KUNG FU AND THE CHRISTIAN
Paul Wong

Recently someone from our congregation called my attention on a subject that I am familiar with. The person wanted to know whether or not a Christian can learn Chinese martial arts - "Wu-Shu". First of all, I want to let you know that I am not an expert on Chinese martial arts but I do know enough to be able to discuss it intelligently. Secondly, I am not against all forms of Chinese martial arts, but there are certain aspects of Kung Fu that I do know, for certain, is harmful for the Christian to learn. There are not too many Christian ministers who can discuss this subject with their congregation. I am thankful to the LORD that I do have enough knowledge so that I can share with those who are interested in it. What you are about to read is strictly applied to the Christian only. What is good to the world at large may not be good for the believer in Jesus Christ.

In high school I was one of the tiniest students in my class, and my seat was usually in front. Whenever the teacher asked questions I would raise my hand and gave the answers. I was popular in my class but there were two class bullies that did not like me. Each of them was at least six inches taller and 50 pounds heavier than I was. They were also champion athletes. Every time they walked past me they would smack my head and ruffle my hair. I hated them but could not fight against them because they were so big and strong. One day a friend talked to me about Kung Fu. My main motive of studying Kung Fu was to get even with those two class bullies. I joined the Chin-Wu Athletic Association the most famous Kung Fu academy in China. They taught the Shao-Lin temple boxing. At age sixteen I became quite proficient in Kung Fu and had taken part in public exhibitions.

After I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit at the age of seventeen my attitude towards Kung Fu had changed. There was no longer a motive for revenge, but I was still fascinated by it. During my fourth year of study in architecture in London, England I had the opportunity to work as an extra on the film set of "Inn of Sixth Happiness". It is the story about Gladys Aylward who became a Christian missionary in China and established a mission to help the refugees during the Sino-Japanese war. I was one of the four extras who were chosen to play the role of Kung Fu practitioners in the movie. My part was to confront Gladys Aylward who was played by the famous actress Ingrid Bergman. That scene was cut. While studying in England my involvement in Kung Fu was minimal.

When I returned to Ipoh, West Malaysia my interest in Kung Fu was revived. I had a successful architectural practice with plenty of prestige and influence and I became the president of a Kung Fu association that promoted Kung Fu of the highest degree. There were two Kung Fu masters who had influenced my thinking on this subject. Both were Christians. The first one is Fok Yu Kuang. He was one of the few Kung Fu masters who were sent by the National Academy of Martial Arts in Nanking, China to promote this art in foreign countries. This academy had all the top Kung Fu fighters in China. Sifu Fok was the son-in law of Barnabas Chang, one of the three early workers of the True Jesus Church in China. Sifu Fok’s religious group had dissociated themselves from the True Jesus Church but his wife later rejoined the main Body. I shall talk a little bit more about him later. The other Kung Fu master is Yuan Tao a one-time Kung Fu champion in China. When he was in his early twenties he killed a man in a boxing contest with the first punch. That is how deadly Kung Fu is. Master Tao became a Christian in his older years and his temper became mild. The government of Taiwan honored him by appointing him as the director of all physical training in the armed forces. The lives of these two Kung Fu masters who became Christians have a profound influence on my thinking of whether or not Christians should learn the Chinese martial arts.

In China martial arts is called "Wu-Shu" but its more popular name Kung Fu is known throughout the world due to the television series of the same name and films starring Bruce Lee. Kung Fu means achievement through activity that requires time, energy and patience. It is not only a system of martial arts, but also a way of life, very much like a religion. Kung Fu requires of
the practitioner a strict code of physical, mental as well as spiritual discipline, unparalleled in any western form of martial arts. To reach the highest order of proficiency in Kung Fu one must follow eastern religions such as Buddhism and Taoism.

