

## The distinctive feature of Kwong Sai Jook Lum: Feeling (or about Sensitivity and Yieldingness in Kwong Sai Jook Lum)

Kwong Sai Jook Lum is a particular kind of kung fu from southern China that is practiced for health, self defense and spiritual growth. Anybody can get some results in this art by learning the system alone, which includes techniques both barehanded and with weapons; however, for a real and true mastery of this style a knowledge of philosophy, traditional Chinese medicine and of meditative and breathing exercises useful for growing *Chi (Qi)* is required. In particular, to get inside Kwong Sai Jook Lum it is mandatory to understand the meaning of “soft and hard”, as described by the world head of the school and Fifth Generation Grand Master, Gin Foon Mark: this concept is hard to understand for people who have not deepened the cultural background and the different traditional arts that have always been tied to kung fu. In fact, although he has always been renown mainly as a kung fu master, he strongly believes in tuning with his own culture and in being a complete person. This is what fundamentally defines a Master. There is a big difference between what Chinese people call a “Sifu” and what they call a “Master”: while the former indicates someone who has great skill but basically shows and teaches only his art, the latter pertains to someone who is the best in his field, has a multitude of talents and excels in all of them. Master Mark for example excels not only in Southern Praying Mantis kung fu, but also in Six Healing Sounds Chi Kung, in Lion Dancing and music, in acupuncture, painting, calligraphy and, lastly, in cuisine.

All these skills are not disconnected from each other, as would happen for a collector of disciplines; in fact, they are quite interwoven, so much as being hard to master one of them without knowing the others, and this is especially true for kung fu. As completion of his long path of deepening in all of these, Master Mark, after leaving New York for Philadelphia and later for Minneapolis (where he then kept teaching), chose to focus mainly on the soft – or “internal”<sup>1</sup> – side of the style, considering it not only fundamental but also decisive. The most interesting result of this work is the attention paid to “feeling”: the emphasis on this aspect characterizes and distinguishes his School from others who practice Jook Lum all over the world. Paradoxically, it could be said that the most distinctive technique of this style... is not a technique!

The concept of *feeling* is in fact the beginning, the basement and the secret of this style. To achieve this it is necessary to start from the attitude the practitioner must have, attitude that is of mind and of body at the same time. It is proper to keep the mind relaxed and calm, like what we do in Six Healing Sounds Chi Kung<sup>2</sup>, to cultivate breathing – obviously, diaphragmatic – and “working with the bright of the heart”, to quote Master Mark.

The following indications are useful to practice in the correct way kung fu exercises and Six Healing Sounds Chi Kung alike: “*Control the Mind*”, or allow it to reach a state of tranquility, eliminating as possible all those thoughts that come up during the exercises; “*Control the Breathing*”, or breathe naturally in a slow, constant and flowing way; “*Control the Body*”, or execute the stances properly, so to relax and involve all the body in extremely natural positions. The limbs have to be loosened, relaxed and soft. Postural vices, inborn muscular blockades or locks in the flow of *Chi*, although could appear as “natural” for being self-induced and not “forced”, in truth represent normal and temporary phases of the learning process, and practicing long enough under the guidance of a Master tends to harmonize the technical correctness with the spontaneous naturalness of individual movements.

It's good to explain now, however, what is intended for softness or yieldingness applied to this field: it's not correct to be weak and unstable, as a child would be, instead it is proper to be adaptable like bamboo canes, that bend under the flow of a river in his full strength, only to stand up again when the power of the water decreases. “*Be like bamboo*” is one of the expressions Master Mark often uses during his lessons.

To work on sensitivity is necessary to reach and gain contact with the partner or the opponent and immediately assess speed, direction, power and intent of the technique; when contact is obtained, to be as light as a feather and to use *feeling* to section the opponent's action and then counterstrike. A starting stiffness is quite counterproductive: being contracted is like crying so high that any other

<sup>1</sup> In the brief differentiation between “internal” and “external” styles, the first ones are focused on the use of breathing and internal energy, or *Chi (Qi)*, literally energy or vital breath.

<sup>2</sup> On this subject, compare the articles published on the numbers 12 and 13 of NMHM.

sound would be covered. Likewise, the lighter the practitioner is, without being any less martial and effective, the harder it will be for the opponent to feel him, like he was whispering. It has to be underlined that being soft does not guarantee enough sensitivity in itself, though it is an essential premise: using the same analogy as before, it could be said that one thing is to hear a sound, a quite different one is to be able to "listen" to it and to understand its meaning.

