

Wudang

Twin Cities Tai Chi

A MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER

I/19



From Sifu Paul

Greetings, everyone,

There's always something uplifting about the New Year, as beginnings are full of potential and creative energy. In this issue, we take a look at the year ahead at the studio, honor the passing of martial arts Grandmaster Gin Foon Mark, appreciate our newly restored floor, feature upcoming classes, and more.

Grandmaster Gin Foon Mark September 14, 1927— December 19, 2018

As the year 2018 came to a close, Grandmaster Gin Foon Mark, an important and iconic figure in the Chinese martial arts world, passed away at age 91. He is best known as the fifth-generation grandmaster of Kwong Sai Province, Bamboo Forest Temple, Southern Praying Mantis Style Kung Fu (Kwong Sai Jook Lum Gee Nam Tong Long Pai), more commonly referred to as Southern Praying Mantis Kung Fu. Master Mark studied, practiced, and taught Chinese martial arts for an incredible 86 years. In addition, Master Mark was an acupuncturist and herbalist, an artist of painting and calligraphy, a teacher of meditation and Qigong, a chef and restaurateur, and a drummer/choreographer in Chinese lion dance. He broke down barriers in being among the first to teach non-Chinese the art of kung fu in America and helped to establish Chinese martial arts in the late 1950s and 1960s as viable and effective fighting arts in an era when the Japanese martial arts karate and judo and Western boxing and wrestling predominated. He was featured on the cover of Black Belt magazine in 1969, the most



widely read and longest-running martial arts magazine, at a time when Chinese martial arts were rarely covered. Master Mark established schools in New York, Pennsylvania, and Minnesota. He taught students from all over the U.S., Canada, and Europe.

The Making of a Grandmaster

Gin Foon Mark was born September 14, 1927, in a village near the city of Toison in southern China. He began learning martial arts at the age of 5 from his great-grandfather, who taught him Mok Gar Kuen (Mark Family Boxing). He also learned the White Crane Kung Fu system from his uncle Kong Boon Fu.

Master Mark was the oldest of three children, each about 5 years apart in age; his sister was in the middle, his brother the youngest. During that time, if you were an older boy, the Japanese would force you to join their army. When the Japanese came, Master Mark and his mother would go and hide in the mountains. They would leave the two younger children at home because the Japanese wouldn't hurt small children.

<<

Farewell, Grandmaster
Gin Foon Mark



At the age of 9, to protect him from the Japanese, Mark went to live in the Southern Shaolin Temple at Chun San. There he studied Buddhism, Shao-Lin kung fu styles including White Crane, Eagle Claw, Leopard, and Tiger Claw; Chinese medicine including acupuncture and herbology; cooking; painting; Qigong and meditation; Feng Shui; and Sin Kung (spirit skill). Moon Kai Fat See (Moon River Buddhist Sage) was the master who taught Mark at the temple.

Mark's great-uncle was a general in the army and brought him into service as his assistant and bodyguard when Mark was just 14 years old. Mark was wounded in the war when a bullet ricocheted off a tree and hit him in the shin. As he would later describe, "He used a Chinese powder to take the bullet out and stop the bleeding" as he displayed the scar.

After the war, Mark and his family left Toison and moved to Hong Kong. There, Mark assisted his uncle in teaching White Crane Kung Fu.

Mark's grandfather came to the U.S. first and worked on the railroad. He brought Mark's father to the U.S., leaving Mark with his mother and siblings in China. In 1947, Mark's

father brought him over first to help make money to bring the rest of the family to the U.S. Mark's father had started a laundry business in New York City. Mark said he didn't want to wash other people's dirty clothes, so he chose to work in a bakery. Eventually, and with some difficulty, the rest of the family came to America.

Mark began teaching kung fu and performing lion dance in the city and around the state through some of the Chinese fraternal organizations that had formed there.

He went to work for his uncle, who was the head chef at the New York Hilton Hotel. Master Mark worked as a manager and cook, doing tableside knife shows while preparing patrons' food.

