

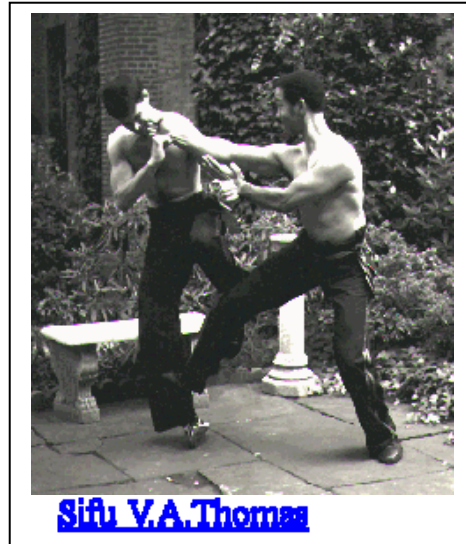
## CHI GERK VING TSUN'S FORGOTTEN STICKING FEET

*Most Martial Artists consider ving tsun a top-heavy system with hands doing most of the dirty work. But its three principal blocking techniques also apply to chi gerk, or the practice of sticking legs.*

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*Ving tsun kuen*, sometimes written "wing chun", currently is one of the most popular and misunderstood of the Chinese martial arts. Perhaps because of the disproportionate amount of attention given to certain features of the system, many people curious about ving tsun kuen perceive it as a top-heavy style with little or no footwork. One hears such expressions as "sticky hands" and references to startling hand speed so often the overall impression is that at its heart, ving tsun is no more than an art of deception.

Also misleading are vague references to ving tsun's mysterious hidden footwork. Any martial art that has managed to withstand the test of time - and in the 20th century, the challenge of widespread popularity - obviously has more - or perhaps less - to it than mystical "closed-door" transmissions. For so many people to make this system work for them should be evidence enough that it has a basis in rational physical principles, which if properly ingrained in a fighter's reactive consciousness will let him out them to use.



### **The sticking leg theory**

Sun Tzu, the Chinese military philosopher/strategist, wrote over two millennia ago: "Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril." If we as martial artists take this proverb to its logical extreme, it compels us to take stock of all the offensive and defensive tools at our disposal, and discard that which is useless in a given situation.

Ving tsun kuen always is referred to in popular literature as a "short-range" style. In truth, however, when fighting without weapons, the longest range possible relates to the use of the legs in kicking. Any science of fighting, then, is no more than a method of ending a confrontation through the most expedient means. According to ving tsun principles, there should be no "throwaway" techniques, and so a kick, for example, is never executed unless one has the controlling factor of hand contact as well; this almost assures that a kick will not completely miss its target.

Any fighter will agree that when one is but inches away from an opponent, there is neither adequate room nor sufficient time for the use of elaborate, elegant kicks directed at the head. With adequate distance from an attacker, one can utilize the forearm in deflecting a kick, as this involves a clashing weapon of comparable mass. The range also allows for recovery time, and a conventional one-two block/counter sequence can usually be successfully employed.

The relative strength and weight of the thigh of the attacker's kicking leg is of crucial importance when the distance is closed, however. Compare the mass of the wrist or forearm (conventional long-range blocking "tools") to that of the ankle and shin, and then to that of the heavily muscled thigh or calf. It becomes clear that at close range, the hands cannot be committed to guarding the body below the waist; for reasons of economy and practicality, the hands cannot be committed to fending off a kick and then be expected to effectively recover defense of the head and torso. Nor can one thus deliver a counterattack simultaneous with a block (which constitutes the law of ving tsun known as "lin siu dai da") without exposing himself to the opponent's next move.

Ving tsun's answer is to employ the legs in nearly all the same ways as the arms, including the use of blocking techniques. Theory states simply that a total fighter must be capable of utilizing hand against foot when attacked.

### **Sticking hands compared to sticking legs**

In ving tsun's sticking-hands training, one learns to put the hands "on track" to instantaneously neutralize and respond to aggressive hand techniques. Note: "sticking" is the term preferred over "sticky", as the latter adjectival form suggests something unnatural; sticking is a technique, not a state. One learns to shun the impulse to back away from an attack and then jab into empty space, hoping to land a stray blow via timing. Instead, a different instinct is cultivated: a *desire* for constant contact known as "sticking" which enables the ving tsun practitioner to feel the initial force of the attacker's every moment, perhaps even to sense his very intentions before they materialize.

The strength of the so-called "immovable elbow" is emphasized toward maintaining control of the body's centerline and creating a "bridge" (i.e., placing the arm in a position where it is at once it's most sensitive and it's firmest, without rigidity). There is no fixed area of the arm known as the bridge; it changes depending on the situation. But without a bridge, the arm - whether attacking or defending - may be likened to a train without a track on which to run; its isolated strength is irrelevant without a guiding force.

Through bridging and sticking with the hands, one can nullify the incoming attacking force and return it, utilizing a spring like, sudden disruptive force known as ging in a simultaneous defense and counterattack. One learns through *chi sao* (sticking hands) when to be soft and when to be hard.



There is equal emphasis on bridging (which for the legs involves the use of the knee and shin/calf area as analogs for the elbow and forearm) and the use of ging in *chi gerk* (sticking legs).

