

BAT JAAM DO
The Knives of Wing Chun
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Modern firepower has changed the world of protection, but bat jaam do skills remain relevant to the wing chun stylist.

Considerable attention has been given to the hand forms and their applications in wing chun kuen. Except for advanced wing chun people, less attention in depth has been given to the weapons work in the wing chun system.

In keeping with its deep simplicity, there are only two primary weapons in the wing chun system — the long pole (kwan) and the short bat jaam do. The latter are the double “8 chop knives” which protect all eight directions around an individual like the I-Ching symbol. The pole is the mother of long weapon work though it also has some quick short-range uses. The knives (do) provide the foundation for short weapon and range work. With properly timed footwork it also can attack past long weapons. Which weapon is “better” depends on the context and the skill, training and preference of the user.

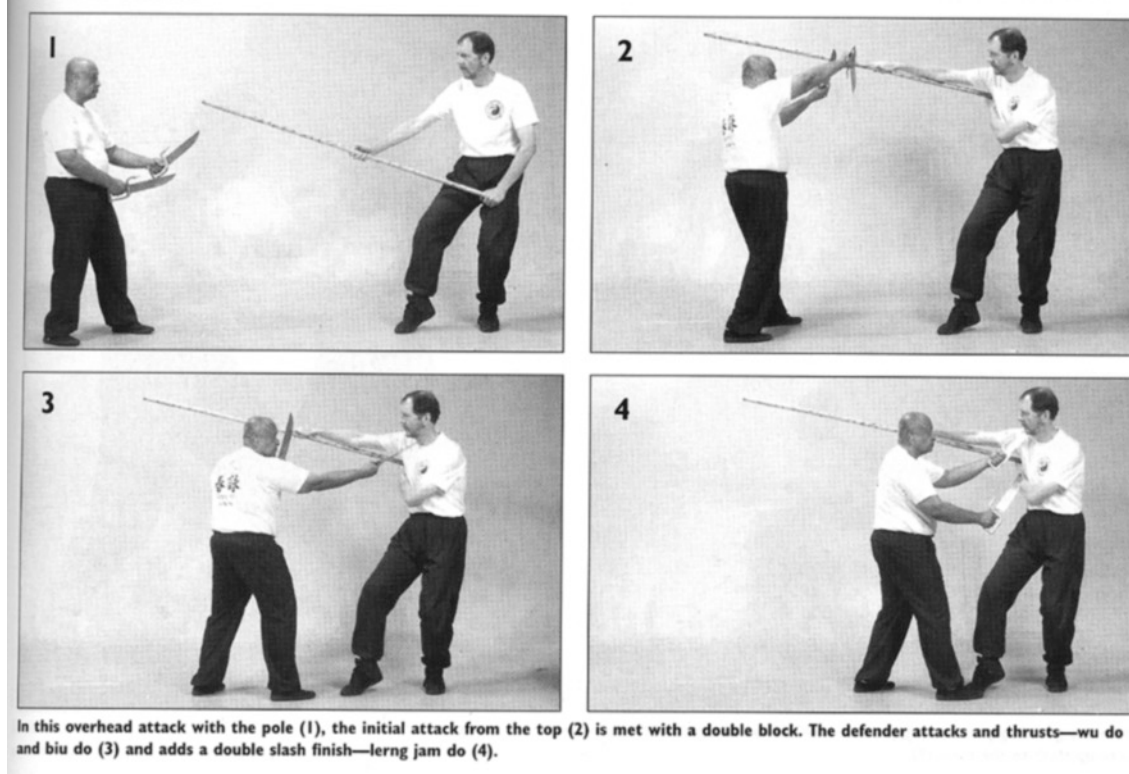
Yip Man closely guarded his knowledge of the bat jaam do. From his varying teachings, different versions of the do emerged among his students and in turn the next generation. They all have some common features and some variations. The bat jaam do work of Augustine Fong of Tucson, Ariz., is based on the teachings of, and his long-term association with, Ho Kam Ming. Like all masters, Augustine Fong has his own “signature” opening before the motions in the do work that he learned from Ho Kam Ming. Ho Kam Ming was a dedicated persistent and loyal student of Yip Man from the mid-1950’s until the death of Yip Man. Other teachers of the bat jaam do set have their own good reasons for what they do. After all, wing chun kuen is bath an applied science and a personalized art.

