

Essence of Combat Science -- Wang Xiang Zhai

An Interview with Mr. Wang Xiangzhai about the Essence of Combat Science



The founding master of 'Dachengquan', Wang Xiang Yhai, who is famous in the North and South, and praised by the martial arts circles of the whole country, has recently moved to Beijing. For the exchange of knowledge and opinions among the practitioners of different martial arts, he has arranged a meeting time every Sunday afternoon from 1:00 pm to 6:00 pm, at Dayangyibin Alley, where he acts as the host, and exchanges opinions with other famous experts of boxing, carrying forward and promoting the martial spirit of our nation as his sincere wish. A reporter interviewed Mr. Wang yesterday, having the following discussion with him.

[1] Interviewer: I have always admired and respected your superb boxing skills, may I ask what is your aspiration with regard to the combat science?

Wang Xiangzhai: Being praised as the representative of 'Dachengquan' by my friends really makes me embarrassed. I left my teacher in the 33rd year of the Reign of Guang Xu of the Qing Dynasty (1907), and since then, I have travelled all around the country, and thus I have seen much and learned much about life, left my footprints on uncountable places, both north and south of the Yangtze River, met many famous masters and veteran boxers, and experienced untold hardships.

My biggest gain during these more than thirty years has been meeting many good teachers and helpful friends to compare skills and knowledge with, thus I am confident that I, as a veteran boxer, am on the right path of combat science. A few days ago, Mr. Zhang Yuheng repeatedly made some comments in newspapers. Fearing that people of different circles have not clearly understood his meaning, and thus have had some misunderstandings, I wholeheartedly want to let people know what I have in mind. My remaining years are

gradually waning away, life itself is enough, there is no room for fame and gain to occupy my mind, thus I am so anxious to, while this body of mine has not yet decayed, join forces with prominent compatriots to advocate the full development of natural instincts and martial virtue, and get rid of heresies. I do not want to be praised in vain, like those deceiving the public in order to gain fame.

[2] Interviewer: What is the basis of combat science?

Wang Xiangzhai: What is, after all, the basic principle of combat science? Different people have different answers to this question, but studying boxing routines, forms of movements, fixed techniques, and training hits and beats, all fall into the category of superficial, and although the boxing routines and forms of movements have been popular already for a long time, they are, indeed, extremely harmful to the people.

[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 Jiyuan 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. 'Tongbeiquan' is popular in northern China, especially in Beijing. The practitioners I have met were mostly out of shape, however, some were also holding a theory that was close to being right, but when checking their skills, they were very far from it. Most probably their predecessors were not like that, but the later generations have lost the essence. Although occasionally there were some who had deep and great skills in some one-sided parts of it, eventually they will have no hope of walking down the right path of combat science.

'Meihuaquan', which is also known as 'Wushizhuang', has a direct lineage that has been passed down generation by generation, especially in Henan and Sichuan provinces. Their way is different in approach but equally satisfactory in results with that of the practitioners of 'Wujisanshou' of Fuzhou, Xinghua, Quanzhou, Shantou, and other places. They also have their special and profound strong points for dealing with the enemy, but unfortunately most of them are one-sided and only very few are complete.

'Bafan', 'Mianzhang', 'Pigua', 'Baji', 'Dagongli', 'Sanhuangpao', 'Niantui', and 'Lianquan', all have their strong and weak points, most are one-sidedly inclined to hardness and a few to softness, they lack the internal skill of gathering the spirit. As for 'Dahongquan',

'Xiaohongquan', 'Tantui', 'Chuojiao', long boxing, short boxing, and the other various schools, I would rather not discuss them.

[4] Interviewer: What is your opinion on preserving the national arts?

Wang Xiangzhai: The boxing arts of our nation are in a chaotic state, thus the people cannot know what course to take. Summed up, they have abandoned the quintessence and kept only the scum, nothing more. Although the martial arts of Japan and the boxing of Western Europe are one-sided, they all have their original points. In comparison to an ordinary boxer of our nation, they are countless miles ahead. The people should be very ashamed of this. So we should clean up and carry forward the old knowledge. Except for us, who else is there left to do it? Despite my meagreness, I call for action to advocate it, only for this purpose.

[5] Interviewer: Sir, you have fixed a time to play host to the martial artists of various circles, this has proved that you are very modest and enthusiastic for the martial way, but why do you do all this?

Wang Xiangzhai: The way of learning builds up from comparison, this applies to boxing as well. When comparing skills, there is victory or defeat, but one's personality is not harmed by it, on the contrary, it may improve one's personality and increase one's morals. If everyone could inspect and learn from each other's experiences, the dispute between different schools could be avoided, and furthermore, it could stop the irresponsible talking. I wish that those who pursue the same things as I, will not take these words as empty talk, and if the prominent personage and the wise hermits of this country will be willing to make a journey to grant me instruction, they are very welcome. If you do not wish to come to visit me, please just send me a note and I will surely and wholeheartedly pay you a visit and respectfully listen to all you have to say. To sum up, I only seek to improve the boxing art, I do not bother about anything else.

