

The Southern Shaolin Temple Revealed!



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American Students Visit Fukien Temple

By David Theroff

In June and July 2000, Shao Lin Grandmaster Sin Kwang The' led a group of 85 American Shao Lin students to China. These students were from various Chinese Shao Lin Centers (Shao Lin Kung Fu schools found in the USA under the direction of Senior Master David & Sharon Soard of Denver, Colorado).

Two of the main purposes of this trip were to visit the Shao Lin Temple in the Fukien province of China, the root of our Shao Lin system (known today as Shao Lin Del as well as exhibit some Shao Lin material in "cultural exchanges" of martial arts with other martial artists. This trip was a chance for Grandmaster The' and his students to get back to the roots of Shao Lin Kung Fu.

The last Grandmaster of the Fukien Shao Lin Temple was Grandmaster Su Kong Tai (Djin). He had a rare

disorder that caused hair to grow all over his body. His parents, fearing their son was a demon, abandoned him in the woods near the Temple; Shao Lin monks took him in and raised him, where he eventually became the Grandmaster of the Shao Lin Temple.

Around 1927, just after the Chinese government had destroyed the Shao Lin Temple near Songshan Mountain, Grandmaster Su and the monks decided to burn down the Fukien Shao Lin temple themselves and flee to avoid being destroyed by the government. They fled to the nearby mountains where eventually Grandmaster Su awarded the Grandmaster title to Le Chang Ming (who had been a resident of the Fukien Shao Lin Temple). Grandmaster Le moved to

Indonesia where he passed the Grandmaster title on to Sin Kwang The'.

For many years historians have argued about the existence of the Shao Lin Temple in the Fukien province of China. Today, there are actually two Shao Lin Temples in the Fukien province of China: there are the remains of the ancient one in the downtown area and the new temple up on Putian Mountain.

Although the history of the buildings may always remain a mystery fit for debate, there is no doubting the amount of

Shao Lin material Grandmaster The' has inherited and taught for many years to over 50 school locations in the USA.

Pilgrimage to China

In 1992 Grandmaster The' led his first group of American Shao Lin students to China. It was also then that we set a record for the largest Western group to ever visit the Songshan Temple. During our cultural exchange of martial arts with the Shao Lin Temple monks, almost all of which were under the age of 17, the monks displayed material that was Wu Shu based. We did not see any evidence that traditional Shao Lin was being taught there. In June 1992 the senior monks of the Songshan Shao Lin Temple erected a stone tablet in honor of Grandmaster The' and Senior Masters David and Sharon Soard (who co-led the China trips with Grandmaster The') at the famed Shao Lin tablet forest.

The first part of our June 2000 trip led us to Tibet. It was in Tibet that our group set a record for the largest Western group to visit there. City officials met us along with the local media where the Tibet Travel Service and City Officials presented a banner of welcome to us. From Tibet we traveled to the famed Hua Shan Mountain. This was a high point for many of us because this mountain had been sheltered for many years due to the difficulty of getting to the area. The climb, aided by footholds carved in the rock along with rusty chains for holding on to, was not for the typical tourist.

We knew beforehand that the climb was not going to be easy, and there were quite a few in our group who had learned the first four roads of



Demonstration of a USA Shao Lin Master - Master Brian Davis performs Suo Cha fist.



"Award presented to Eagle Claw Master Li li Hong" From left to right: Grandmaster Sin Kwang The, Senior Master Sharon Soard, & Master Li li Hong

Hua Fist, challenging martial arts material to say the least. Our local guides kept telling us that it would take us two full days to climb from the bottom of Hua Shan to the top, and that they had climbed Hua Shan many times. They were used to the typical tourist, however, not a group of Shao-lin martial artists! Some in our group climbed from the bottom to the top of Hua Shan in less than 2 hours!

The next point in our trip was to take us to Shaoyang, where we were to be hosted by one of China's top masters, Eagle Claw Master Li li Hong. (Master Li has been a friend of our schools for many years and has traveled during our other China trips with us). The bus ride to Master Li's school took over nine hours one way over roads that were obviously not designed for bus travel. Once we arrived, the entire city came out to meet us as several thousand cheering people lined the streets. Here we held another cultural exchange of martial arts. This was the largest and warmest welcome we have ever received in China! Many new friends were made that day.

Southern Shao-Lin Temple

Most of us had no idea what to expect upon arriving at the Shao-lin Temple in the Fukien province. When we arrived in Putian, the ruins of the original southern Shao-lin Temple were the first thing to see. It became very clear that not many foreigners had been to this spot, as even the local guides could not seem to find the Temple. We walked blocks out of our way to find it nestled in the middle of a huge construction zone where new buildings were going up everywhere. It was very small and only one building remained. It had been rebuilt to commemorate the original site of the Southern Shao-lin Temple. The Chinese government built a new Shao-lin Temple up on Putian Mountain and that was our next stop.

The drive up the mountain was beautiful and very picturesque. When we arrived there were quite a few people out front at the main door of the temple hitting gongs and clapping for our arrival. It became obvious to us that the foreigners had not discovered this site yet as there were only a couple of street vendors out front, and for the most part we were the only visitors. (This was a major difference compared to our visits to the Songshan Shao-lin Temple, which reminded me more of a 7-Eleven store than a temple of martial arts).



Left: "Eagle soaring" One of Eagle Claw Master Li li Hong's student performs a Wushu routine

Below: "Largest Group in Tibet" Grandmaster The' and his group of USA Shao-lin students hold banner presented by city officials of Tibet



The first thing on the agenda was a tablet dedication ceremony. The Shao-lin Temple monks were dedicating a tablet in honor of Grandmaster The' and the Shao-lin Do System. The tablet described the last three Shao-lin Grandmasters, two of which were residents of the Southern Shao-lin Temple before it was last destroyed: Grandmaster Su Kong Tai Djin (the last Grandmaster of the southern Shao-lin Temple), Grandmaster Le Chang Ming, and Grandmaster Sin Kwang The'. This was the only tablet at this Shao-lin Temple!

Afterward we went to the nearby training center and had a cultural exchange with the young monks of the Shao-lin Temple. While traveling in China doing cultural martial arts exchanges we had come to expect our counterparts to be children under 17 years of age performing almost the exact same Wu Shu routines that everyone does, as well as only a handful of forms. We were all surprised and very pleased when two elderly men got up to perform traditional martial arts forms, and we gave them both a standing ovation for their excellent performance!

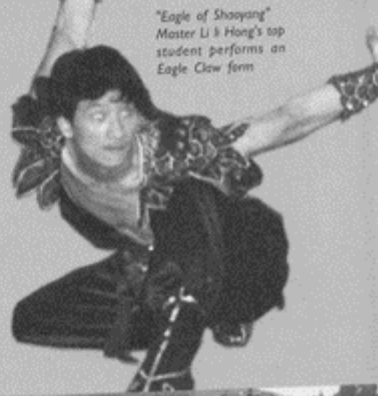
When one visits these original temples, it serves as a reminder of the rich history of the ancient martial arts. We may also find, in the martial arts, that we sometimes look so hard for things only to find what we're searching for right here in our own backyard of the USA. 🌸

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Below: "A Southern Shao-lin Temple Greeting Party" Monks of the Putian Shao-lin Temple, Fukien Province, China



"The Tablet of Honor"
From left to right: Master John Theroff, Sensei Master David Soth, Master Matt, Sharon Soth, Grandmaster Sin Kwang The', Master Brian Brown, Master David Theroff and Master Karl Glaser



"Eagle of Shaoyang"
Master Li & Hong's top student performs an Eagle Claw form

