

Course: Circus History, Assignment C2

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## Perch

*More than one circus discipline!*



## Summary

The following essay deals with the traditional Chinese acrobatic discipline of pole balancing which reaches back to 770 B.C. and is known as perch nowadays. The research questions how the discipline of perch is defined, how a perch is constructed, what are different variations and where does it come from, are answered. Moreover an overview over several perch artists and troupes is given and combinations with other circus disciplines are described.

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## Introduction

When I studied mechanical and process engineering in my first education an acrobat and friend of mine asked me if I could estimate and construct a “Schleuderperche” for him. “Schleuderperche” is the German word for a swinging perch, shown in Figure 1. I didn’t know what this is and he send me an impressive video<sup>1</sup>. In this video the base is holding a four meter long perch in his belt and a girl climbs to the top where she attaches herself on her hair. Then the base swings her around in a circle. Unfortunately, I was too busy to construct the perch but this was the first time I got in touch with a perch as a circus discipline and my interest was drawn.



Figure 1: Duo Cardio performing swinging perch in German "Schleuderperche"<sup>2</sup>

Now I am studying circus arts with the specialization in partner acrobatics. As my flyer works also at the Chinese pole and is practicing hair-hanging, it seems likely to combine my skills of basing with her tricks at the pole in a perch act. That explains my personal interest to learn more about the perch and his history. As it was for me in the beginning, I noticed in conversations with other circus students that the perch is quite unknown as a circus discipline. Most of the people I spoke did not know what the name mean and first after a short explanation some of them remembered an act or a video where a perch was included. Yet, historical facts or detailed information about the perch I could not get. Therefore, my first research goal was to collect wide information about perch. Where does the perch come

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately the link to this video isn't anymore available. A similar example of a swinging perch you can find under „LA PERCHE ÉQUIPOISE - YouTube“, accessed January 2, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcbNep43N5o> from 1:26min. to 1:38min.

<sup>2</sup> 'Duo-Cardio', *Duo-Cardio*, accessed 23 January 2016, <http://www.duocardio.com/>.

from? When was it born and how does the circus discipline develop? How is a perch constructed and what are different variations? Furthermore I want to look at some examples of acts and learn about famous perch artists.

In the first chapter different types of perch are defined and variations of the balancing perch are described more in detail. The history of perch and its origin is discussed in the second chapter. In the third chapter perch troupes and artists are introduced and combinations from perch with other disciplines are described. In the conclusion the results of this paper are collected and the answers to the research questions are reflected.

# 1 Types and variations

In the following chapter first the different types of a perch are distinguished. Then we have a closer look at the balancing perch. After the basic principle is described, variations and the corresponding equipment from different balancing perch are introduced. Movements and tricks at the perch will close the chapter.

A perch itself is less a circus discipline than more an acrobatic accessory<sup>3</sup>. In Wikipedia under perch (equilibristic) there are four types of perch poles listed “balancing perch pole, swing or swinging perch pole, hanging perch pole and standing perch pole”<sup>4</sup>. Yet the classification at the website of the library of the circus school in Montreal, ENC (École national de cirque) is more consistent, as the swinging pole, mentioned in the introduction, is a different version of the balancing perch<sup>5</sup>. So three different types can be distinguished:

1. The balancing perch,
2. the fixed perch,
3. and the aerial perch.

The fixed perch is in my understanding also known as the Chinese Pole and the aerial perch consists to the group of the Aerials. In this paper the balancing perch is considered in detail. It concerns according to the *Circus dictionary*<sup>6</sup> to the group of the equilibristic.

In literature the perch which can be theoretically any “balance property” is named differently like for example “balancing pole”, “balancing perch” or “balancing perch pole”. In this paper it is called perch. Moreover the name of the perch as an acrobatic discipline changed in the history of the perch what is described in the second chapter.

## 1.1 Basic principle

A detailed description of a perch is given in “Acrobatie & Equilibre” by Gourevitch.<sup>7</sup> The basic principle is that a porter, also called the base, holds the perch in a vertical position and a

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Thesaurus : Perche • Kentika™’, accessed 2 January 2016, <http://www.bibliotheque.enc.qc.ca/Record.htm?Record=706014652429&idlist=2>.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Perch (equilibristic)’, *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, 7 April 2014, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Perch\\_\(equilibristic\)&oldid=603087249](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Perch_(equilibristic)&oldid=603087249).

<sup>5</sup> ‘Thesaurus : Perche • Kentika™’.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Balancing Perch Pole, the | Simply Circus’, accessed 19 December 2015, [http://www.simplycircus.com/Circus\\_Dictionary/Balancing\\_perch\\_pole](http://www.simplycircus.com/Circus_Dictionary/Balancing_perch_pole).

second acrobat, called the flyer fulfills different movements on the top.<sup>8</sup> An example of two perch artists is shown on the front page of this paper.<sup>9</sup> The perch can be balanced from the base on various positions: On the shoulder, in front of the belly with support by a belt, on the forehead, on the legs, on one or two arms, on the chin and even in the mouth, that means with a mouthpiece on the teeth.<sup>10</sup> For every position there is a fitting bottom piece available. Depending on the variation of the act and the movements and tricks of the flyer, also the top piece of the perch is differently designed.

