

THE ORIGINS AND SYSTEM OF TANGLANG BOXING
40 YEARS OF SERVICE TO CHINESE BOXING—A MEMORIAL ISSUE, BY WONG, HON FAN, 1972



In the latter days of the Ming Dynasty, there was a man from Shandong Province named Wong Long. He saw with his own eyes that China was going to fall to the Manchu invaders and thought for a time about devoting himself to the defense of his country, but though he strove to do so there was no way for him to obtain a position in the Ming army.

So he instead journeyed to Mount Song in Henan Province and joined the Shaolin Temple there, where he studied the fighting arts with a view to using them against China's enemies in the future. When the Manchu forces breached the passes along the Great Wall and invaded China, Wong Long immediately went alone to fight against them, but owing to the presence of traitors who were selling out China to the foreign invaders there was no chance for a hero like Long to use his martial might.

After the Manchu conquest and the establishment of the new Qing Dynasty, Long returned to the Shaolin Temple,

where he organized the monks in a plan to restore the Ming Dynasty and to avenge China's humiliation by the Manchus. However, things did not turn out as he wished, since the Qing court learned of the details of the plot and ordered that the temple be surrounded and burned to the ground. Long and his colleagues deployed their extraordinary skills to protect the Master of the Shaolin Temple in his flight, in order to prevent him from being seized and arrested by the Qing forces. They fled by a circuitous path to Mount Omei in Sichuan Province, and then to Kinming in Yunnan Province.

They passed through several provinces one by one until they reached Mount Lao in Shandong Province where they established a residence for Buddhist monks. Not long after that, the monks' Master passed away and one of the elder monks among them was selected to manage the group's affairs. This monk regularly matched his pugilistic skills against those of Wong in order to break the stifling peace and quiet of the place, and every time that Long was defeated in these contests he was humiliated and he vowed that he would beat his elder brother (not literally his elder brother, but figuratively so), in three years' time.

When the three years had passed, Long once more contended with his elder brother and was once again defeated, and he was ashamed to the point where he wanted to commit suicide. His elder brother planned to travel aimlessly for a time and before he left he said to Long, "I will return in three years. Then you shall have to treat me with greater respect."

With that, his elder brother left. One day after that, the weather was extremely hot and the monks found themselves shut up in their rundown dwelling and bored to death. Long then took his sword and sutras and went into a dense forest in order to avoid the stifling heat. When he reached the forest, a cool breeze was blowing gently and he felt joyful in both his body and soul. Just as Long opened then sutras and began to read them, he suddenly heard a wild sound of an insect chirping in a rather mournful way. When he looked up to observe it, he was a mantis (Tanglang in Chinese) engaged in a struggle to the death with a cicada. Relying on its two sharp arms, the mantis slowly pressed in on the cicada and before long the cicada had died in the mantis' hands.

After Long had observed this, he realized that the mantis measured advance and retreat, and the length of these, resembled greatly the moves involved in boxing. Long thereupon pulled down the tree branch where the mantis was and caught it and took it back to the temple. He contended with

it day and night using a stalk of grass to fight it, and found that the mantis has a variety of moves, including *adhering to*, *sticking to*, *collapsing* (or *bursting*—the sound of collapsing), *pressing hard upon*, *dodging*, *feinting*, *jumping over* and *shifting places*.

Now, Long was an extremely clever fellow and before three days had passed he had awakened to the fact that there were a total of twelve techniques in the mantis' attack, namely *Ngou* (hooking and grabbing), *Lou* (bringing in/carrying), *Choy* (hitting, beating, striking, and snatching), *Gwa* (hanging and suspending), *Diew* (snap pulling and clawing), *Peng* (embracing or tying up the arms, and collapsing), *Tieu* (flicking up), *Jin* (advancing), *Chan* (adhering to), *Neem* (sticking to), *Tiph* (attaching to and pressing) and *Kow* (standing next to and nestling). These twelve techniques were collectively incorporated into the essence of the method of the seventeen Clans, and were moreover integrated with the *Monkey-Step Method*.

