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REFLECTIONS ON TRADITION AND RETURN TO MEANING IN MARTIAL PRACTICE

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Abstract

This article reflects on the living tradition of Luo Guang Yu's Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu, warning against its dilution in modern times. It defines tradition, outlines the art's three inseparable pillars—combative skill, longevity cultivation, and Confucian moral practice—and stresses the vital role of lineage and transmission. Through these, martial capability and civil refinement unite in a coherent way of life. The call is clear: preserve not only the art's technical content, but its integrity, unity, and spirit across generations.

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''The Master said:
Set your will on the Way,
Stand firm in virtue,
Be grounded in humanity,
And be immersed in the arts."
(The Analects, 7.6)

Family Lineage

Wang Lang
王朗

Sheng Xiao Dao Ren
生肖道人

Li San Jian
李三剪 (c.1821)

Wang Rong Sheng
王荣生 (c.1854)

Fan Xu Dong
范旭东 (c.1841)

Luo Guang Yu
罗光玉 (1888-1944)

Lin Bo Yan 林伯炎 (1903-1990)
Zhao Zhi Min 赵志民 (1901-2002)

Xu Jin Ge 徐晋阁 (1949-)
Li Jin Rong 李锦荣 (1947-2024)

Kai Uwe Pel
裴凯 (1964-)

Master Luo Guang Yu
罗光玉 (1888-1944)

1. INTRODUCTION

The tradition of Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu stands at a crossroads, facing challenges and opportunities unlike those confronted by past masters. For them, the art was a lifeline—shaped by the demands of survival, the discipline of rigorous apprenticeship, and the responsibilities of moral leadership. Today, increased commercialization, global exposure, and digital access have carried the art into new cultures and communities, offering many the chance to benefit from its time-tested practices and wisdom. Yet the same forces that have broadened its reach now threaten the depth, coherence, and integrity that previous generations fought tirelessly to preserve.

These forces have quietly reshaped how the art is learned, taught, and understood. Rigorous, methodical training is too often distilled into marketable fragments, packaged for quick consumption. The art's combative, health, and philosophical dimensions are frequently presented in isolation or skimmed over, severing the interconnectedness that once made them an indivisible whole. Under commercial pressure, standards have weakened, and the purpose of training has shifted from functional substance to visual spectacle.

These distortions appear in several recognizable patterns. In some cases, schools romanticize the tradition but limit themselves to stylized choreography and superficial ritual, neglecting the essential functional combat training that once defined its core. In others, the pendulum swings in the opposite direction: schools focus narrowly on fighting methods and sport competition while discarding the health and moral cultivation that provide depth and transformation. A third tendency blends unrelated martial traditions in the name of comprehensiveness, but in doing so, erodes the internal logic that gives the art its unity. Finally, some schools operate on a transactional model, where advancement is bought rather than earned—selling forms, commodifying Baishi ceremonies, and offering rapid rank without the skill, responsibility, or sincerity essential to authentic transmission. If left unchecked, these paths will further erode the tradition and hollow its living spirit.

The task before us then is not merely to remember this unity from the past but to actively embody and build it in our training halls, teaching methods, and daily practice. To meet these challenges with precision rather than sentiment, we must first be clear about what, exactly, we seek to preserve. This is the purpose of *Reflections on Tradition*—to return to meaning-making in the martial tradition of Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu by stripping away illusion and reawakening to the essence that past masters fought to preserve. That clarity begins with understanding what tradition truly means—both in a general sense and within the specific context of classical Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu. Without this clarity, we risk mistaking the preservation of surface features for the safeguarding of essence.

After establishing a foundational understanding of tradition, I will then turn to the three core elements that give Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu its living heart: the combative methods rooted in Ming dynasty martial practice, the longevity and health practices of the Eighteen Arhats Qigong, and the moral cultivation grounded in Confucian philosophy. The transmission of this foundational core is further embedded in a teacher-student relationship, where lineage plays a crucial role in ensuring the continuity and integrity of the tradition. The remainder of this essay will examine each element in turn, showing how they work together to form an integrated whole—and why that unity, rather than the isolation of its parts, is essential to the tradition's continued vitality.