## 1.2 Equipment

The perch is according to Gourévitch between 4 and 8 meter long<sup>11</sup>. Shorter perch require a very fast reaction and are more difficult to balance for the base. On longer perch disturbing vibrations can occur.<sup>12</sup> In the past the perch consist from bamboo an appropriate material, which exists a lot in the Far East where the perch has his origin.<sup>13</sup> Nowadays it is made from an alloy of aluminum, called duralumin.<sup>14</sup> This material is also used in aircraft manufacture and has the required characteristics of lightness and stability. The diameter of the perch varied between 45mm and 75mm depending of the number of flyers and the tricks they perform.<sup>15</sup> Besides, the perch can be also constructed as a ladder, shown in Figure 2 (left and middle), than it is often used as a feet-perch, balanced on the legs.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Zinovij Bonič Gurevič and Éliane Hilpert, *Acrobatie & équilibre* (Paris (36 Bd Gouvion-Saint-Cyr, 75017): Association Arts des 2 mondes, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>9</sup> Copy of 12.jpg (JPEG-Grafik, 338 × 450 Pixel) - Skaliert (96%)“, accessed January 2, 2016, <http://www.acesofacts.com/pictures/Copy%20of%2012.jpg>.

<sup>10</sup> Gurevič und Hilpert, *Acrobatie & équilibre*, 100; Kiphard, *Die Akrobatik und ihr Training*, 93.

<sup>11</sup> Gurevič and Hilpert, *Acrobatie & équilibre*, 101.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Kiphard, *Die Akrobatik Und Ihr Training*, 92.

<sup>14</sup> Gurevič and Hilpert, *Acrobatie & équilibre*, 101.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Kiphard, *Die Akrobatik Und Ihr Training*, 92.

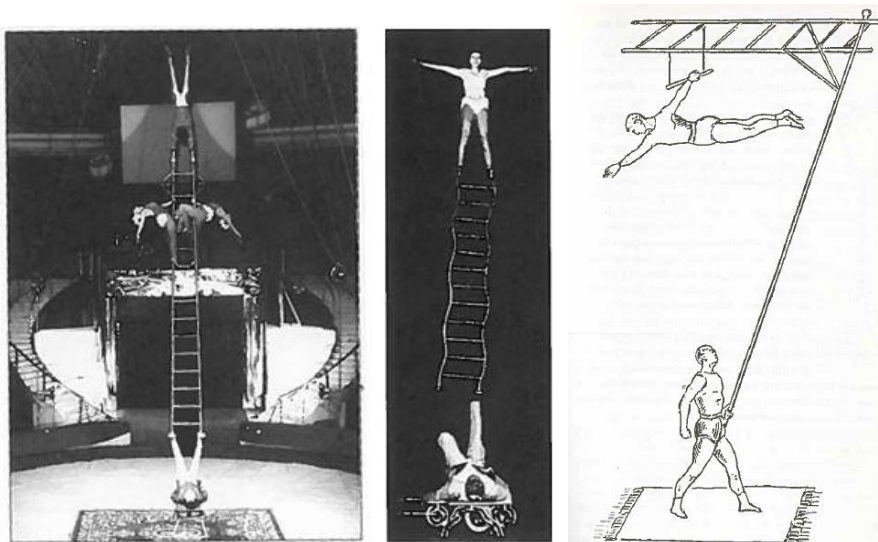


Figure 2: Perch in form of a ladder balanced on the legs (left and middle) and an L-shaped perch invented by William Star (right)<sup>17</sup>

A further variation of the perch is the L-shaped form like a gallows, shown in Figure 2 on the right side. According to Strehly it was invented by the American William Star and is often used to perform aerials (for example straps).<sup>18</sup> Moreover there are a circular perch and a very elastic perch which has the shape of a fishing rod.<sup>19</sup> The perch balanced in the mouth is snapped off on the bottom where the mouthpiece is attached.<sup>20</sup> Common bottom pieces to balance the perch on the shoulders are shown in Figure 3 a) and the construction of the belt to balance the perch in front of the belly b). This kind of bottom piece is also used for the variation of the swinging perch.

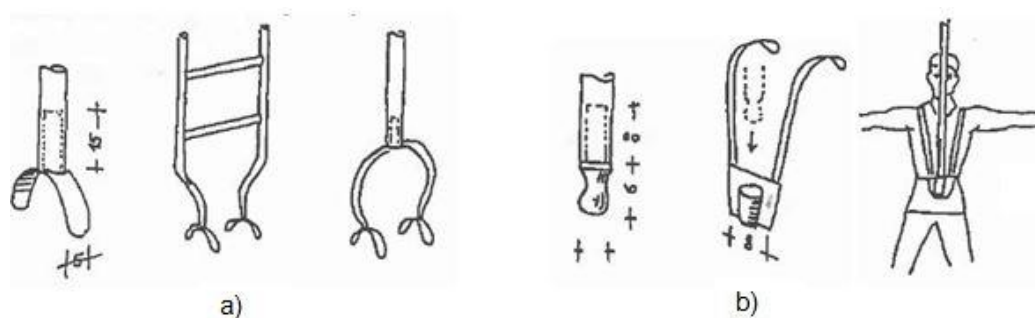


Figure 3: Bottom pieces to balance the perch a) on the shoulder and b) in a belt.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Gurevič and Hilpert, *Acrobatie & équilibre*, 100, 115; G Strehly, *L'acrobatie et les acrobates* (Paris: Librairie S. Zlatin, 1977), 283.

<sup>18</sup> Strehly, *L'acrobatie et les acrobates*, 281.

<sup>19</sup> Kiphard, *Die Akrobatik Und Ihr Training*, 92; Gisela Winkler, *Von Fliegenden Menschen Und Tanzenden Pferden Band 2: Die Künste Der Artistik*, vol. 2 (Gransee: Edition Schwarzdruck, 2015), 194.

<sup>20</sup> Kiphard, *Die Akrobatik Und Ihr Training*, 92.

<sup>21</sup> Gurevič and Hilpert, *Acrobatie & équilibre*, 101.



