

Eben: “Alright, well, thank you very much Sifu for this – I guess it’s our fifth chat now. So we’ve talked about the three basic hand forms and *chi sau*, and today we’re going to be talking about the *mook jong*. So, just to preface some of the conversation, I think that the wooden dummy is a fairly iconographic and distinctive symbol—something people think about—with Wing Chun. So there might be something we want to say to maybe demystify or explain the symbol a bit. It also appears, at least to me, very odd at first glance; it seems like a weird—like the actual physical, the dummy itself—seems very strange as a tool or apparatus. And the *mook jong* form and practicing on the dummy is a more advanced kind of training. It’s—in our club—it’s blue sash and above typically. And it’s a longer form as well, with a lot more sections and series of movements. So I guess just to start is why, in a general sense, do we train with the wooden dummy?” [1:23]

Sifu: “Yeah, I mean that’s just a big question. In many different ways...when you look at the Wing Chun curriculum and you see that, corresponding to each form, there’s a whole other series of skills and drills and things that people need to master, typically the form matches the complementary exercises and things; so that’s why, when you’re looking at something like the *mook jong*, it *is* advanced, because it’s the fourth form that people typically learn. So by that time, they’re going to have a foundation in their horse around movement, around stepping, around kicking, around hand techniques, and even integration between the two.

“So what does the *mook jong* do that, um, let me say that a different way. Without the *mook jong*...let me say this a different way as well. Basically, what does the *mook jong* accomplish that the other forms maybe can’t. The way that I see and understand it is it is more complex and it is more dynamic. It is more of an integrated expression of the art. It has very dynamic stepping and footwork; it has complex series of techniques flowing from one to the next; it’s around changing centerlines with different lines and different angles; it’s leg-jamming and kicking and stepping, while doing hand replacement. You’re really doing an integration piece, in terms of the overview, to really help your body just start to naturally feel these patterns that want to flow from one to the next. That’s one way to think about it.

“And, you know, just like each of the forms has these sort of essences—you know, like Siu Nim Tau is about your horse, and it’s about energetic sensitivity, and it’s really about the centerline, and learning a handful of hand positions; and, then, Chum Kiu is you’re taking all of that and then now you’re putting it in motion, and then working on your dynamic balance, and you’re challenging...coordinating hands and feet, and changing the centerline, right, the footwork; and, then, Biu Chee is, you know... So it just keeps elaborating, I guess is my point talking about all the old forms.

“What are some of the essences of the *mook jong* form? Well, for me, number one is the footwork is so dynamic. You’re going in, you’re going out, you’re moving laterally, you’re changing the line; whereas in our typical stepping drills, we’re usually doing linear things, right? *Bik ma* or *huen ma*.”

E: “Sorry, the other forms, too, are more on a line, or—Siu Nim Tau—on a point, and this one seems more triangular almost.”

S: “Exactly. And, then, stepping in, and, then also, stepping out, cutting across, and stepping in again. So it really is now helping you integrate all of the necessity of movement that you’re likely going to need in some sort of physical altercation; as opposed to say straight-line, centerline and a couple steps, or

moving laterally or just one *chum kiu ma* step. It makes you really have good footwork. That, I would say, is one essence.

“And then the second one is, then, distancing. The *mook jong* doesn’t collapse. [5:00] So your distancing around how deep do you step in to get into the right position to be able to control centerline, with power, without being jammed up, or without being too far away. It really helps you get clear on how to step in deeply on somebody. Now, it’s great if you have a partner to help you with these things, but you know partners are sort of dynamic themselves: so, they can collapse, they can...the *mook jong* doesn’t make mistakes. You have to accommodate around it.

“That’s the other thing that I think is an essence is that a lot of the movements are, well what happens, what do you do when you get stopped? Right, because those *mook jong* arms are made out of solid red oak. I mean, they jiggle a little bit, but they don’t give or collapse, like a partner will. So this is really a great practice, and I think it’s probably—I don’t want to say the most important—but definitely one of the top two important essences of this form is: if you train it with this intention, that right on contact of being stopped it teaches you how to then change into the next movement, so that you can learn to develop *fon sau*—we call that continuous attacking, right, we don’t stop. Even if someone stops or blocks us, we change the line, we keep going: that metaphor I use of water going down the stream, you know, it’s a bit of a dam or a boulder or a log—you know, it changes, but it doesn’t stop. And so that’s the same thing with the *mook jong*. If you play it that way.

“So that’s the other thing about the *mook jong*, is you can play it anyway you want. You just take the *faat do*, and say I’m going to play the *mook jong* and focus on centerline—awesome. I’m going to do it with relaxation—awesome. I’m going to do it around coordination—awesome. So you can polish your *faat do* on the *mook jong* just like you can polish your *faat do* in any of the forms.

“But specific to the nature of that form, for me, it’s about how do you change when, you know, you’ve got someone who’s like the *mook jong*, like solid, they’re not moving?: you’ve got to change. You’ve got to change, find the sweet spot, and hit, and then keep doing that.

“What do we have? We have learning dynamic footwork, we have proper distancing, and then we also have learning how to change and flow with *fon sau*.

“Now, you’ll see sometimes people will make a lot of noise on that *mook jong* because they’ll use it to do conditioning. Ok, if that’s what you’re doing, then sure. But just be clear about it. You’re using it to condition—but it’s not necessarily an *essence* of the *mook jong*’s nature. It’s not an intention for you to use it to condition your forearms or anything else, but you *can* use it for that—it’s like you use a tree or a metal bar or a big pot full of bearings, or whatever you want to punch. But don’t confuse that with that being the nature of the form—it’s not meant to condition you. It’s meant to help you teach you skill, work the *faat do*.

