

Controversy Erupts Over Shuai Chiao Leadership

When shuai chiao grandmaster Chang Dung Sheng died in 1986, he failed to name a successor. When an American assumed control, Taiwan was pleased. Ironically, the objections came from America.

By William Barret and Dave Cater

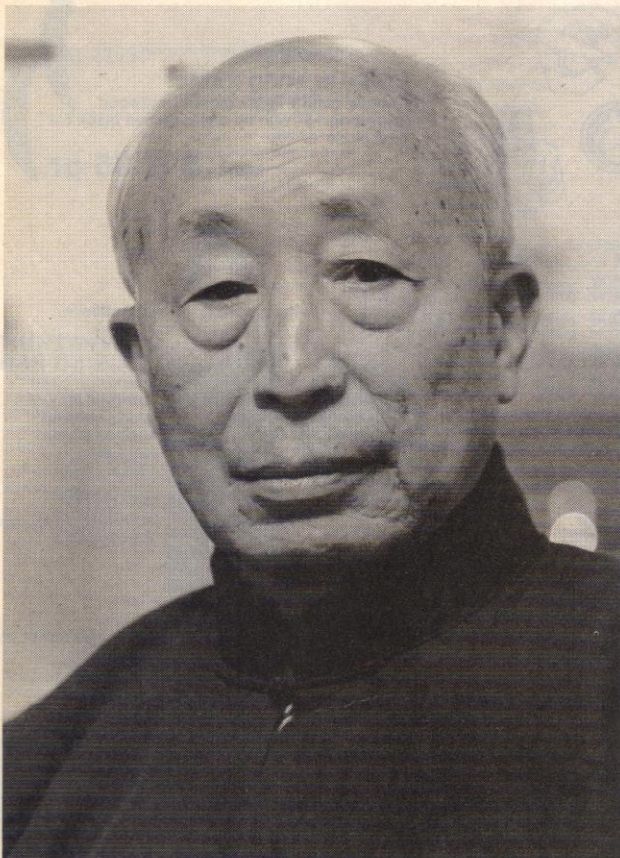


Photo by Bob Sbarge

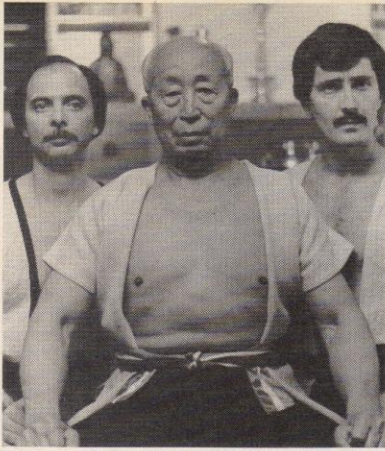
A kung-fu pyramid is shaped in much the same manner as the Chinese family unit. At the top is the grandmaster or father; his word is gospel and obedience comes without question. The elders and senior members occupy the next level, for they are wiser by having survived the true test of time. As is custom, upon the father's death the eldest inherits the mantle of family leadership; the chain of command continues unabated. This neat, tight package has been swarthed deep in Chinese tradition for thousands of years, and except for an occasional disgruntled member (say a younger brother is jealous of a sibling's lofty status or a practitioner disagrees with policy), the unit grows more cohesive with each passing generation. Those who can't adjust (for the good of the whole) are afforded two options — either conform to accepted style or get out. There's no room for discussion when a single chair sits at the head of the table.

But as we all have come to realize, not every family unit — and this especially holds true in the kung-fu world — is bathed in eternal peace and harmony. There are enough twists and turns along life's road to push someone over the edge. When that happens, the family bubble of tranquility is punctured by the slings and arrows of hostility. Suddenly chaos and discontent shove their way into a family structure once held strong by love and respect. Just how long disharmony lingers depends on how deep the schism. Some problems are resolved with conciliatory conversation. Some shouts last a lifetime.

When a martial arts family begins to erode, the pressures to rebuild and regroup are heightened by sheer numbers and logistics. Keeping peace within four walls is difficult; maintaining order throughout the four corners of the world is virtually impossible.

* * *

Two years ago, Chang Dung Sheng held a hammergrip on his style of *shuai chiao* (Chinese wrestling). Nicknamed the "flying butterfly," Chang was considered one of the fiercest fighters in Chinese history and spent the 20th century unbeaten. As shuai chiao's grandmaster, Chang was leader, father, and guiding light to 39,000 practitioners, 38,500 or 99 percent of whom were of Taiwanese descent. Peace was



Making godsons of Frank DeMaria (left) and Peter Chema (right) sat well with former shuai chiao grandmaster Chang Dung Sheng (center).
Photo by Bob Sbarge



Shuai chiao principals during the art's happier days. In back row, second from left is Daniel Weng, grandmaster Chang Dung Sheng and then top student Gene L. Chicoine. Weng has now formed his own organization and Chicoine has risen to the top of the International Shuai-Chiao Association.
Photo courtesy of Daniel Weng

at hand, but the art was stagnant. The remaining 500 members were spread thin from the U.S. to Europe, and Chang realized shuai chiao faced extinction unless inroads could be made on the international level.

