



Question and Answer Series
The Seven-Star Set
by Grandmaster Wong Kiew Kit

Question 1

Can you tell us of some famous practitioners of the Seven-Star Set, and possibly some stories on how the set was developed and used in the past?

Sifu Markus Kahila

Answer

I don't know of any famous practitioners of the Seven-Star Set. The kungfu set itself was not widely practice, which does not mean it is not effective. Dragon Strength, for example, is also not widely known, but it is the pinnacle of my kungfu development.

One main reason why effective kungfu sets are not well known was because masters of these sets kept them as top secrets in the past. We must, of course, guard against dualistic thinking. This does not necessarily mean that popular sets are not effective. The 108-Pattern Yang Style Taijiquan Set is very popular, and it is also very effective for combat as well as good health and spiritual cultivation, though today many people who practice this set daily may not have these benefits.

I also don't know much about how the set was developed and used in the past. The Seven-Star Set was recorded in the Shaolin Classic written by the abbot of the northern Shaolin Temple, the Venerable Fu Yu, around the year 961 during the Song Dynasty. The routine of the set recorded in this classic, however, was not the same as the routine I learned from Sifu Ho Fatt Nam.

But I believe it was the same set, and the philosophy was also similar. The difference was due to the long time between the two versions. Even within about 40 years since the time I learned the set from my sifu, I cannot remember the exact routine. (Videos were unknown then, or not widely used.) But the philosophy, principles and characteristic forms are the same. I also have included some applications which I have found useful.

But I can clearly remember the stories, which were about real experiences, related to my learning of this set.

My sifu learned the set from his simu, the wife of my sigung who taught my sifu the art of lightness. When my sigung, whose name I do not know, stopped teaching the art of lightness to my sifu, his simu pitied him and taught him this Seven-Star Set. My sifu told me that his simu was small-sized but very combat effective. Her feet were tiny, bound in a traditional way, but

she was excellent in the organ-seeking kick derived from the Seven-Star Set.

Before teaching me the Seven-Star Set, my sifu asked me a rhetoric question. "How would a fragile-looking lady counter the ferocious sweeping kick of a Muay Thai fighter?" he asked. Before I could answer, which probably was "I don't know", he continued, "The way you see in movie how a heroine blocks the powerful sweeping kicks with her delicate hands is disastrous. Her hands would be fractured, and the kick would continue to hit her face."

"A Muay Tahi fighter's sweeping kicks are very powerful," my sifu continued. A professional Muay Tahi fighter kicks at a 'pinang' tree (which is like a small palm tree) 200 or 300 times every day until the tree shakes!"

I was quick to grasp the learning opportunity. "Then, how would she block a powerful sweeping kick, sifu?"

"You will learn it in this set I am going to teach you. But don't block a powerful kick," he advised.

I taught I would learn the set in a few months. I was mistaken. All my sifu taught me was some typical movements, especially a typical Seven-Star jump. As a good student, I practiced those few movements every day for many months. I was quite proficient in kungfu then. I was an assistant instructor helping my sifu teach Shaolin Kungfu at the Guangdong Association in Kuala Teengganu, the capital of the state of Trengganu in Malaysia.

Eventually my sifu asked my siheng, Pok Kai, who injured me with a gentle tap of his cup fist on my solar plexus that took me six months to recover, to teach me the Seven-Star Set. He taught me the set in a relative short time.

I was too young to understand the significance of kungfu training then. I thought, wrongly, it was a waste of time practicing the Seven-Star jump daily for many months. My siheng could just teach me the set in a few weeks. But I still practiced the Seven-Star jump dutifully and diligently as my sifu told me.

On hindsight I now realize that the best benefit I got was not from the set but from the jump. My daily practice made me very agile, which is not only important in kungfu but more importantly in daily life. I believe my physical agility derived from practicing the Seven-Star jump daily also contributed to my mental agility.

Question 2

Considering the story of how Sigung Ho learned the Seven Star Set, is there something special about the origins or character of the set that made it suited to a master of the Art of Lightness and his family?

Sifu Mark Blohm

Answer

The Seven-Star Set was taught to my sifu, Sifu Ho Fatt Nam, by his simu, the wife of a Northern Shaolin master who taught my sifu the Art of Lightness. I don't know the names of the master and his wife.

My sifu was a kungfu apprentice to the master who earned his living as a traveling medicine man. At that time transportation was poor. My sifu told me that he had to carry all the luggage on his back and walked from town to town. With typical Shaolin Wahnam attitude, my sifu said this was good for him as it contributed to his training in the Art of Lightness, which he did not realize at the time.

Every morning my sigung would take my sifu into a woods for training. My sigung would mark ten trees in a large circle which were far apart and not within vision from one another. My sigung and my sifu would start running together round the ten marked trees.

After some time my sigung, despite his age, would be far ahead. Then my sifu would lose sight of my sigung. After a while my sigung, having completed the round, would be behind my sifu. As my sigung passed my sifu, he would hit my sifu hard on the back of the head, say "You are very slow." This continued everyday.

"One day," my sifu said, "I got out of the wrong side of bed."

I can remember this occasion very well. I was naïve, and asked, "What's wrong with getting out on any side of the bed, sifu?"

"Oh, it's an idiomatic expression. It means every thing went wrong that day," my sifu kindly explained.

