The weapons that we use for class instruction were in fact the weapons of mass destruction of their day: Swords, spears, halberds, whips – entire villages and armies were wiped out by skilled soldiers or terrorist bandits wielding these deadly implements.

These weapons of course pale in comparison to the destructive power of today’s weapons: Atomic bombs, stealth jet fighters, deadly pathogens, poison gases, sun-hot lasers and more. We really can’t compare them – like apples and oranges they just aren’t comparable. Instead we should realize and accept that our purpose for wielding classical Chinese weapons in class is no longer related to combat or battle at all.

Sure, you might happen to have a sword lying around and pick it up and use it against some miscreant. But I ask you, when did you last do so? And if you really should have to suddenly defend yourself you’re more apt to have a brief case, skillet or high-heeled shoe nearby – weapons of last resort, not mass destruction.

If you’re the paranoid type, you do keep yourself within arms-reach of actual functional weapons but the weapons aren’t swords, spears or halberds. Instead they’re shotguns, rifles and semi-automatic handguns.

So this brings us to the question: If we aren’t going to keep our swords and spears at the ready for self-defense, why do we even have such weapons and why do we practice classical weapons forms in class?
ANCIENT WEAPONS, MODERN NEEDS

Of course the reasons are subjective as to why we and many other martial arts schools continue to teach students ancient and archaic weapons forms and techniques, so keep in mind that these are only my own personal reasons. But biased though I am, I think they’re pretty good reasons.

* First, learning classical weapons forms is fun. In our kids program, the single biggest reason the kids want to move from up from the beginners program to the intermediate ranks is they then get to learn weapons. We’re just big kids – we still have fun showing our husbands and wives our cool new broad sword and swinging it around in the back yard.

* Next, we like to keep old things alive for historical and aesthetic reasons. Classical music, Latin, Shakespeare – these may not be thriving in our modern culture, but many of us would feel a sense of loss if they withered away completely. A certain satisfaction is derived from knowing we are practicing weapons forms that are the same as or similar to those practiced by skilled devotees from a time and a place long gone.

* Weapons forms help us develop coordination and body skill to a high degree. To keep strong stances and good form and foot work while sending our intent and chi into a weapon is a challenge for most of us, and part of why we train in martial arts is to develop ourselves and improve our confidence by conquering such challenges. Such training often enhances our skills in our “easier” empty-hand forms and techniques.

* Weapons practice helps us strengthen the arms, wrists and hands. Strength in these areas is essential for any martial artist.

* Drilling our weapons forms demands a high level of concentration and focus, which is valuable for our mental cultivation. First the variety of weapons that we learn demands that we keep the mind sharp to learn and memorize additional sequences of movements. Then we have to maintain our visualization of our imaginary opponent with movements and implements that are foreign to us, and therefore the techniques are more difficult and challenging to see.

* While you probably won’t have your staff or nunchuks nearby in the unlikely event you do suddenly need to defend yourself or a loved one, the skills learned with classical weapons are readily transferable to other everyday implements that are nearby. Your staff techniques transfer to a broom; your steel whip techniques transfer to a leather belt, and so on.
**TIPS FOR WEAPONS FORMS MASTERY**

You’ve probably noticed that in our weapons training in class I focus mostly on forms practice, and I don’t spend a whole lot of time teaching or having you practice advanced “applications” of movements, just basic applications. This is because as already explained the relevance of mastering these weapons for real self-defense is minimal. I myself haven’t spent all that much time researching and drilling their advanced combat applications. When I was most gung ho about developing my self-defense skills years ago I spent a fair amount of time at the shooting range with my .357 Magnum practicing quick reloads – and not much time thinking about how best to angle my broadsword in defense of a spear.

So if you do want to be really expert at fighting with a sword or spear, just in case someone perfects the Time Machine and you wind up back in China in the Ming Dynasty, you may need to find an additional teacher who can help you supplement your skills and knowledge.

But for refinement of your forms – practiced for the several reasons I outlined above – I can be more helpful. Here now some tips for your weapons training:

* Mentally think of the weapon as an extension of your body – it is part of you, not separate from you. Just as your chi must circulate and fill your whole body with empty-hand forms it must do so with weapons forms, now flowing even into the weapon.

* Be very clear about the “energetic” quality of any weapon or implement, and be precise in your energetic intentions and qualities with that weapon. Be sure you can clearly distinguish the advantages – both internal and external – of each weapon relative to others.

* As much as with empty-hand techniques, precision of your strikes or cuts is of paramount importance. Practice working to hit smaller and smaller targets as you drill each weapon, then in your forms practice see the targets on your imaginary opponent with precision.

* Pay equal attention to the Yin aspect of the weapon which of course is balancing the Yang aspect with every movement. Most people are only aware of the Yang aspect.

* The “Nine Pearls” concept is even more important with weapons forms than with empty-hand. This of course refers to the proper connec-
tion and transfer of motion through the nine joints from the ankle through the wrist to ensure a smooth, powerful “whip-like” motion in the weapon.

* People of old often attributed great spiritual power to their weapons. Regardless of your beliefs in such matters, use the weapon as a reminder that our kung fu practice is ultimately about the cultivation of the spirit. Experiment with how your weapon can truly be a tool for spiritual growth.

**EXERCISE**

I probably recommended this to you when you first began weapons training, but in case I missed you or as a reminder of a great exercise to do anytime, take an entire day and don’t put your weapon down no matter where you go or what you do. At some point you will forget you are even holding your weapon, and that is when it is really starting to become a natural extension or your body.

**ASSIGNMENT**

Explain what, as you see it, is the number one reason that weapons forms are of value to you. If you feel all of our weapons forms are not of any value to you, explain why. Send your thoughts to me at lessons@thep- eacefuldragon.com. Please put “Lesson 45” in the subject line.

**RECOMMENDED READING**

*By Yang Jwing Ming*

Like all of Yang’s books this one is well researched and gives a good overview of the classical weaponry of China prior to the prevalence of firearms. From the common to the exotic, you’ll learn about the common categories of weapons, the history of each weapon, the uses, and you’ll get tips on how to choose the weapons most suitable for your skills and interests.
Every month a book or article will be suggested by Master Sbarge. Reading about topics related to the arts you are training in will help you get the most out of your practice. Just remember that reading can never replace your practice! Each month’s recommended reading is purely optional, though Master Sbarge may on rare occasion ask that you do read a particular book.

For additional reading suggestions by Master Sbarge, go to http://www.thepeacefuldragon.com/books.shtml.

**Note:** All Peaceful Dragon students are urged to complete monthly assignments because they are important for you to fully benefit from your training. Master Sbarge reads every single student's lesson responses every month, and will periodically respond or comment on them.