



CHOY LEE FUT COVERS LONG, MEDIUM AND SHORT
RANGES OF FIGHTING AND COMPLEMENTS EACH RANGE
WITH FOOTWORK, HAND AND FOOT METHODS

KUNG-FU'S "COMPLETE"

By Mario Figueroa



Choi Lee fut kung-fu is known for its long-range movements, complex footwork, use of animal movements and many lengthy forms. There have been many articles written about this popular style, making it one of the most recognizable styles of shaolin kung-fu. And although we read that choy lee fut is a "complete system," few can explain what earns choy lee fut, or any style for that matter, this distinction. Is it the number of forms in the style? Is it the use of traditional weapons? Or the inclusion of animal forms? These are components that certainly add richness and identity to a style but in and of themselves make it neither a system nor complete. So, what is it about choy lee fut that makes it both?

Choy lee fut is carefully organized, codified and documented. It is defined and structured into disciplines, levels, concepts, principles and strategies. Thus, it is systematized. But being a system of kung-fu does not make it complete. Choy lee fut covers many aspects of combat going well beyond long-range methods and has extensive short-range methods, grappling and pressure point components. So, as a system of combat it can be defined as complete. However, the teachings of CLF go much further and deeper than combat and more into a system of thinking and living.

To properly cover all this would require volumes, so this article will provide an overview while focusing on a part of choy lee fut not normally seen—its short-range fighting techniques.

THE CHAN FAMILY SCHOOL

To gain further insight, I consulted with my older kung-fu brother, sifu Thomas Fuhr, head instructor of the Chan Family choy lee fut school in San Diego, Calif. (www.clfsd.com). Fuhr and I trained together under one of the most respected proponents of the style in the United States, master Frank Primicias of the Choy Lay Fut School in Poway, Calif. Fuhr completed his training with Primicias and pursued further training with sigung Chen Yong Fa, the fifth patriarchal lineage holder and great, great grandson of the founder, Chan Heung.

Fuhr has continued his training and has been accepted as a member of the Wing Sing Tong, the inner circle of Chen Yong Fa's direct students. This is a testament to Fuhr's hard work, dedication, character and high level of skill and ability.

SEVEN LEVELS OF KNOWLEDGE

Far more than just a style of kung-fu, choy lee fut is an organized and codified system of deep knowledge preserved from the original teachings of the Shaolin Temple. In Chan Family choy lee fut, this knowledge is structured into seven disciplines: kung-fu, chi kung, healing, feng shui, lion dance, lok yum (sounds, mantras) and mo da (code of ethics and conduct). While these are each distinct and can be taught independently, they each contain aspects of the others. This makes each level a platform for the others and extensions of each other. In a way, it can be viewed as one continuum where these different disciplines overlap. For example, kung-fu teachings contain aspects of the other levels, such as concepts of chi kung, sounds, code of ethics and healing. Thus, it can be said that in choy lee fut,

SYSTEM



BAGUA HANDS
Cheung gnarn chui or spear thrusting fist to the head (1). Larp qiu cheung gnarn chiu or grasping block spear thrusting fist (2). Larp qiu farn jong geung chi chiu or left grasping block and uppercut punch with ginger fist (3). Ngau sau choy or short hook sweeping fist to the back of the neck (4). Bouy jang loq que ma or exploding elbow to the temple while dropping to a kneeling stance (5).

all teachings are advanced and only the student is beginning.

As independent disciplines, each of these areas is organized into different levels and stages. Take chi kung, for example. The lohan system of chi kung is made up of multiple forms. These include health building as a basic platform, followed by chi building and combat chi kung. Thus, the lohan chi kung is a system onto itself that even includes wooden dummy training.

Chen Yong Fa states that prior to the current generation, only the first level, or the kung-fu, had been revealed. It is in this generation that the other levels of choy lee fut knowledge are being taught openly to students who are willing to sacrifice the time and effort required to learn such a large body of knowledge.

STAGES OF TRAINING

The first level or discipline, kung-fu is itself broken down into different stages of training. First are the horses (stances), hands and feet. Then come forms, weapons and dummies. This is followed by the bagua principles, which teach the multi-directional approaches to utilizing the body and make up the higher muscle/skeletal training. Within the bagua principles falls training the bagua hands, which is a series of techniques and training methods developed to quickly prepare a student for effective combat.

Using bagua hands has notable results not only in the acceleration of readiness for combat, but also in the battlefield effectiveness of those that have trained with these methods. Next

come the two-man sets and two-man dummies and training in the external and internal gates. Animal forms embody and develop different energies, external and internal. Each stage is codified and documented, ensuring that the preservation of this deep, ancient knowledge and the teachings are systematized to lead the practitioner steadily into the higher levels of understanding.

It is important to acknowledge the variations between different branches of choy lee fut. Since its creation, the style has grown and evolved primarily because of the contributions, additions and advancements of masters throughout the ages. While this has resulted in differences in the steps of training, and in the sequence of movement in forms, the essence of choy lee fut kung-fu remains intact. This maintains the common thread between the various lineages. All the branches exhibit a systematic, codified form of instruction and a broad set of principles covering many aspects of combat and teachings beyond combat. Each branch has developed special attributes and contributions that have added to the richness of choy lee fut as a whole.

