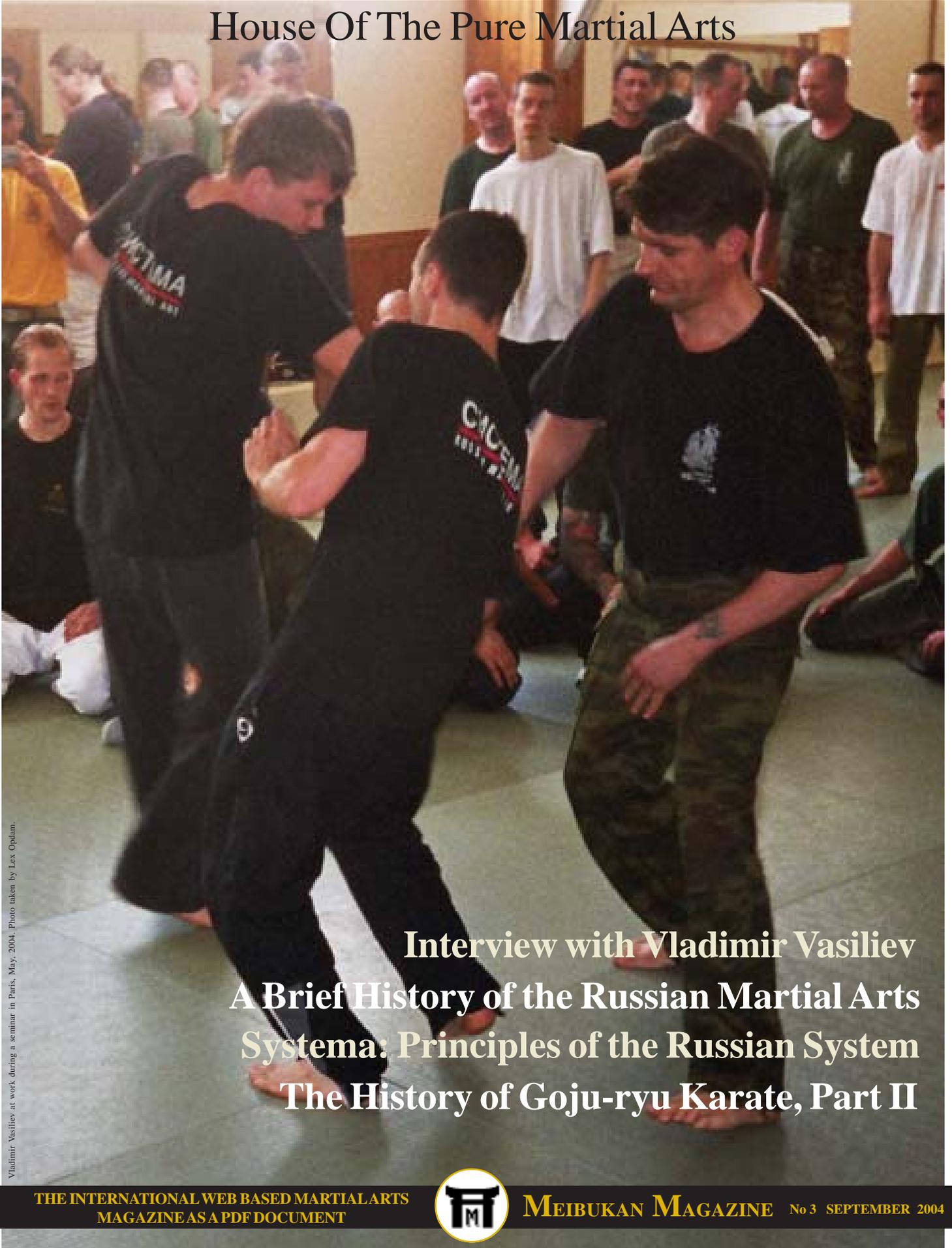


MEIBUKAN MAGAZINE

House Of The Pure Martial Arts



Interview with Vladimir Vasiliev

A Brief History of the Russian Martial Arts

Systema: Principles of the Russian System

The History of Goju-ryu Karate, Part II

Vladimir Vasiliev at work during a seminar in Paris, May, 2004. Photo taken by Lex Oplam.

