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Sifu Jonathan Weizhang Wang was born in 1973 in Beijing, China. He began his studies in Kung Fu at the age of 8 when he started training in Shan Xi Xing Yi under Master Cui Guo-Gui. In 1989, Sifu Wang immigrated to the U.S. and started training under Grandmaster Jiang Hao-Quan, a distinguished graduate of the Nan-King Guoshou Institute and one of the top Martial Arts professors in China. Sifu Wang studied traditional Chinese fighting techniques intensely under Grandmaster Jiang for several years. During this time, he also was studying Taichi under his father, Master Daniel Yu Wang, one of the few people in the world to have mastered all five classical styles of Taichi as well as Taichi Sanshou and weapons.

In more than 20 years of studying Martial Arts, Sifu Wang has established a very respectable professional resume and has won several championships in various categories. In addition to his continued participation in tournaments and diligent training, Sifu Wang returns to Beijing several times a year to perfect his skills by training with some of China's most respected Kung Fu masters.

How long have you been practicing Kung Fu, and how many styles have you trained in?

I have been practicing Kung Fu for 29 years. I started study Xing Yi with Grandmaster Cui Guo Gui when I was 7 years old. At that time, most of my training was focusing on Xing Yi forms and Xing Yi power releasing exercises. When I was 14 years old, I studied "Taoist Qi Gong" with Master Yin Yao Kui. I realized the importance of knowing the meditation aspect of Martial Arts from that time on.

I immigrated to the United States when I was 15 years old. My father started to train me in Taichi, Wushu, and Kung Fu. In order to improve my training, he introduced me to Grandmaster Jiang Hao Quan, who is a legend of Chinese Martial Arts. He graduated from the famous "Nan King Guo Shu Institute" in the 1930s. He was national boxing champion, and competed in San Da, Shuai Jiao, diving, and gymnastics. After I met Grandmaster Jiang, I started to train in all aspects of Kung Fu: Forms, Weapons, San Da, Shuai Jiao, Qin Na,

JONATHAN WANG

Redefining Kung Fu

By Jose M. Fraguas



REDEFINING KUNG FU

and Boxing. While I was training with Grandmaster Jiang, I also trained Modern Wushu with Coach Zhu Gan Ping, Eric Chen, and Joanna Yang in LA. I was deeply attracted by the beautiful movements and gracefulness of Modern Wushu.

I decided to train professionally when I graduated from UCLA in 1997. I was trained in the world-known "Beijing Wushu Team" and visited Grandmaster Wu Bin in Beijing. Next, I got to know Master Ma Wei-ling, who is an expert in Praying Mantis Boxing. I flew to China at least 10 times in between 1997 and 2007, and systematically studied Six Harmony Mantis and Six Plum Flower Mantis. In the meantime, Master Ma Lei of the Chinese military police academy taught me some Qinna techniques. Master Ma Lei was a close friend of Master Ma Wei-Ling. Unfortunately, Master Ma Lei passed away in July 2009, and it is a great loss for the entire Chinese Martial Arts community.

