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KUNG-FU®

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CHINESE KUNG-FU: AN OVERVIEW.



THE MAJORITY of people in ancient China were farmers by profession. Any martial arts practiced had to be done in what little leisure time was available. In this way the term "Kung-Fu", meaning leisure time or skilled achievement, came to be applied to the martial arts. Actually, Kung-Fu can mean any type of skilled achievement. A more literal term for fighting art would be *Chung Kuo Wu Su* (Chinese martial art) or simply *Kuo Su* (national art). Several other common colloquialisms used are: *Ch'uan Su*, fist art; *Wu Su*, martial art; and *Ch'uan Fa*, fist method. The most widely known term, Kung-Fu, will be used in this article.

Kung-Fu develops self-defense techniques, health, peace of mind, physical fitness, and is also a mystifyingly beautiful art form. Fighting techniques are practiced for self-defense and as military training. Ancient underworld organizations and secret societies have been known to utilize the martial aspect of Kung-Fu. These techniques are not restricted to empty hand, but also include weaponry of many types and the use of herbal poisons. Health practices include many standing, sitting, and moving internal Kung-Fu exercises called *Nui Gung*. Peace of mind is gained through meditative exercises and relaxation of neural pathways by practicing specific movements. Physical fitness is developed by increasing coordination, strength, speed, and flexibility. In China acrobats, dan-

cers, actors, and school children are all trained with Kung-Fu exercises. As an art form, Kung-Fu emphasizes graceful motion and coordination of movement, and is therefore displayed as entertainment during festivals and holiday gatherings. Thus, to limit Kung-Fu to fighting techniques would hardly represent the art in its entirety.

The first reliable records of Kung-Fu were found on the oracle bones and turtle shells of the Shang Dynasty (1766-1122 B.C.). It is believed to have originated much earlier than this. Stone knives, axes and arrows from the Neolithic Period have been recovered by archaeological excavations in China. Indeed, Hung Ti, the legendary first emperor of China, is known to have used copper swords for

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AN OVERVIEW

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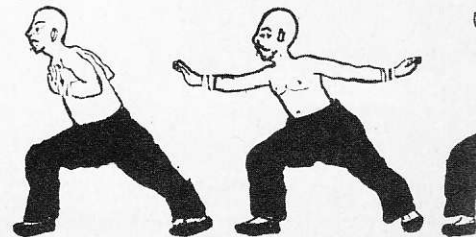
combat. The beginnings of the internal systems of Kung-Fu have a somewhat obscure history. Again, the first recorded evidence of these practices was found among the Shang ruins. Knowledge of internal systems was acquired as early as the Neolithic Age, since bone acupuncture needles have been unearthed from this period.

Martial arts became increasingly popular when the war-like men of Chou from Western China conquered the previous Shang ruler in 1122 B.C. The Chou King moved the capital to Loyang in 770 B.C. and the dynasty came to be known as the Eastern Chou. A notable discovery during this dynasty was by Ben Ch'e, who found that by checking pulses at a point near the wrist he could determine any illness of the internal organs. The period from 770 through 481 B.C. was referred to as the "Spring and Autumn." During this time Kung-Fu flourished and was called *Ch'uan Yung*. From 480 to 256 B.C. was the "Era of Warring States," in which Kung-Fu was termed *Chi Chi Su* (the same characters as used for the Japanese *Jiu-jitsu*). Many well known philosophers appeared during the Warring States Period, such as Confucius, who taught his disciples the martial arts of archery and the sword.

The Ch'in-Han Dynasties (221 B.C. - 220 A.D.) saw the merging of the internal and external systems into a single entity. At this time Kung-Fu was called *Chi Ch'iao*. Various new weapons were incorporated into the martial arts, and Taoists began research on the relationship of voice sounds for curing disorders of the internal organs. They discovered that by making different sounds at specific intervals during a twenty-four hour period, specific ailments could be cured.

During the Three Kingdoms Period (220-265 A.D.), a man named Hua T'o created a method called *Wu Chien Shi* that included the five animal forms: Deer, Bird, Monkey, Tiger, and Bear. It is said that he was taught these movements by a Taoist named Chin Ch'ien. This marked an important milestone in the development of Kung-Fu exercise.

After the brief Chin reunification in 265, China was divided into the Northern and Southern Dynasties (265-589). The northern nomadic tribes of China attacked the central areas and the social order was disrupted. A result was increased interest in religious pursuits. The famed monk Ta Mo (Bodidharma) came to preach Buddhism in Honan Province at the Shaolin Temple of Sung-shan. Many



Kung-Fu men went to this temple to study Buddhism and to avoid social problems. Two famous books, *The Sineu Change Classic* and *Washing Marrow*, were

written by the disciples of Ta Mo in honor of his name. The writing of these two books is often attributed to Ta Mo himself. Also, various new forms were created at this time, some of which are taught intact today. "Rock Fist" and "Eighteen Hands of LoHan" are two examples of this. A most important aspect of the Northern and Southern Dynasties was the re-separation of the external from the internal techniques.

