

Wing Chun Power Training by Gregory E. LEBLanc

In Wing Chun Kung Fu there is a saying "First courage, second power and then technique", this reflects a greater importance put on the willingness to fight and on an ability to make techniques profitable. Power development in Wing Chun Kung Fu is not primarily based on muscular strength but rather on knowledge of body mechanics, joint/tendon strength and using the opponent's own committed power against them. This joint/tendon-based power is termed structural power and is the key to understanding how to transmit power using Wing Chun footwork and in the old days was one of the inner circle secrets of Wing Chun. In Wing Chun power comes from a joint supported alignment with the ground, or is derived from the motion and speed of the body (momentum). Power in Wing Chun also depends on strong emotion (called Geng Ging) creating an explosive, vicious attack. The type of power used against the target also can be different, usually taking the form either of a penetrating or percussive force. Regardless of the type of power and its implementation, power must be trained and applied in a controlled, automatic and natural way. To this end Wing Chun has developed a variety of methods to promote and train striking power, chief among them is working with the Luk Dim Boon Gwan (The Six and a one half point pole or Dragon Pole). The advantage to using the Dragon Pole is that it naturally coordinates various qualities needed to maximize power; thus training the student to use the body, breath and mind all in one action.

Deriving striking power from an alignment with the ground or from the body alignment and mass in motion is generally referred to as structural Power. Structural power is an understanding of the concept of Power Points on the body and how they relate to using the angle of the joints in unison. Power Points are key areas on the body associated with the 12 major joints that when stabilized correctly provide maximum transmission of force through the body and into the target. The critical power points are the ankles, knees, hips, shoulders, elbows and especially the wrists. The trick to using Power Points correctly is a major part of the fundamental concepts and skills that are the corner stone of Wing Chun's power theory and practice. Practiced in a natural and simultaneous way these concepts of structure and power points allow the practitioner an ability to access force for striking that is not totally dependent on muscular power. In the interest of developing structural power, correct breathing and the proper state of mind the Wing Chun practitioner trains with the 9' long Dragon Pole.

The modern Dragon Pole is typically constructed out of a single piece of hard wood such as Purple Heart, giving it great weight, strength and flexibility. It's history links it to the long poles used by boatmen in rural China, they would use their poles to guide and manipulate cargo boats in the shallow rivers of old China. Wing Chun Dragon Pole became an adaptation of ancient pole fighting

training that was passed onto its masters through mutually beneficial relationships with teachers of older Shaolin derivative styles. The pole actions were grafted onto the existing Wing Chun system and some say practiced in secret by Wing Chun masters in hiding traveling on riverboats. Even today one of the training techniques for the Dragon Pole involves moving heavy wood floating on the surface of a pool. Dragon Pole applications tend to mimic the open hand usage of Wing Chun, they are direct, powerful no-nonsense actions designed with the quick and violent realities of combat in mind (typically used with a pole of fighting length around 6-7'). Modern Wing Chun practice develops the Dragon Pole less for its application as a weapon and more for its perfect compliment to the reinforcement and the promotion of structural power. The end benefit is that Dragon Pole training offers a simultaneous positive resistance to the bodies Power Points and at the same time develops control and application of force for Wing Chun open hand techniques.

Sifu Gary Lam of Monterey Park California describes the Dragon Pole as critical training for the development of what he calls Internal Power. Internal Power is a term used to describe the use of the structural framework of the body in motion, accompanied by a deliberate mental and emotional intent to one point of expression; in this case that one point becomes the last 12" or so of the working end of the Dragon Pole. He often demonstrates Internal Power by exhibiting a devastating marshaling of power in the many strikes and projection techniques of Wing Chun, a way of doing Wing Chun that a senior Wing Chun practitioner and student of Sifu Lam's dubbed "scary Wing Chun". Internal Power becomes the sum total of the bodies force, guided and authenticated by the traditional marks of success, that is: Jun (stability), Fai (speed), Wan (accuracy) and Geng (power). These four qualities of success are what Sifu Lam defines as the merits of mastery in any art, expressed in a seamless combination with all of Wing Chun's actions.

