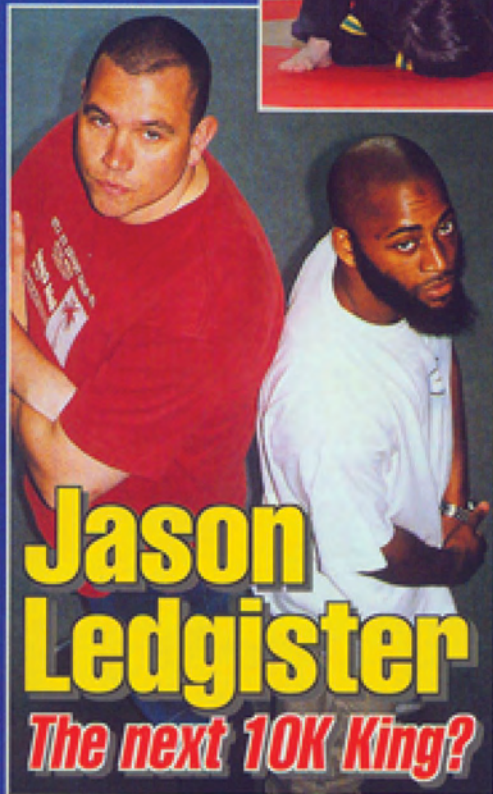


THE WORLD'S GREATEST MARTIAL ARTS MAGAZINE

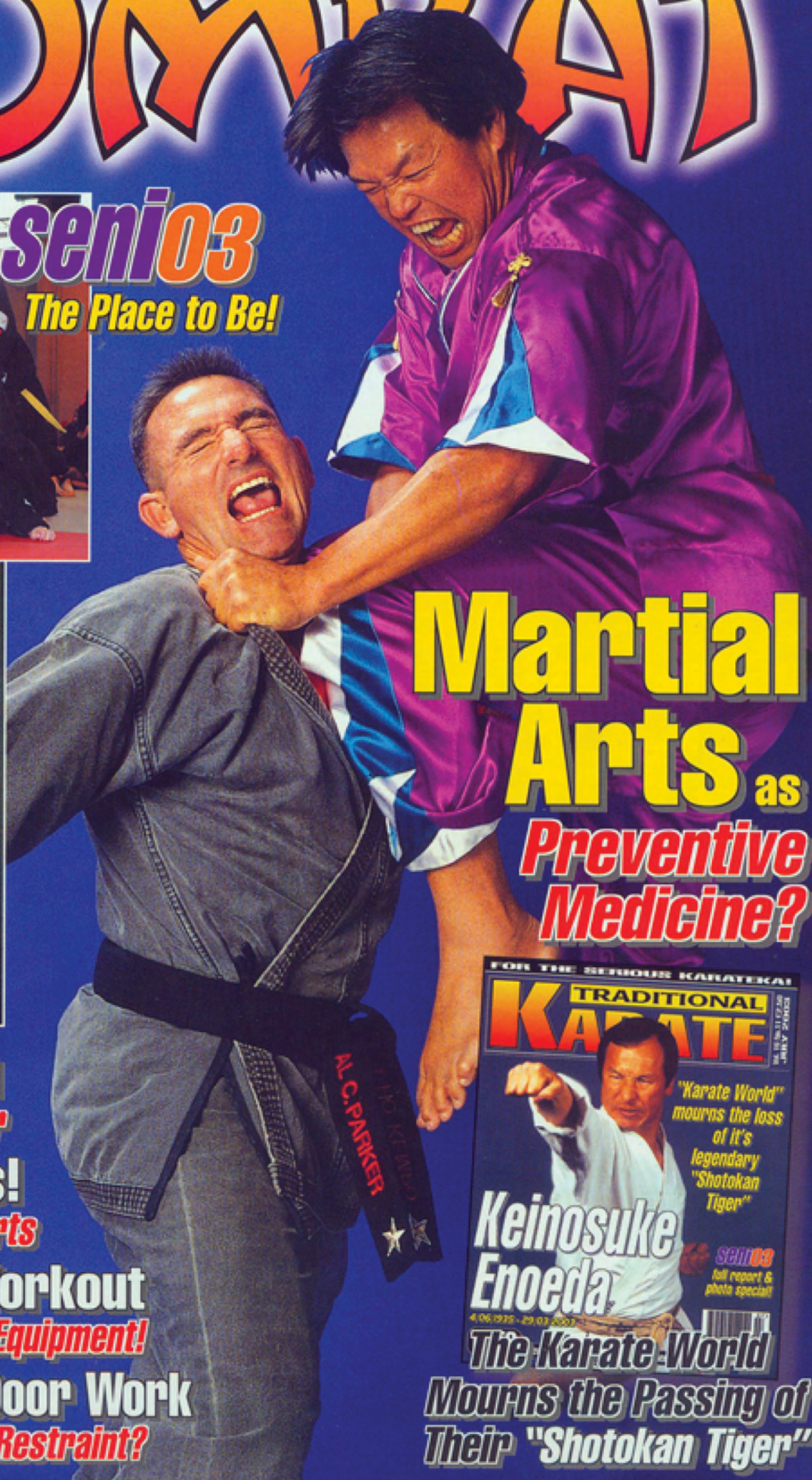
COMBAT



senio3
The Place to Be!



Jason Ledgister
