

Primer to Starting Kung Fu

A Guide to preparing the body and mind for traditional training



What is Kung Fu?

What do we mean when we say Traditional Kung Fu

Kung Fu refers to a skill attained through hard work. In Chinese, Kung Fu can be used for any person that has achieved mastery of a chosen ability such as a chef or artisan. When we say Kung Fu with regard to martial arts we specifically mean traditional Chinese Kung Fu originating from China being designed and utilised for real combat, during historical periods where knowledge was gained and tested in actual warfare and fighting. Within the Chinese language traditional Kung Fu can often be referred to as “Gong Fu” (a different pronunciation), “Wu Shu” (Martial Arts) or “Guo Shu” (National Arts). Kung Fu normally encompasses aspects of cultural traditions, philosophy, religion, Chinese medicine, and history intertwined with the self-defence, military and combat techniques passed down through the ages.

Kung Fu is not a single art or style but encompasses thousands of styles and variations that were developed over thousands of years in China, often with their roots tracing back to the Shaolin Temple and the monk Bodhidharma. Kung Fu is often classified by the school or “family” it derives from, its geographical location such as Northern or Southern, or sometimes its relative mix of internal or and external methods.

Is Kung Fu Right For You?

What does kung fu encompass and is this a good choice for me?

Kung Fu is suitable for almost any age group, gender, skill level and ability. Additionally, given its mix of internal and external methods, if done in the correct manner Kung Fu is also very suitable for those with ailments or physical restrictions. In fact, many of the greatest masters throughout history started training in Kung Fu specifically because of being weak, sick or having health conditions. It requires no equipment, can be tailored to your level and will have long lasting positive effects on a wide range of health factors.

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Physical

Kung Fu will build attributes including strength, speed, flexibility, and coordination.



Mental

Kung Fu improves cognitive processes and emotional regulation



Spiritual

Kung Fu improves re-connectivity with the self and with the world.

“Real knowledge is to know the extend of one’s ignorance” - Confucius



Kung Fu systems are fighting systems. However because real combat is a game of life or death, many moral and spiritual aspects have been melded into them. Therefore we call them Martial Arts, as they convey a cultural beauty that includes knowledge passed down through the ages. Through experience the teachers of the past knew the outcome of combat was often injury or death, and as a result much emphasis was placed into cultivating life, through physical and mental development. These aspects were often classified as external and internal methods. Knowledge was taken from Chinese Medicine, religious practice, and also shared between various groups developing their training methods to improve the arts. Some methods were used to strengthen the body to withstand rigorous combat, some to enhance the mind to deal with the pressure of facing an opponent, and others, to rejuvenate and help the body recover from damage, injury or imbalance within the body.

Along with this came the moral dilemma of being superior in combat situations to the majority of people, often in a time when law and order was decided in the heat of the moment - from this values developed to guide those who followed the lifetime of Kung Fu pursuit. These values provided a framework that helped Kung Fu blossom into its own distinct culture, and encompass all areas of life for the dedicated student.

Because of the wide range of knowledge within Kung Fu, there is quite possibly something for everyone within the art. The key is to know what you wish to attain from learning Kung Fu and tailor your approach and selection of a style and teacher that will assist you to reach your intended outcome. Some train Kung Fu for general health and wellness, others for historical and cultural reasons. Perhaps you have an interest that aligns with Kung Fu yourself. So ask yourself, what motivates you and what is important to you? Once you know the answer to these questions you can begin to determine if Kung Fu, and a specific style is right for you



Master Lin Bo Yan (c. 1903–1990)

Which style of Kung Fu should I learn?

Which one is best?

The first thing to realise is that systems of Kung Fu do not reside in a bubble, and there are no superior or inferior systems. Kung Fu is about personal cultivation and therefore can only reside within the practitioner. This means there are only good and bad Kung Fu practitioners. Each system will have a different emphasis and combination of the components that comprise the system. This means it is upon to you to determine which system is the best for your requirements and how good your Kung Fu will be. In the same way we learn a new language, our ability to communicate in that language depends on our own achievement and application of the skill, not the actual language structure itself. We do not say Spanish is a “bad” language, but we know some people can speak fluently and others cannot. Those that speak fluently therefore are a good representation of the outcomes of learning the language.

