

Rebuilding the North Shaolin Monastery



古塔魅影

2010 - 2020

by Gregory Brundage

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the spirits and memories of all those who have had the discipline and courage to fight for truth, justice and the greater good, as well as those who have toiled in the fields of inequity while living by and preserving the wisdom of those before us. This includes but is not limited to the good Shaolin monks, those of Wudangshan and millions of other people around the world – past and present. May their spirits be remembered in reverence and preserved as a light for humanity especially at times when all may seem lost.



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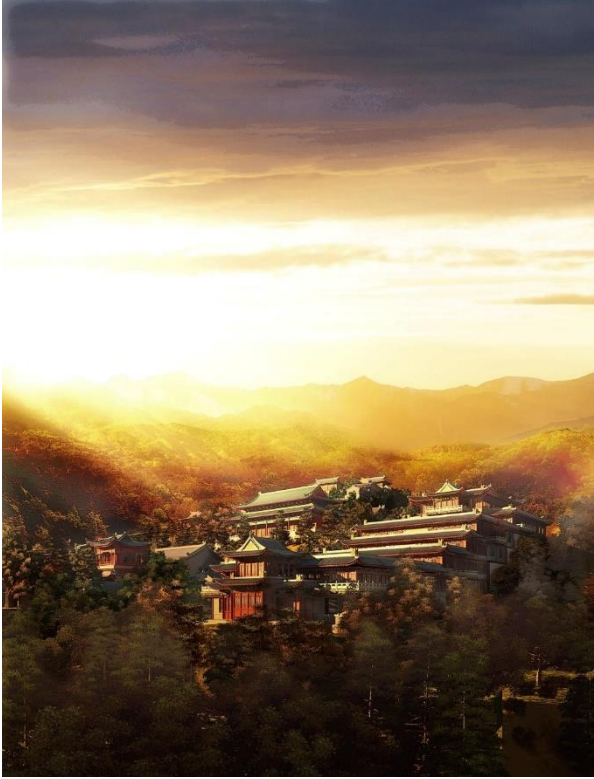
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Introduction to Rebuilding the North Shaolin Monastery Article Series

苦尽甘来

Kǔjìngānlái - Hardship finishes, sweetness begins (idiom)



Architect's design for North Shaolin Monastery (2009)

June 2020 - North Shaolin Monastery is northeast China's premier mountain retreat for those in search of the twin lures of enlightenment and transcendent martial arts. It was supported throughout history by the headquarter Songshan Shaolin and a long line of China's most notable Emperors before being destroyed in May 1942 during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression.



Work to restore the ancient monastery began in 2009 and is expected to be completed in about 2025. The reconstructed monastery will be considerably larger than the original while incorporating Tang and Song Dynasty architectural features and ecologically friendly energy systems.

This collection of articles was published in *Kung Fu Tai Chi Magazine* (USA) and chronicle regular visits by the author to the reconstruction site of the North Shaolin Monastery and surrounding mountain towns and villages over a 10-year period from 2010 to 2020. Much has changed since the first story was published in 2010.

North Shaolin Monastery was and is now again the major branch Shaolin Temple of the headquarter monastery on Song Mountain in Dengfeng city, Henan Province in central China.



North Shaolin Monastery, August 2013 Sutra Hall on the left, Great Buddha Hall on the right. The ancient white tower is center



October 28, 2019 – Meditation Hall (Cang Tang) left, Monk Domicile center, and Great Buddha Hall, right



September 2014 – Young lay disciples practicing Taolu

These articles explore the current conditions and distant histories of the North Shaolin Monastery as well as the local mountain people's folklore and other stories from the intersections of their personal and families' lives, the mountain and monastery. A few of the people interviewed in this series of articles have since passed away and what was published in these articles may be the only lasting record of their stories about the mountain and the monastery.

Background

The Ch'an (Zen) Buddhist North Shaolin Temple currently being reconstructed on Pan Mountain (Panshan) in Ji County (Jixian), 105 kilometers north of Tianjin and 95 kilometers east of Beijing is in the imperial heartland of China and thus exposed to much more direct, mostly foreign aggression than the headquarter Songshan Shaolin which is much further inland and closer to central China.



Located on Pan Mountain (Panshan) the North Shaolin Monastery has a strategic location in Jixian, and Jixian in China due to its location in a critical mountain pass from the sea inland and from North to South not far inland from the eastern coast. This unique strategic location gave it a role in history most people – even in China – don't know about.

The North Shaolin Monastery - originally called "Faxing Temple" was built in the Wei Jin Dynasty (220 - 317 AD). It is the oldest temple in the very large mostly rural Jixian area. According to the official Shaolin Temple history it became part of the Shaolin family under the auspices of Abbot Fuyu near the beginning of the Yuan Dynasty (1271 - 1368) in China.

Despite its long noble history, ask most people in China today where the “North Shaolin Temple” is and surprisingly they say “*Zai Songshan*,” (at Song Mountain) in Central China. In other words, even in China today most people don’t know the noble legacy of the North Shaolin Monastery as the large, ancient and very special east-coast branch of the famed headquarter Songshan Shaolin in Henan Province.

This suggests that events leading to and resulting from the destruction of the North Shaolin Temple in 1942 during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression erased even the memory of this noble temple from most Chinese people due to the chaos and destruction of that and subsequent wars. It wasn’t just North Shaolin that burned that Spring day of May in 1942. The entire mountain along with seventy-one other Buddhist temples was burned as well.

This isn’t to say or suggest that the North Shaolin monks went out in a blaze of glory fighting the Japanese at the temple as it didn’t happen exactly that way. Instead hearing the Japanese Imperial Forces were coming the monks on North Shaolin were ordered to abandon the ancient monastery in an attempt to save them and the monastery. Had the monks been locked within a closed fortification like a stone monastery they would have been easy targets for superior Japanese artillery. Songshan Shaolin had been burned down 14 years earlier during the Warlord Era in 1928. The elder monks did not want a repetition of that tragedy.

World War II was a much longer and more devastating war for Chinese than for Europe and the USA, as it started much earlier in 1937.





The North Shaolin monks left the monastery and consequently North Shaolin Kung Fu disseminated widely prior to the final destruction of the Temple especially in the Beijing/Tianjin/Pingu areas specifically and Hebei Province in general. Thus, a suicidal battle was avoided, and maximum use of their unique skills was used rather than obliterated along with the ancient monastery.

Reading the articles in this series one learns that Panshan was a major center of resistance against the Japanese army. Munitions were manufactured, militias were trained and there was even a bank hidden in caves with gold collected to fund the resistance movement. The headquarter Songshan Shaolin was not part of this war of resistance as it had been destroyed 14 years earlier, though it is widely believed some or many monks survived the final battle against the warlords and joined the resistance movement on Panshan and elsewhere in China.

Though North Shaolin Monastery was generally abandoned by the monks prior to the Japanese final assault on the mountain in an attempt to protect the monastery, it was none-the-less still used by the resistance as a defensive fortification and destroyed when the Japanese burned the entire mountain.

Following the destruction and looting of the North Shaolin Temple in subsequent years and decades few remains existed of the original temple except for the foundations of a few buildings, a few parts of the old walls and one battered 13-tiered ancient pagoda from the early-mid Qing Dynasty.



Part of the old wall at North Shaolin (February 28, 2010)

When I first saw the white tower (bái tǎ) pagoda in 2010 it was in serious need of repair with crumbling foundations, scores of bullet holes and foliage growing on the tiers and roof.



Dragon and bullet hole on the White Pagoda (January 22, 2012)

And yet, it stood defiant through time though forgotten in the lush forests of Panshan as a living testament of the struggle to overcome self along the path to enlightenment.



February 28, 2010

Now, as of 2020 the North Shaolin Monastery has been mostly rebuilt. Like the phoenix rising from the ashes, the reconstruction of the original noble monastery is nearly finished and thus begins a new era for the ancient and noble North Shaolin Monastery.



September 24, 2019 Reincarnated White Tower (bái tǎ)

The burning and destruction of North Shaolin Monastery and 71 other Buddhist temples on Panshan in Jixian County in May 1942 was not an isolated event.

Sino Japanese Wars 1894 - 1945

The first "Sino-Japanese War," fought in 1894 and 1895 was triggered by the Korean Donghak (Eastern Learning) academic movement leading to Korea asking China for help to liberate them from Japanese colonialism. Supported by Russia, Germany and France, Japan won and then invaded Liaodong Peninsula in China. Japanese forces prevailed and China was forced to sign the humiliating Treaty of Shimonoseki which gave China's Liaodong Peninsula and the island of Formosa (later named Taiwan) to Japan. Shortly thereafter principally Russia began implementing its own imperial designs in north China.

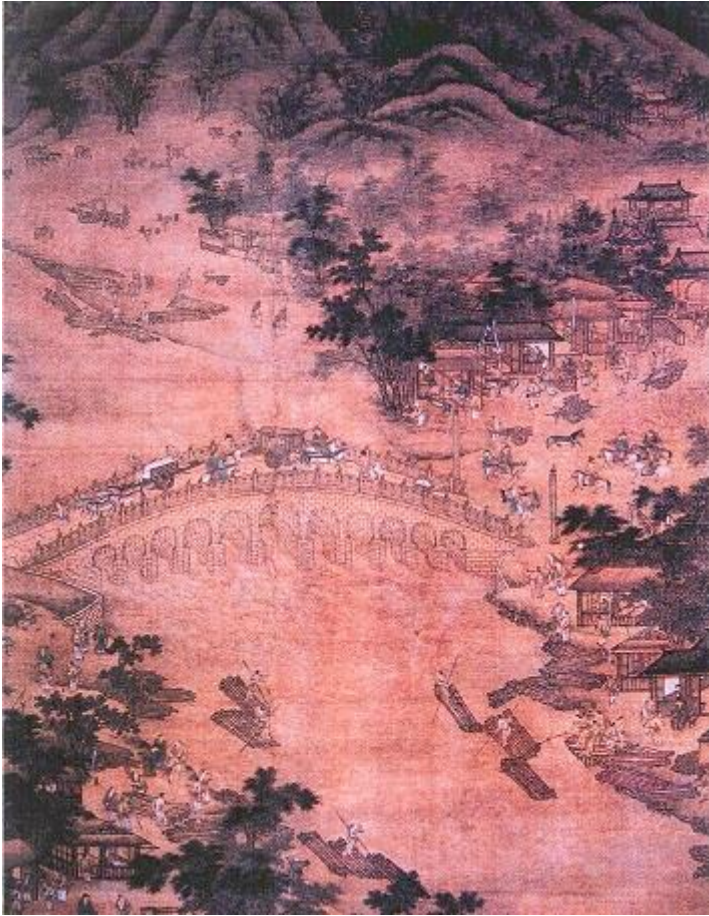
On September 18, 1931 the Japanese mounted a full-scale invasion of Manchuria (today's Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, and part of Inner Mongolia).



This rapid colonialization followed a staged provocation called the Mukden Incident.

Six months later the colonialization was sufficiently cemented that Japan formalized establishment of its colonial state calling it "Manchukuo."

The Second Sino-Japanese War starting July 7, 1937 was triggered by another staged provocation called the "Marco Polo Incident."



Lugou Bridge (Marco Polo Bridge), constructed from 1189 to 1192

This was followed by the Japanese blitzkrieg military conquests through Beijing and Tianjin and continuing south along the coast, eventually branching inwards towards central China.

In this second war Japan was supported by the Soviet Union and the United States.

It forced the beginning of China's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression which lasted until 1945. As many as 22 million people were killed in that war, however this may be an underestimate. (Clodfelter, *Michael Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Reference*, Vol. 2, p. 956) That number includes civilians who died due to famine and other environmental disasters caused by the war as well as the 'regular' Chinese army, however does not include casualties among Chinese militias or Chinese casualties in Manchuria or Burma. That number also does not include casualties via Japan's notorious biological and chemical warfare research and development programs falling under the auspices of the aggressors' infamous Unit 731.

The Chinese Civil War

Though the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression ended in 1945 within a week after the end of that war the United States turned its bombers and unified military around and began attacking their former allies in China in a new war against communism. Foreign efforts to colonize China were (and in some ways still are) relentless. The civil war between the American backed Nationalists against the indigenous communists led by Mao Tse Tung ended in 1945 with a staggering loss of Chinese lives. The defeated Nationalist army took and kept Formosa (now Taiwan) and permeated what is now called the Golden Triangle largely taking control of the opium smuggling industry.

The Secret Army: Chiang Kai-shek and the Drug Warlords of the Golden Triangle, by Richard M. Gibson with Wenhua Chen. Wiley, 2011

For a book review see:

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2012/04/22/books/book-reviews/chinese-national-army-and-the-golden-triangle/>

Others moved to the USA and elsewhere.

Within mainland China peace was restored, however the devastation following 99 years of war starting with the anti-Qing Dynasty revolutions (Taiping Rebellion 1850–1864), the Eight National Alliance of foreign occupations and the Opium Wars (attempting to stop the foreign directed flow of opium into China), the Warlord Era, the War Against Japanese Aggression and then finally the Civil War ending with the defeat of the Nationalists in 1949, left China impoverished and largely in ruins. Before those wars China was the richest country in the world.

By 1949 it was arguably the poorest country in the world.

Pilgrimage to the True North Shaolin Temple

Part I Rebirth

重生

Chóng shēng – Rebirth

September/October 2010

Originally published in the print edition of Kung Fu Tai Chi magazine

When you say: “North Shaolin Temple” even in China, people usually think of Henan’s Songshan Shaolin Temple. Henan however is really located in east central China.

The real “Northern Shaolin Temple” was and is located on Panshan (Pan Mountain) in Jixian (Ji County), 105 kilometers or so north of Tianjin and about 95 kilometers due east of Beijing, not far from the east coast of China.

Actually, there is no temple at this temple, having been destroyed during WWII and only the ancient 13 storied white tower pagoda (Bǎotǎ) remains, along with parts of some walls towering above the lovely landscape - in silent witness to 695 years of Chinese history.



August 21, 2012 Top of the White Tower (Bái tǎ)



Other remains of the noble North Shaolin Monastery



North Shaolin photo by Wei Min – c. 1993

People living in the nearby rustic villages believe the temple will be completed in two years, but that may be an optimistic estimation, as archeologists, historians, architects, and designers wrestle with the reconstruction plans. Finance has been an issue and construction halted several times due to the lack of it.

There's a dirt road now, going up to within hundred yards or so of the temple grounds. Construction has started in what appears may be a basement area, but it's only a beginning, a tiny dot in all the vast work that remains to rebuild the venerable monastery.

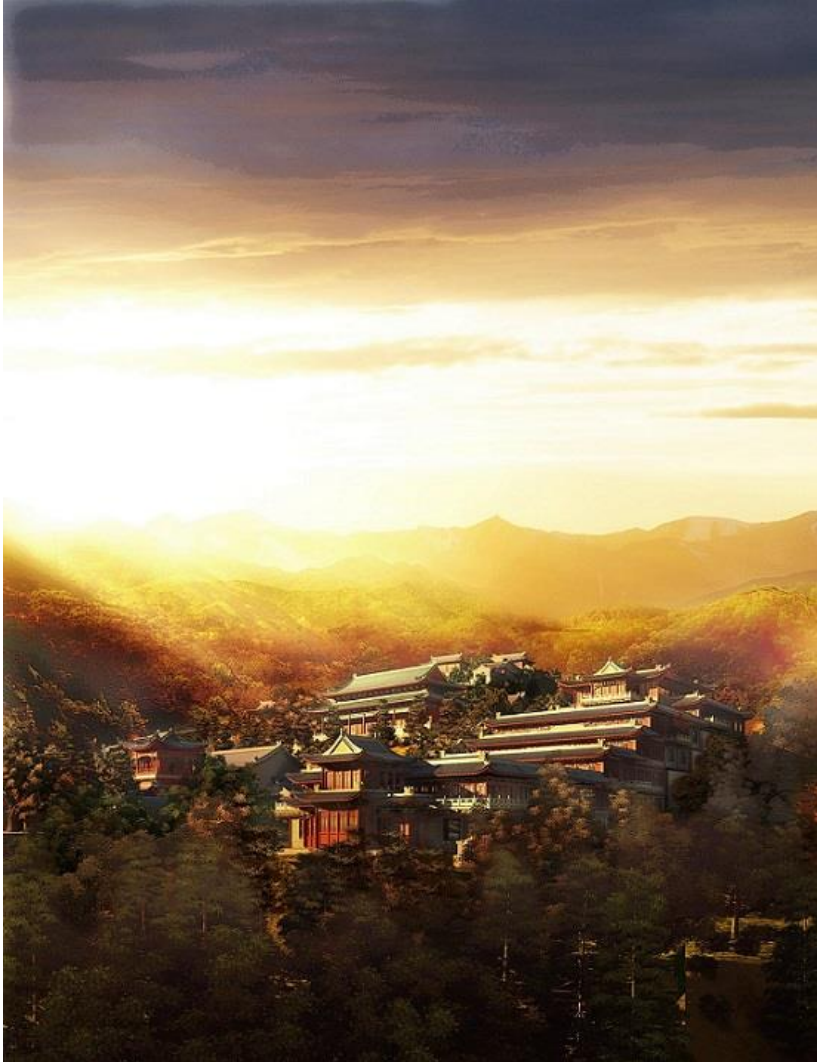
At the foot of the mountain there is another Buddhist temple with monks, devout believers, couples in love, families, the bereaved praying for loved ones and Chinese hikers that may find their way there. There were, before 1942, 72 temples on Pan Mountain, but only one Shaolin. The remains of this other temple I visited on this day was well over a thousand years old and the walls of the temple were partly just the walls of the cave in which it has survived for more than a millennium. Everything about it was ancient, even the monks and an odd stillness surrounded the place. None-the-less, when I asked a monk for his phone number, he slowly pulled out his cellular and it too was ancient.

This appears to be a boom area that's about to happen. There's even a beautiful town that's been built at the foot of the mountain with a thousand castle-like homes that are almost finished, but again, appearing lonely, without windows, doors, residents, grass, or trees. But, to most people in Panshan this area is already a kind of paradise preserving traditional lifestyles – lifestyles that are about to jump into the 21st century at light speed. No nation on earth has leaped into modernity with such vigor as China.

Panshan itself is unique. As the location of the Royal Road and visited by a long line of Chinese emperors going back at least to the Han Dynasty, it received more than a little royal largesse. Innumerable fruit trees grow there, and it is in many ways a Garden of Eden-like place with very unusual rock formations, caves, and other unique qualities.

The investment necessary for the Shaolin reconstruction project is huge, estimated to be between 160 and 290 million dollars. The original architectural features will be preserved said Shaolin Abbot Shi Yongxin. Abbot Shi Yongxin earned his current position in 1999 and is the thirteenth successor after Shi Xing Zheng. He is also the first Chinese monk to get an MBA.

Taiwan architect Ricky Liu has won the contract to rebuild the temple and his plan envisions preservation of the original Tang and Song dynasty designs combined with environmentally friendly power-saving technologies. Thus, the final product will be a harmonious fusion of the truly ancient and eco-friendly new; of Ying and Yang.



Artist's conception of completed North Shaolin Monastery

Ricky Liu is one of Taiwan's most famous architects having been the lead local architect in the dazzlingly futuristic Taipei Performing Arts Center.

Architects and engineers from Beijing's Tsinghua University will work on the restoration project along with Liu. The project is gigantic in scope. The site of the original North Shaolin Temple covered some 33 hectares (one hectare is 10,000 square meters). For now, however, the exact shape and size of the new temple is all being kept tightly under wraps.

The rebuilding of the North Shaolin will influence the Wushu world. Northern Wushu styles are different from Southern styles in a variety of ways. As noted by Donn Draeger and Robert W. Smith in their classic text: "*Asian Fighting Arts*," Northern people tend to be taller and slimmer than their southern counterparts and tend to use more kicks, whereas southern styles tend to use more punches. This distinction is summarized in the well-known Chinese adage: "*Nan quan, bei tui*," which means: "south fist, north leg." Currently Northern styles, i.e. using primarily kicks, are hard to find even in Beijing. Nanquan styles clearly dominate for example in Kung Fu and Wushu competitions. However, after the North Shaolin gets up and running, styles using more kicks (e.g. *Tan Tui* - "Springing Leg") are likely to have a revival.

Though the monks at North Shaolin are from Songshan Shaolin, there is in Panshan town at least one master of North Shaolin Kung Fu, Seventh Generation Master Shang Mian Hui. His family has lovingly preserved the original styles down through the centuries.

One might wonder about the destiny of this ancient and soon to be rebuilt North Shaolin Temple.

Though some have criticized the Henan Songshan Shaolin Temple of being "too commercial" it definitely has done a lot to promote the ancient teachings of physical, mental and spiritual discipline inherent in the Shaolin system. Shaolin schools inculcate profound values in a world increasingly bereft of meaning beyond mindless materialism and ephemeral pleasures. That local people in the area around the Songshan Shaolin have shops selling Shaolin memorabilia in small businesses is their own business and foreigners should just mind their own Ps and Qs, in this writer's opinion.

Also, in and around the Songshan Shaolin is the Tagou Shaolin School of Dengfeng, Henan province. It is the world's largest martial arts training center with over 38,000 students.

What is it about fighters in general, and warrior monks - Shaolin, Templers, Mamluks, Janissaries, that has such appeal? Maybe it's because of the "Oneness" - the acutely focused one-pointed awareness of time in the here and now that is similar to, or the same as a Buddhist meditation and enlightenment. Maybe it's the absolute adherence to discipline - something somewhat lacking in the self-oriented modern world - that draws the mind to higher planes.

Warrior monks historically have had tragic histories. The Shaolin monasteries were destroyed and rebuilt many times. The Knights Templars were mostly killed off in 1307; those that survived fled to what is now the Island of Malta - which was at that time nothing more than a bleak rock in the frigid Northern Mediterranean Sea. Every one of the Mamluk Caliphs was tortured and killed by those greedy to steal their treasures. In 1826 Sultan Mahmud II directed cannon fire on the barracks of the Turkish Janissaries and killed most of them in their sleep.

Yet, the legends of the great warrior monks live on, shining pathways to greater realities, like moonlight on rippling ever changing seas.

It was the German philosopher Nietzsche that invented the concept of "Superman" or "Übermensch" in his book *"Thus Spoke Zarathustra."* His concept of "Superman" is set as a goal for humanity, a paragon of egalitarian modernity.

Those who have seen the performances of the Shaolin monks surely wonder: "Are these Supermen?" The monks will sincerely deny it of course as humility is inculcated as the first necessary precondition for learning martial arts. MMA stars may be very proud, but that is a luxury monks cannot afford due to the ego aggrandizement that accompanies it.

The tiny traditional restaurant at the foot of Panshan mountain where I went for lunch before visiting the Shaolin Temple had the best beef stew I've ever tasted. The old lady cook/waitress was delighted at her first foreign customer and though rather shy, smiled hugely at my compliments on her incredibly delicious cooking. The chrysanthemum flower tea sent blossoms of springtime dancing in my mind on that cold windy afternoon. This winter of 2010 has had record cold and snows in Northern China. Even now at the end of April the nights hover around freezing and the winds howl.

A young German Sheppard on a leash barked as I neared the construction site in a world that is still burdened with the infinite agonies of war and poverty. How fortunate I am to be in China. What I saw was a mountain, an ancient white tower, and the seed of a construction site.



The only construction as of February 2010

Facing the beautiful ancient pagoda set against the late winter landscape I wondered how those brave Shaolin monks lived and died on these very same mountain slopes. Do supermen feel the harsh cold dry winds sweeping down from the Arctic regions?

What battles were fought, and deeds of heroism performed on these very same slopes, yet remain absent from history books and even the memories of humanity? Will the new breed of Shaolin live up to the purity and honor of the old?

Only time will tell. Time is the secret of China, a nation with such a vast and long history that no single scholar can hope to know it all, or even a tenth of it.

“Since before time and space were,
the Tao is.

It is beyond is and is not.

How do I know this is true?

I look inside myself and see.”

From the *Tao Te Ching*

(Translation by S. Mitchell)

Though dramatic changes will surely come the Shaolin Temples are preserving something of greater value than money, fame, or fortune. As martial artists everywhere know, there is clean honesty in sweat; truth, bitter and sweet in training and transcendence can be reached through the camaraderie of like-minded people working towards a common goal: mastery of a transcendent art. Buddhist or not, the wheel of karma turns and a rebirth is happening in the Jixian Northern Shaolin Temple.

2020 Notes

First, why do I title this article Pilgrimage to the True North Shaolin Temple? Why “True?” The fact is there are a couple of other temples claiming to be “North Shaolin.” However, the North Shaolin on Panshan is the only North Shaolin recognized by the headquarter Songshan Shaolin and the government. This doesn’t mean the other two are “illegitimate” as they could have been branches of Panshan Shaolin. However, historical records have yet to prove that as far as I know. Likewise, their masters may well be, and in my opinion probably are real masters of North Shaolin Kung Fu. That is very possible. However, just to keep the record straight, I titled this first article: “Pilgrimage to the True North Shaolin Temple” to avoid any confusion.

Second, in my articles I tend to use the words “temple” and “monastery” interchangeably. In some cases, they are the same, however, in English monks live in a monastery, whereas they may or may not live in a temple. Songshan Shaolin public media refers to itself as “Shaolin Temple.” Why? Probably because “temple” has two syllables and monastery has four. Chan (Zen) Buddhists are known for being succinct and straight to the point. They don’t waste words or syllables. Personally however, I have more of a legalist background perhaps, and see a monastery as larger than a temple, and thus use of the descriptor “monastery” is more correct. Maybe it’s because I’ve seen many small and tiny temples in my travels and prefer the more accurate word “monastery,” which does carry with it more of a philosophic and devotional connotation than the word “temple,” in my opinion. There are thousands of temples in which no monk has entered in years, decades, and centuries. Though I dislike “nit-picking” I think some discerning readers might notice I use both terms interchangeably and wonder why, so I thought: Better to explain it in the beginning than leave the highly analytic readers perplexed!

Rebuilding North Shaolin Temple Part II

Discovery

兼爱

Jiān'ài - universal love, principle advocated by Mozi
(c. 470 BCE – 391 BCE) stressing that people should
care for everyone equally

October 2010

Nine months ago on a frigid winter day I first visited the construction site of the North Shaolin Temple located on Pan Mountain, in Jixian (County), not far from Tianjin city, on the north coast of eastern China. Construction had barely begun – and nothing was going on.

Recently, I returned on a steamy Sunday afternoon in early fall to find a completely different picture. Lush green scenery dominated the background and construction was fully underway.

People thronged nearby restaurants adorned with flowers and serving healthy, natural, and sublimely delicious foods. There was an upbeat optimism in the air – while birds sang, and crickets chirped on the awesome mountainside landscape surrounding the construction site of the true North Shaolin.



Estimates of the completion date of the construction on the true North Shaolin Temple have changed from two to three years however at least one major building, “Fa Tang Hall” perched fairly high on the mountain nears completion.

Foundations for other buildings are underway, though construction of the main temple has not yet begun, nor has substantial restoration of the fabulous 13 storied pagoda.

Construction work is being done by the Henan Songshan Shaolin Temple located in Central China while investment comes from both the Songshan Shaolin Monastery and Tianjin city government. So far, Songshan Shaolin has invested 160 million Yuan in the project.

According to Professor Yang Chang Ming of Tianjin University Department of Architecture and Design, plans change periodically with the most recent models representing designs as of September 2010, however they too are subject to change.



The original Northern Shaolin Temple was first built 1,500 years ago and became a branch of the Shaolin in 1315 during the Yuan Dynasty. It was destroyed during the “War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression,” in 1942. The only surviving part of the old temple is a magnificent 13 storied pagoda built during the Qing Dynasty, 1636 – 1911.

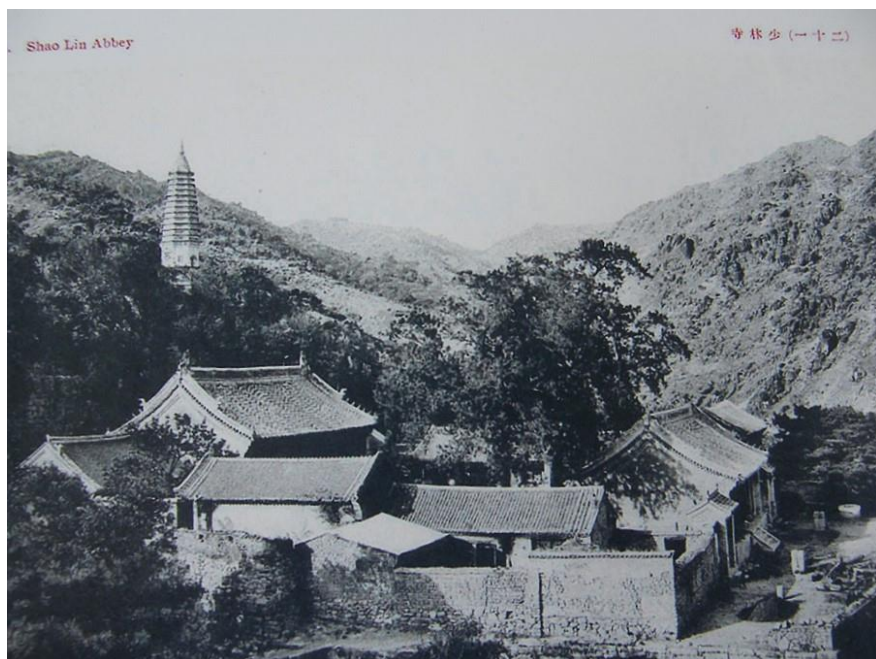


Photo of North Shaolin before 1942

The North Shaolin was so thoroughly obliterated during that war that even finding its location was difficult in the extreme.

That discovery process was led by Professor Gao Wen Shan, one of the first professors to graduate from the Tianjin Institute of Physical Education, Professional Wushu Program.

In 1979 he first heard that there was a North Shaolin.

Though the Songshan Shaolin had some records of the North Shaolin, nobody knew the exact location (as Songshan Shaolin's library was burned in 1928 during the last year of the Warlord Era).

At the beginning of the 1980's Professor Gao took part in a performance in Tianjin and met up with Shang Bao Liang, the 6th Successor of North Shaolin Kung Fu.



Gao Wen Shan and Shaolin Master Shang Baoliang in 2011 at North Shaolin. Da Xiong Temple Hall (Buddha Hall) is in the background

After that he visited Jixian county many times looking for the Temple he finally found the 13 storied pagoda that led him to first suspect that it was the answer to his long quest for the North Shaolin.

Following that he wrote the book: *Research of Northern Shaolin Temple* (北少林寺考) which proved to be a major contribution to further researchers on this site which is sacred to Kung Fu practitioners world-wide.

Following a clue given by Mr. Gao, a journalist came to the Jixian Guan Zhuang Zhen - Wa Yao Village.

Standing in the yard of Wei Fan, a villager he saw the Pagoda, a "white Fo pagoda towering like a giant."

("Fo" means Buddha in Chinese.) Weifang said that people called it the "rouge tower" and it is in fact the site of a gem Buddhist Pagoda.

He subsequently found out that Chinese soldiers held meetings there during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Invaders. “The Japanese invaders fired all the temples here, and only this Pagoda survived,” he wrote.

“I had rests there when I was young,” said 77-year-old mom of Wei Fang, whose husband also fought the invaders. Two generations of the Wei family had worked for the North Shaolin and they know well the structure inside and the history of its destruction by Japanese invaders. There are in the village, many such stories.

Though casual observation of the pagoda makes it appear un-restored at present, they are currently chiseling the stones used in the foundation of the original construction. Nearby is a pond which is surrounded by fences called the “Red Dragon Pond.” Wei Fang told the journalist that it never dries up and is an amazing beauty. There is a dragon countermarked on the stone, Wei Fang said, and “when the water is clear we can see the shadow of a dragon. It looks alive.”

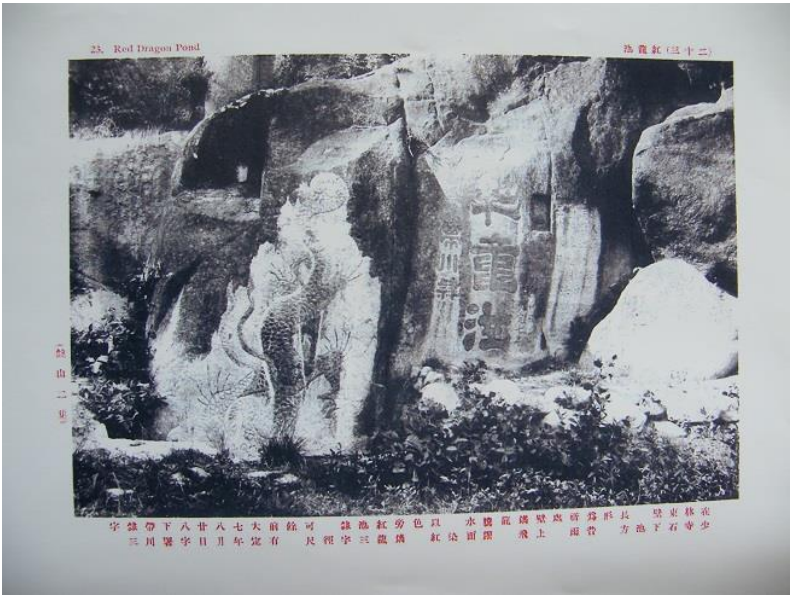


Photo of Red Dragon Pond by Professor Gao



Red Dragon in 2010



More recent photo of Red Dragon Pond in Summer

The rebuilt temple will include the following:

1. 入口园区 Entrance garden
2. 大雄区 Great Buddha Hall – Main Hall
3. 生活区 Monk living area
4. 演武区 Wushu practice area
5. 道路景观区 Shao Shan path travel spot
6. 景观区 Interesting stone travel spot
7. 观音殿区 Guan Yin palace
8. 遗址区 Tower and forests site

Support areas include:

1. Zhong Zhou Hall
2. Shan Men (Entrance Gate hall)
3. Tian Wang Palace (Heavenly King Palace)
4. Guan Yin Palace (Goddess Palace)
5. Ta Lin Site (Tower-Forest Site)
6. Qu Shi spot (Special Rocks)
7. Performance Area

The construction of the North Shaolin Temple is being done in several stages. The first stage started on June 5th, 2009 over an area of approximately 8,000 meters, beginning with the Great Buddha Hall, Shan Men Hall, Tian Wang Palace, Da Xiongbao Hall, Fa Hall, Pei Hall and the monks living area.

Attention to minute detail is being made to integrate the design of the buildings with the natural environment and to ensure that the natural landscape is preserved during installation of their advanced information network, solar energy systems, air conditioning, heating, etc.

Given that the Shaolin Temple is Zen based the distinguishing feature of the new re-construction is its' adherence to the original Tang and Song dynasty styles combined with simplicity.



Dougong (“cap and block”) Architecture – What’s really amazing is that no nails, glue or other binding materials are used and yet these buildings resist storms and blizzards, earthquakes and other natural disasters for centuries due to the interlocking design structure. This building innovation may be more than 2,500 years old. The physics are simple: the interlocking brackets transfer weight to vertical columns, lessening the strain on the horizontal beams.



Most Chinese believe that the peak of Chinese civilization occurred during the Tang Dynasty with spectacular developments in a vast multitude of arts and sciences.

When asked where the monks for the rebuilt Shaolin Temple would come from, a local guide said that at least some would come from a nearby Chan (Zen) Buddhist Temple called Baitesi ("Si" means "temple" in Chinese and is pronounced much more like "suh" than "yes" in Spanish). With translation assistance from my companion and friend on this trip Miao Hui, we asked if we could visit.

Finding the venerable monastery on a small sides street in Panshan town at the base of the mountain we were hugely impressed at the beauty and antiquity of the place, as well as the graciousness of the monks, not to mention the fact that they also train students in Shaolin Kung Fu and Chen style Tai Chi.



Baitesi Monastery front gate on a small street a couple of hundred meters up from a main street in Panshan town



Inside Baitsi

More than a thousand years old Baitsi is headed by Abbot Yan She. During our visit we were shown around by monk Shi Fa Hui who was open and plain speaking about himself, Buddhism, and his temple. He became a monk at age 17, he said, because he was sickly and wanted to become healthy.



Left to right: Abbot Yan She, Shi Fa Hui and writer's friend and translator Miao Hui

The temple schedule we found out starts at 5:30 in the morning with chanting and meditation, includes seven hours of training and ends at 9:00 pm.



Writer G. Brundage at Baiteisi in Panshan town – where the Shaolin monks first stayed before moving to the mountain.

The diet is vegetarian, but delicious. The Spartan lifestyle awakens the senses to richly appreciate the subtle flavors of natural herbs and vegetables, not to mention the pristine air from the surrounding pine and rock dotted mountains.

