Cheng Style Baguazhang

by

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1. The Origins of Cheng Style Baguazhang

The founder of Cheng Style Baguazhang was Cheng Tinghua. He was also known as Yingrong. He was from Cheng Family Village in Shen County, Hebei. He was born in the 28th year of Qing Daoguang (1842). In his youth he went to the capital to study. After his studies were completed, he opened an eyeglasses shop in Beijing outside the Suiwen Gate. Therefore everyone called him 'Eyeglasses Cheng'.

"According to tradition, in his early years Cheng Tinghua was very good at Shuai jiao and had earned himself a small reputation for it. As a result of this, his association with Yin Fu and Shi Jitong was somewhat close. With the recommendations of these two men, he asked to study under Dong Haichuan. At this time he was 28 years old." (See Li Ziming's article, *Baguazhang Mingjia Cheng Tinghua Er San Shi.*) After training for several years, Cheng Tinghua deeply got the essence of Dong Gong's Bagua Turning Palms. He was recognized widely in the martial community as a person of extraordinary abilities. After Dong Haichuan died, Cheng Tinghua, based on what he learned of the basics of the palm forms, together with his thorough understanding of the principles, created his own routines with his own special features to make Cheng Style Baguazhang. He taught many students causing his style to spread far and wide.

In the 26th year of Qing Guangxu (1900), on August 14th, Cheng Tinghua, met with disaster outside the Suiwen Gate, when the 8 Army troops shot and killed him. He was 52 years old. After Cheng Tinghua was killed, his brother, Cheng Tianhua, his oldest son Cheng Youlong etc, risked death to return his remains to his home. He was quickly buried in his wife's family's native place – Louzizhuang, in the eastern suburbs of Beijing. Today, his tombstone is no longer there. Only his younger son Cheng Youxin's second son, Cheng Deliang, is still in the area, farming.

Cheng Tianhua, also called Lao Tian, was Cheng Tinghua's fourth younger brother. After bringing his brother's corpse back home, he did not leave the village. He took the child Cheng Youxin to the ancestral home in Hebei. He brought the Cheng Style Martial Skills back to their native place. He taught Cheng Yousheng, Liu Ziyang, and many other people. Cheng Yousheng, also called Cheng Zhongfa, was Cheng Tianhua's fourth son. His students were Sun Zhijun, Zhang Baozhong and others. They now live in the capital, and regularly teach students in the Beijing East Wall Single Martial Arts School. Within the capital, their fame is quite high.

Cheng Youlong was also called Haiting. Even though he lost his father when he was young, he did not stop his studies. Not only did he mature in the fighting and weapons of the Bagua School, but he also spent 20 years studying Taijiquan, San Cai Sword, Chun Yang Sword, Six Ways of the Halberd, Spring and Autumn Dao. His studies made him one of the best of his generation.
Cheng Youlong was only 20 years old when his father died. When Cheng Tianhua was on the point of leaving, he entrusted Youlong to the care of Cheng Tinghua's disciple, Yang Mingshan. Not long after this, Yang Mingshan and Cheng Youlong returned to the family village. Youlong settled down there and never left. The two men openly and regularly taught students in the Cun Zhong Sui Zong temple grounds. Their disciple Ma Deshan began to show talent, and eventually finished learning the big weapons. (Yang Mingshan was Ma Deshan's maternal uncle.) "Ma Deshan, was also called Zihao, and styled Rulong. He was from the eastern suburbs of Louzizhuang. He was born in the 16th year of Qing Guangzhe (1890). There was a time in Beijing he played the banhu (stringed instrument) in the Tong Xing Long temple. He managed the Kan and Li Gua's Gymnastics and Martial Studies Association. Shortly before the founding of the new Government, he returned to his village and took up farming. He died in 1958" (see Zhao Xuezhuan's Jingji Wushi Ma Deshan.) His disciple, Zhang Bingzhong, currently lives in Dongba. His main disciple, Si Zhen, called Shangjie, is currently in advanced age and lives in Louzizhuang. He has his disciple, Dong Junxiong, and others studying with him.

Cheng Youlong died on October 1, 1928 at the Tianjin Jing Ye Convent. Ma Deshan took his body to Louzizhuang.

Cheng Youxin was called Shouting. Because his body was small, he had the nickname "Cu Ye" (short uncle). When his father died he had not yet reached the age of 20. by working hard and practicing diligently, his skills became very deep. His specialty was lower basin palm. In his old age he was living in Louzizhuang.

Cheng Yougong was called Xiangting. He was Cheng Tinghua's nephew (the son of his oldest brother). He learned his martial skills from Cheng Tinghua. He was in charge of training the army in the northeast.

Li Wenbiao was also called Guangpu. He was from Hebei province. He was Cheng Tinghua's number one disciple. His skills were head and shoulders above all others. This was repeated publicly by everyone. His disciple Luo Xingwu was also called Dewen. He was from Donglu County, Hebei (1881-1969). To complete his skills, he got Cheng Youxin and Cheng Yougong to give him pointers. His martial skills increased daily. His son Luo Dacheng and disciple Liu Jingru are both well known martial arts teachers in Beijing today.

