

流水行雲

Flowing Water Moving Clouds

By Lafi Rodriguez

Since the early 1940's our Ying Jow Pai system has played a particular song during the practice of the Wu Style Tai Chi fast form. The song seems to have been created just for us. It flows with our movements; speeding up or slowing down according to the Tai Chi positions. But what are its origins, history, name and composer?

As part of my initial research I asked older generation Chinese musicians and internal martial artists. The song was familiar yet no one knew the name or its history. I then wrote to Chinese universities and one music department responded.....in Chinese. I began translating.



Mr. Siu Tit Hung

The song is called “Flowing Water Moving Clouds or “Lau Sui Hang Wan” in Cantonese and was written in Shanghai by Cantonese composer Mr. Siu Tit Hung around the years 1936 to 1940. It was a hit and we adopted it soon after. The name comes from an idiom of the Chan Buddhist sect



“Lau Sui Hang Wan”

(known to most as Zen). The meaning is to adapt to any situation and excel in anything you do in a natural manner. When confronted by conflict to go around it and to not be tied down by perceptions, anger, attachments or past sadness.

This concept of “Flowing Water Moving Clouds” was first incorporated into martial arts by the Bagua stylists. Like a river - to be constantly moving, thinking, plotting even when appearing motionless. To envelope your opponent and adapt to his way of moving, to be like water. Then be a cloud – there, but not there. Clouds seem motionless... but move slowly. Absorb and disperse the strike, redirect/deflect softly but when you hit.....hit like a wave! Other kung fu systems also have forms named after this simple poetic title.

Eventually, Tai Chi people understood this Chan Buddhist phrase as, to move calmly and gracefully but with a purpose. The popularity of this phrase ended up in sculptures, and its calligraphy as framed art in both China and Japan. The song also ended up in a popular Chinese opera with lyrics. Mr. Siu Tit Hung fled communist China and settled in Hong Kong and continued producing many songs but none reached the popularity or wide influence of 流水行雲 Flowing Water Moving Clouds.