



# Shaolin Collection - 7

## The Shaolin Animals



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# The Shaolin Animals

This is the seventh in a series of documents, which are in my opinion considered essential for studying Shaolin Gong Fu.

## About this Library

Most of these documents are translations of historical texts which are just now (2003) beginning to emerge. For this library, only the texts considered as core by the author to the study of Shaolin were selected. While some of the readers might question some of the texts in this collection, please bear in mind, that Shaolin has a different meaning for every person studying the art.

## Shaolin Collection - 7

With this 7th paper, I will now start going more into detailed aspects concerning Shaolin per se. In this particular document we will provide an overview on the Shaolin animal styles. I did not write this document. This is part of my private collection, and I am not even sure where this one originates from. If any of the readers knows the author, please inform me, because credit should go where credit is due.



# The Shaolin Animals

## Introduction

The “classical” and “non-classical” animal styles are all complete fighting styles based upon the movement and characteristics of animals familiar to the Shaolin monks (the dragon, is, of course, mythological). Each animal embodies a particular range of strategies. A well-rounded fighter is assumed to be familiar with all the animals, in order to be able to choose strategies appropriate for different situations. Monks traditionally specialize in one style that is well-suited to their physiques and characteristics.

# The Non-Classical Animal Styles

## Praying Mantis

Praying mantis style is a very famous style, developed in the 1700s by a fighter named Wang Lang. He supposedly developed it specifically to defeat the monks of the Shaolin Temple. The story is that he had been a very successful fighter who decided to test himself against the monks and failed miserably in his first fight. He then supposedly devoted years of his life to developing a fighting system with which he could defeat them. The result, we are told, is Praying Mantis style (named, it is said, the praying mantis whose defeat of a much larger cicada inspired Wang Lang to study its movements) The monks, in a pattern that was repeated many times in history, adopted the resulting style into the curriculum of the Temple.

Praying Mantis as we learn it is a combination of a set of sophisticated deflections, counters, and grappling movements with Monkey style footwork (see Monkey style, below). The fundamental strategy of Praying Mantis is to wait patiently for an opening (often in the form of an attack), then tie the opponent's arms with a grappling technique and strike into soft areas and nerve centers.

## Shaolin Bird

Shaolin Bird style is one of the older fighting styles, being derived from the very old Lo Han style by way of the later China Hand style that seems to form the basis of much of the familiar Korean and Okinawan styles. (Many of the movements in Okinawan karate and such styles as Tang Soo Do closely resemble movements in China Hand and Shaolin Bird styles).

In Shaolin Bird style the hard, linear strikes and kicks of Lo-Han and China Hand first begin to acquire some of the circularity and fluidity that is characteristic of many later Chinese styles.

The strategic assumption in Shaolin Bird style is that the opponent is larger and stronger. The Bird stylist compensates by leaping in to deliver a flurry of strikes, and then leaping back out of range; or, again, by goading the opponent into a charge and sidestepping while striking. Bird style relies on quick transitions between low and high attacks and stances, sudden reversals of direction, long-range jumps to cover ground quickly, and well-developed stamina. Bird forms emphasize elbows and finger thrusts to soft targets.

## Monkey

Monkey style is an advanced style that demands much of its practitioners. Like Shaolin Bird style, it assumes that the opponent is larger and stronger, and compensates by making it hard to reach or hold onto its practitioner. The Monkey stylist jumps, flips, rolls, and climbs to avoid his attacker. He attacks from peculiar angles, and contorts his body to strike when the opponent believes himself safe.

A monkey stylist, if faced with an opponent who likes the lunging attacks and strong stances of, let us say, a Shotokan stylist, might sidestep the lunge, climb onto the opponent's knee to elbow into the head, and then dive into a roll to escape retaliation. Monkey stylists strike with the backs of the forearms, with the elbows, and with hook kicks and ape kicks (like a front snap, but twisted inward to strike like a roundhouse, but with the leg turned the opposite direction). Monkey stylists like to tease their opponents into rash action and take advantage of their rashness.

## Eagle claw

Eagle claw style is an animal style derived from the grappling art of Shaolin Chin Na. It relies on very powerful seizing, pinching, twisting, and locking techniques to immobilize or punish an attacker. Eagle claw stylists work hard on developing their grips to facilitate application of painful locks and nerve pinches. Like jujutsu, Eagle claw employs leverage and joint manipulation to defeat an opponent.

## Other styles

There are many more Shaolin animal styles. A suggestive list might include White Ape, Wild Horse, 10,000 Bees, and Golden Centipede.

# The Classical Animal Styles

## The Tiger (Hu Xing)

This is the most strength-oriented and external of the five Shaolin animals. Movement is characterized by advancing straight forward into the opponent. Strong stances and fierce stepping contribute to the strength of the strikes. Footwork is designed to provide a stable base to smash through the opponent.

