

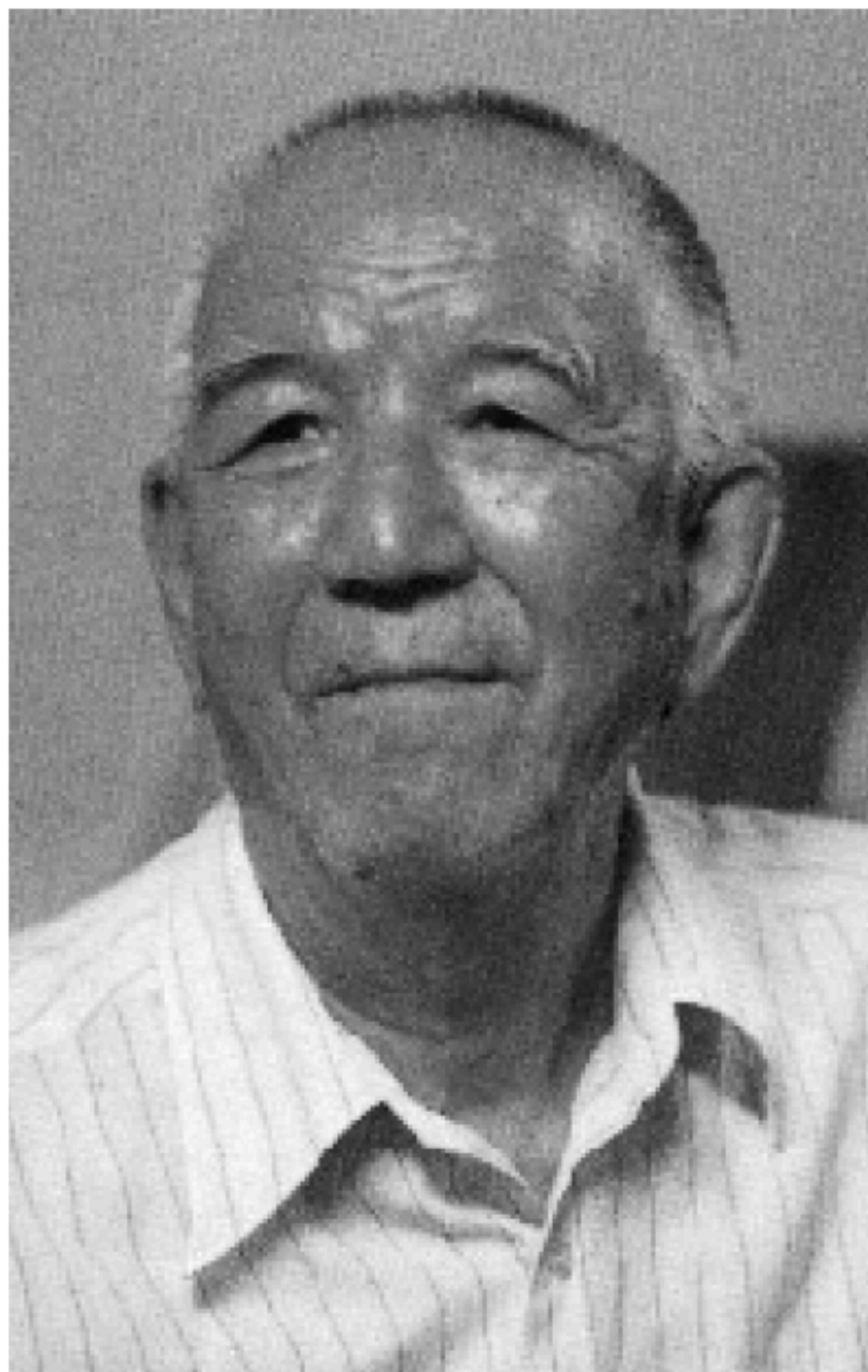


Pa Kua Chang

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**Gong Bao Tian's
Ba Gua
in Taiwan**

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***What is a Complete
Ba Gua System?***

