The five animal style (Crane, Dragon, Tiger, Leopard, Snake) is a combative martial art that uses the motion and characteristics of different animals as a guideline for execution of body movement.

Though other martial art styles may have specialized in a specific animal (Monkey, Crane, Tiger, etc.), the style is a culmination of many different animals. It is often easier to remember something if you can visualize it, and past masters of kung fu have labeled certain body movements after animals or actions in nature to help one visualize a movement upon execution.

The five animal style does not require one to act like a monkey or to prance like a tiger. Though the movement is quite beautiful or exciting, the naming conventions are used mostly to help one visualize a technique as an animal might have applied it.

For example, a monkey paw, a horse stance, holding the wind, pushing the mountain, and sowing the field, are all visual phrases that help a practitioner remember a movement by visualizing it during execution.

The Five Animal Style Kung Fu is as much theory as application. There are more than Five Animals that make up this system of martial arts, but the five animals and their relation to one another have come to represent the entire system.

United they stand, divided they fall. Each animal by itself, is not as strong as all five used in unison. It is important to understand that everything has a strength and a weakness. When looking at the system, we must see each animals strength as well as its weakness.

Typically the tiger represents the element of bone. The Snake represents Chi or internal power. The leopard represents speed and strength. The crane represents sinews or muscles and tendons. And the Dragon represents the spirit.

The Tiger is known for its power derived from its strong bone structure. It is also known as a deceptive hunter. A Tiger fully commits its action during execution, placing the full force of itself within an attack. The target rarely sees the attack coming until it is too late. However, the Tiger isn't the most agile or quickest creature. Its committed nature also hinders its flexibility to adapt to its existing environment.