

WANG XIANGZHAI
ESSENCE OF
COMBAT SCIENCE

Translated from Chinese by Andrzej Kalisz



YIQUAN ACADEMY 2004

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At beginning of 1940s Wang Xiangzhai was interviewed several times by reporters of Beijing newspapers. Those interviews in collected form were appended to many books about yiquan published in China. Here we provide English translation of this collection.
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Founder of dachengquan – Wang Xiangzhai, is well known in the north and in the south, praised by martial artists from all over China. Lately he moved to Beijing. He issued statement that he will wait to meet guest every Sunday afternoon from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. in Dayangyibing hutong, in order to exchange opinions and knowledge with other martial artists, to promote and develop combat science. Our reporter visited him yesterday.

Reporter

You have great abilities. I admire you. Could I ask about your aspirations in combat science?

Wang Xiangzhai

I feel ashamed when friends introduce me as a great representative of dachengquan. Since I left my teacher in 33rd year of reign of emperor Guangxu (1907), I traveled all over country, left footprints in many places, experienced many hardships and met many famous masters. Most valuable was meeting teachers and friends, with whom I could compare skill and improve it, so if we are talking about combat science I can say that I’m “an old horse which knows way back home”. Lately Zhang Yuheng wrote several articles about me. Because I’m afraid that it could cause some misunderstandings, I would like to explain my intentions. I’m getting older, I’m not thinking about fame, but when I still can, I would like to work together with others to promote natural human potential and virtues of a warrior, to eliminate wrong teachings of those who deceive themselves and deceive others. I’m not doing this to become famous.

Reporter

What is essence of combat science?

Wang Xiangzhai

There are different opinions about what is the essence of combat science. But I think that training of forms, focusing on techniques, hitting hard objects, it is all very superficial.

Training of forms has been popular for long time, but actually it is something harmful, leading people astray.

Reporter

Xingyi, Taiji, Bagua and Tongbei are internal family of martial arts. What can you say about them?

Wang Xiangzhai

People often say that xingyi, taiji, bagua and tongbei are belonging to internal family. I have no idea how this division was created, there is no point in discussing it. But older masters were saying this, so those concepts are commonly used.

Xingyiquan, xinyiba and liuhebu of Henan province belong to one family of martial art. Li Daidong (known as old Dai) was descendant of Li Zhihe. Li Zhihe was Dai Longbang's teacher. Although system of Yuan family from Jiyuan has different name, actually it comes from Li. Although Dai changed name xinyi to xingyi, original meaning didn't change. The essence of this art is that each action is appropriate.

You should know that in original xingyiquan there were not 12 forms, but essence of 12 forms should be contained in body. There was not theory of 5 elements being born from each other or destroying each other. Five elements meant five kinds of force. It was not about techniques or forms. I remember as my teacher was saying that iron relates to force contained in tendons and bones, it means hardness of iron or stone, perception of force which could break and cut iron plates. Tree means crooked surfaces and supporting, like a standing tree. Water means fluid movement, like snake, like dragon, water is permeating everywhere. In case of fire, force is like gunpowder, hands are like bullets, in moment of contact opponent's body is "burned". Earth – force is solid, mighty, well supported, full and round, as if heaven and earth combined into one power. Five elements merge into one. It has nothing to do with concepts that such technique defeats another technique, as many people are saying nowadays. If you see something with eyes, then consider this and make decision, and then do the action to counter opponent's move, you will be defeated.

Baguazhang was originally called chuanzhang. When I was a child, I had opportunity to meet Cheng Tinghua. I remember that he was like a dragon flying in air, his changes in movement were innumerable and unpredictable. It is difficult to reach this level. If you think about Dong

Haichuan, it is difficult to imagine his skill. Liu Fengchun is my good friend. His basics are deep, but he lacks higher achievement. But those who practice 64 palm methods and 72 kicks are far behind him. I hope that baguazhang practitioners will concentrate on studying double and single palm change, focus on experiencing each movement, working hard and studying theory. If they do this for long time, many can approach essence.

Yang Shaohou and Yang Chengfu brothers were inheritors of taijiquan. They were my friends. So I know that this art contains things reasonable from point of view of mechanics. But among a hundred practitioners not more than one can understand the demands of this art. Even if someone has some skill, it is not complete, because the basic training of practical experiencing was lost long time ago. There is lack of proper force in lower part of body. Originally there were 3 methods, known as “old three cuts”. Wang Zongyue changed them into “thirteen postures”. Later there appeared 140, 150 sequences. This is why the true essence was lost.

