

CHI FLOW

NEWSLETTER

Bagua's Fire Palm

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

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Magic Squares and the Problem of Balance

The secret is not that the squares are magic. The magic is that the squares are not secret.

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Q&A Mailbag

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THE TRIGRAMS AND BAGUA'S PALM

The Eight Palms, of Baguazhang (or, Eight Trigrams Palms) are primarily derived from the ideas featured in the I-Ching (Book of Changes). The trigrams are also 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 the progressive nature of the lines of the Trigrams of Bagua.



The three lines of each of the trigrams are associated with the shape and character of the palms. They also depict the action of the hand, body, and foot. When the hand initiates motion, 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. Instead, the motions involve a more holistic integration of the whole organism or hand, body, and foot.

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

BAGUA'S FIRE PALM

The Fire Palm is characterized by the four fingers spread open, standing upright, and facing upwards. The thumb also points upward, but diagonally, making an arc with the index finger. The palm faces outward and the wrist is bent back, but naturally and not with force. As with all Bagua palms, the relaxation of the

joints is paramount. The relaxation of the shoulders (Glenohumeral joint), the scapula, the hips and even relaxation of the ankles all aid in structurally supporting the erect shape of the Fire Palm. The elliptical shape of the upper and lower arms is closed and connected, with the fingers spread open at the center. This shape correlates to the trigram for Fire, which is two solid parallel lines at the top and bottom with a broken, segmented line in the middle.

The rising nature of the fingers and the arms in the practice of the Fire Palms is analogous to the I-Ching that states that Fire is drawn towards Heaven, while water falls down to Earth. In the book, "Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan Push Hands"





written by Ma Yueh Liang and Wu Ying Hua, in the context of the Five Phases, Fire is represented with an arrow pointing directly upwards.

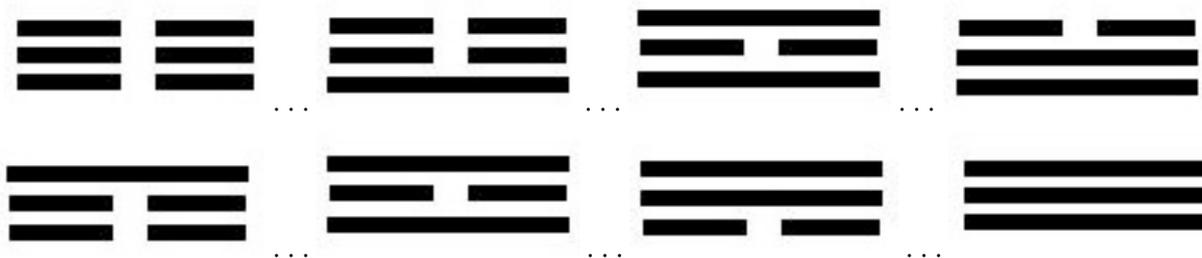
Image: Zou Shuxian, (Jiang Rong Qiao's adopted daughter), instructs Gerald A. Sharp in Fire Palm

The idea of the two solid lines outside the interior broken line suggests a "closed door" form. This is nothing to do with secrecy. Instead, the structure outside formed by the hands above and the feet below, is solid and like a fortress, while the inner part of the structure is soft,

light, and hollowed. This allows a seemingly stiff structure to flow and spin like a top.

In the traditional description, "the chi is allowed to flow freely inside." Chi itself is often depicted as a broken line, because chi is actually composed of two parts: that which we see as breath and that which we don't see but can sense. Often, the aspect of chi that we cannot see but can sense, is associated with the pulse. In the Yellow Emperor's Classic on Medicine, the element of Fire combined with "to flow the chi" describes pulsation.

When practicing the Fire Palm, not only is the exactness of the palm and the outer structure essential, but the inner aspect that combines the breath with the pulse and the pulse with action is essential in deriving full benefit from practicing the Fire Palm.



