

Ip Man Wing Chun

The forms and principles –
the keys to an efficient Wing Chun

Volume 1: Siu Lim Tao – The “Little Idea”

Sifu Horst Drescher

Official textbook for Ip Man Wing Chun according
to the teaching standards of IMWCD



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Introduction

Ip Man Wing Chun is probably the fastest expanding Chinese Kung Fu style during the second half of the last century. To that point the Wing Chun style was mostly unknown in the world and was only taught in the Chinese town of Foshan (Fat Shan) in the south Chinese province of Guangdong. Master Ip Man was the first to publicly teach Wing Chun in Hong Kong in the fifties.

The global expansion of Wing Chun began with Bruce Lee's movies; he was the first Chinese to be given a main role in a Hollywood movie. With his own, "non-classical", martial arts style, "Jet Kune Do", he had a huge influence on the development of martial arts. However, the foundation of Jet Kune Do is Wing Chun which he learned from Ip Man during his youth. The popularity of Wing Chun increased drastically with Bruce Lee's fame.

Ip Man (1893–1972) developed a Wing Chun style based on six relatively small movement forms. This Wing Chun system is the most widespread Wing Chun system today. There are other Wing Chun styles practiced in southern China, Vietnam or Taiwan. However, with a few exceptions these systems are either little known in Europe, or not known at all.

Ip Man himself learned Wing Chun from two different masters and did not start teaching until the age of 42.

Master Ip Man has only left the first three forms of his Wing Chun as video sequences to the world. Other than that, not much is known about his Wing Chun, which he taught in a long career as a teacher during the fifties and sixties.

Unfortunately, it is not known how the Wing Chun Ip Man learned from his masters looked like. It also not known why he changed his

Wing Chun the way we know it today. And a lot of the things he taught were vocally passed on; Ip Man himself did not leave a written guide.

So “Ip Man Wing Chun” is a relatively young Kung Fu style, and its roots remain hidden in the past.

However, it is known Master Ip Man got a “western” education at a College in Hong Kong and later on tried explain his martial art rationally and logically. He crossed out old Chinese theories and terms like “Ying and Yang” and the “five elements” from his Wing Chun method to make it simpler and easier to understand.

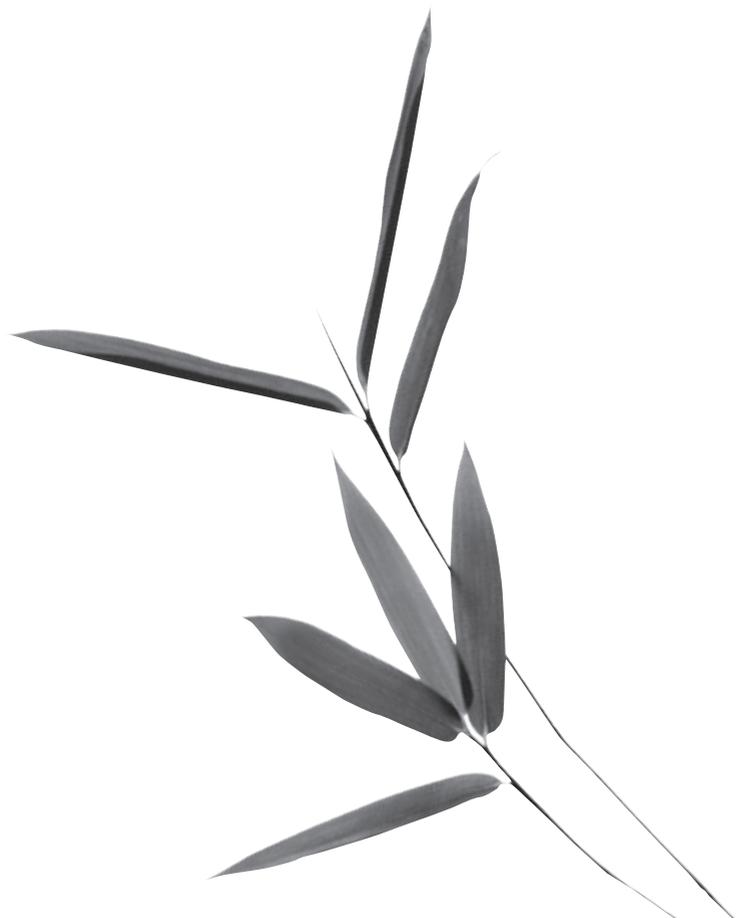
From the intention of explaining eastern Kung Fu in a western way this series resulted.

