

Silk-Reeling Energy for Tai Chi, Bagua, and Hsing-I

by Ken Gullette

The information in this book is based on 15 years of practice and high-quality instruction from members of the Chen family and their disciples. This book is designed to be a reference companion to Ken Gullette's Silk-Reeling DVD, which is available on his websites.

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Other Books and DVDs by Ken Gullette

What other internal artists are saying about Ken Gullette:

"I have come to my last lesson in Silk-Reeling. I like your way of teaching. You can explain it so easily and lead the student straight to the point." -- J. van der Valk

"The DVDs are very well done indeed. Thank you very much for this brilliant work, it is much appreciated." -- J. Binck

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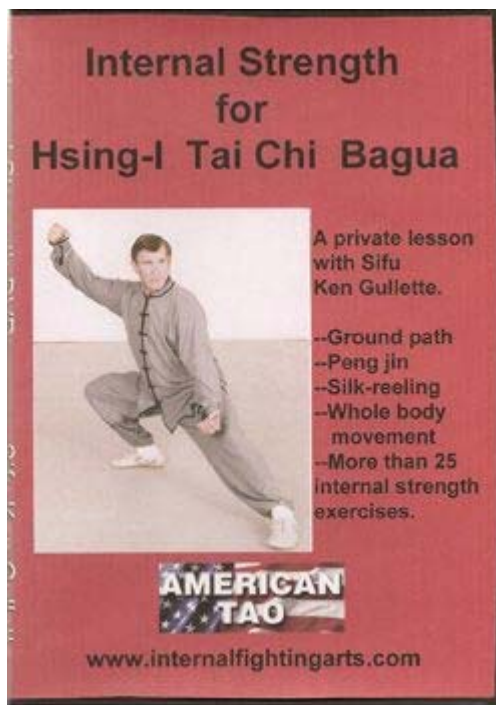
"Your site is very good. I study with a teacher in London doing Yang Tai Chi. They don't teach things like silk reeling until after about 10 years." -- M. Cox

"First, let me say how glad I am that I discovered your site in the course of an internet search. It did not take long to come to a decision about joining. The material on the site is well organized and clearly presented. Your analytical approach to internal strength is accessible and sheds light on the mysteries of the subject from the very first lesson." -- R. Kollmar

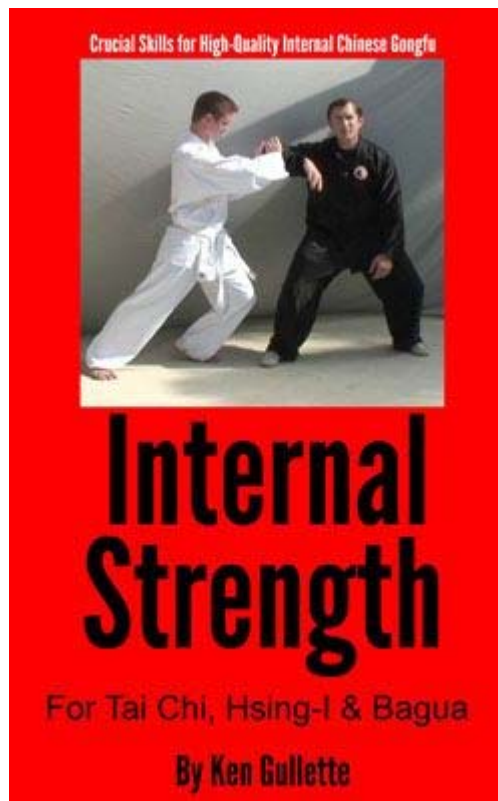
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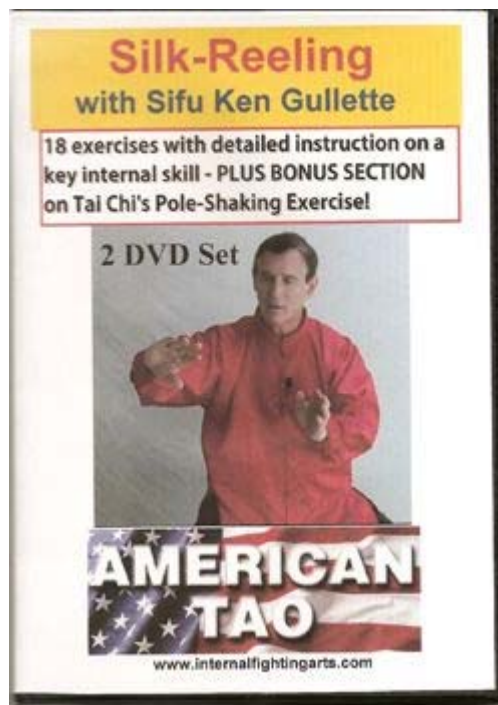
[Internal Strength DVD](#)



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Introduction - Why You Don't Understand Silk-Reeling Energy



Before we go further, let me clarify something.

Silk-reeling energy -- also known as Chan Ssu Jing -- is not metaphysical or magical. It is not based on invisible energy spiraling through your body.

Silk-reeling energy is a physical skill that depends upon the coordinated, connected body mechanics that are required for high-quality internal Chinese kung-fu. It is most often discussed in Taiji and Bagua, but silk-reeling is also present in good Xingyi.

In the classical texts of Chen taiji, it is said that if you do not understand silk-reeling, you do not understand taiji.

If this is true, why are millions of taiji students and teachers in America and around the world clueless about silk-reeling?

All movements in taiji, bagua, and xingyi are silk-reeling exercises.

The first time I studied silk-reeling energy, I was misinformed by my teacher. He said that as we were doing our taiji form (at that time the Simplified Yang 24) we were supposed to imagine our chi spiraling from the foot to the hand. We had to visualize our energy spiraling up through our body like a spring.

There was no instruction or mention of "ground path," or "peng," or "opening and closing the kua," or "rotating the dan t'ien." There was a mention of whole body movement. There was plenty of talk about "cultivating chi" and "detaching the mind."

My teacher, who claimed to be an internal arts master, had no clue about silk-reeling energy. As a result, neither did I.

My friends, you can imagine chi or you can work at "cultivating" chi all day long and still not be able to infuse the spiraling movements of silk-reeling energy into your own movement. And that is why you do not see this spiraling in the movement of most Tai Chi players that you encounter.

The term "energy" is translated poorly. The Chinese intended it to mean "method" or "strength" or "power." When a certain movement is described as "peng energy" or "liu energy" or "silk-reeling energy," it means a certain method of dealing with incoming force using internal body mechanics. It was developed by the founder of Tai Chi Chuan, Chen Wangting. As Tai Chi was watered down over time, becoming the weak "moving meditation" that most people practice, the skill of silk-reeling movement was lost. It was not, however, lost in the practice of Chen Taiji.

Flash forward more than a decade, and I was introduced to Chen taiji by Jim and Angela Criscimagna, who at that time lived in Rockford, Illinois. It became obvious that silk-reeling, like all the skills needed for high-quality taiji, was based on physical concepts and internal body mechanics.

Since that time, as I have studied and practiced, I have met tai chi teachers and students who still do not understand how to perform these spiraling movements. Some believe it is a scientifically valid energy in our bodies, something Western science does not recognize because of a vast conspiracy among Western scientists.

It only takes a couple of simple demonstrations for these folks to realize that they do not understand silk-reeling, after all. It's fun to see the light bulb flash on above their heads when they begin to understand.

The Silk-Reeling exercises make for an amazing leg workout. I've seen veteran martial artists of all styles suffer leg fatigue after only a couple of minutes of these exercises.

This ebook will attempt to give you information to help in your journey through the internal arts. But remember, when it comes to the internal arts, It Has To Be Shown. This ebook is a great reference, but your greatest understanding will come when you watch the video [on my website](#) or on the [Silk-Reeling DVD](#), and then use this book to keep you on track when practicing on your own.

A note about the different spellings for Tai Chi, Hsing-I, Bagua, and Chi Kung. I use both styles of spelling these words -- Wade-Giles and Pinyin. Americans originally understood the "Tai Chi" spelling, but as time is passing, the other way of spelling it -- Taiji or Taijiquan -- is becoming more common than it used to be. You will see both styles of spelling these

words in this book.

6 Skills You Need for Taiji, Xingyi, and Bagua



Six Key Physical Skills for Tai Chi, Hsing-I and Bagua

There are six key skills you need for high-quality internal arts. They are:

1. Establishing and maintaining the ground path at all times.
2. Establishing and maintaining peng at all times.
3. Whole-body movement (whole-body connection).
4. Silk-reeling energy (spiraling movements through the body).
5. Rotating the Dan T'ien (forward and backward, side to side, and a combination).
6. Opening and closing the kua (the creases at the tops of the legs at the groin).

One Principle, Three Techniques

Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang, a direct descendant of the creator of Tai Chi Chuan, Chen Wangting, says that Tai Chi is based on "One principle and three techniques."

The One Principle is "when one part moves all parts move, and Dan T'ien leads all movement."

The Three Techniques include:

1. The Dan T'ien rotating over and under.
2. The Dan T'ien rotating side to side.

3. The Dan T'ien rotating in a combination of directions.

The Dan T'ien is an area of the body that is about an inch and a half below the navel and about an inch and a half inside the body. It is generally the size of your fist. You train this area to move independently of the hips (it takes a lot of practice and correction) similar to the way a belly dancer moves.

Tai Chi is a complex martial art. Performed slowly, it can be used as meditation and for physical health. But keep in mind that this is a martial art. It is not supposed to be practiced with an empty or detached mind. The "intent" of each movement includes the body mechanics that provide the relaxed power required in a self-defense situation. If you are not doing the internal arts with the above skills, principle and techniques, you are not doing the internal arts -- you are simply imitating the internal arts.

The ground path and peng were discussed in my Internal Strength [ebook](#) and [DVD](#).

In this ebook, we will put it all together. As you work on these exercises, remember that all six key physical skills must be present in all movement at all times.

Exercise 1 - Single Arm Reeling

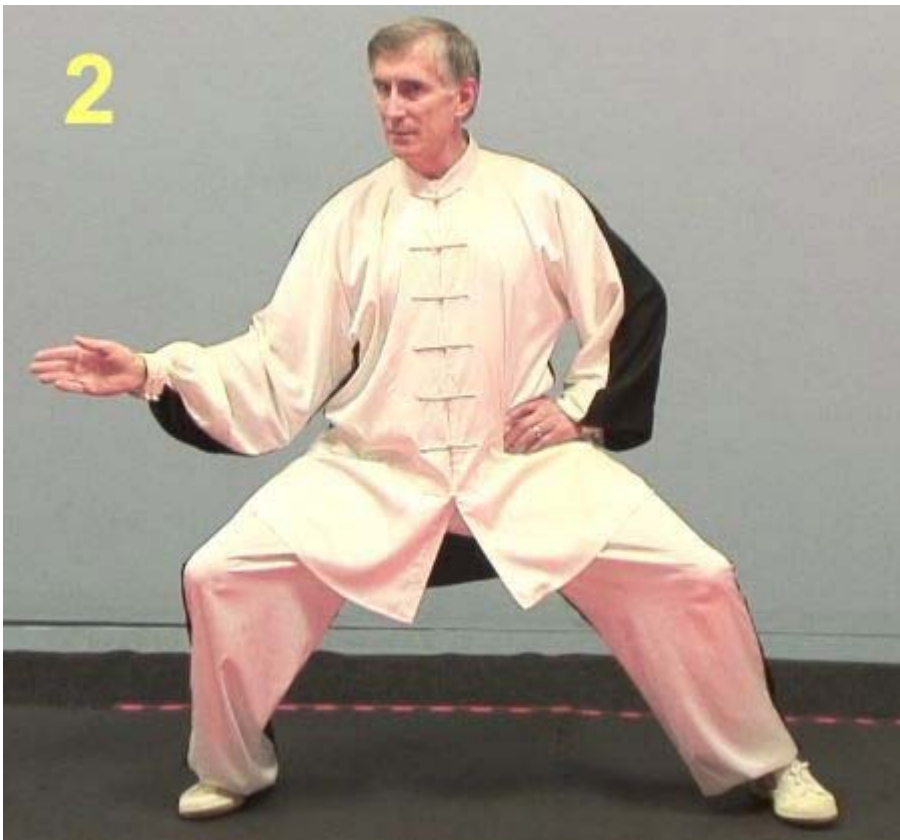


One:

Start with your hand out and your arm about shoulder level (Photo 1). In all of the exercises in this book, keep your shoulders relaxed and level.

