

This is an example of lost track's distinctive hand position.



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The form is just like any other. See the performer kicking, punching and spinning. You see the moves are long and flowing and you know enough to recognize it as some kind of northern kung-fu. But as you watch the demonstration something catches your attention. At first it's hard to describe. You can't put a finger on it but something about the way he moves ...

Then it hits you. That player out there looks like he's almost faking it. His moves, postures, strikes all have a hint of — there's nothing else to call it — uncertainty. The skill is there, no doubt, but the form looks like he's making it up, or deciding on the moves as he goes along. What gives?

What gives is that you are watching a performance of the lost track style. It goes by a number of names: mi zong (which means "lost track" and is also spelled mi tsong) and yen ch'ing being two of them. It's a big family of kung-fu with a lot of marriages. Many styles have joined with lost track to become hybrids, such as mi tsung-luo han (lost track/Buddha's disciple). But there is a core style and it's a beaut.

The lost track trades on an idea as ancient as the martial arts, but to many people can only be traced to P.B.L. (post Bruce Lee) times. That idea is, simply put, that there should be spontaneity in the arts; that the mastery of the arts leads to

Studying the lost track style lets you shed the robotic thinking of your ancestors.

# KUNG-FU'S Lost Legacy

BY TED MANCUSO



The spear-hand is on top while the hidden hand smothers all movement.



Lost track is an ancient and famous member of the "long fist" family.

# Lost Legacy

spontaneous, free and immediate responses and not the dead reactions of robotic thinking.

The idea of actually programming uncertainty into a style shows how "modern" classical masters really were. As in a composition by Mozart where we come across "ad lib," we are encouraged by the creators to co-create the form. Often people forget that all art is co-creation. There's no need to break out of the "classical bonds" because they never existed in the first place. Throughout history, all styles have had this element of creative interaction with the student.

Lost track style presents all sorts of problems, especially for the advanced practitioner. Of course, when so many hours and so much work have been expended to make movements precise, powerful and direct, it almost seems criminal to ask the player to "lost that" and confuse his own way again. To purposefully choose the "lost track."

For instance, at one point the player has to start walking in a circle while simultaneously revolving his arms. Then, suddenly, he turns inward and spirals that large circle into a small twist while

sweeping with his feet and hooking his hands. And then, almost before he can recover his own balance, he has

**Fist (1), elbow (2) and hammer-fist (3): lost track changes levels with ease.**

to reverse the direction of the circle and spin into a cat from the opposite angle. Such "traps" and "reversals" are common in the lost track.

Other times he has to move definitively in one direction, only to change his mind at the last second and not only look but also strike to the opposite angle. The lost track lives up to its name. Players move as though in a maze, hence its other name, "labyrinth boxing."

## One Hand Full, One Empty

In lost track one hand is always "full" and the other empty. The relation of full to empty can cover a lot of ground. The full hand is said to be the "real attack" while the other is subterfuge. The empty hand is generally linear, visible — even obvious. The full hand often enters at an angle, unsuspected or even aided by the opponent's reactions.

But think of the practice this takes. It is completely opposite from the method in which most students practice their forms where they are displaying forthrightly their talents for the teacher of the audience. The Lost Track demonstrator is actually learning how to confuse both the audience and himself. For if he can't almost master the feeling that he, himself, is lost then it will never convince others.

And of course, when we talk of kung-fu we should always remember that the term "hand" is a technical one. "Hand" in kung-fu refers to the entire body. So what does "empty" and "full" mean in this context? That one entire

*Though created centuries before bagua, there are similarities between lost track and the internal style.*





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side of the body lies while the other continues with the real attack. In other words, the left side might advance with a shoulder strike just before the body flips and attacks with the right arm. Lost track indeed.

#### Off-Beat Fist

Another aspect of lost track relates to its basic beat pattern. Mi tsong strongly emphasizes “change-ups” in tempo. It utilizes both broken rhythm and offset rhythm. Briefly, broken rhythm refers to techniques that actually stop for a moment then continue. Most fakes, misdirections and “indirect angulars” fall into this category. In offset rhythm the initial movement never stops, instead going from one speed to another without interrupting itself. Such “change-ups” are common in wrestling when one grappler attacks but expects a response that will lead him to the next move. Both methods prompt the appropriate — or more accurately inappropriate — response from the opponent and lead to confusing rhythmic changes that weaken his defense and allow openings.

