

## CHAPTER THREE

# SPLIT

## 劈拳

### INTRODUCTION TO SPLIT

*Xingyiquan* classic texts say “The element that split relates to is metal, its form is like an axe, and the internal organ that it relates to is the Lung.” This is the common view of all classic *xingyiquan* texts, and is the theory respected by all traditional folk *xingyiquan*. “Split relates to metal” means that split corresponds to metal from among the five elements.<sup>1</sup> “Split adopts the form of an axe,” means that it splits through objects, copying the action of a metal axe splitting wood. Examining the movements of the hands during a split technique, they really do have the appearance of chopping forward and down while holding an axe – the power is applied from above and descends in an arc towards the front. Therefore, when the old masters said, “split takes its form from an axe,” they meant that the action resembled that made while splitting wood with an axe. This is quite descriptive but still vague enough to encourage students to explore and discover the meaning for themselves through training.

There are many methods of doing split. *Post standing* must be done to start with. *Post standing* builds the foundation for split – only by doing *post standing* can one build the strong foundation that will enable one to get a good grasp of split. Variations in footwork include: *fixed stance split*, *moving stance split*, *aligned stance split*, *reverse stance split*,

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<sup>1</sup> See Introduction and Appendix I for more detail.

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*advance to split*, and *retreating split*. A variation in handwork is *pull down split*. Variations in bodywork include: *dodging split*, and *split turn around*.

### METHODS OF PERFORMING SPLIT

#### 1. STANDARD SPLIT: ALIGNED STANCE SPLIT WITH MOVING STEP

##### 1a Right Split

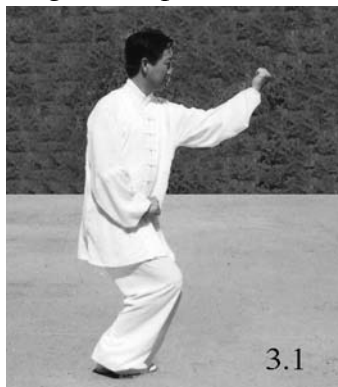
yòu pīquán

右劈拳

##### Description

Start from *left santishi*. For a description of the *opening move* into *santishi*, see *santishi post standing*.

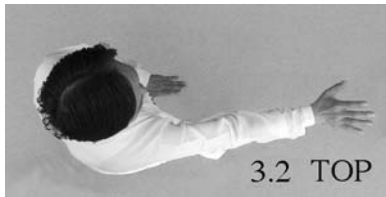
**ACTION 1:** Clench both hands, pulling the left fist back to meet the right fist at the belly. Hug both elbows into the ribs. Advance the left foot a half-step and immediately bring up the right foot parallel to the ground beside the left ankle. Keep both legs bent with the knees together. Continue on with the left fist – bring it up to the solar plexus then drill forward and up to nose height. Tuck the left elbow in, by twisting the ulnar edge [the little finger side] of the forearm up so that the fist heart is up. Do not move the right fist yet. Press the head up and look at the left fist. (image 3.1)



**ACTION 2:** Stride the right foot forward and follow in with the left foot a half-step.

Keep most of the weight on the left leg to form a *santi* stance with the right foot leading and the left foot back. While doing this, drill the right fist up to the solar plexus, towards the left elbow, then along above the left forearm, fist heart up. As the right fist approaches the left fist, unclench both hands and inwardly rotate them, turning the palms down and forward. Pull the left palm down and back to the belly.

Chop the right palm forward and down to shoulder height to split, sinking the wrist slightly so the palm faces obliquely forward and down. Keep the arm slightly bent and urge the right shoulder into the strike. Press the head up and look in the direction of the right hand. (image 3-2 and from top)



### Pointers

- During the first movement of action one, the left hand should clench gradually as it moves back, and the trunk should move the left shoulder back slightly to draw the hand in. During the second movement of action one, the left fist should drill out at exactly the same time as the left foot advances, so that they work together.
- The right hand should land its split at exactly the same time that the right foot lands, so that the foot and hand enter together.
- The left foot should follow in quickly. The length of the stance should be appropriate to its height; the feet should be closer together in a higher stance and farther apart in a lower stance.
- Split strides forward into a forward and downward strike, so the stance should be slightly shorter than that of *santishi*, and the hand should finish lower than in *santishi* – at shoulder height.
- *Split* is a complete movement. Perform it slowly when learning, but once comfortable, actions 1 and 2 should be continuous and completed as a single action.

