



## Mission Statement of Wing Chun's Wooden Dummy

# 木人樁與我的三十載

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詠春學的木人樁法全套共108式，分為8節。今次這篇文章並非探討樁法的歷史或演變，只是想分享個人心得及研習歷程。

從三十幾年的修練及教授經驗中，體驗到樁法絕對是詠春拳的寶藏，甚至可以稱為整個技擊系統的核心，若未有練習樁法，就等如未曾正式踏入詠春之門。

木人樁安裝方面，傳統詠春木人樁會以「地

### Introduction

The wooden dummy has an irreplaceable mission in wing chun: the 108 wooden dummy techniques are effective and efficient for the training of inch power and tendon strength (a hallmark of a powerful wing chun artist), supple strength body control, footwork, kicks, stability, structure, stance, whole-body coordination, proper distancing, accuracy, technical mastery, forearm toughness, (even) leg flexibility, and rhythm (the hallmark of the 'natural' or smart warrior), not to mention the wing chun techniques themselves. Thus, it is an indispensable tool for the attainment of wing chun proficiency and continuous improvement of the practitioner's martial prowess: below, we discuss four points concerning the use of the dummy to sustain this assertion. We first hint at how stance, stability, and kicking power can be developed by examining how one particular set of techniques are practiced on the dummy. We then mention one way to discern if you are properly cultivating inch power, tendon strength, and supple strength control. Third, we will have a high level discussion about rhythm. Finally, we have a brief talk about proper distancing and its implications for wing chun exercises such as 'chi sao' (sticking hands).

### Wooden Dummy Setup

Before we proceed further on the main topics, it is useful to know at least two ways the wooden dummy is set up in wing chun. The first is to affix the dummy to the ground - this is the older way. The second is to suspend the wooden dummy in 'mid-air': two long planks of very tough and flexible wood runs through the trunk of the

椿」形式，把樹身種在地下。但當葉問將詠春帶到香港後，發覺「地椿」並不適合香港的樓宇設計，於是選用「木架式懸吊椿」，懸吊椿因而開始普及，懸吊椿其實更有利鍛鍊寸勁及收力的協調。

學習木人椿法前必先熟練小念頭、尋橋及標指三套拳法，因為拳套乃是椿法的基本功。尤其是入椿的步法，包括小念頭二字掛羊馬、尋橋子午馬及標指入步等。當適當地配合腰馬的運用，椿法能大大提升學員的寸勁力度、入位角度及手門位置準確性等。

椿法最基本要注意與椿的距離及椿的高度（見圖1）。椿法其中一個手法叫「托手」，能幫助確定手距與身體的距離（一般建議為六寸）（見圖2），以免有「束橋」之弊。另要注意切勿離椿手過遠，因為在搏擊中需要習慣性以近距離纏著對方的橋手。

回想當年剛剛開始學習詠春，由於教練及其他同門的身形相對矮小，發覺他們習慣性地以一個較遠對手的距離纏手，當盤手一輪之後，便只靠單手踏著對方的橋手，這種方式既不是纏手，又不是離身搏擊，實在令人有些摸不著頭腦。此外，他們的練椿模式亦是偏遠及過於著重腰馬。當時年紀尚幼，加上沒有機會與其他門派比較，故有好幾年時間都一直以他們這套模式練習。後來在英國設館授徒時，多了很多機會接觸到其

wooden dummy，the ends of each plank are then affixed to a metal structure that is in turn affixed to the wall. The second setup was largely adopted by Yip Man because of its better suitability to Hong Kong practice conditions: it is much more effective than the older setup in training one's inch power and supple strength body control. In fact, it is a better setup for the practitioner concerned to train himself in all the aspects of wing chun listed in our introduction above. For the remainder of this article, our discussion assumes that the dummy is set up in the second way.