If talking about health aspect, spirit is restricted, there is lack of freedom and comfort. If talking about combat, use of body is restricted, body which could be naturally used in innumerable ways is changed into something mechanical. In result work of nervous system is disturbed and practice is waste of time.

Their way of practice: fist here, palm there, kick to the left, kick to the right, it is funny and pathetic. If talking about using in combat, if opponent has at least some little skill, it is completely useless. Even the famous experts of taijiquan can use their skill only when opponent is stiff and inert. These deviations are so big, that taijiquan became as descriptions of movements from chess manual.

In last 20 years most of taijiquan practitioners are not able to see what is valuable and what is not. Even if some know something, they don't possess practical skill. And students believe some hearsay instead of judging by what they can see themselves. So this art is lost. It's a pity. But I still hope that there will be some representatives of taijiquan who will have enough courage to take fast and sharp action, so the future could be different. If they succeed, I will see them as friends with whom you listen to the same music.

As for taijiquan, I dare to say that my knowledge is deep. If someone doesn't agree, he may criticize me, he may blame me. Those who understand combat science will forgive me my harsh words. I think that those who achieved something in taijiquan, when they learn about what I said, will nod silently, and smile will disappear from their faces.

Tongbeiquan is popular in northern China, especially in Beijing. Most representatives whom I met didn't show anything special, but there are some who have theories close to the essence of combat science. But when I checked their skill, it turned out to be far from the theory. I suppose that it was different before, but then transmission was lost. Although sometimes you meet people who have skill, but it is one sided. It will be difficult for them to enter proper path of combat science.

Meihuaquan, a.k.a. wushizhuang – this system was transmitted through generations and is popular in Henan and Sichuan provinces. Wujisanshou which is practiced in Fuzhou, Xinghua, Quanzhou and Shantou is similar, although there are some differences. As for combat, many representatives have deep specific skills. But there are too many superficial things and not enough essence.

Bafan, mianzhang, pigua, baji, dagongli, sanhuanpao, niantui, lianquan all have their advantages and shortcomings, usually there is too much hardness, not enough softness, there is lack of skill related to focus of mind, spirit.

As for dahongquan, xiaohongquan, tantui, chuojiao, I know their advantages and shortcomings. I don't even want to discuss this.

Reporter

What is your view on preservation of guoshu?

Wang Xiangzhai

Martial art in China is in situation of chaos. People don't know which path they should follow. Generally we can say, that essence is neglected and superficial is stressed. Japanese judo and European boxing, although they are not perfect, they have their advantages. If you compare typical martial artists of our country with them, you will see that we are far behind. It's such a shame! We must put old teachings in order, improve them and develop. If we don't do this, nobody will do it for us. Although I cannot do much myself, I'm calling everybody to work together. This is the goal of my criticism.

Reporter

You arranged time for meeting martial artists. We can see that you are modest and have passion for the development of combat science. What can you say about this?

Wang Xiangzhai

Progress in science needs comparing. It's the same with combat science. When you compare there is winning and being defeated. But being defeated shouldn't be seen as a lost, but rather as opportunity for improvement and development. If such contacts were regular, we could avoid sectism, arguing and boastfulness. I hope that those who have similar intentions will come to share their knowledge. If someone doesn't want to come, he can send me a letter, and I will go to visit him and listen to what he has to say. Summarizing, I only want to help developing combat science, I have no other intention.

Reporter

You are a famous master of dachengquan. What can you say about this martial art.?

Wang Xiangzhai

When we start talking about combat science, a lot of thoughts appear, it is difficult to explain everything. But when you understand main principles, everything becomes simple. While learning martial art, you should think about why you are learning it. If you are clear about this, it is easy to achieve results. In most cases it is about health and self defense. Health is basis for all activities of human beings. So you shouldn't neglect the issue of cultivating health. When you learn in proper way, benefits are great, but if methods are wrong, it could even cause death. Among those whose training is based on fierce movements not many achieve longevity. There are numerous cases of people who became cripple because of improper training. Such martial art is cause for laugh and for sadness at the same time. Knowing about benefits and problems related to practicing martial art, you should concentrate on observing movement and non-movement. Movement doesn't mean only changes of outside form. You should observe if each change, each movement outside and inside conform with principles of training for health and self defense. Why moving? Why not moving? What is result? What happens in the process. Experiencing it, you can approach the essence. As for subtle and refined issues, you should study and ponder them all the time, otherwise it will be difficult to achieve anything.

