

## **MARK BO SIM - SWISS INTERLUDE BY DAN DOCHERTY**

When Tai Chi pal Cornelia Gruber told me that her master, Madam Mark Bo-sim, was coming to Tai Chi Cho (biannual event organised in November in La Chaux-de-Fond), I was immediately interested (as was editor Ron). My late master was one of those who had befriended her many years ago when she first came to Hong Kong from Guangdong and he spoke highly of her skill in forms.

Though recovering from a long illness, Sifu Mark, as expected, gave an excellent performance as did her sister (I particularly liked her sword form) and students whom she brought to Switzerland with her. Sifu Mark set up her Chinese Wushu Research Institute in Boston's Chinatown and over the years has trained many well known martial artists such as Derek Frearson, Nick Gracenin, not forgetting her daughter and her movie actor/director son, Donnie Yen.

She started training in martial arts when at primary school and training in internal martial arts when she was 10. She teaches a massive curriculum which includes basic Wushu, Wushu Theatre, the rare Fu style Tai Chi, Pa Kua, Praying Mantis, Hsing I, Tong Bei, spear, fan, broadsword, staff, Tai Chi Ribbon, Wudang sword fencing, and long tasselled sword.

I asked her about the meditative aspect of Tai Chi Chuan practice. She said this is one of the aspects of Tai Chi and it is necessary to look at the individual to see what suits him or her best. Sifu Mark said she practiced sitting meditation. She also internally chants the Eight Forces when practicing; e.g. when performing "Grasping Bird's Tail" she would say "Peng, Lu, Ji, An" as she applied the forces, this helps to be clear about application.

In practicing form she emphasises roundness and correct structure. However, for there to be an internal element or Nei Kung, there must be Yi (intent) present. She learned Fu style Tai Chi and Wudang sword from Fu Wing-fay, son of the famous Dragon style Pa



Kua master, Fu Chen-song, when almost grown up. It puts a lot of emphasis on the waist and contains the major Tai Chi Chuan techniques, but the sequence is different from the Yang Long Form.

I wondered what she thought about the debate on martial arts direct from China and those which have come via Taiwan and Hong Kong. The China faction hold that what they are doing is the authentic stuff unchanged over the years, while the Taiwan Hong Kong faction maintain that during the Cultural Revolution many top masters were unable to practice or teach and some (Wang Pei-sheng, Wu Gong-zao et al.) were even sent to Laogai (Chinese Gulag) so knowledge was lost and the tradition was carried on more authentically outside China. She said she found the debate irrelevant and what mattered was following correct principles. Yin and Yang exist together in a circle and this produces softness and correctness.

She also opined that though theoretically there should be no difference between Western and Chinese students, but that Westerners are for some reason fascinated by the concept of “fa jin(g)” (discharging force). Sifu Mark thought this was particularly unwise for older folk as they should focus more on Tai Chi’s health benefits though it was ok for younger people to do more “fa jin”. Most Chinese only practiced Tai Chi for health.

Sifu Mak said that the rare Liang Yi (Two Basics – i.e. Yan & Yang) Chuan that she teaches uses Tai Chi and Pa Kua formats combined and she has done a book on it with her teacher in it. She says Pa Kua differs from Tai Chi because it uses Bai Bu (toes turned out) and Kao Bu (toes turned in) with the waist (though certain Tai Chi styles including mine have similar footwork). Tai Chi hands are less extended in the on guard than in Pa Kua and Hsing I. She already knew Hsing I before she learned Tai Chi and her combined form contains the Single Palm Change as well as elements from the other two arts.



Both her Sikung (master's master) Fu Chen Song and Li Yu lin were masters of the famous Wudang sword form and trained in it with General Li Jing-lin, also known as "Miracle Sword Li". When performing this form the speed can be fast or slow depending on the practitioner's age and health. Two types of sword are used; a light one is used for practice and a heavy one for fighting. Interestingly the opposite is true in a number of internal schools where a heavier weapon is used in practice to train "Kung" while a lighter one is used for combat.

What I liked about Sifu Mark's reminiscences was that she talked of the friendship the old masters had for one another and she ended by saying that all the different internal styles at Tai Chi Cho were in the end one family. The weekend ended on a lighter note though I am unsure how the Chinese ladies with Madam Mark liked some of my old master's thoughts on womanhood as quoted by yours truly.