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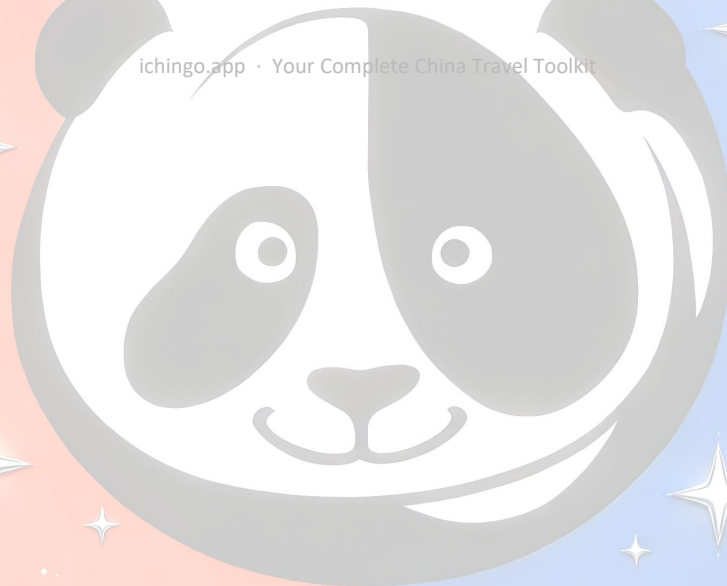
China Culture Guide

Chinese Kung Fu — The Art Beyond the Movies

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History, styles, philosophy & where to experience it — for first-time visitors to China

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Introduction — More Than Movie Kicks

When most foreigners think of Chinese kung fu, they picture Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, or flying monks from a movie. The reality is far more interesting. Chinese kung fu — practiced for over 3,000 years — is simultaneously a fighting system, a physical art form, a spiritual practice, a medical therapy, and a philosophy of life. It is one of China's most important cultural exports, and one of the most accessible parts of Chinese culture for visitors to experience firsthand.

This guide covers what kung fu actually is, the major styles and their differences, where to watch and learn kung fu as a visitor, and which apps on ichingo.app will help you book tickets, find classes, navigate to temples, and translate what the master is telling you.

Part 1 — What Is Kung Fu? (功夫 Gongfu)

The Word Itself

Kung Fu (功夫) does not literally mean martial arts in Chinese. The word means **skill achieved through hard work and time** — it refers to any mastery developed through long, dedicated practice. A chef who has perfected dumplings after 20 years has kung fu. A calligrapher with flawless brushwork has kung fu. A warrior with devastating fighting technique has kung fu.

Term	Chinese	Meaning
Kung Fu	功夫 Gongfu	Skill through hard work — any mastery
Wushu	武术 Wushu	Martial arts — modern competition sport
Guoshu	国术 Guoshu	National art — traditional forms and identity
Qi Gong	气功 Qigong	Energy cultivation — breathing and meditation
Tai Chi	太极拳 Taijiquan	Internal style — slow, meditative movement

A 3,000-Year History in 5 Lines

- Origins: Combat skills developed for hunting and warfare, documented from the Shang and Zhou Dynasties (17th to 3rd century BC)
- Shaolin: The Shaolin Temple built in 495 AD in Henan became the cradle of Chinese martial arts, blending Buddhism, Taoism, and combat

- Golden Age: Song to Ming Dynasties (960 to 1644 AD) — hundreds of distinct schools, boxing styles, and weapon systems flourished
- Modern era: Republican China standardized kung fu for national identity; the Communist era formalized Wushu as a competitive sport
- Today: Both traditional kung fu and modern competitive wushu exist side by side — one preserves lineage and philosophy, one emphasizes athletic performance

 **Did You Know:** The legendary Bodhidharma, the Indian monk credited with founding Chan (Zen) Buddhism in China, is said to have taught Shaolin monks physical training that became the foundation of Shaolin Kung Fu. Whether historically accurate or not, this story has shaped kung fu mythology for 1,500 years.

Part 2 — The Major Styles of Kung Fu

Chinese martial arts divide into two broad families: **External styles (外家拳)** emphasize physical strength, speed, and technique. **Internal styles (内家拳)** emphasize Qi (energy), breath, mental focus, and using an opponent's force against them.

