



Martial art form using reptilian traits impresses audiences and provides health benefits to practitioners, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

# Snake boxing strikes with grace and power



The vast and tough wilderness has granted snakes stunning agility, speed and strength. Faced with extreme circumstances, they exhibit killer instincts and survival skills.

Those extraordinary traits were picked up by Chinese martial arts masters and became a source of inspiration in honing their craft. They imitate the movements, strategies and principles of snakes to enhance combat techniques.

By emulating these slithering reptiles, martial arts practitioners have developed similar qualities, learning to adapt to different situations when on the offense or needing to defend themselves.

To date, snakes are among the few fierce animals, such as tigers, cranes, leopards and praying mantis that stand out and have been worshipped in the field of martial arts, as their namesakes in multiple traditional Chinese martial styles emit the attributes, such as flexibility and power, of the animals.

In Fucun town of Jindong district in Jinhua city of East China's Zhejiang province, Fu Guogang has been practicing snake boxing for more than four decades.

As 2025 marks the Year of the Snake, Fu has received more opportunities to present the fighting style for various public occasions since the New Year's Day holiday.

When Fu begins waving his arms and twisting his torso, he conjures up the vivid image of a snake, coiled in wait and ready to strike.

As his body undulates in smooth, curved lines, the man in his 50s shifts hands and bends his fingers until they are tightly clasped, resembling a serpent dancing on air.

"Snake boxing imitates the snake's natural feeding, fighting, tumbling, coiling, entangling, and rapid striking movements. The serpentine movements are cleverly combined with attack and defense techniques," Fu says.

These movements are refined for martial arts applications, such as quick strikes that mimic a snake's bite, fluid body movements that emulate slithering, and the ability to dodge attacks with swift changes in direction the way a snake



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evades its predators, he explains.

"For instance, adopting a snake's fluidity allows practitioners to intertwine with their opponents in defense and strike them from angles they would not expect in offense," he says.

Since snakes are more common in China's southern regions, snake boxing has been much more widely practiced in the south than in the north, including in Zhejiang, Fujian, Sichuan and Guangdong provinces, and Hong Kong.

Snake boxing has also evolved into a fitness program and has been performed for various public events, such as the 200-day countdown ceremony for the 19th Asian Games Hangzhou last year.

Fu grew up in Fucun, the birthplace of Jindong snake boxing that originated in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

His ancestor Fu Yiqian was the founder of Fucun's local snake boxing.

"He developed a love for martial arts from a young age, excelling in both skills and intellectual reflection on improving them," says Fu Guogang, explaining the history of snake boxing development that has been passed down for generations.

"After observing and studying the characteristics of how snakes coil, strike and use their tongues, he combined his knowledge of martial arts with these observations and continually practiced, eventually creating snake boxing in the area," he adds.

Since childhood, Fu Guogang has followed his father Fu Binfu in practicing the martial art and became a fifth-generation inheritor.

"Back then, my father would use hemp ropes to make wooden posts and hanging rings for training, which laid a solid foundation for my basic skills," Fu Guogang recalls.

As he delved deeper into the martial art, he developed a better understanding of snake boxing while finding commonalities with other martial forms, such as tai chi, spearing and swordsmanship, and integrating their essence and philosophy.

"The idea was to enhance snake boxing's content and make its movements more distinctive while retaining its traditional features," he says.

To start with, a person's feet must be firmly planted on the ground and slightly apart while maintaining balance and agility with the body remaining upright and loose, Fu explains.

The snake boxing style is



based on whipping or rattling power which travels up the spine to the fingers.

"The ability to move sinuously, essentially by compressing one's abdominal muscles, is very important," he emphasizes.

With a subtle twist of the waist, practitioners extend their arms forward in a striking motion. But, unlike the forceful straight punch used in other martial arts, it is quick and whipped, much like the sudden strike of a snake's head.

The hands flick out, with the fingers snapping forward like the fangs of a snake, while the body stays low to the ground, dancing with deceptive speed and precision.

"Every motion should be controlled, yet graceful," Fu says.

To his understanding, snake boxing emphasizes the cultivation of both internal and external strength and is a valuable cultural heritage accumulated over a long period.