MISSION STATEMENT

Meibukan Magazine is an initiative of Lex Opdam and Mark Hemels. Aim of this web based magazine is to spread the knowledge and spirit of the martial arts. In a non profitable manner Meibukan Magazine draws attention to the historical, spiritual and technical background of the oriental martial arts. Starting point are the teachings of Okinawan karate-do. As 'House of the Pure Martial Arts', however, Meibukan Magazine offers a home to the various authentic martial arts traditions.

FORMAT

Meibukan Magazine is published several times a year in an electronic format with an attractive mix of subjects and styles. Each issue of at least twelve pages is published as pdf-file for easy printing. Published editions remain archived on-line. We have chosen for a low picture resolution for easy downloading

Readers of the webzine are enthusiasts and practitioners of the spirit of the martial arts world wide.

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Meibukan Magazine is pleased to submit views, concerns and experiences on any subject matter IF related to the mission statement expressed by the Meibukan Magazine. Therefore articles, photographs and illustrations are welcome, although Meibukan Magazine is selective and can not guarantee that submissions will be placed. Submission can be mailed to our P.O. Box by floppy, CD or DVD, or can be sent to our e-mail address.

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Column

2

Martial System or Martial Art

History

2

A Brief History of the Russian Martial Arts

The martial arts of Russia have a long but unknown history. With the ending of the Cold War the surviving arts slowly emerge again.

Feature

5

Principles of Systema

James Williams, teacher of Systema, gives an in depth explanation of the philosophy behind the Russian System, in which learning to flow with force is taken to an exceptional level.

Review

The Russian System Guidebook by Vladimir Vasiliev. 9

Ancient Okinawan Martial Arts by Patrick McCarthy. 14

Interview

10

Interview with Vladimir Vasiliev

Born in Russia, Vladimir Vasiliev's work spans across 10 years of extensive military service with the Special Operations Unit of Spetsnaz. After moving to Canada, he founded the first school of Russian Martial Arts outside Russia.

Feature

15

History of Goju-ryu Karate, Part II

Although Kanryo Higaonna learned and taught a style related to Whooping White Crane, Goju-ryu Karate today is very different from it. Mathieu Ravignat examines the changes Chojun Miyagi made.



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Meibukan Magazine founders are Lex Opdam and Mark Hemels.
Web design by Lex Opdam.

Martial system or martial art

In this special edition of Meibukan Magazine we have chosen to present a martial system that has its roots in the Slavic warrior tradition. It was influenced by Asian martial ways and later systemized. For modern military purposes it was further developed within certain units of the Russian Special Forces better known as the Spetsnaz. After hearing, reading and seeing this Russian martial system in practice, I feel it deserves a public place in the 'established' world of martial systems. More research is needed regarding this unique systems origins, philosophical and ethical principles within the framework of this systems teachings.

Depending on the philosophical concepts integrated in a martial system, the founders or reformers of it present their martial system as an 'art' or not. More important are their intentions and the way teachers expose the martial system to their students and the outside world. In general, we acknowledge a martial system being an art if its purpose is to serve something higher than its practical fighting use alone. These higher purposes often relate to selfrealization, spiritual growth or religious beliefs.

I doubt that the Russian Special Forces have any guidelines for didactical and methodical teachings serving a higher spiritual goal other than being prepared for combat in extreme circumstances. I believe, however, that a transformation could take place within an individual by undergoing a certain amount of practice in a certain way combined with the individual's life-experience and self reflection, and that the practical goal alone – being capable to act and survive in extreme circumstances – could be surpassed. This despite a lack of spiritual guidance from a teacher or certain methods a system contains for spiritual purposes. I also think that being subject to issues related to extreme fear, like for example the Spetsnaz training and experience, could lead to spiritual growth. I believe that the opposite effect is also possible.

Altogether, I prefer to speak about a Russian martial system, which is - by some people - considered to be and taught as an art.

In this issue we cover the history and philosophy of the Russian Martial System. In addition we present an interview with Vladimir Vasiliev, who is a teacher of Systema and an ex-member of the Spetsnaz.

