

CONCEPTUAL LEVELS OF TRAINING IN MANTIS KUNG FU

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Conceptual Levels of Training in Mantis Kung Fu

At the heart of the Seven Star Praying Mantis system is a brilliantly designed training methodology that is holistic, scientific, and regimented. Training is combat focused with an approach that develops strong technical fundamentals in the early years while promoting applied performance in the later. As with many traditional Chinese martial systems, Praying Mantis kung fu has three levels of training: Beginner (Shang, 上), Intermediate (Zhong, 中), and Advanced (Xia, 下). Each stage of training corresponds to a holistic body of martial skills, skill attributes, and knowledge that must be trained, understood, and ultimately mastered. Master Luo Guangyu symbolically referred to these three levels of learning as Qixing, Meihua, and Guangban in recognition of the important role he held at Shanghai Jingwu as an ambassador to the greater Shandong Mantis community, and as a gesture of respect to the three main branches of Mantis. He also more esoterically referred to these three levels as Li, Jing, and Qi, which has deep historical and cultural significance.

What is a “system”?

To be considered a “system”, a program syllabus must inherently meet four criteria. First it must be goal oriented focusing on practical combat – empty hand or weapon. This could include for example military use, law enforcement use, self-defense use, or even sport combat use. Second, it must include a well-defined and integrated group of fighting techniques. Third, it must contain a cohesive governing body of knowledge in the form of theory, principles, tactics and strategies. Fourth, it must contain a logically designed training methodology.

What makes QXTL a fighting system?

Originating in north China 350 years ago during a time of continuous states of upheaval, wars, famine, lawlessness, and revolution, Praying Mantis kung fu was founded in the proud tradition of Shaolin, and was dedicated to the mastery of violence through violence. Founded by Master Wang Lang, Mantis boxing was based on a foundation of Shaolin Taizu Quan and Tong Bei Quan boxing, and further combined the best knowledge of eighteen boxing masters from the time, as documented in Abbot Fu Ju’s Eighteen Shaolin Families Sonnet.

Praying Mantis kung fu has three levels of training: beginner, intermediate, and advanced, symbolically referred to as Li (力), Jing (精), and Qi (气).

十八家拳法
太祖的長拳起首韓通的通背為母
鄉恩的纏封尤妙溫元的短拳更奇
馬籍的短打最甚孫恆的猴拳且盛
黃祐的靠身難近綿盛的面掌飛疾
金相的撻手通拳懷德的棒持硬崩
劉興的勾擻採手譚方的滾漏貫耳
燕青的拈拿跌法林沖的鴛鴦腳強
孟魁的七勢連拳崔連的高裏割捶
楊滾的棍採直入王朗的螳螂總敵

Eighteen Families Sonnet

“Born out of the Shaolin tradition four hundred years ago, it is a fighting system, codified by a practical and diverse group of fighting techniques - kicking, striking, grappling, and throwing - governed by a holistic body of fighting strategy, tactics, principles, theories, and training methodology.”



During the time Mantis boxing was used by organized private militia fighting the Qing government, and later by caravan guards and civilians for use in self-defense encounters. In our modern-day era, QXTL continues to be well suited for civilian self-defense purposes. It includes a unique mix of interrelated fighting techniques encompassing kicking, striking, stand-up grappling, throwing, and footwork methodologies, known as the Four Attacking Methods (Si Ji Fa). It includes an integrated body of strategy, tactics, principles, and theories, including for example the Twelve Keywords, Eight Direct Twelve Indirect, Seven Long Strikes Eight Short Strikes, Eight Lethal Strikes and Eight Non-Lethal Strikes. And finally, it synthesizes everything into an effective training methodology providing the blueprint for the what, when, where, how and why of training. It is this last piece that I will explore in more detail below. While combat purpose lies at the heart of Mantis boxing, it is worth mentioning here that it also holistically incorporates many deeply layered elements of culture, philosophy, history, health, and spirituality.

Three Stages of Training 三节

There are three stages of training in the QXTL curriculum: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. Old Chinese boxing manuscripts commonly referred to these as Shang (上), Zhong (中), and Xia (下). Specific to our own lineage Master Luo Guangyu symbolically referred to these three levels as Qixing, Meihua, and Guangban, respectively; and more esoterically as Li (力), Jing (精), and Qi (气). Each of these stages corresponds to a broad grouping of martial skills, skill attributes, and knowledge that progressively builds a foundation upon the next. It is important to note that within each stage, and between each stage, there is a continuous spectrum of inter/intra-looping feedback cycles. See Table 1 below for more details.

Values

The study of Northern Shaolin Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu is just as much a path of Self Protection as it is about Self Realization. It is about the mastery of the art, mastery of training, mastery of learning, and mastery of self. The San He Wu De framework is a simple yet eloquent framework that espouses three fundamental precepts and lays the groundwork for the study of kung fu and how to live a meaningful life. The first precept requires that you to cultivate the Right Mind (心), the second precept requires you to possess the Right Moral Standing (德), and the third precept requires you to put forth the Right Effort (功). These three stages permeate throughout the entire system.

