

# Caffeine High

**Official Newsletter Australasian Ving Chun Kuen Instructors Association**

**- using the internet to counter the mis-information spread by the internet -**

## FROM THE BARISTA

**Welcome to the 2nd edition of this our official – ‘occasional’ - Instructors newsletter, and a big ‘Thank You’ to those who proffered feedback on the June issue.** One reader expressed his concerns over the influence ‘Sifu Net’ was having over one of his students in particular, and how that filtered through to the rest of his class. Our subsequent discussion centered around how best to achieve positive outcomes for the student involved and the class as a whole. We began by acknowledging that ‘Sifu Net’ is here to stay, and that we should focus on the positives rather than the negatives in our search for a solution. We should begin, we decided, by recognizing that our

role as teachers is not to ‘ban the net’ (burn the books) but to give them the tools of discernment and sound reasoning – a filtering mechanism - so that when they open the books they can better ‘stay on the tracks’.

While we might discourage ‘Sifu Net’ disruptions during class, try congratulating a student for their enthusiasm and thirst for knowledge of Wing Chun that drove them to spend long hours searching the net in the first place.

Speak their language. Learn to use, when appropriate, examples from ‘Sifu Net’ to illustrate the validity of your lesson. Make ‘Sifu Net’ your ally not your enemy.

Don’t focus on the ‘similarities’ or the ‘differences’ in expression between different Wing Chun schools and lineages. We have readymade and time-tested filtering mechanisms called ‘Principles’; focus on them.

Focus on the principles: Conservation of Energy; Economy of Motion; Simultaneous Attack & Defense; Relaxation; Skill to Overcome Brute Force.

Finally we have Siu Nim Tao as a blueprint for ‘Control of Force’, whereby we begin to build and embed neurological pathways uniting the mind and body.

In ‘**Spare What You Share**’, I give two rather subtle examples from ‘Sifu Net’ which illustrate why, as Instructors, we should consider giving something the ‘flick’ before we give it a ‘tick’. – *Kevin Earle*

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**Feature Article: Excerpt from ‘Ving Chun Kuen: The art Of Invincibility’.**  
*Kevin Earle - ... the health benefits of training on the Wooden Dummy....*

**Spare What You Share – Why insist on confidentiality? Why do I caution Instructors to be careful about their sources, who and what they promote? Ving Chun is a system, a method, and some “Masters” just don’t get it! These examples may just clarify why I have such a strong opinion about ‘keeping it in the family’....** *Kevin Earle*

*“...it’s just.....an occasional newsletter...” Kevin Earle*

## SPARE WHAT YOU SHARE

It's hard enough as it is, with the volumes of Wing Chun information available at a keystroke, to keep students focused on the basics and on your class curriculum, without you yourself adding to the problem. Next time you tick a 'like' box to another Wing Chun 'Masters' comments or articles; or save his videos to your 'favorites' folder; or post his videos and links to your Facebook page; be aware that your students may see such actions as a recommendation or endorsement of that 'Masters' teachings, and before you know it you have incorrect training methods and concepts taking root in sponge-like minds, filtering into their training, and being spread amongst the other students. The problem is then multiplied when you attempt to correct their error, for not only does it create confusion, but they may begin to question your knowledge and authority as an Instructor.

The spread of misinformation is often intergenerational. Someone says that their teacher told them that a saying formed the basis of a Wing Chun principle. Repeated often enough the saying becomes cast in stone, inviolate – when in fact the original saying was never a part of Wing Chun at all but was imported from another system; or was the result of mistranslation; or merely copied and repeated because it seems like a good idea. Chinese whispers. Just because some (possibly well meaning) Wing Chun 'Master' repeats something over and over, or has had his photo in a book, or has a flash looking website, that doesn't mean the saying is true.

We can all chuckle and point out errors in the more obvious examples of 'poor' Wing Chun – goodness knows there is enough of it on the net – but I am going to give two examples of the type of (mis-)information that on the surface appears harmless; yet it is within their subtlety that lay the snares which can lead the unwary astray.

