

# NEIGONG VOLUME I: TRANSFORMATION FROM EXTERNAL TO INTERNAL BODY

*A Manual for Beginning Internal Development*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION: Understanding Neigong and Poles

Neigong (内功- internal skill) is acquired through a systematic practice of principles whose core concepts are centered around the idea of poles, or extremes (极- ji). Foundational to the idea of poles as it relates to Neigong is the assumption that if one exists, then its opposite does too. For example, there is no Beiji (北极- North Pole) without the Nanji (南极- South Pole); for in order for a North to exist, there must be something understood as the South.

Similarly, Neigong presumes external skill exists, and it can be argued—as it will be in this manual—that Neigong cannot exist without interaction with external skills. The two are interconnected in the same way as Yin and Yang or the Northern and Southern Poles of a magnet. Attempting to understand one without the other is akin to studying electromagnetic waves while ignoring their varying frequencies and wavelengths, such as visible light, ultraviolet, or infrared. Each range of wavelengths provides specific and measurable information about the properties and behavior of light, just as external skills provide the context and practical application for understanding the internal principles of Neigong in relation to internal power. Likewise, just as visible light, ultraviolet, and infrared are specific regions within the electromagnetic spectrum, tension force, exerted force, and resistance are energy-power regions within the scope of jin (劲—energy/force). This highlights the concept of Ji: while two poles are opposites, their interdependence is determined by what happens between them.

Consider the application of power delivering a push in Taijiquan's push hands. On the spectrum of force/energy, resistance, tension, and exertion exist closer to the external pole. These manifest in the physical preparation of the body—muscles contracting to create tension, force being exerted to push, and resistance encountered from the opponent's body. Closer to the internal pole are qi (气- vital energy) and empty force, which involve subtle, less tangible forms

of power. Qi harmonizes the physical movement to be void of tension, while empty force represents a refined power that moves an opponent with minimal visible effort. Between these two poles, the spectrum of power transitions seamlessly, with each region contributing to the whole. This interplay highlights the essence of Ji: while the internal and external poles are distinct, their significance lies in the continuous and dynamic connection between them.

#### **Glossary:**

- Neigong (内功) - Internal skill/practice
- Ji (极) - Pole/extreme
- Beiji (北极) - North Pole
- Nanji (南极) - South Pole
- Jin (劲) - Energy/force
- Qi (气) - Vital energy

#### **Key Concepts:**

- Poles (Ji): The fundamental principle that opposites exist in relationship to each other
- Force Spectrum: The continuum between external and internal methods
- Interdependence: The relationship between opposite poles and the transitions between them

## **2. THE INTERNAL BODY: Shape Requirements**

Developing the internal body, built upon external skill mastery, is fundamentally a matter of transformation. At the apex of external force understanding, the body must be conditioned to begin its transition into the base requirements for internal force development. Thus, the Neigong journey begins with a final examination of external skill—the external body in its most refined state.

At its highest level of external force application, the body manifests what is called zheng ti li (整体里- Total Body Power). This refers to the complete embodiment of any chosen force method throughout the entirety of the body. Whether employing tension force, resistance force, or exertion, the whole body manifests the chosen method without any part remaining uninvolved. This totality gives rise to what are called shapes (形- Xing). While shapes presuppose total body power at the base level of Neigong training, their purpose transforms under the internal

perspective—they must become empty of external power. The shape must fulfill the most fundamental requirement of Neigong—it must separate partiality (分虚实- fen xu shi).

This concept returns to the idea of poles. The ground represents an unchanging pole in power development, whether training internal or external power. Power generation begins with the ground—evident in how we naturally drive our feet down when moving heavy objects. From the external perspective, this ground force can be amplified in the body through various methods like torque, coiling, or whipping, further enhanced by resistance, tension, and exertion. While external methods acknowledge partiality, they approach empty and full primarily as means of power amplification—full increasing full.

