



DRAGONS FROM THE SOUTH

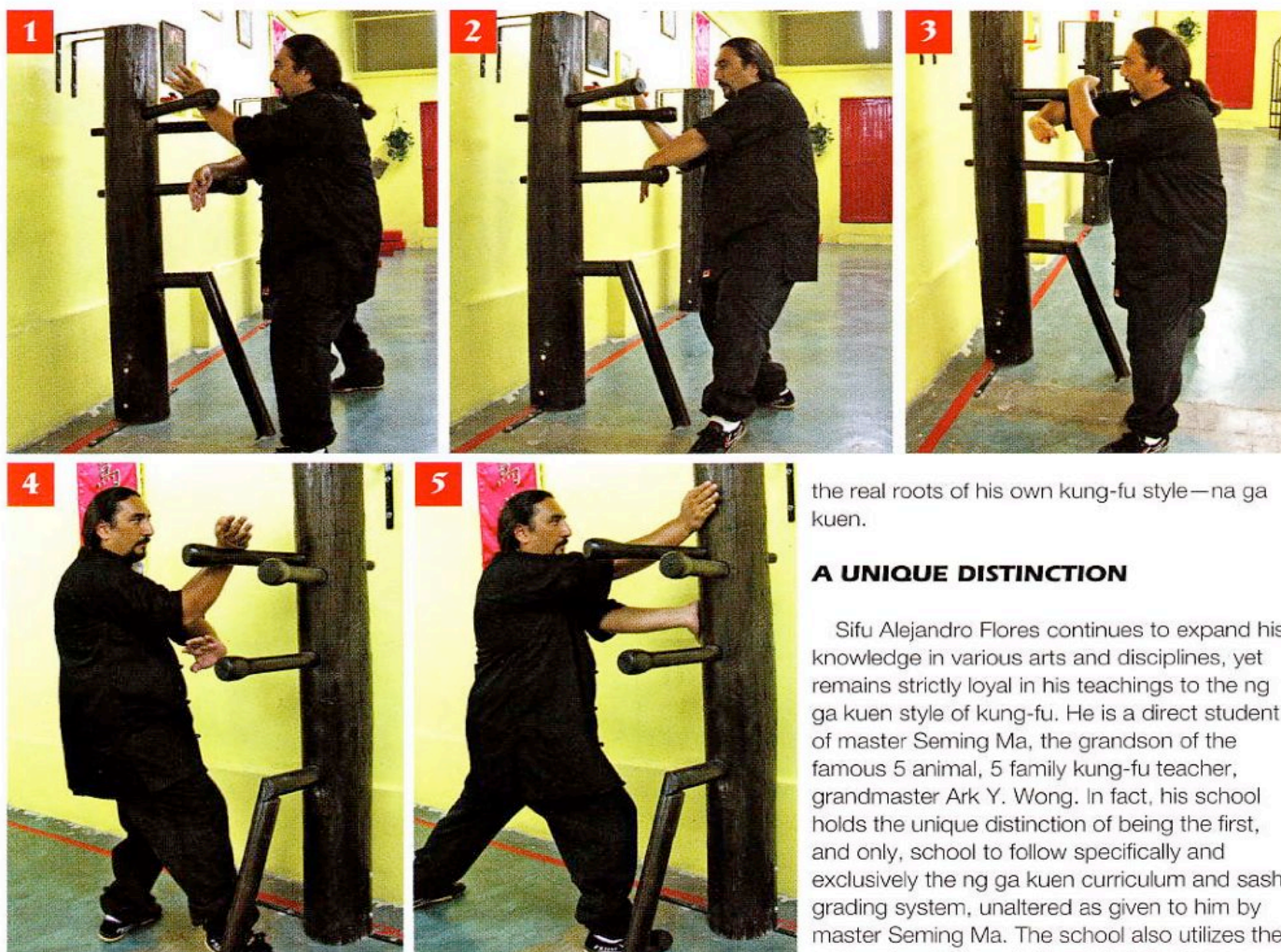
SIFU ALEJANDRO FLORES IS TEACHING
HIS DRAGON MEXICO KUNG-FU STUDENTS THE TRUE
MEANING OF KUNG-FU TRADITION

By Mario Figueroa

I am driven through narrow streets crammed with cars and lined with shops of all sorts, multitudes of people in every direction. We stop in front of a large store front, only our destination is an adjacent doorway, under a kung-fu sign and a picture of grandmaster Ark Wong. This could have been Hong Kong or any of the Chinatown districts in large cities around the world, but today we are in Monterrey, Mexico, at

the home of the Dragon Mexico kung-fu school (www.dragon-mexico.com.mx).

