

“On a more esoteric level, there’s three sections in the form: so each section also has an energetic flavour to it. The first section is actually a chi gung exercise. And that’s why we practice it very slowly and mindfully. So what is chi gung? Chi gung is the development of energy within your body, learning how to regulate it, how to expand it, how to move it, in ways that you want to. So my understanding on that is when we’re doing mindful breathing, when we’re training the first section of Siu Nim Tau very slowly, well in order to move energy I have to make sure I have an open channel for energy to flow and I also need to know how to generate it—so breathwork supports both of those. So let me explain that a little bit more.

“So the inhale of your breath is like yoga from the inside out, it’s like you’re blowing up a balloon in your body, so the whole body starts to expand outwards like an inflating balloon, and what that opening does is it sort of opens up and stretches any sort of muscle tension or tightness or holding that we have in our body. Now all of us, no matter how much pain or tension or structure we have in our body—we’re doing it. This isn’t happening to us. But because we’ve been doing it for maybe decades, we’re not consciously aware of the fact that I’m holding all of this tension in my shoulders or my legs or wherever I have it. It’s just there and I don’t have the direct conscious control of it anymore to let it go. So that mindful breathing helps you to use the breath to open, to stretch, to expand, and then, on the exhale, to soften, to release, to relax, to flush. And with each breath, we reduce a layer of tension until the sensitivity comes back, over several hundreds, thousands, or tens of thousands of breaths until we get to that layer of unconscious holding in our body and then we can open up those channels. So my point being is that your breathing continues to keep your energetic channels open through releasing and relaxing muscle tensions, letting the meridians have more energetic flow, and then by fueling your chi with your breath—so bringing it more into Western science, or Western mind, oxygen creates energy, it fuels the cells—so by having full deep breathing, we’re fueling the chi while the exercise or the movement of the breathing is actually opening up the channels. So when you practice this mindfully, you’re going to notice more sensations of heat, tingling, pins-and-needles, tension, pulses, twitches, spasms—whatever it is for you: that increased sensitivity is your chi speaking more powerfully and more sensitively to you through your own nervous system. So when you become very, very sensitized to your own blocks and open energy channels, and then learning how to generate more chi with mindful breathing, you have the foundation here of a very strong chi gung exercise.

“Ok, so you’ve gotten rid of all of the blocks, and you’ve actually generated more energy. So now that you have that in place, then you can learn to focus the energy. So when you practice the first form of Siu Nim Tau, as your wrist moves forward on centerline, away from the body, you want to—and this is the practice that my Sigung talked to me about—imagine when your hand is close to the body you have like a ball of energy or fire in your *daan tin*, that place just below your navel—the energy zone in Chinese medicine and Chinese philosophy—and that that ball is sort of like a compressed ball, and that as your wrist moves forward away you can imagine that ball of energy starts to radiate away from the core and towards the extremities so, as my wrist moves forward, that energy starts to move up here, down the shoulder to the elbow to the wrist, and then also down the torso to the knee to the ankle, so that by the time I finish the forward *fook sau*, the furthest distance away from my body, I’m now noticing sensations in my hand and fingertips and now in my toes. When I start to retract that hand, [4:12/15:00] I know I’m gathering up the energy from the extremities and bringing it back into the core slowly. So to do this I sort of have to imagine colour, like a red flame starts to retract. And I can simultaneously maybe do it from the feet up. I mean, for me, I had to practice one limb at a time; I couldn’t do all of them, I mean, that’s very advanced. And first I had to use colour, but after I was able to build those sort of neural pathways of coordinating my energy going to the extremity as the hand moved forward and retracting and coming back and compressing into the *daan tin*, like a, like going to the gym and doing bicep curls,

like you're strengthening the muscle, well you're strengthening the energetic muscle by compressing and releasing the energy. Through mindfulness, through breath.

"And then the next sequence for me is, after I can imagine the colours, well now I can notice sensations. So because of my professional experience as a somatic movement psychotherapist, a lot of our training is noticing sensations in the body, and like noticing 'oh I've got a little twitch here, or there's some heat, or there's some tingling' and so now I start to track the sensations in the body, imagining if my forward hand goes this far, I'm going to start noticing sensations in my hand. While I keep mindfully breathing in, and then as I retract it I want to start noticing sensations in the arm, the elbow, up in the shoulder. And then when I bring that *wu sau* into the last bit it feels like it's almost compressing that ball again. Right, like tensing, just a little bit. So that when I start moving it forward it now wants to release. And compress, and release, and compress.

"So the mindfulness, which means your internal vision, which means paying attention to sensations on the inside of your body, because that's your internal vision—wherever your internal vision goes, and you've heard me say this in class before, your *yi*, your intention, so this is the Chinese medicine or Chinese philosophy corollary or parallel to the somatic one, which is wherever your *yi* goes, energy goes. If I look at the wall, and I go to strike that wall, and I'm sending my energy or my eyes on the other side of the wall, my fist will go through the wall. If I'm just looking at the surface of the wall, it'll just hit the surface of the wall. So I'm training the internal part by noticing sensations in the body while I'm doing the movements and breathing. So it's sort of a complex skill but I hope you can understand what you're trying to do. When you keep practicing that over time, and then it becomes an unconscious habit, well then any time my hand goes forward, what do you think happens? What do you think happens?"

