



Practical



In our quest to feature the various aspects of 'Internal Arts' we are pleased to introduce you to the art of Baguazhang.

At the recent Tai Chi Caledonia event in Scotland, we were fortunate to host two of Europe's highly experienced practitioners. Observing the regular practice sessions between Aarvo Tucker and Luigi Zanini prompted me to enlist their help in putting together this piece on the practical applications of the art.

Aarvo Tucker lived in Taiwan and China from 1981 - 1997 where he studied Taijiquan, Baguazhang and Xing-I with two teachers, Liu Hsi-heng and Lo Dexiu. He lives in Surrey, teaches in various parts of the UK and can be contacted on 01428 741044.

Luigi Zanini from Vicenza, Italy has studied Chinese martial arts since 1977, training with Tang Lang & Tam Twei and was the winner of the Italian Championships in 1988. Luigi can be contacted either through Tai Chi Chuan magazine or on email: lzar@iol.it

Aside from including these well-illustrated applications I have included an article by Luigi on Sun Lutang's Baguazhang.

Applications

Bagua Zhang

INTRODUCTION - AARVO TUCKER

Because of the great diversity in the different schools of Baguazhang, it is perilous to make generalizations. The following statements about Bagua reflect my own views which were formed to a significant extent by my teacher Luo Dexiu. While the following misconceptions of Bagua as an art of self-defense are to my mind rather obvious, they are views that I have come across many times. My apologies in advance if these comments contradict the teachings of any other schools of Bagua — my perspective and experience of Bagua is by no means encyclopedic.



CIRCLING

The first misconception is that Bagua in combat involves circling an opponent just as we do circle walking practise. As such it would involve the opponent being static while the Bagua-ist circled the opponent at some distance. While as a tactic of surprise it might occasionally work, odds are that the opponent will simply pivot to keep facing this circumambulating adversary. My teacher told the story of a person who had studied some Bagua and who was competing in a tournament in Taiwan. While using this tactic, he got consistently clobbered. His opponent calmly watched him walking around, and then finally stepped forward and took advantage of the relative instability and open flank of the circle walker. In Bagua you want to get to the side or rear of your opponent, not present your side to the opponent.

WAIT FOR OR INITIATE ATTACKS?

The second misconception is that you always wait for the other person to strike first. Tactically you want to be free to either respond to or initiate an attack. Of course we are not talking about provoking a fight. But a martial art by definition deals with combat, even if only

theoretically, and the theory must be based on experience somewhere along the line. I know of no martial arts that are practised as such that do not include attacks as well as counter or defensive techniques. By initiating you can elicit a response so as to better predict your opponents movements and control his/her balance.

FIST OR PALM?

Another idea that is over-generalized is that Bagua people only use the palm or open hand, and not the fist. While it is true that many Bagua techniques use the open hand for grabbing, trapping, striking, pushing, and Chinna, the fist is also used.

CIRCULAR OR LINEAR?

Some people assume that Bagua movements, either solo or partner, are always done in a circle. Most styles of Bagua, especially if they are a comprehensive system, contain drills, sequences, and whole 'forms' which are performed non-circularly, for developing certain qualities of movement, techniques or other skills. On the other hand, some people mistakenly believe that by walking in a circle and perhaps doing a movement or two, they are doing Bagua.

CHOPPING



(1) Aarvo (left) and Luigi (right) are facing each other.



(2) Luigi throws a straight right punch which Aarvo deflects with his lead arm.



(3) Aarvo steps forward with his lead arm chopping forwards, the left pushing Luigi's punching arm away.



(4) Using the forward pressure from Luigi's blocking hand, Aarvo pulls that hand across which frees his lead arm for another chop.

LEG ATTACK: KNEELING



(1) Faced off.



(2) Luigi grabs Aarvo's wrist with his lead hand as he steps around with his rear foot to put pressure on Aarvo's leg.



(3) Continuing the attack on the leg, Luigi kneels, breaking his opponent's balance.



(4) He then follows up with a palm strike/push to the face.

ENTWINING



(1) Faced off.



(2) Luigi has stepped forward and kicked which Aarvo side-steps slightly and wraps the kicking foot.



(3) Stepping forwards with the rear foot, Aarvo aims the left hand towards his opponent's face.



(4) Continuing to thrust forwards and upwards Aarvo finishes by projecting his opponent on to his back.