How to Apply the Fire Palm

The Fire Palm is one of the most used palms in many styles of Baguazhang. It is often the one that beginners start with in circle walking. The upper arm provides a guard for both a strong advance or retreat. It also helps to divide the upper and lower hemispheres of an opponent's body through the seemingly downward pressing action of the lower palm. By using the word "seemingly," I mean that the downward-pressing palm obliquely faces the earth while the fingers point upwards toward the elbow of the upper arm.

In addition to the opposing nature of the palms employed, the arms and palms that comprise the "Fire Palm" make a segment of a circular shape to create both an upper and lower attack. By rotating this circular shape through space, the motion describes the circumference of a sphere. The same action also sets up the possibility of spinning off an opponent's attack or defense: this can be used to go behind the opponent's back, to sweep or tie up their feet, or be applied in a wide variety of other ways.

Whatever the specific target of the Fire Palm attack, the approach generally makes these circular attacks in a stand up position. This circular approach can be extremely useful in dealing with opponents who favor a straight in or linear attack. A direct linear attack also might be expected in encounters with larger opponents.

Gerald A. Sharp



Li.

The Fire Palm Trigram.

Pre-Heaven (Polar) symbol

The Fire Palm is located opposite the Water Trigram in the polar or Pre-Heaven symbol.



Post-Heaven (cyclic) symbol

The Fire Palm is located between the Wind and Earth trigrams in the cyclical, or Post Heaven symbol. Since the Post Heaven symbol is based on the cyclical process of the seasons, Fire sits atop the apex of the symbol and represents summer, while at the bottom of the symbol is the opposite phase of Water representing mid-winter.



MATH AS A FOUNDATION OF NEI JIA KUNG FU: THE SECRET OF THE MAGIC SQUARES IS BALANCE

BY DAVE TAYLOR

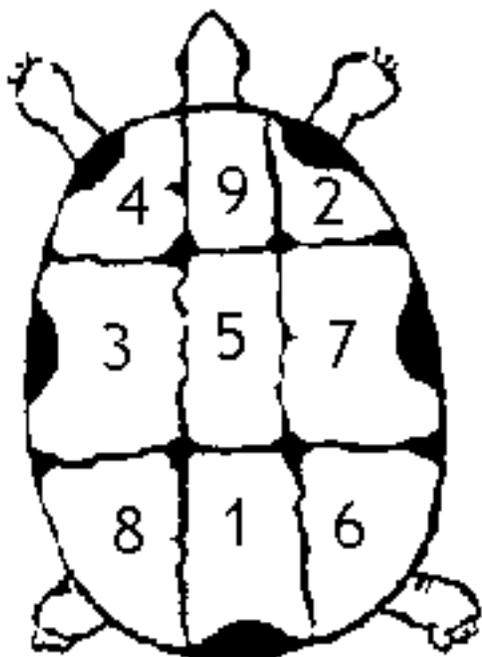
The Lo Shu 3x3 magic square is one of the earliest and best known numerological devices associated with China. It is often presented as appearing on the shell of a tortoise, which is one of the earliest media used for writing. The following discussion is built on *The Chinese Pa Kua: An Expose* by Ong Hean-Tatt and *Benjamin Franklin's Numbers: An Unsung Mathematical Odyssey* by Paul C. Pasles. Benjamin Franklin made the study of Magic Squares a nearly life-long endeavor and this book is a wonderful overview of the topic. Both books are interesting and touch on commonalities between the Magic Squares, Chinese numerology and Jewish mysticism.

The odds are that you have seen this 3x3 magic square before. Perhaps you have seen this device as a mystical symbol connected with birth. Perhaps you think of magic squares as a mathematical recreation like Sudoku. Perhaps you have encountered one of the numerological incarnations of the magic squares. Or maybe (like Euler) you have touched upon aspects of the magic squares that are tied to more formal mathematics.

