

Hooked on Bagua

The core of Dong Hei Chuan's deer
hooks weapon art resides in his first
two palm changes

BY LEWIS PALEIAS



Though it's been a while since I wrote about bagua's deer hook swords (also called crescent moon swords, Mandarin duck knives and heaven/earth swords), I've received hundreds of e-mails on this fabulous arcane weapon duo requesting more information on where to find them or how to do the double palm change. It never ceases to amaze me how many friends you can make through the practice of martial arts. But first a little history.

Some say that the Daoist master Dong Hei Chuan (1797-1882), the creator of bagua zhang, became a eunuch to obtain employment in the Forbidden City, yet this operation was only performed on children; never adults. Some say he only faked being a eunuch, but it's hard to believe the Royal Chamberlain wouldn't first have checked the authenticity of his claim before handing over the keys. One

story stated that he was trying to infiltrate the royal household to assassinate the Qing Emperor Yong Zheng. If so, the closest he ever got to the emperor was to take up residence with Prince Su, where he taught bagua to Su's household and bodyguards.

Yet his chief rival, Yang "the Invincible" Lu Chan (the creator of Yang tai chi chuan), was retained by no less than eight royal princes and often resided in the castle of the most powerful, Prince Yuan. Though Yang Lu Chan was considered the foremost martial artist in Beijing, popular martial stories from the late Ching dynasty reveal that he and Dong Hei Chuan fought to a stalemate the two times they sparred to amuse the royal court.

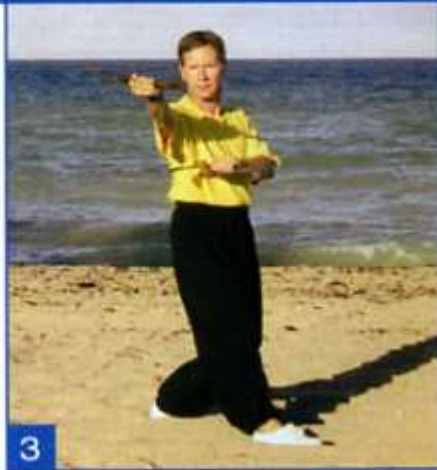
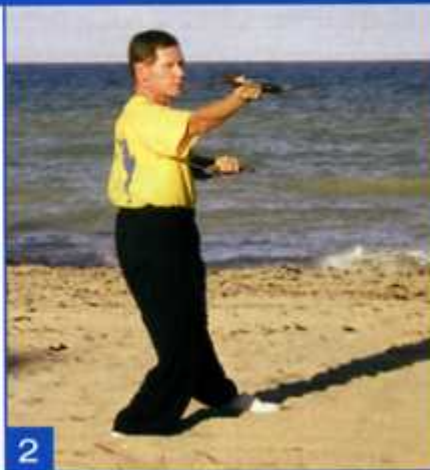
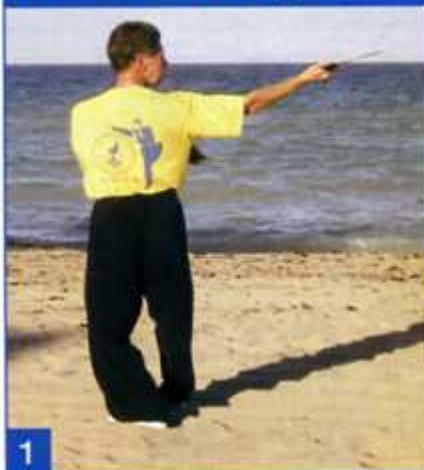
In fact, his reputation as a peerless martial artist was so great that Chung Ting Hwa ("Spectacle Chang") moved his eye-

glass shop in front of the eastern gate of the royal compound just so he could keep on bumping into Dong and convince him to take him on as a student.

Dong Hei Chuan was quite content to have only one main disciple, Yin Fu, to carry on his martial legacy. Then the unthinkable happened; they had a major disagreement. Words were said, feelings got hurt and teacher and student separated. No one really knows why. One story says the argument was regarding Yin Fu's decision to remarry after the death of his wife, something the conservative Daoist, Dong Hei Chuan, was against. They eventually reconciled, but only just before Dong's death. Not wanting his art to disappear, Dong made up for lost time by taking on scores of students, with one stipulation: only masters need apply.

Dong felt that his art was like graduate school. Whatever your art, bagua would

Double Palm Change



Starting with the right leg, walk seven tight steps leading with the right blade (palm up) and the rear blade palm down (1-3). End by stepping your left leg into the ba (pigeon-toed stance) (4). Single Change. Swing both blades horizontally to your left (5), open your stance, squat down, rotate the swords 180 degrees and swing both swords to your right (6).