Lex Opdam
Editor in chief

Russian Martial Arts

A Brief History of the Russian Martial Arts

The martial arts of Russia have a long but unknown history. The earliest accounts testify of combative contests as part of tribal rites. Until the 17th century an authentic martial tradition flourished, which declined under Western and communist influence. With the ending of the Cold War the surviving arts slowly emerge again.

- By Lex Opdam -

In an overall look upon Russia's martial history one could say that Russia's martial traditions, like many others in the world, have a long and tested history. Although Russia's martial history traces back before the Slavic warrior communities, the first important recorded foreign influences of which we know today, left their marks upon the Slavic techniques, tactics and strategies of combat around the 6th century AD.

Tribal warfare

Before the 6th century AD, combat traditions during that Slavic period were passed on to each new generation as part of tribal rites and preparations for tribal combat. Combative sports and grappling contests were conducted as part of tribal rites, among them children competed with each other making their passage from childhood to adulthood. These contests were conducted to honor Peroun, the Slavic patron deity and with this in mind we find the first traces of a Russian martial arts tradition.

Between the 6th and 9th century Russia was under heavy attack by foreign invaders, and the Slavic communities were forced to reflect on their martial traditions. Until this period, the Slavic communities were mainly involved in tribal warfare within their own regions.

Firearms

After the 9th century, although the centuries before had already had an impact upon Russian fighting traditions, new developments arose in the field of metallurgical adjustments to weapons and armor. Between the 9th and 13th

century these new developments led again to adjusted techniques and tactics, especially in close-combat fighting. From 1237 AD until the 15th century, Russia came under Mongol occupation. This period had a tremendous impact upon the Slavic martial traditions. The weaponry of the Slavic changed in response to Genghis Khan and his horde. It was at this time that, despite the enormous influence of centuries of occupation, many say the Slavic martial arts began their own evolution, rather than copying the Eastern martial arts.

At the beginning of the 17th century a rapidly increasing Western influence took place. Firearms took over the role of engagement in combat and other Western martial traditions were introduced. This resulted in a diminishing of the Oriental martial traditions and the decline of the Slavic martial arts. Although the general skills and knowledge of the Slavic martial traditions rapidly disappeared, some Slavic families and communities kept these Slavic martial arts alive and practiced and continued to teach these traditions to every new generation.



Russian Holy Warriors (Bogatyr).

“The Slavic martial arts traditions did not meet the communist ideological structure and therefore became an enemy of the state.”

October Revolution

The most drastic event to the Slavic martial arts traditions began in 1917 during the October Revolution when all nationalistic martial traditions were forbidden. The communist government especially wanted a united socialist culture where cultural traditions that did not meet their conditions were terminated. The Slavic martial arts traditions did not meet the communist ideological structure and therefore became an enemy of the state.

Some of the Slavic families continued practicing and teaching the art in secret, and oral history even tells us that they were sometimes in a position to get their sons into the elite divisions of the Special Forces (Spetsnaz). These Special Forces units (and several specialized secret police units) were the only ones allowed by the Soviet authorities to practice specialized and lethal techniques focused on combat by means of killing and assassination that contained unarmed and armed techniques. Turning a blind eye, the authorities noticed that the ancient knowledge of Slavic martial combat would not disappear because of its practical use, but on the other hand, suppressed any other activity that went beyond this.

Sambo

In the 1920's, Stalin ordered a man named Voroshilov to research close combat methods that could be suitable to train Russia's army in a standardized way. Voroshilov in his turn formed in

1923 the research group called “Dynamo” and ordered three people (Spiridinov, Oschepkov and Kharlampiev) to investigate the native martial systems of different countries such as Japan, Mongolia, China, India, and countries in Europe. This research took almost a decade and resulted in several levels of combat under the name Sambo meaning ‘Self-protection without Weapons’. Although the Sambo the world knows today is mostly known to be an Olympic Sport, the Sambo, better described as ‘Combat Sambo Spetsnaz’, practiced by certain elite units of the Special Forces, is of a very different caliber. The name Sambo used in the name ‘Combat Sambo Spetsnaz’ was a cover for the outside world. It uses weapons and practices lethal techniques in all possible ways. This is not the case in other levels of Sambo, like the Sambo known as sports Sambo, or the Sambo that also contains immobilization or restraining principles often used by the Soviet police. Modern military aspects, foreign martial ways,

“Modern military aspects, foreign martial ways, ancient and modern health methods were systemized and became the way of close-combat practice within certain units of the Special Forces.”

ancient and modern health methods (probably with ancient Slavic martial principles) were systemized and became the way of close-combat practice within certain units of the Special Forces.