I will shortly describe dachengquan, so martial artists can discuss it. First I say about stages of study. Practice for health and practice for self defense are one thing and should not be separated. If one part is lost, it will create deviations and lead astray.

First you should start from mind training, to reveal and develop natural human ability of using nervous system and body. First step in learning martial art is mind training as basis, experiencing subtle movements of body. Second step is shi li – testing force and shi sheng – testing voice. Third step is self defense. I will explain them one by one.

1. Basic training

You should start from zhuangfa – postural exercises. You can fit them freely into everyday life, practicing anywhere and anytime, standing, walking, sitting or lying on bed. You should assume the posture, body should be straight, there should not be any distracting thoughts, in the state of non-movement and calmness nervous system is positively stimulated, breath becomes even and calm, muscles are mildly stimulated, each cell is naturally taking part in movement, force is everywhere inside and outside. In this way, although you don't use typical form of training, bones and muscles are trained, mind is trained naturally too. You only need to observe all the subtle changes. If you practice for longer time, this seemingly simple standing will bring incredible results and satisfaction. If you want to learn essence of combat science, you should start from zhan zhuang.

2. Testing force and testing voice

After you practice basic exercises for some time, your natural potential develops. If talking about using it, you shouldn't follow illusory thinking. Very often, because illusory thinking, practice changes into something opposite to what I'm talking about. Pulling sprouts up will not make the plant grow faster. The way of using can be adjusted according to needs. But you should understand the state of force in movement. Only then you can move further. If talking about introduction to combat science, shi li is most important method. Ability of using force is developed thanks to shi li. By testing you get to know force. Thanks to knowing you can efficiently use it. First you should make sure that the feeling of force is even in whole body, that your body feels agile, bones are supporting posture. This way you can use mutually related contractions and stretches, relax and tension. Force from inside is issued outside. It is better to do movements slowly than fast, in calm than in haste. The more subtle movement, the more harmonious spirit. You want to move, but you stop, you want to stop, but you move. When you move it's like you cannot help stopping, when you stop it's like you cannot help

moving. In shi li there shouldn't be partial, superficial force, especially there shouldn't be unbalanced one directional force. You should observe if the whole body force is round, full or not, if it is possible issuing force at any moment, if there is feeling of mutual reaction between body and surrounding air. Intention shouldn't be broken, spirit shouldn't be dispersed. Light and heavy are ready to be used. If one moves, whole body follows it. Force should be unified, swift and solid at the same time, round and full. There shouldn't be anything forgotten or lost on any side. Summarizing, if someone has not achieved satisfactory state of comfortable force, we don't call it combat science.

Shi sheng – testing voice serves supplementing insufficiencies in shi li. Each person is naturally different and meeting different difficulties in study. Shi sheng should supplement skill by using breathing. It is also called internal breathing or back abdominal breathing.

3. Self defense

Self defense is combat skills. You should know that big movement is not as good as small movement, small movement is not as good as non-movement. You should know that in non-movement the never ceasing movement is born. Movement which has obvious form is expression of lack of proper force. So called movement in non-movement is a movement as if there was no movement. Movement and non-movement have root in each other. The wonderfulness of using it is in using mind, intention leading, elastic use of joints working, stretching and contracting, strong point of support, spiral force, movement around pivot, moving center of weight in stable way, using elastic force of breathing. If someone can use it, he has basis for combat.

What I'm saying sounds abstractive. But there are many things which it is difficult to express with words. If someone practices diligently, he will achieve understanding. Differentiating between big and small movement is actually depending on mastering basics, whether you achieved practical perception of various kinds of force. If you master basics of using force of whole body, movement can be big or small, it doesn't matter if it is big or small. When basics are not mastered, everything is wrong. It is the same with so called using or not using force. Usually people are not able to use force without disturbing blood flow. Force which is related to disturbance of blood flow is stiff, not harmonious, it is not good for health. If you can use force without disturbing blood flow, there is not effort, but there is force when you need to use it, this is natural force. It is like seeking miraculous but real things, starting from empty imaginations. It is difficult to express it in words. Summarizing, dachengquan is not based on beauty of outside form, but on using mind. Shortly, when there is form, this is something not

ripe. Only when technique achieves level of unconscious using, miraculous appears. This is what I'm talking about.