The first example is from the Facebook page of Wing Chun 'Master', Jordan Del-Grande, (miraculously promoted to Master the day he started training with Sifu Greg three years ago). Jordan claims to to teach everything from healing the sick & raising the dead; time travel; business management and mastering computer science through his Wing Chun curriculum. Not only that, he writes that he's about to revolutionize the entire Wing Chun system with a new Mook Yan Jong. In his own words; *"A totally revolutionary design to upgrade Wing Chun much like how Gates or Jobs changed the computer world. Not kidding."* Really? I can't wait Jordan.

But I digress. Despite his supernatural powers 'Master' Jordan has been having some physical difficulties. Since Jordan is far more articulate than I, I have cut & pasted directly from his Facebook entries regarding his shoulder problem. *"Looking into the physio and chiropractic exercises, I discovered that they were not helping me. Looking into my Wing Chun exercises I realised they were the instigator of my problems. From here I noticed that there was something missing between both of them - A foundational issue that needed to be rectified."* And, *"People of Wing Chun should become extremely familiar with the shoulder as with techniques like the Bong Sau and its internal rotation, inch punches, Sticky Hands and centreline theory, it is quite common for practitioners of Wing Chun to have shoulder injuries, especially at the rotator cuff - due to weak rhomboids."*

So we read that Jordan has been having shoulder problems, and that he believed Wing Chun was the 'instigator' of those problems, the root cause being 'weak rhomboids'. All seems reasonable until we look at some possible conclusions a Student could draw from Jordan's postings:

1. Shoulder injuries are common in Wing Chun
2. If I practice Wing Chun I can expect to get shoulder injuries.
3. Weak rhomboid muscles are the cause of shoulder injuries among Wing Chun practitioners.
4. To avoid shoulder injuries I should strengthen my rhomboid muscles.
5. I need to be strong to do Wing Chun.
6. I know these things to be true because Jordan the Wing Chun Master said so.

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**SPARE WHAT YOU SHARE - ...continued**

Since some people do get shoulder problems from Wing Chun, there is an element of truth to the first statement. This can lead some people to (mistakenly) believe that the subsequent statements are true as well. Some will even take it to mean that Jordan must be really knowledgeable about Wing Chun, and begin to follow all of his teachings. However Jordan is very wide of the mark. In fact, Jordan exhibits no understanding of basic Wing Chun principles. To put it bluntly, Jordan has no idea what he is talking about.

Let me be quite clear:

- Correct practice of Wing Chun will not cause shoulder injuries.
- In Chi Sau (or use of the Bong Sau) one must not lift, carry, or hold the weight of one's partner.
- One should not rely on developed strength.
- One should follow the principles of Relaxation, Conservation of Energy, Skill to Overcome Brute Force.
- One's Bong Sau is created by one's training partner.

Therefore I must stress that:

- It is not weak shoulder muscles that cause a Wing Chun practitioner to develop shoulder problems.
- One will not get shoulder injuries if one's Bong Sau is correct.
- One's natural strength will suffice for Wing Chun.

I believe that if one undertakes a training program to strengthen the shoulder muscles it will only reinforce the mistaken idea that one needs to use strength in Chi Sau and to complete a Bong Sau. Worse, it will also reinforce the muscle memory to automatically engage the muscles during Chi Sau, which is the opposite affect to which one should be training. Further, it will lay the foundation for greater injury when one's (now stronger) muscles fail – as they no doubt will - against a greater load.

I am sure that Jordan is very knowledgeable in many fields, but it is obvious to me that Wing Chun is not one of his areas of expertise. Unfortunately, his own students don't know any better.