"What went wrong, sifu?"

"I refused to go training. I am not going to train, I told my sifu," my sifu said.

"You've done well, his sifu said. Now, let's continue the training," my sifu continued. "But I was stubborn. I said to my sifu that he told me he would teach me very good kungfu but all he did was hit me at the back of my head during running."

I just listened.

My sifu continued. "My sifu said that he was teaching me excellent kungfu. Now it's the third time I am asking you. Are you going to train? But, as I said, I got out from the wrong side of he bed. I actually saw my simu giving me an eye signal asking me to continue to train. But I was just stubborn. I told my sifu that even if he skinned me I would not go to train."

My sigung led my sifu to the back of the hotel they were staying. My sigung tugged his long robe under his waist slash.

"Now, don't blink your eyes," my sifu reported to me. "I saw my sifu bend his knees slightly, and in the next moment he was in the air, above the high wall at the back of the hotel."

"How high was the wall, sifu?"

"About 10 feet high. There were pieces of glass on the wall to prevent burglary. . I saw my sifu do a summersault in the air above the wall, scrape off some pieces of glass with his long pipe and when he was upright again, stood on one leg on the high wall in the pattern, White Crane Flaps Wings. Then he jumped down from the wall and landed without a sound."

I listened in awe.

"I suddenly realized that my sifu was teaching me the almost-lost Art of Lightness. I knelt down and beg him continue teaching me. But he refused. It was a tradition among elderly masters that if a student was asked three times and the student did not want to learn, he was not destined to learn it," my sifu explained.

"I learned an invaluable lesson," my sifu continued. "So, the next time when I had a rare opportunity to learn from your sigung, Yang Fatt Khun, I just followed whatever he taught me. He taught me One-Finger Shooting Zen, and almost nothing else for more than two years. I just trained what he asked me to. I was richly rewarded. I learned the Art of Dim Mak."

This was an inspiring story my sifu told me.

He said his simu took pity on him, and taught him her specialty, the Seven-Star Set.

I don't know much about the origin of the Seven-Star Set except that it was recorded in the Shaolin Classic authored by the Venerable Fu Yu, an abbot of the northern Shaolin Temple, in the year 961 during the Song Dynasty.

The main character of the set is agility, which is most suited to a master of the Art of Lightness. Like my sifu when he learned One-Finger Shooting Zen from my sigung, when I learned the Seven-Star Set from my sifu all I did and almost nothing else was the Seven-Star jump for many months. This practice certainly gave me a lot of agility.

Question 3

I have learned a version of the Seven Star Set before in the past while visiting Yunnan province of China (learned provisionally, rather than learned adequately!)

One aspect of the Set was noticeable at the time:

- it seems suitable for a smaller and weaker opponent (such as a female) versus a larger and stronger opponent.

One aspect of the Set seems noticeable with the benefit of hindsight:

- the footwork and Seven Star stance seem particularly useful for countering wrestling shoots and throws.

Please can you confirm or correct these observations, and discuss these aspects of the Set if applicable.

Sifu Andy Cusick

Answer

The Seven-Star Set is a rare art though it is well known but little seen by those knowledgeable in kungfu history. The next time we meet, you should demonstrate to me whatever you can remember about the set, and I shall comment on its benefits for both kungfu application and daily living.

Although the initiated have heard of the Seven-Star Set, though they may not have seen it, even amongst them not many know it is suitable for a physically weaker and smaller sized opponent against a stronger and bigger sized one, and of course less know why it is so.

A great Taijiquan master, Huang Zhong Yue, commented that there was nothing unusual for a physically stronger or bigger sized person to defeat a physically weaker or a smaller sized opponent. But if the case was reversed, i.e. a physically weaker or smaller sized person defeat a physically stronger or bigger sized opponent, then the art was great.

Many people know that this it is possible for a physically weaker or smaller sized exponent to defeat a physically stronger or bigger sized opponent, though they may not know how. Taijiquan and Wing Choon Kungfu are two arts famous for this achievement.

This achievement is possible due to two factors, namely internal force and mechanics. If you have much internal force, which does not depend on muscular strength, size and gender, you can defeat an opponent who may be physically stronger and bigger in size. Even if you do not have internal force, by employing body mechanics you also can defeat an opponent who is physically stronger and bigger.

Taijiquan makes use of both internal force and Taijiquan mechanics. Wing Choon Kungfu, being an external art, makes use of Wing Choon mechanics.

A principal factor in both Taijiquan mechanics and Wing Choon mechanics is waist rotation. But the use of waist rotation in these two arts is quite different.

However, judging from the performance and appearance of Taijiquan and Wing Choon practitioners today, it seems that many of them do not employ internal force or the mechanics of their art to enable a physically weaker or smaller sized exponent to defeat a physically stronger or bigger sized opponent. Most Taijiquan practitioners today in Pushing Hands do not use internal force or waist rotation. Many Wing Choon practitioners today develop big muscles and use mechanical strength.

Personally, I find Seven-Star mechanics even more sophisticated and effective than that in Taijiquan and Wing Choon Kungfu! The body mechanics in all these there kungfu styles are quite different, though the one used in the Seven-Star Set by all initiated practitioners is also used by high-level Wing Choon masters. The movement of the mechanics is so subtle that most people may not realize it, and , of course, it needs much skill to perform it perfectly.

