

Wing Chun's Chance Action Fighting by Gregory E. LeBlanc

Wing Chun Kung Fu is best known for its powerful, relentless linear attacks. Seeking the path of least resistance, and then repeatedly striking to specific targets on the opponent's centerline. Wing Chun strives to end a conflict as decisively as possible, taking the most direct route available. Surprising to many is the fact that Wing Chun consists of several systems of training, of which the striking techniques are but only one part. Two of the arts other styles of training are the pushing and pulling systems of Wing Chun usage. These techniques of control are used to manipulate, weaken, destabilize and project the opponent; usually used to assist the primary attacking techniques. These techniques are part of a class of fighting movements called *chance actions*, so called because they are only used when an opportunity or chance presents itself. Pushing and pulling are developed to work with striking (crossing hand), closing (standing grappling) and footwork (kicking, traps, pushing, throwing and leg breaks) techniques, which when combined present the unified Wing Chun open hand system as was taught to Sifu Gary Lam (Lam Man Hog) by the late Sigung Wong Shun Leung.

Sifu Lam presents the entirety of his Wing Chun system in four general levels; these different levels categorize the ability of each student and outline the curriculum of Sifu Lam's system in four stages of development. Each student starts with a course of basic training, learning the fundamental concepts, principles and rudimentary applications of Wing Chun. Then the *crossing hand* system is taught; this covers all skills and techniques for going into an opponent's position and landing a combination of blows to the head and neck. In Sifu Lam's school this covers all training up to a particular technique called *changing hand*, this completes the material covered for level one. After level one has been properly digested the student enters into the second level training, focusing now on the chance action techniques as well as the closing and footwork training.

The second level training emphasizes a different approach to skill development and especially a different way of doing Chi Sao (sticky hands). When learning in the first level training, practicing Chi Sao is about hitting the opponent and trying to not get hit. In second level training the student starts to develop abilities to control the opponents fighting structure and also begins to develop how to fight with what is referred to as feeling, called by Sifu Lam "Natural reaction fighting". What this implies is that if you can control the opponent and react based on instinct, then you can do what you want, when you want and how you want. Training to control the opponent is significantly different than trying to hit only, it means disciplining yourself to not always hit and not being afraid of being hit. It means beginning to train chance techniques such as pushing and pulling, and of trying to feel what the opponent is doing and how they are doing it.

Chi Sao training of this nature is often referred to as playing, learning to control instead of always trying to beat the opponent, it is definitely not free fighting. All out fighting would not allow for the opportunity needed to develop these skills. This is an important distinction that must be made, because here you must trust and be trusted by your training partner. If you cannot train control because you are obsessed with hitting and not being hit by the opponent, then you will not have a training opportunity for advancement to the higher levels of Wing Chun. This is easy to understand but very difficult to do. In practice this means being able to have the discipline, self-control and character to not always strike to win every match of Chi Sao, as Sifu Lam says, "You must train with a open and big heart". The student must in the end learn to turn off his muscle power; striving rather to develop subtle technique, keen sensitivity, and how to harness the body's innate structural power. It has been said of Grandmaster Yip Man that when he practiced Chi Sao he would only use control techniques, demonstrating in word and in deed his mastery of Wing Chun's highest levels.

Chi Sao offers a training environment to develop these higher-level chance action skills such as pushing and pulling, which could not reasonably be developed under real life combat conditions. Ultimately, if the student cannot overcome himself, then he has no chance of overcoming his opponent and truly learning the control side of Wing Chun kung fu. All of this of course implies that the correct structure, sitting, facing, footwork and other core Wing Chun fighting concepts are maintained in Chi Sao, this is also usually very difficult. Difficult not only to physically maintain, but also emotionally difficult to be self-restrained. The student wishing to progress must often slow down his techniques so that correct footwork and body structure are not lost to speed and an uncontrolled desire for making the hit. Sifu Lam can often be heard saying, "If you want to go faster, slow down, if you want to be stronger, train softer".

Pulling training begins with learning the basic drills, these cover using an outside and inside arm pull, as well as an outside arm bar pull. These techniques are trained as both initial and following actions on the opponents leading or secondary attacking strikes, and serve to throw the attacker into environmental obstructions, to the ground or into another opponent. Pulling also serves to disturb, destabilize and disrupt and opponents correct body structure, balance, direction and main attack. Pulling and pushing are often combined to work together, changing direction and throwing off the opponent's natural reaction to recover his balance. Chance actions are typically followed by footwork techniques such as a leg break or a throw, and crossing hand strikes such as Lap Sao and Pak Sao.

Pushing training is separated into two categories, those being one handed or two-handed pushing techniques. One handed pushing (toi sao) uses the lead hand to push on the opponent's centerline, usually applying pressure just

below the shoulder at the humeral joint. The other hand is used to misdirect the opponent's position and to bring them slightly off balance, Sifu Lam calls this *making the opponent wrong*. The idea of two or more movements for every one fighting action, such as initially *making the opponent wrong* just prior to performing the push, is a subtle but prevalent idea in Wing Chun. It is the kind of information that is hard to see and usually must be pointed out by one's teacher. The concept of *leading* in Aikido or *off balance* (kazushi) in Judo is very similar to Wing Chun's concept of *making the opponent wrong*.

Two handed pushing (Po Pai or butter fly hands) is a more complex technique and is trained from eight different lead in hands, examples of which would be Bon Sao, Gan Sao, Hun Sao and so on. Also different about the Po Pai is that instead of ejecting the opponent away from you with the arms held straight as in Toi Sao (one handed pushing), Po Pai pushing follows the opponent at a close range for the entire push. This is done to maximize the power (taking the opponents position) of the push and to also protect the Wing Chun practitioner from being hit by a counter strike in the medium range. Po Pai not only serves to push, but also to strike. Using internal power, a *yin style* iron palm strike is delivered to the opponent's internal organs along with the push. Po pai is an action that must be executed with impeccable timing to be effective and relies heavily on the practitioner's development and use of structural power. Po Pai can be used to project the opponent outside the fighting distance, and like the Toi Sao can be used to strike the opponent against objects in the environment including other opponents.

Pulling and pushing as well as all other chance or secondary actions must be used with caution and never thought of as primary attacks. The chief reason for this is what's called *chasing hands*, the prohibitions against which was one of Sigung Wong Shun Leung's most important edicts. His conviction was that your principle goal should always be to attack directly to the enemy's centerline and therefore the most important targets. Any divergence from this philosophy was nothing short of opening your own defensive gaps and becoming a target yourself instead of attacking one. To break with this commandment entails following the movements of the opponents actions rather than perusing the primary centerline targets that are the head and neck. This is an easy sin to make when trying to learn chance action fighting; it takes a correct combination of actions and events to execute a chance technique properly and safely. Making a chance action into a primary technique will spell disaster against a seasoned opponent. It will provide a waiting bridge for the enemy to cross, or will open a gap in one's defenses that may be impossible to close once violated. Sigung Wong Shun Leung would say that training anything else other than how to attack and stop the enemy is training to be a target. Thus in our tradition chance actions serve to provide a deeper experience and a more developed background to a persons training, broadening their options and honing the primary attacking techniques. Fighting is gambling; Wing Chun teaches that training must be about putting the odds in your favor as much as

possible. Wing Chun accomplishes this goal in its training experience by being as direct in action, simple in solution and economical in movement as possible.