Your weight is on your right leg and your right arm is out. Keep the arm slightly rounded.

You should have the ground path from your left foot to your right hand.



Two:

Spiral the arm down to the side (Photo 2). The palm will spiral so that it faces outward. At the same time, sink deeper into the right kua (the crease at the top of the leg at the groin). Close the oblique muscles. Notice how your hand has spiraled from the position in Photo 1. Your weight remains on the right leg in this photo.



Three:

Shift your weight to the left side and spiral the hand inward so that it is in front of you with palm facing up. As you shift, use the ground from the right leg and rotate the Dan T'ien as your hand moves.

You are now in the left kua.



Four:

Turn the Dan T'ien and waist to the left and spiral your hand up and over so it is facing sideways.

While turning, use the ground path from the right foot and connect it through the body to the right hand.

While you are turning, you are closing deeper into the left kua.



Five:

Begin shifting your weight to the right (Photo 5). Push from the left foot. The Dan T'ien rotates as the arm comes across.

Notice the hand is spiraling as the shift occurs.

At this point, the ground path is from the left foot to the right shoulder. In this position, you can deliver a shoulder strike or bump.



Six:

Continue shifting into the right kua as your hand continues to spiral (Photo 6). The ground path is now from the left foot to the right elbow or forearm.

The Dan T'ien rotates, the muscles in the legs are also "cranking" slightly to the right.

The joints in the shoulder and elbow are relaxed and opening.



Seven:

You are back where you began, with your weight on the right side and closed slightly into the right kua.

Now you are ready to repeat the sequence.

If you look at these photos one after another, you see that you are practicing "down" energy (Photo 2), inward or "liu" energy (Photo 3), "up" energy and "peng" energy (Photo 4), and "peng" energy (outward) in all photos.

Peng exists in all energies. It is the most important of the internal energies. Without peng, there is no internal movement.

Likewise, peng depends on the ground path. Without the ground path, peng has no power.

Important note: Notice how little your hips turn in these photos. Your waist turns far more than the hips.

The video on the DVD or on the website makes this all more clear.

After doing many repetitions using the right arm, change sides and use the left arm.



Beginner's Mistake:

One of the mistakes beginners make is that they lack "whole body connection."

In Photo 8, I am doing the exercise with my left arm and preparing to rotate across the body.

Remember, when one part moves, all parts move.



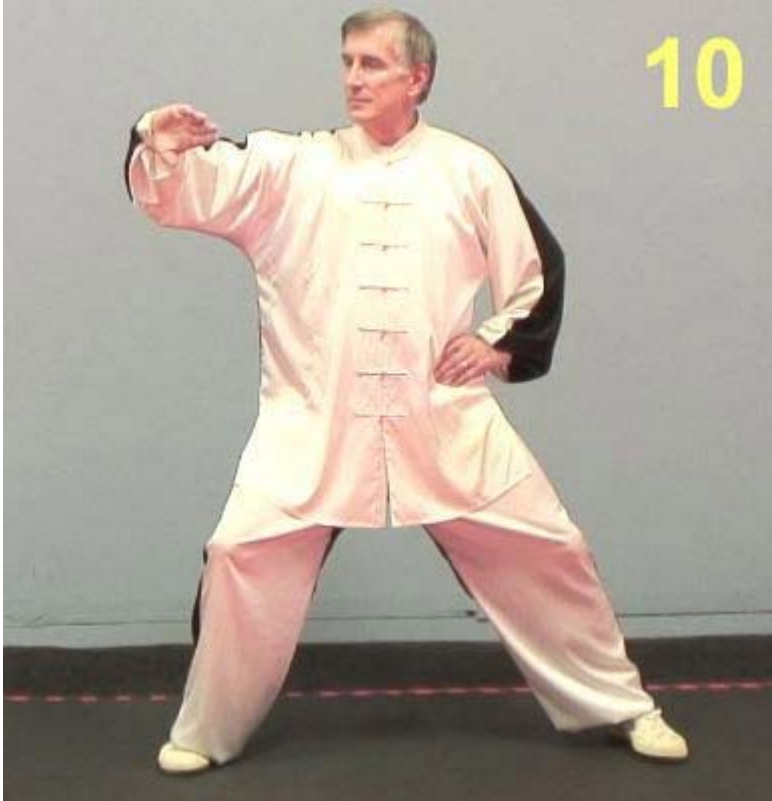
In Photo 9, my body is shifting but my arm and hand are lagging behind. I am not connected.

All parts should move if one part moves. Look back at Photo 5 to see how it should look when shifting across. The spiraling starts with the foot. As your hand moves, both of your legs are spiraling (the muscles are "cranking"), the Dan T'ien is turning, the waist is turning, the shoulder, elbow and hand are spiraling. The hips only turn a little bit. Turning the hips too much is one of the biggest mistakes beginners make.

Another mistake beginners make is that they don't spiral. Look at Photos 4 through 7. Notice how the hand is spiraling all the way across. Many beginners will move their hands across their bodies in the same position. That is a "dead" spiral. Your hand must spiral the entire way through each movement.

This is explained more thoroughly in one of the coaching sessions on the [Silk-Reeling DVD](#). This ebook is a companion to the DVD. Remember, "It Has To Be Shown." It is very difficult to "get" this just by reading.

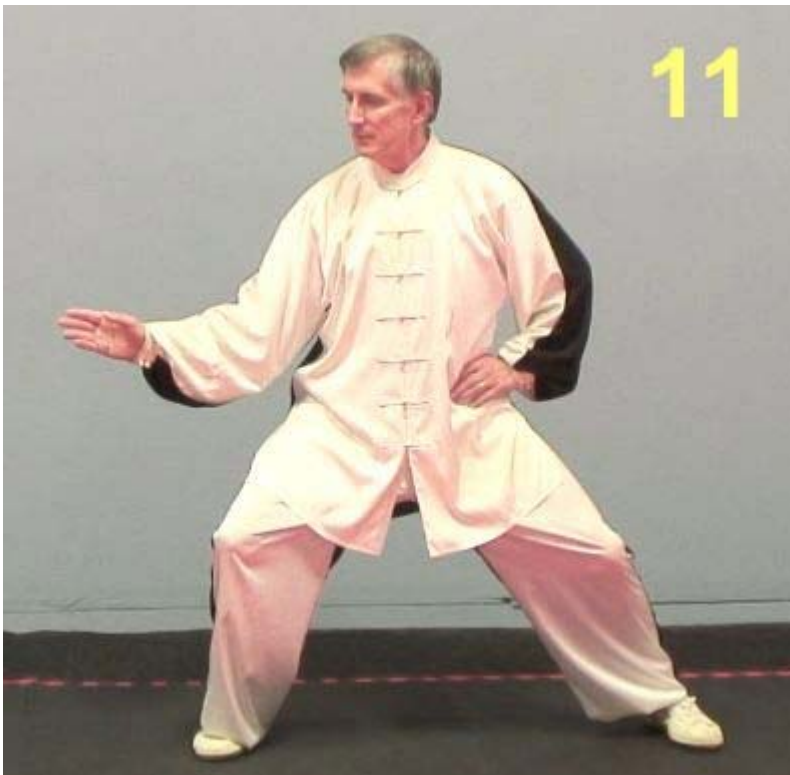
Exercise 2 - Single Arm Reeling with Stepping



One:

In this exercise, you do Single Arm Reeling and add a step. This is very similar to "Wave Hands Like Clouds."

At first, stand in the starting position for the Single Hand Reeling (Photo 10).



Two:

Spiral the arm down and close the body, sinking into the right kua (Photo 11).



Three:

Shift to the middle and spiral the hand (Photo 12) -- with slightly more weight on the left side, opening the right kua and closing the left.



Four:

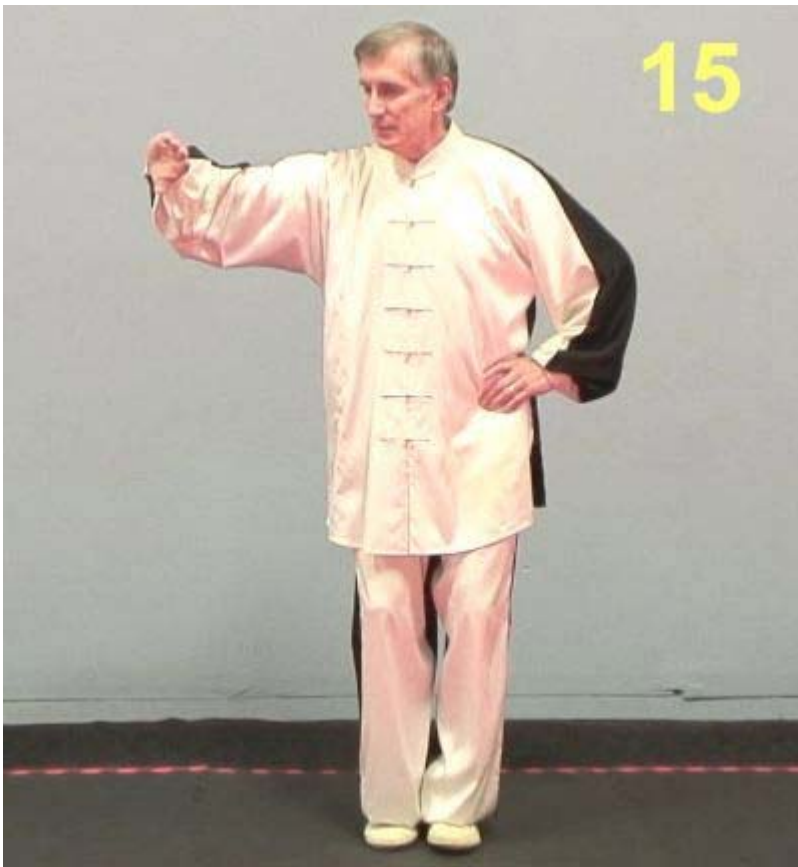
Close deeper into the left kua as you rotate the Dan T'ien (not the hips) to the left and spiral the hand up and outward (Photo 13).



Five:

"Sit back" and shift across into the right kua as your Dan T'ien rotates and the hand spirals across your body (Photo 14).

When the hand gets in front of your face, bring the left foot next to the right foot (Photo 15).



Six:

After stepping in, your arm stops at the place it began (Photo 15). Make sure your legs are relaxed and not "locked" rigidly. Your lower back should be relaxed and ground should go from the left foot through the right hand.



Seven:

The hand spirals down again and you close the body while lifting your right heel (Photo 16). Remember, when the hand comes down, the heel comes up and the body sinks.



Eight:

When the hand spirals to the middle you step the right leg out to the side, closing into the left kua (Photo 17). The right kua is open and the left is closed.



