

YIQUAN

YAO CHENGGUANG'S METHOD



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FROM AUTHOR

Learning from master Yao Chengguang, I had opportunity of listening many times to his explanations of various questions regarding yiquan. His descriptions and explanations are always very precise and are directly related to practice. With master Yao Chengguang's approval, I prepared this work, based on his teachings.

The book is made of two parts:

- **PART I** – about principles of studying yiquan, zhan zhuang, shi li, moca bu and fa li,
- **PART II** – about shi sheng, tui shou, san shou, wooden staff practice, yiquan today and future of yiquan.

I hope that it will be valuable introduction to yiquan.

ON PRINCIPLES OF STUDYING YIQUAN

HONEST ATTITUDE, SEEKING THE TRUTH, CREATIVITY

According to master Yao Chengguang, yiquan is a branch of science. We should keep scientific attitude while studying, verifying old concepts and developing new ones. We should learn yiquan and keep developing it, seeing yiquan as a whole, not concentrating only on some part of it.

SCIENTIFIC ATTITUDE IN LEARNING YIQUAN

In last years there appeared some people in yiquan circles who talk of emission of qi, hitting opponent without touching him, about supernatural abilities. There are also some people talking about "eighteen fighting methods", "thirty six methods" and some "ultimate techniques". According to master Yao Chengguang yiquan is an art and science based on facts proved during practice. From the very start of the development of yiquan, the main idea was getting rid of fallacies and superstitions, and seeking the basis in scientific concepts. All its principles, like: "relax and tension", "mutual relation of movement and non-movement", "simultaneous use of pushing and pulling", "unity of absorbing and throwing away", "force in direction contrary to movement", "frontal and diagonal used together", "soft and hard help each other", "forward and backward", "single and double", "light and heavy" etc. are based on the concept of dialectical unity of the opposite.

Even such great masters in history of yiquan as Wang Xiangzhai and Yao Zongxun didn't do emission of qi, hitting opponent without touching and didn't exhibit supernatural abilities. Propagating such concepts makes people think of yiquan as something supernatural and mysterious. Those concepts are contrary to the principles of yiquan, because they oppose the physics of human body. According to principles of mechanics, when there is no external force applied to body, the body is staying in state of non movement, or continuing movement without changing speed. If there is some change in this state, it is because some force is applied. When we talk about force, it means mutual relation of bodies. Basis of tui shou is contact of hands and relation of forces used by both partners. Then it is possible to use many principles of physics, like: leverage, sum of forces, movement of a screw etc.

Wang Xiangzhai said: "No method is basis of martial art, if there is a method, it should be empty". The value of any martial art is based on its principles, and not how its outer form looks. It's like with coins: we have 1 fen, 2 fen, 5 fen. There is no need to issue 3 fen, 4 fen or 8 fen coins. The method of martial art is "one action is changing into hundreds, hundreds are based on one". So the method of yiquan is a method of principles, it's "great unified method", method of developing our natural abilities. It's not some techniques, which are something very superficial. Wang Xiangzhai said: "All those forms and techniques caused degeneration of martial arts". So there is no place in yiquan for all those "eighteen fighting methods", "thirty six methods" and other "ultimate techniques".

Those "mystical concepts" and "ultimate techniques" appear, because those who propagate them didn't undergo systematic study and practice of yiquan as a whole system. They try to hide their lack of knowledge and understanding of yiquan by talking about "ultimate techniques" and about miraculous, supernatural, so people would think how advanced they are and how their level of knowledge is far beyond understanding of normal people.

Many students ask master Yao Chengguang about the problem of some teachers keeping their knowledge in secret. Yao thinks that teachers who act in this way just don't have real knowledge and skill. Those people don't have much to offer to their students, and what they have is not really profound. So they are afraid, that if they teach students all they know, they will not have anything more left which they could teach. So they choose mysticism and obscurity. Yao Zongxun used to say: "I open my treasure house for all of you, and you just keep trying to take from it as much as you can". Yiquan is not something mysterious. But at the same time it is not something very easy to learn. So even if student have chance to learn from good teacher, the results of study and practice depend also on student's ability of understanding, his character, perseverance, courage, physical fitness etc. Even if teacher is trying to teach student everything he knows, it is not sure if student will be able to understand it and master it. So if teachers try to hide their knowledge, how can wushu develop?

