

R. W. Smith on Ben Lo

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[Ben Lo] can:

- withstand chops on his arm until the chopper's hand goes numb
- make you feel like a bridge has fallen on you by chopping you once with a relaxed hand
- drop you to your knees by pressing his wrist against yours or - worse! - by sawing on your wrist
- putting a hand on your stomach (you likewise) push you backwards irrespective of your weight or strength
- bring the qi to the palm of his hand creating a small lung there

These are not skills, only manifestations of his skills. It is in tuishou (push-hands) that one is astonished into an appreciation of his great craft. Other than Zheng Manqing he is the only one I have pushed with whom I could not push even a little. He is always there but you can't bring any energy to bear on him. A neutralizer par excellence, he sticks to you and ends by uprooting you.

He cannot be armlocked. Mr. Chee, an excellent Shaolin boxer in Malaysia, I could not armlock either, but there was a quantum difference between the two. Chee's qi was somewhat forceful in neutralizing me while Ben's is elastic and whatever technique I essay he neutralizes, at the same time locking or pushing me.

Though self-effacing and mild, Ben in the old days really epitomized the *wu* [武, martial]. Where situations tended toward the physical, he was a terror. Boxers in Taiwan wanting to compare themselves with Professor Zheng often tried their wares first on Ben. After this "Lion Who Guards the Gate" completed their education, few of the challengers went on to Zheng. Ben was discouraging.

After the birth of his son, Danny, Ben told me that he realized the beauty and creativity in life and vowed never again to be destructive. He keeps to that vow despite being tempted by various yahoos.

Ben's potency makes one wince. When I took Bill Paul, former west coast judo champ to him for a skirmish, Ben so completely managed him that Bill, impressed, took Ben down to San Francisco State University where he demolished the whole football team, if only one at a time.

Despite his skill and pragmatic ability, Ben is still largely unrecognized. He doesn't advertise and will not even paint a sign on the window of his studio. Word of mouth brings him students. Far inferior teachers get and keep more students through commercial promotion and fancy rhetoric.

There were all kinds of fighting specialists on Taiwan. The top "heavy hand" on the island had trained his hands so that he could chop down a (small) tree barehanded or, at least, chop the bark off it. Ben, who liked to try these specialists, braced the champions and this odd couple took turns whacking each other's forearms. Soon enough they found that neither could "suffer" the strike of the other. It was a tie but the fact that Ben struck with a relaxed arm while the champ used all his force spoke loudly.

Ben was approached by a well-known Chinese taiji teacher from Chicago for some sensing-hands. Ben agreed, and instantly the other was at sea drowning, completely out of his element.

Ben lightly pushed and pulled him all over.

Frustrated, the man yelled: "What in the world is this?"

"This is called taiji," Ben answered. "This is how yin and yang interact in tuishou."

"But," Chicago says, "I have many students. I owe much of my reputation to my lectures on yin and yang!"

Ben said that might be so, but talking was not doing.