

XIN-YI

Combat Without Contact

by Jane Hallander and Doc-Fai Wong

Photos by Jane Hallander and Doc-Fai Wong



Examples of empty force used by Du-Yang Min on student Doc-Fai Wong.



Through a unique form of meditation and martial discipline, Xin-Yi can open up a person's fullest bodily potential, releasing their inner energy, and making them a powerful, super-deadly force to be reckoned with.

Picture two martial artists, each with their internal strengths developed to the point that conventional fighting techniques were useless against one another. At this stage only a direct clash of *chi* (internal energy) would decide the victor.

Although it sounds like something out of a Hong Kong kung fu movie, this level of martial art has existed in the past and is still attainable today. Known as *xin-yi* (mind and intention) in China, this form of martial art relies upon the ability to combine the martial artists' *shen* (spirit), *yi* (intention), and *chi* together to form what is perhaps the ultimate bare handed fighting art.

Xin-yi should not be confused with the *xing-yi* (commonly referred to as *hsing-i*) martial system, which means *form and intention*. While *xin-yi* combines the mind (or spirit) together with intention and *chi* in a martial art that is expressed without the need of set patterns or forms, *xing-yi* describes the practice of strengthening learned physical patterns with the addition of intention and *chi*. Some types of *xin-yi* martial arts use the *xing-yi* system as a base from which to enlarge into more *chi*-related fighting systems.

True *xin-yi* masters have never been easily accessible to the public, even in China where their teachings were best known. In the old days, before China's political upheaval in 1949, the best martial art masters were often live-



Dan tui (single leg) stance, also done only by students who have reached the tung chi (opened) stage.

in private tutors for wealthy families. Such was the case of Wang Xiang-Zhai, one of the grandmasters of the xing-yi system and the founder of his own famous xin-yi style, called *yi-quan* (known in other romanizations as *i-chuan*), which translates to *intention fist*.

Wang Xiang-Zhai's xing-yi teacher was Guo Yuen Shen, who bore a nickname that translated to *half punch defeats opponents*. Guo picked up that title from observers who could barely see his entire lightning-fast punch before his opponent was sent flying.

Wang Xiang-Zhai went further into martial art levels when he enlarged upon and added to his xing-yi knowledge with the development of his own martial style, *yi-quan*, also known as *da cheng quan*. With the advent of *yi-quan*, Wang did away with formalized xing-yi sets, revising the techniques into abstract patterns that were designed to teach students to react instantly with spontaneous responses combining both physical techniques and chi-induced intention. As a result of his revolutionary fighting style, Wang became famous throughout China in the early 1900's.

One of Wang's top disciples was a doctor who held medical degrees in both Chinese and Western medicine, having graduated from a prestigious German university in the 1920's. This doctor was named Yu Peng-Si. Prior to learning from Wang Xiang-Zhai, Professor Yu had been

a student for many years of China's best Shaolin martial arts masters. As a wealthy doctor, Yu could afford to house Wang Xiang-Zhai and pay him handsome sums of money to teach him his secrets.

Professor Yu, besides being a gifted and knowledgeable martial artist, was also a devoted Tibetan Buddhist. From his extensive Buddhist studies and the teachings of his Buddhist master, Yu devised a method of chi development that, when combined with Wang Xiang-Zhai's *yi-quan* system, would produce *the ultimate martial artist*.

Professor Yu defined chi as relating directly to the oxygen-carrying capacity of the blood, having its own channels or meridians that ran along the same course as the circulatory system. If those channels were completely opened, the person would have the ability to deliver hundreds of times more oxygen to each body cell, thereby improving overall health, slowing the natural aging process, and greatly increasing mental and physical strengths.

As a skilled doctor, Professor Yu's experience told him that at the time of birth the body's chi conducting channels were completely opened. Then as the individual matured, through everyday stress and changes in nutritional patterns, the chi channels gradually closed, until at maturity the average person's breathing capacity was limited to the chest area.

