

Special Feature Issue:

Taiji vs. White Crane

Wu Gong Yee & Chan Hak Fu

Detailed Account on the Epic Battle in 1954 and How It Became a Pivot Point in Chinese Culture



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PIVOT

Taiji's Wu Gong Yee vs. White Crane's Chan Hak Fu

BY Y. L. YIP
WITH LEROY CLARK

[‘pi-vot’: a person or thing on which something depends or turns; the central or crucial factor]



Societal forces frequently act upon individuals in such a manner as to cause them to play out significant acts in their lives largely beyond their own individual control. Yet these individual behaviors, seemingly uncontrollable by the individual being acted upon, may in turn bring measurable, long term effect on larger society and the culture that forces that original behavior. Some would argue this is always the case. Regardless whether sometimes or always, individuals may be thought of as puppets on the stage of life, pulled, twisted by strings of control beyond any one individual's control, made to dance across the stage.

Historically taijiquan has gone through several critical pivot points that resulted first in the original development; then opening and showcasing to the general public in Beijing in the middle of the 19th century; and finally, in an era that was thought to

have de-emphasized the original purpose, arguably the last major pivot which saved the art and its brother martial arts from everlasting obscurity by once again involving the general public in order to booster and support at a critical time. This last event was no less a critical pivot point for modern martial arts than the original art was to Beijing in the 1850s.

January 1954 saw the much-publicized fight between taijiquan's Wu Gong Yee and White Crane's Chan Hak Fu. It was Hong Kong's "Fight of the Century". The epic battle embodied the mysterious internal against the accepted external, youth against the mature, northerners against southerners, one culture against another, locals against invaders, educated and rich against locals of poor means, tradition against western influences, and speakers of one language against those of another. Traditional Chinese martial arts were openly displayed before the western world as had not been done except in China's interior in the motherland's treasured martial art past. The protagonists of this pivot point were Chan Hak Fu of the external White Crane Style and Wu Gong Yee of the internal taijiquan. The year was 1954.



The epic battle between Wu Gong Yee and Chan Hak Fu started a new genre of literature and movie.

PREFACE

In 1996, I wrote the original article for publication in the Chinese magazines *Wudang* and *WuLin*. Since then I have not seen any formal articles on this subject. Now nearly a half-century has passed since that epic event. In June of this year however, three Hong Kong commercial television stations produced nearly simultaneous programs on that historic event. Reporters visited the practice grounds of Wu family disciples Jordan and Ho Fung College and the Wu family's taijiquan celebration. They taped the Zhang San Feng birthday anniversary dinner and the meeting of the Kam Chuen Association on June 2, 2002. The reporters took photos of the old Wu family members and even visited the scene of the fight in Macao. Finally, they visited the gravesite of Wu Gong Yee.

The fight remains a controversial issue based on what one sees on the world-wide-web and

in the English-speaking world. The controversy stems mostly from incomplete information. Much of it is based on the widely copied, poor quality video made from the movie of the event. In the West, the general public has scant knowledge of the background of the fight. On the other hand, in the Chinese world, especially on the mainland, many have no access to the video and base their assumptions on mere imagination from reading written descriptions of the event. Often these descriptions are inaccurate, exaggerated, and biased towards one side or the other.

I was most fortunate to have been around during that period. Ever since I was a young boy growing up during that time I have heard the accounts of that fight over and over. I lived with and was close to people who were intimately involved with that event. That fight was really something! Fortunately at this time, many of the people active in that scene then are still alive today.



1996 article in China's "Wudong" magazine

These elderly gentlemen, seniors in the Hong Kong martial arts world, are now in their 70s and 80s. I still am able to visit them and personally listen to their first-hand information and details. I have heard them tell and re-tell the story for nearly half a century now. When discussing the event, one can clearly see their eyes light up with joy as they relive those exciting days and the fight that was burned into their memories.

Now it is time; it is time to write down an accurate account of what was a milestone event in modern martial arts. It was another pivot point in taijiquan's history. This is done for future generations of martial art enthusiasts and historians now while some of those directly involved are still with us.

BACKGROUND

January 17, 1954—a day I will never, can ever forget. On that day Hong Kong played host to the biggest media blockbuster event possible then. The White Crane disciple, Chan Hak Fu, challenged the Gatekeeper of Wu family taiji, Master Wu Gong Yi (Ng Kung Yee)—imagine! Once the news of the challenge spread out, the martial arts world and lay public were stunned. The fight actually lasted less than half an hour... however, the effect and influence was wide and profound.