Zhang Yongde was also called Xinzhai. The martial arts community called him "Xuezi Zhang" (Boots Zhang). He was a top student of Cheng Tinghua. He taught very few students in his lifetime. He was extremely strict with his students. Today, living in Beijing at the advanced age of 80, is Old Mr. Zhou Zunfu and his students.

In addition, Yang Mingshan's disciple, Mr. Wang Rongtang, today is also in advanced years. He has a disciple Li Zengfu and others are studying his fighting skills.

The information in the preceding narration is limited to Beijing and limited to those whom the authors know. There are others that the authors do not know, or know but not know well and not certain if it is appropriate to speak of them. This article is only to offer a few remarks by way of introduction so that others may come up with valuable opinions. The same as in Daoism, the people in the know are considered to be not many. If anyone has supplemental information on the martial skills and origins of the different styles and branches of Cheng Bagua, please publish it so that by this exchange, then we can broaden our skills and virtue.
2. Cheng Style Baguazhang's Inner Content and Special Points.

The foundational skill methods of Cheng Style Baguazhang are the standing frames and moving posts. The stepping method mainly uses the "Treading Mud Step". It also uses the "Crane Walking Step" for strength development. The Eight Fixed Posture Palms [Ding Shi Ba Zhang] are commonly called the Eight Big Forms [Ba Da Shi]. Their names are: Fierce Tiger Comes Down the Mountain, Big Peng Spreads its Wings, Embrace the Moon to the Chest, White Ape Offers the Peach, Black Bear Extends it Arms, Lion Opens its Mouth, Point to Heaven, Insert into the Ground, Green Dragon Extends it Claws. The Old Eight Palms [Lao Ba Zhang] are also called the Eight Big Mother Palms [Ba Da Mu Zhang]. Its inner content varies a lot among the different styles. In the Cheng School, without exception, the eight palms are: Single Change, Double Change, Flowing Posture, Behind the Body, Turning Body, Grinding Body, Overturning Body, and Returning Body. When the palm forms are practiced as being mutually linked and strung together it is called Bagua Connected Palms [Bagua Lianhuan Zhang]. In addition, if the foundation above uses changing postures and the lively stepping frame to walk the circle, and if it uses all of the inner content of the 64 Hands, then it is really called Swimming Body Bagua Connected Palms [You Shen Bagua Lianhuan Zhang], and it is a high level Cheng Style Baguazhang routine. Paired practice is divided into Soft Hands [Rou Shou], Single Drills [Dan Cao], and Paired Practice [Dui Lian].

It should be noted that currently many different styles teach a version of the 64 Hands that begins with ‘Advance Step, Flicking Strike.’ This is not a transmission from Dong Haichuan, but comes from the famous martial artist, "Big Spear Liu" Liu Dekuan. It was originally called "Liu Style 8 Methods 64 Hands". Liu Dekuan spent all his life studying martial arts. He gathered skills all his life and with painstaking care in his later years he compiled an excellent martial arts routine. Therefore it is widely transmitted among the different Bagua Schools. Besides this, there is the 64 Techniques method single drills method, the 36 Tiangang Hands, the 72 Hidden Feet, etc. for drilling the palms and moving the legs. These are methods to kill the enemy as you attack. These are really only taught in the Cheng Schools. And if there are no students, then they will not be transmitted.

The inner content of weapons training is based on the Turning Palms. They use give prominence to walking the circle to make them special. They include Turning Saber, Turning Sword, Stick to the Body Spear, Spring and Autumn Knife, Fangtian Halberd, etc. There are no less than ten types of routines. Among them are the specialized weapons: Zi Wu Mandarin Ducks Yue, Chicken Claw Stabbers, Judges Pens, etc.

The outgoing hand in Cheng Style Baguazhang takes the shape of the dragon claw palm. The tiger's mouth is stretched and rounded. The thumb opens outward. The four fingers curl inward. Doing palm drills requires that the practitioner have both form and spirit. The qi must sink into the dantian. Stand like Mt. Yue. The vitality is collected within. The body method is like a dragon or snake. Use the waist to make the decision. Twist, overturn, walk and turn. Bend the legs to tread the mud. Toe-in and toe-out are expansive. It is natural and unrestrained, firm and steady. It uses advancing, retreating, and turning around. Proper usage is circuitous. The fingers separate and the palms rotate. Hard and soft assist each other. The palm is like a piercing shuttle. With proper usage it cuts to the spot. In setting up a complete routine, first train the legs, second train the body, and finally train the palms. Emphasize using the fists and feet. Use weapons to assist in making an integrated system. It has clear cut, distinctive characteristics. (For the Quan Pu materials see Mi Ji Fu Cuo.)