

Understanding the Jiu Jie and Abiding by the Ba Fan in Baguazhang Practice

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The so-called Jiu Jie (九节) (Nine Sections) precisely are dividing the body into three sections, and then each section again being divided into three sections to give a total of nine sections. Therefore in the body, the head makes the end section, the trunk makes the middle section, and the legs make the root section. Then the upper limbs are divided so that the hands make the end sections, the elbows make the middle sections, and the shoulders make the root sections. With the lower limbs, the feet make the end sections, the knees make the middle sections, and the hips make the root sections. In issuing power in Baguazhang, power arises from the root, passes through the middle, and moves out from the end. If the root section is not understood, the power will have no source, the hands will issue in vain. If the middle section is not understood, the power won't be transferred, the changes won't be agile. If the end section is not understood, the power will not penetrate; it will be difficult to get results.

The so-called Ba Fan (八反) are eight aspects of Baguazhang that make it different from other martial arts. The idea of 'fan' is that it is different from what is commonly seen, different from the normal way of doing things. This is one of the main traits of the movements in Baguazhang. After a long period of training and practical experience these essentials begin to emerge. The inner content of the Ba Fan are below:

Fan #1. Commonly when a person advances, he first steps up with the rear foot and when he retreats he first withdraws the front foot. But in practicing Baguazhang, when advancing, we first advance the front foot and when retreating we first withdraw the rear foot. Specifically, using the right empty step as an example, with the right foot in front, when advancing and retreating, the right foot first advances half a step. Then the left foot follows and takes a big step past the front of the right foot. Then the right foot again follows and advances half a step. When finished, the left foot will be in front making a left empty step. Similarly when doing the retreating step, the left foot first withdraws half a step toward the rear. The right foot then withdraws a big step past the left foot toward the rear. Then the left foot again withdraws half a step. When finished, you will have completed an empty step. This makes it easier to be quick and stable. You need not worry about shifting the weight. You can instantly advance to the front or retreat to the rear. Using this type of stepping method when advancing and retreating, you will make the enemy feel that he is unable to retreat when you are advancing. When you retreat, the enemy will not be able to follow. In advancing and retreating, you rush the enemy with the half step, I then remain calm and unhurried, but the enemy's hands become fully occupied and his feet in confusion. I then follow my mind's desires, the enemy ability fall short of his wishes. In addition, when using this type of stepping method, it is not easy for the enemy to detect my weight shifts, they are comparatively hidden. This is a quick and stable, high level stepping method.

Fan #2. Commonly when a person advances or retreats he uses a straight step, but Baguazhang requires using a straight step when entering, using a curved step when leaving, using a horizontal step when cutting across, and using a move backwards step when turning back. The stepping method is quick and clever, and turning around freely.

Fan #3. Commonly a martial artist has a wide variety of hand techniques, but a person practicing Baguazhang uses stillness awaiting motion, uses motion responds to change, uses not changing and yet responding with 10000 changes. The enemy may have 1000 changes and 10000 transformations but I have a fixed rule: I maintain real strength, act according to circumstances, dominate the overall situation, and control the changes and transformations.

Fan #4. Commonly when people fight, they use many strikes and kicks and they run and jump about, but a person practicing Baguazhang uses the piercing palm and the covering elbow, uses the straight palm piercing strike, and uses the wrist to strike the opponent. Also commonly people don't use the entire hand to grip and seize the other party, and many use the fingers and palm to issue strength.

Fan #5. Commonly when people strike they use the extremities, and only pay attention to that part's physical power. But with a person practicing Baguazhang, to use the extremity he must first use the root, and use whole power to strike the opponent.

Fan #6. Commonly people use their hands to make fists to strike with, but in practicing Baguazhang, the emphasis is on striking the opponent with the two palms. Compared with using the fists, they are quicker, have more reach, and have more power.

Fan #7. Commonly people turn around to face the rear direction, but in practicing Baguazhang, the moving steps travel in eight directions, quickly and with many changes. Other people's fists strike in six directions, but in Baguazhang, you are required to look around at 10 directions. (That is the four sides, four corners, up and down, and the spaces between.)

Fan #8. Commonly people straighten their backs, advance in a straight line and retreat in a straight line, but a person practicing Baguazhang then turns and changes positions. The palms arrive and the steps follow.