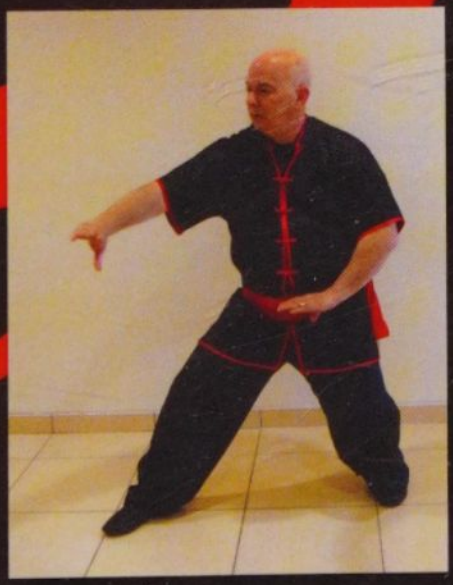
DEVELOPING JIN

Silk-Reeling Power in Tai Chi and the Internal Martial Arts



Phillip Starr

Author of *Martial Mechanics*



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Developing Jin

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The Making of A Butterfly

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DEVELOPING JIN

Silk-Reeling Power in Tai Chi and the Internal Martial Arts

Phillip Starr



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For Barbi, whose spirit illuminated the path when I had lost my way.

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Foreword

For some years now, friends and students have repeatedly asked me to write a book on one of the most obscure, esoteric aspects of the internal martial arts of China: coiling power. I considered how extremely difficult such an undertaking would be; after all, this abstruse facet of the traditional neijia really requires hands-on training, which is far beyond the scope of the written word. But they continued to nag and haggle until I finally agreed to give it a whirl.

Let me begin by saying that there are several schools of coiling power. The Chen style of taijiquan utilizes what is popularly known as *chansi-jin* ("silk-reeling power") while other schools of internal boxing, such as xingyiquan and baguazhang, refer to their methods by different names. However, names are unimportant; what matters are the principles upon which this special power is based, how it is developed, and how it is to be applied.

I recall the first time I was witness to the effectiveness of this unique form of striking power. My teacher, Sifu W.C. Chen, asked us to watch as he demonstrated a punch on one of my hapless classmates. Beginning with his loose fist no more than three inches or so from the chest of my kung fu brother, Sifu Chen suddenly twitched and his fist shot forward. When his fist struck his student's pectoral muscle, the effects were instant and devastating. My classmate dropped almost straight to the floor, clutching his chest and groaning loudly. It was as if he'd been shot with a .45 caliber handgun! He lay on the floor while our teacher administered a form of massage *(tui-na)* therapy to him for several minutes. Even so, he was unable to train properly for the remainder of the class.

Sifu Chen explained, "The power of my punch comes up from below the soles of my feet. It coils around my body and is finally

released through my fist. The power is many times stronger than it would ordinarily be, and it penetrated through my opponent. If I had allowed it to remain inside him, the effects would be much more serious." Dear God! It looked like such a *little* punch—it was certainly nothing like the "large" punches that we practiced in class—how could it possibly generate so much power?

And so it was that I began to learn the intricacies of coiling power. It was a lengthy process, especially considering that there was something of a language barrier. Although Sifu Chen spoke very fluent English, he sometimes found it difficult to put certain concepts into easily understandable terms that I could grasp.

Many years later, when I began training my own students, I realized how difficult it is to teach this special technique. I thereupon set out to find and develop more efficient methods of presenting this material. This book is the result of those efforts.

1

GOT JIN?

The word *jin* (劲) refers to strength, vigor, zeal, or expression of strength. It's actually the combination of *yi* (意, "intention"), *qi* (氣, "vital energy"), *li* (力, "force" or "strength"), and *xin* (心, literally "heart," referring to "mind"). Insofar as its use in martial arts terminology is concerned, jin is defined as "principles of motion or connected force." That is, it's the result of the combination of yi, li, xin, and qi expressed through physical movement.

Many people, including many who actually speak Chinese, confuse qi with jin. Acquiring jin means that you must learn correct body alignment and structure, connected expression of the breath with the application of strength, and focusing the mind on the task at hand. When these things are united into a single entity, the result is what we might call "trained power."

What Is Jin?

One of the problems encountered by students of the neijia (the internal Chinese martial arts) is that they try to develop jin apart from qi, or they try to guide qi through the body without the application of jin. Insofar as martial arts training is concerned, both of these approaches are wrong.

Guiding qi through the body is often practiced by qigong devotees who are interested in improving and maintaining their health. Such exercises can improve your health, but without the implementation

of jin, these routines won't do squat to improve your martial skills. However, some aspiring kung fu practitioners practice these health-maintenance exercises with the assumption that they will eventually result in the attainment of real boxing skill. Let me make a slew of new friends by stating that this is absolutely incorrect.

Kung fu requires that we learn to exert force correctly, and in a variety of different ways. This necessarily involves physical movement and li, which, as I mentioned earlier, translates as "physical strength" or "force." That is, power is expressed through our physical bodies. *To move with speed and precision requires the correct use of strength rather than brute force.* For example, professional baseball pitchers can throw a ball at incredibly high speeds, and they can do it throughout an entire baseball game. Someone who has just learned how to throw a baseball cannot possibly hope to do the same thing because his or her body has not been properly strengthened and the muscles have not been "tuned" to that kind of activity. Professionals have learned to use only the amount of strength that is absolutely necessary in delivering a pitch. They have learned to "do more with less." The novice has not. The novice will use much more strength than is really necessary and will probably use whole muscle groups that are not required. Consequently, the novice's pitch is slow and the movements are heavy and awkward. A novice will tire quickly and cannot hope to pitch through an entire professional game. The professional has learned to use jin: "trained strength." The novice relies on brute force.

Types of Jin

One of the areas of study of the Chinese martial arts that often confuses beginners as well as advanced pupils is the study of the many different "types" of jin. The names of these different "types" of jin often vary from one instructor to another, and while some teachers

speak of employing only a handful of different types of jin, others utilize two dozen or more! Small wonder that students feel as though their brains have turned to cheese.

Let's get one thing straight here: there is only one qi. Some people practice what they refer to as "different types of qi." This is due to a mistranslation or misunderstanding of the subject. I have heard of people practicing what they call listening qi, exploding qi, pushing qi, expanding qi, and so on. What they mean is that they practice different forms of jin: different ways of manifesting power, strength, or a trained skill of some kind. The qi itself is unchanging. It is energy. However, there are many different ways of applying it; these methods of application are referred to as jin. The best-known is referred to as *fa-jin* (发劲), which is the ability to emit jin in the form of a sharp, powerful blow.

The internal martial arts train students to emit power through the application of eight different body actions (see chapter 4). No matter what technique you perform, you must utilize one of these eight body actions if your intention is to transmit power. These body actions could be called forms of jin, and each one requires a great deal of practice and refinement before it can be said to be truly correct.

Like a novice baseball pitcher, beginners tend to make their movements too heavy, and they often use too much brute force. Their balance is awkward and their movements lack polish and celerity. These inadequacies are overcome only through tedious repetition and focused practice. Real skill is not developed overnight.

However, even after you've learned how to perform the basic techniques and postures via the eight body actions, your training is far from complete. It's one thing to be able to stand in one spot and execute a proper thrust with body rotation. It's quite another thing to be able to apply that movement or technique in combat. Fighting necessarily involves movement, and you dare not stand still and simply execute your techniques on the spot. You must learn to

respond to the opponent's movements—how to withdraw, advance, evade laterally, and so on. Each of these tactics could be said to utilize a different form of jin (trained strength or movement).

When applying different body actions to different tactics, a different jin is applied. You can see how quickly the different combinations of body actions with tactics can multiply the "types of jin" you will learn. Because giving each jin a different name would eventually lead to a good deal of confusion, I prefer to keep the number to a bare minimum by naming only the general ways in which you intend to apply energy or strength: emitting energy for purposes of striking an enemy, listening (becoming sensitive to the energy or movement of another person), and so on.

The Real Chansi-Jin

Chansi-jin (缠丝劲), which translates as "silk-reeling power," is a unique feature of the neijia. The methods of generating and emitting this special jin, which allows the internal stylist to strike with tremendously explosive power, even at very close range, vary somewhat from one system to another. However, there are very, very few neijia practitioners today who are truly capable of applying it. This is not necessarily because it is especially difficult to develop (although it does require some considerable rigorous training), but because most contemporary neijia enthusiasts and instructors simply don't know how to do it properly. I'll bet that statement isn't going to help me win any popularity contests, but let me stick my neck out even further and risk life and limb by repeating myself: *At the present time, there are very, very few neijia stylists who know how to develop and apply the true chansi-jin . . . even in China.*

The foundation for developing chansi-jin is presented in the earliest stages of a student's training. The eight body actions, moving from the *dantian* (an area located about three inches below the navel;

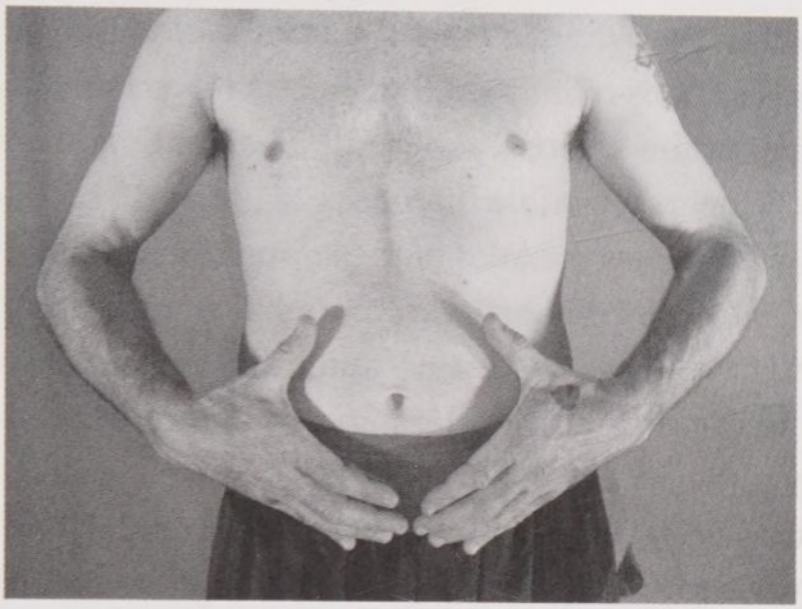


Figure 1.1. The dantian.

see fig. 1.1) and developing a strong, stable root, are the cornerstones upon which real chansi-jin is based. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that students strive to master the fundamentals before attempting to practice chansi-jin exercises.

Fact versus Myth

There are numerous stories that have been perpetuated over the generations concerning the internal martial arts of China. Some are true and some are completely false. More often than not, the truth lies somewhere in the middle. Let's look at a few of the most popular notions regarding the neijia and its legendary chansi-jin.

More than a few neijia enthusiasts believe that it is entirely possible to develop chansi-jin to such a degree that one need only touch the opponent to send him flying several yards. I call this the *Star Wars* approach to internal kung fu. Let me be perfectly frank about this claim. It is *myth.* While it is possible to generate uncanny power through the proper application of coiling power, it does not beget superhuman might. Moreover, the claim made by some perfidious individuals that it is possible to knock someone off their feet or

even render them unconscious *without making physical contact* is utter horse pucky. These charlatans often pass themselves off as internal stylists but possess no genuine martial skill at all. Their antics do all authentic neijia practitioners a terrible disservice.

There are those who dismiss the tales of neijia practitioners who could allegedly generate astonishing power through the application of coiling power. Certainly many of these accounts are considerably embellished, but it is important to understand that a number of them are very likely quite accurate. For instance, one well-known yiliquan instructor demonstrated the power of such a blow by having one of his senior students hold a very thick telephone book against his chest. The instructor simply slapped the book, causing the student to collapse on the spot. Although he'd experienced considerable pain, the student was unhurt, and after some tui-na (Chinese massage therapy) had been administered, he was able to stand. The teacher explained that the energy of the blow had been fired directly through the student, exiting out his back. Several minutes later, he asked the young man to remove his jacket and turn his back to the class. Sure enough, on his right scapula was a dark five-fingered bruise!

I have met neijia enthusiasts who insist that in order to develop the enigmatic chansi-jin, one must move the hand or hands in the shape of the double-fish diagram of the *taiji* (fig. 1.2). They believe that doing this will someday bestow upon them the ability to generate



Figure 1.2. The double-fish diagram of the taiji.

coiling power. Fish nipples. The only way to develop the authentic coiling power is through progressive training; you must first learn the eight body actions, then reverse breathing, engaging, the so-called "twistings," coiling the small, internal tissues of the body's core . . . and then put it all together and learn to release it. Waving your arms or turning and shaking your body will do absolutely nothing for you unless these skills are thoroughly mastered. Period.

How to Use This Book

Just in case you're wondering, there are no silver bullets to be found in these pages, no secret techniques that can be mastered in a few weeks while you practice in the semidarkness of your locked and dimly lit bedroom, no "quick and easy" training routines that will turn you into a supreme kung fu master before your next birthday. What you will find, however, are training concepts and routines that will, through arduous, seemingly endless, and sometimes painful repetition, enable you to dramatically improve the effectiveness of your chosen internal discipline. But before you begin, you must resign yourself to the fact that it's going to take time. Don't try to hurry the process! If you do, you're almost guaranteed to hurt yourself—internally or externally, or both.

The Stages of Chansi-Jin Training

The authentic chansi-jin is learned in stages. Each stage requires extensive practice, and you must *never try to hurry the process.* Train thoroughly through each stage before moving on to the next. The training phases are outlined below:

1. Basic Body Actions, Structure, and Breathing

This is the first and most fundamental stage of training. Students must learn how to correctly utilize the larger muscles of the body while maintaining proper body alignment at all times. They must also learn special breathing techniques, which are vital to the effective application of this jin. It is essential that you acquire considerable skill with the basic body actions and be able to fully integrate them with the principles of structure and breathing technique before moving on to the second stage of practice.

2. Engaging

In the second stage, students learn to "pack" internal tissues (tendons, fasciae, and other connective tissues as well as small muscles) with qi. This is done through special breathing exercises, and you can actually feel the interior of the body "puff up" slightly, as if you were blowing up an inner tube. I refer to this skill as "engaging." Engaging helps protect your body from the explosive "recoil" that is produced as a result of emitting chansi-jin. It also closes the body's vital points, protecting you against an enemy's attack.

3. Twisting the Tendons

In the third stage you must learn to slightly "twist" the tendons just prior to *fa-jin* (emitting power). When the appropriate tendons are mildly stressed, they produce and store internal power that will be released at the moment of fa-jin. This will require considerable practice.

4. Coiling

You must learn to lift, contract, and "twist" (a technique affectionately referred to as "coiling") the appropriate internal tissues of the torso just prior to the execution of your strike. Bringing these internal tissues and muscles into play not only increases the amount of

mass behind the blow; they also intersupport the larger muscles, allowing more of their mass to be brought into play.

5. Technique

Not all techniques can utilize chansi-jin. You must therefore learn which techniques are appropriate and exactly how to apply the previous principles (engaging, twisting, and coiling) to them. When you first undertake the study of chansi-jin, your movements will be rather large. In time they will become smaller and smaller until they are almost imperceptible. The power that is developed through the practice of the large movements becomes condensed and explosively powerful. A full discussion of this special technique would require an additional book, which is one of my future projects.

A Word of Caution

I remember my teacher warning me that incorrect practice of the *chansi-jin* could result in very painful injuries, which could even include internal damage! And being a fairly typical bull-headed teenager, I ignored him. However, once I began to practice this special technique in earnest, I discovered that he was absolutely right. So, I will now parrot his words and warn you.

Once you begin to use the internal coiling technique to practice emitting power (see chapter 13), it is necessary that you release *all* of the energy when you strike. Do not fail to do this. Power that is not released will figuratively "bounce around" inside you, and believe me, it's more than a little uncomfortable. If it is stuck in the abdominal area, it is akin to placing your viscera in a blender and turning it to "puree." You will probably become rather nauseated and you may even vomit. The first time this happened to me, I realized that it is entirely possible to cause internal damage to oneself by repeatedly practicing the technique incorrectly!

Additionally, it is essential that your body mechanics are absolutely correct. If your shoulder is raised or stiffened, the energy will lodge there. It cannot be adequately emitted, and the result is that it figuratively "slams against" the joint, causing considerable pain. This can happen at the location of any joint that is involved in the execution of the technique, but it is more commonly felt in the arms and shoulders than in the legs or hips (figs. 1.3–1.4).



Figure 1.3. The shoulder is raised or tensed when the punch is fired.

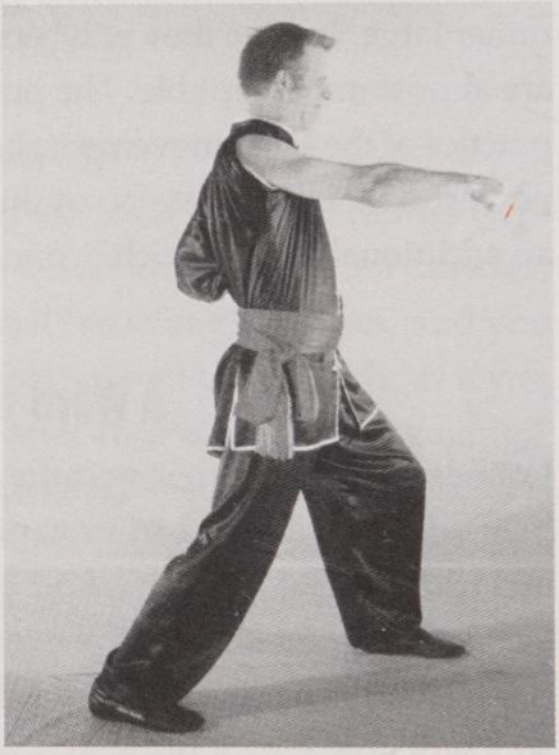


Figure 1.4. The energy is blocked in the shoulder joint and our boy experiences a jolt of searing pain!

If you experience much discomfort, stop your practice immediately and find your mistakes! *Do not continue to practice with the chansi-jin if you are experiencing discomfort.*

2

BASIC CONDITIONING EXERCISES

Before embarking on study and training in the methods of energy coiling, it is essential that you first undergo a period of physical (and to a lesser degree, mental) training to condition your body, mind, and spirit. I suggest practicing these special exercises at least three or four times each week for a minimum of three months before attempting to learn the coiling exercises. You can learn the methods of engaging and the techniques of hand coiling, but you shouldn't attempt to perform the actual "core" coiling movements until these exercises have been practiced for at least three months. Moreover, I strongly recommend that you continue to practice these exercises for an additional nine months, even after you've started to practice the energy-coiling movements. This will provide you with a year of physical conditioning practice, which will substantially enhance your energy-coiling skills.

These exercises are intended to stretch and strengthen the internal tissues that are vital to the application of coiling fa-jin. They should be practiced in addition to, rather than instead of, the usual pre-class stretching and warm-up exercises.

A Different Way of Walking

Butt Walking

That's right; I said "butt walking"! This is a real and important exercise, so sit on the ground with your legs stretched out straight in front of you. Use the muscles around the kidneys to advance one buttock at a time, walking a minimum of twenty yards (figs. 2.1–2.3). Also practice "walking" backward. It's a very effective and inexpensive way to polish your floors!

Don't cheat by jerking your shoulders up and down or using swinging movements of your arms or torso. Don't use your legs to assist you, either.

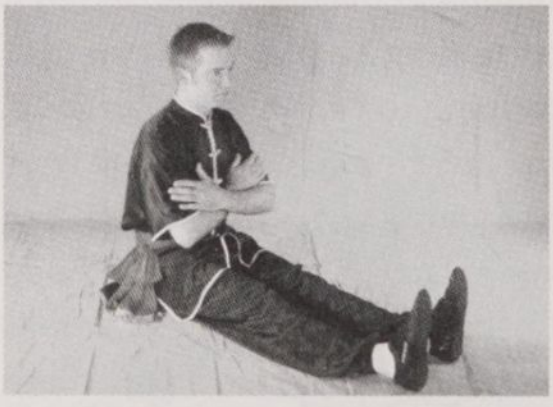


Figure 2.1. Stretch your legs out in front of you and fold your arms across your chest.



Figure 2.2. Lift from the kidney and advance one leg . . .



Figure 2.3. Then lift the other leg from the kidney and continue to move forward.

Walk on Your Back

If you thought the last exercise was tough, you'll love this one! Lie on your back with your legs straight. Use movements of the muscles around the shoulder blades to advance forward at least ten yards (figs. 2.4–2.6). Also practice moving backward.

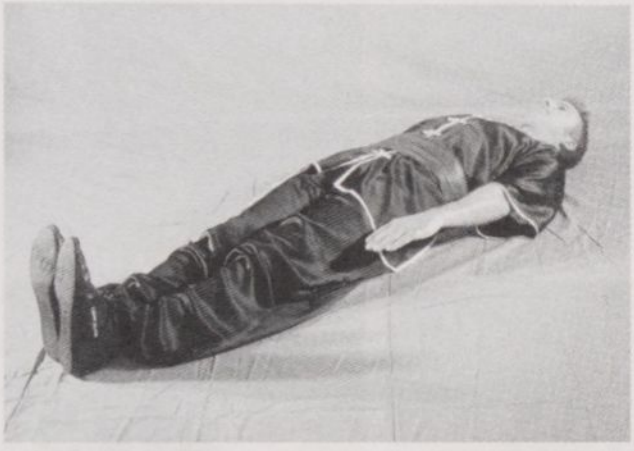


Figure 2.4. Lie on your back as shown.



Figure 2.5. Lift one shoulder and advance it.



Figure 2.6. Lift the other shoulder and pull yourself along the floor.

Serving Tea Exercises

Practice both inside and outside forms of the tea-serving exercise, and pay special attention to movements of the waist, back, and shoulders. Once you have learned to do the exercises correctly, perform them with a cup of water in your hand. The object is to run through each exercise several times without spilling a drop. But for now, you'd better get a towel.

Inside Method of the Tea-Serving Exercise

Follow figures 2.7 to 2.15.



Figure 2.7. Begin with your feet spread shoulder width apart and your fists on your hips.



Figure 2.8. Thrust out your right hand, palm up.



Figure 2.9. Turn your waist to the right.



Figure 2.10. Lean back and sweep your arm behind you along a horizontal plane.



Figure 2.11. Turn your waist to the left as your arm sweeps over to your left side.



Figure 2.12. Bring your arm and hand around to the front with the palm and elbow turned up.



Figure 2.13. Turn your waist to the right as your arm sweeps rightward.



Figure 2.14. Coil your wrist around, keeping the palm turned up.



Figure 2.15. Return your hand to the beginning position and begin again.

Outside Method of the Tea-Serving Exercise

Follow figures 2.16 to 2.24.



Figure 2.16. Begin as in the previous exercise.



Figure 2.17. Thrust out your right hand with the palm up.



Figure 2.18. Turn your waist to the left.



Figure 2.19. Coil your hand, being careful to keep the palm turned upward.



Figure 2.20. Turn your waist rightward and thrust your hand out behind you.



Figure 2.21. Turn back to the left and bring your arm and hand around to the left.



Figure 2.22. Lean back and sweep your arm along a horizontal plane overhead.



Figure 2.23. Turn to the right as your arm sweeps over to the right.



Figure 2.24. Turn to face the front as your arm and hand return to the front.

Repeat the exercise.

Tea-Serving Exercise While Walking

These exercises can be practiced while you advance and retreat. It sounds easy enough to do, but it will require considerable practice (figs. 2.25–2.30). This is actually an old baguazhang training routine, and practitioners would practice it while performing bagua's signature exercise of "walking the circle".



Figure 2.25. Advance one foot in *sanzai* as you begin the exercise.



Figure 2.26. Your steps should be rhythmical as you continue to practice the routine.



Figure 2.27. Correct breathing will help ensure that you maintain your balance.



Figure 2.28. Practice walking backward, too.



Figure 2.29. Train to walk in this fashion for several minutes with both tea-serving exercises.



Figure 2.30. This will require considerable practice!

3

THE FOUNDATION OF INTERNAL KUNG FU

Now that you've hopefully learned how to polish the floor with your backside, it's time that we sat down and had a little chat about what forms the very foundation of internal kung fu. You've been leafing through the pages of this book looking for it, and now you've found it: the perplexing, inscrutable subject of qi! Yes, we're going to talk about the one subject that has stirred so many controversies in martial arts circles.

There are those who believe but can't do much with it, although their instructors may assure them that it will "eventually come." At the other end of the spectrum are the naysayers who deny the existence of the whole notion of vital force. This is often the result of their inability to apply it themselves for one reason or another. In the middle are the fence-sitters: those who aren't quite ready to throw out the baby with the bathwater but are not quite sure what to do with the whole idea. Is it real or nothing more than a myth? Let's have a look.

The Concept of Qi

In Chinese, the word *qi* (氣) has several different meanings. Generally, it is translated as "air" or "breath." In Chinese martial arts we speak of qi as the life force or vital energy that is found within all living organisms. Many contemporary neijia enthusiasts are not altogether familiar with the concept of qi as it is understood by the Chinese themselves, so let me take a few moments to elaborate.

The concept of qi is not exclusive to Chinese culture; most ancient cultures embraced the idea of an invisible life force and had words for it. In Japanese it is known as *ki,* in Sanskrit it is called *prana,* and in ancient Hebrew it was known as *ruakh.* The ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and even the Native Americans had terms for this concept.

Qi flows around and through all things in the universe. Like fish that swim in the ocean but are unaware of the water surrounding them, so we live in an ocean of qi. It is the "stuff" that binds the universe together and which allows organisms to live and work. Over time, every creature's supply of qi diminishes and it begins to age and become weaker. When the qi is finally depleted, the organism dies. In humans, qi accumulates in the dantian, an area located about three finger-widths below the navel and two finger-widths inside the abdomen. It is not on the surface of the skin, as some qigong novices erroneously believe. Rather, the dantian may be compared to a large ball located inside the lower abdomen (see chapter 1).

At birth we inherit a given supply of qi from our parents. This is known as "congenital qi" *(yuanqi)* and it is stored primarily in the kidneys. Yuanqi allows for the production of "acquired qi" *(qingqi* and *yingqi),* which continuously nourishes and supplements the congenital qi. Qingqi is the qi that is derived from the air we breathe. Yingqi is the qi obtained from the intake of nutritive substances—food and drink. The qi that we inherit from our parents and that we draw in from nutrition and normal breathing is referred to as

neiqi (inside or internal qi) because it nourishes the body and maintains health as it circulates through a series of invisible channels that are not unlike the vessels through which blood flows. If the energy becomes blocked in one or more channels, pain and illness may result. Needles can be inserted into these channels at special points (where the channels come up near the surface of the skin) to assist in removing the blockages and stimulate the smooth flow of qi. This is the basis of traditional Chinese medical therapies such as acupuncture and tui-na (traditional Chinese massage therapy). *Waiqi* (outside or external qi) refers to several different concepts:

- It can refer to the portion of the neiqi that flows just under the surface of the skin and acts as our first line of defense against disease.
- It can refer to the ability to utilize the qi to protect the body against blows. This skill is sometimes referred to as "iron shirt," and there are several styles of it.
- It can refer to the ability to emit qi for martial or healing purposes.

The Nature of Qi, Qigong, and Internal Kung Fu

Qi is essential to the development of jin, but many practitioners of the internal martial arts misunderstand how the process works. For instance, most neijia enthusiasts practice various forms of qigong (routines that are intended to cultivate and nourish qi), believing that these exercises will enable them to express qi through their martial arts and that no muscular effort is required at all. Nothing could be farther from the truth, and this is why, after many years of dedicated qigong practice, they are unable to realize their goal.

So, is the practice of qigong essential to the practice of internal martial arts? The answer is yes, but you need to understand what kind of qigong you should practice and how it works. Here is a short list of the types of qigong practiced in China:

Qigong for Health

This is by far the most common form of qigong. Every morning, millions of Chinese fill the local parks and practice a wide variety of qigong exercises, most of which are intended to ward off illness. Some exercises are used to assist in overcoming an ailment that has already materialized, but if the disease has progressed too far, such forms of qigong have little therapeutic value. These myriad qigong exercises have almost no direct connection to martial qigong, but they are typically taught to most neijia practitioners, who are assured that the practice of these exercises will enable them to effectively emit qi. This is simply untrue.

Qigong for Spiritual Awareness

Some forms of qigong are regularly practiced by certain Buddhist or Taoist sects in the hope that they will foster a sort of spiritual awakening. They have very little, if any, martial value.

