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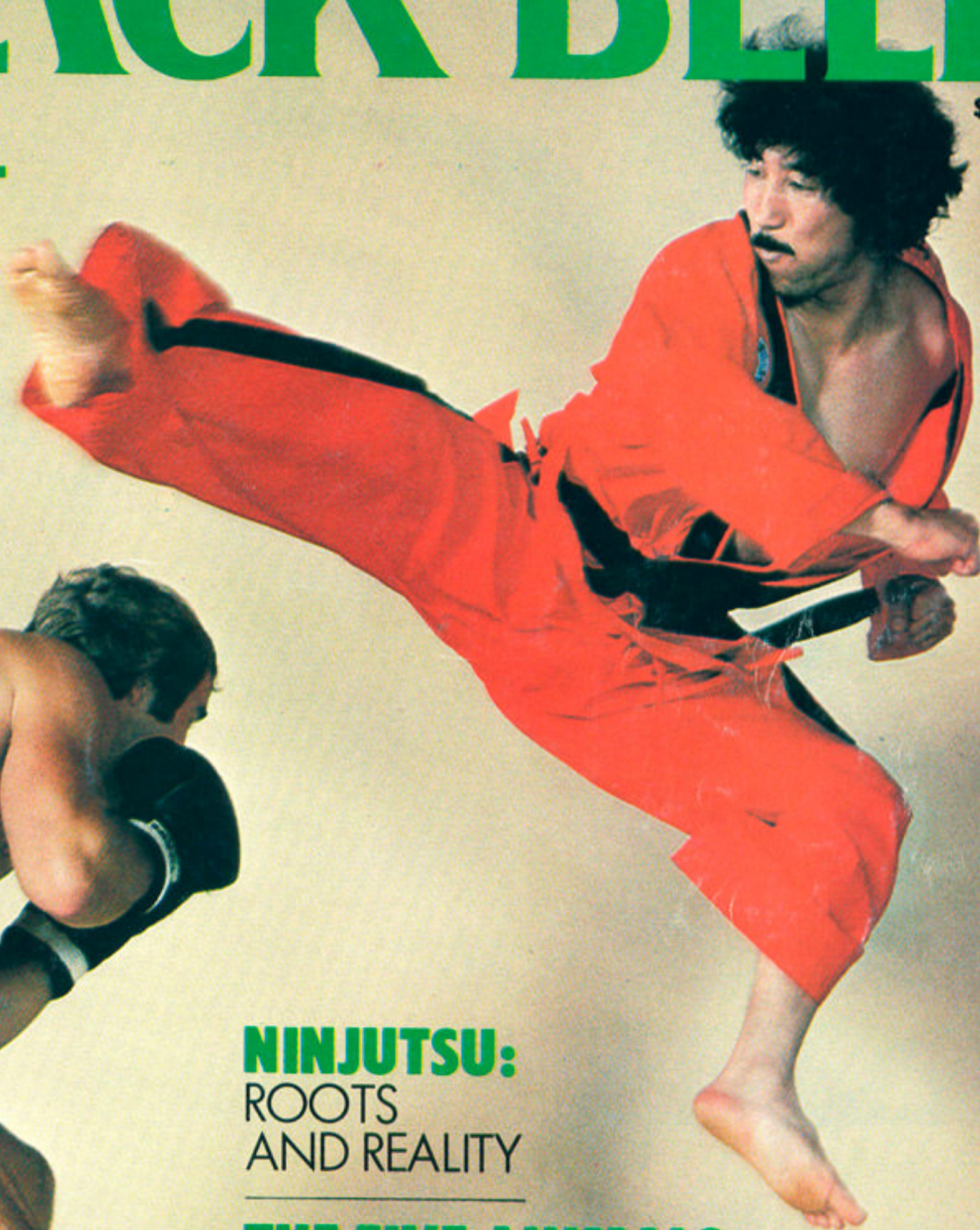
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THE MARTIAL ART OF THE FUTURE?

BLENDING
TAE KWON
DO AND
BOXING



NINJUTSU:
ROOTS
AND REALITY

**THE FIVE ANIMALS
OF CLASSICAL KUNG FU**

KYUDO:
THE WAY OF THE BOW

**COMING BACK FROM
KARATE INJURIES**



THE FIVE ANIMALS OF KUNG FU

by Alex Holub

Hand illustrations by Grace Gallant

Kung fu. Whenever most people hear that word it conjures up images of Bruce Lee—or those unbelievable Chinese movies where people are able to leap two- and three-story buildings, and the hero takes on what appears to be all of downtown Phoenix during rush hour and soundly thrashes them. As much as we'd like to believe that these represent pure classical kung fu, they don't. Bruce Lee modified wing chun kung fu with aspects of Occidental boxing, karate, and various other odds and ends. The Chinese movies are made just to make money. The gymnastics, even, at many tournaments are for the show, for judges who don't know how to judge pure forms. The true art itself is not often seen. But just as it is important for one who desires to be a good singer to learn classical technique, it is also important for one who truly desires to be a good practitioner of kung fu to learn a pure classical style. It is in the training of the classical systems that the complete person is built up.

