

## Gary Lam Wiung Chun - An Introduction by Gregory E. LeBlanc

Wing Chun Kung Fu is perhaps one of the best-known martial arts in the world, being originally from southern China it has spread with great enthusiasm to every corner of the world. Brought from China to Hong Kong by Grandmaster Yip Man, the art has enjoyed great attention based on its efficient fighting methods and its many famous exponents. One of Yip Man's most notable first generation students was the late Wong Shun Leung. Sigung Wong made a reputation for himself and for Wing Chun by fighting and winning over 60 skill comparison matches (beimo) early in his career, as Yip Man's head coach he was considered the principle Wing Chun instructor of Bruce Lee. Sigung Wong was also an accomplished Doctor of herbal medicine, as well as a highly sought after calligrapher.

In Monterey Park California, one of Sigung Wong's most senior successors has for the past several years been quietly teaching the Wing Chun system of his teacher. That successor is Sifu Gary Lam (Lam Man Hog). Sifu Lam trained with Wong Shun Leung for over 15 years and was his head coach for 6 years. Sifu Lam distinguished himself by winning the Hong Kong full contact elimination tournament in 1978, defeating all challengers in three elimination fights. This fighting victory resulted in being awarded the coveted champions gold coin medallion, and gained him the respect and admiration of his fellow practitioners from all styles. Sifu Lam has also been a competitive Hong Kong Thai boxer, and in the early nineties often served as a judge for Thai boxing matches in Hong Kong. Sifu Lam has been teaching Wing Chun Kung Fu and training Thai Boxers for over 20 years. He also had the honor and distinction of serving as the 1991 President of the Hong Kong Wing Chun Society.

Sifu Lam describes the Wong Shun Leung/Gary Lam Wing Chun system as having five main branches of study. These branches serve to categorize the bulk of the open hand techniques that are developed throughout the students training experience, giving an overall framework for the entire system. Additionally the wooden man (muk yan jong), Dragon Pole (luk dim boon guan) and Double Knife (baat jaam do) are also taught.

The branches are as follows, with detailed description of each one:

1. Crossing hand - Striking techniques
2. Closing - Standing grappling and escapes
3. Footwork - Kicking and leg destruction

4. Pushing - One and two handed projections

5. Pulling - Outside, inside and turning projections

The most well known techniques of Wing Chun fall into the category of crossing hand, these are the movements most often seen in the Qi Sao training (sticky hands). Crossing hand techniques usually focus on gaining contact with an opponent's extremity and then using that contact as a bridge to obtain the target area, this bridge can either be provided by the opponent or created by the practitioner. The head and neck are the preferred targets of choice, with secondary targets being on the centerline of the upper and lower torso. The crossing hand technique used will vary depending upon the situation, typically executed in combination with a simultaneous control or defensive action.

The different types of Wing Chun techniques are described by Sifu Lam as a buffet of martial knowledge, each student is led by the teacher through the variety of martial dishes. Choosing carefully and not hurrying the process, the various actions are slowly enjoyed and then thoroughly digested. When the student has matured, he/she then has a tool box of Wing Chun techniques at the ready, filled with the most appropriate actions needed in that moment. Perhaps the most important element in transforming the student's tool box of techniques into a working system of fighting is Qi Sao (sticky hands), Qi Sao is Wing Chun's open secret to success in applying, combining and changing from one fighting action to another.

Called the soul of Wing Chun, Qi Sao in its advanced form is a free style sensitivity drill, ideally training the student not only how to hit the opponent but also how to feel and control their attacking actions. Qi Sao allows the student an opportunity to gain experience using Wing Chun techniques and still be able to go home with the same number of teeth that they came with. Qi Sao is not just about mastering physical movements; it is also about developing mental and emotional qualities essential to success in Wing Chun training. Qualities which must be understood and applied if high level concepts such as "Sam Yi Hap Yat (mind and body unified, thinking and action together)" are to be truly understood and made one's own.

Sifu Lam always says that everybody must go by the same road of development; each step in training must be mastered without exception. If a student wishes to go to the heights of Wing Chun excellence, he/she must master not only the physical aspects of the art, but his/her own mind and emotions as well.

The next branch of Wong Shun Leung Wing Chun is called closing. Closing includes all aspects of training that study how to enter in upon, occupy and control an opponent's position. Closing also includes techniques that secure and hold the enemy, similar to chin na (Chinese grappling). Closing ultimately gives the practitioner the ability to move past the opponent's three gates of

defense (wrist, elbow and shoulder), stopping his action and holding his position. Closing techniques focus on disturbing balance and breaking the opponents ability to squarely face you, and neutralizing his bodies correct structural alignment for physical power (called the sitting/facing position by Sifu Lam). Closing movements are done on their own to hold an opponent or in conjunction with other techniques, such as a leg break, takedown or projection.