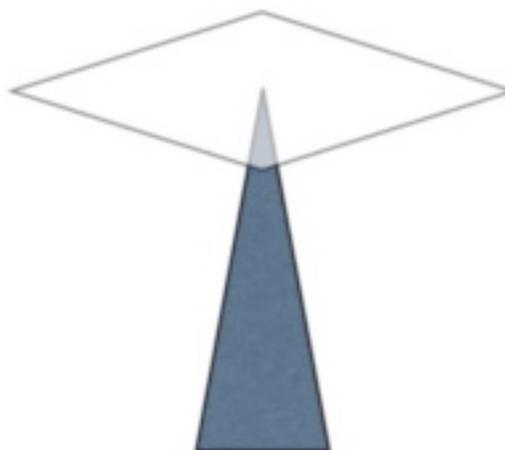
Magic Squares have all the rows and all the columns add up to the same number. All of the magic squares in this article have each column and each row add up to a sum of 15. (The full diagonals also add up to 15.)

We can think of the magic square in terms of weights attached to a square flat plate. Such a weighted plate would balance at a point in the center. This is a system that would stay in balance... until it is disturbed. This balanced plate is a system that has no restoring force. The application of any external force would cause the plate to fall. This is characteristic of a mechanical system that is statically stable but unstable against a perturbation. As the T'ai Chi classics say, "One feather cannot be added. A fly cannot land."





The Magic Tortoise Marking



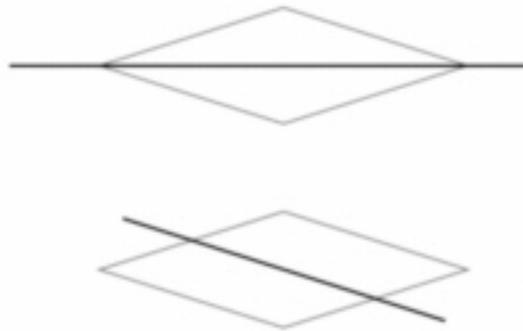
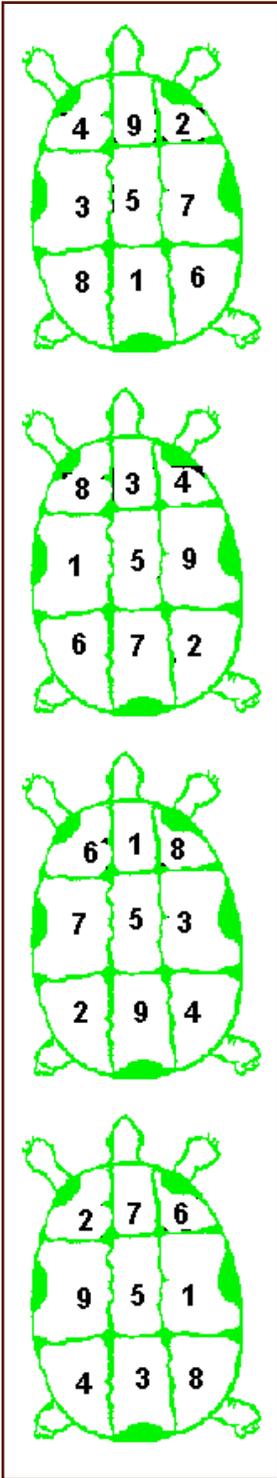
The restoring force required for a plate or tortoise shell to remain in balance under external perturbation is a model for the action required to maintain balance in performing the form, standing meditation or in push hands.

At first, there seem to be eight different 3x3 Magic Squares that can be made from sequential integers starting from one. Actually, a little inspection reveals that these are all rotations or simple transforms of the original Lo Shu magic square.

The green tortoises are all rotations in the plane around the 5. The blue tortoises can be thought of in several ways. One way is to start with the original Lo Shu magic square (green, upper left). The upper right blue tortoise is obtained if you rotate about the 4,5,6 diagonal. The next blue tortoise is obtained if you rotate the Lo Shu magic square about the 2,5,8 diagonal. The third blue tortoise is obtained from the Lo Shu magic square by rotating it about the 3,5,7 row. The bottom right blue tortoise is obtained if you rotate the original Lo Shu magic square about the 9,5,1 column.

What we have is that all the other magic squares are actually the original Lo Shu magic square re-written after a collection of rotations.

