

What is a Principle?

The sheer weight of numbers suggested in the last section is reason enough to talk Principles instead of specifics.

“One Principle of Wing Chun is that, if there is a bridge, you go through the bridge. If there is no bridge, you make a bridge. You only follow the Principles, you come to higher and higher levels without a teacher.”

—Wang Kiu (Q- 15)

“Go through the bridge” does not specify where the Other’s hand is or how our Own hands are positioned. This level of generalization identifies a Principle—it can be applied to many situations that might not look similar without a clue showing us what to look for. Following this Principle gives us all of the Jeet (slicing) hands. “Going through the Bridge” tells us where to hit, as the points that can be reached by the 1st Section of Hand while the 2nd Section of Hand contacts the Bridge are limited. This last point even tells us we will be working at so-called “sticking” range in order to function the 2nd Section of Hand. Wing Chun is so integrated as a System, that a single Principle like this one touches almost every aspect of it. These connections form the rungs of the ladder that GM Wang is saying we can climb alone if we grasp them properly.

Notice that every hand in BaiSao (beyond the simple hit) is concerned with finding or creating a bridge, then going through it. Beyond Jeet, the BaiSao hands catalog ways to control both of the Other’s hands

while having one of our Own available for hitting. So, one could say that using BaiSao as a conversation-level demonstration of Wing Chun's ideas features this Principle of "Going through the bridge".

GM Wang has always taught that it is the Principles that are important—any particular hand is just an expression of the Principles—and you see that there are an awesome number of expressions possible! This is a strength of principle-based teaching. One of the things that always impresses me about GM Wang's way of teaching is that he can toss out a string of specific skills or techniques, then abandon them and move on without a care. If he comes back to the same point again, it is often with a different set of examples. He is clearly not attached to any of them. He wants them to be disposable, transparent to something beyond.

What is an Essence?

In Quote # 13, GM Wang said, "...Wing Chun has an Essence, an Integrity..." "Wing Chun Essence" is a title GM Wang has used for seminars. He wants students to see that there is something behind the techniques, behind even the Principles, an underlying intrinsic quality defining the art.

Figure 3, on the title page of this chapter, shows Essence as an intangible 'something' lying behind everything else. It is shown becoming gradually less distinct as attention moves further into the working details of System and Principle. The essence of a thing is very difficult to state directly. It is thus referred to indirectly.