Modern diets are so full of sugar and salt it's no surprise many die of heart disease, stroke and other diseases associated with hypertension and obesity. "Simplify, and then simplify some more" are good watchwords for life in a monastery. Modern people also suffer from "complicated thinking." This is not necessary in temple life.

Much of real Kung Fu has more to do with unlearning than learning. Buddhism teaches letting go of desire, with desire being the primary cause of suffering.

Reality is a "punch in the face," (according to Bruce Lee) not the relentless vague and powerful anxieties that haunt postmodern humanity.



Stonework on Baitesi tower

We from the “outside world” tend to think of life in a temple as somehow apart from the reality of life, yet after a while within, we realize that our concepts of reality are conditioned patterns far removed from the greater realities of nature and our place in it. “Harmonization” is the key, or path to discovering ourselves, and our optimal relationships to things and people around us. Though “enlightenment” may come at any time or place, natural environments are the womb within which we evolved and mirror within which we may glimpse the reflection of our original face.



Stonework on Baiteisi tower

Monasteries in China have always been an essential part of the community, not separate from it. Monks have always been social workers, teachers, medics, spiritual guides, and in the case of Shaolin also provided substantial physical security for the community and nation.

People boiling with anger and aggression eventually always hurt themselves, as the old Tai Chi adage states: “To generate a force is to become vulnerable to equal and greater counter forces.” “Kung Fu,” whether Wushu, painting, or flower arranging, teaches basically the same things: Master self first and a universe of possibilities previously undreamed of opens all around. Ego is a tyrant. Let it go. The walls between conscious and unconscious are not absolute. Dissolving that wall opens a vast primordial reservoir of potential for good or evil, depending on the moral training and discipline of the individual.

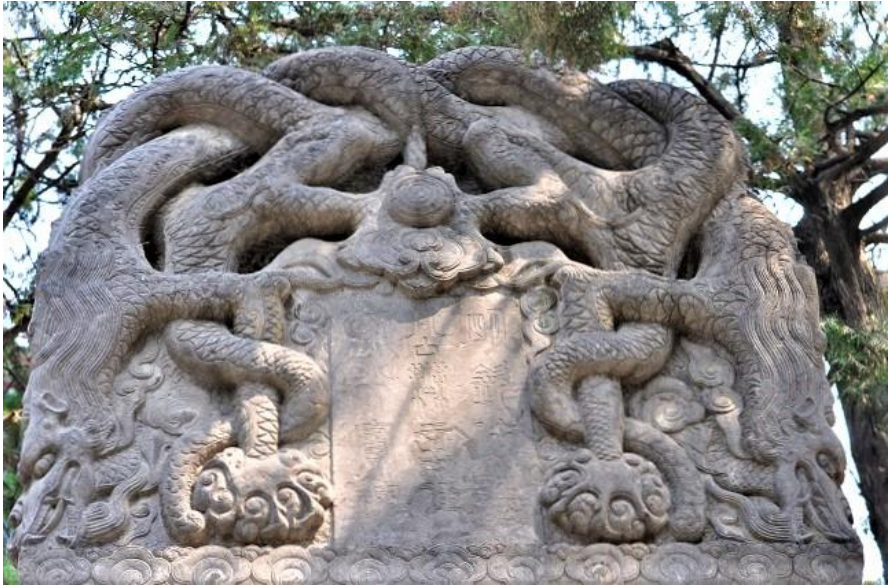
Freud was partly right. We humans are primarily motivated by unconscious forces; however, he didn’t take into account the effects of learning or how that learning can awaken different and potentially more interesting parts of the older structures of the brain.

It is not, as he postulated, all about sex and fighting. After coming down from the trees our ancestors survived not because of our fighting abilities – our teeth were not so long or sharp, our claws not so fierce, and our running speed marginal at best - but because of our ability to cooperate and communicate. Herein lies the doorway to the greater parts of our potential.



Twin coiled stone dragons at Baitesi in Panshan town

The above stele (standing stone slab used for commemoration, dedication, demarcation, and sometimes grave markers) is a very close duplicate to one I photographed at Songshan Shaolin.



Stele at Songshan Shaolin I photographed in August 2012

In fact, the concept of universal love was already ancient in the time Jesus. Mozi (468-376 BCE) for example advocated love for all without discrimination in sharp contrast to Confucius who believed in hereditary positions, family and country above all else and other discriminatory practices common at that time and even today. Buddhist philosophy frees the mind of discrimination from these artificial constructs we project onto the universe.

Buddhists are funny kinds of people, respecting all life while transcending the fetters of time and space, being and non-being, this and that, and me and you. Many-a-time and in many languages, I asked a monk his name, only to be answered with: "monk." Such a response can shock the mind to silence. What are you going to do? Slap him around a while? "Give me your personal and family name! How dare you unlock the wondrous boxes/cages of personal, familial and nationalist belongingness?"



In Baitesi, Panshan Town

Old temples remain, new temples based upon the templates of old are rebuilt and life continues largely unchanged in this ancient land. But the newest technologies are incorporated to ensure a greener, holistic, ecologically friendlier future, even and especially in the Northern Buddhist Shaolin Temple on Panshan Mountain, Jixian County, near Tianjin, in North China.

That the completion date has changed by a year is nothing given the huge scope of the project and vast landscape of history that is being rebuilt.

Feast at stone gate with Liu and Zheng

The autumn water's clear
you see down very deep
a way to purify your spirit.
Wise government officials
take time off from their duties
climb on their horses,
ride out to these tangled woods.
Here are two of the best,
a pair of precious jewels.
They've brought along a meal
and spared no expense.
We eat and watch the twilight
listening in bliss to flutes.
Even the dragon, deep under water
wants to join the music.

By Du Fu, Autumn of 745 C.E.



Mountain residents next to North Shaolin Monastery. I didn't know it at the time, but the person second to the left there, grandmother Wang Xiu Lan was to become a dear friend and invaluable source of information about the history of the people on the mountain during the war years.

Rebuilding North Shaolin Temple Part III

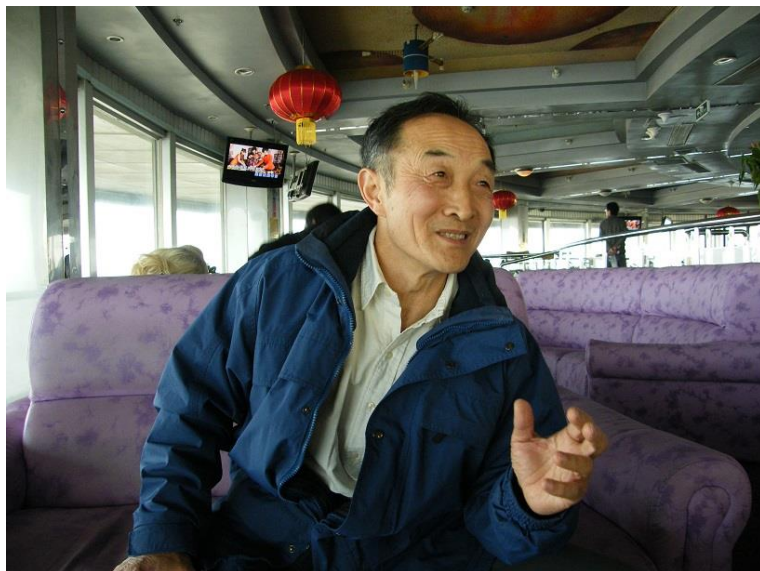
Professor Gao

蜜蜂

Mì fēng - Honey bees

April 2011 - In June 2010 reconstruction was suspended on the North Shaolin Temple and as of April 2011 had not begun again, though there was heavy construction being done on the freeway interchange a couple of kilometers away. Issues involving the disposition of the villagers and the cutting of trees seem to be at the forefront of this delay. Villagers are asking for a government investigation to find out what is necessary to get the project back underway.

On Monday, April 4th, 2011 my friend Miao and I set out from Beijing to meet Professor Gao Wenshan in Tianjin, the primary researcher to discover the true location of the Northern Shaolin Temple in Jixian County.



Professor Gao Wenshan who first found the remains of lost North Shaolin during interview in Tianjin city rotating Radio and TV Tower

We spent a lovely afternoon and evening sipping tea nearly half a kilometer high above the city in the spectacular Tianjin city rotating Radio and TV Tower, learning about his investigative work and long experience as a Shaolin Wu Shu and Tai Chi instructor. The next day we went to the construction site of the Shaolin Temple, met with several local residents, and spent the afternoon in the “Tower Forest.”

The Dilemma

On April 5th, 2011 Gao, his wife, my friend Miao and I set out on another journey to the site of North Shaolin. Arriving around 11:00 am we first visited the home/villa hotel of Mr. Wei Min perched halfway up Panshan (Pan mountain) where the site of the Northern Shaolin is located. There we ate a splendid lunch and soon were joined by Shang Baolian, 6th generation master of Northern Shaolin Kung Fu. (One of his more illustrious ancestors was Shang Shi Zhi, famous for teaching Shaolin Kung Fu around China.) Others joining our lunch included Jin Tie Jun, a reporter with the Jixian TV broadcasting station. Over lunch we talked about the situation halting construction.

“It’s not only a matter of moving the villagers,” one man said. “So many trees have been cut, and in some cases, we don’t even know who cut them. Now the fee to even visit the temple area has jumped to 130 Yuan (around \$20.00) whereas before it was only 40 Yuan. This increase is to pay for the road the government built but it seems excessive. Many groups of Chinese come to visit but this fee is too much.” (The average income in China is only about \$4,283 per year, with millions of people earning less than \$200 per month).

The need for the central government to investigate the situation and get negotiations restarted was voiced by all. It appears three major parties are involved: The villagers, the Shaolin and Tianjin County government. The villagers really want the central government to come in and advocate on their behalf.

It was reported in Kung Fu Tai Chi magazine (May/June 2011) that villagers around the Songshan Mountain Shaolin were forcibly relocated, “...one of Shi Yongxin’s first moves as Abbot.” Though the good Abbot still defends that decision as correct, one can wonder if he is considering a different path for the North Shaolin.

Is he giving villagers on Panshan time to reconsider voluntarily moving to the very beautiful town that was built at the foot of that historic mountain? If so, it appears their decision has already been made, and they are not willing to voluntarily move.

What to many may be a “shabby chaotic village” is a beautiful traditional paradise to those that live there. Could the houses be remodeled, and harmonized with a new Shaolin Temple? Many questions remain unanswered.

American oil companies have often faced similar dilemmas, and in more recent – enlightened times – have opted to spend sometimes vast amounts of money to alter the pathways of pipelines to accommodate the needs of local people to preserve sacred, traditional and otherwise special places.

This dilemma is not a new one. Some could accuse the villagers of being greedy, demanding too much for their houses, whereas others could accuse Shaolin of being greedy capitalists destroying their lives and cultures for the sake of progress and potential revenue.

This is an eternal conflict: progress vs. tradition. In the end, hopefully a compromise of some sort will be reached between all parties, a coalition of forces dedicated to the common goal of preserving individual interests while promoting the common good. In most cases however, everywhere in the world, progress wins.

There is a very popular new song in China now about this same dilemma called: Destroy the East Wall (拆东墙). It’s the story of a man who owns a wine shop which has been in his family for generations. He is offered a fortune by a developer to sell it and finally he does. The melody and singing are beautiful and there are hints of humor amid the larger theme of sadness in the story. In the end he is destroyed along with his wine shop. There is even a short phrase in Chinese: “Ding zi hu,” which succinctly describes the conflict between the need to preserve the old and the need to flatten it to make way for the new.

Of course, this is a conflict experienced everywhere in the world. I remember a song from the 70s with the words: “Tear down paradise put up a parking lot,” by Joni Mitchell.

Karma or coincidence?

April 5th, 2011 was also a special holiday in China called “Tomb Sweeping Day” (*Qing Min Jie*). After lunch our group went to the construction site, and indeed nothing had changed whatsoever from my last visit. So, Professor Gao and company took us to another very special place, the Shaolin’s “Ta Lin,” which literally means “tower forest” but is the traditional cemetery of the monastery.



Truly ancient Royal Road leading to the Ta Lin – Cemetery for monasteries on Panshan

Apricot flowers bloomed in the mid-spring afternoon while the buds of tree leaves gave promise of another rebirth in this sacred place covered by high thin clouds and massaged by gentle cool breezes.

Shaolin follows chán (Zen) Buddhist traditions and words can never capture this true natural phenomenon. Honeybees hovered in their unpredictable ways gathering nectar from wildflowers while the spirits of unnamed monks and abbots rested peacefully.

Honeybees

Either at the peak or on the level soil,
their invasion of our boundless nature we cannot foil.

After gathering honey from a hundred flowers,
For whose sweet tooth is their toil?

不論平地與山尖，無限風光盡被占。

採得百花成蜜後，為誰辛苦為誰甜？

LUO YIN (833-909) 羅隱

The cemetery has been partially restored in recent years by an American Chinese couple from Texas that visits every year along with their children. They stay a week or two, as long as they can and work hard before returning to their lives and jobs so far away. They also donate money to the temple fund to help in restoration. But, so much remains to be done. Their work is like triage, a preliminary restoration to slow the crushing wheels of time's effects on all things.

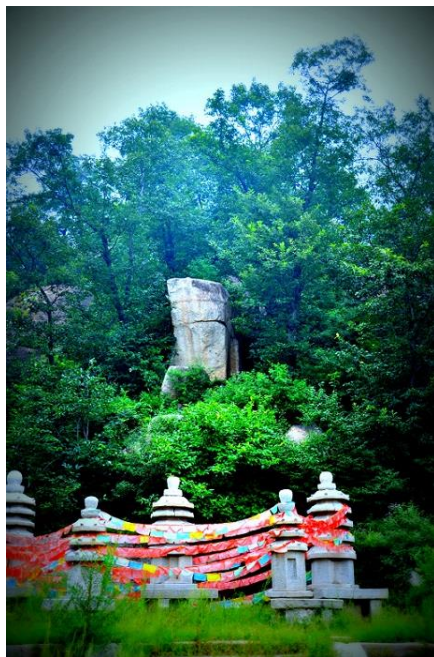


Small part of the Ta Lin (cemetery) above North Shaolin Monastery on
Panshan

According to the villagers living around the temple, the actual destruction of the North Shaolin Temple occurred during the late summer and early fall of 1942. So terrible was the destruction that nothing remained except the very large white pagoda.

Battles raged for weeks, with monks and villagers fighting together in and around the temple and later in the numerous caves in the area. During the days they hid in the caves. They fought at night. The battle of Jixian was called “*Zong Da Bao Dong*.” Nothing had been done since that awful time to restore the Shaolin’s Ta Lin until this Chinese American couple arrived.

High above the far end (upper part) of the cemetery there are huge rocks on the mountainside, including a large level rock above which is written in very faded Chinese: “Speakers platform.” The ancient path leading up there was obscured by decades of wild plant growth and needed a little rock climbing to ascend. One could imagine that the speakers at the funerals for Shaolin Abbots and monks had to be rather spry fellows!



Speakers Platform above the Ti Lin about one kilometer above the North Shaolin Monastery on Panshan



Time collapsed in the apricot grove cemetery and all too soon it was time to return again to that which we modern people call reality; though I for one know that a part of me will always remain in the peace and serenity of the Panshan Ta Lin. This sacred grove is a healing place for the souls of all who visit.

On the return path Wei Min mentioned that the American man who brings his family every year to work on restoration of the cemetery had suffered numerous health problems but sitting in the grove his ailments disappeared and health returned. This sacred place is also – it appears - healing for the body – a focus place in time and space that has blissfully escaped the march of time and progress.

Following the path back from the eternal resting place I pondered: Today is Qing Min Jie (Tomb Sweeping Day). Is it a coincidence that Gao brought us here today, to this cemetery of the ancient Shaolin masters? Most Chinese I have met believe in destiny, and who can ever calculate the probabilities involved in the chains of cause and effect that led us to this particular place on this particular day?

A Casual Verse on a Spring Day (春日偶成)

With thin clouds and light winds, near midday,
By bloom and willow, I cross the front stream on my way.

Bystanders know not my heartfelt joy.
That I slack off like a juvenile, they will say.

雲淡風輕近午天，傍花隨柳過前川。時人不識余心樂，將謂偷閒學少年。

Cheng Hao (1032-1085) 程顥



Great Buddha Hall in 2011

SIDEBAR

About Gao Wenshan – Master of many arts

Born in Shen Yang City, within Liaoning province Gao Wenshan was inspired by Kung Fu shows he saw as a child. At the age of six he started formal Wu Shu training in Shaolin and Tai Chi. He was with the first group of Wu Shu trainees in the master's study program of physical education at Shanghai Tiyu University.



January 1, 2011

In 1979 he started training with Master Cai Long Yun for three and a half years. He recalls training all day, beginning before sunrise – even wearing shorts in the winter and then reading until midnight. “Those were hard years,” he said. “Sweat and salt,” were his best friends.

Gao’s interest in the location of the Northern Shaolin really started in about 1980. He was doing a Wu Shu tour which included a large tournament with his teacher (Cai) in Fujian and was told that their Shaolin was not the “real” Shaolin. This made him curious about what the “true” styles of Southern and Northern Shaolin were, as compared to their various offshoots.

In 1983 he started teaching in the Tianjin University Physical Education Department. He retired in 2007 though he still teaches masters classes in various styles of traditional Wu Shu at the Tianjin Sport Institute.

Clues he used to find the true temple included a map in Tongzhi from the Qing Dynasty with the North Shaolin in the center.

He also found 25 poems by Emperor Qiang Long about the Northern Shaolin. Some of the walkways within the Shaolin were constructed by that emperor who was a frequent visitor. In addition Professor Gao has a variety of pictures and paintings from before the time before temple and surrounding area was burned. Then there were also records in the “Jixian Xian Zhi” the traditional county record book.

The old name of the temple was “Faxing Temple” before the Yuan dynasty in the 13th century. But, his most valuable resources were human, villagers around the temple that were very old, and whose parents and grandparents recalled the temple in its former glory.

Though 65 years old, Gao stands straight as a Marine and moves with the agility and strength of a man in his prime. After lunch on Panshan he demonstrated one of his Shaolin forms, and his punches and kicks snapped in the air as loud as cracks of a whip.

While driving up to the Shaolin Temple from Tianjin I asked if Tai Chi and Shaolin were opposites on the spectrum of Chinese martial arts, i.e. soft (internal) vs. hard (external) styles. He stretched out his arms in two hemi-circles like a hug and touched his fingers in a big circle. “They use different paths,” he said, “but attain the same goal.”

During the drive my translator/friend Miao was talking with his wife in the back seat and I found out that Gao actually does speak pretty good English, which was something of a relief given my rather rudimentary Chinese. I’d heard before that his Japanese was even better. Gao Wenshan is indeed a soft-spoken master of martial arts and human relations. In addition to above mentioned skills, he’s also an accomplished photographer. At his house the previous evening he showed me some of his collections of photos that were beautiful, meaningful and wordlessly spoke to the heart.

[2020 Update: I recently heard Professor Gao is still doing fine and doing quite a bit of traveling as well. Bravo professor Gao!]

Rebuilding North Shaolin Temple Part IV

Water Dragon

Chinese New Year's at the True North Shaolin Temple

水龙年

Shuǐ lóng nián – Water dragon year

YEAR OF THE WATER DRAGON

For those who missed the first three stories published in Kung Fu Tai Chi magazine on the rebuilding of the North Shaolin Temple, it was destroyed along with 71 of the other temples on Pan Mountain during the “*War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression*” during the 1940s. Only one large white pagoda survived the terrible onslaught at the North Shaolin.

The Songshan Shaolin and Tianjin City have announced commitments to spend around two billion Yuan (RMB the Chinese currency) to rebuild the temple. Unfortunately however, for a variety of reasons in June of 2010 the construction was halted (For details written in April 2011, see:

<http://ezine.kungfumagazine.com/ezine/article.php?article=961>)

Nine months later I headed back filled with hope that progress had taken place in my absence.

January 22nd, 2011 however was no ordinary day in China.

It was the Chinese Lunar New Year's Eve; and it was no ordinary New Year's Eve either because it was heralding in the Chinese year of 4,710 - year of the Water Dragon.

Dragons hold a special place in the pantheon of Chinese martial art mythology and history. For example, it says in “Three Kingdoms” in reference to the incomparable hero Xuande:

"Seasoned plans and master moves; all divinely done.

To one mighty dragon two tigers can't compare.

At his first trial what victories were won!

Poor orphan boy? The realm is his to share." (1)

New Year's also known as the "Spring Festival" is by far the biggest of all holidays in China. Dragon and Lion Dances, fireworks (and more fireworks) and family gatherings are happening everywhere on New Year Eve and Day. The holiday officially ends on Lantern Festival, the 15th day of the Lunar New Year.

Where, I wondered for about one whole hot second, should I – the intrepid martial arts explorer – experience this wonderful event? There was only one answer: The true North Shaolin Temple.

So, I loaded up the car with... fireworks, cameras, notepads, snacks, an electronic dictionary, passport and so on, and headed towards Panshan (Pan mountain) in Jixian (Ji County) near Tianjin city.

Before leaving I made a reservation at the small picturesque Xin Nong guesthouse hotel perched on the mountain near the site of the destroyed temple.

Greeted at the hotel door by Mr. Wei Guo Xin, the proprietor and his lovely wife, daughter and father, I was delighted to feel right at home again.

Shortly thereafter I met other visitors which included a couple of small families that also decided to spend New Year's Eve at home away from home. We all then proceeded to eat a scrumptious feast that included beef, mutton, mountains of hot freshly steamed jiaozi and lots, lots more.

After that a friend that lives in Panshan I'd called ahead of time showed up and together we walked up to the sacred remains of the once world-renowned North Shaolin Temple. I was more than a little disappointed to find that nothing had changed since my last visit. But I was happy. The sun shone brightly, and I was there with a friend who knew the famed tower, trails around it and local people.

Whereas before I'd always admired Rogue Tower from a distance, this time we walked right up to the ancient surviving pagoda tower. We walked up an ancient stone stairway on the back of the tower, then along a very narrow shelf line around the outside, and stepped, with awe and reverence, and very, very carefully – inside.

Electricity danced along my skin playing harmonies of flute and hide covered drums throughout my entire nervous system, while an endless series of gongs seemed to reverberate along my bones. Incense drifted through the air, or was it just my imagination? Could this be real? It seemed a dream. The *qi* of the place roared in waves. Is Satori something like this(?), my puny ego asked itself. Or was it just imagination? Ha! Probably read too many novels like those Lobsang Rampa classics.

But the nagging questions remained: How much history has this temple really seen? Answer: Just about everything.

Dates regarding its' construction vary considerably. The Official Shaolin site says it was originally built in the Wei or Jin Dynasty around the second or third Century AD, and it is the earliest Buddhist temple in Tianjin and the annals of Jixian County. Then, the venerable master Fuyu (1201 – 1275) built five sub-temples of Shaolin incorporating the already existing temple on Panshan, however only this one was officially given the title: "Shaolin."

Thus, this temple has seen at least one thousand, seven hundred years of history, of which some 737 years were under the discipline of Shaolin Chan (Zen) Buddhism.

One might wonder how Buddhists celebrate the New Years, and indeed the next day - New Year's Day - I visited one of only two Buddhist temples in the neighborhood to survive the wars, to find out. But I'm getting ahead myself here.

After pausing for an indeterminate amount of time, and then taking some pictures, we walked down the mountain and drove to Baitasi (White Tower Temple) a branch of Songshan Shaolin Temple also on Panshan. The monks I had met there before had left and instead I met Shifu (Master) Shi Yan Dong, newly appointed abbot of the monastery.



(Former) North Shaolin Head Monk Shi Yan Dong at prayer in front, Shi Heng Gui at drum – Dulesi Monastery in Panshan town, down the mountain from North Shaolin Monastery

We chatted briefly while he worked on New Year's preparations. "Can foreigners come here and stay for a while?" I asked. "Yes," replied Shifu. "How much would it cost for one night?" I inquired. "There is no charge," he replied softly as if such a thing were obvious. Epiphany time again.

Before leaving I kicked around their monstrously heavy, heavy bag, and then headed back to the guesthouse hotel for dinner.

At the hotel I helped the mother and grandmother of the house make jiaozi - the traditional steamed dumplings served on New Year's though mine were a little less than perfect (OK, they looked darn strange).

Around 7:00 people the whole family gathered for the evening meal and toasted the New Year. Then, all retired for a nap so-as to be fresh for the midnight festivities.

As for me, I set my alarm for 10:30 to climb up the mountain above the Shaolin's white tower pagoda (bái tǎ), to get photos from behind it of "Zhuan Wa Yao" Village's fireworks at the foot of the mountain.

A little before 11:00 pm I set out on my adventure, after explaining to Mr. Wei's daughter my intentions. She tried mightily to talk me out of it, but I was not about to be dissuaded. It probably sounded crazy to her, and she thought getting a good photo like I drew on paper for her was impossible. Finally, when she realized I wasn't going to change my mind she said: "Good luck!" in Chinese. I felt a bit bad, because I wanted to share the midnight moment with my new friends, but I am/was a martial art maniac/photographer on a mission of supreme importance. I was going to be the one, the only one to get photos of fireworks from behind the North Shaolin Pagoda at exactly midnight on New Year's Eve of the Year of the Dragon, in the year of 4710!

It was a crystal-clear moonless night with a million stars above, the kind of stars one can only see in the countryside or out at sea. The temperature was about 18 below zero, but fortunately there was not much of a wind.

I've been to this site four times before and thought I knew my way around but getting up on the mountain above and behind the temple was new. There was no clear path that I could find and I had to climb the mountain with its huge boulders and deep piles of last fall's leaves, off trail. I'm sure there was a path, I just couldn't find it in the frozen darkness.

Luckily, I've spent months backpacking in mountains and forests before and feel very much at home there. Nearly froze to death above the tree line after winter snows too yet survived it all. So, this was a "walk in the park," in comparison. The full moon helped.

Finally, I found some huge solid rocks in just the right position. Zhuan Wa Yao village was clearly and directly behind the ancient Pagoda. My watch had stopped at 8:18 for some reason and I had to rely on my mobile phone clock for the last 10 minutes. I had no time to waste. I kept receiving Happy New Year text messages, but I ignored them. I set up my tripod, double checked the battery, made test shots with the camera at different settings, and waited.

When the moment came the lower part of the sky behind the pagoda lit up with a million colors exploding simultaneously. My phone rang, "Happy New Year's Shi Long" I heard faintly... "Uh can I call you back in a few minutes?"

Click, click went the camera.



January 23, 2012 Midnight

After an hour or so the still of the night ebbed and receded, as the revelers returned to their warm homes and a blanket of quiet reclaimed the earth.

Too soon it was time to get down the mountain from this high rock. There was a trail I could see with my tiny flashlight, for about 15 meters before it disappeared over some rocks that seemed to be a cliff of some sort.

To make a long story short, about an hour and a half later I emerged onto a country road. It was like any country road anywhere, but I had my trusty GPS so I didn't feel totally lost. On one hand it didn't have any of the nearby roads for some reason, but generally did point the way. Had I been a bird the return to the hotel would have been easy, but instead it was another adventure. Strangely I wasn't cold or tired in the least, but rather exhilarated and enjoyed the stroll under the brilliant stars scattered like a million diamonds across the sky.

A small dirt road leading up off the winding old country road proved to be the wrong one, though my GPS said it was right. Then, the GPS shifted and directed me up a hill across a gorge, off-trail again. Having spent a significant amount of my childhood and teen years wandering mountains in the U.S. and Europe in winters and summers, I felt perfectly fine plunging back into the forests and leaves, down one hill and up another.

Then I heard a human voice. It was Mr. Wei outside his hotel, probably worried about me. What a kind fellow! Though I had enormously enjoyed my midnight adventure, it was also ever-so-nice to return to civilization and a warm home, guided the last 50 meters by a caring friend.

Sleep came easily that night!

The next morning, I had an appointment to go to Dulesi (pronounced: Dul-la-seu") Temple in Zhuan Wa Yao Village, as they were having a "*Miao Hui*," or traditional festival.

Getting there wasn't so easy, because most of the roads again weren't on my GPS as many were quite new. The village had defiantly been undergoing a lot of reconstruction too, more-so than the Shaolin! But I stopped and asked a few people who were always friendly and willing to point the way, happily explaining in rapid-fire Chinese, of which I could only understand half at best.

Dulesi is famous for having the lofty and sublime Guanyin Pavilion, 23 meters in height, the oldest multi-story timber structure in China which shelters the 16.8-meter clay sculpture of the 11 heads Goddess Guanyin. No less than Li Bai himself, one of most brilliant and talented poets of the Tang Dynasty inscribed the wooden board with: "Eternity attained."



Dulesi monks pray for a prosperous New Year

After taking another bazillion photos and making more than a dozen new friends I hiked back to the car, only to make more friends along the way, some of whom gave me a traditional (non-alcoholic, natural, traditional and blissfully hot!) fruit drink of some kind.

Then, I drove off... north, far north to another city: Zhangjiakou and other adventures. But, nothing in my life so far can compare to the family atmosphere at Xin Nong guesthouse, my short time at Baiteisi (Shaolin) Temple and the kindly generous abbot Shi Yan Dong, New Years' Eve, Year of the Dragon at North Shaolin Temple and the festive atmosphere at Dulesi Temple.

The warmth of all these people and the richness of the textures of their lives and varied cultures will live with me always.

On the outside, I dare say some of them were poor, but their inner lives glow with the pearl of wisdom eternally sought after by that most ubiquitous of all creatures, the mighty dragon.

NOTES

Three Kingdoms, attributed to Luo Guanzhong, translated by Moss Roberts. Published by Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, Berkeley Los Angeles Oxford, Sixth Printing, 2011 p. 15.

About North Shaolin Monastery on Songshan Shaolin's official website:

http://www.shaolin.org.cn/templates/EN_T_new_list/index.aspx?nodeid=326&page=ContentPage&contentid=2094

Rebuilding North Shaolin Temple Part V

Grandmother Wang and the Buddha

North Shaolin Reconstruction Update: Full-Speed Ahead!

支柱

Zhī zhù - Pillar

August 21, 2012 After more than a year delay, construction began again on the true North Shaolin Temple on Panshan (Pan Mountain) in Jixian County, northeast China.

Hua Sheng Ji Tuan Construction Company began work in February (2012) to complete the rebuilding barely begun by the first construction company previously hired to do the job.

Hua Sheng Ji Tuan really knows their business having done most of the reconstruction for the Songshan Shaolin over the past forty-year period. They have a forty-person team with collectively hundreds of years of experience. But there is a lot more here than meets the eye, and healing is more than just constructing buildings, however exactly they may be reconstructing the original temple, destroyed so many years before.

On Monday August 21st, 2012 I made my fifth trip to the reconstruction site of the North Shaolin Temple.

I had the gate to the construction yard of the temple on my GPS so it was not difficult finding the sacred place and when I turned off the car at the gate it was instantly obvious that there was something radically different in the warm summer air. Mixed in with the chirping of innumerable birds and cicadas was a different sound, the sliding sounds of a shovel on concrete, punctuated with an electric saw and the sound of a large earth moving machine. There was the foundation of a new building in front of the huge mostly completed library building (Sutra Hall) at the back, upper part of the new temple complex. People were working everywhere, young, and old, men and women.

First Miao and I stopped and talked with an older gentleman, a laborer with a glorious suntan who'd seen a lifetime of building temples, to get some information on what was going on. (My theory is the guy was probably a Buddha in disguise!)

Charmed by his knowledgeable, open answers we next moved a bit up the hill to talk with the construction manager Mr. Li Yi Cai. For the next couple of hours, he graciously answered questions about every aspect of the new reconstruction. Of course several times he had to stop to coordinate this and that, give directions to this worker and that, talk on the phone with some other very important person and then another, but generally he did his best to help us understand what had happened over the past seven months and what would happen over the next several years.



First, he predicted that it would take about four years to finish the basic plan outlined by the architects (a photo of the architectural design can be found in the May/June 2011 issue of Kung Fu Tai Chi magazine).

His workers generally labor from 6:30 am till 6:00 pm seven days a week to keep to the timetable. I asked where the money came from and he answered the Songshan Shaolin. I asked where he came from and he said the Songshan Shaolin. These answers made me happy for some reason.

His knowledge of the history of the Shaolin temples, architecture, geography, even Buddhism and innumerable other subjects was extraordinary. Though he was busy he was also patient and generous with his time and the sharing of his knowledge. He was also excited as it would only take a day or two before they could raise the pillars that would hold the roof of the huge Buddha Hall, they were building in front of the large library building already mostly constructed. At the time we were there an earth moving machine was leveling off a large area immediately to the west of the newest building so that a huge crane could come in and lift the giant pillars into place.



Above: Pillars for the Great Buddha Hall



Support beams



Construction work is a kind of Kung Fu in my opinion. True, my background is in brick and stone, but I can tell these gentlemen are masters of their their art.

After this fascinating discussion Miao and I walked up the hill to the first building to see what was going on there and talk with some of the workers. That turned out to be great fun as they were all very friendly easy-going guys and even let us help lay a few bricks. Decades ago I worked as a mason and easily fell into the rhythm of slapping down some “mud” (concrete/sand/water mix) and carefully placing a brick in place followed by a few firm taps with the trowel handle to sink it firmly in place and remove air bubbles between it and the brick beneath.



Miao tried too and though I suspect our “hard work” of a few minutes might have been replaced with the real professional brick laying of the masters at work there immediately after we left, it was none-the-less great fun and at least for me a blast from the past, with the added joy of having laid a few bricks in the new North Shaolin Temple. Having worked with American masons I’d say the Chinese version is much the same (efficient, professional and having a good sense of humor), except perhaps they don’t drink beer as far as I could tell, though I was told in the evening some of them might on special occasions imbibe just a little Chinese white wine...! In China most construction workers live at the site as did this crew. It was a four-year commitment to work, and a mission of healing.

After this exhilarating experience Miao and I walked back down the hill to chat with the construction manager for a few more minutes, having had some time to reload my almost inexhaustible supply of questions. Then, we took a few more photos and headed to our country guest house owned by Wei Ming, where we've stayed a few times before.

Wei Ming's Guest House

Greeted by the owner's wife we had some tea to rest after our long drive and photo/interviewing sessions. A few drops of rain fell, and we all moved inside to the office where we sat around a table and continued our chat about developments in the world of North Shaolin reconstruction. Then, something rather unusual happened.

In came great grandma, Wang Xiu Lan who sat down with us, pulled out a long traditional Chinese pipe and carefully stuffed its small bowl with tobacco I found out was grown locally.

After a few puffs she smiled sweetly, and I had to admit I felt almost overwhelmed by the joviality of this rather elderly lady.



Wang Xiu Lan August 2012

"Just how old is she?" I asked Miao to ask her.

"Eighty-three," came back after a moment. We all did calculations for a while trying to figure out her birth date, finally concluding that it must have been 1929 plus or minus a year or two because she like most country people in China calculate age according to the lunar calendar.

Pretty soon I was asking her about the war years around the Shaolin. I found out she moved there with her family when she was 14, or around 1943.

Her memories of that time seemed very clear.

"We were running and hiding all the time," she said, "always trying to escape. When the Japanese found Chinese, they killed us, because of Sanguang politics (the infamous "three cleans," robbing, burning, and killing until clean). We often hid in caves. First, they sent in dogs. If we killed the dogs sometimes, they put in poisoned gas. Sometimes they came in and killed everyone. Sometimes they left thinking the dogs just got lost in the cave. So, some of us survived."

"Do you remember the Shaolin Temple at all?"

"No most of it was destroyed by then. Only the base of the temple remained at that time."

Then I asked a stupid question: "Did you lose many friends?"

She didn't say anything, but I could see her eyes had filled with tears. Her hand shook slightly, and she took another puff on her pipe.

I gave her the dignity of a moment to reflect then figured I'd dredged up enough of the sweet old lady's bad memories and changed the subject to happier things as quickly as possible. I found out she'd gotten married at age 16, and had four children, three of whom were boys and that they owned three guest houses all near the top of Panshan.

When I asked her how she felt seeing the temple being rebuilt, she expressed genuine happiness, and when I asked how she felt about the massive development all around the Jixian town she seemed quite at peace with it all.

On the subject as to her diet, she said she liked to eat just about anything and seemed quite easy going about life in every aspect. Asked if she had any secrets to account for her long life, she answered that the mountain water was special.

Not long after we had dinner with their family of about 10 people, down to fourth generation 10-month-old baby boy Li Wei Ye who happily played with everyone. Eating dinner, I discovered another reason why the matriarch of the family lived so long. The diet was very healthy with mountains of fragrant mountain vegetables, fried chicken and eggplant soup, tofu, eggs, fried peanuts, and tons of other mouthwatering country cooked specialties. After dinner the clouds cleared enough for a crescent moon to shine through over the lovely flowers and beautiful mountain landscape. The coolness of the evening and beauty of the surroundings was breathtaking.

