

Sam Chien: The 3 Battles “Mother Form”

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By Dr. Mark Wiley

For martial artists, one of the most important themes for developing better quality of life is maintaining a wide perspective on health and fitness, one that is based on connecting mind, body, and spirit with the physical actions of the martial arts. A glance at the local school or gym tells a different story.

People trying to become fit while not even engaging in what they are doing! The treadmill and stationary bike are perfect examples. Here we see people doing an activity that separates their lower body from their upper body (the legs are moving, but the waist and arms are not). We also find the mind not focused in the moment or even on the exercise (the person is watching TV, listening to music, reading a magazine). In many martial practices the classes are short at 45 minutes, and stances are assumed while hands are moved, but little emphasis is placed on connecting them with breath and intention. Is it any wonder that people are not achieving their desired fitness levels and martial skills, when not only is their mind and body split, but even their upper and lower bodies are not working in unison?

To remedy this I'd like to introduce those of you who may not be familiar, with a mind/body training form drawn from southern Kung-fu that includes a view to a wellness lifestyle that includes integration, synergism, holism, mind, body, and spirit. The movements of this form are as vital as its underlying principles, steeped in connecting mind, body and spirit, and its method of practice has the power to transform your fitness routine... and your life.

This form so impressive for health and strength building for the same reason it is applicable to martial art application. It integrates mind (intention), body (strength, tension, relaxation), spirit (psychology, mind-set), and breath (qi energy). Even though it derives from an esoteric Chinese martial art, it is a valid and impressive health system in its own right. It is called “sam chien” or the “three battles form.” There are many sam chien forms, from Five Ancestor Fist, Crane, Tiger boxing and more, and of course the cousin (or offspring form) San Chin found in many of the Okinawan karate styles. The information we present today is based in the tradition of Ngo Cho Kun or Five Ancestor Boxing, also spelled Wu Chu Chuan and Wuzuquan.

Underlying the martial techniques and concepts of this form are a set of principles. These principles not only inform the root techniques and their application, they also strengthen mind, body and spirit. Here I describe a few of the principles and how they benefit health and wellness. Let's take a look at the essence.



4 Essential Movement Concepts

Sam Chien is known as the “Mother Form” because it contains the main movement concepts that inform how every movement in the art is done. The practitioner is always aware of his “center line” and aims to move his waist from side to side along its axis as well as move his hands and arms within the following four concepts: *pu*(float), *tim* (sink), *tun* (swallow), and *toh* (spit out).

Pu (Float). Float is a metaphor for all motions and techniques that rise or cause your opponent to be lifted (“floated”) off his balance. When the opponent’s balance is destroyed, he will be in an awkward position, becoming “light as a feather blown by the wind,” thus making him easier to defeat. By taking advantage of your opponent’s attacking momentum, you can move with his force, borrow his strength, and combine with it your blocks and holds. You can then effectively uproot or “float” your opponent to throw him, or to simply knock him down.

Tim (Sink). Sink is a metaphor for all motions and techniques that pull down or cause your opponent to be lowered (“sunk”) off his balance. Such motions include the pressing hand, heavy hand, locks, throws and downward strikes. When you sink your hand into an opponent’s attacking hand or arm, your opponent will find himself unable either to lift his hand or to pull it back, thus finding it difficult to counter. Thus, by sinking, you can easily immobilize or trap your opponent’s arms. This sinking strategy is the hardest of the art’s four concepts to actualize. Only through proper training of *qi kun* and *sam chien* can proper sinking energy be developed. It is this sinking energy which makes *ngo cho kun* famous for its “heavy hand.”

Tun (Swallow). Swallow is a metaphor for all motions and techniques that pull forward or cause your opponent or his techniques to be guided forward (“swallowed”) and taken off his balance. To swallow simply means to retract the hand or to contract your extremities. By using such techniques as *kim* (grab), *kou* (hook), and combining them with hip rotation, you can swallow or neutralize an opponent’s attack. This will cause him not only to miss his target, but to lose his balance, after which you can counter attack swiftly with a *toh* (spit out) striking or pushing technique.

Toh (Spit Out). Spit Out is a metaphor for all motions and techniques that thrust forward or cause your opponent to be thrust away (“spit out”) after being taken off balance. To “spit out” is to strike out or extend your hand or foot to strike your opponent. After using a feint to confuse your opponent, you lash out with your intended strike amidst his confusion. By using the tactic of combining feints with strikes you can successfully overcome an opponent. In spitting, your hand is likened to “an arrow ready to shoot from a bow: swift and poised.”

