Kwizera Claudien at World Championship in 2019

By Jejje Muhinde;

Every evening, Alain Bizimana trains for one and half hours after school, he dedicates his daily effort to discipline, preparation and concentration.

Roaring in a cacophonous voice all the way during a training session, the 17- year old is joined by a group of six other young Kung Fu enthusiasts aged between 13-16 years. This is just one group of youth practicing Kung Fu in the Eastern Province, Kayonza district.

Having joined the sport five years ago, Bizimana is the more experienced and trains the rest of the group as an orchestra crescendos them into proximity.

Throughout the years, Rwanda has witnessed the making of numerous Bruce Lee-wannabes with wushu, the Chinese term for “martial arts”. The popular Chinese martial arts are becoming popular across the small East African nation.

“Practicing Kung Fu helps not only to build discipline but also to learn respect for others. Martial arts are based on core values that dominate the practices and teachings, it makes you feel healthy and fit,” said Bizimana.

“While the sport is about self-defense, it also embodies certain characteristics such as confidence, control, focus and respect. Respect is about showing positive feelings and attitudes towards yourself and others, and always taking others into consideration,” He points out.

In September 2019, a martial arts performance was staged in Kigali, to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China.

Kung Fu show staged in Rwanda to celebrate 70th anniversary of founding of Peoples Republic of China

Chinese and Rwandan performers like Bizimana, and other adults as well as children, entertained a full house of about 500 spectators with various Kung Fu performances such as Tai Chi, Wing Chun, Qigong and Sanda.

Emile Rukundo, the vice president of the Rwandan Chinwoo Wushu Kung Fu

Academy says that Kung Fu has become a popular sport in Rwanda.

Rukundo and his colleagues who started the academy in 2017, have since then been receiving Kung Fu teachers from China. About 50 people, including young people, are trained in Kung Fu at the academy.

“Kung Fu has become a popular sport, particularly among school-age children. They find it interesting because it keeps their body in shape, and it teaches them self-defense and self-control,” said Rukundo.

According to Rukundo, the Confucius Institute at the University of Rwanda and the Chinese Embassy in Rwanda have supported the academy through organizing Kung Fu competitions, which have motivated young Rwandans to learn Kung Fu.

The number of Kung Fu clubs in Rwanda has been growing in recent years, according to the Rwanda Kung-fu Federation and the total stands at 31 this year, with over 2,000 registered members.

Kwizera Claudien who has represented Rwanda at several Kung Fu competitions says the reason why he liked Kung Fu Wushu game was because it allows him to use the whole body, legs and arms and various tools where they use swords, clubs and more.

“Chinese martial arts teach an excellent way of life,” Kwizera, adding that the sport helps people become strong, healthy, stay in good shape and develop excellent concentration.

Kwizera says he got a chance to meet Jackie Chan

Kwizera who has been practicing the Chinese martial arts for nearly the last eight years thinks the sport is a lifetime physical exercise that is ideal for one’s health and relieves stress. “Training can ease tension, strengthen your body and help blood circulation. Frequent practice may alleviate depression and anxiety and improves the mood,”

“Martial arts has taken me to places that I never dreamt of, I have made friends with different people from different cultures. I heard of a chance to meet with Jackie Chan, the movie star,” He revealed.

During the first wave of the Covid-19 outbreak, Rwandan Kungfu players and coaches received food donations from the Chinese embassy to assist them in their daily life amid the difficulty caused by the pandemic.