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Ming-Period Evidence of Shaolin Martial Practice

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THE Shaolin 少林 Monastery is arguably one of the most famous Buddhist temples worldwide. The reason lies not in the scholarly achievements of its resident monks, nor even in the traditions associating it with Bodhidharma (Damo 達摩), legendary founder of the Chan school. Rather, Shaolin's fame rests on the martial arts, for many traditions of Chinese fighting consider this monastery their birthplace. The twentieth century has witnessed a fascinating cultural exchange, as Chinese fighting techniques have enjoyed increasing popularity in the West. Featuring a unique mixture of military, therapeutic, and religious goals, these martial arts spread Shaolin's renown among large populations, which are not necessarily familiar with the Buddhist faith.

Is the fame enjoyed by the Shaolin monastery justified? Did its monks ever practice the martial arts? Could they have ignored the Buddhist prohibition of violence? Did Shaolin's geographic, economic, or social environment prompt their violation—if such ever

I am indebted to Ade, who guided me at the Shaolin Monastery and generously shared with me rubbings and transcriptions of its inscriptions. I am grateful to Zhou Qjufang of the Shanghai Library, and Timothy Connor and Hilde De Weerd of the Harvard-Yenching Library. My thanks are also due to Oded Abt, Patrick Hanan, John Kieschnick, Chris Laughrun, Jacob Raz, and Robin D. S. Yates. My research was supported by an Israel Science Foundation Fellowship.

occurred—of a primary Buddhist tenet? And what about the government—what was its attitude to the specter of monks who, instead of reading the scriptures, practice the martial arts? Despite their relevance to the Buddhologist and the social historian alike, so far these questions received no attention from Western scholars. European and American sinologists did not examine whether Shaolin monks ever practiced the martial arts, and if so since when and why.¹ By contrast the history of Shaolin fighting was studied, as early as the Republican period, by an outstanding Chinese scholar, Tang Hao 唐豪 (1897–1959). Not all the sources were available to Tang, who was interested in the military aspect of the Shaolin martial arts more than in their social or religious significance. Still his pioneering work is very significant, for it charts the major stages in the evolution of the Shaolin fighting techniques.²

Martial-arts histories that were written by Chinese and Japanese scholars draw on Tang Hao's research of the Shaolin monastery.³ Likewise, his findings served as the starting point for this study, in which I examine Shaolin martial practice during the late Ming, the earliest period regarding which we have solid evidence of regular military training at the monastery. Evaluated in this paper for its

¹ The few exceptions are either sketchy or erroneous; the former include Paul Demiéville, "Le Bouddhisme et la Guerre: Post-Scriptum à l' "Histoire des Moines Guerriers du Japon" de G. Renondeau," reprinted in *Choix d'études buddhiques* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), pp. 261–99, and J. J. M. de Groot, "Militant Spirit of the Buddhist Clergy in China," *TP* 2 (1891): 127–39; among the latter see A. A. Dolin, "Legendarny monastyr' ili traditsii ushu," *Problemy Dalinevo Vostoka*, 4 (1988): 206–16; 5 (1988): 152–69; 6 (1988): 171–81.

² See especially Tang Hao 唐豪, *Shaolin Wudang kao* 少林武當攷 (1919; photographic reprint, Hong Kong: Qilin tushu, 1968), and his *Shaolin quanshu mijue kaozheng* 少林拳術秘訣考証 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guoshu xiejin hui, 1941); see also Tang's "Jiu Zhongguo tiyu shi shang fuhui de damo" 舊中國體育史上附會的達摩, in *Zhongguo tiyushi cankao ziliao; di si ji* 中國體育史參考資料第四輯 (Beijing: Renmin tiyu, 1958), pp. 23–31; his "Jiu tiyu shi shang fuhui de damo; er: fuhui damo de shiba shou" 舊體育史上附會的達摩; 二: 附會達摩的十八手, in *Zhongguo tiyushi cankao ziliao; di liu ji* (Beijing: Renmin tiyu, 1958), pp. 27–37; and his "Songshan Shaolin chuanxi de he huiji de ticao" 嵩山少林傳習的和匯輯的體操, in *Zhongguo tiyushi cankao ziliao; di wu ji* (Beijing: Renmin tiyu, 1958), pp. 26–33.

³ See, among others, Lin Boyuan 林伯原, *Zhongguo tiyu shi; shangce, gudai* 中國體育史: 上冊: 古代 (Beijing: Beijing tiyu xueyuan, 1987); *Zhongguo gudai tiyu shi* 中國古代體育史 (Beijing: Beijing tiyu xueyuan, 1990); Cheng Dali 程大力, *Zhongguo wushu: lishi yu wenhua* 中國武術: 曆史與文化 (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue, 1995); and Matsuda Ryūchi 松田隆智, *Zhongguo wushu shilue* 中國武術史略 (Translation of *Zusetsu Chūgoku bujutsu shi*), (Taipei: Danqing tushu, 1986).



Map 1. Some Henan sites associated with the martial-arts. Taijiquan originated at Chenjiagou village, Chang Naizhou compiled his martial-arts manuals at Sishui, and the Funiu-Mountain monks received military training at the Shaolin Monastery.

military, religious, and social implications, this evidence is outlined chronologically in the Appendix.

THE SHAOLIN MONASTERY

A combination of geographical, political, and religious causes contributed to Shaolin's renown long before the Ming period. Founded during the late-fifth century, the monastery benefited from the aura of sanctity that surrounded its location on the slopes of Mt. Song

嵩, Henan (see map 1).⁴ As early as the first centuries B.C. Mt. Song was chosen as one of the “five [holy] peaks” (*wuyue* 五嶽), to which Chinese emperors were supposed to pay ritual homage. In addition, the mountain’s relative proximity (thirty-five miles) to Luoyang facilitated imperial patronage. Several medieval dynasties, which chose Luoyang as their capital, generously supported the Shaolin Monastery. The Sui Dynasty Emperor Wendi 文帝 (reigned 581–604), for example, bestowed upon it a 1400-acres estate, the name of which, Cypress-Valley Fort (Baigu wu 柏谷塢), is preserved to this day in the name of a village in the monastery’s vicinity.⁵ Finally, the Bodhidharma legend secured Shaolin’s eminent position in the Chan school. By the early eighth century, a tradition was established that the Chan teachings were transmitted by Bodhidharma to Huike 慧可 (fl. sixth century) on Mt. Song.

The earliest evidence of Shaolin participation in military affairs dates from the Tang period. Several stele inscriptions, which are still extant at the monastery, attest that on two occasions Shaolin monks engaged in fighting: in the final years of the Sui Dynasty (around 610), they warded off an attack by bandits, and, in the spring of 621, they participated in the campaign of the future Tang emperor, Li Shimin 李世民, against another contender for the throne of the defunct Sui, Wang Shichong 王世充. The battle against Wang

⁴ The monastery is situated at the foot of Mt. Song’s Shaoshi 少室 peak. Collections of materials on it include: Fu Mei 傅梅, *Song shu* 嵩書 (preface 1612) (copy Naikaku Bunko library); (those *Song shu* chapters that are relevant to the Shaolin Monastery’s history have been reprinted under the title *Songshan Shaolin si ji zhi* 嵩山少林寺輯志 in series no. 2, vols 23–24 of *Zhongguo fo si shi zhi hui kan* 中國佛寺志彙刊 (Taipei: Mingwen shuju, 1980)); Jing Rizhen 景日珍, *Shuo Song* 說嵩 (preface 1721) (copy Harvard-Yenching Library); and *Shaolin si zhi* 少林寺志 (preface 1748), eds. Jiao Qinrong 焦欽龍 and Shi Yizan 施奕簪 (copy Harvard-Yenching Library).

The best modern history is Wen Yucheng’s 溫玉成 *Shaolin fanggu* 少林訪古 (Tianjin: Baihua wenyi, 1999); see also Xu Changqing 徐長青, *Shaolin si yu Zhongguo wenhua* 少林寺與中國文化 (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji, 1993); *Xin bian Shaolin si zhi* 新編少林寺志 (Beijing: Zhongguo luyou, 1988); *Shaolin si ziliao ji* 少林寺資料集, ed. Wu Gu 無谷 and Liu Zhixue 劉志學 (Beijing: Shumu wenxian, 1982); and *Shaolin si ziliao ji xu bian* 續編, ed. Wu Gu and Yao Yuan 姚遠 (Beijing: Shumu wenxian, 1984).

See also “Shōrinji,” in Mochizuki Shinkō 望月信亨 ed., *Bukkyō daijiten* 佛教大辭典 (Kyoto: Sekai seiten kankō kyōkai, 1954–1971), 3:2806–7.

⁵ The modern village is situated approximately twelve miles to the monastery’s north-west. According to Tang sources, Shaolin’s estate was located fifty *li* (approximately sixteen miles) to the monastery’s north-west; see “Shaolin si bei” 少林寺碑 (728), in Dong Gao 董誥, comp., *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (1814; photographic reprint, Beijing: Zhonghua, 1983), 279.18a.

took place around Luoyang, where he had established his capital.⁶ Following his defeat, the Tang court handsomely rewarded the Shaolin monks, one of whom was appointed General-in-chief (Da jiangjun 大將軍) in Li's army. The inscriptions include a letter of thanks that Li Shimin addressed to the Shaolin monks, as well as several official documents, in which the Tang government bestows land and other privileges upon the monastery, in recognition of its military support (see Appendix).⁷

The Tang steles leave no doubt that, at least on two occasions, some Shaolin monks fought. However, what these epigraphic sources do not mention is equally important: the inscriptions allude neither to martial training at the Shaolin Monastery, nor to any fighting technique in which its monks specialized. It could be argued that the participation of Shaolin monks in battle indicates that they received military training at the monastery. That some of them apparently distinguished themselves in combat could strengthen this argument. Yet, there are also other possibilities: those monks that fought might have received martial training outside the monastery, or else they might have been trained *ad hoc* for the military engagements in which they participated (rather than being regularly instructed in fighting as part of their monastic regimen). It is even possible that Tang-period Shaolin monks fought, despite never receiving military training.

The Shaolin steles are the only Tang-period sources that allude to the monastery's involvement in warfare. In the travelogues and

⁶ For general background see Howard J. Wechsler, "The Founding of the T'ang Dynasty: Kao-tsu (r. 618-26)," in *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 3:162-67.

⁷ The inscriptions' authenticity merits a separate study. Here I will merely note that it is unlikely Tang-period Shaolin monks dared forge a letter by their dynasty's founder. It is likewise improbable that they fabricated an entire series of seventh, and eighth, century official government-documents (*die* 牒), bestowing economic and legal benefits on their monastery. Therefore scholars such as Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613-1682), and legal historians such as Niida Noboru 仁井田陞 (1904-1966), have usually accepted the veracity of the Shaolin Tang-steles; see Gu Yanwu, *Jinshi wenzi ji* 金石文字記, Siku quanshu edition, 2.29b-30a, 3.34b-35b; Du Mu 都穆 (1459-1525), *Jin xie linlang* 金薤琳琅 (Ming edition) (copy Beijing Library), 12.1a-8b; Wang Chang 王昶 (1725-1806), *Jinshi cuibian* 金石萃編 (1805 edition), 41.1a-7a, 74.1a-8b, 77.14a-23a; Niida Noboru, *Tō Sō hōritsu bunsho no kenkyū* 唐宋法律文書の研究 (Toho bunka gakuyin, 1937), pp. 830-33; and Demiéville, pp. 362-63; see also Meir Shahar, "Tang-Period Evidence of Shaolin Military Activities" (forthcoming).

poems of renowned Tang literati that visited Shaolin there are no allusions to military training at the temple. Furthermore, the literature of the ensuing Song and Yuan periods does not allude to Shaolin martial practice either. Thus, even though it is possible—perhaps even likely—that, as early as the Tang-period, the martial arts figured in Shaolin's monastic regimen, the available sources do not permit us to conclude so with certainty.

LATE-MING EVIDENCE

During the seven centuries that followed the carving of the Shaolin inscriptions we hear nothing of Shaolin engagement in military affairs. Then, without warning, we are flooded with late-Ming evidence of this monastery's martial aspect: at least forty extant sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources attest that by the late-Ming period Shaolin monks had been practicing the martial arts (see Appendix). They reveal that martial practice had become such an integral element of Shaolin monastic life that the monks created new Buddhist lore to justify it. Internal growth of Shaolin etiological legends was related to the external spread of the monastery's fame. By the mid-sixteenth century military experts from all over the empire had been traveling to the Shaolin Monastery to study its fighting techniques.

References to the Shaolin martial arts appear in a variety of late-Ming literary genres: military encyclopedias, martial-arts manuals (of the Shaolin school as well as its rivals, which defined themselves in opposition to it), geographical compositions (local gazetteers and monastic histories, as well as travelogues and poems by visitors to the temple), historical writings (such as chronicles of the sixteenth-century campaign—in which Shaolin monks took part—against piracy), epitaphs (of Shaolin fighting-monks) and even fiction (in classical and vernacular idioms). These wide-ranging sources reveal that Shaolin military activities captured the attention of diverse segments of the Ming elite. The Shaolin martial arts figured in the writings of generals, government officials, scholars, monks, and poets. Historians were likewise intrigued by the nexus of Buddhism and warfare. In an essay titled "Shaolin seng bing" 少林僧兵 (Shaolin Monastic Troops), Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613–1682) surveyed various

recorded instances—at Shaolin and other monasteries alike—of Buddhist involvement in warfare.⁸ His query into the origins of the Shaolin military techniques evinces that by his time they have been well established.

Late-Ming sources on the Shaolin Monastery differ from the preceding Tang-period materials not only in their wealth and diversity but also in the precise information they provide on the fighting techniques practiced by the Shaolin monks. Tang epigraphic sources do not tell us whether those Shaolin monks that fought specialized in a given combat method. By contrast, sixteenth and seventeenth century texts allude to the Shaolin methods of spear-fighting and unarmed hand-combat (*quan* 拳), even as they leave no doubt that the weapon in which the Shaolin monks specialized—indeed the one that made their monastery famous—was the staff.

CHENG ZONGYOU'S EXPOSITION OF THE ORIGINAL SHAOLIN STAFF METHOD

The earliest extant manual of the Shaolin martial arts was dedicated to staff fighting. Titled *Shaolin gunfa chan zong* 少林棍法闡宗 (Exposition of the Original Shaolin Staff Method) (hereafter: *Shaolin Staff Method*), it was compiled around 1610 by a military expert named Cheng Zongyou 程宗猷 (Style: Chongdou 冲斗) from Xiuning 休寧, Huizhou 徽州 Prefecture, in the southern part of today's Anhui. The Cheng family belonged to the local gentry, and its late-Ming members included several noted scholars and degree holders. However, Zongyou's interests—like those of several brothers and nephews of his—were not in classical learning but in the military arts. We possess a description of the entire Cheng household—Zongyou and his brothers—demonstrating martial techniques at the local yamen, as well as an account of an eighty-men strong military force, trained by Zongyou, and made up entirely of members of his estate.⁹

⁸ The essay is included in Gu's *Rizhilu ji shi* 日知錄集釋, annotated by Huang Rucheng 黃汝成 (1834; photographic reprint, Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1984), 29.21a–22b.

⁹ See Hou Anguo's 侯安國 preface to the *Shaolin gunfa chan zong*; on Cheng Zongyou see also Lin Boyuan, *Zhongguo tiyu shi*, p. 337. Cheng, like his contemporaries, sometimes refers to his native place Xiuning 休寧 by its earlier name Haiyang 海陽, and he alludes to Huizhou 徽州 by its alternative names Xinan 新安 and Xindu 新都.

Cheng Zongyou was neither a bandit nor a member of the Ming hereditary military—two groups that we might expect to have mastered the martial arts. Rather he was of literati background, and his acquaintances included renowned scholars.¹⁰ Still, martial arts were his passion, which was shared by some other members of his class. The earliest extant manual of the “internal school” (*neijia* 内家) of fighting, for example, was compiled by Huang Baijia 黄白家 (1643–?), son of the renowned scholar Huang Zongxi 黄宗羲 (1610–1695), and seventeenth-century methods of spear-fighting were recorded by Wu Shu 吳鈇 (1611–1695), who was also a poet and a literary critic. These literati were often trained in fighting by instructors of lower social status. Their contribution to martial-arts history lies in recording techniques that, having originated among the unlettered classes, would otherwise have been lost.¹¹

In addition to his *Shaolin Staff Method*, Cheng Zongyou compiled a manual of archery titled *She shi* 射史 (History of Archery) (preface 1629),¹² as well as treatises on the techniques of the spear, the broadsword, and the crossbow. In 1621 he issued the latter three, together with his manual of the Shaolin staff, in a combined edition titled *Geng yu sheng ji* 耕餘剩技 (Techniques for After-Farming Pastime).¹³ The relative length of the manuals included in this handsomely-illustrated book leaves no doubt that, as Cheng himself acknowledges, the staff was his weapon of choice. Indeed, the *Shaolin Staff Method* is as long as the other three manuals combined.

