



Question and Answer Series
Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow
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Question 1

Whenever I practice Cloud Hands (in any set), I feel that if one masters just that, he could be able to encounter any attack. Could that be possible? If so, what would make Cloud Hands so effective? Would you kindly explain where are they coming from (History & Background) and why did they evolve the way they did?

Santiago

Answer

You are right in your feeling. If one masters just Cloud Hands, he is able to counter any attack.

It was recorded that Yang Lu Chan practiced Grasping Sparrow's Tail thousands of times every day. When he fought with other masters in his travels over China and defeated all of them, thus earning the enviable title "Yang the Invincible", he only used Grasping Sparrow's Tail.

I believe "Grasping Sparrow's Tail" used by Yang Lu Chan was Clouds Hands. It is a metachronism, i.e. misplaced term due to time difference. The term "Grasping Sparrow's Tail" did not exist during Yang Lu Chan's time. It was coined later by his grandson, Yang Deng Fu, for a set of techniques comprising "peng", "lu", "li" and "an", or "ward off", "roll back", "press forward" and "in contact".

These four techniques correspond to the patterns "Immortal Waves Sleeves", "Double Dragon Plays with Pearl", "Push Boat According to Flow", and "Open Window to Look at Moon" in our Wahnam Taijiquan. We also have "Black Bear Sinks Hips" in Grasping Sparrow's Tail, which corresponds to the "cheng" technique in Yang Style Taijiquan and is found in the set in Yang Style Taijiquan but this technique is not identified.

In other words, in Grasping Sparrow's Tail practiced in Yang Style Taijiquan there are five techniques, like what we practice in Wahnam Taijiquan, but the fifth technique, "cheng", is not named. Normally only four techniques - "peng", "lu", "li" and "an" - are named.

It is recorded that "Grasping Sparrow's Tail" evolved from "Lazy to Roll up Sleeves" in Chen Style Taijiquan, which in turn evolved from Cloud Hands. I believe that what Yang Lu Chan practiced thousands of times every day was Cloud Hands with emphasis on "Lazy to Roll up Sleeves". It is worthy of note that what Yang Lu Chan practiced and used in defeating all challengers was not Yang Style Taijiquan but Chen Style Taijiquan.

I had a similar experience a few years ago when I was teaching chi kung in Lisboa, Portugal. I can't remember how the conversation led to the topic but I was telling the class that if one had mastered Grasping Sparrow's Tail, he could handle any attack, like what Yang Lu Chan did.

Someone in the class asked , "Sifu, can you show us?"

As usual, I answered, "Yes, of course. Is there anyone who would like to attack me?"

In unison, as if by prior arrangement, everyone pointed at one particular person, whom I later learned was called Manuel.

"You can attack me in any way you like," I told Manuel.

He charged at me with a punch. I casually brushed him away.

"Try again," I said.

Manuel attacked me a few times, and each time I brushed him away quite effortlessly using patterns from Grasping Sparrow's Tail, focusing on rotation of my waist.

Later Riccardo Salvatore told me that Manuel said to him, "I don't know what happened, but Sifu was like an axis. Each time I moved in to attack, I was spiraled away."

Honestly I thought Manuel was a martial art beginner, though on reflection his movements were good. I was quite surprised to learn from Riccardo Salvatore that Manuel was the top Taekwondo master in the country, was an international sparring champion himself, and also had trained Taekwondo champions. I should have suspected something special when everyone pointed at him as I asked for volunteer to attack me. I was naive and did not pay attention at that time.

What I used to ward off Manuel's attacks was actually Cloud Hands applied spontaneously, though at the time I tried to use patterns from Grasping Sparrow's Tail.

Why was I so effective in using Cloud Hands to encounter Manuel's attacks? The following were the reasons:

1. I had much experience in sparring and actual fighting, and therefore was perfectly relaxed when facing an opponent.
2. I had good stances, effective waist rotation, good timing and spacing, and good judgment.
3. I had high-level skills, much internal force, and wide understanding of combat application.
4. I understood the combat applications of Cloud Hands and could apply them effectively in actual combat.

With this background, we can answer with some insight what make Cloud Hands so effective in encountering any attack. There are two main reasons as follows.

1. Cloud Hands is very versatile, and can be adjusted to defend against or counter any attack.
2. Waist rotation is an integral aspect of Cloud Hands, and with waist rotation an exponent can deflect an opponent's force.

Although the two reasons are true, and are expressed clearly, most people will still not understand why Cloud Hands are so effective in encountering any attack. They do not understand because they do not know how to adjust Cloud Hands for the

purpose of defending or countering. They do not know because they lack a wide understanding of combat application.

On the other hand, even when they have a wide understanding of combat application, if a technique is not versatile, they will be unable to use the technique to meet any attack. For example, as a Mirror Hand is not versatile they will be unable to use it to defend against a kick, a throw or a chin-na attack.

However, understanding and practice are different. Even if an exponent has a wide understanding of combat application, and Cloud Hands is versatile, he may not be able to use it against any attack if he lacks skills and internal force. In other words, he may theoretically know the applications of Cloud Hands against any attack, but he lacks the skills and force to use them effectively in practice.

Hence, having high-level skills, much internal force, and wide understanding of combat application, which is the third reason mentioned above in my experience with Manuel, is a requirement to use Cloud Hands effectively against any attack. Another requirement is to understand the application of Cloud Hands and to use them effectively in actual combat, which was the fourth reason.

The third and the fourth reasons are complementary. One may have a wide understanding of other combat applications, but if he does not understand the combat applications of Cloud Hands he may not be able to use it effectively against any attack. On the other hand, he may know the combat applications of Cloud Hands, but does not have a wide understanding of other combat applications, he may be unable to adjust Cloud Hands to encounter attacks that are outside the norm.

An exponent may have internal force, but if an opponent's force is more powerful, the exponent may not succeed in applying his defence or counter. Cloud Hands has a built-in mechanism to offset this setback, namely waist rotation. By rotating his waist the exponent can deflect a stronger force of the opponent. Indeed, in my encounter with Manuel, I used waist rotation extensively, not because I did not have sufficient force but because it was an integral aspect of Cloud Hands and

very effective in deflecting an opponent's force.

Nevertheless, the two requirements alone as stated in the third and fourth reasons above may not be sufficient. The exponent must also have good stances, effective waist rotation, good timing and spacing, and good judgment, as stated in the second reason above.

As I have mentioned elsewhere, looking back at my many sparring sessions and actual fights, I believe a main reason why I could remain undefeated was because of my good stances. Those of you who have seen me demonstrating combat application would have noticed the importance of good stances. I could fell opponents bigger than me, for example, because I had good stances. I could keep Boxers at bay despite their fast jabs because of my good stances.

Waist rotation is innate in Cloud Hands but you must be able to implement it efficiently. Good timing and spacing, and good judgment are of course crucial. You may know the combat applications of Cloud Hands against any attack very well, but if your timing or spacing is poor, or your judgment wrong, you will still be defeated.

Perhaps the most important factor, which is also the factor that many people overlook, is the presence of mind. You may know the combat applications of Cloud Hands against any attack, and actually have practiced them well with your cooperating classmates, but if you become nervous or panicky when an opponent attacks you, you will throw all your knowledge and training to the winds and fight frantically like an untrained person.

This is a major weakness of most kungfu practitioners. It is not without good reasons for the saying that the highest kingfu is at the level of mind, and being relaxed when facing a fearsome opponent is one of its many aspects.

An effective way to have presence of mind in combat is to earn it through years of rough sparring with other martial artists or through actual fighting. A more civilized way is to train sparring with your classmates with a lot of threat.

So far the explanation of how Cloud Hands can be effective against any attack is academic. It would be useful to examine some practical aspects of how Cloud Hands can be used against various attacks.

Attacks can come in countless ways, but all of them can be classified into four categories: striking, kicking, felling and chin-na. We shall choose a typical example for each category.

Suppose you face your opponent using the pattern, "Playing the Lute", with your right hand and right leg in front. Your opponent rushes in with a "Black Tiger Steals Heart", using a left Bow-Arrow and a right punch.

As his punch nears, move your right leg backward to an appropriate space and simultaneously ward off his right punch with your right arm, rotating your waist in a clockwise direction, and push him away with your left hand to your right side or to your back. You may, if you like, strike him instead of pushing him away.

You face your opponent using the same "Playing the Lute". He moves in with a right side kick.

Shift your body slightly backward to avoid the kick, and simultaneously sweep your right hand in an anti-clockwise direction downward with your open palm facing your right, then quickly turn your hand upward with your open palm now facing your left so that you hold his leg, cover his two hands with your left hand, and swiftly move your right foot to place it behind his left foot, and fell him backward with a forward push of your hands.

Now your opponent moves forward and attempts to fell you using "Carry Tiger back to Mountain", or "Fell Tree with Roots" in Shaolin Kungfu.

Move your left leg slightly backward in a small arc to reverse his leverage advantage, simultaneously hold his right wrist with your left hand, and hold his left upper arm near his shoulder with your right hand to prevent him from striking you, move your right hip in contact with his right hip to act as an anchor, and rotate your waist in an anti-clockwise direction while pushing his left shoulder backward with your right hand to fell him backward.

Your opponent moves in to grip your right wrist with his right hand, and your right elbow with his left hand in an attempt to apply a chin-na grip on your right arm using the pattern "Old Eagle Catches Snake".

Relax your right arm, make a small anti-clockwise circle and move it like a snake so that your right arm presses his two hands against his own body, and simultaneously move your right leg forward behind his right leg, place your right hip against his body as an anchor, rotate your waist in an antic-clockwise direction, and fell him backward with your right hand using the pattern "Carry Tiger Back to Mountain".

All these counters use the movements of Cloud Hands.

Does this mean that if one wishes to encounter any attack, he needs to learn only Cloud Hands and no other techniques?

As explained above, it is not just the technique of Cloud Hands that enables a master to encounter any attack. He needs combat skills, internal force, wide understanding of combat applications, good stances, effective waist rotation, good timing and spacing, good judgment, and being perfectly relaxed when facing opponents. He acquires these requirements gradually through practicing combat applications of many techniques.

Hence, if a student just learns the combat applications of Cloud Hands against any attack, even if he knows them, he will not be able to apply them effectively in combat because he lacks the other requirements.

Cloud Hands came from the great Zhang San Feng himself. He was honored not just as the first patriarch of Taijiquan but also as the first patriarch of internal kungfu.

Zhang San Feng was a great Shaolin master, a fact not many people realize. Before him, Shaolin practitioners first practiced the physical form of Shaolin Kungfu. Those who had proven themselves to be worthy, were taught nei kung, or internal art, which is now more commonly called chi kung, or energy art. When a few of them had become advanced, they were taught meditation, or a training of mind.

After graduating from the Shaolin Temple in Henan, Zhang San Feng retired on the Wudang Mountain in Hebei to continue his training to attain Enlightenment, which he did. As he was a very advanced Shaolin practitioner, he performed his Shaolin Kungfu in chi flow and a meditative state of mind.

After completing a set, he remained at standing meditation when he would sway gently and blissfully, known as "Flowing Breeze Swaying Willows", and sometimes going into graceful movements in chi flow, poetically described as "Flowing Water Floating Clouds", which was later shortened to Cloud Hands.

Zhang San Feng had a few students, but they were not at his high level. They could not perform kungfu movements in chi flow. So Zhang San Feng stylized these originally spontaneous movements of Cloud Hands into definite forms so that his students could practice them with uniformity and continuity as a set. In other words, instead of performing spontaneous chi flow movements of Cloud Hands which varied from time to time which Zhang San Feng did but which his students initially could not do, he taught his students definite forms derived from the spontaneous movements, arranged in a routine so that the students could learn them systematically.

In this way the students could learn a kungfu set of patterns which contributed to their health, vitality, longevity and spiritual cultivation as well as for combat. This original set was called Thirty Seven Pattern Long Fist. It was so called because there were 37 patterns, and all the patterns were performed in a continuous flow as if they were one long pattern. "Fist" here means a kungfu set.

This was Shaolin Kungfu, and to differentiate it from the Shaolin Kungfu practiced at the Shaolin Temple on Song Shan or Song Mountain in Henan, which was later called Songshan Shaolin Kungfu or Henan Shaolin Kungfu, the Shaolin Kungfu practiced on Wudang Mountain was called Wudang Shaolin Kungfu, later shortened to Wudang Kungfu. Centuries later it evolved into Taijiquan, and to differentiate it from other styles of Taijiquan, this original Taijiquan practiced on Wudang Mountain is now called Wudang Taijiquan.

Hence, Wudang Taijiquan evolved from Cloud Hands, i.e. the spontaneous movements in chi flow poetically described as "Flowing Water floating Clouds". The series of movements which later formalized into Grasping Sparrow's Tail was also called Cloud Hands.

Grasping Sparrow's Tails consisted of a few patterns, but gradually this collection of patterns was expanded to more patterns which formed various kungfu sets. The set in Chen Style Taijiquan, which formed the base of our Wahnam Taijiquan set called "Flowing Water Floating Clouds", and the 108-Pattern in Yang Style Taijiquan also contain patterns called "Cloud Hands".

Hence, the term "Cloud Hands" may refer to a pattern, a sequence similar to Grasping Sparrow's Tail, or a set like Flowing Water Floating Clouds. In the same way, in Shaolin Kungfu the term "Black Tiger Steals Heart" may refer to a pattern, a sequence like the first of the 16 combat sequences, or a set like the first combat sequence set.

In the 1970s China promoted kungfu, called "wushu" in Mandarin Chinese, not as a martial art but as a sport. A committee of Taijiquan masters composed a set, which was mainly based on Yang Style Taijiquan, for competition purposes. This set was called the 24-Pattern Simplified Taijiquan Set.

Although it was named "Simplified", it is a beautiful set comprising all important Taijiquan patterns. "Cloud Hands" is a significant pattern performed many times to form a sequence in this set. However, in modern wushu tradition, internal force, combat application and spiritual cultivation are not taught in this set. Wushu championships are accessed by solo demonstration of the set.

When I first taught Taijiquan in our school, I used this 24-Pattern Simplified Set. But, of course, in our Shaolin Wahnam tradition, we pay much importance to internal force, combat application and spiritual cultivation. While teaching this set at the St Petersburg Taijiquan Festival on 2nd November 2012, I suggested that we found a more poetic name for this set. Kevin posted my suggestion on our Shaolin Wahnam Discussion forum. Christina suggested "Grasping Sparrow with Hands

Like Clouds". I modified it to "Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow". Zhang Wuji provided the Chinese character for the complete name of the set to be "Wahnam Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow Tai Chi Chuan Set".

This is a brief historical background of where Cloud Hands came from and how it evolved into a set in our school. The pattern "Cloud Hands" can be used to encounter any attack if the exponent also has other requirements like skills and judgment. The sequence "Cloud Hands", represented in Grasping Sparrow's Tail, form the basics of all Taijiquan techniques. The set "Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow" embodies all the important benefits that practicing Taijiquan will bring, namely good health, combat efficiency and spiritual cultivation.

