

Martial Art during the Qing Dynasty

The roots of Taijiquan and the developments of Chen Wangting fall within the Ming Period (1368 – 1644 AD). That the art of Taijiquan should have begun its branching into the five family styles under the Qing dynasty (1644 – 1911 AD) reflects the general development of the Chinese martial arts in that period, which was marked by an even greater diversification into different schools and styles than under the Ming dynasty. Thus, sixty-two systems of combat alone are listed in a single book, the *Qingbaileichao* – and they do not include such well-known styles as Taijiquan, Bajiquan, Baguaquan or Xingyiquan. The majority of styles in this period are linked to individuals or families, and not widely disseminated. Filipiak explains: "An essential condition for the development of individual local combat styles was the patriarchal family system. The great store traditionally placed in the family, its setting itself strictly apart from other clans and its autochthonous way of life preserved the art of combat over generations. Outsiders were not privy to this knowledge". (Filipiak, p. 98)

Like the clans, the secret societies tended and passed on their martial arts. These societies were often religious sects that assimilated the traditions, the clan mentality and the martial arts of the rural family clans.

In times of crisis they would often become politically active and, if there was an uprising, they would often be at its head. One of the oldest secret societies in which martial arts were taught was the sect of the White Lotus. From it the sect of the Eight Trigrams would later emerge. Many secret societies trained with special arms.

Thus there was the League of Double Sabres, that of the Small Sabres and that of the Tiger-Tail Whip. Since armour was a relative rarity in the circles of the secret societies, members would train many techniques to steel the body. This might involve beating oneself with bricks to make one's sensitive points insensitive to pain.

The middle of the Qing Period also saw the first texts issued that attributed the origin of Chinese martial arts to the Shaolin Monastery. The Indian monk, Bodhidharma, who is also said to have introduced Chan (Zen) Buddhism into China, is reputed to have taken boxing to the Shaolin Monastery in about 585 AD. It is a fact that this monastery played a pre-eminent part in developing the Chinese martial arts; but the same circumstance has led to the tangle of myths and legends surrounding its history and influence.

The precise point in time at which Shaolin was founded appears to have been the year 495. There are indications that arts of combat were practised there from then on, but no earlier evidence substantiating the existence of a specific Shaolin style or art at that period. A real flowering of martial art at Shaolin occurred under the Ming dynasty. Contemporaneous sources praise the courage and abilities of the fighting monks against pirates and bands of brigands.

The staff was a prime weapon in this. In the Qing era, the Shaolin Monastery became a favoured goal on travels; but martial art practised in public could no longer be seen at the monastery, as, by then, the Shunzi, the first emperor of the Manchurian Qing Dynasty, had already forbidden the Chinese to practise martial arts. The Shaolin Monastery's form is often referred to as the 'external school'. In the time of the Qing Dynasty, a countermovement was to coalesce in martial arts circles, calling itself the 'internal school'.