The next 10K King?



Martial Arts as Preventive Medicine?

Plus **Wan Sifu**
A True Kung Fu Master

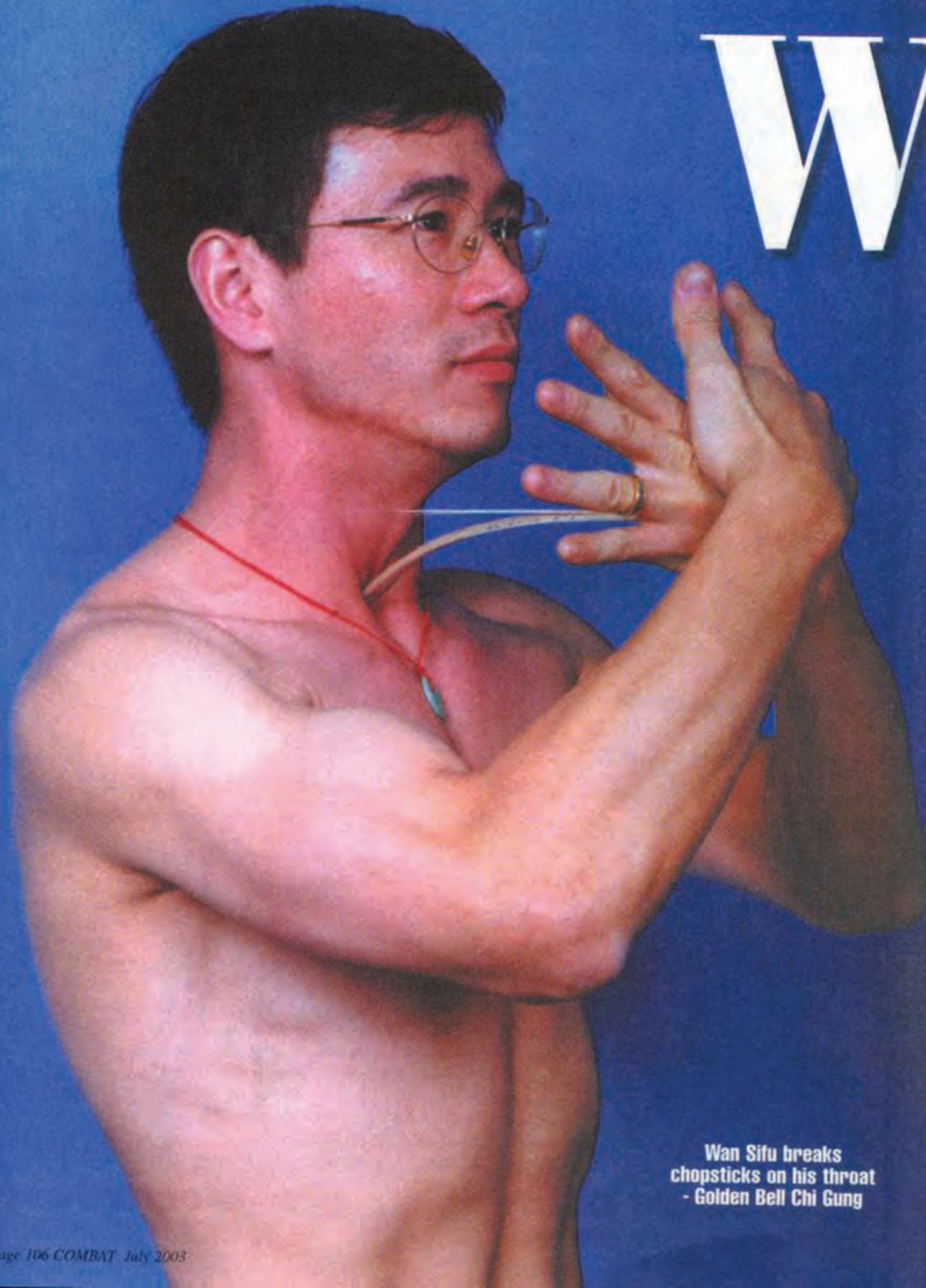
Safety Matters!
Flooring For Martial Arts