Reporter

I suppose that after interview with you was published many people visited you. Where there some famous martial artists among them?

Wang Xiangzhai

I'm grateful for introducing me to readers. As for famous martial artists from Beijing, no one visited me so far. I received many letters from various parts of China, from people who expressed similar views. There came some people who offered me a job as instructor. Lately in capital city there are people seriously interested in learning combat science and they come to me. Some come on their own account, others are introduced. Because there are people interested in it, I'm promoting combat science. I don't want to argue or compete with anyone. I only want to help people to understand combat science better. I hope that combat science will be improved, that people will not see wining or being defeated as glory or humiliation. I hope that some people will not think that they are always right, while actually they only follow something which makes no sense. I hope that martial art teachers will become true researchers, not impostors. Unfortunately today not even one among one hundred is a true master. In most cases when I watch them, I see that what they do makes no sense. As for those who teach to make living, they shouldn't be ashamed to learn from others, from those who are better from them. They should remember not to mislead their students.

Today martial artists don't understand the essence of combat science. They think about nothing more than only making a living. They shouldn't talk about martial art as something mysterious and secret, as it results in popularization of deviations. But in most cases their knowledge and understanding is limited, so it is difficult to change situation in short time. I just hope that they will gradually be able to understand what I'm talking about.

Reporter

When martial art was originated? There are so many schools. Representatives of each of them say that their way is true. In such situation students don't know who is right. What is proper?

Wang Xiangzhai

Science is based on comparing and analysis what is better and what is worse. Otherwise anyone could say that his way is right, and laymen will not be able tell truth from false. But if we are talking about combat science, its value should not be based only on criteria of winning or being defeated. We should consider if it is reasonable, if it conforms with needs of human beings. By reasonable I mean, that if science doesn't lead to achieving natural, comfortable feeling of force and satisfaction from study, I wouldn't call it proper combat science.

Knowing or not history of martial art is not so important. We should put attention to its value from point of view of science, of conforming to the needs of human beings.

It is said that martial art has very long history in China. In Warring States period there appeared form of competition, where competitors were fighting with horns attached to their heads. Martial art was gradually changing and developing. During Tang dynasty there were various schools. During Yuan, Ming and at beginning of Qing dynasty martial art was flourishing. There were many practitioners. Because different people had different level of skill and knowledge, different schools were established and each of them maintained that they had the truth.

During reign of Kangxi and Yongzheng emperors of Qing dynasty guns were not popular yet. The rulers were afraid of power of people practicing martial art, so they tried to destroy it. Civil education was propagated and martial arts were looked down upon. At the same time writers who wrote fantastic stories about sword masters flying in the air were favored, and in result in imagination of most people martial arts became something magic and mysterious. Practice of forms and sets of techniques was propagated, to lead people astray. It wasn't possible to follow true path. Opera and stories served as tools of propaganda. It caused people look down upon martial artists. Situation was becoming worse and worse until today. It is terrible! Fortunately there were some experts who kept passing the essence to next generations. So there is still some slight hope. Although in last 20 years many institutes propagating guoshu were created all over China, but the more they propagate it, the faster will be the fall down. They will never enter the true path of combat science.

Actually learning the essence of combat science is not difficult. But situation is bad, because people's minds are poisoned by reading fantastic stories about masters. And for the teachers martial art is mainly a way of making living. They will not understand the essence of combat science. Even if they are able to understand something, they fear the shame if they would have to learn again from beginning. During last half year many visited me to compare skill. I don't want to mention their names, so they can keep making a living. Now they know about their mistakes. But why don't they come to discuss? Why don't they want to compare skill,

which would help them to develop? They know facts, but they lie about it and attack me. They make up absurd stories and pretend not to know anything about it. What sense does it make?

As for those who are not professional martial arts teachers, but they want to be seen as experts, they make up mysterious stories in order that people see them as some supernatural beings. They are like those who go to opera, having no knowledge of this art, but they try to give advices to the artists. They say that what I'm teaching is wrong. So I dare to invite them to visit me, so they can give me a lesson. I hope to have some trial of skill. If they cannot come, let them suggest time and place and I will go there. If someone has at least a little skill, I will praise him. If not, I will not tell other people about it. If someone only talks how great fighter he is, it is not worth a penny.

Reporter

You point to the right path for development of guoshu, opening new opportunity for seeking common benefit. But it seems that your criticism toward taijiquan is excessive.

