

INSIDE

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★ THE SEVEN-STAR/
PRAYING MANTIS.

••ACUPUNCTURE••

•Shaolin Temple
in California

Behind TV's "KUNG-FU" -with David Chow.



Above right: Keeping a busy schedule of teaching, the Grandmaster has over 100 students of all races at his studio. The man who finally broke Kung-Fu's "color line" in 1964, Grandmaster Wong is proud of the achievements of his students since then.

Above left: The "Dragon Drop," one of the most physically difficult stances to master, is used to drop quickly to the ground in a fight, or when cutting down hard with a weapon. Requiring extremely strong but flexible knees, the "Dragon Drop" is also an exercise used to develop breathing and internal powers.

Below right: An ancient weapon from the bloody feudal past of China, the "quan do" is held by the Grandmaster. Hand and weapons forms, known in Karate as "katas," are called "acting" by Wong.

Below left: In addition to his knowledge of the fighting styles of Kung-Fu, Grandmaster Wong is also a Master of the ancient art of herbal medicines. The Grandmaster's Wah Que Studio also serves the Chinese community as an herb store, with a wide variety (including sea horses) on hand.



KUNG-FU GRANDMASTER ARK Y. WONG

By CORY SHIOZAKI



"It was a good decision, opening up the school like that. It's easy to see that it was right," said the Grandmaster about that time in 1964 when he broke the traditional Kung-Fu "color line" by opening up his Wah Que Studio to anyone who was interested. Previously an art reserved exclusively for full-blooded Chinese, the opening up of Wah Que probably first set in motion the forces that eventually led to the mass popularity of the art today. "Like I've said before," Wong added, "the art isn't something you can take with you, but it's something I would like to leave to dedicated students."

Accordingly, the Grandmaster maintains a busy teaching schedule at his Wah Que Studio, located in Los Angeles' Old Chinatown. Seven days a week, Wong can be found teaching over 100 students interested in learning his art. With both public and private classes, a varying range of instruction is available. "For the beginners, I teach the basics of the art in an all-around approach," Wong points out, "and for anyone wanting to concentrate on a specific form or technique, I do this in the private classes."

The Grandmaster's first school was located in the Chinatown district of San Francisco. "It was a small kwoon, but not too bad. I stayed for four years and taught the art to some of the prominent Chinese families of San Francisco—remember, the art was still all-Chinese back then."

Born near Canton in 1900, Wong was exposed to the martial arts almost from the beginning. Because of the chaotic conditions and instability of the times, some kind of self-defense training was necessary for the very real problem posed by numerous "hoodlums and bullies" all over; so at age 7, he was enrolled at a school by his grandfather.

Training in Kung-Fu continued over the years of his youth, and he even travelled once to Canton to study under the Shaolin monk Pang. This extensive training soon had its culmination when he received the title of Grand Master in 1921. In the Gung Fu protocol, a Grandmaster distinguishes a practitioner as a sifu (teacher) of Masters.

Later that year, in recognition of his achievements, Wong





Grandmaster Wong in the "Fu," or Tiger, stance. A "ready" stance, "Fu" was developed from the original Five-Formed Fist of Shaolin Kung-Fu. The "Fu" form is based upon exercises to develop the bones of the practitioner.

was invited by some friends to come to America as their teacher. He accepted, and in 1922, set up the first of many schools that would come in the next 50 years.

Following his San Francisco school, the Grandmaster taught in various parts of California before finally coming to Los Angeles in 1934. With the exception of one extended trip to Hong Kong in 1961 ("Many people, including my old instructor, wanted me to stay and teach in Hong Kong," Wong recalls, "but I just didn't have the time."), he has more or less settled down in Los Angeles.

The Grandmaster teaches many branches of the basic Shaolin style of Kung-Fu at his studio, but his own style isn't one of his favorite conversational subjects, a throwback to the traditional secrecy surrounding the Masters. In talking to those who know the Master better, there is still some uncertainty. One former student (now a sifu himself) couldn't even guess. "Some say that his personal style is Choy Li Fut, but I don't know. He knows so many techniques from so many different styles, and he combines them all. There's nothing wrong with that, though; it's just harder to classify it. But whatever you want to call it, he's still pretty quick!"

As is fitting for one with the title of Grandmaster, Wong is a versatile man with skill the 18 Classical weapons, herbal medicines and Lion Dances, seen and noticed most frequently by non-Chinese during the many fairs and festivals at "Chinatowns" across the nation. The Grandmaster, in fact, is a regular participant in the festivals in Los Angeles' Chinatown—sometimes fighting the Dragon, sometimes coaching the dancers, and sometimes leading the dance himself.

"One of the things you had to learn in China before you could be called Grandmaster was the Lion and Dragon acting," Wong recalls. "You had to know the hand techniques, the weapons, everything. . . perfectly. Nowadays, not too many people outside China learn the full art. They just learn the hand techniques for self-defense mostly. Many of the people who call themselves 'experts' don't really have the full art."

Still firm and trim, and possessing the alertness and agility of a man twenty years younger, Wong credits his art. Relying on that firm principle of Kung-Fu fighters, that good breathing is the whole show, the Grandmaster regularly exercises this facility—early in the morning when he wakes up, and at night before he retires. This, and a good life, are the two things that keep him young.



ARK Y. WONG



Photos by Steven Woo & Miron Hom



Above right: In Kung-Fu weapon theory, no approach is left out. Shown here with a spear, the Grandmaster stands in a "Hork" (Crane) stance—able to guard himself with the weapon and his foot. "Hork," for the development of the sinews, often features one-legged standing in the manner of real cranes.

Above left: During the filming of TV's "Kung Fu," Grandmaster Wong was one of the actual practitioners called upon to act as extras. He is shown here in a "Lung" (Dragon) stance, completely captivating the other extras in the background. "Television acting is surely different from what I thought, all the things that must be done to make it come out right."

Left: Although Kung-Fu practitioners refrain from the Karate practice of developing thick callouses on the hands for extra hardness, Grandmaster Wong shows a hand-toughening method that will be followed by an application of some of his herbal medicines. In this way, the hand gets tough enough to do the deadly blows called "Hit the Spot," yet it remains soft.