*"My hands are
smarter than a computer."
Grandmaster Gin Foon Mark*

Because of his reputation in the martial arts, Mark was invited to teach at the Freemasons Hall and Athletic Club in New York's Chinatown. There he met Chin Ho Dun, who shared Mark's passion for martial arts, and they became friends. Chin Ho Dun was taking private lessons from Lum Wing Fay, known as Lum Sang (a title of respect meaning Sir Lum), who was the fourth-generation grandmaster of Kwong Sai Jook Lum Southern Praying Mantis Kung Fu. Master Lum was also teaching at the Freemasons Hall and Athletic Club in Chinatown.

Contact Us

For timely updates, follow Twin Cities T'ai Chi Ch'uan on **Facebook**.

Email: mail@tctaichi.org

Website: tctaichi.org

Phone: 651.767.0267

<<
Grandmaster
Gin Foon Mark in
the early 1960s

Words of Wisdom

Short teaching phrases and aphorisms would accompany Master Mark's techniques:

- "If you don't move, I don't move."
- "Short power is like a hammer: a small movement in the hand makes big power at the end."
- "Use feeling and timing to get closer and short power to hit—this saves a lot of energy."
- "The hands are thinking, the mind is not thinking."

- "Feeling, timing, and common sense creates a shortcut."
- "Don't follow the form, the form is nothing, follow the feeling."
- "I'll teach you timing and feeling, then you can create the form."
- "Defense should be soft, the hit should be hard."

Finally one day he uttered these words: "My hands are smarter than a computer."

Yes, they were.

Chin Ho Dun introduced Mark to Lum Sang; a connection was made. Master Lum invited Mark to attend one of Ho Dun's private classes. At the class, Mark saw the contrast between White Crane, a long-fist kung fu style, and the compact, small-circle, movement-efficient Jook Lum Southern Mantis style. He also saw and felt Lum Sang's internal power. Master Mark once remarked, "Lum Sang touched you like a cockroach crawling on your skin; the heat felt different, the qi penetrated." Mark asked Lum Sang if he would accept him as a student. Lum Sang said yes.

Mark and Chin became training partners and studied privately with Lum Sang for years,

eventually learning all aspects of the system: forms, weapons, partner work, dim mak (point striking), Chinese medicine, and Sin Kung (Spirit Skills). Gradually Mark gave up his other martial arts styles and concentrated exclusively on Southern Praying Mantis Kung Fu. Mark had the reputation as being the hardest working of all of Lum Sang's disciples, rising every day before dawn to practice forms and internal work. Mark and Chin began teaching beginners for Lum in his public classes. Over time, the two took over the school, and in 1969, Grandmaster Lum "closed his hands" and retired to a monastery in Taiwan.

Chin Ho Dun died unexpectedly in the prime of his young adulthood. Mark was shaken by the loss. Before leaving for Taiwan, Lum Sang made Mark the fifth-generation grandmaster and left Mark in control of the altar and other antiquities from the previous grandmasters in the lineage.

Teaching a Future Superstar

Lee Hoi Cheun was a well-known Chinese actor with the Hong Kong Cantonese Opera Troupe. He was in New York City in 1959 for the troupe's annual performance. His 18-year-old son Bruce flew in from San Francisco to visit his father and to see New York for the

<<

Friends and training partners: Gin Foon Mark and Chin Ho Dun



first time. Bruce had studied Wing Chun off and on for four years with the famed Ip Man in Hong Kong and had done a little boxing and more than a little street fighting but was hungry to learn more martial arts. He asked his father if he knew of any Chinese sifu teaching kung fu in Chinatown. His father consulted two friends from New York, who both recommended Master Gin Foon Mark as a skillful sifu who had recently opened a school that was not restricted exclusively to members of private associations in Chinatown. A meeting was arranged between master and prospective student. Gin Foon Mark accepted the young Bruce Lee for three weeks' intensive training in the Southern Praying Mantis style.

In that time, Lee worked with Master Mark directly, learning things about his own Wing Chung style he never knew, the history and lineage of Southern Praying Mantis Kung Fu, and solo and two-man forms training. They covered footwork, handwork, combinations, feeling, timing, borrowing an opponent's power, fighting strategy, the use of traditional training equipment to develop the

body without injury, the power of soft internal training, nerve and pressure points, and more.