After Ip Man’s death Wing Chun has experienced many changes by his students and their students. Each of them tried on their own way to interpret Wing Chun newly, and to change and develop it. Last of which was probably mainly due to the fact that Master Ip Man did not preserve anything of his Wing Chun and especially its principles in a written way.

I believe that in the six forms as a foundation of Wing Chun the most important concepts and principles, which make Wing Chun an efficient and practical self defense, are already contained. Therefore I assume the order in which the forms are learned is not random, and that there is a logical connection in the system making Wing Chun a unique martial art.

The teaching of the principles has not yet been displayed in detail. But it is about time to explain the concepts detailed so Wing Chun can keep its promises: being an efficient and rational martial art.

The unawareness of the principles contained in the forms is the reason for many changes of Ip Man’s original Wing Chun style made over the last four decades. The executions of the movements as well as the in-



Chapter 1

The construction of the Wing Chun system

Overview of the forms

Ip Man Wing Chun is based on six movement forms which contain the techniques as well as the theoretical principles required for an efficient behavior in a self defense situation.

Partially, these forms are meditative movement sequences developing the concentration ability, the consciousness for the anatomically correct positions, the correct use of force, the balance and the correct coordination of various muscle groups.

The six forms in Wing Chun are so-called “keys” to understanding the body’s biomechanics in a self defense situation. For that reason every form is based on the prior one. Every new form deepens and completes the student’s knowledge of the techniques and applications step-by-step.

Seen that way the movement forms are the curriculum of Wing Chun Kung Fu.

The six forms of Ip Man Wing Chun will briefly be explained on the following pages.



1. Siu Lim Tao



The Siu Lim Tao in Wing Chun consists of three parts.

The first thing this form teaches is the correct stand and thereby is a correction of wrong body structure because it improves the balance of the muscles. In this form a very specific tension of the muscles is trained which makes a very stable stand possible. Moreover, the spine is brought into a straight stretch so the body is able to redirect incoming energy of an attack from the arms via the upper body into the stand.

The first part serves the buildup of force. The method of the form teaches the student the development and application of the so-called “inner force” (Gung Lik) which later on plays a part in the application of the techniques.

The intentional slowness of the movement in the first part of the form – while arms and upper body remain constantly tensed – is a crucial part of the Siu Lim Tao and the condition for the use of energy in Wing Chun. This is one of the most important aspects of Wing Chun without which the Wing Chun system is incomplete.

The “inner force” (Gung Lik) is the condition for the dynamic application of every single Wing Chun technique, be it attack or defense. The second part of the form serves the learning of the correct coordina-

tion of tension and relaxation of the arms. The correct use of force always refers to the moment of contact to the opponent. That means, the second part of the form trains the ability to execute a movement as relaxed as possible and to focus the tension on the last few centimeters of a move. The ability to focus the tension on the last moment of a move is called “Ging” in Wing Chun. In Tai Chi this principle is called “Fa Jing” and is taught very late. But because Wing Chun was developed to be quickly applicable this principle is already contained in the first basic and is the condition for everything else. The knowledge of Ging is essential for the so-called “One-Inch-Punch” made famous by Bruce Lee.

The third part of the form teaches the eight different angles from which an attack may occur and the shortest paths from one angle to another. Without understanding the eight angles in Wing Chun, one does not have a connection with the “Eight paths of the knives” learned last in Wing Chun.

According to the most popular order of the Siu Lim Tao (Siu Nim Tao) – form one combines the sentences 1 – 3 to the first part, part 2 is the whole 4th sentence, and part 3 contains sentences 5 – 8.

2. Chum Kiu



The second form Chum Kiu is the sequel to the first one.

In this form, the footwork is integrated into the techniques of Wing Chun.

