Traditional Shaolin culture: Shaolin Large Flood Boxing (Dàhóngquán 大洪拳)

words: Le Fujun and Shi Xing Mi (Walter Gjergja)
images: Shi Xing Mi (Walter Gjergja) photographed by Letitia Huston

Among the various Shaolin boxing sets practiced today which have a clear traditional background, Shaolin Large Flood Boxing (herein referred to as Dahongquan) is certainly one of the most famous, practiced in most Shaolin schools as a fundamental advanced element of Shaolin Wugong.

Despite being relatively well known as a boxing set, Dahongquan remains however a very complex element of Shaolin culture, requiring in depth study for prolonged periods of time to truly appreciate its cultural, historical, martial and physical characteristics.

Firstly Dahongquan is in fact the name of several boxing sets: for this reason it is often difficult to clearly distinguish the backgrounds on the different sets. Moreover, these sets are also referred to by several different variations of the name, adding to the confusion of what constitutes the Dahongquan sets.

In Shaolin Small Flood Boxing (Xiánhóngquán 小洪拳) there are a pair of matching boxing sets, commonly referred to as the Small and Large Flood Boxing sets from the late Yuan / early Ming Dynasties, usually attributed to Master Li Sou (Lǐ Sōu 李叟). In this case the two sets are of the same style, where Xiaohongquan is the "road one" (yīlù 一路), or first routine, and Dahongquan is the matching "road two" (èrlù 二路), or second routine. This Dahongquan is simply an elaboration on the first Xiaohongquan set and visually very similar, unrelated to the Dahongquan sets discussed in this article.

The boxing set most commonly referred to as Dahongquan is (even visually) largely unrelated to the boxing sets of Li Sou; it does not have one single creator and has in fact an interesting and very unique story, part legend part history.

Song Dynasty

The founder of the Song Dynasty (宋朝 宋朝, 960-1279) Emperor Zhao Kuangyin (Zhào Kuāngyīn 赵匡胤, 927-976) was a martial artist from childhood. In his travels as a young man, prior to his military enrollment and rise to power, he came across an old
man in Shanxi Province (Shānxīshěng 山西省) and was defeated by his "Soft Boxing" (Róuquán 柔拳).

Thereupon, Zhao Kuangyin followed the man until, to his surprise, he finally stopped at the Shaolin Monastery (Shàolínshì 少林寺). There he requested to be taught the main concepts of Soft Boxing. He apparently stayed in the monastery for only a short period, but in this time he absorbed the key concepts of Soft Boxing and in return passed on some of his own boxing sets. His sets were called Flood Boxing (Hóngquán 洪拳) and later became known as Old Flood Boxing (Lǎohóngquán 老洪拳) to differentiate them from the later developed Flood Boxing sets of Li Sou.

Qing Dynasty

Zhao Kuangyin had another second stay at the Shaolin Monastery later in life and supported the Temple monastic order throughout his reign as emperor. Before his death he donated to the Monastery's Masters his journals containing notes he kept from all his martial arts study and military experience, including principles of his (Old) Flood Boxing style.

During the Qing Dynasty (Qīngcháo 清朝, 1644-1911) the Shaolin Monastery Masters compiled an enormous boxing set, or sequence of sets, based on the notes donated by Emperor Zhao Kuangyin. Altogether it consisted of six roads, of which the first three are taught openly today, the first being the most commonly known and widely practiced.

The entire boxing set, or sequence of sets, was named Dahongquann (Large Flood Boxing) as it was an amalgamation of an extensive array of techniques and principles which drew mainly from Zhao Kuangyin's style, Lao Hong Quan (Old Flood Boxing).

Dahongquann today

Today the six roads of Dahongquann have expanded to over ten, due to additions and modifications from secular Masters, however the original six roads remain the core of Dahongquann, with the first three taught openly and the first one representing its fundamental boxing set most commonly associated with the name Dahongquann.

The different segments of the complete set introduce, or expand on, particular concept relating always to the five elements of Shaolin boxing sets practice: calming the spirit, focusing the mind, using the energy, training the body, martial application.
With the division into six separate roads with ending postures, each can then be picked out and trained individually. To practice the entire set in one go would be quite exhausting, as each single road is longer than the average Shaolin boxing set. Furthermore each Dahongquan boxing set offers such vast study and training material to require years of dedicated practice to be truly understood and mastered.

The following is the mnemonic (gējué 歌诀) outline of the first road of Shaolin Dahongquan.

