Over my years of martial art practice, I have faced many difficulties which I had to find the solutions myself. More often than not, it’s a time consuming process. It was the usual hard work over time for me, except that with the turn of the decade, the times change faster than people. With the reduced time people spend for outdoor recreational pursuits and reduced mental focus needed for the more sophisticated arts, I now have to teach with the most efficient method. No more martial poems for the practitioner to guess the true meaning of the style. No more unexplained aspects of Kung Fu, people want to know how it’s like before reaching the stage of progression, simply because they want to know they are spending their time in the most efficient way possible.

Kung Fu enthusiasts who have been following my blog posts will know this particular Kung Fu teacher is inclined towards providing the public with more information about the Kung Fu styles he is teaching. I feel that there is no longer a need to keep secret phrases and knowledge within the inner circle these days. People already have problem deciphering the traditional teachings. Not every Chinese person is well read in classical Chinese literature, nor understands Chinese philosophies themselves. Thus I will spare no effort in organizing the traditional teachings I have received mainly from my sifu, praying that I will have enough time on earth to do so.

As of the 21st Century, people’s perception of martial arts are different from that of my teacher’s generation. To a complete layman who watches recent movies, maybe a martial art that teaches you to do backflips is the most practical or most worth learning. Some may feel that a person putting his hands in front of his face, and raising his shoulders to cover his chin is a serious fighter. This issue has in fact affected many beginners, including beginners who learn under me. In reality, if you slam your fist into the person’s face hard, it makes no difference if the hands or shoulders are up or down.

The beginner does not actually understand much more than the layman. Both of them will think that stances matter very much how practical the fighter will be, but anyone who’s got enough substance as a martial arts combatant will be able to tell you that it is the actions
such as hitting, blocking, grappling, moving that will give you the outcome of a fight. The stances actually make it easier to perform certain striking, blocking, grappling or movement techniques, but they do not end fights. This very aspect of fighting will take some time demonstrating to beginners and laymen. Until then, these beginners and laymen will probably have the impression that Hung Gar Kung Fu is one of the more impractical styles of Chinese martial arts, because its stances are wide and open. However, this style has actually some of the most direct and hardest hitting ‘strikes, blocks, grappling and movements’, actions that will affect the result of a fight.

That's why, many people who have not tried similar arts do not really understand Hung Gar. Most of them know the Wushu performance part of it, but not of its well thought out combat system. Perhaps this has got to be my very role in the Hung Gar world, to educate people about its function as a combat style. Let us dispel some misconceptions right away:

One: The single finger hand is a decorative trademark of the Nan Quan Wushu. Practitioners turn their head back and suddenly look forward, flexing their arm muscles, making them tremble. They also show a fierce face with wide open eyes.

The truth: Nan Quan Wushu is inspired by Hung Gar Kung Fu and Choy Lee Fut Kung Fu of the South. Nan Quan Wushu is a performance art, it is also an aesthetic sport. Hung Gar Kung Fu is a real life combat style which has seen much fighting over the centuries. In combat one does not turn their eyes away from their opponent at all! Even if you are doing a technique which turns you around 180 degrees or more, you should re-establish sight of your opponent as soon as you turn back. Furthermore, having the expression of a
berserk maniac will not give you any advantage against any trained person; but fierce power in your arms and body will. If you want to judge if the person performing the form is capable of fighting, first judge by the line of sight. It should always be facing the supposed direction of attack.

Flexing the arm muscles does not help. The look of muscle tightness and even trembling is not a voluntary muscle motion. The real single finger hand is supposed to be made up of finger, wrist, elbow and shoulder positioning combined with breathing to move the hand forward. As a form of Qi exercise it compresses Qi in the arm and reacts with unwanted muscle tension and waste energy, hence the tight appearance and the vibration. This exercise serves to strengthen the arm and also prepare the practitioner for conditioning exercises with hard impact on the arm.

Two: Palm strikes are delivered with the arm and fingers totally straight in Nan Quan Wushu. Performers extend their arm so straight their elbows hyperextend, showing great flexibility. Their shoulders are also pulled backwards to display a ‘chest up’ posture.

The truth: Nobody delivers palm strikes with the arm and elbows hyper extended. Chances are the elbow will be injured. Shoulders on the other hand should be fully extended forward with the back muscles extended, this can give you much more power, and many inches of reach, which even one inch is very precious in a real fight. Even when we do push ups, we will still utilize our shoulder joint. Our shoulder would not be all the way back at the top of the rep.