2. THE NATURE OF TRADITION

Tradition is a defining feature of human culture, linking one generation to the next through the preservation of practices, values, and knowledge. Some traditions remain largely unchanged, while others evolve with new circumstances or eventually fade. At the most familiar level, traditions manifest in everyday customs such as a handshake and bowing, which convey respect and social engagement. Beyond conventions lie more specialized systems of knowledge and practice, such as the healing traditions of Chinese medicine and acupuncture, which have been refined over centuries. At even deeper levels, philosophical traditions like Confucianism provide enduring frameworks for ethical conduct, wisdom, and self-cultivation, dating back over 2,500 years. Finally, there are profound religious traditions like Daoism and Buddhism, which encompass spiritual discipline, metaphysical belief, and moral guidance. Within this broad spectrum, martial traditions—such as Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu—occupy a distinct place. This martial tradition unites practical, ethical, cultural, and spiritual practices, forming a living inheritance that integrates self-preservation, self-vitalization, and self-realization.

2.1 Working Definition of Tradition

Tradition, as defined by Shils (1981), includes the practices, beliefs, customs, rituals, objects, and shared memories that bind a community across time. It serves as both a cultural inheritance and a living connection to the past, enabling the transmission of knowledge and values across generations while allowing for adaptation. While traditions may evolve through the introduction of new variants, their continuity depends on the preservation of core elements that remain stable and recognizable. For a tradition to endure, these elements must be perceived as authentic—either by faithfully reflecting their origins or convincingly embodying their spirit—so that they are embraced by successive generations.

Expanding on this, Soares (1997) frames tradition as a "reservoir for the living," sustained by a distinct social group with a shared identity. Living traditions require that these collective memories be tangibly embodied in the material environment—through artifacts, spaces, or practices—and be animated by a "spirit of continuity." This emphasizes tradition's adaptive value, showing that the past is not merely preserved but actively mobilized to address contemporary challenges.

Both Shils and Soares underscore the critical role of custodians—those who inherit, embody, and transmit the tradition. Custodians are responsible for safeguarding its present integrity and future vitality, serving as active stewards who ensure that the tradition remains faithful to its origins while adapting to the changing needs of society.

It is important to distinguish between a living tradition and what might be called fossilized traditionalism. A living tradition is defined by its ability to maintain internal coherence while adapting to new conditions. It is a way of life, a value-laden practice that sustains both skill and meaning over time. Fossilized tradition, by contrast, only preserves surface-level forms—rituals, symbols, or aesthetics—while the inner logic and moral orientation have been lost or forgotten.

2.2 Martial Traditions

Martial traditions occupy a distinctive place within this broader understanding of tradition. Like all living traditions, they involve the preservation of inherited practices and values. However, they also demand an embodied, skill-based transmission in which knowledge is inseparable from practice. Techniques, training methods, and tactical principles cannot be preserved merely through documentation—they must be lived, practiced, and refined over time. Martial traditions are also bound to a moral orientation, social identity, and interpretive framework that gives meaning to their methods. In this way, they link physical skill, ethical formation, and intergenerational continuity into a single, integrated inheritance.

Borrowing from Shils (1981) and Soares (1997), a martial tradition can be defined as a historically rooted set of combative practices, beliefs, customs, and rituals that constitute a distinct martial arts system, with knowledge and skill transmitted intergenerationally through the direct teacher–student relationship. In martial contexts, this transmission is not merely verbal or documentary—it is embodied. Techniques, tactical principles, and training methods must be lived, practiced, and refined for self-preservation. But there is still more.

