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# Crouching Tigers & Hidden Dragons: Chinese Wushu flourishes in Canada

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By Huang Xiaoyun

TORONTO, Oct. 29 (Xinhua) -- Jonathan Leung had a very different childhood from others of his age. He started the wushu training at five at the Ji Hong Wushu & Taichi College in Canada's western city of Edmonton. And he had to practice certain movements every day while his peers went out to play.

The 18-years-old Leung just represented Team Canada in the non-combative Taolu discipline at the 10th World Wushu Championships (WWC) at Ricoh Coliseum in Toronto, which was held from October 24 to 29. More than 600 competitors from 72 countries participated in the event held by International Wushu Federation every two years.

Wushu, the Chinese term for Martial Arts, is divided into two groups. The combative elements of Wushu are known as Sanshou and feature spectacular full contact fighting. The non-combative, ritualistic elements are known as Taolu and consist of highly artistic and precise routines.

It is the first time the event has taken place in Canada, and the second time in North America. This year Canada is represented by 20 athletes including Leung, 10 in Taolu discipline and 10 in Sanshou segment. Some of them are in the top rankings in the world and already won some international medals including Pan American Wushu Championships, Junior World Championships.

"We see it is a great opportunity to raise awareness about Wushu in Canada and in the world," Sunny Tang, President of Wushu Canada, said of the championship in a recent interview with Xinhua.

Though this sport was officially born in 1949, when the People's Republic of China melded over 300 martial arts disciplines into a single athletic pursuit, Wushu was not introduced as a sport to Canada until 18 years ago.

Before that, Canadians only knew Wushu as a traditional Chinese martial art from action movies starring Wushu masters like Jack Chan or Bruce Lee.

Tang, also president of Sunny Tang Martial Arts Center in Toronto, organized Canada's first national Wushu team for the 3rd World Wushu Championships in 1993.

"Our team was very weak," recalled Tang. "There was not a tiny chance for us to win a medal, not to mention a gold!"

Situation is totally different now. Margherita Cina, one of Tang's students, brought the first gold medal for Team Canada in Taolu Women's Jianshu (double-edged sword) on October 26. Cina, a first year student of Arts and Sciences at McMaster University joined Sunny Tang Martial Arts Centre when she was five years old.

"Canada is ranked No. 1 among the non-Asian countries in Wushu competition!" Eileen Fauster, President Wushu Ontario, said with pride.

The number of registered members of Wushu Canada has increased to more than 5,000 in five years, including 3,600 in Ontario. Since 2006, Wushu Ontario has received funding from the provincial government every year to further increase awareness of the sport.

Last year, Canadian Wushu athletes brought home 13 medals - including three gold medals in

the Taolu competition - from the World Junior Wushu Championships in Indonesia. Canada finished fifth in overall medal standings at the event. This is the highest ranking for a North American country in this traditionally Asian-dominated sport.

"Students not only learn how to defend themselves, but also learn how to be self-disciplined, humble and good team players," said Fauster, also a student of the Sunny Tang Martial Arts Centre. Fauster has practiced Ving Tsun, one of the Wushu disciplines, for 10 years and won the Bronze medal at the 2nd World Traditional Wushu Championships in Zhengzhou, China in 2006 at an age of 44.

Hongyuan Luo, President of Ji Hong Wushu & Taichi College, attributed the growth of Wushu in Canada to the increased international exchanges of talents and theories.

Wushu is an official sport in Asia. Many Asian countries have professional Wushu athletes, while all the athletes in Canada are amateurs. China, where Wushu is originated, has always the highest level of Wushu performance and competition.

In recent years, many professional Wushu coaches and gold medal winners from China and other Asian countries came to Canada to coach students in Wushu schools, or set up their own Wushu schools. The most up-to-date Wushu teaching practices they brought to Canada helped the country's Wushu practitioners a lot at both theoretical and technical level.

Luo's own experience is a good example. Luo and his wife Daijuan Gu were both Wushu majors at the University of Guangzhou, China and practiced Taichi since childhood. They had been instructors and lecturers at the South China Normal University in Guangzhou before they moved to Edmonton in 1988 and set up Ji HongWushu & Taichi College in Edmonton in 1989.

Now Luo's college has three branches in Edmonton, Calgary, and Toronto, with a total of more than 1,000 students. Some of their students in Edmonton have been learning Taichi from them since 1989 because they found out there is always something new to learn.

"Wushu can push people to work hard and be the best," said Fauster. "I see our Wushu athletes have won scholarships and bursaries from universities. They always want to be the best."

Editor: Anne Tang

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