



Question and Answer Series:

The Yang Style 108 Pattern Set

By Grandmaster Wong Kiew Kit

Question 1

As a set to eventually specialize in, would the Yang 108 Pattern Set be a good choice over a set like the Flowing Water Floating Clouds Set?

Dominic, Ireland

Answer

In a de facto situation, that is a real situation many people are facing today, the Yang Style 108-Pattern Set is a good choice to specialize in over a set like the Flowing Water Floating Clouds Set.

But in a de jure situation, that is an idealized situation that most people do not have a chance to be in, the Yang Style 108-Pattern Set is not a good choice over a set like the Flowing Water Floating Clouds Set.

So, we have two answers which appear to contradict each other. Of course there is no contradiction. The apparent contradiction is due to two different situations, a de facto situation and a de jure situation. A de facto situation is an everyday real-life situation, a situation that most people are in. A de jure situation is an idealized situation, a situation that is not found in everyday life but is meant for theoretical discussion.

Generally, we shall first discuss the de facto situation as understanding it will give us the best available benefits. Then we shall discuss the de jure situation as understanding it will give us the best potential benefits. First we have a bird in our hand, then we know how we may have two birds in the bush.

Why do we practice Taijiquan? Or, to give the question a wider scope, why do we practice a martial art?

There are two main reasons why we practice any martial art. One is to be able to defend ourselves, and two is to have good health.

It is indeed shocking that most martial artists today do not attain these two main benefits despite having dedicated much time to its training. Most martial artists today sustain much injury, and they cannot defend themselves as indicated in routinely taking hits in free sparring. Worse they are not even aware of this shortcoming.

Taijiquan masters have classified the benefits of Taijiquan training into three progressive categories. At the fundamental level, Taijiquan practitioners have good health, at the intermediate level they are combat efficient, and at the highest level they attain spiritual joys.

Hence, if all martial arts, including Taijiquan, are available, and students can derive the benefits the arts are meant to give, presuming the time, effort and expenses were equal in their training, it is wiser to choose Taijiquan that gives three categories of benefits which are good health, combat efficiency and spiritual joys, than other martial arts, like Karate and Boxing, that give only two, which are good health and combat efficiency.

This is a de jure situation. In a de factor situation, suspending considerations for time, effort and expenses for the time being, most other martial arts do not even give good health and combat efficiency to their practitioners, though some do. Even a student may have access to a few martial arts that do give good health and combat efficiency, it is still wiser for him to practice Taijiquan or any other kungfu style taught in our school or elsewhere if he can find it that also provides spiritual joys besides the two stated benefits.

In this given de factor situation when a student has a choice of a few martial arts that give him all the three categories of benefits of good health, combat efficiency and spiritual joys, considerations of time, effort and expenses become significant. In this respect, irrespective of whether a practitioner will eventually specialize in the Yang Style 108-Pattern Set or just practices it as part of his spread and depth dimension, attending the Yang Style 108-Pattern Set course in Ireland from 17th to 20th February 2014 is not only a good but an excellent choice.

Although the fee will be higher than that of most other Taijiquan courses elsewhere, students will get much more than their money's worth. On the other hand, the time and effort required in the training are much less than those in other schools.

The Yang Style 108-Pattern Set to be taught in Ireland is an excellent set for those who want to specialize in it. It is worthwhile to mention, though it may appear boastful to others not familiar with our arts, that this statement applies to the Yang Style 108-Pattern Set taught in our school, and not to any Yang Style 108-Pattern Set taught elsewhere.

The simple reason is that elsewhere students may not have good health and combat efficiency, and have only minimal spiritual joys. Often they have knee injury, and almost always they are unable to apply the set for combat. Their spiritual joys, by comparison with ours, are minimal, like relaxation and socialization, but not the joy and zest for life, a deep sense of family love, and often a life-changing glimpse of Cosmic Reality.

Being quite sure of attaining these wonderful benefits is a main reason why the Yang Style 108-Pattern Set is good for specialization. In other words, as the opportunity to attend the course is available, if a student (or an instructor) grasps the opportunity, continues to practice the set on his own and specializes in it, he has a very good chance of attaining high levels of good health, combat efficiency and spiritual joys.

Another main reason why the set is good for specialization is that it covers excellently all the four dimensions of martial art, namely form, skills, application and philosophy. The form is elegant and graceful. Many valuable skills, like using minimum force against maximum strength, and starting later arriving earlier, are developed. The set is adequate to handle all forms of attack, and is also valuable for non-combat everyday purposes. The set incorporates a rich philosophy which can enhance our daily life.

Nevertheless, in a de jure situation where all other things were equal, the Flowing Water Floating Clouds Set is better than the Yang Style 108-Pattern Set for specialization. This is because the Yang Style 108-Pattern focuses on good health, whereas the Flowing Water Floating Cloud Set focuses on combat, which includes and surpasses good health.

In other words, because the Flowing Water Floating Clouds Set is structured for combat efficiency, practitioners specializing in it are not only more healthy than those practicing the Yang Style 108-Pattern Set as the health requirements of a combatant are higher than those of an ordinary person, they are also better fighters in physical combat as well as in daily life.

Yet, the Flowing Water Floating Clouds Set is not as good for specialization as the Wudang Taijiquan Set. We should remind ourselves that it is relative. By itself, the Yang Style 108-Pattern Set is already excellent. But by comparison, and if all other things were equal, the Flowing Water Floating Clouds Set is better, and the Wudang Taijiquan Set is the best.

The Wudang Taijiquan Set is the best for specialization because it is the climax of Shaolin Kungfu development, and as Shaolin Kungfu is the best martial art in the world, it also means that Wudang Taijiquan is the climax of all martial arts. Obviously, specializing in the best is better than specializing in something that is less.

Relatively, while the focus of the Yang Style 108-Pattern Set is on health, and the focus of the Flowing Water Floating Clouds Set is on combat, the focus of Wudang Taijiquan is on spiritual cultivation. Leaving spiritual cultivation aside for the time being, if all other things were equal, using methods from Wudang Taijiquan is more cost-effective than using methods from the Yang Style 108-Pattern Set or from the Flowing Water Floating Clouds Set for health as well as combat. Why? As it is the climax of all martial art developments,

the best methods are found in it.

But all other things are not equal. Obviously if a person has not learnt Wudang Taijiquan or Flowing Water Floating Clouds, he will not be able to choose them for specialization. Even if he has learnt all the three sets, but if for some reasons he is more skillful in the Yang Style 108-Set, then in a de factor situation this set will give him the best results if he chooses it for specialization. He may not be as skillful but if he likes it more than the other two sets, choosing it for specialization may also give him the best returns.

Question 2

At last year's Festival of Taijiquan in Florida we learned the signature set of the three main styles of Taijiquan. My experiences of practicing the three sets were remarkably different.

The 108-Pattern Yang Style felt soft and smooth. It was deeply meditative, light and uplifting. It nourished my scholar mind.

The Flowing Water Floating Clouds was very forceful. It was extremely powerful and full of deeply invigorating chi which set my meridians on fire like nothing before. It nourished my warrior mind.

The Wudang Taijiquan set was spiritual bliss and absolute beauty in motion. It nourished my eternal mind.

Is there any relationship between the nature of these three sets and the five levels at which chi flows in the body i.e. the skin, the flesh, the meridians, the organs and the bone marrow. Does the chi generated from practicing these three sets cleanse and nourish the five levels in different ways leading to different experiences and benefits for practitioners?

Kevin, Ireland

Answer

Congratulations for your very perceptive realization. Your feeling and observation excellently fulfilled the aspirations of these three signature sets.

Yes, you are perfectly right. The 108-Pattern Yang Style Set is meant to cultivate gentle, graceful chi. It is mainly because of Yang Style Taijiquan, manifested in this set, that many people regard Taijiquan as a scholar's martial art.

The Flowing Water Floating Clouds Set, which typical represents the Chen Style Taijiquan, is meant to cultivate fast and forceful chi. It is the most martial of the various Taijiquan styles.

Wudang Taijiquan was the style practiced by Zhang San Feng on the Wudang Mountain. This kungfu genius was already healthy and extremely combat efficient. The main aim of his cultivation was to attain the Tao. Hence, Wudang Taijiquan is the most spiritual of the Taijiquan styles.

The five levels of chi flow in the body are natural and spontaneous. In other words, if all other things were equal, irrespective of which Taijiquan style a person practices, or what kungfu or chi kung exercise he practices, his chi will flow first at his skin level, then at his flesh level, at his meridian level, at his internal organ level, and finally at his bone-marrow level.

This means that practitioners of Yang Style, Chen Style and Wudang Taijiquan will experience chi flow at all these five levels progressively. Of course, what they practice must be genuine, and that they practice correctly. As most people today practice any style of Taijiquan as gentle physical exercise and not as an internal martial art, there will not be any chi flow no matter which style they practice.

