

The Spirit of Martial Arts

Liu Jing Ru is a Grand Master of Bagua, Xingi and Liu He Praying Mantis. He was born in Hebei province, China in 1936 and has lived, taught and practiced martial arts in Beijing for most of his life. Grandmaster Liu began his Bagua and Xingi training with the famous Master Luo Xing Wu. He studied Zhang Shi Bagua and Drilling Fists with Master Qiu Ya He, a student of Zhang Zhong Kiu. He also trained in Yi style Bagua with Tinfu's nephew, master He Zhong Chi. He is also a 7th generation lineage holder of Liu He Praying Mantis. Recently, Grandmaster Liu was in Melbourne as guest of the Zi Ran Men Kung Fu Academy, whose Master, Liu Deming, is a current student of Liu Jing Ru.

When my Master asked me to write something about the recent visit to Melbourne of Liu Jing Ru, I wasn't sure where to start. I could begin by acknowledging his status as a martial artist in China, list his impressive achievements or perhaps explore the different systems of which he is Grand Master and lineage holder. While such things would adequately represent him as a man and Master, they do not really represent what his time in Melbourne meant to our school or how I personally remember the Grand Master. Rather, when I reflect upon the time I spent training with Liu Jing Ru, I am reminded of the Three Treasures.

The three treasures *Qi* (Energy), *Jing* (Essence) and *Shen* (Spirit) are a classical tenet of Chinese Medicine. Often spoken of in esoteric terms in the west, the cultivation of the three treasures can simply be viewed as the development of the mind (*Shen*), body (*Jing*) and the interconnection of the two (*Qi*). However any such translation fails to capture the universal nature and flexible focus that are so much a part of concepts that are a product of Eastern philosophy. As well as health and well being, one can equally apply the three treasures to any human pursuit.

In this way, the Grand Master embodied the three treasures of martial arts, the martial energy, martial essence and, above all, the martial spirit necessary to achieve *Gong Fu*. It is these three things that impressed themselves upon me the most and of which I wish to speak about.

Energy. Watching my own Master train, I am always taken by his command of Qi. This is demonstrated by the way his changing movement is linked to martial power that is continually adjusting and changing state. Defence seamlessly transforms into attack, hidden movement explodes into obvious and inescapable power and the lightness of a bird is suddenly the heaviness of a tiger. Liu Jing Ru, at the age of 67, displayed a subtlety of martial energy that can only come through many, many years of practice.

Qi is an intrinsic concept, learned through a type of awareness. It must be practised and experienced with the senses and therefore defies wordy description. Hence it was a privilege to cross hands with the Grand Master in training. We were able to feel the power of his attack and emptiness of his evasion. This was impression number one.

Essence. That Liu Jing Ru understood and captured the essence of martial arts was evident in his teaching technique. Each style and system of training has its own particular emphasis and flavour. Liu Jing Ru showed us that each movement also has its own essence, an organisational core from which the energy springs forth. The Grand Master was able to convey the essence of any technique, no matter how complex, in one or two simple movements. That this essence could be extracted and transmitted with such ease, and to both beginner and accomplished student alike, was truly remarkable. This was impression number two.

Spirit. Over the three weeks that we spent training with Liu Jing Ru, I continually asked my own Master what the Grand Master thought about us, a disparate group of westerners practicing an obscure Chinese martial art. The answer I received was invariably the same, that the Grand Master believed our school has a great spirit. This only partly satisfied me. What did he think of my form, strength and skill? Soon after he left however, I realised that this was both high praise and encouragement for us to keep training. For, more than anything else, it is Liu Jing Ru's spirit that still lingers with me.

But then, what is martial spirit? Can it be described in terms of aggression, guile, fanatical self discipline, respect? Anyone who has trained martial arts for even just a few

years knows how difficult it can be to keep yourself going, week-in, week-out, and through injuries, emotions, work and everything else in life that gets in the way. To see someone who is approaching seventy years of age happily train and teach for several hours, day after day, was nothing short of inspirational. It made it obvious that no single mind-set will sustain your training through all your years. Martial spirit is a love of training that can never fully be taken away. It is a passion.

There is one moment spent with the Grand Master that particularly sticks in my mind. It was a weekday evening toward the end of our training session. The Grand Master sat on a chair and watched us drill through our Bagua straight sword. Days of training and the late time had caught up with him and he looked, for the first time, somewhat old and tired. I'm not sure exactly what he saw in our training but suddenly he was up and out of his chair, gruffly admonishing and pontificating. He grabbed a straight sword and began demonstrating, his body moving like a younger man, a pugilistic expression on his face and eyes shining brightly. That is the true martial spirit, and impression number three.

On behalf of the Zi Ran Men Kung Fu Academy, I would like to thank Grand Master Liu for the openness and willingness with which he taught us. To keep the passion alive, one must be continually challenged and stimulated. While our own Master, Liu Deming, is inspiration enough, the experience of training with a Grand Master steeped in tradition is something we will never forget.