



WANG ZIPING WITH ONE OF HIS FAVORITE WEAPONS,  
THE MONK CRESCENT SHOVEL.

# The Great Wang Ziping

## A GRANDDAUGHTER'S LOVING REMINISCENCE

THE SITE: ORLANDO, FLA. The date: September, 1992. The scene: The National Chinese Martial Arts Competitions. Bulbs flash. Swords slash. In one circle, men and women in shining black, red, gold and turquoise leap, kick, punch and fly. In the other circle, all is serenity. The gentle movements of tai chi flow peacefully like gentle ripples on a shimmering pool kissed by a spring breeze.

Inside the arena the audience applauds. Outside, merchants and practitioners market everything from high-tech videos to the simple ancient weapons of the Orient. There are artists from all nations, each passionate about his event. There is laughter. There is anger. There is passion. There is love.

Still, amidst all the excitement and bustle of this festive affair, I have a sense of loss. Being here with so many great martial artists, I cannot help but remember the greatness of my own grandfather, Wang Ziping and, in short, I miss him. Deeply.

I know how happy he would be if he could see his disciples, the new generations of people from all over the world, so dedicated to promoting and refining the Chinese martial arts. He so loved martial arts all of his

**Wang Ziping was an extraordinary Chinese martial arts master and a patriotic figure of both past and present China.**

*By Grace X. Wu-Monnat*

life. With all my heart, I wish we were together and he could be here to feel the joy.

### EXTRAORDINARY MAN

My grandfather, Wang Ziping, was an extraordinary Chinese martial arts' master and a patriotic figure of both past and present China. He is known throughout China for his public feats of strength as well as his martial arts prowess.

Again and again throughout his life he represented the nation in soundly defeating foreign boxers, wrestlers and karate challengers. In his early life he had to be quickly spirited out of town after each of these victorious bouts because, at that time, fighting with foreign competitors was discouraged in China. He was a master of the sleeve sword, the green dragon sword, the long

spear and the monk crescent shovel. In his later years, he was a compassionate physician of traditional Chinese medicine. China reveres his memory by including his portrait on a commemorative postage stamp honoring the Chinese martial arts.

Wang Ziping was born in 1881 in Cangzhou, Hebei province, considered the capitol of martial arts. Both his father and grandfather were well-recognized wushu masters. Wang Ziping's feats and strength became legendary. But fame did not come easily. In fact, when he was six years old, Wang Ziping was too little and too weak to be accepted as a martial arts student by either his father or his uncle. They thought he was not strong enough. But, fortunately, the world always has its own balance and magic. On the other side of his life was the deep under-

standing of his mother. She told him, "If you like martial arts, practice hard. You will be good." His mother added, "Don't be a tiger-head-snake-tail with everything. Be consistent!"

With his mother's encouragement, he took the first step of a lifelong journey in the martial arts. First, he dug a ditch for practicing jumps. As time passed, the ditch would get deeper and deeper, wider and wider. Ultimately, from a standstill, Wang Ziping could jump ten feet forward and eight feet backward. From this beginning, Wang Ziping developed other humble methods by which to develop his strengths and athletic skills. These early methods multiplied into the feats and accomplishments which have become legendary.

The outstanding strength Wang Ziping developed from his early makeshift training devices first became apparent when he was 16 years old. On a hot summer afternoon Wang Ziping's group of young friends told him of a challenge announced in Jiede, Heibe, a small village about ten miles from Wang Ziping's home. Someone had placed stone weights at a bridge. Above them was a sign which stated that

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whomever could lift these stone weights could carry them home, plus receive a reward of 20 pounds of groceries. All the proud young men of Wang Ziping's village thought this sounded like a worthy challenge. They all went to Jiede to try, including Wang Ziping.

On the way, everyone wondered how heavy the weights would be. When they arrived, a couple of young men were in charge, strutting around with the bamboo bar and asking for volunteers. Now that the young men were there, the weights looked gigantic, two rough stones weighing over 215 pounds. There were not even any braces to stabilize the stones on the bar. The task was formidable. No one came forward to grasp the bar. One by one each young man turned his eyes toward one person, Wang Ziping. At last, Wang Ziping emerged from the group. He stood in front of the weights, his feet apart and solid as if nailed to the ground. He took a deep breath, slowly leaned toward the weights, took a solid grasp, quickly turned his wrists up, and the weights appeared in the air.

