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An Interview with David Leung— Chinese Martial Arts

by Sonja Ungemach

There are no simple answers when discussing Chinese martial arts with LCC psychology instructor and martial arts teacher David Leung. Our interview lasted well over an hour and was generously interlaced with everything from Chinese parables to lessons on the laws of physics. David takes care not to over-simplify the meaning or value of the disciplines he teaches, choosing to focus on the philosophical aspects of Tai Ch'i Ch'uan and Wing Chun Kung-Fu, rather than on their value as a means of combat—which indeed they are.

"The value of my program is not as much to protect yourself physically, to fend off aggressors, but more in the process of becoming a master of your own life—of awareness." As such, it is a tool for self-actualization, a meditation, as well as a means of self-defense.

David himself is a good example of what he means by "the process of becoming." Born in Hong Kong, he came to Eugene 14 years ago as a student at the University of Oregon. He began teaching martial arts to a few of the other Chinese students and gradually developed a following. In the 14 years since, he has taught over 4000 students.

David was surprised by the wide reception the martial arts received in the West. He credits the "alternative culture" of the 70's with the early growth in interest, but now sees it as a discipline for all kinds of people. Once seen as an "art for old people and hippies," Tai Ch'i is now popular among psychologists, counselors and other professionals.

David says he never intended to become a master of the art and, in fact, feels he is still in the process of becoming one. "You never really *become* a master. By the time you're a master, it's time to close the door and take down the shingle." He likens the process to bringing the grain out in the wood by polishing it, revealing the "hidden reflection of life within."

David teaches two disciplines—Tai Ch'i Ch'uan and Wing Chun Kung-Fu. Tai Ch'i, the more well-known of the two, is based on the principle of "dynamic balance" and a harmonization of the opposites. In one exercise, the push-hand technique, one's movement is totally interrelated with that of one's opponent (or partner). This interaction reflects the interrelatedness of oneself to others and to the universe. It is also the key to self-defense. "I do not fight *against* my opponent. I always try to utilize the energy of my opponent to harmonize with what I want do do."

Traditionally an art of self-defense, Tai Ch'i is also widely used as a mental discipline for relaxation, stress reduction and meditation. "I do not pride myself on producing a killer fighter or second generation robot killer machine," says

David, but rather that "my students have become more philosophical. That is my achievement."

Wing Chun Kung-Fu is the other discipline that David teaches. Known popularly as Kung-Fu, this one is more oriented toward the self-defense aspects of the art. Originated by a woman in China, it was devised to use the minimum amount of strength (a woman's) against the maximum amount of strength (a man's). David illustrates with the parable of the great oak and the bamboo: The branches of the great oak cannot stand the weight of the snow. They break and are blown away with the next storm. But the bamboo bears the weight and bends with it.

David justifies the seeming contradiction of the potentially violent aspects of the art with the principles of universal love and harmony. "It may seem that martial arts teacher speaks with double tongue. We say, on the one hand, we ought to have love, concern for other individuals, but then tell you, if you want to hit someone, hit them here, where it will hurt. . . . The tool of death combined with principles of life—they harmonize to produce the universe."

David Leung has been called a dancer, a meditation expert, and a vicious tiger. In fact, he admits to being none and all of the above. He also teaches psychology at Lane Community College and was one of the few local persons invited to speak at the Olympic Scientific Congress last summer. He spoke on Eastern and Western aesthetics.

To find out more about his classes, call 344-1058 or 343-2452.

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