[6] Interviewer: Sir, you are the founding master of 'Dachengquan', you must have some judicious views about this school, would you please tell us some details about it.

Wang Xiangzhai: The way of combat science is extremely complicated and difficult to unravel. Extremely complicated and difficult, yet it is extremely simple when its gist has been grasped. Thus when we study boxing, we should first know what we study it for. When we know that, we can surely gain something. Most people study boxing mainly for health, and then secondly for selfdefence. Good health is the basis of all the human activities, so the ways of health preservation and protecting one's body really cannot be neglected.

If one learns the method of exercise properly, then the benefits will be great, but learning it improperly can even lead to death. Only very few of the sportsmen doing strenuous exercise can enjoy longevity. The boxers who have lost their lives or injured their bodies because of improper exercise are uncountable. That kind of boxing is indeed pitiful and also laughable. Knowing the advantages and disadvantages of studying boxing, one should experience and observe the states of movement and stillness with special care while exercising, not only the external movement of the body, but also the moving state of the spirit.

One should use the spirit and mind to observe the whole body inside and outside, and whether every action is in accord with the requirements of health preservation and self-defence or not. Why move? Why be still? What are the results? What is the phenomenon in

the middle of the process? Thus perceive by intuition, and you will be approaching the truth! As for the profound and subtle essence of the Tao, one can only keep on studying and searching, otherwise it is not easily gained. Now here is a brief summation of the be-all and end-all of 'Dachengquan' to be questioned by the various fellow martial artists, so that an open discussion on combat science can be started.

First I shall talk about the stages in the study of boxing. As I said before, health preservation and self-defence are inseparable from each other, if one is lost, then abuses are created and one will enter the wrong path. First of all, one should train and foster the spirit, the temperament, and the natural instincts, and only after that start talking about bringing the fine instinctive strength of the nerves, the limbs, and the trunk into play. The first step in studying boxing is exercising the nerves as the basic training method, and intuitively perceiving the peristalsis of the whole body. The second step is training the trial of strength (shili) and the trial of voice (shisheng). The third step is self-defence. They are separately narrated below:

Basic training: in daily life, in order to gain results from training all the time, while walking, standing, sitting, and reclining, one must start the training from the pile standing (zhanzhuang) method. Arrange the posture of the whole body properly, keep the body upright, have no thoughts, strengthen the nerves in stillness, adjust the breath, warm up and nourish the muscles, let every cell activate naturally. The strength comes from the inside and reaches the outside smoothly in the whole body. Thus, one does not train the bones and the muscles, yet they get trained by themselves, one does not nourish the nerves but they get nourished by themselves, one should especially experience and observe their barely perceptible movement and activity. When one has done it for long enough time, one will know that standing brings many inexhaustible wonders. One who wants to achieve wonders in his boxing skills, should first dedicate his time to pile standing.

Trial of strength and trial of voice: after having the basic training in boxing, one's natural instincts have been strengthened. In applying them one must take strict precautions against the predominance of human desire, or else the misapplication of the illusory will arise. Sometimes, because of the predominance of desire, the natural instinctive strength becomes something that has nothing to do with exercising the natural instincts. Therefore the scholars of the past told us not to try helping the shoots grow faster by pulling them up. The way of applying the natural instincts can be suited to personal needs, but first, one must understand the moving state of strength, only then can one continue to the second phase. Trial of strength is the most important thing in learning the basis of boxing skills, with trial of strength one gains strength. The strength is gained and realised by trying it, and one will realise how to use the strength too.

First one must make the strength equal all over the body, the muscles agile, and the bones supporting the frame of the body, so that the muscles can contract, stretch, relax, and tense in harmony. Strength should come from inside and be issued outside. In movement, slow excels over quick, be relaxed rather than impatient, the movement should be slight and the spirit full. When one wants to move one will stop, when one wants to stop one will move, furthermore, when moving one cannot help but stop, when stopped, one cannot help but move.

In trial of strength, one should not have unilateral strength, furthermore, one should not have sheer strength. First of all, one should perceive by intuition whether the strength of the whole body is all-pervading or not, whether the strength can be issued out at any moment or not, and whether one can react to the atmosphere or not, furthermore, one must not let the mind break and the spirit disperse. Have light and heavy forces ready to be issued out, when one part of the body moves, the whole body moves. The strength is consistent,

resulting in nimble and heavy insubstantiality, and round and whole substantiality. Up and down, left and right, front and back, do not forget them. To sum up, what cannot lead to comfort, happiness, and gaining strength does not deserve to be called boxing.

The trial of voice is a supplement for the insufficiencies of trial of strength. All people have physiological differences due to the congenital, so everyone's body has parts difficult to connect, thus trial of voice is namely complementary internal breath work. It is also called inner breath, or brain [abdomen]-back breath.

Self-defence: namely combat. One should know that a big movement is not as good as a small movement, a small movement is not as good as stillness, one must know that only stillness is the endless movement. If the body moves, that is just an expression of immobility and lack of strength, what is called movement in stillness, is moving as if one was not moving, the movement and stillness are the basis of each other, and the wonders of their application mostly depend on the nervous system being connected, the mind leading, the big and small joints and ligaments extending and contracting mutually, the fulcrum being firm like iron, having twisting and opposite strengths, rotating around the pivot point, moving the centre in a balanced way, and issuing the explosive power together with the breath. If one can exert it properly, one has the basis of combat.