Turns, forward and sideward steps that make the hand techniques of the first form applicable, follow. The second form also teaches the principle of simultaneousness which is of great importance to the efficiency of Wing Chun. The body structure the student learned from the stand in the first form is transferred into the footwork and the various applications.

The Chum Kiu itself is divided into 3 parts which are counted differently than in the more known counting way of 4 parts of the form.

The first part of the Chum Kiu focuses on turning the body (Yu Ma), which is regularly repeated. The first part of the Chum Kiu also contains the principle of the “searching arms” and the three principles of fighting and their distances, which gave the form its name.

Without this concept Wing Chun cannot be used as a successful self defense. Without the knowledge of how to get to the correct distance from an attacker, speed, force, chain punches, “universal solutions”, which are often taught in Wing Chun, are all useless. “Blitzdefence” and “proactive actions” also are in this category...

The second part of the Chum Kiu contains the part of the footwork, which is primarily used during making contact with an attack, using an angle away from the opponent (Sip Ma).

The third part of the Chum Kiu contains the part of the footwork, which is used to close in on the opponent after successfully making contact, to decrease the distance and end a fight (Biu Ma).

All three components combined are the so-called circle step (Huen Ma) which has to be known to understand the following form, the Muk Yan Chong (wooden dummy form).

The Chum Kiu is the sequel of the Siu Lim Tao, which explains the eight angles, because it explains the three distances which have to be gone through to successfully end a fight. This again cannot be executed if the force and its application from the Siu Lim Tao were not learned correctly. Chum Kiu is less of a form for application, but rather the concept for understanding the wooden dummy form in which the application of the Wing Chun techniques are contained.

3. Muk Yan Chong



The “wooden man” form, mostly just called wooden dummy form enlarges the arsenal of techniques a student knows by low kicks and further combinations of hand techniques. Training with the wooden dummy improves the basic techniques the student adapted before. The precisely defined position of the wooden arms on the stem forces the student into the correct angles of the arms during training. Through training with resistance the student improves the application of footwork and the control of force from the prior forms.

The wooden dummy is supporting prop. A beginner may use it as well as an intermediate that has just learned the complete wooden dummy form and its combinations. Therefore, there is no consensus between the Wing Chun schools as to where its position in the system is or its importance. In Ip Man’s Wing Chun system the “Chong” was taught after the Chum Kiu, sometimes parallel with the Biu Gee and sometimes after the Biu Gee. However, there are good reasons to teach the “Chong” before the Biu Gee!

4. Biu Gee



Biu Gee is the form Ip Man showed only few of his students. The order of the forms results from their function in the complete system. While the wooden dummy form teaches the footwork in Wing Chun the Biu Gee does have nearly no footwork at all. Kicks are used in a larger distance, and therefore before the Biu Gee comes into action.

The most important techniques of the Biu Gee – the stinging fingers and the elbow – are so-called “emergency techniques” that are put into action in a way shorter distance from the opponent.

The third weaponless form improves the student’s fighting skills because it enlarges the repertoire of techniques the student has got. This form’s techniques are called “emergency techniques” by which one can master situations in which an attacker attacks surprisingly and/or has already come very close to the defender. This includes attacks from the side, from behind, choking and clinging. The techniques are therefore applicable in a shorter distance, including stinging fingers and elbow techniques.

The Biu Gee teaches the student another very important principle for the application of each technique – the principle of dichotomy. In this level the understanding of dichotomy of movements is shown, and the effects of own techniques enhanced. The application of contrasting techniques is decisive for exploiting the attacker’s kinetic energy

and for the functioning of Wing Chun against physically superior attackers.

On old Wing Chun saying goes: “Biu Gee does not leave the house!” Because of its dangerous efficiency this form was only taught to a few students back in the days.

5. Luk Dim Boon Kwun



The long staff in Wing Chun is about 2.8 meters long and has, because of its length, only a few applicable techniques. The name “six-and-a-half-point-long-staff-form” is derived from the number of techniques the form describes. It is a short movement form, but it requires highly intense training.

The meaning of this form for weaponless self defense is primarily the improvement of the stand, the strengthening of supportive muscles and the ability to concentrate force on a tiny point.