The footwork in the Seven-Star Set and the Seven-Star Stance are agile and useful for combat. Congratulations for your sharp perception that they are particularly useful for countering wrestling shoots and throws. Most people may not realize their combat application.

I spent many months just practicing the Seven-Star footwork and the Seven-Star Stance, and nothing else. In my ignorance at that time I did not know their usefulness. I thought my sifu could have just taught me the Seven-Star Set. But I was a good student. I did what my sifu told me to. With hindsight I realize that the practice contributed much not only to my combat efficiency but also my physical and mental agility.

We shall, of course, learn and practice the footwork and stance, and other important aspects of the Seven-Star Set. Those attempting wrestling shoots

and throws will be surprise at the ease and efficiency of the counters. I am happy to have an opportunity to transmit this well-known but little-understood set to deserving students.

Question 4

In your autobiography you mention that the Seven-Star Set "is excellent against Muay Thai". May I kindly ask why?

You also mentioned that "the Seven-Star Set is excellent for the small-sized against bigger, stronger opponents". May you explain how this set would overcome bigger and stronger opponents in comparison with Taijiquan?

Santiago

Answer

As my sifu was about to teach me the Seven-Star Set, he asked me a rhetoric question, "How would a fragile lady defend against the ferocious sweeping kicks of a Muay Thai fighter?"

Before I could answer, which would be "I don't know", as I didn't know at that time, my sifu continued, "What you see in kungfu movies how a heroine would defend against the ferocious kicks of a Muay thai fighter by blocking them with her both hands is disastrous."

Muay Thai was very popular at that time, and there were many kungfu movies from Hong Kong showing how fragile ladies defended against Muay thai sweeping kicks using their delicate palms.

"Her hands would be broken, and the sweeping kicks would continue to hit her face," my sifu explained. "The sweeping kicks of Muay Thai fighters, especially professional ones, are very powerful. They kick at a pinang tree (like a small palm tree) two to three hundred times a day until the tree shakes."

I was quick to grasp the opportunity. "Then, how should she defend against the powerful sweeping kicks, sifu?"

"You're going to learn them in this Seven-Star Set I 'm going to teach you. But don't block a powerful sweeping kick," my sifu advised.

When my sifu said that techniques from the Seven-Star Set were excellent to counter Muay Thai attacks, it had a lot of weight, as my sifu was formerly a professional Muay Thai fighter. Seven-Stars techniques were not just excellent against Muay Thai sweeping kicks, they were excellent against all Muay Thai attacks, including all other kicks, knee strikes and elbow strikes.

I would even go to the extent of saying that as far as techniques are concerned, a Muay Thai fighter has no chance against a Seven-Star exponent. As soon as the Muay Thai fighter makes a move, he would be defeated by the Seven-Star exponent! Even when the Muay Thai fighter is more powerful, he would still be defeated because the Seven-Star exponent does not use force against force.

But if there is a wide difference in skills, like the Muay Thai fighter is an expert and the Seven-Star exponent a beginner, the beginner would be no match against the expert. The decisive factor for victory is not techniques but skills.

However, even when you are skillful, if you do not know the Seven-Star techniques, you would not be able to beat a Muay Thai fighter. Just like even when you are a good driver, but if you don't have a car, someone riding a bicycle would be faster than you.

It is worthwhile to mention that by watching the Seven-Star Set or even being able to perform the Seven-Star Set is insufficient to know the intricacies and sophistication of the Seven-Star techniques. Students must learn them in a course taught by a competent teacher.

In fact, this is a main problem facing most kungfu practitioners today. Excellent combat techniques are found in kungfu, but most kungfu practitioners do not know how to apply them, even when they may perform these techniques beautifully in solo demonstration. It is like having a car but not knowing how to drive it.

Why are Seven-Star techniques excellent against Muay Thai? This is because the techniques as well as the principles of the Seven-Star Set were constructed with the philosophy in mind of small-sized exponents defeating bigger-sized opponents who are powerful, fast and agile. It is as if the Seven-Star Set was constructed as a nemesis against Muay Thai.

The term "as if" is used here because I believe the masters who composed the Seven-Star Set did not have Muay Thai in mind. Muay Thai just happens to fall in the category of a martial art that is powerful, fast and agile, though its exponent may not necessarily be big-sized.

Will the Seven-Star Set also be effective against martial arts that are not powerful, not fast and not agile? Of course, it is. In fact it would be easier from a Seven-Star exponent to beat someone who is weak, slow and clumsy. Just as if a car is specially built to beat other cars which are powerful, fast and agile, it will be easier for this special car to beat cars which are weak,

slow and clumsy. So, the Seven-Star Set is excellent not just against Muay Thai, but also against other martial arts.

Let us take an example of a martial art that is quite different from Muay Thai – Lohan Kungfu. Are Seven-Star techniques excellent against Lohan Kungfu? Yes, they are. Lohan Kungfu, where being big-sized is an advantage whereas it is a disadvantage in Muay Thai, is also powerful, fast and agile.

A Lohan exponent may not use a lot of sweeping kicks like a Muay Thai fighter does, but swinging arm movements in Lohan Kungfu are similar in principles. Seven-Star techniques are excellent to counter these swinging arm movements.

