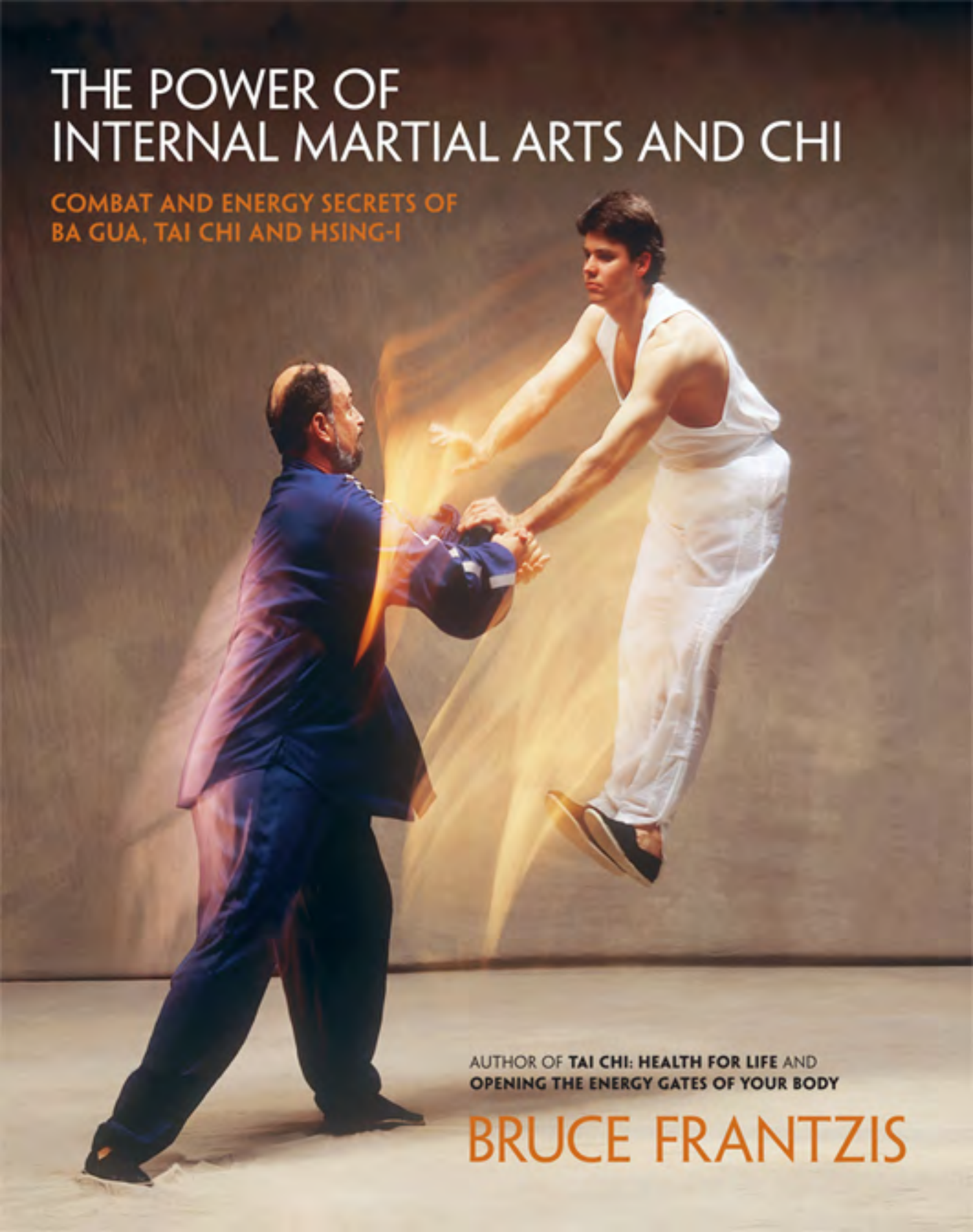
THE POWER OF INTERNAL MARTIAL ARTS AND CHI

COMBAT AND ENERGY SECRETS OF BA GUA, TAI CHI AND HSING-I



AUTHOR OF **TAI CHI: HEALTH FOR LIFE** AND **OPENING THE ENERGY GATES OF YOUR BODY**

BRUCE FRANTZIS

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Courtesy of Caroline Frantzis

Liu Hung Chieh demonstrates the Five Element fighting application of hsing-i's Drilling Fist, punching to the head of the author.

Hsing-I

5

Fighting Considerations and Applications

HSING-I CHUAN AS A MARTIAL ART

Like tai chi, hsing-i is a hybrid internal martial art. It exists in the middle ground between the psychological attitudes and emotional disposition of the Shaolin martial arts and internal power chi methods of the Taoists.

The name *hsing-i chuan* is composed of three terms:

1. *Chuan* (see p. 122), which translates as "fist." The word pertains to everything concerned with defeating a human being in physical combat.
2. *Hsing,* which means "the form of something." Everything that manifests, at the level of either energy or matter has in one way or another a form, a shape, a cohesion, a configuration—the form of a cup, the form of a thought, the forms of different species of animals. More specifically, hsing indicates the form or shape the body will take during a martial posture assumed for hitting, throwing, or controlling an opponent.
3. *I*, specifically in the phrase hsing-i, refers to the ability of the mind to create an idea and project it into the body, creating a functional physical form, that is, a way of moving, a fighting strategy, a fighting posture, or a kind of power.

The term *hsing-i*, then, can be looked at from two perspectives. First, it is whatever form that the mind—"I"—directs. If the mind imagines a concept, the body automatically molds and creates a bodily movement and form that pragmatically implements the idea. Second, by way of a computer analogy, the form (the hardware) can run varieties of ideas (software), and so there is a need to know and develop all the ideas that a form is capable of delivering.

Hsing-I Is an Excellent Bridge from the External Martial Arts to the Internal

Hsing-i's practitioners are military in approach—marching in straight lines, with a powerful emphasis at the end of every technique on mentally or physically taking an enemy down. In this sense, hsing-i is similar to most punch-and-kick martial arts. The obvious external attributes of punching and striking are inherent to the way hsing-i is practiced. For many external martial artists not satisfied with the slow-motion form practice of tai chi, hsing-i done at normal speed fits the bill.

Moreover, hidden within the apparently linear techniques of hsing-i is a significant amount of very small, almost unseen, complete circles that are normally lacking in external martial arts. In many ways, hsing-i is a kind of sophisticated internal karate. Rather than using muscular tension or anger for power, hsing-i focuses instead on utilizing relaxation, chi, and stillness of mind to accomplish the pragmatic martial goal of winning in a violent confrontation. Hsing-i possesses either the same or similar primary goals as other more external fighting arts, such as karate or boxing, but includes the chi work, health aspects, and ability to be martially effective into old age that most of the external martial arts lack.

The internal techniques of hsing-i can be as subtle and virtually invisible as those of ba gua or tai chi. However, hsing-i does not focus on the yin (soft), but rather on the yang (hard) internal energies of the tactics of repositioning, finding an effective fighting angle, and utilizing formidable internal power. Hsing-i's technique does not feel soft, but can appear so at touch due to its extreme flexibility and rapid ability to change from tactic to tactic. A majority of all the internal work in tai chi and hsing-i is exactly the same. The differences reside mainly in the fact that tai chi essentially seeks to fuse hard and soft energy, whereas hsing-i seeks only to maximize hard energy. The terms "hard" and "soft" do not refer to muscles at all but to the quality of the internal energy. Both arts require soft and relaxed muscles and never use muscular contractions.

The physical technique of hsing-i is based completely on efficient use of the nei gung internal power system; hence, it is internal. Because of this, it, too, is capable of making the weak strong and the sick healthy. However, its primary mental set is still the aggressive one of Shaolin, karate, or boxing.

The perspective of hsing-i is, as mentioned, militaristic: define the mission, do whatever it takes to win, preferably with minimal damage, but without qualms about inflicting whatever degree of pain or damage the situation calls for. Like many military personnel, hsing-i practitioners are often proud of their combat prowess. The stories about past hsing-i masters often tell of them simply brushing their opponents lightly yet leaving huge swellings and contusions on the body. Like tai chi and ba gua, hsing-i has the ability to deliver fa jin without inflicting pain, injury, or

severe shocks to the central nervous system of the recipient. However, unlike tai chi and ba gua, hsing-i tends not to use its gentler side.

The vast majority of hsing-i schools emphasize the culturally defined "macho" attitude: Solve the problem in the shortest most direct way to gain the victory. Physically, this attitude translates into: get in position, attack, and take the opponent out with the least amount of wasted energy. This approach is rather different from that of the vast majority of tai chi schools, which encourage the yin attitude of yielding and cooperating to win, without hurting anybody, if humanly possible.

Historical Origin of Hsing-I

Legend has it that hsing-i was originally created by Yue Fei, whom many consider to have been China's best general. It is often conjectured in China that, if China's emperor had not become jealous of Yue Fei's military prowess and popularity, and ordered him to commit suicide, Yue Fei would have stopped the Mongol invasion dead in its tracks. The story is that Yue Fei invented two martial arts for his troops to use in battle. For his enlisted men, he created eagle-claw boxing, and for his officers he invented the more powerful hsing-i, based upon spear technique, which accounts for the linear appearance of hsing-i's movements.

There are many accounts concerning the history of hsing-i that are important to prospective students of the art in that they record the numerous hsing-i lineages. The closer the hsing-i teachings are to the original lineage material, the better they are for the student. Unlike practitioners of tai chi and, to a lesser extent ba gua, the stronger hsing-i people did not and still do not attempt to teach their methods purely for health. Unlike ba gua, hsing-i is not beautiful to watch. Given hsing-i's lack of aesthetics, its poor public relations concerning health benefits, and its strong no-frills martial orientation, it tends to attract a smaller number of adherents than other martial arts. No more than a skeletal history is provided here, one that focuses on the value of the art for practitioners going into the twenty-first century—that is, the value for health and healing, stress reduction, self-defense, and general balance in a breathless technological society.