The fight made taijiquan and the Wu family more deeply rooted in Hong Kong, Macao, and South East Asia. Eventually, the effect spread to North America. It led to a high-pitched kung fu fever that lasted for two decades. It induced the birth of a new style of Chinese martial novels and, subsequently, even kung fu movies. It gave birth to some truly great names—like, Jin Yong, the newspaper tycoon and novelist; the legendary Bruce Lee, the great Jacky Chan, and of course Jet Li.

In those years in Hong Kong, Macao, and South China, southern Shaolin was in vogue. White Crane was one of the most well known external styles, along with Wing Tsun, with Ip Man, Hung Gar, with Lam Sai Wing, and Choy Li Faat, etc. White Crane had a long and very strong pres-



Kwan Tak Hing

NAME/TERM TRANSLATIONS:

Cantonese	Mandarin Pinyin
Cha Leung Yung	Cha Liang Yong
Chan Hak Fu	Chen Ke Fu
Chan Man Tung	Chen Wen Tong
Chan Yuet Faat	Chen Yue Fa
chit choh	qie cuo
Dai Lik Ching Wah	Da Li Cheng Hua
Kam Yung	Jin Yong
Kwan Tak Hing,	Guan De Xing
Kwong Boon Fu	Kuang Ben Fu
Lam Moong	Lin Meng
Lau Fak Maan	Liu Fa Meng
Leung Yu San	Liang Yu Sheng
Luk Chi Fu	Liu Zhi Fu
Lung Fu Dau King Wah	Long Hu Dao Jin Hua
Ng Dai Kwai	Wu Da Kui
Ng Kung Yee	Wu Gong Yi
Ng Siu Chung	Wu Zhao Zhong
Ngho Si San Yan	Wo Si Shan Ren
Shek Kin	Shi Jian
Sun Man Pao	Xin Wen Bao
Yu Jim Yuen	Yu Zhan Yuan
Yuen Siu Tin	Yuan Xiao Tian

ence with many followers. Many people working in public agencies, as well as local police, practiced White Crane. One of the more famous was Kwan Tak Hing (Guan De Xing).

Kwan Tak Hing, the famous film star, played the role of Wong Fei Hung in more than 100 films. He literally became the living Wong Fei Hung in the Chinese world during his hay day. He induced movie director Tsui Hark to make another film of Wong Fei Hung with Jet Li.

Eventually Jet Li rose to world fame, however, in most Chinese minds, Jet Li will never replace Kwan Tak Hing (Guan De Xing).

In such early movies, what was seen was actual, genuine kung fu demonstrated on the run rather than wushu as seen now in some of Jet Li's movies. Many local kung fu gatekeepers and masters took part in those earlier movies. One was Mr. Shek Kin, a villain, who gained the great respect of Bruce Lee and played the role of a big villain in "Enter the Dragon" as the owner of the secret island and shaolin betray-

er. Another was Lam Cho, nephew of Lam Sai Wing, who was Wong Fei Hung's true disciple. Yet another was Yuen Siu Ting, father of Yuen Wo Ping, the now world famous martial art director. Shek Kin, Lam Cho, Yuen Siu Tin, were real masters and gatekeepers that appeared in Kwan Tak Hing's early martial art movies.

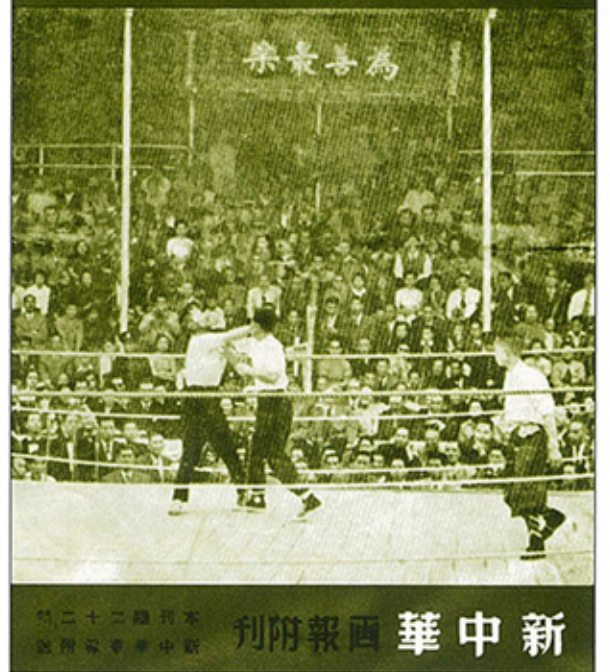
In addition, there were the three Fu's, i.e., Kwong Boon Fu, the most senior, Luk Chi Fu, now a world famous Lion Dancer, and the younger but exceptionally skilled Chan Hak Fu, disciple of White Crane Gatekeeper, Master Ng Siu Chung. White Crane Gatekeeper Ng Siu Chung, gained fame by claiming he defeated "Big Force" Ching Wah. Ching Wah like Wong Fei Hung, was one of the "Ten Tigers of Quandong".

