

# Unearthing the Treasures: *The True Kung Fu Sword, Part II*

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It is time to introduce a few martial sword arts that fortunately are not lost and still being practiced. Hopefully, people can practice and popularize them.

I can only offer what I have studied. May I be so bold to claim: if we adhere to these, we would not be far from the ancients but also be close to creating a sword renaissance. Perhaps sword art can have this one chance for survival.



"Moon hangs in the sky's corner" from san cai jian.  
Photo by Terry Martin

## San Cai Jian

The *san cai jian* (literally translated as "three talents sword") was handed down to me by Master Han Chin Tang. There are three components: basics, form and two person form (*san cai dui jian*).

It is well known that the usage of martial sword is essential. The usage of the san cai jian mainly involves "leakage." That is, "finding a leak" and "mending the leak." These two are opposite yet complementary aspects in combat.

"Three talents" means Heaven, Earth and Man. They refer to the upper, middle and lower parts of a body. In plain words, we can just call them high, middle and low.

Regrettably, the history of this famous sword art is unclear. Since it was a mandatory training course in the Central Martial Arts Academy (in the Republic of China), it is widely practiced. But it is not so favored by aficionados, their accusation simply unbelievable: not pretty enough.

San cai jian follows strictly classical rules in martial sword, keeping the form unadulterated by unnecessary theatrical gestures. But some san cai jian practitioners only train hard for acrobatic showmanship, not for proper usage. This tells us that pretty moves are not always practical; and practical moves are not always watchable!

To learn this sword, one must study the basics: thrusting, splitting, pointing, uprooting, etc. As to how many, some count ten basics, some twelve--these are minor details. Most important is to practice the basics until one is in full control of the "one-tip-two-blades" of the "three-foot-cold-spring" of a sword. This is the technique of the offense and defense of all sword art and the only way to master all sword art.

Next comes solo and then two-person form practice. The san cai jian combines basics with footwork

and upper-body work to "finding the opponent's leak" and "mending your own leak" in a series of attack and defense movements. Three parts alternate, rapidly moving high then low; three gates snake swiftly from left to right. This simulates life and death combat with an opponent. Repetitions of moves and direction change, variation, familiarity and clarity of intention are the foundation of the san cai dui jian (two-person form).

It is worth mentioning that the two-person form just folds the solo san cai jian in half to make two complimentary halves. This enables one to practice with a fellow student, taking turns in offense and defense. The twin halves match and compliment each other perfectly and snugly. So to make progress in "finding leak" and "mending leak," one does not need to learn yet another two person form.

I'd like to highlight an important point of technique: the pragmatism of the san cai jian demands that the target of every move is flesh, either to intercept the wrist or pierce the heart. It never attempts direct contact with another sword, ringing "ding-dong ding-dong" like percussion instruments. The sparks between clanging swords in martial art (kung fu) movies are simply absurd, like seeing blacksmiths work their craft on screen!

A martial proverb says that "Sword is power in stillness." Here's another one: "Take off later yet arrive earlier." Their manifestation in the san cai jian is: first cripple the enemy's hand in order to disable his sword; then the opponent can be captured or killed at leisure!



*"Wind sways the lotus leaves" from  
kun wu jian.*

### **Kun Wu Jian**

The Kun Wu Sword was handed down to me by Master Liu Yun Chaio. Here there are also three components: basics, form and two-person form (*kun wu dui jian*). The basic requirement of this sword training can be covered by one word: stickiness. Its essence contains two requirements: "stick" to the enemy's weapon, "stick" out into the enemy's opening.

There are several possible origins of the name "Kun Wu." One is it was the name of an ancient marquis; another possibility is it was the name of a marquis' sword. Some say it was the name of a state or mountain. Who knows which is true? We can only be sure that even if an old bamboo scroll or ancient sword were dug up that bears this name, it still has nothing to do with modern swords of the same name. What can one say?

Appealing to authority and antiquity is simply human nature.

Kun Wu Sword was born in Cang County, the famous "Hometown of Martial Arts." Master Liu's Kun Wu Sword came from his kung fu brother, Commander of Fifth Route Army General Zhang Xiang Wu.

General Zhang and his brother, Supervisor of Hebei Province General Li Jing Lin, had the same lineage. If we try to trace further upstream, all we get are hearsay and legend.

General Li was honored as "Number One Sword Under Heaven." He served as vice president of the Central Martial Art Academy. He was very supportive of many tournaments and demonstrations in the early days of the Republic of China (early 20th century). Every time he gave a demonstration, it was always sword art.

It is said that Wu Dang (武當) Sword, famous for its practicality, was promoted by General Li. If asked where it came from, it was said to be from a Celestial! There are articles and books on Wu Dang Sword. Some say that the whole story was made up by General Li, who didn't want to disclose his exclusive technique of Kun Wu Sword --- believe it or not!

General Li could utilize and make up his own sword art. One of the three forms of Tai Ji sword in Yang Tai Ji Quan was created by him.

Basics are, by definition, the foundation. Kun Wu sword technique contains thrusting, splitting, pointing, uprooting. Any sword basics are pretty much the same. The only differences are in the execution. A sword consists of one solid body. The front, middle and rear sections each has its own function yet they must work in concert. Only after that, stickiness--sticking to and "sucking in" the opponent's weapon--can be realized.

In other words, it is best to be equipped first with knowledge and skill of the three usages of the sword before practicing the Kun Wu form.

Among various branches of Kun Wu Sword, differences in the form are quite small. Fundamental differences are not found in minor details like how many moves, their sequence, or differing ways to name them. We should ask if they are equipped with the same nutritional level of sword tactics.