After Yue Fei, the lineage moves through a variety of people. Usually one finds protracted stories about how the next heir is forced by the previous lineage holder to cultivate tremendous patience and resolve by undergoing severe hardships and tests of moral character. Only after the prospective lineage heir endured these tests would the current lineage holder agree to first give small parcels of knowledge and, eventually, the full teachings, allowing the heir to acquire the whole system of knowledge, and thereby the capacity to pass it on.

(Text continues on page 178.)

A PERSONAL ODYSSEY THROUGH THE MARTIAL ARTS

Northern Praying Mantis

The basic on-guard stance of Praying Mantis boxing resembles the manner in which the insect itself hold its forelegs when it is stationary. I learned Praying Mantis to find the answer to why so many martial artists in China frequently said, "Praying Mantis is most afraid of hsing-i." Then, too, I wanted to attempt to find out out what, if any, reality lay behind the story of the "death touch" (**dim mak** in Cantonese; **dian xue** in standard Chinese), which is often sensationalized in martial arts magazines. Praying Mantis, both in its Northern and Southern schools, was supposed to specialize in this technique. I subsequently found that much of the magazine writing about this subject was exaggerated.

DIM MAK
The art of hitting acupuncture points to cause harm or death.

DIAN XUE
Mandarin for dim mak.

Although the Northern and Southern schools of Praying Mantis are radically different in both appearance and technique, many in the West confuse the two. Southern Mantis focuses on close-in fighting; Northern Mantis on mid- and long-distance fighting. What the two schools share in common (besides an extremely aggressive nature) is the ability to execute fast, multiple strikes with deadly accuracy to an opponent's vital points.

Southern Mantis is a Canton province short-arm method, where the arms are kept close to the body. It focuses intently on arm-touching, hitting practices in the manner of Wing Chun and stresses breath work and being able to separately use and control the internal opening and closing movements of each and every joint in the body. There is a lot of chi gung work within Southern Mantis forms. Consequently, it is a true external/internal martial art. In this respect, it is related in technique to the Cantonese styles of White Eyebrow and Wu Mei. Most of its strikes are delivered close-in from a very short distance. It uses minimal kicks, mostly front kicks, usually only to below the waist.

Northern Mantis is another story. It is a Shandong province long-distance fighting style, with long, extended postures and a varied arsenal of long-range hand, forearm, and kicking techniques, generally done to, but not above, the neck. Northern Mantis is primarily an external martial art, without a well-developed chi gung method. It does, though, have highly developed touching practices, but does not place as great an emphasis on them as does Southern Mantis. Northern Praying Mantis has many styles. Many Northern Mantis practitioners would agree that Seven

A PERSONAL ODYSSEY THROUGH THE MARTIAL ARTS

Northern Praying Mantis, continued

Star is its most unsophisticated branch and Six Combination Praying Mantis its most sophisticated and effective branch. I learned three methods of Northern Praying Mantis: first Half-Step, then Seven Star, and finally Six Combinations.

My Half-Step teacher was over eighty, a solidly built man who emanated an immense sense of dignity. He preferred to use power hits rather than pinpoint strikes, and his forearm blows and hammer fists landed like lead pipes during applications.

True to the Northern Mantis style, he enjoyed using the staple technique of employing a pincerlike grabbing mantis hand to first pluck an attacking man's incoming fist out of the air, then break the attacker's balance using the opposite forearm, and finish the job with a counterstrike by the original grabbing hand. Part of breaking the attacker's balance involved first smashing the radial nerve in his forearm, which induced terrible pain that prevented him bracing against the next attack. This teacher loved using foot-stamps in conjunction with grabbing an arm, taking a half-step forward, hitting, and shocking his attacker to within an inch of his life. Mantis, more than most forms of Shaolin, uses foot-stamping techniques that drive the stamper's chi into the ground, from where the natural energetic bounceback generates enormous power in the subsequent strike of the Mantis expert. Simultaneously to the chi going into the ground, a shock wave is created that penetrates an opponent's body. Another specialty of Northern Mantis is **shao twei,** a type of leg cut, ankle sweep, or kick directly aimed at several nerve-sensitive spots on the calf or the Achilles tendon, which it attempts to snap.

SHAO TWEI
A Northern Praying Mantis leg cut, ankle sweep, or kick targeting the calf or Achilles tendon.

The teacher who introduced me to Seven Star Praying Mantis was a short, wiry man in his fifties. A former sergeant in the army, he spoke Mandarin with such a thick Shandong accent, I was never quite sure what he was saying. Students of his told me that this instructor was well known in the heavy drinking areas of Taipei for using his skill in several challenge matches that took place after he came with the army to Taiwan from the Mainland. The stories had it that his tried and true technique was successful against men much larger and stronger than he. From six feet away from his challenger, he would do a flying kick to chest or head. As his feet were coming down, he would attack with multiple hand strikes, and when his opponent would try to protect himself, he would find that his

A PERSONAL ODYSSEY THROUGH THE MARTIAL ARTS

Northern Praying Mantis, continued

arms were trapped midair. Upon landing, the Seven Star teacher would throw his opponent down with shao twei and reverse feet, which left him poised to kick the thrown man either in the head, groin, or knees.

My Six Combination Mantis teacher specialized in strikes to sensitive spots in the body using fingers as well as cutting hands and palms. He was a muscular fifty-year-old with extremely long arms, whose tendons and muscles stood out when he flexed his forearms. He normally refused to teach anyone, and only taught me to repay a debt he felt he owed to a third party. As a man of means, all training took place privately within his large-walled courtyard. His teaching centered on fighting applications through sparring. He played rough as a matter of course, constantly accelerating speed, power, and ferocity during sparring to deliberately force his student to climb to the next level of martial competence. As his student, you absolutely had to progress in order to work out how to physically deal with him. If you didn't put up a defense with zest, he would really sting your sensitive points, such as the throat or the bones just behind the ear.

If you could not perform to standard (which was hard to do when fingers were continuously coming at your eyes and the most vulnerable parts of your throat, neck, and head), you would be thrown down hard with shao twei, left to contemplate whatever point had been driven home.

A phrase used to describe Northern Praying Mantis is, "Mantis hands and monkey feet." In the main, Mantis tactically focuses on skipping, jumping, and half-steps to close in on an opponent from mid- or long-range fighting distances. Mantis especially favors skipping steps where the back foot appears to be kicking the front foot into movement.

Northern Praying Mantis has, in fact, several distinguishing characteristics. It uses the elbow tip, which remains fixed in space like a multi-angle fulcrum around which the forearm rotates and the fingertips strike vital points on the body. From a starting position, where your forearm is vertical and its beak-hand fingers are directly in front of you, the Mantis fingers strike downward toward the inside of your body at any point on an arc of 180 degrees or more, and to the outside of your body up to 45 degrees. At each place, the Mantis fingers can deliver a full power strike to a vital point. Within a second, the beak hand can then change targets and hit with multiple finger strikes at radically different angles along a 225-degree-plus axis.

Fast and multi-angle snapping wrist movements that create all kinds

A PERSONAL ODYSSEY THROUGH THE MARTIAL ARTS

Northern Praying Mantis, continued

of knuckle strikes are also a speciality of Northern Mantis. Ba gua actually has a greater range of techniques, but rather than the strikes being linear and choppy like Mantis, they are done with very smooth circular and spiraling wrist movements that look like a moving gyroscope, where each several degrees of rotation creates a new hand weapon. Due to the emphasis in Praying Mantis on striking vital points, extreme speed and precision of strikes is usually valued over power. The power of Praying Mantis is derived from the forearm and its ability to suddenly grab and pull an opponent with significant shocking force. The style emphasizes extreme speed in changing from one hand strike to another. During one continuous attack, a Mantis person, using a different snapping hand technique each time, may strike five or six times, each from a completely different angle—high, low, or on opposite sides of the body.

The multiple strike aspect of Mantis was especially useful for honing my internal martial arts defensive techniques. There are ba gua methods that produce even faster and more varied continuous attacks than those of Mantis. Mantis, however, reinforced my perceived need to be able to defensively perform fluid multidirectional combinations when on the other side of a spectacularly aggressive and overwhelming attack. Knowing the internal logic of Mantis and its fighting perspective when dealing with multiple attacks made me appreciate the need to add layers to my internal martial arts defensive capabilities that I might otherwise have neglected.

It ultimately turned out that the reason Mantis most fears hsing-i is twofold. First of all, hsing-i's sunken and always dropped power elbows are able, at the critical change points between techniques, to simply nullify the less powerful elbows of Mantis. Secondly, especially during a multiple lightning attack, the constant forward motion of hsing-i takes away the gaps in awareness and physical motion which a Mantis player expects and needs to find in an opponent in order to locate a hole through which to get first and subsequent successful hits.

At the end of the day, given the fighting techniques involved, it is easy to see why, like the praying mantis insect itself that uses its legs to rip its prey apart, the martial arts style of Praying Mantis is legendary for its viciousness.

Modern hsing-i emerged from northwestern China in the nineteenth century. It began with an individual called Li Luo Neng (also known as Li Neng Ran), who successfully learned hsing-i not as a youth, but in middle age. Ultimately, Li persuaded his teacher Dai Long Bang to fully impart his knowledge by having Dai's mother plead his case. Many of the earlier hsing-i martial artists were illiterate people whose whole education was in how to acquire internal power normally beyond the reach of the most educated class. Hsing-i people often ran convoy agencies, which, in the era before firearms, provided protection from assassination as well as physical security against bandits out to steal shipments of valuable goods.

Li Luo Neng is a mythic source figure with many students. From this source, three clear schools of practicing hsing-i evolved over time. These schools are discussed in the sections that follow.

THREE MAIN SCHOOLS OF HSING-I

The Shanxi School

After hsing-i moved from the legendary Yue Fei in the medieval Song Dynasty to Li Luo Neng in the nineteenth century, it underwent several changes, as Li's martial art descendants mixed the original hsing-i with other internal practices to create two new styles.

The original school is often called the Shanxi school because that is where Li Luo Neng taught his students. In Beijing, although many schools identified themselves as teaching a Shanxi style (because it was the original method), in reality they were closer to the Hebei style (see following section). Titles do not necessarily indicate a reality.

