

# FIVE ELEMENT SPEAR

## 五行枪

### INTRODUCTION TO SPEAR

The style of *xingyi* is famous for its spear, *bagua* for its sabre, *taiji* for its sword, and *shaolin* for its staff. In *xingyi*, practising spear improves empty hand skills, and empty hand skills are the foundation of spear skills. The creator of *Xinyi liuhe quan*, Ji Longfeng, excelled at the spear. “He could hit a target from a galloping horse, when he raised his spear no one could escape. He was called the spear spirit.” He applied the principles of the spear to empty hand techniques when he created *xinyi liuhe quan*, and spear practice retained its place of importance as *xinyi* developed into *xing-yi quan*.

Previous generations of *xingyi* masters examined many spear techniques and selected the most practical and strongest – those which most showed the flavour and characteristics of *xingyiquan*. *Xingyi* spear emphasizes power and trained skill, and uses no flowery movements. It is simple and practical, and especially emphasizes spear and body moving as one with a full, integrated power and intimidating air. The power of the whole body connects through to the tip of the spear, so that the spear is truly an extension of the body. The five element techniques of the spear are the same as those of the five fists – chop, thrust, drill, slash, and crosscut. Although the moves are named simply *spear chop*, *spear thrust*, *spear drill*, *spear slash*, and *spear crosscut*, there are at least two moves contained in each short combination.<sup>1</sup>

The spear demands a high degree of deep skill and coordination. The spear is the king of the weapons. They say ‘a year for the fist, a month for the staff, but day by day for the spear’. That is, it takes a year to master empty hand skills with hard training. With this foundation, a month is sufficient to learn staff. But the spear must be practised daily year in and year out. There are no shortcuts in learning the spear, only hard practice. If you are not willing to work hard then you won’t master the spear.

If you want your spear technique to be familiar and refined then you must practise the techniques, the routines, and partner spear ‘shaft sliding’. You must understand the

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<sup>1</sup> Author’s note: In the descriptions I use both the traditional and the modern names for each technique to make it easier to learn and teach.

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application of all the techniques. If you think of the application and imagine an opponent, you will learn the techniques quicker. You should also study spear theory, learn from the experience of past masters, and study spear applications to improve your ability with the spear.

There are three lengths of spear – long, medium, and short. The long spear is about four meters, the medium spear about three meters, and the short spear about two meters. The long spear develops strength, the short spear develops agility, and the medium spear develops both strength and agility. Not many people practise the long spear, mostly because it is awkward to carry and store. Most *xingyi* players like to use something between the medium and short spears – about 2.5 meters.

In choosing the wood for a spear shaft, you need a good quality white waxwood. It should be supple and smooth skinned with no knots or kinks. The base should be the size of your own thumb and forefinger held in a circle. A short spear can be a bit thinner, and a long spear a bit thicker. The circumference of the tip should be the natural thickness of the wood as it has grown. You should not shave down the wood as this reduces its natural suppleness and can lead to breakage.

A spear is comprised of three parts, the wooden shaft, the metal head, and the horsehair tassel. The spear shaft is divided into thirds – the third of the shaft at the tip is the fore-section, the third of the shaft at the base is the aft-section, and the third in the middle is the midsection. During spear practice, the hands often slide up and down the shaft to best carry out the different techniques. The very end of the spearhead is called the tip, and the other end of the shaft is called the base or butt.

## FIVE ELEMENT SPEAR TECHNIQUES

### On Guard

yùbèishì

预备势

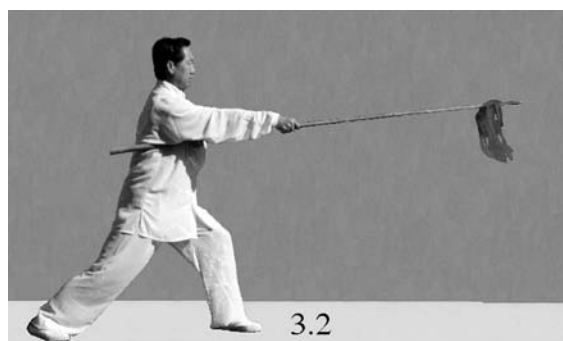
*On guard* position is the opening of any *xingyi* weapon routine or practice session, and is the ready position for many techniques. *On guard* is the *santi* stance with both hands holding the spear, ready to do any technique. *On guard* is the foundation for spear training, so you need to do post standing, similar to *santishi* post standing, in this position to establish the correct posture in the body and prepare the way for further spear study.