Three years passed by, and just when Long had developed his own unique style of boxing his elder brother returned from his wanderings. Exhibiting his new style, the elder brother was amazed and asked Long how he had done it, whereupon Long told him the story of the day when he heard the mantis' chirping.

From that day on, there was no limit to Long's ever-increasing knowledge of boxing skills, and he engaged diligently with his elder brother in study and practice of the pugilistic arts. Thus, the art of Tanglang boxing was gradually refined until it reached the point of perfection.

Both Long and his elder brother passed away during the next decade. The monks of that temple deemed Tanglang boxing to be their most valuable treasure and were loath to demonstrate it to outsiders. However, one day an itinerant Taoist priest named Sing Siew was granted lodging at the temple for a time and it was from this time that Tanglang boxing was first transmitted to the wider world.

Sing Siew further taught Tanglang boxing to one Lee Saam Jin of Haiyang County. Once Lee had honed his skills, he established a caravan protection service in Jinan in Shandong Province, whose fame spread far and wide. All of the green-wood heroes (This refers to men who lived outside the bounds of regular society, often studying martial arts and so called banditry, not unlike Robin Hood and his men) of the Yangtze River valley who learned of the reputation of Tanglang boxing's lightning-quick moves studied it and Lee's heroic name lasted throughout his lifetime.

Lee had no progeny, so in his old age he traveled far and wide searching for a qualified person to succeed him. He traveled to Fushan County, where he learned of one Wong Wing Sung, he had recently passed the imperial examinations for government service in the military. Lee visited Wong's home and requested that Wong display his skills so Wong obliged him with a display with his famed big sword. Lee watched to the end, but instead of praising Wong he said, "Is that all there is to your skill?" Wong was so infuriated by this remark and tried to throw himself at Lee, but before he could reach him Lee had already disappeared. While Wong pondered this, he suddenly heard the sound of laughter behind him, but when he whirled around to catch Lee he was unable to do so, and was instead checked by Lee. At this, Wong beseeched Lee to serve as his teacher and he subsequently refined his skills over several years under Lee's tutelage. Lee then vanished, and no one knows whence he went.



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The Wong family was very wealthy. It did not present its sons as candidates for official posts, nor did he attempt to dazzle others with his fighting skills. Wong used Tanglang boxing as a pastime during his abundant leisure hours. In this manner, the years passed by one after another, with a decade like a day and Tanglang boxing became still more ferocious and advanced.

In his old age, Wong taught Tanglang boxing to one Fahm Yook Tung. Fahm possessed a tall and robust physique. He weighed more than 300 pounds and was called a giant. Fahm was moreover an expert at *tiet shazhang* (iron body conditioning).

One day, Fahm was passing through a field in the countryside where two farm bulls happened to be vying with one another. When the bulls saw Fahm they thought he had come to attack them so both of them charged Fahm. Fahm saw that the bulls meant to inflict grievous harm on him and realized that it would truly be difficult to restrain them without employing his special iron palm and fighting skills.

When the first bull reached Fahm, he concentrated all his might on his right foot, kicked it forcefully in its underbelly, whereupon the bull fell to the ground right after the thud of Fahm's foot. When the other bull reached him, Fahm grabbed one of its horns with his left hand and struck it forcefully in the backbone with his right hand, whereupon it also fell to the ground.

When the farmer who owned the bulls demanded that Fahm compensate him for the deaths of his two animals, Fahm retorted, “I was merely defending myself! Would you have paid compensation for my life had I been killed by the bulls?” With that the matter was laid to rest, but owing to this incident Fahm's renown for great strength spread far and wide.

Fahm in turn passed on his knowledge to several people including Jingshan Lin and Lo Gwong Yook. In 1918, the boxing skills of the Tanglang school met with admiration at the General Assembly of the Shanghai Jingwu Physical Training Association, whereupon association members were sent to Northern China and Master Lo Gwong Yook was chosen to go south to Shenjiang and take up the post

of general instructor. When a National Athletic Meet was held in Beijing in 1928, his disciple Chengxin Ma attended the meet as a representative of Shanghai, and took part in a competition *San Sao* (fighting techniques). The result was that Ma was one of the top contestants, and the papers in both Beijing and Shanghai vied with one another to cover him and Master Lo's own reputation became ever more widespread. Before long Master Lo was ordered by the central general assembly (of the Jingwu Physical Training Association) to go South to Guangdong province. There Master Lo made an inspection of the Jingwu Physical Training Association branches in each area, including Hong Kong, Macao and the islands of the South Pacific. When his mission was accomplished, he hurried back to Shanghai, but just at that time war broke out with the Japanese at the Song River over the December 12th Incident, and as a result the Jingwu Physical Training Association was damaged and the association's affairs were in a state of disarray.