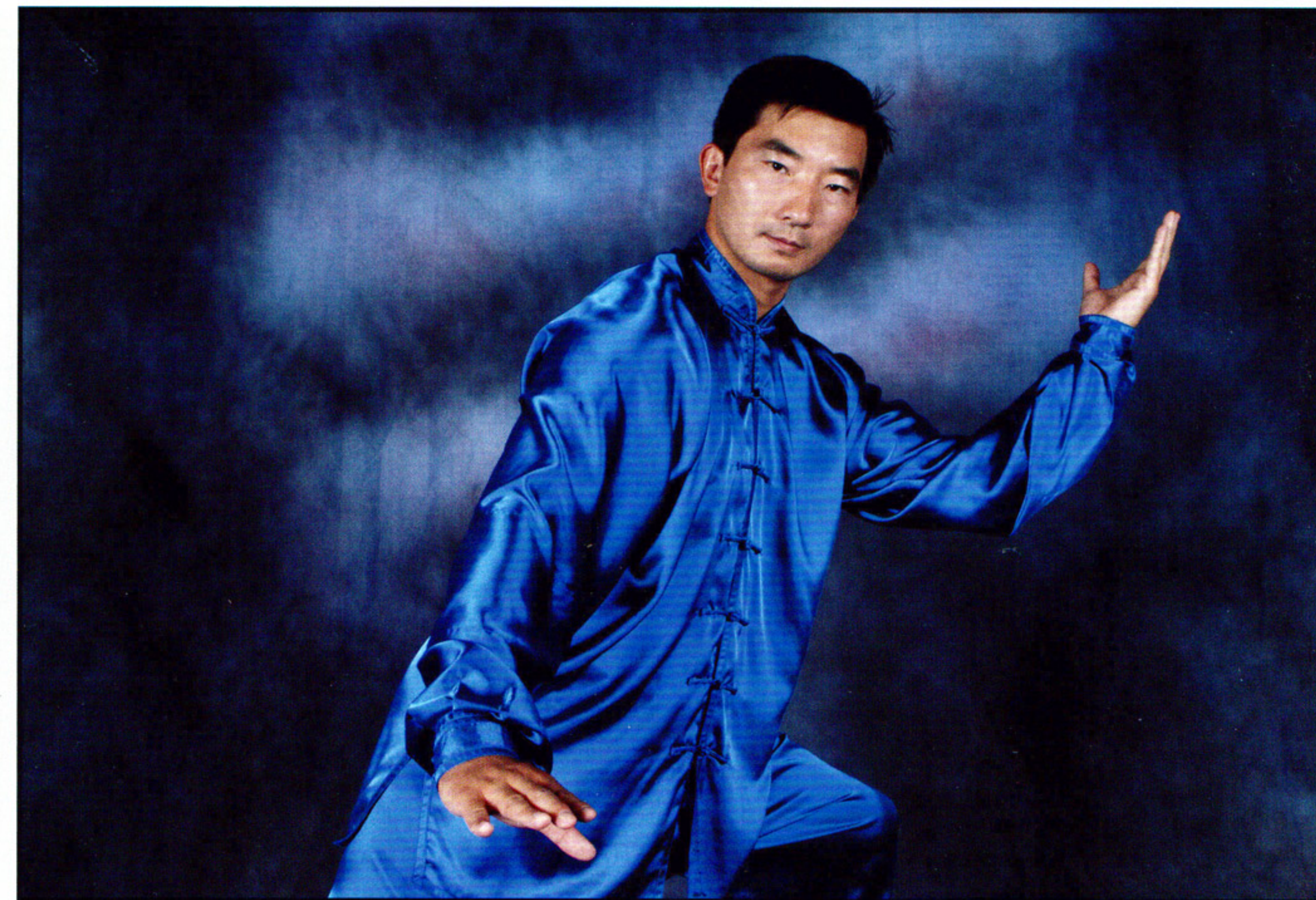
In 1998 and 1999, I visited the Beijing Physical Education University and trained Sanda with Coach Guan Jian Min and Shuai Jiao with Coach Shen Zhi Kun. Both coaches gave me many guidelines on how to compete in San Da and Shuai Jiao competitions. In 2001, I visited Grandmaster Liu Xue Bo and studied five Chuo Jiao forms. Grandmaster Liu is the representative of that style of Kung



Fu. Chuo Jiao is known for its kicking. In 2002, 2003, and 2004 I visited Grandmaster Guo Xian He and studied Eagle Claw Kung Fu. Grandmaster Guo is very open-minded and let me train with his family members and top students. Grandmaster Guo showed me many Eagle Claw fighting techniques and Gong Fa training methods. In 2002 and 2003, I visited Master Wang Hua Feng of the Beijing Physical Education University. Master Wang taught me Pigua and Duan Bing after he came back home from work. I sparred with his students at his home and learned many weapons sparring skills.