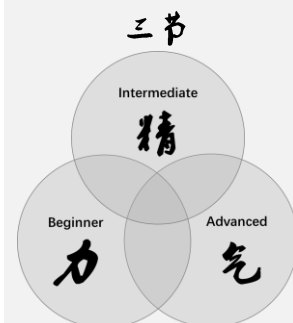
站打构
粘進樓
貼崩挂
靠打採

Twelve Keyword Principles

The study of kung fu is about the mastery of violence, mastery of training, mastery of learning, and mastery of self. It requires the right understanding, the right virtues, and the right effort.

Three Levels of Training

| System Components | Stage I | Stage II | Stage III |
|--|---|--|---|
| 1. Goal • Combat preparedness | Name • Li 力 • Qixing 七星 • Shang 上 • Beginner 初 | Name • Jing 精 • Meihua 梅花 • Zhong 中 • Intermediate 中 | Name • Qi 气 • Guangban 光板 • Xia 下 • Advanced 高 |
| 2. Techniques • Footwork • Kicking • Striking • Grappling • Throwing | Characteristics • Physical • Cognitive • Form • Doing • Block • Fundamentals | Characteristics • Mental • Associative • Conscious • Reading • Variable • Systems | Characteristics • Spiritual • Autonomous • Unconscious • Planning • Random • Intuitive |
| 3. Tactical Theory • 3 Fast, Slow, Steady, Calm • 4 Attack Methods • 5 Internal & External • 6 Harmonies • 7 Long & Short • 8 Direct & Indirect • 9 Hit & Hit Well • 12 Keywords • 8 Directional • 9 Methods • 108 Pressure Points | Duration 2 – 3 years | Duration 2 – 4 years | Duration 2 – 3 years |
| 4. Training Methodology | Values: Respect, Honesty, Courage, Equity, Responsibility, Attitude, Effort | | |



“Attitude is about maintaining a growth mindset and a willingness to learn without ego. The student must be willing to celebrate failure and learn from it, rather than fearing it and avoiding it.”



Five External 五外行

- Respect
- Humility
- Honesty
- Justice
- Loyalty

Attitude is about maintaining a growth mindset. The student must be willing to celebrate failure and learn from it, rather than fearing it and avoiding it.

In the beginning students learn foundational fighting techniques, tactical patterns, iron body, and core empty hand and weapons forms.

Drills and practice become more variable and random as the student learns to Read, Plan, Execute, and Adjust in real time.

The Right Mind is about having a good attitude and represents your overall outlook on life. The Right Values (武德) are your moral compass that guide you with clarity in the decision-making process. They are unchanging and define who you are and what you stand for. The Five External Values include Respect, Humility, Honesty, Justice (Equality) and Loyalty. The Five Internal Values include Will, Endurance, Perseverance, Patience, and Courage.

The Right Effort is about your work ethic and is the physical manifestation of attitude and moral code. It is about effort of direction (what you do and how you do it), effort of intensity (how hard you do it), effort of frequency (how consistently you do it), and effort of duration (how long you do it for). Without the proper attitude, values, and effort, a student will be limited in their ability to progress in the system. A diligent conscientious student can attain an advanced levels in 6-9 years, generally progressing at a rate of 2-3 per stage. Most people on average however will take between 10-15 years to achieve advanced levels. The culmination of these three elements – Attitude, Wu De, and Effort will result in excellent long-term gains and a rewarding life.

Beginner Level: Qixing (七星), Li (力)

The Qixing or Li stage of training begins with the students first day of class. We begin building the student up making their bodies strong and teaching foundational fighting techniques, tactical patterns, iron body, and core empty hand and weapons forms. Training focuses mainly on physical motor coordination skills learning footwork, kicking, striking, grappling and throwing tactics. There is a significant initial learning curve here with the student primarily focusing on what to do and how to do it. Training is very regimented with a wide variety of fixed single-person and two-person drills that develop mechanics, pattern recognition, and macro sensitivity. The teacher plays a crucial role in providing guided feedback, but not a mechanical intervention.

Intermediate: Meihua (梅花), Jing (精)

At this stage in training the student has developed a platform with strong foundational skills and a strong body. The student can associate macro and micro cues in solving motor problems and can physically execute tactical offensive and defensive patterns. The student is beginning to develop an ability to self-analyze and self-learn allowing them to independently make adjustments. During the Meihua stage, learning shifts to an increasingly mental one, or cultivation of the mind. The student begins to focus more on learning system tactics, theory, and strategies of fighting. The teacher will also introduce new and/or refined variations of techniques, as well as provide increasingly refined feedback. Drills and practice become more variable and random as the student learns to Read, Plan, Execute, and Adjust in real time. Students at this level may also begin assisting the teacher in leading classes and helping the newer students.

