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Interview with Kenny Perez

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By Nick Scrima, *Journal of Chinese Martial Arts*

Sifu Kenny, you have more than four decades of martial arts experience in a plethora of different styles, which culminate with your transition and immersion into Chinese martial arts and ultimately leading into what has become your passion, Contemporary Wúshù (武術). How old were you when you first started training in Judo in 1972 and how did you first develop an interest in martial arts?

As a young boy growing up in southern California in the 1960's I became interested in television shows like *Star Trek*; *Wild, Wild West*; *Batman* and of course *The Green Hornet*. I enjoyed James Bond movies and others like *Our Man Flint*. These heroes had great fighting skills. They wouldn't just box but had throwing and karate skills. At the time I thought this was so unique. I had no connection to Karate or Gōngfū (功夫). (Ironically that was the time when Bruce Lee (Lǐ Zhènfān 李振藩) was becoming famous and I lived so close to Long Beach!) Being a hyperactive child, at the age of 9 my mom signed me up for Judo at the YMCA. This is where my training began. I learned the skills to grab, sweep, toss and control people under Sensei Nakamura and even getting tossed myself. I enjoyed it all.



Coach Kenny Perez

What styles followed your early Judo training? Did these methods and teachers influence your martial arts development?

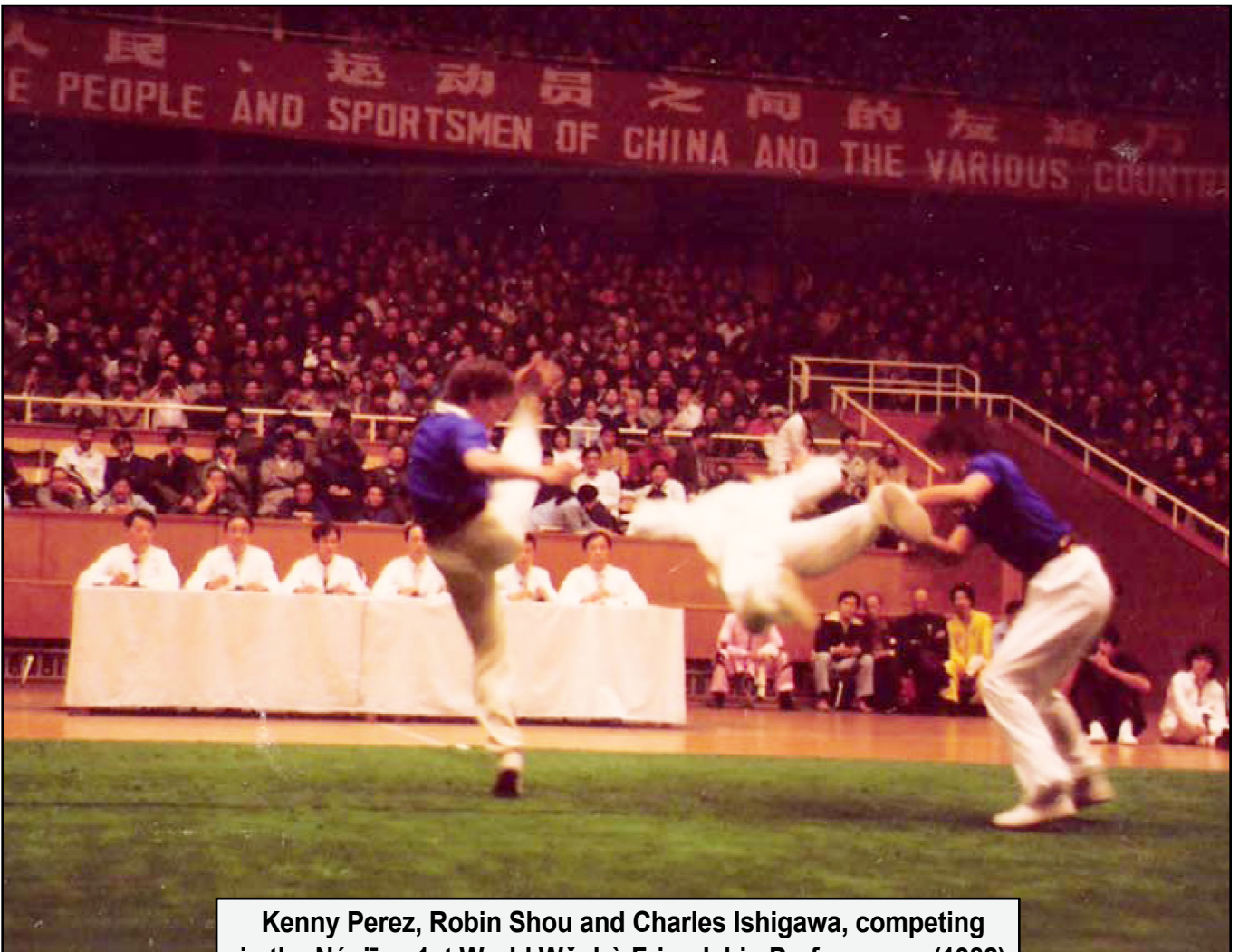
After a while my brother and I began training in Kenpo Karate. My first teachers were Fred Russell and Don McCoy. They were like big brothers and boy did we fight—working out and humbly getting our butts kicked daily. This was my indoctrination into the martial arts and the old school, hard-hitting sport of Karate. I learned great street tactics and how to fight back, even when on the ground. I learned to get up and fight or get smashed. Of course nowadays this would be crossing the line of child abuse.

These skills proved worthy shortly after, as I was involved in a fight at school and my newly acquired skills of blocking gave me an advantage. I actually hurt my aggressor by only using my blocking skills. I thought “Wow!,” I am applying these skills and it works! I owe these instructors a lot, as they moved me from the comfort of my home and put me in the pit. I felt I was capable and ready with a newfound confidence. I was so impressed that I wanted more, but still no Gōngfū schools were available in my town.

After six years of Kenpo I began Shurei-Ryu Karate under Sensei Charlie Contreras. This style was strong and grounded, and the fighting was straightforward. Our dojo seemed to attract some very tough students. Our greatest strength was in fighting and our forms were intense. My Sensei would also bring in a Golden Glove boxer named Ardon, who trained us in boxing skills. Sensei Contreras was a staunch traditionalist and he did not want me training at other schools, so he gave me the ultimatum: stay or go. I decided to go.



Kenny Perez training with the Běijīng (北京) Wǔshù Team (1981)



Kenny Perez, Robin Shou and Charles Ishigawa, competing in the Nánjīng 1st World Wǔshù Friendship Performance (1982)

The TV series *Kung Fu* starring David Carradine, made its way into American households every Thursday evening from the Fall of 1972 until the Spring of 1975. This series generated a cult-like following and kindled the interest of countless young people in Chinese martial arts and Chinese culture. What impact did this TV series have on you and how did it affect your journey into Chinese martial arts?

The television series, *Kung Fu*, and the Gōngfū movie explosion arrived in 1972. I felt that Bruce Lee jumped off the screen, kicked me in the face and pierced my soul. I was amazed. I longed to train in Gōngfū. After watching Bruce Lee I made a pair of Nunchaku. I learned anything I could. I would read martial arts magazines—*Karate Illustrated* and *Black Belt*—and watch 8mm films of Eric Lee and Kam Yuen. I would read about the cool weapons and weapons routines of Gōngfū, and about West Coast competitors such as Eric Lee, James Lew, and Albert Leong. I wanted to learn more. One spring day a friend from school said he had some Gōngfū magazines. It was the first few issues of *Inside Kung Fu* magazine. I was immediately intrigued.

About that time I was also into tumbling. My friends and I would practice flipping off trees, tables, walls, fences, even cars. Looking back I guess we were doing “Parkour” before it had a name. About that time Sifu Fāng Zhìróng (方致榮) - Augustine Fong came to Phoenix and opened a Yǒng Chūn (詠春) school. I quickly joined. I wanted to live at the Guǎn (館). I would go for classes in Wing Chun and weapons. From Sifu Fāng I learned single broadsword, double broadsword, staff, chain whip and the Woo Dip Do (double butterfly knives). I began competing with them and winning. I was among the first to compete with these weapons in Arizona. Sifu Fāng taught me how to do an aerial cartwheel and a butterfly kick. At that time I was training in Kenpo, Shurei Ryu and Wing Chun (Yǒng Chūn).

Please share your experiences with Grandmaster Douglas Wong, from your first meeting and subsequent training in the White Lotus System.

Enter my Gōngfū master and mentor Douglas Wong. I was at a state fair watching a stage show called “Orient 75” and that is where “they” jumped off the page and onto the stage—Douglas Wong, James Lew, Albert Leong and Mei Fong. I finally saw these competitors in person doing exciting Gōngfū routines, weapons and tricks. I talked my mom and dad into letting me spend the summers in California with my cousin. There I had



Douglas Wong, Kenny Perez, Carrie-Ogawa Wong

picked out a few choice schools to call. I thought Douglas Wong’s school seemed the most inviting. He welcomed me into his school and our deep alliance began.

I thought of him as my second father. He took me in as his personal closed-door student. I would stay and train with him, then we would go hang out and he would show me his old 8mm library of Gōngfū and Wūshù films. We would go to competitions and he would be my corner man when fighting and he would cheer me on when doing forms. I thought I would win everything. With Douglas Wong over my shoulder how could I lose?