Wang Xiangzhai

My knowledge is shallow yet. I don't dare to say that I open new opportunities. I only propagate what tradition of ancestors offered us. I have many friends in taijiquan circles, and many times there were some awkward situations. But comparing to other styles, in taijiquan there are not so many deviations, there are quite many good concepts, this is why I'm talking about it. Otherwise I would stop long time ago. If talking about criticism, among representatives of taijiquan most don't understand combat science. Long time ago I heard about Taoist Zhang Sanfeng. Later, traveling a lot, I could see that no other martial art is practiced by so many people as taijiquan. For long time I have had doubts about this art. I heard that it was created by Zhang Sanfeng, so my opinion about him was bad. Then I had chance to read Zhang Sanfeng's works and it turned out that he was advanced in Taoist practices, that he was "deeply submerged in the ocean of truth". Hence I came to conclusion that he couldn't create taijiquan. Actually it doesn't matter if he was or not the founder, because even if someone is successor of Zhang Sanfeng but doesn't understand his teachings, there is nothing we could talk about. I don't know who is Zhang Sanfeng's successor. If someone does not understand his teachings, calling himself successor is a fraud. What is important is if someone has real knowledge or not.

And now each of representatives of taijiquan is teaching something else, their theories are different. They just create something false and useless. I remember what Zhang Sanfeng wrote: “If you abandon your body, it is not Tao, if you stick only to your body, it is even worse”. In taijiquan there is 140, 150 sequences. Is there a sequence, a method they don’t stick too? What are those sequences for? Spirit is restricted by them. It is bad for freedom of nervous system and body. I think that as Zhang Sanfeng was so wise, he wouldn’t teach something as useless as taijiquan.

As for theories of taijiquan, those beautiful words about single and double weight, about avoiding onesidedness, it is only small part of basic knowledge of combat science. When we are talking about those manuscripts, I suggest that representatives of taijiquan ask themselves, if what they do conforms to those theories. They say that taijiquan is the highest level martial art. Why is it so useless in practice then?

I heard that some taijiquan people practice divination, thinking that it will help them to achieve combat skill. How stupid!

Even if principles and methods of taijiquan were better than others, skills higher, still if talking about mind, spirit, this way is wrong. Everything is wrong. Many people practice taijiquan today, there is strong propaganda. But wise people see that it is something which you don’t need to attack and it will fall down anyway. If my words are improper, please criticize me. If someone has knowledge and wants to persuade me, I will sweep the road in front of my house to meet him.

Reporter

People must agree with your criticism. But I have many friends, who improved their health practicing taijiquan. This is why I think that your criticism is excessive.

Wang Xiangzhai

Value of martial art doesn’t rely only on relax and other superficial things. This is not something which you could understand at once. Zhuangzi said: “skill enters the way of nature”. This is basis of culture and art, this is lifestream of chan (zen). If such small aspect could represent the whole of combat science, why should we study it deeply? Please think: even practicing in such rigid, mechanical way you achieve some results. And if you don’t use all those methods, freely, naturally experiencing what’s happening, effects are still better. I’m sure that such method is better.

Reporter

There are so many styles of martial art, with varying theories. I have many friends who practice martial arts. Some learn from books. But they don't achieve results. Which book should they choose?

Wang Xiangzhai

Martial art as such is not divided into styles. There shouldn't be division of Chinese and foreign, new and old. What is important is only if something makes sense or not. Popular styles are based on learning forms and sets of techniques. This is not essence of martial art but its false face. Although some understand mechanics of techniques and some superficial issues, they are not able to go beyond limitations of determined techniques and forms, so in result it is all useless. As for authors of books, it's the same. Although learning martial art is easy, it doesn't mean blindly mimicking form. Some people learn directly from good teacher, and still after several dozens years they don't understand the essence. How could you rely only on book description.

In case of any learning, you should understand principles, starting from basics, through practice you gradually learn the subject, testing knowledge and skill, through many sided practical verification you can reach the essence. You shouldn't practice in front of a mirror, because there is danger that everything will be limited to outside resemblance of form, not learning the essence. How will it be when you learn only from book? Those who learn from book are like a blind man riding a blind horse. But thanks to books you can learn about the theories, you just shouldn't focus on mimicking form.

