



Question and Answer Series:

Baguazhang

By Grandmaster Wong Kiew Kit

Question 1

As mentioned in the <http://www.shaolin.org/general-2/kun...e-walking.html> History & Philosophy of Baguazhang Circle Walking, Sigung used a variety of sources for researching the art in his preparation for the course. Could Sigung give a few words on which sources he found the most useful and what sort of misinformation about Baguazhang exists?

A related question I have is how useful would a study of the classical Baguazhang literature, the "Songs" and "Methods" of Baguazhang, be for us? How should we reconcile some of the "Songs" and "Methods" which might seem contradictory to the way we do things in Shaolin Wahnam, such as the mentions of "keeping the mouth closed" and "breathing only through the nose"? Are there certain "Songs" or "Methods" that are particularly useful for us modern practitioners of Baguazhang?

An English translation and commentary of the "Songs" and "Methods" of Baguazhang by Master Liang Shou-Yu (co-author with Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming of Emei Baguazhang) can be found <http://www.shouyuliang.com/2006-sept...eight-s> here.

Frederick Chu

Answer

Unlike Shaolin Kungfu, there are not many classics about Baguazhang. The following are the classics I used, all in Chinese and listed in the order of importance in the amount of material derived for use in the Baguazhang course at UK Summer Camp 2012. Some of them are modern publication based on classical material. The translation of the authors' names is based on Cantonese pronunciation.

1. True Transmission of Baguazhang by Sun Sek Fong
2. Study of Bagauzhang by Sun Lu Tang
3. Secret Classic of Baguazhang edited by Lau Heng Hon
4. Illustrated Explanation of Bagazhang by Yim Tak Wah
5. Internal School of Baguazhang Ngai Cheng Woh
6. Bagauzhang and Baguazhang Combat edited by Chang Fen Poi, Chun Yu Choong, Loh Hoong Shun
7. Specific Techniques of Bagua by Cheong Hoe Chun and Fei Sek Weng

However, the relative lack of classical source is compensated by the abundance of internet material, some of which is very useful but much is mediocre and a few is misleading.

Here is a brief description of the Chinese sources.

“True Transmission of Baguazhang” describes the eight “mother palms”, some combat application and Baguazhang weapons like the sword, the exotic drake-duck spade, the crescent-moon spear, the Guan Dao and the spear. It emphasizes moral values, discusses internal and external, soft and hard aspects, and distinguishes between low-level practitioners and high-level practitioners. Low-level practitioners merely perform patterns, whereas high-level practitioners understand their principles.

Some basic principles are mentioned as follows.

Beginners should move with small steps, hooking the foot in each step. Each step must be sure-footed so that the body will not be shaky. Start slowly, gradually become fast. All movements should be smooth and fluid.

There are three stages in circle walking. At the first stage, movements are large and the posture is high. At the intermediate stage, practitioners should lower their posture. At the third stage, the posture is low and movements small and fast.

This classic pays much attention to footwork, affirming the saying that “30% of victory lies in the hands, 70% lies in the feet.” It also mentions that many kicking techniques are hidden.

There is one significant difference between the advice given here and our practice. Here, it is advised that breathing in and out is through the nose with the mouth close. But we breathe in through the nose and breathe out through the mouth. At an advanced stage, we do not worry about the breathing.

It is interesting that “Study of Baguazhang” mentions that Baguazhang incorporates Eighteen-Lohan Fist and Seventy Two Kicking-Leg Techniques, which are from Northern Shaolin. Hence, if you find Shaolin Kungfu in Baguazhang, it is no surprise.

The classic explains how One-Energy transforms to Two-Aspects, then to Four-Forms, which are philosophical description of how the eight “mother palms” are performed. Practitioners begin with the Wuji Stance and are in tune with the Cosmos, described as One-Energy. They move to the typical Baguazhang pattern, “Green Dragon Tests Claw”, turning the hands in one direction and rotating the waist in another direction, described as Two-Aspects. Then they thread their hands up and down, and separate them on two sides, as at the start of Baguazhang circle walking, described as Four-Forms.

The eight mother-palms at various positions of the octagon structure are characterized as lion, unicorn, snake, cockerel, dragon, bear, phoenix and monkey.

It is worthy of note that the classic mentions that these animal-forms are performed at the various gua or trigrams, or various positions in the octagon structure, and not that the various trigrams symbolize these animal-forms. Due to linguistic factors, this distinction is not clearly made in Chinese.

In fact, in Chinese a literal translation of the relevant description is as follows:

Qian is the head, kun is the stomach, zhen is the feet, xun is the hips, kan is the ears, li is the eyes, gen is hands, dui is the mouth.

Qian, kun, zhen, xun, kan, li, gen and dui are the gua or trigrams which form the octagon, or Bagua, from which the term Baguazhang derives.

The classic goes on to say that in kungfu, in literal translation, qian is lion, kun is unicorn, zhen is dragon, xun is phoenix, kan is snake, li is crane, gen is bear, and dui is monkey.

What is meant here is that at the position in an octagon known as qian, the lion form is performed, and at kun the unicorn form, etc. It does not mean qian is a lion or represents a lion, as many people interpret it to be.

The practice of linking some aspects to some philosophical terms is not uncommon in kungfu culture. For example, in Xingyiquan the five elemental fists of pi-quan (literally chopping fist, figuratively thrust palm), zuan-quan (spiral fist), beng-quan (crushing fist), pao-quan (cannon fist) and heng-quan (literally diagonal fist, figuratively horizontal chop) are related to the five elemental processes of metal, water, wood, fire and earth.

But I do not see much meaning in the relationship, or I may not have learnt its hidden meaning yet.

I suspect, for example, that because the technique, which is thrusting a palm out, is called pi-quan, literally meaning chopping fist, and chopping is related to an axe chopping, and an axe is made of metal, pi-quan is said to relate to the elemental process of metal. But we could also explain that as the movement of a palm thrust is like water, this technique should be related to the process of water.

In the Five Elemental Fists of some Hoong Ka schools, for example, the five patterns “Cross-Road Separate God”, “Throw Ball in Waves”, “Clamp Wood Fist”, “Eight-Tenth Arrow Punch” and “Thousand Tons to Ground” are related

to the five elemental processes of metal, water, wood, fire and earth.

Either I am ignorant of its deeper meaning or some masters forced relationship between patterns and the elemental processes. Except for the last pattern, “Thousand Tons to Ground”, which can be justified to relate to the elemental process of earth as the movement of the technique is downwards, which is represented by the earth process, I do not find much significance in the relationship in the other patterns.

Follow this principle of relationship due to its process, the pattern, “Throw Ball in Waves”, despite its name, should be related to fire as the movement of the technique is upward, which is represented by the fire process.

