

To buy this book. Press  
the button to go  
to YMAA Shopping.

THE  
MARTIAL  
WAY AND  
ITS  
VIRTUES  
—TAO DE GUNG—



—F. J. CHU—



---

THE  
MARTIAL  
WAY AND  
ITS  
VIRTUES  
—TAO DE GUNG—



---

F. J. CHU

---

YMAA Publication Center  
Boston, Mass. USA

**YMAA Publication Center, Inc.**  
Main Office  
4354 Washington Street  
Boston, Massachusetts, 02131  
1-800-669-8892 • www.ymaa.com • ymaa@aol.com

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Copyright ©2003 by F. J. Chu  
All rights reserved including the right of  
reproduction in whole or in part in any form.

Editor: George A. Katchmer Jr.  
Illustrations and Chinese Calligraphy: Jerry Fu  
Cover Design: Richard Rossiter

### **Publisher's Cataloging in Publication**

Chu, F. J.

The martial way and its virtues : Tao de Gung / F. J. Chu. — 1st ed.  
—Boston, Mass. : YMAA Publication Center, 2003

p. ; cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN: 1-886969-69-8

1. Martial arts—Moral and ethical aspects. 2. Marial arts—  
Psychological aspects. 3. Self-defense— Moral and ethical aspects.  
4. Mind and body. I. Title.

GV1102.7.P75 C48 2003  
796.8/01/9—dc22

2003109400  
0309

Printed in Canada

## CONTENTS

Foreword .....	ix
Part I: The Martial Way	
Prelude .....	3
I. The Force of Virtue .....	9
II. The Martial Way .....	15
III. China Hand, Empty Hand .....	33
Part II: Strategy and Technique	
IV. No Magic Wand .....	43
V. Practice Real Life .....	49
VI. Lose Your Ego .....	55
VII. The Illusion of Technique .....	63
VIII. Circles and Straight Lines .....	71
Part III: The Virtues of Martial Arts Training	
IX. Time and Timing .....	83
X. Empower Your Warrior Mind .....	89
XI. Learning and Teaching .....	95
XII. The Ultimate Convergence .....	103
Notes .....	107
Bibliography .....	109
Index .....	111
About the Author .....	113



# Prelude

*Tao De Gung* is a purist's vision of the martial arts. The book is a call to practicing martial artists everywhere and to aspirants of the martial Way. It draws upon the wisdom of the sages, from antiquity to the modern day, to embrace a path of living and training that might be radically different from what one may be pursuing today. The impetus of this essay is the integration of apparently discordant values: pacifism and aggression, mind and body, self-defense and sport, and strategy versus technique. The tension between the meeting of spirituality and brute physical force, and life against death, are recurring themes. *Tao De Gung* highlights the immediate relevance of philosophical thinking on "real life" martial arts practice. Philosophical discourse, like martial arts practice, is a way of life. One becomes a preparatory exercise for the other. Going beyond mere contemplative reflection, it advocates the principle that personal transformation occurs only when it is driven by personal values. These values are then incorporated into a martial artist's life through disciplined and regular practice. Thought embodies action. At the same time, this book seeks to puncture the "illusion of technique" engendered by the many volumes of how-to-fight picture books common in the genre today.

During the long course of training, students of the martial arts occasionally encounter other veteran martial artists who are highly skilled in the art of fighting and self-defense. These individuals are typically the teachers in the training hall and senior instructors at other schools. We admire their technical abilities and seek to learn from their expertise, although we may not necessarily put much stock in their actions outside the martial arts arena. In short, we respect them as fighters even if they may not inspire us as human beings that we model ourselves after.

Alternatively, there are observers and writers of the martial arts scene who bring to bear upon the art an insightful understanding of the historical, philosophical or spiritual underpinnings of the martial Way. On rare occasions we might encounter a few such individuals who, by weight

of their wisdom, skill and example, earn our respect as extraordinary human beings. They make a contribution to the understanding and appreciation of the martial arts but may not be competent martial artists themselves. Consequently, their lack of physical and technical proficiency in the martial arts makes us question the real-life applicability and immediacy of what they write or say.