Hong Kong during the 1940s and the 1950s of course was not nearly as developed as today. The city had yet to become the little dragon metropolis of the 1970s. Being a southern China city, the population was made up mostly of Cantonese. They spoke Cantonese and a few dialects of the Pearl River Delta. The factories and small businesses that would eventually turn Hong Kong into a world class city, were still in their developing stages. In general, the inhabitants lived the peaceful life of a small town. However, finding employment was not easy and salaries were quite low.

By 1949, however, a huge influx of refugees from the north began to hit the peaceful little town. Most of these refugees flooding in from the north were better educated, wealthier, and had better special skills than the small town locals. Thus right off, they created a great deal of tension in the scramble to find housing and jobs. Yet, on the other hand, many of the newcomers opened shops, small factories, and entertainment establishments like bars, tailors, film-studios.

Note, e.g., that Run Run Shaw, of the famous *Shaw Brothers*, and Raymond Chow, Man Wai, who later started the *Golden Harvest Film Studio* (which produced films with soon to be superstar Bruce Lee among their huge successes). Others included the Peking Opera and Yu Jim Yuen, the master teacher of Jacky Chan, Sammo Hung,

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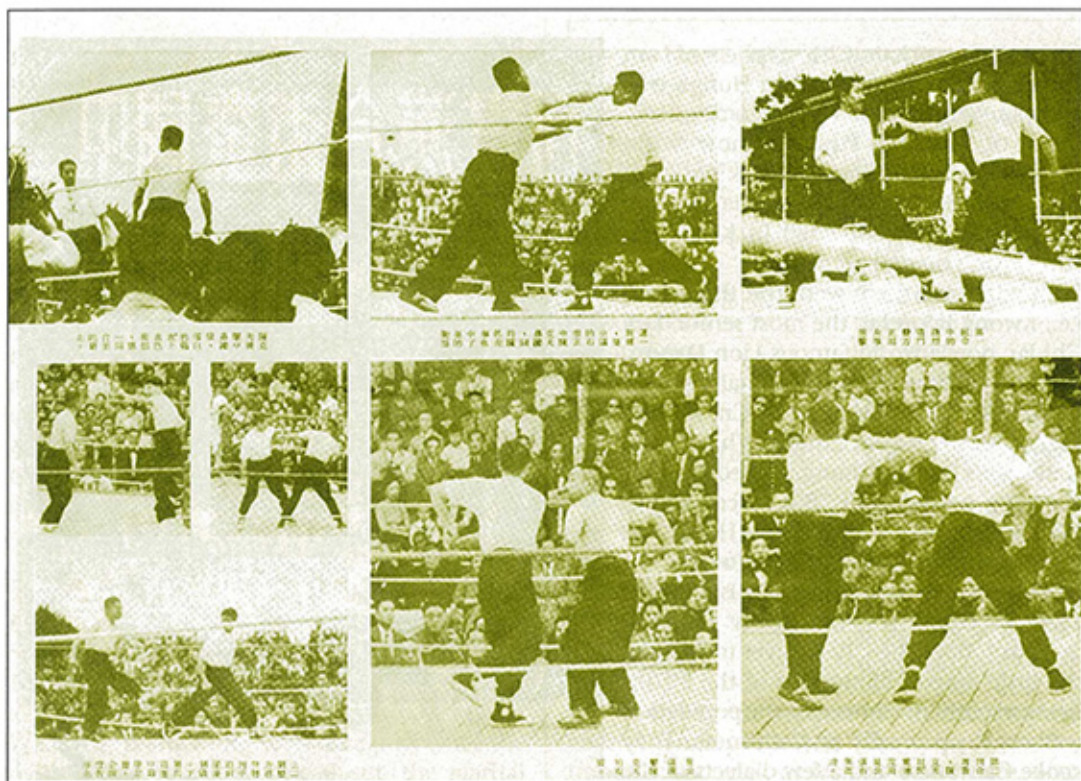


Cover from New China's "Chinese Martial Art Demonstration Photo Album"

and Yuen Biu were there early too.

None of the great influx of newcomers knew Cantonese while very few of the small town locals could speak Mandarin. A great deal of tension was created by the conflict of social class, the difference in education levels, the differences in background cultures, the very stiff competition for job opportunities, problems encountered when foreign bosses ruled over local employees, and the ever present language and communication problems. These new tensions were the themes of many movies made in Hong Kong during this period. The problem would be finding the lucky guy, or unlucky poor soul, who would light the match in this volatile minefield.