Nine:

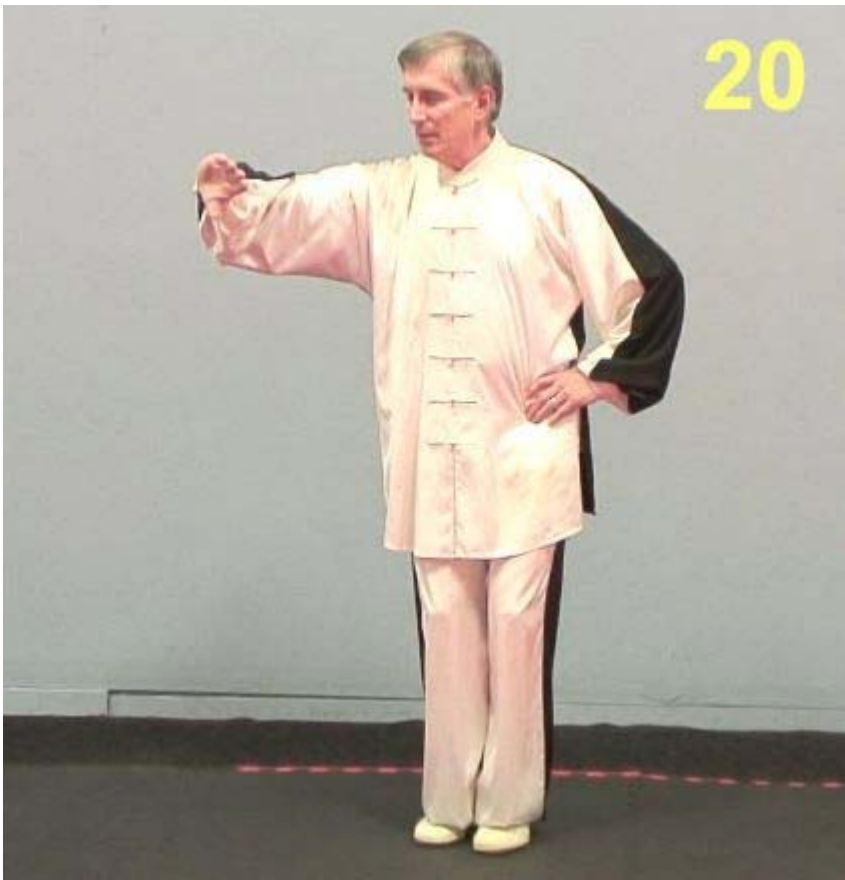
Rotate the Dan T'ien to the left and spiral the hand up and outward, closing deeper into the left kua (Photo 18). The ground path is from the right foot through the right hand.



Ten:

Rotate the hand across as you shift into the right kua. The ground is still coming from the left foot.

When your hand gets to the middle (Photo 19) you will begin stepping in with the left foot.



Eleven:

Complete the movement and maintain ground from the left foot through the right hand
(Photo 20)



Photo 21 is what Photo 20 looks like from a rear view. The right arm is out and the left hand is resting on the side like the old nursery rhyme "I'm a Little Teapot."



In Photo 22, the right hand drops and the right heel comes up.



In Photo 23, when the hand reaches the middle, step out to the side with your right foot.



In Photo 24, rotate the Dan T'ien to the left and push the ground from the right foot through

the right hand as you spiral the hand up and outward to the side.



In Photo 25, sit back slightly, then shift the weight to the right side, rotating the hand across, and when it reaches the middle, you begin to step.



In Photo 26, you complete the movement and begin the next sequence (you will lower the

hand and raise the right heel to begin the next stepping sequence).

Exercise 3 - Double-Hand Reeling



Facing the left, start with your hands down and in front of you, as if you are blocking a kick with both hands (Photo 27). Your left kua is closed and weight is on your left leg (70% on the left leg).



Spiral your hands upward and "get under it" as if you are catching an arm that is throwing a

punch (Photo 28).



"Sit back" slightly and shift the weight, closing into the right kua and turning the waist with the arms. During this movement, the ground comes from the left foot through the hands. As your waist turns and your weight shifts, your hands are spiraling across your body (Photo 29).



In Photo 30, you have reached the end of the shifting of weight. Notice how "centered" the stance is. Even though I have closed into the right kua (left kua is now open), My hips have not turned too much and they are not sticking out over the right foot. That's one of the mistakes beginners make. When they pull across their body, they jut the hips out sideways, throwing their posture off-balance. Photo 30 is an example of a "centered" stance, even though my weight is now 70% on the right leg.



Remember in the Single Hand Reeling exercise when the hand dropped down and you sunk your weight and closed the obliques? You do the same here, but you are spiraling both hands down. In a self-defense situation, Photo 30 represents catching and pulling a punch, while Photo 31 represents a takedown (including an armbar). I have sunk my weight but remain in a "centered" stance.



"Sit back" slightly and shift your weight to the left, grounding from the right foot, turning the Dan T'ien and the arms together, and shifting into the left kua (Photo 32). The hands are spiraling all the way across the body.



Finish in the same position that you started (Photo 33) and then repeat the sequence. After

practicing a while facing left, switch and practice facing the right side.

Remember to maintain ground and peng in both hands at all times. Some people say that one hand is "yin" and the other is "yang" but don't misinterpret that as one hand being stiff and one being soft. Both hands should have "intent" at all times. And remember, the "intent" is a self-defense application. Actually, in any movement, one side of the hand may be yang and the other side yin.

Exercise 4 - Double-Hand Reeling with Stepping



Start with Double-Hand Reeling and when you complete the first cycle and the hands are moving back to the front position, step your right foot in (Photo 34).



Spiral your hands up and lift the left heel (Photo 35).



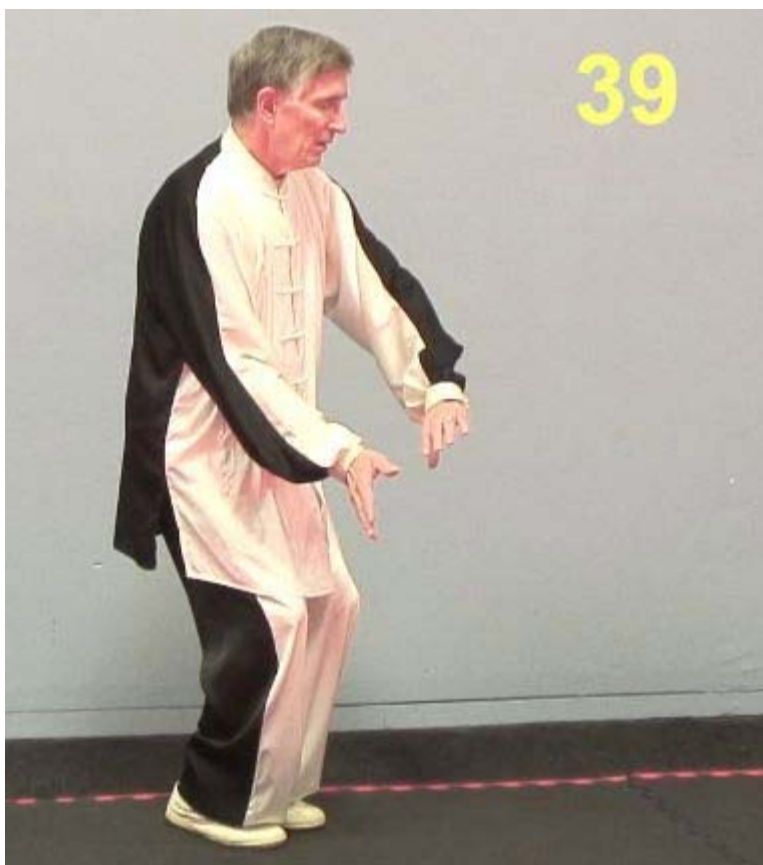
Pull and spiral your hands across the body. When they get to the middle, step your left foot out. Your ground is coming from the right foot and you are closed into the right kua.



Close deeper into the right kua and sink, rotating the hands down with "down" energy. Sink the weight.



Sit back slightly and shift the weight, grounding from the right foot. Turn the Dan T'ien and waist as you spiral the hands across your body, closing into the left kua. Here in Photo 38, as your hands get to the middle, begin stepping with the right foot.

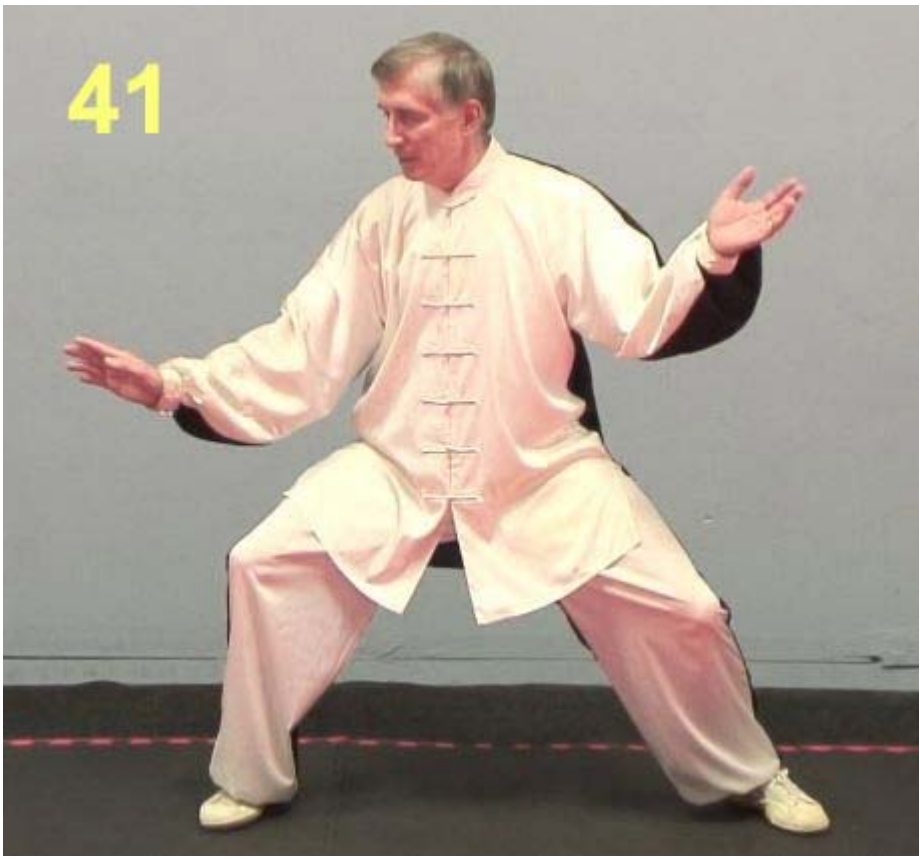


In Photo 39, you have stepped in and returned to the starting position. Repeat the sequence. When you have repeated several times -- or when you have run out of space -- practice going to the right side.

Exercise 5 - Up/Down Diagonal Arms



Begin with one arm going up at an angle and the other going down at an angle. In Photo 40, the right hand is angled up and the left hand is angled down. My left kua is open and the right one is closed slightly. The chest has opened slightly.



Spiral the right arm down and the left one up as you sink and close deeper into the right kua (Photo 41). Close the obliques.



Sit back slightly and shift your weight into the left kua as your right hand spirals across and your left hand spirals down (Photo 42). Your ground path begins in the right foot during this movement. Do a slight turn. Notice the "closing" of the body compared with Photo 40. Tai Chi, Bagua and Hsing-I movements are made up of closings and openings. Here in Photo 42, the Dan T'ien and waist turn more to the left than the hips do. Now, you are prepared to shift the ground to your left foot.



Sit back slightly, grounding from the left foot, and shift the weight to the right as your hands continue to spiral with the arms continuing on their circular journey (Photo 43). If this was a self-defense situation, you can see that this would be an elbow strike with the right elbow.



You have opened the arms, opened the chest, and completed the weight shift to the right kua. Notice the hips have remained level, the shoulders are "down" and the stance is centered, even though the weight is on the right side. There is peng in both hands. Also notice that my weight has remained sunk. If I was standing higher and my legs were locked, I would have my "chi in my chest," as the old saying goes.

Keep repeating this sequence with the right hand angled upward, then after a while, do it on the other side with the left arm angled upward. The sequence is shown below (Photos 45 through 50). Notice the spiraling positions of the hands and arms.