The four movement concepts are used conjointly, like combining “swallow” with “sinking” in your block and grab in an effort to “float” an opponent. Or you can combine “spit out” with “sinking” to attack your opponent, immobilizing his hand or depressing your attack hand with “sinking” energy, thus making your opponent unable to thwart your technique. The physical understanding and applications of the four movement concepts are trained in the *qi kun* (commencement fist), which is the set that opens every fist form.

This set is trained and developed through a series of “structure tests,” wherein practitioners train their root and ability to internalize and apply the four essential concepts of *pu*, *tim*, *tun*, *toh*. These structure tests now involve two people working together as partner, not adversaries, wherein the mind, body and spirit of both must connect and move as one.



Points for Proper Practice

Maintain Steady Vision. While performing any physical activity, look sharply and focus your eyesight so that you can see clearly either up close or far away. Look with eyes like an eagle, that take in everything yet focus only on what they need. For fitness training, and in all aspects of life where concentration and focus is essential, maintaining a steady vision, a strong gaze full of intention maximizes effort and insight... and results!

Maintain a Calm Spirit. Remaining relaxed and focused while training will prevent you from feeling nervous, losing confidence, and giving up. Combining breath, posture and intention in movement allows you to remain calm and not panic or feel at a loss, when the training is difficult and you need that extra push to go the extra mile or lift another set. Remaining calm or spiritually "centered" is the hallmark of even the most basic of spiritual practices. But rather than sitting in meditation, if you coordinate breath and thought and movement, your fitness routine becomes a moving meditation.

Alternate Strength with Relaxation. Use strength to move the weight. Use suppleness to release it. Strength training alternates between "hard" and "soft" motions, or tension followed by relaxation. This allows time to strengthen the tendons (which relate to the liver), the muscles (which relate to the spleen), the blood (which relates to the heart), and the breath (which relates to the lungs).

Prepare by Being Well-trained. Finding the right personal trainer, and doing the correct exercises in the correct manner, will make you well-trained. You must commit to the training as part of your new lifestyle. And with proper training comes proper body development and good health. This prepares you for life's challenges and increases immunity when health is compromised.

The mind-body part of being well-trained is essential. In a basic sense, this is the idea of being "in the moment." That is, neither being ahead of yourself nor beneath the wheel of life. Proper training of health maintenance practices will prepare you for even the worst of conditions. Where merely lifting weight makes you strong, a mind-body approach prepares you spiritually, mentally, physically and energetically through its holistic integration within each effort.

Don't Neglect Your Training. The idea here is to make a conscious decision to take charge of your health and wellness. And the best way to do that is to create a ritual, a daily routine that includes diet, exercise and mental and spiritual practices. The daily training of this form is such a ritual that is at once healthful for the spirit, the energy, the muscles, the tendons, the breath and the mind. You must carry out your healthy lifestyle rituals everyday, regardless. If not, you may "fall off the wagon" and find it harder to get back on track again.

Demonstrations of Sam Chien

Below are two videos of the Sam Chien mother form. The first is performed by the late Grandmaster Alexander Lim Co of the Beng Kiam line of Ngo Cho Kun. The second is performed by sifu Daniel Kun of Kong Han Line Ngo Cho Kun. They are very similar and different at the same time. Yet both apply the four concepts of Sink, Float, Swallow, Spit and align the movements with breath inhalation and exhalation timing, along with tension and relaxation and focus of mind and intention. Have a look, see how it may compare to a method of Sam Chien or San Chin you practice now... or see how adopting such a form might improve your martial training and mind/body/spirit wellness goals.

From Martial Concept to Life Application

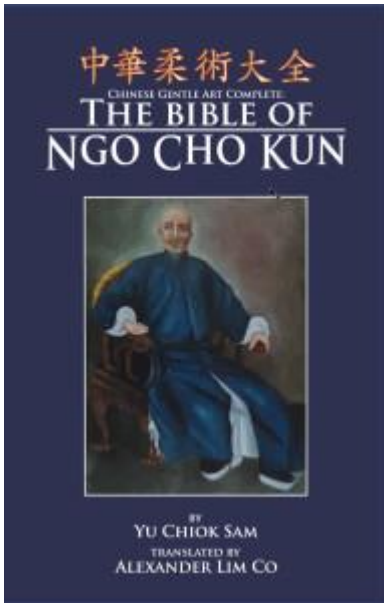
The purpose of this article was to illustrate how something that appears unrelated to health can, in reality, be a strong tool to achieving healthy goals. If we look at the basic concept of this Three Battles form, we can then apply its essence to virtually any task in life. Here's how.