Heritage

It is not (yet) clear whether the Slavic martial tradition did have an evolution after 1917 or that it has emerged into a

modern eclectic martial system. There are many questions concerning the preservation of the ancient Russian martial ways as both a system and an art within the Special Forces and the Slavic families. If one looks deeper in the martial history of the Soviet empire, there is much unclarity, and a totalitarian regime like the USSR would have done everything to erase or rewrite history. Without having material to compare, or direct access to certain knowledge from the past, it is difficult to compare Russia's martial systems before and after 1917. There are Slavic families in Russia that have survived the 19th century while keeping their martial traditions alive. In the last two decades, old Slavic martial styles appeared in public in Russia and their origins are researched. It is even said that some of the Slavic families of noble heritage were able to get their sons into those Special Forces and keep their Russian Martial Arts active. Today there seem to be only a few left who indeed are named Russia's martial arts guardians. These guardians keep old martial ways intact and add only useful modern and scientific knowledge concerning the body and mind. This knowledge has been thoroughly researched throughout the USSR's good and bad civil and military history. In this case, one indeed could speak of an evolution in Slavic martial tradition, but one that has its martial cornerstone from more than 1000 years back.

Note that in the case of those few guardians, not all ancient knowledge was given to the elite Special Forces in the general and official trainings. Some of the Spetsnaz soldiers seem to have received private training outside the boundaries of USSR authority.

It would be fortunate if the keepers of Russia's martial traditions would bring their martial traditions to the surface and offer opportunities to investigate Russia's martial arts traditions and, where possible, support these traditions to continue.

Combat Sambo Spetsnaz

There is hardly any written material on ancient Russian fighting techniques available. Partly because we are not aware of it (yet) and partly (and possibly mainly) because the present Russian Martial System teaches a person to move naturally



Anatolii A. Kharlampiev.



Vladimir A. Spiridinov.



Vasilii S. Oschepkov.



Courtesy of Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia. Alexander Nevsky, Artist Vasnetsov, Victor Mikhailovich 1848-1926.

Saint Alexander Nevsky (1219-1263) Grand Prince of Russia also known as the 'Knight in Shining Armor', defended Russia throughout his life with utmost devotion.

and free without pre-arranged forms and postures. Its way of bio-dynamics has a principle that contains moving from the Solaris plexus instead of the Lunar plexus, which is not often seen in many other Eastern martial arts. It points directly towards mobility and non-resistance. It is difficult to accompany such body dynamics with drawings or written words, and nothing as yet is known to be recorded on film before 1917. Therefore, it is also difficult to compare Russian martial art as practiced before 1917 and after. Just recently, after the Communist

regime fell in 1989, 'Combat Sambo Spetsnaz' is slowly revealing itself in and outside of Russia. Its secrecy has for the greater part been broken, and since the early 1990's international schools have been founded.

In this present era, there are several known schools of 'Combat Sambo Spetsnaz', like for example 'ROSS' (Russian Own System of Self-defense) 'A.A. Kadochnikov Russian Style', and the System better known as 'SYSTEMA'. They all have the same basic principles of bio-mechanics and the study of human behavior under extreme circumstances, but differ in the way their teachings and history are presented.

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Lex Opdam is editor-in-chief of Meibukan Magazine.

For more information (in English) on the Internet about the most known Combat Sambo Spetsnaz schools visit:

- SYSTEMA**
<http://www.russianmartialart.com/>
- ROSS**
<http://www.amerros.com/>
- A.A. KADOCHNIKOV RUSSIAN STYLE**
<http://www.kadochnikov.org/>



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Systema

Principles of the Russian System

“Allowing things to be as they are frees us from fighting and contesting,” says James Williams, teacher of the martial art of Systema. In this article he gives an in depth explanation of the philosophy behind the System, in which learning to blend and flow with force is taken to an exceptional level. “Systema is a state of consciousness, not a series of techniques.”