Martial arts (wu-shu) existed in China before the Christian era, but it was not until 540 A.D. that Kung Fu was developed in the Shao-Lin temple in the Henan province. A Buddhist priest named Bodhidharma (Tamo in Chinese), traveled from India to China to see the Emperor. At that time, the Emperor had started local Buddhist monks translating Buddhist texts from Sanskrit to Chinese. The intent was to allow the general populace the ability to practice this religion. Tamo traveled to the countryside temple where new trees had been planted. It was called the Shao-Lin temple. Tamo saw the Shao-Lin monks lacked physical, mental and spiritual stamina to perform even the most basic of Buddhist meditation. Tamo introduced the Indian yoga meditation and physical exercises that were designed to strengthen the body, mind and spirit of the monks. The basic exercises were based on the movements of the dragon, tiger, leopard, snake and crane. That was how Shao-Lin temple boxing developed. Most forms of Kung Fu, including Taichichuan, originated from the Shao-Lin temple. Even the Japanese Karate has its source from Shao-Lin temple. Bruce Lee developed Jeet Kune Do from the Wing Chun style of Shao-Lin temple boxing.

Kung Fu is incompatible with Christianity in the very basic concept of religion. Buddhism originates from Hinduism that teaches multiple gods and goddesses. It is in direct conflict with the Christian concept of the One True God. The Christian God is the Creator of the universe and mankind from whom we have life and must draw our strength. Buddhism tries to awaken the consciousness of the god within oneself. Buddha taught the true way of enlightenment is -

"Be your own light, your own refuge. Believe only that which you test for yourself. . . Do not accept authority merely because it comes from a great man, or is written in a sacred book, for truth is different for each man and woman." In short, Buddhism rejects a Supreme God who saves mankind through the Lord Jesus Christ and imparts His divine instructions through the Holy Bible. In Buddhism absolute truth does not exist. Our Lord Jesus Christ declared: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (Jn. 14:6) Kung Fu also is in conflict with pure Buddhism that teaches non-violence. It is impossible for a Kung Fu practitioner to follow the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ: "To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also." (Lk. 6:29)

The other religion from which Kung Fu is integrated is Taoism. Lao-Tse (604-531 BCE) was its founder. He was searching for a way that would avoid the constant feudal warfare and other conflicts that disrupted life during his lifetime. The result was his book "Tao-te-Ching." Taoism started as a combination of psychology and philosophy but evolved into a religion in 440 CE when it was adopted as a state religion. At that time Lao-Tse became popularly venerated as a deity. In other words he was worshipped as a god. Tao is the first cause of the universe. It has a parallel with Christianity. "In the beginning was the Word (Logos)." Here the similarity ends.

Tao teaches that it is a force that flows through all life. Of course the Bible tells us that “the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (Jn. 1:1) Taoism teaches that "Yin" (dark side) is the breath that formed the earth. Yang (light side) is the breath that formed the heavens. They symbolize pairs of opposites which are seen throughout the universe, such as good and evil, light and dark, male and female. The Holy Bible states: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Taoism teaches the "Chi" literally air or breath within the self can be nurtured through meditation to generate the greatest force of energy and power. This principle called "Chi Kung" is utilized in Kung Fu to perform superhuman feats of strength.

A person practicing "Chi Kung" can bend or break the staff of a spear with the pointed blade thrust against the throat. They can break a brick with one finger or balance the whole body on one finger. A branch of Kung Fu called "Shing Kung" enables practitioners to jump fifteen feet up in the air and stay up there for one minute. That would make Michael Jordan's hang time look like an amateur's. My father had seen a Shing Kung
practitioner walk on Tofu cakes like stepping stones without denting the tofu. How do they do that?

Let me explain a little bit more about "Chi Kung." The closest counterpart of "Chi" in Christianity is the spirit of man. The Bible calls it "the inward man." (2 Cor. 4:16) In practicing Chi Kung the person must first meditate. The Shao Lin monk meditates on a sutra (Buddhist or Taoist verse) until he no longer becomes conscious of himself. He focuses on the belly or navel section “Tan Tien” (center of gravity of the body) and continues to meditate, expelling every part of his physical and psychic being until he reaches a state of "nothingness." What happens then? Here is the critical point. A close friend of mine who practiced Chi Kung revealed this to me. When the body, mind and spirit reach a state of "nothingness", many shafts of light enter the mind and descends to the "Tan Tien". My friend told me that those shafts of light look like demons. The demons enter the body through the mind. This is how the Chi Kung fighter has the superhuman strength. The strength comes from the demons. Consider the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ about the unclean spirit who goes out of a man. "And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first." (Lk. 11:24-26)