In the original Shanxi* style there was an equal emphasis on the Five Elements and the Animal Forms. Besides doing the single movements in lines, Original Shanxi had short forms or katas, such as **lien huan** (linking form), **ba shr** (eight forms) for the Five Elements, and **tsa jr chuei** (mixed or complicated fists) for the Animal Forms, which combined the individual line movements. Sometimes a single Animal Form would also have a short form that was designed to physically implement the single Animal Form's basic principles and mind intent. Originally, there were twelve Animal Forms. Today, some systems do not practice all twelve, some practicing fewer than ten.

LIEN HUAN
One of the forms of hsing-i, based on the Five Elements.

BA SHR
One of the forms of hsing-i based on the Five Elements.

TSA JR CHUEI
One of the forms of hsing-i based on the Twelve Animal Forms.

In the West, the relevance of whether a hsing-i school is of Shanxi origin usually does not help the student understand what the school actually does. In the original school, hsing-i was learned in three clear progressive stages: San Ti, then the Five Elements and their combined forms,

**Editor's note*: The author studied the Shanxi methods of hsing-i from Liu Hung Chieh for three years in Beijing.

then the twelve animals and their forms. As the original hsing-i students spread out from Shanxi province, other schools were founded and called by the names of the provinces where they had established themselves. The two most common provinces were Hebei and Honan. In Honan province, a Muslim style of hsing-i is said to have flourished. The practitioner who brought it there was a follower of the Muslim religion. The Hebei school often did not remain pure hsing-i, but commingled with ba gua.

The Hebei School

Many of the top students of Li Luo Neng ended up coming to Hebei province, especially to Beijing and its nearby port city of Tianjin. During this same period, the ba gua school was also in ascendancy, and the two schools trained with each other.

There are many accurate stories about the relationship between ba gua and hsing-i. One common myth that has been recounted in many books in English is definitely inaccurate. It concerns an alleged fight between the founder of ba gua, Tung Hai Chuan, and the famous hsing-i master, Guo Yun Shen, and how as a result of this epic battle the hsing-i and ba gua people came together for a mutual exchange of knowledge. This story is a good legend, but nothing more.*

In reality, the ba gua people and the hsing-i people were always friendly. As a matter of fact, at the turn of the century, there was a house in Tianjin where seven hsing-i and ba gua martial artists lived together as friends, including Li Tsung I, who was a top hsing-i man, Cheng Ting Hua, one of Tung's Big Four (see p. 309), and Chang Chao Tung, another top hsing-i/ba gua man. They were all dedicated to the martial arts and were all teachers. Rather than opposing each other, these two camps cooperated in their martial arts training. As a result of this interaction, the hsing-i people always wanted to learn ba gua, since they were consistently beaten when practicing with their ba gua friends. The ba gua people were open-minded and enjoyed learning hsing-i, but their interest in hsing-i did not match the interest the hsing-i people had in learning ba gua. However, the ba gua teachers saw that it might be useful for their beginning students to first get a solid grounding in internal power from a more linear, yet clearly internal method. Then they could start learning the more complex Circle-Walking methodology, which requires a more sophisticated mental process. It is as a result of this friendship, especially that between ba gua's Cheng Ting Hua and hsing-i's Li Tsung I, and not because of any mythical epic battle, that the trend for hsing-i and ba gua mixing originally began and continued on.

**Editor's note:* The author researched the accuracy of the stories concerning the relationship of hsing-i and ba gua. All his research done in Beijing indicated that Guo Yun Shen and Tung Hai Chuan had virtually no contact with each other.

There are ba gua schools where the techniques are done like hsing-i, and there are hsing-i schools in which the techniques are done in the manner of ba gua. One of many examples would be the hsing-i taught in the Tianjin school that mixed the teachings of Li Tsung I and Cheng Ting Hua, which through Chang Chun Feng came to Taiwan and to Hung I Hsiang. Its forms have the movements of classical hsing-i, but much of its methodology actually contains the basic internal body principles and techniques of ba gua, which are quite different from those of classical hsing-i. Conversely, many people practice ba gua's circular movements with the mind, energy, and internal mechanics of hsing-i. One example of this is the Sun Lu Tang method.

HEBEI HSING-I
One of the main branches of hsing-i; a newer style that is heavily influenced by ba gua.

As the hsing-i and ba gua groups commingled, the new hsing-i method that was created often became called the **Hebei** school. In this strongly ba gua-influenced hsing-i school, the predominant influence and emphasis was on the Five Elements, with the Animal Forms being of secondary importance. In general, if teachers do ba gua as well as hsing-i, they will often focus their hsing-i teachings on the Five Elements. This tendency occurs because teaching students to obtain a solid foundation of internal power through the five elements is easier than to teach them through the basic ba gua Circle-Walking. However, once the student has some internal power, the Circle-Walking techniques of ba gua develop martial adaptability and the capacity to use sophisticated fighting angles in students much better than do the Animal Forms of hsing-i. Consequently, teachers put their energy into teaching ba gua rather than the hsing-i Animal Forms. When the Hebei school does teach Animal Forms, the internal content tends to be more similar to ba gua than hsing-i. They may use some of the external movements of the hsing-i system, or entirely different movements that use the hsing-i nomenclature, but are not the classical movements.

In the Western World, the greatest number of hsing-i schools belong to the Hebei method, although such schools may not be conscious of the origin of their material.

The I Chuan School

BENG CHUAN/ CRUSHING FIST
One of the five basic techniques of hsing-i chuan.

NEI JIA
A term used to describe all the internal martial arts or Taoist chi practices as being one family.

The I Chuan* is another mixed school. One of the finest students of Li Luo Neng, founder of the Shanxi school, was a man named Guo Yun Shen, who had the "legendary" battle with ba gua's founder, Tung Hai Chuan. Famous for his half-step **Beng Chuan**, Guo produced two students who became important in the development of hsing-i. The first was Sun Lu Tang, who created a tai chi style that fused hsing-i, tai chi, and ba gua together. He widely spread the idea that all three were of one internal family, called the **nei jia.** As an adult, Sun learned the complete Shanxi

**Editor's note:* The author studied I Chuan during his undergraduate days in Tokyo with Kenichi Sawai, who called it Taiki-Ken, and later in Hong Kong with Han Hsing Yuan.

hsing-i system directly from Guo. Sun's martial descendants render the purest exposition of Guo's art.

The I Chuan branch of hsing-i was founded by Guo's student, Wang Hsiang Zai, who was Guo's last disciple when he was old. Wang only learned from Guo when he was a teenager. Later, Wang mixed Guo's hsing-i with Western boxing, Buddhist chi gung, and ba gua foot movement techniques he learned later in life to create I Chuan, or mind intention boxing. When he was older, his style was also called *da cheng chuan*, or Great Achievement Boxing.

I Chuan focuses strongly on San Ti (see p. 190). Practitioners often do the form for decades, frequently devoting half or more of every practice to San Ti. This is quite different from the Shansi and Hebei schools where, after the first few years, San Ti is only held for minutes at a time, between lines or at the end of forms. Moreover, the I Chuan school also does San Ti differently from the other schools. Here, Pi Chuan (see p. 187) is replaced by eight standing postures, at heights ranging from above the head to lower tantien level. The most well-known one is called Holding a Ball, or the Universal Post. The footwork of the standing postures is also different, and is of two types. The first is done in a modified horse stance with the feet parallel, and the second is done in a cat stance, which is completely back weighted, with the ball of the weightless foot on the ground, heel raised.

The Five Element practices of I Chuan emphasize an open centerline, where the hands are spread apart but the intention is always on the centerline. In contrast, the other schools emphasize closed centerlines, where the arms or hands are physically held in front of the centerline. I Chuan's Five-Element practices utilize hourglass-like walking with regular steps (such as are seen in karate and southern Chinese martial arts), which are not used in the Shansi or Hebei schools. I Chuan in general emphasizes regular steps rather than half-steps. Whereas the other hsing-i styles condense many large ideas into tiny components of the physical movements of the Five Elements and animal styles, the I Chuan school makes each minicomponent into a separate external movement.

In I Chuan, the emphasis on holding the standing postures is to develop fa jin. I Chuan's primary two-person training exercise is a form of touch training, where the arms of both partners move in circles, similar in concept but not with the same techniques as ba gua's Rou Shou (see p. 235) or tai chi's Circling Hands (see p.159). Each partner attempts to: (a) apply fa jin, discharge force, and uproot the other from arm contact alone; (b) completely trap the other's arms so there cannot be any resistance to being hit; (c) hit the other; (d) use arm contact alone to throw the other to the ground without using hip or shoulder throws. After this, the partners practice sparring, sometimes with boxing gloves.

(Text continues on page 185.)

A PERSONAL ODYSSEY THROUGH THE MARTIAL ARTS

The Hsing-I of Kenichi Sawai called Taiki-Ken

A member of the Shibuya tai chi school introduced me to Kenichi Sawai's hsing-i group, who were fanatics about developing chi through standing practices (see p. 86). Sawai had studied for ten years in China with Wang Hsiang Zai, founder of the I Chuan school of hsing-i.

At the time I was introduced to Kenichi Sawai's class, it was primarily oriented toward a love of fighting rather than health and fitness. Many of the students were the strong young men of the competitive martial arts scene in Tokyo at that time, and they were there to seriously learn how to fight. Many were third-, fourth-, and fifth-degree black belts in karate.* If a man came to Sawai's group and said he wanted to learn the fighting arts, he was usually tested to see if he was sincere and to see if he had a fighting spirit, a characteristic highly valued in the Japanese martial community.

After observing the class for a long time, I underwent the initial formalities that introduced me to the school, including revealing the nature of my previous martial background. I was then asked to spar in order to verify if I was a genuine fighting black belt or merely a dilettante. My first opponent looked grave. When it was mentioned from the sidelines that I was a black belt in karate, Sawai looked toward my sparring partner, who then took a bead on me and began to give me a much harder time. The next thing I knew, he kicked me in the heart (heart strikes were a speciality of that group). I crumpled to the floor, falling with intense pain and an imminent sense that this life was going to be over very soon. I had never experienced anything like this before in karate. Subsequently, I found out my sparring partner was a ringer — he had been a fifth-degree black belt in karate for years before studying with Sawai.