Also, during this period, some great masters of various major northern China martial art



Newspapers and magazines covered the event with numerous articles and photos.

styles came to Hong Kong. They included the neijia styles of north China. Yes, the famous neijia styles of the north, especially the most famous disciple of Yang Cheng Fu, Tung Ying Kit and, of course, Yang's eldest son, Yang Shou Zhong.

In addition, Wu Gong Yee, the Gatekeeper of the Wu family style, the second largest style of taiji and the son of the famous Wu Jianquan also arrived in town. At that time Chen style taijiquan was still quite small in popularity. Wu Gong Yee arrived in 1948 and brought with him a letter from his brother, Wu Gong Cho, introducing Gong Yee to Shum Heung Lam, the tycoon of mosquito repellent incense. Included in his family entourage were Wu Dai Kwai, Wu Dai Chai, Wu Ngan Ha along with her husband Kwok Siu Kwing, and their grand-daughters, and Wu Dai Sun the son of Wu Gong Yee and the current Gatekeeper of the Wu family in 2002. Wu Dai Kwai had actually arrived much earlier in the Pearl River Delta and had already established quite a name for himself with his fighting record.

Wu's style although newly arrived from the

north and with a short local presence already enjoyed huge fame in northern China. But to the Hong Kong locals the Wu's were unheard of. To the lay people, this new upstart newcomer who claimed to be of the secret neijia and who claimed to be able to use softness to control hard, who claimed to be able to use 4 *taels* to deflect a thousand *catty*, as well as claiming this martial art was suitable for anyone and that it could make the sick and weak strong and healthy, attracted a great deal of attention. These claims especially attracted the educated and wealthy to taiji's door. It should be noted, however, this was not a claim from the northern masters themselves. Rather these claims came from the press and media. Needless to say, many local martial arts people were not overjoyed at learning of these claims. This resulted in yet more tension between the newcomers and locals.

Wu Gong Yee was the Gatekeeper of the Wu family style, the second most popular style in China. He was a great master of taijiquan. He was also the eldest son of the second-generation great

master Wu Jianquan. Being the eldest son is very significant and symbolic of having received the family heritage and thus better overall skill. He was in charge of the Hong Kong Kam Chuen Association. He also had been the Vice-Principal of the Hunan National Martial Art Academy. At that time, most of China's generals and high-ranking army officers came out of that province, including Chairman Mao Tse Dong, a province of strong martial tradition and status in China. He also had been the Chief Martial Arts Coach of Internal Art at the Whampoa Military Academy. Whampoa Military Academy was the only military institution with status equivalent to that of West Point in the U.S.A.

Wu Dai Kwai, Gong Yee's eldest son, was around 30 years of age. He had been brought up and rigorously trained by his grandfather Wu Jianquan from the time he was young boy to adulthood. He enjoyed a great deal of fame in the Pearl River Delta for all the fights he entered there. His victories there were wide and frequent in those towns. They included the Provincial Capital Canton, now known as Quanzhou, and Faat-shan which was the nest of Wong Fei Hung, as well as Wing Tsun, Choylifaat and lots of local arts. Claims were that he was never defeated.

Once Wu Dai Kwai quarreled with a bunch of pier porters when he was inebriated. This event took place over on Wanchai Harbor. That waterfront area was full of bars and taverns and was the root of the famous movie story about Suzie Wong. Wu Dai Kwai alone fought over 30 porters. Although they held bamboo sticks and iron hooks, during the melee they eventually ran to the local police station to seek refuge. This street rumble, with the lone Wu Dai Kwai against more than thirty porters, made the paper headlines and is still in the police records of that local station. Events such as these soon made the Wu's well known and fascinating to the public eye.

White Crane adept Chan Hak fu was around 30 years old then. He was young and very strong. He had also practiced some western boxing. Since he was a young, strong elite in an existing well-known martial art style, since he was a beloved disciple of a local famous Gatekeeper, he was the

favorite of many, many local fans.

Wu Gong Yee was well known too, but he was 54 years old. Fifty four was a bit old for ring fighting. But, taijiquan claimed the weak could defeat the strong, the old could compete against youth successfully. People were eager to see if this claim carried any merit. They wanted to see if the walk could match the talk.

Taijiquan claimed the weak could defeat the strong, the old could compete against youth successfully. People were eager to see if this claim carried any merit

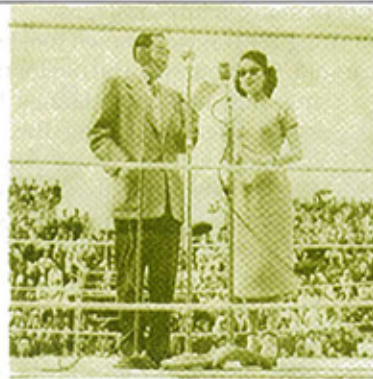
Thus in the minds of the people of Hong Kong, the fight soon became a match representing much more than mere physical fighting. It became a flashpoint, a match of a favorite local against the foreigner, the south against the north, external against internal, old against the young, Cantonese speakers against those who spoke only Mandarin, and the western Tibetan Buddhist art plus western boxing against an

indigenous Han Chinese Daoist (Taoist) art. The fever grew to a high public pitch.