When choosing a Kung Fu system it can be easy to get confused and distracted by the vast array of knowledge, terminology, tools and movements. What we should be looking for is a system that has the right mix of training focus for our needs and a teacher we can learn from to improve our own ability, not how our choices will look to others or for self promotion via social media or similar platforms.

"The person who asks a question is a fool for a minute, the person who does not ask is a fool for life." - Confucius



Northern Praying Mantis System

Praying Mantis Kung Fu was founded 400 years ago in the tradition of Shaolin, integrating late Ming dynasty martial practices with Chan Buddhist meditation and Neo-Confucian philosophy. It evolved against a backdrop of political instability, social unrest, and large-scale violence premised on the notions of self-preservation, moral agency and the natural right to self-defense.

As a system it includes a profound body of integrated fighting techniques that includes kicking, striking, grappling and throwing. It is further organized by a governing body of knowledge in the form of tactical theory, principles, and strategy. And finally a comprehensive training methodology ties everything together laying out road map for the what, when, where, how and why of progressive skill building.



Master Xu Jin Ge

It is a good idea to do your research before deciding. These days much information can be gathered through online research from the comfort of our own home, and you can learn a lot about a particular style or teacher before investing any time in training. Does your chosen style have a clear lineage to show the various teachers through the years? Does the system have a structure that includes the attributes you wish to develop? Does the system have a community of practitioners to support you, learn from and answer questions? Another good idea is to look at the senior students of the teacher - do they display the qualities and skills you wish to achieve? If they do not, there is a high likelihood you will not attain these either.

Some of the more popular systems include Hung Gar, Ba Gua, Wing Chun, Praying Mantis, Choy Li Fat, Eagle Claw, Yang and Chen Taiji, and many of the most famous and well regarded teachers can be easily identified by discussing with students of these arts.

How are kung fu systems structured?

What are the main components?

Traditional Kung Fu was developed within the culture of ancient China, therefore certain environmental and cultural factors have determined the structure of how and what is learnt.

Earlier we mentioned combat, Chinese Medicine, religion and martial values. All of these have a role to play in systems of Kung Fu.

Most Kung Fu systems trace their origin back to the Shaolin Temple and the visiting Indian monk Damo (Boddhidharma). Legend tells he taught the monks a series of movements to improve their physical and mental condition. Some styles were later held within a family, passed down through the ages. Others were taught within distinct groups, military or even secret societies. These Kung Fu systems were used for personal or goods protection, warfare, physical and mental development and even political uprisings.

Traditional Chinese Kung Fu systems are unique compared to modern sport based martial arts in that they do not comply with any specific set of rules or restrictions. As such, the techniques within Kung Fu include the full use of all body parts, and target the full range of the opponents available bodily targets.

Kung Fu systems usually comprise of different aspects such as a range of basic techniques which can include simple movements, stances and exercises for strength and agility. From basic movements the students will normally learn series of movements from just a few, to over several hundred combined in a sequence known as a "form".

“Use the Light that dwells within you to regain your natural clarity of sight.” – Laozi



From these forms applications and techniques will be taken and practiced to get a better understanding. Weapons may also be practiced in some styles and usually are grouped into short and long weapons.

Most traditional styles will include training for building internal energy or “Qi” through meditation type practices or movements coordinated with breathwork. Often in conjunction with these methods, body hardening will be practiced to withstand strikes to the body, and sometimes special medicines will be made to assist repair and recovery. Finally the skills learnt will be applied to more live situations such as various levels of free sparring the students become more controlled and confident.

It is important to note that some schools teach a modernised sport version of Kung Fu often referred to as Wushu. This is a competitive performance form of Kung Fu developed after the Chinese cultural revolution. Although it is a physically demanding and impressive sport, with aspects of traditional Kung Fu movements within it, it is missing much of the content of traditional Kung Fu systems and is more akin to gymnastics than traditional Kung Fu, as its focus is performance and competition rather than self cultivation and combat. Be aware when researching a potential school or instructor that some will pass off Wushu as traditional Kung Fu and you will need to evaluate their knowledge from the content of their teaching.