The Ultimate Workout
Without The Need For Equipment!

Martial Arts & Door Work
Violence or Control & Restraint?



Mourns the Passing of Their "Shotokan Tiger"



Wan Sifu breaks chopsticks on his throat - Golden Bell Chi Gung

Wan Sifu

By Phil Duffy

The Hong Kong Perception

"Wai, hello?"

"Sifu it's Phil, I'm just checking to see if training is cancelled tonight?"

"Cancelled, why cancelled?"

"Erm, well, because it's raining out and we train outside."

"Oh raining. So you don't fight in the rain? If it's raining out and someone want fight you, you say no, no - too wet, cannot fight?"

"Erm, I guess not."

"Okay good. Then I see you later, normal time, 9.30pm."

And so come rain or shine, another late night training session gets arranged with Wan Sifu alongside the docks of Kennedy Town, a small district on the West side of Hong Kong Island.

I'd been training with Wan Sifu for around 6 years by this point, so it didn't really surprise me when he said training was still on. We met back in '95, not too long after I'd originally headed out to the Far East with the intention of traveling through China to Korea. At this point my martial art background in the UK had primarily been 10+ years training in WTF Taekwondo. I'd stopped off in Hong Kong to visit an old friend and to maybe pick up some cash, but my original goal was to train in Korea.

Having a deep (although somewhat skeptical) interest in all martial styles, I thought it rude not to find out what the local flavours were like. I went in search of local Chinese systems available for westerners to train in. My first foray into Chinese martial arts was with Wing Chun. Unfortunately this system didn't sit well with my preconceived ideas of what martial art training should be (to say I was a little closed minded back then would be an understatement). Tai Chi faired even worse, I still remember the look the old masters gave me as I walked away. I was thoroughly convinced it was nothing but aerobics in the park for old men.

Shortly after, frustrated at my attempts to find 'real' Kung Fu in Hong Kong, I came upon a contact who gave me a card for a Choy Lay Fut and Northern Shaolin Kung Fu instructor. Now we're talking! I made contact and

headed down to the Sai Wan District on Hong Kong Island to seek out yet another supposed master. Upon arrival I met a young bespectacled Chinese man in his mid 30's with a very youthful face and pleasant smile.

"Hello, I'm looking for a Mr. Wan Kei Ho," I said, checking the business card I'd been given. "Yes, that's me" he said, still smiling. This can't be him, I thought! He's too young, too thin! He can't be a master! Maybe he's got the same name as his Dad and his Dad's the master? I looked around his shop, convinced I'd see someone more suitable. I was looking for someone old, bald with a long white beard and Master Po eyes. He noticed and assured me he was the Kung Fu master I'd spoken to on the phone earlier. I smiled and nodded, resigned to again seeing nothing but waving arms and beautiful poses, with no practical



Lau Sigung breaks heavy tiles on Wan Sifu's head



Lau Sigung smashes heavy tiles on Wan Sifu's back whilst student Roy Bennet presses a steel sword deep into Sifu's throat

application. "You want to see some of my Kung Fu?" he said. I caught the sparkle in his eyes, as if he knew I thought he was a phony. "Sure, I'd love to". Arrangements were made to look after his shop and he took me through a few back alleys to a small, secluded terrace at the rear of the main town.

