

## HISTORY

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# The beginnings of Yang's Martial Arts Association Poland. Thirty years of activity

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### Abstract

**Background, Aims and Objectives.** The purpose of this work was to investigate and describe the circumstances surrounding the founding of YMAA Poland (a subordinate to YMAA International) and its activities between 1986–2016. Yang's Martial Arts Association (YMAA) was founded by Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming. The author of this paper proposes to reconstruct the events preceding the establishment of YMAA Poland on the basis of available material, and briefly analyze and present its activity with special focus on its early years. For this purpose, the first part of the paper presents a profile of Dr. Yang Jwing Ming. In a separate section, a summary of the position of martial arts in Poland prior to 1986 is presented. At that time a successful attempt was made to contact the Chinese Kung Fu/Tai Chi Master, Dr Yang Jwing-Ming, and is described. This contact, thanks to the efforts of the Polish instructor Tadeusz Gacki, this contact, culminated in the founding of YMAA Poland. The early years of the organisation's activities, and the main directions of its development up to 2016 are described in the last part of the paper.

**Methods.** A qualitative analysis of the sources and the materials collected during the library and archival research was applied. Tadeusz Gacki's private archive provided the primary sources. The most important material was the correspondence between himself and Master Yang, some YMAA documents (including the founding files), video cassettes and photographs. All this material is of historic value and is published for the first time (with the permission of Tadeusz Gacki). The other main source is Tadeusz Gacki the founder of YMAA Poland himself, whom the author interviewed in 2016 and with whom constant contact was maintained while this article was being written. Another important informant was the current president of YMAA Poland, Robert Was (interviewed in 2015), who provided particular information on the current direction of the organisation's development. Information collected during participant observation (YMAA member since 2005) has been used as a supplement.

**Results.** A view of the circumstances of the creation of YMAA Poland emerges from the analysed material. The collected material facilitated the recreation of the historical background to the events preceding the founding of the organisation, and highlighted the main problems the Polish instructors had to deal with in organising such an ambitious project. Thanks to the archival material, supported by interviews with Tadeusz Gacki and Robert Was, a more complete insight into the process of establishing the first international Chinese martial arts organization in Poland has been achieved.

**Conclusions.** YMAA Poland was established in 1986 after the first visit of Master Yang Jwing-Ming to Tychy, Poland. It was the first YMAA school outside the US. Since that time, Polish martial arts enthusiasts have benefitted from the opportunity to contact and learn from the world's leading specialists. YMAA Poland has been actively promoting Chinese martial arts in Poland during the 30 years of its activity and has trained many high ranking instructors. It is a dynamic institution, and an important component of the YMAA International community.

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***"Poland was the land from where the adventure of YMAA outside the United States, began and expanded".***

***Robert Was, President of YMAA East European Headquarters***

### **Introduction. Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming and Yang's Martial Arts Association (YMAA) International**

Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming was born on August 11, 1946 in Xinzhu Xian, Taiwan [Yang 1990]. When he was fifteen he started his Kung Fu (Gongfu) training of the Shaolin White Crane (Bai He) with Master Cheng, Gin Gsao. In thirteen years of study (1961-1974) under Master Cheng, Yang Jwing Ming became an expert in the White Crane style of Chinese martial arts. He also mastered various weapons such as saber, staff, spear, trident, two short rods, and many others. With the same master he also studied White Crane Qin Na (or Chin Na), Tui Na and Dian Xue massages, and herbal treatment. When he was sixteen, he began the study of Taijiquan (Yang Style) under Master Kao, Tao (when he left Taiwan, the contact with the master ended. Master Yang found him after years and awarded to the rank of YMAA Grandmaster). Yang Jwing-Ming continued his practice and study of Taijiquan with Master Li, Mao-Ching also with his training partner Mr. Wilson Chen in Taipei. Yang Jwing Ming has mastered the Taiji bare hand sequence, pushing hands, the two-man fighting sequence, Taiji sword, saber, and Qigong [Yang 2016].

Asked about the reason he started practicing Gongfu, Dr. Yang answered: *"(...) I became interested in martial arts partly because I grew up in a traditional Chinese society. I was born right after World War II in Yang's Village, which consisted of more than 600 relatives and family members living together. Back then, it was not uncommon to see many people around you training Kung Fu. Serious martial arts practitioners and highly-skilled masters were much more prevalent than they are today. Training Kung Fu was as common as learning to play an instrument, or playing sports. Martial arts movies and martial arts street performers were also very popular. Whenever I saw martial artists performing in the movies or on the street, it made me very excited and increased my desire to learn it. Because training martial arts was so popular, my parents were not surprised that I wanted to train Kung Fu and did not object to it. Also, because Chiang, Kai-Shek's party was aggressively preparing for war against the Chinese Communists, there were many people who were searching for ways to condition themselves both physically and psychologically. Training martial arts proved to be one of the best ways of reaching this goal"* [Joyce 2012].