Qigong for Martial Skill

These forms of qigong are aimed at gathering, cultivating, and learning to effectively emit qi through the application of your martial arts techniques. They must necessarily involve training jin, because qi simply cannot be effectively applied without it. As far as martial

qi simply cannot be effectively applied without it. As far as martial arts are concerned, qi can be expressed only through our bodies. We must learn exactly how this is to be done, and that's what this book is about.

What Did You Say about a Song?

Let me climb out on a limb and say that *all internal martial arts require and utilize some measure of muscular effort.* So there. I remember way back when taijiquan was first introduced to the public via certain martial arts magazines and books. I am a voracious reader and I

snapped up these delicacies, only to find that much of what they espoused about the utilization of qi in internal boxing was so much balderdash. They insisted that absolutely no strength was required, that one need only slap an opponent to airmail that person into the next county!

No doubt, part of the problem was that the first Eastern martial arts teachers to present their arts to the West were trying to teach Westerners in a second language, English. This is exceedingly difficult to do. They would tell their students to "relax" and to avoid tensing their muscles. I remember when I first heard these instructions from my own teacher, Master W.C. Chen. I wondered, "How can I stand up or hold my arm out if I'm not supposed to use my muscles?" It was more than a little confusing and it took me some time to fully grasp what he meant. There's relaxing, and then there's relaxing. The correct Chinese term for this is *song* (鬆), and it infers that one should use no more muscular effort than is required. For instance, when you lift a coffee cup, you do so without thinking and without using a great deal of brute force. On the other hand, toddlers often have great difficulty picking up light objects because they use too much muscular effort. Their muscles have not yet learned; they haven't been "toned" to perform that particular task. If you tried to lift a pencil with all of your strength, you couldn't do it, either!

And so it is with internal boxing. The fact is that to perform any kind of movement, from lifting your arms to moving your legs, necessarily requires muscular involvement. And to make these movements quickly requires even more muscular effort! However, this doesn't mean that you need to start gulping down those yummy protein drinks and begin an aggressive program of weightlifting. It simply means that the muscles have to be trained, toned, and employed properly. The movements should be crisp rather than flaccid. They should be firm but not wooden. This sounds easy enough to do, but it really requires some considerable practice over time.

No Yi, No Qi

In Chinese, the word *yi* (意) means, roughly, "intention, idea, mind, imagination." Some people translate it simply as "mind," but I feel this is inadequate and can result in a serious misunderstanding of the concept and how it is applied to the neijia. There is a single, vital principle concerning the relationship between yi and qi that you absolutely must remember at all times: *Where the yi goes, the qi goes—and the body wants to follow.* This principle is so important that one of the three classical internal systems included the concept of yi in its name; xingyiquan. Yi directs qi, period. If there is no involvement of yi, there is no involvement of qi.

Now, consider the statement about qi following yi and the body wanting to follow. Let's imagine that a very attractive person is standing in front of you, waiting for the bus. Your attention—your yi—is focused on that person. Therefore, your qi extends out toward that person. Your body would like to move toward him or her but, in the interests of social acceptability, you control your body and do not allow it to advance. If someone were to attempt to push you backward, you would be highly resistant because your yi and qi are extended forward. However, if the attractive person were standing behind you and you knew it, your yi would extend backward, your qi would follow suit, and your body would want to move backward as well. If you were pushed from the front, you'd be hurled backward because *your body is being pushed in the direction it wants to go.*

This principle is also applied when karate, taekwondo, and kung fu enthusiasts practice breaking boards, bricks, and stones. The secret is told to them by their instructors the first time they prepare to break a one-inch board. "Aim behind the board," the teacher says. Students concentrate as they have been told and successfully split the board! If students fail to do this, if they are afraid of hurting themselves and focus on the surface of the board, the fist will

probably bounce off the wood and the student will experience considerable pain. Only by extending yi (and probably unknown to the student, the qi), will the student succeed. Unfortunately, most teachers and students never fully realize the far-reaching implications of this event.

In the practice of any form of qigong, the movement and placement of the yi is crucial. This is why the ancient writings and songs often refer to where the yi is to be focused during practice. And remember that "yi" implies more than just a passing thought; it refers to your will, your imagination, and your intention.

The Importance of Correct Posture and Movement

Qi is expressed through movements of the physical body. If balance is lost or the correct principles of body movement are not maintained, qi cannot be effectively emitted. A good analogy is that of water running through a hose. If the hose is cracked or has kinks in it, the flow of water through it is impeded. A powerful stream of water cannot be issued through a faulty hose (figs. 3.1–3.3).

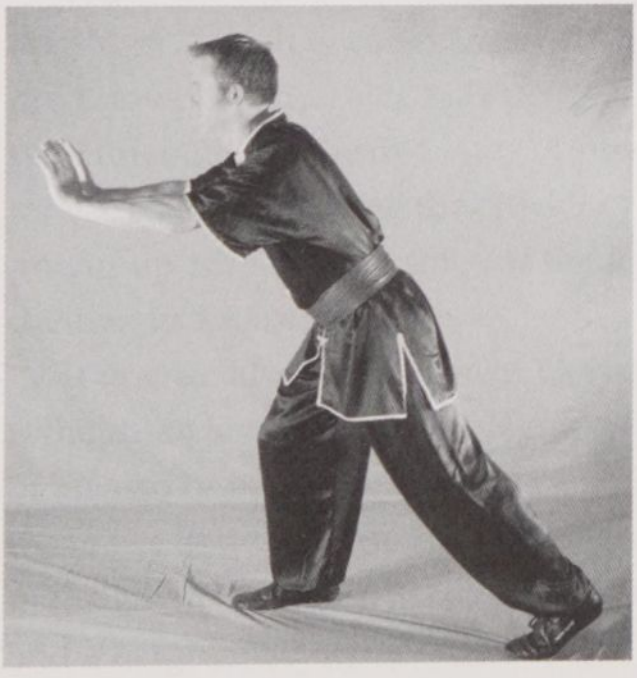


Figure 3.1. If you lean forward or raise your shoulders, the qi cannot be expressed through the hands.

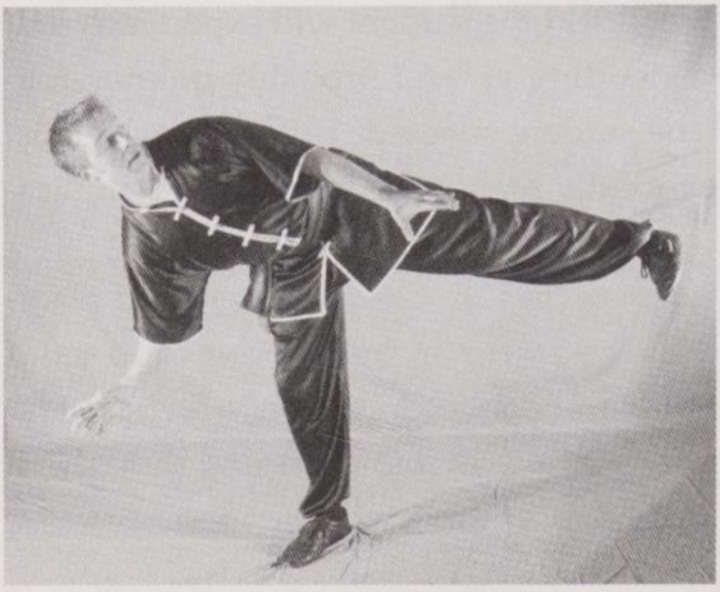


Figure 3.2. A loss of balance results in loss of qi!



Figure 3.3. Using excessive muscular tension cuts the flow of qi to a trickle.

Many practitioners of the internal martial arts are unable to freely express qi because their postures or movements are flawed. Because they are unaware of their errors or are unwilling to admit them, they prefer to express disbelief in the entire notion of qi. This is unfortunate. As my teacher, W.C. Chen, said, "No qi, no internal boxing."

4

IN THE BEGINNING

Before learning how to store and emit power it is essential that you learn some fundamental body mechanics and how they pertain to martial arts technique. By utilizing certain basic laws of physics and principles of human movement, we can increase the amount of mass utilized in a given technique while we also maximize its acceleration. This allows us to strike with tremendous force, and it doesn't matter which martial discipline we practice, because as human beings we're all built alike and the same physiological principles and physical laws apply.

There are eight ways in which a human body can move and create shock, which is considerably different from brute force. These are known as the *eight body actions*. They are the ways in which we utilize the applicable laws of physics and principles of human movement to maximize the efficiency of our techniques by drawing power up through the soles of the feet and moving it through the dantian in a variety of ways.

It is crucial that you learn to strike and kick with your body rather than just your arm or leg. After all, striking with the strength of an arm or a leg alone won't produce much power. Striking with the entire body will produce much greater power due to an increase in the amount of mass involved in the performance of the technique and a heightened acceleration of that mass.

Nowadays much of this information has been forgotten, and neijia adepts sometimes assume that because they are practicing a form of internal boxing, their movements automatically imbue them with some kind of special power. This is altogether untrue. There is no magic inherent in the postures of any internal form of martial arts. All human bodies, regardless of what form of martial art is practiced, are subject to the same laws of physics and kinesiology. We express power through our physical bodies, and there are only so many ways in which we can accomplish this with the greatest efficiency.

Basic Principles

Before undertaking a study of the eight body actions it is important to first examine some fundamental principles common to all of them.

1. Maintain spinal alignment as much as possible. In most of the body actions, this is not too difficult to do. However, when you execute a kick and apply the body action of *Shift*, some leaning is unavoidable and may even be necessary simply because of your body structure (figs. 4.1–4.2).
2. Tilt the coccyx forward and slightly upward, as if trying to gently touch it to the dantian. This compresses the dantian and enhances your stability while also uniting both the upper and lower body (fig. 4.3).
3. Contract the anal sphincter. This assists in compressing the dantian and drawing qi (vital energy) up from the ground. By slightly contracting the anal sphincter and tilting the coccyx in and upward, you create a sort of sacral pump, which draws qi up through the legs and spine.
4. Do not lift the heel of your rear foot when striking. Doing so will compromise your stability and significantly reduce striking power (fig. 4.4).



Figure 4.1. Keep your spine straight when you execute your technique.

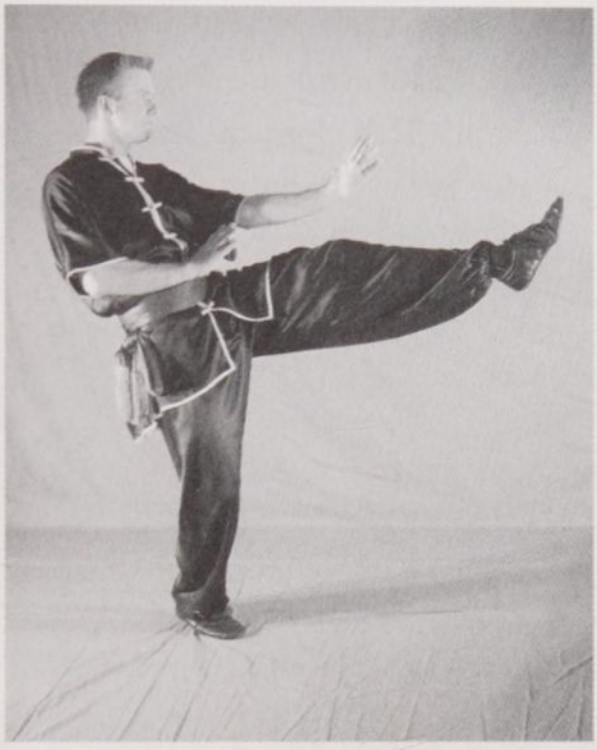


Figure 4.2. You may have to lean slightly when performing a kick.



Figure 4.3. Tuck the coccyx slightly forward and upward.



Figure 4.4. Avoid raising the heel of your rear foot when you strike.

5. In performing thrusting techniques with your hand, push the shoulder through the elbow, and push the elbow through the hand. This classical teaching refers to the feeling that the shoulder is thrusting straight through the elbow and the elbow is thrusting directly through the hand (figs. 4.5–4.6).



Figure 4.5. The shoulder feels like it's pushing through the elbow in the early part of the thrust.



Figure 4.6. At the end of your thrust, push the elbow through the hand.

6. In performing frontal kicks, push the hip through the knee, and push the knee through the foot. As in the previous classical instruction, this refers to the feeling of thrusting the hip straight through the knee joint and driving the knee through the foot. It's as if you're kicking your opponent with your hip rather than with your foot (figs. 4.7–4.8).

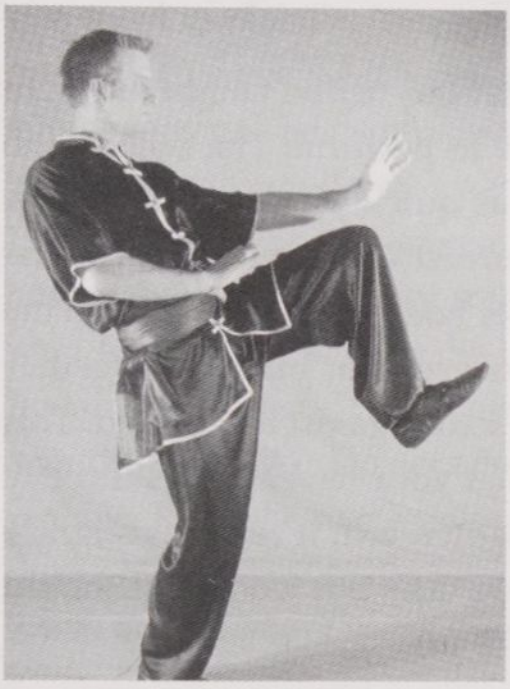


Figure 4.7. Initially, the hip feels as though it's driving through the knee.

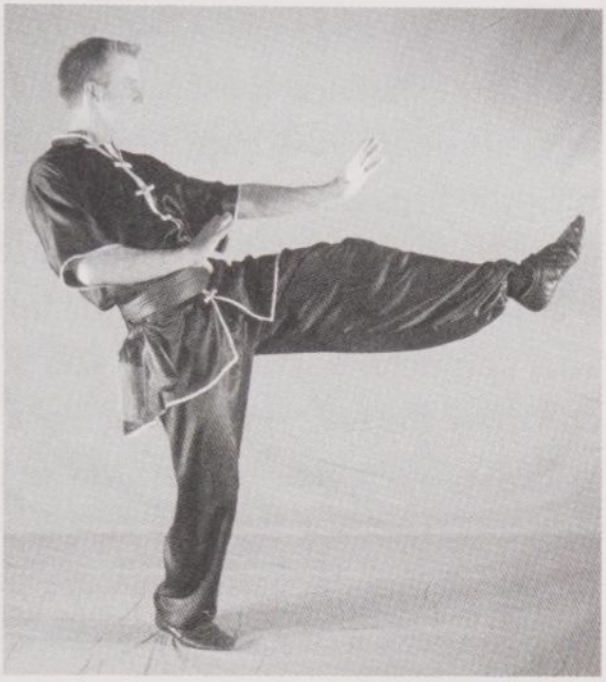


Figure 4.8. At the end of the kick, the knee should feel as though it's driving through the foot.

Practicing the Eight Body Actions

The eight body actions cannot be learned quickly. You must study and train each one individually until you have learned how to perform all of them with some measure of skill. However, just knowing how to perform these body actions is not enough. You must train assiduously to sharpen each one to a razor's edge. These movements have been discussed thoroughly in my previous book *Martial Mechanics,* and their importance to the development of coiling power cannot be understated. I have met numerous practitioners of the neijia, many of whom have more than a decade or two of training under their belts, who haven't the foggiest idea about what these fundamental body actions involve. It is for this reason that I quickly run through them again here.

Body Rotation

This is the first and most fundamental body action taught to beginning students. It is natural and easy to perform. The object is to turn the hips and waist 45 degrees as quickly as possible. Begin in a forward stance with the navel turned 45 degrees inward. The rear leg is slightly flexed and the upper body is relaxed. Tighten the anal sphincter somewhat as you squeeze your buttocks together and drive the rear foot and leg like a piston against the ground. This will snap your rear hip around so that your navel points directly forward. The rear leg does not straighten out; it remains slightly flexed. Be sure that your forward knee does not wobble. It should point directly at your target (figs. 4.9–4.10).



Figure 4.9. Begin with the upper body turned 45 degrees inward.



Figure 4.10. Drive your rear foot against the ground to rotate your rear hip forward.

You must utilize reverse breathing as you move (see chapter 6). The faster you exhale, the faster you'll move. Remember to exhale two-thirds of your air as you execute your technique and keep

one-third in reserve. You must open your mouth to make a large opening through which you can exhale this air as quickly as possible. However, be careful not to tense your muscles and "harden" your body as you do so.

The body action of *Reverse Rotation* is a variation of *Rotation* and begins with the navel pointed straight ahead. Press down with your front foot and snap the leading hip forward to turn the navel inward 45 degrees. This is used in delivering a jab or a horizontal sword-hand strike. Do not allow the forward leg to straighten out or wobble. Keep the rear leg flexed and perform this body movement through the pressure of your foot on the ground. As in *Rotation*, the lower body doesn't move much at all (figs. 4.11–4.12).



Figure 4.11. Begin with the navel pointing straight ahead.



Figure 4.12. Rotate the leading hip forward 45 degrees as you deliver a jab.

Rotation and *Reverse Rotation* are used in executing most of the upper-body techniques. Several kicking techniques also make use of these body actions.

Body Shift

This body action is used almost exclusively for kicking. The idea is to shift your hips and dantian directly toward the target. In performing the front snap kick, the driving foot and leg press against the ground and the hips are thrust slightly forward, toward the target. The front thrust kick uses slightly more hip thrust (figs. 4.13–4.15).



Figure 4.13. Keep the supporting leg slightly bent as you chamber the front snap kick.



Figure 4.14. Snap the hips forward as you deliver the kick.



Figure 4.15. The front thrust kick utilizes a stronger hip thrust.

Body Throw

This body action is used for delivering lunging thrusts. It's very powerful because it moves more body mass than any of the other body actions. Begin in a forward stance with the leading arm and fist extended. Quickly contract the adductor muscles of the inner thighs in a squeezing action to bring the rear leg forward as quickly as possible. At the same time, you must move from your dantian as if someone is pushing on your sacrum and coccyx. Don't lean forward even slightly. The adductors must then relax as you drive forward and deliver a lunging thrust (figs. 4.16–4.18).



Figure 4.16. Begin in a forward stance.



Figure 4.17. Contract the adductors to bring the rear foot forward.



Figure 4.18. Move from your dantian as you drive the rear foot forward. Rotate the hips and torso inward 45 degrees.

With practice, this movement can be executed with surprising speed. Make sure that you begin your exhalation at the beginning of the movement since that's where you need the greatest blast of power; you must overcome inertia and fire your whole body forward in a balanced, controlled movement. When your front foot comes down, the toes must grip the ground like claws and the sole must feel "suctioned" to the ground.

Body Vibration

The body action of *Vibration* is used only for delivery of "snap-back" techniques such as the back-fist strikes or when two techniques are fired off in quick succession. It allows for executing these techniques with the power of the body rather than with the isolated strength of the arm and shoulder.

Begin in a forward stance with the forward elbow pointed forward at the target as if in preparation for a back-fist strike. The navel points straight forward. As the strike begins and the fist travels to the target, the leading hip rotates forward *(Reverse Rotation)* about 30 degrees. At the instant after impact, the leading hip rotates *backward* to the beginning position, and the fist and forearm snap back to the original position. Emphasis is on the *backward* snap of the hip. Take your time and learn to do it correctly, gradually building speed as you become more comfortable with it. When the movement is done correctly and quickly, the hips appear to "vibrate" (figs. 4.19–4.21).



Figure 4.19. Begin with the navel pointed straight forward.

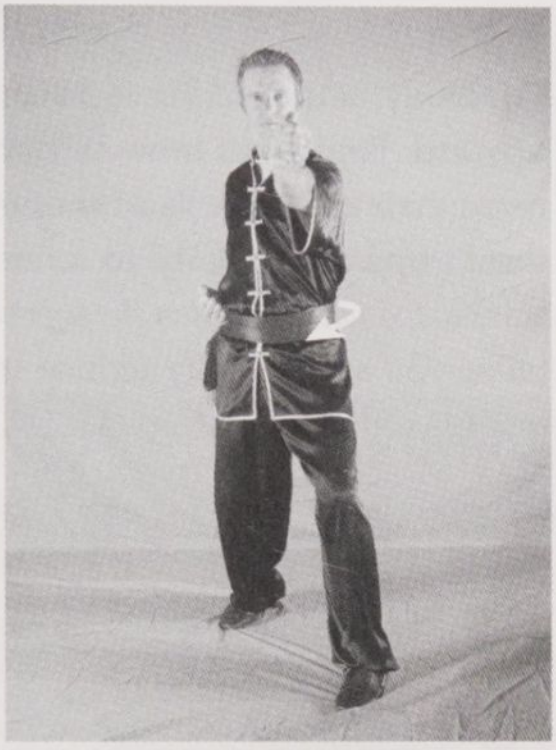


Figure 4.20. As the strike is made, rotate the striking hip forward 30 degrees.



Figure 4.21. Emphasize a strong return of the hip as the fist snaps back to the beginning position.

Body Up

The body action of *Up* is used for strikes or thrusts that move upward. Begin in a bow-and-arrow stance, but lower the stance more than usual. Be careful not to lean forward. As you strike or thrust upward, rise up to a normal level in the bow-and-arrow stance. *Do not straighten the legs or stretch upward,* as this will destabilize you and actually reduce striking power. The upward movement is rather slight (figs. 4.22–4.24).



Figure 4.22. Begin in a forward stance but lower the hips slightly.



Figure 4.23. Rise up slightly as you strike.



Figure 4.24. Don't straighten your legs when you rise!

Body Down

The body action of *Down* is used for strikes that are delivered in a descending motion. Begin in a normal forward stance. As you strike down, lower the hips slightly by bending the knees. Don't bend over at the waist, as this will cause a loss of striking power as well as a loss of balance (figs. 4.25–4.27).







Figure 4.25. Begin in a forward stance.



Figure 4.26. Drop the hips straight down when you strike.



Figure 4.27. Don't lean over!

Body Circle

This is used for executing various throwing techniques, or to strike with the hips. It is executed laterally. The dantian is rolled upward slightly to one side as the hip thrusts slightly outward (fig. 4.28).



Figure 4.28. Roll the dantian to one side as the hip thrusts sideways.

Body Whip

The body action of *Whip* is used only for executing a small number of thrusting techniques and is also sometimes called "Dragon's Back." The shoulders are withdrawn as if trying to touch the shoulder blades together. The hips and dantian thrust forward to create a wavelike effect through the spine. This action is transmitted to the shoulders, which drive slightly forward as the thrust is made (figs. 4.29–4.31).

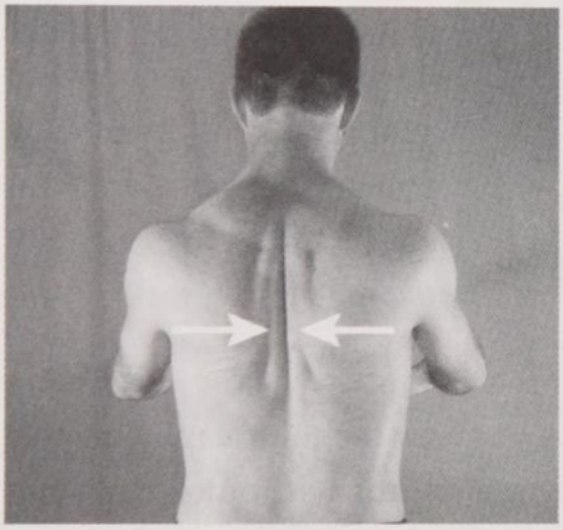


Figure 4.29. Withdraw the shoulder blades but don't lift the shoulders.

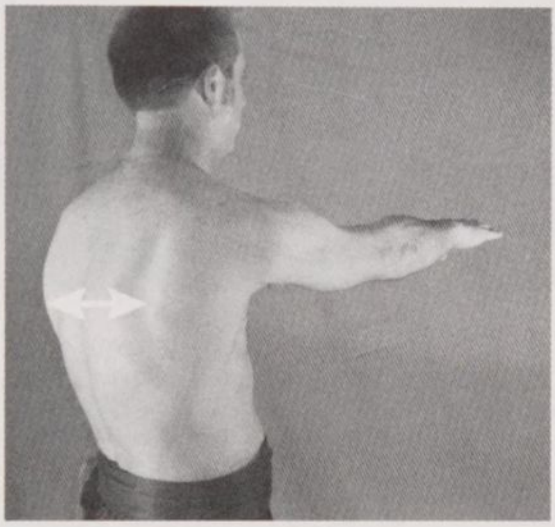


Figure 4.30. Thrust the hips and dantian forward to create a wave-like effect in the spine.

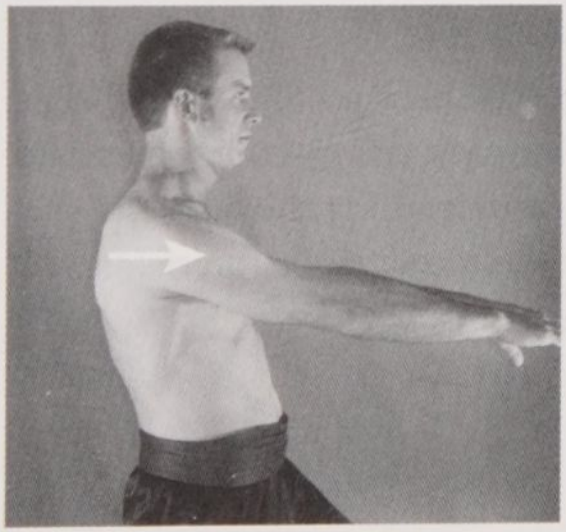


Figure 4.31. The shoulders will snap slightly forward.

When *Whip* is executed with only one hand, the body action of *Rotation* is also involved. The striking hip rotates forward 45 degrees as the spine "whips" forward (fig. 4.32).

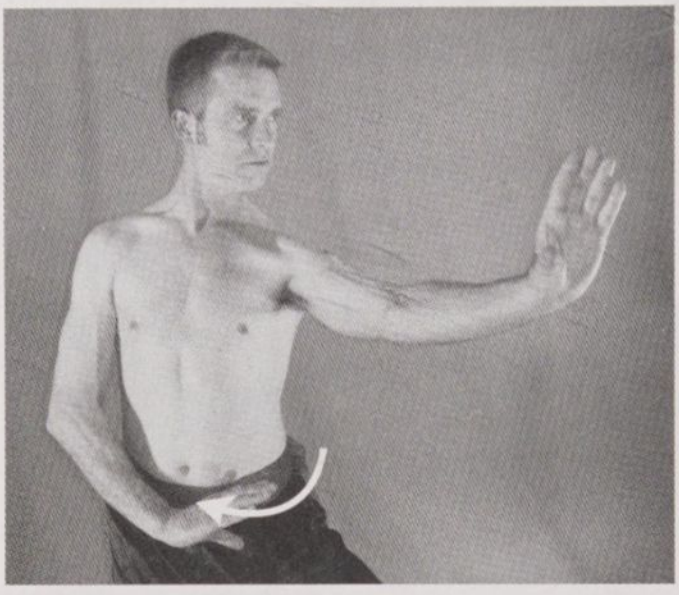


Figure 4.32. The striking hip will rotate as the spine whips forward.

Although the energy-coiling power is transmitted via the eight body actions, they are not the same thing. A given technique may be performed with the appropriate body action but without generating any energy-coiling power whatsoever. However, a technique that is intended to emit the energy-coiling power must be applied via the appropriate body action *as well as with certain internal movements and feelings that are not outwardly visible.*

Therefore, it is essential that you be highly skilled in the eight body actions before attempting to learn the energy-coiling exercises. This naturally precludes novices from learning this material simply because their movements lack the coordination, precision, and muscle tone required for these exercises.

5

STRUCTURE AND ALIGNMENT

In performing the various postures of the neijia, it's essential that you maintain certain internal and external alignments and harmonies. These relationships are usually grouped together in sets of three, and they are often mentioned in writings authored by some of the best-known masters of these arts. Unfortunately, many modern neijia aficionados tend to gloss over them quickly without giving them much real consideration because the translations are sometimes unclear, and oftentimes the reasons for, and the benefits of, their implementation are not thoroughly explained. The fact is that these "sets of three" are much more important than they appear at first glance and a study of them is in order. So, put down that slice of pizza and listen up.