Indeed, masters commenting on the relationship generally say that because the pattern is called “Cross-Road Separate Gold”, it is related to metal, and because the pattern is called “Clamp Wood Fist”, it is related to wood. “Clamp Wood Fist” is also named “Close Iron Gate”. Can we then relate the same pattern to metal because of its name?

Returning to “Study of Baguazhang”, Sun Lu Tang concludes the classic with a brief discussion of the unity of pre-natal energy and post-natal energy, and the returning of the spirit to the Great Void.

“Secret Classic of Baguazhang” is a modern publication edited by Lau Heng Hon based on classical material. This is a huge book covering many aspects of Baguazhang, including history, philosophy, basic techniques, unarmed sets, weapon sets, secret songs and formulae, and stories of Baguazhang masters. This is a treasure for Baguazhang lovers.

This “Secret Classic of Baguazhang” is very rich. The following are just some random examples.

Regarding philosophy, the classic lists “three harms” which should be avoided as follows:

1. Muscular strength
2. Angry chi
3. Lifted chest, sunken abdomen

It is interesting to note that “lifted chest, sunken abdomen”, which is taboo in internal arts, is encouraged in Shaolin Kungfu, especially those who practice external forms. Tying a sash around the waist is an example. Practitioners take a deep breath resulting in raising their chest and sinking their abdomen, then tie a sash tightly round their waist to keep the chest lifted and abdomen sunk.

As lungs are regarded as organs for energy, this enlarging of the chest cavity gives practitioners strength and vitality, which is proven true in real life. Internal martial artists do not tie a sash as Shaolin practitioners do. They relax their chest and let chi sink to their dan tian.

The classic mentions that the “eight trigrams” or bagua from which the name Baguazhang derives, are represented in the body as follows:

Qian is represented by shoulders, elbows and wrists, symbolized by the three unbroken lines of qian.

Kun is represented by hips, knees, feet, symbolized by the three broken lines of kun.

Li is represented by the sternum, symbolized by the broken middle line of li.

Kun is represented by chi-filled abdomen, symbolized by the unbroken middle line of kun.

Zhen is represented by eyes looking horizontally, symbolized by the two broken upper lines of zhen.

Gen is represented by head uplifted, symbolized by the two unbroken upper lines of gen.

Dui is represented by gently closing the mouth with the tongue placed upward at the palate, symbolized by the broken top line of dui.

Xun is represented by lifting up the anus, symbolized as the broken bottom line of xun.

Here is an example of either I fail to see the deeper meaning of the relationship or past masters forcing relationship between the eight trigrams and bodily parts. One could also reasonably argue that qian should be represented by the head as it is the top-most of our body and qian symbolizes heaven.

The classic is very rich in songs and secret formula. The following is an example on the three external harmonies of feet, body and hands.

Techniques and footwork must be co-ordinated
When hand arrives but feet wrong, force is insufficient
When hand and feet arrive but the waist is lacking
Going becomes slow and returning becomes deficient

“Illustrated Explanation of Bagazhang” consists of pictures showing 34 sequences of Bagauzhanng combat applications with brief descriptions. The first sequence, Thrust Palm, is similar to the first few techniques of our first combat sequence in Swimming Dragon.

Although the applications are illustrated, it is difficult for readers, even those who practice Baguazhang, to follow them because the illustrations show only established postures and transitional movements are often missing. The descriptions, like most descriptions on kungfu movements, are inadequate to describe the actual movements. Nevertheless, this short-coming is readily overcome by modern facilities. If you log onto YouTube, you can find a lot of Baguazhang applications clearly shown in videos.

“Internal School of Baguazhang” is concise, and many readers may not understand it if they do not have background knowledge. Many of the explanations may appear trite and although they refer to Baguazhang in particular, they can often be found in other philosophical works. These descriptions explain important principles precisely. The following is an example.

The principles of palm techniques, they take the meaning of Eagle, they take the meaning of Snake. For every change of palm, from the beginning to completion, should be gentle and fast, completed in one breath, without any break. The whole technique is everywhere with mind, everywhere with meaning. There should not be expression of strength popping up or sinking down, thus missing the miracle of flow.

As the title of the classic suggests, it focuses on the internal aspect of Baguazhang. It explains that there are eight internal palms, and eight external palms. The eight internal palms represent the body of Baguazhang, the eight external palms represent its application and are full of variations.

The classic explains as follows:

The eight internal palms emphasize force. The miracle of combat is found here. The eight external palms emphasizes combat. They bring out the miracle of force. The arts of the internal and external eight palms are born from the mutual interaction and neutralization.

The eight internal palms are so-called not because they have no external forms but because they are meant to develop internal force. It is like what we did in the Baguazhang course at the UK Summer Camp of 2012, internal force training using various Baguazhang postures and circle walking.

The eight internal palms described in this classics are as follows:

1. Floating Wood Palm – the arms are held horizontally like in Lifting Water.
2. Moving Clouds Palm – the arms are held high like in Embracing the Sun.
3. Spiral Turning Palm – One arm is held at eye level and the other arm at shoulder level, like in Lion Opens Mouth.
4. Up-Down Palm – One hand held straight is pointing skyward, and the other hand also held straight is pointing downward, as in Point Sky Jab Ground.
5. Embracing Clouds Palm – Both arms are held as if holding a huge ball, like in Unicorn Embracing Moon.
6. Thread-Shuttle Palm – like in the pattern Jade Girl Threads Shuttle.
7. Throw-Step Palm – Moving as if performing Green Dragon Shoots Pearl
8. Wind-Wheel Palm – Start with holding a pearl, then push one hand out

The eight external palms are similar to the eight mother-palms we learned at the Baguazhang course for circle walking, as follows.

1. Single Changing Palm.
2. Double changing Palm.
3. Smooth Posture Palm
4. Triple-Thread Palm
5. Back-Body Palm
6. Circulate Body Palm
7. Turn Body Palm
8. Return Body Palm

“Baguazhang and Baguazhang Combat” is a modern publication edited by modern masters based on classical material.

It includes the Thirty Six Songs mentioned by Frederick. The first song translated from this classic is as follows:

Empty chest, lift head, sink the waist
Hook step, bend knees, grip the ground
Sink body, drop elbows, stretch front hand
Two eyes should emit from tiger’s mouth

This song describes how the basic Baguazhang pattern, “Green Dragpm Tests Claw”, should be performed. “Tiger’s mouth” refers to that part of the palm

between the thumb and the index finger.

There are two differences between what is advocated here and how we practice. We do not grip the ground with our toes; we let our chi flowing down to root us to the ground. Secondly, we need not look through the tiger's mouth. We do not even look at an opponent, but sense him with our all-pervading mind.

The advice above is given to beginners. Gripping the ground with their toes will make them more stable. Looking through the tiger's mouth will help them to focus.

