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Lau Kar Leung and the Shaw Bros. Studio in Hong Kong

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Lau Kar Leung and the Shaw Bros. Studio in Hong Kong

Lau Kar Leung is a third generation disciple of the historical Wong Fei Hung (b.1850-d.1925), the most important real life kung fu expert from Southern China from the modern era who became the character that the first black and white kung fu films in Hong Kong were based on, starting in 1949.

Wong Fei Hung was an expert in Hung Gar Kuen (an adaptation of Shaolin Tiger style). Wong Fei Hung taught Lam Sai Wing (his most famous pupil, who has also been the subject of HK films) who then taught Lau's father Lau Charn, who then taught Lau Kar Leung beginning when he was nine years old, and this instruction lasted until he was 28.

Lau Kar Leung was a real life master of Hung Gar, and he is the most prominent auteur of the kung fu film to come out of Hong Kong film industry during the 1970s and 1980s, the period which I call the classical kung fu film era (distinguished by long takes with actors performing 30-40 moves in one shot).

Lau took his expertise in traditional Hung Gar, and combined it with his knowledge of presenting kung fu as a stage performance from the Chinese Opera that he also learned from his father, as well as his years as a top action choreographer for Hong Kong cinema, and directed 17 feature length kung fu films for the Shaw Bros. Studio between 1975-1985.

Lau was carrying on the tradition of showcasing kung fu to the outside world started by his father's sifu Lam Sai Wing, who published the first Hung Gar manuals in Hong Kong beginning in 1917. Prior to these publications kung fu was a secret, only to be shared between the master and his students, in a

traditional master student relationship, and was only to be taught to Chinese, no foreigners were allowed to learn it.

Lam Sai Wing's books leave out 5 moves for every move shown, so that it is impossible to learn the system from the book. In this same tradition, Lau Kar Leung would showcase Hung Gar in his films, but never showed complete forms in sequence, so you would still have to seek out a teacher to learn the style.

Lau promoted orthodox Hung Gar kung fu through his films as a director, which was his explicit stated goal, and by doing so kept the historical tradition of the martial arts from the Shaolin Temple alive into the 20th century.

Lam Sai Wing (b.1860-d.1943) books edited by student Zhu Yu Zhai