Style	Chinese	Type	Origin	What Makes It Unique
Shaolin Kung Fu	少林功夫	External	Shaolin Temple, Henan, 5th c. AD	The most famous style. Power, speed, acrobatics. 72 arts including iron body training. Basis of countless other styles.
Tai Chi	太极拳	Internal	Chen Village, Henan, 17th c.	Slow, fluid, meditative movements that cultivate Qi and balance. Practiced by over 300 million people worldwide. Excellent for health at any age.
Wing Chun	咏春拳	External	Guangdong, Qing Dynasty	Close-range, fast strikes. Economy of movement. Legendarily developed by a woman. Made famous globally by Bruce Lee and Ip Man.
Bagua Zhang	八卦掌	Internal	Beijing, 19th century	Circular walking patterns based on the Eight Trigrams. Evasive, spinning movements. One of the Big Three internal styles.
Xing Yi Quan	形意拳	Internal	Shanxi, 17th century	Linear, direct, explosive strikes. Movements based on 5 elements and 12 animals. Among the most combat-effective internal styles.
Wudang Kung Fu	武当功夫	Internal	Wudang Mountains, Hubei	The Taoist counterpart to Shaolin Buddhist kung fu. Emphasizes internal energy, sword techniques,

				and harmony with nature.
Northern Long Fist	长拳	External	Northern China	Wide stances, long-range kicks, acrobatic jumping. Foundation of modern competitive wushu.
Hung Gar	洪拳	External	Guangdong, Qing Dynasty	Strong horse stance, powerful arm techniques. One of the Five Animals southern styles.

 **Visitor Tip:** If you only try one thing in China related to kung fu, make it Tai Chi in a public park at dawn. In every major city, hundreds of people gather at sunrise to practice together — in temple gardens, lakeside parks, or plazas. It is free, open to all, and one of the most distinctly Chinese experiences available to any visitor.

Part 3 — The Philosophy of Kung Fu

What separates Chinese kung fu from a mere fighting system is its philosophical depth. Every major style is built on a foundation of ethics, spirituality, and a philosophy of how to live — not just how to fight.

Pillar	What It Means in Kung Fu
De (德) — Virtue	Virtue, humility, and discipline come before technique. The most dangerous fighters are expected to be the most peaceful people.
Qi (气) — Life Energy	All internal styles cultivate Qi — the vital energy flowing through the body along meridians (same concept as Chinese medicine). Good kung fu is about generating and directing Qi efficiently, not just muscle power.
Tao (道) — The Way	Especially in Wudang and Tai Chi traditions, kung fu is a path of alignment with the natural world. The highest mastery is effortlessness — not forcing, but flowing.

The Five Virtues of a Martial Artist

- Ren (仁) — Benevolence: treat others with compassion, especially those weaker
- Yi (义) — Righteousness: act with honor and moral principle, not self-interest
- Li (礼) — Courtesy: respect your master, peers, and opponents
- Zhi (智) — Wisdom: understand when to fight and when not to. The greatest warriors avoid unnecessary conflict
- Xin (信) — Integrity: be honest in word and deed; keep your promises

 **Did You Know:** Bruce Lee's famous quote — Be like water — is a direct expression of Taoist

kung fu philosophy. Water is soft but overcomes hard rock. It takes the shape of any container but is unstoppable. This idea is central to Wing Chun, Tai Chi, and virtually all internal styles.

Part 4 — Where to Experience Kung Fu in China

4A. Watch a Professional Kung Fu Show

The fastest way to experience kung fu as a visitor is a professional stage performance. These shows combine martial arts, acrobatics, music, and storytelling into a 60 to 90 minute theatrical experience.

City	Venue	Show	Price and Notes
Beijing	Red Theatre (红剧场)	The Legend of Kung Fu	¥280–¥680/person. 70-min nightly. English subtitles above stage. The most famous kung fu show in China.
Beijing	Jinsong Theatre	Legend of Shaolin Kung Fu	¥280/person. 60-min. Book via Klook or Trip.com.
Dengfeng, Henan	Shaolin Temple Martial Arts Hall	Shaolin Monk Performance	FREE with temple ticket (¥100). Daily shows. The most authentic option.
Shanghai	ERA Intersection of Time	Acrobatics and Martial Arts	¥180–¥680. More acrobatics-focused but includes kung fu elements.