In a minute or two, someone helped me to my feet. It was extremely difficult to stand and begin breathing normally again. After giving me a little while to recover, they asked me to spar again, this time with a third-degree black belt, which was about my level at that time. In this

*In Japan at that time, the strongest active fighting black belts were usually third, fourth, and fifth degrees. The third-to-fifth degree black belts in Sawai's group included a strong contingent from Mas Oyama's Kyokoshin Kai karate school. The late Mas Oyama was famous in Japan for killing bulls with his bare hands.

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The Hsing-I of Kenichi Sawai called Taiki-Ken, continued

round, I did just fine, being able to get him fairly often with round kicks to the head. Later, it was explained to me that Sawai just wanted to see if I could go beyond my initial fear and maintain fighting spirit. After this interesting initiation, I was accepted into the class.

The class took place in Meiji Jingu Park, which was a major national shrine and the site of Japan's most important traditional New Year's event. The training took place in a clearing surrounded by trees. (Years later, as part of Japan's unrelenting industrial destruction of natural environments, the practice area, which was a rare natural spot in central Tokyo, had been cemented over to make a parking lot.) When I arrived at the class, students were standing in front of the trees. Their arms were held up in the air before their chests, as if each person were hugging a huge ball. Some stood with feet shoulder-width apart, body weight evenly placed on the ground. Others stood on one weighted leg, with the heel of the weightless leg slightly raised. This standing ritual was performed for an hour or two before anyone moved, usually with Sawai participating or sometimes walking up to individuals and correcting their postures.

After the standing was over, students started to practice the moving hand techniques—either individually or in groups. In the beginning, each complete step would take about thirty seconds. Progressively, however, as your chi got stronger, one full step with its attendant hand technique could take as much as ten full minutes. Next, students began Push Hands practice, the object being not only to break your partner's balance, but afterwards to either hit or apply a fa jin technique, which, unlike the fa jin of tai chi, often delivered quite a shock to the body. Then came free sparring, which was particularly interesting in terms of learning to defend against kicks and throws, as many sparring partners were high-ranking judo and karate black belts. Sawai himself was a former seventh-degree black belt in judo before his martial studies in China. At the conclusion of the session, the circle completed itself. The class finished with standing to stabilize chi, calm the mind, and fully absorb all that had been learned in class.

Sawai's love of fighting was downright infectious. A former combat veteran, he had a samurai's serious no-nonsense attitude toward the dance of life and death. He was not a sadist, but would not abide a dabbler's lack of martial intent and commitment. He assumed his students would settle for nothing less than maximum fulfillment of their

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martial potential. Sawai could be gruffly playful, but when he got down to business, his manner was severe, and very down-to-earth. If you made a mistake in sparring, he would take you to task and, after a third failure, correct your mistake, often allowing you to painfully feel what your opponent would do to you—if given the opportunity. This approach strongly motivated all of us there to rapidly correct our faults!

A short, stocky man, Sawai particularly liked Pi Chuan (see p. 187) and the Monkey way of moving in hsing-i, especially its blocking methods and its rapid footwork that moved a fighter in and out of range. The offensive technique of which he was particularly fond was a heart strike, which he did both with the back of his wrist Monkey style or with the front of his knuckles, as in the animal form method of Horse. This bent-wrist fist technique mimics a fighting horse crushing its hooves down on its victim after it has stood on its hind legs. As Sawai's elbow descended vertically, his protruding front four knuckles would come cutting down on your heart.

If Sawai respected your sincere commitment to learning martial arts, he sooner or later applied this technique on you, allowing you to appreciate the nature of a martially induced heart attack. I can personally attest that it made a very real and lasting impression concerning the effectiveness of hsing-i that went deeper than mere words ever could.

A controversial subject often connected to I Chuan is the training technique of **kong jin,** or "empty force." In this technique, teachers move their students physically either backward, up in the air, or down to the ground by a wave of their hands from a distance, all without physically touching them. Unfortunately, although this works well with students, many incorrectly assume it can be done to strangers against their will, which, it can safely be said, rarely happens. Extensive research was done on this subject in Beijing to find out if empty force would work on uncooperative martial art experts—it did not. However, the technique of empty force chi training can, in fact, be useful for moving chi therapeutically to clear blocked energy channels.

KONG JIN
The energy technique of hsing-i where practitioners are purported to knock people down without touching them, solely by projecting energy.

Empty force is a training technique whose purpose is to sensitize practitioners to the movement of chi in themselves, in their opponents, in the space between themselves and their opponents, and in the psychic energy generated in combat. It aims to empower the recipient to be able to become sensitive and respond appropriately to the chi of others, whether during physical contact, or unimpeded in the gap before they touch your flesh or hit you. It requires cooperation at the psychic level between student and teacher, and often the histrionics seen during the encounter with empty force are incredibly exaggerated. The purpose of this exaggeration is simply to generate a sensitivity to energy and to be able to use that sensitivity to respond to a physical stimulus in real time, in a physical confrontation, rather than to gain the magical ability to knock King Kong down with an invisible force from a wave of your fingers.

THE TECHNIQUES AND TRAINING PRACTICES OF HSING-I

The hsing-i of Li Luo Neng had three components: San Ti, Five Elements, and various Animal Forms. It has large-, middle-, and small-**frame styles** (see p. 111). Hsing-i's basic qualities as a martial art include:

FRAME
The physical shape and energetic qualities that an internal martial arts posture assumes, ranging from small and condensed (small frame) to large and expansive (large frame).

1. The energetic and combat intent behind a movement is emphasized more than the physical movements of the form.
2. Functional power in each and every part of every movement, rather than only the ability to move well.
3. Movements that are designed purely from the viewpoint of combat effectiveness. In hsing-i, any movement that is not functional or is wasted in either solo forms, two-person practices, or in combat is considered to be the equivalent of a martial sin.
4. *Bu hao kan, hen hao yung* (the classic phrase in Chinese that describes hsing-i), freely translated means that hsing-i does not look pretty, it just works exceptionally well in combat.

5. A prime strategy that rests on the idea of never retreating. Hsing-i invades the space of opponents continuously, encroaching on their defenses until they are overwhelmed and defeated by the advancing motion. In hsing-i, even if you need to retreat for tactical considerations, your mind is just taking a short respite until it can reposition for its primary mission, which is to attack as soon as possible.
6. A mentality that is completely goal-oriented and based on a high level of aggression. Any defensive maneuvers are only interim tactics used until the hsing-i practitioner can get back to the main mission of attack. If the decision to commit to battle is made, there is little or no compassion for an adversary.
7. A primary focus on developing yang, not yin, methods of internal power; that is, hardness, not softness.
8. Developing the outside of a practitioner's body to feel extremely hard to someone touching it. Simultaneously, the practitioner's subjective experience is that the inside of the body feels soft and flexible. This chi balance of hard on the outside, soft on the inside is the exact opposite of tai chi.
9. A main philosophical orientation toward developing internal strength and unwavering focused intent.

The image frequently used to describe the technique of hsing-i is that of an iron ball rolling right over the opponent. Whether your body type is thin or heavyset, one of your major internal goals in hsing-i is to sink chi to make your body and arms become incredibly heavy, like lead. Yet you still need to retain the ability to move with sensitivity and be as agile as a leaf in a strong wind.

So heavy and dense do the arms become that practitioners, when they attack, can move their opponents arms out of the way as if they had no substance. The arms of opponents bounce off the heavier arms of the hsing-i adept like tin bounces off lead. During an attack, hsing-i practitioners use these heavy arms to completely control the arms of their opponents and move the opponents' hands away. The heavy arms of the hsing-i fighter can always open the defenses of their opponents for a clean and decisive attack.

The Five Elements

The Five Elements are in effect the five energies that, according to Taoist cosmology, comprise the energy matrix of the universe. In traditional Chinese medical theory, these five dynamic energies (Fire, Water, Wood, Earth, Metal) balance the internal organs of the human body. Each of the following hsing-i Five Elements utilizes a particular hand technique that moves power along a specific physical force vector. Each individual Five

Element hand technique has a slightly different way in which it is done: high (to the opponent's heart or above), middle (between the heart and the lower tantien), and low (to the opponent's hips, groin, or legs).

PI CHUAN/ CHOPPING OR SPLITTING FIST
One of the five basic techniques of hsing-i chuan.

METAL ELEMENT
In Chinese cosmology, one of the basic energies or elements from which all manifested phenomena are created.

Chopping/Splitting Fist (Pi Chuan) In this Five-Element technique, physical motion goes from up to down, utilizing Push Downward internal energy (see p. 135). The final posture of the complete **Pi Chuan** movement is the one held in San Ti. Pi Chuan itself focuses on vertically downward-moving power. The internal pressures that this movement initiates in the body, in addition to its basic chi work, directly and positively affects the lungs. It is represented by the **metal element,** and focuses on making an extremely strong spine and hands as hard as steel.

The basic motion of Pi Chuan is a cutting action usually done downward with the palm or, in some schools, sometimes forward with the edge of the palm. In all schools, the fighting applications of Pi Chuan are also done with different parts of the closed fist. Pi Chuan is the primary on-guard defensive position in hsing-i. In this posture, one hand is held high, covering the middle and upper body sections, and one hand low, covering the body's middle and lower sections. Pi Chuan is used extensively against straight-line attacks. Many top hsing-i practitioners base their whole offensive strategy on only using Pi Chuan and Beng Chuan (Crushing Fist), defending with the upper hand of Pi Chuan and attacking with the bottom hand using Beng Chuan.

TSUAN CHUAN/ DRILLING FIST
One of the five basic techniques of hsing-i chuan.

WATER ELEMENT
In Chinese cosmology, one of the basic energies or elements from which all manifested phenomena are created.

Drilling Fist (Tsuan Chuan) Here, physical motion goes from down to up and uses Ward Off, expansive internal energy (see p. 127). The internal pressures that **Tsuan Chuan** generates within the body during execution of the technique, in addition to its basic chi work, directly and positively affect the kidneys and the whole vitality of the body. It focuses on vertically upward-moving power. Tsuan Chuan is represented by the **water element,** and focuses on making the hands able to move around the opponent's arms like water moves around a rock. It is equally used for attack and defense. Its fundamental action brings one hand down your centerline as the other hand simultaneously moves upward along your centerline in a kind of drilling uppercut.

