

HOW GOOD IS YOUR WING CHUN?

LEAVE YOUR COMFORT ZONE TO FIND OUT

BY MARTIN MURPHY PHOTOS INTERNATIONAL WING CHUN ORGANIZATION



So, how do you know how good your *Wing Chun* really is? How well do your forms stack up against the standard? And has your *Chi Sau* become so routine you and your classmates all know each other's tricks? How is your *Wing Chun* progressing absent outside reference points, agreed standards and the force of competition, or are you training in a bubble?

A group of *Sifus* in Hong Kong and Europe has been trying to help students answer these questions. *Sifu* Donald Mak, head of the *International Wing Chun Organization (IWCO)*, with some of his colleagues of the *World Wing Chun Union (WWCU)* and the *Russian Wing Chun Federation* in Hong Kong and Russia, respectively, have been holding several regular, almost annual, *Wing Chun* competitions since 2010. Held in Hong Kong, Mainland China and Russia, the competitions are open to all *Wing Chun* practitioners from any country and any lineage. In the most recent competition, held in October in Hong Kong, over 300 people from 15 countries and regions participated.

Based in Hong Kong, with branches around the world, the *WWCU* was established in 2009, hoping to set aside the differences among *Wing Chun* schools and lineages and uniting fellow practitioners from around the world by providing a platform for *Wing Chun*'s development and communication to the public. One of its main activities has been organising *Wing Chun* competitions, including setting rules and standards and training judges and referees.

As *Sifu* Mak explains, "In the old days, martial arts in China was used for lethal purposes, including for protecting treasure and important rich people. Many martial artists became bodyguards or worked in security. But today,

MANY OF US HAVE BEEN TRAINING IN *WING CHUN* FOR A LONG TIME. FOR OTHERS, IT MAY BE JUST A FEW MONTHS OR A FEW YEARS. REGARDLESS OF LENGTH, YOU'VE MOST LIKELY BEEN DOING YOUR FORMS, DRILLS AND *CHI SAU* WITH THE SAME *SIFU* AND GROUP OF STUDENTS THROUGHOUT YOUR TRAINING.

there are few ways to use *Wing Chun* and other martial arts in a way that can keep their original spirit alive. Competition is the best way to do this, and it can raise the standards of the art and arouse interest, similar to what is done in *Boxing* or *Muay Thai*.”

However, *Sifu Mak* will be the first to admit that such competitions cannot fully replicate the lethal nature of *Wing Chun*, given the emphasis on safety and the enforcement of rules. The very nature of the competitions does not adequately allow the original skills of *Wing Chun* to manifest themselves in the ring. Critics of the competitions say there is too much *Boxing* and pushing, and it's hard to detect the deployment of *Wing Chun* in many fights.

While acknowledging such drawbacks, *Sifu Mak* and his colleagues in Hong Kong say it's still early, and the competitions have evolved since their first event in 2010 into a set of rules that reward fighters who can demonstrate *Wing Chun* skills, rather than just scoring points pummeling their opponent with punches.

The competitions test four categories of *Wing Chun* skills. The first is *Tau Lu* (forms). These include the three empty-hand forms of *Sil Lim Tao*, *Chum Kiu* and *Biu Jee*, and the Wooden Dummy, the Long Pole and the Butterfly Swords. What the judges are looking for in these forms is not so much a sequence of movements or a particular style, as different lineages will perform the forms in a variety of ways, but how the practitioner demonstrates smoothness, power, balance and fluidity. Judges are also looking for certain intangibles, such as *Jing* (“Essence”), *Hei* (“Internal Energy”), and *San* (“Spirit”). These elements form the standards by which practitioners are judged under the current rules.

A second category is full-contact fighting. Here, the competitors wear full protection and are expected to use an array of *Wing Chun* techniques to subdue their opponent during a three-round bout. Points are given for the number of effective strikes and use of *Wing Chun* attacking methods, including takedowns and kicks.

Perhaps, the area that has evolved the most since the early competitions in 2010 and 2012 is *Chi Sau*. In those matches, the *Chi Sau* category was not that dissimilar to full contact, with the



Judges look for the uses of *Wing Chun* techniques and the competitor's ability to control power with accuracy.

only differences being that fighters started from a rolling position and no kicking was allowed. Many felt this format did not reflect the true nature of *Chi Sau*, so the *IWCO* revised the rules prior to the 2014 competition in St. Petersburg. For starters, to preserve the *Chi Sau* format that most *Wing Chun* practitioners are familiar with, the *IWCO* did away with all protective gear.

According to the current *Chi Sau* competition rules, the bouts take place inside a 1.6 by 1.6 metre marked area, which the competitors should try to stay within, using turning, pivoting and footwork, or they lose points. Fighters are discouraged from excessive pushing and pulling to get their opponent out of the marked area.

Competitors should aim to score points using *Wing Chun* techniques to strike the body or take down their opponent. Light strikes or touches to the side of the neck are acceptable, but strikes or touches to the head or throat are disallowed. In addition, no elbow strikes or joint locking or dislocating techniques are permitted, although grappling is sanctioned. Judges look for the uses



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While demonstration of the forms, full-contact fights, and *Chi Sau* are now the main categories showcased in the competitions held in Hong Kong and Mainland China, the Russian branch of the *IWCO* and the *Russian Wing Chun Federation* have introduced a fourth category, called *Duai Chak*. These are choreographed two-person pre-set fights that should demonstrate an array of *Wing Chun* elements. Both the benefit and challenge of the *Duai Chak* is it tests the practitioners' understanding of *Wing Chun* concepts and techniques, e.g., what defence is best used for certain attacks, how to use footwork, and knowing how to coordinate kicks and hand strikes in the most efficient way. The scoring criteria are like those of *Tau Lu* (forms).

So far, the *WWCU* has held four major competitions: two in China in 2010 and 2014 and two in Hong Kong in 2012 and 2016, while the Russian branch of the *WWCU* has held four separate events each year since 2013. Competitions are being arranged for 2017, but no dates have been set.

While detractors may say these competitions give people the wrong impression of *Wing Chun*, its advocates argue the more competitions held, the more judges are trained, and the more practitioners and students see them as a way to demonstrate their skills, rather than just winning a punching match, then the more they will evolve into a format that will more accurately capture the original spirit and nature of *Wing Chun*.

For those interested in holding or learning more about *Wing Chun* competitions, **Sifu Donald Mak** is willing to share his experience and provide a set of the current rules for judging and scoring. He can be reached at info@hkwingchun.com

of *Wing Chun* techniques and the competitor's ability to control power with accuracy. Punches or palm strikes that land just short of hitting or touching the opponent's face or nose will earn points, while strikes to the body must be executed with controlled power, i.e. only a slight touch to the body will score points.