

CHI FLOW

NEWSLETTER

Bagua's Heaven Palm

We will profile the Heaven palm and consider its place within the Pre-Heaven and Post-Heaven Trigram Symbols.

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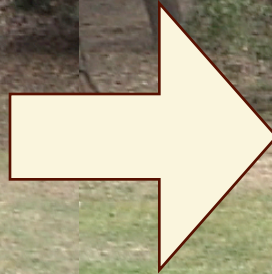
Pat Kessler describes the beginnings of her practice of Wu style T'ai Chi Ch'uan with David McCullar.

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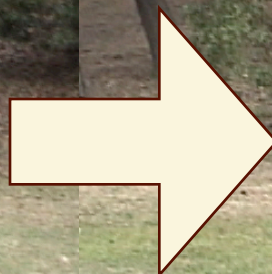
Another Rebuttal: Misinformation in a Rose

We pick up the topics of Dantian Rotation and Wang Hao Da.

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1. The Practitioner on the Left intercepts a right cross punch from the opponent on the Right; 2. The Practitioner on the Left uses the Heaven Palm shape to bridge into the Opponent's center; 3. Instead of exchanging blows, the Practitioner on the Left wraps the left arm around the Opponent's neck to set up a Reverse Scarf Hold, and further reaches down and takes the Opponent's right leg at the back of the knee; 4. As the Opponent loses balance, the Reverse Scarf Hold is applied as a neck or spinal crank, and with the help of the leg as a lever (and the opponent's further bodily reactions) the severity of the crank can develop and increase.



THE TRIGRAMS AND BAGUA'S PALM

by Gerald A. Sharp

The Eight Palms, of Baguazhang (or, Eight Trigrams Palms) are primarily derived from the various shapes of the palms based on the Eight Trigrams as featured in the I-Ching (Book of Changes). The trigrams are eluded to in such works as the Tao Te Ching and the Hua Hu Ching. The Eight Palms have a variety of actions associated with them - as many as the progressive nature of the lines of Bagua.

The three lines of the trigrams not only refer to the palms but also the action of the hand, body, and foot. When the hand initiates, the rest of body follows closely in sequence finishing in the feet. This approach to the practice of Baguazhang moves beyond an emphasis placed solely on the Palms -- and isolated techniques or particular movements, but instead, point to a more holistic integration of hand, body, and foot.

In this first installment on Bagua's Eight Palms we focus on the Heaven Palm.

BAGUA'S HEAVEN PALM



In Bagua, there are two symbols, the Pre and Post Heaven Trigrams. The Pre Heaven Symbol bases itself on opposites: Heaven / Earth, Fire / Water, Lake / Mountain, Thunder / Wind, and the Post Heaven Symbol is cyclical, reflecting the seasons and various aspects attributed to or associated with them. The practice of Bagua often begins with concepts associated with the polar, or Pre-Heaven arrangement. The intermediate stage often focuses on circular concepts. The advanced stage focuses on the unification and integration of both ideas.

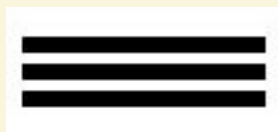
In the early stages of Bagua practice, the palms are studied. One is taught how to form the shapes of the palms, synthesize them with movement (Mother Palms), and apply techniques. In this way, the shapes organize and lay out the primary path of study for students. The Heaven Palm is characterized by actions of intercepting, entering, or application in which the heart(s) of the palm(s) face up. The thumb is spread for catching, and the heart of the palm is concave for striking or grabbing.



In the theory of Bagua, the symbols with the first line unbroken are considered primarily Yang, while the symbols with a first broken line are considered Yin. These are associated with the human characteristics for man and woman respectively. The unbroken line of Yang is also associated with the sky above (which is endless and vast), the horizontal line of the horizon, and the personal characteristics of strength, power, and untiring (Yang) energy.