"Wow!" everyone exclaimed. Wang Ziping's teen-age friends were awestruck. The crowd at the bridge applauded. Everyone was so excited, they were ready to carry the weights home. The young man in charge came over and asked, "Would you please tell us your name and where you come from?" Wang Ziping gave his answer without hesitation. Now, a knowing smile dawned across the leader's face and he nodded, "Oh! That's why." "There is a note in the bar, please read it." Everyone waited as the note was opened and read.

"We hope to make friends by this contest," the note stated. "Anyone who is able to lift the weight will be awarded with this weight and groceries, except for Wang Ziping!" After a long hearty laugh, many came to Wang Ziping and wanted to learn how he had become so strong.

Wang Ziping was also known as "Qianjin Wang" (King of a Thousand Pounds). While Wang Ziping was teaching in Jinan, he was so absorbed in his work he hardly ever left the school. Many times his colleagues suggested that he go out and enjoy the famous beauty of the surrounding countryside. One day, Wang Ziping decided that he would go to the famous scene of 72 Wells for a visit. He enjoyed the beautiful



FROM LEFT:  
MADAME WANG JURONG, WANG ZIPING  
AND GRACE X. WU-MONNAT.

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## **"When he was six, Wang Ziping was too little and too weak to be accepted as a martial arts student."**

view of Black Tiger well. Then he came to the teahouse for a little break. Suddenly, the raging sound of powerfully rushing water caught his attention. His curiosity drew him toward the sounds. Unexpectedly, he found a water mill and a rushing river. Watching the water's powerful flow turning the waterwheel, Wang Ziping gazed for a moment with interest. A small crowd had gathered near the mill and, like Wang Ziping, was fascinated by the river's rush and the waterwheel's spin.

Someone in the crowd mused aloud, "Do you think any man could stop that?" This was exactly what Wang Ziping had been wondering himself and he replied, "I do not know. Nature's force is mighty. But, still, I would like to try to stop the wheel." The people in the crowd then took a look at him, and almost laughed. What they saw was an unassuming young man of medium size. Everyone wondered how it could be possible that he would stop the wheel. Wang Ziping saw the doubt flickering in the eyes of the group of onlookers. Quickly, he rolled up his sleeves and bent to the task. For a few

moments he stared intently at the point where the water met the wheel, analyzing the best point at which to grasp its axle. Then, beneath his shirt the cord-like muscles pulsed as he grasped the waterwheel's axle. The crowd hushed. Wang Ziping strained. There was a short grinding sound, then, nothing. The waterwheel stopped and Wang Ziping smiled as the cheer of the crowd broke the moment of silence.

Then, suddenly, a stalwart person stepped out of the crowd, looked sternly at Wang Ziping and bade Wang Ziping to follow him: "I'll accept you as my disciple if you wish," he said simply. Wang Ziping followed. He could not have been happier. The man who had spoken was the most famous wushu master, Yang Hongxiu. After that, King of the Thousand Pounds became Wang Ziping's nickname.

I am so proud of my grandfather because he was not only a legendary figure, he was also loving, compassionate, and humble. During the years I lived with him, I learned much about how special he was.

China's cultural revolution

changed so many of society's values and the lives of its people. Because my parents, Madame Wang Jurong and Dr. Wu Chengde, were both university professors, the tenets of the Cultural Revolution required them to be taken to re-education camps in the country. That left no one to care for my grandfather, who by then was in his 80's and alone. I moved to my grandfather's house at the age of nine simply to keep him company and take care of him. I was too young to act as an adult. Every night Wang Ziping had important visitors from all over the world. I could not even stay awake until these loquacious visitors left each night. I would try, but, at last, would fall asleep almost anywhere in the room. It could be on a couch or chair or even the bare floor.

I fondly remember that my grandfather carried me in his arms to my bed almost every night for the first couple of years I lived with him. I guess it would be fair to say that I was a little company to him in the daytime and he was a loving protector of me at night.

Life was hard at that time. What grew out of the hardship was a strong, close relationship between my grandfather and me. As time went by, we not only understood each other well, we also developed a kind of harmony within us. Grandpa had a great sense of humor. We laughed so much together! When I was a little older, instead of falling asleep, I would wait for hours until his visitors finally stood up to leave. Then, behind their back, I just had to make some naughty faces to express my relief after waiting so long for them to leave. Grandfather always heaved with laughter, but tried his best to conceal it from his important guests.

