



Kenneth Fish

In the first article of this series I introduced some basic concepts of alignment and power. We will deal with these concepts repeatedly in future columns. In this issue, however, we are going to get started on the "how to" aspects, beginning with the essential foundation of Xingyi: footwork and leg training.

Xingyiquan, as other Chinese martial arts, lays great emphasis on strong legs and stable balance. What sets xingyiquan apart from most others is that xingyi stances are almost entirely rear weighted. This is a strain even for those with experience in the systems of Chinese martial arts, much less absolute beginners. It is for this reason that some teachers begin instruction with more basic stance work. In Shandong and Hebei this may be a set called "Bashou" or "Eight Hands," a repetitive series of movements, not unlike "Tantui" or "Springing Legs" which introduces the student to basic stances and hand-foot coordination.

Xingyiquan footwork is not very complex, emphasizing stability in movement. Power generation is totally dependent on stance and posture, and effective defense relies heavily on quick footwork and coordinated body movement to achieve a superior angle of entry to one's opponent. As we will see, one trains simple, basic movements repetitively until they are second nature, and then learns to apply them in as many situations as possible. The same holds true for xingyi striking techniques.

### THE BASIC XINGYIQUAN STANCE

The basic stance will be referred to as the Triangular stance. This is a rear-weighted stance, with the thighs held close together as in Figure A. One's spine should be absolutely vertical, with the lumbar and cervical arches flattened by rotating the bottom of your pelvis forward (anteriorly) and pushing upward with your neck, as if trying to press the crown of the head to the ceiling. The center line of your hip and shoulder should align vertically with the ankle of your rear foot. In the beginning it may be useful to have a partner hold a pole against your back with each step. Your

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forward foot should be about one step ahead of your rear foot, or about as far ahead of you as the length of your own foot, so that the length of the stance (the distance from your rear heel to your forward toes) should be about three foot-lengths. The width of the stance should be between one and two inches (here again it may be helpful to stand with your feet on either side of a pole or a length of tape.) The rear foot is turned outward (laterally) about 35 degrees, and the toes of the forward foot should point straight ahead. It is important that the center line of your forward kneecap (patella) be horizontally aligned with the center line of your forward foot. Knees should be bent, and hips should face squarely forward. Your toes should be slightly curled, as if gripping the ground, and they should flex and grip with each step.



Figure A - The Triangular stance is a rear-weighted stance, with the thighs held closely together, spine absolutely vertical, with lumbar and cervical arches flattened by rotating the pelvis forward and pushing upward with your neck, as if trying to press the crown of the head to the ceiling. The center line of your hip and shoulder align vertically with the ankle of your rear foot.

### PIQUAN FOOTWORK TRAINING

In the Splitting (Piquan) footwork, the Triangular stance is alternated with a second foot posture, called Chicken step, in a zigzag foot pattern. In Chick-ken step one's feet are together, with all of your body weight supported on one foot, the toes of the other foot barely touching the ground, heel raised about an inch off the ground, knees bent. The supporting leg should be the leg to the outer edge of the foot pattern.

To walk through the splitting form stepping pattern, I suggest laying down a guide with masking tape. Make three parallel lines, the outermost lines separated from the center line by a distance equal to the width of your shoulders, measured edge to edge.

*To practice the Triangular stance:*

1. Stand facing squarely forward, with your heels on either side of the center line. (Fig. T1)

2. Toe out with your right foot, until your right foot points to your right about 35 degrees. Sink your weight onto your right leg, bending the knee and sitting back. (Fig. T2)

3. Extend your left foot ahead of you on the center line, bracing your right thigh against your left, knees bent. The left knee should point straight ahead. Hold this stance, counting slowly to ten. (Fig. T3)

This is the Triangular stance.

