

## A Record of a Visit to a Master of Martial Arts: Yang Shouzhong

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In the world of Southern Chinese martial arts within the Taijiquan circles, the name Yang Shouzhong is widely known and recognized. Many people are undoubtedly familiar with his name.

Last winter, he participated in the South-North Martial Artists' Dragon-Tiger Grand Gathering at Southorn Playground in Wan Chai for a charity performance where he demonstrated Taiji Saber—a supreme skill passed down by his father, Master Yang Chengfu. He executed the pressing technique of the Taiji Saber with mastery, his movements reaching a state of profound transcendence. Man and saber became one, with the dazzling white blade flashing like lightning, swirling through the air. The audience was captivated, breaking into enthusiastic applause and cheering loudly.

Yet, when Yang Shouzhong finished his saber performance, he remained calm and composed. With an air of ease, he raised the saber in both hands, saluted the audience, and gracefully stepped off the stage.

Observing his facial and body features, he appeared to be a warrior in the tradition of the valiant men of Yan and Zhao—his energy full, his spirit complete, and his demeanor open and forthright. His execution of the Taiji Saber was a sight to behold; his postures in motion were as agile as a swimming dragon and as light as a soaring wild goose. He seamlessly combined hardness and softness, unlike the stage performers who rely on mere theatrics to impress. His movements and footwork alone revealed the depth of his diligent training and mastery of saber techniques.

Speaking of Yang Shouzhong's history, his father was the renowned Master Yang Chengfu, whose name was celebrated throughout China. His great ancestor Yang Luchan was the founding master of the Taiji lineage. By the time it was passed down to Yang Shouzhong, he had become the fourth-generation successor.

He was a martial brother from the same school of the esteemed master Dong Yingjie. Twenty years ago, Master Yang Chengfu was invited by martial arts enthusiasts in Guangdong Province, and Yang Shouzhong, along with his senior brother Dong Yingjie, accompanied Yang Chengfu to the south to promote Taijiquan. Their skills were extraordinary, setting themselves apart with a unique approach that complemented each other.

Today, his disciples are numerous across Hong Kong and Macau, forming a family.

His father, Yang Chengfu, whose given name was Zhaoqing, was the youngest son of Yang Jianhou, who was the youngest son of Yang Luchan. His ancestral home was in Hebei Province, but he later resided in Beiping. With a profound family heritage in martial arts, he inherited and repeatedly refined the techniques passed down from his ancestors.

Thus, Yang Shouzhong dedicated himself to the practice and promotion of Taijiquan within the martial arts community. Alongside his senior brother, Dong Yingjie, they were regarded as two heroes, standing at the forefront of the Hong Kong martial arts scene. Their martial skill and virtue earned great admiration from the overseas Chinese community.

Yang Shouzhong resided in Yuen Long, New Territories, Hong Kong, leading a life that was half dedicated to teaching martial arts and half to farming for his own enjoyment. His lifestyle was comfortable, leisurely, and carefree. He remained detached from idle gossip and controversies, preferring instead to spend his free time with a close circle of three, five fellow disciples, engaging in discussions and lighthearted conversations.

He shared a deep bond with his senior brother Dong Yingjie, their aspirations aligning seamlessly. Both were free of any bad habits, aside from their love for reading books and newspapers, practicing calligraphy, and, most of all, engaging in martial arts. He delighted in practicing Taijiquan, Taiji Saber, Taiji Spear, and Taiji Sword, using them to cultivate the spirit and nurture the mind and body.

Whenever he had spare time, he would take a car to Hong Kong to visit his senior brother Dong Yingjie, where they would reminisce and catch up. At times, they would go together to tea houses or restaurants to relieve life's burdens. Yang Shouzhong was humble and approachable, treating others with warmth and kindness. He treated his fellow disciples with the affection of a son or nephew, and served his senior brother Dong Yingjie with the devotion of a true family member, as if they were his own flesh and blood. They constantly encouraged one another, sharing hardships and joys alike, working together to advance the art of Taijiquan.

Schools and organizations across Hong Kong and Kowloon greatly admired Yang Shouzhong's martial reputation, with many inviting him to serve as a martial arts instructor to train the next generation. Among his closest friends were his fellow disciples from the Yingjie Taijiquan Health Institute, including Ma Zideng, Ouyang Nan, Dong Huling, and Liang Xiongwei.

I came to know Yang Shouzhong through an introduction by his fellow disciple, Ma Zideng, at a banquet at Ying King Restaurant. Though he was originally from Beiping, he spoke Mandarin with a subtle Cantonese accent—his voice was clear and pleasant, free from the coarse speech of the marketplace. His demeanor was composed and dignified, and in conversation, he was both engaging and adept at socializing with guests.