A Lohan exponent many not use a lot of elbow strikes like a Muay Thai fighter does, but the upward cannon punches and horn punches are similar in principles, and Seven-Star techniques are excellent counter. Lohan Kungfu uses a lot of powerful thrust punches, and Seven-Star has excellent counters. Indeed, I believe it was against Lohan Kungfu in mind that the masters composed Seven-Star.

Both the Seven-Star Set and Taijiquan are excellent for the smaller-sized against the bigger-sized, and for the physically weaker against the physically stronger. But they achieve this special ability in different ways. Personally I find the methods used in Seven-Star even more effective.

The main principle in this special ability in Taijiquan is to deflect an opponent's force and motion by using circular movement, which can be realized with waist rotation. The opponent's force and motion are then redirected back to himself in a figure-of-eight movement. Taijiquan techniques are circular and extended.

When an opponent throws a powerful punch, for example, instead of blocking it head-on, a Taijiquan exponent deflects it and turning it back to the opponent by first following the punching momentum, next turning it away, and then pushing the punching arm back to the opponent in a circular movement and striking him.

A Seven-Star response is faster and direct. As an opponent throws a powerful punch, instead of blocking it or deflecting it, a Seven-Star exponent also shoots out his Seven-Star palm. His timing and spacing must be perfect so that his shooting arm will brush away the opponent's attack, and his Seven-Star hook grips the opponent's throat at a time when the punch is brushed off. If the opponent moves back or moves away, the Seven-Star hook will grip the opponent's upper arm.

For those who heard the story of my fight with a Muay Thai fighter in my younger days, this was the Seven-Star hook I used to grip his throat. The back-hand slap on his groin in another situation was from a Monkey Set.

Other famous kungfu styles or sets that utilize the ability of the weaker beating the stronger, the smaller-sized beating the bigger-sized are Monkey, Wing Choon, Praying Mantis, Baguazhang and the Flower Set. They use different techniques and different principles to achieve the same aim, illustrating the richness of kungfu.

Personally I find the Flower Set and the Seven-Star Set the most effective. They use similar principles, but the Flower Set uses the techniques of dim-mak whereas the Seven-Star Set uses the techniques of chin-na. In this aspect I would consider the Seven-Star Set has an edge over the Flower Set. If an opponent dodges the initial attack, a Flower Set exponent would have to use another technique, but the Seven-Star Set exponent would change grip the opponent's throat to gripping the opponent's arm.

Seven-Star techniques are amazingly effective, but they are secretive. This was probably a main reason why this effective set was not widely practiced as its masters wanted to keep its secrets.

Question 5

I noticed a couple of people mention that Seven Stars set is good for a small sized person (something which always catches my eye!) which means I can't resist asking the question I was thinking of asking earlier. When I heard "Seven Star Set" my first thought was "Is this related to Seven Star Praying Mantis?" and especially given it is being taught in Switzerland, our cradle of Praying Mantis Kungfu! But I thought others would probably already know this, and from reading what others said I figured it was probably something completely separate. However knowing that Praying Mantis was known as being good for small people, and hearing now that Seven Star is as well, I do want to know if they are related?

And I would ask a related part of the question which is, if all things were equal, ie same time spent in stance training and combat application, same force developed, which would be the best combat art for small people to practise, or even what would be the top 3 in order?

Paul – Drunken Boxer

Answer

No, the Seven-Star Set is not related to Seven-Star Praying Mantis Kungfu.

The Seven-Star Set was already recorded in the Shaolin Classics in the Song Dynasty, where Praying Mantis Kungfu was invented in the Ming Dynasty a few hundred years later. Seven-Star Praying Mantis is a branch of Praying Mantis Kungfu, and was first defined even much later.

Although both are effective for the small-sized exponents against bigger-sized opponents, they developed differently with different philosophies and methods.

The Seven-Star Set is a kungfu set of Northern Shaolin Kungfu, whereas Seven-Star Praying Mantis is a kungfu style. There are many kungfu sets in the Seven-Star Praying Mantis Style.

Both the Seven-Star Set and Seven-Star Praying Mantis are effective for small-sized exponents against bigger-sized opponents. But the principles and techniques they use are different.

Seven-Star Praying Mantis uses the curved arms of an exponent to neutralize the force of an opponent, whereas the Seven-Star Set uses the

“threading” movement of the exponent’s arm. Both attack an opponent’s vital points, thus causing serious injury without using much muscular strength.

Seven-Star Praying Mantis uses the index-fingers and the knuckles of the mantis hook for this purpose, whereas the Seven-Star Set uses crab-pincers and fingers of the palm for the purpose. Both use kicks, but while the kicks in Seven-Star Praying Mantis are more varied, those in the Seven-Star Set aim specifically at the sexual organ.

Both the Seven-Star Set and Seven-Star Praying Mantis have their Seven-Star Stances, but they are different although the name is the same. The Seven-Star Stance of Seven-Star Praying Mantis is high, like a high False-Leg Stance but the front leg is straight with the heel touching the ground and the toes pointing skyward. The Seven-Star Stance in the Seven-Star Set is low, like a Unicorn Stance low on the ground. We should think of a different name for either of these stances to differentiate them.

