

# WING CHUN

## UNCHAINED, NOT UNCHANGED

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THE LEGENDARY WONG SHUN LEUNG WAS QUOTED AS SAYING, "YOU MUST BE THE MASTER OF WING CHUN—NOT ITS SLAVE!" IN TODAY'S WING CHUN LANDSCAPE, WE SEE MANY INSTRUCTORS AND STUDENTS WHO ARE CHAINED BY WING CHUN, INSTEAD OF EXERCISING THE FREEDOM OF BEING ABLE TO MOLD AND SHAPE IT INTO THE MOST USEFUL METHOD IT COULD BE.

There are some who are looking at the many possibilities of what *Wing Chun* can be, if looked at with imagination and thinking outside the box, but they are, unfortunately, few and far between.

I always tell my students not to limit themselves or the system. I tell them, "A technique is a structural foundation of an application limited only by your imagination." We live in a world where people are looking for THE answer. We want to see the world in terms of black and white and avoid grey areas, but in the environment of a dynamic fighting situation, everything is grey.

In looking at the individual techniques, such as *Taan Sau*, *Bong Sau*, *Fak Sau*, etc. We shouldn't ask, "What is this?", but rather, "What all can it be?" In many other Chinese martial art methods, a single technique can have a defensive application, a striking application, and a *Chin Na* (grappling) application. They are looking at "What all can it be?" and are not limited to a single "What is it?" answer.

Too often, we hear statements, such as "There is no ducking in *Wing Chun*", "There is no spinning strikes in *Wing Chun*", "There is no back kick in *Wing Chun*", etc. These are statements from people who are crammed into the prison of *Wing Chun*, not of people exercising the freedom of becoming the master of the system, instead of its slave.

*Sifu* David Peterson tells a story of his teacher, Wong Shun Leung, being criticised by some of his classmates, because he won a fight with a knee strike when his opponent ducked down in the fight, so he was vulnerable to the knee, and this was the closest and most direct weapon to use; the closest weapon to nearest target—direct, efficient and economical. How is that NOT *Wing Chun*?

When one looks at how most *Wing Chun* practitioners apply the system, it would appear that the only hand strike found in the system is the Chain Punch. If we speak of "Jab, Cross, Hook and Uppercut", we are speaking of *Western Boxing*, not *Wing Chun*. Right? But, wait, a Jab and Cross are simply straight punches—*Wing Chun* certainly has those! The Uppercut is found in the *Chum Kiu* form, and the Hook in *Biu Gee*, so why do we not see the classic and extremely effective "Jab, Cross, Hook and Uppercut" combination being practised and applied by students of *Wing Chun*?

Far too often, practitioners get a mental picture of what they "think" *Wing Chun* should look like

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*Sifu* Massengill's new book *Wing Chun Unchained* will be published early 2016.



and work very hard to conform to that picture. Worse, they reject any application of a tool of the system that does not fit with their mental image of what it should “look” like. Shouldn’t the final determining factor of how we utilise the system be what it “works” like, and not what it “looks” like?

Going back to Wong Shun Leung’s advice of not being a slave to *Wing Chun*, but being the Master of the system, I would take that idea even further and suggest we free *Wing Chun* from the slavery and limitations created by our pre-conceived ideas of what the system is; we unchain *Wing Chun*, and allow it to be, in the words of the US Army slogan, “All It Can Be!”

One issue I personally see is found in not allowing the system to adapt to our modern environment. It’s not unusual to find instructors proudly claiming that they teach the traditional, authentic system, as passed directly to them UNCHANGED from the way Ip Man taught it! In my opinion, this would be a good and noble claim if today’s students faced the same kind of fighters that Ip Man’s students faced. However, that’s simply not the case. Lest anyone make the mistake, by the foregoing statement, that I am suggesting lightly discarding those ideas, to the contrary, I am suggesting hurling them away with as much force as possible!

The world of fighting changed on November 12th, 1993. That was the date of the first *UFC*. From the point of the introduction of *MMA*, the world has become a vastly different place. Fighters don’t move the same, they don’t think the same, and they certainly don’t fight the same!

*Sifu Massengill attempts a Tsan Da against the hook, but Latayette gets a hand in the punching line. The most direct angle of attack for Massengill’s hand is the left hook.*