Cheng’s familiarity with staff-fighting was due to the lengthy pe-

¹⁰ Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558–1639), for example, wrote the preface to Cheng’s *She shi* 射史 (1629) (copy Beijing Library).

¹¹ Huang Baijia’s martial instructor Wang Zhengnan 王征南 (1617–1669) received no formal education and earned his livelihood as a manual laborer. See Huang Zongxi’s epitaph for Wang, “Wang Zhengnan muzhi ming” 王征南墓誌銘, in Huang Zongxi’s *Nanlei wending* 南雷文定 (Congshu jicheng edition, Shanghai: Shangwu, 1936), 8.128–30. See also Douglas Wile’s translation in his *T’ai Chi’s Ancestors: The Making of an Internal Art* (New York: Sweet Ch’i Press, 1999), pp. 55–57.

¹² A copy is available at the Beijing Library.

¹³ Copies are available in several libraries in China, including the Beijing Library and the Shanghai Library. The titles of the other three manuals included are: *Juezhang xin fa* 蹶張心法 (Essentials of the Crossbow Method); *Changqiang fa xuan* 長槍法選 (Selections of the Long-Spear Method); and *Dandao fa xuan* 單刀法選 (Selections of the Broadsword Method).

Cheng Zongyou’s *Shaolin gunfa* is available also in a pirated edition, titled *Shaolin gun jue* 少林棍訣, which carries a forged preface attributed to Yu Dayou 俞大猷 (1503–1579) (copy Naikaku Bunko library).

riod he spent at the Shaolin Monastery. According to his own testimony his apprenticeship there lasted no less than ten years. His description of the training he received reveals that at least one Buddhist monastery rendered late-Ming society the unique service of martial education. The Shaolin establishment emerges from his writings as a place where clergy and laity were trained together in staff-fighting:

The Shaolin Monastery is nestled between two mountains: that of culture (*wen* 文) and that of fighting (*wu* 武). Indeed this monastery has transmitted the method of staff-fighting and the doctrines of the Chan sect alike, for which reason gentlemen throughout the land have always admired it.

Since my youth I was determined to learn the martial arts. Whenever I heard of a famous teacher I wouldn't hesitate to travel far to gain his instruction. Therefore I gathered the necessary travel expenses, and journeyed to the Shaolin Monastery where I spent, all in all, more than ten years. At first I served Master Hongji 洪紀, who was tolerant enough to admit me into his class. Even though I gained a sketchy understanding of the technique's broad outlines, I didn't master it.

At the time Master Hongzhan 洪轉 was already an old man in his eighties.¹⁴ Nevertheless his staff method was superb, and the monks venerated him the most. Therefore I turned to him as my next teacher, and each day I learned new things I had never heard of before. In addition, I befriended the two Masters Zongxiang 宗想 and Zongdai 宗岱, and I gained enormously from practicing with them. Later I met Master Guang'an 廣按, one of the best experts in the Buddhist technique. He had inherited Hongzhan's technique in its entirety, and had even improved upon it. Guang'an tutored me personally, and revealed to me wonderful subtleties. Later I followed him out of the monastery and we traveled together for several years. The marvelous intricacy of the staff's transformations, the wonderful swiftness of its manipulations—at first I didn't grasp them, but gradually I became familiar and was enlightened. I chose this field as my specialty, and I believe I did have some achievements.

As for archery, riding and the arts of sword and spear, I paid quite some attention to their investigation as well, however by that time my energy of half-a-lifetime had already been spent. My great uncle, the military student (*wu xuesheng* 武學生) Yunshui 雲水 and my nephews Junxin 君信 and the National University student (*taixuesheng* 太學生) Hanchu 涵初 had studied with me once at Shaolin. They pointed out that so far the Shaolin staff method had been transmitted only orally, from one Buddhist master to the next. Since I was the first to draw illustrations and compile written formulas for it, they suggested I publish these for the benefit of like-minded friends. At first I declined, saying I was not equal to the task. But

¹⁴ A spear-manual attributed to Hongzhan, and titled *Menglü tang qiangfa* 夢綠堂槍法 is included in Wu Shu's 吳受 *Shou bi lu* 手臂錄 (Congshu jicheng edition, Shanghai: Shangwu, 1939), pp. 113–24.

then illustrious gentlemen from all over the land started commending the supposed merits of my work. They even blamed me for keeping it secret, thereby depriving them. So finally I found some free time, gathered the doctrines handed down to me by teachers and friends, and combined these with what I had learned from my own experience. I commissioned an artisan to execute the drawings, and, even though my writing is somewhat vulgar, I added to the left of each drawing a rhyming formula (*gejue* 歌訣).

Together these drawings and formulas constitute a volume, which I titled: *Exposition of the Original Shaolin Staff Method*. Just casting a glance at one of the drawings would probably suffice to figure the position depicted therein. Thus the reader will be able to study this method without the aid of a teacher. Despite an apparent simplicity, each sentence captures the secret of victory and defeat, each drawing harbors the essence of movement. Even though staff-fighting is called a trivial art, its explication in this book is the result of strenuous effort.

If this book assists like-minded friends in reaching the other shore, if they rely upon it to strengthen the state and pacify its borders, thereby enhancing the glory of my teachers' methods, yet another of my goals would be accomplished.¹⁵

Cheng's hope that his *Shaolin Staff Method* would enhance the fame of his monastic instructors was not frustrated. Shortly after the manual's publication, the renowned Mao Yuanyi 茅元儀 (1549–ca. 1641) commented: "All fighting techniques derive from staff methods, and all staff methods derive from Shaolin. As for the Shaolin method no description of it is as detailed as . . . Cheng Zongyou's *Exposition of the Original Shaolin Staff Method*."¹⁶ Mao was so impressed with Cheng's manual that he incorporated it almost in full into his encyclopedic *Wubei zhi* 武備志 (*Treatise of Military Preparations*).¹⁷

Cheng's exhaustive presentation of the Shaolin staff method begins with a description of the weapon. He provides specifications for the length, weight, and materials to be used in the preparation of the staff, to which, like most late-Ming military experts, he refers as *gun* 棍. According to Cheng, the staff can be made either of wood or of iron. In the former case its recommended length is 8 to 8.5 *chi* 尺 (which in the Ming would mean approximately 8.2 foot to 8.7 foot), and its weight 2.5 to 3 *jin* 觔 (approximately 3.2 pounds to 3.9 pounds). The iron staff is slightly shorter (7.5 *chi*, or, approximately, 7.7 feet), and its suggested weight between 15 and 16 *jin*

¹⁵ Cheng Zongyou, *Shaolin gunfa*, 1b-2b.

¹⁶ Mao Yuanyi, *Wubei zhi*, 1621 edition, photographic reprint in vols. 27-36 of *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng* 中國兵書集成 (Beijing: Jiefangjun, 1989), 88.1a.

¹⁷ Mao Yuanyi, *Wubei zhi*, chapters 88-90.

(approximately 19.5 to 20.8 pounds).¹⁸ Cheng also discusses the type of timber to be used in the preparation of the wooden staff:

As the regions of the country vary, so do the types of wood. As long as the wood is solid and dense, as long as it is both hard and pliant, growing thinner and thinner from the base to the tree-top like a mouse's tail, it will do nicely. A straight pole that is naturally free of scars and nodes would be preferable. By contrast, if the staff is produced by cleaving or sawing, it will easily break along the veins.¹⁹

Cheng distinguishes between fifty-three individual staff positions (*shi* 勢), each of which he represents by a drawing, accompanied by an explanatory “rhyming formula” (see fig. 1). Individual positions are strung together into practice sequences called *lushi* 路勢 (“sequence of positions”). Intricate diagrams guide the practitioner in the performance of these sequences, which simulate the kind of motions that characterize a real battle (see fig. 2). Finally, several practice-sequences combine into what Cheng calls a “method” (*fa* 法). All in all, he lists five different methods of the Shaolin staff: Little Yaksa Spirit (Xiao Yecha 小夜叉); Big Yakṣa Spirit (Da Yecha 大夜叉); Hidden Hands (Yinshou 陰手); Pushing Staff (Pai gun 排棍); and Shuttling [Staff] (Chuansuo 穿梭). The Pushing Staff differs from the other four methods in being a technique of dual rather than solitary practice, and both the Pushing Staff and the Shuttling [Staff] differ from the remaining three in being “free methods without fixed positions” (*huo fa wu ding shi* 活法無定勢).²⁰

According to Cheng, the five methods alike originated at the monastery. In this respect, it is no accident that the word “original” (*zong* 宗) figures in the title of his manual: *Exposition of the Original Shaolin Staff Method*. Cheng's goal was to expound what he argued were the authentic Shaolin techniques, as distinct from the numerous methods that—even as they carried the monastery's name—were far removed from its original teaching. His agenda mirrors the fame that the Shaolin Monastery had acquired by the early seventeenth century. If it were not for the monastery's renown, practitioners of other techniques would not have capitalized on its name,

¹⁸ See Cheng Zongyou, *Shaolin gunfa*, 2.1a, 3.8b; for the relevant conversions, see “Ming Weights and Measures,” in *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 7:xxi.

¹⁹ Cheng Zongyou, *Shaolin gunfa*, 3.8a-b.

²⁰ Cheng Zongyou, *Shaolin gunfa*, 1.5b-6b.

高搭袖勢
勢名搭袖棍辟立
前虛後實在呼吸
側身斜劈非真劈
顛步平掣圈外入
力弱勢低不吾降
佳自鳥鳥單丁急



Fig. 1. The “Lifting-Sleeve Position” (Gao daxiu shi) from Cheng Zongyou’s *Shaolin Staff Method* (1621). Courtesy of Shanghai Library.

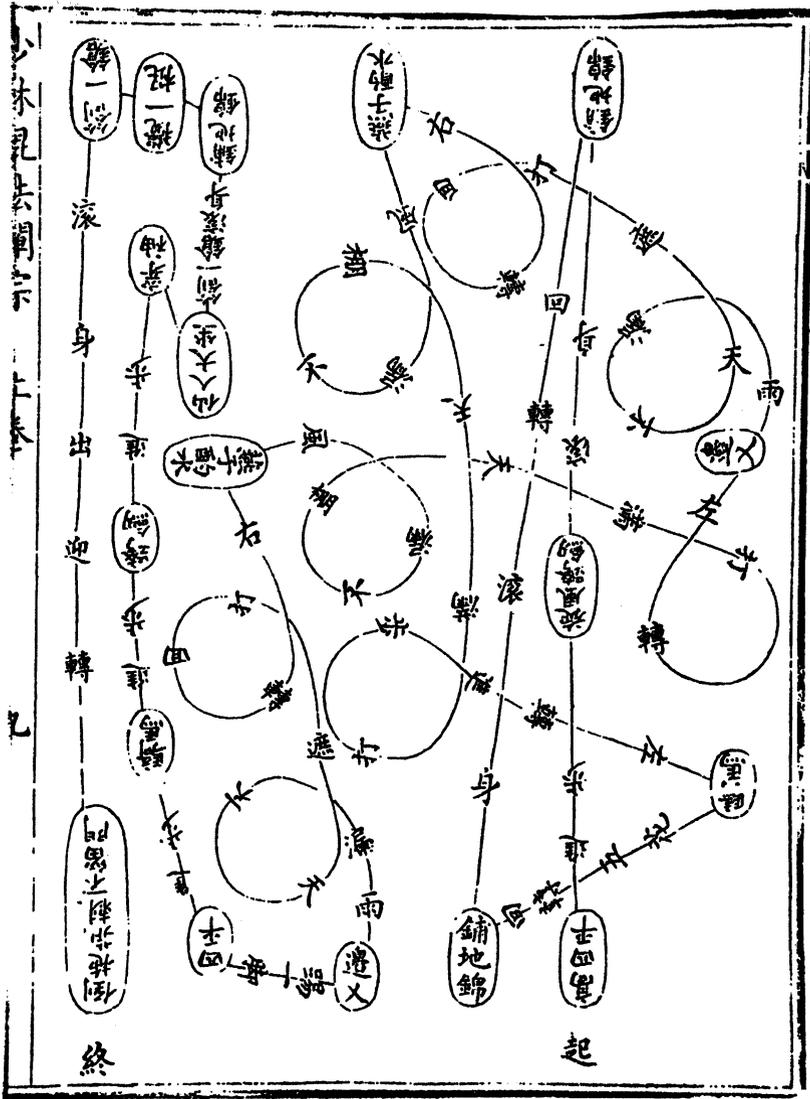


Fig. 2. Practice-Sequence Diagram from Cheng Zongyou's *Shaolin Staff Method* (1621). The names of individual positions (*shi*) appear inside the circles. Courtesy of Shanghai Library.

and Cheng would not have been prompted to present the *original* Shaolin method.

Thus, Cheng's *Shaolin Staff Method* reveals a landscape familiar in today's world of martial arts: one of competing schools, each professing to be the sole inheritor of the same original teaching. The rivalry between martial experts all claiming possession of *the* authentic Shaolin teaching is most apparent in the "Questions and Answers" section of the *Shaolin Staff Method*, where Cheng addresses the following query, posed by a hypothetical interlocutor:

"Today, there is no shortage of Shaolin staff experts. And yet their methods all differ. How could it be that by choosing a different teacher, a practitioner ends up being taught a different technique?"

I replied: "The teachings all derive from the same source. However, with the passage of time people turn their backs on it. Teachers esteem unusual methods, and prefer strange techniques. Some take the opening section of *this* practice-sequence (*lu* 路) and mix it with the closing section of *that* sequence. Others take the closing section of *that* sequence and mingle it with the middle section of *this* sequence. So much so, that what was originally one sequence is transformed into two. Thus teachers confuse the world, and lead the practitioners astray, all for the sake of fame and profit. I am much grieved by this situation, and it is exactly for this reason that I strive to set things right."²¹

MONKS AND GENERALS

Although his was the most detailed exposition of the Shaolin staff, Cheng Zongyou was not the only expert to discuss it. On the contrary, references to the Shaolin techniques of staff-fighting appear regularly in late-Ming military encyclopedias, beginning with Tang Shunzhi's 唐順之 (1507–1560) *Wu bian* 武編 (Treatise on Military Affairs), which was written some seventy years prior to the publication of Cheng's manual.²² Other military compilations that feature the Shaolin staff include: *Jixiao xinshu* 紀效新書 (New Treatise on Military Efficiency) (ca. 1562), by the renowned general Qi Jiguang 戚繼光 (1528–1588); *Treatise of Military Preparations* by the above-mentioned Mao Yuanyi; and *Zhenji* 陣紀 (Records of Military

²¹ Cheng Zongyou, *Shaolin gunfa*, 3.7b–8a.

²² Tang Shunzhi, *Wu bian qianji* 前集, Wanli edition, photographic reprint in vols. 13–14 of *Zhongguo bingshu jicheng*, 5.39b; on Tang Shunzhi, see *Dictionary of Ming Biography 1368–1644*, ed. L. Carrington Goodrich (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 2:1252–56.

Tactics), by the military commander He Liangchen 何良臣 (fl. 1565).²³ The latter composition indicates a spread of the Shaolin martial arts within monastic circles. It notes that the monastery's staff method has been transmitted to the monks at Mount Niu 牛, by which it probably refers to the monastic center on Mount Funiu 伏牛, Henan (see map 1).²⁴

Late-Ming military experts usually heap praises on the Shaolin staff method. Qi Jiguang, for instance, lists it among the famous fighting techniques of his time, and Mao Yuanyi concludes that it has served as the source for all other staff styles. However, the information to be gathered from critical voices is no less significant. Martial artists who disapproved of the Shaolin method provide us with detailed information on it. This is especially true of those military experts that found fault with the Shaolin emphasis on the staff, for they offer the strongest testimony of its centrality in the monastery's regimen.

One expert who objected to the Shaolin concentration on staff-fighting, arguing that it resulted in neglect, and even distortion, of training in other weapons, was Wu Shu. Wu was born on the banks of the Lou 婁 river (now called Liuhe 劉河), in the subprefecture of Taicang 太倉, some thirty miles north-east of Suzhou in today's Jiangsu. Like Cheng Zongyou, he was of literati background, and under his other name, Wu Qiao 吳喬, he is known to us as author of the *Weilu shihua* 圍爐詩話 (Poetic Conversations Around the Fireplace).²⁵ Wu specialized in spear-fighting, which he began studying in 1633, under the guidance of an itinerant spear-expert named Shi Dian 石電 (*hao*: Jingyan 敬巖) (?-1634). Some forty years later he summarized his spear studies in an anthology titled *Shou bi lu* 手

²³ See respectively Qi Jiguang, *Jixiao xinshu*, annotated by Sheng Dongling (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), 14.165; Mao Yuanyi, chapters 88-90; and He Liangchen, *Zhenji* (Congshu jicheng edition, Shanghai: Shangwu, 1939), 2.27; on Qi, Mao, and He see, respectively, *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 1:220-24; 2:1053-54; and Lin Boyuan, *Zhongguo tiyu shi*, pp. 319-20.