The next morning my friend Miao and I returned to the construction site to find out that plans to bring in and place the giant pillars had been delayed by a day or two because the construction manager wasn't satisfied that the ground next to the site was large or stable enough to support the giant crane.

After this short discussion my friend Miao and I climbed high in the hills above and behind the newly rebuilt temple, no easy task to say the least as the hills are covered with thick brambles and wildflowers; they're steep and there are no trails heading to the locations I wanted to shoot from. We even did some rock climbing to get the best shots of the temple from behind.

So, we took a few more pictures and then had to find our way back down before heading back to Jixian town.

First, we went to visit the ancient Dulesi Temple to get a map of the mountain area as that temple is at the heart of the small town, and then to the nearby Baitesi (White Tower) Temple because it's affiliated with and staffed by the Songshan Shaolin Temple.

Originally built in the early Liao Dynasty (916-1125) the White Tower was rebuilt in 1058. The base is made of huge marble slabs and beautifully carved bricks.

At Baitesi we learned many things. First, I was happy to find out that there were now seven monks living at the temple, (five more than the first time I visited) and happy to find out that Shi Yan Dong was still abbot. (“Shi” by the way is an honorific used before a monk’s name.)

Unfortunately, Shi Yan Dong was in Beijing on that day so instead we interviewed Shi Heng Qui, who like Shi Yan Dong was from Songshan.

We found out that monks from Baitesi would be a part of the new Northern Shaolin staff when the temple is completed but were busy at the current time helping local people learn more about Buddhism. “A pyramid is only as strong as its base,” as the old saying goes.

Regarding the history of the Northern Shaolin he had something very surprising to say. He suggested obliquely that a relative of Genghis Khan may have had something to do with the founding of the Northern Shaolin Temple as a Shaolin temple, accompanying the nameless Shaolin monks on their way to incorporating Faxing Temple into the Shaolin order.

The original Northern Shaolin temple was called Faxing Temple and built in the second to third century ACE and became incorporated into the Shaolin under the direction of venerable master Fuyu (1201-1275) in the Yuan Dynasty.

The Yuan dynasty was the dynasty China was ruled by the Mongolian invaders whose conquest was pretty much finished by 1279. So, the monk’s story of Genghis Khan’s relative having something to do with the incorporation of the original Faxing Temple into the Shaolin fits the historical timeline accurately. I don’t recall having read this before, but it certainly could be true.

We talked about Buddhism too, for example the Chinese version of the Sanskrit “Om Mani Padma Hum” (唵嘛呢叭咪吽), (*Om mani padme hum* in Tibetan) as I’d recently returned from a sojourn in Tibet.



Of course there's a Kung Fu club in Lhasa!

We also talked about women monks at the Songshan Shaolin, and it appears there were some before but not now.

I asked him if there would be a Tagou school at North Shaolin, as is the case at Songshan Shaolin. Monks do not have a Shaolin Wushu school at Songshan per se at least for outsiders, though most are trained in Wushu.

(I also made a short visit there during my summer vacation this year.) Tagou Shaolin School – the largest Shaolin and martial arts school in the world - is the only Shaolin Wushu school within the sacred Songshan Temple grounds though there are dozens of other Shaolin schools outside the Temple grounds.



Tagou Shaolin School inside Songshan Shaolin Monastery



One of many temples inside Songshan Shaolin Monastery

He said he didn't know but seemed to hint that maybe not, though he didn't directly say that. Much appears to still be in the planning stages concerning the North Shaolin Temple.

My friend Miao asked if he had a book about Buddhism that she could read and he kindly went to another room and gave one to her, written by Shi Yongxin the Abbot of the Shaolin Temple.

I must say I was awed by the straightforward honesty and sincerity of Shi Heng Qui. He was very soft spoken and helpful though I could tell he wasn't in the habit of answering barrages of questions by a foreigner on many topics in rather short order. He seemed shy, unusually peaceful (compared to people I usually meet anywhere), and really pure and kind.

But I could also tell he was strong, both physically and psychologically. I didn't ask about his personal history but there was no doubt he'd had an interesting life.

Buddhists and especially monks tend to not dichotomize things into simple categories like good and bad, but instead see things of this world as Maya, the temporary passing illusions in which most of us poor working slobs find ourselves.

"Mèngguànpàoyǐng" is Chinese for "dreams and visions in a bubble," a concept like the Indian word "Maya," referring to the illusory nature of the transient world.

Chinese culture itself seems to avoid simple dichotomization. For example, most Chinese great literature has flawed heroes, and bad guys that have some and often many redeeming qualities. Few things are simple here in Asia!

Following this enlightening journey into the world of peace and harmony – simple truths and straightforward honesty, my friend Miao and I thanked him for his time, went back outside into the bright sunny day, and took a few more photos. For some odd reason I couldn't stop myself from wildly attacking their rock hard and extremely heavy, heavy bag hanging in the central courtyard of the temple. A few visitors were amused by my enthusiastic foray into what I'd call *běituǐ* (Northern leg) as I've always liked kicks more than punches. But it was fun in any case.

Then we hopped back into my rather dilapidated and rapidly aging economy car and started the drive back to Beijing. On the way my friend Miao translated some of Shi Yongxin's book for me which I'll paraphrase here:

"To Buddhists all the religions are generally the same. We help people to simply life and see things more clearly and honestly. People accept what they find useful and discard the rest until such time as they may need it or simply reconsider it. Peace is the goal which all wise people seek."

Shaolin – Temple in my Heart by Abbot Shi Yong Xin

To sum up this story, it takes more than time to heal some of the wounds of the past and though feelings and memories can be contained, they should never be forgotten. And, though attempts to rebuild some of the destruction of the past may be delayed, eventually it will be done, and done well by those best suited to do the work.

Imagine! A Buddha looking like that and rebuilding his own temple!

Rebuilding North Shaolin Temple Part VI Inside

Chinese New Year's at Shaolin Branch: Baitasi Temple

Year of the Water Snake 4711

(February 10, 2013 - January 30, 2014)

坐 禅

Zuò chán – Seated Meditation

SIDEBAR 1

Think about the ancient snake, the survivor of over a hundred million years of evolution, what a martially well-equipped creature! By nature, they are solitary creatures, though they take care of their young – briefly at least.

If people leave them alone, they leave people alone. Some believe that the dragon, the most revered of the 12 Chinese zodiac animals evolved from the snake. In a way perhaps we all did.

At the base of our human brain and top of our spinal cord is a small archaic area called the R-Complex, with “R” standing for “reptile,” appropriately named because it’s similar to our cold-blooded ancient forbearers in a variety of ways, governing regulating “simple” (but critical) things like breathing, heartbeat, spinal movement, attacks like biting and a variety of defensive moves.

The usual Chinese word for snake is “蛇” and in pinyin is *shé*. The snake is associated with the 6th of the 12 Earthly Branches, or to the double-hour of 9-00-11:00 a.m.

So, where am I – the intrepid martial arts reporter to be during the hours of the snake on New Year’s Day of the Year of the Snake?

Mmm?!?

SIDEBAR 2

Becoming a Shaolin Monk

Most monks at the Songshan Shaolin were exceptionally talented Shaolin Kung Fu students living in the area around the Temple who also inculcated the Buddhist virtues of right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

The way to become a Shaolin Monk is in theory simple enough. 1) Find a Shaolin Monk and 2) become his disciple. After an unspecified amount of time and a bond of trust is strongly built the disciple participates in a ceremony at the Temple and makes vows to the Temple, to Buddha and to his or her master. Each relationship between master and disciple is unique, keeping in mind that this is Chán (Zen) – at once the most practical and mystical branch of Buddhism. Chán discipline includes prolonged and intense contemplation and deep meditation. Chán means (seated) meditation.

The foundation of Buddhism rests on two major beliefs: 1) Life is suffering and 2) Desire is the cause of suffering. Most people live, eat, and dream in swirling seas of desire for power, wealth, beauty and other physical pleasures. Monks must let go of desires to attain enlightenment. The way of the monk is not easy. For a Shaolin monk this must be made exceptionally difficult as they must endure intense physical training in addition to the mental and spiritual disciplines they must always adhere to. But no man, woman or monk is perfect and indeed it seems some monks lean towards the martial end of their training while others towards the more spiritual aspects, whereas a third smaller group finds the road between – the middle path – and truly excel at both.

Like China itself the Shaolin remains somewhat paradoxical. Some monks stay in the temple their whole lives, some go to other monasteries to live and/or teach, while others travel in or outside of China and teach.

Some monks join the military whereas others decide to stop being a monk, in many cases getting married. In some ways, monks are very free to do as they wish within broad parameters, however the organization itself is very top-down power oriented.

The Abbot makes the decisions and the disciples do what they are told. This is part of the special bond between shīfu (master) and disciple. Not everyone that wants to become a Shaolin monk can. It takes a special kind of individual and a unique relationship between the aspiring monk, his or her shīfu and the temple community where they live and train.

STORY

Last year I spent New Year's at North Shaolin Temple located on Panshan (Pan Mountain) in Jixian County (between Beijing and Tianjin) and took photos of the midnight fireworks in the small town in the valley below the temple from up in the hills behind the remains of the Temple's magnificent white tower (bái tǎ) the lone survivor of the wars here.



View from the inside of the White Tower at North Shaolin.

It appears to have been repaired several times.

Work on reconstruction of the temple had stopped for more than a year. Then in late August I returned and found that work had recommenced and was going at a good speed. Construction on the Library ("Sutra Depository" or "Depository of Buddhist Texts") at the highest point of the site was nearly finished and work on the Prayer Hall (*Da Xiong* Temple Hall) just below had started.

So I wanted to go back, but this year do something different. Specifically, I wanted to know how Shaolin monks living in the nearby Shaolin (branch) Temple called Baitasi celebrated New Year's if indeed they did. But, instead of bringing fireworks like last year I brought a light bag – some alternative to the massive nearly rock-hard heavy bags they trained with.

My plan was to spend a day – 24 hours with the monks to get the inside story. But it turned out to be a lot more than that.

Day One

I arrived on Friday February 8th about 4:00 pm. It's been a cold winter here in north China, one of the coldest on record, but it was sunny and nice despite the brisk below zero weather.

I parked outside the gates and walked in heading towards the Abbot's office. I'd met Abbot Shi Yan Dong about a year before and found him to be a quite pleasant agreeable person and hoped he'd allow me to stay with them for the night and another day. He was in his office. We had an interesting conversation about a variety of subjects including building the new temple on the ashes of the old, life in Baitasi, Buddhism, my series of stories on the reconstruction and so on. When I finally asked him to stay there for the night he agreed.

Our conversation was a little limited because I had no translator and had to rely on my rather broken but growing Chinese language ability (or disability as it may be). Often, I had to say: "Ting bu dong," (I don't understand) and he'd patiently rephrase his sentences so I could understand.

"Do you think that the Shaolin will modernize?" Shi Yan Dong replied, "No." To which I responded, "In history it changed, grew and developed. Why stop?"

Shi Yan Dong came back with "Would you like some tea?"

Having lived in China for a while I knew that asking again probably wouldn't work, so I changed the subject again: "Sure! How many hours a day do you meditate?"

The Abbot held up the Chinese finger sign for "six," and he smiled.

"This guy sure doesn't waste words," I thought.

The kindly Abbot then showed me to a small bedroom behind an office next to the small rooms for the monks. I put down my bags and asked if it was OK to take pictures freely. To this he said "wait. On Sunday there are special prayers; you can take photos then."



My humble but comfortable bed



Windowsill in my quarters - Quite lovely

I could hear chanting to the rhythm of a drum beat and found out that they say group prayers at 4:00 pm. Anyways, I relaxed for a few minutes when someone came to tell me it was time for dinner at 5:30.

I went in the small rustic eating room which is worth a description. It's kind of dark, with a very old cement wall on one side and a low corrugated metal roof held up by two-inch diameter very old tree saplings. Straight ahead there was a small potbellied stove with an ancient water kettle sitting atop. On the right there were four medium length "long" tables. I was guided to the one on the end (the far right) the place for visitors I surmised. There were two bowls with chopsticks under them on the table. I was then shown to the table under the windows where the food was. In one of my bowls I put a ladle full of the thin rice soup (only rice and water) and in the other I put a piece of the rather delicious hot corn bread that had a little bit of bean paste in the middle.

I sat down and drank the rice soup from the bowl and used my chop sticks to eat the corn bread. It took me about 3 minutes to work my way through that. Afterwards I was shown the hot water kettle and how to wash my bowls and chopsticks which I had to return to where I found them. The monks of course eat in silence and must finish all their food, every speck of it. The Abbot sat at the front table alone.

Despite the "silence during eating" rule I quickly picked up on the fact that my new brother monks all had a sense of humor and were very open and friendly. I'm sure they were as curious about me as I was about them. When asked where I'm from I always say that I'm a "world citizen," but came from Korea, where in fact I'd spent the last seven years before coming to China four years ago. When pressed I'd admit that I have an American passport... but honestly added that I really am a mix of about 24 nation's cultures - not simply "an American."

After dinner a couple of the monks invited me to one of their rooms. Another description is in order.

First, these monks live in poverty. Their rooms are small, maybe four meters by eight at the most. The walls need paint and the floors are cold cement. Everything is old, really old. This particular room had only one cot, two chairs and a small desk. One chair I later figured out was specifically designed for meditation because the seat was wider than most and had no arm rests. There were some very well read old, old books here and there – all in Chinese of course as none of them spoke any English beyond “hello.”

We chatted about many things... like Buddhism and of course: Shaolin Kung Fu! I felt very much at home there with them for a variety of reasons... one being that they all were/are actually very funny guys with rich senses of humor. That is one thing that always attracted me to Chan Buddhism – there is usually an undeniable humor built into the foundation of their ungraspable philosophies.

After talking for half an hour or so one of the monks called Shi Heng Gui (all monks use the moniker “Shi,” and “Heng Gui” is his Buddhist name) invited me to show them some of my skills.

I was a bit stiff from a 10K run the day before so I showed them a modified Hatha Yoga stretching routine I’d learned as a youth called: “Salute to the Sun” in which I included right, left and center splits at the appropriate places.

My flexibility seemed to impress them a bit, and then Shi Heng Gui effortlessly dropped into the side splits too. Though a few years younger than me he felt/feels more like an older brother because of his maturity, undeniable humility and very advanced skill levels.

He then showed me a Kung Ku form called: “Shao Hong Chuan,” (“Little Red Fist” – a Shaolin form for beginners).

Though as a teen I’d learned some Shaolin Taolu (forms) I’ve forgotten them over the years and really wanted to learn one, so this was very exciting for me. His gracefulness, speed and explosive power were awesome to behold. The other monk in the room told me that Shi Heng Gui was a champion in China once upon a time, even winning tournaments in Beijing. I wasn’t surprised in the least because he looked and felt like a real fighter, not just a showman. Simultaneously his Buddhism, centeredness, peaceful mindedness and general positive mind told me he was a lot more than “just a fighter.”



Shi Heng Gui

About 7:00 pm Shi Yan Dong (the Abbot) invited me to join him in his office and we talked for a while. He informed me that the monks needed to meditate in the evening. Shortly thereafter I returned to my room. Luckily for me and everyone there the rooms were nice and warm on this cold winter night.

I jotted down some notes, checked my e-mail and read some newspapers on my phone, sent some text messages and soon fell into a comfortable sleep in my new home behind an office in Baitasi – Branch Temple of the Shaolin. Wow! Fireworks were going off almost constantly in the village as the next day was New Year's Eve.

Though I'd like to end Day 1 there, I would be remiss not to mention that I was a bit hungry! Oh! The life of a monk isn't so easy~!

Day Two – New Year's Eve

I'd been told the evening before that their days during the winter begin at 5:30 am. I woke hearing a slow rhythmic drum in my dreams. Around 6:00 I actually woke and crawled out of my cot into my shoes.

Emerging into the cold misty early dawn's light I was greeted by a monk that told me it was breakfast time. Guess what was on the menu... Yep, thin rice soup and corn bread with a little bean paste in the middle. Yummy, but not exactly the breakfast I'm used to.

After eating and brushing my teeth by the outdoor water-pipe with warm water heated by an ancient coal stove, I felt pretty good. A huge monk I'd met there on my previous trip – Shi Yuan Liang (which means “forgive” I think – though they could be different characters) invited me to his room. I remember him specifically because he was breaking huge hunks of marble rocks and bricks with his hands the last time I'd met him.



Pieces of the brick went flying after he hit it



I guess I'd describe him as a gentle giant kind of guy. His room was somewhat different from Shi Heng Gui's room in that he had an old microwave oven, (old, old) computer and even small (old) speakers! Wow! What luxury!

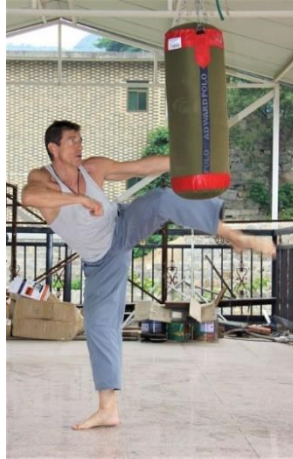
After chatting for a while, we went outside and met with another monk Shi Guo Guang, who I found out was not from Songshan Shaolin like the other monks I'd met. In his late thirties I found out he'd joined the monastery at a later age and even had a teenaged daughter. But, like the other monks he had that same quiet good humor and positive outlook on life and sincere devotion to Buddhism. During the prayer services the next day I found out his reading of the prayers were especially sweet and powerful, and I understood some of his special talent.



Shi Guo Guang

After chatting with him outside along came the cook, Shi Hong Yuan. Of all the monks this guy was probably the funniest and he reminded me much of Jackie Chan in the recent Shaolin Si (Temple) movie. He also is from the Songshan Shaolin.

It then seemed a good time to hang up my little light bag alongside their monstrous camouflaged heavy bags. It seemed so small... In any case, I stretched and worked all three bags for a while along with Shi Heng Gui. He could really smash those granite-like bags of theirs and really enjoyed flying from one to the other... bang BANG BANG!



I like the smaller light bag especially up high because I like high kicks and spinning kicks and prefer speed and mobility over power. But, Shi Heng Gui seemed to have all three. He could do anything I could but even better, in addition to having an encyclopedic knowledge of Shaolin and Tai Chi forms all rooted deeply in Buddhist philosophy. Every one of his actions was perfect as far as I could tell.

Though it was almost 11:30 by this time (lunch time), I really wanted to go to the North Shaolin site to photograph the construction that had taken place since the last time I'd been there in August.

Did they get the roof on the Prayer Hall I wondered? They were just putting up some the enormous wooden pillars the last time I'd been there.

The North Shaolin Temple site is only about a 20-minute drive from Baitasi, and Wei Min's guest house is only a five-minute walk from the Northern Shaolin.

I wanted very much to stop there first to pay my respects and give him a copy of the January/February issue of Kung Fu magazine because it had the interview with and a photo of his mother Wang Xiulan.

Also, the narrow ribbon-like road to his guest house was paved unlike the last few hundred meters to the Northern Shaolin, and my antique economy Chinese car had seen better days and generally didn't like really bumpy country dirt roads, so his place seemed like the best place to park!

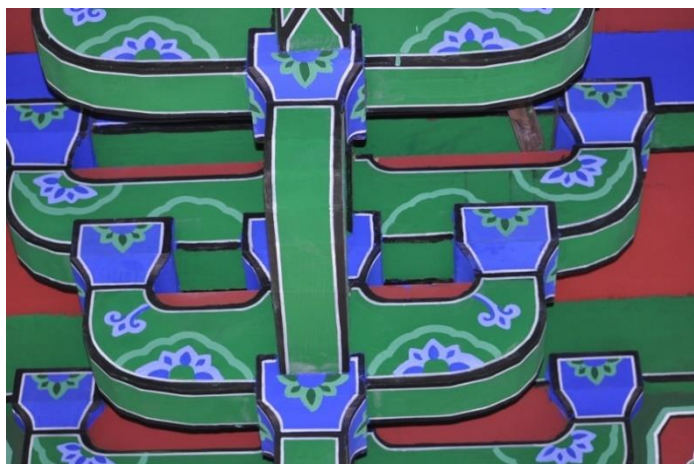
Last summer the rains washed his first beautiful new freshly laid wet cement road down the hill. I suggested he pray the second time the cement was laid. It stopped raining just then. Coincidence? Ha!

Wei Ming as always treated us (I and whoever I'm with...) like family and soon we were talking about this and that. I wanted to have lunch but was too eager to see the new construction on North Shaolin so I asked if we could have lunch there after our tour. Gracious as always Wei Ming assented. So off we hiked down the little new cement road and up a longer dirt road to the temple. At the large blue gates, we stopped as they were locked. Fortunately, Shi Heng Gui knew the security guard and called him on his phone. Shortly after the gate opened and in we went.

My eyes swept up the mountainside to see the pure beauty of the two massive buildings nearing completion. History was telescoping in a unified loop. Totally lovely.



I took some pictures from a distance and we walked up further, entering *Da Xiong Temple Hall* – Buddha Hall (for prayer) first and then walked up behind it and into the Library (Sutra Depository). Time stood still for me at least though I could tell Shi Heng Gui was strongly affected too.



The exquisite painting on the interlocking beams of the Library's rafters was surreal in its perfection.



Click, click, click went the camera as my body worked, but spirit quietly breathed in the peace, sweetness and serenity of the cold mountain morning air in a place where unspeakably brutal history was being rewritten with peaceful natural wood, stone and paint.

During previous conversations with Wei Ming I'd been told many people come to Pan Mountain because of its restorative healthy energy.

Perhaps my feelings reflected some of that, combined with the knowledge of the great and terrible history and glimpses of the many beauties and wonders yet to come in this sacred place.

Past present and future merge at rare times in life and this place always seems to do it for me.



Shi Heng Gui

After some immeasurable time, we walked back to the guest house where Wei Ming's family joined us for a massive feast with chicken, squid, liver, tofu salad, rice, all kinds of vegetables and a dozen other dishes. Shi Heng Gui of course ate only vegetables.

After lunch we walked out on the patio/garden area in front of the guesthouse under the eyes of the North Shaolin and over-looking the village below. We breathed in the glorious air and had to feel a certain oneness with all things.

Returning to the temple I chatted with Abbot Shi Yan Dong and a couple of his guests for about 45 minutes then took a well-deserved nap I figured. After waking I saw Shi Heng Gui doing some paperwork then I met with Shi Guo Guang and we talked about life and philosophy for a while.

One of the monks – the cook came by. I'd forgotten his name but said Ni Hao! (Hello!)

I think he accurately realized my forgetfulness and came back a few minutes later and gave me a piece of paper with a little Chinese writing. I asked what it means and he firmly stated: "Hong Yuan!"

Then it came back to me. He was Shi Hong Yuan. I laughed. He's a funny guy!

Before long it was dinner time (5:30) Darn! I'd missed chanting at 4:00 pm again!

Walking into the cozy dining hall I could smell something very different... WOW! Jiaozi! The little steamed dumplings Chinese all eat on New Year's. Great hot mountains of steaming Jiaozi beckoned in the dining hall! Those Jiaozi lit up and warmed the whole room. The greatest joys come from the smallest things.

Dinner done all too soon; bowls and chopsticks washed, I trained with Shi Heng Gui – doing Taolu.

Well after sunset I joined a few of the monks in one of the rooms that had an ancient TV. There was no cable, just a fuzzy broadcast TV. They were watching CCTV 1. I found out almost everyone in China watches this on New Year's Eve with their families. CCTV's New Year's Eve entertainment is a variety show with lots of comedy skits, singing, dancing, and magic shows. Though I could understand half at best, I was delightfully entertained and very grateful that the monks accepted me into their family and shared this evening with me. They even snacked on peanuts! There was also plenty of tea and my cup was never dry.

It was a joyous celebration of laughter and conversation. Shi Heng Gui joined us off and on for a while. Though it seemed he rarely relaxed, his meditation seemed to carry through all activities and he was always relaxed. He did Tai Chi at times during the evening. He wasn't a showman. It's just his nature.

People look at monks who usually dress in a similar fashion and think they are the same but the uniqueness of their personalities is huge as is their acceptance of differences and joy of life.

At 11:45 I went outside to try to get some pictures of fireworks alongside the huge thousand-year-old plus white tower. ("Bai" means white, "ta" means pagoda like tower – "si" means temple.)

Indeed, the night sky was brilliant with stars and fireworks of infinite colors exploding in all directions. Focusing a digital camera on exploding fireworks at night was an exciting challenge.



By 12:15 it was already the Year of the Snake and very, very slowly the cacophonous fireworks began to diminish yielding way to the peacefulness of the night.

Of course, they never really stopped and could be heard off and on all night, and even for the next several days.

By 12:30 I was tired and turned in for the evening. I'd been told there was a special 4:00 am New Year's Morning Prayer and I was invited to attend; I was determined to attend!

Day Three – New Year’s Day

Unfortunately, I overslept again. Guess I’d be a terrible monk! Exceptionally loud fireworks did wake me around 6:30 however... fortunately just in time for a breakfast of more... Yeah! Jiaozi! What a luxurious life I had!

Even having overslept I didn’t feel guilty or in a hurry. Those kinds of emotions just didn’t seem to belong in this environment that appeared to be knit together with humor and understanding. I know as an outsider there’s a lot I didn’t see, but that’s what I felt and over the years I’ve learned feeling usually is the best indicator for what’s really going on – more so than thoughts or caged in words.

For those with more earthy interests I suppose here I could mention that after breakfast I needed to go to the “men’s room.” At Baitasi it’s an old hall off to one side on the far right looking out from the monk’s rooms, done all in (old) cement with squat toilets and without running water. Strangely it didn’t smell too bad and even looked pretty clean all “down under” if you know what I mean. Exactly how they did that I don’t know and didn’t ask. But, like most toilets in China it’s strictly a BYOTP (bring your own toilet paper) sort of affair!

Afterwards I went outside to wash using water warmed in a large pot on the coal heated stove in a small shed between the monks’ rooms and the toilets. That was refreshing!

We all seemed to spend a lot of time outside, though the monk’s rooms and small offices were heated with a great central heating system. I never did find any showers – I heard there were some but there was a problem with the electricity or something and I suspect the monks had to do body washing in their rooms.

During my first couple of days there I did meet another couple of monks; one very tall and the other a bit short. I got both their names... one of which I remember because it took me a long time to figure out. “Dai Hao” turned out to be his nickname, but it also means “say hello to your family,” in Chinese, I think. Very funny guy! He chopped coal and kept the fire under the kettle of water for washing always going.



He must be an enlightened person, I think. Why? Would an enlightened person be a lazy fellow like me, or a splendid humorous person who is humble and does most of the real work?

They were not from the Songshan Shaolin I was told and seemed a bit shy of me. They were fond of walking clockwise circles around the huge white Tower deep in meditation in the early mornings and early evenings.



They were always friendly and sincere but just didn't talk much. Rituals are such a big part of all of our lives. Life in the monastery also has its rituals but I seemed to be sleeping through a lot of them. Still, I was aware of how each person has his own.

After washing on day three I worked out with Shi Heng Gui and the bags for an hour before retiring to his room where he really began to formally teach me. Fortunately, he had a student there named Ms. Chen that helped me understand more detail of what he was saying. The following is only a small part:

"Everything comes from the heart: prayer, fighting and sleep. Everything also comes from imagination - like a photo - it's so important to imagine good things. In meditation you have no thinking - no words. Everything from One.

"Zuòchán is (Zen) meditation." (This Chinese word is pronounced like "Zoa chan.")

"Zhi Zhou" is mantra - a phrase that is repeated many times to help attain singleness of mind. (Pronounced like "Dzir Jo.")

"Om mani padme hum" is one of the Zhi Zhou the monks at Baitasi often use, along with "Āmítuó Fó."

"The mantra is a way to control heart/mind. Life is suffering; desire is its' cause. Accept it. Don't run away from it."

"You have to help yourself. Don't wait for 'the Gods.' Buddhism is the teacher. A good teacher is important so the student can rise."

At this point I felt compelled to ask a question about how to reconcile/harmonize the great goods and evils of the world.

His answer was “*Zhōngyāng*,” meaning “center.”

I tried to rephrase the question. He gave a prayer bracelet to Ms. Chen.

It seemed to me the answer was that simple.

Too many people in the world suffer from complicated thinking. I know I do! Keeping it simple may indeed be the best road to happiness. At first this Shi Heng Gui guy didn't look like so much sitting there on his cot in his small monk's room, but he seemed to grow during this talk and see through to the heart of things. His teachings were immortal and wise, simple yet infinitely deep.

I saw a different side of him there – was he really so different from Bodhidharma (?) I wondered. He certainly wasn't just a Kung Fu master I realized – or perhaps this was just a different side of his Kung Fu, like the different faces on a diamond – all of which can be seen at the same time as light transmits cleanly and clearly through the perfect electronic structure sparkling with brilliant rainbows of color coming from a multitude of angles simultaneously.

Despite all that, I'm not a particularly religious kind of guy but do appreciate a spiritual life. I say my five prayers every day, even though I do this out of sight. Why? Islamophobia has been escalating and I wish to be known as an individual first before being labeled when possible.

I always introduce myself as a Muslim when I first came to a monastery and first meet some monks.

Fortunately, they have always been totally inclusive and welcoming of all people. The abbot of the Shaolin Monastery Shi Yong Xin wrote in his book: “All religions are one.”

Some Islamic traditions teach there were 124,000 Prophets, though only 25 are mentioned by name in the Quran. We believe God sent messengers to every nation.

Could Buddha have been a Prophet? It's impossible to say for sure. It would be forbidden to say that he was or was not.

However, I have always studied as many philosophies and religions as possible and there is a huge overlap in beliefs between them.

Some argue that Buddhists don't believe in God, however one might assert that the Buddhistic concept of "One Mind" could be the same thing. Some assert that Buddhists worship the Buddha, and most but not all do. I've studied the Buddha's teaching and never found any indication what-so-ever – zero - that he wanted to be worshipped. According to Oxford scholar Peter Frankopan:

"Statues of the Buddha started to appear only after the cult of Apollo became established in the Gundhara Valley and western India. Buddhists felt threatened by the success of new religious practices and began to create their own visual images. Indeed, there is a correlation not only in the date of the earliest statues of the Buddha, but also in their appearance and design: it seems that it was Apollo that provided the template, such was the impact of Greek influences. Hitherto, Buddhists had actively refrained from visual representations; competition now forced them to react, to borrow and to innovate."

Peter Frankopan, *The Silk Roads – A New History of the World*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2016 p. 9

2020 note: During the 10 years I've been going to North Shaolin there have been three "Head Monks." Each time I explain that I'm Muslim and wish to learn about Shaolin and Buddhism. They have always been completely understanding and welcoming. I think their openness should be a role model for others.

I'm also a scientist and the first rule of solving a complex equation is to simplify the equation by for example finding common denominators – and certainly all people have these common denominators – we're born and die, while in between we have hopes, dreams and fears, great joys and sorrow.

That's the human condition. Finding the common denominators can be a great tool to solving some of these problems of the world, reconciling the differences between those great goods and evils and soothing some of the often-ridiculous fears that people often have.

During my first meeting of this trip with Shi Yan Dong he'd mentioned a nearby lake. I asked Shi Heng Gui if he'd like to go. He said sure and after lunch off we went aided by Ms. Chen who continued to help with translations. The lake was frozen over so completely cars were driving on it and quite a few people were enjoying the sunny day there.

We declined invitations to rent ice bikes and sleds, instead choosing to walk and slide around and eventually decided without thinking to stop and started practicing some Chen style Tai Chi – an art Shi Heng Gui has also mastered, interspersed with anecdotes of Buddhist philosophy and practical advice.



Ms. Chen practices Tai Chi on frozen lake at Panshan

After the lake we dropped Ms. Chen at her home and drove back to Baitesi in time for the 4:00 pm chanting.



Outside Baitesi on New Year's Day

It was a beautiful ceremony and I took lots of photos and recorded it as well. It was certainly a spiritually inspiring performance attended by about 20 people mostly from the local community.



At 5:30 it was dinner time – noodles this time – and corn bread again. At 7:00 I went out for a walk to find more food and was happy to find a KFC about a 20-minute walk away. After I returned, I went to see Shi Heng Gui who had another of his students – this time an electrical engineer – a handsome young fellow who brought him lots of gifts like different kinds of fruits and so on.

I talked with them for an hour or so then felt tired and ready for sleep.

Day Four

Woke at 6:00 again and went for breakfast – this time mantou a steamed rather dense white bread with... rice soup. A couple of the monks encouraged me to put some black sauce on it, but the sauce was a bit salty for me... Still it was warming on the cold morning.

I then did a short Taolu exercise with Shi Heng Gui before going to my humble abode to pack my two small bags. I felt a bit sad planning to leave but felt the need to return to Beijing and write the story I'd come to research. I'd only planned to stay one night at the temple but instead had spent three.

After packing I went to the different monks' rooms and chatted briefly with them, then went to see Shi Heng Gui who had a very interesting older lady who had been a student with him in a master's Tai Chi class for some years.



She was very wise and knowledgeable about Buddhism, martial arts, and life, and I immediately felt a deep affection for her. After that I walked around the temple area and took photos... noticing something I hadn't before. One of the small temples was actually Taoist and dedicated to the Goddess Guan Yin.

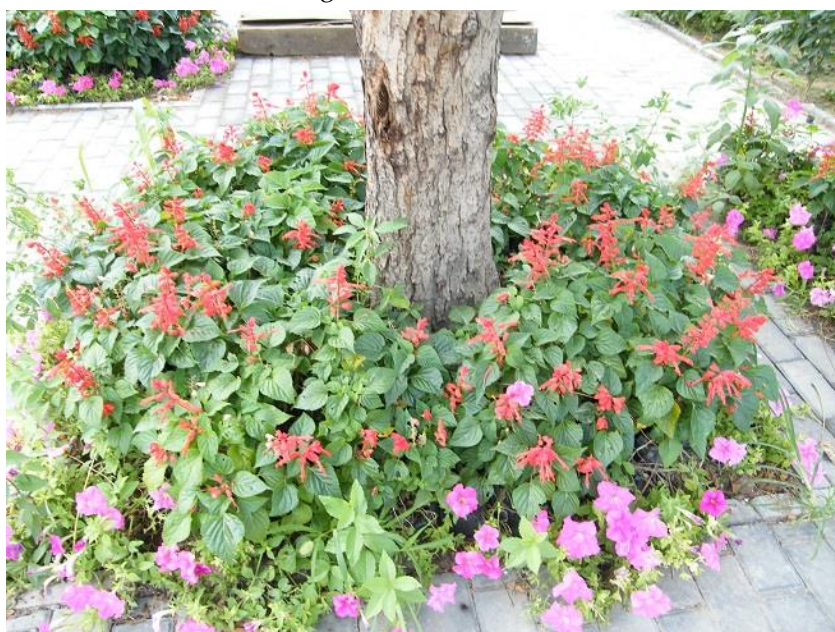


Small inconspicuous Guan Yin Temple Hall just inside the front entrance of Baitesi Monastery

The small sign in front says it was built during the Ming Dynasty and rebuilt during the Qing Dynasty and that this was a well-known Taoism area in Jixian (Ji County). Here was Buddhism and Taoism in harmony again. I saw some interesting harmonizing of Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism in the Songshan Shaolin also.



Symbol of Sanjiao – The three teachings – harmony of Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. Photo taken at Songshan Shaolin 2012



In the courtyard of Baiteji

An hour or so later I knew I had to leave soon, but it was lunch time, so I stopped for one last meal with the brothers.

I and most men don't feel comfortable with long goodbyes, so I put my bags in the car and accompanied by Shi Heng Gui and Shi Guo Guang said farewells and left.

They say a place is just a place, but people make it special. Let there be no doubt the people at Baitasi are special indeed. I also believe that I leave a part of me with everyone I meet, and I take a part of them with me when I go. From a purely rational point of view this means we all learn from each other and if we are caring people, we carry some of our friend's "spirit" with us too.

When I got home, I ate first(!) then started sifting through and editing photos. By late evening I was finished and slept.

Day Five

Back at home I woke up with a little headache something I often have. Strange I thought... I didn't have a headache during the time I was there.

I started sifting through my notes and research wondering what the brothers were up to – and realized part of me was definitely still there! I wondered about my goals when I went there. I wanted to know what their "normal" day was but found no "normal" day. Each day was different – and seemed to flow one to the next quite effortlessly. The monks had practically nothing in the way of material goods but seemed quite happy none-the-less. The old question: "Do we own our things or do our things own us?" came to mind.

Spent almost all of day five writing and it flowed easily. I had intended to go running and other martial art training as is my habit but typing took longer than expected. So, let it go... tomorrow is another day.

Christians talk about "born again." I guess each new reality to which we awaken begins a new life in us. I hope I can keep the centeredness, humor, discipline, and explosive power of Shi Heng Gui and the fellowship of all the monks alive in me for a long, long time. I know I'll go back, but the question arises... have I really left(?) as no doubt a part of me is still there. Clinging to the past? Most unenlightened! Forgetting one's kindly brothers? Most unenlightened! What am I? Ha!

