



Sharing the Beauty of China

|| 中华优秀传统文化传承发展工程支持项目 ||

CHINESE KUNGFU



Wang Guangxi



China Intercontinental Press



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图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

中国功夫：英文 / 王广西著；韩慧枝等译. —北京：五洲传播出版社，2018.8
(“中华之美”丛书)

ISBN 978-7-5085-4014-6

I. ①中… II. ①王… ②韩… III. ①功夫(武术)—介绍—中国—英文 IV. ①G852

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2018)第191816号

“中华之美”丛书

主 编：陈陆军

出 版 人：荆孝敏

中国功夫

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责任编辑：高 磊

封面设计：谢金宝

内文设计：北京本一缘文化传播有限公司

出版发行：五洲传播出版社

地 址：北京市海淀区北三环中路31号生产力大楼B座7层

邮 编：100088

发行电话：010-82005927，82007837

网 址：<http://www.cicc.org.cn> <http://www.thatsbooks.com>

承 印 者：北京利丰雅高长城印刷有限公司

版 次：2018年8月第1版第1次印刷

开 本：650 × 960mm 1/16

印 张：8.75

定 价：160.00元

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Foreword

Wushu, the Chinese martial art form known as kungfu in the West, is a valuable cultural heritage of Chinese people and contribution to human civilization.

Wushu, often used in the form of combat, consists of several different kinds of movements. The Chinese people's determination to win and strong character traits are reflected in the fierce body combat (which appear in the form of postulated and imitation combat).



Stretch out view of cooper pot with conviviality, archery and water-and-land warfare pattern (Warring States Period, Chengdu, Sichuan province)

Wushu reflects the character of Chinese people and applies their unique understanding of theory and principle to combat. It differs from European and American boxing, which are widely known to be violent; and from Japanese Karate, which possesses the cultural characteristics of an island country; it is also different from Muay Thai, which has characteristics of strong jungle fury. Wushu is a particular balance between hard and soft, and extrinsic and intrinsic values, which not only show the robust beauty of one's figure, but also the meaning of profound elegance. Apart from simply combat techniques, martial arts are rooted in Chinese philosophy, containing ancient Chinese philosophers' understanding of life and the universe.

Wushu, which aims to improve health and self-defense, begins by fostering one's moral character. The martial art movements are physically demonstrated while internal thoughts are static and neutralized; the energy is thus fierce on the outside and quiet on the inside, static on the inside and dynamic on the outside. Wushu is not fond of bravery, nor fighting. Like still waters, peace and quiet is considered the highest realm of martial arts.

Having survived the vicissitudes of life while maintaining all of its strength and vitality, some even believe Wushu to be the epitome of Chinese traditional culture and national spirit.

THE ORIGINS OF MARTIAL ARTS



Wushu was historically termed “quan yong” or martial arts. But fairly recently, the Chinese government changed the term to “guoshu” during the Republican Period (1912–1949) while foreigners call it “kungfu.” The Chinese martial art was rooted in the war between humans and animals among the tribes. An excerpt from *The Book of Poetry* traces the martial art back to the Spring and Autumn Period (770 BC–476 BC). Further passages from *Zhuangzi* recorded over three thousand swordsmen of King Zhao (in the late Qin Dynasty) fought with each other day and night, and never grew tired of fighting. During the Han Dynasty (202 BC–AD 220), the practice of martial arts made remarkable progress. Many a paintings on relief stone sculptures from the Han Dynasty, which were unearthed in Henan, describe the martial arts movements in varied forms, including similarities to fencing, painting, sword playing, snatching spears empty-handed, and bayonet practice using a sword and lance—all of which reflect the “solo” and “sparring” forms of martial arts.

