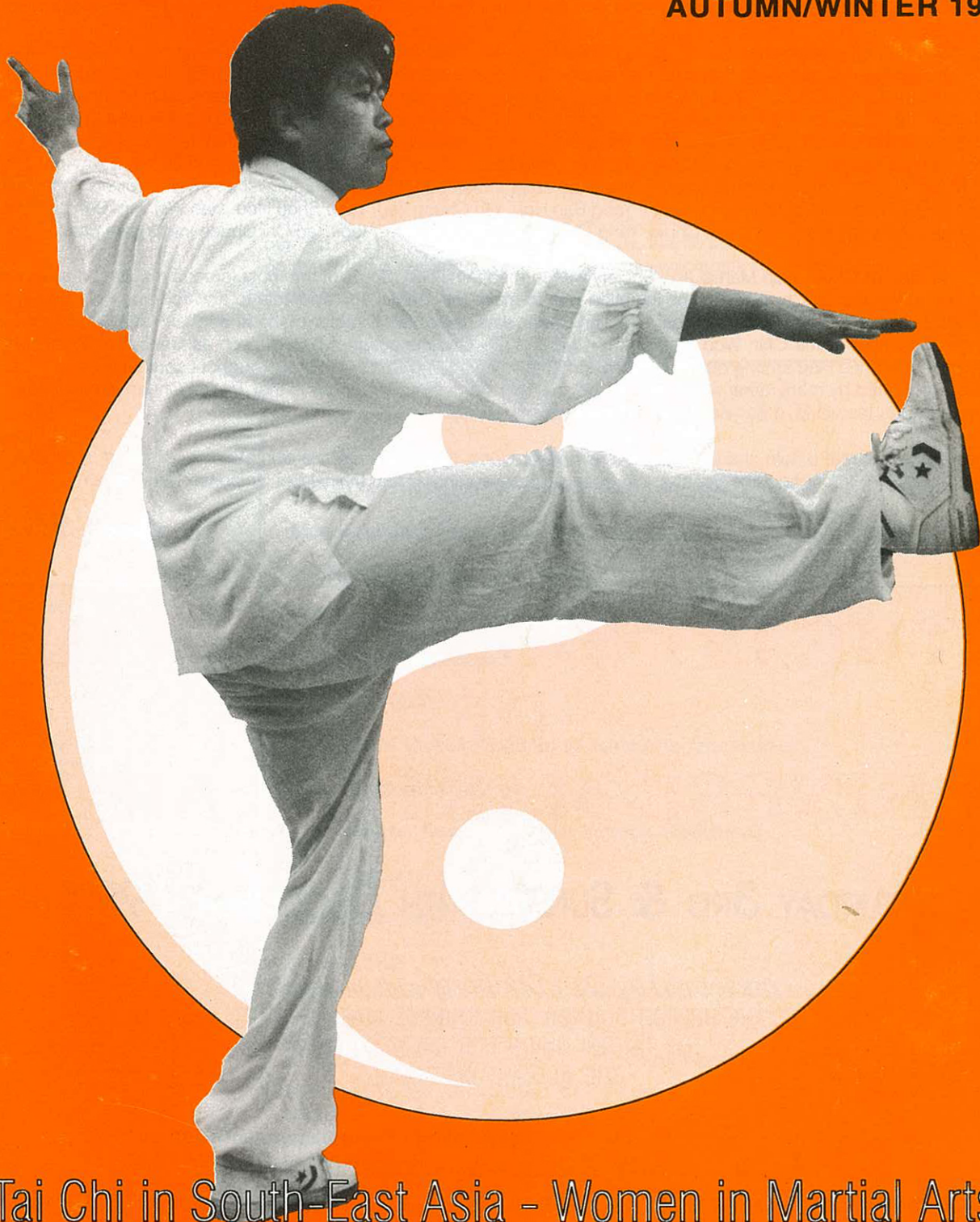


TAI CHI CHUAN

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF MY FAMILY

Sifu Eddie Wu



My great great grandfather Wu Chuan Yo (1834-1902) was the founder of Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan. He was a Manchurian member of the Imperial Guard in Peking. He learned Tai Chi Chuan from the founder of Yang Style, Yang Lu-Chan. His area of specialization was neutralization. His eldest son, Wu Chien Chuan (1870-1942) was the second master of Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan. His influence of the development of the Wu Style was very significant. Wu Chien Chuan modified the forms taught to him by his father. He utilized a narrower circle and created many new ways to apply the form in a practical manner.

