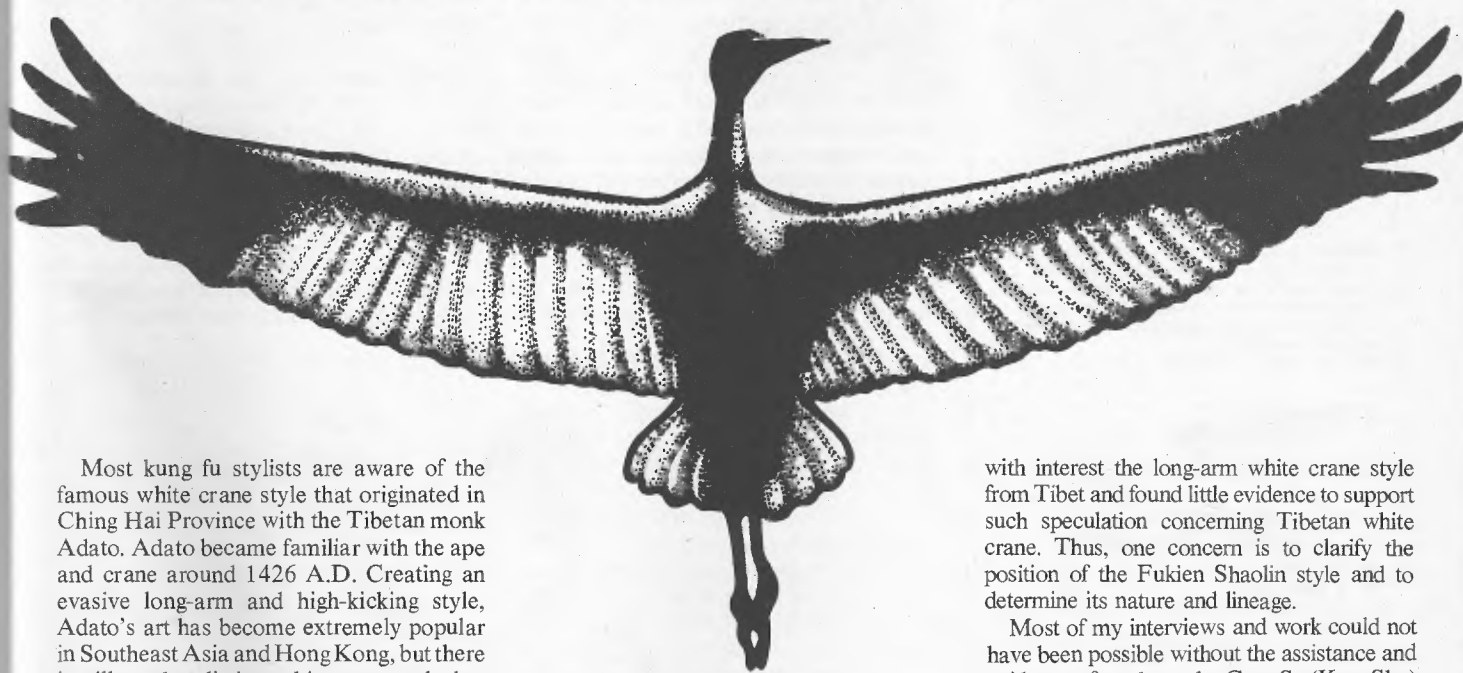


# FUKIEN WHITE CRANE

## A SELDOM-SEEN TRADITIONAL CHINESE ART



Most kung fu stylists are aware of the famous white crane style that originated in Ching Hai Province with the Tibetan monk Adato. Adato became familiar with the ape and crane around 1426 A.D. Creating an evasive long-arm and high-kicking style, Adato's art has become extremely popular in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong, but there is still another distinct white crane style that few note as a separate art. It stands as an art that has had a direct bearing on the development of karate and still quietly lingers cloaked in the secrecy of tradition and often overlooked as another form of tai chi. Fukien white crane stands as a uniquely sophisticated art that could be used as an intricate key to grasping the traditions and methods of the Fukien Shaolin temple.

