

What is the Difference between Fancy Forms and Gong Fu?

When my main teacher watched my early demonstrations of forms that I had previously learnt, he said that they looked nice but they were empty. I asked, "Empty of what?" He said, "Most people are only imitating the teacher's movements. If the teacher does not have the essence, there is no chance that the student would have it." At this stage I had already trained for many years and had thought that my forms or movements were quite good. I was to learn that there was a lot more to these practices than meets the eye. At first, it is hard to tell what the difference is, apart from some obvious things, such as how the master flows through the form, how good his posture is and how relaxed he is. So how can we learn to go deeper into our practice? In Chinese, the term "**gong fu**" (or kung fu) is used to describe **the difference between a mere imitation of movement and true skill.**



Gong fu comes with investing time and effort into training and following the correct method to achieve the desired result. If we want to go to Sydney from Canberra, it is not desirable to go to Melbourne first, even if the road is better. We need to go the direct route, straight to Sydney. Learning a trade or becoming a good doctor requires a good teacher and method plus time and effort. **Gong fu is an accumulation of skill.** It takes time to change the body and mind from an uncooperative partner to a willing one. When we start our training in Tai Chi or Wu Dao Gong, we become more aware of our weaknesses. We might feel unhealthy, uncoordinated and stiff. These are precisely the reasons that we need training. By practising the correct methods, we begin to reshape our mind and body. **Being able to transform ourselves is the great benefit that these arts offer.** Once you begin, you are on the journey, that is, the process of change in accordance with the principles and methods of training.

Over the centuries, China has accumulated hundreds of systems for training the mind and body. The essence of these systems is what we really need to practise. At first this is hard to accept because **the essential training is deceptively simple, yet nobody can do it well.** On the other hand, learning many different forms can be interesting but they do not always **address the underlying weaknesses.** When my teacher was learning, he said that he also felt frustrated when doing the foundation training. He often saw his friends doing many interesting forms and free sparring. He felt that he was missing out. However, once he had laid a solid foundation, he found it easy to learn any form. He knew the essence and his body had changed, so he could feel and do

what was required, no matter which form he was practising.

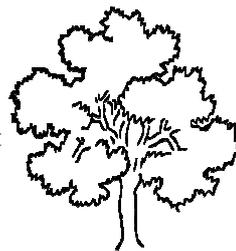
In our Wu Dao Gong system, we spend a great deal of time laying a solid foundation. Tai Chi students who also train in Wu Dao Gong have found that their understanding and practice of Tai Chi has improved greatly. One student, who has just turned seventy and has only been training Wu Dao Gong for 4 terms, is now much stronger. Recently, she demonstrated her punch to the Tai Chi class. Everyone was amazed at her power and coordination. This skill is a great testimony to the importance of building a solid foundation. **You cannot fake power and strength which comes from correct practice over time.** This is the beginning of the development of gong fu.



In order to build this foundation, we need to **develop leg strength, power, relaxation, coordination, joint strength and calmness of mind.** In Tai Chi, we have many techniques to achieve this. The relaxation practices (fa soong gong such as Balancing Yin Yang and the Hun Yuan Qigong) help the mind to calm down and the body to eliminate tension. The silk reeling exercises (chan si gong such as Spinning Arm) develop flexible joints and whole body coordination. Push hands trains sensitivity and ward off power. Fa jin teaches the release of whole body power.



In the Wu Dao Gong system, we use punching methods to develop power and coordination. We also have simple forms to address weaknesses in the body, such as arm and leg coordination and postural alignment. We practise standing meditation, such as San Ti, to build correct alignment, adjust our strength, lower our qi, as well as developing our power of concentration. We also use various techniques to train the legs and strengthen the whole body. **All these methods enable the mind and body to become strong but not tense, calm but not sluggish.** In other words, we could say that the training liberates the mind and body and gives us the power to change.



Traditionally, our training system is regarded as treasure. How much we gain or absorb depends on the quality of our practice. If our mind wanders and is not mindful of the accuracy of our movements, our development will be limited. It takes time to go deep. Conditions have to be right. Progress cannot be forced. Gradually, through diligent practice, you will experience more and more and understand the deeper levels of the art.

– Chief Instructor Brett Wagland