

Newsletter July 2007

News from the East

Greetings from hot and wet Penang.

You might be comforted to know that while the UK suffers from flooding we are also experiencing something similar over here. This means that work on Zhong Ding International Headquarters (or less grandly our new bungalow) is progressing slowly. We do, however, have a completion date of mid July, so fingers crossed!

Already enquiries are coming in for training in the new centre and I would like to urge all Zhong Ding students to seriously consider such a superb opportunity. We will be open from August to all serious students who wish to experience intensive, total-immersion training in Asia. We will be offering two long-term programmes (Chinese Neijiaquan and Southeast Asian Martial Arts) for apprentice instructors (minimum six months depending on experience) as well as short courses ranging from a week to three months.

The centre will have accommodation for a maximum of four live-in students and will be fully equipped for training. The main training hall is modeled in typical Malay fashion with a sprung wooden floor, while the equipment area has bags, wooden dummies and weapons targets.

Our extensive network of martial arts contacts in the area ensures that students will find opportunities to experience whatever aspects of the Asian martial arts that interest them.

So if you want to find out more send me an e-mail or look out for further details on the zhong-ding website or on www.living-tradition.com

Home News

Now for news closer to home. I shall be visiting the UK at the end of the year and in December we will be having the first Zhong Ding Championships for several years. This should be an exciting occasion and will include a UK versus Malaysia team competition as well as guest demonstrations by instructors from Malaysia and (hopefully) the US.

The competition is scheduled to take place in the East Midlands on the first weekend in December and we will take this opportunity to hold a grand Zhong Ding Christmas bash!

Events in the competition will include a Team Demonstration competition with teams from each area participating, pushing hands and form, and a weapons sparring event. The Malaysia versus UK competition will feature traditional silat (Malay martial art) demonstration competition, where the participants act out a story for the judges, weapons sparring and full-contact sparring.

More details of the competition will be posted on this website as they become available.

Articles

If you are a fan of my purple prose look out for articles in Martial Arts Illustrated, starting with the June edition.

My article for this month focuses on the issue of the individual's responsibility to their martial arts lineage and was prompted by some of the rather disgusting challenges that are floating around in cyberspace at the moment.

Until next month bet wishes and train hard.

Nigel

No Family Teaching!

A strange title, you might think but if translated into Mandarin Chinese or Bahasa Malaysia as "meiyou jiaoyang" or "kurang ajar", then it becomes immediately apparent to speakers of those languages as to what is the topic of this article. For those of us who don't speak those languages then let me explain. "Meiyou jiaoyang" means exactly no family teaching while "kurang ajar" means literally less teaching. But what the two phrases have in common is that they are used to vilify someone who has behaved in an unacceptable manner and they put the blame not on the individual being vilified but on his parents. Using either of these phrases indicates a very serious response to a breach of acceptable behaviour and the phrases are seldom used lightly because of the level of response they will provoke. You might say that they constitute "fighting talk".

What then do these phrases have to do with the Asian martial arts? Well in the cultural context that these arts were born from, behaving respectfully and appropriately so as to show respect to your parents and elders, is an integral part of the process of learning martial arts and of being a member of martial arts society.

This means that all of your actions need to be judged against the rule of what is acceptable to your martial arts teacher and your lineage. In most cases the teacher and the lineage will be measured against the norms of acceptable behaviour in martial arts society. An example of this might be that to go to another teacher's school to challenge them puts the challenger in the wrong unless he wins. If he does, the loser is expected to stop teaching. If the challenger loses he is expected to ask to become a disciple of the victor. If the challenged boxer loses but carries on teaching then he has transgressed this unwritten code and similarly if the challenger issues his challenge simply out of ego he might well be regarded negatively, and if he loses then does not try to become a disciple of the victor he will definitely be regarded as being in the wrong. There is an explicit protocol to be observed in such affairs and those who do not follow it will find themselves losing the respect of their martial peers. Thus challenges should, ideally be carried out in a "polite" manner, that is without cussing and bad-mouthing, more along the lines of "Respected Teacher, please teach me your skills", rather than "Yo muvva f*%&^\$r I'm going to kick your ass!"

One important point to be noted here is that it is not just the individual who transgresses the code of acceptable behaviour that receives a negative reaction from his peers, but his whole school. Such matters concerning shame and face are a very big deal in Asian society and can result in suicides, blood feuds and all sorts of unpleasantness.

One of my teachers, Master Lau Kim Hong of Zhengzi taijiquan when still a young teacher was challenged by two men who came to his class and loudly proclaimed that they were exponents of Western Boxing and that they would like to see how taijiquan would measure up against the speed of boxing. This challenge was issued loudly enough so that all of the students present could hear and presented a potentially large "loss of face" for Master Lau. Following acceptable protocol for such things Master Lau asked one of the young men to please show him his skills. The would-be challenger started skipping from foot to foot and then launched a fast jabbing attack at Master Lau's head. He responded by stepping forward into the attack and lifting both his arms up in front of his face, then as the boxer withdrew slightly in preparation for another combination of blows, Master Lau slapped him once, hard, across the face. The effect of such a relaxed slap at the hands of a skilled taijiquan exponent was instant and devastating. The boxer dropped to his knees clutching his face and then, helped by his friend, crawled over to a bench at the side of the hall where he spent the rest of the lesson. The friend too did not want to attempt his own challenge and sat next to his

wounded comrade. Master Lau commented laconically that the challenger's groaning disrupted the rest of the lesson but he reserved his most blistering criticism for the subsequent behaviour of the erstwhile challengers. They were not gentlemen he noted because although beaten they did not come back to learn from him. Such behaviour is most definitely indicative of "meiyou jiaoyang". Of course since the two young men were students of a foreign art, western boxing, nothing less was to be expected, but since they were Chinese, Master Lau felt that they should have had some sense of what was right or wrong in such a situation.

The fact that, no family teaching is considered such a serious stigma in the world of Asian martial arts, points to the importance of responsibility. As students in an Asian martial arts tradition we are the representatives of our teacher and our lineage. We carry the heavy burden of responsibility which requires that we constantly measure our actions against the standards of our martial arts seniors, teacher and lineage.

It is not an overstatement to say that the internet, while being a sometime useful source for information, is also an enormous breeding ground for "kurang ajar". Martial arts sites are littered with challenges, insults and a myriad of examples of no family teaching. What is the saddest thing to me about this is that some of those active in such behaviour are the staunchest traditionalists and defenders of tradition. There is no doubt, if their posted biographies are to be believed, and I have no reason to doubt them, that these people are competent fighters and have learnt "the real thing". However, I also have absolutely no doubt that their teachers and the proud lineages that they represent would never condone such behaviour. Win or lose in such affairs their lineage has already lost. The martial arts society of peers out of which their beloved traditions have grown can only pass one judgement on their behaviour: "kurang ajar", "meiyou jiaoyang", no family teaching!

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