

INSIDE KUNG-FU®

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THE ULTIMATE IN MARTIAL ARTS COVERAGE

A man with a shaved head and a goatee, wearing a black martial arts uniform, is the central figure. He holds a long, curved sword in his right hand, raised high. His left hand is extended forward in a martial arts gesture. The background is a blurred, natural setting with trees and a bright sky.

The Martial Arts Magician

*acupressure-
the
compassionate
art*

A New Look at
Full Contact Karate

*secrets of the
deadly ninja*

San Soo-The
Free Fighting Style
of Kung-Fu



Jimmy Woo is one of the best known and enduring kung-fu practitioners in the country. Yet age is not a characteristic easily associated with Jimmy Woo. His rippling muscles and sharp-featured face make him look twenty-years younger.

Although he has about 28 affiliated martial arts studios, he cannot be thought of as a "fast buck" martial artist. For the last 43 years Jimmy Woo has been teaching a special kind of kung-fu (san soo) which was handed down from his great-great grandfather and during the annual festivities in Chinatown, Woo has been granted a one-hour demonstration time for the last 17 years.

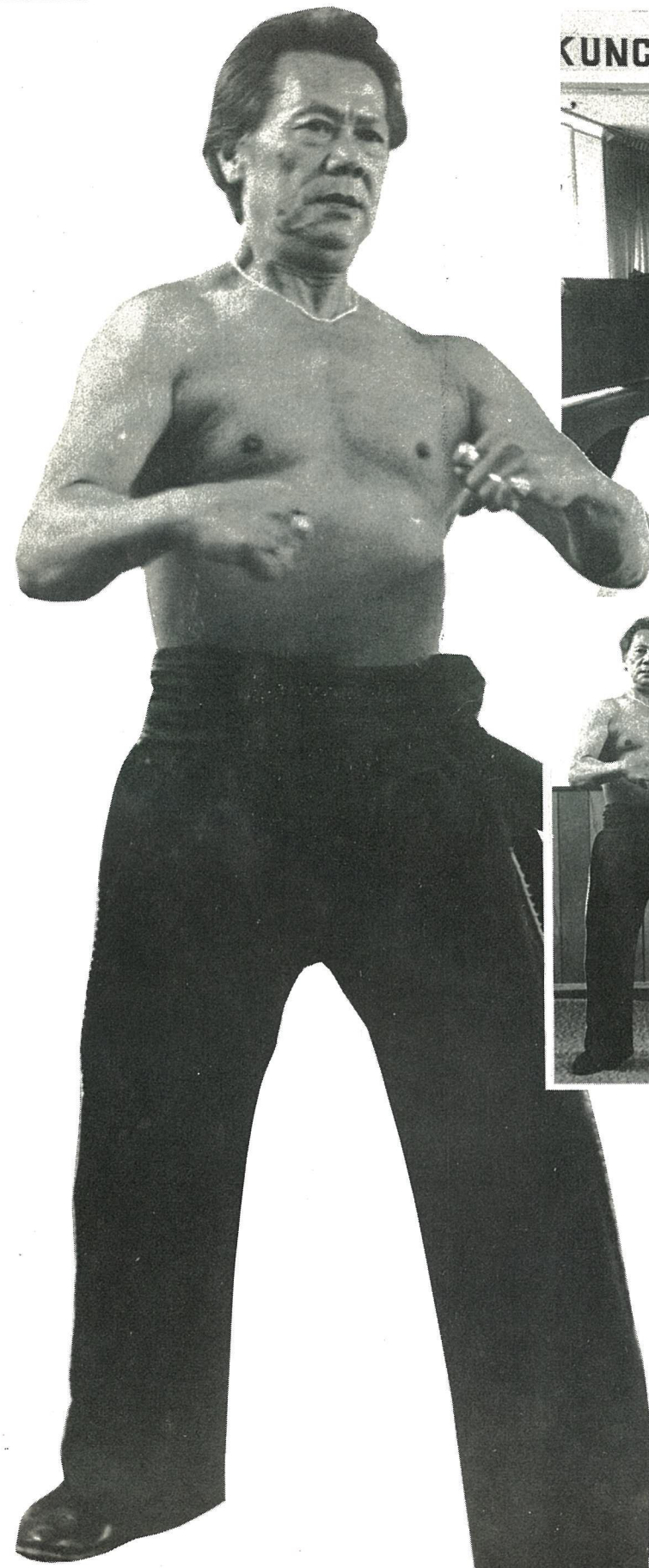
According to Woo, san soo is not a sport, but rather a "fighting technique". It is based on a combination of punches, kicks, strikes and blocking, in perfect unison directed to vital points of the human body. These techniques can be changed

the free
fighting style
of kung-fu...

