

Sports

At 73, Grandpa can

By Stuart Warner
Executive sports editor

Gene Chicoine is taller than six-foot; he weighs 200 or more pounds. A veteran of the martial arts with a sixth-degree black belt in kung-fu, Chicoine can obliterate a stack of bricks with one bare hand.

It didn't seem much of a match as Chicoine approached his opponent, a 73-year-old grandfather at least a half-foot shorter.

It wasn't.

Chicoine hit the floor with a thud that shook the walls of the Hop Sing Temple, Chicoine's martial arts studio in Mogadore. As he pulled himself off the mat, his eyes were rolled back in his head, his body was shaking.

"I'm just glad," said Chicoine, still slightly stunned, "that he was only playing."

Certainly, the throw could have been even more violent. One of the world's leading martial artists, Grandmaster Chang Tung-Sheng of Taiwan was only demonstrating a basic kung-fu technique for a Beacon Journal photographer. "You should see him with some of his advanced students," Chicoine said. "He throws them across the room."

THAT AN OLD MAN could toss younger, stronger men around as if he were throwing pillows at the walls — this is difficult to understand for those in a society that worships its youth, a society that sometimes regards its elders as so much excess baggage.

Yet in his country, Chang is revered as an athlete. There are none foolish enough to challenge his preeminence in the martial arts. Not any more. His last challenge was five years ago. While visiting King Hassan of Morocco, the chief of the king's palace guard wanted a match with Chang. Chang knocked his foe unconscious, it was reported by *Inside Kung-Fu*, a martial arts magazine.

Such magazines help spread the mystical lore of martial artists. Most Americans have been exposed to the martial artists' feats of strength — breaking boards and bricks with bare hands or feet. However, the feats of which legends are made are rarely, if ever, seen. There are claims of martial artists who can leap 20 feet into the air or who can liquidate an opponent by simply pointing a finger in his direction.

IT WAS in search of separating the myth from the mysterious that Chicoine and David Han found Chang when they visited Taiwan last summer.

"We went to Taiwan to discover the truths about the martial arts," said Han, a systems engineer at Goodyear. Han also serves as Chang's interpreter. "We were very lucky to find Professor Chang. We met other teachers while we were studying with him. When they found out we were learning from Professor Chang, they would say, 'Why are you talking to me? What can I teach you after you learned from Professor Chang?'"

In the almost half century since he won the national martial arts championship of mainland China in 1933, Chang has become a genuine Chinese superstar. "He's treated like a king over there," said Chicoine. "He's a national celebrity."

HOWEVER, Chang does not claim to be a superman; he is skeptical of martial artists who do.

"Kung-fu, in my language, means time," Chang said through Han. "It is a skill you acquire through time. If a man acquires just a little bit of money every year, after 50 years, he would build up great wealth. The same is true of martial arts."

Chang does not directly dispute the superhuman claims made by some martial artists. When asked about powers such as *de-mak*, the ability to direct a force against an opponent from across the



Chinese Grandmaster Chang Tung-Sheng

room; or *che-ma*, the delayed death touch, he responds: "Perhaps the ancient martial arts masters had such powers, but they are a lost art. I do not believe (such powers) still exist."

Asked about Bruce Lee, who popularized kung-fu in this country in his television role as Kato and in several kung-fu movies such as *Enter the Dragon*, Chang chuckled.

"Bruce Lee is a good movie star," he said.

THE CHUCKLE was not characteristic Chang. Robert Smith, in a chapter about Chang in the book *Chinese Boxing, Masters and Methods*, describes Chang as "the most disciplined Chinese boxer (Chinese boxing is one form of kung-fu) I have ever met. I never saw him smile and I seldom heard him speak." (Smith added that when he first met Chang, Chang kicked him in the groin "just to establish a relationship.")

It is through this discipline that Chang, a strict Moslem, harnessed the powers of kung-fu. (He said he once practiced but one single exercise for three years.)

Kung-fu is the oldest of the martial arts forms, dating back perhaps 5,000 years. It is said that all other martial art forms such as karate, which is only several hundred years old, are derived from kung-fu.

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Beacon Journal photos by Dennis Gordon

Shen demonstrates Tai-Chi. Chang, who lives in Taiwan, is 73 years old.

There are many different kung-fu arts and styles, but they can be divided into two basic groups — the external or hard forms and the internal or soft forms.

The hard forms stress strength and speed, abilities that diminish with time. It is the soft forms — forms that stress the harmony of mind and body — that sustain power as youth fades.

The soft forms derive their power from a force called *ch'i*. Roughly, *ch'i* is the ability of the mind to direct the energy of the subconscious, that reservoir of untapped brain potential. This concentrated energy produces maximum results with minimum effort. Thus Chang, a master of several internal kung-fu forms, is able to direct his *ch'i* to overpower a younger, stronger opponent, who must rely primarily upon physical skills.

PERHAPS the *ch'i* is the most mystical of all martial art techniques, real or imagined.

The masters such as Chang pass along their secrets to only a few select disciples. They are careful who will receive a transmittal, Chang said. "In ancient times," said Chang, "if a student used martial arts to break the law, both the student and his teacher would be killed. Students must have good character above all."

An instructor at the Central College of Police

to the rank of Lt. General, Chang has had thousands of students. Of those, he has selected only 16 disciples. Han and Chicoine are among those 16. Chicoine was Chang's first Caucasian disciple. Chang said he had a dream that he would find a Caucasian to help him "spread the gospel" of his kung-fu teachings. "It was destiny, an act of God, that we meet," Chang said.

CHICOINE AND HAN persuaded Chang to come to the United States to help dissuade many of the myths that have been commercialized into the martial arts business here.

Even Chicoine admits to some commercialization of the art.

"At our annual show (held last night), we lay on a bed of nails and have someone smash bricks on our stomach with a sledgehammer, that sort of thing. People have come to expect that. They won't sit still to watch us demonstrate our forms and our use of weapons."

Chang is hopeful of obtaining a permanent visa so that he may stay in the U. S. and teach. However, he feels that the government of Taiwan may refuse such a request, for he is considered "a national treasure."

It is said he is the last of the masters of the pure forms of kung-fu. "When he dies," said Han,