

五禽戏 *Wu Qin Xi* 'Five Animal Play'

The *Wuqinxi* 'Five animal play' or 'frolic' was perhaps the first dynamic *Qigong* set in history. It was based on ritual shamanic dances practiced by China's prehistoric clans that imitated the behaviour of wild beasts and birds. The famous Chinese medical physician and surgeon *Hua Tou* developed these into a pattern for health preservation during the Eastern *Han* dynasty 25 - 220 C.E. The five animals - tiger, deer, bear, ape (sometimes mistranslated as monkey) and bird (often identified as a Crane) form the most popular *Qigong* method today.

Overall the sequence strengthens muscles and bones and promotes circulation of *qi* and blood. This can help in preventing and curing disease as well as maintaining good health and prolonging the lifespan. Each animal has specific characteristics and benefits. The courage of the tiger builds strength and conditioning; the poise of the deer relaxes the upper body and promotes calmness; the sturdiness of the bear steadies the lower back; the agility of the monkey increases dexterity; and the grace of the bird lightens the body.

Practiced standing and moving, there are many variations. Some are simple while others are complex with 5 or even 10 techniques for each animal play. There are 'boxing' martial styles that include self defence are that are more rigid in contrast to soft variants. In almost all styles the actions include external exercises for the physical body and constitution, combined with internal concentration and breathing for stimulating mental activity. Often they are performed somewhat vigorously to encourage sweating as a therapeutic tool for treating illness. Traditionally each animal has two different movements, the ten forms are :-

1	虎戏	<i>Huxi</i>	'Tiger play'	虎举	<i>Huji</i>	'Tiger raises'	虎扑	<i>Hupu</i>	'Tiger pounces'
2	鹿戏	<i>Luxi</i>	'Deer play'	鹿抵	<i>Ludi</i>	'Deer collides'	鹿奔	<i>Luben</i>	'Deer runs'
3	熊戏	<i>Xiongxi</i>	'Bear play'	熊运	<i>Xiongyun</i>	'Bear moves'	熊晃	<i>Xionghuang</i>	'Bear sways'
4	猿戏	<i>Yuanxi</i>	'Ape play'	猿提	<i>Yuanti</i>	'Ape lifts'	猿摘	<i>Yuanzhai</i>	'Ape plucks'
5	鸟戏	<i>Niaoxi</i>	'Bird play'	鸟伸	<i>Niaoshen</i>	'Bird stretches'	鸟飞	<i>Niaofei</i>	'Bird flies'

