

Zhou Xiang

Oral Accounts: Zhang Zhenzhi and Hou Jinlong

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Mr. Zhou Xiang was also known as Zhou Yuxiang. He was from Tianjin Wuqing Wafang Village. He was born in 1861, the first year of the reign of Emperor Tongzhi. He was a famous Baguazhang master. He was our grand teacher. Our teacher was called Xue Zhaoji. He was a student of Mr. Yuxiang. Mr. Yuxiang was originally a student of Baguazhang Grandmaster Cheng Tinghua. Around the time that the Eight Nations Allied Armies entered Beijing, Mr. Cheng was killed by the German forces near the Hade Gate. Then Mr. Yuxiang became a student of Liu Fengchun. Mr. Yuxiang was obsessed with the art. He practiced diligently and was an expert. He was braver and stronger than most men. Because his skills in Baguazhang were so deep, that Mr. Yuxiang had a special introduction in *The Register of Famous Martial Artists*. In Tianjin there was a famous Baguazhang master of the previous generation named Mr. Zhang Zhankui. At first, Mr. Yuxiang also studied with him. Mr. Zhang Zhankui had a job in Tianjin catching criminals. Every time he had a tough case he would ask Mr. Yuxiang to help him out. So one can see that Mr. Zhang Zhankui was completely confident in Mr. Yuxiang's martial skills

Extremely Skillful in Martial Arts

Mr. Yuxiang deeply got the true transmission of Baguazhang from Masters Cheng and Liu. He also received instruction in Xingyi Quan from the great master, Li Cunyi. He was also a very good friend with the great Taijiquan master, Li Ruidong. They would often have mutual exchanges. They learned each other's strong points to offset their weaknesses. In addition to his native great strength, his martial arts skills were very high, particularly his palm skills were deep and vast. Teacher Zhaoji often quoted Great Master Li Cunyi as saying, "Zhou Mazi's (Mr. Yuxiang's nickname) palm skills are not less than Cuihua Liu's" (That is Liu Fengchun's nickname.) Mr. Li Ziyang often spoke to us in regard to this evaluation. Still more Mr. Li Ziyang often related to us that because of Mr. Yuxiang's great palm skills, each time Mr. Yuxiang and Mr. Zhang Zhankui had their mutual exchanges, Mr. Zhang Zhankui did not dare to join hands. He had to resort to using evasion to respond to him. It was that difficult to get the upper hand. Teacher Zhaoji said, "Mr. Yuxiang talked about how meeting others throughout his life, very few impressed him. He only admired and respected Guo Yunshen, Cheng Tinghua, Li Cunyi, Liu Fengchun, Sun Lutang as great masters and none others." In addition, he also had positive feelings for the skills of Li Ruidong and Shang Yunsheng. With other people, he

often acted as if they were beneath his notice. In those days, Mr. Yuxiang would cross hands with practitioners of all the famous styles. In *The Register of Famous Martial Artists*, it says that Mr. Yuxiang in his younger years won fights in famous palaces, one after another defeated two top teachers of the sixth son and ninth son of the prince.

Mr Li Ziyang spoke about time when Mr. Yuxiang and Xingyi Quan master, Mr. Ma Yaonan, got together. Mr. Ma Yaonan was a student of the great Xingyi Quan master Mr. Guo Yunshen. His skills, for the most part, came from Master Guo. His Xingyi Quan skills were very deep. During the early years of the Republic he came to Tianjin and often competed with people from other styles. He rarely had an equal. Mr. Liu Yunji (a student of Li Cunyi) praised Mr. Ma Yaonan's high skill in front of Mr. Yuxiang. In fact he was thinking of urging Mr. Yuxiang and Mr. Ma Yaonan to have a competition. At last, the two men met at the Wu Shi Hui. Both men were eager to get to work. Therefore it was not long before they started sparring. They fought about ten bouts, but neither could beat the other. Mr. Li Cunyi urged them to take a break. Mr. Li Cunyi said, "You two performed like Zhang Fei fighting Ma Chao!" This was his way of saying that both men had great skills.

