

# William Cheung

Answers questions on the wooden dummy

## 1. How was the wooden dummy first created?

### Why are its arms and leg positioned the way they are?

The Wing Chun wooden dummy was designed from the old Southern Shaolin Temple Wooden Dummies Corridor about 300 years ago. The corridor consisted of 108 wooden dummies representing 108 different attacking techniques so that the practitioner could practise defence and counter attack on the dummies accordingly. The position of the 3 arms and one leg of the Wing Chun wooden dummy is designed for 108 specific techniques parallel to the original 108 techniques performed on the 108 original wooden dummies in the Shaolin Temple. With this in mind, sometimes a specific arm is regarded to be “not there” depending on the technique. Also the arm can represent the elbow or the wrist. The leg is representing the front leg of the opponent.

The earliest wooden dummy was built with a much longer trunk (maybe 9 ft tall) with the bottom tapered in. A hole would be dug in the ground and the dummy would be buried about 3 ft or 4 ft deep with gravel packed around it. The gravel would give way slightly when the wooden dummy was struck, in order to soften the practitioner’s contact point. Later on, the dummy was installed in the boat during the Red Boat Opera era, the trunk of the wooden dummy replaced by the mast of the boat. The practitioners then fitted the arms and leg to the mast.

## 2. What is your background with the wooden dummy? How many years have you trained on it?

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In 1951, my brother George, AKA-King Kong, persuaded Yip Man to commission a carpenter, Cloakie, to build the first wooden dummy outside of China, in Hong Kong. Then Cloakie created the framed wooden dummy. The first modern wooden dummy was built and installed on the roof top of our house in Argyle St, Kowloon in 1951. The second wooden dummy was then built for Yip Man for Restaurant Union’s premises in Shum Shui Bo in Kowloon a couple months later. I have been training wooden dummy since 1951.

In 1956, King Kong came to Sydney, Australia to attend University. He brought the first wooden dummy to Sydney with him. When he moved house in 1959, he placed this particular dummy in the care his friend who ran a gas station. One winter’s night when the temperature plummeted, King Kong’s friend used the wooden dummy as firewood to keep him warm. It was a sudden and tragic end to the first modern wooden dummy.



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### **3. Why is the wooden dummy so important in wing chun?**

Wing Chun is probably one of the few martial arts systems using the palms and arms to block kicks. Many of the techniques like Grun Sao (Rolling Block) and Kan Sao (Cross Armed Block) use the palm and forearm to block a kick. It is necessary to toughen the weapon for these blocks. Apart from improving speed and sequential training, wooden dummy training can also improve footwork, balance, and positioning as well as timing and precision.

### **4. What benefits does the wooden dummy offer to modern martial arts students?**

Wooden dummy is very good for eye, hand, foot co-ordination as well as toughening the tools for blocking. It is a tremendous benefit to all martial arts students.

### **5. What hand strikes are used on the dummy? Is there any potential for injury?**

The blocking areas are met with part of palms and inside and outside of forearm as well as outside and inside of the legs just below the knees. However one must take precautions that the contact area is not on the bone or pressure points. The hand striking weapons can be heel of the palm, side of the palm, and the knuckles as well as phoenix knuckles. The weapons for kicks are met at the front ball, side and the heel of the foot.

*Pictured right is Grandmaster Cheung training on the wooden dummy.*

*Video at top of page demonstrates an animated self defence training tip.*

### **6. What foot strikes are used? Is there any potential for injury?**

The elbows and knees can be trained on the wooden dummy if the wooden dummy is adequately padded. If it is not done correctly, serious damage can result to the palms, fists, arms, feet and knees. Serious bruising and fractures as well as symptoms resembling being struck on the pressure points are the possible outcomes. A word of advice is that Traditional Wing Chun Iron Palm Training can be very helpful.

### **7. Can a beginner train on a dummy, or does a person need a certain amount of experience?**

Beginners can benefit by training wooden dummy. However, one must be very patient and careful in the early stages. Just contact softly and lightly until the body is conditioned.

### **8. What are the five most important things you have learned during the decades you trained on the dummy?**

There are many things I learned and treasured in many years of wooden dummy training. Five of most important lessons are:

1. Footwork with better direction, positioning as well as better distancing.
2. Improvement of eye, hand and foot co-ordination and timing and accuracy.
3. Improvement of striking power and blocking skills.
4. Improvement of the centering the elbow with the enhancement of defence and improve the angle of confrontation.
5. Improvement in performing complex combination movements.