If all other things were equal, in my opinion the best three types of kungfu in descending order are Monkey Kungfu, Seven-Star Set and Flower-Set. Three other kungfu types that are also very effective for the small-sized against the bigger-sized, i.e. the fourth, the fifth and the sixth top in order are Taijiquan, Wing Choon Kungfu and Praying Mantis Kungfu.

It is worthwhile to note that while these six types of kungfu are suitable for the small against the big, the reverse is not necessarily disadvantageous. In other words, if you are big-sized, by practicing any one of these six types of kungfu, you may not be at a disadvantage against opponents who are small-sized. Some of our Monkey specialists, for example, are not small in size.

This principle actually applies to all styles of kungfu – if the exponents know how to use the kungfu for effective combat. If they don’t know, and most don’t, it does not matter what style of kungfu they practice, they will still be unable to apply their kungfu for combat.

Question 6

How would Sifu describe the force generated and used by the Seven-Star Set? Is it necessary to practice other force training methods separately? If so, which are the best choices to supplement this set?

Sifu Leonard Lackinger

Answer

The force generated and used in the Seven-Star Set is flowing. Sets that also generate and use flowing force include 108-Pattern Yang Style Taijiquan, Flowing Water Floating Clouds Set, Praying Mantis Eight Collection Set, 12 Sequences of Tantui and Flower Set. The Dragon Strength course you attended is excellent to develop flowing force as well as consolidated force, besides many other benefits.

Consolidated force, like that from Triple Stretch and Iron Wire, would be inadvisable. But we in Shaolin Wahnam can change the consolidated force into flowing force. Other kungfu practitioners, including masters, may not be able to do so.

Muscular strength, like that from weight lifting, is detrimental. This means that if one uses muscular strength in apply Seven-Star techniques, it would detract from the effectiveness of the combat application.

It is not necessary but helpful to practice other force training methods separately. In other words, if one practices the Seven-Star Set, correctly of course, he would develop internal force. In the same way, if one practices Taijiquan correctly, without practicing any other force training methods, he can develop a lot of internal force. But if he does not practice correctly, as most Taiji practitioners today do, he will not develop any internal force regardless of how long he may have practiced.

Other force training methods that generate flowing force to supplement the practice of the Seven-Star Set are One-Finger Shooting Zen, Lifting Water and Cloud Hands.

Question 7

I recognized that most strikes from the Seven-Star Set comes from the center. For me it seems to be a very advanced kungfu set (like Wuzuquan and Xingqiquan) because it needs good force to make the strikes powerful from the center.

But interestingly Sitaigung Ho Fatt Nam learned this advanced set when he was a kungfu beginner. Did he realize quite fast that the Seven-Star Set is an advanced art?

The Seven-Star Set seems to have many tactics and strategies. But why doesn't it have any Dragon-Riding Stance, like in Flower-Set, to attack a stronger opponent from the side? Sigung, can you please tell us more about my perception and questions? Thank you from the heart.

Best wishes Roger.

Answer

While there are many Seven-Star attacks coming from the centre, there are also many that come from a side. It may not be easy for martial artists, including masters, to recognise where Seven-Star attacks come from because not only they are deceptive, the same movement can also be applied to come from any direction.

It is too verbose to explain this interesting strategy in words; one has to attend the Seven-Star course to learn it. This strategy, like many other aspects of our kungfu training, can be beneficially applied in daily life.

The Seven-Star Set is a very advanced art but it may look elementary to the uninitiated. This makes learning the set even more interesting.

Having good force to apply Seven-Star attacks from the centre or from any direction is of course desirable. But even when an exponent does not have good force, his Seven-Star attacks can still be very effective.

This is another interesting point in attending the Seven-Star course. As a great Taijiquan master, Wang Zong Yue, said in his Treatise of Taijiquan, for a stronger exponent to defeat a weaker opponent is natural, but how would a weaker exponent defeat a stronger opponent? This required a sophisticated art.

As I have mentioned earlier, many lessons in our courses can be applied to daily life. If you are in a stronger position — in business, social situations or in any conditions — to defeat your weaker opponent is natural. But if you were in a weaker position, how would you defeat a stronger opponent?

My sifu, Sifu Ho Fatt Nam, was not a kungfu beginner when he learned the Seven-Star Set from his simu, though he was not as advanced in his kungfu attainment or as wise in his experience in his later life. I don't know whether he had learned other martial arts before this occurrence, but I know for sure he had been following my signug for many years and demonstrating kungfu feats like piercing straws through potatoes and breaking the bottom of bottles by hitting the opening on top, which he told me were stuntman's tricks.

I did not ask my sifu directly, but I guess he realised quite fast that the Seven-Star Set was an advanced art. He told me, when starting to teach me this set, that this set made his simu, despite her small size, a kungfu expert, and that techniques from this set were excellent in countering Muay Thai attacks, which many martial artists feared.

The Seven-Star Set certainly has many tactics and strategies. It has to be for a set suitable for small-sized exponents to defeat bigger-sized opponents. If a person does not have much money or position but wants to succeed in life where there are many people who have more money and better position than him, he needs a lot of tactics and strategies.

Using the Dragon-Riding Stance as in the Flower Set to attack a stronger opponent from a side is one of many tactics and strategies. Calling it a tactic or a strategy depends on various factors, like the exponent's intention and his overall mode of operation.