The actions are: *Stand the spear; Left bow stance send out the spear; Left on guard position.*

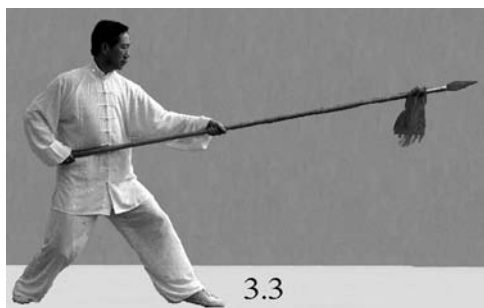
ACTION 1: Stand at attention with the right hand holding the spear vertical at the right side with the base on the ground. Let the left hand hang naturally, press the head up, and look forward. (image 3.1)

ACTION 2: Turn 90° to the left to face the way in which the stance will face. Step the left foot forward and bend the knee while straightening the right leg, shifting forward into a bow stance. Lift the spear horizontally with the right hand, pointing the tip

forward [to the side, in the new direction], extending the right arm with the spear shaft at chest height. Bring the left hand to the right armpit with the palm up to support the shaft. Look past the spear tip. (images 3.2)



**ACTION 3:** Shift back, extending the left leg more and bending the right leg to shift back into a *santi* stance. Extend the left arm to send the spear out and slide the right hand back to the base, pulling the base to the right waist. Keep the left arm almost straight, and hold the shaft with the palm down. Keep the spear on the midline of the body, shaft almost horizontal, but the tip at chest height. (image 3.3 and from the front)



### Pointers

- Complete the three actions smoothly as one move.
- When moving into the bow stance and sending the spear forward, be sure to send the tip directly forward without wobbling around. Slide the right hand smoothly, maintaining contact with the shaft.
- Complete the placement of the spear as you sit into the *santi* stance. This is the final posture of the ready stance.

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- This is the spear's equivalent to the *santishi*, and the posture is adjusted to suit the spear. In the empty hand *santishi*, the trunk is angled 45° to the front. With the spear, however, the trunk should turn more, about 60° to 70°. The rear foot is also turned out more — about 70°. The spear shaft must be held snug to the trunk, with the right hand holding the base at waist height on the right side. The left hand is in front, pointing the spear in the correct direction. Three points serve to stabilize the spear — the lead hand, the rear hand, and the waist — so that the spear and body are joined as one. Practice post standing in this posture. Post standing might seem like a waste of time, but it builds a strong foundation for future mastery of the techniques and proper performance of the movements. Post standing sets the basic posture into the model form so that movements can become correct. During post standing you should seek kinesthetic awareness, get a feel for the power lines, and master the requirements of the spear.

### 3. SPEAR THRUST

#### INTRODUCTION TO SPEAR THRUST

What is traditionally called ‘*bengqiang*’ in *xingyi* is the spear technique of outer trap, inner trap, and stab. The final stab is similar to the ‘*beng*’ driving punch of the five elements – a half step advance with a straight attack.<sup>2</sup>

Traditionally the spear thrust is done with a half step advance and following step. I have added a cover step, a back step, and a circling step to make the footwork more agile, train the connection between the spear and body more effectively, and make the spear technique more applicable.

Spear thrust includes *stationary thrust*, *back-cross step thrust*, *cross-over step thrust*, *roundabout step thrust*, *turn around thrust*, and *closing move*.

#### 3a Stationary Thrust

yuánbù bēngqiāng

原步崩枪

Start from *on guard* (image 3.25). *Stationary outer trap*; *Stationary inner trap*; *Stationary stab*.



