

We want your help!

The 8th edition of our magazine is a fact. Although the business of our daily lives gives us but few possibilities, we are glad that we can present another edition to thousands of international readers. Our web statistics show that our PDF editions are well visited and downloaded and therefore we can also adopt that these are read. Also we get daily registrations of people who have put themselves on the mailing list for the announcement of every new edition (by means of our website). We are delighted that our aim, spreading the knowledge and spirit of the martial arts on an international level by means of the Internet, is met.

We want to thank those who have declared their mental support by sending us positive e-mails. We appreciate these responses and want to let you all know that we feel strengthened in our mission.

Because of changes in work and home situations, the editorial board of Meibukan Magazine has been reduced since the last two editions. For Meibukan Magazine this means less capacity on different fronts. Therefore we have to put more effort by means of time and energy into the search for interesting articles which would qualify for a possible publication in our magazine.

The general appraisal of an article (checking of facts/sources/persons etc. and aptitude), the contact with the authors and copyright holders, the preparations of those articles which are effectively placed, demand more time than most people imagine. We are always searching for good material, be it already published or new material. Often we have a mixture of both since our aim is not to be newsworthy in the first place but to be helpful in providing serious martial arts material to the interested. Both new and old material are fine for our magazine and when we ourselves have time and energy we also actively create and contribute to it.

Because we only have a few hands for the job to search/investigate interesting material, I want to call upon our readers to provide us with references/links to serious and thorough non-commercial articles which could be suitable for publication in our magazine.

It is difficult to explain in short what kind of material Meibukan Magazine is looking for, but now that the first 8 editions of our magazine have appeared, I believe that the articles published so far give a clear indication of the type of material we are interested in.

If you are in a position to provide us with material, the most convenient way for us would be if you could supply us with a weblink or even a Word document by email concerning the article that you think would fit in our magazine. Ideally, provide us with information of where and when the article is/was published (webpage or magazine), who the author is and -if possible- how to reach him and possibly the copyright holder. Even if you only have a weblink that you think could be interesting for our magazine, please feel free to mail us by our submission email. Of course we can not guarantee we will place the article(s), but we will certainly take the effort to study the material attentively.

Lex Opdam
Editor in chief

Karate and Kobudo?

In talking to many practitioners of the Okinawan martial arts, one often hears two separate terms used; karate and kobudo. One is the unarmed practice common to the island, the other the weapon arts. On the surface, this separation makes sense; it's a very easy division to make since the difference between holding something and not holding something is pretty obvious. Since the translation for karate means "empty hand", the separation seems even more obvious. However, although this separation makes sense on the surface and is a common idea in Okinawa, in Japan, and here in the West, I would suggest it is an artificial one, one that comes out of a specific set of historic circumstances, and is not actually representative of the Okinawan martial heritage.

- Frederick W. Lohse III -

Conceptually, separating armed and unarmed arts is rather unusual worldwide. While many of the Japanese Shin-budo are extremely specific in their choice of tools- Judo is empty handed, Kendo uses only a shinai (bamboo practice sword), Kyudo uses only the bow- these arts resemble the Western sports of fencing, boxing, or wrestling more than they do most martial arts. They were designed, much like their Western counterparts, to fit a specific need. Elements of practice that were deemed unnecessary to their goals were eliminated. Hence, Judo does not contain many of the armed or striking techniques common to many traditional Jujutsu styles, Kendo includes no unarmed training or understanding of the spear, halberd, or thrown weapons as many classical Japanese arts do, and so on. Their specific designs enable focused study of a particular set of techniques, a practice designed for self-development, sport, fitness, or some combination of these. However, in more traditional martial arts the differentiation between armed and unarmed arts is often vague, at best. The classical Japanese arts, Chinese arts, Philippine arts, Indonesian arts, all mix armed and unarmed techniques, usually in the same system, using the same tactical concepts. Historically, in looking at the Okinawan arts, the same applies.

While today karate and kobudo are often considered separate practices, this is a relatively new phenomenon on Okinawa.