When it was time to go back to Phoenix I would make a point to return as often as I could for training and competitions to learn more from Master Wong. He introduced me to his great friends and masters like Grandmaster Ark Yue Wong (1900-1987), famous for Five Animals style. I knew I had a legacy to uphold.

Please describe your involvement in martial arts tournaments during the period from 1972 to 1980.

I began my competition career in 1973. I remember competing in a local tournament where I took third place in the beginners’ fighting division. I knew I had a lot to learn. I remember buying Bruce Lee’s book, *Tao of Jeet*

Kune Do. This philosophy helped me improve a lot. As for doing routines, I think I immediately caught on excelling in this event. I competed in every tournament I could, from Mexico to Oakland, California, and other states such as Texas, Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio. I would compete in Phoenix, Tucson, San Diego, Los Angeles, Las Vegas and up to San Francisco. My mom would take me everywhere. One highlight was winning “Three Star Grand Champion” at Tat-Mau Wong’s Tournament in San Francisco. Another big tournament for me was Ed Parker’s Internationals. I remember winning my divisions. This was my testing ground. When I came back I won the Chinese division at the “Internationals.” I also won Grand Champion in 1982. I knew then that my Wǔshù was finally good. I continued to compete, winning more than 250 trophies and awards, because I wanted to promote modern Wǔshù.

How did you become interested in Wǔshù and what was your first training experience in the art?

When Douglas Wong was my Sifu he would teach me any weapon I wanted to learn. He also gave me videos of the performances of famous masters and athletes. One

video had a Chinese athlete doing Wǔshù on the TV program *Wide World of Sports*. He explained to me that Wǔshù was China’s modern interpretation of Traditional Gōngfū. He told me about a competitor named Anthony Chan from San Francisco. Later, at a tournament in Hollywood promoted by Cho He Il, I got to meet Anthony Chan. His style was so fresh compared to mine and he did great skills and acrobatics. We became friends and I would go to San Francisco to train with him when I could.

You were one of the first Westerners to travel to China for Wǔshù training. After all your experiences, I can only imagine how much you must have yearned for and anticipated this trip. Please share with us how and when this came about.

I met another Wǔshù icon, Roger Tung from Washington. He came to Long Beach and invited me to his workshop at James Ibrao’s school. I was so excited to attend. I learned Guīdìng Quán (规定拳) Long Fist and Broadsword. Tung seemed impressed with my ability and took a personal interest in me. We all met for a reception afterwards at Master Ibrao’s house; that’s when Roger Tung invited me to go to China with him for in-depth training.



Kenny Perez (1st left 2nd row), Donnie Yen (4th right 1st row) and Guangdong Men's Wǔshù Team (1981)

I was attending college at that time and decided to put it on hold. I began saving my money by selling my personal things—my car, my bike, everything. I was China bound! My friends and family pitched in and we raised the money I needed. I remember getting to the Los Angeles airport and waiting for the group to arrive, one by one: Roger Tung, Christopher Pei, Mài Bǎochán (麥寶嬋) - Bow-Sim Mark, Keith Hirabayashi, Zhēn Zǐdān (甄子丹) - Donnie Yen, and others, and off we went, the first American Wǔshù team.

Please describe your arrival in China and your first experiences from the time you got off the plane, going through customs, and arrival at the place you would be staying.

It was like a *National Geographic* episode. I remember the unique musty smell. The plane landed in Guǎngzhōu (廣州), far away from the airport building and kind of isolated. There were Army troops and special guards all around us. We had to wait for a connection to Fúzhōu (福州). We were on our way to the Chinese National Wǔshù Championship to observe.

After clearing customs we went to our hotel. All the guys slept in one room as this was all that was available. But looking back, I think it was more for our safety. I remember sleeping on the floor.



Kenny Perez and Jet Li



Donnie Yen, Kenny Perez, Jet Li and Wú Bīn (1981)



Wú Bīn, Bow-Sim Mark, Fàn Bǎoyún, Kenny Perez, and Jiǎng Xiānpǔ (1981)

The next day, there wasn't enough room on the plane for all of us to continue the journey, so Christopher Pei and I volunteered to stay behind for another day. I was a bit worried, but luckily he spoke the language; this is when our special bond began. Back then China was still in the post-communist depression, frozen in time, slightly closed down, cold, gray and overrun with Mao suits and black bicycles. The air quality was bad. I remember that in the street market they would sell black charcoal and orange peels. People would burn coal and orange peels for fuel and for warmth.

Even on the street we experienced some animosity as we were considered the "foreign devils" invading Nánjīng (南京). If you know the history of Nánjīng, then you can understand the local discontent. When I came back from China I saw a TV special on how their schools used propaganda, with puppets of Uncle Sam being the enemy. Generally, however, we were well received; we were a curiosity to the locals and drew a crowd whenever we went out.

The city structure was broken and overwhelmed but I really didn't care about this as I was in my Wūshù utopia and it was awesome. There were guards and police

everywhere and we were closely watched and always accompanied. We were not allowed to go out on our own and we even got in trouble a few times. I was not sure about all the guards but I guess we were the first to train in China and Nánjīng and they weren't prepared for foreigners, so that is why we were always watched.

We had a refurbished house that obviously was built by foreigners. I think it was part of the Protestant English missionary school. We had to pass through the guard gate. We had warm water on certain days of the week but we didn't have a heater and it got very cold. We kept our windows open during the cold winter days to keep the air fresh. We slept under blankets and parkas. When I needed to call home I had to order an international call for 3:00 a.m. and then wait up for the call to go through.

Back then the training was much regimented, very communistic. I witnessed a regional youth tournament tryout. The athletes had been selected from thousands of hopefuls and the competition was fierce. They came from all over to try out. Making the team gave them special status and money, helping their families to live better. The athletes had a strict training program. The coaches were cold and cruel, very demeaning. Here it would have



Kenny Perez and renowned martial artist and movie star Jet Li (Marin City, CA 1989)





Kenny Perez, Donnie Yen, Kung Fu Fight Director Yuán Héping (袁和平), Brandy Yuen (1982)

been called abuse, withholding food, training all night, running for hours like some boot camp, but every day for years that was the norm. That is how they produced champions behind the Iron Curtain.

When did you begin training after your arrival in China? Was there a special training regimen established for you? What was your first day of training like?

After our arrival we went to the National Wǔshù Championships in Fúzhōu. At that tournament we watched and made friends, and I saw my friends from the Běijīng team compete. We took trips to see the sights. Then we went to Nánjīng to Wútái Shān (五台山) Sports School where we began our training after a welcome reception with lots of food and toasts and me dancing. I was always the one to demonstrate my dancing skills which I enjoyed because it helped me bond with the other athletes.

The first day we had to demonstrate our skills and watch the Jiāngsū (江蘇) team members demonstrate theirs. Of course they were amazing. We were introduced to our coaches: Wáng Jīnbǎo (王金寶), a national champion for many years undefeated until Lǐ Liánjié (李連杰) - Jet Li came of age, Chen Yuen Jer, an Internal Master who helped create 24-step Tàijí (太極), Zhāng Zhìguó, and

others who were descendants of the Zhōng Yāng Guóshù Guǎn (中央國術館) – Central Martial Arts Academy. I'm sure they all learned from great masters.

In Nánjīng I also learned from team members Zhang Yaoning, Zhāng Ānji, Zhang Tianzhong and Wáng Zhèntián. Our training involved a lot of warm-up running and also a warm-up game of basketball followed by intense stretching, always trying to get our head to our toes. We all had to go through the Jīng Wǔ (精武) version of Tán Tuǐ (彈腿) 12 and Wǔ Bù Quán (五步拳) to improve our foundation. Then came the endless basics. At that time our house wasn't ready for us to move in.

I remember being so sore at night and with shin splints that followed because we had to walk to our hotel. I really didn't mind the daily walk because it gave us the chance to see Chinese daily life. As for meals, we were given rice porridge and eggs for breakfast; for lunch we usually had fish, vegetables, noodles, and sometimes beef.

How long was your first visit to China? Please explain how the training progressed from day to day. Was there a specific training curriculum, and objectives or goals for you to follow and achieve?

I stayed four months in Nánjīng and four months in Běijīng (北京). Eventually we had to learn the original



Xi Qichen and Kenny Perez

1968 version of Guīdìng Quán (规定拳). Back then it was a grueling 8-section routine; the new one now has four sections. After that we got to learn a long weapon, a short weapon, a sparring set, a traditional weapon, and a traditional hand set. At the end of our training program we were tested and graded on our knowledge and abilities, and were given certificates.

After my training in Nánjīng I went to Běijīng where I began training at Shíchàhǎi Sports School, home of the Běijīng Wǔshù team, along with my new training buddy and friend Donnie Yen. Here the training was different. We would train intensely when Coach Wú Bīn (吴彬 1937-) was there; if he was gone it was a bit more relaxed. But the athletes had great respect for Wú Bīn and the other coaches. I was able to train and synthesize two different training styles from the Jiāngsū team and the Běijīng team. This greatly influenced my Wǔshù skills and teaching abilities.

Who were some of the unique personalities you met during this trip? Please describe them for our readers.

