

A Simple Explanation of Baguazhang's *16 Character Secrets*

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The 16 characters of the Baguazhang *16 Character Secrets* are: 穿 chuan, 搬 ban, 截 jie, 拦 lan, 拧 ning, 翻 fan, 走 zou, 转 zhuan, 推 tui, 托 tuo, 带 dai, 领 ling, 缠 chan, 扣 kou, 刁 diao, and 钻 zuan. These are the basic methods that Baguazhang uses for fighting. Friends who practice Baguazhang have asked for an explanation of the “16 Characters Secrets”. The author has taken the liberty to supply a superficial explanation of these characters that enthusiasts may use as a reference.

穿 Chuan: Chuan is piercing, penetrating through. It is the idea of piercing and inserting. A common saying goes, “Stick in the pin wherever there is room.” That is: don't miss any opportunity. Chuan, in Baguazhang, is getting into the enemy's cracks during fighting. Seize the opportune moment to use one of the hand methods to attack. The piercing palm is like an arrow. It has the idea of leaving the bowstring and flying out. Instantly the rear hand, with a straight palm, goes straight out from under the front elbow. The piercing palm is where the quintessence of Baguazhang fighting lies. Therefore, in the old Baguazhang martial arts manuals, there is the saying that stresses this method, “Naturally, experts fear the three pierces.” The piercing palm can be subdivided into: upper piercing palm, lower piercing palm, front piercing palm, and rear piercing palm (also called reverse piercing palm). The old manuals also say, “*Welcome Wind Pierces the Sleeve* uses three piercing palms. The three pierces stepping method is a true transmission.” You can see that getting the three pierces is a necessity. It depends on changing steps, changing forms, and continuously changing the body positioning. The rear hand pierce uses the front hand as a guide. You must be sure to have it stick close to the elbow as it moves forward. The old manuals say, “When piercing, the straight palm sticks close to the elbow as it moves forward. The rear shoulder changes to become the front shoulder. You must not be far away and you must not hesitate. Your foot enters his groin and is the criteria.” When doing the piercing palm, use the shoulder to push the elbow. Use the elbow to push the wrist. Use the wrist to push the palm. Both shoulders mutually change. The foot entering his groin area can demonstrate your awesome power. Some of the particular techniques are: *Penetrate the Ear Piercing Strike* and *Sparrow Hawk Enters the Forest*.

搬 Ban: The ban character originally had the idea of moving. In Baguazhang, the ban character corresponds to the Gen trigram. Gen makes the mountain. It has the idea of not falling down. Your appearance is like that of Mt. Yue, standing eternal. You have the strength to move others, but they do not have the strength to move you. In Baguazhang, this makes the kao [靠] methods. Things like shoulder strike, elbow strike, body strike, back strike, all correspond to the ban character. Specific techniques are: *Advance Step Lean on the Mountain, Yield to the Mountain Press and Lean, Zhang Fei Rushes against the Curtain*, etc. Here ban becomes striking or leaning.

In addition, to the above explanation of the ban character, the hand going from inside to outside changing the direction of the enemy's incoming attacking hand, is also called ban. For instance, in Taijiquan there is *Ban, Lan, Chui {Parry, Block and Punch}* and in Baguazhang there is *Ban, Lan, Pu Mian {Parry, Block, Pounce on his Face}* and *Yuanhou Ban Zhi {Monkey Moves the Branch}*, etc.

截 Jie: Jie is blocking and intercepting. It is the idea of stopping and intercepting. The three methods of fighting are: The method of exchanging strikes, the method of intercepting and striking, and the method of escaping and neutralizing. With these three types of fighting methods, the last method is a higher level than the first method and the first method is difficult. When you begin to study fighting, the first thing you grasp is the exchanging strikes method; that is mutually exchanging strikes, the enemy issues his hand to strike me and I then strike him in return. This is also first sealing, then striking. Maybe it is connected sealing, pulling and striking; or advancing and having the sealing and striking be the same thing.