In the past, the leading figures in the Okinawan martial traditions practiced, and taught, a variety of techniques. Looking at the various figures of Okinawa's martial past, this becomes immediately obvious. Kosaku Matsumora was known for his skill with the bo (staff) (Nagamine, 2000, p. 34). In the 1866 demonstration at the departure of the last Chinese Sapposhi, Seisho Aragaki, who went on to be Kanryo Higaonna's teacher, demonstrated a variety of armed and unarmed techniques ranging from empty hand to tinbe (shield & machete or short spear). The famous Yara Chatan passed down both Chatan Yara no Kusanku and Chatan Yara no Sai. Perhaps most telling, the single greatest legacy of one of karate's most famous exponents, a man who was nicknamed for his karate, "Tode" Sakugawa (Kanga Sakugawa), is the bo kata that bears his name, not his karate.



Kanga Sakugawa

“The classical Japanese arts, Chinese arts, Philippine arts, Indonesian arts, all mix armed and unarmed techniques, usually in the same system, using the same tactical concepts.”

Obviously, the pioneers of what was to become Okinawa’s karate and kobudo did not see the two as separate arts. The leading teachers practiced and taught both. This continued on into the next “generations”. Kanryo Higaonna is said to have been skilled with a variety of Chinese weapons. Along with his karate, Chotoku Kyan passed down the bo kata Tokumine no kon, a kata he considered an important part of his legacy. The noted bo masters Masami Chinen and Modem Yabiku both studied Itosu style karate. (See Hokama, 2005.) Indeed, virtually every legendary Okinawan bushi is known for both armed and unarmed skills. This is, with a little examination, not surprising. In earlier times, the martial arts were not practiced primarily for self-development, or sport. They were practiced for self-defense, or combat. In that light, any martial artist would need to be able to use, and be able to counter, not only unarmed attacks, but a variety of weapons. Over time, this approach to the practice of the martial arts has changed, starting during the Meiji period (1868-1912), and intensifying in the post-war years. However, in general the majority of late Meiji and early Showa era (1926-1989) Okinawan martial artists also intrinsically connected armed and unarmed practice.

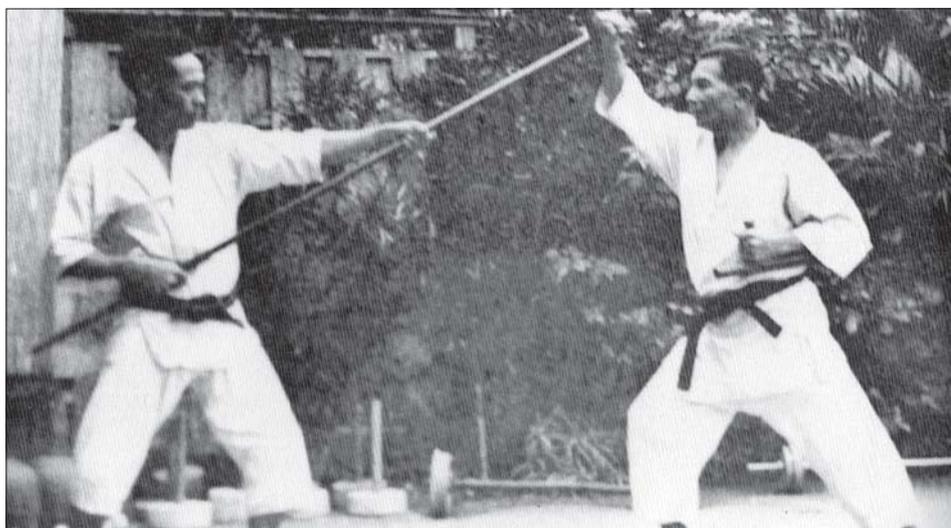
The founder of Shito-ryu, Kenwa Mabuni, known for his efforts to preserve and pass