Basing on my over 30 years experience, I can say, that this branch of science is extremely difficult, but at the same time extremely easy. If you have an able student, after 100 days you can know that he will become an expert in the future. But there is only one or two among one hundred. And very often those who are able, don't actually study with passion or they are swindlers. So many of them are rejected by teacher. As for average students they believe too much in hearsay, instead observing facts. They don't understand that fame doesn't mean anything. Although there are as many martial art teachers as hair on body of an ox, those who really understand this art are as scarce as horns of unicorn. Those who have understanding are usually different from most people. They are not interested in fame and benefits, so they will not associate with hypocrites and swindlers. It is difficult to find real master. Even if you meet him, how will you be able to know? Even if you will be able to recognize him as a real

master, maybe he will not teach you. Even if he teaches you, his way of teaching may not be efficient. Even if it is efficient, it is not sure if you will be able to understand the essence. There are some many problems laymen don't realize. Anyway, learning now is easier than before, because this is era of science flourishing. It helps to understand the principles on which combat science is based. But we shouldn't limit understanding of combat science, using contemporary science, knowledge of anatomy, maintain that there is nothing more, except what we can already explain. There are many issues which can be hardly explained with contemporary science, but maybe they will be explained later. There is no limit in development of science. Maybe some things we will never be able to name and explain, we don't know this. Summarizing, when we talk about present state, we should remember about the spirit of martial art and scientific methods to solve problems.

Reporter

People don't disagree with your theories. But they think that it is difficult to learn without using forms, especially for beginners.

Wang Xiangzhai

Human body has many functions. Even most able person, if he will practice whole life, he will not be able to use up all possibilities of using body. What sense is there in rejecting essence and focusing on something superficial? If talking about forms and determined sets of techniques, the more you concentrate on them, the further away you are from the essence. You become like a woman with feet bound (Qing dynasty custom). This way if higher the level (seemingly), the more difficult practical using of skill. So often beginners turn out to be better in practice than those seemingly more advanced. Unfortunately there are many such examples. Theories that some form brings some force and some technique is defeating other technique is absurd and deceiving people. Those who tell such stories have no idea about combat science.

Reporter

You are right. Present situation of martial art. is bad. Could you give some advice how to achieve results in combat science?

Wang Xiangzhai

Before I was talking about general principles of cultivating health. If someone can practice according to it, he will reach half of the way. If someone wants to know deep secrets of combat, he must go the same way. But unfortunately only most stupid or most wise people decide to go this way. Study of combat also starts from zhan zhuang and shi li. I was talking about this before. There are many shi li methods, and mastering all kinds of force doesn't mean end of the learning of combat, but only opening possibility of learning it. Next issue is mastering the principle of "changes between relax and tension, tension and relax should be proper, in changes between full and empty, empty and full there should be balance".

Summarizing, when you learn from a teacher, level of your achievement depends on your individual abilities. And achieving ability of doing proper action in any situation is something difficult without long practice of combat.

Reporter

Some martial artists say: how could you develop force without using force? None of famous experts of old and present time denied the principle of developing qi in dantian as a way to success.

Wang Xiangzhai

Laymen talk about using force. There are also martial artists who propagate principle of not using force, but actually their theories are wrong, they don't understand the real meaning of the principle of not using force. You can not use force, but you cannot not to use intention. Using force – stiff force, comes from fear of being hit by opponent, but then your spirit is already defeated, it's difficult to avoid being hit then. So what we call using force is a big mistake in combat science.

As for qi in dantian, considering analysis of principles, scientific research and my own opinion based on practice, this theory doesn't seem proper. In abdominal cavity there is stomach, intestines, liver and other organs. This is not place for qi.

As for force, energy, everything relies on arguing forces, elasticity, using of opening and closing, pulsation of breath, feeling of unity with everything, in mind there is image of unity of air filling whole space of universe. Of course we are not talking here about qi of qigong. When people talk about round lower abdomen, saying that it means qi filling dantian, it is a big mistake. You should know that when you use force, it should be continuous and even, there should be feeling of comfort and agility, this is proper. Those who learn today don't

understand those principles. They practice several dozens years only to change naturally agile body in a rigid mechanism. What a pity!

Reporter

Your criticism is right, but when you are ready for challenges, waiting for fights all the time, there is danger, that you will be defeated at some point. What then?

Wang Xiangzhai

How would I dare to make challenges? I'm not seeking fights. I only want to open discussion for sake of developing combat science. If nobody would do this, people will only deceive themselves and others. I have no other choice as repeating bitter words, but with heart full of concern. I will give invigorating injections, to cure this paralysis gradually. I don't dare to assume that I will succeed. I only hope that it will happen.

