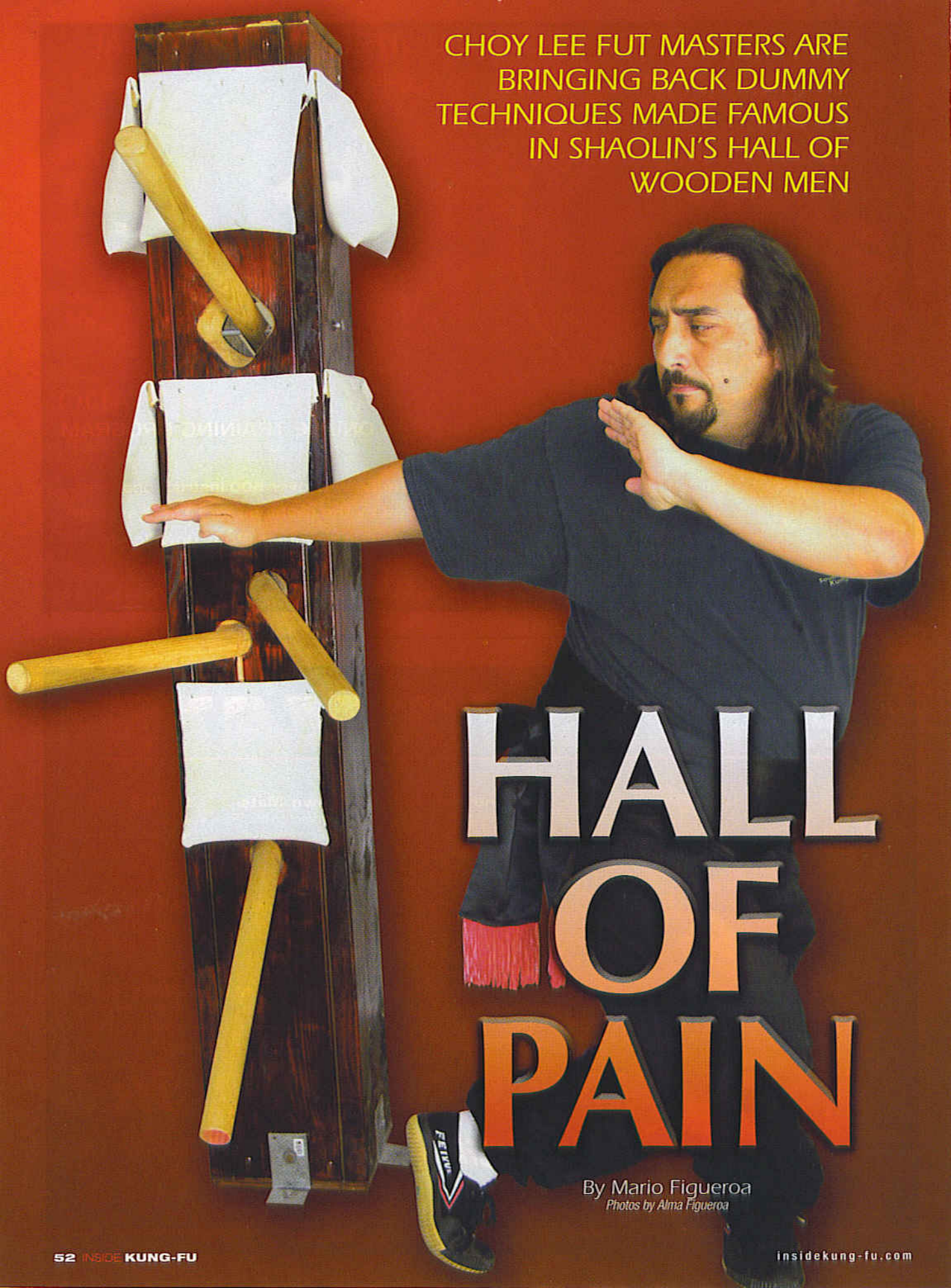
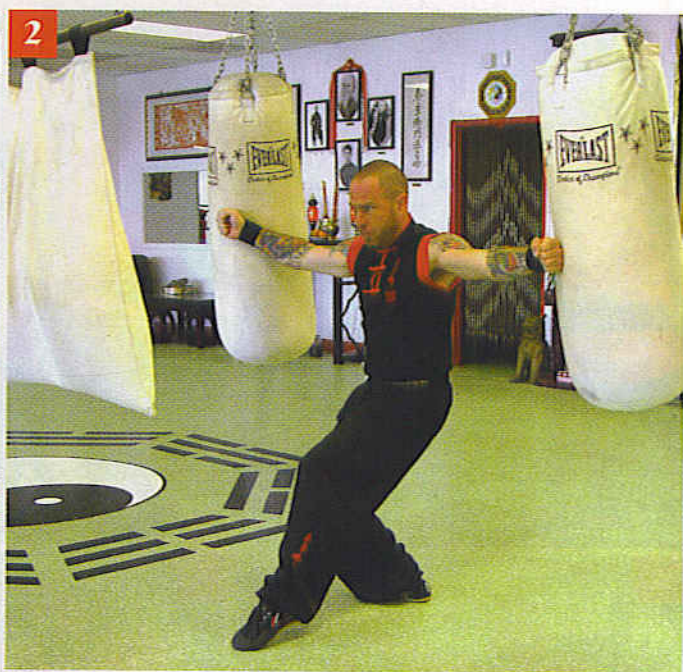
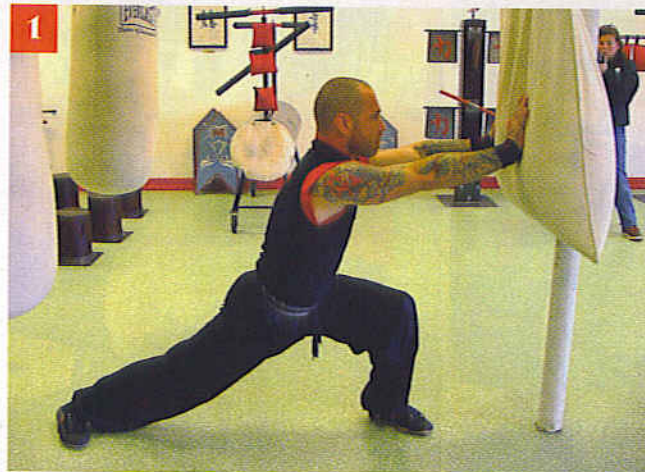