Liu Yun Jiao's Ba Gua in America: An Interview with Jason Tsou

by Mike Hitchcock

Jason Tsou (鄒家驥 - Zou Jia Xiang) has been teaching Chinese martial arts in the Los Angeles area for 17 years. His background includes Ba Gua Zhang (八卦掌), Ba Ji Quan (八極拳), Yang and Chen Tai Ji, Shuai Jiao, Long Fist, Xing Yi Quan (形意拳), and Praying Mantis. He began his martial art training 36 years ago in Taiwan at age 11. While living in Taiwan he trained in Ba Gua Zhang from Liu Yun Jiao (劉雲樵) and also trained in Shuai Jiao (摔角 - Chinese wrestling) from Chang Dong Sheng (常東昇). His career has been highlighted in several magazine articles in the U.S., as well as in Taiwan. He has traveled to mainland China on several occasions both as an engineer and martial artist and was able to meet other Ba Gua Zhang teachers. One of these teachers was Xie Pei Qi (解佩啓 - see *Pa Kua Chang Journal* Vol. 4, No. 1 and photograph on page 13) who specialized in using Qin Na (擒拿) in his Ba Gua Zhang. Jason Tsou and his teachers have emphasized a functional approach in their teaching of martial arts.

How did you first meet Liu Yun Jiao?

In 1969-70 I was chairman of the Chang Hai Kuo Shu club. This was a kung fu club at Feng Chia College located in Taichung, in Taiwan. My praying mantis teacher, Su Yu Chang (蘇昱彰), invited Liu Yun Jiao to our club. It was through this introduction that I first started to train with him. At that time I had to commute from Taichung to Taipei two or three times a week. We practiced at his house and later on he acquired a studio. Sometimes we would practice out in the alley so we could have more room.

What were Liu Yun Jiao's teaching methods like?

Most of his students were from various martial arts backgrounds. He would teach most of his students Ba Ji or Ba Gua. He taught a few student two types of long fist, Tai Zu and Mi Zhong. When I first started with him I started doing Ba Ji. He would watch you train and advise you what to train. In my case he thought I should do Ba Gua. At first I didn't think too much of Ba Gua. Later I realized how effective it could be and began to appreciate it a great deal. We would usually train 2-3 hours a class. If you needed more leg strength he would have you do Ba Ji first. This training was very good for building up leg strength.

During the summer we would go to the mountains and train for 2-3 month periods for 8-10 hours a day. Liu Yun Jiao would have his senior students teach most of the classes and then he would work with us as much as time permitted. We learned a great deal



Ba Gua Zhang Instructor Jason Tsou

during these special camps. We had weapons training, *qi gong* (氣功), applications, and forms. The chance to train for long periods like this was very beneficial. When it was possible we would also do these special camps in the winter as well.

In both systems we had a definite learning sequence. In Ba Gua you begin learning the basic arm movements; rolling, twisting, penetrating, and wrapping. This is taught with the single arm and then double arms. It is practiced to the front, side, and rear. After that, the arm movements are taught going into and out of the low stances both to the front and rear of the forward leg. The lower stances require much more body usage. After the arm movements are learned, a body twisting exercise is taught called "fire and water." This involves lowering and raising of the body while turning. Leg training begins with "square walking" and making inside and outside turns using the "fire and water" exercise. Proper walking is introduced for circle walking with a variety of single and two-person drills.

Much of our training involves two person exercises for entering and immobilizing. These are learned on straight lines, angles and circles. At about the same time the first form, *Liang Yi* (兩儀), is also taught along with its applications. As I explained earlier, the forms for the leg and arms are taught later on along with *qi gong*.

The 64 palms or "eight mother palm changes" are then taught based on the previous learning. In this way you know exactly what you are doing in the

changes. If the changes were taught sooner it would be very difficult to do them correctly. There is really a lot going on in the changes with the arms, legs, breathing, stepping, and *qi gong*. Once the 64 palms are learned, we start pole training. This involves many different exercises, going from simple to more difficult and learning the "entering the forest" form done with nine poles. That is the basic progression of teaching in general. Other drills and exercises, or weapons, might be introduced at various times.

When Dong Hai Chuan (董海川) taught Cheng Ting Hua (程庭華), he is said to have taught him Ba Gua Zhang based on Cheng's Shuai Jiao experience. It is possible that other lineages may have adapted some of this training. With your multi-martial art training, could you compare your Ba Gua training to your Shuai Jiao training? Are there any similarities or differences, such as the methods of throwing?

From my years of experience in these two martial arts I believe that modern Shuai Jiao is taught more like a sport. In Shuai Jiao you have a special jacket. Many techniques first depend on grabbing your opponent's jacket and pulling on it to unbalance and control him for throwing. I find that in Ba Gua it's really different. You might say that there is more tripping and uprooting than grabbing and throwing. You're more like an eel or snake, using *Chan Si Jin* (纏絲勁 - Silk-Reeling energy) to find the opponent's leak, control his legs, and upset his balance. At the same time your arms lock his upper body so that you can completely immobilize him. Then you can follow through with a variety of techniques or throws.