Drilling Fist twists the body and arms powerfully, and is done in three basic ways. In the first, after the upward motion, the hands come to a dead stop at the end of the of the technique. In the second, the hand first moves upward as if to go through its target (the head, for example) and then returns to a lower position in order to block a potential counterattack. With both these methods, the hitting hand proceeds forward on a straight trajectory along the centerline of your body from your lower tantien. In the third method, the hand moves in a zigzag, waterlike, formless manner that mimics the irregular motion of water going around a rock. The twist at the end of the punch is always emphasized.

WOOD ELEMENT
In Chinese cosmology, one of the basic energies or elements from which all manifested phenomena are created.

Crushing Fist (Beng Chuan) This technique uses straight-ahead physical motion along with the internal energy of Press Forward (see p.134). Beng Chuan is hsing-i's most well-known attack technique. It is often considered to be the most powerful straight punch in all the Chinese martial arts. The internal pressures initiated in the body by this movement, in addition to its basic chi work, directly and positively affect the liver. Beng Chuan is represented by the **wood element,** and focuses on making fists "grow" out of the body. It is often compared to the force of a powerful plant growing and expanding through concrete with a steady, inexorable force.

Beng Chuan is not like a normal straight punch, which depends on its momentum for much of its effectiveness. Rather, Beng Chuan's power is most likely to be applied from a very close distance, after, say, your arm has broken your opponent's balance in the act of moving forward for an attack. Beng Chuan is often used to stop the incoming attack of opponents and steal their power, after which either arm may attack. Beng Chuan is usually done with a quarter turn of the fist. It is applied both pressing down from above or pushing up from below an opponent's arm. Beng Chuan's retracting arm is used to push internal power downward to make the opponent's arm and body stand still (that is, not run away) while your other arm strikes. Beng Chuan also uses an elliptical rolling action to climb up an opponent's arms, and small defensive circular arm movements to set an opponent up for a counterattack. In back weighted stances, Beng Chuan is known for power punches with the arm of the forward leg. As the arm advances, Beng Chuan often neutralizes the opponent's attack with the front half of the extending punch and hits with the finishing second half of the arm's extension.

The first three techniques of the Five Elements—Pi Chuan, Tsuan Chuan, and Beng Chuan—are usually first practiced walking in straight lines only. They are considered sufficient for most to understand the basic internal substance of hsing-i. After these three are mastered, it then becomes profitable in terms of practice time to work with the next two techniques, which complete the full balance. The next two methods of Pao and Heng Chuan normally begin with using the seven-star stepping pattern of hsing-i. In these steps, the body moves in a zigzag pattern of connecting 45-degree angles. (The 45-degree angle way of stepping is also widely used in aikido and ninjitsu.) This diagonal stepping is used to move around the perceived superior power of a linear attack, as well as to get the body of one attacker between yourself and other assailants when you are attacked by several people at once.

PAO CHUAN/ POUNDING FIST
One of the five basic techniques of hsing-i chuan.

Pounding Fist (Pao Chuan) Pao Chuan focuses on diagonal physical motion, and uses the internal energies of Ward Off, Roll Back, Press Forward, Push Downward, and Pull Down (see p. 138). Pao Chuan concentrates on moving power diagonally in all directions and on explosive forward-moving power. In addition to its basic chi work, the internal

pressures initiated in the body by this movement affect the heart and pericardium directly and positively. It is represented by the **fire element,** and focuses on explosive and rapid oscillating releases of power. In Pao Chuan, one hand initially defends and shifts the opponent's center of balance. Once your opponent's striking hand has been neutralized by your upper hand's Pao Chuan or Pounding Fist, your other hand attacks in a very smooth transition.

FIRE ELEMENT
In Chinese cosmology, one of the basic energies or elements from which all manifested phenomena are created.

In Pao Chuan, the upper defensive hand is the more difficult to master and is the most important part of the technique. Often your upper hand, forearm, and elbow are used to twist an opponent's arm or leg out of the way. Then, in this newly created gap, you hit the opponent with your upper arm's hammer fist to conclude the movement. When your upper arm descends, a hammer or back fist is also used to either defend or smash the opponent's body in an inward-moving, Pi Chuan-like motion. The lead hand in Pao Chuan is especially used in defenses against high kicks.

Flames flick and move rapidly. The arms in Pao Chuan can either be light and seemingly weightless, representing the edge of the flame, or heavy and dense representing the core of the fire. Part of the intent of Pao Chuan is to be able to instantly explode with the hitting hand, in rapid strikes that, like fire, seek the tiny holes in your opponent's defenses. Done without physical tension, these punches often use the internal technique of "silk arms," where your arms can alter direction and move as smoothly as a silk banner in a changing wind. The bottom hand of Pao Chuan may either hit forward or upward. However, the blow is not like Beng Chuan. Rather, it is often done with a lighter feel, using vibrating rather than expanding power to penetrate opponents and take them down.

Crossing Fist (Heng Chuan) Here, the physical motion focuses on the inside of the fist moving horizontally. Heng Chuan is the most difficult of the Five Elements to do well. It focuses on horizontally moving power, and combines the energies and applications of the first four elements (pi, tsuan, beng, and pao) into one seamless technique. The internal pressures initiated in the body by Heng Chuan, in addition to its basic chi work, directly affect the spleen. It is represented by the **earth element,** and focuses on tightening the cross-linkages between the left and right sides of the inside of the abdominal cavity.

HENG CHUAN/ CROSSING FIST
One of the five basic techniques of hsing-i chuan.

EARTH ELEMENT
In Chinese cosmology, one of the basic energies or elements from which all manifested phenomena are created.

It is said it takes many hsing-i people ten years to fully understand Heng Chuan, because without completely grasping the internal mechanisms of the first four, the fifth and last punch always lacks important attributes in execution. The interchange between its hands is very circular as they move in opposite directions horizontally across the body, but this is difficult to perceive when observing an experienced practitioner. The basic punch combines the expanded action of a straight Beng Chuan-like punch with the twisting and sideways movements of Tsuan Chuan, as well as with inside and outside crossing blocks. Each of the two hands is making circles

in opposite directions. When Heng Chuan is incomplete, its form movement often resembles a karate block with the thumb side of the forearm.

In application, Heng Chuan is used to go around the body of opponents and strike them from the opposite side. For example, without your feet moving, your hand begins in front of the attacking man's right hip, but it strikes him on his left kidney as your waist turns. From an advanced hsing-i practitioner's perspective, the blocking, pulling hand of Heng Chuan is even more challenging than the attack hand, and eventually opens many internal connections, which enable the Animal Forms to reach their full adaptability. Often hsing-i masters can see just how far a practitioner has penetrated the hsing-i system by having them just do Heng Chuan. Although Heng Chuan is the most difficult of the Five Elements with which to generate full power, once mastered it gives the ability to enhance the capacity of all your other hsing-i techniques.

San Ti

At the very heart of the martial practice of hsing-i and its Five Elements is San Ti, or the "trinity posture." San Ti is done holding a static standing posture, with your arms in the air. In the classic schools of hsing-i, the posture is held in Pi Chuan, which is the first of the Five Elements. Of all hsing-i schools, I Chuan places the greatest emphasis on San Ti.

There is a common story about the best people in hsing-i that says they were made to do San Ti for between one and three years before being allowed to learn anything else. Many interpret this type of demand as a useless hazing process. However, this process of standing is the most foundational power training in hsing-i, and without it the training of the Five Elements and the Animal Forms could easily become nothing more than Shaolin-type movements with minimal internal power.

Without internal power, hsing-i loses its quite legitimate claim to martial arts fame, as its fighting applications depend on that power. Good classic hsing-i usually employs the method of first developing a reasonable level of internal power, then skillfully learning fighting applications for how to use that power, while simultaneously continuing to upgrade it. Most external martial arts focus first on being able to move well and then develop power. Hsing-i, in contrast, focuses on developing power first, and afterward learning to move well, including refining and implementing fighting angles. Hsing-i has a lesser number of movements than does tai chi or ba gua (or, for that matter, most systems of Shaolin), but concentrates on making each of its relatively limited techniques count.

What San Ti Teaches

Aside from martial aspects, San Ti teaches how to make the mind calm and how to free it of accumulated stress. The process that San Ti sets in motion

for balance, health, and healing is expanded and fulfilled in the Five Element practices. The primary energetic function of the metal element Pi Chuan, for example, is to move energy in the lungs. In Pi Chuan, the spreading of the open palm and the extending of the fingers has the effect of opening up the lungs, which then brings plenty of oxygen to the rest of the body.

Each of the energies of all your internal organs ends in acupuncture meridian lines at the end of your fingers and toes. Thus, moving your chi strongly to the ends of your fingertips and toes correspondingly stimulates all your visceral organs energetically, thereby increasing your strength. Because of this activity, Pi Chuan is called "the Mother of the Five Elements," and is the well to which hsing-i practitioners always return to increase their internal power (as ba gua players do with the Single Palm Change).

The first of the Five Elements, Pi Chuan or Chopping Fist, can be looked at from different perspectives. In its moving aspect, for instance, it can be considered a complete fighting technique. In its final position, though, often held unmoving for long periods, it is referred to as San Ti or "holding Pi Chuan." In the I Chuan schools, however, San Ti is not one posture that is held, but eight different standing postures that form the core of the I Chuan system. San Ti focuses on cultivating five critical processes: (1) breath; (2) legs and waist; (3) arms; and unifying the connections within your self, both (4) externally and (5) internally.

Breath Like hsing-i in general, San Ti uses a wide variety of breathing techniques. Breathing begins with regular Taoist breath training, which emphasizes breathing from the lower belly, sides, kidneys, upper back and spine. In regular Taoist breathing, the belly is expanded on the inhale and deflated on the exhale. Later, regular breath work is extended by application of mind intent to breath energy, which is guided in and out of specific parts of the body in progressively more powerful sequences. Each level of breath practice must be stabilized before moving on to the next. If it is not, a couple of steps down the line you will find that your ability to advance to the next level of internal power will be greatly impeded by the limitations your previous incompleted practices have fixed in your energy channels. Moving on to each new type of breathing requires the guidance of an experienced teacher who has been through the process, experienced its results, and can recognize the nuances of how internal energy is developing in your body.