Reporter

Many people agree with you, but many condemn you.

Wang Xiangzhai

Those who condemn me, should sit down at night, and think about themselves. But, well, let them laugh at me and curse me, if they want. I don't care. If essence of combat science will be renewed, I will not regret ruining my own reputation.

Reporter

Your knowledge and your virtues are widely known. But a master should be moderate and reserved.

Wang Xiangzhai

I feel ashamed. Moderation is a popular slogan. Moderation is basis for self-improvement. In other words you are full inside and empty outside, but the same can be expressed as being solid outside and agile inside. Laozi was talking about this. But now people use it as a slogan, which serves only deceiving others. Traveling for almost 40 years all over country, I could see that probably only in the art of opera there is no place for people who don't know their stuff. As for moderation, I think that it should be used according to situation, it shouldn't mean being polite to anyone and everywhere, because people of today are not acting according to

old books with stories about wise people who were sincere and respectful, taking pleasure from treating people with love. I don't deserve praises, but if talking about virtues, I'm just trying to follow mule's tail. Tao is hunyuan, it is unity of everything. It's about if something makes sense or not. If it makes sense it is Tao, if not, it is not Tao. It is not about miracles or about fantastic stories. It's not eccentricity of false followers of Buddha or fake Taoists. When knowledge of normal things of society is not sufficient, how can you talk about other thing?

Reporter

You said that in opera are many valuable things, that comparing to typical martial artists, level of opera artists is higher. What is basis for saying this? It doesn't seem right.

Wang Xiangzhai

Originally opera was used to supplement the system of education. Elements of fighting in opera come from actual martial art. In combat science there is training of "qiba", this is kind of testing force. Qiba is force related to axis between head and feet, body is unified, as if magnified, as if being one with universe. This is the meaning of qiba. In opera they have this term, but mistakenly interpreted as posture of a tyrant. If you compare it to qiba in combat science, although there is some difference, you can see relation. This is why I say that there are valuable things in opera. As for those postures which were created only to give esthetic pleasure, they are something artificial, false. As for contemporary representative of martial arts, it is difficult to meet one, whose postures would be balanced. They all just try to behave like young, vigorous people, although not all of them are able to make it. How could they reach the deep essence of combat science?

Reporter

I suppose that many people came recently to ask for your teachings. What are your feelings?

Wang Xiangzhai

In fact there were many visitors, but it's all just people who were curious. As for serious discussion about combat science, most were not able to join it. As for martial artist, those who I hoped would come, didn't come.

Reporter

What did you expect?

Wang Xiangzhai

Although I'm not very able, I hoped that visitors would ask difficult questions. That we will discuss about what reasonable combat science should be like, what is its meaning in human life, what is its true essence. Although fighting is not the only and main goal of combat science, but it is the indicator of its efficiency, so I would like to have some friendly fights. Lately I wasn't able to meet all visitors, unfortunately. So from now on, I will also receive guests on Wednesday and Friday afternoons from 1 to 6 p.m.

Reporter

How martial artists reacted to this proposal?

Wang Xiangzhai

I promise that I will not laugh at anyone, I will not tell incredible stories afterwards. My goal is studying the essence of combat science with benefit for others. I will not be sad if no one comes to learn from me or to teach me. But I'm sad because famous master don't come to discuss or just see me, so I can hardly hope that there is future for combat science. I only want to help with development of combat science, improving the situation of martial art in society, eliminating wrong customs, nothing more.

Reporter

Publishing of previous interviews caused quite a stir. I'm sure that you had many guests.

Where there some experts among them?

Wang Xiangzhai

There were people who have similar intentions. Most came to learn from me. If talking about experts, Lu Zhijie and Shao Zefen from Fengtai wanted only to try tui shou, to "listen force". There were no others, no one wanted to have test of free fighting. Because tui shou is only part of fighting. As for famous masters from Beijing, no one came. It was surprise to me. I don't understand this. Warrior's virtues were always most important to me, so I'm polite and yielding. Of course not indiscriminately. I yield to old, to modest, to weak. If someone doesn't believe, he can ask those who visited me already. When Lu came first time, we just did some

tui shou and he thought that my skill was only like this, so he was not convinced. But when he visited me several times he started realizing the difference, now he is my loyal student.

Reporter

Which masters of previous generations do you admire?

Wang Xiangzhai

In last 100 years, apart from Dong Haichuan, Che Yizhai and Guo Yunshen, as far as I know others have not achieved that level. But China is big, there are many people whom I didn't meet, so I cannot evaluate them.