Figure 4 shows the bottom piece which is built to support the lower arm to be able to balance the perch on one arm a). Ending the cube of the perch with simple cap, shown in b) makes the surface bigger and allows balancing the perch on the forehead. In c) and d) are bottom pieces shown which are used to balance the perch on one or to feet.

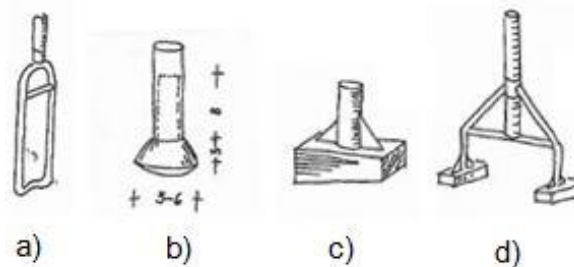


Figure 4: Bottom pieces to balance the perch a) with one arm b) on the forehead c) on one foot and e) with both feet.<sup>22</sup>

The top of the perch varies with the tricks and movements of the flyer. Different top pieces allow different movements and figures. Handles shown in Figure 5 a), b) and c) are used when the flyer performs a handstand. For the balance on one leg or on one arm the top piece d) is used which gives the flyer stability just under the knee or in case of one arm under the elbow. Slings shown in e)-h) can be used for hands or feet and allow the flyer to perform different kind of flags and hanging figures. The leg locks shown in i) and j) are used when a middle person on top of the perch carries another flyer.

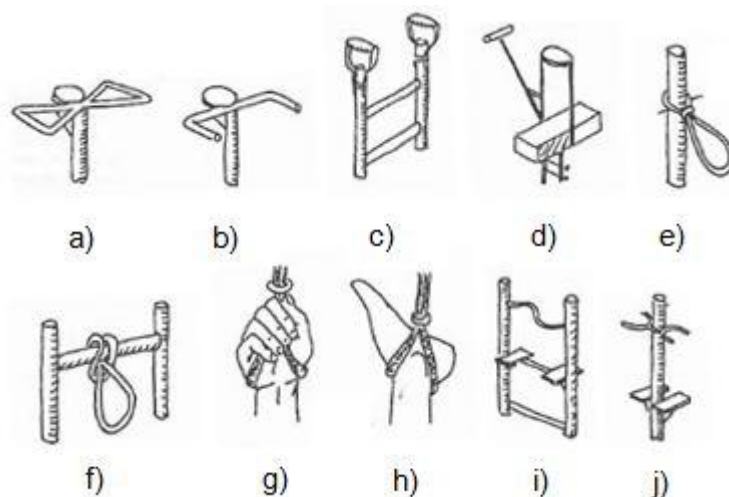


Figure 5: Examples of different top pieces. a)-c) Handles to perform a handstand<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Other top pieces are a ring for head balancing, platforms to stand or lay on, a horizontal high bar and rigging points for straps.<sup>24</sup> More extensive top pieces are for example a turning star or a ring where the flyer itself can twist in. A very fancy top piece consists of a round frame in which a motorcyclist turns loops.<sup>25</sup>

### 1.3 Movements and tricks

On top of the perch up two three and on a feet perch even four acrobats can perform their tricks at the same time.<sup>26</sup> The tricks reach from hand- and free headstands, over one arm balances and flags to teeth-, neck hang. When the top of the perch is built like a high bar, back- and front blanches, knee-, toes- and heel hangs are performed.<sup>27</sup>

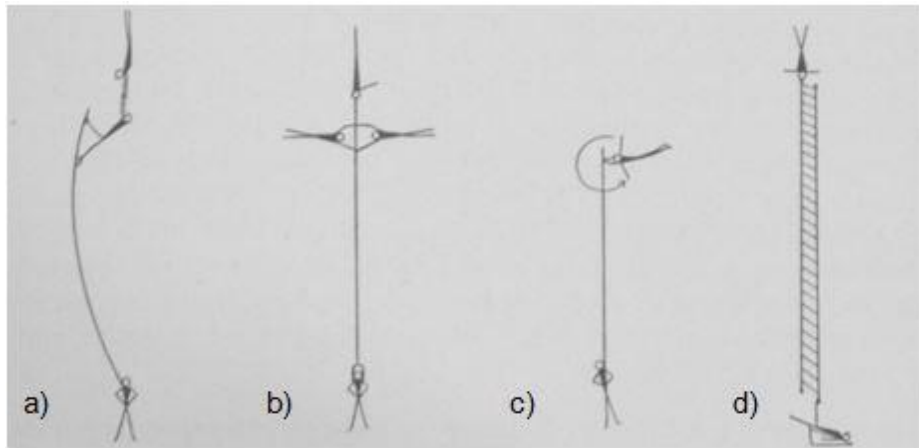


Figure 6: Perch tricks out of the book "*Die Akrobatik und ihr Training*".<sup>28</sup>

Figure 6 shows the draft of four incredibly perch tricks.<sup>29</sup> In a) is a hand to hand balancing performed on top of a shoulder perch. Two flags and a one arm of a third flyer on the top of the perch is hold by a base in b). The swinging perch mentioned in the introduction is shown in c), in this trick the flyer can perform hair-, teeth- and neck hanging or he is attached by foot slings. In d) a ladder perch is balanced on one foot of a laying base and on the top the flyer performs a free headstand. An impressive effect is to perform this trick with a special ladder which can fall apart. When the ladder is tilt over to one foot, the side of the ladder with the horizontal bars falls down and only a single pole with the flyer on top remains.<sup>30</sup> In Figure 7 Yotshitaro is shown performing this perch trick. It is originally drawn by Jules Garnier and

<sup>24</sup> Kiphard, *Die Akrobatik Und Ihr Training*, 92.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 94.

published in the French book “*Les jeux du cirque et la vie foraine*” by Hugues le Roux in 1889.<sup>31</sup> Later it is also published by Giesela Winkler in the book “*Von fliegenden Menschen und tanzenden Pferden*” in 2015.<sup>32</sup>



Figure 7: Early perch acrobatics performed by Yotshitaro<sup>33</sup>

In Figure 8 different positions of the flyer on a perch out of the book “*Acrobatie & Equilibre*” are shown. This book is recommended to the reader who wants to learn more about perch. Gourévitch describes the movements and gives also advice for practicing the exercises. The only difficulty could be that the book is written in French.