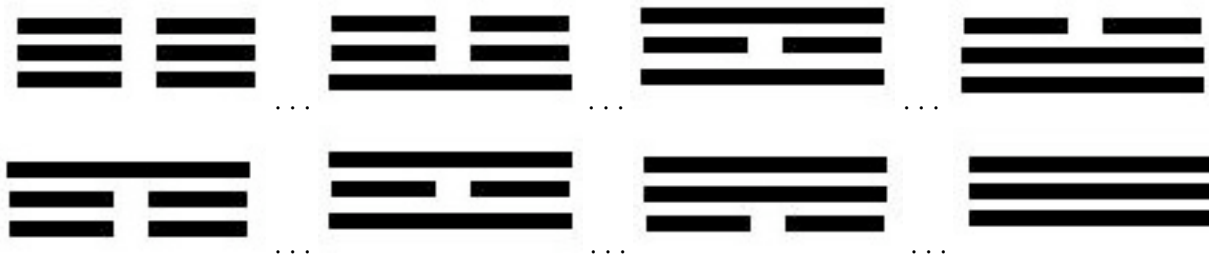
The Heaven symbol is in the primary position on the vertical axis with Earth in the Pre-Heaven trigram. In the Post-Heaven arrangement, the Heaven symbol moves to the location that Mountain occupies the Pre-Heaven arrangement. Heaven's palm is extended and faces upward. The techniques associated with Heaven Palm ought to be continuous and full. The palm that faces upward both slices across and twists and turns.

The Heaven Palm is often used as a bridge to horizontally enter across the opponent's center-line, and then -- in a slight lifting twisting manner -- take the opponent's neck in a circular choke or head manipulation. The diagonal crossing palm(s) can also be used to hook and turn the corner to gain control of the opponent's back or back of leg(s). The palm transitions from right to left and left to right are also useful in attacking the neck or throat from the back after entering with a duck under or other technique utilized to gain the opponent's back.



Qian. The Heaven Trigram.

This trigram is associated with the action of splitting. One association is the (mythical heavenly creature the) dragon. It also represents the never ending horizon, that that lies forever in the distance and remains our greatest challenge: ourselves. Heaven is associated with the following traits: active, bright, innovative, strong, unyielding and yet not unchangeable.



MATHEMATICS AS A CORE PRINCIPLE OF NEI JIA KUNG FU (PART 1)

BY DAVE TAYLOR

The T'ai Chi Ch'uan classic says, "When the opponent does not move, I don't move. When the opponent moves first, I still arrive first." This sounds impossible. Is there a way that can this strange and mysterious advice be integrated into a system of martial arts? I believe that this feature of Nei Jia kung fu is at the core of the difference between External and Internal styles of Chinese kung fu and that it can be illustrated using a simple game.



In external (Wei Jia) martial arts, force and speed are maximized. These attributes can be enhanced by training to a certain extent, but the weak and the slow are destined to be defeated every time. This is just what one expects in Olympic fencing or Western boxing, where a single good move done with enough speed and force that the opponent cannot effectively counter it is likely to be decisive. The emphasis is inevitably on the offensive.

In the Chinese (Nei Jia) Internal Martial arts, the claim is made that force and speed are not the decisive factors. Instead, the emphasis seems to be on the defense or on counterattacks. A variety of other factors involving skill, relaxation, and experience are said to be decisive in Nei Jia kung fu according to the T'ai Chi classics and other writings. But it was not obvious to me how this was to be accomplished in my first reading. I found

that one of the more annoying aspects of these texts was the overarching emphasis on Eight Trigrams or Five Elements. The texts seemed to transition from relatively sensible-seeming concepts to allegorical discussions of Chinese philosophy and astrology that were impractical at best.



I now see things quite differently. In my opinion, the emphasis on the Eight Trigrams or Five Elements in Nei Jia kung fu is neither allegorical nor indirect. Instead, the emphasis on the Eight Trigrams or the Five Elements is direct instruction that requires only a some background, context and practice to apply as a martial art. Unfortunately, there is both a conceptual and contextual problem for a Western audience -- or perhaps



for any modern audience -- in fully appreciating the Eight Trigrams or the Five Elements. Instead of trying to present this foundation directly, I will try to build on familiar concepts to provide a useful context. This will show how it is possible to see how an emphasis on defense or on counterattacks can be consistent with skill, relaxation, and experience. The actual connection with the Eight Trigrams and the Five Elements will be made elsewhere.

Consider a contest where two opponents perform the same action, "A:" say a straight punch. A winner might be chosen because one player inflicts more damage on the other. If the two opponents strike simultaneously, the winner might be determined by which player is able to exert more force. If the two opponents strike with the same force at different times, the player to strike first might be the winner. This sort of very simple contest does not result in a very interesting game structure.