Master Yao Chengguang always stresses, that yiquan is a branch of science. Studying science, we shouldn't be arrogant and impatient. We must treat the field of our study seriously, not making people think it's something miraculous, and not keeping our knowledge only for ourselves. Those who learn yiquan should not follow some fallacies, but should keep attitude of a scientific researcher, connecting practice with theoretical studies. Studying a martial art, you should try to understand its principles. Only then you can make real progress. Only then yiquan can be further developed.

LEARNING YIQUAN WITH USE OF A SCIENTIFIC SYSTEM OF METHODS

"Science, system, strictness, standard", this is the principle which master Yao Chengguang is using in teaching. According to him, the study of yiquan must be based on scientific concepts, on a systematic program of study, strict demands and standard postures, so students can gradually get knowledge of all practice and theory of yiquan, from simple to complex, from shallow to profound. Students must have chance to follow clear path, developing proper reactions and movements. Learning and mastering some skills is based on creating appropriate system of reactions. By repeating exercises many times, the reactions are enhanced, and certain skills are developed. Without the principle of "science, system, strictness, standard" wrong reactions can develop, which would make mastering some skill impossible.

Master Yao Chengguang got rid of the old teaching method of showing something without explaining. He uses modern method of linking practice with theory, gradually leading student to higher level, using standard demonstration with vivid explanation, making yiquan easier to learn. According to master Yao, zhan zhuang, shi li, fa li and other basic training methods are just various forms of seeking and developing of hunyuan li. So mind activity is key point in all those training methods. After some time of practice of basic methods, students should also make fighting practice a part of their program, under more demanding conditions continuing seeking and developing hunyuan li. They should practice running, rope jumping, fa li, tui shou, san shou, developing physical attributes, improving endurance, speed, coordination.

Yiquan stresses practice. Test of fighting skill is the ultimate indicator of effectiveness of training methods. Development of fighting abilities and skills is result of improving of functioning of neural system, improving your physical and mental side, mastering skills and strategy. There are no shortcuts in study of yiquan. **The only possible shortcut is: proper**

method + good teacher + ability of understanding + courage + physical attributes + hard work.

CREATIVE ATTITUDE , ABSORBING FROM MANY SOURCES

Yao Chengguang says, that while studying yiquan, you should have contact with people from other martial arts, so you can know their abilities and skills, and absorb from them what is valuable. You shouldn't be like a frog in a well, seeing only small part of the sky. When Wang Xiangzhai met western boxers, he noticed that boxing is very practical and scientific, so he absorbed a lot from boxing. Later, thanks to Yao Zongxun's work, the training system of yiquan was further developed. We started using hitting pads and bags, gloves and other protective equipment. At that time many people in chinese martial arts circles were critical about those changes. But science should be developed all the time. Developing means getting rid of some old stuff, absorbing from many sources, and creating new concepts and methods. Practice proved that Yao Zongxun was right when making those changes. Introducing bags and pads made training of punches closer to real fighting. Gloves and protective equipment make possible hitting hard and testing fighting methods without injuring training partner. It enriched training system of yiquan, making training more effective. It was next breakthrough in history of Chinese wushu.

Some people talk a lot about "training of tendons and bones" ¹. According to master Yao Chengguang it is early and not mature concept of Wang Xiangzhai, from the first period of development of yiquan. Wang never mentioned such a concept in later years. "There is no limit to the development of martial art, how could we talk about great perfection". All masters with great achievements devoted all their lives to seeking and perfecting, absorbing new, rejecting what was wrong, gradually developing their systems. Their views were changing, different in early period, in middle period and late period. Later teachings are more mature. But we still have people who keep propagating early concepts of Wang Xiangzhai. Obviously it is result of not knowing and not understanding history of yiquan, not understanding the process of its development. Of course those early concepts of Wang were very popular at some point of time, at some stage of development of wushu. But during process of development some ideas must be rejected. It's the same in society and in martial arts. Today, high technology is used on battlefield. If we would rather use spears and halberds, because we think it is our precious tradition, anybody can predict the results. Also martial arts should be developed creatively, according to demands of new times and modern knowledge. Rules of yiquan tui shou and san shou competitions have been prepared during last years. Thanks to support of Chinese Wushu Association such competitions were already conducted. It is next step which we made. We can expect that yiquan will soon appear at international events.