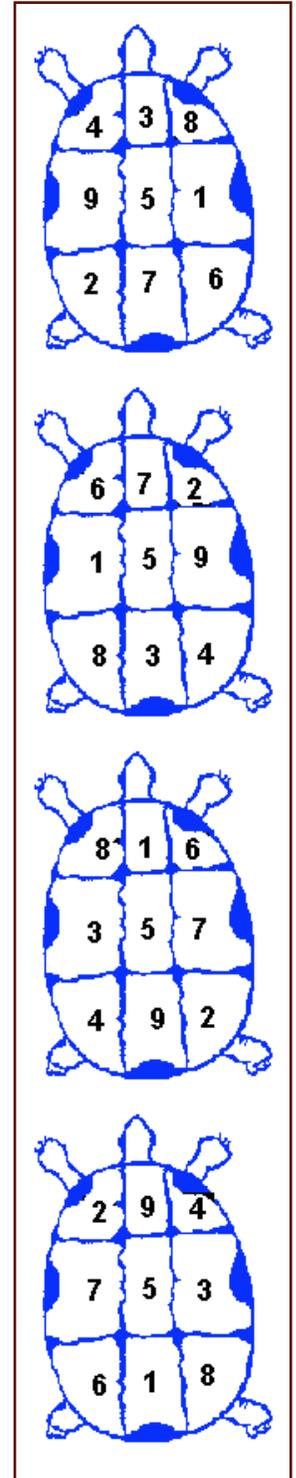




We can think of the magic square in terms of weights attached to a square flat plate. The plate would balance at a point in the center. It would rotate in the horizontal plane about the central axis through that point to give any of the green tortoises. Out of plane rotations about axes within the plane produce the blue tortoises.

We now have a different case where the magic square is a model dynamical system that is stable against perturbations that lead to rotations around these axes. Disturbances can result in one or more simple rotation around each axis. This is also directly applicable to the practice of internal kung fu since it is a model for understanding the body dynamics of the form and push hands. Intuitive understanding of the stability of the system leads to being able to select a stable path with a favorable outcome.

This is one of the most simple perspectives on stable and unstable dynamical systems. I believe that there are many rewards to be gained in your practice from going beyond this low level viewpoint of dynamical stability to something more sophisticated. The art of unbal-



ancing your opponent requires understanding the paths that lead to both stability and instability. It also is a legitimate approach to the practice of T'ai Chi Ch'uan that is supported by the classic texts and also applicable to Nei Jia kung fu. It is legitimate, traditional and widely accepted approach, but it is not a universally accepted approach. For example, this internal view of stability and balance is the way I read the Wu text of Wu Gong Yi. It is not the way I read Yang Ban Hou's writings that seem to emphasize discharging an opponent and take a more external path to the



practice of T'ai Chi Ch'uan. This schism is one that runs across many styles and the approach of many teachers.

氣
流
CHI FLOW



Mastering Yourself: Are You Continuing to Learn?

Recently, I went to the Temple City Library to pick up a book for my wife that she had on hold and I was surprised there were quite a number of T'ai Chi practitioners there. I must confess that I was even more surprised by the behavior of the T'ai Chi teachers.



One of the major groups there was being led by a self-proclaimed lineage holder of the Wu School. The other was being taught by a prominent lineage holder of the Chen Style of T'ai Chi Ch'uan.

The Chen group was practicing almost in the front door, as if trying to garner as much attention as possible. What made this situation even more strange was that two of the elder practitioners of the Chen group were on the verge of a brawl. This happened just at the particular time that I showed up.

There can be disagreements between participants of any class. Where older Chinese practitioners are found, minor disagreements are just part of the expected landscape. However, this was no ordinary disagreement, and the two arguing weren't just your run-of-the-mill elderly practitioners either.

One had learned Chi Kung from me some twenty years prior in Barnes Park in the City of Monterey Park, California. He had also learned from dozens of teachers, but claimed he was the student of top teachers in Taiwan and China. He also claimed to have been taught by Bruce Lee. I will call this fellow, "Denny."