Anyone can visit. Just copy the Chinese characters below, go to China and show those characters at bus or train stations and to taxi drivers. It doesn't cost money to stay there but donations are always accepted. Oh! It helps a lot if you speak some Chinese or have a translator, but really it isn't necessary if you have a good heart. A sense of humor really helps too, I think. A Chan Buddhist master once told me to do the opposite of whatever he told me. So, I didn't. As for the temple, go, but leave your luggage behind.



Rebuilding North Shaolin Temple Part VII Release

Reconstruction SURGE!

and other changes in Panshan – Home of the North Shaolin

放生

Fàng sheng – To release captive animals



July/August 2013

July 27, 2013 - A three-part story

“The ultimate of Shaolin Kung Fu is the practice of immutable mind and the unperturbed mind has equanimity, without attachments to the external appearance of Chan (Zen).”

From “*Shaolin – Temple in my Heart*” by Shaolin Abbot Shi Yongxin

Part I

On July 14th around 4:00 pm the air was warm and pregnant with incipient rain accompanied by jagged bolts of distant lightning and faint echoes of thunder lending further vibrancy to the chancy air tickling the leaves in the lush mountain forests around the incubating North Shaolin Temple.

Strolling up the narrow winding rutted dirt road to the large blue gates to the reconstruction site of the true North Shaolin Temple located on Pan Mountain (Panshan) in Jixian County, in Northeastern China – we were greeted at the last turn by the breathtaking vision of two great classically designed Buddhist Temple halls above – the upper one – Sutra Hall (*Cang Jing Ge*) painted with divine glory in immaculate detail and beauty, the other just below – Prayer Hall (*Tian Wang Dian*) appearing rough-hewn but magnificent in its unfinished enormous simplicity and glory. Does the Prayer hall await a paint job? Ha! Like the one hand awaits a clap? What absurd questions the dichotomous mind creates locked into future and past as we are rather than savoring the beauty and joy of what is – here and now!

On this auspicious day my friend Miao and I met the crew chief of a different construction company from last time we visited, this one being the “Shaolin Traditional Construction Team” with the Crew Chief named Mr. Jiang who though very busy stopped to talk for a while.



Traditional Construction Team - Crew Chief Mr. Jiang on right

Mr. Jiang's crew was involved in mainly interior work and was finishing for the day, loading lumbar onto a truck, scaffolding onto another truck; other workers were using a wire brush to smooth the mortar between bricks of the outside brick wall, cementing parts of the temple floor and so on. Given that they start at 6:30 am they were moving at a pretty good clip given that we arrived at 4:30 and remained till 6:00 pm when they called it a day. Fortunately, it was a relatively cool day without the burning late July sun.

Based on Song Dynasty architecture the temple construction was on schedule and Mr. Li Yicai's heavy construction team we'd met last summer was nearly finished for the time being though they were scheduled to return in the fall to begin work on the Monk's chanting building (Chan Tang) and four floor domicile building to the side of the main halls already completed.

The artisans who lovingly paint these halls will return when the pillars and walls fully dry within the newest structure, Tian Wang Dian.

Next a large platform must be built for three huge bronze Buddhas. After they are built it will take about another month for them to fully dry. There should be 25 or 26 Buddhas installed along the side walls in this main Prayer Hall to silently attend those seeking enlightenment within this vast and beautiful hall.

As the day was winding down and the storm drew closer, a solitary young monk was seen walking up the dirt road to the construction site. I was busy throwing scaffolding clamps into a large truck with a couple of the workers but like them stopped to look when they whispered about his arrival. I didn't know this young monk and was curious who he was and what stories he might have to tell.

His name was Shi Yan Wan and he had been living in a small house rented by the Shaolin Temple only about a ten-minute walk from the construction site. This raised a few questions... What about the Shaolin monks at Baitasi Temple in the village at the foot of the mountains? Why didn't he live there?

"They moved back to Songshan Shaolin," was the answer.

"Baitasi is... empty?"

Shock!

I'd heard a few months before that the Songshan Shaolin Temple was actually renting Baitasi Temple from the Jixian County Buddhist Association during the construction of the Northern Shaolin but was surprised to find out that arrangement had changed.

"The way of the initiating ("Qian") is change and transformation

So that each being obtains its true nature and destiny

And the union of the great harmony is preserved.

This is what is favorable and upright."

From the *I-Ching – Book of Changes* – Translated by
Alfred Huang

Grabbing my cell phone from the old camera bag I called Shifu (Master) Shi Henggui and in my rudimentary Chinese found out that he was indeed back at Songshan Shaolin, but the possibility of his return seemed open. We chatted briefly but change is the immutable state of nature; can't stand in the river in the same place twice and all that.

After the end of work, my friend Miao and I walked with Shi Yan Wan to his temporary home – though small a lovely place nestled in the forests with benches and a table in front. He invited us for tea which we gratefully accepted.

The conversation that followed included all kinds of interesting things, like differences between Taoism and Buddhism, cause and effect in Buddhism, and about his own background. It turned out that Shi Yan Wan had graduated not too long before from the "Institute for Studies of Buddhism and Religious Theory" at Renmin University of China in Beijing (1) set up in 2011, then had been assigned to the Shaolin family. Though he wasn't a "Wushu" guy himself I was happy to see a light bag for punches and kicks hanging in the central area of the long veranda where we were drinking tea.

Shi Yan Wan seemed like a very kindhearted and sincere young man with a thorough knowledge of Buddhism. We asked what he studied in the Buddhist College and it included modern and ancient Chinese, English, calligraphy, Tao of Tea, and of course Buddhist philosophy. His parents are both Buddhists as well.

I asked who else was living in the cluster of small apartments there and he said “no one.” I asked if I could stay there sometime and he said “Sure!”

The storm was getting closer and the sun was not far from setting. I invited Shi Yan Wan to come to Wei Ming’s guest house where I was staying but he politely declined as he said he had some lunch he’d made left over and intended to eat it for dinner.

All said and done we bid our farewells and walked off down the densely forested country road back to our guest house not far away. A cool wetness and stronger breeze promised that the rain was not far away.

After a late dinner at Wei Ming’s I turned on the TV and watched a movie I hadn’t seen before titled: “Yip Man’s Final Fights” (Ye Wen Zhong Ji Yi Zhan – readers may recall he was Bruce Lee’s teacher of Wing Chung Kung Fu), actually the third of three movies about this legendary martial artist. It was a terrific movie to watch as the storm unleashed its wild fury upon the harmony of the legendary mountain.

Before sleep I wondered about Shi Yan Dong, Shi Henggui, Shi Guo Guang, Shi Hong Yuan and my other friends from Baitasi Temple and regretted not visiting or calling them recently, though I knew I wasn’t really at fault – my full-time school had assigned me to teach two advanced science classes in mid-April and I was swamped at work with no time for hobbies, or even friends for nearly three months. Karma, I guess. One of the nice things about Buddhist philosophy is there isn’t a whole lot of sin, guilt and regret, but rather a peaceful minded letting go of the past, awareness of karmic (cause and effect) chains and recognition of the constancy of change in nature. I slept well that night as the storm mellowed into a gentle rain till dawn when I awoke.

I thought briefly of visiting Shi Yan Wan before leaving Panshan but knew that monks need meditation and I shouldn’t be greedy with his time. Our meeting seemed lovely and perfect as it was, and I’m on vacation now so another visit soon seems like a good ending on this chapter. In sum, construction was continuing, however the next heavy construction wouldn’t begin till September and though my Shaolin monk friends had returned to their homes in Songshan, I had a new friend at North Shaolin now.

PART II

Returning home to Beijing I quickly went through the photos selecting a dozen or so good ones, cropped 'em, fixed the lighting on a couple and so on before batting out a rough first draft of this story so far. Then, the next morning July 16th there was a huge three-day international Wushu competition in Beijing I'd been invited to cover, and I wanted to get to the Opening Ceremony. It took nearly four days after that competition was finished to edit the nearly 3,000 photos I got, write a story and upload the best photos and story to my site. I also made a lot of new friends and got their Wushu schools' information at the competition to add to the fighting arts Asia directory I've been working on for a few years.

After all that I turned my attention back to Shaolin.

I knew/know money is an issue affecting the speed of reconstruction at North Shaolin. Since Baitasi was now closed I decided it was time to call the accountant at Songshan Shaolin, a Mr. Hu it turned out. He, I heard, had just arrived at Panshan town. The day after a brief conversation he graciously opened a bank account in the name of North Shaolin Temple in Panshan Town – specifically for donations to help rebuild the Northern Shaolin. (2)

During this conversation I also found out that that a) construction plans had been greatly accelerated – with the heavy construction work on several buildings to begin at the beginning of August, b) some changes had been made to the existing design, mainly enlarging the buildings and c) a new Abbot had been assigned to North Shaolin, Shi Yan Pei who was due to arrive July Friday July 26th.

That meant if I went back to the Temple on Friday, I could meet the new Abbot and accountant. I also found out that Friday was to be a celebration of Guanyin's enlightenment. Guanyin – meaning “observing the cries of the world” - is the Buddhist Bodhisattva associated with compassion and is venerated by East Asian Buddhists, usually as a female. In China she is usually called Guanyin Pusa. So, special events were planned for Friday.

Wow! That was a lot to assimilate. Definitely had to go back Friday!

Part III

Arriving Friday morning we called Shi Yan Wan and were directed to a small Buddhist hotel near Baitasi Temple where there was a prayer ceremony going on attended by about 50 people who were chanting in unison prayers to Guanyin led by that same good monk.

After that we relaxed and had tea with the Shaolin accountant Mr. Hu, Shi Yan Wan and some local people. We all took a short walk and talked about friends and future plans. I found out the plan for the afternoon was a ritual called: *fangsheng* which literally means release but involves setting captured birds and fish – otherwise destined to be eaten – free – back into nature.

Fang Sheng's origins date back to at least the sixth century when monks led worshipers in releasing fish and tortoises into temple ponds. Chinese Buddhists believe the compassionate act of releasing captive animals will cleanse sins and bring good karma.

So, around 3:00 pm our small caravan headed out to the nearby Lake Yu Qiao. Someone had rented small traditional Chinese row boats that slowly collected on shore. First, about 20 of the people with us chanted some prayers while the low clouds held back another storm, though a few drops fell – heaven's happy tears at the release of some beautiful creatures back into the loving arms of nature.



The blue bags are filled with live fish. Shi Yan Wan is center, and the monk on the left is Shi Yan Kong – the new Kung Fu Master

Ironically there was a small fishing boat a couple hundred meters out in the lake, but that made no difference. The ritual was more a symbol that spoke loudly to the hundred or so people at the lake that came around to observe the proceedings. Buddhists are vegetarians and don't eat animals. Setting a few free was a quiet polite message: Let the living things live – send them back home.



After the prayers they released the birds that eagerly flew off. The foot of a small eagle had been wired to the floor of his cage. One of the Buddhist ladies ever so gently freed him of his bondage and off he flew too, back home to the sky.



Then I was invited into one of the boats – along with Shi Yan Wan, another young monk, the rower and a lady and child - to release the fish who had –like the birds - escaped being someone’s dinner.



When we got to the center of the large lake, they carefully opened the large blue bags that held the fish and one by one emptied them back into their home. I took copious pictures to record this beautiful event.



Half an hour later we all met again on shore and after they all said another short prayer, the monks, accountant Mr. Hu, my friend Miao and I headed off to the monk's small house near North Shaolin Temple knowing that the new Abbot Shi Yan Pei was soon to arrive. Though he'd visited the Temple before, we'd missed each other during my last visit, and I was most eager to meet him.

While we waited, I entertained their light bag with some of my favorite kicks and punches to the amusement of a small audience.

Around 6:00 pm he arrived, and we sat around chatting for some time. I found out that the monks' quarters would be large enough to house around 150 monks, and though quarters for women monks were planned, they wouldn't be in the first group to arrive. I also found out about some of the more difficult practices of some of the Shaolin monks at Songshan. For example, the Shi Yan Pei told us about "*chen qi*," which usually refers to a seven-day retreat of meditation, but at Shaolin can be 49 consecutive days where monks meditate for eight hours, then walk for eight hours. They eat at regular times and sleep only six hours. That seemed a bit difficult for me!

I asked Shi Yan Pei if he had ever met an “enlightened” (*kai wu*) person. He said he’d heard of some, giving me two examples, one named Laiguo Fashi, and the other Xu Yun (known also as Zen Master Hsu Yun), telling us stories about the latter who among other things was one of the teachers of Zhou Enlai, the most revered diplomat and statesman in modern Chinese history. Hsu Yun was also a poet, lived to be 120 and is one of the most revered Ch’an masters in Chinese history.



**“Drawn some sixty years ago by karma
I turned life upside down
And climbed straight on to lofty summits.
Between my eyes a hanging sword,
The Triple World is pure.
Empty-handed, I hold a hoe, clearing a galaxy.**

**“As the 'Ocean of the Knowing-mind' dries up,
Pearls shine forth by themselves;
Space smashed to dust, a moon hangs independent.
I threw my net through Heaven,
Caught the dragon and the phoenix;
Alone I walk through the cosmos,
Connecting the past and its people.”**

Hsu Yun – English translation by Paul Hansen

After a lively discussion spanning many subjects, we all walked through the long moist grasses up a narrow winding dirt path to the North Shaolin reconstruction site awed to soothing silences by the oneness connecting the multitude of pasts and futures funneled through the narrow pin-hole doorway of the here and now.

We did chat here and there and I found out they had new design plans for the Northern Shaolin Temple. I asked Shi Yan Pei to describe his feelings seeing the new construction resting upon the ashes of the old. Without missing a beat he said: "Coming home."

I asked him if he thought perhaps, he'd lived here in a previous life. He smiled and said: "Maybe," a ubiquitous answer especially here in China. I suppose he didn't have much choice really. If he'd said: "Yes" that might have seemed too proud. If he'd said "No," that would have been too narrow-minded. So, his answers were perfect I guess, fitting all interpretations while excluding nothing.

Shi Yan Pei – the new leader of North Shaolin – did impress me as a profound, broadly educated, deeply sincere, and truly spiritual man. He also seemed a bit shy, but that's to be expected I suppose.

Later, back at their (temporary) home Shi Yan Pei allowed me to photograph the beautiful designs for the emerging temple. I also found out that in a couple of weeks some of the fighting Shaolin monks were expected to move to the Panshan home next to the Temple. That definitely deserves a big "WOW" in my book. In addition to that I and my friend Miao were invited to photograph some of the treasures found buried under the earth by the construction crew. These treasures were in the form of large stones with engraved calligraphy from ancient times, probably buried since the destruction of the temple in the early 1940s.



Date, unknown



Reviewing all I'd heard in the past week, I realized that construction plans had been accelerated with heavy construction on several buildings to begin as soon as a week or two, plans for the buildings had been tweaked to make at least some of them even larger, the Buddhists here practice *fāngshēng*, returning the natural living creatures to their homes, some of the Shaolin meditation practices are a bit too much for me (*chén qī*), Chinese Ch'an masters have lived even within the past century, fighting monks will arrive at North Shaolin soon, and... these new friends seemed to be able to get things done.

Still, I missed Shi Yen Dong, Shi Heng Gui and the other monks that were here before, but Shaolin rotates monks here and there depending on a variety of considerations so I'm pretty sure we'll all meet again. They did make a lot of friends while they were here, as evidenced by the great group of locals that attended the prayers and *fāngshēng* celebration of returning creatures of the wild to their homes in the sky and water.

All said and done, we thanked all there, Abbot Shi Yan Pei, Mr. Hu and Shi Yan Wan for their great hospitality and drove off into the night, thinking... until next time.

Though it may seem a bit late in the story to mention this, the smell of the forests there, especially after the rain is intoxicating. The rock formations studding the forested mountains are divinely inspired, and the total rural atmosphere surrounding the temple area is like being transported though a time machine. Who can deny the attractions of such an environment?

*"Can joy be found in the mountains?
Let me tell you.*

*There's more joy in the mountains
than anywhere else.*

*Pines and bamboos perform sacred chants.
The songs of Sheng flutes are played by birds.
In the trees, monkeys climb for fruit.
In the ponds, ducks cavort with lotus lilies.*

*This escape from the ordinary world
month by month and year by year
eliminates the hindrances to Enlightenment."*

Poem Number 2 on Living in the Mountains by Xu Yun

<http://www.hsuyun.org/index.php/visual-arts/poetry/hsuyunpoems/494-hsuyunpoems1.html>



Rebuilding North Shaolin Temple Part VIII

Spirit of the Masters

一日三秋

Yī rì sān qiū - One day three autumns - from the *Book of Songs*

A *chengyu* (four-character proverb) literally meaning that one day seems like three years: figuratively meaning really missing someone, place, or thing.

It had been too long a time since I've been back to the forested mountain home of North Shaolin Monastery. But finally, November 16th, 2013 I got a couple of days off to immerse the spirit in the splendor of a better home.

For me home has always been wherever I am, but I am most at home in mountains, forests and alongside the seas and oceans. Not that I don't like cities for truly I do sometimes enjoy the city lights, but home should be peaceful and natural in my opinion.

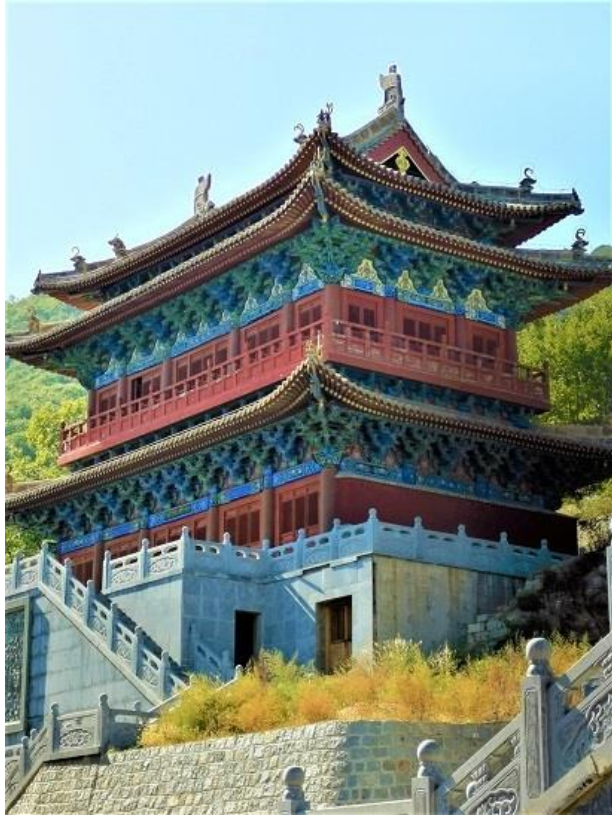
I had a busier than usual schedule planned for this visit. First, I was going to meet a very special semi-local who'd led the team effort to rebuild the "North Shaolin *Ta Lin*" or Pagoda Forest (graveyard). Then, I had made an appointment with Master Shang Mian Hui, the Seventh Generation Master of North Shaolin Kung Fu to take some photos of him and his students training. Also, I had some questions for the head monk at North Shaolin Monastery Shi Yan Pei regarding the origin of the Muscle Change Classic, called the *Yi Jin Jing* in Chinese. Fortunately my translator and friend Miao Hui had just arrived back from Dubai the day before and given that practically nobody in that rural area speaks English that was fortunate. And also, I wanted to see how progress was going on the reconstruction of the Temples within the majestic North Shaolin Monastery, and likewise wanted to do some labor with the workers as I usually do at least for a short time.

But, there are many levels of need, and deep down inside I think I most wanted to smell and feel the autumn leaves, the pine scented air, clean my system hiking up hills taking in the serene beauty, drink the cold mountain water, and bath in the one-ness of it all against the backdrop of the reincarnated the North Shaolin Monastery shining like a diamond against the ever-so-high azure sky, and basically enjoy the sensations that bring back the original human true nature resting mostly dormant within us all.

We arrived Saturday and first went to the reconstruction site, met the workers, took a few photos and then joined in the fun. At first, I wielded a shovel helping to level out the earth at the foot of the stairs leading to Sutra Hall which would be paved soon.



November 16, 2013



Sutra Hall in 2019

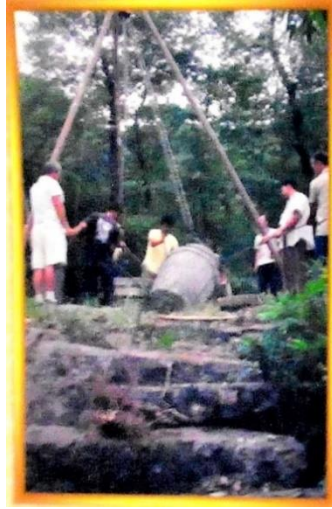
After that I picked up one of my favorite tools, the pick ax, to soften the earth ahead of the other workers so they could more easily move the earth to level it. That got a good sweat going and the arms bursting with *qi*. Swinging a pick ax like that is a lot like chopping wood, terrific exercise. I dug up a lot of ancient roof tiles and bricks from the old temple and put them aside. After a couple of hours we bid farewell and headed back home to Wei Min's house where we had dinner with him and his lovely family. Before long the kindly gentleman that came to North Shaolin every summer for the past eleven years to rebuild the Ta Lin (Pagoda Forest: graveyard) arrived. I'd heard so much about him for the past four years I was quite excited and bursting with questions.

When he arrived with his lovely wife I thought he looked exactly as he should, a tall, slim, wise and kindly looking older gentleman with a small white beard and long hair. When I asked if it was OK to use his name and take a photo, he politely asked me not to. His work was not for reward, or fame or credit, but only because it was there and the right thing to do. I respect his wishes and will refer to him as Mr. Fu, as this word sound has many good possible meanings. By the way, he doesn't smoke or drink alcohol, is vegetarian and speaks excellent English. That evening he explained a lot about the North Shaolin and other monasteries and temples on Panshan, Chinese architecture and Feng Shui, the semi-mystical art and science of locating places for building, construction and design with reverence to and optimal use of *qi*, aligning everything with natural forces to enhance life within the structure.

He told us about his work rebuilding the *Ta Lin*. But, what made my jaw drop on the floor and almost fall off my chair was the news that the "North Shaolin *Ta Lin*" was not part of the Shaolin at all, but rather another monastery altogether called *Zheng fa si* (*Law Monastery*) but usually called "*Zhong Fa Si*", meaning Middle Law Temple (because it's midway up the mountain), the remains of which are located only about five hundred meters above North Shaolin Monastery on Panshan. Almost everyone who refers to that hallowed Pagoda Forest refers to it as the *Shaolinsi Ta Lin*, but... Mr. Fu knows. He with his crew rebuilt it stone by stone over the period of more than a decade and he knows the truths and secrets of the place better than anyone.



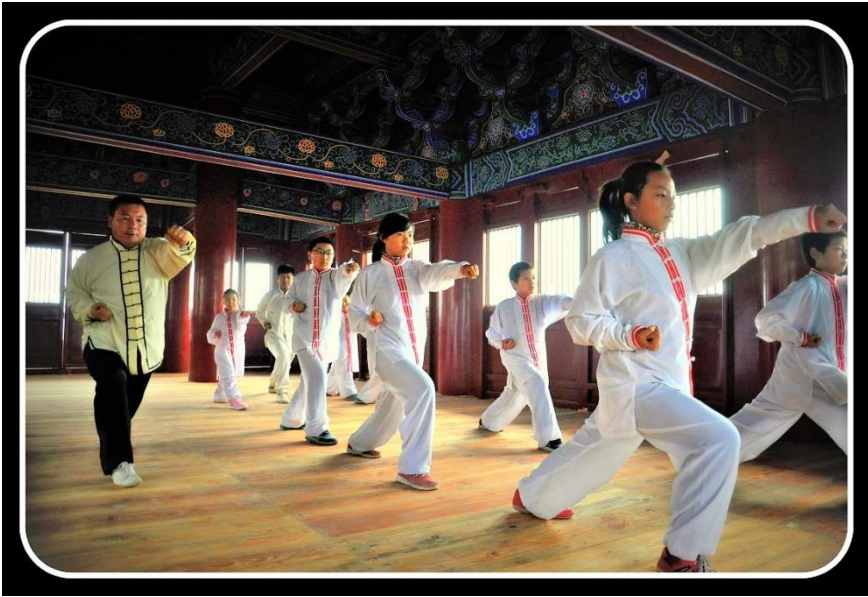
Small photo of Mr. Yao's work crew



The tripod lift was a crucial part of the Ta Lin reconstruction process as the stone grave markers are exceedingly heavy.

The hour had grown late and it was time to go off to bed, with deep peaceful sleep for everyone under the full moon of autumn but before sleep we arranged to meet again at 2:00 pm the next day to hike up the mountain and hear and see the stories he had to tell.

Early next morning I woke to see the spectacular sunrise before we had one of Wei Min's beautiful wife's super breakfasts with wild mountain vegetables, fresh hot country buns, hot steaming corn meal soup, boiled eggs, along with spicy salty Tofu and other things. After that we went off to visit Master Shang and his students to take some exciting pictures to accompany a story about his direct descent North Shaolin Kung Fu style. That was a huge amount of fun as kids are always fun, and his adult students are entertaining humorous guys in addition to being highly skilled martial artists in a style little known outside of China except for the highly respected and well-known southern version of North Shaolin Kung Fu called Bak Sil Lum. The sun was shining brightly and one could only compare the visual effects to traveling back through time when the foremost weapons of war were staffs, spears, halberds and swords.



Shang Mian Hui, December 8, 2013 Photo taken in Sutra Hall



Shang Mian Hui, December 8, 2013



Taolu



After that we all went out for a fabulous lunch that kept coming and coming in waves as is the tradition in Chinese restaurants in China. It was delicious beyond belief, and hard to not overeat. Hanging out with the living legends of North Shaolin Kung Fu was certainly anyone's idea of the "Kung Fu Dream." We talked about many things including the fact that the North Shaolin Monastery had recently been awarded official Tianjin Cultural Heritage Site status, and they were now applying for China's National Cultural Heritage Site status. The Songshan Shaolin Monastery was declared a World Cultural Heritage Site by UNESCO, August 1, 2010.

After lunch we rushed back to and up the mountain to Wei Min's house to meet with Mr. Fu who showed up right on time. Up the mountain we hiked past the shining North Shaolin Prayer and Sutra Halls up and up along the ancient stone Royal Road upon which a long line of Chinese emperors also hiked dating back to the Wei/Jin Dynasty, a living testimony to the oh-so-magnificent beauty of Panshan.

When we arrived at the first "*Ta*" (pagoda grave markers) a lovely pair on the left, Mr. Fu said they were the first two he'd put back together, hoisting the huge stone sections into place with the help of a construction crew he'd hired and a large steel tripod, ropes and pulleys.

I've been there many times before but it took on an extraordinary beauty when seeing it through the eyes of the man who'd led the reconstruction effort. I'd always wondered why the *Ta* didn't have names engraved upon them, (like Songshan Shaolin *Ta Lin* and others) and he explained that the name stones had been taken by local officials to make sure that thieves didn't steal them. They'd also taken the ash urns which had been located under the plate like stones on the ground in front of each *Ta*. These treasured relics can be found at the government office in Panshan called *Wen Bao Jiu*.

He also pointed out various parts of one final remaining *Ta* scattered around the outside periphery of the *Ta Lin*, mostly buried under natural foliage and earth which he'd not put back together as he couldn't find all the pieces.



Appears to be the top of a grave marker

We walked further up the Royal Road and he pointed to some ancient ruins.

As we walked up the Royal Road through the middle of the *Ta Lin* Mr. Fu explained many details of the reconstruction work. When we got to the top front and center Ta, we stopped.



“Feel the Spirits of the Master Monks,” Mr. Fu intoned solemnly. He asked us to close our eyes and relax, to feel the spirit of the place and those within. Mr. Fu believes the place is alive. When he first came here eleven years ago, he was in very poor health, and believes the spirit of Panshan, the air, the water, the herbs, vegetables... the *qi*, and the Masters together restored his health and vitality.

We walked a few hundred meters more up the forested Royal Road and Mr. Fu showed us a “stele,” a large flat stone lying on the ground with ancient writing engraved on it, as timeless and peaceful as the mountain itself. “This stone has the history of the *Zheng fa si* engraved on both sides,” he told us. It looked impossibly heavy and impossible to turn over. “We put it upright a couple of times,” Mr. Fu explained, “but some boys pushed it down both times, so we decided it was safest to leave it on the ground.”



The history of the largest monastery of Panshan rests abandoned upon the earth

He pointed to the stele that was standing upright about ten meters to the right with a most amazing tree branch grown in such a way as to hold the stele there for eternity. "That is the dragon tree branch that grew there to hold the stone upright so nothing can ever push it down," Mr. Fu explained.

And, he was right, the sturdy branch does indeed look like a dragon holding that stele up and in place.

We walked up a little further and he showed us the ruins of *Zheng fa* Monastery and explained how we could differentiate it from the remains of Emperor Kangxi's palace buildings. "Do you see that wall up there to the right with the pinkish stones?" he asked. Indeed we did, peering through the trees and bush further up the mountain side. "Emperor Kangxi imported his stones from elsewhere, whereas *Zheng fa si's* buildings and temples were all made of stones cut here on Panshan."



Possibly an older part of Zheng Fa Si



Identified as a new part of Zheng Fa Si

"*Zheng fa si* was the 'central' monastery on Panshan; it was the training center for all monks that went to the 72 temples on the mountain. It was a very large temple." Indeed, there were the foundation stones and burned remains of many large buildings over a very large area there. I suspect however that North Shaolin had more autonomy than Mr. Fu might have suspected, due to its' long relationship with many, many Emperors of China and its' repeated service to the nation.

"At the top of the mountain there was *Yun Zhao* Temple," he explained.

As Mr. Fu talked the mountain became alive again with monasteries, monks and the royalty of ancient China.

Though Mr. Fu said that a flood destroyed everything, he also mentioned that the Japanese burned the entire mountain and every temple on it.

I'd researched the history before in some detail. The Japanese Imperial Army was very angry about two major Chinese counter-offences in Jixian (Ji County, in which Panshan is located) called: "*Jidong da Baodong*" (1937) and the "*Great Campaign of One Hundred Regiments*" (1940). The North Shaolin Monastery had been a center for Chinese resistance fighters during the war and that's why they burned the entire mountain and every temple on it in May of 1942.

I asked Mr. Fu where the North Shaolin Monastery's *Ta Lin* was located. He said just along-side to the left and below Wei Min's guest house. "During the Cultural Revolution there was a great need for land and they thought nothing of 'some old graveyard.' So, they just scattered the stones and plowed everything under."

The above two paragraphs explain why virtually everything of North Shaolin Monastery was destroyed (except the large white 13-tiered Bao Fu Pagoda Tower, called "Rogue Tower" by locals). Though very little was left of *Zheng fa si* it was more than was left of North Shaolin Monastery.

Walking down the mountain along the Royal Road, Mr. Fu mentioned that there were rumors that some or many of the monks at *Zheng fa si* had been *Wang Ye* or cousins of the Emperors. Mr. Fu also mentioned that the father of Emperor Kangxi, the *Shunzhi* Emperor (reigned 1643 - 1661) and first Qing Dynasty Emperor to rule over China gave up the throne to his son Kangxi and became a monk. Thus, it might not be a great surprise that some or even many royal cousins and other family members might follow this tradition and enter the monastery. Incidentally Emperor Kangxi was the longest reigning Emperor in China with 61 years on the throne and a famous patron of North Shaolin along with his grandson, Emperor Qianlong.

The poetry of Emperor Qianlong and also some of Emperor Kangxi can be found engraved onto huge rocks all along the Royal Road there on Panshan.



Poetry by Emperor Qianlong

Mr. Fu also told us a local legend about how all the huge surreal rocks came to be found on Panshan, whereas nothing like them can be found on adjacent mountains. "A long, long time ago an ancient Taoist boasted to the people that he could bring all the Gods to Panshan if he so wished. The people doubted him and demanded that he do so. Consequently, the ancient uttered magic words and low and behold the Gods all appeared. The ancient was a bit surprised and embarrassed that he'd brought the Gods only to boast to local people. So thinking quickly, he asked the Gods to bring all the most beautiful stones in the world to the sacred mountain of Panshan, which they did. After thanking the Gods, they left. And, that is why Panshan is the only mountain around with so many beautiful huge rocks so curiously placed.



And on it went as we walked down the mountain back to Wei Min's guest house, a conversation sprinkled with ancient and modern history, legends, architecture, feng shui, humor and enlightenment.

After this supremely uplifting journey through time and space, we had to go and talk with North Shaolin Monastery head monk Shi Yan Pei (“Shi” meaning “monk”) because I was curious what he thought about the origin of the famous “Muscle Change Classic” called “*Yi Jin Jing*” in Chinese. Legend has it that it was either written by or passed down from Bodhidharma at Songshan Shaolin Temple sometime during the 4th to 5th centuries, but my research beginning with a Chinese Shaolin historian/writer named *Tang Hao* back in the 1950s suggested that this wasn’t the case at all and in fact it was a fraud, “not from Shaolin while capitalizing on the name Shaolin,” and was written/painted much more recently, probably in the 1800s. Shi Yan Pei however seemed to believe it was created by Bodhidharma, despite the mounting evidence that it wasn’t. After that the good monk went on to tell us fascinating stories about Bodhidharma. Naturally Shi Yan Pei served hot fragrant tea as he is surely also a master of the ancient art of *Chan Cha Dao* (Zen Tea Ceremony), which didn’t look like a ceremony but rather flowed naturally, seemingly without effort.

The spirit of the masters appears to live on in those associated with North Shaolin, as certainly Mr. Fu, Shi Yan Pei, Wei Min and all of the monastery workers appear to me to be most enlightened masters of their arts. Not long after the sun set behind the mountains Miao and I had to return to Beijing, but a part always remains there nestled in the huge unusual rocks and trees and earth, water and sky, temple bells and birds surrounding the rapidly rebuilding North Shaolin Monastery. By the way, construction on the monks’ quarters has been postponed till spring for some reason. Never mind, considering the age of this monastery, it’s only a blink of the eye in time.

One last note... for those who’ve followed this series I usually refer to the North Shaolin as the North Shaolin “Temple,” but in this story have used “North Shaolin Monastery” in most cases instead. There is a reason for that. There are many temples, large and small, and monks don’t necessarily live in all of them. Monasteries however are where monks live, and the Shaolin Monasteries are more than simple temples, they were major monasteries housing up to a hundred or more monks at their peaks. Thus, “North Shaolin Monastery” is a more accurate name than simply “North Shaolin Temple.”

世事如烟了无痕

“The affairs of this world disappear like smoke without a trace.”
But not always right away...

Rebuilding North Shaolin Temple - Part IX Sujia Dizi and Wuseng
Buddha Hall, Sujia Dizi and Wuseng Ceremonies

基础

Jī chǔ - Foundations



It's now mid-May 2014 here in Beijing and all virtuous young men's attention is surely focused on... yes, martial arts and here I am, recently back from a few trips to the incipient North Shaolin Monastery in my eternal quest to fully experience the revival of the noble North Shaolin legacy in China.

As readers of this series know, I've been following the reconstruction of the North Shaolin Monastery located on Pan Mountain, in Ji County in northeast China for the past four years. It was destroyed in May of 1942 during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. The entire mountain was burned and all 72 Buddhist Temples destroyed. The completion date for the reincarnated North Shaolin Monastery is sometime around 2017 or 2018.

The best news is that the steps to the Great Buddha Hall at North Shaolin Monastery have been completed and ground is currently being cut from the mountain for the foundations of the Chanting Hall (*Chan Tang*) and the Monks Quarters (*Ceng Liao*). Land is being built up and then leveled for the large central courtyard.

Saturday May 17th 2014, they had six large earth moving machines all working at once; excavator/diggers and bulldozers tirelessly shaping these three areas 12 hours a day, with a good-sized steam roller on the side ready to pound down that foundation till it's like bedrock.

Because this is mostly "old" already compacted soil, there shouldn't be a need to wait too very long to actually lay the foundations of the next two buildings. It's been a relatively dry spring and work has flowed uninterrupted by weather or other material world affairs.

There is more rebuilding going on however in a different world of the Shaolin. In Songshan Shaolin Abbot Shi Yong Xin has done an amazing job of bringing back Vinaya (traditional Buddhist rule systems) necessary for reconstruction of Buddhist practice and ceremonies thereby illuminating traditional Buddhistic pathways to enlightenment. These ancient systems are followed at Songshan Shaolin Monastery and here at North Shaolin Monastery - as the Shaolin is one family - albeit a rather large world-wide extended family. Recently there has also been a revival of *Sujia Dizi* and *Wuseng* ceremonies (explained below) at North Shaolin Monastery - more steps upon the path to rebuilding the North Shaolin's honorable tradition.