Question 2

What are the advantages and disadvantages of selecting the Wahnam Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow Set over the Yang 108 pattern set as a specialist set for a Special Intensive Combined Taijiquan/Shaoquan course in Malaysia?

Kevin

Answer

Before answering the question, it is helpful to have a better understanding of the term “specialist set” or “specialized set”, as the term used by us has changed its meaning over time due to our progress. This description also reveals the development of our Shaolin and Taijiquan syllabuses.

In the first advanced combined Shaolin-Taijiquan course in July/August 2005 where only senior instructors were invited, no special sets were selected but we used Shaolin Kungfu and Taijiquan against other martial arts, like Judo, Grappling and Wrestling when Kai Uwe, who is an expert in these areas, taught many counters.

In the second advanced course in September 2005, five Shaolin sets, namely “Tiger-Crane”, “Dragon Form”, “Dragon-Tiger”, “Five Animals” and “Monkey”, were selected as “specialized sets” for closer study. They were called “specialized sets” because the core Shaolin syllabus at that time (and is still now) was the Basic 16 Combat Sequences. Course participants, having completed the 16 combat sequences, chose one of the five sets for further study.

The 16 Shaolin combat sequences were composed by me, and were based on the 12 Shaolin combat sequences at the Shaolin Wahnam Association in Sungai Petani, Malaysia in the 1980s. The 12 combat sequences were also composed by me to meet an expedient need, which was to enable students to apply kungfu patterns for combat in about 3 years instead of 15 years or more.

When I first learned Shaolin Kungfu from Uncle Righteousness, I learned mainly forms, which was the norm then and is also the norm now, except that some schools today introduce random free sparring using Boxing gloves and Kick-Boxing techniques into their schools. I was, however, quite outside the norm. I engaged in free sparring with my classmates, but was unsystematic then, and sought martial artists of other kungfu schools and other martial arts for free sparring.

Even at this early stage I remained undefeated, not because I was good but because I was smart. Unknown to me then I used Sun Tzu's philosophy of knowing myself and knowing my enemy. Although I was not good, my opponents were worse.

When I learned from Sifu Ho Fatt Nam, the emphasis was on force training and combat application. My kungfu performance improved tremendously. I still sought other kungfu practitioners and other martial artists for free sparring, and I could defeat them easily, often within three moves but sometimes I allowed them to go on for fun.

Again I was smart. Usually I could anticipate my opponents' moves, and responded accordingly with counters I had prepared and practiced well beforehand. Infrequently, if their moves were outside what I had prepared, I just let them pass. Most attacks were stereotyped. If you prepare 10 counters well, you can handle more than 80% of attacks.

My path to using kungfu for free sparring was orthodox. I first learned kungfu forms – a lot of them. Then I engaged in free sparring, and tried to use the kungfu forms I had learned. This was unmethodical. When I learned from Sifu Ho Fatt Nam, I made a huge jump in my learning process. Instead of figuring what kungfu patterns to use while sparring, my sifu taught me basic counters against common attacks. This saved me a lot of time and effort. But I still had to learn my forms first – Four-Gates and then Shaolin Bagua Set (which was different from the Baguazhang we now have in our school).

So when I taught at the Shaolin Wahnam Association in Sungai Petani in the 1980s, I used this method. The first kungfu set I learned from Uncle Righteousness was Tiger-Crane, and the first set I learned from Sifu Ho Fatt Nam was Four-Gates. I found Tiger-Crane too sophisticated for beginning students, so I used Four-Gates as the fundamental set which every student had to start with, like what occurred at the southern Shaolin Temple at Quanzhou before it was burnt by the Qing Army in the 1850s.

After Four-Gates, students could select one of the following: Bagua, Flower Set, Triple Stretch and Taming Tiger. Meanwhile I also taught 12 Shaolin combat sequences. This sped up the students' ability to use kungfu patterns for free sparring from 15 years to 3 years. It took me about 15 years before I could use kungfu patterns to spar efficiently. This was actually not too bad, considering that most kungfu practitioners today could not use kungfu patterns to spar at all regardless of how long they had practiced or taught kungfu. Some of them use a semblance of Kick-Boxing.

I made another huge jump in using kungfu patterns for sparring when I first taught Intensive Shaolin Kungfu Courses in 2000s. Instead of teaching kungfu sets first, which is the norm, I started with the 16 Shaolin combat sequences, which were improved from the earlier 12 combat sequences.

There are some differences between the new set of 16 sequences and the earlier set of 12 sequences. The new set is more systematic and comprehensive as follows:

1. Sequences 1 to 4 – Combat skills.
2. Sequences 5 to 8 – Striking.
3. Sequences 9 to 12 – Kicking.
4. Sequences 13 to 16 – Felling and Chin-Na.

Originally I planned to have 20 combat sequences, with Sequences 17 to 20 emphasizing on chin-na. At that time videos were unknown; even photographs were not widely used. We could only complete 12 sequences comfortably and

often had to rush through Sequences 13 to 16 which actually focused on felling. As chi-na was also included in Sequences 13 to 16, I left out Sequences 17 to 20.

These sequences were linked together to form sets, as follows:

1. Sequence 1 to 4 – Black Tiger Steals Heart
2. Sequences 5 to 8 – Fierce Tiger Speeds through Valley
3. Sequences 9 to 12 – Happy Bird Hops up Branch
4. Sequences 13 to 16 – Fell Tree with Roots

Sequences 17 to 20 are linked to form a set called Fierce Tiger Descends Mountain, and as we did not have sufficient time to learn it at an Intensive Shaolin Kungfu Course, it was assigned to be a selective set, the meaning of which will be explained subsequently.

Before we attempted the combat sequences, we learned basic Shaolin patterns. 4 attack patterns and 4 defend patterns were linked to form a set called Lohan Asks the Way.

A parallel development occurred in Taijiquan. I also had 12 Taijiquan combat sequences when I taught at Shaolin Wahnam Association in Sungai Petani in the 1980s. These earlier 12 sequences were Taijiquan version of the 12 Shaolin sequences. The attack and defence were similar, but instead of using Shaolin techniques I used Taijiquan techniques.

Our present 12 Taijiquan combat sequences, however, were not derived from the earlier ones, but were evolved from my teaching of Pushing Hands and Striking Hands in Intensive Taijiquan Courses. As students systematically progressed from Pushing Hands to Striking Hands, discernable patterns emerged which I linked together to form the new 12 Taijiquan patterns.

The 12 sequences were linked together to form 4 Taijiquan sets as follows:

1. Sequences 1 to 3 – White Snake Shoots Venom
2. Sequences 4 to 6 – Green Dragon Shoots Pearl
3. Sequences 7 to 9 – Black Bear Sinks Hips
4. Sequences 10 to 12 – Carry Tiger Back to Mountain

Before attempting these combat sequences, we learned some basic Taijiquan patterns, which could be summed up in the sequence, Grasping Sparrow's Tail.

The patterns were combined with some other basic patterns like Single Whip, White Crane Flap Wings, Green Dragon Shoots Pearl and Cross-Hand Thrust Kick to form a set called Cloud Hands. Although this is the shortest Taijiquan set in our school and therefore easy to learn, it incorporates all important techniques and skills of Taijiquan. It is the Taijiquan counterpart of Shaolin Lohan Ask the Way.

When I first taught Taijiquan in our school, I used the 24-Pattern Simplified Taijiquan Set, which is now called Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow in Wahnam Taijiquan. There are also other Wahnam Taijiquan sets, like Yellow Bee Sucks Pollen, which is a condensation of the 12 combat sequences into 8 sequences, and Old Eagle Catches Snake, which is a crystallization of the 12 sequences into 4 sequences.

There are also the 108-Pattern Yang Style Taijiquan Set, and the Flowing Water Floating Clouds Set, which incorporates the essence of Chen Style Taijiquan. To top it all there is the Wudang Taijiquan Set, which is the climax of Shaolin Kungfu development and the source of all styles of Taijiquan.

Hence, we were quite revolutionary. Instead of starting with classical Shaolin or Taijiquan sets, which students today learn mainly for demonstration but are unable to apply them for combat, we started with combat sequences composed by me, and students were able to apply them for combat in a matter of months instead of years which some exceptional students could do. Our students also have benefits of health and spiritual joys that other students may not have.

This relatively long background is not only interesting as it describes how our kungfu sets developed, but is also necessary to understand the meaning of the term "specialist set" or "specialized set". We first used the term "specialized set" to differentiate it from "basic sets" like Black Tiger Steals Heart and Fierce Tiger Speeds through Valley in Shaolin Kungfu, and White Snake Shoots Venom and Green Dragon Shoots Venom in Taijiquan, which all Shaolin and Taijiquan students in our

school practice. In other words, a specialized set was one a student attending a particular course chose to specialize in. A basic set was one all students would learn in a regular class or in an intensive course.

For example, in an early Intensive Shaolin Kungfu Course in 2005, Dragon-Tiger and Five Animals were specialized sets, because only some students who attended this course chose these sets to specialize in. Sets like Lohan Asks the Way and Black Tiger Steals Heart practiced by all Shaolin students in our school were basic sets.

In the recent Taijiquan Festival in St Petersburg in the United States, Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow, 108-Pattern Yang Style Taijiquan, Flowing Water Floating Clouds and Wudang Taijiquan were specialized sets as only those who attended this course learned them. White Snake Shoots Venom and Green Dragon Shoots Pearl were basic sets because all Taijiquan students in our school learned them.

The term “specialized set” might give an impression that the set was very advanced. This was not the original intention, as sets like Dragon-Tiger and Five Animals were intermediate, and sets like Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow and White Crane Flaps Wings (another specialized set that I taught in some regional Taijiquan courses) were quite elementary. Thus, we changed the term “specialized set” to “selective set” to convey the meaning that it was a set a student selected to learn in a particular course, instead of a set he specialized in at an advanced level. If he chose to specialize in it later on, a selective set could become a specialized set.

We can now examine with more insight the advantages and disadvantages of selecting Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow over 108-Pattern Yang Style Taijiquan as a selective set a Special Combined Shaolin-Taijiquan Course.

Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow (henceforth called Grasp Sparrow for short) is a shorter version derived from the longer 108-Pattern Yang Style Taijiquan (henceforth called 108-Pattern). Hence, the philosophy, skills, techniques, tactics, strategies and application of both sets are the same. Advantages and disadvantages concerning the two sets are mainly due their length. What is advantageous in one set can be disadvantageous in the other.

Cloud Hands has 24 patterns, whereas 108-Pattern has 108 patterns. Although there are only 24 patterns, Grasp Sparrow contains all significant patterns found in 108-Pattern, because the same patterns are repeated numerous times in the longer set. Some patterns, like Lift Hand, Carry Tiger Back to Mountain, Separate Leg, Strike Tiger Poise, Bend Bow Shoot Tiger and Sway Lotus Leg, are not found in the shorter set.

Being shorter, Grasp Sparrow is easier and faster to learn. The sequences are clear-cut, and one can learn the whole set in a relatively short time. The numerous repetitions in 108-Pattern can sometimes be confusing, causing beginning students to be mixed up in various sections of the set.

On the other hand, those who have time and patience may find the longer set more rewarding. Not only the extra patterns found in the longer set contributes more combat applications, but also as the longer set has more combinations of common techniques arranged in different sequences, it gives more depth and variety in combat situations.

For example, although Grasp Sparrow has Low Stance Single Whip to defend against any kicking attacks, 108-Pattern has an added pattern in Striking Tiger Poise for this purpose. The advantage of Striking Tiger Poise over Low Stance Single Whip is that the former technique is quicker and more versatile.

Sway Lotus Kick is found in 108-Pattern but not in Grasp Sparrow. This technique is useful against sweeping kicks, as well as to deflect simultaneous attacks from many spears or to capture the spears.

In Grasp Sparrow, Single Whip occurs twice. The first time it is followed by Cloud Hands. There is not much combat significance in having these two patterns together; they just happen to follow one after the other to present the two patterns in the set.

The second time, Single Whip is followed by High Padding Horse, and two Thrust Kicks. There is some combat significance here. If an opponent counter attacks after you have executed a Single Whip, you can brush off his counter-attack and

strike with a thrust palm using High Padding Horse. As he tries to dodge, follow up with a thrust kick. The second thrust kick is for a different situation, when an opponent attacks from behind.

In 108-Pattern, Single Whip is followed by the same sequence as above as well as by other different sequences. In Sequence 3 of 108-Pattern, Single Whip is followed by Cloud Hands, and again by High Padding Horse and two Separate Kicks (or organ-seeking kicks) instead of thrust kicks. As an opponent wards off your Single Whip and counter-attacks, you respond with a palm strike using High Padding Horse. As he dodges or tries to ward off your palm thrust, you follow up with a Separate Kick or organ-seeking kick. As soon as he dodges or wards off the kick, you move in with another Separate Kick.

In Sequence 1 of 108-Pattern, Single Whip is followed by Lift Hands, White Crane Flaps Wings and Green Dragon Shoots Pearl. If you attack an opponent with Single Whip and having warded off your attack he releases a triple attack of a strike, a kick and another strike, you can deflect his first strike with Lift Hand, strike his kicking leg with White Crane Flaps Wings, and brush off his second strike and simultaneously counter-strike with Green Dragon Shoots Pearl.

In Sequence 5, Single Whip is followed by Playing the Lute and Flying Slantingly. When an opponent counter with a punch after warding off your Single Whip, you can break his arm using Playing the Lute. As he pulls back his arm, you can fell him with Flying Slantingly.

In Sequence 6, Single Whip is followed by Snake Body Low Stance and Golden Cockerel Stands Solitarily. If an opponent executes a sweeping kick after warding off your Single Whip, you avoid his sweeping kick using Snake Body Low Stance. As he jumps in to grab your neck and executes a series of knee jabs as in Muay Thai, you respond with Golden Cockerel Stands Solitarily.

If you wish to give a Taijiquan demonstration, though this is not an important aim in our school, Grasp Sparrow is crisp and neat, and suits the purpose well. 108-Pattern is too long and may be boring to spectators. However, if the spectators are

martial artists who wish to have a deep appreciation of Taijiquan, 108-Pattern will serve the purpose better.

Most people today practice Taijiquan for health. Grasp Sparrow would be too short for them to have generated sufficient health benefit in their practice. Grasp Sparrow is better for learning important Taijiquan techniques, or for exhibiting Taijiquan techniques in wushu competitions as it was originally intended. 108-Pattern, performed leisurely in one's garden, is ideal for relaxing, loosening joints and muscles, and attaining gracefulness and balance.

But this disadvantage of Grasping Sparrow, or reversely the advantage of 108-Pattern, may not apply to use in Shaolin Wahnam. By choosing just a few patterns from either Grasp Sparrow or 108-Pattern to generate an energy flow, we can attain more health benefits in shorter time than other people practice the long 108-Pattern set.

Even if we leave aside energy flow, because of our cost-effectiveness, we can also have more benefits relaxing, loosening joints and muscles, and attaining gracefulness and balance by performing Grasp Sparrow as gentle physical exercise than other people practicing the long 108-Pattern set. Other people may think us arrogant, but we are just stating a fact, which unfortunately the other people may not appreciate or even understand.

