



Yintong talks with...

Lin Cunguo, chairman of the Sino-UK Kungfu Research Agency



Lin Cunguo's agency includes an academy, fitness centre and film production company. What makes them different from others is that the core of all his businesses is wushu/kung fu, a martial arts whose origins lie in the Shaolin Monastery.

Born in a kung fu village – Liangshan – in China, Lin was accepted by the specialist combat regiment at Shaolin Monastery as a child disciple. When the movie Shaolin Temple was released in 1982, it caused a sensation not just among Buddhists and kung fu enthusiasts but in China and the wider world.

The monastery was inundated with demands for teaching, performances, and films. Lin's hard training regime began to pay off. Being one of the best kung fu practitioners, as well as an excellent communicator with an appetite for learning, he became the first choice to represent the monastery. Frequently appearing on TV and film screens he rapidly developed his acting skills.

Celebrities

It was an exciting time, Lin told me when we met in London, giving an example of when he and his colleagues performed at the opening of the National Basketball Association tournament in Toronto "We were treated like celebrities, we were stopped everywhere and were asked for autographs."

These activities made him very proud to represent China and his monastery and he started to realise the positive impact that kung fu had on people and the world. To make

the martial art really connect, he needed to engage with people in the West. He saw the UK as the financial centre of the world, with a long history and a cosmopolitan culture bringing together all races and nationalities of people, but with limited kung fu awareness. This made it a perfect base to promote kung fu to the world.

He set himself up with a laptop to communicate globally with new friends via email and to study English, continuing his education more formally. Shaolin is not a university though many of its residents are professors and highly-educated individuals from whom he absorbed knowledge and wisdom.

Skills

Armed with new skills, Lin was ready to bring kung fu to the UK. He was first invited to work with the YMCA to help inspire young people to learn a new skill and promote good health. He then went on to start his own training course at a sports centre, growing it to 40 students within just six months. In 2006, at the annual Martial Arts Expo, his delegation won the championship, which caught the attention of one of the judges from China – Master Wu Bin, renowned teacher of movie star Li Lianjie. Impressed by Lin's teaching methods Wu supported him in setting up his own academy. Lin pulled out all the stops and launched within a week at an event attended by hundreds and attracting media attention from the likes of the BBC.

Developing his theme, in 2008 Lin opened a fitness centre with a fusion concept. The centre looks like an ordinary fitness outlet, with standard equipment, but an holistic approach has been adopted, integrating Zen philosophy, kung fu and Chinese medicine into the fitness and training. This has been a great success, notching up 1,600 members within two years of opening.

Relentless

Lin's efforts in promoting kung fu and bringing Chinese martial

arts into the mainstream has been relentless. He is currently establishing an entertainment company to meet the changing needs of the film and television industry, launching the inaugural Chinese Wushu Festival in Europe, and leading a petition to get martial arts into the Olympics.

He is now in a good position to achieve his dream of "making Britain a healthy nation and promoting world peace through kung fu." Many visitors to China note the mass participation morning exercises in the parks and that is what Lin plans for London. Kung fu has many forms such as tai chi and qi-gong and there is something suitable for everybody.

Positive

Lin believes that this initiative would improve the nation's health and contribute to easing pressure on the NHS. Moreover, he says, "Kung fu and the Zen philosophy attached to it promotes truthfulness, positive energy and harmony, through practice and exercise in the mind and body, the world will become a safer and more peaceful place."

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