Enter Gene L. Chicoine, a blustery Midwesterner with karate and goju-ryu experience. Sensing his days were numbered, Chang took a liking to Chicoine, an ex-deputy sheriff turned businessman, and immediately began the arduous process of training him as a possible successor. Chicoine was Chang's first personal student in a decade. Still, few believed the grandmaster of China's first kung-fu style — estimated at 3,000 years old — would even consider choosing someone outside the inner circle, much less an American and a Caucasian.

But in June, 1986, tragedy struck the shuai chiao community when Chang succumbed to cancer at the age of 76. At the time, Chicoine was first vice president of the International Shuai-Chiao Association (ISCA). He quickly stepped into the grandmaster's shoes and began running the ISCA from its headquarters in Mogadore, Ohio. (Chang believed the next great shuai chiao expansion would occur in the United States). Chang made Chicoine's accession easier by placing the Taipei Shuai Chiao Committee (TSCC) and all other affiliated organizations under ISCA control.

This decision was accepted as *fait accompli* in Taiwan, where vows and oaths made in the presence of the grandmaster are considered morally binding. But in the United States, Chicoine's rise to power sparked heated debate that ultimately led to a major break in ranks.

Voicing the loudest objections were Americans Frank DeMaria and Peter Chema, and Taiwanese-born Daniel Weng, who at the time held a teaching position at the Ohio State University. Chicoine claimed to be the highest-ranking shuai chiao practitioner in the world at ninth degree (Chang was tenth degree), but DeMaria and Chema also said they were given ninth-degree rankings courtesy of Chang. Weng currently stands at the seventh-degree level.

DeMaria, who lives in New York State, was among the original members of the ISCA Board of Directors. He has long been a contributor to *Inside Kung-Fu*, with many of the articles featuring Chang posing for pictures with the author. He later resigned his position with the board because he said the ISCA insisted on total control over what he wrote on the art of shuai chiao. Chicoine, however, says DeMaria was dismissed because he was not a "true" disciple of the grandmaster and as such had not earned a voice on the board.

DeMaria tells his side. "I met the grandmaster in Taiwan in 1979 when he was chief judge for a bout between myself and my sifu, Wu San Jyu, (master of *mei jung chuan* or confusion style boxing, which is a little-known Northern style). As I was Wu's disciple, it was impossible for me to become Chang's disciple." This was because of a point in Chinese protocol. Wu was of a lower level than Chang, so by taking DeMaria as a disciple, Chang would have had to elevate Wu to his level. This was strictly forbidden by Chinese custom and tradition.

Instead, DeMaria said Chang took him as an adopted godson, which implied all rights and benefits of discipleship. He maintained the ap-



Grandmaster Chang Dung Sheng counters the attack of student Daniel Weng during a 1983 shuai chiao and kung-fu exhibition at the University of San Francisco.
Photo courtesy of Daniel Weng



To the surprise of most knowledgeable observers, Gene L. Chicoine (kneeling) was grandmaster Chang's top choice to succeed him as shuai chiao leader. Chang worried his art would eventually die if it wasn't introduced to other countries and he considered the United States the site for the next great shuai chiao expansion.

Photo courtesy of Gene L. Chicoine



Peter Chema (left), who was afforded the title of Chang's "godson," took a neutral position on the fight for shuai chiao control. History, he maintained, could not be rewritten, no matter what others tried to do.

Photo by Eric Sbarge

pointment afforded him equal rank with Chicoine, who disputed the nature of DeMaria's acceptance in the grandmaster's family. Chicoine said DeMaria's relationship with Chang "was merely a formality" and in no way approximated discipleship. Chema, who accompanied DeMaria to Taiwan and was adopted as a godson in the same ceremony, flatly states, "We are all kung-fu men. What other kind of relationship would it be?" Chema declined a position on the board, he said. "I felt my relationship as a son to the grandmaster was enough," said Chema, who also lives in New York. "I also foresaw the political turmoil which would come and wanted no part of it."

Weng is the lone Taiwanese disputing Chicoine's claim to the ISCA presidency. Weng, presently teaching at the Chinese Cultural University in Taiwan, first was introduced to shuai chiao by Chang at the

"When you stand a guy next to me, he knows he's going to get more than a black eye and a bloody nose."

—Shuai Chiao President Gene L. Chicoine

National Taiwan Normal University in 1968. Weng eventually captured the national championship in his weight class in 1970 and 1971. After several shuai chiao teaching assignments, Weng assumed a position as teaching associate at Ohio State, where he introduced four courses in shuai chiao and Chang style tai chi into the university's physical education curriculum. He recently received his Ph.D for the dissertation "Fundamentals of Shuai Chiao," which later became a book. Weng originally was secretary of the ISCA, but eventually resigned over alleged "constitutional violations" by Chicoine. Undaunted, Weng formed the United States Shuai-Chiao Association, headquartered in Columbus, Ohio. Among its trustees is U.S. kung-fu notable Adam Hsu.