"A Concord Exhibition of Wrestling by Ng and Chun". The contestants enter the ring.

紅伶演唱



POPULAR ACTORS AND ACTRESS SINGERS



Popular actors and actress singers entertained the crowds as part of the fund raiser.

THE ORIGIN OF THE FIGHT ACCORDING TO LAM MOONG

At that time little was known of how the idea for the fight actually originated. Not until 1976, twenty-two years later, did the original reporter, Lam Moong, reveal the truth in the *Wu Lin Weekly* magazine (Note: This publication is now out of print; it is not the *Wu Lin* magazine popular now) on how the seed of that fight was planted. During those early years Lam was a reporter for the *Chung Sing Man Pao* (*China Voice Evening News*). On one occasion he had an afternoon tea with the Vice CEO of a private detective organization in the Malaya Café in the Victoria District of Hong Kong. Such afternoon teas were a common daily habit in those days. During their leisurely afternoon conversation, the Vice CEO praised Wu Gong Yee highly. This was because he was learning from Wu. That particular day he spoke incessantly of the great power of taijiquan, of how the softness of taijiquan can defeat hard

power, of how it uses 4 taels to deflect a thousand catties. He noted that Wu Gong Yee, especially, had great power. The Vice CEO described Wu as having two types of taijiquan: one for health promotion, another for fighting. He said Wu had reached a most refined stage of development. He said Wu Gong Yee could easily toss an enemy ten plus feet only using two fingers.

Lam Moong reported that the detective was later very remorseful for this. He feared being blamed by his peers in taiji. Such was his remorse and fear that he had refused to reveal his name although it had been over two decades since the event. Both Lam and the detective were elderly by then.

Lam did not believe the detective's descriptions. However, the detective insisted he was telling the truth. He also insisted in bringing reporter Lam to Wu Gong Yee's school to have a real look. The detective said, "Wu Gong Yee welcomes any style and person to come and have 'chit choh'." (This is a very common Chinese term meaning exchanging knowledge to test the validity and improve skill. Really, it is a term of humility.) Should anyone not believe in the great power of taijiquan, he could just go and try it."

Lam then asked, "Does this come from the mouth of Wu Gong Yee?"

The detective responded, "Of course, we studied under him for a long time. I have heard him say this many times."

It struck reporter Lam that this would make an excellent *news* headline since the Chinese martial arts were said to be so good for so long and yet in Hong Kong open fighting and ring fighting were very rare unlike western boxing or Japanese arts. Reporter Lam Moong thought that since Wu Gong Yee is ready to come out, this should make a great story.

With that, Lam decided to visit Wu Gong Yee. The first time he went, Wu was not there. Lam left a message explaining that he would return the following morning. But the next morning Lam visited again and Wu Gong Yee was still not there. So, Lam simply asked some of the people in the school, "Will Master Wu really 'chit choh' with other people of the 'martial forest'? They responded, 'Of course, what are we afraid of?' Lam wrote then, 'at that time I was still green in experience. After I heard that, I felt there could

be no doubt as to its authenticity.' So, he wrote a special newspaper article describing the great power of taijiquan and included the sentence, "The Gatekeeper of Taiji, Wu Gong Yee, welcomes 'chit choh' with anyone of the 'martial forest' at any time. But he did not realize the same words spoken in private and orally by students may mean a totally different thing by a master in print and in public.

Once that special article hit the newspaper stands there was immediate response from Hong Kong's martial arts community. People from various styles wrote letters to the newspaper. The telephone was quite rare at that time, so most of the responses came in via letters. They all wanted to test their skills against those of Wu Gong Yee to see which art was superior. The newspaper published the letters and forwarded the original copies to Wu Gong Yee.

Some six days later, Wu Gong Yee asked his people to call the newspaper. He denied ever having said the words, "Welcome 'chit choh' with anyone' and he said further, 'the aim of taijiquan is to improve health, prevent disease, and to achieve longevity'. Further, the message he especially wished to be relayed to the newspaper was, "Our Association's rules strictly forbid disciples from even quarreling and arguing with outsiders, so of course, we definitely would not welcome fighting with anyone at any time." Wu then requested the newspaper list and correct the errors. Though Lam felt Wu's words varied from those of his school, nevertheless, when he published the article, he knew he had not actually spoken directly with Master Wu. Therefore, he published the corrigenda. But after publishing the corrigenda, surprisingly, even more rumors and slander arose. After two more days of this, reporter Lam decided to write yet another special article. This time he wrote very clearly that the words did not come from Wu Gong Yee or his son Wu Dai Kwai.