During my visit there, I met modern Wǔshù greats such as Lǐ Tiānjì (uncle of Lǐ Déyìn 李德印); Zhāng Wénguāng, 10th degree Master and top Wǔshù Professor in Běijīng; Yú Hǎi (Mantis King); Wáng Chángkǎi; Pān Qīngfú; Zhào Dàyuán (Bāguà); Lǐ Zīmíng (Bāguà); Chén Xiǎowàng; (Chén Tàijí Grandmaster); Féng Ziqiáng (Chén Tàijí

Master); the whole Běijīng Wǔshù Association and other athletes including Xú Xiàngdōng, Huáng Jiàngāng, Qiū Jiànguó, Hú Jiānqiáng, Zhào Chángjūn, Yáng Shìwén and so many more.

This was the golden age of Wǔshù. At that time Donnie Yen and I had become close friends, having similar interests and being close in age. We were both trying to get to Běijīng to train so we had to put together a request letter that Anthony Chan, who was already there, helped deliver for us.

You must have been just as excited returning home as you were when you first learned you were going to China to train. Please share your feelings and ambitions at that time.

I was like a new athlete fully loaded with new training skills ready to share with my teacher and the world. I made new friends and I was in a unique position—I was so into it because I had found my niche and wanted to learn more.

What were your specific plans once you returned to the United States?

I wanted to continue learning, I wanted to return to China, I wanted to begin teaching athletes, and I wanted to get Wǔshù recognized in North America to the level that it was in China.

At this point, I would like to shift the focus of the interview to specific training questions. Wǔshù has made great strides and innovations in how material is introduced in order to build a foundation and set a direction for athletes to follow. Please share your thoughts on this subject.

Because of the government control of the various styles and masters of Wǔshù, they all had to come to the same table and create a standardized sport that could be centrally controlled and judged, just like gymnastics.

Then, because of this standardization, Wǔshù could be reviewed and redone with the modern training methods and inclusion of physiology and technology, thus raising the difficulty level. Wǔshù has had the opportunity to improve and become a more recognized sport that has been revamped again and again. This is a positive progression.

There are other qualities that a Wǔshù athlete learns to develop from early on that can be helpful to the

Traditional practitioner, especially the competitor. One of these qualities is the dramatization and overall presentation of a routine (Tào Lù (套路). What are your views regarding this point?

I believe it is an integral part of any martial art, especially in the execution of routines because this intensity expresses the warrior spirit. It is like lifting weights in a calm fashion; not much strength is developed compared to those weightlifters who push hard, moaning and groaning but showing great results. It is like singing without emotion—not putting any soul into the music.

This is not just dramatization; the emotional display of the spirit in the routine makes the form 3-dimensional, which makes it more intense and interesting to watch. Intention, spirit, flavor, drama—what the Chinese call “Wèidào ”—is needed to make the routine come to life.

Stretching in Wǔshù often involves bouncing, which is regarded as ballistic stretching and considered to be bad for the body. Some Traditional Long Fist



Philip Wong, Caesar Britton, and Kenny Perez (1988)



Huáng Qiūyàn , Zhōu Jīngpíng, Donnie Yen, Frank Hiramiril, and Kenny Perez (1981)

styles also incorporate similar stretching. What is the rationale behind ballistic stretching and how is it that few injuries occur from it? What is the proper way to conduct it?

Maybe it is bad for beginners, especially while the muscles are cold, but if your muscles are conditioned then this type of stretching takes the muscles to a higher level of flexibility. Intense stretching and bouncing also conditions the muscles for the violent expanding and contracting movements in Wǔshù's kicking arsenal. This helps when doing the jump kicks and subsequently conditions the athlete for dropping into splits and hopping up from the ground.

In China, since these athletes have stretched like this for years, the body is used to it and typically no injuries occur. This kind of stretching is used for touching the head to the toe so that as you bounce, you pull your body closer to your head, stretching the hamstring muscle group with a bit more force.

One of my teachers noted the difference in stance training between the Southern School and the Northern School. He said that in Northern Long Fist, the movements contain a lot of jumping, agile footwork, low pressing stances and a variety of kicks. He felt that holding static stances for an extended period of time was not conducive, and in fact was counterproductive, to the type of strength and agility needed to perform these movements with

speed and efficiency. How is stance training viewed in Contemporary Wǔshù and do different training methods apply to Cháng Quán (長拳) versus Nán Quán (南拳)?

Stances are an important part of basic training no matter whether Northern or Southern; the foundation is the most important part of a routine. If one can execute a stellar jump kick but not hit the stance there will more than likely be a deduction in the score. Stand before walking, walk before running and flying. Northern stances are more open, whereas Southern stances are more compact. There is a difference in Northern and Southern stance work but the root must be strong regardless.

I recall seeing some footage of Wǔshù routines from the early 1970s. At that time, the forms were not much different from their traditional counterparts, being the typical Cháng Quán, Nán Quán, Tángláng Quán (螳螂拳), or Fānzǐ Quán (翻子拳). It seems that with each decade since the 1970s, Wǔshù routines have become more stylized, with a lot more acrobatics, which has increased the level of difficulty. Can you comment on this transformation and explain to what end these changes have been made?

These changes were meant to enhance the traditional routines with the contemporary to make Wǔshù more of a competitive and aesthetically appealing sport. It is innovation to create interest. Then with the push for the Olympics, the bar was raised even higher to include



Kenny Perez and his student, Kyle Loehr, a Wǔshù champion and winner of countless medals and awards

720-degree kicks and acrobatic flips and twists. This made Wǔshù a high-level elitist sport, which seems to appeal to the young people like other innovative and extreme sports.

The 42 Tàijí routine compiled by Lǐ Déyìn (李德印) as the standardized compulsory Tàijí routine remains a solid form that represents all four major Tàijí styles: Chén, Yáng, Wú and Sūn. I felt that this was a breakthrough, especially as it regards Tàijí in competition and something that could have

been adapted even within the Traditional circles. However, many of the current Tàijí routines are far removed from their original counterparts, and often look nothing like Tàijí. Please share your thoughts regarding this matter.

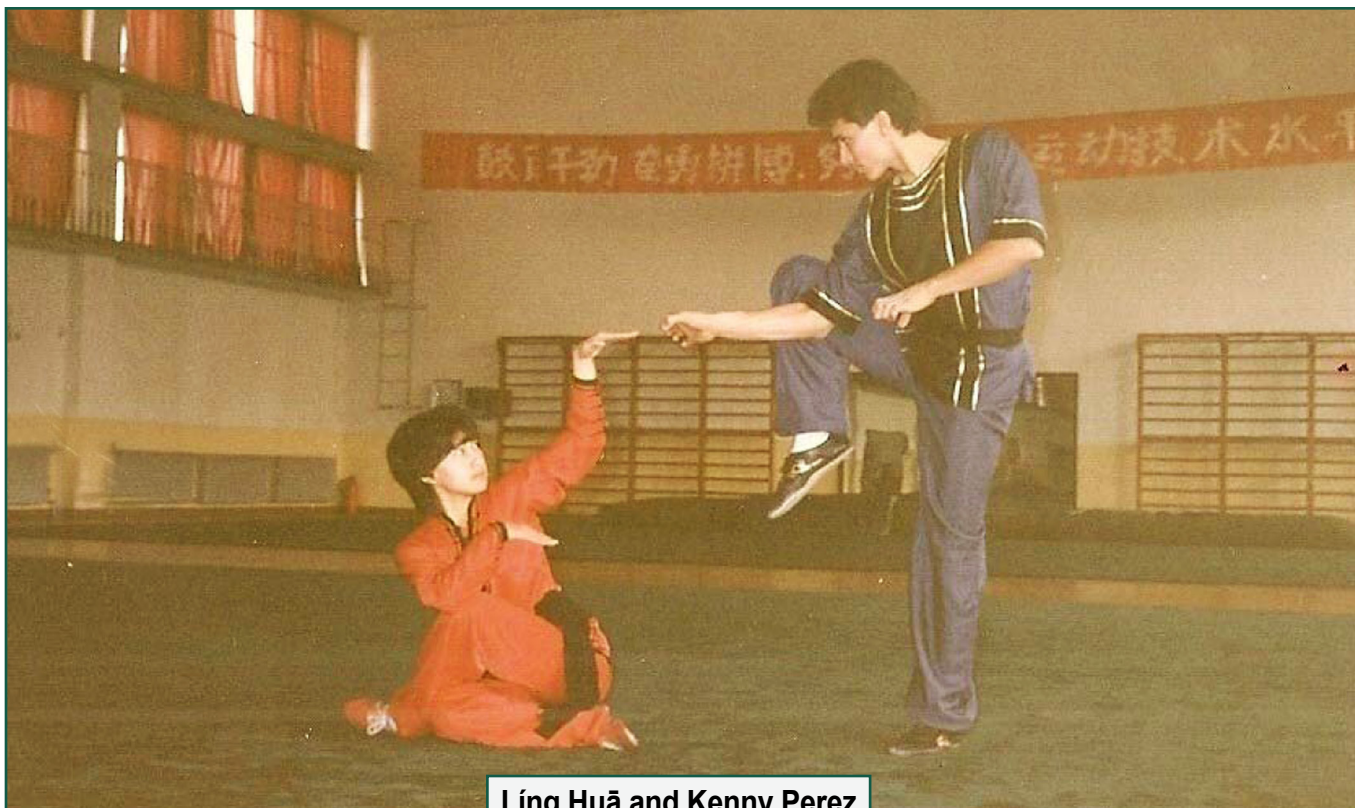
The changes were made to enhance the aesthetic appeal but I believe this created a hybrid style. There are still the traditional and the old compulsory routines. These are the guidelines, but to keep the interest of younger generations the skills were enhanced. Looking at Chén style Tàijí there is a jump kick and a split movement. Also, traditional Chén style was actually a fighting style, only later did Yáng Chéngfǔ (楊澄甫 1883-1836) transform it into a slower, easier simplified style that the royal family could learn. Today's young athletes, however, can demonstrate their skills with higher jumps and more spinning ability.

