

Kung Fu

Kung fu is the term used to describe martial arts in Chinese. It also denotes the style of fighting that can be traced back to the martial arts practiced in the Shaolin temple in China. Kung fu is a martial art because it is different than mere fighting or combat. Martial arts have a system and a method through which one trains and learns a specific way to fight. Martial arts such as karate and taekwondo have their roots in Shaolin Kung fu. Between the 3rd and 7th Centuries in China, there are records of performances and training for combat that show the most basic origins of martial arts. It was some time during the 6th Century that the Shaolin temple began training its members in the martial arts.

Between the years of 750 and 1300, the Song Dynasty ruled China and the founder of the Dynasty was himself a master in Shaolin Kung fu. Therefore, he set up his government to fully support people training in the martial arts. There were many schools that were created to teach people to become archers, swordsmen, and boxers. During this time, even women were encouraged to train in these combative arts.

Since the origin of the martial arts can be traced to the Shaolin temple, it is important to examine what made the Shaolin temple such a fertile ground for the arts. The monks and disciples who lived at the monastery lived very simple lives. They learned to do whatever was necessary to keep the temple self-sufficient. This means, they were farmers and carpenters as well as Buddhist monks. They also lived a life of strict discipline so that the monastery ran smoothly and all the rules of the temple were obeyed. The introduction of martial arts to the temple was a way to keep the monks exercised and healthy as well as to teach them self-defense. Learning how to fight, the monks could also defend themselves from warlords and brigands.

Sometime during the Ming Dynasty, the Shaolin temple built another monastery in the Fujian Province. This was south of their monastery in Henan and to distinguish the two, one was nicknamed the southern temple and the other the northern temple. The martial art of kung fu taught at each temple became very different. The kung fu from the southern temple is known for its powerful stances and strong hand and arm movements while the kung fu from the northern temple is known for its quick strikes and its long-range movements.

Learning the art of fighting meant more than just learning how to punch or kick. The Shaolin masters spent most of their time away from busy cities and were very familiar with nature. In nature, they observed the animal kingdom and the different characteristics of the animals. When the masters saw the tiger they were awed by his power and fierceness. When the masters saw snakes they saw how quickly they attacked their prey with lightning-fast strikes. Examining these movements in nature, the masters began to draw principles and concepts from what they saw and emulated the movements that they saw as effective.

Name _____

Date _____

Kung Fu (Cont'd)

In order to better memorize the movements and techniques the masters created forms, or sets, which were a series of movements strung together and practiced by the martial arts student. Practicing the forms over and over made the movements become a habit and second-nature for the student and also promoted health. The student became stronger and faster while also learning the movements that were effective for combat.

As the fighting techniques were continually practiced, more and more people contributed their understanding to the martial art and it continued to develop. As it developed, more styles were created that emphasized various aspects of combat and were better suited to certain people. For example, people with slender bodies versus people with heavy-set bodies could all find a style that contained the important principles of the Shaolin temple. As the theory of the arts was developed, other training techniques were also learned. New and effective ways of strengthening the muscles and bones of the body were developed.

These methods that were learned in the Shaolin temple were passed on generation after generation until the present-day martial arts arrived. Today, many people in the world study martial arts and have a rich history of the development of their art to enhance their fighting skills. This is why many martial artists recognize the Shaolin temple masters for the role they played in developing the best fighting styles in the world.

Name _____

Date _____

Kung Fu Questions

Multiple Choice:

1. This term is used to describe martial arts in Chinese:
 - a. Shaolin
 - b. Kung fu
 - c. Boxing
 - d. Temple
2. It was during this century that the Shaolin temple began training in martial arts:
 - a. The 6th century
 - b. The 8th century
 - c. The 15th century
 - d. The 1st century
3. The Southern Temple style of kung fu was known for all of the following EXCEPT:
 - a. Powerful stances
 - b. Strong arm movement
 - c. Strong hand movement
 - d. Quick strikes

True or False

- _____ 4. Many schools that were created taught people to become archers, swordsmen, and boxers.
- _____ 5. The Shaolin masters spent most of their time in the busy cities.
- _____ 6. Practicing the forms over and over made the movements become a habit and second-nature for the student and also promoted health.

Fill Ins

7. Between the years of 750 and 1300, this Dynasty ruled China: _____.
8. Sometime during the Ming Dynasty, the Shaolin temple built another monastery in the _____ Province.
9. Name two of the animals that the Shaolin masters' studied in order to draw principles from nature: _____.
10. The two Shaolin temples were nicknamed _____.

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Kung Fu Answers

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7. Between the years of 750 and 1300, this Dynasty ruled China: **The Song Dynasty**.
8. Sometime during the Ming Dynasty, the Shaolin temple built another monastery in the **Fujian** Province.
9. Name two of the animals that the Shaolin masters' studied in order to draw principles from nature: **tiger and snake**.
10. The two Shaolin temples were nicknamed **the northern and southern temples**.