6. Baat Cham Dao



The last form is the second weapon form of Wing Chun and, as the order indicates, is mastered last. It is possible this form was developed in older ages to improve the use of short swords in mortal combat on the battlefield.

The use of weapons in a very specific, weaponless self defense system like Wing Chun may have two explanations:

1. The short swords refine the techniques and improve the application of specific energy in Wing Chun.
2. The understanding of cutting weapons decreases the risks in an emergency situation against armed attackers. However, ranged weapons are not in this category because they pose an incomparably higher risk. It is important to remain cautious and realistic when estimating the effectiveness of own techniques.

Grandmaster Ip Man laid the heritage of Wing Chun into his son's hands and passed his double knives on to his younger son Ip Ching. This shows the passing on from one generation to another.

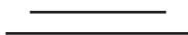
Chapter 4

The Siu Lim Tao – Stand

Yee Gee Kim Yeung Ma - The “double horse stand”

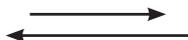
The first lesson in Wing Chun is assuming the stand, the so-called “Siu Lim Tao Ma” or “double horse stand”. The first form of Wing Chun, the Siu Lim Tao or the Little Idea is fully executed while remaining in the stand, and contains only the correct stand and the most important hand techniques of Wing Chun.

“Ma” is the Chinese word for “stand”. Therefore, the basic stand in this position is often referred to as “Siu Lim Tao Ma” – Siu Lim Tao stand. This stand, explained in the following chapter is for training the correct body structure and posture. It is not yet a fighting position as is often assumed. The triangular position of the feet on the ground form the Chinese sign for “two”, by drawing one line between the tips of the toes, and another one between the heels:



This means the basic position prepares the footwork the student has to learn in the following forms and in the basic school. The two indicates there are two stands in the basic position that are not yet explained. The right leg is for walking to the left, the left leg for walking to the right.

This is not too difficult, but it is not obvious, especially because it is not often explained. It will look like this:



Samuel Kwok says about the stand of the Siu Lim Tao¹¹:

The Siu Lim Tao is the structural foundation upon which all else will be built. Without a good foundation, all that follows will be inherently weak. Without a strong Siu Lim Tao, everything else learned will be a mere shadow of the real Wing Chun. Literally translated, Siu Lim Tao means “Little Idea”. This meaning is that all learning begins with a little idea of the subject matter.” (...)

The Siu Lim Tao begins with the proper setting up of the training stance, Siu Lim Tao Ma (Ma simply meaning stance in Chinese). Here the student learns to root their body weight in such a way to create a very stable base. Once the stance has been initially set up, there will be no further footwork or shifting. This form is done in a stationary position for two reasons:

Standing in the basic stance throughout the form will begin to train the legs to support us in our fighting stance, helping us to develop power for our techniques by building a strong base.

Secondly, the stationary nature of Siu Lim Tao lets the student focus on proper hand and arm position without the added complication of stance shifting, or stepping.”

¹¹ Kwok, Samuel and Massengill, Tony: Mastering Wing Chun, The keys to Ip Man's Wing Chun system, Los Angeles 2007, p.57f.

Yee Gee Kim Yeung Ma - Das Einnehmen des Standes



Before the form.

The stand before the beginning of the form is called “Wu Ji” in Tai Chi, the empty stand. The concentration should only be focused on the single movements of the form and not be distracted by other thoughts. That is why the first form of Wing Chun is called the “Little Idea”!

Firstly, the shoulder is pulled back a little, until the collarbones form a line.

The hands are pulled to the height of the solar plexus, fists closed. The lower arms are, in this position, parallel to each other and the ground. The line between the lower arms is exactly at the middle of the upper body. The elbows are pulled towards each other a little, so the lower arms do not make contact with the upper body in this position. The resulting body tension should be maintained during the whole form.



The knees are bent until the knee-cap and the large toe form a vertical line.

The feet are rotated outwards on the heels.

The heels are rotated outwards, by a switch of weight onto the balls of the feet. Thereby the upper body comes a little to the front and the body weight during this rotation is on the frontal ball of the foot.