In your school, how do you determine which type of training is offered to different students?

In my school we have a beginner level and everyone must go through this training. Then there is the intermediate level, after which we split the courses three ways: Traditional, Cháng Quán, and Nán Quán. We evaluate everyone for their strong points and decide what

style is best for them, although everyone is welcome to attend Tàijí classes and everyone learns applications for self-defense.

In my school, I encourage all students to take part in a competition at least once because I believe there are immeasurable benefits to be gained by this experience. How do you view competition and how do you determine if a student is suitable for it? What do you expect from such students; what is their training routine?



Líng Huā and Kenny Perez

We do encourage competition but we have some students who come only for the workout and camaraderie. If they do show interest in competition or if we see that special dedication, then we are happy to coach them to ensure they are prepared to compete at local, national and international levels. Participating in competitions is a great way for them to grow, to make friends and meet athletes from other places, to gauge their skills and do their personal best.

As part of the training regimen we expect them to put in more practice time and to keep repeating sections of their routines to build stamina and get corrections for proper movement. We make sure that they understand the rules for proper entry and exit, showmanship and all the other elements that judges look for in competitors. We teach them about rhythm, spirit, paying attention to detail, speed, power and foundation. All of this is apparent in the presentation of their routine.

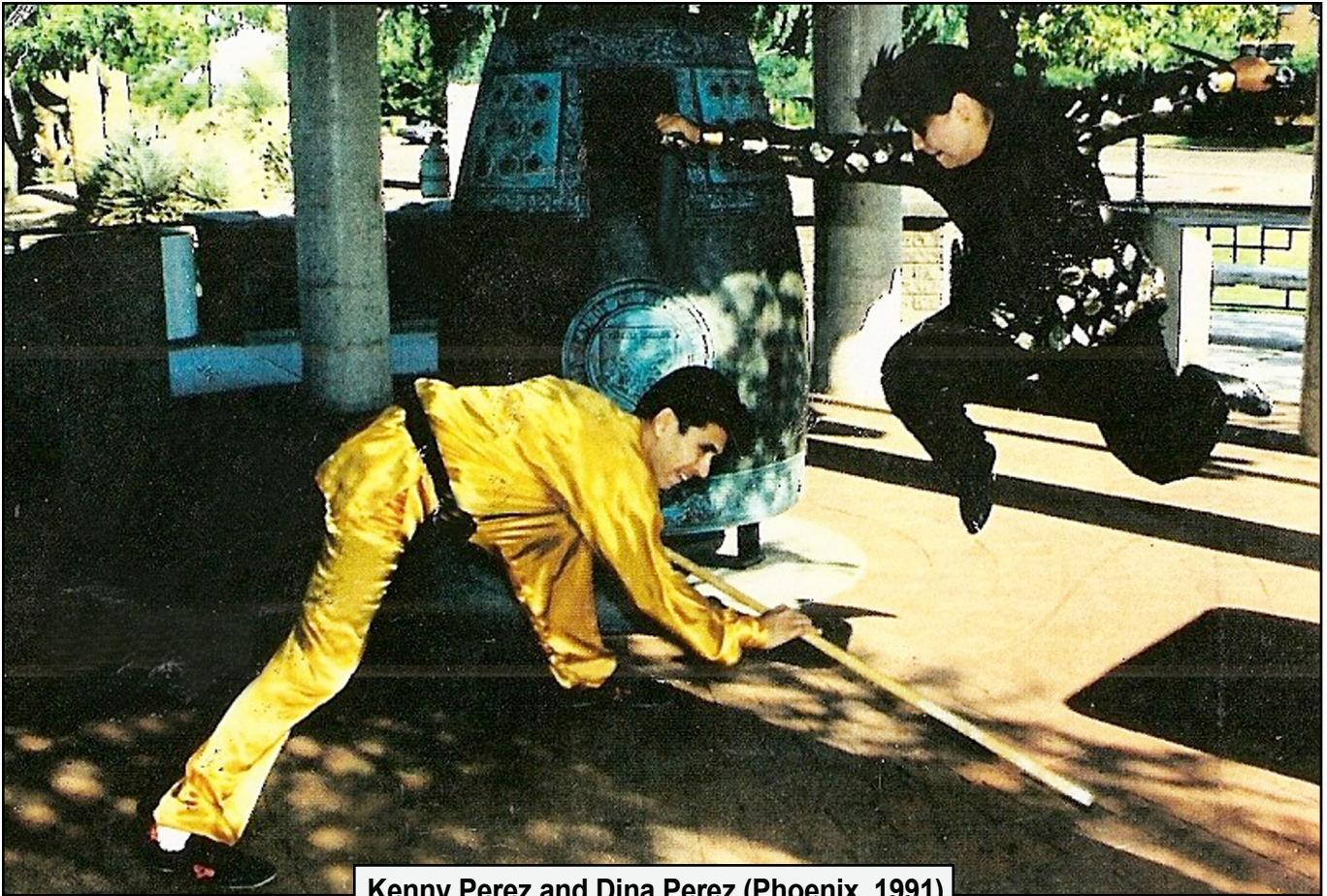
I know that in China, competition is taken very seriously and the training can be extreme. Many Chinese coaches who now teach in the United States have tried to implement the same training demands, but have found that here things are different. As a coach, what parameters do you expect your students to meet before entering their first competition? What expectations and training requirements do you prescribe for them?

Through trial and error, we have adapted our teaching to work for the American students, because obviously no one wants to lose students.

Wǔshù has been established in North America for the better part of three decades. Many exceptional athletes and former champions have been coaching in the United States for years. Also, more continue to come. However, it seems that the gap in skill that exists between North American and Mainland Chinese athletes is still not being narrowed. Why is this occurring and what, if anything, can be done to close this gap?

I think a lot of the coaches who come from China are from an elitist group so they do demand more from their athletes. They want to do well so that if and when they return to China they will demonstrate their success through the skills of their students.

Because there are so many people in China who are training at local clubs, or on provincial teams, college teams and professional martial arts teams, there is greater competition and also many more athletes who show outstanding personal drive. Therefore the level of skill and presentation is very high. But in the United States, Wǔshù doesn't share the same popularity among American youth because they have so many more sports to choose from.



Kenny Perez and Dina Perez (Phoenix, 1991)

Wǔshù is not a homegrown sport; obviously it is primarily an Asian sport. We need to get more American models to promote Wǔshù and adapt the style to be more Americanized. But Běijīng missed the opportunity to showcase the sport in the 2008 Olympics. Even during the opening ceremonies when they showed Wǔshù on television, the commentators mistakenly called it “Karate.” Sadly, most of the youth today do not even know about Jet Li or Jackie Chan (Chén Gǎngshēng - 陳港生).

Every Coach/Shīfù in Chinese martial arts is a proponent of Wǔde (武的) - Martial Virtue. And yet resentment and rivalries have been rampant within the traditional Chinese martial arts community for generations. This is one of the factors that has hampered the spread of the art. What is surprising to me is that this rivalry may be even more prominent among the Wǔshù community. Although there have been great friendships, there is still a demarcation line between Traditionalists and Contemporary Wǔshù practitioners; these rivalries can be viewed as the “enemy within.” Why are these sentiments so prevalent and what can be done to resolve them?



Kenny Perez and Coach Wú Bīn (2007)

It must be clear that the contemporary sport of Wǔshù has its roots in the traditional practices; this view is the same as in other arts such as classical dance and modern break dancing. Change can be good. Look to the *Yijing* (易经 *Book of Changes*). I hold my teacher Douglas Wong on the same level of importance as Coach Wú Bīn.

The spirit of competition and old-fashioned rivalry during competition is good, but at the end of the day follow the Golden Rule: people should treat each other as they would want to be treated. That is the advantage of the post-event receptions with food and dancing. That is a great time for everyone to relax and bond. It worked in my day and it can still work today.

Given your extensive knowledge and decades of training experience, I would like to ask you to offer some advice to our readers. First, can you give us some training tips for improving flexibility?

Yes, stretch with intensity; this means no “happy” stretching.