In Neigong, however, the basic requirement shifts: the shape must become empty to allow the ground to 'fill it up'. This emptiness enables the body to become *according to* any power source. Where external skill shapes aim to generate total body power, internal skill shapes seek to become according to power itself. The internal method effectively detaches power from the body, recognizing power as an independent entity.

Within the Chinese internal arts framework, this entity is called jin (劲- energy/force). Classical theory states that jin follows qi (气- vital energy), qi follows yi (意- intent), and yi follows shen (神- spirit). In this process, jin leads the body. Therefore, before entering the study and practice of energy, the body must accomplish two transformations: first from full to empty, and second, becoming according to power rather than amplifying or creating it.

### **Glossary:**

- Zheng ti li (整体里) - Total Body Power
- Xing (形) - Shape/form
- Fen xu shi (分虚实) - Separating empty and full
- Yi (意) - Intent
- Shen (神) - Spirit

### **Key Concepts:**

- Total Body Power: Complete manifestation of a chosen force method throughout the entire body
- Shape Transformation: The process of emptying shapes of external power
- Power Direction: The relationship between ground force and body alignment

- Sequential Development: The classical progression of jin, qi, yi, and shen
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### 3. SOLO PRACTICE: Seated Meditation

Having established that the internal body emerges through transformation of an externally-developed body conditioned by external power methods, we now turn to foundational practice. While external methods focus on generating and amplifying, our seated practice aims to achieve the opposite—releasing power from the body to create emptiness. It's crucial to understand that "releasing" here means eliminating power, not redirecting or applying it in any way.

Seated practice serves as a fundamental training method because it directly addresses the core principle of internal body development for Neigong—creating a shape that can release power and direct it to the ground (this will be done automatically through the act of sitting). A backless chair provides ideal conditions for this development:

- The seated position naturally encourages song (松- relaxed) hips, fulfilling both the active direction and desired quality
- An upright back allows the shoulders to align properly and sink into the chair (which functions as an extension of the hips)
- The chair's legs replace our tendency to use feet for power amplification, effectively removing this external skill habit

While traditional meditation might employ lotus or half-lotus positions, this practice requires feet planted on the ground. This positioning prevents lower back injury during partnered training and should therefore be maintained in solo practice as well.

Classical literature provides two explicit directives to be mindful of: chen jian (沉肩- Heavy shoulders) and song kua (松垮- relax the hips). Chen jian, meaning heavy shoulders, is traditionally paired with tui zhou (推肘- push the elbows). However, at this foundational stage, only chen jian is vital, as tui zhou relates to the more advanced skill of returning force from the ground—a study that comes later in development. The goal is to empty the shape: force and tension must be sunk to the ground; which, again, is accomplished by the act of sitting.

#### Basic Position [PHOTO]

- Sit upright in a backless chair
- Place hands above the knees
- Point toes forward

- Maintain natural spinal alignment

#### Practice Method:

1. Release any manifestation of total body power while maintaining postural shape. This release is only meaningful for practitioners who have achieved total body power—one must have power to release in order to understand true emptiness.
2. Observe the natural structural support:
  - Chair supports hips
  - Hips support spine
  - Spine supports shoulders
  - Shoulders support neck
  - Neck supports head
3. Use this structural inventory to identify where unnecessary muscular contraction might be maintaining shape, rather than relying on the natural tensile strength of proper alignment

Keep a detailed record of areas that resist releasing power. Your practice focuses on maintaining a bodily state of emptiness. Successfully achieving this represents the accomplishment of 'fen xu shi' (分虚实)—separating empty from full.

#### Glossary:

- Song (松) - Relaxed/loose
- Chen jian (沉肩) - Heavy shoulders
- Song kua (松垮) - Relax the hips
- Tui zhou (推肘) - Push the elbows

#### Key Concepts:

- Power Release: The elimination (not redirection) of total body power
- Structural Support: Natural alignment without muscular effort
- Empty Shape: A posture maintained through alignment rather than force
- Practice Progression: The importance of having power before learning to release it

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#### **4. PARTNERED PRACTICE: Seated Meditation**

Partnered practice serves as the definitive test of internal body development. It verifies whether the shape has truly voided itself of external power (total body power), achieved emptiness, and can effectively direct force to the floor.

