

The Name Is The Syllabus

V2 · 參 · 蔡李佛 — Choy Li Fut

TLDR / 80-20

蔡李佛 declares its own contents: Choy family fist, Li family footwork, Buddhist palm.

Three sources in one name — and a style that almost every martial arts library mentions without ever teaching.

The Keys

1. What the name encodes.

蔡 — the Choy family's fist. 李 — the Li family's footwork. 佛 — Buddhist palm. Three lineages named in order of what each contributed. A student who knows only the name already knows the art is a composite and knows which part came from where.

2. Where it comes from.

Founded in **1830** by a man from Xinhui, Guangdong. Carried by a family lineage from Guangzhou to Hong Kong during the war, and now recognised as national intangible cultural heritage. A living style with a traceable transmission path.

3. How it appears in other people's books — always the same way.

In a discussion of plum-blossom naming conventions, as an example of somebody else's point. In a Kenpo taxonomy, listed beside Wing Chun Pai, Tong Long Pai and Bak Hok Pai. In a Wing Chun text, as a style some students happened to practise. **Three mentions, three lists, no form, no principle, no drill.**

4. Why that pattern exists at all.

An author writing about their own art names the neighbours to locate it — *here is what we are not*. A list confirms a thing exists and transmits nothing about it. So a style can be widely known and nowhere taught, simply because nobody who practises it wrote the book you happen to be holding.

AI's Take

The useful habit here is a reading test you can apply to any library. Ask whether a subject appears as **a heading or as an item in someone else's list**. The first means a practitioner is talking; the second means a neighbour is pointing.

It also says something about how martial arts knowledge travels. The information that survived into general reference works is the placement — where the style sits, who is near it. What did not survive is any of the technique, and no amount of adding more books by other people's practitioners will change that.

Choy Li Fut itself is large, living and well documented in its own literature. Absence from any one shelf is a statement about that shelf.