It was here that my perception of what Chinese Martial Arts really have to offer was to change dramatically. After demonstrating some of the basic techniques within his system (very fast and physically powerful), Wan Sifu could see I did not appreciate the real power within his Kung Fu. With a smile he asked me if I wanted to 'test' his Chi-gung.

Taking off his jacket and wearing

only a vest top, I could see that what I mistook for thin was actually a lean body rippling with muscle. Sifu Wan then presented me with his forearm and motioned for me to squeeze it. A solid iron bar is the closest description I can get to. I couldn't make a dent in the skin, let alone the muscle tissue. He moved my hand to his bicep which was equally as impregnable. Impressive, but still this is no measure of his Chi-gung, he probably lifts weights! At that point he moved my other hand back to his forearm, which was still like cast iron and relaxed his bicep. His upper arm became like soft tissue, no tension whatsoever, liquid almost. As did his shoulder and the rest of his body, but his lower arm was rock

solid. How the hell did he do that? I couldn't fathom any way for the body to retain iron like tension in the lower arm and the rest of the body remain relaxed and limp. It was then that Wan Sifu explained that the tension created was not muscular tension, but a moving of the internal chi through the body at will. Whoa, the Chi word!

I'd read the books and magazines, I'd seen the demo's in the UK and to my naive mind Chi was some Jedi mind trick excuse that people came up with, if they couldn't do reverse spinning kicks in their sleep! And here was a guy demonstrating something that I couldn't explain though my rudimentary understanding of basic physics and biology, and he calls it Chi. Well if there's ever a time to quit being a skeptic, this was probably it.

Sifu took the lesson further and produced a wooden chopstick, passing it to me. I checked it and it seemed genuine enough. He then asked me to try and break it by placing each end of the chopstick into my two palms and forcing my hands together. I pushed hard, but it wasn't going to break. Before that happened I was convinced it would spear through my palms. He told me to press harder, but the pain stopped me. He took the chopstick from me, added a second and placed them both against his throat, his palm held flat against the other ends. I could see what was going to happen and feverishly tried to convince him it wasn't necessary on my behalf. Sifu just smiled and continued talking in a relaxed manner, ignoring my protests. Again no obvious tension existed as his free hand came up and smashed the back of his supporting hand, the chopsticks instantly caved under the stress and fell to the ground in splinters, his throat remained undamaged. I stood there transfixed unable to believe that someone had risked becom-

ing a living Shish Kebab, in order to demonstrate the power of this thing called Chi.

However it wasn't long before my skeptic alter ego appeared on my shoulder and said 'yeah, but that's nothing but a circus trick is it - can he really fight?' Still a little dazed I broached the subject of real applications and asked Sifu if his Chi power can be used for offence, as well as extreme defense? He explained that he could show me techniques, but without understanding the energy I wouldn't really understand what I was looking at. Taking this as a bit of a blow off, I nodded. Sifu then looked at me and the twinkle reappeared. He said that to understand the energy I needed to feel the energy. Okay, no problem, show me. And with that he motioned me to throw a punch. I pulled my guard up, left it a couple of seconds and then launched a swift right cross to his left temple. I didn't see the technique. I had no idea what he did, or how he moved. All I felt was searing, burning pain across the back of my hand, and the full body jerk that whipped my head back and left me motionless for what felt like half a minute. His free hand moved to my throat, soft and slow, as if making a point that I could do nothing to prevent his further attacks. My hand felt like the skin had been dragged off my arm like a glove. The power was immense, nothing like I'd ever experienced. As Sifu massaged my hand with the Dit Da Jow (herbal wine) the physical pain subsided, but my system was still having problems believing it had received such a shock.

It wasn't until a few hours later while on the ferry home, that I began to realize the depth of this man's Kung Fu ability. That he could manifest such devastating power had me in awe. And that that power, wasn't as significant as the fact that he could just as easily defend against it with internal energy. No matter how hard or fast I strike, he could probably withstand the blow and use that timing to rip me apart, made me realize how insignificant my martial art training had been to date. Winning trophies mean nothing to a person who's own personal ability has reached such a level. Wan Sifu and people like him have taken their training beyond the simple striking and grappling skills I'd been exposed to, and brought it to a level that I previously believed were only found in legend.