How should I start?

What should I focus on and practice?

When choosing a Kung Fu system it can be easy to get confused and distracted by the vast array of knowledge, terminology, tools and movements. When beginning it is important to focus on basics and not get overwhelmed or over excited about “knowing” a new technique.

Goal Setting

A simple method for improving is to focus on improving one particular skill or ability for each area of study. This could include one type of stretch, such as the front splits, one strength exercise, such as a set number of push ups, and one technique, such as punches in horse stance. Set an attainable target for each goal (usually time or number of repetitions), and a time frame for when you want to achieve it. By focusing only on a few goals at a time you can focus your energy into reaching those goals. Once achieved it will be much easier to maintain these skill, and you can move on to new goals, continuing your progress.

Non-Linear Learning

Its understandable to want to learn quickly and reach your goals as soon as you can, but sometimes this can be counterproductive. Don't try to rush the learning process, and also don't give yourself too much pressure to learn quickly, as this may affect your motivation and actual skill retention. For a true traditional Kung Fu system it was generally expected it would take around 5-7 years of full time (i.e daily) training to master the complete art. This may seem like a long time, but this is often a byproduct of our modern and impatient worldview, and several years is not much in the scheme of a lifetime of training and health benefits. Through Kung Fu we should be aiming to create a lifestyle that builds the positive attributes gained through training, and not the belts and certificates that prove our worth. Also keep in mind that every day is different and you may not feel at your best each training session. The body and mind are complex systems and this means that sometimes you do not feel as though you are improving, and even at times going backwards. Learning does not happen in a straight line so just keep going and trust in your body's ability to learn, a breakthrough moment may be just around the corner.

“When there is no thought, one's nature is empty of differentiated characters and is tranquil, but when there is thought, that is self-transformation.” – Huineng, Platform Scripture



Attainment of Mastery

They say it takes 10,000 hours to master a skill. Whether or not this is true, we do know that if you enjoy your learning you will both learn quicker and easier. In this way we should heed the idea of “The journey is the destination” Enjoy your time training and becoming more in tune with your body and mind, you may be surprised at your progress when you do.

How should I prepare?

What do I need for my first class?

Time

Ensure you can dedicate enough time to your training. If you are attending a class, don't turn up late and if possible give yourself enough time to do any additional warmups, after class stretching or to ask the instructor questions. If you are training at home, or outside ensure you are free from distractions such as ringing phones, TVs, or children who may break your concentration. It is expected within a traditional school that any teacher time should be supported by self training time to help you retain the information already learnt and ensure you can learn new information in your next class rather than just relearning the same things. At a bare minimum you should match any teacher time with the same amount of time dedicated to reviewing and self training.

Space

When you are training by yourself, make sure you have an adequate sized clear space free from obstacles that could be dangerous. Ensure the ground is even, and there are no large cracks or uneven areas that you could trip on.

Partners

If you are training by yourself, it's a good idea to try and find a training partner to practice two person drills, applications and exercises with. This will help to understand techniques and applications better and gauge how your movements work with a live reacting opponent. Your training partner or partners should be people you trust and also preferably close to your own skill level.

Determination

As with any endeavour, how you approach it will have a major impact on the outcome. Traditional Kung Fu especially can be complex, especially considering it was developed under a language system and world view that is different to most western students. You may find many movements unusual and difficult to coordinate at first. Sometimes you will not understand what you are doing as movements and muscle memory may be developed before understanding the application for your movements. Because of this you need to be determined to keep training and working hard and not get discouraged from a perceived lack of improvement or understanding.

