

Chapter 1

Introduction

It's the Chinese version of the David and Goliath story. An old white bearded man, frail in appearance, cane in hand, strolls passively down a country road accompanying his son and granddaughter to market. Just as the three happy travelers reach the outskirts of their village, a group of thugs descend upon them. The group's leader stands boldly in the center of the road and barks, "Give us your money or we take it by force and let 'Ox-breath Chiang' have his way with the girl." Ox-breath, the Chinese equivalent of a Sumo wrestler on steroids, eyes the girl and grunts, saliva dripping gingerly from the corners of his mouth. The girl's father immediately leaps forward to protect her but is caught mid-stride by a backfist from Ox-breath's bear-size hand. He lands unconscious in the ditch by the side of the road, blood ebbing from his mouth.

The ruffians break into laughter and mock the beaten man's foolish bravery. The group's leader commands a few gang members to start searching through the man's clothes for money. Ox-breath turns back towards the young girl to claim his prize, but as he reaches out for her arm, the tip of the old man's cane pierces him through the eye and a palm strike to the chest sends blood gushing out of his nose and mouth. As the giant begins to fall to the ground, the old man hooks him under the arm and, with a tornado like spinning movement, plays "bowling for bandits" by hurling the lifeless mass into the crowd of hooligans. The group scatters like insects at a crop dusting festival, but two or three are knocked down by the flying heap of flesh. The others rush towards the old man like

hyenas on a feeding frenzy, yet he effortlessly weaves, darts, and spins in and out of the assailants' attacks; sweeping, throwing, striking and kicking until they all lie quivering in the dusty road like beached jellyfish. The young girl helps her father to his feet and the three family members continue on their journey, the "frail" old man strolling away passively.

As far fetched as this story might seem, most of us who practice Chinese martial arts, especially the so-called 'internal' styles, are fascinated with this kind of tale because its message is that highly refined skill can easily overcome brute force. This is the concept which led most of us to study these arts and this idea keeps us going through long, hard hours of training. A small guy can beat up a big strong guy without a rock and sling? A force of four ounces can deflect a thousand pounds? Where do I sign up!?!

If a student is lucky enough to find a good teacher who has a training program which is designed to develop complete martial art skill, he or she immediately realizes that developing this skill is going to take many long hours of hard work everyday. The majority of this work, especially in the beginning stages of development, is not fun. The training is basic, it is repetitive, it is exhausting, and it can easily become boring. There is no secret, there is no magic, there is no free lunch.

Many students who enter the "internal" martial arts become interested because they relate a few of the terms associated with these arts, such as "soft" and "relaxed," with "easy." However, if they find a good teacher who is teaching a complete system,

they soon discover that the training is anything but "easy." At every level of practice the training is physically demanding, however, at the beginning levels the work is especially difficult. Working hard at fundamental repetitive exercises is nothing new to anyone who has attained a high degree of skill at any discipline. The professional baseball player can knock a fastball out of the park with a swing that appears effortless. The all-pro basketball player can drive down the lane, weave around defenders, leap into the air and "hang" for what seems to be minutes, his flight ending with a reverse slam executed while his head appears to be floating above the rim. He makes it look easy. The professional football player, the baseball player, the basketball player, the concert pianist, the Olympic gymnast and the old white bearded man in our story are all individuals who have reached the highest level of excellence in their field, and they all have one thing in common; they have spent thousands of hours practicing the fundamentals of their discipline and through this practice have reached such a refined level of skill that everything they do appears to be effortless and natural.

While thousands of hours of practice is the key element to developing skill in any discipline, practice cannot be haphazard. Any good training program is systematic and progressive; there is a method. Basic skills are developed fully before more complex skills are encountered. Components of the practice are first trained separately until each component can be performed correctly in isolation before the components are integrated. The progression is step-by-step and the system is designed to develop higher and higher levels of refined skill.