In 2003, I started to train with Master Hu Hong Xing, who is an expert in Chen Style Taichi. In 2005, I met Master Su Zi Fang in Los Angeles. Master Su was the top Taichi competitor in China, and I started systematic study of all styles of Taichi from her. In 2006, I visited Guan Zhou Physical Education University and trained with Master Wang Wei Bao, a specialist on Sports Gong Fa. He introduced me to many Gong Fa exercises in Guang Zhou. In 2007, I visited Master Zhang Long Xiang in Beijing; he is the current Iron Palm champion in China. He can break six 6 bricks in one strike. He taught me some fundamental training methods of Iron Palm.

In 2007, I visited Grand Master Ma Ming Da in Guang Zhou; he is the foremost Chinese Martial Arts historian in



the world. He also is an expert in Baji, Pigua, Duan Bing, and Fan Zi. In 2008, I met Master Jason Tsou in the Chinese Martial Arts Championship Tournament in Las Vegas. He is an expert in Baji, Pigua, Bagua, Mantis, Duan Bing, and Chang Bin and I studied Baji and Pigua styles from him in private lessons. Currently, I am learning Chang Bing from him.

Was there any specific reason why you got to train in the art of Kung Fu?

I started to study Kung Fu because it is my family tradition. Both my grandfather and my father are Kung Fu masters. My grandfather was from the Cang Zhou area, He Bei Province. Cang Zhou is located in Northern China, which bordered Mongolia hundreds of years ago. Cang Zhou is one of the few Martial Arts mega cities in China, and its people had to know Martial Arts for survival. There were many Martial Arts super heroes were from Cang Zhou and almost everybody living there has some Kung Fu skills. It would be a shame for a person not to know Martial Arts in Cang Zhou. Under this strong influence, I started training Kung Fu since a young age. I would like to continue preserving this Martial Arts tradition, since it is my own family heritage.

What do you think are the most important qualities for a student to become proficient in Kung Fu?

I think discipline, focus, humility, bravery, creativity, and curiosity are most important. student cannot practice Kung Fu well without discipline. It is common sense and applies in all fields. You need to have great focus in order to perform Taichi, for example. Your focused practice can make the "Qi" energy flow in the body more freely ... increasing your energy level. You need be humble at all times. If you are arrogant, even though you may have superior skills, you may be alienated by your fellow classmates or even instructors. They may not share or teach you new techniques because of your arrogant behavior. Bravery is a must in a sparring match. Sometimes, you may confront a more skilled opponent. You need to be brave to accept that particular match and more challenges later on in life.

With all the technical changes during the last years, do you think there is still a "pure" or "original" style of Kung Fu?

I think it is hard to find a pure style of Kung Fu right now, and there are a few reasons: In the beginning of creating a style, the creator can focus only on one or a few fighting principles. For example, the Chuo Jiao style focuses prima-

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rily on the kicking aspect of fighting. However, the grand-master's students continue to perfect the style. Therefore, many forms, weapons, and Gong Fa exercises were created. As time has passed, it is hard to find the original style anymore.

Secondly, in modern times, many people try to create new forms for fitness and artistic reasons. There is nothing wrong with creating forms for the above reason. Unfortunately, many of the new form creators lack real fighting experience, so the combative value of the forms is not as significant as old forms. When so many new forms are created, it is harder for new generation practitioners to tell which is a combative form and which is an artistic form. In the long run, the original style of Kung Fu is buried deep under newly created forms.

I think you still can find the essence of Kung Fu, even though they are hiding in the oceans of Kung Fu styles. It does require many years of hard work to find the original principles and techniques of traditional Kung Fu styles. It definitely is one of the most difficult tasks for any professional Kung Fu teachers.

Do you think different "styles" are truly important in the art of Kung Fu?

I think the main characteristics of styles are the most important. Some styles focus on long-range fighting (Chuo Jiao), some focus on the usage of elbows (Mantis Elbow Form), and some specialize in ground fighting (Di Tang). In recent years, China has been hosting stylized sparring competitions. For example, Baji practitioners can spar each other with Baji techniques. Even though the level of the competition is not very high, it sets a good direction for future Kung Fu fighting. In a MMA tournament, it is hard for a fighter to show stylized techniques; but in a stylized sparring tournament, we can see more clearly the usage of traditional techniques in fighting situations.

