



Question and Answer Series:

Kung Fu Against Other Styles

By Grandmaster Wong Kiew Kit

Question 1

In the formative years of kungfu at the Shaolin temple, were any patterns learned from visiting martial artists, or did Shaolin kungfu develop completely independently from other martial arts?

- Sifu Charles Chalmers

Answer

Shaolin Kungfu was (and still is) not only a source but also a receptacle for many other martial arts. While it provided inspiration and material for other arts, it also received their best from them. This process of giving to and taking from other martial arts have continued from its formative years to the present time.

The first source of Shaolin Kungfu was the Eighteen Lohan Hands, taught by Bodhidharma, from which the Eighteen Lohan Fist, the prototype of Shaolin Kungfu, developed. The Eighteen Lohan Hands probably came from yoga exercises practiced by Bodhidharma in India.

Generals who retired to the Shaolin Temple for spiritual cultivation brought with them their martial arts, which greatly enriched Shaolin Kungfu. They introduced many classical weapons as well as military strategies to Shaolin. These generals might also have introduced the Horse-Riding Stance.

From Taoist masters Shaolin Kungfu learned the Small Universe and the Big Universe. While these two excellent chi kung exercises never became the principle training methods in the Shaolin Temple, many Shaolin masters practiced and valued them highly.

The Mongolians brought their famous wrestling, which greatly enriched Shaolin felling techniques and floor work.

Influences from other martial arts are not necessarily always beneficial. Karate, which owed much of its material to the Shaolin source, revived free sparring in Shaolin Kungfu at a time when it was at its worst decay.

Taekwondo, which also owed much of its material to Shaolin, brought in high kicks. Its influence, especially after Bruce Lee had made kungfu well known in the West, became so pervasive that for a time many people consider how good a person's kungfu was by how high he could kick!

The influence of Western Boxing Siamese Boxing is wide-spread. Today, when they spar, most Shaolin practitioners, indeed most martial artists of any style, would bounce about and punch and kick like Western and Siamese Boxers. The influence is so complete that nowadays when one mentions “san da”, the image is that of kungfu practitioners with boxing gloves fighting like Boxers in a boxing ring, forgetting that the term actually means free sparring using typical kungfu forms.

This giving-to and taking-from process of Shaolin Kungfu is interestingly manifested in our school in relation to Taijiquan. Taijiquan originated from Shaolin Kungfu. In our school, Taijiquan was first taught to our students to meet expedient needs modelling on the Shaolin syllabus. In return, Shaolin Kungfu in our school has benefited much from Taijiquan, like graceful continuous movement, the flow method of internal force development, and the integration of form, energy and mind.

Question 2

If a student shows interest in competing in MMA events, how much should their instructor encourage them? What benefits would there be from training for such a competition? What negatives would there be?

- Sifu Matt Fenton

Answer

The instructor should give the student full encouragement and help.

An important aim of our school is to restore the glory of kungfu. An important manifestation of this aim is to take part in free sparring competitions using kungfu skills and techniques, and win. We claim that our kungfu is capable of combat, and we must walk our talk.

But we are not going to let our students enter competitions blindly and be bashed. As scholar-warriors, we do not enter combat and then hope to win. We already have won, and enter combat to confirm victory.

We do so not out of vain-glory, but paradoxically out of humbleness. When we win we must not humiliate our opponents, as unfortunately some MMA artists do. We must give respect to our opponents due to them. This does not mean we may not hurt our opponents. If it is absolutely necessary, we will not hesitate to disable or even kill an opponent. Fortunately, unlike in real fights, it is not necessary in competitions.

There are many benefits derived from both the training and the actual participation of MMA and other free sparring competitions. There are, of course, also negatives. But as scholar-warriors, we shall make the negatives as opportunities for improvement.

An obvious benefit is to restore the glory of kungfu. We are true to our belief that our kungfu is combat effective, and are ready to prove it. We do not want to be made a mockery of our philosophy.

We also have no illusion that MMA artists and other free sparring competitors are formidable. Except for experienced fighters in our school, many of our students will be badly beaten if they enter free sparring competitions now. This is not because our kungfu is inadequate, but because they lack real fighting skills and experience, which are different from friendly sparring amongst schoolmates.

Thus, if our students enter sparring competitions now, not only they will be defeated but more significantly they will be injured, physically as well as emotionally. They will lose confidence in themselves as well as in our school, and have doubts as to what we claim is true.

But we shall change these negatives to opportunities for improvement. We shall train them systematically so that they will progress from a position of being defeated and injured to a position where they can win free sparring competitions honourably and without sustaining injuries themselves. Besides seeing this transformation and gaining a lot of confidence, they will also gain much in tactics and strategies, as well as developing internal force and mental clarity, which are not only useful in free sparring competitions but more important in their daily lives.

The Choy-Li-Fatt course and the Kungfu against Other Martial Arts course at the Winter Camp in January 2012 are excellent for this purpose. If all other things were equal, Choy-Li-Fatt is the most effective for free sparring competitions, with or without gloves.