We are at a more advanced level, even for those of our students who learn Baguazhang the first time. We can let chi flow to the ground rooting us, which is not only more stable but also enable us to have unity of chi flow. We can expand our mind so that it covers not only an opponent's movements but also his intentions. Other practitioners do not have these abilities.

The book also lists other Baguazhang principles, like "three hearts", "nine strengths", and "nine requirements".

The "three hearts" or three centres are the abdomen as the focused centre, the eyes as the sensing centre, the head as the function centre, and the hands and legs as the operating centre.

We have surpassed the above advice. Our whole being is one heart or one mind. Not only our abdomen is charged with chi, our whole being is charged with chi. We do not just sense with our eyes, function with our head and operate with our hands and legs, we can do all these with any part of our body.

The "nine strengths" are stretch-up strength, lift strength, sweeping strength, struggle strength, horizontal strength, spring strength, inside strength, turning strength and united strength. We also have surpassed these nine strengths. Our body is just one strength or one energy, which can be employed to perform work done by any one of these nine strengths and more.

The "nine requirements" are that the waist is to be lowered, that chi is to be sunk, that the anus has to be lifted, that the tongue is to touch the palate, that the elbows are to be in, that muscles and joints are to be relaxed, that the shoulders are to be dropped, that the body is to be retracted, and that the palms are to thread.

Again we have surpassed all these requirements. We need not pay particular attention to them, but when we perform any Baguazhang techniques these requirements are met, like we lower our waist and sink our chi to the dan tian. There are also requirements that other Baguazhang practitioners need to follow, like lifting up the anus and placing the tongue at the palate, but we don't have to, yet we still produce good or better results.

Why don't we need to follow requirements that Baguazhang masters have advised practitioners to follow, yet we still obtain good or better results? It is because from our normal training we have surpassed the level the requirements purport to attain. For example, lifting the anus and placing the tongue at the palate are to facilitate chi flow, but we already have good chi flow even without these requirements.

We have often mentioned that we practice high-level arts. Even without following these requirements we can attain a level higher than what the requirements aim at, confirms our claim.

“Specific Techniques of Bagua” is also a modern publication based on classical material. It explains the application of specific Baguazhang techniques against 64 combat situations.

There are some sophisticated techniques on kicks or using the leg to fell opponents. But unless one is advanced in combat applications or learns from a master, he may not realize the sophisticated techniques even when there are short descriptions. The verbal descriptions, as usual, are inadequate to explain clearly how the transitional movements are performed.

Even if he can follow the pictures and descriptions, he will still miss many important combat points, such as timing and spacing. The pictures and descriptions may indicate a practitioner to move a step forward, for example, but without proper guidance from a competent teacher, a student may not know when to move or where to place his feet, which will render his technique ineffective.

A very important point a student is likely to miss if he learns from the book without guidance from a competent teacher is that he will expose himself in his movements. The illustrations in the book are well done, showing that both exponents in combat cover themselves adequately, but an unsuspecting student is likely to expose his vital points to be exploited by his opponent if he has not been properly trained.

Besides these classical sources I also have a collection of photographs and hand-written explanation on the 64 applications of Baguazhang sent to me many years ago by a Baguazhang master. They show some interesting and sophisticated applications. But uninformed readers would not understand

them because the photographs indicate established forms, transitional movements are not shown.

This shortcoming is overcome with videos, and there are a lot of videos on YouTube. The following are just some random samples.

Here is a good video (of a series of videos) showing basic Baguazhang Circle Walking by Sifu Kent Howard of Wang Shu Jin's lineage:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdoLKvgRrOY>

Here is a video showing more advanced Baguazhang Circle Walking by Sifu Sun Zhi Jun:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndY4jMB9w6U>

Baguazhang masters are known to be old yet healthy and agile. Have a treat watching Sifu Lu Zi Jian who is 118 years old performing double sabres, rolling about on the floor:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61FwzcabBoI>

Here is a performance of Old Bagua Palms by Sifu Liu Jing Nu:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6aAnaPDxjw>

The 64 Palms of Baguazhang are linked together into a set known as Baguazhang Swimming Dragon Set. There are various versions of the set, and here is a video showing one of them:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j6TVYw8moFI>

Here is a video showing some Baguazhang applications:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mo6X9IU4sh8>

Here is another video on Baguazhang application:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KEIwMpBjn0>

Baguazhang performed as wushu is beautiful to watch, though it may not be effective for combat. Here is a beautiful demonstration:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86GTh9so4KY>

Here are some Baguazhang sparring sets. It is obvious that they are performed as routines rather than for combat training. The video also shows some interesting specific techniques:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ndP6Sv_ySqE

Although the performers of the wushu Baguazhang as well as the sparring routines probably cannot use their art for combat, we can still learn a lot from the videos for combat application. There are many Baguazhang sparring sets on YouTube where practitioners perform them as mere routines. If we examine them, because of our training, we can understand the combat applications of Baguazhang patterns, as well as how certain combat situations can be overcome.

Please note that there are two approaches here. One is from patterns to situations, i.e. we find out how Baguazhang patterns are used for combat. The other is from situations to patterns, i.e. if we are in a certain combat situation, how we can effectively handle it using an appropriate pattern.

Having a philosophical understanding, we can then put the patterns or the situations into practical use. A good way is to break up a sparring set into sequences, and practice them. Then further break up a sequence into smaller parts. Go over the parts in routine. Then practice the parts at random.

Regarding the “Songs’ and “Methods” mentioned on the internet, the following are some of the differences between what is advised and what we do in our school.

“When you walk, the entire body should not sway. All of this relies on the two calves under the knees crossing each other firmly. Though the stability of the lower section of the body concerns the balanced waist and tights, the middle section of the body also needs the legs and waist.”

This principle is also true in the Baguazhang we practice in our school, but not true in some styles, like the Monkey where the body is often bent forward to reduce its size, and the Drunken Eight Immortals where the body is purposely swayed from side to side for deception.

“Likely touch the lips, close the mouth, the tongue touches the roof of the mouth. In breathing the air is all entered from the nose. When manifesting force to its maximum, use the “hen” and “ha” sounds to emit. Unite the whole original chi as one, it is called “gaining”.

In Baguazhang as well as in all other styles, we usually keep our mouth gently open. We breathe in through the nose and breathe out through the mouth, or we may not worry about breathing at all. We can make any sounds, including the “hen” and “ha” sounds if we like, or we may not make any sounds. We can do this because of our chi flow.

We may follow the advice if we like, but it would not be as effective as our own way.

“Baguazhang has a great difference from other kungfu styles. Stepping forward with moving front leg first is able to achieve success. When stepping backward the rear foot should retreat first. When stepping try to keep on the outside of the opponent and away from the centre line.”