The many systems of kung fu are all based on the movements of five major animals: the snake, tiger, dragon, crane, and leopard. This is the foundation of all classical kung fu training.

And at the basis of this classical training is the "horse" or the front stance. Just as a cavalry man would go to war on his horse, so would the kung fu man go into battle on his own horse. It is from this foundation that the individual is built—from the ground up. In true classical training at least one full year is devoted to the building of the horse alone. Not only are the legs strengthened, but the character is developed through patience.

The horse is of paramount importance, for all that the kung fu practitioner does later will be affected by the horse. If a move is incomplete, for example, due to the horse being in a too "open" position, then the individual stands a chance of being taken down, kicked, or displaced. The knee should be properly bent, the feet

flat on the ground at all times. This helps to keep the balance centered—and it's much harder to fight someone who is well-balanced than one who is not.

Next, the position of the torso. The hips and shoulders should be in line, the chest should be up, and the spine straight. Breathing is then done only with the diaphragm and should be felt deep into the pelvic area.

Last is the position of the head. At all times it should be erect, with a feeling of balance. The chin should be tucked slightly in, so that the head and neck are in a relaxed position.

A necessary thing to remember is that the whole body should not feel strained in any of the horse stances. One should feel as comfortable as possible. In fact, the horse may be considered a position of standing meditation. After one has been conditioned to stand without strain in the front horse for 30 minutes or so, it isn't difficult to stand and meditate for an hour or more.

Another necessity in classical kung fu, as in any other fighting art, is the extension of the arm. The major difference here is the placement of the elbow. Unlike Western boxing and some styles of karate, the elbow should always be pointed downward—never is it locked at the full extension of the arm. No matter what animal is being performed, the elbow is always bent and pointed downward. This changes a movement such as a punch from a "push" type of motion to a *power* motion. It also takes the force out of the arm and places it into the chest and back, which have larger and stronger muscles. Further, if anyone grabs the arm for an elbow break, as long as it is bent the control will be in the hands (or elbow) of the defender.

The last item to mention about classical kung fu is the kick. The basic kick is the front snap kick done without any movement of the hip. This makes it much faster, and when the heel is extended forward it also becomes much stronger. Most kung fu kicks are based on this simple movement. It changes only when the posi-

tion of the body and the lower part of the leg from the knee down change position. So what at first appears to be a front snap kick then comes to its end as a roundhouse kick.

Each move in classical kung fu is a complete flowing of the body. First, the hand and arm begin to move. The body follows, and last is the movement of the legs. The power flows upward all the way from the ground to the point of contact or outward to the very tip of a weapon. It is very difficult to describe this in words or to show it in a few photographs. It is a feeling one senses when performed properly. With this flowing power, as with all classical kung fu, when it's done properly it "feels right." When the move feels right, it usually also looks right.

All of the sets of movements (*kuen*) in kung fu are designed to be complete fighting systems on their own. Most of kung fu is technique and the sets are a series of interlocking, flowing techniques. In order to make use of a technique, all one need do is to break the set apart.

But even aside from being a series of techniques, the sets are of enormous value. They teach timing, speed, and power. Moreover, they offer coordination of the whole individual, mind and body, through a series of movements. Breathing must be precisely adjusted to each movement, or endurance will be low. One's concentration becomes better the more one works on the movements. The body is strengthened, both internally and externally. Finally, one learns to flow from move to move with little conscious thought or effort.

Each of the five animals, being a separate system, is designed for a different purpose. Each one builds a different part of the body and mind, and each has different techniques of defense and counterattack. Some are a mixture of internal and external techniques. Others are purely internal or purely external. But they also form an interlocking network that is more than the sum of its parts. No one system alone can be all that one will ever need.



In a characteristic snake defense against a straight lunge punch, the defender steps in deflecting the punch and actually coils his hand around the attacker's (1-3). He not only diverts the attacker's force but continues the motion (4), exposing the sensitive underarm to a (5) snake-hand strike.



