



KRISTOPHER SKINNER/TIMES

MASTER GINI LAU, left, practices a kung fu form with student Sherry Kennedy on Thursday in Walnut Creek. As young artists, Lau, Jackie Chan, Samo Hung and four others trained and performed 365 days a year. Their experiences were made into a movie, "Painted Faces."

Kung fu master preserves legacy

■ Gini Lau often was forced to disguise herself as a boy while enduring grueling warrior training in Hong Kong

By Jackie Burrell
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Long before Chow Yun Fat and Michelle Yeoh swirled above the "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" rooftops or David Caradine talked about "Little Grasshopper," kung fu was an imperial combat technique.

Twelfth-century warriors disarmed foes, dislocated their joints and shredded their tendons using techniques taught today in strip mall judo shops and martial arts studios.

But the discipline and technique of ancient martial arts forms like Eagle Claw kung fu



GINI LAU watches Sherry Kennedy and Johnny Lau practice a technique. These days, Lau judges exhibitions and teaches.

are a historical legacy passed down through the generations from master to disciple and father to son — or daughter.

For Eagle Claw, eight generations of training come to rest in the heart and hands of Master Gini Lau, daughter of Great

Grand Master Lau Fat Mang, and heir to three dynasties' worth of warrior tradition.

In truth, the petite, soft-spoken San Ramon resident does not look like a kung fu legend with lethal weapons for hands.

Her long glossy hair is swept up and held in place with a flower; her features are delicate and her smile is infectious.

From early childhood, the Hong Kong émigré was trained in a fighting style that dates to the 12th century southern Sung Dynasty, when warriors used the distinctive talonlike hand movements — Eagle Claw — to tear tendons, rip muscles from bone and incapacitate enemies.

During the Ming Dynasty, a Shaolin monk blended the distinctive hand work with weapons and long-range technique still

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