We should not ask about a move or step, "Where does it go?" but instead, "How does it get there?" "Attack the person when there is one; attack the shadow (in solo practice, imagine the person to which you direct the techniques) when there is none." With a sword in hand, the person in mind, the sword, mind, footwork, torso, must become a lithe organic whole. This is the requirement of Kun Wu two-person sword.



*"Cover the front and ward off the back" from kun wu jian.*

The two person form for Kun Wu sword has to be studied separately. The offensive and defensive moves are drawn from the Kun Wu form but the sequence is different and movements are not exactly the same.

Kun Wu two-person form shows the operation of one-sword-three-sections, one-move-three-intentions, plus the importance of footwork. For stepping forward and backward, high and low, and the angle are the foundations of offense and defense, withdraw and advance, virtual and real intention of the hand.

If one can't advance and retreat like wind, how can one use a sword like wind?



The Bajì Sword was taught me by Master Liu Yun Chiao. It has three parts: basics, form and two-person form.

The ancients used sword for its practicality. In a private dual, the goal is to pierce the heart or behead the opponent in one strike! This requires tremendous strength. More so on the battle field, where soldiers wear armor. Without strength, how can one decapitate the enemy and win?

Therefore, the purpose of the sword basics is how to focus the strength of the whole body in a single strike. It must be capable of penetrating armor in order to kill.

Among various systems of bajì quan, there must be some sword art. Is it Bajì Sword? It is unclear. Some bajì systems use other sword arts so it is not consistent.

Here, I would like to recount the unusual origin of the Bajì Sword that I learned. Is it a meaningful story? Or interesting miracle? That would depend on the individual practitioner to decide.

The time was the spring of 1933. The location was the headquarters of the Fifth Route Army in Huang County, Shandong Province. The characters were Master Liu and his brother General Zhang who practiced bajì quan, pigua zhang and also bagua zhang under Elder Gong Bao Tian. They practiced Kun Wu sword very hard. But when their teacher Elder Li Shu Wen saw it, he snickered and made fun of how useless it was.

Master Li ordered General Zhang to try out his sword. Not only could the general's sword not advance any moves, he could not even hold it firmly. His sword kept dropping or flying away!

Then Master Li explained the importance of "sword power:" If there is no energy or power with the moves, it is merely a window display!

Because his two pupils were practicing Kun Wu sword, Master Li used the form, one move after another, to analyze the 纏勁 (wrapping) and 斫勁 (chopping) strength of the Yin, and the Yang viciousness of chopping strength. After some days, unknowingly, without changing the movements or sequence, what was later known as Bajì Sword was born.

As a result, the form of Bajì Sword is the same as Kun Wu sword. The scripture (the name of each move of the entire sequence of the form) is also identical. Master Liu's book *Kun Wu Sword*, published in the winter of 1990, is often called Line One Kun Wu Sword. The contents of another book, *Kun Wu Sword Vol. II*, published in the winter of 1993, is indeed for the Bajì Sword introduced here. The latter

is often referred to as Line Two Kun Wu Sword.

Why a different name? There are two considerations in naming a system: the name and its content. Considering its content and substance, Baji Sword appears to be more appropriate. If we think about the name, Cang county has a few systems of Kun Wu sword which are widespread. There are also a few books on Kun Wu sword, but then there is never Second Road nor Third Road.

It's not good to measure merit by sheer volume. Let alone it seems misleading that just because I have Kun Wu Sword Roads One, Two, and Three while others only have Road One, mine therefore must be the highest form while all others are incomplete frauds. A decent person would not do such a thing, therefore it is better to avoid it!

Also, Baji Dui sword, commonly called Third Road of Kun Wu Sword, is not a choreographed sequence of two-person practice. It is only a collection of separate movements of opposition. There are no firm rules or order; it merely guides students in the direction of real combat.

If we analyze the technique, the first is, "The three gates in the art of the sword are left, right and center. By tradition they are referred to as right tiger, center snake, left dragon."

劍術三門左右中，右虎中蛇左曰龍」

Second, "The tiger's leap does not enter the dragon; the dragon's flip does not enter the tiger. The dragon's flip and tiger's leap are both the snake's gait." This combines footwork and sword technique, also what Master Liu stated: "One step one move, one step two moves, one step three moves."

虎躍不入龍，龍翻不入虎，龍翻虎躍皆蛇行」

Finally, all arts follow the same principles, from "Straight gait in front of the chest is unstoppable," to "Straight gait and straight usage is the secluded secret." Master Liu said: a sword can only go forward not turn back; can also attack continuously, even change left handle to right, and still, it is always moving forward. This Nirvana of sword art is simply beyond words!



Sword was originally just a weapon. Countries all around the world have had it.

However, only in China has sword become a sword culture.

But then, we don't know since when, the sword has gradually become only a *symbol* of sword culture. It reincarnates in various forms, everywhere in life. For eons, it's guided our emotions. Its blade has penetrated into culture, while retreating further away from sword, the weapon and sword art, the martial technique.

Cultural trends, following a natural course, are blameless and selfless. The blame lies solely with martial arts: due to its own negligence and carelessness, it deviates further from martial art. Furthermore, from its complacency and self deception, it in turn hurts the culture.

Culture is like a mother, loving and forgiving. Now, it depends on sword art, like a wounded hero, to make up his mind, to choose.

If it would rather rest at its mother's breast, then please rest in peace.

If it retains any intention to return to life, then Master Han and Master Liu's sword arts will not be lost. In Taiwan or overseas, the martial arts community, if it really put its mind to it, should be able to find a big enough team to rebuild sword art together

An heroic sword needs not speak. An exclusive art excels in silence. It would not be hard for real lovers of sword to find companions and study together.

If so, it will be good fortune both for the sword arts and also for the sword culture.