²⁴ The Funiu Mountain range is situated approximately 100 miles south-west of the Shaolin Monastery. That the monks there practiced the martial arts is confirmed by Zheng Ruoceng's 鄭若曾 *Jiangnan jing lue* 江南經略 (preface 1568; Siku quanshu edition), 8b.22b, as well as by the official *Mingshi* 明史, ed. Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉 et. al. (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1974), 91.2252.

²⁵ Wu Qiao, *Weilu shihua* (Congshu jicheng edition, Shanghai: Shangwu, 1939).

臂錄 (Record of Hands and Arms) (preface 1678), which includes seven different manuals.²⁶ One of these, titled *Menglü tang qiangfa* 夢綠堂槍法 (Spear Method from the Dreaming-of-Foliage Hall), is attributed to the Shaolin monk Hongzhuan, whom Cheng Zongyou mentioned as his staff teacher. Even as he incorporated Hongzhuan's manual into his anthology, Wu was highly critical of the Shaolin method it represented. "Shaolin [monks] do not understand spear fighting at all," he exclaimed. "In fact, they employ their [techniques] of the staff for the spear." (*Shaolin quan bu zhi qiang, jing yi qi gun wei qiang* 少林全不知槍, 竟以其棍爲槍).²⁷ In other words, because they overemphasize staff training, Shaolin monks fail to take advantage of the spear's unique features, as Wu further explains:

The Shaolin staff method has divine origins, and it has enjoyed fame from ancient times to the present. I myself have been quite involved in it. Indeed, it is as high as the mountains and as deep as the seas. It can truly be called a 'supreme technique' (*jueye* 絕業) . . . Still as a weapon the spear is entirely different from the staff. The ancient proverb says: "The spear is the lord of all weapons, the staff is an attendant in its estate." Indeed, this is so . . . The Shaolin monks have never been aware of this. They treat the spear and the staff as if they were similar weapons.²⁸

Whereas Wu Shu disapproved of the monks' disregard for weapons *other* than the staff, another military expert, Yu Dayou 俞大猷 (1503–1579), was critical of their staff method itself. Yu is known to us as a successful general, who served as regional commander on five of China's frontiers. He was born into a hereditary military family in Jinjiang 晉江, Fujian, and his brilliant military career was due in large measure to his contribution to the suppression of piracy along China's south-eastern coast.²⁹ Yu distinguished himself not only as a strategist but also as an accomplished martial artist. He specialized in a staff method known as "Jingchu changjian" 荆楚長劍 (Jingchu Long Sword), and he compiled a manual of staff

²⁶ See Wu Shu, pp. 109–11 for his initiation into the martial arts. On Wu see also Lin Boyuan, *Zhongguo tiyu shi*, pp. 339–40; Matsuda, pp. 28–30; and "Shou bi lu," in *Siku da cidian* 四庫大辭典, eds. Li Xueqin 李學勤 and Lü Wenyu 呂文郁 (Changchun: Jilin daxue, 1996), p. 1633.

²⁷ Wu Shu, preface, p. 1.

²⁸ Wu Shu, p. 113.

²⁹ See *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 2:1616–18.

fighting, titled *Jianjing* 劍經 (Sword Classic), which won praise from contemporary military experts.³⁰

Intrigued by Shaolin's renown, Yu traveled there around 1560 to observe the monastic fighting technique, but he was, according to his account, deeply disappointed. The monastic art had declined so much, he claimed, that he ended up teaching the monks his own martial techniques. In the following account of his visit to the monastery, Yu uses the word "sword" (*jian*) for the staff, as he does in the title of his staff-manual:³¹

I had heard that the Shaolin Monastery in Henan possesses a divinely transmitted method of fencing (*jijian* 擊劍) [i.e. staff-fighting]. Later, when I was on my way back from Yunzhong 雲中 [in Shanxi], I followed the path to the monastery. More than ten monks, who considered themselves experts in this method, gave me a demonstration. I realized that the monastery had already lost the ancient secrets of the art, and I openly told them so. The monks immediately expressed their desire to be instructed, to which I responded: "One must dedicate years upon years to master this technique." So they chose from amongst them two young and courageous monks, one named Zongqing 宗擎, the other Pucong 普從, who followed me to the South, and took up residence inside my military barracks. I taught them the True Formula of the Yin and Yang Transformations,³² as well as the profound and illuminating imperatives.

After more than three years had elapsed, the two said: "We have been here long enough. We beg permission to return in order that we may teach our fellow monks what we have learned. This way [your] method will be transmitted for ever and ever." And so I let them go. Thirteen years swiftly passed, and suddenly one day my

³⁰ Yu's *Jianjing* must have circulated as an independent volume prior to 1562, when Qi Jiguang quoted it in full in his *Jixiao xinshu*, 12.132-54. It is also available in Yu's collected writings, which were published in three installments, between 1565 and the early 1580s, under the titles: *Zhengqi tang ji* 正氣堂集; *Zhengqi tang xuji* 續集; and *Zhengqi tang yuji* 餘集. The *Jianjing* is in the *yuji*; see the combined 1841 edition of all three installments (copy Harvard-Yenching Library). He Liangchen praises the *Jianjing* in his *Zhenji*, 2.27.

³¹ I am not sure of the reason for this usage in Yu's writings. Perhaps he applied the word "sword" for "staff" because the former had already appeared in the name of the staff method, *Jingchu Long Sword* (*Jingchu changjian*), which he studied. In any event the text of Yu's *Sword classic* leaves no doubt that it is concerned with staff-fighting (rather than fencing), as indeed was clear to Yu's contemporaries Qi Jiguang and He Liangchen; see also Tang Hao, *Shaolin Wudang kao*, p. 42; Tang Hao, *Shaolin quanshu mijue kaozheng*, pp. 67-69; Lin Boyuan, *Zhongguo tiyu shi*, pp. 317-18; Lin Boyuan, "Tan Zhongguo wushu zai Mingdai de fazhan bianhua" 談中國武術在明代的發展變化, in *Zhonghua wushu luncong* 中華武術論叢 (Beijing: Renmin tiyu, 1987), pp. 67-68; and Matsuda, pp. 7-9, 52-53.

³² The Yin/Yang terminology figures in Yu's *Sword Classic*, as in the following formula: "Yinyang yao zhuan, liang shou yao zhi" 陰陽要轉, 兩手要直 (Yin and Yang should alternate, the two hands need be straight). See *Jianjing*, in *Zhengqi tang yuji*, 4.3b.

gatekeeper announced that a monk was wishing to see me. He was allowed in, and lo and behold he was Zongqing! He told me that Pucong had already joined the ranks of divine beings, and that only he, Zongqing, had returned to the Shaolin Monastery, where he taught the Sword Formulas (*jianjue* 劍訣) [i.e. staff-formulas] and Chan Regulations. Amongst the monks, almost a hundred achieved a profound knowledge of the technique. Thus it can be transmitted for ever and ever!³³

General Yu was under the impression that his staff method would be transmitted for generations at the Shaolin Monastery. Did he overestimate his impact on the Shaolin tradition? An examination of Cheng Zongyou's manual reveals that the staff technique he learned at Shaolin—some fifty years after Yu's visit to the monastery—was entirely different from the one outlined in Yu's *Sword Classic*. The two staff styles—that taught by the general and that studied by Cheng—vary in everything from the names of methods (*fa*) and positions (*shi*) to the rhyming-formulas and illustrations.³⁴ Furthermore, we can trace at least some of the nomenclature in Cheng's *Shaolin Staff Method* to a military encyclopedia that antedates Yu's encounter with the Shaolin monks.³⁵ Clearly, an indigenous tradition of Shaolin staff fighting, which predated the general's visit to the monastery, continued to thrive there long afterwards.

General Yu misjudged his influence on Shaolin fighting, but it is not impossible that he left some mark on it. A hint is provided by the following passage from Wu Shu's *Record of Hands and Arms*, which was compiled approximately a hundred years after the general's visit to the Shaolin monastery:

The Shaolin Monastery has a staff-fighting method called "Five Tigers Interception" (Wuhu lan 五虎攔). "One strike down, one strike up" (*yi da yi jie* 一打一揭) is all there is to it. Striking down, the staff should reach the ground; striking up it should pass one's head. It is a simple method, and there is nothing spectac-

³³ Yu Dayou, "Shi song Shaolin si seng Zongqing you xu", 詩送少林寺僧宗擎有序 in *Zhengqi tang xuji*, 2.7a–8a. An almost identical account of Yu's visit to the monastery is found in his "Xinjian Shifang Chan yuan bei" 新建十方禪院碑 (1577), in *Zhengqi tang xuji*, 3.6a–7b.

³⁴ Tang Hao located only one shared formula in Yu's and Cheng's manuals: "jiu li lue guo, xin li wei fa (or: sheng)" 舊力略過，新力未發 (生) ("[Strike when] one surge of [your rival's] energy is largely over, and before another has been generated"); compare: Yu Dayou, *Jianjing*, in *Zhengqi tang yuji*, 4.23a, and Cheng Zongyou, *Shaolin gunfa*, 3.4a; see also Tang Hao, *Shaolin quanshu mijue kaozheng*, pp. 65–66; and Matsuda, p. 53.

³⁵ The Shaolin method of the "Hidden Hands" (Yinshou), discussed in Cheng's *Shaolin gunfa*, is already mentioned in Tang Shunzhi's *Wu bian qianji* (5.39b), which was compiled approximately ten years prior to Yu's visit to Shaolin.

ular about it, almost like a farmer hoeing the soil. Still, by practicing it long enough one attains refinement. "Striking down and up" (*dajie* 打擗), one obtains strength. Even the other Shaolin techniques are all in awe of this method. It can not be taken lightly just because it is so simple.³⁶

Wu Shu highlights the formula "one strike down, one strike up" as characteristic of the "Five Tigers Interception." The same formula figures prominently in Yu Dayou's *Sword Classic*, for which reason it is likely that the method the general taught is none other than the one Wu Shu describes. If Tang Hao, who formulated this hypothesis, is correct, then by the late-seventeenth century the Shaolin monks had been engaged in two systems of staff training: one, recorded in Cheng's *Shaolin Staff Method*, which predated Yu's visit to their monastery, the other called by Wu Shu "Five Tigers Interception," which they learned from the Ming general.³⁷

Leaving aside the question of Yu Dayou's precise influence on the Shaolin martial arts, his association with the monastery reveals a connection between two segments of late-Ming society, which scholarship tends to regard as quite distinct: the Buddhist *sangha* and the military. General Yu treated Shaolin monks as fellow professionals, with whom he conferred on the technicalities of his field. His conception of their monastery as a military institution enriches our understanding of the multifarious roles that Buddhism played in late-Ming society.³⁸

According to Yu's account, *he* instructed the Shaolin monks. In other instances Shaolin monks shared *their* martial expertise with members of the military. The clearest example is that of the mid-sixteenth century campaign against piracy, during which military officials in the Jiangnan region called on the Shaolin monks for help. The monks who responded and joined the war, did not forsake their religious identity. Rather than blending in with the other soldiers, they

³⁶ Wu Shu, p. 89.

³⁷ Tang Hao, *Shaolin quanshu mijue kaozheng*, pp. 68-9; see also Matsuda, p. 54.

³⁸ On these roles—religious, cultural, social, and political—see, among others, Yü Chün-fang, "Ming Buddhism," in *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 8:893-952; Yü Chün-fang, *The Renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-hung and the late Ming synthesis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981); and Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series, 38 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Council on East Asian Studies, 1993).

formed their own monastic units. However, at least one cleric was offered a position in the military and consequently returned to the laity. This is the seventeenth-century Shaolin monk Liu Dechang 劉德長, who was appointed Mobile Corps Commander (Youji jiangjun 游擊將軍) in the army. Even after he abandoned the monastic order in favor of the officer corps, Liu maintained contact with his Buddhist *alma mater*, accepting as students Shaolin monks who sought his instruction in spear-fighting.³⁹

If Shaolin monks conferred with generals, they also associated with the emerging community of martial artists that did not belong to the military. We met two literate members of that community, Cheng Zongyou and Wu Shu. A third one (also literate), Cheng Zhenru 程真如 (fl. ca. 1620), received his military education not at the Shaolin Monastery but at another Buddhist center, Mount Emei 峨嵋 in Sichuan. Cheng traveled there to gain the instruction of the monk Pu'en 普恩 (fl. ca. 1600), whose spear techniques he later recorded in his *Emei qiangfa* 峨嵋槍法 (Emei Spear Method).⁴⁰ He notes that Pu'en received this technique from a divine being, for which reason, perhaps, the monk was reluctant to part with it. Cheng was obliged to spend two years gathering firewood, before Pu'en was convinced of his sincerity, and revealed to him the mysteries of the spear.⁴¹

Cheng Zhenru voyaged far to be tutored by the best spear master. In this he resembled other late-Ming martial artists—monks and lay persons alike—who conducted an itinerant life-style. Pu'en “journeyed all over the land, but could find no rival”; Shi Dian traveled from village to village in search of students; Cheng Zongyou spent several years on the road with his Shaolin mentor Guang'an; and the Shaolin monk Sanqi Yougong 三奇友公 (?–1548) is said to

³⁹ See Wu Shu, p. 109.

⁴⁰ Included in Wu Shu, pp. 93–109. It is tempting to speculate that Cheng Zhenru belonged to same extended family as Cheng Zongyou. The former's birth-place is given as Haiyang 海陽, by which old county name the latter sometimes refers to his native place in Xiuning, Anhui.

Tang Shunzhi's “Emei daoren quan ge” 峨嵋道人拳歌 indicates that as early as the mid-sixteenth century some Emei monks practiced the martial arts; see his *Jingchuan xiansheng wenji* 荆川先生文集, Wanli edition; photographic reprint, SPTK edition (Shanghai: Shangwu, 1922), 2.8b–9a.

⁴¹ See Cheng's introduction to his *Emei qiangfa*, in Wu Shu, p. 93.

have acquired over a thousand students in his extensive wanderings through Henan, Hebei, Shandong, and Jiangsu.⁴² Whether they belonged to the clergy or the laity these itinerant martial artists usually took up residence in local temples. Wu Shu alludes to Shi Dian's sojourn at a local temple called Returning-Kindness (Baoben si 報本寺), and, according to Huang Baijia, Wang Zhengnan gave lessons at the Iron-Buddha Temple (Tie Fo si 鐵佛寺).⁴³ Providing the vagrant martial artist with shelter, the local temple offered space for military instruction as well.

Late-Ming martial artists were thus often on the road, or as the Chinese would have it "on the water." Sixteenth- and-seventeenth-century authors allude to martial artists in the context of the "rivers and lakes" (*jianghu* 江湖),⁴⁴ which term designated all those who earn a transient livelihood: actors, storytellers, fortune-tellers and the like. Did martial artists, like other "rivers-and-lakes" itinerants, travel for economic reasons? At first glance it would appear that military experts journeyed for educational goals: to study, teach, or test their strength against worthy rivals. However, the cultivation of professional skills is hard to separate from financial considerations. Presumably, teachers were remunerated by students, and competitions could take the form of public performances paid for by spectators. In this respect, sources on the nineteenth-century martial community could shed light on its sixteenth century antecedent. In his *Jianghu congtan* 江湖叢談 (Collected Talks on the Rivers and Lakes), Yun Youke 雲游客 (fl. 1900), describes in vivid detail the vagrant livelihood of martial artists: some serve as armed escorts (*baobiao* 保鏢), who accompany goods in transit; others journey to

⁴² See, respectively, Wu Shu, p. 93; Wu Shu, p. 110; Cheng Zongyou, *Shaolin gunfa*, 1.2a; and Sanqi Yougong's epitaph which was inscribed on his burial stupa and is still extant in Shaolin's Stupa-Forest (Talin 塔林). On Shaolin itinerant warriors see also Xie Zhaozhe 謝肇淛 (1567-1624), *Wu zazu* 五雜俎 (1618 edition; photographic reprint, Taipei: Xinxing, 1971), 5.23a.

⁴³ See respectively Wu Shu, p. 110 and Huang Baijia, *Neijia quanfa* 內家拳法, in *Zhaodai congshu bieji* 昭代叢書別集 (Daoguang edition) (copy Harvard-Yenching Library), 24.1b. See also Douglas Wile's translation of the latter in his *T'ai Chi's Ancestors*, p. 58. Wang's house was too small for instruction, for which reason he gave lessons at the Tie Fo Temple nearby. Thus, in his case, the decision to practice in a temple was not related to itinerancy.