Stretching for extended periods of time may be uncomfortable but you will see the results

Partner stretching brings faster results because you are out of your comfort zone

Gauge your progress; use a tape measure to keep track of your progress

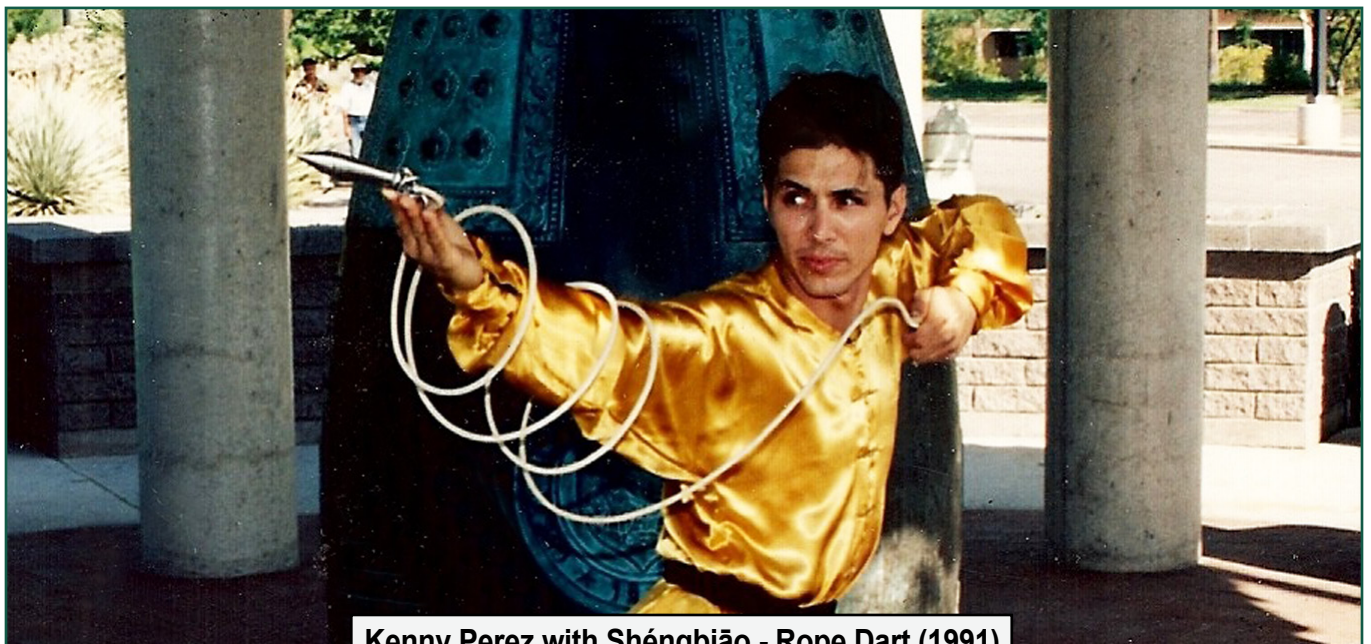
Stretch before and after training

If you are tighter on one side, first stretch on that side, then stretch to the other side, and then return to the first (tighter) side again

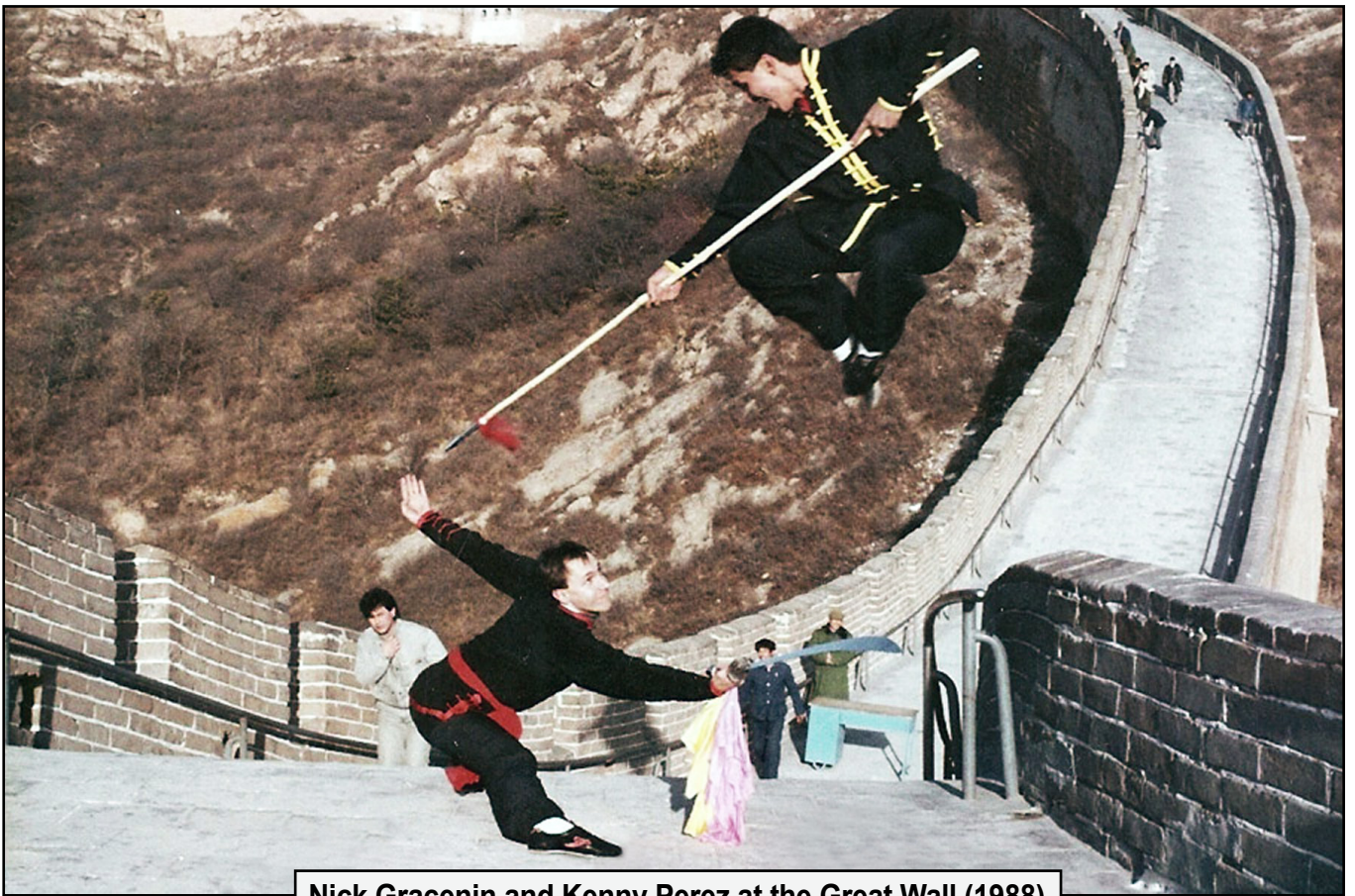
Use PNF (Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation) stretching with and without a partner.



Kenny Perez showing how it's done!



Kenny Perez with Shéngbiāo - Rope Dart (1991)



Nick Gracenin and Kenny Perez at the Great Wall (1988)

What tips can you offer for improving one's Tào Lù (套路) – Forms or Routines?

Break the moves down to each individual movement and use mirrors, I have also found the use of body analysis software to help. Using video playback and similar software can improve body placement, body alignment, and facilitate other corrections. Repeat the routines—by numbers, by names. This helps the brain to remember it better. Most importantly, understand how each movement works so that it reflects your spirit and intent, and is not just flash from a paper tiger.

What tips can you offer to overcome burnout and fatigue?

Sometimes practitioners need a break, to take a step back. Just take a breath and don't train like you're going to war—unless you are. Spice up the training, do cross training, implement games or skills such as forms on bricks, practicing your form in reverse, doing the whole form while actually defending against another student, whatever is needed to challenge yourself and recreate your interest.

In closing the interview, I would like to ask about your recently published book, *Wūshù Skills*. You were kind enough to present me with an autographed copy. I have read the book several times and I highly recommend it to all Chinese martial arts practitioners. Please express your feelings about writing this book, beyond what you already describe in it.

With the release of my book I hope to show more people, even the Wūshù athletes, ways to improve their skills, be aware of their history, and understand how the forms apply in real-life situations.

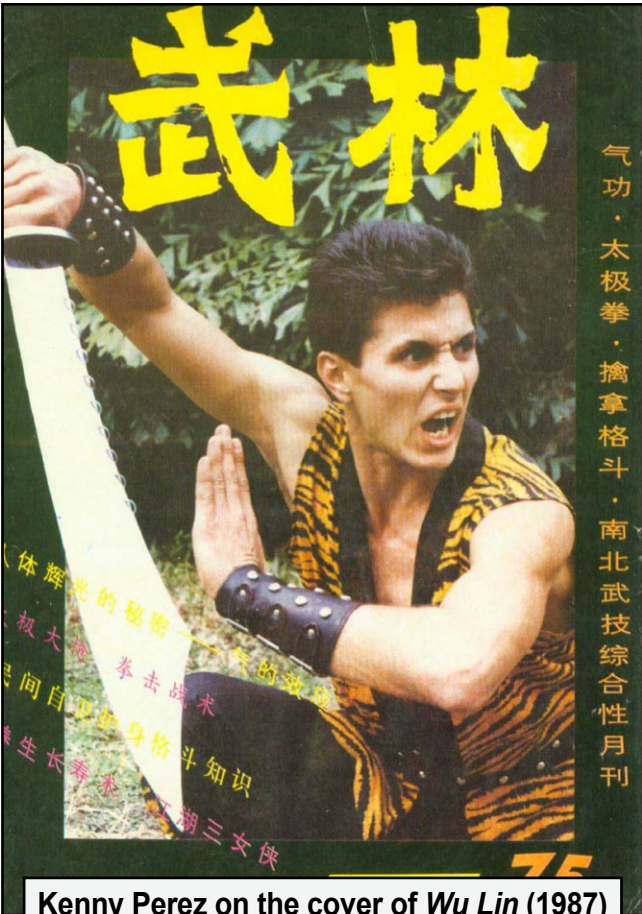
What is in store for you in the future as it pertains to Wūshù?