Master Yao Chengguang says that now it is crucial moment in development of yiquan. Wang Xiangzhai and Yao Zongxun were precursors of this science. We should continue their work. Let's hope that yiquan people will not think just about their private benefits, propagating yiquan as some mysterious system, but will keep honest attitude, doing deep study and research, seeking truth, cooperating with others, making contribution to the development of yiquan.

1 - Yiquan which we do is based on concepts developed by Wang Xiangzhai in later period. We don't treat the classical concepts like qi or nei jin (internal strength) as something not related to biomechanics, but as some old way of describing functioning body and relation between consciousness, neural system and movement system. So there is no place for the concepts of dividing training into two parts: "training of tendons and bones" and "training of qi" (from translator).

ON ZHAN ZHUANG

Master Yao Chengguang is often repeating his father's words: "When you understand the content of zhan zhuang, you understand half of yiquan". Zhan zhuang is a method with which students are introduced into the world of yiquan.



Mind activity, use mental images, is most important element of zhan zhuang. Any movement of human body is result of working of muscles on joints and bones system, and it is directed by neural system. And neural system is controlled by conscious mind. So mind activity is very important. Practical skill is directly related to mastering of mind activity. But if you think only about mind, neglecting form, martial art would become a tower build without foundation. The proper path of zhan zhuang is linking together mind activity with proper posture. Wang Xiangzhai's words: "Seek only fullness of spirit and mind, and not resemblance of form" are appropriate for high level of practice. Beginners shouldn't blindly follow them.

In zhan zhuang mind is focused, body is relaxed, breathing is natural. According to the aim and effects of practice, zhan zhuang can be divided into two groups: yangsheng zhuang (health postures) and jiji zhuang (combat postures).

The main goal of yangsheng zhuang is cultivating the relax of spirit and body (it's based on the principle of „relaxed but not loose”), with help of positive imaginations. Achieved results are:

- „Change of strength” (huan jin) – getting rid of rigid, partial strength. This gives you basis for further practice of changes of relax and tension in jiji zhuang.
- Health: body is relaxed,, mind is tranquil, cerebral cells are resting, body is regulated by biofeedback mechanism, blood circulation and metabolism improve, whole organism is strengthened.

After you develop some feeling of „relax” in yangsheng zhuang, you should make next step, moving to working with changes between relax and tension in jiji zhuang. From yiquan’s point of view relax and tension is a basic pair of opposites which constitutes the movement functions of human body. Force, speed, coordination, endurance, and other physical attributes, all are in some ways related to the question of relax and tension. The main idea of the practice of yiquan is to master and to be able to use effectively relax and tension. This is not only relax and tension in body, but also in mind – which is even more important.

The aim of changes of relax and tension is developing a whole system of contradictory forces, or using different words: developing hunyuan li – holistic force. At beginning we concentrate on our body. After we develop some basis, we put some more attention also to developing the feeling of contradictory forces between body and surrounding space and objects. Finally those feelings are unified – we achieve high level of coordination between mind and body, body and surroundings. This unity is achieved through mo jin (seeking force) practice.

Seeking force means that, according to the principles of: comfort, harmony and fullness, you experience the feeling of force while changing between relax and tension. At beginning you are doing it slowly and softly. There shouldn’t be excessive tension, and there shouldn’t be excessive relax. Excessive relax makes the force slack. Excessive tension makes the force rigid. In both cases you are losing agility, your reaction is slow, fa li is not explosive, and you are getting tired very soon. Methods of mind activity are used accordingly to student’s level in mo jin.

