

By Shifu Yan Lei

# UNLOCK THE SECRET OF SHAOLIN STANCE

*How to revolutionise your martial art's form*



**O**ne of my favourite Shaolin forms is Rou Quan (soft fist) because it skilfully hides powerful kung fu techniques inside a flowing movement, the first form every Shaolin novice must learn is Xiao Hong Quan, The Eight Treasures is one of the most popular Qi Gong forms in China, Shaolin monks regularly entertain people with drunken master or monkey forms.

As you can see, the Shaolin forms are diverse and used for different purposes: health, war, peace, enlightenment, self-defence, and sometimes just pure entertainment. But whatever the reason they are all made from the same substance; stance.

### SHAOLIN GOLD

The kicks, the punches and the order of the stances are the links that make the form but it's the stances that are the essence of Shaolin. There are many different kinds of jewellery that are made from gold but take away the gold and you can't have the jewellery. This is the same with the forms. Take away the stances and there are no forms. This is why we call stances Shaolin Gold.

### THREE YEARS

Shaolin Temple training used to consist of three solid years of training only in stance work. Not a single form would be learned. After the monks had perfected their Shaolin stances they would then move on to practice body conditioning. They would practice their leg or arm or hand and after they had perfected body conditioning they would go on to learn a few forms, which suited what they had specialised in.

### STANCE WORK

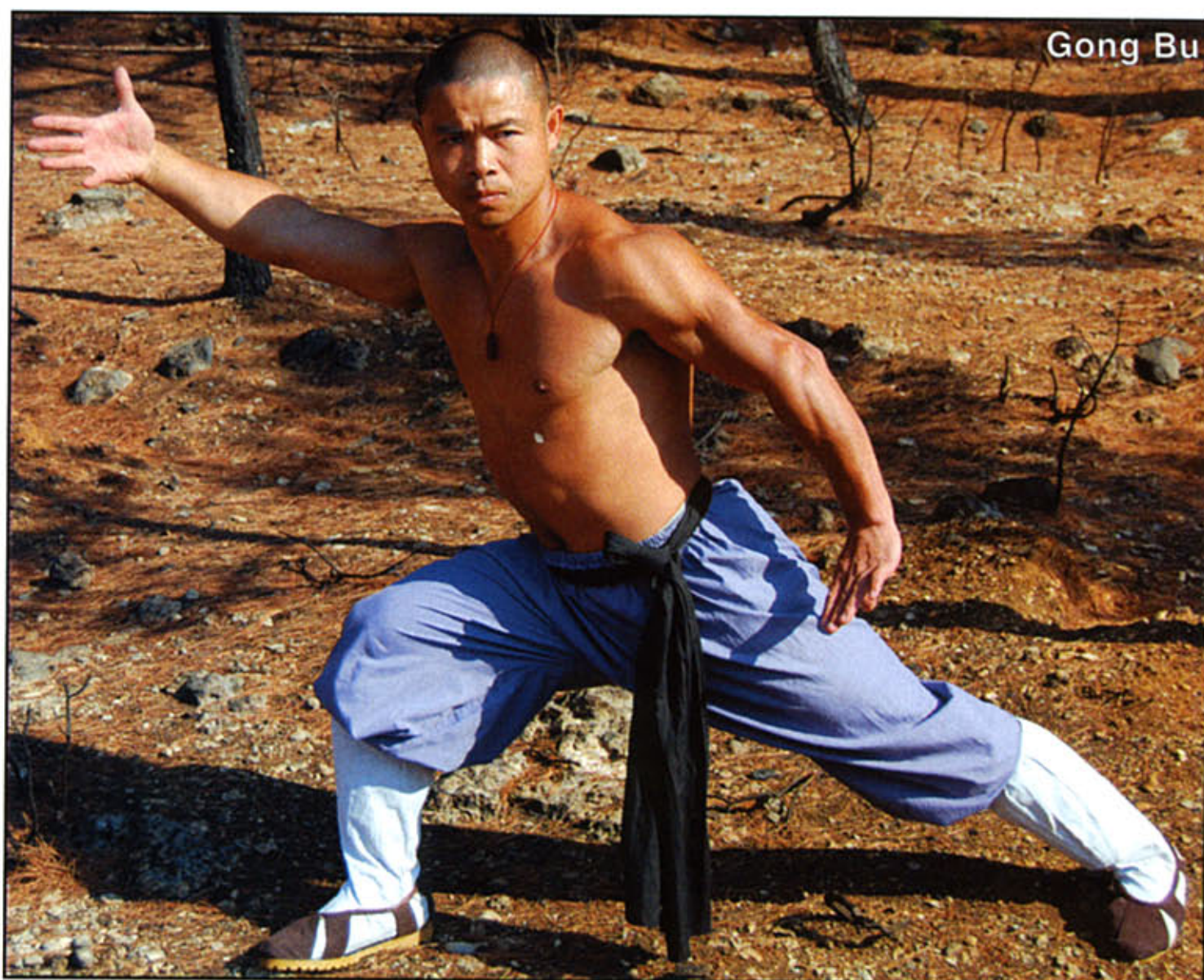
Today many of us practice forms and never practice stance but if you do stance work this will revolutionize your form and make it quicker and easier for you to learn new forms. Not only will your body have memory of the stance but your legs will be strong and so will your mind. Practicing stance work is a very good way of building strength in your mind and body at the same time.

