qi?" And his response



**Tim Cartmell demonstrates his "fa jing" ability in Taiwan, 1991**

was that, "It is a natural occurrence in the body and the more you think about it, or try to control it, the worse off you'll be. Thinking about it will only hinder your progress." In all the years I studied with him, that is all he ever said about it.

Excluding Chinese medicine and *qi gong*, as far as the martial arts are concerned, what I found from my 10 years of study in China is that there is an inverse relationship between the amount teachers talked about *qi* and mysterious concepts, and their ability to fight. Meaning that the instructors that I found who had the most martial ability and were the most proficient in their martial art talked about *qi* the least. I found that the people who were talking about *qi* and mysterious concepts were usually not very good at the martial arts.

**I know that you did well in some of the full contact tournaments that you participated in when you lived in Taiwan. How did you come to enter those events and what was the experience like?**

Like I said previously, San Soo fighters don't enter tournaments and they don't do anything that could be considered "sportive." In Taiwan there are a lot of full contact tournaments and they were different from most of those you find in the United States in that you wear the minimum of protective gear and there are very few rules.

After I had been studying Xing Yi for about one year, my teacher, Xu Zhen Wang, entered me in an All Taiwan full contact tournament. I had never fought in a tournament before and I won the spirit award for fighting hard, but I came in about fourth place. I lost to another Xing Yi fighter. I was disappointed that I lost, but it was a good experience for me. It was a lot different from a street fight and so you needed a different concept of how to fight in order to win these tournaments. The only rules were no finger attacks to the eyes, and once the opponent was on the ground, you had to stop, you couldn't follow up on them. But other than that it was pretty much anything goes.

About six months later they were having another All-Taiwan tournament and I wanted to enter that one and try again. For about a month before the tournament I practiced specifically for competition. When I went in the tournament I was about 150 pounds and a middleweight. But at this tournament the middle and heavyweight divisions were both small. So they took some people from the middle weight division and moved them into the light-middleweight division and they put me in the heavyweight division. I went into the tournament as a heavyweight at 150 pounds. I managed to win that tournament and came through without any injury.

The next year my Xing Yi teacher entered me in a much larger international invitational tournament. I represented the United States and won the middleweight division. After that I stopped fighting in the tournaments but went back several times as a referee.

In our Tang Shou Tao school, we only practiced



**Tim Cartmell demonstrating Kung Fu San Soo, 1983**

"tournament techniques" for a few weeks before the tournament took place because my teacher felt, and I think rightly so, that you could either be a martial artist and train for combat street fighting, or you could be a tournament fighter. You really can't do both all of the time. So we were not allowed to train for sport tournaments for very long, only a few weeks right before the tournament came up. I think this is a point that people should remember. You can really only train for combat or for sport. It is difficult to train for both at the same time as they require different strategies and techniques.

**What was the sequence of training in Tang Shou Tao?**

When I first started with Xu Hong Ji, he was kind of testing my sincerity, so I just had to follow him and study the *qi gong* with his friend. When he actually started teaching me, the first thing he taught me was how to stand in a basic standing posture (*San Ti Shi* - 三體式) and he taught me how to breath. Next he taught me *pi quan*. I did that for several hours a day, everyday, for a few months before I started the other elements. After several months of *pi quan*, I learned



**Tim Cartmell demonstrating an application of Tai Ji's "roll-back" in Taipei, 1991**

the other elements more rapidly, one every two or three weeks. Then he started showing me basic applications and different ways to strike.

From there I learned the combined forms and the twelve animals forms from Xu Hong Ji's son. I had been with him about two years and had learned all of the traditional Xing Yi sets. Then Xu Zhen Wang wanted me to have more experience with other people and experience at teaching so he opened the class again at his father's old school. A lot of his college students came to classes there and I was the senior student.

When he opened the school he went back and taught me all of the Tang Shou Tao basic forms, the eight step forms and other Shaolin style sets from the Tang Shou Tao system so that I could teach them to the younger students.

**What do you think is the value of those basic forms for beginning students?**

Because I had had over twelve years experience in martial arts doing Kung Fu San Soo and had a foundation in fighting, I started with the traditional Xing Yi sets. But I think that for people who are not physically in good shape or haven't done a lot of athletics or people with no martial background, that these sets are very good. They train the basic body mechanics, improve the physical condition, the basics of how to apply power, fundamental footwork, and all of those things that are important to martial arts. Although Xing Yi looks very simple, there are a lot of subtleties and deep concepts in the art.