The Kungfu against Other Martial Arts course provides the most effective fighting skills for handling other martial artists. It represents the crystallization of my more than 20 years of sparring and actual fighting experience.

Earlier I mentioned that our students should win free sparring competitions without sustaining injuries. Many people, including our students, may be very surprised at this statement. It is because they equate free sparring to generous exchanges of blows and kicks where injuries are inevitable. This is random hurting one another, not genuine self-defence. In genuine self-defence, we do not want to be hit, not even once. Such skills will be systematically taught at the Kungfu against Other Martial Arts course.

Even after taking these two courses at the Winter Camp, students should not enter free sparring competitions yet. They should apply their fighting skills in a 30-Opponent programme. This is a close-door secret in our school that students have to learn personally from their sifus.

After completing the 30-Opponent programme, students should still not enter MMA competitions yet. MMA competitions represent high-level fighting. Students should start modestly, taking part first in local, regional and national competitions to gain experience and confidence before entering MMA and international competitions. Even in relatively low-level competitions, we must be sure of winning before we enter the competitions. A scholar-warrior does not enter combat and hopes to win, he has already won and enter combat to confirm victory.

Question 3

Are some styles of Kung Fu more suited than others to fighting with Boxers? If so, which ones and why.

- Kevin, Shaolin Wahnam Ireland

Answer

Yes, if all other things were equal, Choy-Li-Fatt is most suited than other styles to fighting with Boxers. It is because Choy-Li-Fatt techniques and footwork are excellent in overcoming Boxing techniques and bouncing about.

As most martial artists today fight like Boxers regardless of what styles they practice, Choy-Li-Fatt is an excellent choice if one wishes to be combat efficient. He must, of course, learn from a competent teacher. Unfortunately, most kungfu teachers today either only teach solo practice for demonstration or fighting like Boxers.

We shall have a better idea why Choy-Li-Fatt is more suited to fighting Boxers than other kungfu styles if we examine some examples of how different kungfu styles typically respond to Boxers' attack and defence.

When a Boxer jabs, a typical response from a Shaolin practitioner is to ward off with a Single Tiger. Even before the Shaolin practitioner can make contact, the Boxer would have pulled back his first jab, and thrusts another jab. If the Shaolin practitioner attempts to ward off the second jab with a second Single Tiger, the Boxer would have thrown a right cross, followed by a rain of punches on the helpless Shaolin practitioners. The shifting from one False-Leg Stance to another, or from a False-Leg Stance to a Bow-arrow Stance by the Shaolin practitioner is also too slow for the bouncing of the Boxer.

On the other hand, the Shaolin practitioner using typical Shaolin strikes would have difficulty attacking a Boxer. If he attempts to strike a Boxer using "Black Tiger Steals Heart", the Boxer would just parry away his punch with one hand, and hit his exposed head with the other hand. When the Shaolin practitioner tries to withdraw into a False-Leg Stance to avoid the Boxer's strike, the Boxer would bounce in with a rain of hits on the Shaolin practitioner.

The scenario with a Taijiquan practitioner is similar. As a Boxer throws a jab, a Taijiquan practitioner would typically respond with warding off, using “Immortal Waves Sleeves”. The Boxer would withdraw his first jab, and throws a second jab, against which the Taijiquan practitioner would try to ward off with another “Immortal Waves Sleeves”. The Boxer would follow up with a rain of hits on the helpless Taijiquan practitioner.

Similarly, using typical Taijiquan patterns, a Taijiquan practitioner would have difficulty attacking a Boxer. If the Taijiquan practitioner attacks with typical Taijiquan palm strikes and finger-thrusts, the Boxer would just parry them away, followed by crosses, hooks or undercuts, which a Taijiquan practitioner may not be accustomed to.

Indeed, these are the main reasons why many kungfu practitioners could not match Boxers, and also why they discard their kungfu techniques and fight like Boxers.

Does this mean that kungfu is no match for Boxing? Unfortunately, the answer is yes – for most kungfu practitioners today. Otherwise they would not perform kungfu only in solo demonstration, but discard it when sparring and adopt Boxing techniques.

But for those who have a wide understanding of kungfu philosophy, skills and techniques, the answer is no. They will choose those skills and techniques that are most suited to overcome Boxers. This is what we are going to do at the “Kungfu against Other Styles” course during the 2012 Winter Camp.

The big problem for most kungfu practitioners is that there are so many skills and techniques to choose from, and they do not know what to choose. In fact many of them do not even know the difference between skills and techniques. The problem is further aggravated by the fact that typical kungfu patterns which they normally practice are not suited to fighting Boxers.

The situation with Choy-Li-Fatt is different. Typical Choy-Li-Fatt patterns are suited to fighting Boxers and other martial artists! This means that Choy-Li-Fatt practitioners do not need to choose from hundreds of techniques those techniques that are most suitable; they just use their typical techniques!

