



San Soo From The Ground Up: Part 3

Throughout time real knowledge has always been and always will be kept in small circles. Due to the fact that every individual has their own way of interpreting knowledge and different levels of understanding given knowledge, there will always be bickering and disagreement. With all honesty I can say that out of the hundreds of books and articles on martial art that I have read, I have always found something of value. The written word can be picked apart and taken out of context so very easily, especially by those who talk more than train. I like to tell my friends and students that kung fu is experiential. You must train to feel the changes inside and outside of your body. If you spend your time in training you will come upon some wonderful and enlightening experiences.

In the first section of this article we discussed lower body structure and connection. The second section we moved into the upper body and the relation and connection to the lower foundation. We also covered moving in structure while performing static and dynamic arm positions. In addition, we touched on some ideas relating to issuing energy. In this third part of the series, I will attempt to bring the previously mentioned movement concepts together and give some insight on usage.

At the end of the second section we touched on moving into the next phase in structure training and issuing power. This is where I would like to pick it up. If you practice stillness in your stance work and learn to relax your structure, you will not be able to stop the reeling effect when you begin applying this concept into your moving exercises. What comes next is to start enhancing it and projecting it to all parts of your body.

If you train slowly you should be able to “visualize” the energy moving from the ground to your knees, to your hip, to your spine, out to your shoulder and finally after passing the elbow it reaches the hand. Work on keeping the solid connected feeling throughout all of the



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exercises and eventually this will flow into your forms and San Soo practice. Relaxed structure is rooting in motion and allowing power to reach your extremities from the rotation of all joints.

Now work your windmill exercises and try doing one up windmill and one down windmill block. Start with your right hand moving straight up your centerline. When it reaches face high and begins to rotate outward to the right block position, you begin lifting the left hand upwards and outward to the left and continue into your down windmill movement. At the same time your right hand has finished the up windmill and is moving back up the center line, your left hand will cross on the outside of your right hand at about the chest level. It is less restrictive to your movement to do the down windmill to the outside of the up windmill. This takes some practice to become smooth and to coordinate your stance work with this exercise. The application of this exercise is practiced all the time in San Soo but I've not seen it drilled. This will help tremendously with your timing and coordination of upper and lower body. Remember not to think so much about the hand movements that you forget about dropping your weight and keeping a solid foundation.

You can drill one complete move from any form over and over again and if the correct dynamics are being used, it will act as a drilling exercise that will develop reeling energy. Remember to relax your body into the movement so that when you enhance the movement and express the energy it will feel natural.

If you choose to release the energy while training be sure to fully let it go. True release of power can not and should not be stopped and must smoothly release like an arrow from a bow. There are distinct levels of training that should be experienced in San Soo with regards to learning to fully release your energy. Jimmy would always tell me to



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make sure I was striking the correct targets and to take my time so that I could visualize it happening, but this is more in the beginning stages. Since you almost have to use a certain amount of dynamic tension (needed to stop from making full contact), this can not be considered truly releasing the power. With experience your targeting will become very good. Then you can start learning to follow through with your strikes and move through your partner by striking past the intended target but using the intent to visualize the strike. In this way you can use your full body motion and weight to move your opponent into position for your follow up. At this stage you need to be careful of your training partner since one mistake can mean a life changing injury. I like to tell my students to move down and in all the time. If your body drops you must think up too. If you move forward there should also be a thought of power to the back as well as side to side. This will keep your body's energy balanced. Of course this is training and after years of doing this it becomes ingrained in your muscle memory and is no longer a thought, but becomes your natural response. Your intent is what directs the power and knowing some basic anatomy is crucial to the visualization of your target areas. This usually is covered throughout San Soo training but any extra effort in this area will be of great value. All of these things relate to the change of intent we spoke of earlier.

To continue with this idea, I would like to explain the change of angles that will affect the application of your heightened intent. As explained in the previous section of this article, when you relax your structure while performing the dynamic windmill exercises, you will not be able to stop the reeling effect from your feet to your waist and upward through the spine. Now, if you are training the up windmill with this in mind, you will also see how the shoulders rotate and turn from left to right. In application, this is how you achieve the proper angle for