It is uncommon to meet a true martial arts master, and rare to meet a martial arts master who is also a sage. To encounter someone who is arguably qualified to be both is to be in rarefied company. When a martial arts student has the privilege of working with such a person, it is a blessing twice received. In the Chinese worldview, the concept of life-enhancing energy (*chi*) is the foundation of physical conditioning as well as the key to mental empowerment and personal performance. At the highest skill levels, martial arts and spirituality merge. Stated alternatively, at the highest levels the integration of strategy and technique brings about the emergence of spirit and the development of *chi*. Martial arts skill is based on both physical prowess and mental refinement, with an exacting focus on the physical, mental and spiritual being. Thus this book addresses martial artists in training and seekers of the martial Way who choose to make the long, arduous and rewarding journey towards self-perfection, for the martial Way has many invaluable lessons to teach us.

Schopenhauer, one of the most original minds in the history of Western metaphysics, once said: "Live first, then philosophize." What he meant, I believe, is that in order to finally cross over into the realm of true philosophizing, one first must bear all the burdens, learn from all the mistakes, and accept all the frustrations, disappointments and joys of life's long journey.

In that spirit, this book is organized into three parts. Part I sets forth the philosophical precepts of the martial Way as a heroic and enlightened pursuit, one that requires devoted training and ongoing refinement. It puts the martial arts into historical perspective by examining the evolution of one particular martial arts style as it developed from traditional China, to feudal Japan and up through the modern day American scene.

Part II focuses on various aspects of strategy and technique, dwelling upon solitary training and training with partners. These discussions attempt to balance the detailed psychophysical considerations of a violent confrontation with its attendant emotional and attitudinal issues. Topics such as how we should practice, what are the classic mistakes to avoid, how we view ourselves and our opponents, and how we develop our own personalized strategies and techniques are explored. It hints at the real theme of the martial Way as a triumph, not so much against an opponent, but over oneself.

---

In Part III, the book concludes by returning to the spiritual antecedents of the martial arts. It poses the questions: What are the virtues of martial arts training? What is the philosophical purpose of pursuing the martial Way? This section discusses the development of a warrior mentality and the transformation of a martial artist from student to teacher. It proposes not only how to fight and win—at the risk of enduring damage and loss—but how to win without a fight. To uphold a principle without the physical and moral courage to implement it often renders the practice of a martial code of conduct academic. Finally, the book speculates upon the ideal of an “ultimate convergence” of mind, body and spirit in one person at one given point in time, perhaps generating more questions as well as answers about what kind of martial artist—what kind of person—one wants to become.

道  
德  
功

*Tao de gung*  
The martial way and its virtues

# The Force of Virtue | I

The wisdom and knowledge that the martial arts offer is something that should be preserved in modern society. The Asian intellectual heritage embraces the whole cycle of life that most of Western psychology has studiously avoided. The practitioner who views his training as merely a means of self-defense will eventually realize that his efforts are unrewarding. The martial Way is nothing less than self-cultivation and the promotion of virtuous conduct. The most important test of a martial artist is always the most difficult one, and that invariably occurs at the most inopportune moment. That is why it is called a “martial art.”

When one is threatened or under attack, it is natural to feel fear and anxiety. But fear is not harmful to the spirit of the martial artist. What is damaging to the spirit is either not knowing what to do, or the nagging voice of an external authority. Happy is the individual who trusts his own judgement enough to distinguish reality from illusion and fact from vanity. The Yaqui shaman-sorcerer Don Juan advises:

*“When a man decides what to do, he must go all the way, but he must take responsibility for what he does. No matter what he does, he must know first why he is doing it, and then he must proceed with his actions without having doubts or remorse about them.”<sup>1</sup>*

The highest form of proficiency in the martial arts is to be able to walk away from a fight without having to fight. Fighting often only perpetuates more fighting; although when confronted with a recurrent evil, there may be no other choice. Like an animal backed into a corner where retreat is no longer possible, it braces itself for the final ultimate confrontation. The true martial artist has enough inner strength and confidence to know that he never has to demonstrate his ability for the sake of showmanship or even to gratify his own ego needs. He knows that, if

given no choice, he is prepared to react to an unprovoked attack by mustering all the capabilities within himself. Even if defeated by a more formidable opponent, he might still be able to walk away with his pride intact because he knows that he did everything he could—first to avoid the fight—then to do everything in his power to win it. If he has done his absolute best, then he has passed the test regardless of the outcome of the fight. In certain respects, individuals in modern society need to be faced with life-and-death situations, if only metaphorically. An individual is always capable of going further, doing more than he knows. His potential always exceeds his reach. A man's identity lies in the choice of the possibilities open to him, giving him the power to make sustained acts of choice.