### Stance & Stability

Stance, structure and stability underpin our power generation process. Without a stable foundation we cannot produce power efficiently. In wing chun, this stability must be coupled with inch power and supple strength body control (amongst other things) to be effective for executing powerful kicks. In section 5 of the 108 wooden dummy techniques, you practice a set of movements useful for counterattacking someone trying to grab you on your upper or mid body level, like a bear hug (i.e. not a takedown with a lower entry). Imagine this 'bear-hugger' is coming towards you face on: you can first sidestep to the right or to the left; say you sidestep to the left: (1) you use your right arm to execute a 'chuen sao' against the bear-hugger's right arm at the same time as you are sidestepping, so that now your right shoulder and the side of mainly your upper body (not as much your lower body, because of a different rotation speed between the upper and lower body in this technique) is facing him; (2) riding on the momentum and your torque from the above, you immediately turn your chuen sao into a 'tan sao', execute a rib-cage palm strike with your left hand, and a right mid-body kick to your bear-hugger - all with the same striking time, all with inch power, to send something like an electric bolt to your adversary's body on three points.

In the above set of movements,  $\frac{1}{2}$ s of your arm and leg tools are used as striking weapons; hence, your left leg must assume a strong-enough structure to maintain stability and allow you to generate the requisite inch power for the counterattack to be efficient and effective. Few if any are better than the wooden dummy at helping you train this. If your stance is not stable, you will not achieve a proper body structure, and therefore be able to generate the power you need for the section 5 kick, as this kick is executed when you are actually at an arm's length with the bear-hugger. It is alright to kick the air and feel that your kick is powerful, but when you apply this kick to the dummy, if your body structure is not stable, you will not be able to 'move' the wooden dummy even an inch backwards (when your kick is not powerful enough to bend the flexible wood planks). Or, if kicking the wooden dummy with all your might throws you completely off balance, the dummy is telling you that you have not applied your inch power and supple strength body control properly (- more about inch power in the next section). Thus, the wooden dummy acts as a kind of 'reporting mechanism' here to tell you if your kicks are powerful enough, in turn helping you to understand if your stance and structure are correct.

### Inch Power & Tendon Strength

The wooden dummy is an excellent tool for inch power and tendon strength training. By inch power I mean the power generated from a very short distance, even an inch, between you and your opponent. By tendon strength we are referring to the strength of your muscle tendons, which is a kind of 'internal' strength by contrast to external muscular strength of the typical bodybuilder or rugby player. The strong warrior should possess both tendon and external muscle strength. However, he cannot be a powerful warrior (even if he possesses much strength) without first mastering the art of acceleration - the overused "Force = Mass x Acceleration" formula (hereafter referred to as "F=MA" is cited once again as explanation. One of the most effective ways of applying F=MA is to apply inch power to all your striking techniques. Nonetheless, without tendon strength, you cannot cultivate inch power.

Remember this in a proper Cantonese accent then, "No tendon strength, No inch power". Actually, the cultivation of tendon strength and inch power is like a chicken and egg problem - there is not a necessary formula for which gets developed first, although the two are clearly different things. In fact, in practicing applying inch power to my palm strikes and kicks on a heavy duty wooden dummy, I have found enhancement in my tendon strength. On the other hand, when the writer has been practicing the wing chun knife form with an extra heavy knife, he has found significant improvement in forearm tendon strength, without necessarily being better at applying inch power.

So what does the wooden dummy do with regard to your inch power and tendon strength development? Here it plays at least two roles: first, as a reporting



他同門及門派，發覺其他詠春同門一律以近距離觸手，經過不斷反思及改進，開始領悟到詠春箇中奧秘。舉例說，貼椿修練整體優勢較大，過往那種練習方式並不全面，因為椿身高度不適合自己而要刻意遷就便會練壞手門及意識。