ARM THROW



(1) Faced off.



(2) Luigi blocks the right punch and engages the other arm.



(3) He then lowers his body as he enters with an elbow strike to the mid-section of his opponent.



(4) Luigi pulls with his left hand as he turns in for an arm throw, his right foot assisting.

COVERING



(1) Faced off.



(2) Luigi deflects with piercing palm,



(3) which then turns into a grab enabling him to step to the outside striking the ribs with his forearm.



(4) He finishes with his right arm coming over the top to 'cover' the face of his opponent, taking him backwards.

FROM CHOPPING TO THROWING



(1) Aarvo deflects the incoming punch, left hand preparing to grab the arm.



(2) Aarvo chops, both hands on the inside.



(3) Pulling down and forwards



(4) Turning in for a throw, Aarvo's right arm should firmly control his opponent's neck and head (*which for safety he kept loose*), left hand continuing to pull the right arm of the opponent to complete the throw.



by Luigi Zanini Ph.D.

palms against enormous cannons on the city walls. It is said that after years of training he could slightly move the cannons from their seat with the power of his smashing palms.

Sun was famed for his dexterity, and was so skilled that his Xingyiquan teacher Guo Yunshen nicknamed him “Living Monkey”. He reportedly had the ability to move with small, quick steps - so quick that his movements appeared to be like lightning! He could move his Qi and his body gravity centre like a caterpillar. His Fajing ability was such that he could injure his opponent’s arms only using his counter-fajing.

The name of Sun Lutang (Sun Fuquan) is very well known to those who have an interest in internal Chinese martial arts. During his long life he mastered the three internal systems of Xingyiquan, Baguazhang and Taijiquan, leaving a lasting impression in Chinese history. Not only is his Taijiquan system widely accepted, as an official branch of the art, but his Baguazhang also became a must for all Gongfu and Wushu practitioners.

Sun Shi Baguazhang was created in the early 19th century according to his personal conception of martial art, and is today one of the most renowned practice methods of the Boxing of the Eight Trigrams. It is a matter of fact that a only slightly modified version of his basic sequence “Baxingzhang” (Eight Animals Palm) illustrates the subtle art of Eight Palm Techniques on the most official (and also unofficial) manuals and publications in China.

We owe much to Sun’s cultural development. He was a man of culture and literature and the first among the martial art teachers of his generation to publish in a book on the art, “Ba Gua Quan Xue” in 1916. (The art of the boxing of the eight trigrams.) But Sun Lutang, together with his martial and working activities, was also a prolific author in the field of martial arts. In 1915 he wrote a text on Xingyiquan, and composed another three books on Taijiquan, Baguazhang Sword and the “True Essence of Boxing”. His personal diary – an exceptional document written by one who lived with historical names like Yang Chenfu, Fu Chengsun, Wang Xiangzhai, Guo Yunshen and more – was stolen by Sun’s daughter, Sun Jianyun, and was subsequently lost.

XINGYIQUAN, TAIJIQUAN

Baguazhang was not the first martial system Sun studied. Under Li Kuiyuan and Guo Yunshen he studied Xingyiquan for many years. This was an internal boxing style which was concrete and direct, that concealed the power to transform the young, unlucky and depressed (he tried to commit suicide) Sun into a mature fighter. There are legendary tales regarding Sun training with bare

In his 30s Sun went to Beijing to study Baguazhang under the guidance of Cheng Tinghua. This Xingyiquan experience and acquired skills turned out to be helpful to Sun, who rapidly improved, and, after only three years left Cheng Tinghua, for a new wandering experience through China. Cheng gave him a new nickname (as Guo Yunshen did before): Sun was now a man “Who is even cleverer than a lively monkey”.

Sun travelled a lot through China, never staying too long in the one place. This meant that only a few students completed their martial curriculum under his tutelage, especially Baguazhang, an art that Sun seemed dis-inclined to teach. Despite that, the art of the circle remained solidly planted, like a milestone in Sun’s martial heart and knowledge. In his 50s, when he met Gao Weizhen, a Wu style Taijiquan teacher, he decided to adopt Taijiquan into his practice and ultimately created his own system, based on all his past internal experience. His daughter, Sun Jianyun writes: “The stepping pattern comes from Baguazhang, the leg and hips techniques from Xingyiquan and the softness of the body comes from Taijiquan”. His Taijiquan is called “Huo Bu Kai He Taijiquan”, quick steps – open and close, another obvious reference to Baguazhang and internal arts.