A yin/yang symbol painted on the small roll-up door ushers a long, nearly vertical flight of concrete stairs. At the top is a large room. Iron shot-put spheres lie neatly on a corner of its concrete floor with traditional weapons, two wooden dummies and a kung-fu altar identifying this as a school of traditional Chinese martial arts.



1 An inside dual-level block (1) is followed by an outside dual-level block (2). The arm trap (3) flows into an outer shift with right a bridge check and lower guard (4). The series ends with a dual-level butterfly palm strike (5).

Despite its nondescript appearance, the Dragon Mexico is one of the most important traditional Chinese kung-fu schools in Mexico. The school has been in operation for more than two decades and currently serves over 200 students, including a branch operating at the Autonomous University of Nuevo Leon, a university of the highest international standing.

The temperature and humidity hover over 100 degrees. No air conditioning, no cold-water fountain and only a small fan to circulate the thick, moist air. This is, after all, a kung-fu school, and its members pride themselves on surviving the Spartan conditions. Even though it is Sunday and the city is rich in places of leisure and entertainment, students prefer to be at the school, which is filled beyond capacity. The students are here to greet me and participate in a seminar on advanced conditioning methods. As an older kung-fu brother to their teacher, sifu Alejandro Flores, students are eager to meet me; I am received with the utmost cordiality, respect and attention.

Under Flores' leadership, the school has grown tremendously, not only in size but also in knowledge. Over the last five years, Flores has worked tirelessly to improve his foundation in Chinese culture and traditions; to understand different styles of kung-fu; to master advanced training methods such as iron palm and chi kung; and most importantly, to discover

the real roots of his own kung-fu style—na ga kuen.

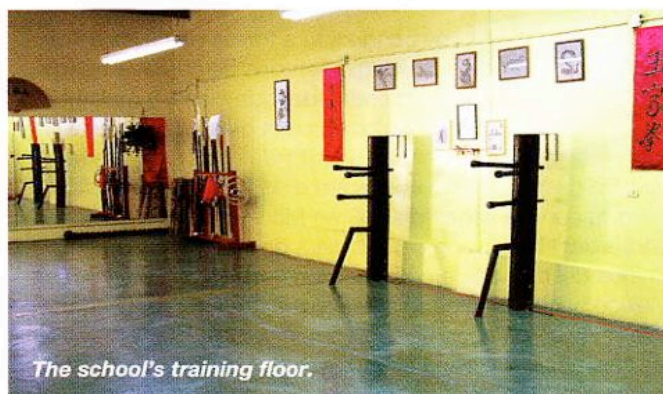
A UNIQUE DISTINCTION

Sifu Alejandro Flores continues to expand his knowledge in various arts and disciplines, yet remains strictly loyal in his teachings to the ng ga kuen style of kung-fu. He is a direct student of master Seming Ma, the grandson of the famous 5 animal, 5 family kung-fu teacher, grandmaster Ark Y. Wong. In fact, his school holds the unique distinction of being the first, and only, school to follow specifically and exclusively the ng ga kuen curriculum and sash grading system, unaltered as given to him by master Seming Ma. The school also utilizes the system terminology in its original Cantonese language. Other 5 Family kung-fu schools both in the U.S. and Mexico are integrating the ng ga kuen curriculum, but to date only Dragon

Mexico has made the complete transition. The first testing to these requirements was held in December 2006, which marked a historic event for the school, the ng ga kuen style and for traditional kung-fu in Mexico.

KUNG-FU R & D

Much of the effort over the last 18 months has been directed toward "research and development." With assistance



The school's training floor.



Figueroa and Flores square off (1). Figueroa attacks with a right reverse strike, which Flores intercepts with a left bridge block (2). Flores sees an opening and attacks with a right heel kick to the front knee (3). Figueroa counters (4) with an inward circular leg block (5), and delivers a side thrust kick to the supporting knee (6).

from this author, the Dragon Mexico school has become somewhat of a "hands-on" laboratory. One integral aspect of this work involves the codification of the ng ga kuen style. The style has long been transferred in the traditional method; the master demonstrates and the student tries to emulate. As the student gets better, he gains ability and begins to "see" how the style works. This method yields results that are directly relative to the natural abilities, focus, motivation and attentiveness of the student. The persevering student also gains results, while the undecided or non-serious students are weeded out.

Unfortunately, this approach also creates substantial variation in students' understanding, and over time yields significant differences in how the style is interpreted and understood. At a time when we are seeking to spread the traditional arts, it also becomes important to describe and explain the workings of the system in a simple, yet articulate manner. This will make apparent the many important aspects of training in the style and can attract students who

may not otherwise have considered participating in kung-fu. It also helps to reach out to those in the gray area—individuals with latent abilities or hidden potential that can, with a bit more information, insight and attention—turn tops in kung-fu. Most importantly, having a documented reference of the style, as well as its concepts, principles,

approach and scope, will lessen variation in understanding and teaching.

