

Bagua and tai chi links

**Dov Weisenberger explores
the connection between the
bagua and tai chi chuan**

The cosmological model of the bagua has two basic patterns: the pattern attributed to Fu-Xi (Yellow Emperor) and that of King Wen. The trigrams that appear in the two patterns are the same, but differ in their internal arrangement and therefore in their internal relations and their derived meanings.

If we compare the two patterns, we will discover not only discrepancies in the meanings of the identity trigrams, but also contradictions. These things may be due to a lack of knowledge, trends of interpretation, poor translation or all these issues combined. Even among tai chi chuan practitioners, there is no consensus on the applied meaning of some of the trigrams.

However, beyond the controversies, there is agreement between the schools, either at the therapeutic / medical level or at the martial level, regarding the centrality of the bagua theory in general for understanding physiological, mental and energetic processes.

Two patterns

Emperor Fu-xi, followed by King Wen, created a template to explain the cyclical nature of the phenomena. These two patterns are archetypal representations of the cyclical processes in nature, one (Fu Xi's) is the way that traditional Chinese medicine views and explains life (destructive and constructive cycles), and the other (Wen's) is perfectly suitable for tai chi chuan martial theory as it is described in the tai chi classics.

The martial aspect of tai chi chuan theory consists of the '13 tactics,' which includes the 'eight gates' and 'the five steps.' The eight gates refer to the eight basic hand techniques. The five steps are the four basic directions of movement (north / south, east / west), with the fifth being the centre, the meeting point of the four. That aspect is shown in King Wen's model.

Two ways of looking at the bagua model

The first way is to look at it as if there is a stationary centre which the trigrams rotate around. This is the way of classical Chinese medicine.

The second way is to look at it as a moving centre capable of responding in correlation with the change of the trigrams. This way correlates with the practical use of tai chi chuan.

In this article we will mainly discuss the second option, namely the pattern as presented by King Wen. Only then can we understand why, for example, in King Wen's pattern, the relationship between the kun trigram (earth) and the chien trigram (sky) is different than it is in the Fu Xi pattern, and why the transition from one trigram to the

XIANTIAN BAGUA



HOUTIAN BAGUA



Shay applies cai on Matan, Matan replies with sidestep and uses an push

next is inconsistent. For example, chien (sky) represents the north-west direction (and not north, as in the Fu Xi arrangement), while the kun (earth) trigram represents the south-west direction (and not south, as in the Fu Xi arrangement).

The fundamental difference between the Fu Xi pattern and the King Wen pattern can be described as this – the circular pattern is maintained in both, but its internal movement varies. While the original trigrams remain the same in both cases, their meanings vary. The result of this is that it is possible, and makes sense, to look at the circular representation of the bagua in a more flexible and complex manner:

1. As a cosmological model (the five elements)
2. As a medical model (energetic)
3. As a martial model (practical)

The 13 tactics, eight gates, four directions, four corners, five steps, and nine palaces

As mentioned, the thirteen tactics or techniques consist of the eight gates and five steps. The five steps are the four basic directions of movement plus the center, and these five are related to the eight gates which are basically the hand techniques.

Four corners

The eight hand techniques are divided into the four directions and the four corners, which are diagonal. In such a circle, every one of the eight gates is located 45 degrees from the center. In tai chi chuan, the center and its eight gates are called the nine palaces. In Wudang system there are a number of pushing hands that implement bagua theory:

1. The first pattern is the essentially stationary practice called the 'four directions'. Its execution illustrates the four basic directions of movement from the eight hand techniques (peng, lu, ji and an), while at the same time applying two aspects of the five-element model by moving weight from foot to foot (front and back).

2. The second pattern is a moving pattern called the 'nine palaces,' which is a more complex version of the previous pattern. During nine places practice, the partners move, synchronised with each other in zig-zag steps, drawing the nine palaces on the floor with their steps, an exact square that includes the sum of its sides and diagonals.

3. A third pattern, also moving, is called the eight gates and five steps or da-lu (which means the big round) or the four corners (kao, zhou, cai and lie) alternately. In this pattern, the partners move in a continuous circle of eight steps around a centerpoint, all the while changing directions and weight at will. While on the move, each of the partners apply the four-cornered hands techniques in turn.

4. The fourth pattern is freestyle push hands (either fixed steps or moving steps), in which all 13 techniques are implemented and their myriad combinations.



Matan applies peng to Shay's ji, Shay sidesteps and uses zhou

Interpretations

Suffice to refer to the names of the patterns for an initial impression of the close relationship between the models described above and their martial application. For example, the martial aspects of the five steps, in the four directions pushing hands have the following meanings:

Center is identified with the earth element = central equilibrium.

West is identified with the metal element = step forward.

North is identified with the water element = look or move to the left.

East is identified with the tree element = step back.

South is identified with the fire element = looking to or moving to the right. The martial aspects of the trigrams, of the eight gates, when applying to the four directions pushing hands have the following meanings:

North is represented by the kan trigram (great abyss) = peng technique, i.e., upward and sideways.

West is represented by the tui trigram (lake) = ji technique, that is, strike forward.

The east is represented by the Chen trigram (storm) = An technique, that is, strike or press down.

South is represented by the li trigram (fire) = lu technique, i.e. downward and sideways.

