

My Impressions of Yip Man Tong in Foshan

by Chu Shong Tin

November 9th, 2002 was the grand opening of “Ip Man Tong” in Foshan City, China. The Hong Kong Ving Tsun Athletic Association organised a tour and more than a hundred Ving Tsun practitioners, both local and from abroad attended the ceremony. Those who participated in the grand opening got on an uniform, compliment of The Hong Kong Ving Tsun Athletic Association and looked rather chic. The event had drew Ving Tsun practitioners from directly under Grand Master Ip Man lineage, Ving Tsun practitioners in Foshan along with its’ local residents, altogether two thousand odd people attended. Apparently, this was the biggest event in Foshan City’s history, and was really an exciting time for everyone there.

After the delivery of opening address by Mr. Leung, Principal of Foshan Museum, and the presentation of banners and mirrors to the Museum by the guests, everyone went inside to explore. Upon entering, the space imposed on me a sense of simple elegance yet with modern touches, a perfect complement to a martial arts Grand Master but one who carried himself like a Confucian scholar. One felt at home but at the same time inspiring great respect for their host, Grand Master Ip Man. Obviously the organisers and the architects had put a lot of effort into the Museum’s making, otherwise we would not have such a brilliantly designed architectural piece.

The exhibits in the Museum are categorised into (i) Grand Master Ip Man’s wooden dummy, the hundred or so photos and also a video of Grand Master Ip demonstrating the wooden dummy form (ii) bronze statue of Grand Master Ip Man along with some candid pictures (iii) photos of Ving Tsun practitioners, both Chinese and Foreigners training in all corners of the world. All of them in their own ways contribute to the promotion of the art of Ving Tsun.

When I saw the photos of Grand Master Ip Man taken with the first ever group of Hong Kong students, I was immediately reminded of the time and different emotions overwhelmed me. The photo was taken in August 1950. The men in the photos started training with Grand Master Ip Man June that year, and after a couple of months, most of them quitted. Only two students, Mr. Leung Sheung, and Mr. Lok Yiu remained. Mr. Leung persevered because he had had a lot of experience with other forms of martial arts and he believes that Ving Tsun is an excellent style to learn so he decided to keep on training.

In those days, Mr. Leung and Mr. Lok were having a very tough time financially, but they still tried their best to provide support towards Grand Master’s living. In 1951, I was accepted as a student of Grand Master Ip Man, and the three of us became a trio in supporting his everyday’s needs. Although the times were tough, every new year, we still managed to give a gift of clothing to Grand Master Ip. If our money was not too tight, we would give *Cheong Sam* (a style of Chinese suit made with imported fabric), otherwise we would give a *Da Shing Fui* (a style of Chinese suit made with local fabric for day to day wear) along with a pair of new shoes and some socks.

The way we looked after Grand Master Ip is in my mind more worthy than a millionaire spending a fortune on him.

So in my view, were it not for Mr. Leung and Mr. Lok continual training in spite of their financial hardship, which in turn allowed Grand Master Ip to continue his teaching at the Association of Restaurant Workers of Hong Kong, Ving Tsun could not grow to what it is today, a world renown style of martial arts. What we have achieved today would also not be possible, this gathering at Foshan of practitioners from all over the world, and the building of a memorial museum “Ip Man Tong” dedicated to Grand Master Ip by the Cultural Council of Foshan City.

Even if Grand Master Ip was one in a million and possesses extraordinary martial arts prowess, that alone could not have done any good were it not for the dedication and insistence of Mr. Leung and Mr. Lok to continue their training. Grand Master Ip’s life history may also have to be rewritten. Perhaps we will not have today’s opening ceremony of “Ip Man Tong” at all. I believe that when we reminisce about Grand Master Ip, about the opportunity to study this excellent style of martial arts that he presented us with, we should at the same time, appreciate the contribution of our two most senior students, Mr. Leung and Mr. Lok as well.

Furthermore, it was Mr. Lee Tin Pui (aka Lee Man), a friend and student of Grand Master Ip, that introduced him to the Association of Restaurant Workers of Hong Kong. In fact, his final resting place is right next to Grand Master Ip’s. Every year I pay my respect to both Grand Master Ip and to Mr. Lee. Mr. Lee also, is a person worthy of a place in our hearts.

From what I can see in “Ip Man Tong”, there is an abundance of information about Grand Master Ip and his students, and visitors will no doubt learn a lot from visiting. I highly recommend it to all students of Ving Tsun and indeed to martial artists of any style. It is definitely worth seeing and money well spent.

Lastly, I have to thank the Cultural Council of Foshan City for their support in building the Museum and also the Ip Man Tong Development Council museum working group and committee, for their dedication, and a job well done, and also support from friends from all over the world. All of them has enabled “Ip Man Tong” to be built without any hindrance, and all student Ving Tsun can now share the luster and glory of the system, and what Ving Tsun has evolved into today, a main stream and prominent martial arts style.

Note: Although Grand Master Ip is very proficient in his martial arts prowess, he is very mild mannered, carried himself like a gentleman and has the aura of a Confucian scholar rather than a warrior. It is not until his passing away that his friends dedicated the title “Grand Master” to him.