on a huge number of Okinawan kata, was enough of an expert in kobudo to be one of Shinken Taira’s main teachers; he obviously considered the armed arts important enough to preserve as well. Taira, the founder of the Society for the Preservation and Promotion of Ryukyu kobudo, also learned from Jinsei Kamiya, a noted Goju-ryu exponent. Ginchin Funakoshi, the founder of Shotokan, also practiced kobudo, as the famous picture of him using sai (a forked metal truncheon) demonstrates. In the early days, he also taught some bojutsu, though this dropped out of most Shotokan practice. (McMahon, 2001.) Conversely, his student Shinken Taira also taught karate. During the late Meiji period and right into the post-war era, the Okinawan arts were undergoing massive change. They were being exported to Japan and becoming something new in the process, while on Okinawa they were being re-examined and renamed. With each generation, there had always been change and crossfertilization between styles and teachers. However, in this period there came to be a more focused approach to codifying systems, naming them, and creating clearer lineages and lists of kata to go with them. Nevertheless, throughout this process the conflation of armed and unarmed techniques continued. As people developed new systems and named them, they usually included both armed and unarmed kata. Isshin-ryu’s founder Tatsuo Shima-buko included a variety of karate, bo, sai, and tonfa (right-angled baton) kata. The late Juhatsu Kyoda considered armed techniques important enough to add bo and sai kata to the Tou’on-ryu he named after his teacher Kanryo Higaonna. When he

founded his organization, the Goju-ryu Kokusai Karate Kobudo Renmei, Seiko Higa, who had also studied with Shinken Taira, Shinpo Matayoshi, and Kenko Nakaima, included kobudo in the title even though there are no weapon kata in the Goju system. Other Goju teachers also considered kobudo essential to their practice- Seikichi Toguchi added rhythm bo and various kobudo kata to his Shoreikan, and Meitoku Yagi added Gekisai and Saifa practiced with sai. Zenryo Shima-buko taught Tokumine no kon along with Kyan’s karate. Kenko Nakaima’s Ryuei-ryu has always included armed and unarmed kata. Hohansoken was known for his Matsumura style karate, but also for his deep knowledge of a number of weapons. Seikichi Odo’s Okinawa Kempo includes a variety of armed kata, taught, as in all these systems, as part and parcel of the karate they accompany.

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Throughout the history of the Okinawan arts, karate teachers have taught and practiced kobudo, and kobudo teachers have taught and practiced karate. The two have never been seen as separate specialties, at least until recently. Starting some time in the early part of the last century a separation began to develop, at least in many people’s minds, between Okinawa’s armed and unarmed techniques. Some of this change probably grew out of the existing training environment. While virtually all the old masters practiced both, different people were known for different things. While Chojo Oshiro practiced karate, people came to him to learn the bojutsu he was most famous for, and while people would go to Itosu to learn karate, they would perhaps not seek him out for the kobudo he knew. In each generation there would be teachers that were better known for different skills. In time some of these teachers’ students also became known for their teachers’ skills, creating lineages that held certain knowledge, more or less loosely. This is a general tendency however, and I would suggest that the real reason



Eisuke Akamine with bo and Shinken Taira with tonfa.

for the increased separation between armed and unarmed techniques was a particular set of historical influences on the development of the Okinawan arts in the early and mid 20th century.

In looking at the Okinawan arts that have the least connection to the armed techniques of the island perhaps the starkest separation is in the Naha-te based Gojuryu¹. While a number of Goju teachers have incorporated armed techniques into their teaching, the base system as founded by Chojun Miyagi is almost unique on Okinawa in its complete exclusion of weapon techniques². Since Goju is so stark in this respect, examining some aspects of Goju's development in this period can shed some light on how this separation may have become more common in the Okinawan arts in general.

While Miyagi sensei's teacher Kanryo Higaonna was said to also be skilled in Chinese weaponry, he is not known to have passed any of this down. Among his students, Kyoda sensei went on to include bo and sai kata in his system, though it is unknown who he learned them from, while Miyagi did not. Higaonna's history may have some bearing on why Miyagi, who considered himself Higaonna's heir, did not include armed practice in his system.