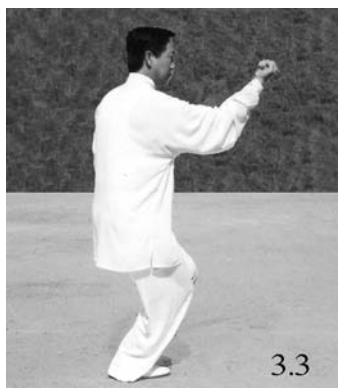
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### 1b Left Split

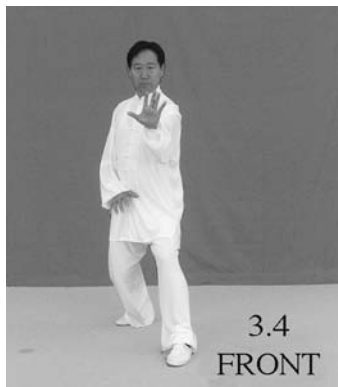
zuǒ pīquán

左劈拳

**ACTION 1:** Following from *right split*, advance the right foot a half-step and bring the left foot up to the right ankle with the foot off the ground. Keep both legs bent and the knees together. While doing this, clench both hands and pull the right fist back to the belly, then drill it up and out from the solar plexus to nose height, with the ulnar edge twisted up so that the centre of the fist faces up. Keep the right elbow tucked in, the head pressed up, and the eyes on the right fist. (image 3.3)



**ACTION 2:** Stride the left foot forward and follow the right foot in a half-step, keeping the weight mostly on the right leg. While doing this, drill the left fist up and out from the solar plexus, past the right elbow and along the top of the forearm, fist heart up. As the left fist approaches the right fist, turn both hands over and open them, and pull the right hand down and back to the belly as the left hand splits forward and down to shoulder height. The left palm faces obliquely forward and down. Press the head up and look to the direction of the left hand. (image 3.4, and from front)



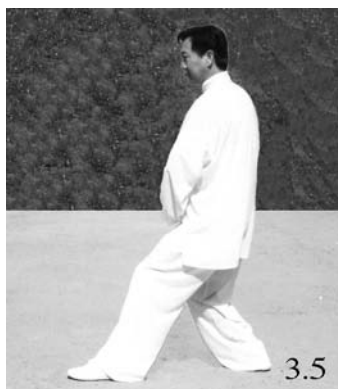
## 1c Split Turn Around

pīquán zhuànshēn

劈拳转身

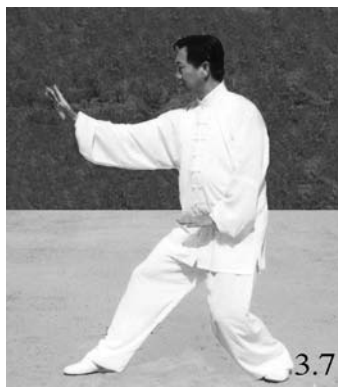
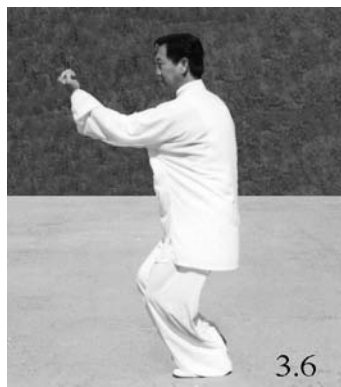
**Description.** Using the *right split* as example.

**ACTION 1:** Clench the right hand and pull it back to the belly. Hook-in the right foot, shift onto the right leg, and turn around 180° to the left, to face the direction from which you came. Swivel the left foot to get it pointing straight, so that the legs form a *santi* stance. (image 3.5)



**ACTION 2:** Advance the left foot a half-step and bring the right foot up beside the left without touching down. While doing this, drill the left fist up from the belly and out from the solar plexus to nose height, ulnar edge twisted up. Look at the left fist. (image 3.6)

**ACTION 3:** Stride the right foot forward and follow in a half-step with the left foot, keeping the weight mostly on the left leg. While doing this, bring the right fist from the solar plexus to the left elbow then along the top of the forearm to unclench and split forward. Press the head up and look forward. This action is the same as *right split*. (image 3.7)



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- The action of *split turn around* is the same whether on the right or left side, just reverse the right and left actions.

