

WING CHUN & MY UNCLE, YIP MAN:

A LO MAN KAM NARRATIVE

Yip Man's real name was Ki Man. He was a native of Foshan in Kwangtung. He was the second child born in the family, living on Fook Yin Road in the Mulberry Gardens of Foshan. His is a well-known family in that area. Next door to his house is a famous Teahouse of Foshan, Tou Yun Gue. Also next door is a famous bakery, Gow Hing Long. The houses of Mulberry Gardens are very big, and Mulberry Gardens itself is very large and well known in Foshan.

I was born in Hong Kong and grew up there. My mother was Yip Man's sister. During World War II and the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, I went to Foshan to live with my uncle in Mulberry Gardens. At that time, I met and studied with my uncle every day. My mother regularly told me stories of Uncle Yip's great boxing accomplishments. As a youth, this inspired me, especially in view of the difficult time in which we were living.

At the age of seven, my uncle became one of the students of Master Chan Wah Shun. Master Chan was old at the time and rarely taught students himself. Yip Man was his last. Since Yip became Master Chan's closed door disciple, Master Chan developed a great liking for him. Yip Man's elder fellow students, Ng Choun Su, Lar Ru Chi, and Chan Ru Man, all took care of the young Yip Man.

The tuition of Master Chan was very high: each student had to pay a few ounces of silver. The common man at the time could not afford such a cost, so Master Chan's students only numbered in the teens. This is also why Wing Chun is known as the rich person's kung fu. Six years later, Master Chan was near death. Before he died, he ordered his student Ng Choun Su to teach his younger students. Master Yip Man followed the elder fellow-student for three years. At the age of sixteen, Master Yip went to Hong Kong to study English at St. Steven's College. There he was introduced by a classmate to the second son of Mr. Leong Jan, Leung Bik. The two studied together for three years and perfected the art of Wing Chun.

Among his fellow students, Yip Man got along best with Mr. Yun Ke Shan, who is the student of Mr. Ng Choun Su. Both Yip and Yun are the same age and often spent time together. While at Yip Man's house, Mr. Yun met Yip's son, Yip Chun. Mr. Yun was very impressed by Yip Chun, so he taught him the first form of Wing Chun, "Shaolin Tao."

During the early years of the Chinese Republic, Foshan had a yearly festival called "Autumn Scenes." One year Yip Man and his wife went to see the festival. While there, an officer of the military tried to take advantage of Mrs. Yip. At the time, Yip was wearing a long gown with cloth shoes. His stature was not tall, and he looked more like a gentleman than a fighter. The officer figured he was weak and helpless, so he became more daring and offensive. My uncle immediately resorted to the "simultaneous attack and defence" technique of Wing Chun, and the officer was knocked to the floor immediately. The officer then took out his revolver, but uncle grabbed its barrel and used the strength of his thumb to break the trigger, rendering it useless.

When the Japanese occupied Foshan, the military police caught wind of Yip Man's reputation and invited him to become their coach. But he refused from the standpoint of righteousness. That angered the Japanese greatly, to the point that they ordered another kung fu master, surnamed Leung, to challenge Master Yip Man. Yip Man accepted only after being asked many times. Master Leung thought his punch very powerful and used it against Master Yip. Yip Man immediately executed the Wing Chun "Horse Stance and Kwan Sao" to defend himself, and then turned around and kicked Master Leung to the ground. After this occurrence, Yip Man left Foshan due to the increased pressure the Japanese placed on him. However, he still continued helping the Chinese government suppress the Japanese. After the Japanese resistance, Uncle Yip did not teach Wing Chun, but worked at the police department. In order to rid the area of evil and protect the people, Master Yip solved many crimes, including the Foshan Sar Ton Fon Street Robbery, and caught the robber in Sing Ping Theater. Master Yip Man continued his position as leader of the military patrol of south Kwang Chow until the collapse of Mainland China.



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With the mainland lost, my uncle left Foshan for Hong Kong. There he was introduced to Mr. Lee Min, who later helped Yip establish a Wing Chun school at the Mess Union in Da Nan Street, Kowloon. At the beginning, the followers were Lee Min, Leung Chan, Lou Yue, and myself. We had no more than ten students. Mr. Lee is not only a student but also a good friend with my uncle. Later on, Shu Sun Tin and Yip Bue Shing also followed uncle. The students kept increasing to the point that in 1954 Master Yip Man left the Mess Union to establish a kung fu institute at Hia Ten Street, Deep Water Bay, Kowloon. The other students and I followed as usual. At that time, uncle had to leave two or three times a week in order to teach the students of a union at Hollywood Road and Tai Wong Temple at Queen's Road, East Wanchai. The students kept increasing, so uncle moved the institute from Hia Ten Street to Lee Da Street to Lee Jenwou Village to Hing Yip Building. But he did not openly advertise for students. One would have to be introduced or know a follower. Bruce Lee was introduced by Mr. Cheung Jwo Hing to learn Wing Chun when the institute was at Lee Da Street.

The way of Yip Man's instruction depended on every student's degree of knowledge, natural ability, personal habits, and interests. Yip Man's great innovation was to personalize instruction by making each student's progress dependent on his own habits and will to succeed. The strength of Yip Man at over seventy was no less than that of a young man. About nine years ago, robberies occurred frequently in Hong Kong. One night when Yip Man was taking a walk, two thugs with knives tried to rob him. It only took Yip Man a few kicks to knock them out of the way. My uncle encouraged me in 1956 to travel to Taiwan and establish a Wing Chun clan there. Also, I received sponsorship from President Chiang Kai-shek in this regard. I was then representing the young people of Hong Kong. I began to miss my home in Hong Kong and tried to return, but my uncle scolded me for coming back. Yip Man thought it was too great a chance to pass by. In 1960, my uncle commanded me to make my permanent home in Taiwan, and I have remained here ever since then. I returned to Taiwan to serve my country by enrolling in a military school and learning the art of war as a field commander.

Now that I think about it, I realize Yip Man's intention in sending me back to Taiwan was that I should devote myself to this country and keep Wing Chun prospering here. His wish is today being fulfilled, for there are French, American, English, South African, Australian, East African, and West German students learning here.

During the Asian and World Kung Fu contests, the members of the Wing Chun sport team have received high honours, thus helping the Wing Chun style to prosper around the world. Because of my obligations in Taiwan, I was unable to attend my uncle's funeral. What the people outside our area have never learned is that the authentic disciples of Yip Man, such as myself, were the only ones entitled to wear the black band of mourning around their waists. Indirect students were entitled only to wear black bands around their arms. Since the death of Yip Man, confusion has continued to expand related to all matters associated with Wing Chun. I have chosen to respect the traditional Chinese ethic and my uncle's memory by avoiding argument and conflict with all those people who claim to be the new head of Wing Chun Clan. My uncle taught that Wing Chun is not for sale. Students may apply for lessons, and each student can make his own decision about which exponent teaches the boxing most suited for him.

Contact Information

Sifu Lo Man Kam teaches in Taipei, Taiwan. For more info on him, he may be contacted at:

~~Sec. 3 Pa To Road, Alley 51, Lane 12, Number 3, 4th Floor
Taipei, Taiwan
Republic of China
Tel: 011-86-6-7522405~~



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