Once a while, when they practice perfectly, they may unknowingly enter into a chi kung state of mind, and experience some chi flow as a novelty. As this happens haphazardly, their chi flow remains only at the skin level, and is not powerful enough to progress to the flesh level.

Amongst the small minority who practice genuine Taijiquan, other things are not equal. Hence, the chi flow generated from practicing these three sets cleanses and nourishes the five levels in different ways leading to different experience and benefits.

As the 108 Pattern Yang Style Set was constructed for health, the chi flow generated flows mainly at the skin level and the meridian level. This is because the skin level is the first level of flow, and being relatively the least powerful of the three styles, practitioners of this style experience chi flow at the skin level.

Further, the meridian level is the level that is most suitable for overcoming illness and promoting good health. The big, circular movements of the 108-Pattern Yang Style Set are conducive for this purpose. Advanced practitioners may experience their chi from their meridians flowing into their internal organs.

Some Yang Style classics describe practitioners using their mind to direct chi to flow along various meridians according to their movements. When they move their arms out in “Immortal Waves Sleeves”, for example, they direct their chi to flow along the three hand ying meridians from their body to their palms. When they bring back their arms in “Double Dragons Play with Pearl”, they direct their chi to flow along the three hand yang meridians from their palms to their body.

When they lower their stance in “Black Bear Sinks Hips”, they direct their chi to flow down their legs along the three leg yang meridians. When they push out their palms in “Open Window to Look at Moon”, they direct their chi to

flow along the three leg yin meridians from their feet back to their body.

Some practitioners follow this advice from the classics. But because they lack the skills to be in a chi kung state of mind, their visualization becomes a liability instead of an advantage, making them stressful instead of facilitating their chi flow along their meridians. This is an example of shallow understanding bringing harm.

As the Flowing Water Floating Clouds Set was constructed with combat in mind, the chi flow of its practitioners tends to be at the skin level and the flesh level. It is at the skin level as this is the first level of chi flow. It is at the flesh level so that chi will “soak” them up with internal force for effective combat. This attainment brings the result of “silk wounding iron”. The silk effect is due to chi flowing at the skin level making their skin soft and smooth. The iron effect is due to chi flowing at the flesh level making them “hard” and powerful.

The chi flow of advanced practitioners “soaks” into their bones and chi flows at the bone-marrow level. This results in tremendous internal force.

Wudang Taijiquan was constructed with spiritual cultivation in mind. It is also the most powerful of all styles of Taijiquan. Hence, the tremendous chi generated flows at all levels, but is focused at the bone-marrow level. This gives its practitioners a lot of internal force, not only for combat but also to break through the illusionary body to merge with the Tao.

Relatively, because the chi of advanced Flowing Water Floating Clouds practitioners is transformed into essence and flows at the bone-marrow instead of “soaking” the flesh as in the case of less advanced practitioners of the same set, the more advanced practitioners are less bulky than the less advanced, but more powerful. Practitioners of Wudang Taijiquan, being the most advanced, are the least bulky and the most powerful.

Practitioners in our Happy Shaolin Wahnam Family progress a step further. Because of our understanding of Taijiquan philosophy and the benefit of breadth and depth, we can employ the appropriate skills to direct chi flow at the appropriate level for our intended purpose irrespective of the set or style we perform.

For example, when we perform the 108-Pattern Yang Style Set we may direct chi to flow at the flesh level for combat efficiency or at the bone-marrow level for spiritual expansion. When we perform the Wudang Taijiquan Set we may direct chi to flow at the meridian level for health, or at the skin level to look glowing when we go on a date. It is incredible, to the point of being ridiculous, that we can be very cost-effective in fulfilling our needs and aspirations.

This amazing facility is possible for typical Shaolin Wahnam practitioners who have breadth and depth. They should have learnt at least the 108-Pattern Yang Style Set and Bone Marrow Cleansing. An atypical Shaolin Wahnam student who only follows the standard Taijiquan syllabus but has not taken extra courses for breadth and depth, would not have this amazing facility. He would practice Taijiquan as an internal martial art, like what past masters did, and let his chi flow naturally and spontaneously to progress from one level to another.

Practitioners who have the most amazing facility will be those who have attended my recent Wudang Taijiquan course in Penang. They can perform not only any Taijiquan set, but any kungfu set or chi kung exercise at any level, and attain better results in shorter time. Why is this so? It is because they have learned the philosophy, techniques and skills of the climax of Shaolin Kungfu, which means the best methods of all martial arts.

Question 3

I believe that the Yang 108 Pattern Set is one of the softest sets in our syllabus. Please can you talk about the reasons for this emphasis on softness, and the particular benefits that go along with it?

Sifu Andy Cusick, Shaolin Wahnam Glasgow

Answer

Yes, the Yang Style 108-Pattern Set is the softest set in our repertoire. It is also the softest in all kungfu.

In my young days I learned a Cotton Palm set from my sidai, Sifu Yeung Khun Chi, the Grandmaster of Chin Woo Athletic Association, Georgetown, Penang, who also taught me Tantui, Eagle Claw and Praying Mantis, in exchange for some chi kung and combat applications I taught him.

I only learned the physical form of the Cotton Palm set. After reading from kungfu classics, and learning Cosmos Palm from Sifu Ho Fatt Nam, and Wuzuquan from Sifu Chee Kim Thong, who also knew Cotton Palm, I concluded that the internal force of Cosmos Palm, Cotton Palm and Red Sand Palm was similar. If this is true, then the Yang Style 108-Pattern Set is even “softer” than the Cotton Palm set.

If we list our representative sets from the softest to the hardest, they will be as follows.

Yang Style Set – San Zhan – Baguazhang – Flower Set – Dragon Strength – Wudang Taijiquan – Flowing Water Floating Clouds – Siu Lin Tou – Xingyiquan - Triple Stretch – Iron Wire

The main reason for this emphasis on softness is historical. When Yang Deng Fu invented this set from Chen Style Taijiquan, he meant it for health. Reviewing the transformation of Chen Style Taijiquan to Yang Style Taijiquan, we can see that Yang Deng Fu did three things:

1. He rounded the movements, making linear movements circular.
2. He enlarged the movements, making them bigger.
3. He performed the movements slowly.

All these innovations made Taijiquan soft.

If you, for example, perform the linear movement of Beauty Looks at Mirror in a circular manner, it becomes softer.

If you perform Beauty Looks at Mirror, still in linear fashion, in a bigger movement, it becomes softer.

If you perform the same movement more slowly, it becomes softer.

Because of exponential progression, the same linear, short and fast Beauty Looks at Mirror performed in a circular, bigger and slow manner becomes nine times softer.

The main benefit of softness is health. Indeed, chi kung for health is sometimes referred to as soft chi kung, whereas chi kung for combat as hard chi kung.

We can immediately feel health related benefits by performing the following simple exercise.

Make a linear palm strike, like bending your elbow and thrust out your palm in a linear fashion.

Now make a circular palm strike, without bending your elbow by circulating your whole arm from your shoulder.

Don't you feel more relaxed with the circular movement? If you listen to yourself more attentively, you may also feel mentally fresher.

Next, perform the circular arm movement of the palm strike in a small circle. Compare it by performing the same movement in a big circle. If you add waist rotation, it is even better. Do you feel any difference? You were relatively tighter with the small circle, and more loosened with the big circle – physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

Now perform the circular movement -- in small circle, big circle or both -- fast and compare it by performing slowly. What difference can you feel? When a person performs a movement fast, unless he is trained in genuine chi kung like we do, he tends to tense his muscles. When he performs the same movement slowly, he is more relaxed. Even for us trained in chi kung, we can feel a difference.

If we can discernably feel the difference by performing this exercise only once for a few minutes, imagine the huge difference by performing Taijiquan the soft way in contrast with the hard way an hour a day, every day for ten years.

The great benefit, by a very big margin, however, is not just being loosened, relaxed and mentally fresh, but to generate an energy flow. As we in Shaolin Wahnam know very well, it is the energy flow that overcomes pain, injury and illness, and gives us good health, vitality and longevity.

An even greater benefit is to attain a chi kung state of mind, or in Taijiquan terms, to enter Tao, or in modern terms to attain a higher state of consciousness. At the fundamental level, this enables us to be peaceful and happy. At the supreme level, it enables us to merge with Tao or return to God the Holy Spirit. And there are countless benefits in between.

It may be a big surprise to many people that despite being the inventor of this wonderful Yang Style 108-Pattern Set, Yang Deng Fu did not enjoy the many wonderful benefits described above, except vitality. It must be realized that we state the truth, though it may not be widely known, and we are not afraid to do so, but it does not distract us from our respect and honour we give to this great Taijiquan master, whose innovations have benefitted us tremendously.

Yang Deng Fu was not healthy – physically and emotionally! He sustained an internal injury from his father's or uncle's strike while training that he had to carry for life. He was also notorious for his bad temper. Once when someone annoyed him, he killed the person with just one strike.

His childhood was not happy and he did not enjoy his training. Once he ran away from home to avoid the rigorous training of his secretive family Taijiquan.