### Pointers

- Pay particular attention while turning that the weight shift of the body stays stable – hook the foot in and turn the body around quickly.

### 1d Split Closing Move

pīquán shōushì

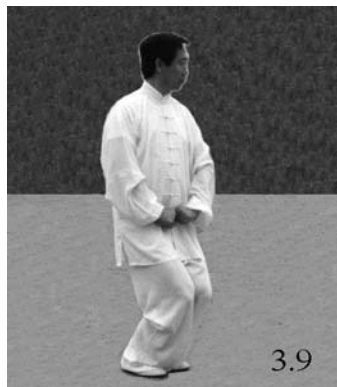
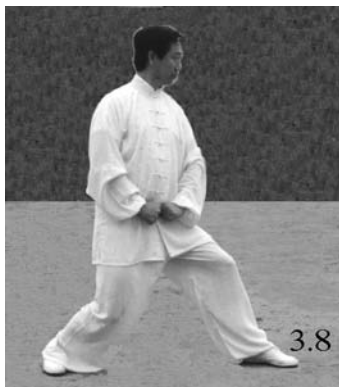
劈拳收势

### Description

On arriving back at the starting point, do a *split turn around* to face the original direction, and continue on until you arrive in a *left split* – that is, continue until the left foot and hand are leading – then perform *closing move*.

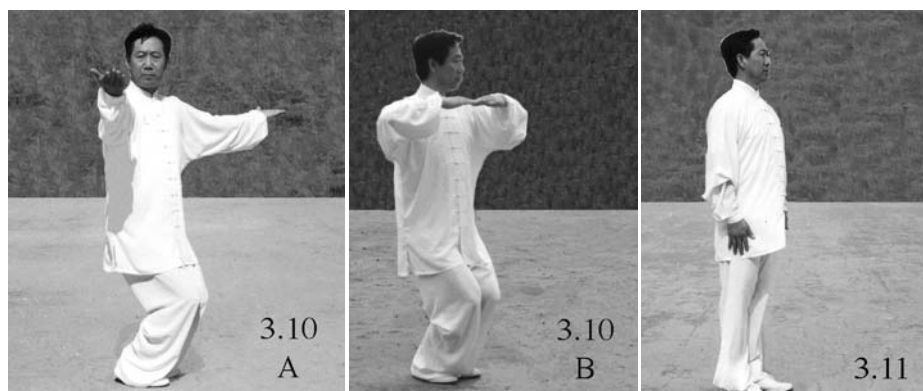
**ACTION 1:** Clench the left hand and cock the fist to press it down at the belly, fist heart down, beside the right fist, which has stayed at the belly, clenching the fist with the heart also down. Do not move the feet, but press the left foot into the ground as the left fist pulls back. Press the head up and look forward. (image 3.8)

**ACTION 2:** Shift onto the left leg and bring the right foot up beside the left foot, keeping the legs bent to maintain the body at the same height. Keep the fists at the belly. Press the head up slightly and look forward. (image 3.9)



**ACTION 3:** Unclench the fists and lower the hands, then raise them in a curved route to shoulder height at the sides of the body, arms slightly bent and palms up. Then bend the arms further and bring the hands in to the face, fingers pointing to each other and palms down. Do not change the flexion of the legs during this action. (images 3.10 A and B)

**ACTION 4:** Lower the hands past the face, pressing down to the belly, then place them at the sides. While doing this, straighten the legs to stand up. Turn the body to face forward, and the closing movement is done. (image 3.11)



**Pointers**

- Three actions must occur simultaneously, with full spirit: sink and bring in the left fist, press the left foot into the ground, and press the head up.
- Circle the hands up then press them down in one continuous action. Press the hands down as you stand up, so that the hands and legs act in unison.