The game can be expanded to two possible actions, "A" and "B:" say a straight punch and an uppercut. If both players strike simultaneously, and action "A" always beats action "B," then this is still a rather boring game. It could be slightly more interesting -- like the proverbial bar fight -- if one players strikes before the other, but it is still not a very interesting game.

Let's expand the number of options to, "A" "B" or "C:" say a straight punch an uppercut and a hook punch. If both players strike simultaneously, and "A" always beats "B" while "B" always beats "C," the game can still be interesting. The mathematical structure of game theory is that just because we know "A" beats "B" and "B" beats "C," the available information says nothing about the outcome of "A" vs "C."

(This is an example of non-transitivity.)



If we accept a game structure in which "A" beats "B," "B" beats "C," and "C" beats "A," we have the familiar game structure that we know from the game sometimes called



“Rock, Paper, Scissors.” (The image at right is from Wikipedia.)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rock,_Paper,_Scissors)

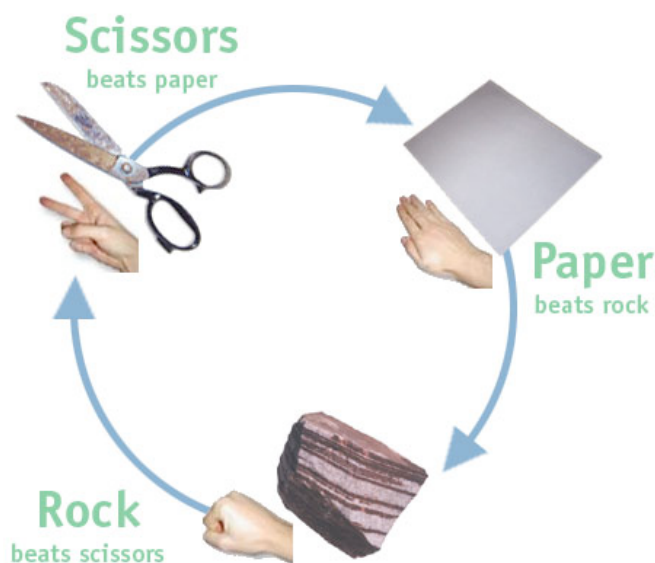
It is possible to try to gain an advantage by knowing your opponents tendencies, but there are now enough options that the game that the outcome is actually too random for our purposes: either player may select an action that defeats the selected action of the other player.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magma_%28algebra%29)

There is an approach to playing this game that will allow one player to always win. It is regarded as cheating in the “Rock, Paper, Scissors” game: you wait until the other player makes his selection and then you select the action that will beat their choice. By following your opponent, you gain the advantage. Skill in evaluating the character of the opponent’s action goes hand in hand with experience in knowing the structure of the game to secure a winning result.

It turns out that “Rock, Paper, Scissors” is the simplest game with this sort of structure. This game also seems to have been invented in China. It also goes under the name “Rock, Scissors, Cloth.” The Five Elements and the Eight Trigrams are both more complicated but they share key aspects of the same overall group structure.

In my opinion this game theory concept explains why the emphasis in Nei Jia kung fu seems to be on the defense or on counterattacks. It also provides a context for how skill and experience can prove to be decisive every time. This is also a way that permits success using the approach proscribed by the T’ai Chi Ch’uan classic: “When the opponent does not move, I don’t move. When the opponent moves first, I still arrive first.”



The T’ai Chi Classic says, “When the opponent does not move, I don’t move. When the opponent moves first, I still arrive first.”

By following your opponent, you gain the advantage. Skill in evaluating the character of the opponent’s action goes hand in hand with experience in knowing the structure of the game to secure a winning result.



My Start in T'ai Chi

by Pat Kessler

September 11, 2001, changed a lot of things, including my job. I work for FedEx Express as a flight captain, piloting MD10 and MD11 aircraft. Security at work has always been strong, and 9-11 made it worse. Some time after the dust settled, the FedEx flight department initiated a "cockpit defense" course. This was a one-day hands-on close-quarters self-defense course, based on the SPEAR ("Spontaneous Protection Enabling Accelerated Response") system. I learned a lot during that day, but I also knew that I needed and wanted to know more if self-defense was to be a real ability.



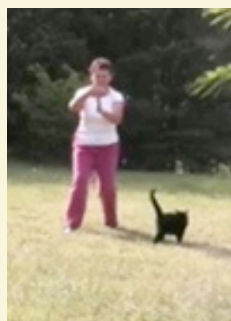
My brother-in-law suggested Krav Maga, the system used by Israeli forces. A Krav Maga studio had just opened in the Memphis area, so I signed up. The school also offered noon classes in T'ai Chi. This was the Yang-style short form, and I stayed after my Krav Maga class to do the T'ai Chi.