The other man arguing was a classmate of Bruce Lee and a student of Yip Man. I will call this fellow, "Hank." He also practices T'ai Chi Ch'uan.

They were arguing over the effectiveness and legitimacy of a particular application. Now when it comes to application, in my opinion Hank could easily drop all of the participants of the class (and this includes Denny). My assessment is based partly on the fact that Hank uses small, direct centerline strikes. These strikes are meant to attack vital points and basically beat the snot out of an opponent. Hank actually has fighting experience.





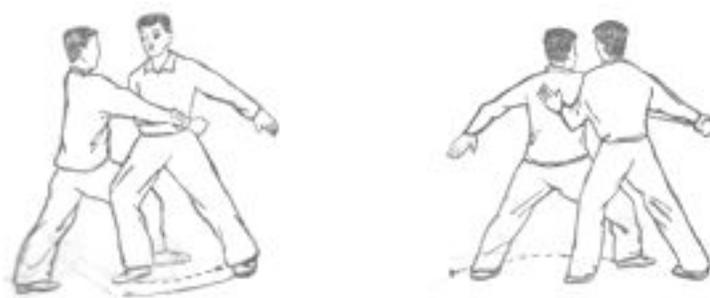
Denny, whose practice includes a version of Chen Style, looks martial. But his center moves so grossly that his overt movements invites either a striker or a grappler to take advantage of the transitions between his movements. He also exposes his center for any competent internal stylist to take advantage of any of his movements.

OK. Hank was about to punch out Denny for his reference and emphasis on what Denny referred to as "Combat T'ai Chi." Denny moved away from the group slightly, and began doing Yang Style. This was one of the more external demonstrations of T'ai Chi I've seen in a long time.

This assessment is not based on the fact that this student never gave me credit for teaching him. Instead, it's based on the fact that Denny's movements are simply far too large to employ concealed force. In my opinion, it simply cannot be effective as "Combat T'ai Chi." While watching Denny practice, at that moment I was happy that he'd never given me any credit whatsoever for teaching him.

One thing stands out to me as most disturbing. After twenty-five or thirty years, you'd think Denny would have learned something about the internal principles of T'ai Chi Ch'uan. (He claims now to have been practicing for more than 40 years.) Denny has been teaching in a few locations in the local area for over twenty years now. You'd think he would have a very advanced practice. In fact, it is just the opposite. Denny has no internal aspect to his practice at all.

Even after all these years, his practice has failed to advance.





I recently befriended a former student of Denny's. This student has been practicing on his own now for some time, studying from a book. This fellow, and student of Denny's, has truly come a long way on his own.

In my opinion, this student has an enormous grasp of the internal principles of T'ai Chi. Also in my opinion, he would have inevitably been unable to continue studying with Denny because he does not teach the internal principles, the classics, nor does his form follow any authoritative work or transmission of the Yang family teaching. Also, Denny does not really teach: his assistants teach. These assistants are both victims themselves and perpetrators of fraud. This approach perpetuates both inconsistency and a lack of knowledge of the internal principles.



When I came out of the building, Denny and Hank were still arguing. I put the book I came to pick up in the car and picked a spot where I could watch what transpired. I liked Hank's standing up to the "Chinese social club Ta'i Chi class" and also Hank's standing up to Denny's line of B.S.

Another T'ai Chi teacher that was there claims to be a Wu style lineage holder. I will call him "Juan." About this time, Hank went over to Juan's group. Juan's group did seem to have more of an internal approach to practice. I say this even though I personally feel that Juan's Wu style teaching is VERY different than what Ma taught me both in precision and in fundamentals. Juan was teaching Push Hands. Juan was showing his students how to relax and unbalance an opponent with the least amount of force. While I feel that Juan followed the internal principles of T'ai Chi, Ma Yueh Liang always included a double dose of fundamentals in the training, in order that all students would have a sophisticated framework to advance and share with each other over time. This omission is one of my issues with Juan's teachings.