Reporter

People often say about Yang Luchan. What do you think about his teachings?

Wang Xiangzhai

Yang Luchan also was one of representatives of martial art of previous generations, he was teaching taijiquan, now many people are learning this art. Basing on what I noticed, I can say that Yang Luchan learned only part of this science. Wang Zongyue of Ming dynasty also wasn't an expert. But Wang Zongyue learned part of the teaching of Yue Fei, about double pushing hands. He changed three methods into thirteen postures and started call it taiji. As for Zhang Sanfeng as a founder, there are not sources about it. Only later people made up this story. I don't understand where from come those 140, 150 sequences. When talking about this art, if talking about body, it's good that there are not any big deviations, but as for mind, the damages are tremendous. And this art has nothing to do with real combat at all.

Reporter

How other martial artists reacted after publishing of interviews with you. Have you got any information?

Wang Xiangzhai

Those who understand philosophy agree with me. Those who cannot understand at least know now about some things. Even for those who understand, it is difficult to use, not saying about those who don't understand. But now typical representatives of martial arts talk only about training for health, they stopped talking about how great is their combat skill. They just

realized that they have not much idea about fighting. But they still maintain that practice of forms is essence of martial art, and this is a big mistake. Combat skill is something much more subtle. The way of cultivating life is based on focusing spirit and cultivating character, mind and empty swiftness become one, this is science of body and mind, about human nature and principles of life.

If you only think about such technique, such posture, moving forward, jumping backward, it will be difficult to see the gate of cultivating health even in a dream. The art of cultivating life is actually simple, human nature is taking pleasure from free action, natural potential is revealed then. Each morning just stand in place with fresh air, don't use any methods, just make your all joints bent slightly, think that you are standing in the great space of universe, slowly experience what's happening, blood is flowing inside body, between body and outside space there is some slight, elastic tension, this is what is called "spirit is as if swimming". You should feel comfort in mind and body, you not only are not limited, but gradually there comes feeling of being tuned in with the whole nature. After longer time natural potential will be revealed and spirit will shine, without trying too much you will develop basis for combat skill. If you will always stick to mechanical techniques, practicing forms with stick and spear, which look beautiful, thinking that you know combat science, and someone who understands it will see you, he will keep vomiting for 10 days. It's terrible. Those people will never understand combat science.

Reporter

Your goal is studying true principles of combat science, developing wushu. Why so few people reacted to your invitation to discussion?

Wang Xiangzhai

It is difficult to solve this problem. I think that there are many people who understand wushu, but especially many are those who are practicing and teaching it, but actually have no idea about it. Those who practice some style for many years think that they have achievements and call themselves inheritors of the style. Thanks to this they are respected and can make a living. When it turns out that they should reject what they learned and start from beginning, it is difficult for them, they fear that it would negatively affect their possibility of making a living, will destroy their future. Probably because this is quite a serious problem, not so many are visiting me. The worst thing is that there are some absolute ignorant people, who are not able to take part in discussion, but they only tell absurd stories and calumnies, trying to conceal

their own problems. Unfortunately people believe them, without thinking more about the subject. It's terrible! If it doesn't change, there is not much chance for development of combat science.

Reporter

You are in avant-garde of development of combat science. Thanks to your persistence there is chance for development of wushu.

Wang Xiangzhai

I'm deeply moved. Of course I will do all I can. I don't think about if there is actual chance to succeed or I'm deemed to loose. I have only one goal, thinking only what to do so there may be progress in combat science. I'm repeating all the time that combat skill is only a part of combat science, like twigs and leaves in relation to whole tree. But people often evaluate martial art only by who won or who was defeated in fight. As for evaluating martial art there are two ways. One is studying if actions are proper. I gladly welcome people who are interested in it. If someone wants to have san shou or tui shou sparring, it's fine too. If someone will be a bit better than me even in one aspect, I will praise him in front of other people. Otherwise I will not talk about it at all. I hope that friends who will come will ask difficult questions and give me challenges, so we can learn something from each other, and combat science can develop. Those who go along this path should take up the burden of making the combat science great and shining, personal matters shouldn't influence it. What is important is benefit for all, even if you must sacrifice something. You should be able to give up small to achieve great. I'm full of commitment, I hope that others will also act this way and people will learn from each other for common benefit. If combat science will flourish, I will be happy, and next generations will benefit.

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