The Three Alignments

In performing any given posture, the nose, the forward hand, and the corresponding foot should align vertically. It is known that the human body can generate the greatest amount of force along a path that is aligned with the centerline of the body. Remember this principle:

The farther your punch (or kick) travels outside of that central path, the weaker it becomes because it is not provided the additional support of the various muscular and skeletal structures. See figures 5.1–5.3.



Figure 5.1. The forward alignment.



Figure 5.2. If the blow moves too far to the inside, power is lost.



Figure 5.3. The blow is weakened if it moves too far to the outside of the body's centerline.

The Six Harmonies

The so-called six harmonies consist of a set of three external harmonies and a set of three internal harmonies.

The Three External Harmonies

1. The hands harmonize with the feet.
2. The shoulders harmonize with the hips.
3. The elbows harmonize with the knees.

Again, this is a reference to vertical alignments of the body that, if practiced in the various boxing techniques and postures, allow you to strike with the force of the entire body because the external structures intersupport each other. If the elbow of the striking hand is aligned with its corresponding knee, the elbow will automatically be dropped so that it points down. In the case of a vertical punch, the elbow is dropped down naturally. However, when executing the "flat fist" or "corkscrew" punch, the elbow will be rolled only slightly downward. This prevents isolation of the pectoral muscle when thrusting or striking with the hand. If the elbow of the striking arm is pointed out to the side (as is often seen in forms of Shaolin boxing and other styles), the power of the blow is derived mainly from the pectoral muscle rather than from the waist and abdominal muscles.

If the elbow "hangs down," the reaction force generated by the blow will travel back through the arm and down to the sole of the driving foot. From there, it bounces back up through the driving leg, through the arm and hand, and into the target to produce *shock* (figs. 5.4–5.6).



Figure 5.4. Initial impact.



Figure 5.5. Reaction force.



Figure 5.6. A secondary reaction force, which we call *shock*, is produced.

However, if the elbow is turned outward and the pectoral muscle is isolated, it is unable to withstand the force of the blow, and the returning reaction force passes out through the elbow (fig. 5.7).

To test this principle, try this experiment: Stand in a firm stance and extend your punching fist with the elbow turned outward. Your partner will place both hands on your fist and try to push you backward. When your partner brings his or her weight to bear against your arm, it will collapse (fig. 5.8).

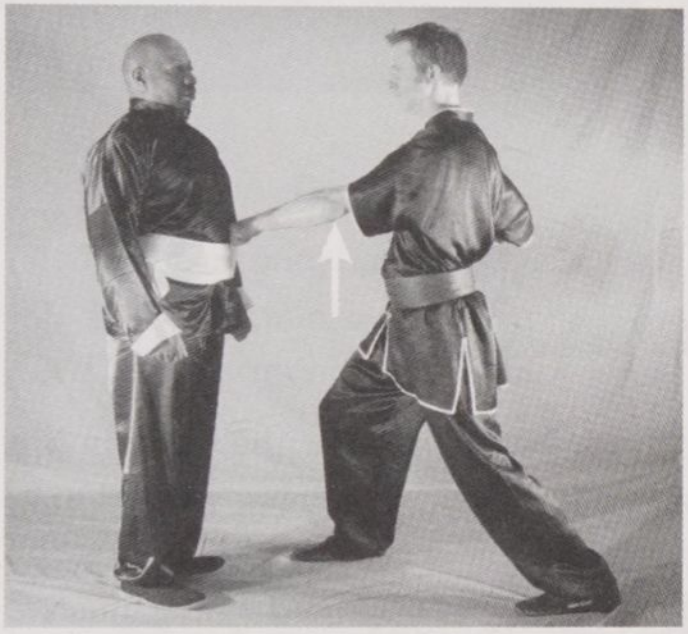


Figure 5.7. If the elbow is turned out to the side, the blow is considerably weaker.



Figure 5.8. If your elbow is turned outward, your arm will collapse.

If you drop your elbow so that it points down, you will be able to resist your partner's weight and strength. In fact, you will feel it being transmitted through the sole of your rear foot and into the ground (fig. 5.9).



Figure 5.9. If your elbow hangs down, your arm will remain stable and strong.

The shoulder aligns with the hip. That is, if the striking hip rotates forward, the shoulder follows suit, remaining aligned to it. If the hip rotates forward but the shoulder remains "square" to the target, the muscles of the chest cannot be supported by the muscles of the waist, which includes the abdominal muscles, and legs.

Try the same experiment as before, but "square up" your shoulders to your partner. You will find that your partner is easily able to push you backward. The force passes out through the back of your shoulder instead of being transmitted down through your driving leg (fig. 5.10).



Figure 5.10. If your shoulders are squared, your partner can move you easily because your posture is weak.

The Three Internal Harmonies

1. The heart (xin) harmonizes with the yi (intention, mind, will).
2. The yi harmonizes with the qi.
3. The qi harmonizes with the power.

The word *xin* refers to the heart *and the mind,* since, according to traditional Chinese medical theory, the heart houses the emotional mind. By stating that the xin and yi must harmonize, the old masters are telling us that the intention must be clear, without any emotional involvement. Anger or fear will distort not only your perception of the situation but your intention as well.

When xin and yi are clear and working together, qi can be directed easily. Where the yi goes, the qi follows. If there is no clear intention, the qi cannot be directed and focused. The qi must harmonize with the li (strength, power) of the body. This infers that the body parts must be properly aligned and structurally stable. We express qi through our physical bodies. If the body parts are not properly aligned, power cannot easily be transmitted. Maintaining the three internal harmonies is actually the formula for the development of jin.

The Three Pressings

1. The head presses upward.
2. The palms press forward.
3. The soles press downward.

"Pressing the head upward" refers to the principle of maintaining alignment of the cervical vertebrae with the thoracic vertebrae. You should feel as though you are trying to "press" your head (the *baihui point*) up against a low ceiling. This helps straighten the cervical vertebrae (figs. 5.11–5.12).

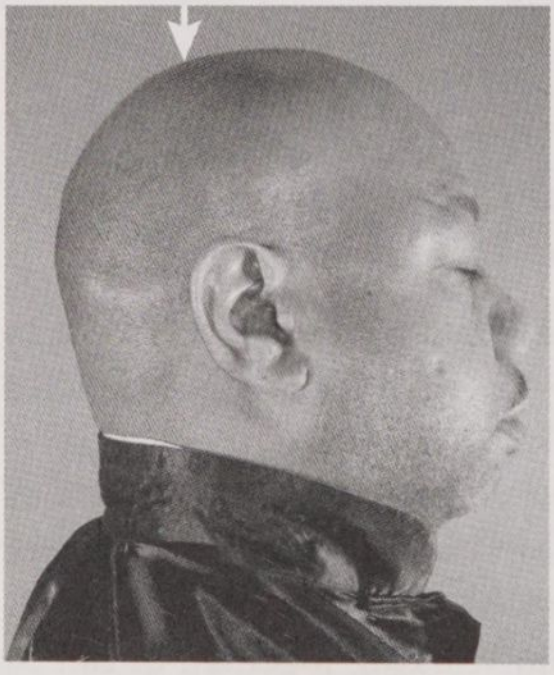


Figure 5.11. The baihui point.

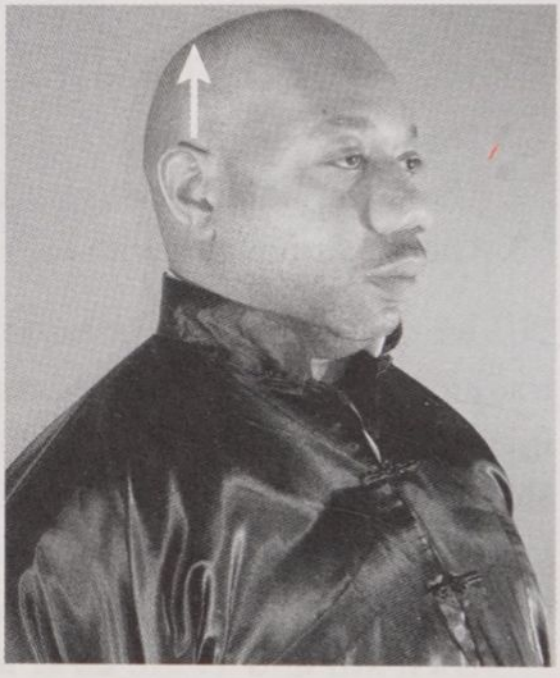


Figure 5.12. Push your ears away from your shoulders.

The toes lightly grip the ground so that the soles of the feet feel as if they are "suctioned" to the ground. This helps ensure stability of the foundation. The palms feel as if they are pressing forward. This infers that one should extend qi forward through the arms and palms at all times. The arms are never empty or light.

The Three Liftings

1. Neck lifts up.
2. Tongue lifts to the upper palate.
3. Coccyx lifts up.

"Lifting the neck" upward prevents us from tilting the head in any direction and compromising the alignment of the cervical vertebrae. "Lifting the coccyx" means to tilt the coccyx slightly forward and upward while simultaneously contracting the anal sphincter. This actually creates a compression of the dantian and unites the upper and lower body. If the buttocks are allowed to protrude out behind you, alignment of the thoracic vertebrae is impossible. The upper body will be separated from the lower body and your posture will be considerably weakened.

By pushing the crown upward and lifting the coccyx, the spine is "pulled straight" from both ends. It is as if a vertical pole is inserted through the baihui point on the top of your head, exits through the perineum, and enters the ground. To test the difference this kind of alignment makes, perform the following experiments:

Stand firmly with one arm extended in a punch and have a partner grasp your wrist. Your partner pulls on your wrist to try to unbalance you. If you maintain vertebral alignment, your partner will be unable to do so. If you lean in any direction or just tilt your head slightly, your partner will be able to move you with ease (figs. 5.13–5.14).



Figure 5.13. If you maintain correct alignment, your partner cannot move you.



Figure 5.14. If you lean or tilt your head, your posture will be much weaker.

The same experiment can be conducted with your partner using a push (fig. 5.15).

Correct spinal alignment will also seemingly increase your strength. Try this experiment: Have your partner stand with one fist extended and not maintaining vertebral alignment. Grasp your partner's wrist. Maintaining your vertebral alignment, pull your partner off balance (fig. 5.16). You will find that this is quite easy to do.



Figure 5.15. If you maintain vertebral alignment, you can easily resist your partner's push.



Figure 5.16. Correct alignment will allow you to pull your partner off balance with ease.

Touching the tongue to the roof of the mouth joins the Conception and Governing Vessels, two acupuncture channels that are crucial for drawing energy up from the earth and emitting it. The Conception Vessel begins at the *huiyin point* (midway between the anus and the base of the genitals), runs up the centerline of the body, and ends at the root of the tongue. The Governing Vessel also begins at the huiyin point, runs up the spine, over the crown, and ends on the roof of the mouth (see figs. 5.17–5.18).



Figure 5.17. The Conception Vessel.



Figure 5.18. The Governing Vessel.

If vertebral alignment is not maintained, it is almost impossible to draw the energy up through the feet, legs, and spine. On the other hand, if the thoracic and cervical vertebrae are correctly aligned, qi can move up through the body very easily because the simple act of standing or sitting correctly assists in "opening" the main acupoints through which the energy must move.

The Three Roundings

1. Round out the back.
2. Round out the chest.
3. Round out the *hukou* on both hands.

The correct positioning of the upper back is sometimes described as "bear's shoulders"; it's slightly rounded but not tense. This slight rounding of the shoulders causes the chest to "round inward" and become slightly concave. In this unrestrained position,

the diaphragm is held comfortably in a natural position and the breath can be "dropped" easily when you perform reverse breathing (see chapter 6). The area of the lower back should also be slightly rounded out, especially the point known as *mingmen,* which is located on the spine directly opposite the navel.

The web between the thumb and forefinger is known as the "tiger's mouth" *(hukou)* and should be rounded. Gently stretch out the thumb and forefinger (figs. 5.19–5.21).

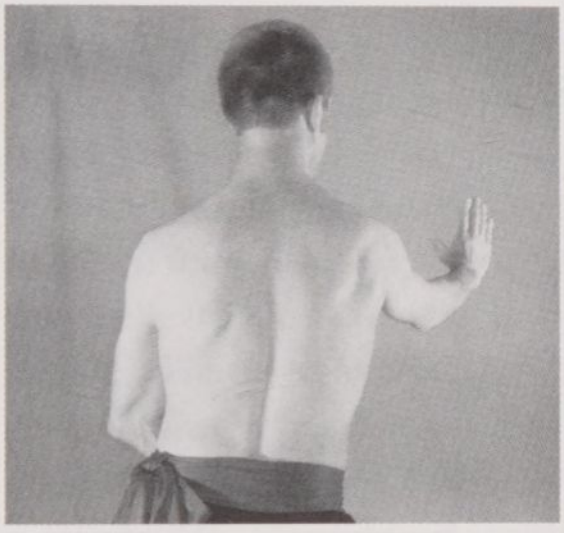


Figure 5.19. Round out the upper back.

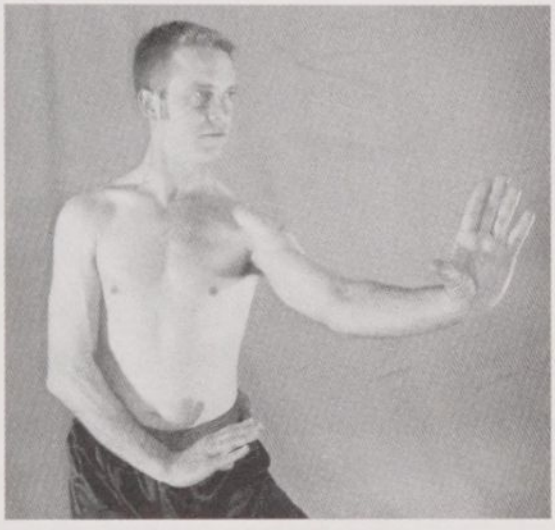


Figure 5.20. Swallow the chest, but not too deeply.



Figure 5.21. Open the hukou.

6

TRAINING THE BREATH

Many generations ago, Taoists developed a special breathing technique that enhanced their ability to circulate qi and direct it to different areas of their bodies. Because it was modeled after the way in which they imagined that a fetus "breathes" while in the womb, they believed that it would assist in slowing down the aging process. It is known as *reverse breathing*. Although I have mentioned this special form of breathing in my previous books *Martial Mechanics* and *Martial Maneuvers*, I will repeat it here; yes, it's that important.

It's said that the internal martial arts systems adopted this unique form of breathing because they were allegedly influenced by Taoist philosophy. It greatly enhanced their ability to emit power while simultaneously helping make their bodies highly resistant to an aggressor's blows. Naturally, such special information was kept secret and transmitted only to the most trusted disciples. With the passage of time this peculiar technique was eventually taught to outsiders, and it became rather common knowledge. Unfortunately, many instructors and students began to neglect this special form of breathing because it wasn't particularly exciting or fun to practice. They directed their attention toward more exhilarating training routines, and the technique of reverse breathing was eventually forgotten altogether. Today, many internal martial arts schools still employ this powerful breathing technique, but there are also many schools

that neglect it, believing that the manner in which one breathes is of no great significance. They are woefully incorrect.

Normal versus Reverse Breathing

The manner in which most people breathe is called *normal breathing*. The lower abdomen expands slightly during inhalation and then contracts slightly during exhalation. If you watch your abdomen as you breathe you'll see that this is true. Many martial arts enthusiasts use an exaggerated form of normal breathing when they execute their techniques. That is, they quickly and powerfully contract the muscles of the abdomen as they exhale. They believe that this adds impetus to their blows. To some degree this is true; it adds impetus to the power of either the upper or lower body, depending upon whether one is punching or kicking. However, the strong inward contraction of the abdomen actually separates the upper and lower body so that it is impossible to strike with the power of the whole body! Part of the reason for this is because normal breathing causes certain muscle connections that run between the upper and lower body to go slack. One becomes like a doughnut (or a politician, depending upon how you look at it): all sweet and pretty on the outside but empty inside.

Reverse breathing actually strengthens these muscle connections and helps unite the upper and lower body. It causes the intrinsic energy (qi) to sink to the dantian and enables you to fully utilize the power of the abdominal muscles, which are the strongest muscles in the body.

How to Perform Reverse Breathing

The Taoists reasoned that a fetus could not breathe through its under-developed lungs while still in the womb. They believed that it "breathed" through the umbilical cord, which was attached to the mother's navel. When it "inhaled energy," it did so by contracting its abdomen. When it "exhaled," the abdomen would be pushed forward to help expel waste. As practitioners of the neijia, we breathe in the same manner (figs. 6.1–6.3).

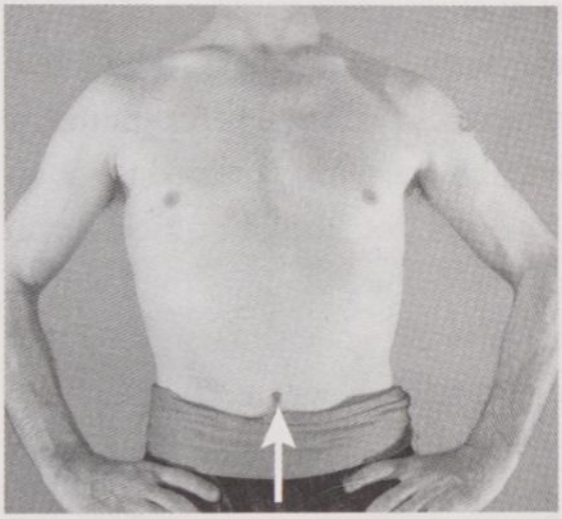


Figure 6.1. The abdomen is gently contracted inward as you inhale.

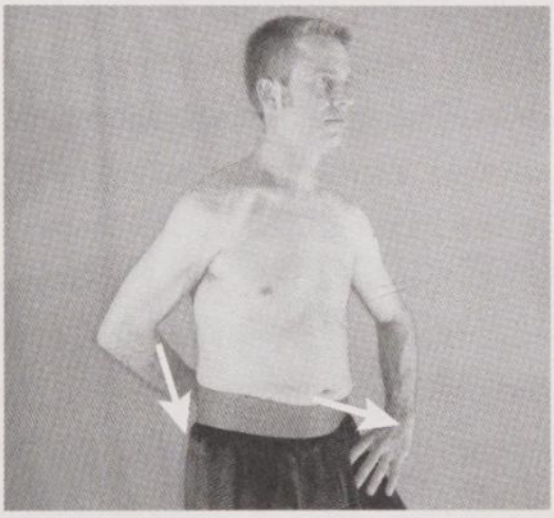


Figure 6.2. The abdomen, flanks, and lower back expand outward as you exhale.

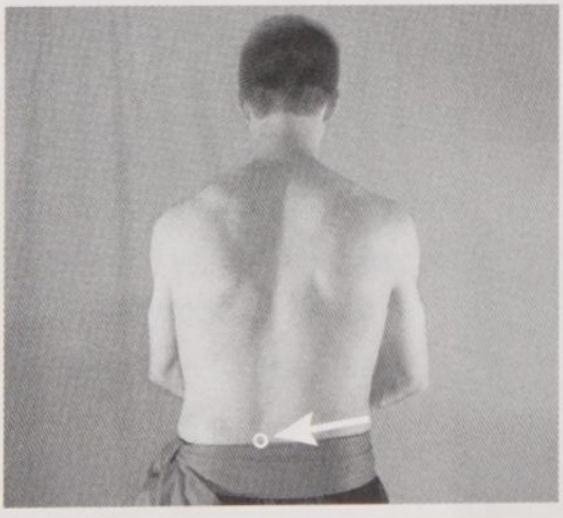


Figure 6.3. The mingmen point is directly opposite the navel on the spine.

Inhalation is made through the nose as the abdomen contracts slightly. Exhalation is made through the mouth, and the lower abdomen is pushed forward not only in the front but also around the flanks and the lower back (the area of the mingmen). The anal sphincter is also contracted during exhalation.

This form of breathing will produce enormous power. If you need to exert a "slow" kind of force, such as the force required in lifting or pushing a heavy object, exhale slowly as you expand the lower abdomen. However, when you deliver any kind of strike or kick, the breath must be exhaled as quickly as possible.

The human body is basically a machine that is powered by a bellows. The greater the quantity of air that is pumped through it, the stronger its movements will be. The faster the air is pumped through it, the faster the body will move. To expel your breath quickly you must make a large opening and push the air out. This means that you must open your mouth. If you try to exhale primarily through the nostrils, you cannot get the air out quickly enough because the openings are simply too small. You may also end up blowing mucus all over yourself! See figure 6.4.

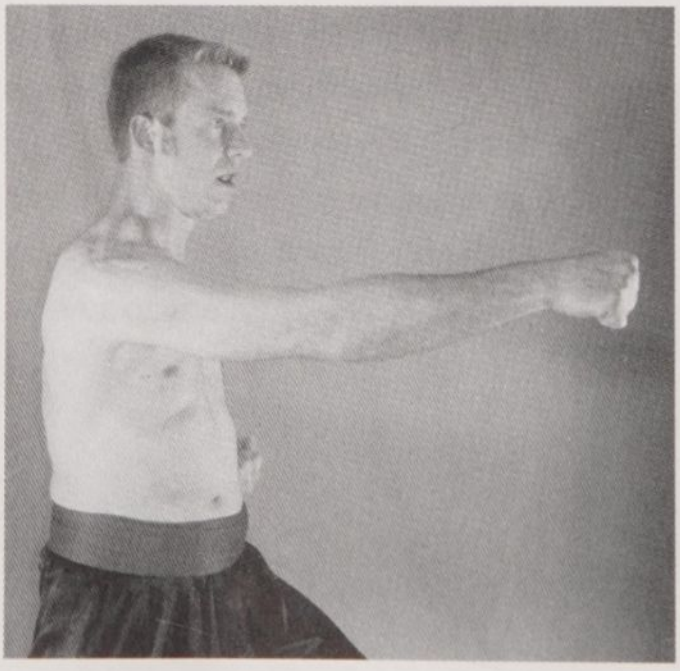


Figure 6.4. Exhale two-thirds of your breath as quickly as possible.

To test the power of reverse breathing versus the power of normal breathing, try these simple experiments.

Experiment One: Resisting a Push

Stand in a balanced stance and extend one arm in the manner of a punch. Have your partner place his or her hands against your fist. Your partner may even lean his chest against your fist. Make sure that you maintain correct spinal alignment. When your partner pushes, perform a strong reverse breath. Moving you will be like trying to move a dump truck.

If you try the same experiment using normal breathing, you'll find that you're much less stable, and your partner will move you backward easily (figs. 6.5–6.6).



Figure 6.5. If you use reverse breathing, you will be firmly rooted and strong.



Figure 6.6. Normal breathing will actually weaken your posture.

Experiment Two: Absorbing a Blow

Stand in a firm stance and place your hands behind your back. Your partner will slam a forearm into your abdomen as you execute a strong reverse breath. Your partner should start with light blows and slowly increase the power of the strikes over time as you become more comfortable with this form of breathing. You will find that the blows have little or no effect. If you try the same thing with normal breathing, you will find the blows more painful, and you may well be knocked backward and have the wind knocked out of you (figs. 6.7–6.8).



Figure 6.7. Reverse breathing makes you highly resistant to strikes.



Figure 6.8. It requires much more effort to protect yourself if you use normal breathing.

Reverse breathing can also be used to normalize your breathing when you have strongly exerted yourself and you are gasping for air. In such cases, perform three or four reverse breaths, and your breathing pattern will return to normal.

7

LET'S GET ENGAGED!

Once the basic body actions have been thoroughly learned, you should proceed to learn what I refer to as "engaging." It is my contention that engaging is actually identical to what internal stylists refer to as *peng-jin* (掤勁). It is exceedingly difficult to explain on paper just how this jin is to be trained; to learn this and the other aspects of genuine internal power really requires a hands-on approach. This is perhaps why this art is dying out. Too many people, including many Chinese instructors, have sought to learn it from books, videos and DVDs, and by listening to explanations provided by all manner of teachers. However, it actually has to be felt and experienced directly, and the only way to do that is to train diligently under an authentic instructor who possesses genuine skill. Even so, it is possible to acquire a certain fundamental understanding of the subject through careful study, and those of you who wish to learn more about this subject can do so by contacting the International Yiliquan Martial Arts Association.*

* You can contact the International Yiliquan Martial Arts Association by email at yiliassn@gmail.com.

Engage? Why?

It's one thing to strike a target using only the mechanical principles described in chapter 3, but it's quite another when you add the dimension of coiling power. This special jin enables you to strike with enormous power, but what many practitioners forget is that *their bodies must be able to withstand the impact of their own blows!* If the body is unable to tolerate this power, one may suffer external or even internal injuries. Engaging acts like a shock absorber, allowing the body to resist considerable force. Discerning students will see that this means that they can use this special technique not only to protect themselves from the power of the blows they themselves generate, but also from strikes delivered by an assailant. Moreover, if you strike an opponent while you are engaged, you will deliver considerably greater power!

How Does Engaging Work?

Well, you're going to have to use your imagination here. My description is not to be taken literally. It is a figurative representation of the technique, but with practice, you will *feel* it and come to know its reality.

Engaging works much like an inflated car tire. The tire is filled with air and protects the wheel from being damaged by the surface of the road (fig. 7.1).

Beneath the surface of our flesh are layers of connective tissue called fascia, which are connected and surround virtually all of the muscles, tendons, ligaments, organs, blood vessels, nerves, and other internal tissues in much the same manner as plastic wrap is used to hold the contents of sandwiches together. It consists of several layers: a superficial fascia, a deep fascia, and a subserous (or visceral) fascia, and it extends uninterrupted from the head to the tip of the toes.



Figure 7.1. The inflated tire protects the inner wheel.

The fasciae can be "packed" or "inflated" with qi (or you may want to simply think of it as air), and once this is done, they act in the same manner as an inflated tire (fig. 7.2).

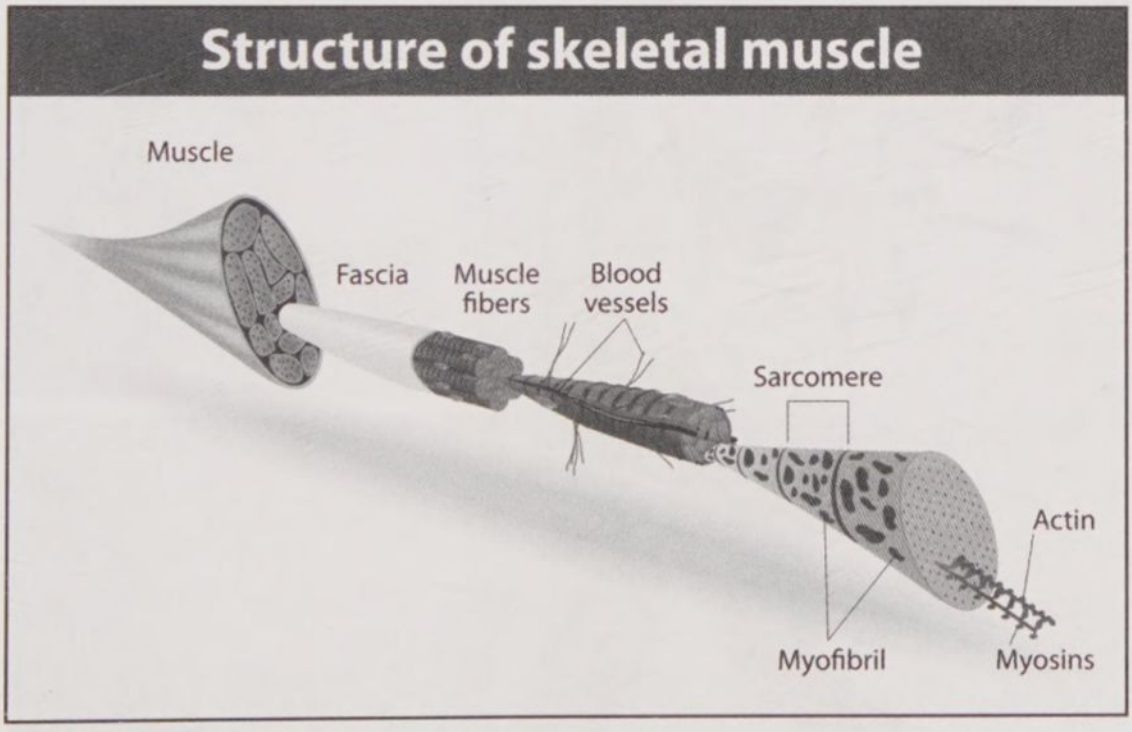


Figure 7.2. The fascia layer.

Training to Engage

Your yi (idea, will, imagination) is the primary tool used to develop the ability to engage. It's best to train your arms first. Once this is done you should move on to train your legs and then your torso, neck, and head.