At last, Denny departed. Probably the embarrassment of not being able to refute the argument about "Combat T'ai Chi" from Hank gar-



nered more attention than he would have liked. As I was leaving, Hank recognized me, and made a big deal out of seeing me. With Denny gone, Hank announced to the crowd that he was there 20 years ago in Barnes Park, when I taught Denny and how Denny had learned from a variety of people. Hank also commented that Denny never gave these teachers credit and that Denny would do the same to his Chen Teacher.

Ultimately though, in my mind, it's not that Denny never gave me or so many of his other teachers any credit. It's that Denny continues to strive to learn from many different teachers, but that he doesn't really learn anything.

The Tao says "Ruling a large country is like cooking a small fish." In my opinion, the same could be said for learning: if you turn it over and over without letting it cook or simmer, it's bound to fall apart easily.

Learning T'ai Chi is funny. It takes personal dedication. You have to focus both on what you can see and what you cannot see. In the Fast Set book, Ma notes that "chi" is both Yin and Yang; it can both be seen and be invisible. The part of chi we see is overt action of breathing, and the air and other parts are invisible. If our breath is natural and deep without being forced, the aspect we can't see becomes stronger.

Learning T'ai Chi is a path of personal discovery. It leads to an appreciation of what resides inside us: in our connective tissue; our organs; our energy; and to use less to accomplish more. The goal is to strip away more and more of the parts of an effective action until only the minimal part remains: to move to the next plateau and so on, until the core of least-action is achieved without sacrificing effectiveness. While they may not appear martial, the deeper you go into the Chinese internal martial arts, the more small movements matter.

Gerald A. Sharp

Mailbox Q&A

QUESTION

Hello Mr. Sharp:

You probably don't remember me but we made some business a few years ago and you sent me your baguazhang videos. By the way thank you they have proven to be an excellent resource for me and I appreciate having them.

My inquiry now regards the two person forms of the Jiang Rong Qiao system. I know there are formal patterns in the system both stationary and moving; they are mentioned in a number of different sources including your website. But, I have been unable to locate any specific information about these. Do you have any



information either in video or book form that somehow could be made available to me? If not, is there any other source you could refer me to?

Thank you in advance for any information you may have for me.

Sincerely

Mark Q;

(Gerald A. Sharp) Answer:

Mark,

Thanks for your inquiry. Yes, there are two person sets, and yes, I do know both the Bagua and Xingyi two person sets of Jiang Rong Qiao's Nei Jia Kung Fu.

Now, you'd think since I've been teaching Bagua and Xingyi since 1992, that there'd be more than twenty people who'd have learned or been exposed to them. However, that's not the case. Most people only learn solo sets, and some that's all they want to learn. However, I think there's great benefit in learning the two person sets, and Jiang's sets are much more in-close than all the others I've seen. The Bagua two man set especially emphasizes in-fighting, choking, grabbing and seizing, go-behinds and ducks, sweeping and throwing; not to mention some low shin and ankle kicks.

I'm currently working with a student who has learned the two person Bagua set as well as the Bagua Rou Shou or Push Hands and various two person training methods of Jiang's Bagua. I'm hoping they will shoot a video with me before the end of this year, or at the latest early next year, to at least keep a record, if not offer a video up to the public.

At this time, I have nothing to offer up in print or video. Yang Jwing Ming and Liang Shou Yu's book and video could be useful, the book more than the video, but I fear the set, especially their Bagua Two Person set is more Wushu or external. To me, it appears to lack the sophistication of multiple options of grabbing, choking, and throwing applications, not to mention the turning of the corner, ducks, and go-behinds, or in-fighting in the Stand Up position that Jiang's approach has.

I have roughly translated a rare book of the Jiang Rong Qiao School on the Two Person Practice of Xingyi, or San Shou Pao. The San Shou Pao is the longest known two-person set in Xingyi. It is about 2 to 3 times longer than most An Shen Pao forms. I hope to come out with it later this year. Perhaps, I can at least come out with a Bagua Two Person book soon thereafter if the video is not yet available. I will let you know when I have (or come across) something. Until then I wish you well, and hope that your daily practice and life are filled with insight and the joy derived from discipline and hard work.