 **ichingo.app — China App Connection:** To book kung fu shows and Shaolin Temple tours:
 Klook — Search Kung Fu Show Beijing or Shaolin Temple Tour. English booking, instant confirmation, accepts Visa/Mastercard. Full guide on ichingo.app.
 Trip.com (携程) — More options and often cheaper than Klook for domestic venues. Full guide on ichingo.app.
 Feizhu (飞猪) — Best for combining Shaolin visits with high-speed train tickets from Zhengzhou or Luoyang. Full guide on ichingo.app.

4B. Visit the Shaolin Temple (少林寺)

The Shaolin Temple in Dengfeng, Henan Province, is the single most important kung fu destination in China. Founded in 495 AD, it is the birthplace of Shaolin Kung Fu and Chan (Zen) Buddhism, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2010.

- Location: Mount Song, Dengfeng City, Henan Province — about 80km from Zhengzhou
- Getting there: High-speed train to Zhengzhou, then bus or taxi to Dengfeng (about 1.5 hours)
- Entrance fee: ¥100 per person — includes Pagoda Forest and Martial Arts Hall

- Daily kung fu performances: Free with entry ticket at the Martial Arts Hall — check the daily schedule at the gate
- Kung fu training classes: Short introductory sessions on-site; multi-day residential programs at nearby martial arts schools

ichingo.app — China App Connection: Getting to Shaolin Temple as a foreigner:

Baidu Maps (百度地图) — Navigate from Zhengzhou train station to Shaolin Temple. The English interface works well for major destinations. Full guide on ichingo.app.

Didi (滴滴) — Book a private car from Zhengzhou to Dengfeng for about ¥150–¥200. Easier than the bus and works with a foreign phone number. Full guide on ichingo.app.

Yandex Translate — When monks give instruction or you need to read temple signs, point your camera at any Chinese text for instant translation. No VPN needed inside China. Full guide on ichingo.app.

4C. Try a Kung Fu Class

Experience Type	Price Range	What to Expect
Drop-in trial class	¥100–¥200	1-hour intro at a local studio. Basic punches, stances, a short form. Often in English near tourist areas in Beijing and Shanghai.
Half-day experience	¥200–¥500	2 to 3 hours. Learn a short sequence, get a certificate. Available near major sites and martial arts schools.
Shaolin day class	¥300–¥800	On-site instruction at Shaolin Temple or nearby school. Covers horse stance, basic strikes, traditional conditioning.
1-week residential	¥3,000–¥8,000	Daily training 6 to 8 hours. Accommodation and meals included. Wudang Mountain and Shaolin area have the best programs.
1-month immersion	¥8,000–¥20,000	Full residential at a traditional school. Includes Chinese basics, meditation, Qi Gong, and intensive fighting practice.

4D. Watch Tai Chi at Dawn — Free, Anywhere

One of the most underrated experiences in China is completely free: watching or joining morning Tai Chi in a public park. This happens every morning in virtually every Chinese city, usually between 6am and 8am.

- Beijing: Temple of Heaven park, Beihai Park, Jingshan Park
- Shanghai: People's Square, Century Park, Fuxing Park
- Guangzhou: Yuexiu Park, Baiyun Mountain
- Chengdu: Renmin Park, Wangjiang Tower Park
- Xi'an: City Wall park, especially near the east gate

✓ **Good to Know:** Just stand at the edge and watch. Most practitioners are happy to let visitors observe. If you want to join, stand nearby and copy the movements. No one will ask you to leave. This is one of the most genuine cultural experiences available to any visitor in China — and it is free.

Part 5 — Kung Fu in Chinese Culture

5A. The Legendary Masters

Name	Era / Style	Significance
Bruce Lee (李小龙)	1960s–70s / Jeet Kune Do	The man who brought kung fu to the world. His philosophy — be like water — is pure Taoism. He created his own synthesis style, rejecting rigid forms.
Jackie Chan (成龙)	1980s–2000s / Various	Pioneered acrobatic kung fu comedy. His training at the China Drama Academy began at age 7 — 10 hours a day for 10 years.
Jet Li (李连杰)	1980s–2000s / Wushu	5-time Chinese national wushu champion before becoming an actor. His films Hero and Fearless are visually stunning explorations of kung fu philosophy.
Donnie Yen (甄子丹)	2000s–present / Wing Chun	The Ip Man film series made Wing Chun globally famous and sparked an international surge in Wing Chun school enrollment.
Ip Man (叶问)	Historical (1893–1972)	The real Wing Chun master who taught Bruce Lee in Hong Kong. His story is the subject of multiple major films.