In their work *Luo Guang Yu Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu: A Traditional Chinese Martial Art* (2020), my teacher Master Kai Uwe Pel and kung fu brother Andrew Best provide a detailed historical account of Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu and the broader Shaolin tradition. They characterize Shaolin heritage as a confluence of combative skill, yogic health cultivation (Luohan Gong), and Buddhist meditative practice—together forming "a complete system of the body, energy, and mind" that is distinctly a product of imperial-era China. From this perspective, Shaolin Kung Fu is not a single style but a tradition—a living matrix from which many systems evolved, unified by shared philosophical and practical foundations.

Building on this insight, I propose five essential criteria to more precisely define "traditional" Chinese martial systems:

1. **Historical Origins** – It must have emerged in imperial-era China (pre-1911).
2. **Combative Practices** – It must include a coherent body of functional empty-hand and weapons techniques, tactics, strategies and training methods.
3. **Longevity Practices** – It must preserve a mind–body health discipline, typically in the form of various qigong and meditation methods.
4. **Philosophical Practices** – It must be informed by a philosophical framework drawing from one or more of the Three Teachings-Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism.
5. **Lineage Continuity** – It must be transmitted intergenerationally through a direct teacher–student relationship sustained for at least three generations.

These criteria not only clarify what is meant by "traditional" in the Chinese martial arts context, but they also safeguard the integration of physical, philosophical, and health-oriented elements that give systems such as Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu their enduring coherence. They also provide a clear and important demarcation for modern developments post 1950's in China's national sport competition wushu movement.

If these are the conditions that define a living traditional martial system, then Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu offers a particularly rich case. Its historical formation and survival into the present result from a unique synthesis: rooted in the combative systems of late Ming and early Qing dynasty China, refined through the health practices of the Eighteen Arhat Qigong, and guided by the moral and social philosophy of Ruism (Confucian). These elements are not separate, but form an interdependent framework where each reinforces and gives meaning to the others.

However, none of these can endure without lineage and transmission. Lineage connects the present to the past, ensuring the continuity of both technical knowledge and the values that shape the art. Transmission, as the active process of passing down this knowledge and ethos, preserves the tradition while allowing it to evolve. Together, lineage and transmission form the bridge between past and future, ensuring that Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu remains a living tradition, relevant and vital for generations to come.

With lineage and transmission ensuring the continuity of tradition, we now turn to the three core elements that define the essence of Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu. These elements—combative skill, longevity practices, and philosophical cultivation—are not isolated practices, but an integrated system where each element supports and enhances the others. In the following section, we will explore how these core elements form the foundation of the tradition and work together to shape a complete martial system.

3. CORE ELEMENTS OF TRADITION

3.1 Core Element One: Martial Practice and Combative Adaptability

At its heart, a martial tradition is defined by its ability to physically and mentally prepare practitioners for real violence. In Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu, this *combative function* is not an optional branch of the system but its primary root—the source from which all other aspects draw their original purpose. Without it, the art ceases to be martial in the traditional sense.

Historically, this combative role has been both practical and adaptive. In its earliest phase of development, the system likely served local militias in Shandong province, defending against both Qing authorities and coastal banditry on the Shandong peninsula. Over time, it became the preferred skill set of caravan guards, whose survival depended on protecting goods and travelers along China's inland trade routes.

In the early 20th century, Master Luo Guang Yu—representing his teacher Master Fan Xu Dong—brought Seven Star Mantis to the Shanghai Jingwu Association. There, the art stepped onto a national stage where traditional combat methods were preserved, yet continuously tested against the highest standards of a modern, collaborative training environment. Surrounded by exceptional teachers from traditional systems across China and immersed in a large, diverse talent pool of practitioners, the system was refined, challenged, and strengthened—its roots deepened even as its branches spread wider. At this phase, it continued to serve both military purposes in the run-up to the Sino-Japanese War and civilian self-defense needs.