In 1914 Wu Chien Chuan, along with colleagues, Xi-Yui Seng, Yang Shoa Hoa (Yang Shou Hou) and Yang Cheng Fu founded a famous martial art school. This had an important effect in the practice of Tai Chi Chuan as it became available to the general public for the first time. Wu Chien Chuan moved south to Shanghai in 1928. There he was appointed to the Board of Directors of the Shanghai Martial Arts Association. Subsequently, he became the supervisor of the Tai Chi Chuan section of the famous Ching Wu Sports Association. In 1935, my great grandfather established the first Wu's Tai Chi Chuan Academy in Shanghai.

Wu Kung Yi was the eldest son of the third generation. He was instrumental in the spread of Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan throughout the orient. In 1954, Wu Kung Yi responded the controversy started by the newspapers in Hong Kong regarding the validity of Tai Chi Chuan as a martial art by agreeing to accept a challenge to fight another style of martial art. He put only one restriction on the match and that was that the proceeds of it be donated to charity. The contest of the two different styles of martial art intrigued thousands who came to view it. Wu Kung Yi was fifty three at the time, twenty years older than his opponent. It soon became apparent to the committee overseeing the fight that the opponents were not mismatched and that the contest was a serious one indeed. At the completion of the second round, they ended the fight by voting it to be a draw. Wu Kung Yi had clearly demonstrated Wu's Tai Chi Chuan as a formidable style of martial art.

Wu Kung Yi's younger brother Wu Kung Chu and younger sister Wu Ying Hwa also influenced the development of Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan. Wu Ying Hwa assisted in the operation of the academy in Shanghai. It was under her direction that the academy re-opened again in the Late nineteen seventies. Wu Kung Chu was an expert in many facets of Tai Chi Chuan. He was the author of the first book on Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan which was initially published in 1935. Fortunately this classic was published again in 1980.



My father, Wu Ta Kwei was the eldest son of the fourth generation. He was a highly respected martial artist who continued the work of Wu Kung Yi in spreading Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan throughout the orient. There were academies in Hong Kong, Kowloon, Macau, the Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia. The Japanese invited him in the nineteen fifties to introduce the style into Japan. He also brought Tai Chi Chuan to the Mass Media by often appearing on television in Hong Kong and Singapore. One of my father's aspirations was to expand Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan into North America. However, he did not live to see that become a reality.

There are other members of the fourth generation of the Wu family who deserve mention. My oldest Uncle Wu Ta Chi is one. Until his death in 1993 he managed the academy in Hong Kong. My aunt Wu Yen Hsia with her brother's assistance manages the Wu Style headquarters in South East Asia. My other uncle Wu Ta Hsin is an expert martial artist and a specialist in weapons training. He runs a branch of the school in Hong Kong.

I would also like to mention my sister, Wu Hsiao Fung who is of course, a family member of the fifth generation. She introduced Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan to Vietnam and received an award from the Ching Wu Society for her achievement. She presently resides in Toronto, Canada. My sons Austin and Edward have studied for 5 years. The eldest, Austin, is also teaching in Toronto. My own training started at the age of six. We lived with my grandfather and uncles and I trained with the whole family. My grandfather was my teacher until I was twelve years old. After that my father was my teacher. In 1976 I came to Toronto to take over the school my uncle Wu Ta Chi started the year before. Wu's Tai Chi Chuan Academy in Toronto is now in its seventeenth year.

For those interested in our activities we publish a newsletter, called Cloud Hands, on an irregular basis produced in our Toronto club by Lloyd Martin Kennedy. Otherwise contact Sifu Gary Wragg, at the U.K academy in London. Tel: 071 794 1862

An in-depth interview with Sifu Eddie Wu will follow in a future issue of Tai Chi Chuan.