

STIRRING A NEST OF HORNETS
My Memories of a Great Wing Chun Kung-Fu Weapons Master
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Wong Shun Leung, Wong Chock, John F. Di Virgilio 7-1980

On a hot Hong Kong night in July of 1980, Wing Chun grandmaster Wong Chock took me to visit Grandmaster Wong Shun Leung's class in Kowloon. I was introduced as young "John D" from Honolulu, Hawaii. The two long time students of the late Great Grandmaster Yip Man, having finally reunited after some years of separation started talking to catch-up with things in life. The two classmates, talked at length about their whereabouts and old memories of their younger years with their teacher Yip Man.

After a long hour waiting nearby on the practice floor in boredom, I walk over to the wall and pulled a long staff. I performed the long staff form then picked up a pair of short swords that was on Grandmaster Wong Shun Leung's desk. The class environment was terrible. Street noise with cars pushing on their horns, automobile and bus exhaust, the opened and noisy television, and worst of all, the cigarettes that both Wongs puff away on made me feel a bit sick. Despite the bad air and noise, I started to performed the Wing Chun kung-fu "Baht Chaam Do" (Eight Chop Short Swords) form.

The chatting between the two Wongs abruptly stopped as I got through the several sections of the eight parts (sections) found in my sword form. Grandmaster Wong Shun Leung stood up, shaking his head with his cigarette still in his mouth. He looked at me then looked down at his still seated classmate Wong Chock, then turned back to me, again shaking his head side-to-side and said "No Such Sections. . . Not Correct!" in both the long staff and sword forms.

Wong Shun Leung's negative reflections on my forms were very disturbing! I had spent nearly six years perfecting my Wing Chun kung-fu techniques and a lot of time working on the weapons forms preparing for this Hong Kong trip. My teacher, Robert Yeung, in Hawaii, learned both weapons forms from Wong Chock. At this point, I could do nothing but put the two short sword back down on the table and sit quietly in a state of confusion and embarrassment. I wondered to myself, how can my weapons form be wrong? I knew that Wong Shun Leung was the older kung-fu brother (more senior in learning) over Wong Chock, but how could the knowledge be different.

The two masters started a long conversation back and forth, in some instances negatively shaking their heads. With my limited understanding of the Cantonese language, I wondered about their vocal exchange was all about? I signaled the interpreter, Ah Keung, sitting with the two masters, to come over and tell me what the lengthy and noisy discussion was about. Ah Keung said wait a little longer, as the two masters are discussing a lot of interesting information that is not known to many of the inner circle or the outside Wing Chun community. Over the next hour, Ah Keung returned to make a few short reports on the discussion between the old masters. Ah Keung explained that the two masters discussed many things and lot of "Dirty Laundry" that needed to be cleaned up before it poisoned the entire Yip Man Wing Chun lineage. However, the most important was your Hawaii short sword form, it really stirred up a hornet's nest of stinging experiences and revelations about of how the late Great Grandmaster Yip Man taught the Wing Chun weapons to his students. Ah Keung, said that some portions of the sword form that I performed were not correct.

Ah Keung explained that in times of monetary hardship, Yip Man showed a good many followers a shortened mix bag of blade techniques for good money, on the condition that they shall not share with others his teaching. All blade practices, with one exception, were one-on-one private sessions. Hence, only a few knew about who was learning the blades and none dare share. These mixed blade forms held only a small picture of the true form and applications. The many shorten forms had no more than eight sections or parts. Along with having only a shortened eight sections, these mixed forms all had one identifying bad technique imbedded into the form, so that Yim Man could later identify them as the incorrect forms. The bad technique placed into the incorrect form was the flipping the blades along each forearm. Master Wong Shun Leung said that only two of Yip Man's students learned the whole form and a third student got halfway. Yip Po Ching was the first to learn the blade system but he tragically died young a few years before Yip Man's passing. Wong Shun Leung was the second, with the third person learning half the form that lived in Macau. Several other Yip Man students got only bits and pieces of the blade form but that was it, nobody else got more. The whole short sword form in reality had a total of 13 parts (sections). The short swords were practiced in three phases; against the single long sword, the 9' long spear/staff, and finally against an opponent armed with two blades.

Ah Keung continued, it is unfortunate that masters Wong Chock, Chow Tze Chuen, and Moy Yat, having scraped up and pooled their monies together for lousy sword lessons. Together,

all three, received small group lessons from Yip Man and got the incorrect form which contained the flipped blades. Likewise, after seeing your Hawaii short sword form, Grandmaster Wong Shun Leung said it is just another incomplete mixed bag creation form. Your Grandmaster, Wong Chock, is very distraught over this revelation. Wong Chock will send a letter to his other two classmates about the disturbing revelation about their incomplete sword instruction. Master Wong Shun Leung will help them, if they wish, to relearn the 13 part form. Most import John, you have brought luck upon yourself. Grandmaster Wong Shun Leung liked your aggressive chi sau (partnered stick hands drills) performance against one of his top student and well know student earlier tonight. He also likes western students like yourself. Westerners are quick, big, and strong. He also likes people who have a college education, and have an intense desire to learn Wing Chun. Grandmaster Wong Shun Leung, with Wong Chock's approval, said to come back tomorrow morning and he will begin correcting your sword form and knowledge.

On these words, my personal feelings turned from dark and dismal into a brighter and more hopeful outlook on my Wing Chun experience. I would get instructions about the Wing Chun swords from the famed Wong Shun Leung himself! The following morning, Grandmaster Wong Shun Leung greeted me with bad news, he could not stay, but do not to dismay, come back later this afternoon and his chief instructor Yuen Yim Keung will start teaching me the correct sword form and the accompanying contact-touch applications. Good enough, I took the opportunity and returned that very afternoon. It was obvious from the start that the Wong Shun Leung's Wing Chun sword practices were far and away better than what I had previously learned. The clear objectives in each part, applied progressions, footwork, the various parallel alignments, and the development touch stickiness were all part of a very unique blade system. The system was a far superior system over the Wong Chock's blade form and methods.

From 1980 until his last year of life, with master Yuen Yim Keung's guidance, I used my professional coaching and educator's methods to developed a teaching curriculum for the 13 part form and the associated eight contact-touching skills. Both the form and the contact-touching skills are needed together to unpack the knowledge and techniques found within the Wing Chun short sword system.

In closing, I owe the late Grandmaster Wong Shun Leung and late master Yuen Yim Keung a very grateful thank you. Both helped many others beside myself in their Wing Chun knowledge and experiences and deserve a mountain of credit for keeping the Wing Chun short swords alive for future generations.