Today, Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu continues to fulfill its original mandate through the domain of civilian self-defense—the biological, natural, moral, and legal right to protect oneself or others from unlawful violence with reasonable and proportionate force. Grounded in the reality of physical confrontation, the art retains functional relevance in a world where contexts may evolve, but the human need for protection remains constant.

Structurally, the combative repertoire of Seven Star Mantis Kung Fu is organized through the Si Ji Fa (Four Attacking Methods), a framework that integrates the system's technical knowledge into a coherent whole. These empty-hand methods interlock to cover the full spectrum of fighting ranges—kicking, striking, standing grappling, and throwing—giving practitioners both breadth and depth of application.

Si Ji Fa:
- 24 fist methods
- 18 palm methods
- 24 leg methods
- 72 qin na (seizing and controlling) methods
- 36 throwing methods

Equally important is the organizational process by which these methods come to life. In Seven Star Praying

Mantis Kung Fu, *process* refers to how interrelated techniques are woven into tactical patterns, and how those patterns form the foundation for broader strategies and guiding principles. This is not static knowledge—it is embodied through live training methodologies honed and transmitted over centuries. Progressive drills, partner exercises, and application-based work develop practical execution and properties of timing, precision, power, and adaptability under both fatigue and pressure.

In addition, Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu encompasses an extensive arsenal of both bladed and non-bladed weapons training, preserving eighteen distinct weapons practices within its curriculum. These include battlefield arms such as the halberd (大刀), spear (槍), and staff (棍); refined single-edged and double-edged weapons like the sabre (刀) and straight sword (劍); as well as specialized weapons such as the three-sectional staff (三節棍), and dagger (雙刀). Each weapon embodies its own tactical theory, footwork patterns, and conditioning requirements, while complimenting the principles found in empty-hand practice. Together, they form a complete martial repertoire that hones discipline, adaptability, and a deeper understanding of range, timing, and power generation across diverse combat contexts.

Thus, the combative element is not merely a catalog of techniques but a living, practiced coherence of self-preservation. It is the point where history, culture, function, structure, and process converge to maintain the art's fighting viability. As long as this element remains intact—neither fossilized into performance alone nor diluted by indiscriminate fusion—Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu will endure as a living martial tradition in the fullest sense.

3.2 Core Element Two: Qigong and the Cultivation of Energy and Mind

Within the Seven Star Praying Mantis tradition, the cultivation of health, vitality, and mental clarity is not an optional supplement to combat training but a foundational pillar. A living martial tradition must sustain the practitioner over decades of practice, enabling both technical refinement and the transmission of knowledge to the next generation. In this respect, the tradition preserves an integrated system of mind–body cultivation through the Eighteen Luohan Xing Gong (十八羅漢行功), a dynamic energy qigong set designed to strengthen the body, improve health, vitalize energy, regulate the breath, and focus the mind.

Historically, the Luohan Xing Gong is attributed in martial folklore to Bodhidharma (達摩, Damo), the Indian monk credited with transmitting Chan Buddhism to China during the Northern Wei period (471–534 CE). Other exercises also attributed to Bodhidharma include the *Muscle-Tendon Classics* and the *Bone-Marrow Washing Classics*. While historical sources such as Yang Xuanzhi's *Memories of Luoyang's Temples* offer only sparse and indirect reference to Bodhidharma, legend holds that he introduced these exercises at the Shaolin Temple in modern day Henan province to improve the health and endurance of monks engaged in long hours of seated meditation and, over time, martial training. In this original context, the movements served a unifying purpose: restoring physical vitality after prolonged stillness, developing structural integration, cultivating breath control, and focusing intent—qualities that carried over from seated meditation and proved equally valuable in martial application.