⁴⁴ Cai Jiude 采九德, for instance, alludes to a Shaolin monk as a member of the "rivers and lakes." See his *Wobian shilue* 倭變事略 (preface 1558) (Congshu jicheng edition, Shanghai: Shangwu, 1936), 1.9-10; Compare also Wu Shu, preface p. 1.

towns and villages, where on the local market-day they “sell their art” (*mai yi* 賣藝) in public displays of martial dexterity.⁴⁵

Itinerancy creates a link between late-Ming martial artists and their late-Qing successors. It also associates both groups with their fictional representations. For, as early as Tang-period fiction, the itinerant realm of the “rivers and lakes” has been the inevitable environment for the heroic deeds of the knight-errant (*xiake* 俠客). Indeed, in “martial-arts fiction” (*wuxia xiaoshuo* 武俠小說), the “rivers and lakes” no longer signify a manner of livelihood, much less waterways. Instead, they symbolize a realm of freedom, where the laws of family, society, and state no longer apply. Situated beyond everyday life, it is in the “rivers and lakes” that the dreams of knight-errantry are fulfilled.⁴⁶

MARTIAL MONKS AND THE STATE

Late-Ming military compositions give the impression that the Shaolin martial arts have been practiced since earlier periods. Wu Shu, for example, comments: “The Shaolin staff method has enjoyed fame from ancient times to the present,” and Yu Dayou goes as far as lamenting the decline of the legendary monastic technique. Shaolin monks, the general argues, “have lost the ancient secrets of their art.” Assuming that these sixteenth-century military experts are correct, and Shaolin fighting originated long before their time, why during the late Ming are we inundated with information of it? What happened in the sixteenth century that explains the sudden interest in monastic fighting?

The late-Ming vogue of military encyclopedias could provide a partial explanation why the Shaolin martial-arts—even if they had been practiced earlier—were first described at that time. The sixteenth century witnessed the publication of numerous military compilations, in which a wide variety of martial topics—from cannons and warships to monastic fighting—were discussed.⁴⁷ Another, more

⁴⁵ Yun Youke, *Jianghu congkan* (Beijing: Zhongguo quyi, 1988), pp. 191–220.

⁴⁶ See Chen Pingyuan 陳平原, *Qianqu wenren xiake meng* 千古文人俠客夢 (1992; reprint, Taipei: Maitian, 1995), pp. 187–228.

⁴⁷ See Joseph Needham and Robin D. S. Yates, *Military Technology: Missiles and Sieges*, part VI of Volume 5 of Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge

significant, reason for the growing interest in fighting monks was the decline of the regular Ming army. By the mid-sixteenth century the army was in such dire straits that “the defense installations of the empire, along with their logistical framework, had largely vanished.”⁴⁸ The situation was so grave that, in 1550, the Mongol prince Altan was able to freely loot the Beijing suburbs. The deterioration of the hereditary Ming army was reflected in the attention paid to a large variety of local troops (*xiangbing* 鄉兵) that could be recruited to supplement it. Military analysts commented on the fighting skills of such diverse groups as mountaineers (from Henan), stone-throwers (from Hebei), sailors (from Fujian), and salt workers (from several provinces).⁴⁹ As for the Shaolin monks, particular attention was given to *their* military capabilities following the mid-sixteenth century campaign—in which they took part—against piracy.

The 1540s and 1550s witnessed pirates raids on an unprecedented scale along China’s eastern and southeastern coasts. The pirates, who were known as *wokou* 倭寇 (literally: “Japanese bandits”), included, in addition to Japanese and other foreigners, large numbers of Chinese, who were involved in illegal overseas trade. Their attacks were especially severe along the Jiangnan coast, where they pillaged not only the countryside but even walled cities. In 1554, for example, the city of Songjiang 松江 was captured and its magistrate put to death. The government encountered tremendous difficulties in its attempts to control the situation, partly because the local authorities were themselves involved in trade with the bandits, and partly because of the decline of the regular military. Thus it was not before the 1560s when order was restored to Jiangnan, partially through the efforts of the above-mentioned generals Yu Dayou and Qi Jiguang.⁵⁰

University Press, 1994), 5:27–29.

⁴⁸ Ray Huang, *1587 A Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 159.

⁴⁹ See *Mingshi*, 91.2251–52; see also Charles Hucker, “Ming Government,” in *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 8:69.

⁵⁰ For general background see James Geiss, “The Chia-ching reign, 1522–1566,” in *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 7:490–505; and Kwan-wai So (Su Chün-wei 蘇均燁), *Japanese Piracy in Ming China During the 16th Century* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1975).

Several sixteenth-century sources attest that in 1553, during the height of the pirates' raids, military officials in Jiangnan resolved to mobilize Shaolin—and other—monastic troops. The most detailed account is Zheng Ruoceng's 鄭若曾 (fl. 1505–1580) "Seng bing shou jie ji" 僧兵首捷記 (The Monastic Armies' First Victory), included in his *Jiangnan jing lue* 江南經略 (The Strategic Defense of the Jiangnan Region) (preface 1568).⁵¹ Even though he never passed the examinations, Zheng gained the esteem of his contemporaries as an expert geographer of China's coastal regions. For this reason, he was selected in 1560 as advisor by Hu Zongxian 胡宗憲 (1511–65), who was then the Supreme Commander of the armies in Fujian, Zhejiang, and the Southern Metropolitan Region (today's Jiangsu). Zheng's tenure in Hu's headquarters must have contributed to his familiarity with the campaign against piracy, of which the latter was in charge.⁵²

Collating Zheng's and other late-Ming accounts, we can ascertain which official initiated the mobilization of fighting monks: Wan Biao 萬表 (*hao*: Luyuan 鹿園) (1498–1556), who served as Vice-Commissioner-in-Chief in the Nanjing Chief Military Commission.⁵³ We can also pinpoint at least four battles in which monastic troops participated. The first took place, in the spring of 1553, on Mount Zhe 赭, which controls the entrance from the Hangzhou Gulf, through the Qiantang River, to Hangzhou City.⁵⁴ The remaining three were waged in the canals-strewn Huangpu 黃浦 River delta (which during the Ming belonged to Songjiang 松江 Prefecture): at Wengjiagang 翁家港 (July 1553), at Majiabang 馬家浜 (Spring of

⁵¹ The "Seng bing shou jie ji" is in chapter 8b; see the Siku quanshu edition.

⁵² On Zheng see *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 1:204–8

⁵³ Compare Zheng Ruoceng, 8b.16b; Cai Jiude, 1.9–10; and Wan Biao's epitaph in Jiao Hong 焦竑 (1541–1620), *Guochao xianzheng lu* 國朝獻徵錄 (1616 edition; photographic reprint, Taipei: Mingwen 1991), 107.82b; on Wan, see *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 2:1337–39.

⁵⁴ Three sixteenth-century gazetteers allude to the participation of "monastic troops" (*seng-bing* 僧兵) in this battle, even though neither specifies to which monastery they belonged; see the 1561 *Zhejiang tongzhi* 浙江通志 (chap. 60); the Jiajing-period (1522–1566) *Ningbo fu zhi* 寧波府志 (chap. 22); and the 1579 *Hangzhou fu zhi* 杭州府志 (chap. 7). The relevant passages from all three gazetteers are reproduced in *Mingdai wokou shiliao* 明代倭寇史料, ed. Zheng Liangsheng 鄭樑生 (Taipei: Wenshizhe, 1987), 5:1831; 5:1976; and 5:2073 respectively; compare also Cai Jiude, 1.9–10. Zheng Ruoceng (8b.17a) alludes to a monastic victory on Mount Zha 鮓, by which he is probably referring to Mount Zhe.

1554), and at Taozhai 陶宅 (Autumn 1555).⁵⁵ The incompetence of an army general led to a monastic defeat in the fourth battle, following which the remains of four fallen monks were enshrined underneath the “Stūpa of the Four Heroic Monks” (Si yi seng ta 四義僧塔) on Mt. She 佘, some twenty miles southwest of today’s Shanghai.⁵⁶

The monks scored their biggest victory in the Wengjiagang battle. On July 21, 1553, 120 fighting monks defeated there a group of pirates, chasing the survivors for ten days along the twenty-miles route southward to Wangjiazhuang 王家莊 (on the Jiaxing 嘉興 Prefecture coast). There, on July 31, the very last bandit was disposed of. All in all, more than a hundred pirates perished, whereas the monks suffered four casualties only. Indeed, the monks took pity on no one in this battle, one employing his iron staff to kill an escaping pirate’s wife. (Zheng Ruoceng does not comment on the monks’ disregard for the Buddhist prohibition on killing, even in this instance when the murdered woman presumably was unarmed.)⁵⁷

Not all the monks who participated in the Wengjiagang victory came from the Shaolin Monastery, and whereas some had previous military experience, others presumably were trained *ad hoc* for this battle. However, the cleric who led them to victory did receive his military education at Shaolin. This is Tianyuan 天員, whom Zheng extols both for his martial-arts skills and for his strategic genius. He elaborates, for instance, upon the ease with which the Shaolin friar defeated eighteen Hangzhou monks, who challenged his command of the monastic troops:

Tianyuan said: “I am real Shaolin (*Wu nai zhen Shaolin ye* 吾乃真少林也). Is there any martial art in which you are good enough to justify your claim for superiority over me?” The eighteen [Hangzhou] monks chose from amongst them eight

⁵⁵ Compare Zheng Ruoceng, 8b.19a–23a, with Zhang Nai 張鼐 (*jinshi* 1604), *Wusong jia yi wo bian zhi* 吳淞甲乙倭變志, in vol. 2 of *Shanghai zhanguo congshu* 上海掌故叢書 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1936), 2.38b–39b. For locations in the Huangpu River delta see *Shanghai lishi ditu ji* 上海歷史地圖集, gen. ed. Zhou Zhenhe 周振鶴 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin, 1999). I take it that Wengjiagang is today’s Wengjia village, near Zhelin 柘林.

⁵⁶ The four monks were: Chetang 徹堂, Yifeng 一峰, Zhenyuan 真元, and Liaoxin 了心. Their stūpa is no longer extant; see Zhang Shutong 張叔通, *Sheshan xiao zhi*, *Ganshan zhi* 佘山小志 干山志 (1936; reprint, Shanghai: Shanghai shi xinwen, 1994), p. 30. I am grateful to Yang Kun 楊坤 of the Songjiang Museum for this reference.

⁵⁷ Zheng Ruoceng, 8b.21b.

men to challenge him. The eight immediately attacked Tianyuan using their hand-combat techniques. Tianyuan was standing at that moment atop the open terrace in front of the hall. His eight assailants tried to climb the stairs leading to it from the courtyard underneath. However, he saw them coming, and struck with his fists, blocking them from climbing.

The eight monks ran around to the hall's back entrance. Then, armed with swords they rushed through the hall towards the terrace in front. They slashed their weapons at Tianyuan, who hurriedly grabbed the long bar used to fasten the hall's gate, and struck with it horizontally. They tried with all their might, but could not get into the terrace. On the contrary, they were beaten by Tianyuan.

Yuekong 月空 [the challengers' leader] surrendered and begged forgiveness. Then, the eighteen monks prostrated themselves in front of Tianyuan and declared their submission.⁵⁸

The description of Yuekong's martial skills would probably ring familiar to readers of martial-arts fiction. Several motifs in Zheng Ruoceng's narrative became standard features of this late-imperial, and modern, literary genre. Martial-arts novels (and more recently films) commonly celebrate heroes who single-handed, and empty-handed, overcome troops of heavily-armed adversaries.⁵⁹ However, from Zheng Ruoceng's perspective, Tianyuan's martial skills were no fiction. The sixteenth-century military analyst was so impressed with the Shaolin monks' fighting abilities that he urged the government to make regular use of monastic armies:

In today's martial-arts, there is no one in the land who does not yield to Shaolin. Funiu 伏牛 [in Henan] should be ranked as second. The main reason [for Funiu's excellence] is that its monks, seeking to protect themselves against the miners (*kuangtu* 礦徒), studied at Shaolin. Third comes Wutai 五臺 [in Shanxi]. The source of the Wutai tradition is the method of the "Yang Family Spear" (Yangjia qiang 楊家鎗), which has been transmitted for generations in the Yang family. Together, these three [Buddhist centers] comprise hundreds of monasteries and countless monks. Our land is beset by bandits inside and barbarians outside. If the government issues an order for [these monks'] recruitment it will win every battle.⁶⁰

Zheng might have overestimated the strength of sixteenth-cen-

⁵⁸ Zheng Ruoceng, 8b.18a.

⁵⁹ In this respect Zheng Ruoceng's chronicle illustrates the difficulty of separating historical and fictional martial arts narratives. It is noteworthy that another anecdote in Zheng's chronicle, concerning the monk Guzhou 孤舟, was fictionally embellished within fifty years of its publication; compare Zheng Ruoceng, 8b.16b-17a with Zhu Guozhen 朱國禎, *Yongchuang xiaopin* 湧幢小品 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959), 28.673.

⁶⁰ Zheng Ruoceng, 8b.22b.

ture monastic forces, and he likely exaggerated their contribution to the war on piracy. After all, clerical participation in this campaign was limited. The biggest monastic unit—in the Wengjiagang battle—numbered 120 warriors, and others included no more than several dozens each. Therefore, despite the skills and courage of individual soldiers, monastic troops could not have had a large impact on the campaign. Still, Zheng was convinced that fighting monks could render great service to the state. Was his call for their recruitment heeded? Were Shaolin monks drafted for campaigns other than the war on piracy?

Even prior to the piracy wars provincial authorities in Henan had noticed the military potential of Shaolin monks, and called upon them to participate in local campaigns. In 1552, for instance, fifty Shaolin monks led by Zhufang Cangong 竺方參公 (1516–1574) contributed to the government's successful offensive against the Henan bandit Shi Shangzhao 師尚詔.⁶¹ On another occasion, in the 1630s, Shaolin monks were conscripted by a magistrate in Shanzhou 陝州 County, Western Henan, to quell local unrest. Those were the dynasty's waning years, and the fabric of government was unraveling. The magistrate, named Shi Jiyan 史記言, could no longer rely on support from the capital. Therefore he took money from his own pocket to finance a local militia. He enlisted Shaolin monks to train it, and scored several victories before being defeated by the vastly larger armies of the rebel leader Ma Shouying 馬守應, better known by his nickname Lao Huihui 老回回 ("Muslim Fellow").⁶²

The contribution of Shaolin monks to military campaigns in

⁶¹ See Zhufang Cangong's epitaph, which was inscribed on his burial stūpa, and is still extant in Shaolin's Stūpa-Forest. Compare also the 1581 Shaolin stele inscription "Dengfeng xian tie" 登封縣帖, which is likewise extant, and is partially transcribed in Wen Yucheng, pp. 293–94. (The *Mingshi* (205.5416) does not allude to monastic participation in the campaign against Shi Shangzhao).

Shaolin monks might have contributed to earlier government offensives against Henan bandits. According to the "Dengfeng xian tie" Shaolin warriors participated in the 1510s campaign against Liu Liu 劉六, and in the 1520s campaign against Wang Tang 王堂; see Wen Yucheng, pp. 293–94.

⁶² See *Mingshi*, 292.7489–90. The Muslim leader Ma Shouying was one of Li Zicheng's 李自成 (ca. 1605–1645) closest allies; see Morris Rossabi, "Muslim and Central Asian Revolts," in Jonathan D. Spence and John E. Wills, eds., *From Ming to Ch'ing: Conquest, Region, and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 170, 189.

Henan—like their deployment in the Jiangnan coastal region—proves that monastic military training won the endorsement of at least some Ming officials. Therefore, it has been generally accepted that the Ming government looked favorably upon Shaolin martial practice. One scholar goes so far as suggesting that: “Shaolin monastic troops were transformed into a special military force, subordinate to the government’s military apparatus.”⁶³ However, just as some Ming officials welcomed monastic military training, others were deeply suspicious of it. Within the government there were those who feared lest martial monks turn their military skills against it. In his *Yu zhi* 豫志 (Report from Henan) (ca. 1595), for instance, Wang Shixing 王士性 (1547–1598), severely criticizes fighting monks as prone to banditry and revolt. Wang, who held censorial posts at the top echelons of government, condemns the entire Henan monastic community for its complicity with bandits and sectarian rebels, singling out the Shaolin monks for the harshest reproach.⁶⁴

Wang’s *Report from Henan* outlines the bleak socio-economic conditions in the province, shedding new light on the emergence of the martial arts there. A dark picture of appalling misery emerges from his report, which describes, for example, the famine of 1593–94, in Runing 汝寧 prefecture, southern Henan, where cannibalism occurred: “People were murdered to be eaten . . . Human flesh was openly sold, being displayed at the butchers’ shops.”⁶⁵ Hunger resulted in lawlessness, and Wang enumerates the myriad types of Henan outlaws from gamblers to the notorious miners (*kuangtu*), for whom “mining is a vocation, and killing people is a means of livelihood.”⁶⁶ It is in this context that he discusses the Henan clergy, which he explicitly accuses of banditry and revolt:

Henan monks never obtain ordination certificates (*dudie* 度牒). Today they shave their heads and become monks; tomorrow they let it grow and return to the laity. They are allowed to do as they please. Therefore, whenever the White Lotus Teaching (Bailian jiao 白蓮教) emerges, there are thousands upon thousands who

⁶³ Cheng Dali, p. 106; see also *Zhongguo gudai tiyu shi*, p. 379.