Shuai Jiao uses what we call *Si Beng Tong* (撕崩捅). This translates as a simultaneous tearing, jerking and penetrating action, which is more of a two-way energy used to create the opening and offset the person's balance for throwing. A lot of this starts with the hands grabbing independently. Ba Gua may also appear as if it starts only with the hands, but it definitely uses the hands and the legs together in reaching the target. In this way you open both the upper and the lower gate so that you can control the entire person. I find that in Shuai Jiao the hands first create the opening and then the legs are used strictly for throwing, but not for controlling the opening as the legs do in Ba Gua. This means that Shuai Jiao uses much more upper body pulling and pushing to open the opponent's gate and gain control.

Could you comment on the similarities and differences in applying Qin Na techniques in Ba Gua Zhang as compared to other martial arts?

Of course there are some similarities in locking, but there are also a lot of differences as well. The biggest difference I see in Ba Gua is that in the process of creating the opening you wrap around the person and

lock his body as well as a joint. The way you respond is more a result of how you get in and the way your opponent moves. You always go along with him at first, but then change or divert the direction to apply the locking. In Ba Gua you completely use sticking — flowing with the other person to see how he moves and manipulate his power to your advantage. It involves a lot of sensitivity. In Ba Gua, Qin Na has a much broader definition, as it not only involves locking the joints with your hands and legs but using your whole body to completely control your opponent. For example you might take him down by pressing your knee against his knee at the correct angle, as well as locking up his upper body with your body so that he is completely immobilized. In other martial art styles, applying the lock may be more of a trained sequence of actions such as, when you do this, then I do that. It would be less sensitivity-oriented than Ba Gua Zhang and make greater use of body strength to gain control and set the locking.

Ba Gua also uses a lot of pressure points along with the Qin Na. I've heard that Gong Bao Tian (宮寶田) and Ma Gui (馬貴) were both very good at this. When I was visiting with Xie Pei Qi he really liked to use Qin Na a lot. If you asked him how a lock worked he would get up and apply it to you. I prefer this way of teaching myself. He would rather demonstrate it on you than provide lip service. Whenever you tried to grab him he would handle it most effectively by using his sensitivity



Jason Tsou practicing a "power issuing" exercise from Liu Yun Jiao's Ba Gua



Jason Tsou's Ba Gua teacher, Liu Yun Jiao

and painfully lock you.

Liu Yun Jiao was also very good with his sensitivity. He would draw you in and brush you away like brushing a piece of lint from his shirt. We call this swallowing and spitting. He really emphasized a balanced approach using the whole body as a unit in his training.

In your instruction of Ba Gua Zhang do you do any specialized palm training or leg training?

Palm training is done, but we look at the palm as meaning the entire body and not just the hand. I would rather say Ba Gua open hand than Ba Gua palm. There is even a level in which training emphasizes the fist, but this doesn't matter. I say this because Ba Gua really stresses the open hand. The reason for the open hand is that it makes it easier to apply Qin Na, do throws, or strike very quickly. It's OK to toughen the palm to a limited degree so that it's toughened for some pain, but not to any degree that would cause a loss of its sensitivity. Hard pounding could cause nerve damage. Referring back to our definition of considering the whole body as the palm, the *Chan Si Jin* power-issuing training is what is important. We

also say "eight direction palm" but it really means many directions so that you can face your opponent in any direction and open their gate or create a leak by using different angles. This is also part of our training. We have a form that stresses the palms called *Ying Shou* (鷹手), likewise there is one for the legs, this one is *Si Xiang Tut* (四象腿), or "four direction leg." This name is borrowed from the *Yi Jing* (易經). In Chinese philosophy the beginning state of creation is called *Wu Ji* (無極). Emerging from this comes *Tai Ji* (太極), or *Liang Yi* (兩儀) which is a division into two elements. This then further divides into four or *Si Xiang* (四象), and from this comes the eight or *Ba Gua* (八卦). This creation from fundamental elements also describes our training. However, this is only the philosophical part. When referring to martial arts *Si Xiang* means your limbs, the arms and legs.