Main stages of mo jin in jiji zhuang:

- Forward-backward, opening-closing, upward-downward – this is first stage of mo jin practice. You concentrate on developing the feeling of contradictory forces in your body, using comparatively “short” imaginations.
- Changing directions of seeking force. There is no determined order of directions. When you already have developed some feelings of contradictory forces in you body, you can concentrate a little more on developing the feeling of contradictory forces between your body and surrounding space. The imaginations are „longer”, more expanded in space.
- Seeking force in relation to six surfaces simultaneously. This is advanced stage. There is no single direction. The force is „pulsating” in your whole body. The frequency of changes between relax and tension is very high. There appear very short and very fast oscillating movements in all parts of your body, you achieve the state of “movement always being born and never ceasing”. Body is as “fast spinning wheel” – when something hits it, it is immediately bounced away. You mind is focused and alert, you are ready to bounce away anything which hits any part of your body. You feel as if your body was one with surrounding space and with whole universe. Yao Zongxun described it this way: „Spirit is as if beyond matter, force in natural, consciousness contains universe”.

In mo jin, you should put attention to following questions:

- If you feel tension, stiffness or weariness, you can stop the mind activity typical for jiji zhuang, and use mind activities typical for yang sheng zhuang instead, in order to have some relax and rest, and after some time you can continue seeking force.
- Time of exercise should be adjusted according to individual conditions. Usually people who have some basics can practice jiji zhuang for some 30 minutes on each side. First you should put attention to the quality of exercise, and then think about practicing longer.
- You should keep feeling of „comfortable force”, „fullness of force”, coordination, „using mind and not force”. You should observe carefully the feelings while doing mo jin, not losing the feeling in any moment.

In mo jin we start from determined order. Then we move to changes of order, and then to no order. You must be focused and alert. You are preparing for reacting in combat situations – you must be ready to react according to feeling in any moment, under any conditions.

There are various jiji zhuang postures. There are different accents in them. This is related to the possibility of emerging of various situations during fighting. Hunyuan zhuang is actually basic preparatory posture in fight – it’s the stage of “accumulating force”, before you issue it forward. Palms are directed inward, as if embracing something, there are 3 parts of expanding force, and 7 parts of embracing force. In pingbao zhuang palms are directed downward – it’s the posture through which you are moving from hunyuan zhuang when you are issuing force – there is some pressing down and turning arms outward. In chengtuo zhuang palms are directed forward and upward – it’s the position of hands when issuing force forward. There is pushing and pulling, expanding and lifting. In gougua zhuang pulling back, and at the same time force pointing forward, are stressed. Niaonanfei zhuang is an advanced form of jiji zhuang – training of fast reaction is accented here – the frequency of changes between relax and tension is very high. Fuhu zhuang and xianglong zhuang help to develop strong legs and prepare you for reacting in not typical situations in combat – so when during fight your position is low and body is twisted, you still have ability of agile stepping and freedom of issuing force. Duli zhuang is related to issuing force with your legs – it is preparing you for kicking practice. Sitting postures help you to develop ability of acting in non typical situations, when your feet loose support of ground (“root”).

Hunyuan zhuang is the most basic of jiji zhuang. When you have some awareness of hunyuan li, you can start practicing pingbao zhuang, chengtuo zhuang, gougua zhuang, niaonanfei zhuang etc. When you have some basis in doing high postures, you can start low postures and sitting postures. You should give some attention and time to all postures, so you develop ability of acting in various and changing situations. You can choose one or two postures on which you concentrate more. But you shouldn’t forget about practicing other postures too.

The idea of zhan zhuang in yiquan is that using appropriate forms of mind activity, by doing mo jin, you develop and enhance hunyuan li – the force balanced in all directions. The goal of jiji zhuang is seeking and developing hunyuan li. Hunyuan li is the core idea of the whole training system of yiquan.

ON SHI LI

When you have some feelings and experience regarding hunyuan li, you should put some more attention to shi li practice too.



Master Yao Chengguang says, that zhan zhuang is basis, but shi li is the crucial method. The scope of shi li practice is largest, and the level of difficulty is highest. In the training system of yiquan, shi li is the method which creates the bridge between basics and advanced training. The fighting abilities depend on shi li training. When practicing yiquan, you must put a lot of attention to shi li training.