The hand formation usually associated with this style is the tiger claw. Most people incorrectly believe the claw is solely used to rake an opponent. Instead, the palm strikes first to break up the target, and then the fingers clench to grab the skin.

The tiger is an important animal in Chinese folklore. Sayings like “when two tigers meet, one gets killed and the other gets maimed,” and “there's only room enough on a mountain for one tiger” provide some insight into the Chinese concept of what a tiger is.

Traditionally, the tiger is thought to develop strength in the bones. According to modern medicine exercise has some effect on the health of the skeleton, but primarily it is affected by diet. A modern interpretation of this is that the old masters were referring to what is now called slow-twitch muscle – the stamina-oriented muscle fiber.

### The Tiger (Hu Xing) - An in depth look

As there are no lions in China the Tiger is considered to be the king of all land beasts. The ancient Chinese sanguine Mountain has no room for two tigers” is not far from the truth if we consider the ferocity of this animal. As the shaolin masters observed the tiger in its natural environment they decided it would have immense value as one of the chosen animals to help their study of Kung Fu. This type of characteristic is reflected in the tiger stylists' movements with strength, courage and power. Tigers are said to be ferocious and not aggressive, the distinction here is that when a tiger attacks generally it is not angry but simply focussed upon achieving the task laid before it. The emphasis is to develop strong dense bones with speed and strength during an attack. The action of a tiger can be associated with a pressing forceful, hard external action similar to being run over by a car.

The tiger practitioner will not only develop power but also develop and condition tendons and bones which will ultimately strengthen and harden the neck and spine. This kind of training is important if the practitioner intends to exude hard external power from strong stances and a powerful waist.

The most predominant technique known is the tiger claw (Hu Zhua) where the hands mimic a claw shape by curling the fingers in to position. Generally the strike is short and direct, there are also pulls, tears, twists or presses



upon contact with the adversary. The targets for this type of technique are face, neck, groin, arms or wrists. Upon impact the pressing action allows the hand to grip better with the fingers, the tigers claw can then pull in a downward motion or twist the vulnerable area.

This type of technique is not to be confused with that of the Dragons claw where a locking action is normally assumed, instead this is explosive when applied. The tiger style also uses big powerful standard fist punches (lao hu tai tou or tiger raises his head), the idea here is a representation of the tiger using its large powerful head to strike or butt. Often one hand will be used to trap an arm or wrist whilst the other strikes to the intended area. The grabbing hand can also be used to twist the adversary's limbs whilst initiating pain to pressure points around to joints using the fingers. Another striking action is the use of the palm portion of the tigers claw, ideal for the rib area. There is a long kick to the rear known as hu wei tui. This technique is almost a cross between a back kick and a side kick to the rear with the body parallel and hands stretch out in the opposite direction. If striking with a tigers claw it should be understood that the whole hand is important and not just the fingers, good stance and palms are also very important. The original shaolin training method to help develop oneself for hu zhua was the use of small heavy sandbags, which are thrown into the air and caught repeatedly with the fingertips at speed. Students would use their fingers and forearms to lift clay jars with different levels of gravel within them in order to provide resistance (similar to the original dragon training). Squeezing branches was another method used to strengthen the hands, however as with the leopard training a modern day rubber ball will suffice. To gain finger strength press-ups can be performed using the fingertips as support.

## The Leopard (Bao Xing)

Although an external animal, the leopard does not have as much mass as the tiger. Therefore, it can't crush its prey like a tiger. Instead it relies on speed and aggression to make up the shortfall. The leopard attacks with a relentless series of attacks, unconcerned about blocking or being hit.

"Why block when I can hit" sums up this up pretty well. Highly ferocious, this form emphasizes speed and charging at the opponent. Unlike the tiger, the leopard form has no time or need for rooted stances. The only reason the leopard would root a foot is to get a better push off when he or she leaps at an opponent.

Why the does the Leopard de-emphasize blocking? Because it is an inherently slow action. You have to see the attack coming in, move your arm quickly enough to intercept the attack, and then actually deflect the strike, all in 3/10ths of a second or less. The leopard capitalizes on this in two ways. First, the all-out attack of the leopard means the defender must

devote all of his attention to blocking rather than counter-attacking. Second, eventually one or more of the leopard attacks will get through by overloading the opponent's defensive abilities.

The main strike used in leopard style is the leopard paw. This is formed by bending the fingers into a half-fist so that the second row of knuckles, the "door-knockers," is exposed. Because of the relative fragility of the bone on the knuckles, the leopard paw is never used on the skull, only on soft targets like the torso or throat.

Traditionally, the leopard is thought to develop muscle. In this context, possibly the masters were referring to what we would now call fast-twitch muscle, the speed-oriented muscle fiber.

### The Leopard (Bao Xing) - An in depth look

In Chinese mythology the Leopard or Panther (same animal) is second only to that of the Tiger when considering power and ferocity. The Leopard, although smaller than a tiger, is actually stronger and faster for its size; the tiger is larger and more powerful.