### THE MOST IMPORTANT SHAOLIN STANCES

The five most important stances in Shaolin are: Ma Bu, Gong Bu, Pu Bu, Xie Bu, Xue Bu. (If you don't already know these stances I teach them in my DVD: Rou Quan and Shaolin Workout One & 2)

### STANCE STILLNESS

The first thing you must do when you start to train in stance work is practice



Gong Bu

the stance in stillness. All of the stances are equally important but we always practice Ma Bu - also known as horse stance - the most because this is one of the hardest stances.

Start by trying to build up the time you stay in horse stance. But to start with don't be too ambitious. You need to be patient and take it step by step. Don't give yourself a target as to how long you want to stay, just start to practice.

### KEEP YOUR BODY FLAT

"Keep your body flat" which means make sure your back is straight, your bottom tucked in, your knees are in line with your feet, your thighs are as flat as a table so if someone wants to eat their dinner of them then they can!

Check this position in the mirror, not only from the front but also from the side. Focus your mind and focus your breathing.

### RELAX AND BREATHE

It is vitally important that you practice your breath at the same time. Try to make your breathing as even as possible. Make sure that your body doesn't show that it's breathing, i.e.: your shoulders should not rise and fall. When your body starts to get tired then tell it to relax. You can start with your head and work your way to your neck and your shoulders and through your whole body. Relaxation is an integral part of stance work.

Think of nature, a lion isn't tense and panting with its muscles locked as it creeps upon its prey but it is completely relaxed and focused. We need to be the same.

### DON'T HEAR OR SEE OR THINK, JUST DO

We have a saying at the Shaolin Temple, which is: our eyes don't hear anything, our ears don't hear anything, our mind doesn't think anything. This helps us to stay in the stance because doing stance work is a Shaolin meditation.

Slowly build up the time you stay in horse stance, little by little, and when you feel very tired, stand up and do some stretching, shake out your muscles and start again. Understand that you're not just making your leg strong but you're also making your willpower strong.



Xie Bu

## SET GOALS

Once you have been doing this for a few weeks you can then start to set some goals. Start with five or ten minutes of horse stance and don't move. Move on to fifteen minutes. Make sure you keep low and you don't change position or get higher as you get tired. You have to begin low and stay low.

## MAKE THINGS DIFFICULT FOR YOURSELF

When you can stay in horse stance for half-an-hour then you can start to make things more difficult for yourself. You can do this in a number of different ways. You can hold a weight in your hands so that you now practice your arms and your legs at the same time. You can put small plastic glasses (they must be unbreakable) of water on your arms,

legs, shoulder or head so if your movement isn't stable then the water will spill. This checks your balance.

Another way to practice is to stand on a post. This makes it harder for you because you only have a small place and you have to stay high. These are all traditional ways to practice but they are very effective. Practicing this way will give you strength, stamina and good balance. And don't forget to practice your Qi so that not only are you becoming externally stronger but you are also becoming internally stronger.

You can also hold the other stances in stillness but the horse stance is the stance we practice most at Shaolin.