At the age of eighteen he entered Tamkang College in Taipei Xian to study physics and also began practice

of traditional Shaolin Long Fist (Changquan or Chang Chuan) with Master Li, Mao-Ching at the Tamkang College Guoshu Club (1964-1968). Soon he became an assistant instructor under Master Li. In 1971 he completed his M.S. degree in physics at the National Taiwan University and then served in the Chinese Air Force from 1971 to 1972. In the service, Master Yang taught physics at the Junior Academy of the Chinese Air Force. He also started teaching Wushu, gathering valuable experience as an instructor. After being honorably discharged in 1972, he returned to Tamkang College to teach physics and continued practice under Master Li, Mao-Ching. From Master Li, Master Yang learned Northern style Gongfu, which includes both bare hand techniques, especially kicking, and numerous weapons. This meant that his training as a master of martial arts had become complex [Yang 1990].

In 1974, Yang Jwing Ming decided to study Mechanical Engineering at Purdue University, United States. But it was also a new opportunity for practicing Gongfu. A few students asked him to teach Gongfu and Taijiquan. Master Yang agreed and soon Purdue University Chinese Kung Fu Research Club was founded in the spring of 1975. Because he was a diligent student, in May, 1978 he was awarded a PhD. in Mechanical Engineering by Purdue. In 1980 he had moved to Houston and started working in Texas Instruments. There he founded Yang's Shaolin Kung Fu Academy. But the most important period began on October 1, 1982, when Yang's Martial Arts Association was established in Boston, MA. Two years later, in January 1984, Dr Yang quit his job and decided to devote himself to the practice and teaching of Chinese martial arts and traditional methods for maintaining health. In 1986 he purchased property in Jamaica Plain in a suburb of Boston and assigned it to be the headquarters of his new organization, Yang's Martial Arts Association. The organization grew, and from July 1, 1989 became one of the sections of the parent organization, designed to preserve and promote oriental culture, Yang Oriental Arts Association, Inc. (YOAA, Inc.). The headquarters of YOAA was Roslindale, Massachusetts, USA [Yang 1990].

The main object of YMAA was to preserve traditional Chinese Kung Fu and Qigong. It was also important to present to the Western world the legacy of Eastern medical knowledge that accompanied Chinese martial arts. There was great interest and the project grew. Currently, YMAA is an international organization, including 60 schools in Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Chile, France, Holland, Hungary, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Founded in 1984, YMAA Publication Center has published many of Dr. Yang's groundbreaking books and videos, and is a pioneer in the cultural exchange between the East and West. It also supports the teaching and practice of Chinese martial arts and incorporates a scientific perspective, because Dr.

Yang combines a scientific narrative of the traditional methods of Chinese medicine and philosophy.

Since 2004, a new project has been started. Dr. Yang has worked to develop the nonprofit YMAA Retreat Center, a training facility in Humboldt County, CA. Here a selected group of students is trained in a comprehensive 10-year Gongfu/Taiji/Qigong program. At this place Dr. Yang wishes to preserve traditional Chinese martial arts to the standards and quality of ancient times. He still remains the chief supervisor of YMAA International, but after almost three decades of overseeing and directing YMAA International, Dr. Yang officially passed down the YMAA school legacy to his younger son, Nicholas in January 2008 ([ymaa-retreat-center.org/history](http://ymaa-retreat-center.org/history) 2016). Dr. Yang is also Vice President of the International Wushu-San Shou Dao Association, Co-Leader of the 1994 North American Martial Arts Demo Team, Honorary Member of the American Shiatsu Association, Honorary Adviser of the Martial Arts of China Historical Society, Honorable Appointee to the Eastern U.S. Kung-Fu Federation. He received the following awards: Prix Bushido, French Book Award, 1st Place, 1997, Inside Kung Fu Magazine – Man of the Year 1990, Black Belt Magazine – Kung Fu Artist of the Year 2000, Inside Kung Fu Magazine – Man of the Year 2007, Martial Arts Publisher of the Year 2008 by the 11th World Congress on Qigong and TCM, Dr. Effie Chow and the American Qigong Association ([ymaa.com/publishing/authors/dr.yang\\_jwing-ming](http://ymaa.com/publishing/authors/dr.yang_jwing-ming) 2016). He promotes the traditional approach to students and to teaching, while maintaining openness to new challenges:

*“Art takes a lot of time and the right mind to truly appreciate and enjoy. Many things we do in our everyday lives and careers can be considered very complex and beautiful forms of art. Whether it is martial arts, music, writing, painting, engineering, speaking a language, healing and helping people, playing sports, playing chess, or whatever we concentrate on and dedicate ourselves to, the development and true feeling of the breadth of each art-form can only be felt when practiced diligently, with discipline, with humility, and with the right intentions. Without these things, the art you practice will always be only on the surface. You should continue searching deeper and deeper into your practice. Keep finding resources and people to learn from and help lead you. Don't get stuck in the same spot. What you will discover is so rewarding. Keep your cup empty and you will always see the beautiful horizon ahead. If your cup is full, then there will be too many clouds obstructing your view. I began training martial arts because I wanted to fight, but from that time until now, after more than 50 years of practice, it has evolved into something so much more”* [Joyce 2012].

Although he has scaled down his level active involvement in the field of education, Dr. Yang remains a respected authority for teachers and practitioners of martial arts, worldwide.

