

## Newsletter October 2007

As my visit to England approaches I find myself busy making all the usual last-minute preparations. As I write I have just finished the final proof-reading for Master of the Way, a book celebrating the life of Master Liang He Qing. In this book as well as collecting some of Master Liang's most important teachings and a biographical sketch of his life, I have also included an in-depth analysis and description of Master Liang's unique role and contribution to his community as teacher, healer, preserver of tradition and warrior. This book will be available from me during my visit.

As preparations for the Master Liang He Qing Memorial Championships continue apace I trust that all of you are training hard in preparation for what will truly be a memorable event. Special guests will include Guru Zainal Abidin of Silat Tua and some of his senior students who will be taking part in the featured Malaysia versus UK silat competition. This event will include a full-contact match (Come on Adam!), weapons sparring and a traditional event called Silat Story in which exponents act out a story using silat techniques and skills. All in all it should be very entertaining.

On Sunday December 2nd Guru Zainal, myself and Don Harradine will be doing a joint seminar in which we compare the different approaches to distancing in the weapons usage of taijiquan, silat and western fencing.

Guru Zainal has been practicing martial arts for more than 40 years and teaching for the last thirty. He is, in my opinion, one of the most knowledgeable and well-rounded Malaysian martial artists I have met and no matter what your discipline there is much to be learnt from him. In addition he plays a mean guitar and has a repertoire of 60's songs that is truly something unique! (He mocks my singing skills too!) So the Zhong Ding Party on the evening of December 1st should be a very special occasion.

So I look forward to seeing all of you soon and in the meantime train hard and have fun!

## Distance – The Crucial Factor

### An Examination of Distancing in Chinese, Southeast Asian and Western Weapons Usage

#### A Multi-Style Seminar

Featuring Guru Zainal Abidin Shaikh Awab, Don Harradine, Nigel Sutton

The course will focus on the use of distancing in Chinese, Malay, Thai and Western martial arts with particular reference to weapons usage.

The course instructors will present a study of both the theory and practice of distancing, drawing on the wealth of their experience in these areas. Course participants will learn and explore a range of different methods for estimating and using distancing with a range of weapons from the knife, through the sword and parang, to such long weapons as the staff.

Guru Zainal Abidin (co-author of Silat Tua: The Malay Dance of Life) is a veteran martial artist who as well as being inheritor of several Silat systems is also a lineage holder in a family system of Classical Thai Martial Arts. Guru Zainal has competed successfully in Muay Thai tournaments in Thailand and is a Senior Instructor in the Penang Silat Community.

Don Harradine's martial arts experience spans three decades during which time he has earned teaching qualifications in fencing, taijiquan, baguazhang, xingyiquan, Silat Tua, Silat Lian Padukan and Silat Embo.

Nigel Sutton has trained in Chinese martial arts for the best part of three decades. During the last 15 years he has lived in Malaysia where as well as studying and teaching the Chinese arts he also studies Silat, Eskrima and Krabi Krabong.

For more information contact: Don Harradine.

## Teaching – A Blessed Vocation

Last Newsletter I wrote about the fact that our art is a treasure without price. This month I want to talk about those who take on the heavy responsibility of preserving and passing on this treasure.

Most recently I have been busy compiling and preparing the book which will serve as a memorial tribute to Master Liang. I have endeavoured to make this a fair and accurate reflection of the tremendous impact his teaching and his life had on those of us who knew and loved him, and on Zhong Ding in general. Much of this book is concerned with Master Liang's role as a teacher and this, in conjunction with certain things that my silat teacher, Guru Zainal Abidin, has said to me led me to the reflections which I share with you here.

As a teacher Master Liang came into my life at a time when, for several years, I had committed myself to the intensive study of Zhengzi Taijiquan. For a number of reasons Master Liang convinced me that my martial arts journey would benefit from a wider study. Inspired by his example I began to learn and practice not only the arts that Master Liang taught but also Master Tan Swoh Theng's wuzuquan and later Chen style taijiquan with Masters Fu Chang Hui and Zhu Tian Cai.