Beside the flyer also the base can raise the difficulty by balancing the perch and performing another movement at the same time. Thus he can go down into a split, or walk on stilts.<sup>34</sup> More variations are described by Winkler, as the base of the perch can for example also walk on a tight wire, a ladder, a roll or a ball.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Hugues (1860-1925) Auteur du texte Le Roux, *Les Jeux Du Cirque et La Vie Foraine / Par Hugues Le Roux... ; Ill. de Jules Garnier* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1889), 168.

<sup>32</sup> Winkler, *Von Fliegenden Menschen Und Tanzenden Pferden Band 2: Die Künste Der Artistik*, 2:195.

<sup>33</sup> Hugues Le Roux, Jules Garnier, and A.P. Morton, *Acrobats and Mountebanks. By Hugues Le Roux & [with Illustrations By] Jules Garnier. Tr. from the French by A.P. Morton. With 233 Illustrations* (Chapman and Hall, limited, London, 1890), p.227.

<sup>34</sup> Kiphard, *Die Akrobatik Und Ihr Training*, 93, 94.

<sup>35</sup> Winkler, *Von Fliegenden Menschen Und Tanzenden Pferden Band 2: Die Künste Der Artistik*, 2:195.

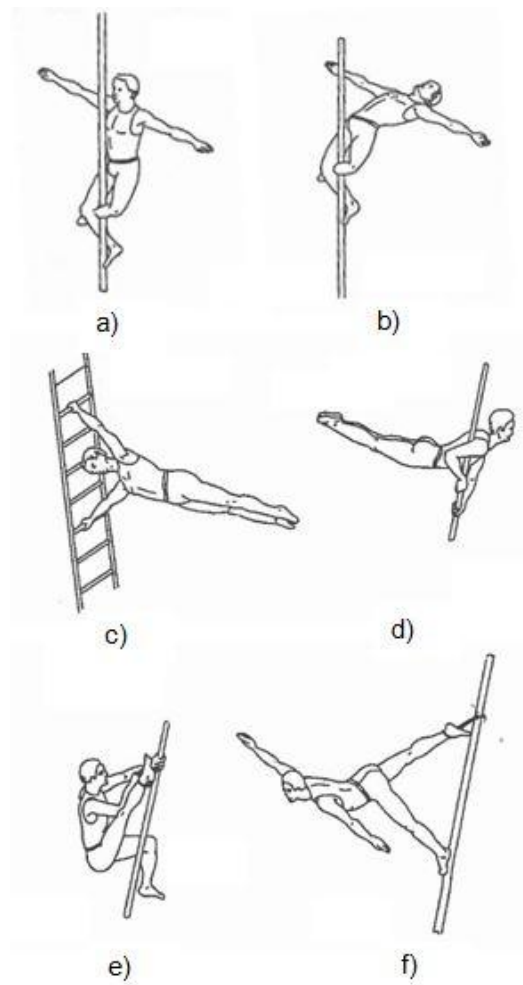


Figure 8: Different positions of the flyer on top of a perch. a) and b) shows a sit on the perch, c) and d) two variations of flags and e) and f) the entrance and the end position of a flag on the legs by support of a sling,<sup>36</sup>

In the show “Totem” from Cirque du Soleil, a perch act is shown by Aleksander Khaylafov and his troupe. He balances a perch on his forehead with a flyer who performs a free headstand on top. Then he walks up a Russian bar, which lies only on one side of the shoulder of another acrobat. After he arrived almost on the other side, the free side is picked up from the floor by the next base and Alexander walks back to the middle of the bar, still balancing the perch with a headstand on top. Before he arrives at the middle, two more bars are added on the side of the bar he stands on. They form now a cross on which a small platform is set. This allows Alexander to sit down. Then he turns around and stands up again, before the whole setting is built down reversely and the flyer descends the perch.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Gurevič and Hilpert, *Acrobatie & équilibre*, 109, 111.

<sup>37</sup> DmitryKhaylafov, ‘The Perch Act from Aleksander Khaylafov’ *CirqueDuSoleil, Totem 2009-2013*, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S21-VjUobuQ>.

## 2 History

In this chapter the origin of the perch and the early development according to Kiphard and the book “Chinese Acrobatics through the ages” by Qifeng is described briefly.