In this book, Richmond, Virginia, based Pa Kua Chang teacher Park Bok Nam describes in detail the various components of Pa Kua Chang's basic training as it was taught to him by his teacher Lu Shui-T'ien (1894-1978), a native of Shantung Province, China. The book details exercises which will help any martial artist improve his or her footwork, body flexibility, *ch'i* circulation, and internal striking power. Additionally, the publisher has made available a companion video tape in which Park Bok Nam demonstrates a majority of the exercises contained in this book.

This book contains fundamental exercises and an explanation of the principles upon which they are based. There are no Pa Kua Chang forms described in this book because Park believes that Pa Kua Chang forms should not be taught to students until other fundamental skills are developed. Park is fond of saying, "I have water to give to thirsty students, but unless they have a cup for me to pour it in, they cannot hold the water." The "cup" is symbolic of fundamental skills and principles, the "water" is the complete art of Pa Kua Chang. Park firmly believes that at each level of training the student has to develop the "cup" before the teacher can pour in the "water."

While many students today are taught the Pa Kua Chang form as the sum and total of the art, Park was taught that forms practice makes up only a small sliver of the total art of Pa Kua Chang. There are many components of Chinese martial arts that cannot be developed solely through forms practice. The majority of these components fall into three broad categories. Any complete Chinese martial arts system will include elements of the following:

Ch'i Kung

氣功

1) *Ch'i Kung* - breath control, visualization, and non-specific body movement techniques for various purposes - increased circulation to the distal points of the extremities, increased vital capacity, meditation, and *ch'i* development.

Nei Kung

內功

2) *Nei Kung* - training designed specifically for the development of muscle groups, ligaments, and tendons not usually under conscious control.

Wai Kung

外功

3) *Wai Kung* - external, i.e. visible, aspects of any martial art including firm balance, flexibility, good posture and stance work, proper mechanical alignment, coordination, and stability.

The Fundamentals of Pa Kua Chang

Ideally, these elements will be developed in a progressive, balanced curriculum designed by an experienced teacher who will guide each student's individual development. Pa Kua Chang, being a complete martial art system, contains elements of all three of these disciplines. In Park's training program, all of these elements are trained separately through basic training exercises before they are brought together in forms practice or fighting.

Beyond Pa Kua Chang Forms Training

When martial arts practitioners ask why Park Bok Nam does not teach Pa Kua Chang forms to beginners, he tells the following story.

Living at opposite ends of a remote country village by the sea, there are two families. Each family has a young son. Both of these young boys love to eat fish. In one family, every time the young son wants to eat fish, his father takes out his fishing gear and travels down to the seashore to catch fish for his son to eat. His wife cooks the fish and the family has a nice fish dinner.

In the second family, when the young boy tells his father he would like to eat fish for dinner, his father takes his son out and shows him how to find materials and construct a fishing pole, line, and hook. He then shows his son how to find and cut bait. Next he takes his son down by the sea shore and shows him the best areas for fishing, shows him how to bait a hook and teaches him how to catch fish. Once the fish are caught, he takes his son home and shows him how to clean the fish and then his wife shows the boy how to cook the fish. The second family then sits down to enjoy a nice fish dinner.

From that time forward, whenever the second family wants to have fish for dinner, father and son go together. Over the course of time the son learns how to place drop lines, how to fish with nets, how to catch crabs, how to dig for clams, when to employ specific kinds of bait, what times of the day are best for fishing, how to fashion lures, etc. The father puts forth a lot of effort teaching his son, and after a short time the son

becomes a fairly skilled fisherman. In the first family the father still goes to catch fish alone anytime his family wants fish for dinner - it is easier and much less time consuming.

A year later the country is involved in a war and the men of the village are called off to fight. In the first family, the wife knows how to prepare and cook fish, but neither the mother or son knows how to catch the fish. However, in the second family, the son is now able to go catch fish easily on his own and bring it home for he and his mother to eat. Which of the fathers was smarter?

Park believes that if a student learns a form without first having a thorough experiential "body knowledge" of the principles on which the form movements are based, he is eating fish without knowing how to catch it. Someday when his teacher is not there to teach him more deeply, or when he is called on to apply his art in a fighting situation, he will be out of luck. The purpose of this book is to begin to teach the Pa Kua Chang student "how to fish."