But they still need combat skills and need how to use the techniques for combat. If they don't, if they only perform the techniques for solo demonstration, they will still be bashed by Boxers and other martial artists. Acquiring the skills and learning how to apply the techniques for combat are what we shall do at the Choy-Li-Fatt course during the 2012 Winter Camp in Norway.

Meanwhile, let us examine how a Choy-Li-Fatt practitioner would typically respond to a Boxer's attack. Please bear in mind that while knowing the philosophy (as explained below) is the first important step, one must practice and practice to be able to apply the response effectively.

Instead of warding off a Boxer's jabs as in Shaolin Kungfu and Taijiquan, a Choy-Li-Fatt practitioner would strike his arm against the Boxer's jabbing arms. Would the Choy-Li-Fatt practitioner be hit by the Boxer's jabs if he does not defend against the jabs? No, he won't; his body-movement and footwork would have avoided the Boxer's jabs while he simultaneously strike the Boxer's arms.

If the Boxer attempts to move forward to rain blows on the Choy-Li-Fatt practitioner, the Choy-Li-Fatt practitioner would retreat a step and simultaneously rain blows on the Boxer's arms or body. If the Boxer tries to bounce away, the Choy-Li-Fatt practitioner would move in swiftly to rain blows on him.

The interesting point is that the same technique can be used for attack or defence. Indeed, the attack and defence run together harmoniously.

The two arms of the Choy-Li-Fatt practitioner are like two iron rods. If an opponent attacks, he uses his rods to strike the attacking arms. If the opponent retreats, he uses his rods to strike the opponent's arms or body.

Question 4

In the film “Ip Man 2” a fight between a boxer named Twister and Ip Man is a very closely contested affair. Did the film makers portray a plausible scenario? By this I mean, could the combat efficiency of a skilled boxer nearly equal that of a very highly skilled Wing Choon Kung Fu master such as Ip Man?

- Kevin, Shaolin Wahnam Ireland

Answer

My opinion is that the scenario portrayed in the film was not plausible. In the film Ip Man successfully fought through an ambush of many armed assailants out to take his life. Not only he saved himself, he also saved his student who was far less skillful. With this level of skills, Ip Man in the film could easily beat the boxer.

There is no doubt that a top boxer is very formidable fighter fighting within his Boxing rules. However, if there are no rules as in a real fight, a skilled boxer would be no match against a highly skilled Wing Choon master or a master of any kungfu style.

Even if Boxing rules were followed, which would place kungfu masters in a huge handicap, they could beat skilled Boxers readily. Indeed, this actually happened in China in the early 1900s when kungfu masters like Huo Yun Jia and Wang Zi Ping convincingly beat foreign Boxers by a huge margin.

There simply is a huge gap in combat potentials between kungfu, which is a life-death fighting art, and Boxing, which is a sport protected by many safety rules. A boxer’s techniques are severely limited only to strikes to the body and parrying with the hands, whereas a kungfu practitioner has a range of techniques that boxers may not even imagine to be possible.

Even if a kungfu practitioner has to put on gloves and follow Boxing rules, he still has a bigger range of attack and defence techniques than a boxer by a huge margin. Hence, it is a blantant excuse to the initiated when some kungfu practitioners say that they could not fight if they put on gloves.

The fact is that even without the boxing gloves these kungfu practitioners could not fight because their training is only on solo demonstration and never on combat. If they have had kungfu combat training, they would be

able to fight even when putting on boxing gloves would have much reduced their fighting potential.

Choy-Li-Fatt Kungfu is particularly effective in this respect. If all other factors were equal, a Choy-Li-Fatt practitioner would be more combat efficient than practitioners of all other martial arts – with or without gloves. This is because of the wide range of Choy-Li-Fatt techniques for boxing-style fighting.

In other words, if both combatants have equal force, speed and fighting experience, the one using Choy-Li-Fatt techniques would have a bigger advantage in winning than the other using any other martial art! If the Choy-Li-Fatt practitioner loses the combat, it is not because of his techniques or boxing gloves he has to wear, but because of his speed, force, fighting experience or other factors.

One of the main objectives of the Choy-Li-Fatt course in the Winter Camp of January 2012 is to realize this special feature of Choy-Li-Fatt in combat – with or without gloves, and with or without abiding by Boxing rules.

Question 5

What are the most crucial elements that distinguish Chinese kungfu from all other fighting arts?

- Sifu Zhang Wuji

Answer

If I am to pick the most crucial element that distinguishes Chinese kungfu from most other fighting arts, I would choose internal force. It separates Chinese kungfu from all other martial arts.

Because Chinese kungfu focuses on internal force, whereas other martial arts don't, it results in many manifestations. For example, due to internal force, age, gender and size are not crucial in Chinese kungfu, but this is not the case in other martial arts. An elderly, fragile-looking lady can be more powerful and more combat efficient than a young, muscular man, whereas in other martial arts an older person is normally stronger than a younger person, a man normally stronger than a woman, and one with big muscles normally stronger than one who is smaller sized.