Kiphard describes in “*Die Akrobatik und ihr Training*“ the work on a pole as an first step towards the acrobatics with the balancing perch. More than thousands years ago in the Veda-time exercises at an even spile called Malla-Khamp had been performed in India.<sup>38</sup> Chrysostomus one of the most famous church fathers of the Christian antiquity (1-311 A.D.) reports on a perch balance in a palace which is described as a tree without root.<sup>39</sup> On a Chinese painting from the beginning of Christian time, a base is shown who balances a perch with 6 children on his forehead. This is an enormous achievement even for today’s definition.<sup>40</sup>

The earliest record of a perch performance in front of an audience is shown in Figure 9. It is recorded on a stone relief from a Han Dynasty grave in Feicheng in the province Shandong on the East coast of China (left). On the copy of the detail (right) the cross shaped perch, climbed by a midget is visible.<sup>41</sup>



Figure 9: Early record of a perch performing (around 770 B.C.). A stone relief in a Han Dynasty grave in Feicheng (left) and a copy of the crossed shape perch in detail (right).<sup>42</sup>

Further memories from the early origin of perch arose from the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.- A.D.220). In Figure 10 cliff carvings in Cangyuan show an acrobat standing on the top of a perch which is balanced on another acrobat’s forehead.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Kiphard, *Die Akrobatik Und Ihr Training*, 90.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>41</sup> Fu Qifeng, *Chinese Acrobatics Through the Ages* (Beijing: China Books & Periodicals, 1985), 9.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

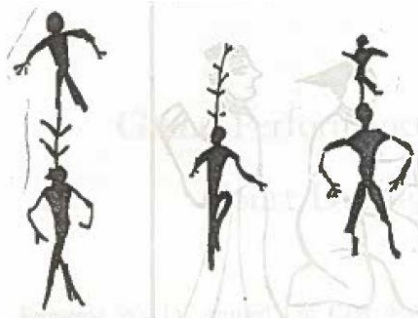


Figure 10: Ancient cliff carvings showing a flyer standing on the top of a perch, which is balanced on the forehead of the base (on the left side)<sup>44</sup>

Acrobatics, singing and dancing, martial arts, music and opera in China were also called the “Hundred Entertainments” (206 B.C.-A.D.220).<sup>45</sup> A very detailed picture of the “Hundred Entertainments” is in form of a stone carving in a Han Dynasty’s grave passed on.<sup>46</sup> A detail, shown in Figure 11 depicts a man balancing a cross-shaped pole on his forehead with three children on top, one laying on the tip of the pole and the two others hanging with their feet on the horizontal sidebars.<sup>47</sup> Qifeng describes this pole balancing as a famous new acrobatic act of the Han Dynasty. It was called “Climbing the Long Pole from Dulu”, named after the small state Dulu in the Western Regions of China, in which the acrobats were famous for their flexibility.<sup>48</sup>



Figure 11: Pole balancing as the origin of modern Perch, a detail of the "picture of the Hundred Entertainments" discovered in a Han Dynasty grave in Beizhai Village<sup>49</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



In the time A.D. 220-581 the perch acrobatic developed further and various national groups performed their own tricks.<sup>50</sup> Notations written by Lu Hui of the Eastern Jin Dynasty from 317-420 A.D. describe incredible pole balancing tricks. For example the description of “Pole on the forehead” which can be also seen on a stone monument shown in Figure 12 or on the earth ware published in “*China: Dawn of a golden Age, 200-750 AD*”, shown in Figure 13.

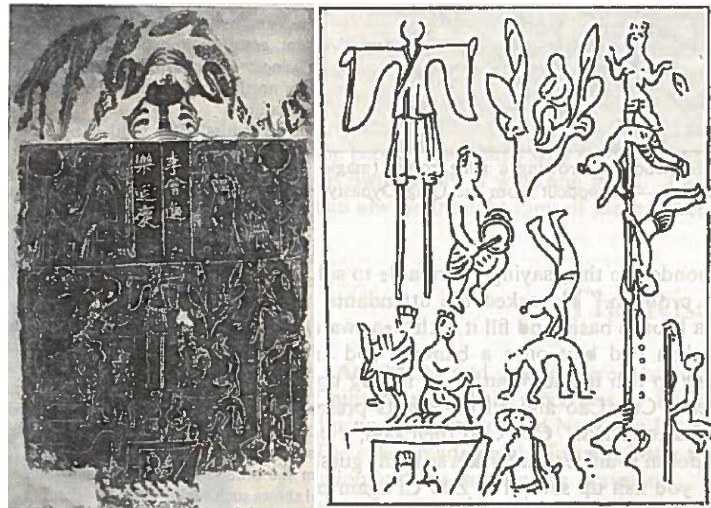


Figure 12: A stone monument of the Northern Wei Dynasty showing an acrobatic performance (right). The detail of the monument shows as well the perch trick “pole on the forehead” (left).<sup>51</sup>



Figure 13: Acrobats of the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534)<sup>52</sup>

In the Tang Dynasty 618-906 A.D. perch acrobatics went on the next higher level of performing arts. There were more perch artists than ever before: talented artists, excellent

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 34,35.

<sup>52</sup> James C. Y. Watt, Prudence Oliver Harper, and Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.), eds., *China: Dawn of a Golden Age, 200-750 AD* (New York : New Haven: Metropolitan Museum of Art ; Yale University Press, 2004), 144.

performers and even “court masters of Pole Balancing”.<sup>53</sup> One of the most famous and excellent artists was Auntie Wang, she was a strong-woman and admired for her effortless dance while she was balancing the perch.<sup>54</sup> Another important symptom of the Tang Dynasty was, that the culture developed not only in China, but also spread out to their neighbors. Qifeng speaks from a “long term exchange with Japan”.<sup>55</sup>

