

Date: Thu, 28 Mar 1996
From: Chip Ellis
Subject: neijia: Fists of Fury

Executive summary:

One anecdote indicates that it is better to use the heel of the palm to strike rather than the fist. Using the fist often results in a broken hand. Even ordinary people can do a lot more damage with the palm, presumably due to the better mechanical connection between the arm bones and the target. The small bones of the hand are more vulnerable to breakage.

Another anecdote indicates that if you are trained in the internal martial arts you can hit bone (like an eye socket) with your fist, demolish the bone, and leave no marks on your hand. Presumably this is due to the transfer of energy to the broken target and perhaps some effect of internal energy flow.

Question:

- 1) Assuming an attack to the head, is it better to use a fist or an open palm?
- 2) Delving into the neijia principles, what is the role of the qi in protecting the attacking fist, if any?
- 3) Has anyone out there had any first hand experience related to this subject? If so will you please comment in order to shed some light on the topic.

Now the rest of the story...

The first story was told to me by a student who heard it from a Honolulu policeman. The student was talking to the cop and wondering why there were so few fists in the Yang style slow set moves. The cop said that in his experience, viewing the results of numerous fights, most of the people who used fists to fight ended up with broken hands.

The cop said that when the combatant used the heel of the open palm he had observed that there was little or no damage to the person's hand. Also, even "ordinary" people were able to generate a great deal of power and damage to their opponent using the heel of the hand.

The second story was told to me by a person who teaches Taiji quan to prisoners at the Maui minimum security prison. He teaches them the Yang style slow set and the Dong family fast set. The combatants were the "bull" of the floor (a large man with lots of street fighting experience), and the "punk" newcomer (a smaller man with an attitude).

The bull became totally dedicated to the study of Taiji quan. For over a year he practiced at least 8 hours a day, mostly doing the Dong family fast set. This set involves both hard and soft movements, and is done both slowly and very quickly. Done properly the player can fa jing in many parts of the set.

The teacher had been teaching the class of prisoners for over a year when the punk entered the scene. He attended the classes (since that's what was happening) but he was a trouble maker and spend most of his time harassing the teacher and his students. One of his favorite methods was to perform lots of flashy high kicks as he was showing off his tai kwan do training. After a while the bull became upset with this and told the punk to shut up or go away.

One day the bull discovered that the punk was about to make an attempt to break out of the prison. Since part of the bull's responsibility was to keep order among his cell mates, he would be blamed big time if such an escape took place. He had no choice. He contacted the guards and told them of the punk's plans.

Unfortunately the guards were not adroit as they thwarted the punk's attempt, so the punk learned who gave him away. He came looking for the bull. When the punk found the bull at home in his cell he started a fight. At first the bull practiced his Taiji training and tried to avoid a fight. But the punk had a piece of steel that he had fashioned into a crude knife and was determined to hurt the bull.

So the bull taunted the punk and told him to go ahead and throw his best flashy kick. The punk complied, at which point the bull charged and proceeded to do sever damage to the punk's body in a flash of blows. I don't remember the count exactly but it was something like: all ribs on both sides of the punk's body were broken (including the floating ribs), the punk's skull was cracked in four places, all his front teeth were knocked out, and the bull left deep knuckle depressions in the bone around one of the punk's eye sockets.

Needles to say, the punk went to the hospital in very serious condition. The bull was sent to the maximum security prison on Oahu. Before he went, he talked to the teacher and remarked, "You

know, it was amazing. If I had hit someone like that before my taiji training I would have broken my hands. But look, my hands aren't hurt at all. I think the internal power protected them."