

The Wing Chun Double Knife Training (Baat Jaam Do) by Sifu Gary Lam & Gregory E. LeBlanc

Wing Chun Kung Fu is a martial art best known for its tight, aggressive, straight line empty hand attacks. It was the martial art that gave the world Bruce Lee and was the martial art chosen and used by the famous Hong Kong challenge fighter Wong Shun Leung. Less known publicly, but equally famous in martial art circles, is the hallmark weapon of Wing Chun, the Baat Jaam Do (a.k.a. eight cut knives). Today there are few if any opportunities that warrant knowledge of weapons like the Baat Jaam Do, but training with this weapon also serves the dual purpose of refining empty hand abilities. In my school if and when a student is ready to learn the eight cut knives, it is not taught principally to develop a fighting ability with the weapon, but rather to heighten already seasoned open hand skills. Traditionally the Baat Jaam Do was reserved only for students close to completing their formal training; this is due to the fact that skill with the double knives is directly linked to an advanced ability in the empty hand techniques. It is said that if the open hand techniques are good then the knives will also be good. If a student trains before he/she is ready then the knives will not be properly learned, and consequentially advancement of open hand usage will be adversely influenced. What is true though is that if you train correctly, the Baat Cham Do will greatly improve the students *closing style* abilities (i.e. Wing Chun grappling) and the overall timing of open hand actions. The eight cut knife movements and usage is nearly identical to open hand moves, without a thorough background in the Wing Chun hand techniques there would be little purpose in learning this deceptively complicated weapon.

Traditionally Wing Chun teachers taught only qualified students, this is due to the fact that if they learned to soon and then later attempted to use the knives, it would almost certainly end in disaster. An analogy of this would be trying to teach an average automobile driver how to race cars, and then entering them in a professional race. This is a scenario for tragedy; the unqualified car racer would be lucky to stay alive in such a dangerous situation. The same can be said about learning the knives; the student must be ready to learn if the training is to have meaning. And in case you're worried if the Baat Jaam Do has lost its fighting spirit in our modern day, several years ago my Sifu, the late Wong Shun Leung, sparred with a champion western fencer on television. Wong easily beat the fencer, and when the fencer complained Wong had an unfair advantage with two swords, Wong offered him a second blade and beat him again. Afterwards the fencer petitioned Wong for instruction, he happily agreed and proceeded to introduce him to Siu Nim Tao, the first stage of Wing Chun training. Thus Wong by example reiterated the truth of Baat Jaam Do understanding and usage, the practitioner must master Wing Chun first if the hands are to become knives. Much like wisdom, learning the Baat Jaam Do is difficult and rare; few are ready to tread its razor edge of excellence.

Baat Jaam Do training begins with learning the eight basic movements; these are further combined and trained as moving lines. Thus the eight individual techniques are combined into sixty-four separate combinations. At this stage correct structure and timing are emphasized. Free style lines of techniques are also practiced, further engendering natural execution of all the basic techniques.

These eight basic techniques are:

1. Qi-Stabbing
2. Jam-Chopping
3. Gan-Block and cut
4. Kwan-Double block
5. Bon-Deflection
6. Biu-Line deflection forward
7. Jaam-Stopping
8. Tan and Qi-Deflect out and stab

The eight basic actions serve to introduce the fundamental form, usage and fighting concepts of the Baat Jaam Do. Also practiced here are arm strengthening exercises done with heavy weight Baat Jaam Do, traditionally made out of copper. The training is conducted slowly, building a strong foundation over long months of practicing only the basic movements. When I trained with Sifu Wong he would have me practice these basic techniques by holding the backs of chairs, this built powerful control of the movements that later allowed me to master all aspects of the knife training.

Wong Shun Leung learned Baat Jaam Do from his Sifu, Grandmaster Yip Man. This was not presented in a particular order; training often involved learning random aspects of the double knife training. This kind of training forced the student to contemplate the weapon and discover for him/her self what its true meaning was. My Sifu was a kind of Wing Chun genius; he was able to understand the logical relationships of the separate actions. This allowed him to bring to life for himself the full knowledge of the eight cut knives. Later he formulated this into the revised Wong Shun Leung Baat Jaam Do training, re-ordering rather than changing what he was originally taught. This variation retained the original content of what Yip Man passed down to him, but it arranged it in such a way as to allow the new student to penetrate quickly and deeply into the knives most secret places. Baat Jaam do is about timing, speed

and courage. It is meant to swiftly kill the enemy with a two handed simultaneous action. The target is the opponents weapon hand and there bodies vital regions. Hand to hand fighting is considered gambling; fighting with Baat Jaam Do is a kind of suicide, you must become like someone unafraid to die. To succeed you cannot fear for your life, this is a special attitude, a killing mind, a mind of war. In the past I only trained with the Baat Jaam Do when I had a tough fight coming up, it honed my fighting mind (jin yi) and instincts for the ensuing battle. Under normal conditions I do not emphasize knife training in my day-to-day marital arts practice, otherwise my overall attitude will become too intense and hostile. This hostility will unduly affect the day-to-day affairs of my life and make my open hand fighting cruel. This is not a comfortable way to be in the world, for my self or the people in my life.

Baat Jaam Do structure is significantly different from its Wing Chun paired weapon the Luk Dim Boon Gwun (a.k.a. the Dragon Pole). The Dragon Pole relies heavily on the development and use of internal power and therefore the bodies correct structural alignment, the eight cut knives are almost entirely dependent on the sharpened edge of the blade for power. What matters here is not the body's physical power but instead technique and position, the structure of the Baat Jaam Do is concerned with maintaining and attacking with the knife-edge and point. Footwork is also modified in knife training, using a special way of stepping called *gote ma*. In the regular Wing Chun hand-to-hand fighting the footwork is not concerned with the extended range of an attacking weapon, we face our enemy squarely, the hands leading the body's position. In Baat Jaam Do the opposite occurs, using the *gote ma* step the practitioner turns his/her body sideways to our enemy's position, thus bringing the body off our attackers forward line. This is of course done in conjunction with a standard simultaneous attack and defense knife action. This places the body safely behind our knife actions, providing maximum protection from being cut or stabbed by the enemy. Regardless, the emphasis of weapons footwork must be on never facing our opponent's weapon.

Training advances by teaching the student the Wong Shun Leung and Yip Man versions of the Baat Jaam Do Form. There are slight but significant differences between these two forms, changes are mainly concerned with the importance of certain movements over others and in what order they appear in the form. Single person contact training equipment (similar to the Dragon Pole training dummy), as well as two person training is also introduced at this level. Knife training with a partner begins by defending and initiating attacks against the Dragon Pole, this includes single and double-sided pole attacks. Each of the basic techniques are brought into play, the student must rely on correct footwork and knife holding structure to respond effectively against full power dragon pole attacks. This style of training also develops double to single knife fighting, always conscious of not being on the facing angle of the enemy's weapon. The double knife vs. double knife training is reserved for the advanced level training, here courage, timing and speed are all important.

Techniques here are almost exclusively on the opponents outside line. When I did partner training under Sifu Wong, we would use rolled up magazines as mock Baat Jaam Do, this prevented serious injury but not serious bruising.

As with all martial arts the highest levels of skill are measured by the practitioner's natural, instinctive ability. On this lofty level of mastery what can appear to be a simple action, is in reality founded on decades of training and experience. With the Baat Jaam Do it is no different. The knife techniques are a specialized way of using the open hand actions, without that background there is no Baat Jaam Do. It is my sincere hope that succeeding generations will inherit the Baat Jaam Do, passing it on as was intended. Taught and practiced in the traditional manner, ensuring quality and authenticity of this fading art.