Self-Belief, Positivity, Open Mindedness

You may also find some skills very difficult at first, or you may see your instructor perform actions that you believe to be outside your realm of possibility. Try to remember that everyone was a beginner once, and to achieve high level skills you first have to believe you can achieve it. Some of these may be strength or fitness related, some may be technique or skill based and you may have a view of yourself that defines what you are “good” and “bad” at. Try to ignore the self limiting ideas and have an open mind of what you can achieve and just try and learn.

What should I wear?

Do I need to buy a special outfit to practice?

You may have seen many pictures of Kung Fu practitioners wearing traditional monk outfits, silky uniforms or traditional Chinese clothing. You may have wondered if you need to purchase these special types of clothing to practice Kung Fu. The reality is that many of these clothes are a result of the traditions and time frames of the people who have trained Kung Fu in the past, and not actually a part of the Kung Fu itself. There are some general guidelines you can follow but you do not need to dress like an ancient monk in order to train. Some schools may have their own uniform which you are required to wear, or you may enjoy to wear a certain style of clothing but the most important thing to keep in mind is that all outfits should be practical and safe.

“The great person is one who does not lose their child's heart.”

— Mengzi



Clothes

Clothes should be comfortable and relatively loose fitting. This is to ensure you can move freely during your training. Most Kung Fu training will involve moving your limbs to the end ranges of motion so you do not want any restriction from clothing hindering your movement. Areas to keep aware of are the neck, shoulders, hips and knees, as any tightness here can prevent comfortable movement and power of arms for punches or reduce depth when squatting down or kicking height. If you are training with throws or grappling you will want the clothes to be made of a material that will not stretch or rip easily during training. Also keep aware of how thick your clothing is to ensure you do not overheat, or get too cold once you cool down in cold weather.

Shoes

Unlike many other Eastern Martial Arts systems, Chinese Kung Fu generally utilises shoes during training. The simple reason for this is that training in the past was done in a wide array of places - in training halls, out in fields, on stone paved courtyards and more. Also training was often done in regular attire - this meant shoes and clothes worn in daily activities were used. Shoes should be low profile, with relatively thin and flexible soles. Much like the minimalist or barefoot style shoes of today, this allows the foot to have better sensitivity of the ground to improve foot strength and control for balance and transmission of force.

What's Next?

What are my next steps to starting kung fu?

Now that we have gone over some of the basics regarding Kung Fu training, the next step is to find a school or teacher. For a true traditional Kung Fu school many of the basic exercises, values and class structure will be very similar. This means that provided you have done some background research on a style or teacher you can be confident the beginner learning phase will generally cover a good range of content. Once you reach more advanced levels of training, your teacher, training partners and style may become more crucial to your overall development and level of skill.

If you decide to begin your training via online or virtual learning, just be aware that the depth of understanding will be limited. For beginners, virtual learning can be a valid option, especially if you do not have a suitable school or instructor nearby. If you pursue online study, try to make sure the course you are choosing offers individualised feedback and guidance based on your own personal training so that you can identify and improve specific weaknesses or key areas.

You can also prepare yourself physically by building endurance through activities such as running and swimming, improving strength with basic movements like push ups, pull ups and body weight squats, and work on your flexibility with simple stretches. There are many guides and videos both free and paid that can help you improve these areas prior to or outside of your Kung Fu training, and these will assist you in maximising your Kung Fu skill training time. Finally, try to remember that as its name suggests, Kung Fu is something acquired through hard work. As with anything of value, you need to take action and put in the effort in order to get the return. Kung Fu can give you a life of health, enjoyment, community, and knowledge, but you must be willing to take the first step, just as Confucius said:

