

Hong Kong, founded in the mid-19th century, has been home to various martial arts styles since its inception. As it was geographically and culturally adjacent to Guangdong province, back then, the martial arts masters primarily came from cities and villages nearby, so the styles popular in the province were the ones they practiced.

To uncover evidence of northern martial arts, particularly Taijiquan, we must travel back to the Chinese Republican era. As early as the 1930s, when traditional Chinese culture experienced a resurgence (and deep adaptation) in response to modern influences, the first masters of these arts arrived in the city. These masters were primarily affiliated with the southern branches of various National institutions, such as Jingwu.

It was only at the end of the Republican era and the birth of the so-called “New China” in 1949, amidst the turbulent times that ensued in China, that an incredible number of mainlanders sought refuge in Hong Kong. Among them were many skilled individuals in various business and artistic fields, including martial arts.

Descendants of prominent families and lineages, such as Yang Chengfu and Wu Jianquan’s offspring, as well as the Dong family, relocated to Hong Kong. Many lesser-known, yet equally skilled, masters also settled in Hong Kong, contributing to the fertile ground for the emergence of the ‘Kung Fu’ craze in the 1970s. This phenomenon, in turn, brought Chinese martial arts to global attention.

One of the earliest mentions about Yang Chengfu’s older brother, Yang Shaohou, was published as a brief introduction in 1956. Back then, particularly in the literary field, many writers used pseudonyms, so I’m not certain who the “laughter at ephemeral life” might have been. However, the biography he wrote appears to have been, at least partially, based on those published in various Chinese newspapers.

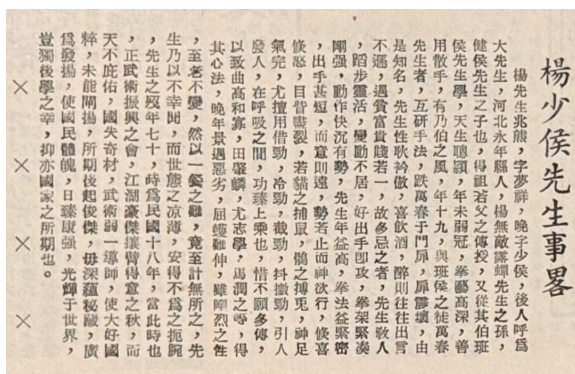
It’s still an interesting read, and I hope you all can enjoy it as usual!

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A Brief Account of Mr. Yang Shaohou

Mr. Yang, given name Zhaoxiong, styled Mengxiang, known as Shaohou in his later years. In later generations, he was referred to as “the Great Master.” He was a native of Yongnian

County, Hebei, the grandson of Master Yang “the Invincible” Luchan and the son of Master Jianhou. He received transmission from both his grandfather and father, and studied under his uncle, Master Banhou. He was naturally intelligent, and before reaching the age of twenty, his martial skills were already profound. He excelled in free-hand applications, possessing the demeanor of his esteemed uncle.



At the age of nineteen, he engaged in hand-to-hand practice with Wan Chun, a disciple of Banhou. During the exchange, he threw Wan Chun against a door, breaking the door panel upon impact. From this, his reputation spread. Master Yang had a stern and proud disposition. He enjoyed drinking, and when intoxicated, he would often speak with little restraint. He treated the rich and poor, the noble and humble alike, making no distinctions—thus, many resented him.

The master instructed his students with agile footwork, moving unpredictably and never remaining in one place. He preferred to attack as soon as he engaged. His boxing frame was tight and strong, his movements swift, heavy, and full of momentum. As he advanced in age, his boxing techniques became even more compact. His strikes grew exceedingly short, yet his intent reached far. His posture appeared still, yet his spirit was always about the move. His expression shifted suddenly between joy and sorrow, his eyes wide and intense—like a cat pouncing on a mouse or a falcon seizing a rabbit. His spirit was full, his energy complete. He was particularly skilled in using ‘borrowing Jin (strength)’, ‘cold Jin’, ‘intercepting strength’, and ‘shaking strength’, as well as in leading opponents and issuing them forth. Within the span of a single breath, his skill reached the highest level.

Regrettably, he was unwilling to pass on his teachings to many, leading to a situation where ‘the tune was high, but those who could harmonize to it were few’. Among those who obtained his core teachings were Tian Zhaolin, You Zhixue, Ma Runzhi, and others. In his later years, his circumstances deteriorated, and he found himself constrained, unable to express himself. Though his nature remained unyielding and fierce, unchanged even in old age, he eventually reached a point where securing even a single meal became difficult, leaving him without any recourse. That such an unfortunate fate befell him became widely known, and how could one not lament the cold indifference of the world with a sigh of regret?

Master Yang passed away at the age of seventy, in the eighteenth year of the Republic. At that time, it was precisely an era of martial arts revival, a season when heroes of the martial world raised their arms in triumph. Yet Heaven did not grant its protection, and the nation lost a remarkable talent. Martial arts lost a great mentor, preventing this precious national heritage from fully flourishing.

What is hoped for is that future generations of outstanding individuals will not conceal profound knowledge in secrecy but will widely promote it—so that the physical strength of the people may steadily improve, shining brightly upon the world. This is not only the good fortune of later students but also the expectation of the nation itself.

by the ‘Laughter at ephemeral life’ (1956)