Here is the reason why a Christian cannot practice Chi Kung. When the Chi Kung practitioner meditates to reach a state of nothingness he has to expel everything that is in him, including the Holy Spirit. Do you know what happens when a Christian expels the Holy Spirit? It is an insult and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, therefore it is an unforgivable sin. Our Lord Jesus Christ said: "Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men." (Mt. 12:31) "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame." (Heb. 6:4-6)

I have been asked this question many times. Can a Christian practice “Tai Chi Chuan” the Ultimate Fist? It is a soft and gentle form of exercise and it also promotes good health. Surely there must be no objection to Christians practicing Tai Chi Chuan. We must first know what a significant part Tai Chi Chuan occupies in Kung Fu before I can answer this question. Kung Fu may be divided into two main types. The first type is Wai Kung - external system, and the second type is Nei Kung - internal system. Wai Kung consists of offensive and defensive moves that utilizes physical force or strength that are clearly visible. Nei Kung consists of internal offensive and defensive moves that uses Chi Kung that are not apparent or visible. In the Wutang boxing system there are three main boxing forms in Nei Kung called the dragon system. Hsing - I called the dragon head, is very aggressive. It promotes attack and no retreat.

The second form is Pa Kua Chang called the dragon's body. This form is based on the movement of the octagon around the opponent. The third form is Tai Chi Chuan called the dragon tail. It is mainly for defense. All three forms of the internal system, Hsing-I, Pa Kua Chang or Tai Chi Chuan are all in the dragon system of fighting. The Bible informs us the dragon is the Devil and Satan (Rev. 12:9) The tail of "a great, fiery red dragon" drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. (Rev. 12:3-4) The devil is very sly and cunning. He uses Tai Chi Chuan, the dragon's tail, to lure innocent and unsuspecting Christians to become a part of him. We need to come out of the dragon system.

No Kung Fu story can be complete without the legendary Bruce Lee. He was born in San Francisco in 1940 in the year of the dragon, hence his Chinese screen name is “Lee Siau Loong” - Little Dragon.

In January 1969 he wrote to Planet Hollywood: "Starting in 1970 I will achieve world fame and from then onward till the end of 1980 I will have in my possession ten million dollars. I will live the way I please and achieve inner harmony and happiness." Bruce Lee did fulfill his ambition. He became famous all over the world and his films made in excess of ten million dollars. He did live the way he pleased but did not achieve inner harmony and happiness. Strangely enough, he was working on a new film called "Game of Death." in Hong Kong. On the night of June 20, 1973 he died on the bed of his co-star Betty Ting-pei. The medical authorities officially pronounced that Bruce Lee had died of cerebral edema (swelling of the brain), but Kung Fu experts
say that he died from other causes. Some say that he was a victim of "Dim Mak" the Kung Fu death touch. Others say that he had offended the demons of Kowloon (nine dragons) by bad "Feng Shui".

Bruce Lee's screen name in Chinese is Little Dragon. From my understanding of Kung Fu, Bruce Lee had died from overindulgence in conflicting moral principles. Bruce Lee was a practitioner of Chi Kung. At the Ed Parker Karate Tournament in 1964, Long Beach, California, he had given a public demonstration of this power with his one to three inch punch that knocked a 190 pound man six feet away. One of the rules of the Shao Lin monks is that they cannot indulge in sex. The monks could reach the highest level of Chi Kung because they were celibate. A married man can practice Chi Kung but he cannot reach a very high level of proficiency. Chi Kung and sex do not mix. You cannot practice Chi Kung and live as you please. Some Kung Fu writers are correct by describing Bruce Lee's death as a misadventure. Most of the martial arts community would like to venerate this icon as a demi-god so they either talk very little about the circumstances of his death or try to cover up his sins. Bruce Lee had died from an adulterous and sinful lust of his flesh.

