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AN UNEXPECTED COMPONENT OF WING CHUN

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MARC DEBUS' TRAINING WITH YIP MAN'S NEPHEW

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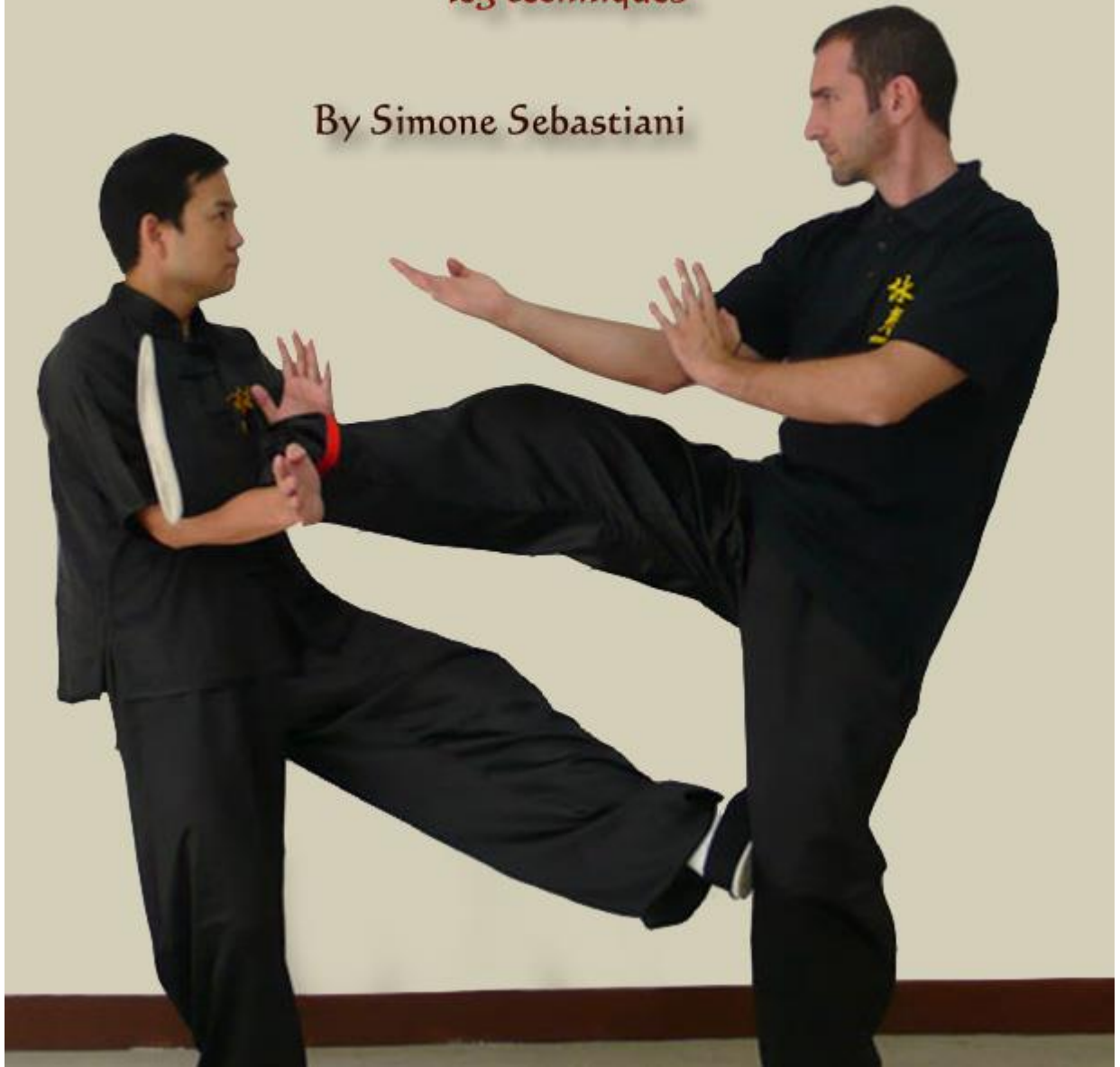
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More Than Just Hands

The often overlooked
importance
of Wing Chun's
leg techniques

By Simone Sebastiani





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There is a saying in Chinese Kung Fu that goes "Nan Chuan Bei Tui". It roughly translates to "Southern arts punch, northern arts kick". Wing Chun is a southern style Chinese martial art well known for its skilful use of the hands (from here the famous Chinese saying "Fai Sau Wing Chun" that means "Wing Chun quick hands") but, at the same time, there is another important aspect that is the expression of the lower part of the body: the leg techniques. At the first glance many people think that in Wing Chun there are no kicks and the leg techniques are very simple; this misunderstanding has arisen because in the northern Kung Fu styles kicks are very spectaculars with jumping and leaping whereas in Wing Chun the few kicks are not over the waist level. In fact, like any other Wing Chun techniques, kicks are not beautiful or spectacular, they are focused only in the effectiveness; kicking attacks in Wing Chun are very simple and direct. Wing Chun leg techniques are employed in combination with the hands and are used to take the better position to strike the opponent.