Despite the effort of his last two articles, the fire just would not die-down. The frankensteinian frenzy grew. People were still writing in... challenges and harsh words of insult even three weeks after the articles appeared in the paper. Through all this, Wu Gong Yee kept his composure and etiquette and disregarded all the cacophony.



"The Chinese Wrestling Match between Ng Kung-Yee of the Solar Plexus School and Chan Hak Fu of White Stork School..."

During this time, Chan Hak Fu was in Macao. There he held the position of Principal of the Tarzan Gymnasium. The chairman of the alumni association at that time saw the claim of Wu Gong Yee in the newspaper and brought it to Chan Hak Fu. Chan decided to challenge Wu Gong Yee. He boarded the ferry from Macao to Hong Kong where he asked permission to do the challenge from White Crane Gatekeeper Ng Siu Chung.

One day some three weeks later, Lam Moong was at 'yumcha' in the Ko Shing Tea House, a very well known Tea House facing the Central Market. He was enjoying 'yumcha' with White Crane Gatekeeper Ng Siu Chung. Ng's clinic was opposite the Tea House. Also present there was the famous kungfu novel writer, with pen name, Noh Si San Yan [meaning "I Am Also A Mountain Man"], writer Wong Wai Fung, and Ng's disciples - Kong Boon Fu and Chan Hak Fu.

A Bei-shaolin person approached the group



Various scenes around the contesting ground during the match.

from across the room and asked about the Wu Gong Yee matter. He said he really wanted to test the power of taijiquan. The writer Wong Wai Fung responded, "If we really have a chance to 'chit choh', Chan Hak Fu would be the suitable candidate." Wong then proceeded to describe the essence of White Crane, the great merits, the pros and cons, and points of difference between White Crane and taijiquan. The description was highly illuminating to Lam. So much so that the following day the reporter published the descriptive words of Wong Wai Fung. Lam then called his article, "The Oral Fight of Wu and Chan".

With that came reaction from some taiji people. Some thought that if the 'chit choh' between the two styles could be formalized it would be the biggest blockbuster event in martial arts. Momentum for the fight was increasing. Some started to go around talking it up and even trying to organize the match. But, Hong Kong law clearly prohibited dueling, therefore, effort was soon made to see if such a match could be held in Macao.

Business tycoon Mr. Ho Yin was approached because he had great influence in both communities. Even judoka and western boxers challenged each other in those days. But this was much different. Ho Yin felt that since both Wu

Gong Yee and Chan Hak Fu practiced Chinese kung fu, since one taught in Hong Kong and the other in Macao, the match would indeed be suitable. Ho Yin gave his promise of support and arranged to make the match a benevolent fund raising event with all the proceeds going to the hospital and to help the poor.

Ho Yin sent his personal assistant, Ng Wai Hwa, to help in coordination. "Uncle Hwa" was a true gentleman who used to travel around Hong Kong and Macao organizing meetings and business deals for his tycoon boss. He knew the media people well. Everyone liked "Uncle Hwa". He attempted to secure opinions of members of the two styles. A meeting was scheduled in the penthouse conference room of the Sun Kong restaurant. Principals of both sides were invited to participate in the discussion of the match.

The taijiquan side was represented by Wu Gong Yee and his son Wu Dai Kwai. Many of their senior students were there also. White Crane Gatekeeper Ng Siu Chung did not show up. Only a senior disciple, Lee Kim Kam, together with disciple Chan Hak Fu and a few other disciples participated.

The meeting was chaired by Lau Fak Maan. Lau Fak Maan was the Gatekeeper of Eagle Claw style and the father of Lily Lau. Master Lau was very highly revered in the martial art community. The meeting was held at that particular place because the Chief Manager was also a disciple of Wu Gong Yee and because many taiji classes were held there routinely. The Manager repeatedly expressed his unhappiness over the event. He viewed Wu and Chan as being of different seniority levels. He held that it was impolite and unfair for a match of such age disparity.

The meeting started off very solemn. Chairman Lau sat at one end of a long table with "Uncle Hwa" at his side. On his left, in first place, sat Kwong Boon Fu, the most senior disciple of the White Crane style. At his side sat White Crane spokesman, Lee Kim Kam. Chan Hak Fu sat at his side. Chan remained silent and merely followed the decisions of his seniors.

