

Main Menu

-  Home
-  News Blog
-  Laws
-  Theory
-  Weapons
-  Articles
-  Articles+
-  Forums
-  Chat
-  Links

Chinese martial arts - kung-fu (wushu)



Kung-fu (also known as wushu) is one of the typical demonstrations of traditional Chinese culture. It is a sport which utilizes both brawn and brain. The theory of Wushu is based upon classical Chinese philosophy, while the skills of Wushu consist of various forms of fighting: fist fights, weapon fights, and other fighting routines (including such offence and defense acts as kicking, hitting, throwing, holding, chopping and thrusting) and unarmed combats. Kung-fu is not only a sporting exercise but also an artistic form. It is used to cure illness as well as for self-defense and is a comprehensive form of culture of the human body. Kung-fu enjoys a long history and great popularity in China. Thanks to its uniqueness and charisma originating from traditional oriental culture, wushu is captivating the attention of more and more people in other nations.

As one of the earliest and long-lasting sports, wushu has developed its own characteristics over time. Major characteristics are listed below:

(1) Because of its long history incorporating differences in

culture, ideology, region and usages, wushu has developed into a great variety of schools and styles. While some schools emphasize the use of fists and hand technique, others emphasize leg technique and footwork. Some take interest in the variation of acts whereas others prefer simplicity. Some focus on keeping opponents at arm's and leg's length while others like to fight in close contact. The assortment of schools and styles displays the colorful features of wushu and gratifies the various needs of people.

(2) Kung-fu includes the use of many weapons. Chinese ancients named the kung-fu arsenal the "Eighteen Arms", but there are many more in use. Almost all fights are accompanied by weapon usage of one kind or another. The combination of fist fights and weapon usage allows for a fuller and more efficient application of kung-fu skills while sharpening the insight of combat and control and enriching the program of kung-fu exercise.

(3) The combination of offence and defense is the essence of wushu. Implications of offence and defense permeate the complete gamut of wushu exercise. They are fully demonstrated in both practice and real combat. Even a solo practice implies the atmosphere of offence and defense against an imaginary opponent in time and space. Wushu masters have systematically summed up the contradictions of offence and defense and established a set of theories and techniques on combat.

(4) The movement of the human body is only the external display of kung-fu. Kung-fu is by no means limited to the external movement, but also emphasizes the full display of the internal temperament, mental attitude and potential of the human being. The practice of kung-fu not only strengthens the bones and muscles but also the internal organs and intelligence. Coordination and cooperation are called for with each and every movement of the hand, eye, body, foot and form of movement. Kung-fu stresses that the mind directs the circulation of air flow within the body and that the inner circulation of air generates the external strength, so demonstrating the combination of external and internal forces. Cultivating air flows inside the body in order to improve the basic structures inside the body is an important purpose of kung-fu exercises.

(5) Ingenious applications of substantial and insubstantial blows are incorporated in the movements and forces of wushu. Motion and stillness alternate with each other, while hardness and softness supplement one another, greatly enhancing the artistic expression and the practicality of wushu, and demonstrating its inclusive and equilibristic nature. Once in action, the movements can be as fast and forceful as a gust of wind, while being still, the body looks as steady as a mountain. Hard blows are like

lightning and thunderclaps, whereas soft punches are like breezes delicately caressing willow twigs. Human feelings and abilities are clearly demonstrated through the rhythmic movements of opening and closing, and the emotions excited in doing exercises.

Wushu boasts versatile functions, of which the most outstanding are:

(1) Moral Cultivation

As a human practice which stresses cultivation of moral characters and demonstration of spirit and temperament, Wushu is conducive to developing good manners and conduct. It also helps adjust one's psychology. The moral characters and etiquette are held in esteem by all schools of Wushu masters.

(2) Offence and Defense

Kung-fu practitioners can master various offence and defense techniques of armed and unarmed combat for self-defense through a great number of training exercises. Many of the Wushu techniques can also be utilized in military and police training programs.

(3) Curative Effect

Taiji Quan, one of the traditional schools of Chinese shadow boxing, and the various still standing exercises emphasize the adjustment of one's breathing, thinking and psychology. These exercises have been proven to have good curative and rehabilitative effects on sufferers of chronic diseases of many kinds. As these exercises help strengthen the coordination of the human body and its immunity, they are ideal for preventing and curing diseases.