#### The Legend of Mi Zong

How was mi zong started? Probably in precisely the way any fighting style is created. Some fighter discovered a breakthrough concept, in this case deception, and then used his curriculum to emphasize the insight. Good, basic

fighting skills are always assumed in the fullest sense. Mi zong is only standard chang chuan (northern long fist kung-fu) with a peculiar emphasis. Put simply, if you can’t throw a punch it doesn’t help to fake one.

But there is a charming legend to mi zong. It is said mi zong was the product of a servant trying to “steal” some kung-fu from his host family. This particular servant would sneak into the second floor of the building where the family members practice kung-fu on the ground floor. Finding a hole in the

floor he would lie on this belly and look down at the forms being practiced. Only trouble was, he couldn’t see the movements when the players left the view of his spy hole. So as best he could he’d piece together that night’s moves into a crazy quilt form of his own. Well, it’s said that a bully came one day to challenge the well-known fighting family but all the adult males were away. The young teens were unable to defeat the challengers and the family honor was in dispute until the



*According to an ancient saying, “Pull east, strike west.” Directional changes are used to conquer, as shown in the series above.*

## Lost Legacy

Continued.

servant stepped forward to vanquish the challenger. On the men's return he was immediately adopted into the fighting family but encouraged to continue with this "lost" style of training since, after all, it had proved so successful.

An exaggeration? A good story? Possibly, but it perfectly illustrates one of the primary elements of lost track, that weird pieced-together feeling one finds when performing it. A special feeling elusive for a number of reasons...

### A Perfect Mixer

Mi zong belongs to that special group of kung-fu styles rarely seen in their pure form. For whatever reasons — historical or structural — some styles seem to perfectly accommodate themselves to mixing with other arts. Some styles have been mixed so long that people think of them as styles in their own rights. Choy li fut, for instance, is the amalgamation of Choy family, Li family and fut (shaolin) fists. Mi zong is truly a perfect style for such associations. One of the most famous hybrids is mi zong — lo han which combines lost track with a shaolin derivative (disciple of Buddha style). Pure, unadulterated mi zong is rare. In some cases, this may be because the style itself is very small, just as Low family's three fists have been absorbed into the hung style. Or it may be, as is this author's opinion, that the style's special attributes are considered so specialized that it augments and tempers other styles. Few people in kung-fu realize, for instance, that the so-called drunken style is actually a pretty new phenom-

enon. Drunken movements were considered specialized and advanced forms of training, never a style onto themselves. Mi zong, with its definitely advanced sense of tempo and interruption, may fulfill similar needs in other styles.

As far as simplicity, mi zong is deceptive in its structure. There are five sets to the core style, of which the first is called mi zong jia or lost track structure. This is an odd set, almost more a series of poses with attitudes. Next, mi zong has its own version of tan tui (spring leg), one of kung-fu's most famous forms. Then there are three roads named simply No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3. These five hand sets are most commonly the trunk of the mi zong tree. No. 1 is a short set with few fancy moves. But, if you have an eye for such things, you still see that the set, like a series of jokes, definitely sets up the player for quick changes. A common pattern is to perform a move on one side, then the other side and then, on the third repetition to change the move completely. This is more than just confusing. It's instructive. The first two sides train both sides of the body, but the third change-up implies all sorts of detours and alternative routes that can be taken from the first position. Variation and adaptability are trained right into the form.

The nice thing about studying "pure" styles of kung-fu is not so much the secrets they contain, but just the information that hasn't been lost.

Different styles of kung-fu often have "signatures." In leopard style, for instance, the leopard's paw is a distinct hand formation. In pi qua (split and deflect style) the huge arm-flapping is a telltale sign of the style. Lost track contains a signature hand all its own. The last three fingers of the hand are kept straight — spearhand style. But the index fin-

## Pages from a Chinese book on Mizong style

②右脚向体前落步，右腿屈膝，左腿自然伸直。同时，右手握柄向上举，臂内旋，经上摆至左腹前；左臂外旋，经胸前屈肘绕至右腋处，手心向上；两臂于胸前交叉，两手握柄，使刀由后向上、向前、向左、向下弧形挂刀，刀尖斜向左前下，刀背斜向左后。目视左前下方。（图9）



图8



图9

### 5. 左右逢源（左）

重心前移，右腿直立，左腿随之屈膝上提，脚面绷平，脚尖向下。与此同时，两手握柄，将刀背继续由左前经身体左下方向后挂刀，刀尖斜向后下，刀背斜向右后上。目视刀背。（图10）