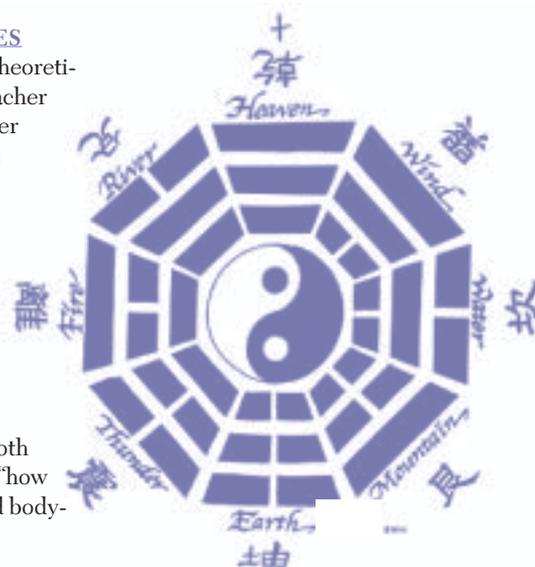
SUN’S INNOVATIONS

Sun’s Baguazhang was the first to adopt animal names and references for the definition of martial techniques (i.e., the Hawk and the Snake postures). His Xingyiquan experience probably prompted him to use these animal names (usually there are 10 or 12 animals patterns) to depict and evoke the spirit of the movements. Before this time Baguazhang techniques were defined and codified using a more direct terminology (“reverse punch”, “push up the vest and hit”, etc.), as many old Baguazhang schools and sequences confirms. After Sun published his book, the world of Baguazhang adopted a more philosophically oriented vocabulary which often obscured the relationship between Bagua theory and martial application.

ANALOGIES AND DIFFERENCES

Sun’s Baguazhang type should have, theoretically, been quite close to that of his teacher Cheng Tinghua, who was also a teacher of Shuai Jiao (Chinese wrestling). Sun took careful note of everything his teacher explained so it is reasonable to believe that his system is clearly derived from the Cheng School. However, there are a series of major and minor differences that make Sun’s system innovating in respect to Cheng’s.

One of the main characteristics of both Cheng and Sun schools is the basis of “how to handle” short distance fighting and body-



to-body situations. It's evident that Sun operated in his system a basic simplification of rotating, torsion and screw-like movements. Cheng's system included much more spinning and turning movements.

Sun supposedly took inspiration from Xingyiquan for his revision of the system. He writes in his book: "Like in Xingyiquan, in lifting the hand, before you move left foot forward, use the right foot as the root. This is the correct posture of the body. Xingyiquan in circles, corresponds to Earth, it is the phenomenon of Earth. So Xingyiquan has the form of crossing in the centre and looks for the creation of movement. (...) Xingyiquan and Baguazhang are the two faces of the same coin. Their principles are based on the energy that contracts in the centre of the movement. This unites the Qi and returns it back to Dan Tien." Sun advocated a fundamental unity of internal principles which created a more instinctive, simplified Baguazhang.

POWER AND STRUCTURE

The basic sequences in his book ("Eight Animals"), and in modern Chinese manuals, (the so called "Orthodox Baguazhang") are in reality quite simple and relatively easy to perform, compared with other Baguazhang schools like Fu Chengsung's (who was also a good friend of Sun's having exchanged many martial experiences together) or Cheng Tinghua's. There is no extreme torsion or the classic rippling and flexing movements of the spine, which are regarded as the trademarks of Baguazhang. On the other hand, we know from the ancient tradition of long-term students of Sun, that the book form was an elemental one, tailored for the external students of Sun, since the internal or "closed door" disciples were able learn a much deeper and richer system. Sun's Baguazhang deepness is based more on the speed of the body and the power originated through structure, than the beauty and the intricacies of the forms.