What was said above was mostly abstract, but much of its meaning cannot be described in words. If one can keep practising unceasingly, then it is naturally not difficult to realise. What is the distinction between the so called big movement and small movement, in fact, depends on individual basic skills, and whether all kinds of strengths are being gained by the body and understood by the mind or not. If one can raise the hands and move the feet with the whole body having mechanical skills everywhere, then a big movement is fine, a small movement is fine as well, and a movement that is neither big nor small is also equally fine.

If one does not have the basic mechanical ability, then no matter what the movement is like, it is all wrong. The same applies to using strength and not using strength. The movements of an ordinary person cannot have strength without constant unilateral tension that disturbs the blood circulation. Every kind of strength based on constant unilateral tension is stiff and inharmonious, and besides that, harmful to health. Having strength without constant unilateral tension is namely having strength without using strength, and when using it, one gains strength.

That is what the natural instinctive strength is like. It is like seeking all kinds of real things from the unreal, which is hardly possible to express in words. Anyway, 'Dachengquan' is beyond the external form of being good or bad, it actually depends on dealing with the mind. In a nutshell, having a fixed form and fixed techniques are all false, skills reaching the level of no-mind are getting very rare, this is what the above means.

[7] Interviewer: I think there must have been many visitors calling on you since the last time your views appeared in a newspaper. Were there any brilliant persons of unusual ability?

Wang Xiangzhai: I'm very gratified that you care and introduce me to the readers. Among the martial artists of Beijing, there still was not a single person willing to come and grant me instruction. But the numerous letters coming from all quarters of the country expressed that there are many people who hold me in favour and esteem. Moreover, there were some people from some places who came here to bargain, wishing to be appointed to the position of an instructor. Furthermore there was an incident that I can tell you about. Recently, there were very many people who were seriously researching combat science and seeking for advice. Most came to ask for

instruction by their own initiative and there were also those who were introduced by someone else. That is the only reason I advocate combat science.

I have no intention of contending with others, moreover, I scorn contention. I wish to help all the countrymen who are interested in combat science to understand it, and also hope that the combat science legislation will be reformed completely. Victory or defeat should not be taken as honour or disgrace. I wish that other boxers would not consider themselves to always be right just by studying blindly and practising recklessly. I especially hope that all boxers will become healthy pugilists. I do not wish them to become martial artists wandering from place to place making a living with their tricks. But nowadays, out of one hundred boxers, not even one has anything right at all.

Looking at them, I mostly get the feeling that it is all completely wrong. As for the boxers who rely on boxing to make their living, they just should not feel ashamed of studying again from others after they have started teaching. They should not be hard on themselves in spirit, but try hard to follow those who excel over them. They must keep in mind that they should not mislead and harm their students. Nowadays, boxers do not know where the spirit of combat science is. While they have no alternative but to make their living with it, surely they should not instruct people with mystery and violence. That way they might not commit the great error of going as far from the truth as the heaven is from the deep sea.

But then again, the weaknesses of these men are too numerous and they cannot be easily influenced over a short period of time. I only hope that they will become conscious of the truth and start to self-examine themselves bit by bit, nothing more.

[8] Interviewer: Since the martial way arose, many schools have been born, each advocating its own way so that eventually the students end up with a feeling of ignorance. What is legitimate after all?

Wang Xiangzhai: All learning in the world depends on comparison, only that way can good and bad be distinguished, otherwise every school will claim to be right, and the laymen will have difficulties distinguishing right and wrong. The correctness of boxing cannot be judged merely by the criterion of victory or defeat, it must be judged by whether it is reasonable and suitable to the human needs or not. What is reasonable is achieving comfort, gaining strength, and getting zest into one's life. If one does not achieve comfort, gain strength, and if the study does not bring zest into one's life, then it cannot be called boxing.

Whether one knows of the history of boxing or not does not matter at all, one should only see whether there is any value in regard to learning and whether it accords with the requirements of life. But speaking of the combat science of our nation, it has a centuries-old history. It began revealing its brilliance in the Warring States Period (403 BC - 221 BC), and gradually advanced and evolved. During the times of the Tang and Song dynasties, boxing started to turn into technical skills and different styles started to evolve. During the Yuan, Ming, and early Qing dynasties, the different schools were most popular.

There were very many practitioners, and only because their strength, skill, and attainments were different and some being wise and others stupid, boxing broke into different schools,

each claiming its teachings as correct. Those schools are namely what are now called the various styles. During the reigns of Kangxi and Yongzheng of the Qing dynasty (1662 - 1735), firearms were not yet prevalent. The emperors feared that the martial arts would be used against the government, therefore they wanted to destroy them for good and so that they could never recover.