木人椿腳法共8組，熟練後更可將其組合成「串連8腳」，此修練方法對精練腳法、速度及靈敏度等有很大幫助。

要修練全套108椿法，一般建議學員一星期至少練習三天，每天6至7套。至於椿法的實際技擊應用則屬另一個層次，因此椿法即使能夠打得頭頭是道，還需由有質素的師父，根據學員的本質、體能、高度、反應、資歷及優勢等，帶領及指導出手。

mechanism to tell you if you are practicing correctly; second, as an actual inch power training device, when it is heavy duty enough. To tell if you apply inch power properly, you must use your 'musical sense', especially your ears. Say, when you strike a palm strike on the dummy with all your might... what kind of sound do you hear from the dummy? Are you hearing a 'hard, external' sound with the kind of texture that you hear when you clash two metal bars together, or are you hearing a 'soft, internal' sound with the kind of texture that you hear when you strike a wooden club into a rubber tyre? Of course, the contrasting illustrations above are exaggerated, but they are useful for understanding what I'm trying to explain: when you are striking the wooden dummy, if you hear a hard sound rather than a soft sound, chances are, you are merely using your external muscular strength (with no wing chun inch power), and not your tendon strength. For when you are using inch power properly, what you are effectively doing when you strike the wooden dummy is that you are injecting force into the wooden dummy, rather than 'slapping' on the face of the dummy. So, listen to the wooden dummy, what it is saying to you about your inch power proficiency. Be a good listening friend to it.

### Rhythm & Flow

Acquiring rhythm and flow is a necessary step in becoming a 'natural' fighter, as in other physical disciplines. What looks easily done by Roger Federer on the tennis court is much harder if not a present impossibility for an amateur player who does not have the rhythm. Rhythm brings order out of chaos and marries all the components that the wing chun artist has learnt into one seamless flow; it is what unifies diversity meaningfully into a focal point of bodily expression. I think Bruce Lee's discourse on 'wu wei' is useful here:

"Wu wei is the art of artlessness... To state it in terms of gung fu, the genuine beginner knows nothing about the way of blocking and striking... When the opponent tries to strike him, he instinctively blocks it. This is all he can do. But as soon as the training starts, he is taught how to defend and attack, where to keep his mind, and many other technical skills - which make his mind "stop" at various junctures. For this reason whenever he tries to strike the opponent he feels unusually hampered. He has lost altogether his original sense of purity and freedom. But... as his training acquires fuller maturity, his bodily attitude and his way of managing the techniques... will resemble the state of mind he had at the very beginning when he knew nothing, when he was altogether ignorant of gung fu."

Rhythm training when practicing on the wooden dummy has the objective of not only integrating all the wing chun components into a whole, but also of bringing your conscious awareness of all that you have learnt into the subconscious, internalized, 'natural' state. It is not hard to find a justification for doing this. When the prowling lion jumps on its prey, it does not consciously analyze the components of all its body part movements and hunting skills in order to accomplish this. Likewise, the mature martial artist interacts with his opponent with dynamic rhythm and natural flow. By the sound pattern and sequence you make on the wooden dummy during practice, you can hear if you have proper rhythm. As you mature in the art, the better your rhythm would sound, and the easier and smoother your movement execution will look to the bystander. So, learn to make some music with the wooden dummy, and perhaps take some percussion lessons if you do not have a good sense of rhythm.

### Distancing

Finally, a word on distancing: proper distancing is vital for the accuracy and power of strikes, for the proper execution of offense and defense. My wing chun sifu, Grandmaster Stephen Chan, shares that back in the day when he commenced his wing chun training, he observed that many were in the habit of staying a long distance away from the wooden dummy

during their wooden dummy practices; they were also in the habit of translating this practice of 'long distancing' to their chi sao exercises, sometimes even lengthening the distance further by only using one arm to stick with the other chi sao opponent; then, with only one sticking hand, the two may pace up and down the floor as if dancing to a poor form of cha cha cha. Sifu thinks that this is a serious problem that needs to be addressed.