Case 2:

For my next example I refer to an article on punching written by Yun Hoi (Zopa Gyatso), published in Facebook. Yun Hoi trained with Sifu Greg in the mid to late '60's, later dropping what he refers to as the 'Hong Kong' version and switching allegiance to Yuen Kay San lineage of Mainland China. By all accounts he is well educated; he certainly writes some rather interesting articles. I will say that I respect his efforts and opinion, however I don't always agree with everything he writes.

His article is about a 'Kuen Kit', "Kuen yao sum faat" (The Punch Comes from the Heart). 'Kuen kuit', or 'Words of Wisdom', are simply that. There have been many such sayings associated with Wing Chun, but they are not principles of the art. Over the years many have been discarded as being unrelated to Wing Chun or irrelevant, even contradictory. In this particular case I cannot agree with all of Yun Hoi's analysis as presented.

To deal specifically with his article, he writes *"First, we can interpret the kuen kuit to mean that the true Wing Chun punch comes from the anatomical region of the heart."* Since there are a number of different 'true' Wing Chun punches found in Siu Nim Tao, Chum Kiu, and Bil Jee, which 'true' Wing Chun punch is he referring to?

From his description he appears to be comparing the 'Hong Kong version' (his words) of the Centreline punch, or Vertical Fist punch found at the start of Siu Nim Tao, with 'his version' of the centreline punch, which appears to be the Lifting Punch found in Chum Kiu. Two different punches, like comparing chalk with cheese.

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## SPARE WHAT YOU SHARE - ...continued

Yun Hoi then states that the 'Hong Kong' version results in 'Flying Elbows'. (Anyone who has learned this punch correctly knows that this is not the case). The rest of his analysis of the 'Hong Kong' version is, bluntly, wide of the mark in my experience. According to Yun Hoi's analysis correct alignment should have both fist AND elbow on the centreline. (He writes: "*It has the advantage of closing the centreline as the elbow, not just the wrist, is on the centerline.*") A simple test will show that it is nigh impossible for anyone to deliver a powerful punch with a vertical fist in such a contorted position. In fact in viewing Yun Hoi's own photos of himself executing a vertical fist strike (he has several available for viewing) he appears to be using the 'Hong Kong version' in which, (his words), "*The punch finishes with the arm angled in from the shoulder with the elbow fairly much on the side bodyline*"—contrary to his own admonition to keep the elbow in the centre.

In my opinion, to say that the 'Hong Kong version' results in 'Flying Elbows' shows a poor or limited understanding of the 'Hong Kong version' &/or Flying Elbows. There again I cannot speak for all 'Hong Kong' versions, and I am not privy to what further Hong Kong training Yun Hoi may have explored between the time he left Sifu Greg's, and when he commenced his mainland Wing Chun training. What I can say is that the vertical fist strike as understood and taught by me at Earle's Academy does not result in either tension or flying elbows, as supposed by Yun Hoi.

Don't misunderstand me. What I know of Yun Hoi, I like. But as much as I admire his intellectual and literary achievements, unfortunately any merit to be found in his article is greatly diminished by his faulty analytical breakdown of the vertical punch and his underlying constant enduring penchant to deride 'Hong Kong' Wing Chun and elevate his own (cult-like) status.

Hopefully the breakdown of the those two examples from the net will give greater insight into why I encourage people to stay away from 'Sifu Net', stay loyal to ones lineage, and focus on the principles. - *Kevin Earle*

Both a mechanical watch and a digital watch are systems that tell time, but the operational parts of either one cannot be used to fix or enhance the operation of the other; remove one part and their function is destroyed.

Similarly the balance of an eco-system can be disrupted or destroyed by the introduction of a foreign species; or by the extinction of another.

Like those examples Ving Chun Kuen is a complete system the functionality of which is weakened by unnecessary additions which hamper the progress of the practitioner, and compromise his practical ability. - *Kevin Earle*

Your students didn't join your school because of me, or because of the Association. Apart from their own dreams or weird ideas on why they wanted to learn Wing Chun, they've stayed because of *you!* It's not our role to educate your students, but to support you, the Instructor.