SAN SOO

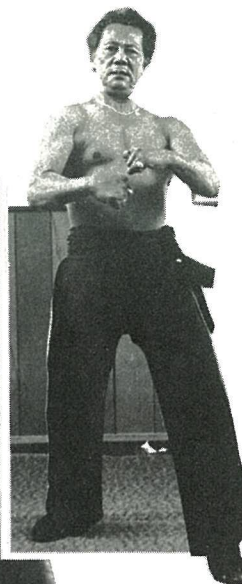


Photos by Nancy Nishioka



KUNG-FU

NO SMOOKING
IN THIS
AREA



instantly to suit the situation and do not necessarily follow a set pattern.

The utilization of highly scientific principles of physics, leverage, concentration and controlled breathing released at the moment of impact gives the exponent extreme power. Agility, balance, co-ordination, humility and respect are also emphasized in san soo.

Since the Chinese keep much of their knowledge of the art to themselves, its origin and development are very obscure. Kung-fu underwent many changes during thousands of years of evolution by many brilliant minds. About 400 years ago, it was introduced to Okinawa (Okinawa-te) and many other parts of the Far East.

It underwent a radical change, intermingling with native forms of unarmed defense, and changing from natural circular forms found in Southern China (Num Pi) to hard forms, consisting of theatrical poses like those seen more frequently in karate today.

In 1917, it again underwent another change when it came to Japan and was adapted to the Japanese culture and personality.

The art has been practiced by Jimmy

Woo's family for five generations beginning with his great-great grandfather who was taken in as an orphan by a monastery in China. It was there about 150 years ago, the young gung-fu practitioner obtained a book with all the secrets of san soo. The book was then passed down to his first son, then to Woo's grandfather's first son, then to Jimmy Woo. Jimmy had the book photocopied and given to each of his brothers.

"The book," explains Woo, "is more or less like a law book. When you go to law school you learn from law books which are passed down to you. And the lawmakers make the law. The monks made this book and it has been passed down for generations who learn from it."

Jimmy Woo is a man with a flamboyant and sometimes a violent past. He

fought often and well in his younger days — sometimes too often and too well. He says that it was a part of his life he is not proud of; a time when he was ruled by the wild feelings of his youth.

Today he says that if someone tries to tempt him into a fight, he just gives them the biggest smile and turns the other cheek. He says that he has the confidence to defend himself, if necessary, but now he has too much respect for human life to abuse and injure his fellow man with needless fighting which today he finds "ugly".

"Let them call me a coward, says Woo. Let them call me yellow. I know I'm not. There is no need to hurt someone just to prove them a liar. But even so, if a man tries to actually fight me, I will have to act though I do not like to do so."

What brought about the change in Woo's attitude? "Basically I have more confidence in myself. I began to realize that if I continued doing what I was doing I might really hurt somebody and plus I didn't want to spend time in jail either. I began to like myself a lot better, I became older and more mature, and my outlook on life changed. My family could not believe it, I changed so much.

Woo takes the san soo art of fighting very seriously and does not see a place for it in sport. "For example, say I hit you and it is a foul. I have made contact with a clean blow, but it goes against me. That is not fighting. When we fight, there are no fouls or rules, we just fight the best we know how. In China, you never have two men shake hands and walk away. One man dies or is ruined for life." (CONTINUED ON PAGE 61)



Bernice Woo, wife and student of Sifu Jimmy Woo, illustrates how to defend against a grab with fellow san soo black belt Bill Lasiter. Stepping inside of her attacker to prevent retaliation, she brings her left arm over in a swift, powerful,

downward blocking motion. She then follows up quickly with a backfist to the neck area, pivots and finishes him off with a kick to the solar plexus.

san soo

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31)

Of san soo, Woo makes this analogy. "If you go to school to be a doctor, you read books which talk about medicine. You can take kung-fu all your life, but until you've taken san soo, you will not be a fighter. A lot of young people come to me to learn to be a killer, but then they train with me for about six months and their character changes completely. They become warmer and have more respect for others."

Woo believes that the teacher is very important and admits that he is a much better teacher than he was years ago when

he did not feel that way. "Fifty years ago a couple of guys shoved an airplane down a hill because they wanted to fly. Now we go to other planets and it all came from the same basic idea. If I was smarter today in teaching my students I could teach them better. As a teacher I want to give something of value. Maybe I don't make a person the best fighter in the world, but I give him confidence, a new outlook on life and to me that is something of value."

Woo feels it is very important to know the background of your instructor. Dur-

ing the kung-fu fad, many studios were opened by instructors who didn't have the slightest notion of what they were doing. In his own case, five generations of kung-fu practitioners testify to Woo's right to teach the art.

For the last eighteen years in El Monte, California, Woo has been doing just that and obviously quite effectively. Probably the most irrefutable piece of evidence is practicing what you preach. And Jimmy Woo, a fit, trim, muscular sixty-three year-old gentleman who has not been sick since he was nine years old, is living proof.



In this sequence, Mrs. Woo points out to her attacker why it is not a good idea to grab her by the hair. Utilizing a pivotal kick in order to maximize the force behind it, she brings her rear leg around and plants her foot in her attacker's

groin. Still utilizing the force of her pivot, she knocks her opponent's guard arm down to his side, clearing the way for a clean shot to the head.