

“Ok, so thanks again for doing a second conversation on Wing Chun topics. And in the first one we talked about Siu Nim Tau, and today we’re going to talk about Chum Kiu. So, of course, Siu Nim Tau is a form that’s generally focused on, or introduced at the white sash level, and Chum Kiu’s introduced at the red sash level, the second form we learn. And so the first question is just a general, kind of how we opened the last conversation: so, what is unique to Chum Kiu, what do we learn or practice in Chum Kiu? So, first, in a very general sense, and then, second, we could probably also break it down by the three sections of Chum Kiu like we did with Siu Nim Tau.” [0:44]

“Yeah, sure. So thank you for inviting me to the conversation. And I really enjoyed our first one, and it’s great to now continue sequencing through the three empty-handed forms—and so I’m sort of setting the tone that we’ll do Biu Chee next time. But today, in terms of Chum Kiu, I just want to step outside of the form, just for a moment, to talk about the curriculum in terms of how the system is taught, at least in our family, in our lineage, and with the brilliance of my Sifu and Sigung and the people in the line above that: there is a scaffolded, foundational learning system. So what I mean by that is that certain things need to be in place with fairly good habits, or unconscious habits, so that new skills and competencies can be developed. So when we enter into Chum Kiu, it’s not that we’re doing something completely different; what we’re doing is something just more dynamic that adds a few more elements but includes all of the important things from Siu Nim Tau: which is the structure of the horse stance, which is centerline, which is your basic hand positions, which is relaxation, which is straight-line—which is all of those things that we practice in Siu Nim Tau—we now bring into Chum Kiu. We don’t abandon them or forget about them.

“And so Chum Kiu makes things more dynamic. So you’ll notice that in Siu Nim Tau, the horse stance—the *Yi Chi Kim Yeung Ma*—is static. It doesn’t move. Because you’re trying to form that internal structure that binds the upper and lower bodies together and that’s what, more or less, the *Yi Chi Kim Yeung Ma* horse stance does, is it creates the body as one unit that moves as a unit all the time in its more dynamic expression. So, in Chum Kiu, we take that sort of static structure, and then we start putting it into movement. So, one of the new things that we’re really training in Chum Kiu is dynamic balance. In Siu Nim Tau, it’s static balance: you’re just standing there and the most simplest way of describing what balance is is the ability to stand up and not fall down. And to do things with all the other attributes: timing, coordination, etc. etc. In Chum Kiu, we move away from static balance into dynamic balance. We start to move the structure, we move the horse stance, we move it with forward energy, turning energy, shifting energy, pulling energy; we move it with two legs stepping, we move it on one leg with kicking and stepping. We’re really upping the level of an individual’s ability to have balance while maintaining structure, while maintaining centerline, while changing the centerline, while having really good techniques, moving from different playing fields, from a lateral centerline, turn to coming back to the one directly in front, to a subtle shift. We’re really playing a bigger spectrum for the individual to integrate all of the attributes, theories, principles, that are found in the whole system—what we call the *faat do*. Balance is a big one.

“The second really important thing is you start to really learn how to generate power. In most of the form you’re going to see a lot of shifting of the stance. What the shifting does—it does many things—but the two most important things that shifting does is it helps you generate power, and then it also allows you to change the centerline. Putting those two things together, if we take this to a practical application in a self-defence situation—at least in Wing Chun fight theory—is the ability to change centerline—which means to change the line of attack, to get out of the way of someone’s full frontal attack—to slip that angle and to be able to take another line where their full force or structure or

strength isn't going to be but yours will be because your centerline will be facing them. This is a really important thing to have in terms of how our system works. We want to deflect and change [5:00] a person's strong energy to a place where we no longer are. The shifting allows us to do that, and then, simultaneously while changing centerline, it allows us to generate power to either block, trap and control whatever may be on the centerline, take the other person's hands, and then to also hit. These two things now start to work together: we start to integrate things. Now we're learning how to change centerline, and then how to generate power.

"Each of the different sections focuses on different sort of pieces. And maybe a little bit later on in the conversation we can go into each of the sections, but I just sort of want to talk about those general ideas. The focus of what you're doing in Chum Kiu is bringing all the things you learned from Siu Nim Tau into something that is going to start to challenge your dynamic balance, while asking you to generate more and more power, which is then going to—you're playing this back-and-forth pendulum, as it's like, 'ok I want my shifting and turning to have a lot more energy and a lot more power,' but that's going to challenge you to develop more balance. And then when you get more balance, and we'll talk about how we do that in Chum Kiu, then you can start cranking up more energy. So we keep going back and forth: more power, more balance, more power, more balance—and sharpen both of those metaphorical blades in the system.

