

A tribute to Master Liang He Ching RIP



5th May 1938 - 1st July 2007

A number of people have written tributes to Master Liang and they may be read below:

Fong and I have been students of Master Liang for fifteen years, during which time he was a constant source of support, encouragement and wisdom, not only in relation to our martial arts study but also to our lives in general.

We first met him at the Guangsao Huiguan where he was teaching martial arts. Master Lau Kim Hong had recommended that we go and learn the Fast Taiji of his old friend Liang He Qing.

The Guangsao Huiguan (Association Hall for Cantonese people from the Guangsao region) is laid out in traditional pattern, with the downstairs being dedicated as a temple while the large spacious area upstairs is used for community activities. It was here that Master Liang was teaching a class of about thirty students ranging in age from late teens to mid fifties.

Wondering what the large White Man was doing he came over and a conversation ensued in which Master Lau's name was mentioned and discovery was made of mutual friends in the martial arts world.

When I asked if he would teach us his Fast Taiji he readily agreed and thus started a relationship that would see us training with him and meeting him on an almost daily basis for the three years that we lived in Muar, and then at regular intervals after that.

All those who visited us in Malaysia during those early years will remember the small patch of earth next to the scout hut where morning training was conducted. The call to prayer from the nearby mosques punctuating the practice; then the gradual stir of activity as dawn's light rose over the Muar River estuary and the town came to life.

I will not pretend it was easy getting up at five to arrive a good hour after Master Liang had started his own training. Fong and I with infant Lian in tow who, while still a baby, slept in his car seat by the side of the training area; then, as a toddler, scrambled around at our feet, sometimes training himself, with a special little staff that Master Liang, or Grandfather as Lian called him, had shaped for him.

After training, if there was time we would retire for a breakfast of roti canai or if it was term time I would hurry home for a shower and then leave for work. Sometimes the training was so intense that I would feel

physically sick but it was an intensity that was self-imposed, for Master Liang was ever solicitous of our well-being, urging us to rest. We, however, inspired by his example would practice what he was teaching us again and again.

After learning the Fast Taiji, knowing that I was a great fan of the Wong Fei Hong movies, Master Liang offered to teach me the forms of his beloved Hung Gar. Although I was not really attracted to the style, I could not pass up this opportunity. Master Liang learnt from Master Song Sao Bo who learnt from Master Lam Sai Wing who learnt from Master Wong Fei Hong himself. Now I would become a part of this lineage, as would many Zhong Ding members.

Fong and I went on to learn many forms from Master Liang, even while learning the more important lessons which his life and practice embodied. Training, training, training was what it was all about for Master Liang. Not for him the luxury of comparing his standard of skill to that of others, or of resting on the laurels of his achievements. No, for him martial arts meant getting up every morning to start training at 4am, constantly, polishing, honing and refining those skills that he had learnt from his teachers, Master Song Sao Bo, Master Yang Ching Feng and many others whose names I sadly do not know. For Master Liang always urged us to learn from anyone we could; urging that if one human could master these skills so could we.

Master Liang was filled with what he called the Jingwu Jingshen, the spirit of Jingwu. The creed of Huo Yuanjia's Jingwu School as embodied by Master Liang was that the best of all martial arts should be preserved and taught to all, irrespective of race or creed. "You and I may be different races," he would frequently say to me, "But our blood is the same colour!"

Master Liang did not have time for what he called "the squabbles of menpai (different schools)". He wanted us to practice and get the benefits of what was good in all styles. While he kept his practice of the so-called "internal" styles separate from that of the "external", practicing them on different days, he stressed that practice of both would not impede progress in one or the other; a different message from that preached by others. He insisted that internal and external were merely levels of development and that by studying a wide range of styles the diligent exponent would be able to capture the unique flavour and specialities of each and thus enhance his or her martial skill.