I will continue to do that to the best of my ability.  
*Committed to your success! Kevin Earle*

**Sifu Beau has restructured his school  
and now trains under the banner  
'MANA WING CHUN'**

**We congratulate him on new beginnings  
And wish him every success in his endeavours**

#### Web Links & Contact

[VCK Association](#)

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## **Health Benefits of Earle's Ving Chun Kuen**

**Known for its powerful and practical rapid-fire fighting method, less widely understood are the overall health benefits of Ving Chun Kungfu training. In particular little is known of the health benefits of unique training methods on Ving Chuns Wooden Dummy.**

### **Introduction**

Fortunately the health benefits of regular exercise are well documented and widely accepted. Unfortunately however, poorly executed exercise routines can exacerbate existing health problems and even cause new problems. Horrific injuries are a weekly occurrence in most high impact sporting codes, which by their very nature invite injury, while it is not uncommon for older persons looking to regain their youthful vigour to suffer serious joint problems and possibly heart attacks, stroke, or sudden death, as a result of even moderate training. For these reasons I recommend training in the low impact training program Earle's Ving Chun Kuen, the goal being to reduce the chance of problems developing in the first instance, and secondly, being therapeutic and rehabilitative in the case of existing problems.

Ving Chun Kungfu is an ancient Chinese art that trains the whole body. I believe that few kungfu teachers today have any understanding at all of what is meant by the term 'whole body' in kungfu terms, or any real understanding of the health benefits of the art. Their emphasis is on the fighting aspects only. I am not surprised by this, because it is an art of fighting. Of course it can be argued that knowledge of any health benefits of Ving Chun is not important since any such benefit is simply a by-product of the physical training for fighting or self-defence. However while it is true that improved health and vitality are a by-product of the martial exercise, I believe it is a mistake to underestimate the value of the health benefits to ones performance of the practical method.

### **Health Benefits**

The key lays in an idea known as Siu Nim Tao. This training method, which is unique to Ving Chun, may help one overcome headaches, fatigue, muscular pain, back pain, joint pain, depression, and stress related health problems while improving ones chances of avoiding obesity, arthritis, stroke, and cardiovascular disease; all while practising effective self-defence. While other low impact regimes may have similar benefits I know of none other that simultaneously develops the high level of practical self-defence skill which is the hallmark of the system. Further, I believe none have the associated health advantages of the Wooden Dummy training.

Some may question the veracity of my assertions as to the benefits of such training. Consider then that many of the problems that affect the quality of life of the older person are to do with mobility (*range of motion, joint problems, muscular atrophy*); balance (*falls*); coordination (*skills impairment*); neurological (*cognitive impairment including concentration & memory problems*) ; immune system breakdown (*increased susceptibility to infections, colds and flu, etc.*).

It is not just the elderly who can benefit. I believe that the foundation for these problems in later life is laid in one's youth with exercise induced injury and poor postural habits being a major cause. Ving Chun training using correct methods while young can stop bad habits developing in the first place.

Here I have listed a few major benefits that can be gained training Ving Chun.

- Develops practical self-defence skills using natural body movement.
- Low impact stress free exercise that will enhance balance by improving postural alignment.
- Develops ability to consciously relax tense muscles, aiding mental relaxation, relieving stress, and reducing fatigue.
- Working with natural body movements to develop and maintain the working relationship of the muscles, the joints, and the skeletal and cardiovascular systems.
- Strengthening of the muscles and the tendons and ligaments attachments to the muscles; which in turn improves ones posture; which in turn reduces the constriction of veins, arteries, nerves, and internal organs; and helps to prevent low back strain and aid in recovery from low back strain.
- Maintains muscle tonus, bone density, and respiration into later life
- Improves posture and balance by using relaxation to enhance muscular control and coordination of natural body movement.
- Good posture minimises risk of neck injuries, and lowers the risk of arthritis from wear and tear on joints caused by poor posture.
- Good posture may reduce the risk of kyphosis (dowagers hump)
- Improves muscle oxygen transport & use, lowers pulse rate & respiratory rate placing less strain on the cardiovascular system.
- Increases overall metabolic activity aiding weight reduction &/or weight control, thereby reducing the risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease.
- Increased immunity to common ailments such as cold and flu.
- Enhances brain function by developing and maintaining neurological pathways
- Enhances memory
- Injury free method, the intensity of which can be increased as individual develops