The delivery of explosive force from a tiger is heavily reliant upon its size and short thick muscle mass in order to overpower. However, the leopard's body structure is comprised of smooth, long toned muscle encompassed within a fast frame. The leopard will always use lightening fast speed and footwork to produce power and strength. The Shaolin practitioner when practising leopard style techniques will not emit solid power which is tense and forceful, instead it will be produced from loose relaxed whip like techniques generated using balance and speed, flexibility, agility often using the hips.

The original Shaolin monks chose this animal to mediate between the massive strength of the tiger and the quick penetrating force of a crane. The leopard practitioner aims to develop both physical strength and speed better known as li by the Chinese and represents an external form of conditioning for skin, tendons, bone and muscle. With the leopard style of training there is little internal qi generating benefits since qi development is promoted with slow precise movements. However, here the valuable benefits are external fighting techniques.

There is however, a definite link between the dragon and snake techniques in order to support leopard training to mould oneself to be an effective fighting stylist.

The predominant and notable characteristic of the leopard stylist is the leopard's fist bao chui and is designed if executed in the correct manner to produce trauma using fast penetrating force through the adversary's body. The bao chui fist formation is not like a normal fist but uses the first joint of the four fingers and the thumb is held flat along the outside of the fist to add stability thus concentrating power into a smaller area and increasing the total force of the punch.

The original training for bao chui involved punching firm sandbags and undertaking push-ups on the knuckles instead of the hands. If the leopard stylist lacks knuckle conditioning they could whilst executing a punch break their knuckles. It is important to add that the hand should also be well conditioned to withstand the force behind the properly delivered fist.

One particular notable training technique for this kind of stylist is the use of rubber balls held in the hands whilst squeezing with all ones strength hundreds of times. Some of the other techniques associated with this type of training are also the regular closed fist with several forearm and elbow strikes. The adept will be an expert at transferring external jing or power to the area of the body that makes contact with the adversary. Penetrating force is transferred through the forearms and elbows at the point of contact.

The leopard stylist rather than blocking and counter-striking will use deflection against an oncoming blow using forearm as their own punch simultaneously drives in. This kind of movement uses a change in angle of the punch slightly to find the adversary's weak area. The footwork associated with this style uses quick short stances which are stable to produce strength balance in order to change direction quickly and easily. The areas which the leopard techniques will pray upon are to both the face and the torso. Areas of focus with the leopards fist maybe too small to reach with a regular fist however, one technique known as 'leopard plays ball' uses a regular closed fist that strikes down upon the opponents head like a bouncing ball, thus executing a groin kick at the same time. Leopard spirit is similar to that of the tiger when considering ferocity however, the fundamental difference is the speed of the form. Overall the participant when practising these kinds of technique stands to gain speed with striking fist techniques as well as fast footwork. Other benefits are strength within stances and tremendous power and force.

## The Crane (He Xing)

To some, the crane is the epitome of grace. In a fight, it prefers to stay away from toe-to-toe confrontations that might be more suited to a tiger or leopard. Instead, the crane uses its long legs and powerful wings to angle away from an opponent, striking with its wings and beak when an opportunity presents itself. Despite the relatively fragile nature of the crane, it is still a fierce fighter. Its higher level of mobility and insistence on attacking from strange angles makes it a tough opponent. Anybody who has ever been pecked by a goose or duck can attest to the deceptively powerful strikes that beaks can deliver. Emulating this, the crane-stylist uses a hand formation called the "crane's beak" where the four fingers and thumb are brought together at the tips, mutually reinforcing each other and creating a strong striking surface. The crane develops the sinews (tendons and ligaments). As it is also a Chinese symbol of longevity, it is thought to develop the jing (refined chi, or libido).

## The Crane (He Xing) - An in depth look

The crane is only a bird but is a bird reputed for its amazing libido and longevity. Such an excess of libido denotes an abundance of energy within its body. Also considering its association with longevity it is hardly surprising that the crane was chosen by the old Shaolin Masters to become one of the Shaolin animals.

The Chinese believe that jing is the essential energy which is characteristically associated with the spirit of the crane. Jing when translated actually means libido. The crane is a quiet and calm animal and its powers of concentration are not easily broken, for example, the crane will stand for hours on just one leg without the slightest movement.

The crane style was designed in order for the martial artist to hold energy within the body and increase strength both internally and externally. This in turn will help develop qi internally and at the same time help to harden both bone and muscle.

The crane is very similar to the calm and quiet nature of the snake and as with the snake movements the crane style is extremely useful for over throwing or controlling an opponent with very little effort. Crane form techniques are soft, relaxed and circular, however they still have the ability to exude sudden fast power upon contact with a target. The techniques can be both long and short. Many of the shorter movements are usually joint locking techniques to cause disablement to the limbs of the adversary. The long and reaching techniques are usually direct strikes to vital pressure points on the opponents body.