(4) Health Improvement

The practice of the basic exercises



and routines of Wushu are effective methods for improving the pliability of the joints and the suppleness of the back and legs. The generation of energy, the jumping and leaping and the changes from one stance to another, all help enhance human strength and speed of movement. Wushu, therefore, can be taken as the basic exercise for other sporting activities.

(5) Artistic Effect

The graceful movement of the body, especially the typical oriental charm revealed during exercises and practice of kung-fu, has an impressive artistic effect and provides visual delight. People can benefit mentally as well as physically from the display of the kung-fu offence and defense skills and the exertion of forces through the display.

(6) Intelligence

While stressing the development of physical prowess Wushu also emphasizes the exercise of thinking. By adjusting various human functions, Wushu also helps improve the nervous system and is therefore good for intellectual development.

History of kung-fu



Kung-fu originated from the human activities of production and pursuit for survival, health and prosperity. In primeval times, production tools were simple and crude while the level of productive forces was very low. Since wild animals presented a great menace to the human race, hunting in groups turned out to be a necessity for self-defense and food

acquisition. The hunting activities not only helped sharpen human intelligence and physique, but also helped people develop some armed and unarmed grappling techniques, using simple weapons and devices such as hitting, dodging, jumping, chopping, axing, thrusting, stabbing and hurling. The most primitive and simplest weapon is the cudgel being the easiest to find, prepare and use. Along with improvements through actual usage and the advent of metallurgy, the materials for making weapons also changed from stone to metals. To the kung-fu arsenal were added spears, swords and axes. Kung-fu, at its early stage of development was practiced primarily for self-defense and for the acquisition of means of subsistence. At that stage, it was not an intentional, planned or organized sport.

During the Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century – 256 BC) a kind of wrestling called jiaoli was listed as a military sport alongside archery and chariot racing. The Warring States Period (403-221 BC) produced many strategists who stressed the importance of kung-fu to the building of strong army. As pointed out Sunzi, China's earliest extant book on the art of war, "Wrestling and thrusting exercises strengthen the warrior's physique". Among the distinguished masters of swordplay at that time not a few were women. One of them, Yuenu by name, was invited by Emperor Goujian to expound her theories of swordsmanship, which were highly evaluated then as well as in later generations. The Qin (221 - 206 BC) and Han (206 BC – AD 220) Dynasties witnessed the growth of such fighting arts as shoubo (wrestling) and jiaodi in which the contestants charged at each other with cattle horns on their heads. Besides, there were drama dances in which a variety of weapons including broadswords and halberds were used to perform pre-arranged patterns of movements as in present-day kung-fu routines. In the Jin (265- 439) and Southern and Northern (420 – 581) Dynasties kung-fu came under the influence of Buddhism and Taoism. Ge Hong (284 – 364), a famous physician and Taoist philosopher, integrated wushu with qigong (breathing exercises), an important branch of national Chinese medicine.

Around 497, legendary Shaolin Temple was built. In a context of kung-fu history, Shaolin Temple is remarkable for the foundation of famous Shaolin kung-fu school. In future, this school became the basis of later kung-fu styles.

The court examination system initiated in the Tang Dynasty (618 – 907) gave impetus to the development of kung-fu. All officers and soldiers must pass some tests in the martial art before they could be promoted. Honorary titles, such as “Warrior of Courage”, and “Warrior of Agility”, were conferred on outstanding masters of kung-fu.

The Song Dynasty (960 – 1279) saw the appearance of numerous kung-fu societies. During this period many skillful performers demonstrated stunts in the streets, their repertoires including “sword versus shield”, “spear versus shield” and exercises with other weapons.

In the Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644) kung-fu prospered as never before. Lots of kung-fu schools were founded, and large number of exercises and styles, including Baduanjin (an eight parts exercise), Yijinjing (a system of muscular exercise), Taijiquan (also called Chinese shadow boxing) appeared.

Under the reign of the Qing Dynasty (A.D. 1644 - 1911), common people were forbidden to practice kung-fu by government, and many secret martial arts communities were formed. The end of the Qing Empire and the beginning of the Republic generated renewed interest in the martial arts. Practicing kung fu was seen as being in the national interest because it helped strengthen both the body and the mind.



[Back to the contents page](#)