

“I guess one thing I’d like to ask—well there is a couple things, but: in relation to our last conversation on Siu Nim Tau you talked, you discussed a lot about chi. I don’t know if you want to talk about that in relation to Chum Kiu.”

“Sure, I mean to me there’s a very straight-forward progression, so if we just do a quick review back to Siu Nim Tau, our first section is about learning how to cultivate and store and slowly move your chi from the *daan tin* core of your body to the extremes in your hands and feet. And then, in second section, you learn how to further release, not just move, but release that energy in long-arm energy in all kinds of different layers and levels of centerline and directions. And then, in the third form, you start actually learning how to move the energy in combinations as opposed to just single movements, but in combinations of hand positions that culminate in a hit. But all that’s done with a static horse. Now, you’re taking all this idea of building energy, and now you’re moving it while you’re moving your horse. So you’re generating more chi in addition to the ones that you cultivated through your chi gung practice, and learning how to funnel and focus it through Siu Nim Tau. Just a simple forward stepping movement is so much energy available if we know how to funnel it efficiently and economically. The reason why many people want the big arms and all the big muscles is because they’re not using their energy efficiently, they don’t know how to use a simple step and just a little torque of hip movement simultaneously. So, that straight-line energy movement of the forward step, but if you shift while you’re stepping forward at the same time, that exponentially increases the amount of energy you have available to funnel through the structure of shoulder to elbow to wrist to hand, whether it be a block or a hit, and then release it with a little bit of *jing*—and we can talk about that maybe another conversation. You don’t have to be a big person with a lot of muscles to have devastating power. You’re just very kinesthetically, somatically, martially brilliant in terms of how you generate, amplify, [2:19/50:00] focus and then release your energy.

“I’ll use another metaphor. I think I’m more or less accurate if you look at Grand Prix Formula One racecars. They have relatively small engines: I think they’re not more than two liter engines. But the way they are designed, in terms of how they focus that power and energy, and the chassis and the suspension and the light-weight materials, I mean, a very small engine can outperform—you know you get these big muscle cars, five liter Mustangs or whatever else, right, 400-horsepower, but they’re so inefficient, so poorly designed in terms of how they transmit that power. Maybe they’re great in the straight line, but they take that first curve and then they’re rolling the car over. So Wing Chun is more like the Formula One racecar, like you don’t need a big engine to generate a lot of power and still have mobility and really hairpin steering and all those other sort of things that a great racecar has.

“So back to the original question is your Chum Kiu really helps you to start focus and shift and move your energy and your power just with good habits. When we were talk about the three element theory where you’re coordinating your hands and feet together, I mean the energy’s just naturally going to flow to that endpoint and then when you finish the shift or you put the foot down or the catch-up step comes, that’s where you’re really pulling the trigger and releasing the energy with the *jing*. Up until that point the energy’s just flowing forward. But you still have relaxation and sensitivity to feel. So again taking this to the next level in a self-defense situation is, in Wing Chun, I don’t commit to a strike until I know I’m going to hit. Because if you commit to like throwing a punch or jab, like you have to commit to that punch and see whether it hits or misses or whatever else. And if that person ducks, moves out of the way, you have to wait for that punch to fully extend and then come all the way back before you can try something else. In Wing Chun, we’re just probing with structured hands and arms and feet like water that’s snaking its way through a river or up against the dam waiting for the hole to emerge and then we

flow into it. And then when I know that that person can't get away from the strike—and I'm talking literally like two or three inches away from the target—the face, the chest, wherever you're going to strike—up until that point I'm just probing with forward energy, but with very relaxed yet structured limbs. And then when I know, through my sensitivity, that there's no way that they can get away from that, then I pull the trigger on the hit. But only until then. Only until then. Your Chum Kiu can help you with that. Your Chum Kiu can help you just to move the energy, the flow, to have the balance, and know that the hit will come at the very last second, and you don't have to commit to that."

"So we—my understanding is that 'Chum Kiu' means something like 'searching for the bridge,' 'seeking the bridge,' something like this. So I'm wondering if you could speak about what that means: why is it called a 'bridge'; what's the 'searching' for, what are we searching for?"

"Well, we're searching for contact with the opponent on centerline. And so the bridge is something—you know, if we use that metaphor of the bridge—so I'm searching for the bridge—well, what does a bridge do? Well it helps you cross a threshold. To get to the other side. For me, to get to the other side is to hit. So I'm learning how to engage. And the searching is I'm moving around, trying to find and feel it, so I may not always be in a straight line, facing the bridge, so sometimes I have to shift, sometimes I have to step, sometimes I have to turn. That's the searching part, and then the bridge is you need to get engaged with your partner or your opponent on centerline. So that when you have the contact, you now have the bridge. Now, your training in chi sau will train you how to cross the bridge. You might have to do some fancy sort of footwork or movements to get across that bridge, but ultimately to get to the other side of the bridge is going to result in a hit. The Chum Kiu is the movement to get you to search for, find, and connect to the bridge."