**Later when you started studying the Ba Gua with Luo De Xiu, did you notice a lot of similarities in the straight line Ba Gua from the Gao style and the basic sets that you learned from Xu Zhen Wang?**

Yea, a lot of the "eight step" sets from the Tang Shou Tao system are a combination of Xing Yi and Gao style straight line Ba Gua forms. Since I had learned the eight steps sets in Tang Shou Tao, when I began to learn the linear Ba Gua I was already familiar with many of the movements. We did them a little differently, but the basic body mechanics were there.

**After studying from all of the Xing Yi and Tai Ji teachers you had been with, what was it that attracted you to studying Ba Gua with Luo De Xiu?**

For one thing, Luo had a complete system of Ba Gua. He had studied with Hong Yi Xiang (洪懿祥) and Hong Yi Mian (洪懿綿) and a man named Liu Qian (劉騫) in Gaosheng who was a student of Sun Xi Kun (孫錫堃). He had spent many years organizing and perfecting his Ba Gua and had a complete system. That was the first thing that impressed me because it was not common, even in Taiwan, for someone to have a complete Ba Gua method. There are some other teachers who do have whole systems of Ba Gua, but besides having a complete system, Luo was also a very proficient fighter, an open teacher and a fine gentleman. It doesn't matter how well someone can fight, if they won't teach, it doesn't do the student any good.

Luo had all of the qualities I was looking for in a teacher. He had a whole system, he was good at it, and he was willing to teach it. All of those things combined made me decide to stay in Taiwan longer than I had originally intended and study Ba Gua with Luo, and I consider myself very fortunate to have had such an opportunity.

**When you went to the mainland, what was it that attracted you to the study the Sun style of Ba Gua and Tai Ji?**

I had read all of Sun Lu Tang's books in Chinese and I was very impressed with his depth of knowledge and I had heard a lot of stories about him and talked to a number of people who knew him, including his daughter. He impressed me because he was one of the top martial artists of his time. A lot of the famous fighters that you hear about were large and strong men, Sun, however, was quite small in stature but still able to compete with the best. Because the basic principles which I adhere to in martial arts are along the lines of generating natural power without effort and not using force against force, I was interested in Sun Lu Tang. I think that because of his size, everything he did was, by necessity, in line with similar principles. So I was very interested in studying his martial arts.



After I met and talked with Sun Jian Yun (Sun Lu Tang's daughter), I was also very impressed with her level of skill and knowledge of martial arts. I wanted to specifically study his Ba Gua and his Tai Ji. I had studied with her briefly a couple of times during previous trips with Dan Miller. Later, I made a special trip to spend a period of time in the mainland to study just with her and Sun Lu Tang's grandson, Sun Bao An, and learn the whole systems of Ba Gua and Tai Ji.

**What are some of the things you found out about his Ba Gua style?**

Sun's Ba Gua is very simple, but all the essentials are there. I've heard that originally Dong Hai Chuan (董海川) only taught about three palm changes and his martial art was relatively simple. Over the years as teachers inherited the art they added to it and brought in different things from other styles. What Sun did was to reduce the forms to their minimum bare essentials so that all of the different energies and body mechanics and motions and ways of developing *jing* are included, but the movements are very simple so that it is easy for you to pay attention to what is important rather than having to worry about complicated routines of motion. That attracted me, things that were both simple to learn and complete in principle.

**When you went to learn the Sun style you say it was attractive to you in its simplicity, however, you also had over twenty years of martial arts experience. Do you think you could have gotten as much out of its simplicity without having the background you had?**

No. But then again, because of my background, they didn't teach me all of the basics that they usually teach beginners. They had me demonstrate my Ba Gua, Xing Yi, and Tai Ji and saw that I had experience and so they just taught me the forms and we went right into the heart of the training. If I had been a beginner, I would have had to spend more time on basics and learned the forms more slowly.

I don't think it is necessary to practice a multitude of forms and movements in order to become a proficient fighter. If you are just a beginner, with no background whatsoever, and you only learn the forms, if you practice them correctly and you have a very good teacher it will be enough for you to develop martial ability, but only if the teacher teaches you how to use the movements in great detail. Otherwise

you are just walking through a bunch of forms.