5B. Kung Fu as Health Practice

In modern China, the vast majority of people who practice kung fu-related activities do so for health, stress relief, and community. Tai Chi and Qi Gong have large bodies of modern medical research supporting their benefits:

- Tai Chi reduces falls in elderly patients — confirmed by multiple clinical trials
- Regular Tai Chi practice reduces blood pressure and improves balance and flexibility
- Qi Gong is prescribed alongside conventional medicine for some chronic conditions in Chinese hospitals
- The meditative focus required in internal styles has measurable effects on stress reduction

📱 **ichingo.app — China App Connection:** Practicing kung fu and health exercises in China with app support:

平安好医生 (Ping An Good Doctor) — Book TCM doctors who can prescribe Qi Gong or Tai Chi as part of a health plan. Works with foreign phone numbers. Guide on ichingo.app.

Keep (Keep App) — China's most popular fitness app with Tai Chi and Qi Gong video courses. Over 300 million users. A great way to learn basics before a live class.

Weibo (微博) — Many kung fu masters run Weibo accounts with free training videos. Search 太极 or 少林功夫 to find them. Weibo guide on ichingo.app.

Part 6 — Visitor Quick Reference

Useful Chinese Phrases

English	Chinese	Pronunciation
Where can I watch kung fu?	哪里可以看功夫？	Nali keyi kan gongfu?
I want to try a kung fu class	我想体验功夫课	Wo xiang tiyan gongfu ke
How much is the ticket?	票多少钱？	Piao duoshao qian?
Is there an English guide?	有英文导览吗？	You Yingwen daolan ma?
What time does it start?	几点开始？	Ji dian kaishi?
Shaolin Temple	少林寺	Shaolin Si
Tai Chi	太极拳	Taijiquan
Can I join the practice?	我可以加入吗？	Wo keyi jiaru ma?

The Complete ichingo.app Toolkit for Kung Fu Visitors

Need	App	How It Helps
Book show tickets	Klook / Trip.com	English booking for Beijing Red Theatre and Shaolin Temple tours. Accepts international cards. Full guide on ichingo.app.
Get to Shaolin Temple	Didi + Feizhu	Didi for local taxi; Feizhu for high-speed train to Zhengzhou. Both guides on ichingo.app.
Navigate to parks for Tai Chi	Baidu Maps	English interface for major parks. Search park name for walking or transit directions.
Translate the instructor	Yandex Translate	Point camera at Chinese text for instant translation. No VPN needed inside China.
Find martial arts classes nearby	Dianping	Search 武馆 (martial arts school) near your location for classes and reviews.
Book restaurants after practice	Meituan	Food delivery or restaurant reservations near any venue. Guide on ichingo.app.
Buy train tickets to Henan	Feizhu / Trip.com	Book high-speed rail to Zhengzhou — the nearest major hub to Shaolin Temple.

Pay for everything	Alipay / WeChat Pay	Temple entry, show tickets, taxis — all accept QR code payment. Setup guides on ichingo.app .
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Final Thoughts

Chinese kung fu is one of humanity's great living traditions. It connects a fisherman's grandson who practices Wing Chun in Hong Kong with a Shaolin monk who learned the same lineage 1,500 years ago. It turns physical movement into philosophy, self-defense into meditation, and a fighting art into a path of personal cultivation.

Whether you watch a monk break a spear shaft against his throat at the Shaolin Temple, join a hundred people for Tai Chi in a Shanghai park at sunrise, or sit down for a 90-minute performance at Beijing's Red Theatre — kung fu is one of the most visceral and memorable ways to connect with Chinese culture.

For step-by-step guides to every app mentioned in this document — Klook, Didi, Feizhu, Baidu Maps, Yandex Translate, Dianping, Alipay, Meituan, and more — visit ichingo.app — your complete toolkit for experiencing China.