A very common technique is the crane wing (he I) which characteristically is a circular sweeping technique, which terminates as a striking action. This action is a representation of a crane spreading and opening its wings. The technique itself allows the practitioner to utilize the whole of the arm and fingertips as a striking weapon. There is no doubt that this type of technique if delivered in the correct manner will generate power from the whole of the practitioners body. Crane strikes with its wing (ye he kai yi) is a different technique which actually strikes across the adversary's eyes with a slicing action. Considering a crane has a long neck, many of the crane style movements terminate with an outstretched movement with the hand forming a beak. The cranes beak (he zui) is a very common association when the practitioner is initiating the crane style. When forming a cranes beak using the hand, the fingers and thumb are pressed together to form a point and the wrist is bent. Usual targets for this kind of technique are again, as with the snake, focussed at vulnerable areas such as the eyes or throat. It is not uncommon for double techniques to be applied to two adversaries at the same time, this is known as twin cranes raise their heads (shuang he tai tou).

A simulation of the cranes neck (he jing) which forms a hooking hand can be used to pull an opponent off balance and then grabbing at the neck, arms or legs. This strike considering the spirit of this animal should be applied using soft relaxed force, however the fast snapping action of the wrist will focus power to the blow.

Another application using the cranes beak is known as crane guards its nest (bai he shou chao) when the cranes beak is used as a blocking action. Another application of the crane beak hand is the use of the top of the wrist known as the cranes head (he ding). This type of action is an imitation considering the manner in which a crane might strike using the top of its head following with the thrusting action using its neck. This type of technique if focussed to areas such as throat, solar plexus, jaw or armpit and will undoubtedly cause incapacitation extremely quickly, these types of technique are formidable. As this attack is launched using the hard portion of the wrist it is further pursued with the bent wrist into the injured area using the whole arm as with the cranes neck. Advanced techniques of this nature when used to block against an arm strike from the adversary will simultaneously become a strike as with a technique known as crane guards the cave (ye he shou dong). The secret with this technique is the pressure point on the arm that has been penetrated, the direct consequence for the opponents arm is a painful disabling or deadening effect.

Undoubtedly the most common pose associated with the crane is when it stands on one leg, it is these characteristics which have moulded the way in which the Shaolin Masters came to understand the stance of the crane style. White crane stands on one leg (bai he du li) is a position which the practitioner will assume when evading from a low kick typically to the shin, with this movement the knee is simply raised to a high position. A split second after the practitioner has assumed the high knee position the already raised leg will execute a kick to the opponents body, this is known as crane stretches his claw (bai he tan zhua) this is a front kick. Here you can see the calmness and softness associated with the spirit of this animal as the adversary's energy is dispersed into thin air. The student can gain a number of characteristics when practising the style of this animal, they can expect to gain better balance with speed whilst remaining active, loose with a supple waist and light balanced footwork.

There is one particular exercise which can be used in order to gain flexibility in the wrists of the practitioner, that is the execution of press-ups using the backs of the wrists as support and at the same time squeezing the fingers and thumbs together. Finger conditioning for this animal will be inherited from the formerly mentioned other Shaolin animals. It is fair to say that the dragon and tiger claws will already provide the crane stylist with the well conditioned fingertips and hands required considering the type of exercises undertaken. The crane practitioner should already understand the focus and spirit of the snake in order to direct qi energy through the fingertips. However, one ancient method specifically for the fingertips of the

crane stylist is the use of sandbags as a focus point of the beaks fingertips and after this stage one could use a large jar of coarse gravel to increase intensity and conditioning. Another similar wrist conditioning exercise is when the practitioner strikes the sandbags using the backs of the wrists. To gain superior balance the student may stand on one leg for many minutes with their eyes closed and to make this exercise more rigorous small sandbags or weights can be tied to the ankles. To think of spirit of the cane it is one of deep relaxed concentration thus encouraging focus and intent with the student.

## The Snake (She Xing)

Venomous snakes are possibly the most dangerous animals on the planet, considering how lethal they can be compared to their size. Because of this, Nature has balanced things by providing many of them with distinctive mechanisms, like bright-colored scales, the cobra's hood, or the rattle-snake's rattle. The snake might kill you, but you can't claim you weren't warned first. In many ways, the Shaolin snake-style typifies this. When attacking, the snake-stylist goes for vulnerable spots like the eyes, throat and groin. However, because of the serious consequences of hitting such targets, the snake-stylist must be calm and peaceful and avoid a fight. It is only when there is no recourse but to fight, and the situation serious enough to warrant it that one should use the techniques of the snake form.

The snake techniques also promote "ting" or "listening" energy. This is the sensory ability developed through "sticking hands" and related exercises. Through its use, the snake-stylist can neutralize an opponent's attack with a minimum of effort and risk. Because of its quiet attitude and emphasis on rhythmic breathing, the snake is traditionally thought to develop the chi.