Kanryo Higaonna began teaching his Naha-te in Okinawa around the start of the 20th century. At that time, the school system on the island was undergoing a series of deep changes brought about by the Meiji restoration. Among these changes was a new focus on physical and moral education (with a strong nationalist component) in the schools. Judo and Kendo were both standard subjects in schools in Japan, and were seen as ways to develop these traits. On Okinawa there was a push by a number of important teachers to have the local art, karate, become nationally known for its benefits, and to have it included in the school curriculum as well. Higaonna taught in the Naha Commercial High School starting in 1905, but was not the first karate

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teacher in the public schools. Itosu Ankoh started teaching in the school system in 1901. In developing his karate to make it more useful for the school system, he changed the art as he had learned it, creating simpler kata (the Pinan katas) and focusing on group drills. It is also said that he made the practice safer, concentrating on its physical education elements. Although later he also taught in the schools, Higaonna and his karate initially lost out to Itosu in getting the public acclaim, and perhaps recompense, that accompanied the public school position. Morio Higaonna relates that it is possible Higaonna was not paid for teaching in the school system and that the principal asked him to focus his teaching on “physical, intellectual, and



Seiko Higa (1st row left), Seikichi Toguchi (1st row right), Ryugo Sakai (2nd row right), late 1950s.

Courtesy of Anthony Mfranklin.

moral education” (Higaonna, 1995: 21-22). He also relates that it may have been while teaching at the school that Higaonna “closed the fist” as a part of moving his karate from a purely fighting art to one also focused on health and moral development. (See Higaonna, 1995.)

While Kanryo Higaonna left nothing written about his feelings regarding the development of karate in the schools, one can imagine that he was disappointed that Itosu's karate, not his, was accepted. In the years ahead, Itosu continued to push for his karate, bringing it to the attention of the Ministry of Education, publishing his 10 precepts, and eventually having it thrive through his student, Funakoshi, who became the premier Okinawan teacher in Japan. Watching this take place, it is easy to see how Higaonna might mimic some of the changes Itosu made, focusing his art more on mental and physical education, and perhaps away from purely martial application. If nothing else, at some time in this period, he “closed the fist” in the system, a change considered to be a move towards a less directly combative

“To quote a senior practitioner of Uechi-ryu and student of Shinken Taira, Katsuhiko Minowa: “karate and kobudo are like two wheels on an axle.””

model of training. This process of development continued with Chojun Miyagi.

As Miyagi took over the mantle of Naha-te's leading instructor, he also was participating in what amounted to a sea-change in Okinawa's martial arts. With things like admission into the Butokukai, the change of the characters from “Chinese Hand” to “Empty Hand,” and the model of Judo to go by, it may have seemed there was a clear path for Okinawa's arts to follow into the future. Miyagi, along with a number of other notable karate figures, knew Jigoro Kano and had trained some Judo. He also saw the popularity of that art, its clear goals, organization, and development from older arts and its value as a method of physical and mental training. He wanted Okinawa's art, his art, to show the country its value as well, to promote the system his teacher had taught him, and perhaps to preserve the art in a changing world.

Of all the actions he took to help move Okinawan karate into the Japanese mainstream, one of the most telling was his participation in the meeting that proposed formally accepting the name change, and his support for this change (see McCarthy, 1999). While much has been made of the political and historical aspects of this, the name change accepted by many karate teachers in 1936, from the characters Chinese Hand (唐手) to Empty Hand (空手 karate), is truly symbolic of a much larger change in the common understanding of the art. In its basic translation, the character used for the term “te” or “ti” (手) means hand. In that sense, it is easy, and logical, to conflate it with a person's hands, and so with empty handed technique. However, in the Okinawan martial vernacular, the term has a different meaning. It refers to technique, and is almost a general term for the martial arts, armed and unarmed. As an example, in Matayoshi kobudo certain weapon kata are referred to as “ti”, as in Guwa no ti, or Guwa technique³. The name change to “Empty Hand,” therefore is an even larger

shift in the Okinawan arts than it appears if one is thinking of it only as a move between two terms for unarmed combat. Instead, it is a formal movement away from a term roughly meaning “Chinese based fighting techniques” (toudi) to “Unarmed fighting way” (karate do). By shifting the emphasis away from the more general Okinawan term to the more Japanese “te”, the meaning is limited, emphasizing the concept of the hand. This name change in essence redefines the art, removing the armed techniques that had always been part of the larger art entirely.