Closing, along with all other non-striking movements, are in Sifu Lam's Wing Chun style called secondary actions. Sifu Lam refers to secondary actions as techniques that usually do not initiate an attack, and are used only after a primary strike. Because secondary actions such as closing are not the main point of Wing Chun, which is to strike and incapacitate your opponent, they serve only to add a further dimension of control and versatility to our primary abilities. Secondary actions such as closing are used only when the opportunity is presented, automatically reacting to a chance occurrence in the volatile and close range environment of Qi Sao or a street fight.

Footwork is a vital element to understanding the full range of movements used in open hand combat. These techniques in Wong Shun Leung Wing Chun include stepping, trapping to push, takedowns, leg breaks and of course kicking. Footwork is developed through training leg strength, coordination and especially balance. The power in Wing Chun kicking is identical to that of the hands, in that it is derived from a structural alignment with the ground. Kicks are often delivered to the knees and ankles, as well as the stomach, hip joints and lower torso. Kicking usage is developed through tireless training drills and the practice of Qi Gerk. Qi Gerk is a sensitivity drill for footwork training; this practice develops coordination, timing and accuracy.

Leg attacks can be applied as unique and separate techniques executing independent actions, or as part of a strategy meant to disturb and unbalance the opponent. Wing Chun has a saying "Hands go, legs go. Legs go, hands go", in the end the arms and legs work together as the yin and yang of the same action. To see these types of leg attacks in action, demonstrated by a Wing Chun master, is to be at once humbled and horrified by the direct and cruel nature of the Wing Chun kicking and footwork techniques.

The next two concepts of Wong Shun Leung Wing Chun are pushing and pulling. These two styles are similar in that they are used to disrupt and weaken an opponent's balance, structure and foundation. Thus weakening his ability to issue power and fight effectively. Pushing and pulling also weaken an opponent's ability to defend himself, destroying his chance for a following action and leaving him vulnerable to attack. Pushing and pulling are used in combination with other types of techniques, such as tripping and takedowns, breaking your opponent's balance or creating a advantageous position for yourself. These techniques are vital when fighting a larger and stronger

opponent, taking away structural power by keeping their mass in motion and off balance. Pushing and pulling also become important when fighting multiple attackers, using the techniques to create human obstacles, shields and weapons. These techniques are also used to make the environment your weapon, smashing your opponent into whatever is available in your immediate area. Pushing and pulling are different in that pushing is seen as a control action (a measure of deliberate skill), whereas pulling is seen as a chance action (decisively moving on an opportunity).

The **wooden man** (a.k.a. wooden dummy) is also taught, developing structural power and how to properly apply that power (yin action and yang power). The concept of Sam Yi Hap Yat is promoted here (mind, body and spirit unified in action), each technique applied with a calm and deliberate purpose. Sifu Lam often refers to the wooden man as your second coach, naturally helping to correct structure and develop the proper timing and angle for usage. The Wing Chun practitioner should ideally visualize an actual combat situation as he goes through the movements on the dummy; this is referred to as training with a shadow enemy.

Additionally, Sifu Lam's Wing Chun training program includes teaching the 6½ point pole (Luk Dim Boon Gwan), also known as the dragon pole. The dragon pole is taught as a weapon and as a training tool for developing internal power. Measuring nine feet long for training purposes and made from the heaviest woods possible, the dragon pole is seen as a model for using any pole like object as a weapon. Dragon pole usage is dependent on unchallenged control of the weapon, and in application closely resembles Wing Chun's open hand techniques. The dragon pole utilizes straightforward movements based on correct body structure; focusing on controlling the opponent's centerline and not chasing their weapon.

Finally, Sifu Lam teaches the eight cut knives (Baat Jaam Do) as a training device and weapon. This phase of a student's learning is reserved for the most advanced stages of his/her development; this is because the hand techniques must be at an expert level to use the knives correctly. Double knife techniques rely almost entirely on the working ability of open hand Wing Chun movements. The training and usage of the double knives depends not on the practitioner's structural power as with the dragon pole, but rather on the use of evasion and position, capitalizing on the knives razor sharp edge for power.

Sifu Lam's teaching philosophy is one of openness and equal opportunity; instruction will come with hard work (Kung Fu) and committing yourself to learning. Sifu Lam is dedicated to preserving Wing Chun for future generations and raising Wing Chun to even higher levels of development and sophistication. Sifu Lam presently has three assistant instructors Siheng Mitch Grimm, Daniel O'Neill and Gregory LeBlanc. The school maintains a modest but strong group of students from all backgrounds and walks of life.