

The ILEETA Journal



Volume 15
Edition 2

Spring Edition

June 2025

ILEETA
International Law Enforcement
Educators and Trainers Association

To Simulate is to Rehearse. To Symbolize is to Transform: A Strategic Perspective for Contemporary Security

by Fabio Gomes



In the field of security — whether in shopping centers, airports, or high-risk operations — preparation is a non-negotiable requirement. Simulations are widely used to ensure that teams are ready to act in times of crisis. But what if we are limiting our development to rehearsing procedures, when we could access a deeper field of strategic transformation?

This article proposes a reflection, through the lens of traditional Chinese wisdom, on the difference between simulating and symbolizing — and how this distinction can significantly enhance the development of security professionals across different sectors.

The Value of Simulation

Simulation is a well-established tool. It recreates crisis scenarios, tests reactions, adjusts routines, and improves responses. It is a way to generate familiarity with the unexpected — even if, paradoxically, within a controlled context. No matter how realistic it may be, simulation is essentially a rehearsal: participants have predefined roles, there are prior scripts, clear protocols, and a known outcome.

It effectively reinforces operational standards, especially in environments where mistakes can have serious consequences. However, care must be taken so that this reinforcement does not turn into rigidity. When a team is trained only to repeat pre-established formulas, it risks losing its ability to adapt in the face of real instability. In this sense, Sun Tzu's lesson is instructive: *"What is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy."* This reminds us that strategic mastery requires more than procedures — it demands understanding the intentions at play and the ability to dismantle them before they materialize.

Martial Experience as a Strategic Device

My journey as a security consultant is based on over three decades of study and practice of the Chinese martial system Ving Tsun, under the mentorship of Grand Master Leo Imamura, in the direct lineage of Patriarch Moy Yat. This system, rooted in classical Chinese strategic

thinking, understands that martial movements are not techniques — in the sense of standard procedures aimed at achieving a specific goal — but symbolic combat body devices.

As Patriarch Moy Yat himself used to say, *"erudition and martiality complement each other."* That is, it's not just about acting, but about developing a lucid conduct, sensitive to the situation, born from embodied wisdom. From this perspective, action is not imposed but arises in harmony with the environment — exactly as proposed by Chinese strategic tradition.

To Simulate is to Predict. To Symbolize is to Anticipate.

This view inspired the training format I developed over the years, including during my invitations to instruct Ving Tsun for the Brazilian Army Special Forces Course, specifically in the counterterrorism phase. Instead of theatrical simulations with predictable endings, I proposed a structure in three stages:

High predictability — where participants have full knowledge of what will happen.

Medium predictability — with partial access to scenario information.

Low predictability — where the unknown prevails, stimulating spontaneous responses.

This progression gradually encourages the shift from mere execution of procedures to the development of adaptability and strategic anticipation. Once again, Sun Tzu is clear: *"To win without fighting is the pinnacle of skill."* And winning without fighting requires terrain reading, tactical sensitivity, and emotional management — not just programmed reactions.

It is at this point that Bruce Lee's words deeply resonate. A disciple of Ip Man — the same master as Patriarch Moy Yat — Bruce articulated a central principle of Chinese thinking on adaptability in terms familiar to the West:

Perspective...con't

“Empty your mind. Be formless, shapeless — like water. If you put water into a cup, it becomes the cup. If you put water into a bottle, it becomes the bottle. If you put it in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Water can flow or it can crash. Be water, my friend.”

This metaphor precisely expresses what symbolic study seeks: the ability to move between forms without clinging to any. It's not about overcoming through force, but through adequacy. Being like water means acting at the right time, with the right strength, in the right direction.

From Procedure to Situational Wisdom

This approach is especially relevant for security professionals. After all, it's not enough to follow protocols: one must interpret the environment, capture nuances, and respond lucidly amidst uncertainty. This holds true in airports, where a subtle gesture may signal imminent risk, and in shopping malls, where the flow of people and emotions creates a constantly shifting atmosphere.

Unlike technique, which focuses on the predictable, situational wisdom — as proposed by Chinese thought — operates on what is unfolding within the situation. The concept of *shi* (勢), central to this tradition, guides individuals to perceive the latent potential of the current configuration. The professional ceases to be a mere executor and becomes a strategist — even in routine actions.

Conclusion: Security as a Strategic Field of Adaptation

Simulation remains a valid and necessary tool. However, integrating it with symbolic study expands its effectiveness, guiding professionals beyond the realm of control — toward situational awareness and strategic autonomy.

Chinese tradition reminds us that the true challenge is not to directly defeat an opponent, but to be carried by the situation, shaping conditions to naturally reach the desired effect. Training based on symbolic devices is not

merely about preparing for risk — it's about transforming through it, developing a presence capable of influencing the course of events without resisting them, that is, without imposing.

This is how security should be: adaptive, strategic, and profoundly human. Or, as Bruce Lee said, *be water, my friend*. **ILEETA**

About the Author

Fabio Gomes is a professional with extensive experience in training special operations forces using the Chinese martial system of Ving Tsun. With a solid background in security consulting and years of collaboration with the Brazilian Army's Special Forces and Commandos, he has also conducted training with the Special Police Operations Battalion (BOPE) in Rio de Janeiro, contributing to the enhancement of elite police officers. His approach integrates strategic intelligence and human development, offering comprehensive training that goes beyond physical combat, promoting an adaptive and proactive mindset.

Website: www.fabiogomes.com

E-mail: contato@fabiogomes.com