**Didn't you tell me earlier that that is exactly what Sun Lu Tang had done with his "inner door" students?**

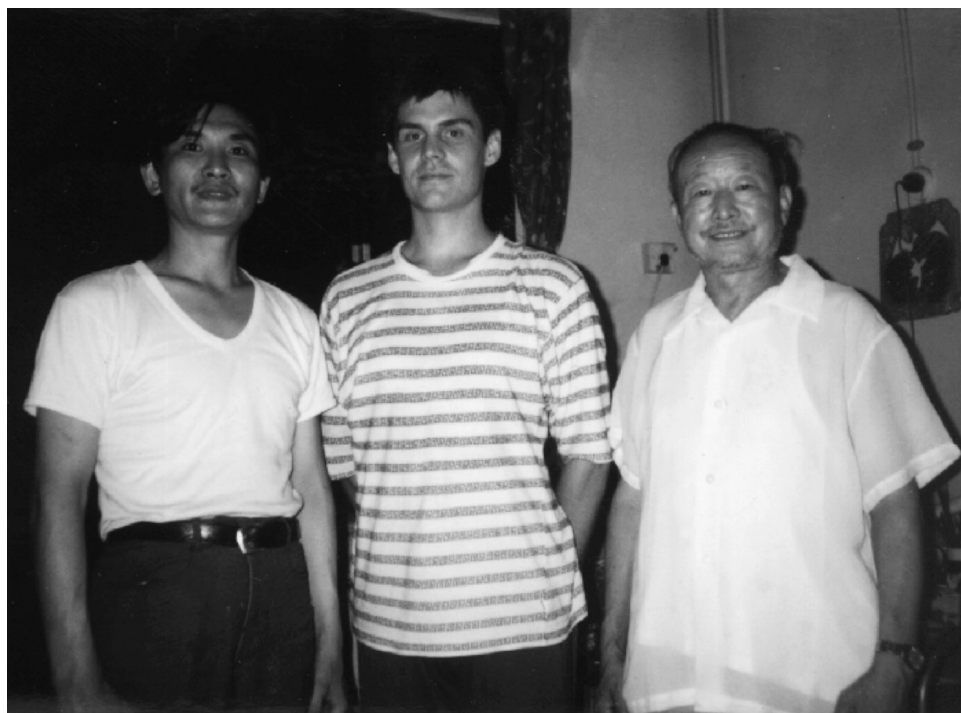
Yes. His grandson, who was a boy when Sun Lu Tang was teaching, told me that Sun Lu Tang taught a lot of students the form, but it was only his top students who were taken out of the courtyard and into the house where Sun would close the door and show them how it all really worked.

I remember one story his grandson told me specifically. He said that he was playing with a ball in the courtyard and Sun Lu Tang had taken his top students into one of the buildings and closed the doors. He was going to teach a push hands class. Not long after the students had gone into the building, the doors burst open and one of the students went flying out backwards and landed flat on his back in the courtyard. Sun had knocked him through the doors.

Most teachers have that kind of separation among students. Depending on the student's sincerity and ability and how hard they practice, the teacher will invariably choose several students he will teach more than others, that was also true with Sun Lu Tang.

**What do you like about Sun Lu Tang style Tai Ji?**

Most people studying Tai Ji will learn one slow form. That is only one part of the training. That is kind of like the basics. Other styles, like the Yang and Wu, also had a fast form that went with it. Or if they only practiced the slow form, they would also have sets of exercises that would teach you how to *fa jing* and



**Tim Cartmell with Sun style Ba Gua teacher Liu Yan Long (left) and Sun Lu Tang's grandson Sun Bao An (right), Beijing, 1994**



**Tim Cartmell practicing push-hands with Xing Yi instructor Liang Ke Quan in Beijing, 1992**

other exercises, besides pushing hands, that would teach you how to connect with blows, and various other drills. Most teachers you find only do one slow form and one or two types of push hands and that will be it. For some reason they expect their students to be able to go out and fight. It's not going to happen.

The form practice is analogous to a boxer jumping rope and hitting a speed bag. You can't put him in the ring with only that experience. He might be in good shape and coordinated, but he doesn't know how to fight yet.

What Sun Lu Tang did is he again reduced it all to its essence. His form, as far as basics goes, is complete unto itself. He didn't separate his forms into a long extended posture form, and then a medium frame form, and then a small frame form. He didn't have one form for health, another for power, and then another for actual martial use. He put it all together into one form.

A lot of people say that Sun put Xing Yi footwork inside his Tai Ji, but in reality, this is the same footwork inherent in Tai Ji that all good Tai Ji practitioners use when they fight. It is usually either implied or hidden in the forms, or it is not shown to everybody. Sun was one of the few teachers who just taught it openly. He taught the form at the highest level in that the form was done just as the techniques were done in fighting.. He didn't have anything hidden. His theory was to practice like you are going to fight. He didn't have it separated into a lot of different parts.