The Holy Bible teaches us: "Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body." (1 Cor. 6:18) Sexual immorality is a deadly sin that destroys the body, spirit and soul.

Now I shall talk about Sifu Fok. [In Cantonese Sifu means Grand Master] He was both a Christian minister and a Kung Fu master at the same time. He had opened his home compound and taught Kung Fu from Monday through Friday and preached to a small congregation on the Sabbath day. He was a Oneness believer and Seventh Day Sabbath keeper. He had left the denominational church that I belong. Sifu Fok was known for his self-control and disciplined temperament. He had trained himself to decline challenges for contests and to absorb punches without flinching, and he seldom retaliated even when physically attacked. He would only defend himself, and if possible, without inflicting serious injuries to his attackers. He thought that was the closest he could practice Christ’s teaching of turning the other cheek. Because of his unusual qualities many Christians including an American missionary came to him for martial arts training. I am not sure whether or not Sifu Fok had the Holy Spirit when he became a Christian but even if he was Spirit-filled at first the Holy Spirit would have immediately left him the moment he started to get involved with Chi Kung.

Sifu Fok taught the Nei Kung system of Kung Fu - Hsing-I, Pa Kua Chang and Tai Chi Chuan. As a member of the Central Academy of Martial Arts in China he was also proficient in other forms of martial arts. He was a good western style boxer and held a third dan (degree) in Judo. To be a Kung Fu master and teacher of the internal system of boxing he had to be a serious practitioner of Chi Kung. Sifu Fok had reached the apex of Kung Fu. He thought that by being invulnerable to physical attacks without retaliation, he was practicing Christ's teachings of "turning the other cheek." He thought he had bridged the gap between Christianity and Taoism/Zen Buddhism, but he constantly had a conflict within himself - "How can I be a good Christian minister and a good Kung Fu master at the same time?" He could not honestly reconcile those two opposite religions, philosophies and teachings. He was mentally and spiritually obsessed with reaching "ultimate and perfect rest". What is it?

If you had seen that latest epic Kung Fu movie "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon", it will help you to understand the Taoist/Zen Buddhist religions' influence on Kung Fu. Like most westerners you would find it difficult to understand the final scene where the young heroine jumped down from the bridge of the Wudang Temple where the supposedly highest form of Kung Fu was taught. That last jump was to reach the "ultimate and perfect rest" in "heaven." We call it suicide.

Sifu Fok had wanted to have that ultimate and perfect rest, but instead of seeking it through the Lord Jesus Christ he was deceived by the devil and sought it through Kung Fu. Once he tried to accomplish his goal by jumping down from the second floor of his home. Due to his many years of Kung Fu training he instinctively
broke the fall and landed on the concrete floor without hurting himself. One fateful day he was alone at home. The devil made sure that he would surely die that time. He locked himself inside the bathroom. Then he did something really too horrible to describe. He cut the veins on his own wrist with a razor blade. His wife came home and looked for him. She saw the blood streaming out from the bottom of the bathroom door. She pounded the door but could not open it. Sifu Fok had already died from hemorrhage inside the bathroom.

Many of my “brothers” (fellow students) of Sifu Fok believed that our master had gone to "heaven," and they would always say a prayer every year at his altar on the anniversary of his death. To me he went straight to hell. My Kung Fu master's suicide was the last straw that turned me off something that I liked very much. God showed me that Kung Fu/Taoism/Zen Buddhism and Christianity have absolutely nothing in common. I gave up Kung Fu many, many years ago because I had a conflict within my soul. Many of my Kung Fu friends have asked me this question over and over again. If you give up Kung Fu how will you defend yourself when there is a real need to do so? I was unable to answer them at that time, but God has been faithful to me ever since. Let me relate to you four outstanding incidents in my life that show beyond the shadow of a doubt that the Lord Jesus Christ is my true defense.