Finding the Right One

A good bat jaam do is a little different from other southern butterfly knives. A good personalized one will have approximately an 11-inch blade length and will be about two inches wide near the handle. The handle on the top side will have a hook for catching and controlling the opponent’s weapon. A good light one could be about a pound in weight. Each knife needs only about the first three inches back from the point of the top and bottom edges to be sharpened. It is designed for the fast and key motions of poking, circling, twisting, snapping, cutting, chopping, stomping and sliding. In doing the bat jaam do work the full uses of different energies (gings) can be used and understood.

Wing chun as we know it was born in Southern rebellions against the Qing dynasty. But in its birth it absorbed and simplified the long martial history of China. While many weapons were used in the rebellions, the disciplined use of the do and the kwan was added to wing chun training after the systematized learning of the empty-hand forms, which are the foundations of the system. Interestingly, the same logic and sequence of learning is applied in good wing chun weapons training today: First empty-hand development, then the weapons which the hands will use. The siu lim tau must be thoroughly learned before going on to the chum kiu, bue gee and the dummy forms. Of course, specific teachers may introduce some drills from advanced forms. Weapons work is introduced only after the student has learned to properly use his hands and his foundations are mature. Wing chun places a great deal of emphasis on control...controlling oneself first and then the opponent. Premature bat jaam do work can result in the accumulation of subtle bad habits affecting balancing and coordination. To the untrained eye, someone wielding the bat jaam do can look ferocious, but without good wing chun foundations the real skills and appropriate self-defense could be dangerously weak.

Pole vs Knives



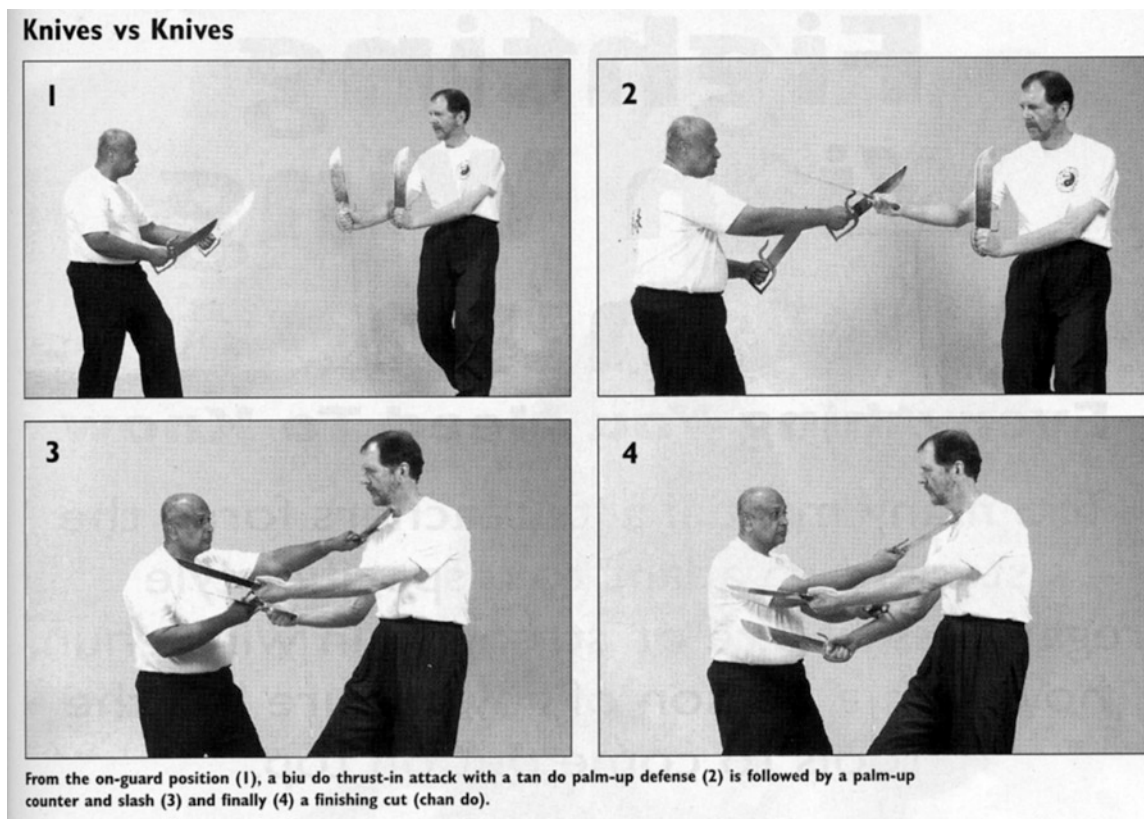
The Power Behind Do

The power of bat jaam work in wing chun comes not from arm musculature but the structural unity which includes proper joint and gravitational alignment as well as quick proper foot and wristwork. Big hacking motions are avoided. The footwork is immensely improved both in speed and power.

