

GUANDAO

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A **guan dao** or kwan dao (Chinese: 關刀; Mandarin Pinyin: guān dāo; Cantonese IPA: /kwan55 təu55/, Jyutping: gwaan1 dou1) is a type of Chinese pole weapon that is currently used in some forms of Chinese wushu. In Chinese it is properly called a Yanyue dao (偃月刀) which translates as 'reclining moon blade'). It is an ornate version of a plainer Chinese weapon known as a long-handled sabre or horsecutter and consists of a heavy blade mounted atop a 5-6 foot long wooden or metal pole with a pointed metal counter weight used to balance the heavy blade and for striking on the opposite end. The blade is very deep and curved on its face; this resembles a Chinese sabre or the Japanese naginata and bisento, or the European glaive and voulge. Often the edge will taper to a point on the top for thrusting. The reverse has a spike used for hooking and dismounting victims. In addition there are sometimes irregular serrations that lead the back edge of the blade to the spike. Usually a red sash or tassel is attached at the joint of the pole and blade. Variations include having rings along the length of the straight back edge as found in the nine-ring guan dao, having the tip curl into a rounded spiral as in the elephant guan dao, or featuring a more ornate design as exemplified by the dragon head guan dao.

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Guandao at the
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History

According to legend, the guan dao was invented by the famous general [Guan Yu](#) during the early 3rd century AD, hence the name. Due to his large stature, he was able to wield such an imposing weapon and developed the guan dao into a versatile tool. Guan Yu's guan dao was called 'Green Dragon Crescent Blade' (青龍偃月刀) which weighed 82 Chinese jin (estimated 49 kg.).

However, historically speaking it is likely that Guan Yu used a lance or a dagger-axe (ji) and not his eponymous sword. While the famous novel Romance of the Three Kingdoms by Luo Guanzhong describes him as wielding the guan dao, this description is an anachronistic one, as there is no proof that it was ever used prior to the Song dynasty when it was first illustrated in the military manual Wujing Zongyao. The guan dao, therefore, was likely neither invented nor ever used by Guan Yu, meaning that it is somewhat of a pop culture-derived misnomer. However, some historians believe that the Guan Dao was simply an uncommon, rare weapon prior to the Song dynasty and was thus not illustrated before then.

While it could be used from horseback, the guan dao could also be used by infantry as an anti-personnel and anti-cavalry weapon. It is said that Guan Yu's

original guan dao weighed between 100 and 200 lb (45 and 90 kg), the modern guan dao which has been adopted by martial artists today usually weighs between 5 and 20 lb (2 and 10 kg).

Combat Uses

The guan dao is used quite frequently in the part of contemporary Wushu that is deemed to have derived from 'Shaolin' form of martial arts in modern times and in popular fictional depictions. According to contemporary Wushu practice, its purpose is more to disarm an opponent and deflect his strikes rather than to attack. To that end, a large veil cloth is attached to the end to dissuade and confuse opponents. However, there is no evidence of this being an authentic aspect of the weapon's usage. Tassles and cloths are attached to numerous weapons such as jian, dao, and guan dao used in Chinese opera, one of the sources of movements found in contemporary wushu. In addition, we do not see these tassles and cloths attached to weaponry in other cultures, so we can assume this feature would have been of little consequence - if confusion was a great element surely they would be found in later European dueling-type swords and we would perhaps see it filtered into modern day fencing. There is a notch located on the back side of the blade used to grasp opposing weapons. Moreover, the long range of the guan dao allows the wielder to keep his distance. In modern training, the proper wielding of a guan dao resembles an intricate dance. Historically however it shares design similarities with some european polearms - as both a heavy and a long weapon it is doubtful that theatric techniques could have been practically employed. Like most Chinese weapons, the exact usage and technique is not clear.

[Annotation, lr: The guan dao form of the Tien Shan Pai style has a clear usage for combat. The form tells also the history of general Guan Yu, e.g. him riding on the horse. Because of the difficulty of handling a weapon with such weight, and its character of soft and hard techniques, the guan dao furthermore strengthens the body of a practitioner on a very high level. One has to use his energy in an absolutely correct way. Therefore it is the weapon of the master.]

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