The Seven-Star Set does not use this tactic or strategies because it uses other effective tactics and strategies. It also finds this method detrimental to the general mode of Seven-Star operation. Thirdly, there is an innate weakness in using the Dragon-Riding Stance, but the Seven-Star jump which often replaces the tactic or strategy of the Dragon-Riding Stance eliminates this innate weakness.

The Seven-Star Course is definitely an interesting course where participants learn tactics and strategies not only to defeat bigger, stronger opponents but also to enrich daily life.

Question 8

Both Tai Chi Chuan as well as the Seven Star Set are said to be excellent choices if a physically weaker or smaller person wants to overcome a stronger opponent.

Looking at the Seven Star Set video I get the impression that they both use different strategies to achieve this.

What are their differences and/or similarities in terms of strategy to overcome a stronger opponent?

And related to this: What benefits will our Tai Chi Chuan practitioners get from learning and practicing the Seven Star Set?

Sifu Andrea Zilio

Answer

Yes, both Taijiquan and the Seven-Star Set are excellent for small-sized exponents against bigger-sizes opponents. But they use different strategies to achieve this purpose.

Before explaining the different strategies, it may be worthwhile to point out that Taijiquan is a kungfu style whereas the Seven-Star Set is a kungfu set. There can be many kungfu sets in a kungfu style, and different styles may have a set with the same name, though the sets may actually be different in other aspects.

In our school, for example, Taijiquan has many sets like Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow, Old Eagle Catches Snake and Flowing Water Floating Clouds. The set called Taming the Tiger is found in styles like Hoong Ka, Choy-Li-Fatt and Northern Shaolin, and they are all different though they have the same name.

As far as I know the Seven-Star Set is found only in Northern Shaolin. It is a very old set, extending back to the Song Dynasty which was about 1000 years ago. Because of its long history, there are different versions of the set, or they could be different sets.

The Seven-Star Set in our school was from my sifu, Sifu Ho Fatt Nam. He learned it from his simu, who was a tiny but very combat efficient.

It is interesting to compare the different strategies used in Taijiquan and the Seven-Star Set to combat bigger sized opponents.

Taijiquan makes use of two important principles to minimise an opponent's force. Namely waist rotation and body movement.

Instead of meeting a powerful force head-on, a Taijiquan exponent deflects it away in a circular motion. Suppose a punch with 100 units of force is coming at you. To stop it head-on, you need at least 100 units of force. If you block it away diagonally, by moving your arm you may need 50 units of force.

But as soon as the punch comes in contact with your arm, without moving your arm but rotating your body, you can deflect the punch with only 10 units of force. Not only your waist rotation deflects the punch, you also bring your opponent forward near to you for your counter-attack. This is the principle of waist rotation.

The other important principle is body-movement — without moving your feet. As the punch with 100 units of force is coming, you move your body backward, without moving your feet, by shifting your stance back. You need zero units of force to avoid this powerful punch. You did not block it; you avoid it by moving the target away.

However, the punch is still pointing at you, which may not be favourable. So you also deflect it away as you move backward, in which case you need only 5 units of force, not 10, to do so. This movement of using minimum force against maximum strength is well illustrated in our Pushing Hands.

There are a few interesting points worth mentioning regarding this strategy of waist rotation and body movement.

Taijiquan is said to derive from 13 techniques, which are warding off, rolling back, pressing forward, in contact, taking, diagonally flying, elbowing, anchoring, moving forward, moving back, moving to right, moving to left, remaining at centre. I knew the first twelve, but was puzzled at remaining at centre. Then, in a flash of inspiration, I realised it meant body movement.

“Using minimum force against maximum strength” is best expressed in Chinese as “si liang po jian jin” which means “4 taels against 1000 catties” or “4 ounces against 1000 tons”. One should note that at least 4 ounces are needed; it is not totally without force.

When you use 4 ounces of force against an opponent's 1000 catties, it does not necessarily mean that you don't have much force. You may have more than 1000 catties of force, but you choose to use only 4 ounces to defeat him.

The strategy of the Seven-Star Set is different. While Taijiquan strategy may be represented as circular, that of the Seven-Star Set is straight. Straight here does not mean head-on. The movement taken by a Seven-Star exponent may be slightly curve, but its curvature is so slight that it appears like straight.

Suppose a punch with 100 units of force is coming at you from north to south, or from 0 degree to 180 degrees. If you move your defence from 180 degrees to 0 degree, you will meet his attack head-on, and you will need more than 100 units of force to stop it. If you move your defence from west to east, or from 270 degrees to 90 degrees, you will need about 50 units of force to block his attack.

Now you move from 190 degrees to 0 degree. Your movement is not a defence, it is an attack, using the tactic of "no-defence-direct-counter". No-defence is a misnomer. The defence is incorporated in the counter-attack. Somewhere about half-way your counter-attack will brush off and deflect his attack. You do not block his attack; you brush it off with little effort. You need only about 5 units of force to brush off his 100 units of force, and you hit him at about the time he has completed his attacking movement.

Another strategy used by a Seven-Star exponent is to hit an opponent from a side as he attacks from the front. As his punch of 100 units of force is coming at you from north to south, you move from south to east or west and strike him at the same time. Here you don't even need 5 units of force for defence; you move the target away from his attack, and simultaneously counter-attack him.