Advanced: Guangban (光板), Qi (气)

As the student progresses into the advanced level they will have already developed a strong body, a strong mind, a strong understanding of the fighting system, and high level of applied combative skills. At the advanced Guangban stage, the teacher transmits higher levels of knowledge to the student in the form of Iron Palm (Tie Sha Zhang), Eighteen Luohan Qigong, and various philosophical concepts.

“The focus of training becomes increasingly a spiritual pursuit, combining the ancient yogic like longevity practices of Shaolin qigong, with deadly Iron Palm training – culminating in the ultimate synthesis of mind, body and spirit.”



The focus of training becomes increasingly a spiritual pursuit, combining the ancient yogic like longevity practices of Shaolin qigong, with deadly Iron Palm training – culminating in the ultimate synthesis of mind, body and spirit. At the discretion of the teacher, permission may be granted to the pupil to begin cultivating students on their own, and promoting the rich traditions, values, and knowledge of the system.

Symbolic Levels of Li, Jing, Qi

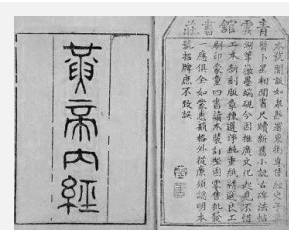
Master Luo Guangyu also more esoterically referred to the three levels of training as Li, Jing and Qi. This notation has much deeper symbolic meaning on two important levels. First, it represents the San Bao (Three Treasures), an key concept in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). And secondly, it reflects the ancient philosophical construct of the Three Elements (San Cai).

Jing, Qi, and Shen was first written about in the Huang Di Neijing, or the Yellow Emperor’s Inner Classic - the main classical medical book of ancient China dating back circa 2600 BC, and describes the Three Treasures (San Bao) of human make up. Jing (精) in Mandarin means Essence, and represents the physical human body (DNA, proteins, enzymes, organs, systems, etc). Qi (气) means vital energy and is the electromagnetic energy generated by our bodies, and all living biologic organisms. Shen (神) means spirit and is the state of mind, consciousness and unconsciousness, that exists in humans. This model is fundamental to the understanding of TCM, qigong, and qigong training. For example, in the practice of our Shaolin Eighteen Luohan Qigong exercises - an ancient yogic like energy training regimen originally introduced by Damo 1500 years ago - these three conceptual levels of Jing, Qi, and Shen are also followed. In the beginning we first we focus on cultivating Jing. After developing a foundation we later focus on cultivating Qi. Only after cultivating strong levels of Qi and control over it, can we in turn begin to focus cultivating Shen. This in turn comes full circle eventually allows us to achieve harmony and balance with nature.

Jing, Qi, and Shen has yet another deeply layered relationship to the San Cai (Three Elements), from the Yi Jing (Book of Changes). The Yi Jing dates back approximately 3,000 years and was a common source for both Confucianist and Taoist philosophy, being one of the first scholarly / philosophical efforts to place itself (mankind) within the universe. The San Cai was a simple yet profoundly intuitive model describing the structure of universe and our place in it as represented by Tian (Heavens), Di (Earth), and Ren (mankind). The three levels of Li, Jing, and Qi reflect the domains in mankind (Ren).

Concluding Remarks

Having taken you through an in-depth look at the three conceptual levels of training in our Luo Guang Yu Seven Star Mantis system, you should now have a much clearer perspective on where you are in your own kung fu journey, what it means to train, and what you are working towards. You learned about some of the deeper symbolic layers and relationships between training, qigong, the Three Treasures (San Bao) and the Three Elements (San Cai), and you should also have gained a better understanding of the core values our family represents. Remember that the real value of the system ultimately comes from physical training and the effort that you put into it. Be kind and train hard!



“Jing, Qi, and Shen was first written about in the Huang Di Neijing, or the Yellow Emperor’s Inner Classic - the main classical medical book of ancient China dating back circa 2600 BC - and describes the Three Treasures (San Bao).”



“Monk In Chan Meditation” from Luohan Qigong, Shaolin Authentics (少林衣鉢真傳)



Mantis Publications & Research



Who We Are

We are a diverse group of individuals dedicated to the transmission and promotion of traditional Seven Star Praying Mantis martial arts (Qixing Tanglang Quan). We represent the proud family lineage of Master Luo Guang Yu, who made the style famous in the Shanghai Jingwu Association in 1919. In 1919 we celebrated the 100-year centennial anniversary of Seven Star Mantis in Shanghai.

Seven Star Mantis

Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu is an open hand combat system originating out of China ~ 400 years ago and is widely considered to be the apex of traditional Chinese martial art. Born out of the Shaolin tradition it is a fighting system, codified by a practical and diverse group of fighting techniques (kicking, striking, grappling, and throwing), governed by a holistic body of fighting strategy, tactics, principles, theories, and training methodology.

A Typical Class

A typical class in our Northern Praying Mantis Kung Fu system covers a wide range of exercises, skills, and drills. You will learn traditional fighting techniques, application of 12 Keyword principles, physical conditioning, tactical theory, and traditional forms and weapons. These practices have been passed down for hundreds of years, and we continue to strictly adhere to and promote our rich practices and traditions.

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