As we know, muscles work in pairs. In the case of the elbow joint, the biceps are paired with the triceps. When the triceps are fully contracted, it cannot push any more. A palm strike is a very impactful push so the triceps have to have some remaining range of motion during the point of impact. Also, the stability of the movement is also affected as the triceps are no longer working with the biceps to stabilize the joint.
Even if you are to do a palm strike forcefully without hitting a solid object, you will still hurt yourself. Performers are able to do a palm strike with elbows fully extended because they are not striking forcefully like a Hung Gar practitioner, they are merely putting their hands out.

Not only is Hung Gar hard to understand by people who have not started practicing it, it is also not easy to train up the body coordination, muscle memory and the strength needed to use it. With the physical aspect of the art left to the student’s own diligence, the other part is the teacher’s job to make the skills taught easy to pick up. If the transmission of knowledge is done well, the student can then focus on the training to reach the next level.

While prescribing lesson plans and homework for my students, I take into consideration the person’s character, academic and occupational background, intellectual inclination, whether the person is more of an artistic or a logical person and most importantly the person’s health and fitness condition. This way I can plan the best way to explain to the person and the best way the person learn and enjoy the training. Some prefer to work on something they know in detail and focus on working on it. Some prefer to explore around freely with a creative mind. Some prefer training buddies, some prefer to be alone in their practice.

While different people will have their own specialized approach in dealing with studying martial arts, holistic study is more challenging. A logical thinker will often have to tap on the right brain for visualization and spatial awareness. A science and math person will have to rely on language proficiency to understand and memorize instructions. It is very helpful to encourage learners to transit to the other fields of thought to make their learning experience more complete. Kung Fu is an art that has science behind it. Its form, takes form because of its function.

In terms of practicing and using martial arts, many people only specialize in a few areas. In Hung Gar, certain clusters of techniques have to be used in conjunction with each other. Yes you can specialize in having a very powerful straight punch or downward palm strike which can break bricks and boards, but you also cannot ignore the technique needed to
land strikes. However in Hung Gar Kung Fu there are structural concepts which applies across a big fraction of techniques. These are the holistic concepts that hold the style together and gives every technique synergy with each other. These are what make Hung Gar a well refined martial art with binding core concepts. Both specialized cultivation and holistic approach to training is important for a complete Hung Gar user.

Among Chinese martial arts, some other styles have risen in popularity recently due to exposure from academic research. The studies churns out theses, backed by facts and experiments. This makes the function of these Chinese styles more understandable, hence more attractive to modern martial arts enthusiasts. In the old days, people learn an art and devote themselves to it not just because they are ‘in the know’, but also because of their feelings to the art. Of course, the emotional side of things cannot be neglected.

So why am I keen in bringing out the goodness of Hung Gar Kung Fu in articles, videos, learning notes? My personal love and attachment to this style is a big factor, however I also feel that this is a worthy field of study because Hung Gar is currently not well understood by the masses. It may not even be well understood by many Hung Gar practitioners themselves.

Hung Gar is a reasonably more sophisticated art to master. When it comes to techniques people have to understand why we place our hands in certain positions, with the fingers in a tiger claw position. They have to know which actions or stance the opponent takes calls for a fist, a palm or a claw hold. If you do not know the situation the technique is applied it will not work. While it is with no doubt true that with not enough muscle memory, speed or strength that the technique will not work, if we help the learner grasp the function and con-
cept of the technique quickly it will speed up the skill development process and avoid learning obstacles with a trial and error style learning method. The trial and error style learning method means having very regular fighting experience. Over indulgence in sparring can distract the student from achieving good basics. In the previous generation, a martial artists could very possibly gain more fighting experience in real street fights instead of controlled sparring in a martial arts school.

When it comes to power and internal strength, the 12 bridge hands principles of Hung Kuen can be challenging to train up. Therefore the teacher has to guide the student along the way, answering questions and giving pointers. For example why we combine isometric strength with certain movements. Or why we have to point our fingers straight in certain directions, or why we point our elbows downwards and sink our elbows. To attract modern martial artists through scientific explanation, it will be more challenging for us as we have more techniques and concepts to break apart in our analysis.

The style of Hung Gar is a precious style of Kung Fu. It has a rich historical background, fighting wars since its founding until the modern era. It saw much action during civil unrest. Besides that there is also a comprehensive range of techniques, while learning the style one can probably get a good overall idea about Chinese martial arts as Hung Gar Kung Fu comprises of both Southern and Northern features.

With the popular misconceptions going around, I can’t help but try my very best to clear them up. Hung Gar Kung Fu is not a mysterious martial art with a mystical air or a veil of secrecy. There are proven methods recorded in texts; it’s up to the person practicing the art to follow these methods and reap the benefits in increased strength, awareness and technical competency.

Yours Truly,
Leroy Kwok of www.SingaporeKungFu.com