Therefore they started to influence the people to think highly of the civil arts and look down upon everything martial. On one hand they advocated flying immortal swordsmen and taught the mystical on purpose, on the other hand they praised the boxing forms and fixed techniques in order to lead the martial arts astray. The middle road and the great Tao could not be asked about, and they used opera and storybooks to serve as their tools of propaganda. Furthermore they made the people who practised martial arts to be despised by the scholar-bureaucrats, so the situation went from bad to even worse. All kinds of ugly performances emerged, what a great pity and tragedy.

Luckily our combat science predecessors secretly had successors, and they succeeded in having a gleam of light survive. Although training halls were set up all over the country to advocate the martial arts during the last twenty years, the more they were advocated, the sooner they would be lost, never being able to return to the right path of combat science. In fact, learning boxing is not difficult, but because the brains of the ordinary people are tormented by the storybooks, and furthermore, because the boxers of modern times mostly do it for living, the combat science is completely at loss. Even if some people are conscious of that, they are still too ashamed to study from others, and thus have no way out.

During the last half of the year, the other boxers have come to me to compare their skills in combat. I will not point out who they were, in order to let them keep their ways of making a living. Now they mostly understand that they were wrong, but why do they not agree to come and discuss the martial arts openly, and furthermore, why are they not willing to compare their skills in combat, in order to improve their learning? On the contrary, they go against their conscience and claim others to be wrong. They do nothing but secretly create absurd tales, and still they pretend being ignorant of those tales. What do they do that for? As for the non-professional martial artists, they want to become mysterious boxers by creating these tales, being like theatregoers not well versed in drama, they are not able to do anything but throw punches at random to show off their skills.

That is really something to be despised. In case my words are considered erroneous, can the nonprofessional boxing students agree to grant me instruction? Furthermore, I wish to have small friendly tests of skills in combat, and even if the people who come to me have no martial skills at all, I will not insult them, and I will not tell about them to other people in order not to harm their business. If one cannot come to visit me to grant me instruction, then please tell me the place and the time, and I will come to pay my respects on time. If one has even a tiny strong point, I will do my utmost to give him publicity, and if one has no strong points at all, I will keep my mouth shut. If one always considers oneself as a top boxer behind closed doors, that is not worth a penny.

[9] Interviewer: I have heard your discussion pointing out the right path of our national arts. You have introduced something new, and a fresh approach in seeking the good of everyone pursuing the same things, but I think you went a bit too far in some of your critique towards 'Taijiquan'.

Wang Xiangzhai: My understanding of the Tao is still shallow, I do not dare to say that I have introduced something new, I just follow and spread the tradition of the predecessors, nothing more. There are many more things, but I feel embarrassed to say them because I

have many good friends practising 'Taiji'. Also, this boxing is less abused than most of the others, and has more sensible practitioners, thus I freely criticise it. I would have already stopped discussing about it a long time ago otherwise.

Talking of criticism, I am afraid that among the 'Taiji' practitioners, those who will never understand combat science are fearfully many, and those who are far from being learned masters are even more numerous. In my childhood I heard of the fame of the Taoist Zhang Sanfeng. Having grown up, I travelled all around the country, so I know that among all the schools of boxing, 'Taiji' has the biggest amount of practitioners. I had already been doubtful of this boxing for a long time. I heard this boxing was handed down from Mr. Zhang Sanfeng, thus I had despised Sanfeng for a long time. Later I read the collected edition of Mr. Sanfeng's teachings, and began to realise that he had advanced all along the great Tao.

He had already gone deep into the Sea of Law and profoundly realised absolute truth. However, I even more deeply believe that such boxing was not handed down from him. Actually, if it was or was not does not matter at all, because, even if one was the descendant of Sanfeng, one is not worthy to talk about his art if one has not gained its essence. I do not know who were the successors of Mr. Sanfeng, but I suppose they were inferior to Sanfeng. If they had been capable, why would they have misled others? Whether the teachings gained by the students are true or false is the key.

Moreover, nowadays the practitioners of this boxing are different from each other and the theories vary. It is all random and false! I remember that Mr. Sanfeng said: Leaving one's own body is wrong, but clinging to one's own body is much worse. 'Taijiquan' has one hundred and forty or fifty postures, is there any posture or method that is not being clung to? What are these postures for? Moreover, the spirit is firmly bound and cannot be liberated. It is indeed harmful to the freedom of the nerves, the limbs, and the trunk. Remembering how wise Mr. Sanfeng was, he should not have gone so far as to hand down 'Taijiquan' that is so improper.

Discussing the wordy content of the 'Theory of Taijiquan', the single and double weighting and even weighting, and all such profound things are also nothing more than a part of the rudiments of combat science. May I ask the famous 'Taiji' masters to examine their conscience, whether there can be even a single posture or method in accord with the theories of this boxing guide? Since they claim it to be supreme combat science, why does it not produce any results in practice? Furthermore, the practitioners of this boxing believe that they can gain good boxing skills with superstitious practises. This is even more absurd.

Even if all the methods of this boxing would excel over the others, and the skills would tower above the ordinary, there is no doubt that it would still be wrong on the spiritual side, and besides, that is not the case. Although 'Taijiquan' is practised by a huge amount of people, which has given it much publicity, the sensible people have long known that it has collapsed of itself. Perhaps there was something improper in my words, I really hope that the other martial artists will question me without any hesitation, if there is someone who can instruct me, I will sweep the pathway to welcome him.

