

# Five Animals and Five Elements

-By Dixon Fung

The five animals and five elements theories are two of the core principals of the Hung Ga system. As Hung Ga students, we learn the shape of the animals and elements and their usages. I am not going to discuss or to repeat the numerous articles that had been written in the past on this topic. Today I like to share with you some of my interpretations of the five animals and elements theory. In kung fu, we speak often of the “internal”. Internal training to me occurs in two areas. Internal in Chinese is “Noi Kung”. Noi Kung in one sense discusses and teaches the cultivation and manipulation of chi. Noi Kung is also “Sum Faht”. Sum Faht can be translated literally as “Inner/heart methods”. Sum Faht is the explanations of the methods and the translation of the theories into actual applications.

As humans, we learn thru different means. We learn kung fu thru copying of movements from our sifu and seniors. We also learn thru mental processing and thru images of the philosophies, such as the concepts of the twelve bridges, five animals, elements etc. In the beginning, we imitate the shape of the animal or element to express the power and release the devastation we wish to cause on our opponents. An example is the usage of the tiger claw. We imagine our hand, and shape it like that of a tiger claw to lock, to destroy our opponents. This is a concept we all know and understanding as martial artist. However this is only the beginning. We should not “box” ourselves in the boundaries of the shape of the system. We must combine the shape (ying) and the mental aspect (yi) of the philosophies into every technique. When we do that, a tiger claw is no longer simply a tiger, it is a combination of all five animals in one move.

## The combinations of animals and elements:

When I say combination, I mean all or part of the five animals/elements can be use in any one technique. Example, let take a double tiger claw move. It is the shape of a tiger. But during entry into your opponent, we can use the footwork of the leopard. The reason is leopard is a faster animal than the tiger; speed is essential in any fight. Upon entry, the bridges meet; depending on the strength of the opponent; if he is weaker of course we will continue with the “tiger” faht in pressing his bridge down. However if the opponent bridge is stronger, we can then utilize the “snake” faht and steal/leak thru his bridge. Once our claw touches his body, we can use the precision of the “crane”faht on the points or tendons etc for a greater devastation. The “dragon” faht is constantly present thru out this technique. The dragon is the most Supreme Being. Its movement is unpredictable. We use this idea in our body movement. Dragon is also the highest form; it is suppose to be unbeatable. By thinking like the dragon (the usage of the yi), we will have confidence in our technique. To summarize this double tiger claw technique, we are using the spirit of the dragon, fast entry of the leopard, shape of the tiger, bridge of the snake and the precision striking of the crane.

Now let us take it one step further and talk about the combination of the elements theories in this double tiger claw. Beside the shapes of the elements moves which we all know. We must also explore the “yi” of the elements. Sifu once spoke of “Ng Lek” five strengths. This is the yi of the five elements.

- Dragon uses the strength of earth, which is firm and loose, hard and soft simultaneously. Just think of the firmness of the mountain and the looseness of the soil. It is strong and decisive.
- The snake uses the strength of the water. It changes with the environment, hard like ice in the cold and soft in its liquid form when it is warm. Like the dragon it has a duality of hard and soft but unlike the dragon, the snake is more flowing with the environment.
- The tiger takes on the strength of fire. Fire is like a bomb; it explodes on his opponent without hesitation. Also fire is intimidating. It sends fear into his opponent.
- The leopard uses the strength of gold. It uses body momentum to generate power, like an axe coming down on you.
- The wood strength belongs to the crane. Wood gives you the idea of balance; it is a very important concept both physically and mentally. Without balance, there is no power in our techniques. Without mental balance, we cannot function properly as a whole.

Now we can combine the “Ng Lek” into the same double tiger claw example. Once we do that we are combining the “ying” and the “yi” in everything we do.

Lets take another example, a simple reverse punch. We were taught this is a fire punch (ying). Upon impact we can use the yi of gold, which is like an axe or hammer that smashes thru everything in its path. The twisting of the stances, bridge and the body to generate power, thus the balance is needed which is the concept of wood. The animal ideas are there as well. As I said the spirit of dragon is always present in each of the techniques because of its unpredictable movements and the confidence it has. The precision in the striking of the crane faht is there for accurate hitting. By now hopefully you know what I am trying to say and you can fill in the rest yourself.

To sum this up, all the theories of elements, animals, bagua, twelve bridges etc are tools to help us learn and deliver our techniques more efficient. Do not “box” into an idea that a tiger has to be this and a crane has to be that. The Tiger and Crane were used to present an idea to understand certain concepts (the ying and yang/hard and soft etc).

For all we know it can be call Lion and Eagle as long as the lessons are taught and understood by everyone. We know the five elements theories in the Xingyi system are different from that of Hung Ga. That is perfectly fine because as Hung Ga students we are using our own interpretations to get the lessons across. In the end, the understanding of the concepts and able to use the concepts is the most important

lesson. The theories are tools to help paint a mental picture to help us express the movements thru physical applications. That to me is the lesson. Once you understand this point, you can even further and add the twelve bridges theories onto the two examples I gave in this short article.

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