We are more cost-effective because we understand Taijiquan mechanics, like differentiating yin-yang and rotating the waist, whereas other people may not, and hence make mistakes like throwing their body forward, thus lacking grace, and shifting their body, thus hurting their knees. We can get more benefit practicing correctly for 3 minutes than other people practicing incorrectly for 10 minutes.

It is more advantageous to learn Taijiquan mechanics using Grasp Sparrow than using 108-Pattern. This is because as Grasp Sparrow is short and comparatively simple, one can better focus on the task at hand, whereas as 108-Pattern is longer and comparatively complicated, he is more easily distracted from the task by attempting to remember the routine.

Nevertheless, for most people having learnt Taijiquan mechanics correctly, it is more advantageous to practice 108-Pattern than Grasp Sparrow to develop energy flow and internal force. This is because 108-Pattern is longer, therefore it provides more opportunities for development, and also the movements are generally smoother, therefore it facilitates better energy flow.

In other words, presuming all other factors being equal, if one person practices Grasp Sparrow and another person practices 108-Pattern, the second person is more likely to develop energy flow and internal force than the first person. Again, this does not apply to us in Shaolin Wahnam. It is because of two reasons – we know the philosophy, and we have the skills -- energy flow and consolidating force – to realize the philosophy.

Regarding combat application, Grasp Sparrow has the advantage of learning faster, whereas 108-Pattern has the advantage of learning more. If a person is limited in time but wishes to apply Taijiquan well in combat, Grasp Sparrow is an excellent choice. If he has a lot of time and wishes to go deeper into Taijiquan combat application, 108-Pattern provides a better alternative.

All important Taijiquan applications are found in Grasp Sparrow. Grasp Sparrow also has more than sufficient techniques to handle any combat situations, except perhaps when one is being pinned down on the ground. Not many kungfu sets, including Grasp Sparrow and 108-Patterns, have counters against being pinned on the ground, though most of them, if not all, have techniques preventing this from happening. If one is already being pinned down on the ground, he has to borrow a technique or two from Drunken Eight Immortals to counter the situation.

Relatively speaking, it is more advantageous to use 108-Pattern than Grasp Sparrow for spiritual cultivation. This does not mean that Grasp Sparrow is not effective for spiritual cultivation, but presuming all other factors being equal, 108-Pattern is a better choice. This is because the arrangement of the patterns in 108-Pattern are more flowing and conducive to leading practitioners into a deeper level of consciousness. The arrangement of patterns in Grasp Sparrow is comparatively more abrupt, which tend to keep practitioners in their everyday

consciousness.

This relative disadvantage of Grasp Sparrow does not apply to us. Right at the beginning we smile from the heart, which sets our spirit free. Immediately we enter Tao, which bring us to a heightened level of consciousness. Other people practicing 108-Pattern have to spend some time over many patterns before they can come close to this spiritual level.

Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow is derived from 108-Pattern Yang Style Taijiquan. If one is short of time or likes to have an introduction to Yang Style Taijiquan, Grasp Sparrow is a very good choice. If he has a lot of time and wishes to specialize in Yang Style Taijiquan, 108-Pattern is a more complete approach.

Our school is unprecedented in kungfu and chi kung history. We offer such a wide range of courses and in such high standards that practitioners in the past could not dream about, nor practitioners in future may have a similar opportunity. Not only this, we also have the great advantage of breadth and depth. In other words, whereas other practitioners would have minimized results when practicing two or more arts at the same time, we maximize our results remarkably!

For convenience we can classify our many Taijiquan sets in our school as follows:

Basic Level

1. Cloud Hands
2. White Snake Shoots Venom
3. Green Dragon Shoots Pearl
4. Black Tiger Sinks Hips
5. Carry Tiger Back to Mountain
6. Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow
7. White Crane Flaps Wings

Intermediate Level

1. Yellow Bee Sucks Pollen
2. Old Eagle Catches Snake
3. 108-Pattern Yang Style Taijiquan

4. Taiji Sabre
5. Taiji Staff
6. Wudang Sword

Advanced Level

1. Flowing Water Floating Clouds
2. Wudang Taijiqian

It is worthy of note that the basic level is the most important, and in many ways it is also the most useful. If one has not done well at the basic level, his future progress both as a matter of time and of potential will be much affected.

Lessons from basic courses are also more useful in daily life. In free sparring or real fights, basic skills and techniques are generally more effective. In daily activities, basic skills and techniques are more often used than advanced ones.

However, if you wish to specialize, it is wiser to choose an advanced set. It gives more breadth and depth in practice as well as more wisdom in philosophy.

Question 3

Both the Cloud Hands and the Grasping Sparrow's Tail are legacies of great past Masters.

Could you please elaborate more about those two legacies in terms of applications in daily life and combat, energy-force training and mind-spirituality cultivation aspects?

Sifu Roland Mastel

Answer

“Cloud Hands”, I believe, is the shortened form for “Flowing Water floating Clouds”, which in turn was a poetic description of the free movements of Zhang San Feng in chi flow after practicing his kungfu. This is similar to what we do after practicing our kungfu and entering chi flow.

What Zhang San Feng practiced was Shaolin Kungfu – a fact not many people know. This Shaolin Kungfu was called Wudang Shaolin Kungfu to differentiate it from the Henan Shaolin Kungfu, sometimes called Song Shan Shaolin Kungfu, practiced at the northern Shaolin Temple on Song Shan or Song Mountain in Henan Province.

Wudang Shaolin Kungfu was later shortened to Wudang Kungfu, which later evolved into Taijiquan. To differentiate it from the other styles of Taijiquan, such as Chen, Yang and Wu, the prototype Taijiquan practiced by Zhang San Feng on the Wudang Mountain, which was actually Shaolin Kungfu, is now called Wudang Taijiquan.

During the subsequent Ming Dynasty, the imperial Shaolin Temple was moved to the south in the city of Quanzhou in Fujian Province. Shaolin Kungfu practiced here as well as spread to the public was called Fujian Shaolin Kungfu.

When this southern Shaolin Temple in Quanzhou was burnt by the Qing Army with the help of Lama kungfu experts, a few masters escaped. Amongst them, Pak Mei retreated to Ermei Mountain in Sichuan, Chee Seen built a secret Shaolin Temple on Nine-Lotus Mountain also in Fujian, Fong Tou Tuck retreated to Wudang Mountain in Hebei, and Jiang Nan escaped out of China.

The Shaolin Kungfu practiced by Pak Mei and passed on to posterity was called Ermei Shaolin Kungfu, later shortened to Ermei Kungfu. The Shaolin Kungfu practiced by Fong Tou Tuck and passed on to posterity was called Wudang Shaolin kungfu, later shortened to Wudang Kungfu. This Wudang Kungfu from Fong Tou Tuck was different from the Wudang Kungfu of Zhang San Feng a few centuries earlier. Fong Tou Tuck's Wudang Kungfu was harder and did not resemble Taijiquan.

The secret southern Shaolin Temple on Nine-Lotus Mountain built by Chee Seen was also burnt by the Qing Army, led by Pak Mei. Many disciples, like Sam Tuck, Hoong Hei Khoon, Lok Ah Choy and Fong Sai Yoke, escaped to Guangdong Province. The Shaolin Kungfu spread by them was called Guangdong Shaolin Kungfu, but interestingly it was not shortened to Guangdong Kungfu.

Hence, there are five main types of Shaolin Kungfu, namely Henan or Song Shan Shaolin, Fujian Shaolin, Ermei Shaolin, Wudang Shaolin and Guangdong Shaolin. Henan or Song San Shaolin is regarded as Northern Shaolin as it originated from the northern Shaolin Temple. All the other four types of Shaolin are regarded as Southern Shaolin as they originated from the southern Shaolin Temples in Quanzhou or on the Nine-lotus Mountain. Not many people, however, realize that there are two southern Shaolin Temples.

On the other hand, "Grasping Sparrow's Tail" refers to a series of Yang Style Taijiquan techniques devised by Yang Deng Fu. The techniques are "peng" or ward off, "lu" or roll back, "qi" or press forward, and "an" or in contact. The technique, "chen" or sink down, is also found in Grasping Sparrow's Tail, but traditionally it is not mentioned.

These five techniques are given poetic names in our Wahnam Taijiquan as follows:

1. Peng – Immortal Waves Sleeves
2. Lu – Double Dragons Play with Pearl
3. Qi – Push Boat According to Flow of Current
4. Chen – Black Bear Sinks Hips
5. An – Open Window to Look at Moon

It is often said that Yang Style Taijiquan was invented by Yang Lu Chan. This is a misconception. What Yang Lu Chan practiced and used in defeating all challengers in his travels over China to test his martial art was Chen Style Taijiquan. It was his grandson, Yang Deng Fu, who modified Chen Style Taijiquan by making the forms bigger and the movements slower for health rather than combat purposes that Yang Style Taijiquan was created.

It is also said that Yang Lu Chan practiced Grasping Sparrow's Tail thousands of times everyday, and used only Grasping Sparrow's Tail to defeat all his challengers. This is a metachronism, a displace termed due to time difference. It is the same as saying that Yang Lu Chan lived in China. During his time, there was no China. The Republic of China was formed about a century later.

Similarly, during Yang Lu Chan's time there was no Grasping Sparrow's Tail. What Yang Lu Chan practiced was Cloud Hands, which was not in any fixed form, but the movements often included a pattern called "Lazy to Roll up Sleeves" in Chen Style Taijiquan, and it sounded like "lan chi yi" in the local dialect.

Later these free movements were stylized by later masters into specific forms, and were also collectively called "lan chi yi". Over time, the oral "lan chi yi" which originally meant "Lazy to Roll up Sleeves", was written as "Grasping Sparrow's Tail" as their pronunciations in the local dialect were similar.

This historical background, besides providing us with some interesting facts that the general public may not know, traces the legacies of Grasping Sparrow's Tail from the time of Yang Deng Fu in the 20th century to Cloud Hands of Zhang San Feng in the 13th century. It also explains why many patterns in other styles, like

Hungry Tiger Catches Goat in Hoong Ka, Circle-Hand in Wing Choon, Reading Spring-Autumn Annals in Baguazhang, and even the earlier Tiger Form in Xingyiquan are similar to the movements in Cloud Hands and Grasping Sparrow's Tail.

For us in Shaolin Wahnam, both Cloud Hands and Grasping Sparrow's Tail generate an energy flow, which in turn gives us good health, vitality and longevity. It is unbelievable but true that if any of our student is sick or in pain, he can perform Cloud Hands or Grasping Sparrow's Tail to have a chi flow, and if practice this regularly and sufficiently, he will overcome his illness or pain.

If he is already healthy, practicing Cloud Hands or Grasping Sparrow's Tail will ensure his continued good health as well as contribute to his vitality and longevity.

Comparatively, Cloud Hands is easier as he does not have to worry about the numerous specific patterns in Grasping Sparrow's Tail. But if he wishes to develop specific qualities to enhance his daily performance, like differentiating yin-yang and rotating his waist, Grasping Sparrow's Tail is a better choice as these qualities are emphasized in particular patterns.

Practicing Cloud Hands or Grasping Sparrow's Tail will also enable practitioners to be relaxed, graceful, elegant, have physical and mental balance, and attain mental freshness and clarity. These qualities enhance whatever they do in their daily life.

The benefits are spontaneous. In other words, practitioners do not need to know how to apply the qualities they have derived in their practice of Cloud Hands and Grasping Sparrow's Tail to whatever they do in daily life to enhance the results.

The results will automatically be better without them having to do anything extra or special.

Presuming all other factors being equal, Cloud Hands is more effective than Grasping Sparrow's Tail in giving relaxation, mental freshness and mental clarity. This is because Cloud Hands is more simple, practitioners need not be concerned with performing the various patterns of Grasping Sparrow's Tail correctly.

Please remember that the comparison is relative. Grasping Sparrow's Tail also gives these benefits, but Cloud Hands is more cost-effective if all other factors were equal. On the other hand, Grasping Sparrow's Tail is relatively more cost-effective in making practitioners more graceful and elegant, and giving them physical and mental balance.

These benefits from practicing Cloud Hands and Grasping Sparrow's Tail apply to us and other who practice these two arts correctly. The benefits may not apply to the great majority who practice these two arts.

As it is often the case, some other people reading our literature may be angry at the above statements. This is their business. Actually, if they care to listen, they too will also benefit much from the secrets we openly share with the public.

Why do the great majority of people who also practice Cloud Hands and Grasping Sparrow's Tail not obtain the wonderful benefits we get? It is because they do not practice them as internal arts, they practice only their external forms. The crucial difference is chi flow. If they have chi flow, they practice them correctly as internal arts. If they do not have chi flow, they practice them as gentle physical exercise.

It is the chi flow, not the external techniques, that gives the benefits. The more chi flow a practitioner has, the more benefits he gets. Of course, he must also guard against over-training. As our chi flow is very powerful, it is easy for our students to over-train.

We shall now compare the benefits of Cloud Hands and Grasping Sparrow's Tail in combat application, energy-force training and mind-spirituality cultivation.

For most people, including those who have been teaching Taiji dance for many years and regarded as Taiji masters, they cannot see any combat application in Cloud Hands. They also cannot see any combat application in Grasping Sparrow's Tail.

They regard Cloud Hands as a pattern, and Grasping Sparrow's Tail as a series of patterns in the Taiji they practice. Often they may not actually know why they practice Taiji, though they may say that they practice for health, but without

realizing that their practice does not make much difference to their health.

If they examine themselves honestly, they may find that it is actually for socialization, which is important for happy living, or for fulfilling a habit which they have unconsciously developed.

Most Taiji masters, especially if they are Chinese, know that Taijiquan is a martial art. But even when a martial art novice attacks them, they would not know how to defend themselves. This is the sad situation a great martial art like Taijiquan has fallen into.

Even those who train Taijiquan as a martial art may not know how to apply Cloud Hands, Grasping Sparrow's Tail or any Taijiquan techniques for combat. They would use Kick-Boxing in their sparring and fighting, though some of them may be able to discuss Taijiquan combat application on paper.

So in reality, there is actually not much difference between Cloud Hands and Grasping Sparrow's Tail in terms of combat. More than 90% of Taiji practitioner would be unable to use them in combat situations.

But in theory, Grasping Sparrow's Tail will provide more opportunities than Cloud Hands in combat because there are more techniques in Grasping Sparrow's Tail.

"Peng", or ward off, as its name implies, can be employed to ward off an opponent's attack, like a middle punch. "Lu", or roll back, is used to roll back an opponent's attack, like pulling his kick according to his kicking momentum to fell him. "Qi", or press forward, is to press forward against an opponent, closing his two hands to fell him backward. "Chen", or sink down, can be used to sink down an opponent as he shoots at you. "An", or in contact, can be used to strike an opponent with your two palms.

There are also less obvious, but sophisticated, applications. When an opponent closes your defence by gripping your one hand against your other hand to your body, and simultaneously strikes you with his other hand, a combat situation many martial artists would be quite helpless, you can counter effectively using "peng". When an opponent grips your arm with his two hands, you can fell him

using “lu”.