The next stage involves learning the various levels of reverse breathing and spinal breathing, including coordinating the breath with movements inside the joints and spine, and the moving of internal organs in various multidirectional ways. The final stage of breath practice includes the feeling of losing all sense of physical breath, even though your breathing processes are very strong. You shift your awareness from moving air in

and out of your system to fully relying on moving chi energy first inside and then outside your body, as the sense of physical breath drops away.

Legs and Waist San Ti develops your ability to root your energy and create and/or strengthen balance in your legs. As the methods for dropping your chi to your lower tantien are learned, your body (regardless of its shape or weight) will seem to feel heavier and heavier to someone's touch. When the sinking of the chi and all the other grounding techniques are accomplished, your body progressively becomes exceedingly stable whether hit from the front, side, or back. Being strong and stable against a frontal attack usually comes first, then strength comes to the sides of the body and, finally—the most difficult to achieve—to the back. Part of what you learn involves a separate ability to transfer the power of an incoming blow or touch into the ground. Upon contact, instead of the strike hurting you, some, much, or all of its power is diverted down your body to dissipate into the ground.

As your leg and hip flexibility grows, you become able to raise and lower your stance effortlessly. The internal methods for developing power in the legs come next. Then, techniques are learned for joining your leg, waist, and spine into one inseparable whole, with no energetic gaps or physical weakness in their unified power.

Finally, your legs and waist are trained to turn horizontally and rotate like a smoothly oiled wheel, where the power of each amplifies the other. When the "oiling" is complete, your waist is able to turn extremely rapidly, to both the left and right, whether you are front- or back-weighted.

Arms Once your legs and waist are stable and you have a foundation to stand on, the next phase is infusing both attack-oriented and defensive power into your arms, from the shoulders to the fingertips, with the initial focus being on the elbows, forearms, and hands. To train for this power, you first learn to relax your arms and lengthen all the soft tissues in your body from your spine to your arms. During this process, the bending of the elbows with relaxed strength is critical to ultimate success. Next, the chi flow from your spine to your fingertips must become continuous and without gaps. This flow must become powerful until the chi in your palms and fingertips becomes full and extremely tangible, bringing with it a strong blood flow. The stronger the blood flow to your fingers, the softer and more full your hand should feel.

The next stage focuses on bringing downward vertical power into the elbows. As this training progresses, your arms begin to become heavy, extremely alive, and responsive to external stimuli. After elbow strength increases and your arms become heavy, the focus shifts to developing the ability of your hand to absorb energy back to your spine. As this process occurs, you concentrate on perfecting the clawlike grip of hsing-i.

After all the above are accomplished, the intent shifts to making the skin on your arms become extremely sensitive to the subtleties of air pressure. This sensitivity acts as a precursor to being able to feel your opponent's arms and body in fighting applications. Finally, through various forms of mind intent, you learn to absorb and to project power from your hands using various internal techniques, such as openings and closings and twistings.

Unifying Your External Physical Connections Another major goal of San Ti is to connect your physical body into a unified whole. Such unification allows the movement of any small part of your arms or legs to be fully backed up by the whole of your body, thereby amplifying the power of the small body parts significantly. Several methods are used to accomplish this goal. The first involves connecting up all your alignments through the interior of your body. These include how to adjust the various soft tissues, joints, and bones of the body so they interconnect and reinforce each other, thereby maximizing the ability of the body to both absorb and project power. These alignments are also equally used in the internal arts of tai chi and ba gua.

Hsing-i particularly focuses on the six external coordinations or combinations of the body called **liu he** in Chinese. These six are the shoulder and the hip, the elbow and the knee, and the hand and the foot. Most who read about or practice hsing-i think that these six combinations are gross anatomical connections. In fact, each little sub-part of the arm and leg connects with each other tiny sub-part of its corresponding leg or arm or part of the torso, as well as the corresponding forearms/calves, upper arms/thighs of the trainee. These body parts must join so finely, that as one moves a micro-inch, its corresponding part moves the same proportional micro-inch. Any pressure exerted on one place in the body is immediately countered and amplified by its correspondent.

LIU HE
Six combinations of body parts that must be finely coordinated to maximize physical power in the internal martial arts.

Along with the internal alignments and the six combinations, hsing-i shares several liftings, sinkings, and roundings of the body with tai chi and ba gua. However, given the relatively linear orientation to movement in hsing-i, linearity is much more expressed in this martial art than in tai chi and ba gua, whose natures emphasize motion that is circular or spiraling.

Liftings of the body refer to these locations: the top of the thighs, the back of the knee, the midriff, spine, top of the forearms, and neck and crown of the head. Hsing-i raises the neck in a much more pronounced manner and with more obvious strength than tai chi or ba gua. These liftings are integral to developing the Ward Off power (see p. 127) of hsing-i. Sinkings of the body include shoulders to the hips, elbows to the knees, wrists to the ankles, hands to the feet, chest to the lower tantien, ribs to the hips, tailbone to the bubbling well point on the ball of the foot into the ground, and from the feet to the end of the etheric body below the feet.

These sinkings are integral to developing the Push Downward power (see p. 135) of hsing-i. Roundings of the body include: the shoulders forward and backward, soft tissue from the spine to the front centerline of the body in both directions, the elbows toward the centerline of the body, the ribs toward the sternum, thighs and calves slightly inward, palms slightly forward, simultaneously the inside of the thumb and little finger toward each other, and the outside nails away from each other.

Using the Gaze to Unify Your Internal Connections The next stage of San Ti involves unifying your mind with the gaze of your eyes and your awareness. The object here is to fuse your physical power, chi, mind and perceptions into one unified entity. This training is done by fixing your gaze on the index or middle finger of your lead hand. You can either look into the far distance or at any intermediate length up to thirty or forty feet away. As you gaze, inhale. On the inhale, with your intent, breathe in energy from beyond your index finger to and through your index finger—to your nose, throat, and down the central channel (see p. 317) to your lower tantien. On the exhale, you reverse the pathway of the breath. This practice brings several effects.

By developing your gaze in coordination with your breath, you learn to clear out the gaps in awareness that often happen when you look at an opponent or the battlefield upon which you fight. These gaps create the mental states that allow you to become distracted, hesitant, or be fooled by feints or sudden movements. Through this process, your gaze is linked to your breath. Gradually, this enables you to simultaneously feel your body's chi and the energy residing in your lower tantien. With the four qualities of breath-chi-feeling-seeing acting as a unified whole, wherever you look, your awareness and power will automatically follow.

This gazing practice also opens up and strengthens your peripheral vision. Eventually, with this practice, you will be able to look straight ahead at an opponent, with a completely relaxed and expressionless face, while your field of vision extends from the ground to well above your head, and as far to the side as is physically possible. This extension of peripheral vision is critical for fighting multiple opponents, where visual tension impedes your ability to instantaneously adjust to new tactical conditions emerging either from the environment or the actions of your opponents.

This gazing technique sensitizes the mind, making it alive and calm with a relaxed concentration, the same state that comes from doing the "tradak" candle-staring exercises in yoga. When practiced sufficiently, this technique leads to an expansion of the mind so that it can link directly to the central nervous system, allowing you to feel the chi of your body with great clarity.

After San Ti has done the first phase of its work, the serious student is ready to begin to learn the fighting techniques of hsing-i chuan. No matter how long anyone learns hsing-i, they should never leave San Ti.

A PERSONAL ODYSSEY THROUGH THE MARTIAL ARTS

Gazing

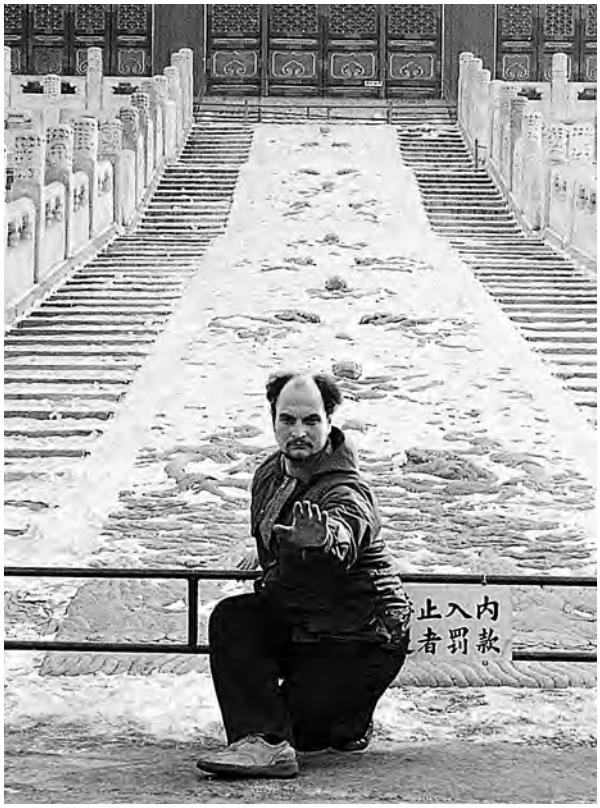
I experienced the results of the gazing method for the first time in 1974, practicing at Hung I Hsiang's school in Taipei, Taiwan. In those days, the training used to occur on the concrete floor of an elementary school gymnasium. I often showed up to practice San Ti barefoot for an hour before the class started, before anyone arrived, by the light of a lone light bulb.

One day while breathing through my index finger for more than half an hour, all my attention seemed to be involuntarily drawn to the space in front of me at which I had been gazing. The space began to change. Soon my sense of the room began to visually disappear. Shortly, my index finger, hand, and then even my body itself seemed to vanish, as my mind began to expand dramatically, feeling as if it had no boundaries, only an ever-increasing crystal clear awareness. Soon the inside of my body began to feel as if it had no substance. Then, this changed. While feeling completely empty of any sense of physicality, at the same time I experienced the inside of my body to be just a living energy that was directly connected to my hand and the space inside me. Next, everything became empty of any sensations of any kind, with my mind being totally comfortable and content to be where it was, without needing or desiring to do anything or go anywhere.

