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Authentic Shaolin Heritage Training Methods Of 72 Arts Of Shaolin

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The Enduring Legacy of the 72 Arts of Shaolin

For centuries, the Shaolin Temple has stood as a beacon of martial arts mastery, spiritual discipline, and physical perseverance. Among its most treasured and enigmatic contributions to the world of martial arts is the legendary system known as the 72 Arts of Shaolin. These are not merely a collection of fighting techniques but rather a comprehensive and holistic curriculum designed to forge the body, mind, and spirit into an unbreakable whole. The **Authentic Shaolin Heritage Training Methods Of 72 Arts Of Shaolin** represent a profound path of self-cultivation that has been passed down through generations of dedicated monks. In this article, we will explore the genuine practices, historical context, and the underlying philosophy that make these methods a cornerstone of traditional Chinese martial culture.

The term "72 Arts" often conjures images of superhuman feats—breaking iron bars with bare hands, walking on rice paper without leaving a trace, or resisting powerful blows. While these abilities are indeed part of the legend, the authentic training behind them is far more grounded, systematic, and spiritually significant. To understand the true nature of these arts, one must look beyond the myth and appreciate the disciplined, gradual, and holistic approach that defines the Shaolin path. The training methods are deeply intertwined with Chan (Zen) Buddhism, Traditional Chinese Medicine, and a profound understanding of human physiology and psychology.

Understanding the 72 Arts of Shaolin

The 72 Arts, often referred to as *Shaolin Qi Shi Er Yi*, are traditionally categorized into two primary divisions: the internal arts (Nei Gong) and the external arts (Wai Gong). This classification reflects the core principle of Shaolin training—that true martial power arises from the harmonious union of inner energy (Qi) and outer physical strength. The number 72 is symbolic in Buddhist tradition, representing completeness and the manifold paths to enlightenment. In the context of Shaolin, these arts cover a vast spectrum of skills, including bone conditioning, muscle strengthening, tendon transformation, breath control, meditation, and specialized combat applications.

It is crucial to distinguish between the authentic heritage and the many modern adaptations or commercialized versions. The **Authentic Shaolin Heritage Training Methods Of 72 Arts Of Shaolin** are not about quick results or flashy demonstrations. They are rooted in a monastic lifestyle of discipline, frugality, and unwavering dedication. The traditional curriculum was designed to be practiced over many years, often a decade or more, with each stage building upon the previous one. This gradual progression ensures that the practitioner develops not only physical resilience but also the mental fortitude and spiritual insight necessary to wield such power responsibly.

Before delving into specific training methods, it is essential to understand the philosophical bedrock upon which these arts stand. The Shaolin approach is fundamentally holistic. The body is seen as a vessel for the mind, and the mind as a vehicle for the spirit. Training the body without cultivating the mind leads to brute force without wisdom. Training the mind without strengthening the body results in a weak vessel that cannot contain powerful insights. The 72 Arts are designed to develop all three aspects simultaneously.

At the heart of this philosophy is the concept of **Qi**(vital energy). The authentic training methods emphasize the cultivation, circulation, and projection of Qi. This is not a mystical or supernatural concept but a practical one grounded in Chinese medical theory. Through specific breathing techniques, visualization, and postural alignment, practitioners learn to gather Qi, store it in the lower abdomen (Dantian), and direct it throughout the body to enhance strength, endurance, and healing capacity. The external, physical practices are always supported by internal, energetic work. This integration is what distinguishes true Shaolin training from mere athletic conditioning.

Categories of the 72 Arts

The 72 Arts can be broadly grouped into several categories, each focusing on a different aspect of human capability. Understanding these categories provides insight into the comprehensive nature of the system.

External Hardening Arts (Wai Gong)

These arts focus on conditioning the physical body to withstand impact, deliver powerful strikes, and develop extraordinary strength. Common examples include:

- Iron Shirt (Tie Bu Shan): A method of conditioning the torso to withstand punches, kicks, and even blunt weapons. This is achieved through specific breathing, posture, and repeated impact training with bags, sand, or wooden dummies.
- Iron Palm (Tie Sha Zhang): A systematic approach to hardening the hands for breaking bricks, stones, or delivering devastating strikes. The authentic method involves striking progressively harder surfaces over many months, combined with herbal soaks to heal and strengthen the tissue.
- Golden Bell Cover (Jin Zhong Zhao): A higher-level art that integrates breath, visualization, and muscular tension to create a protective "Qi shield" around the body. This is one of the most advanced and revered of the external arts.

Internal Energy Arts (Nei Gong)

These arts focus on cultivating and directing Qi for health, longevity, and martial power. They are often practiced in stillness or slow, deliberate movement.

- Eight Pieces of Brocade (Ba Duan Jin): A classic Qi Gong set that stretches the meridians, regulates the breath, and promotes the smooth flow of Qi. It is often used as a warm-up or a standalone health practice.
- Muscle-Tendon Changing Classic (Yi Jin Jing): A profound method for transforming the physical structure of the body, increasing tendon strength, flexibility, and the capacity to conduct Qi. This practice is foundational for many of the higher-level arts.
- Marrow Washing Classic (Xi Sui Jing): An advanced internal art aimed at purifying the bone marrow, rejuvenating the body, and achieving a state of profound vitality. This is considered one of the highest practices within the Shaolin system.