I hope to bring Wūshù to more people. I have helped integrate Wūshù into the college system in Phoenix and I have introduced Tàijí as a sport in the Senior Olympics. I want to help promote Wūshù as a sport, art, health exercise and self-defense system, because we will all benefit from its growth.

Kenny Perez Photo Gallery



Zhāng Ānji (张安继) with Drunken Sword (1982)

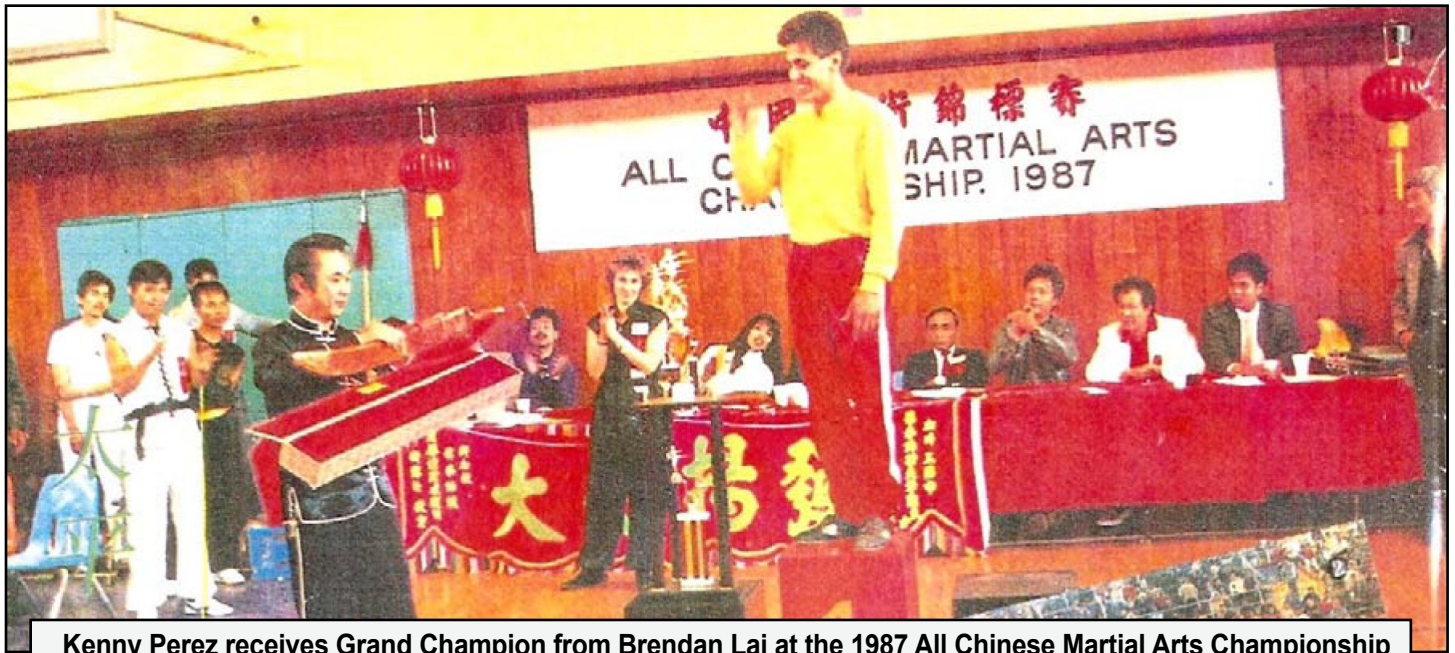


Kenny Perez on the cover of Wu Lin (1987)



Kenny Perez with Dragon Spear (1982)

Photo Gallery Continued...



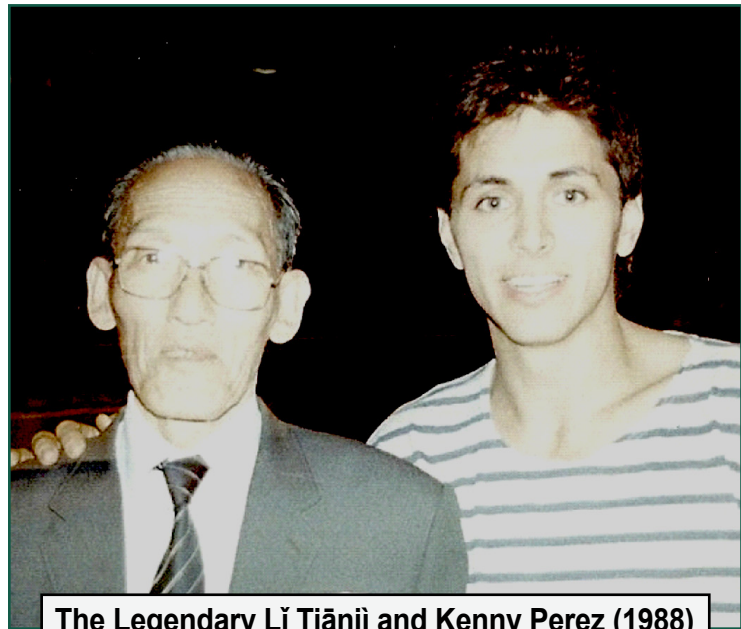
Kenny Perez receives Grand Champion from Brendan Lai at the 1987 All Chinese Martial Arts Championship



Lǐ Tiānji, Ni Menhua, Bow-Sim Mark, Donnie Yen, Máo Bǎihào, Kenny Perez and Secretary Li (1981)



Zhāng Yuèníng and Kenny Perez (1982)



The Legendary Lǐ Tiānji and Kenny Perez (1988)

Photo Gallery Continued...



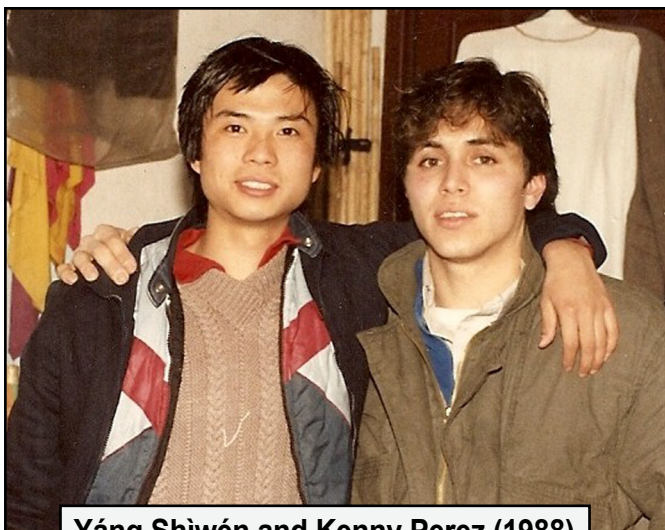
Jiāngsū (江苏) Wúshù Team (1984)



Kenny Perez with Coach Zhāng Zhìguó (1984)



Kenny Perez with Coach Wáng Jīnbǎo (1982)



Yáng Shìwén and Kenny Perez (1988)