CHOY LEE FUT MASTERS ARE
BRINGING BACK DUMMY
TECHNIQUES MADE FAMOUS
IN SHAOLIN'S HALL OF
WOODEN MEN



HALL OF PAIN

By Mario Figueroa
Photos by Alma Figueroa



Sarm sing sa bo jong (3-star hanging bag dummy) (1). Sifu Thomas Fuhr strikes forward with a seung cong jeung (double-palm strike) using (2) a deep ding ji ma (pushing stance). He slides back into a diu ma (hanging stance) while striking both side bags with seung kwa choy (double backfist). He continues moving toward his right with a sow choy (sweeping fist) as his right hand strikes (3) with a rear pow choy (reverse cannon fist). Fuhr continues his rotating momentum and delivers a right chong geuk (side kick) as he pushes (4) against the left side bag with a jit kiu (slicing bridge).

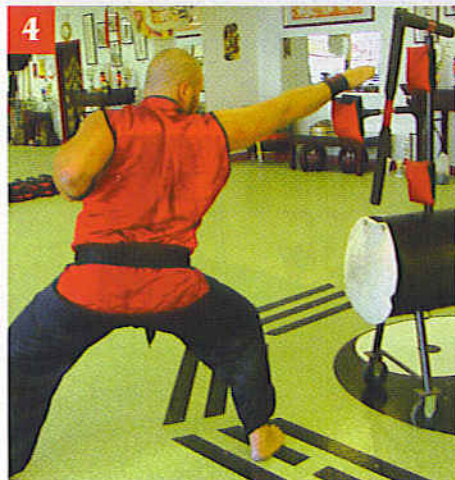
The legendary Shaolin Temple and its famed martial arts remain shrouded in mystery and mystique. One of the most enigmatic and controversial of the shaolin methods is the wooden dummy training and the legendary Hall of Wooden Men. Did the Hall of Wooden Men really exist? There is no evidence of wooden dummy training or of a wooden men hall in what is now the Shaolin Temple. Further, there is no wooden dummy training in modern shaolin kung-fu. Could wooden dummy training be a more recent introduction or even a fabrication?