Kung Fu nowadays often is referred to as a sport in some circles (Wushu) ... would you agree with this definition or is "only" Martial Art?

I think Kung Fu has many functions: self-defense, mind-body fitness, combative sports, and recreational activity. Modern Wushu gets more popular because of the movies, so people misinterpret Kung Fu as merely a performance sport. In other words, they did not look at the whole picture. I can describe Kung Fu as a gigantic elephant. I let a person touch the elephant while his eyes are closed. When he touches the elephant's legs, he thinks the elephant must look like a tree; when he touches the elephant's tail, he

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thinks the elephant must look like a broom; when he touches the elephant's ears, he thinks the elephant must look like a gigantic fan. Kung Fu is so vast, so deep, and so diversified, and it really is difficult to describe it with a simple word. So, if we really want to know what an "elephant" looks like, we need to open our eyes, step way back, and look at it carefully.

How do you see Kung Fu in North America and around the world at the present time?

There are some fundamental problems Kung Fu is having right now: Because only a few people can translate traditional Kung Fu techniques in real combat situations, its combative effectiveness is becoming questionable. Also, due to the strict safety rules in San Da tournament, many traditional techniques cannot be used. Therefore, a Kung Fu fighter can easily ignore the basic Kung Fu fighting skills. Iron Palm techniques, elbow techniques, and clawing techniques cannot be seen in Kung Fu fighting tournament. So many Sanda champions do not even train traditional San Shou and Gong Fa anymore. A big problem is that in order to get into the Olympics, modern Wushu forms are becoming more and more difficult to learn. You

need professional coaches, safe facilities, and talented athletes to make practice Wushu possible nowadays. Therefore, it will reduce the Wushu population in the long run.

Do you think the number of techniques of the style has relevancy in the mastery of the art of Kung Fu?

I think both are important. First, you need to have a broad base as general education. Secondly, focus on one or two areas. Kung Fu fighting can be categorized in five areas: 1) Upper-body striking techniques: fists, palms, elbows, shoulders, head, hook-hands, and fingers striking techniques; 2) Lower-body striking techniques: feet, legs, knees, and hips striking techniques; 3) Throwing techniques: sweeps, hip throws, waist throws, shoulder throws, and sacrifice throws; 4) Qinna Techniques: joint manipulation, muscle grabbing, and meridian attacks; and 5) Ground Fighting Techniques: striking and Qinna techniques. Once you build a strong foundation from the above areas, you can specialize in one or two areas. For example, if you are very tall, you can specialize in long range kicking and punching methods.

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I think the traditional Gong Fa training is missing in training. Gong Fa is the backbone of Kung Fu training; without Gong Fa, a practitioner may have difficulties against bigger and stronger opponents. Many people may think Gong Fa is boring and hard; however, I think Gong Fa training can be fun. It all depends on how you practice it. Many new Gong Fa exercises have been created recently by the Chinese Wushu Research Institute in Beijing. I think many of these exercises can be fun and productive for Kung Fu Gong Fa practitioners.

Kung Fu means time and effort. I think the most important and most challenging quality is "patience." Many of us want to become good in Kung Fu with minimal time and effort. Based on my experience, studying Kung Fu is a graduate process. It requires lots of time to build up your foundation in the beginning, but the speed of learning will gradually become faster. Having enough patience to build up a strong Kung Fu foundation is a challenge to many beginning level Kung Fu practitioners. After you pass this long stage, you will find yourself a more patience and down to earth person than ever. This important characteristic will benefit you through a lifetime.

Why do you think that preserving the cultural values of Martial Arts is important in our modern society?