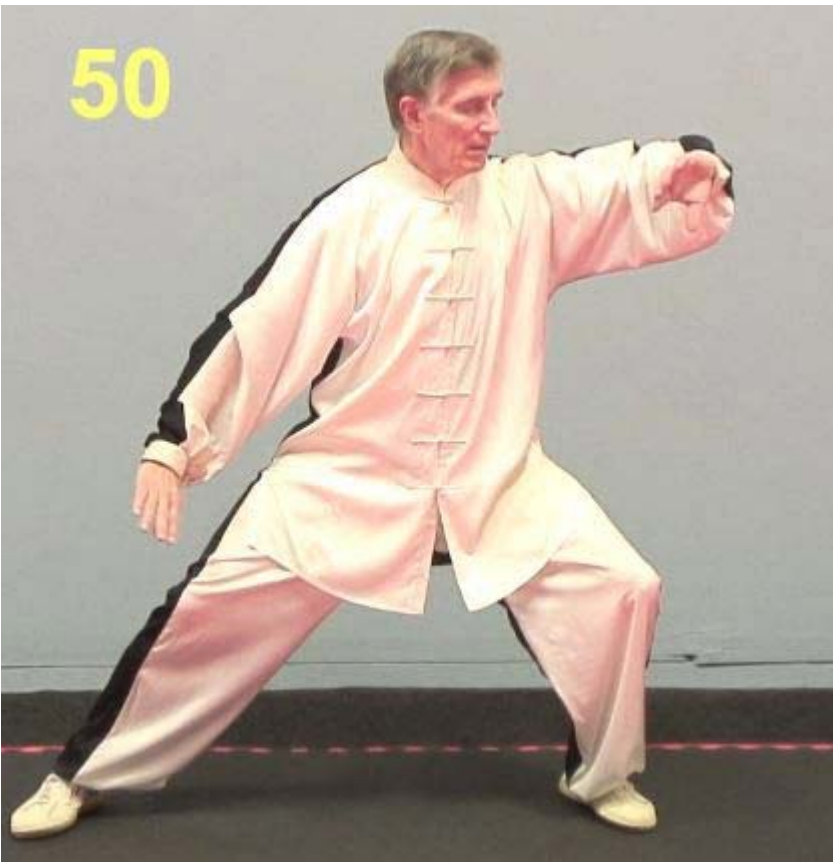
One of the self-defense applications of this movement would be to deflect an incoming kick (Photo 47).



After deflecting the incoming kick (Photo 47) you are now set up for a shoulder strike (Photo 48).



Or an elbow strike (Photo 49).



Exercise 6 - Inward Reeling

This exercise teaches you to spiral inward with the elbow leading the way.



In Photo 51, the right hand is held upward and the left hand is downward around Dan T'ien level. Weight is on the right leg.



Begin shifting the weight into the left kua and leg. The ground is coming from the right foot. Reel the right arm inward by spiraling the elbow as you spiral the other arm downward and out to the side.



Continue by sweeping the right arm downward and the left arm upward. You will begin "sitting back" at this point. The Dan T'ien has rotated to the left.



The left elbow begins reeling in toward the center as you sit back toward the right kua, with the ground coming now from the left foot. The right hand sweeps downward. The Dan T'ien, legs, and arms are all spiraling here. At this point, you can direct the ground path to a variety of places -- from the left foot to the right shoulder, for instance. This particular posture could also be a supporting posture with the left hand supporting and the ground coming from the left foot.



The left elbow spirals inward. Notice the difference in hand positions in Photos 54 and 55. This indicates the spiraling of the hand, led by the elbow. I'm closing now into the right kua.



The right arm sweeps in its outside circle while the left arm sweeps downward. Still into the right kua and the ground is still coming from the left foot but preparing to shift the ground from the left to the right foot.



Now you are back where you were in Photo 51. Your right hand is beginning its spiral, to be led by the elbow. At this point, begin sitting back as you start the turn and the closing into the left kua.

Notice the difference in the hip position between Photo 56 and 57. The "sit back" is subtle but it is often the beginning of a weight shift. It is better explained and demonstrated in the videos on the [Silk-Reeling DVD](#) or on my [Internal Fighting Arts website](#). You may want to refer to the videos, where I coach a beginning student through the process.

As in all silk-reeling movement, you are connected throughout the body, from the ground through the hands, with all parts moving together -- the legs, the Dan T'ien, the waist, the torso, the shoulders, elbows and hands.

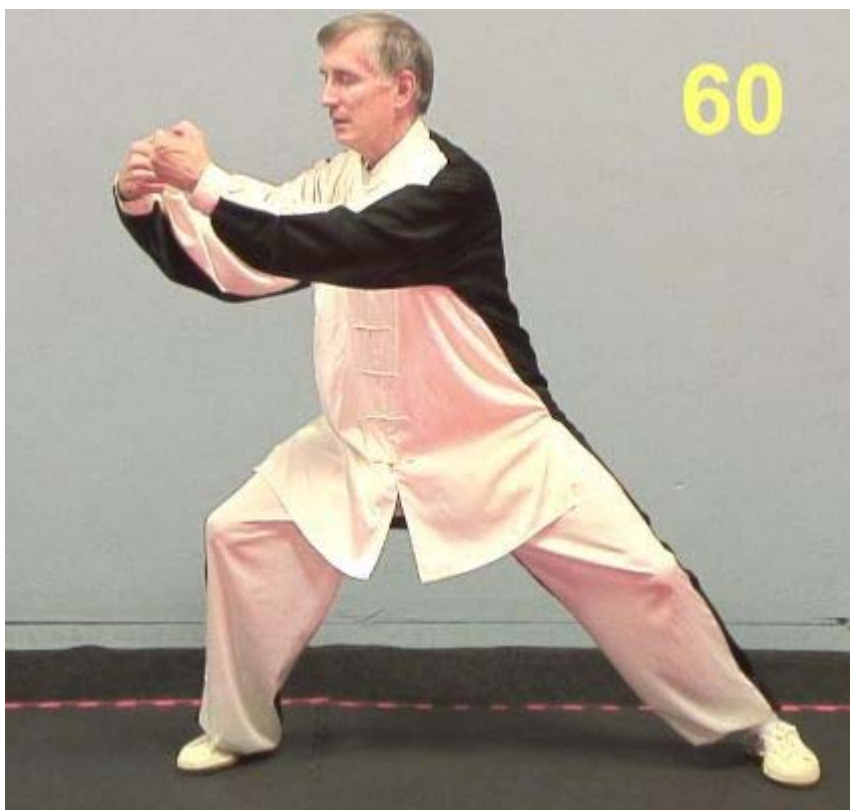
Exercise 7 - Push Out/Pull Down



Begin in a position where you are pushing outward, closed into the right kua (Photo 58).



From the left foot, the ground strength comes through the body in a connected wave -- through relaxing and "bowing out" the lower back, through the shoulders and arms as the wrists begin turning over and the hands begin a spiral (Photo 59).



By the time the hands spiral under and back over the top, they are fists (Photo 60). Now, you will shift the ground to the right foot as you begin pulling downward in the next photo.



In Photo 61, you are sinking your weight and pulling downward with the fists as you begin sitting back toward the left kua.



Shift to the left kua as everything turns and cranks -- the legs, the Dan T'ien -- and you pull the fists across as if you are pulling someone standing behind you over your right leg. The

ground is coming from your right foot.



When you get to the right side (notice how the waist has turned but the hips have not turned as far), you will begin sitting back and shifting the ground to the left foot. The hands begin to open.



The hands open as you turn to the right, opening the left kua and closing into the right kua.



The ground strength from the left foot unfolds through the body in a wave as the hands push

outward (Photo 65). This is NOT done with just arm movement. The hands are connected to the ground and to the movement of the rest of the body. If you push out just with arm muscle, you are not connected and the push will not be as strong as it will be with whole-body connection.



In Photo 66, your cycle is complete and you begin again. When you have completed several repetitions, turn so that you are facing the left side and do several repetitions.

Exercise 8 - Double Hand Opening Circle

This exercise is derived from parts of the movement "Buddha's Warrior Attendant Pounds Mortar." It is exercising "up" or supporting energy, rollback energy, and down energy.



Begin the exercise by standing with weight divided evenly and downward energy in your hands. Sink your weight (Photo 67).



Close into the right kua as your hands spiral up to the left, just like the opening movement to Buddha's Warrior. The ground is coming from the right foot. Keep the shoulders level and the weight down. The leg muscles are spiraling slightly, the Dan T'ien is rotating to the left.



Photo 69 shows the first part completed. There is supporting energy in the right hand and outward energy (peng) in the left hand. You are closed into the right kua but your hips remain level.



The ground path shifts to the left foot as the hands begin spiraling over, across the body (Photo 70). You begin to shift the weight from the right kua to the left as the Dan T'ien turns with the hands.



You are now in the left kua and the hands have moved to the right side (Photo 71). The ground is coming from the left foot.



Spiral the hands downward and begin shifting the weight to the center. You are exercising "down" energy with the weight in your hands.



In Photo 73, you are centered again and ready to repeat the sequence. After repeating several times raising to the left side, change and go the opposite direction, raising to the right side and rotating to the left.

Exercise 9 - Small Arm Spiral

This exercise is a much smaller version of Exercise 1 - Single Hand Reeling. It uses a much smaller circle and it exercises the down, inward, up, and outward energies that are found in all styles of Taiji, Bagua, and Xingyi.

This exercise also helps you loosen the wrist. Many of us -- at least us boys -- are raised to keep the wrist locked. A limp wrist has always had a negative connotation. But in the internal arts, you must learn to relax the joints and be flexible, including the wrists. It can literally take years to get rid of these bad habits. This exercise helps. However, this exercise also requires a loosening of the shoulders and elbows.

Relaxing and moving your arm like a whip, and your hand like a paint brush is difficult for men and women, but you also must learn to do this while maintaining ground, peng, whole-body connection, Dan T'ien rotation, and opening/closing the kua. None of this is easy. It only looks easy.



Start with your right arm out. You are using outward energy and the ground path is from the left foot to the right hand. You are closed into the right kua. Left hand is resting on your side.

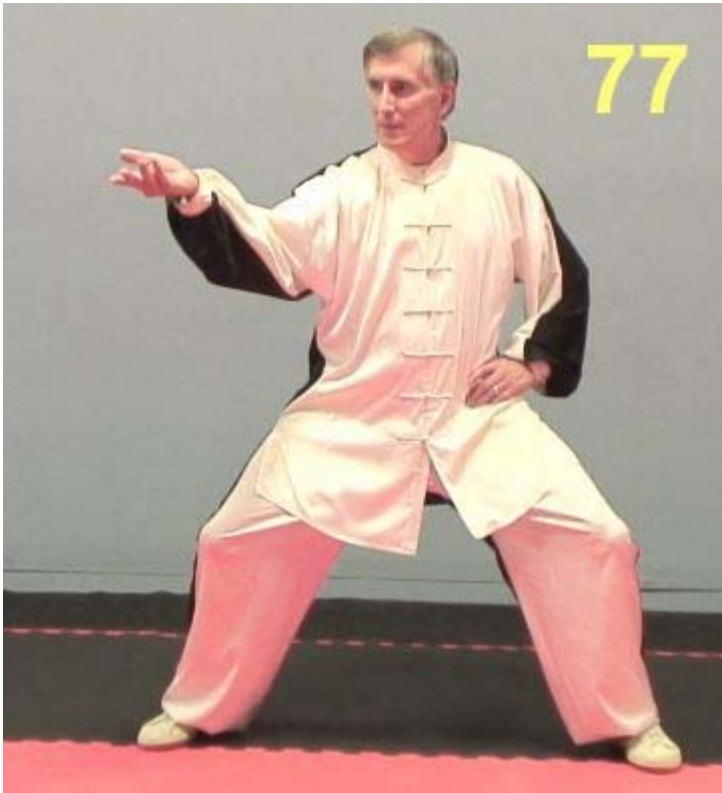


Sink the weight and rotate the hand downward, using down energy (Photo 75).