⁶⁴ Wang Shixing, *Yu zhi* (Congshu jicheng edition, Shanghai: Shangwu, 1936). Wang also alludes to the Shaolin martial arts in his “Song you ji” 嵩遊記, included in his *Wuyue you cao* 五岳遊草 (1593 edition) (copy National Central Library, Taipei), 1.2b–3a. On Wang see *Dictionary of Ming Biography*, 2:1405–1406.

⁶⁵ Wang Shixing, *Yuzhi*, p. 8.

⁶⁶ Wang Shixing, *Yu zhi*, p. 6.

join it, and the government has no way of investigating. Bandits (*dao* 盜) also frequently shave their heads, change their appearance and join the monastic order. Once their troubles are over, they return to the laity. No matter whether they are sedentary or itinerant, you won't find one monk in a hundred who does not drink wine or eat meat.⁶⁷

As Barend ter Haar has shown, during the late Ming the term White Lotus Teaching (Bailian jiao) rarely signified a religion of that name. Instead government officials used it to denounce all those groups that they rightly or wrongly suspected of rebellious intents.⁶⁸ Wang Shixing's usage of the term is a perfect example. He did not examine whether there was a single group in Henan that styled itself White Lotus Teaching, and if so whether its tenets resembled those of other congregations with the same name. Indeed, Wang could not care less about sectarian theology in the province. Rather, by using the label White Lotus Teaching, he was warning his fellow officials that the Henan monks were dangerously seditious. Wang does not hesitate openly to charge the monasteries of admitting to their ranks escaping bandits, and his added accusation that the monks drink wine and eat meat is meant to create the same impression: their disregard for the Buddhist dietary laws indicates that the inmates of the Henan temples are not genuine monks.

Wang Shixing reserves a special diatribe for the Shaolin monks, who, he argues, not only violate Buddhist dietary laws, but also know nothing of Chan Buddhism. For example, they are not familiar with the elementary practices of shouting and beating, by which Chan masters shake their disciples into enlightenment.⁶⁹ The Shaolin residents, he sums up, are good-for-nothings, who spend their time drinking, eating, and fighting:

As to Shaolin, only the itinerant monks, who travel from afar, keep there the Buddhist regulations, as befitting a monastery. Its own monks drink wine, eat meat, and practice martial arts (*xiwu jiaoyi* 習武較藝). They are familiar with hand-combat (*quan* 拳) and staff-fighting (*gun*) only, and know nothing of [Chan] beating (*bang* 棒) and shouting (*he* 喝).⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Wang Shixing, *Yu zhi*, p. 9.

⁶⁸ B. J. ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), esp. pp. 13-14, 196-246, 289-90.

⁶⁹ For a survey of these practices see Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History*, trans. James W. Heisig and Paul Knitter (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 1:163-70.

⁷⁰ Wang Shixing, *Yu zhi*, p. 6.

Thus the Ming government's attitude towards Shaolin military activities was far from uniform. Whereas some officials were willing to rely on monastic troops on the battlefield, others were suspicious of fighting monks' rebellious intents.⁷¹ However, Ming officialdom does appear unanimous in its explanation for the Henan clerics' military inclinations, tracing these monks' military skills to the conditions of rampant violence in that province. Wang Shixing, who accused Henan monks of complicity with bandits and sectarian rebels, suggests that conditions of poverty and social anarchy provided an impetus to the monks' martial activities, just as they led to the militarization of other segments of society. Zheng Ruoceng, who urged the government to recruit monastic troops, holds the same view. In his essay "The Monastic Armies' First Victory" he notes that the Funiu monks (in southern Henan) sought martial-arts instruction at Shaolin in order to protect themselves against the miners, whose criminal activities are elaborated upon in Wang's report. Taken together, the two writers indicate that widespread lawlessness in Henan contributed to the military inclinations of the province's monastic population.

If the socio-economic conditions of poverty and violence in Henan provide a partial explanation for the evolution of monastic fighting there, we would expect them to yield other military methods too. It is noteworthy that beginning in the late Ming and all through the late Qing, Henan served as a hotbed of martial-arts. The world-renowned Taijiquan emerged (probably in the seventeenth-century) at Chenjiagou 陳家溝 village some thirty miles north of the Shaolin Monastery, and Chang Naizhou 萇乃周 (fl. 1760) compiled his martial-arts manuals nearby at Sishui 汜水 (see map 1).⁷² Baguaquan 八卦拳 likewise originated in Henan (probably in the eighteenth century), and Xingyiquan 形意拳, which emerged in nearby Shanxi, was practiced there as well. Similarly, Bajiquan 八極拳 originated

⁷¹ The suspicion of fighting monks' rebellious tendencies lingered into the Qing period, when it became more pronounced; see *Zhongguo gudai tiyu shi*, p. 379, and Lin Boyuan, *Zhongguo tiyu shi*, p. 380.

⁷² On the Chenjiagou origins of Taijiquan, see Tang Hao 唐豪 and Gu Liuxin 顧留馨, *Taijiquan yanjiu* 太極拳研究 (1964; reprint, Beijing: Renmin tiyu, 1992), p. 3, and Douglas Wile, *Lost Tai-chi Classics*, xv-xvi. Chang Naizhou's manuals are translated and analyzed in Douglas Wile's *T'ai Chi's Ancestors: The Making of an Internal Martial Art* (New York: Sweet Ch'i Press, 1999), pp. 71-188.

either in Henan, or in the neighboring, and equally poor, Hebei.⁷³ The Shaolin Monastery was situated therefore in a region where many of the late-imperial fighting techniques emerged.

Scholars have pointed out the significance of endemic violence to the history of martial arts on the North China plains. Predatory economics transformed the martial arts into an integral element of rural society throughout much of Henan and its neighboring provinces. Robbed of their crops, villagers formed self-defense militias, which often plundered other villagers' produce. As Joseph Esherick and Susan Naquin have shown, martial practice at the village level served as the background to rebellions such as Wang Lun's (1774), the Eight Trigrams (1813), and the Boxers (1898-1900), which swept through Henan, Hebei, and Shandong.⁷⁴ Douglas Wile concludes that the cruel ecology of the North China plains played a crucial role in the evolution of the Henan method of Taijiquan.⁷⁵

Suspicious of martial monks' seditious intents were probably not uncommon in seventeenth-century society. Whether these were founded or not, the perception that martial monks could rebel is mirrored in at least one vernacular story, included in the anonymous collection *Zuixing shi* 醉醒石 (The Sobering Stone) (ca. 1650). The story, which was written after the Manchu conquest, but is set during the Ming, is titled "Kuang heshang wang si dabao; yu shushi kong she nimou" 狂和商妄思大寶：愚術士空設逆謀 ("The Mad Monk Foolishly Dreams of the Imperial Throne; The Stupid Fortune-teller in Vain Lays Plans for Revolt").⁷⁶ Its protagonist is a monk named Mingguo 明果, who studies staff-combat at the Shaolin Monastery. (The narrator comments that the monastery is famous for this fighting method.) A stupid fortune-teller examines Mingguo's features, and tells him that he is destined for the imperial throne. Misled by

⁷³ On the Henan connection of Baguaquan, Xingyiquan, and Bajiquan see Lin Boyuan, *Zhongguo tiyu shi*, pp. 371-73.

⁷⁴ See Joseph W. Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), esp. pp. 60-61, 65-67; Susan Naquin, *Shantung Rebellion: The Wang Lun Uprising of 1774* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 37-38, 43; and Susan Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China: The Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 30-31.

⁷⁵ Douglas Wile, *Lost T'ai-chi Classics*, pp. 5-9.

⁷⁶ *Zuixing shi* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1992), 12.100-108; on the *Zuixing shi*, see Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 163-64.

the prophecy, the foolish cleric abandons the monastic life, and gets involved in a seditious plot, that ends in his being caught, and executed, along with the fortune-teller and everybody else involved.

The argument used by the fortune-teller to entice monk Mingguo is interesting. In order to convince him of the feasibility of his becoming emperor, the fortune-teller evokes the name of another monk that did. This is of course the founder of the Ming dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328-1398), who began his career as a novice at the Huangjue 皇覺 Monastery, in Fengyang, Anhui. There is no evidence that Zhu, who entered the monastery when he was sixteen, practiced the martial arts there. Still, we do know that after leaving the monastery at twenty-three, he became the commander of an army, which took over the Chinese empire.⁷⁷ In this respect, then, the fortune-teller did not lie. At least one Chinese monk did become a military leader, and established a dynasty, which lasted three-hundred years.

THE JINNALUO LEGEND

The sixteenth-century debate on martial monks' loyalty to the state provides us with information on their weaponry. Zheng Ruoceng, who urged the government to employ Shaolin monks, alerts us that they did not practice only the staff. In his account of the campaign against piracy, he notes that the monks used—in addition to staffs—steel tridents (*gangcha* 網叉) and hooked-spears (*gouqiang* 鉤槍).⁷⁸ Other late-Ming sources confirm that Shaolin monks were trained in various military techniques besides staff-fighting. Wu Shu discusses the Shaolin method of the spear, and Tang Shunzhi alludes to the Shaolin practice of unarmed hand-combat (*quan*).⁷⁹ Even the greatest advocate of the Shaolin staff, Cheng Zongyou, acknowledges that Shaolin monks engaged in hand-combat. “Those

⁷⁷ On Zhu Yuanzhang's early years at the monastery see Wu Han 吳晗, *Zhu Yuanzhang zhuan* 朱元璋傳 (Shanghai: Shenghuo dushu xinzhì sanlián, 1949), pp. 11-16, and Frederick W. Mote, “The Rise of the Ming Dynasty, 1330-1367,” in *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 7:44-45; the *Zuixing shi* alludes to Zhu Yuanzhang in 12.101-2.

⁷⁸ Zheng Ruoceng, 8b.18b.

⁷⁹ Tang alludes to the Shaolin *quan* in his poem “Emei daoren quan ge,” in *Jingchuan xiansheng wenji*, 2.8b.

[Shaolin monks] who apply themselves to hand-combat,” he notes, “do so with the hope of bringing it to the same level of perfection as staff-fighting.”⁸⁰

Still, even authors who attribute to Shaolin other weapons leave no doubt that its monks specialized in the staff. Wu Shu criticizes the Shaolin clerics for applying to spear-fighting the techniques of the staff, and Zheng Ruoceng’s illustrations of the monks’ deftness invariably concern staff, or staff-like, weapons. In one anecdote, he celebrates the skills of Tianyuan, who employed a door-bar as an improvised staff, and in another, he tells of a monk named Guzhou 孤舟, who used a *real* staff to beat up eight assailants. This second vignette features the military official Wan Biao, who initiated the mobilization of Shaolin monks against the pirates:

The three provincial officers (*sansi* 三司) mocked Luyuan [i.e. Wan Biao]: “Monks are useless,” they said. “Why do you honor them so?” Luyuan told them of some monks’ cultural and military accomplishments. The three provincial officers suggested they bet wine on it, so Luyuan arranged a banquet at the Yongjin 湧金 Gate [in Hangzhou]. The three provincial officers came, and secretly ordered eight military instructors to lie in ambush. They urged Luyuan to invite an eminent monk to fight them. Luyuan invited Guzhou, who did not know what it was all about and happily came.

When Guzhou arrived the eight military instructors, each armed with a staff, jumped on him and started hitting him from all sides. Guzhou was completely unarmed and he employed the sleeves of his monastic robe to evade the blows. One of the staffs got caught in his sleeve, at which point Guzhou effortlessly snatched it, and started hitting back the eight assailants. He instantly threw all of them to the ground with his staff. The three provincial officers burst into applause.⁸¹

Religious lore, no less than military and historical sources, attest that Shaolin monks specialized in staff-fighting. The staff is the only weapon that, during the late Ming, influenced the monastery’s myths and rituals. By the sixteenth century at the latest, Shaolin monks sought to justify their staff-practice by attributing it to a Buddhist deity named Jinnaluo 緊那羅 (Sanskrit: Kimnara). According to a legend which originated at the monastery, Jinnaluo was incarnated there as a lowly menial. When the monastery was attacked by bandits, he employed a divine staff to repel the aggressors.

⁸⁰ Cheng Zongyou, *Shaolin gunfa*, 3.7b.

⁸¹ Zheng Ruoceng, 8b.16b. Guzhou might have been trained at a monastery other than Shaolin.

In gratitude, the Shaolin clerics appointed Jinnaluo as their monastery's Guardian Spirit (*qielan shen* 伽藍神), and thereafter practiced his divine art of the staff. Thus Shaolin monks worshiped a tutelary deity who specialized in their quintessential weapon.

The legend of the staff-wielding Jinnaluo survives in at least four seventeenth-century publications: Cheng Zongyou's *Shaolin Staff Method*, Fu Mei's 傅梅 *Song shu* 嵩書 (The Book on the Song Mountain) (Preface 1612), a Dengfeng-County gazetteer dated 1652, and a Henan-Prefecture gazetteer dated 1661.⁸² However, the earliest evidence is epigraphic. A 1517 stele inscription titled "Naluoyan shen hufa shiji" 那羅延神護法示跡 (The Deity Naluoyan Protects the Law and Displays His Divinity) contains a version of the legend, which was authored by Shaolin's abbot Wenzai 文載 (1454–1524). Unlike subsequent renditions, this inscription refers to the monastery's staff-wielding savior as Naluoyan (Nārāyaṇa) instead of Jinnaluo (Kīṃnara):

On the twenty-sixth day of the third month of the Zhizheng 至正 period's eleventh, *xinmao* 辛卯, year (April 22, 1351), at the *si* 巳 hour (between 9 a.m. and 11 a.m.), when the Red Turbans (Hongjin 紅巾) uprising in Yingzhou 潁州 [in modern western Anhui] had just begun, a crowd of bandits arrived at the monastery. There was a saint (*shengxian* 聖賢) at Shaolin, who up until then had been working in the monastery's kitchen. Several years he diligently carried firewood and tended the stove. His hair was disheveled, and he went barefoot. Wearing only thin trousers, his upper body was exposed. From morning till night he hardly uttered a word, arousing no interest among his fellow monks. His surname, native place, and first name, were unknown. He constantly cultivated all the deeds of enlightenment (*wanxing* 萬行).

That day, when the Red Turbans approached the monastery, the Bodhisattva (*pusa* 菩薩) wielded a stove-poker (*huo gun* 火棍) and alone stood mightily atop the lofty peak. The Red Turbans were terrified of him and escaped, whereupon he disappeared. People looked for him, but he was seen no more. Only then did they realize that he was a Bodhisattva displaying his divinity. Thereafter, he became

⁸² See Cheng Zongyou, *Shaolin gunfa*, 1.1b; Fu Mei, 9.30b–31a; *Shunzhi Dengfeng xian zhi* 順治登封縣志, eds. Zhang Chaorui 張朝瑞 and Jiao Fuheng 焦復亨 (preface 1652) (copy Beijing Library); and *Henan fu zhi* 河南府志, eds. Zhu Mingkui 朱明魁 and He Bairu 何柏如 (1661) (copy Shanghai Library).

The Jinnaluo legend was further elaborated in eighteenth-century sources such as Jing Rizhen, *Shuo Song*, 8.2b, 21.26a–27a, and *Shaolin si zhi*, 1.12a–b. See also *Kangxi Dengfeng xian zhi* 康熙登封縣志, eds. Jing Rizhen 景日畛 and Zhang Shenggao 張聖誥, revised by Shi Yizan 施奕簪 and Jiao Ruheng 焦如蘅 (1696; revised edition 1745) (copy Beijing Library), 8.8a.