Extend one arm with the arm comfortably bent. Your hand and wrist should be neither stiff nor flaccid. Rather, your fingers, especially the forefinger and the little finger, should be gently stretched forward. Open the hukou ("tiger's mouth," the web between the thumb and forefinger).

Now, you're going to have to use your imagination as you inhale and imagine that your arm actually inflates slightly. When you exhale, the arm continues to remain inflated, or, if you prefer, you can inflate it a little more with each breath. With practice, you'll actually *feel* your arm inflating! See figure 7.3.



Figure 7.3. Extend the fingers and keep the arm relaxed.

Testing the Engaged Arm

Begin by extending your arm but don't engage it. Your partner will seize your arm and squeeze, trying to force you to submit. If desired, your partner can press on a nerve point as shown (figs. 7.4–7.5).

The second time, engage your arm and have your partner seize it as before. If your arm is engaged, you will experience no discomfort at all, even if your partner is pressing on a nerve (fig. 7.6). When you are engaged, the vital points are "shut" and cannot be adversely stimulated.

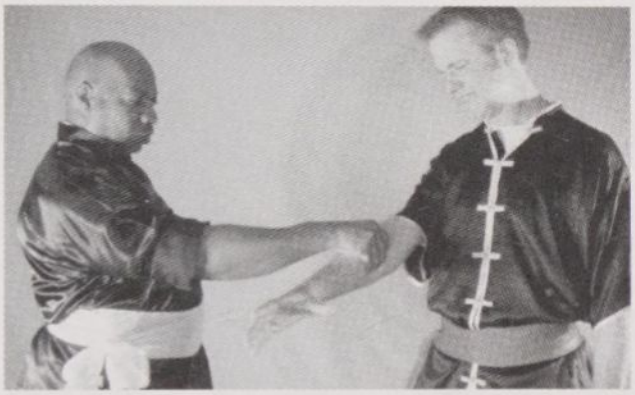


Figure 7.4. Your partner should seize your arm and apply force.

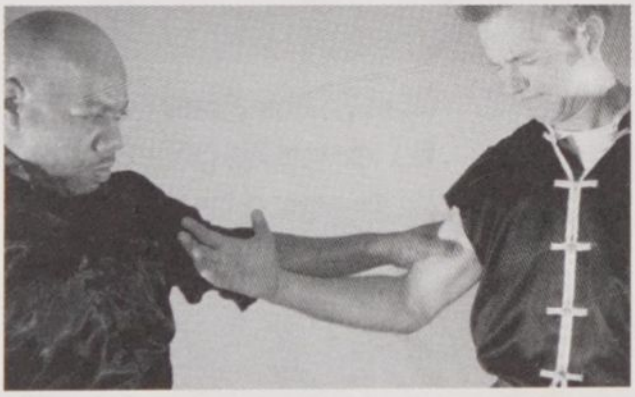


Figure 7.5. Your partner may opt to seize a nerve point.



Figure 7.6. If you are engaged, you'll experience no discomfort.

Testing the Engaged Leg

After you have learned to engage your arms, practice to engage your legs. Inhale and feel the legs inflating with qi (or air). Your partner can seize vital points on your legs or administer kicks with the shin or instep. Over time, your partner should increase the amount of force used to kick. However, your partner should never kick into the knee joint, as this can result in injury (figs. 7.7–7.8).

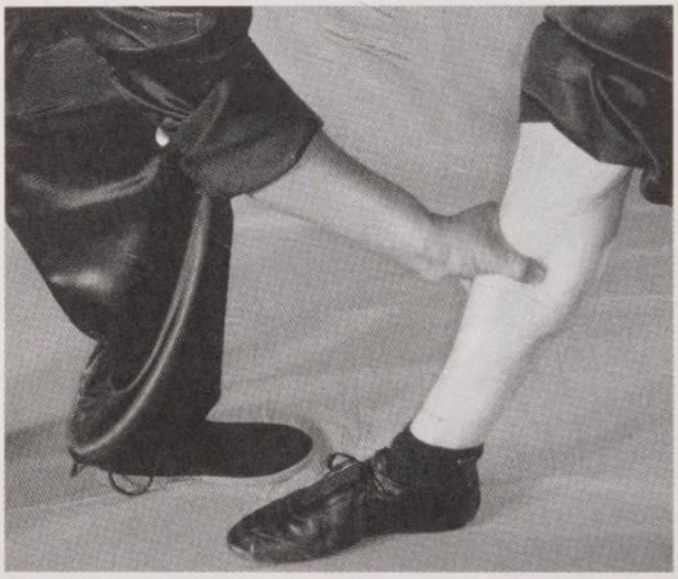


Figure 7.7. Your partner can test your leg by seizing nerve points.



Figure 7.8. Your partner can also kick into your leg, gradually increasing the power of the blows.

Testing the Engaged Torso

Having completed training for the arms and legs, you should proceed to learn to engage your torso, neck, and head. This is identical to the previous methods; inhale and *feel* the body "inflate." When you have trained for some time, you can test yourself by having your partner strike into your body with open hands or forearms. For safety's sake, your partner should avoid striking into your spine, ribs, and other bony areas (figs. 7.9–7.12).



Figure 7.9. Your partner can strike your abdomen with the forearm.



Figure 7.10. He can also strike into your kidney area.



Figure 7.11. He can also strike down into the tops of the trapezius muscles.



Figure 7.12. Your partner can seize your throat to try to force you to submit.

Training with Binding

A forgotten training method that is very useful for strengthening one's ability to engage is known as "binding." *It should not be practiced by anyone suffering from hypertension or any blood-clotting disorders.*

Using a length of cloth (long bungee cords also work very well), bind your arms from the wrist to the upper arm. This will temporarily restrict the circulation of blood. Once they are bound, practice to engage the arms. Feel them inflate and push out against their bonds. Initially, you should practice this exercise for no more than ten breaths.

Release the binding and engage your arms as you feel the blood rush back into your arms and hands. This special training technique can also be applied to the legs and the torso (figs. 7.13–7.15).

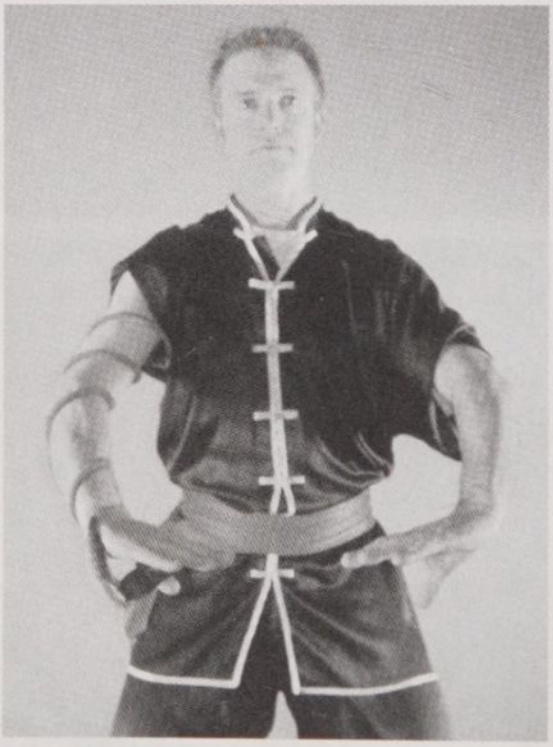


Figure 7.13. The binding should not be so tight as to completely cut off blood flow.



Figure 7.14. As you engage, concentrate on feeling your limbs push out against the bindings.



Figure 7.15. Bind the arms, legs, and torso separately; do not bind them at the same time.

It's important to remember that the muscles are not tensed when you engage! Tensed tissues cannot engage and may be easily injured. It is my opinion that the old Okinawan karate form known as *sanchin* was originally intended to teach practitioners to engage rather than employing dynamic muscular tension to try to harden the body.

While muscular power fades with age, the ability to engage can actually become stronger. This accounts for some of the stories in which past masters were able to withstand heavy blows without the slightest discomfort.

There are other methods of training the special technique of engaging, but they are often inefficient, and some can be downright dangerous. In my opinion, the real art of engaging can only be taught and learned through the old-fashioned tried-and-true hands-on approach.

8

BEGINNING WITH STILLNESS

Virtually all of the neijia place great emphasis on what is commonly known as *zhan zhuang* (stake standing). These are static postures that are combined with special breathing and visualization techniques to foster the free flow of qi throughout the body and foster the development of jin. However, they were also intended to be used to cultivate the ability to engage.

The Standing Exercises

When first beginning to practice these exercises, you should perform them in a static manner. That is, there is no perceptible movement of the body while the exercise is performed. This stage of practice should be maintained for a period of at least one year. After the initial one-year period has been completed, you should move on to practice the exercises while moving; this involves only slight movements of the hands and arms. After completing the second twelve-month training period, you should practice the exercises while "walking." This initially involves linear walking both forward and backward, and progresses to the baguazhang exercise known as "walking the circle." This form of training should be practiced for another minimum one-year period. After the three one-year periods have been completed, you should continue to practice these

exercises, but you may opt to use any of the three practice methods, according to personal preference.

Standing Positions

There are three fundamental positions used for these standing exercises:

1. Horse-Riding Stance
2. *Sanzhai* Stance
3. Natural Standing

Obviously, the horse-riding stance and natural standing postures are not used for the type of practice that involves walking. It is essential that students stand in their stances correctly, maintaining correct body alignment at all times to facilitate the free flow of qi and blood.

The horse-riding stance must be the proper width; exactly two shoulder widths and no more. The natural stance places the feet at shoulder width with the knees slightly bent (figs. 8.1–8.3).



Figure 8.1. Horse-Riding Stance.



Figure 8.2. Sanzhai Stance.



Figure 8.3. Natural Standing Stance.

Length of Practice Sessions

Each practice session should last for a minimum of fifteen minutes *after* the breath has been slowed to a minimum of eight breaths per minute (if you are able to slow your breathing to only four breaths per minute, that's even better). Each posture should be maintained for a minimum of one minute.

Practice only one posture until you can do it correctly. Only then should you attempt another standing posture. Once all eight postures have been learned, it is not necessary to practice all of the postures in each session. In a given practice session you may opt to practice only one or two postures. At other times you may practice all of them. The primary reason for practicing these exercises should be kept in mind and should be the primary factor for consideration as to how many and which postures to practice in a given practice session.

If you plan to practice for an extended period, the *natural stance* is a good choice, as it will not place too much strain on your legs and cause your mind to focus on discomfort rather than the breathing exercise at hand.

Recommended Times for Practice

According to traditional Taoist instructions, the optimum times of day for practicing any form of qigong are between the hours of 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. or between the late hours of 11 p.m. and 1 a.m. These times are known as the time of *cu* (also spelled *tsu*), when the yin and yang energies of the earth change; yang time changes to yin and yin time changes to yang. However, practice at these times tends to be very inconvenient, if not impossible, in today's world (unless one is living as a Taoist hermit).

Insofar as personal training is concerned, I believe the best time for practice is in the early morning. If this is not possible, you should simply practice whenever you are able. These routines may also be practiced at the beginning of your martial arts practice or they may be used a form of "warm-down" following your training so the qi can be gathered, centered, and put back into normal circulation.

The Nine Standing Postures

We will utilize eight arm and hand positions that are representative of the full range of positions in which the arm and hand may be placed to accommodate the execution of a given martial technique. A ninth category includes a posture for kicking.

Each posture may be performed using both hands simultaneously or each hand separately. The postures can be practiced in different ways, depending upon where the energy is to be emitted (for example, in *fuzhang*, the energy may be emitted from the palm as if pressing down, or from the ulnar aspect of the hand and arm like a sword-hand strike).

Paozhang (Embracing Palm)

This is the most fundamental posture found in zhan zhuang. For many neijia adepts it is known affectionately as *embrace.*

A. Natural Posture; Squeezing

Stand in a natural posture with the knees well-bent. Bring the arms and hands up as if embracing a tree. The elbows droop and the wrists remain relaxed. The chest is slightly concave with the upper back rounded out. The forefingers are level with the mouth and the tiger's mouth of both hands is open so that the palms are slightly cupped.

Imagine you have a large beach ball between your arms. When you exhale, feel as if you are *gently* squeezing the ball as if to bring your hands together *or* as if trying to hug it against your chest. When you inhale, release the squeezing feeling (figs. 8.4–8.5).



Figure 8.4. Imagine squeezing a large beach ball as you exhale.



Figure 8.5. Release the ball when you inhale.

B. Natural Posture; Expanding

In this exercise, imagine a wide rubber band around your hands or wrists. When you exhale, try to pull your hands apart slightly and concentrate on *feeling* the resistance of the rubber band. *Do not tense the arms or shoulders.* When you inhale, allow the rubber band to pull your hands back to the beginning position (figs. 8.6–8.7).



Figure 8.6. Feel the resistance of the rubber band when you exhale.



Figure 8.7. Inhale and imagine letting the rubber band draw your hands back to the beginning position.

C. Sanzhai; Squeezing

Stand in sanzhai and extend your forward arm and hand in the posture of embrace. Place the other hand at your waist.

Use the same visualization as in the natural posture position. When practicing the feeling of squeezing, your forward hip rotates gently inward not more than 45 degrees. *Feel* your front foot pressing down into the ground and the power being received by the rear foot (figs. 8.8–8.9).



Figure 8.8. Stand in sanzhai and extend one arm in the posture of embrace.



Figure 8.9. Squeeze inward slightly with your arm, as if to crush the beach ball against your chest.

D. Sanzhai; Expanding

When practicing for expanding, your rear hip gently rotates forward no more than 45 degrees. Feel your rear foot pressing into the floor but do not concentrate on tensing the legs (fig. 8.10).



Figure 8.10. Press outward slightly with your arm.

Special Points for Practicing the Paozhang Moving Exercise

On exhalation, gently rotate your wrists slightly inward as if to point the little finger and ring finger of each hand at the *yintang* point, located between the eyebrows. This helps activate the *laogong* points in the palms and positions the arm and hand correctly for the position of paozhang. You should feel a slight rotation in the ulnar side (the little-finger side) of the forearms down to the elbows. You must not allow the arms, wrists, or hands to become tense during this exercise.

When you inhale, gently rotate the wrists back to their original positions (figs. 8.11–8.13).



Figure 8.11. Gently rotate the wrists slightly inward as you exhale.



Figure 8.12. As you inhale, rotate the hands back to their original positions.



Figure 8.13. To locate the *laogong point,* touch your middle finger to your palm as shown. The point is under your fingertip.

Pizhang (Chopping/Splitting Palm)

From paozhang, turn the palms inward to face each other with the fingers pointed very slightly upward. Keep the tiger's mouth open and form a "willow-leaf palm" (also known as a "tile roof palm") by slightly cupping the palms and extending the little fingers inward just a bit while letting the forefingers stretch slightly. The elbows hang down, with the distance between the palms no greater than the width of the shoulders. The forefingers are as high as your mouth.

A. Natural Posture; Press Down

Stand in a natural posture with the hands in the posture of pizhang. Inhale through the nose and let your wrists drop so that the forefingers point straight ahead. Imagine that the seven-star point on each hand (the palmar aspect of the styloid process) rests on top of a large beach ball.

As you exhale, imagine and *feel* that you are pushing your hand down onto the beach ball and crushing it as you drop your wrists so that your forefingers arch back as if to point at your nose. Direct your force forward and down at about a 30-degree angle, aiming at a point about four feet in front of you. Do not use muscular force or tension (figs. 8.14–8.15).



Figure 8.14. Imagine placing your hands on top of a large beach ball.



Figure 8.15. Exhale and exert energy at about a 30-degree angle. Imagine you're crushing the beach ball.

B. Sanzhai; Press Down

Stand in the xingyiquan posture of *santi*. Practice the same exercise as described above. Be sure to press down against the floor with the rear foot and gently rotate the forward hip forward no more than 45 degrees (fig. 8.16).



Figure 8.16. Stand in sanzhai and exert energy to crush the ball.

Special Instructions for Practicing the Moving Exercise

As you exhale, feel as if the forefingers of the pressing hands arch back very slightly, as if to point at your nose. Of course, they will not stretch back nearly that far, but the feeling is that they will. You will experience a slight pulling in the radial aspect (the thumb side) of the forearms and a mild stretching sensation in the ulnar side (the little-finger side) of the wrists.

When you inhale, return the wrists and hands back to their original positions (figs. 8.17–8.19).



Figure 8.17. Actually stretch the fingers back toward your nose as you imagine emitting energy.



Figure 8.18. You can also practice with just one hand.



Figure 8.19. Return your hands to their original position when you inhale.

Shuzhang (Pushing or Thrusting Palm)

From pizhang, turn the palms forward as if you are pushing against a wall. Keep the elbows hanging down, the tiger's mouth on each hand open, and stretch the forefingers back slightly as if trying to point them at your nose. Maintain the willow-leaf palm shape of the hands and separate the palms by about a palm span. Be sure to keep the chest slightly concave.

A. Natural Posture; Push

Stand in a natural posture and extend your arms as if pushing forward, but keep the elbows gently bent. Inhale through your nose and raise your wrists slightly so that the fingers point somewhat downward.

As you exhale through your mouth, imagine and *feel* that you are pushing against a heavy object that moves slightly. Drop the wrists slightly and allow the fingers to arch back as if trying to point them at your nose. Be careful not to allow the wrists to stiffen at all. You may also visualize pushing against a spring board that flexes slightly. *Never imagine pushing against something that will not move!* See figures 8.20–8.21.



Figure 8.20. Inhale and raise the wrists slightly.



Figure 8.21. Exhale as you drop your wrists and imagine pushing against a heavy object.

B. Sanzhai; Push

Stand in sanzhai and extend one hand in the position of shuzhang. You can use either palm. Practice the exercise as described above. Feel your rear foot pressing against the floor but do not exert muscular tension. The hip on the side of the pushing hand must gently rotate forward no more than 45 degrees (fig. 8.22).

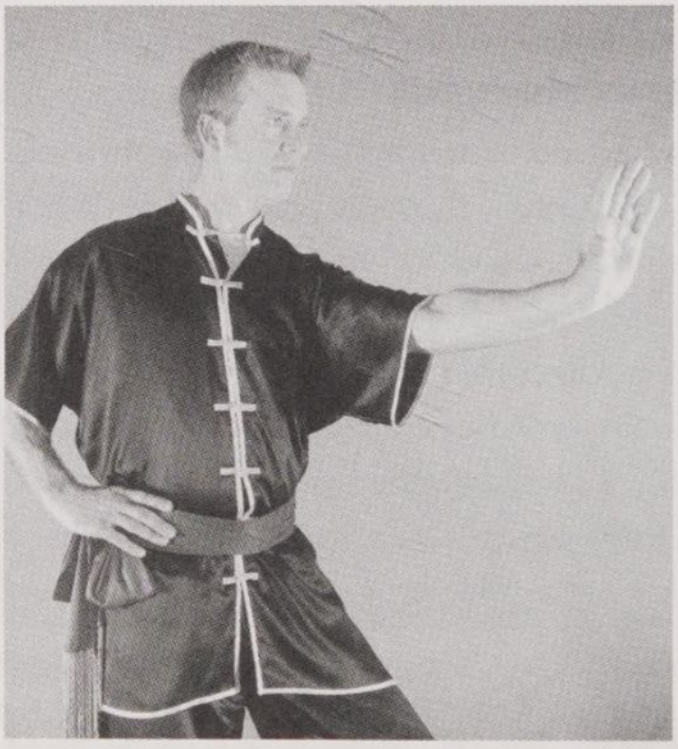


Figure 8.22. Practice the pushing palm exercise in sanzhai.

Practicing the Moving Exercise

You will feel a heaviness on the underside of your forearms and a slight expanding in the back (of the shoulders). This exercise may also be performed with loose fists, and as you imagine thrusting, slightly tilt the wrist downward and extend the shoulder very slightly forward (figs. 8.23–8.25).



Figure 8.23. Inhale and withdraw the arms by drawing the shoulder blades together.



Figure 8.24. Exhale and drop the wrists as you separate the scapulae.



Figure 8.25. You can also practice with loose fists.

Fuzhang (Downward or Pressing Palm)

From shuzhang, turn the palms downward with the distance between them no more than the width of the shoulders. Let the elbows hang down, keep the tiger's mouth open, and maintain the "willow-leaf" shape of each palm. The hands should be held at shoulder level.

A. Natural Posture; Press

Stand in a natural posture with your arms out in front of you and inhale.

As you exhale, imagine pressing down on a large beach ball. Do not exert muscular force (figs. 8.26–8.27).



Figure 8.26. Flatten the palms and keep your elbows down.



Figure 8.27. Exhale and imagine pressing straight down to crush a large beach ball.

B. Natural Posture; Press Down at Sides as if Flying

This is identical to the above exercise, but the arms are extended out to the sides at shoulder level. The fingers point toward the front and the elbows droop (fig. 8.28).



Figure 8.28. Extend the arms to the sides and imagine pressing down on two beach balls.



C. Natural Posture; Press Down Low at Sides

This is identical to the above exercise but the hands are held low, at the sides. When inhaling, let the fingers droop. When exhaling, push down slightly with the palms (fig. 8.29).



Figure 8.29. Hold the arms low and imagine pressing on two beach balls.

D. Natural Posture; Cut Outward

Hold your arms out before you and let the fingers point straight ahead.

When you exhale, turn the fingers inward and focus on cutting outward with the seven-star points. Imagine a large rubber band around your wrists and try to *feel* that you are pressing out against it. Do not exert muscular force or raise the elbows or shoulders (figs. 8.30–8.31).



Figure 8.30. Extend your arms but keep your elbows down.



Figure 8.31. Imagine trying to chop out to the sides.

E. Natural Posture; Cut Outward with Hands Low

Hold the palms down in front of you. Let the fingers point straight ahead as you inhale.

When you exhale, cut outward slightly with the edges of the palms. Use the rubber band visualization (figs. 8.32–8.33).



Figure 8.32. Extend your arms down in front of you.



Figure 8.33. Exhale and imagine cutting out to the sides.

F. Sanzhai; Press

Stand in sanzhai and extend your leading hand. This exercise is identical to that done from a natural posture. When you press down, lower your hips slightly (fig. 8.34).



Figure 8.34. Imagine pressing down with your leading hand.

G. Sanzhai; Press Down at Sides as if Flying

From sanzhai, extend both arms to the sides and practice the exercise as previously described (fig. 8.35).



Figure 8.35. Extend your arms to the sides and imagine pressing down on two beach balls.

H. Sanzhai; Press Down Low at Sides

You can use both hands or the front hand alone. Practice the exercise as previously described. Drop the hips slightly as you press down (fig. 8.36).



Figure 8.36. Hold your hands down low and imagine pressing.

I. Sanzhai; Cut Outward

From sanzhai, do the exercise as previously described. However, gently rotate your leading hip forward no more than 45 degrees (fig. 8.37).



Figure 8.37. Cut outward and imagine a resistance.

J. Sanzhai; Cut Outward with Hands Low

This is identical to the exercise described previously, but use only the forward hand, and rotate the leading hip forward no more than 45 degrees (figs. 8.38–8.39).



Figure 8.38. Cut outward with the leading hand.



Figure 8.39. You can use loose fists when practicing this posture.

SPECIAL NOTE

This exercise will stimulate the ulnar aspect of the hands and arms. Be careful not to raise your shoulders (a common error) and remember to open the armpits as if holding a softball under each one.

Yangzhang (Lifting Palm)

From fuzhang, turn the palms upward. The distance between them is not greater than the shoulders. Keep the tiger's mouths open and maintain the shape of the willow-leaf palm.

A. Natural Posture; Lift in Front

From a natural posture, extend the arms and hands out before you. As you inhale, let the wrists drop so that the fingers point somewhat upward.

Upon exhalation, raise the wrists gently and flatten the palms as if lifting something heavy. Be careful not to raise the shoulders. Keep the chest concave and drop the elbows (figs. 8.40–8.41).



Figure 8.40. Extend your arms to the front. The elbows should hang down.



Figure 8.41. Imagine lifting a heavy object.

B. Natural Posture; Lift to Sides

This is identical to the previous exercise, but the hands are extended to the sides (fig. 8.42).



Figure 8.42. Imagine lifting heavy weights with your arms extended to the sides.

C. Sanzhai; Lift in Front

From sanzhai, you may use both hands or just the leading hand. When you inhale, lower your hips slightly but do not bend over. When you exhale, slightly straighten your knees as if lifting a heavy object (fig. 8.43).



Figure 8.43. Practice in sanzhai with your arms held out in front.

D. Sanzhai; Lift to Sides

This is the same as the exercise previously described. Use both hands, but look at the tip of the forefinger of the leading hand. Lower your hips slightly when inhaling and raise them slightly as you exhale (fig. 8.44).



Figure 8.44. Stand in sanzhai and lift to the sides.

SPECIAL NOTE

An eerie feeling is sometimes produced when you drop your breath (using reverse breathing) upon exhalation and imagine lifting a heavy object. This is perfectly normal.

Loshuanzhang (Twisted Palm)

From the previous posture, twist the arms and wrists outward. Do not tense the muscles of the arms or wrists when you do this. Keep the tiger's mouths open and maintain the shape of the willow-leaf palm. The elbows are bent and hanging down.

A. Natural Posture; Screw Outward

Extend the arms to the front with the palms facing up. Inhale and imagine a large rubber band around your wrists.

As you exhale, twist the wrists outward as if trying to point the ulnar aspects of your hands at the sky (figs. 8.45–8.46).



Figure 8.45. Inhale and imagine a rubber band around your wrists.



Figure 8.46. Exhale and twist the wrists outward.

B. Natural Posture; Screw Outward with Arms Hanging

Let your arms hang naturally at your sides. The palms face forward.

When you exhale, turn the palms outward. You may also practice rotating the palms *inward* (figs. 8.47–8.49).



Figure 8.47. Arms hang naturally with the palms turned forward.



Figure 8.48. Exhale and rotate the wrists outward.



Figure 8.49. You may opt to turn the wrists inward.

C. Sanzhai; Screw Hands Outward

You may practice with both hands or just the leading hand. The exercise is identical to that used in a natural posture (fig. 8.50).



Figure 8.50. Stand in sanzhai and screw the hands outward.

SPECIAL NOTE

It is very easy to inadvertently contract the pectorals (muscles of the chest) when you practice this exercise. Focus on your dantian and keep the chest relaxed.

Tiaozhang (Rising Palm)

From the loshuanzhang, turn your arms and palms so that the thumbs point down at the ground with the palms turned outward. The fingers point inward toward each other with the forefingers held as high as the mouth. This is akin to the posture of paozhang with the palms turned outward. Maintain the shape of the willow-leaf palm and keep the tiger's mouths open. The distance between the hands is no more than a palm span.

A. Natural Posture; Press Outward

Imagine a large rubber band around your forearms as you inhale. Do not allow the elbows to flare out to the sides; keep them tilted downward somewhat and relax the chest and shoulders.

When you exhale, slightly separate the hands as if wiping them around the inside of a large cylinder. Concentrate on feeling the resistance of the large rubber band (figs. 8.51–8.52).



Figure 8.51. Imagine a large rubber band around your forearms.



Figure 8.52. Exhale and pull your arms apart.

B. Natural Posture; Hands to Sky

Raise your arms up with the palms turned up as if supporting a heavy object. This position resembles that familiar posture of Ho-To (the so-called "Happy Buddha"). However, the arms are not held straight up overhead; they should be at about a 45-degree angle from your hairline. Turn the fingers back toward your head rather than pointing them in toward each other. When you inhale, bend the elbows slightly.

Upon exhalation, push upward with the hands and arms and try to feel as though you are pushing a heavy weight. Feel the weight of the imaginary object not only against your palms but against the soles of your feet as well (figs. 8.53–8.54).

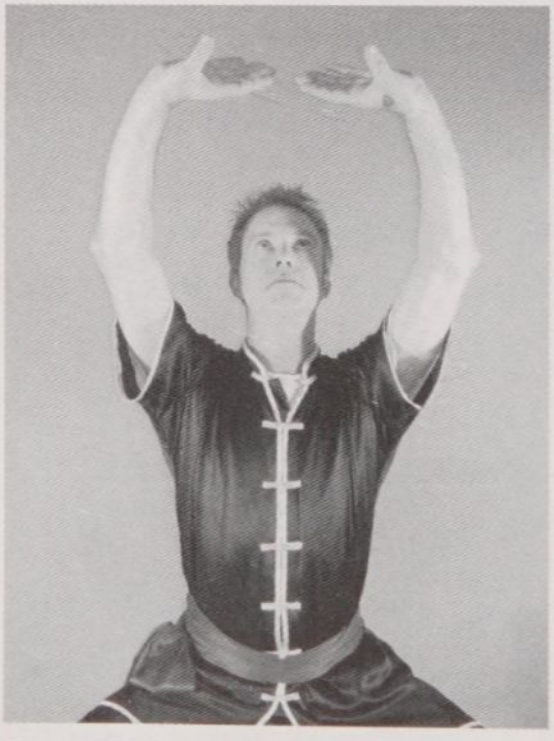


Figure 8.53. Raise your arms as shown.