He humbly referred to himself as an unrefined man, but his manner over drinks was openhearted and full of wit—one glance was enough to see that he was far from an ordinary rough-mannered man. He greatly enjoyed recounting the story of his ancestor, Yang Luchan, who endured great hardships to master Taijiquan under Chen Changxing in Chenjiagou. The tale was not only deeply moving but also served as an inspiring example for young martial artists today.

The ancients said, "There is nothing difficult in the world, except for a determined person." Listening to Yang Shouzhong speak of his distant ancestor, Yang Luchan, who endured great hardships to learn and eventually became the founding master of the Yang style

Taijiquan, his name has been passed down along with the martial arts of the Taiji school, spreading his fame for eternity. This is further proven by the ongoing legacy. Yang Shouzhong, by inheriting his ancestor's unparalleled skills, gained both fame and influence in the martial arts world.

Yang Shouzhong's techniques were powerful and refined, his movements agile yet his steps were steady. Every action he performed adhered strictly to the secret methods passed down through his family lineage, while also incorporating his own insights. His execution of movements and footwork demonstrated the essence of Taijiquan through practical application, rather than relying on mere superficial flourishes to deceive others or himself.

I asked him about its intricacies. In response, he cited a maxim in martial training, explaining:

“Follow the rules, master the rules, transform the rules, transcend the rules—but never stray from the rules. In the beginning, practice must be slow; gradually, it must become steady. Once a certain mastery is reached, movements should flow naturally in harmony with one's will. The interplay of movement and stillness, emptiness and solidity, Yin and Yang, opening and closing—all these must be expressed within spirit and posture. Within circles, there are squares, and within squares, one must seek circles. Though the movement may appear to be broken, the intent remains unbroken. It's spiritually agile and wonderfully subtle, reaching the pinnacle and ascending to the peak. When practicing the fist to this level, it becomes beyond imagination.”

He further explained that these same principles apply equally to the practice of the saber, spear, and sword—each adapting according to the same fundamental truths.

I deeply admired his explanation and suddenly grasped that all Taiji martial arts revolve around strict adherence to principles, never allowing for reckless improvisation or forced embellishments. From this, it became clear that Yang Shouzhong's martial path was one of genuine mastery and profound cultivation, far removed from those who merely steal fame with empty posturing and superficial skills.

Yang Shouzhong and his senior brother, Dong Yingjie, were known as the Twin Stars of Taiji in the martial arts world, working together to uphold the authentic Taijiquan tradition and bring honor to the Taiji lineage. He was straightforward and free of ambition, treating all



branches of Taijiquan without bias or division. He actively sought to eliminate sectarian prejudices and was a passionate supporter of his senior brother Dong Yingjie's philosophy of "One Taiji Family."

He strongly encouraged unity among fellow disciples, through the "One Taiji Family" advocating for the realization of this ideal—strengthening oneself to strengthen the collective, and ultimately advancing toward national strength. His goal was to revitalize Chinese martial arts, erasing the humiliating label of the "Sick Man of East Asia."

Residing in Yuen Long Market, Yang Shouzhong maintained a close and friendly relationship with the local residents. The atmosphere in the community was harmonious, and many people dedicated themselves to the rigorous practice of Taijiquan at his home. He was a strict and disciplined instructor, ensuring that his disciples adhered to proper principles and showed respect to others. Because of this, the people of Yuen Long held both him and his students in high esteem.

Yang Shouzhong rarely performed his martial arts in front of large crowds. One the rare occasions that he did, it was at the South-North Dragon-Tiger Martial Arts Gathering at Southorn Playground, where he demonstrated the Taiji Saber.

When he stepped onto the stage, saber in hand, his movements were remarkably agile—like a silver dragon rising and falling, his execution was utterly masterful. His performance was so extraordinary that the audience erupted in enthusiastic applause and cheers. Everyone present recognized that the reputation of the Yang family's Taijiquan was truly well-deserved.

Master Yang Shouzhong was not only an unparalleled expert in the Taiji Saber—he had also attained profound mastery over Taijiquan, Taiji Spear, Taiji Sword, and all other aspects of the Taiji system. Each was performed with the same level of brilliance, reaching the pinnacle of skill. His Taiji Sabre we witnessed that evening was merely one aspect of his extensive expertise.

Master Yang, due to his ancestral unparalleled skills and profound family heritage, combined with his meticulous training, has earned great reputation in the Taijiquan world today. This success was not achieved by chance.