"Maybe I'll pause there for maybe a follow up question or clarification because that was a pretty big download."

"I mean, I guess one thing I might—another question I had is how is Chum Kiu different from or building upon the scaffolding from Siu Nim Tau. So you're saying it's bringing forward all of the—everything we've been working on in Siu Nim Tau. It's sort of changing some of—what we were talking about just before we started recording—the training wheels, potentially changing some of the artificialities and making it a bit more dynamic in that sense. So I'm wondering if you could talk about that, but also in the first conversation you were talking a lot about the metaphor of Siu Nim Tau being digging the ditch, laying the foundation, and maybe building the first floor. What is Chum Kiu?"

"Yeah, I mean, metaphorically, that can be pretty loose. We can start putting up some joists or—I'm not a construction guy so I probably wouldn't be really good in terms of going forward with the metaphor with that—but basically continuing the construction. So what you're basically doing is you're adding some dynamism into the form, into your kung fu. So whatever dynamism and movement and energy might do—so maybe you're going to put in the electrical system... I don't know what that would be. But the point being is that you're still not quite ready to live in the house yet. But you're moving towards that. Basically, I think I mentioned this in the first one, when you can go play in the penthouse and have a big party and be very relaxed and joyful and very dynamic and still feel very safe that you can keep doing that while there's an earthquake outside your house, then you've got really good kung fu. So that really, if you take that metaphor, is like if you're doing very dynamic chi sau, with a highly-skilled partner where there's a lot of explosive energy, quick movements, but with timing, balance, centerline—like all of this, it becomes more of a very, I don't want to say dangerous dance, but a very edgy dance. Where both people have so much skill and control, and are moving so quickly and powerfully, but they can pull back the energy at the very last second so no one gets injured or hurt, but both people know exactly where there was a hit or where there wasn't. And they're doing it at a really high speed. But people

watching it wouldn't even be able to track 1/100th of what's actually going on, of what those two practitioners can feel. So that really is how—that's playing in the penthouse in terms of your Wing Chun.

“So coming back to the Chum Kiu, well what the Chum Kiu allows you do is actually move for the most part, but to move with balance, to move with power, and to move while still having some internalized structure, and being able to occupy, control or regain centerline. Many of the movements in Chum Kiu—like you'll turn laterally 180° to cover both sides. We don't worry about the back of our body because well we don't give the back of our body away. So we just want to be able—can I turn from one side and go to the other range of 180°, turn, and do that quickly, with power, and be able to square up with our *doi yeng*, facing the shape of our opponent or our training partner. And we'll bring in different techniques in some of the movements, the shifting, the stepping, just to again [10:00] coordinate hands and feet. So this is probably my opinion: the third most important part of Chum Kiu—so because we are using hips, stepping and kicking—we want to make sure that in our movements, that we are coordinating the movements of our hands, hips, and feet together. So coordination is again really, really important.

“Why is that important? Well if we go back to the nature of Wing Chun—which is an art that does not use brute force or muscular strength but uses the whole structure of the body, like a bridge that's engineered with several parts but it's the whole structure that does most of the work as opposed to using the big hydraulic pump or push-arm to force something—we use the structure of our body to deflect, absorb, change all the energy coming towards us. But we also use the structure that, when we generate power and feed a block or a punch to somebody, that it's the movements and the energy generated by the shifting or the stepping that creates most of the energy for the hit or the block as opposed to the arm strength. The hand coordination means that, when I'm turning my hands or my feet or my body, if I'm stepping, I want my hands to move—or at least one combination or pair of my hands to move—in coordinated fashion with my turn, my shift, or my step. Because what that means is that the end of the turn, the shift, or the step—if my hand is coordinated—the energy or the power will be exactly available at the place that I need it to, which will typically be around this joint or the hand or the fist where the strike or the block's going to take place.

“To demonstrate this a visual would ideally be helpful. But imagine, if you could, someone who's standing in front of you and then they throw a punch with their arm, and then their step follows up after the punch has landed. Well, they've missed the wave of energy, or they actually were too soon by throwing the punch with brute force and not using the energy of the stepping to actually release the punch. So the coordination was off: the punch moves first and then the legs follow. Conversely, if someone takes a full step towards somebody, stops, and then throws the punch, they're too late. Right, because after the step has stopped, the wave of energy—again, if we use the metaphor like a wave of water—I mean that wave has risen, broken, and crashed up on the shore, and we haven't been able to take advantage of that energy: that natural movement, or shifting, or turning. So, in Chum Kiu, we coordinate that the hands will always begin with and end with the shift, the turn, or the step. If we make that as a habit, in terms of how we move in our Wing Chun, you will always have power available, as an unconscious habit, in terms of however you step, or turn, or engage with somebody. This is the brilliance of the art, is that we keep creating these really amazing habits that you don't have to think about anymore, they're just built into the way you are as a being. So that your conscious awareness can then focus on higher-level things more and more and more as these unconscious habits are just always there and available, and then get integrated in the undercurrents.”