This advice does not apply to our school. We can step forward or backward with either leg because we can have good balance as well as agility by differentiating yin-yang. We can also step outside or inside the opponent depending on which side is advantageous for us.

“Baguazhang has a great difference from others kungfu styles. The force of the front palm and the rear palm is connected. If you wish to use the endings, first move its roots. Every form is like this. Do not treat it likely.”

This advice does not apply to us. According to this advice, when one strikes with his palm, the force must come from his shoulder as the shoulder is the root of the palm. The front palm and the rear palm must be coordinated according to this principle.

For us the root is at the dan tian. When we strike, our force issues from the dan tian. When we are advanced and our whole body is charged with energy, the root can be at the wrist. When we strike our force issues from our wrist, though eventually it comes from the dan tian. As soon as our force is expended in our strike, energy from the Cosmos flows in to fill our dan tian and other parts of our body when force has been used. We can do this because of our chi flow.

“The spirit of Baguzhang is manifested from the neck bone. When turning and twisting the head, the hands should move first. When changing techniques the head withdraws, and when emitting the head extends. It is like a spiritual dragon connecting the head and the tail.”

For us the spirit of Baguazhang is manifested in the whole body. When turning or twisting the head, the hands may move first, or later, or at the same time, or not at all, depending on which movement is most advantageous. Similarly, when moving the hands or any part of the body, the head or any part of the body may move first, later, at the same time or not at all.

“When striking an opponent, the upper arms must be used as the root. The upper arm on the shoulder area should not extend completely. This means if you desire to advance, step forward with the front leg. If you step forward with the rear leg, the spiritual effort is in vain.”

This advice does not apply to us. We are not limited by such restrictions. If we strike an opponent, depending on which is most favorable, we can use our

elbow, shoulder, waist or feet as the root, not necessary it must be the upper arm. If we desire to advance, we can step forward with either leg. Whatever we do it will not affect our spirit or the effectiveness of our action.

“The abundant force is emitted from tendons and bones. The hand originates from bones and must coordinate with tendons. The big tendon on the heel is connected with the chest and spine, i.e. the entire body is united into one unit. When emitting techniques with stepping forward, the force is able to smash.”

This is not true for us. While it is true that when internal force is issued from bones, it is more powerful than when it is issued from muscles, our advanced practitioners can cause more damage by issuing internal force from a palm or a finger. The internal force issued is different.

When issued from bones it is hard internal force, when issued from a palm or a finger it is soft internal force. Soft internal force can cause more damage than hard internal force like in Cosmos Palm when the force is issued from a palm, and dim mark when the force is issued from a finger.

Such damaging force can be issued from any position, with or without stepping forward. When force is exploded as in the advice above, hard force is channeled into an opponent by physical movement causing a smashing effect. When force is channeled into an opponent using a palm or a finger, soft force is directed by mind to penetrate into an opponent to distort his energy network causing severe, and sometimes delayed, damage.

“When stepping, the waist is raised first. If retreating and withdrawing are appropriate, marvelous result can be demonstrated. If the feet desire to move but the waist does not move, the stepping will be slow and unsteady and the opportunity will be delayed or lost.”

While rotating the waist is an effective way to move, and it is recommended for beginners so that they develop a good habit of movement, sometimes for some particular occasions it may be better just to move the feet while stepping forward or retreating without raising or moving the waist. This is often done in Xingyiquan when pressing into an opponent.

When one is well trained in rotating the waist while making any movement with the feet, the waist rotation can be so minimized while pressing forward as in Xingyiquan that it is not noticeable.

Hence, while these “songs” and “methods” are helpful to practitioners in general, some of them contradict what we normally do in our school. Not only we do not fail to get the results following the “songs” and “methods” is purported to give, we actually get better results by not following them!

This does not mean that the “songs” and “methods” are misleading. Indeed, Baguazhang practitioners in general should follow these “songs” and “methods”. But we are different. We are elite. Because of the tremendous benefits we get from our other training, like chi flow in chi kung, solidness in Shaolin Kungfu and fluidity in Taijiquan, we can forgo these “songs” and “methods” and still get better results than what these “songs” and “methods” aim to give. This is the advantage of breadth and depth.

An analogy can make this clearer. If you are a learner-driver, you have to follow driving instructions precisely, like adjusting your seat and mirrors, holding the steering-wheel correctly and placing your feet properly. But if you are an expert driver, you may ignore these instructions yet drive more safely and efficiently.

In the same way, although you may have practiced Baguazhang for a short time, your performance of and benefits from Baguazhang may be better than those who have practiced for years. One main reason, besides the advantage of breadth and depth you get from our school, is that we have resources to what past masters have discovered and passed on to us in classics.

Question 2

In an earlier Q&A, you briefly mentioned that you believe Dong Hai Chuan learned Baguazhang from a Taoist immortal:

Quote:

It is not uncommon that some practitioners perform kungfu movements while in Self-Manifested Chi Movement. Sometimes the practitioners may not have learnt kungfu before! Then, why could they perform kungfu movements, which were often beautiful and authentic?

There were a few possible reasons. One, they were in contact with Universal Mind, which is omnipresent and all knowing. Two, they reached into their own deeper levels of consciousness, which revealed kungfu movements they had seen or had learnt in past lives. Three, they were in contact with some higher beings who transmitted the kungfu movements to them. This, I believe, could be the case of Dong Hai Chuan, the First Patriarch of Bagua Kungfu, who said he learned the art from a Taoist immortal on Hua Mountain.

<http://www.shaolin.org/answers/ans03b/aug03-3.html>

Can you kindly elaborate on this?

Could Baguazhang be a martial art passed on to mankind by immortals?

Stephen

Answer

It is understandable for most people to think it is a crazy idea when told that a martial art was transmitted to a master by a non-human being, like a god or an immortal. Before I learned from my sifu, Sifu Ho Fatt Nam, in the early 1970s, I myself would not believe such an outlandish suggestion.

But my training with my sifu gradually changed my perception of the supernatural, not through instructions from my sifu but through my direct experience of events that actually happened.

When I first went to my sifu's house to learn kungfu, I was very surprised to find many statues of gods and buddhas on an altar. I clearly remember telling myself that I went there to learn kungfu, not religion or metaphysics. I knew my sifu was a rare and great Shaolin master, though not many

members of the public knew that. Later I found out that the general public knew him as a great spiritual teacher.

If I claim myself to be scientific, like basing my conclusions on actual events and not on speculations, I would have to accept that spiritual beings exist, though most people would not have the opportunities to see them. One of the series of events that convinced me of this fact is my series of conversations with Immortal Li, one of the famous eight Taoist immortals.

I also had personal experiences of my first sifu, Uncle Righteousness, appearing in my dreams to teach me Shaolin Kungfu what he did not teach me before he left this world for heaven. If not for my spiritual experiences while learning from Sifu Ho Fatt Nam, I would have regarded these lessons beyond the physical realm with Uncle Righteousness as dreams. But with my enriched spiritual experiences, I would take poetical license to regard them as reality.