Suddenly, my mind returned to its normal awareness. After this experience, my body began to become aware of how effortlessly chi energy was moving through my body whenever I did San Ti, or any other hsing-i movement for that matter. A few years later, I related this incident to my **kundalini** meditation teacher in India and asked him what had happened. Did that experience have any relationship to meditation? He regarded me awhile, and then explained that this was an experience of the first stage of **samadhi** or transcendental absorption into the absolute, as described in tantra and yoga.

KUNDALINI
A meditation method of India that uses energy work to unravel the mysteries of human consciousness and "enlightenment."

SAMADHI
A meditative experience that is indicative of a specific stage of "enlightenment."



Courtesy of Caroline Frantzis

The hsing-i Dragon Form depicted here utilizes the basic Five Element technique of Chopping Fist. which is done both jumping in the air and squatting on the ground. Dragon is used extensively in the ground-fighting techniques of hsing-i.

The Animal Forms

There are twelve basic Animal Forms, although some hsing-i schools may use a few more or less. Often, the same animal form can have different names in different schools.* The Animal Forms are generated from the Five Elements and give full variance to all physical possibilities inherent in the Five Elements. For example:

1. Punching or chopping with one hand could become a double punch or double palm strike in the Tiger and mythical Tai Bird forms.
2. Punches or palm strikes where both hands are normally in front of the body could be done with one hand to the side or back of the body, as in Swallow or Dragon.
3. The Pao Chuan punch, which is normally done from the back leg, is done on the forward leg, as in some Horse and Sparrow forms.
4. The basic chopping action of Pi Chuan is done jumping in Dragon.

The principles of the Five Elements are done with different stances and footwork.

For example:

1. Squatting stances in Snake.
2. Jumping in the air and spinning in Monkey.
3. The back heel off the floor in Eagle.
4. Dropping to the ground in Swallow and Dragon.
5. Standing on one leg with the other high in the air, as in some forms of Swallow or Crane.

In beginning hsing-i practice, everyone learns all the Animal Forms to increase and balance their knowledge of the Five Elements, to broaden

*The Animal Forms in hsing-i include, but are not limited to, Tiger, Horse, Bear, Monkey, Snake, Water Strider, Chicken, Ostrich, Hawk, Sparrow, Crane, Eagle, Dragon, Tai Bird, and Unicorn.

their repertoire of fighting techniques, and to be able to create physical movement from mental intention alone. The mind training is especially critical in the Animal Forms, both in terms of developing intent, overall fighting strategies, and a whole-body style of movement.

Although everyone first learns all the Animal Forms, a majority find the most profitable next stage of practice is to concentrate on a few that fit the practitioner, these forms being determined by body type or the natural mental or emotional temperament of the learner. These forms are then practiced until they become embedded in the nervous system of the practitioner.

More about the Five Elements and Animal Forms In basic hsing-i practice, all the hand techniques of the Five Elements are initially performed at one height, usually at the level of the head or mid-torso. Later, however, both in form movements and applications, all these hand techniques are equally done around the upper, middle, and lower part of your own or your opponent's body. All the movements of hsing-i, both the Five Element and animal techniques, have certain qualities in common.

All the techniques are oriented to the centerline of the body, both in attack and defense, and all utilize both regular and broken rhythm. In the regular-rhythm methods, body and hand movements continue with ever-quickening drumlike cadences, overwhelming the opponent, who cannot keep up the pace and is defeated. Regular rhythms are used mostly when an opponent is retreating.

Broken-rhythm methods, in contrast, are by far more commonly applied in hsing-i. Broken rhythm does not repeat the same pattern twice. Thus, the opponent is denied the ability to predict moves and consequently work out a reasonable defense using the expectation of what is supposed to happen in the next likely rhythm. If your opponent does not know what is coming next, in either attack or defense, you gain a strategic advantage. In hsing-i and, for that matter, all internal martial arts, the basic timing mechanism involves a practitioner's concentrating on the "silent" space between the beats of an

Courtesy of Caroline Frantzis

The basic Five Element technique of Heng Chuan or Crossing Fist.

opponent's movements and intent. It does not involve focusing on an opponent's defending and attacking rhythms themselves.

This important timing consideration is another reason why stillness of the mind is so prized by internal martial artists—stillness is the underlying precondition necessary to stealthily and effectively slip in between the beats. The broken-rhythm method in hsing-i requires the mind and central nervous system to wait a microsecond before moving to break the rhythm of the fighting interaction. Often, the internal martial artist will allow the opponent to attack first, in order to ascertain the proper fighting angle for counterattack. This requires great composure in the midst of combat, a quality that is developed in the practice of San Ti.

In the hsing-i form and fighting applications, your hands are kept fully alive with mind intent and awareness held equally in each. One hand never moves perfunctorily, never only to simply complete the biomechanics of the other hand or in an automatic recoiling action. Hand techniques rarely use snapping actions, where the hands whip out or snap back to their original position. Rather, each hand technique inexorably keeps moving forward inch by inch, invading your opponent's space.

In hsing-i, Pull Back techniques are used specifically to neutralize an incoming attack, to pull an opponent or to tear skin. Each arm posture is designed to be stable at each point along its trajectory, so that it is difficult or impossible for an opponent to move your arms if you do not want them moved. This quality is well known and utilized in hsing-i's five element technique of Beng Chuan, or Crushing Fist. This point of stability also allows you to hold your ground. Remaining fixed in space, you have the ability to physically move the arms of opponents to a desired location, to redirect incoming aggressive force, and to stop opponents dead in their tracks before they move in for an attack.

In all hsing-i hand form techniques, the hand physically begins from the vicinity of the lower tantien, employing strong twistings of the arm during each micro-inch of movement, and especially accelerating the twisting of the whole body at the point of impact. The hand then returns to where it started, after moving the feet anywhere from either a half-step to several steps. All the hand techniques are designed to deliver full power, either from a dead stop or from half an inch or less away from your opponent's body. In all the specialized hand techniques, the elbows are always significant as their power is used to dig into and diminish the power-generating capacity of the opponent (called "cutting the opponent's power" in hsing-i terminology). The power of your entire body is concentrated in your hands, the principle of which is the origin of the common phrase in hsing-i, "You kick your opponent with your hand." As a practitioner becomes more advanced, this ability extends to being able to focus the unified power of your whole body in the specific body part of your choice.

(Text continues on page 201.)

A PERSONAL ODYSSEY THROUGH THE MARTIAL ARTS

Monkey Boxing

I first became introduced to Monkey in high school by an older boy from Hong Kong. I helped him pass his exams, and, offering to teach me this martial art, he beat the stuffing out of me using Monkey and Cantonese White Crane on the grass in Central Park. My initial experiences with Monkey allowed me to take to another level all the rolling, falling, and groundwork techniques of judo, jujitsu, and aikido, as well as the ground-fighting techniques of karate. Later, I continued my studies of Monkey at various times in Taiwan.

I vividly remember the Monkey boxers who were training on the grass one grey afternoon in a Taiwan park. My then-future teacher, a small, middle-aged man, in a full squatting position was jumping around on the ground, making noises like a chimpanzee, open hands in front of his face and making all kind of grimaces and coy eye movements. His opponent was standing there, intently staring at him, getting ready to kick him in the head. Just as he began his kick, the small man on the ground made eye contact with him, used a weird face to distract him, and during the resulting fraction-of-a-second gap in the kicker's attention, jumped forward toward him, went airborne, and did a flip. Head down, the small man grabbed his opponent's thighs and simultaneously kicked him in the head, stunning him. Immediately thereafter, the Monkey boxer used his kicking legs to throttle his opponent's neck. Squeezing his opponent's neck strongly, the Monkey boxer, a sardonic look on his face, bent his own knees, crunched his own stomach, and threw his opponent down by twisting his head. Both men landed with a crash, the Monkey man on top, with his hand poised to either tear out the groin of his prey or rip out the tendons of his legs.

Like all Shaolin martial arts, Monkey has both Southern and Northern branches. I was most involved in the Northern style, which encompasses some chi gung methods. Above and beyond Monkey being extremely functional, it was, from the point of view of the joy of movement, a lot of fun to learn and practice. Monkey is a paradoxical martial art, which on the one hand is extremely playful and on the other raises viciousness to a malevolent art form.

Its primary techniques of cruelty involve striking the eyes, throat, and groin, tearing one's opponent's arteries or nerves out with one's teeth or fingernails, pinpoint knuckle and elbow tip strikes and rakes, wrist strikes, and striking the joints, especially during groundwork. On its more playful

A PERSONAL ODYSSEY THROUGH THE MARTIAL ARTS

Monkey Boxing, continued

side, Monkey practitioners, in a constant flow, deceptively and smoothly roll on the ground, jump and rapidly change height levels from deep squatting on the ground to being fully upright to being airborne. Monkey methods involve continuously moving toward and away from an opponent in a peek-a-boo manner, making it difficult to get a bead on a Monkey boxer, who all the while uses emotional trickery and distracting facial expressions.

The arm techniques of Monkey are both the long-range ones of the lumbering gorilla with hands that hang below its knees, and of the close-in fighting type of the smaller monkeys. This martial art uses jumps and rolling on the ground equally, offensively to get from out of range into attacking position and defensively for evasion. Hitting and kicking are used moving either toward or away from the opponent. Monkey boxers also like to literally climb up the body of an opponent. After attaching themselves to your body or standing on your shoulders or upper back, Monkey practitioners will control your head, take you down to the ground, and very rapidly finish the job.

My experience of learning Monkey was most valuable in its constant reminder never to assume anything, which is the essential ingredient a Monkey practitioner relies upon to deceive an opponent. Learning Monkey made me aware of the science of how to efficiently apply bites and nail-cutting pinches and scratches to especially vulnerable body points. When doing internal martial arts, I subsequently paid attention to how I could defensively assume dangers that most people would ignore and not let my guard down. Monkey forced me to develop countermeasures for attacks from bites and skin-tearing nail actions, kept me motivated to keep up work in tai chi Push Hands, and made me think about how to adjust my movements in order to reduce my vulnerability during potentially nasty close-in fighting conditions. Being aware of how fluidly Monkey people can move in and out of range in all directions greatly helped expand my ideas and focus during training on the absolute need to be able to follow someone rapidly while using various techniques of tai chi or hsing-i.