I found the T'ai Chi fairly interesting, and the changes in my balance seemed to help my performance in dressage (a horse-back discipline). Unfortunately, attending Krav Maga classes three times a week (the minimum suggested for study) was difficult. The studio was a half-hour drive from home during non-rush hours, and the classes were not at a convenient time of day for coping with the rest of my life. Therefore, I reluctantly dropped out.

The T'ai Chi still interested me, and I acquired a number of texts and a few videos aimed at the beginner. I do know that self-taught T'ai Chi is far from ideal, and my progress was painfully slow. I also took the same tack with Pilates -- sporadic attempts to learn, and to keep at it.

Early in 2006, a woman who keeps her horse at the same farm where I keep mine commented that her boyfriend was out of town. He had gone to California to study T'ai Chi for a week. I commented that it sounded like he was pretty serious about it. She confirmed this, and I asked if he would consider teaching it. She was sure that he would, because he was already teaching it.





“I had a hard time remembering the order of the forms, and my practice was sporadic as I figured out how to schedule time to practice something I felt very unclear about. These things got sorted out, however, and practice and instruction became more and more important to me.”

I met her boyfriend at her birthday party a few weeks later, and we talked a while about T'ai Chi, particularly the Wu-style. I mentioned my interest in the martial aspects, which was well received. I got contact information and agreed to come out for a free lesson to see if I would really be interested.

After my first lesson, my new teacher, David McCullar (who some of you know), told me that if I were going to be any good at this activity, it would take more than showing up once a week for a lesson. I was expected to practice on my own, and take more instruction whenever I could manage it. Then he told me how much he would charge as much as a dressage lesson, actually. I took a long moment and a big gulp, and agreed.

The first few weeks were rough. I had a hard time remembering the order of the forms, and my practice was sporadic as I figured out how to schedule time to practice something I felt very unclear about. These things got sorted out, however, and practice and instruction became more and more important to me.

Eighteen months after that first lesson, my average week has around twelve hours of T'ai Chi, in some form or another, including 2-3 training sessions with David. I train slow set, fast set, push hands, moving steps, applications, and am learning broadsword. With David's encouragement, I studied with

Gerry Sharp for 10 hours last August. I look forward to learning as much as I can. I started somewhat late - in my 50's - and have regrets that I don't have several decades to improve my art.

There have been benefits. I have always been a reasonably competent and confident person, but these aspects have become deeper and quieter in my psyche. My dressage riding has improved incredibly. This is due to changes in both balance and core strength. There have been a few difficulties, including a chronic shoulder problem (which started before T'ai chi) and a husband who wishes that my practice time were spent watching television with him. To be fair, he likes that I do things I enjoy.

T'ai Chi ranks in my top lifetime learning experiences, which also include learning to ride horses, learning to fly, music, whitewater canoeing, windsurfing and gourmet cooking. Windsurfing has fallen by the wayside, but I expect T'ai Chi to be with me for the rest of my life.

Pat Kessler (Tennessee, USA)





Zhang Jin Gui of the Chian Chuan Society pictured here at work as Treasurer. Zhang Jin Gui is one of the most senior and most advanced members of the group. The Chian Chuan Society is part of the combined legacy of Wu Chian Chuan, Ma Yueh Liang and Wu Ying Hua. There are many members of this group with skill. Zhang Jin Gui has great skill. Beyond that he is also one of those individuals that it is simply a privilege and a pleasure to know.

Another Rebuttal: Misinformation in a Rose Nixon Article

by Gerald A. Sharp

I have decided that Rose Nixon's article featuring Liu Ji Fa in the October 2007 issue of T'ai Chi magazine cannot be let pass without comment. In the past I have admired Ms. Nixon's articles on Pei Xi Rong and his students. But this latest article is different. I think that it leaves a great deal to be desired. I also think that there are things presented as facts in this article that must be questioned.