Shaolin's protector of the law (*hufa* 護法),⁸³ and occupied the seat of the monastery's guardian spirit (*qielan shen*).⁸⁴

This legend is not unrelated to historical events. The Shaolin Monastery was attacked by bandits during the 1350s Red Turbans' uprising.⁸⁵ As Tang Hao has demonstrated, the attack on the monastery probably took place not in 1351 (as the 1517 inscription has it), but rather in or around 1356, during the Red Turbans' northern offensive, in the course of which the rebels captured most of Henan, including Kaifeng city.⁸⁶ That the monastery was plundered, and even partially destroyed, by the Red Turbans (or by other bandits that took advantage of their rebellion), is attested by two fourteenth-century inscriptions (one dated probably 1371), which celebrate its restoration during the first years of Ming rule, as well as by two epitaphs, dated 1373, for Shaolin monks who lived through the revolt.⁸⁷

Even as fourteenth-century sources confirm that the Shaolin Monastery was attacked during the 1350s, their version of events differs significantly from that of the sixteenth-century legend. Whereas the latter has a staff-wielding deity repel the Red Turbans, the former mention neither him nor any other monk who resisted the aggressors. Instead of a monastic victory, the early-Ming sources elaborate upon the havoc the bandits wreaked on the monastery.

⁸³ The term *hufa* is usually applied to the four Lokapālas, who serve as protectors of the world (each guarding one quarter of space) and the Buddhist faith.

⁸⁴ The inscription is still located at the monastery. It is partially transcribed in Tang Hao's *Shaolin quanshu mijue kaozheng*, p. 54; for a biography of its author, Wenzai, see Fu Mei, 9.32b-33b.

⁸⁵ On the Red Turbans uprising see Mote, "The Rise of the Ming Dynasty," pp. 38-40, 42-43, and Ter Haar, *White Lotus Teachings*, pp. 115-23. The movement's political mastermind was Liu Futong 劉福通, and the religious leader was Han Shantong 韓山童, who declared the imminent arrival of the Buddha Maitreya. Following Han's capture and execution, his son Han Liner 韓林兒 was installed by Liu as emperor of a new Song Dynasty.

⁸⁶ Tang Hao, *Shaolin quanshu mijue kaozheng*, pp. 55-62.

⁸⁷ The inscriptions, titled "Chong zhuang fo xiang bei" 重裝佛像碑 ("Stele Commemorating the [Gold] Re-Coating of the Buddha Images") and "Chong xiu fatang bei ming" 重修法堂碑銘 ("Stele Inscription Commemorating the Renovation of the Dharma-Hall"), are summarized in the *Shaolin si zhi*, 3.9a-b and 3.10b-11a respectively. The former provides 1371 as the renovation date. The two epitaphs, for the monks Jungong 俊公 and Xungong 訓公, were inscribed on their respective burial stūpas; the relevant passages are transcribed in Tang Hao's *Shaolin quanshu mijue kaozheng*, pp. 55-58, where he analyzes them in conjunction with the stele inscriptions.

For instance, the rebels peeled off the gold that coated the Buddha images, and then broke the statues in the hope of finding treasures hidden inside. The destruction of the monastery was so thorough that the monks were forced to abandon it. Tang Hao concludes that they could not have returned to Shaolin prior to 1359, when the government's counter-offensive, led by Chaghan Temür, forced the Red Turbans out of Henan.⁸⁸

The earliest (stele) version of the legend identifies Shaolin's savior as Naluoyan (Nārāyaṇa), who figured in Buddhist mythology long before his association with the Shaolin techniques of the staff. Buddhist literature usually describes Naluoyan as a warrior, armed with the legendary *vajra* (*jingangchu* 金剛杵; sometimes rendered as "thunderbolt").⁸⁹ As Ade 阿德 points out, as early as the twelfth century Naluoyan had been venerated at the Shaolin Monastery. A Shaolin stele, which was commissioned by the monastery's abbot Zudian 祖端 (fl. 1150), shows this fearsome guardian-deity brandishing the *vajra*.⁹⁰ Naluoyan's early association with Shaolin could explain why, by the early sixteenth century, he had been chosen as the progenitor of the monastery's martial arts. However, in the course of the sixteenth century Naluoyan's identity merged with that of another Buddhist deity, Jinnaluo. Perhaps for no other reason than the similarity in their Chinese names—Naluoyan 那羅延 and Jinnaluo 緊那羅—Shaolin monks confused the two divinities. Thus a 1575 Shaolin stele titles the monastery's staff-wielding guardian Jinnaluo,⁹¹ by which name he has been recognized thereafter.

Like Naluoyan, Jinnaluo is a deity of Indian descent. Jinnaluo is the Chinese transliteration of the Sanskrit *Kimnara*, which name figures in Hindu and Buddhist literature alike. In Indian mythology, the *Kimnara* are sometimes described as semi-divine semi-human beings, and sometimes as heavenly musicians.⁹² In China

⁸⁸ Tang Hao, *Shaolin quanshu mijue kaozheng*, pp. 56–61.

⁸⁹ For this reason he is identified with *Vajrapāṇi* (*Jingangshen* 金剛神); see "naraenkongō," in *Zengaku daijiten* 禪學大辭典 (Taishūkan Shoten, 1978), p. 967.

⁹⁰ Often, the *vajra* is shaped like a short scepter, which is symmetrically ornamented on both ends; see "kongōsyō," in Mochizuki Shinkō, 2:1333–35. Naluoyan's *vajra*, as depicted in the Shaolin stele, has a hilt. It resembles therefore a short sword, (except that it has no sharp edges); see the illustration in Ade's 阿德 "Jinnaluo wang kao," 緊那羅王考 *Chanlu* 禪露 12 (1999): 52.

⁹¹ I have examined this stele during a visit to the monastery in October 2000.

⁹² See "kinnara," in Mochizuki Shinkō, 1: 543–44; see also "kinnara," in Nakamura Hajime 中村元 ed., *Bukkyōgo daijiten* 佛教語大辭典 (Tokyo: Tokyō shoseki, 1981), pp. 250–51.

they were known as members of the Buddha's retinue, which was made up of eight types of divine beings, collectively called the "Eight Categories of Devas, Nāgas, [and Other Divine Beings]" (Tianlong babu 天龍八部).⁹³ One Mahāyāna scripture that played an important role in shaping Chinese conceptions of the Kiṃnaras is the *Lotus Sūtra*, which was translated into Chinese six times. This sūtra distinguishes between four "Kiṃnara Kings": The Kiṃnara King of the Dharma (Fa Jinnaluo wang); of the Fine Dharma (Miaofa 妙法 Jinnaluo wang); of the Great Dharma (Dafa 大法 Jinnaluo wang), and the Kiṃnara King Dharma-Holder (Chifa 持法 Jinnaluo wang).⁹⁴ Accordingly some visual representations of Shaolin's tutelary deity display four Jinnaluos (Kiṃnaras), each armed with a staff.⁹⁵

Jinnaluo (Kiṃnara) is thus a deity of foreign origins, yet his appearance in Shaolin lore addresses local concerns. Arming Jinnaluo with a staff, the Shaolin monks transformed this Buddhist deity into the divine progenitor of their martial-arts. Thereby they enhanced the prestige of their fighting-method as divinely transmitted, while coloring it with a Buddhist aura as befitting a monastery. It is noteworthy that the claim established by the legend for the divine origins of the Shaolin staff is echoed in contemporary military literature. Military experts such as Yu Dayou and Wu Shu allude to the supernatural provenance of the Shaolin martial arts.

The earliest version of the legend has the deity fight with a staff, but it does not specify whether he transmitted his fighting method to the Shaolin monks. By contrast, later versions of the myth, such as Cheng Zongyou's, make an explicit connection between the god's, and the monks', fighting techniques:

"During the Zhizheng period (1341–1367) of the Yuan Dynasty the Red Troops (Hongjun 紅軍) revolted. The monastery was badly ravaged by this sect (*jiao* 教). Luckily, just then somebody came out of the monastery's kitchen and reassured

⁹³ In addition to the Kiṃnaras, the eight categories include: Devas (Tian 天), Nāgas (Long 龍), Yakṣas (Yecha 夜叉), Gandharvas (Gantapo 乾闥婆), Asuras (Axiuluo 阿修羅), Garuḍas (Jialouluo 迦樓羅), and Mahoragas (Mohouluojia 摩睺羅迦). See *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經, Kumarajiva's (344–413) translation, in *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 (Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–32) [hereafter T.], 262, 9:12a; see also Leon Hurvitz's translation, *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), p. 56.

⁹⁴ See *Miaofa lianhua jing*, T. 262, 9:2a, and Hurvitz, pp. 2–3.

⁹⁵ This is the case with the 1575 Shaolin stele mentioned above.

the monks saying: "You should all be calm. I will ward them off myself." Wielding a divine staff (*shen gun* 神棍), he threw himself into the stove. Then, breaking out, he emerged from [the stove], and stood astride Song Mountain and the "Imperial Fort" (Yuzhai 御寨). The Red Troops disintegrated and withdrew.

The monastery's residents marveled at this event. A monk addressed the crowd saying: "Do you know who drove away the Red Troops? He is the Mahasattva Guanyin (Guanyin dashi 觀音大士), incarnated as the Jinnaluo King (Jinnaluo wang 緊那羅王)." Therefore they wove a wickerwork statue of him, and to this day they continue to practice his [fighting] technique."⁹⁶

Shaolin monks altered Jinnaluo's image in more than one way. Not only did they supply him with a staff, they also elevated him to a position he previously had not enjoyed: a Bodhisattva. In Cheng Zongyou's version, Jinnaluo is identified with no less a figure than the Bodhisattva Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara), who is shown behind her staff-wielding avatar in some of his visual representations (see, for example, fig. 3).⁹⁷ Still, even as Jinnaluo's sanctity was enhanced, it was carefully hidden behind the facade of a lowly menial. Jinnaluo emerges from his Shaolin legend as a saint in disguise—a deity incarnated as a scullion clad in rags. Furthermore, despite his position as Shaolin's guardian spirit, the eccentric saint does not hesitate to defy monastic regulations: instead of shaving his head, he flaunts "disheveled hair." In this respect, the divine progenitor of Shaolin fighting resembles other Chinese Buddhist saints whose divinity is masked behind shabby clothes, lowly occupations, and, sometimes, outrageous behavior.⁹⁸ According to the *Liuzu tan jing* 六祖壇經 (Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch), even the renowned Huineng 慧能 (638–713) began his glorious Chan career as a scullion treading the pestle in his monastery's kitchen.⁹⁹ The common menial origins of the Chan patriarch and the Shaolin tutelary deity suggest that the former's career might have influenced the latter's legend. The Jinnaluo myth had its protagonist keep a symbol of his kitchen

⁹⁶ Cheng Zongyou, *Shaolin gunfa*, 1.1b.

⁹⁷ Guanyin is shown on a cloud above Jinnaluo's head in a 1980s statue, which is located in the renovated Shaolin "Jinnaluo Hall" (Jinnaluo dian 殿). I have examined this statue during a visit to the monastery in October 2000.

⁹⁸ For a general survey see Meir Shahar, *Crazy Ji: Chinese Religion and Popular Literature*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series 48 (Cambridge Ma.: Harvard University Asia Center, 1998), pp. 30–45.

⁹⁹ See Philip Yampolski, trans., *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), pp. 128, 131–32.



Fig. 3. Jinnaluo atop Song Mountain and the "Imperial Fort." Note behind him the Bodhisattva Guanyin, of whom he is sometimes considered to be an avatar. From Cheng Zongyou's *Shaolin Staff Method* (1621). Courtesy of Shanghai Library.

days: the stove-poker (*huo gun* 火棍), which in his hands was transformed into the fighting-staff. Thus, the hidden saint's lowly origin was skillfully associated with Shaolin's quintessential weapon.

Cheng Zongyou's version of the legend contains a curious element: Jinnaluo, he tells us, threw himself into the stove from which he emerged to stand astride Song Mountain and the "Imperial Fort." Situated atop the Shaoshi Mountain peak, the "Imperial Fort" is five-miles away from Song Mountain.¹⁰⁰ Only a giant of supernormal dimensions could have stood astride both, indicating that inside the blazing stove Jinnaluo underwent a process of magic transformation. That this is what Cheng Zongyou had in mind is confirmed both by the woodblock illustration that accompanies his text (see fig. 3), and by Fu Mei's version of the legend, which specifies that Jinnaluo's "figure was transformed (*bianxing* 變形) and he grew several hundred feet tall."¹⁰¹ Jinnaluo's gigantic proportions explain why the terrorized bandits dispersed upon seeing him. He was revealed to them not as a mortal but as a deity.

Jinnaluo's powers of transformation recall another deity, whom Chinese myth armed with a staff. This is, of course, the beloved simian protagonist of the *Xiyou ji* 西遊記 (Journey to the West) story-cycle, Sun Wukong 孫悟空. Possibly the most famous Buddhist warrior in Chinese literature, Sun Wukong figures in a body of legends surrounding Xuanzang's 玄奘 (596-664) historical journey from China to India in search of Buddhist scriptures. The legends, which can be traced back to the Song-period, evolved through a series of prose narratives and plays, culminating in the sixteenth-century in one of the masterpieces of Chinese fiction, the hundred-chapters novel *Journey to the West*.¹⁰² Throughout this lengthy literary evolu-

¹⁰⁰ On the location of the "Imperial Fort" see *Shaolin si zhi*, 1.1b-2a; the name "Song Mountain" refers in this instance to the peak of this name, and not to the entire Song Mountain-Range (of which Shaoshi is another peak).

¹⁰¹ Fu Mei, 9.30b.

¹⁰² On the evolution of the "Journey to the West" cycle, see Glen Dudbridge, *The Hsi-yu chi: A Study of Antecedents to the Sixteenth-Century Chinese Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), and his "The *Hsi-yu chi* Monkey and the Fruits of the Last Ten Years," *Hanxue yanjiu* 漢學研究 6.1 (June 1988): 463-86; on Sun Wukong's origins see also Meir Shahar, "The Lingyin si Monkey Disciples and the Origins of Sun Wukong," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 52.1 (June 1992): 193-224; on Sun Wukong's religious cult, see Sawada Mizuho 澤田瑞穂, "Songokū shin" 孫悟空神, 1979; rpt. in his *Chūgoku no minkan shinkō* 中國の民間信

tion, Sun Wukong, known as the “Monkey Novice-Monk” (Hou Xingzhe 猴行者), is equipped with a magic staff, which in the sixteenth-century novel is titled the “As You Wish Golden Rings Clapsed Staff” (Ruyi jingu bang 如意金箍棒). As indicated by its name, the dimensions of this fabulous weapon change in accordance with its proprietor’s wishes:

[Sun Wukong] held the treasure [i.e. the staff] in his hands and called out, “Smaller, smaller, smaller!” and at once it shrank to the size of a tiny embroidery needle, small enough to be hidden inside the ear. Awe-struck, the monkeys cried, “Great King! Take it out and play with it some more.” The Monkey King took it out from his ear and placed it on his palm. “Bigger, bigger, bigger!” he shouted, and again it grew to the thickness of a barrel and more than twenty feet long. He became so delighted playing with it that he jumped onto the bridge and walked out of the cave. Grasping the treasure in his hands, he began to perform the magic of cosmic imitation. He bent over and cried, “Grow!” and at once grew to be ten thousand feet tall, with a head like the Tai Mountain and a chest like a rugged peak, eyes like lightning and a mouth like a blood bowl, and teeth like swords and halberds. The staff in his hands was of such a size that its top reached the thirty-third Heaven and its bottom the eighteenth layer of Hell. Tigers, leopards, wolves, and crawling creatures, all the monsters of the mountain and the demon kings of the seventy-two caves, were so terrified that they kowtowed and paid homage to the Monkey King in fear and trembling. Presently he revoked his magical appearance and changed the treasure back into a tiny embroidery needle stored in his ear.¹⁰³

Sun Wukong’s performance is strikingly similar to Jinnaluo’s. The two Buddhist warriors are equipped with the same magic weapon, and perform the same transformation miracle that enables

仰 (Kōsakusha, 1982), pp. 86–102; see also Allan J. A. Elliot, *Chinese Spirit Medium Cults in Singapore* (1955; rpt., Taipei: Southern Materials Center, 1981), pp. 74–76, 80–109, 170–71.

¹⁰³ Anthony Yu, trans., *The Journey to the West* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), 1:108; the original is Wu Chengen 吳承恩, *Xiyouji* 西遊記 (Beijing: Zuoja chubanshe, 1954), 3.32–33. I suspect that the English renditions of *bang* as “club” or “cudgel” are misleading for they suggest a short and heavy instrument, whereas the description of Sun Wukong’s weapon in the novel—no less than its depiction in Ming woodblock prints—leaves no doubt that it is a long rod, similar to the Shaolin staff. For this reason I have changed Yu’s “cudgel” to “staff.”

More generally, an examination of Ming sources reveal that the terms *bang* and *gun* refer to the same weapon. In his *Wubei zhi* (104.1a), for example, Mao Yuanyi explains that “the *bang* and the *gun* are the same thing” (*bang yu gun yi ye* 棒與棍一也). In the sixteenth-century novel itself Sun Wukong’s “Ruyi jingu bang” is sometimes referred to as *gun*; see Wu Chengen, 27.310–11.

them to assume superhuman dimensions. Which of these staff-brandishing deities inspired the other's myth? Did the Journey to the West story-cycle serve as a source to the hagiographic literature of the Shaolin Monastery, or, conversely, Shaolin monastic legends influence novels and plays celebrating Sun Wukong?

