

[3] Interviewer: 'Xingyi', 'Taiji', 'Bagua', and 'Tongbei' are considered to be schools of internal boxing, what are the differences of all these branches?

Wang Xiangzhai: People often say that 'Xingyi', 'Taiji', 'Bagua' and 'Tongbei' are internal styles, I do not know how the names of internal and external came about, so I cannot comment on that. By observing the past famous masters, one can see a part of it though.

The original 'Xingyi', and the 'Xinyiba' and 'Liuhebu' of Henan province, are of the same school. When tracing the lineage of Mr. Li Daidong (who was known as Old Dai) of Henan, you can find out that he is Mr. Li Zhihe's great-grandson, Mr. Li Zhihe was the teacher of the old gentleman Dai Longbang. The Yuan family of Jiyan in fact followed the school of Mr. Li, although they named the art differently. Mr. Dai, although he changed the name 'Xinyi' into 'Xingyi', was not in contrary with the original meaning, and in that boxing the word 'boxing' carried the meaning of most faithfully adhering to it.

One should know that the original 'Xingyi' completely lacked the training method of the twelve forms, but the whole body was meant to express the essence of all these twelve forms. It did not have the theory of the mutual promotion and restraint of the five elements, there were just the five elements representing five kinds of forces. It did not have any fixed techniques, boxing routines or forms of movements either. I remember well the words of my late teacher about the five elements: Metal means the strength contained in the bones and the muscles, the mind being firm like iron or stone, being able to cut gold and steel. Wood has the meaning of the bending but rooted posture of a tree.

Water means force like the waves of the vast sea, lively like a dragon or a snake, when used, it is able to pervade everything. Fire means strength being like gunpowder, fists being like bullets shot out, having the strength to burn the opponent's body by the first touch. Earth means exerting strength heavy, deep, solid, and perfectly round, the qi being strong, having the force of oneness with heaven and earth. This is the syncretism of the five elements. It has nothing to do with one technique overcoming another technique as the modern people claim. If one first sees with the eyes, then thinks of it again in the mind, and then launches the counter-attack towards the enemy, it is very seldom that one will not get beaten up.

'Bagua' was originally known as 'Chuanzhang'. In my childhood I met Mr. Cheng Tinghua, I remember he seemed to be like a divine dragon roaming in the sky, changing infinitely, it is hardly possible for the modern person to reach such skill and strength. I distantly remember Mr. Dong Haichuan, it is even harder to understand how profound was his insight into the Sea of Law and attainment of the Tao. Mr. Liu Fengchun is a friend of mine, his skills are really profound, but his attainments are slightly inferior, but still those studying the sixty-four palms and seventy-two steps cannot compare with him.

I wish that the people practising 'Bagua' would concentrate on the double and single 'chuanzhang', paying special attention to intuitively perceiving every movement, doing their best to take a more advanced course of training, and earnestly enter into the theory, putting it all into practise for a long time, then they could get close to approaching its essence.

As masters of the original 'Taijiquan', I should recommend the Yang brothers Shaohou and Chengfu. They are also old friends of mine, thus I know that this boxing really has some knowledge of mechanics, but out of one hundred persons not even one gains its essence, and even if one can gain it, it is still one-sided, because the basic skills of intuitive perception already died out a long time ago, thus their lower bodies have no real strength to speak of. Originally this boxing consisted of three fists, also called the "old three cuts", Mr. Wang Zongyue changed it into "thirteen postures", and it was later changed into as much as one hundred and forty or fifty postures, this is the major reason for the distortion.

For health preservation, it restrains the spirit and mettle, and brings discomfort to the practitioner. For combat, it harms the practitioner's limbs and trunk, and causes the useful body to become a mechanical and stiff thing, it also disturbs the student's nerves, and is nothing more than wasting one's time. As for its method of training, a punch with a fist here, a slap with the palm there, a kick to the left, and another one to the right, that is pitiful and laughable.

As for dealing with an enemy in a fight, against a master-hand, please do not even consider it, if the adversary is not stiff and sluggish, even the famous masters of this boxing have no chance to apply their skills. These abuses are so big that 'Taijiquan' might soon become just a mere form comparable to a chess manual. For the last twenty years, most people who have studied this boxing have not been able to differentiate right and wrong, even if someone has been able to differentiate them, he has not been capable of putting it into practice. As for common students, most of them use their ears instead of their eyes.

So ruined is this boxing that it has become useless, this is really deplorable. I wish that the powerful members of this school would promptly and strictly clean it up, and attempt to develop it in the future. When the day of success comes, they will be held as the bosom friends of all the boxing fans. I dare to say that I understand 'Taijiquan' deeply, those who do not agree, can notify me or lay the blame on me, only the wise ones might understand. At the same time, I suppose those who have really gained something in their study of 'Taijiquan', when they read this, they will nod in agreement and cannot help laughing.