In Augustine Fong's knife work, the do is not flipped back. Flipping an 11-to-12 inch blade backward can look dramatic, but leaves one open for dangerous counters. In a real situation one does what is necessary, but training one's reflexes in the best possible way is part

of a great martial art. The individual is an important variable and some people can compensate for bad habits better than others. Proper wristwork, stancework coordination, flow, timing, eye power and focus must come together in good bat jaam do work. Learning the sequence of the motions of one or more versions of the bat jaam do form is not enough for the development of outstanding application and teaching others.

As in the rest of wing chun, the skills of the do include the sustained cooperation of both hands — always supporting each other. Thus, in the bong do (wing arm knife motion), the accompanying wu or defensive hand must move properly forward and inward to provide the back-up for the bong do. Without the proper second hand, a strong opponent can put the forces of the body in disarray. Bat jaam do training assists in speed and power development and pays off whether one has two short weapons, only one, or none.



Knives Working Together

Coordination of the two knives also accelerates the improvement of many other sides. These include footwork and simultaneity as in pak da (slap/hit), jut da (jerk/hit) and fak da (whisk/hit). There is also the stability which is developed from the sinking with the knives and can help against being thrown or taken to the ground.

It also aids in the development of “short power” in small spaces and close fighting skills. The skills are easily transferable to other short weapons such as sticks or anything else available. Sometimes in stickwork outside wing chun, one can end up rolling around and flailing on the floor and have other troubles against bigger and stronger people. Bat jaam do

stancework and its accompanying short power, mobility and appropriate rooting provides additional insurance against these possibilities.

The use of short weapons against long weapons has many possibilities. Just ask a good escrimador. Such is also the case with the bat jaam do. The wing chun eight-foot kwan or pole is a formidable weapon. Knife versus pole demonstrations can be awesome in the hands of skilled gung-fu people. Advanced skills can determine the winner. Learning to use both the kwan and the do is part of wing chun's finishing skills. (Of course, having a good teacher who himself has received solid teaching helps immensely.)

The bat jaam do usage has its own strategies and tactics. Controlling another weapon, such as the pole, and getting close for the finish is important strategically. Tactically, the quick wristwork, coordinated fast footwork, including shooting and sliding steps, and eye power are keys to victory over longer weapons. Modern firepower has changed the world of protection, but bat jaam do skills remain relevant. The relevance is not only for learning wing chun as a complete art, but for acquiring the versatile use of short weapons for developing martial coordination, footwork, and timing.

Yip Man's organization of wing chun knowledge is often along classic Chinese cultural lines. The teaching of the hand and dummy forms has been organized into approximately 108 fundamental motions for each. As in any textual interpretation opinions vary on what is fundamental and what is an application depending on the teacher. Yip Man himself appears to have edited the curriculum here and there in his own evolution as a teacher. There is also a fascination with the number three. Three seeds or fundamental motions. Also the three saam pai fut—the “praying motions” especially at the end of the bue gee.

In the I-Ching manner, there is the bat jaam do's protection of eight key directions. Although there are numerous do motions there is the attempt for curricular purposes to organize them into eight key functions listed at the beginning of this article. Actually there are more than eight, including shooting (bue), very small circling (huen), warding off (wu), sticking (chi do), upward (fak), outward (fuun), slash (chaan), move (do bo), simultaneous lower/upper gates (gaan/jaam), cutting (goot), rolling (kwan), locking side block (tan), snap (tiu), and slicing (tong). Similarly, there are organizations of energies and postures each into eight categories. These are for curricular organization. Applications are more complex and come with skills and experience.

Bat jaam do work is not a sport. Demonstrations of the do against poles and sticks can give a little idea of the possibilities; however, as in real combat, the skills of an advanced person are directed at protecting oneself and finishing things quickly. The distinction between blocking and attacking can be blurred in an instant.

The siu lim tau teaches balance and rooting among many other things, Chi sau primarily teaches timing. These virtues are enhanced by mobility and footwork, which in turn provide the special edge to kicking when necessary. The proper use of the bat jaam do enhances all these elements. The additional weight of a pound or so in each hand teaches a lot about

adjustments in the coordination of the joints and the proper balance and power in all the stances...forward, turning, bracing, three-pointed, and complete circling. Just as good empty-hand work is an absolute requirement for bat jaam do training, the knives reciprocate by enhancing the earlier work. Empty hands and legs really fly with power and speed after good bat jaam do training.