The Eighteen Luohan Xing Gong as preserved in Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu was documented by Master Fan Xu Dong (樊旭東, c. 1841) in his *Shaolin Yi Bo Zhen Zhuan* (少林衣鉢真傳) and transmitted to his disciples, including Master Luo Guang Yu. Within the taxonomy of Chinese internal arts, it is classified as an external moving qigong practice (wai gong, 外功; xing gong, 行功) and more specifically *wai dan* (外丹), in contrast to *nei dan* (內丹). The set consists of seventy-two sequential postures that combine coordinated movement, regulated breathing, and directed intention. The practice systematically mobilizes the joints, massages the internal organs, improves circulation, activates the parasympathetic nervous system, and builds energy (qi) in specific regions of the body before circulating it through the twelve primary meridians. Physiologically, this develops flexibility, balance, and resilience; mentally, it cultivates tranquility and heightened proprioceptive awareness.

The benefits of this training extend well beyond general health. Increased joint range and connective tissue elasticity help reduce the risk of injury in dynamic combat; refined breath regulation supports endurance and maintains energy output under pressure; heightened mental control enhances emotional regulation and sharpens decision-making; and integrated posture

reinforces stability. In this way, the Luohan Xing Gong directly supports the combative dimension of Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu, making it a true partner discipline to fighting technique rather than a parallel or unrelated practice.

The theoretical underpinnings of this qigong system are deeply interwoven with the principles of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), which predates Bodhidharma's legendary arrival by centuries. The cultivation of jing (精, physical essence), qi (氣, vital energy), and shen (神, spirit) is a long-standing tradition discussed extensively in the *Huangdi Neijing* (黃帝內經, c. 168 BCE), the foundational text of TCM. Within Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu, this tripartite model is applied pragmatically: jing as the physical structural foundation, qi as the dynamic energetic force of movement, and shen as the unifying heart–mind awareness guiding intention and action. The regular practice of Luohan Xing Gong is thus not merely a health exercise but an embodied expression of these interrelated principles, sustaining the vitality of both the practitioner and the tradition itself. Master Luo Guang Yu further integrated this model conceptually into the naming of the three levels of training in Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu—Jing, Qi, and Li.

If the combative and qigong elements form the physical and energetic pillars of Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu, its philosophical foundation provides the ethical and intellectual framework that binds them into a coherent way of life. Without a guiding philosophy, skill and vitality risk becoming aimless or misdirected. In this tradition, that framework is drawn primarily from Ruism, more commonly referred to as Confucianism in its Latinization. Here, the art becomes more than a means of fighting and maintaining health—it becomes a vehicle for moral self-cultivation, the disciplined pursuit of harmony between inner character and outward conduct, and the preservation of a tradition in which technical excellence is inseparable from ethical responsibility.

3.3 Core Element Three: Ruist Philosophy

Martial tradition in Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu is equally a tradition of philosophical practice and the pragmatic cultivation of wisdom. At its heart lies a Ruist philosophical tradition (Ru Xue, 儒學), deeply rooted in Neo-Confucianism called Dao Xue (道學), or School of the Way, which evolved out of classical Ruism during the Song dynasty lead by Master Zhu Xi as a response to the institutionalized success of Mahayana Buddhism in China. In this view, martial training is not merely the acquisition of combative skill, but a pathway of self-cultivation—the art of living and becoming—grounded in the **junzi** (君子) ideal of learning for the self (xiu shen 修身), moral responsibility, social engagement, and disciplined conduct aligned with principle (li 理).

Ruism implicitly assumes a naturalistic and deeply relational understanding of life, positioning humans as highly differentiated moral agents embedded within an interdependent web of family, community, society, the world, and the cosmos. It teaches that human nature is inclined toward goodness, yet this potential must be intentionally developed through sustained and accumulated effort. Within this tradition, martial practice is not isolated from life; it expresses and tests one's character. Skill, influence, and power without virtue is dangerous; virtue without disciplined method is fragile. The work is to unite both through leadership.