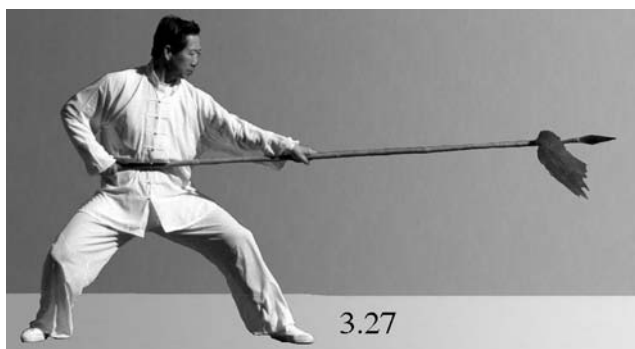
**ACTION 1:** Without moving the feet, rotate the left palm towards the thumb to circle the palm up while rotating the right palm away from the thumb at the side. Work the hands together so that the spear tip circles up, left, and down in a counter clockwise half-circle about 30 cm in diameter. Look past the spear tip. (image 3.26)

<sup>2</sup> In most styles, ‘*beng qiang*’ is defined as an upwards or sideways snap of the fore-section, with the power shaking the tip. Only in *xingyi* is the thrust called a ‘*beng*’. So when in *xingyi* you perform a normal, snapping ‘*bengqiang*’, it is called a ‘*bibeng qiang*’, or, ‘the other *beng*’ to differentiate the two.

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**ACTION 2:** Close the left arm a bit forwards, rotating the left palm away from the thumb to press down with the thumb/forefinger web. Rotate the right palm towards the thumb. Work the hands together so that the spear tip circles clockwise down, left, and up, and then right and down. Send power out to the spear tip. Look past the spear tip. (image 3.27)



**ACTION 3:** Shift forward, pushing into the right leg and bending the left leg to shift about 60% of the weight forward on the left leg. Allow the shaft to slide through the left hand, using it to aim forward. Send the spear out forcefully with the right hand, accelerating into the stab. Cup the right hand in the left hand. Send power to the tip of the spear so that it quivers. Almost fully straighten the arms, and hold the spear horizontal at chest height. Look past the spear tip. (image 3.28)



### Pointers

- The hands must rotate at the same time to turn the spear. The spear must be held tight to the body while trapping inward and outward. The spear tip must draw two half circles.

- When stabbing, the spear must go in a straight line and the power must go out to the tip. It must be sent out like an arrow, and be brought back in a straight line.

### 3b Back-cross Step Thrust

bēibù bēngqiāng

背步崩枪

*Back-cross step outer trap; Step forward inner trap; Stab.*

**ACTION 1:** After stabbing, pull the spear back in a straight line to the right side of the body with the right hand, letting the spear slide through the left hand. Without moving the left foot, step the right foot forward behind the left foot and shift into a cross step. Rotate the hands to circle the spear up, left and then down to complete an outer trap. Look forward. (image 3.29)



**ACTION 2:** Step the left foot forward and shift mostly onto the right leg. Rotate both hands to circle the spear tip down, left, up, and then right and down to complete an inner trap. (image 3.30)

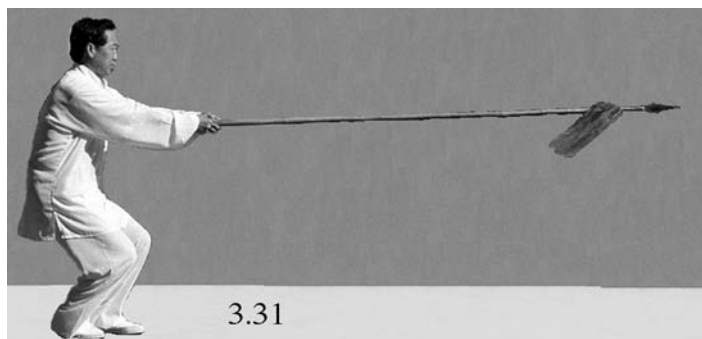


**ACTION 3:** Without moving the feet, shift forward, straightening the right leg and bending the left leg with most weight on the left leg<sup>3</sup>. Stab forward forcefully with the spear, sliding it through the left hand. Finish with the spear tip at chest height and the shaft level. Send power to the spear tip so that it quivers. Support the right hand in the left hand. Keep the arms slightly bent. Look past the spear tip. (image 3.31 and 3.31 from the front)