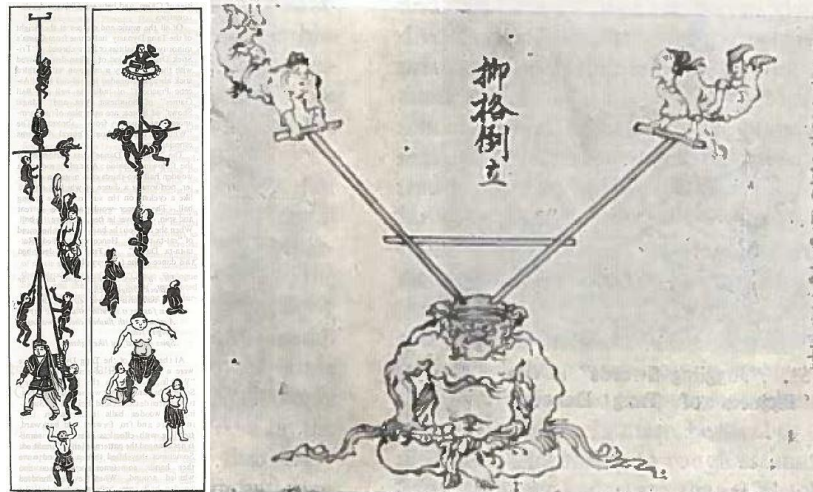


Figure 14: Perch acrobats in the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.)<sup>56</sup>

During the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368 A.D.) perch acrobatic acts appeared in variety shows, yet without adding anything new.<sup>57</sup> In the end it was thanks to the exchange with Japan that perch came to the Western world. The Asian acrobatic disciplines were brought the first time to America and Europe by the imperial Japanese troupe from professor Risley. In the Year 1868 the troupe performed for the first time in Rotterdam. In Figure 15 the advertisement in the “Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant” is shown.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Qifeng, *Chinese Acrobatics Through the Ages*, 43.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 58, 59.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>58</sup> Frederik L. Schodt, *Professor Risley & the Imperial Japanese Troupe: How an American Acrobat Introduced Circus to Japan, and Japan to the West* (Berkeley, Calif: Stone Bridge Press, 2012), 210.





Figure 15: A Perch act for the first time in Holland brought by professor Risley. Advertisement for the Imperial Japanese Troupe in Rotterdam<sup>59</sup>

Yet, according to the “Short history of circus” written down on Circopedia it was the French equestrian Louis Soullier who brought Chinese acrobats to Europe and introduced traditional Chinese acts as perch balancing, diabolo-juggling, plate-spinning and hoop-diving the first time to an Western Audience in 1866.<sup>60</sup> An impressive collection of pictures from traditional Chinese acrobatics can be found in “Chinese Acrobatics”.<sup>61</sup> Acrobatics on a bamboo pole are shown in Figure 16.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> ‘SHORT HISTORY OF THE CIRCUS - Circopedia’, accessed 20 November 2015, [http://www.circopedia.org/SHORT\\_HISTORY\\_OF\\_THE\\_CIRCUS](http://www.circopedia.org/SHORT_HISTORY_OF_THE_CIRCUS).

<sup>61</sup> *Chinese Acrobatics* = *L’acrobatie chinoise* = *Akrobati ya Kichina* (Pékin: Foreign Languages Press, 1974).