Drawing upon the ancient canonical texts of the Four Books and Five Classics, the Ruist tradition identifies five constant virtues (五常 wu chang): ren 仁 (compassion), li 禮 (ritual conduct), yi 義 (rightness), zhi 智 (wisdom), and xin 信 (trust). In Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu, these are embodied as martial virtue (武德 wu de) with five external virtues of conduct representing respect, humility, honesty, fairness, and loyalty; and five internal virtues of mind representing will, endurance, perseverance, courage, and patience. Together, these form the notion of San He Wu De (三合武德), the "Three Harmonies of Martial Virtue," uniting a cultivated heart-mind with moral virtue and disciplined action.

Among the Confucian virtues, ren stands as the cornerstone. Often translated as humanity, compassion, benevolence, empathy, or kindness, ren refers to an inner disposition that recognizes the intrinsic dignity of others and acts not merely to preserve life, but to promote mutual flourishing and the greater good. More specifically, ren establishes both a lower and an upper boundary of moral conduct: in its negative form, it mirrors the Golden Rule—"do not do unto others what you would not want done to yourself"—and in its positive form, it emphasizes that "in establishing oneself, one should seek also to establish others and aim for the highest good."

More deeply, ren is rooted in concrete, lived relationships. It begins in the family and is anchored in the virtue of xiao (孝), or family reverence, which demands gratitude,

respect, and responsibility toward one's parents and elders. The family is not merely one social unit among many; it is the core social training ground in which the self first becomes coupled to others through daily interaction, care, love, and obligation. From birth to maturity, it forms the primary arena in which moral dispositions are developed and enacted. From this intimate foundation, moral concern radiates outward in ever-widening concentric circles—to the broader kin group, the community, the nation, and ultimately to all people in the world. In this way, ren is not an abstract or free-floating humanitarian sentiment, but a cultivated capacity that begins with concrete obligations and expands outwardly through lived practice.

This ethical core has been preserved across generations not as abstract doctrine but as lived tradition of praxis. Within the Luo Guang Yu lineage, masters have consistently emphasized that technical excellence and moral formation are inseparable: skill is to be guided by virtue, and virtue to be tempered through disciplined practice. In this way, Ruist philosophy transforms Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu into more than a system of combat and health cultivation—it becomes a way of life and a lifelong practice of character, where mastery is measured as much by who one becomes as by what one can do.

4. LINEAGE AND TRANSMISSION

Lineage is the chain of human relationships linking present-day practitioners to the founders of a tradition. In Chinese martial arts, it is more than a historical roster — it is a living inheritance of skill, knowledge, and ethos, sustained through successive generations. Each link in that chain carries both the art's technical repertoire and the moral responsibility to preserve and represent it faithfully.

Transmission is the active process by which this inheritance is carried forward. If lineage provides structural continuity, transmission is its lifeblood — the deliberate and often personal passing on of techniques, tactics, strategies, principles, interpretive frameworks, and values. It may take the form of formal instruction, direct apprenticeship, ceremonial recognition, oral teaching, written records, or, most profoundly, the embodied example of a master in practice.

This process is imbued with a deep sense of sacredness and reverence. In the teacher–student relationship (師徒關係 shī–tú guānxì), there is a parallel to the familial bond, often viewed as an extension of the parent-child dynamic. The teacher is not merely an instructor, but a moral guide, mentor, custodian, and even secondary parent, entrusted with shaping the student's development in skill, character, and life conduct. In turn, the student is expected to honor the teacher with the same respect and gratitude afforded to family — a related expression of xiao, or family reverence. This respect manifests in loyalty, diligence, and the faithful preservation of the art as it was entrusted.

Confucianism here emphasizes the teacher's role as a transmitter of both the Dao (道) and moral principle (li 理), demanding respect not only for the teacher's knowledge and experience, but for the tradition they embody. In the martial arts context, this meant the master's responsibility extended beyond technical instruction to cultivating the ethical framework necessary to wield skill rightly. Through this sacred relationship, the tradition is preserved and passed on not merely as a body of knowledge, but as a living, evolving moral practice.

