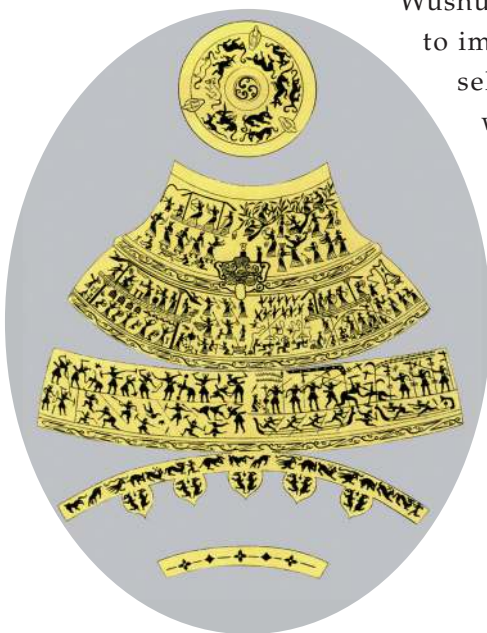


Foreword

Wushu, the Chinese martial art form known as kung fu in the West, is an important part of Chinese culture. It reflects the character of Chinese people, and applies their theories and principles to combat. It differs in many ways from other forms of combat, such as boxing, karate and Muay Thai. Wushu strikes a unique balance between hard and soft, and between extrinsic and intrinsic values, and can demonstrate the potential beauty and elegance of the human figure. Rooted in ancient Chinese philosophers' understanding of life and the universe, wushu is much more than just a combat technique.

Wushu, which ultimately aims to improve one's health and self-defense skills, begins with the mind. While demonstrating martial art movements, an expert's mind remains calm and neutral. The energy is dynamic on the outside but calm and focused on the inside. Wushu does not encourage



Stretched out view of copper pot with scenes of land- and water-based warfare. Warring States Period, Chengdu, Sichuan province.



CHINESE KUNG FU

fighting or bravery; instead, peace and quiet are considered its goals.

Having maintained its strength and vitality for so long, some believe wushu to be the epitome of traditional Chinese culture and to be representative of China's national spirit.



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The Origins of Martial Arts

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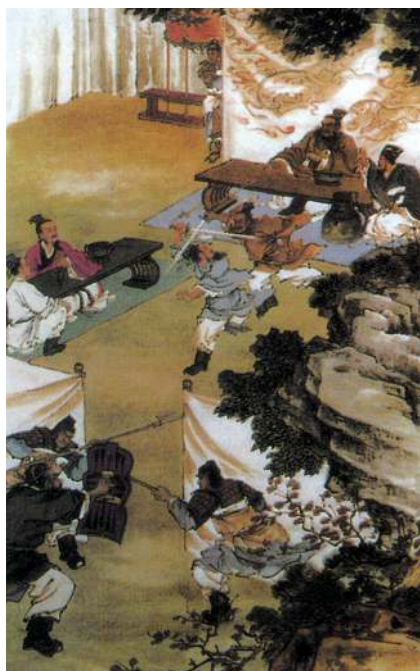
The term “wushu” literally translates as “martial art,” and since 1949 wushu has been the name for the modern exhibition and full-contact sport that is judged according to a set of aesthetic criteria. Outside China, it is often referred to as kung fu, although in Chinese this term can also be used in contexts completely unrelated to martial arts. Wushu is a more precise term for general martial arts. Its origins are rooted in ancient tribal wars. An excerpt from *The Book of Poetry* dates martial arts to the Spring and Autumn Period (770 BC–476 BC). Passages in the *Zhuangzi* text record more than 3,000 of King Zhao’s swordsmen (late Qin Dynasty) fighting day and night without growing tired. During the Han Dynasty (202 BC–AD 220), the practice of martial arts made remarkable progress. Many paintings and stone sculptures from that period have been unearthed in Henan, some of which involve swords, spears and lances while others demonstrate separate “solo” and “sparring” elements.

Xiang Zhuang performing a sword dance at the Hongmen Banquet.

The drawing portrays the famous story of Hongmen Banquet. In 206 BC, two states, Chu and Han, clashed after the Qin Dynasty ended. Liu Bang, King of Han state, went to Hongmen to meet Xiang Yu, King of Chu state. During the banquet, Xiang Zhuang performed the sword dance as a cover for his attempt on Liu Bang’s life.

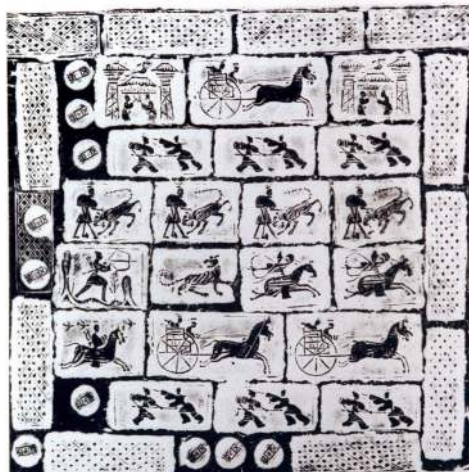


Mirror design depicting a fight between a man and an animal. Qin Dynasty (221–206), Yunmeng, Hunan province.



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THE ORIGINS OF MARTIAL ARTS



Martial arts and hunting scenes. Hollow brick relief. Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220), Zhengzhou, Henan province.



Qigong Jade Inscription.