Sincerely,

Gerald A. Sharp



Shifu Sharp,

Greetings again! I am writing to discuss the push hands methods of the Middle Flat and Erect Elbow to ensure a more correct understanding of them. My understanding is that the defender, when sitting back, is to guide the aggressor into the technique. Merely looking at the techniques, one might be tempted to believe that the practitioner sitting back is actively pulling the other in (especially with the Erect Elbow), but from what I could tell this would be an erroneous use of the technique, as it flip-flops the aggressor and defender. The practitioner sitting back is actually responding to a push from his or her partner. Having experimented with the techniques I have two major questions:

First, is defender the emphasizing lu or cai? This one pertains mainly to the Erect Elbow in whose demonstration it somewhat saliently appears that the defender is lightly grabbing the aggressor's wrist as well. I realize the eight kinetic energies interact in application to a point that hard and fast distinction can be difficult, perhaps even unnecessary. I suppose that what I am really asking is whether the defender plucks the incoming force from the get go or rolls it into an advantageous position and then lightly controls the wrist. In the Middle Flat Elbow, you very clearly state that the defender sticks to the aggressor's forearm, leading the aggressor's tricep into his or her flat elbow, so right now I am leaning toward the latter interpretation, but I could see it either way.

Also, I feel uncertain about the change in direction for this technique, specifically whether it is motivated from a "push" or a "pull". If, for example, I am in a pattern in which I first tap my opponent with my left elbow and then my right and wish to reverse it, do I move forward, pushing my opponent's right hand with my right hand forming the archery stance immediately after tapping with my left elbow (rather than waiting for my opponent to move in again)? Or is it the case that I, forward in an archery stance and having my left arm tapped, can choose to forgo pressing with the right hand and instead sit back into empty stance, tapping his or her left arm with my right arm as I assume an empty stance? I initially used quotation marks because I would conceptualize the former situation as a change motivated by a "push" and the latter by a "pull", though I do not know if these are the absolute best terms to describe the situation.

I would sincerely appreciate your insight on these questions to ensure that I am properly using the wonderful resources you have made available.

Yours in the arts,
Philip

Philip,

Good to hear from you, and I like your excellent, detailed question.

First of all, the 13 methods offer one of the foremost training regimens for moving beyond techniques, and developing a broader range of capability with the muscles and joints used in the stand up phase of a conflict. That being said, the middle flat and erect elbow "techniques" train the wrists, elbows, shoulders, Glenohumeral joint, and scapulae, the lumbar curve, spinous process, hips, knees, ankles, feet (and many more).



When an opponent advances on such a sharp angle into the center of the defender when practicing the aforementioned techniques, the tendency is to move the body in reaction. This movement often involves moving the spine or crumpling, over-bending of the knees, or attempting techniques such as go-behinds or a duck-under. While these techniques can be effective, the choices often become limited to what works or what may seem to work, instead of developing a bigger menu of choices based on the ability to relax the joints of the body which by doing so, may draw the opponent off the line and out from the very center of their aggression. Additionally, it is best to avoid such gross action at times during training and use *lu*, or following, instead, but avoid grabbing with force, if at all. This, in turn, can set up a host of other possibilities, and even allow for the limited use of force to neutralize an attack and gain control of a situation without using gross or overt action to do so. You can apply it from the get-go, as you say, but during training, again, it is best to use patience a bit to see the full scope of an opponent's extension and by allowing that to occur, begin to train the various joints I eluded to earlier. This concept ought to be applied gradually all the way from the wrist through the soles of the feet, and in this way, the principle of *lu* can be expanded and built upon. Further transforming *lu* to the principle concept that it is.