He did not live long. He passed away before he reached sixty.

There was no doubt that he had a lot of internal force and was a terrific fighter. Why didn't he enjoy the benefits of his internal force, except to enhance his fighting ability which did not make his life happier or even easier?

The main reason was that he lacked the philosophy of Taijiquan that we have. He did not know the three functions of internal force that we do, and he did not know that it was chi flow that gives the wonderful benefits of overcoming pain, injury and illness, and gives good health, vitality and longevity. Even if he knew, he did not realize it. Thus, this wisdom and its resultant benefits are not passed down his lineage.

The most important of the three functions of internal force is to maintain life, which includes overcoming pain, injury and illness. It is chi flow, not the Taijiquan movement, that brings about these benefits.

It is quite shocking that many Yang Style practitioners today, especially in the West, sustain knee injury. I believe this is due to wrong teaching. Many instructors fail to teach rotation of the waist, which is very important in Taijiquan mechanics. As a result students shift their body forward with their knees moving in a linear manner.

It is also surprising that hardly any of the thousands of thousands of Yang Style Taijiquan practitioners all over the world have internal force. Indeed I posed this question to some instructors over meals during the recent Wudang Taijiquan course. The forms performed by thousands of Taijiquan practitioners, especially those of Yang Style, are technically correct. They practice the forms slowly, gracefully and dedicatedly. Why hardly any of them have internal force even when they have practiced daily for over 10 years?

We do not expect them to be as cost-effective as ourselves. Our students, even fresh beginners, can feel internal force after just one session, or at the most after one month of regular class. Other students even when their techniques are correct and they perform the forms slowly and gracefully without thinking of irrelevant thoughts still cannot develop any internal force after 10 years!

Mark Blohm was kind to suggest that it was because of the teacher, implying me. Andrea Zilio said that the other students did not have chi flow.

These are excellent answers. A good teacher will be able to help his students to have a chi flow, if not in one month at least in one year. Even if a good teacher is not available, students practicing the techniques and skills correctly should have a chi flow after a few years. The problem is that they do not realize the essential ingredient for the benefits is chi flow with the result that their chi flow which happens haphazardly is not regular and strong enough to bring them the benefits.

We are ridiculously generous. We offer them this golden opportunity, like the Yang Style 108-Pattern course in Ireland. We even go to the extent to say that these students do not have to acknowledge they have learnt from us. We sincerely want them to restore the greatness of their art. But if they choose not to make use of the opportunity, it is their business.

Developing internal force which brings good health, vitality and longevity is only half the task of training Taijiquan as an internal martial art. The other half, besides the internal, is the martial aspect. Hence, in all our Taijiquan training, we pay importance to combat application.

We do so not because we aspire to be terrific fighters, though we are good at fighting if the need arises, but because martial training brings our attainment of good health, vitality and longevity to a higher level. In our law-abiding society, an average person does not have to fight even once a year. Dedicating ourselves to such a rare eventuality is not a wise use of time. But having good health, vitality and longevity affects us everyday of our life. It is wise to bring such attainments to a

higher level.

An ordinary person is quite happy if he is free from pain, injury and illness. But the health demand of a martial artist is more than this. He needs, for example, to make quick decisions and execute fast movements. An ordinary person is quite happy if he can sit and watch a game of football or any sport. The vitality demand of a martial artist is higher. He wants to be able to run and jump for an hour or two and not panting for breath and not being tired. An ordinary person is happy if he lives to 90 and be respected as an elderly person. A martial artist lives to 90 and feels and acts younger than others who are 60.

If we perform Taijiquan movements, like those of the Yang Style 108-Pattern Set, in circular and big forms slowly, we can attain the health aspects, but not the martial aspect. To attain the martial aspect without neglecting the health aspects, or to attain yin-yang harmony, we have to transform big circular movements performed slowly to small smooth movements performed fast.

Students at the recent Wudang Taijiquan course in Penang learned the required philosophy, techniques and skills for this transformation. Students of the Yang Style 108-Pattern Set in Ireland will also learn the required philosophy, techniques and skills, which will bring a lot of benefits not only to Taijiquan but also to their daily life.

Question 4

Do we in Wahnam tradition adopt any Chi Kung exercises that are traditionally done by Yang Style practitioners, or do we replace these with Shaolin Chi Kung?

What Shaolin Chi Kung techniques and skills are particularly relevant for the correct practice of Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan and does their effectiveness depend on the level of practitioner?

I was also wondering how to recognize a suitable / competent Yang Style teacher.

Jacek

Answer

No, we in Shaolin Wahnam do not adopt any chi kung exercises that are traditionally practiced by Yang Style practitioners.

Any Taijiquan (Tai Chi Chuan) practitioners, including those from Yang Style, who adopt any chi kung exercise from anywhere as their main exercise to manage energy (this is what chi kung is) is tactically admitting that theirs is not genuine Taijiquan, though they may not realize it.

Taijiquan itself is chi kung. In other words, when one practices Taijiquan, he is practicing chi kung.

The Yang Style 108-Pattern Set is a set of chi kung with 108 chi kung exercises. The Eighteen Lohan Hands is a set of chi kung with 18 chi kung exercises. Sineu Metamorphosis is a set with 12 chi kung exercises.

In our school, any kungfu set is also a chi kung set. The Flower Set is a set with 72 chi kung exercises, with some repetitions. Flowing Water Floating Clouds is a set with 108 chi kung exercises, again with some repetitions.

In other words, you can take any one or more patterns from the Yang Style 108-Pattern Set, Flower Set or Flowing Water Floating Clouds – just like you can take any one or more patterns from Eighteen Lohan Hands or Sineu Metamorphosis – perform them a suitable number of times to generate a chi flow which will give you good health, vitality and longevity.

For example, you may choose just one pattern, “Lifting Water”, practice it about 20 times to generate a chi flow. Or you may choose the five patterns in “Grasping Sparrow’s Tail”, practice them about 10 times each on the left and the right side to generate a chi flow. If you do this regularly, you will overcome pain, injury and illness if you have any, including those that you may not be aware of, and you will have good health, vitality and longevity. It is worthwhile to remind ourselves that it is the chi flow, not kungfu or chi kung patterns, that bring these benefits.

In his classic book on the Yang Style 108-Pattern Set, Yang Deng Fu recommended some chi kung exercises as supplementary practice. These exercises are similar to, but not the same as, the beginning movements in the Dragon Strength Set.

Some Yang Style instructors borrow chi kung exercises from elsewhere, but they do not teach or practice them as chi kung; they practice them as gentle physical exercise. Indeed some of them explicitly say these exercises are meant to loosen them, or as some sort of warming up. They do not realize that loosening or warming up is not the original objective of these chi kung exercises, and that as a wonderful martial art there is no need to loosen or warm up in Taijiquan. A Taijiquan practitioner, by training his Taijiquan and without borrowing anything from outside, is ready for action at any moment.

Not many people outside our school are aware that the chi kung derived from Taijiquan patterns is more powerful than the chi kung derived from exercises the general public normally classifies as chi kung, like those from Eighteen Lohan Hands and Self-Manifested Chi Movement.

This is understandable as Taijiquan is martial chi kung, which is two levels above Eighteen Lohan Hands which is health chi kung, and three levels above Self-Manifested Chi Movement which is medical chi kung. Chi kung masters in the past classified chi kung progress into five levels, namely medical chi kung, health chi kung, intellectual chi kung, martial chi kung, and spiritual chi kung.

If chi kung from Taijiquan is more powerful than that from Eighteen Lohan Hands and Self-Manifested Chi Movement, why do I recommend Taijiquan training to be an hour whereas that in Eighteen Lohan Hands or Self-Manifested Chi Movement to be 15 minutes. Isn’t training more time in a more powerful chi kung expose practitioners to over-training. No. The reason is that the nature of training in these three types of chi kung is different.

Shaolin Chi Kung techniques and Yang Style techniques are noticeably different. The techniques or outward forms of Lifting the Sky and Double Dragons, for example, are different from the techniques of Grasping Sparrow’s Tail. If all other things were equal, Yang Style techniques are more cost-effective than Shaolin Chi Kung techniques in practicing chi kung, like generating an energy flow. This is a

main reason why many people, without actually knowing what they say, refer to Yang Style as internal, and Shaolin, including Shaolin Chi Kung, as external.

The fundamental skills particularly relevant for the correct practice of Yang Style Taijiquan as well as of Shaolin Chi Kung or any internal art are the same. They are being relaxed and gently focused at the same time. These two skills collective as one is known as entering Tao in Taijiquan, entering Zen in Shaolin, entering a chi kung state of mind in chi kung in general, and attaining a heightened state of consciousness in modern language. This skill is essential. Without it, one cannot successfully practice chi kung, regardless of whether he performs Shaolin Chi Kung techniques, Yang Style techniques or any techniques.