## Aims and methodology

The purpose of this work was to investigate and describe the circumstances of the founding YMAA Poland (a subordinate to YMAA International) and its activities in 1986-2016. The author of this paper aims to reconstruct the events preceding the establishment of YMAA Poland of available material and to briefly analyze and present its activity with a special focus on the first years, key for its activity. For this purpose, the first part of the paper presents a profile of Dr. Yang Jwing Ming. In a separate section, a summary of the position of martial arts in Poland prior to 1986 is presented. At that time, a successful attempt to contact Chinese Kung Fu/Tai Chi Master, Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming is described. This contact, thanks to the efforts of the Polish instructor Tadeusz Gacki, this contact, culminated in the founding of YMAA Poland. The early years of the section's activity and the main directions of development by 2016 are described in the last part of paper.

A qualitative analysis of the sources and the materials collected during the library and archival research were used. Tadeusz Gacki's private archives were the primary sources. The most important were correspondence between him and Master Yang, some YMAA documents (including founding files), video cassettes and photographs. All these materials are of historical value and are published for the first time (with the permission of Tadeusz Gacki). The main source is also the initiator of YMAA Poland, Tadeusz Gacki, whom the author interviewed in 2016 and remained in constant contact while writing this article. Another important informant was the current president of YMAA Poland, Robert Was (interview in 2015), who provided particular information on the current direction of the section development. The information collected during the participant observation (YMAA member since 2005) has been used as a supplement.

## Chinese Martial Arts in Poland before YMAA

The origins of Chinese martial arts in Poland are connected with Pszczyna, a town in the southern Poland, where in 1959 emerged a new movement of self-defense, known as Pszczyna Fighting School or Pszczyna Budo School. Here the classes were animated by two brothers, Jozef and Jan Brudny. The method of fighting which was taught there was combination of the techniques of judo, jujitsu and karate. In 1987, Pszczyna Fighting School introduced Chan Shaolin Si, the first elements of Chinese martial arts. In 1973 in Cracow, Ryszard Piwowonski and Grzegorz Ciembroniewicz founded Chow Gar Section of Kung fu under the auspices of the Academic Sport Association (Polish: AZS) of the Medical Academy and Jagiellonian University.

Three years later, in Warsaw, a new section of Kung fu was initiated by Krzysztof Lozinski. It was the place where the next generation of instructors was created: Jacek Swiatkowski (Polish Association of Hung Gar Kung Fu) and Piotr Osuch (Osuch Kwoon) trained there. In Sopot (1978) Vietnamese master Le Tuan Vin established a new section of Black Dragon Kung fu. Also Warsaw became a very important place for martial artists. In the years 1979-1985 new strong instructors began their activity: Janusz Szymankiewicz and Marek Stefaniak (since 1979, Ving Tsun Kung Fu), Ryszard Jozwiak (1980, Viet Vo Dao, also known as Vietnamese Kung Fu), Andrzej Braksal (1982, Shaolin Chang Quan and Yang Taijiquan in School of Shaolin Kung Fu) and Slawomir Mielczarek (1985, Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu Association). In the same year, 1985, in Tychy, Tadeusz Gacki<sup>1</sup> started to teach kung fu according to the YMAA program (Shaolin Chang Quan and Taijiquan) [gokjasienica.pl/upload\_files/File/info%20tai%20chi.pdf 2016; Muraszko 2006].

The situation of martial arts in Poland in the early 1970's was complicated. In fact, in the minds of the people there were just karate and judo, propagated by the popular action movies. Hardly anyone had heard about the differences between Chinese and Japanese martial arts, even for working instructors it was sometimes a problem. The appearance of Chinese style kung fu was quite a challenge for the pioneer instructors; they had to create new structures and organizations. Polish instructors were expending great efforts to find qualified teachers among the Chinese masters of martial arts for the newly emerging cadre of teachers. Before, most of them learned about kung fu from books, with no personal instruction from a qualified teacher [Was 2015]:

*“In those days, only a few Poles had contact with the real masters of martial arts, and the basic source of knowledge on the subject was usually translations of books distributed by the instructors in the form of a photocopy. While image quality is often not allowed to distinguish, or demonstrating a technique has set a hand up or down,*

<sup>1</sup> Tadeusz Gacki graduated from the instructor's course for foreigners in Jinan (China) in 1986. Promotor of Taijiquan and Qigong, author of several books and many articles (i.e. Tadeusz Gacki, Jacek Wegrzyk, *Chi Kung*, Wydawnictwo Diament, 1990) founder of many organizations promoting Chinese martial arts, now head of the Center of Arts Tai Kung Tao, instructor of Kung Fu and self-defense. In 2008 Judging Committee of the World Famous Martial Arts Artists (appointed by the World Academy of Science and Culture in Hong Kong) honored Tadeusz Gacki with the title “World-renowned martial artist”, giving the occasional medal, a certificate and biography in a special publication on the occasion of the Olympics Beijing, 2008. Tadeusz Gacki brought YMAA to Poland. (gokjasienica.pl/upload\_files/File/info%20tai%20chi.pdf 2016).

*but we were so happy to have access to those materials that altogether we did not bother. Translations also left much to be desired – but you had to start somewhere”* [Wegrzyk 2014].