Of course, besides doing the form and push-hands you still have to practice the movements on other people. People have to attack you and you have to practice the techniques on them over and over until it all becomes reflexive.

**Now that you are back in the United States, what are you teaching and what is your schedule?**

I teach the complete style of Gao Yi Sheng style Ba Gua, I teach Sun Lu Tang's Ba Gua, I teach the medium frame of Yang style Tai Ji, including various push hands, fa jing power exercises and actual fighting applications, I teach the Sun style Tai Ji, Chen Pan Ling's Tai Ji form, the short Yang Tai Ji form, I teach Xing Yi Quan, San Soo, and Tru-Balance Dynamics, which is my own synthesis of the basic principles of correct body use.

**What system of Xing Yi Quan do you teach?**

The core of the Xing Yi that I teach is from the Tang Shou Tao system, but I have also studied some Shanxi Xing Yi and Xing Yi with Liang Ke Quan and various other teachers. So, depending on the student, I will teach either traditional Hebei Xing Yi or Shanxi Xing Yi. So it is kind of a synthesis of the different Xing Yi systems that I've learned.

**If a beginning student comes to you who has never studied Ba Gua before, where do you start their training?**

It depends on the person's background. If someone already has some fighting experience, I will usually teach them the Gao Yi Sheng style. It is a little more involved and they get right into the martial applications. People with no background I often start with the Sun style because it is simpler to learn and you can learn basic fighting applications relatively quickly. It all depends on the person and how much time they are willing to spend. For people that don't want to spend too much time, the Sun style is a better option because there is a lot less of it. You can learn all the forms and basics relatively quickly. The Gao style is much more involved and has a greater range of techniques. To learn the whole style takes quite a few years.

**I know that in your teaching you place a great deal of emphasis on proper body alignment and posture. Do you teach them this inside the context of the form movements, or do you teach them something else first?**

All of my students, no matter what their background, start with my basic Tru-Balance posture alignment. My theory is this: in any martial art that I teach, we never use brute force or muscle tension strength. Everything is 100% based on alignment and what I call "natural power." We generate power one of two ways. One is by compressing our body, the other is by swinging our limbs.

Most people, even those who have a background, need some basic training along those lines. So in martial arts, I start everyone out with basic postural alignment and a set of eight natural power exercises. Once they go through those then they start the basics

of whatever style they are learning.

Everything that they do, no matter what style, always comes back to the basic principle. There is never an exception to the rule. If you are striking, kicking, executing qin na, throwing, even wrestling, it always comes back to the principles of alignment and non-use of force.

**I know that right now you are currently studying some Gracie Jujitsu. What made you interested in pursuing that?**

Since I was young, my major emphasis in martial arts has always been practical fighting ability. The Chinese martial arts are deficient in ground grappling. San Soo has some ground fighting and other Chinese styles also have a bit of it, but I lived in Taiwan for ten years and have traveled all over mainland China and I've found that, in general, the Chinese don't grapple on the ground. I think that it is mainly due to their historical background in martial arts. Chinese martial arts came from a battlefield background. People in armor who fall down don't grapple. You are like a turtle on your back if you are wearing armor and fall down. Lying on the battlefield in the midst of battle will almost certainly result in your being trampled to death or speared by the nearest upright enemy.

Many times, the Samurai in Japan were sitting on mats unarmed when a conflict started. They were also often involved in police work where grappling and submission skills were a necessity. So they came up with elaborate and sophisticated grappling methods.

A few years ago I heard about the Gracie's and I saw their tapes and I liked what I saw. I didn't deny the fact that I was very deficient in ground grappling skills. So for the last few years when I came back to the states, I would go and take a lesson. When I moved back to the states at the end of last year, I started studying Gracie Jujitsu regularly. Originally I studied with Nelson Montiera and his senior student Ted Stickle, who was an old San Soo friend of mine. I now study with Mark Eccard, who is the top student of Rickson Gracie.

**If someone comes to you and says, "I want to learn how to fight." What do you teach them?**

If someone comes to me and they just want to learn basic self defense skill and they do not want to devote years and years to training, I would teach them a kind of modified San Soo with a lot of ideas taken from the internal arts.

If someone comes with absolutely no martial background at all, usually within six months they will be fairly proficient at self defense. If they are interested in continuing their training after that, then they can go on with whatever style they want to study or learn San Soo more in-depth. Otherwise, I teach whatever style the student wants to learn from the start.