Preserving traditional cultural values of Martial Arts is extremely important. Once the cultural values are lost, you cannot easily find them again. As former President Bill Clinton once said, "It is easy for China to build a modern city like New York, but it is hard for the U.S. to build an ancient city like Xi An." Like traditional Chinese architecture, many important cultural heritages need to be preserved. Humility, patience, respect, discipline, honesty, responsibility, etc., all are good examples of important Chinese cultural values. I strongly recommend parents to let children get involved in Martial Arts training at an early age. This will be one of the most precious gifts you can give to the future generation.

What are your thoughts on the future of Kung Fu?

First, we need stronger leadership, organization, unity, and promotion. From a competition perspective, every national level tournament should have Gong Fa, San Shou, and Form categories. We should have a grand champion division. An athlete must be able to win in Gong Fa, San Shou and Form, all three categories, to become the grand champion of the tournament.

Second, people presently want to learn more about Chinese culture. They can use Kung Fu as a gateway to dis-



cover Chinese culture. We should have more cultural exchange programs between China and the U.S. For example, we can have Kung Fu and Chinese Cultural summer camps for young children. Third, Kung Fu athletes from China should participate more in MMA types of tournaments. Those athletes should use traditional Kung Fu techniques in tournaments. "The Art of War MMA Competition" is a good example of that. Some of the traditional Shuai Jiao techniques can be seen in this tournament. Finally, Kung Fu should become a selective class in the short run and mandatory class for the long run in all Chinese schools. If a student does not receive general Kung Fu education, he or she should not graduate from schools. This will raise overall awareness of Kung Fu in the host country, and influence the rest of the world.

Are there any accomplishments you feel particular proud of?

I feel I am a pioneer of rediscovering the essence of Kung Fu, which is Gong Fa plus San Shou plus Forms plus Healing equals Kung Fu. Every style of traditional Kung Fu should have the above characteristics. If one thing is missing, it is incomplete. Gong Fa is the foundation of Kung Fu; forms are the artistic expression of fighting techniques; San Shou is the library of individual fighting techniques; and

healing arts help you to recover from injuries. If you feel weak in Kung Fu training, please look into the above four areas and see whether you missed anything.

Is there any advice that you'd like to give to martial artists in general?

Set up good foundations and be open-minded. If you practice from a combative perspective, here is my advice. At first, systematically practice Gong Fa. Work on your basic physical conditions: Endurance, power, stamina, flexibility, agility, and reflex. Secondly, work on your mental strength through Qigong meditation. You need to get patience, courage, focus, and confidence through meditation exercises. Third, work on your basic fighting skills: Striking, throwing, grappling, and ground fighting. Fourth, experience the usage of the techniques through drills and light sparring. Lastly, test yourself in competitions. Once you've done all of the above, you may still find difficulties in competition. Do not worry ... this is normal. You need to keep an open mind, and continue to learn from your teacher, classmates, and competitors, because no matter how hard you practice, there is always someone out there who potentially could beat you. You may be a champion today, but another competitor may beat you tomorrow. Be open-minded and you will find inner peace and satisfaction. 🐉

How important is Form training in Kung Fu in general? And why?

Form training is very important. Chinese Kung Fu forms are the trademarks of Kung Fu and have many important values. They can improve one's speed, agility, stamina, balance, coordination, and reflexes. However, practice form alone cannot make you a good fighter, because you are missing Gong Fa and San Shou training. Some of the most important problems of only practice forms are: 1) When you practice form, there is a standard routine to follow. The more you practice it, the more fluent you become. However, you never will fight the same way as you practice form. 2) In forms training, nobody will ever attack you back. Once you confront a real opponent, he may strike you with great power. You may get shocked, confused, and lose the fight. 3) Practicing forms only does not help you increase striking power, sense of distance, timing, fighting coordination, and fighting mentality. You may use the speed and agility from form training to fight an average person on the street. You will have problems when you fight with a physically and technically superior opponent. 4) Practice forms alone may make the fighting techniques inside of the form impractical. Because you lack real combat experience, you may form the wrong awareness and confidence from form practice. As many traditional Kung Fu masters described – weak punches and impractical kicks.

What do you consider the major changes in the art since you began training?