Members of our Shaolin Wahnam Family also have told me their supra-mundane experiences. A senior student, for example, told me that the late Grandmaster Lam Sai Weng, appeared to teach him Iron Wire. The lessons did not happen in dreams, but in real life and the grandmaster appeared just like a normal person.

The amazing part was that this senior student, who is not Chinese, had never heard of Grandmaster Lam Sai Weng before, and did not know about Iron Wire. It was later that he saw pictures on my website that he realized the metaphysical teacher was Grandmaster Lam Sai Weng. And it was when he showed me what he had learned from the metaphysical teacher that I told him it was Iron Wire. Having been personally taught by the grandmaster himself, of course, this student's Iron Wire was excellent.

An instructor told me that a warrior-god appeared to transmit to him some lessons. I can't remember whether this occurred in his dream or waking life. But one day when we visited a Chinese temple, this instructor, who is not Chinese, was surprised to see a statue of the warrior-god was exactly the same as the one who appeared to transmit to him some lessons – the same in appearance and in attire! This warrior-god is very closely related to our school.

With this background knowledge, we shall better understand the answer here as well as the one in my Question-Answer series.

In our chi kung classes, it is not uncommon to find some students burst into kungfu movements during chi flow. Usually these kungfu movements are gentle and graceful, like Taijiquan. Sometimes they can be vigorous, like Shaolin Kungfu.

One memorable example was when Dr Daniel in Belgium performing powerful Lohan Kungfu while in chi flow. Daniel had not learned any kungfu before. The chi kung lessons with me were to help him overcome a serious heart problem.

After performing some chi kung dynamic patterns, Daniel first went into some gentle chi flow. Soon the chi flow became not just vigorous but manifested in solid stances and powerful patterns that I could easily recognize as Lohan Kungfu.

Normally such vigorous movements are not what a patient with a serious heart problem should do. Being a medical doctor himself, Daniel knew this, but he was not concerned and was actually enjoying himself. With my understanding of chi kung philosophy knowing that self-manifested movements from chi flow are very safe, I was not concerned, and told me, as usual, "Carry on. Enjoy yourself."

This was a trend of Daniel's chi kung practice. Every time after performing any chi kung patterns, he would go into vigorous chi flow movements performing beautiful and powerful Lohan Kungfu, more beautiful and powerful than what many Lohan Kungfu master could do. The routine each time was not the same, but it was no mistaking that it was Lohan Kungfu.

Indeed, I was so impressed with his chi flow movements of Lohan Kungfu patterns that I composed a Lohan Kungfu set for him to practice after his recovery. Of course, he recovered from his serious heart problem. I had no doubt about this right from the start.

Daniel did not have to go for the heart surgery which his colleagues demanded. He also can enjoy playing tennis and skiing which his heart specialist friends said he could never do again.

Daniel's performance of Lohan Kungfu during his chi flow was due to one of three possible reasons as explained in my Question-Answer series, namely he was in contact with the Universal Mind linking him with someone performing Lohan Kungfu, he reached deep into his own unconsciousness of one of his past lives when he was a Lohan Kungfu master, or a supernatural teacher taught him while in chi flow.

In Daniel's case the most likely reason was the second. He was a Lohan Kungfu master before in his past life.

The first possible reason was not likely. If it were, Daniel's performance would not be so beautiful and so powerful. It would also not happened every time he had a chi flow.

The third possible reason was also not likely. If it were, his progress would be gradual and systematic. He would not be able to perform beautiful and powerful Lohan Kungfu the first time in his chi flow, and maintained the very high standard every time.

In the case of Dong Hai Chuan, the First Patriarch of Baguazhang, the third reason was most likely, i.e. he learned Baguazhang or the essence of his art which later came to be called Baguazhang from a Taoist immortal.

Let us briefly review the historical source of Baguazhang. There is very little record on the beginning of Baguazhang except what is popularly known and usually regarded as legend, which implies that it may not be supported by historical facts. But all Baguazhang practitioners and the great majority of both kungfu masters and kungfu scholars regard Dong Hai Chuan (1797-1882) as the First Patriarch, and some regard him as the founder.

There is a difference between being the first patriarch and the founder of a kungfu style, a difference that many English speaking persons may not realize.

Hoong Hei Khoon, for example, is regarded as the first patriarch of Hoong Ka Kungfu. What he taught and subsequently passed down the lineage by his successors was the same as what he learned from his sifu, the Venerable Chee Seen, though Hoong Hei Khoon might have made some additions or improvements.

Yim Wing Choon is regarded as the founder of Wing Choon Kungfu. What she taught and subsequently passed down the lineage by her successors was different from what she learned from her sifu, the Venerable Ng Mui, though the main features were retained and at the time the founder might not consciously set out to found a new style.

The concept of a founder of a kungfu style is a phenomenon in English, but not in Chinese. In Chinese, irrespective of whether the kungfu style was the same as or different from what the first master of the lineage learned from his sifu, he is regarded as the first patriarch of that lineage.

Hence, in Chinese Yim Yim Choon is regarded as the First Patriarch of Wing Choon Kungfu, Chen Harng as the First Patriarch of Choy-Li-Fatt Kungfu, and Dong Hai Chuan as the First Patriarch of Baguazhang. Strictly speaking, they did not found or invent new kungfu forms. They learned them from their teachers, but the changes they made to meet expedient needs were many and varied enough that the resultant styles were quite different from the original styles they learned.

Similarly, in the Chinese context, Siddhartha Guatama did not found Buddhism, and Lao Tzu did not found Taoism. The teachings which English speaking persons later refer to as Buddhism and Taoism were already in existence before Siddhartha Guatama and Lao Tzu. These greatest of teachers refined the teachings and passed on to posterity as a coherent system for the benefit of anyone who wishes to follow them irrespective of his professed religion. It is also interesting to note that before the advent of English, followers did not refer to what they practiced as Buddhism or Taoism, they just called it the teaching.

The First Patriarch of Baguazhang, Dong Hai Chuan, was already well versed in kungfu in his youth. There was no mention about his early teachers, but he was good at Shaolin Lohan Kungfu, and beat many masters, including on a lei tai, or open platform where combat took place with no rules until one was killed, decisively defeated or conceded defeat.

But Dong Hai Chuan was still not satisfied with kungfu attainment. He travelled all over the country seeking great masters to improve his art. A significant contribution to his kungfu advancement was learning circle walking and Taoist internal arts from Huang Guan Dao Ren, or Yellow Crown Taoist Master, of the Longmen or Dragon Gate school.