I used to hear stories about it taking five years of study in the internal martial arts to get the basics and then ten years to become proficient. I think that is

absolute nonsense. If you have a good teacher who understands how to fight and knows how to teach, within a year of hard training in any internal style, you should be able to handle yourself in most any kind of street altercation. Obviously, if you fight someone who has had fifteen years of combat training, there is a limit to what you can do with one year's training. But for what most people might encounter with street fighters or muggers and such, a year's training will allow you to be well equipped to handle yourself. The mastery of any art, however, will take a lifetime of intense study.

**If someone came to you and said that they were not interested in fighting at all but wanted to learn some exercise for their health, what would you start them with?**

Again, I always start with the Tru-Balance Dynamics. With the alignment and relaxation exercises. From there I teach various types of *qi gong* that I have learned over the years in Taiwan, such as *Ba Duan Jin* (八段錦 - Eight Section Brocade), or Swimming Dragon *qi gong*. For people who want to build their strength I also have a whole set of Chinese gymnastic exercises for strength.

I always start with Tru-Balance because if you want to be healthy, or you want to have martial ability, it all comes from the same body. I don't see any difference between what will make you healthy and what will give you martial power. So I always start with correct body alignment and relaxation, how to use the body most efficiently without any effort or tension.

A lot of people will learn martial arts for health. Although learning a martial arts does not necessarily mean you are going to go out and fight, I am dead set against people who modify martial arts or martial arts training for "health." The health benefits of martial arts training are the "side effects" of training for combat efficiency. When you use the body in the most efficient and natural manner, coordinate your mind and body, and learn how to breath correctly, it naturally gives you the most power for martial arts. When you try to alter the original martial art into some kind of "health practice," I think you are going to invariably detract from the system's health building potential.

Chen Wei Ming (陳微明), a famous Yang style student of Yang Cheng Fu, said in a book he published in the thirties that, "Although everyone knows that Tai Ji is a great and devastating martial art, very few people know that it is also good for health." You can see from that quote that there has been a 180 degree turn around in people's perceptions of things like Tai Ji in the last 60 years. Nowadays, most people know Tai Ji is some kind of health exercise, but many are surprised when you tell them it is originally a martial art.

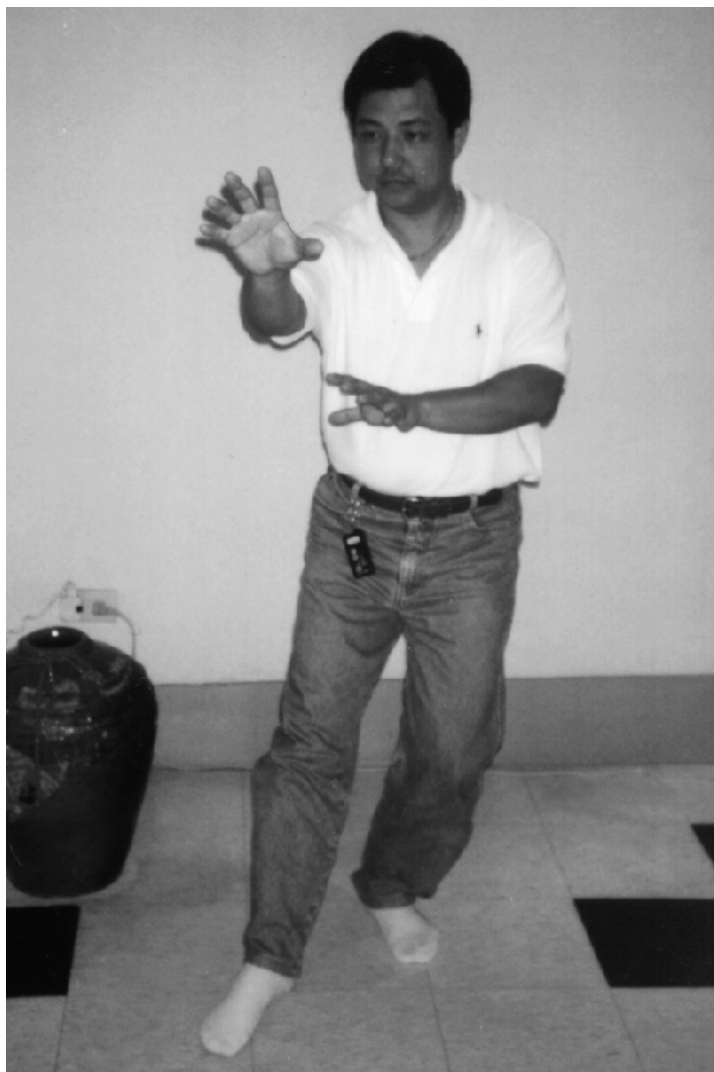
*Qi gong* and related exercise systems have the advantage of being simpler and relatively easy to learn. Martial systems are more complicated and involved, but besides the benefits of health, self-defense skills are also acquired.