### The Snake (She Xing) - An in depth look

The snake may appear not to be an ideal candidate for a shaolin animal due to its lack of legs, however if you think in more depth the snake will use slyness and softness rather than hard raw power.

The snake style is designed to cultivate internal Qi (Chi) energy thus gaining superior focus and penetrating force not associated in anyway with the external animal. The snake as it moves is very evasive as it twists its body in a zigzagging motion. In order to survive the snake must use its body in a different manner to compensate for its lack of limbs. The snake coils its body to begin with, then raises its head into a striking position and from this position straightens its body and strikes with precision and speed. This type of striking force is just from the momentum and twisting movement from the coiled position. The animal itself is calm and relaxed and is said to possess more Qi (Chi) than the other animals. When a strike occurs and when combined with the external strike this animal is formidable.

The snake form differs to the other shaolin animals as it has no hard punching techniques instead it uses both hard and soft principals to be successful. The fingertips and palms are used to strike with penetrating force. The snake is in direct opposition to that of the tiger. The snakes energy is quiet and internal and makes no external sound as it strikes, whilst tiger styles are noisy and active as the practitioner exhales to gain power. As with any internal style characteristics this is understood to be of an advanced martial level where strikes and blocks are made simultaneously (offence and defence are one and the same!). Soft coiling actions which are deceptively defensive suddenly change to offensive strikes. Hence the speed of attack is not as important as the smoothness and flow.

There are many different finger-striking actions associated with the snake practitioner. One is known as white snake throws out tongue (bai she tu xin), here the fingers recreate the forked form of the tongue with the index and middle fingers extended whilst the remaining fingers are folded underneath and back out of the way. This strike is then used to focus upon the soft areas or adversary's eyes. Another fingertip strike is known as snake comes out of its hole (qing she chu dong) where the practitioners fingers are together to form a cobras head shape, this strike can also be inverted to block or strike to the throat or eyes. This type of strike often comes from a bent elbow.

One inverted snake technique known as water snake swims to the surface (shui she shang an) terminates to pressure points around the throat and armpits.

Another important factor when considering the spirit of this animal is to keep the whole body moving and flowing if to be combined with the actions of the other animals. In many cases it is necessary to administer soft circular actions which terminate with focus and a harder action as the technique makes contact.

When practising snake it is important that the practitioner is relaxed with good concentration. The snake parts of a form should be calm and soft. Another issue to understand when training with snake movements is to remain "connected" with all parts of you body contributing to the desired end. As well as a flexible body concentration and clarity of thought are a necessary attribute for any martial artist. Practising snake style movements will allow the practitioner to project their qi (chi) energy up through their arms and out of the ends of the finger tips, however when practising in air there will apparently be no recognizable power but upon contact with a desired target power will prevail.

Unlike the other Shaolin animals which are associated with finger-striking methods, the snake style has no fingertip external strengthening and development exercises. The reason for this is that providing the Shaolin practitioner has correct balance between the other animals of Shaolin they will develop adequate finger and hand conditioning.



As the student practises the snake form calmly and quietly they will develop feeling and sensation and a sense in order to understand an opponents next move. When a snake practitioners arm makes contact during this type of training it can be likened to the sticking effect normally associated with wing chuns sticky hands or maybe even tai chi chuan's push hands. As previously mentioned the practitioner's moves are apparently powerless, however these soft touches have a magical sting upon contact, undoubtedly the adepts movements are quick and forceful if and when required. The force of a snake strike is said to be over seven times an individuals normal power! The psychology behind the snakes special spirit is that the five animal practitioner must be calm enough to mentally look inside their own body and feel peace and tranquillity. Nothing will bother him externally.

If the correct snake spirit is developed the student will feel the energy flow from the spine along the arms and out of the fingertips. The stylist will move slowly in deliberation before the simultaneous blocking and striking action occurs as the "snake uncoils". Assimilation of the Shaolin snake techniques, and having gained penetrating focus and intent as well as lightening speed will undoubtedly if delivered to the correct pressure point vital areas of the body cause excessive pain, unconsciousness or even death.

## The Dragon (Long Xing)

In Chinese mythology, the dragon is a powerful elemental creature that approaches the status of a demi-god. They were responsible for such things as regulating storms and the flow of rivers. They had the ability to change form, fly, change size and other wonderful feats. Dragons had three to five claws on each hand, with the five-clawed dragon being the symbol of the Emperor. To properly hold a teacup, a writing brush or chopsticks, one needs three fingers. Unlike its European cousin, the Chinese dragon had culture – no sitting in a cave waiting for a knight to attack it, for sure. Since the dragon is the most spiritual of the five, likewise it develops the most spiritual quality: shen. This is a transcendent energy that comes from the refinement of chi into jing and eventually into shen.

### The Dragon (Long Xing) - An in depth look

The Chinese Dragon is in no way similar to the Western Worlds fire breathing dragon. It is confined to the spiritual beliefs of Buddhist texts and is understood as a supernatural animal with characteristics which enable it to make itself any size and appear or disappear.