Because of internal force, Chinese kungfu training contributes to health, vitality and longevity, whereas other martial arts do not! This may come as a surprise to many people, and some may be angry at the statement, but it is to their benefit to know the truth.

The truth is that other martial arts may contribute to the practitioners' combat efficiency and physical fitness, but not to their health, vitality and longevity. This does not mean that those who practice other martial arts cannot be healthy, have vitality and enjoy longevity. They can, but it is due to other reasons, and not due to their martial art training. On the other hand, even leaving aside other reasons, just by practicing Chinese kungfu alone contributes to the practitioners' health, vitality and longevity.

Why is this so? It is because of internal force training in Chinese kungfu, which involves energy flow, whereas in other martial arts the training is physical which involves muscular tension and mental stress.

In other martial arts, energy is spent during training, resulting in practitioners having less energy after the training than before. As good health, vitality and longevity depends on the amount and smoothness of

energy flow, a reduction of energy due to physical training detracts from good health, vitality and longevity. On the other hand, in kungfu training, energy flow is generated, resulting in practitioners having an increase in both volume and smoothness of energy flow after the training than before. This contributes to good health, vitality and longevity.

In internal force training, practitioners need to be physically and mentally relaxed. This further enhances their energy flow, resulting in better health, vitality and longevity. In other martial art training, which is physical, practitioners tense their muscles so as to generate physical strength, which also results in mental stress. This causes energy blockage which further distract from health, vitality and longevity.

Internal force training is actually found in all styles of kungfu, though it is not obvious in so-called external styles! It is taught right at the start of all kungfu styles – in the form of stance training. It lays the foundation of kungfu, which is not just strengthening practitioners' legs as many students erroneously believe, but a training of energy and mind.

In their practice, kungfu practitioners of all styles are to be physically and mentally relaxed. It is only when they are relaxed, can they explode internal force, or “fatt keng” in Cantonese, “fa jin” in Mandrin pronunciation. I remember that when I was small I heard and read stories of masters of so-called external styles, like Wing Choon and Prahying Mantis, exploding internal force when fighting. Leong Chan, a famous Wing Choon master who was slender and elegant, for example, could fell an able-bodied opponent with just a single palm strike.

However, genuine kungfu with internal force training is now very rare. Many kungfu students today not only bounce about like Boxers but also adopt physical training of other martial arts like weight lifting and rope skipping. It is like throwing away gems for stones.

Question 6

Would Shaolin masters of the past like Uncle Righteousness , Grandmaster Ho Fatt Nam , The Ten Tigers of Canton , Pak Mei , and Bodhidharma compare to masters in the modern day when it comes to combat efficiency and internal force.

- Steve Rivera, Shaolin Wahnam USA

Answer

Modern day masters are nowhere in combat efficiency compared to masters in the past not only in Shaolin but also in any kungfu styles. Past masters could kill with just one strike, whereas modern day masters freely exchange blows in combat.

Past masters could walk down a street and be ambushed by more than 30 armed assailants yet emerged unhurt. As recent as 60 years ago, my sifu, Sifu Ho Fatt Nam, single-handedly fought off more than 30 armed assailants who intended to kill his family and burn his house, and of course he and his family remained unhurt. Today many modern day kungfu masters cannot even fight against a good Boxer or a Karate blackbelt.

Question 7

Which skills should a kungfu student develop to beat a highly skilled boxer? How to develop these skills? Which strategies would you recommend to apply in fighting Boxers?

- Sifu Anton Schmich, Shaolin Wahnam Germany

Answer

Some important skills a kungfu student should develop if he wishes to beat a highly skilled Boxer are as follows:

1. Being relaxed and focused
2. Ability to correctly judge a Boxer's reach
3. Good stance and body-movement to avoid a Boxer's strikes
4. Good footwork to chase after a Boxer's retreat
5. Adequate coverage to prevent a Boxer's surprise counters

Some people may be surprised at the above answers. This is probably due to their confusing skills with techniques.

These skills may be developed in the following ways:

1. Practice appropriate chi kung exercises to be relaxed and focused
2. Practice systematically with a sparring partner using appropriate techniques to develop good spacing and timing as well as body-movement
3. Systematically practice chasing a Boxer as he retreats taking care to cover him adequately, then defeating him decisively
4. Practice sparring with Boxers, progressing progressively from low-level Boxers to high-level Boxers

The following strategies are invaluable:

1. Do not hand your defeat to a Boxer
2. Exploit his offers
3. Create victory if he does not hand out his defeat

The following tactics with the appropriate skills are useful:

1. Cover and strike
2. Cover, chase and strike
3. Cover, fell and strike
4. Continuous kicks
5. Cover and chin-na

Techniques that are useful in implementing the above strategies and tactics include the following. The pattern names are in Shaolin terms; Taijiquan practitioners may use the Taijiquan equivalents.