Steps to Becoming a Shaolin Wuseng (Martial Monk)



Photo from Songshan Headquarter Shaolin Monastery

Kung Fu Tai Chi magazine has already published articles differentiating different classes of Buddhist Shaolin martial monks. In brief, China's martial monks were *Sujia dizi* or Chán (Zen) Buddhist lay disciples. Historically they were mostly former soldiers or other highly trained martial artists that were housed on Shaolin's extensive grounds but not usually within the monastery. Though not fully ordained monks, in Chinese language *Sujia Dizi* are considered a form of "monk." Reading the much-abbreviated text for the *Sujia Dizi* Ceremony (see below) one might understand why.

- There were three major groups of martial monks:
 - *Wuseng* (*Wǔsēng*) who fought for example thieves and pirates, but were not fully ordained

monks; there are many *Wuseng* today

- *Sengbing* (*Sēngbīng*) Soldier monks – who fought as part of an army, i.e. at the founding of the Tang Dynasty (there are no *Sengbing* today)
- *Biaoyanseng* (*biǎoyǎn sēng*) Performance monks who are usually also *Wuseng*

The above were/are distinctly different from:

- “*Bīqiū*” - fully ordained monks who as a rule did not engage in martial activity outside the temple though one might speculate that they might have during the last great battle against the warlord Shi Yousan that finally burned the Songshan Shaolin in 1928, or in the case of the North Shaolin, some *Bīqiū* may well have joined the Chinese resistance movement fighting against the Japanese, however according to (Buddhist) Vinaya rules/law, by joining an army they would be violating their vows as *Bīqiū* and thereby revoking their status as ordained monks.

Shi Yan Pei, head monk at the North Shaolin Temple explained some of the requirements to becoming a *Sujia Dizi* in an interview, January 22, 2014 at Beijing University. First, one must have the intention to become a Buddhist...

- A. Then, find a Master from the Shàolín Temple
- B. After that, develop deep communication with the Master and build a bond of trust. After that...
- C. Accept “*Wu Jie*” (*wǔjiè* which means Five Precepts) and food requirements.

The food requirements include a) following a vegetarian diet (*sùshí*) and b) waste no food. These precepts are not formulated as absolute imperatives for the *Sujia Dizi*, but as training rules that laypeople undertake voluntarily to facilitate practice.

- D. After a sincere belief in Buddhism is established, there is a formal “*Gui Yi*” ceremony, wherein one becomes a “*Sujia dizi*.”

The Buddhist *Gui Yi* in China is a formal ceremony wherein one pledges to take refuge in the “Three Refuges,” (also called “Triple Gem,” or “*Sānbǎo*” in Chinese): the Buddha (*Fótuó*), the *Dharma* (teachings of the Buddha, usually in the form of the Sutras; *Fǎ* - law) and the *Sangha* (the Buddhist community, *Sēng*).

For a variety of reasons, I recently attended two *Gui Yi* Ceremonies here in China; one was a very large Chinese Mahayana Ceremony with about 200 initiates held at a monastery in Beijing, and the other smaller Chan Buddhist *Gui Yi* Ceremony at North Shaolin Monastery. The ceremonies were similar, but different.

According to Kung Fu Tai Chi magazine Editor Gene Ching in a recent correspondence, “Each *Gui Yi* is unique, rather like weddings.”

The *Gui Yi* Ceremony in China begins with the about-to-be Lay Disciples assembling, usually in the “Buddha Hall” of a monastery, or in some cases a larger venue as the needs require. At some *Gui Yi* ceremonies initiates wear either a black or brown floor length wide-sleeved traditional robe. A couple of initiates that I saw were wearing gray monk clothes. At least one or two people at the larger *Gui Yi* Ceremony at the Mahayana Monastery had been monks before but followed a different path for a while and were starting again upon this path at the beginning.

The heart of the ceremonies at the two monasteries was essentially the same though the forms were a bit different. Fortunately, the USA Shaolin has a good website and I was able to learn at least some things about their *Gui Yi* Ceremony as well.

***Gui Yi* Ceremony in China – Summary**



Gui Yi Ceremony in Beijing

I. Respectful request for the presence of the Master

(Mahayana) The monks ceremonially parade in upon the formal request of those about to take *Gui Yi*.

II. Incense praise

“Our spiritually bright and enlightened nature is still, illuminating, true and eternal

Used to be deluded, now it is awakened and revealed clearly

With the compassionate guide of the Three Jewels (Three Refuges)

We offer this incense, taking refuge with and paying homage to the Buddha, who is the king of the Dharma...”

At the Mahayana Ceremony, someone on the stage ritually offered incense to the presiding monk; at the Shaolin *Gui Yi* initiates held the incense first vertically between prayer position hands, and then horizontally to their foreheads before ritually putting it into the incense burner themselves.

III. Earnestly supplicating for the Three Refuges transmission

(Mahayana - Summary) “Your eminence, all of us, your disciples are now supplicating that your eminence will transmit the Three Refuges to us, so we may take pure Three Refuges...”

IV. The benefits of taking refuges

In the Mahayana *Gui Yi*, the “protection of 36 virtuous Gods” was intoned as part of the ritual, however no mention was made of “gods” in the Shaolin *Gui Yi* Ceremony. Shi Yan Pei referred to “*jinnaluo*” in an interview after the ceremony, but said he was not a god, but a man, in fact a cook in the Songshan Shaolin during the Yuan Dynasty who basically chased away thieves with a staff.

V. Invite the sages

(Mahayana) Formal invitation of various Buddhas and Sages to attend the ceremony.

VI. Repentance

“For all the evil karma that I have done in the past,
Arising from beginningless greed, hatred, and ignorance,
And created by my body, mouth, and mind,
I seek to now repent of and reform all karmic obstacles.

(Recite three times, each time followed by a bow pressing the forehead to the ground.)

VII. Receive the Three Refuges

I, disciple _____, after taking refuge with the
Buddha, will only:

... take refuge with the Buddha.

... take refuge with Buddhist canon
(teachings/sutras).

... take refuge with Buddhist communities.

VIII. Vow

I vow to save innumerable living beings.

I vow to eradicate inexhaustible afflictions.

I vow to study illimitable Dharma-doors.

I vow to accomplish the unsurpassed Buddha Way.

IX. Exhortation

“Now you have made the four great vows, wisdom shall be your guide. If your faith and practice are firm, your vows will certainly be fulfilled. Then even if you are in the secular world, your minds are that of a Bodhisattva, and the merit and virtue you obtain will be inconceivable. You should have great joy and contemplate the

rareness of refuge, deepen your faith, solidify your vows, be out of the abyss of afflictions, and reach the Bodhi shore. Now you have taken refuge with the Three Refuges, which is the right cause of supra-mundane, be careful not to lose it, cautiously keep it and cultivate it. Will you follow the Buddha's teachings?" (Answer: "Yes, I will follow the Buddha's teachings.")

X. Dedication of merit

I dedicate the merit and virtue from the profound act of taking refuge,
Including all the superior, limitless blessings generated..."

During most of the ritual initiates are kneeling with the body upright, though in a few parts disciples are standing. The ceremony in both monasteries was in Mandarin Chinese. *Gui Yi* initiates take classes or do advanced study before this solemn occasion to ensure they can fully recite and understand what they are vowing. The chanting is slow and beautiful and there are different melodies to the different prayer and proclamation chants. Naturally there is incense burning. This is an ancient ritual with deep and profound meaning woven through each minute action of the presiding monks.

Part VII (above, Receiving the 3 Refuges) of the Mahayana *Gui Yi* ceremony in China has the initiates proclaiming: "I will not follow other religions or read the sacred books of other religions..." The Shaolin *Gui Yi* was more like: "I will only take refuge with..." Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. This is different again from *Gui Yi* at the U.S.A. Shaolin Temple where initiates are reminded to continue to believe in whatever they believed before, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mohamed, God or Buddha.

These differences are natural and understandable within the context of the different cultures, reaffirming Gene Ching's conclusion that *Gui Yi* Ceremonies are indeed very unique. Mahayana is more tradition and scripturally bound and Chan – more fluid; China tends to be a bit more conservative in some ways and the U.S. a bit more liberal in others. There are many paths to enlightenment.

At least in China after *Gui Yi* the new *Sújiā Dìzǐ* receives a license/certificate in the form of a small booklet, like an I.D. with the date of his or her *Gui Yi*, and his or her new Buddhist name. The first name will be the generation name of the Buddhist group family name cycle, followed by a second “personal” or given name chosen by the Shifu, or Master.

A word used in Chinese history and literature for soldier or military monk is *Sēngbīng*. According to Shi Yan Pei: “During special periods in Chinese history, *Sengbing* were organized to help the country, but they do not exist at this time as China is now in peace. However, ceremonies for *Wuseng* still exist. The initiate must be a *Sujia Dizi* and be training under a certified Shaolin Master. Additional vows are required.”

This short story by Shi Yan Pei was followed by another: “According to ancient Buddhist law, monks in India were not allowed to carry money. So, when it was necessary to carry money, they hired someone to carry it for them.”

This may have been a metaphoric example justifying the use of employing *Wuseng* (martial monk) and or *Sengbing* (soldier monk) to engage in military affairs, thus keeping the ordained Shàolín monks free from violations of monastic codes.

***Wuseng* Test**

As mentioned above a “*Wuseng*” begins by becoming a *Sújiā Dìzǐ* and training in Shaolin Kung Fu under an accredited master. There is a test which includes answering questions and a performance of *Taolu* (Chinese for what the Japanese call “*Kata*” and Koreans call “*Poomse*”) which must demonstrate the student’s mastery of Shaolin technique. Additional vows are also required.

One question a *Wuseng* applicant can expect is: “Why do you want to be a *Wuseng*?”

Though I'm no master or monk, I suspect a good answer might include the desire to be a good "messenger" of Shaolin Kung Fu, as this appears to be a, or even the major role for *Wuseng* and *Biaoyanseng* (Performance monks) these days. *Wuseng* are often or usually also Shaolin Kung Fu teachers and *Biaoyanseng* help teach people about the beauty and power of Shaolin Kung Fu via their performances. Real Shaolin Kung Fu includes a lot more than just kicks and punches. It is a way of life based upon Buddhist principles of protecting life and pursuing enlightenment. "Chan" (Zen) means "meditation," they are one and the same thing. But in Chan this is not only quietist meditation in a temple hall or cave, mountain side or wherever, but can be done during all activities. Chan mind is ordinary mind.



Abbot Shi Yong Xin has referred to the Shaolin monk's military tradition as "martial Chan (*Wuchan*)" meaning that fighting art exercises are tools for the cultivation of Chan awareness; in fact they are carried out in a meditative state as full awareness transcending dichotomies is required at master levels of training and combat. Psychologists posit a similar state called "flow." Sports and sciences are arts at their higher levels and Shaolin cultivated the highest levels in ancient history as survival of the monastery, monks, local communities and at times the empire absolutely required it.



Photo from Warlord Era in China

Conclusions

The steps to Buddha Hall at North Shaolin Monastery are completed and areas for laying the foundations of the Monks' Quarters, Chanting hall and courtyard are nearly complete.

The steps to *Sujia Dizi* and *Wuseng* status are there now. *Sujia Dizi* and *Wuseng* ceremonies at North Shaolin have been revived, albeit on a small scale. During my last visit to North Shaolin I found there were five monks and two *Sramanera* (*Shāmí* in Chinese - novice monks usually ages 7 - 20) living there.

The path/way to enlightenment is ever present. Full *Bīqīū* (monkhood) ordination ceremonies are sure to come, but keep in mind:

“When Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara was practicing the
profound Prajna Paramita,
he illuminated the Five Skandhas and saw that they are all empty,
and so he crossed beyond all suffering and difficulty.

Form does not differ from emptiness;
emptiness does not differ from form.

Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.

So too are feelings, cognition, formation, and consciousness.”

From: Heart Sutra

References

<http://usashaolintemple.org/news/9th-annual-disciple-ceremony/#.U3BBd4GSySo>

Shi, Yong Xin (2013) Shaolin - Temple in my Heart, China Intercontinental Press, Beijing

Sidebar: What is Shaolin Kung Fu?”

This is a rather difficult question to answer as there are hundreds or perhaps thousands of “Shaolin Taolu” practiced around the world varying in authenticity from direct descendant Songshan and North Shaolin Monastery forms each of which may have dozens of variations, to hybrid forms and purely modernist fabrications. Though the latter categories may sound somewhat dubious, Shaolin Kung Fu is characterized by martial utility and a rather narrowly defined set of prototype stances and techniques. Going to Wushu competitions here in China one may see people competing in Taolu using hybrid and modern creations. Though this may seem sacrilegious to Shaolin purists, a sign outside the Tagou Educational Headquarters at the Songshan Shaolin Monastery may give some insight as to their philosophy regarding these issues:

Motto of the Shaolin Tagou Educational Undertaking Group

"Be a devout learner and an undaunted practitioner and stay away from factional or sectarian bigotry in matters related to Kung-fu, because all Kung-fu sects are quintessentially and professionally identical. All you are expected to do are not only to inherit but to flesh out kung-fu lore passed down to you, not only to build up your physique but to optimize your psyche, so that you have redoubled vitality and unfailing mettle, and not only to strive to attain but to exalt the acme of kung-fu..."

Rebuilding North Shaolin Temple - Part X Spirit of Yun Zhao Monastery

精神

Jīng shén - spirit; mind; consciousness; essence

October 7, 2014 - Pan Mountain (Panshan), location of the famed North Shaolin Monastery is sacred in Chinese Chan (Zen) history – for it was the home of some 72 Buddhist Temples – none of which survived the tumultuous years of the late Qing Dynasty and 20th Century. Some however have been rebuilt. The North Shaolin is one currently under construction.

Though there are several Chan Buddhist monasteries in China calling themselves “Shaolin” and even have monks from Songshan Shaolin living and administering there, only North Shaolin Monastery is officially recognized by Songshan Shaolin as a sub-temple. To understand why this is, one must understand a wide matrix of historical events and geographic considerations making North Shaolin unique. For example, North Shaolin Monastery Wuseng and Sengbing (martial and military lay disciples) did not rebel against the incoming Qing Dynasty at the end of the Ming Dynasty (about 1640), unlike South Shaolin Monasteries which did and were destroyed. The extent to which “South Shaolin’s” activities at that time were sanctioned by the Songshan Shaolin Abbot is unknown. Another distinction between North Shaolin and other “non-official” branches of Songshan Shaolin is the very special location of North Shaolin on Panshan – a holy mountain. To say “72 Buddhist Temples” sounds rather glib, as if all were the same, but each was and is very special, unique and sacred in its own way – part of a community of spirit. Thus, to understand North Shaolin Monastery’s history one must also understand the mountain, its history, geography, legends and other monasteries there.

During the Mid-Autumn Festival this year, I and translator/friend Miao journeyed to the peak of Panshan to get a “view from the top,” so to speak having heard there was “a monastery” up there. We drove as far as the road allowed, then climbed into something resembling a large golf cart for tourists, then took a cable-car most of the rest of the way to the peak.

“The master took the high seat in the hall and said,
“One person is on top of a solitary peak and has no
path by which to leave. One person is at the busy
crossroads and has neither front nor back. Which is
ahead, which is behind? Don’t make the one out to
be Vimalakirti and the other to be Fu Dashi. Take
care of yourselves.”

The Record of Linji, P. 141 – Translation and
commentary by Ruth Fuller Sasaki. The Complete
text can be downloaded from:
http://info.stiltij.nl/publiek/meditatie/leraren/_historisch/linji-sasaki.pdf

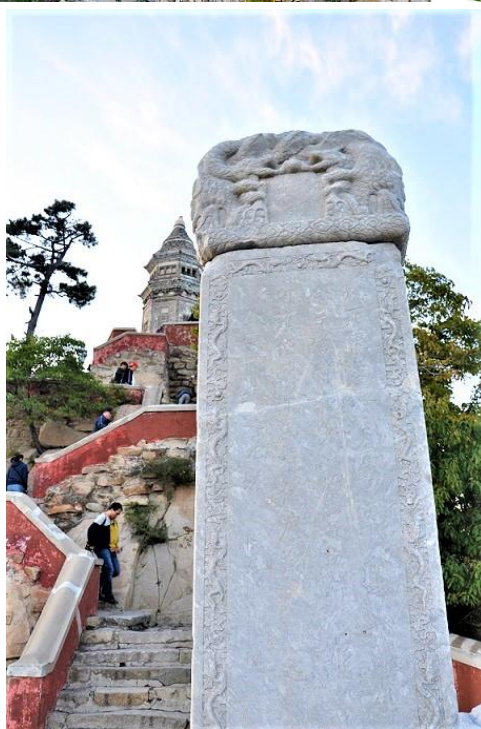
According to translator/commentator of the *Record of Linji* Ruth Sasaki, “One person on top of a solitary peak” refers to a person who has attained enlightenment – the realm of suchness beyond discrimination. The “path by which to leave” refers to the state of enlightenment where even practice is left behind and differentiation and emptiness are realized as the same. The “busy cross-roads of life” refers to the enlightened man in the ordinary world – unattached, and thus having no front or back. Vimalakirti was a legendary Buddhist lay contemporary of Shakyamuni (Buddha) who had attained a degree of enlightenment beyond even some bodhisattvas. Fu Dashi, (497–569) known as Fu Xi, was another famous layman and inventor, believed to be a reincarnation of Maitreya – the Buddha to be.

Near the top of the mountain is a monastery called Shangfang Temple, first built in the second year of the Taihe Period (828) in the Tang Dynasty.



It has a heavenly view of the whole valley below and the “Qi” (intrinsic energy) of this monastery is very strong and exhilarating. But the Temple is obviously new and clearly it was destroyed during the wars and recently rebuilt. Though we walked around for half an hour or so we didn’t see any monks, just a couple of tourists.

From there we walked up the mountain a little further. The official history relates that the temple at the top of Panshan, Cloud Covered Temple (called “*Yun Zhao Si*” in Chinese) was originally named “Dragon Subduing Nunnery.” It was first built under the auspices of Master Daozong, an enlightened monk, also known as He Jiong (784 - 841) in the Tang Dynasty.



Shangfang Temple

However, a monk living at *Yun Zhao Si* said that the “Ta” or Buddhist Tower in the center of the mountain-top monastery was originally built by Empress Wu Zetian (690-705), one of the most colorful, controversial, and effective administrators in Chinese history.

In the 30th year of the reign of Wanli in the Ming Dynasty Emperor Shenzhong conferred upon this monastery the imperial name of *Yunzhao Temple*, the name by which it goes today. In the 17th year (1678) of the reign of Kangzi, the emperor toured the temple and left several tables with imperial inscriptions on them, including, *Yunfeng Fajie* (Divine Place on Cloud Enveloped Peak), and *Panshan Xiufeng* (Elegant Peak of Mount Panshan).

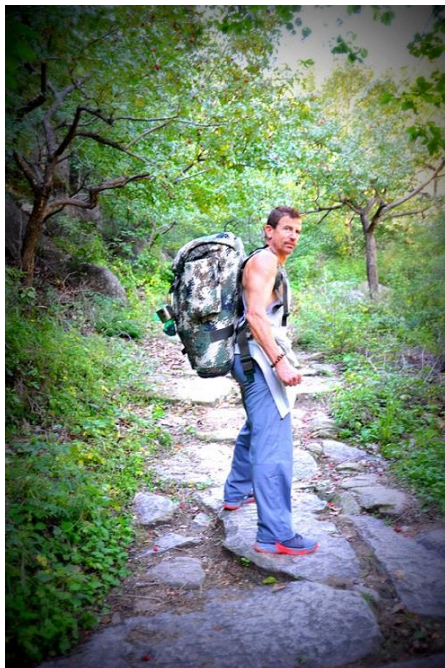
The temple underwent rebuilding in the 8th year of the Emperor Qianlong (1743) who left at the temple his imperial inscriptions such as *Jinjie Changmin* (Ever-brightness of the Golden World) and *Zhu Zhihuishan* (Live in a Sagacious Mountain). The Temple however declined during the late Qing Dynasty and was mostly destroyed and abandoned in 1942. It was repaired and in places rebuilt in August 1992 and subsequently opened to the public.

Currently there are four (male) monks living there, alas, it is no longer a nunnery. They are of the Chan (Zen) school of Buddhism following Shaolin Abbot Shi Yong Xin, though the Temple is administered by the government’s Ministry of Tourism. It is a popular tourist spot for Chinese and ranked among the top 15 scenic spots in China.

One cannot walk around the grounds of the rebuilt temple or ancient remains overgrown with long grasses without feeling the extraordinary calmness, mind-stopping beauty and power of this, the highest peak of Panshan. There are waterfalls and huge ancient stones with carvings of all manner, secluded enclaves off the beaten path, and small exquisite groves few people visit, hidden in the mists of time and geography.

Yun Zhao Monastery is located in the center of the dividing line between Beijing and Tianjin. At least when we were there standing on the mountain top at sunset one can cup the rising moon with the left hand and setting sun with the right - with arms in balance. It was absolutely surreal as a million stars slowly appeared in the darkening sky above the symphony of birds happily chattering in the mid-autumn chill.

The day before...



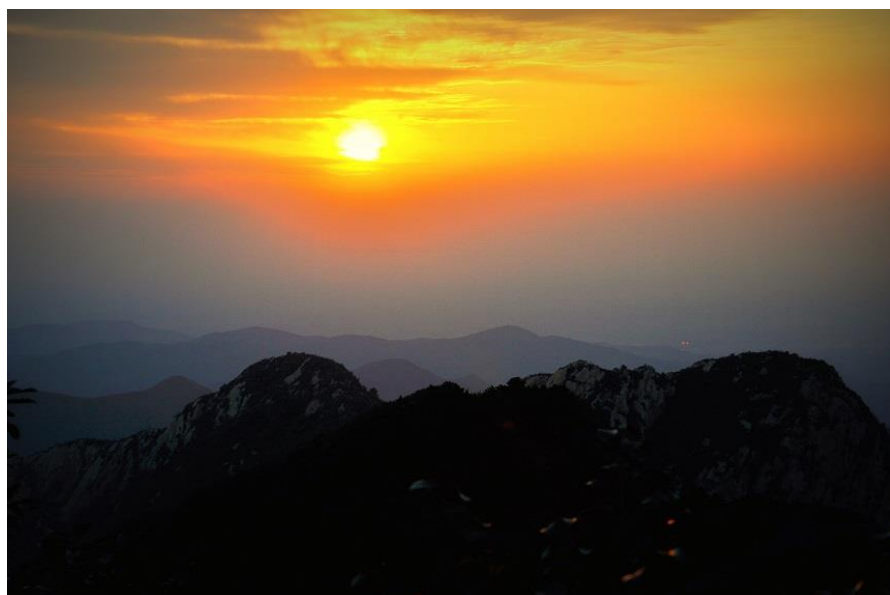
Hiking up the Royal Road enjoyed by Emperors since the Han Dynasty

That morning

We'd woken that morning in tents hastily constructed the night before in the remains of Emperor Kangxi's vacation home almost half way up the mountain.



Foundation of one building that was part of Emperor Kangxi's
Palace above North Shaolin Temple on Panshan





After a camp breakfast we hiked down the mountain a bit to meet Head Monk Shi Yen Pei and the other monks next to the incipient North Shaolin Monastery. I was a little sore from mountain climbing the day before with a rather heavy backpack, but happily joined the monks' training for an hour. This workout included several hundred kicks. After that and some tea Shi Yen Pei showed us small exquisite clay models of the three very large bronze Buddhas which are currently being made in Thailand for the North Shaolin Monastery's Buddha Hall.

Shi Yan Pei named the Buddhas (from left to right) as" "Amitofo, (Amitabha Buddha), Shijiamonifo (Siddhartha Gautama) and, Yaoshifo (the Medicine Buddha - Bhaisajyaguru in Sanskrit)."



Amitofo (Amitabha Buddha)

Amitabha was a king who renounced his kingdom to become a monk. He practiced diligently for five eons, realized enlightenment and became a Buddha. Amitabha Buddha reigns over Sukhavati, the Western Paradise, also called the Pure Land. Those reborn in the Pure Land experience the joy of hearing Amitabha teach the Dharma (Buddhist teachings) until they are ready to enter Nirvana. Amitabha symbolizes mercy and wisdom. He is often called the Buddha of Infinite Light.

Shijiamonifo (Siddhartha Gautama)

This is the person most people refer to as “the Buddha.” Though “deified” by many he never claimed to be more than a man (also an important philosophical difference between Chinese Chan Buddhism and some other sects). Siddhartha Gautama was born in the 5th or 6th century BC in Lumbini, in what is now Nepal. His father was King Suddhodana, the leader of a large clan called the “Shakya.” His mother, Queen Maya, died shortly after his birth. He grew up in a very sheltered, opulently beautiful environment, but at the age of 29, driven by curiosity left his home and over time encountered “the four sights,” including old age, disease, and death. These horrified him and then he saw a wandering ascetic (the fourth sight), a holy man who appeared happy in the midst of suffering.

These sights had a supremely profound influence on him. Not long after returning home he left the palace, shaved his head, exchanged his princely robes for beggars' rags and went in search of enlightenment. After much hardship Gautama discovered what Buddhists call the "Middle Way," a path of moderation between from the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification. After 49 days of meditation seated under a Bodhi Tree, at the age of 35 he attained Enlightenment.

Statues of Buddhas in different countries usually take on local features.



Buddha in Bangkok National Museum, Thailand

Yaoshifo (Medicine Buddha, Bhaisajyaguru in Sanskrit)

The “Medicine Buddha” is often described as a doctor who cures suffering using the medicine of his teachings. On achieving Buddhahood, he became the Buddha of the Eastern Pure Land. There, he is attended to by two bodhisattvas symbolizing the light of the sun and the light of the moon respectively.

Though the first two Buddhas briefly described above are well-known in the West, the beliefs of the Medicine Buddha are not so well known. An excellent translation of the “Medicine Buddha Sutra” can be downloaded from:

http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/medbudsutra.pdf

A short from of the vows of the Medicine Buddha can be found at:

http://www.chinabuddhismencyclopedia.com/en/index.php?title=12_Vows_of_Medicine_Buddha

Though Shaolin medicine specializes in traumatology, it incorporates all branches of Chinese medicine, as Shaolin doctors historically had to attend not only to the needs of the monks, but also the communities in which the monks lived, travelers, and on occasion royalty as well.



The Medicine Buddha at Songshan Shaolin

The three very large bronze Buddhas are expected to arrive at North Shaolin Monastery early next year (2015).

For those martial artists who might wonder “What is the purpose of all this?” it is nice to know that there are numerous benefits to having a mind that is purified and enlightened.

People of genuine enlightenment who have understood the mind and seen the nature can establish Dharmas or not establish them... People who see the nature “obtain independence” just like Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva. The “spiritual powers” that they obtain are the six spiritual powers: 1) the heavenly eye; 2) the heavenly ear; 3) the knowledge of others’ thoughts; 4) the knowledge of former lives; 5) the knowledge of the extinction of outflows; 6) psychic power.

P. 350 – 351 *The Sixth Patriarch’s Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra*, English translation by the Buddhist Text Translation Society
<http://www.fodian.net/world/Platform-Sutra.pdf>

Shi Yan Pei said construction of North Shaolin was proceeding on schedule, but they would go to Tianjin in the afternoon to apply for local and national licenses necessary for ongoing construction, attending to environmental concerns, transportation and so on. Another interesting development is that the North Shaolin Monastery is now open to the public for the first time in 88 years (it was burned in May 1942).

Lights illuminated the North Shaolin Monastery under the starry sky.

Offering a Meal for the Monks of Mount Fu-Fu

Having come late to the pure truth, every day I withdraw farther from the crowd. Expecting monks from a distant mountain I prepare, sweeping out my simple thatch hut. It's true: from their place in the clouds they come to my poor house in the weeds. On grass mats we have a meal of pine nuts. Burning incense, we read books about the Way. I light the oil lamp as daylight thins and ring the stone chimes as night comes on. Once you've realized the joys of stillness your days hold ample peace and leisure. Why give serious thought to returning?

Poem by Wang Wei (699-761)

Adapted from:

http://www.poetrychina.net/Story_of_Zen/zenstory15a.htm

“World-Honored One, wherever this treasure of a sutra has spread and there are people capable of upholding it, you should know that, thanks to the Medicine Buddha’s past vows, his virtues and the power of his name, the place will be free of untimely death. In that place, there will no longer be evil demons or spirits to sap the vital energy of the people. “Even if there were, these devout men and women would recover, enjoying good health and peace of mind.”

P. 34, *Sutra of the Medicine Buddha*, Translated and annotated under the guidance of Dharma Master Hsuan Jung, By Minh Thanh & P. D. Leigh; It can be downloaded from www.buddhanet.net

Sidebar

All of the great religions seem to be in one way or another associated with mountains.

It was on 7,498-foot peak of Mount Sinai that God spoke to Moses and gave him the 10 Commandments. Also:

“So, it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently.”

Exodus 19:16-19

According to the New Testament it was on the "Mountain of Transfiguration" that Jesus became the connecting point, acting as the bridge between heaven and earth and was transformed from a man to the Son of God.

"'This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased'-- and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain."

2 Peter 1:16-18

Jesus often went to Mountains to pray, sometimes with his disciples and sometimes alone.

In Islam mountains are also considered very special indeed.

It says in the Quran:

"And He has set firm mountains in the earth so that it would not shake with you..." (Quran 16:15)

"Have We not made the earth as a bed, and the mountains as pegs?" (Quran 78:6-7)

Mountains play an important role in stabilizing the crust of the earth, as they inhibit the shaking of the earth. The modern theory of plate tectonics holds that mountains work as stabilizers for the earth, an aspect of plate tectonics since the late 1960's. The roots of mountains can reach several times their elevations above the surface of the ground.

In Buddhism also mountains have a very special history and tradition.

“Why are most famous mountains (in China) associated with Buddhist temples and monks? When Buddhism was first introduced into China most temples were built in cities with government funding. But by the mid and late periods of the Tang Dynasty, after Chan Master Mazu Daoyi started to build Buddhist monasteries and Chan Master Baizhang Huaihai set monastic rules, Buddhism gradually abandoned its reliance on society and became relatively independent. Buddhist monasteries also moved gradually to the relatively tranquil and serene mountains. Such a shift provided Buddhist monks with a better environment for pure practice and self-cultivation while simultaneously transforming those famous mountains with monasteries into treasured sanctuaries that could purify people’s minds.”

Maitreya Beliefs and Actualization of the Earthly Pure Land, Speech presented at the Opening Ceremony of the 2010 China Fanjingshan Buddhist Culture Symposium, 2010/8/ 29

The Four Holy Mountains of Chinese Buddhism, Wutai, Jiuhua, Emei and Putuo mountains are the world-renowned sites of enlightenment for Manjusri Bodhisattva, Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva, Samantabhadra Bodhisattva and Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva respectively. A Bodhisattva, by the way is a person who makes a vow to save all sentient beings before he himself becomes a Buddha.

Several other mountains could be added to this list. Songshan (the home of central Shaolin Monastery) for sure, because of Bodhidharma’s nine years of meditation and enlightenment there, as well as his being the patriarch of Chan (Zen) Buddhism in China.

Mount Tai (Taishan) is venerated by Buddhists and Taoists alike, some 1,545 m above sea level and is in fact, literature and legend one of the most famous mountains in China. There are three most famous Buddhist temples on Taishan, the Pervading Light Temple (the Puzhao Monastery) before the mountain, the Yuquan Temple behind the mountain, and the the Lingyan Temple (the Divine Rock Temple) to the northwest of the highest peak.

Fanjingshan (Mount Fanjing), should be on this list too as it is the site of enlightenment for the Maitreya Bodhisattva.

Panshan might also be added to this list as it was formerly the site of some 72 Buddhist temples, which may be something of a record.



Rebuilding North Shaolin Temple - Part XI View from Qian Xiang
Monastery

**View from Qian Xiang Monastery at the Base of Panshan &
Reconstruction News**

大我

Dàwǒ - the collective / the whole / the transcended self

November 9, 2014 Back in Beijing the moon flickered through its phases with the speed of hummingbird wings and suddenly it was time to return to Pan Mountain (Panshan), seeking as I was an ancient cave monastery, I'd visited at the foot of this holy mountain some five years ago. I vaguely remembered the turn-off from the small village road was onto a rough-hewn stone road and found such a turn-off but wasn't sure if that was it. There was a small village store at the fork of that road so we asked a young woman there if she knew of a cave monastery at the foot of the mountain. She immediately said yes and graciously volunteered to guide us there as it was an area she knew well because her husband's family was from that village area.

The sound of the valley stream;
Just this is the teaching of the Buddha;
The form of the mountains;
Can this be other than the pure body?

Su Dongpo (1036-1101)

Who, I have always wondered, were the Shaolin monks of North Shaolin? A few things I know: they were men, monks, and martial artists; some would have specialized in medicine, others in farming, some in Sutras, and others again in simple meditation. But all lived in a community of Buddhist communities on Panshan.

China now is in so many ways still rediscovering its past as so much was lost during the infinitely violent end of the Qing Dynasty and other karmic reshufflings leading up to the political emancipation of 1949 and then the economic and other liberalizations of Deng Xiaoping. This rediscovery process is a bit like a telescoping of time. Buddhism, Chan and the Shaolin have gone through several cycles of death and rebirth before in China. Its influence has waxed and waned perhaps like a Ying Yang symbol on a pinwheel, sometimes white, sometimes black, sometimes merged into oneness, but always with a dot of remembrance.

The Master said, "The common person sees light and darkness as two, but the wise person comprehends that their nature is non-dual. The non-dual nature is the real nature. The real nature does not decrease in common people nor increase in worthy sages. In afflictions it is not confused and in Dhyana concentration it is not still. It is neither cut off nor permanent. It does not come or go. It is not inside, outside, or in the middle. It is not produced or destroyed. The nature and mark is 'thus, thus.' It permanently dwells and does not change. It is called the 'Way.'"

P. 374 *The Sixth Patriarch's Dharma Jewel Platform Sutra*, Buddhist Text Translation Society; Full-text can be downloaded from:

[http://online.sfsu.edu/rone/Buddhism/Platform
%20Sutra.pdf](http://online.sfsu.edu/rone/Buddhism/Platform%20Sutra.pdf)

So too, Vinaya, the discipline/rule systems of Buddhist monasteries have gone through its own cycles in Shaolin. At some times in history Shaolin rigidly followed these rules, at others Shaolin masters and monks followed a divine order intrinsic to Chan and the universe/non-universe but not so easily defined.

When not a single dharma (Buddhist teaching) is established in the mind, then the ten thousand Dharmas can be established there. To understand this principle is to achieve the Buddha's body which is also called Bodhi, Nirvana, and the liberation of knowledge and vision as well. Those who see their own nature can establish Dharmas in their minds or not establish them as they choose. They come and go freely, without impediments or obstacles. They function correctly and speak appropriately, seeing all transformation bodies as integral with the self-nature. That is precisely the way they obtain independence, spiritual powers, and the Samadhi of playfulness. This is what is called 'seeing the nature.'"

Platform Sutra, Ibid, P. 349

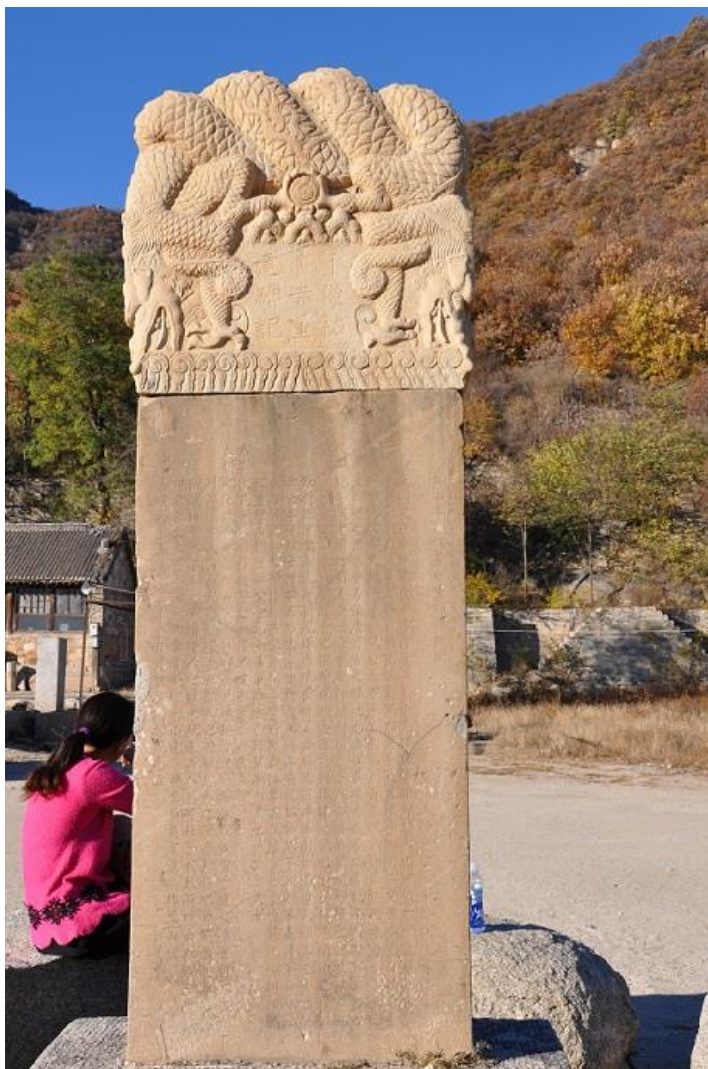
But all through the revolutions of rebirth, Shaolin remained connected to this world via a series of relationships with surrounding communities via its monks, prayers and other good works. Panshan has been a holy Buddhist mountain since time immemorial, possibly as far back as the Han Dynasty almost 2,000 years ago, though North Shaolin Monastery did not become part of the Shaolin family until the Yuan Dynasty (1215-1294) under then soon to be emperor Kublai Khan (who reigned 1260 – 1294).