You will note that all of the health problems listed here are associated with or can be alleviated, reversed, or avoided, by correction to one's posture. So why is it that the health benefits are not more widely taught? Perhaps it is because knowledge that has been accumulated and handed down over generations' forms invisible fibres in the fabric of the art, and in the culture of society as a whole. It just 'is'. The teacher gives no thought to teaching it because it is an inherent aspect of the art, and so the student may remain ignorant of the fibres existence, merely copying the movements and reaping any scraps of reward that may come simply as a by-product rather than excelling by design. The essence is not grasped because the essence cannot be seen.

### **Structural Balance & Postural Alignment for Skill development**

I have occasionally been questioned as to the attention to detail and the time taken correcting and adjusting a student's posture; however the fact is that poor posture doesn't only adversely affect one's health. It can stop one from excelling in their endeavours, for poor posture affects one's structure and balance, creates tension, and causes fatigue, thereby laying the foundation for possible injury, all factors which individually and collectively adversely affect skill development.

While modern sports science understands the role structural balance and postural alignment play in helping athletes of all codes reach their fullest potential, such knowledge is not new. Certainly it is

not new to Kungfu. In the earliest historical account of Chinese martial art theory, Wu-Yue Chunqiu (circa 700 BC), it is recorded *"In hand to hand combat a dedicated mind and a balanced body are very important"* and *"Balanced posture and controlled breathing harmonises the body and spirit"*.

### **Added Benefits - Earle's Ving Chun Kuen Wooden Dummy Training**

It is essential that Wooden Dummy training is not undertaken until one has built the necessary foundation with the daily practise of Ving Chun's pattern of movement known as Siu Nim Tao, under the guidance of a knowledgeable mentor. Building upon the improved postural habits, training on the Wooden Dummy takes it to new level. A training aid to further develop the practical skills used in self-defence, the focus health-wise is on further developing the mind-muscle connection. Improvements made to one's posture, structural integrity and motor coordination, during the basic training, are further reinforced by the unique wooden dummy training.

Coordination is improved in all skill categories: fine motor coordination, gross motor coordination, and complex motor coordination. Fine motor skills are those involved in such activities as reading, drawing, painting, using a mouse and keyboard etc., while the term Gross motor skills generally refers to uni-activities such as walking and running.

Complex motor skills are those that combine a number of distinctly separate individual movements into one simultaneous movement. Lap Sau and Chi Sau are examples of two person complex skills. In Wooden Dummy training, performing a right Palm-Up Arm, left Vertical Palm, and right Mid Heel Kick, simultaneously, is one example of a complex motor skill. Performing a left Splitting Arm, and a right Lying Palm, simultaneously, while pivoting is another example of a complex skill. Linking the two with simultaneous stepping and pivoting into one continuous movement, further adds to the complexity of the exercise. For maximum benefit these types of drills must be performed with imagination and an awareness of posture, balance, structure, relaxation, and the correct use of energy. Since imagination, attention and concentration is required to memorise then recall such complex movements, and judgement must be exercised to perform them with honest self-analytical attention to detail, there is an obvious benefit to neurological function and cognitive ability.

Those exercises, when combined with the contact on the dummy, form a physically and mentally challenging process known in Kungfu as 'Building up One's 'Chi' (Life Force). The constant contact on the dummy is a tangible form of 'Chi' which one can see, hear, and feel. But it cannot reach its full potential without 'abstract Chi' (such as is developed in Siu Nim Tao) a unique neurological sensation which endeavours to build communication between mind and body by using ones imagination.