On the right of Chairman Lau sat the taiji people. Wu Gong Yee sat in the first seat, next to him was his son Wu Dai Kwai. Next to Dai Kwai sat the taiji senior students. There were some ten plus people in attendance and the meeting

seemed to be a bit pompous, at first. Wu Gong Yee was a northerner. He was of slender build yet sturdy with a moustache. He wore a long, dark gray Chinese gown and wore soft bottom kung fu shoes. Wu held a one-foot long smoking pipe that had a brass cup at the tip. During the meeting he drew on the pipe continuously. He presented an air of leisure and calmness. Lam, however, felt he was quite excited in his heart.

Once the meeting started the aura of pomp and calmness was quickly displaced. Neither side wanted to give ground. Wu Dai Kwai, in particular, was extremely agitated. He said if the White Crane people really wanted a match with Wu Gong Yee, the White Crane Gatekeeper Ng Siu Chung should be the representative. As for Chan, he himself (Wu Dai Kwai) was ready and most willing to fight him. The atmosphere quickly grew more and more tense. Wu Dai Kwai proposed to fight Chan Hak Fu then and there. Dai Kwai was restrained by his father and Chairman Lau. Little by little people calmed down. Wu Gong Yee then said that since the proceeds of the match would go to benefit the poor and the sick, he was ready to take up the fight.

Lam Moong later wrote, "I really came to admire Wu Gong Yee at that precise moment. It is very well known in Chinese martial art circles that "quan" is most powerful in the young and strong while the staff is most powerful in the older and fierce. Wu was already 53 years old. Chan was barely 30. In terms of ability to withstand pain and physical assaults, Chan definitely held an advantage." Thus after Wu Gong Yee expressed confidence and, more importantly, was willing to help the poor and the sick, even then and there giving reassurance to his son Dai Kwai, reporter Lam came to deeply admire his courage and dignity of presence.

So, both sides there agreed to the fight. A tentative date was chosen. It was decided the fight would consist of five rounds, each five minutes, with a rest of three minutes between rounds. The fight was to be totally open to all forms of attack with the exception of eye gouging or attacking

the groin. Should there be "an accident", all agreed that would be fate and no one would argue.

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After the meeting adjourned, Lam Moong was extremely exhilarated. He wrote his report and released it via the *New Asia News Agency*. It immediately spread to all the newspapers. The next day all newspapers in Hong Kong carried the news in banner headlines. The Wu/Chan fight entered a new phase. Even more local citizens began to take notice. It quickly became the talk of the town. The frenzy grew even more. People started to place bets on the outcome.

Since the date and fight rules had not yet been absolutely fixed, a few months remained for planning and the arrangements. The people of Hong Kong started to discuss and speculate. Students of both styles made claims and told stories. Soon terms like "cotton needle", "wild horse parts mane", and "embrace bird's tail" came to be heard in many daily conversations on the street.

White Crane senior students discussed two important considerations:

1. Chan Hak Fu had promised to fight. But he was a junior and, therefore, not that given to the importance of face. He should at least fight properly. Who would train him? And, how would they train him?

2. Since the fight would be in Macao's New Garden, they wanted Chan Hak Fu to present a very good appearance. White Crane must not look poor. Thus, raising money became very important.

Although fight preparation in both camps was very secretive, nevertheless, Lam, since he was the originator of the challenge, still was allowed first hand information. Within a few days Lam heard that the White Crane people had arranged for Chan Yuet Fak to be the coach of Chan Hak Fu. Yuet Fak was an old friend of Lam Moong. Chan Yuet Fak had excellent credentials in western boxing but Lam had never heard of him having any connection to White Crane. He wondered why the White Crane people wanted Yuet



比武大會 技師表演



比武大會

技師表演

No kicking above the knees would be one of the rules. Tung and Lau demonstrated that together.

rants and casinos. In those days, food was very cheap. A dish of fried oysters cost only about two Macao dollars. Macao currency then was valued around 80% to 90% of Hong Kong's currency. It was about twenty cents U.S. or a little over one shilling of the U.K.'s currency then.

LAM MOONG'S PRE-FIGHT INTERVIEWS

On the day prior to the fight, Lam Moong interviewed Wu Gatekeeper Wu Gong Yee and White Crane Gatekeeper Ng Siu Chung. In his interview, Wu was noticeably at-ease. He was again drawing on a dry pipe. He offered Lam a cup of tea. Of course, Lam could not ask the usual questions. Questions related to preparation and of personal confidence would have been humiliating for such a senior and respected taiji master. Those questions would be off-limits. Instead, Lam asked about the common rumors of the day running through the public—whether the Organizing Committee had fixed both White Crane and taiji camps; questions related to both sides doing their utmost to

demonstrate techniques by only lightly attacking then the judge proclaiming 'both sides winners'. This would be so neither side would take umbrage.

