

Leung Sheung

Leung Sheung was born in 1918 in the Canton Province. By the time of his early youth, he was in the Macau area, a Portuguese Colony at the mouth of Pearl River, located near Hong Kong. At 14, he started his formal martial arts training in Choi Li Fut, White Eyebrow, and Dragon style.

By 1949, Leung Sheung had developed quite a reputation in several areas, one as a restaurateur, another as a lion dance performer, and as a martial artist. Leung Sheung was very, very fond of the Lion Dance. During this period in Hong Kong, merchants would extend a collection of vegetables from their second floor balcony for the Lion Dancers. Attached to the vegetable bundle would be a red envelope containing "lucky money." Toward the conclusion of the Lion Dance, the "lion" would take the vegetable bundle and money. The performers, usually a three-man team, would be required to climb upon each other so that the "lion" could take the money in his mouth. All the lion dancers wanted Leung Sheung, a big man, probably 5'10" to 5'11" and weighing around 200 pounds, as the base.

As a restaurateur, by 1949, Leung Sheung had been in the restaurant business for some time. In recognition of his abilities in the restaurant business, Leung Sheung was selected as an officer in the Restaurant Association in Hong Kong. The Association owned a flat in the city of Kowloon. They used the flat as an office and for lodging for people coming from main land China, escaping the Communist rule there. As an officer in the Restaurant Association, Leung Sheung had some level of influence in the use of this flat. It is important to remember that at this time, lodging in Hong Kong was extremely scarce. The massive influx of people into Hong Kong was putting an extreme strain on the housing and job market. Typically, the Restaurant Association would provide the flat as a place to stay for their restaurant workers, cramming 40 to 50 people into this small, one-room flat. So, typically, when bedtime rolled around, the back door would be opened, and the "cots" brought out, and they would line up out the back door. When daylight approached, the cots would be folded back up and moved against the wall. Residents would then depart to their various restaurant jobs in and around the city of Kowloon and Hong Kong.

As a martial artist, Leung Sheung was well respected for his proficiency in Dragon Style. He taught White Eyebrow in the flat. As people "hot bunked" (slept in shifts), there was room to teach and practice during the day and night. Leung Sheung had heard about Wing Chun since he was quite young, but as Wing Chun was quite secretive and well protected, he had never seen it; but, this martial art intrigued him, as did the stories about one of its teachers, Yip Man. The thought that he would take Wing Chun at his first opportunity was beginning to emerge as a prominent thought in the back of his mind.

Mr. Lee, also an officer in the Restaurant Association, in 1949, found out that Yip Man was currently in Hong Kong. Knowing Leung Sheung's interest in Wing Chun and Yip Man, he informed Leung Sheung that Yip Man was in town. Leung Sheung urged Mr. Lee to introduce him to Yip Man. By the time they met, Leung Sheung had already decided that he wanted to learn Wing Chun from Yip Man. He would provide the flat for Yip Man to teach in. In addition, Leung Sheung would turn over his White Eyebrow class to Yip Man, and he would become a student again.

Leung Sheung promptly introduced Lok Yiu and Tsui Sheung Tin to Yip Man, and the three of them became the first batch of Wing Chun students in Hong Kong. Both Leung Sheung and Lok Yiu resided at the Restaurant Association's flat during this time. Yip Man would now live in the flat, having no place to stay, and from 1949 until 1955, Leung Sheung and Lok Yiu trained under Yip Man intensively.

In 1955 Leung Sheung returned to Macau, and taught Wing Chun during the one year he was there, returning to Hong Kong in 1956.

In 1956, Leung Sheung began to teach Wing Chun publicly, along with Lok Yiu, Tsui Sheung Tin, and Wong Sheung Leung. They formed the first generation of teachers from Yip Man's class, and were widely recognized as the best students Yip Man ever produced.

From 1956 though 1978, Leung Sheung taught Wing Chun continuously. During his entire teaching career, he maintained a very low profile, never advertising his school. His famous saying from this period was, "You find me, you are lucky."

Leung Sheung's teaching philosophy in Wing Chun was to think of students as drift wood. As a teacher, figuratively, he lived on the bank of a wide river, and from time to time, driftwood came up on the bank in front of his house. Occasionally he inspected the driftwood, and from time to time, he'd find a piece that interested him. He'd drag the select piece up the bank a bit so it wouldn't wash away. As the pieces accumulated higher on the bank, he would find one piece that interested him enough to take it into his shop and begin to shape it. As with all things, the external appearance does not always show what lies beneath. Some driftwood will not be molded, either because of too many knotholes or other various failings. However, he would keep the driftwood that molded at the master's hand.

Deeming a student as appropriate, a piece of driftwood to be kept, Leung Sheung would then become very demanding on that student. It was back into the river for those students with "too many knots."

In 1968, when Bruce Lee returned to Hong Kong to shoot a movie, he attempted to have a (daily) friendly dialog with Leung Sheung. Bruce Lee always payed him "high respect" during their meetings. Both Bruce Lee and Tsui Sheung Tin referred to Leung Sheung as their older brother.

In 1970, Leung Sheung had a kidney stone removed. After the stone's removal, Leung Sheung's health began to degrade steadily from that point onward. Leung Sheung passed away in 1978.