LONG HANDS TO SHORT HANDS

Choy lee fut (CLF) employs a wide arsenal of combat methods. According to Chen Yon Fa, CLF kung-fu is a system of long hands, short hands, grappling/chin na/cum la, wrestling, pressure points and neural points. In this progression, one can see that while best known for its long hands, it is but a fraction of the repertoire available in the system and that short-range, close-quarter methods play an important role in the system. This can best be illustrated in the short hands principles of choy lee fut.

Short hands or close-quarter fighting is not a separate form of fighting. As such, it is difficult to isolate since it is part of the three-gate principle of choy lee fut combat. Unlike other styles where the three gates are vertical sections of the body going from lower, middle and higher, in choy lee fut the three gates constitute ranges of distance progressing from outer, to middle to inner gate. This can be visualized as a fortress with three walls of defense. Choy lee fut uses long hands to destroy the outer wall and footwork along with short hands to



18 PENETRATING DRAGONS

Lau ma larp qui or forward twisting stance with grasping bridge block (1). Dragon claw to the throat (2). Left claw to the wrist points and reverse throat nerve attack with an elbow break (3).

"Choy lee fut is famous for its effectiveness in multiple-enemy situations."

defeat the middle and inner gates. For opponents strong on the inner gate, short hands lead to grappling, wrestling, pressure points and may ultimately resort to neural points, otherwise known as dim mak or dim yuet.

Choy lee fut is famous for its effectiveness in multiple-enemy situations, which comes from its long hands or external gate (noi lim sau) methods. However, in one-to-one combat long hands are effective in closing the distance and moving in to the inner gates (oi lim sau). A famous choy lee fut phrase states that all long leads to short and all big leads to small, meaning that the familiar long hands techniques are developed for use in close range, thus becoming short hands. Well-known techniques such as gwa choy, and sow choy, yeung kiu and chum kiu are combined with small circularity and footwork for positioning to become effective grabs, armlocks, jamming and smashing techniques.

SHORT HANDS FROM ANIMAL TECHNIQUES

There are however, specific short-hand methods, some of which are the more-recognizable animal forms. From the snake choy lee fut gets its sensitivity, its sticking and its more passive, yin methods of following the strength of the opponent. Combinations such as poon, chun, say ying kuen tie up and cross the opponent's arms.

Although normally known for its long, extended, open movements, the dragon

also contains short, writhing, grabbing and clawing techniques. At the inner gate, the dragon attacks vulnerable body parts such as main arteries, soft tissues or air passages such as the throat or the thorax. On the limbs, the dragon will pinch muscles, penetrate pressure points, separate joints or press on nerves. An excellent example of close-range dragon techniques comes from the form chun lung sup ba gark kuen or 18 penetrating dragons. This form contains many advanced techniques, some of which are specifically for short-range, close-quarters application.

WOODEN DUMMY TRAINING

Choy lee fut inherited 18 different wooden dummies from its shaolin heritage. Each has three levels: stationary, moving and attacking. There are also

dummies designed for weapon training and chi kung. What is little mentioned is that other dummies, outside of the original 18, have been designed and added for the training of specialized methods. One such dummy is the famous tun yen jong or copper man dummy. The name



COMMON CHOY LEE FUT TECHNIQUES

Gwa char or backfist (1), yeung kiu or reverse bridge block (2) and chum qui or sinking bridge block (3).

"Choy lee fut inherited 18 different wooden dummies from its shaolin heritage."



SHORT HANDS TRAINING IN THE COPPER MAN DUMMY

Poon lap chun girk or circular block grabs with a lower kick (1). Poon chun sai ying kuen or circular pushing block crossing the arms and snake attack (2). Yeung qui, bouy jang or reverse bridge block and exploding elbows (3). Beng jeung or side shoving palm (4). Poon kiu larp chun sot or circular and grasping block with a thrusting knee (5).

refers to the model used in ancient China by acupuncturists and alludes to the object of its practice. This dummy was designed by later generation Chan family members to teach the methods of pressure-point attacks and point and meridian striking as passed down by Chan Hueng.

Many of the short hands of choy lee fut are trained in the tun yen jong, including combinations of chin na, animal techniques and point striking using both the hands and feet. One such combination is poon lap chun girk. This combination of movements includes yern girk, one of the nine basic kicks of the system in combination with advanced hand and leverage applications. This illustrates how techniques from all stages of training can be combined into an almost endless array of combat applications. It also shows that all stages build on each other, with each stage an important part of the overall quality of mastery. In addition, this demonstrates how as the practitioner advances, so do his options for addressing the types of situations that can be encountered in combat. This is a clear indication of the brilliance in design of the choy lee fut system of kung-fu.

CONCLUSION

Much more needs to be written about the amazingly deep and complex art of choy lee fut. This is only an initial attempt at a brief overview of the overall system from the Chan family perspective and highlights an aspect that is not typically associated with choy lee fut kung-fu—its short-distance techniques. The system employs a wide variety of methods and techniques beyond the familiar long-range movements. Choy lee fut, in all its variations, covers long, medium and short ranges of fighting and complements each range with footwork, hand and foot methods giving the practitioner the tools to address a multitude of combat situations. Choy lee fut goes well beyond combat and is a system that addresses the three levels of human development—physical, mental and spiritual. As such choy lee fut is much more than meets the eye. ☯

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