*Practicing the Piquan stepping pattern:*

1. Assume the Triangular stance as described above. Extend your left foot to the tape line to your left and slightly forward. (Fig. P1)

2. Shift your weight and pull yourself over to your left leg, bringing your feet together into a Chicken step, knees still bent, right foot suspended lightly, heel one inch off the floor toe gently touching down. Hold this stance, keeping your back vertically aligned as in the Triangular stance. (Fig. P2)

3. Advance from the Chicken step by extending your right leg to the right and forward, onto the center line. (Fig. P3)

4. Follow step with your left foot coming forward and to the rear of the right foot onto the center line without shifting your weight forward. This move, done correctly, will place you back in the Triangular basic stance with the right foot forward. (Fig. P4)

Repeat the above sequence to the right. One should begin with at least 50 repetitions per set.

I am sure that some of you are wondering how you can move forward from a Chicken stance to a Triangular stance without shifting your weight, at least not visibly or appreciably. The answer, of course, is the same way you get to Carnegie Hall. Practice. Next issue we will begin learning the upper body actions to accompany our foot work for the Piquan (splitting form) of xingyiquan.



Fig. T1 - Stand facing squarely forward, with your heels on either side of the center line.

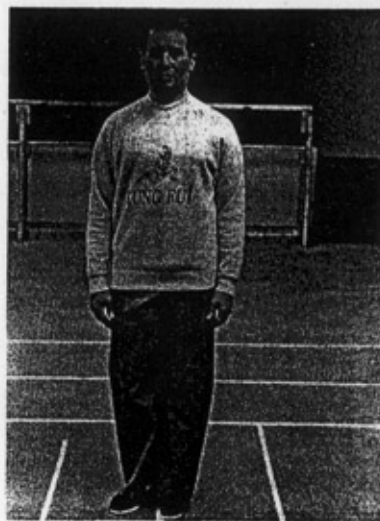
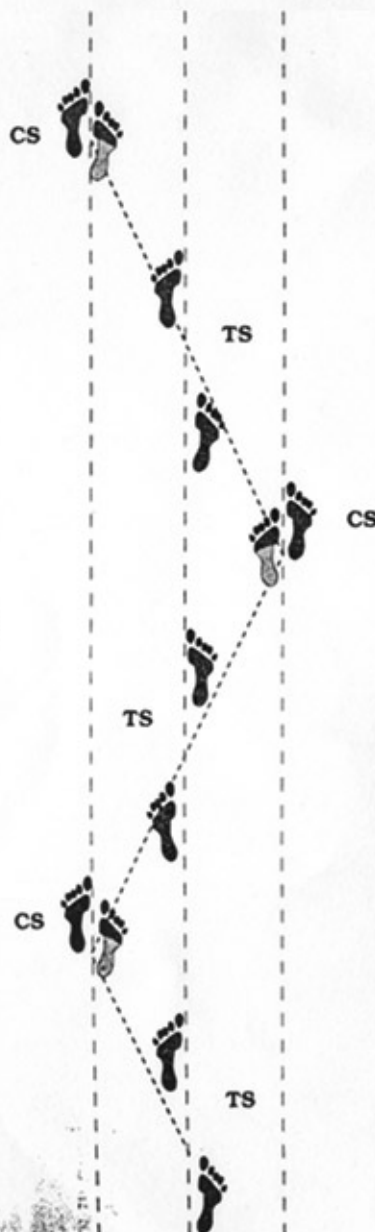


Fig. T2 - Toe out right foot until right foot points to right about 35 degrees. Sink weight onto right leg, bending the knee and sitting back.



Fig. T3 - Extend left foot ahead on center line, bracing right thigh against left, knees bent. Left knee points straight ahead. Hold stance, counting slowly to ten. This is the Triangular stance.



The stepping pattern for Pi Quan walking from xingyiquan.  
 TS - Triangular stance;  
 CS - Chicken step.



Fig. P1 - From Triangular stance, as described in Fig. T3, extend left foot to the tape line to the left and slightly forward.



Fig. P2 - Shift weight and pull yourself over to left leg, bringing feet together in a Chicken step, knees still bent, right foot suspended lightly, heel one inch off the floor, toe gently touching down. Hold this stance, keeping your back vertically aligned as in the Triangular stance.



Fig. P3 - Advance from Chicken step by extending right leg to the right and forward onto center line.



Fig. P4 - Follow step with left foot coming forward and to the rear of the right foot onto center line without shifting weight forward. This will place you back in Triangular stance with right foot forward.