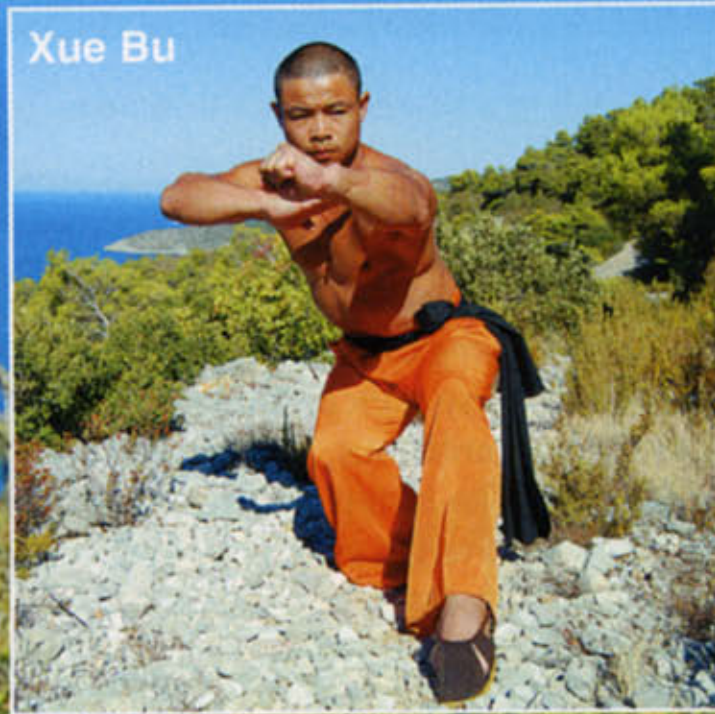
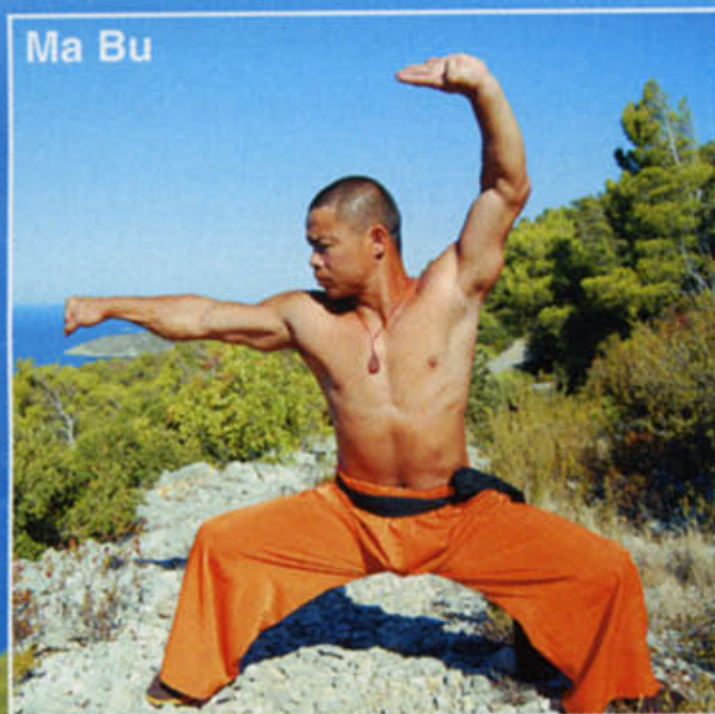
## MOVING STANCE

Alongside the stillness training you should also practice stance and move-

ment together. You stay in horse stance then you do some traditional punches then you change into another stance to do different punches. Stance is always linked with punch. So when you practice five stances then you also practice five punches. The traditional punch names are: gong bu chong quan, ma bu chong quan, pu bu bian gung bu chong quan, li bu chong quan (Shaolin Workout 1 & 2 demonstrate this). Build up how many punches you do each time.

## THE DOOR TO SHAOLIN IS NOW OPEN TO YOU

If you practice this way you will have an excellent foundation for when you move on to learn Shaolin forms. Not only will you be able to learn them quickly but also you will be able to execute the moves in a very precise way.



Having a strong horse stance is one of the keys that open the doors to Shaolin. If you have a strong horse stance this means that you have a strong mind and strong legs, which means you will have greater staying power when you run or you fight in the ring, or you practice qi gong. All of these benefits come from just one simple stance, which can then be used in a myriad of different forms and with not only Shaolin martial arts but all martial arts.

**Pu Bu**

***In next month's issue: Unlock the Secret of Shaolin Kicks***

*Shifu Yan Lei is a 34th generation fighting disciple from the Shaolin Temple in Henan Province, China. As well as teaching privately and running Shaolin Brighton he has a wide range of Shaolin martial arts instructional DVDs. This is the first time in the West that many of these practices have been taught. More details can be found on: [www.shifuyanlei.co.uk](http://www.shifuyanlei.co.uk)*