Photo courtesy of Gei. L. Chicoine



Photo courtesy of William Barret

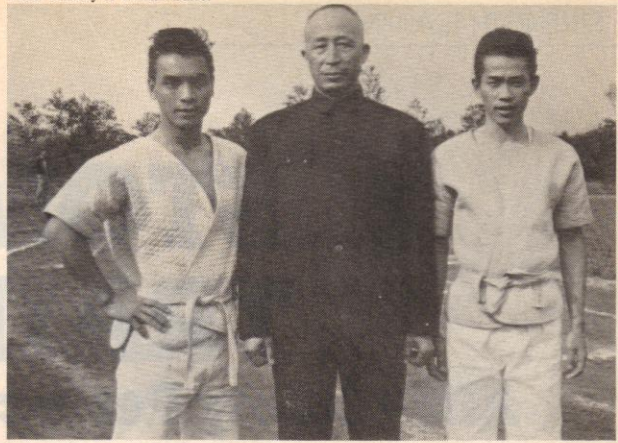


Photo courtesy of William Barret



Above are rare photos of the grandmaster and some of his most trusted countrymen. Top left is Chang and current grandmaster Gene L. Chicoine. Top right is Chang (circa 1957) with Roger Soo (left), secretary general of the Taipei Shuai Chiao Committee and an unidentified student. Lower right are some of the top shuai chiao representatives. In front row from left: James Chang, son of former grandmaster Chang Dung Sheng, author William Barret, C.H. Hsieh, chairman of the TSCC, and Richard M. Chin, director of the Asian Martial Art Association. Top row from left: shuai chiao student Nelson Wings, Roger Soo, shuai chiao secretary general, and Simon Chu, chief shuai chiao instructor at Taiwan's Central Police College.

Don't think all this has gone unnoticed by Chicoine. The ISCA president has begun proceedings which would eliminate any mention of Weng and DeMaria, and possibly Chema and the shuai chiao constitution. To which Chema replied, "I don't think you can rewrite history." Ah, but history definitely is on the side of the current administration. Also adding key support are the powers that be in the TSCC.

Roger Soo, secretary general of the TSCC, has thrown his organization's full support behind Chicoine. In an exclusive interview in Taipei with *Inside Kung-Fu*, Soo said despite strong bonds with DeMaria and Chema, among others, Chang considered Chicoine the person who

"We are all kung-fu men. What other relationship can there be . . . I don't think you can rewrite history."

—Peter Chema

best could carry (some say financially) shuai chiao into the 21st century. At the interviews, Soo was backed by some of the highest Taiwanese authorities on the subject of shuai chiao, including: Huang Kuo-jeu, nationally recognized grandmaster of hsing-I and Chang's long-time friend; C.H. Hsieh, chairman of the TSCC and vice president of Mitsubishi in Taiwan; James H.J. Chang, the grandmaster's son; and Dr. Richard M. Chin, master of jow ga and director of the Asian Martial Arts Association in New York. All consider Chicoine the legitimate head of shuai chiao throughout the world.

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THE UNITED STATES SHUAI-CHIAO ASSOCIATION
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USSA COMMITTEES AND CHAIRMAN

Coaching	David Lin
Judging	Victor Ke
Ranking	Daniel Weng
Training	Jude Braun, George Chang
Tournament	Mia's Miller, Jerry Siao
Teaching Materials	Jim Mattox
Education	Dr. Kleinman
Research	Gonzalo Hernandez
Membership	Bob Trimble, Jeff Kuo, Dr. Schwartz

USSA FORMALLY INCORPORATED

On November eleventh of last year the United States Shuai Chiao Association was incorporated in accordance with the laws of Ohio.

The USSA was formed from the merger of the International Shuai Chiao Association and the International Shuai Chiao Federation. This merger was necessary to achieve the goals of the organization and to provide a consistent, uniform, and fair competition on the global level. Only through this merger can we achieve the goals necessary for Olym.

Last fall, a general election was held following the merger. The new organization was elected to go forward.

Dr. Carl Bell
Chuan Shong C
Adam Hsu
Victor Ke
David Lin
Allen Siegal
Tommy Wan

As the same was elected to go forward.

President
Vice Presid
2nd Vice P
Executive
Treasurer

Most of the USSA will be following their chairman's lead.

INTERNATIONAL SHUAI-CHIAO ASSOC.
3808 Mogadore Road
Mogadore, Ohio 44260
(216) 628-2711

May 20, 1986

Executive Board on Affiliated Schools
International Shuai Chiao Association

Dear Members:

Due to the recent development in the health of Grand Master Ch'ang, and my recent conversation with him, I have assumed the position of President of the I.S.C.A. at his request. This procedure is also in accordance with our constitution in that I assume the President's duties at any time of his absence or his inability to perform his duties.

As I have previously stated, I had a personal conversation with Grand Master and I am at this time assuming another two (2) positions.