# An Interview with Xu Hong Ji's son, Xu Zhen Wang

conducted by Tim Cartmell

I first met Xu Zhen Wang (許振旺 - also known as Ahney) in 1984 while I was studying Xing Yi Quan with his father, Xu Hong Ji (許鴻基). At the time Xu Zhen Wang was teaching classes of his own in several universities in and around Taipei. I immediately "took" to Xu Zhen Wang. He was a very open and honest individual and despite his considerable skill and successes as a full contact tournament fighter, he was friendly and unassuming.

Unfortunately, after I had been with Xu Hong Ji for just a few months, he passed away. Xu Zhen Wang accepted me as his only private student and trained me one-on-one for the next year. For the following two years after that, besides private lessons, Xu Zhen Wang also gave me the opportunity to train with his school brothers (my "uncles") as well as allowing me to act as



**Xu Zhen Wang standing in Xing Yi's San Ti posture in his home in Taipei, Taiwan**

his teaching assistant. Xu Zhen Wang is the epitome of a well rounded instructor. In class, he was always attentive to the individual needs of his students, always encouraging one towards improvement and inspired a trust and confidence that is rarely found in most teacher-pupil relationships. In recent years, Xu Zhen Wang has retired from teaching, devoting himself to his family and career.

## **What was your father's background in martial arts?**

When he was young, my father studied Western boxing, but he saw that many people who boxed ended up with scars and injuries and he thought there must be a better way to train (translator's note: Ahney literally said that his father was "afraid of having his nose broken"). He started training with Hong Yi Xiang, practicing Xing Yi Quan. After he had reached a certain level in the art, he taught at Hong's school. My father could speak Japanese and English and he helped Hong interpret for the foreign students. At the time there were quite a number of American soldiers practicing. Since my father did a part of the actual instructing, he had a lot of opportunity to test his skill. In order to get more detailed explanations from Hong, my father would often tell Hong that this or that technique didn't work as well as it was supposed to. Hong would ask my father what he did. My father would demonstrate the technique and then Hong would go into great detail as to how the technique was to be properly applied. My father said Hong's skill was very great and the best way to learn was to feel the technique first hand. My father also read many books about martial arts in Chinese and Japanese. He was especially interested in the actual fighting applications of the art. He also learned a little Ba Gua, but not much.

## **When did Xu Hong Ji start his own school?**

When my father was about 30, he and one of his school brothers, Li Ching Xiang (also known as "Black Snake") broke away from Hong and started their own school. Traditionally, teachers expected their students to follow them as subordinates and the split caused some friction between Hong and my father. The original name of Hong's school was Tang Shou Dao. My father helped develop the name and the logo. My father used the same name for his system but named his school Shen Long (Spirit Dragon) Tang Shou Dao. Besides teaching at his own school, my father also taught at several other schools and taught classes to the

American soldiers. Thereafter, he made his living teaching martial arts.

### **Your father also taught overseas?**

My father went to teach in Japan every year and several of his Japanese students have schools there. He also went to the U.S. about five or six times for about a month each time.

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## ***My father's focus was on using Xing Yi as a fighting art.***

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### **What did your father actually teach as part of his system?**