According to Buddhist writings dragons live in oceans. Since dragons live in large bodies of water their association with the rest of the world is through water. If a dragon wishes to become visible, anyone can see him. However,



only those who have reached a high level of enlightenment can see this special animal. Chinese cultures believe that dragons can be seen on clouds and are also responsible for producing rain.

Dragons have bodies similar to that of the snake, covered with scales, but they have lizard like arms and legs with sharp claws. The head of a dragon is similar to that of a serpent. Considering Buddhism and its heavy influence upon Shaolin Martial Arts the mythical beast was perfect to represent one of the Shaolin animals.

Dragon style fighting transcends the easily understood real world of external martial arts and enters the spiritual world of internal strength and power.

Although the dragon style of training may have some external benefits the internal and inner health benefits and chi developments are predominant. Many of the dragons movements in Shaolin are soft and circular and can be likened in some respects to that of the snake and often the dragon style techniques are in fact variations of some of the other animals. The dragon, should not be confused with the snake because the snake has no legs, and the claws are a very important element.

However, the snake techniques do contain more soft coiling actions with fingertip strikes, the dragon techniques are demonstrated with soft circular movements that terminate with hard sudden power. Therefore, the snake stylist would only exhibit soft power and the dragon uses a force that combines both hard and soft training principles.

The Shaolin dragon form uses clawing techniques which should not be confused with the tiger claw version. However, the dragon claw hand (long zhua) is a grab, while a tiger claw (hu zhua) is a squeezing and tearing motion. The dragon claw techniques are primarily pulling and locking techniques and are softer and more circular than a tiger which initiates downward ripping techniques.

Not all dragon techniques have claw hands there are also palms and fists. The dragon claw hand is flat and designed for grabbing arms, ears and other extremities. The palm strikes of the dragon differ from the snake form because the dragon strike is a claw strike and not a fingertip attack as with the snake.

The traditional Shaolin temple dragon claw training involved special strengthening exercises for the hands and arms (long zhua gong). Heavy clay jars would be used by the practising student; each exercise would start with a slow lifting motion. They would start with an empty jar and as strength increased water was added until the jars were full and then the procedure would be repeated with sand and finally rocks of increasing sizes and weight.

The dragon stylist is encouraged to use their waist to generate power rather than merely the shoulders and arms. This is a characteristic representation which imitates the whipping action of a dragons long tail.

The major contribution to Shaolin from this animal is undoubtedly the internal conditioning aspect of the training which is associated with qi (chi or ki) development. Qi is energy and power generated internally by the body and if harboured in the correct manor can be combined with external strength to produce devastating results. With these methods undertaken the net effect is that power generation increases considerably in comparison to that of a normal external technique.

Breathing is a major component when considering qi development whilst demonstrating the Shaolin dragon forms. The lower body is used to draw in air rather than just the muscles of the chest. This is not a tense and dynamic method but instead soft and relaxed. If executed in the correct manner this will help to lower the qi into the dan tian area at the nucleus of the body's internal energy and strength. This type of training with correct breathing techniques helps to fill the participants body with circulating qi thus making the body more flexible and relaxed. Characteristically the fighting application of this animal hinge around a type of hard and soft breathing (referred to as soft carries hard). The practitioners breathing is soft and relaxed until the strike is made upon which time a sharp expulsion of breath focuses power upon contact.

To practice Shaolin dragon forms the movements should be soft and slow almost similar to tai chi chuan. Too much tension will cause a lack of qi flow and hard external power should only be emitted upon contact with an object.

This animal is by far spiritually the most powerful Shaolin animal and the practitioner should view his or herself in the same manner, for example dragons can appear and disappear (no we are not talking about students appearing and disappearing), but the ability and spirit to fool and deceive with movements that appear to be committed in one direction when in reality the attack suddenly appears from the opposite direction. The ability of the dragon to change size is also an important factor. The whole body can be used as a weapon or the fingertips could be used to damage small areas of the adversary, movements can begin from a coiled or sometimes almost crouching position with a sudden expanding action.

Considering dragons are reputed to move from oceans to clouds the correlation when training in this format would be the ability to demonstrate both take downs (oceans) and throws (clouds).

Another important characteristic to note assuming the spirit of the dragon is intent and is known as shen. When qi developed and focus is instigated using the eyes can in some case be enough to scare the adversary (eye contact).

The Chinese believe those who are ill cannot produce shen and is a by-product of those with healthy bodies and well-developed qi.

This particular animal undoubtedly gives the participant a vehicle that can be used to combine internal energy with external strength to produce awesome power.

# Rare Animal Styles

Many unique animals have evolved specially for Kung Fu. Some, like the previously listed styles have evolved to the point of forming their own systems. Other animals are still embedded within the curriculum of a larger system. Given the wide range of animal manifestations in Kung Fu, it would be impossible to list them all. However, to show the rich variety within Kung Fu, the following is a listing of a number of rare styles in Kung Fu.