[10] Interviewer: Sir, you criticised the shortcomings of 'Taijiquan', I certainly have to admit, but I also have many friends who have gained good health by practising this boxing, I am afraid that your critique is somewhat inappropriate.

Wang Xiangzhai: The value of combat science is not only in relaxation and other trifling achievements. One must know that combat science is persistent learning, which is a human need and one cannot learn it thoroughly in a very short time. Therefore Zhuangzi said:

Martial arts do indeed enter the Tao. They are the basis of culture and arts, they are the lifeblood of Zen and philosophy. If just a tiny result could represent boxing, then there would be no need to observe and study combat science. If one sticks to the practice of boxing in the way you said, it will produce some results. Furthermore, one should know that if one can take the time to practise boxing, do it without any method, freely and slowly perceiving by intuition, then the results will be great. I dare to say they will be much more than what you mentioned .

[11] Interviewer: The different schools of boxing are extremely numerous and their theories differ. Among my good friends there are many who practise boxing. Some of them practise according to books, but none of them has gained any results. What kind of a book should they adopt?

Wang Xiangzhai: Combat science cannot be divided into schools, and the boxing theory does not have the distinction of Chinese or foreign, and new or old. Do nothing but examine whether it is right or wrong, and suitable or unsuitable, that is enough. At large, the numerous schools of our society, generally take the approach of forms and techniques to learn boxing. One must know that this kind practice is just forgery conducted by the later generations, it is not the original essence of combat science. Even though a few people by chance realise some side-mechanics and one-sided techniques, they have not, however, left the methods and forms after all, so it is without avail in the end.

As for the writers of the martial arts guide books, they cannot exceed this boundary either. Although this doctrine is very easy to study, it is still not as simple as following others like sheep. Sometimes those who are taught by a famous master who passed the knowledge orally and from the heart, still cannot differentiate between right and wrong after dozens of years. How could these writings then be of any use? In any kind of learning, one should first understand the fundamental principle, and bit by bit intuitively perceive the skills, starting from the basics. In addition to that, one should ponder carefully, making a clear distinction between right and wrong, and proving one's perceptions by experimenting in many ways. Only then can one move on to study those technical skills.

One should avoid training in front of a mirror, because this way one can easily become similar in form but untrue in spirit. Those training according to books are really the blind being led by the blind. Then again, by reading a book one can collect the crystallization of all sorts of theories, not paying any attention to the postures and form. According to the survey of my thirty years of teaching, this branch of learning is extremely difficult yet also extremely easy. A gifted student, in less than one hundred days of exercise, has the hope to become a great learned master, but among one hundred students there is not even one or two of them, and in most cases the talented sagacious people lack honesty and tolerance, some of them are even shams and cheaters.

Therefore most are abandoned halfway by their teachers, this is also a pity! As for the common students of our society, their difficulties are really lamentable. Most people always believe their ears instead of their eyes. The two words, fame and fact, cannot be mentioned in the same sentence. Even though the amount of boxers in the world is uncountable, those who have gained the essence are rare like a unicorn's horn. All of those who have gained the essence are very different from the ordinary people in character. They cannot be enticed by fame or attracted by benefit, and they would never associate with the hypocrites! Finding a master is very difficult indeed.

Even if you meet a wise master how can you differentiate whether he is wise or not, and then he is not necessarily willing to teach you. Even if he agrees to teach you, he does not necessarily have a good method of teaching. Be it that he has a good teaching method, it is still not certain that one can realise the essence of his teachings. There exist a variety of difficulties that an inexperienced person cannot know. Then again, nowadays it is easier to study than before, because the science is flourishing. It helps very much in understanding the principles of combat science, but still, combat science cannot be limited to this.

If it is explained with the hierarchy of science and local anatomy, then it should be the one and the only way and phase of studying. But there are still many principles in our combat science that cannot be explained, but after some years they might be proved by science. Learning knows no limits, perhaps there are no means to ever explain it, this cannot be known. Summed up, if discussed under the conditions and knowledge of today, one should add a scientific method to the spirit of combat science, then it will not be difficult to solve the problems in combat science.

[12] Interviewer: Repeatedly in their comments, the readers did not deny your theory, but they felt uneasy studying without forms and routines, especially the beginners!

Wang Xiangzhai: The human body has all kinds of functions; no wise man can exhaust them all even if practising all his life. What is the reason to abandon the essence and study the scum? The more one studies the methods of forms and routines the farther one will be from the truth. That is like binding the feet of the women, the more profound one's skill is, the more difficult it is to extend the feet, therefore the beginners advance much faster than the veterans. This argument has been proved by many irrefutable examples. The theory created by the later generations where a certain posture breeds a certain strength, and a certain method overcomes a certain boxing skill is real magniloquence resulting in deceiving the people. I am afraid that the one who claims such things has no understanding of boxing at all.

[13] Interviewer: What you said, Sir, is very right, and the martial arts are indeed at a loss. Would you teach everybody a simple and convenient way to succeed, that people could easily produce results with?