The three principal blocking techniques of ving tsun kuen - *tan*, *bong*, and *fuk* - apply not only to the hands. The same principles also can be effectively applied to the legs. Thus we have the techniques of *chi gerk*.

In conventional long-range kicking, the attacker either detects or creates (through misleading feints) an opening in his opponent's guard. This method relies almost exclusively on the use of eyesight and timing. In *chi gerk*, however, one uses not only sight, but feeling, precise positioning, and speed to recognize or create opening.

Just as in chi sao, in chi gerk one fights for control of his own body's centerline in defense and seeks to attack that of the enemy. Once having established contact with the opponent's leg, acting independently, immediately determines the opponent's weakness - balance, protections, or flexibility - and capitalizes on them, trapping, parrying and counterattacking in rapid succession.

### **Training in chi gerk**

All martial arts recognize the necessity of rooting (i.e. having a strong stance) as the most essential element in delivering powerful hand techniques. But it must be emphasized that having a solid foundation is all the more important when one stands one-legged - in other words, in the delivery of any kick, Gravity may seem the enemy of those who dream of flying, but to the martial artist it is vital. His most trusted techniques would lose their effectiveness in a weightless environment.

Ving tsun kuen derives the power in it's noted "one-inch punch" from the strength of the *yee ji kim yeung ma* stance from our fundamental primary form, *siu nim tau*. Yee ji kim yeung ma is, in fact, the only stance used in the whole of siu nim tau, a form which employs no foot movement. One important method of training in siu nim tau involves practicing the form at a slow pace. A minimum of one hour's time is pent by novices performing siu nim tau to develop a strong base, perfect form in hand techniques, and learn to sink one's energy and weight for proper rooting and balance in yee ji kim yeung ma. The strength of one' stance is essential for effective chi sao.

Similarly, the first stage of chi gerk training is the practice of siu nim tau on one leg, alternating legs at the point of exhaustion, for a minimum of one hour. The strength this develops provides balance, which in turn creates flexibility and power.

Once the single-leg stance becomes more natural to the trainee, he begins practicing hundreds of alternating front and side kicks from this position, learning to cover his centerline below the waist and to attack along the track of this middle path.

In the third stage of training, one begins to learn sensitivity in a partner exercise. Two men in single-leg stances grasp one another's forearms. The initiator of the exercise executes a kick, to which the defender must react instantaneously, raising the leg for blocking and trapping. Once contact is established, it must be maintained, so the two students sharpen their sensitivity to each other's weakness.

The configuration of the fighter's active leg in this exercise is determined by the nature of the attack. The leg positions tan, bong, and fuk gerk - which are analogous to the hand positions bearing the same names - are employed in accordance with the theory related to each. Each is, in fact, a fighting theory in itself.

As soon as one leg is exhausted or loses total control or balance, the other must recover proper positioning by initiating a new attack, or a block, depending on the situation. When one participant makes such a change, his partner must sense it and fight for control by means of sticking - following the attack only within his own zone of vulnerability, and ultimately crashing down on his entire leg and pinning it to the floor.

When a student begins to show proficiency in this stage, he must attempt to free himself from the "crutch" of forearm contact, which is really only used by initiates to help maintain balance and judge kicking range.

In the next stage, chi sao and chi gerk are unified in practice. The leg techniques are used when the hands are tied up or when a weak stance or disadvantageous positioning on the opponent's side can be created or detected.

Finally, at a highly advanced stage, another challenge is added: the loss of eyesight. All the aforementioned techniques are practiced in blindfolded, and the sense of touch takes over completely in judging positioning. Eyesight, often a misleading crutch for the fighter, comes to be better appreciated as an added advantage by the experienced ving tsun exponent.

For perfecting the trainee's sense of positioning and for conditioning purposes, the gerk jong (kicking dummy) is utilized in the higher stages of chi gerk training. This apparatus has a comparable function to that of the *muk yan jong* (wooden man). When used properly, it teaches one to cultivate sensitivity even when delivering or receiving real, penetrating force.

Just like the wooden man, the gerk jong conditions the body's natural weapons while ingraining in them their own sense of being "on track". One also learns at this level of study to cultivate ging (spring energy) in encountering brute strength. The ingrained sequences with the defending leg on track help it to intuitively take the proper course and upsetting this generating force at its root.

The ving tsun fighter must learn to maneuver around both the opponent's legs, striking them briskly in logical sequences designed to force him out of a position of advantage.

One common misconception about ving tsun kuen is that it lacks sophisticated sweeping techniques. Sweeping is used, but as suggested by our more general explanation of ving tsun theory, the emphasis is on seeking the fruit rather than the flower. To attempt to uproot a man by controlling his attacking leg alone - which bears less weight and is less crucial to balance - is less efficient than to rob him of his very base. His kicking leg, after all, can be retracted, whereas the weight-bearing leg cannot.



### **A word of advice**

The purpose of demonstrating these chi gerk techniques has not been to discredit other martial arts or our ving tsun practitioners, or to stir controversy over "proper" and "improper" training methods or fighting theories. This article should be regarded merely as a suggestion, an encouragement.

Every style of Chinese kung-fu has specific strengths, yet none should pride itself on its superiority, for as the ving tsun proverb states, "Hand against hand, foot against foot; there is no unstoppable technique". Learning is an endless process which should continue until death if we are to perfect ourselves as human beings, to "know" ourselves, as Sun Tzu taught.