

“I find something similar to what we’re touching on here is: it almost seems at first paradoxical the sort of relation between relaxation, releasing tension, while moving, with explosive power.”

“Isn’t that beautiful?”

“Yeah. Well, it makes me think of the Taoist idea of *wu wei*, not-doing, no struggle. But it’s not quite passive, it’s not fully active, it’s not passive either, it’s sort of this mix of both.”

“This opens up a big can of worms. And it is very Taoist in terms of, it’s yin-yang. Right, and so that’s a paradox...”

“I was thinking about, too, when you were saying the *go bong* becomes a *tan*—but through the relaxation, through the recoil. So you’re not trying to do much there: you just have to drop the elbows, you have to relax and let it do that.”

“Yeah, you just got to let it go, and your unconscious habit of just—as you let the energy go and there will be a natural recoil of the elbow, like you don’t even have to do that—but all you have to do is just let the elbow, just help the elbow, turn in. Gravity will bring the elbow down on its own. So in many ways, all you got to do is get out of the way and just stop the elbow at the appropriate *tan* position. That’s a way of finding the spirit or the energy of kung fu, like the felt sense of it. But if you just sort of put the *go bong sau* out and drop it into a *tan*, well, yeah, you’re doing the movements, but the kung fu’s not going to get in your body: you don’t have the spirit of how it lives, how it breathes. That’s why studying the art and understanding the *faat do*—the good teachings—will help you get there, otherwise you’ll be lost in the wilderness for a long time.

“But I do want to go back to this thing around paradox, and the yin-yang and Taoism: my own personal beliefs, but also from some of the great teachers—not only martial arts teachers, but spiritual teachers—they have a very basic saying that: if there isn’t paradox it isn’t true. How can something be relaxed yet structured; well, it can. They’re not mutually exclusive, it’s just the way our left brain and language works, which always wants to compartmentalize, atomize, deconstruct, make things smaller than they actually are. That’s what language does, as beautiful as language can be; its biggest problem is that the moment the words come out of my mouth, I’ve automatically made something I’m trying to talk about smaller than it actually is. Because that’s what words do. So just when I say the word ‘relaxation,’ well relaxation doesn’t mean no structure, and when I say ‘structure,’ well structure doesn’t mean no relaxation, but our minds want to make it such—that sort of black-or-white, all-or-nothing thinking. So that’s the beautiful, beauty of the yin-yang symbol is: it’s a circle, which is a whole, with two parts seeming opposites, but then a little speck of the one part in the opposite of the other, saying it’s actually connected and the same. So, it’s beautiful symbolism—and an arrow to the truth.

“What you want to then do, if we talk about structure or relaxation, is, well, when you’re doing your form, when you don’t have anyone giving you anything, well, it’s easy for you to find your own perfect balance of relaxation and structure. But if someone’s pushing against you, well it’s not like ‘oh, I want to use that exact same balance that I had in my Siu Nim Tau forms,’ like you have to find a new balance

that gives you enough structure and enough relaxation to—and here’s where I bring theory in because it always comes back to theory—to occupy centerline, straight-line direction. That’s the whole point of the structure and relaxation, is to support me to occupy centerline; which again the sort of subtitles, which means ‘I never get hit, I can hit anytime I want.’ So you see how all these things are linked together. So, you know, with someone’s energy, you’re going to need more structure, and you may have to give up just a little bit of the relaxation to not get hit—that’s a pretty fair tradeoff! But you know some people will tense up, ‘ok, I won’t get hit,’ but then they can’t change, they’ve lost too much sensitivity, they’ve lost the ability to hit with power or to change. So we’re always trying to find that sort of harmonized ideal balance with the reality that I’m being given.”

“It seems like, I don’t know, I find practicing [4:53/65:00] Wing Chun to be kind of meditative in a certain sense, and so it’s interesting that it is that in motion, it’s a relaxation while yet fighting, while being martial. And so it seems like it almost, it could teach us a different idea of what it means to have strength, or to be calm, to be relaxed.”

“Yeah, absolutely. And so as you continue to go through the curriculum, where your Chum Kiu supports you to start being relaxed while you’re in movement, while you’re coordinating—no one’s throwing a punch at you or fighting you—it’s just helping you develop some skills so that when we get to this highly dynamic chi sau that I talked about earlier—where someone’s running hands and trying to take your balance and changing the line and running punches and all kinds of things, feet and hands are moving right at you—and you’re learning in this little playful dance to just continue to neutralize and shut down and retake the centerline without getting hit. And you’re doing it with a smile on your face and calm. I mean, when that becomes an unconscious habit, where hands and feet are moving a millimeter away from the target and you’re able to sidestep it, change the line, neutralize it, jam it, block it, and hit on your own, and that just becomes a way of who you are and how you are in the world—I mean, number one, it just brings a certain level of confidence that has no alpha dog energy in it, you’re just like so relaxed because you have this awareness of what you can do at a high level of being pushed to your edge.

“But at the same time, if you’re presented with a self-defense situation, I mean it’s not going to mean you’re just going to be all loosey-goosey and like ‘oh yeah, no problem man, like I can deal with it.’—I mean, you’re going to get a jump of adrenaline, and you’re going to have some fear, and you’re going to have some anxiety, and that’s really smart, but the point is is that the moment you get contact with somebody, all that training takes over. Any fear, anxiety you have is typically going to happen before you have contact. As soon as someone touches you, your training software comes online, and you’re going to do stuff you’ve never imagined, and you’re not going to be worried or panicking or freaking out because you’re going to be empowered, you’re going to have volition, you’re going to have agency in actually doing something about it. People typically get paralyzed in fear because they don’t know what to do or they can’t do anything about it.

“Again, I can just go on and on about this stuff, and I’m just being aware of our time, but maybe the last thing I’ll speak about in our session today is that moment where we don’t have contact, that is probably the most risky part, not just physically, but emotionally, psychologically, in a fight. Because, unless we’ve really trained for that, that’s the part where our old fight-flight-or-freeze patterns can come in which may not reflect our Wing Chun training. But the *My San Jong* training, at the end of the chi sau curriculum, trains you what to do, with good habits, when you don’t have contact. So it even helps you

train out any freeze response you might have. Because we're not going to <technically?> start a fight from chi sau where people say 'ok, let's come up together, put our hands together.' The chi sau trains you what to do on contact right away and finish it, but what do you do until you get the contact? What if you haven't trained how to engage? What if your legs just sort of freeze when someone's coming towards you like, 'oh my god,' or you stand there in the Ip Man movies with your *jong sau* forward like an idiot? So the *My San Jong* trains you how to go to centerline when someone's coming towards you without hesitation, but without being ahead of the wave or without being too far behind it. So I think on that, I'll wrap it up."

"Ok, well, thank you very much Sifu for this, for this discussion."

"Oh, it's great, I really appreciate having the conversations. Until the next time."