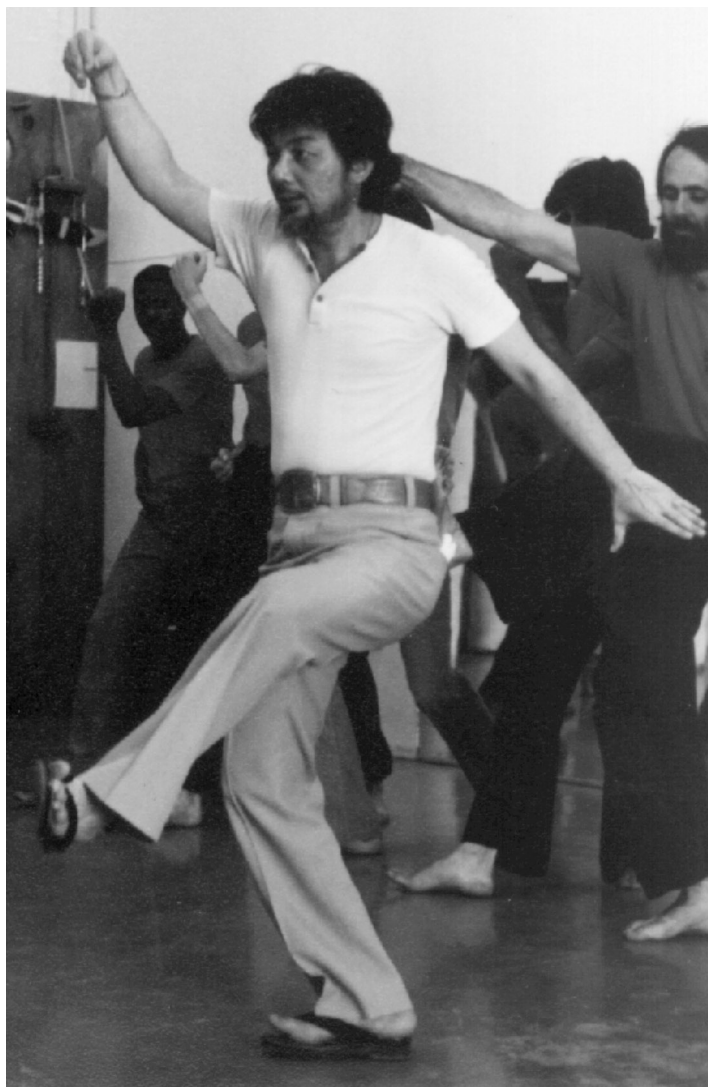
The training started with basic straight line forms and progressed until the student had a good foundation. After the initial period of training the basics, the students began studying Xing Yi. Training started with the Wu Xing (Five Elements). A great deal of emphasis was put on thoroughly training the five elements. After the five elements, the students learned the twelve animals and the combined forms. Students learned and trained at the fighting techniques from the forms and at a more advanced stage in training began learning push hands and *San Shou*. My father had researched and been exposed to other styles, but Xing Yi Quan was the core of the system.

### **What were some of the principles your father emphasized in training?**

My father's focus was on using Xing Yi as a fighting art. One of the things he emphasized was the ability to deliver a very powerful blow from a short distance. He said that winding up a strike or using a lot of brute strength was just a waste of energy. With the proper body mechanics, timing and momentum, a very strong blow can be issued from a distance close to the target. My father's stance was somewhat higher and smaller than many others, he emphasized mobility. Beginning students can start with larger movements, but at a higher level motion should be natural and compact.

### **When did you start training?**

I started training in my father's school when I was about 13. At first I didn't like the training and I had to train with the regular class just like any other student. I got no special treatment or training because I was the teacher's son. Later I began to enjoy the training and the martial arts.



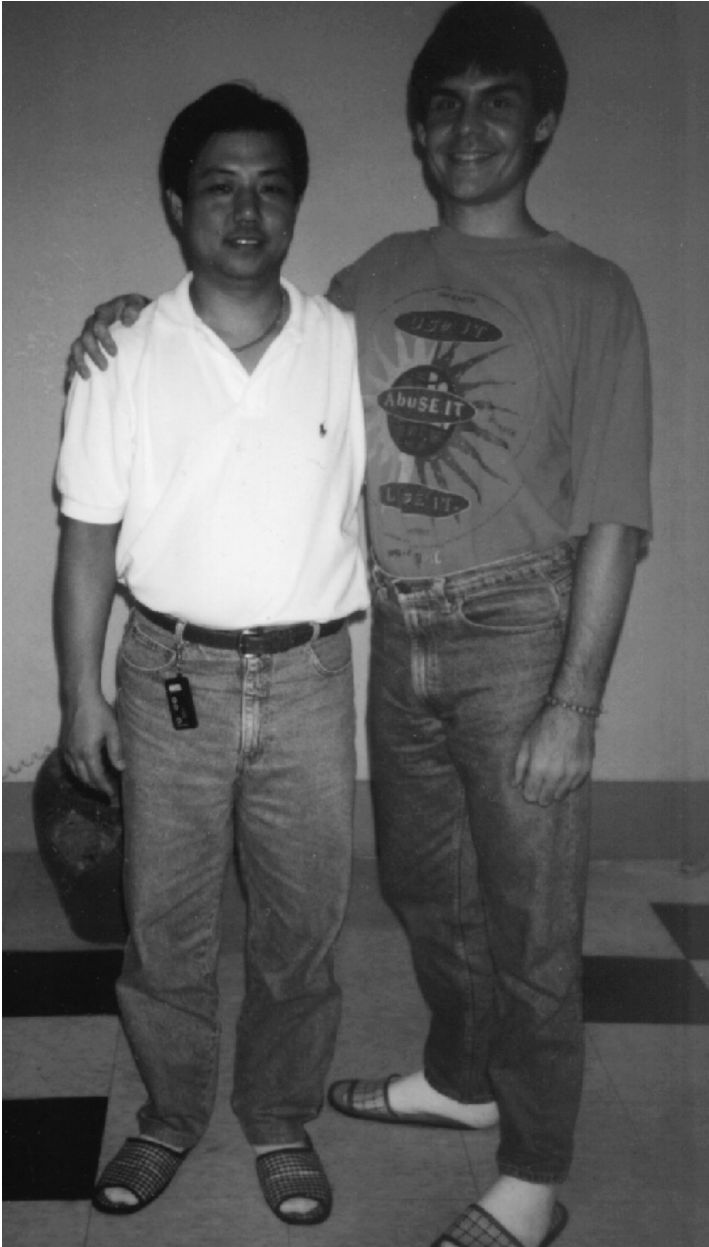
**Xu Zhen Wang's father, Xu Hong Ji, teaching in the at Vince Black's school in Yuma, AZ.**