Why must we practice shi li? In zhan zhuang you develop and enhance hunyuan li in relatively static position. Usually when you start moving, the feeling of fullness of hunyan li disappears. Only after next adjusting of posture and mind activity, the feeling appears again. Yao Zongxun said; “You cannot talk about real fighting skills, when you lack hunyuan li. But you cannot fight by using zhan zhuang posture. The hunyuan li, developed through zhan zhuang, must be kept also in movement. You must be able to use it also in rapid and fast changing movement. The process of passing from static posture to movement is done by practicing shi li”.

The main idea of shi li is continuing of developing and enhancing hunyuan li, with use of appropriate mind activity, in situation when body is moving – so when position changes, you can still feel this unified, full force, and you are able to use it freely. This way you create conditions for the ability of issuing force in any moment, any situation. Shi li is also a method of checking the quality of zhan zhuang practice. Quality of zhan zhuang is basis for quality of shi li. Zhan zhuang and shi li are mutually related, an affect each other. Shi li is form of expanding zhan zhuang in space.

When you start shi li practice, you must use principles of: natural, soft, slow, relax, subtlety. The feeling of force of whole body must be unified and balanced. Bones give support, joints are relaxed and agile, muscles are relaxed and stretched, you have feeling of “as relax not relax”. You should feel movement of your body through surrounding air, subtle as unwinding a silk thread. When something moves, you must have feeling of movement of whole body – “when some part of body moves, there is no part which doesn’t move”. Gradually the movement becomes more subtle, you become more focused and alert, intention and force are not broken, whole body is moving naturally.

Regardless if it’s zhan zhuang or shi li, when you start the practice, there should be no haste. Yiquan is stressing spirit, mind, feelings. When movements are fast, mind is impatient, you are losing feelings in some moments of movement, the effects of practice become “rough”, which affects development of hunyuan li and ability of it. So, at beginning you should practice slowly – the slower, more subtle, the easier is developing the good coordination of mind and body.

Because hands are very sensitive, when you start the practice of shi li, you can concentrate on hands. Then you should try to get the same feelings in other parts of body, with you whole body „tasting” shi li in slow, gentle and subtle movement.

In shi li, no matter which movement and what mind activity used, when you move forward, you should have feeling of some force directed backward. When you move backward, you should feel some force directed forward. It’s the same about upward and downward, to the left and to the right. This is the meaning of saying: “force in direction opposite to movement”. The goal is: developing the feeling of contradictory forces in various situations, so you can get basis for the ability of issuing force according to feeling during fight.

There are several forms of shi li practice:

- Shi li in fixed position. At beginning you practice one movement many times. For example you do pingtui shi li. Then you learn and practice next shi li movements, like: kaihe shi li, fu’an qiu, boshui etc. It prepares you for practicing mixed shi li in fixed position.
- Mixed shi li in fixed position. You are mixing various shi li movements in freely changing order. So you can do one pingtui movement, and then kaihe movement, fu’an qiu, boshui etc. It prepares you for various changes in single pushing hands practice.
- Shi li with steps (steps practice will be described in next chapter). You repeat single shi li movement while doing steps forward, and then steps backward. It prepares you for mixed shi li with steps.
- Mixed shi li with steps. During one exercise while doing steps forward, and then steps backward, you freely mix, all kinds of shi li movements in changing order. The goal is preparing for various changes in double pushing hands and free fighting.

When your movements are natural, coordinated, you can start freely changing between steps forward and backward. For example you can do one step forward, one step backward, one step forward, two steps backward etc. After some time you can start doing it with steps in various directions, changing postures and paths of movement, avoiding any determined order.

When during subtle, slow movement you have clear feeling of hunyuan li, you should „pull down the fences”, changing the slow movement to faster, big movement to smaller. Sometimes you can practice slower, sometimes faster. Sometimes doing longer movements, sometimes shorter. Then the order and rhythm must be changing during one exercise. In fight, you cannot first prepare some movement and then use it, you must be able to change according to situation. So you should keep feelings of continuity, but you change the rhythm, making pauses too. You must develop ability of being ready for issuing force in any moment, according to situation. This is demand of combat.

