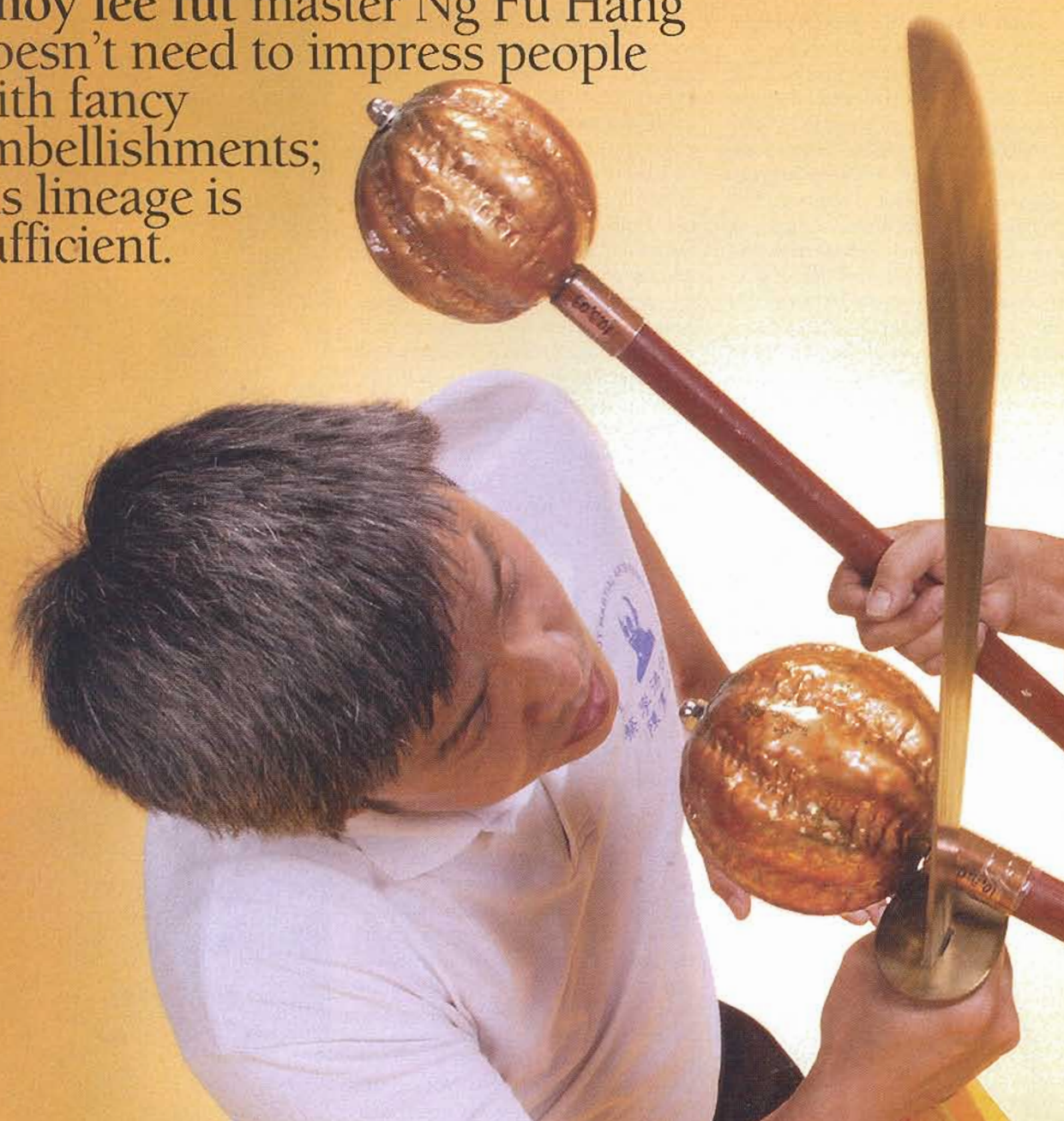


Choy lee fut master Ng Fu Hang doesn't need to impress people with fancy embellishments; his lineage is sufficient.



# A Voice FROM THE PAST

BY SAMARA SIMMERMAN



The Choy Lee Fut Martial Arts Federation in Arcadia, Calif., is a simple studio, devoid of extravagant artwork, lavish fountains or expensive alters. Just a single room with a wall of mirrors on one side and an array of weapons on the other side. Master Ng Fu Hang doesn't need to impress people with fancy embellishments; his lineage is impressive enough. But it doesn't stop there.

