

# Six Harmonies

## OF LIU HE BA FA

BY STUART AGARS

### INTRODUCTION

For years, the principles within Liu He Ba Fa (in Mandarin), Lok Hup Ba Fa (in Cantonese), or “Six Harmonies Eight Methods” (hereafter abbreviated as LHBF), also known as Water Boxing, has been practised and passed down secretly to indoor students. This is why the story of LHBF has been shrouded in mystery for over 900 years.

To this day, LHBF remains an extremely rare internal art containing well-guarded sets of principles and requirements that have only begun to reach the public light since the end of WWII in the Far East.

In the last issue, I gave a brief overview of the Origins and Principles of LHBF. This article explains the Six Harmonies of LHBF.

Let me start by telling you the full name of LHBF (take a deep breath)

The full name of LiuHeBaFa is “Hua Yue Xing Yi Liu He Ba Fa San Pan Shi Er Shi”. It’s a really great name as it fully explains the system. The name can be broken down into small sections (I have underlined the sections for clarity, and the name can be understood like this:

- “Xing Yi” means mind and nervous system;
- “LiuhebaFa” Means Six Harmonies and Eight Methods;
- “San Pan” means “Upper, Middle & Lower” i.e. 3 Height levels;
- “Shi Er Shi” means 12 Styles of fighting.

What first drew me to LHBF was the comprehensive theory on body mechanics. The full theory of LHBF has been written down in a collection of stanzas called ‘The Five Word Poem of Liu He Ba Fa’ accredited to Li Dong Feng. It



*“Hua Yue” is the name of the mountain where LHBF originated.*

is called the ‘Five Word Poem’ as each stanza is made up of five words (a bit like a Haiku poem in one way). My good friend Ruth Hampson and I have translated a copy of the ‘Five Word Poem’ into English under the guidance of my Master Hui Kit Wah.

In this article, I explore the Six Harmonies of LHBF in detail and discuss each of the harmonies in clear easy to understand terms.

The internal arts, I believe, try to explain the same thing; how to improve body structure, how to move the body in one piece and how to link

the mind to the movement. Abundant and diverse benefits follow from practising these principles in all of our affairs!

The Six Harmonies of LHBF are:

體合於心	Body and Mind Combine
心合於意	Mind and Intention Combine
意合於氣	Intention and Chi Combine
氣合於神	Chi and Spirit Combine
神合於動	Spirit and Movement Combine
動合於空	Movement and Emptiness Combine

## 1. BODY AND MIND COMBINE

My Master taught me formally like this, he said “The body is divided into 3 plates; Upper, Middle & Lower. Each plate also has 3 sections e.g. for the upper body / arm, we have – Shoulder, Elbow & Wrist. The Mind is the central nervous system, it controls everything: feelings, eyesight and body. Your Heart / Mind<sup>1</sup> is the Emperor and your body are his soldiers. Your mind places an order and your body carries this out.

The best way to find this first Harmony, from my experience, is to stand in Jarm Jong, the standing pole meditation stance, and scan up and down your body. You can immediately appreciate two things, (try it, you will smile at its simplicity): A. that you have a Body and B. that you are thinking about it – in that instant of realisation Body and Mind are in Harmony. Both Simple and Complex in an instant, we can be grateful for this wonderful harmony.

## 2. MIND AND INTENTION COMBINE

The second harmony of LHBF is Mind and Intention combine and we all can do it. For example, imagine you catch a ball in mid-air. Mind and Intention combine perfectly, imagine the mathematical equation required to explain this! Ralph the rescue dog, always has Mind

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<sup>1</sup> Sometimes my Master interchanges Heart / Mind which can be a long topic on its own! Mind here means the highest level or consciousness. We all have many things going on in our mind, multiple thoughts all at the same time, like a committee meeting! however in the martial arts way we only want one thought at a time in our Mind (and Heart).

and Intention co-ordinated when he catches his ball. His Mind and Intention are fully engaged together in one action. And I am sure that Ralph the rescue dog doesn't do calculus!

