

## **About Leg Techniques of Wing Chun**

Leg techniques which is also known as kicking attacks or kicking techniques, is our Chinese martial arts' expression of the skills of the lower limbs in the art of self defense. In my early days of learning under my teacher, the late Grandmaster Yip Man, he repeatedly mentioned that since I am short in stature and size, I should emphasize the training of the lower body (the training of the lower body covers the stances, waist usage, footwork and kicking techniques). There is a saying that is 'in order to succeed, you have to be diligent enough and also able to endure hardship'.

The late Grandmaster Yip Man's specialty skill in Wing Chun is that of kicking techniques. This was Grandmaster Yip's most commonly used skill in overcoming an opponent. During the time when Grandmaster Yip was the group leader of a secret investigation team in Foshan, he already had the reputation of being able to break three wooden poles with one kick.

In another incident which occurred after Grandmaster Yip had migrated to Hong Kong in 1949, there was this incident whereby a strong young ruffian was kicked out with a single leg technique. This incident happened when Hong Kong was still an undeveloped city. Grandmaster Yip was staying in an area with extremely poor living conditions. The living conditions were so terrible that there was no pipe-in water and families had to retrieve water from a public tap by the roadside. There was an incident once whereby Grandmaster Yip was standing in the queue waiting for his turn to fill his bucket with water. Suddenly there was this young muscular chap who thinking that he would use his brawn to get his way decided to cut queue. Seeing this ruffian take undue advantage of the situation Grandmaster Yip went up to him to have a word with him on his unreasonable behavior since everyone else was queuing for their turn. However the young ruffian not only did not want to listen he decided to teach Grandmaster Yip a lesson. In that split second before the ruffian's blow could land, Grandmaster Yip had already used his Piercing Bridge hand technique to intercept the blow and simultaneously used a front kick to drop the ruffian. This incident illustrates the depth of Grandmaster Yip Man's skill in the Wing Chun leg techniques.

Although I did not personally witnessed the above incident and only got to know it through words of mouth, during the course of Grandmaster Yip's teaching, there was once where he demonstrated this technique to me and it left a vivid impression because of its realistic simulation. Especially memorable is Grandmaster Yip's demonstration of Kwan Sao with a kick. Quickly as a bolt of lighting Grandmaster Yip was able to simultaneously strike with his kick and neutralize with his hands without having to extricate his kicking leg first in preparation or moving his body. Grandmaster Yip's fierce kick came through so quickly to my stomach that I was not able to stop it yet Grandmaster's control was so good that he only touch me gently without injuring me. Grandmaster Yip's precise and nimble control of his kicking power enabled him to demonstrate to me this aspect of the Wing Chun skills.

Another time Grandmaster Yip was demonstrating how to use one's leg as though it was a hand. He instructed me to extend the Tan Sao posture and then Grandmaster Yip used the Fook Gerk to place on my Tan Sao. Thereafter Grandmaster Yip with a downward retracting motion was able to pull me off-balance and caused me to bend my knees and fell to the ground. This was my personal experience of Grandmaster Yip's maxim of using the leg as if using a hand.

Grandmaster Yip's total confidence in the use of Wing Chun's leg techniques can be seen in another incident. During the early days when Wing Chun was gaining a foothold in Hong Kong, it was common for other martial arts styles to come to try out the new kid on the block by holding a competition whether by invitation or direct challenge. During this time, another Chinese style wanted to test out our Wing Chun school and a competition was organized accordingly. However Grandmaster Yip would only agree to the competition readily on condition that kicking techniques could also be used. Unfortunately the competition was called off in the end for some unknown reason. Notwithstanding the cancellation of the competition, this reflected Grandmaster Yip's confidence in Wing Chun kicking techniques.

It is only half a century later, when I got to know that fellow Wing Chun practitioners have the intention of publishing a special issue of "Ip Man's Wing Chun – 50th Anniversary Memorial Journal" that I take this opportunity to briefly touch on the topic of Wing Chun's leg techniques.

### **"Southern Fists, Northern Kicks" ?**

There is a saying in Chinese martial arts that goes "Southern Fists, Northern Kicks". This means that southern Chinese martial arts are famed for the use of the hands whereas northern Chinese martial arts are well versed in the use of the legs. Wing Chun is a southern Chinese martial arts that is well known for skillful use of the hands which alone is sufficient to overcome an opponent. From this a misunderstanding has risen that Wing Chun is lacking in kicking skills and its kicks are lacking as compared to the more well known northern Chinese styles which specializes in this area. Actually in the attack and defense skills of Wing Chun there is a special aspect and that is the kicking techniques which is used in combination with the principles of centerline and concurrent striking and defense.

Leg techniques are such a good winning edge that a boxing maxim says that the hands are like two swinging doors to open up the opponent to be destroyed with the devastating kicks. Furthermore there is a proverb that says the fists strikes 30% of the time whereas the kicks are used during the remaining 70%. The role and purpose of Wing Chun leg techniques can be classified into 3 parts :

(a) Making the weak to overcome the strong. The legs are naturally longer and also stronger than the hands. This gives an advantage to the user of kicks in overcoming an opponent. The use of kicks is especially suited for those of small stature and consequently have problem overcoming a much bigger and taller person. Wing Chun as an internal martial art uses kicks that are economical and do not go above the height of the waist. Thus, to launch kicks by shifting, jumping and leaping are not the kicking techniques of Wing Chun.

