

General Qi Jiguang's Approach To Martial Arts Training

By

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Ming General Qi Jiguang (1528-1587), presents his views on martial arts training clearly and concisely in his *New Book of Effective Discipline* (1561) and *Actual Record of Training* (1571). [1] In these works, one can see practical application of the best in Chinese military tradition, They reveal that, probably even well before Qi's time, the martial arts practiced in the villages as part of militia training had gradually evolved into a form of recreation as well, and had become characterized by the "flowery" movements associated with self expression and individual styles. Qi condemned these "flowery" martial arts as undisciplined and inappropriate for military use in combat and emphasized that, "...in training troops, the pretty is not practical and the practical is not pretty..." [2]

Qi's view of the role of boxing as the foundation for developing weapons skills (primarily broadsword and polled weapons in anti-pirate operations) conforms closely to the explanation contained in the *Han History Bibliographies* (c. 90 A.D.). [3] With this purpose in mind, Qi developed a boxing routine comprised of 32 forms selected from what he considered to be the foremost styles of the day. The result was his chapter titled, "Boxing Classic Essentials", in the *New Book of Effective Discipline*. [4]

Although boxing, with its agile movements, was considered to be the foundation for weapons use, it was only one element in Qi's overall training regimen. The training regimen included: maintaining an overall strong fighting constitution (through remaining "lean and mean"); strong hands and arms through training with heavier than normal weapons; strong feet and legs through running over 600 yards without gasping for breath and, using ankle weights (bags of sand) while running; and overall bodily strength and endurance by training while weighted down with heavier than normal armor. [5] Strength, endurance, and agility were physical traits prized in the Chinese military from earliest times. Weight lifting, long distance running, jumping, climbing, and swimming were among the activities associated with military training and martial arts prowess over the centuries. [6] However, this does not mean that brute strength was considered the determining factor in battle. To the contrary, brain was favored over brawn in the tactics of hand-to-hand combat. This is most clearly brought out in Yu Dayou's (1503-1580) *Sword Classic*, which Qi included in its entirety as a chapter in his *New Book of Effective Discipline*. According to one of Yu's general formulaic verses, "Use hard force prior to the opponent's release of force. While the opponent is busy, I calmly wait; I observe his rhythm and let him struggle." The key to Yu's tactics is, "Take advantage of the point where his old force has passed and before his new force is

released.” [7] Thus, one can see in Ming period military martial arts writings basic theories similar to those which later appear in the so-called taijiquan classics.

Qi combined his demands for physical fitness and effective hand-to-hand tactics into an overall training program which eschewed “flowery” routines and stressed realistic weapons techniques using sparring and striking at targets. Rewards and punishments were used to encourage high proficiency. [8]

References

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Qi Jiguang, *New Book of Effective Discipline*, Introduction, pp. 5, 17; *Actual Record of Training*, Introduction, p. 13812, juan 4, 13963.

Henning, “The Chinese Martial Arts in Historical Perspective”, *Military Affairs* Vol. XLV, No. 4, 1981, p. 174: “The *Han History Bibliographies* – completed around 90 A.D.) provide the first broad definition of the martial arts, which constituted one of four categories under the major heading, “Military Writings”. They are defined simply as “skills’ or “techniques” to practice use of the hands and feet, and to facilitate the use of weapons to gain victory through offense or defense. Based on the bibliographical listing, these skills included archery, fencing, boxing, and even an ancient game of football or *cuju* 蹴鞠 for agility and maneuver in the field. The entry on boxing or *shoubo* 手搏 as it was called, appears to be the earliest clearly identifiable reference to Chinese boxing. Commentaries on the entry differentiate *shoubo* from wrestling, which was categorized as a military sport as opposed to a combat skill.” Wang Xiangqian 王先謙, ed., *Hanshu Buzhu* 漢書補注 (Annotated Han History), Changsha, 1901, juan 30, p. 64.

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6. Li Quan 李筌, *Taibai Yinjing* 太白陰經 (Mysterious Military Classic, lit. Dark Classic of Planet Venus), Tang Dynasty, in Zhang Haipeng, ed., *Mohai Jinhu*, Taipei: Wenyou Shudian, 1969, juan 2, pp. 13345-47; Du You 杜佑, Tang Dynasty, *Tong Dian* 通典 (Comprehensive Compendium) Zhejiang Shuju, 1896, juan 148, pp. 23a, b; Zhao Silian 兆思廉, *Chen Shu* 陳書 (Chen History), 557-589 A.D., Shanghai: Zhonghua Shuju, 1936, juan 8, p. 2a, juan 10, p. 2a, juan 11, p. 1a.

Qi, *New Book of Effective Discipline*, juan 12, pp. 152-169.

8. Qi, *ibid*, juan 6.