



San Soo From The Ground Up: Part 2

In the second section of this three part series you will now start to see the structure of the upper body come into play. In the first part we focused mainly on the structure and root of the lower body, from the foot to the knee and upward to the hip. The power is generated from the earth and moves front to back, side to side, and drives from the rooted foot. This is the foundation you must lay down while preparing to stack and connect the upper torso. Most of the time this training is going on at the same time but I think it is necessary to clearly define the connectivity of both the upper and lower (as well as the internal) body. Jimmy would say, "You step in your stance and you turn from stance to stance, otherwise you have no form." When you saw Jimmy demonstrate these ideas while explaining them, it was clear he was speaking of structured, balanced movement coupled with positioning, timing, and accuracy. Speed and power were never emphasized and in fact were not encouraged at all. How correctly you move will always be more important than how fast and hard you can move. Since you will never be the strongest or the fastest (and should always assume the other guy is), moving in structure and utilizing everything you do have becomes all the more necessary, and clearly more important. When Kung Fu San Soo is done correctly it should seem effortless to you. Jimmy would say to me, "It's like walking young man, very natural." The explosive intent needed in self defense is another issue. We are going to discuss quality of structure at this time.

The structure and connection of the upper body and the lower body follow some of the same basic ideas but of course have many differences muscularly and energetically. Let us begin with the spine



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If your root is correct and the connection is complete to your upper body, the power will issue from the spine. This is a very important aspect of issuing true power that utilizes the whole body and not just the extremities. The structure of the body should be straight and should not tilt or lean. From the top of the head down the small of the back should be straight and the backside should not stick out. Relax the lower back and front of the hip area and the sacrum will naturally tuck. Let gravity do the work and you will not have to strain to force the sacral tuck. You can also think about the lower stomach area (dan tien) being pressed to the lower back (ming men). The same idea applies to the chest and chin so that your chest is hollowed (or relaxed-sung) and the neck is straight. Lifting from the crown point of your head will help relax your shoulders down. Remember to use your mind and not the strength to accomplish this. Straining can cause damage to the body over years of improper training. This alignment concept is not something you can just talk about; you have to train it so that it becomes natural and effortless. This again is just the static position and not how the spine will move when issuing power.

When I teach students the stance positions at first it is (for the most part) static. When they begin to move from stance to stance it is still static in the upper body but spinal alignment and connection should be encouraged while holding each stance for a period of time. After some time of training in this fashion and when the structure is correct while in motion, we begin applying various arm positions and windmill blocks.



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The arm positions will vary depending on the needs of the class but will always help to train the use of the lower body and the spine to issue power up and out to the structured shoulders and arms. This is good training to do prior to doing windmill blocking and different striking exercises.

It is fairly common to see students doing these training exercises too fast and sloppy, merely throwing their arms around without the proper intent and structure. The up windmill and down windmill exercises serve many purposes but for this explanation I will keep to the blocking idea. If starting with the right hand, the up windmill should turn a full clockwise circle in front of the body clearing from the groin to the forehead. As the hand starts from set position (refer to section 1 of the series) the fist will be palm facing your body from six o'clock to nine o'clock then will begin rotating to palm out by about ten or eleven o'clock. The fist should come up at least as high as your eyes, it is not necessary to go any higher, that would be more of an up block and not an up windmill. Your rotation should carry through to two o'clock where your forearm will reach the 45 degree angle. That is the point where you can sustain strong impact. This is mentioned just for purposes of structure. Just as in the first section of the three part series, it was pointed out that we are not covering the rotation, stepping, angling and all the elements in use when actually applying the techniques. There should be no clashing. Continue the rotation back to the six o'clock position. Left side is the same accept



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the circle is counterclockwise. Try working with only one hand for fifty to one hundred repetitions and then do the same for the other side. When you start doing both sides together your structure will be strong. Work for timing and focus of intent. Ten quality repetitions are far better than one hundred repetitions done poorly.