(b) Giving the opponent an unexpected attack. The Wing Chun practitioner can use his leg techniques within the distance of a single arm bridge to coordinate with the use of the two hands to strike. This requires the use of the hands to distract the opponent while adjusting the lower limbs to strike without alerting the opponent. This is in line with the famous Chinese 36 Strategies of "feint to the east, attack to the west" to steal the thunder on the opponent.

(c) Using the leg to neutralize the opponent's leg. The Wing Chun practitioner who is using the leg techniques for attack and defense must take note that the upper and middle body zone is the province of the hands with the legs used in the lower body zone to counterattack. When using the legs one must use the legs to neutralize and concurrently in combination with the

hands counterattack the opponent's leg attacks to the lower body zone with one's own kicks. Only then can one fulfil the requirement of the Wing Chun maxim "when you want to strike to the top (of the body zone), I strike to the bottom; when you strike to the bottom, I will strike to the top".

### **Shadow-less Kicking Method**

Wing Chun's kicking attack is not only swift and speedy like lightning but precise and unpredictable. Wing Chun's shadow-less kick is so called because it is sudden and quick as a flash of lightning; so quick that the opponent does not even have the opportunity to react to the kick. This is how the name "Mo Ying Gerk" (in Cantonese, Shadow-less Kick) came about.

The ability to execute a Wing Chun shadow-less kick is dependent on the following primary requirements :

(a)The attacking motion must be minimal and tight to be sudden and non-telegraphic, yet the reach must be wide and far to retain the power of the movement.

(b)Secondly the movements must be linked by maintaining the flexibility of the posture, stances and footwork. This can only be achieved if one is soft and relaxed.

To achieve minimal attacking motion, the following principles must be observed.

#### **1.No Move of Upper Body and Drawing Back of Leg**

When one is using leg techniques the upper body must not move and the kicking leg must be able to kick out straightaway without the need to draw back first. It is common to see martial arts practitioners tilt the body when kicking. Wing Chun's requirement is that the upper body must remain motionless.

#### **2.Simultaneous usage of arms and legs**

Wing Chun's leg techniques maintains that "without hands, there are no legs". This means that if one were to unleash a kick there should be an accompanying appropriate hand technique. One should never hastily use the kicks on their own. With the accompanying use of the hands one can "feint to the east, attack to the west" to simultaneously attack and defense. Only then can one achieve victory.

#### **3.Leg should not exceed waist height**

The kicking leg should never exceed the waist height in order to maintain a tight and close attack and keep the body balanced when attacking with a kick. The correct place to attack with the legs will be discussed below.

#### **4.Using the leg like a hand**

Grandmaster Yip would constantly remind us during training sessions that we should use our legs as if we were using our hands. The requirement for using the hands in Wing Chun is that they must be acutely sensitive and agile, able to react at the correct moment, guarding the centerline closely, maintaining a state of natural relaxation, and sink and drop the shoulders.

The elbows and shoulder are likened the knees and the kua respectively. These are the requirements for using the leg techniques in Wing Chun.

### **Wing Chun's Kicking Techniques**

The fundamental principle in using power in Wing Chun is to relax. One's leg power must be natural. Before executing a kick the Wing Chun practitioner must first relax the waist and kua, sink the breath to the Dan Tian. Only then will the power reside in the waist and then extend to the knees before reaching the lower thigh and finally reaching the heel. When a kick reaches the target or is being intercepted by the opponent one should be immediately retract back the leg.

Wing Chun's kicking method is to let the heel do the leading but within this there can be found hooking, stamping, sweeping and flicking. These are the expressions of kicking that can be found in the Wing Chun Wooden Dummy to deal with different situations. The following are the kicks found in the Wooden Dummy :

1. Kwan Sao –Side Kick (Caption 5)
2. Tan Da – Slanting Kick to the Knee
3. Tan Da – Front Kick
4. Chuen Kiu – Front Kick
5. Kwan Sao – Trampling Kick
6. Pak Sao – Detaining Kick
7. Kwan Sao – Low Side Kick
8. Pak Sao –Slanting Kick to the Knee
9. Gaun Sao – Sweeping Kick (Caption 6)
10. Jut Sao – Front Kick (Caption 7)
11. Tan Da – Low Front Kick
12. Pak/Tan - Slanting Kick (Caption 8)
13. Lap Da – Slanting Kick (Caption 9)

The main focus of the attacking leg is the body's middle and lower zone. The middle zone includes Dan Tian, tail bone, groin, floating ribs and solar plexus. The bottom zone includes upper inner thighs, knees, ankles, instep, calves and shins. Appended below is classification table for Wing Chun leg techniques.

