

Oliver comes to Sibu to perfect his kung fu skills

By RAYMOND TAN



Mr Gilsenan demonstrates two white crane movements.

SIBU:— There is a Chinese saying, "When you drink water, you must think of its source".

Oliver Gilsenan is a Canadian from Montreal. For three months, he has retreated to our small town, which, geographically, is quite unknown to his part of the world. (Probably, before his coming, Sibu was unknown to him as well.)

But, this does not matter to Oliver, for he has come to seek what he cannot find much in his country.

Oliver, 21, is here to perfect the Chinese martial art of the white crane, which he has learnt since he was 15 and of which he is assistant instructor in Montreal now.

When I first met him, I was astonished. Instinctively, I questioned: "Why does he choose Sibu as his base of training?"

From the movies, I learn that westerners will turn to places like Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and may be, most likely, China for such training. (Remember? In movies like *The Karate Kid*, *The Iron Silk*, etc.?)

But, for Oliver, Sibu is his source. His master, another Canadian by the

name of Lorne Bernard, had also been here to be trained and perfected the art a few years ago.

More importantly, the art of the white crane was passed to them by a local from here, who emigrated there 15 years ago. In his school days and childhood, Master Augustine Ngu, now in his 30s, and the pioneer of the White Crane Kungfu in Canada, was just an ordinary kid residing here. Though a faithful student of the art then, he remained to be his humble self.

But today, his name rings a bell in the Chinese kungfu arena in Canada, and today also, he had not only successfully opened a school in Montreal, but has also spreaded its branch to Toronto.

According to Oliver, Chinese Kungfu has gained popularity throughout the Western land. In his visit here, he was surprised that there's more enthusiastic students in his Western homeland than the place here, though considered to be the oriental source. Why is it so? Why is such a valued oriental culture fading in our society?

In our casual conversation, we came up with a same conclusion. Whatever that one has and has

it abundantly, one tends not to value it. The local young people of today tend to be more interested in the Western rock music and fashion, and look at the Western way of life as something presti-

gious. As such, their own culture fades, as it gives way to the sophistication of this modern world.

Oliver felt sad about this. Coming from the Western land, where it has so much been adored

by the oriental youngsters, he felt that the young people here should cultivate a deep interest in their own culture.

Appreciation

Though brought up in a Western atmosphere, he has come into close contact with the Chinese, and has since then, had a deep appreciation for the Chinese culture.

He described the oriental culture as something that focuses so much on the development of one's inner-self.

He gave the example of the martial art that he is learning now.

To him, the Chinese kungfu stresses a lot on one's breathing to bring out one's inner strength.

This is being done through the practice of breathing with the help of the stomach area (known to the Chinese as the "Dan Tien" style).



Mr Gilsenan...Sibu is my source.

Another aspect of the inner force of the art that he is presently learning is the study of the weak points of a body. Known as the "Sich Dao" system, a kungfu student will learn how to make use of the time and blood circulation in one's body to touch his various weak points. Such art is also commonly known as "Dien Sieh" or "Dien Mai".

To Oliver, this is something very extraordinary.

As such, he is very respectful to the culture. In fact, this is one of the many things that he has learnt in his close association with the culture.

Therefore, as he put it, Chinese kungfu was a step higher in the learning of life.

"Unlike other forms of martial art, it is not something that you can see when you first learn," he explained.

Therefore, he said, one needed patience and toleration in order to perfect the art. For this, I am confident that he has achieved the basic discipline of the Orient.

While here, Oliver has

also learnt to be respectful to the elders.

"Before I came," he told me, "my instructor has been constantly reminding me that respect is a very important element in the life of a Chinese."

Therefore, throughout the interview that day, I heard him addressing his instructor politely as Master Lee whenever he had to consult the latter.

This is something that today's youngsters in our society has not learnt to appreciate.

Oliver is also a student of the Concordia University in Montreal, majoring in History and minoring in Commerce.

He first took up the art as a form of hobby. Now, white crane martial art is a way of his living. He promised me that he would be back in two years' time, as there was so much more to be learnt.

Post understands from other sources that during his time here, he had been challenged by a member of another oriental martial art's club, and the latter was not his match.