In Poland, before “kung fu crazy” began in the 80s of the 20th century, to learn the basics of martial arts it was necessary to reach out to foreign books, because there were not any Polish publications about Oriental martial arts. “The black market” turned out to be helpful and the distribution of illegal Polish language translations began. The authors of many of these translations came from the circle of martial arts enthusiasts whose names to this day we do not know. These copies were duplicated by means of home-made photocopiers and then sold on local book markets for small sums. These materials spread very quickly. It was just such a book, *Long Fist* (by Dr. Yang Jwing Ming, 1981), to whom Robert Was, the current president of YMAA Poland, was introduced.

During the last half of the 70's, each section worked independently and the instructors, realizing that this independence would not improve the situation of the Chinese martial arts, decided to initiate change and to create a parent organization. They met in 1982 in Warsaw. The first major public Kung Fu / Wu Shu demonstration also took place at this meeting. “At that meeting, the Kung Fu / Wu Shu Commission of the Central Committee for Physical Culture (CCPC) was founded and Janusz Szymankiewicz and Tadeusz Gacki were chosen to be the leaders. The main goal of the CCPC was to improve the cooperation and the level of both teaching and learning”.

The main goal of the C.C.P.C. was to improve the cooperation and the level of both teaching and learning, by organizing workshops and seminars at the Kung fu centers in Poland [Gacki 1989]. So the Polish instructors decided to work on two fronts: some of them decided to make contact with Wu Shu Federation in China and asked them for help. Tadeusz Gacki decided to contact with some Chinese martial arts masters on his own.

### The story of one letter

The issue of establishing contact with relevant people becomes crucial. Tadeusz Gacki recalls: *At the beginning of this Pszczyna school, the kung fu was “bland”. There was a book by Bricea Tedrner, we began to read it, to learn first forms. Well, but I always wanted to get to the sources. We had three “Black Belt” magazines, there where addresses of different schools, and, we took the first idea to write to some Chinese masters to ask for help* [Gacki 2016]. They sent many letters, but the answer came back only from one person: Mr Yang Jwing Ming. Jacek Wegrzyk, the student of Tadeusz Gacki, described this situation on his blog as an anecdote, partially dedicated to YMAA Poland history:



**Photo 1.** Tadeusz Gacki and Yang Jwing Ming (1986).

*“About two months later, my instructor came up to me after the training: “Jack, you probably know English, would you translate the letter for me?”, he asked. I picked up the envelope and froze – there was a logo on the envelope belonging to a person, who in my opinion was the author of the best books about kung fu, which I have ever read. Dr. Yang, apparently responding to a letter of Tadeusz wrote that he was very touched by the fact that in distant Poland someone was interested in Kung fu, that would be happy to come for two weeks to teach us and that there were no high demands, he would not take from us a penny for tuition. We were to cover only the cost of the ticket and accommodation. He had one more request. He was very sorry that we had to wait two months for the answer, but – unfortunately – he could not read Polish and had to find a translator. Maybe we could write in the future in English? I looked at Tadeusz and I asked: Listen, in which language did you write this letter? In Polish, he answered, I used to learn English at school, but briefly. So I preferred to write in the good Polish language. And did someone else answer? – I asked. No one, replied Tadeusz. When the first shock had worn off, Tadeusz suggested I would help him in translating correspondence. His and my dream suddenly started to become real [Wegrzyk 2014].*

Indeed, the text of the letter was very promising. Because of its historical value, let me quote it in a full version:

*Dear Mr. Gacki,*

*I am sorry to reply to your letter so late because it has taken me one month to find someone to translate your letter. I will be very happy to teach you or any of your students if there is any opportunity. If possible, you or your student can come to the United States to join my school for training and later go back to teach. Alternatively, if your school can afford to pay my travel and living expenses, I can come to Poland periodically such as every three months or half a year to teach. I can stay at least one week for every visit. This will at least guide you and your students to the right path of Kung Fu training. If above possibilities can be realized, after a few years, your school can be then qualified as a real Kung Fu school under my name. I am sorry*



**Photo 2.** Participants of the first seminar with master Yang Jwing –Ming in Tychy, 1986. On the right of the master – Tadeusz Gacki (with the mustache), behind master Yang – Andrzej Braksal, Jarosław Koza (next to Andrzej Braksal in white uniform). Instructors from Warsaw are in black uniforms. Among others: Narcyz Latecki, Jacek Zając, Krzysztof Pobożniak, Dariusz Przybyła.