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Circle your left hook downward as you step back into a cat stance (1). Step forward with your left leg and thrust your left blade forward (2). Step forward with your right leg and thrust your right hook out while simultaneously pressing your left hook downward (3).

Mandarin Ducks Leave the Water



Application: The author jams Ed's saber attack with his right hook (1), blocks his leg and slices the neck arteries (2).

perfect it. Some students, such as Chung Ting Hwa, were shuai chiao masters and some, such as Li Cun Yi, were xing-I guys. Since he taught privately, he adapted his bagua instruction according to the arts and personalities of his students. Thus, each of his students passed down different versions of the "eight mother palms." The most consistent training, however, occurred within the teachings of the single and double palm changes. Dong Hei Chuan passed down the adage that the heart of his art resided

in these two changes. Same thing with the deer hook swords form: The core of this weapon art resides in the first two palm changes.

Walking the Circle

In my previous deer hook article, the first eight steps leading up to the single palm change taught you to walk the circle and returned you right back to where you started. The diameter of this circle is roughly 6 to 8 feet across. You don't step on the line of the circle; the circle is run-

ning between your legs with one foot inside the line and the other just outside the line. The inner leg floats straight forward while the outer leg swings with the foot turned inward (kou bu) to follow the curve of the circle. Just before your front foot touches down, the back foot thrusts or pushes you forward an additional 6 inches. Keep your back erect and your head pulled up from the crown (bai hui point) through the entire stepping sequence. Your weight is deep in the back leg as you smoothly transfer onto the

"new" back leg. Do not drag your feet; hover the foot just above the ground or use the heel-to-toe rolling step. It should feel like you're sitting in a giant's palm and the palm is propelling you forward.

Dare to be Square

The next seven steps teach you to walk the square—that is, tighter stepping utilizing the bai bu (swing out) step. This allows you to feel the waist/hand cutting power. Since you're stepping tighter, you will go all around the circle plus another half (facing the opposite direction from where you started). A good exercise is to, literally, walk a square repeatedly and in both directions until it can be done smoothly and without bobbing.

The Double Palm Change. After the seven steps around the tight circle, bring your left foot next to your right in the pigeon-toed ba stance. Circle both

blades, chest high, to the left; overturn the blades as you open up your stance with your right leg, and squat down and swing the blades, knee high, to the right. The left palm faces up and right palm faces down. This is the same as you performed for the first palm change.

Mandarin Ducks Leave the Water. Bring your left hook up and back, then circle it downward as you step back into a cat stance. Step forward with your left leg and thrust your left blade forward. Step forward with your right leg and thrust your right hook out, while simultaneously pressing your left hook downward to seal an opponent's weapon.

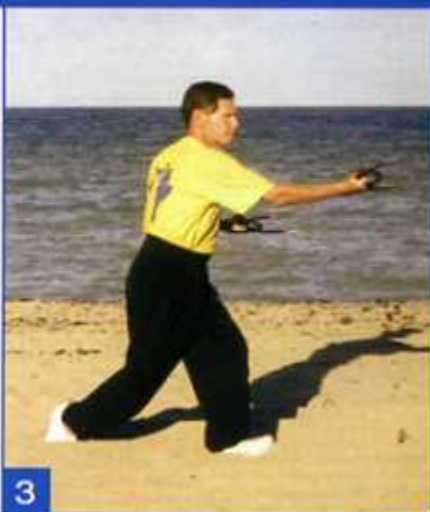
Autumn Wind Sweeps the Leaves. Cross-step your left leg behind your right and begin raising your right arm. Pivot on your left toe and right heel as you rotate your body to your left while swinging your blades. The left blade cuts horizon-

tally across, palm down, while the right axes across and downward, palm up.

Large Roc Spreads Its Wings. Pull your swords toward your chest and cross them. Both palms are facing you and your left hand is closest to your body. Lift up your right knee (eventually, you will perform the last movement and this one as a spin). Step out diagonally to the corner with your right leg into a lying horse stance (mostly weighted in the left leg) and separate your hands. Your right blade faces palm down and angles down over your leg, while your left stretches diagonally up with the palm facing out.

Green Dragon Turns His Body. Bring your right foot in toward your left foot and swing it out stepping clockwise. At the same time, bring the left hook in (palm down) toward your lower chest while the right hook coils in (palm up) and then swing back out to the lead posi-

Autumn Wind Sweeps the Leaves



Cross-step your left leg behind your right (1). Pivot on your left toe and right heel as you rotate your body to your left while swinging first your left blade palm down (2), then your right blade palm down right palm up (3).