When you get to high level of shi li, no matter what changes, you always keep the feeling of fullness of “comfortable force”. When mind is reaching, force is reaching – there is no difference between mind and force. Finally even the concept of shi li ceases existing – you achieve the stage of natural force.

Yao Zongxun said: „You should be like a flag exposed to wind, like a fish in river. The flag is moving in ways which cannot be predicted – when wind blows, it reacts. Fish is as if moving slightly, but actually it is moved by the movement of water.”

ON MOCA BU

The ability of controlling distance is very important in combat. It is based on good footwork. As master Yao Chengguang explains, in combat the opponents are moving all the time, the distance between them is changing. To be able to defend yourself and attack effectively, you must use steps, changing distance and your position in relation to your opponent. Good footwork must be precise, springy and agile. You must be able to keep dominating position, and ability of effective issuing of force in any moment of the fight. All attack and defense movements have their basis in steps. The steps we are talking about are different from normal walking or running, and are different from the steps of athletes running or jumping. It's very specific way of moving. It is said: "I would rather reveal 10 ways of issuing force, than one way of stepping", "When hands arrive, and steps arrive at the same time, fighting becomes easy". Those traditional sayings explain the importance of steps in combat.



The basic practice of steps in yiquan is called mocabu. Moca means friction. When you practice steps, your foot is moving above ground, but you imagine as if it was rubbing ground, so you feel some resistance. Moca bu can be described as shi li for legs.

When you start practicing moca bu, you should remember about the principles: natural, soft, relax, subtle. You must use mind activity. Whole body force must be perceived as unified and balanced. In situation when your legs are moving you still keep feeling of hunyuan li. Of course at the same time there is appropriate work of upper part of your body. The movement of whole body is unified, according to the traditional principle: "When upper moves, lower naturally follows, when lower moves, upper is naturally leading".

When you start moca bu exercise, you should stand with your body straight. You should be focused, watching some target far in front of you. Knees are slightly bent. Hands are on both sides of your body, palms in some distance from body, as if being supported by two balustrades, so it is easier to keep balance (of course it is only imagination, you shouldn't put your palms on anything). We can start from step with left foot. Imagine that you are pulling your left foot out of mud (body is pulling leg), as if you tried not to loose your shoe in the mud. You can imagine that your knee is as if pulled upward by some rope, which helps

pulling foot out of mud. Center of foot is as if stepping on a small wooden roll. You are slowly moving the roll forward with your foot. At the same time you have intention as if wanting to move it back. In yiquan you should develop the intention of simultaneous forces in opposite directions. When during moving your left foot forward, your left knee becomes almost straight (it's never completely straightened), you move your foot some two foot widths to the left (about 20 cm). First put down front part of sole of your foot. Then gradually move your weight onto your left leg. During this movement, you are slowly putting your left heel down. Left knee is bending slightly. When weight is on your left leg, you start pulling the right foot "out of mud". Demands are the same as previously. Steps backward are also practiced.

This movement can be described with words: : lifting, stepping over (this means also some straightening of supporting leg, with pressing down with foot), stepping down, contracting. Lifting is related to knee. Stepping over is when you move your foot above ground. Stepping down is the intention when you are putting your foot down. Contracting, means feeling of concavity in center of your foot.

When you have some basics, you can change the exercise into more advanced variant. When front (left) foot is moving the roll forward, you should support this with force of your back leg and your whole body. When knee becomes almost straightened, and you move your foot about 20 cm to the side, you still keep moving it forward, supporting this with your back leg and whole body. The step with right foot is done in the same way. Steps backward are also practiced. The steps can be made longer – it's called: big step. It helps to make your legs stronger. You learn shorter and longer steps, in order to be able to adapt yourself to various situations in combat. The big step practice is related to the long and low variants of jijì zhuang, which also help to strengthen your legs, and improve your stability.