As I sit down with Ng at the front of the school, the students diligently practice fist form sets, obviously accustomed to hard work and self-sustained discipline. I am struck not only by their skill, but also by the relaxed ease of their conversation and the apparent joy they take in practicing

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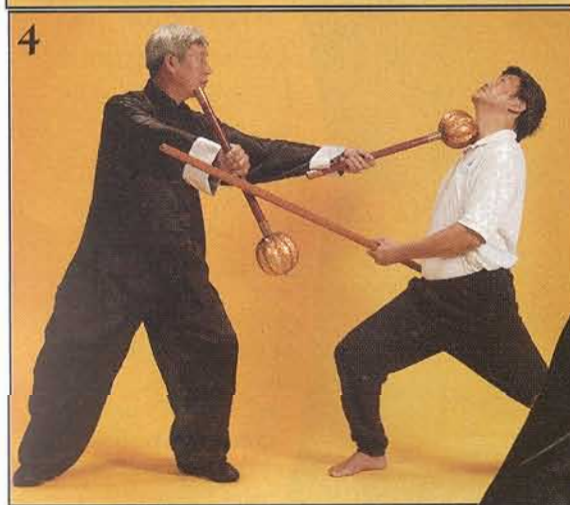
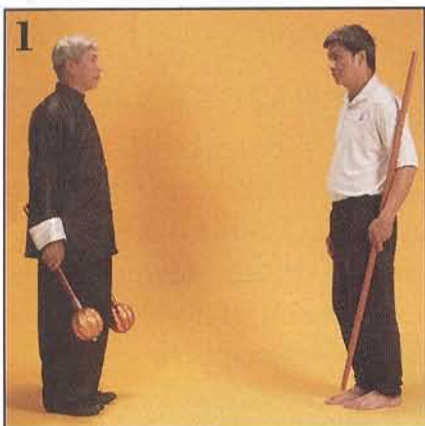
their art. One gets the sense that they are being taught more than just kung-fu forms; that they are somehow privy to a unique philosophy — an untainted art that carries with it the history and wisdom of the past. But then again, what else would you expect from the students of Ng Fu Hang, direct descendant of choy lee fut founder Chan Heung.

“The more you move away from the direct lineage, the more corrupt the system becomes,” explains Ng, without pretension. There is no chance of that happening here, considering that Ng is a fourth-generation practitioner of choy lee fut who has devoted his life to maintaining the purity of a tradition into which he was born.

## History

Ng Fu Hang is the great, great grandson of Chan Heung, founder of the choy lee fut system. In King Mui, China, during the early 1800s, Chan Heung spent over 20 years learning kung-fu from three masters of the shaolin arts: Chan Yuen Wu, Lee Yau Shan and a Buddhist monk named Choy Fook. Having attained a great deal of knowledge, Chan Heung created his own style of kung-fu — choy lee fut — named in honor of his teachers and the Buddhist origin of the art.

At the age of six, Ng Fu Hang began training under the tutelage of his grandfather, Chan Yui Chi, grandson of Chan Heung. Chan Yui Chi was not only a



Sifu Ng Fu Hang faces his opponent (1). The attacker swings the pole sideways at Ng (2). Ng blocks (3) the strike with his golden melon hammer. He then thrusts the other golden melon hammer at his attacker's neck (4). The attacker falls to the floor (5). Ng follows up with his right golden melon hammer.



“Choy lee fut is good for smaller body types, because of the fast footwork, lower stances, jumps and kicks.”



gifted martial artist, but also a practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine. Always the generous teacher and scholar, Chan Yui Chi openly shared his knowledge, accepting pay from students and patients only if they could afford it. As a young man, Ng assisted his grandfather's teaching while developing his own skill as a martial arts expert. He continued learning from his grandfather until Chan Yui Chi's death in 1965. In 1970, Ng moved to Hong Kong to help his uncle set up a kung-fu school. After several years as a teacher, Ng relocated to the United States with his mother. In 1998, Ng opened his California school, carrying on the tradition of integrity and generosity set forth by three generations of masters before him.