I also remember the many times after school I sat next to my grandpa comparing hand strength. He had great big hands. His strong hands spread out like Chinese fans. My little hand fit in his like a small piece of dough yet, I tried so hard to squeeze his hand. The little power I had just could not bother him. Grandpa always got a good laugh and he never smashed my aggressive little hand.

At that time during the Cultural Revolution, government proclamations prohibited my grandfather from teaching martial arts to the public. But Wang Ziping just could



WANG ZIPING (CENTER) ENJOYS A NEW YEAR'S EVE CELEBRATION WITH SEVERAL CHILDREN, INCLUDING 3-YEAR-OLD GRANDDAUGHTER GRACE X. WU (FAR RIGHT).



**“During the Cultural Revolution,  
government proclamations prohibited  
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martial arts to the public.”**

not turn away his host of eager students. Still, the government's punishments for disobedience were severe at the time. How could this dilemma be solved? Simple. Wang Ziping did not publicly teach one word of martial arts during this period. However, everyday at Wang Ziping's usual teaching place, a very shy little girl appeared to demonstrate and instruct Wang Ziping's group of older students in sophisticated martial arts techniques far beyond her age.

Most of the students were nearly two heads taller than the little girl. Nearby, on a bench, Wang Ziping sat peacefully, his keen, joyful eyes silently watching. Every now and then, the little girl might look confusedly from her group of older students to Wang Ziping. Then, he might cock an eyebrow or gently nod his head. Suddenly, the little girl seemed to remember and turned again to her students with further advice and instruction.

In short, during the Cultural Revolution, you might say, I was my grandfather's teaching puppet. Without us ever conspiring, each evening he would patiently and lovingly instruct me in some nuance of the martial arts. The next day, it seemed, I was able to show off this technique to the other students who, although they could not be instructed by Wang Ziping, still gathered at his house each day to practice and to follow my new examples.

Even though the literal proclamations of the Cultural Revolution forbade my grandfather from public teaching, I do not think they prevented it altogether. For, as always, after myself and the older students completed our exercises, we gathered around the feet of Wang Ziping. We always hoped he would give us some encouragement or criticism about our martial arts practice. But he never did. Always, however, he told us a story about the martial arts. We listened to the tales then

wondered why he told us these particular stories.

As time went by, we learned each story gave us some advice on how to wisely practice Chinese martial arts. For example, one day my grandfather told us a story about a well-known strong man in his village who had practiced the forms and disciplines of martial arts his whole life. One fine day, two bullies strutted into his village. After bothering the strong man's friends and neighbors, the bullies challenged the strong man. After a few rounds, neither challenger could hurt the strong man. His blocks and defenses were impenetrable. On the other hand, the strong man could not land any of his kicks or punches.

He would punch or kick, as he had always learned, but these would either fall short or be blocked. That was the end of the story. We wondered how the story related to us. Later we came to understand that, when we are beginners, it is easy for

us to follow the forms of our leaders and to repeat movements without conscious thought. The story taught us that no matter how well-practiced our forms and exercises, if routinely practiced without thought, in a practical application, our best-learned techniques will fall short of their marks and be useless.

Our lessons at the feet of Wang Ziping were not entirely limited to Chinese martial arts. For instance, I remember my grandfather's story about a doubting young man who came to Shanghai to visit him when my grandfather was well into his 80's. The young man had heard legends about Wang Ziping, but thought them greatly exaggerated. He wanted to see this so-called legend for himself. While openly respectful to Wang Ziping, the young man could not wait to quiz Wang Ziping about the stories the young man had heard. Did Wang Ziping really do this? Could it possibly be true that...? Wang Ziping patiently sipped his tea and listened to the young man's queries. When the young man waited for a response, Wang Ziping simply suggested they repair to Wang Ziping's small courtyard and practice martial arts together. The young man leaped at the opportunity for, now, the young man would have the chance to awe Wang Ziping with the young man's own physique and martial arts skills.

In the courtyard, Wang Ziping suggested, "Before we practice a form, let's do a simple exercise." The young man intently listened. "I will run three circles backward in the courtyard," said Wang Ziping "while you run forward and try to catch me before I complete the third circle."

What kind of challenge was that, wondered the young man. I could catch this old man blindfolded.

"Yes!" said the proud young man, "I will catch you before the end of the first circle!"

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