In our training we begin with a form to train the waist, hips and back. This form is known as *Liang Yi Zhang*. After this form is learned, we progress to *Si Xiang Tut*, to strengthen and train the legs. *Si Xiang* level means you have to train your arms and legs. The legs are trained first because of the *qi* (氣) descending downward from the *dan tian* (丹田). The *qi* goes down

through the *Ren Mai* (任脈) to the *dan tian* and then up through the *Du Mai* (督脈) and spine. In the Ba Gua stage, or the eight, the *qi* is flowing through the entire body and all of the body is twisting. We always use the whole body in our training, but we stress the areas mentioned above, in the learning process.

Could you compare Ba Gua Zhang with Chen Tai Ji?

First, let's discuss the similarities. They are both based on *Yin* (陰) and *Yang* (陽). All *Chan Si Jin* has *yin* and *yang*. If you don't have *yin* and *yang* then you don't have *Chan Si Jin*, period! Both Tai Ji Quan and Ba Gua Zhang have *Chan Si Jin*, but in my opinion, Ba Gua has more of it. For example if you were to say Tai Ji had 80% then Ba Gua would have 100% in comparison. I don't know any other style that emphasizes *Chan Si Jin* as much as Ba Gua Zhang does. That is the big difference between these two styles, as well as their similarity.

Some of the other differences are in the way the applications, strategies, and power issuing are trained. Chen is influenced so much by Long fist. Long fist and Chen Tai Ji are both clear in their attacks and fairly well-balanced in entering either the front, back, and side gates of the opponent. In Ba Gua the side gate is used much more. They both have their own power-issuing method as well. For example I feel that Tai Ji is like a rolling ball that has continuous rolling and Ba Gua is more of a cork screw or spiral. It's the same for comparing other styles as well. They all have their own flavor of power-issuing. Ba Ji has more stomping and its power is explosive like a cannon; Praying Mantis has a springy type of energy, and Pi Gua uses a whipping type of action.

Because Liu Yun Jiao was so famous for his Ba Ji as well as his Ba Gua Zhang, did he ever seem to blend either art?

You could really see that he didn't mix them. Both martial arts were very clearly done differently. It was easy to see each one's own power and flavor. The differences were really apples to oranges and he kept them that way.

Another area of interest in the internal martial arts has been with *Dian Xue* (點穴). Some martial artists have even said that *Dian Xue* and the internal arts are inseparable and that this was the intent of their originators. Could you express your feelings on this matter?

I wouldn't say this is true only for internal martial arts. In any martial art, oriental or not, you should know the weaknesses of the human body. Knowing these areas allows one to inflict great pain and damage. If I remember correctly, Liu Yun Jiao said he went through this specialized training but he didn't go into

much detail. He didn't mention if he received this training from Gong Bao Tian. I do know that he had a lot of knowledge of *Dian Xue* from many different sources. Possibly it came from his training with Li Shu Wen (Ba Ji & Pi Gua), or Ding Zi Cheng (Six Harmony Mantis), or his exchanges with other martial artists.

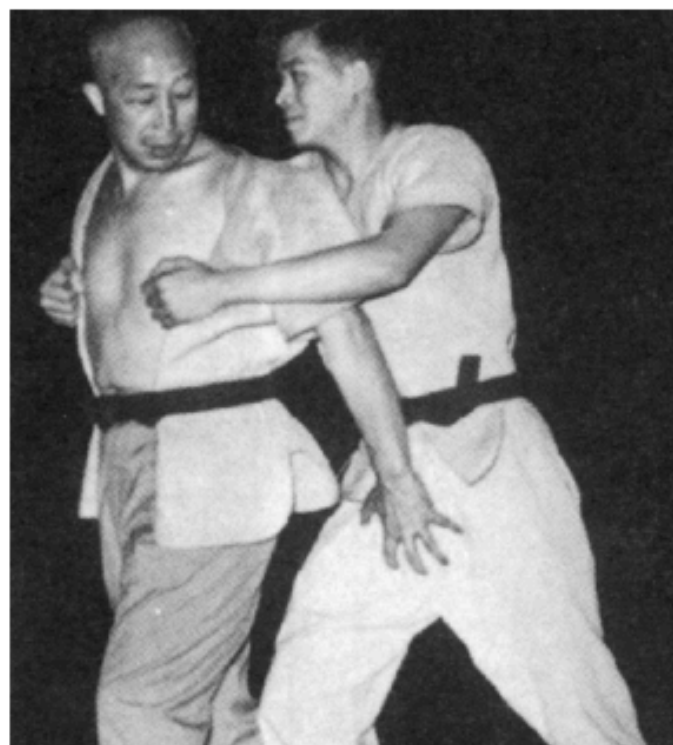
What is Ba Gua Zhang's greatest strengths in its applications? What makes it different from other arts?