The effectiveness of the techniques but more significantly of the skills, depends greatly on the attainment level of practitioners. The main reason, though most practitioners may not realize it, why more than 80% of Taijiquan and chi kung practitioners do not have the benefits their practice is meant to give is because they lack the minimum skill level even when they may perform the techniques correctly and beautifully.

Most Taijiquan practitioners cannot use their Taijiquan for combat because they lack combat skills even when they have the right techniques. Most Taijiquan and chi kung practitioners do not enjoy chi kung benefits like good health, vitality and longevity because they lack chi kung skills though their chi kung techniques are correct. If some practitioners do have good health, vitality and longevity, it is due to other factors, not due to their Taijiquan or chi kung practice.

After having the necessary skills, techniques become important in how much benefits practitioners get from their practice. In other words, after they are skillful in combat or in generating an energy flow, what techniques they choose and how well they perform them how much more benefits they can get. But before this, i.e. before they have the fundamental skills for combat and for generating an energy flow, no matter how good their chosen techniques are and how beautifully they can perform the techniques, they may not derive any combat or chi kung benefits.

There are two excellent ways to recognize a suitable or competent Yang Style teacher, one to access his performance in the art he teaches, and the other to access his effectiveness in his teaching.

A competent teacher of Yang Style or any art must be a living example of the art he teaches. If he teaches Yang Style Taijiquan, he should be healthy as a result of his Yang Style practice, and he should be able to use Yang Style Taijiquan in combat. If he takes medication on a routine basis, and does not know what to do when an assailant punches him or grips his arm, he is not even a competent practitioner, and hence is unlikely to be a competent teacher.

To access his effectiveness as a teacher, you examine whether his students exhibit the benefits the art is meant to give. If the students look tired and stressful, and have no experience at sparring, then the teacher is not competent. If the students are full of life despite some tough exercise, and they employ Taijiquan techniques skillfully to overcome simulated combat situations, they indicate that their teacher

is competent.

In the recently concluded Art of Teaching course, we classified teachers into four categories – bad, mediocre, good and great. The aim of the course was to train great teachers.

A bad teacher brings harm instead of benefit, like knee injuries. A mediocre teacher just teaches according to a syllabus, often without knowing whether his students can follow. A good teacher brings benefits the art is meant to give. A great teacher brings out the best in his students, not just in the art he teaches but in their daily life.

The guidelines above show a competent teacher ranging from mediocre to good. It will be fun for you to apply the above classification of teachers into four main types on Taijiquan and chi kung teachers today. It is even more important for you to apply the above answer to find a great teacher for yourself, or if you are already teaching, to make yourself into a great teacher.

Question 5

5a. Why is this set so long in comparison with other sets, or why are other sets so short in comparison with this set?

5b. What are the expected results if I specialize in this set in comparison with Wudang set or Flowing Water Floating Clouds?

5c. Would it be more beneficial for my level to specialize in Flowing Water Floating Clouds or in Yang 108-Pattern Set?

5d. What are the things that I should take into consideration when choosing a set for specialization?

Santiago

Answer

The 108-Pattern Yang Style Taijiquan Set is long because initially it was the only set practiced by Yang Style practitioners. This long set could have been linked together from numerous shorter sets. Later, when Yang Style developed into a school of its own, the reverse would happen when shorter sets were composed from this mother set.

This was the general trend in the history of all kungfu styles. When Shaolin Kungfu started there was only one set, the Eighteen-Lohan Set, which was developed from the Eighteen Lohan Hands. Over its long history of over 1500 years, countless sets were developed to meet expedient needs.

When Zhang San Feng practice his kungfu on Wudang Mountain, there was only one set, the Wudang Kungfu Set, which was later called Wudang Taijiquan. As Taijiquan developed, due to differences of needs, aspirations and other factors, different sets issued from this mother set, like Chen Style Set, Yang Style Set, and Wu Style Set.

The same trend could have happened, but actually did not, in our school. To meet expedient needs, I devised four basic sets, namely Black Tiger Steals Heart, Fierce Tiger Speeds through Valley, Happy Bird Hops up Branch, and Fell Tree with Roots. We could have combined all these four sets into one long set called the Wahnam Sets. In the future masters in our lineage could composed shorter sets from this long mother set to meet expedient needs of their students.

But in our school this trend did not develop in this way because I brought our training to a higher level. I introduced classical sets that were the specialties of past masters.

Non-Wahnam students specializing in this set, presuming that they practice it as a genuine art from a competent teacher, will get the benefits this set is specially designed for. Yang Deng Fu specially composed this set for health. Hence, these students will be healthy. They will also be relaxed and graceful, and have some internal force.

They may also be able to apply some of the patterns for combat, but if all other things were equal, they would not be as combat efficient as those who specialized in Flowing Water Floating Clouds. They may also have some spiritual development, but will be unlikely to be as spiritually developed as those specializing in Wudang Taijiquan.

On the other hand, those specializing in Flowing Water Floating Clouds would be combat efficient. They are also healthy, but may not be as relaxed and graceful as those specializing in the Yang Style Set. They may experience spiritual development but not as much as those specializing in Wudang Taijiquan.

Those who specialize in Wudang Taijiquan will benefit most in spiritual development as this is what the set is designed for, but they may not be as relaxed and graceful as those who specialize in the Yang Style Set, and not as combat efficient as those who specialize in Flowing Water Floating Clouds.

But you and all other Wahnam members are different. You will have all the benefits mentioned above, i.e. good health, combat efficiency and spiritual development when you specialize in the 108-Pattern Yang Style Set. Your combat efficiency will be better than non-Wahnam students who specialize in the Flowing Water Floating Cloud Set or any Chen Style Set, and your spiritual development will be better than non-Wahnam student who specialize in the Wudang Taijiquan Set. This is because our teaching is of a much higher level than that in other schools.

In our school, presuming all other things were equal, those who specialize in Wudang Taijiquan will get the best benefits in all the areas of health, combat and spiritual cultivation, those who specialize in Flowing Water Floating Clouds will get more benefits than those who specialize in the Yang Style Set. This is relative. Although those specializing in the Yang Style Set get the least benefits, their benefits are still a lot.

But other things are not equal. Those who missed the Special Wudang Taijiquan course in Penang recently would not be able to specialize effectively in this set. I have no plan in the immediate future to offer a Special Flowing Water Floating Clouds course, so Wahnam members would be unable to specialize effectively in

this set. Although the Yang Style course in Ireland is not at the level of a special course in Malaysia, it is still of a very high level.

Hence, if you attend this course and choose to specialize in the Yang Style Set, you will have more benefits in all the three areas of health, combat and spiritual development than other Wahnam members who specialize in Flowing Water Floating Clouds or Wudang Taijiquan if they have not attended any courses on these sets. Presuming that a Wahnam member had attended courses in all the three sets, but if he is more skillful in one particular set or likes that set the most, it is likely that he will also get the best results if he specializes in that set.

If all other things were equal, it would be more beneficial for you at your present level to specialize in Flowing Water Floating Clouds. For most other people, like those outside our school, it will be more beneficial for them to specialize in the 108-Pattern Yang Style Set. This is because these other people do not have the knowledge and skills that you have. If one does not have the skills to drive a car, it is better for him to ride a bicycle.

But other things are not equal. If you haven't attended a course on Flowing Water Floating Clouds but have an opportunity to attend a special, though regional, course on the 108-Pattern Yang Style Taijiquan Set, specializing on the Yang Style Set will be more beneficial.

Suppose a Wahnam member has attended a general course on Flowing Water Floating Clouds like the one held at St Petersburg last year, and he is going to attend a special course on the 108-Pattern Yang Style Taijiquan Set in Ireland next year, which set will give him more benefits if he chooses one to specialize in? Of course, the Yang Style Set because the special course will give him more depth.

Now let us compare two Wahnam members A and B, and both of them will attend the Yang Style Set in Ireland. A also attended the St Petersburg course last year where he had an introduction to all the three main styles of Taijiquan, but B did not attend this course. If both choose to specialize in the Yang Style Set, who will have more benefits? Of course, A because he has more breadth.

Now, for more fun, suppose C attended the St Petersburg course, and D will attend the Ireland course. If both choose to specialize in the Yang Style Set, who will have more benefit? In other words, does breadth or depth give more benefit? The result will depend on how far is the breadth and depth. If C's breadth is more than D's depth, C will get more benefit. If D's depth is more than C's breadth, D will get more benefit. If C's breadth equals to D's depth, they will get the same amount of benefit.

When choosing a set for specialization you should consider the breadth and depth of the set, available resources, and your liking and skills. These factors correspond to the art, the teacher and the student.

Obviously choosing a set with much breadth and depth is better than one with less breadth and depth. Choosing a 108-Pattern set, for example, is better than a 24-Pattern set because there is more breadth. Choosing the 36-pattern Dragon-Tiger Set is better than the 36-pattern Lohan Asks the Way because there is more depth.

It is important to consider the resources available, especially the knowledge and teaching ability of the teacher. Even when a student has chosen a set with much breadth and depth, but there is no competent teacher to teach him, he won't obtain many benefits from his specialization. This problem, fortunately, does not apply in our school, but is common in most other schools.