Yu's training principles allowed the chi to develop and extend lower in the body until it reached an area between the navel and the *tan tian* (a distance approximately three



Cu-Yang demonstrates the xing-yi system's famous zhuang quan (turning fist), a deadly penetrating punch.



A sequence of an exercise called lifting the clouds, used to develop the ability to use chi outside the body, specifically for lifting people high in their jumping exercise. Ou-Yang starts to life as if she were lifting a cloud (1), continues to one side (2), and up (3), over her head (4), and finally back to the other side (5).

fingers below the navel). When this stage was reached, Yu found, the student's entire bodily chi channels could be opened to permit a constant flow of chi and oxygen.

Along with training in the actual development of chi came training in the ability to harness and control that same chi, allowing xin-yi practitioners to direct chi outside of their bodies at will to affect people who were not within actual contact range. Wang Xiang-Zhai's principles of contact martial arts were added to the chi development techniques to form the basis of a martial art that could be used effectively against anyone, no matter what their level of martial art training.

In 1981, Professor Yu and his wife, Ou-Yang Min, came to the United States as the subject of a research study made by a large research organization. Two years later, Yu died in San Francisco at age 83. His wife of 60 years, now 80 years old herself, continues to teach his martial art system in San Francisco.

Ou-Yang Min has studied martial arts all of her life. The daughter of wealthy parents, she too had her own live-in teachers, including the great Chinese martial artist Yang Cheng-Fu, the grandson of the founder of Yang style tai chi chuan. Ou-Yang was proficient in tai chi chuan, shaolin kung fu, knife throwing, and even western boxing (learned from a famous Russian boxer) when she met Professor Yu. After they were married and as his martial style drew more and more students, she found herself doing much of the active xin-yi instruction. As Yu's top disciple, Ou-



Yang Min is now considered the grandmaster of Yu's xin-yi martial system.

One might ask how such a high level of martial art as xin-yi can develop without forms and sets to practice? Professor Yu's system uses different types of meditation positions and active exercises to train and develop specific parts of the body and its energy into the ultimate martial artist.

Chi itself is developed primarily through the everyday practice of a form of standing meditation called *zhan zhuang*. As the student's chi drops lower towards the tan tian area and the student becomes more relaxed and proficient at meditation, hand positions are slightly changed to deepen the meditation and relax the body more, causing the chi to move down faster.

After the student's chi has been fully opened, a state known as *tung chi*, the meditation changes to a difficult standing meditation called sun and moon and a sitting lotus meditation (*da zuo*). The sun and moon posture is



designed to help develop the strength of the chi and the ability to extend it outside the body, while the lotus sitting meditation is meant to quickly replenish expended chi. Neither the sun and moon or da zuo meditations are allowed to be practiced by students whose chi channels have not been fully opened. To do so would cause tenseness in the shoulders with the sun and moon position and the thighs with the lotus position that would stop the downward progression of their chi.

Those who have attained the tung chi level also practice stationary stances such as *dan tui* (single leg), a position that leaves the xin-yi student standing on one leg with the other raised in a high arching half circle for as long as they can stand. This position not only strengthens the legs, but forces them to relax their body so much that they can easily control the flow of chi.

The many different active exercises have a variety of purposes. While they do not aid in the actual development of chi itself, the exercises and their footwork are used to build the students physically and increase their sensitivity, allowing them to make maximum use of the chi they are developing.

Many of the active exercises have been taken from xing-yi and Wang Xiang-Zhai's teachings as beneficial aids towards strengthening various parts of the body. However, each exercise also serves to develop specific types of chi transmission, a benefit derived from xin-yi's Buddhist chi development origins. For instance, an exercise called the *eagle form* mimics an eagle capturing its prey and then releasing it. As students reach forward with relaxed open arms, imitating an eagle's wings, they are both strengthening their legs and shoulders and training their chi to flow easily from their fingertips and arms.

Another exercise is called *dun tui* (squat legs). Here xin-yi students practice what at first looks like deep knee bends with their arms outstretched, over a period of five to ten minutes. Physically, *dun tui* strengthens all of the leg muscles, while at the same time the students work on relaxation and the ability to send chi out of their fingers.