Buddhist monasteries are in some ways like people in that they have a spirit; an intrinsic wholeness that is greater than the sum of its parts; individual histories, stories and spirit live after them and few are truly forgotten. Just so, North Shaolin was a member of a large community of 72 monasteries on Panshan; so logically I wanted to know the neighbors, the fabric of the living breathing community in which it lived, and given its current rebirth, will live again.

In Part VIII of this series I described the remains of *Zheng Fa Si* (*Law Monastery*) usually called “*Zhong Fa Si*”, meaning Middle Law Temple (because it’s midway up the mountain) located just a kilometer up the mountain from North Shaolin Monastery. It was the training monastery that supplied monks for most of the other 71 monasteries on Panshan. In Part X, we looked at “*Yun Zhao Si*” at the peak of this holy mountain, and Shangfang Temple just below it (as well as some background regarding the three huge bronze Buddhas expected to arrive at North Shaolin Monastery early 2015).

And so this month I wanted to visit a cave monastery at the base of Panshan before meeting the North Shaolin monks and exploring the reconstruction news there. Thusly we come back to Mrs. Zhang Ji Dong, the lady from the store that volunteered to show us the way. She climbed in the back seat of the car and off we went, back out to one of the village’s main roads, around a corner or two, then a bit up the mountain, a bit back down some rather rutted dirt roads, and around, and up and down and around, turning right and left and left and right; and of course my GPS said we were driving in some blank spot of nothingness, a true Chan adventure!

After about 20 minutes of this mind spinning bone jarring tour we arrived at a large... what? Prehistoric parking lot? There were two fabulous pairs of gigantic stones to one side, and obviously ancient steles (large upright stone slab “signboards” engraved with characters and sculptures of twin dragons at the top) spaced across the front and center of the large flat area. Towards the back at the foot of the mountain there was a picturesque ancient house.

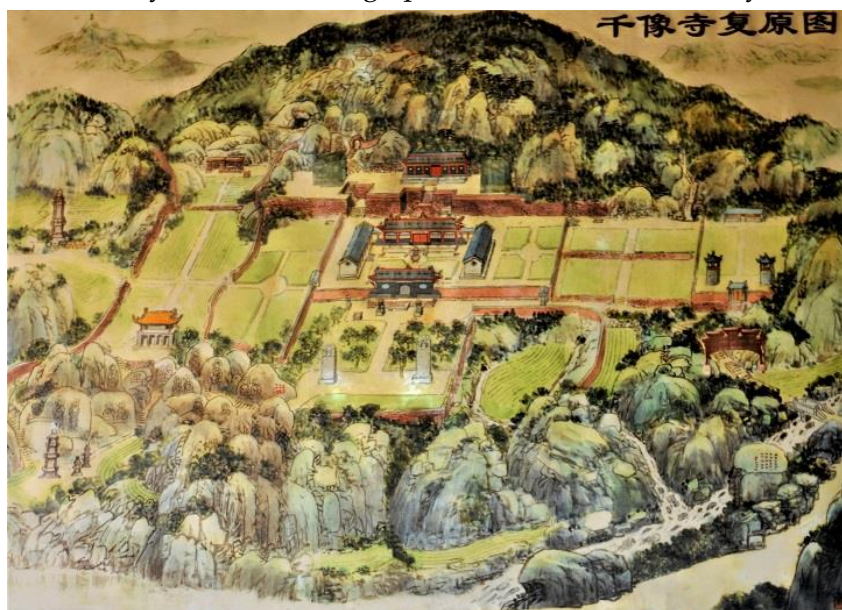


Only later did it dawn on me that this wasn't a prehistoric parking lot, but rather the holy grounds of a former large and noble monastery, also decimated in the wars.

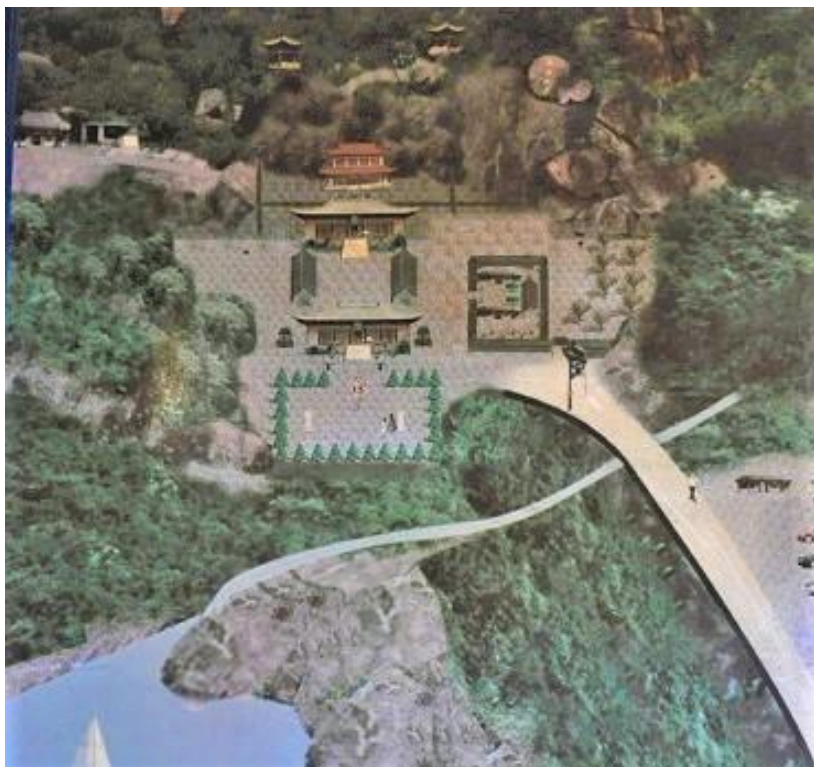
"Inside," the lady told us, "you can meet the monk." The house it turned out was sort of a small monastery, and therein we met a friendly unassuming monk.



We greeted him with the appropriate “*ěmítuófó*” with the right hand held vertically in front of the heart – a normal greeting with Buddhists. After introductions we found out *Qian Xian Si* (meaning Thousand Buddha Temple) dated back to the Tang Dynasty, was rebuilt during the time of Emperor Qianlong, but was destroyed during the fall of the Qing Dynasty, though reconstruction is planned to begin next May. He showed us a painting of the monastery before it was destroyed and the design plan for the new monastery.



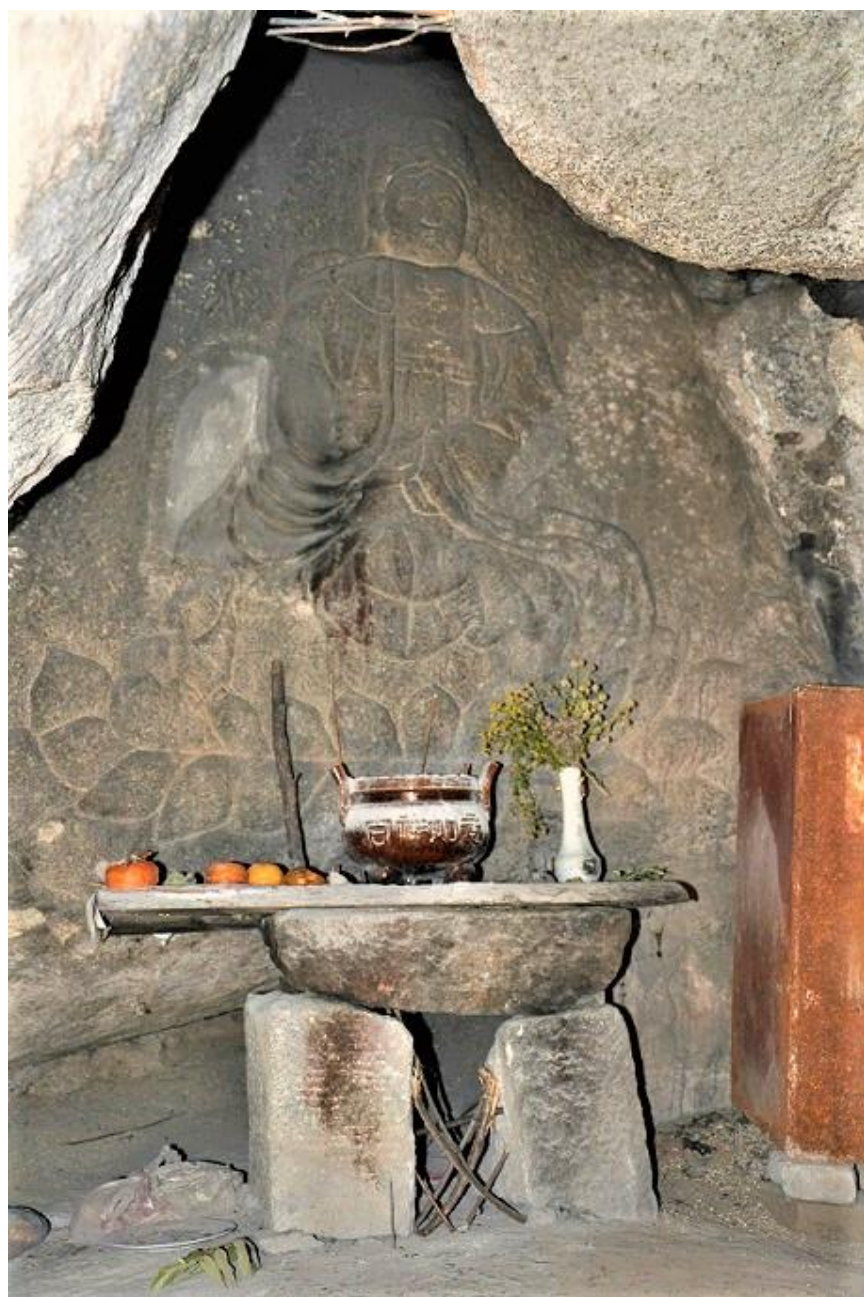
Old painting of *Qian Xian Si*



Plan for the reconstructed monastery

We also found out his name is Shi Chang Jie and he was ordained at a Pure Land sect Buddhist monastery on Jiu Hua Mountain in Anhui. Then (with some relief) I found out there was a small prayer hall within a cave here...(!) though I had known since arriving it wasn't the huge cave monastery; I'd discovered five years earlier. No matter! I'd gone in search of a cave monastery at the foot of Panshan and found one. I gave the good monk my name card, and he gave me his. He also told us about plans for the new monastery. The first building called "*Tian Men*" (Heaven Gate) will be built just above the lovely (recently repaired) water reservoir; above that on the mountain will be *Tian Wang Hall*; above that will be *Da Xiong Baodian Hall*, and above that will be the Sutra Library called *Cangjing Ge*. As monasteries go this will be a small one, true to the size of the one before and they also plan to follow Tang Dynasty architectural designs.

After brief further pleasantries my friend Miao and I went outside to meet Mrs. Zhang. She then showed us the way to the small cave temple. After a 20-minute walk up forested hills we were there. Ah! Wonderful peacefulness radiated in, out and around the area while small birds sang amongst the golden autumn leaves.



Time of course has no meaning in such places and so by and by we left, at least physically to have refreshments upon some huge boulders before descending to look for the ruins of the ancient buildings that comprised the physical form of the monastery that was and will be again. Searching amongst the hills to the left of the “parking lot,” (ancient assembly area, or possibly the location of a great hall) we found them, the foundations and partial walls of three small/medium sized Buddhist halls, one above the other on the mountain. If stones could speak what stories they would tell! The ruins of what walls remained were about a meter thick – enough to keep out the icy mountain cold of winter and sizzling heat of summer.



I climbed to the top of one broken wall to survey the area and could see the remnants of other halls below. What a majestic view and for an instant the past came alive again, or was it the future?

After taking some pictures Mrs. Zhang showed us a nearby small stone house that had been a communications headquarters for the Red Army, used for coordinating the resistance movement against the Japanese Imperial Army during the war. There was even a modern Stele commemorating the location and its historic role in the war. Looking carefully at the stones comprising the small building's wall I could see some had been salvaged from the (by then already destroyed) old monastery.



Walking back to the large flat area where we parked we saw a cheerful looking older gentleman with his wife packing burlap bags onto the back of his old motorcycle. Mrs. Zhang told us he was an old doctor in the village and knew lots of history of the monastery and Panshan. Ah ha!

I wanted to run over to meet him (ridiculously fearing he might leap on his motorcycle and flee) but instead strode purposely forward in what dignified manner I could muster and introduced myself in my best Mandarin. Fortunately, Miao showed up in time because he couldn't under half of what I was saying due to my barbarous accent. Never mind. Dr. Guo Song Hai we found out is from Panshan, as were his parents and grandparents, and we learned that the large bags he was putting on his motorcycle were filled with local herbs.

Soon enough he opened up and started telling us stories. This monastery is actually in *Lian He Cun Village*, meaning Unified Village – a name given during the War of Resistance against the Japanese (which started in 1937 – long before the U.S. entered what was to become WWII). North Shaolin Monastery is in the adjacent *Zhuan Wa Yao* village – meaning “Brick Making Village,” though they made grenades there during the war we later found out. We also learned that on the back of the mountain in a “dangerous place” was the location for the bank of the resistance movement. Unified Village, also called Contact Village was the central communication headquarters for Panshan and surrounding areas. He told us many stories; one went like this: “There was an old woman named ‘Yang Mama’ who was a resistance army hero. Once a wounded soldier came to her door and naturally, she took him in. Soon enough the Japanese came looking for him. But she had dressed him as a farmer and presented him to them as her son, saving his life. She was so trusted by everyone that she also worked as a courier taking gold and silver back and forth from the hidden “bank” (in a cave) and moved around fairly freely delivering messages. We also found out she liked to smoke a traditional Chinese pipe with local tobacco.

He also told us about the end of the Qing Dynasty (some 30 years before the Japanese invasion), and called it a “starving time.” “The royalty would burn whole families (to death) if they were caught stealing anything but the people’s homes were destroyed and the crops burned. Starving people looted the old royal buildings anyways, sold whatever they could find, and took apart the old royal palaces on the mountain for shelter.”

He told us about *Tian Cheng Si* (a monastery somewhere further up the mountain) during the war of resistance, and how it had been burned three times but could not be destroyed (until many years later during the Cultural Revolution).

He also told us the story as to how *Qian Xian Si* came to be called “Thousand Buddha Temple.”

“A long time ago – during the Han Dynasty – there was an old blind man. He prayed to Buddha to help him and was answered in a dream telling him to come to the well at this temple (suggesting the ancestry of this monastery may be older than Tang Dynasty as we were told before – the older of the two stele may also be of Han Dynasty origin he said), and wash his eyes every day. Time passed but he kept coming and every day and washed his eyes in the well water. One day after washing his eyes, suddenly he could see! Then, out from the well came a Buddha who said: ‘Thank you for coming every day to our temple and remembering us. There are hundreds of us here, but we have no place to stay.’ The old man said: ‘You are welcome to stay on our boulders.’ And to this day there are images of 1,000 Buddhas on the spectacular boulders around *Qian Xian Si*. The monastery itself was destroyed, but the Buddhas on the rocks survived.”



The Well at *Qian Xian Si*, November 9, 2014

Though I wanted to continue talking with him for several more hours at least, the sun wasn't far from setting and I needed to get to North Shaolin Monastery to take pictures of progress on construction before sundown. So, we got Dr. Guo's phone number, promised to meet him again soon and off we went to North Shaolin Monastery.

And, were they working? Oh yes, they were; specifically putting steel into the base of the Monk's dormitory building (*Seng Liao*). I was a bit surprised at that as the other buildings were built of wood and tiles only, following Song Dynasty design and construction perfectly. But this building has steel woven through the foundations; will be two stories tall and house up to a hundred monks, though the outer design will conform to Song Dynasty style.



Gentleman, scholar, monk Shi Yan Wan
examines work on the foundation of the monk's
living quarters at North Shaolin Monastery

Back at their current (rented) apartments a short walk away, we chatted for an hour or so, sharing our adventures of the day including contact information for Dr. Guo, as Shi Yan Wan and Shi Yan Pei are also collecting histories of Panshan, and naturally want to know all the neighbors in this large holy mountain range, for I obviously am not the only seeker of the ancient and modern histories, legends and traditions here.

All said and done it was back to Beijing after another day of beauty, enchantment and enlightenment on Panshan.

Back home the next morning I was watching BBC, CNN and Chinese CCTV simultaneously while reading rt.com, World News Report, New York Times and Wall Street Journal and cooking breakfast as usual. Oh my goodness! What complicated news! It seems the karmic chains of the material world never change.

“On this occasion he saw that the crowd was full of spies and would-be assassins. ‘Cultivators should not hold thoughts of good or evil,’ he said, ‘What cannot be named by any name is called the self-nature. The self-nature is non-dual; it is also called the real nature, the real mark. Within it all schools and sects are set up. It’s not enough just to talk about it, however. You must understand and immediately give proof to the state of no-mark.’”

“Hearing these words, the assembly realized that all their thoughts had been bound up in good and evil and they were greatly ashamed. They bowed down before him and said, “From now on we’ll be different. Please, Great Master, be our teacher.”

Platform Sutra Ibid, P. 370

And the wheel turns.

Many thanks to Mrs. Zhang Ji Dong for spending the day with us and showing us around, to Dr. Guo for sharing the treasures of Panshan’s legends and histories and Miao Hui for translations again.

Rebuilding North Shaolin Temple - Part XII Fan Yi Hui Chan House

茶道

Chá dào – The Way of Tea, Tea Ceremony

January 14, 2015

On the mountainside where North Shaolin is currently being rebuilt things slow down during the winter. Farmers still rise early to milk the cows; chickens still sing their most distinctive cock a doodle doo songs to signal the dawn and life goes on in most ways the same as it has for thousands of years, but there is quietness in winter that's unmistakable, peaceful and beautiful in a stark still way. So too the monks rise before dawn for meditation and chanting; some hot vegetables, rice and tea might make up breakfast. The Shaolin monks practice their taolu (the original Chinese version of Kata/Poomse) and whatever the business of the day is begun.

But in winter the sounds of re-construction at North Shaolin Monastery are conspicuous only in their absence for the crews have returned to their families and the awesome silence is only broken by the sounds of wind in the trees and a few solitary birds braving the harsh winter of North China. Yet, warmth remains in many forms.

The Way of Tea

A friend presented me
with tender leaves of Oolong tea,
for which I chose a kettle
of ivory-mounted gold,
a mixing-bowl of snow-white earth.
With its clear bright froth and fragrance,
it was like the nectar of Immortals.
The first bowl washed the cobwebs from my mind -
The whole world seemed to sparkle.
A second cleansed my spirit
like purifying showers of rain.
A third and I was one of the Immortals -
What need now for austerities

to purge our human sorrows?
Worldly people, by going in for wine,
sadly deceive themselves.
For now I know the Way of Tea is real.
Chio Jen (Tang Dynasty)

In the Song Dynasty (960 - 1279), monks got up, washed their face and hands, and drank tea in the morning. Then, they sat during meditation before taking a nap. When they got up, they washed and drank tea. Then, they had a meal, washed their face and hands, and drank tea. Monks were and to a large extent still are inseparable from tea in daily life. Tea they say “ignites the vitality and strengthens the will.”

In the Song Dynasty many Chinese temples formulated ritualized ceremonies for drinking tea. The most famous was the tea banquet of Jingshan Temple (径山寺) in Yuhang District, Hangzhou city, Zhejiang Province. Built in the early Tang Dynasty this temple became like the Vatican in the Song Dynasty, while Hangzhou was country's political, economic and cultural center, rather like Kyoto. Whereas monks in Europe were the earliest true wine masters, monks in China were the original masters of tea. Chan (Zen) and tea co-evolved in China along a path from south to north, and from inside monasteries to every corner of the empire and beyond.

The earliest Buddhist communication between Jingshan Temple and Japanese Buddhists was in 1235 when Japanese Buddhist monk Enni Ben'en (called Yuan'er Bianyuan in China, 1202-1280) studied various forms of Mahayana under Chinese Rinza Master Wuzhun Shifan at Jingshan Temple. (It is also believed Enni Ben'en was the first to bring udon noodles from China to Japan.) This appears to have been the origin of the now famous Japanese Tea Ceremony.

Fan Yi Hui Chan House – Beijing



Introduction

This particular adventure began with a phone call from Shi Yan Pei, head monk at North Shaolin to my translator friend Miao, who dabbles with gems and jewels as her hobby and vocation. On any one day she might buy or sell rough or cut diamonds, emeralds, sapphires, opals and dozens of other precious stones. She might suggest a cutting for a stone, or design and sketch a piece of jewelry for a client as such are her interests. Also, she gets to meet some of the richest people in China and company owners from all over the world. So, it was only natural Shi Yan Pei would call her to invite us to the opening of a new Chan house in Beijing that has starkly simple, yet posh tea rooms, jewelry, incense, fine china pottery and a small vegetarian restaurant making it a unique “five culture house” here in Beijing.



Welcome to Fan Yi Hui Chan House. Finding it was a bit of a challenge tucked into an enclave of traditional China hidden behind numerous sky scrapers. Walking there one strolls past Nanxincang Warehouse, built during the Ming Dynasty and used as a granary until the Qing Dynasty. Nine such storehouses remain intact along with the eastern wall. The brick storehouses feature louver windows and are constructed with brick similar to Beijing hutongs (traditional buildings).

Up this little road one turns left and in the distance the entranceway to Fan Yi Hui Chan House can sort of be seen with binoculars at least if one happens to have them handy. Walking along this little road towards the Chan House one is entertained by various signs giving unquestionably good advice (see photos) and shops, like “Lord of Salt – Mr. Taste and Mrs. Tea.”

Upon arriving at Fan Yi Hui one knows one is there, somehow, even if unable to read Chinese. It’s just obvious and I’m not sure what gives it away.

Walking in one leaves the hustle and bustle of modern, busy, loud Beijing and steps into a quiet, peaceful harmonious fusion of traditional and contemporary, delicately scented with herbs, flowers, incense and tea aromas blended with guzheng (21 stringed ancient instrument of China) set into timeless tea rooms right and left, lit softly yet clearly. Even the air in Fan Yi Hui is soft and gentle. It is in fact a total multi-sensory blast of warmth, quiet and softness after the cacophony of wintery downtown Beijing.

We were greeted at the door by a hostess that was expecting us and politely toured around the first floor, and later, the exclusive second floor which is usually reserved for members only.

Before long we met the owner and originator of this vision-like corner of heaven, Mr. Cao Wei - a former Chan Buddhist monk. After a couple of photos we sat down with Li Lai, Vice General Manager of Fan Yi Hui to listen to the story.

Though one might think this unique Chan House must have been years, and millions of dollars in the making, in fact the idea for Fan Yi Hui House sprang up in April 2014, when Mr. Cao was thinking of a way to harmonize traditional and modern Chinese cultures. Also, surprisingly the construction and design costs were somehow, very, very little - on the order of around 100,000 Yuan which is peanuts in Beijing. How is this possible? Difficult to say, but this is China, the land of mystery.

And, who is this former monk Cao Wei? "As a child," Mr. Cao said, he "fervently only wanted to be a monk," which he did become. But, after some 12 years in the monastery, due either to karma or pressure from his parents, he left to "find a new path."



Asked why he wanted to build a Chan house near the very center of Beijing, he only said (something to the effect of) "Modern society is so full of stress and desire. Coming back to natural mind should be simple." (Why I couldn't guess he'd say that is baffling.)



Asked about the meaning of the name of this Chan house," Vice General Manager Li Lai explained in Chinese: "Fan Yi Hui means 'Universe One Wisdom,' but implies many other things too. Wisdom is greater than the universe, (or maybe) transcends or contains the universe. Following the ways of truth is implied, and also one rule about everything having a beginning and end." Translating Chinese philosophy can be pretty darned difficult. The discussion of the meaning of Fan Yi Hui lasted a full ten minutes or so. (One thing foreigners must learn in China is patience. Most Chinese here seem to love details and trying to get a brief summary quickly isn't going to work. It's usually best to leave some things to the translator to figure out and boil down, then just hope for the best.)

During this interview we also found out that the formal opening of Fan Yi Hui isn't till May when Abbot Yao Zheng of Ningxia will arrive. For those who, somehow or other might not be familiar with this auspicious local, Yinchuan is the capital of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region and former capital of the Western Xia Empire of the Tanguts, which emphasizes another interesting thing about China: There are always 1,000 stories behind a story, at minimum. Abbot Yao Zheng by the way happens to be a master of Xing Yi Quan, the major internal linear style of Chinese Kung Fu.

Like a well-cut gem Fan Yi Hui has many translucent facets which sparkle in different ways. The jewelry displayed ranges from the styles of ancient Chinese royalty to simple rough and polished stones, which include diamonds, jade, emeralds, rubies and lapis lazuli. For those not familiar with lapis lazuli it has been a sacred stone since at least the 7th millennium BC, is primarily found in the Badakhshan province in northeast Afghanistan, and was even used for the eyebrows of the funeral mask of King Tutankhamun (1341 – 1323 BC). It has been the special stone of royalty for thousands of years, is the stone sacred to the Medicine Buddha (*Yaofo*), and attributed to have healing power. The Old Testament refers to Lapis Lazuli (Exodus 24:10) “As they saw the God of Israel, and there was under his feet as it were paved work of lapis lazuli.”

Typing all this the next day a word that kept popping up in my notes is “*Chanding*,” which I found out means meditation, but also calming and focus. Tea and incense can be useful for attaining this quiet and focus of mind.

Fan Yi Hui isn’t a simple place to describe, but it is a calm place in the heart of Beijing where one can savor fine tea, enjoy a simple vegetarian meal, meditate, and just be for a while.



As I've written before at the conclusion of stories relating to North Shaolin and its family, for Chan is a family extending even beyond suchness and non-suchness, and other human created dichotomies, leaving is never easy. It's a painful rebirth into the chaos of modern life with all its contradictions and excesses, desires and material things. But, one can take the calm and peace of mind, even some tea, incense and jewelry "to go" if this is the tender of one's desire. Returning is always easy, as there are doors everywhere if looked for, even in a cup of tea:

"The civil official Zuo Si in the Jin Dynasty wrote a poem titled My Cute Girls, of which are few lines are as follows:

*"My two daughters are cute girls,
Fair and flawless as lily pears.
We give the younger the name Pure,
her tongue's glib but never demure.
The elder's name is an orchid fine,
brows are rainbows and eyes shine.
They brisk in woods like two fairies,
can't wait to get ripe fruits and berries.
To flowery nature they're so much bound,
wind and rain chorus a cheerful sound.
Tea scents from home lure them with desire,
pursing rosy lips they help blow the fire.*

Yu, Lu (780 AD - Jiang Yi & Jiang
Xin, Trans., 2009) *The Classic of Tea*

P. 57

Yep, it was the tea that brought 'em home.

Emerging from the Dharma

“Subhuti, what do you think? If someone filled the three thousand great thousand-worlds with the Seven Precious Jewels in the practice of giving, would such a person obtain many merits?” Subhuti replied, “Very many, Bhagavan! Why? Such merits do not have the nature of merits, and for this reason the Tathagata speaks of many merits. If someone accepts and maintains even as little as a four-line gatha from within this sutra, speaking it to others, then his or her merits will be even greater. Why? Subhuti, this is because all Buddhas, as well as the Dharmas of the Anuttara Samyaksambodhi of the Buddhas, emerge from this sutra. Subhuti, what is called the Buddha Dharma is not a Buddha Dharma.”

Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita Sutra, Verse 8
translated from *Taisho Tipitaka* Volume 8, Number 235

Serenely picking tea —
Through morning mists
Or crimson evening clouds —
His solitary journey is my envy.
We rendezvous at a remote mountain temple,
Where we enjoy tea by a clear pebble fountain.
In that silent night,
Lit only by candlelight,
I struck a marble bell —
Its chime carrying me

A hidden man
Deep into thoughts of ages past.
The Day I Saw Lu Yu off to Pick Tea
Aaron Fisher, *The Way of Tea*

Note 1: In Buddhist tradition the seven jewels or possessions of the Chakravartin represent the seven factors or limbs of enlightenment. These are the aspects of wisdom-awareness that overcome the delusions or hindrances on the path to enlightenment. The seven factors are: 1) Perfect mindfulness, 2) Perfect discrimination of phenomena, 3) Perfect effort or energy, 4) Perfect joy, 5) perfect versatility or flexibility, 6) Perfect single-pointed concentration, 7) Perfect equanimity.

An auxiliary or lesser group of seven royal jewels also accompanies the rule of the Chakravartin. These are the sword, the naga skin, the throne, the robes, the boots, the royal house or palace and the palace gardens. These secondary jewels represent the material inheritance or attributes of the Chakravartin.

Note 2: Naga is a Sanskrit and Pali word for a deity taking the form of the great king cobra found in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism.

Note 3: Whether in a Chan house or not, for a heady brew mix all of the above with your hot tea.

Note 4: If you can figure all this out, you are either a fool or an enlightened person, and in either case your Kung Fu should be just about perfect.

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Rebuilding North Shaolin Temple – Part XIII Meditation Hall and Mountain Spirits

永恒

Yong héng - eternal / everlasting / to pass into eternity

Summer/Winter, 2015 - 2016

It was an unusually busy year for me with visits to interview the Kung Fu masters and Silk Road sites in Afghanistan, Xian, Urumqi, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, and I'd transferred to the bigger of the two high schools at my empire-like school in Beijing which was and still is undergoing a number of transformations involving a huge amount of time and energy. Yet still I managed a few visits to North Shaolin Monastery in its own state of endless transformation, specifically rebuilding some 70+ years after its destruction during what Westerners call WWII but what was part of a much longer series of wars here in China. What follows are some ultra-brief recaps.

May 17th, 2015 – September 5th, 2015

Work on the second story of the Great Meditation Hall (*Chan Teng* – Zen Hall) had just begun. Shi Yan Pei (Head Monk of the North Shaolin) was there kindly bringing me up to speed on news, making exquisite tea, and peacefully coordinating the 10,000 things that make up his job at this time, however Shi Yen Wan was away visiting university friends. Shi Yan Kong was there, for he is really the primary Shaolin Kung Fu *Shifu* (pronounced “sure-fu” in Beijing at least and meaning Master; Southern Chinese however say: “Sifu”) there for the past few years teaching the young trainee monks that live here as well.

I was also happy to hear that the construction of three huge bronze Buddhas (and five smaller ones) for Buddha Hall were nearing completion in Thailand and should arrive at North Shaolin around the end of September of early October.

As my school in Beijing was still in session, this visit was all too short.

September 5, 2015

It was a rainy day – a cool blessed relief after the hot summer when I visited North Shaolin again. All the senior monks were away – Shi Yan Pei at Songshan Shaolin, and Shi Yan Wan and Shi Yan Kong at their small Panshan urban temple coordinating chanting, prayer and meditation for the residents there. However, four monk trainees were there and I know though young, their expertise at Shaolin Taolu is extraordinary. How fortunate am I!

So I (and translator/friend Miao who had returned from a prolonged stay in Sri Lanka learning gem cutting and polishing) practiced with the monk trainees for a couple of hours in the veranda that spans the front part of the courtyard apartments where they live adjacent to the North Shaolin Monastery. Their favorite Taolu I found out is called *Qi Xing Quan* (Seven Star Fist) and they performed this Taolu with amazing precision, strength and power. Oh! Did I mention, speed? Yes, lots of speed. Pure speed. Too fast for me speed. Fortunately, the youngest of the boys there hadn't learned this Taolu either so at least I wasn't alone lagging behind a bit.







After that we played with the heavy bag for a while, a useful training companion with which I fortunately had the upper hand and we also played with some simple attack and defense moves as I was curious what they'd been taught to prepare them for sparring/fighting. It seemed to me their primary response to most attacks was trapping the attacking limb, with and without locking and in most cases instant counterattacks. It reminded me a bit of a line from the old "Kung Fu" TV series: "The only way to beat a Shaolin monk is: Don't attack him."

By the time we'd about finished all that the rain had more or less stopped temporarily and we all walked over to the ancient/new monastery and explored developments which were amazing to me, shining as they were in the sweet smelling serenity of the early fall mountain after the rain. This is a mountain of wild flowers and fruit after all, not to mention the world's most delicious chestnuts and well, the whole cornucopia of nature's most grand and precious gifts. Arriving at the construction site I was immediately gripped by the splendid *Chan Tang* – Zen Hall for meditation which in spring was but one story high, but now a majestic four stories tall and nearing completion.



Chan Tang (Meditation Hall) N Shaolin Sept 6 2015 - Picture taken from *Cang Jing Ge* (Sutra Hall)

It may not look glorious now however I suspect the finished product will be spectacular.

A few hundred meters in front of the *Chan Tang* was the Annex building for the *Seng Liao* – Monks' quarters/dormitory in a preliminary state of construction.

(Checking a dictionary after getting home I found the ancient meaning of the "*Liao*" character used for the monk's sleeping quarters usually means: "hut," and "shack" as historically monks quarters were rather simple, to be sure; "*Seng*," of course means "monk," as in "*Seng Bing*" or soldier monk and also "*Sangha*," the Buddhist monastic order.)

The *Seng Liao* proper will be between the Annex Building and the *Chan Tang*, however construction hasn't started yet. It's expected that after completion of the *Chan Tang*, monks may live on the lower floors at least temporarily. Also, interesting to note, though maintaining Song Dynasty design, the new buildings are being constructed of cement with steel reinforcements, as the rather dry climate in North China these days makes fire a genuine concern.

Work was also going on in the Buddha Hall (*Da Siong Baodian*), patching here and there, some painting and so on in preparation for the arrival of the huge Buddhas late this month or early next month.



Great Buddha Hall on the right

After exploration of all these beautiful developments, and dozens of photos we all strolled back to the current monks' quarters to find Shi Yan Wan and Shi Yan Kong had returned.

Though usually it would be Shi Yan Wan as the senior on-site monk making tea and chatting, Shi Yan Kong stepped up and we spent another delightful hour chatting about things, developments on the mountain, various friends, etc. I also told him about my travels in Central Asia, and gave him a poster/calendar very kindly given to me at the Buddhist Monastery in Tashkent Uzbekistan, along with some (Muslim brand) scented oil from Sri Lanka, herbal soap from Beijing, incense from India (and some fruits and almonds too).

I tried to explain to Shi Yan Kong my dream of Buddhists playing a greater role helping foster world peace by building bridges between nations and the major religions. Operating from a base of centered inner stillness in harmony with nature, these Chan (Zen) people seem to observe and realize far more than most people would ever guess. In contrast, how blind and deaf are we people of the "modern" material world in comparison endless locked into and blinded by ephemeral desires.

Then, as always, all too soon, it was time to go. But, before leaving Panshan we had to stop at Wei Ming's Guest House first, as he and his family are dear old friends now and also integral parts of the Panshan family. Upon arrival we were happy to find Wei Ming and his lovely wife well. We also found out grandma Wang Xiu Lan, now in her 90s is still perky and getting around just fine. (I interviewed Grandmother Wang for Part V - August 21, 2012, of the "Rebuilding the Northern Shaolin" series of stories published in Kung Fu magazine.



Grandmom Wang Xiu Lan with translator Miao Hui

But, when I asked about Mr. Yao, (interviewed in Part VIII, *Spirit of the Masters* of this series, November 2013), the real name of the Taiwan/ American gentleman who worked tirelessly every summer for 12 years rebuilding stone by stone the “*Ta Lin*” (Pagoda Forest/ monk’s graveyard) of *Zhong Fa Si* Temple just a few hundred meters above North Shaolin on Panshan, we found out he had passed away last October at the age of 65.

His delightful stories of the mountain were transmitted to him over many years from old villagers many of whom have also passed away. Mr. Yao was a treasure trove of mountain and Daoist lore and a fine, loving gentleman that sure will be missed by all of us whose lives he touched.