**2. FIXED STANCE SPLIT**

dǐngbù pīquán

定步劈拳

**Description**

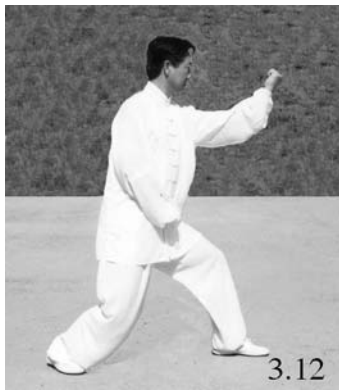
‘Fixed stance’ means that there is no half-step advance or half-step follow in. There is only one step for each split, and each action finishes in a *santi* stance. The rear hand comes through with the advance of the

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rear foot, in one single split action. This is a good practice for beginners, before going on to the standard *moving stance split*.

**ACTION 1:** Start from *left santishi*. Do not move the feet or right fist. Clench both hands and pull the left fist back to the belly, then bring it up and out from the solar plexus to drill up and forward to nose height. Keep the left elbow tucked in and the ulnar edge turned over. Press the head up and look forward. (image 3.12)

**ACTION 2:** Advance the right foot but do not follow in with the left foot. As the right foot lands and grabs the ground, let the left foot swivel to 45° to form a *santi* stance with the right foot leading and the left foot back, most of the weight on the left leg. While doing this, drill the right fist out from the solar plexus to the left elbow, then along above the left forearm, then, as the right fist approaches the left fist, rotate them inward and unclench the hands. Split the right hand forward and down to chest height and bring the left hand back to the belly. Press the head up and look forward. (image 3.13)



- Carry on in this way, alternating right and left.

### Pointers

- Do not change the height of the stance while changing position. The split must be completed as the foot lands – hands and feet combining with integrated power and timing.
- *Turn Around and Closing Move* for *fixed stance split* are similar to those of the *standard split*.



### 3. REVERSE STANCE SPLIT

àobù pīquán

拗步劈拳

**Description.** Start from *left santishi*.

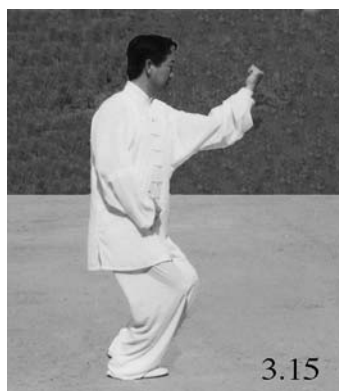
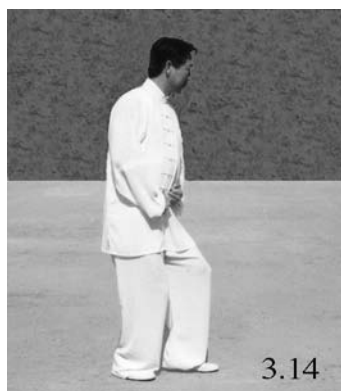
#### 3a Reverse Stance Right Split

àobù yòu pīquán

拗步右劈拳

**ACTION 1:** Withdraw the left foot back to beside the right foot and touch down to shift onto the left leg. Clench fists and pull the left fist back to join the right fist at the belly. (image 3.14)

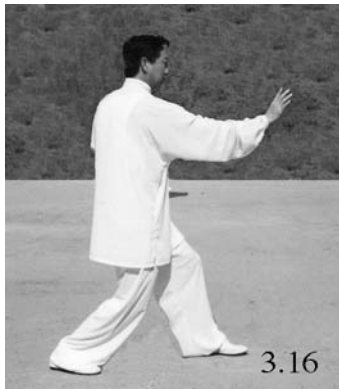
**ACTION 2:** Bring the left fist up to the solar plexus then drill forward and up to nose height with the ulnar edge turned up. While doing this, step the right foot a half-step forward and follow in with the left foot to nestle it by the right ankle without touching down. Press the head up and look forward. (image 3.15)



**ACTION 3:** Take a big step forward with the left foot and follow in a half-step with the right foot, keeping most weight on the right leg. While doing this, bring the right fist past the solar plexus, to the left elbow, then along above the left forearm to unclench and split forward, and pull the left hand back to the belly.