But more than the arts that Master Liang taught, he also educated me in the way of the teacher, based on his own decades of teaching experience. When various crises or problems faced Zhong Ding, Master Liang's advice and example proved invaluable. Much of what he taught me was about the art of being a teacher.

When talking on this subject Master Liang would often return to the idea that as teachers we had the opportunity to rise above our own faults and limitations. His point being that when we became teachers we become carriers of the knowledge of the previous generation and no matter our own weaknesses we must have the strength and integrity to pass on the art intact to the next generation.

This is a message that I have taken to heart and although I am aware that I am all too human with more than my share of human faults, when it comes to my martial arts training I have tried to always act in the best interests of my students with the intention of preserving and strengthening the lineage. On occasions when the interests of individual students have conflicted with those of the lineage I have been compelled to act in a way most beneficial to the continuation and preservation of the art. This is my responsibility.

Where Master Liang left off in his education of me as a teacher, my current teacher, Guru Zainal Abidin, has taken up the reins. Since very early on in our teacher-student relationship he pointed out to me that his understanding and practice of silat paralleled my understanding and practice of taijiquan, much of his teaching has consisted of this tricky business of the role of the teacher.

Like me he has been entrusted with the responsibility of passing on several distinct systems, including his wife's family system of classical Thai Boxing and Krabi Krabong (Thai weapons art). This responsibility I know is in his thoughts every single day but rather than see it as an onerous burden, he regards it as a blessing. As teachers, he feels, we need never regret having wasted our lives. As long as we are able to pass on the experience and knowledge of those of previous generations to those of future generations we are living the most positive of lives.

Like Master Liang, whose teachings his sometimes mirror in the most uncanny of fashions, given the difference in their cultural backgrounds, Guru Zainal believes that the role of teacher gives us both the responsibility and the strength to rise up above individual feelings and weaknesses in order to act for the good of the lineage.

In my own experience I have found that my responsibility as a teacher has enabled me to rise above fear, both of injury and of embarrassment, to represent my school and my teachers. When I tested for and was chosen to represent Britain as a member of the 1986 British Wushu Team, it was because my teacher wanted me to enter. I suffered and endured through three months of intensive training because my teacher had placed his hopes in me. At the time I was going through a traumatic divorce and psychologically, if not physically, was in a terrible state. Although I was tempted many times to give up I persisted and, I hope, made my teacher proud.

When I first started teaching taijiquan's fighting skills in public seminars I had little faith in my own ability but my confidence was bolstered by the fact that I did not want to let down my teacher or my lineage

Since that time there have been numerous occasions when I have had to act in a way that I might not personally have chosen to do; my role as teacher, however, has dictated that I must follow the course of action that best promotes and preserves the lineage. On occasion I have had to work with individuals that I did not respect or like, sometimes my own peers and martial arts brothers or sisters. At times like those the example of my Chinese teachers and indeed of Chinese society as a whole served to bolster my spirits and carry me through. This example is that the members of the group, no matter what their individual feelings may be, will always work together for the greater good. Thus members of martial arts families who are sometimes sworn enemies will still compromise and cooperate to further the aims and protect the teaching of their common lineage. This ability to work together has ensured that Chinese business, social and financial networks remain strong no matter what pressures they face. I try to follow their example.

Now with the Master Liang He Qing Memorial Championships looming on the horizon, is the time for all of us in Zhong Ding to show this same spirit. My hope and expectation is that all the members of our extended family, no matter what their individual differences, will gather together to celebrate Master Liang's life and his deep impact on all of our lives. The event will be filmed and a copy given to Master Liang's family as a small token to show our gratitude for his teaching and example.

Now is the chance for us all to exhibit in whatever measure we feel able something of Master Liang's beloved JING WU JING SHEN; the spirit of Jing Wu which puts the promotion and preservation of these arts we love above all sectarian and individual differences.

As a teacher I feel blessed that I have some small part in ensuring that Master Liang's legacy is preserved for, as Master Liang's young grandson observed after seeing the tributes on the Zhong Ding website: "Wouldn't Grandfather be proud if he could see all these things!" I know he would and somehow I feel he is.

See you all at the competition.

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