If you look at the Seven-Star Set, the techniques appear linear. This is deceptive. Kungfu is alive — a fact I learned from my sifu in my student's days. The apparently linear techniques in the set can be used in any direction. It was not without good reasons that my sifu asked me to practice just the seven-star jump every night for many months.

If all other things were equal, I would consider the strategies in the Seven-Star Set even more effective than those in Taijiquan. An obvious advantage is speed. Seven-Star responses are faster than those in Taijiquan. Another element is surprise. A Seven-Star exponent often surprises his opponents,

striking them sometimes before they have completed their attack!

Taijiquan practitioners, in fact practitioners of all other styles, can benefit a lot from the Seven-Star course. The mere fact of learning strategies that are different from those prominent in ones style is a great benefit by itself.

The benefit is two-fold. Not only you can apply the different strategies on your opponents, you can handle them well if your opponents use those strategies on you.

A third benefit is that the different strategies enable you to see things from new perspectives. You are not limited to what you have been familiar with. And the new perspective can extend beyond the two different ways for smaller exponents to overcome bigger opponents.

Just as you may have more than 100 units of force but use only 5 units to defeat your opponent, you may have many strategies and perspectives but use only one appropriate strategy or perspective in combat or daily life. This makes you unfathomable — a sure sign of a high-level master. Opportunities for breadth and depth in our school enable us to accomplish this ideal.

More importantly, the Seven-Star course gives us more philosophy, techniques and skills to enrich our daily life.

If someone asks you a question which you may not want to give a direct answer, for example, like asking, "How old are you?", you may answer it in the Taijiquan way. You can use the strategies of body movement and waist rotation, and then counter attack him, by saying, "Ah! that's an interesting question. It is not so important how many years you have lived, but how well you have lived those years. I have lived my years very well. Have you?"

Or you can use the Seven-Star way, saying, "I look more youthful than you. Do you practice the Seven-Star Set?"

Question 9

What is the difference between the Seven Star, the Dragon Strength, the Wudang and the Dragon Set?.

Anton Schmick

Answer

A good way to compare the difference among the four sets, namely Seven-Star, Dragon Strength, Wudang Taijiquan and Dragon Set, which I presume is the Dragon Form Set, is to use the four fundamental dimensions of a kungfu set, i.e. form, force, application and philosophy.

Regarding form, Dragon Strength is Southern Shaolin, whereas all the other three sets are Northern Shaolin. It is worthy of note that Wudang Taijiquan is a modern name. Initially it was just called Shaolin Kungfu, and to differentiate it from the Shaolin Kungfu practiced at the Shaolin Monastery in Henan, which was called Henan Shaolin, it was called Wudang Shaolin.

It is also worthy of note that we are often known as a school that practices Southern Shaolin Kungfu because in the early years, Southern Shaolin constituted our training material. But now there is a lot of Northern Shaolin in our school.

Most people think of Southern Shaolin as a style with a lot of fist techniques, and Northern Shaolin with a lot of kicks, expressed in the saying, "nan quan bei tui" or "southern fist, northern kick". This expression is well represented in the first two categories of wushu, namely "Chang Quan" and "Nan Quan", or "Long Fist" which is Northern Shaolin, and "Southern Fist", which is Southern Shaolin. The other five wushu categories are "Dao Shu" or "Sabre Techniques", "Jian Shu" or "Sword Techniques", "Gun Shu" or Staff Techniques", "Jiang Shu" or "Spear Techniques", and "Taijiquan" or Tai Chi Chuan.

But, contrary to popular belief, there are also many Northern Shaolin sets where kicks are not prominent. In the three Northern Shaolin sets above, kicks are prominent in Seven-Star, but not in Wudang Taijiquan and Dragon Form.

What many people do not realize is that Southern Shaolin represents the latest development of Shaolin Kungfu. In Dragon Strength, force training and combat application, the two pillars in kungfu training, are incorporated

into the set, whereas in Seven-Star, Wudang Taijiquan and Dragon Form, the three sets comprise only of combat application.

Hence, practitioners who practice Dragon Strength can develop internal force, whereas practitioners of the three other sets have to practice supplementary force training methods. This is probably the reason why today those who practice Southern Shaolin for a long time have internal force, though they themselves may not realise it, and those who practice Northern Shaolin and internal arts like Taijiquan, Baguaquan and Xingyiquan for a long time still do not have internal force.

This situation applies to most other kungfu practitioners. Our students are different. Because all our training is triple cultivation, by practicing just the sets and without supplementary force training methods (which does not mean that they are not useful as an addition), our students can develop quite a lot of internal force. Practitioners of Taijiquan and other internal arts are supposed to have this result, but because they do not know the underlying philosophy and do not have the necessary skills, they do not have internal force irrespective of how long they may have practiced.

Relatively, the internal force in Seven-Star, Wudang Taijiquan and Dragon Force is flowing, whereas that in Dragon Strength is consolidated. This is mainly because of the two sessions of “ta chong” or “force training on stance” at the beginning of Dragon Strength.

Due to the magic of chi flow and the great advantage of breadth and depth, our students can practice any additional force training methods. But most other practitioners do not have this benefit. They may cancel their force if they practice opposite methods.

For example, if they practice Seven-Star but add triple-stretch force training, or if they practice Dragon Strength but add lifting water force training, their result will be detrimental because they use opposing methods that cancel each other. But if our students do the same things, their result will be enhanced. Other people may find it hard to believe, and some may be angry. As I have often said, that is their business, but I am stating the truth.

