

KUNG FU INTERVIEW



TIPS FOR BEGINNERS AND KUNG FU IN THE MODERN WORLD - Q&A WITH SIFU WOLFGANG HERBST

As a quick intro, can you tell us a bit about yourself and your school?

My name is Wolfgang Herbst - I am the founder of Naam Kuen Kung Fu School in Germany. At my school, students can learn Hung Gar Kuen as well as Choy Lee Fut Kung Fu - both of which are styles originally based in the South of China. This also explains the gwoon's name "Naam Kuen Kung Fu", which in Cantonese means Kung Fu of the Southern Fist. Among all the different martial arts, from young age I felt attracted the most to Chinese kung fu. I started practicing Chinese martial arts in Germany before I decided to travel to Hong Kong/China to learn more. This helped a lot to understand the culture and principles behind the styles. It's not only the history, but also training methods and how you approach them, what makes the difference.

What are the most common mistakes, or assumptions, you've encountered during your years of teaching?

I feel there are three main traps waiting for new students. First one is the desire to skip basics, the wish to move to spectacular movements as fast as possible. If you can't manifest power in a basic punch or kick, it's little to no use to practice advanced techniques. Second is not to practice on one's own - while it's a necessity to trust the teacher, sooner or later the sincere student should make time at least once or twice a week to repeat exercises besides the regular lessons for developing deeper skills. At the end of the day, all your progress is up to you. The third mistake is to give up - you will need to constantly be able to adapt to changes in life and motivation to keep the fire burning.

Movies such as "Yip Man", "The Grandmaster" and such are probably one of the reasons many people start to practice at some point. Since reality is mostly not matching most of these movie scenes, what are some key aspects a beginning martial artist should focus on?

As I said the key aspects to focus on are the basics, in Chinese called "Ji Ben Gong". Forms do have their place from day one, but if you put too much emphasis on this aspect of training, the forms and the student's kung fu will be empty and without life. A good teacher is one who can grow interest in the student to aim for perfection at very basic exercises, to motivate them to excel in the foundation. Once the students endured this strainous part of training, not only will they learn new movements much quicker, they will also understand the principles and ideas behind them.



How can Kung Fu be used in an educational, non martial arts setting?

Kung Fu is not just exercise for the body but also integrates the use of the mind and heart, which therefore cultivates the spirit. In an educational setting this can be used to reach the benefits often associated with meditation. For example, teaching a simple form in children's physical education classes might be a great addition to the typical competition or team based sports and games you usually find in schools. When practicing a kung fu form, kids can focus on themselves which helps them to find peace and balance to the growing demands towards them. For adults at work doing a few internal exercises from Qi Gong or internal arts

during lunch break, for example 5 minutes, greatly helps to relief stress and increase productivity.



What direction do you see Kung Fu or martial arts, as a whole, heading in?

There will always be kung fu for health and self improvement. That being said, real kung fu is more than this. In China the masters say, just a few more decades and people will have to travel to the West to learn authentic kung fu. Regardless of the place, for most people it's already hard to make time twice a week in the evening to train. However, developing the profound skills Chinese martial arts became famous for, takes a lot of time, time being a factor most people lack. Those who are so advanced in the practice as to realize how incredibly valuable Chinese kung fu is, have the challenging responsibility to find ways to pass on skills and knowledge despite, or maybe adapted to the current development of society. Otherwise the chance is alarmingly high those kind of skills won't be found after the end of the 21st century.



To end this interview in style, what is the best Kung Fu or martial arts advice you have personally ever received and what is the best advice you would give to our readers?

You already are what you want to become, therefore smile and keep an open mind. At the same time, no matter how long you've been practicing already, be careful to maintain your beginner's attitude "Co Sum": Stay hungry and critical towards your skills always. There is no right, there is only less wrong. Best of luck to you and happy training!

