

Anecdotes about the Pervious Generations in Baguazhang

By

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Anecdotes about Mr. Ruan Zhigu

Ruan Zhigu was a student of Mr. Dong Haiquan. His skill was pure and deep. He had a high degree of mobility. He could travel across the palace rooftops as if he were walking on level ground. Master Dong warned him, “Your skills for leaping into the air and walking of walls are very good. But if you misuse them, I will cut off your head.” Ruan heard this and became afraid. He thought to himself: “That would be inconvenient!” One time, Ruan left Beijing and returned to Baoding to see his family. He was gone for about six months. When he returned to Beijing, he was using crutches and walking with great difficulty. His feet didn’t clear the ground by more than two or three inches as he dragged himself up the road. Master Dong saw his condition and asked what had happened. Ruan replied that his legs were bad. Master Dong felt sorry for him, but he also felt good, so to avoid causing trouble he left again. After this, Ruan Zhigu was not involved with external affairs for many years. After Master Dong died, Ruan threw away his crutches. He resumed walking without restraints. He never again feigned injury.

Anecdotes about Mr. Yin Fu

Yin Fu, called De’an, styled Youpeng, was from Zhanghuai village, Ji County, Hebei. He was very good at Tan Tui. Having a certain skill in his art, he went looking for a teacher. He asked Mr. Dong Haichuan to be his teacher and train him in Baguazhang. Under Master Dong’s devoted care he studied Tan Tui, Lohan Quan blended with Baguazhang. He trained arduously for many years. He was famous among the Beijing teachers. He had many students. These included Ju Qingyuan, Ma Gui, Li Yongkui, and others.

When Mr. Yin Fu was teaching martial arts in the palace, the chief palace eunuch, Cui Rugui, studied with him. A little later, the emperor Guangxu also studied martial arts with Yin Fu. As a result, Yin Fu informally became the emperor’s teacher.

In the 26th year of Guangxu’s reign, the Eight Nations Alliance invaded Beijing, the Dowager Empress fled to Si’an with Emperor Guangxu. Yin Fu followed to wait upon, protect, and drive the wagons. He got sick from breathing opium. One night, Yin Fu was resting on a heatable brick bed. As he stirred up the heat to inhale the smoke, a big strong guard, who was the chief wrestler, came in (in the Qing dynasty there were good wrestlers in the camps). He grabbed Yin Fu with both hands, one hand on his leg and one hand on his shoulder. He said, “Now we will see how good your skills really are. If your strikes kill me then I accept it.” Yin Fu laughed and said, “You are one of us. Are you playing a prank?” As he spoke, his right hand dropped down to the smoking pipe. His left hand moved to the top of the guard’s hand on top of his shoulder. He said,

“Here is a different prank.” The guard said, “Now I must see your toy.” Yin Fu gave his hand one snap and the guard’s wrist was broken and he was thrown far away. The guard lay on the ground and could not get up. He shouted, “Yin Laoshi, allow me to fix my wrist!” Yin Fu said, “You may leave and ask someone else to fix it.” After this the guard’s hand was completely deformed.