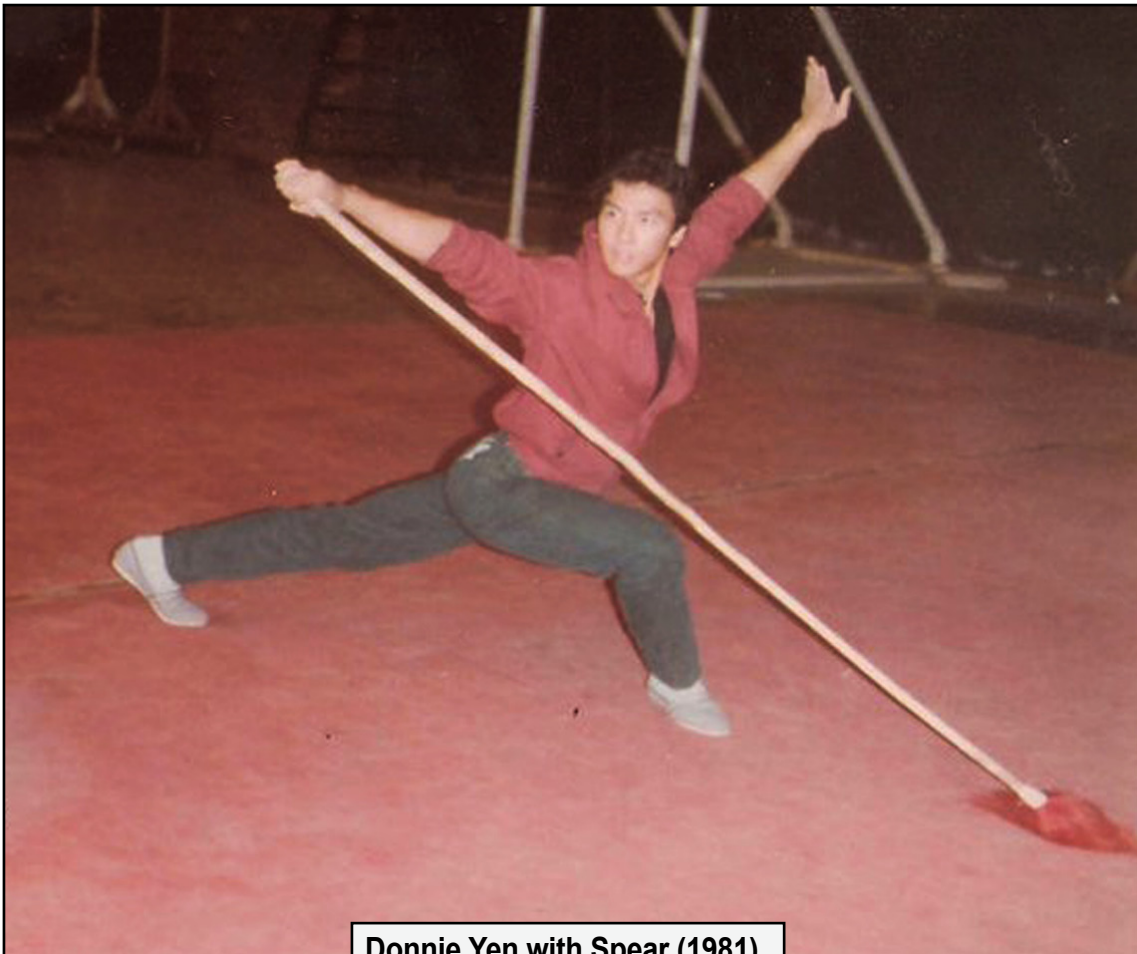


Zhāng Yuèníng and Kenny Perez (1982)

Photo Gallery Continued...



Huáng Dégāng with Nine Ring Broadsword (Beijing, 1981)



Donnie Yen with Spear (1981)

Kenny Perez Pinyin Glossary

Geographical and Historical Places

- Fújiàn (福建) - Coastal province located in Southeast China.
Guǎngdōng (廣東) - Literally "Vast East," located on the southeast coast, most populous province in China.
Héběi (河北) - Province whose name implies that it is "North of the Yellow River."
Húběi (湖北) - Province in the easternmost part of central China.
Jiāngsū (江苏) - Coastal province; name derives from two cities: Jiāngníng (江寧 now Nánjīng) and Sūzhōu (蘇州).
Shāndōng (山東) - Literally "East of the Mountains"; coastal province in North China.
Shānxī (山西) - Literally "West of the Mountains"; province located in North China.
Běijīng (北京) - Literally "Northern Capital"; one of the largest cities and Capital of the People's Republic of China.
Shànghǎi (上海) - Literally "Above the Sea"; the most populated city in the world.
Fúzhōu (福州) - Capital of and one of the largest cities in Fújiàn Province.
Guǎngzhōu (廣州 - Canton) - Capital and largest city in Guǎngdōng Province.
Nánjīng (南京) - Literally "Southern Capital"; located in Jiāngsū province; one of the four ancient capitals of China.
Yāntái (烟台) - Located in Shāndōng; considered the birthplace of Praying Mantis style.
Shíchàhǎi (什刹海) Sports School - Home of the Běijīng Wǔshù Team.
Wútái Shān (五台山) - Sports School in Nánjīng.
Zhōng Yāng Guóshù Guǎn (中央國術館) - Central Martial Arts Academy established in Nánjīng.

Martial Arts Styles

- Wǔshù (武術) - Literally "Martial Arts"; term originally used to depict all Chinese fighting styles but now associated with the sport of Contemporary Wǔshù.
Tàijí Quán (太極拳) - Grand Ultimate Boxing.
Chén Shì Tàijí Quán (陳氏太極拳) - Chén Style Tàijí Boxing.
Yáng Shì Tàijí Quán (楊氏太極拳) - Yáng Style Tàijí Boxing.
Wú Shì Tàijí Quán (吳氏太極拳) - Wú Style Tàijí Boxing.
Sūn Shì Tàijí Quán (孫氏太極拳) - Sūn Style Tàijí Boxing.
Xīnyì Hùn Yuán Tàijí Quán (心意混元太極拳) - Heart-Mind Primordial Force Tàijí Boxing.
Xíngyì Quán (形意拳) - Form Intent Boxing, a major Internal Style.
Bāguà Zhǎng (八卦掌) - Eight-Trigrams Palm, a major Internal Style.
Tàijí Tángláng Quán (太極螳螂拳) - Tàijí Praying Mantis Boxing.
Shàolín Quán (少林拳) - Young Forest Boxing; China's best-known martial arts style derived from the Shàolín Temple; now used to denote "External Style."
Chā Quán (查拳) - Chā Boxing, a prominent Muslim style.
Huà Quán (華拳) - Flower Boxing, a major Traditional Long Fist style.
Hóng Quán (洪拳) - Flood Fist, a major Traditional Long Fist style.
Tán Tuǐ (彈腿) - Snapping Legs, a Traditional Northern (Muslim) style that develops leg skills.
Cháng Quán (長拳) - "Long Boxing"; traditionally used to describe styles such as Chā Quán, Huà Quán and Hóng Quán; now often associated with Contemporary Wǔshù routines.
Tángláng Quán (螳螂拳) - Praying Mantis Boxing developed in Shāndōng Province by Wáng Lǎng (王朗).
Fānzǐ Quán (翻子拳) - Overturning Boxing, a style that influenced many other Northern Systems.

Pīnyīn Glossary Continued...

Yīng Zhǎo (鷹爪) - Eagle Claw; here referring to Contemporary Wǔshù.

Nán Quán (南拳) - "Southern Boxing"; traditionally, the Yángzǐ Jiāng (揚子江 - Yangtze River) has been used as the demarcation line to distinguish Northern and Southern Styles. Nán Quán is often used to describe Contemporary Southern Routines.

Cài Lǐ Fó (蔡李佛 Choy Li Fut in Cantonese) - Southern Style developed by Chén Xiǎng (陳享 1806-1875).

Yǒng Chūn (詠春 Wing Chun in Cantonese) - "Everlasting Springtime"; a close-in fighting system made famous by Bruce Lee.

Notable Figures

Ark Yuei Wong (黃德銳 Huáng Déruì 1900-1987) - Born in Guǎngzhōu; a Gōngfū pioneer in North America; openly taught students from all backgrounds without prejudice; one of his most famous students is Douglas Wong.

Anthony Chan - First US athlete to compete with modern Wǔshù routines; brought the Běijīng team in 1980 for its second US Wǔshù tour (the first. in 1974. was dubbed "China's National Team").

Jackie Chan (陳港生 Chén Gǎngshēng 1954 -) - Hong Kong martial arts action movie star who started as a stunt man; starred in *Drunken Master*, *The Fearless Hyena*, *The Big Brawl*, *Rush Hour*, and *Shanghai Noon*.

Chén Xiǎowàng (陈晓旺) - Chén Style Tàijí Quán Master

Fàn Bǎoyún (范宝云) - Běijīng Wǔshù Team Leader.

Féng Zìqiáng (馮自強 1928-2012) - Chén Tàijí Master and founder of Xīnyì Hùn Yuán Tàijí Quán, a system that combines the structure of Chén Tàijí with elements of Xíngyì Quán.

Augustine Fong (方致榮 Fāng Zhìróng) – Yǒng Chūn (Wing Chun) instructor; one of Kenny Perez's early teachers.

Nick Gracenin - Studied Northern Shaolin and major internal styles with Bow-Sim Mark and other leading teachers in the US and China; has won many honors; now teaches in the Washington, DC, area.

Hú Jiānqiáng (胡坚强) - Athlete from 1980s Běijīng Wǔshù Team; worked in the *Shaolin Temple* film; now teaches in Los Angeles, California.

Huáng Dágāng (黄达刚) - Nán Quán champion in 1982; member and now head coach of Guǎngdōng Wǔshù Team; Kenny Perez's Nán Quán coach.

Huáng Déngāng (黄德刚) - Member of the Běijīng Wǔshù Team in the late 1980s; expert in Nán Quán.

Huáng Qiūyàn (黄秋艳) - Female Běijīng Wǔshù Team athlete in 1980s.

James Ibrao - Student of Ark Yuei Wong; operates a school in Los Angeles, California.

Jiǎng Xiānpǔ (蒋先普) - Běijīng Representative of the All-Sport Federation Company in charge of the Běijīng team and all other Běijīng Wǔshù entities.

Kam Yuen - Known for his Tàijí Praying Mantis; did choreography work for the TV series *Kung Fu* starring David Carradine; frequently appeared in a variety of roles.

Bruce Lee (李小龙 Lǐ Xiǎolóng 1940-1973) - Martial arts innovator and founder of Jeet Kune Do; starred in the TV series *The Green Hornet* and earned international fame with movies such as *The Big Boss*, *Fists of Fury* (AKA *Chinese Connection*), *Way of the Dragon*, *Enter the Dragon*, and *Game of Death*.

