

Wing Chun Kung Fu History

Of all the Chinese martial arts, it is Wing Chun that has perhaps the most interesting (and romanticised) history, given that the style was developed by a woman. Wing Chun is a southern style of Kung Fu that emphasises self-defence without wasted movements. Most every technique serves as both a defence and an attack, with simultaneous attack and defence multiple straight-line strikes at close range, rapid hand techniques and low kicks.

Wing Chun students concentrate on controlling or 'trapping' one or more of an opponent's limbs so as to ensure the most effective deployment of their striking technique. Trapping skills are developed through chi sao (sticking hands) training. Formal Wing Chun training also utilises three shadow-boxing sets, a wooden dummy set and two weapon sets.

The first shadow-boxing set is sil lum tao and focuses primarily on breathing, balance, coordination and correct arm and hand positions. The core of the art's technique is contained within this set, which translates as 'way of the small idea'. The second set is called chum kil (searching for the bridge). Chum kil teaches defensive maneuvering skills and closing techniques. The third shadow-boxing set is bil gee (thrusting fingers) which as the name suggests develops finger strikes.

The wooden dummy (an instrument made famous by Hong Kong cinema) is a training device unique to Wing Chun. It is made of a wooden trunk with three arms and one leg. The wooden dummy set (muk yan chong) teaches the applications of trapping, controlling and the basic combative techniques.

The two weapons used by the Wing Chun practitioner are the long pole (luk dim boun kwan) and the twin butterfly knives (pak charn dao). To trace the origins of Wing Chun we must go back to the reign of the Ming dynasty (1368 - 1644) during which Kung Fu was practised by the Shaolin. With the usurpation by the Manchurians and the establishment of the Ching dynasty, many Ming patriots sought refuge in the Shaolin Temple and readied themselves for the day when they would attempt to overthrow the ruling government. It was during this time that Kung Fu enjoyed a golden period. There was one problem, however. The Manchurians employed professional soldiers who were highly skilled in martial combat and highly familiar with Shaolin Kung Fu. As such, the Manchurian soldiers put an end to many of the Shaolin's rebellious activities wherever they went. This caused a dilemma for the Shaolin monks who realised they could not train a young rebel with the relevant Shaolin skills to defeat a Manchurian soldier as to learn the full Shaolin system took approximately eighteen years.

The elders of the Temple convened a meeting and agreed to develop a new fighting art which could be learned in a much shorter period of time. They engaged in lengthy discussions during which each elder revealed his or her most secret fighting techniques. The elders became so encouraged by their meetings that they renamed their meeting hall Wing Chun Hall or 'Forever Springtime Hall' expressing their hopes for a renaissance in Shaolin martial arts instruction.

However before the new martial art could be completely developed, the Mings were betrayed by an insider, the soldiers and the monastery badly burned. Only a few people escaped the terror, one of which was a Siu Lum nun named Ng Mui, who took refuge in the White Crane temple on Mt Tai Leung. Like the few surviving practitioners of the various martial arts styles, Ng Mui began to teach her martial knowledge to laymen. These practices were kept secret as the Ching government had dispatched martial arts experts to exterminate any layman practitioners. In an effort to preserve her teachings, Ng Mui modified her teachings into a new system, which relied on efficiency of motion and direct line attacks which could be mastered in a short time. Ng Mui decided to call her art Wing Chun, in honour of the Wing Chun Hall in which she and the other elders had held their discussions.

Ng Mui passed her Wing Chun system onto many people, none more so than Yim, the teenage daughter of a bean-curd vendor who was betrothed to a salt merchant named Leung Bok Chau. However such was Yim's beauty that she attracted the unwanted attention of a local warlord who made known his intentions to marry her, forcibly if necessary. Ng Mui took pity on Yim and taught her the Wing Chun fighting system with which Yim challenged the warlord to open hand combat and defeated him, thus earning her freedom to marry Leung Bok Chau.

In upholding the Kung Fu traditions, Yim taught Wing Chun to her husband, who in turn taught Wing Chun to Leung Lan Kwai, who taught it to Wong Wah Bo, a member of an opera troupe on board a junk. Also on board was Leung Yee Tei, who had learned the six-and-a-half point long pole techniques from Abbot Chi Shin. Leung Yee Tei and Wong Wah Bo combined their knowledge and incorporated the six-and-a-half point pole techniques into Wing Chun.

Leung Yee Tei passed his knowledge onto Leung Jan, a well-known herbal doctor in Fat Shan in the Kwangtung province. Leung Jan achieved the highest level of Wing Chun and passed the art onto his two sons, Leung Bik and Leung Cheun, and another student, Chan Wah Shan. Chan Wah Shan taught only sixteen disciples over 36 years, the last of which was Yip Man who began training in Wing Chun in 1901 at the age of seven.

Yip Man continued his training until he was 15 when he moved to Hong Kong to study at St Stephen's College. It was there that he met and trained with Leung Bik, the eldest son of Grandmaster Leung Jan. In May 1950 Yip Man began teaching Wing Chun full time. Over twenty-three years he taught thousands of students (the most famous of which was Bruce Lee), and Wing Chun soon spread worldwide. KFS

About the Author

<http://www.martialarm.com/history/wingchun.html>

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