

# Distinguishing Features of the Schools of Baguazhang

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As Baguazhang has grown, gradually the art has taken on the characteristics of different styles. Each style has grown separate from each other's influences, and as each has advanced through the years its characteristics have grown. At present, the major styles are: Yin Style (Yin Fu), Cheng Style (Cheng Tinghua), Song Style (Song Changrong), Liu Style (Liu Fengchun) and Ma Style (Ma Weiqi). These are all styles of first generation men. Although they all had one teacher, nevertheless, differences arose in the palm methods and with particular practice methods. Yin Style uses the piercing palm as its main feature. Cheng and Liu use the pushing palm. Song style uses the level plum flower palm. Ma style is noted for excellence with the hammer method. Within all these styles there are more differences yet each of the teachers thoroughly knew the fundamental principles of Baguazhang. After concentrated research and careful consideration of the dissimilarities of their personal conditions, the differences in the styles is the result of them assimilating the characteristics of different martial arts. Take for example the Yin, Cheng and Ma styles.

Master Yin Fu was a Lohan Quan master. Thus in the Yin Style the Lohan Quan influence is noticeable. The pattern of the palm has the five fingers, together, shaped like the point of a knife. The steps are like floating clouds and flowing water, smooth and unbroken. The whole outer form is firm, yet open and expanded.

Master Cheng Tinghua associated with Xingyi Quan Masters. He mixed his art with Xingyi Quan and achieved great things. Thus Cheng style is somewhat like Xingyi Quan. The palm is shaped like the Xingyi Palm. The steps are firm and strong.

Master Ma Weiqi was an expert in the secrets of the fist. Thus in Ma style's Turning Palms, the hammer method is evident in the movements.

Even within one style there is variation. For example, in the Yin Style piercing palm method there are differences among the third generation: Ma Gui (Shiqing), because his body was short and small and his arms hung down past his knees, therefore his Turning Palm forms were low and small. He was very capable with the crab palm. His power was explosive and his qi full. Gong Baotian (Zhanyuan), because his body was long and thin and his movements were nimble, used quick changes as his specialty. People called him "Monkey Gong". Yin Fu's fourth son, Yin Yuzhang's body was thin and moderate. His movements were nimble and quick. Advancing, retreating, dodging, unfolding, prancing and shifting were his specialties. He was excellent at practicing the snake palm. Men Baozhen's (Pinsan) body was tall and very strong. His Turning Palm method was steady and firm. He used the piercing palm as his major feature. He also used cutting, pounding, splitting, carrying, shaking, blocking, seizing and locking, which are all good methods for

a tall man. Peng Jiuchun originally was a scholar who had passed the imperial exams and who then abandoned it for martial arts. His body was small and weak. His specialty was to use soft to neutralize hard. He was said to have reached the realm of the “one hundred forgings of steel to temper it” power method.

“Soldiers seldom have power, water seldom has form”. Baguazhang’s styles arise from many factors that promote it, and from the forefathers’ painstaking efforts of many years. Only while among Baguazhang’s styles there are differences in the exterior shape and specific practice methods, in their innate character they are still the same. Each style uses walking turning and moving to make the foundation. Spirit, qi, mind, and strength are combined into one. In their power methods, all are between Taijiquan and Xingyi Quan, requiring hard and soft to aid each other. It is only that these are expressed differently in the different styles, that’s all.