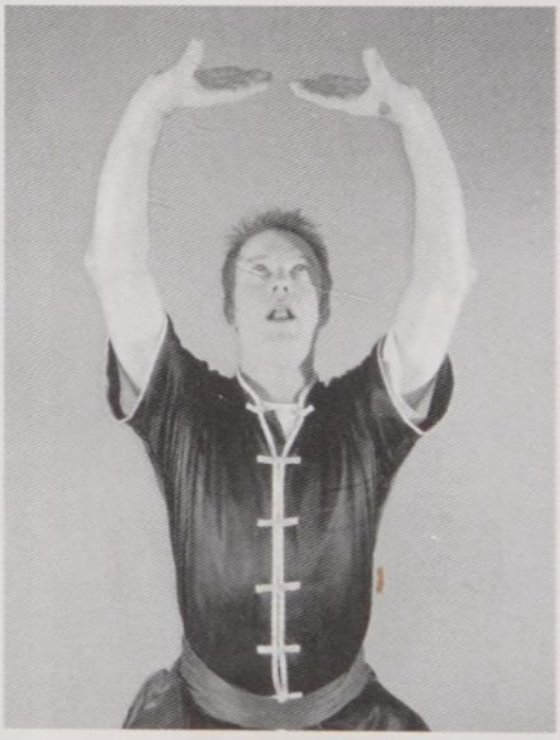


Figure 8.54. Imagine pushing against a heavy weight as you exhale.

C. Sanzhai; Press Outward

From sanzhai, you can practice with both hands or with either hand singly. The exercise is identical to that used in the natural posture (fig. 8.55).



Figure 8.55. Practice the exercise while standing in sanzhai.

D. Sanzhai; Hands to Sky

As in the previous exercise, you can use both hands or either hand singly (fig. 8.56).



Figure 8.56. Press upward while standing in sanzhai.

SPECIAL NOTE

If you turn your fingers inward to point at each other, your elbows will stick out to the sides and weaken the structure of the posture. Be careful not to arch your chest or raise your shoulders.

Liaozhang (Poking Palm)

From tiaozhang, lower your arms and hands to your sides. The fingers point at the ground but maintain the shape of the willow-leaf palm and keep the tiger's mouths open. Do not look down; keep your eyes directed straight forward. Lower the shoulders; this is where you will find out how much tension you had in your shoulders in the preceding exercises.

A. Natural Posture; Thrust Down

With your arms and hands hanging down, inhale and very slightly lift the hands straight up.

Exhale and thrust the fingers straight down. Imagine that your arms are made of rubber and that you can actually extend your fingertips down to the ground (figs. 8.57–8.58).



Figure 8.57. Inhale and lift your hands up very slightly.



Figure 8.58. Exhale and thrust down.

B. Natural Posture; Thrust Forward

Begin as in the start of the previous exercise. Imagine a thick rubber band is attached to each wrist and bolted to the wall behind you.

When you exhale, push your arms forward very slightly and feel the resistance of the rubber band (figs. 8.59–8.60).



Figure 8.59. Imagine rubber bands attached to each wrist and bolted to the wall behind you.



Figure 8.60. Exhale and push your arms forward slightly.

C. Natural Posture; Press Outward

Begin with your arms hanging down as before. Imagine standing in a doorway with your arms and hands against the doorjambs.

When you exhale, push the backs of your hands and arms very slightly outward. Focus on feeling the resistance of the doorjambs as you press outward (figs. 8.61–8.62).



Figure 8.61. Imagine your arms and wrists resting against a doorjamb.



Figure 8.62. Exhale and push your hands and arms outward.

D. Sanzhai; Thrust Downward

From sanzhai, practice the exercise with your leading hand. The other palm is held at the side of your waist (fig. 8.63).



Figure 8.63. Thrust down while standing in sanzhai.

E. Sanzhai; Thrust Forward

Use the leading hand to push forward (fig. 8.64).



Figure 8.64. Push forward with your leading hand.

F. Sanzhai; Press Outward

Use the leading hand and arm to press outward (fig. 8.65).

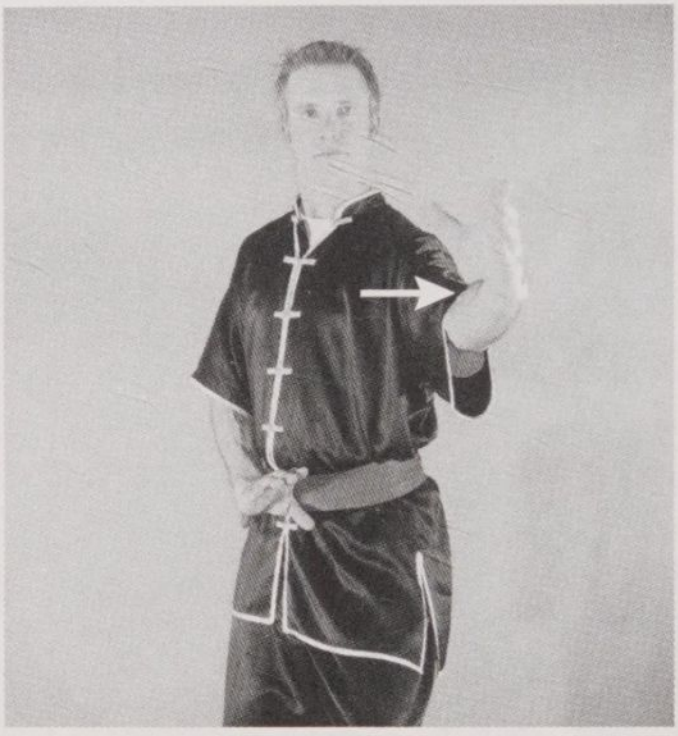


Figure 8.65. Press out to the side with your leading arm.

SPECIAL NOTE

This exercise often produces a sensation of qi in the tops of the forearms, especially when practicing the "press outward" exercise.

The Kicking Posture

The posture known as *kick* may involve holding the kicking foot out to the front as if doing a frontal kick, or out to the side as if practicing a side-thrust kick. Because you must balance yourself on only one foot, this can be somewhat difficult to do until you learn to strongly root yourself to the ground. The object, of course, is to train yourself to emit *qi* when kicking.

Kicking Posture

Begin by standing naturally with your hands held in the position of paozhang or shuzhang. Inhale and raise one foot beside the knee of the supporting leg. Keep the supporting knee slightly flexed. Imagine a thick rubber band around the ankle of the kicking foot.

Exhale and extend the kicking foot gently. Concentrate on feeling the resistance of the imaginary rubber band. On subsequent inhalations, retract the foot only slightly. You need not bring it all the way back to the knee each time.

When you have completed the exercise with one foot, simply place the foot back on the floor and relax for one full breath before training the other leg (figs. 8.66–8.68).



Figure 8.66. Imagine a rubber band around the ankle of your chambered leg.



Figure 8.67. Exhale and kick forward against the resistance of the rubber band.



Figure 8.68. Retract the foot only slightly.

SPECIAL NOTE

Be sure to slightly contract the anus and tuck the coccyx up and inward just as you do in all of the hand postures. Slightly push the hips into the direction of the kick but be careful that you do not lean. Maintain alignment of the spine and neck at all times.

Concluding the Practice

After ending your practice session, do not walk around right away. Make loose fists and place the tips of your middle fingers in your palms. They will rest on top of the laogong points. Imagine your qi circling around the navel; men will circle it in an expanding clockwise circle thirty-six times and women should visualize it circling clockwise twenty-four times.

Then circle it in a shrinking counterclockwise circle until it returns to the dantian. Men will circle it twenty-four times and women thirty-six times. Your eyes should be shut and your eyeballs rotate, following the movement of energy around the navel. After the circling has been completed in both directions, focus your yi (and consequently, your qi) on your dantian for about sixty seconds (figs. 8.69–8.70).



Figure 8.69. Imagine circling qi around your navel in an expanding clockwise circle.



Figure 8.70. Slowly draw the energy back to the dantian by imagining it moving in a shrinking counterclockwise circle.

Place your left palm on the right side of your abdomen and your right palm on your right kidney. Twist your waist gently rightward and imagine emitting qi from your energized palms into the kidney. Then reverse the hand positions and do it on the opposite side (figs. 8.71–8.72).



Figure 8.71. Turn to the right and energize your right kidney.



Figure 8.72. Reverse the hand positions and repeat the exercise to the left.

You may then rub your eyes, ears, and kidneys with your palms. Rub nine times clockwise and nine times counterclockwise (figs. 8.73–8.75).

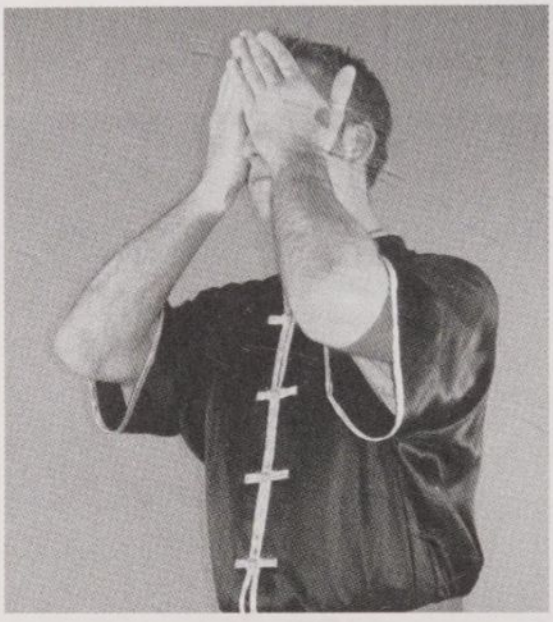


Figure 8.73. You may wish to rub your closed eyes with your energized palms.

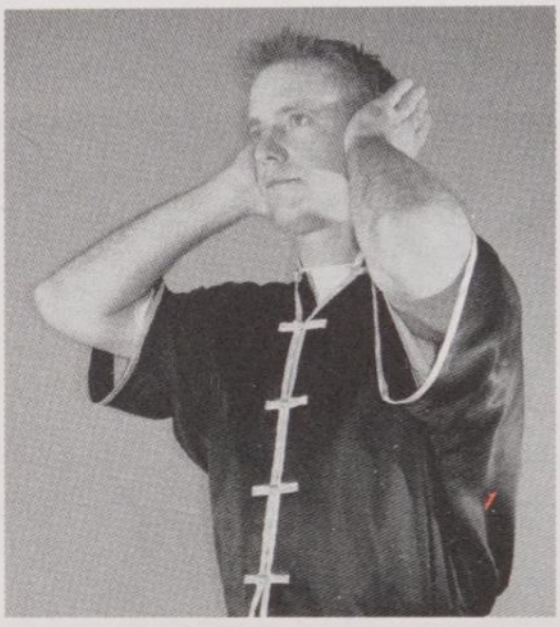


Figure 8.74. You can rub your ears.

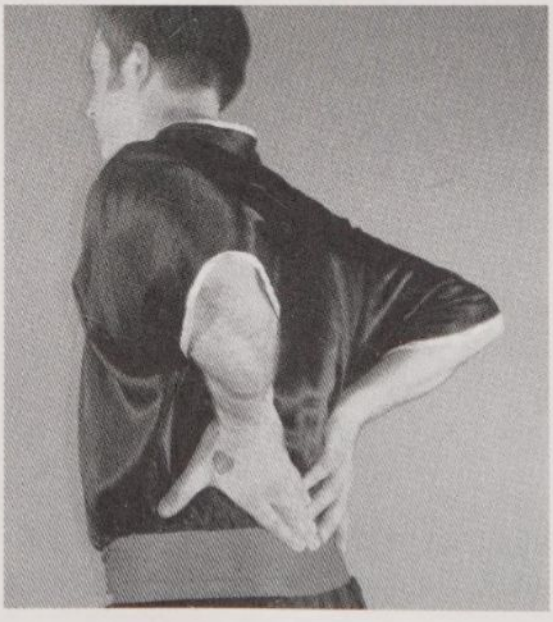


Figure 8.75. Massage your kidneys to energize them further.

Do not take food or drink for several minutes. Wait at least one hour before having a full meal.

Advanced Training for the Static Postures

Once you have practiced the standing postures for some time and are able to establish a firm root and experience the sensation of qi in your palms, you can practice by standing on bricks.

The brick is balanced on its edge, and you must concentrate on rooting and drawing energy through the *yangquan points* on the soles of your feet to help you maintain your balance. This is a very effective training method because the additional mental concentration and awareness (of figuratively breathing through the soles of the feet) really intensifies the effects of the exercise.

When practicing the kicking posture while standing on a brick, be very careful not to fall and injure your ankle (figs. 8.76–8.77).



Figure 8.76. The yangquan point.



Figure 8.77. Push the qi down through the sole of your foot and through the brick.

9

THE BREATH COILING FORM

Once you have learned to engage your entire body in a static position, you must learn to do it as you move through various postures. This can be accomplished through extensive practice of the Breath Coiling Form. This set is actually comprised of twelve neigong exercises with which you should already be quite familiar. These exercises are typically practiced individually to promote and maintain internal health. I developed this unique form to link them together, making it easier to practice them. Regular training with this form will strengthen the body and the internal environment.

Breath Coiling Form

Beginning the Set

Face south in the posture of Attention (fig. 9.1).

- Touch your tongue to the upper palate and keep it there throughout the set.
- Use reverse breathing. Inhalation is made through the nose and all exhalation is through the mouth. Exhalation should be slow and forceful, but the body is never tensed or stiffened.
- When inhaling, the anal sphincter should be mildly contracted. When exhaling, it should be strongly contracted.
- Keep your coccyx tucked slightly inward and upward.
- Maintain spinal alignment, being mindful of your cervical vertebrae aligning with the thoracic vertebrae.
- Engage your entire body, filling the fasciae and other internal tissues with qi.



Figure 9.1. Stand at attention facing south.

Commencement

Open your feet 45 degrees. Raise your arms laterally, palms up, until they are at shoulder height. Inhale (fig. 9.2). Fold your arms so your palms face down in front of your chest with the fingers turned inward and nearly touching. Then press your palms down in front of your lower abdomen and exhale forcefully (fig. 9.3).



Figure 9.2. Turn 45 degrees rightward, inhale, and raise your arms.



Figure 9.3. Turn forward and press the palms down as you exhale forcefully and *engage your body.*

Section One

1. Toe out your feet to a pigeon-toe stance and turn your palms inward so they face each other. Then draw your fists to your hips as you inhale.
2. Exhale slowly and forcefully, and thrust out both spear-hands to the height of your throat. The distance between your hands is one palm span.
3. Keeping your arms extended, cross the right arm over the left arm. Inhale and snap the arms over to the position of two inside blocks with the hands open and the palms twisted outward. Your armpits should be kept open as if a softball is placed under each one.
4. Repeat number 2.
5. Repeat number 3, but cross the left arm over the right arm.
6. Repeat number 2 (see figs. 9.4–9.12).



Figure 9.4. Turn your heels outward and turn your palms over to face each other.



Figure 9.5. Quickly draw the fists to the hips and inhale.



Figure 9.6. Perform spear-hand thrusts as you exhale powerfully.



Figure 9.7. Cross the right arm over the left as you inhale.



Figure 9.8. Snap the arms over like two inside blocks. Keep the wrists straight.



Figure 9.9. Execute spear-hand thrusts again.



Figure 9.10. Inhale and cross the left arm over the right.



Figure 9.11. Snap over the two inside blocks again and inhale.



Figure 9.12. Perform the double spear-hands once more. Are you still engaged?

Section Two

1. Inhale as you draw your hands back in front of your shoulders with the thumb sides of your hands turned down. Keep your elbows flared out to the sides.
2. Drop your elbows down so your palms are turned upward in front of your upper chest, beneath your chin. Then perform double underhanded spear-hands as you slowly and forcefully exhale. The distance between the hands is one palm span.
3. Repeat numbers 1 and 2 two more times (See figs. 9.13–9.15).



Figure 9.13. Inhale and draw the hands back.



Figure 9.14. Turn the palms upward and drop your elbows.



Figure 9.15. Exhale and thrust the hands out with the palms turned upward.

Section Three

1. Inhale and draw your palms back so the ulnar edge of each hand rests under each breast, in the breast crease, with the elbows flared to the sides.
2. Turn your palms down, then exhale slowly and forcefully as you press them down in front of your lower abdomen. Your fingers are pointed inward, almost touching. Keep your armpits open, as if holding a softball under each one.
3. Repeat numbers 1 and 2 two more times (figs. 9.16–9.17).



Figure 9.16. Inhale and draw your hands back as shown.

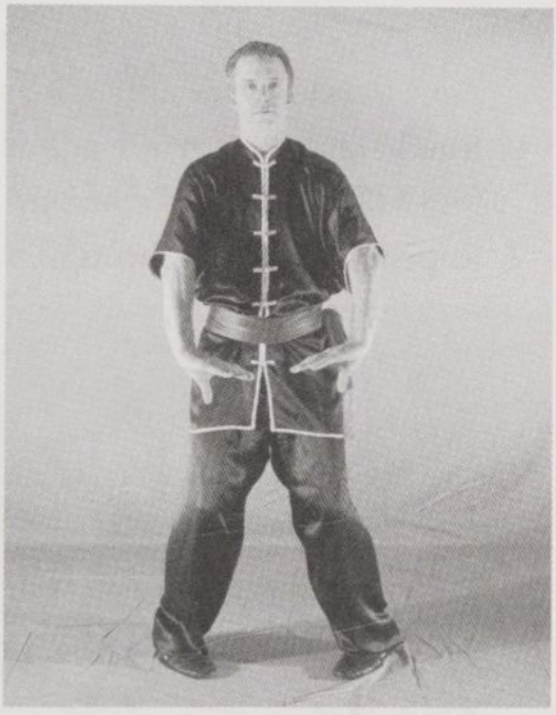


Figure 9.17. Exhale and press your palms down.

Section Four

1. Inhale and draw your open palms upward to your hips.
2. Turn your left foot out to the east in a sanzhai stance.
3. Step to the east with your left foot in a forward stance and exhale quickly as your palms push forward with the thumb sides pointed down and the fingers turned inward. The distance between the fingers of your hands is one palm span.
4. Inhale and draw your palms in to your chest facing downward. Your fingers almost touch.
5. Exhale slowly and forcefully, and press your palms down in front of your lower abdomen with the fingers turned inward. Your hands are on opposite sides of your forward knee.
6. Inhale and draw your palms upward to your hips as the right foot follow-steps to come up to sanzhai.
7. Repeat numbers 3 through 6 two more times (figs. 9.18–9.24).







Figure 9.18. Draw your open hands on your hips.



Figure 9.19. Turn to the east.



Figure 9.20. Exhale quickly as you advance your left foot and push.



Figure 9.21. Inhale and draw the hands to the chest with the palms down.



Figure 9.22. Exhale and push the palms downward.



Figure 9.23. Turn the palms to face each other.



Figure 9.24. Draw the open hands to the hips and bring up your right foot in a follow-step.

8. Toe in your left foot then toe out your right foot to face the west in a right sanzhai stance.
9. Step your right foot to the west in a forward stance and exhale quickly as your palms push forward with the thumb sides pointed down and the fingers turned inward.
10. Inhale and draw your palms in to your chest facing downward. Your fingers almost touch.
11. Exhale slowly and forcefully and press your palms down in front of your lower abdomen with the fingers turned inward.
12. Inhale and draw your palms upward to your hips as the right foot follow-steps to come up to a sanzhai stance.
13. Repeat numbers 8 through 12 two more times (figs. 9.25–9.31).



Figure 9.25. Toe in your left foot.



Figure 9.26. Toe out your right foot to stand in a sanzhai stance.



Figure 9.27. Advance your right foot and push outward with your palms.

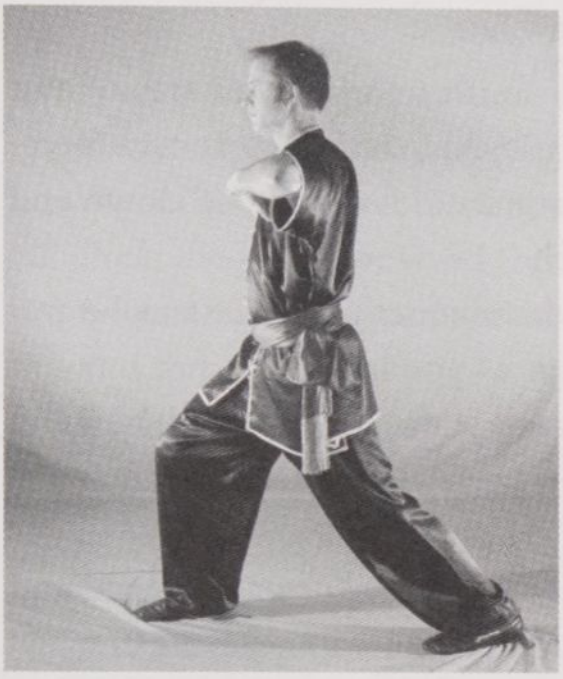


Figure 9.28. Draw your palms back to your chest as you inhale.

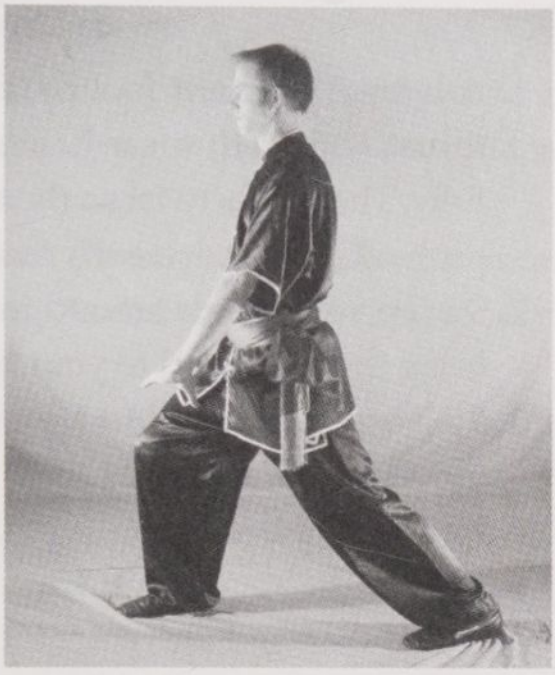


Figure 9.29. Press your palms down on either side of your knee.



Figure 9.30. Turn your palms to face each other.



Figure 9.31. Inhale and draw your hands to your hips as your left foot follow-steps.

Section Five

1. Advance your left foot to the south in a forward stance and thrust with both spear-hands as you exhale slowly and forcefully. The hands twist so the thumb sides are turned down and the backs of hands nearly touch.
2. Sweep your hands around in the manner of a breaststroke and bring them upward to your hips as you inhale.
3. Step your right foot to a forward stance and repeat the hand movement of number 1.
4. Repeat number 2.
5. Step to the south with your left foot in a forward stance and repeat the hand movements of number 1 (figs. 9.32–9.33).



Figure 9.32. Advance and thrust your hands forward as shown as you toe out your front foot.

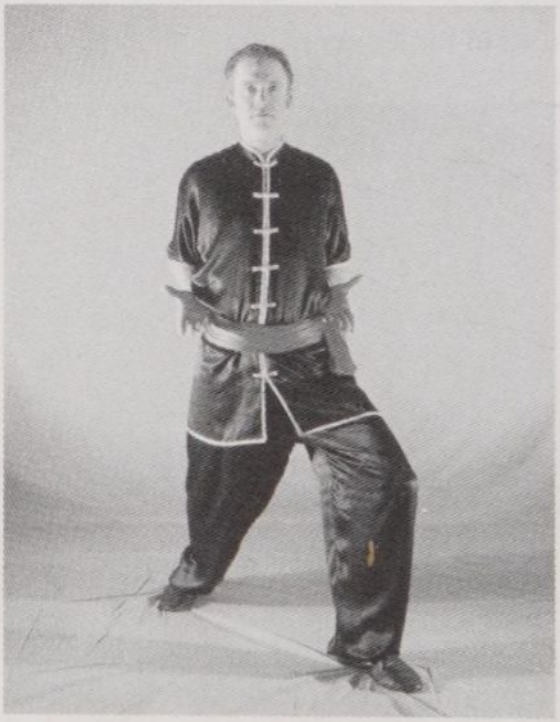


Figure 9.33. Sweep your hands outward and bring them to your hips.

Repeat these movements two more times. When you thrust the hands forward for the third time, proceed to Section Six.

Section Six

1. Sweep your hands around to come upward to the hips like a breaststroke, and inhale as you advance the right foot to face the south in a pigeon-toe stance.
2. Push the palms upward (but not directly overhead) with your fingers turned inward and nearly touching as you exhale slowly and forcefully.
3. Inhale and draw your palms down to your upper chest with your palms down.
4. Exhale slowly and forcefully as you push your palms down in front of your lower abdomen with the fingers turned inward and almost touching.
5. Repeat numbers 2 through 4 two more times (figs. 9.34–9.37).



Figure 9.34. Sweep your hands around and bring them to your hips as you step up to a pigeon-toe stance.



Figure 9.35. Exhale and push your palms upward.



Figure 9.36. Inhale and draw your palms down to your chest.



Figure 9.37. Exhale and push the palms down.

Perform the upward and downward pushing movements three times.

Section Seven

1. Inhale and toe out your left foot as your right arm sweeps over like an outside block, hand open, to the east with your left palm under your right elbow.
2. Advance your right foot to the east and turn to face north in a pigeon-toe stance. Press your right palm down in front of your lower abdomen with the fingers turned inward as your left hand pushes upward (but not directly overhead) with the fingers turned inward. Exhale slowly and forcefully. Your hands must be vertically aligned.
3. Inhale.
4. Reverse the hand positions of number 2 with your left arm going down on the inside of your right arm. Exhale slowly and forcefully.
5. Inhale.
6. Repeat the hand positions of number 2, exhaling slowly and forcefully (figs. 9.38–9.40).



Figure 9.38. Toe out your left foot and bring your right arm around, lining up your hand with your nose.



Figure 9.39. Step up with your right foot to face north.



Figure 9.40. Push your right hand upward and your left hand downward (the photo shows a front view of the posture).

Repeat these hand movements two more times.

Section Eight

1. Step your right foot behind your left foot. Turn around to face south in a pigeon-toe stance and inhale.
2. In an outside arc, swing your left hand around into the small of your back (mingmen) with the palm facing outward and the thumb side down. Your right hand swings out and up in front of your forehead, ending in the position of a high block. Exhale slowly and forcefully as you press the back of your left hand into the mingmen area (located in the small of the back, opposite the navel).
3. Inhale and swing your arms in outside arcs to change arm positions.
4. Reverse number 2.
5. Repeat number 3.
6. Repeat number 2 (figs. 9.41–9.43).

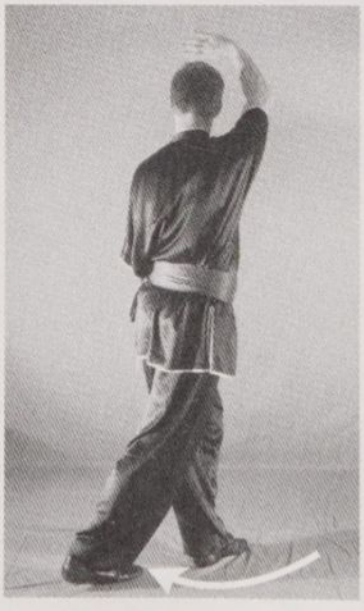


Figure 9.41. Step your right foot behind your left.



Figure 9.42. Turn to face south.



Figure 9.43. Front view.

Repeat the exercise with hand positions reversed. Perform the arm movements shown in figure 9.43 two more times on each side.

Section Nine

1. Inhale as you step your right foot back and turn to face the west in a pigeon-toe stance.
2. In outside arcs (as in Section Eight), swing your right arm into the small of your back (the area of the mingmen) with the palm facing out and the thumb side down. As you do so, your left arm swings in an outside arc to a high block position. Turn your waist to the right as far as you can and exhale slowly and forcefully. Press your right hand into the mingmen.
3. Reverse the hand positions of number 2 and repeat.
4. Repeat number 2 (figs. 9.44–9.45).



Figure 9.44. Step back with your right foot.