In martial aspect, the four corners will have the following meanings:

Northwest is represented by the chien trigram (Sky) = lie technique, i.e. spiral movement.

Southeast is represented by the hsun trigram (wind) = cai technique, i.e. uprooting (up/down).

Southwest is represented by the kun trigram (earth) = zhou technique, i.e. using

the forearm or elbow.

The northeast is represented by the ken trigram (ka) = kao technique, that is, shoulder or body technique.

From interpretations to practise

Following the described above, countless variations can be created during which the actions and reactions are conducted in sequence and in combination with some or all of the principles as they appear in the bagua. For example, a strike or push forward with or without a step can follow with an upward deflection. This deflection may be followed by a downward uprooting, which is immediately answered by an elbow or

shoulder strike, which is in turn countered by a circular deflection, and so on. The continuous nature of tai chi chuan techniques is why the art has been called 'Long boxing', figuratively describing the long and continuous like the flow of the Yellow River, in which the water's volume, force and direction constantly change along the river's route.

Further dimensions

It can be said that, although the bagua model is a predefined model with predefined interpretations, there is within its framework a freedom of action via a multiplicity of possibilities. The bagua model as a circle or square contains complex patterns of internal relationships between the trigrams. These relationships can be linear, a vector or straight line, like the saying 'seek the straight amidst the bent'. They can also be circular, as expressed in the line from the *Song of Sparring*: "Achieve it inside a circle, not with hands and feet disorganised."

Bagua theory attributes a number to each trigram, these numbers form a magic square. These relationships express an idea of symmetry at a given distance on the one hand, and an idea or principle of infinite reversibility on the other. The distance symmetry is reflected in the classic phrase "When my opponent advances the distance between us seems bigger and when he retreats the distance looks shorter". Whereas the inverse principle embodied in the classic phrase "In the straight there is the round and in the round there is the straight".

The sums of all the connections between the



Shay starts with lie and pushes forwards, Matan replies with lie while shifting his weight

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trigrams numbers will give the same and perfect relationships in a circle, for example:

The sum of all trigrams equals 50, and each vertical or horizontal half in a circle equals 25. All the squares within the circle have precise and symmetrical relationships between them.

The sum of two diagonals is always the same and equal to 15, and the sum of each trigram in each direction is also 15.

And this is the meaning of the nine palaces, which is the eight gates plus the centre point, in the following magic square:

| | | | | |
|------|-------|-------|------|------|
| | North | | | |
| | chien | kan | ken | |
| | | 6 1 8 | | |
| West | tui | 7 5 3 | chen | East |
| | | 2 9 4 | | |
| | kun | li | hsun | |
| | South | | | |

Summary

There is a direct and practical connection between the bagua theory and the tai chi chuan classics, which describe the martial art that makes use of the theory. This special connection is an example of a connection that must exist between theory and practice. In our case, the tai chi chuan practitioner combines theory and practice like heaven and earth. Indeed

Since tai chi chuan as a martial art is based on the principle of yin-yang, which is clearly expressed in the bagua model. In practice the relationships between each trigram and its number has three main meanings:

1. The yin and yang states of the trigrams kan, tui, li and chen foil and encircle the yin and yang states of the trigrams ken, kun, chien and hsun. That is, the four directions techniques apply to the four-corner techniques.

2. The yin and yang states of the ken, kun, chien and hsun trigrams foil and encircle the trigrams kan, tui, li and chen. That is, the four-corner techniques are the counter-reaction to the four-directions techniques.

3. All eight gates or techniques are combined and integrated into one system.

Prolonged, consistent and accurate practise of the pushing hands drills and applications guided by classical principles according to the above models will provide good proficiency and deep understanding of the martial aspect of tai chi chuan.

the tai chi chuan form begins with wu ji, the standing or empty meditative or yet tai chi, which starts the movements that create the multitude of phenomena. The form then returns to and ends with unity-style (union), which signifies the highest level the practitioner should aspire to, namely - being one with heaven and earth; the circle is closed and reopened... endless...

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Chew Your Dates

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One of the constant refrains today is: "I've done my research."

The internet and social media have given us great tools to enable us to do this. Unfortunately, there is a yang and yin aspect to this. The positive is the wealth of data that enriches our understanding of the object of our search. The negative, to paraphrase Abraham Lincoln: "Do not believe everything you read on the internet."

For the vast majority of us, our research is very positive. However, to use an actual quote from the colophon to the Neijing tu (internal pathway diagram):

Dùn g n rén wúcóng l ngq 鈍根人無從領取.

"There are obtuse people who do not have the ability to grasp it."

These are people who swallow whole dates, a Chinese idiom that perfectly sums it up goes:

Húlúnt n z o 囫圇吞枣

One day, a doctor spotted a young man gorging himself on dates and told him: "Eating dates is good for the spleen but too many is bad for the teeth."

The following day, the doctor saw the young man again and this time he was gorging himself on pear. The doctor explained: "Eating pears is good for the teeth but too many is bad for the spleen."

The next day the doctor saw the man with both dates and pears. The man, who considered himself clever, said: "This is the answer. I can chew the pears without swallowing to protect my spleen, and I can swallow the dates whole to protect my teeth."

Today to swallow whole dates is an idiom used to describe a person who accepts information without really understanding it.

Bottom line—chew your dates!

Gordon Falconer