*I cannot offer any more help. If you write next time, please use English if possible. This will save me a lot of trouble. Thank You. May 3, 1985, dr. Jwing-Ming Yang, President YMA Academy (Private archives of Tadeusz Gacki).*

The decision was simple. Polish students were delighted to invite to Poland a martial artist from the USA but it was not easy. The political reality and financial problems stood in the way of realizing those dreams:

*“In those days it wasn't easy at all. First of all, if you wanted to get an invitation, you had to do as an organization. As a private person it wasn't possible. I led an organization, Chuan Shu and we had applied to the Ministry, but first we had to meet with all the authorities (municipalities, the province, the ministry). Miraculously, we got the permission. We were very happy but then it turned out that in order to be able to buy tickets for the master we must have an agreement to purchase a ticket in dollars. We managed to pass also that obstacle. Then, throughout the year the members of my section were collecting money to buy a ticket. Every month we collected some sum, because we have to remember - that it was a time when even groceries were rationed [Gacki 2016].*

Tadeusz Gacki and his students began intensive preparations for the visit of the master, which was established on April 1986. They also received training materials from the Master Yang – six books and two video cassettes. He asked the Polish team to study them carefully, especially the first Long Fist sequence – Lien Bu Chuan. The Master asked Mr. Gacki to train students in the basic Long Fist stances and drills. After arriving in Poland, Master Yang intended to spend some time to check them, and accordingly qualify students for more advanced exercises. He also gave reassurance in the letter about his expectations about his stay in Poland. He knew the difficult financial situation of Polish people and asked only for his transportation, living, and food (Letter



**Photo 3.** Tadeusz Gacki and Yang Jwing Ming (1986). Behind – Jacek Węgrzyk.

of master Yang to Tadeusz Gacki, November 14, 1985. Private archives of Tadeusz Gacki)<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately, the cassette was recorded in the American system, NTSC and they had to find the suitable video. It was not surprising that the students were very disappointed not being able to watch it in Poland. Then someone brought video player from the United States. By this time Polish students were taught from the book [Gacki 2016]. Master Yang gave then also tips for conducting training in Chinese martial arts:

1. *At the beginning and end of class the class should bow to my picture (this is the old tradition, to bow to a master, even when he's not present in the gym), and then to you.*

<sup>2</sup> “Sending a letter abroad, it was mandatory to enter on the envelope the address of the sender (Polish: nadawca, short version: nad.) Tadeusz, sending his first letter to the United States applied with this rule. The master, having no idea whether this is academic, honorific title or maybe just a name copied “nad.” in the return letter before the name of Tadeusz (In Polish language “nad” may also be understood as something or someone super, extra, “above the rest”). And in this way, in the company of several people who were involved in the preparation of the visit of the Master, we found that Tadek, as a person most of us merit to the case, really deserves to be “Tadeusz Above All”, and not just an ordinary Tadeusz, of which there were many ...”. Author’s correspondence with Jacek Węgrzyk, 2016.



**Photo 4.** Training hall in a basement. A pair on the left-hand – Tadeusz Gacki and Jarosław Koza, on the right Waldemar Gruchlik (instructor from Warsaw / nickname Eagle). In depth – Dariusz Przybyła and Jacek Węgrzyk.



**Photo 5.** Tadeusz Gacki and Yang Jwing Ming (1986).

- You return the bow. The actual bow is complicated and hard to describe, so a simple bow will do until I come.*
2. *Train from the Long Fist and Chin Na books, as well as the tapes I sent you. The sequence in the first tape will take you at least one year to master. I am going to type several more sequences in the coming year, and will send these to you.*
  3. *The more time you practice the better. Four hours a week of practice is minimum.*
  4. *I have enclosed a picture of me. You should enlarge it and put it in the studio to remind the students to practice hard. (...)* (Letter of master Yang to Tadeusz Gacki, September 20, 1985. Private archives of Tadeusz Gacki.).

Tadeusz Gacki and his disciples quickly implemented these principles. They gave them a foretaste of “traditional Asian training”. The principle of bowing, respecting the master was a substitute for meeting the “real” teacher. They also liked that Master Yang so seriously took up the issue of training and set a demanding standard, even though he did not even see his students before. The fact that someone from the world of Chinese masters responded to the call of Polish martial arts’ enthusiasts motivated everyone. Poles were waiting for a man they knew very little about. He was the only one of

many masters to whom the Poles had sent letters asking for help in learning Chinese martial arts, who answered their letter. No one in Poland knew him personally, so there was nothing concrete about him. The meeting in Poland was meant to explain all the doubts and to answer many questions. After a period of intense preparation the time of long-awaited visit had come. In April 1986 at Okęcie Warsaw Airport, there was the first meeting with Master Yang. *We met him without a problem. Then I thought that if we met I would have 1000 questions, but it was as if we had always known each other. There were also language difficulties, but Jacek Wegrzyk was our interpreter, he was living in Katowice those days and was close to us* (Letter of master Yang to Tadeusz Gacki, September 20, 1985. Private archives of Tadeusz Gacki)<sup>3</sup>.

The whole seminar was organized by students and teachers themselves: *It was a great undertaking. Because at that time, in Poland, buying someone a plane ticket, visa and other items was a great undertaking (...). But it was the beginning, after the first visit that created this structure YMAA in Poland* [Was 2015]. A lot of students were practicing at that time, so they had three gyms available. Also in the apartment block where Tadeusz Gacki lived there was a small training club in the basement. The organization had there its own room for an office and a room with training dummies to exercise (for advanced students). In the afternoons, all students trained in the gym. There were also some funny situations at the beginning of the visit. A common habit in contemporary Poland was giving flowers to welcome the guest. But master Yang did not know this tradition, so when he was handed flowers in the gym he did not know what to do with them. Just in case, he put them aside and forgot about them [Gacki 2016].