The Snake

The snake makes extensive use of internal power. Besides this, it stresses speed and continual movement. There are several main hand positions for the snake, depending on the style and type of strike. Its major emphasis is on strikes with the tips of the fingers, requiring the fingers to be very strong. Part of classical training includes the thrusting of the hands into large buckets of sand, hard beans, and/or stones. Iron palm exercises are also valuable here.

In defense, the hands of the practitioner using the snake move quickly, coiling around a punch or a kick and striking the many pressure, vulnerable, or soft points on the body. The movements are strong and fast, and both long- and short-hand styles are used. It is also not uncommon for the snake fighter to use slaps, cuts, and whip-hand motions to stun his oppo-

nent momentarily. Then he immobilizes him with paralyzing strikes.

As was noticed by the old masters, all snakes don't strike the same. For example, the coiling snake strikes by springing forward, while the cobra strikes with a distinct downward motion. Consequently, there are different types of strikes in the snake system. Some are used to go to larger areas, some to smaller, and still others are for grabbing and pulling with the fingers.

Some of the favorite striking places of the snake are: the throat, the solar plexus, temples, the groin, into the armpit, and the eyes. With the snake, as with any style of classical kung fu, when going to the groin one never uses a downward motion with the hand and arm. Instead, the individual goes lower on his horse or to a one-leg kneeling position, in order to make the strike straight from the

shoulder. From this position he can then come quickly upward into the many vulnerable points which may be opened.

"Continual action" of the hands in the snake style doesn't mean that they are floating around constantly, even if the opponent is fairly distant. It means that once the attack has begun and fighters are locked in combat, the hands continually block and strike in both short and wide circles.

To get some sort of idea of the circular motion of the hands in the snake, all that is necessary is to follow the hands around the steering wheel of a turning car. As one hand goes down around one side to block, the other comes up from under and around the other side, until it is directly in the center of the body above the blocking hand at the top of the steering wheel.

The Tiger

Many people think of the tiger when they hear the word kung fu. This is the most familiar animal of the martial art.

The tiger is one of the stronger animal forms. It develops agility and power through jumps and strikes. It also has the unique ability to strengthen bones, and it develops very strong fingers, hands, and arms.

The tiger is essentially external in

its use of power. Its main movements are hard palm-heel strikes with instantaneous rips and tears—the movements are like those of a common house cat. It will wait until the appropriate moment, and strike with incredible ferocity.

The hand movements of the tiger fighter are usually short, quick downward arcs; rips and tears to the sides; arm blocks and rips at the turn of the wrist; and grabs which dig the

fingers deeply into the opponent's flesh.

The tiger also sometimes grabs to some particular part of the body with the thumb or the finger(s) directly on one or more pressure points. This type of strike will cause damage to a wider part of the body.

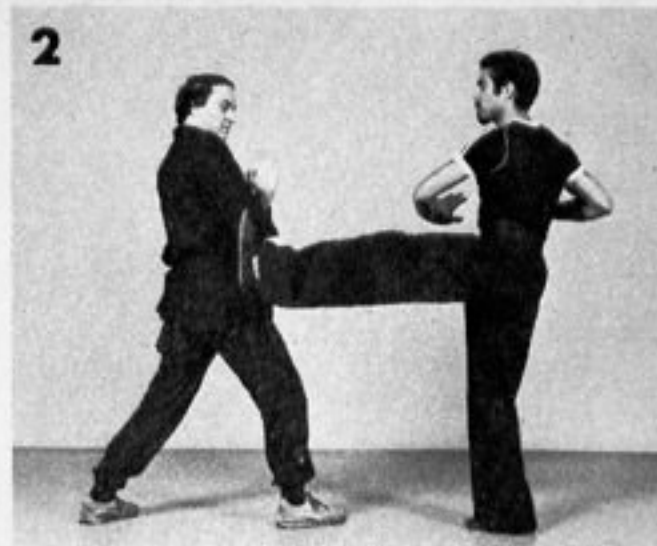
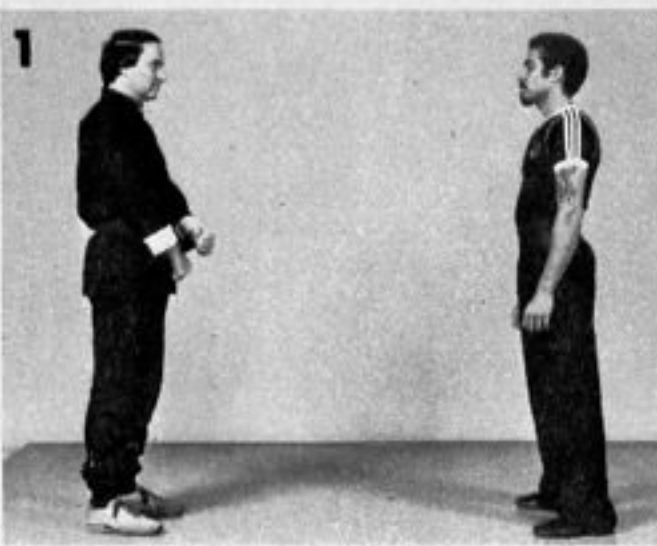
One of the exercises used to strengthen the hands, arms, and fingers for the tiger is done with the "iron palm" bag or a small canvas