Another good example of Mind and Intention Combine is to imagine a tennis player, they want to learn to hit perfect return volley, so they practise like this:

- Be in a Ready Position
- Head & Eyes Looking
- Start Moving, keep looking
- Hitting Hand Ready
- Non Hitting Hand Ready
- Whole body moving
- At the time of impact whole body turning
- Hit through the target, keep looking



*“Intention goes first, Chi Follows”  
Illustration by Helen Evans*

I am sure the astute among you noticed that I used martial arts key points list here to demonstrate that this is a transferable skill.

We all must have at least just once kicked a good shot, hit a ‘sweet’ ball, downed that difficult pool ball, even tossed that ball of paper into the waste paper basket! Everything was just so! (and 1,000 times not quite just so!).

Like the first Harmony for martial arts, we only want one intention at that time.

## 3. INTENTION AND CHI COMBINE

The third harmony of LHBF is Intention and Chi combine.

My Master taught me “Because of course it starts with everything! You want to move right? If you want to do something and move, then your Intention goes first. The Intention is the first. The Chi then follows the intention of what you want to do. If you want to punch, at that moment, your body is not actually moving, but you have started already (like placing the order) – energy is starting and the energy flows from your shoulder, elbow and wrist. At that time your Chi is floating (running) and if you combine together the



*“The Tiger’s Chi & Spirit Combines”  
Illustration By Helen Evans*

Intention is also running, so your hand is moving.

In the martial art way Chi is Force.

I love it when we talk Force in martial arts, as Newton’s second law is;  $Force = Mass \times Acceleration$ .

And is this important for LHBF? Yes, for sure! It is important because LHBF concentrates on moving while maintaining body structure, and moving means to have speed or velocity, and

in Newton’s second law, acceleration is velocity squared!

In martial arts, chi can be considered as force. In the old Chinese martial arts way, you can say that the “Fist is behind the brain”, so if you want to punch, you have Intention first, then with your body structure, you can execute the movement.

This all may seem obvious, but when you are asked to break a wooden board, or spar with someone who is much bigger and stronger than you – you have to learn to ignore the wooden

board or not care that the opponent is bigger. Cast your mind back to your coach – can you hear them saying “Wait, Move, GO NOW !!!! Punch through the target!

The Way is like this.

#### **4. CHI AND SPIRIT COMBINE**

On a daily basis, food and exercise builds the Chi for your body. Chi provides the energy for your body’s daily work.

Spirit is expressed through the body from inside out (and comes from your body and mind health condition). People can easily lose their spirit working too much, feeling stressed or if you are ill – that feeling of being deflated or flat. Spirit is like the presence of their body. If they are healthy and happy then they have a strong spirit like a young tiger- strong. In the west we may say ‘zest for life’!

Chi and Spirit can be treated separately but they are interlocked like father and son. Two individual bodies flowing with the same type of blood. They are complementary.

When I practise my LHBF, just one section of footwork (the side stepping) raises my spirits.

#### **5. SPIRIT AND MOVEMENT COMBINE**

I think this is the easiest one to translate. When you see a fantastic performance, and it moves you – you can see Spirit and Movement in harmony. Spirit and Movement can be like a stunningly beautiful Jet Li performance or Jackie Chan doing a complex stunt routine, and also is occasionally seen when I am late and running for the Leeds to York bus as it sets off from the station 2 minutes early.

## 5. MOVEMENT AND EMPTINESS COMBINE

The Huffington Post describes ‘emptiness’ as the most misunderstood word in Buddhism! But don’t worry, it is easy! In the LHBF way, Emptiness refers to acting naturally, my Master would say – “without burden – your body and mind do not carry any weight. “

Each harmony is a concept, a feeling and I do hope everyone gets something from it - you can stack each harmony on top of each other. You do not have to stack them in order or do them all the time.

One of the main things I love most about the Six Harmonies of Liu He Ba Fa is that once you learn them, they can’t be un-learned, and in fact, I bet that anyone who reads this says – I was doing that anyway!



*“The*

*Phoenix Spirit & Movement Combines”*

