



Unlocking The Small San-sau

Nasser Butt © September 2015

I return to my notes once again while I continue to look at the Small San-sau (SSS) in detail.

I have been pouring over everything I have regarding this most wonderful training method.. notes which I have made and gathered over the years. Picking Erle's brain at every opportunity whilst trying to unlock its secrets and each time I look at it - something new is revealed or, through my notes, I am reminded of something I have neglected or forgotten!

So, why is the SSS such an important tool?

Well... the answer is simple!

Most of Erle's 'old' students will know that Erle had two parallel grading systems when he was teaching. These consisted of:

The World Taiji Boxing Association (WTBA) and The Erle Montaigne System (EMS).

Not everyone was graded in both systems. Most were graded under the WTBA system only!

According to Erle's grading system - a WTBA Level 8 (Blackbelt) student, about to begin his Dan grades, was described as:

“This level indicates that the student is capable of teaching people at the below levels. It does not at this stage indicate a level of proficiency in street defence.”

The Erle Montaigne System carried a higher grade and thus, naturally, demanded a far higher level of understanding and ability, and was the most likely to give you a severe bloody nose or worse - and not many made that grade!

In Erle's words:

“Small San-Sau is one of the tests that one must take in the Erle Montaigne system as opposed to the WTBA's grading system. I regard this exercise as one of the most important training methods as it teaches, timing, balance and co-ordination, where to strike, how to strike, the direction of dim-mak strikes and the power to use. 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.”

So, it was one of a number of “tests” and “one of the most important training methods” - so, by not looking into it or understanding it, or simply skipping over it for the Pauchui, means that you have already failed!

The very first prerequisite of the EMS to be graded was to be able to do the four attacking methods at a level of true fa-jing - with the sound of the ‘one hand clapping’!

There are three punches and one palm technique and they are all inherent in the SSS! These are:

Penetration Palm, Taiji Snap Punch, Taiji Back Fist and Taiji Penetration Fist.

Of course, within each fist and palm technique one could find a number of other attacking methods but these were simply off-shoots of the four original attacks! Therefore, one only had to understand the four ‘parent’ attacks in order to learn about every other kind of attacking method!

This form follows the movements of the Taijiquan form, ‘Grasping Sparrow’s Tail’ up to the posture known as ‘Single Whip’ - and is taken from Yang Cheng-fu’s long form.

The form was invented by the eldest son of YCF - Yang Shouzhong - in order to return the Yang element to his family form as opposed to the slow only movements!

Yang Cheng-fu’s form is often derided within some corners of the WTBA.. it is looked down upon in comparison to its ‘older brother’ - The Yang Lu-ch’an Form! But, those who do, are foolish and do so due to a lack of understanding of the system and the failure to connect the dots! Yang Cheng-fu’s form has solid foundations coming from within the Old Yang itself! It wasn’t conjured out of thin air!

The movements of the SSS form are:

Arn - left, right and left.

Block Right

P’eng

Block Left

Double P’eng

Lu (Roll back)

Chee (Squeeze)

Arn - 3 Techniques:

Arn 1

Arn 2

Arn 3

Fishes In Eight Left

Fishes In Eight Right

Single Whip (The Hook)

Single Whip (The Hook)

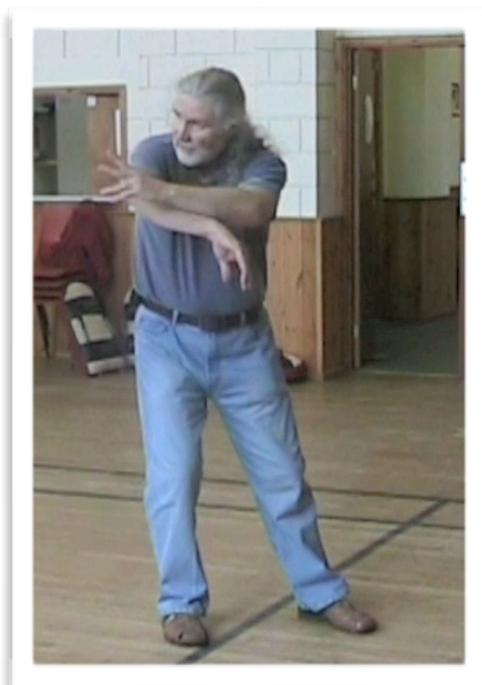
Single Whip (The Hook)

Single Whip (Palm)

Single Whip (Palm)

Single Whip (Palm)

Close



The form teaches us subconsciously about the correct ‘rules’ for fighting:

Never step backwards.

Never fight the peripheral attacking weapon, fight the whole body.