THE EIGHT ANIMALS

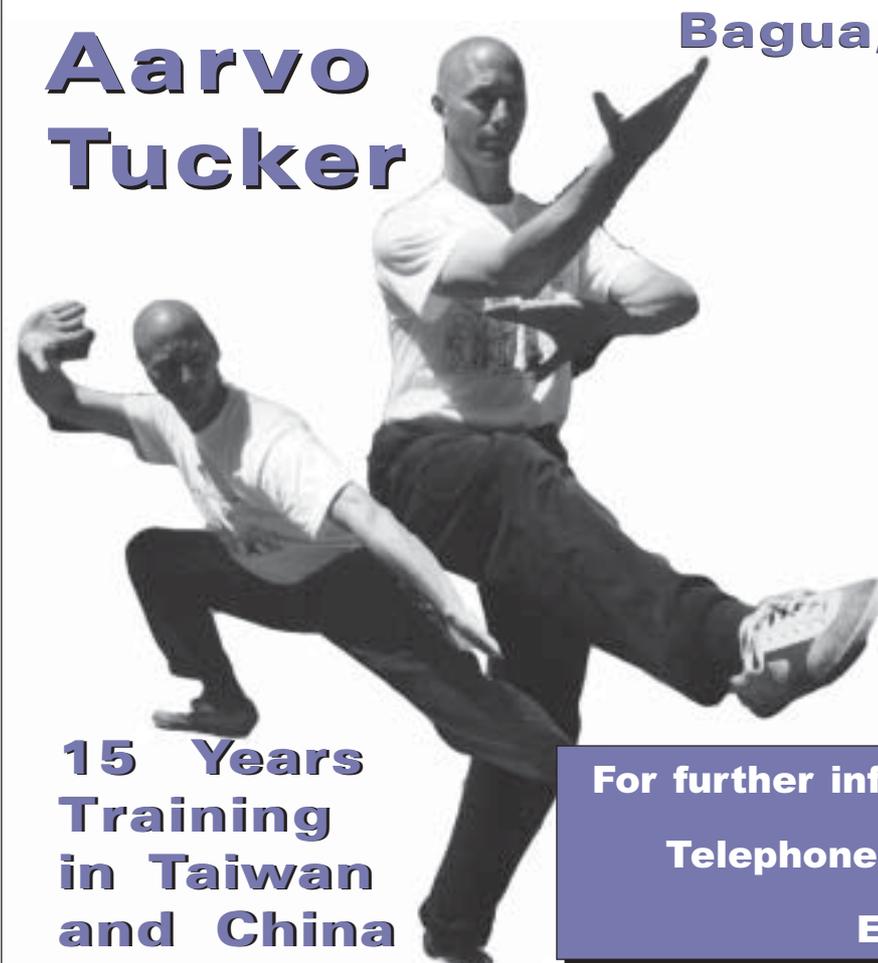
In his Eight Animals Palm, Sun introduced the concept of mutation

and evolution from one Gua (Trigram) to another, providing a flowing adaptability, which relies on the "bare bones" of the system. There are many esoteric aspects from internal alchemy, the study of organs and illnesses, and the Yijing study of changes in Baguazhang. They all represents the peak of Sun's theoretical evolution, but not his approach to real fighting situations.

Behind each animal movement, in the practical application of each Gua, (generally included in "intercept-close in-strike-follow in one breath" techniques) there is a recognisable tendency to simplification. It can still be seen in some of Sun's students and in Sun Jianyun movements. The method itself is basically simple, but nimbleness and speed makes the motion appear complex. The whole-body-tightness of the motion plays a great role in Sun's martial arts, but again we can (and should) go back from there to the main movement in order to not miss the final goal of the study, which is still very simple: *being able to fight*.

Since the beginning of Baguazhang, when Dong Haiquan was teaching and adapting for practical application in fighting situations, it was said that the basis of the system lay in the eight static postures, which should be maintained during circle walking - the so called Eight Mother Palms (Ba Mu Zhang). The secret of evolution also included the so called Penetrating Palm (Zhuan Zhang). Wang Xiangzhai, friend of Cheng Tinghua and Liu Fengchun, and creator of Yiquan, repeated in his memories that the truth in Baguazhang is contained in the Single and Double Palm Change, and that each serious student should commit himself with the maximum effort on these two techniques.

It seems that Sun Lutang developed his Baguazhang using the same perspective of "martial minimalism", whose essential efficacy has been confirmed to be useful until today. Going back to the core of things: absorb what is useful and reject what's useless. Bruce Lee developed and cultivated, nevertheless, the same idea.



Aarvo Tucker

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