The liking and skills of a student are important. Even when an excellent set is chosen and a competent teacher is available, if a student does not like the set or lacks the skills to perform it, he is unlikely to progress far. This situation is quite common with people suffering from so-called incurable diseases. We have an excellent method in chi flow, and excellent healers, but if patients do not want to practice, they will not be cured.

Question 6

Sifu how would the 108 Pattern Yang Set enrich our daily lives be it in relationships or business life? In this regard what advantages would this softer more flowing set have over sets that are generally more forceful?

Not just in the Yang set but in a lot of Kung Fu sets there isn't any ground fighting, Sifu why is this?

Brendan

Answer

Let us examine both holistically and thematically how the 108-Patten Yang Style Taijiquan Set can enrich our daily life be it in relationships or in business.

The holistic aspect means that the benefits derive from the 108-Pattern Set are also available in other kungfu sets. The thematic aspect means that the benefits derived are especially applicable in the 108-Pattern Set.

Practicing the 108-Pattern Set, just as practicing any kungfu set, will give us combat efficiency as well as good health, vitality, longevity, mental freshness and spiritual joys.

Although we do not want to physically fight in a relationship or business life, the benefits we get from kungfu training like the 108-Pattern Set are enriching. For example, in kungfu training it is very important to respond correctly and spontaneously in a combat situation. If an opponent executes a kick, for example, you shift your body backward to avoid the kick using "Striking Tiger Poise," then move in immediately to fell him using Carry Tiger Back to Mountain".

Some people may think that all martial artists learn this, i.e. responding to a combat situation correctly and spontaneously. They should, but in reality most of them don't. Today if an opponent gives Taijiquan practitioners, or more appropriately Taiji dancers, a kick, most of them do not know what to do. They may not even realize they have to respond to the situation correctly and spontaneously.

If an opponent gives martial artists a kick, some of them would bounce away, and many would ignore the kick to move in to exchange blows. In other words they do not know how to respond to the situation correctly and spontaneously, though they may move away and wait for the next combat

situation or fight back frantically.

When this occurs everyday for a few years or even a few months, a pattern of thought and action becomes internalized, and affects relationships and business life, usually unconsciously. So when his girlfriend or wife gives a Taiji dancer or a martial artist a kick, like telling him that she does not want to talk to him anymore, the Taiji dancer just stands there like a fool, and the martial artist shouts back with unpleasantries. They do not know how to respond correctly to a (non-physical) combat situation.

(For our female readers, “girlfriend” or “wife” reads as “boyfriend” or “husband”, together with other relevant changes.)

Our students who have learned Taijiquan or Shaolin Kungfu from us would respond correctly and spontaneously. They would shift their body back, without running away, and immediately move forward and fell their opponent, in this case gently, onto the floor, like pausing with a smile then sweetly saying “I shall talk to you then.” It is difficult for a girlfriend or wife not to be charmed by such a resourceful boyfriend or husband.

If a business rival cuts prices to compete with him, a businessman trained in Taiji dance would not know what to do, whereas a businessman trained in other martial arts would outdo his rival by cutting prices more drastically, ending with both parties losing money. A businessman trained in our arts will step back to examine the situation, then publicize that customers pay higher prices but get much more benefits in return, which has been true all the time.

It is not without good reasons that our students routinely report enhanced relationship and business life. They rightly attribute the enhancement to good luck, or good circulation of chi. Our kungfu students reading this answer here will know another major reason. The benefits from their training in combat application have enhanced their daily life in both personal relationship and business.

Needless to say, good health, vitality, longevity, mental freshness and spiritual joys greatly enhance relationships and business life, though many people may not realize it. A person with knee injuries due to his Taiji dancing is less likely to make his girlfriend happy on a date, or his wife happy just remaining at home. A businessman angry at himself and his classmates in generous exchange of blows in free sparring, or blocked in his energy flow due to grimacing his face and tensing his muscle in solo practice in many martial arts, is less like to make his customers as well as his own employees happy in his business life.

From the thematic perspective, the 108-Pattern Set makes practitioners gentle, graceful and flowing. It is excellent in manifesting the principle of following an opponent's momentum, then turning it against him, or in the context of relationship or business life, leading a boyfriend, husband or customers by the nose for their benefit. It is very important that the philosophy and practice must be "for their benefit", or at least for your mutual benefit.

I have discussed this philosophy and applied the practice in many Taijiquan classes, like in Spain and Japan, where our ladies, of course, were enthralled, but I shall repeat it here with different examples.

When an opponent throws a punch, a Taiji dancer would not know how to respond and be hit. A martial artist of other styles would block the punch head on. Our Wahnam Taijiquan practitioners would ward off the punch following its momentum, lead the opponent and then turn him back, and fell him onto the ground, not by wrestling with him but by off-balancing him, all in one smooth, graceful flow. Many of our petite feminine students were pleasantly surprised when they fell big-sized able-bodied males.

When a boyfriend or husband gives a Taiji dancer a punch, like saying the dress she is wearing is horrible, she does not know what to do and feels hurt. A martial artist of another style would fight back, saying that the shirt and trousers he is wearing are horrible too, and they may start to quarrel. A Wahnam Taijiquan student would sweetly say, "Ah, you have good taste. Won't you take me to a shop and buy me a pretty dress now? Please don't peep while I change."

Other more forceful sets, like Triple Stretch and Choy-Li-Fatt, may not have these advantages. A practitioner of these sets may counter-strike the punch, like saying "You have to learn to like my dress if you want to take me out." It is better than being hurt or fighting back, but not as elegant and superior as getting your boyfriend or husband to buy you a new dress.

In our school, due to the advantage of breadth and depth, we can make a forceful set like Triple Stretch or Choy-Li-Fatt graceful and flowing, but the 108-Pattern Set has a relative advantage.

What about those who are already gentle, graceful and flowing? Will attending the 108-Pattern course backfire and turn them into softies? No, not in our school. They will learn how to use gentle, graceful and flowing movements to explode force and to press onto an opponent. We do not merely talk about yin-yang harmony, we walk our talk.

So, the training at the 108-Pattern course will enable you not just to merely ask your boyfriend or husband to buy you a new dress like a helpless lamb, but to speak with such charming power that he cannot resist.

If a business rival badmouths you saying that your product or service is unsatisfactory, instead of not knowing what to do like a Taiji dancer, or badmouthing him back like other martial artists, as a Wahnam Taijiquan practitioner you take your rival's publicity as free advertisement and tell people to buy your product or service to find out for themselves and in the unlikelihood they are dissatisfied, they can have their money back.

The underlying reason why the 108-Pattern Set as well as most other kungfu sets do not have ground fighting is because they were practiced as fighting arts, and in our school they still are practiced as fighting arts while we are fully aware of their non-fighting benefits.

Ground fighting occurred in sport, like in "xue jiao" or Chinese wrestling, but not in real fighting. For ground fighting to happen, an opponent has to first take you to the ground. In a real fight, which was not uncommon in the past for which these kungfu sets were trained, if an opponent is so silly to attempt taking you to the ground, you would have smashed his head or broken his spine.

If he is so skillful that he can take you to the ground before you can smash his head or break his spine, there is no need for him to go to the trouble of ground fighting. He could have struck your groin or broken you legs. If he spares your groin and legs, and mounts on you, you can still poke his eyes, or if his face is too far away, you can jab your palm into his ribs.

Kungfu gymnastic or dance masters are correct when they give such answers when asked what they would do if an opponent attempts a shoot, for example, to take them onto the ground, or when an opponent is already pinning them down. The problems is that they don't have the skills to do so, or even the techniques when an opponent simply punches or kicks them.

Shaolin Kungfu is all comprehensive. I have often mentioned, and in the process made some people angry, that all techniques in other martial arts, including ground fighting, are found in Shaolin Kungfu, except most Shaolin practitioners today have not progressed advanced enough to use them.

Even in a real fight, you and all our Shaolin Wahnam members would not want to smash your opponent's head or break his spine. There are techniques in the 108-Pattern Set to prevent an opponent taking you onto the ground without resorting to these drastic actions. Do you know what these techniques are? We shall practice them during the 108-Pattern course.

To have some fun, we shall also let our sparring partners pin as down, and borrow two techniques from Drunken Eight Immortals to overcome two situations, one being pin-downed spread eagle, and the other with face upward. These two techniques, using the same combat principle, can overcome any pin-down!

The 108-Pattern Yang Style Taijiquan Course in Ireland is going to be a lot of fun, besides bringing many benefits.

Question 7

Is there a difference if the repetitions and mode changes are practiced within a set vs repeating the 24-Pattern set a few times?

Is it advisable to mirror complete sets?

Is it advisable to mirror the basic of Tai Chi Chuan combat sequences to practice the applications on both sides?

“Wild Horse Separates Mane” is a frequent pattern in Yang Style Tai Chi Chuan and happens to be one of my favourites. I have noticed that it is found in at least three selective sets, but not included in the standard syllabus. Is it because its applications are too sophisticated?

