

## **Which Monastic Martial Arts Styles in Real Life are Closest to Jedi Training & Culture in Star Wars?**

I have been a Star Wars and martial arts fan for all my life, and both are intertwined for me. My childhood goal was always to journey to Dagobah, find a master Yoda, and be trained! Much of my adult life has been a way of trying to approach this fantasy within the opportunities in our real world. Here is my top 6 run down of the closest possibilities our historical and current reality has offered for those Jedi-fantasists among us:

### 6. The Knights Templar & Christianity

The warrior monks famous in Western history. The sword/cross symbolism providing a link between combat and faith. A complicated political relationship with the establishments of the time, losing their way (?) and ultimately betrayed, hunted down and those who could not flee into hiding were executed. Their Order 66 became our Friday 13th.

### 5. Samurai & Shinto:

This is the tradition that is name-checked the most as the inspiration for the Jedi, partly because of the Kurosawa film influences. Yes, they have swords, But they are not monks. As far as I am aware, the Shinto priests are separate from the warrior class and do not train martially, whilst the Samurai themselves do not perform monastic duties. Also the Shinto framework does not have the equivalent of 'The Force', rather focuses on separate spirit entities in nature.

### 4. Emei & Buddhism:

This is one of the top three legendary monastic kung fu mountain communities in China, along with Shaolin and Wudang (see below). Although the martial arts have not been preserved too well. Some nice practices, but sword is not central. Obviously Buddhism has been linked to the conduct of the Jedi and their focus on non-attachment, and this was clearly brought in, in a big way in the prequel's account of the Jedi. Anakin's big struggle!

### 3. Vedic culture, Yoga & Kalaripayattu:

Claimed to be one the oldest martial arts in the world, Kalaripayattu and related practices in south India are closely connected to yoga physical practice and philosophy, and intertwined with Ayurveda medicine. So we have in the south Indian traditions a system of health and mind cultivation, healing arts and martial practices linked to both Vedic/Hindu and Buddhist traditions. Some cool sword practices. The warrior posture in yoga symbolises the internal and external aspect of development. While these traditions influenced the creation of my number 2 choice below, you will struggle to find the practice of these arts within a monastic community in the present day.

### 2. Shaolin Monks & Chan Buddhism

The most famous warrior monks on the planet in present day. Scripture, a framework for mind, body and spirit and fighting arts all intertwined. After the development of this community's martial arts from the legendary visit by Bodhidharma from India, Shaolin Monks were called on by various ruling dynasties to intervene in disputes and protect citizens, very close to the role Jedi fulfilled for the Republic, and with all the political

tensions that come with these relationships. Although they do wield swords amongst other kick-ass instruments, Shaolin's main weapon is the staff, Again the Buddhist ideology permeates the prequel Star Wars movies but it's hard to find an equivalent of The Force in Shaolin discourse.

### 1. Top Choice - Wudang Monks & Daoism

This community, in my view is the closest to Jedi culture, and has been the silent influence on Star Wars Mythology the whole time. But they have only been known to the West in the last couple of decades.

So who are they? You may have already come across them - The Wu Tang Clan based their work and imagery on kung fu B movies that featured the power of Wudang Sword. Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon focuses on Wudang culture and the importance of a particular sword, The Green Destiny. I personally love The Karate Kid (2010) remake as it features Wudang Mountain as Mr Han's (the Miyagi figure) source of kung fu, and the monks there are actually featured in their movie practicing their arts, not actors. The clip of this bit of the movie is here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYQG-nk9v\\_E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYQG-nk9v_E) and behind the scenes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1fIIA-EtOk>

So how do they compare to the Jedi? Wudang masters are monks - check. The pinnacle of their extensive martial arts practice is the sword- the closest we have to lightsabers! Both straight swords (Jian) and curved sabres. Importantly, all of their martial arts, health cultivation practices and cosmology are expounded with reference to The Dao (the Force!) - the unfolding patterns of Universal forces (YinYang Theory, 5 Element Theory, etc). Balance and harmony are key ideas in applying these frameworks to both martial arts and the living of life.

Chi is the internal vitality and energetic principle that is cultivated internally as part of all these practices. In particular with practices such as Taiji (Tai Chi) and Bagua, we are encouraged to tune into internal sensations, (feel the force!) as opposed to hammer out muscle-based drills. In their sword practices, Chi and Shen (Mind/Spirit) are paired/fused with the blade and action of the Jian (sword). The sword is used for both physical combat and also shamanic ritualistic practices, exorcisms, and other esoteric functions.

I think Qui-Gon Jinn epitomises the Daoist Jedi, with his focus on the Living Force, mysticism and the central role of lived experience over social structures (even the Jedi council).

There are clear influences of Daoism on Japanese Shinto, and in China Daoist martial arts have been retained within monastic communities. Wudang mountain is the largest and most famous, whereas other communities include Laoshan and Huashan. Many other famed Daoist monk martial arts masters chose to move away from the temple communities and live as hermits in the wild (many fled the cultural revolution to do so). So a Yoda-Dagobah training situation is possible too!

It was this community that attracted the Star Wars fan-boy mind in my adult body when I first discovered Wudang culture after watching Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon. I had

found my personal Jedi Academy. I have devoted much of my adult life to training and now teaching these practices ever since.

Here are some beautiful videos on Wudang culture and Daoism, featuring our own real-life Yoda, Grandmaster Zhong YunLong:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewMECZJr0JM&t=6s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LaULzIYPZf8&t=1197s>

Finally here is another person's take on why Daoism is the real Jedi culture:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rTK3rQ-1PA>