A warrior must be concerned with doing the very best that he can do, limited only by the circumstances beyond his control. Reaching for this ideal easily transcends the parameters of speed or strength. From the master sage to the dedicated *shodan* to the rank novice, there are always those above and below us. It is useless to be envious of another's talents or accomplishments. In practicing the martial arts, the *sifu* can become great by striving for precision; but the middle-aged businessman, the earnest young mother as well as the distracted teenager, all potentially wise as well, can strive for precision—and think of perfection. The reach to develop our heroic nature is worked out in the plain everyday details of our daily lives, and its underlying passion central to a person's individual calling.

The greatest gift of self-proficiency is the relaxed, confident feeling it generates inside. That sense of assurance comes from the knowledge that one has prepared properly, and that everything is under control (to the extent that any situation can be within one's control). Open-minded, clear-headed common sense is the ready position for any confrontation: to think for oneself; to be a leader, not a follower; to not simply mimic the one with the strongest voice or the most authority. The overwhelming majority of those who train diligently in the martial arts never achieve even a modicum of celebrity or wealth, but they do achieve something significant in their own lives. An obscure martial artist is still a true martial artist, and that intrinsically is a great achievement because the meaning lies in the difficulty of the effort itself.

Life is a battle between positive and negative forces. It reflects the oldest and most basic conflict faced by man since the beginning of time—the conflict of good versus evil. The martial artist and the warrior need to believe in the meaningfulness and importance of his actions. He believes in the power of goodness and virtue and its ability to eventually triumph over the forces of evil and darkness. He holds the conviction

that, somewhere along the line, what he is and does will make a difference in his actual experience. The warrior exults in the excitement of the battle for a good cause, relishes the joys of victory, and perseveres in the face of defeat. He upholds a faith that his sacrifices will be worth even the ultimate price.

At the same time, there is another battle looming internally, inside his mind. The martial Way may involve fighting with others, but fighting against oneself is the more difficult challenge. During a lifetime, an individual will have many opportunities to overcome his imperfections and amoral tendencies. His human nature will at times turn him to thoughts of desire, fame and profit. These forces threaten to keep him in a cycle of greed, lust and delusion. The average person is all too preoccupied with his cravings for pleasure, wealth and other worldly enjoyments. The vast preponderance of his thinking revolves around his wishes, troubles, and hopes. Such tendencies are an innate part of man's being and are not sinful; but if they remain unchecked, they lead to greed, fear and alienation. If one pursues a virtuous path, worldly success may be a result or by-product to be enjoyed. However, that is all they represent and nothing more.

Without a moral and spiritual context, one cannot attain a lasting, inner peace. That is because happiness cannot be fully defined in terms of wealth, power, fame or even posterity. Knowing this, an individual can push back his concern with possessions and status, and raise his lot in life by consciously making direct choices about who he is, what he has, and what he does. The martial artist who trains with discipline and lives with virtue attains an aura of energy, focus and dominance. He feels it in every fiber of his body, and this kind of power becomes self-evident even to his opponent. When this surge of power occurs, he will overwhelm his opponent. This kind of personal power goes beyond physical strength and technical ability. It is the force of a calm, resolute mind that will not accept fear or failure. Don Juan sums it up this way when he describes how a warrior, as an impeccable hunter who hunts power, becomes a man of knowledge: "For me the world is weird because it is stupendous, awesome, mysterious, unfathomable;... you must assume responsibility for being here, you must learn to make every act count since you are going to be here for only a short while." This is how the warrior "stops the world" and can "see" what is around him. This is how he becomes a "luminous" being.<sup>2</sup>

For each and every person, happiness means using his wealth wisely, knowing that his assets and accomplishments have accumulated without detriment to others, and that he is free of indebtedness to anyone. Knowing that life is finite, the only viable choice is to relish it day by day,

moment by moment. Otherwise, at death's door a man may realize too late that he has not made good use of what he has had. When a martial artist practices a *kata* with care, everyone around him knows it; and when he does it carelessly, that is recognized as well even though nothing may be said. When one sits down to take a meal, a cup of tea is as good as a glass of vintage wine even though the latter may seem far more costly and rare. In the memoirs of Gichin Funakoshi, the founder of modern *karate*, he followed some daily habits in his adult life. For example, he awoke early in the morning, dressed and combed his hair, a process that sometimes took an hour. He believed that a samurai must always have an impeccable appearance. Afterwards, he would turn in the direction of the Imperial Palace and bow to the emperor. Only after these rites were completed would he sip his morning tea.