## The Bear (Xiong Xing)

In Chinese belief, the bear is a masculine symbol of yang, contrasting the snake's female yin. The constellation commonly known as the Big Dipper is still called the Big Bear in Asia and its pattern is frequently carved into sword blades as the "seven stars". Once very common in China, today bears have been hunted to the brink of extinction because their paws are considered a delicacy and their gall is believed to be a potent medicinal. In reaction to this sad situation, Jackie Chan and Michelle Yeoh have been campaigning to bears and other wild animals as part of the Asian Conservation Awareness Program.

The bear appears in Hua Tuo's five animal Qigong and Xingyi. As one might expect, bear style uses big, powerful upper body movements. Along with claw attacks, some schools deploy punches, elbow and shoulder strikes. Force is generated from the arms alone. Bear also emphasizes a strong neck posture. Instead of turning the head, the whole body moves so the spine is never twisted.

## The Dog (Gou Xing)

The dog is the eleventh animal of the Chinese zodiac. It has an odd role among the Chinese. It is praised for its humility and loyalty, yet despised as a scavenger. Keeping dogs as pets is a sign of prosperity that was banned up until recently in Beijing. In ancient times, lunatics were smeared with dog excrement to expel demons. Today, the Chinese breed chow dogs for food and fur just as Americans breed cattle.

Dog style is a style on its own and it has Northern and Southern schools. Its basis is ground fighting. Dog-like gestures like rolling, panting, "lifting the leg to make water" are used as martial applications. One often fights from being down on all fours, and dog style is notorious for low kicks and tricky leg techniques.

## The Cock (Ji Xing)

The cock is the tenth animal of the Chinese zodiac. It is believed to be courageous and benevolent, always leading the hens to seed and protecting them. The Chinese consider them a useful animal, not only for their eggs and meat, but also of alarms of daybreak and trespassers, and natural bug killers.

Cock techniques are common within the forms of many styles, like "golden cock stands on one leg", while Xingyi has its own cock form. Cock fighting emphasizes quick and light footwork with many single leg stances. It has a unique "short" power, where a minimum of time and energy is used to generate striking force, like the one-inch punch. This emulates the quick motions of a cock's pecker, as if to eat seed.

## The Sparrow Hawk (Yao Xing)

The sparrow hawk is notably different from its raptor cousin, the eagle. Ancient Chinese legend tells of trained war birds, eagles, hawks and falcons, large enough to pick up horses. The sparrow hawk is not thought of with the same regard for power and size. Rather, it is respected for its speed and agility.

Sparrow hawk is a form of Xingyi. Unlike eagle style, it does not focus on claw attacks. It mimics the body movements instead of just the claw or wing. The footwork uses quick turns like a sparrow hawk swooping in flight. The fist techniques also strike upward, like a soaring bird. This is also an animal form of Xingyi.

## The Swallow (Yan Xing)

Chinese superstition holds that swallows are the harbingers of spring. During the winter, they transform into mussels. The Chinese love swallows, so much that one of the nicknames of Beijing is "the city of swallows". A particular delicacy, bird's nest soup, is made from the nests of sea swallows. However, the actual nest is cooked off during arduous preparations. What is sought after is the swallow spittle that is used to make the distinctive broth.

Swallow style is another animal form of Xingyi. It is thought to be a light bird, so the energy of swallow style is like "light body" Kung Fu. Body movements go low, then fly up quickly. It focuses on jumping techniques and flexibility.

## The Horse (Ma Xing)

The horse is the seventh animal in the Chinese zodiac. Much of China's ancient warfare relied heavily upon war-horses, so warriors venerate them. Today, a young stud fighter might still be nicknamed a "thousand li" colt (a li is a distance measurement like a mile). Chinese Buddhists also sanctify the horse because it was a white horse that brought back the Buddhist Sutras from India. Hence, the first Buddhist temple in China was White Horse Temple (Baimasi), which is located near to Shaolin Temple.

Horse style is another form of Xingyi. The fists are held up like front hooves, prepared to "kick". The footwork leaps forward like a gallop. This style has a powerful first strike, and when combined with pressure point attacks, can knock an opponent out in one shot.

## The Duck (Ya Xing)

The duck is the symbol of fertility and conjugal fidelity. It is believed that mandarin ducks mate for life, and when their mate dies, they die of pining. Duck tongue and livers are considered a delicacy, not to mention the world famous Peking duck. When eating Peking duck, the word for duck head (ya tou) is phonetically similar to young girl, so it is a favorite part for young men to eat. In Taiwan, there was a Duck Egg Buddhist sect devoted to the goddess of compassion, Kuan Yin. Followers maintained a strict vegetarian diet except for duck eggs until the government banned the movement for "immoral behavior".