Liu Ji Fa is a legitimate student of Ma Yueh Liang, and I am happy to say that I met him many times at the Shanghai Music Center on Tuesday mornings as Ma taught his closest students various aspects of the Wu Style system. He also regularly attended the monthly demonstrations of the Chian Chuan Taichichuan So-

Rattus Festivus

Rattus

The Chinese New Year, or Spring Festival, 4706, Year of the Earth Rat begins on Feb. 7, 2008. New Year festivities traditionally start on the first day of Spring, according to the lunar calendar, which is still used for festive occasions such as the Chinese New Year. Many Chinese calendars will print both the solar and the Chinese lunar dates on Western calendars, which were officially adopted in China in 1911.

Legend has it that in ancient times, Buddha asked all the animals to meet him on the other side of a river to celebrate the first day of Spring. Twelve came, the Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Rooster, Dog, and Pig. However, unbeknownst to all the animals, including the Ox, the Rat had hopped on the back of the Ox, and as they reached the other side, the Rat leaped off and by doing so, arrived first. As they arrived, one by one, Buddha named a year after each one, and he announced that the people born in each animal's year would have some of that animal's personality. Therefore, people born in the Year of the Rat are known for their manipulative skills, tactfulness, and as legend would have it, go to great extremes to win a battle, regardless of size or position. Yet with some, honesty and an unprejudiced attitude is something they also aspire to. The following years belong to the Rat: 1900, 1912, 1924, 1936, 1948, 1960, 1972, 1984, 1996, 2008, 2020.



ciety, (founded by Wu Jian Quan originally in 1935 and led by Ma Yueh Liang and Wu Ying Hua until their passing). However, I believe that the references to both Wang Hao Da and dantian rotation in this article are way off base.

First of all, Teacher Ma trained as a western Medical Doctor at the Beijing Medical College (which Ma always called the "Pe-king" Medical College). He earned his credentials in 1929. He specialized in hematology and eventually ran the blood clinics in Shanghai until his retirement.

I like to think that because he had been trained in western science, teacher Ma engaged in a constant process of questioning the concepts and practices he encountered. My take was that he searched for scientific fact over fiction. He was constantly putting everything under a microscope, as it were, to get to the core of what really mattered. It is unusual to find an adept teacher take this sort of a reductionist approach to the study of a holistic art, but that's what happened. It touched many aspects of what Ma did, and I think it is a major part of not only what made him great but also of what made him a great teacher. Again and again Ma would be able to break things down take me step by step through movements I did not think I would ever be able to do. I would start off just being polite and Ma would still be able to teach me more than I thought I was capable of doing. Ma also took this approach with presenting the process underlying his art when he presented concepts like the Eight Trigrams. While they are usually presented as mystical, arcane , and seemingly useless, Ma taught me practical ways to use the Eight Trigrams in applications.

Teacher Ma could still find areas where reductionism was not required. He was once asked if his art was rooted in Taoism or Buddhism or any ancient philosophical or religious practice, and his response was simply, "It's all one..." When pressed, he repeated, "It's all one."

Returning to my point concerning dantian rotation, teacher Ma taught this in Zhangzhuang, or standing meditation. Specifically in the Earth Phase of the Wu Xing Chi Kung of the Wu Style Taijiquan system (which is actually performed as seated meditation). The rotation was first horizontal, then vertical, and finally

Rattus Festivus

Festivus

During Chinese New Year celebrations, people often wear red, and exchange red envelopes (which often contain "lucky money" for children). Fireworks, that shower the festivities, along with fire, were once used to scare away evil spirits and monsters during the ancient Spring Festival (or, Chinese New Year). The Chinese New Year is more often than not called Spring Festival, because it is considered the first day of Spring according to the ancient calendar which was replaced by the Western one around 1911.

Since the ancient Han Dynasty (around 200 B.C.), the ancient dragon dance has been practiced traditionally to encourage good luck and long life. The dragon is made of silk, paper, and bamboo and may stretch as much as a hundred feet long or more. The participants are under the fabric of the dragon, but with practice, skill, and strength make it look real and bring it "magically" to life. The Lion Dance, which came along later, has gained in popularity because of its dynamic practice and dramatic Kung Fu skill. However, a great Dragon Dance that is smooth and twists and turns with no outward show of force can require as much "Kung Fu" in the hands of skilled performers. Participation in either the Dragon or Lion dances are revered as both a skill and an honor to perform.