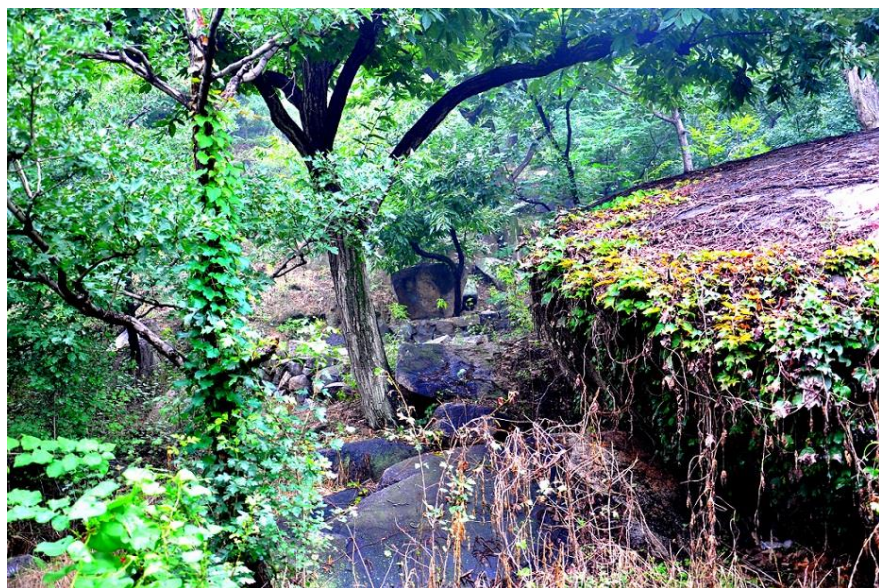
He was so modest he asked not to be photographed and even that his real name not be mentioned, and I honored his wishes, but I did accidentally get the following photo:



That's him on the right - He had rich sense of humor and appreciation of irony addressing the vicissitudes of life with laughter.

Talking with Wei Ming about him I also learned that the first time Mr. Yao visited China was in 1972 working as a translator with the entourage of then President Nixon. I found out the first time he'd visited Panshan was in 1989, due to a friend his, a famous movie actor that wanted to buy a house on this even more famous mountain. Panshan is famous not only for North Shaolin, but also many emperors for nearly 2,000 years visited here; it had and still has part of the "Royal Road," and for example Emperor Qianlong visited Panshan some 32 times during his reign for such is the beauty and majesty of this awesome and some would say sacred place. Though Mr. Yao was by profession a real estate broker in Texas, Wei Ming, his family and many others here know his heart and spirit lived on Panshan. It was last summer (2014) for the first time in 12 years that he didn't come here to work through the hottest months of the year on the ancient *Ta Lin*. He better than any other foreigner, and even better than most Panshan folk, knew the secrets of this mountain, its people and the Spirits of the Masters, past and present here.

Wei Ming told us several other stories about Mr. Yao. For example, one time many, many years ago he was shopping at an old market in Beijing and bought an ancient painting of monks. Afterwards he had a dream that one of the old monks in the painting told him he had a very special mission in life. Wei Ming told us that during his last visit in the summer of 2013 Mr. Yao told him he'd had a realization: Rebuilding the *Ta Lin*, was his very special mission. My feeling is he had other missions too, for he was an amazing collector of folk stories and lore, and I'm forever grateful to him for sharing some of them with us.



After some time of reminiscing, we had to go as the night was well on and the work I have to do in Beijing without end.

Bidding fond farewells, we were off into the rainy night, down the dark mountain side with hairpin switchbacks, through Panshan town, onto the highway, through Pingu and other historically famous ancient places and into Beijing proper.

But something was missing, or not? Could I still hear the merry chortle of Mr. Yao's humor, or the solemnity of his speech when talking of the ancients?

Here belongs a short quote from Part VIII of this series, with his correct name where it should be:

“As we walked up the Royal Road through the middle of the *Ta Lin*, Mr. Yao explained many details of the reconstruction work. When we got to the top front and center *Ta*, we stopped.

“Feel the Spirits of the Master Monks,” Mr. Yao intoned solemnly. He asked us to close our eyes and relax, to feel the spirit of the place and those within. Mr. Yao believes the place is alive. When he first came here eleven years ago, he was in very poor health, and believes the spirit of Panshan, the air, the water, the herbs, vegetables... the *qi*, and the Masters together restored his health and vitality...”

And the rain kept falling until just before dawn, which was unusually bright and clear.

January 3, 2016

In Putonghua (Mandarin Chinese) there's a commonly used phrase: “*mang, mang, tai mang le*,” which means, “busy, busy, too busy!” So, I couldn't get back until this day. “*Zhe shi seng huo*,” which means, “that's life.”

I got to the apartments rented by the Shaolin adjacent to the quickly rebuilding monastery around 2:00 pm and at first it seemed no one was there. But from the corner of my eye I saw a movement in one window and I called out: “*Heshang*,” which means “monk.”

A moment later a pleasant looking young man emerged and I introduced myself, thinking perhaps the monks had moved into the Chan-Ting building as he wasn't dressed like a monk. But, no, I quickly learned, this was Shi Yan Lu, a Shaolin Kung Fu Shifu, from the Shaolin now teaching at North Shaolin. And, to my further surprise and delight I found out his English is reasonably good too! Oh joy!

And, as if that wasn't happiness enough, a few moments later Shi Yan Pei showed up. He'd been spending a lot of time at Songshan Shaolin lately and I haven't seen him in a long time. Fortunately, he'd arrived just the day before. Shi Yan Wan and Shi Yan Kong I found out were in Hong Kong for a few days but the younger apprentice monks, Xiao Qi (the older) and Xiao Hao were at the monastery. Well, most of the family together again. Of course, I'd heard of the arrival of the huge Buddhas for the Buddha Hall, and could see the amazing construction developments when I drove up, but...

But first I got to know my new friend and soon to be teacher Yan Lu a bit. He'd really started at Shaolin around the year 2000, and expressed his desire to become a monk to Shi Yong Xin who advised him to finish his education first as he was only a senior in high school at that time. So Shi Yan Lu continued study of Shaolin Kung in his hometown of Hebi, in Henan, very close to Songshan Shaolin. After high school he went to Henan University of Technology, specializing in communications. Then in 2006 he went back to Songshan Shaolin and began training as a monk, meeting among other people Shi Yan Pei, with whom he studied. I asked his specialty and he said: *Xiao Hong Chuang*. I found out that there are five main styles of this – the Shaolin “introductory” taolu. I also found out that he visited the U.S. and President Obama with Shi Yong Xin in 2009, meeting quite a number of world leaders, including then Pilipino President Aquino, then President of Sri Lanka Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, and others. “There were people from all different religions there, it was most amazing,” he said. He also had a photo of him with former American heavyweight champion Evander Holyfield.

After coming back to China, he said he still wanted to be a good monk, but felt there were some parts of life he needed to explore outside of the monastic rules. And when visiting some friends, he met a young lady and became friends. When he asked his Shifu about this, his teacher was “very supportive,” and “I took off my robes in 2011,” he concluded. He said this with a straight face, being a sincere person, I believe. Yet, even married he continued to work as a Shaolin Kung Fu master at Shaolin. Only a couple of weeks ago did he arrive at North Shaolin. His longstanding friendship with Shi Yen Pei helped make a lively and sometimes funny interview, but for the sake of brevity I'm writing the “abridged edition” here.

Shortly after Shi Yan Lu and I went to the monastery to see the amazing developments. First - in chronological order - I marveled that the *Chan Tang* "Great Meditation Hall/building was completed and even painted. Its serene majestic Song Dynasty architectural beauty graced the mountain alongside the Buddha Hall. It was/is a quiet vision of loveliness. One cannot undo the past, but rebuilding brings its own kind of unique healing and enlightenment. There is an organic nature to classical Chinese architecture that can't simply be defined. I'm sure if I had better software skills, I could take a nautilus outline, lay it over a traditional monastery design and prove some intrinsic organic features.

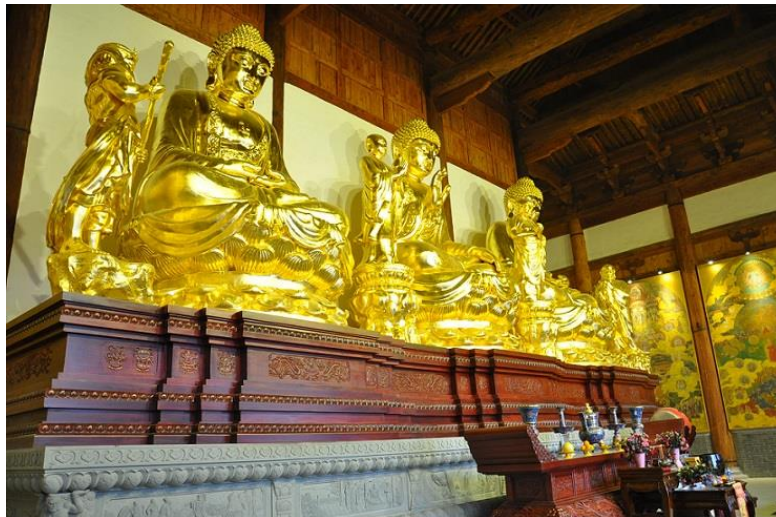


Chan Tang Meditation Hall

2020 update: My software skills improved a little bit during the subsequent five years and so I made this:

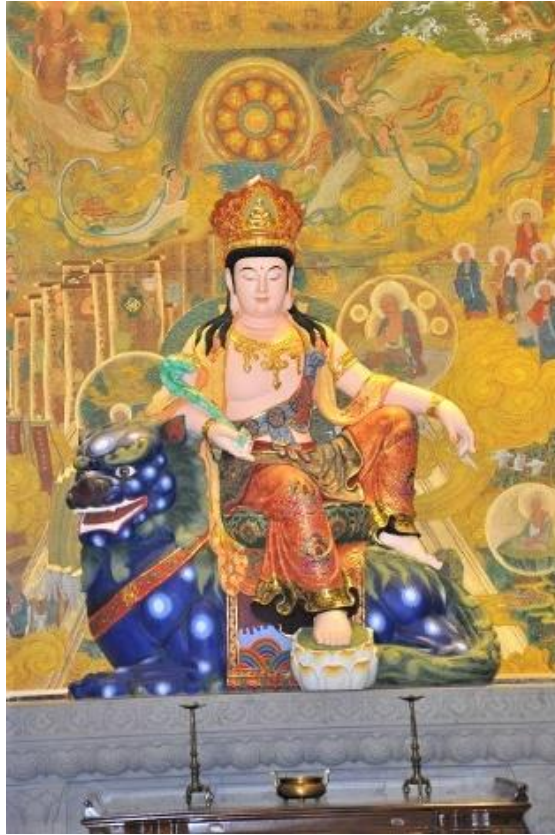


Walking a little more we entered the Great Buddha Hall and beheld the immense Buddhas and Bodhisattvas that had only recently arrived from Thailand. Their eternal serenity was/is inspiring – stillness of mind, centered, relaxed in perfect sitting form – timeless symbols of the guide(s) to enlightenment and moral behavior.





On the right side of the Great Buddhas



Closeup

Click, click, click went the camera and soon or not I'm not sure which we went outside and I persuaded Shi Yan Lu to perform his favorite version of *Xiao Hong Chuan* taolu. I took videos and then practiced with him, greatly honored that he'd do so with a fellow with such little skill as I. Xiao Qi looked on, probably amused at my lack of skill, but he betrayed nothing of this, good natured young man that he is. Many or most monks are reticent to allow photos, thus I didn't take any of him. But the video provides a glimpse of masterful taolu that appears as if it were done underwater, so smooth, slow and effortless that it appeared.

Then, down the mountain we went returning to the apartments where everyone together ate a truly natural and delicious vegetarian dinner. Ah! Such a wonder filled day, but it was quite dark and cold at 6:30 and I had to drive back to Beijing before too late. Farewell to friends and family, never goodbye just “see ya later.”

It would be unjust to finish this story without a tip of the hat to the mountain itself. Yes, Panshan has an amazing history with visits by emperors for around two thousand years. Who knows why, except, there is an energy – a *qi* – a vibrancy – electromagnetic plus “X” that one feels there. Most or all of the great prophets went to mountains to pray and communicate with God. A visit to a mountain is a good, healthy, and in some cases holy thing well recommended to all.

Elephant in the room

Finally, in response to the elephant in the living room even in China I have heard sleezy rumors about Shaolin Abbot Shi Yongxin. These scurrilous rumors have appeared in both Chinese and western “news” reports. One recurring issue throughout history has been that if one does anything good there will be others who will attack that individual. It’s disappointing but also to be expected. Foreign efforts to diminish the substance and image of China have been unrelenting these past few centuries. A pity some people have not yet learned smearing mud on another person or institution does not really improve one’s own standing, but rather diminishes the aggressors as the truth of things will come out in the end.

Though I am not privy to the inner workings of the Chinese police and government, I heard a story from a friend in the Chan House a month or so ago by someone who is far better connected than I. He said a thorough investigation had been made into the allegations by the religious affairs bureau under the Denfeng city government in coordination with other government appointed corruption investigators and the Abbot was cleared.

Though it's just a rumor which I hesitate to report, it appears there may be a corporation in Hong Kong that has put a great deal of pressure on the good Abbot to "go public" with the Shaolin and sell shares. Unwilling to do this – basically relinquish control of the monasteries under his guidance – the Abbot has according to some, been ikimedted to a disinformat-on campaign designed to either have him replaced or change his attitudes regarding incorporation. However, because of an ongoing investigation into the sources of those rumors, the report remains sealed. Not many people here doubt the sincerity of President Xi Jinping's pledge to wipe out corruption at all levels, "from the tigers to the flies."

My own feelings are this: In a fair system a person is innocent until proven guilty and I have yet to see or hear of a single shred of solid evidence against Abbot Shi Yongxin. I think if someone represents good in this world, they will have enemies who try to make themselves look big by diminishing others. I strongly advise reading the book: "*Shaolin – Temple in my heart*," by Abbot Shi Yongxin.

When he became abbot, the Shaolin was in ruins. During his time as abbot the Shaolin has grown to be a world-wide organization that has helped, directly or indirectly hundreds of thousands or perhaps even millions of people live better lives. The Shaolin has since Bodhidharma in the 6th Century represented the moral backbone of China and it has consistently demonstrated the strength and courage needed to protect the homeland and defend the innocent. It hasn't won every battle, for example it was burned in 1928 by a foreign supported Nationalist warlord. Yet, it came back and returned to its sacred mission.

As for the rumors about me, whereas it is true I'm an alien, I'm *only part robot* and any theories to the contrary are entirely without merit and only spread by jealous vicious competitors.

Finally, in anticipation of the upcoming Chinese New Year, I can only say: "*Gongxi, Gongxi Fa Cai*" in anticipation of the Year of the Fire Monkey, 2560 to be celebrated February 8 this year.



Source: <https://sanctuaryoftao.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/MonkeyFeature.jpg>

Rebuilding North Shaolin – Part XIV Guan Yin Hall

光阴似箭

Guāng-yīn-sì-jiàn – Time flies like an arrow



Pretty much everyone agrees that fall is the most beautiful season in Beijing and the north of China in general. Not surprisingly they even have a word for it: 秋高气爽 *qiūgāoqìshuǎng* – literally translated as: “Autumn Lofty *qi* Refreshing” with “*qi*” generally meaning intrinsic energy.

The morning of Sunday October 28th, 2018 had a steady north wind bringing slightly cold crystal-clear air to my home in Beijing while the sky shimmered in pale blue grandeur. I woke in my apartment in the middle of correcting midterm exams and planned an escape back home to North Shaolin Monastery on Panshan – Pan Mountain about 95 Kilometers east of here. The leaves around here were in full color aflame with brilliant hues of yellows, oranges and reds.

Though I haven’t published anything about Rebuilding of North Shaolin Monastery for a long time I’ve visited several times to hook up with dear friends and luxuriate in the mountain’s aura of serenity. For reasons unknown to me unseen and unknowable forces compelled me on this day to visit and reconnect the worlds between then and now, here and there. All becomes One when one wills to make it so, or perhaps more accurately abandons the desires that keep worlds apart.

A couple hours later I found myself cruising through Panshan town at the base of Pan Mountain. Not much has changed along this road during the eight years I've been visiting.

Panshan isn't just a mountain range; it's also a classic prototype small town at the foot of the mountains surrounded by farms with lots of small markets along the winding small main street leading to the mountain. True, there's a new side of town with wide modern straight streets and apartment buildings, but the road from the highway to the monastery is classic rural and evocative of small-town nostalgia – even for me and I'm not a nostalgic person.

People young and old riding mostly dilapidated motorbikes frequently darted out of nowhere in front of me as usual, mutton was being grilled in front of restaurants here and there and faint wood fire smells drifted in the morning air combining with the autumn leaves smells making a fantastic bouquet of olfactory timelessness. Fruit and vegetable sellers tidied their shops, a herd of goats wandered by, an older couple teetered across the street, and on and on. It's really beautiful.

Cruising up the switch-backed mountain road triggered a flickering multitude of memories. Because this is a historic mountain and national park with royal history there's a small – again really old – check-point. In fact, there's a huge rock overhang there and I suspect it was an ancient gateway too. I told the old security guard – in my best Putonghua (Mandarin) I'm a lay disciple of the Shaolin and I wasn't sure he understood me as he just continued to look at me with unabashed curiosity. So, then I said: "Pangyo!" which means "friend."

"Pangyo!" he repeated as his eyes lit up and face wreathed in smiles. He turned around and lifted the time-worn gate. Has this happened before (?) I vaguely wondered.

About three quarters of a mile below the monastery I could see it shining up on the mountainside. Wow! So much had been done since I was there last spring. In the distance I could see construction of the monks' living quarters was mostly finished and a new smaller Hall had been built at the front of the monastery complex.

About 11:30 am when I saw the turnoff to the now mostly rebuilt monastery I wondered if the monks had moved into their new living quarters yet but decided to go a couple of hundred meters further to their humble old quarters in a really small courtyard. Turning off the small road up an even smaller stone driveway I saw a car parked in the lovely old yard and figured I'd guessed correctly; they were still there. About 30 seconds after parking Shi Yan Wan came out of a small office room and warmly greeted me. A couple of minutes later Shi Yan Pei came out and I was doubly delighted as being the head monk there he's got all the latest news. Shi Yan Wan by the way is Shi Yan Pei's administrative assistant and general manager of construction as Shi Yan Pei has to travel often and Shi Yan Wan takes care of things in his absence. Shi Yan Wan also does a lot of Shaolin history research and other things. He's really quite a brilliant young man.

A few minutes later we were sitting in Shi Yan Pei's tiny office and He started to prepare tea. I first asked about the other monks and found most of the old crew was still there including Shi Yan Kong the head Kung Fu master teacher there for the past few years. He's been traveling the world a bit with the Shaolin Abbot I was informed, but he looked the same and fit as ever.

Then I told Shi Yan Pei a little about my most recent Kung Fu adventures in Ethiopia and he was happy to hear Kung Fu is quite popular there. Our conversation slowly dilated to the development of Shaolin Kung Fu in several countries...

The green Chinese tea was aromatic, rich, and soothing all at the same time. It warms inside and out, refreshing like a mountain valley in springtime. Little do most people know smell is the most powerful sense in many ways. The sensory input goes directly deep into the brain without all the filtering the other senses experience en-route to the emotional centers of the brain. My experiences of drinking green tea at North Shaolin are strung together like pearls on a string, rooted in ancient times, yet always current in the river of newness.

Then we got around to North Shaolin Monastery news and I found out the new building in front of the top level of the monastery was Guan Yin Hall. Designed in classic Song Dynasty style – that is with interlocked wooden pillars and beams – she's a classic beauty of Chinese architecture.





When will they move into the monastery monks' quarters? "Next year in June," Shi Yan Pei replied. Wow! "Up to 20 monks will live there to begin with" he added.

Another happy event is a slightly larger than life size statue of Bodhidharma had arrived and was gracing the platform area in front of Great Buddha Hall.

In Chinese Bodhidharma is called Pútídámó or just “Damo” for short. He is usually depicted in Chinese art as having red hair and it is generally thought in China he had a Central Asian background, however Indian scholars are now strongly pushing the theory of his southern Indian origin.

To quote from my book *North Shaolin, History, Culture and Reincarnation*:

Bodhidharma

Bodhidharma was the Indian patriarch that originated Chán Buddhism in China. Chán is uniquely Chinese. In the *Record of the Buddhist Monasteries of Luoyang*, Bodhidharma is described as a Persian Central Asian (Broughton, 1999, P. 54 & 138). However, his disciple Tanlin identified his master as a South Indian Tamil (Broughton, 1999, p. 8). Given that Bodhidharma is described physically as “The Blue-Eyed Barbarian” 藍眼睛的野人 (*lán yǎnjīngde yě rén*) in Chinese texts (Soothill & Hodous, 1995), it seems probable that he was from the Central Asian region rather than south India. Many (Central Asian) Kashmiris have reddish hair and blue eyes, which they attribute to being descendants of Alexander the Great’s army which marched through that area (330-323 BC) with some staying and intermarrying with locals. Tamils being from the south of India are virtually all dark skinned with brown eyes and black hair. In all fairness to the Tamils however, it is possible that Bodhidharma was from there, but because brown eyes are a dominant genetic trait, both of Bodhidharma’s parents would have to have had foreign ancestors for him to have blue eyes.

Daoxuan’s version of the *Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks* says that Bodhidharma arrived in the South Chinese Kingdom of Song, making his arrival sometime before 479 AD, as that kingdom fell to Southern Qi in that year.

However, according to another historical record, the *Anthology of the Patriarchal Hall* (祖堂集 *Zǔtángjí* – 952 AD) Bodhidharma arrived in China in 527 during the Liang Dynasty. So, it's fairly safe to say Bodhidharma arrived in China sometime around 479 – 527 AD, plus or minus a few years.

After arrival in China he visited the Liang Court (now Nanjing) but left after his cryptic teachings offended Liang Emperor Wu (Emperor Xiāo Yǎn 蕭衍 of Liáng 梁) a sincere patron of Buddhism.

“The emperor asked Bodhidharma, ‘How much karmic merit have I earned for ordaining Buddhist monks, building monasteries, having sutras copied, and commissioning Buddha images?’ Bodhidharma answered, ‘None. Good deeds done with worldly intent bring good karma, but no merit.’ The emperor then asked Bodhidharma, ‘So what is the highest meaning of noble truth?’ Bodhidharma answered, ‘There is no noble truth, there is only void.’ The emperor then asked Bodhidharma, ‘Then, who is standing before me?’ Bodhidharma answered, ‘I know not, Your Majesty.’

“From then on, the emperor refused to listen to whatever Bodhidharma had to say. Although Bodhidharma came from India to China to become the first Buddhist patriarch of China, the emperor refused to recognize him. Bodhidharma knew that he would face difficulty in the near future, but had the emperor been able to leave the throne and yield it to someone else, he could have avoided his fate of starving to death.

“According to the teaching, Emperor Wu’s past life was as a *Bīqiū* (one of the first disciples of the Buddha). While he meditated in the mountains, a monkey would always steal and eat the things he planted for food, as well as the fruit in the trees. One day, he was able to trap the monkey in a cave and blocked the entrance of the cave with rocks, hoping to teach the monkey a lesson. However, after two days, the *Bīqiū* found that the monkey had died of starvation.

“Supposedly, that monkey was reincarnated into *Hou Jing* of the Northern Wei Dynasty, who led his soldiers to attack Nanjing. After Nanjing was taken, the emperor was held in captivity in the palace and was not provided with any food, and was left to starve to death. Though Bodhidharma wanted to save him and brought forth a compassionate mind toward him, the emperor failed to recognize him, so there was nothing Bodhidharma could do. Thus, Bodhidharma had no choice but to leave Emperor Wu to die and went into meditation in a cave for nine years.

“This encounter would later form the basis of the first kōan of the collection ‘The Blue Cliff Record.’ However that version of the story is somewhat different. In the Blue Cliff’s telling of the story, there is no claim that Emperor Wu did not listen to Bodhidharma after the Emperor was unable to grasp the meaning. Instead, Bodhidharma left the presence of the Emperor once Bodhidharma saw that the Emperor was unable to understand. Then Bodhidharma went across the river to the kingdom of Wei.

“After Bodhidharma left, the Emperor asked the official in charge of the Imperial Annals about the encounter. The Official of the Annals then asked the Emperor if he still denied knowing who Bodhidharma was. When the Emperor said he didn’t know, the Official said, ‘This was the Great-being Guanyin (i.e., the *Mahasattva Avalokiteśvara*) transmitting the imprint of the Buddha’s Heart-Mind.’

“The Emperor regretted his having let Bodhidharma leave and was going to dispatch a messenger to go and beg Bodhidharma to return. The Official then said, ‘Your Highness, do not say to send out a messenger to go fetch him. The people of the entire nation could go, and he still would not return.’”

Translation from ikimedia a.eu, adapted from the *Anthology of the Patriarchal Hall*

There is some controversy regarding Bodhidharma and his visit to Shàolín. Legend has it that after his visit to the Liang Court Bodhidharma crossed the Yangtze River on his way to the Kingdom of Wei, location of the Songshan Shàolín Monastery where he sat facing a wall for nine years in a cave in silence and that he experienced his enlightenment during this time.

For example, Wang Guangxi, who was standing director of the Modern Chinese Literature Research Institute and Deputy Dean of Wushu Culture Research Center, Physical Education Institute, Shengzhou University wrote that: “Bodhidharma (?-563) once visited the Shàolín Temple but didn’t live there for a long time...” (Wang, 2008, P. 14)

However, the *Jingde-era Record of the Transmission of the Lamp* (景德傳燈錄 *Jingde chuandeng lu* – dates vary between 1004-1011) records the following:

“The Second Patriarch of Chinese Chán is Huike 慧可 (487–593). After studying Taoism in his youth, he turned to Buddhism, ordaining under Chán Master Baojing (寶靜禪師). Later he spent eight years in meditation, leading to a vision at about the age of forty that guided him to Bodhidharma... Huike went to Shaolin temple and called upon Bodhidharma at the cave where he was meditating. Receiving no acknowledgment from the master, Huike waited outside for the entire night. It was winter, and by dawn the snow had reached his knees. Finally, Bodhidharma asked, “You have stood long in the snow. What do you seek?” Huike replied, “I request only that the master, in his mercy, open the Gate of Sweet Dew and liberate all beings.” Bodhidharma said, “The supreme, marvelous Way of all Buddhas can be attained only through ages of effort practicing what is difficult to practice, enduring what is difficult to endure. Why should you, with your shallow heart and arrogant mind, ask for the true vehicle and suffer such hardships in vain?” Huike cut off his left arm and presented it to the master as a sign of his detachment and desire to study the Way. With this, Bodhidharma accepted him as a disciple.

“One day he said to Bodhidharma, ‘My mind is not yet at rest. Master, I implore you, please put my mind to rest.’ The master replied, ‘Bring your mind here and I will put it to rest for you.’ Huike said, ‘I have searched for my mind, but am unable to find it.’ ‘There,’ said the master, ‘I have put your mind to rest for you.’ *After about five years* Huike received dharma transmission from Bodhidharma, then became a wandering teacher.” (Italics added by author)

Sasaki, R.F. (2009 b) P. 264, 265

This text clearly states “after about five years...” which suggests that Bodhidharma’s stay at Shàolín was more than for a “short time,” giving some credence to the legends regarding the length of his stay at Shàolín.

Six short treatises called *Xiaoshi liumen* are attributed to Bodhidharma while he was at Shàolín Temple “although there is no evidence that he was the actual author.” (Sasaki, P. 419)

“*Xiaoshi liumen*” (小室六門) or “Bodhidharma’s six gates.” “*Shaoshi*” (少室) is an alternate name for Bodhidharma from the fact that Shaolin si 少林寺, is his temple, and was located on the peak *Shaoshi* 少室 of Mount Song (嵩). The six treatises that comprise the *Xiaoshi liumen* are: 1) *Xin jing song* (心經頌) Verse on the mind sutra; 2) *Po xiang lun* (破相論) Treatise on the cessation of thoughts; 3) *Er zhongru* (二種入) The two entrances; 4) *Anxin famen* (安心法門) Dharma gate for pacifying the mind; 5) *Wuxing lun* (悟性論) Treatise on awakening to the nature of mind; and 6) *Xuemaì lun* (血脈論) Treatise on the transmission. The individual texts date to the Tang; texts for the *Anxin famen* and the *Er zhongru* have been found at Dunhuang. The *Xiaoshi liumen* itself appears to date to the Song.

Sasaki, R.F. (2009 b) *The Record of Linji*, P. 419-420

The enlightenment of Bodhidharma, so the legend goes, laid the foundation for Chán Buddhism – the last major branch of Buddhism to evolve. Though the roots of Buddhism lie in India, Chán is uniquely Chinese, and is considered by many to be the most direct path to enlightenment.

Bodhidharma's vision of the path to enlightenment was radically different from the status quo of that time. He rejected most of the standard *Vinaya* (Buddhist rule) system of the time focusing instead on an intuitive grasp of the Buddha mind through meditation ("wall-gazing" 觀 *bìguān*).

In the *Two Entrances and Four Acts*, traditionally attributed to Bodhidharma, the term "wall-gazing" appears as such:

"Those who turn from delusion back to reality, who meditate on walls, the absence of self and other, the oneness of mortal and sage, and who remain unmoved even by scriptures are in complete and unspoken agreement with reason."

Red Pine, Ed. (1989)

Both Tanlin and Daoxuan (writers of the *Biographies of Eminent Monks*) associate wall-gazing with "quieting the mind," or *ān xīn* (安心) in Chinese which literally means "Peaceful heart."

Bodhidharma was unique amongst Buddhist monks in that he emphasized a mind/body unity and personal enlightenment rather than heaven. Some scholars suggest he was influenced by Daoism (Taoism) which emphasizes naturalness, simplicity, patience, non-action, receptiveness and spontaneity, generally speaking those themes found in the *Daodejing* (Tao Te Ching):

"Simplicity, patience, compassion
These three are your greatest treasures
Simple in actions and thoughts,
you return to the source of being.
Patient with both friends and enemies
You accord with the way things are
Compassionate toward yourself
You reconcile all beings in the world."

The above quote does sound strikingly like “Peaceful heart.”

Within Chinese Chán there are five schools. The lines: “One flower opens five petals, the fruit naturally ripen,” attributed to Bodhidharma is said to foretell the branching off of the five Chán schools that later evolved in China: *Yunmen*, *Guiyang*, *Linji*, *Fayan*, and *Caodong*, each of which derives its’ name from its founder.

Thus, nobody knows for sure about Bodhidharma’s past. In any case it is inconsequential.

His teachings however are enlightening. To quote from his “Bloodstream Sermon.”

Many roads lead to the Path, but basically there are only two: reason and practice. To enter by reason means to realize the essence through instruction and to believe that all living things share the same true nature, which isn’t apparent because it’s shrouded by sensation and delusion. Those who turn from delusion back to reality, who meditate on walls, the absence of self and other, the oneness of mortal and sage, and who remain unmoved even by scriptures are in complete and unspoken agreement with reason. Without moving, without effort, they enter, we say, by reason.

To enter by practice refers to four all-inclusive practices: suffering injustice, adapting to conditions, seeking nothing and practicing the Dharma...

The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma, translated by Red Pine, PDF can be downloaded from:

<https://terebess.hu/zen/Bodhidharma.pdf>

According to multiple sources he only studied on Sutra, the Lankavatara Sutra. The D.T. Suzuki translation can be downloaded from:

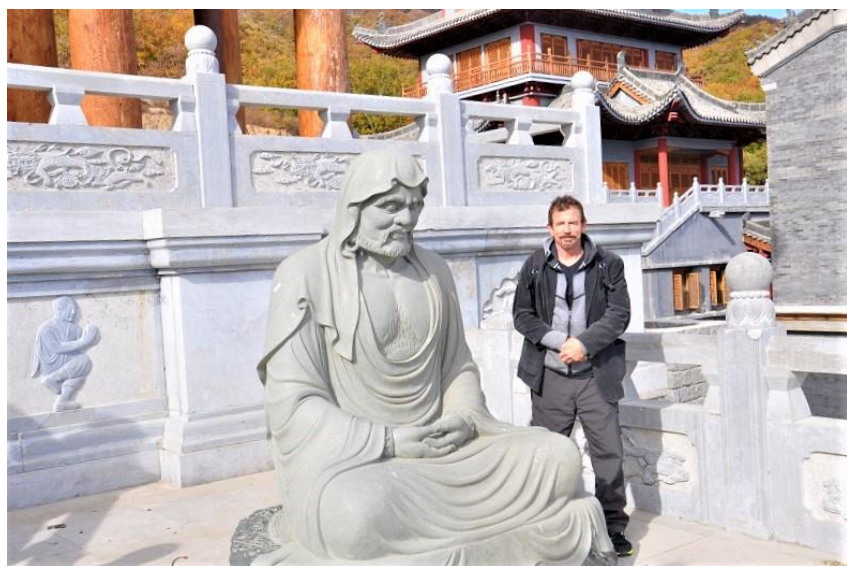
<http://www.buddhistische-gesellschaft-berlin.de/downloads/lankavatarasutrasuzuki.pdf>

The most common legend believed by most people is Bodhidharma meditated for nine years sitting upon a rock at Shaolin Monastery on Song Mountain (Songshan).



Entrance to the cave wherein
Bodhidharma meditated on
Songshan

Whatever the history may be he remains a humble yet towering figure in the history of Chan philosophy and Chinese history and I was pleased to see his teachings will be remembered at North Shaolin Monastery.



Meditation Hall on left, monks' sleeping quarters on the right
I asked if the construction crews were still working and he said yes, making me quite happy as repeatedly over past years work had stopped due to finance issues.



Workers in Guan Yin Hall



In Guan Yin Hall



Stone work on Monks' Quarters

After a tour of the Monastery Shi Yen Pei kindly asked if we'd like to eat before departing and we gratefully accepted his kind offer.



Subtle flavors but exquisitely delicious just the same

Who is Guan Yin?



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Liao_Dynasty_Avalokitesvara_Statue_Clear.jpeg

Guan Yin is the East Asian Buddhist, Taoist and Chinese folk religion's Goddess of Mercy combining limitless compassion and wisdom. These two qualities complement each other quite nicely. Guan Yin means "observing the sounds (or cries) of the (human) world," I was told. The word 'avalokita' means "seeing or gazing down" and "Evara" means "lord" in Sanskrit. In China she's usually called "Guan Shi Yin Pu Sa."

Guan Yin is referred to as Avalokitesvara in the Lotus Sutra – an ancient Indian Buddhist scripture dating back to the first Century CE.

In Buddhism she's identified as a Bodhisattva, which is a Buddha in a former life that makes a vow to save all sentient beings by delaying their supreme awakening – Nirvana – to help others along the path to enlightenment.

There are many legends of the origin of the Chinese version of Guan Yin. One relates to the Buddhist saint Miao Shan. A short version can be read at:

http://chinabuddhismencyclopedia.com/en/index.php/Miao_Shan

Though most people think of Avalokitesvara as female, s/he was first imported to China from India in the first Century as a male, though s/he encompasses both male and female characteristics. Historians write that “Guan Shi Yin Pu Sa,” was depicted as male in China until about the Song Dynasty (960-1279).

All of that dichotomous thinking aside, Guan Yin Pusa is a wonderful symbol/role model of compassion and wisdom, eternal qualities that ebb and flow through cycles in history and the nearly completed Guan Yin Pusa Hall at the front of the North Shaolin Monastery is simple, elegant and beautiful.

Changes

I also noted that the ancient White Tower, Bai Ta, the sole survivor of the wars had been repaired and repainted like new. Thus, there were no more bullet holes to remind one of the bad old days. The cycle of rebirth turns again.

Reflecting on the nearly completed monastery brings to mind my first interviews with Shi Yan Pei and the plans made so long ago in my memory (but only the blink of an eye in the legendary North Shaolin’s memory).

Entrance garden, Central Temple/Hall/Library area called Zhong Zhou Hall (Center Hall), Cang Jing Ge (Fa Tang) Sutra Hall, Shan Men (Entrance Gate Hall), Tian Wang Palace (Heavenly King Temple), Guan Yin Hall (Bodhisattva Temple), Monks’ living quarters, Wushu practice area, Tower and forests site – Ta Lin – ancient Tower-forest – Tombs up and behind the Temple, and Performance area.

What remains to be completed? Tian Wang Palace, the Entrance Gate Hall, the entrance to the monks’ quarters, the Wushu practice and Performance areas, and a regular parking area – at least.

What else? Oh, the Entrance Gate itself, and a more solid road from the street below will have to be constructed. The dirt road now is still a bit difficult to navigate in a car or van especially in rainy weather.

Still, it looks like and is a thriving monastery now.

This world has changed so much in the nine years since I first visited here, but the work to restore this legendary monastery has flowed forward in harmony with the community, nature and the mountain spirits.



