

How Long...?

It amazes me how in the modern era we have so-called martial arts 'masters' who give out imbecilic advice to their students on a daily basis and are never challenged by anyone about it!

These self-appointed 'masters' with their lofty titles and 'Mickey Mouse Degrees', can easily be found out by a diligent student by simply carrying out a little basic research for themselves.

I regularly receive questions from students who have been confused as to "How long it should take them to learn a specific form or a training method in their Taiji?"

Let us clarify this point once and for all by using simple logic and the advice left to us by some of history's greatest warriors, and some common sense!

Firstly, we must understand the difference between *learning a form* and *studying and understanding a form* - they are not one and the same!

Learning a form or a training method can be done relatively quickly depending on the individual concerned - but that does not mean that you understand it or know it! For example, a dancer or anyone involved in body mechanics can learn the movements of a form or a training method very quickly but, that DOES NOT mean that they now know or understand it and are ready to move onto the next thing!

According to one of the greatest warriors and strategists in history, Miyamoto Musashi, it takes:

"A thousand days of training to develop, ten thousand days of training to polish. You must examine all this well."

Let me make it simple... what Musashi is telling us is that it takes approximately 3 years to learn and almost 27 years of study to know and understand! These are not merely fancy words or sayings - they are instructions to be followed by diligent students!



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Furthermore, Musashi continues:

“It is necessary to know ten thousand things by knowing one well. If you are to practice the way of strategy, nothing must escape your eyes. Reflect well on this.”

Here Musashi is re-emphasizing the point of studying and understanding ONE subject “well”... it’s not rocket science!

According to Dong Yingjie, one of the foremost disciples of Yang Cheng-fu, in his book - Methods Of Applying Taiji Boxing (Taiji Quan Shiyong Fa) - co-authored by Yang Cheng-fu:

“When beginning to learn the Thirteen Dynamics solo set, it takes about three months to become acquainted with it, about a year to become familiar with it, and about five years to become good at it. After that, the more you practice the more refined it will be. But without the authentic transmission, that will not be the case. Without the authentic transmission, the only result will be a slightly strengthened body. The boxing theory after ten years would still be confusing. How would you know its profound subtleties?”

The Thirteen Dynamics are the foundations of all things Taiji... again, note that Dong is in total agreement with Musashi and clearly points out the differences between learning, knowing and understanding a form!

The Small San-sau is a training method of the Thirteen Dynamics!

It takes FIVE years to just become “good” according to Dong and many more years to refine it and if not done right then ***“The boxing theory after ten years would still be confusing. How would you know its profound subtleties?”***

I have consistently stated that Erle told his personal senior students that it would take ***“five years of study to begin to understand the San-sau”*** - that doesn’t mean that you simply ‘do’ the form for five years and that’s it - NO! It means that you have to study and breakdown every facet of it and understand it for at least five years - yet today students are being given idiotic advice that no - we don’t need to train it for that long. It can be done quicker!

I’ll let you into some ‘secrets’ - since my works are being read and plagiarized - I’ll throw this bone for free - not that it’ll make any difference to closed minds:

The San-sau should be, looked upon as a component of training taught alongside the traditional forms thus, giving them meaning. It can be split into four distinct categories:

Upper Body Strikes - consisting of fists, palms, elbows, forearms, fingers, shoulders, head, etc.

Lower Body Strikes - consisting of kicks, stomps, knees, etc.

Throws - consisting of take-downs and sweeps, etc.

Seizing - consisting of locking the joints, breaking, choking, strangulation and submission holds.

So, how many of you practicing the small San-sau have trained the above? Has your 'paper master' even shown you these ideas? And if not... then why not? The answer is simple - they don't know!

So, let's put this advice into context:

Folk like Musashi, Yang Lu-ch'an, Yang Ban-hou and Yang Shao-hou, Sun Lu-tang, Ching Ting-hwa - who spent their entire days training, fighting wars, maiming and killing, and honing their skills 24/7 whilst teaching professional soldiers and Imperial Guards the same skills are telling us that it takes a long time of study to understand and know your forms or training methods - years, decades - and then we have the modern donkeys telling us ... Oh, you don't need to train for as long as that to understand! We can do it quicker! We'll get you your 'Master's Degree' quicker - look, I got mine after 6 years! These fools have not even trained one full-day's training of the Masters of old nor even been in a schoolyard fight let alone anywhere near a battlefield and yet they are claiming that they have the authority and knowledge to change the forms or training methods with their little egotistical minds!

Oh, the vanity of fools!

The same 'masters' when faced with a larger opponent and failing will tell us that the training methods or forms need adjusting to make them work!

Well... Dong is clear on the subject:

"Do not complain that Taiji cannot be applied nor blame your instructors for a lack of instruction. It is fundamentally related to internal skill..."

It's a lack of understanding and skill - get it? It's not a difficult conclusion!

Musashi... he who killed his first opponent - a trained samurai whilst still in his early teens tells us:

"Teaching people a large number of sword techniques is turning the way into a business of selling goods, making beginners believe that there is something profound in their training by impressing them with a variety of techniques. This attitude toward strategy must be avoided, because thinking that there is a variety of ways of cutting a man down is evidence of a disturbed mind. In the world, different ways of cutting a man down do not exist."

And finally, Erle tells us:

"It must be stressed however, that although each technique could be used as a self-defense method, you must only ever treat the small San-Sau as a training method, never taking away or adding to it. It was designed by persons of martial genius to teach us something and to change it in any way is to take away from what it has to teach you."

Although, I have used the small San-sau here as an example this applies to all the forms and training methods - no exception!

They say that a fool and his money are parted easily and that every student deserves the teacher they get...

Question is who are you going to believe? The real warriors who actually lived, walked and died on the Way or the paper tigers who'd be blown away in an instant by an amateur boxer - yet they'll tell you that they know better?

When time frames of study were given by real Masters, they were given for a reason. The longer the time frame the deeper the required study of the subject matter!

Enjoy the journey!