

Weapons and Kata

Okinawan kobudo was at its zenith some 200-400 years ago and of all the authentic kobudo kata practiced at this time, only relatively few by comparison remain extant. Between the 1700s - early 1900s a decline in the study of Ry-ky Kobujutsu (as it was known then) meant that the future of this martial tradition was in danger. During the Taisho period 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 Ryukyu 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 kobudo kata, those he did manage to preserve are listed here. They do not include all those from the Matayoshi, Uhuchiku and Yamanni streams however.

Bo: The bo is a six-foot staff, sometimes tapered at either end. It was perhaps developed from a farming tool called a tenbin: a stick placed across the shoulders with baskets or sacks hanging from either end.

The bo was also possibly used as the handle to a rake or a shovel. The bo, along with shorter variations such as the jo and hanbo could also have been developed from walking sticks used by travelers, especially monks.

The bo is considered the 'king' of the Okinawa weapons, as all others exploit its weaknesses in fighting it, whereas when it is fighting them it is using its strengths against them. The bo is the earliest of all Okinawa weapons (and effectively one of the earliest of all weapons in the form of a basic staff), and is traditionally made from red or white oak.

BO Kata

- **Shuji No Kon Sho, Shuji No Kon Dai, Koshiki No Shuji, Shu shi no Kon**
- **Sakugawa No Kon Sho, Sakugawa No Kon Dai, Sakugawa No Kon Chu**
- **Soeshi No Kon Sho, Soeshi No Kon Dai, Sueyoshi No Kon, Kongō No Kon (Taira Shinken's Bo Kata)**
- **Shirotaru No Kon Sho, Shirotaru No Kon Dai**
- **Sesoko No Kon, Yonekawa No Kon, Tsukenbo, Chinenchichanaka, Chatanyara, Choun, Urasoe, Tsukensunakake**
- **Tokubetsu-Bo: Kyu Shaku Bo, San Shaku Bo**
- **Matsu Higa no kon, Ten U no kon, Chatan Yara no kon**
- **Matayoshi Kobudo Bo Kata: Shushi Nu Kun, Choun Nu Kun, Sakugawa Nu Kun, Chikin (Tsuken) Nu Kun, Shiishi Nu Kun, Ufutun no Kun, Chatan Yara no Kun, Kubo no Kun, Yonegawa no Kun**
- **Isshinryu Bo kata : Tokomine No Kon, Urashi No kon, Shishi No Kon No Dai**

Sai: The sai is sometimes mistakenly believed to be a variation on a tool used to create furrows in the ground, however this is highly unlikely as metal on Okinawa was in short supply at this time and a stick would have served this purpose more satisfactorily for a poor commoner, or Heimin. The sai appears similar to a short sword, but is not bladed and

the end is traditionally blunt.

Records from China prove its original existence although in a much more elongated form where it was known as Tsai and was used purely as a weapon. The weapon is metal and of the truncheon class with its length dependent upon the forearm of the user. The two shorter prongs on either side of the main shaft are used for trapping other weapons such as a sword or bo.

The sai originally reached Japan in the form of the jitte or jutte, which has only a single prong. Both are truncheon-like weapons, used for striking and bludgeoning. Sai were thought to be given to those in Okinawan society that the Japanese could trust to maintain order. Sai are traditionally carried in threes, two are used in combat and the third is used as either a precursor to the actual fight and is thrown at the enemy, or as a spare in the event that one is knocked from the hand.

There are many other variations on the sai with varying prongs for trapping and blocking, and the monouchi, or shaft, can be round or octagonal. Sai were also used as handcuffs and were a symbol of authority in Okinawa. A form known as manji sai has the two shorter prongs pointed in opposite directions, with another monouchi instead of a grip. Two sai are called zai.

SAI Kata

- **Tsukenshitahaku no Sai, Hamahiga no Sai, Yaka no Sai, Hantaguwa, Kojo, Tawata, Chatanyara no Sai, Manji no Sai, Jigen no Sai, Aragaki no sai, Sokon no sai**
- **Matayoshi Kobudo Sai Kata: Nicho Sai(also called as Ni Cho Zai, Sancho Sai(also called as San Cho Zai) and Shinbaro No Sai (also called as Matayoshi no Sai)**
- **Isshinryu Sai kata : Kusanku no Sai,Chatanyara no Sai**

Tonfa: The tonfa is more readily recognized by its modern development in the form of the police nightstick, although its usage differs. It supposedly originated as the handle of a millstone used for grinding grain. The tonfa is traditionally made from red oak, and can be gripped by the short perpendicular handle or by the longer main shaft. As with all Okinawan weapons, many of the forms are reflective of "empty hand" techniques.

TONFA Kata

Hamahiga no Tonfa, Yaraguwa, Matsu Higa no tonfa

- **Matayoshi kobudo Tonkua kata : Tonkua Kata Dai Ichi,Tonkua Kata Dai Ni**

Nunchaku: A nunchaku is two sections of wood (or metal in modern incarnations) connected by a cord or chain. There is much controversy over its origins: some say it was originally a Chinese weapon, others say it evolved from a threshing flail, while one theory purports that it was developed from a horse's bit.