The pursuit of simplicity, of restraint over excess, makes a man more attentive to the beauty of the everyday. In life's thousand and one daily details, seeing the value of one thing or another comes down to a matter of choice. Whether a martial artist is fighting for his life or grooming himself, there are no ordinary moments. If he transforms everything he does into an act of training, then everything he does becomes important. Anything that is important is worthy of his thought, effort and attention. Understanding the difference between knowing and not knowing lets him walk down the path with a peaceful heart. Then he may find that all the power, grace and beauty that he seeks is already within his reach. But he must open his eyes and his mind to see them.

It was Socrates in the West who first taught us that the most important convergence occurs within our selves. This kind of education has many by-products—some good, some bad—all of them disturbing. Only much later does the student know that the “splinter of Socratic irony” has entered his spirit, an occurrence for which he will be always grateful. For the ways in which a person understands the reality of our world are via his mind, body, and spirit. Until all three aspects are integrated, a person is not yet whole and therefore, not fully capable of seeing the whole world. In particular, the convergent capacities of the mind not only determine what one knows but also how one evaluates what one knows. It expands the imagination and engenders clarity of thought and action. The objective is no less than the Socratic ideal of an individual who thinks for himself, uses independent judgement, and acts with deliberate choice. Can a martial artist be virtuous if he feels satisfaction in harming someone else? What good is knowledge of something if that knowledge is not infused with a sense of virtue? Can an immoral person really understand the truth? Can reality be perceived by an unjust mind? Finally and perhaps most importantly, can one really know and believe

in something and then fail to implement it? An individual can only contemplate the ideal human character from the perspective of personal transcendence.

There is a deep affinity between personal transformation and the external world. Modern Western philosophy has long proposed the concept that the emergence of reason and order reveals itself gradually through the long dialectic of historical events. In particular, the German philosopher Hegel, in his seminal work *The Phenomenology of Mind* published in 1806, described how the adoption of intellect and organization leads both individuals and societies onto progressively higher forms of spirituality or *geist*. However, the belief that human beings are moving inexorably, if however haphazardly, towards higher forms of consciousness has been seriously challenged by the events of the last hundred years. The skeptics point to the layers of racism, dogmatism and material deprivation that still envelops much of the world. The victims of recurring wars, genocide, disease and ignorance in the twentieth century gave credence to the pessimistic dictum that the dark side of human nature has changed very little over the last 40,000 years. Can we blame them for holding the view that life offers a cyclical or static existence to which time provides very little that is new? For those who care about such questions, which worldview—sustained progress or recurring cyclicity—does one embrace?

Martial arts practice teaches students to take a larger view of life. The fusion of cognition and action is the ultimate test for the martial artist. For the individual, the ultimate convergence is the marriage of a disciplined, physical force and a spiritual, moral force. To be a true martial artist, one must train hard. But one must also be a good citizen, be a good parent, do good deeds, and think good thoughts. It is important and useful to have a powerful punch and a fast kick, but the value of living a virtuous life is the most essential aspect of training. Only then can a martial artist put into practice the Way of goodness and thereby discard the Way of violence and aggression. In Heidegger's terms, the martial arts can increase our power over oneself and others, but it is for naught if a person does not retain a direct connection to humanity, to his relatedness with others. No matter how brilliant and powerful, an individual is but a link in the chain of humanity and cannot exist as an isolated point in time and space. An individual can attain a mastery over other beings but lose the sense of Being itself.

How does the intelligent individual break free from his isolated thinking? How does he maintain a connection with his physical presence and his emotional depth? He can begin by looking at himself as he really is, and examining his strengths and weaknesses, his hopes and illu-

sions, by embracing the Socratic maxim that wisdom begins from an awareness of his own ignorance. He must open his eyes, recognize his strengths and define his objectives. The beginner martial arts student instinctively looks to his *sifu* for answers. He assumes that, with the passage of time and effort, the teacher's knowledge and insights may be transmitted to the student, making him (for better or worse) more like the teacher. This reflexive gravitation towards experts who can deliver solutions reflects human being's myths about certainty and completeness.

In the end, the journey through the martial arts is not about filling in the missing pieces of a complex puzzle. There are precious few secrets or magic tricks. For the advanced student, the parts of the world in which he now travels are mostly empty voids, places without masters, spaces only he can fill. Men for the most part fear the freedom of the unknown, fear being alone. Ultimately he is alone because no one else can understand the things each man feels in his own heart. This higher level of being dictates that each individual finds for himself his own unrevealed destiny in accordance with his desires. The freedom of new beginnings—the pull of what is to be—transforms what may appear to others as aloneness and uncertainty into a daily gift of life. Like Sisyphus in the myth, he finds his universe neither sterile nor futile; in spite of his burdens, he knows himself to be the master of his days.