When an opponent grip your wrist, you can not only release his grip but also break his wrist by using “qi”. Those who have attended Taijiquan courses with me may be amazed at seeing how “chen” is used to fell an opponent at the time he tries to fell you. It is an excellent demonstration of the Taijiquan principle of using an opponent’s force against himself. As an opponent wards off your attack, you can close him completely using “an”.

There is only one type of movements in Cloud Hands, or two if we include its reverse movements. Most people would not know how these movements can be used in combat. But a master can use just Cloud Hands against any attack! This was what Yang Lu Chan did when he fought with many masters who attacked him in different ways.

The same situation, i.e. Grasping Sparrow’s Tail for practitioners in general, Cloud Hands for top masters, applies in energy-force training.

Both Cloud Hands and Grasping Sparrow’s Tail are very effective for generating energy flow and developing internal force. But practitioners in general will find Grasping Sparrow’s Tail more advantageous over Cloud Hands because the many techniques in Grasping Sparrow’s Tail give practitioners more opportunities in their training.

As there are five techniques in Grasping Sparrow’s Tail, if you are tensed in one technique, the set-back can be compensated by the other four techniques. You will still be able to generate an energy flow.

If you fail to consolidate flowing energy into internal force in one technique, this set-back can be compensated by the other four techniques. You can still develop some internal force.

But there is only one technique in Cloud Hands. If you fail in this technique, you fail completely. You will not be able to generate an energy flow or develop internal force.

Grasping Sparrow's Tail develops different types of force – peng force, lu force, qi force, chen force and an force, all of which are flowing. Cloud Hands develop only one type of force – flowing force.

But a master is different. He does not need five techniques, he only needs one. And he can generate more energy flow and consolidate more internal force using just one technique and in far shorter time than students using five techniques.

Because he is a master, having gone through the training of Grasping Sparrow's Tail before, he can just develop flowing force using Cloud Hands, and he can convert the flowing force to peng force, lu force, qi force, chen force, an force, and any other types of force which practitioners of Grasping Sparrow's Tail may be unable to do.

The same situation also applies in mind-spirituality cultivation. Because they are more techniques to perform, Grasping Sparrow's Tail provides more opportunities for practitioners to tag their mind, thus attaining one-pointedness. When their mind wanders, which happens frequently to ordinary practitioners, they have more opportunities to bring their mind back to focus.

A master is different. He can focus his mind more readily than ordinary practitioners, and once focused he can maintain a one-pointed mind for a long time. He does not need the many techniques in Grasping Sparrow's Tail to help him. Hence, Cloud Hands is more advantageous. If he has to perform the many techniques of Grasping Sparrow's Tail, he can maintain his one-pointed mind in a relaxed manner.

For letting the spirit roam freely and expanding the spirit into the Cosmos, skills that are applicable to masters rather than general practitioners, Cloud Hands has a big advantage over Grasping Sparrow's Tail. Without having the numerous techniques in Grasping Sparrow's Tail to bother him, a master can feel a tremendous sense of freedom flowing spontaneously in Cloud Hands.

Without the restriction of the numerous techniques in Grasping Sparrow's Tail which may tie him down to the phenomenal world, a master performing Cloud Hands can more readily expand into the Cosmos. This probably was what the great Zhang San Feng did when he attained immortality.

Question 4

Our Wahnam version of the set contains two additional patterns, Elbow Strike and Shoulder Strike, in order to include all of the 13 Techniques of Tai Chi Chuan.

Sigung, where do these 13 Techniques come from? How can they help us to deepen our Tai Chi Chuan practice? Can any Tai Chi Chuan pattern be classified into these 13 fundamental movements, for example "White Snake Shoots Venom" or "White Crane Flaps Wings" when used as a kicking technique?

Sifu Andrea Zilio

Answer

It is often said that Taijiquan originated from 13 postures or techniques. These 13 postures are in two groups, called "ba men" or "eight gates", and "wu bo" or "five steps".

The eight gates or techniques are:

1. Peng, or ward off
2. Lu, or roll back
3. Qi, or press forward
4. An, or in contact.
5. Cai, or grip
6. Lie, or spread
7. Zhou, or elbow
8. Kao, or anchor

Please note that "an" is usually translated as "push", and "kao" as "shoulder strike" by most Taijiquan practitioners and scholars. My translations to "in contact" and "anchor" respectively are unorthodox, but I base my translations on their practical application as well as the meaning of the Chinese words. I suspect that the majority of those who describe these terms merely copy descriptions from other sources, often without really understanding what they mean.

The first four techniques, namely peng, lu, ji and an, form the sequence, “Grasping Sparrow’s Tail”, in Yang Style Taijiquan.

We frequently use “Grasping Sparrow’s Tail” in our teaching as it is an excellent sequence to demonstrate fundamental Taijiquan movements. We provide poetic names to the patterns as follows:

1. Immortal Waves Sleeves, which manifests peng
2. Double Dragon Plays with Water, which manifests lu
3. Push Boat According to Flow of Current, which manifests ji
4. Black Bear Sinks Hips, which manifests chen
5. Open Window to Look at Moon, which manifests an

The technique, “chen”, which means “sink”, is also found in “Grasping Sparrow’s Tail” of Yang Style Taijiquan, but is normally not singled out for mention.

In “Grasping Sparrow’s Tail”, the technique, “kao”, is expressed in the pattern, “Shoulder Strike”, a term we also use in our school. But I interpret “8 gates” not as 8 patterns but as 8 techniques, which will give this concept of “8 gates” more room for application.

In other words, in my interpretation, “ward off”, “roll back”, “press forward” and “in contact”, refer not to patterns, but to techniques. In “Grasping Sparrow’s Tail”, these principles are manifested in “Immortal Waves Sleeves”, “Double Dragons Plays with Water”, “Push Boat According to Flow” and “Open Window to Look at Moon”. In other context, the same techniques may be manifested in other patterns.

For example, if an opponent executes a thrust punch at me, instead of using “Immortal Waves Sleeves”, I can use another pattern, “Lift Hand”, to ward off the attack. If he pushes at me, instead of using “Double Dragons Plays with Water” to roll back, I can use “Fisherman Casts Net”.

The other 4 of the 8 techniques are often expressed in the following patterns:

1. "Cai" or grip, expressed in "Playing the Lute"
2. "Lie" or spread, expressed in "Wild Horse Separates Mane"
3. "Zhou" or elbow, expressed in "Elbow Strike"
4. "Kao" or anchor, expressed in "Shoulder Strike"

The cai or grip technique is a good reminder that chin-na is an important aspect of Taijiquan. But many Taijiquan practitioners today have no idea of chin-na. They have no idea, for example, how "Playing the Lute" can be used as a chin-na technique. In our school, a pattern we often use to execute the grip technique is "Old Eagle Catches Snake".

Other patterns besides "Wild Horse Spreads Mane" that execute the spread technique include "White Crane Spreads Wings" and "Fisherman Casts Net". Isn't "Fisherman Casts Net" a manifestation for rolling back? Kungfu is alive. While the same technique can be manifested by different patterns, the same pattern can also manifest different techniques.

Besides "Elbow Strike", the zhou or elbow technique can also be manifested in "Punch Below Sleeves" in Yang Style Taijiquan, "Press Elbow" in Chen Style Taijiquan, and "Big Boss Holds Elbow" in Wudang Taijiquan.

The pattern, "Shoulder Strike", is classified as a kao or anchor technique because the shoulder strike is not executed from the shoulder but from the bad foot, which acts like an anchor. The anchor technique is frequently used in felling an opponent. A good example is "Carry Tiger Back to Mountain". An exquisite example is "Black Bear Sinks Hips". Where do you think is the anchor in this Black Bear pattern?

The five steps are as follows:

1. Jin, or move forward.
2. Tui, or move backward.
3. Gu, or step to the left.
4. Pan, or step to the right.
5. Ding, or remain at the centre.

Moving forward, backward, to the left, and to the right are obvious. An excellent approach to practicing all these footwork movements is our Pushing Hands.

Remaining at the centre poses a problem in combat situations. What does it mean? How does remaining at the centre enables you to be combat efficient?

I faced this problem initially. I spent much time thinking over it. The “enlightenment” came when I started teaching Taijiquan, reinforcing the advice that a teacher learns a lot when teaching.

In fact, remaining at the centre is a key to winning in many combat situations, especially in modern times when opponents frequently fight like Boxers or use kicks randomly. If you are one of those who tend to retreat when facing a threatening opponent may recall me telling you to nail your feet to the ground.

We also train this important technique of remaining at the centre in Pushing Hands. Can you guess at the important skill involved? Yes, it is body-movement. You sink your body backward, without moving your feet, to avoid an opponent’s attack. You may remember my advice in Pushing Hands – when an attack is short-ranged use your hands, when it is middle range, use body-movement, when it is long-range move your feet.

These 13 techniques were reputed to come from the great Zhang San Feng, who composed the first Taijiquan set based on these 13 techniques. It was not called Taijiquan then. It was just called the Thirteen Techniques. It was also called 37- Pattern Long Fist.

I reckon these 13 techniques were manifested in 37 patterns which were performed continuously without a break like the continuous flow of Yangtze River, the longest river in China, sometimes called the Long River. Over time this short set developed into a long set. The Wudang Taijiquan we practice in our school has about 140 patterns.

Besides helping us to learn the basic movements of Taijiquan, these 13 techniques also deepen our Taijiquan understanding and practice.

As the 13 techniques are basic, which means very important, they form a foundation upon which all future Taijiquan development depends. How fast and how far a Taijiquan practitioner advances will greatly depend on how well he has practiced these 13 techniques.

If he does not understand the principle of warding off and cannot perform the technique effectively, he will take a long time to learn how to defend himself against even simple attacks. For example, when an opponent throws him a thrust punch, and he blocks it head on, he may quickly move to other patterns or other techniques, but he will take a long time and a lot of effort, as well as much punishment, to be able to defend against opponents' attacks effectively.

On the other hand, if an opponent throws him a thrust punch, as he knows that blocking the attack head-on is against Taijiquan philosophy, he deflects the attack using minimum force. He may spend more time mastering the technique, but once he understands the philosophy and is able to perform the technique well, he can learn other patterns manifesting the same techniques very fast. This, in fact, is one of the main reasons why our students can achieve much in a short time.

If he does not understand the principle of using his body-movement while remaining at the centre, and cannot perform the technique well, he will not progress far no matter for how long he may practice. For example, whenever an opponent kicks at him, he retreats his steps, with the result that he will be pressurized by a kicking opponent. He may practice a long time and take a lot of punishment, but he may still not know how to counter kicks.

On the other hand, if he has a good understanding and practice of the technique of remaining at the centre by using body-movement, he can shift his body backward without moving his feet, to avoid the kick, and swiftly move his body forward, again without moving his feet, to counter attack as soon as the kick passes. He may spend more time mastering this technique, but once he can perform it well, he can learn many other patterns and techniques within a short time.

So, by practicing the 13 techniques well and understanding their philosophy, because these 13 techniques form the foundation of Taijiquan, a practitioner can progress fast and far. As an analogy, instead of learning how to speak over a telephone, in a restaurant, at a supermarket, on a date, or while working in an office, a student learns the basics of speaking well. Once he can speak well, he can do so in any situation.

The answer to whether any Taijiquan pattern can be classified into these 13 techniques is "yes and no".

The technique "chen' or "sink" as manifested in the pattern, "Black Bear Sinks Hips", for example, is missing in this classification. As we have experienced in our practice, this is a very useful technique. When someone punches at you, you grip his arm using "Old Eagle Catches Snake", and press him onto the ground. This is an application of the sink technique. When an opponent grabs your leg when you kick him, you respond with an elephant-step and hang your reverse fist on his head. This is also the sink technique.

Another obvious area not covered by the 13 techniques is when you strike, like using "White Snake Shoots Venom", "Bow-Arrow Thrust Punch" or "Green Dragon Shoots Pearl". The 13 techniques also do not cover kicks, like "White Crane Flaps Wings" and "Cross-Hand Thrust Kick".

In such situations, the answer is No. No, there are many Taijiquan patterns not classified into these 13 techniques.

On the other hand, the answer can be yes if we take the 13 techniques as a general, inclusive classification, instead of a specific, exclusive classification.

Using the examples above, “Black Bear Sinks Hips” may be classified as “roll back”; “Old Eagle Catches Snake” as grip; “Elephant-Step Hanging Fist”, “White Snake Shoots Venom” and “Green Dragon Shoots Pearl” as press, and “White Crane Spreads Wings” and “Cross-Hand Thrust Kick” as spread. According to their footwork movement, the above patterns may be classified respectively as centre, back, forward, forward, centre, back, centre.

Are we forcing these patterns into techniques that are previously fixed? No, in fact, historically it was from the 13 basic techniques that these later patterns developed, sometimes with modification or variation. It is helpful to remember that kungfu is alive, and this classification is for convenience, and not as compartmentalization to restrict us.

Let us have some fun classifying the patterns of the first sequence of our Wudang Taijiquan set into “eight gates” and “five steps” of the 13 techniques as follows.

1. Cosmos One Energy – roll back, centre
2. Two Aspects of Yin-Yang – roll back, centre
3. Nebula Evolving Round –ward off, centre
4. Cosmos First Emerges – spread, right
5. Cosmos First Emerges – spread, left
6. Shift Horse Ask Way – ward off, right
7. Shift Horse Ask Way – ward off, left
8. Ward Off and Strike – press forward, right
9. Ward Off and Strike – press forward, left
10. Open Window Look at moon, press forward, forward
11. Cannon Fire Toward Sky – press forward, back
12. Golden Tortoise Exposes Back – press forward, forward
13. Two Saints Transmit Tao – press forward, forward
14. Ape Throws Rope – press forward, back
15. Ape Throws Rope – press forward, back

- 16.Ape Throws Rope – press forward, back
- 17.Single Bee Sucks Pollens – press forward, centre
- 18.Gentle Breeze through Sleeves – spread, back
- 19.Cannon Fire Toward Sky – press forward, forward
- 20.Spiritual Lion Opens Mouth – press forward, forward
- 21.Green Dragon Tests Claw – press forward, forward
- 22.Play the Lute – grip, centre

The 13 techniques are found in all Taijiquan sets, ranging from the relatively elementary Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow to the very advanced Wudang Taijiquan. An understanding and practice of the 13 techniques provides us with an introduction to basic Taijiquan movements as well as leads us to its profound depth.

Question 5

Andrea's question reminds me of the Song of Secrets for Training in the 13 Techniques.

I'm interested to know how Sifu's understanding of this classic has changed over time and how that understanding has influenced Sifu's practice, advancement and teaching of Taijiquan, as well as all types of Kung Fu. In particular I'm interested in these two lines: "All the time pay attention to your waist, the abdomen is charged with chi and might" and "What is the aim of Tai Chi Chuan practice? Health and vitality and eternal spring".

Sifu Mark Blohm

Answer

The "heart-attainments" of past masters, which may be translated as the essence of their teaching, are recorded in classics, often in what are called "kor kiut" or songs of secrets. The secrets are hidden in the open and coupled with the conciseness of the classical Chinese language and the need to have background knowledge of kungfu terms, many people may not understand the classics even when they know the dictionary meaning of all the words used in the songs of secrets.