Lantern festivals are also immensely popular during Chinese New Year, and while the ancient paper lanterns are still often on display at such events, so now are a myriad of other forms of luminous works of art including three-dimensional landscapes and flowers made from lights; as well as dragon boats that are lavishly dressed with a multitude of colorful lights and a barrage of unique decorations. Chinese Opera and plays retelling episodes from Journey to the West (The Monkey King and his "Jing Go Beng," or Magical Staff), Na Zhua (a Boy Prodigy who fights with a magical ring and silk cloth), and various legends featuring good overcoming evil are also extremely popular during Chinese New Year festivities.



combined both ideas in a more spherical manner in both directions: it follows the both the circumference and S-Curve of the Yin and Yang symbol. So I concur that Ma did present this material in his teachings.

Teacher Ma (Yueh Liang) was a practical man, and his practice did not rely on mysticism or lofty ideas that couldn't be conclusively verified. Teacher Ma avoided using force or employing tactics: instead he paid considerable attention to precision and flexibility.

However, while Teacher Ma would teach this dantian rotation, it did not end there. In my experience, he would present dantian rotation in one breath and in the next breath Ma would debunk it. His overarching teaching was that if any practice didn't lead to minimalism or simplicity it ought to be forgotten. The idea presented in the Rose Nixon article, that Ma taught Dantian rotation so freely is untrue. He would teach the act of simply sitting or standing, perhaps including the aforementioned visualizations. I do not believe that this should be viewed as teacher Ma's practice reinforcing the sort of mystic view of dantian rotation that is presented in the Rose Nixon article.

Next, I am astonished by the idea that Liu Ji Fa reminds Rose Nixon of Wang Hao Da. As I discussed earlier, Liu Ji Fa attended the Monthly meetings supporting Ma and the association. He also attended the Tuesday morning training for advanced students at the Music Center. I have no evidence that Wang Hao Da ever went to the Music Center in the '90's at all. If he attended more than two meetings it cannot be verified. Wang Hao Da's name is not listed on the attendance roster more than a couple of times at best. I had never heard of him before he was featured in magazines or promoted as an indoor student of Ma Yueh Liang by George Xu. I have been able to verify that he did study with Ma for a short time in the '80's, but was not considered an indoor student.

Further, an important part of training with Ma Yueh Liang was the interaction with his advanced students. Teacher Ma always asked me to visit and practice push hands with his closest students in People's Park. He specifically mentioned Zhang Jin Gui, Chen Xiao Qun, Zhou Zhan



Gerald A. Sharp pictured here doing the Wu style T'ai Chi Ch'uan "Knife" (Broadsword) form at Ma Yueh Liang's house, which was still being used as a meeting place for the Chian Chuan Society three years after the passing of Ma Yueh Liang. Zhang Jin Gui is in the background at work as the group's Treasurer. The connection with the earlier picture becomes obvious. It is less obvious if the swordplay going on behind his head distracted Zhang Jin Gui. That is not the way to bet: this sort of thing had happened many times before.



Teacher Ma always asked me to visit and practice push hands with his closest students in People's Park. He specifically mentioned Zhang Jin Gui, Chen Xiao Qun, Zhou Zhan Fang, and others. He never mentioned Wang Hao Da's name...

Why wasn't Wang Hao Da on the roster of attendance at barely more than a couple of Monthly Meetings through the 90's? Why wasn't Wang Hao Da ever found at Ma's house continuing to train or learn? These are my questions for those who seek so actively to promote him as an indoor student of Ma Yueh Liang.

Fang, and others. He never mentioned Wang Hao Da's name. In the end, all of the indoor students of Ma stuck by him until his passing. This group was defined more by their relationship with Ma and with each other than by their location, but in either definition of the group, Wang Hao Da was nowhere to be found. I was there at the end of Ma's life, as was Zhang Jin Gui, Fei Gua Ching, Zhou Zhan Fang, Li Li Jun, and most of his children. If Wang Hao Da was so close, why wasn't he there?

Why wasn't Wang Hao Da on the roster of attendance at barely more than a couple of Monthly Meetings through the 90's? Why wasn't Wang Hao Da ever found at Ma's house continuing to train or learn? These are my questions for those who seek so actively to promote him as an indoor student of Ma Yueh Liang.

Perhaps, Wang Hao Da never said that he was, nor ever considered himself an indoor student of Ma Yueh Liang. Perhaps this was a part of someone else's effort to sell videos and workshops. Wang Hao Da himself may or may not have had direct involvement in this commercial effort. Videos clearly show that Wang Hao Da's push hands methods are considerably different from Ma's methods. Furthermore, Wang's interpretation of Beng, Lu, Ji, and An are not what Ma Yueh Liang taught.