Two reasons compel us to conclude that the Sun Wukong legend inspired the Jinnaluo myth, rather than vice-versa: firstly, during the late-Ming period the Journey to the West story-cycle was much more widely known than the legend of the Shaolin tutelary deity. Whereas the latter was a local myth, familiar only to the monastery's residents and visitors, the former was spread throughout the land in written form, as well as in oral and dramatic adaptations in numerous local dialects. Secondly, the Journey to the West cycle, and its simian protagonist's transformation magic, predate the Jinnaluo myth by several centuries. The earliest extant prose version of the journey, *Da Tang Sanzang fashi qu jing ji* 大唐三藏法師取經記 (The Master of the Law, Tripitaka of the Great Tang, Procures the Scriptures), is believed by most scholars to have been written during the Southern Song, approximately three hundred years prior to the emergence of the Shaolin guardian spirit. As early as this Song-period narrative the Monkey Novice-Monk is armed with a magic staff, and assumes superhuman dimensions.¹⁰⁴ If one legend influenced the other, it is therefore most likely that Sun Wukong's inspired Jinnaluo's.

Sun Wukong is not the only staff-wielding Buddhist warrior in Yuan and Ming period literature. Chinese lore features two other fighting monks that handle this weapon: Lu Zhishen 魯智深 of the martial-arts novel *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (Water Margin), and Huiming 惠明 of the romantic comedy *Xixiang ji* 西廂記 (The Western Wing).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ See *Da Tang Sanzang fashi qu jing shihua* 大唐三藏法師取經詩話 (Beijing: Wenxue guji, 1955), pp. 27, 87. In this Southern-Song narrative Sun Wukong performs a magic that differs slightly from the one he, and Jinnaluo, execute in late-Ming versions of their myths. Instead of transforming himself into a staff-wielding giant, the monkey transforms his magic staff into a giant, which, armed with a staff, fights on his behalf. On the dating of the *Da Tang Sanzang fashi qu jing shihua*, (which survives in two slightly different versions), see Dudbridge, *The Hsi-yu chi*, pp. 25-29.

¹⁰⁵ See respectively *Shuihu quanzhuan* 水滸全傳 (1954; reprint, Taipei: Wannianqing shudian, 1979), 4.69-70, translated by Sidney Shapiro, *Outlaws of the Marsh*, authors given as Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1995), 1:75-76, and Wang Shifu 王實甫, *Xixiang ji* 西廂記, annotated by Wang Jisi 王季思 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), 2.60-61, translated by Stephen H. West and Wilt L. Idema, *The Moon and the Zither*:

The complex evolution of these fighting friars' story-cycles cannot be covered in this paper. Here I will only mention that, like Sun Wukong's, their legends can be traced back to the Southern Song.¹⁰⁶ Thus, the story-cycles of the three staff-wielding monks—Sun Wukong, Lu Zhishen, and Huiming—strengthen the impression gained from sixteenth-century sources that monastic staff-fighting emerged prior to the late-Ming. Assuming that the three fictional monks had been fashioned after real monks, staff-fighting had been practiced either at Shaolin or in other Buddhist monasteries as early as the thirteenth-century. (Admittedly, however, Lu Zhishen's and Huiming's staff-practice is presented as an idiosyncratic trait, which is not shared by their fellow monks.)

The significance of Jinnaluo in Shaolin's pantheon of divinities—and of staff-fighting in the monastery's regimen—is attested by numerous icons, which are still extant at the monastery. Shaolin's Lixue Pavillion (Lixue ting 立雪亭) contains a (seventeenth-century?) statue of the staff-brandishing deity, and the monastery's Baiyi Hall (Baiyi dian 白衣殿) is decorated with a nineteenth-century mural of the gigantic Jinnaluo treading Mt. Song and the "Imperial Fort."¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, by the eighteenth century at the latest Jinnaluo was accorded his own ritual space, when a chapel was erected in his honor. A wickerwork statue of the deity occupied the center of a "Jinnaluo Hall" (Jinnaluo dian 殿), which contained also bronze and iron icons of the deity (see fig. 4).¹⁰⁸ The wickerwork sculpture

The Story of the Western Wing, by Wang Shifu (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 233–34.

¹⁰⁶ Lu Zhishen's name figures in a Southern-Song list of subjects popular among storytellers. Indicating that as early as that period he was imagined with a staff, the story celebrating him is classified in the category of *ganbang* 桿棒 ("staff") tales; see Luo Ye 羅燁, *Xinbian Zuiweng tanlu* 新編醉翁談錄 (Shanghai: Gudian wenxue, 1957), p. 4. (Lu is referred to in the story by his nickname "Tattooed Monk" [Hua Heshang 花和尚].)

Wang Shifu's play derives from Dong Jieyuan's 董解元 (Master Dong) (fl. 1190–1208) *zhugongdiao* 諸宮調, which already features a staff-wielding monk named Facong 法聰; see Dong Jieyuan, *Dong Jieyuan Xixiang* 董解元西廂, marginal commentary by Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (Ming edition; photographic reproduction, Taiwan: Shangwu, 1970), 2.62–82, translated by Chen Li-li, *Master Tung's Western Chamber Romance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 46–61.

¹⁰⁷ I have examined both icons during a visit to the monastery in October 2000.

¹⁰⁸ The earliest explicit references to a Jinnaluo Hall date from the eighteenth-century, but it is possible that it was erected earlier; see Jing Rizhen, *Shuo Song*, 8.2b, 21.27a, *Shaolin si zhi*, 1.6a, and *Kangxi Dengfeng xian zhi*, 8.1b.

紫那羅像在殿內



Fig. 4. Jinnaluo's statue inside the Shaolin Hall dedicated to him. Woodblock illustration from the *Shaolin si zhi* (1748). Courtesy of Harvard-Yenching Library.

is mentioned already in Cheng Zongyou's seventeenth-century *Shaolin Staff Method*, which specifies that it was woven by the monks. However, a century later the common view was that the god himself sculpted it, for which reason the likeness was accurate.¹⁰⁹ This addition to the Jinnaluo legend mirrors an anxiety, not uncommon in Chinese religion, concerning the truthfulness of a deity's image. The myths of several Chinese deities have their protagonists create their own icons, probably to assuage the believers' concern lest they pay homage to a visually-misleading one.¹¹⁰ Jinnaluo's self-made wickerwork statue no longer survives. In 1928 it burnt down in a fire that consumed the entire Jinnaluo Hall. The shrine was reconstructed in 1984, and it houses three new statues of the deity, who is the object of a rejuvenated religious cult.¹¹¹

Seventeenth and eighteenth century sources note that Jinnaluo's Shaolin cult distinguished that monastery from all other Buddhist temples. Jinnaluo was appointed as the temple's "guardian spirit" (*qielan shen*), which office was held in most monasteries by another martial deity: Guangong 關公.¹¹² Unlike Jinnaluo, Guangong is not a deity of Buddhist origins. He is a third-century general, whose veneration originated in the popular religion. The heroic general was probably incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon of divinities no earlier than the Song-period, when a legend emerged of his post-humous enlightenment. According to this legend, Guangong's departed spirit was led to salvation by the historical monk Zhiyi 智顓 (538–597), whereupon, in gratitude, it volunteered to officiate as the guardian-deity in the latter's monastery.¹¹³ To this day Guangong occupies the post of tutelary deity in most Chinese Buddhist

¹⁰⁹ See *Shaolin si zhi*, 1.6a.

¹¹⁰ See Shahar, *Crazy Ji*, p. 197.

¹¹¹ On the twentieth-century vicissitudes of the Jinnaluo Hall see *Xin bian Shaolin si zhi*, p. 23.

¹¹² See Fu Mei, 9.31a; compare also Jing Rizhen, *Shuo Song*, 21.26b.

¹¹³ On the evolution of the Guangong and Zhiyi legend see Huang Huajie 黃華節, *Guangong de renga yu shenge 關公的人格與神格* (Taipei: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1967), pp. 106–16. The legend is mirrored in the Ming-period novel *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義, where the monk's name is changed from Zhiyi to Pujing 普靜; see *Sanguo yanyi*, author given as Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1972), 77.617–18, and Moss Roberts, trans., *Three Kingdoms: A Historical Novel*, attributed to Luo Guanzhong (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 585–86.

temples, whereas Jinnaluo holds this office at the Shaolin Monastery.¹¹⁴

Jinnaluo was not the only Buddhist deity whom Shaolin monks armed with their own weapon. The Shaolin monastery's "Thousand Buddhas Hall" (Qianfo dian 千佛殿) contains an enormous wall-painting of the "Five Hundred Arhats" (Wubai luohan 五百羅漢), dozens of whom are equipped with staffs. In this magnificent painting, which dates from the 1630s,¹¹⁵ staffs appear in numerous shapes, and fulfill diverse functions. Some are adorned with metal rings, identifying them as the Buddhist ring-staff, the *xizhang* 錫杖 (Sanskrit: *khakkhara*). Others serve as walking sticks or carrying poles. However, in the hands of many arhats, the staff assumes the aspect of a weapon. Consider, for example, the one wielded by an awe-inspiring arhat, whose protruding nose, large eyes, and bushy eyebrows, exemplify the tendency of Chinese artists to exaggerate the foreign features of the Mahāyāna saints (see fig. 5).¹¹⁶ The staff's motion, no less than its proprietor's muscular arms, suggest that it is used for combat, and the fearsome tiger contributes to the martial atmosphere. Evidently, Shaolin monks projected their martial art into the realm of the Mahāyāna divinities.

Why did Shaolin monks ascribe their fighting techniques to Buddhist deities? In addition to enhancing the monastery's prestige, their attribution to the gods probably sanctioned the martial arts. In this respect the Jinnaluo legend reflects the awareness of sixteenth-century Shaolin monks that their martial practice violates the Buddhist prohibition on the taking of life. The staff-wielding deity exonerated the monks from their responsibility for the creation of military techniques. His legend could be read therefore as a Buddhist apology for the monastic exercise of violence: if an incarnated

¹¹⁴ In some monasteries Guangong shares the office of "guardian spirit" with other deities; see J. Prip-Møller, *Chinese Buddhist Monasteries: Their Plan and Its Function As a Setting For Buddhist Monastic Life* (1937; Reprint. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1967), pp. 204, 224.

¹¹⁵ On the dating of the Thousand Buddhas Hall and its wall-painting, see *Shaolin si qian fo dian bihua* 少林寺千佛殿壁畫 (Zhengzhou: Henan meishu, 1986), pp. 19, 104.

¹¹⁶ Compare arhat images in *Luohan hua* 羅漢畫 (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 1990) and Richard K. Kent, "Depictions of the Guardians of the Law: Lohan Painting in China," in *Latter Days of the Law: Images of Chinese Buddhism 850-1850*, ed. Marsha Weidner (Kansas: Spencer Museum of Art, 1994), pp. 183-213.



Fig. 5. An arhat armed with a staff. Detail of an early seventeenth-century wall painting at the Shaolin Monastery.

Buddhist deity could wage war in defense of a monastery, then, by implication, Buddhist monks could do so as well. Evidence that the legend was understood in this light is provided by several late-Ming hymns (*zan* 讚) in honor of Jinnaluo, which are recorded in Cheng Zongyou's *Shaolin Staff Method*. The hymns seek moral grounds for the deity's military actions in the Buddhist virtue of mercy (*ci* 慈; Sanskrit: *maitra*). They suggest that the protection of the Buddhist faith—even if it involves violence—is an act of compassion. Cheng Zongyou's brother, Yinwan 胤萬, who authored one hymn,

summarizes the argument: “Mercy,” he writes, “is cultivated through heroism” (*ci yi yong yang* 慈以勇養).¹¹⁷

Thus, we find in late-Ming Shaolin literature an awareness of the tension between martial practice and the Buddhist prohibition of killing. The Jinnaluo legend can be interpreted as an attempt to resolve this tension. It suggests that waging war in defense of the faith—for which the deity provided precedence—is permissible. It is equally important, however, to note what we do not find: to the best of my knowledge, all through the seventeenth century Shaolin literature does not associate the martial arts with the search for Buddhist enlightenment. Late-Ming authors do not suggest that martial practice could lead to spiritual perfection, nor that the latter, if achieved, could enhance martial skills. In this respect, the relation between Buddhism and the Shaolin martial arts differs from the one that evolved in Japan. At about the same time that the Jinnaluo legend emerged, Takuan Sōhō 澤庵宗彭 (1573–1645) formulated the theory of the “no-mind” (*mushin* 無心) of fencing. The Japanese Chan master argued that mental perfection is indispensable to swordsmanship, just as it is born from it. Centuries later, Takuan’s concept of the connection between spiritual and martial self-cultivation was popularized in the West through the works of Suzuki, Herrigel and others.¹¹⁸ However, during the late Ming, a similar rhetoric of Buddhist enlightenment did not figure in the Chinese martial arts. Future research may determine whether its appearance in China—possibly in the late nineteenth century—was the result of Japanese influence.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ See Cheng Zongyou, *Shaolin gunfa*, 1.4b.

¹¹⁸ Takuan formulated his ideas in several essays, the most famous of which is *Fudōchi shinmyōroku* 不動智神妙錄; see Takuan Sōhō, *The Unfettered Mind: Writings of the Zen Master to the Sword Master*, trans. William Scott Wilson (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1986); see also Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*, Bollingen Series LXIV (New York: Pantheon Books, 1959), and Eugen Herrigel, *Zen in the art of Archery*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Vintage Books, 1971). G. Cameron Hurst suggests that scholars such as Suzuki and Herrigel have overestimated the impact of Chan Buddhism on the Japanese martial arts. He points out that the usage of Buddhist terminology by specialists in martial arts does not necessarily imply that their practice was spiritually motivated; see his *Armed Martial Arts of Japan: Swordsmanship and Archery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 127, 192–93.

¹¹⁹ Tang Hao has already demonstrated that the Chinese martial-arts term *roushu* 柔術 (“soft arts”) has been borrowed from the Japanese *jūjutsu*. He also showed that Nitobe Inazō’s 新渡戸稻造 *Bushidō: The Soul of Japan* (first published in English in 1899, and then translated

CONCLUSION

The available evidence does not permit us to conclude when Shaolin monks started to practice the martial arts. However, there is no doubt that by the sixteenth century military training figured prominently in the monastery's regimen. One reason for the attention late-Ming authors paid to the Shaolin martial arts was the decline of the professional Ming military. Some military experts urged the government to supplement the regular army with monastic troops, and fighting monks indeed contributed to the sixteenth-century campaign against piracy. By contrast, other government officials were suspicious of monastic military training, fearing lest martial monks turn their skills against the state.

Shaolin was not the only monastery where the martial arts were practiced. Sixteenth and seventeenth century sources allude to military training in other Buddhist centers that also merit research: Mt. Emei (in Sichuan), Mt. Wutai (in Shanxi), and Mt. Funiu (in Southern Henan). In addition, fighting was practiced in various local temples that offered shelter to itinerant martial artists. However, Shaolin clerics were considered by far the best fighting monks. One reason for their outstanding martial skills was Shaolin's location in central Henan. Poverty and rampant violence integrated military training into the fabric of Henan society, explaining in part the province's contribution to the late-imperial martial arts.

Shaolin martial practice was reflected in the monastery's religious lore. During the late Ming Shaolin monks ascribed their techniques of staff-fighting to a Buddhist deity named Jinnaluo, whom they venerated as their monastery's tutelary deity. The Jinnaluo legend enhanced the prestige of the Shaolin martial arts, and provided religious sanction to the monks' military activities. The legend betrays the influence of Ming-period fiction and drama. Jinnaluo has been partially fashioned after the staff-wielding Sun Wukong, simian protagonist of the Journey to the West story-cycle.

The question why Shaolin monks chose the staff as their weapon

into Japanese, Chinese, and many other languages) exerted significant influence on the martial-arts manual *Shaolin quanshu mijue* 少林拳術秘訣; see Tang Hao, *Shaolin quanshu mijue kaozheng*, pp. 15-32.

merits a separate study. Here I will merely note that the staff's role as weapon may have derived from its significance as a Buddhist emblem. Beginning in the early-medieval period Chinese monks carried a ring-ornate staff called *xizhang* 錫杖 (Sanskrit: *khakkhara*) as a symbol of religious authority.¹²⁰ Future research will determine whether the staff Shaolin monks employed in battle derived from the one their ancestors carried as monastic insignia.

Appendix

REFERENCES TO MARTIAL-ARTS PRACTICE AT THE SHAOLIN MONASTERY THROUGH THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

(Biographical and bibliographical details, including Chinese characters, appear in the following list only if they are not provided in the above text or notes.)