##### **The Partner's Role**

The partner's role is crucial and specific: they must apply an increasingly powerful pushing force until reaching and sustaining their maximum exertion. This requirement prevents a common training error—calibration. Calibration occurs when partners unconsciously match their exerted force to the sensation of having their force directed toward the floor. Rather than attempting to overcome your empty state, they maintain a constant degree of exertion that follows your body emptying their force. This creates a false achievement that only functions ‘correctly’ with specific training partners.

##### **Partner Requirements**

Your training partner must be proficient in external force methods, demonstrating:

- Understanding of direct force application
- Ability to increase resistance against incoming force
- Skill in maintaining tension forces to create bodily braces

Without these abilities, fundamental errors emerge:

- Improper force application (like using gravitational force) causing both practitioners to rely on the chair for support
- Disconnected force due to weak core/stabilization
- Premature cessation due to discomfort or inadequate conditioning

##### **States and Force Conditions**

In solo practice, only emptiness—the complete voiding of total body power—can be achieved, as there is no applied force on the body. However, partnered practice introduces the crucial static load condition: when your partner applies force, your ability to sink this force into the chair and ultimately into the floor results in the state of song. This creates two distinct phases:

1. Emptiness: The preliminary state void of total body power

2. Static Load: The condition that arises when successfully directing partner's force groundward, resulting in song

### **Progression Requirements**

The transition from solo to partnered practice depends entirely on the practitioner's ability to clearly experience and maintain emptiness—the complete voiding of total body power and other force stressors. Without this foundation, static load conditions cannot be properly achieved.

### **The Chair's Role**

The chair functions as an extension of the hips by providing a concrete tool for force direction. Just as the body's natural load is directed into the chair through the simple act of sitting, the partner's applied force must follow the same pathway. This intermediate stage using the chair develops the skill of force direction through the hips that will later be achieved independently when seated practice is abandoned.

### **Practice Method [PHOTOS]**

1. Initial Position:
  - Practitioner: Lift hands just above mid-thigh, palms facing abdomen
  - Partner: Adopt bow and arrow stance, arms locked, hands placed on practitioner's forearms
2. Execution:
  - Partner gradually increases pushing force aiming to break seated posture
  - Practitioner maintains empty body state while directing incoming force acting on the body into chair and ground

### **Success Indicators:**

- Absence of horizontal force vectors affecting the torso's structural integrity
  - A horizontal push will have a horizontal effect if not converted downward
- Clear contrast between partner's combined force methods (tension, exertion, and resistance) and your song state
  - They are noticeably working harder than you are
- Partner's visible tendency toward ground engagement as force redirection achieves optimal static load conditions

## **SAFETY WARNING**

Extreme caution is essential in partnered practice due to significant risks:

- Potential falls from chair
- Chair failure under static load
- Other dangerous situations

Remember: The goal is transformation, not proving strength. Prioritize safety over immediate results, as proper internal development requires consistent, safe practice over time.

### **Glossary:**

- Song (松) - Relaxed state
- Gong Fu (功夫) - Skill developed through time and effort

### **Key Concepts:**

- Static Load: The condition where force is successfully redirected groundward
  - Calibration Error: Partner unconsciously matching rather than testing
  - Force Direction: The process of guiding external force to ground
  - Success Verification: Observable indicators of proper practice
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## **5. CONCLUSION**

The journey of developing Neigong through the transformation of the external body into the internal body reveals several crucial principles. First, this transformation is only possible when external skill has reached its apex—specifically in the mastery of total body power. Without this foundation, one cannot truly understand or achieve emptiness, as emptiness can only be recognized in contrast to what was once full.