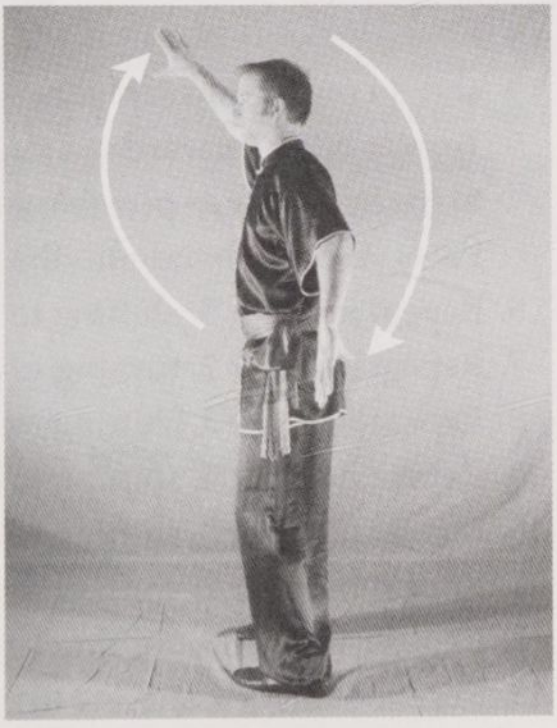


Figure 9.45. Turn to face the west and bring your arms around in outside arcs.

Repeat the movement shown in figure 9.45 two more times, and finish with your right hand high and your left hand in the small of your back.

Section Ten

1. In outside arcs (as in Section Nine), swing your right arm into the small of your back (mingmen) with the palm facing out. The thumb side of the hand is pointing down as the swing is made. Once the hand settles into the position in the small of the back, the thumb side is up. As you do so, your left arm swings in an outside arc to a high block position. Turn your waist to the right as far as you can and exhale slowly and forcefully.
2. Inhale and step your right foot to the north in a forward stance with your feet aligned.
3. Exhale slowly and forcefully, and turn to the right as far as you can. Press your right hand into the mingmen.
4. Inhale as you shift into a horse-riding stance facing the west and, in outside arcs, reverse the hand positions.
5. Turn to a left forward stance facing south, and turn your waist to the left as far as possible as you exhale forcefully and slowly. Press your left hand into the mingmen.
6. Repeat number 3, shifting to a horse-riding stance.
7. Repeat number 2, turning to a right forward stance.
8. Repeat number 3, shifting to a horse-riding stance.
9. Repeat number 4, shifting to left forward stance.
10. Repeat number 3, shifting to a horse-riding stance.
11. Repeat number 2, shifting to a right forward stance.
12. Repeat number 3, shifting to a horse-riding stance.
13. Repeat number 4, shifting to a left forward stance (figs. 9.46–9.48).



Figure 9.46. In outside arcs, swing your arms into the positions shown. Step your right foot to the north, turn your waist as far as possible, and exhale.



Figure 9.47. Shift back to a horse-riding stance and reverse the arm position.



Figure 9.48. As you shift into a left bow-and-arrow stance, turn your waist and exhale.

Repeat these movements two more times.

Section Eleven

1. Inhale as you step your right foot up to face north in a pigeon-toe stance, and in an outside arc, swing your left arm around and bring it up beside your right hand (this looks as if you're doing double high blocks).
2. Exhale forcefully as you strike down with the edges of both hands. Use the body action of Whip. Keep the armpits open.
3. Draw your palms upward to your hips.
4. Inhale as your arms go straight up with the palms facing forward.
5. Exhale and twist to the right in a hook stance as you lower your arms in front of your chest. Your palms are turned inward and your forearms are vertical (as if executing two downward elbow strokes).
6. Untwist to a pigeon-toe stance and repeat number 4.
7. Twist to the left and repeat number 5.
8. Untwist to a pigeon-toe stance and repeat number 4.
9. Twist to the right again and repeat number 5 (figs. 9.49–9.53).



Figure 9.49. Step up to face south and bring the left hand beside the right.



Figure 9.50. Strike down with both sword hands and exhale forcefully.

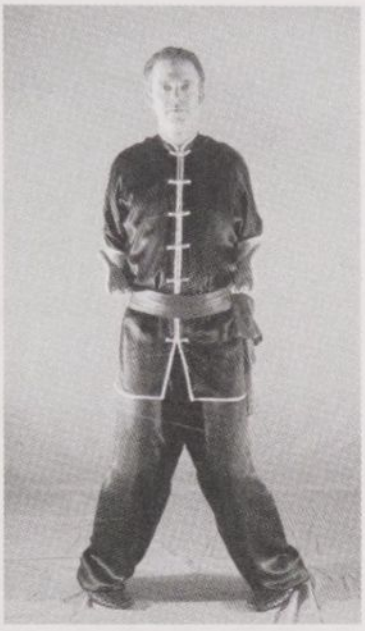


Figure 9.51. Draw the hands to the hips.



Figure 9.52. Stretch the arms up.



Figure 9.53. Twist to a hook stance and lower the arms as you exhale.

Repeat the postures shown in figures 9.52 and 9.53 two more times.

Section Twelve

1. Untwist to face south.
2. Snap your arms out like two low blocks with the palms turned inward, right over left. Keep the armpits open throughout this section.
3. Exhale gently as the palms turn forward.
4. Inhale.
5. Exhale and rotate the hands in the opposite direction.
6. Repeat the hand movements of numbers 1 and 2 two more times (figs. 9.54–9.57).



Figure 9.54. Inhale and bring the arms down with the palms turned inward.

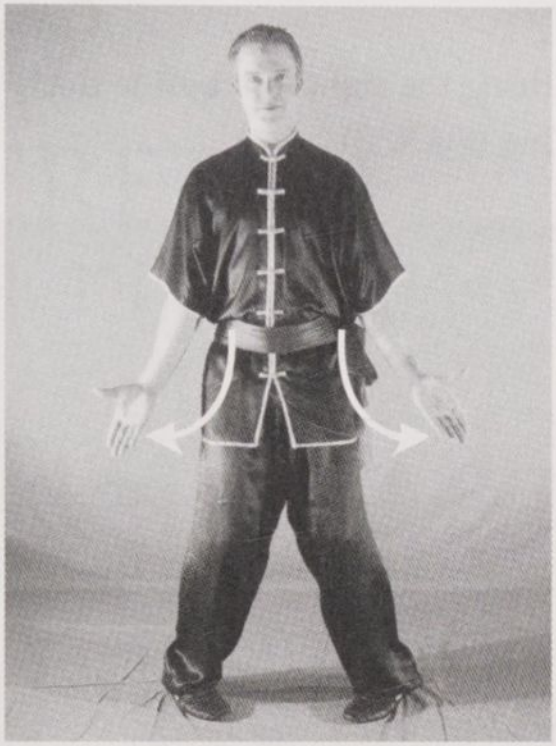


Figure 9.55. Exhale as you turn the palms forward and outward.

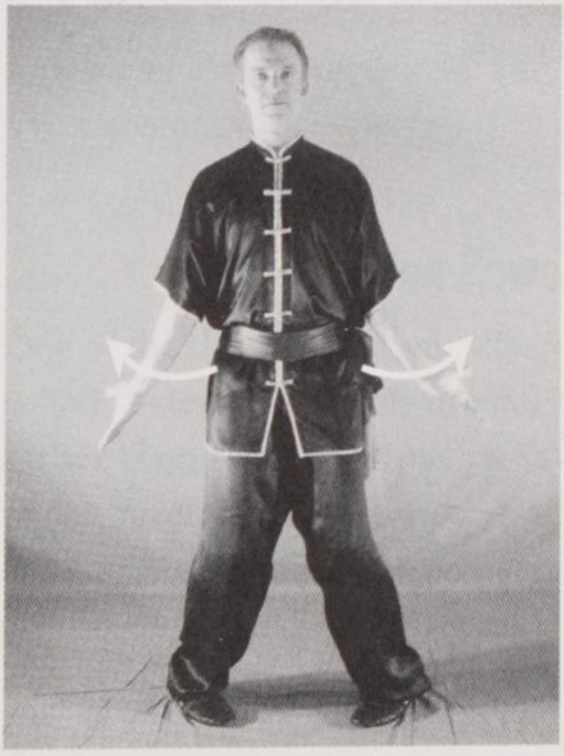


Figure 9.56. Exhale as you turn the palms forward and outward.



Figure 9.57. Inhale and then turn the palms in the opposite direction.

Conclusion

Bring the right foot beside the left foot, relax, and calm the breathing (fig. 9.58).

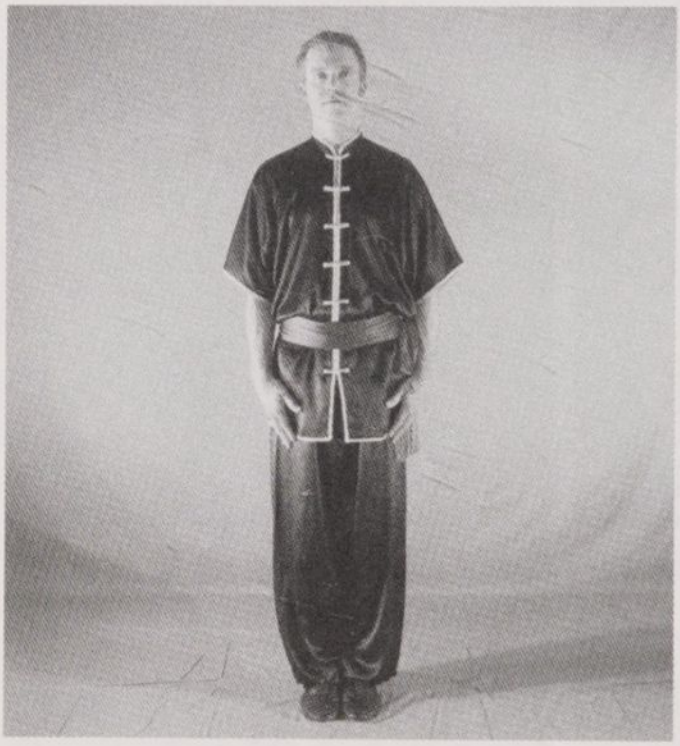


Figure 9.58. Bring the right foot up beside the left foot.

10

THE SECRET OF TENDON POWER

Unlike other martial disciplines, the neijia rely on what we call "tendon power" instead of the strength that is supplied by the larger muscles. Don't confuse tendons with ligaments; ligaments are the tissues that connect bone to bone. Ligaments are mainly found in between the joints and are generally quite short. Tendons, on the other hand, connect muscle to bone and are located throughout the body. They are elastic and enormously powerful because they are capable of absorbing energy and then releasing up to about ninety-five percent of that energy.

Tendon Power in the Neijia

One of the things that make the neijia so very different from the so-called "external" schools *(waijia)* is their utilization of tendon power rather than relying primarily on muscular force. When the neijia stylist receives an aggressor's attack, the aligned structure allows the body to remain relatively relaxed and torque certain tendons to absorb the blow. The act of stretching or torquing a tendon creates a small electromagnetic charge within the tissue, which can then be released in the form of a strike or a thrust.

Let's Twist!

Once you have practiced the preliminary exercises for at least a year, thoroughly learned the eight basic body actions, and acquired substantial skill in the art of engaging, you are ready to learn how to twist! This doesn't necessarily take a long time, but it will require some considerable practice. We're going to begin by learning the Six Twistings, which are six ways of coiling and storing energy in the tendons of the upper back, shoulders, elbows, wrists, and hands. These movements are intended to teach you to exaggerate the coiling movements of the hands and arms—a skill that is vital to the successful application of fa-jin.

Before you begin to practice these exercises, remember that *it is absolutely crucial that you remain totally engaged at all times.* It's very easy to become so absorbed in the practice of each exercise that you neglect this aspect of coiling. Don't!

1. Outside Coil

Execute an outside block movement with the hand open or in a relaxed fist. As the hand comes in line with your nose, turn it so that the thumb side points to the front. You should feel stretching all the way to your shoulder and the inside of the scapula (figs. 10.1–10.2). *Make sure that your whole body is engaged throughout this exercise.*



Figure 10.1. Perform an outside block movement . . .



Figure 10.2. Turn your wrist. Feel the stretching on the inside of your shoulder blade.

2. Reversed Outside Coil

Begin with your arm out in front of you with the palm turned downward. Turn your hand so that the thumb side is down, and keep trying to turn it as if to twist it 180 degrees to face upward (figs. 10.3–10.4).



Figure 10.3. Stretch your arm out with your palm facing down.



Figure 10.4. Turn your hand thumb down.

3. Inside Coil

Perform an inside block with the hand open or in a relaxed fist. Rotate the palm outward as if trying to perform an outside wrist twist on yourself. You should feel the twisting all the way to your shoulder and scapula (figs. 10.5–10.6).



Figure 10.5. Sweep your arm up.



Figure 10.6. Twist your hand outward as far as you can.

4. Reversed Inside Coil

Start with your arm stretched out in front of you with the palm turned down. Draw a small circle outward with the arm and hand and turn the hand thumb side down, as if you are trying to turn it 180 degrees and twist it far enough to face upward. Again, you should feel the twisting and stretching through your entire arm, shoulder, and scapula (figs. 10.7–10.8).



Figure 10.7. Stretch your arm out in front of you with your palm down.



Figure 10.8. Turn your forearm and hand over as shown.

5. Downward Coil

Bring your fist or palm (which is turned palm up) from your hip over to your navel as you try to twist it outward and thumb down. Keep the armpit rounded (figs. 10.9–10.10).



Figure 10.9. Start with your palm on your hip.



Figure 10.10. Bring your hand in front of your navel and twist your arm outward.

6. Reversed Downward Coil

Start with your hand, open or in a relaxed fist, out in front of you, palm down. Bring it in toward your navel and try to screw it thumb down (figs. 10.11–10.12).



Figure 10.11. Extend your arm out with your palm turned down.



Figure 10.12. Draw your hand to your navel and twist your wrist thumb down.

It is absolutely crucial that you get the twisting and stretching sensation all the way from the hand to the shoulder. However, there must not be any unnecessary tension in the body at all. Keep the armpits open, as if holding a softball under each one. Adhere to the principles of spinal alignment and use proper body action and breathing when you release the twisting sensation and execute your technique.

11

INTERNAL COILING

I often refer to this as "core coiling" because it involves manipulation of the core tissues: the large abdominal muscles, the iliopsoas muscle, and smaller internal muscles, fasciae, and other tissues. It is absolutely critical to the development of fa-jin because it increases the amount of mass behind the blow.

Basic Core-Coiling Exercises

The basic core-coiling exercises will require some considerable practice before you can do them without having to stop and think. As you practice these exercises, be sure that your body is properly engaged at all times.

One-Sided Coiling Exercises

This is a simple exercise that is really quite easy to do. You will find that standing in front of a full-length mirror will be helpful because it will allow you to monitor your posture and ensure that you're not leaning to either side as you practice.

Stand with your weight evenly divided on both feet. Contract the abdominals on the left side without contracting those on the right side. This isn't nearly as difficult to do as it sounds, and with a little

practice, you'll be able to do it easily. Then practice doing the same thing on the right side (figs. 11.1–11.3).

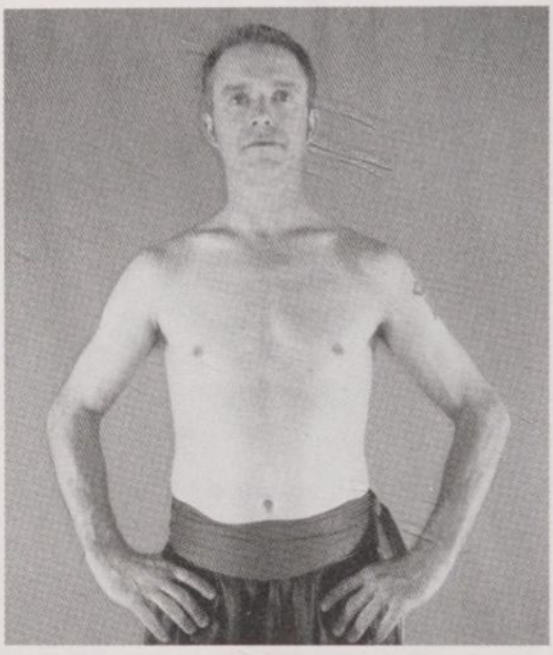


Figure 11.1. Begin with the abdominals relaxed.

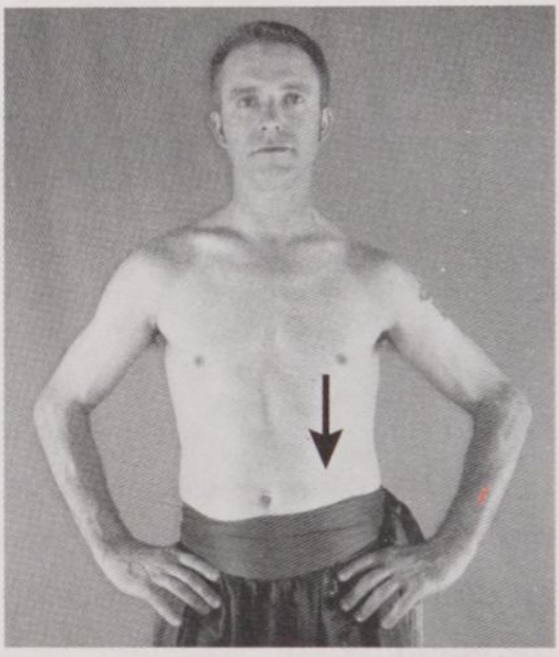


Figure 11.2. Contract the abdominals of the left side only.

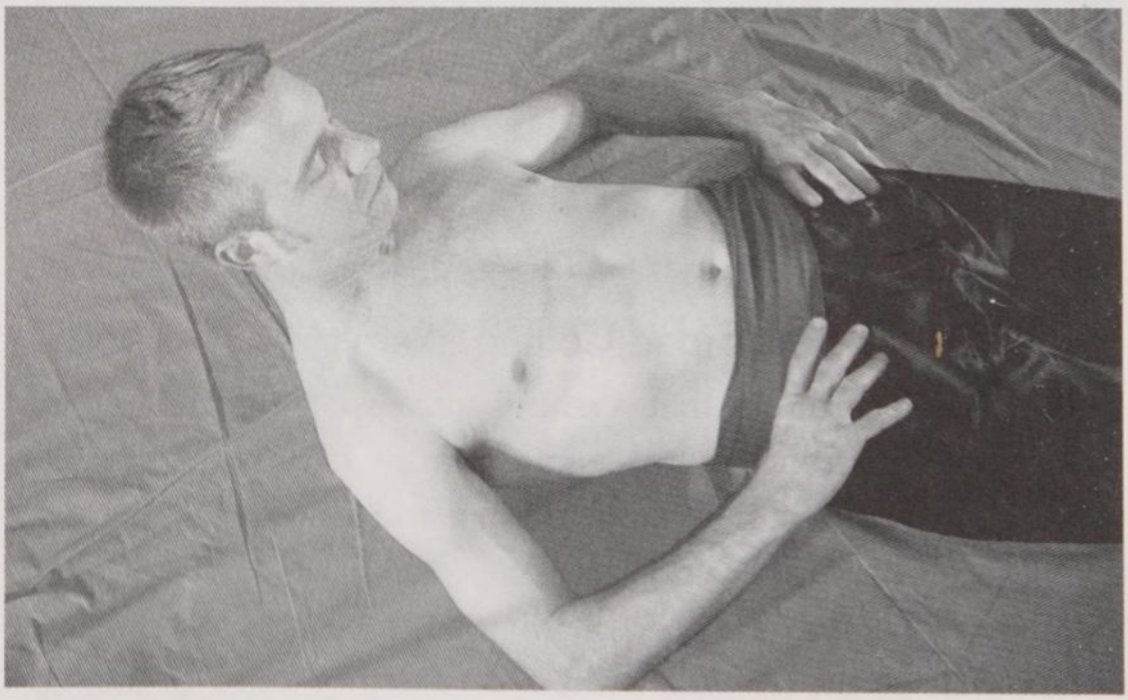


Figure 11.3. An excellent way to practice is to lie on a bed with a pillow under your head, which will enable you to watch the abdominal contractions.

Alternate Sides Abdominal Coiling

Once you can easily contract only one side of the abdominals, practice alternating the contractions (figs. 11.4–11.5).

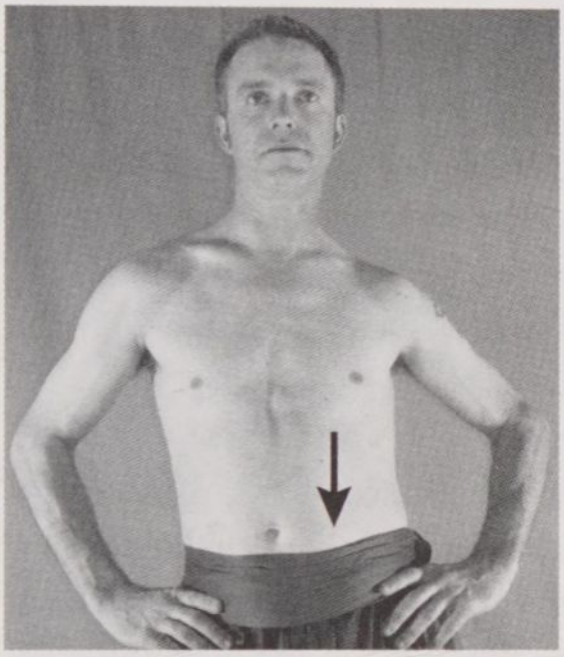


Figure 11.4. Contract the abdominals on the left side . . .

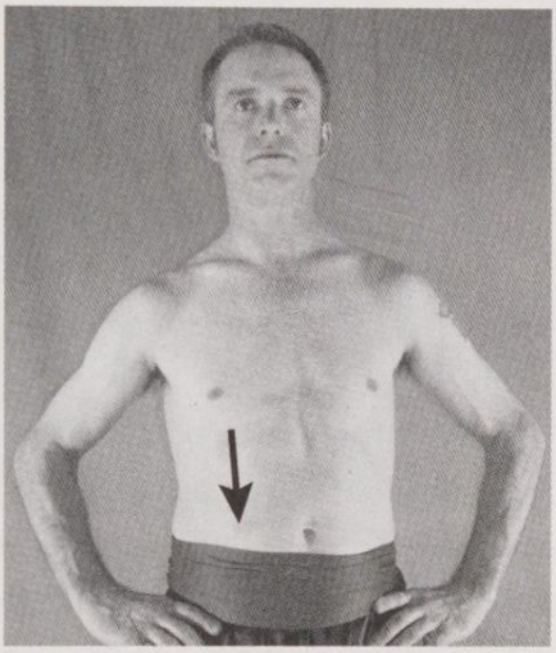


Figure 11.5. Then switch and contract only the abdominals of the right side.

Advanced Core-Coiling Exercises

The advanced exercises cannot be mastered quickly. There are no shortcuts, and you mustn't try to hurry the process. Take your time and learn to do them correctly.

Contract, Twist, and Lift

Up until now you have practiced simply contracting the abdominals. You must now learn to figuratively *twist* them as they contract. It should feel as though the abdominals, as well as other deeper internal muscles and connective tissues are being "twisted" like the strands of a rope.

Push down your body's centerline with your left palm as you push upward with your right palm. Practice contracting and twisting the left abdominals while you simultaneously raise the muscles and connective tissue around the right kidney area. This action, which is often referred to as "lifting the kidney," includes the erector spinae muscle and the thoracolumbar fascia as well as smaller internal tissues.

As you continue with your training, you will eventually be able to feel smaller internal tissues interacting with the larger abdominals. Practice on each side until you can do this exercise easily, then train to alternate sides (figs. 11.6–11.8).



Figure 11.6. Push down with your left hand as you contract and twist the left abdominals.

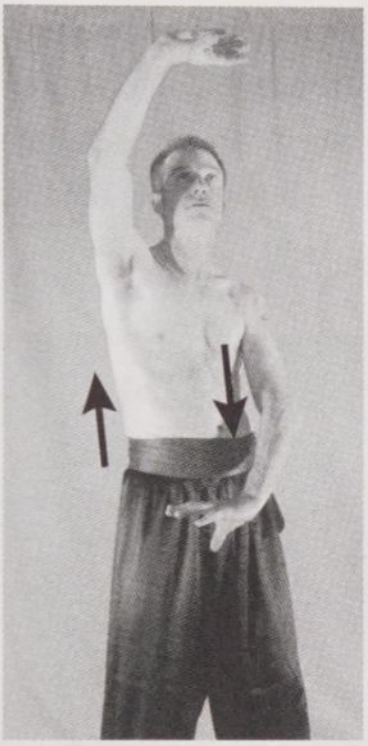


Figure 11.7. Push upward with your right palm and lift the right kidney area.

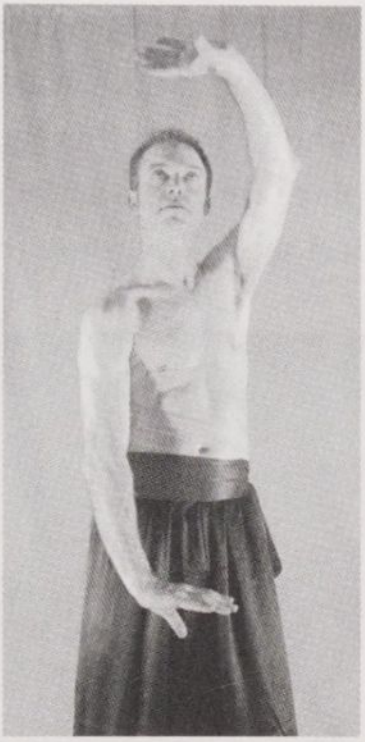


Figure 11.8. Now alternate sides, lifting the left kidney area as you contract and twist the right abdominals.

This is perhaps the most difficult aspect of this training to put down on paper. It really has to be felt and experienced directly. When I teach this technique to my senior students, I have them place their hands on my abdominals and kidney area so they can feel what I'm doing (fig. 11.9).

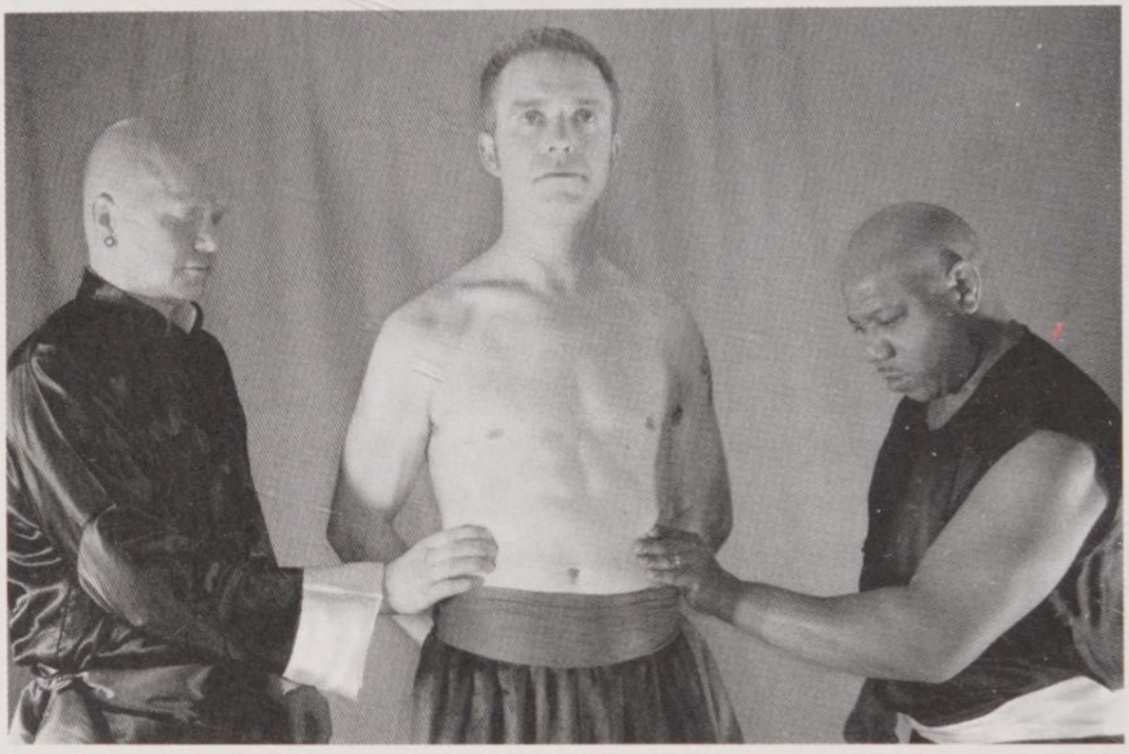


Figure 11.9. Students can better understand this technique if they can feel an experienced instructor perform it.

