

Second Tuesday

A Newsletter about Tai Chi Books

Hi Everyone,

Today I'd like to talk about the fascinating topic of **Chinese Martial Arts Training Manuals**.

Many of these training manuals were historically considered family secrets. "Secret training manuals" are, in fact, a stock motif in Chinese martial arts movies and novels:

- *"The senior students looked anxiously around the table at each other. Not only had the Master been murdered, but the secret training manual had been stolen. The manual, which had been passed down from master to senior disciple for more than five hundred years, contained the key ideas that gave the school techniques of frightening efficacy. The manual had to be retrieved and the Master's murder avenged, no matter what the cost."*

This quote is taken from the preface of **Chinese Martial Arts Training Manuals: A Historical Survey** by Brian Kennedy and Elizabeth Guo and is the focus of this newsletter. Below are a few excerpts to give you a feel for the style and content of this book.

This book explores the topic of Chinese Training Manuals in an upbeat fashion:

- *"Ming dynasty generals wrote them, Qing dynasty soldiers studied them, Republican-era warlords pondered them, Shaolin monks consulted them, bodyguards and sport coaches took lessons from them –and they still line shelves in bookshops across China. They are the training manuals, the do-it-yourself guides to Chinese martial arts."*

The "Tai Chi Classics" are in fact one such training manual, and the second part of the book describes a handful of Chinese Training Manuals, including a few Tai Chi and Qigong manuals.

- *"Professor Kang Ge Wu's Top Twelve Chinese Martial Arts Classics ... Taijiquan Classics by Wu Yu Xing (1812-1880), who claimed he found this work in a salt shop in 1852."*

The book also sheds light in the complex ways in which oral and written genres interact, and how all these books cross-pollinate and have very similar material.

- *"They are all the same book," according to Liu Kang Yi, a respected Taiwanese martial arts historian and publisher. He was speaking to the authors of this book in reference to the Xingyi classic training manuals,*

but to a large extent the statement is equally true for the training manuals of any of the Chinese martial arts systems. Because training manuals usually incorporated material from earlier books ...

If your curiosity is piqued and you'd like to browse a few English translations of some of the earlier and original training manuals there is an excellent website that I'd like to recommend:

<https://brennantranslation.wordpress.com>

At Brennan Translation, you can read the English translations of key Tai Chi training manuals written in China and Taiwan from 1880s -1950s.

However, beware how these training manuals can be hard to read in translation, in fact the authors make the following equation: "*Good Chinese Essay = Bad English Essay*"

- *When settling down to read a Chinese martial arts manual in translation ... one should have reasonable expectations. Many times Chinese martial arts practitioners, -especially Western practitioners who are just getting started –have an exaggerated sense of what a martial arts classic will contain. The basic thinking or hope is that once they read this book, their understanding of martial arts will greatly improve. This rarely is the case."*

Enjoy!

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