“So that’s something that seems, from the leap from Siu Nim Tau to Chum Kiu—it seems one thing we’re training a lot in Chum Kiu is the six element theory. Bringing together the various, I guess they’re joints in line with one another.”

“Yes, very much so. You’re absolutely right. The three external elements of the six element theory is what I’m talking about here in terms of how hands and feet move together. So that, generally speaking, you want your wrist and ankles, or hand and feet, whichever connective piece you want, you want them to be moving forward at the same time and the same distance away from the body. And if that happens then your elbow and knee should also be the same distance away from your body as you’re stepping forward. And then at the same time, the shoulder and the hip will also be lined up. So, in yoga, they call it ‘stacking the bones’, so to speak, but what we’re talking about is: I’m making sure that I’m creating structure that moves coordinated so that the energy that I generate through my stepping or shifting will transmit through that structure I’ve created and release naturally without me having to force or push something.”

“So if your wrist is past your foot, does that fit into the wave metaphor where you’re saying that you’ve sort of broken that, [15:00] you’ve missed the...”

“You’re just a little bit ahead of it. So again, a great surfing metaphor for those of you who maybe have surfed: If you let the wave pass you by, then you get up on your surfboard, well it’s too late. And then, if you jump up on your surfboard, or try to before the wave has gotten there, you’re just going to fall over because there’s nothing to pick you up and carry you. So there’s an internal sensitivity of your timing—you’ve got to catch the wave. This is something that we practice in some of our stepping drills or shifting drills, is imagine that when you step you feel a little bit of energy rise on the front step and then when the catch-up step comes, that’s sort of the crashing of the wave. So I just play with that. I imagine this little wave coming from my *daan tin*, sort of moving through when I step. The front foot is like the rising, that building of the wave as it starts to swell, and then when the catch-up step sort of finishes, that’s the crashing of the wave. And that is where you generate the most of your power. So we can even go into something a little bit even more, I don’t want to say esoteric, but a really deep body awareness that the forward step, before the catch-up step gets there, the forward step is the one that really is about uprooting, jamming, contacting, engaging something, creating space, destabilizing someone else’s balance, changing the centerline, so that when your catch-up comes, you’ve got that full snap of power to release. When you really feel that in your kung fu, you know you’ve been training for a while and you really are moving with the spirit of the Wing Chun within yourself.

“So the six element theory again is just lining up hand and wrist, forward, elbow and knee, and shoulder and hip—and when those things are visually lined up then you’ll have a corresponding felt sense of what six element theory feels like in your body. Right, so again we use six element theory and our vision to help us find it, but then when we find it we have to feel it. I mean, I think I’ve said this before, if not in our first interview, then certainly in class a thousand and one times, is your kung fu is ultimately a felt sense. Even though we talk about theories and principles and attributes and technique and this and that, all of that is just a way to help you teach, a way to teach, to help you learn that felt sense of proper structure, of proper sensitivity, all of those things that we’re trying to get are felt senses. So it’s great to be in our mind to think about it but we have to, you have to translate that into ‘well, what is actually six

element theory feel like in my body, what does centerline feel like when my punch is there, what does,'—I mean we can go on and on and on with that.

“And then conversely if we don't have the six element theory of the hand and foot, elbow and knee, shoulder and hip lined up, well we'll know what that feels like, and it won't feel good. Because in our training with partners and other people, we're going to have bad experiences: our centerline is going to be open or I'm not going to have enough structure or I'm going to be too tense and someone will be able to take advantage of that. And then I'll very quickly learn 'ooh I don't like this felt sense in my body,' and then I'll keep making adjustments to find it. To find the yes.”

“So do you recommend—this is jumping a bit off maybe, but—do you recommend people play around with their kung fu and intentionally try to not do something; so, for instance, try to have your hand forward from your foot and see how that's different from, and try to learn why we have the six element theory from a feeling of...”

“Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. I mean, you know it's really important for people to study the art. And what I mean by that is you need to play around, you need to experiment, you need to make all kinds of mistakes to find where the truth is. Now in class, when you're asked to do something specifically, that's maybe not the time to play around with it too much. But good teachers will sometimes set that up in the class for you to find all of the no's, so you know what the yes feels like.