In our school all the four sets can be applied in any type of combat, including by small-sized exponents against big-sized opponents, or reversely by the strong against the weak. This is because we can adapt our style to existing combat situations. More significantly, our practice of these knife sets will also enable us to enrich our daily life.

These wonderful benefits, however, may not be applicable to most other practitioners. Most of them do not know the combat application of the sets, except perhaps some simple and obvious ones in Dragon Form. Most of them would not be able to enrich their daily life with these sets.

Relatively, Seven-Star is most suitable for the small-sized and weaker opponents against the bigger-sized and stronger opponents. In daily life, Seven-Star practitioners can also apply the same principles with appropriate actions in situations where they are physically, economically or socially weaker.

Dragon Strength is the most suitable when opponents are of equal or inferior size and strength. In daily life Dragon Strength exports can apply the same principles in situations where they are in superior positions.

I suddenly had a realization why the Dragon-Strength Set was suitable for the superior against the inferior. It is because the training of the Dragon Strength Set makes you superior to your opponent, even when you are smaller in size.

This is achieved in making you more powerful and faster, particularly with the training of dragon-force and dragon-speed. As a result of practicing the Dragon Strength Set, you will be more powerful and faster in combat as well as in daily life.

Would Dragon Strength be a disadvantage if your opponent is more powerful and faster than you, like meeting a high-level master in combat or a highly effective person in daily life? No. the serving movement of Dragon Strength will help you to minimize your de-facto inferiority.

The philosophy of Seven-Star is for the small and weak against the big and strong. Its special features are the organ-seeking kick, the seven-star jump and the seven-star grip.

Would a big-sized exponent be at a disadvantage when compared to one who is small-sized. If all other things were equal, it would be a disadvantage because a big-sized person would not be as agile. But other things are not equal. If the big-size person is equally agile, it would not be a disadvantage.

On the other hand, irrespective of an exponent's size, using muscular strength would be a disadvantage. The Seven-Star Set works well when flowing force is used.

All the other three sets take the form and spirit of the dragon. A prominent feature of the dragon form is swerving movement. A prominent feature of the dragon spirit is presence of mind. Hence, regarding philosophy, a special feature of Seven-Star is agile, whereas that of the three other sets is serving movement.

All these four sets are marvellous. If a practitioner has a chance to learn even only one of these sets, it is a marvellous opportunity. Of course, it is not just learning their outward form, but also their force training, application for both combat and non-combat purposes, and their philosophy.

Question 10

The Seven-Star Set is suitable for smaller opponents.

What benefits would a taller guy like I am gets from learning it?

Then in one of your Q/A series I read about Sitaigung Ho Fatt Nam teaching another Set to one of the Sultans of Malaysia as part of his training. How and in which sense can the training of a Kungfu Set be regarded as a form of high level Chi Kung?

Jan

Answer

While the Seven-Star Set is excellent for small-sized exponents against big-sized opponents, it is not disadvantageous for those who are big-sized except one factor, and that is agility. Big sized-exponents are generally not as agile as those who are small-sized.

Agility is an important factor for the Seven-Star Set. It contributes greatly to Seven-Star being a very formidable set. But if big-sized exponents can develop agility, like practicing the seven-star jump, and as they also know the techniques that small-sized opponents can use on them, the Seven-Star Set becomes an advantage not only in combat but also in daily life.

Big-sized exponents will then have the advantages of sides. They have their natural advantages of being big-sized, and they also have the advantages of being small-sized from the Seven-Star Set.

For example, to fight against an opponent of 500 units of force, an ordinary exponent needs 500 units of force. But using techniques from the Seven-Star Set he can defeat his opponent using only 100 units of force.

If Peter has only 200 units of force, he cannot use ordinary techniques to defeat Paul who has 500 units of force. But if Peter uses Seven-Star techniques, he can defeat Paul though he has only 200 units of force.

Now John also has 500 units of force. Using ordinary techniques, John will be evenly matched with Paul. But if John uses Seven-Star techniques, not only he can defeat Paul, he can also do so more easily than Peter does.

My sifu, Sifu Ho Fatt Nam taught one of the sultans of Malaysia the Shaolin Pakua Set. Normally the Shaolin Pakua Set is performed fast, like many other Shaolin sets.

But my sifu made some modifications when teaching the sultan this set. Not only he taught the sultan to perform the movements of the set slowly and gracefully, he also taught the sultan how to generate an energy flow, which gave the sultan good health, vitality and longevity.

The secret is not the movements of the set, but using the movements to generate an energy flow. It is the energy flow that gives a practitioner good health, vitality and longevity, not the set. In the same way it is the cash flow that gives a person a comfortable economic life, not the job he does.

My sifu, Sifu Ho Fatt Nam, taught me the secret. Later, another of my four sifus, Sifu Choe Hoong Choy of Choe Family Wing Choon, also taught me the same secret using Siu Lin Tou, the fundamental set of Wing Choon Kungfu.

Our students in Shaolin Wahnam are very fortunate. Now I transmit the secret to them, so that irrespective of what kungfu sets they practice, including the Seven-Star Set, they are able to generate an energy flow to have good health, vitality and longevity.