Rotate the hand inward, shift the ground to the right foot through the right hand, rotate and

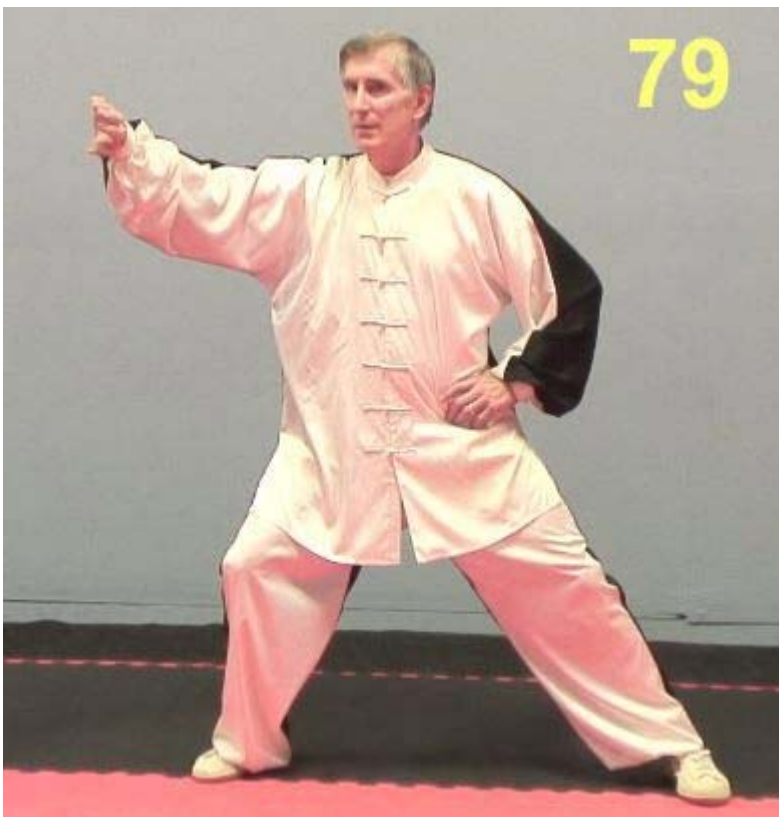
close toward the left (Photo 76).



Get under it and spiral the hand upward, using supporting energy. At this point you can experiment using either ground from the right foot or shift to the left foot.



The hand continues its spiral as the palm rotates downward and the ground comes from the left foot (Photo 78). You are rotating and closing to the right.



You end where you began, ready to repeat the sequence. After doing it several times, change and do it with the left arm.

When you do all of the exercises in this book, remember to pay attention to how loose your shoulders, elbows and wrists are. You can not do these effectively if your joints are moving in a stiff manner.

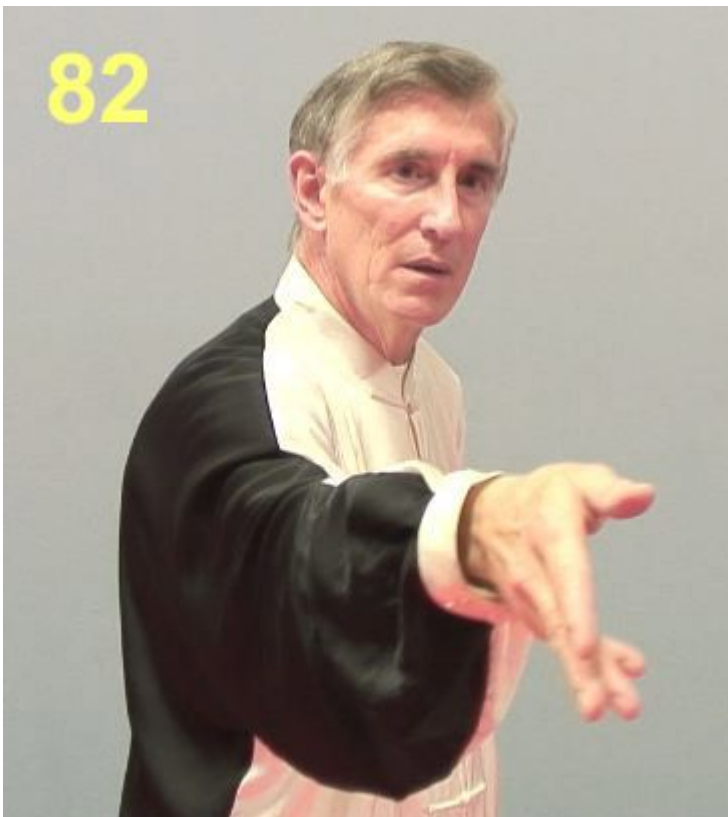
A Different Angle of the Small Arm Spiral



From a close-up view, I begin with outward energy (Photo 80).



Rotate downward and sink your energy (Photo 81). The wrist must be relaxed.



Rotate inward (Photo 82), keeping the wrist relaxed.



Rotate upward, using supporting energy (Photo 83).



Begin rotating outward, changing from supporting to outward energy (Photo 84).



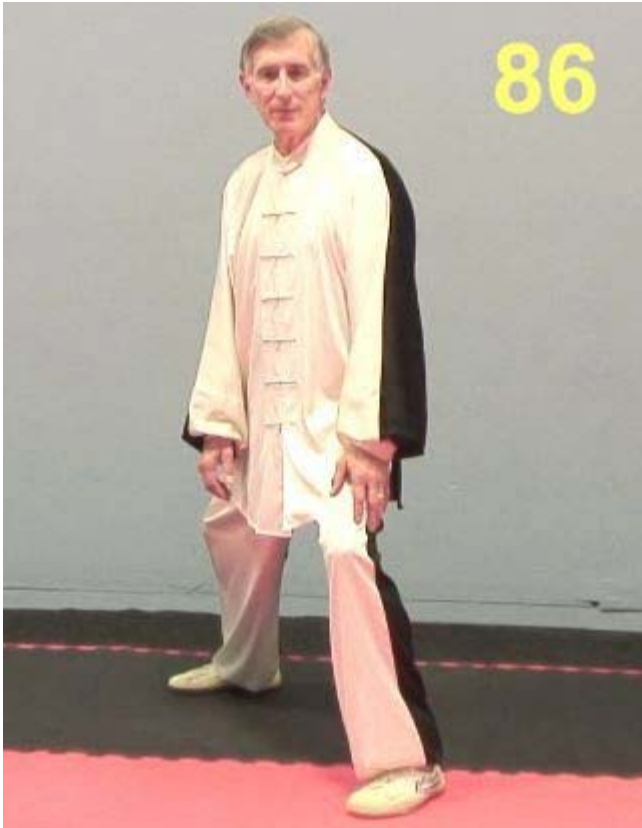
Complete the sequence (Photo 85) and keep the circle going by doing more repetitions.

Remember that even though most of the action appears to be in the arm and hand, your entire body is moving and cranking, from the foot through the hand.

Exercise 10 - Single Shoulder Spiral

The shoulder spiral is an important silk-reeling exercise for several reasons. It helps keep your shoulders limber and healthy. It is also very useful to loosen your shoulders, teaching you to allow them to move during these exercises and your internal movements.

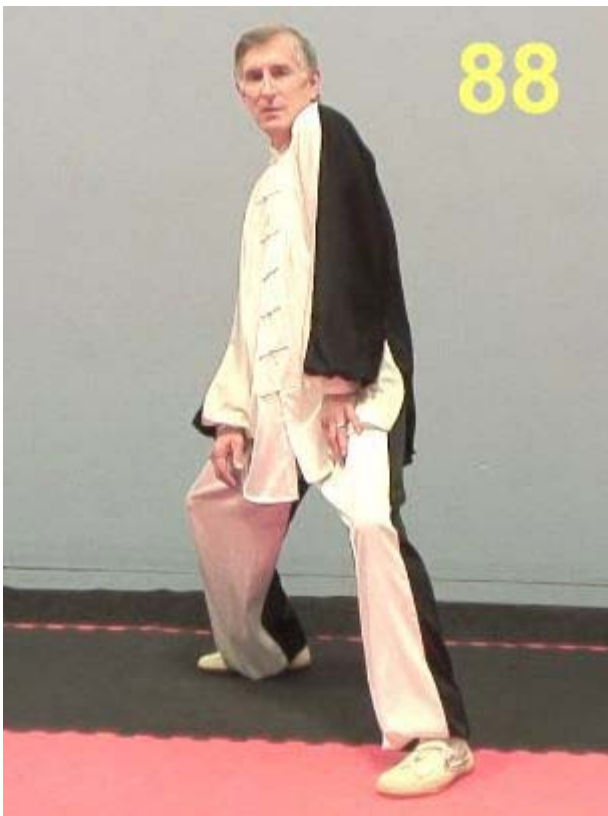
Like all of these exercises, it is also useful as a self-defense concept. Loosening the shoulders and learning to use ground, peng, and the other internal body mechanics that I teach, helps you to develop effective fajing. This shoulder exercise is also the basis of a good shoulder strike. You are developing Kao energy by working on this exercise.



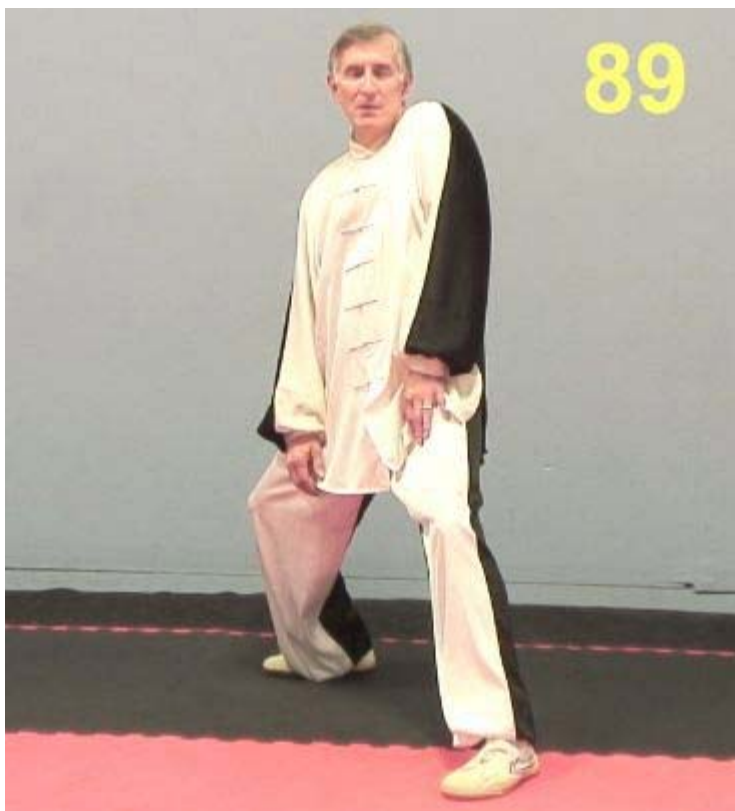
In Photo 86, I am standing with my left foot out, closed slightly into the left kua.



Ground from the left foot and connect it with the left shoulder. Begin sitting back and rotating the shoulder to the inside (Photo 87). Relax the left hand and let it move as the shoulder moves.



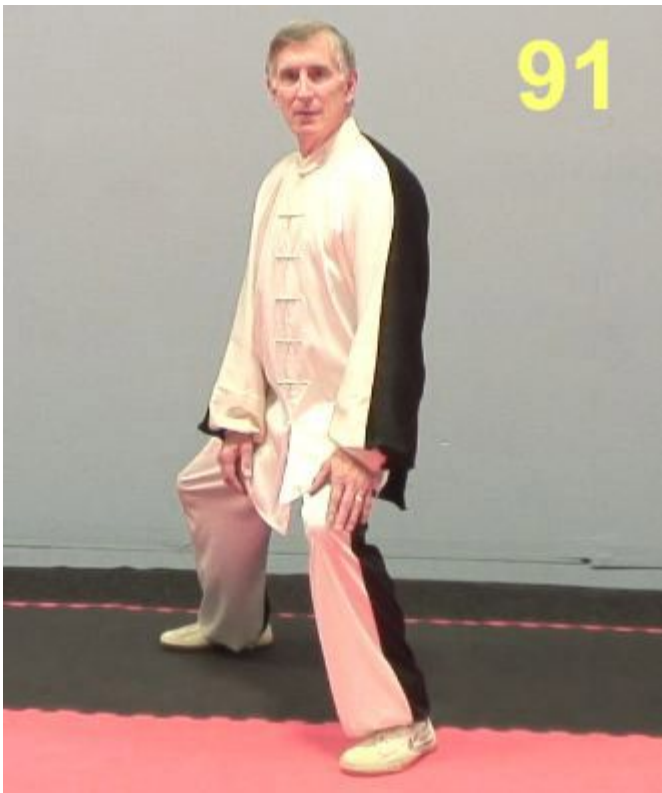
Isolating the shoulder, allow it to continue spiraling up toward your face (Photo 88). You are closing into the right kua.