Bruce Lee left New York with an expanded view of what he didn't know and an enlightened view of what there is to know about martial arts. This experience sowed the seeds for the development years later of Lee's own Jeet Kune Do style (Way of the Intercepting Fist). He would also use Gin Foon Mark's example of teaching non-Chinese, and eventually women, when teaching Jeet Kune Do to the public. Bruce Lee also paved the way for Asian actors to gain leading roles in film by becoming Hollywood's first Asian superstar.

My Personal Experience

Master Mark moved to Minneapolis in 1971. He came to help David Chung, one of his students from New York, who had come to the Twin Cities and opened a Southern Praying Mantis school in downtown Minneapolis. Soon Mark was running the school and invited

Continued on page 6



<
Grandmaster Gin Foon
Mark and Sifu Paul
Abdella in front of
Mark's Jook Lum
Temple altar

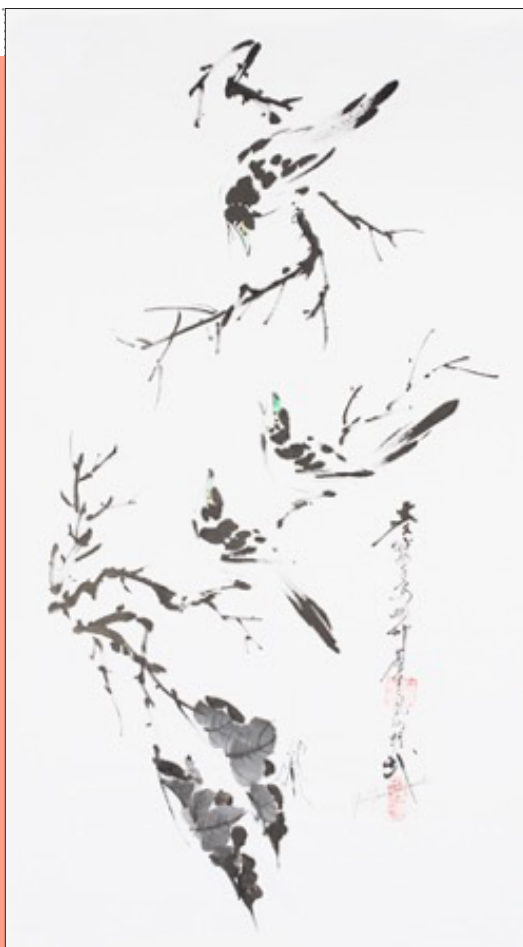
Masterstrokes

After two years of training, I asked if he would teach me some calligraphy and painting. I am an artist in the Western/European tradition, and I had learned calligraphy briefly with T.T. Liang, so I had a foundation and was excited to learn something from Master Mark, whose art I admired. The fundamental distinction he made between the two art forms was that painting came from the mind and calligraphy from the body. He would demonstrate calligraphy as if he were practicing kung fu. "Here's a kick!" he would exclaim as his hand flicked the brush to finish a character; the movement seemed to come from deep in his center.

In brush painting, he imagined a scene and executed it with clear vision and deft brushwork. I admired his technical command of ink and watercolor, loading a brush with heavy ink on one side and the right amount of water on the other. A fluid sweep of his arm across the page with momentary pauses produced a stalk of bamboo with well-placed stem rings and perfectly rendered light, shadow, and half-tones. He would say, "I don't paint a likeness, I paint a feeling." As he engaged with an emerging image, he might explain, "Look! This bird is talking to that one!" then laugh at the thought.

His use of space was also masterful. I once filmed him painting a rabbit resting in the grass with minimal strokes, the white of the paper producing most of the form. The painting took ten minutes. A place for his signature and seal, considered at the outset, would be the final element added to balance a composition.

— Paul Abdella



<
Photo of Master Mark
painting by Mike Cain

Continued from page 4

his classmate Chuck Chin to come from New York to help with the school. Southern Praying Mantis became the predominant kung fu style in the Twin Cities. Mark also began cooking in local Chinese restaurants and eventually opened his own award-winning restaurant, called the New China Inn, which he ran for more than 30 years in Minneapolis.