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blocking or striking. It's logical to think that the shortest path from point A to point B is achieved by proper positioning of the body. Rotation and circular angles also minimize the power on power clash that realistically will make the stronger person the victor. In the second paragraph of the first section of this 3-part series, I spoke about the connection from the blocking hand to the rooted feet. This is the same idea with the exception that you are not just standing there trying to absorb impact. You are moving with it and adding positioning, direction and intent to maximize your balance and remove his. With rotation your shoulder should come into position for counterattack. This also applies to your waist, which puts your lower body into position for stepping, kicking, kneeing or trapping. If you are doing your up windmill exercise with dynamic foot work you will notice that the timing must be adjusted with your hands. When you move from stance to stance, your upper and lower body needs to coordinate and your eyes need to lead your body. You must see something happening and not just move through the exercises. You will notice the rotation happening naturally but it is important that you do not just learn to match the hand and arm work with the leg work. Moving forward and turning around should be done as if your distance to an opponent is crucial, since distance creates the time needed to respond. In practicing with a partner, when the punch is coming towards you and you up windmill block without much rotation of your shoulders, the opponent's arm and body will be pushed away from you. This in effect gives the opponent his balance back and causes a clash of the limbs. Now if you were to do the same up windmill block in the exact same manor but you were to rotate your shoulders (even slightly) the effect is far different causing his loss of balance and your gain of positioning from the side. This is only one basic (but very deep) idea on rotation. If you think about what is happening with your whole body



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when you rotate like this, it is positioning your hip forward, which shortens the distance for all your lower body movements.

This idea applies in throwing as well. It is common to see people grab a leverage and immediately try to throw or take someone down before they have achieved the proper angle. If you start pushing or pulling with your hands, your opponent will react by moving away or towards you, making you lose the balance you need to turn and drive with your legs! Something Master Jack Sera constantly repeated and emphasized in our training was that the hands are for holding, turn with the shoulders and drive with the legs and the last thing you finish with is the follow through with your hands. Most people do this backwards. When you hold with your hands and turn your body the angle changes on whatever part of your opponent's body that you are holding. This is very important to understand, since you need to move someone off balance before you start trying to throw them or take them down. It is also very hard for someone to deflect and or move with a blow if they are in the process of trying to regain their balance! They usually absorb everything you give them. When holding someone be sure that you are holding them off balance and not moving them into a balanced position. Do not stop following them. Once you have moved your opponent off balance do not let up but continue to hold them and turn. The rotation of the shoulders is imperative. The subtlety of this kind of movement must be felt to be appreciated.

There are an infinite number of circular values in a sphere. If you imagine a ball (solid ball) made up of individual circles you can appreciate the possibilities of the rotational value of the human body and all of the joints. The vertical, horizontal and many diagonal angles are being expressed with every joint of the body. Of course these subtle rotations are not always visual but are there nevertheless. Body



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positioning is very important when you talk about the way your rotation will make your opponent come around you. You can increase the amount of rotation or shorten it depending on how you move into position and at what level your body is at the time of the rotation, i.e. upright, low stance, kneeling or rolling. San Soo does not have any throwing moves that allow for the opponent to roll out. The angle when you train is far different than when you actually apply a throw or a take down. Instead of allowing the person to make a large round arch you are cutting it off and delivering them to the ground with purpose and direction. I like to use the analogy of the McDonalds arch which shows a much more direct dropping angle than you would use with a training partner. Always remember that first you must achieve the correct angle and make the opponent come around or lean off balance before you start trying to push and pull them around. This is what creates the “effortless power” effect that when used with the correct timing, weight distribution, positioning and finally power, an incredible amount of energy can be produced. If you see someone being thrown and you can't tell which person is more off balance, the person throwing or the one being thrown, then chances are the throw or take down is being done incorrectly. The timing in which you use the transfer of power from your legs is very important, just as is the positioning of your feet and legs. If you strike someone down or deliver them to the ground from the wrong position you yourself will most likely be thrown off balance. You really need to coordinate your upper and lower body as well as the emotion and intent.

In San Soo there is no middle ground. You either use it or make sure you can walk away. Why would you want to let your opponent show you how good they are? Jimmy would always tell me that the opponent should be assumed to be better but don't give him the chance to show you. This is why if you play with kung fu in sport conditions it really can



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depend on who the better and stronger opponent is. In a real combat situation it comes down to who is smarter at that time. The pain factor must be involved for the art to be completely appreciated. Everything you touch should hurt your opponent and cause some kind of nerve or muscle response that changes their intent and or cadence. Surviving or dying and winning or losing are two very different ideas.

The depth of any art can never be fully expressed in writing. Actual training with a teacher that has a full understanding of the concepts and dynamics is imperative. That goes with any learning experience in any field. There are no shortcuts! This three part article has been an attempt to hopefully get practitioners of all arts to look a little deeper into the fine aspects of the art they have chosen. “It’s not the art that makes the man, it’s the man that makes the art.”

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