We see some evidence of the authenticity of shaolin wooden dummy training in the many kung-fu styles that trace their roots and their inheritance to the Shaolin Temple. The folklore of many styles speaks of the shaolin wooden men. Further, there are many styles that have retained and use wooden dummies of various designs in their training. The mook jong can be found not only in wing chun, but also in hung gar, praying mantis and with variations, in other styles. Chow gar praying mantis retains the inheritance in their

exceptional variety of training drills termed "jongs." In fact, if you look deep enough, you will find some remnant of wooden dummy training in most shaolin-derived systems of kung-fu. This is a strong indication that there was a wooden dummy training system that originated in the Shaolin Temple.

We occasionally find that legends and folklore are based on ancient truth; this is one of those cases. An extensive system of wooden dummy training was developed at Shaolin and used for advancing and improving specific kung-fu skills. The most tangible evidence is found in choy lee fut's wooden dummy system. Chan Heung, founder of the choy lee fut system of kung-fu, learned the wooden dummy system from his teacher, shaolin monk Choy Fok and incorporated this as a key aspect of his training. Thus, a system of wooden dummy training dating to the Shaolin Temple has been preserved, documented and passed on within generations of choy lee fut practitioners.

This article will outline the format and organization of this system, address the overall logic and training concepts behind it and highlight several of the unique dummies being used.



The ma jong springs toward sifu Barry (1), who roots in his sei ping ma (horse stance) and uses a jit kiu (forearm bridge) to stop the attack and push the ma jong back. The ma jong springs back. Barry intercepts a high attack with a cheun kiu (penetrating bridge), at the same time attacking with a fu jow (tiger claw) hand (2). He continues to a right penetrating arrow fist or charp choy to the ma jong's face-level, spring-loaded target (3). Barry holds his stance and penetrates further by going into a to ma (forward penetrating horse stance). This sends the ma jong back. The ma jong springs back again (4). This time Barry stops the ma jong with a jong sat (crashing knee strike) to its chest-level target and a cheun kiu (5).

A BIT OF HISTORY

Chan Koon Pak learned the complete system of wooden dummies from his father and founder, Chan Heung. Chan Koon Pak is credited with passing on knowledge of the wooden dummy system to a number of third-generation choy lee fut masters. The last choy lee fut wooden hall was assembled under the guidance of Chan Koon Pak. Many masters learned portions of this extensive system from Chan Koon Pak, but it was his son, Chan Yu Chi, who absorbed the complete system and took on the task of documenting it for posterity. Chan Yiu Chi was a prolific teacher greatly spreading the art of Choy Lee Fut, including wooden dummy methods. The complete, documented system was passed on to his son Chan Wan Hon. He was restricted by the Chinese government from openly teaching his kung-fu. His son, sifu Chen Yon Fa, began teaching choy lee fut and its wooden dummy system in Australia 50 years later. This is the first generation since Chan Koon Pak to make available the complete system of choy lee fut wooden dummy training.

HALL OF WOODEN MEN

Choy lee fut's wooden dummy system consists of 18 different dummies, each of which is taught at three levels. There are also other dummies that were developed and added to the system. The dummies are categorized or grouped into pri-

mary, secondary and tertiary dummies based on level of skill required. The system includes dummies for open-hand and weapons training, which makes for a complex array of dummies that, when assembled, become a true depiction of a hall of wooden men. This, however, is a rare sight since some of the dummies are reserved for only advanced practitioners and are difficult to construct. One place where the hall can be set up in its entirety is the Chan Family Choy Lee Fut school in San Diego, Calif., under the direction of sifu Thomas Fuhr (www.clfsd.com).

Why is there so much of everything in choy lee fut kung-fu? So many forms, so many weapons, so many dummies. When considering this question, it is important to remember that the style is designed not just around breadth, but also depth of training. And to transfer depth of knowledge requires breadth of material. This is a basic and inescapable equation for any subject of learning. While you may certainly learn enough to be competent with a short course, to become knowledgeable requires a longer course of study.

Choy lee fut kung-fu is a pragmatic system of combat. Each training technique, each form and each dummy has a specific purpose toward the practitioner's full breadth and/or depth of training. Furthermore, there is continuity in advancement from one method to the next, from one dummy to the next one and from one level to the next. Choy lee fut kung-fu does not specialize in one aspect of shaolin training, but is instead a full reflection of shaolin martial arts. So there is always something

higher, more advanced to follow and some higher skill to master, taking you as far as you can thought possible.

