

Chapter 1

Introduction:

What is Kung Fu

This book is about kung fu, specifically the Wing Chun system of kung fu. Even more specifically, it is about the often mystical or secretive internal Chi-kung skills of Wing Chun kung fu. It is written specifically to those who currently practice Wing Chun, or have an invested interest in Wing Chun kung fu specifically. Kung fu is a term that has become synonymous with Martial Arts in both the West and the East. Even in mainland China today the martial arts are referred to frequently as gung fu (Mandarin pronunciation). Originally the term kung fu was used to refer to any skill or ability that had been developed through persistent effort over time. This understanding is helpful to those who have chosen to embark on the life journey of learning a martial art. Not all systems of combat are as difficult to learn as others, but then not all are as effective as others are either. Wing Chun Kung Fu is one of the most notable, effective martial systems available. When Wing Chun is practiced fully, with its secretive foundation of deep energy skills intact, then it truly becomes a system of skills that require unique and diligent effort over time to master. It is truly a kung fu system in the literal meaning of the phrase, as well as the modern meaning.

What it takes to Master Internal Kung Fu

When one begins training in a kung fu style he or she often is unaware of the degree of discipline that will be required of them to progress to the point they desire. This is especially true among western students. It is common for a teacher to hear the question, “how long will it take for me to get to...?” It is not an unfair question, but it

is impossible to answer. There is an old story told in the halls where kung fu was taught anciently that symbolizes the irony of the student’s desire to progress through skills quickly.

The student asks the master how long it takes most students to master their system. The master replies, “15 years”. The student is shocked, then asks “how long would it take me if I work twice as hard”? The master replies, “30 years”! The student protests, “but what if I practice 3 times longer and harder than all the other students, then how long will it take me”? The master smiles and answers, “then it will take you 45 years”.

The moral of this story should be obvious. It illustrates that to learn a valuable skill, one has to be willing to practice for however long it takes to gain that skill. By trying to shorten that time, either by practicing harder or more often doesn’t always mean you will learn it faster. The obsession with being first, or getting to a certain skill level quickly, most often negates the attainment of the very skill desired. This is most certainly the case when learning Wing Chun’s deep energy skills. A focus on learning these abilities by a certain deadline often gets in the way of understanding the true nature of the skill being practiced. With energy skills, one has to let go of time frames and fall in love with the path. One has to learn to enjoy the journey and focus his attention on what is going on where he is currently, rather than always looking ahead to what is down the road. In learning today’s lessons well, tomorrow’s lessons will come much quicker than anticipated.

Kung fu requires a specific quality of personality for one to pay the price of mastery. You must fall in love with learning

the skills, and forsake the modern tendency to cram more stuff into less time. Kung Fu mastery requires a lifetime commitment to learning and developing quality skills. Wing Chun was said to take from 7 to 15 years to master by the monks who first developed it. That is an ambitious time frame, but given that the monks lived their kung fu 24 hours a day, year round it is not entirely unrealistic. True mastery is nothing short of a lifetime endeavor. Sometimes some people may set their idea of what mastery is at a level less than true mastery. Such people may believe and even claim to have mastered a kung fu skill or system, but those who understand the path and know their abilities also know they are not true masters. Such people may puff up their egos with grand titles but the truth sooner or later shows up through their mediocre skills.

Those desiring true mastery, not only learn to master the kung fu skills of their chosen system, but also develop considerable mastery over their human failings and personality. One's nature is refined and developed as a by-product of the years of discipline invested in walking the kung fu path. Those who practice a martial system that has demanding and difficult skill sets (like Wing Chun) will notice many students come and go. Only the very few will ever acquire the discipline to travel the path of kung fu to its enlightened possibilities. Those who train, but do not discipline themselves in the kung fu way will surely benefit from their brief encounter with the arts, but lacking the commitment and discipline to unlock its secrets they will never know the mysteries they may have discovered about themselves, life, and our magical universe.

Wing Chun with or without Chi Energy?

The internal or Chi-kung side of Wing Chun is one of the last great secrets of the art. Many schools do not teach, or even discuss this internal side. Others pay it lip service but do little to bring its power into their training. It should be no surprise to western students of Wing Chun to realize that their kung fu lineage will always return to a Chinese root. In China, I quickly realized that for the Chinese people all styles of kung fu have a significant Chi-kung component. For the Chinese to practice kung fu without any energy skills as part of the training is absurd. For them martial arts are always taught and practiced with chi energy.

Most of modern Wing Chun has come through grandmaster Yip Man's line. Grandmaster Yip himself was somewhat reluctant to teach the chi side of the system to students who were less dedicated or gifted. But there are many stories of Grandmaster Yip's Chi-kung abilities. One that is common is that he would sometimes spend up to an hour to perform the Sil Num Tao form. It has been reported that he sometimes put a wet piece of paper on his shoulders and that after finishing the form the warmth generated from the energy would dry the paper. Anybody familiar with Chi-kung training would recognize these as typical chi building practices.

For some reason those who became skilled in the chi development that is an essential part of Wing Chun became somewhat reluctant to pass these skills on. Perhaps it was due to a cultural problem where Chinese teachers often chose not to teach chi to non-Chinese students. Or perhaps it was due to a lack of a workable understanding of chi in the West that made it difficult for Chinese teachers to pass this knowledge on. Even today some teachers are reluctant to discuss chi openly or publicly with their students. In Western Wing Chun circles in general, the idea of chi

is often thought of as more mythical than real. Those who know about it still follow the closed mouth tradition passed down to them from their Wing Chun parentage.