Sifu Leo, Austria

Answer

Yes, there is a difference between practicing the 108-Pattern Set and repeating the 24-Pattern Set, regardless of whether we consider the original version or our Wahnam version.

Many patterns in the original version of the 108-Pattern Set, including the core patterns of Grasping Sparrow’s Tail, are performed only on one mode, whereas these patterns are performed on both modes, left and right, in the 24-Pattern Set. A practitioner of the original version of the 108-Pattern Set, therefore, would not be as efficient in using the other mode of these patterns in combat.

There is more variety of patterns in the 108-Pattern Set, and these extra new patterns are not found in the 24-Pattern Set, like Strike Tiger, Seven-Star and Sway-Lotus Kick. However, the patterns in the 24-Pattern Set are sufficient to meet all attack situations in general. The extra patterns are useful only in special situations.

Hence, between these two sets of the original version, I prefer the 24-Pattern Set. It is superior to the 108-Pattern Set in both combat and health purposes.

It was precisely to overcome these setbacks of the original 108-Pattern Set that I modified it, resulting in our Wahnam version of the 108-Pattern Set. I also slightly modified the original version of the 24-Pattern Set by adding the Shoulder Strike and the Elbow Strike, which were also added to the 108-Pattern Set as these techniques are not found in the original version.

When we compare our Wahnam versions of the 108-Pattern Set and the 24-Pattern Set, the setback of only one mode of core patterns no longer applies, but the longer set has the advantage of greater variety of patterns. Another advantage of the longer set is that the arrangement of its sequences is more effective for combat. Hence, in my opinion, it is superior to the 24-Pattern Set.

If we take both sets and both versions, my preference in descending order, i.e. the best choice first, is as follows:

108-Pattern Set Wahnam Version -> 24-Pattern Set Wahnam Version ->
24-Pattern Set Original Version -> 108-Pattern Set Original Version

It is not advisable to mirror complete sets, and this comment also applies to the original version of the 108-Pattern Set. If it was necessary to have both the left and the right modes in a particular set, the master composing it, if he was worth his name as a master, would have both modes but not necessary as a mirror.

The patterns are performed in both the left and the right mode in the Wahnam version of the 108-Pattern Set, and in both versions of the 24-Pattern Set, with a few exception like Needle at Sea Bottom, Elbow Strike and Sway-Lotus Kick. Does having both modes in our Wahnam version of the 108-Pattern Set contradict the statement that it is not necessary to mirror a set, like the original version of the 108-Pattern Set, if it has only one mode? No. It is not necessary to mirror the original version, but having both modes in our Wahnam version is better.

The time spent for mirroring the set can be used for other purposes. If a left mode is preferred but not available, like applying a left ward-off against a left palm strike, a practitioner of the original version of the 108-Pattern Set can use another pattern, like Jade Girl Threads Shuttle.

There are subtle differences between using the left mode of warding off, and using Jade Girl Threads Shuttle, but for combat in general, Jade Girl Threads Shuttle is an adequate substitute.

Mirroring a set would take double the amount of time for practice. It is not justifiable to spend the large amount of extra time for this little benefit.

Even if we suspend the consideration of time, it is still not advisable to mirror a set, especially a long, asymmetrical set like the original version of the 108-Pattern Set. It would make the practice boring.

It is worthwhile to note that mirroring a complete set is quite different from having both the left and the right modes included in a set. The former is

boring, whereas the latter is not.

Even practicing a set like Lohan Asks the Way, where both the left and the right modes are arranged symmetrically, unlike our version of the 108-Pattern Set where the left and the right modes are not arranged symmetrically, is different from mirroring a complete set, even a short one like Black Tiger Steals Heart of Shaolin Kungfu or White Snake Shoots Venom of Taijiquan.

All these setbacks in the original version of the 108-Pattern Set are not only overcome but are turned into advantages in our Wahnam version. The time taken to perform the original version and our Wahnam version is about the same, but not only we have both the left and the right modes in our version, but also we can go deeper into finer points.

For example, a practitioner of the original version would use a right ward off against a thrust punch, irrespective of whether an opponent uses a right thrust punch or a left thrust punch, because the practitioner only learns the right mode. This is permissible at an elementary stage.

But there are differences between using a right ward off or a left ward off against a left thrust punch. When an exponent uses a right ward off against a left thrust punch, not only he is exposed but also he misses the opportunity to close an opponent adequately, a principle we effectively use against Boxers. Those who practice the original version would miss these finer points.

If he is lucky enough to learn from a competent teacher, instead of using a right ward off against a left thrust punch, a practitioner of the original version may use Jade Girl Threads Shuttle, using his left hand to float an opponent's left punch, and his right palm to strike the opponent. But he would not use a left ward off, simply because he has not learnt it.

Again in this case there are differences between using Jade Girl Threads Shuttle and using a left ward off. If an opponent is short and powerful, or tall and skillful with kicks, using a left ward off would be superior to using Jade Girl Threads Shuttle. Practitioners of the original version would not have the opportunity to learn these finer points.

It is not necessary and not advisable to mirror the basic Taijiquan combat sequences to practice the applications on both sides. The combat sequences are composed in a way that the best techniques are employed in the given situations by both the initiator and the responder according to the aims and objectives of the training as well as their level of attainment. Hence, mirroring the combat sequences is not only boring and wasting time but also will miss applying the best techniques for the occasions.

Let us take the first Taijiquan combat sequence, Immortal Waves Sleeves, for illustration. Please bear in mind that we do not train just one combat sequence in isolation. Every combat sequence is a part of the whole system providing comprehensive combat training.

There are good reasons why the initiator moves in with his right leg and attacks with his right palm. The right hand is the emperor-hand, which can be effectively used for both attack and defence. Developing the emperor hand in this way is an important aim of the sequence. Using the right leg in front facilitates waist rotation, a very important principle students put into practice right at the start of their combat training.

If a practitioner uses his left hand instead of his right, he would not be training his emperor-hand. What about a left-hander? Should he reverse the mode of the sequence? He can, but it will not be to his advantage. A big disadvantage is that using his left hand, even when it is his better hand, does not enable him to use the best techniques in the given situation. Moreover, if he trains according to the arrangement in the sequence, gradually his right hand will be as adroit as his left hand, which gives him an added advantage over most people who are right-handers.

If a practitioner uses left leg in front instead of his right leg, the aims and objectives of this sequence will be compromised. He would not, for example, have an ideal position to train waist rotation. Consequently his training to use an opponent's momentum against himself will be affected.

If he trains only with his right hand and his right leg in front, will he be competent to use his left hand and his left leg in front? Yes, this will be practiced in other sequences for both attack and defence. All the modes – right-right, right-left, left-left, left-right – are found in the 12 basic Taijiquan combat sequences.

Students practice all these modes not by mirroring the combat sequences. These modes are used when they are advantageous in certain given combat situations. In other words, if a student uses left-left, it is not because he wants to mirror right-right, but because in that given combat situation, left-left is a choice mode. For example, in Combat Sequence 10, Cloud Hands, the left-left mode is used in Low Stance Vertical Punch in response to an opponent's Jade Girl Threads Shuttle in this situation. Changing to a right-right mode would be inappropriate.

But you are not thinking of just reversing the mode of this one pattern, you are thinking of mirroring the whole sequence, changing every left to right and vice versa. This issue is irrelevant because had you started with a different mode from the one prescribed in the sequence, many or all the patterns in the sequence will be different as every pattern is chosen as the

best response for that particular situation in question.

If we do not mirror our combat sequences, would we be able to respond correctly and spontaneously if an opponent, despite many disadvantages, uses another mode other than the one in the sequence? Of course, we can. We are trained to respond correctly and spontaneously to the situation, not according to the routine of a sequence.

Suppose in Sequence 1, an opponent attacks you with his left vertical punch in a left side-way Horse-Siding Stance., i.e. using the left-left mode instead of the right-right. You can follow the sequence and brush off his attack with your right Low Cloud Hands, in which case you are in a better advantage than had your opponent used the original right-right mode. Or you may respond as in Sequence 10, using a right Low Stance Vertical Punch to strike him using the tactic of no-defence-direct-counter. Or you may grip his arm using Old Eagle Catches Snake, a slight modification of mode in Sequence 10.

Besides being found in the 108-Pattern Set, Cloud Hands Grasp Sparrow, and Wudang Taijiquan, “Wild Horse Separates Mane” is also found in Shaolin Five-Animal and Dragon Strength, but is called “Majestic Dragon Across Stream”.

This pattern is not found in our standard Taijiquan syllabus because when I composed the sets for the standard syllabus, I did not find this pattern the best choice for various situations in the combat sequences.

Historically, the Taijiquan syllabus was a mirror of the Shaolin syllabus. The Shaolin syllabus was devised to meet expedient needs. The two main needs were force training and combat application, which were also the two pillars of any genuine kungfu training in the past.