Wang Xiangzhai: A general idea of health preservation was already outlined above. If one is willing to do as advised, then one has already advanced halfway on the path of health preservation. If one wants to study the profound skills of combat, then one must also go through that, but if one is not an extremely foolish person or great sage, one will not be willing to do so. If one is a genius or has a character close to that of the sages, then there is no need to study all those methods. Also the methods of combat have pile standing (zhanzhuang) and trial of strength (shili) as the basis. I already narrated their general ideas above. The methods of trial of strength are too numerous, and besides, after all kinds of strengths are gained by the body, one should not think that the way of combat has been completed.

At that point one has just begun to have the possibility of studying combat. For example, how to gain the mastery of "interaction of relaxation and tension never not being correct, and the interaction of void and solid coming to equilibrium" is another problem. Anyway, after finding a teacher, the profundity or shallowness of one's attainments indeed depend on one's individual talent, strength, and skill, and whether one can grasp the right timing to be able to launch an attack at any moment, but without much experience in actual combat, it is hardly possible to gain it.

[14] Interviewer: I have heard many martial artists saying: "If you do not use strength, how can you increase it? None of the ancient and modern masters neglected the enriching of the dantian qi, and only because of that, could they be successful."

Wang Xiangzhai: The theory of using strength is the talk of laymen. There are also those who speciously support the theory of not using strength, but do not know what it means after all. One must know that not to use strength is correct, but not to use the mind is incorrect. If one uses strength then the internal organs die, the body becomes ineffective, stiff, stupid, and easy to be taken advantage of by others. In other words, it is just a disguised form of passive resistance. The idea of resisting is produced by the fear of being hit by the adversary, but in this way one is completely ignorant of the fact that the spirit has already accepted to be hit. How could one then not get hit by the adversary?

Therefore, using strength is a great taboo in combat science. As for the theory of the dantian qi, from the theoretical point of view, field tests, and my own perception from experience and observation, this theory does not seem proper. Within the abdomen there are the intestines, the stomach, and the liver, there is no place to fill with the qi. As for the functions of force, they are all effects of the opposite power, the explosive power, and the power of the universe combined, and exerted together with breath that makes the body bulge and undulate, open and close, and the body and spirit being integrated with the atmosphere in one's mind.

That has nothing to do with what the people call the qi of qigong. They always take a potbelly as dantian qi, that is just extremely wrong. One must know that when exerted, the strength must be issued evenly and completely. In order to be entirely free from worry and to gain strength, one should also be at leisure and natural, that is just being reasonable. The students of modern times do not understand this truth, they spend dozens of years working hard, and instead of gaining lively bodies and minds from the training, they become machines. Is that not a great pity!

[15] Interviewer: Although your critique is appropriate, it is still always the same combat arena, and if you, in the long run, accidentally misstep in one of the challenge fights, then what?

Wang Xiangzhai: How would I dare to give an open challenge, I do not even dare to act as the ringleader for challenge. I just wish that my fellow boxers would be willing to advocate, discuss, and investigate combat science like this, then it would not be difficult to carry it forward in the future. However, if nobody does this, I wish to start from myself, with nothing else other than advising the others with earnest words and good intentions, and often injecting cardiotoxic shots into the arms of the other boxers of our country in order to little by little cure their illness of paralysis, I offer a few commonplace remarks by way of introduction so that others may come up with valuable opinions. Even if my body be full of cuts and bruises, my utmost wish will come true if combat science can be promoted.

[16] Interviewer: People generally accepted your talks, but there were still some who were liberal in their condemnation of you.

Wang Xiangzhai: Those who understand me are wise people, those who condemn me should sit alone in the still of night to listen to their hearts. Anyhow, let them laugh who will, I will not mind. If the true essence of combat science will prosper again, how could personal praise or blame make any difference?

[17] Interviewer: How can the ordinary people dare to disagree with your knowledge and virtue?

Wang Xiangzhai: What you said is right, I am very ashamed, but our countrymen have already become socially reserved. Honesty and prudence are really the basis of the self-cultivation of learning and morals, in other words: being solid inside and void outside, or firm outside and nimble inside. That is just the same principle as that of Laozi, "The desireless one can see the essence, while the desiring one only sees its manifestation." But somehow it is made use of by the people. It has already become the talisman of those who make their living by deceiving others. Lies in the society are also created by such people.

I have travelled all around the country for almost forty years, often feeling that there is only the art of "opera acting" that does not put up with the society. Opera does not allow the laymen to assume positions in it either, but there are many styles of opera which all differ, I do not know all of them. As for what is called honesty and prudence toward others, I think one should act according to the other party, there should not be any unreasonable politeness. Like the sages of the past, respectfully serve others and be honest and sincere, overcome your desires and show love to others.

I am very glad to comply with that as the teachings of the books of good intercourse and treating each other with respect cannot be seen nowadays. I do not deserve praise for my learning and morals. In studying morals I only put myself under the patronage of the important people. What is called Tao is the truth that is all pervading and complex, and the only proper course to take. In other words, is it reasonable or unreasonable? Reasonable is namely the Tao and unreasonable is not the Tao.