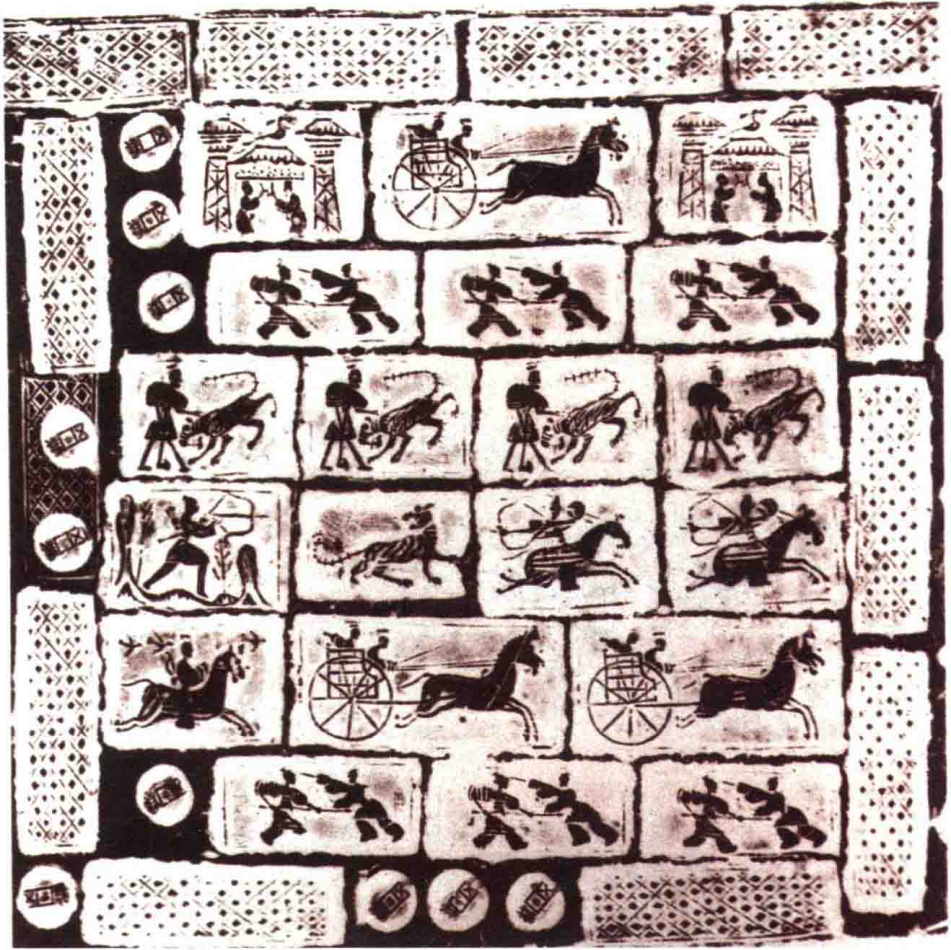


Mirror with human-animal fighting patterns, the Qin Dynasty (221–206), Yunmeng, Hunan province



Hongmen Banquet—Xiang Zhuang performing sword dance

The drawing portrays the famous story of Hongmen Banquet in Chinese history. In 206 BC, two states—Chu and Han—contended for hegemony after the Qin Dynasty ended. Liubang, 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.



Martial arts and hunting drawings, hollow brick relief, the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220), Zhengzhou, Henan province

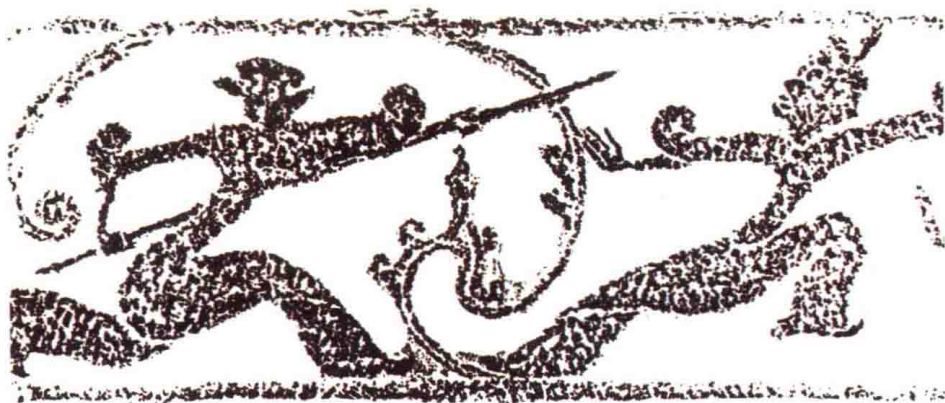
Following the Spring and Autumn Period, Taoism was formed, and famous Chinese philosopher Laozi advocated for the “renewal of oneself while embracing perfect peace,” and for the “unity of body and mind while concentrating on breathing” while Zhuangzi essentially proposed the idea of “exhaling the old and inhaling the new.” The Xingqi Yupei Ming, or the *Qi* Circulation Inscription, from the Warring States Period (475–221 BC) recorded the *qi*-promoting method. Laozi and Zhuangzi’s theory of “cultivating *qi*” combined the