The process begins with understanding that all power methods exist on a spectrum between poles. The external methods of tension, resistance, and exertion represent one end, while the internal methods of emptiness and song represent the other. However, these poles are not merely opposites—they are interconnected points on the spectrum of force expression. This relationship is demonstrated clearly in the progression from solo to partnered practice.

Solo practice introduces the fundamental challenge: can one truly empty the body of total body power while maintaining structural alignment? This emptying is not merely relaxation, but



rather a conscious void of force methods that have become habitual through external skill development. The development of emptiness occurs through subtraction—systematically removing the experience of keeping shapes and postures 'strong'. The seated meditation practice provides an ideal condition for this exploration, using the chair as both tool and teacher in understanding how to direct force groundward.

However, it is in partnered practice that the true test of transformation occurs. Here, under the pressure of actual force application, we discover whether emptiness has been genuinely achieved and if the body can maintain its structural integrity while directing force to the ground. The static load condition that emerges—manifesting as the state of song—represents the first genuine expression of internal power. This achievement is marked not by the generation or amplification of force, but by becoming according to power itself.

This manual details only the beginning of the internal journey—the crucial transition point where external skill provides the foundation for internal development. It is at this juncture that practitioners must face a fundamental truth: the apex of external power methods becomes the base of internal power methods. This transformation is not about abandoning external skill, but rather about using it as a reference point for understanding its opposite—a truth that can only be realized through dedicated practice and direct experience.

What has been discussed here forms the essential foundation for practicing internal martial arts such as Xingyiquan, Taijiquan, and Baguazhang. These arts explicitly work with shapes, and the internal body development described here is a prerequisite for their study. These arts ultimately weaponize the internal body, using it to neutralize an opponent's power methods, rendering them ineffective.

Moreover, this foundation is crucial for advancing to the study of jin (internal energy/power) itself. Such study cannot begin until one has achieved the experience of power being separate from the body, following the classical progression: body led by jin, jin led by qi, qi led by intent, and intent led by spirit. The transformation detailed here is but the first step on this journey.

### **Glossary:**

- Xingyiquan (形意拳) - Form-Mind Boxing
- Taijiquan (太极拳) - Grand Ultimate Boxing
- Baguazhang (八卦掌) - Eight Trigrams Palm

### **Key Concepts:**

- Transformation Process: The journey from external to internal skill

- Development Sequence: The progression of body, jin, qi, yi, and shen
- Application Context: The relationship to internal martial arts
- Foundation Building: The importance of this work for future development

## **AFTERWARD**

This manual has focused solely on the fundamental transformation required to begin internal development—specifically, the ability to empty one's shape of force while maintaining structural integrity. This transformation represents only the first step in developing neigong, but it is a crucial one that many practitioners overlook or misunderstand.

It bears repeating that this transformation is only possible for those who have already achieved mastery of external force methods. Without having developed total body power through external skill training, there is nothing to empty, no force to release, and thus no way to understand true emptiness. The practices detailed here presume this foundation—they are not meant to develop external skill but rather to transform it. Practitioners who attempt these methods without first developing external power will find themselves merely relaxing rather than truly emptying, leading to fundamental misunderstandings of internal development.

The progression marker for moving beyond this stage is clear and verifiable: one must be able to recognize when they are no longer using their own force to maintain postural integrity. This awareness marks the beginning of true emptiness and opens the door to studying force itself as an independent entity.

This series aims to prepare practitioners for studying internal martial arts from an internal perspective. This means developing neigong before attempting to weaponize it through specific martial applications. Many practitioners attempt to learn internal martial arts without first developing this foundation, leading to the practice of external methods in internal forms. By focusing first on this transformation, practitioners can approach arts like Xingyiquan, Taijiqian, and Baguazhang with the internal body already developed, allowing them to truly engage with these arts' internal principles rather than merely mimicking their external shapes.

The next stage of study will focus on understanding and working with force itself, building upon the empty body developed through the practices detailed in this manual. However, attempting to study force without first achieving this fundamental transformation would be premature, as one cannot truly understand force as an independent entity while still generating and maintaining it within one's own body.