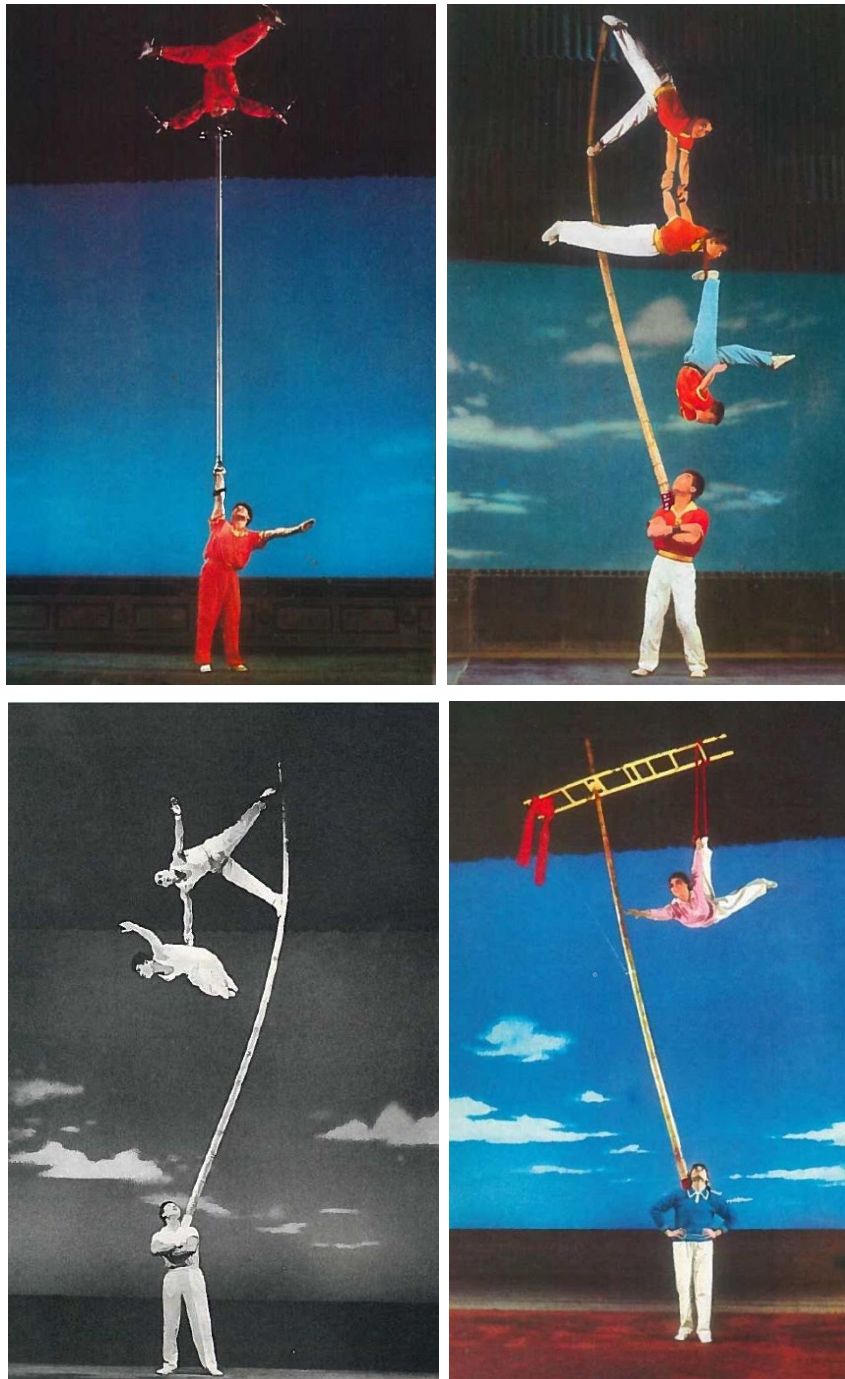


Figure 16: Perch, one of several traditional Chinese acrobatic acts out of “Chinese Acrobatics”.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 15–18.

### 3 Famous artists and combination with other circus disciplines

To show the development of perch in the last years and give examples what perch can be nowadays, the following chapter gives a small survey of different perch acts, troupes and artists. To support the subtitle of this essay “*more than one circus discipline*” the variety of perch is shown by the many combination of perch with other circus disciplines.

The following list over different perch acts from famous artists is given on the website from Circopedia:<sup>63</sup>

- Del Moral Troupe
- Duo Dobritch
- The Hermans
- Jorgen and Conny
- Mikheev Trio
- Shagunin Troupe
- Vadim Shagunin
- Olga and Vladimir Smirnov
- The Kozjaks

The links to their acts show what tricks are performed in the last years. Outstanding is the Swedish duo Jorgen and Conny with a stable choreography of a combination of dance moves, hand-to-hand acrobatics, juggling and perch.<sup>64</sup> Further perch troupes are mentioned in the book “*Von fliegenden Menschen und tanzenden Pferden*“ by Winkler, some examples are shown in Figure 17. The Esperantos for example perform a perch act where the base is standing on a roll. A double perch act with a middle artist who holds the upper perch is shown by the Bulgarian troupe 5 Cosmos at circus Aeros in 1975. As well as the Georgytroupe who performed a double perch act in which the base balances a perch on one shoulder and the middle holds a second perch in a girdle with a third artist on top of his perch. The Uessems walks over a free standing ladder with a perch on the forehead on which a free head to head balance is performed. On a ladder perch balanced on the feet of a base, two artists of the Russian troupe Milajew climbed up with a one arm handstand

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<sup>63</sup> ‘Category:Perch-Pole Balancing - Circopedia’, accessed 22 November 2015, [http://www.circopedia.org/Category:Perch-Pole\\_Balancing](http://www.circopedia.org/Category:Perch-Pole_Balancing).

<sup>64</sup> ‘Jorgen and Conny Video (1965) - Circopedia’, accessed 20 November 2015, [http://www.circopedia.org/Jorgen\\_and\\_Conny\\_Video\\_\(1965\)](http://www.circopedia.org/Jorgen_and_Conny_Video_(1965)).

balanced on the head of the middle and down with the back to the ladder in a head to head balance.<sup>65</sup>



Figure 17: Foot-ladder-perch act of the Skylights, graduates 1983 at the national artistic school in Berlin (left). The Staubertis in 1984 (middle) and Czech ladder acrobat Wolf balancing a perch on his forehead (right)<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, the list of the medal winners of the circus festival in Monte Carlo shows successful perch troupes, they are listed in Table 1.

Table1: Perch acts winning prices at the Monte Carlo Festival<sup>67</sup>

Name	Year	Price
LE DUO DOBRITCH, Perch artists Cirque Busch-Roland, Germany	5 <sup>th</sup> festival 1978	Silver Clown
LA TROUPE DES 9 PERCHISTES DE LEONID KOSTIUK Cirque d'Etat de Moscou	6 <sup>th</sup> festival 1979	Golden Clown
DUO ZALEWSKI, Perch artists Cirque d'Etat de Pologne	10 <sup>th</sup> festival 1984	Silver Clown
LES KEHAIOVI, Acrobates à la bascule Cirque d'Etat de Bulgarie et Blackpool Tower, Grande-Bretagne <sup>68</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup> festival 1987	Silver Clown
LES KHAILAFOV – perch artists	29 <sup>th</sup> festival 2005	Bronze Clown
Troupe de Hangzhou – perch with double hoop	34 <sup>th</sup> festival 2010	PRIX TMC MONTE-CARLO

<sup>65</sup> Winkler, *Von Fliegenden Menschen Und Tanzenden Pferden Band 2: Die Künste Der Artistik*, 2:195.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 2:194, 195, 213.

<sup>67</sup> 'Winners — Monte Carlo Festivals', accessed 4 December 2015, <http://www.montecarlofestival.mc/en/winners/>.



Some posters of perch troupes can be found in the Dutch circus museum and are shown in Figure 18.



Figure 18: Posters of the perch troupe Simili (left), the 4 Satis (middle) and the Rooge's siters.<sup>69</sup>

Also to mention is Ivan Henry who performed a perch act with his monkey Bongie in 1968. Pictures out of his blog are shown in Figure 19.