Later, according to Dong Hai Chuan himself, he met a Taoist immortal on Jiu Hua Mountain, or Nine-Beautiful Mountain. The Taoist immortal, known as Bi Deng Xia, taught him the essence of the art which was later known as Baguazhang.

Dong Hai Chuan worked as a servant in the kitchen of a Manchurian prince. During a party where the hall was crowded with guests, Dong Hai Chuan carrying many plates of delicious dishes on his arm swerved through the crowd adroitly. The prince was very impressed and asked Dong Hai Chuan to give a kungfu demonstration.

The head teacher of the palace guards was annoyed and challenged Dong Hai Chuan to a sparring match. Dong Hai Chuan defeated him easily, and was promoted to replace the defeated master to teach the imperial guards. When the prince asked Dong Hai Chuan the name of his kungfu style, Dong Hai Chuan could not answer immediately. Then he saw a bagua or eight-trigram decoration on a wall, which prompted him to answer that it was Baguazhang, or Eight-Trigram Palm.

Later Dong Hai Chuan left the imperial service and taught Baguazhang in Beijing. He did not teach his students the same material. He would teach the first three Mother Palms, namely Single-Changing Palm, Double-Changing Palm and Smooth-Flow Palm as fundamentals. Then he would teach them according to their nature and ability. Amongst his top disciples were Cheng

Ting Hua and Yin Fu.

Dong Hai Chuan was challenged by a famous Xinyiquan master, Guo Yun Shen, who was well known for his “ban bu beng quan”, or “half-step crushing-fist”. Guo Yun Shen was so skillful and powerful with his half-step crushing-fist that no one could stop him – until he met Dong Hai Chuan.

They fought for three days and neither emerged as victorious. The challenge ended in a good note, they became good friends.

(We shall learn the half-step crushing fist in the Xingyiquan course at UK Summer Camp 2013. We shall learn the efficiency and power of this technique, which is especially useful in free sparring competitions, but not the violent character that Guo Yun Shen was noted for. We can erase the violence aspects with chi flow, which Guo Yun Shen probably did not know!)

Many kungfu scholars described Dong Hai Chuan as mysterious about the source of his kungfu teachers, especially in his telling his students that he learned from a Taoist immortal on Jiu Hua Mountain. When I first read about this legend, my initial impression was that probably Dong Hai Chuan developed his art on his own but created this story to make it glamorous. This is also what most people believe.

Most people do not have the opportunities of metaphysical experiences that I had. After those spiritual experiences I believe what Dong Hai Chuan said could be true. My sifu, Sifu Ho Fatt Nam, for example, told me in private that the Monkey Set he specialized in was taught to him by the Monkey God. Knowing my sifu as I did, I had no doubt that what he said was true, though most people would think that it was a made-up story.

My sifu was extremely accomplished in kungfu. He could perform kungfu feats that even master dare not dream to be possible. Yet, he did not want these feats to be known by the public. He also did not want many people to know about his Monkey Set. There was no need at all for him to make up a story.

Similarly Dong Hai Chuan was already very accomplished in his Baguazhang. There was no need for him to make up a story about how he learned it if it were not true. He could just say he invented the skills and techniques himself, or improved on what he already knew, and he would just be as formidable in combat, and nobody would dare to question him.

There is one more important reason why I believe Dong Hai Chuan learned from an immortal – a reason most scholars who want to argue about the origin of Baguazhang could not fathom, whereas the very few who could may not be bothered to discuss it, and it is as follows.

There was a big jump in the standard of Dong Hai Chuan's kungfu before and after his training on Jiu Hua Mountain. By himself he would not be able to improve so much and so rapidly. He was good at his kungfu before Jiu Hua Mountain but judging from records of his earlier fights, he would be unable to match the head teacher of the imperial guards. After Jiu Hua Mountain he was a great kungfu master, defeating the head teacher easily.

It was possible that Dong Hai Chuan had human help, but it was very unlikely. Not only Jiu Hua Mountain was isolated, but what Dong Hai Chuan accomplished after Jiu Hua Mountain was unknown before both in form and in quality.

As an analogy, in an earlier example even if I had doubt (but actually I didn't) that the senior student learned from Grandmaster Lam Sai Weng in a supra-mundane manner, after seeing the superb quality of his performance of Iron Wire, would have clear the doubt. Unless taught by a great master of the art, no one, even if he is a very clever and fast learner, would have progress so fast and so much.

Yes, Baguazhang could be a martial art passed down by immortals. It is certainly a rare opportunity to learn it.

Question 3

How does Ba Gua Zhang compare to an art like Choy Lee Fut in terms of fighting multiple opponents? To me it seems like one distinction I can tell is that Ba Gua Zhang uses more of a mix of short and wide stances, whereas Choy Lee Fut focuses more on long range?

Sonwukong

Answer

Both Baguazhang and Choy-Li-Fatt are effective arts to fight against multiple opponents. But their approaches and techniques are quite different. It is interesting and educational to compare them, which will enrich ones understanding and performance of combat even if he does not practice Baguazhang or Choy-Li-Fatt.

Comparatively Choy-Li-Fatt has longer range than Baguazhang. This does not mean that Baguazhang does not have long range techniques, besides middle-range and short-range. It is a matter of comparison. Choy-Li-Fatt stances are longer, and the hand techniques also reach further. But Choy-Li-Fatt also has middle-range and short-range techniques. Both Choy-Li-Fatt and Baguazhang are complete arts.

Choy-Li-Fatt is also harder than Baguazhang. Except for Choy-Li-Fatt masters who have progressed from external to internal, Choy-Li-Fatt is an external art, whereas Baguazhang is internal. Presuming all other things being equal, an external art is more threatening than an internal art in combat, and therefore more suitable for fighting against multiple opponents.

Choy-Li-Fatt makes full use of these features in multiple fighting. In fact, the development was the other way round. Choy-Li-Fatt was used by Chinese patriots as well as in the Chinese Republican Army for multiple fighting against the Qing Army, and it was very effective. These features evolved in Choy-Li-Fatt from actual fighting experience.

A Choy-Li-Fatt exponent would use these features to move into multiple opponents. By swinging his powerful arms systematically, opponents would be hit or move away. Those who are hit would have their head or body smashed or bones broken. Those who try to block the powerful swinging arms would have their defending arms broken too. As opponents retreat, the Choy-Li-Fatt practitioner would move into them ferociously. This is an excellent strategy when the Choy-Li-Fatt

exponent is good and the multiple opponents mediocre.

Baguazhang works on different principles. While Choy-Li-Fatt bases on powerful long-range swinging attacks, Baguazhang bases on agility. Baguazhang stances are short, and will be unsuitable for techniques used in Choy-Li-Fatt. But the short stances are effective in getting behind opponents.

A Baguazhang exponent would weave amongst multiple opponents and strike them down from their side or back. He must be constantly on the move. If he stops at one position he will give an opportunity for his multiple opponents to move in on him and attack him at the same time.