Dragon Pole training begins by learning the correct way to hold and heft the pole, if done incorrectly it becomes easy for the pole to be knocked from your hands and difficult to correctly express the bodies structural power through the pole. Then the student is given various lines of techniques to perform, these cover the basic techniques of Dragon Pole and introduce the footwork methods used throughout the training. At this stage the Arrow Punching exercise and single leg form training are introduced, these practices develop whole body power in motion and train leg strength and balance. After a sufficient amount of time has gone by, allowing the student to digest the introductory material, the form training is introduced. The Dragon Pole form is where it gets its name as the "Six and one half point pole"; this is because there are six main strikes in the form and a half strike. There are other actions in the form besides these, but these six and one half strikes are considered the main lesson of the Dragon Pole form. The form should be done with a relaxed firmness (Yin with Yang inside), harnessing the structural power of the body behind all pole actions. Sifu Lam considers the Dragon Pole essential for learning empty hand

structural power and also teaches that it is through the pole training that the student truly learns to be both yielding and explosive as you react to an opponents attack. Sifu Lam teaches that in training any single quality such as power; its opposite quality should first be promoted. Thus Dragon Pole training while initially training one to be powerful ultimately teaches us to be receptive, soft and yielding (called Yang with Yin inside). This is the key to the correct control and expression of power, if we fix our action or power then it will not have a way to naturally maximize its potential.

Training continues with practicing two person drills and utilizing the standing or hanging Dragon Pole dummy. Two person training gives the practitioner an opportunity to get first hand experience with how the techniques will work in actual combat and also introduces the ideas of deflection, misdirection and evasion. As with empty hand training, the goal is being able to execute techniques in a random, un-rehearsed and natural way, this is trained through controlled free sparring with the poles. Dragon Pole dummy training focuses on developing the accurate use of power and further develops the student's use of structural force against a solid and moving target. Advanced levels of all form and drill training end by linking the various techniques into spontaneous, free flowing combinations of techniques.

Wing Chun power training is continued further by practicing the Pun Sao drill and eventually practicing the Baat Jaam Do (Double 8 cut knife). The Pun Sao drill is a variation of the basic Qi Sao training (Wing Chun free sparring training), and as in Qi Sao is begun with the arms interlocked and the legs positioned in a training stance. In Pun Sao the goal is to learn how to harness and apply structural power in Qi Sao, this is done by an emphasis on the sitting (structural alignment with the ground) and moving (body mass in motion) power as pressure is applied to the opponents centerline. Adding a double hand pull upon retreating expands on this practice, followed by your opponent taking your position in response to the pull. Like all other drills this eventually becomes an animated and free flowing practice, training to naturally apply structural power and respond to changes in position and balance naturally. The Baat Jaam Do training develops tight, focused and powerful handwork, further engendering the correct flavor and application of structurally correct Wing Chun.

Wing Chun was designed to provide a direct and powerful answer to the fast paced and unpredictable realities of hand-to-hand combat. Its system was built on fundamental concepts that can be found at all levels of training, making the outward appearance of its techniques secondary to its inner structural standards. Sifu Lam describes the journey of Wing Chun training as going from the simple to the complex and in the end back to the simple again; advanced Wing Chun develops not from its outward form but rather from a deepening of the essential concepts, structure and skills.

Wing Chun not only reflects the qualities of a high standard traditional Chinese martial art, but also adapts as part of the changing modern world of fighting arts. Sigung Wong Shun Leung and Sifu Lam have both made alterations to the form of Wing Chun that was based on their evolving experience of the martial arts, but always preserving its core concepts, skills and fundamental structure. It is the tradition of structure, concepts and skills of Wing Chun that defines its heart and soul, and holds the integrity of its theory and power in place. To this end it is the hope and goal of Masters like Sifu Lam that the heart and soul of Wing Chun be passed down to the next generation, that heart and soul is Wing Chun's true power and legacy.