Times were difficult. Fighting equipment was scarce. All equipment, even weapons had to be made. "Our weapons represented the climate of those times", Tadeusz Gacki mentioned that they even did sharp training sabers, with available materials. Master Yang could not bring weapons. During the first seminar there were also the first official training shirts presented, which later became part of the current training outfit in YMAA. Master Yang brought them [Gacki 2016]. Let us give voice to one of the participants of the seminar, Jarosław Koza, the later president of Eastern Headquarters YMAA, who participated in that first seminar:

*"I am one of those fortunate people who participated in the first seminar with Master Yang and I remember it*

<sup>3</sup> *"When we arrived with the Master Yang with a friendly taxi driver to our destination, the Master looked at the plaque with the name of the city, which was written "Tychy" and neither said nor asked: "Tai-ji - sounds very good." Reluctantly, we explained that in Polish is "Ty-chy", not Tai-ji, but we all thought it was a good omen for the future. And indeed - we were right".* Author's correspondence with Jacek Wegrzyk, 2016.

*very well. Meeting with Master Yang was for me, but I also think that for the other participants, a great experience. Until now, they had practiced mainly Japanese martial arts. Chinese martial arts were poorly known, trained only with the available books or with the help of Vietnamese teachers, but this practice was far from true Gongfu. As we later found out, we all committed the same mistakes and practiced Gongfu based on the experience of Japanese martial arts. Thus, the arrival of the Master was an important event and created a wonderful opportunity to learn something true, especially since we already knew two books by Master Yang: 'Shaolin Chin Na' and 'Shaolin Long Fist Kung Fu'. We trained three times a day. Early in the morning we practiced Taiji. After breakfast, he held training in White Crane and then in the afternoon classes in Long Fist. This training was a new experience for me and I discovered that the real Gongfu is not a trick but a deep knowledge based on centuries-old tradition. All we learned was explained to us and had a deep significance. I was very lucky because Master Yang asked me to participate in all meetings held three times a day, classes. None of the other participants had such a privileged position"* (ymaa.pl/szkola/ymaa-polska/ymaa/72-10-lat-ymaa-polska 2016).

At the end of his visit Dr. Yang declared the Tychy school the YMAA Provisional Headquarters in Poland:

*"I, Dr Jwing-Ming Yang, the founder and the director of Yang's Martial Arts Association (YMAA), have established a temporary YMAA headquarters in Tychy, Poland, during my visit in April, 1986. It has the temporary name 'Ognisko TKKF 'Chuan Shu'". In this Polish headquarters, Mr. Tadeusz Gacki has been assigned as a chief instructor and authorized as the director and coordinator in this headquarters. Other YMAA candidate schools, which are located in Warsaw with instructor Andrzej Braksal, and Gdynia with instructor Jarosław Koza, should coordinate with Mr. Gacki for all instructions, publications, and Martial Arts camps (...). Signed by Dr. Jwing-Ming Yang, President, YMAA International Headquarters"* (Document from October 8, 1986. Private archives of Tadeusz Gacki).

The document also regulated the issues of examination, financing visitors from Headquarters of YMAA invited to stay in Poland. According to new rules, the schools in Poland would become regular YMAA members only if the Polish instructors obtained assistant instructor rank (sixth stripe). After the visit by Master Yang, schools from Gdynia, Gdansk, Warsaw, Poznan, and Kalisz joined the Tychy school, and started using the YMAA training schedule. Four years later Tadeusz Gacki received a letter from the Headquarters of YMAA confirming his position as YMAA instructor at a school in Tychy (Letter of Master Yang to Tadeusz Gacki, April 12, 1990. Private archives of Tadeusz Gacki). On February 22th, 1993, Tadeusz Gacki and the school in Tychy were officially promoted in the YMAA hierarchy to YMAA East European Headquarters. The current president of

this headquarters was Tadeusz Gacki. Among others, the East European Headquarters were to develop Chinese martial arts and Chinese culture in Eastern European countries, and to expand the YMAA international organization by forming YMAA branches and provisional schools in Eastern Europe (Document from February 22, 1993. Private archives of Tadeusz Gacki). "Poland was the land from which it all began, the expansion, or even the adventure of YMAA outside the US", noticed Robert Was (Was 2015), current president of YMAA East European Headquarters. After opening the branch in Poland, YMAA began its development in other countries (e.g. Portugal – 1998, France in 1994, South Africa 1995). So Poland became the first branch outside the United States.