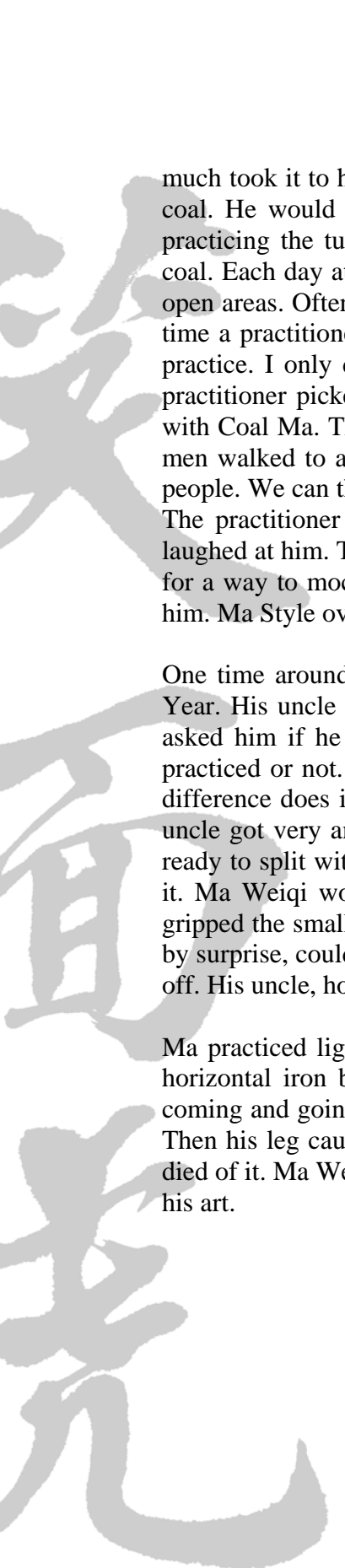
As a result of that Yin Fu became famous and people became envious. One night Yin Fu was sleeping. He heard someone knock on his door with some urgency, asking Laoshi to come and take care of some business. Yin Fu asked, “Who is it?” The person replied, “It’s me!” Yin Fu then opened the door. Unexpectedly, a man with a saber struck at Yin Fu. Yin Fu raised his hand doing a horizontal sweeping palm. The saber chopped into the doorframe. The man abandoned the saber and ran away. It was an assassin’s sneak attack. That night Yin Fu didn’t go back to sleep. After daybreak, his students arrived to begin practice. They saw the saber sticking in the doorframe but were afraid to ask how it got there. Yin Fu said, “Last night, an assassin visited. His sneak attack failed and he fled. You can take the saber down now.” Only the saber was wedged in very deeply and they could not get it out. Yin Fu swore and said, “You are all useless!” He then grabbed the saber and pulled it down.

Cui Rugui studied with Yin Fu for several years. Just before New Year, Cui went to Yin Fu’s home to see his teacher. He held a check and said, “Please, Laoshi, use this to buy some wine to drink on New Year’s Day. He visited for a little while, and then left. Yin Fu had never learned to read. He took the check and put it aside and did not use it. A short while later, his student, Li Yongqing, arrived. They drank some tea and chatted. Yin Fu said that Cui had come by and had also presented him with several taels of silver. Saying this, he gave the check to Li Yongqing to look at. When Li saw it, he laughed and said, “This is 1,000 taels of silver!” Yin Fu did/could not believe it. The two men went to the bank to cash the check. Yin Fu was extremely happy. Right away he withdrew ten taels and asked Li Yongqing to have a meal with him. After this, Yin Fu bought himself a house and lived a prosperous life.

Anecdotes about Mr. Ma Weiqi

When Ma Weiqi asked Dong Haichuan to be his teacher and teach him Baguazhang, Dong faced him and said, “If you train your skills for three years, then you will be crowned with success.” After this, Ma Weiqi for three years did not return home. Each day he constantly asked help from his classmates. Afterwards, his skills advanced rapidly and his fame grew throughout the capitol.

At that time, there was a Manchu banner man named Fu Niyinchang (he was often called Fu Liu and later adopted the Chinese name Yeqian). He had a reputation for being a great doctor. Originally he had asked Mr. Yin Fu to guard his compound. But because Yin Fu was teaching inside the palace, he asked Ma Weiqi to guard the compound. At that time, many people would come to pay a visit and compare techniques. To those that came to visit, Ma would immediately use his overturning backfist to strike them. Invariably he would hit his target. Fu Liu saw this and was delighted. He asked Ma Weiqi to teach him the technique of the overturning backfist. Ma said, “Getting it was not easy. Giving it up is harder still. Therefore I do not teach it.” Fu Liu said he wished to have Mr. Ma open up a coal business. After this, people called Ma Weiqi, “Coal Ma”. Then Ma Weiqi began to teach Fu Liu the overturning backfist. Fu Liu also very