All this involves significant effort in the analysis, comparison, standardization and documentation of the style. Varying viewpoints and perspectives have to be considered in this process, as would the concepts and ideas of other styles that exhibit similarities in form and function. It is also recognized that many fundamental principles common to all shaolin kung-fu systems transcend style, family or system differentiation. These elements are part of our shaolin inheritance of which no one style can lay claim.

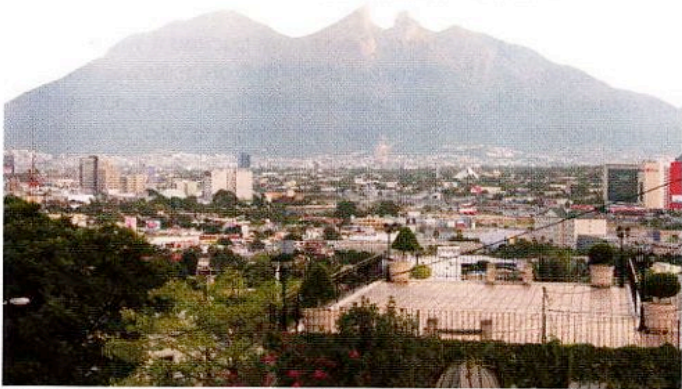
This author began the process of analysis and documentation several years ago and a good amount of codification of fundamental principles, theory and approach have already been accomplished. This work has been put into teaching and practice at the Dragon Kung Fu school with great success. Two areas in particular, body conditioning and kung-fu utilization in free fighting, are showing excellent results in students of all levels.



The entrance to the Dragon Mexico Kung-Fu school.



Nuevo Leon Autonomous University Kung-Fu group.



Monterrey, Mexico, landmark "Horse Saddle" Mountain.

BODY CONDITIONING

Ng ga kuen uses a simple 3-star arm blocking drill with differences between teachers and schools. A more complete conditioning drill derived from iron body training has shown improved results among students. The exercise is taught in stages: basic stationary 3 star; stance transitioning 3 star; shin star; elbow strikes; and body hits. Each of these elements can be practiced independently to focus on a particular body part or together as a complete 10-star body conditioning drill. The complete drill can be used as a simple workout; it works stances, hip/waist rotation, trunk flexibility, balance stability, coordination and stamina, if done properly and with intention. A key is to hold body positions with attention to detail and to coordinate the arms, legs and body in the movement transitions.

SOLO PRACTICE

The ng ga kuen wooden dummy is a rare sight these days. At first glance, it looks similar to the wing chun version; but upon close attention, it has subtle yet distinct differences. The most obvious difference is the round portion at the end of the arms. Meant to simulate human hands, the round portion is used to apply grabs and pulls. Other differences come in the angles and dimensions of the design.

The exercises from the 10-star body conditioning drill can be exercised with the ng ga wooden dummy when a partner is not available. The dummy, however, is best utilized as a bridging tool between empty-hand practice and combat applications training. With the dummy, the practitioner can exert full



A demonstration at the University.

speed and force without worrying about hurting a human partner, while simultaneously exercising conditioning against the hard wooden striking surface provided by the dummy. Complete forms, short sequences or single techniques can be applied against the dummy. Palm strikes, back slaps, bridge cuts, pulls, tugs, sweeps and stop kicks can all be improved through dummy practice.

KUNG-FU FOR COMBAT

Traditional kung-fu stylists often hear that their style is not right for combat. Although controversial, it is hard to argue that most kung-fu practitioners do not use the methods and techniques from their styles when free sparring. The prevailing opinion is that kung-fu techniques are impractical and cannot be used for free fighting. In reality, kung-fu techniques are designed for real combat and are difficult to use and apply under the restricted rules of competition point fighting. Kung-fu is meant to be flexible; the practitioner must adapt to the conditions at hand and utilize the many effective techniques contained in traditional kung fu training. Emphasis is placed on using kung-fu methods and techniques as archived in the style's forms for free fighting. Great care is taken to protect the students from injury, since the techniques embedded in kung-fu forms are truly meant for life-and-death combat.

Slowing things down is one method that helps students gain confidence and experiment with their repertoire. This starts with two students taking turns—one moves, the other responds in a continuous, random sequence. The student has time to think and respond without fear of getting hit. Over time, the response time becomes shorter and the techniques become more varied. Eventually, the students respond instantaneously, and the flow and speed of the exercise resembles free fighting.

While admitting there is much more to learn about kung-fu, Flores continues to display the courage and humility so important in a true master. With an open mind, a deep passion for traditional kung-fu and a vision of continued advancement, Flores and the students of the Dragon Mexico school in Monterrey, Mexico, are not only keeping the tradition alive, but taking their kung-fu to new heights. 🐉

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