The person in charge of the Hong Kong Jingwu Physical Training Association deemed Master Lo to be the embodiment of the orthodox school of Tanglang boxing, and was loath to let this opportunity pass by, so he sent a cable to the Shanghai Provisional Office (of the Jingwu Physical Training Association) in which he urged Master Lo to come to Hong Kong. It was only from this that the people of Hong Kong came to know the real truth about Tanglang boxing. Master Lo left an extremely favorable impression on the people of Hong Kong, but unfortunately Hong Kong was occupied by the Japanese a few years later, and Master Lo was not willing to live through war and separation in Hong Kong, where patriotic Chinese and Chinese traitors were mixed together. He therefore bought a boat and returned to North China, but sadly fell seriously ill and passed away at Chunshen. This great master of learning and integrity thus withdrew from this world, and now lays dead and buried. Tanglang boxing was then transmitted to this writer's generation, the seventh such transmission over a period of 300 years.

The above essay was originally published 26 years ago (note: this was written in 1976) in my work *Tanglangquanshu Chanml* (An Elucidation of the Secrets of the Art of Tanglang Boxing). In recent years, I have discovered often in newspapers and magazines that those discussing the art of

BELOW LEFT TO RIGHT: Wong, Hon Fan demonstrates a posture from the form Muy Fah Kuen (Plum Flower Fist); a young Wong, Hon Fan.

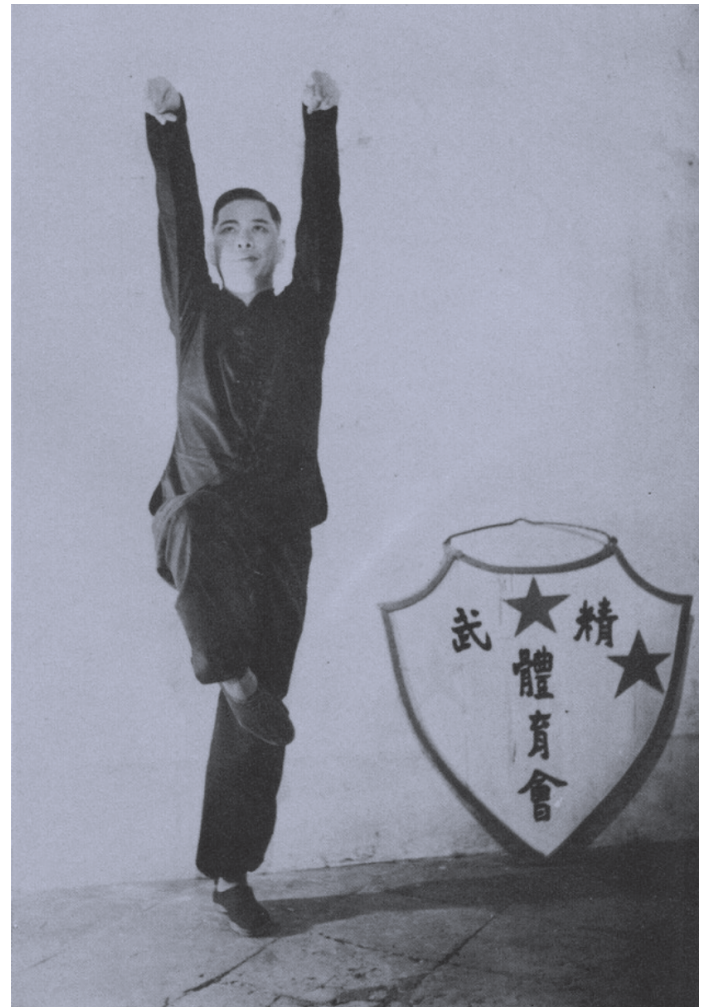
Tanglang boxing often draw the wrong conclusions by false analogies, or cite a portion of my own meager oeuvre and use it as evidence. They call the previous masters of Tanglang boxing tiaren (literally, “heaven person,” sometimes used for a person of great ability) or shenxian (immortal, or supernatural being) and other such preposterous things, and although this is meant as praise is it not instead an insult to our forbearers? I therefore must add something here to clarify the matter.

