

Rock, Paper, Scissors

“Rock, Paper, Scissors” is a childhood game that graphically demonstrates how certain powers or movements control and defeat others. There is a martial art that takes this game and uses it as a blueprint for the understanding of the creative and destructive forces of the universe, the health and balance of the five organ systems of the body, and as a fighting system to boot.

XINGYI'S GAME TO MASTERY

BY LEWIS PALEIAS

Xingyiquan (literally mind/form or shape/will boxing) is one of the oldest and best known of the Chinese internal martial arts. It is the art of imposing your will on your opponent by using five shapes or phases of energy to conquer his own. Since the late southern Song dynasty nearly 1,000 years ago, xingyiquan has been the basic training for new recruits of the Chinese army. Whether or not Marshal Yue Fei (A.D. 1103-1142), the great Chinese hero and Defender of the Realm, actually created this art is still being debated. He did, however, pass down many treatises on this art and codified its training program so a new soldier had to only learn five fist patterns, which is something he could do in a fairly short time.

These same five energy patterns also adapted



When you're playing
for real, there may
be no better style
than xingyi.

**MUTUAL CONQUEST
EXERCISE.**

Execute a left pi (1), which is melted by a right pao (2), which is hosed by a left zuan (3), which is dammed by a right heng (4), which is demolished by a left beng (5), and which is chopped down by a right pi (6).

5

6



Rock, Paper, Scissors

“Xingyi’s power is like a rattan staff: soft at the beginning, yet hard at the instant of striking.”

themselves to universal weapon techniques, which gave the soldier the ability to simply use whatever weapon was at hand — sword, saber or spear. In consideration of the weight of armor and weapons, all extraneous movements were eliminated and the footwork pared down to the half-stepping necessary to get in and out of fighting range.

Internal? Not Exactly

Although xingyiquan is classified as an internal style, its theory and principles are different from those of other internal styles, such as taijiquan and baguazhang. Taiji uses defense as an offense, sticking, following and emphasizing power that is

soft as a whip, but strong and penetrating. Baguazhang emphasizes circular movements combined with constant stepping and the power of a coiled spring that can explode in any direction.

Xingyi uses offense as a defense. Its power is like a rattan staff: soft at the beginning, yet hard at the instant of striking. Almost all the art’s footwork is based on one primary stance called “san ti shih” or three-body posture. This triangular 40/60 stance exposes little to your opponent, yet is an excellent posture for bracing or receiving force. Explosive power (fajing) is released either when stepping with the front or back leg, and then bouncing the force from the ground into the opponent. The main secret of xingyi is that mind and body, hand and foot, the entire body acts like one unit and arrives together like a Mack truck.

There are only five basic patterns of movement for expressing jing. These five movements, elements, or phases are the foundation of the entire art, and all the various techniques and fighting strategies are derived from them. From learning and understanding these five fundamental movements you then progress to understanding how they work together for production and conquest. Practice using your mind and imagination. Visualizing the energy of fire exploding upward like a cannon ball or the battering ram of wood crashing through helps manifest the jing. The five fists are:

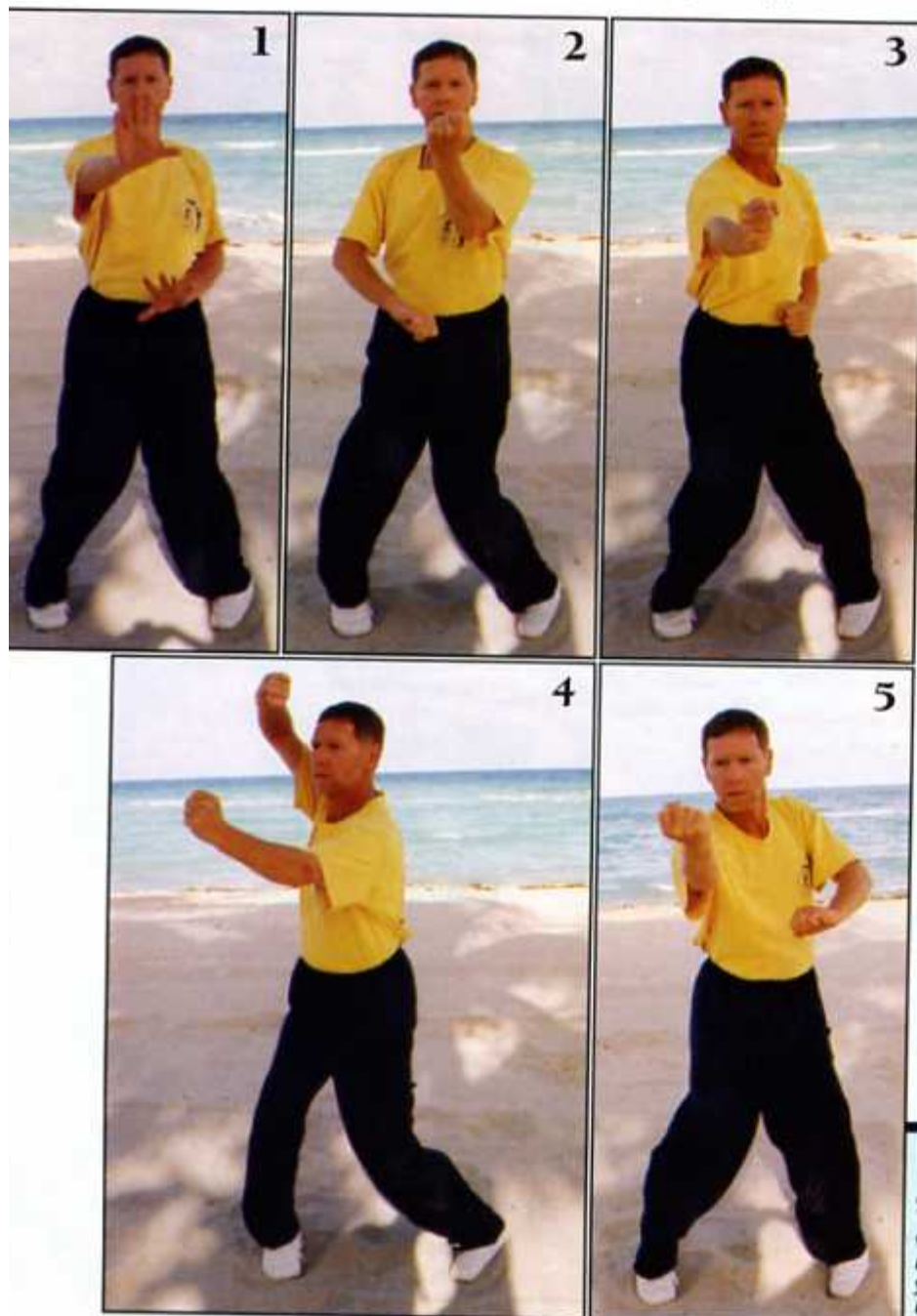
Pi Chuan (Splitting) — A downward axing movement. It belongs to metal and relates to the lung. Metal produces water and conquers wood.

Zuan Quan (Drilling) — A forward punch that rotates like a drill. It belongs to water and relates to the kidneys. Water produces wood and conquers fire.

Beng Quan (Crushing) — Uses the forward punching and withdrawing of the fists like battering rams. Its element is wood and it relates to the liver. It produces fire and controls earth.

Pao Quan (Bursting) — A rising block with an uppercut. It belongs to fire and relates to the heart. It can produce earth and conquer metal.

Heng Quan (Crossing) — This balances a sideways strike with an opposing action. It belongs to earth and relates to the



MUTUAL GROWTH EXERCISE.

From a horse stance, execute a right pi (1). Twist the right down as you drill a left zuan (2), which pulls back as you smash forward with a right beng (3). This turns into a rising block as you deliver a left pao (4), which hooks back to balance your right sideways heng (5).

spleen. It produces metal and controls water.

Watching a master perform these fists is an essential part of training. Though it has been many years since I've seen him, I can keenly visualize my xingyi master, Liang Shou Yu, performing these awe-inspiring energies. "The key is to catch my flavor, and the flavor of each movement!" he told me. Once tasted, they are hard to forget.

One of the most important aspects of these five fists or five phases is their relationship, which is based on the theory of mutual production (sheng cycle) and conquest (ke cycle) of the five phases. This theory is one of the basic tenets in the *Yi Jing* (Book of Changes). When these relationships are applied to health, we have the entire basis of traditional Chinese medicine. In fact, each xingyi movement is designed for strengthening the five important yin organs: heart, lungs, kidneys, liver and spleen. Holding each fist posture benefits its corresponding organ system. Put these mutual production relationships into xingyi's fighting strategy and you can see that pi (metal) can flow into zuan (water), which nourishes beng (wood), which produces pao (fire), that can be followed by heng (earth).

The theory of mutual conquest establishes the relationships of defense in the five fists. Pi can conquer beng, just as an ax can destroy wood. Beng can upset heng, heng defeats zuan, zuan can overcome pao and pao can melt pi. Through these relationships, the five movements can be skillfully combined to make an effective and simple-to-learn fighting style.

Now for practice. Traditionally, the xingyi student performs countless line drills, repeating each element individually; forward, backward, zig-zagging, half-stepping, full stepping, jump stepping, and hitting on the front and back foot until the elements become second nature. Only then are you ready for the cycles.

The Sheng Cycle

Start from a horse stance and later progress to stepping. Perform a right pi (metal). The right then grabs down and back as you drill the left zuan (water), which then pulls back with a simultaneous right

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CONQUEST & GROWTH 2-PERSON EXERCISE.