For example, the first-level dummy, the ching jong or balance dummy is designed to build your bridge hands or kiu sao. It also trains proper distance, height and timing without exposing the student to injury, as would be the case if sparring. As you progress to other dummies, some focus on training speed, while others focus on precision of strikes, reaction, reflexes, footwork and rooting. The objective is to isolate and focus on specific aspects, and then to combine the various aspects at a higher skill level.

CHING JONG - BALANCE DUMMY

The same applies to weapons training. Each weapon has a unique characteristic, almost a personality, and each requires a different set of skills to master. These skills are different than the empty-hand skills. Weapons dummies are divided into long-range, mid-range and short-range weapons dummies. They are also categorized as first, secondary and tertiary levels.

WOODEN MEN OR MECHANICAL MEN?

Who can forget the great Bruce Lee's famous words, "Dummies don't hit back!" With all due respect to the late master, he was not referring to choy lee fut dummies, as these dummies *do* hit back! Lee never saw dummies like these.

From the most basic dummy, the ching jong, with its weight-bearing, moving arm, choy lee fut dummies are interactive training devices. They represent the highest technology of the times, are a testament to the brilliance and sophistication of shaolin methods and are ingenious designs even by

"Choy lee fut's wooden dummy system consists of 18 different dummies, each of which is taught at three levels."

today's standards. They feature rotating propellers, moving arms, spring-loaded bodies that respond to your movements, swinging bags and pulleys all designed to work specific skills and strengths.

THE SPRING-LOADED MA JONG HITS BACK

At secondary level, various dummies are arranged in three-star formation (sam sing) with the practitioner in the center working with all three dummies in concert. Now, footwork, peripheral vision, anticipation and sensitivity come into play along with the various aspects on which each dummy is designed to focus. If you think single-dummy practice is impressive, this will blow you away.

A 3-STAR (SAM SING) DUMMY SET-UP

Also worthy of mention are the various bag dummies, some of which are a combination of wooden dummy and hanging bag. These heavy-weighted moving targets provide dynamic real-time reaction and realistic resistance. Some such as the sam sing sa bo jong, for example, also have weight bags attached to the practitioners legs that impede footwork and movement.