In the minutes of the meeting discussing this name change, Genwa Nakasone makes it very clear that a major reason for the name change is “consideration of karate do’s development as a Japanese budo.” (McCarthy, 1999: 60) Much as Judo left armed techniques behind, the new karate did as well. While Miyagi stated that the classical forms must be preserved, he also worked hard to develop a newer Okinawan budo. As a part of this, he participated in an effort to develop a generic “Okinawan Karate” after the model of Judo and Kendo—a Shin-budo put together from older arts in a new, organized, and focused package. To this end he supported and helped develop some of the proposed “unified” kata, now known as the Gekisai kata, wrote about the importance of the spiritual



Courtesy of Anthony Mirakim.

Ryugo Sakai and Seikichi Toguchi, late 1950s.

and physical education aspects of training as opposed to the purely fighting aspects (see McCarthy, 1999), and traveled extensively to promote his art, both around Japan and as far away as Hawaii.

While Miyagi’s Goju-ryu does not exactly resemble the education-based model he

worked so hard to develop⁴, it has certain elements of it as core to its organization and practice. One of these is the complete absence of armed techniques. While I do not argue that Okinawan Goju-ryu lacks true martial content, as many sport karate styles do, I do see the absence of armed technique as an expression of Miyagi Chojun’s work to develop his karate as both an extension of the training he had received and as a modern Japanese Budo, complete with a clear syllabus, a defined set of warm up and preparatory exercises, and both kata for school children and public classes (the Gekisai) and the classical kata that had been passed down to him.

“...the attitude that weapon training brings is markedly different from the attitude that sport karate creates. Using a weapon is a constant reminder of the dangers of practice, and the deadly nature of the techniques studied.”

A deeper examination of the development of Goju-ryu is well outside the scope of this article. However, this brief examination serves to shed light on one way in which the separation of the armed and unarmed techniques on Okinawa came about. Looking at another good example of karate’s development in this period – the rise of Ginchin Funakoshi’s Shotokan – we see similar trends. Funakoshi brought karate to the mainland, received a good deal of help from Jigoro Kano in the process, and worked hard to popularize the art. In doing so, he primarily taught Itosu’s karate, a karate already prepped for a larger public audience, and continued to change it. He also took his karate deeper into the model of a Japanese Budo, in the process dropping the weapon arts he practiced and initially taught and focusing on the spiritual and physical education aspects of it, as well as identifying it closely with the “national spirit” of Japan. With his and Miyagi’s karate being the primary models for the Okinawan arts on the mainland, karate there developed almost entirely as an unarmed practice. (One could also perhaps say that this is one reason why sport karate then developed primarily on the mainland- with no weapon training in the practice, the mind-set weapons bring to training is excluded, making a shift to sport practice seem a

much more natural extension of the training in general.)

The changes happening in the public presentation of much Okinawan karate were also taking place in a larger arena of increasing formality. Before the 20th century, there were essentially no formal systems of toudi on Okinawa. Various teachers became well known, took students, and these students passed on their teachers’ knowledge. Students would train with various teachers, going to one famous for his bo work, another for his kempo, another for his kama (sickle), and so on in their search for knowledge. Most of the founders of today’s systems did this- Chojun Miyagi also trained with Gokenki and Todaiki, for example. In the push to become a Japanese Budo, formal names for systems, and then codification of what these systems contained, became necessary for acceptance into the Butokukai. Through this process, if a teacher did not know certain weapon skills, or did not want to teach them, these would then not become part of his “style”, or ryu, and his students would not learn them, or consider them part of the art. Hence some schools contain no weapon techniques, and with students encouraged to stay within one “ryu,”⁵ cross training became less likely. In the long run, this led to ryu devoted entirely to weapon arts, partially as a reaction to the lessening of these practices in the larger Okinawan martial community, and partially since these teachers taught weapon skills and formed a school teaching them. However, as this stylistic formality increased in the early 20th century, it added another impetus to the increasingly liminal nature of the Okinawan weapon arts.