White punches forward with a left beng (1). Yellow intercepts with his left and chops downward with a right pi (2). White uplifts with his left while firing a right pao (3). Yellow deflects it downward while drilling a right zuan (4) at white's face. White checks it with his left while sideways striking yellow's side with a right heng (5). Yellow defeats earth by withdrawing his right fist (6) and smashing forward with his left beng (7). White circles around it with his left and answers with a chopping right pi (8).



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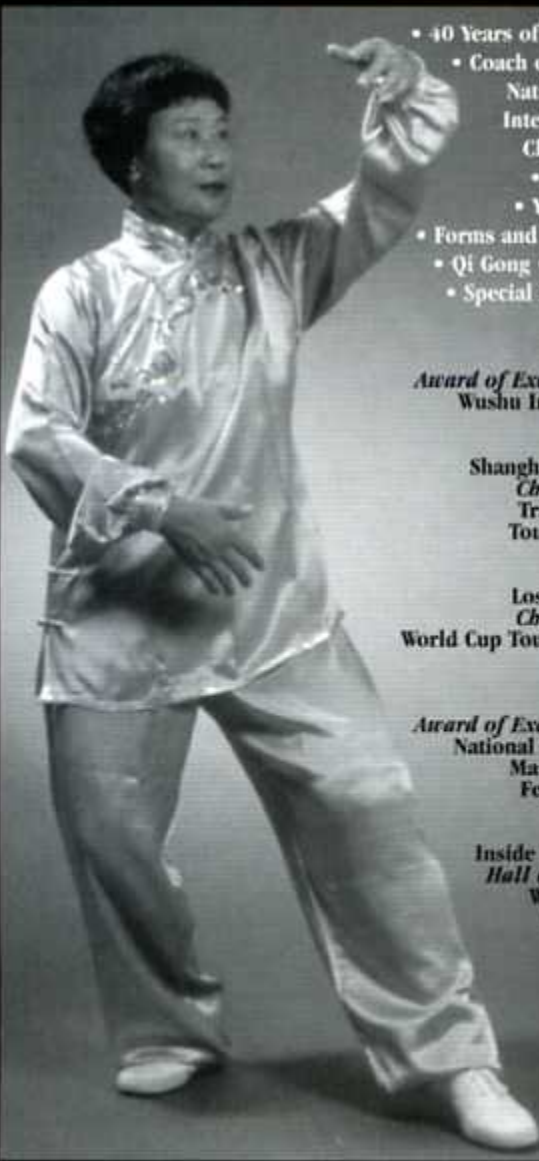


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Xingyi

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beng (wood), which transforms into a left pao (fire), which hooks and splits into a right sideways heng (earth). The left pi naturally chops out and you then perform the opposite side.

The Ke Cycle

Perform this linkage in two ways: left pi (metal) rises into right pao (fire), conquered by a left zuan (water), which is dammed by the right heng (earth), which explodes into a left beng (wood). Chopping with a right pi starts the opposite side.

Second exercise: Perform a left pi, which exchanges with a right beng, which transforms into a left heng, which becomes a right zuan, exploding into a left pao and finishing with a right pi. Now do the other side.

If the five fists are a small alphabet, then these different linkages act as grammar. All we need now is a partner and we can maintain a meaningful dialogue through our hands.

Conquest & Growth Partner Exercise

Now for the fun. Start slowly and gradually increase your speed. Work from stationary positions before graduating to movement. Don't attempt the opposite side until you have perfected one side first.

White punches forward with a left beng (wood). Yellow deflects with his left hand and chops down with a right pi (metal). White counters by swinging his left arm upward and delivering a right pao (fire). Yellow seals it down with his left hand while drilling a right zuan (water) to white's face. White stops it with his left hand while punching sideways with a right heng (earth). Yellow pulls back his right fist to deflect the attack while battering his left beng (wood) forward. White circles the punch away with his left hand and executes pi (metal) with his right. Now keep it moving. Flow seamlessly, one fist blending into the other. When you can flow as smoothly as in tai chi pushing hands, then you can start adding footwork. To change over to the opposite side, just execute a right-hand beng after your partner blocks your left beng with his pi. This will make him chop with a left pi and, presto! You're on the other side.

Although xingyiquan has only five basic movements, their variations and applications are unlimited. My teacher, Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming, used to say it was like dancing the waltz, which has only three steps but hundreds of variations. Learning this art is a lot easier today. Though not as common as taiji, xingyi is slowly becoming more popular as the number of teachers who offer this wonderful art increases. There are also quite a few books and videos available. The book I recommend is *Xingyiquan — Theory, Applications, Fighting Tactics and Spirit* by Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming and master Liang Shou Yu. It is my personal favorite, not only because it is a complete repository of the art, but also because it has compiled all the poetry, songs, treatises and letters that the masters of old used to transmit the deep, essential truths of this profound art of simplicity.

So, which art is the best? Well, the beauty of xingyi is that it strikes first. The beauty of taiji is that it doesn't. And bagua, like old man river, just keeps rollin' along. How about a game of "Knucks?" ☯

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