

Where art and combat meet

Hong Kong Local Partner Manley Leung talks about his life-long love of martial arts.

Bruce Lee has been an inspiration for martial arts fans for generations, not least Hong Kong Local Partner Manley Leung.

Manley has been fascinated with the combat arts since he was a child, in particular the Wing Tsun martial arts style made famous by his hero, Bruce Lee.

"Like many children in Hong Kong, I grew up loving kung fu movies, from Bruce Lee to Jet Li to Donnie Yen, who portrayed Ip Man.

"Ip Man is regarded as the grandmaster of Wing Tsun. He taught numerous students many of whom later became masters themselves, including Bruce Lee.

"They were my inspiration to get involved, but I didn't put my interest into practice until 2011 when I was 30 and working in New York as a lawyer at White & Case."

Manley's first Wing Tsun teacher (or Sifu) was an American, Alex Richter, at the City Wing Tsun Athletic Association, which was just a few blocks away from White & Case's New York offices.

"As someone from Hong Kong, it's funny that I learned Wing Tsun from a white guy in New York, but he was an excellent teacher."

Manley returned to Hong Kong in 2014 when his New York teacher connected him to Sifu Lee Yuen Tim.

Manley says: "Sifu Lee is a senior trainer who has been teaching for more than 40 years. At the age of 76, he's still in incredible shape and still holds classes every day.

"He's since become what I'd describe as my Wing Tsun grand uncle."

Manley attends classes every weekend and loves the physical and mental benefits of martial arts.

He says: "Of course, it's good to know you can defend yourself, although thankfully I've never had to use it outside the gym, but Wing Tsun is far more than that.



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**MANLEY LEUNG,
LOCAL PARTNER, HONG KONG**



A photo from Manley and Inez's wedding album

"Obviously, people would see martial arts as a very aggressive pastime but, while Wing Tsun is a very attacking style with even defensive moves having an element of aggression, I find the training is also brilliant for calming the mind.

"The last thing you want to do in a fight situation is to panic, so we're taught to stay calm in any situation, which is something that's helped me at home and work.

"Wing Tsun has also taught me the importance of practice, because you need to repeat every move hundreds of times to perfect it and build muscle memory. That discipline is another thing that can be applied in everyday life."

Legend has it that the Wing Tsun style was invented by a Buddhist nun, Ng Mui, at the Shaolin Temple. She passed it onto her female student and the artform developed from there.

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Manley says: "Those origins possibly explain why Wing Tsun is not all about brute strength or physicality, but instead focuses on using your opponent's strength against them whatever your size. It also emphasizes solving problem in the most efficient manner (such as always looking for the shortest distance to hit your opponent) which is another rule that is helpful for everyday life."

Wing Tsun (like many other traditional Chinese martial arts) doesn't have a belt system, with students simply told when they have progressed to better levels, however Manley is keen to integrate some of the things he learnt in New York should he become an instructor in future.

He says: "What I liked about the way American schools practiced Wing Tsun is that they added a series of set goals, which gives you something to work towards.

"You were also encouraged to question your Sifu, which is very much against tradition in Hong Kong, where Sifus are treated with a high level of respect and can't be challenged."



Wing Tsun facts

Wing Chun is practiced by more than 2 million people across the world

It originates from Southern China and, legend has it, was invented by a Shaolin nun

International Wing Chun Day is held annually on 3 March

Wing Chun's most famous student is Bruce Lee, who was trained by legendary teacher Ip Man

Around 90% of Wing Chun schools in the world have historical links to Ip Man



Manley is now qualified as an assistant instructor and, should he teach in future, he'd love to add a small element of what he learned in the United States to hopefully encourage and motivate more people to take up Wing Tsun.

"Becoming an instructor is something I'd like to do," he says, "because it's great to give back to an artform that's rich in culture and has given so much to me."

In fact, Wing Tsun can be credited for playing an even larger role in Manley's life – he met his wife, Inez, while training in Hong Kong.

He says: "Inez actually knew my Sifu in New York, so it's a small world, and we trained together for several years before getting married in 2018. Inez hasn't attended classes since we had our first child in 2021, but it's something we're both very passionate about."

"I can only say how much Wing Tsun has been a benefit to me in my life – it's something I'd recommend to anyone."

Manley is the only lawyer in the Hong Kong office to practice Wing Tsun, but he did share his love of the martial art during a previous annual wellness day.

He says: "Sifu Lee came in and held a session to demonstrate self-defense skills based on Wing Tsun and my colleagues really enjoyed it."

"I can only say how much Wing Tsun has been a benefit to me in my life – it's something I'd recommend to anyone. It also has the ability to bring people together from all different backgrounds."

"I know from my time in the United States how much Bruce Lee is held in great esteem, many decades after he died, so it has a unifying effect, which is one of the reasons I love it so much."





Manley and Inez with their Wing Tsun family in New York



Sifu Alex Richter teaches Manley using a wooden dummy



A photo from Manley and Inez's wedding album



Manley earns his black shirt from Sifu Alex Richter



Qualifying as an assistant instructor with Sifu Lee



Sifu Lee held a session at the Firm's Hong Kong office on international wellness day