1. Bow-Arrow Thread Bridge
2. Single Tiger Emerges from Cave
3. Wave Dragon Back to Cave
4. Golden Leopard Speeds through Forest
5. Fell Tree with Roots
6. White Crane Steps on Snow
7. White Ape Holds Branch
8. Double Bows Tame Tiger
9. Happy Bird Hops up Branch

All these strategies, tactics and techniques will be taught at the “Kungfu against Other Styles” course in the Winter Camp in January 2012 in Norway.

Fighting against Boxers is also an important topic in the “Choy-Li-Fatt” course, where two other strategies and typical Choy-Li-Fatt techniques will be used.

The two strategies are:

1. If there is form, strike the form
2. If there is no form, strike the shadow

Answering an earlier question I said that for most kungfu practitioners today, kungfu would not be able to match Boxing. This is because there are so many techniques in kungfu that these practitioners do not know the most suitable techniques for this purpose, so they use typical kungfu techniques which are generally not suitable for fighting against Boxing. More significantly, they do not have systematic combat training.

However, if we choose the most suitable techniques and skills as well as tactics and strategies, we can reverse the situation. Boxers will find it hard to match well-trained kungfu practitioners.

During my trip to the United States recently, Anthony Spinicchia brought out the topic of kungfu classics. I mentioned that even when one had access to the classics, he might not understand them. One reason was that important information was merely stated in the classics, but not explained.

The answer here provides a good example. Many people would not understand what is written above, though the writing is actually simple and straight-forward. Shaolin Wahnam students may be able to understand half of it, but those who have attended a kungfu against other martial arts course will understand clearly.

Question 8

Which strategies would you recommend to apply in fighting MMA practitioners?

- Sifu Anton Schmick, Shaolin Wahnam Germany

Answer

A good strategy is to avoid the opponent's strength and attack his weakness. MMA practitioners are all-rounders except chin-na and dim-mark. Hence applying chin-na or dim-mark on them is recommended.

When you can successful apply chin-na or dim-mark on them, irrespective of their size and physical strength, you can subdue them. The victory is also elegant and is reversible.

This strategy can be used if you are good at chin-na or dim-mark, and you are not wearing gloves. Of course, if these two conditions are not present, you would not be able to use this strategy.

Another useful strategy is to strike the form if there is form, strike the shadow if there is no form. The advantage is that you can apply this strategy regardless of whether you wear boxing gloves or not, but your arms need to be powerful.

When a MMA practitioner attacks you, irrespective of what attack he uses, you move a step slantingly back and strike your arms on his attacking arms or body.

If there is insufficient space for you to move back, you can move to his side or back, in which case you strike a leopard fist into his ribs, spine or back of his head. If you do not wish to maim him, instead of striking his vital spot, you can fell him on his back, simultaneously apply a tiger-claw on his throat.

If he moves back, you chase his shadow and strike your powerful arms on his body or head.

A third useful strategy is to strike him when he is not prepared for it. When he is taking you down, for example, dislocate his neck using "Naughty Monkey Plucks Coconut", or tear off his groin using "Monkey Steals Peaches".

This will kill or maim him, which of course we would not want to do. Instead you can grip hard at his throat, using “Golden Cockerel Locks Throat” or his groin using the same monkey technique. MMA practitioners are not used to the concept of control. Hence, you must hurt him enough for him to let go of his attack, but not serious enough to kill or maim him.

Question 9

There are several stories of classical kung fu masters and even modern masters "mixing" together various styles and sets to create combinations. Examples that I can think of are the Tiger-Crane set of Hoong Ka, Choy Li Fatt's three progenitor systems, Dong Hai Chuan's Baguazhang students (who were already accomplished in other arts) and even your own experience (if my memory is correct) in adding certain hand forms to the One Finger Shooting Zen set.

How can a master be sure that any modifications that he makes to a particular form do not dilute or otherwise distract from the advantages that are already there in the original forms?

- Frederick Chu

Answer

A master is sure from his understanding and experience. If he is not sure, he may dilute or distract from the advantages already present in the original forms. Worse, he may cause harmful effects.

Let us take two examples.

Hoong Hei Khoon was a master of the tiger form. He understood the form well, and had much experience in using the forms effectively.

His wife, Fong Wing Choon, was a master of the crane form. From his wife, Hoong Hei Khoon learned the crane form, which he also had much understanding and experience.

From his understanding and experience, Hoong Hei Khoon found that while his tiger form was excellent for combat, there were occasions when he could further improve his combat efficiency by adding a crane form.

For example, instead of using a thrust kick as in "White Horse Presents Hoof" which was found in his tiger form, he could use an organ-seeking kick as in "White Crane flaps Wings" which needed less effort, was less conspicuous, and more deadly.

So he included some crane patterns into his tiger form, resulting in the famous Tiger-Crane Set. He fully understood what he was doing, and realized the pro and con of adding crane patterns to his tiger form. He also had much

experience of the resulting benefits.