Master Liang was always there for us at crucial stages of our life. Whatever the crisis Master Liang had good and timely advice. All those problems we faced on the martial path Master Liang had met with and overcome before and his advice and support always proved invaluable.

When my first Chinese martial arts teacher, Mister Huang Jifu died, it was Master Liang who helped us through the grieving process.

Master Liang took a deep personal interest in Zhong Ding, it was his Grandchild. He remembered the names of the students, both those he had met and those I talked about that he had not met. He always wanted to know what was going on, who had progressed, who was doing what. He was immensely proud of all his Martial Grandchildren; I can see now the wonder and admiration on his face when he saw a good performance of some of the skills that he had imparted.

I have so many memories that they would fill a book and one that comes to mind now was of the time that he first visited England and sat on the examination board for a Duan Grading in London. At first as the students ran through their forms he sat relaxed yet attentive. Then when they started practicing pushing hands, including grappling and groundwork, he sat forward and put on his glasses. Finally when it came to sparring he was half standing, his whole body urging on the fighters. When this was finished he turned to me and stated that this was "real martial arts" and that we were on the right path! I hope and trust we are continuing and will continue to walk that path

Master Liang was a quiet, modest and unassuming man. In his twenties and thirties he ran a full-time school, teaching throughout Johor State. Photos from that time show him sparring with students, smashing stacks of concrete blocks and having bricks and planks broken over his body. This was not a part of his past that he ever talked about. I saw the photos by accident! But the one thing you did know about him was that he

practiced. Every day in his small dentist's surgery he would kick a wooden target or strike and practice qin na (locking skills) on a heavy metal ball. And every morning he would be there training by the river.

It is no exaggeration to say that Master Liang had a deep and positive effect on every student that he met. Zhong Ding would not be what it is today without Master Liang, Fong and I would not be where we are on our martial path without Master Liang. His effect on our martial arts world has been and will continue to be profound. His legacy is the skills that he imparted and the spirit with which he did so. My hope is that we will all do our best to preserve and continue this legacy.

JING WU JING SHEN!

Long Live Master Liang He Qing's Spirit of Jing Wu!

Nigel Sutton

Liang He Qing Shifu Rest in Peace

On the 1st of July, a humid Sunday morning, while on our way to watch the "Ultimate Warrior" fighting competition, my mobile phone rang. The voice at the other end was my martial arts senior sister, Cao Lian from Muar. She broke the sad news that Master Liang had passed away. Even through the numbness and disbelief my immediate reaction was no Master Liang, no more seeing him... and then the sadness and loss brought tears.

My favourite Master, my number one teacher in the world, gone for good and I started to blame myself for taking things for granted, for thinking that he was going to be alright every time he was admitted to hospital over the past few years.

The news left me unable to do anything, no training, no housework – I had lost the master I loved and I couldn't accept the truth that everything in this world comes to an end. The Chinese have a saying "Good men die first" and I want to know why! Every time I think of him I am moved to tears. Those first few days were a blur of phoning others to tell them of Master Liang's passing. I remember telling Master Lau Kim Hong and when I broke down he comforted me.

The very first time we met Master Liang was in 1992. He was recommended to us by Master Lau Kim Hong. During that time we were living in Muar. My son, Lian was nine months old and he used to sit either sleeping or watching us training every morning..

Master Liang was not only a friendly, thoughtful master, always ready to help, but also always willing to do everything he could to teach you his skills. He never treated students differently because of the colour of their skin, their race or their religion.

Some members of the Chinese community, including some of Master Liang's students, were not happy with him for teaching a "laowai" (foreign outsider). They felt that the fact that he was doing so and doing so openly was seriously wrong; to put it bluntly, teaching Nigel was bad!

Master Liang's answer was that he would teach anyone who wanted to learn. After all, as he said, "If you cut Nigel his blood will be the same colour as mine." Those students of Master Liang who objected to Nigel being a student were not heard from anymore after that.