The basic ideas of this Ngo Cho training form is integrating mind/body/spirit by synergistically coordinating breath with intention with movement during the course of a single physical activity. If we apply this to lifting weight, here's what we get.

1. As long as you keep your mind focused on your intention of isolating specific muscles when lifting a weight—rather than focusing on the struggle—your mind and movement will be integrated. Put the mind IN the body, not outside of it.
2. If your breath is timed with your movements, inhaling while releasing the weight-lift and exhaling while lifting or pressing the weights, then intrinsic energy will develop body strength. Coordinating breath and action creates a connection that increases results.
3. If you “sink” your weight while lifting/pressing the weights by lowering your center of gravity, you will be on balance, avoid injury and strengthen the tendons and muscles. This seems obvious, but many people do curls with only their upper body. If you lower your center, when the weights are raised their weight will push through your body into the ground, and the ground will send that energy back to your arms. You will need step 1 (mind in the body), to notice this, but when you do your progress will soar!
4. If all of this (tension, relaxation, breathing, moving, and intention) is done continuously for a period of time, then it becomes a spiritual practice, a type of “moving meditation” that centers, integrates and develops mind, body and spirit.

I wish you much luck in finding innumerable ways in your activities of daily living where you can apply these martial concepts and reach toward optimal health and martial goals. The Sam Chien form, aside from developing strong martial techniques, is a mind-body fitness approach that turns routine into results.

To learn more about Sam Chien, check out these great books!



In *The Bible of Ngo Cho Kun*, Alexander Lim Co pours scholarship and more than 50 years' experience in Ngo Cho into the first-ever illustrated publication, and English-language translation, of this historical book on Fukien Five Ancestor Boxing. Long held as the “Bible of Ngo Cho Kun,” this treatise on Five Ancestor Fist Kung-Fu has been a treasured keepsake among lineage holders of the style. Originally published in China 1917 by Yu Chiok Sam, one of the “Ngo Cho Ten Tigers,” or leading disciples of the art’s founder Chua Giok Beng. It has been out of print for over 90 years!

“This translation is an absolute gem for Chinese martial arts enthusiasts the world over.”—Jake Burroughs, The Ground Never Misses

“Given that we are discussing a manual from 1917, and many of the early Republic era texts tended to be somewhat obscure, this was a pleasant surprise. Any student will want to have a copy of this manual on their bookshelf.”—Ben Judkins, Kung-Fu Tea

Kong Han Ngo Cho: Forms, Weapons and Fighting begins with a historical presentation of the development of the various lines of Ngo Cho—each with a different focus on the representative systems of Tai Cho, Crane, Monkey, Monk, and Damo. The book then delves into the fundamental training that sets the basis for mastery of this style. Empty hand techniques, internal organ qigong exercises, solo forms, two man forms, training sets, fighting applications, weapon forms and applications, and full-contact lei-tai competition training are all presented in this comprehensive volume.

Several forms are taught in great detail in solo, two-man, training sets and applications. These include Sam Chien (Three Battles), Di Sip Kun (20 Punches), Si Mun Pa Kat (Hitting the Four Corners). The weapons forms and applications detailed include the Da Dao (two-handed sword) and the 5-foot Pole.

About the Author



Dr. Mark Wiley is a martial arts grandmaster, holistic healer, researcher and author. His interest in traditional health practices was not just a mere curiosity; he was looking for long-lasting relief from the debilitating migraines and chronic pain that plagued him from childhood. He began martial arts training in 1979 and the study of mind-body health practices in 1987. Since 1994, he has been conducting extensive training and research in the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan. Dr. Mark has a Master's in Health Care Management, and Doctorate's in both Alternative Medicine and Oriental Medicine. He has authored 15 books and has served as editor of the publications, *Martial Arts Illustrated*, *Martial Arts Legends*, *Tambuli*, *Martial Arts Masters Magazine*, *Journal of Asian Martial Arts*, *Quality of Life*, and *The Catalyst Review*, and for the companies Tuttle Publishing, Agora Publishing, and Unique Publications. He is a health contributor to Easy Health Options, The Healthy Back Institute, The Chinese Medicine Academy, The Pavilion Center, and is the CEO and publisher of Tambuli Media. For Tambuli he is author of [Arthritis Reversed](#) and [Mastering Eskrima Disarms](#).