On the other hand, the aggressor can also benefit from the same use and relaxation of the joints, by relying more on the joints and less on the force from an isolated area such as the forearm or shoulder for example. By integrating the joints sequentially, the aggressor sets up a chain of events, which can be adjusted or built upon depending upon the opponent's reaction as they move into the center. When both participants then work with such sensitivity, then it is the listening and relaxation skills that become paramount, and, depending upon the flexibility of the joints, the two practitioners become even more astute and aware of aggression as it develops and progresses.

Concerning the change hands operation of the flat and erect elbow techniques, this is often done by the aggressor; who extends their arm for a "third" cross of the opponent's

Concluding the Flummoxed Flow:

Following Fashion to Extinction

Once upon a time, there were integrated martial arts schools in Europe built around either famous teachers or famous families. These schools typically had a fee-for-service business model and prepared private individuals for the military (e.g. martial training in a time when positions as officers in the higher ranks were for sale) or for other jobs where such skills would be useful.

The book, *By the Sword: A History of Gladiators, Musketeers, Samurai, Swashbucklers, and Olympic Champions*, by Paul Cohen, has a title that belies the author's emphasis is on the development of Olympic fencing. There are a few stories that might appeal to Asian martial artists or the broader audience suggested by the title. But one story that really caught my attention was the extinction of the integrated martial arts schools in England. These schools taught wrestling, boxing, weapons and sounded to me as though they paralleled some of the martial arts schools in China organized around a family or an individual. These integrated schools seem to have survived based on earned reputations, although one school might be more famous for Catch As Catch Can wrestling and perhaps another more famous for swordsmanship.

The integrated martial arts schools in England died out within one generation. They were defeated by the import of the fashion of dueling, the rapier and fencing (or rather rapier) instructors from Spain.



center. The reason for this is normally there is no reason for the defender to have to move back unless they are aggressed further. If a defender moves back at any time from an attack, this is termed as "running away." While moving back may work with some opponent's and allow for pass or a "slide by," this may not work against someone who is advanced at concealing their force. In this case, the aggressor will just continue their attack on the center, because they are simply following the defender's retreat.

Furthermore, "running away" gives the aggressor the chance very likely to upend, get to the back, or go behind the opponent to further a more severe attack on the defender. An extreme example of this is when someone has skill "turning corners." By this I mean, even if their leg attack is stopped, they are able to feel the defender move any part of their body back, or run away, and by doing so they are able to turn the corner and attack from the side at the calves or ankles. In Push Hands, a lateral twist or attack is also possible, as well as the obvious straight up the middle, when a defender runs or begins to "run away."

Hopefully, I've answered your superior question, Philip. There's no doubt in my mind, you are exploring beyond the "techniques," and tapping into the internal knowledge which is there but takes a bit more continued dedication and patience, which I myself am still enjoying learning more of.

Let me know, if I am off in addressing your question, Philip.

Sincerely,
Gerald A. Sharp

In the Next Issue of the Chiflow Newsletter:

- **Bagua's Thunder Palm Mailbag (We will profile the Thunder Palm and it's place within Baguazhang.).**
- **Another rant about math or science in the practice of Nei Jia kung fu.**
- **Mail Bag**

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Perversely, the English martial arts instructors seem usually won their contests with the Spanish rapier instructors. The problem was that the English instructors used the unfashionable weapons with which they had learned their skills (e.g. sabers, etc.) with while the Spanish instructors used the fashionable long Spanish rapier. The longer rapier was regarded as a way of keeping an opponent much further away. This was highly valued by the novices and near novices that were also most likely to engage in the duels (sometimes with one or two lessons just before a gentlemanly duel to the death).

Of course, not all of the martial training in England stopped. But the fashion of dueling seems to have killed off the integrated martial arts schools in England. Generations later in the West, it is relatively easy to find instruction in Japanese cum Brazilian Jujitsu but it is nearly impossible to find English Catch As Catch Can wrestling instruction. This situation has come about in a way that has almost nothing to do with the relative merits and practices of these two styles of submission wrestling.

The story of what happened in Elizabethian England and the West is a cautionary tale for today. Substance does not always win out over fashion.

---- the editor