“And you’ll notice many of the techniques that are in the *mook jong*, it’s preparing you for things that are going to likely emerge in a self-defence situation that is very dynamic, with somebody who likely has some skill. Because otherwise, all you really need is your punch, your palm strike, and maybe a *pak sau* for a fight, really. Step in, get the hands, hit. This is when someone’s going to be a bit more complex, give you a bit of a challenge, and that’s where you’re going to have all of these interesting movements coming out, that are a little bit more complex, more dynamic. But still aligned with the *faat do*. So again, I’ve said this so many times in class, Wing Chun is such an amazing art, and that people don’t recognize

that we're training at such a high level even as a beginner. You're training high level stuff. And so when you start training things that are high level in Wing Chun, it's almost, almost esoteric. It's almost just more academic or to know...you're rarely going to need the things that are coming out of this in a real self-defence situation. This is more of an expression of the art, that you can be very playful if you're doing dynamic *chi sau* with another skilled Wing Chun practitioner—a lot of the things from the *mook jong* are going to come out. It's going to look beautiful and wonderful, but for most fighting, eh, not really. You should be able to finish things pretty quickly without having to do these more complex dynamic movements—and yet they're available to you. And you have that in your back pocket, on top of all the other gifts. So maybe I'll pause there—[10:00] it's a big answer, I don't know if you have some more specific questions about it; I can go on more as well, so I'll just give an opportunity here for clarification or nuance."

E: "Maybe just a question about the conditioning point. And, again, it might be depending on your intent when you go to the *mook jong*, or what you're playing—what your intent is to play while you're playing with it—but what would you say on the difference between hitting it really hard or hitting it softer? Does that just depend purely on your intention or is there sort of...or how would you speak to the two different intentions there?"

S: "I need you to ask that question again."

E: "Ok. So I guess I'm wondering if part of the practice here is to learn to hit hard or if it's more to be softer, or just both of those things?"

S: "Well, if you want to hit hard, you can get the punch bag. That's the only way you're going to develop your power. Now, the *mook jong* can help you, in terms of, if you want to hit with power and release it, you have to have the right distancing, you have to have the right line. You have to have the right energetic flow, like if you pull the trigger too quickly, before you've really penetrated the other person's ethereal space, and then, if you're too jammed up...right, so. You can go up to the *mook jong* and using the *po pai*, for example, flow in there, feel a little bit of the compression, and then just a little bit of *jing*, just to like feel the penetration into the *mook jong* body. Now, that's different than smashing the arms with your forearms or hitting it really hard and fast with your palms or your knuckles. So you're actually going in, feeling, probing, bringing a little bit of your body, your *chung chi*, and then your *jing* into the technique. That's different from, and I'll sometimes do this for my forearms, I'll do these *dai bong saus* with a shift and I'll wing my arm into the.....just over and over and over, and I'll work it from here all the way up here, and then down and just put a whole schwack of *dit da jau* on it. But I don't feel like I need to do too much more conditioning, other than maybe when I jam the legs with the outside of my calf. Because when I attack that wooden man's leg, like I attack it. I'll just put it there, like I'm trying to cut that leg out when I enter it with somebody, that's my intent. It's not just to feel what their leg's up to, it's like I'm taking that line, and I'm going to see what I can clear out of the way."

E: "I guess something else I've been wondering about the form is it seems to have a different—maybe it doesn't—but it *seems* to have a different take on kicking, potentially. So in, we've had our conversation about Chum Kiu where you put your weight back on the back foot, somewhat artificially, to kick, and

that's sort of a sign that somebody's pushed you back there. Is that a similar intent with the *mook jong* because it sort of seems like there's different kinds of kicks going on."

S: "Yeah, and it's the same principle because you'll be—with the exception of the side kick that you do—but everything else, you're sticking to the *mook jong*, while you're actually doing the kick. You'll have a *pak* on the leg or a *bong* will be sticking as you slide down the leg, things like that. You'll be engaged in the other one. And even the one where you're doing the side kick, you're really...like the movement is *pak*-ing the elbow, striking underneath the forearm, and then your arms are still out there, engaging, and then the side kick comes out. I don't see too much of a paradox or contradiction from that."

E: "But the kicks are still...it looks a bit like, but maybe it's because it's, again, from the outside, it looks a bit like you're almost leading with kicks sometimes, but is it still, the principle is still they put you in that situation in which you know to kick?"

S: "Yup. Like on that side kick, you imagine a situation where someone's coming down the tracks really quickly with a punch, you're changing the line, *pak*-ing to clear the elbow, there's an exposed hole there, so then I'm striking in two quick movements, and then while I'm jamming them up here, I can take out their knee, all in one movement. So what that—you know it's great, because these questions also remind me of things that get buried so much into habit, I can make them conscious again—the other thing with the *mook jong* is you're now learning how to attack with your entire body. When you're coming to the centerline, you're jamming with the leg, the hand...and so with the kick's it's not just hands anymore, it's like the whole [15:00] thing is coming now, if you're put into that position. For me, it's more of an integrative form; it really gets people to, ok, you're not just working hands, you're not just working legs, it's your entire being that is showing up on the centerline now. And, for me, that has vast philosophical and life lessons or ramifications about being fully committed and fully integrated, and, I'm here right now. As opposed to: I'm showing up a little bit, or I'm tentative. Whereas it's like: I'm all in."