So, the name change creates a change in how the art is seen- it formally becomes an unarmed art- and codification creates some incentives to limit access to weapon training. Added to this, some of the main practitioners and teachers of the art work to push a model of it related to the Japanese Shin Budo, with clearly defined boundaries and a set of values that emphasize spiritual and physical training as much as or more than connection to earlier combative traditions. At the same time, Japan and Okinawa were changing. There is little need for armed hand-to-hand combat skills in the modern world. Soldiers use guns, and

civilians are mostly unarmed. It is easy to see the potential usefulness of karate as a means of self-defense. Training with archaic weapons is however, a little different- it is harder to justify it in any practical terms in the modern world, and Meiji Japan was nothing if not focused on moving into that modern world. Part of making the Okinawan arts relevant to the rapidly changing culture of Japan and Okinawa was removing the elements that seemed most incongruous with the push towards “modernity.” Again as was the case in the development of Kendo and Judo. It does not, on the surface, seem as relevant, so weapon training perhaps seemed easy to push aside.

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This incongruity is then coupled with certain logistical issues. One is simply the amount of time it takes to develop anything resembling mastery of a variety of armed and unarmed skills. With karate being promoted as a “way,” like Judo or Kendo, it also becomes something people pursue as a part of a larger life, a method of self-cultivation. As a part of a larger life, the time needed to develop a full skill set becomes even harder to invest. Weapon training usually comes after some skill in unarmed technique is developed. It is not for new students, and in larger classes with students training for a shorter time, particularly in settings like the universities where karate was initially popularized in mainland Japan, it may never even come up. With students engaged for reasons of fitness or self-cultivation, it is not even necessary. Weapon training also requires much more space than empty hand training, is more dangerous, and has added equipment costs. Take all that, and with the art potentially redefined not to include it, it is easy to see how weapon training may have come to be seen as a separate, and less common, part of the Okinawan martial tradition. One not for all practitioners, but only for those who chose to go into the arts in a certain way.

By extension, then, it is also easy to see how it is even less well integrated into

karate training in the west. Not only did westerners start training karate well after the name change formally shifted its name to “empty hand” and these trends had had some time to work themselves out in Okinawa and Japan,⁶ but in many cases they learned in mainland Japan, where the main systems – Shotokan and its descendants like Wado-ryu, Japanese Goju-kai, Shitoryu, and so on – don't include much if any weapon training. On Okinawa some westerners had instruction in weapon techniques, but most of the first generations also trained for a limited time, usually a short tour of duty on the island, giving many of them little time in which to get past the earlier stages of unarmed training. Even if they did have some training in kobudo, the weapons themselves were harder to come by back home, as were people to train them with. So it is even easier to see how in the west weapon training could have come to be seen as a separate, less common, and less important part of the tradition.

However, it is not separate, not less important, and historically not less common. While on the mainland many karate styles developed without armed techniques, on Okinawa senior practitioners have always maintained a connection to both. As noted above, as new systems developed they included weapon training, and even in the case of systems like Goju-ryu, most major exponents pursued instruction in kobudo, and maintained it in their practice. Given the incentives not to – logistical pressures, a push towards a defined budo model, systems codified not to include it, and a nomenclature that excludes it – why has kobudo training remained so central to the Okinawan arts?

In short, because the empty hand arts are incomplete without it. To quote a senior practitioner of Uechi-ryu and student of Shinken Taira, Katsuhiko Minowa: “karate and kobudo are like two wheels on an axle” (McKenna, 2006). I agree, and would further argue that karate and kobudo are not separate arts. Their connection for the earlier generations of Okinawan martial artists is clear, as is the importance of weapon training for most of today's senior practitioners. They are all parts of Okinawan “ti.” Making the point even clearer, Ryugo Sakai said to me in 1992: “you

cannot understand karate if you do not understand weapons.” I agree. But, one may ask, why?

First, I would say that the mindset of any martial training is crucial. There is much said these days about the difference between sport karate and classical karate. I think these definitions are somewhat fluid, hard sometimes to pin down. However, the attitude that weapon training brings is markedly different from the attitude that sport karate creates. Using a weapon is a constant reminder of the dangers of practice, and the deadly nature of the techniques studied. I am not a big fan of the “its so deadly we can't really practice it” school of talk. That's because often talk is all it is. To be “deadly” you need lots of training; you need to be fast, precise, strong, and determined to do damage. You also need to know how to do the “deadly” damage. Weapon training brings many of these elements to the forefront. In doing pair work, and armed or unarmed you cannot really train without doing pair work, the danger is apparent. Unless you are going so slowly the training is useless anyway or are so far away that only the weapons touch (useless again), a mistake can lead to serious injury or even death. Unarmed training is much more forgiving – one can take a decent punch, even to the face, with minimal damage – a split lip, loose or broken teeth, a broken nose, etc. However, a decent stab with the sai into the body might kill you, and will certainly require immediate emergency medical attention. This difference, if you are training hard and fast, creates a certain mindset. It



David Nauss, Fred Lohse, bo sai, Cambridge 2002.