In moca bu you must put attention to following questions:

- When you have basic feelings of resistances in your feet area, you can imagine that your whole body below waist is in mud. The imagined mud can gradually become denser. You can imagine that it is difficult to move through mud, and your foot is like a plough, making trench. The aim is in developing strong feeling of resistance and strengthening legs. But at the same time it is whole body training.
- Your body should be kept straight, with feeling as if being suspended from above. Concentration on legs training shouldn't cause losing proper, stable position of whole body.
- You must put some attention to symmetry between your both legs. If you notice that one of your legs is much weaker, you must concentrate more on strengthening it.
- Before you practice forward and backward steps, you can practice steps in fixed position, and use some supplementary exercises, which can help to strengthen your legs and improve balance, like: lifting your foot and putting it down on side of your body, lifting foot and stepping down in front of your body, lifting knee while stepping backward etc.
- No matter if you do steps forward or backward or mixing various numbers of forward and backward steps, or even doing them with changing rhythm, you should watch a target far in front of you all the time.

Wang Xiangzhai said: „Steps make the position determined. But steps also make position not determined. When front leg is moving in, back leg is following. Front and back leg have

naturally determined positions. From forward step move to backward step. From backward step move to forward step. From forward step make backward step, which will be changed into forward step. From backward step make forward step, which will be first part of backward step. Let there will be no determined position”.

When after practicing forward and backward steps (including big steps) for some time, you have some experience and have developed some basis, you should change order and rhythm. Forward or backward, whole step or half step, big step or small step, with uniform speed or suddenly changing tempo. Your mind must be focused and alert. Imagine that you are making step forward, and then your foot meets some obstacle. Or you are stepping down, and it turns out that there is a hole in ground just there. You must instantly feel the change of situation and react, stopping the movement, or taking your foot back etc. Your intention should be as if moving on very thin ice. The goal is preparing you for demands of combat. You should practice in such a way, that opponent is not able to read your intention or rhythm of your movement. In changing conditions you must keep feeling of fullness of force and ability of issuing it.

ON FA LI

Some people who do yiquan have only very superficial knowledge of this system. They think that zhan zhuang practice is enough to fully develop the elastic, explosive force of whole body. Master Yao Chengguang says, that in combat you cannot just rely on static zhan zhuang or on slow shi li. To be able win fights you must develop the skill of technically proper use of sudden “explosion of force”. Zhan zhuang, shi li and moca bu are basic training methods of yiquan. Their aim is developing hunyuan li, creating conditions for fa li. And fa li is basis of combat skill. Yiquan is a system of training methods, which are closely related to each other. During the training process, one stage is preparing you for next one, no stage can be omitted.



Fa li is effective way of using force in martial art. Fa li is very important stage of yiquan practice. Yiquan is based on study of methods of issuing force of various martial arts. Gradually its own specific method of fa li practice was developed. The main factors which help to achieve quality of fa li are:

- High level of stimulation of neural system, achieved thanks to appropriate mind activity. While practicing jiji zhuang (on higher level of practice), you can imagine that poisonous snakes and wild animal are surrounding you, and they are fighting with each other. Even the smallest hair on your body is “standing up” as if being a sharp blade. You are ready to fight for your life. Your spirit is aroused. You have feeling, that

if you fight, anywhere you hit, you can split stones and break mountains. „The success in fight is based on courage”. Without brave, fearless spirit, the best skill is useless. The crucial point of fa li is acting as if there was real threat.

- Using the pressing on ground with back foot, and resulting reaction force. When you do mo jin in jiji zhuang, you work with this force and movement of whole body, when back foot is pressing on ground, and your body is pushed forward.
- System of contradictory forces in whole body. The more complete is this system, the fuller, and bigger issued force (adding speed of more parts of body). Upward-downward contradictory force is basis for all other contradictory forces. Wang Xiangzhai said. „The axis of changes of relax and tension is between above and below”. Unity and mutual leading of upper and lower is basis for the whole system of contradictory forces. Mo jin in zhan zhuang and shi li serve developing the system of contradictory forces.
- Fast vibrating of all parts of body during continuous changes between relax and tension. The higher frequency, the force can be issued more abruptly, the easier is issuing it without delay, in any direction, with any part of body, according to the need. This is the pulsating of force about which Wang Xiangzhai said: „movement always being born and never ceasing”.