We in the west have a tendency to buy into the legends of Chinese Grandmasters and take them more seriously than the Chinese do. We romanticize our thoughts and feelings and escalate the status of certain people over others with no good reason. They may look the part. They may say things that encourage this perception. Our high rating of these people relative to others is usually not based on anything with real substance. Often we even end up calling them Masters or Grandmasters. While they may - or may not - be a decent person, they are very seldom what we build them up to be. Teacher Ma, and many legit teachers of the arts, did not (and do not) want to be called Master or Grandmaster. These are fictional names from mythological stories. Ma abhorred the word Master, and never accepted being called anything other than Teacher. While he taught us how to flow the chi, dantian rotation, meditation, and tones for that matter, he debunked and dismissed any thought of mysticism surrounding any of these practices, and instead gave more credence to embracing simplicity and a quiet mind.



Mailbox Q&A

The Tao of Just Showing Up

QUESTION

Hi Gerald --

Thanks for your kind comments about my "inspirational" status. Makes me think of Sifu Woody Allen's comment that "90% of life is just showing up."

Anyway, I was interested in your comment on your website.

If one ignores natural movement in Taijiquan, they will most certainly lead them self into a false sense of reality. All the while believing that they have discovered chi or even Nirvana. However, if Taijiquan is ever tested in joint hands or push hands practice, this false sense of reality is often exposed. For example, some practitioners focus on creating all movements from the waist. This statement is - in fact - correct, but this approach is often implemented incorrectly. If the waist "leads" all movements or is the first part of the body moved, then in actuality what the practitioner is doing is exposing their central equilibrium. They are "putting the cart before the horse" in their practice. Therefore, it is wise to keep the waist at the center of all movements, and maintain the arms and legs as if spokes on a wheel.



Pushing Hands - Moving the Body
Before the Hand Ends Badly

This is the genius of Wu Style Taijiquan, which seems almost void of outer waist movements and minimizes the externalization of any outer physical movements.

After all these years playing Yang style, I have been studying Wu Style with Master XXX. Master XXX has been patient but critical of my Yang style shoulder movement, obvious weight shifts, and the like. And he emphasizes that the hands go out with intention and not power. Is this what you are speaking of when you say .."If the waist 'leads' all movements or is the first part of the body moved, then in actuality what the practitioner is doing is exposing their central equilibrium."? And on the same subject, I was curious what you thought of the following:

<http://www.classicaltaichi.com/internal-discipline.html>

I feel myself to be on new ground and would appreciate your insight.

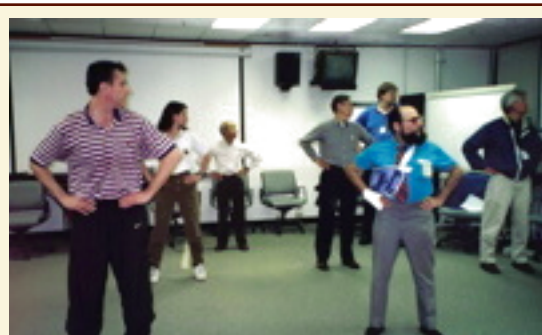
D. P.

Answer:

D.P.,

Thanks for asking me for clarification, and I will try my best to answer you. First of all, personally, I have a problem with the word, "Master." Ma Yueh





Pictures from a 1999 Workshop in Los Angeles.
Above: Leading a Liangong session.

Below: Demonstrating Tuishou - Pushing Hands - Gerald A. Sharp moving Ning Ning with just a touch. It is one of my favorite things when Push Hands leads to laughter.



Liang abhorred the word, and, if anything, ask we call him Lao Shi, which means teacher. He even discouraged saluting. So while Ma might be considered "old school," having been born in 1901, he came from a time when a person's word mattered – and doing had more validity than titles. In this way, Ma was like a breath of fresh air from what I'd been exposed to previously in the States.

...<snip> <snip>...

Concerning the practice, from Ma I learned that the Zhong Ding, or Central Equilibrium, was to be safeguarded and protected. He advocated moving less, if at all, and emphasized listening for movements in the opponent's center, utilizing the mind and the sensitivity in the hands to evaluate and observe. His idea of Ward Off, involved less Beng Jing and more Ting Jing (Listening Energy) and Evaluation. In fact, he pointed out how one meaning of Beng was, "to evaluate."

