

“Alright, so, first of all thank you very much for agreeing to do this.”

“Hey, I’m very happy to be doing this.”

“So I think the original idea here was to do something that could go on the website and it would be something that would enable yourself and other instructors—if we want to keep going with the idea—to talk about stuff that they’ve learnt and thought about with Wing Chun. And it could either be posted in public or the private side of the web, we’ll sort of I guess maybe see how it goes and see which audience it goes towards more. And one of the ideas was also to have, in relation to the passport, was to have maybe discussions on various areas that are touched on in the passport sections—the various forms, various techniques, things like that—and I think it would be interesting to have that opportunity to read that stuff; I mean, I come from a background of I love reading, and so it sort of opens up the ability to do practice outside of the club, and continue our training, and deepen our understanding of things. So that’s sort of the frame.

“So I was thinking that potentially today we could talk about Siu Nim Tau. It’s something that we have some stuff on the web about but I think that it’s a rich area and we could see where that takes us. So we’re doing it kind of as an interview but essentially I view my role as kind of an excuse to get you to talk, so if you don’t like what I’m saying take it however you want, in any direction.

“So the first thing I was thinking with Siu Nim Tau—maybe starting from a very general level before we get into the specifics of Siu Nim Tau itself—I was thinking, with Wing Chun, and we start a lot of classes doing the forms, why forms? Why do forms at all? Why do them at all, why “forms”—why that term, why that word? Why do we do them on our own, when so much of Wing Chun is with others, in relation to others? So yeah just sort of a general question about forms before we get into Siu Nim Tau.” [2:22]

“Well before I offer some information, I guess I would call it, just to talk a little more about where the information is coming from. So, by no means is it the definitive answer. In any art form that is practiced by human beings it inevitably is going to become diverse, and differentiated, and have cultural drift, and all kinds of nuances, and any art form I don’t think is tangible for any one human being to fully grasp and understand. So even me as a Sifu, as a teacher, my understanding is limited: there’s no way I could fully comprehend, understand, embody the full expression of this art form. So keeping that in mind, I’m going to be offering a partial understanding based on direct teachings from my Sifu, from my Sigung, from the readings I’ve done, from my own direct experience. So I offer that for people to then have their own experience and see if it’s true for them. So not as I’m passing the gospel down, so to speak, but I’m offering some ways that people can engage in this information for their own learning and coming to their own understanding and discovering of the art.

“So having said that, now I got that out of the way—and just know that that is attached to everything I say—why forms, is your question. And then, why do we train by ourselves as opposed to, in martial art, where we want to have contact. So my understanding around forms is in order to perfect an art we need to have some mindful repetition. And forms help us sort of in a nice package take the real essence or competencies or theories or principles or attributes in a set that we can practice over and over again. And so when we look at the Wing Chun system—which you know is throughout our lineage, the *faat do*, the understanding of how to train—we have three empty handed forms, the Mook Jong, and the two weapons forms. So each of those forms represents sort of a sequential or scaffolded learning curriculum that supports the next level, that supports the next level, that supports the next level. So Siu Nim Tau is sort of your entry level foundation for you to just build some basic competencies, [5:00] some tools, some basic understandings, some embodied structures that will help you then take it to the next level.

So oftentimes the metaphor that I use when I'm teaching this is Siu Nim Tau is like if you're building yourself a house, you're digging a ditch, you're digging your foundation. You can't really live in the foundation; you can't frame it; you can't have parties in it—you can't live in it. You're just grounding it from a place to then build upon.

“So what does Siu Nim Tau do in terms of the forms? Well it gives us some basic movements and postures that allows us to start to embody some of the theories, principles, and attributes and supporting ideas of the whole system. So let me just name those explicitly for anyone who's interested. So two theories, of straight-line and centerline. Six attributes: coordination, orientation, timing, balance, sensitivity, and what's the other one [note by Sifu: relaxation]: structure, timing, balance—did I say balance? Balance, timing, orientation, coordination, sensitivity—I hope I got them all in there anyways. Three principles: saving time, saving movement, saving energy in everything that we do. And so that really is what Wing Chun is: is how to embody all those theories and principles and attributes in a harmonized way in a moment of time on contact with someone else's energy. That's the full expression of Wing Chun. That's a pretty magical, high-level, embodied wisdom. You have to start somewhere. So Siu Nim Tau helps us get that foundation.

“So what does it do? It introduces us to our static horse stance, stationary, it doesn't move. We just want to build that internal structure, that when we're sinking the knees, we're lowering our center of gravity; when we're thrusting the pelvis forward, and squeezing the abductors—those inner thigh muscles just below the groin—that thrusting and squeezing binds the upper and lower body together which basically takes your whole body and makes it move as one structure. That's really important to understand: that anything that we do in Wing Chun, we're bringing our entire being into the centerline, we're receiving energy, generating energy, feeding it through the whole structure. This is where someone of a smaller stature can have a hope to defend themselves against someone who might have bigger body size or bigger muscles, because if they don't have the skillful training, my whole body can deal with someone's big arm, if I'm a small person. So just that horse stance gets you to lock your upper and lower body together and root it in a low center of gravity into the ground. That's a big part of what Siu Nim Tau teaches you, is through the form and motions is that you lock and hold and internalize that structure.

“Now I know you're a practitioner, you know what that structure looks like. It looks very awkward and a little weird and sort of unnatural. And it's a training tool; it's like training wheels; it's like scaffolding on a building. You take those off. But the internalized structure is available to an individual on a moment of contact. So in Wing Chun you're not going to walk around in that funny sort of toes-in, heels-out structure. It's just to help you internalize the upper and lower body moving as one unit.

“What else does Siu Nim Tau actually train you? Well it introduces you to where the centerline is. That vertical axis, or as my Sifu calls it, the sagittal plane that runs down the length of your body through the core line of it extended forward away from you: that's the centerline. So you train to start to keep your hips and shoulders square and structured behind the centerline and to place your hand and wrists on the centerline in different hand positions. So you're training centerline in very simple, easy movements for beginners. You're training to use straight-line techniques, which is again a big part of Wing Chun theory, is that the overwhelming majority of our techniques go in a straight-line. What else are you learning? You're learning, in the first section, to relax. To go slow. To be very mindful, to give your nervous system lots of time to notice subtle adjustments in movements as you add structure to arm positions that move away from the body and change structure as the wrist retreats on centerline. You're learning how your relaxation allows you to feel confidence, it supports you later on for sensitivity, for

timing, for developing power. So sensitivity and relaxation [10:00] all work together. You're just learning these sort of beginning theories, principles, and attributes in very simple, easy to learn movements in a way that's not going to overwhelm somebody in a static horse stance so that we're not challenging their balance and getting them to get all tight and tense. So again just referencing that these are just foundational skills to help support higher-level ones later on and more often.

"So you're learning your horse stance, you're learning centerline, you're beginning to train straight-line, you're learning basically maybe a dozen or so different Wing Chun techniques—hand positions, the most common ones that are going to be available to you. So you get to learn some of those movements.