In October of 1988 Mr. Alex Kiesel from YMAA Headquarters in the U.S.A. came to Tychy to lead a two-week seminar with the instructors and advanced students of YMAA provisional schools. He was invited through an official invitation of the Polish Center of Association for Spreading Physical Culture. During the 1986 trip, Master Yang had promised to return every five years and to send a qualified YMAA instructor every year to continue passing down traditional Chinese Kung Fu training as taught at YMAA. For a variety of reasons, no one was able to go in 1987. However, in the spring of 1988, Alex Kiesel accepted the invitation and took two weeks off from his job to travel and continue YMAA training in Poland. He knew that it was just a beginning of Kung fu in Poland, "But since Dr. Yang's original trip two years ago, the quality of martial arts in Poland has improved very much", said. "Approximately 50 people from all over Poland who attended the two-week session were very enthusiastic and interested in new material and theory. About half of the groups were instructors (comparable to YMAA rank of second stripe) and half were advanced students"(...). The students in Poland do not have the luxury of a school with training facilities accommodating to martial arts as we do here in the States (...). The training sessions took place in various gyms, outdoors, sometimes in parking lots or wherever space could be found. (...) The martial arts situation in Poland is improving all the time. (...) There are currently at least 2500 students practicing under the YMAA system throughout Poland, said Alex Kiesel (Special Report from YMAA in Poland, an interview with Alex Kiesel, ymaa.com/files/YMAANews08.pdf 2016)<sup>4</sup>. The second visitor from the United States YMAA was Michael Wiederhold. In November, 1989 he visited the YMAA Provisional School in Poland. The visit was at

<sup>4</sup> During Alex's stay in Poland, a funny episode took place: Alex said he did not like fish, and Jacek (Wegrzyk) translated, that he liked fish. So we served the fish and the poor Alex ate and said nothing. Only at the end he said that he hated fish. And we like fools, ran for the fish, and it was not easy to get them! Even my mother -in-law helped to prepare them .... And he was so polite and ate everything! [Gacki 2016]

the same time as the first Polish Kung Fu Tournament, in Tychy. The jury was composed of instructors of the various schools in Poland and Michael Wiederhold was asked to be one of the judges<sup>5</sup>.

In the following years, other Kung fu and Taichi instructors of YMAA visited Poland (i.e. Wen Ching Wu, 1992; Rami Rones, 1993, 1994; Jeff Pratt, 1995, and others). During the seminars, the Polish students also became acquainted with a basic program of Hsing Yi and Bagua styles (internal styles, not related to Shaolin martial arts). In 1994 the President of EEHQ YMAA (East Europe Headquarter YMAA) was Jaroslaw Koza and the capital of the European Headquarters of YMAA was the city of Gdynia. In 1995 Master Yang also visited Wroclaw. One year later, YMAA Poland had the opportunity to host a special person – Grandmaster Li Mao-Ching, teacher and mentor of Master Yang. Grandmaster Li Mao-Ching has practiced Long Fist and Praying Mantis styles and is a world-renowned expert. Despite his advanced age, he visited Poland again in 2006. During Master Yang's next visit to Poland in 1999, Robert Was became the new EEHQ YMAA President and the main training center was relocated to the city of Cracow (continuing so to this day). Over the years, YMAA Poland has developed in cooperation with other branches of YMAA. Since August 2000, YMAA Summer International Camps with Master Yang have been initiated. The first camp was held in Budapest, and in subsequent years it also took place in Poland (e.g. the town of Sucha Beskidzka – 2001, Ustka – 2003, Brenna – several times). Apart from the Summer Camps, YMAA Poland organizes seminars and workshops for instructors and trainees, where they can improve their skills and also take exams to prove their progress. With time the traditional YMAA material began to include new elements, such as San Da sparring and Chinese San Shou wrestling. This is the result of cooperation with masters of other martial arts organizations, who have been invited to national camps. In 2003, San Da sparring Seminars was conducted in Poland at YMAA national camps, by specialized instructors: Pedro Rodrigues and Victor

<sup>5</sup> (...) This being the first Polish tournament, most of the contestants were very nervous and this showed in many of their performances. A little coaching on how to behave and present themselves in a positive manner would have gone a long way to improving their scores. The second day was the sparring competition. The fighting was very fierce and very exciting to watch but was not true Kung Fu. The sparring looked like kick boxing or Thai boxing. They have not discovered the elegant fluidness that true Kung Fu possesses compared to the stand-there- and-bash-your-way-to-glory attitude of kick boxing. This is not to say that all the fighters were this way. On the contrary, the more successful ones were able to use timing, offense and defense and combined techniques to rise to the championship". Michael Wiederhold [My Experiences in Poland, ymaa.com/files/YMAANews13.pdf 2016].

Casqueiro from Portugal (ymaa.pl/szkola/ymaa-polska/ymaa/57-historia-ymaa-polska 2017).

YMAA Poland is constantly in touch with new masters who are willing to share their skills during several days of seminars, usually organized in Brenna. The last guest of YMAA Poland was Amazigh Zenia, Shuai Jiao, Shou Bo instructor. In recent years, Yang has rarely visited Europe. Owing to his age, he limits his travels and is replaced by his eldest son, Nicolas Yang, the YMAA instructor.

## The Future

The first step on the difficult way was made. Following years brought new changes. YMAA changed with people who led it. Today YMAA Poland is a network of interconnected schools in the cities of Cracow, Gdynia, Sopot / Gdansk, Wroclaw, Warsaw, Katowice, Belchatow, Biaystok and Lublin. In these schools 15 instructors of YMAA have been teaching. What is the future of the organization in Poland? Tadeusz Gacki said:

*“These days we can't fight traditionally, in the fight against the MMA fighter we will lose. The program of the YMAA should also be adapted to the realities, the elements that transmit the tradition should stay, but new changes are needed. Anyone who trains to fight knows that today we have no time for many hours of traditional training, which can take 20 years of practice and we will not check our skills in real fight-for-life. Now the MMA fighter after the year of practicing can turn the opponent into a pulp. That is why YMAA needs a modern training, but some elements that sustain and show the tradition must stay”* [Gacki 2016].