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The hand movements are identical to those of *standard split* described earlier. Press the head up and look forward. (image 3.16 and from front)

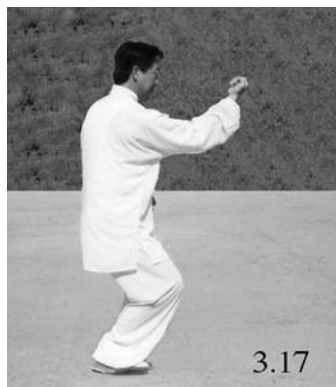


### 3b Reverse Stance Left Split

àobù zuǒ pǐquán

拗步左劈拳

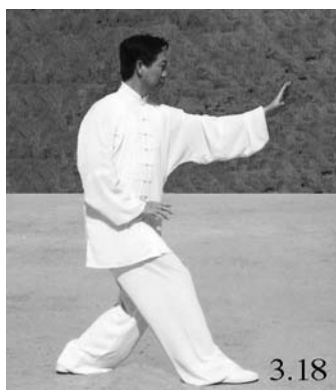
**ACTION 1:** Take a half-step forward with the left foot and follow in with the right. Clench the right fist, pull it back to the belly, and then drill it forward and up to nose height, ulnar edge turned over. Look forward. (image 3.17)



**ACTION 2:** Take a big step forward with the right foot and follow in a half-step with the left. While doing this, bring the left fist out past the solar plexus to drill forward above the right forearm. As the left fist approaches the right fist, rotate the fists inward and unclench them, chopping the left hand forward and downward and pulling the right hand back to the belly. (image 3.18)

**Pointers**

- Drill the left fist out as the right foot advances a half-step. Split the right hand forward as the left foot lands forward. The upper and lower body act together.
- Keep the lumbar and waist area lively and loose. Urge the right shoulder into the *right split*, and urge the left shoulder into the *left split*.
- The stance should have an appropriate width between the feet for stability. They should not be on a straight line, nor should they be wider than the shoulders.

**4. OLD STYLE SPLIT**

lǎoshì pīquán

老式劈拳

**Description**

This method really is a splitting fist as it uses fists throughout [the name in Chinese of *standard split* is ‘splitting fist – *piquan*’, although it uses a palm]. One fist pulls back and the other fist strikes out and down to pound. The footwork is the same as the *standard split*, the only difference between them is in the use of fists.

**ACTION 1:** The actions of the feet and hands are similar to those of the first action of the *standard*, or *moving stance*, *split*.

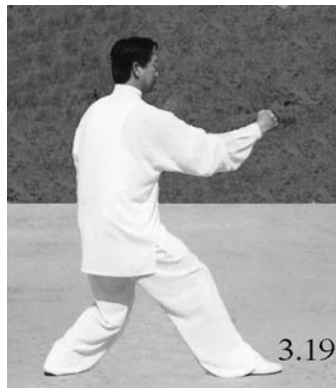
**ACTION 2:** Take a big step forward with the right foot and follow in a half-step with the left foot. While doing this, bring the right fist up to the solar plexus then drill out along the left forearm. As the fist approaches the left fist, inwardly rotate both forearms slightly so that the fist eyes face up. Pull the left fist back to the belly and split forward and down with the right fist to chest height. Bend the right arm slightly, urge the shoulder forward, settle the elbow, press the head up, and look forward. (image 3.19)

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- Carry on alternating right and left.

### Pointers

- All requirements are the same as *standard split*, the only difference being that *standard split* uses the palm and *old style split* uses the fist to strike. When you use the fist to split forward and down this gives a hidden pounding and punching power and intent. It uses the fist and forearm to strike, and is a pounding action forward and down. Just as the fist arrives at the point of contact, use the forward drive of the legs, the settled extension of the shoulder and elbow, and the settling of the wrist forward to create a unified whole body power.
- *Turn around* and *Closing move* for *old style split* are similar to those of *standard split*.



## 5. DODGING SPLIT

yáoshēn pīquán

摇身劈拳

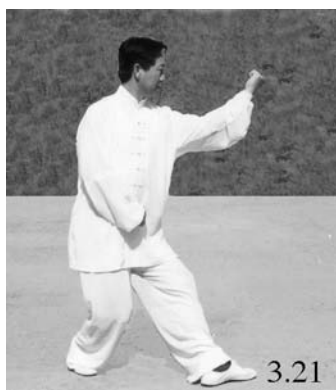
### Description

The *dodging split* uses body technique and positioning for evasion while the hands still perform the splitting action to counterattack. Start from *left santishi*.