The intercepting and stopping method is only sealing and stopping the enemy's incoming hand and not striking him in return. The old masters gave their students many uses for this method. The art calls this wei shou [feeding hand]. The intercepting method requires direct opposition to the incoming force. The technique is like pointing your hand. In the instant that the enemy issues his attack, your hand or foot intercepts to strike the enemy's upper three joints (shoulder, elbow, wrist) or lower three joints (hip, knee, foot). This causes him to be unable to carry out his actions. In the leg methods above, Baguazhang has the *72 Intercepting Legs*.

拦 Lan: The lan character has the idea of blocking and sweeping. The hand and forearm go from the outside to the front and inside, drawing a level circle. This is the blocking hand, sometimes called circling hand. It can also be called the circular blocking hand. When the hand and forearm do a horizontal strike to the front, it is called *heng lan*, [horizontal block]. Some particular hand methods are: *Pulling Hand Horizontal Block, Blocking Hand Piercing Palm*, and *Wild Crane Goes down to the Sea*.

拧 Ning: Ning is rolling. The martial arts manuals say: “With the fist strikes, there is rolling inside of rising.” This also refers to small angle rolling and turning. In the practice method, there is the waist twisting, body twisting, arm twisting, etc. In the functional method, there is the saying, “Reeling silk energy emerges in an endless stream.” This is the particular manifestation of the ning character.

翻 Fan: Fan is the idea of returning, turning over, and turning around. It is, in movements, suddenly turning toward or turning the body around. It is used to turn a dangerous situation into a safe one, having the result of turning a defense into an offense. The old martial arts manuals say: “In diagonal overturn and sideways overturn, the waist puts forth effort. When the overturn arrives at its destination, the strength must be hard.” This is sufficient to explain the meaning of fan in fighting. In Bagua Turning Palms there is the saying, “Eagle overturns. Monkey looks.” Particular techniques are: *Monster Boa Overturns its Body*, *Sparrow Hawk Overturns its Body*.

走 Zou: Walking in Baguazhang does not have the same meaning as normal walking. What most embodies the zou character’s special points in Baguazhang is precisely the Bagua Turning Palms, also called walking the circle or moving posts. There are basic elements for practicing Baguazhang moving skills. The waist strength must manifest. When walking, use the waist to pull the legs. When walking, the legs do not use strength. The walk is natural, light, quick, easy and smooth. Even though the distance is eight to ten feet, you quickly cover the distance. The author has a little firsthand experience of this. This is different from fleeing, jumping up in the air, leaping, or jumping over. Its very special point is that it does not reveal the form. Turning and changing position is another stepping method of the body form. It is the strong point of changing. It is also called zou. The actions of the hand methods must be coordinated with it. They also must rely on the structure of walking to bring about changing position. Particular techniques are: *Walking Horse Escapes the Whip*, *Tyrant Sheds his Armor*, etc. Walking is Baguazhang’s most distinct special point. You can say that it is the soul of Baguazhang. Therefore in the old martial arts manuals it says: “Altogether, walking has no limits. Bagua’s true principles are my home.”

转 Zhuan: The zhuan character can be used to explain the movements of making an arc or a circle. This explanation is easily confused with the ning character. There is a difference between the two. Determined by the place of changing or not. For instance: I issue my right hand to attack the enemy’s right ear. The enemy issues his right hand to defend against my right hand. This time my right hand overturns and turns to go down. It turns to attack his right ribs. This can be called turning [zhuan], but it cannot be called twisting [ning]. Or, the enemy comes at me with terrifying force to pounce on me, I can turn to arrive at his rear to strike him. This also can be called turning but it cannot be called twisting. The special point of the zhuan character depends on changing your attacking position. Specific techniques are: *Turn the Body Beat the Waist*, *Turn the Body Strike with the Elbow*, etc.