Chinese nunchaku tend to be rounded, whereas Japanese are octagonal, and they were

originally linked by horse hair. There are many variations on the nunchaku, ranging from the three sectional staff (san-setsu-kon nunchaku), to smaller multi-section nunchaku. The nunchaku was popularized by Bruce Lee in a number of films, made in both Hollywood and Hong Kong.

NUNCHAKU Kata

- **Nunchaku no Sho, Nunchaku no Dai, San Bon Nunchaku**
- **Matayoshi Kobudo Nunchaku kata: Kohbu Nunchaku kata Ichi, Nunchaku Kata sandan**

Kama: The kama is the traditional farming sickle, and considered one of the hardest to learn due to the inherent danger in practicing with such a weapon. The point at which the blade and handle join in the "weapon" model normally has a nook with which a bo can be trapped, although this joint proved to be a weak point in the design, and modern day examples tend to have a shorter handle with a blade that begins following the line of the handle and then bends, though to a lesser degree; this form of the kama is known as the natagama. The edge of a traditional rice sickle, such as one would purchase from a Japanese hardware store, continues to the handle without a notch, as this is unneeded for its intended use.

KAMA Kata

- **Tozan, Kanigawa no Sho, Kanigawa no Dai**
- **Matayoshi Kobudo Kama Kata : Kohbu Nicho Gama (also called as Tairaguwa Gushikawa No Kama No Kata Ichi)**

Tekko: The tekko or tecchu is a form of knuckleduster, and primarily takes its main form of usage from that of empty-hand technique, whilst also introducing slashing movements. The tekko is usually made to the width of the hand with anything between one and three protruding points on the knuckle front with protruding points at the top and the bottom of the knuckle. They can be made of any hard material but are predominantly found in aluminium, iron, steel, or wood.

TEKKO Kata

- **Maezato (From Taira Shinken)**

Tinbe-rochin: The tinbe-rochin is one of the least known of the Ryūkyū system and exudes a feeling of history long gone. The usage is, at first glance, visually reminiscent of a combination of Zulu fighting and European sword and small shield fighting, and weapons of this nature can be found in most cultures throughout the world. The tinbe (Shield) can be made of various materials but is commonly found in vine or cane, metal, or archetypically, from a turtle shell (historically, the Ryukyu Islands' primary source of food, fishing, provided a reliable supply of turtle shells). The shield size is generally about 45 cm long and 38 cm wide. The rochin (Short spear) is cut with the length of the shaft being the same distance as the forearm to the elbow if it is being held in the hand. The spearhead then protrudes from the shaft and can be found in many differing designs varying from

spears to short swords and machete-style implements.

TINBE-ROCHIN Kata

- **Kanigawa no Tinbe**
- **Matayoshi Kobudo: Matayoshi no Tinbe**

Surujin: The surujin consists of a weighted chain or leather cord and can be found in two kinds: 'tan surujin' (short) and 'naga surujin' (long). The lengths are about 150-152 cm and 230-240 cm respectively.

It is a weapon which can be easily hidden prior to use, and due to this fact can be devastatingly effective. In the modern era, found with a bladed instrument at one end and a weight at the other, the surujin techniques are very similar to those of the nunchaku. Leather cords are used for practice or kumite, whereas chains are favored for demonstration, but rope was the original material used.

SURJIN Kata

- **Nagai Kusari, Mijikai Kusari**
- **Matayoshi Kobudo: Suruchin no Toseki**

Ekū: The Okinawan style of oar is called an eku (this actually refers to the local wood most commonly used for oars), eiku, iyeku, or ieku. Noteworthy hallmarks are the slight point at the tip, curve to one side of the paddle and a roof-like ridge along the other. One of the hojoundo (basic moves) for this weapon utilizes the fact that a fisherman fighting on the beach would be able to fling sand at an opponent. While not having the length, and therefore reach, of the bo, the rather sharp edges can inflict more penetrating damage when wielded properly.

EKU Kata

- **Tsuken Akachu No Eiku De (Also called as Chikin Akachu No Eiku De)**

Tambo: The tambo, sometimes spelled tanbo, is a short staff (compared to a bo) made of hardwood or bamboo. Its length is determined by measuring from the hip socket to the top of the ankle. It is much longer than the traditional rattan sticks used in Eskrima. Tambo are often used in pairs.

Kuwa: The hoe is common in all agrarian societies; in Okinawa, the kuwa has been also used as a weapon for as long as there have been farmers. Compared to garden-variety hoes, the handle tends to be thicker and usually shorter, both due to Okinawan stature, and the fact that much of the agriculture takes place on hillsides where long handles would be a hindrance. A classic shape of blade is a simple rectangle of steel with a sharp leading edge, but may also be forked with tines.

- **Kata Matayoshi No Kuwa Nu De**

Nunti: The nunti is comprised of a bo with a manji sai mounted on the end. A nunti can

be seen in the movie Karate Kid 2 being wielded by Mr Miyagi's opponent.

- **Kata Nunti Sho, Kata Nunti Dai**

Sansetsukun: The sansetsukun is similar to a nunchaku, but has three sections of wood (or metal in modern incarnations) connected by a cord or chain.

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