Never meet force on force, always move at a slight angle to the attacker as you move in.

Never use two steps in fighting.
Never look at the attacking portion.
Never use a lock or hold as your main fighting method.
Never use pushes or pulls in self-defense.
Never go to the ground. (That does not mean that Taiji or the Internal arts do not have 'grappling' in their system.. it simply means we do not take the fight to the ground!!!)
The legs are for standing, the hands are for fighting.

These 'rules' are not arbitrary rules! They ensure the correct responses from the body itself. The way that the body moves in the SSS is a deliberate design of the training method to trigger specific changes which are critical to our survival in time of danger!

It also teaches us about the Thirteen Postures of Taijiquan, along with large and small circle energy and secondary attacks when the 'primary' weapons fail!

The Thirteen Postures were the original postures of the first attempts to put together a single set in H'ao Ch'uan which later became known as Taijiquan. Those thirteen postures remain today and in fact they remain more so in advanced push hands.

Without understanding and being able to grasp the essence and principles of these Thirteen Postures - there is NO H'ao Ch'uan! It is that simple!

The concept of 'No Mind' boxing arises from a thorough understanding of these principles.
For example, if we do not understand why P'eng is considered a Yin defence and Lu is considered a Yin attack, then we have no way of understanding how to connect to our opponent's energy, on a subconscious level, thereby producing a 'No Mind' response.

Those purporting to be practicing H'ao Ch'uan are simply deluding themselves and would fail miserably when faced by a real attack loaded with intent and malice!

I'd be curious to know how many of the current crop of practitioners can even name the Thirteen Postures, let alone demonstrate their core elements!

Funnily enough, by studying and practicing the SSS, these concepts are embedded into the subconscious!

The Thirteen Postures consist of eight postures or energies and five directions:

P'eng (Yin defence)
Lu (Yin Attack)
Chee (Yang Attack)
Arn (Yang Attack)

The above four are generally referred to as the Four Primary Methods.

P'eng jing is the major jing used in all of the others. P'eng is moving Qi, while Lu is 'collecting Qi', Chee is receiving Qi while Arn is striking Qi.

These also cover the Primary Directions and if they are defeated - due to bad technique, poor understanding or simply lack of training - then you must use one of the Four Corner Methods to save yourself!

The next four postures are:

Tsai
Lieh

Chou (2nd Line of Defence)
K'ao (Third Line of Defence)

The remaining Five 'postures' or rather directions are:

Move Forward
Move Backward
Look Right
Gaze Left
Central Equilibrium (Earth Energy)

Central Equilibrium or Earth Power appears in all the postures!

The 'Wooden Man'

In the two person version of the SSS, your partner is acting as the 'Wooden Man' - he or she , put simply, are a punching bag! Only ONCE during the SSS does your partner do "something other than just throw punches."

The job of the 'wooden man' is to teach NOT to compete! If the Wooden man starts to compete then the practitioner fails to learn or develop correctly!

Only in one other training method related to the SSS does the Wooden Man do something more than just punch. Here, one must understand clearly, as to WHY?

A Word on Connectivity

Connectivity is one of the most critical concepts within the Internal Arts, in particular, and martial arts in general!

This concept, along with ***Rooting/Grounding*** is taught from day one to all students and like the aforementioned, is a difficult concept to grasp by most students. I have had several students, who are highly placed practitioners within other martial arts, who struggle with this concept.

Connectivity should not be mistaken for '***Sticking***', as it most often is - the two are completely different and oft confused.

A student must learn to connect to him/herself and stick to their opponent!

Connectivity, as with most things, must first be developed and understood on a physical level. If a student cannot connect with him/herself on a physical level then he/she will fail to connect themselves with the mind and thus, the spirit!

The SSS is a 'master tutor' of connectivity. It teaches us how to connect with the body, then with the mind and finally open the gateway to the spirit. At this level - ***there is no opponent!***

The versatility of this amazing training method cannot and should not be underestimated by any serious practitioner of Taijiquan and those claiming to be representatives of the Erle Montaigne System!

It is a "test"!

It was meant to be difficult and as Erle would say, ..."if a student were to study the SSS for 5 years, along with the Post training, then he or she would be a formidable fighter being able to deal with virtually any attack!

How many of us can honestly say that they have spent or invested in that loss for 5 years?"

The SSS is so much more than just techniques or combinations strikes. At its epitome of 'freestyle' attacks it really is something to behold. However, most students will never achieve these heights. Not because they are incapable but, as I have already said, because they never study it long enough to allow the form to reveal all its secrets!

Erle once said to me that a person knowing the SSS well would absolutely destroy someone who understood their Pauchui poorly!

Heed his message!