It's been an hour since we started training and the drizzling rain has dried up, although the ground is still wet. The temperature is mild for a Hong Kong late spring evening, although with the linger-

ing rain clouds trapping the ever present humidity, it still feels like a sauna. The Kennedy Town docks are caught between the dazzling bright lights of the towering harbour front city blocks, and the inky blackness of the Hong Kong sea at night. Along that short strip of shadowed land hidden between moored cargo vessels and stacked shipping containers, the sound of laboured breathing can be heard as three foreign Kung Fu students are given a few golden seconds to relax and recover. One of the students, a tall, lean personal fitness trainer from west London is still nursing the back of his hand where Sifu earlier demonstrated his 'Um Ging', or heavy energy. "To understand real Kung Fu" Sifu often says, "you need to feel the physical energy, both internal and external, as well as see and train the technique."

Once again Sifu motions to us with a slight nod "Okay, Gwa Choi, Sau Choi, fifty times, no stop, but this time take care of your standing." Tired muscles groan as we resume Ma Sik (horse stance), and again prepare for the call. "Yat, yi, sam, sei, ng, lok..." And so it goes as the numbers are counted off with Sifu commenting on foot position, stability of stance and tension held in shoulders along the way.

Wan Sifu teaches traditional Choy Lay Fut Kung Fu (also known as Fut Gar Kune) from the Buk Sing branch, founded by the renowned boxer Tam Sam, along with Northern Shaolin Kung Fu and Chi-gung from Ku Yu Cheung's lineage and Sun style Tai Chi as created by Sun Lu Tang. Undoubtedly he's also been exposed to other Chinese systems along the way. Ask any scholar of Chinese martial arts and they will tell you those three masters mentioned above are some of the greatest martial artists ever to exist in China. Additionally Sifu's lineage continues in direct decent from all of the above masters to his own Sigung, Lau Gam Dong, famous throughout Hong Kong for his amazing Golden Bell Chi-gung ability, down to his own master Lau Wai Yip (Lau Gam Don's son). Sifu also studied for many years under master Chiu Kwok Chung, now living in Canada, who's lineage also travels from his master Wong Yuen Woo, through Lung Chi Cheung back to Ku Yu Cheung and Tam Sam. To have an unbroken lineage to all those masters mentioned above is a rare pedigree.

Together with Lion Dancing, a host of traditional Chinese weapons, Muscle/Tendon Changing Chi-gung, Iron Sand Palm and the extremely high level Golden Bell Chi-gung, Sifu offers a

completely rounded system, with philosophies and techniques firmly grounded in the principles of Chinese medicine and traditional Chi-gung practice.

Additionally Wan Sifu is in a unique position amongst many teachers of Kung Fu. With over 30 years training in traditional Chinese martial arts, he literally has wisdom beyond his years, but being of a relative young age he's still young enough to demonstrate his ability to it's full potential. This is never more evident than when training with him for not only is his teaching great for health and the development of Chi, but Sifu's edge has always been that no matter what he teaches, it must always apply to actual combat, a factor that seems to be increasingly rare amongst many traditional stylists these days. Although Sifu never condones fighting, he believes that training must always focus on this aspect. Self-defense is always foremost in his mind and that principle is reflected fully in his teaching style. Every facet of his technique, no matter how obscure or fanciful it may seem at first, has a place in the real world of combat. Solid basics combined with the correct application of Ging (energy) make for practical technique with devastating effect.

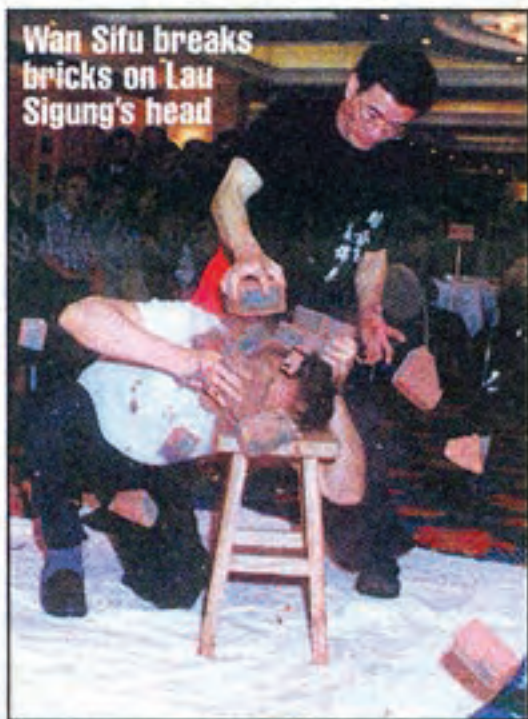
Sifu's basis for the effectiveness of his combat techniques, originate with the fundamental 5 animals of Fut Gar Kung