**Shàolín Dàhòngquán (yīlù) 少林大洪拳 (一路) Shaolin Large Flood Boxing (road one)**

(5 sections, 40 postures)

**第一段 diiyī duàn - first section**

1. white cloud covering peak (báiyún gàidīng - 白云盖顶)
2. arrow step with a single fork (jiànbiù dāncā - 箭步单叉)
3. raise up leveling the elbow (qǐshēn pánzhǒu - 起身盘肘)
4. double clouds over the peak, double stomping feet (shuāng yúndīng, shuāng hènjiǎo - 双云顶，双恨脚)
5. large seven-star (dà qīxīng - 大七星)
6. bow step with a single whip (gōngbù dānbiān - 弓步单鞭)
7. holding the moon in the arms (huáizhōng bàoyuè - 怀中抱月)

**第二段 dièr duàn - second section**

8. three charging cannons, large shrinking body (sān chōngpào, dà suōshēn - 三冲炮，大缩身)
9. three smashing fists, double snapping hands (sān záquán, shuāng juèshǒu - 三砸拳，双撅手)
10. double clouds over the peak, double stomping feet (shuāng yúndīng, shuāng hènjiǎo - 双云顶，双恨脚)
11. large seven-star (dà qīxīng - 大七星)
12. bow step with a single whip (gōngbù dānbiān - 弓步单鞭)
13. empty step holding the moon in the arms (xūbù huáizhōng bàoyuè - 虚步怀中抱月)
14. advance step drawing hand (shàngbù bānshǒu - 上步扳手)
15. turning back with three spear hands, turning the head toward the full moon (huishēn sān qiāngshǒu, huítōu wàngyuè - 回身三枪手，回头望月)

**第三段 dì sānduàn - third section**
16. hand-held cannon (tishǒupào - 提手炮)
17. three raking hands (sān bāshǒu - 三扒手)
18. double stomping feet (shuāng hènjīāo - 双恨脚)
19. large tiger holding the head (dàhǔ bāotóu - 大虎抱头)
20. hand-held cannon (tishǒupào - 提手炮)
21. arrow step with a single fork (jiàn bù dānchā - 箭步单叉)
22. raise up leveling the elbow (qǐshēn pánzhōu - 起身盘肘)
23. sand in the face (yíngmiàn shā - 迎面沙)
24. double snapping hands (shuāng juēshǒu - 双撅手)
25. left-right leveling elbow (zuòyòu pánzhōu - 左右盘肘)

第四段 disi duàn - fourth section

26. hand-held cannon (tishǒupào - 提手炮)
27. spear hand slap kick, vajra pounding pestle (qiāngshǒu cǎijīāo, jīngāng dàoduǐ - 枪手踩脚，金刚捣碓)
28. hand-held cannon (tishǒupào - 提手炮)
29. ancient tree's coiled roots (gǔshù pán'gēn - 古树盘根)
30. three shaking hands (sān yáoshǒu - 三摇手)
31. sparrow turning over (yàozi fānshēn - 鸦子翻身)
32. ramming the earth with a hammer (hàngdǐchuí - 夯地锤)
33. right bow step with three spear hands (yòu gōngbù sān qiāngshǒu - 右弓步三抢手)

第五段 diwǔ duàn - fifth section

34. sparrow threading through the woods (yàozi zuānlín - 鸦子钻林)
35. raise up pointing the elbow (qǐshēn dīngzhōu - 起身顶肘)
36. snap kick, outward swinging lotus, double snapping hands (tántuǐ, wàibǎilián, shuāng juēshǒu - 弹腿，外摆莲，双撅手)
37. cloud over the peak, large tiger holding the head (yúndǐng dàhǔ bāotóu - 云顶大虎抱头)
38. hand-held cannon (tishǒupào - 提手炮)
39. arrow step with a single fork (jiàn bù dānchā - 箭步单叉)
40. double rising slap kick, five flowers sitting on the mountain (èrqī cǎijīāo, wūhuā zuòshān - 二起踩脚，五花坐山)

Shi Xing Mi (Walter Gjergja), born in Italy in 1972, studies Kung Fu WuShu since age 13 and Chan philosophy since age 18. Disciple of Grand Master Shi De Yang, with
traditional ceremony in the Shaolin Temple has been nominated secular monk of the 32nd generation, monastic name Shi Xing Mi. He has spent many study stays in Shaolin and has been the protagonist of numerous articles, books and documentaries on Shaolin culture.

Shi Xing Mi is the founder and head master of a leading Shaolin school in Italy, Shaolin Wuseng Houbeidui, and conducts Shaolin culture seminars and demonstrations throughout Europe.

For more information: www.shaolinwuseng.com

-----------------------------

Le Fujun, born in the USA in 1985, is a young Shaolin instructor, historian and author, fluent in Mandarin, who has conducted extensive research in conjunction with his personal study and practice of traditional Shaolin culture, under the guidance of Grand Master Shi De Yang, whom he follows as a direct student and visits frequently in China.

Le Fujun is the founder and director of Shaolin Chan City, in St. Louis Missouri, a school focused on the study of traditional Shaolin culture.

For more information: www.shaolinchancity.com

-----------------------------