In the Shaolin syllabus, force training was taken care by stance training and One-finger Shooting Zen. In Taijiquan, force training was taken care by stance training and Lifting Water, later replaced by Cloud Hands and reinforced by Grasping Sparrow’s Tail.

For combat application I composed 16 combat sequences for Shaolin Kungfu. These 16 combat sequences were formulated into 4 fundamental sets. These 16 combat sequences were crystallized into 12 combat sequences in Taijiquan, and the 12 sequences were also formulated into 4 fundamental sets.

In composing the combat sequences, I covered all the four categories of attack, namely striking, kicking, felling and gripping. I also selected the best patterns for the attack and defence situations. “Wild Horse Separate Mane” was not one of these selected patterns.

Before students could apply patterns for combat, they needed to be familiar with basic patterns. In Shaolin Kungfu, I chose the four basic strikes and their defences to formulate Lohan Askes the Way, the first basic Shaolin set.

The first basic Taijiquan set, White Crane Flaps Wings, was more sophisticated. It was built upon a more elementary set, Cloud Hands, which I first taught in Spain and later in a VIP course in Colombia. I added kicking, felling and gripping techniques to Cloud Hands to make the set comprehensive.

“Wild Horse Separates Mane” was not in the original set, Cloud Hands, which consisted mainly of Grasping Sparrow’s Tail, Single Whip and Green Dragon Shoots Pearl. “Wild Horse Separates Mane” was also not used in the kicking, felling and gripping techniques. But its modified form, Immortal Waves Sleeves, is a fundamental pattern in the standard Taijiquan syllabus.

Hence, a direct answer is No, Wild Horse Separates Mane is not included in the standard syllabus not because its combat applications are too sophisticated, but because it was not a choice pattern for attacks and defences in the combat sequences which eventually formed the syllabus.

Nevertheless, an indirect answer is Yes, it was not a choice pattern because its combat applications are too sophisticated to be included in the basic attacks and defences which formed the syllabus.

Question 8

The Yang Taijiquan I currently practice is different and involves a lot of intricate movements to complete one pattern. I would like to use "Cloud Hands" as an example.

Before the hand completes its downward movement in "Cloud Hands," there is a downward backhand strike, a side strike and downward chop! The same three striking movements are repeated on the left side and the right side in one continuous flow, completing the sequence of "Cloud Hands." The three striking movements are executed very subtly from the wrist to perhaps prevent outsiders from "stealing" the art. From the outside, it looks like one large continuous flow with no break.

Aside from training strikes, the extra movements seem to serve no actual purpose in combat. My flow of internal force also feels choppy when I perform it this way. However, I can't help but wonder about the correlation between the wrist movement and generation of internal force.

Could this version of "Cloud Hands" be developed from spontaneous chi flow? Perhaps Yang Lu Chan discovered this movement one day in spontaneous chi flow while practicing his Chen Taijiquan and decided to formalize his discovery into a new pattern. After all, nothing is rigid and structured in spontaneous chi flow. Yang Deng Fu would later simplify "Cloud Hands" to be one continuous movement.

Stephen

Answer

What you have described is not what we do in our Wahnam Taijiquan. It is also not what Yang Style practitioners do. It was also not what I conclude from reading their records what Yang Style masters did in the past

From my understanding of Taijiquan philosophy in particular and kungfu philosophy in general, the actions described by you do not serve any useful purposes.

Unless a practitioner already possesses a lot of internal force using these movements, which are not normally visible to observers, for striking or any combat application is not effective. But you can have an informed guess whether these subtle movements are used for combat application by asking yourself, with due respect to the master, whether the master teaching these

movements have a lot of internal force, and whether he is very competent in combat.

If the answer is no to one or both questions, then combat application is unlikely to be a reason for such practice. If the answer is yes to any one of or both the two questions, then combat application may be, but not surely, a possible reason for the training of these movements.

But the best is to ask the teacher himself why these subtle movements are included in the version of Cloud Hands he teaches. Your questioning must be polite, and it must indicate that you ask to find out, not to question his authority. If he hesitates or refuses to answer the question, you must tactfully change to another topic.

It is also unlikely that the subtle movements are made to hide some secrets. Although some sophisticated techniques are close secrets, generally secrets lie in skills and application, not in form. If a teacher says that he hides some techniques, which are from, so as to keep some secrets from leaking to the public, we can safely conclude that he has not reached a high level in the art.

To put it crudely, and this does not refer to your school, Taijiquan has been so debased nowadays that it does not even measure to folk dancing, who except self-deceived fools who cannot even perform folk dancing but think they are practicing a fantastic martial art, would be interested in such secrets. From another perspective, when teachers cannot even teach ordinary Taijiquan properly so that their students can derive some basic benefits of a physical exercise instead of knee injuries, what secrets do they have?

It was unlikely that this version of “Cloud Hands” was developed from spontaneous chi flow. If you observe chi flow, generally the movements are big and smooth, not jerky and minute. It is pertinent to know that chi flow was not common in Taijiquan in the past, not even amongst masters.

It was unlikely that Yang Lu Chan discovered these subtle movements in spontaneous chi flow, and Yang Deng Fu later modified these subtle movements into big continuous movements. Such small movements were unlikely in spontaneous chi flow.

Presuming that this unlikelihood actually happened, there was no good reason why Yang Lu Chan preserved these jerky, minute movements and passed them on to selected disciples. Even if this were true, there would be other schools today practicing these minute movements, though they may not know their significance.

My conjecture why these minute movements occur is not complimentary, and I hope your teacher's answer will prove me wrong. Somewhere down the lineage, a teacher added these minute movements to make his teaching grandiose, without realizing that his addition contradicted fundamental Taijiquan principles.

Question 9

In prior training, I had been taught that peng jin ("ward-off energy") is one of the most important "jins" in Yang Family Taijiquan. In fact, it was so important that we were instructed to manifest peng jin whenever we performed the set. My teachers would have us freeze our postures and "test" our ability to manifest peng jin.

I am curious of Sigung's thoughts on the relative importance of peng jin in Yang Family Taijiquan vs. Wahnem Taijiquan.

Chiahua.

Answer

My interpretation of the five different types of force, or jin, in Taijiquan is quite different. In my understanding all the five different types of force are the same force but used differently.

The five different types of force are:

1. Ward off force, or peng jin
2. Roll back force, or lu jin
3. Press forward force, or qi jin
4. Sinking force, or chen jin
5. In contact force, or an jin

The difference in these five types of force lies in their application, not in their nature. These five types are the same internal force, but depending on how the force is used, it is called ward off force, roll back force, etc. In one situation he may use his force as ward off force, and in another situation he may use the same force as roll back force.

As an analogy, suppose a person's income is \$5000 a month. He may use \$1500 for housing which he calls housing money, another \$1500 for food which he calls food money, \$500 for transport which he calls transport money, \$1000 for miscellaneous expenditure which he calls expenditure money, and \$500 for saving which he calls saving money.

Depending on their uses, he has five different types of money, namely housing money, food money, transport money, expenditure money and saving money. But all these different types of money is the same money. If a situation warrants it, he may use, for example, some of his transport money for food, or vice versa.

My advice for the manifestation of the different types of force is also different. I would advise that we train manifestation in all the five different ways, and not just on one way, i.e. ward off force or peng jin.

Ward off force is used mainly to deflect an opponent's attack, especially a thrust punch. If a practitioner practices only ward off force and neglects the other types, he would be in difficulty when opponents attack him in other ways. If he trains all the different types of force, he is versatile.

In our school we go beyond training just the five different types of force for combat. We develop internal force, which we know to have three main functions:

1. To maintain life
2. To enhance life
3. To have better result no matter what we do

Being more combat efficient is only one of the many aspects of the third function. Instead of sparring, when we read a book or plan a marketing project, we shall also have better result due to our force training. Those who follow the advice mentioned by you may only be able to ward off an opponent's attack effectively, but may not benefit much in other aspects of life.

Even masters may not benefit from the benefits that we have. I believe one of the main reasons, though it is not widely discussed or even understood, why not one of the three great Yang masters lived beyond 60 was because they did not realize the three functions of internal force mentioned above.

Obviously they did not just train peng jin or ward off force, as they could handle any attack extremely well. But they employed their tremendous internal force only for combat. They might not have better result if they read a book or planned a marketing project. They also did not use their internal force to maintain life and enhance life.

Question 10

At the Xingyi Course this year you mentioned that Yang Style Taiji and Wuzuquan were the most flowing styles in our Treasure House of Kung Fu Sets!

Yet what is the difference between Yang Style Taijiqian and Wuzuquan in terms of combat application, internal force and spiritual cultivation?

Aiming spread and depth, what are the benefits of practicing both of these flowing styles as opposed to the benefits of practicing flowing and consolidated styles like Yang Style and Iron Wire?