Continue the circle, with the shoulder rotating past the head and to the left (Photo 89). Notice that your right shoulder is not spiraling. You are now shifting the ground path to the right foot.



By grounding from the right foot, continue rotating the left shoulder around and now toward the front (Photo 90). Your weight is shifting toward the left side now.



In Photo 91, I have returned to the original position, closed into the left kua and ready to repeat the same exercise. After you do this for several repetitions, begin reversing the direction (as seen below in the next few photos).



In Photo 92, I reverse the direction, grounding from the left foot to the left shoulder and beginning to rotate it to the left side.



The left shoulder rotates to the outside (Photo 93).



The circle continues, connected to the left foot (Photo 94).



The shoulder reaches the top of the circle near the face (Photo 95).



In Photo 96, the shoulder continues its spiral down on the inside.



In Photo 97, the cycle is complete and you are ready to begin again.

After doing both directions with the left shoulder, change sides and do both directions with the right shoulder.

Important Notes

It's important to remember that the ground path and peng must be maintained at all times and through all movements. This means you have ground and peng in your shoulders, too.

In the old Kung-Fu TV show, it was said that, "A Shaolin monk, when reached for, cannot be felt."

This is not mystical. It describes how a great kung-fu fighter does not meet force with force. When you reach out to push or punch at him, he "leads you into emptiness."

One of the self-defense applications of this fits well with the strategy I teach called "Yield and Overcome." When someone pushes at your shoulder, you relax it, spiral it out of the way as you do in this exercise, and the push either misses or slips off, causing your opponent to lose his balance. Then you counter or you move on peacefully.

Exercise 11 - Double Shoulder Spiral

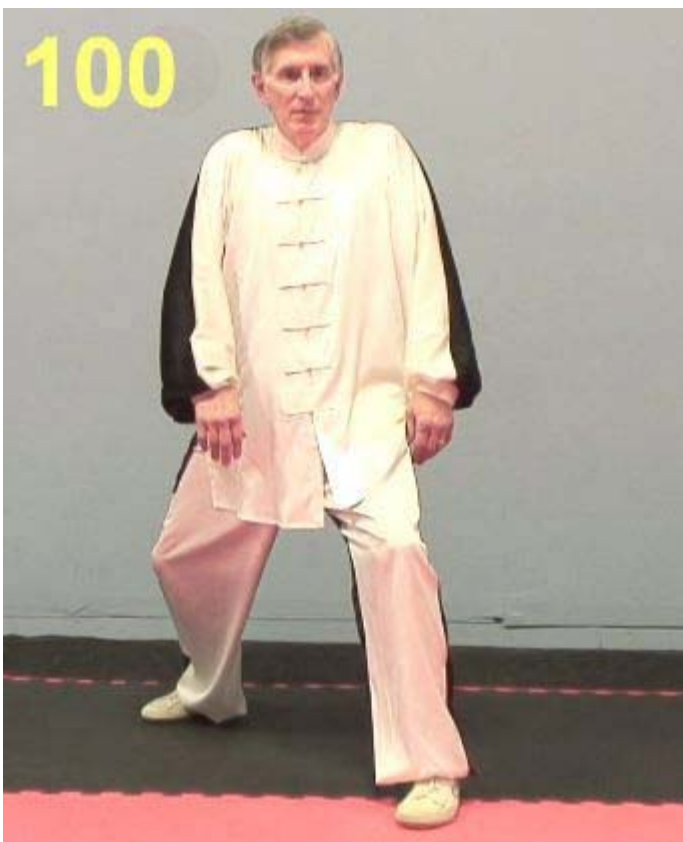
Another exercise that helps you loosen the shoulders, connect them to the ground, and prepare to more effectively use Kao energy.



In Photo 98, I am closed into the left kua, waist turned to the left and shoulders almost square. Hands are at the sides and we'll keep them relaxed through this exercise. You want to isolate the shoulders.



The ground comes from the left foot. Sit back and begin spiraling the shoulders up and back toward the head (Photo 99).



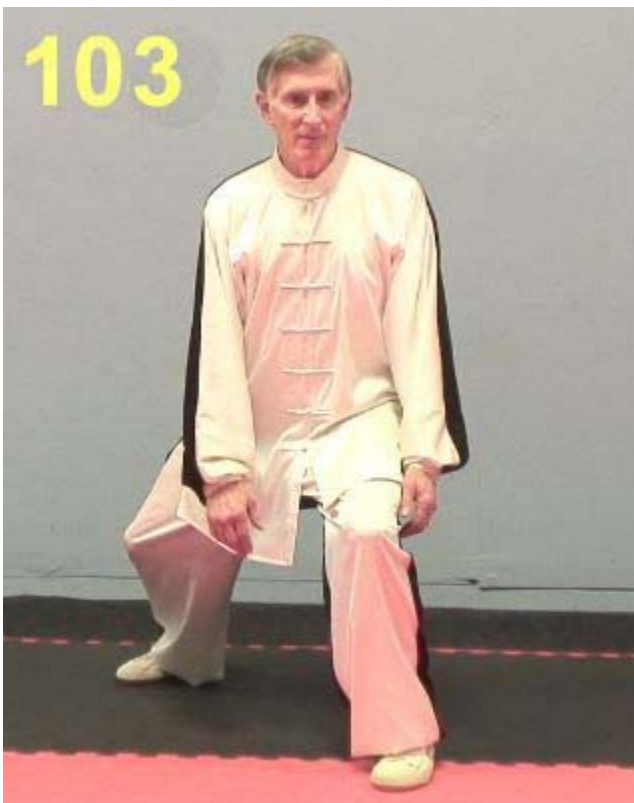
The shoulders continue rotating toward the head (Photo 100). You are closing into the right kua.



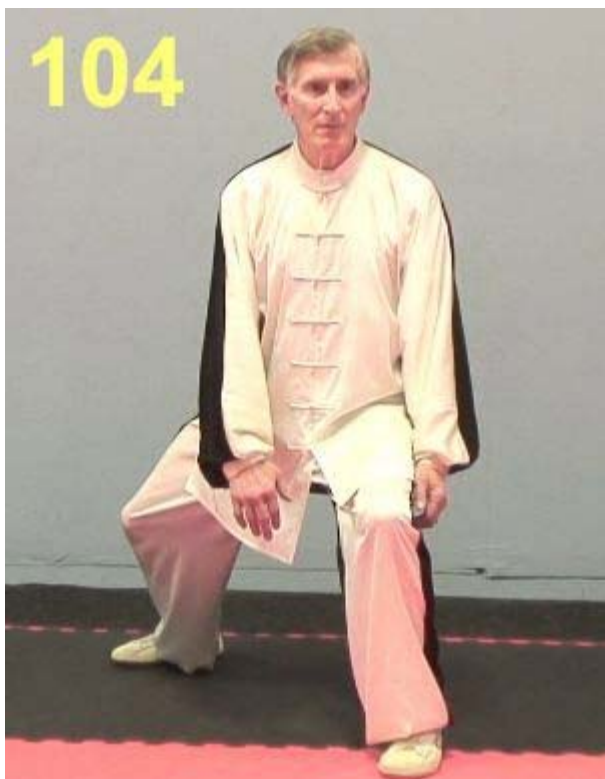
The shoulders rotate past the head (Photo 101).



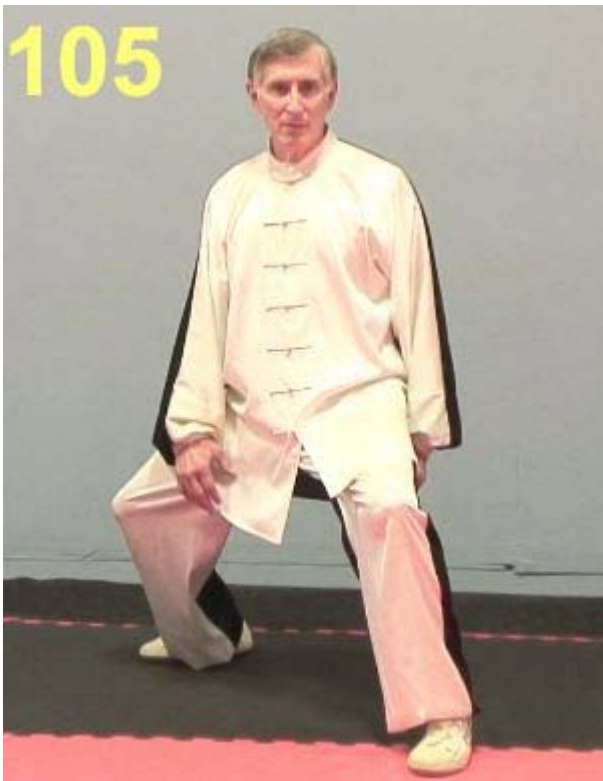
Sink your energy and let the shoulders drop as they continue to rotate. The ground is shifting now to the right foot.



As the shoulders drop, they continue rotating back toward the left leg (Photo 103). Ground comes from the right foot.



In Photo 104, you have reached the end of the cycle. Continue for several repetitions, then change direction as described in the next sequence of photos.



As you reverse direction, sit back and let the shoulders rotate down and backward. Ground comes from the left foot and you are shifting your weight from the left to the right.



In Photo 106, the shoulders have rotated back behind the head and now start their

movement upward. The ground is shifting to the right foot.



The shoulders continue rotating toward the left leg (Photo 107).



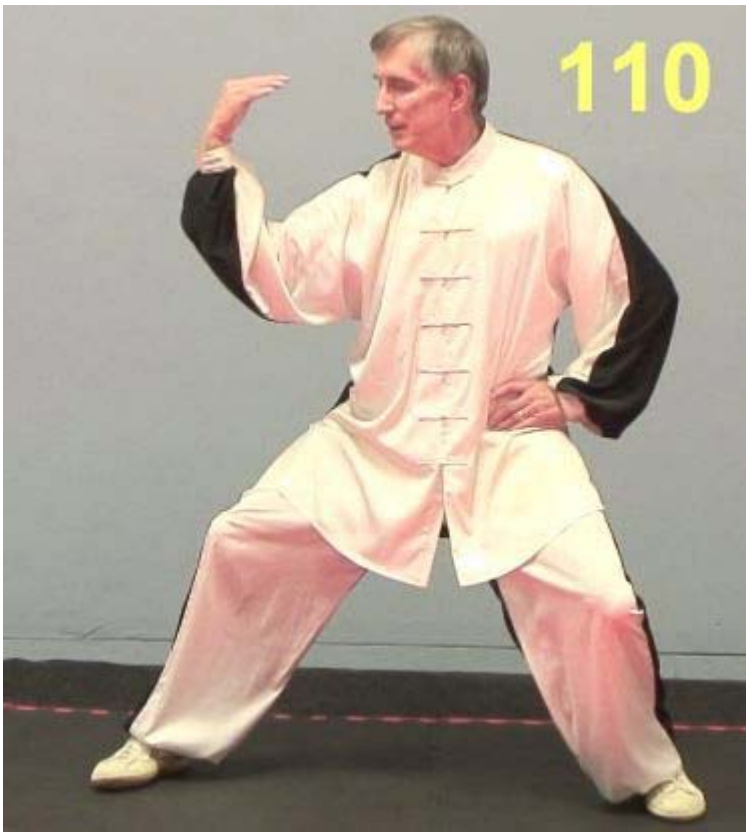
End in the same position you started (Photo 108) and continue for more repetitions. When you have done both directions several times, change so that your right foot is out front and repeat both directions.