Wu emphatically denied any such arrangement. He said he had never met with the Organizers after the original meeting. Wu said that as a traditional martial artist, he would do his utmost to use his best skills. He said he would not even consider the concept of winning or losing. He said if the fight should be pre-arranged and staged to merely demonstrate a few moves on the public stage, it would be cheating the public and would greatly disappoint students of taijiquan.

During the same day interview with the White Crane Gatekeeper Ni Siu Chung, Ng asserted that he was an outsider and that it was kids' business. He seemed unusually calm and uninvolved.

It is difficult after all these years to properly convey completely the hubbub and how it snowballed so fast; the frenzy. But once it hit the papers it became the talk of the town. It was a media blockbuster. Especially so in those days when there was little other entertainment; no television. Radio was still the main means most used to gather the news. Even though early-on the match started out as a mere suggestion, many including the media kept stirring it up to a frenzy. Soon the very principals themselves could not alter the course of impending action. The idea of the match seemed to take-on a life of its own, beyond the control of the two would-be combatants, beyond control of anyone.

FIGHT ISSUES

Chan belonged to the younger generation. Wu belonged to the older generation. They represented a different caliber of martial artists. In a traditional sense, the fight should have been impossible to seriously consider. Should Wu Gong Yee win, it would not bring much glory because of his elevated status of Gatekeeper and seniority in age. Should the fight end in a draw, it would be a serious loss of face for him, not to mention the loss of face and lasting humiliation should he lose.

On the other hand, Chan, not being a Gatekeeper and being of a much younger

generation, would gain great face no matter what the outcome. He stood to gain no matter how the fight might end. Thus, comparatively, Chan Hak Fu had much less to lose in this match. Because of the uneven potential loss, many in Wu's camp were strongly opposed to even responding to the call for the fight. Among these voices was that of Yang Wah Biu. Yang was the disciple of Wu Jianquan. He now lives in Rochester, New York. Yang Wah Biu quarreled several times with Gong Yee over the unworthiness of even responding to the suggestion for such a fight.

Other family disciples, including Wu Dai Kwai himself, wanted Dai Kwai to take up the challenge. After all, Dai Kwai and Hak Fu were nearly the same age. Wu Gong Yee, Wu's family Gatekeeper, rightfully would be expected to fight the Gatekeeper of White Crane, Ng Siu Chung, instead of a junior disciple. Others thought the ideal match would be Ng Siu Chung against Wu Gong Yee and Chan Hak Fu against Wu Dai Kwai. That would offer Gatekeeper against Gatekeeper and disciple against disciple with no mixing of generations.

When Wu Dai Kwai made this last suggestion to the White Crane camp, the White Crane people would not hear of it. They insisted on the original agreement. This infuriated the young and superbly conditioned Wu Dai Kwai. He was immediately agitated and quickly sprang to his feet. He nearly came to blows, right there in the public street, with one of the judges, Lee Kim Kam. Lee Kim Kam was a judge of fencing, weight-lifting, and White Crane boxing. That was in 1953.

By the end of 1953 a huge fire destroyed one of the squatter-hut colonies. Squalid squatter colonies were a common sight back then. Many refugees and the extremely poor lived there. Thus with the fire, thousands became homeless and many were soon struck with disease. Thus, when the business tycoon Ho Yin proposed to make the match a reality with the goal of raising funds for the poor and displaced, especially for Macao's Keng Hu Hospital, it quickly gained traction. Besides, Macao, then under Portuguese rule, allowed such fighting. It was only then that Wu Gong Yee agreed to go ahead with the fight preparations.



Masters like Tung Ying Kit and Lau Fak Man demonstrated a few mock attacks and responses.

THE FIGHT

Since there was so much talk of the upcoming fight in the street, in the newspapers, and on the radio, the fight was frequently fantasized in everyday public speech. Both sides freely propagandized their version of how they thought the fight would end. This went on for nearly a whole year. But when the event became a certainty, the news stunned Hong Kong and Macao. It got everyone's attention. There had been no such opening fighting in China for many years.

Not only did thousands crowd in from Hong Kong but droves from nearby China also came across in a flood to see the fight. In those years people could still cross the border with relative ease. Others swarmed in from Southeast Asia, Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia. Chinese who had practiced taiji and kung fu and who had previously immigrated to other places for work now returned to jam little Macao. Food stalls, restaurants, casinos, stores selling tourist souvenirs, famous crabs, shrimp paste cakes, oyster sauces, were all having a hay day. Business suddenly boomed. Everywhere in the street people would gather to discuss and heatedly debate the probable outcome of the fight. For many in Macao such newly found prosperity had not been known in Macao for many years. There was a carnival atmos-