

## Chi Sau

Chi Sau (sticking hands) training is a signature component of Wing Chun Kung Fu. Chi sau allows the practitioner to integrate various aspects of the Wing Chun system. It is first and foremost an energetic sensitivity exercise. Through prescribed arm positions, structure and movement you can begin to attune to the energy of your training partner. You begin to focus and sense the energy (chi (aka qi)). The connection through the arm contact is the portal wherein each person learns how to deeply sense and feel movement, tension and energy from your partner.

I emphasize the word partner, because chi sau must be done cooperatively if there is to be proper learning about energetic sensitivity. In the beginning of chi sau training, the movements must be done in a slow and relaxed manner, to allow the body to learn how to sense and feel energy. In doing chi sau this way, you can set an intention to “pay attention” to sensation and energy on a subtle level. If chi sau is done quickly and aggressively without cooperation, the body learns to become tense, rigid and insensitive. The body reacts to fear or anger instead of learning how to respond with proper technique and energy in an intentionally relaxed manner. Remember, the more relaxed the practitioner is, the more he/she will be able to develop speed and power.

Once a basic foundation of proper technique, structure and energetic sensitivity has been laid, you can slowly start to integrate a variety of hand strikes, blocks, and trapping techniques. Again, this needs to be done in a cooperative manner where each person intentionally assists his or her partner by taking turns feeding energy (initiating techniques) to the other and allowing the other to respond properly in a calm manner. Soon, the practitioners’ energy begins to flow between them, almost like dancers, where one person leads and the other follows. Through this prescribed mode of “playing chi sau,” your ability to respond becomes quicker and more powerful as your body has been allowed to learn progressively under ideal training conditions.

Chi sau training can now progress to include shifting, stepping and coordinating the flow, exchange and release of full body energy. At this level, all chi sau movement and energy originates from the daan tin, or chi storage area, located just below the navel of the body.

Through the initiation of leg and hip movements and coordinated with breath, the chi is moved from the core of the body to flow outwards. The chi is released in a direct and focused way through strikes, blocks, kicks or traps. In this way, the chi is radiated from the core of the body towards the extremities (hands, feet) and is then gathered back up into the core, via breath and relaxed muscles. The chi is again ready to flow and be released at lightning speed with maximum power and effect. This oscillation of “relaxation and release” is the

ideal state of being when practicing chi sau. With the exception of a strike, when we release chi we train to use the least amount of energy required to accomplish our goal.

Our goal, via blocks or traps, is to control the centerline of the partner. We want to use the least amount of energy because it is consistent with the Wing Chun principle of efficiency and when we use less to achieve more, our ability to maintain sensitivity is at an optimal level.

Even as we train to block, trap and eventually strike we want to maintain our ability to sense and perceive changes in our partner's energy and movements. This is so we may be able to further adapt to our partner's attempts to avoid being controlled on the centerline. Only when we know that there is no escaping our dominance of the centerline, we can know that we can hit at will. In chi sau there is no need to hit your partner. You know you could if this were a real self-defense situation. Chi sau is not combat: it is a training technique to prepare you for combat.

If you practice chi sau aggressively, with little sensitivity and control, and no cooperation, you are no longer training chi sau. You are now training your ego and pride. Under these less than ideal conditions, skill development is arrested. Further, your partner will become demoralized and tired. It is not pleasurable to be hit and to use aggressive energy in chi sau. You will deplete your chi, muscles will become sore and tired, sensitivity will become numbed and your spirit will suffer. Your kung fu training will stagnate and you will likely give up training, thinking that you have learned all there is to know about chi sau. Chi sau, when practiced properly, will offer a lifetime of learning. There are no limits to how energetically sensitive you can become.

There is a time, place and means to train with more "realistic" self-defense energy within the Wing Chun system. This comes only after much training, discipline, control and skill development. Training with this self-defense energy should only be done when there is a solid base of integrated Wing Chun knowledge and skill within you. Chi sau training is one of the tools to prepare you for this.