The opinion of Robert Was is similar:

*“Each fighting style must evolve, otherwise it will fall by the wayside. Sooner or later, it has to be adapted to reality. By contrast, the training program that includes traditional structure lasts for many years. Even if there were any changes there were just cosmetic, but in general this is a very traditional message. All these forms are arranged and developed by Master Yang Jwing-Ming, because traditionally there were no systematic forms. Master Yang created it and this structure has been working for many years”* [Was 2015].

Over the years of its activity, YMAA has developed a team of specialists, who have been promoting Kung fu to this day. There are people like Tadeusz Gacki (City of Tychy), Narcyz Latecki (City of Tychy), Jacek Zajac, Piotr Czerepuk, Robert Was (City of Cracow), Maciej Ciesielski (City of Gdynia), Rafal Szulkowski (City of Sopot), Mariusz Targos (City of Wroclaw), Zbigniew Panasewicz (City of Cracow), Bartosz Grad (Cracow).

In 2016 YMAA Poland was celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its activity. Festive seminars and accompanying events were held in November in Katowice.

## Acknowledgement

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## Początki Yang's Martial Arts Association w Polsce. Trzydzieści lat działalności

**Słowa kluczowe:** chińskie sztuki walki, kung-fu, *gongfu*, YMAA, historia sztuk walki, Yang Jwing-Ming

**Abstrakt**

Tło teoretyczne, cele i zadania. Celem pracy było zbadanie i opisanie okoliczności założenia YMAA Poland (filia YMAA International) i jej działalności w latach 1986-2016. Yang's Martial Art Association (YMAA) zostało założone przez dr. Yang Jwing-Minga. Autorka niniejszego artykułu podjęła próbę odtworzenia i zanalizowania zdarzeń poprzedzających założenie YMAA Poland na podstawie zebranych materiałów archiwalnych i wywiadów. W tym celu w pierwszej części artykułu przedstawiono sylwetkę dr. Yang Jwing Minga. W osobnej części przedstawiono szkic sytuacji sztuk walki w Polsce przed 1986 rokiem. Następnie opisano udaną próbę nawiązania kontaktu z chińskim Mistrzem Kung Fu / Tai Chi, doktorem Yang Jwing-Mingiem. Ten kontakt, dzięki wysiłkom polskiego instruktora Tadeusza Gackiego, zakończył się założeniem YMAA Poland. Pierwsze lata działalności sekcji i jej główne kierunki rozwoju do 2016 r. opisano w ostatniej części pracy. Metodologia. W pracy zastosowano jakościową analizę źródeł i materiałów zgromadzonych podczas kwerendy bibliotecznej i archiwalnej. Głównym źródłem było prywatne archiwum Tadeusza Gackiego. Szczególnie istotna była korespondencja między nim a Mistrzem Yangiem, niektóre dokumenty YMAA (w tym dokumenty założycielskie), kasety wideo i zdjęcia. Wszystkie te materiały mają wartość historyczną i są publikowane po raz pierwszy (za zgodą Tadeusza Gackiego). Głównym źródłem jest również sam inicjator YMAA Poland, Tadeusz Gacki, z którymi autorka przeprowadziła wywiad w

2016 roku i pozostawała w stałym kontakcie podczas pisania artykułu. Kolejnym ważnym informatorem był obecny prezes YMAA Poland, Robert Wąs (wywiad w 2015 r.), który przekazał szczegółowe informacje na temat aktualnego kierunku rozwoju sekcji. Jako uzupełnienie wykorzystano informacje zebrane podczas obserwacji uczestników (autorka jest członkiem YMAA Poland od 2005 r.).

Wyniki. Z analizowanych materiałów wyłania się obraz okoliczności powstania YMAA Poland. Zebrane materiały pozwoliły na odtworzenie historycznych wydarzeń poprzedzających założenie sekcji i nakreślenie głównych problemów polskich instruktorów, z którymi musieli sobie radzić przy organizacji tak poważnego projektu. Dzięki materiałom archiwalnym wspieranym przez wywiady z Tadeuszem Gackim i Robertem Wąsem osiągnięto pełniejszy wgląd w proces ustanowienia pierwszej międzynarodowej organizacji chińskich sztuk walki w Polsce.

Wnioski. YMAA Polska powstała w 1986 roku po pierwszej wizycie Mistrza Yang Jwing-Minga w Tychach. Była to pierwsza szkoła YMAA poza USA. Od momentu pierwszego kontaktu z chińskim mistrzem polscy entuzjaści chińskiej sztuki walki mieli okazję uczyć się od najlepszych specjalistów na świecie. Przez 30 lat swojej działalności YMAA Polska aktywnie promuje chińskie sztuki walki, wyszkoliła wielu wysokiej klasy instruktorów i zawodników, jest dynamiczną instytucją i ważną częścią społeczności YMAA International.