Application: The author deflects his opponent's saber down with right hook (1), exchanges hooks and up-cuts the groin while cross-stepping (2).

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Roc Spreads Its Wings

Pull your swords toward your chest and cross them, both palms facing you and left hand closest to your body, while lifting up your right knee (1). Step out diagonally to the corner with your right leg into a lying horse stance and separate your hands; the right blade faces palm down and angles down over your leg while your left stretches diagonally up with the palm facing out (2).



The author blocks Ed's saber chop with both hooks (1). Squatting down, he then attacks low while keeping his saber high (2).

tion. Continue circle walking. You can repeat this double change palm or repeat the spin, go into the single palm change, change direction (use the ba step) and learn the other side.

Don't Stop

Learn to perform the deer hook movements high and low, wide and extremely tight. When you perform, you should feel like a dragon soaring through the clouds, with claws outstretched. Definitely learn to do them in both directions. You probably already know the eight mother palms or maybe a swimming barehand form. Practice it with the deer hooks in your hands. The extra weight will prove to be a new challenge. It will also prevent sloppy or unconnected movements, while greatly increasing your arm and upper body strength and power. You can also try cutting with different parts of the blades.

Be Careful

Those who have purchased a set of handmade combat steel deer hooks from me know that, though pointed, the blades are not sharpened, even though they can take a razor's edge. I was told long ago that "only a fool or a master practices with sharpened weapons." You have to expect that mistakes will be made while learning a weapon. That's why it's called "practice." The learning experience, however, should be challenging, not hazardous. You will puncture yourself many times with those pointed tips; you don't need to lose fingers. There aren't many places I haven't hooked myself. Another reason I don't sharpen them is the pleasure of sparring against wooden weapons, such as a staff, sword or saber. Even without an edge, the wooden tai chi sword will be quickly destroyed (beware of dangerous flying

splinters). The Japanese bokken (available at any martial arts store) works great. So does any staff.

A sharpened weapon, however, will constantly bite into the wood until there's nothing left, or until it slides and removes your partner's hand. We hand-make combat hardwood swords and sabers more than 1 inch thick just so my students can safely spar. Their handles are lead-filled for perfect balance and weight. I only play metal-to-metal for exhibitions. Remember: Even a dull metal sword can run you through. Both you and your partner should wear protective goggles every time you play: One mistake could change your lives forever.

Back to School

Unlike a generation ago, there are now fabulous sources written in English

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Green Dragon Turns His Body



1 Bring your right foot in while bringing the left hook in (palm down) toward your chest while the right hook coils in, palm up (1). Swing the blades right out, stepping clockwise (2). Continue circle walking (3-4). End by stepping into the ba stance and circle the swords back to embrace the moon at chest posture (5).



available on baguazhang. Jerry Allen Johnson has a couple of great books out. Dr. John Painter's six-tape set on the principles of bagua fighting is a must. Some masters have translated the secret transmissions that they received directly from the great bagua masters of the past and saved these pearls of wisdom for the next generation. The great Li Zi Ming published the knowledge of his teacher, Liang Zhen Pu, and John Bracy brought his master's, Liu Xing-Han, words to us.

Bok Nam Park revealed the fabulous stepping and training methods of Lu Shui-Tien in his two-volume set "Fundamentals of Pa Kua Chang." They are all in my library. The only source (that I know of) that contains a complete deer hook form is the fabulous "Ermei Baguazhang," by master Liang Shou-Yu and Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming (they also

have videos). It also includes bagua theory, qigong, barehand forms, two-person sets and all the secret oral transmissions handed down from their teachers.

Keep These Arts Alive

The internal arts were in their heyday around the close of the 19th century. People had the time and motivation (especially in the Boxer Rebellion turmoil) to learn these arts as complete systems: qigong, barehand, weapons, free fighting, weapon sparring, power augmentation, explosive power training, herbal healing and tui na. In the fast-paced world of today, however, it's hard to find the time necessary to master these complex mind/body arts. As my teacher, Dr. Yang, Jwing Ming, explains, "All we have left of these arts today is just the dust off the cover of the book."

Most people who study bagua have

only a few pieces: mother palms, a couple of drills and maybe a swimming body (you shen) form. Here is one of the missing jewels. Learn the deer hook single and double palm changes and start reuniting these pieces of immortality. For the Daoist sages, no other quest was as important. Bagua to them was the blueprint to the inner workings of the universe. According to an old Chan Buddhist adage, "70 is the destiny of man." There is an equally old Daoist saying that states, "150 die; die young." Now that I'm in my 50s I like that bagua concept more and more. Why, it gives me almost another century of life! Maybe like old man river (and bagua), I'll "just keep rolling along." ☯

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