### **What about your tournament experience?**

When I was about 15, I participated in my first full-contact tournament. I was much younger and smaller than my opponents and I took second place. I gained valuable experience and ended up winning the next three or four tournaments that I entered. Not long after I was drafted and went to fulfill my military service obligation. After the Army I came back to Taipei and began teaching students. I felt that the fighting competitions were a kind of "proving ground," and that winning full contact tournaments showed you what it takes skill-wise to become a teacher.

### **Where did you first teach?**

I first taught in my father's school. Later one of my school brothers and I began teaching in Universities. After my father died, I taught you as my first private student and a couple of years after that I reopened the school.



**Tim Cartmell and Xu Zhen Wang, Taipei, 1994**

**What has happened to your father's Tang Shou Dao Association?**

There are still a number of my father's students teaching in various places around the Island. They still organize tournaments. There was no one really appointed as a successor. My father's school brother, Li Ching Xiang, is the "senior" of the association.

**Do you have any advice to give new students about training the internal arts?**

Basics are very important. For Xing Yi practitioners, repeated practice of the five elements is vital. No matter which art you practice, you must train until the movements of your art are refined and natural, they must become a part of you. The teacher must really teach the student or the student will not improve much not matter how hard he trains.

When fighting, remember that your opponent is "alive" and your movement must also be "alive." It is also important to practice until you can issue power from a short distance in a natural manner. With practice, what initially feels stiff and uncomfortable will become natural and flexible. It is much like playing the piano, a beginner's fingers are stiff and the movements forced. With continued practice, however, the fingers become relaxed and flexible and playing is natural.

Finally, it is the responsibility of the student to take what the teacher has given him and explore its possible variations and changes. The Chinese say "Jiu Yi Fan San" (to infer to whole from one part). Like a good parent, the teacher should encourage his student to go out and become a teacher in his own right or seek other teachers after he has reached a certain level in training.

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***No matter which art you practice, you must train until the movements of your art are refined and natural, they must become a part of you.***

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**What are the important principles when standing in San Ti?**

The feet are in the "chicken step," that is usually interpreted to mean 70% of the weight is on the back leg with 30% on the front leg. However, the 30% weight on the front leg means the weight of the leg itself, almost all the bodyweight is on the back leg. Extend the front leg and lightly touch the floor with the bottom of the foot. If you put weight on the front foot so that the foot "spreads out" under the weight, then there is too much weight on the front leg.

Keeping the weight on the back leg aids in mobility, one can move forward or backward without shifting weight. The front arm is extended naturally with the forearm rotated inward with the palm facing down. This twists the radius and ulna and decreases the chance of injury to the arm if it is struck. The fingers are spread naturally and the wrist is bent only slightly, bending the wrist too much cuts off the flow of energy from the arm to the hand. The rear arm guards the solar plexus area and "the elbows do not leave the body." The index finger of the front hand is in line with the nose. You should feel as if the palms are bathed in warm air. The breath should be full and natural and the whole abdomen should expand when you inhale (even around the kidneys). Continued practice will strengthen the body against blows. The hips are held level without tilting the pelvis back or pulling it under. Standing practice should be balanced with moving practice.

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**Journal of Asian Martial Arts:** 821 West 24th Street, Erie, PA 16502 - This is a high quality publication which provides well researched articles in a scholarly fashion.

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