用途：敌持械于左（右）



图10

攻我下盘，我用刀背左（右）拨挂敌械，刀尖划敌下盘。

要点：左、右挂刀要贴身而过，不可离身太远，切忌碰地触身。

### 6. 立马劈山

①左脚前震踏落地，右腿随即屈膝提起。两手握柄，继续使刀向左上划弧，将刀斜置于身体左前上方，右手握刀于左肩前，左手握柄至右腹侧，两臂胸前交叉。目视刀头。（图11）

②右臂稍外旋，屈肘向上、向左，直臂向下弧形摆荡；左臂内旋，经腹前屈肘绕至左腰侧，使刀继续经头前上方向左下劈，刀刃向下，刀尖向右。当刀尖绕至头上方时，右脚向体前落步，脚尖左扣，体左转90°，两腿屈膝半蹲，成马步。目视刀刃。（图12）

用途：敌持械于前方攻我下盘，我用刀背左后拨挂敌械，并上步贴近敌身，用刀快速劈敌上盘。

要点：左震脚与挂刀同时进行，马步与劈刀要协调一致，劈刀要迅猛。



图11



图12

ger and thumb are held in an open ring. There are a number of reasons for this formation. Anatomically the classical "willow leaf" position can actually injure the hand after excessive practice, because while the fingers are straight the thumb is bent (some shaolin teachers suggest a straight thumb, too). But, more to the point, the mi zong hand is neither strike nor grapple. The distinctive position suggests and summarizes the highest principle of the style: uncertainty.

### Feel the Beat

Imagine doing a form at a high level, not looking for a replicated, robot-like consistency but a hint of uncertainty; just enough to make "playing the form" like playing music. It is a complete fallacy in the first place to assume that forms were designed by the masters to be repeated generation after generation, person-to-person without variation. People, of course, have varied levels of flexibility, strength and speed. Properly taught forms should reflect this. But too often extended skills like the splits or high kicks are emphasized to the exclusion of more unique abilities. And taking this even further, it is a student's intensity and tempo where individual characteristics most often show up. Lost track addresses this by actually weaving a degree of uncertainty into the fabric of the forms. Eyes change direction, power slides from light to intense, speed shifts, angles alter. The legacy of lost track is an approach to what in Chinese is known as *tzu ran* (spontaneity).

I stand erect, breathing deeply. I am about to begin the form. Though practiced over and over, I have no clear idea how this performance will go. More practice doesn't assure me of less risk. The opposite is true. The better I get at the form the more chances are required. Shapes, timing, rhythm — all could change without a moment's notice. I could live up to the name: lost track fist and completely confuse myself in a form I should know like my own house. Or I could find new moves, new ideas and new appreciation right in front of me.

Uncertainty stands at the core of martial arts training. Self-defense training is a subtle relationship between security and reality. Despite how things may seem at any given moment, there is no ultimate style, move or strategy. The reason for this is simple, but not immediately apparent. Attacks change in different locals, at different times. The nature of attacks change socially, too. Most people have seen more fighting on TV than they even have in their whole lives. It may seem like this take-down or that kick is the ultimate, but times and styles change. So the aspiring self-defense trainee often enters a school "to feel more secure" and then encounters a distinct change of perspective at some point.

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There are three ways to respond to this very human situation. The first, increasingly popular in tai chi and other circles, is to completely disavow the martial for your style: exercise, sport, anything but martial. The other extreme is to describe your style as "the ultimate self-defense," or "the most practical" street method. This emphasis increases the seriousness and practicality of teaching and, who knows, it might even be the truth for a while. The problem lies in the dysfunctional human expenditure of energy it encourages. Years of training to prepare for seconds of combat that will probably never come is not rational. Then there's the third path in which uncertainty is accepted as a part of life. Train as hard as you can and take the turns of fortune with a warrior's shrug. Uncertainty, after all, is something no one can escape.

Chinese culture is wide and expansive and it has contributed one idea of great importance in the ancient — and it turns out in the modern — world. Faced as it was with all the harshness of famine, flood, war and pestilence, the Chinese, rather than turning to a Godhead who offered them one form of security or another, developed their seminal philosophical text — the *I-Ching* (Change Classic) — as a document completely dedicated to change and its many faces. Uncertainty was the foundation of this view of the universe: adaptation the highest form of human ingenuity. ☯

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