The following "Song of Secrets for Training in the 13 Techniques", shortened to "Songs of 13 Techniques", is very important in Taijiquan, and has contributed much to the development of Taijiquan as well as other kungfu styles in our school. It is reproduced below first in its original Chinese wording, then in Cantonese pronunciation, in Mandarin pronunciation and in its English translation. We wish to thank Sifu Michael Chow for providing the material at "Song of Secrets for Training in the 13 Techniques".

十三勢行功歌訣

十三總勢莫輕識，命意源頭在腰隙
變轉虛實須留意，氣遍身軀不稍癡
靜中觸動動猶靜，因敵變化是神奇
勢勢存心揆用意，得來不覺費工夫
刻刻留心在腰間，腹內鬆靜氣騰然
尾閭中正神貫頂，滿身輕利頂頭懸
仔細留心向推求，屈伸開合聽自由
入門引路須口授，工用無息法自休
若言體用何為準，意氣君來骨肉臣
詳推用意終何在，益壽延年示老春

Sap Sam sai Harng Kung Kor Kiut

sap sam chong sai mok heng shik, meng yi yun tow choi yiew kwik
phin chiun hui sat sheui lau yi, hei phin kwoon keui but sau chi
cheng chong chook doong doong yau cheng, yian tik phin fa si san kei
sai sai chiun kwai yoong yi, tak lai but gau bei kung fu
hak hak lau sam choi yiew kan, fook nap soong cheng hei thang yen
mei lui choong cheng san koon deng, moon khuen heng deng tau yun
zhai sai lau sam heong chui kau, wat san hoi kap teng tzi yau
yiap moon yian lou sheui hau sau, kung yoong mou shik fatt tzi yau
ye yin thai yoong hou wai cheun, yi hei gwan lai kwat yoke san
cheong cheui yoong yi choong hou joi, yik sau yin lin si lou chiun

Shi San Shi Xing Gong Ge Jue

Shi San Zong Shi Mo Qing Shi, Ming Yi Yuan Tou Zai Yao Xi
Bian Zhuan Xu Shi Xu Liu Yi, Qi Bian Shen Qu Bu Shao Chi
Jing Zhong Chu Dong Dong You Jing, Yin Di Bian Hua Shi Shen Qi
Shi Shi Cun Xin Kui Yong Yi, De Lai Bu Jue Fei Gong Fu
Ke Ke Liu Xin Zai Yao Jian, Fu Nei Song Jing Qi Teng Ran
Wei Lu Zhong Zheng Quan Ding, Man Shen Qing Li Ding Tou Xuan

Zi Xi Liu Xin Xiang Tui Qiu, Qu Shen Kai He Ting Zi You
Ru Men Yin Lu Xu Kou Shou, Gong Yong Wu Xi Fa Zi Xiu
Ruo Yan Ti Yong He Wei Zhun, Yi Qi Jun Lai Gu Rou Chen
Xiang Tui Yong Yi Zhong He Zai, Yi Shou Yan Nian Shi Lao Chun

Song of Secrets for Training in the 13 Techniques

Don't underestimate the thirteen techniques, the source of life is at the waist
Pay attention to 'apparent' and 'solid', without hindrance chi flows with grace
Stillness in movement, movement in stillness, adjust according to what the
situation is

Every technique must be guided by will, combat efficiency will be achieved with
ease

All the time pay attention to your waist, the abdomen is charged with chi and
might

The spine is straight and full of spirit, the whole body is relaxed with head upright
Be attentive to details in every move, spontaneous let your movements be
A teacher's guidance is needed to enter the way, when accomplished, unrestricted
the rules is he

What is so difficult about the form? Mind and energy are the king

What is the aim of Tai Chi Chuan practice? Health and vitality and eternal spring

Before answering the questions posed, it would be helpful to have a brief
explanation of the "Song of 13 Techniques" as follows.

The thirteen techniques refer to eight techniques and five footwork movements
from which Taijiquan evolved.

The eight techniques are

1. Ward off
2. Roll back
3. Press forward
4. In contact
5. Grip
6. Spread
7. Elbow
8. Anchor

The five footwork movements are

1. Move forward
2. Move backward
3. Move to the left
4. Move to the right
5. Remain at the centre

The source of Taijiquan movements is at the waist. For example, when a Taijiquan practitioner wards off an attack, he does not merely moves his hands from his elbow, but he starts his movement by rotating his waist.

In Taijiquan combat it is important to note whether an opponent's movement is apparent, which means feint, or solid, which means real. He may, for example, feint a top movement with his hand, and when you attempt to respond to this hand movement, he may kick you below, which is his real attack. However, if you neglect the feint movement, it may change to be a real attack.

This distinguishing of whether opponents' movements are feint or real should not interrupt your chi flow and fluid bodily movement. On the other hand, when you make feint and real movements, the movements must also be smooth, and not staccato, so that your opponents may not differentiate them.

You should attain the harmony of stillness and movement. For example, when you move about vigorously, your mind is still. When your mind is active, you are relaxed and composed. You are able to adjust quickly and spontaneously to whatever the situation is. When an opponent rushes at you with multiple attacks, you remain relaxed and respond accordingly. If your opponent remains still, you may make feint movements to distract him.

Every movement you make is purposeful. You do not make unnecessary or wasteful movements. In this way you attain combat efficiency easily.

All your movements issue from your waist. Your chi is always powerful and focused at your dan tian. You have good posture and good balance and presence of mind. Your whole body is relaxed and always ready for action. Your movements are spontaneous, and perfect in details.

A competent teacher is necessary to initiate you into genuine Taijiquan. At the beginning rules and guidelines speed up your progress. But when you are advanced, you would not be restricted by rules.

Although perfect form is important, you should not be unduly worried over the form. Mind and energy are the most important in Taijiquan. What is the aim of practicing Taijiquan? It is to attain good health, vitality and longevity.

An understanding of the "Song of 13 Techniques" has contributed much to both my practice and teaching of Taijiquan and all other kungfu styles. The changes brought about by this understanding may be viewed from two dimensions: before understanding this classic, and how the changes continue to improve my practice and teaching after understanding the classic.

Before my understanding of the classic, my performance of kungfu was more external and head-on when responding to opponents' attacks. An excellent example is my changing of "Beauty Looks at Mirror" to "Single Tiger Emerges from Cave" when responding to an opponent's thrust punch in the basic Shaolin combat sequences.

In my early years of teaching, I taught students to use “Beauty Looks at Mirror” to defend against an opponent’s “Black Tiger Steals Heart”. Later I taught students to use “Single Tiger Emerges from Cave”. Despite their names, the “Tiger” defence is “softer” than the “Beauty” defence.

This change was not influenced by any specific line in the “Song of 13 Techniques”, but by the general concept in Taijiquan of “using minimum force against maximum strength”. This concept was also applied in the Mirror Hand defence, but more so in Single Tiger.

After the understanding of the classic, changes continued to improve both my own performance and my teaching.

The line, “the source of life is at the waist”, for example is seminal. It helped to illustrate the essence of Taijiquan mechanics, leading me to understanding that even without internal force, Taijiquan could be used by a smaller-sized person against a physically stronger and bigger opponent.

The benefit was not only in defence. It was also in attack. The rotation of the waist led me to understand spiral force, and how to explode it in Single Whip. It also led me to understand exploding spiral force using Black Tiger Steals Heart in Shaolin Kungfu.

The next advancement was in reducing big movements to smaller ones, which participants at my Intensive Taijiquan Courses would have experienced, and which resulted in increasing speed and combat efficiency. A further development was exploding force from the wrist instead of from the dan tian. All these developments could be traced to the line “the source of life is at the waist” from the Song of 13 Techniques.

The line “without hindrance chi flows with grace” was also very influential. Before understanding this line, my Taijiquan movements were graceful but still physical. After understanding it, I was able to generate energy flow, then internal force with my Taijiquan practice.

The benefit spilled over to other styles of kungfu. My Shaolin Kungfu became smooth and flowing. Some of those who attended my Intensive Shaolin Kungfu Course would have remember me telling them to perform Shaolin Kungfu movements as if they were Taijiquan.

In Wuzuquan it enhanced the development of internal force in San Zhan, a skill I took more than two years to acquire in the late 1960s, but which with the help of chi flow course participants at the Special Wuzuquan Course in Penang in December 2012 could acquire in a matter of days!

In the Baguazhang Course in June 2012, chi flow not only helped course participants to develop internal force using the eight mother palms but also move fast and effortlessly in Baguazhang Circle Walking. It even enhanced consolidation of internal force in such a powerful set as Iron Wire.

These developments in Taijiquan as well as other kungfu styles owed much to the line "All the time pay attention to your waist, the abdomen is charged with chi and might" of the Song of 13 Techniques. Paying attention to waist rotation not only has made all our kungfu movements very elegant, and enabled us to exploit the momentum of our opponents, but also has remarkably enhanced our generating and exploding spiral force.

The line "What is the aim of Tai Chi Chuan practice? Health and vitality and eternal spring" has helped to shape the basic philosophy of our school regarding why we train kungfu and chi kung. While students of many other kungfu schools hurt themselves physically and psychologically in their free sparring practice, and students of many other chi kung schools focus on learning and demonstrating chi kung techniques, we are very clear that the priority of our kungfu and chi kung training is to have good health, vitality and longevity.

Question 6

In our early days of the Shaolin Kung Fu and Taijiquan set training development you taught us breath control as an effective way to train chi, force and speed. I found this teaching amazing.

In recent times this teaching quite obviously in Taijiquan but also in Shaolin Kung Fu became less focused. My guess is that it is because of the magical introduction of the flow-method. I have found this teaching marvelous.

At the combined Shaolin/Taijiquan course in Bern you mentioned, if I am correct, that this development aimed at the mind level in our martial art development, meaning to use mind to direct chi in order to move the body. Also you mentioned that this development would lead to the cosmic mode where cosmic breathing would be activated. So there was no specific need for breath control this way.

Could you please elaborate on the flow-method, corresponding with the mind level of training a martial art and the connection of it to Cosmic Breathing?

Sifu Roland Mastel

Answer

This is a very important question that not only illustrates the philosophy of internal force training and spiritual expansion but also describes the development of our teaching in our school.

When I first taught Shaolin Kungfu in Intensive Shaolin Kungfu Courses in the early 2000s, "Lohan Asks the Way" was used to develop the important skills of form, force and speed. This method was very effective and helped students to perform any kungfu set with picture-perfect form, internal force and flowing speed. This in turn enabled them to apply kungfu techniques effectively in combat sequence practice and free sparring.

The procedure was as follows. First students performed the patterns in picture-perfect form. Next, they exploded force at appropriate patterns. Then they linked

various patterns into a sequence, and performed the sequence of many patterns flowingly as if they were one continuous patterns, without neglecting their picture-perfect form and internal force. Because the various forms were performed flowingly without any unnecessary break, speed is attained without the practitioner becoming hasty.

I learned this method from my sifu, Sifu Ho Fatt Nam, when I practiced Four-Gates. My sifu found that I performed the set in a staccato manner. So he asked me to perform it flowingly, linking many patterns into a sequence and performing a sequence in one breath. We call this procedure form-force-flow, i.e. from picture-perfect form we progress to exploding force at appropriate times, then performing various patterns flowingly. Later we called it the force-method.

When I taught Taijiquan, especially in Intensive Taijiquan Courses, I discovered that practitioners could develop internal force by first performing the form flowingly, then letting their energy flow as a result of their flowing form, and eventually when their energy flow was vigorous it generated internal force. I did not invent this method; it was practiced by many masters in the past. But I noticed the process operating inside the practitioners, and when I taught the process to other students, I could help them to develop internal force effectively.

We called this process form-flow-force, i.e. first we performed the patterns in picture-perfect form, then the various patterns were performed flowingly, and when the flow became vigorous it generated into internal force. Later we called it the flow-method.

When I looked back at my own development of internal force, I discovered that the same process operated in a similar way, but because I was unaware of the process at the time, I took a much longer time than our students now to develop internal force.

The process in my case was similar to, but not exactly the same as, the one I taught to Taijiquan students. The similarity was in the chi flow. In my case, I generated an internal chi flow as a result of my smooth movements. Then I

consolidated the chi flow into internal force.

In the case of the Taijiquan students, they also generated an internal chi flow as a result of their smooth movements. But their chi flow generated itself into internal force when its flow became vigorous. There was no conscious attempt on the part of the Taijiquan practitioners to consolidate flowing energy into internal force. When they exploded force, or fa-jing, a lot of energy was focused and exploded out, but the energy was not consolidated in a way done in the force-method.

I applied this flow-method when teaching some Shaolin sets like Siu Lin Tou, Fower-Set and even Iron Wire, and found that students developed a lot of internal force within a very short time! The flow-method was also safer than the force-method because the flowing energy would wash away any blocked energy should students unwittingly practiced wrongly.

The force-method is still very important in our school, and Lohan Asks the Way is still the primary set to teach this force-method to students in Intensive Shaolin kungfu Courses. But because of the effectiveness of the flow-method, which is also used in Shaolin Kungfu, the force-method is not as much emphasized now as before.

Yes, you are right in your reflection that the flow-method aims at the mind level. When a practitioner has attained a very high level of mind, he can use his mind to direct his chi flow. His chi flow will in turn move his body. By using his mind to direct his chi flow in certain ways, he can move his body without using muscular contraction.

When he performs a kungfu movement, for example, instead of tensing his muscles to move his form, he can direct his chi to move it. Many Taijiquan masters consider this a supreme skill. It is incredible but true that many of our students have attained this skill!

When a practitioner uses his mind to direct energy to direct form, he may attain cosmic breathing. His energy while flowing inside his body will also activate an exchange of energy between his body and the Cosmos. Hence, he may not need to

breath in and out with his nose and mouth as it is normally done by ordinary people, because fresh energy from the Cosmos flows in spontaneously into his body, and stale energy from his body is spontaneously disposed off from his body into the Cosmos.

Because he does not need to breath in and out with his nose and mouth, he will not be out of breath as breathing becomes irrelevant in this case. As he does not tense his muscles to perform bodily movement, he will not be tired, as tiredness is due to excessive muscular tension. Hence he can perform vigorous action, like sparring, for hours without panting for breath and without being tired. This is a master's skill, but again incredibly all those who have attended my Intensive Shaolin Kungfu Courses and Intensive Taijiquan Courses have this skill!

As he continues to cultivate to the highest level, the energy flow inside his body will merge with the energy of the Cosmos, achieving the supreme attainment of his personal spirit merging with the Universal Spirit. I believe the great Zhang San Feng achieved immortality in this way.

While the flow-method can lead to Cosmic Breathing and even to the highest achievement of attaining the Tao, it can also operate at a much lower level. Even without attaining Cosmic Breathing, he can still perform his movements smoothly to generate an internal energy flow. Then he can use his mind to direct his energy flow to move his body. At this relatively lower level, he needs to breathe in and out through his nose and mouth.