<sup>3</sup> Translator's note: The stab may be done shifting into a forward stance or bringing the right foot forward to a closed stance. Either way is correct. I have translated the text as is throughout, even when the author has done the alternate stance in the photo.

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### Pointers

- Complete the outer trap while the right foot steps through behind the left leg.
- Complete the inner trap while the left foot is stepping forward.
- Be sure to transfer your power through to the spear tip so that it quivers.

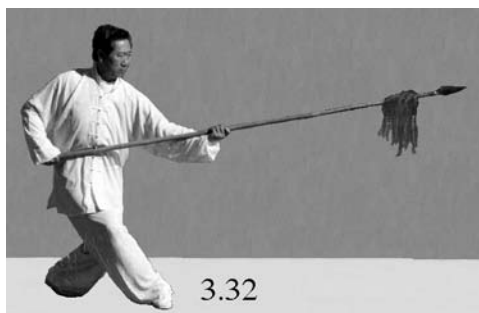
### 3c Cross-over Step Thrust

gàibù bēngqiāng

盖步崩枪

*Right cross-over step, outer trap; Left step forward, inner trap; Stab.*

**ACTION 1:** Without moving the left foot, step the right foot forward in front of the left foot, turning the foot out to land with a hooked out foot. Shift weight forward between the feet to form a cross step with the legs slightly bent. Rotate the left palm towards the thumb to turn the palm up. Rotate the right hand at the waist, palm away from thumb. Rotate both hands simultaneously to cause the spear tip to draw a counter clockwise half-circle up, left, and down. Keep the spear shaft tight to the belly. Look past the spear tip. (image 3.32)

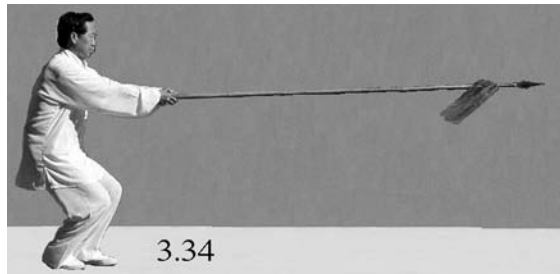


**ACTION 2:** Step the left foot forward without moving the right foot, keeping most weight on the right leg. Rotate and press down on the shaft with the thumb/forefinger web of the left hand. Rotate the right palm towards the thumb, so that both hands work together to draw a clockwise circle down, left, up, right and down with the spear tip. Keep the spear shaft tight to the belly. Send the power to the spear tip. Press the head up and look past the spear tip. (image 3.33)





**ACTION 3:** Without moving the feet, shift the weight forward by pushing the right leg straight and bending the left leg to form a 60/40 stance weighted to the left leg. Push the spear straight forward forcefully with the right hand, letting it slide through the left hand. Stab to chest height with the spear shaft level. Open the left hand to support the right hand. Keep the arms almost straight. Send power to the spear tip so that it quivers. Look past the spear tip. (image 3.34)



#### Pointers

- Complete the outer trap as the right foot does the cross-over step.
- Complete the inner trap as the left foot steps forward.