Phil Duffy poses with a fellow competitor alongside Wan Kei Ho and his master Lau Wai Yip



Wan Sifu breaks bricks on Lau Sigung's head



Fu - the snake, the crane, the leopard, the tiger and the monkey. The Fut Gar style is slightly different from other southern Kung Fu styles in that it combines the techniques and energies of the 5 separate animals into single techniques. For example, Chap Choi may look like a standard Leopard Fist attack if viewed from outside the system, but a knowledgeable student will understand that that single technique combines the direct straight line attack of the snake, the fist shape and penetration of the leopard and the footwork and maneuvering of the monkey. 3 separate energies and characteristics combined in a single lightning fast strike. Additionally traditional Kung Fu isn't limited to hitting standard targets, namely the head and trunk of an opponent, to cause damage. Rather Fut Gar focuses on attacking the nearest target, whether it be an exposed hand, arm, or leg, with the shock / pain of the initial attack causing enough of a diversion, to allowing instant access to more vulnerable areas.

However, without the knowledge and training in the various Ging's, or energies of the system (of which he demonstrates with ease), many originating from Ku Yu Cheung, the techniques by themselves may not be effective. Although Sifu has a repertoire of seemingly hundreds of techniques, he believes the study of a few techniques combined with correct energy training, is what makes the techniques effective in real combat. Without a solid grounding in the energies of the system, which are all a result of training the Chi, Kung Fu techniques are in danger of becoming the flowery, ineffective techniques often seen today.

To see Sifu move when performing Tai Chi, or Kung Fu is inspiring. To feel

the immense energy issued from those techniques can be frightening and painful. When facing him, his speed can be unfathomable sometimes, never telegraphing his intended movement, his motion is always slick, direct, but still natural. Even to his students, some of which are seasoned martial artists with 20 years training under their belts his movements can often not be read. And on those rare occasions when his intended techniques are known to all, by the time he's initiated the movement it's often too late to defend.

Sifu's internal power is the real key to his amazing ability. A master of becoming diamond hard one moment, only to then relax to the point of nonexistence makes it almost impossible to control him. A fellow student and long term martial artist with a comprehensive background studying Muay Thai in Thailand, commented that he thought he understood the concept of power and what it's like to be hit full bore, but all that changed the first time Sifu demonstrated his awesome energy in a open handed strike to his exposed arm. That realization has been reconfirmed many times since.

And so with the training over and the hard work done for the night, it's fine to joke and laugh. Sifu's smiling now and telling one of his many detailed stories about past masters and their training methods. And as the four of us are standing there, steam rising from our backs after three hours of intense training, I look back to the docks themselves. To most people in Hong Kong they're nothing but a small container port, but for myself and a number of other lucky students those docks are a conduit to thou-

sands of years of Chinese martial art knowledge, stories, anecdotes and the purest of techniques. And that knowledge, believe it or not, is open to anyone who wants access. All they have to do is be willing to pay the price - sweat and dedication!

After seven years in Hong Kong, I never actually made it to Korea (I traveled China, but that's a different story). I found what I was looking for in the first port I searched and there was no need to continue the hunt. After observing many other systems of internal and external Chinese martial arts and meeting many varied masters, old and young from a host of styles, I'm glad to say my initial perception of what makes a martial art has changed dramatically. Now when I'm introduced to a system I've not previously come across, unlike my early days with Wing Chun, or Tai Chi, I look for what can be achieved with both the hard and soft energy. For in Hong Kong what the 60 year old man can do, now he's no longer able to rely on brute strength and speed, therein lies the power of the Chinese martial arts.

Overseas students / instructors wishing to contact Sifu William Wan for seminars / training in Hong Kong, or abroad, please E-mail: wankeihokungfu@netvigator.com Tel: (+852) 2872 6226. Or contact the author: Phil Duffy E-mail: bignosephil@yahoo.com Tel: (+852) 2915 5272