Hence, the process of regulating the breath, like the process of visualization, progresses in a circle. At the beginners' level, a practitioner does not know how to regulate his breathing. At the intermediate level he regulates his breathing. At the advanced level he does not need to regulate his breathing.

On the other hand, the force-method can be use to attain Cosmic Breathing and even merging with the Cosmos too, though, if all other things were equal, it is not as cost-effective as the flow-method. At a very high level a practitioner using the force-method needs not breath in and out through his nose and mouth, as his

internal energy flow, which is an essential requirement if he wishes to consolidate internal force, can enable him to exchange energy with the Cosmos.

At the supreme level his personal energy flow may merge with the Universal Energy Flow. In order to achieve this, he must not consolidate any internal force. In fact he should do the reverse; he should convert his internal force to flowing energy, and with his mind and energy as one, his personal energy and mind merge with the Supreme Reality.

Question 7

Could you please compare and contrast the sets "White Crane Flaps Wings" and "Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow" and elaborate a little on where each set fits in to the wonderful Art of Wahnam Taijiquan?

Jeffrey

Answer

A good conceptual framework for a comparison and contrast of the two sets is to use the four factors of form, force, application and philosophy. Why do we use these four factors?

It is because these four factors provide a comprehensive description of the scope and depth of any martial art. In other words, by considering these four factors we cover all the important points regarding the practice and benefits of a martial art.

The form of "White Crane Flaps Wings" is from Yang Style Taijiquan but the arrangement of the patterns is such that the set can be performed fast like Shaolin Kungfu, thus giving it an appearance of Chen Style Taijiquan.

The form of "Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow" is also from Yang Style Taijiquan but the arrangement of the patterns is such that the set is usually performed slowly like what most people today conceptualize Taijiquan to be, which is how Yang Style Taijiquan is normally performed.

Both sets are of medium length. "White Crane Flaps Wings" has 46 patterns, whereas "Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow" has 56 patterns. As many of the patterns are repeated, the number of individually different patterns in "White Crane Flaps Wings" is 23, and that in "Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow" is 28.

Most of the core patterns are the same, and they are from Yang Style Taijiquan. Eight patterns in "White Crane Flaps Wings" in "Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow", and thirteen patterns in "Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow" are not found in "White Crane Flaps Wings".

The individually different patterns of both sets are listed below, with a \$ sign after those patterns that are not found in the other set.

White Crane Flaps Wings

1. Cloud Hands
2. Immortal Waves Sleeves
3. Double Dragon Plays with Pearl
4. Push Boat According to Flow
5. Black Bear Sinks Hips
6. Open Window to Look at Moon
7. Fisherman Casts Net
8. Single Whip
9. White Crane Flaps Wings
10. Green Dragon Shoots Pearl
11. Play the Lute
12. Cross Hands Thrust Kick
13. Reverse Hanging of Golden Lotus
14. White Snake Shoots Venom
15. Old Eagle Catches Snake
16. Carry Tiger Back to Mountain
17. Punch Below Sleeves
18. Bow-Arrow Thrust Punch
19. Low Stance Vertical Fist
20. Side Kick
21. Fierce Dragon Across Steam
22. Strike Tiger Poise
23. Reverse Cloud Hands

Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow

1. Lifting Water
2. Wild Horse Separate Mane
3. White Crane Flaps Wings
4. Green Dragon Shoots Pearl
5. Playing the Lute
6. Repulse Monkey
7. Immortal Waves Sleeves
8. Double Dragon Plays with Pearl
9. Push Boat According to Flow
10. Black Bear Sinks Hips
11. Open Window to Look at Moon
12. Fisherman Casts Net
13. Single Whip
14. Cloud Hands
15. White Snake Shoots Venom
16. Cross Hands Thrust Kick
17. Double Bees Suck Pollens
18. Low Stance Single Whip
19. Golden Cockerel Stands Solitarily
20. Jade Girl Threads Shuttle
21. Needle at Sea Bottom
22. Shoulder Strike
23. Elbow Strike
24. Dodge Extend Arm
25. Reverse Hanging of Golden Lotus
26. Punch Below Sleeves
27. Like Close Like Cover
28. Cross Hands

In “White Crane Flaps Wings” the structure of the set is a north-south movement. After performing the right and the left mode of Grasping Sparrow’s Tail, a practitioner who starts in a central position facing north, moves north, then turns around and moves south, turns around to move north diagonally, then retreats southward to complete the set. This structure is typical of Southern Shaolin sets.

In “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” the structure of the set is a east-west movement. A practitioner who starts on the right side facing north, moves from east to west, retreats from west to east, moves from east to west again, turns around to move from west to east, and again turns around to move a short space to the west to complete the set. This structure is typical of Taijiquan sets and Northern Shaolin sets.

In terms of form, both sets fit in very well with our Wahnem Taijiquan, though there is some difference in the purpose of our teaching and benefits for our students.

“Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” is excellent for our purpose of teaching Taijiquan form. The arrangement of the patterns in this set is such that the patterns can be performed flowing and gracefully, which is typical of Yang Style Taijiquan, and which is also what many people conceptualize Taijiquan to be. Students have a lot of practice in and therefore benefit much from important Taijiquan principles like “starting with the back leg, rotating the waist, and completing in the hands” and “no beginning no ending”.

Besides providing excellent opportunities for students to learn important Taijiquan movements, “White Crane Flaps Wings” has the added advantage of performing Taijiquan in a fast and forceful manner, as in Chen Style Taijiquan. This gives our students an opportunity to realize that the Yang Style Taijiquan that many people normally see performed in a park is not the only type of Taijiquan, and that Taijiquan can be fast and forceful. Indeed, no martial art can be effective for combat if it is not fast and forceful.

In terms of force development, both sets use the flow method, though the force

method is used in some patterns in “White Crane Flaps Wings”. Relatively, “White Crane Flaps Wings” is more powerful than “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow”.

Without internal force “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” is like a dance, and it would be lacking in force for combat. But without internal force “White Crane Flaps Wings” can still make use of muscular strength for fighting.

If the two sets were practiced not as genuine Taijiquan but as Taiji dance, its gentle, flowing patterns make “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” more advantageous for health and longevity. The tensing of muscles to produce muscular strength in some patterns of “White Crane Flaps Wings” may cause some energy blockage.

But in terms of vitality, “White Crane Flaps Wings” is more advantageous than “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow”. This is because the more vigorous movements of “White Crane Flaps Wings” are more conducive to fitness and strength.

In our school both sets are practiced as genuine Taijiquan. “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” provides a good opportunity for students to experience that gentle, graceful movements when performed correctly generate energy flow, which develops into internal force. Thus they experience “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” as an internal art. They also discover that they can also perform the techniques of “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” in a fast and forceful manner.

“White Crane Flaps Wings” enables our students to experience both the soft and the hard aspects of Taijiquan. Our students have the opportunity to experience soft force from the flow method, and hard force from the force method. This set illustrates an important philosophical teaching of our school, that all great arts are both hard and soft.

If both sets are practiced as genuine Taijiquan, “White Crane Flaps Wings” is relatively more effective in bringing benefits for health, vitality and longevity. This is because while “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” is relatively slow, soft and graceful, while being slow, soft and graceful too, “White Crane Flaps Wings” can also be fast, hard and powerful. This yin-yang balance gives “White Crane Flaps Wings” an advantage.

It should be noted that the comparison is relative. When practiced as genuine Taijiquan, "Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow" also brings good health, vitality and longevity. It can be fast, hard and powerful too.

Both sets are complete in combat application. Not only both sets can be used to defend any attack, they also incorporate all the four categories of attack, namely striking, kicking, felling and chin-na.

"Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow", known by its more common name of 24-Pattern Simplified Taijiquan, is a widely practiced set by many people all over the world. The majority of them, however, practice it like a dance, with nothing internal and nothing martial. They are unlikely to know the combat application of any pattern in the set - not even in simple punches and kicks, like "Punch Below Sleeves" and "Cross-Hands Thrust Kick".

If the techniques were a straight-forward punch without the vertical arm, and a straight-forward kick without simultaneously separating the palms, these Taiji dancers may know the combat application, though they would probably not be able to execute the techniques effectively.

But these techniques, which were straight-forward initially, had evolved over time to be sophisticated, and are more effective for combat if practitioners know their combat application and have the skills to apply them.

On the other hand, "White Crane Flaps Wings" was composed by me, and is therefore unknown outside our school. But the combat applications of some of its patterns are more easily discernable, even by Taiji dancers. "Bow-Arrow Thrust Punch" and "Side-Kick" obviously are for punching and kicking opponents.

Hence, relatively speaking the combat application of "White Crane Flaps Wings" is more obvious than that of "Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow".

But not many people, including martial artists frequently engaged in free sparring, can pick out the felling and chin-na techniques in either set. Indeed, many people, including Taijiquan practitioners, mistakenly think that there are no or little felling and chin-na techniques in Taijiquan.

There are many felling and chin-na techniques in Taijiquan, and also in these two sets, but they are hidden in the open. “Black Bear Sinks Hips”, “Fisherman Casts Net”, “Repulse Monkey” and “Wild Horse Separate Mane”, for example, are felling techniques. Shaolin Wahnam students would not fail to notice that “Carry Tiger Back to Mountain” is excellent for felling opponents, though many other people may not realize it is a formidable felling technique.

Examples of chin-na techniques include “Double Dragon Plays with Pearl”, “Push Boat According to flow”, “Play the Lute” and “Old Eagle Catches Snake”.

While the combat applications in “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” are more refined and sophisticated, i.e. they are more complex and not easily discernable to the uninitiated, the combat applications in “White Crane Flaps Wings” are more direct.

As the level of combat today is quite simple, the more direct applications of “White Crane Flaps Wings” are relatively more useful for us in today’ combat situations, which are not complex enough to warrant the need of sophisticated applications of “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow”.

“Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” provides a good opportunity for our students to progress to more advanced level in our Wahnam Taijiquan. At more advanced levels of combat, like that between masters, “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” offers more sophisticated techniques.

There is more variety of attacks in “White Crane Flaps Wings” than in “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow”. For example striking in “White Crane Flaps Wings” involves the three levels of top, middle and low, whereas low strikes are not found in “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow”. There are three different types of kicks in “White Crane Flaps Wings”, i.e. thrust-kicks, organ-kicks and side-kicks, whereas in “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” only thrust-kicks are found.

Hence in Wahnam Taijiquan, “White Crane Flaps Wings” enables our students to focus on spread, whereas “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” enables our students to focus on depth.

The felling and chin-na techniques are more obvious in “White Crane Flaps Wings”,

found in “Carry Tiger Back to Mountain” and “Old Eagle Catches Snake”. In “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” felling and chin-na techniques are hidden in “Playing the Lute” and “Repulse Monkey”.

In Wahnam Taijiquan, our students first use relatively simpler and more obvious techniques from “White Crane Flaps Wings” for felling and chin-na, then progress to more sophisticated and hidden felling and chin-na techniques in “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow”.

Both “White Crane Flaps Wings” and “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” were created to meet expedient needs. In the 1970s the Chinese government promoted kungfu, known as wushu, as a sport. There were seven categories for competition, which was based solely on demonstration. Taijiquan was one of the categories, the other six being Changquan or Long Fist, Nanquan or Southern Fist, Daoshu or Sabre Techniques, Jianshu or Sword Techniques, Gunshu or Staff Techniques, and Jiangshu or Spear Techniques.

Taijiquan masters were invited to come together to compose a set for the wushu competition, and the result was the 24-Pattern Simplified Taijiquan Set.

Although this set was initially meant for competitors to perform as solo demonstration in wushu competitions, I found it contains of all important Taijiquan patterns and philosophy. Hence, when I first taught Wahnam Taijiquan in our school in the early 2000s, I used this set as the base.

After the Tai Chi Chuan Festival in Saint Petersburg in Florida in November 2012, this set was renamed “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” as its original name, “24-Pattern Simplified Taijiquan”, might be misleading. It was called “24-Pattern” because there were 24 individually different patterns. It was called “Simplified” because it was simplified from the well known 108-Pattern Yang Style Taijiquan.

In “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” practiced by us in Wahnam Taijiquan there are 28 individually different patterns. This is because “Black Bear Sinks Hips” and “Fisherman Cast Net”, which are found in both our set and the original set, are counted as two separate patterns by us as they have important combat

applications of their own, but not counted as separated patterns in the original set because they are regarded as transitional movement for “Open Window to Look at Moon” and “Single Whip” respectively. In Wahnam Taijiquan we also do not regard this set as simple as it contains some sophisticated techniques and philosophy.

In regional courses where students wished to have a taste of Taijiquan but there was insufficient time to teach it at some depth, I taught them Grasping Sparrow’s Tail. At the VIP Taijiquan Course in Villa de Leyva, Columbia in September 2005, I added a few patterns of Green Dragon Shoots Pearl and kicks to form a set called “Cloud Hands”, so that the participants had a complete set to practice.

When I formulated the 12 levels of Taijiquan for the core syllabus of our Wahnam Taijiquan training, which correspond to the 12 levels of Shaolin training, I further added a few more patterns to “Cloud Hands” so that the set was complete with all the four categories of attack and defence. The new set was called “White Crane Flaps Wings” and it became the fundamental set for Wahnam Taijiquan training, corresponding to “Lohan Asks the Way” in Shaolin Kungfu.

Both “White Crane Flaps Wings” and “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” are excellent sets in Wahnam Taijiquan. They contain all important Taijiquan patterns and provide a sound understanding of Taijiquan philosophy.

Wahnam Taijiquan students practicing either set will learn the fundamentals of Taijiquan, like basic stances, footwork, waist rotation, breath coordination, six harmonies, flowing movement and exploding force. They will also learn combat applications covering all the four categories of attack and defence, as well as important Taijiquan principles like “using mind and not using strength”, “no beginning and no ending”, “using minimum force against maximum strength”.

Question 8

Sifu, why is the Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow set not included in our standard syllabus?

Sifu Leonard Lackinger

Answer

Although “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” is an excellent set, it is not included in our standard Taijiquan syllabus because the selected set, “White Crane Flaps Wings”, is a better choice for this purpose. For other purposes, like a selective set, “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” is highly recommended.

This leads us to two relevant questions, “Why is “White Crane Flaps Wings” the best choice for our standard Taijiquan syllabus?” and “Why is “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” highly recommended as a selective set?”

If we examine our standard Taijiquan syllabus, which can be accessed at <http://www.shaolin.org/review/taijiquan.html> we can see that there is only one foundation set, which is “White Crane Flaps Wings”. The other sets in the syllabus are combat application sets, an advanced set, and weapon sets.

A foundation set is one that lays the foundation that provides the fundamentals of the art and prepares students for future development. A combat application set is one that is composed of combat sequences used in combat application. A weapon set is one that involves a classical weapon.

A selective set is one that students (and instructors) select for some special purposes, like deepening in the art or experiencing the legacies of great masters. Some selective Taijiquan sets are “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” which provides a deeper understanding of Taijiquan, and “108-Yang Style Taijiquan” and “Wudahg Taijiquan” which provide experiencing the legacies of Yang Deng Fu and Zhang San Feng respectively.