Now let us take an example of a modern kungfu master. Although he is called a master out of respect, he has no understanding and no experience of using his kungfu form to develop internal force or for combat.

When he sees other martial artists using weights and kick-boxers sparring, he is impressed. So he incorporates into his school weight lifting as a force training method and kick-boxing for sparring purposes. He may even call his art kungfu-do.

He does not have a deep understanding of weight-lifting and kick-boxing. For example, he does not understand that developing big muscles in weight-lifting causes energy blockage, and that free exchange of blows in kick-boxing causes him internal injuries.

He also has no experience of weight-lifting and kick-boxing enriching his kungfu. He has a mistaken concept that big muscles and kick-boxing improve his combat efficiency, not knowing his combat efficiency would be much better had he known how to apply kungfu for combat, and also not realizing that weight-lifting and kick-boxing have brought him harmful effects.

Hence, by mixing weight-lifting and kick-boxing with kungfu, this modern master has diluted and distracted from his original kungfu form, and has actually brought harmful effects to himself and his students. Such harmful attempts to create combinations without proper understanding and experience, unfortunately, are not uncommon nowadays.

Question 10

Your courses like Shaolin against other Martial Arts get more and more amazing though they cover many basic techniques! It is simply mind blowing that whenever I think “Oh yes I know that”. it turns out to be a big surprise.

Why is that I keep on being amazed, amused and blown away even when taking so called basic courses?

- Sifu Roland Mastel

Answer

The main reason is that I keep improving both the contents and skills of my teaching. Another reason is that these new courses are devised to meet expedient needs. The third reason is that due to my wide understanding and experience, I am able to choose the most suitable material and teach it in a most effective way for the purpose in question.

For example, there is at present an expedient need for students to handle Boxing and Kick-Boxing because irrespective of what martial arts they practice, most martial artists today spar like Boxers and Kick-Boxers. Hence, I have devised two new courses, Shaolin and Taijiquan against other martial arts.

Both the techniques and skills in these two new courses are very basic. In fact, they are of a lower level than the techniques and skills taught in the basic Shaolin 16 combat sequences and the Taijiquan 12 combat sequences.

However, because of my wide understanding and experience in combat application, I know that what students need are not advanced skills and techniques, but confidence and experience in meeting opponents who use a fighting art very different from what they have been accustomed to. In fact, if the skills and techniques are too sophisticated, they may become a hindrance instead of an aid. Therefore I choose more simple skills and techniques, which are more effective.

I also teach these skills and techniques systematically and progressively, paying more attention to skills than to techniques, as it is actually skills that students need when fighting against Boxers and Kick-Boxers. As the techniques used by Boxers and Kick-Boxers are simple, relatively simple kungfu techniques are sufficient to handle them if our students have good skills. Indeed, sophisticated techniques would slow down the acquiring of

these skills.

Although the skills and techniques are simple, there is much profundity in their application. For example, a small difference between using “Bow-Arrow Thread Bridge” for blocking or for threading can bring a big difference in result. If you use it for blocking, as many initiated practitioners would do, you expose yourself to a Boxer’s punches. If you use it for threading, you hit a Boxer as he launches forward to strike you.

The teaching is systematic. First, students learn to keep a Boxer at bay. Next, they deflects, not blocks, his strikes. Then they cover him adequately. Only when students have ensured they are safe, they counter-attack the Boxer.

The teaching is also progressive. First, students practice at low speed and with little force. Next, they practice at normal speed and with normal force. Then they practice at high speed and with much force. In their counter-attack, the progress gradually from striking to felling, to chin-na and to kicking. With systematic and progressive training, students can benefit in an hour what others may not obtain in many months of random and haphazard premature free sparring.

So, although you are an advanced practitioner, you may still be amazed, amused and blown away by such a basic course. You are amazed, for example, by the effectiveness of the systematic and progressive teaching methodology; you are amused by the fact that such simple skills and techniques can produce better results than sophisticated skills and techniques, and you are blown away by the transformation of students in such a short time from a position of uncertainty and nervousness to a position of confidence and efficiency when facing Boxers and Kick-Boxers.

Question 11

With regards to lifting weights to train internal force, as well as just about any other activity, how does chi relate to the muscles? I know that large muscles can take a lot of energy to maintain, and that tense muscles can lock up chi. However, my western mindset tells me that muscles are a necessary part of moving. Is it possible to move without muscles? Does practicing Shaolin Kungfu cause one's body to have the optimal amount of muscle, not too much and not too little? Am I causing myself confusion by combining two different paradigms?

- Sifu Matt Fenton

Answer

You have raised a very interesting point regarding internal force and the use of muscles. I believe no one has explained this point before. I have not read anything about it in classics or modern writing. My answer, therefore, is probably unprecedented. It is based on my experience as well as my understanding of force training philosophy.

When we say, “Don’t use your muscles” we are speaking provisionally. What we mean is that we do not tense our muscles. In the same way, when we say that a person’s energy is blocked, we mean that it is relatively blocked. There is still some energy flowing.