**ACTION 1:** Clench the left hand to a fist and pull it back to the belly. Withdraw the left foot to beside the right foot and shift back to the right leg. Turn the body a bit to the right. Press the head up and look forward. (image 3.20)



**ACTION 2:** Advance the left foot a half-step to the forward right with the toes hooked slightly out. While doing this, drill the left fist up past the solar plexus, forward and out with the ulnar edge turned up, arm bent, and fist at nose height. Keep the right fist at the belly. Press the head up and look forward. (image 3-21)



- Follow through with a regular splitting strike. The rest of the actions are the same as the *standard split* described above.

### Pointers

- *Dodging split* emphasizes circular footwork. First withdraw the lead foot then step forward.
- Shift the weight back when the lead foot withdraws. At this time the body should turn away and tuck in with an evasive dodging action.
- The actions should link together without a break.
- *Turn around* and *Closing move* for *dodging split* are similar to those of *standard split*.

## 6. RETREATING SPLIT

tǔibù pīquán

退步劈拳

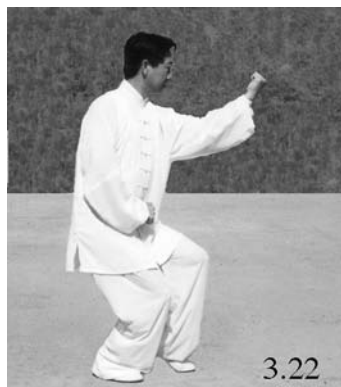
### Description

*Retreating split* trains retreating footwork. A characteristic of *xingyiquan*'s footwork is, "to advance, first advance the lead foot, and when it advances, the other foot must follow in. To retreat, first retreat the back foot, and when it retreats, the other foot must withdraw." *Retreating split* uses this characteristic footwork – that of first retreating the back foot then withdrawing the lead foot. Start from *left santishi*.

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**ACTION 1:** Retreat the right foot a half-step and shift back onto the right leg, then withdraw the left foot to touch down beside the right foot. While doing this, clench the left fist and pull back to the belly, then drill forward and up past the solar plexus to nose height with the ulnar edge turned up. Press the head up and look forward. (image 3-22)

**ACTION 2:** Retreat a big step back with the left foot then withdraw the right foot a half-step to form a *santi* stance with the right leading and the left back. While doing this, perform a *standard split* with the right hand and pull the left hand back to the belly. Press the head up and look forward. (image 3-23)



- Carry on, alternating right and left.

### Pointers

- When retreating, the toes touch down first, then the rest of the foot. The retreating step needs to be agile, and the withdrawing step must follow smoothly. The backward weight shift should be stable.
- The first actions must work together - the left fist drills out as the right foot retreats and the left foot withdraws.
- The second actions must work together - the right hand splits as the left foot retreats and the right foot withdraws.
- Do not apply hard power when doing the *retreating split*. Keep the movement soft to work on coordination and smoothness.

- *Turn Around* and *Closing Move* for *retreating split* are similar to those of *standard split*.
- Referred to in some classics as *cat washes its face*, the technique *retreating split* is indeed similar, but emphasizes the footwork, while the technique *cat washes its face* emphasizes the hand action.
- There is also another type of *retreating split* that is performed thusly – the right hand splits forward as the left foot retreats back. The left foot lands with a thump. This is just a different personal choice in technique. Everyone may choose from a variety of methods according to their experience and preference.

## POWER GENERATION FOR SPLIT

The hand action of split “rises with a drill and lands with a turn over.” There is no straight line movement as the hands rise and fall and the arms extend and return – the hands follow an elliptical route throughout. Each hand rises with a drilling fist and drops with a turning over open hand. We must focus not only on the route of the hands or fists along this elliptical track, but must emphasize the track followed by the elbows, since the hands are pushed out directly from the elbows. The elbows must hug the ribs, whether extending or returning; they must ‘adhere to the ribs,’ ‘slide on the ribs,’ or ‘rub the ribs.’