Qigong Jade Inscription

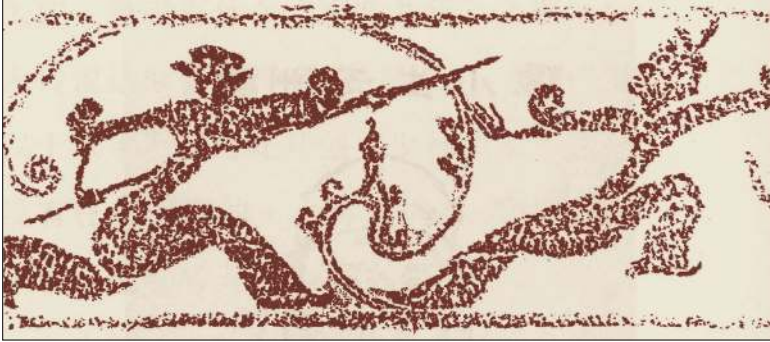
The jade column with twelve sides dates from the early Warring States period and is kept in the Tianjin History Museum. Forty-five engraved characters describe a method of Qigong practice similar to Zhoutiangong. It is the earliest record of Qigong ever found in China.

This inscription translates as, "When exercising Qi energy, one must take a deep breath and store more energy to enable one's Qi to extend to the lower part of one's body. When Qi moves below the waist, one must stop to make Qi sink. Then breathe out the Qi in reverse direction, like grass in a bud growing upward. With mutual movement and exchange, if one exercises Qi along this direction, one can live longer; if against this direction, one will die."

Taoism formed after the Spring and Autumn Period. The famous Chinese philosopher Laozi advocated the "renewal of oneself while embracing perfect peace" and the "unity of body and mind while concentrating on breathing." Zhuangzi proposed the idea of "exhaling the old and inhaling the new." The *Xingqi Yupei Ming*, or the *Qi Circulation Inscription*, which dates from the Warring States Period (475–221 BC), records the qi-promoting method (*qi* is usually translated as energy). Laozi and Zhuangzi's theory of cultivating *qi* combined the theory of yin-and-yang with the theory of the five elements: metal, wood, water, fire and earth. This became the training basis for the meditation of wushu. Some of Laozi's philosophical theories, such as restricting action through silence and conquering the unyielding with the yielding, were absorbed by various styles of wushu and are considered the principles of the internal elements of martial arts.



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An example of armed versus unarmed combat. Stone relief, Han Dynasty, Nanyang, Henan province.

Cultivating extrinsic and intrinsic values and unifying the body and soul are fundamental characteristics of wushu. Martial arts emphasize the importance of *qi*, while martial artists are trained to transfer the potential energy in their bodies and achieve the goal of “mind leading *qi* and *qi* promoting strength.” During the Song (960–1279) and Yuan (1271–1368) Dynasties, martial arts began to incorporate *qi*-promoting techniques. Shaolin kung fu matured by the end of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) and the Wudang styles grew out of the same period; both are seen as important stages in the historical development of martial arts.



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The Principles of Wushu



CHINESE KUNG FU



Tiger-shaped stone,
 from *China's Scenery*
 by Okada Gyokuzan,
 published in 1802.

Li Guang, a famous general of the Western Han Dynasty (BC 206–AD 25), shoots an arrow into a stone in the shape of a crouching tiger while on a night patrol.

Whether a person has reached the highest level in martial arts is measured by four aspects: force, fist position, strength and psychology. Together, these four aspects make up an organic whole and embody martial arts at the highest level. For a kung fu master, his force should have the quality of both pliability and hardness; his fist position should be nimble but with a clumsy outward appearance; his strength should be able to hit people by his will; and his mind should be prepared to fight, but not act in anger.

Being able to determine an appropriate balance between hard and soft and between external and internal forces is required for all styles of martial arts. Force is linked to the concept of “yang,” while “yin” is linked to the concept of mercy. In Chinese wushu,



THE PRINCIPLES OF WUSHU



The Sixth Patriarch Cutting Bamboo, by Liang Kai.
 Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279)

Huineng was the sixth patriarch of Buddhism in ancient China. This drawing makes use of bold lines and a simple, unsophisticated style.

there is no pure “hard fist” position, nor a pure “yielding soft fist” position. If the fist is too hard, then the strength will be exhausted; if it is too soft, the strength will be too weak. Both have obvious drawbacks. Only a balance of the two can allow the fist to switch smoothly and harmoniously between the ways of yin and yang.

The phrase “cats hide their claws” comes from the philosophy of Laozi, and implies that the smartest thing can seem simple. Monks use this term to explain how high-level martial arts are practical, as opposed to complicated or beautiful. An important discipline of wushu is that a beautiful thing may not be practical, and often a practical thing is not beautiful. The smart object may not be better than the simple object, and most simple things can exceed smart things. Therefore, the mystery of wushu does not lie within tangible skills because the greatest skills are intangible.

Martial artists use *qi* (the functional activities of the body) to create the force to hit an adversary.



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This can be broken down into several steps: “strength comes from will,” “force derives from mind” and “fist works as desired.” The idea is to transfer the energy from one’s body by will power, focus one’s strength on one particular point, and then release that force.

Martial artists aspire to fight well without being influenced by anger. Laozi said that a good fighter was never angry. A man who is easily angered will never be a good fighter. Therefore, those learning martial arts must learn to control and adjust their moods: they should remain calm when they meet with enemies and remain undaunted in the face of perils.

An understanding of the concepts of hardness and softness together with the ability to control one’s emotions are essential for those wishing to reach the highest levels. These aspects are the pillars that underpin wushu.