- By James Williams -

If someone had told me a few years ago that out of a western Christian tradition would come a martial art as deep, sophisticated and evolved as the best of the oriental arts I would not have believed them. Yet there is such an art coming out of the ancient Russian culture with deep roots in the Russian Orthodox monasteries. At its root in the present day is an exceptional man, Mikhail Ryabko. Trained by one of Stalin's Falcons from the age of five and beginning his operational career in the Russian Spetsnaz (Special Forces) at the age of 15, Mikhail Ryabko was not only given the secrets of this ancient art, he was put in the position of repeatedly applying both the art and its principles in life and death combat on, what for much of his early life, was a day-to-day basis. This System, taught by Mikhail Ryabko, is not a shadow of what once was, it is a living practical art that even now is being applied by warriors in combat. When working with Mikhail and his foremost student, Vladimir Vasiliev, one is struck by the calm depth of these men. Enormous knowledge and ability taught with calm, deep conviction.



From left to right: Vladimir Vasiliev, James Williams and Mikhail Ryabko

Operating system

The heart of Systema is its operating system. Techniques do not define the art, in fact, techniques per se are not taught. To make the most of Systema the mind/body must be free to do whatever is necessary, and not be limited by trained techniques. Techniques create a box, limiting the individual's ability to solve problems. By operating system, I mean the manner in which human physiology and psychology access physical reality according to both a classical Newtonian and quantum physics understanding of universal reality. This operating system opens the door to a completely new world. When Vladimir was told at one seminar, “You are very flexible, he replied, “No, I am free.” It is this very freedom, this giving up of ego, which gives back so much. This is because principle-based Systema conforms to the individual instead of requiring the individual to conform to it. Everyone's expression of Systema is different. It is like you are taught how to paint and then you express yourself.

Faith

The Systema operating system as taught by Mikhail Ryabko and Vladimir Vasiliev is a faith-based operating system. The process of giving up your ego-based personal power and having faith that things are the way that they should be forms the core of this art. Mikhail teaches that fear produces unnatural movement. It is only through faith – knowing that things are the way they are supposed to be – that we can be free of fear and move naturally. Faith is based on the fact that everything that we need to exist has been given to us. Most of those things that are essential

to our existence we do not even think about. We tend to breath unconsciously even though oxygen transfer is the most

“You breathe in when you are born and out when you die, in between is your life”

important thing that takes place in our body. It is the seminal energy transfer from which all else becomes possible. As Mikhail says, “You breathe in when you are born and out when you die, in between is your life.” Gravity keeps the atmosphere, which contains our oxygen and us on the planet that supports our life. Electro-magnetism allows shape and form. All of these, and many other unseen forces work to our benefit, yet they are all gifts, as we have nothing to do in determining them. We live by grace, who's meaning you may ponder for yourself. If you are further interested you might do some research in regards to strong anthropic principle and superstring theory. That which we view as solid and “real” does not last. Those energies that allow us life, that we cannot see, are more real than those “solid” objects that will all pass away.

Being present

One of the exercises that I use to keep present and in faith, is to catch myself judging another or lacking forgiveness. These states of mind do not come from faith; they come from fear. You will find that you are constantly judging, and this does not just refer to negative judgments. Accepting things as they are is as freeing as it is difficult. Reality is that at any given moment things are exactly as they “should” be because they are responding to universal law. The fact that we think that they “should” be different means

“A key element in Systema is not to contest for space or to hold ground. Learning to blend and flow with the force is taken to an exceptional level.”

we are not accepting what is, we are denying reality. How does this transfer to a martial art, you may ask? Allowing things to be as they are frees us from fighting and contesting. A key element in Systema is not to contest for space or to hold ground. Learning to blend and flow with force is taken to an exceptional level. It also keeps us in the present moment of time, freeing us from the confines of the past and future. The conscious human mind, the ego mind, is moving constantly between past memory and future anticipation. Neither of these states is real and both limit or preclude our ability to perceive the absolute moment of “now” time. We tend to spend the majority of our time in this state of unreality. Those moments when we are truly present stand out for us such as when we have done something very dangerous that took all of our ability to accomplish and when done we have the “high” that comes from being absolutely present.