**Incident number 1.** You remember the two class bullies in my high school! After graduation we went in different directions. One of them got a job as a health inspector in our hometown. The other went to London, England to study law. I also went to London, England to study architecture. After graduation we returned to our hometown. The lawyer opened his own law firm and was very successful and he was also elected into office as a City councilman and became a very influential and powerful politician. After graduation I also returned to our hometown, worked for a while for a prestigious architectural firm and later opened my own architectural firm. One day this lawyer called me to his office. He wanted me to be the architect of his development and building project. He gave me another building project and I also designed his family home. He actually helped me a lot to build up my architectural practice and we became very good friends. One day we had a reunion of some of our former high school classmates and we talked about old times in high school. When I told the lawyer that I had secretly learned Kung Fu with the intention of beating him up. He looked at me incredulously, smiled and said, “You didn’t!” We all had a good laugh. Praise and thank God I did not have to deliver a single Kung Fu punch or kick to get even with what he did to me in high school. He had done more than enough to compensate for those high school childish activities. God is truly wonderful for what He did to me. Praise His holy name! HalleluYah!

**Incident number 2.** I was working as one of the team members for a project in an architectural firm in Los Angeles, California. The team captain Big George was a Vietnam war veteran. He was very grouchy and rude to every one in the team. He was especially more abusive to me. He kept on blaming the Vietnamese soldiers for killing his buddies. Although I had explained to him that I am not a Vietnamese but he would still insult and call me names. Many times he tried to provoke me into a fight. I tried to avoid confrontation by ignoring his remarks. This went on for weeks on end. I prayed to the Lord to help me keep my cool.

One day at about five when we were about to leave the office this big bully challenged me to a fight. I began to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as I was praying, John, who was one of the other team members, stepped up and stood between Big George and me. Now John wasn't as tall as Big George but he had wide shoulders like a barn door. John had represented Canada in the Olympics as a weight lifter. He looked up at George square in the eye and said to him. "George, I have watched you for many weeks picking on Paul. It's not fair. If you want a fair contest I'll give you one. Let's step outside to the parking lot now!" When George heard this he said: "Take it easy John. I was only joking. I do not really want to hurt Paul." John said, "Well, stop joking from now onwards. I'm sick and tired of your dirty remarks, Okay?" Big George never abused me again. Thank the Lord Jesus Christ for sending someone to help me.

**Incident number 3.** On my second missionary trip to Brazil I had the privilege of preaching in one of the Brazilian congregations. It was the custom of the pastor and visiting ministers to stand near the entrance of the chapel to greet and embrace all the members as they leave the chapel. There were about 200 people at the
service on that day. I had embraced nearly half the number of people when one huge man came forward. Unlike the other people he hugged very tightly and pressed my face on his chest. He did not let go and I had difficulty in breathing. I knew I had to do something otherwise I would be suffocated. I said: "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I command you Satan to leave." Suddenly the man released his stranglehold, fell backwards and fell to the floor unconscious." Everybody in the chapel was excited and crowded round me. They were speaking through the interpreter: "How did you do it?" "Were you using a Kung Fu move?" I explained that I was only calling on the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of the ladies were telling that the man had been terrorizing the church for the past few weeks. He had incredible strength. Only the previous week he had broken the church pews with his bare hands. Praise and thank our Lord Jesus Christ. I did not have to use any Kung Fu moves to defend myself. The Name of the Lord Jesus Christ is all-sufficient and powerful.

Incident number 4. After preaching in Salinas, California Brother Samuel, his wife Angela and I returned to San Francisco late at night. As our car was turning left an oncoming vehicle rushed towards us and hit us. There were two persons in the other car. One of them came over to rob us. As I went out of the car to try to reason with him the robber first pressed his gun to my head and demanded all my money. As I retreated backwards he pressed the gun on my chest. I had come to the point where I could no longer rely on my human ability. When I closed my eyes to pray the Lord Jesus Christ strengthened me. I opened my eyes and looked squarely at the thug and shouted right to his face, "In the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I command Satan to leave." The thug retreated and left the scene. The police later caught him. At the trial he pleaded guilty to the crime. Once again, I want to thank our Lord Jesus Christ for saving my life.

"Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; Yes, our God is merciful. The LORD preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me.”

Psalm 116:5-6