How can *xingyi* masters knock someone far away with just one splitting palm? I think that first of all, the old masters had deep skills, high technical ability, and used whole body power. In addition to hitting the right spot, applying force at the optimal angle, and applying the optimal timing, the key lies in applying force in a continuous, unbroken manner at the instant of impact. This increases the length of time of the applied force, thus giving the ability to knock someone far away.

Split should be applied with a wavelike power, but this wave must not be too large or obvious. It is more a matter of synchronizing the hands, eyes, body, and feet and adding focus. The power delivery of split is to chop downward and to push forward, with a very slight upward ‘lengthening power’ in the body to counterbalance the downward

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action. The application of these three forces at once with a continuous unbroken energy at the instant of impact at the opportune time is what makes split effective. When using split, first apply the downward forward power. This makes the receiver unwittingly apply an upward countering force. 'Borrow his force to augment your own.' Take the receiver's upward opposition and apply an upward force from your lumbar/waist area. This makes it easy to lift his root. Once his root is lost his body is unstable and his power dissipated. A forceful push forward then will send him a long way off.

- The downward and forward action of split comes from the settling of the elbow.
- The upward lengthening power comes from the upward press of the head and the lengthening of the lumbar area.
- The forward drive comes from the back heel driving into the ground and the body's forward thrust with the shoulder and waist urging into the move; add a drop of the shoulder and an extension of the arm to push and deliver the power.
- The integration of these power applications uses mainly the strength of the legs, lower back and shoulder girdle. The resulting force comes largely from the leg force and body technique. You could say that the legs, lumbar/waist area, and shoulders contribute 60 to 70 percent of the force.
- Concentrate your power and force on the last part of the extension, synchronizing the launching of force with an expulsion of breath.

Of course, the key to split is whole body power – the hands and feet arriving smoothly together, the whole body's force as one, the power integrated. When hitting with split, be sure to press the head up. When the hand chops forward and down, hold the idea of lengthening the head slightly upward. This gives greater forward and downward splitting power to the hand.



## **BREATHING CYCLE FOR SPLIT**

You must coordinate positional breathing once you are comfortable with the movement in order to gain whole body power.

- Inhale as the lead hand clenches and pulls back. Move slowly and focus on keeping an imposing manner.
- Pause your breath as the lead foot advances a half-step and the lead hand drills out.
- Exhale as the rear foot steps forward and the rear hand comes through to split.

See page 177 for more detail on breathing theory and techniques that apply to all *xingyi* techniques.

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS FOR SPLIT**

The classic texts say, “learn the set way, but there is no set way in application.” You need to act according to the actual situation; you cannot just perform actions as if performing a routine, but must use techniques flexibly. The key to using split is to apply the power specific to the split technique.

The hands protect the centre line when they drill up. The hands should defend the centre line at all times no matter whether you are advancing, retreating, or stepping around.

Analyze the application of split according to its form:

- The implication of the lead hand clenching and pulling in, then drilling out, is: the lead hand grabs and pulls down the attacker’s hand, grabbing clothes if they are there, otherwise grabbing ‘meat.’
- The implication of the forward drill is: hit the attacker’s head or defend by jamming, being aware that you can open the hand to change to a hooking pull.

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When advancing, advance the whole body, so when the rear hand comes through to chop down it strikes the attacker's head or chest as you advance, using the footwork to shove the body and the hand to split through, seeking to push the attacker away.

Whether or not you can realize these goals depends on hard practice every day, how matched your strength is to your opponent, and your ability to apply the technique with the proper direction, angle, and timing. As long as you are using a technique or power approximating that of split, that is, if you strike forward and down from above using the split power, then whether you strike with open hand, fist, or forearm, it falls into the range of the 'split' technique.

## THE POEM ABOUT SPLIT

### 劈拳歌诀

劈拳似斧性属金，  
起钻落翻细推寻。  
拳掌劈落头上顶，  
手脚齐到方为真。

Split is like chopping with an axe. Its nature is that of metal.

Initiate with a drill and land with a turnover, a little force will push an opponent far away.

The head presses up as the fist or hand lands the strike,

The hands and feet arrive together and go direct to the core.