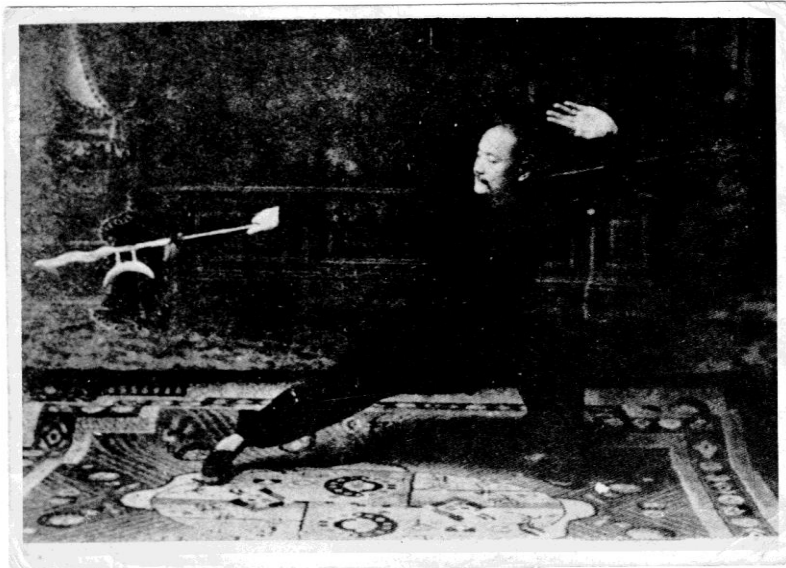
千里之行，始於足下

“A journey of a thousand miles,
begins with a single step”

What We Offer

Here at the Luo Guang Yu School of Seven Star Praying Mantis we offer a complete system of a well regarded and highly structured style passed down from the tradition of Shaolin. Our offline academies provides introductory and fundamental training courses, and we have instructors trained to a high level around the world should you choose to progress further and reach more advanced levels of training in person. To learn more about style you can visit us at www.luoguangyu.com to read more where we have an extensive library of content and articles on marital practice and philosophy of thought. Furthermore you can find our contact information below on the next page.

Mantis Publications & Research



Master Luo Guang Yu (1888–1944)

Recent Publications

Foundational Concepts and Legal Principles in Self-Defence
 基础概念与法律原则
 沈志敏 著
 沈志敏 著

Foundational Concepts and Legal Principles in Self-Defence

The Secret to Better Performance is Control
 沈志敏 著
 沈志敏 著

The Secret to Better Performance is Control – Lessons in Mindfulness in Praying Mantis Kung Fu

Educational Series on Violence and Self-Defence
 Part I: The Realities of Violence
 沈志敏 著
 沈志敏 著

Part I: The Realities of Violence – Case Study Analysis on Current State of Victimization in the US

In Recognition of Master Pel celebrating forty years in Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu
 沈志敏 著
 沈志敏 著

In recognition of Master Pel celebrating forty years in Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu

Announcement: Retirement from Arena of Public
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Announcement: Retirement from Arena of Public

Part III: Cultivating the Five Internal Values and the Right Effort in Praying Mantis Kung Fu
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Part III: Cultivating the Five Internal Values and the Right Effort in Praying Mantis Kung Fu

Part II: Cultivating the Five External Values and Right Moral Standing in Praying Mantis Kung Fu
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Part II: Cultivating the Five External Values and Right Moral Standing in Praying Mantis Kung Fu

Part I: Three Harmonies & Martial Values and Cultivating the Right Mind in Praying Mantis Kung Fu
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Part I: Three Harmonies & Martial Values and Cultivating the Right Mind in Praying Mantis Kung Fu

How Low Can you Go? Foundational Footwork and Benefits of a Low Framed Methodology
 沈志敏 著
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How Low Can you Go? Foundational Footwork and Benefits of a Low Framed Methodology

Conceptual Levels of Training in Luo Guang Yu Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu
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Conceptual Levels of Training in Luo Guang Yu Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu

Mantis Publications & Research



Seven Star Praying Mantis

with Chan Buddhist meditation and Neo-Confucian philosophy. It is considered the apex of traditional Chinese martial arts providing a development pathway of self-protection and self-cultivation. As a self-defence system it integrates practical empty-hand and weapons techniques (including kicking, striking, grappling, and throwing) organized by a governing body of knowledge (in the form of combat strategy, theory, and principles) and implemented through an arduous training regimen that develops applied self-defence skills, improved physical fitness, and enhanced cognitive abilities. Visit our website at www.luoguangyu.com to learn more and read our extensive list of publications on martial practice and philosophy of thought.

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 history of combat practices and traditions.

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