### Fukien Shaolin Kung Fu

The Shaolin Temple stands as the impetus for most martial arts in Southeast Asia. Some speculate that around 2697 B.C. the softer principles of combat were being perceived as a form of wrestling in Hopei Province. Several Chinese migrating groups who originated from this area have had an overwhelming influence on the culture and martial arts of other lands. During the Chin Dynasty, a Taoist cult leader and 300 followers left and moved toward Japan, bringing with them the wrestling skills and interests that later became known as judo, sumo, etc. During the Han dynasty the Huns and the Turks were driven from this region by

emperor Wu's troops. They settled in Hungary and Turkey, bringing with them wrestling skills that were far different from Greco-Roman skills. This unique form of grappling, coupled with punching and kicking, gave rise to what we know as wrestling. Some of the same group migrated to Korea, bringing the same interest and the same art. In Korea the term *tang soo do* would be used to describe "the Way of the Chinese Hand." Until the 19th century, Japanese and Okinawans similarly referred to their karate as "the Way of the Chinese Hand Fighting," and the origin of their art is often credited to the Fukien Shaolin Temple. Some modern karate enthusiasts speak highly of the art; others feel the art was disregarded by the Okinawans and the Japanese for more lethal weapons. The author has heard some speculate that the Okinawans and Japanese dismissed the high kicking methods of the Chinese, while still others suggest that the highest form of Okinawan karate may be practiced by the descendants of the white crane style.

With all of this in mind, the author studied

with interest the long-arm white crane style from Tibet and found little evidence to support such speculation concerning Tibetan white crane. Thus, one concern is to clarify the position of the Fukien Shaolin style and to determine its nature and lineage.

Most of my interviews and work could not have been possible without the assistance and guidance of my host, the Gwo Su (Kwo Shu) Federation of China. Chairman Mao Chung Shu set up some enlightening discussions and demonstrations with some of Gwo Su's elder kung fu men.

### The Emergence of the White Crane

A visit with Master Lui Yin Sun proved to be one of the most exciting, because the Lui family has been generally accepted as direct descendants of the Fukien Shaolin Temple, so this meeting clarified the nature and development of Fukien white crane.

During the Chin dynasty, a monk named Fung We Sho taught his daughter, Fung China, Fukien Shaolin kung fu. Eventually, her kung fu became highly skillful and disciplined. One afternoon, while pausing from practice, she noted the fierce shrieks and cries of a white crane feeding. Impressed by this large egret's ferocity, she decided to develop a method of studying the bird's aggressive attacks. To this point, her resulting martial art expressed the general Shaolin study, or five animal curriculum, and her insights into the combativeness of the crane

