

THE FIVE-ANIMAL BOXING OF SHAO-LIN

(Boxing of Dragon, Tiger, Leopard, Snake and Crane)

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The Five-Animal Boxing of Shao-Lin is the boxing of imitation of the movements of dragon, tiger, leopard, snake and crane. It is said that, inspired by HUA To's "Five Animal Exercise" (physical exercise in imitation of the movements of tiger, deer, bear, ape and bird) in the Period of the Three Kingdoms (220-280), PAI Yu-feng, the great boxing master of the Shao-lin School in the Yen Dynasty (1206-1368), invented his five-animal boxing (i.e., boxing of dragon, tiger, leopard, snake and crane) by integrating the movements of the five animals with Shao-lin boxing. PAI Yu-feng once remarked, "the five elements in one's body, i.e., energy [or ching, the fundamental substance which maintains the functioning of the body; essence of life], strength, breath [or ch'i or qi], bones and spirit [or shen, mind] must be tempered alternatively through exercises before one can feel like a celestial being." Thus it is said that the Five-Animal Boxing, the dragon boxing is intended to build up one's spirit, the tiger boxing one's bones, the leopard boxing one's strength, the snake one's breath and the crane boxing one's energy or ching.

(1) The dragon boxing to build up one's spirit (or mind): when practicing, there is no need to put forth strength on any part of the body. Listen quietly to the breath filling into tan-tien and enlivening the whole body, with both arms calm and steady, and the five elements [or five internal organs, i.e., heart, liver, spleen, lungs, and kidneys] corresponding to one another, like a celestial dragon flying in the sky, sweeping majestically in a mysterious way.

(2) The tiger boxing to build up one's bones: when practicing, you should build up the breath throughout the body, with the arms and waist solid, and arm pit strength exuberant. You should also keep this breath through the whole process, with every one of your movements

powerful and majestic, your eyes glaring and the top of the head [possibly a misprint of "neck"] hardened, looking like an angry tiger pouncing out from the forest, as if pushing the mountains aside with its front paws.

(3) The leopard boxing to build up one's strength: the leopard is not as majestic-looking as the tiger, but has mightier strength. As it loves jumping, its waist and kidneys are by no means weaker than the tiger's. When practicing, the basic position is the short [or low] "horse-riding step," and you should put forth strength on every part of the body, your fists clenched, your fingers and thumbs as hard as metals. There is a lot of fist-clenching position in the leopard boxing. It is also called "gold leopard boxing."

(4) The snake boxing to build up breath: the breath should be controlled mainly in a serene, lithe way, as snake's breath that goes rhythmically through every one of its chine bones. In controlling the breath, keep your body lithe, your arms and waist nimble, and use your forefinger and middle finger to indicate the rhythm of the snake-like movements of your body.

(5) The crane boxing to build up energy (or ching): it is better to practice at a moderate speed. PAI Yu-feng said, "The crane's ching is in its feet and its spirit (or shen) at its serenity." To follow this method, you should stabilize ching and shen, relax your arms to do the breathing exercise, thus your shen and will are at ease and your mind and hands cease to bother each other.