

# Yiquan Training: Isometric Opposing Force Pairs

By J. P. Lau  
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The concept of isometric opposing force pairs (*Zheng Li*, 争力) is the core of Yiquan. It is the basis for discharge/release of power (*Fa Li*, 发力) and spontaneous reflexive action (*Fan Ying*, 反应) in combat. Understanding and proper use of kinesthetic perceived internal/external isometrics opposing forces (*Zheng Li*, 争力) is essential to Yiquan training. The ideal strength/force for martial arts application is different from mechanical strength/force. Special conditioning and training is required to nurture this whole-body balanced force (*Hun Yuan Li*, 浑元力). This balanced force is always in perfect harmony, balanced in all directions, having no absolute direction but having the potential to “explode” internal power as external force in any direction. Yiquan uses Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP): mentally directed imagery (visualization) to guide your neuromuscular coordination and kinesthetic perceptive training in relaxed standing (*Zhan Zhuang*, 站桩) in order to seek, sense, learn from experience, understand and master this force (*Mo Li*, 摸力). The essence can only be cultivated by integration of the mind and body in relaxed standing practice using the concept of *Zheng Li*. In this article we will cover *Zheng Li* and training of spontaneous reflexive action.

## A. Isometric Opposing Force Pairs (*Zheng Li*, 争力)

*Zheng Li* (争力) is the focus awareness of opposing force pairs that you perceive and cultivate through the use of visualization. In certain situations, they may be considered as relaxed internal or external isometrics of muscles, mentally induced neuromuscular relaxation and tension exchanges. *Zheng Li* (争力) is the tool to synthesize your mind-body into whole-body harmony. When practicing relaxed standing (*Zhan Zhuang*, 站桩) mentally direct these opposing forces pairs to “pull” or “push” in all directions from your “center” to maintain your perfect balance, to cultivate a “spring-like force (*Tan Li*, 弹力) imbedded in your focus-attention”. Internal *Zheng Li* (*Shen Nei Zheng Li*, 身内争力) involves visualizing connecting your various body elements with imaginary springs while external *Zheng Li* (*Shen Wai Zheng Li*, 身外争力) requires visualization of either moving through a viscous fluid to “feel” frictional drag on your body or connecting of various body elements to external objects with imaginary springs. Using this concept of focus awareness of opposing force pairs in all your Yiquan training of trial & feel (*Shi Li*, 试力), footwork (*Zou Bu*, 走步) and release of power (*Fa Li*, 发力) exercises will re-pattern your neuromuscular coordination to always move with whole-body movement, harmony of action and force.

The small step relaxed standing posture (*Hun Yuan Zhuang*, 浑元桩) is the foundation and starting point for nurturing *Zheng Li* (争力). Start your training with the one-directional exercise. When you have mastered it, extend your training to the multi-directional exercise.

## One-Directional *Zheng Li* Exercise

Stand in *Hun Yuan Zhuang* (浑元桩). Visualize hugging an imaginary elastic balloon and imaginary springs connecting your wrists to a distant wall in front of you. Visualize imaginary springs connecting your knees. Stay relaxed and mentally direct your action with minimal external movement. Pushing off your lead foot, shift your weight slightly backwards, leading with your head, visualize stretching the springs between your knees outward and the springs connecting your wrists to the distant wall backward, upward, and outward. Feel the forward pulling force of the strong imaginary springs and the opposite backward pulling force of your arms, resulting in very small or no external motions of your wrists. Simultaneously, visualize pulling the elastic balloon backward and outward. Next, pushing off your rear leg, shift your weight slightly forward, leading with your head, compressing the springs between your knees inward and the springs to the distant wall forward, upward and inward. Simultaneously, squeeze the elastic balloon forward and inward. Feel the resistance (backward pushing force) of the imaginary springs and the opposite forward pushing force of your arms. “*Feel*” the forces with no excessive tension; seek the forces imbedded in your focus attention. Perceive and experience the relaxation/tension exchange and the isometric opposing force pairs in your entire body. Relaxation and tension must be used with appropriate balance. Too relaxed or too tensed are both ineffective, non-usable states.