bag filled with sand. All that is necessary is to drop the bag and catch it from above with the fingers, pulling it straight upward. This develops strength in the fingers, hands, and especially forearms.

The hands of the tiger are always in dual motion. As one goes forward to strike, the other goes back. It becomes a type of yin and yang motion. This movement also has the tendency to increase the external power of the act.

Blocks are generally done with the palm of the hand (with the fingers out of the way, of course) or the arms. Many of the upward blocks are done with a leading elbow. This sort of motion allows the hand more freedom to strike.

Several favorite striking points of the tiger are the face and neck, the inner side of the arm, and the groin, as well as the chest and stomach. With a leading elbow on the block, the opponent's move can be easily controlled and the appropriate part of the body can be exposed for the strike.



Showing the characteristic dual-hand motion of the tiger, the defender blocks a kick (1&2), then sweeps the attacker's hands out of the way with his left hand as he strikes with a tiger claw to the face (3&4).



In this crane sequence, the defender employs both the "foot" and the "wing" of the style. He parries and grabs the attacker's punching arm (1&2), gripping at the pressure point (lung-6). Then with the crane wing he breaks the elbow (3) and backhands the face (4&5) of the attacker.

The Crane

The crane system simulates the flying, the defensive maneuvers, and agility of its namesake. This system develops alertness, balance, and coordination.

In the crane system, the practitioner's hands simulate the wings, the head and beak, or the foot of the crane. It all depends on what is need-

ed at the time.

In defense, the crane fighter appears at times to be opening himself up. This is just a ploy in order to get his opponent to attack a specific area. When the attack is launched, he will counter with a wide, expansive, circular block on the attack which will immediately be followed by a resounding open-handed cut or slap.

Due to the fact that there are three hand positions in the crane system, different areas of the body tend to be targeted. With the open palm (the wing) the areas are usually the forehead, the top of the head, the sides of the torso, and the side of the face. The cut movements are on the shoulders, the bridge of the nose, the lower rib cage, and the throat. The thrust

movements are similar to those of the snake and would go for the same places as the snake. The beak movements would also go for vulnerable, soft, or pressure points. Finally, the claw or foot would go for grabs to the same areas as the beak would strike, and in returning the hand an upward pulling motion would rip the spot.

The crane system requires coordination and balance, for it often attacks with several different move-

ments, such as a kick and two slaps, simultaneously. The practitioner is often even found standing on one leg, but any attempt to sweep or kick the skilled crane fighter would be futile—his speed and agility would put him out of the way with a broad jump. In fact, the opponent would usually end up with a rather strong kick to defend himself from, even in the midst of the jump.

Blocks with the crane system are

usually with a cut, slap, back-of-the-wrist, or the beak. These types generally are a preliminary to a countermove, for they place the hand in a good position for a strong strike, usually into an opened area.

Due to the crossing of the hands in front of the body the crane fighter can block to his front and attack to two sides within a split second. Add to this a kick to the back, and four opponents can quickly be handled.



The dragon makes use of maximum, nearly frontal, force in its attacks. In this case, the attacker is poised and attempts a direct, two-handed frontal push (1-3). But the defender, meanwhile, has stepped in and very slightly to the side, behind the attacker's lead leg. This footwork (compare 2 and 3), which is characteristic of the dragon, allows him to respond with a straight push of his own, symbolizing the dragon's flaming breath and knocking the attacker off-balance (4).

The Dragon

The dragon is the only mythical animal in the five-animal system. It is a very important part of the Chinese mystical tradition and has a similar meaning (mystically) as the snake.

The hand position of the dragon can be found in any of the ancient or contemporary drawings of oriental dragons. If one cares to look closely enough, this same position can be seen on the front grasping appendages of lizards.

The dragon is known for its ferocity and lightness, for many of the drawings of dragons are backgrounded by clouds and fire.