Figure 19: Ivan Henry with his monkey Bongie performing a humorous perch act at the Al Mall International Circus in 1968<sup>70</sup>

<sup>69</sup> 'Circusmuseum.nl', accessed 2 January 2016, [http://www.circusmuseum.nl/index.php?option=com\\_memorix&Itemid=26&task=result&searchplugin=quick&PHPSESSID=00f4477f68cac382b339cd7c68369476](http://www.circusmuseum.nl/index.php?option=com_memorix&Itemid=26&task=result&searchplugin=quick&PHPSESSID=00f4477f68cac382b339cd7c68369476); Winkler, *Von Fliegenden Menschen Und Tanzenden Pferden Band 2: Die Künste Der Artistik*, 2:212.

<sup>70</sup> Ivan M. Henry, 'The Circus Blog - Part 323', accessed 2 January 2016, <http://www.thecircusblog.com/?paged=323>.

Really spectacular is the world record of the Kehayov teeterboard troupe from Bulgaria. They accomplished a column of seven artists in which the base George Kehayov uses a girdle perch and the top flyer arrives with a jump from the teeterboard. This was written in the Guinness Book of World Records in 1986 and to date, has not been beaten.”<sup>71</sup>



Figure 20: Seven man high hold by George Kehayov <sup>72</sup>

Some of the tricks and troupes mentioned above can be seen in the video “la perch équiPOSE” on the website “la perche”. This video gives a good impression of the variety of perch and several combinations with other circus disciplines. Among other there is the combination with Russian bar, unicycle, ice skates, Russian cadre and Rola-Rola performed.<sup>73</sup>

In the future there is a contemporary perch act by Mikkel Hobitz Filtenborg and Julien Auger to be expected. A trailer of their new creation in 2016 “100% circus” gives a first impression.<sup>74</sup> Figure 21 shows a picture of Auger in training, balancing a perch on his shoulder on which the flyer performs tricks in a vertical rope.

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<sup>71</sup> zandergarcia1, *Teeterboard 7 Man High (England 1986)*, 2010, accessed 2 January 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guVtXFdoWE8>.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> ‘LA PERCHE ÉQUIPOISE - YouTube’, accessed 2 January 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcbNep43N5o>; ‘La-Perche-Equipoise’, *La-Perche-Equipoise*, accessed 19 December 2015, <http://duocardio.wix.com/la-perche-equipoise>.

<sup>74</sup> ‘100% Circus on Vimeo’, accessed 19 January 2016, <https://vimeo.com/145782151>.

As a prospect there is also the perch act by Duo Cardio from Mexique and France to mention which will be seen at the festival Cirque de Demain 2016.<sup>75</sup>



Figure 21: Julien Auger training perch

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<sup>75</sup> 'Programmation | Festival Mondial Du Cirque de Demain', accessed 23 January 2016, <http://www.cirquededemain.paris/infos-pratiques/les-spectacles>.

## Conclusions and discussion

The first research goal was to collect wide information about perch. This had been difficult at the beginning. In the Codarts Library there had been not a single book about perch. I only found several pictures and YouTube videos in the internet. Mainly by help of the library website of ENC, the circus school in Montreal I could find titles of books about perch. Furthermore, friends and the team of Circopedia answered me on my research questions and suggested me books, which allowed a well-founded research to the topic of perch.

Perch can be divided in fix-, aerial- and balancing perch. Only the balancing perch, a combined form of equilibrium and acrobatics had been content of the further research. Balancing perch is the concept of a base balancing an object with another acrobat performing tricks on top of it. The built up and different variations, as the L-shaped form, the circular and the super elastic perch are mainly described by help of the books *“Die Akrobatik und ihr Training”* by Kiphard and *“Acrobatie & Equilibre”* by Gourévitch. The individual top and bottom pieces as well as some common positions of the flyer and the base give an impression of the various possibilities of a perch.

Based on the book *“Chinese Acrobatics through the ages”* by Qifeng the early history of perch is described. It goes back to 770 B.C. from when the first records are found and developed from a cross shape pole, climbed by midgets to the “Long Pole from Dulu” balanced on the forehead of a base. In the Tang Dynasty (618-906 A.D.) the perch acrobatics went on the next higher level with more perch artists than ever before and excellent performers like the strong-women Auntie Wang. Moreover the cultural exchange with Japan was important for the development of the perch as it was among others the imperial Japanese troupe from professor Risley which brought the perch to Europe countries in 1868.

The six circus troupes who won a medal in the renowned circus festival of Monte Carlo with a perch are only one example of the incredible acts, which had been performed with a perch. Some of the countless examples of amazing combinations on a very high technical level with different circus disciplines had been described. They show that perch is far more than one circus discipline. It is the concept of an acrobat balancing an object with another acrobat on top of it. This concept allows the acrobats to bring everything they perform on a higher technical level. A base, for example can juggle five clubs and riding on a high unicycle, while balancing the perch on his forehead on which another artist performs a free headstand spinning rings at his arms and legs at the same time. Although the unbelievable perch acts of



the past are difficult to surpass the participation of the duo Cardio at the festival Cirque de Demain in 2016 and the Trailer of a contemporary circus show “100% Circus” including a perch, may be expect that the development of perch is not finished and will continue with the contemporary circus as well.

Beside the used books I recommend three more sources I have not available but which might include interesting information about perch. The Russian book “*Équilibrisme*” written by Gurevich in 1982, the Chinese book called “*An illustration to ancient Chinese performances and acrobatics*”, published in 2007 and “*Le sens de l'équilibre: une clef pour l'Art du cirque : équilibristes, fildeferistes, funambules, cyclistes, patineurs, perchistes*” by Adrian in 1993. All the titles you can find below in the Bibliography.

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