At that time I feel I was so much more naïve than today; always asking Master Liang questions, and not always connected to martial arts. He would always give a patient and full explanation, helping in any way needed. Master Liang taught me how to treat my fellow human beings, how to differentiate right from wrong, in short how to be a good human being. He was like my own father.

Over the years Master Liang taught me many of his Jing Wu forms, applications, fan, Damo sword, fast taijiquan and many other aspects of his martial arts. He constantly stressed that we should have Jingwu Jingshen and that we should live with wu de, "The Martial Code" (martial ethics). He also told us that

whatever we wanted to learn he would teach so that we could preserve it and pass it on so that his art would not die when he was gone.

Master Liang wanted us to train hard and to pass on his art to the West. He said that there were two kinds of martial arts students that we face in life. The first is the serious learner, while the second is the fun learner. Serious learners will do as they are told, appreciate the teacher's teaching, take everything in, improve their forms and in time pass on what they have learnt.

The fun learner plays the fool in class, uses the classes to kill time and treats training as entertainment or as a social occasion, an opportunity to meet people and make friends. These students he felt, if taken seriously just wasted time. With such students Master Liang's advice was to teach them in the same spirit as they are learning, not to take it too seriously and just to have fun. With the serious student, however, it is the teacher's duty to teach all that he can, to truly pass on the art.

Master Liang loved to say that learning wushu was for ourselves not for others. Wushu can be practiced any time any day and you don't need a partner or any special equipment. He told us that when others criticized us never to take it into our hearts and to treat students like our own family, assisting them to learn how to do the right thing, behave in the right manner and treat others in the right manner. In addition he stressed that we should always try never to trouble people, to always make life easier for others. Money, he would tell us, can't buy everything whereas your art will be with you at all times, so long as you continue training.

Indeed Master Liang did not want our money. I had to force him to take red packets from us every time he finished teaching a particular form or subject. He would always say that he had money. Our reply was that if he didn't take our money we would be unable to continue training with him, to do so would cause us great shame.

From day one I learnt to put a red packet into his shirt pocket or waiting until he opened the door of his car and then putting the red packet on his front seat. Faced with no choice he had to take the red packets but he always insisted that he had his own dental clinic and two children with good jobs to provide him with money.

I know from the bottom of my heart that he gave his art to us in Zhong Ding in a spirit of generosity and we must repay him by keeping his art alive.

MASTER LIANG my sorrow and pain at losing you will ease and fade but my promise is that I will continue to train hard, passing down your art as I am doing now with my own young students

MASTER LIANG, you have my thanks as father, teacher, beloved friend, forever you will live in my heart and my soul. So now rest in peace in the knowledge that you are forever a beloved part of the Zhong Ding International Traditional Martial Arts Association and that hundreds and then thousands of students will pass on you art, ensuring that it never fades away.

Tan Mew Hong

I was very saddened to learn of the loss of Master Liang. Though I trained with him on fewer occasions than many of the other Zhong Ding family, Master Liang struck me as not only being the martial artists' martial artist but also a true gentleman. I will always owe him a debt of thanks for the kindness he showed to my wife and I on our honeymoon in Malaysia some 14 years ago.

Master Liang was the embodiment of all that is best in the Chinese martial arts. His high level of skill was the result of a quite remarkable lineage of teachers with whom he had trained in his earlier years, combined with a tenacity and perseverance throughout his life which was reflected in a daily training routine any Olympic athlete would be proud of. Master Liang's openness to new ideas and his ability to capture the essence of the arts he studied enabled him to reach a level of skill and understanding that few of us will ever be able to emulate but which should act as a standard for us all to aspire to. He also wanted to share his

love of the Chinese martial arts with any soul he felt had a genuine interest in his own passion, regardless of their ethnicity.