Rebuilding North Shaolin Temple – Part XV Origins

起源

Qǐyuán – origin / to originate / to come from

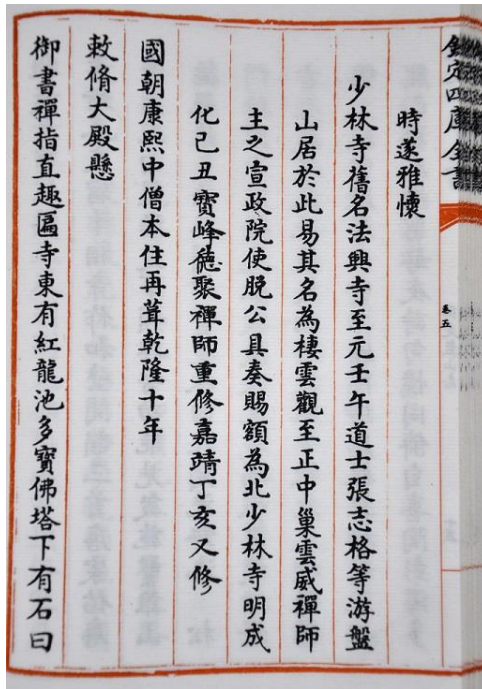
June 25, 2020 Note: Gene Ching, editor of Kung Fu Tai Chi Magazine asked for a summary story for the print edition of the magazine. That was a particularly busy year for me, though I stopped at the monastery briefly a couple of times. The COVID-19 epidemic hit later in the year and travel became somewhat “problematic.” Even as of this writing in June 2020, there are again travel restrictions in and out of Beijing. I am most eager to get back to Panshan and my friends there, but alas it’s not practical at this time. I’ve also been quite busy for example collecting and editing my Silk Road Kung Fu Friendship Tour series of articles for two books, and the “Rebuilding the North Shaolin” series for this book. Editing the writing is quite entertaining for me but finding the best photos and editing is time consuming. Hopefully I’ll be able to return home to North Shaolin soon.

The summary article below was published online March, 2019

The North Shaolin Monastery, originally called “Faxing Temple” was first built in the Wei Jin Dynasty (220 – 317 CE). It is the oldest temple in the very large mostly rural Jixian area. According to the official Shaolin Temple website it became part of the Shaolin family under the auspices of Abbot Fuyu during the Mongolian rule of the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368 CE) about a thousand years after Faxing Temple was first built.

The North Shaolin Monastery was adopted into the Shaolin family following the resolution of a 30-year conflict between Taoists and Buddhists on Panshan. “In 1245 Fuyu (1203-1275) was appointed by the first Emperor of the Yuan Dynasty Kublai Khan as the abbot of (Songshan) Shaolin Monastery before the former took the throne. (Shaolin.org.cn, “Fuyu”)

Fuyu's good friend Yelu Chu Cai (Yeh-Lu Ch'u ts'ai) was a Buddhist scholar that worked as a mediator between the Mongolian and Chinese systems of governance and as a leader in a pro-Chinese faction within the Mongol court at that time. He was influential in reorganizing the military and worked to reduce the suffering of the people. Fuyu had earned extraordinary merit in a variety of ways, for example he was famous for inviting martial artists from all over China to the Songshan Shaolin Monastery to harmonize the best of their techniques into an even wider and more effective the Shaolin curriculum. Fuyu was given permission by the Khan to open five other temples, one of which was 70 years later to become the North Shaolin Monastery (*"Panshan Zhi"* or *"History of Panshan"* and *In the Service of the Khan: Eminent Personalities of the Early Mongol-Yuan Period 1200-1300*).



Qianlong's Panshan Zhi - Taoists take over Faxing Temple and application to emperor to rebuild it as North Shaolin

The North Shaolin expanded over the centuries and was a frequent stop for Emperors as they ascended Pan Mountain along the Royal Road.



The Royal Road on Panshan

“According to historical records, from the beginning of the Three Kingdoms to the end of the Qing Dynasty, Panshan was the place where the emperors used to travel. For example, Wei Wudi Cao Cao, Tang Taizong, Liao Taizong, Liao Shengzong, Jin Shizong, until the Qing Dynasty, Emperor Kangxi, Qianlong, Jiaqing, Daoguang and other emperors, strode up the Royal Road in Panshan for ritual Buddhist meditation. Tang Shizong Li Shimin, who came back from the Eastern Expedition, was once stationed in Panshan, leaving a legacy under the North Shaolin Temple: the account stone, and the stones on the four corners. According to legend Tang Taizong stationed in the place.” (Translated from 蓟县武林秘史 北少林寺考)

And yet, North Shaolin Monastery was also just one of 72 Buddhist monasteries on the legendary mountain.

“Unfortunately, the Royal Road was cut when a large dam was built in 1993 about a kilometer below the Temple and is mostly forgotten now except by locals, though many parts of that ancient stone pathway from the original Royal Road remain in the area. It leads up right beside the North Shaolin Monastery and up further through the Ta Lin (pagoda forest graveyard) of “Zhong Fa Si”, meaning Middle Law Temple (because it’s midway up the mountain) to other temples and (locally) famous caves and locations in the mountains. Zhong Fa Si was the ‘central’ monastery on Panshan; it was the training center for most of the monks that went to the 70 temples on the mountain. It was a very large temple.” It is locally believed some or many of the monks at Zheng Fa Si had been Wang Ye or cousins of the Emperors. The father of Emperor Kangxi, the Shunzhi Emperor (reigned 1643 – 1661) and first Qing Dynasty Emperor to rule over China gave up the throne to his son Kangxi to become a monk. Thus, it might not be a great surprise that some or even many royal cousins and other family members might follow this tradition and enter the monastery.” (The North Shaolin Monastery, History, Culture and Reincarnation).

Also see November 17th, 2013 interview with Mr. Yao, the Taiwanese American gentleman who rebuilt Zong Fa Si’s Ta Lin starting in about 2005, published January, 2014 – Rebuilding the Northern Shaolin Temple: Part VIII Spirit of the Masters.

Dynasties rose and fell, floods and fires came and went, yet the North Shaolin Monastery survived until 1942 during the War or Resistance against Japanese Aggression when the entire mountain was burned as it was a base for the Chinese resistance movement. They had a bank located in a cave for storing gold even though people were starving; they had a grenade factory even though people were routinely killed for their efforts to win back their freedom. Such was their unshakable determination.

During the wars and resulting chaos and poverty that followed, much of the surviving parts of the ancient monastery was carted off by migrant villagers to rebuild their own homes. Even the location of the North Shaolin was lost as most of the traditional villagers had left in the churning mass migrations during the wars. But then, it was found again.

“That discovery process was led by Mr. Gao Wenshan, one of the first professors to graduate from the Tianjin Institute of Physical Education, Professional Wushu Program. In 1979, he first heard there was a Northern Shaolin.

“At the beginning of the 1980’s Mr. Gao took part in a Wushu performance in Tianjin and met up with Shang Bao Liang, the 6th Successor of the Northern Shaolin Kung Fu. After that he visited Jixian many times looking for the Temple, and finally found the 13 storied pagoda that led him to first suspect that it was the answer to his long quest for the North Shaolin Monastery. Following that he wrote the book Research of North Shaolin Temple (北少林寺考) which proved to be a major contribution to further researchers.

“Following a clue given by Mr. Gao, a journalist came to the Wa Yao Village. Standing in the yard of Wei Fang, a villager, he saw the Pagoda, a “white Buddhist pagoda towering like a giant.” Wei Fang said that people called it the “Rouge Tower” and it is in fact the site of a gem Buddhist Pagoda. He subsequently found out that Chinese soldiers had held meetings there during the War of Resistance against Japanese Invaders. “The Japanese invaders fired all the temples here, and only this Pagoda survived.”

My Journey

It was nine years ago this time of year when I first drove here. Back then there was only the White Tower (白塔 bái tǎ) and no monastery – that could be seen. I remember a news article I’d read:

“Shaolin Temple in Henan province will spend 2 billion yuan (\$292.92 million) to rebuild a temple in Jixian county of Tianjin, United Daily News reported, according to chinataiwan.org.

“After several rounds of fierce competition between architects from all over the world, Liu Peisen from Taiwan won the bidding with a plan to preserve the temple’s traditional Tang and Song dynasties-era (AD 618-1279) look but also use environmentally-friendly and power-saving technologies.”

(Shaolin temple to spend \$292m to rebuild North Shaolin Temple chinadaily.com.cn 2009-09-28)

Somehow, I found my way there and met Wei Ming and his family and he introduced me to Panshan's Master Shāng Mián Huī - Seventh generation Master of North Shaolin Kung Fu and many other luminaries of the mountain. Back then I spoke almost no Chinese but somehow, we all communicated well enough. It was late fall and cold so after that visit that I stopped at a small roadside farmer's restaurant and had the most delicious soup in my life - hot and steamy real food, countryside soul food, the stuff that warms inside and out.

Why did I come to China in the first place? A tiny article in a martial art magazine in late 2008 I read in South Korea saying that the location of North Shaolin had been found. In February 2009 I moved to China.

So much has changed yet so much is the same - still it's nice to have a growing family at North Shaolin - an inclusive family - the Shaolin family that discriminates against no one and welcomes all.

<http://www.kungfumagazine.com/ezine/article.php?article=1473>

Rebuilding North Shaolin Temple – Part XVI Expansion Plans

努力

Nǔlì – great effort / to strive / to try hard

NEWS FLASH: Expanded plans for North Shaolin Monastery surfaces in China.

June 30, 2020 During the past couple of weeks I collected and edited the Rebuilding North Shaolin Temple series of articles into a book. Because I live in Beijing, I can't really travel outside the city at this time due to a (small) resurgence of COVID-19 in Beijing during this month of June. So, I sent a WeChat message Shi Yan Wan at North Shaolin asking for any new photos of the construction.

Among the collection of photos he sent was an astonishing new “model” I hadn't seen before:



This is a plan for much larger monastery than I have seen before. It's still just a model, but this is the latest plan. It is significantly larger than previous plans. Though this model dates to 2017, it only became official recently.



North Shaolin Design Plan from 2009

I asked about the new completion date and he replied, “five years.”
Wow!

Before the conversation earlier today with Shi Yan Wan, I thought the construction of the major buildings was nearly complete. This reminded me of the meaning of King Wen’s Later Heaven Bagua symbol, that is, achieving balance and acquiring energies by accepting changes flowing through the passage of time. The one constant in nature is change.



King Wen's Later Heaven Bagua symbol

Source: Machine Elf 1735 - CC BY-SA

3.0,

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1084>

I checked China's number one browser for: 北少林寺扩建规划 (expansion planning North Shaolin Temple) and found nothing.

That isn't surprising as there are so many big projects going on in China.

I asked Shi Yan Wan who created this new design and he said it was designed by the Tianjin Housing Appraisal Design Institute. Though I recall hearing of them before I looked them up and found:

Tianjin Housing Appraisal Architectural Design Institute is a large state-owned comprehensive architectural design unit. The business scope covers the entire design process, including architectural design, engineering appraisal, survey, urban planning design, environmental landscape design, electromechanical equipment design, cultural relics protection appraisal design, architectural industrialization design, green building consultation, construction drawing review, etc. (Chinese).

This is all great news for Shaolin enthusiasts worldwide. Five years to completion? Ha! Only the blink of an eye in the time scale of China and the Shaolin. In the meantime people can certainly visit and train at the existing North Shaolin Monastery. Like Songshan there is no hotel in the monastery, though there are guest houses nearby and a few in Panshan town at the foot of the mountain. Anyone who wishes to visit probably should have a Chinese speaking friend as there are not many people in Panshan town that speak English well. In addition to all that, it may be some time before the COVID-19 epidemic abates enough for safe international travel. Though this disease didn't spread massively in China the way it did in the US, it's unlikely Americans coming from the US will be allowed to enter China soon. Ah yes, time to appreciate the great quality of patience again.

Other photos he sent include:



Cang tang



Larger view of Cang Tang



Panshan from the Great Buddha Hall

耐心

Patience - nài xīn

“So it is that whenever Heaven invests a person with great responsibilities, it first tries his resolve, exhausts his muscles and bones, starves his body, leaves him destitute, and confound his every endeavor. In this way his patience and endurance are developed, and his weaknesses are overcome.”

Mencius

Epilogue

尾声

Wěi shēng - coda / epilogue

This June 2020 First Edition will hopefully be followed by a Second Edition as reconstruction of the North Shaolin Monastery will apparently be going on for five more years.

It is my hope that people who read my works are inspired to seek attain higher levels of transcendence and inculcate an honorable moral code into their belief systems and actions. The moral codes of the Shaolin set high standards.

The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China – An Annotated Translation and Study of the Chanyuan Qinggui by Yifa is a good source of information on the kind of moral and behavioral codes which most monks have followed in China for most of history.

A pdf can be downloaded from:

<https://terebess.hu/zen/Chanyuan-qinggui.pdf>

The rules are rather strict, e.g. only two meals a day (no snacks!) with no exceptions. Failure to follow this and other rules results in expulsion from the monastery.

And,

To emphasize the harmony of the Sangha, members are prohibited from quarreling or fighting. Those who have quarreled must be made to prostrate themselves before each other. Those who have engaged in physical fighting must be expelled.

<https://terebess.hu/zen/Chanyuan-qinggui.pdf>

Things have liberalized a bit in the latter part of the 20th Century and monks now generally eat three meals a day. Most monasteries however still require very high levels of discipline.

The rules governing overt behaviors are only one small part of the over-all text of the Buddhist Monastic Codes and it is more the mental and spiritual discipline focused on transcending the dualist worldview that pervades the actual teachings which begin on page 145 of the above cited pdf.

For example:

The evils of wealth and sensuality are more dangerous than a poisonous snake and should be greatly avoided. The monk should be compassionate, and he should think of every sentient being as a newborn infant.

<https://tereless.hu/zen/Chan-yuan-qinggui.pdf> P. 115

Buddhism and other religions and philosophies

Mystical Union

Tao (Dao)

“From the one came the two,
came the three, came the
10,000 myriads of things.”

In Chinese, *shou-yi* means “embracing the one.”

Can one unite the body and the spirit as one and embrace the “Oneness” without departing from the great Tao?

Can one achieve harmony with such gentleness by holding on to the true spirit within as if the innocence of an infant?

Can one free oneself from worldly knowledge and cleanse one’s mind, so that no faults shall be made?

Can a ruler love his people by governing with the natural Way without personal intention?

Can the mystic gate to all life essence be opened or closed without the virtue of the mysterious nature?

Can one gain the insight of nature and become a wise person without the effort of action?

The mysterious nature creates and nurtures all things without the desire to possess them.

It performs with all efforts without claiming for credit.

It flourishes all beings without the intention to take control of. Such is the “Mystic Te” or “Mystic Virtue.”

http://www.with.org/tao_te_ching_en.pdf

Tao is the root word for “morality” in Chinese. To be One with the Tao is the goal of Taoism.

Hinduism and Buddhism

To quote from the Chinese Buddhism Encyclopedia:

Nirvana (Sanskrit: निर्वाण; Pali: निब्बान Nibbāna; Prakrit: णिव्वाण) is an ancient Sanskrit term used in Indian religions to describe the profound peace of mind that is acquired with moksha (liberation). In shramanic thought, it is the state of being free from Suffering. In Hindu philosophy, it is union with the Brahman (Supreme Being).

<http://www.chinabuddhismencyclopedia.com/en/index.php?title=Nirvana>

Generally speaking, Nirvana refers to the “great awakening” that releases a person from the chains of karma - transcending self and not-self, and opens the doors to union with the “One Mind,” which could be interpreted as God. It certainly was and is in Hinduism, and in some ways, Buddhism can be thought of as a branch of Hinduism. Buddha Gautama’s parents for example were Brahmins. Unfortunately, the followers of Buddha Gautama were not keeping written records at that time, and at least some details of the exact nature of his teachings are not known.

Judaism

Judaic Kabbalistic and later Hasidic mysticism in regards to “mystical uniting” with God (cleaving, “*devekut*,” uniting “*hitahed*,” and union “*yiḥud*”) is distinct from Christian and Islamic epistemologies, yet carries some similar attributes.

Christianity

Reading the very early Christian Gnostic texts I find mystical writing similar to Taoism, Chan (Zen) Buddhism, Judaic and some of the more mystical understandings of Islam.

Father of divinity and life, creator of mind, giver of good, giver of blessedness!

Thou art one. Thou art one, just as there is one (who) will say to thee: Thou art one, thou art a single living spirit. How shall we give thee a name? We do not have it, For thou art the existence of them all. Thou art the life of them all. Thou art the mind of them all. For thou art he in whom they all rejoice...

<https://www.pdfdrive.com/the-nag-hammadi-library-gnostic-gospels-and-texts-pdf-d34342935.html>

In the above quote one can reason that God may be vaguely understood as the One Mind, similar or the same as Taoist concept of Tao and the Hindu/Buddhistic concept of Nirvana, a mystical union transcending all dichotomies.

The Gnostic *Thunder, Perfect Mind*, offers the following voice of a feminine divine power:

For I am the first and the last. I am the honored one and the scorned one.

I am the whore and the holy one.

I am the wife and the virgin....

I am the barren one, and many are her sons....

I am the silence that is incomprehensible....

I am the utterance of my name.

Ibid

Incomprehensible?

There is a thread of transcendence beyond dichotomies (found in conventional thinking) in all these texts. They are all strikingly similar to the Tao Te Ching and other sacred texts. Transcending dichotomies, they short-circuit logic and bring back direct experience with natural law, a divine organizing principle.

Islam

In Sufi teachings the identification with God is sometimes called Tawhid (for example refer to Rābi'ah al-'Adawīyah (d. 810), Junayd of Baghdad (835–910), Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273), and Fakhr al-Dīn 'Irāqī (d. 1289). Quite a number of Sufi orders are still flourishing today.

Sacred Texts database

This Internet site is recommended:

<https://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/index.htm> to explore and find commonalities in all religions.

Also see:

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/mystical-union-judaism-christianity-and-islam>

Analysis

Any empirical scientist would have to ask: "Is this experience of Nirvana by any name a measurable phenomenon?"

Some answer may come from the sacred texts themselves. Given the commonalities it appears to be a potentially universal experience, minus cultural and linguistic variations.

Another question is this: “How well can these enlightened people function in a complex society?” Can for example such a person work as an accountant and calculate profit and loss, and make the hard decisions that sometimes have to be made to keep a business functioning, for example laying off workers when business is slow?”

Given historical records it appears the answer is these people can function just fine, in fact way above average given that Buddhist abbots for example had to function as administrators of sometimes large monasteries which involved accounting, human resource kinds of decisions, diplomacy, education and quite a variety of other skills. The holy prophet Jesus apparently worked as a stone mason (not a carpenter as most children’s stories suggest) and the holy prophet Mohammed worked as a businessman buying and selling merchandise.

An empirical analyst would also have to ask: “In most of the religions above, those who seek a “unified state” with the Supreme Being, are a minority, and often a despised minority. In some countries Sufis for example are genuinely hated and sometimes killed for their beliefs which are labeled as heretical. Why is that?”

Any number of hypothesis can be generated to answer that question which would need to be tested to arrive at any conclusions. Hypothesis might include:

1. Orthodox religious leaders intentionally discourage religious/spiritual practices which might inculcate greater enlightenment within their communities as more enlightened people might question the authority and/or honesty of those leaders.
2. Orthodox religious leaders are usually appointed by virtue of their following orders rather than having an “enlightened” perspective on religious/spiritual beliefs and behaviors. Thus, followers within religions are also taught obedience to narrow-minded dogma, rather than transcendence within the framework of their religious system.
3. Many or most orthodox religious leaders might not be that enlightened themselves and have no idea how to teach deeper and wider spiritual understandings. It might be assumed that

the brightest children are raised to be professionals in business, law, medicine, engineering, etc. whereas the more dull-minded might fall back on religion as a safe harbor.

It should be noted that in Chinese history few emperors made Taoism the state religion. The reason for this is ascribed to be the Taoist belief that the man who is One with the Tao can be equal to or even greater than the emperor, and this naturally cannot be tolerated! There is little doubt a still mind can be vastly more creative than one always grinding obediently along known pathways, and creative people do have the potential to change things, something established power structures absolutely despise.

Danger and Hope

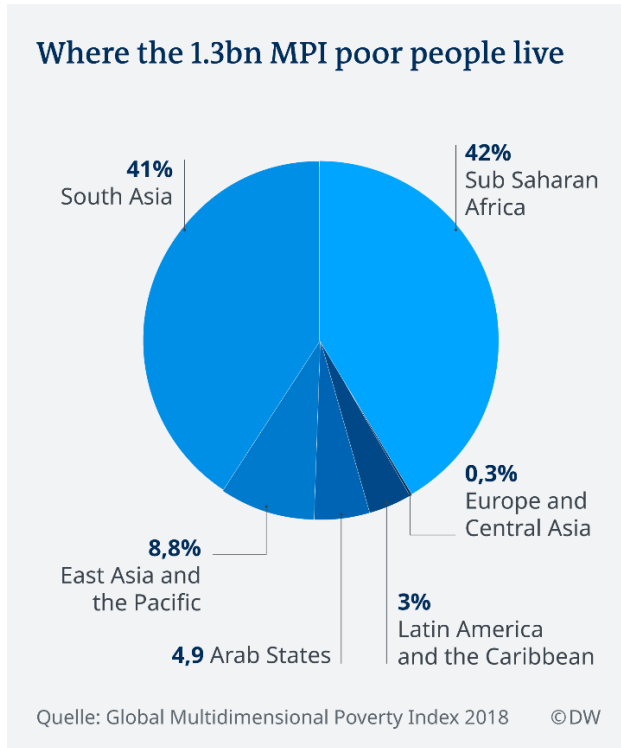
In stark contrast to all the echoes of enlightenment above (“fingers pointing to the moon”), the world as of the year 2020 appears to be at a potentially very dangerous transition point. There are those who argue WWII has already started albeit via an asymmetric form of warfare. The 79.5 million forcibly displaced people (see below), far higher than at the end of WWII, reinforces this notion.

Egoism, tribalism, racism and nationalism are unapologetically paraded across the headline news on a daily basis while the world has never before been armed with so many different and highly effective ways for people to kill each other.

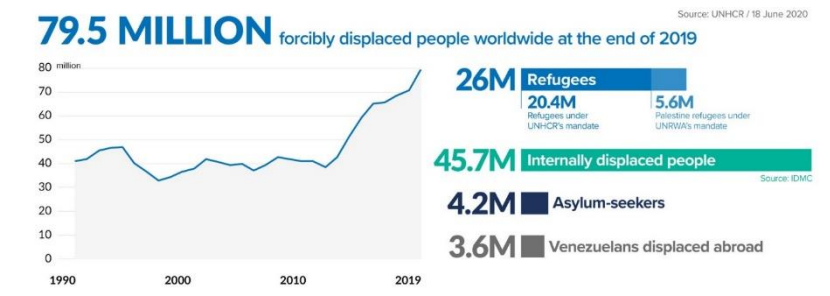
Consequently, it very important that people from all walks of life including the major religions and philosophies start to look more for commonalities between people and their philosophies and religions and spend less time searching for differences and pointing accusatory fingers at each other. The old truism: “United we stand, divided we fall,” has never been truer. It is time for humanity to invest a lot more in finding common ground, values, goals and beliefs.

Certainly, analysis and finding differences is essential for things like evaluating the effectiveness of different kinds of medicine, the stress bearing capabilities of different kinds of materials and other scientific areas of study. However, that analysis must be balanced with integrative synthesis.

It's all a matter of balance and this world has become terribly unbalanced especially in recent decades.



Wars and political corruption appear to be the primary causes of poverty.



Until the people who have some sense of morality and ethics, spirituality and/or religion stop fighting each other and start to work together the “problems” will only get worse.

Such imbalances are not without extreme liabilities as popular revolutions around the world have proven again and again throughout history.

Thus, I encourage open minded inquiries into the heights and depths of all religions and moral philosophies to encourage everyone to inculcate meaning and hope for our individual and collective well-being and futures. Likewise fairer methods of economic distribution are clearly long overdue.

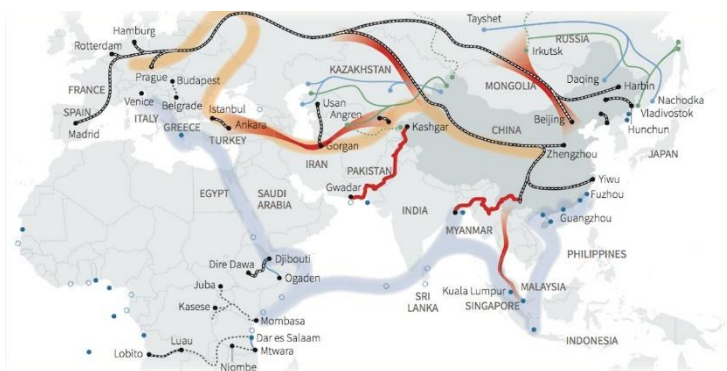
Simultaneously I will not exclude atheists from this quest for a more peaceful world because I’ve known secular atheists that were far more peaceful than some of the “religious” people I’ve met. Those fake religious people may know their religion by heart, but they do not know the heart of their religions.

This quest for peace can and must transcend all previous boundaries as we are all tied to the same life systems of this planet and must work together for the common good - for the first time in recorded history - if life on this planet is going to survive.

Can an organization like the Shaolin help? Clearly it is already. There are Shaolin Temples in dozens of countries and millions of people know of the powerful martial arts that evolved within the Shaolin system from the beginning of the Tang Dynasty.

Other roles that the Shaolin could play in promoting peace depends on the Chinese government.

For example, few will argue against the belief that President Xi Jinping is probably the most respected diplomat in the world today.

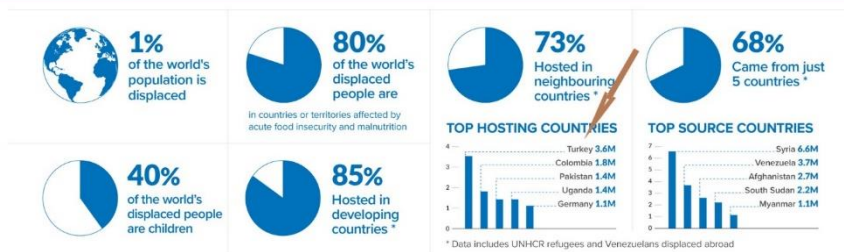


<https://www.beltandroad.news/2020/06/24/why-belt-road-initiative-is-able-to-keep-gaining-popularity/>

The above is a simplified map of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which is helping development in dozens of the least developed countries in the world and provides ease of access to western markets for manufacturers in those countries. Could the Shaolin participate for example in helping to establish a peace education curriculum? This is impossible to say as the current situation is “fluid” leaving many possibilities open for exploration.

It is also interesting that Turkey has taken in the largest number of refugees in the world.

Figures at a Glance



What's even more interesting is that these two nations are the east and west ends of the continental Silk Roads.

Surely secular conflict resolution strategy and diplomacy education programs could and should be developed and disseminated worldwide.

Working together on peace education on a global scale, hope becomes possible.

Kung Fu



Monk at Songshan Shaolin 2012

How does this all relate to Kung Fu and martial arts specifically?

It appears in ongoing human experience and history, having a profoundly righteous cause and/or profound love can unlock deeper, possibly spiritual (and/or neuro-endocrinological) potential within humans which can appear to be supernatural.

Hold fast to the Power of the One

It will unify the body and merge it with the spirit

It will cleanse the vision and reveal the world as flawless

It will focus the life-force and make one supple as a newborn...

Know this Primal Power that guides without forcing

that serves without seeking
that brings forth and sustains life yet does not own or possess
it.

One who holds this Power brings Tao to this very Earth
He can triumph over a raging fire or the freeze of winter
weather

Yet when he comes to rule the world it's with the gentleness
of a feather

Tao Te Ching Verse 10

<http://taisa.si/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Tao-Te-Ching-by-Jonathan-Star.pdf>

Again and again Men come in with birth and go out with
death

One in three are followers of life

One in three are followers of death

And those just passing from life to death also number one in
three

But they all die in the end

Why is this so?

Because they clutch to life and cling to this passing world

I hear that one who lives by his own truth is not like this

He walks without making footprints in this world

Going about, he does not fear the rhinoceros or tiger

Entering a battlefield, he does not fear sharp weapons

For in him the rhino can find no place to pitch its horn

The tiger no place to fix its claw

The soldier no place to thrust his blade

Why is this so?

Because he dwells in that place where death cannot enter

Tao Te Ching Verse 50

<http://taisa.si/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Tao-Te-Ching-by-Jonathan-Star.pdf>

This is not in a scientific sense a reliable mechanism, (that we know of) however is a recurring theme in human experience and history. It may or may not relate to - at least transient - union with Tao/God/Tawhid/Nirvana, but that possibility also exists.

Can Kung Fu training be a form of spiritual exercise? Most East Asian martial arts inculcate a transcendent philosophy as a critical part of training and combat. Without the discipline of a moral code they cannot become elevated to the level of high art.

A new paradigm shift

Greater understanding between people is essential for the next major paradigm shift which will not be technology based but rather spiritual and humanistic. Endless technological developments significantly contributed to bringing our species to where we can now cause extinction of not only humanity but all life on earth.

Technology is very useful for 10,000 things, however the keys to unlocking our understanding of the meaning of life will be not found in technological innovations but rather in finding and sharing the commonalities between people and between people and the earth's ecosystems.

Altogether too much energy has been put into finding and exploiting differences between people, whereas not enough energy has been put into exploring our commonalities and our relationships with the wider life sciences on this living planet. The promotion of endless war and aggression must be abated if life on earth as we know it is to continue.

We have much work to do to restore the balances of nature within and between people and our environment.

Popular culture has raised aggression and war, selfishness, and hedonism to the level of godhood. Mars, Narcissus and Bacchus rule the world now, not a benevolent harmonious spirit. Taoist, Hindu/Buddhist enlightenment and the 10 Commandments which followers of the Abrahamic religions are supposed to follow take a far distant second place in the mass media's pantheon which is based primarily on ego aggrandizement. This must change or all is lost.

Worshipping ego, money, power, and hedonist pleasure is worshipping false deities. Money and power are simply vehicles, the question is where does one go with them? Hedonistic pleasures are transitory and usually lead to regrets over long periods of time. Like eating large amounts of pure sugar, there are always multiple ill effects with huge costs later on.

Cleanly earned money, power, and natural healthy pleasures – in measured amounts - however are reasonable reinforcements for honest work.

I don't see competition between religions as a valid, spiritual, useful, or good thing. I think it's a pathetic waste of time at best. People will gravitate to their own level of liking, thinking, and understanding. Anything that leads people to a good path, learning to differentiate good from evil is generally OK in my opinion, even in many cases, holy.

Please recall the highly inclusive statement from Shaolin Abbot Shi Yongxin quoted earlier in this book:

“To Buddhists all the religions are generally the same. We help people to simplify life and see things more clearly and honestly. People accept what they find useful and discard the rest until such time as they may need it or simply reconsider it. Peace is the goal which all wise people seek.”

Shaolin – Temple in my Heart by Abbot Shi Yong Xin

Also see: <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/dharmadata/fdd50.htm>

Please remember in Islam it is believed there were something like 124,000 prophets who all taught the same basic ideas, most importantly belief in one god.

Despite an abundance of misinformation to the contrary, Islam is also a very tolerant religion mandating freedom of religion.

Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion.

(Pickthall translation)

You shall have your religion and I shall have my religion. (Shakir translation)

To you be your Way, and to me mine. (Yusuf Ali translation)

Quran 109:6

It is my well-founded belief that the great prophets and philosophers were all very tolerant, compassionate, and forgiving people. Some of their followers, however, have distorted the original teachings of the great philosophers and prophets resulting in incalculable huge problems later in history and today.

Transformation

Rebuilding the North Shaolin Monastery is a form of transformation. Monasteries (and other spiritual/religious communities) have been and are places of peace and are designed to cultivate greater awakenings. Destroyed in war, it is now nearly finished being rebuilt. This is a good thing.

Most good stories are stories of transformation and the last 10 years have represented multiple transformations for me personally as a writer and hopefully as a spiritual being. I retain my central beliefs that all religions stem from common roots though the branches and flowers vary according to culture, languages and timelines. I sincerely pray that much greater measures of peace are “just around the corner.”

Why I care

Traveling the world as I have the past 55 years or so I have seen and experienced great and terrible things, the best and worst that humanity has to offer. For example, I was fortunate to have lived in some of the world’s most beautiful, peaceful, and amazing places with extraordinarily enlightened people, and in contrast as a journalist I worked in a few wars and tragically impoverished places. Extreme poverty and hunger are forms of violence in my opinion, illuminating the stark and growing inequalities in the world. They are “silent crimes,” because the victims have no voice in the world.

On June 21st, 2020 I saw this in the news:

Trump calls COVID-19 “Kung Flu” during rally,
trick of stoking hate to win election

By Xu Keyue, *Global Times* 2020/6/21

Kung Flu? What scurrilous innuendo. How laughably ridiculous!

Ego and nationalist-driven men and women of power will do what they will do and there isn't much an ordinary fellow like myself can do about it. Getting upset certainly will not help. Fortunately, however I was/am in a unique situation where I can perhaps shine some light on the history and current regeneration of a major branch of the Shaolin Monastery in China and share it with a broad audience worldwide. Use one ounce to deflect 10,000 pounds, as the old saying goes.

In response to all the mayhem coming from the material world these days, I can only pray for peace and encourage others to appreciate, maintain and teach the peace and tranquility that God has so benevolently given many of us in so many ways and forms.

As a child my parents chose unusual babysitters for me, usually professors from different departments and sometimes especially talented Graduate School students. Each had different stories to tell and I learned about the attributes of many great philosophies and religions at a very young age. My parents were also instrumental in helping start the Department of Religious Studies at our State University in the late 1960s.

Much is required from the person to whom much is
given;

Much more is required from the person to whom
much more is given.

Luke 12:48

Thus, I hope readers will be tolerant of my unified/pluralist viewpoints on things and join me in celebrating diversity and enjoying the color and pageantry of life rather than diminishing it with tedious reductionist logic, inappropriate summaries and/or premature ill-conceived divisive conclusions.

I will leave that kind of thing to the colonialists and others who make knots and chaos of what should and could be a diverse, beautiful, and loving healthy world.

Imagine if the budgets of the world's "defense" departments and ministries were instead devoted to working together to feed and educate, rebuild, and give hope to the world. This little blue planet called earth could again become a paradise-like place.

I hope and pray readers will enjoy this book and pass the torch of light and truth, train their bodies and minds to be moral, ethically balanced, strong, hardworking and honest, patient and forgiving, charitable and wise, have a little chuckle now and then and otherwise enjoy the good life this material world can provide to the deserving souls within.



<https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/166118>

The cycle of rebirth is not just a metaphor, it is a biological truism and spiritual journey for those with the courage and wisdom to participate.

Lastly, I met an old kung fu master once and asked him if he was Confucian, Taoist, or Buddhist. He answered: "All those things teach people to be good. So, I try to be good."

One World, One Dream - the hope for humankind and our
collective home



<https://www.pxfuel.com/en/free-photo-xiiav>

Special Thanks

Special thanks to all the sages through the ages for sharing their wisdom with the world, my parents of course who provided a broad education, all the most excellent monks, Professor Gao Wenshan who located the lost North Shaolin Monastery, Mr. Yao who shared so many wonderful legends and histories of Panshan and reconstructed the Ta Lin, Grandmother Wang Xiu Lan for sharing her precious stories from the war years, and innumerable other people on Panshan who took the time to share their knowledge of the North Shaolin Temple, and of course dear friend Ms. Miao Hui who was almost always available to help with translations, getting appointments, helping to navigate and constant friendship down through the years.



View of Panshan Valley from the former location
of one of Emperor Kangxi's palaces above North
Shaolin Monastery on Pan Mountain

This book is a collection of a series of articles first published in Kung Fu Tai Chi Magazine 2010 to 2020 that follows the 10-year reconstruction process of the venerable North Shaolin Monastery on Pan Mountain ("Panshan") near Po Hai Bay connecting to the Yellow and East Seas. This monastery is not to be confused with the headquarter Songshan Shaolin in Henan closer to central China. The North Shaolin Monastery joined the Shaolin family at the beginning of the Yuan Dynasty under the direction of Xueting Fuyu, 1203–1275 an abbot of the Shaolin Monastery of the Caodong lineage. Antecedent histories prior to its destruction in 1942, views into the philosophies and daily practices of the monks living nearby and at the construction site, memories and legends shared by villagers on Panshan, as well as some possible futures are presented in clear detail. This book also contains many large photos that help bring to life this 10-year reincarnation process and unique history and character of the mountain in vivid color. This book concludes with an Epilogue that illuminates remarkable similarities between the great religions and philosophies of the world and emphasizes there has never in history been a greater need for peace and cooperation than at this present time.

June 30, 2020