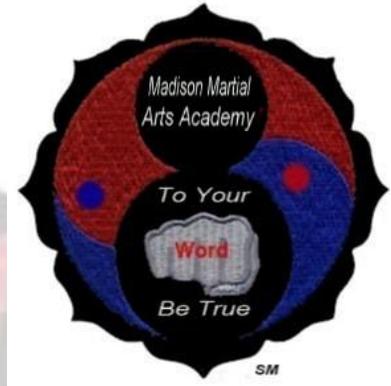


# ***THE WAY OF A WARRIOR***

*By: Grand Master. Michael Neal*



Did you know that the term “Kung Fu” does not refer specifically to the martial arts? It is more a slang usage found in the U.S. and in some parts of southern China. The martial arts have an intellectual content. They represent sets of values and are based on specific views of the world and of man’s place within it. It was a master of Kung fu in Hong Kong, who spoke of the Martial arts as “Using the mathematics of the human body”.

He meant that the body might be thought of as a complex machine. It has its bearings, the girders, ropes and pulleys and like all machines, it can break if it is forced to work unnaturally.

An elbow is flexible in all directions but one, so pressure on the joint in one direction in which it cannot bend may immobilize or break it. Over 2000 years ago, classical martial arts emerged to serve the needs of the war in China, and war was plentiful. What was military life like in China and India between 500 BC and the third century AD? These were the conditions right for the development of the very specialized form of fighting which could later be identified as the pioneers of today’s martial arts.

The martial arts became a way of life for many. Records of exercises known as “Hit and Thrust” were practiced as far back as the Shang dynasty, around the 17<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

Later China was again overrun by foreign power, this time by the Manchurians from the Northeastern borders. They pushed through China's northern borders capturing the city of Beijing. Before 500 BC. China did not exist as a nation.

The territory occupied by the People's Republic of China today was divided into a large number of minor, independent states, whose social systems were essentially feudal in structure. Warfare was widespread, but armies of peasants, led by local warlords, were often small. The martial art was originally used concerning the combat systems of Europe as early as the 1550's. The term is ultimately derived from Latin, and means "Arts of Mars" where Mars is the Roman god of war.

The lineage of Shaolin martial arts has been continued directly into present day. At the height of its prosperity, about 1,300 years ago, the Shaolin Temple had a complement of 1,500 monks, including 500 fighting monks, together with the land and buildings to house and support them.

It is said that in 520 AD, a Buddhist monk from India named Bodhidharma came to the Shaolin monastery at the foot of the Songshan Mountains in north-central China. To help the monks withstand the long periods of meditation he introduced from his Chan (Zen) school of Buddhism, special breathing techniques and exercises to develop both their inner strength and their ability to defend themselves in the remote and often dangerous mountainous area in which they lived.

The Ch'ing Emperor was persuaded that it was dangerous to tolerate the existence of a center of independent people with such exceptional fighting skills. He sent an army, which was assisted by a renegade Shaolin monk. The Temple was surrounded and burned down. All the records of the Shaolin Temple were burned; it is believed that it is unlikely that Bodhidharma deserves his position as the patriarch of Ch'an or Zen and the martial arts. However, his teachings live through the practitioners of the arts he is said to have founded.

Based on these exercises, the Shaolin monks gradually developed a sophisticated fighting system known as Shaolin Martial Arts. Observing nature and living in harmony with the world was an important concept to go hand-in-hand with the Zen Buddhist concepts. Much of the martial arts that the Western world has come to know is reminiscent of the style and attitudes forged during the Manchurian rule. There are many different martial arts all originated in different countries thousands of years ago as forms of self-defense.

Karate comes from Japan and Kung Fu from China, Tae Kwon Do is native to Korea. In Terms of techniques, Tae Kwon Do emphasizes kicks more than other martial arts. In the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century marks the formation of the modern forms of Judo, Jujitsu, Karate, and Kendo based on the revivals of old schools of Edo, a period of martial arts which had been suppressed during the Meiji Restoration. In the late 1960's and 1970's witnessed an increased media interest in the Chinese fighting systems, influenced by martial artist Bruce Lee. His martial system was an unconventional one.

He called it Jeet Kune Do, or “the way of the exploding fist” a style designed to live outside the boundaries of other traditional martial arts styles. The system he founded, has its roots in Wing Chun, and is ideally adapted to close-quarter combat. It is a unique and scientific form of martial arts. Bruce Lee was important for more than just his ability to act in popular movies. He was also a leader in the arts, realizing that the things that did not work should be discarded for techniques that were effective.

The Wind Chun system is a style of southern Shaolin Temple boxing and was invented 400 years ago by a Shaolin Buddhist nun named Ng Mui. She combined the temple's most combat ready fighting arts and stripped away the unnecessary movements. While still retaining the economic speed and attack theories of Shaolin. She then taught this new style to Yim Wing Chun. Since then Wing Chun has become known as the most powerful and realistic style of combat ever used in martial arts. Bruce Lee studied Wing Chun. He was taught the style by the late Ip Man--leader of the Wing Chun clan. It is a style of Kung Fu that originate from China. At college in the USA, he encountered many other fighting styles, of both Asian and European origin.

He was a keen experimenter, rapidly mastering many new techniques from the arts he encountered. His thorough training in Wing Chun gave him the speed, power and agility to make him a masterful martial artist. Bruce Lee is credited as one of the first instructors to openly teach Chinese martial arts to Westerners. Wing Chun Kung Fu was created by Shaolin Monks to fight against the Manchurians in war. It is very efficient and streetwise style that U.S. Special Forces still use today for close quarters combat on the battlefield.

Jackie Chan and Jet Li are also prominent movie figures who have been responsible for promoting Chinese martial arts in recent years. There is a legend that says the young woman named Yim Wing-Chun, at the time after the destruction of the Southern Shaolin Temple and its associated temples by the Qing

government. That Yim Wing-Chun rejected the local warlord's marriage offer, but she'll reconsider his proposal if he can beat her in a martial arts match. She soon crosses paths with a Buddhist nun, Ng Mui, who was one of the Shaolin Sect survivors. She asked the nun to teach her boxing. She taught Yim Wing-Chun a new system of martial art that had been inspired by Ng Mui's observations of a confrontation between a Snake and a Crane. This, still nameless style allowed Yim Wing-Chun to beat the warlord in a one-on-one fight.

Wing Chun is a close contact combat, using quick punches and kicks with a tight defense. A good teacher will teach a student to overcome force with positioning and turning rather than meeting it head on.

Training in the martial arts offers many benefits to the trainee, self-defense, physical, mental, emotional and spiritual developments. People of all levels of social classes have practiced the martial arts; they were first practiced primarily by the upper classes that had the time and money to pursue them. People today have found that it not only is a great self-defense, but the martial arts will also improve their fitness, and their children. It is a great self-esteem and sharpens their focus in such a powerful way that it will benefit them throughout their life. Any educator of the martial arts will teach you that it is a form of exercise and self-improvement, and not a tool for bullying.