much took it to heart. Mr. Ma managed the coal business. Every day he had to deal with tons of coal. He would frequently shovel the coal into a pile and then walk around the pile of coal practicing the turning palms. When his practice was done, he would then strike the lumps of coal. Each day at dawn, he would go to the Temple of Heaven to see who was practicing in the open areas. Often he would crouch down and watch from the corners of his eyes. There was one time a practitioner asked, "What are you looking at? Do you practice?" Ma answered, "I don't practice. I only do." The two men crossed hands and Ma threw him several yards away. The practitioner picked himself up and asked Ma who he studied with? Ma replied that he studied with Coal Ma. The practitioner asked if he could visit Coal Ma. Ma said that he could. The two men walked to an area with very few people around. Mr. Ma said that his teacher loved to hit people. We can then try a test. The two had a contest. The practitioner was thrown very far away. The practitioner said, "You are not Coal Ma's student. You are Coal Ma himself!" Mr. Ma laughed at him. The practitioner did not dare to cross hands with him again. Mr. Ma often looked for a way to mock people. Therefore ordinary martial arts teachers did not dare to contest with him. Ma Style overturning backfist also became famous because of this.

One time around New Year's, Mr. Ma arrived at his uncle's home to wish him a happy New Year. His uncle was an expert at practicing the splitting staff. His uncle saw him come in and asked him if he had been practicing. Ma never allowed other people to question whether he practiced or not. After he heard these words he was not very happy. Still more he said, "What difference does it make whether I practice or not. In any case it is none of your business." His uncle got very angry. The two men went into the courtyard and each took a long staff and got ready to split with them. His uncle had practiced the staff all of his life and was very good with it. Ma Weiqi would be defeated quickly. Still more would be thrown down by the staff. Ma gripped the small head of his uncle's staff with both hands and pushed it down. His uncle, taken by surprise, could not defend against it and was pushed all the way to the ground. Ma swaggered off. His uncle, however, because he was shamed, fell ill and died.

Ma practiced light skills and enjoyed travelling the rooftops. Outside of his home there was a horizontal iron bar. Whether coming or going he would leap up off the top of the iron bar, coming and going freely. One day, he got careless. He leaped up but the height was not enough. Then his leg caught on the top of the iron bar and he fell down hard. It was untreatable and he died of it. Ma Weiqi, all his life, did not have disciples; therefore we don't have a transmission of his art.

Anecdotes about Mr. Shi Jitong

Mr. Shi Jitong (1835 – 1908), was from Xiaozhai Village, Ji County, Hebei. After Yin Fu asked Dong Haichuan to teach him Baguazhang, Shi Liu, on the recommendation of Mr. Yin, also asked Dong Haichuan to teach him Baguazhang. He was diligent and hard-working.

At that time, the Temple of Heaven was a restricted area. So early in the morning, Shi would jump over the walls to practice martial arts there. After a long time of doing this, his skills became very good. Some years past and someone asked him, “Where do you practice?” He was seeking instruction. But this person only wanted to talk, not practice. He was very full of himself. Not only did Shi not give him directions, but he asked him to leave.

One time, a guest came to visit. He asked to come before people were practicing. After the visitor had finished practicing, he said, “You go back! Your skills are no good.” The guest replied, “Teacher, I have come to seek instruction. What you taught me must not be any good!” Mr. Shi said, “You if don’t accept, we shall compare. With my hands behind my back, I will use my feet to fan your ears. Three feet using the inner fan will come at you and I will count that as a win. Three feet using the outer fan will come at you. I count it as a loss for you. Come!” The guest had only just stepped forward when Mr. Shi, with his hands behind his back, dodged left with one foot and dodged right with the other foot and fanned both of his opponent’s ears. The guest expressed his thanks and left.

Wang Fuquan was Mr. Shi’s disciple. One day Wang came to Mr. Shi’s business looking for his teacher. Wang was wearing a completely clean suit of purple cotton print cloth. He was wearing a pair of fancy shoes and knickerbockers. He saw his teacher and said, “Hello Teacher!” Mr. Shi saw how he was dressed and was not pleased. He said, “Have you been practicing?” Wang replied, “I have.” In fact, Wang Fuquan’s skills were really not bad. Mr. Shi said, “Let’s go to the courtyard and you can show me.” The two men went to the courtyard and Wang began practicing the turning palms. Shi was displeased and decided to punish him. He waited for Wang to stretch out his hand to do a technique. Shi pushed his wrist and used his leg to pick up Wang’s leg. His other hand grabbed his foot and twisted throwing Wang to the ground. Shi went into the house, vanishing like smoke. Wang got up and saw that he only had one shoe on. He looked around for it but could not find it. Then he went to the house, got down on his knees and said, “Please Teacher, give me back my shoe!” Shi tossed the shoe onto the ground and said, “You are disgusting! Look at how you are dressed! Do you think your skill is reflected by your clothes? You look like an idiot!” Wang played the yes-man and left.