Kumi waza.

Courtesy of Jim Brath.

requires attention, and proper intention. It requires trust in both self and partner. It eliminates competition, unless you want to train in a dojo full of cripples. You can't get lazy and let an attack in, and if your partner is training properly and making his attacks fast, hard, and as close to his targets as possible, you can't get lazy, ignore a single attack, or safely make random movements. You also need to deal with fear. Doing hard, fast pair work day after day entails risk, and if you don't have some fear of injury you do not really understand the risks involved. The risk is minimized through proper training, but never goes away. You need to accept and train past it to progress. These elements combine to create a mindset that is, in my opinion, that of classical karate, or toudi- a fighting art, not a sport. I believe it is focused and facilitated by weapon training, in a way unarmed training can't really match. At the same time, weapon training emphasizes a number of crucial physical elements that are easier to miss in unarmed practice. Proper ma'ai, or range, is essential to all techniques. But in unarmed practice, the differences in range are sometimes hard to see. Variations in height and reach of partners, and the variety of attacks with different ranges from shoulder bash to fully extended kick, come quickly and are sometimes very subtle. The larger differences between weapons, and their vastly different utility at different ranges, makes the practice of proper ma'ai very clear, and easier to understand. Moving between them then helps develop a sense of how range shifts, and how you can use those

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changes. Moving between them also makes one shift the focus of intention. You can see when someone is using a bo but thinking of their body- their intention is in their hands and feet, not where the weapon is. Shifting one's focus out through the weapon is a mental exercise in itself, one that teaches a great deal about range, intention, and timing.

Coupled with that is the process of developing targeting and precision. The striking surfaces of most weapons are much smaller than that of, say, an elbow. To hit properly you need to know where the weapon is going, quite precisely. While in unarmed pair work a general punch to the body might be acceptable (if not desirable), in weapon training a general strike is not really effective, or safe for your partner. Nor is it possible when the surface area of the striking weapon might be less than 1 centimeter in diameter. At the same time, the path the weapon

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you about making sure you use the same precision in your unarmed technique, as well as again teaching you about shifting your focus to where it needs to be instead of where it is habitually.

The variety of weapons practiced is also a teaching tool. One counters a bo attack with a kama differently than one does with an eku (oar). Each weapon has a different range, as discussed above. They also have different characteristics- some cut, some pierce, some bludgeon, some, like the body, can do a variety of these. Some can take an attack directly and some require



Houhan Soken.

travels is also crucial. While I might treat someone with a slightly wild punch as a training opportunity, I won't do pair work with someone who can't really control where their weapon is going. It's too dangerous. In developing skill, you need to be able to control both the target and the path the weapon takes to get there, very cleanly. This then leads to being able to put the weapon where you want, when you want, in the way you want. In turn this can teach

dodging or redirection when used to defend. These options are determined by their physical qualities, and changing between them teaches a sense of how to use different options in a way that is again harder to see with unarmed practice, since all the options are always there. For example, it's hard to grab with a tonfa, but pick up nunchiyaku (2 section flail) and suddenly a whole set of seizing techniques becomes available. It's easy to forget the huge

variety of things the body can do, and weapon training helps refine the sense of options open, helping to keep the practitioner using the proper tool for the task at hand, armed or unarmed.

Finally, weapon training also helps train body movement and mechanics. The bo, for example, is stiff. If the body is also stiff, little power will be transmitted through the weapon. It will move slowly and inaccurately, and the more strength poured in, the less effective the strikes will become. This is, pretty much, the same in karate training. However the bo, and other weapons, make this immediately clear. They teach pliability of form, quick footwork and agility, and evasion in a way that is slightly harder to do in karate training. One can, if planted properly, take a strong sweep or mawashi geri (round kick) to the leg. One cannot take a strong strike with the bo there and stay standing. That difference alone changes the practice.