Lung xing (dragon form) is an exercise that serves to tone muscles and internal organs as students practice pushing chi out of their entire bodies, as if the chi were an expanding ball.

Xing-yi's famous *turning fast punch* (*zhuan quan*) is practiced both to teach students how to punch with penetrating physical power and to penetrate with chi coming out through their fists. All of the active exercises are designed to prepare xin-yi students for when they reach the highest stage of aggressive martial development, known as *empty force*, where they will be able to strike with their chi alone.

Actual fighting ability comes primarily from the practice of xing-yi push hands. These direct fighting, two person exercises teach the students both sensitivity and the leverage necessary to employ each type of xin-yi fighting technique.

The techniques used in Professor Yu's martial system come in three classifications that may be used individually or together, depending upon the opponent's level of martial expertise.

For the average person, who is relatively stiff and tense, a direct contact power (*jing* in Chinese) is used. Xin-yi students learn to use their bodies physically as a single power-generating unit. Therefore, a single body movement can be enough to violently repulse an opponent. A punch will penetrate with far more force than the sheer physical punch of an ordinary fighter.

Since expertise in any martial art also involves the ability to defend against the same kind of attack that the student is learning to use, xin-yi students practice pushing and repelling one another. Professor Yu's teacher, Wang Xiang-Zhai, was an expert at contact force and, with a slight movement of his body, could easily throw a student violently against a wall.

While Yu wanted his students to develop this ability, he also didn't want them to be injured practicing it. Therefore, he developed what he called "jumping". When

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students are thrown back as they push Ou-Yang Min or their advanced classmates, their bodies, taught through meditation postures and exercises to be connected, literally *bounce* back, allowing them to land on their feet in a balanced position after each jump. Not only can they safely practice throwing one another around, but in an actual street situation they will not be knocked helplessly to the ground. Instead, if they are pushed, they bounce back immediately into a fighting position.

More advanced opponents require the second type of technique, called *qiao li* (clever strength). This involves the knowledge and use of angular directions of attacks, pressure points, and locking techniques, used in conjunction with direct contact techniques. *Qiao li* also employs the use of soft, blending concepts, similar to those seen in aikido or ju jitsu.

The name of the game in Yu's xin-yi is to always take control of opponents before they can get the upper hand. By combining a sticky feeling, developed from push hand practice, with *qiao li*, xin-yi practitioners can quickly feel their opponent's tenseness and weaknesses and use clever strength techniques against them.

For those with the highest level of martial expertise, fully developed *chi*, and a knowledge of contact and clever strength, the next level of Yu's xin-yi is training for the use of their own *chi* as a weapon directed at their opponents from a distance. Here is where training in directing *chi* outside of the body, practiced in xin-yi exercises, comes into use.

Called *kong jing* (empty force), effectiveness is limited to only those who have well developed internal power themselves. Against the average person, the use of empty force will *not* stop them from their attack, but will probably make them seriously ill several hours later. Only the opponent whose *chi* can also extend outside their body can actually be stopped in the middle of an attack, without actual contact being made by a defender using xin-yi empty force.

The self-defense concept that Ou-Yang Min teaches is a straight line principle, using hip and shoulder extension for a more direct and longer reach. This concept applies to all phases of her xin-yi. Along the same principle, xin-yi footwork directs the practitioner to step along a centerline, directly between the opponent's legs. Stepping directly into the opponent's territory gives the xin-yi defender front and rear leverage as opposed to the opponent's side to side positioning, a fighting and balance advantage. It also brings about intimidation as the opponent finds their own space aggressively invaded. Intimidation can often determine who has control over the fighting situation.

The xin-yi practitioner's hips are positioned straight forward, giving any forward attack a stronger focus of energy and faster, more direct techniques. There are also side-

ways fighting positions should they be necessary.