Sifu Anton

Answer

Our Treasure house of Kungfu Sets has more and a greater variety of kungfu sets than in any school I know now or in the past, with the exception of the Shaolin Temple. In the long history of the Shaolin Temple over 1500 years, the Shaolin Temple had more kungfu sets than us, but it may not have as great a variety!

This statement, of course, is not made out of vainglory, but to state a fact.

Taking representative sets from our Treasure House, the range from the softest to the hardest is as follows:

Yang Style Set – San Zhan – Baguazhang – Flower Set – Dragon Strength – Wudang Taijiqian – Flowing Water Floating Clouds – Siu Lin Tou – Xingyiqian -- Triple Stretch – Iron Wire

The 108-Pattern Yang Style Set of Taijiqian and San Zhan of Wuzuquan are not only the softest, they are also the most flowing. But there are differences between the two sets in terms of combat application, internal force and spiritual cultivation. The comparison, of course, is based on the presumption that all other things were equal.

The combat application of the Yang Style is more sophisticated yet more discernable than that of San Zhan. Yang Style practitioners have a greater variety of responses against different attacks from opponents, whereas San Zhan practitioners employ about the same responses against a great variety of attack.

If an opponent uses a thrust punch, for example, depending on various factors like the opponent's force, speed and stability, or the exponent's strategy and experience, a Yang Style practitioner may respond with Immortal Waves Sleeves, Double Dragon Plays with Pearl, or Cross Hand Thrust Kick. A San Zhan practitioner would not worry about all these factors, and just respond with Catch Hand, Strike Palm.

Depending on whether an opponent applies a Muay Thai knee jab, a Judo throw or a gripping attack, a Yang Style practitioner would respond with Repulse Monkey, Jade Girl Threads Shuttle, or Green Dragon Shoots Pearl. For a San Zhan practitioner, it does not matter what attack the opponent uses, he would still respond with Catch Hand, Strike Palm!

Now, whom do you think is superior, the Yang Style exponent with sophistication to choose the best response for a particular situation, or the San Zhan practitioner who uses the same response regardless of the opponent's attack?

If all other things were equal, as mentioned earlier, the Yang Style practitioner is superior. But in real life, other things are not equal. If a practitioner has breadth and depth like in Shaolin Wahnam, the San Zhan practitioner is superior. He does not need to carry different credit cards for different purposes and places. He uses his platinum card regardless of what and where he makes purchases.

In terms of internal force, the Yang Style practitioner is flowing and soft, whereas the San Zhan practitioner is flowing and hard. If you wish to defeat a stronger, bigger opponent, or fell an opponent onto the floor, flowing soft force is relatively more efficient. If you wish to press an opponent to a wall, or damage an opponent with one strike, flowing hard force is a better choice.

In daily life, flowing soft force from Yang Style Taijiquan will make you elegant and graceful in your daily life, while the flowing hard force from San Zhan will enable you to be assertive yet flexible. Such transfer of internal force developed from Yang Style and San Zhan training to daily work and play is spontaneous and even expected in our school, but may not happen in other schools.

This is because we are clearly aware that our Taijiquan training is meant to enrich our daily life. We also have the skill for transfer, especially in the magic of chi flow. Practitioners in other schools may not have this philosophy, and therefore do not make any conscious effort to purposely apply their Taijiquan training to enrich their daily life. Even if they do, they do not have the skill. Most other practitioners perform Taijiquan or Taiji dance for recreation. They have no idea of flowing soft force or flowing hard force.

It is worthwhile to realize that spiritual cultivation ranges from the basic level to the supreme, and is irrespective of religion or the lack of it. The onus of attainment in any art is practical experience. In other words, we must not just talk about spiritual cultivation, but actually enjoy the result of having cultivated our spirit.

The basic level is to be relaxed and peaceful, while the supreme level is to merge with Cosmic Reality, called attaining the Tao in Taijiquan terms, or returning to God the Holy Spirit in Western culture. There are countless stages in between.

If someone is nervous and agitated, but after practicing the Yang Style Set or San Zhan he becomes relaxed and peaceful, he has achieved much in spiritual cultivation. He has cultivated his spirit from being nervous, which means his spirit is weak, and agitated, which means his spirit is disturbed, to being relaxed, which means his spirit is at ease, and peaceful, which means his spirit is tranquil.

The Yang Style Set is relatively more cost-effective in attaining these benefits at the basic level. This, of course, does not mean that the San Zhan Set is not effective. It can be very effective, but if all other things were equal, the Yang Style Set is relatively more effective.

Benefits at the intermediate level, like becoming determined and confident in whatever we do, San Zhan is relatively more cost-effective. San Zhan is also more cost effective at the supreme level of merging with Cosmic Reality.

Aiming at spread and depth, and presuming all other things were equal, practicing flowing and consolidated styles like Yang Style and Iron Wire is more cost-effective than practicing both of these flowing styles, though one is flowing soft and the other is flowing hard. This is because practicing flowing and consolidated styles have more spread than practicing two different flowing styles.

Similarly, when we narrow down the spread, practicing two different flowing styles, like Yang Style and San Zhan is more cost-effective than practicing two sets of the same flowing style, like Yang Style and Wu Style. Narrowing down further, practicing two sets of the same flowing style is more cost-effective than practicing the same set twice.

This phenomenon is peculiar to our school because of our spread and depth. In other schools because they do not have the advantage of spread and depth, the outcome is reverse. For them, practicing the same set twice is more cost-effective than practicing two sets of the same style. Practicing two sets of the same style is more cost-effective than practicing two different styles, especially if the two styles are of opposite nature.

This may explain why students whose style has limited sets, like those who practice popular Wing Choon, are generally more combat efficient than students whose styles have many sets, who in turn are more combat efficient than students learn in schools with many different styles, often with conflicting nature. It also explains why masters advocate that students should focus on only one art at a time.

On the other hand, kungfu geniuses like Ng Mui and Pak Mei, who had spread and depth, were far superior to other kungfu masters.

It is incredible that now we in Shaolin Wahnam have the opportunity of spread and depth that even masters in the past did not have. Contrary to what has been the norm in kungfu practice throughout the ages, in our case the more opposite the two arts are, the better will be our benefits.

With reference to the list of kungfu sets ranging from the softest to the hardest mentioned above, because the range between Wudang Taijiquan and Triple Stretch is wider than the range between San Zhan and Flower Set, if all other things were equal, those who practice Wudang Taijiquan and Triple Stretch will have more benefits than those who practice San Zhan and Flower Set.

Why is this so? It is because the wider range gives it more spread.

As Yang Style and Iron Wire has the widest range, practicing both sets will give the best benefits. In Yang Style, one learns flowing soft force. In Iron Wire he learns consolidated hard force. These two modes of internal force training, generating flowing soft force and consolidating energy into hard force, represent the two extreme range of internal force training methods. All other internal force training methods fall in between these two extremes.

Letting energy flow and consolidating energy into internal force are required in all internal force training methods. Depending on the type of force desired, practitioners adjust the proportion between flowing energy and consolidating energy.

In Yang Style Taijiquan, about 90% of the energy is flowing, and 10% is consolidated. In Iron Wire about 10% is flowing and 90% is consolidated. Other types of force are somewhere in between. In San Zhan, for example, about 80% of the energy developed is flowing, and 20% consolidated. In Baguazhang about 70% of the energy is flowing and 30% consolidated. Hence when one has learnt Yang Style and Iron Wire, he is able to let the energy flow and consolidate energy at their extreme, which results in learning other methods of force training easier.

When one practices both the 108-Pattern Set or any set of Yang Style and San Zhan or any set of Wuzuquan, his range of force training methods is narrower because both sets use the flow method. Another practitioner who practices the 108-Pattern Set and also the Iron Wire Set has the opportunity to use both the flow method and the force method. Someone who has both methods is more effective than another who knows only any one.

This evidence is abundant in our school. Shaolin practitioners who also learn some Taijiquan sets, or Taijiquan practitioners who also learn some Shaolin sets, find their kungfu performance improve tremendously. Shaolin Kungfu and Taijiquan represent the crystallization of the force method and the flow method. We are very lucky that we can integrate both methods in yin-yang harmony.

We may sound arrogant but it is true that this phenomenon happens only in our school. In other schools, including myself in my own training as a student, training two opposing methods, like Yang Style Taijiquan and Iron Wire, is highly discouraged as the two opposing arts cancel each other's benefits.

In our school the two methods are not opposing but complementary, which means that our results in these two arts, and by transference of skills in all other arts, will be much enhanced instead of diminished! This phenomenon is unprecedented in kungfu history.

Do you know why two opposing arts in other schools become complementary in our school? Yes, it is because of the magic of chi flow.

Indeed it is because of chi flow that we have attained unbelievable results in force training for daily living as well as in clearing blockage in overcoming illness. The 108-Pattern Yang Style Taijiquan Set in Ireland is an excellent course for chi flow. For those who have learnt Iron Wire before, this 108-Pattern is an excellent complement. For those who have learnt Iron Wire, the flow method in 108-Pattern Set course will enhance any force development and, more importantly, our daily life.