

Specialty of Wing Chun Kung Fu

The core principles of Wing Chun include (1) Practicality, (2) Efficiency and (3) Economy of Movement. Practitioners are sometimes encouraged to sense the energy behind their movements. The core philosophy becomes a useful guide to practitioners when modifying or refining the art.

Practicality

Wing Chun techniques emphasize practicality and efficiency to maintain its ideals on effectiveness. Strikes are intended to injure or disrupt the target. Efficiency in Wing Chun is based on the concept that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Likewise its primary targets all lie along the "centerline" of one's opponent.

Efficiency

Wing Chun believes in using the least amount of required force in any fighting situation. It believes properly timed positioning and movements can and should be used to defeat an opponent. This is achieved through balance, body structure and relaxation. The Chinese saying "4 taels to move 1000 catties" (referring to an old Chinese measurement system) is appropriate here in describing how a small amount of force, correctly applied, can deflect a powerful attack.

Wing Chun uses deflection and counter-attack in the same motion or will intercept the opponent to nullify an attack, rather than blocking then attacking in two separate motions. Further on interception, the punch can act as a block as a consequence of the structure and the position of the arm traveling along its triangular "power-line" pathway to the opponent's "Core". This means that the opponent's attack is automatically deflected by the arm-structure of the Wing Chun practitioner as the counter-punch is delivered. The "structure" permitting this deflection to occur is controlled through the correct focus of energy from the "core" to the "elbow". If the structure is not in place, the counter-attack/interception is likely to break down losing the "forwarding" power which may result in the deflection failing and allowing the attacking punch to make its target.

In addition to efficiency being understood as the "shortest distance to the opponent's core" (which relates specifically to the speed of attack/counter-attack), it is also important to understand the importance of energy efficiency within Wing Chun. A person using Wing Chun is said to be able to defeat a stronger person because they are able to use their structure effectively. Given this, it is essential in ensuring that the Wing Chun practitioner has a full understanding of structure which enables them to use the correct use of energy required - deviation from the structure results in having to use the muscles more and the practitioner's Wing Chun will not as effectively counter the strength of a stronger opponent. The structure deflects the energy in the enemy's attacks and opens for counter attacks, if used properly it will also weaken the opponent's blocks resulting in strikes that hit.

Economy of Movement

Most Wing Chun attacks take the straightest possible path to the target (usually a straight line) to break the opponent's structure. Wing Chun theory focuses on the opponent's centerline, an imaginary vertical line bisecting the opponent's vitals (throat, heart, stomach, groin). The Wing Chun punch, for example, is delivered centrally from the practitioner's chest rather than diagonally from the shoulders in the first two forms. This helps teach the centerline concept. In the later forms, the punch is delivered diagonally from the shoulder to the centerline. This is because the distance is shorter than bringing the hand from the shoulder, to the center of the chest, and then down the centerline at the opponent.

In addition to the core principles, there are also several commonly observed guidelines during the practice of Wing Chun Kung Fu:

Balance, structure and stance

Wing Chun practitioners believe that the person with better body structure will win. A correct Wing Chun stance is like a piece of bamboo, firm but flexible, rooted but yielding. This structure is used to either deflect external forces or redirect them into the ground.

Balance is related to structure because a well-balanced body recovers quicker from stalled attacks and structure is maintained. Wing Chun favors a high, narrow stance with the elbows kept close to the body. Within the stance, arms are positioned across the vitals of the centerline. Shifting or turning within a stance is carried out on the heels, balls, or middle (K1 or Kidney 1 point) of the foot depending on lineage. All attacks and counter-attacks are initiated from this firm, stable base. Wing Chun rarely compromises structure for more powerful attacks because this is believed to create defensive openings which may be exploited.

Structure is viewed as important, not only for reasons of defense, but also for attack. When the practitioner is effectively 'rooted', or aligned so as to be braced against the ground, the force of the hit is believed to be far more devastating. Additionally, the practice of 'settling' one's opponent to brace them more effectively against the ground aids in delivering as much force as possible to them.

Relaxation

Softness (via relaxation) and performing techniques in a relaxed manner, is fundamental to Wing Chun.

1. Tension reduces punching speed and power. Muscles act in pairs in opposition to each other (e.g. biceps and triceps). If the arm is tensed, maximum punching speed cannot be achieved as the biceps will be opposing the extension of the arm. In Wing Chun, the arm should be relaxed before beginning the punching motion.
2. Unnecessary muscle tension wastes energy and causes fatigue.
3. Tense, stiff arms are less fluid and sensitive during trapping and chi sao.
4. A tense, stiff limb provides an easy handle for an opponent to push or pull with, whereas a relaxed limb provides an opponent less to work with.

5. A relaxed, but focused limb, affords the ability to feel "holes" or weaknesses in the opponents structure (See Sensitivity section). With the correct forwarding these "holes" grant a path into attacking the opponent.
6. Muscular struggle reduces a fight to who is stronger. Minimum brute strength in all movement becomes an equalizer in uneven strength confrontations. This is very much in the spirit of the tale of Ng Mui.

Centerline

While the existence of a "central axis" concept is unified in Wing Chun, the interpretation of the centerline concept itself is not. Many variations exist, with some lineages defining anywhere from a single "centerline" to multiple lines of interaction and definition. The most commonly seen interpretation emphasizes attack and defense along an imaginary horizontal line drawn from the center of the practitioner's chest to the center of the enemy's chest. The human body's prime striking targets are considered to be on or near this line, including eyes, nose, throat, solar plexus and groin. Wing Chun techniques are generally "closed", with the limbs drawn in to protect the central area and also to maintain balance. In most circumstances, the hands do not move beyond the vertical circle that is described by swinging the arms in front, with the hands crossed at the wrists. To reach outside this area, footwork is used. A large emphasis and time investment in training Chi Sao exercise emphasizes positioning to dominate this centerline. The stance and guard all point at or through the center to concentrate physical and mental intent of the entire body to the one target.

Wing Chun practitioners attack within this central area to transmit force more effectively, since it targets the "core center" (or "mother line", another center defined in some lineages and referring to the vertical axis of the human body where the center of gravity lies). For example, striking an opponent's shoulder will twist the body, dispelling some of the force and weakening the strike. Striking closer to the center transmits more force directly into the body.

Punches

Because of the emphasis on the center line, the vertical fist straight punch is the most common strike in Wing Chun. However, the principle of simultaneous attack and defence suggests that all movements in the Siu Nim Tau with a forward execution flow into a strike if no effective resistance is met, without need for recompose. Other explicit examples of punches can be found in the Chum Kiu and Bil Jee forms, although these punches may appear to be superficially different they are simply the result of the punch beginning from a different origin position while following the same fundamental idea, to punch in a straight line following the shortest distance between the fist and the opponent.

The vertical punch is the most basic and fundamental in Wing Chun and is usually thrown with the elbow down and in front of the body. Depending on the lineage, the fist is held anywhere from vertical to horizontal (palm side up). The contact points also vary from the top two knuckles, to the middle two knuckles, to the bottom three knuckles.