But if he is constantly on move, he can fight with one opponent at one time though there may be many opponents around him. Because he is agile and his movements uncertain for the multiple opponents, they would not know where and when to attack simultaneously.

If other factors were equal and the multiple opponents are not skillful, which is usually the case or else they would not need to attack a single person in a group, Choy-Li-Fatt is more effective in multiple combat. If it is a one-to-one combat at masters' level, Baguazhang has an advantage over Choy-Li-Fatt.

Even when the Choy-Li-Fatt exponent is powerful, it is quite easy for the Baguazhang exponent to penetrate his swinging attacks and get to his back to strike him. But if the Choy-Li-Fatt exponent is more skillful, he can surprise the Baguazhang exponent with appropriate counters when the latter makes his penetrating moves, or even when he has got to the Choy-Li-Fatt exponent's back.

Kungfu is not only effective. It is interesting like playing chess.

Question 4

Sifu, what is the highest attainment in Baguazhang?

Sifu Matt Fenton

Answer

The answer is subjective. Different people may give different answers within its range of possibility. To say that the highest attainment in Baguazhang is to become a millionaire, for example, is incorrect because becoming a millionaire is outside its range of possibility, though its benefits may have indirectly contributed to the millionaire's skill in making money.

The achievements of all martial arts fall under one, two or all of these three categories:

1. Combat efficiency.
2. Good health.
3. Spiritual cultivation.

Combat efficiency is the basis of any martial art. If one practices a martial art and is unable to defend himself, we can rightly say that what he practices is not genuine. Shockingly, the great majority of martial artists in the world fall under this below-par category. Either they exchange blows generously, which means they cannot defend themselves, or worse, they do not even know how to exchange blows.

Many martial arts, when practiced genuinely, only provide combat efficiency, but not good health and spiritual cultivation. As they fulfill only one of the three categories of benefits, we call them third-class or mediocre martial arts. Examples are Boxing, Kick-Boxing, Karate, Taekwondo, Mixed Martial Arts, Wrestling, Judo and Muay Thai.

Indeed, their practice is detrimental to health and spiritual cultivation. Most such martial artists are frequently in pain and endure internal injuries, which are detrimental to health, and are often angry and stressful, which are detrimental to spiritual cultivation.

Some martial arts contribute to combat efficiency and good health, which includes vitality and longevity, but not to spiritual cultivation. As they fulfill two of the three categories of benefits, we call them second-class or good martial arts. Examples are external styles of kungfu, like Choy-Li-Fatt, Wing Choon, Hoong Ka, Tantai, Praying Mantis and Eagle Claw.

Many of the masters of these styles are highly spiritual. They have internal force, and are generally peaceful and happy, which indicate spiritual development. But this is an exception – they are masters, and they form a very small percentage of the total number of practitioners. Their external training has gradually evolved to become internal, which contributes to their spiritual cultivation, or they were selected for special internal training.

Some martial arts contribute to all these three categories of benefits of combat efficiency, good health and spiritual cultivation. As they fulfill all the three categories of benefits, we call them first-class or great martial arts. Examples are internal styles of kungfu, like Baguazhang, Xingyiquan, Wuzuquan, Taijiquan and Shaolin Kungfu.

Amongst these great arts, Taijiquan and Shaolin Kungfu are a class above because they lead to the highest spiritual attainment, referred to as merging with the Tao, seeing the Original Face, or in Western terms returning to God the Holy spirit. The other great aims do not purposefully aim at this attainment, but their training, often without the practitioners' conscious knowing, cultivates the practitioner's spirit.

This is so because their training is internal, which is the cultivation of essence, energy and spirit, whereas the training of the second-class martial arts is external, which is the cultivation of tendons, bones and muscles. Shaolin Kungfu and Taijiquan are special because they actually evolved from the highest spiritual cultivation to see the Original Face or to merge with the Tao.

On the other hand, the training of third-class martial artists, by their own definition, is taking punishment, like striking their fists or legs against poles, and pushing their abilities to their limits like lifting weights, running and rope skipping, which insidiously damage both their body and their spirit.

It is a pity that many martial artists do not realize this philosophy, and damage themselves physically and spiritually without their own knowing. In the past when samurais fought for their lords for a living, or in the present when young Muay Thai fighters fight in a ring to feed their parents' families, their sacrifice is justified, though lamentable. But it is just folly due to ignorance when people submit themselves to such suffering as a hobby.

In my opinion, the greatest achievement in Baguazhang is attaining longevity with good health, vitality and agility. Many Baguazhang masters live beyond eighty. Not only they are also healthy and fit, they can still perform their Baguazhang excellently, including rolling on the floor. Their remarkable achievement is no co-incidence. Their Baguazhang training has contributed to these attainments.

As I have said, the answer is subjective. It is influenced by personal choice and values. Some people may regard combat efficiency as Baguazhang's highest attainment, others may regard it as spiritual cultivation.

Personally, while I agree that Baguazhang is highly efficient for combat, it still does not have the breadth and depth of Shaolin Kungfu, or even Wudang Taijiquan. The two highest regarded arts, chin-na and dim mark, are found in Shaolin Kungfu and Wudang Taijiquan, but not in Baguazhang, at least not in the Baguazhang that is popularly practiced, though Baguazhang classics mention that the 72 Shaolin chin-na techniques are hidden in it.

Perhaps the highest martial art attainment a Baguazhang master can achieve is "Strike Across Space Palm". But even the training for this art has to be borrowed from Shaolin.

The levels of spiritual attainments of practicing Baguazhang are high. Despite being powerful and highly combat efficient, Baguazhang practitioners are generally peace-loving, soft-spoken, kind and happy. These are no mean achievements, especially considering that many martial artists today are stressful and angry – at other people and at themselves.

But Baguazhang training by itself will not lead to the highest spiritual attainment of merging with the Supreme Reality. If a Baguazhang master attains this most noble achievement, it is through other means, like Shaolin Zen meditation or Taijiquan Taoist silence-sitting.

Nevertheless, Baguazhang or any other martial art in our school is different. What is not originally available in any art, is attainable by us in that art. With our breath and depth, we can, for example, employ Baguazhang for chin-na and dim mark. We can practice what we call a third-class martial art like Karate as first-class giving us combat efficiency as well as good health and spiritual cultivation. It is not for no reason that we claim ourselves to be elite.

But, of course, it will be more cost-effective if we use an art that is specially designed for the purpose, like Wudang Taijiquan.

Question 5

What is the main thing or key point that Sifu has learned or discovered while reviewing, practicing and teaching Baguazhang?