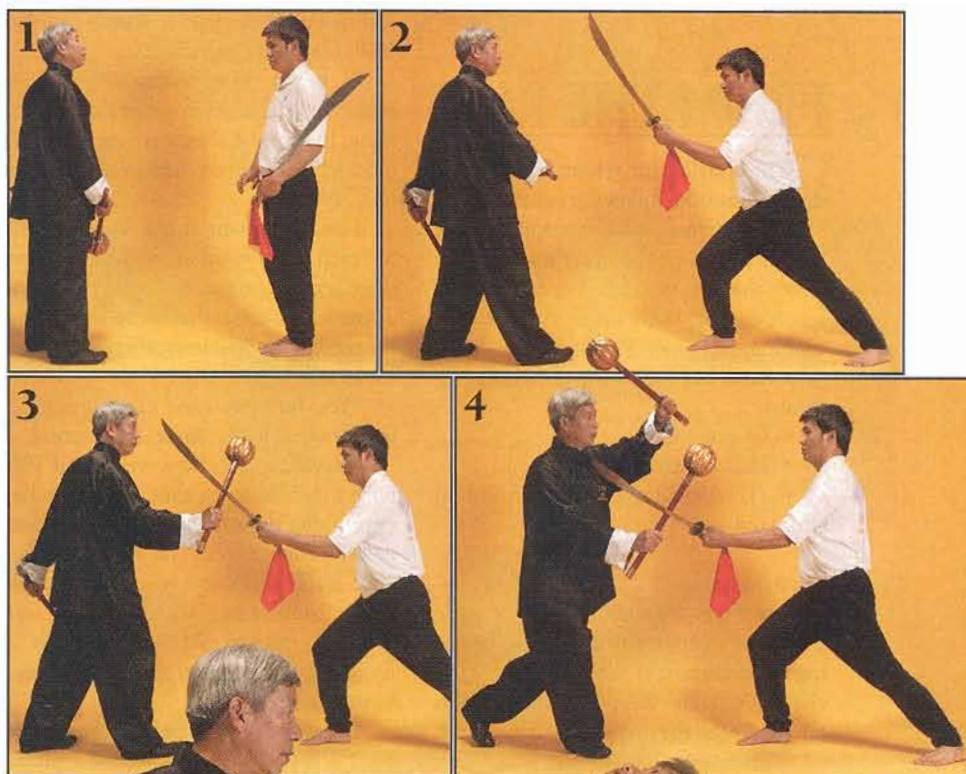
### Choy Lee Fut

As we watch the students, I take note of the long stances and high kicks of their sets, wondering how such uncharacteristic moves became part of this southern style. So I ask Ng what makes the style stand out among other styles. Ng shakes his head and smiles.

"Choy lee fut is not better than any other kung-fu style. Some schools say they are better than others, I don't want to say that." It is that kind of modesty and respectfulness that lets me know I am in the presence of a true master. "Choy lee fut is a complex system because it combines three different styles. There are 190 hand and weapon sets in choy lee fut. You would have to learn two sets a year and study for 90 years just to learn them all. Too much!"

Ng then explains that there are many choy lee fut schools, but that only he and his cousin, who runs a school in Australia, are the direct descendants of Chan Heung.

"When you learn from somebody who has learned from somebody, the forms change. As you go farther away from the direct lineage, it grows less and less original." Ng has devoted his life to the preservation of the initial choy lee fut system. Characterized by speed and power, choy lee fut combines the quick hand techniques of the southern styles with the high, flexible kicks of the northern styles. The circular movements of the hands and lively footwork make this style interesting when observed and formidable when encountered. The strength of the long, circular arm strikes originates in the waist-hip rotation, giving power to the



From a ready position (1), the attacker cuts down at sifu Ng at a 45-degree angle from the top (2). Ng blocks the attack using his golden melon hammer (3). Using a right twist horse, Ng pushes away the broadsword (4). He then uses his remaining golden melon hammer to hit the attacker in the head area (5).

fists at the end of loose, flexible arms, similar to the action of a rope dart.

"Choy lee fut is good for smaller body types because of the fast footwork, lower stances, jumps and kicks," Ng explains. He adds that the abundance of tumbling, high kicks and jumps, not seen in many southern styles, is ideal for conditioning and training. However, they are not actually used for fighting. In fact, the kicks during fighting should be no higher than waist level.

Ng emphasizes that choy lee fut orig-

inated as a streetfighting form and is meant to be practical, not beautiful. It is a complete system that incorporates both internal and external forms. The external forms focus on speed, strength, and power, and are designed to condition the body by providing cardiovascular exercise and building stamina. The internal forms instill a harmonious mind-body connection by promoting the flow of chi to the internal organs. These forms concentrate on proper breathing and slow, fluid movements.

# A Voice FROM THE PAST

The choy lee fut system has 190 sets divided into the following categories:

- Traditional fist and weapon forms, solo or in two-person sparring sets;
- Shaolin wooden dummy forms incorporating both hand and weapon training;
- Sand bag forms (or punching bag forms);
- Qi gong forms;
- Lion dancing; and
- Traditional Chinese medical theories.

## Weapons

Choy lee fut incorporates a wide variety of weapons in its system, bringing the traditions of the past to the 21st-century warrior. Weapons in the system range from the typical (staff, spear,

broadsword) to the unusual (double melon hammer, tiger fork).

"I teach these weapons for good health...for the development of the chi gong. In the past, they were used for self-defense. The streets were very dangerous," Ng notes.


I asked Ng why it was so important to teach these weapons in an age when there is really no use for them. He laughs at my assumption that there is no need for these weapons, reminding me of the crime rate in Los Angeles.

"Yes, but you can't carry around a broadsword on the streets," I respond.