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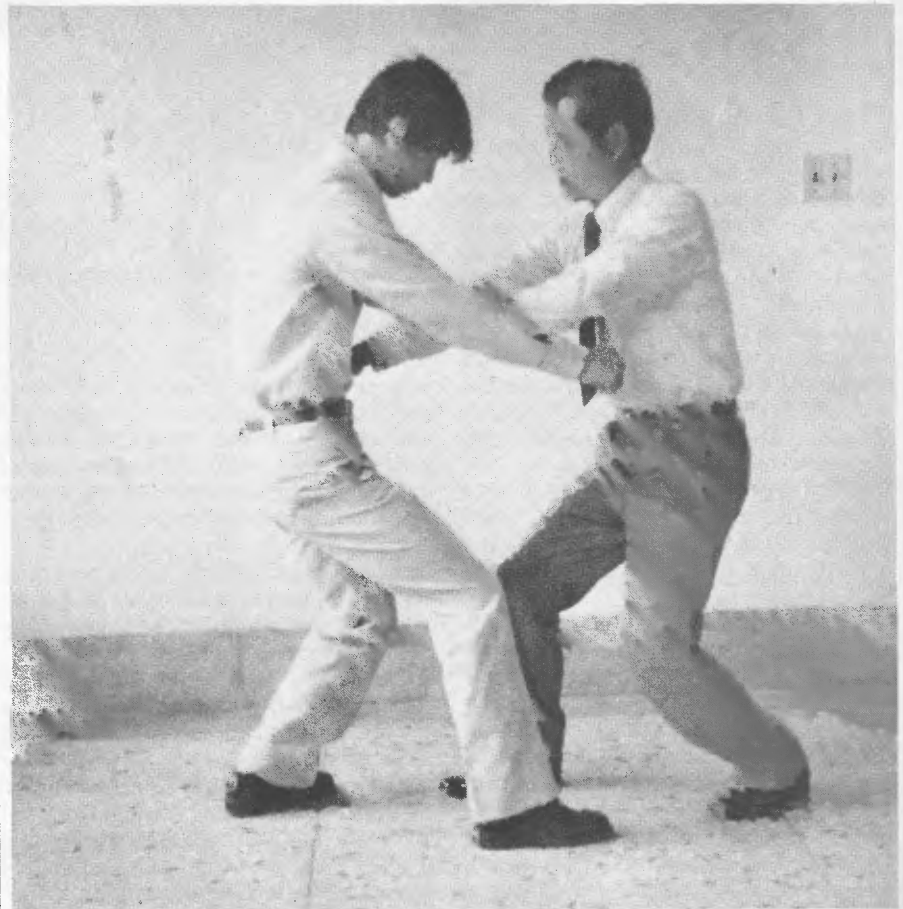
**WHITE CRANE**

had already been stimulated by this classical "five animal approach" expressed by her father. Thus, the characteristic side stepping, and the aggressiveness of the crane had already fascinated Fung Chinya. She became so enthralled in the crane's feeding movements that she made her observations a daily routine. She devised a large pedestal ten feet from her practice area and routinely placed large pieces of meat on the edifice. After practicing each day, she watched groups of cranes attack the meat. Finally, she mimicked these elegant, fierce movements and the "eating crane" style was tediously developed. Later her observations were organized into three other classifications of crane movements: flying, sleeping and singing. The emotion and nature of the eating crane made this style the most aggressive of the four crane emotions. These short movements are soft but extremely fast. Some suggest that she taught this soft hand system to another woman, Wing Chun, and a more stationary art was developed. Thus, as developed, this art, Fukien white crane, stands as a refinement of Fukien Shaolin techniques by a Fukien Shaolin master, and that her refinements led to the development

of a softer style. This art was brought to Taiwan by Lin Da Shurin from Fujo Province. As in its origin, the bond of the Chinese family enveloped the art. Each student devoted himself to his master or father and outside of the perimeters of the family, few were taught. Even those few who were alien to the family were adopted as family. Often, beginning instruction is held open to all, but true Fukien white crane is said to have been taught only "inside the door" to those students who were family. With this extremely restrictive formula for instruction, Fukien white crane has maintained a very esoteric structure, and few have had the opportunity to see the art demonstrated.

**The Descendants of the Temple**

In 1927 Lin Da Shwen and Lui Yin Sun met. Lin Da Shwen was looking for a good student. Poor and homeless, Lin Da Shwen was obligated to teach to live, and yet, he did not wish to ruin his art by superficial instruction that failed to develop any total understanding of his art. He felt his kung fu could not be taught in large classrooms, that his art took time. It was personal, consisting



Fukien white crane perceives a block and a punch as a simultaneous action. Here, Lui Yin Sun's block is instinctively combined with a tracer punch.

## The Philosophy of Lui Yin Sun

Mr. Lui's classical instruction dominates his life, and his tenor of instruction is still the same. He suggests that only good people can really learn and develop kung fu. But good people can only be taught by good instruction. For this reason, instruction must be personal and highly valued. Good instruction develops patience and diligence, which emits a timeless energy; an energy that is characterized by personal growth. Thousands grapple with the study, but few learn—and fewer improve—the art. Perhaps, the overriding feature of modern training is its desire to hurry learning. The net result is that movements have no vision or direction. Energy is wasted and real kung fu is hardly noticed.