Soft and hard are two terms that the students hear from their first day in the School and that they'll hear afterwards during their practice. A student learning and practicing correctly the Art will be soft while performing most of the applications and forms, while he'll be using the hard part of the technique only at the last moment of the attack. This could sound easy, but it actually takes years of practice to reach the proper skill level which enable the use of the "soft and hard" style of the Sothern Praying Mantis.

It is very difficult to describe the application of the internal force in the final moment of the attack. In fact, it should not be confused with the physical and muscular strength, however, in the right conditions, anyone is able to generate this type of energy. The typical Taoist concept of softness or yielding applies to all techniques immediately prior (and subsequent) to the time when you use the hard power.

This sensation or sensitivity is similar to that one developed by blind people. One of the exercises that the students practice is in fact, to work a technique with a partner and closed eyes. You will have no trouble dealing with people bigger or stronger than yourself as long as the foundations of the style and techniques have been learned correctly: these foundations are founded basically from being centered on the Dan Tian.

Without going into technical details, here it will suffice to recall only some of the general settings. For example, the distance between the feet must correspond to the width of the shoulders; in the "horse stance", the heel of the advancing foot must be positioned in such a way that corresponds to the back foot toe (and vice versa in the reverse guard). When teaching, it is also described as "shoulder width, heel and toe." The weight of the body is divided into equal parts on his toes<sup>3</sup> (never on his heels, if not when we are attacked). Both knees should be slightly bent, and the abdomen is slightly under tension. The shoulders are relaxed and down, while the center of gravity must be in the diaphragm.

Looking at the figure of the human body as a whole, it will appear, in the typical posture that assumes in Jook Lum, as a kind of hourglass consists of two isosceles triangles: the upper one has a base in the shoulders and the lower vertex in the area of the Dan Tian, which is in turn the upper vertex of the lower triangle, the base of which are the legs. It is interesting to note how this geometric representation applies both to a front view (in this case two sides of the triangle are formed by the arms) and for the lateral view.

The head is high and the eyes should be facing forward, into the void, without focusing on anything in particular. The Grand Master often liked to say, "Don't look down, there's no money on the ground!". The hands and arms should be outstretched, but not fully extended, and represent the antennas of the mantis; elbows must be tightened to protect the ribs and the center line, exactly how the insect does. The practitioners of this style prefer the short-range combat and are able to deliver shots on certain nerve centers or acupoints.

Next article on NMHM will provide about other technical content as well as further details about the history and the full name of the style.

<sup>3</sup> In the front (the so-called balls of the feet) there are the bones of the phalanges and metatarsals; in plants there is the phalangeal triangle, whose base is the hinge metatarsal-phalangeal joint, commonly also called the bearing of the foot. It is precisely this area that is based on the weight of the body.

***Respect founding Grandmasters***

*Joon Jo*

***Respect your Master***

*Joon Si*

***Respect their teachings***

*Joon gow do*

***Learn Benevolence***

*Hok yun*

***Learn Righteousness***

*Hok yi*

***Learn Kung Fu***

*Hok Kung Fu*

Sifu version (more or less):

"T not a T

V not a V

hand comes from chest, punch out (forward)

you don't come, I don't (move/hit)

you don't come, maybe I hit"

T not a T - here the word "ding" is used because of it's shape. It implies that the feet are never perpendicular in a T shape, like a fencer for example.

V not a V - "baat" (which means 8) has a V shape, which implies that the feet are never angled all the way in (like wing chun for example)

So the feet are not like a T, and not like a V... They are anywhere between those two extremes.

"shu tung hlem hau faat" - The hand comes from the chest and punches out. Another way that Sifu says it: "Punch come from chest". When we punch, the hand and elbow is in and in front of the chest. Not like Shaolin or Hung Ga's chambered positions.

You don't come, I don't hit (strike is better). This means, that the general rule is to wait for the opponent to come in and attack. This is both a gentleman's move, and a fighting strategy. If the opponent comes in first and attacks, their power can be exploited in a counter attack. The praying mantis waits in ready position.

The last line is a clause to the rule. If the opponent doesn't attack, but the situation requires immediate action, it is justified to attack first.

I don't know the exact origins, but this poem is common between the southern praying mantis styles.