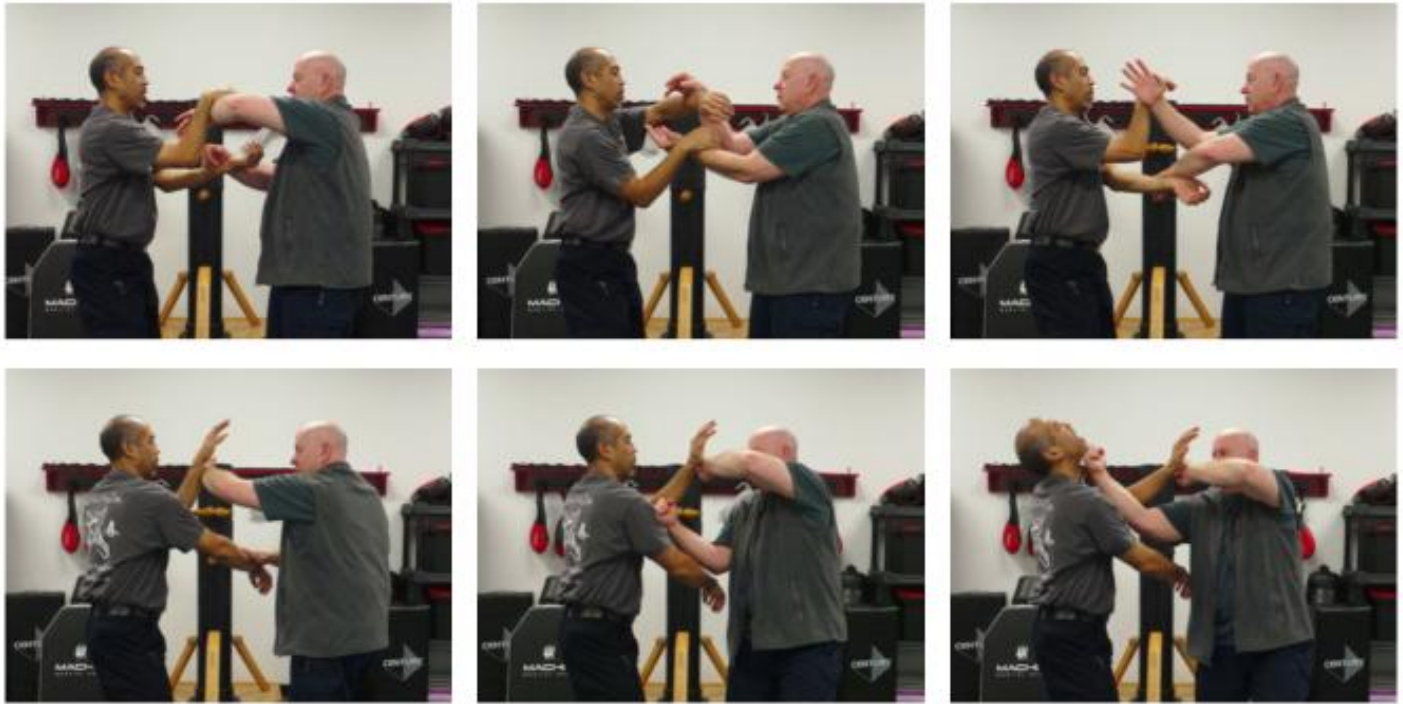
**Far too often, practitioners get a mental picture of what they “think” *Wing Chun* should look like and work very hard to conform to that picture.**

When Ip Man was teaching in Hong Kong, between 1950 until his death in 1972, his students primarily faced other *Gung Fu* systems—*Hung Gar* and *Choy Li Fut* being the most prominent. These systems and their applications are a far cry from the way most modern fighters approach the fight. The traditional methods faced by Ip Man’s students used lower fighting stances, making them less mobile; they used very committed movements in attack, making it easier to apply the popular “simultaneous defence and attack” of *Wing Chun*. On the rare occasions when they

*Sifu Massengill covers the jab with a Paak Sau cover, and uses the high Wing Guard from Biu Gee against the cross, leaving his opponent vulnerable to a hook to the body.*







In *Chi Sau*, after a *Laap/Fak Da* attack is covered, the uppercut is the most direct route to an open target without having to re-position the attacking hand.

faced *Western Boxing*, even that was much different from today's methods.

The evolution of fighting since the 1950s and 1960s has been almost overwhelming. Muhammad Ali was on the world *Boxing* stage in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. It was Ali's fighting style that changed *Western Boxing* from a more flat-footed slugfest, into the more mobile, slipping, stick and move style we see today. Attempting to utilise *Wing Chun* against this modern *Boxing* method is a much different challenge than what Ip Man's students faced. Just that fact alone makes it necessary for the method of application to adapt beyond those taught by Ip Man, not out of any disrespect for Ip Man's teaching, but purely out of the need for the system to survive in the modern era as a functional fighting method—not just a museum piece, paying homage to the past.

Another deficiency found in the training approach

of many *Wing Chun* schools today is far too much *Wing Chun* vs. *Wing Chun* training and far too little *Wing Chun* vs. other methods being given priority in schools. In today's multi-systemic fighting approach, what we train against is just as important as the method we train.

*Wing Chun's* future depends on those who are willing to adapt, while those who insist on keeping *Wing Chun* exactly as their teacher and their teacher's teacher taught it will find themselves well-equipped to apply their skills in a world that no longer exists.

*Wing Chun* is not insufficient when it comes to fitting in and being an effective and efficient system for dealing with the application needs of today. The tools are up to the task. The strategy and tactics of utilising those tools is what needs to adapt. It is time we teach and train *Wing Chun*—Unchained, not Unchanged! 🌟

When an opponent gains control of the elbow and begins to flank him, Sifu Messengill utilises a backward spin with the shifting back elbow from *Chan Kiu* to gain an advantage.