So there it is, empty space and uncertainty awaits us! The Taoist classic *Chuang Tzu* describes it wonderfully as “being in the realm of Nothing whatever.” And the only way these spaces (or the things that we put in these spaces) will have any real meaning will be the ideas and skills that each person works out for himself. All an individual is left with is the freedom to try out what he can do in the face of the “absolute,” the “infinite void.” As he moves out further along the path of his journey, he finds himself alone again. He has now traveled well beyond the automatic responses and well-worn ruts of his routine world. This is hard to do because from uncertainty arises fear. The experience of Nothing recalls the pristine purity of when he first began to embark on his long life journey.

Over two millennia ago, the ancient Chinese sages already anticipated that the journey of the human spirit in search of freedom and security was destined to be a long and arduous one. Across the expanse of many centuries and disparate cultures, a small number of wise and brave souls steadfastly followed this path, even in the face of persecution, tribalism, gangsterism and brutality. Extending all the way through our modern day, there has been an amazing uniformity of experience on the part of those individuals who listen to the call of the mythical philosopher-warrior-king. In his masterpiece *The Open Society and its Enemies*, the

philosopher Karl Popper tried to disclose to us the sources of man's proclivity to acquiesce to the powers of demagoguery, tribalism, racism and wanton violence. First published in 1943 war-torn Europe in the midst of man's single greatest act of catastrophic self-destruction, his concluding sentiments were this:

*There is no return to a harmonious state of nature. If we turn back, then we must go the whole way—we must return to the beasts..... if we shrink from the task of carrying our cross of humaneness, of reason, of responsibility, if we lose courage and flinch from the strain, then we must try to fortify ourselves with a clear understanding of the simple decision before us.... We must go on into the unknown, the uncertain and insecure, using what reason we may have to plan as well as we can for both security and freedom.<sup>3</sup>*

It is unlikely that Popper, separated by the vast enormity of time and space, was ever inspired by or was even familiar with *Chuang Tzu*. But in this context, both the substance and style of these two particular thinkers resonate to a remarkable degree. For even the truest warrior finds it daunting to be alone and without companionship. The inadequacy of his knowledge and the inconsistency of his resolve constantly threaten to turn him away from the chosen path. Someone who embraces the martial Way has trained to accept the possibility of calamity. He stoically knows that agony and pain, disappointment and torment are an integral part of life that cannot always be overcome through sheer effort. By constantly seeking the sources of his own motivations, he will in time attain the serenity he wishes for. Kierkegaard has described this type of warrior as "the knight of faith," someone who accepts his lot without complaint, views his responsibilities as a duty, and faces his death with courage. The knight of faith lives fully in his immediate world and on his own terms, but places his trust in a higher spiritual dimension.

## A CLASSICAL VERSION OF THE MARTIAL ARTS

Through the millennia, man has been subject to aggression and violence from other men, and has pondered ways to meet such hostility. The source of man's ceaseless conflict lies in our nature. We are just not content with the simple life. We want what we do not have and lust for what others possess.

“Empires wax and wane; states cleave asunder and coalesce.  
Thus it has ever been.” —*Three Kingdoms* (Chinese Novel 1400 A.D.)

Ironically enough, the modern civilized world promotes many alternatives for conflict resolution in place of overt violence. As a result, physical strength, mental determination and emotional endurance have lost their urgency in today's popular society. Are we a generation self-absorbed in the absence of routine discipline and sacrifice?

While the martial arts revolve around the way of personal combat, it also demands that its adherents live in accordance with a certain warrior code of conduct and honor. *The Martial Way* promises a long and arduous journey. It is an invitation to the subordination of self, the endurance of sustained practice, and the cultivation of the body and mind, with no tolerance for self-indulgences of any kind.

Martial arts without compassion and honor promises only violence. Stripped of its spirituality, it threatens injury and suffering to both its victims and its practitioners. In the end, this higher ideal is what separates the warrior from the predator.



**F.J. Chu**, born in Taiwan, ROC, is a certified black belt instructor in Kenpo Karate. Over the past twenty-five years, he has also trained in Fu Jow Pai Kung Fu, Aikido and Tai Chi Chuan. He is the author of two books on investing, President of Sage Capital Group, Inc., and Principal of the Chinese School of Southern Westchester (Scarsdale NY). F.J. Chu lives with his wife and three children in Rye, New York.

ISBN 1-886969-69-8



9 781886 969698