"I was wondering also—also last time about Siu Nim Tau, we talked a little bit about breath in relation to the forms—so I have probably a beginner's question here, but: how do we, or how should we, view breath in relation to the movements? So, you talked about that, in Siu Nim Tau, especially in the first section, it's a very slow inhale and exhale in relation to the arm moving out or in. But later on when we're doing these quick releases, and in [7:19/55:00] Chum Kiu as well, are we sort of taking a breath with each—is there like an exhale each time you release the energy and inhale on the recoil or something like this, or is it a more sustained breathing, or do we even not focus on that consciously?"

"Well, I guess what I would say is you need to explore that for yourself. I have my own ways that I try and do it, and for me it's just a very simple way because when a fight is on, whatever you have trained is going to match with whatever your survival instinct that gets activated in your nervous system as well. So what your training does is it's not trying to completely override your survival instinct of the fight-flight-and-freeze, but it's trying to harness it into relationship with it. So there's going to be certain things that are going to be happening physiologically within you that you can moderate or modulate through your training. But you're not going to be able to totally transcend—or at least I certainly haven't even after 25 years of practice—but I've learned to be in relationship with it so it's not a hindrance. So let me put this again in a concrete example: so when I start cranking up my Chum Kiu, moving fast or trying to generate more power, have a little bit more *jing*, typically what happens is the body wants to tense up right to create more internalized structure. So, again, tension and structure are two different things; so this is where if we train slowly to keep adding more and more structure but not crossing the

line where it turns into tension—this is sort of a godhead of the training that you want to be able to focus on. I have to do that at my own pace and speed so that I can be mindfully and somatically aware that's what's going on.

“The other thing that happens—and this is going to get into your question on breath—is that when I'm cranking things up, and if I start to get tense, well what happens is my breath gets shallow. And then I've noticed that—not so much in Chum Kiu, but certainly more so in Biu Chee—that, by the time I finish Biu Chee, which is really big dynamic explosive movements, I'm out of breath. Because I notice that, midway through, I lost the mindfulness around just breathing fully and deeply and getting the oxygen to my body. I'm just sort of like holding my breath and doing the movements, you know pushing pushing pushing, in a sort of anaerobic exercise, and at the end of it, I'm exhausted, I'm panting—well, that's not ideal. So playing with your breath by just saying 'ok, I'm going to go through Chum Kiu this entire form just focusing on full breath; no matter how fast or hard that I'm moving, I'll let everything else fall to pieces, because I just want to start to integrate my breathing, my natural breathing, as more and more of a natural habit in terms of how I move.' So I wouldn't necessarily say 'ok, on the strike or the return to center I want to make sure I'm doing exhale, or when I'm pulling the hands back that I'm doing the inhale.' I haven't been able to find a natural pattern of how movement could naturally correspond with breathing—that if my hands go forward I exhale and if they come in...—it just doesn't work for me. I haven't been able to find that rhythm. But I can naturally breathe in and out while the movements are happening, whether they're coming forwards, sideways, inwards, outwards—that I have been able to do.”

“Right, so it's more about focusing on—if you notice your breath is tense, then figuring out how to relax it and let it do what it needs to do in a relaxed way.”

“Yeah, exactly, and remember breath is doing two things, or at least two things. Number one, it's cultivating relaxation—you know, that's important, because if you're relaxed you have increased sensitivity, if you're relaxed you can actually let more energy flow through your body which means you can hit harder or have a more effective block. And then, also, if you're relaxed, with that sensitivity, you also can feel the structure and how much more or less you may need. So again these attributes all link to each other. But also full breath creates chi. You know like oxygen literally fuels the fire. Well, inside you, with your neurochemical firings, your oxygen is part of that process too. So the more air that you can bring in without forcing it—I mean some people can <forced breathing>—I mean that's not relaxed breathing. Well, yeah, you got the energy, you get that sort of hyperventilation. Some yogic practices will do that sort of really quick, firing up the energy, like in kundalini yoga, like they will do these really, these pranayama practices that fire you up, but you don't get the relaxation, you just get the energy burst. Holotropic breathwork, which can get you into some trance states, also does that to you: it gives you way more inhale and less exhale so it really brings the energy up, but it sends you off into sometimes a trance or dissociative state. And obviously you don't want to be dissociative in a fight. So for me, for the martial practice, is I want it to have the energy but I also want to have [12:19/60:00] the relaxation.”