Our Taijiquan syllabus is formulated with general aims and specific objectives in mind.

The general aims are to provide students with an understanding and practice of Taijiquan that contribute to their health, vitality, longevity, mental freshness, spiritual joys and combat efficiency.

The specific objectives, which realize the general aims, are to provide students with training in Taijiquan in all the four aspects of form, force, application and philosophy in unarmed as well as selected armed combat, against single as well as multiple opponents.

The four aspects of form, force, application and philosophy are chosen because they give a comprehensive study and practice of the art. For the weapon category, the sword is selected for training because it is Taijiquan's most famous for its sword. The sabre is also selected because, in our opinion, it best represents other weapons. A crescent-moon spear or a three-sectional staff, for example, would not be representative.

Setting aims and objectives will make our training purposeful and cost-effective. We are proud and happy to say that judging from the results of our students, we have achieved our aims and objectives well.

It may seem unnecessary to mention, but I shall still mention it because thousands of thousands of Taijiquan and other martial art practitioners outside our school seem to be unaware of the following fact. If you practice a martial art and become more and more unhealthy, it just contradicts the stated aim that practicing the art makes you healthy. If you practice a martial art and be routinely hit and kicked in free sparring, it just contradicts the stated objective that you learn self-defence.

Before addressing the two relevant questions above, it will be helpful to have a quick look at our Taijiquan syllabus. The form category of the 12 levels of the syllabus is reproduced below.

1. Stances. Footwork and Basic Forms
2. White Crane Flaps Wings
3. White Snake Shoots Venom
4. Green Dragon Shoots Pearl
5. Black Bear Sinks Hips
6. Carry Tiger Back to Mountain
7. Wudang Sword
8. Taiji Sabre
9. Empty Hands Enter White Blade
10. Tiger Enters Herd of Sheep
11. Dodge Hit

After learning the fundamentals, students learn the basic set of “White Crane Flaps Wings”. The subsequent four levels deal with combat application involving striking, kicking, felling and chin-na. “Flowing Water Floating Clouds” is chosen for advanced study and practice, after which the sword and the sabre are learnt. The next level deals with combat against an armed opponent. The last two levels deal with multiple attacks against unarmed and armed opponents.

“Empty Hands Enter White Blade”, “Tiger Enters Herd of Sheep” and “Dodge Hit” are combat strategies. At present the skills and techniques for these strategies are taught individually. In future, to help students remember them better and practice them coherently, these skills and techniques may be linked into sets.

This was the reason – to enable practitioners to remember the skills and techniques better and practice them coherently – why sets were formed. This was the reason why all the sets in the syllabus, including “White Crane Flaps Wings”, were created.

The same philosophy underlying the Taijiquan syllabus also applies to the Shaolin syllabus, which can be accessed at <http://www.shaolin.org/review/shaolin.html>

The form category of the 12 levels of the Shaolin syllabus is reproduced below:

1. Basic Patterns, Stances and Footwork.
2. Lohan Asks the Way
3. Black Tiger Steals Heart
4. Fierce Tiger Speeds through Valley
5. Happy Bird Hops up Branch
6. Felling Tree with Roots
7. Cross-Roads at Four Gates
8. Flowing Water Staff
9. Plum Flower Single Sabre
10. Empty Hands Enter White Blade
11. Tiger Enters Herd of Sheep
12. Dodge Hit

With an understanding of the philosophy behind the Taijiquan syllabus we can now answer with insight why “White Crane Flaps Wings” is the best choice for the foundation set amongst the many Taijiquan sets we have in our school.

At that time we did not have many Taijiquan sets to choose from. We had “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow”, which was then called “24-Pattern Simplified Taijiquan”, “108-Yang Style Taijiquan”, “Cloud Hands” and “Flowing Water Floating Clouds”.

The four combat application sets were composed from the 12 basic Taijiquan combat sequences, and thus could not be used as a foundation set. The other Taijiquan sets that we now have – “Yellow Bee Sucks Pollens”, “Old Eager Catches Snake” and “Wudang Taijiquan” – were not created yet. “Yellow Bee Sucks Pollens” and “Old Eager Catches Snake” were later composed from consolidating the 12 basic combat sequences to 8 and 4 combat sequences respectively. “Wudang Taijiquan” was recreated from classical sources.

Of the four Taijiquan sets available then, “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” was the best choice. “Cloud Hands” did not have sufficient techniques to meet the requirement of the Taijiquan syllabus. “108-Yang Style Taijiquan”, was too long, and “Flowing Water Floating Clouds” was too advanced.

Even “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” was lacking in some techniques. For example, there was no low strike, and there was only one type of kicks. Moreover, some patterns, like Repulse Monkey and Golden Cockerel Stands Solitarily, were too advanced.

Hence, I used “Cloud Hands” as a base and added some required techniques to create a new set, to be named “White Crane Flaps Wings” after a beautiful pattern. Initially I thought of naming it “Green Dragon Shoots Pearl”, as this was a prominent pattern in the set. But this name was already taken by the second combat application set.

“White Crane Flaps Wings” was excellent to function as a foundation set. The starting Cloud Hands remind practitioners of how Zhang San Feng developed Taijiquan. The two sequences of Grasping Sparrow’s Tail cover all important Taijiquan movements.

Single Whip provides training for exploding force. The many repetitions of Green Dragon Shoots Pearl provide sufficient training in waist rotation, which is very important in Taijiquan and also which is what many Taijiquan practitioners today are poor at.

The added techniques made “White Crane Flaps Wings” a complete set with all the four categories of attack and defence. The forceful execution of Fierce Dragon Across Stream reminds practitioners that Taijiquan is a martial art.

Sharp observers may notice that “White Crane Flaps Wings” is very rich as a foundation set in Taijiquan compared to “Lohan Asks the Way” in Shaolin Kungfu. A noticeable difference is that “White Crane Flaps Wings” covers all the four categories of striking, kicking, felling and chin-na, whereas “Lohan Asks the Way” covers only one category of striking.

This was due to the improvement of my teaching methodology. When I composed “Lohan Asks the Way” I was just thinking of basic Shaolin patterns. When I composed “White Crane Flaps Wings” I was thinking of not just basic Taijiquan patterns but also that the patterns should include all the four categories of combat.

There was, nevertheless, still a setback in the composition of “White Crane Flaps Wings”. Do you know what it was? There was no side attack. This setback was rectified in “Yellow Bee Sucks Pollens”, “Old Eager Catches Snake”. In fact, the name of the set, “Yellow Bee Sucks Pollens”, highlighted the rectification of this setback.

While “White Crane Flaps Wings” is an excellent foundation set, “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” is an excellent selective set.

Firstly, it is short. It is interesting to note that while most other practitioners think that the longer a set is, it is more advanced, we in Shaolin Wahnam regard a shorter set more advanced than a longer one if both produce the same result. In other words, if you need 56 moves to have the same result as another practitioner who needs 108 moves, you are more advanced.

You are much more advanced if your result is better. This in fact is the case of “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” as a selective set. By performing just 56 patterns of the set, you can develop internal force, apply the patterns for combat besides attaining good health, vitality, longevity, mental freshness and spiritual joys, whereas many other people perform longer sets only for demonstration, and often sustain knee and back injuries.

You will also have these wonderful benefits by practicing the foundation set, “White Crane Flaps Wings”. Why then should you learn “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” as a selective set?

This leads to the third reason. The skills and techniques in “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” are more sophisticated than those in “White Crane Flaps Wings”. Instead of felling an opponent with Carry Tiger Back to Mountain found in “White Crane

Flaps Wings”, you can use Repulse Monkey found in “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow”, which is less conspicuous but more difficult to defend against.

If an opponent attacks you, irrespective of what attack he uses, you can counter with Dodge Extend Arm, first dodging his attack, and immediately counter-striking him. This pattern, or an application of this principle, is very useful when you press into an opponent relentlessly with your combat sequence.

Fourthly, this set is very effective for practicing the flow method. As the flow method is very important in Taijiquan, this set is invaluable.

Even when a practitioner may not know the flow method, if he performs this set flowingly and gracefully in a relaxed manner, he can eventually generate an energy flow. If he persists regularly in his practice, his energy flow may develop into internal force.

Many other kungfu sets may not have this facility. It is because the arrangement of the patterns in these sets does not encourage flowing and graceful movements, or the performance of some patterns demand physical strength which impedes energy flow.

Why, then, many people who practice the “24-Pattern Simplified Taijiquan Set”, which is the same as “Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow” except for the added shoulder and elbow strikes, do not have internal force or even energy flow? It is because their performance of the set is not flowing, or not graceful, or not in a relaxed manner, though they think they do.

Question 9

Dear Sigung,

As a beginner in our school I don't know much of the program for advanced students but I read here in the forum and in the website that advanced kungfu students make a decision about their specializations, i.e. choose an animal spirit/set to manifest in their kungfu.

If I understood well some sets and patterns can manifest the animal spirit better than others. Hence somebody specialized in Dragon Force could theoretically manifest the Dragon in any pattern and more or less so with other animals (I hope I am right despite my low understanding).

On the other side, the Dragon can be manifested best in Taijiquan. One can think that the Dragon spirit is or should be present in a good Taijiquan practitioner. Then here is my humble question:

I wonder if other animals can be manifested effectively by doing Taijiquan (Tiger, Crane, Monkey, etc.) and how that can affect the practitioner of a set like Cloud Hands or any other Taijiquan set in our school in terms of combat efficacy, energy development and spiritual joy.

Davy

Answer

For convenience, we classify kungfu sets in our school into two groups, basic sets and selective sets. Basic sets are those practiced by all kungfu students. Selective sets are those selected by some students for some special purposes.

When we first introduced the selective sets in 2005 we called them special sets, but later changed the term to selective sets for reasons which will be explained later.

In Shaolin Kungfu, Lohan Askes the Way, Black Tiger Steals Heart, Fierce Tiger Speeds through Valley, Happy Bird Hops up Branch, Fell Tree with Roots, and Four Gates are basic sets. These sets form our Shaolin syllabus, and all Shaolin practitioners in our school practice these sets.

Tiger-Crane, Dragon-Tiger, Five Animals, Dragon Form and Shaolin Monkey were the first selective sets offered in 2005. Later many more selective sets were introduced, like Shaolin Tantui, Eagle Claw, Eighteen Collection, Taming the Tiger, Iron Wire, Triple Stretch, Flower Set, Siu Lin Tou, Choy-Li-Fatt Twelve Fists, Drunken Eight Immortals, Wuzuquan San Zhan, Baguazhang Swimming Dragon, and Xingyiquan Five Element Fist. Only students who attended special courses where these sets were taught, practice these sets.

In Wahnam Taijiquan, the basic sets are White Crane Flaps Wings, White Snake Shoots Venom, Green Dragon Shoots Pearl, Black Bear Sinks Hips, Carry Tiger Back to Mountain, and Flowing Water Floating Clouds. All Taijiquan students in our school learn these sets as they form the core Taijiquan syllabus.

Selective sets in Wahnam Taijiquan are Cloud Hands, Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow, Yellow Bee Sucks Pollens, Old Eagle Catches Snake, 108-Pattern Yang Style Taijiquan, and Wudang Taijiquan. Only students who attended special courses where these selective sets were taught, learned these sets.

When the selective sets were first taught, they were called special sets because they were not taught in our normal syllabus. This led to the misconception of practicing these sets as specialization.

But specialization in the sense of choosing a special set to have a deep understanding and practice of the set to attain an expert level was not the intention when these sets were first introduced. The intention was to give our students opportunities to practice classical sets after they had learned basic sets which were composed by me to meet expedient needs. To rectify the misconception we changed the term from "special sets" to "selective sets".

Examining the examples above given for selective sets shows that in the progress after their basic training, advanced kungfu students do not necessarily select sets that manifest certain animal features. If they select sets like Dragon-Tiger, Eagle Claw and Monkey Set, their sets do manifest features of the dragon, tiger, eagle and monkey. But if they select sets like Shaolin Tantui, Siu Lin Tou and Twelve Fists, their sets do not reflect any special animal features.

Moreover, if they like, they can progress after their basic training without having to choose any selective sets. They can still be very advanced deepening their basic training, though their depth and certainly their breadth will be much enhanced if they also practice some selective sets.

Yes, you are correct in saying that some sets and patterns can manifest certain animal features better than others. For example, a set like Tiger-Crane obviously manifests the features of the tiger and the crane better than sets like Tantui, Eagle Claw and Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow. In fact, it is for this reason that the set is called Tiger-Crane.

A pattern like "Swimming Dragon Plays with Water", which may not necessarily be found in sets that specialize in the dragon form, obviously manifests the features of the dragon better than patterns like "Black Tiger Steals Heart", "Cross-Road Separates Gold" and "Low Stance Vertical Punch".

Some patterns may not be named after an animal, but may manifest the features of the animal. "False Leg Hand Sweep", for example, is not named after the crane, but has the features of the crane. "Immortal Waves Sleeves" is not named after the dragon, but has the features of the dragon.

Someone who specializes in the features of a certain animal can manifest these features in any pattern or set. For example, a person specializing in Dragon Force can manifest Dragon Force or any of the dragon features in patterns like "False leg Hand Sweep" and "Low Stance Vertical Punch". He can also manifest Dragon Force or any dragon features in sets that are not connected with the dragon, like Siu Lin Tou and Eighteen Collection.

But whether this transfer of a special animal feature to another pattern or set is advantageous or otherwise depends on how skillful a practitioner is. If he has the benefit of spread and depth, like students in our school, this transfer is advantageous. For example, while applying “False Leg Hand Sweep” which manifests the features of a crane, he may use Dragon Force. While performing Triple Stretch, which manifests the features of a tiger, he may use the swerving movement of a dragon to his advantage.

But if he is not sufficiently skillful, the transfer will distract from the effective of the pattern or set. The negative transfer may render his pattern, “False Leg Hand Sweep”, manifesting neither the dragon nor the crane. By adding dragon features to his Triple Stretch which manifests the features of a tiger, his performance of the set may have neither the ferocity and power of a tiger nor the presence of mind and fluidity of a dragon.

Taijiquan manifests the features of the snake and the crane. But Wahnam Taijiquan is different. While maintaining the features of the crane, Wahnam Taijiquan manifests the features more of the dragon than the snake.

The snake is like a dragon, but less majestic and less powerful. It is sometimes referred to as a dragon on earth, whereas dragons soar the sky. Hence, Wahnam Taijiquan is more commanding and more forceful than most other types of Taijiquan. In generating energy flow, Wahnam Taijiquan emphasizes more on the presence of mind, whereas other types of Taijiquan make use of bodily movements.

Yes, the dragon spirit should be present in a good practitioner practicing Wahnam Taijiquan. He radiates an invisible but discernable force. In other types of Taijiquan, practitioners focus more on energy flow and elegant movements, which are characteristic of the snake and the crane.

Features of other animals can be effectively manifested in Taijiquan too. Besides skills as mentioned above, whether the transfer of these features to Taijiquan is advantageous or disadvantageous depends on a few other factors too.

