

Study Extensively

Study extensively, inquire carefully, ponder thoroughly, sift clearly, and practice earnestly. --Zhu Xi

Zhu Xi was a 12th century Chinese thinker who managed to combine elements of Taoism and Buddhism in a Confucian framework. The popularity of his Neo-Confucianism set the stage for a Chinese system of state examinations based on his edited list of Chinese classics. No, I am not about to give you a lecture on Chinese philosophy nor on *chuan-fa*, but I do wish to offer his five recommendations as a guide for both intelligent citizens in general, and intelligent martial artists in particular.

First we must ask what “extensively” means. In today’s modern age, there is much more knowledge available to the casual learner than at any time in history, unless you happened to have been the librarian in Alexandrian Egypt before the Romans (probably Aurelian) burned all those scrolls in the third century. Despite the availability of knowledge, how many of us really study anything, let alone study it extensively?

I voluntarily took up a study of French in the ’70s because I was annoyed at having to look up the smallest French phrase appearing in an English novel. The author had assumed that any intelligent person reading the book would understand the common phrase, but I didn’t, so I said “*Asse’est assez* (Enough’s enough)” and set about learning to read the language. Yet, I still can’t read a French newspaper. When I sponsored Roland Maroteaux in 1984 and then visited France to teach during the next 3 summers, I studied spoken French so I could teach better. Yet, I still can’t initiate a casual conversation with French friends on anything except perhaps Shiho Nage or Ippon Kumite. I realize that I have studied French to a greater extent than many; but could my study be called “extensive”? I don’t know what would mark it as such, but I would not call it an extensive study until I could comfortably read, speak, and understand the language in at least 75% of the cases (I prefer 90% which is at least an A-).

How many martial artists of any style from any cultural tradition truly study extensively? Extensive could mean studying deeply or widely or both. Let’s say you have settled on training in Parker Kenpo. You have a black belt but are not sure what it takes to make fifth dan. You are impressed with Master Parker’s many innovations but you don’t know what inspired them or what base he innovated from. You know he studied under William Chow but are not sure exactly how Chow taught or what his other successors are teaching. You have never compared Parker Kenpo to other kempo systems nor have you looked at the variations carried on by his senior students. So, even if you have not broadened your martial studies with a familiarity of subjects as far-flung as ju-jitsu and karate, neither have you deepened your knowledge of Ed Parker’s Kenpo.

Just as I was unsure what could be considered an “extensive” study of French (but had my own estimation of it), I am not sure what would be considered an extensive study of Parker Kenpo. But, I would bet that most kempo black belts would consider studying the aspects suggested in the paragraph above a good beginning.

If you earn a BA and pass your foreign language requirement by taking three semesters of French, a high school student might think that you have studied French extensively. College students would not. However, if you got a BA in French Language and Literature, even college students would acknowledge that you had studied the language extensively. If you get a black belt in Kenpo or any martial art, for that matter, and you can illustrate the shodan requirements, other black belts would not think you've study the art extensively. But if you can compare your Kenpo with their kempo, TKD, Shotokan, Shito, etc., even upper level dan-holders in other martial arts would acknowledge that you have studied extensively.

In order to study extensively, you need to "inquire carefully" (next week).