Exercise 12 - Diving Palm Spiral

This is a common movement in Baguazhang.



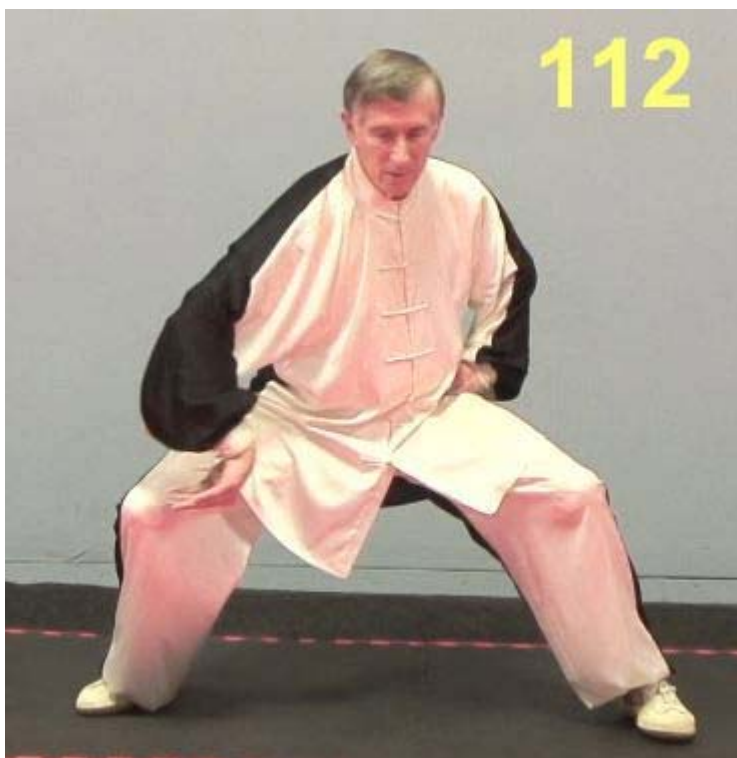
Start with the palm held outward. It can be with the palm facing out or -- as in the case of Photo 109 -- the palm is facing inward. You are closed into the right kua with your right hand out. Your left hand is resting on your left side.



In Photo 110, the ground is coming from the right foot as I sit back. The hand is coming toward my face like a snake. I am closing toward the left kua. Dan T'ien is rotating toward the left.



Spiral the wrist so that the hand is diving downward (Photo 111). Sink the weight into your left kua. The Dan T'ien rotates downward on the left side. The ground is about to shift from the right foot to the left.



With the ground coming from the left foot, sit back and begin turning to the right as the right hand continues to spiral down and outward (Photo 112). The palm is facing upward at this moment. You should experiment with Dan T'ien rotation during this part of the exercise. It isn't just rotating from left to right on a horizontal plane. It is also dropping and rotating from the left, downward and to the right on a vertical plane. This is the "3rd Technique" that Chen Xiaowang refers to -- the Dan T'ien rotating in a combination of forward/backward and side to side.



Close into the right kua as the hand extends and is ready to spiral upward. The Dan T'ien has rotated to the right.



In Photo 114, the rotation continues as the arm is extended. Although the uniform hides it, the arm is not locked. There is still some "play" in the elbow.



In Photo 115, we're back at the beginning and ready to repeat the exercise. After doing it with the right hand several times, change directions and do it with the left hand.

Exercise 13 - Single Elbow Spiral

The single elbow spiral trains you to spiral through the elbow. It's also a great Dan T'ien rotation exercise. One of the keys to performing this successfully is for the rotation of the Dan T'ien to follow the rotation of the hand. The ground is connected to the elbow throughout this exercise. Loosen the joints -- wrist, elbow and shoulder -- and let them relax and move. The movement in this exercise is seen in a lot of self-defense applications.



In Photo 116, I start with my fingers pointing upward and my hand at chest level. Knees are relaxed and weight is centered.



In Photo 117, the elbow spirals as the hand flares open and the fingers rotate downward toward the kua. The Dan T'ien is rotating over the top in a back to front direction. Begin sinking your weight.



In Photo 118, the fingers are in line with the right kua and the Dan T'ien has reached the bottom part of its rotation. Weight is sunk, of course. The Dan T'ien is going to next rotate under and toward the back (next photo).



As the Dan T'ien rotates under and back, the hand and elbow continue to spiral (Photo 119). The lower back is relaxed now and ready to bow out.



The hand and Dan T'ien are rotating in the same direction (Photo 120). By this point, the lower back is "filling up" and bowing out.



Notice how the elbow is spiraling as the hand also spirals (Photo 121). At this point, the Dan T'ien has also turned up the back and is almost ready to turn down the front again.



Let the hand and elbow continue to rotate back to the original position. The Dan T'ien is also at the top and ready to rotate forward and down with the hand. If you look closely at the photos, you will see that the knees flex more because the weight sinks as the hand and Dan T'ien rotate down the front, but as the hand and Dan T'ien rotate up the back, it is okay to rise just a bit.

The following photos give you a side view, showing how the wave of ground strength works through the lower back.



Photo 123 shows me starting the exercise.



In Photo 124, my hand, Dan T'ien and elbow are spiraling forward and down.



The Dan T'ien and fingers reach the bottom of the rotation while the elbow has already started going backward and up (Photo 125).



The hand and Dan T'ien begin rotating under and toward the back (Photo 126). The lower back is beginning to "fill up." The elbow continues to spiral upward.



The wave goes up the back as the elbow begins spiraling forward and the hand and Dan T'ien continue their backward and upward rotation (Photo 127).



Photo 128 shows a return to the starting position. The hand and Dan T'ien are at the top of their rotation and preparing to go down the front again.

When you have practiced this direction several times, do the same exercise with the left hand.

After practicing this direction, you are ready to reverse it. The following photos show you how to do that.



To reverse directions with the Single Elbow Spiral, start with your hand and Dan T'ien at the bottom of their rotation -- the hand will be at the kua (Photo 129).



Rotate the Dan T'ien up the front of the body as the hand and fingers rotate upward (Photo 130). The elbow is spiraling down.



The hand begins to rotate under the armpit and you can see the upper back beginning to fill up as the Dan T'ien reaches the top of its rotation (Photo 131) and prepares to go down the back.



The wave works down the back. Weight is sinking and the elbow is spiraling backward.



The Dan T'ien and hand finish the rotation cycle. The elbow has rotated back and down. It is not easy to see the elbow spirals in photos, but you will feel it when you perform the

exercise.

Exercise 14 - Double Elbow Spiral

This is a way to work both elbows together in spiraling exercises. The same rotations and energies apply to this the same as the Single Elbow Spiral.



Start with both hands open near Dan T'ien level (Photo 133). Weight is centered. Do not lock your knees out. Relax the legs. Let your entire body relax.



Begin rotating both hands and the Dan T'ien downward (Photo 134).



As you rotate under and back, the elbows will spiral backward and up (Photo 135). The wave is working through the lower back.



The wave goes up the back as the hands and Dan T'ien rotate (Photo 136). The elbows spiral up, forward, and then down. It's okay for the body weight to rise slightly here, and for you to rise up slightly in your stance. Notice the legs are never locked out.



The Dan T'ien and hands begin their rotation down the front. The elbows are spiraling downward at this point.



The hands and Dan T'ien rotate down the front (Photo 138). Elbows are starting to rotate backwards. Your weight is sinking again.



Photo 139 shows a return to the starting position. Continue the same direction for several cycles. Then reverse the direction (see the next sequence of photos).



To reverse the direction of the Double Elbow Spiral, you will begin in the same position with hands in front, palms up (Photos 139 and 140).



Rotate the hands in an upward direction as the Dan T'ien also rotates up the front of the body (Photo 141). The elbows are spiraling downward here.



As the hands and Dan T'ien reach their highest point, the elbows are spiraling toward the front (Photo 142).



In Photo 143, the hands and Dan T'ien rotate down the back. The elbows are rotating backward and down.



Photo 144 shows the hands rotating under as they seek to return to the original position. The elbows are spiraling downward.



Photo 145 shows the hands along the kua and the Dan T'ien has reached the bottom and is preparing to rotate up the front. At this point, you can begin the sequence again (see Photo 133).

Exercise 15 - Horizontal Dan T'ien Rotations

When Grandmaster Chen Xiaowang describes the Three Techniques of Taijiquan, he clasps his hands and shows them rotating side to side on a horizontal plane.

This exercise works that Dan T'ien rotation.



Begin with your hands on your Dan Tien area. It does not matter which hand is against the abdomen and which is on top of it. According to traditional superstition, men are supposed to have the right hand first and women have the left. That is utter pseudo-science nonsense. I don't worry about that sort of superstition. You shouldn't worry about it, either.

Your weight is centered. Your Dan T'ien is relaxed (Photo 147).



Rotate the Dan T'ien (your abdominal muscles) to the left, closing a little into the left kua. Do not turn the hips. The hands are following the Dan T'ien movement (Photo 148).



Rotate the Dan T'ien to the back as you inhale and do "reverse breathing." You don't have to suck in your stomach to rotate the Dan T'ien, but if you do reverse breathing, you will pull the abdomen in when you inhale. You want to "fill up" the lower back. It should bow out when the Dan T'ien rotates to the back. Your weight is shifting from the left kua to the right (Photo 149).



In Photo 150, your Dan T'ien has rotated to the right. You have closed slightly into the right kua. The lower back begins to unbow. Notice that the hands have followed the Dan T'ien to the right side.



Exhale and return to center. The Dan T'ien fills the abdomen and comes forward again from the right side. The lower back unbows.

Continue rotating, then reverse the direction, starting from the front, moving to the right side, to the back, to the left side, then back to center.

Exercise 16 - Vertical Dan T'ien Rotations

The 2nd Technique of Chen Xiaowang's "Three Techniques" involves rotating the Dan T'ien over the top and under in a vertical rotation. It can go in either direction.

It is easier to show this one in a side view.



In Photo 152, I start in the same position as the Horizontal Dan T'ien Rotations -- centered and with my hands on my Dan T'ien area.



In Photo 153, I let the Dan T'ien drop and my hands follow.



The lower back bows out as the Dan T'ien moves under and to the back. This would be the time to begin inhaling (Photo 154).



The Dan T'ien rotation continues up the back (Photo 155), and the "wave" goes up the back as the abdomen is pulled in and up.



The Dan T'ien reaches the top of it's circle (Photo 156). Notice the body has risen just a bit but the knees are still flexed, not locked.



Photo 157 shows a return to the original position. When you have done several repetitions, reverse the direction. Start in this position, then rotate the Dan T'ien up and to the back, down the back, and under, returning to this position (Photo 157).

Exercise 17 - Leg Circles Part 1

This is an exercise designed to loosen the joints in the legs and teach you to open and close the kua while you spiral through the leg. These rotations with the heel are done fairly quickly, but can be slowed down if you want.



In Photo 158, I raise the heel of my right foot so the toe is barely touching the ground.



With the ground coming from the left foot, open the right kua and spiral the heel in a circle. At this stage, you have circled down and outward (Photo 159). Don't put hardly any weight on the right toe.



Continue the circle by rotating your heel forward (Photo 160). Your right kua begins to close. Continue to rotate the heel back toward the left and then down to the original position.

You should do both directions and then switch and do the circles with the left foot. The next sequence of photos shows the left foot performing the opposite direction spiral.



To go in the opposite direction, start with the kua closed and rotate the heel forward, remaining lightly on the toe (Photo 161).



Rotate the heel outward while opening the kua (Photo 162).



