

**Author of Lost Ming Boxing Treatise Identified
By
Stanley E. Henning**

As an important element of Chinese popular culture from earliest times, the martial arts comprise an exciting field for scholarly research. The most exciting aspect of such research is the discovery of new or previously overlooked information, which can help us gain a better understanding of the history and nature of these arts. One such piece of information is the named of the actual author of a lost ming boxing treatise titled *Baida Yaopu* (白打要譜) or *Essential Manual on Boxing* by a heretofore unknown author named Wang Boyan.

While researching the origins and evolution of Chinese boxing, I ran across the following short entry on the *Essential Manual on Boxing* (6 chapters), under "Military Writings" in *Dushu Minqiu Ji* or *Reader's Handy Selection Guide* (c. 1795) [1]:

"Today's widespread Song Taizu 32 Form Changquan [Long Boxing named after the first Song Emperor]; 24 Qitanma [throws and grapples]; 8 Shanfan [rapid turning moves; 12 Duan [close hitting]; and Soft Zhang's Duanda [close hitting]; all have their strong points and are well known. Yngchuan [place in Anhui Province] Wang Boyan [author] has recorded the movements of each style and composed essential formulae for them in the same manner as Shaolin Staff and Yang Family Spear."

The styles listed in this concise entry are among those mentioned in General Qi Jiguang's *New Book of Effective Discipline* (1561). General Qi used techniques from these styles to develop his own 32 form set to train his troops in Yiwu, Zhejiang. This 32 form set appears to be the foundation for Chen style Taijiquan. In other words, if this manual were ever to resurface it could provide us with valuable insight into the most prominent Ming styles as well as well as the origins of Taijiquan. The significance of this information further piqued my curiosity. Who was this Wang Boyan from Yingchuan, Anhui – who was so knowledgeable in the techniques of boxing?

Early in 1995, I was pursuing Professor Ma Mingda's introduction to the People's Physical Culture Press edition of Qi Jiguang's *New Book of Effective Discipline*, wherein I noticed that a prominent official and compatriot of Qi's, Wang Daokun (汪道昆), played a major role in getting Qi's training manual published. [2] Noting that Wang Daokun's surname (汪) was the same as the unknown Wang Boyan's, I decided to check out Wang Daokun's biography. My effort was made easier by his importance as a "Jinshi" or holder of the highest degree in the Chinese bureaucratic examination system.

I was excited to find that Wang Daokun was also from Anhui (Shexian) and that his literary style name, Boyu (伯玉) was strikingly close to Wang Boyan's given name, Boyan (伯言). Furthermore, Wang Daokun was indeed responsible for training citizen soldiers of Yiwu, Zhejiang (令義烏教民講武) to participate in General Qi Jiguang's anti-pirate operations. [3]

Based on the striking coincidences associated with the names and places of origin of Wang Daokun and Wang Boyan, plus Wang Daokun's close association with Qi Jiguang's troop training program and publication of Qi's *New Book of Effective Discipline* with its chapter on boxing, I concluded that the actual aauthor of *Essential Manual on Boxing* must in fact be none other than Wang Daokun.

During a visit to Chengdu in February 1996, I was able to compare notes on this subject with one of China's top physical education historians, Professor Kuang Wennan of the Sichuan

(Chengdu) Physical Education Institute, who confirmed my belief that Wang Daokun was likely the real Wang Boyan. [4]

While it seems almost certain that Wang Daokun was the real Wang Boyan, this conclusion is admittedly tentative, based as it is upon circumstantial evidence. Did Wang Daokun publish *Essential Manual on Boxing* under the alias “Wang Boyan”, or was this a printer’s error which should have read “Wang Boyu”? Another question is, did one of Wang’s staff publish the manual with the biographical information altered? We may never know the answers to these questions, but the intellectual exercise involved in trying to trace such information can provide us further insight into the history of the Chinese martial arts.

Notes

Qian Zeng 錢曾 (c. 1795), 讀書敏求記 (Reader’s Handy Selection Guide), 書目文獻出版社, 1984, p. 88.

Qi Jiguang (戚繼光), 紀效新書 (New Book of Effective Discipline), 馬明達點校 annotated by Ma Mingda, Beijing: People’s Physical Culture Press, 1988.

中國人名大辭典 (Big Dictionary of Chinese Names), 鄭州 : 中州古籍出版社, 1993, 481.

Discussions between the author and Professor Kuang Wennan, , Sichuan (Chengdu) Physical Education Institute (Chengdu, PRC), 25 February 1996. Professor Kuang is on the editorial committee of the Physical Culture Section, *China Grand Encyclopedia* 中華大典體育分典 and was the lead author for *Outline of Chinese Martial Arts Culture* 中國武術文化概論, Sichuan Jiaoyu Press, 1990. He has also written numerous articles for Physical Education Literature and History 體育文史 and other publications.