Another reason many Wing Chun practitioners are unfamiliar with the internal aspect of their art is the fact that Wing Chun can be an effective fighting system without learning the difficult internal side. Aikido is similar in this regard. Many law enforcement officers learn Aikido techniques to help them control and subdue a difficult individual. These techniques work effectively, but possess only a small portion of the true power they can manifest when learned with the internal side of Aikido. One only has to watch footage of the great Founder of Aikido, O'Sensai Uyeshiba demonstrating his skills to see the difference between Aikido done with chi (ki) energy and the Aikido given to law enforcement as techniques. The same is true with Wing Chun. Its techniques work because they are scientific principle centered motions designed to be efficient and effective. Even done poorly Wing Chun is more than a match for many other Martial systems. But when Wing Chun is performed with its full essence intact, with Chi-kung skills behind the framework of quality techniques, it is many, many times more effective, powerful and even magical.

Like Aikido, Wing Chun is an internal, Chi-kung art. All its principles, stances, techniques and philosophies point to this. It is so obvious it almost seems ridiculous to need to point it out! But also like Aikido in Wing Chun there are those who learn the techniques only, and then there are some who train the energy. Why then is it difficult to find a teacher who can and will teach the internal side of Wing Chun? Any who know Chi-kung will know the answer. Any martial system is much easier to teach without the seemingly

mystical internal side included. This is the reason two versions of Aikido have evolved, one with and one without the internal skills. It seems Wing Chun also as an internal version and a technique based version. It is so much easier to learn both Aikido and Wing Chun without the internal side.

Today martial arts have become very commercial. Teachers try to attract more students to bigger schools so they can make more money. Students are pushed through the training quickly, and thus they may not develop quality skills. Teaching Chi-kung properly requires a dedicated patient student and a wise teacher who can point the way. There is no way to rush this essential aspect of kung fu! Those who still attempt to teach the internal side find that it is most difficult to teach. In fact you can not teach it! All a good teacher can do is point the way. He can invite the student to experience his chi, but it is up to the student to learn it. It is much easier to teach a technique or a motion. Techniques you can see, you can correct, you can drill them and practice them. The student can also imitate it easily. But with internal skills they can not be seen outwardly, they can only be felt, experienced, and this is most difficult to teach to another. These are some of the reasons we see less real Chi-kung development in Wing Chun, or any of the martial arts today.

A Principle Centered System

Perhaps one reason Wing Chun is still very effective even when taught without the more difficult internal skills is because it is a principle based system. The story of my friend Mark is a perfect example of this. Mark had no martial training but was often in situations where he was required to defend himself. He worked in many dangerous situations doing security work,

providing care for the criminally insane and as a police officer. I remember the first time I introduced Mark to any kung fu I decided to teach him a series of fighting principles, which are the base of Wing Chun. I taught him no techniques per say, but demonstrated and drilled these principles. Mark took to them quickly and found they greatly improved his fighting ability. Later when he wanted to learn more I gave him some of the Wing Chun techniques, the boxing forms and some drills to work the footwork and hand coordination. Mark practiced and became very proficient at using these skills. After only about 3 months of practicing these drills he was able to test them in combat.

While working security for a courthouse in Arizona Mark's attention was drawn to a loud angry man across the street who was beating on someone outside of a bar. As the man was yelling and swearing in public Mark shone his flashlight in the direction of the commotion and told the man to stop it. Well he was not having any of that. He came charging across the street and confronted Mark directly telling him how he was going to kick this rent a cop's ass up and down the road. The man was very large, about 6'8", 280lbs and built like Arnold Schwarzenegger! Mark is 5'7" and 180lbs. The guy was very intimidating so when he started poking Mark in the chest he flew into action. Mark fired off a stream of chain punches into this monster's face and throat,

which knocked him to the ground, where Mark kept attacking as he followed the guy down. Then he noticed the guy wasn't putting up much resistance, in fact he wasn't putting up any resistance. He was unconscious! A few minutes later the police showed up and came running over to help, having been told that some giant guy was kicking the shit out of a security guard. What they found was Mark completely unharmed and the Goliath guy was KOed! When they finally brought him around he was very polite and wanted to shake Mark's hand, saying he was the toughest little bastard that he'd ever met!

How could Mark have become so proficient after only 3 months training? Not because he knew the secrets of the internal side, he did not. It was simply because he had drilled the principles of Wing Chun and they were locked into his subconscious. Wing Chun works well because of these principles, and because it has a scientific technique structure to support the application of these principles. Not everyone who trains will be as able as my friend Mark, he has a particular gift at being able to pick up and apply these principles and techniques naturally. Plus he worked constantly in the 3 months to drill and practice these things. Also he has the personality of a pit bull once he is threatened, and that gives him a real fighting spirit.

Wing Chun fighting principles are the core of Wing Chun's practical success. What is a principle? In its simplest form a principle is a rule of thumb. For example in English a principle for correct sentence structure is you put the noun before the verb. I.e. the dog (noun) jumped (verb) over the cat. This principle will apply to any number of word combinations. In combat a principle will likewise apply to any number of technique combinations. Principles are not limited by technique. In fact the correct technique combination is dictated by the principle. For example Wing Chun's principle of simultaneously attacking and defending. This can be used with any combination of techniques imaginable, so long as an attacking function and a defending function are accomplished by the techniques.

It is because of this scientific principle centered nature of the Wing Chun system that it is a most effective combat art even when it is done poorly. One big reason many are unaware of, or unbelievers in the internal skills of Wing Chun is because Wing Chun is a very effective and powerful combat system even when practiced without these deep and often mystical internal skills. Wing Chun works just as a system of techniques and principles, but it is so much more when it is taught with the chi skills that are truly a fundamental part of the original system. It is this internal energy aspect of Wing Chun that we will explore in this book. If the reader is interested in understanding the fighting principles of Wing Chun better, then you should study the 25 fighting principles video and book that we have also produced.

Si-Fu Scott Baker at the Great Wall of China in May 2000