At the outset, it is important to know that chi sao is only an exercise game that helps you heighten body sensitivity, spatial awareness and learn to apply wing chun techniques in a semi-controlled environment. If you are an expert in chi sao, congratulations! You will do well to know that sustained chi sao training has helped you become more 'natural' in your wing chun skills execution, but you should also be able to discern that this does not mean you are a good fighter! Like the wooden dummy, chi sao is only a component of the wing chun system, and not the whole. The moment one treats chi sao as the ultimate fighting exercise, he loses the big picture and runs the risk of deluding himself that he is a skilled fighter. An easy self-test to see if one has fallen prey to this delusion trap is merely to interact with martial artists of other systems, especially those who do not play by the rules of the chi sao game!

So much for misconceptions about chi sao then. To rid oneself of this problem of distancing, the wooden dummy becomes an enormously useful 'quality assurance tool'. A good distance between you and the wooden dummy can be gauged by executing the 'tuok sao' technique, which is a double palm-up strike with your palms striking on the bottom ends of the dummy's wooden arms that are sticking out. Remember your elbow should also remain 6 inches away from your body. If you are able to strike the bottom ends of the wooden dummy arms while maintaining 6 inches between your elbow and your body while standing at the correct stance, you will have found your proper distancing with the dummy, which you can apply to your chi sao, and even to your real fighting opponents. However, for this measuring exercise to be effective, you should also ensure that the wooden dummy is suspended at a height appropriate to your natural height - this is very important.

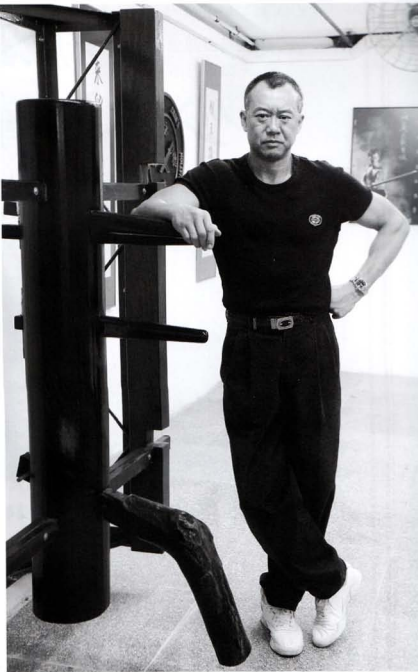
#### **D.I.Y. Health Check**

Before we conclude, I have some important suggestions/questions to help you perform a D.I.Y. health check on whether you are practicing on the wooden dummy properly (and therefore significantly affecting your road to maturity in wing chun):

- Are you able to stand firm even after you have just struck the wooden dummy with a powerful kick at arm's length or close-range? If not, then there's a problem with your stance, stability, and/or inch power application or strength control...

- When you strike the wooden dummy, does the dummy make a hard, external sound? If so, you may be using merely your external muscle strength, and not your tendon strength which helps to generate inch power; also, you may not have proper supple strength/body control - apply supple strength rather than brutal strength, what the Chinese call 'yin strength' which is more internal and subtle than the 'yang strength'.

- When you hit your wooden dummy, does it rattle and shake like Elvis? If so, your wooden dummy might be too non-resistant or light weight to be of benefit to



inch power and tendon strength training. Get one with a thick and heavy trunk. At Stephen Chan's Wing Chun Kung Fu Association, we use a heavy dummy and even sometimes place shock absorbent material between the dummy arms and leg and the trunk itself, making it more difficult for the novice to apply inch power.

#### **Conclusion**

We have explored the value of the wooden dummy within the wing chun system by analyzing how the dummy helps us develop or test our stance and stability, inch power and tendon strength, rhythm and flow, and proper distancing. We finished our discussion by pointing to some questions useful for continuously gauging your own performance on the dummy. Since wing chun is such a rich and dynamic martial art - fitting for the soulful expression of man who is made in the image of God, the perspectives taken in this article must necessarily be a bit simplistic for the benefit of exposition. If the reader would like to find out more about the art of wing chun, please contact Grandmaster Stephen Chan (contact details provided below), even paying him a visit when you have the occasion!