The Sui-T'ang Dynasties (589-907) marked the first time the Chinese martial arts spread outside the central area of China. Chinese soldiers sent to Korea on military duty shared their knowledge of Kung-Fu with the Korean people. During the T'ang Dynasty, Hsu Shien P'ing founded the so-called "soft system" or "Long Fist System," which consisted of thirty-seven forms combining both internal and external techniques. Also, Li Tao Tzu originated the "Early Heaven Fist" style, another soft system.

From 907 to 1279, encompassing the "Five Dynasties" or Wu Tai and the Sung Dynasty, the internal systems made significant progress. Chen Ling-shi of the Wu Tai period called his soft style "Small Nine Heavens." Chang San-geng of the Sung Dynasty practiced an internal method, *T'ai-Chi*, Thirteen Forms." General Yueh-fei incorporated *Hsing-I* techniques into his soldiers' training. He is believed by some to be the founder of *Hsing-I*. With these developments the combination of the internal and external systems reached its first peak. In 1126 Jurchen drove the Sung armies from North China and Chinese culture spread from north of the Yangtze River to the southern provinces. With this transition Kung-Fu spread as far south as Thailand. *T'ai Tzu Ch'uan*, now popular in the southern province of Fukien, was founded during the Sung Dynasty.

In 1279 the Mongols from the north and west of China, under the leadership of Ghengis Khan, conquered northern China and established the Yuan Dynasty. Kung-Fu was popular, but concentrated mainly on the training of military personnel. Fighting on horseback was naturally stressed by these accomplished horsemen. Toward the end of this dynasty, Pai Yu-feng pursued the study of Shaolin Kung-Fu and expanded the "Eighteen Hands of LoHan" into "One Hundred Twenty-eight Hands of LoHan", which he divided

into a five fist system called Dragon, Tiger, Snake, Leopard, and Crane. It is this system which comprises the basic internal training of the Shaolin school.

During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) Kung-Fu, which was called *Ch-i* or *Chi-yung*, made significant progress in the southern provinces. The southern Shaolin system, with headquarters at the temple in Fukien, reached equal recognition with the northern styles. Chi Ki Kuan and Chen Chung were two famous Shaolin teachers of this period. Wang Lang of Shantung created the famous Praying Mantis System; White Crane and Monkey styles were devised; and the little known Fire Dragon internal Kung-Fu was revealed for the first time. Near the end of the dynasty, Ch'en Yuan-ping traveled to Japan to teach *Ch'in-na* (catch-arrest) and Chinese wrestling, creating a basis for *Jiu-jitsu*.

Another northern tribe, the Manchus, overthrew the Ming government in 1644 and established the Ch'ing Dynasty which lasted until 1911. Using the name *Pai Ta* (empty hand) for their art and also practicing Eighteen Weapons, some Kung-Fu men reached an exceptional level of skill. Prominent figures of the period were Tung Hai-ch'uan, Kuo Yun-shen, Yang Fu-kuei, Huo Yuan-chia, and Kan Fung-tzu. Two famous martial artists were Emperor Yung-cheng, who ruled China from 1723 to 1735, and his son, Emperor Ch'ien-lung, who ruled from 1736 to 1795. Secret societies like the White Lotus sect of Taoists practiced Kung-Fu techniques for rebellion against the Ch'ing rule. The secret organizations involved with the uprising in 1900 against foreign influence in China taught their members that Kung-Fu rendered them invincible — even against bullets. These "Boxers", as they were termed by the foreigners, could not withstand the force of Western firearms. Thus, the Boxer Rebellion marked a great decline in Kung-Fu practice due to the lack of faith in its power. In 1874 Japan occupied the Jiu Ch'iu Islands (Okinawa) which had previously been a Chinese tributary. The people of Okinawa learned some southern Shaolin techniques from Fukien Province, forming the foundation of Okinawan Karate.

During the Nationalist and Communist periods (1911-present) Kung-Fu has been popularly termed *Kuo Su* and *Wu Su*. Gradually the art's popularity began to rise. Powerful warlords like Feng Yuhsiang trained their soldiers with Kung-Fu. Several men were responsible for

spreading the art and increasing its popularity: Wu Chi-ch'ing, Yang Cheng-fu, Ching Yi-ming, and Lo Kwang-yi. This period saw Kung-Fu being taught in Western nations for the first time, due to emigration and cultural exchanges with China. It was only in the late 1960's that the Chinese martial arts began to be widely taught to non-orientals and has since become increasingly popular throughout the world.



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