



One of the least attended to aspects of Wing Chun is footwork. The problem is many people only concentrate on their hand techniques and they forget their feet.



Wing Chun Footwork

If you talk to any traditional Chinese martial arts teacher, or read any articles and stories about traditional methods of training, the most common things you will find are tales of how hard people trained their stances and their legs. The reason they did it back then is still relevant to today's students. Quite simply, your legs are your foundation, and without a good foundation you will never be strong or steady enough to make your techniques work as they should and Wing Chun is no exception.

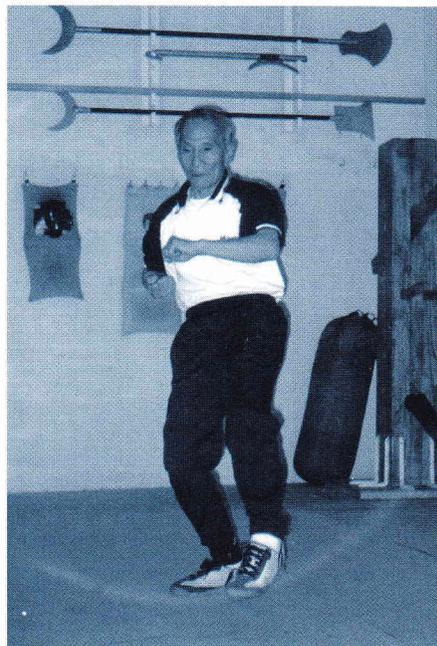
Training a good stance takes a lot of time, patience and practice, but even though you may have made your stances technically correct and physically strong, the next question is how do you use these stances and how do you change from one stance/position to another? This is where your footwork comes in.

In Wing Chun there are three stances, Yee Chi Kim Yeun Ma, Jeun Ma and Jun Ma. To link these stances up together there are two methods of stepping, Bui Ma (Thrusting Step) and Heun Ma (Circling Step). Training Jeun Ma also trains turning your body 45 degrees and 90 degrees and this is another important link in the chain.

Roughly speaking, Bui Ma, Huen Ma and Juen Ma will be used in combination. In the forms all the stances and stepping are trained separately and this allows you to examine them and understand them technically. Although, if you only used them in isolation, you would find that your Wing Chun would be quite stiff and many lack a great many things, leaving you feeling vulnerable and wondering how to cope with a great many situations. Thus it is very important or should I say very, very important that you can move quickly, smoothly and technically correctly to different positions with ease. When you can do this you will be in a better position to use your hand techniques, whether they be attacking or defending. This is because at all times you

have a good stance and your posture is correct and therefore strong. This also allows you to relax more, use less strength to defend yourself, and at the same time allow you to generate more power when attacking.

This all sounds very attractive, but how do you do it? You may be surprised to learn that this is actually trained whilst you are doing Chi Sau – Sticking Hands. This is a part that a lot of people miss. Chi Sau is not meant to be a stationary exercise, or one



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where you monotonously step forwards and backwards.

Whilst Chi Sau allows you to develop your hand techniques and discover how to use them, it also does the same for your stances and stepping. Once you realise this,

it is only a matter of attending to it. For example, when you first start Chi Sau, it is natural not to move too much, and concentrate on your hands. If you are told at the same time to try and move your feet and waist, you would become very confused, very quickly. So at the start, you concentrate on your hands. Your teacher and your seniors should be able to remind you each time you have your legs too straight, or your feet too wide/narrow etc. so you don't need to worry too much.

After a while, you should start to concentrate on your legs and your footwork. A good way to do this is to repeat the same methodology to your feet as you did at the start, i.e. forget about your hands (or at least don't worry about them), and concentrate on your feet.

A nice simple exercise to try:

Use one hand, and changing from either Tan Sau to Bong Sau, allow your partner to guide you in any direction by either pushing on your arm, or pulling it. Your partner should not use too much pressure as the exercise is designed to train your footwork, but as you get better, they can make you move faster, or alternate the pace suddenly.

Your partner should continually change directions, going left or right, forwards or backwards etc. You should try and follow his/her lead, moving at the same speed and changing direction smoothly. Sometimes your partner can move only a little, so you need only to take one or two steps, or even just turn.

Try not to make it a fixed pattern, the more you can make it random the better. Your partner should tell you if you are making mistakes. Be careful not to only step and forget about turning your waist. Once you find you are quite comfortable, try to use your new footwork skills in your Chi Sau. The difference it makes is quite marked. As the Chinese saying goes, “A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step”, or in our case a single step or turn. ■

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