Excerpt From: The Bible of Karate, Bubishi

by Patrick McCarthy

Article 1: Origin of White Crane Gonfu

In spite of his fighting skills in Monk Fist Boxing, Fang Zhonggong was no match for the scoundrels from a neighboring village who deceived and then viciously beat him while vying for control of his village. The injuries Fang sustained during the altercation were so severe that he was unable to fully recuperate and fell gravely ill. Attended to by his loving daughter and personal disciple, Fang Qiniang, his condition gradually deteriorated. No longer even able to eat, he finally died.
Deeply troubled by the loathsome circumstances of her beloved father’s death, Fang Qiniang vowed to take revenge. Although just a country girl from the rural village of Yongchun, Fang Qiniang was nevertheless a promising and spirited young woman. She longed to vindicate her family name, but she had not yet mastered the fighting skills her father was teaching her. She deeply pondered upon how she might find the power and strength to over come such adversaries.

One day, not long after the tragedy, Fang was sobbing over the memory of her loss when suddenly she heard some strange noises coming from the bamboo grove just outside her home. Looking out the window to see what was making such a racket, she saw two beautiful cranes fighting. She noticed how the magnificent creatures strategically maneuvered themselves away from each other’s fierce attacks with remarkable precision. In the midst of piercing screams, the vigorous jumping, and deceptive wing flapping, the barrage of vicious clawing and lethal pecking was well concealed.

Deciding to frighten off the creatures, Fang went outside and grabbed the long bamboo pole she used for hanging clothes to dry. As She approached the cranes, Fang swung the pole but was unable to get close. Each time she attempted to swing or poke with the pole, they sensed her proximity, and, before the pole could reach its target, the birds instinctively evaded her every effort and finally just flew off.

Reflecting deeply upon this incident, Fang concluded that it was a revelation and soon set about evaluating the white cranes’ instinctive combative methods. If someone could fight the way the white cranes had, that person would be unbeatable. After considerable time and study, Fang finally came to understand the central principles of hard and soft and yielding to power. Fusing the central elements of Monk Fist gonfu with her own interpretation of the birds’ innate defensive movements, she created a new style.

After three years of relentless training, Fang developed into an unusually skillful fighter. Capable of remarkable feats of strength and power, Fang Qiniang was no longer the weak and frail girl she once was. Her skill and determination finally gained her a notable reputation. Undefeated in those three years, Fang’s innovative style ultimately became one of the most popular civil self-defense traditions in and around Fujian Province, and became known as Yongchun White crane Boxing (Yonchun He Quan).

In an effort to govern the behavior of those who studied her tradition, Fang cautioned her followers to only use their skills in self-defense. She maintained that great bodily harm, including death, could easily result from excessive force. Imparting her late father’s wisdom, Fang maintained that without first finding inner peace and harmony, one could never truly master the fighting traditions, and hence never master their own lives. Master Fang asserted that it is only through discovering and then mastering the world within that the power of positive human force can be developed on harmony with nature and used to defeat any adversary.

Fang said that the principles upon which her tradition was established (i.e., correct breathing, moral precepts, inner-discovery, etc.) had been handed down from ancient times and were not native to the district of Fuzhou.

Fang’s Test
Fang’s reputation attracted many challengers wanting to test their skill against that of a woman. However, none were successful. Zeng Cishu was one of the men who dared to test Fang’s ability.

Described as invincible, Zeng was a hard style boxing expert with fingers like iron and a body as hard as a rock. Demanding to do battle with the girl, Fang promptly agreed and Zeng prepared to meet his opponent. Without even being hit once, Fang swiftly dispatched the challenger. So taken by her remarkable skill and gracious character, the fallen warrior immediately petitioned her to accept him as her student. As her personal disciple, Zeng Cishu went on to become Fang’s most prized student and eventually became the second-generation master of White Crane gonfu.

In describing his bout with Master Fang, Zeng announced that he had mistakenly relied too much upon physical

strength. Fang only had to use her evasive style and inner force to subjugate him. Zeng Cishu said she was truly a master and worthy of her reputation. Because Zeng was regarded as such a powerhouse, their bout served to greatly enhance Master Fang’s reputation and brought much more recognition to her unique boxing method.

From that time on, Master Fang maintained that anyone learning the fighting tradition must always make sure not to place too much emphasis upon just physical training. True power and wisdom come from within and are reflected without. Introspection and philosophical assimilation must balance strict, hard physical conditioning. This is the way to transcend ego-related distractions and get beyond the immediate results of physical training. People who truly understand the fighting traditions are never arrogant or unscrupulous, and never use their skill unjustly.

In the White crane fighting tradition an instructor must teach according to the student’s own individual ability. Learning the quan one can progress at one’s own pace. Subsequently, the more earnestly one trains, the more swiftly inner strength develops. As in the case of Zeng Cishu, who through relentless practice of the form Happoren developed his inner strength so that it ultimately manifested itself and flowed inward and outward through his Thirty-six Vital Points, invigorating his body so that he could, at will, summon his qu (life energy; ki in Japanese) to any of his vital points. Zeng Cishu made this quan a popular tradition, which was perpetuated and handed down.

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