“So I'll put this into maybe a more simple example: one of the things that we're always trying to cultivate is that healthy balance of the amount of structure you need and then the amount of relaxation. Now if you have too much relaxation, especially when you got a lot of energy coming out at you, I mean you're going to get hit—your techniques are going to collapse, your kung fu's not going to work. So, you know, you don't want things to be too loose, but then you also don't want to have too much structure, or you know what I call unnecessary tension, just to have enough necessary to deal with the force that's coming in. So obviously this is where sensitivity comes into play, but I don't want to go down that rabbit hole yet. Some people who struggle with relaxing, instead of saying, 'you know what, just try and relax a little bit more, try and [20:00] like breath, let go of that muscle tension,' just tell—go to the other end of the pendulum: just say 'get completely sloppy and loose, and completely unstructured, and just feel what that's like in your body. And now start to incrementally add some structure.' For some people, that's the easier way to find that middle point then it is for them to try and incrementally relax from a place of tension. So just as you're suggesting, go to the <Skype garble> the point, and then approach it from a different direction. And you'll likely find it. And you know you'll have experiences, especially if you have a partner who's giving you some energy, if your hand and foot, elbow and knee, shoulder and hip are not aligned properly, you'll see how easy it is for them to take the centerline from you, to collapse you, to take your balance, to do all kinds of things. So, for sure: explore, play, study the art in many different ways.”

“Ok, and I guess going back to Chum Kiu, I mean one thing I've noticed about Chum Kiu and also in Siu Nim Tau is that we're sort of practicing a full range of movement, so in Chum Kiu you do the whole 180° which would be the most you would ever need to turn because if it was less than that you wouldn't turn 270, you would just turn the other way obviously. So you're always doing the full range, but obviously when you actually get in a fight it would be unlikely you would use the full range, you'd probably be a

little bit more, less than 180°, or you'd do a *tan* that was less than..., so you'd also be doing kind of less of that range. But we always seem to practice that full range. And I know last time you were talking about kinaesthetic mnemonics in Siu Nim Tau, so I'm wondering if that full range is a kind of kinaesthetic limit or something also—a kind of mnemonic in itself too."

"Yeah, yeah, so for sure. There's two points in there I want to respond to. So the first one is, yeah, we train a very broad range, you know so if you want to look at a bell curve, you want to train the full standard deviations on each side of the bell curve, right? But you know I want to try and be in the sweet spot in the middle as much as I can but sometimes if I'm asked to sort of go you know to the extremes then at least I'll have the capability. So if I'm going to learn how to shift 180° from one side to the other, but if all I need is to shift 3° in a fisticuff situation, to change the centerline, to generate enough power, to not get hit <Skype garble: and to hit when I want to?>—is the definition of, the practical functional definition of centerline—to not get hit and hit every time I want—then that's all I'm going to do because the principles that guide the kung fu in its most authentic expression, most realistic expression, is save time, save energy, save movement. So yeah, could I generate a little bit more energy if I shifted a whole 180° and unloaded it on somebody, for sure, but if it takes too much time, too much energy, too much movement, if the <?> absolutely necessary to occupy and control centerline, then I put myself at risk. So I'll train the full range, so I'll be able to do 180° if I need, if I'm facing one direction, and I see from my peripheral vision or someone touches me on the back of the shoulder, I can shift quickly to engage and face the shape with *doi yeng*, square up to that threat right away.

"And then the second thing around that mnemonic is, well, one of the kinaesthetic mnemonics around maybe the shifting of 180° is that you're going to learn that full range, that this is the only—these are the limits where I'm going to be facing people, that I don't want to be spinning around in circles and giving my back to anybody. There's lots of those things embedded in specific parts of the form. And I'll talk about some of those as we go in to section by section. But just like Siu Nim Tau, there's many of those things to remind us of important teachings or even principles in terms of the expression.

"One of the other things I guess I want to talk about is, when we talk about training wheels or scaffolded learning, within the form there's going to be corresponding hand movements while we're shifting, kicking, turning, but those don't mean that they will naturally flow in sequence or that these are rigid sequences you would use in a self-defense or a fight. They're just helping you give you something specific, a specific technique, to train coordination of hands and feet, [25:00] to train your balance while you're coordinating your hands and feet together. Your chi sau training later on will help you discern which hand techniques will fill the space of the centerline based on the energy that your opponent gives you. So the hand movements that correspond in the Chum Kiu form aren't necessarily the scripted, static, sorts of things you would do. Some them might come out naturally but it's always dependent upon the individual. So, again, we have to remember that. You're just learning to go to higher level of teachings around balance, generating power, changing centerline, coordinating hands and feet, and doing that with balance."