"Anything can be a weapon if you have these skills...a cane, an umbrella, even a chair! People should be able to defend themselves," he says, adding, "but I also teach the weapons because of tradition...that was the way it was originally taught. At this school it is more for demonstration of the system in its pure form."

I express my intrigue with the double

melon hammer. It is a strange-looking weapon, essentially a pair of copper, melon-sized balls on the end of two short wooden staffs. After much coaxing, I convince Ng to demonstrate the double melon hammer. He shows me three basic blocking techniques and a series of strikes and punches most rudimentary to this weapon. It turns out that this odd relic is used in a way similar to other short weapons.

As we conclude our interview, Ng expresses his gratitude and welcomes me back to the school. Once again I am reminded that Ng's students are a part of something valuable and unique, particularly in this world of commercialized kung-fu; tradition, simplicity, generosity. I imagine how refreshing it must be for his students to escape from the frenzied routine of daily life and just learn kung-fu, in its purest form, from a true master. 

*Samara Simmerman is a Altadena, California-based martial artist and freelance writer.*



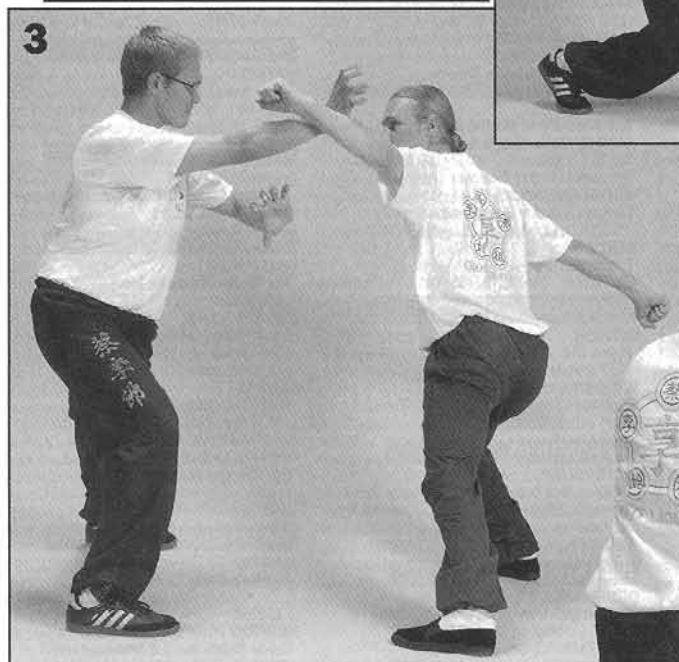
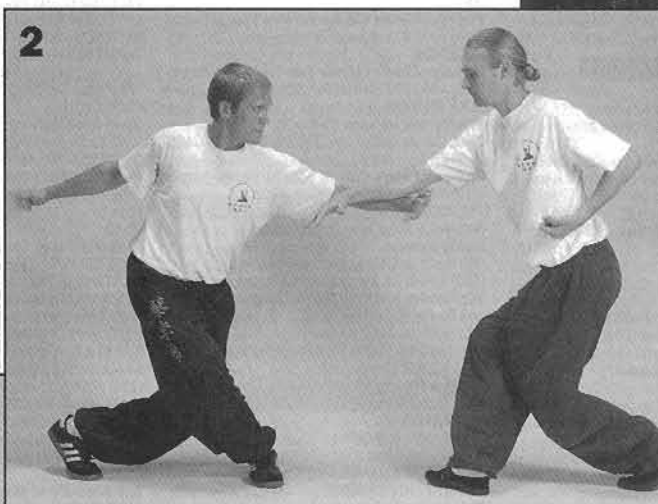
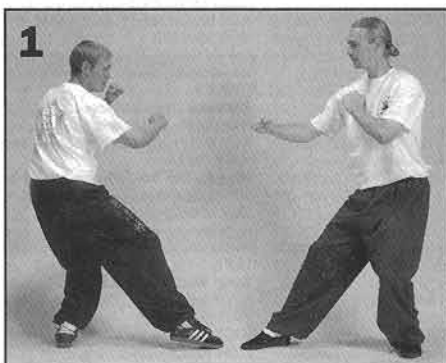
From an on-guard position (1), the attacker opens with a frontal assault and cuts down from the top (2). Sifu Ng blocks the broadsword with his left golden melon hammer (3). He assumes a right kneel down, then pushes the broadsword away (4). He finishes by thrusting the golden melon hammer at his attacker's midsection.

# Technique workshop

## Choy Lee Fut Empty-Hand Training



Ng Fu  
Hang



**F**rom a ready position (1), Bryan opens with a straight punch (2). Armando (left) blocks the punch by cutting down with his left hand and simultaneously performing a twisting horse. The attacker counters with a wild left (3). Armando blocks the attack with his right hand. The attacker tries to strike with the right hand (4), but the defender answers by cutting across. A right uppercut to the face finishes the job.