### 3d Roundabout step Thrust

ràobù bēngqiāng

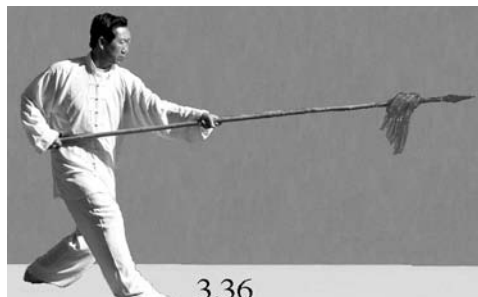
绕步崩枪

*Left roundabout step, outer trap; Right step forward inner trap; Stab.*

**ACTION 1:** Pull the spear base back to the right side with the right hand, letting the shaft slide through the left hand. This forms a ready stance. Advance the left foot with a circular step, landing to the forward right with the foot hooked out. Rotate the left hand palm towards the thumb to complete an outer trap with the spear tip. Rotate the right palm away from the thumb, keeping the spear shaft tight to the waist. The spear tip draws a counter clockwise half-circle up, left and down. Look past the spear tip. (image 3.35)

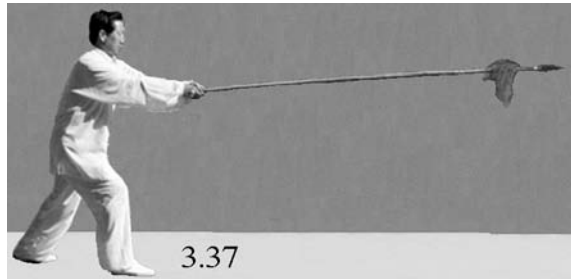


**ACTION 2:** Step the right foot forward without moving the left foot, shifting most weight to the left leg. Rotate both hands to complete a clockwise inner trap with the spear. (image 3.36)



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**ACTION 3:** Shift forward towards the right leg, extending the left leg almost straight and bending the right leg to form a right bow stance. Slide the spear through the left hand, releasing just enough to let it slide while aiming. Holding the spear base in the right hand, push forward forcefully, finishing with the right arm almost straight. Slide the left hand back until it snugs onto the right hand. Stab the spear straight forward at chest height with the shaft level. Press the head up and send the power to the spear tip. Look forward. (image 3.37)



### Pointers

- Use a circular pathway to complete the roundabout step. Use both hands to complete the outer trap.
- Complete the inner trap as the right foot steps forward. Complete the stab as the body shifts forward.
- Do three clear movements – outer trap, inner trap, and stab – but complete them without hesitation.
- Do another stationary thrust by bringing the left foot forward while pulling the spear base back to the waist to form a ready stance. Then continue on.

### 3e Thrust Turn Around

bēngqiāng zhuànshēn

崩枪转身

When you run out of space, if the left foot is forward, hook-in in front of the right foot. If the right foot is forward, then step the left foot through to hook-in in front of the right foot. *Hook-in step, lift and punt; Turn around, heel kick; Rotate, spear chop.*

**ACTION 1:** Hook-in the left foot and stand up. Lift the spear base with the right hand as you rotate the palm away from the thumb. As the right hand arrives above the head, the palm should face out. Slide the spear in the left hand to bring the hand closer to the right hand. As the right hand arrives above the head, rotate the left palm towards the thumb and bend the arm. This makes the spear shaft snap towards the left side. The tip should be slanted downward to knee height. Look at the spear tip. (image 3.38)



**ACTION 2:** Turn around to the 180° to the right, shifting to the left leg and bending it. You are now facing back in the way from which you came. Bend the right knee and lift it with the foot turned out, then kick with the heel at least to waist height, keeping the foot turned. Do not move the hands or the spear. Look ahead of the kicking foot. (image 3.39)



**ACTION 3:** Quickly land the right foot forward and down with the foot still turned out. Rotate the body rightward and land with the legs crossed, dropping down and bending the legs in a scissors stance. Bring the spear base forward, down, and then pull back with the right hand to the side of the waist. Bring the left hand down and back then slide it up the spear shaft, and then chop forward and down from above. Tighten the left hand as it arrives, pressing down with the thumb/forefinger web, palm down. The spear is level, just below the waist. Send power to the fore-section of the spear. Press the head up and look forward. (images 3.40 transitional and 3.40)



- Continue on, stepping the left foot forward to move into *outer trap*, *inner trap*, and *stab*.