Mr. Zhang Jinhe told us how Mr. Yuxiang's art was equal to the great Ziran master, Du Xinwu. In 1925, Mr. Yuxiang and his classmate Han Muxia went to Beijing to take care of some business and get together with their old friends, Mr. Heng Shoushan and Mr. Zhao Xinzhou. Mr. Heng Shoushan gave a banquet at "The Clay Pot House". Mr. Zhao Xinzhou's friend, Mr. Du Xinwu, also came. During the feast, Mr. Zhao Xinzhou praised Mr. Du Xinwu's Ziran skills rather highly. When Mr. Du Xinwu introduced the Ziran skills and he talked a bit about the wonderful skills of his teacher Mr. Xu. Mr. Yuxiang, was never lightly convinced by what people said. Therefore he rose up and requested that he and Mr. Du Xinwu learn from each other by comparing skills in martial arts. Mr. Heng Shoushan immediately suggested that they use chopsticks to compare skills, to stop being touched by the point. Mr. Yuxiang and Mr. Du Xinwu faced each other across a table. Almost simultaneously they started to move. Both men's body methods were extremely fast. After about ten exchanges each returned to their original places. Mr. Du Xinwu saluted to show his respect. Everyone could see that Mr. Du Xinwu's chopstick was in Mr. Yuxiang's hand. Many people invariably highly praised Mr. Yuxiang's body method as being extremely fast and his hand method as being ingenious. But Mr Zhang Jinhe said, "In fact, Mr. Du Xinwu's martial skills were extremely good. And when he compared styles with people, he rarely lost."

One time Mr. Yuxiang was in his hometown. And Taiji master Mr. Li Ruidong was hanging out with him. Mr. Hao Ming told us about how at this time Mr. Yuxiang did his best to destroy the Tongbei master, Mr. Zhang Ce. Mr. Zhang Ce was called the "Arm Saint". He was skilled in both Taiji and Tongbei, and well as with the saber. During the Republic era, there was one year that Mr. Zhang Ce returned to the village. He heard that Mr. Yuxiang was with his family and asked if he could come visit. At that time it happened that Mr. Hao Ming's teacher Mr. Li Zilian was also staying at Mr. Yuxiang's place. Because Mr. Li Zilian mentioned that Mr. Zhang Ce, in his early years, once crossed hands with Mr. Xiang Runtian and was defeated. This was done to provoke Mr.

Zhang Ce, and he was not happy about it. He suggested that he cross hands with Mr. Li Zilian. Because Mr. Li and Mr. Zhang are both guests, Mr. Yuxiang at once encouraged them together. Mr. Yuxiang was not good with words, and his urging didn't have the result he wanted. Instead it causes Mr. Zhang Ce vent his anger on Mr. Yuxiang. Mr. Yuxiang had no alternative; thereupon he crossed hands with Mr. Zhang Ce. In the first bout, Mr. Yuxiang issued into Mr. Zhang Ce. Mr. Zhang Ce ended up with his head buried in the courtyard's haystack.

Mr. Zhang Ce got up and immediately left.

