

Okinawan kobudō

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Okinawan kobudō (古武道; also known as Ryūkyū Kobujutsu, Koryū, or just as Kobudō) is a Japanese term that can be translated as "*old martial way of Okinawa*". It generally refers to the classical weapon traditions of Okinawan martial arts, most notably the rokushakubo (six foot staff, known as the "bō"), sai (short unsharpened dagger), tonfa (handled club), kama (sickle), and nunchaku (nunchucks), but also the tekko (knuckledusters), tinbe-rochin (shield and spear), and surujin (weighted chain). Less common Okinawan weapons include the tambo (short staff) and the eku (boat oar of traditional Okinawan design).

History

It is a popular story and common belief that Okinawan farming tools evolved into weapons due to restrictions placed upon the peasants that meant they could not carry arms. As a result, it is said, they were defenseless and developed a fighting system around their traditional farming implements. However, modern martial arts scholars have been unable to find historical backing for this story, and the evidence uncovered by various martial historians points to the Pechin Warrior caste in Okinawa as being those who practiced and studied martial arts, rather than the Heimin, or commoner. It is true that Okinawans, under the rule of foreign powers, were prohibited from carrying weapons or practicing with them in public. But the weapons-based fighting that they secretly practiced (and the types of weapons they practiced with) had strong Chinese roots, and examples of similar weapons have been found in China, pre-dating the Okinawa adaptations.

Kobudō traditions were shaped by indigenous Okinawan techniques that arose within the Aji, or noble class, and by imported methods from China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and the other countries that traded with the Ryūkyūs. The majority of modern kobudō traditions that survived the difficult times during and following World War II were preserved and handed down by Taira Shinken (Ryūkyū Kobudō Hozon Shinkokai), Chogi Kishaba (Ryuku Bujutsu Kenkyu Doyukai), and Kenwa Mabuni (Shito-ryū). Practical systems were developed by Toshihiro Oshiro and Motokatsu Inoue in conjunction with these masters. Other noted masters who have kobudō kata named after them include Chōtoku Kyan, Shigeru Nakamura, Kanga Sakukawa, and Shinko Matayoshi.

Kobudō arts are thought by some to be the forerunner of karate, and several styles of that art include some degree of kobudō training as part of their curriculum. Similarly, it is not uncommon to see an occasional kick or other empty-hand technique in a kobudō kata. The techniques of the two arts are closely related in some styles, evidenced by the empty-hand and weapon variants of certain kata: for example, Kankū-dai and Kankū-sai, and Gojūshiho and Gojūshiho-no-sai, although these are examples of Kobudō Kata which have been developed from Karate Kata and are not traditional Kobudō forms. Other more authentic kobudō kata demonstrate elements of empty hand techniques as is shown in older forms such as Soeishi No Dai, a Bo form which is one of the few authentic Kobudō kata to make use of a kick as the penultimate technique. Kobudō and Kobujutsu are older and have undergone less "modern development" than Karate and still retain much more of the original elements, reflections of which can be seen in more modern karate kata. The connection between empty hand and weapon methods can be directly related in systems such as that formulated in order to preserve both arts such as Inoue/Taira's Ryūkyū Kobujutsu Hozon Shinko Kai and Motokatsu Inoue's Yuishinkai Karate Jutsu. M.Inoue draws direct comparisons between the use of certain weapons and various elements of empty hand technique such as sai mirroring haito/shuto waza, tonfa reflecting that of urkaken and hijiate, and kama of kurite and kakete, as examples. The footwork in both methods is interchangeable.

Weapons and kata

Okinawan kobudō was at its zenith some 200-400 years ago and of all the authentic kobudō kata practiced at this time, only relatively few by comparison remain extant. Between the 1700s - early 1900s a decline in the study of Ryūkyū Kobujutsu (as it was known then) meant that the future of this martial tradition was in danger. During the Taisho period (1912-1926) some martial arts exponents such as Yabiku Moden made great inroads in securing the future of Ryūkyū Kobujutsu. A large amount of those forms which are still known are due to the efforts of Taira Shinken who travelled around the Ryūkyū Islands in the early part of the 20th century and compiled 42 existing kata, covering 8 types of Okinawan weapon. Whilst Taira Shinken may not have been able to collect *all* extant kobudō kata, those he did manage to preserve are listed here. They do not include all those from the Matayoshi, Uhuchiku and Yamanni streams however.

This page was last modified on 14 July 2009 at 16:16. Text is available under the [Creative Commons Attribution/Share-Alike License](#); additional terms may apply. See [Terms of Use](#) for details. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the [Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.](#), a non-profit organization.