You are right – muscles are necessary for movement. Even when we use internal force, muscles are involved. One cannot move without muscles. But we do not tense our muscles in the way when external martial artists use muscular strength.

But this does not mean that the muscles are listless. The muscles are also taut, but we do not use the term “tensed” as it may give a wrong connotation. The muscles are taut, without being tensed, because they are charged with flowing energy.

Herein lies the big difference. When one tenses his muscles, they become taut because energy is locked up in the muscles. Moving the muscular mass with speed provides muscular strength.

When we use internal force, we relax our muscles and let energy flow through them. The muscles also become taut, not because of tension but because they are charged with energy. The flowing energy provides internal

force.

The concept may become clearer if we use an analogy. An empty water hose is listless. It becomes taut when we fill it with pieces of solid ice. This corresponds to muscular strength.

The water hose can also become taut when we fill it with flowing water. This corresponds to internal force.

The solid ice in the water hose is “dead”. Its use is limited to making the water hose taut to produce mechanical strength. After some time it becomes stale.

The flowing water in the water hose is “alive”. Its use is holistic. Besides making the water hose taut to produce internal force, it can also be used for many other purposes wherever it flows to. It is always fresh and constantly re-charged.

Yes, practicing Shaolin Kungfu or Taijiquan can result in the optimal amount of muscles. You are not causing confusion. In fact your questions open a new vantage point concerning muscles, mechanical strength, energy flow and internal force. It is questions like yours that enable us to understand our arts more deeply, helping us to obtain better result in less time.

Question 12

Sifu, When Buddhism and Kung Fu mingled it was the same in essence as the traveling yogis of India and Himalaya. And living conditions linked the student and teacher to a very close connection so that direct transmission and teaching was guiding the student every step of the way.

Today modern society and life style makes a different challenge for living in such persistent practice. The Shaolin Temple seems to have changed for tourist interests, though Wudang Mountain appears to maintain their roots. (But I don't really know anything about Shaolin or Wudang, I just look this up on internet and make my own assumptions.) During the Cultural Revolution many masters fled to Asia and Indonesia. Are there still teachers and places for students to go to in order to find this kind of close training?

- Spencermk

Answer

I don't know of any place today where students and teachers stay together for life like in the Shaolin Temple or on Wudang Mountain in the past to practice kungfu and spiritual cultivation. This does not mean there are no such places today, but I do not know of such places and I don't think there are.

The closest I knew of was Dr Yang Jwing Ming's noble project of getting dedicated students to stay with him in a retreat for 10 years to practice and revive the greatness of kungfu. I did not follow this project and therefore do not know of its progress.

Years ago I was offered a place on a scenic mountain as well as fund to build something like the Shaolin Temple to teach chi kung and Shaolin Kungfu. (This was even before I taught Taijiquan publicly, so the question of teaching Taijiquan in this retreat centre did not arise.) I declined this kind offer because I was not ready to dedicate myself to this secluded task. I preferred, and still prefer, travelling around the world teaching deserving students besides enjoying delicious food and seeing beautiful places with my dedicated students.

Later, Sifu Rama Roberto built a [retreat centre on the Blue Mountain](#) in Costa Rica. At first he wanted to call it the Shaolin Temple, but after discussion with me, he decided to call it Shaolin Wahnam Centre instead because he didn't intend to have any real monks there.

Although the Shaolin Wahnam Centre on the Blue Mountain is founded to preserve genuine chi kung, Shaolin Kungfu and Taijiquan, it is different from the Shaolin Temple and the Wudang Temple in the past. Besides not having monks, which would be a basic requirement for a temple, a crucial difference is that students and teachers do not stay together for life or for a long time at the Shaolin Wahnam Centre on the Blue Mountain. Although courses are conducted there throughout the year, different students attend different courses at different times for different objectices.

My son, Sifu Wong Chun Nga, also thought of setting up a Shaolin Wahnam Centre in Malaysia. I was not in favour of the idea for economic considerations. It would be too costly to upkeep. Although many students come to Malaysia yearly for my intensive and special courses, it would be more comfortable for them and much cheaper for me to conduct the courses in luxurious hotels, even when the money for the hotel accommodation were paid to maintain the centre.

Besides economic considerations, more important is the difference in aims and objectives between practitioners at the Shaolin Temple and Wudang Temple in the past and Shaolin Wahnam practitioners today.

Practitioners at the Shaolin and Wudang temples were monks. They had renounced all worldly affairs to live a temple life and practice the Shaolin or Wudang arts to attain Enlightenment.

Shaolin Wahnam practitioners do not want to be monks. They practice the arts taught in Shaolin Wahnam to make their own lives as well as the lives of other people more rewarding and meaningful here and now, including enjoying delicious food, enjoying wholesome sex and happy times with their friends and family members – legitimate worldly pleasures not permitted to monks.

Question 13

How do we end up being warriors?