Master Liang was a living treasure who went beyond style or school to capture the very essence of the Chinese martial arts. You may or may not have had the privilege of meeting or training with Master Liang in person, but anyone who has trained in a Zhong Ding school for any length of time will knowingly or unknowingly have come into contact with Master Liang's influence, whether it be in terms of forms such as his cane forms and the taiji fast form, or with his ideas concerning the practice of the arts. His influence has contributed a great deal to the practice of the Chinese martial arts in Zhong Ding schools.

While we mourn his passing and our thoughts are with his family at this difficult time, we should ensure that we continue to uphold the legacy he bequeathed: not just in continuing to practice the forms and other elements he taught us but also in upholding the tradition of Wu De, of which he was a shining example. May he rest in peace.

John Gardiner

I was so sorry to hear about the loss of Master Liang. I think he was a favourite of us all. When I think of Master Liang I always remember seeing him coming down my stairs early in the morning before a class with a broadsword in his hand asking if I wanted to go out to practice the Dao form, which he was kindly teaching me, I never needed to ask he was always ready. (In fact I was so tired from the previous days training I was glad I was making the breakfast and could have a rest!!!!)We would then go outside where I would follow him through the form many times, he had such infectious energy!!! (He would smile and say Practice, Practice!!).

He always seemed very quiet and unassuming, but always happy to help, a real gentlemen.

He was a true master in every sense of the word, and he will be greatly missed by us all.

John Fowler

I received the sad news on Sunday morning that our teacher Master Liang He Qing had passed away.

Although his loss had been on my mind, today has been more difficult being the day of the funeral and the first class I have had to teach since I heard the news on Sunday. As I stood in front of the students tonight I struggled to find the right words to announce the sad news. Looking at their faces I pondered which had had the honour to train with Master Liang, which of them would have memories of spending time with him.

I concluded that in truth everyone present at the class tonight and the many students who would follow in the years to come in the training halls around the world, would have or would be touched by Master Liang.

Master Liang has left a legacy to be proud of and through his many students, those who did not have the pleasure of meeting him will come to know him as a gentle, humble, kind and generous man. A very patient man with a smile for every occasion. A man of knowledge and wisdom with an exceptional high level of skill. He has enriched our lives and through his students others will have their lives enriched by his teachings.

I feel truly honoured that I was allowed to spend time with a true Martial Arts Master.

Thank you Teacher.

David Spencer

A few fond memories of training with Master Liang

I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to train with Master Liang both in England and Malaysia on several occasions. Nigel kindly gave me the opportunity to stay and train with him in Malaysia when I was 13 years old and we went to visit Master Liang. Despite my young age Master Liang was extremely generous in taking the time to personally teach me some of the hundreds of forms he knew. Through a combination of smiles, nods, and pointing, he painstakingly corrected my movements as we trained on the banks of the river Muar. Being minutely adjusted at 5am while sweating profusely in a deep horse stance is something I'll never forget.

One of his students was also kind enough to invite me to stay at her house for a few days and I was able to train each morning and evening with Master Liang. In between visits to his dentist practice Master Liang spent a lot of time showing me around Muar and some of the local shops. In attempting to make me as comfortable as possible I remember several meals of fried egg and gravy, and ironically, also my first taste of KFC!

When visiting Malaysia a couple of year later I again had the chance to train with Master Liang. One of my strongest memories was joining in with one of his classes on the roof of a local building. Thunder and lightening repeatedly lit the sky, fortunately without any rain, while the large group of students followed Master Liang's lead in what seemed a rather surreal experience.

Taking so much time to personally teach a young boy typifies his extreme generosity and desire to pass on as much of his great skill in the Chinese martial arts as possible. Throughout his life Master Liang no doubt contributed to some great memories for thousands of students from around the world and will be missed by so many. May he rest in peace.

Michael Woodruff

Like so many Zhong Ding students, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to train with Master Liang in Malaysia and England on a number of occasions, and remember with great fondness the kindness and patience he showed in his teaching, however inept my efforts may have been, always accompanied by a huge smile.