Recognizing how easily a monkey opponent could drop low, or rapidly move up and down, provided a good background for developing ba gua's vertical actions. It also made me appreciate a tai chi technique like step and punch downward. This particular tai chi move can crush a Monkey boxer to the ground and help defend against other excellent martial ground fighters and grapplers, who want to pull you to the ground and finish you off there.

A PERSONAL ODYSSEY THROUGH THE MARTIAL ARTS

Monkey Boxing, continued

Ba gua also has moves to counter Monkey mischief. Ba gua's footwork and ability to change directions, for example, can nullify the extreme movement and deceptive capacities of Monkey boxers. Ba gua can simply change more quickly and in more directions. Knowing I would really need these abilities after practicing Monkey drove me to achieving them in ba gua. Monkey practice made me realize not to take for granted ba gua's vertical movement techniques and enhanced ability to change. I believe this line of thought motivated me to increase my competence in ba gua.

Monkey boxing also has within it great ground fighting techniques, which are defensive weapons for countering judo and wrestling groundwork. Monkey also provided an excellent background for my later study of Eight Drunken Immortals (see p.228).

All the hsing-i hand techniques are done with various types of footwork, from very fast to very slow, including:

1. *Worm-walking*. Here, the same foot is always kept in the forward position. As you move the forward foot, the other one moves to fill the exact place the forward foot occupied. Worm-walking is used in conjunction with steps done going forward, backward, sideways, and diagonally.
2. *Regular steps*. Here, the left foot and the right foot change their forward and backward position with each step. These steps may be done with legs either front- or back-weighted.
3. *Half-steps*. These are a type of worm walk, often used to rapidly advance into an opponent's position. There are many kinds of half-steps. In short half-steps the distance moved is only a few inches to no more than two feet. In longer half-steps, up to five or six feet or more can be covered with a single step. In both of these, one foot is always in contact with the floor.
4. *Skipping half-steps*. Here, the body covers up to ten feet with a single half-step, as the feet, during the skip, seem to kick each other extremely lightly, propelling the body very far into space.
5. *Flying half-steps*. In this move, the practitioner leaps into the air and comes down again a great distance away to follow an opponent who is either jumping in the air or attempting to run away. This technique is

used extensively with Beng Chuan, one of the Five Elements. (Hsing-i in general uses half-step techniques much more than regular stepping, as well as mixing both steps within a single technique.)

6. *Seven-star steps*. Here, the feet step in diagonals 45 degrees in relation to the opponent, either forward or backward.
7. *Backward steps*. Backward steps are done in such a way as to initiate a full-power, forward attack as your retreating foot touches the ground.
8. *Side-steps 90 degrees to your side*. Moving directly sideways may be done to either the inside or outside of an attacking opponent's body. You may go directly sideways either from where you stand, or after first going slightly forwards or backwards.

PROFILE OF AN INTERNAL MASTER

Hung I Hsiang—Amazing Subtle Body Movements

Courtesy of H. L. Lei

When I studied with the late Hung I Hsiang, he was in his fifties. He spoke with a gravelly voice that sometimes conveyed a bit of gruffness, but in actuality, Hung was an intelligent, perceptive, well-educated, and articulate man. Watching him do ba gua, his small-movement precision was incredible.

The potential for misreading Hung based on interpretation of voicetone, raises an important point about ba gua people. I have met many over the years who practice ba gua for all sorts of animal, human, and spiritual reasons. Some have been saints, some sinners. The one thing in common about them was that they all tended to be people having exceptional innate intelligence, regardless of whether they had a formal education or not.

Hung had been in a lot of fights. In Taiwan, it was very easy to find a fight if you were so inclined. In the early and middle part of this century, all over the world men used to fight for the sheer joy of it. Such fights often took place in designated social places, such as bars. In Taipei, fights usually occurred near areas of prostitution. Very commonly, people were drinking in an underworld atmosphere and probably more often than not there were no hard feelings after a fight. Reputations were built, and rumors were spread: "So and so had such and such technique." It was also common for criminals, military men, and law-abiding citizens to mix it up for fun, and for onlookers to make side bets on a fight, something that is also common today in saloons throughout the Western world. Hung was very well known, and his reputation led to many challenges. Those who challenged Hung suffered the consequences. He was a ferocious fighter who had the skill and the hard character that made many challengers regret their folly.

Hung was physically loose and flexible, and was very good at teaching minute martial arts movements and the technical skills of fighting. Hung's Rou Shou (see p. 235) was superb. He had an amazing ability to move. I had never before seen a person of his size who could undulate his body and move as if he had no bones. Hung had developed the Dragon Body* to the greatest extent possible. He could make his body twist, turn, and fold in ways that had to be seen to be believed. In addition, his hands were incredibly sensitive. He could feel minute shifts of a person's energy and counterattack instantaneously. It was as if his hands had eyes.

Hung's specialty was in the use of very tiny fighting angles based on the triangle, the square, and the octagon. Whereas most sophisticated martial artists use these angles,they usually need inches or feet to apply them. Hung, however, could apply these angles in less than a fraction of an inch of space. He loved analyzing the use of small circles and angles of attack. He was a truly creative martial artist who explored and extrapolated the knowledge he had gained. After three or four hours of class, Hung and his

*In the Dragon Body, the top, middle, and bottom part of the torso can move in different directions while simultaneously remaining completely connected internally.

PROFILE OF AN INTERNAL MASTER

Hung I Hsiang—Amazing Subtle Body Movements, continued

more committed students would drink tea, eat watermelon seeds, and talk about ba gua and fighting angles at open-air tables set up on the sidewalk near our practice hall. Hung's understanding and use of small circles and angles of attack made sparring with him fascinating, bewildering, terrifying, and a pure joy.

Hung was an excellent teacher of technical fighting applications. He always told me "I cannot teach you how to develop chi, but I can teach you how to use it." Hung always emphasized separating the different qualities of the martial arts. All too often people who study different martial arts do them all with the same quality of internal movement and chi.

Hung would constantly reinforce the thought that hsing-i, ba gua, and tai chi were very different. When I was initially with Hung during 1974 and 1975, this thought of difference in the internal arts was very difficult for me to grasp, as all this internal "stuff" was simply "different" from karate and Shaolin. Internal to me at the intermediate stage of learning hsing-i and ba gua meant soft, yet Hung's power was harder and stronger than any karate or Shaolin I had ever experienced. He was soft, and yet not as soft as tai chi masters I had met and studied with. Yet Hung was just as sensitive and able to react effectively in an instant, in just as mysterious a manner as the best tai chi people I had studied with, including Yang Shou Jung (Yang Cheng Fu's eldest son). Hung's hsing-i and ba gua were clearly better than his tai chi. The tai chi style practiced by both Wang Shu Jin and Hung I Hsiang was a tai chi/hsing-i/ba gua combination style developed by Chen Pan Ling, which also combined the essential elements of the Yang, Wu, and Chen styles of tai chi chuan.*

This was now further complicated by the fact that the hsing-i taught by Hung was a Hebei combination style, with hsing-i movements but ba gua dragon body motions and spiraling hand work. The internal quality of Hung's ba gua was only minutely different from his hsing-i, although it was much more undulating. All of this derived from the fact that his hsing-i and ba gua were fused together. Separating the nature of the internal movements from each other was most difficult. Even more so was clearly separating the different types of chi involved. This was very confusing, as Hung was constantly emphasizing to me and all his Chinese students that we had to clearly separate Shaolin and each of the three different internal martial arts. They were to be done clearly and separately, so that the unique qualities of each could be distinctly differentiated. It was only later, first through Bai Hua and later Liu Hung Chieh, that I was to clearly attain this ability to separate the different types of chi, which Hung expended much effort to drive home, but which was beyond my reach in those early days.

**Editor's note:* The author also practiced and researched the Chen Pan Ling tai chi chuan form, which is composed of nine distinct levels of achievement. This research began in Tokyo in 1968 with Wang Shu Jin's student Chang I Chung and continued through 1987 with Wang, Hung I Hsiang, and Huang Hsi I, and with other students of Chen Pan Ling in Taichung, Taiwan, as well as with teachers in Mainland China. To complete this research and comprehend the roots of this style required an in-depth study of the Chen Village form of tai chi, which the author conducted with Feng Zhi Qiang in Beijing, the Wu style of tai chi with Liu Hung Chieh, and the Yang style with T. T. Liang, Yang Shou Jung, Bai Hua, and Lin Du Ying.

PROFILE OF AN INTERNAL MASTER

Hung I Hsiang—Amazing Subtle Body Movements, continued

In the 1970s, Hung I Hsiang had about a dozen exceptionally talented students. Many of his students dominated the full contact tournaments in Taiwan. One named Weng Hsien Ming, won the Taiwan full contact championships three times in a row when he was in his teens. He then went into the army and didn't practice at all for over three years. After returning to civilian life, he was able to train for only a few weeks and still capture second place. Another of Hung's students, Huang Hsi I, also usually won his all-Taiwan full contact tournaments with knockouts. Huang subsequently became one of the best chi gung tui na doctors in Taiwan. The youngest student was Lo Te Hsiu, known for his heel kick to the solar plexus. Over time, Lo researched and became highly skilled at Hung's complete post-birth ba gua system.

Hung I Hsiang's emphasis was not so much on maximizing internal power and chi development. Instead, he focused on the subtleties of how to effectively deliver the power one had and how to rapidly and smoothly change from one technique to another. He did this by showing how to make tiny circles deep within every crevice of the body and how to change internal body alignments with great speed. He spent a lot of time showing how tiny shifts in body weight could create unusual power vectors. He also made students feel this power not only in terms of strikes, but also by showing how changes in subtle body movements could achieve desired defense/attack application outcomes. He taught his students how to instantaneously release themselves from bad internal alignments that could normally paralyze the body, and resume their attack, much like you smoothly change gears in a stick shift car. Hung's emphasis was on how small changes of body movement or chi flow could produce superior practical fighting techniques and overall athletic capacity.