Together these and other things amount to an added dimension in training. The different emphasis creates small but noticeable differences, ones that help develop certain skills more easily. While some are physical, most are mental – shifts



Fred Lohse, Sakai Ryugo, Kagoshima, 1992

Courtesy of Fred Lohse.

in focus, intention, and conception that are challenging but rewarding. Its not that they can't be developed through unarmed practice alone – they most certainly can. It's just that weapon training forms, in some ways, a shortcut or training assist that carries across weapon and body, helping develop a more fully rounded and more capable martial artist.

In short, historically the weapon arts of Okinawa were practiced along with the unarmed arts, as part of a continuous body of knowledge. They are as intrinsic to the martial culture of the island as its more

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popular karate, and have been treated as such by most all of the island's famous martial artists. They also carry an aesthetic, a beauty, all their own. For various historical and cultural reasons, the unarmed aspect of Okinawa's arts has come to the fore in recent decades, with this shift being particularly emphasized by the formal name change away from a general martial moniker (toudi) to the term “empty hand” (karate). However, the weapon arts, while currently less popular, teach certain concepts central to the larger martial ethos of the island, and so form an element of training that is essential to truly understanding these arts. They are as much toudi as any unarmed practice.

Much as my teachers do, I believe that one can not really practice Okinawan karate if one does not practice kobudo. It's not that I don't like karate or think it has great depth. It does. It's just that alone it is incomplete. Or, perhaps, as Shinpo Matayoshi said to me, it is just that “karate, yes, it is one of the weapons in the Okinawa kobudo.”

Notes

¹Naha-te was a Meiji period term for Okinawan martial arts that developed in the Naha area of Okinawa. These include Goju-ryu, Tou'on-ryu, and Uechi-ryu. Uechi-ryu is also notable in its exclusion of armed techniques. However, it came to Okinawa well after the development of most of the other systems on the island; Kanbun Uechi did not start teaching until 1924, and Uechi-ryu was not taught in Okinawa until as late as 1949 (see McKenna, 2006, History of Uechi-ryu, p. 23). Since armed techniques are often taught later in many Chinese arts, it is interesting to speculate that Kanbun Uechi may have missed out on more than the Suparinpe he supposedly did not learn, but there is no evidence to make this anything but speculation.

²Even systems founded by people like Juhatsu Kyoda and Shoshin Nagamine include armed techniques.

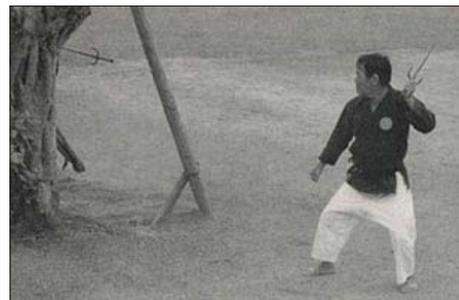
³Methods for using a guwa, or kue, an Okinawan and Japanese farming hoe. A number of the kata in the system use this nomenclature. They include: Kama no ti, Kuwa no ti, Tsuken Akachu no Eku di, and Nunti no ti, among others.

⁴Perhaps in part because of an ambivalence on his part. We will never know, but I imagine he was in some ways caught between wanting to preserve the tradition he valued so much, and bringing it

into what he saw as a new world.

⁵The impetus for this, a combination of Confucian ideology emphasizing respect for the teacher, nationalist sentiment also emphasizing loyalty and respect for elders, and commercial incentives that became more relevant after the war, is a complex issue, and outside the scope of this article.

⁶Indeed, while there was never a complete discontinuation of weapon training on Okinawa, the unarmed arts had grown so much more popular that the founders of both of the main lines of kobudo instruction on Okinawa today, Shinken Taira and Shinpo Matayoshi, stated a desire to preserve and promote Okinawa's armed traditions as one reason for opening their dojo. In some ways, it is possible to see the “decline” in the kobudo noted by both



Shinpo Matayoshi throwing sai.

men as instead a change in an existing balance: a vast increase in one portion of the art instead of a decline in another.

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