## Multi-Directional *Zheng Li* Exercise

When you are aware of and can “*feel*” the external/internal opposing force pairs on your wrists you may build on this foundation towards whole-body *Zheng Li* (争力). Stand in *Hun Yuan Zhuang* (浑元桩) and perform the basic “hug the tree” exercise. Merge with the tree or visualize every part of your body being in contact with the tree. Push it forward; pull it backward; lift it upward; plant it downward; rip it open or squeeze it close. Do these with focus attention with minimum physical motion, to nurture your neuromuscular coordination and reflex, to integrate mind-intent and balanced force. Stay relaxed; focus your concentration on a distance object rather than on your own body. Concentrating too intently on your own body tends to lead to stiffness, rigidity, and tenseness. Make sure your mind-intent (*Yi*, 意) and mentally directed movements do not “disintegrate” during the whole course of its action. Retain the ability to reverse or change direction at any time.

Further development requires visualizing imaginary springs connecting every body element, setting up opposing force pairs pulling in multiple directions from your “*center*”. Typically, you would visualize imaginary springs connecting:

1. your head to each foot, your hands to your feet, your elbows to your knees, your shoulders to your hips setting up the vertical up/down opposing force pairs,
2. your left knee to your right hip and vice versa setting up the forward/backward and lateral opposing force pairs,

3. your wrists to your neck, between the wrists and between the elbows setting up the lateral and forward/backward opposing force pairs.

Of these opposing force pairs, the most important pair is the vertical pair along your spine: Visualize a string pulling the top of your head upwards while sitting down on a high stool to set up a vertical pair (*Shang Xia Zheng Li*, 上下争力). This pair is the main control of your relaxation and tension. Gently push the top of your head upward as if hanging your body from a string. Use musculoskeletal support; focus your concentration and relax your musculature and skin so you “feel” all your body hair “stand up like spears”. Maintain your *frame* integrity to deliver balanced force from curve form. Become one and harmonize with the surrounding to “feel” the external influence (external *Zheng Li*). Seek very small slight movement of every body element in *stillness*.

### **B. Spontaneous Reflexive Action (*Fan Ying*, 反应)**

Reflexive action conditioning is primarily neuromuscular coordination training. You must have a firm foundation in multi-directional *Zheng Li* (争力) awareness before you can start this training. Visualize your every body element being connected by imaginary springs. Your whole-body is an integrated spring-like unity; every element is unified to form the harmonized whole-body. Visualize external stimuli/forces were applied to various parts of your body from differing directions. With your focus concentration, direct your balanced force to react to these, neutralize and discharge/release power at will. The goal is to achieve mind-intent and balanced force arriving simultaneously, mind-intent and balanced force becomes inseparable and indistinguishable.

### **Reflexive Action Exercise**

Visualize standing in the small step posture (*Hun Yuan Zhuang*, 浑元桩) on a raft running the rapids. As the raft shakes and rolls with the waves, use whole-body movement to adjust your balance; do not use your legs alone. Mentally move forward/backward, upward/downward, and laterally left/right with very small external movement to coordinate with the imaginary movement of the raft. Begin practicing with slow movements with preconceived sequence. Eventually you should practice with no preconceived sequence with high speed switching to develop your whole-body mechanics (*Shen Fa*, 身法). Spontaneous reflex is based on your ability to rapidly switch between maneuvers; to generate spring-like force (*Tan Li*, 弹力) from whole-body oscillation (*Dong Dang*, 动荡).

In this article we explored the important concept of *Zheng Li* and its relation to reflexive action conditioning. Yiquan is powered by mentally directing these opposing force pairs to work together and against each other. *Zheng Li* (争力) is the core of Yiquan.