

Interview with Sifu Robert Kenneryd

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1. As a quick intro, can you tell us a bit about yourself and your school? When, where, how and why did you start practicing?

I began my Wing Chun training in 2001 and practiced at several schools in Sweden. In 2005, I started traveling to Hong Kong for further training. There I went to a few different schools but in 2008 I was very lucky to meet my Sifu Donald Mak. His skills and knowledge of Wing Chun are impressive. I realized quickly that I found myself a high-skilled master. He accepted me as one of his students and ever since I've traveled every year to Hong Kong to learn from him.

After a few years of training with SiFu Mak, I got his blessings to both examine students and appoint instructors in the International Wing Chun Organization (IWCO), which is his worldwide Wing Chun organization. In 2017, my SiFu formally accepted me as a Todai (disciple), and I performed my Bai Si ceremony earlier this year. It was a huge honor and one of my biggest accomplishment in Martial Arts.



2. What are the most common mistakes, or assumptions, you've encountered during your years of teaching?

In my experience, the most biggest misconception people have of Wing Chun is that it's easy. The basics are indeed easy and Wing Chun can be efficient in self-defense but to really master the system is a life long journey. Kung Fu is "a skill achieved through hard work", and that is really true.

If you want to be good at Kung Fu, you need to focus on the basics. Don't try to skip steps and rush through the techniques. Be patient and master one technique before learning another.

3. Movies such as "Yip Man", "The Grandmaster" and such are probably one of the reasons many people start to practice at some point. Since reality is mostly not matching most of these movie scenes, what are some key aspects a beginning martial artist should focus on?

I think those movies have created a lot of people's interest in Wing Chun but they are not very realistic. If someone tells you that they can defeat 10 black belts in a fight than they are probably lying or trying to make money of you.

To me, and the way I teach my students, Wing Chun is not about fighting even though it is a very efficient way of fighting. But if you just want to learn how to fight I would recommend something else. Wing Chun is not only a great self defense system but a way of life. It can help you in all aspects of life.



4. How can Kung Fu be used in an educational, non martial arts setting?

I think the educational system can learn a lot from Kung Fu. It really helps you to focus and relax both body and mind. It also teaches you patience and concentration, as well as self-confidence and respect for others.

5. The internet has completely changed our lives over the past 10-15 years. We now have access to lots of information (both good & bad) and connections like never before. How do you feel about this evolution and it's impact on Kung Fu?

In general I think it's good. Many things in Wing Chun were very secretive in the old days (I think it was the same in other Kung Fu styles).

Thanks to sites like YouTube, a lot of information is out there. You just need to sort out what's good and bad.

On the downside it seems that people think they can learn Wing Chun from watching videos. Sure you can learn some basic exercises but a video will not give you the right focus of power/structure and sensitivity. In short, you cannot master the Wing Chun system through YouTube, even though videos/books are a great way to gather information. It can never replace a Sifu teaching you the system and having classmates to reinforce what you've learned through sparring and drills.



6. What direction do you see Kung Fu or martial arts, as a whole, heading in?

Wing Chun is evolving every day. These are very exciting times because, thanks to the internet, it's very easy to find other practitioners from other lineages and exchange experience and ideas.

With the emergence of MMA, there will be constant pressure on some traditional martial arts to become "MMA-friendly," so the challenge will be how to respond to the emergence of MMA while keeping your martial art pure and traditional. One possible direction or path is to demonstrate how your traditional Kung Fu can work in MMA situations. Another is to just ignore MMA and focus on core skills since many traditional martial arts aren't geared for competition. For example, thrusts to the eyes, punches to the throat, kicks to the groin, and arm locks are forbidden in MMA but are at the core of Wing Chun and other styles of Kung Fu.

7. To end this interview in style, what is the best Kung Fu or martial arts advice you have personally ever received and what is the best advice you would give to our readers?

To be humble and realize that no martial art is the ultimate martial art. When searching for a martial art, you should not look for what others claim to be the best system but the system that works best for you.

If you don't put in the work, you won't be good no matter what system you are learning. You have to find it interesting in order for you to put all the work into it.

In my opinion every martial art has profound ideas on how to fight, and I think we should learn more from each other by exchanging skills, rather than nagging about what is the best martial art.

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