Actually with the name "leg techniques," we not only mean kicking attacks but also the footwork and stance; we have to keep in mind that in Wing Chun the leg techniques, like many others, are

"like any other Wing Chun movement, kicks are not beautiful or spectacular, they are focused only in effectiveness"

a concept. This point is largely studied in the lineage of Grandmaster Chow Tze Chuen, one of Yip Man's first generation students. He believes that kicks and footwork are of vital importance in a real





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"we have to use the legs like the hands, according to Wing Chun principles of centerline, relaxation, speed and simultaneous attack and defense."

fight situation where the legs can make the difference. For him we have to use the legs like the hands, according to Wing Chun principles of centerline, relaxation, speed and simultaneous attack and defense.

Kicks will be used in combination with the hands to distract the opponent and make a sudden attack. A Wing Chun "boxing song" says that the hands are like two swinging doors to open up the opponent to be destroyed with a devastating kick.

Moreover the use of kicking techniques are very useful for those people of small stature that can be reach the target in a safety way, don't forget the legs are longer and stronger than the hands. The kicking attacks are also an unexpected attack, because the Wing Chun practitioner can use his leg within the distance of a single arm and coordinate it with the two hands to strike.

So, according to the "theory of the four doors", Wing Chun practitioners can use the legs to neutralize the opponent's kicks and use the hands to find the way to penetrate into on-guard position of the opponent.

The theory of the four doors says that the upper and middle part of the body is the province of the hands (so, it's better to block the strike in these part with the hands) and the lower part of



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Chow Tze Cheun

the body is the province of the hands (so, it's better to block the strike in these part with the hands) and the lower part of the body is the province of the legs (it's better to block a kick with the legs).

The other aspects of the leg techniques are the footwork and the proper use of the stance; this two key point are very important and correlated by themselves. The stance and footwork are trained mainly in the second empty hand form of Wing Chun (Chum Kiu) where we learn the proper use of the waist and the placement of the body weight on the rear leg. A correct stance allows the Wing Chun practitioner to absorb the opponent's strength and repositioning his body structure; the footwork will be necessary when the stance is insufficient to neutralize the opponent's attack.

So, the use of footwork enables the practitioner to remove the body from the path of the force and repositioning his body to a more strategic position for counterattacking.

A Wing Chun maxim goes "Ying Siu Bo Fa, Ying Fu Sung Yung" that means: "Structure (stance) neutralize, footwork dissolved and the opponent can be handled with less effort spent". So, in my humble opinion, we have to focus our Wing Chun training not only in static Chi Sao practice (that remains the core of Wing Chun system) but also in the leg techniques (kicks, footwork and stance). I think that in a self-defense situation the "shadow-less" kicks of Wing Chun are useful and powerful. Moreover the footwork can help us in the practise of Chi Sao where small and rapid step forward or backward can ensure the better Chi Sao practise. I'm sure everyone knows the great reputation of the devastating kicks of the late Grandmaster Yip Man. While Yip Man was group leader of a secret investigation team in Foshan, Chow Tze Chuen told of how Yip Man had the reputation of being able to break three wooden poles with one kick! Chow Tze Chuen had the same stature and size of the late Yip Man. So when Yip Man had to demonstrate kicks he chose Chow Tze Chuen. Yip Man also he taught to him a kicking dummy form, that is a special section of kicking techniques from the normal 8-section wooden dummy form. For these reasons, Master Chow Tze Chuen is known as "Gerk Wong" or "King of Kicks".

In June I travelled to Hong Kong for a training session with SiFu Donald Mak, a direct student of Chow Tze Cheun. SiFu Donald Mak, is a very great representative of the Wing Chun leg



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techniques from the Chow Tze Chuen lineage. It's been very hot in Hong Kong and the lessons was very hard but, at the same time very interesting.

My SiFu (Master Donald Mak) showed me the triangle footwork trained in the Wooden Dummy form and Biu Jee form and the triangle pattern from Chum Kiu (teaching directly from Grandmaster Yip Man to Master Chow Tze Chuen). These footwork movements teach you how to move and how to apply a technique at the same time... while preserving your centreline and take the better striking position. There are no secrets in Wing Chun footwork, you have only to study properly the Chum Kiu and the Biu Jee forms, but also the wooden dummy (kicks and footwork) and spent a lot of time in training footwork correctly. The unique secret is always the same: Practice!



About the author:

Simone Sebastiani lives and teaches in Italy. He has been training in the Chinese Martial Arts since 1984. He studied Gulao and Pien San Wing Chun with Sifu Austin Goh; then his constant research in the Wing Chun world lead him to go deep into the origin of the system (Yip Man lineage) thanks to Sifu Donald Mak and his Grandmaster Chow Tze Chuen. He is the chief instructor and founder of "San Bao" Wing Chun Kung Fu Association.

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Note: Sifu Donald Mak will be in Italy in October 2007 to hold a seminar on footwork and kicking techniques applied to Chi Sao according to the teaching of Grandmaster Chow Tze Chuen.

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