I consider my own body/mind the most difficult battlefield and I the most formidable opponent, and to overcome my own weaknesses has been the purpose of my entire life! But, why Sifu? Why or how do I or am of a Warrior's cast? Why do I take so much pride into standing for what I believe is trustful and honorable? Why do I am willing to spare my life for it?

- Angel

Answer

Different people will answer the same questions differently, and my answers are as follows.

We can end up being warriors by practicing what warriors do.

We do not want just to be warriors, we want to be scholar-warriors, not in the literal but in the figurative sense.

In other words we do not want to be professional soldiers, take up arms and go to wars, while being well versed in the scholar arts like philosophy, literature, painting and music. Rather we want to have and put in daily practice typical qualities of top warriors and scholars, like courage, fitness, determination, integrity, morality, mental clarity and intellectual prowess. In practical terms we want to excel in both our business and private lives.

Obviously, merely wishing to be a scholar-warrior, or reading about how to become one, does not make you into a scholar warrior. You become a scholar-warrior by doing what a typical scholar-warrior does. And to do that well, you need the qualities of top scholar-warriors.

An excellent way to accomplish this is to practice the philosophy and arts you have learnt in Shaolin Wahnam. Why? Simply because the philosophy and arts in Shaolin Wahnam are meant to train students to become scholar-warriors.

In principle, it is the same as if you want to become a lawyer you practice what you learn in a good law school; or if you want to be a deep-sea diver you practice what you learn in a good deep-sea diving school, because these schools train you to be a lawyer or a deep-sea diver.

Saying that he himself is his own most formidable opponent has become a cliché often with the person not really knowing what he means.

In many situations this saying is helpful. Amongst other benefits, it reminds the person not to give up easily, or to be vain when defeating other opponents.

But when we examine the saying with some mental clarity, it is often not true for many people. For many students in Shaolin Wahnam, for example, the saying is not true.

It is now actually harder for many students to defeat other martial artists in free sparring competitions than to practice free sparring the way I have been telling them to, including with an element of threat and undergoing the 30-Opponent programme. The interesting point is that if they put into practice my advice, not merely listening to it, they will eventually find it easy to defeat other martial artists in free sparring competitions.

For you too, though the above advice is not meant for you because you have taken part in and have won many free sparring competitions, your own body/mind is not your most difficult battlefield and you yourself are not the most formidable opponent. In my opinion, your body/mind is your easiest battlefield and you yourself are the easier opponent simply because you have full control over your body/mind and over yourself.

Still, why do you believe in this saying? As I have mentioned earlier, different people may give different answers. My answer is that you have been conditioned to this cliché. Now you can look at it in a new light.

While you should overcome your own weaknesses, it should not be the purpose of your entire life. There are many other more meaningful and also more pleasant things to do, like using Wahnam Taijiquan to win international free sparring competitions and helping people with so-called incurable diseases to regain good health – noble aims which I believe you have dedicated yourself to.

Question 14

Sifu, I understand Wahnam students did enter sparring competitions in the past in Malaysia, and were very successful. Can you tell us about the conditions and outcome of the early competitions we entered?

- Sifu Markus Kahila

Answer

Yes, when I taught at the Shaolin Wahnam Association in Sungai Petani, Malaysia in the 1980s. We did enter free sparring competitions and were very successful.

I particularly remember an occasion, though I cannot remember the year the competition was held, where we won all the final places in both the Under-30 and the Veteran divisions.

It was the Kedah Open All-Style Free Sparring Full-Contact Competition. There were two divisions, Under-30 (if I remember correctly) and Veteran. To us this classification was an irony because all our best fighters were above 30, which would put them in the Veteran division, specially created because the organizers thought that those over 30 would not be as good fighters as those younger.

Hong Kok Beng won the Under-30 division, while Teoh Cheng Keat was the runners-up. You might have met Teoh Cheng Keat at one of the wedding dinners. He was a former Muay Thai instructor before he learned from me. Now he is a successful businessman driving a Mercedes.

In the Veteran division, Cheng Shang Shou was the champion, while Lim Swee Beng (if I remember his name correctly) was the runners-up. All the champions and runners-up were from Shaolin Wahnam.

I did not mention this achievement because we did not pay much importance to winning competitions. In fact I almost had forgotten about it until you brought it up. Actually we did not specially train for the competition. Persuaded by the organizers to take part, we just sent four competitors and all of them became champions and runners-up in their respective divisions.

Another reason why I did not mention it was because I was not really proud of the achievement as the number of participants was not as large as what the organizers made it out to be, though on the night of the finals the hall was

fully packed with spectators. When I asked the organizers why there weren't a lot of participants taking part in an all-style open competition, he told me, probably jokingly though it was flattering, that many did not take part when they knew we were competing!

Irrespective of whether it was a flattering joke, it was inspiring. We would like to repeat this feat where all the finalists are Shaolin Wahnam competitors. With strategic planning and systematic training now, this feat is certainly easier realized than before when we just sent in our competitors randomly.