Training on the banks of the River Muar in the early morning, and at auntie Ciao Lian's home in the evening, with frequent breaks for cold water melon bring back very happy memories, as does visiting his small dentists office and being shown the methods he used to strengthen his hands with a metal ball – he never stopped training. He also took us to visit the training hall of the world championship-winning lion dance team, who demonstrated their training methods for us. But some of my happiest memories are in England, where he toured around the country teaching his art to an eager audience, and his evident pleasure in our enthusiasm for what he had to teach. His humility was remarkable; staying at our home on several occasions, he was most concerned that he was "fitting in" with our ways! I also recall a winter visit when we were constantly on the lookout for snow which he was most eager to experience. Master Liang's English was not extensive, however no-one could have got more mileage out of the word "can", which often came as a question, but most usually as a decisive statement that if you would just get on and train, you'd get it.

On a recent visit to Spain, I reflected just how far Master Liang's influence had spread as I watched some Spanish Zhong Ding students practising one of his qigong forms, and in England, when news of his passing spread, even students who had never had the opportunity to meet him, felt that they knew Master Liang from the affectionate reminiscences of others.

Like so many, I won't forget Master Liang's wisdom or his kindness, or the spirit in which he taught us, and I will continue to "Practice, practice". I know how fortunate I have been to have trained with him. May he rest in peace.

Vicky Holden

I was fortunate enough to have met and trained with Master Liang right at the start of my Tai Chi journey when he travelled to the UK with Master Nigel Sutton to teach at a weekend workshop.

All the truly great Martial Arts Masters seem to possess a certain childlike quality and sense of fun, and Master Liang was certainly no exception.

My main memory of Master Liang which stands out, is standing on the sidelines watching as some of the braver students approached him for a demonstration of CHIN NA, an art at which Master Liang was so adept !

The beaming smile and slight chuckle as one by one the students legs buckled under his seemingly "light touch" is a memory which I will always treasure.

Although as students, we will no longer have Master Liang's psychical presence, each time we dedicate ourselves to learning and practising one of his forms, his Spirit will draw near, and join with us once more in the Art he loved so much..

Travel far MASTER LIANG.....

Stephanie Wilson

I only had the pleasure of meeting Master Liang once, at his home during Chinese New Year (2006). He had just come out of hospital and was somewhat frail, so I had no opportunity to train with him. However, his spirit was undiminished and his character shone through.

Whether flowing from lock to lock with a training partner long before sunrise, or repeating a form long after the 'western' mind thinks it has learned it, or placing emphasis on the development of both gungfu and on form, Master Liang's influence will be strongly felt by anyone who trains with Nigel or Fong.

I am proud to have met Master Liang and for my training to have been influenced so strongly by him. The last words Fong said to me before I left Penang were an echo of Master Liang:

"You just have to continue practicing".

Thank you Master Liang. Rest in peace.

Hugh Crosland

I was sad to learn of Master Liang's passing & of all the words you have all written about him could I say that you speak for me as well?

I particularly remember the fact that when training with him, we worked hard & got a lot done without the feeling of having to stress & strain, we remained happy & relaxed - how did he do that?

Chris Wyhowski

I wish i had had more time to train with master liang but i know for sure his martial arts (forms and training method) will live on with Zhong Ding and its members. I remember him getting very exited watching the push hand at Mansfield then having the skill to help when things went wrong. I'm happy to have had the chance to have met the man

Mike Roberts

I never had the chance to train with master liang but i became his friend afterwards at a evening event. I am a cantonese speaker and when we talked i tried my hardest to talk to him in mandarin. It was only later that he laughed and said that he understood cantonese all along.

Helen Voong

I was saddened to hear of Master Liang's death, although I knew he was ill I honestly thought I would see him again next year. I only trained with him on a few occasions but I just knew it was a huge honour, I could feel the love he had for his art and how he wanted us to be the best we could.

I treasure his walking stick which I have in my care.

Gerry Kennedy (Ireland)