



LIU HAO YI

Beauty and the Sword

There are some basic tenets to good swordplay. The sword, if properly performed, should speak from the heart of a woman. It should have the rhythm of music.

Story and photos by L. Illar

Kung-fu is a unique form of martial art; it develops the given personality of each individual. Whether the performer is male or female, the art highlights the individual's identity. This sexual slant to kung-fu is not new. Tradition indicates that women have always appeared seductive while performing kung-fu.

A quick survey of the average tournament competition in the United States reveals an air of independence among kung-fu stylists. Standardization of uniform, dress, and ritual vary from one school to another. But even more characteristic of the art is the distinction of the women competitors. Each dresses in very feminine attire, and each performs with the graceful charm of a woman. It's not unusual to find the female performer encircled by male competitors. She's a real charmer. If she's highly competitive, her uniform is not only a brightly colored satin, but its cut and trim are distinctly feminine. Their costumes, coupled with the elegance of a long-arm form, creates a spectacle that pops camera buffs through their flash bulbs.

Historically, girls were required to learn the sword. It was a royal tradition to have females perform before their emperor. The sword dance was an enticing, elegant display of kung-fu. One old fable tells the story of Tsou Fe Yet, a famous swordswoman who had such light feet, she could dance in the palm of the emperor's hand. Another famous legend has it that King Tsu Ba Wa was so rough and tough, no woman dared to set foot in his home. His cruelty was infamous, until the day he witnessed the sword dance of Lu Tsee. He found her movements enticing and highly entertaining. She gradually won his favor and they fell in love. Her personal charm was so intense that, through her sword dancing, he was softened and changed. In time, he became a notoriously happy and gentle ruler. Traditionally, the power of the sword lies not in the sharpness of the blade, but rather in the beauty and warmth of the heart which guides it.

In the Republic of China, the legacy of the sword has been handed to a new generation. This most feminine form of martial art is now being kept by stage and screen stars. Miss Liu Hao Yi, a member of the Board of Directors of Koushu (the kung-fu federation of the Republic of China), commands the respect of her martial art peers, while carrying on one of the oldest



At the young age of 24, Liu Hao Yi has already become one of the best-known screen stars in the Republic of China. She has appeared in over 20 movies, and shared sets with Jackie Chan, Di Lo and Frank Wong.

traditions in Chinese culture. In all senses, she is one of today's modern kung-fu masters, and the epitome of the Chinese swordswoman.

In the Republic of China, the sword is still taught to young women studying kung-fu (Fu Shing and other schools stress disciplined sword practice), but few have illustrated the effect of the sword on stage or screen as well as Liu Hao Yi. Miss Liu, at twenty-four, is a well-known kung-fu star in Southeast Asia. She has appeared in over twenty movies, and has studied kung-fu since the age of eight. She enjoys watching kung-fu movies as well as performing in them. Miss Liu has worked with Chung Lo (Jackie Chan), Di Lo, and Frank Wong. Her favorite movie is *The Black Seven Heroes*.

She feels her elegance is partially derived from her style. The "Long Fist" forms best-enhance a woman's figure and manner. They make her visually exciting, more so than any other kung-fu style. Aside from her two hours of practice each day, she also meets with her seventy-year-old teacher, Master Kao Tao Shan, on a regular basis. Her repertoire of weaponry is very traditional. Unlike other instructors, Master Kao has never allowed her to specialize in merely one weapon, but has insisted that she constantly keeps developing. Miss Liu now performs with over twenty weapons. Aside from all this, you can still find her swimming, jogging, bouncing to an aerobic beat and dancing at a disco. When asked how she manages all these activities, she said she trains regularly and constantly watches her diet, eating mostly vegetables, with moderate portions of fish or chicken.

Miss Liu's training extends beyond kung-fu studies. She studied dance (both western ballet and Chinese opera), as well

as acting and directing; while getting a journalism degree in college.

"Kung-fu movies are often misunderstood in the United States," she says. "The well-made movies are extremely difficult to make. These movies have excellent kung-fu people in them and frequently have very real fight scenes." Miss Liu smiled and stressed, "All too many times patterns or choreographed scenes are broken and the kung-fu stars literally struggle to defend themselves." Sometimes this makes a great fight scene. Other times, it could mean a broken nose or other serious injuries.

Looking at Miss Liu, you never would expect her to survive such an encounter. At five feet two inches and merely a hundred pounds, no one would suspect her to be a mortal threat. However, having seen her in action, I can attest to the fact that no modern camera speed tricks are needed to enhance Miss Liu's kung-fu techniques. Rather, they probably need to slow the camera down. When she performs, her kung-fu is very strong and spontaneous. In both action and philosophy, she is one young lady who indeed expresses the ancient wisdom of the masters. When asked, "what importance has kung-fu played in her life?" she replied, "My self-discipline and self-control have both educated, and elevated me to stardom. Kung-fu gave me discipline and self-control."



About the Author: L. Illar, chief instructor of the White Crane Kung-Fu Studio in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, is a member of the Inside Kung-Fu Hall of Fame.