Sifu Matt Fenton

Answer

I have learnt many interesting things about Baguazhang when I prepared to teach Baguazhang at the UK summer Camp 2012. These invaluable lessons not only enrich my teaching of Baguazhang but also enrich my teaching as well as my own performance and understanding of other kungfu styles

As I did not learn Baguazhang formally from a teacher, my understanding of Baguazhang was vague and haphazard. I knew that unlike Shaolin Kungfu, there were not many Baguzzhang sets. In fact I heard that there was only one set, Swimming Dragon Baguazhang Set. I also knew that the core of Baguazhang was the eight Mother Palms, and that there were 64 characteristic Baguazhang techniques.

Apart from this general information, my understanding of the Baguazhang was haphazard. So I decided to make an extensive as well as in-depth study of the art. Fortunately I have a good collection of Baguazhang classics, most of which were bought years ago but I did not really study them. After deciding to teach Baguazhang I visited many book shops to buy more of Baguazhang books, but unfortunately nowadays books on any kungfu philosophy and in-depth practice are sorely lacking.

On the other hand, I could get a lot of material from the internet, especially from YouTube. However, one must be careful that much of the material is mediocre. There is also some very good material. From all this information I could have a clear picture of Baguazhang.

One of the most rewarding things I have learnt about Baguazhang is to use the Mother Palms and Circle Walking of Baguazhang for developing internal force. Interestingly, I picked up this idea not from Baguazhang classics or videos but from a classic on Praying Mantis Kungfu! There was a mention that certain Praying Mantis patterns could be held in a fixed position like in stance training for developing internal force. Another classic on Northern Shaolin describes holding certain Northern Shaolin patterns in a fixed position, and when tired move on to another pattern in another fixed position, and so on in a circle.

This led to my thinking of the eight Mother Palms and Circle Walking in Baguazhang. I tired out the training myself and was amazed at the tremendous amount of internal force created. This gave me a likely answer to my question which I had asked myself in the past, i.e. how did Baguazhang masters had so much internal force. There was no much mention of internal force training in Baguazhang classics. I went into meditation and had signals that past Baguazhang masters did the same training method that I tried out.

Hence, I was very happy when later I read in one of the Baguazhang classics, Internal School of Baguazhang by Ngai Cheng Woh, that strongly suggested that using the Mother Palms and Circle Walking was an important method of force training in Baguazhang. As it is typical in kungfu classics, the master did not explicitly say so. He merely listed two sets of Mother Palms, the external set which is frequently shown in Baguazhang literature, and the internal set which has never been shown.

Readers without background knowledge would probably miss this very important information. They may even argue that the internal set the master showed was not genuine as they have never practiced it or never seen it. When visitors to YouTube say that our combat applications are useless, because they do not know how to use them, you can have a picture of how easily people miss useful information even when it is generously given.

It is worthy of note that many of the hand patterns of the internal Mother Palms are similar to those in our Shaolin Kungfu stance training though the stances are different, like Two Dragons Embrace Sun, Unicorn Carries Moon and Lohan Carries Water. In Shaolin Kungfu we use the Bow-Arrow Stance, the Unicorn Stance and the Horse-Riding Stance respectively, whereas in Baguazhang the typical Baguazhang Stance is used.

We tried out this secret Baguazhang force training method at the Baguazhang course during the UK Summer Camp 2012, and course participants were amazed at its effectiveness.

Another very rewarding thing that I learned while preparing for the 2012 Baguazhang course and which participants verified at the course, is using chi flow in Circle Walking. This is related to but not the same as using the Mother Palms to develop internal force. In internal force development, practitioners move from one stance or Mother Palm to another, after staying at a particular stance for some time. The Circle Walking is transitional. In using chi flow in Circle Walking, the walking is the main training; practitioners do not stop at any stances.

The key point here is not just Circle Walking, which is performed by all Baguazhang practitioners, but using chi to do the walking, which I believe only Baguazhang masters could do but without their conscious knowing. At

the Baguazhang course 2012, all participants were taught how to use chi to do their Circle Walking, and all did very well.

What is the difference between using chi to do the Circle Walking and using muscles to do the Circle Walking as done by other practitioners? When you use chi to do the walking, you can be very fast and agile, yet you are not tired. When you use muscles to do the walking, you are not as fast and agile, and you become tired more easily.

Using chi to do Circle Walking was never mentioned in Baguazhang classics, but it is a natural progression in our training. To others it is impossible; to us it is natural. Why is it so? Yes, it is because of the magic of chi flow.

A third very rewarding thing I have discovered while preparing to teach Baguazhang was the combat application of some strange looking Baguazhang patterns like Cloud Dragon Rushes to Sky, Cloud Dragon Returns Head, Horizontally Bar Rushing Horse, and Lift Hand Touch Sky.

I have been well known for my ability to see combat applications of patterns where many other people would not have the faintest idea. Yet, I was amazed by both the beauty and sophistication of many Baguazhang combat applications.

Take Cloud Dragon Rushes to Sky, for example. What function could be served by bending the body in an awkward position and lifting one hand high up? I am quite sure that many participants at the Baguazhang course of 2012 were astonished when the combat applications of this and some other apparently flowery Baguazhang patterns were revealed.

Turning about is frequently seen in Baguazhang performance. At first I wondered why a Baguazhang exponent should turn his body in combat, as it would make his movement slower and also it would expose his back to his opponent. I was sure there must be a good reason for the turning, but at first I could not find out the reason.

When preparing to teach Baguazhang, the reason revealed itself. While generally it would be disadvantageous to turn the body, there were situations when such turning would be advantageous. It would actually make the execution of some patterns faster, and enable the exponent to be safer.

So, there are many things or key points I have learned while preparing to teach Baguazhang. But, to answer the question directly, what is the main thing or key point amongst these many things and key points? It is the discovery that a typical Baguazhang pattern has three planes, whereas a Taijiquan pattern has two, and a Shaolin pattern has one.

To illustrate this point, let us take the typical Baguazhang pattern, Green Dragon Tests Claw. When a Baguazhang exponent performs this pattern in the left mode, i.e. with the leg hand and left leg in front, if his legs are aligned to the north, his body is aligned to north-west, and his hands are aligned to the west. Hence, there are three planes – north, north-west and west.

When a Taijiquan exponent, facing north, performs Immortal Waves Sleeves, for example, his legs and body are aligned to the north, and his hands are aligned to north-west. There are two planes – north and north-west.

When a Shaolin exponent, facing north, performs Single Tiger Emerges from Cave, for example, there is only one plane. His legs, body and hands are all aligned to the north.

This interesting point was never mentioned in the classics. Future martial artists will find history in this answer. I believe that Baguazhang employing three planes was evolved from actual experience. Baguazhang masters found using three planes instead of one or two enabled them to be more effective in certain aspect of combat.

What do you think is this aspect? Yes, it enables a Baguazhang exponent to attack the back of an opponent more effectively – a hallmark Baguazhang is famous for.