A good Taijiquan practitioner of other schools manifests the features of a snake and a crane. Besides manifesting the features of a crane, a good Wahnam Taijiquan practitioner manifests the features of a dragon. If they introduce the features of a tiger, even when it is done correctly, the transfer will spoil the elegance and fluidity of Taijiquan, and make it look like karate.

Cloud Hands may cease to be Cloud Hands. It may become Tiger Claws. Flowing Water Floating Clouds may become Blocked Ice Roaring Storm.

There is no need to transfer the features of the crane from elsewhere into Taijiquan. Taijiquan itself has crane features.

Although it is gentle and graceful, Taijiquan especially Wahnam Taijiquan, is majestic. Transferring the playfulness and trickiness of the monkey to Taijiquan will distract from his majestic

Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow may cease to be Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow. It may become Playful Monkey Tricks Eagle. Wudang Taijiquan may become Monkey Frolic.

The negative transfer affects not just the form of Taijiquan, but also its combat efficiency, energy development and spiritual joy.

For example, Immortal Waves Sleeves manifests the features of a snake in other Taijiquan, or a dragon in Wahnam Taijiquan. If a practitioner changes the features to those of a tiger or a leopard, Immortal Waves Sleeves would lose much of its effectiveness in using minimum force to deflect an opponent's powerful attack.

Energy development in Taijiquan uses the flow method, which is excellent for features of the dragon, snake and crane. If features of the tiger and leopard, or of the monkey, eagle or praying mantis are used instead, the effectiveness of the flow method is unfavorably affected.

Taijiquan practitioners are noted to be relaxed, elegant yet forceful, which manifest the qualities of the crane, snake and dragon. If the ferocity of the tiger, strength of the leopard, playfulness of the monkey, aggressiveness of the eagle, or the deceptiveness of the praying mantis interfere with the spiritual cultivation of

these Taijiquan qualities of being relaxed, elegant yet forceful, these spiritual joys may be affected.

But we in Shaolin Wahnam are different. We change disadvantages into advantages, setbacks into opportunities – not just in Taijiquan but more significantly in daily life. The selective sets add breadth and depth to our development.

Because of our many advantages that other practitioners may not have, such as our sound understanding of kungfu philosophy and magic of chi flow, we can manifest the features of other animals into Taijiquan when desirable, not only without distracting from the original benefits of Taijiquan but also enhancing them.

Hence, when we use Immortal Waves Sleeves to deflect an opponent's powerful strike, we can be very powerful too without distracting from the circular movement of the snake. When we generate energy flow using the flow method, we can also consolidate the flowing energy flow into internal force using the force method.

More importantly, not only we are relaxed but are quite to spring into appropriate action like an eagle. Not only we are elegant but also courageous like a tiger. Not only we are forceful, but also cheerful like a monkey.

All these wonderful benefits are not only made possible but also attained better and faster with our selective sets. Such a development in our school may not be unprecedented in the whole of kungfu and chi kung history but is certainly rare.

Question 10

If we wish to train the combative aspects of Taijiquan during solo practice of the "Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow" set, should we emphasize focusing and exploding internal force from the wrist and shoulders instead of the waist?

Stephen

Answer

During practice of Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow or any Taijiquan set, when exploding force we should first focus on internal force issuing from the dan tian. This must be executed with the right mechanics, which is excellent described by past masters as "starting from the back leg, rotating the waist, and completing at the hand".

There are two requirements for exploding force or fa-jing successfully, namely sufficient internal force to be exploded, and the right mechanics to explode it.

Both conditions are required. If there is no internal force, exploding force will not be successful even when the mechanics is correct. Even when there is internal force, if the mechanics is wrong, the force will not be successfully exploded.

Failure to meet one or both of these two conditions is the reason why many martial artists do not know fa-jing, or how to explode internal force, which is regarded as an advanced skill.

On the other hand, even our students in Intensive Taijiquan Course and Intensive Shaolin Kungfu Course can learn fa-jing in just a few days. This is because our students have the two requirements and make use of them when exploding force.

Most martial artists do not have internal force, though many of them can be very powerful with muscular strength. Our students develop internal force from their stance straining, like the Three-Circle Stance in Taijiquan and the Horse-Riding Stance in Shaolin Kungfu. The internal force is stored at the dan tian.

When a practitioner explodes force, he focuses at his dan tian. This sets his energy flowing from his dan tian, through his shoulder, through his elbow, through his wrist, and out of his hand, known in kungfu terminology as “internal force going through five gates”. The rotation of his waist sets the energy flowing in spiral. Thus the force he explodes out is spiral force, which is more powerful than linear force like ramming a hardened fist onto an opponent.

If the practitioner focuses at his wrist or shoulder, he may not be able to issue the force from his dan tian. He may generate a spiral movement by following the principle of starting from the back leg, rotating the waist and completing at the hand. But it is spiral mechanical strength, and not spiral force, that hits an opponent.

At an advanced level, the internal force is not just kept at the dan tian, but fills up an exponent's whole body. The meridians from his dan tian all the way to his hands are filled with energy. At this advanced level, the exponent may focus at his wrist instead of his dan tian when exploding force.

Indeed, he needs not even have to start from his back leg, rotate his waist and complete at his hand. He just needs to rotate or flex his wrist. Internal force will shoot out from his palm to an opponent.

Although his internal force is issued from his palm, the source of energy is traced back to his dan tian. It is just like when you turn on a tap, water flows out of the tap, but the source of water is from a reservoir. Water flows all the way from the reservoir to the tap, just as internal force flows all the way from the dan tian to the palm.

There is, however, a slight difference. The water used up from the tap is replaced later in the reservoir when there is a rainfall. The energy used up in the strike from the palm is replaced immediately in the dan tian from the Cosmos.

The dan tian acts as a source for exploding force in most kungfu styles, like in Taijiquan and Shaolin Kungfu. But in Xingyiquan, the source is at the shoulder, though it is still fed by the dan tian. At advanced levels in all kungfu styles,

including Taijiquan, Shaolin Kungfu and Xingyiquan, the source is at the wrist.

Why is the source of internal force at the shoulder whereas it is at the dan tian for most other kungfu styles?

It is because of the principal manner Xingyiquan and the other kungfu styles develop their internal force. Xingyiquan uses the Santi Stance, or the Three-Body Stance, whereas Taijiquan and Shaolin Kungfu use the Three-Circle Stance and the Horse-Riding Stance respectively. The Three-Body Stance is asymmetrical, whereas the Three-Circle Stance and the Horse-Riding Stance are symmetrical. The symmetrical structural of the Three-Circle Stance and the Horse-Riding Stance enables energy from the Cosmos to be stored at the dan tian.

Indeed, I was thinking of this question for quite some time. Why is the Three-Body Stance asymmetrical? I found the answer while preparing to teach Xingyiquan at the 2013 UK Summer Camp. The asymmetrical structure of the Three-Body Stance, together with the correspondence mode when practicing it, enables energy to be located at the shoulders to be used when exploding force.

Question 11

When practicing footwork, waist rotation and moving in stances, I sometimes add the Double Tiger Claws whilst moving in stances, rotating the Tiger Claws with each step.

After a period of time when the chi flow is becoming stronger I sometimes find the Double Tiger Claws changing into similar movements as Cloud Hands. I have also experienced this once in chi flow. I started thinking that Cloud Hands originated from the Double Tiger Claws.

Is there some connection of the Double Tiger Claws and Cloud Hands?

If all things would be equal in terms of progress, who would have the most force, a Shaolin Kungfu practitioner who practices Iron Wire and Double Tiger Claws, and then starts practicing Cloud Hands, or a Tai Chi Chuan practitioner, who practiced Cloud Hands from the start?

Tim Hoorens

Answer

Congratulations. Your experience is the result from the benefits of breadth and depth.

You have practiced your footwork, waist rotation and moving in stances so well that your Double Tiger Claws emerge spontaneously. All these techniques complement one another excellent.

Practitioners who only know Double Tiger Claws but have not practiced footwork, waist rotation and moving in stance, will probably perform the Double Tiger Claws from their shoulders instead of from the waist as you do. This will distract both from their application of force as well as combat efficiency.

For example, if a practitioner executes his Double Tiger Claws from his shoulders, he may generate 200 units of force. But if he rotates his waist he can generate 500 units!

Why can he generate more force by rotating his waist? There are two reasons. By rotating his waist he issues his force from his dan tian, where internal force is stored. By starting from his shoulders he issues his force from his shoulders which have less internal force stored there than at the dan tian. The flow of force from the dan tian is more than the flow of force from the shoulders.

Secondly, when he rotates his waist, he generates spiral force. When he issues force from his shoulders, the force is linear. Even when the amount of force is the same, spiral force is more powerful than linear force. But here the amount of spiral force is more than the amount of linear force. Hence, if all other things were equal except that you rotate your waist when applying the Double Tiger Claws but another practitioner starts from his shoulder, as many practitioners do, he generates only 200 units of force but you generate 500 units.

Besides force application, rotating the waist also has an advantage in combat efficiency over starting from the shoulders. The Double Tiger Claws are often used to deflect an opponent's attack with one tiger claw and simultaneously counter-attacking him with the other tiger claw.

If an opponent's attack with a force of 500 units is coming towards you, you can deflect it with just 200 units of force by moving your deflecting tiger claw from your shoulder. But if you rotate your waist instead of moving your arm from your shoulder, you can deflect the 500 units of force with only 100 units.

You may have a feel of this application of minimum force by doing the following simple experiment. Hold a heavy object, like a table, with both hands. Try to move it by moving your hands issuing from your shoulders. Next, hold the same object with both hands. Move the object not by moving your hands but by rotating your waist. You will find that moving the object by rotating your waist is easier than using your shoulders. This, in fact, is a core principle why in Taijiquan a smaller-sized exponent can defeat a bigger-sized opponent.

When one starts to train the Double Tiger Claws, waist rotation is very important. But when his Double Tiger Claws are very powerful, he can use them any way he likes, sometimes without rotating his waist.

The physical movements of the Double Tiger Claws and of Cloud Hands are similar. Hence, your Double Tiger Claws may spontaneously change to Cloud Hands, and vice versa. This, again, is the result of benefiting from breadth and depth. For example, a Shaolin Wahnam student may only train in Double Tiger Claws, but eventually he can also use Cloud Hands, and vice versa.

The benefits are not only in physical movements and combat application, but also in force development. Suppose a Shaolin Wahnam student trains Double Tiger Claws for three months, he will develop 1000 units of Tiger Claws internal force. Instead of training Double Tiger Claws, he trains Cloud Hands for three months, he will develop 800 units of internal force.

Given the same training time, there will be more internal force developed in Double Tiger Claws than in Cloud Hands. This is because Double Tiger Claws use the force method, whereas Cloud Hands use the flow method. The nature of training is such that, if all other things were equal, the force method develops force faster than the flow method.

But this does not necessarily mean that the force method is better than the flow method. The flow method may have other advantages over the force method. A flow method practitioner, for example, may be more agile than a force method practitioner.

Now, if the Shaolin Wahnam student uses the same three months to train both Double Tiger Claws and Cloud Hands, he will obtain not half the result of Double Tiger Claws, i.e. 500 units of Tiger Claws force, and half the result of Cloud Hands, i.e. 400 units of Cloud Hands force, but he will obtain 1500 units of internal force which he can use in Double Tiger Claws or in Cloud Hands.

When he performs Double Tiger Claws he will have 1500 units of Tiger Claws force. When he performs Cloud Hands he will have 1500 units of Cloud Hands force. In other words, for the same time spent in training, he gets more than double the amount of benefit in each art! This is our concept of breadth and depth.

The benefit of breadth and depth applies in our school. It may not apply in most other schools. For most other schools, if students practice two opposing force training methods, like Double Tiger Claws and Cloud Hands, at the same time period, they will get less than half the benefit they would get had they focused on just one art. For example, they may get only 120 units of Tiger Claw force and 100 units of Cloud Hands force.

Yes, there is some obvious connection between Double Tiger Claws and Cloud Hands. The physical movements are similar, except that the former uses tiger claws and the latter uses open palms.

The combat applications are similar. One tiger claw or open palm is used to deflect an opponent's attack, and the other tiger claw or open palm is used to counter-strike the opponent. A master can use either technique to counter any attack – be in a strike, a kick, a felling attack or a chin-na technique!

The force development is quite different. Double Tiger Claws use the force method, and Cloud Hands use the flow method. But for us in Shaolin Wahnam, we can combine the flow and the force methods in either art to have better and faster results.

I don't have historical evidence for the origin of Double Tiger Claws. The earliest record of tiger claws I have was in a classic called "The Internal Arts of Shaolin" which I believe was written in the Ming Dynasty (14th to 17th century). It showed the development of internal force employing the Shaolin five animals.

There was mention of the tiger form in Xingyiquan, which was invented by Yue Fei during the later part of the Song Dynasty (10th to 13th century). Claws were used in the tiger form, but they were more like Eagle Claws, and very different from the

Double Tiger Claws we use in Shaolin Wahnam. The Art of Tiger Claws was probably established during the Qing Dynasty (17th to 20th century).

On the other hand, I believe that Cloud Hands originated from Zhang San Feng during the later part of the Song Dynasty. After practicing his Shaolin Kungfu, Zhang San Feng entered into standing meditation. Extreme stillness produced movement. Soon chi flow resulted in graceful movements, poetically described as “flowing water floating clouds”, and later shortened to “cloud hands”. These cloud hand movements were stylized into forms which evolved into Taijiquan.

Hence, from this historical background, it was more likely that Double Tiger Claws evolved from Cloud Hands. This was also more logical from the perspectives of force training and combat application, than the possibility of Clouds Hands evolving from Double Tiger Claws. It was more logical and likely that the powerful flow of Cloud Hands evolved into the internal force of Double Tiger Claws, and that the simple strikes of Cloud Hands evolved into the more sophisticated chin-na or Double Tiger Claws.

If all other things were equal, in our school a Shaolin practitioner who practices Iron Wire and Double Tiger Claws and then starts practicing Cloud Hands would have more force than a Taijiquan practitioner who practices Cloud Hands from the start.

Let us compare the force of four students instead of two. Student A practices all the three arts. Student B practices only iron Wire. Student C practices only Double Tiger Claws. Student D practices only Cloud Hands. The range of students from having the most force to the least force will be A, B, C, D.

This is because Iron Wire is more powerful than Double Tiger Claws, and Double Tiger Claws is more powerful than Cloud Hands. The student who practices all the three arts have the most force because he has the benefit of breadth and depth.

As stated earlier, this does not necessarily mean that Cloud Hands is the least useful because it may have advantages in other aspects over the other arts.

The above comparison applies to our school, but may not apply to other schools. In other schools practicing different arts at the same time usually distracts from one another. Thus, a student who practices all the three arts would have less force than one who practices only Cloud Hands.

But if they practice the three arts as physical exercise instead of as internal force training, both students would not have internal force, but the one who practices all the three arts will be muscularly stronger than the one who practices Cloud Hands. This is because Iron Wire and Double Tiger Claws develop more muscular strength than Cloud Hands.