Lineage without active transmission becomes an empty record; transmission without lineage risks drifting from the deeper framework that gives the art coherence and authority. In a traditional system, the two are bound by an ethic of custodianship — the understanding that to inherit the art is to accept responsibility for its preservation and principled development.

In Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu, lineage is a sacred fellowship that connects today's practitioners with the venerable masters of the past. It begins with the legendary founder Wang Lang and the second-generation master Sheng Xiao Dao Ren, and continues through recorded history with Li San Jian (c. 1821), Wang Rong Sheng (c. 1854), Fan Xu Dong (1841–1925), Luo Guang Yu (1888–1944), and Lin Bo Yan (1903–1990. Today, within our sub-family lineage, this living tradition is carried forward by masters such as Xu Jin Ge in Singapore and Kai Uwe Pel in Germany, who continue to preserve and transmit its authentic spirit.

This deep connection bonding nine generations over two-hundred years is not merely symbolic—it is the living conduit through which the art's combative, longevity, and philosophical dimensions have been refined and safeguarded across generations. Transmission in this

context is deeply embodied: less an abstract act of "teaching" than a lived process of absorbing principles through sustained, mindful practice within a community dedicated to carrying the art forward.

Seen in this light, lineage and transmission are not merely historical record or technical pedagogy. They are the deeply human mechanisms by which a martial tradition survives the passage of time, adapts to changing contexts without losing its essence, and maintains the living unity that makes it more than the sum of its parts.

5. THE LIVING UNITY OF TRADITION

In Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu, the three core elements—combative practices, longevity practices, and philosophical practices—form a single, balanced whole. This is the martial ideal of wen wu zhi dao (文武之道): the path of martial capability (wu 武) and civil refinement (wen 文). Wu provides the existential capacity to meet force with disciplined skill, while wen tempers that power with cultivated discernment, moral clarity, and a deep sense of human responsibility.

The combative tradition equips the practitioner to act decisively and forcefully under pressure, drawing on centuries of refined tactical knowledge. The longevity practices, most prominently in the Eighteen Arhats Qigong, preserve the body's vitality and steady the mind, ensuring that martial skill can be sustained across a lifetime rather than expended in a few intense years. The Confucian philosophical framework binds these capacities into a coherent moral path, fostering broad learning, ethical responsibility, and the continual development of character.

These elements are not simply parallel tracks of training—they are mutually reinforcing disciplines. Martial skill gains depth and restraint from ethical cultivation. Energy cultivation gains direction and discipline from martial application. Moral philosophy gains embodiment and resilience through the disciplined practice of both combat and longevity methods. Together, they produce not only a skilled combatant and healthy mind–body, but also a well-rounded person capable of contributing meaningfully to family, community, and society.

Within the Luo Guang Yu lineage, tradition has been preserved not as a set of static forms to be memorized, but as a living way to be enacted. Every lesson, intention, movement, and skill are infused with the values and principles that give the art its enduring meaning. The tradition survives precisely because it is lived—sustained by those who train, teach, and carry it forward with both skill and integrity.

6. CLOSING REMARKS

As a humble teacher, representative, and fellow custodian of the Luo Guang Yu Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu tradition, I see my role not merely as preserving a catalogue of techniques, but as carrying forward a living, adaptive tradition. This responsibility demands more than demonstration—it requires embodiment. To unite skill with virtue, and practice with purpose, is to ensure that what we pass on is not only functionally effective, but also technically precise, morally grounded, and spiritually whole.

Each generation inherits more than just an ecology of practices; we inherit a way of life shaped by wisdom, discipline, integrity, and reverence for the tradition and the venerable masters who came before us. Our task is to train diligently, act honorably, and teach sincerely, so that the next generation does more than learn the art—they live it. Only in this way can Seven Star Praying Mantis Kung Fu remain vibrant, relevant, and true to its spirit for generations to come.

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PAST ARTICLES

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