| <b>Kicking Technique</b>   | <b>Kicking Method</b>  | <b>Kicking Target</b>                 |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| Stomp – using the heel to thrust   | Kwan Sao – Side Kick<br>Kwan Sao – Low Side Kick                         | Dan Tian, ribs, groin, knees          |
|  | Tan Da – Slanting Kick<br>Pak Sao – Slanting Kick to Knee                | Knees                                 |
|  | Tan Da – Front Kick<br>Pak/Tan – Slanting Kick                           | Solar plexus, Dan Tian, groin         |
|  | Chuen Kiu – Front Kick<br>Jut Sao – Front Kick<br>Lap Da – Slanting Kick | Dan Tian, groin, solar plexus         |
|  | Tan Da – Low Front Kick  | Knees, calves                         |
| Hook – using the foot to unbalance and cause the opponent to fall                          | Pak Da – Detaining Kick  | Ankle                                 |
| Trample – using the entire foot or the bottom of the foot to forcefully stomp the opponent | Kwan Sao – Trampling Kick  | Shins, lower thigh, upper inner thigh |
| Sweep – using the shin to kick the opponent’s lower body                                   | Gaun Sao – Sweeping Kick   | Calves, ankle                         |
| Hook – using the sole or tip to kick the opponent’s groin or tailbone                      | Tan Da – Front Kick<br>Pak/Tan - Slanting Kick                           | Groin, tailbone                       |

The use of leg to neutralize a kick involves Bong Gerk, Fook Gerk and Jing Gerk.

### **Essentials of Leg Training**

When using legs on the opponent, it is very important to be fast and agile. It is because there is a delay between the time the kicking foot is lifted off the ground to kick and placing it back on to the ground again. And this momentary delay also affects the body’s ability to move fast. If this is the case, leg attacks not only cannot hurt the opponents but also give the opponent a chance to counter-attack. Before trying to attempting to use kicking, one should train the legs first. Before training the leg, one should train footwork first. The training of footwork is beyond the scope of this article. If there is an opportunity, I will touch the topic on footwork in another article. One should strive to achieve kicks which are flexible and supple.

It is because when one is slow in using kicks to attack than it will be difficult to overcome the opponent. It is only when one has attained the stage of supple and flexibility should one try to achieve a high degree of accuracy. Only when one has trained the footwork to be stable, able

to control the facing direction and distribution of weight placement between the legs smoothly, is one able to kick swiftly. Otherwise one will be slow and clumsy.

The Chum Kiu form is used to train the placement of the body weight of the Side Stance (Pien Sun Ma) and Frontal Stance (Ching Sun Ma) to be entirely on the rear leg. The front leg should just lightly contact the ground. This trains the stance and footwork to be stable, which is the fundamental requirement when learning to kick.

Wing Chun's leg techniques has no somersault, leaping or jumping kicks. Kicks are aimed only at the middle or lower body zone. When training Wing Chun kicks there is no need to follow the methods of northern style kicks; it is sufficient to adhere to Wing Chun's methods which are :

1. Solo leg kicking method
2. Sticking leg (Chi Gerk)
3. Kicking Dummy

#### 1.Solo leg kicking method

All Wing Chun practitioners who first take up kicking must learn to kick smoothly. This requires numerous repetitions. Without this hard work, the Wing Chun practitioner will not be able to generate power. Different styles have different kicking practices. The following are Wing Chun's solo kicking practice methods :

- a) Using the right leg as your center of gravity, stand upright and have the right hand extended in the Biu Jee Sao posture.
- b) Then have the left leg face forward and execute a front kick. Kick to the extreme extension of the kicking leg to generate power so that upon conclusion of the kick, the kicking leg will automatically retract back to the original position. Thereafter the retracting leg traces a small circle before executing another front kick.
- c) Repeat number (b), there are no limit to the number of times one can do this.
- d) Continue to keep the left leg up in the air without touching the ground, turn the body and change into Kwan Sao with Wang Gerk.
- e) The right leg continues to stand in an upright posture while supporting the entire body's weight. Then using the whole body as an axle, kick out the right leg once after each turn of the body. Again there are no limits to how many times one can turn in training.
- f) Reverse number (a) and (e) for the left and right leg.

Note that while practicing kicking, the upper body has to remain still.

#### 2.Sticking Leg (Chi Gerk)

Sticking leg is the second level skill of training in Wing Chun's leg techniques. There are 3 reasons for training the sticking leg. One of them is to cultivate the supporting leg balance. The second reason is to train the waist, kua and knee to become supple and smooth. Lastly, the reason for training sticking leg is to train the sensitivity of both legs and achieve the stage of using hands and legs interchangeably.

#### 3. Kicking Dummy

Kicking dummy is a summary of the previously listed kicking techniques in this article consolidated to form a separate dummy form from the normal 8-section Wooden Dummy

form. This separate section of kicking dummy was created solely to train the kicks. The main motive is to train waist, stance, stepping, hand strike and kicking to move as one.

The use of kicking techniques has to be realized in sticking hand but because leg techniques is not easy to control its power, the potential for injuring the partner is there. In the beginning of my teaching, I was hesitant to include leg technique within the training of sticking hands. It was later through Grandmaster's encouragement that assured me of the value of leg techniques in practical usage. The assurance from Grandmaster Yip changed my way of teaching my students.

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