Rotate the heel backward and to the right as the kua begins to close (Photo 163).

These exercises are a little easier to see on video. But to be clear, you are lightly touching your toe to the ground and making circles with the heel as you spiral through the legs and opening and closing the kua. Try to loosen the ankles and include them and the knees in the rotation. It is easier to feel than it is to see.

This ebook is intended to be a reference for the video. To see the leg circles on video, check out my [Silk-Reeling Energy DVD](#) or join [my membership site](#).

Exercise 18 - Leg Circles 2

This is another exercise that helps you become familiar with spiraling through the legs and opening/closing the kua as you spiral.



In Photo 164, I pick up my right foot and move it forward. My right kua is closed. I am grounding from the left foot.



I rotate the leg to the outside, opening the kua (Photo 165).



I rotate the foot back and in, beginning to close the kua (Photo 166).



The kua closes, bringing the foot in (Photo 167), prepared to begin another circle.

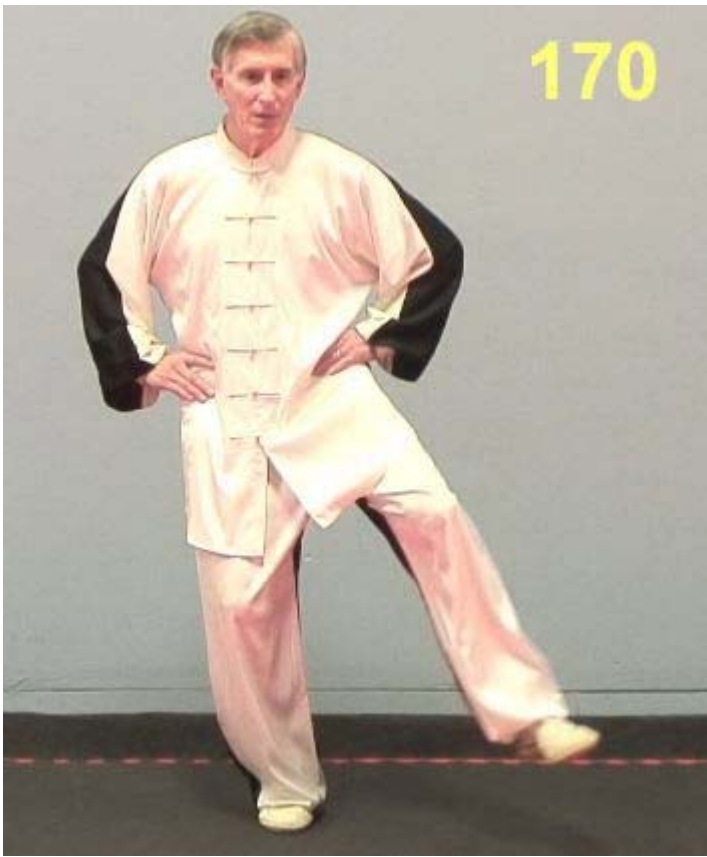


The circle begins again (Photo 168) by closing the kua even more and rotating the foot to the left.

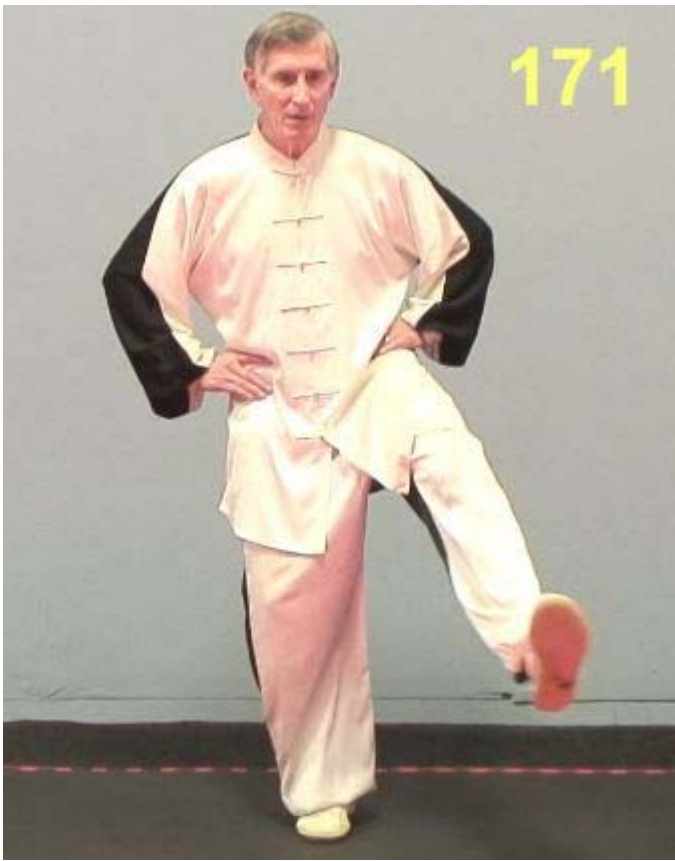
After several repetitions with the right leg, reverse the direction of the circle. See the following photos.



In Photo 169, I pick up my left foot and close the kua.



Rotate the foot back and outward (Photo 170).



The circle continues as the foot goes forward and then to the right (Photo 171).



The circle is completed after the kua closes and the foot circles to the right and comes inward. Now, you can repeat the cycle.

Always do the other side in both directions.

Final Thoughts and About the Author

Tai Chi, Hsing-I and Bagua are made up of spiraling movements that open and close, go in and out, up and down, are hard and soft, gentle and explosive.

The beauty of the internal arts is that they get deeper the longer you study them. Mastery is truly a lifelong journey.

Sometimes, I practice these silk-reeling exercises instead of a form. All the same information is here. All the skills are required for each.

Some of you may remember the old Donovan song from the Sixties called "There Was A Mountain." The lyrics were very zen:

"First there was a mountain, then there was no mountain, then there was."

When you are first exposed to the body mechanics of the internal arts, you think they are incredibly complex.

Then, after you learn some basic movement, you generally become cocky and think that they are actually very simple.

Later, after you understand the body mechanics, you realize how complex they are and how little you understood when you thought they were simple.

Too many students think they have mastered these movements, and they want to learn more and more forms, but they don't yet understand the movements.

Going too fast is the enemy of real skill. Learning too much is the enemy of progress sometimes.

So as you learn more, don't neglect these exercises. Visit them often, and don't forget that -- especially in the case of Tai Chi and Bagua -- all movements are silk-reeling exercises.

About the Author



Ken Gullette was born January 24, 1953 in Lexington, Kentucky. At age 19 he became a fan of the Kung-Fu TV show starring David Carridine, and at age 20, while a student at Eastern Kentucky University, he became aware of Bruce Lee movies.

On September 20, 1973, Ken enrolled in his first martial arts class with Sin The of Lexington, Kentucky. Over the next few decades, martial arts became a way of life. Ken left the church he had been raised in and adopted Eastern philosophies as his foundation and world view.

Ken was a radio and TV journalist for 22 years before entering the world of PR, marketing, media relations and communications. He moved a lot in news, working as a producer for Jerry Springer in Cincinnati at WLWT when Jerry was a news anchor. Ken was a reporter, anchor, producer, videographer, assignment editor, and news director during his career. He won Associated Press awards in radio and TV, culminating with his one-man TV series called Robb's Life, when he followed a Rock Island, Illinois man who had AIDS, doing one story a week for a year until Robb's death in April, 1996.

Ken was the Director of Media Relations for ACT, the company known for its college admissions exam, from 1999, to 2007, when he became Director of Media Relations for the University of South Florida. He has also done communications work for nonprofits in the Quad Cities area.

He earned his black sash in Yiliquan in 1997 but began studying Chen style Tai Chi in 1998.

Ken launched his first martial arts website in 1999, www.kungfu4u.com. It still operates, primarily as a site for his DVDs.

Along the way, Ken competed in many martial arts tournaments, winning more than 100 trophies and medals in forms, weapons, and sparring competition. He won the most medals

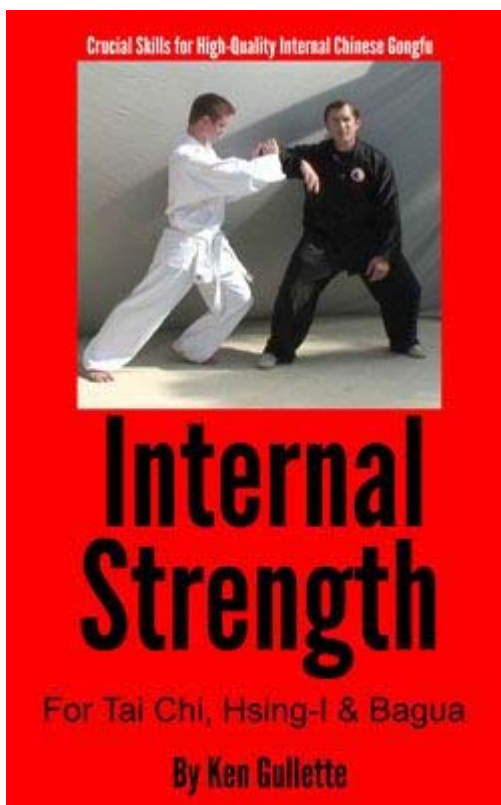
of any competitor at the 1990 AAU Kung-Fu Nationals -- two gold, two silver, and two bronze (see photo above, taken in 1990). One of the golds was for Tai Chi forms.

In 2008, Ken launched his online membership website, www.internalfightingarts.com, and began creating content for the site and for DVDs. The membership site has members around the world who pay a small monthly fee for access to all of Ken's video material. Visit the site and sign up for a 10-part free video series that includes some of the concepts in this ebook.

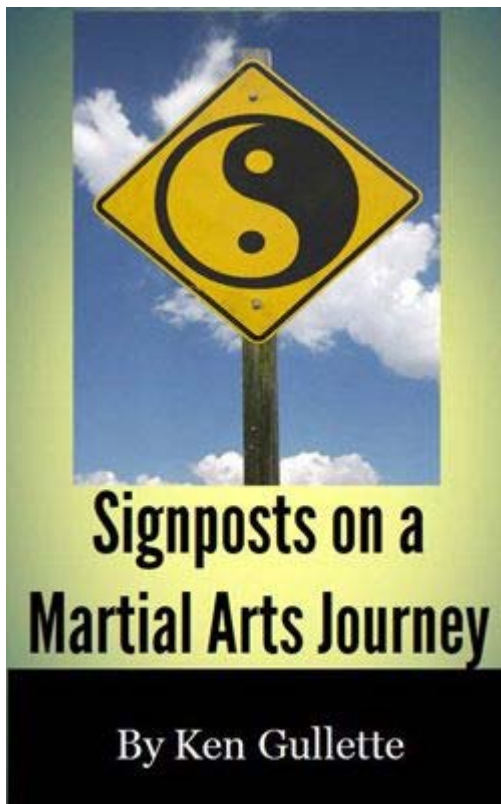
Ken and Nancy married in 2003. Nancy is a tremendous supporter of Ken's martial arts. Between the two of them, they have 3 children and 4 grandchildren (as of 2013). They live in the Quad Cities (Illinois/Iowa border) about 3 hours West of Chicago. Ken still studies and tries to improve his skills, one baby step at a time.

He teaches in parks, at home, and other locations that don't require high overhead. Ken is available for private lessons and workshops. Members of his website are allowed to come to scheduled practices free of charge and get a reduced rate for private lessons.

Ken's other Kindle ebooks are available through Amazon. They include:



Internal Strength for Tai Chi, Hsing-I and Bagua. This ebook is the foundation for the Silk-Reeling material. The cost is only \$4.99. [Order it through Amazon.](#)



Signposts on a Martial Arts Journey: Tai Chi, Hsing-I, Bagua, and the Art of Life. A Kindle ebook collection of 50 informative and insightful posts over a 4 year period from [Ken's popular blog](#). Only \$2.99. [Order through Amazon](#).

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