Eric Lee - Competitor from the early 1970s; one of the first on the West Coast to win with Gōngfū routines; called the "King of Kata," he amassed more than 100 titles in forms competition.

Albert Leong - Student of Douglas Wong; well-known competitor in the 1970s renowned for his Quando skills.

James Lew - Student of Douglas Wong and well-known competitor in the 1970s; now a stuntman and fight choreographer in Hollywood, California.

Jet Li (李連杰 Lǐ Liánjié - 1963) - Former Běijīng Wǔshù team member and national champion who went on to martial arts movie stardom; made his breakthrough in *Shaolin Temple* and followed with *Once Upon a Time in*

Pinyin Glossary Continued...

China, The Legend, Kiss of the Dragon, Romeo Must Die, and Fearless.

Lǐ Déyìn (李德印 1938 -) - Learned martial arts from his famous grandfather, Lǐ Yùlín (李玉琳), and uncle, Lǐ Tiānji; proficient in several styles, especially Tàijí Quán. Lǐ Déyìn compiled the standardized Tàijí 42 form, a synthesis of Chén, Yáng, Wú and Sūn Tàijí styles; produces instructional DVDs and has written extensively on Wǔshù.

Lǐ Tiānji (李天骥 1913-1996) - Learned Shàolín and other martial arts styles from his father Lǐ Yùlín. Recognized as one of China's "10 Best Wǔshù Masters" and the "Father of Contemporary Tàijí Quán" for his innovative work in developing the standardized 24 Tàijí Form and the 32 Tàijí Sword Form.

Lǐ Wěi (李伟) - Athlete on Jiāngsū Wǔshù Team in 1980s.

Lǐ Zhènlín (李振林) - Coach for Jiāngsū Wǔshù Team in 1980s.

Lǐ Zǐmíng (李子鸣 1903-1993) - Disciple of Liáng Zhènpú (梁振蒲 1863-1932) who learned directly from Bāguà Zhǎng founder, Dǒng Hǎichuān (董海川 1797/1813-1882).

Líng Huā (凌华) - Běijīng team member in 1980s skilled in Cháng Quán, Snake Style, spear and straight sword.

Máo Bǎihào (毛伯浩) - Head of the Wǔshù division of the All-Sport Federation Company in China, the branch of government with authority over all sports.

Bow-Sim Mark (麥寶嬋 Mài Bǎochán 1943 -) - Born in Guǎngzhōu, she learned for 10 years directly from Fù Yǒnghuī (傅永輝 1911-1993), eldest son of Fù Zhènsōng (傅振嵩 1872-1953), founder of Fù Style martial arts. Her son Donnie Yen is an internationally known martial arts movie star. Nick Gracenin is one of her most famous students.

Pān Qīngfú (潘清福) - Wǔshù Coach from Shāndōng featured in such films as *Shaolin Temple* and *Iron and Silk* (the latter written by and starring Mark Salzman).

Christopher Pei – Wǔshù Coach based in Virginia; was US Wǔshù Team Leader and has trained in China as an International Wǔshù Judge; first US citizen selected by the International Wǔshù Federation to judge at the 1988 International Wǔshù Invitational competition in China.

Qián Yuánzé (钱源泽) - Head coach for Jiāngsū Wǔshù Team.

Qiū Jiànguó (邱建国) - Nán Quán champion during 1970s from Guǎngdōng; star of the film *Nán Quán King*.

Roger Tung - Modern Wǔshù pioneer from Shànghǎi who helped publicize the art in the US; trained champions including Eric Chen, Cynthia Rothrock, and Keith Hirabayashi.

Wáng Chángkǎi (王长凯) - Coach of Shāndōng Wǔshù Team famous for his skill in straight sword and long tasseled swords.

Wáng Jīnbǎo (王金宝) - Coach of Jiāngsū Wǔshù Team; famous Wǔshù champion and all-around winner in the 1970s; renowned for Monkey Style routines and kicking skills.

Wáng Zhèntián (王振田) - Athlete from Jiāngsū Wǔshù Team known for spear, sword and meteor hammer.

Douglas Wong - Based in Los Angeles; student of Ark Yue Wong of the Five Animal Style. Douglas Wong crossed-trained in many styles and created the White Lotus system.

Tat-Mau Wong - Expert in Cài Lǐ Fó; based in Seattle and operates schools in San Francisco with branches in the US and Brazil; promoter of a major West Coast Gōngfū competition in the 1980s.

Wú Bīn (吴彬 1937 -) - Legendary coach of Běijīng Wǔshù Team; trained numerous champions, many of whom are teaching throughout the world; perhaps best known as Jet Li's coach.

Xú Xiàngdōng (徐向东) - Húběi Wǔshù Team member and now a movie director in Běijīng; famed for his Eagle Claw routine and China's 1981 Eagle Claw Champion.

Yáng Chéngfǔ (杨澄甫 1883-1836) - Son of Yáng Jiàn hóu (杨健侯 1839-1917) and grandson of Yáng Lùchán (杨露禅 1799-1872); founder of Yáng Style Tàijí Quán and credited with developing the slow, even, continuous style of Yáng Tàijí widely practiced today; first member of the Yáng family to teach the style openly; had numerous disciples, many of whom became great masters.

Pinyin Glossary Continued...

- Yáng Shìwén (杨世文) - Athlete from Guǎngdōng Wǔshù Team; Nán Quán champion in 1984-1988.
- Donnie Yen (甄子丹 Zhēn Zǐdān 1963-) - Son of Bow-Sim Mark and famous martial arts movie star in *Ip Man*, *Iron Monkey*, *Shanghai Knights*, *Bodyguards and Assassins*, and *Once Upon a Time in China*.
- Yú Hǎi (于海 1942 -) - Athlete from Yāntái known for his Mantis Style during the 1970s; famous as the Shīfù in *Shaolin Temple*, Jet Li's first film; now Shāndōng Wǔshù Team Coach.
- Yuán Héping (袁和平 AKA Yuen Woo-ping 1945 -) - Gōngfū movie director; credits include *Drunken Master*, *Magnificent Butcher*, *Iron Monkey*, and *Tai Chi Master*.
- Zhāng Ānjì (张安继) - Athlete from Jiāngsū famous for straight sword and Bāguà; China champion in 1982.
- Zhāng Chéngzhōng (张诚中) - Jiāngsū Wǔshù Team member and champion of Xíngyì Quán, spear and double broadsword in the 1980s.
- Zhāng Wénguǎng (张文广) - Wǔshù pioneer who helped to keep the art alive during China's turbulent period; 10th Duàn Master of Wǔshù and head professor of Wǔshù at Běijīng Sports College; on the 1st Wǔshù team that demonstrated in the 1936 Berlin Olympics; Master of Chā Quán and teacher of Wú Bīn.
- Zhāng Yuèníng (张跃宁) - Athlete from Jiāngsū Wǔshù Team famous for his Eagle Claw routine; China's Eagle Claw Champion and Spear Champion in 1982.
- Zhāng Zhìguó (张治国) - Coach of Nánjīng Wǔshù Team.
- Zhào Chángjūn (赵长军) - Athlete from Shānxī Wǔshù team; all-around champion throughout the 1980s and known as the "King of Wǔshù"; now teaching in New Jersey.
- Zhào Dàyuán (赵大元) - Bāguà Zhǎng teacher from Běijīng; student of Lǐ Zīmíng.
- Zhōu Jīngpíng (周京平) - Female Běijīng Wǔshù team athlete in the 1980s.

General Martial Arts Terms

- Duàn Wèi (段位) - Wǔshù's Ranking System.
- Guīdìng Quán (规定拳) - Standardized Compulsory Cháng Quán routine used in Wǔshù competitions to grade athletes on their skills.
- Jīngwǔ Tǐyùhuì (精武體育會) - Jīngwǔ Athletic Association founded in Shànghǎi in 1910 and often referred to as simply Jīngwǔ
- Shí Dà Wǔshù Míngshī (十大武术名师) - 10 Best Wǔshù Masters in China.
- Shīfù (師父) - Master
- Tàolù (套路) - Form or Routine.
- Wèidào (味道) - The spirit and emotional content required to make a routine come to life.
- Wǔ Bù Quán (五步拳) - A basic routine used to teach beginners the five basic stances of Wǔshù.
- Wǔde (武德) - Martial Virtue, the ethical code in Chinese martial arts.

qiū

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jiàn guó

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About Kenny Perez: He has been involved with martial arts for nearly 40 years and has studied various styles including Judo, Shuri-Ryu Karate, Kenpo Karate, Wing Chun Gongfu, Southern Five Animals Shaolin, Northern Shaolin, Hung Gar, Tae Kwon Do, Tai Chi Chuan, Weaponry, Acrobatics and Tumbling, Boxing, Stunt Work, and Contemporary Wushu. In competition he amassed many awards and trophies. He received the 6th level professional coaching degree from Wu Bin of Beijing, China. His other noted teachers include Douglas Wong and Augustine Fong. He operates the Dynamic Martial Arts school in Phoenix, Arizona. He has also worked with martial arts superstars on well-known movies such as "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon." He is a versatile entertainer, skilled in Iron Body Qigong, Chinese Opera Skills, Chinese Drumming, and Lion and Dragon Dancing. His published works include a Wushu video training series and the recent book, Wushu Skills.

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