As a student, Mr. Lui was first instructed in anatomy. He studied acupuncture and the *chi* cycles of the human body. His earlier instruction stressed that medicine and well-being were the real basis of all kung fu. His expertise in this area lies in his study of the *Tang An Boo*, a book of kung fu that was smuggled from the Shaolin temple following its burning. Mr. Lui received three sections of this highly treasured text. His medicine consists of traditional Shaolin remedies.

Today, Mr. Lui stands as a unique figure. At sixty-six, his sons and a few other students are always close to him. He moves with the speed and energy of a highly skilled master who reflects no trace of age. Naturally, older men seek Mr. Lui's instruction, for his style reflects the maturity and wisdom of the ancient arts. The closeness of his clan, and the brotherhood shared by each is reminiscent of the legend of Kwan Kung which binds most kung fu societies. His students feel no need to compete in making a sport of kung fu. Mr. Lui suggested that more often than not did sport training distract an internal boxer from development. Deadlines for bouts preclude sincere study and force the competitor to seek short cuts for immediate effect.

Mr. Lui also plays and instructs long staff (*kwan*) and *san jee kwan*, or nunchuku. Each weapon provides the student with a different level of eye and hand coordination. *San jee kwan* is instructed in a 12-point self-defense program, and generally is considered as an emergency device, because weapon studies could easily mislead a student from the real purpose of kung fu, the development of a good person and his total health or well-being. Weapon studies can not shorten the road to an awareness of kung fu, and only a journey can develop patience, diligence, and timeless energy.



A rare photo of Lui and his father. The senior Lui, at right, was the original head of the Lui family and practiced his art even while blind.

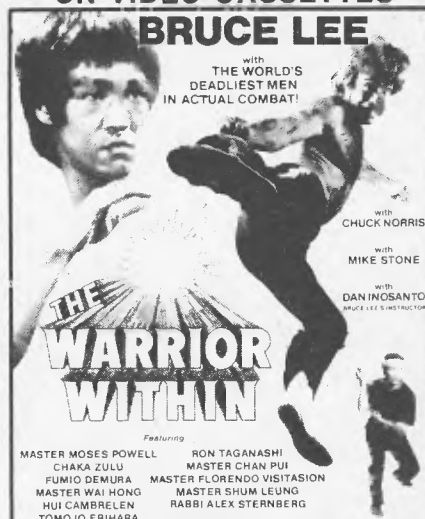
of intricate two-man exercises that emphasized critical hand play, with few kicks. Fortunately for Lin Da Shwen, his first student was the only viable answer to solving his problem. Lui Yin Sun, now deceased, was a young man who had inherited a fortune and a strong desire to practice kung fu. Lui Yin Sun became so impressed with Lin Da Shwen's Fukien white crane that he offered to share his total wealth with the white crane master. His wealth granted him the precious and necessary time to practice with his teacher. Ironically, it was these strange circumstances that led to the preservation of the eating crane style. Lui Yin Sun died at the age of 81. Although blind, he still practiced and taught kung fu until the year of his death. His son, also named Lui Yin Sun and now sixty-seven, heads the instruction of this traditional art. Today, his kung fu family is now being extended further than ever.

In all of Southeast Asia the white crane is revered and reproduced in all forms of art. Households display silkscreens with the crane pictured on pine branches or wooden sculptures of egrets decorate a dining area. The beautifully colored white crane signifies a long and peaceful life. Consistent with the art forms offered by others, these Fukien white crane men, like their counterparts of Tibetan white crane, are noted for their kindness and manners. Both styles, although distinctly different, present themselves as peaceful men studying for their health and well being. Yet, under their tranquility lies a fierceness and aggressiveness that can only be characterized as "white crane."

About the author: Mr. Illar is chief instructor of the White Crane Gung Fu Studio in Baton Rouge. His is an active member of the Kung Fu Federation of China.

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