Duck style is a style on its own, but it is seldom practiced alone because it is incomplete as a fighting style. While it can be used for fighting, its emphasis is more akin to that of Qigong. Duck emulates the duck walk (or waddle) to build up the legs for sweeps or front kicks. The footwork scrapes the ground powerfully and looks rather peculiar, like a Michael Jackson "moon" walk. It also relies on head strikes, so it is good in conjunction with iron head skills.

## The Crab (Xie Xing)

The crab is a common staple. Following the devastating floods that torment China, bumper crab crops are harvested since they are bottom feeders, eating the dead. A favorite Chinese myth is discovering a well of jade crabs that grants instant wealth. As a result, crabs are common subjects of jade sculpture. Since crab shells can resemble the face of a tiger, they may also be hung up to scare away demons.

Crab style is very rare. It is a style all on its own, but has very few forms. Sideways movement, always fighting and moving sideways, gives crab style its unique character. The hands are always kept in front like claws.

## Elephant (Xiang Xing)

Elephants once roamed southern China, but are now very rare. The Chinese still venerate it as one of the four powerful animals, along with the tiger, leopard and the lion. The elephant figures prominently in Buddhist symbolism as a servant of Buddha, sometimes offering shade or serving as his mount.

Elephant is a form within Choy Li Fut (Chailifo in Mandarin). This style combines the clan schools of Choy and Li, and tempers it with a Buddhist influence, represented by the character Fut. It emphasizes big and powerful techniques, and the arms are swung to come down like a heavy trunk.

## Fetus (Tai Xing)

This 'tai' is a different character than the one for emu, although it is spelled the same in English. It is human fetus or unborn child. Some Chinese define the fetus as an animal until it is born. Only then does it become human.

Qigong places high regard for prenatal qi, or the life of the unborn. As a martial style, the stance is similar to a fetal position if a fetus could stand. It uses small quick steps and short power, depending heavily upon elbow strikes. Fetus Kung Fu is a very rare style.

## Scorpion (Xie Zi)

Scorpions are one of the five venomous creatures along with the centipede, snake, gecko, and toad. Despite this, in some regions fried scorpions are eaten as a delicacy. Usually served on a stick or in a platter with shrimp chips, fried scorpions are cooked until their carapaces are tender like soft-shelled crabs. The stingers are generally not eaten, not because of the venom (which is cooked off), but because they are very sharp and can stick in your gums.

Scorpion style is an esoteric form of Shaolin Kung Fu. It fights from a crouching position with one leg raised erect like a scorpion's tail. That leg is the dominant attacking leg. Techniques include many tricky flying kicks, often beginning and ending from this crouching position on the ground. This style demands a high level of skill.

## Terrapin (Tuo Xing)

Terrapin has many different translations to English, but it is some sort of large water reptile, like a giant turtle or tortoise. It is believed to be a harbinger of inspiration and holds away despair. Associated with Venus and the brand new crescent moon, terrapins are another Chinese delicacy. They attracted to crickets and cicadas, so these insects are often used as bait.

Terrapin style exists independently and as a form of Xingyi. The swimming stroke of their front limbs is very powerful, so this style focuses on using that for blocks and strikes. Circular, scooping movements of the arms can be used to hook a fist or catch a kick. It can be also used to strike with a chopping hand, elbow or shoulder.

## Emu (Tai Xing)

This giant bird has been translated as ostrich, rhea and roc. Roc is an incorrect translation because this giant bird was mythical. The emu, ostrich and rhea are real birds, but it is not certain which of these birds was the 'tai' bird. According to legend, this giant bird was a gift of Portuguese traders during the Song dynasty (960-1279). They were described as large, flightless birds that could run 300 miles a day and ate meat, metal, glass and hot coals. Although prone to exaggeration, it is likely that this was a bird like an Emu. Like the lion, only the emperors had direct experience of this bird. The rest of the Chinese attributed all sorts of fantastic characteristics to this animal that they have never seen.

The emu is very strong. It was said to be able to cut open a man's belly with a kick. Accordingly, emu style relies on leg strength. It rams its opponents using fists locked close to the body. But the power behind these strikes is generated from the legs, not the arms. Emu is another animal form within Xingyi.

## Toad (Ha Ma Xing)

The Chinese do not make a clear distinction between toads and frogs. Frogs are a common food source, nicknamed 'heaven's chicken' because they are thought of as being part of the morning dew. It is also considered to one of the five venomous creatures. The mythical immortal Liu Hai had a mount that was a three-legged toad. He could ride him for great distances, but the toad would often escape into wells. Liu Hai would have to fish him out using a coin tied to a string.



Toad style is an esoteric part of Shaolin Gung Fu. Toad fighters crouch low on all fours, and then spring up quickly, hopping like a toad. Back flips are common maneuvers. Generally, both legs will kick out simultaneously. This style relies on powerful legs and has a strong repertoire of kicking techniques.