The dragon fighter stalks, attacks, and counters very swiftly just as the lizard stalks and attacks its prey. He will move with hand movements similar to the crane, but not as wide, and hit with strong, hard, palm-heel strikes. In many instances, as soon as the hand hits the fingers grab, so as to pull the opponent into a devastating face or chest strike.

Unlike those of the tiger, the dragon's countering hand movements are straight, combined with circular

blocks. Add to this the usual step toward the opponent and a grab and pull, and you have a molding of the two opposing forces. The one with the least balance gives way and is overcome. When defending, the dragon moves strongly forward and to the side. This way he's always slightly out of the way of a direct confrontation. From this position he can easily see and control the movements of the opponent.

One thing the dragon and tiger have in common is the tendency to cross the sides of the face with the fingers. Another is the way they attack directly to the groin area. Due to the fact that the dragon's hand goes in a straight line instead of an arc, though, there will be a tendency to strike vulnerable areas with the fingertips—then the grab. Once the grab is made, the hand will pull straight backward and an open-handed hit will quickly follow.

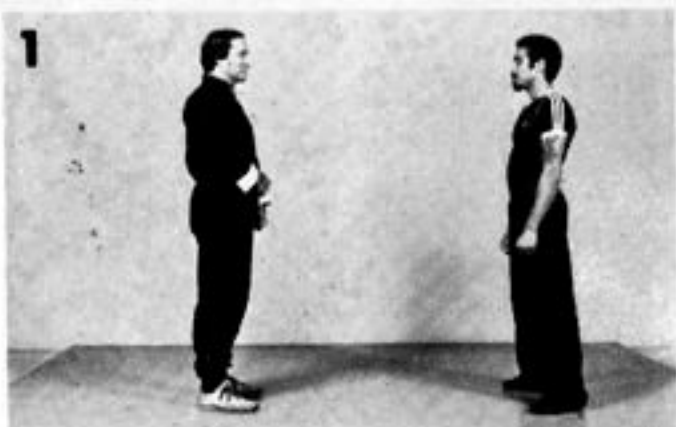
Two standard moves that come from the dragon are the basic upward open-handed block and the standard punch. This punch is often called the "dragon punch" or the "dragon fist."

One of the exercises for strengthening the hands, arms, and fingers for the dragon is done with a two-pound coffee can (if you can find one). Fill it with sand and take the base of the can in your fingertips holding it downward. Begin to turn the wrist to and fro. Then take the can and turn it upright in the fingertips and do the same. There should be no movement of the elbow and the elbow should be pointed downward at all times. This exercise also gives the hand position for the dragon.

The Leopard

The leopard is the last animal in the five-animal system. It's probably best known for its knuckle punch. This is one of the fastest and most destructive punches, but in the classical five-animal system, the open hand is used more often.

The only way to describe the open-hand position is as if one were holding a small bowl. The hand looks somewhat like a cross between the tiger and the dragon.



The leopard fighter steps in as he blocks a front punch (1&2). He counters with a leopard-fist strike to the temple (3), which continues into a takedown (4&5). The leopard is the only animal style which strikes downward (6).

The leopard moves with hand movements similar to those of the dragon. Unlike the tiger, the hands are positioned with one up at chest level and the other protecting the groin area. But like the tiger, the leopard favors rips and tears—unless of course the punch is used. The punch of the leopard system is basically used for its destructive striking power. There are a lot of strong, hard power moves used to break bones and eliminate the opponent quickly.

The tiger and the leopard thus are both large cats, but different in their method of attack and defense. The tiger will attack with its claws out, and will rip and tear its prey, while the leopard will stun its prey using its paw like a club, and then rip and tear. This was noticed by the masters of old, and hence the differences between the animal sets.

Like the dragon, the leopard will go *directly* to a point—hitting with the fingertips, then grabbing and rip-

ping. Unlike any of the other animals, the leopard will go downward with a thrust of the hand—but only when the body is bent over enough that the movement becomes perpendicular.

Unlike the tiger, a strike to the face will come from around the blocking hand instead of directly over it or in front of it. This then could cause either an arm-break, if the arm was held, or a release of any hold and a protection of the groin area.

In essence, the leopard seems to have more in common with the dragon than the tiger. The low block doesn't just go behind the back as in the dragon but will stop at the groin for protection. It hits essentially the same as the dragon and its hand position has some similarities to that of the dragon. Meanwhile, the leopard fist is similar to that of the snake.

The classical five-animal system is one of the oldest and most effective kung fu systems. It combines the natural motions of the body with those of specific animals. The training provides a means of bringing the body to its peak strength and efficiency and it also allows for individual differences. From this system, all others developed, and within each system the five animals are interspersed.