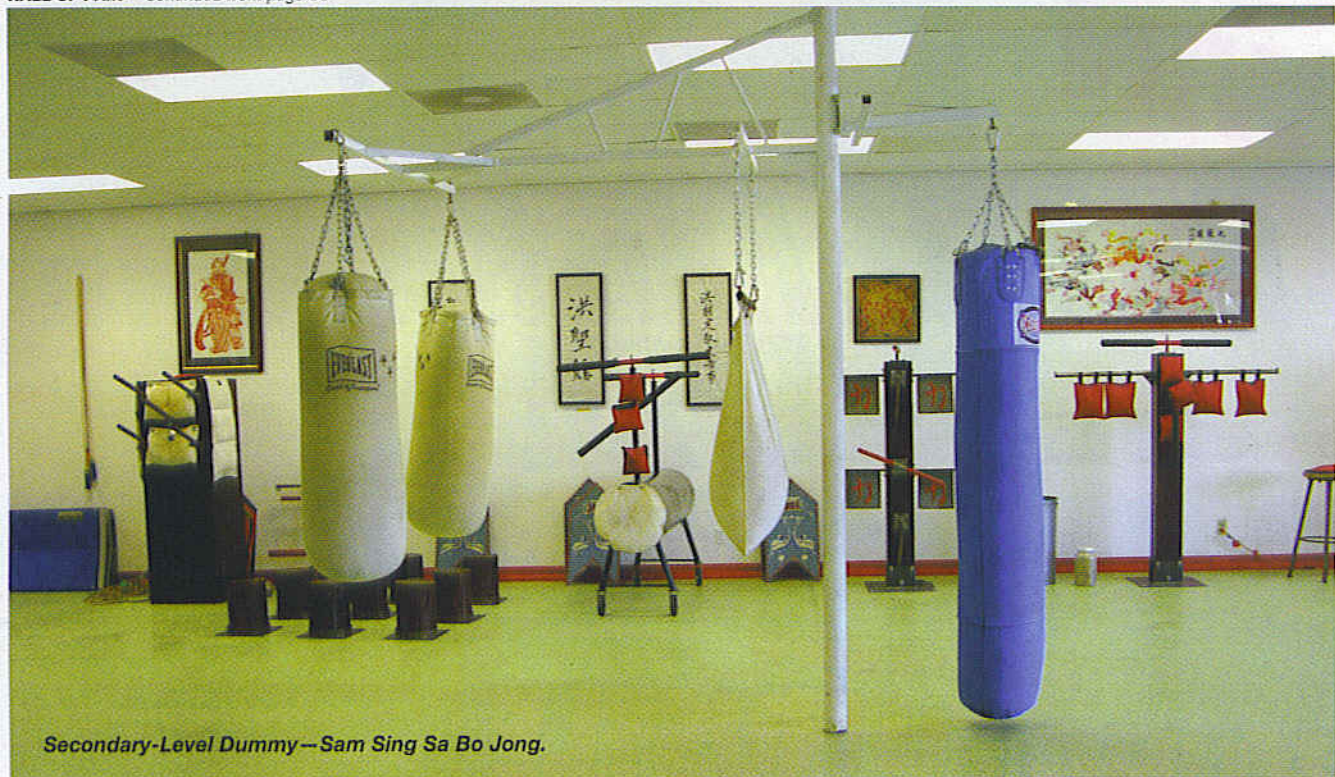
INCREASING DIFFICULTY

The tertiary and higher-level dummies are the most secret and rare in the system, and carry names such as ba gua jong, jook lum (bamboo temple) jong and moon (open door) jong, the latter being so complex that it requires a full room to build. When completed, your room will resemble a stand-alone dummy hall.

Continued on page 74



Wall of Primary-Level Dummies.



Secondary-Level Dummy—Sam Sing Sa Bo Jong.

The individual difficulty level of each device increases at the highest level. Let's examine the moi fah jong, or commonly known as plum blossom poles. At the first level, the poles are all of even height. At the second level, they are in uneven heights, so the practitioner has to negotiate steady footwork while stepping up or down. At the third level, the heights are uneven and the surface angled in different directions.

This exemplifies the ideal of higher attainment and continuously deeper understanding. While mastery of the first level is by all means a great achievement, there are higher degrees of mastery for those few who may wish to pursue them.

MA JONG – THE HORSE DUMMY

The ma jong has been written about but never been shown to the public—until now. This spring-loaded dummy is designed to charge forward toward the practitioner. The ma jong simulates a strong, mobile opponent that interacts with the practitioners. Along with its mobility, the ma jong has strategically positioned propellers in both the vertical and horizontal planes, and spring-loaded targets mounted at different heights and distances.

To stop its advance, the practitioner must strike one or more of the targets. However, the propellers are in the way and must be turned. The strike must be fast enough to avoid getting caught in the circular return of the propeller and strong enough to stop the heavy ma jong. As if that wasn't enough, the vertical propellers activate the horizontal propellers, making it necessary to quickly intercept, evade or be hit on the head or face.

3-STAR BAG DUMMY

One of the secondary three-star dummies, the sam sing sa bo jon, simulates multiple attackers. The bags are of different

weights and sizes; they react differently when struck, swinging in different directions and at different speeds and times. This creates a random and different pattern of movement each time.

GUAN JONG – THE STAFF DUMMY

One of the primary-level dummies for weapons training, it is composed of a number of rotating metal targets, as well as vertical and horizontal propellers. When hit in one direction the propellers will rotate and hit the staff in the direction of the original strike. If strong enough, this will knock the staff from your hands. The targets are made of two metal plates welded in an upside-down "V" shape. When attempting multiple, consecutive strikes, the timing must be correct or the staff will strike inside the opening of the "V" and either be trapped or knocked out of hands.

CONCLUSION

Evidence of the Shaolin Hall of Wooden Men is found in the various styles that have retained jong training. Choy lee fut has preserved a broad, deep system of wooden dummy training based on the original teachings of the Shaolin Temple. This system has not been openly taught in its entirety for over 50 years, but is now available for those who wish to learn it as part of the choy lee fut system of kung-fu. Thanks to master Chen Yon Fa and Chan Family Choy Lee Fut, this knowledge is being passed to the next generation. All choy lee fut is one; may knowledge bring us all together. ☯

Mario Figueroa is a kung-fu practitioner and instructor based in Vista, California. He can be reached at www.shenmartialarts.com or via e-mail at shenmartialarts@cox.net. All photographs were shot on location at the Chan Family Choy Lee Fut school in San Diego, California (www.clfsd.com). Drawings and diagrams are courtesy of Chan Family Choy Lee Fut, Australia (www.clfma.com/au/).