I am not talking of the 'Chi' that is commonly illustrated by fraudulent displays such as knock-out blows from fifty paces, or lighting fires or lamps with ones bare hands or similar absurdities, but rather a centuries old understanding of the unification of one's inner life force with the physical body to develop incredible power. Similar methods are now utilised in modern sports science, as proposed by Lee Parore, Colgan Institute: *"Your movement power is controlled by the neural circuitry throughout your body... strengthen the neural links to reinforce powerful movement"*.

But developed 'Chi' is about more than powerful movement. In 2010 it was reported that (then) seventy-seven year old Mr Chu Shong Tin (a sixty year veteran of Ving Chun) was diagnosed with terminal liver cancer and given just eight months to live. Defying the odds he rejected western

medicine and continued his daily practise of Kungfu. In the four years since his diagnoses the cancer has shrunk, astounding his doctors. While there may be numerous reasons, or combinations of reasons, facilitating such a dramatic turnaround, one cannot help but believe that Mr Chu's amazing ability to harness his 'Chi' was a major factor. Thus one might define 'Chi' as an innate ability to use ones neural circuitry (inner strength, power of the mind) to not only enhance ones physical power; but also to maintain inner strength and vitality, and to heal oneself.

A word of advice: When training on the wooden dummy one should never pound their hands or arms against the dummy's hardwood trunk or arms as if to smash it in some vain attempt at toughening themselves. Some associate Kungfu with Iron Palm training, Iron Body training, or other extreme methods of toughening the body. Ving Chun, however, eschews such extremes and takes a more moderate and balanced approach. Unlike martial artists who toughen the hands to form calluses, some Ving Chun exponents train in silk gloves (when practicing punches on a wall bag) to keep their hands soft and smooth. Perhaps harkening back to the founder Miss Yim Ving Chun, or even 2000 years before to the hermit swordswoman, the Lady of Yue, of whom it was written when describing the martial theory of illusion; *"One must behave like a delicate Lady but fight like a tiger"*. More likely, I believe, it is simply to avoid practises that are harmful to one's health, following the theory of training "Whole Body" Kungfu, not just parts of the body in extreme isolation.

### Summary

Many sports and sports-specific training methods are high impact and focus on developing physical strength and stamina. Such training may lead to physical imbalance, and sporting injuries are common in high impact sports. The focus of Ving Chun training on the other hand is to develop internal strength, best described in this context of this paper, as developing the mind – muscle connection. Further, whether one pursues Ving Chun for enjoyment, for self-defence, or for healthy living, being low impact makes it ideal for the older person and those people who have not lived an active lifestyle since it does not require, or focus on building, developed strength; and it is non-competitive, meaning that physical injuries are rare. In fact a unique advantage of Ving Chun training is that it can be carried out daily regardless of any injury that one may be carrying. As one of my private clients recently reported; *"In trying to maintain a healthy lifestyle I have embarked on a number of programs over the years, starting with great enthusiasm but soon dreading the thought of another session at the gym. Since commencing your program I have greater body awareness, greater awareness of self. Previously I would, on occasion, wander through my day unfocused, but following your routine every morning gives me clarity and focus. It sets my posture and attitude for the rest of the day, and I feel more energetic. As a result I know that I am more productive and deal more efficiently with my own clients. What's more I look forward to each session, and appreciate the fact that I can train every day regardless of any ailment or injury. As a health professional I wish I could take your program and bottle it."*

Finally, I stress again the importance of having a knowledgeable mentor to oversee ones training regime. Through studious experience over 40 years I have developed my own methodology for working with the health and quality of life aspects of this fascinating art, and I enjoy helping others realise their full potential. My program is not a cure for all life's ills, but do not underestimate the role of Ving Chun in developing the power of posture in your life, for there lays one of the keys to good health and longevity. – Kevin Earle ©