#### Pointers

- *Turn around* is one move and should be completed without hesitation. Hook-in well to get the body turned around. Turn around quickly and kick as high

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as you can. Land firmly. Coordinate the action of the hands and spear with that of the feet and body.

- Lift and punt uses a rotation of the hands. To chop, first slide the left hand and then tighten it to put force into the chop. Be sure to lower the body to chop.

### 3f Thrust Closing Move

bēngqiāng shōushǐ

崩枪收势

*Closing move* is always the same. See the description in *spear chop*, page 152. First complete a stab, then retreat the right foot a half-step and withdraw the left foot slightly, shifting back. Pull the spear back and snap it up. The tip should quiver up and down. This will place you in a ready stance. From there, continue on to finish as usual.

## POWER GENERATION FOR SPEAR THRUST

*Thrust* is the most characteristic and fundamental technique of the spear, as it combines outer trap, inner trap, and stab. It is done with various footwork patterns – stationary, back-cross step, cross-over step, and roundabout step. The primary technique is the stab, but first you must circle. This structure of the spear determines this defensive circling. The spear must first control and cross an oncoming weapon before it can stab. Thus, inner trap and outer trap are the most fundamental of spear techniques, and the most important skills. This fundamental combination is traditionally called ‘circle spear’ or ‘circle spear mother technique’.

There are four main principles to the outer trap, inner trap.

- First, outer trap and inner trap draw two half circles to left and right, completing a full circle. The aft-section of the spear shaft must be held tight to the belly, it must not leave the body.
- Second, the hands must alternate ‘yin’ and ‘yang’, rotating together in opposite directions. As the left hand turns out the right hand turns in, when the left hand closes in the right hand turns out. This is called ‘twist the spear, twist the pole’.
- Third, the radius of the circle should be 30 cm. When learning, the spear tip may move in a large circle, but not over head height or under hip height.
- Fourth, the power of the circles comes from the body, transferring directly from the body to the spear. The spear is flexible, so the tip circles from the power transfer. Hold the spear with the left hand neither too loosely nor too tightly. If the left hand is too tight the technique is stiff, and if it is too loose the technique is flaccid. Keep the wrist supple and the grip just right, firm but supple. The right hand should hold firmly with a supple wrist.

To do the outer trap, turn the left hand out, draw back and open the left shoulder, settling it down. The belly should have a very slight power pressing forward, turning rightward. To do the inner trap the left hand rotates in and presses forward and down with the thumb/forefinger web, closing the left shoulder and turning the body slightly rightward. In this way the power of the body core transfers to the spear shaft, giving it more power than just the arms. The spear flexes as the body's power reaches it, completing the circle.

To stab, the spear should shoot out like an arrow and come back like pulling in a line. The spear absolutely must go in and out in a straight line. The power must reach the tip, making it quiver.

The left hand controls the direction and height of the spear tip, sending it accurately to its target. Stab quickly and bring the spear back quickly. When stabbing, release the left hand's grip enough to slide the spear through, using the left hand to aim.

The right hand sends the spear forward, accelerating gradually, releasing power sharply. As the right hand arrives near the left hand, apply one inch power to complete the stab. Turn the hips and waist, close the shoulders, extend the arms and send the hands out to transfer power to the spear tip.

The spear shaft and arms form one straight line. The spear must stab accurately with a focal point. The tip must not wobble.

The bodywork and waist action must be coordinated with the footwork. The footwork must be agile. The bodywork should work together with the footwork to combine with the spear.

*Turn around* is made up of three actions: *hook-in step and lift*, *turn heel kick*, and *rotate chop*. When the right hand lifts and pulls the spear, the spear tip should draw a circle left and down while being pulled back. The right hand must rotate and put a bracing power into the spear while the left hand stabilizes the spear with a carrying power. The turn and kick is the same as the thrusting punch turn and kick, and uses the same trampling power on landing. When rotating and chopping, rotate the waist, settle in the belly, reach the left shoulder forward, tuck in the left elbow, and put the body's power into the chop. Press up into the head while sitting down.