Through form practice, a student will learn continuity, fluidity, connection, body integration and rhythm. These are all very important aspects of fighting skill and when practicing a series of Pa Kua techniques with these principles in mind, the whole will become greater than the sum of the parts. In other words, practicing a form has purpose beyond the linking together of a series of techniques. However, two elements that a fixed form sequence is missing are variation and sufficient repetition of isolated body movements. Unless a student learns how to change, adapt, and vary his movement spontaneously, his fighting skill will always be weak. However, all variation of movement and technique will still adhere to the fundamental principles of Pa Kua Chang. The spontaneous response is efficacious, and proceeds along the path of least resistance. To this end, the body is trained and developed so that proper response is elicited out of habits which are ingrained in the body. Correct habits are formed through repetition of fundamental training methods.

Beyond building correct habits and mechanics, repetition of fundamental training methods serves another very important purpose - overall body development. The "internal" styles of Chinese

martial arts are famous for the practitioner's ability to deliver a tremendous amount of power with very little visible movement or apparent effort. The Chinese refer to the highest level of this ability as *huaching*. *Hua ching* is one of three levels of *ching*, or trained strength, which are as follows:

Ming Ching

明勁

Ming ching or "obvious power." This means that exertion of force, alignment, and the effects of the body's action are all clearly discernible to an observer.

An Ching

暗勁

An ching or "hidden or covert strength." When force is exerted in this manner its origin is not visible to the untrained observer, hence the term "hidden." The practitioner at this level has begun to refine and internalize the body's movement.

Hua Ching

化勁

Hua ching or "refined force." Sometimes this term is translated a "mysterious power," however, this term really refers to strength which is highly refined. The practitioner's application of force is so subtle that the origin of this force is completely imperceptible to the opponent. When the force is exerted one's opponent may believe that he has done something to make himself miss the mark because he cannot feel the source of the strength initiating from the practitioner.

Typically when a martial artist is fighting an opponent, he or she will utilize sensory clues to "listen to" or "feel" the movement of the opponent's body in order to respond correctly to any attack the opponent is preparing to launch. The practitioner who has reached the *hua ching* level of development has completely internalized his or her movements and thus moves so efficiently that the movements are imperceptible even if the opponent is touching the practitioner's body. The movements are very small, smooth and subtle, yet extremely powerful.

In order to develop the *an ching* or *hua ching* ability, the practitioner's body needs to first be cultivated and developed. The process is progressive. Increased levels of flexibility and suppleness lead to increased *ch'i* movement; development of secondary muscle groups, ligaments and joints lead to increased body strength, coordination, and integration; and development of the mind's intention and focus leads to an increased body awareness and a connection between the mind, the body, and nervous system. If these elements have not been progressively developed and trained fully, a practitioner can perform a form movement perfectly with all of the correct body motions and alignments, yet still not have much power. The movement will be "empty." There is no *kung li*, or developed internal strength. Park believes that development of this skill requires hundreds of hours of correct practice.

A practitioner cannot jump right to the *an ching* or *hua ching* level of development without first having spent a considerable amount of time practicing on the *ming ching* level. The reason being that power has to first be developed before it can be hidden or refined. The power is developed through body conditioning on the *ming ching* level. What this means in Park's school is that when a practitioner first begins training, all of the fundamental exercises are practiced with large body articulations. The practitioner's *ch'i* pathways need to be opened so that there is a full and balanced distribution of *ch'i* and the "power" resident in the body is coordinated. Large body articulations promote the movement of *ch'i* in a body which is stiff, inflexible, has *ch'i* blockages, or is uncoordinated. The body needs to be stretched, joints need to be opened and primary and secondary muscle groups need to be conditioned. Park feels that this conditioning will not occur if the practitioner starts out learning small, overly soft, subtle movements.

If a student tries to imitate the movements of an instructor who has reached the *an ching* or *hua ching* level of development, he or she will have a very difficult time developing any real skill. A form sequence is used by an advanced practitioner to refine movements that have been trained and conditioned through fundamental skills training.