It is not a mystical and strange thing, it is not the poor superstitious chapters and verses of the vulgar and pedantic literati either. It has especially nothing to do with the eccentric people, who pretend insaneness, calling that the doctrine of Buddhism and Taoism in order to look different, they cannot even dream about the gate to the great Tao. If one does not understand the society, I have no choice but to retain talking about other things with him.

[18] Interviewer: You said that there are still many places in opera where the essence has not been lost, which are far ahead of the average schools of boxing. I do not understand on what ground you can say that, I feel that this comment is rather improper.

Wang Xiangzhai: Opera was originally meant to subsidy the shortcomings of education, all of its martial performances originated from the way of boxing. In boxing there was originally the qiba (pulling the body) exercise, which is one of the skills of shili (trial of strength). Qiba is seeking the pivoting strength of the barycentres of the vertex and the two feet, making the whole body extend equally and completely, becoming one with the universe, therefore named qiba exercise.

In opera it is mistakenly called "rising of the domination", but watching their postures and the meaning of their theories, although they are not proper, they are not far from that either, thus we know that it has some essence. As for all kinds of postures which try to please the eye and win people's adoration, they are all forged. Of the postures of today's boxers I have not seen a single one that would have gained equilibrium, even the old veterans and young ?lites turn into imitating the untruthful and childish ones, and some of them cannot even succeed in that, how could they ever see the profundity of the martial way?

[19] Interviewer: I suppose that recently there was no lack of people asking for advice. What is your sentiment, Sir?

Wang Xiangzhai: Although there were many people from all circles who came to see me these days, they were all just curious people and what they talked about was not related to combat science. As for the visitor pursuing the same way, none of them was the kind of person I expected.

[20] Interviewer: What did you expect then?

Wang Xiangzhai: Although I am incompetent, I really expected the visitors to test me with difficult questions to the best of their abilities. To discuss what is reasonable in combat science and its important connection with life, and to pay attention to seeking the true spirit of the martial way. Although combat is just a trifling skill, without it the results cannot be proved, therefore I am also ready to have friendly comparisons of skills in combat. These days there were many small things, thus I could not personally meet all the visitors one by one. I am ashamed of that, and thus from now on, I plan to also fix reception times for Wednesdays and Fridays, from three o'clock to six o'clock .

[21] Interviewer: What do your fellow boxers think of that?

Wang Xiangzhai: In order to research the true essence of combat science in its entirety, I already cling to disregarding derision and taunts, and will never promote the supernatural. I always support altruism, I do not worry about there being no one coming to grant me instruction or asking for advice. What I worry about is that the famous masters do not inspect and learn from each other and discuss the problems. I fear it is hardly possible to gain the hope of combat science succeeding. Anyway, I hope that combat science will advance, polish up the goal of the martial way of our society, and wash off the deep rooted bad habits. I am not concerned about other things.

[22] Interviewer: The conversation with you that was published in a newspaper last time has caused quite a stir. I suppose that there was no lack of visitors. Were there any pursuing the same way as you?

Wang Xiangzhai: I was granted the favour of not being abandoned by the society, there was indeed no lack of visitors, but most of them came to learn from me, there were only two gentlemen pursuing the same way, Lu Zhijie and Shao Zefen from Fengtai, who wanted to do push-hands (tuishou), which is nothing more than what the experts call "listening to strength". There were no others, furthermore no one agreed to enter into combat. The method of push-hands is only a onesided part of the way of boxing, it is not what I welcome.

As for the famous masters in Beijing , there was not a single person willing to come to instruct me, that is really not what I expected. I do not understand why the other boxers do not want to contact me. What I have always respected are the martial morals, therefore courtesy must come first, so there are also some limits, namely, the old people I modestly decline, the modest and gentle people modestly decline, the incompetent people I modestly decline.

If you do not believe in my words, please ask those who came to visit me and you will know. When Mr. Lu visited me for the first time, we did a little push-hands and he took my skill only as such, and thus was not convinced. Later he started to visit frequently and started to

realise that there was a huge difference between our skills, and now he has become a faithful disciple of mine.

[23] Interviewer: How many people are there among our martial arts predecessors that you admire?

Wang Xiangzhai: Examining the boxing predecessors of the last one hundred years, besides Dong Haichuan, Che Yizhai, and Guo Yunshen, these three masters, all the others are of minor importance, but our country is huge and has a big population, there are still many people pursuing the martial way who I have not met. I do not dare to make comments at random .

[24] Interviewer: The people often mention Yang Luchan, how was his learning?

Wang Xiangzhai: Mr. Luchan was a combat science predecessor as well, he was skilled in 'Taiji', and now most people follow his lineage. What I talk about has to be observed from every aspect, Luchan only achieved a part of the Tao, even Mr. Wang Zongyue of the Ming dynasty was not a complete expert. Mr. Zongyue obtained the one-sided part of push-hands with both hands, originating from General Yue Fei, changed the three fists into thirteen postures, and named it 'Taiji'.