"You're already paying attention, you're already sensitive to..."

"The energy's already moved there: I've trained it hundreds and thousands of times to go there mindfully so now any time my hand goes or my leg goes forward, the energy is ready to be released. So just beginnings of playing chi gung. If you want to. Some people never do this. But, again, at certain points in your training, you have to keep going to the deeper levels and working the esoteric—not the woo-woo magical stuff—I mean, I can talk about it as chi, or I can talk about it as your neural biology: cellular function. Either way they're both true, but I'm just explaining it now in the Chinese tradition, right, who knew this before Western mind-science 'made it true': note the sarcasm in the voice there.

"Ok, so that first section of Siu Nim Tau is you're learning how to generate and cultivate energy and get rid of all the tension in your body. Actively. So, getting rid of tension allows you to hit harder. It's a clearer vessel for energy. If you have a whole bunch of blocks or whole bunch of micro-breaks in the fibers, it's like hitting the accelerator on a car while you have your hand on the emergency brake: you'd better have a really powerful engine, because you're wasting a lot of energy forcing instead of just like...letting it go, but just enough activation to focus the energy and the release of the power in a way that you can really let it go but not injure yourself when you make contact. So you know I can't just have a floppy fist on centerline, I got to add some structure there. Or I mean I'll hurt myself. So it's knowing how much do I need to release that energy without injuring myself but not holding any more of it back, so I get maximum power with maximum structure.

"So second section. [9:12/20:00] Fast and loose. First section, slow and mindful. So I've learned how to

build up all this energy in first section, and now I train how do I release all of this energy I've built up in singular, long-arm movements, in all possible directions—upwards, downwards, lateral, behind me—on all possible centerlines. What a great training skill! Completely artificial, in terms of I'm still locked in an artificial horse and I'm putting my arms behind me, and beside me, and I'm not squaring up and being *doi yeng* like we like to fight in Wing Chun. I'm just training isolated little pieces. I build energy, now I release it in single movements while rooting myself in the horse: integrated. Integrated. Two things. Stay balanced and in your horse. Learn how to release energy. Great skill in martial art. Is it fighting? Not yet. So again, maybe you've dug the hole now you're putting in the foundation and maybe your first floor, but you haven't started framing yet or anything else, like you're just getting there. You're still developing your toolkit.

“And then the next level, the third section of Siu Nim Tau, well, you notice that there is a series of three or four movements: playing centerline; leaving centerline; coming back centerline. And there's an energetic pulse in between all of the movements, so instead of singular movements, like in second section of Siu Nim Tau, I'm doing combinations of one-two-three. And so you're learning the energetic pulse of fighting Wing Chun by practicing the right way that when you move a hand you release the energy, in the transition between you relax, and then when you release again you learn how to snap, so there's like a breath in and a breath out, metaphorically. By practicing the form properly, when it is ready to hit and when you got to move and when you got to whatever, you already know the spirit of Wing Chun, because you practice it properly with the energetic release in the third section. And you'll notice also that every move in the third section finishes with a hit. So there's some coded kinaesthetic teachings in the forms because I don't think they wrote these things down back in the day, or if they did, they didn't want too many people to know, so they would hide things in a movement that would say, 'well why do we do this?', so there's a reason: why does every, out of the four pieces in the third section, why do they all end in a hit? – Good question, huh? I'm not going to answer that right now. Ok, there's a reason. Again, some sequences. Right, sequences. Scaffolded learning.

“So lots of different reasons to use Siu Nim Tau. You can play with it energetically, you can play with it in terms of chi gung, you can play with it with your horse stance, you can play centerline, you could play leaving and returning, you could practice all of the theories, principles, and attributes. You can do the same form a hundred different ways just by focusing on two or three different things each time you play with it. So that form is always alive. And as your centerline gets better and your sensitivity gets better and all of these other things get better while you're playing the forms and doing other things, every time you do the form there is always something you can improve. Your sensitivity can always get better. Your centerline can always get better. Your horse can always get better. So once you learn the basic movements and then you understand how to train the forms, then that's many lifetimes of learning if you want to take it to that level. As long as your mind stays clear and focused in understanding how to use the forms and to not let the forms use you.

“The forms use you is you're just doing the same thing over and over again because that's the way you were told and you're not curious and you're not exploring and you're not playing around with different, ok let me just focus on relaxation, timing, and centerline this time, or next time let me focus on just my breathing and really good *bong sau*. Like I said: thousands of combinations of how you can play this form if you stay crisp on wanting to improve. Or you can just get lazy enough to learn the movements and then get bored and can't wait until you learn the next form but you haven't actually learned anything useful from the form except how to do the basic movements. The kung fu will not get in your nervous system unless you train properly, and that's what the *faat do*—the understanding how to train Wing Chun properly—is so important. And that's why my Sifu writes about that in the club manual so

much. If you don't know how to train properly, the Wing Chun is not going to show up for you. She will not be there in her fullest expression, anyways. Yeah, you might know centerline, but can you do it with timing, and balance, and explosive power, and great footwork, and [14:12/25:00] dynamic energy release, and that you have to play with, you have to explore, so that's what I mean: use the form to help you.