推 Tui: Tui is a standing palm, maybe single or maybe double. It pushes out levelly toward the front. The pushing palm is also called the striking palm. It is divided into single striking palm and double striking palm. When using the striking palm, you cannot use all of your strength. This is because it is too easy to lose your posture and fall into emptiness. You will then be subject to being controlled by your opponent. Therefore the martial arts manuals have the saying: “First jab, then strike using the wrist bone.” First use a little bit of strength to engage the enemy. When you see that he cannot escape, at that instant issue strength. This way can get the desired result. Specific hand methods are: *Flowing Hand Pushes the Boat, Push the Window to See the Moon, Push the Mountain into the Sea, etc.*

托 Tuo: Tuo is using a single palm or two palms to levelly hold something up, using strength. This action can be used to either attack or defend. For example: The enemy’s incoming hand attacks me. I can use my hand to hold up his elbow. This destroys his strength. This forces him to change his technique and change his form. Specific hand methods are: *White Ape Offers the Peach, White Ape Climbs on the Pole, Heavenly King Upholds the Pagoda, etc.*

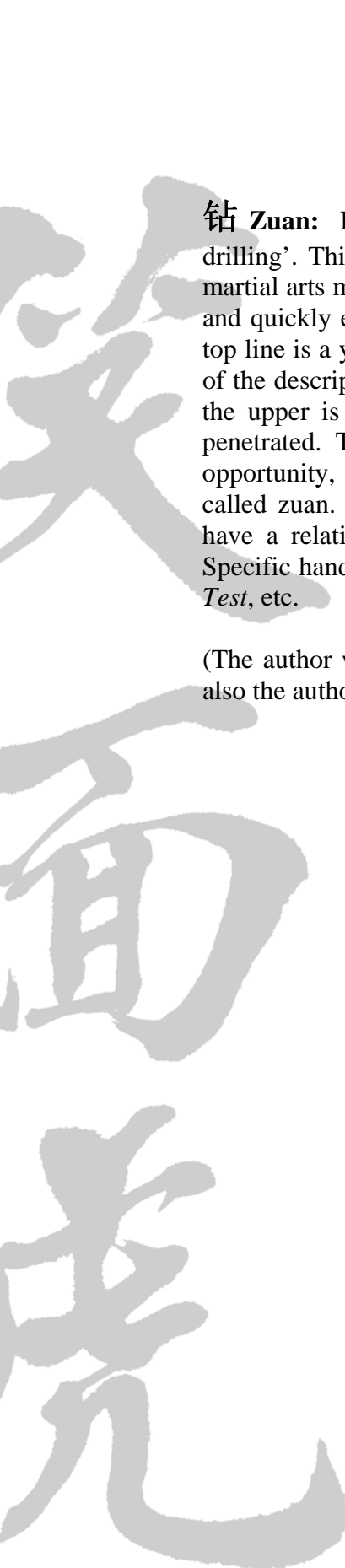
带 Dai: The dai character uses a method that is stroking [捋 lü], nevertheless stroking is not necessarily dai. Because of the stroking hand usage can be coordinated with this hand method, it can be strike or it can be a seizure. Lü is the foundation for the dai hand. It works along the line of the enemy’s attack and then adds on to its strength. Therefore the old manuals say: “A pull that flows with the strength makes dai.” Specific techniques are: *Flowing Hand Pulls the Sheep, 1000 Pounds Fall to the Ground, etc.* If the stroking hand uses strength toward the rear and toward the outside, causing the enemy to change and miss his target, it is called horizontal dai.