Xin-yi hand techniques are based upon the philosophy that one hand tells a lie and the other tells the truth. This means that one hand will fake a technique, while the other waits with the intended strike. Also, the lying hand can become real and the true hand can become false, meaning that a technique that appears to be a feint can easily change to the real strike, completely confusing the opponent. Xin-yi stylists will also fake an upper strike while really planning for the actual attack to be to the lower body, or vice-versa. Again, these basic principles apply to all forms of Professor Yu's xin-yi fighting levels.



Using wise strength to lift student Jane Hallander off balance during a push hands exercise.

Xin-yi footwork is best described as one foot empty and the other full. Weight is placed entirely upon one foot at a time when moving. The foot bearing the weight becomes the full foot and leg, and the one without any weight on the floor is the empty one. By having one leg and foot empty or weightless, the xin-yi stylist has the flexibility to quickly pivot and move in any direction. With all of the weight placed over one leg, the martial artist also retains strength and balance. If someone were to try to push xin-yi practitioners off balance, they could easily pivot into another position without losing their balance.

When moving they will always pick up each foot in a level, parallel position with the ground, never lifting either the toe or heel first. If the toe were lifted before the rest of the foot, a person would have too much weight towards the rear, making it easy to lose their balance if grabbed from behind. When the heel is picked up first, forward balance is lost if pulled from the front.

Excluding defense against an attacker armed with a deadly weapon, this style of Chinese martial art definitely rates as one of the highest, if not the highest, levels of martial development available today.

Within the United States, those students who reside in the San Francisco area are presently the only ones lucky enough to have access to this xin-yi, as neither Yu Peng-Si before his death or Min Ou-Yang now, consider any of their North American students learned enough to teach the art to others. However, the good news is that Ou-Yang is presently developing some students as future xin-yi instructors.

Jane Hallander is a San Francisco based photojournalist and martial artist. Doc-Fai Wong teaches kung fu and tai chi chuan in San Francisco. Both have studied xin-yi from Professor Yu and Ou-Yang Min for over five years.



Min Ou Yang

FEMALE OF THE YEAR

Madam Min Ou-Yang

Madam Min Ou-Yang was first featured in the January, 1986 issue of *Inside Kung-Fu*. Our offices were flooded with calls and letters demanding to see more, so we presented a follow-up article in September, 1987. Since that time there has literally been an exodus of disciples flocking to her Northern California location, all in search of the amazing knowledge she calls the "qi channel," to which she attributes her youth and vitality even at the age of 80.

She originally came to the United States in 1981, with her husband, Peng Si Yu, a medical doctor and full professor at the University of Shanghai. He was a renowned dermatologist and obstetrician, yet his fame came from his prowess as a martial artist.

Dr. Yu studied under Wang Xiang Zhai, considered by many to be the best *xing-yi* (hsing-I) instructor in history. Wang created a formless version of *xing-yi*, which he called *yi-quan* (intention fist). Dr. Yu noted that Wang and his students showed little signs of aging and demonstrated incredible, almost superhuman capabilities. Additionally, Wang's *yi-quan* seemed invincible, with Wang able to effortlessly toss a heavy man across a room.

After Dr. Yu studied with Wang for a number of years, he learned, to his surprise, his Buddhist master knew how to break open his internal energy channels, and this master opened Yu's *qi* meridian. With the implementation of this *qi* channel to his *yi-quan*, Yu now had an art that many said bordered on the supernatural.

Dr. Yu died in San Francisco at the age of 83, but not before passing on his knowledge to his wife, Min Ou-Yang. A former Chinese opera star in Beijing, Madame Yu now teaches in a garage adjacent to her house.

Those who have met the diminutive Madam Yu describe her as nothing short of "awesome." Many claim they have actually seen her throw and tumble her students with literally no contact.

Madame Yu brings from old China true new-age concepts. Her teachings may indeed be the highest form of martial arts training.

THE ULTIMATE FORCE

Opening Qi Channels A Direct Route to the Fountain of Youth

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HONORABLE MENTION

Female of the Year
MALIA BERNAL