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS FOR SPEAR THRUST**

The essence of spear techniques, and the most representative, is the outer trap, inner trap and stab combination, normally called 'middle level spear', which in *xingyi* is called *spear thrust*.

Outer trap and inner trap are used to defend against a straight attack from another long weapon. If a long weapon is coming towards your left side – your 'outside' – use

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the outer trap. If a long weapon is coming towards your right side – your ‘inside’ – use the inner trap.

Because of the spear’s shape, the stab is the most important of all spear techniques, and all other techniques are based on setting up for this technique. The spear stabs out quickly in a straight line with its sharp tip. If it reaches its target it can inflict serious damage or death. Its main targets are high, middle, and low – the head, chest, and abdomen. Other effective targets are the opponent’s leading hand or arm. The opponent’s leading hand and arm are close, so easily reached; you just need to extend your arm to get them with the spear. So if you are good with a spear you should go for your opponent’s lead hand first. Once the opponent’s lead hand is injured he will lose his grip and drop his weapon, and then you can attack at will.

Using different footwork – back-cross step, cross-over step, roundabout step, advance, retreat, and shifting to right and left – has two purposes. One is to keep moving so that the opponent cannot fix on you. The other is to use footwork to get your spear shaft to cross your opponent’s weapon. Your spear can be used for defense much more effectively once it crosses your opponent’s weapon. You attack to the centre, getting inside, and defend by crossing, to take your opponent offline.

The spear’s ‘middle stab’ is the spear’s strongest attack and the hardest to defend against. There are many descriptions of this in the classics. “The spear is the king of the centre.” “The spear stabs out in a straight line.” “The spear goes out like an arrow and comes back like (pulling) a rope.” These are all attempts to describe the directness, speed, and ferocity of the spear stab. You must take care to keep your spear aligned straight with your opponent’s weapon when stabbing, as his position is very hard to defend. There is another way to use the stab, and that is as a direct counter attack. As the opponent stabs towards you, stab back without any defensive action, just sitting back to get your body out of the way. Once the opponent fully extends the spear without hitting the target, he will pull it back. You then follow his spear back to stab. This is called ‘eating a spear and returning a spear’, also known as ‘don’t defend or block, just use one strike.’ And, once your opponent goes on the defensive, you can follow up with continuous multiple stabs – high, middle and low – without giving any breathing space. This is called ‘responding to an attack with ten.’

For the spear you need to remember: ‘cross weapons to defend, straight line to attack.’

As well as practising the outer trap, inner trap, and stab combination, you should be able to stab directly from the outer trap or just the inner trap. You should always, however, start the outer trap action when doing the drawing back action after a stab. And you should always start to stab forward as you do an inner trap. These actions set up the habits that will enable you to take advantage of situations with the spear. This is what the classics mean by “going out is a circle, coming back is also a circle, there is a straight line within the circle, and there is a circle within the straight line, the original spirit of the spear is in the circle”. Circling the spear is its defensive

technique, and is the means to the end, which is to attack. The best attacking technique of the spear is the stab.

You must practise the basics diligently if you hope to ever be able to use the spear in a fighting situation. Just training the techniques and routines is not enough, you must do partner 'shaft sliding' training. You need to master the techniques on your own. Partner training is to gain feeling and the ability to slide and stab, finding the distancing, timing, and ability to attack. It is hard to find a partner who understands the 'shaft sliding' practise, they are 'as scarce as phoenix feathers and unicorn horns'. Most people now just practise routines.

## **THE POEM ABOUT SPEAR THRUST**

### 崩枪歌诀

崩枪技法强中强，  
拦拿圆中找其枪。  
背盖绕步随身走，  
中平一点是枪王。

Spear thrust's strength lies in attacking the midline.

Use the circles of the outer trap and inner trap to control the opponent's weapon.

The footwork follows the body work – back-cross step, crossover step, and roundabout step.

One touch with the middle level stab shows why the spear is the king of weapons.