"We've long seen the snake as a symbol of strength and regeneration, while snake boxing highlights the flexibility and dexterity of the reptile with the toughness and resilience needed for self-defense," he says, adding that this blend of hardness and softness aligns with the principles of Taoism, particularly the *yin* and *yang* philosophy, where opposites are complementary and necessary for harmony.

For more tangible effects, the practice necessitates building a strong spine to contain the power and strong fingers to convey the strike, he explains.

Since breathing is important during the movements of the spine and ribs, it eventually leads to internal training.

To popularize its charm, Fu launched a public training program in Jinhua in 2016, where he received many curious audience members. It encouraged him to establish a snake boxing research society the following year and commit himself to the inheritance and teaching of snake boxing.

Under his promotion, more people have come to appreciate the art of snake boxing.

Xu Anyu, a student from the College of Humanities, Zhejiang Normal University, vividly remembers the panache with which Fu demonstrated snake boxing during her summer vacation last year.

"He executed every movement with precision ... showcasing his graceful and heroic posture," says Xu, who also tried her hand in the martial art under Fu's guidance.

She says that she has been

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Fu Guogang



Fu Guogang from Fucun, Jinhua, Zhejiang province, demonstrates various moves of snake boxing.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



mesmerized by the martial art's flexible and ever-changing nature that packs a tough and powerful punch.

"Every movement flows like a river. It's a visual feast for the audience," she says.

Xu Chunlian, along with dozens of Fu's disciples, has practiced the martial art with the master since 2015 and stays on the course after feeling the health benefits from it.

"I was a traditional tailor. Business was thriving and I was working day and night. Due to the nature of my work, I suffered neck, waist and arm pain. Sometimes it was so exhausting that I could barely lift a teacup," recalls Xu Chunlian who is in her 50s.

As she neared retirement, she met Fu by chance and tried snake boxing to relieve her pain.

"I was surprised that he maintained a very fit physique at his age. He looked energetic and vibrant, so I figured snake boxing might have a positive impact on fitness and health," she says.

Under Fu's guidance, Xu Chunlian received training and soon found her pain and discomfort gradually disappeared.

It has prompted her to make further inroads and hone her skills. Over the years, she has joined several traditional martial arts competitions in Zhejiang, where she won multiple gold medals in the snake boxing category.

Meanwhile, Fu Guogang has ensured the martial art will continue running in the family and has instilled its essence in his daughter Fu Xinyue since she was a child.

"It has been part of my life for as long as I can remember. The initial reason for practicing snake boxing was simply for exercise but later, with other enthusiasts, I started exploring new techniques and refining the key points of each movement," says Fu Xinyue, 25.

"Under my father's direct guidance, we repeated and corrected our movements constantly, and gradually, our actions became more synchronized and filled with power. The beauty of the movements fills me with an indescribable sense of pride," she adds.

As her comprehension and skills grow, she sees snake boxing as the embodiment of resilience, flexibility, and the spirit of hard work and endurance.

"It has given me faith in the face of adversity, enabling me to react swiftly and flexibly to any situation to achieve the best outcome," she says.

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## Common combat movements and stances

Snake boxing uses unique styles consisting of different fist, palm and finger shapes, which are distinct from those of other martial arts.

FIST

PALM

FINGER



**Mouth fist**

The middle finger is curled and extended outward while the other four fingers tightly curl inward. The fingers are clenched together to resemble a snake's mouth preparing to strike.



**Head fist**

The five fingers are partially curled inward with the palm made hollow. The finger joints are tightly pressed together. The fingertips and the back of the fist form an angle, resembling the head of a snake.



**Head palm**

The palm faces downward with the palm edge directed forward. The fingers are pressed together and the palm forms a sharp angle that resembles a snake's head as it darts forward.



**Tongue palm**

The palm faces upward with the back of the hand facing downward and the wrist held straight to mimic the tongue of a snake, used for long-range attacks.



**Head finger**

The index and middle fingers are extended straight and tightly together, while the remaining three fingers bend inward. The thumb is placed next to the index finger and the wrist is bent inward, creating an angle between the fingers and the back of the hand to mimic a snake's head and is used for pinpoint strikes.



**Tongue finger**

The index and middle fingers extend straight forward and tightly together while the other three fingers bend inward. The wrist remains straight and the fingers align in a straight line with the back of the hand. This finger shape is employed for striking with high accuracy and force.