Combat Application Arts

While the conditioning and internal arts build the foundation, the combat arts apply this power in practical scenarios. These include forms (taolu), specialized techniques, and sparring drills.

- Five Animal Forms (Wu Xing Quan): Imitating the spirit and movement of the Dragon, Tiger, Leopard,

Snake, and Crane. Each animal embodies a different quality of power, speed, and strategy.

- Staff and Weapon Arts: Shaolin is famous for its weapon training, including the staff, spear, sword, and many obscure weapons. The staff, in particular, is considered the grandfather of all weapons.
- Qin Na (Seizing and Locking): Joint locks, pressure point attacks, and grappling techniques that use leverage and anatomical knowledge to control an opponent.

Authentic Training Methods: A Step-by-Step Approach

The **Authentic Shaolin Heritage Training Methods Of 72 Arts Of Shaolin** follow a strict pedagogical sequence. A novice cannot simply decide to practice the Iron Palm. They must first build a foundation of fitness, flexibility, and basic stance training. Here is a realistic progression of how a traditional student would approach the training.

Phase One: Building the Foundation (The First 1-2 Years)

The initial period of training is dedicated to developing basic physical attributes and learning the core principles of the Shaolin method. This phase is often the most challenging because it is repetitive, demanding, and seemingly unglamorous.

- Stance Training (Zhan Zhuang): Holding static postures like Horse Stance (Ma Bu), Bow Stance (Gong Bu), and Cat Stance (Xu Bu) for extended periods. This develops leg strength, structural alignment, and mental endurance. A beginner might start with holding the horse stance for one minute and gradually work up to ten or twenty minutes.
- Basic Conditioning: Running, jumping, crawling, and doing hundreds of repetitions of push-ups, sit-ups, and leg raises. The body must be prepared for the more intense conditioning to come.
- Flexibility Training: Systematic stretching of the legs, hips, back, and shoulders. Shaolin flexibility is not just about splitting but about dynamic, functional range of motion.
- Basic Hand and Foot Drills: Learning the fundamental punches, blocks, kicks, and stepping patterns. These are practiced on air targets and simple striking pads.

Phase Two: Introduction to Qi Gong and Internal Work (Years 2-4)

Once the body is sufficiently prepared, the student is introduced to the internal arts. This is a critical turning point because the student must learn to coordinate breath with movement and begin to sense the flow of Qi.

- Breathing Regulation: Practice of diaphragmatic breathing, reverse breathing, and breath retention. These techniques are practiced in conjunction with standing meditation.
- Ba Duan Jin and Yi Jin Jing: The student learns these classic Qi Gong sets, focusing on slow, mindful execution and precise breath coordination.
- Basic Nei Gong Exercises: Simple exercises to gather Qi, store it in the Dantian, and circulate it through the Ren and Du meridians (Microcosmic Orbit).
- Partner Drills for Sensitivity: Push hands and other sensitivity drills that help the student apply internal principles in dynamic interaction.

Phase Three: Specialized Conditioning (Years 4-7)

At this stage, the student has the physical and energetic foundation to begin specific conditioning for the 72 Arts. The choice of which art to specialize in may depend on the student's body type, temperament, and the guidance of the master.

- Iron Palm Training (Example):

The student begins by striking a bag filled with mung beans or rice for several months. The hand is conditioned gradually, always using herbal soaks to prevent injury and promote healing.

- After the hand is sufficiently conditioned, the bag is filled with progressively harder materials—first sand,

then iron shot, and eventually stone chips.

- Throughout this process, the student practices specific breathing patterns to direct Qi to the hands, preventing damage and enhancing power.
- The final stage involves striking solid objects like bricks or concrete blocks, but only after several years of disciplined preparation.

1. The student learns to tense the body in specific patterns while exhaling forcefully, creating a "bracing" effect that protects the internal organs.
2. Initial impact training involves light tapping with padded sticks or bags, gradually increasing intensity.
3. Over months and years, the student progresses to harder impact tools—wooden sticks, metal bars, and eventually heavy striking poles.
4. This is always combined with Qi Gong to maintain health and prevent internal injury.

Phase Four: Mastery and Teaching (Years 7-10 and Beyond)

The final phase of training is about integration, refinement, and transmission. The student who has persevered through the earlier stages now has a deep understanding of the internal and external aspects of the arts. The focus shifts to:

- Advanced Nei Gong: Deepening the practice of the Marrow Washing Classic and other esoteric internal arts.
- Combat Application Under Pressure: Full-contact sparring using protective gear, as well as weapon sparring with controlled intensity.
- Teaching Methodology: Learning how to transmit the arts to the next generation. This includes understanding the pedagogical sequence, how to correct common mistakes, and how to adapt the training for different students.
- Spiritual Cultivation: Deepening the practice of Chan meditation and integrating the martial arts into a complete path of awakening.

The Role of Herbal Medicine and Recovery

An often-overlooked aspect of the **Authentic Shaolin Heritage Training Methods Of 72 Arts Of Shaolin** is the use of traditional herbal medicine. The Shaolin monks were not only martial artists but also skilled physicians. They developed sophisticated formulas to support the intense physical demands of their training.

- Dit Da Jow (Falling and Hitting Wine): A liniment applied to the hands, arms, and legs after conditioning. It promotes blood circulation, reduces inflammation, and strengthens the tendons and ligaments. Each master may have their own closely guarded recipe.

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