728 Several texts, which were inscribed in 728 on one stele at the Shaolin Monastery, mention that in the Spring of 621 Shaolin monks participated in the campaign of the future Tang emperor, Li Shimin, against another contender to the throne, Wang Shichong. The stele is still extant at the monastery. The texts inscribed on it are:

On the front side: a) A detailed history of the Shaolin Monastery, which was authored by the Minister of Personnel (Libu shangshu 吏部尚書) Pei Cui 裴崔 (ca. 670–736). Pei alludes not only to the military assistance Shaolin monks rendered to Li Shimin, but also to another incident in which they resorted to arms: during the last years of the Sui Dynasty (around 610) they ward off an attack by bandits. Pei's inscription, which is usually referred to as the "Shaolin si bei," is transcribed in numerous sources, including chapter 20 of Fu Mei's *Song shu*, and chapter 279 of the *Quan Tang wen*.

On the back side: b) Li Shimin's letter to the Shaolin monks, in which he thanks them for their military support. Titled "Gao Baiguwu Shaolin si shangzuo shu" 告柏谷塢少林寺上座書, it is dated "30th of the 4th month" [of the fourth year of the Wude 武德 reign-period], which corresponds to May 26, 621. Li Shimin's letter is transcribed in numerous sources, including chapter 20 of Fu Mei's *Song shu*; c)

¹²⁰ The *xizhang* is prescribed in such Buddhist scriptures as the *Dedao ticheng xizhang jing* 得道梯橙錫杖經, T. 785, 17:724–25. It is frequently mentioned in medieval poetry, where by metonymy it sometimes signifies its clerical owner; see, for example, Bai Juyi 白居易, "Tianzhu si song Jian Shangren gui Lu shan" 天竺寺送堅上人歸廬山, *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1960), 446.5006. See also John Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture* (forthcoming), and "shakujō," in Mochizuki, 3:2152–53.

Several official documents (*die*), in which the Tang government announces the bestowal of land and other privileges upon the Shaolin Monastery, in recognition of the military support it rendered to the dynasty's founder, Li Shimin. The documents name thirteen Shaolin monks who were recognized by Li Shimin for their merit. One of them, Tanzong 曇宗, was appointed General-in-chief (Da jiangjun) in Li's army. Even though they were inscribed on the Shaolin stele in 728, the documents were promulgated earlier, (in 621, 625, 632, and 724). They are transcribed in several sources, including chapter 74 of Wang Chang's *Jinshi cuibian*.

798 A stele inscription titled "Song yue Shaolin xin zao chu ku ji" 嵩嶽少林新造廚庫記, which was authored by the Assistant Magistrate of Dengfeng County Gu Shaolian 顧少連, briefly alludes to the Shaolin monks' participation in Li Shimin's campaign against Wang Shichong. Whereas the stele is no longer extant, the inscription is transcribed in several sources, including chapter 20 of Fu Mei's *Song shu*.

1515 In two of his essays, Du Mu traces the origins of the Shaolin martial arts to the Tang period. Both essays draw on Du Mu's study of the monastery's Tang-period stele inscriptions; see: a) Du Mu's "You Song shan ji" 遊嵩山記, which recounts his visit of 1513 to the Shaolin Monastery. The essay is included in Du Mu's *You mingshan ji* 遊名山記 (Preface 1515), itself included in the *Baoyantang miji* 寶顏堂秘笈 (1606–1620 edition; copy Harvard-Yenching Library); b) Du Mu's epigraphic collection *Jin xie linlang*, in which he includes Pei Cui's stele inscription of 728.

1517 A stele inscription dated 1517 contains the earliest extant version of a legend attributing Shaolin's staff-method to the monastery's "guardian spirit" (*qielan shen*). The stele, which is still located at the monastery, identifies this deity as Naluoyan (Nārāyaṇa). All subsequent versions name him Jinnaluo (Kinnara). Seventeenth-century versions of the legend are included in: a) Fu Mei's *Song shu*; b) Cheng Zongyou's *Shaolin gunfa chan zong*; c) *Shunzhi Dengfeng xian zhi*, compiled by Zhang Chaorui and Jiao Fuheng; and d) *Henan fu zhi*, eds. Zhu Mingkui and He Bairu. There are also several eighteenth-century renditions.

1548 According to Sanqi Yougong's epitaph, this Shaolin fighting-monk (*wuseng* 武僧) occupied official military posts in the border regions of Shanxi and Shaanxi, and participated in a government military campaign in Yunnan. Sanqi Yougong's epitaph, which was inscribed on his burial stūpa, is still extant in Shaolin's Stūpa-Forest (Talin).

ca. 1550 The sixteenth-century essayist and military expert Tang Shunzhi alludes to the Shaolin martial arts in two of his literary compositions: in his *Wu bian*, Tang quotes a Shaolin staff formula, and in one of his poems he praises the Shaolin method of hand-combat (*quan*). Titled "Emei daoren quan ge," the poem alludes to martial practice at the Emei monastic center as well.

1556 The epitaph for Wan Biao, who served as Vice-Commissioner-in-Chief in

the Nanjing Chief Military Commission, mentions that he drafted Shaolin monks to fight the pirates along the Jiangnan coast. Wan Biao's epitaph is included in chap. 107 of Jiao Hong's *Guochao xianzheng lu*.

1558 In chapter 1 of his *Wobian shilüe*, Cai Jiude mentions the contribution, in 1553, of Shaolin monks to the campaign against piracy in Zhejiang. Cai, who notes that the monks were drafted by the above-mentioned Wan Biao, alludes to a battle on Mt. Zhe, which controls the entrance from the Hangzhou Gulf, through the Qiantang River, to Hangzhou City.

1561 The 1561 *Zhejiang tongzhi* (chap. 60) mentions the contribution of "monastic troops" (*sengbing*) to the May 1553 battle on Mt. Zhe. The gazetteer does not specify to which monasteries these "monastic troops" belonged. The information provided by the 1561 *Zhejiang tongzhi* is repeated in chapter 22 of the Jiajing-period (1522-1566) *Ningbo fu zhi*, and in chapter 7 of the 1579 *Hangzhou fu zhi*.

1562 In his *Jixiao xinshu*, the famous general Qi Jiguang alludes to the Shaolin staff method as one of the renowned fighting techniques of his day.

ca. 1565 In his *Zhenji*, the military commander He Liangchen briefly describes the Shaolin staff method, and notes that the Niushan 牛山 monks practice it as well. (By Niushan, He Liangchen is probably referring to the monastic center on Mount Funiu, Henan.)

1568 In his *Jiangnan jing lue*, Zheng Ruoceng describes the contribution, in 1553, of Shaolin monks to the campaign against piracy along the Jiangnan coast. He elaborates in particular upon two monastic victories: the first, in the Spring of 1553, at Mount Zha (by which Zheng is probably referring to the above-mentioned Mt. Zhe; he notes that the monastic force involved in this victory was drafted by Vice-Commissioner-in-Chief Wan Biao); the second victory, in July 1553, at Wengjiagang on the coast of Songjiang Prefecture. (Zheng describes how the defeated pirates escaped all the way from there to Wangjiazhuang on the Jiaying Prefecture's coast, where the very last bandit was disposed of.) In addition to the Shaolin Monastery, Zheng alludes to the practice of martial arts in several other Buddhist centers, including the monastic complexes on Mount Wutai (Shanxi), and Mount Funiu (Henan).

ca. 1570 In a poem written upon a visit to the Shaolin Monastery, Xu Xuemo 徐學謨 (1522-1594) alludes to the monks' martial arts practice, which, like other sixteenth-century authors, he traces to the Tang period. The poem is included in Fu Mei's *Song shu*.

1575 According to Zhufang Cangong's epitaph, this Shaolin cleric commanded a force of 50 fighting monks in the government offensive of 1552 against the Henan bandit Shi Shangzhao. Zhufang Cangong's epitaph, which was inscribed on his burial stūpa, is still extant in Shaolin's Stūpa-Forest.

1577 In two literary pieces of his, the Ming general Yu Dayou records his visit

of ca. 1560 to the Shaolin Monastery. The general was disappointed with what he described as the decline of the original Shaolin staff method. According to his testimony, he proceeded to teach the Shaolin monks his own staff technique. The visit is recorded in Yu Dayou's 1577 dedication for the renovation of Shaolin's "Ten-Directions Chan Courtyard" (Shifang Chan yuan 十方禪院), and also in a poem, prefaced by a prologue, which was written at approximately the same time, and sent to the Shaolin monk Zongqing. Both pieces are included in Yu's *Zhengqi tang xuji*. Yu Dayou's own staff method, which he taught the Shaolin monks, is described in his *Jianjing*, included in his *Zhengqi tang yuji*.

1581 A stele inscription titled "Dengfeng xian tie," which is still extant at the Shaolin Monastery, notes the participation of Shaolin monks in several military offensives against Henan outlaws, including the 1510s campaign against Liu Liu, the 1520s campaign against Wang Tang, and the 1550s campaign—alluded to in Zhufang Cangong's epitaph of 1575—against Shi Shangzhao. The inscription also mentions the participation of Shaolin monks in the war on piracy.

ca. 1581 In two of his geographical works, *Yu zhi* and "Song you ji," Wang Shixing alludes to the Shaolin martial arts. The first work mirrors a suspicion lest the monks' military practice leads to banditry and revolt. The second text was written following Wang's visit of 1581 to the Song Mountain. Wang, like other sixteenth-century visitors, traces the Shaolin involvement in military affairs to the Tang-period.

ca. 1601 In a poem titled "Shaolin guan seng bishi ge" 少林觀僧比試歌, Gong Nai 公鼐 (*jinsi* 1601) alludes to both armed and unarmed martial training at the monastery. Gong's poem is included in the *Shaolin si zhi*.

ca. 1604 In his *Wusong jia yi wo bian zhi*, Zhang Nai describes the contribution, in the 1550s, of Shaolin monks to the campaign against piracy along the Jiangnan coast. He elaborates upon the monks' July 1553 victory, which is described in Zheng Ruoceng's *Jiangnan jing lue*, but alludes also to two battles (in the spring of 1554 and the fall of 1555), in which the monastic forces were ultimately defeated.

1609 In the first of his five essays on the Song Mountain, Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 (1568–1610) alludes to the practice of hand-combat at the Shaolin Monastery. See "Songyou di yi" 嵩遊第一, in *Yuan Hongdao ji jian jiao* 袁宏道集箋校, annotated by Qian Bocheng 錢伯城 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1981).

ca. 1610 In an essay titled "You Shaolin ji" 遊少林記, Wen Xiangfeng 文翔鳳 (*jinsi* 1610) alludes to both armed and unarmed martial practice at the Shaolin Monastery. The essay is included in the *Shaolin si zhi*.

1612 In an essay included in chapter 9 of his *Song shu*, Fu Mei, who served as magistrate of Dengfeng County, Henan, laments that martial practice, tourism, and wealth, have distanced the Shaolin Monastery from Buddhist contemplation. Fu Mei's *Song shu* includes also other relevant passages on the Shaolin martial arts, including a version of the Jinnaluo legend.

ca. 1612 In his essay “You Songshan Shaolin si ji” 遊嵩山少林寺記, Jin Zhongshi 金忠士 (fl. 1612) alludes to the monastery’s military renown. The essay is included in the *Shaolin si zhi*.

1618 In his collection of miscellaneous notes *Wu zazu*, Xie Zhaozhe alludes to the Shaolin method of hand-combat (*quanfa*).

1619 According to Wan’an Shungong’s 萬庵順公 (1545–1619) epitaph, this Shaolin monk distinguished himself in battle (the epitaph does not specify in which). Wan’an Shungong’s epitaph, which was inscribed on his burial stūpa, is still extant in Shaolin’s Stūpa-Forest.

1621 Publication of the earliest extant manual of the Shaolin martial arts, *Shaolin gunfa chan zong*. This manual was authored around 1610 by Cheng Zongyou, who spent more than ten years at the Shaolin Monastery studying its staff-method. In 1621, it was issued in a combined edition with three other of Cheng Zongyou’s treatises (on the crossbow, the spear, and the broadsword), under the title: *Geng yu sheng ji*.

1621 In chapter 88 of his encyclopedic *Wubei zhi*, Mao Yuanyi praises Cheng Zongyou for writing the best manual of the Shaolin staff method, from which—according to Mao—all other techniques of staff fighting originated.

1622 Zhu Guozhen’s collection of miscellaneous notes *Yongchuang xiaopin* contains two anecdotes celebrating martial monks: the first concerns a Shaolin monk who specializes in hand-combat; the second concerns a monk named Guzhou, who excels in staff-fighting. The latter derives from Zheng Ruoceng’s *Jiangnan jing lie*.

1625 According to Benda’s 本大 (1542–1625) epitaph, this Shaolin monk distinguished himself in battle (the epitaph does not specify in which). Benda’s epitaph, which was inscribed on his burial stūpa, is still extant in Shaolin’s Stūpa-Forest.

ca. 1625 In a poem titled “Shaolin guan wu” 少林觀武, Cheng Shao 程紹 (*jin-shi* 1590), who served as Grand Coordinator (*xunfu*) for Henan, alludes to Shaolin’s contribution to “national defense” (*baobang* 保邦). The poem is included in the *Shaolin si zhi*.

ca. 1660 The anonymous author of the collection of vernacular stories *Zuixing shi* notes, in the twelfth story, that the Shaolin Monastery is famous throughout the land for its staff method.

1669 In his “Wang Zhengnan muzhi ming,” Huang Zongxi provides the earliest account of the “internal school” (*neijia*) of hand-combat, in which Wang Zhengnan specialized. Huang defines the “internal school” as an antithesis of Shaolin hand combat, to which he refers as the “external school” (*waijia*).

ca. 1670 The renowned scholar Gu Yanwu discusses the Shaolin martial-arts in at least three literary pieces: a) In an essay titled “Shaolin seng bing,” Gu traces

the origins of the Shaolin martial training to the Tang period, and alludes to the Shaolin participation in the sixteenth-century campaign against piracy. In addition, he notes instances in which other monastic troops participated in warfare; b) In the second and third chapters of his epigraphic collection *Jinshi wenzi ji*, Gu discusses the Shaolin Tang-period inscriptions, which served as an important source for his essay “Shaolin seng bing;” c) In a patriotic poem titled “Shaolin si,” Gu wistfully imagines the Shaolin monks resisting the Manchu conquerors (to whom he does not allude explicitly). The poem mentions the heroic assistance that the monks rendered to the Tang-dynasty emperor, Li Shimin. The poem is included in chapter 6 of the *Gu Tinglin shi ji huizhu* 顧亭林詩集彙注 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1983).

1676 In his *Neijia quanfa*, Huang Baijia follows his father, Huang Zongxi, in describing the “internal school” in terms of its opposition to the “external” Shaolin school. (Huang’s *Neijia quanfa* is the earliest extant manual of the “internal school.”)

1678 The seventeenth-century scholar and spear-expert Wu Shu includes in his spear anthology *Shou bi lu* a manual titled *Menglü tang qiangfa*, which, according to him, was authored by the Shaolin monk Hongzhuan. Even as he incorporated Hongzhuan’s spear method into his anthology, Wu Shu criticized it as being too heavily influenced by Shaolin’s staff-techniques. According to him, Shaolin monks employ the spear as if it were a staff, thereby failing to take advantage of the former’s unique features. Wu Shu’s spear anthology includes also a manual titled *Emei qiangfa*, which is attributed, ultimately, to a monk named Pu’en from the monastic complex on Mount Emei, Sichuan.

1733 Chapter 31 of Cao Bingren’s 曹秉仁 *Ningbo fu zhi* 寧波府志 (1846 edition) contains a biography of a sixteenth-century Shaolin disciple named Biandeng 邊澄, whose extraordinary martial skills were bestowed upon him in a dream by a ghost. Even if Biandeng is a historical figure, his biography in the *Ningbo fu zhi* is largely legendary. The *Ningbo fu zhi* contains also a biography of the sixteenth-century martial-artist Zhang Songxi 張松溪, who is mentioned in Huang Zongxi’s “Wang Zhengnan muzhi ming” as a practitioner of the “internal school.”

1739 In two instances, the official *Mingshi*, edited by Zhang Tingyu et. al., alludes to the Shaolin fighting-monks: a) The essay on “local militias” (*xiangbing*) (in chapter 91) includes a brief discussion of “monastic troops” (*sengbing*), of which the *Mingshi* lists three: Shaolin, Wutai, and Funiu. The participation of Shaolin monks in the campaign against piracy is also mentioned; b) The biography (in chapter 292) of Shi Jiyan, who served as magistrate of Shanzhou County in Western Henan, notes that during the 1630s he drafted Shaolin monks to train his troops, who were battling rebel forces in the province.

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[Footnotes]

¹⁰² **The Lingyin Si Monkey Disciples and The Origins of Sun Wukong**

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