On a more than a few occasions, he took out books with pictures of Yang Chengfu and Wu Chian Chuan and compare the way the Lower Dantian pointed at the earth. In fact, we would begin the form by staring out and down on an angle, relaxing the body in stages beginning with the hands, wrists, elbows, and shoulders, and then moving inward to the face and slowly moving down the entire body through the soles of the feet. When we practiced the Up and Down Hands, in preparation to do T'ai Chi, we would relax the Qi Hu (Chi Door) point on both sides of the body, allowing the hands to come up, in the mind's eye point the Lower Dantian

towards the ground which required a loosening of the tailbone and hips, and specifically locate the Yongquan ("Bubbling Well") points before lowering the hands to the thighs. This would be followed by further preparation when the hands raise up, the body lowers down, and the weight sinks through the soles of the feet. T'ai Chi begins when the elbows bend, allowing the hands to come in to gradually form the T'ai Chi symbol, the body releases more, gradually, at the tailbone, and the weight differentiates. So from the beginning, we practiced moving sequentially with hand, body, and foot. We also learned to point the Lower Dantian at the ground and gradually, and gently, drop the tailbone down in the center of all movements. ...

Another point I believe you raise is about consciousness, and if the central nervous system directs the peripheral nervous system, then that would mean that the mind ought to be focused and activated to concentrate on the matter at hand and direct the movements. I agree with this, but the peripheral is what strikes and protects, and therefore in my practice I think the movements ought to be sequential and like a "string of pearls," like the classics discuss, and as Ma taught us, put the core, or Zhong Ding, at the center of all movements. He gave an example of the Zhong Ding was like the core of a tree surrounded by its rings and by its leaves, limbs, boughs, and roots. The core is both our mind and spine, and our rings are the layers we are able to cultivate from our ability to relax within movement and



move to relax. Similar to the processes of photosynthesis and the water cycle, we too, acting in accordance with nature's frequencies move with a crest, body, and trough, or hand, body, and foot and do so to cycle both extrinsic and intrinsic energy and interact with nature in a more smooth, unhindered manner. For me, when I follow a more closely knit formation of hand, body, and foot, my practice of the slow set, for example, is easily 25-30 minutes, if not more. Ma was very slow, not because he was 90 some, but because he was just patient and simple.

As for the website you directed me to, I like the way the leg is described as swinging forward when moving. The legs are different then the hands and need more time to move. The only thing I don't see in their description is specificity in the hands. I've also discovered, in order to keep the balance and the Zhong Ding, when the hands move grossly, the feet move finely, and when the hands move finely, the feet move grossly. Anyway, I hope the information I've provided is useful. It might appear elementary in many ways, but I've a great deal to learn myself. Maybe there's something to just showing up as you say. There is a lot more to it than can be seen on first examination.

Sincerely,
Gerald

Concluding the Flummoxed Flow: The Top Ten Unwanted Teacher List

Recently, there have been stories of yet another teacher whose credentials and statements are troubling. According to the press, he is now a fugitive from New Zealand. Xue Nai Yin is being sought for the murder of his wife, and the abandonment of his daughter (known as "Pumpkin") in New Zealand. Authorities claim he passed customs and immigration entry in Los Angeles in September, 2007. Xue Nai Yin was once on the cover of T'ai Chi magazine in 2000. He claims to be a lineage holder of Wu Yuxiang style.

This is further evidence that many of us exercise blind faith when it comes to choosing and following teachers. The Nei Jia kung fu community needs to do a better job at screening the ones we hold up to be good teachers. This is not just a problem of doing a better job of looking at credentials and skills. We should not continue judging people based on their appearance: ethnicity or surface evaluations are poor measures of what a lessons a teacher offers.

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In the Next Issue of the Chiflow Newsletter:

<p>Bagua's Lake Palm</p> <p><i>We will profile the Lake palm and consider its place within the Pre-Heaven and Post-Heaven Trigram Symbols.</i></p>	<p>Mathematics As A Core principle of Nei Jia Kung Fu? (Part 2)</p> <p><i>Are you serious about the role of mathematics in Nei Jia kung fu?</i></p>	<p>Rebuttals: More to Come?</p> <p><i>It was not our intention to start down this path of quibbling with what we read in magazines. But it is just hard to let some things pass...</i></p>
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