Practicing fa li you must remember about principles: natural, relax, unity, coordination, speed, explosive. There are two stages: cumulating and issuing. First there is accumulating and being ready for issuing. Mind and body must be in state of “relaxed but not loose” – there shouldn’t be excessive relax or tension. Mind must be focused, alert. At some moment, suddenly, in explosive way, you are issuing force with some part of your body.

The force issued in yiquan is hunyuan li – force balanced and coordinated in all directions, also called holistic, unified or consolidated force. Consolidation is not something absolute. Dispersion is excessive relax, slackness, lack of feeling of contradictory forces in up-down, left-right, front-back directions and lack of their harmony. Fa li becomes slow, stiff, uncoordinated. And consolidation, unity means using all forces of body which can be used, “on surface and deep inside” – there is sudden, fast contraction. After short tension there is immediate relaxing, so next issuing of force is possible. Relax (but not looseness) is cumulating of force, tension (but not stiffness) is issuing of force. Changes between relax and tension are constituting the process of fa li. The higher tempo of changes, the higher quality of fa li. Wang Xiangzhai said: “Relax and tension, tension and relax to proper extent, empty and full, full and empty are rooted in each other”. During very fast issuing of force many kinds of forces and many principles of physics are used, as: unified elastic force, force of a screw, triangle of forces, leverage, diagonal surface etc.

Fa li is summing up o basic training (zhan zhuang, shi li and moca bu). Without basic training, proper practice of fa li is impossible. But some students, although they did basic training, are still unable to issue force properly:

- When they do fa li, they lack the state of high mental stimulation.
- Body is too tense and stiff, movements are not harmonious, force of legs is not fully used, upper and lower don’t work together.
- Even though there is some unity and coordination, but time of issuing force is too long, there is no acceleration, it becomes pushing force instead of explosive force.

It is mainly result of some weak points in practice of basic methods, and lack of understanding of the demands of fa li. So when doing fa li, you must remember about following questions:

- Mind must be focused, alert, in state of high stimulation. Awareness must be “enlarged and extended”. You should have feeling of great, far reaching force. “When you suddenly move your body in air, you will cause tornado”.
- Before issuing force body should be „as if relaxed but not relaxed”, there should be proper balance between relax and tension.
- During fa li head is as if leading upward. Only when there are upward-downward contradictory forces, exhibiting all abilities of body is possible.
- Back foot must press ground, so there appears force pushing your body forward.
- Imagine that the part of body with which you are issuing force is as if hitting red-hot iron plate. In moment of contact there is sudden issuing of force – this way the speed of issuing force and the following movement backward is very high. Fa li must be strong and fast. But you shouldn’t loose unity and continuity.
- Fa li must be done with shi sheng, using additional stimulation, supplementing fa li.

Issuing of force can be done in two ways: as hitting and as pushing. When hitting, the force is working on opponents body on short distance, in very short time, in a concentrated way. The smaller the surface of contact, the force is more penetrating. This force doesn’t cause big movement of opponent’s body, but is causing injuries. In case of pushing, the time and distance of using force is bigger. The surface of contact is bigger too. This causes big movement of opponent’s body, but doesn’t cause serious injuries.

You can start fa li practice from single movements in fixed position. Then you can do them with steps and in various directions. After some time you can move to the stage of free fa li, when you are mixing in changing order all kinds of issuing force with various parts of body. You are issuing force anywhere there appears (imagined) contact. You can change rhythm, doing the movements sometimes slower, sometimes faster, sometimes the movements can be longer, and sometimes shorter, sometimes you issue force frontally and sometimes diagonally, so in various situation you are able to issue the unified force. Your mental state should be: “when there is contact with opponent, you body suddenly changes into exploding bomb”. But even then you cannot say that you mastered fa li. Fa li must be tested and developed during pushing hands and free fighting practice. You must continuously draw conclusions from this practice and improve your fa li.

From translator:

Originally planned as a small booklet, it became part of a big book, which was published in China in 2005

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