

Sift Clearly

Study extensively, inquire carefully, ponder thoroughly, sift clearly, and practice earnestly. --Zhu Xi

Sifting clearly could mean the same as inquiring carefully — certainly one has to sift through much schlock to get to the quality references one can trust — but in this case, since Zhu Xi has already admonished us to study, inquire, and ponder with a certain level of mindfulness, I suggest that “sift clearly” has more to do with editing what we have discovered.

As I have written previously in the essay *Editing and Art*, “redacting” is editing for publication, and presents us with no easy task. If you understand something to its inner depth, it is pretty difficult to explain it to someone else. If you begin to explain it to someone else, you will not be able to cover the subject in depth (see *A Teacher’s Dilemma*). We edit what we discover not only to offer it to a class of novices, not only to publish it in an article, book, or newsletter, but also for self-consumption. We tend to remember things in chunks, much like we file things in a computer. In fact the computer filing system works so well because it reflects, at least to the extent possible in digital format, the way our brains store things. We have a certain suite of folders, the folders themselves, some sub-dividers, and a few sub-menus.

This article is #213 under my sub-folder *Sunday with Sensei’s Journal 2013*, which is placed in the major folder *Sunday with Sensei’s Journal*, which in turn falls under *Word Docs*, which is nestled neatly under the general category of *Documents* on my computer’s *Inbred Budo* hard drive. However, none of that is in the forefront of my mind when I think of “a series of articles on what that Chinese Neo-Confucian once said”. Only some generic tidbit of what I write stays in the random access part of my memory, although I’ll probably remember enough to look it up six months from now. In the process of doing so, I will begin to remember that the Chinese philosopher was Zhu Xi and that one of the articles was on studying and another was on sifting. In a sense, the entire recollection process is one of sifting, even if sometimes it is sifting in reverse.

In a similar manner, those who “sift clearly” need to put the major conclusion they have reached on the front burner while never forgetting that there are important details and qualifiers on the back burner. Let’s say that you have done a great deal of study and research and have given a lot of thought to the idea that Ed Parker may have gotten some of his concepts from the Filipino martial arts taught in the Pasadena area—arts that had not as yet reached mainstream martial arts in the United States. This raises questions in some martial artists that Master Parker was not as brilliant or original as his students made him out to be. Others might suggest that he was doubly brilliant to convert a stick art to an empty hand art. When you ponder this, you realize that both points can have veracity, but neither takes away from the functionality of the result. Most systems are not made out of whole cloth and many founders do not make more than one or two original contributions. Parker made scores. Sifting the facts makes you realize that what matters to you is the quality of the resulting system, although you would prefer that Parker had been more forthcoming about its roots and influences. You are being

accurate, respectful, and still are willing to acknowledge shortcomings without having those shortcomings negatively affect your respect. What Master Parker did, you conclude, was amazing and laudable. You therefore will keep the amazing and laudable evaluation on the front burner, while the undisclosed influences remain on the back burner.

You have sifted the information clearly enough so that you feel it is both accurate and easily retainable. To sift it another way is possible, of course, but because you have tried to ponder thoroughly about that which you have researched carefully, you are secure in what you have studied extensively.

Now, it's time to practice earnestly.