If you look at the work entitled Shaolin Zhenchuan (The True Teachings of Shaolin), you will find that there is no discussion of a record of transmission of the Shaolin teachings over the ages, and still less is there any exposition of the correct line of transmission.

When Master Lo first arrived in Hong Kong and took up his post in the Jingwu Physical Training Association there, the Hong Kong Jingwu branch had just compiled a book entitled Shengqiu Shuankan (Seeking). The editor-in-chief asked Master Lo to contribute to the volume an essay

introducing the Tanglang School of Chinese boxing. Master Lo had difficulty putting things down in written form, and so he asked Mr. Baoxiang Wu (an instructor of Taijiquan at the Hong Kong Jingwu Physical Training Association) to take notes while he described it orally. The title of Master Lo’s essay was the same as the present one, and states at the outset that Tanglang boxing was created by someone named “Wong Long.” When I returned from Hankow, I lived together with Master Lo for a time in the same room, and my Mandarin, which suffered from a Cantonese accent, had improved somewhat compared to before (note: they spoke different dialects of Chinese). I often asked Master Lo about many secrets of success related to Tanglang boxing. Master Lo unreservedly taught me everything that he knew. In the decade that I studied under Master Lo it was this period during which I learned the most.

One day, I asked Master Lo what kind of person Wong Long was really. Master Lo replied, “I am certain that his family name was “Wong,” but the name “Long” is like the word you Cantonese use for “So-and-so,” so it just indicates that



BELOW: Wong, Hon Fan and student, Huang, Hanchao, demonstrate a technique from the partner form Ling Bung Bo (Understanding Avalanche Steps).



the person was a man and that is all!” The reason for this is that Wong’s first name appears to have been forgotten. And in fact, Mr. Wu had already perceived Master Lo’s intent, so when he took down Master Lo’s words he used the name “Long” instead of “So-and-so Wang.” (The character for “Long” used by Mr. Wu is similar but slightly different from the character used by Wong Hon Fun, as is explained in the next section. Both characters are pronounced *Long*).

Now, when the time came when I was compiling my first book in my series about Tanglang boxing, which was entitled *Tanglangquanshu Chanmi* (An Elucidation of the Secrets of the Art of Tanglang Boxing), I boldly used instead a different Chinese character for “Long”, since it resembled the other character for “Long” in both form and sound. I have encountered those who have reproached what I did, but the merits and demerits of the issue for them are not what I had in mind at the time. I was merely trying to be fair and reasonable, and was blameless at heart. How painful such reproaches were! Isn’t it enough that I can take pride in the fact that when people discuss Tanglang boxing today, they refer to the founder as “Wong Long”, using the same

character that I did for “Long?” (Note: if you understand the intricate details of Chinese writing, this makes sense) How about the matter of their having been only seven generations between Wong Long and myself? It is hard for there to have been more than 300 years of history in this time? Normally one counts 30 years for one generation, so seven generations is only a bit more than 200 years!

There can be no doubt about the fact that from the second generation on, namely, from the time of the Taoist Priest Sing Siew, each of the masters of Tanglang boxing personally transmitted the art to his chosen successor. But the great point of doubt lies in the question of whether or not Wong Long personally transmitted the art to his chosen successor of Tanglang boxing to Sing Siew. My own surmise is that the art of Tanglang boxing was only transmitted to Sing Siew through a generation of the Shaolin monks, roughly a century after Wong Long passed away, thereby making possible its glory throughout the world today.

Sincerely,
Wong, Hon Fan