

Four Resemblances

AN INTERVIEW WITH MADAM SUN JIAN-YUN TRANSCRIBED BY BRADFORD TYREY

The following is from a Question and Answer session with Madam Sun Jian-Yun that occurred in the 1980's and was attended by Bradford Tyrey. Madam Sun was the daughter of Sun Lu-T'ang, the originator of the Sun Style 97 Posture Tai Chi Chuan form.

Q: Master Sun Lu-T'ang taught that all movements in taijiquan and the boxing arts that he taught contain 四象 Si Xiang (The Four Resemblances). Would you explain these to us?

A: The four animals that my father principally taught and applied to taijiquan are those taught to him by his revered masters: Hao Wei-Zhen, Guo Yun-Shen and Cheng T'ing-Hua. In the past, it was not uncommon for teachers from traditional boxing sects to have similar training methods, as such knowledge came from related sources. Regarding 四象 Si Xiang (The Four Resemblances), these refer to the characteristics and spirit-essence of four specific animals that are studied and thereby merged into taijiquan. Both physically and in spirit you are to mimic the characteristic actions of each of these four creatures so that one's body resembles the movements of 'four creatures merging into one, the one being a Human.'

1. 象鷄腿 Xiang Ji Tui (Resembling a Rooster's Leg) This is the shape that one's body assumes when standing upon a single leg. Such a posture mimics the standing of a rooster that has raised a single leg with the purpose of 'about to move.' Raising a single leg must have intent beyond merely raising. Raising one leg requires the supporting leg to sink, establishing the foundation and stability from which to 'rise.' This is the dualism of movement among the yin and yang, upper and lower giving birth to and support to the other. 象鷄腿 Xiang Ji Tui (Resembling a Rooster's Leg), therefore, is not merely the standing upon a single leg; it is the overall concept of simultaneously rising and sinking in a unified manner while maintaining one's central equilibrium. Whether the leg rises into a kick, rises to assume a standing posture or rises very slightly with the toes touching lightly upon the ground, all are postures conforming to principles contained within Rooster Leg training. Furthermore, 鷄 ji

(rooster) signifies the heralding of yang essence and hence the inception of movement. Movement of one's body stems from the wellspring of the feet [referring to the Yongquan (Gushing Spring) point] and legs, one side sensing rootedness and contraction, the other sensing lightness and extension. The earth's qi enters through both feet and rises to the crown of one's head [referring to Baihui (Hundred Meetings) point], along this journey, the primordial essence is dispersed through the limbs and organs. To raise one leg like a rooster heralding the dawn enhances qi to surge to the crown-point from where it unifies all things within one's interior. This is the meaning of 象鷄腿 Xiang Ji Tui (Resembling a Rooster's Leg) as taught by Master Sun Lu-T'ang.

2. 象龍身 Xiang Lung Shen (Resembling a Dragon's Body) A dragon's limbs embraces strength from the inherent skill of using the 三折 San Zhe (Three Bends [Breaks]). These three bends act as 弓 gong (bows) about to release an arrow of force. Each bow is likened to a storehouse of strength, accumulating, enhancing, and sustaining itself before releasing natural force. When practising taijiquan, every posture, every movement must adhere to the 三折 San Zhe (Three Bends [Breaks]) so that both 氣 qi and 力 li (force) can be 合 hé (unified) and then released without the slightest hindrance. In taijiquan and traditional Chinese boxing arts these bent regions of the body are further separated into either the 下三折 Xia San Zhe (Lower Three Bends [Breaks]): the bending found in the inner hip region [outer pelvic area], the bending of the knees, and the bending of the ankles; and the 上三折 Shang San Zhe (Upper Three Bends [Breaks]): the bending found in the inner sternum region which includes the rounding of the shoulders, the bending of the elbows, and the bending of the wrists. Additionally, the Upper Bends and Lower



Bends are supportively paired to form the 對三折 Dui San Zhe (Coupled [Paired] Three Bends). These couplings are: shoulders and hips, elbows and knees, and wrists and ankles. Such coupling mimics the 陰 yin and 陽 yang uniting, separate they are but single forces without cause, together their union moves the heavens.

3. 象熊膀 Xiang Xiong Bang (Resembling a Bear's Shoulders) A bear's neck maintains an upright position enabling 氣 qi to follow a vertical pathway to the crown of the head. Hence, one's shoulders must sense roundness and fullness, enabling the shoulders to roll like a great bear's girth in movement while maintaining the neck's upright position. Master Sun Lu-T'ang taught that the practise of 熊膀 Xiong Bang (the Bear's Shoulders) shall unify the neck with the shoulders, shoulders with the upper back, and the upper

back with the waist; all merge into one through devoted training. The shoulders are mirrors of below, that being one's hips. As the shoulders 滾 gun (roll) they in turn draw the hips into a slight 滾動 gundong (rolling movement). As the shoulders and hips 鬆開 song-kai (loosen/relax and open) and roll, their unified action moves the region between them [the waist] to produce 弓腰 gongyao (bowing/bending the waist). Slight 弓 gong (bowing/bending) of the waist enables the body to slightly round unifying the shoulders, hips and waist into appearing to move as one and is commonly known as 象熊膀 Xiang Xiong Bang (Resembling a Bear's Shoulders).

4. 象虎抱頭 Xiang Hu Bao Tou (Resembling a Tiger Embracing [Its] Head) One's body crouches like a tiger preparing to leap from its lair, while the arms and paws of a tiger extend as if to embrace and cover its head in a protective manner. The tips of the fingers, which resemble the outstretched claws of a tiger, lead and merge with one's 心 xin (heart [the mind]) and 意 yi (intent) to produce 力 li (force). This is one meaning of 象虎抱頭 Xiang Hu Bao Tou (Resembling a Tiger Embracing [Its] Head). A further meaning is the tiger's ability to shelter and protect its body from harm through contracting its body. Contraction 合 hé (unifies) the interior, bringing stability and harmony to all movement. Sheltering also refers to embracing and protecting one's yang essence as the head represents the most yang aspect of the body. It is the tiger's nature to guard yang essence hence it seeks 曲 qu (curvature/ bending) of the body to ease 氣 qi within the belly to 沉 chen (sink) deeper into the perpetual churning of the 丹田 tan-t'ien (Cinnabar/Elixir Field).

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Bradford Tyrey has spent over 18 years in China, with some training in Taiwan, Okinawa (Japan). As a disciple under Madam Sun Jian-Yun, Bradford not only trained with her, but also received special instruction and notes about Sun Style and her father's work and knowledge. Bradford has published several books on Sun Style as well as on other martial arts and styles.