There is no way to do textual research on what was handed down from Zhang Sanfeng and the people would just draw wrong conclusions from it. As for the one hundred and forty or fifty postures, I have no idea where they originated from. But talking of the practice of this boxing, it does not only abuse the limbs and the trunk, but also does infinite harm to the spirit, it is still very far from the art of actual combat, they have nothing in common with each other.

[25] Interviewer: You have frequently published commentary on boxing in the newspapers, how have others pursuing the same path reacted to that? Have you ever heard?

Wang Xiangzhai: The sensible people pursuing the same path accepted it without an exception. As for the conservative people who cannot differentiate between right and wrong, I have no choice but to let them have their own way. Even if one can understand, it is still not easy to put it into practice, and it is even more difficult for those who cannot differentiate between right or wrong at all. However, the ordinary boxers still take exercising the body as the catchword and stop talking about combat. Watching that, one can also know that the way of combat, compared to health preservation, is a very trifling thing.

The way of health preservation relies on concentrating one's spirit and nourishing one's nature. The mind becomes empty and unified; that is called the art of one's body and mind, life and nature. With this movement and that posture, springing forward and jumping backward, it is really difficult to even dream about entering the gate of health preservation. In fact health preservation is simple and easy.

True human nature loves naturalness and unrestricted free movement, the whole offshoot of the natural instincts are the basis of that. Every morning in the fresh air, without any method, just let the joints of the whole body be slightly bent, consider the sky, move slowly and freely, experience and observe the intestinal qi and the flow of blood. At the same time, intuitively perceive the external void and nimble opposing strength. This is called the spirit resembles as if it was swimming.

The spirit and the body are comfortable and natural, not only free and unrestricted, but also gradually realising the echo of nature. After a long time of training, the instincts unveil and the rays of the spirit will shine, one will have gained the basis of combat even without having thought of them. If one always sticks to mechanical movement, plays around with a staff and performs with a spear seeking beauty, taking that as the glory of being good in martial arts, then one does not know that if a man of insight sees that, he will feel sick for ten days. That is terrible, such a person cannot comprehend boxing for life.

[26] Interviewer: Your purpose is studying truth and developing the martial arts, why were there so few visitors? Can you think of a reason?

Wang Xiangzhai: It is very difficult to find an answer for this. According to my conjecture, in the martial arts circles of our country there are no doubt many wise ones, but the unworthy ones are especially numerous. Everyone studying a certain style of martial arts, assiduously practises for many years and flatters oneself by claiming that one alone has accomplished the profound skills, and then calls oneself the successor of that school. This way one will even be respected by the society, so one can solve the problem of making a living at the same time. Once such people are told to abandon all their learning and start studying from the beginning, it is really intolerable for them.

Perhaps their way of making a living would also be affected by that, thus they consider their personal advantages and disadvantages, and notice that the disadvantages would be huge, therefore it is no wonder that the visitors were so sparse. The most fortunate thing in the end is that there are some ignorant people, who do not dare to measure or discuss right and wrong, and thus just make gossip at random, making irresponsible remarks in order to hide their weak points. The people in our society trust them and the people who have been deceived by them are really numerous, this is a great pity. If we do not wipe out this obstacle, the martial arts of our country will hardly have any hope of a quiet and great progress.

[27] Interviewer: Sir, you are the forerunner in the martial arts, and you are holding the decision in your hands. Furthermore, I hope you will keep on working with perseverance, then the martial arts will surely have no difficulties in seeing the days of glory and progress.

Wang Xiangzhai: Your words touch me deeply, naturally I shall do my utmost. Success or failure, praise or blame, I do not dare to care for them. There is only one goal, namely to solve the question of how combat science can advance. Therefore I tell other boxers here: originally combat was just a minor skill, but the ordinary people mostly judge one's boxing skills by the relative superiority or inferiority in combat, therefore there are two research methods.

If one is willing to research the suitability of each action, then I immensely welcome him. If one wants to enter into combat or do push-hands, they are both fine as well. The scope of researching combat science is extensive. If the amount of visitors will increase, then there will be no dilemma.

If the visitor has even tiny strong points, I will certainly do my utmost to blazon forth and praise him. If he has no strong points at all, I will certainly say nothing, because even talking cannot make him understand. I really hope that the visitors will test me with difficult questions to the best of their abilities, in order to compare experiences with each other, aiming at the progress of combat science, everyone pursuing the same way with me, all should shoulder the duty to develop combat science.

This important prospect should definitely not be weakened because of personal reasons, if it can really benefit the general interest. Even if one has to suffer any personal sacrifices, one should still give up something small to achieve something great. I maintain this determination, if combat science can thereby progress, it would not only be an individual gain, but also the whole world and our descendants would benefit greatly.

The reporter and Mr. Wang finished their conversation, and because it was already late, they bid farewell to each other and left. In the 1940's 'Yiquan' was known as 'Dachengquan'. Later Mr. Wang Xiangzhai dropped the name 'Dachengquan' and asked his students to return to the old name as well. All of Mr. Wang's top students did that, but some people still kept using the name 'Dachengquan'. Thus 'Yiquan' and 'Dachengquan' are just two names for one art.

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