When Mr. Shi was 80 years old, his family persuaded him to return to his hometown. Just before leaving, he arrived at the west gate of the station to find a large crowd there to see him off. At that moment he was very pleased. On the railway platform he performed connected strikes and many flying kicks. Then he said, “I am an old man. I am on the point of dying.” All of the people who had gathered around to watch said, “This old man is over 80 years old. His legs and feet still look great! This is really good skill!”

Not long after Mr. Shi returned home, he became ill and died.

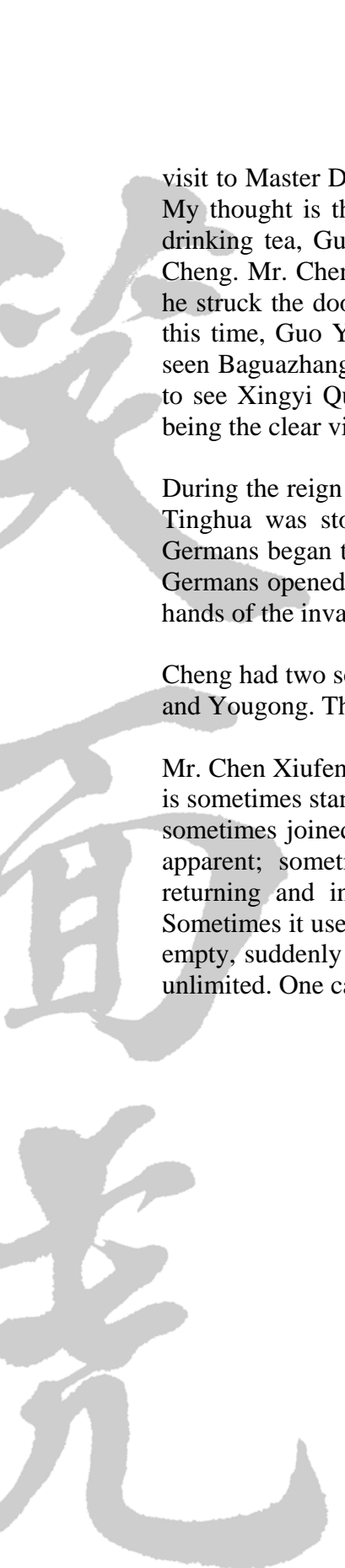
Anecdotes about Mr. Cheng Tinghua

Mr. Cheng Tinghua (1848-1900) was from Cheng Family Village, Shen County, Hebei. After he asked Dong Haichuan to teach him Baguazhang, his skills became tremendous. Later, “Eyeglasses Cheng” was famous as a teacher throughout the Beijing. Also because of this, a lot of people were jealous of him.

One evening Mr. Cheng was on his way home. He heard the sound of fast footsteps coming up behind him. He turned his head to see who it was and saw a man already close to him. In the man’s hand was a bright kan dao [chopping saber] and it was coming down to chop Mr. Cheng’s head. Mr. Cheng contracted his body causing the saber to miss him. He took the saber away from the man and kicked him to the ground. He tossed the saber aside and said, “Friend, go home and practice some more. When you get better, you can come back and try me again.” After he said that, he turned around and finished walking home.

