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Chinese Woodworking: Stock Preparation

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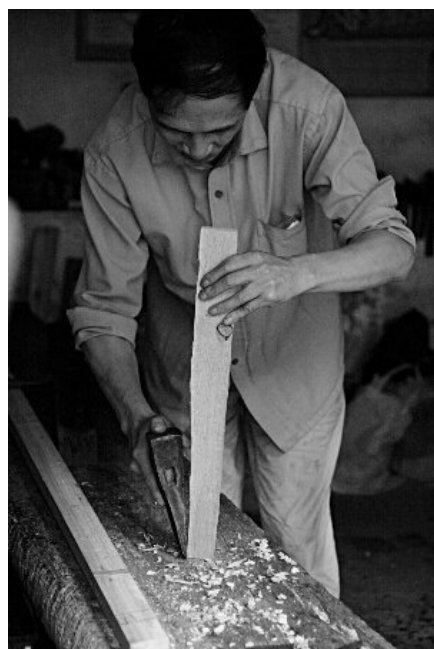
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It's all about efficiency.

For us hobbyists it is interesting to see how full-time hand tool users perform the dreaded task of stock preparation.

It is important to note that Liu Shifu currently does not have an apprentice who would possibly be helping preparing stock. Yes, he would like to see someone take over his shop, continue his life's work so to speak, but this is not an option at this point. In some way it is lucky that we met Liu Shifu at the end of his career: early in his career a Chinese Shifu will hardly ever allow outsiders to watch them work, not to mention photograph. In fact, Liu Shifu was very interested in the prospect that his life's work could find a forum in the United States.

Stock preparation starts with the equivalent to a broad ax which, with enough practice, gets you fairly close to the final dimensions of the board.





The ax is, like many tools in China laminated and for obvious reasons a-symmetric



Next is the equivalent of the Jack/scrub plane.



After that the equivalent of a fore plane, i.e. a long plane to smoothen out the hills and valleys left by the Jack plane.



And finally the smoothing plane. Without asking Liu Shifu explained that the smoothing plane is shorter than the previous planes and has a steeper bedding angle.



Similar to Western planes with Chinese planes you start the stroke with pressure to the toe of the plane and end the stroke with pressure to the heel of the plane. Of course since the ergonomics of Chinese planes are very different to Western planes this shift of pressure is nothing more than a simple movement in the wrist. So instead of coordinating *left hand/arm/shoulder* and *right hand/arm/shoulder* to adjust the down pressure distribution just about right, you only have to put a bit more pressure on your index fingers or your thumbs.

Checking for squareness. Notice the position of the feet relative to the workbench. When using Chinese planes you stand almost directly behind the piece you are planing. This probably contributes to the excellent performance of this type of plane.



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