The down windmill will follow the same circular pattern as the up windmill. Remembering that it is structured movement that we are covering here, just remember to reverse the positions with the exception that the palm side of the fist will always face the body as you cross block and clear the body from the eyes to the groin. The 45 degree angles are of utmost importance. The chest should not stick out! You should hollow the chest and open the spine. Expanding the chest out draws your center of balance up and it closes your spine making your root become very weak. If you feel your shoulder blades when you expand your chest you will feel them press together. This is one level of closing the spine and the one that occurs most often.

The windmill exercises can be done open handed or closed fist. For beginners it is recommended that the fist is used. Do not clench your fist but close your hand in a firm fist position. When using the open palm you need to make sure to maintain structure in the wrist and don't bend or flex. To avoid having to reference this in the third section I would like to mention just a little about the area of the hand used and the intention when using the open palm (staying within the blocking idea). The safer



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method is to block with the forearm and let the hand or palm wrap the attacking limb. If you block using the open hand, the padded portion of the palm should be used to knock the punch down or to deflect it away from the target. I am talking about the solid, padded part of the hand and not out towards the fingers. This applies to both up and down windmills. The explanation above covers a little of where and how you should think when using open hand windmills.

When first training the windmill exercises it is important to make sure your stance remains static and unchanged until you move to the next stance. Force your legs to hold a strong position and don't let your hips sway side to side. Then hold each stance for a count of at least ten repetitions before changing stances. Be sure you change stances with a purpose. Use timing and intent to move. Turn your body in coordination with the rotation of your arms as if you were turning into the solid 45 degree angled block that we discussed earlier. Don't forget about your body when moving your hands and certainly don't forget about both of your hands when moving your body. This sounds logical but this is a common error. This is why it is so important to work these training exercises slowly to let the structure set in. When you do speed up some it should only be to a speed that is still controlled, balanced, timed and coordinated. Now practice until you are hurting and then start to count the repetitions. Repeat the stance work using different upper body static



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positions. Then do the stances dynamic (in motion) with up and down windmills all the time thinking about your timing and coordination of the movements. Then practice any forms you might have memorized using the same concepts.

To set the stage for the third section of this article, I would like to explain a little about the next level of training these exercises. Everything remains the same when you look at the basic movements except now you are going to begin relaxing your inner structure. To clarify what I mean, the inner structure that I am referring to is at the level of the joints and connective tissue. Instead of forcing the lower body to be strong and immobile, you are now going to begin relaxing at the hip and knee. This will naturally cause a reeling effect in the lower structure. This is most noticeable when performing the up and down windmills, although with years of training, it becomes apparent that the whole body and all movements contain this reeling effect. All you have to do is begin relaxing and releasing the body to move naturally but remember that relaxing is not collapsing or becoming a noodle. Your structure must remain intact. This is the point (if you are training correctly) that you will begin to feel the power being generated by the foot, controlled by the waist and issued by the spine. The extremity expresses the power. Regardless of which part of the body you are striking with the power will issue from the spine if you are projecting it correctly.



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As mentioned earlier in this section, the spine will also reel and instead of being in a fixed state it will move like a flame or rippling water. When you begin practicing at this level you must take care not to lift at the shoulders and remain relaxed and sunk in your structure. You must also keep the chin in and the crown point of the head lifted up. This helps with maintaining the upper body connection and will also help the jing or power to release out the shoulder to the hand. The energy will be stifled by the lifting of the shoulders or issued into the neck and sub occipitals which will without a doubt cause serious headaches and neck injury. This is just a little about issuing, but to move back to the exercises, you will need to practice daily and practice correctly to build the proper muscle memory. Now do the fixed arm positions (such as holding the ball or pushing the mountain into the sea) with the dynamic stance training and feel the reeling in the lower body and how the power moves through the spine and out to the hands. Remember when doing the up and down windmills with dynamic stances to make your movements mean something. Watch your timing and positioning.

I must mention again that these principles of movement transcend style or martial system and to reach a state of higher learning you need to apply yourself. This type of training, as with any real study, has no short cuts. You must train long and hard for many years to acquire the level of relaxed structure to be able to issue true power. There is no end to this



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level of study. No belt or rank or even years of lazy or incorrect training can instill these movement principles into your muscle memory. Train hard and be true to yourself. When you release yourself from the self doubt that manifests spite and judgment, you will come to see the good in all styles of movement and through training will come to recognize the similarities in them.