In 1977, I began studying Chinese martial arts in the Jook Lum Southern Praying Mantis style under Sifu Doug Anderson (Wudang November 2017) from the original Mantis school in Minneapolis. I learned forms, sticking hands, blocks, strikes, kicks, strategy, and sparring. It was a perfect transition from my previous Judo training, as it promoted softness and the redirection of an opponent's energy. Gin Foon Mark was always in our awareness as the source of our knowledge and as head of the system. I went to his restaurant many times and to his school downtown for Chinese New Year celebrations and demonstrations.

I studied T'ai Chi with T.T. Liang and Liu Ho Pa Fa with Wai Lun Choi for many years before being presented with an opportunity to study privately with Master Mark in 2010, facilitated by his partner Laura Kohlhasse. His student Steve Mundale assisted Master Mark that first year. I relearned some of the forms from the past and acquired some not previously known. He also expanded greatly my repertoire of hand and foot techniques; developed my feeling, timing, and strategy in partner work; explained point and nerve strike theory and practice; offered a deeper look at the history of the lineage and told stories of the masters; explained the relationship between painting, calligraphy, and martial arts; and much more. Master Mark eventually certified me into the system through a formal ceremony.

The most memorable and amazing aspect of the martial arts training was doing Chi Shu (sticking hands) with Master Mark. It would



<
Grandmaster Gin Foon
Mark opens the
Southern Praying
Mantis altar at our
studio

often begin with a technique he was teaching. Feeling him perform the technique on me really set it in my muscle memory. When I asked for a second or third repetition, he might feel my hand do something different and flow effortlessly into another technique—often something I'd never seen or felt before. This might go on for three or four exchanges until I would find myself trapped with nowhere to go. And he integrated his hands and feet beautifully. If I threw a kick, his fluid horse-up technique would swiftly put his knee into a pressure point on my inner thigh, stunning my leg as he trapped my hands.

Master Mark was a tireless promoter of his art. Through printed material, video and film, and direct transmission, he expanded public awareness and understanding of what was once a closed-door secret practice. He created many of the two-person forms in the system, which deepened the art considerably. Gin Foon Mark embodied the cultured image of a true kung fu master, and he left a legacy that will endure for generations.

Twin Cities T'ai Chi and the Year Ahead

We are always striving to make T'ai Chi accessible to anyone who wants to learn it. For those who want to go deeper into T'ai Chi, we strive to present the complete art in all its many facets and practices. This is not always easy with fewer than 20 hours of classes a week.

In the coming year, there will be clear guidelines to help students navigate their course of study at the studio based on their needs and interests.

Some of those guides and markers include:

- Clear printed and online material showing the overview of the T'ai Chi system, with other styles to follow
- Instructional videos to supplement your classroom work
- Optional use of video in private classes
- Other training tools are in the works. Please offer your requests and suggestions to us based on your interests and what may help you progress on your path.
- If you have skills in the area of IT and could help in developing our future online courses, please let us know.

Reflections on the Second Floor

Our beautiful wood T'ai Chi floor, installed in 1993, received its first resurfacing in 25 years over the holiday break. It was in need of some restoration, as bare wood spots, unevenness, splintering, and the like began to compromise its performance capacity.

A heavy surface buffing, deep cleaning, and a heavy coat of gym poly sealed the deal and brought it back to life. (There was more outgassing than expected even after the winter break, but that has settled. Thanks for your patience and understanding.) The wood



absorbed the finish as if quenching a thirst and left a smooth, even surface with a waxy finish that will patina the more soft-shoed rounds of the Solo Form we put on it. Lots of T'ai Chi practice—a great way to begin the new year! Thanks, Fran.

Upcoming Classes and Schedule Changes

- Monday-evening Weapons class 7:30–8:30 will begin learning the cane on February 11.
- The 12 Animals class Saturday 10:30–11:30 will begin a new cycle and begin learning the Dragon.
- The 43 Postures Form class Saturday 11:30–12:30 will begin learning Symmetry 2.
- The Healing Tao Meditation class Wednesday 7:30–8:45 will finish the Microcosmic Orbit meditation on February 27 and begin learning the Wuji Gong Primordial T'ai Chi Meditation on March 6. All are welcome.

Question of the Month

The Question of the Month column will resume in the February newsletter.

^

The studio floor was refinished over the holiday break.