

What is Kung Fu?

Kung Fu is the Chinese term popularly used for all Chinese Martial Arts styles. Otherwise known as Gung Fu or Gong Fu the name translates as 'skill required over time'. This is similar to the skills developed in any art-form, whether it is painting or practicing music. The more time and effort you put into your practice the higher the skill level you will achieve!

At Kung Fu 4 Kids we teach two forms of Chinese Martial Arts within a single program. One is 'Shaolin Long Fist Kung Fu' – Chang Chuan, which emphasizes the long range fighting skills and developing leg strength for use in our Kicking techniques, low stances and fast footwork. The second style is called 'White Crane Kung Fu' – Bei He Chuan, this style builds fast explosive hands techniques and generating power by developing a supple whip like upper body.

Kung Fu styles are often classified into groups or families and have common traits or training methods. Some of the original styles followed the movements, characteristics and even personalities of different animals into the training and many of the famous styles have developed from animal based training. Examples of animal styles are Tiger, Monkey, Leopard, Snake, Mantis and Crane, all of which have been made even more famous in recent years through the Kung Fu Panda movies!

Kung Fu styles can be generally split into two different classes – External and Internal styles. External styles use muscular strength and apply techniques based on the physical manifestation of power, examples of these styles are Tiger and Leopard. Internal styles use the concept of 'Qi' and internal energy which is the life force of every living being, aligning the body and mind to focus 'fajing' - Martial power is the aim of the internal arts and examples are Tai Chi Chuan or Xing Yi Chuan. Of course the concept of balancing the internal and external powers are important in Kung Fu, as the martial arts are not just for fighting to defend yourself but to also maintain good physical and mental health, so in order to find this balance a Kung Fu practitioner must train the 'Yin (soft, internal, yielding)' alongside the 'Yang (Hard, external, crashing)'. Therefore a style like Whitecranes Kung Fu is ideal for reaching this goal, as it is considered a Soft/Hard style using both the physical body and the focused fajing to manifest power and the development of internal energy and breathing to calm the mind and reduce stress!

Kung Fu can also be categorized as to where it developed or became popular within China. Any styles from above the Yangtze River are considered Northern Styles and any from below are Southern Styles. The term Northern leg, Southern fist is a good generalization of the Kung Fu styles and how each geographical region developed different aspects of their fighting skills. Shaolin Long Fist is a northern Style and Whitecrane is a Southern style.

The foundations of Kung Fu is based upon developing the basic stances, hand techniques and kicks for the particular style practiced. Although Kung Fu has been made famous through Hong Kong movies which depicts a lot of fast punching and flying kicks, these are not the whole emphasis for Kung Fu training. The 4 facets of Kung Fu are:

- Da – Upper-Body Striking – using fists, open hands, fingers, elbows, shoulders, forearms and the head

- Ti – Lower-Body Striking – including kicks, knees and stomping
- Shuai – Throws – using Wrestling throws, takedowns and sweeps,
- Chin Na – Seizing – which includes jointlocks, strangulation and other submission

Martial Moralities (Wude) are also a very important aspect of Kung Fu practice and Chinese Martial Arts were not simply developed as a form of self defense or battle art but also as a code of ethics to apply in life. With great power comes a great deal of responsibility!