领 Ling: Ling has the idea of guiding and leading. In Baguazhang, ling also has a relationship with lü. It looks very similar to dai, only it is not the same as dai. Dai is flowing with and adding on strength, causing the enemy to lose his posture and fall into emptiness. With the ling character, the foundation is also based on lü. As the enemy attacks, you use just a little strength to change its direction and take advantage of it. Dai uses strength that tends to be hard. Ling uses strength that tends to be soft. Therefore the old manuals say: “Neutralizing with diagonal strength makes ling.” Dai and ling are both divided into single hand and double hand. The difference does not rely on using one hand or two hands, but they rely on using strength methods that are not the same. Specific actions of the ling character correspond to the category of neutralizing hand. It goes so far as to neutralize and dissolve the enemy’s incoming hand. How is it used? You must see the specific circumstances and determine it. For the time being this will not be discussed.

缠 Chan: Chan is winding, coiling, and bypassing. In the eight shapes of the martial arts they speak of “snake winding” (People call the martial arts “bashi” [把式 hold shapes]. This is homophonic for bashi [八式 eight shapes].) What are the eight shapes? They are: cat rushes, dog evading, rabbit rolling, eagle overturning, chicken extending, turtle huddles up, mouse drills, snake winds.) The utilization of the chan character in fighting is quite extensive. The hands and arms have the hands and arms winding methods. The legs have their leg winding methods. No matter whether using the striking method, throwing method, or seizing method, they all have their utilizations. Specific hand methods are: *Winding Elbow Slap the Ribs, Winding Elbow Stamp the Foot, White Snake Winds its Body, Drunk Strikes the Mountain Gate, Old Monkey Climbs the Vine,* etc.

扣 Kou: In Baguazhang, when speaking of the kou character, it is spoken of either as an energy method or a body method. Specifically speaking it precisely is the idea of inserting downward. To give an example, if the enemy does lü on my forearm in order to try to control me, I twist and turn my upper arm and forearm. I use strength and insert downward. The form is like the inserting punch in Taijiquan. If the enemy is not willing to loosen his hand, he must follow me down. At this time I can use my shoulder to strike the enemy’s chest. If the enemy does loosen his hands, I raise my elbow and attack him at the right moment. When inserting down, be sure to make use of the body method’s strength and direction in order to have an effect. Specific Techniques are: *Green Dragon Reaches with its Claws, Prone Belly Inserting Punch,* etc.

刁 Diao: In general animals, and birds using their mouths and eating is called *diao* [刁]. So we have the idea of using their mouths and not letting go. The idea is from down, going up. In Baguazhang, the diao character is a type of hand method. Usually the actions are relatively few. Use the thumb and index finger to fiercely pluck the enemy’s hand or wrist upward. This is called diao. In the martial arts this type of hand method is also called ti [lifting]. The old martial arts manuals say, “Diao corresponds with the zhen gua. Zhen makes thunder, so use violence to make diao.” Using the sudden nature of this type of hand method makes the diao character. This type of hand method is like seizing [qin] but not seizing. It is like holding [na] but not holding. It is really difficult for a person to cope with.



钻 **Zuan**: In the section above on the chan character, there is a reference to ‘mouse drilling’. This is the idea of imitating a mouse drilling a hole. In Baguazhang, the old martial arts manuals have. “Dui makes the marsh. You should open the door to the house and quickly enter. This makes drilling.” In drawing the dui gua {insert pic of Dui}, the top line is a yin line. There is a gap between the two short strokes. Therefore in the song of the description of the eight trigrams in the *Yi Jing*, the dui gua is described as: “Dui, the upper is open.” This gap is the very shape of emptiness. This emptiness can be penetrated. Therefore in fighting, you must create the opportunity, quickly find the opportunity, to penetrate the enemy’s empty spaces. In Baguazhang fighting, this is called zuan. In the technique methods of Baguazhang, there are many techniques that have a relationship with the zuan character. This method is often used in throwing. Specific hand methods are: *Old Monk Drapes the Cloth about Himself*, *Zi Xu Passes the Test*, etc.

(The author was a student of the great master Guo Gumin studying Baguazhang. He is also the author of the book, *Jiu Gong Bagua Lianhuan Zhang*.)