theory of yin-and-yang with the five elements: metal, wood, water, fire and earth. This became the training basis for the internal exercise of Wushu. Some of Laozi's philosophical theories, such as restricting action through silence, conquering the unyielding with the yielding and "cats hide their paws" were absorbed by various styles of Wushu and were considered the principles of internal styles of martial arts.

Cultivating extrinsic and intrinsic values and unifying the body and soul make up the basic characteristics of Wushu. Throughout the process of historical development, martial arts have integrated the promotion of *qi* while martial artists have worked to transfer the potential energy in their bodies though systematic *qi*-promoting training to achieve the goal of "mind leads *qi* and *qi* promotes the strength." During the Song (960–1279) and Yuan (1271–1368) Dynasties, martial arts began to incorporating the *qi*-promoting



Qigong Jade Inscription



Bare hands tussling with lance, stone relief, the Han Dynasty, Nanyang, Henan province

methods. The Shaolin kungfu matured by the end of Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) and the Wudang styles grew out of the same period; both are seen as natural trends in the historical development of martial arts.

PRINCIPLES OF WUSHU



The principles of martial arts are also the disciplines of martial arts, which thereby give meaning to the highest realm of martial arts.

Whether a man's martial arts reach the higher level is measured by four aspects: strength, fist position, strength and psychology. These four aspects make up an organic whole and a comprehensive embodiment of martial arts at a higher level. For a kungfu master, his force should have the quality of both pliability and hardness; his fist position should be hidden; his strength should be able to hit people by his will; and his psychology should be prepared to fight, but not act upon anger.

Being able to determine an appropriate balance between hard and soft is required for all styles of martial arts and the embodiment of integrating the "internal and external" forces. Force, also refers to



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 deeply into a stone in the shape of a crouching tiger on a night patrol.

“yang;” and mercy means “yin.” In Chinese Wushu, 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 the strength balanced between the right amount of hardness and softness can allow the fist to switch smoothly and harmoniously between the ways of yin and yang.

The phrase “cats hide their paws” derives from *Laozi*, meaning “the smartest thing seems stupid and simple.” The monks use this term to explain the high-level martial arts are neither complicated nor beautiful, but practical. The beautiful thing may not be practical—and most practical things are not beautiful: this is a discipline of Wushu. That is to say, the smart one may not be better than the simple one, but most



The Sixth Patriarch Cutting Bamboo by Liang Kai, the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279) Huineng, the sixth patriarch of Buddhism in ancient China, advocated seeing one's nature and becoming a Buddha. The drawing was drawn in bold lines in a simple, unsophisticated style.

simple things can exceed the smart thing. Therefore, the mystery of Wushu does not lie within its disciplines because the smartest discipline has no discipline. “No discipline” is therefore the essence of Wushu.

Hitting others based on will means using will to introduce genuine *qi* (referring to the entire functional activities of the body), which spurs the force to hit the counterpart. This is classified in several ways: “strength comes from will,” “force derives from mind” and “fist works as desired.” Its principle is to transfer the energy from one’s body by will power and mindset to the utmost extent, focusing one’s strength to one particular point to release the great force in a flash.

Being good at fighting, without acting upon anger is a skill much needed for one to reach a superior psychological level. Laozi said that a good fighter was never angry. Therefore, a man easily angered will never be good at fighting. Thus, martial arts learners must attain a higher psychological level and be able to adjust their moods: they should be calm when they meet with enemies, remaining undaunted in the face of perils.

Thus, between hard and soft, cats hide their paws and attack using their mind while fighting, but not acting upon anger; all these combined constitute a higher level of Wushu. These four aspects are the large pillars supporting the pavilion of Wushu.