12

APPLYING THE COILING POWER

This is where we start putting all of these training routines together. In the next series of fundamental exercises you're going to focus on using the principles of engaging, twisting, and core coiling to deliver some basic strikes and thrusts. It may seem a bit overwhelming at first, but with regular practice it'll become second nature. Don't *try* to strike forcefully; that'll come along in good time, and in any case, the type of power that is generated through the action of coiling is different from the power that is usually produced by other percussive martial forms. Chansi-jin generates a form of hydrostatic shock, power that is transmitted through a liquid medium. After all, the human body is mostly water, right?

Now, think back to your high school science class for a moment. What are the two components of force? If you guessed mass and acceleration, you're right! The fundamental ideas behind the exercises that you've been practicing every day are:

- to dramatically increase the amount of bodily mass that is brought into the blow, and
- to maximize the distance over which the striking force travels and accelerates.

The more the "path" over which the striking force travels is condensed (for example, the tighter it is coiled), the more it will accelerate. This is akin to pouring water into a tube. If the tube is coiled around several times and becomes progressively smaller, the acceleration of the liquid will increase. At the last instant, the end of the tube—the nozzle—must open, but only very slightly, so that the water shoots out with great force. The snap or twist of the wrist (or even the ankle) acts as the small nozzle through which the power is directed and permitted to escape. The striking surface is the actual opening itself and should be condensed as much as possible.

Basic Striking and Thrusting Techniques

As you practice these basic striking and thrusting techniques, it is essential that you *engage your entire body* and apply the appropriate *twisting* technique in order to apply tendon power. It is absolutely crucial that you get the twisting and stretching sensation all the way from the hand to the shoulder. However, there must not be any unnecessary tension in the body at all. Keep the armpits open, as if holding a softball under each one. Adhere to the principles of spinal alignment and use proper body action and breathing when you release the twisting sensation and execute your technique.

1. Outside Coil

Perform an outside block movement, and as the hand comes in line with your nose, turn it so that the thumb side points to the front. Bend your wrist as if to touch your fingers to the underside of your forearm, then shoot the palm or fist out to the front in a cutting palm or punch (figs. 12.1–12.4).

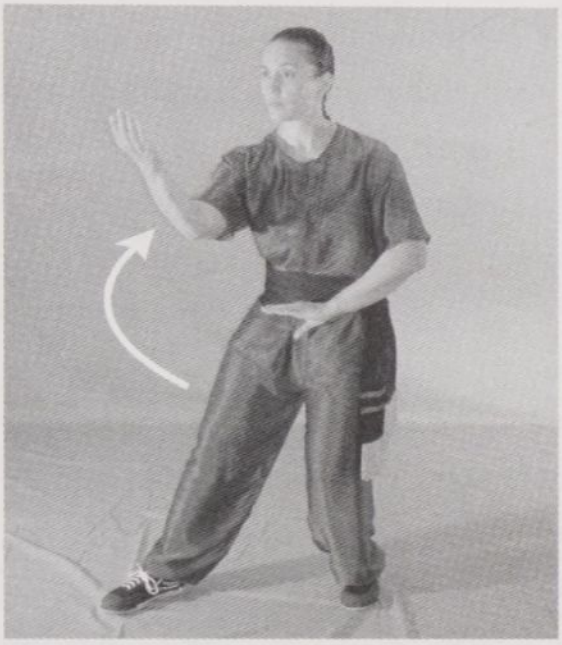


Figure 12.1. Sweep the right arm inward. Turn your waist leftward 45 degrees as you contract and twist the muscles and inner connective tissues of the right abdominals and lift up the tissues of the left kidney area.

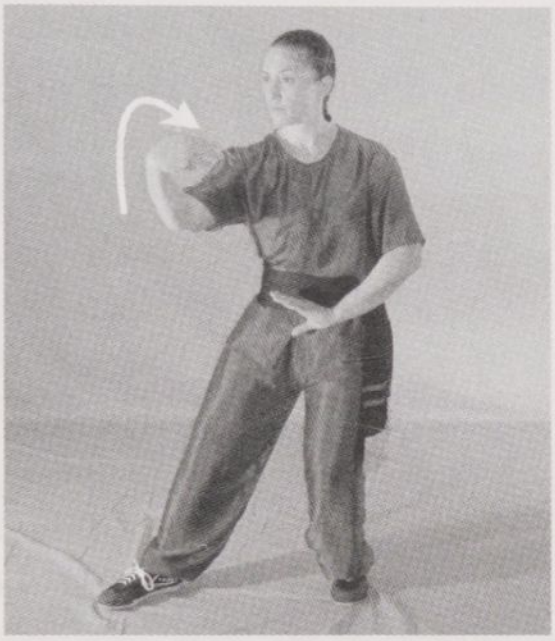


Figure 12.2. Curl your wrist down as you turn to the right. Contract and twist the muscles of the left abdominals and hoist up the tissues of the right kidney area.

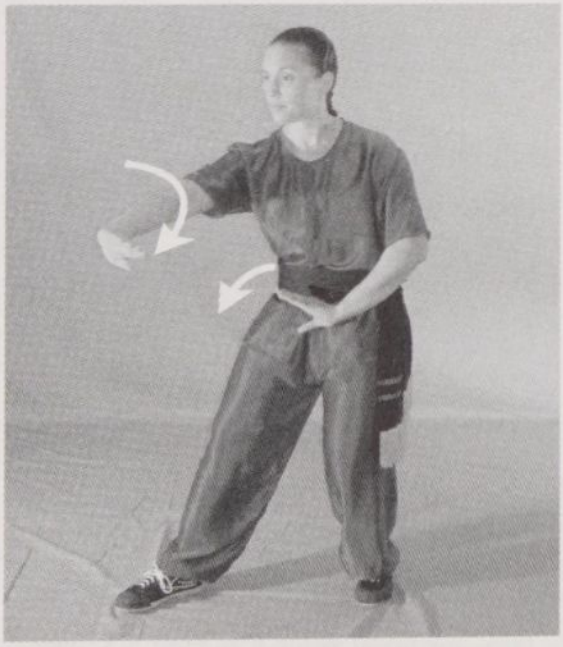


Figure 12.3. Exhale and snap your waist back to the left. Thrust out with the edge of the right palm as you contract and twist the muscles of the right abdominals and lift the left kidney.

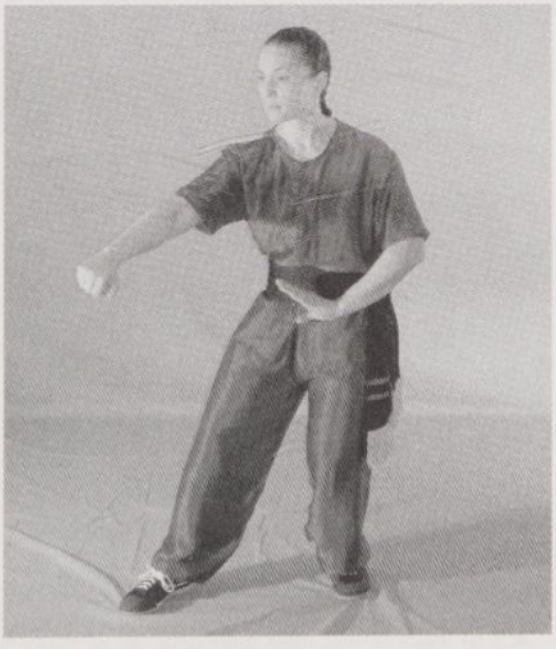


Figure 12.4. You may opt to snap out a punch.

2. Reversed Outside Coil

Begin with the arm out in front of you with the palm turned downward. Turn your hand so that the thumb side is down and keep trying to turn it, as if to rotate it 180 degrees to face upward. At the same time, contract and twist the abdominals of your left side as you lift the area of the right kidney.

Bring the hand in line with the opposite shoulder, moving the arm inward, and draw it within a foot or so of your chin. Then as you turn your waist 45 degrees, twist and contract the muscles of the right abdominals and lift the area of the left kidney. Release the twist to thrust out with a reversed cutting palm (figs. 12.5–12.8).



Figure 12.5. Extend your right arm out in front of you.



Figure 12.6. Turn to the left 45 degrees and turn your hand thumb down as you twist and contract the left abdominals.

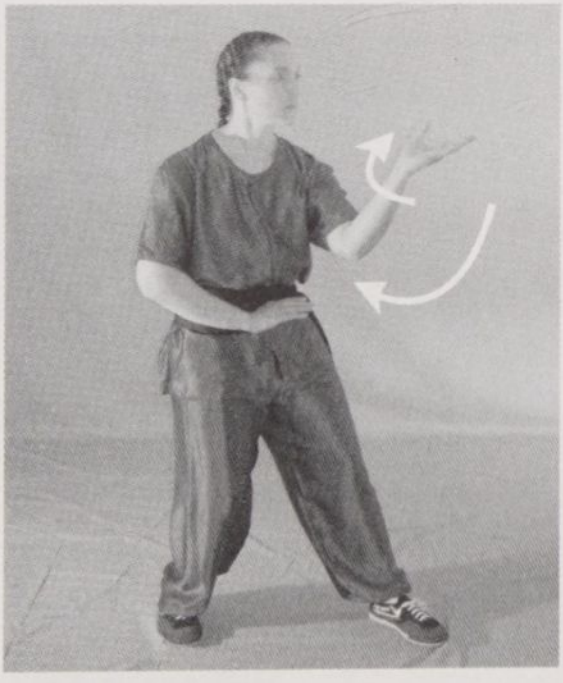


Figure 12.7. Drop your elbow down and bring your hand in line with your chin as you begin to turn your waist rightward.



Figure 12.8. Turn your hips 45 degrees to the right and thrust out with your right palm as shown. The right abdominals will twist and contract as you lift the area of the left kidney.

3. Inside Coil

Turn your waist to the right as you execute a right inside block. Your left abdominals will twist and contract as the muscles of the right kidney area lift upward.

Turn your palm outward as if trying to perform a wrist twist on yourself. You should feel the twisting all the way to your shoulder. Bend your wrist as if to touch your hand to your wrist, and then snap your waist leftward and shoot your hand out in a cutting palm or a punch as you suddenly release the twisting feeling. Your right abdominals will twist and contract, and the muscles of the left kidney area will lift up (figs. 12.9–12.12).

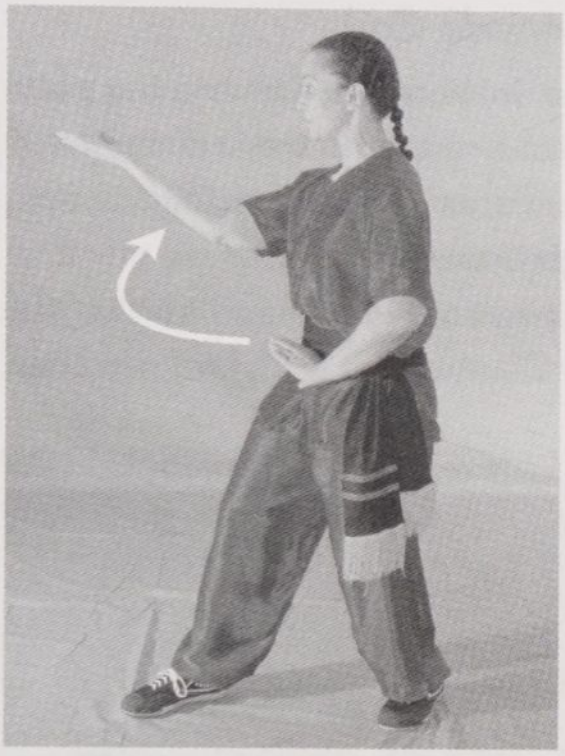


Figure 12.9. Perform a right inside block movement.



Figure 12.10. Coil your hand down toward your wrist.



Figure 12.11. Snap your waist to the left and thrust out with the edge of your palm . . .



Figure 12.12. Or with a fore-fist thrust.

4. Reversed Inside Coil

Start with your arm stretched out in front of you with the palm turned down. Draw a small circle outward with the arm and hand and turn your hand thumb side down, as if you are trying to turn it 180 degrees and twist it far enough to face upward.

Suddenly thrust forward as you snap you hand so that the thumb side is turned up and your elbow snaps straight down (figs. 12.13–12.15).



Figure 12.13. Begin with your arm stretched out in front of you.



Figure 12.14. Wipe outward with the hand turned thumb down. Lift the right kidney as you contract and twist the left abdominals.



Figure 12.15. Suddenly drop your elbow, contract and twist the right abdominals, and lift up the left kidney as you thrust out with a right reversed cutting palm.

5. Downward Coil

Bring your fist or palm, which is turned palm up, from your hip over to your navel as you try to twist it outward and thumb down. Keep your armpit rounded and open.

Bring the hand up your centerline, without letting it touch your body, and then release the twisting sensation and shoot out your hand in a punch or splitting palm (figs. 12.16–12.18).



Figure 12.16. Bring your hand in line with your navel. Lift the right kidney as you contract and twist the left abdominals.

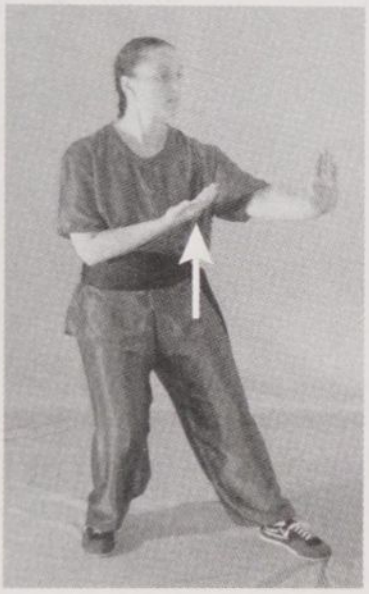


Figure 12.17. Bring the hand up your centerline.



Figure 12.18. Shoot out a splitting palm or punch as you contract and twist the right abdominals and lift up the left kidney.

6. Reversed Downward Coil

Start with your hand, open or in a relaxed fist, out in front of you, palm down. Bring it in toward your navel and try to twist it thumb down.

Bring it up your centerline, not letting it touch your body, and then suddenly release the twisting sensation and strike with a "hammer punch" or a splitting palm (figs. 12.19–12.22).



Figure 12.19. Bring your hand in line with your navel. Lift up the right kidney as you contract and twist the right abdominals.



Figure 12.20. The hand comes up your centerline . . .



Figure 12.21. The hand strikes out in a splitting palm or a "hammer punch" as you snap your elbow down, lift the left kidney, and contract and twist the right abdominals.



Figure 12.22. You may also opt to strike with a splitting palm.

13

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Now let's look at how you will utilize your entire body to generate the power known as "silk-reeling." Most of our work up to this point has been focused on training the upper body, but it's essential that you learn to unite your lower body with your upper body and generate whole-body power.

Increasing the Distance of Acceleration

Consider that the longer the distance over which an object accelerates, the faster it will go, the more momentum it will accumulate, and the more kinetic energy it will acquire. Conversely, the shorter the distance of acceleration, the less momentum and kinetic energy will be generated. Admittedly, this is a gross oversimplification of the principle that I am attempting to illustrate, but it is more than sufficient for our purposes.

If your friend throws a baseball at you from a distance of, say, one foot, the force with which you will be struck is minimal because the baseball thrower's arm couldn't generate much acceleration in the ball; she's too close to the target. On the other hand, if she throws the ball at you from a slightly farther distance, she can get a full range of motion in her arm, thus putting more momentum into the ball at the time it's released. (And you'll end up with one heck of a

concussion!) So if you execute a thrust or a strike and utilize only the motion of your arm and shoulder, the force accelerates for only a short distance (figs. 13.1–13.2).



Figure 13.1. You prepare to punch your partner.



Figure 13.2. Because you make use only of the movement of your arm and shoulder, the thrust is rather weak.

If you rotate your hips, the force is able to accelerate over a longer distance. This considerably increases the amount of kinetic energy that is released at the point of impact (fig. 13.3).



Figure 13.3. If you rotate your hips into the thrust, you will strike with considerably greater power.

Now contract your anal sphincter to unite your upper and lower body and press the sole of your rear foot against the ground as you perform your strike or thrust. The distance over which the force travels will be nearly doubled, adding even more power to the blow (fig. 13.4).



Figure 13.4. By contracting the sphincter and driving the sole of your foot against the ground, you can dramatically increase the power of your technique.

If you "screw" your rear foot into the ground as you execute your technique, the power is made to spiral up the leg, around the waist, up the back, over the shoulder, down the arm, and is released through a final snap or screw of the wrist. This can actually triple the distance over which the force accelerates, adding tremendous impetus to the thrust! See figure 13.5.



Figure 13.5. By screwing the rear foot into the ground, the distance over which the force travels is more than tripled.

Don't Get Hung Up

One of the difficulties that novices experience in learning to applying coiling power is in moving it from the lower body through the upper body without allowing it to slow down or stop momentarily. Interferences such as these will cause a break in the smooth movement of the power, and it will dissipate.

Chansi-jin gets its name from the manner in which silk thread is skillfully drawn from the cocoon of the silkworm. If the thread is drawn evenly and smoothly, the cocoon rotates and the thread will not break. However, if you slow down your pull and then try to speed it up again, or if you stop and try to start again, the thread will break. So the power must spiral up smoothly from the sole of your foot to your hand. This will require considerable practice and cannot be learned quickly. The body parts must be connected like the links in a chain, and they must move in the proper sequence so as to generate maximum power. Each link in this chain of connection and movement must be strengthened because, as the old adage reminds us, *"A chain is only as strong as its weakest link."*

The Feet and Ankles

When I speak of delivering a given technique with your whole body, that's exactly what I mean. This is one of the great secrets to acquiring genuine skill in the internal martial arts. You must do more than simply stand upright or move your waist and wiggle when you perform your techniques. Let's begin by looking at the role of the feet and ankles because this is where your power originates.

The feet should feel as though the yangquan points on the soles of the feet are *suctioned* to the ground. This means that the toes must grip the ground firmly. However, they must not be tensed with too much muscular tension lest the foot, ankle, and even the knee

become too tense. Initially, you must practice this while standing in the static postures, and when that is mastered, move on to practice it while moving. This helps to *connect* your knees, and consequently your legs, to your feet and the ground beneath them. Also, be sure to imagine drawing qi up through the yangquan points to your dantian (figs. 13.6–13.7).

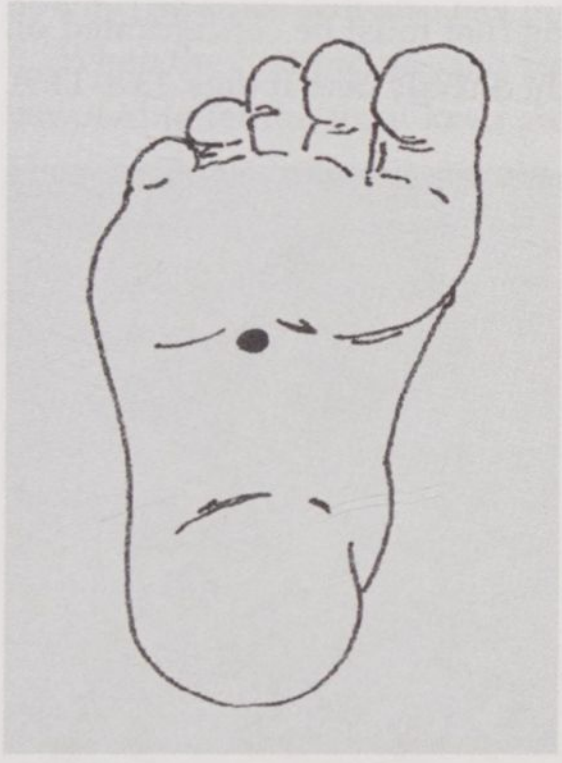


Figure 13.6. The yangquan point.



Figure 13.7. Imagine drawing qi up through the yangquan points to your dantian.

When you deliver a blow, you must feel as though you're trying to thrust your driving foot *through* the floor and into the ground. This creates a reaction force, which moves upward and is transmitted through the striking hand or foot.

Your weight should not sit on the ball of the foot or the heels. It settles in the centers of the soles of the feet at the yangquan points. This is why it is sometimes useful to practice on a slippery surface; you'll find out very quickly if your weight distribution is incorrect.

If the weight is not correctly placed on the feet, the *upward reaction force* will not travel straight up through the legs to the dantian and to the striking surface. Most of it will be dissipated into space.

The angle at which the driving foot presses into the ground is also important. If the angle is incorrect, the power of your blow will be reduced. An easy way to figure this out is to execute the technique on a slippery surface. If the driving foot slips out behind you, the angle is wrong. The supporting foot must be concentrated on suctioning and keeping your weight directly over it (figs. 13.8–13.9).



Figure 13.8. Let the hips and spine sit straight with the weight properly distributed.

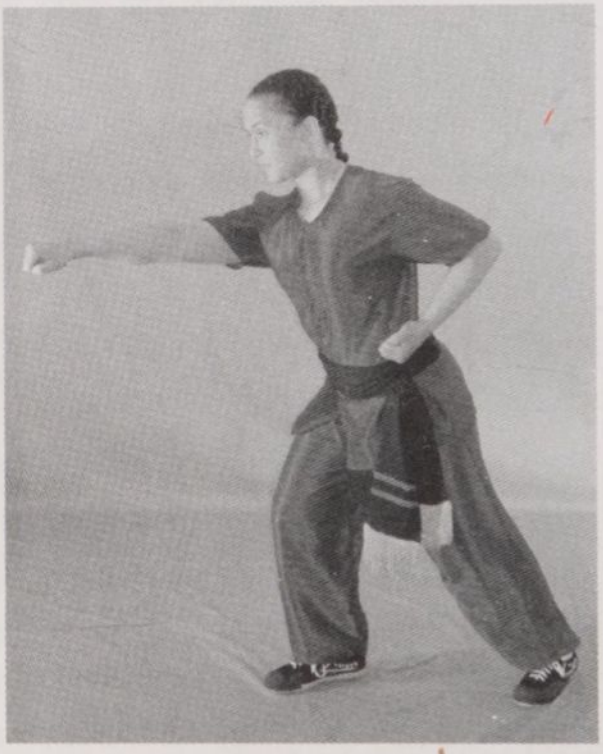


Figure 13.9. If you lean forward, your rear foot will drive back at the wrong angle.

Up through the Legs

Pressing the driving foot into the ground brings the muscles of the legs into play, and in movements involving rotation of the waist, the driving foot should also feel that it is screwing down into the ground. The foot does not actually rotate; the suctioning effect must remain firm, but the foot should *feel* as though it is being screwed down. The ankle will also feel this "screwing down" effect.

When the foot presses and screws into the ground, you may be tempted to let the front knee move. Do not allow this to happen. The front knee must remain absolutely stable. If it wobbles when you execute a technique, it will destabilize your foundation. The rear knee will also feel the screwing effect but it does not move either. Allowing it to move will cause some of your striking force to escape through the rear foot. Also make sure that the driving leg *never straightens out.* The knee must remain slightly flexed. See figure 13.10.



Figure 13.10. Don't allow the front knee to wobble.

It must be remembered that when you deliver an upper-body technique from a short stance, such as sanzai or a pigeon-toe stance, the muscles of the inner thighs must contract inward. This greatly assists in stabilizing your stance, and you will not be shaken by the force of your own blow. This is not done with the longer stances, which use outward tension and are less likely to be destabilized by the reaction force of your technique (fig. 13.11).



Figure 13.11. Contract the adductors when striking from a short stance.

With the driving foot pressing and figuratively screwing into the ground, the buttock of the driving leg will contract. This is as it should be. In fact, you should contract both buttocks as well as the anal sphincter while you roll the coccyx slightly forward and upward.

The inward or outward tension of the thighs and the pressing and screwing feeling of the driving foot are held only for the length of time required for the application of the technique! If they are maintained any longer than that, they will lock you into place, which will severely restrict your ability to move easily and quickly.

To the Waist

The hips, the *gua,* the lower back, and the abdominals play a major role in the execution of effective techniques. There has been much misunderstanding about the use of the hips and waist; many neijia stylists feel that practitioners of the so-called "external" methods, such as karate, emphasize the movements of the hips while the internal Chinese arts rely more on the movement of the waist. The truth is that the Japanese term for the hips includes the part of the body that neijia enthusiasts refer to as the waist; when karate instructors speak of moving the hips, they are actually referring to this larger area rather than just the hip joints themselves.

The waist actually includes several areas, which we will examine in some detail. The first of these is the gua, which is the area of the inguinal crease. It is vitally important in the practice of internal styles because if it is not manipulated correctly, your ability to emit intrinsic energy will be hampered. When you "sit" in a sanzai stance, you should sink straight down into the gua. A simple way to do this is to begin by spreading your feet to the proper length of the stance and then placing your hands on your hips with the forefingers pointed down into the inguinal crease. As you press straight down with your hands and forefingers, you will sit in the gua correctly. This same method of "sitting" is used in the other stances as well (fig. 13.12).

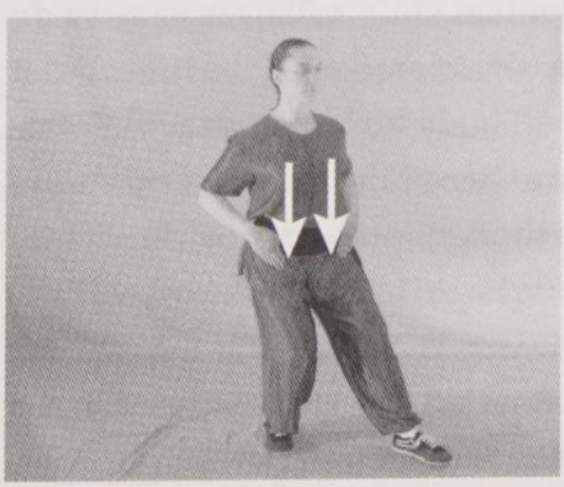


Figure 13.12. Press straight down into the gua with your forefingers.

When you "sit" in the gua, it is said to be closed. The sacrum is tucked somewhat forward to help maintain vertebral alignment. This will create a mild feeling of tension in the lower back. You don't need to try to do this; it will occur by itself. This is the area of the mingmen. It will feel slightly expanded (fig. 13.13).



Figure 13.13. The mingmen.

When you deliver a blow, the gua on that side must *open*—that is, it must push forward. The gua on the opposite side must close

(this is sometimes referred to as "pulled shut"). This is easy to do when applying a technique that involves rotation of the hips, but it is actually used to some degree in all body actions. You will notice a connection between the gluteal muscles of the buttocks and those of the gua. When your foot feels as though it is screwing down into the ground and the glutes on that side begin to contract, you will feel the gua on that side trying to open. This is a good example of how the muscles of the body are interconnected and must be used in the proper manner and sequence to obtain maximum power.

The area of the mingmen must be rounded out and the sacrum tucked under as the coccyx is brought forward and slightly upward as if to touch it to the dantian. This causes a compression of the dantian and assists in maintaining upper and lower body integrity as well as increasing your ability to emit intrinsic energy (fa-jin). See figure 13.14.

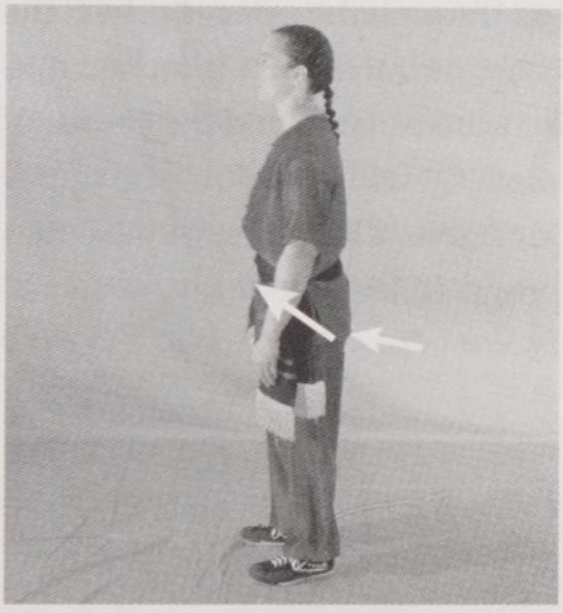


Figure 13.14. Tuck the coccyx in and upward to cause a slight compression in the dantian.

The abdominal muscles are brought into play through reverse breathing. The abdominal muscles are the strongest muscles in the body and must be employed whenever we execute a technique, but they are not tightened as when doing a "crunch" or other such abdominal exercises. Reverse breathing will bring them into the correct condition without you having to *try* to do any more. As you exhale, it is important that you expand not only the abdominal area but also the sides and lower back (the area of the mingmen).