One time, there was a man from Shandong named Li Yongkui. He carried a bedding roll on his back. Inside the bedding roll, he kept a saber. He approached the inside compound and when he got to the door asked, “Where is ‘Eyeglasses Cheng’?” Mr. Cheng saw him there and said, “May I ask your name?” He answered, “My name is Li.” Mr. Cheng also asked, “Where are you from?” He answered, “Shandong. I have come here especially to visit ‘Eyeglasses Cheng’.” Mr. Cheng said, “He is gone, but I am his younger brother.” Li asked, “When will ‘Eyeglasses Cheng’ return?” Cheng answered, “I don’t know.” He ordered a young student to brew tea. Cheng also asked, “Have you eaten?” He answered, “I haven’t eaten anything.” Cheng asked, “Would you like to eat?” He then sent the young student out to buy food. Li said, “I eat five pounds of large flatbreads and 200 dumplings.” When the food arrived Li ate all of the bread and dumplings. Cheng asked, “Have you eaten your fill?” He replied, “It will do.” Li waited impatiently and went outside the door. Cheng ordered the young student to see what Li was doing. The young student went to the door and looked out. He saw Li using his hands to pound on the two stone lions sitting atop the stone hitching posts. He then went back in to report. Cheng thought, he has come all the way from Shandong. It won’t be easy for him to return. Li entered the house to drink some water. Cheng said, “My brother does not have any fixed time to be returning home. I practice some. We can go into the inner courtyard and practice.” Li said, “Good!” and the two men went into the inner courtyard. Cheng used his palm to strike Li on the hip and knocked him down. When Li got up, he attacked Cheng with ‘Hungry Tiger Pounces on Food’. Cheng evaded this and struck Li with his palm again, knocking him down. Li scrambled to get up and said, “You are not Master Cheng’s little brother. You clearly are ‘Eyeglasses’ Cheng!” He got down on his knees and said, “Master, your reputation is well-deserved. Please accept me as your student!” ‘Eyeglasses’ Cheng thereupon taught him to practice the palms. After he had practiced for many months, Cheng Tinghua came to him and said, “I teach, you practice and that’s all right. However, I can’t abide your eating habits. It is time for you to return home!” Li laughed at this and then asked permission to return to his family.

Mr. Guo Yunshen had heard of Dong Haichuan’s fame in Beijing. One time he arrived in Beijing, he went to visit Cheng Tinghua because they were from the same village and they were acquainted with each other. Cheng saw Guo coming. He quickly made some tea and asked, “Are you here in the capitol on business?” Guo answered, “Not business, I thought that I might pay a



visit to Master Dong Haichuan.” As he was making tea, Mr. Cheng said, “You are very famous. My thought is that you shouldn’t see him. If you lose, what then?” While the two men were drinking tea, Guo said, “You see this beng quan!” As he said that, his fist shot out to strike Cheng. Mr. Cheng moved aside to evade the strike and Guo’s fist struck the door frame. When he struck the door frame, he knocked a chunk of it off. Both of the men laughed at this. About this time, Guo Yunshen’s half-step beng quan was famous everywhere. Because he had never seen Baguazhang’s strong points, in his mind he was unconvinced. And Dong Haichuan wanted to see Xingyi Quan’s merits. It is said, the two parties fought for a long time without anyone being the clear victor. They admired each other and became intimate friends.

During the reign of Emperor Guangxu, the Eight Nations Allied Armies invaded Beijing. Cheng Tinghua was stopped at a German army checkpoint. Cheng would not allow it. When the Germans began to seize him, Cheng struck out and knocked down 10 of them. At that point the Germans opened fire on him with their rifles. It is too bad that a generation of heroes died at the hands of the invaders.

Cheng had two sons and one nephew who received the transmission of the art: Youlong, Youxin, and Yougong. They each were able to carry on Cheng Tinghua’s profession.

Mr. Chen Xiufeng also said, “Mr. Cheng Tinghua’s Youshen Baguazhang, when it is being used, is sometimes standing, sometimes walking; sometimes open, sometimes closed; sometimes apart, sometimes joined, sometimes striking, sometimes casting off, sometimes concealed, sometimes apparent; sometimes suddenly close and then over three feet away; sometimes suddenly returning and instantly looking toward the front. Sometimes it uses whole body strength. Sometimes it uses a hand or perhaps two fingers. Sometimes it uses only a finger joint. Suddenly empty, suddenly solid; suddenly hard, suddenly soft; it has no fixed posture and its changes are unlimited. One can say that it is truly marvelous!”