

Fujian: The Home of Southern Boxing -- Door to Chinese Boxing's Transmission Overseas

This is an English summary of important points made in a Chinese language article submitted at the Forum on Building Chinese Folk Culture and Today's Chinese Martial Arts

Held in
Urumqi in August 2007

Stanley E. Henning

For a long time boxing in Fujian has been surrounded by misinformation

(1) **The term "Southern Boxing"** - the popular view has been that so called Southern Boxing emphasis on arm and hand as opposed to leg techniques was based on "Four Many and One Difficulty": many mountains, rice fields, sandy shallows, and boats, and difficult to navigate mountainous terrain. In 1998 I wrote an article countering this view, noting the more likely factors were technical (military close combat requirement for "Short Hitting" as opposed to "Long Boxing") and historical (mid-Ming period training of Fujian volunteers for anti-Japanese pirate operations in coastal provinces). Evidence in source Min Xiaoji (*Fujian Notes*) (1796), in which Fujian boxing is identified as Short Hitting.

(2) **The origins of Yongchun Boxing** - popular views have generally credited origins to a woman (surnamed Yan or Fang, and possibly a Buddhist nun (Ng Mui in Cantonese or Wu Mei in Mandarin). No evidence to support these views, and all ignore the *Yongchun Gazetteer*, which attributes the origins of boxing in Yongchun County (the major Fujian style, named after Yongchun, Fujian, and likely precedent for White Crane style, both of which can be seen as examples of Short Hitting) to Woman Ding Number Seven.

(3) **The Southern Shaolin Monastery myth** - popular views attribute so-called Southern Boxing to a Southern Shaolin Monastery located in Fujian. Local officials in Quanzhou, Putian and Fuqing cities in Fujian have all attempted, to no avail, to prove and get central authorities to confirm, that a Southern Shaolin Monastery was located in their areas. The source of this

myth was 19th century and later secret society (Heaven and Earth Society) membership manuals (for which the Shaolin myth would have been an effective recruitment ploy). Also, an apparent Heaven and Earth Society martial arts manual, *Secrets of Shaolin Boxing* (c.1915), helped fan the mythical flames that have been accepted as fact even today among many Chinese martial arts groups.

(4) **Buddhist nun, Ng Mui, myth** - the popular view in some Fujian Yongchun Boxing circles is that it was first practiced by the Buddhist Nun, Ng Mui. There is no evidence to support this view, however it is quite possible that this story fit in with the overall Heaven and Earth Society story of a Southern Shaolin Monastery connection and the inspiration for this story may have come from a vignette titled Wu Ji (Martial Skills), involving a Buddhist nun, in the highly popular novel, *Strange Tales from the Studio of Small Talk* (c. 1680).

The evidence that Chinese boxing was transmitted from Fujian to Okinawa in the mid-1700's was recorded in *Big Island Notes* (Oshima Hikki) (c.1762), long before any of the myths concerning Fujian boxing had appeared. According to this source, a Chinese the Okinawan's called "Gong Xiang Jun" (Kusanku - this may have been term of respect associated with an official title, but its specific significance remains to be determined) had some of those accompanying him to Okinawa demonstrate a form of boxing similar to that found in the *Wubei Zhi* (*Encyclopedia of Military Preparedness*) (c. 1607). The boxing illustrated in the *Wubei Zhi* was taken from Ming General Qi Jiguang's *Jixiao Xinshu* (*New Book of Effective Discipline*), so this association seems to confirm that what was transmitted was likely Short Hitting, which was prevalent in Fujian at the time.

Chinese boxing was thus Transmitted from Fujian to Okinawa in 1760's, to the main islands of Japan in the 1920's to become Karate, and then to Korea to become Taekwondo by the 1950's. It was likely a form of Short Hitting, related to that illustrated in General Qi Jiguang's 32 forms and similar to what came to be known as Yongchun boxing.