All of this movement concerns the movement of the dantian, which, you will recall, is located inside the lower abdomen, not on the surface of the skin. It is moved around like a ball and can be rotated, rolled forward, backward, sideways, or obliquely. This is done through application of the eight body actions.

The Back, Shoulders, and Chest

The importance of keeping the shoulders naturally dropped, the upper back comfortably rounded, the chest slightly concave, and the cervical and thoracic vertebrae aligned is well known in internal systems such as baguazhang, taijiquan, xingyiquan, and yiliquan. If these points are not followed, the force generated from the soles of the feet cannot be properly expressed through the upper body. If the shoulders are pulled back or raised up, or if the chest is arched out, the muscles of the chest and shoulders are isolated and the power of the lower abdomen cannot be applied. Qi will "float" in the upper body, making you top-heavy and unstable. Therefore, be sure that you hold the upper body correctly (figs. 13.15–13.16).



Figure 13.15. The chest should be slightly concave with the shoulders rounded and the vertebrae aligned.



Figure 13.16. Arching the chest or pulling the shoulders back makes you top-heavy and actually weakens the blow.

The Arms and Hands

The arms should not be excessively tense, but they must be correctly aligned. A line drawn from the hand should pass straight through the elbow joint (which must never be locked straight) to the shoulder, down the back and to the waist, and straight down to the driving leg and foot. If the hand is tensed by squeezing the fist or tightening the muscles of the opened hand, the wrist and forearm will also be tensed, and this cuts the flow of qi to a trickle. It also slows down the technique substantially because tensed muscles don't move quickly. The neijia emphasize that you must never consciously tense the hand; let the impact do it for you. In doing this, the resulting tension is only as much as is required for effective delivery of the technique, and you won't really be aware of much tension at all! See figure 13.17.



Figure 13.17. The elbow should remain slightly flexed, and the hand should not be tensed.

Training Routines for Coiling Power

It is my opinion that chansi-jin produces a peculiar type of power: a form of shock that is known as hydrostatic shock. The term *hydrostatic shock* is something of an oxymoron because the words *static* and *shock* are not consistent. It has been suggested that a more accurate term would be *hydraulic shock,* but I will continue to use the more common term *hydrostatic shock.*

Hydrostatic Shock

Various definitions of hydrostatic shock have been proposed over the years, but the general principle is as follows: As a projectile or force passes through tissue, it creates an impulse of energy against the tissues with which it comes into contact. This impulse and the subsequent tissue displacement can inflict considerable damage to both proximal and remote tissues. Another consideration of proponents of this concept is that the energy impulse causes a sudden spike in the blood pressure due to momentary compression of blood vessels. This sudden rise in the blood pressure is sufficient to cause capillaries in the brain to burst!

So, if you use this kind of power when you strike the heavy bag or a striking post, you're not going to see very dramatic results because neither of those "opponents" contains much moisture. Still, training with the heavy bag and striking post is very beneficial for strengthening the coiling power of your strikes.

The Heavy Bag, Water Bag, and Striking Post

As I mentioned in the previous paragraph, you're not going to see very dramatic results when you practice hitting the heavy bag or the striking post with coiling power. But you need to practice striking against a resistance, and they're ideally suited for providing just that! When you strike the heavy bag, use your yi to direct the energy of the blow straight through the bag (fig. 13.18).



Figure 13.18. Direct your power straight through the bag.

The bag should not swing away from you. Instead, it should "jump" up and down a bit. If it swings away from you, this is an indication that you are *pushing* the bag; your striking force is spreading out over the outer surface of your target.

A heavy bag that contains a water-filled bladder is ideal for practicing this kind of special technique. As with the cotton-filled heavy bag, you must not push the bag. Instead, the skin on the back side of the bag should bulge out.

After you become comfortable striking the water bag, have a partner hug it against the chest or abdomen. Deliver your technique sharply. Your partner will feel the shock pass through the bag and into the body! See figures 13.19–13.20.



Figure 13.19. Make your strike sharp and crisp. Do not push the bag.



Figure 13.20. Your partner will feel the shock pass into his own body!

In using the striking post, direct your energy through the post. With some practice you will discover several different ways of emitting power (fig. 13.21).



Figure 13.21. Strike straight through the post.

14

TRAINING FORM: THREE BECOME ONE

The internal style of yiliquan* utilizes a special training form that provides training in engaging (via the Eight Standing Postures), the Six Twistings, and the six main forms of coiling. This is the first time that this set has been openly presented to the public.

Commencement

1. Face north. Step to the left with your left foot on the toes. Turn your left foot to face forward and settle your weight evenly on your feet.
2. Inhale as your hands rise up level with your chin, palms down. Relax your wrists; your elbows are hanging straight down.
3. Exhale as you bend your knees and lift your fingers so that your palms show forward. Lower your shoulders and swallow your chest so that it is slightly concave.

* Yiliquan (One Principle Boxing) is a hybrid form of internal boxing that my teacher began to develop many years ago. I continued his work and finally succeeded in seamlessly merging the three classical internal systems of taijiquan, xingyiquan, and baguazhang with a form of northern shaolinquan.

4. Perform three Microcosmic Orbit Breaths and engage your whole body (figs. 14.1–14.5).



Figure 14.1. Face south and relax.



Figure 14.2. Step out to the left.



Figure 14.3. Turn your left foot forward and settle onto it.



Figure 14.4. Inhale and lift your arms and hands.



Figure 14.5. Bend your knees and turn your palms forward.

Section One: Engage the Mother Palms

At this point, the remainder of the set is performed with Macrocosmic Orbit Breathing.

Part One

1. Engage with the first inhalation and lower your wrists as shown.
2. Exhale and execute shuzhang (pushing palm). Imagine pushing against a heavy weight.
3. Inhale and turn your palms down.
4. Exhale and execute yangzhang (upward palm). Imagine turning the palms upward against resistance (figs. 14.6–14.9).



Figure 14.6. Inhale and let the hands droop.



Figure 14.7. Exhale slowly and push the palms forward slightly.



Figure 14.8. Inhale and drop the fingers.



Figure 14.9. Exhale and perform yangzhang, like two inside blocks.

Perform this series of movements eight times.

Part Two

1. Inhale and turn your palms down.
2. Exhale and execute paozhang (embracing palm), imagining that you are pushing your arms outward against a resistance.
3. Inhale and bring your palms toward each other as if squeezing a beach ball.
4. Exhale and perform liaozhang (reverse of paozhang), imagining that you are pushing out against a resistance (figs. 14.10–14.13).



Figure 14.10. Inhale and turn your palms downward.



Figure 14.11. Exhale and perform paozhang. Keep your chest slightly concave.



Figure 14.12. Inhale and imagine crushing a beach ball.



Figure 14.13. Turn the hands thumb side down and imagine pushing out against a resistance. Keep the elbows slightly downward.

Perform these postures eight times.

Part Three

1. Inhale and bring your palms toward each other as if squeezing a beach ball.
2. Bring your hands in near the armpits, exhale, and thrust your hands down in tiaozhang (poking palm), imagining a resistance.
3. Raise your hands with the fingers down (thumb sides up) and inhale.
4. Exhale and execute pizhang (splitting palm), imagining chopping down against a resistance (figs. 14.14–14.18).



Figure 14.14. Inhale and squeeze the beach ball.



Figure 14.15. Draw your hands back near the armpits.



Figure 14.16. Thrust your hands straight downward, stretching the fingers downward.



Figure 14.17. Inhale and lift your arms.



Figure 14.18. Exhale and cut down with both hands.

Perform these movements eight times.

Part Four

1. Raise your hands with the palms up and inhale.
2. Exhale and cut out to the sides with fuzhang (downward palm), imagining a resistance.
3. Inhale and bring your palms toward each other as if squeezing a beach ball.
4. Exhale and execute loshuanzhang (twisted palm), imagining a resistance (figs. 14.19–14.22).



Figure 14.19. Lift your hands with the palms turned upward.



Figure 14.20. Exhale and cut out to the sides as if striking with sword-hands.



Figure 14.21. Inhale and squeeze the beach ball.



Figure 14.22. Exhale and raise your arms with the palms twisted outward as shown.

Execute these movements eight times.

Section Two: The Six Twistings

Part One

1. Inhale and bring your hands back to the palm-down position.
2. Slide your left foot back slightly and turn to the east in a left four-six stance as you exhale.
3. Inhale as you twist your left palm, arm, and shoulder in a reverse outside coil.
4. Release the twist and exhale. Then inhale and twist your hand, arm, and shoulder into an outside coil (figs. 14.23–14.28).



Figure 14.23. Inhale and turn your palms down.



Figure 14.24. Slide your left foot back a half step.



Figure 14.25. Turn into a left sanzhai stance and exhale.



Figure 14.26. Inhale and twist your left hand and arm in a reverse outside coil.



Figure 14.27. Release the twist and exhale.



Figure 14.28. Inhale and twist your arm into an outside coil.

Repeat numbers 3 and 4 nine times.

Part Two

1. Exhale and bring your left hand and arm back to the posture of santi. Inhale and twist your left hand, arm, and shoulder in a downward coil.
2. Exhale and bring your hand up in a palm-down position, and inhale as you twist the hand, arm, and shoulder into a reverse inside coil (figs. 14–29–14.32).



Figure 14.29. Exhale and return to santi.



Figure 14.30. Inhale as you twist your arm and hand into a downward coil.

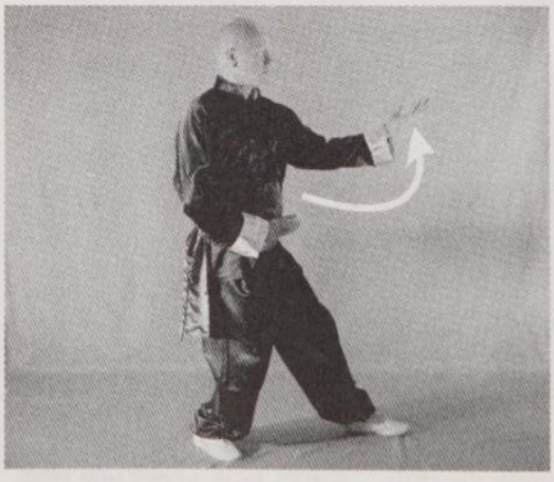


Figure 14.31. Exhale and bring the hand into a palm-up position.



Figure 14.32. Inhale and twist the arm and hand into a reverse inside coil.

Repeat these movements nine times.

Part Three

1. Exhale and bring your hand back to the front in a palm-down position. Then inhale as you twist your hand, arm, and shoulder in an inside coil.
2. Exhale as you release the twist. Inhale and twist your hand, arm, and shoulder in a reverse downward coil (figs. 14.33–14.36).

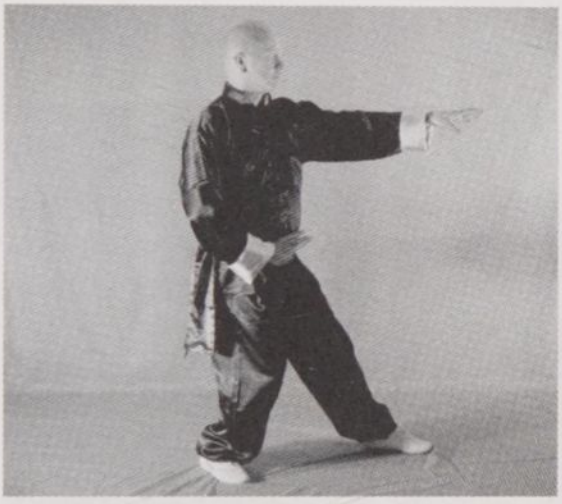


Figure 14.33. Exhale and bring your hand back to a palm-down position.



Figure 14.34. Inhale and twist your hand and arm in an inside coil.



Figure 14.35. Exhale and release the twist.



Figure 14.36. Inhale and perform a reverse downward coil.

Repeat these movements nine times.

3. Turn to face south and bring your left foot back to its original position (fig. 14.37).



Figure 14.37. Turn to face south again.

Repeat this series to the west, using your right hand with your right foot advanced.

Section Three: Internal "Core" Coils

Bear in mind that the term *abdominal tissues* refers not only to the tissues of the frontal abdomen but also those of the sides and back.

1. Exhale as you turn back to the south and bring your right foot back to its original position. Your palms are turned downward and your arms are extended to the front as in the beginning of the set.
2. Draw your hands to your hips with the palms down and inhale.
3. Exhale and contract the internal abdominal tissues of the left side while lifting those of the right side. When contraction is complete, relax and inhale. Repeat this nine times.

4. Exhale and contract the internal abdominal tissues of the right side while lifting those of the left side. When contraction is complete, relax and inhale. Repeat this nine times.
5. Exhale and coil the internal abdominal tissues clockwise. When one revolution is complete, stop and inhale. Repeat this nine times.
6. Coil the internal abdominal tissues counterclockwise. Stop and inhale at the end of each revolution. Repeat this for nine revolutions (figs. 14.38–14.43).

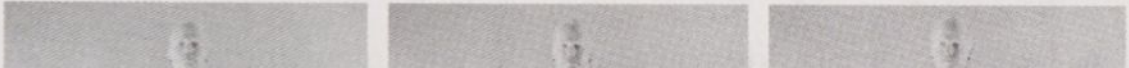




Figure 14.38. Turn back to face south.



Figure 14.39. Bring your palms to your hips.



Figure 14.40. Exhale as you contract the internal abdominal tissues of the left side and lift those of the right side. Then relax. Perform nine times.



Figure 14.41. Contract the internal abdominal tissues of the right side and lift those of the left. Relax, and repeat eight more times.



Figure 14.42. Exhale as you start coiling the internal abdominal tissues clockwise. Be sure to stop the coiling when you inhale.



Figure 14.43. Exhale and coil the internal abdominal tissues counterclockwise.

Section Four: The Six Coils

1. Slide your left foot back slightly and turn to the east. Extend the hands in santi.
2. Execute a left reverse outside coil and strike with a reversed cutting palm.
3. Execute a left outside coil and strike with a cutting palm.
4. Execute a left downward coil and strike with a splitting palm.
5. Execute a left reverse inside coil and strike with a reversed cutting palm.
6. Execute a left inside coil and strike with a cutting palm.
7. Execute a left reverse downward coil and strike with a hammer punch.
8. Turn to the south and draw your palms downward to your hips as you inhale.
9. Slide your right foot back slightly and turn to the west, extending the hands in santi as you exhale (figs. 14.44–14.62).



Figure 14.44. Slide your left foot back a half step . . .



Figure 14.45. Turn to the east in santi.



Figure 14.46. Perform a left reverse outside coil . . .



Figure 14.47. And quickly strike with a cutting palm thrust.



Figure 14.48. Execute a left outside coil.



Figure 14.49. Curl the wrist down . . .



Figure 14.50. And thrust out with a cutting palm.



Figure 14.51. Scoop the left hand into a downward coil.



Figure 14.52. Strike with a splitting palm.



Figure 14.53. Turn the arm over to do a reverse inside coil.



Figure 14.54. Snap out a reversed cutting palm thrust.



Figure 14.55. Perform a left inside coil.



Figure 14.56. Curl the wrist down . . .



Figure 14.57. And thrust out with a cutting palm.



Figure 14.58. Scoop your hand down to a reverse downward coil . . .



Figure 14.59. Snap your elbow down as you perform a left hammer punch.



Figure 14.60. Turn to the south and draw your hands to your hips as shown.



Figure 14.61. Slide your right foot back a half step.



Figure 14.62. Turn to the west in santi.

Repeat numbers 2 through 7 with your right hand. Perform each coil and strike three times.

Conclusion

1. Inhale and draw your palms down to your hips as you turn to face north and put your right foot back in its original position.
2. Exhale and press your palms down as you straighten your legs.
3. Bring your left foot to your right foot. Relax and gather qi at the dantian (figs. 14.63–14.65).



Figure 14.63. Turn to the north, draw your palms back to your hips, and place your right foot back in its original position.



Figure 14.64. Exhale and press the palms down as you straighten your knees.



Figure 14.65. Bring your left foot up beside your right foot.

15

COMBATIVE APPLICATIONS

Once each of the coils has been thoroughly learned, you must practice to combine them with body shifting and footwork so that they can be applied combatively. The methods of practice described here are by no means complete. They are primarily intended to give the advanced neijia practitioner a place to start an investigation of the subject.

I will divide this training into three parts: deflecting and striking, delivering two strikes with alternating hands, and delivering two strikes with the same hand.

Blocking and Striking with the Same Hand

Blocking and striking with the same hand is the first method of application that is taught because it is the easiest to perform. You need only concern yourself with coiling one arm as you use it for deflecting an opponent's attack. It is essential that you are fully engaged as you execute your body movements and counterattack. Beginners who are new to this form of training often forget to engage (which, you'll recall, is also known as acquiring peng-jin) because they are too focused on coiling. Remember that without peng-jin, your coil is empty! It may look outwardly powerful, but it lands like a handful of feathers.

Outside Coil Applications

Only the right side is described, but you must master these movements on both sides.

1. Pivot Step

Execute a very small right outside blocking action as the left foot moves to the right rear quarter in a *flying step*. The right arm begins the coiling action as it also executes the block. Your left hand can come to the outside of your opponent's arm to catch it in a sword-hand block. Perform a cutting palm or punch instantly. You can advance the right foot a small step if you want when you strike. The smaller the movement, the better (figs. 15.1–15.3).



Figure 15.1. Deflect the opponent's attack. Your blocking arm is already coiling.



Figure 15.2. Release the coil as you strike with a cutting palm.



Figure 15.3. You can also deliver a thrust with your fist.

2. Retreat-Advance Step

Withdraw the front foot (you may opt to shift back your entire fighting stance, or shift your upper body backward slightly) as you perform a small outside block. Your right arm is beginning the coil as it blocks your opponent's attack. The left hand can come to the outside of the opponent's arm to catch it in a sword-hand block. Release your coil and advance as you strike the opponent (figs. 15.4–15.5).



Figure 15.4. When your opponent attacks, move back and deflect it.



Figure 15.5. Release the coil and strike your opponent as you move forward.

3. Backward Lateral Step

As the right foot steps to the right rear quarter in a backward lateral step, block with the right arm (making a small movement) and catch the opponent's arm with your left sword-hand. Immediately advance and strike him as you release the coil (figs. 15.6–15.7).



Figure 15.6. Retreat by stepping to the right rear quarter with your right foot.



Figure 15.7. Immediately advance to release the coil and strike!

Reversed Outside Coil Applications

1. Pivot Step

As your opponent attacks, pivot on your left foot, bringing your right foot over to the left rear quarter, and deflect the blow as shown. The left arm begins the coil as you execute the deflection. Advance your left foot as you release the coil and execute a powerful thrust (figs. 15.8–15.9).



Figure 15.8. Pivot and deflect the attack with your left arm.



Figure 15.9. Release the coiling power as you advance and deliver your counterattack.

Inside Coil Applications

1. Backward Lateral Step

Step back with your right foot as you deflect the attack with your left arm. Then advance your front foot as you release the coil and drive a thrust into your opponent (figs. 15.10–15.11).



Figure 15.10. Step back to your right rear quarter as you deflect the attack.



Figure 15.11. Release the coil as you advance and counterattack.

2. Retreat-Advance Step

Move backward to join with the opponent's incoming force as you deflect the attack. Then shift forward to release the coil (figs. 15.12–15.13).



Figure 15.12. Match your opponent's rhythm as you deflect the attack and coil your left arm.



Figure 15.13. Release the coil and strike as you advance.

Reversed Inside Coil Applications

1. Backward Lateral Step

Step back with your right foot to your right rear quarter and deflect the blow with your left hand and arm. Advance as you release the coil and counter with a thrust (figs. 15.14–15.15).



Figure 15.14. Retreat laterally and deflect the attack.



Figure 15.15. Advance and counterattack immediately.

Downward Coil Applications

1. Retreat-Advance Step

Retreat as your opponent attacks and deflect the attack with your right forearm. Seize your opponent's wrist with your left hand as you advance and strike with a splitting palm (figs. 15.16–15.17).



Figure 15.16. Retreat and deflect the opponent's attack.



Figure 15.17. Immediately drive forward and release your coil to strike with a splitting palm.

Reversed Downward Coil Applications

1. Pivot Step

Pivot backward on your left foot and deflect your opponent's thrust with your left arm. Seize your opponent's wrist with your right hand as you advance and strike with your left hand (figs. 15.18–15.19).



Figure 15.18. Pivot and deflect the attack.



Figure 15.19. Advance immediately as you release your coil and strike your opponent.

Delivering Two Blows with Alternating Hands

In this phase, you'll train to deflect your opponent's attack with one hand or arm while simultaneously coiling and then delivering two coiled blows. Again, I must emphasize that it is absolutely essential that you fully engage your body as you begin to move (or even before you begin to move). As in the previous training phase, it is also crucial that your movements *do not stop* at any point prior to delivery of your strike! Any pause in your movements, no matter how slight, will result in loss of the coiling power. From start to finish, your movements must be smooth and unbroken.

The Double Tap

Pay attention to the movement of your hips as you perform these combinations.

1. When your opponent attacks, draw back your front foot to a short empty-leg stance and deflect the thrust with a left outside block. Turn your waist leftward as you execute a right sword-hand block and your left arm makes an *outside coil.* Advance to a forward stance to counterattack with a left cutting palm. At the same time, your right arm begins a *reversed inside coil.* Rotate your right hip forward and deliver a right drilling punch as your left fist draws back to your waist (figs. 15.20–15.23).



Figure 15.20. Draw your front foot back and deflect your partner's punch with an outside block.



Figure 15.21. Turn your waist to the left and execute a right sword-hand block. Your left arm is making an *outside coil.*



Figure 15.22. As you advance and strike with a cutting palm, your right arm begins a *reverse inside coil.*



Figure 15.23. Immediately strike with a right drilling fist.

2. Draw your front foot back to a short empty-leg stance and deflect your opponent's thrust with your left palm. At the same time, draw back your right arm in a *reversed inside coil.* Quickly advance and strike with a right drilling fist. Your left fist will draw down in a *reversed downward coil.* Immediately fire out a left punch. This is done in the manner of striking with a hammer (I refer to it as a "hammer punch"). See figures 15.24–15.26.



Figure 15.24. Draw back your front foot and deflect your opponent's attack with your left palm as your right arm performs a *reversed inside coil.*



Figure 15.25. Advance and counterattack with a right drilling fist as your left arm performs a *reversed downward coil.*



Figure 15.26. Quickly release the coil and strike with your hammer punch.

3. Pivot backward on your left foot as you deflect your opponent's attack with a left outside block. As your left arm makes an *outside coil,* sweep your right arm back in a *reversed inside coil.* Quickly advance and drive your left punch into your opponent's flank. This is immediately followed with a right reversed cutting palm (figs. 15.27–15.29).



Figure 15.27. Step back with your left foot as you block the attack with your coiled left arm.



Figure 15.28. Advance and release the left arm coil to execute a corkscrew punch.



Figure 15.29. Immediately follow up with a right reversed cutting palm.

Delivering Two Blows with the Same Hand

This is considered an advanced skill. You must be able to coil, release the coil completely, and then immediately "recoil" using the same arm and without stopping your motion. Initially your movements will be fairly large, but as your body becomes more accustomed to these peculiar techniques, your movements will become quite small. A practitioner who possesses high skill with this technique can deliver two blows very quickly and with devastating force, yet the movements are so small that many people cannot see them very clearly. My teacher as well as his teacher, Zhang Zhaodong (also known as Zhang Zhaokui), possessed such remarkable skill.

Rapid-Fire Coils

It is essential that you move your hips properly with the delivery of each blow, and although that might seem easy enough to do, it will require some considerable practice. Begin slowly and deliberately. Speed will come of its own accord.

1. Pivot backward on your left foot as you deflect your opponent's attack with a left wing block. This movement initiates a downward coil. Seize your opponent's wrist as you release the coil to strike with a splitting palm. Immediately perform an outside coil with your left hand, advance, and strike with a left corkscrew punch (figs. 15.30–15.33).

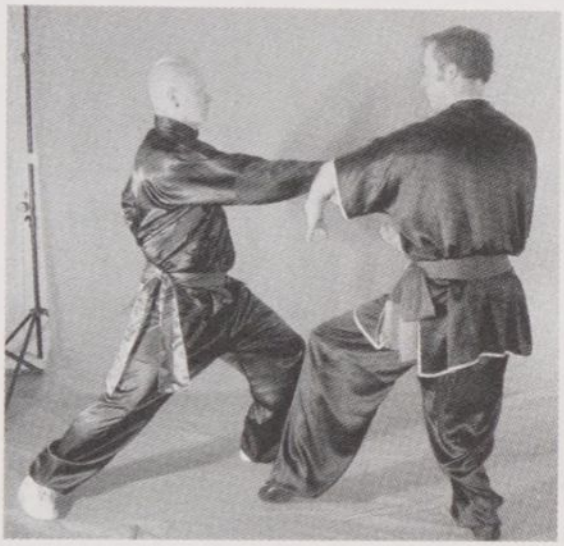


Figure 15.30. Use a pivot step to evade your opponent's attack as you "make a bridge" with your opponent's body through your wing block.



Figure 15.31. Seize your opponent's wrist as you release the downward coil and strike with a left splitting palm.



Figure 15.32. Perform a left outside coil . . .



Figure 15.33. Then advance and perform a left corkscrew punch.

2. When your opponent attacks, draw back your left foot and deflect the thrust with a left palm sweep. Your right arm will contact your opponent's arm with an inside coil. Release the right-arm coil and deliver a corkscrew punch with your right hand. Quickly perform a right reversed downward coil and immediately release it to strike with a hammer punch (figs. 15.34–15.38).



Figure 15.34. Draw your front foot back and deflect your opponent's attack with your leading palm.



Figure 15.35. Attach your right arm to your opponent's arm as you perform an inside coil.



Figure 15.36. Release the coil to drive in a powerful corkscrew punch.



Figure 15.37. Perform a reversed downward coil . . .



Figure 15.38. And release the power with a hammer punch.

3. As your opponent attacks, draw back to an empty-leg stance and deflect the thrust with a left outside coil. Your right hand seizes your opponent's wrist as you step back with your left foot and release the coil to strike with a left corkscrew punch. As your right foot steps back beside your left foot, perform a left reversed inside coil. Then advance your left foot to a forward stance as you release the coil to execute a left reversed cutting palm (figs. 15.39–15.43).



Figure 15.39. Shift into an empty-leg stance and deflect the attack with a left outside coil.



Figure 15.40. Seize your opponent's wrist with your right hand . . .



Figure 15.41. Step back with your left foot and deliver a left corkscrew punch as you release the coil.



Figure 15.42. Perform a quick left reversed inside coil as your right foot steps back beside your left foot . . .



Figure 15.43. Quickly advance your left foot and strike with a reversed cutting palm.

Of course, there are many, many other possible combinations, but this handful should be enough to put you on the path to discovering many more. Take your time, begin slowly, and focus on the correct feeling. You can see that real coiling power is not to be found in large, overt, fancy movements. Instead, it is small and very explosive.

Conclusion

Well, there you have it: a thorough introduction to the real art of chansi-jin. You now have the tools with which to build a strong foundation. It's up to you to use them. I know that some of you are wondering whether I'll get around to writing more books about how to use this special jin in the forms of xingyiquan, baguazhang, and taijiquan. The answer is yes—that's my intention. I deliberately did not include that information and training in this text because it would make this book so large that you'd need a wheelbarrow to carry it around. Besides, you must first train individual techniques. You must master all of the principles I've presented in this book. Only then will you be ready to apply them to your forms.

The art of coiling power cannot be learned piecemeal, nor can it be acquired if your training is haphazard. You must follow the training outline presented in this book and practice every day. There is simply no other way.

About the Author



PHILLIP STARR began studying martial arts in 1956, including judo, Kyokushin karate, Shito-ryu karate, Baixingquan (a form of Northern Shaolin kung fu), baguazhang, taijiquan, xingyiquan, and Filipino arnis. In 1976 he won the United States Karate Association's Grand Championships, becoming the first kung-fu stylist to win the title of National Champion. He is also a two-time winner of the Amateur Athletic Union's Chinese Martial Arts National Tournament. He has authored four books on the martial arts: *The Making of A Butterfly, Martial Mechanics, Martial Maneuvers,* and *Hidden Hands,* as well as numerous articles for various magazines and e-magazines, including *Inside Kung Fu* and *Truwaza.* Starr lives in Liuzhou City, Guangxi, China.

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