It's greatest strength is in it's power-issuing method that makes use of the entire body in it's spiraling silk-reeling energy. You might say that you use this energy in every technique. The body becomes a big spiral. You just don't see this degree of *Chan Si Jin* emphasized in other martial arts.

Many martial arts make use of direct or indirect angling to gain advantage in position. In making use of this type of tactic Ba Gua is extraordinary. You have to think of it like a snake, when you attack the head the tail strikes at you, and when you grab the tail the head bites you, and even if you grab the middle the ends will attack. This is how Ba Gua works.

Are there any other areas of Ba Gua Zhang that you feel are important to mention?

Traditionally Ba Gua has always been taught very conservatively and not been shown to outsiders. Now everything is changing and you can't do that anymore



Jason Tsou's Shaul Chiao teacher was the famous Chang Dong Sheng (left)



**Jason Tsou practicing with the
"double deer horn hooks"**

or Ba Gua will become like the dinosaurs. A lot of people are amazed at Ba Gua's moves and become confused when they first try them. It's not a user-friendly martial art. A reason for this, may be the mysterious history surrounding this martial art and incomplete teaching methods being handed down. In the past people liked this system but didn't know if what they were being taught was correct or not, and many just didn't have access to it at all.

I was very lucky in Taiwan to have joined the Wu Tan association and to learn Ba Gua from Liu Yun Jiao. Also I was very lucky to have Adam Hsu enhance this training. I believe that Adam Hsu is the greatest interpreter of Liu Yun Jiao's Ba Gua Zhang system. When you open the veil and see the true face of this art, you will find that Ba Gua Zhang is very systematic and has a scientific step-by-step structure. Once you learn in this way you can really begin to understand and respect the creator of this system. I enjoy training in Ba Gua Zhang very much. I also enjoy teaching it and sharing it with others. I believe that all the people that have trained in our system agree that Ba Gua Zhang is a very approachable martial art and not a fearful beast that's dangerous and to be avoided.

There are a lot of misconceptions concerning Ba Gua Zhang, that's why it's important to look at how it's basics are taught. You should look at the techniques being taught themselves, how power issuing is trained, and how functional the applications are. You cannot do

without these important training areas. My purpose is not to just teach a form, but to teach a workable martial art that the student can confidently learn to use.

One other area of concern is mixing martial arts. In some systems they teach you all kinds of things and mix styles. I believe that you need to learn the style as it was handed down so that your students inherit it as it was intended. If you add things, it is important to let your students know that this is your own doing and not the way you learned it. Some styles like Pi Gua and Ba Ji marry very well and produce a new product, but it is the teachers responsibility to let his students know that the styles have been merged. In my opinion Pa Kua's characteristic *Chan Si Jiu* does not mix with anything else and is very uniquely it's own.

Could you talk about the weapons used in Ba Gua Zhang?

I remember Liu Yun Jiao always said that Ba Gua weapons were curved just like Ba Gua itself. Also Ba Gua is noted for concealed weapons. The most famous of the Ba Gua weapons are the double deer-horn hooks. The other weapons that master Liu taught were the double tiger-head hooks, double needles, and the saber. I know that other weapons are taught in Ba Gua by other schools, and I believe that they can be used, but it is these curved and concealed weapons that fit the system so well. The deer-horn hooks were made in small sizes that fit nicely in the wide sleeves of the person's shirt. The needles could be kept in the sleeves as well, and they fit in the open hand or in the fist with the edges sticking out. The needles could even be used as a dart when need be. Gong Bao Tian was famous for his concealed weapons and was said to have even used a pipe cleaner once in felling a bird.

Ba Gua itself is an ancient Chinese philosophy, however Ba Gua Zhang is a practical martial art. The philosophy is used to interpret some of the Ba Gua Zhang techniques or the martial art's internal training but it doesn't rely on it. When you come here to class it's not a philosophy class, the purpose is to learn martial arts. The one thing that it takes from the spirit of the *Yi Jing* and uses very well is the state of constant change. I always like the word "change" to describe Ba Gua Zhang in both it's principles as well as it's spirit.

Thank you for sharing this information with interested readers and myself. Hopefully your comments will help in providing a greater understanding and continued growth of interest in Ba Gua Zhang.

Jason Tsou recently conducted a Ba Gua seminar in Hawaii, and is presently starting new classes. Anyone interested in classes or seminars can contact him by phone or by mail. He is listed in the school directory appearing in this journal.