The Hero Battles Bandits

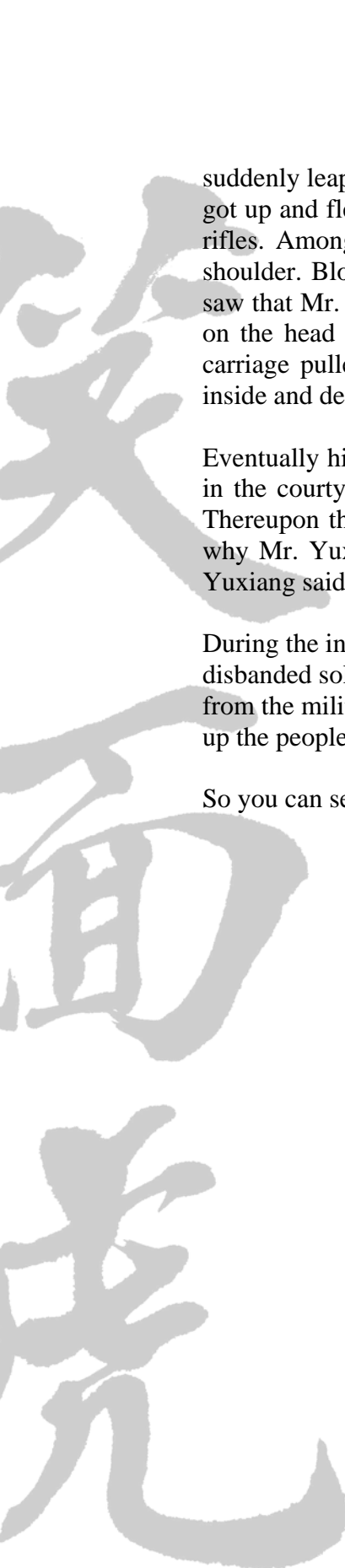
At the beginning of the Republic there was tangled warfare among the Warlords. Tianjin and Northern China were places of strategic importance. Many changes were happening. Stragglers and disbanded soldiers became bandits. The bodyguards in Tianjin were concerned about the bandits.

One time in Tianjin, they were guarding a nobleman's family home at night to protect it against thieves. The nobleman's family home was not far from the inside of the north gate. A mixture of people would come and go through the gate. The road was clear and it was convenient for bandits to flee this way. After a case was reported to the authorities, Mr. Yuxiang took over this case. Mr. Yuxiang and other comrades seeking business analyzed the details of the case. They firmly believed that the bandits would return in the near future and that they could take advantage of that. Thereupon they planned to capture the bandits.

He took advantage of the fact there would soon be a celebration of the 55th birthday of nobleman's uncle. Therefore the idea was to make a big deal of the event. He would be disguised as a family member bringing gifts. Mr. Yuxiang then dressed up as accomplished servant went to nobleman's family home.

Not far from the nobleman's family home was the Liu Family Inn. Because Liu Jitai (Mr. Old Two) was also there seeking to do business, they decided that the others would then in turn hide at the Liu Family Inn. They agreed that when they heard Mr. Yuxiang blow a whistle, then everybody would quickly come to assist him.

Three days later, before dawn, some men called outside the gate of the nobleman's family home. Mr. Yuxiang was hidden and not moving. Not far away, a man leaped up onto the wall and jumped down to open the gate. Four men came inside. They all had rifles. They ran straight to the front of the main hall. Mr. Yuxiang suddenly appeared from behind them and gave a great shout. He struck at them suddenly with a python whip. In the blink of an eye the lash fell on two men. At this time there was a man on top of the roof with a mauser pistol who started to shoot down at him. Mr. Yuxiang narrowly escaped the bullets. He immediately flipped and rolled. Following this he lifted the whip again and lashed and flipped one of the men. Simultaneously, he quickly advanced and struck the man down with his palm. He then leaped to the space below the edge of the roof. He



suddenly leaped up onto the roof and applied his whip. The men were frightened and they got up and fled. He turned around, stretched out his hands and continuously struck at the rifles. Among them one rifle rubbed through the skin and flesh of Mr. Yuxiang's left shoulder. Blood flowed straight away. When the men jumped down from the roof, they saw that Mr. Yuxiang was already standing in front of them. He struck one man straight on the head and he fell down unconscious. At this time, outside the gate there was a carriage pulled by two bandits ready to come to their aid. They heard the commotion inside and decided to flee instead.

Eventually his colleagues hidden at the Liu Family Inn arrived. They saw five men lying in the courtyard, four rifles and the Mauser pistol all gathered by Mr. Yuxiang's side. Thereupon they put the bandits under guard and closed the case. When everyone asked why Mr. Yuxiang didn't blow the whistle during the fierce fight with the bandits, Mr. Yuxiang said, "The situation was urgent. I completely forgot to blow the whistle."

During the interrogation afterwards, they realized that this group of bandits all were disbanded soldiers from the Northeastern Army. Since these bandits really had come from the military, to avoid military retaliation in the days to come, they decided to lock up the people and the affair was never made public.

So you can see Mr. Yuxiang had quite a bit of martial bravery.