“We arrive at the understanding that living the will of God is the passport to the endless possibility of infinity itself.”
– Urantia

Fear

Contesting for space is a huge fear-based response for human beings. We even talk about people invading our space, as if we owned it. The fact that someone’s fist and my face intersect at the same point in the fabric of space/time is an agreement. How you might say would one make such an agreement? These agreements to fight and protect space are made by our fear, our insecurity. The so-called startle reflex, and sharp inhale and tensing of the body when surprised or frightened, is an excellent example of this response. This response is fear based and destructive to us. One of the reasons drunks emerge from traumatic situations so well is that they do not have this response, they are not aware enough to be afraid, fight the kinetic energy and damage themselves.

And there is the real truth of it, we damage ourselves. We do it in so many ways however; here is one that is easy for us to understand. Tension resisting kinetic energy means that something has got to give. Kinetic energy cannot be created nor destroyed so guess who loses.

A natural, faith-based response, is simply to not be in the force vector. In reality, there is nothing to protect. The space that we are in at any given moment does not belong to us, so why not vacate if something else wants to be there? In Systema this response is taken to a truly incredible degree.

Solutions

When practicing Systema, visualize yourself as a contiguous energy field. In other words, there is no separation of body from mind. Visualize your partner the same way and, as you begin to work, keep this awareness. Don’t contest; don’t try to do, just be moved. If you have truly understood the return energy drills, the solutions will come of themselves. This reflects another universal truth, all problems bring their solution with them. An attacker brings the solution to his attack when he attacks. If we relax and “listen,” the solution will become apparent and all we have to do is implement it. However, if we already have a technique that we want to use to solve this problem we have limited our ability to perceive the most efficient solution. If you approach the problem with a toolbox of techniques and strategies, you will be limited to them regardless if they are the most efficient means to deal with the attack. In fact, depending upon

the opponent, they may not be successful at all. When faced with a choice of solutions, the simplest, most efficient, is the correct solution. We define efficiency as the least amount of time, space, and energy it takes to solve the problem.

Energy

Allowing, accepting, also gives us access to energies that we normally have only a rudimentary ability to use efficiently. One of the main energies is kinetic energy. As you get softer, relaxed, and more aware, you realize that there are energies at work within you that you can use. You do not create them, they are not yours to own, however, they are available for you to use if you can give up enough of yourself, your ego self.

Psychic energy is like fire. We cannot create fire, however, we can create a situation in which fire is manifested. We do not own the fire, however, we can use it. It is not intrinsic to us and yet it can serve our needs. There is no need to try and accumulate physic energy inside ourselves; it is everywhere, it is an intrinsic aspect of universal reality. Like a sail that can shape the invisible energy that we call wind, we too can blend and shape forces on the levels that we can perceive. We do not create these forces, just as we do not create the wind, however we can perceive and use them nonetheless.

Breath is the beginning of all energy in the body. It is the seminal energy transfer; without it death occurs, with it machines can be built that take us into space. And with proper use of breath our own body/mind can be trained to do that which does not seem possible.



Courtesy of James Williams

In conversation with master Mikhail Ryabko.



Courtesy of Vladimir Vasiliev



Courtesy of James Williams

Left: Mikhail Ryabko tests Systema practitioner James King with punches to the body. The practitioner has to relax his body and mind and absorb punches with correct breathing. Above: Russian training is hard.

In the beginning, it is essential that we begin to harmonize with our breath. Most people breathe as effort increases because their body is telling them that they need more oxygen. However, as you become more aware, you breathe so that you can do more work and thereby gain more ability and performance. As an analogy, if you want a steam engine to go faster you must first give it fuel, yet we constantly ask our body to do more and then breathe harder to try and make up for the oxygen debt that is incurred. The next step up the ladder is to breathe so that we can do more. The proper use of breath is not just emphasized in Systema, it is everything.

Slow-speed sparring

In Systema, the kata is replaced by slow-speed sparring training. Learning the physical movements is the outside or *omote* of the art. The *ura* or inner art is learned slowly over a period of

proper instruction and training. This growing awareness, perception, and understanding is never ending. This path of discovery is fascinating, enjoyable, and takes you into another world of understanding and performance. Getting into the flow of slow-speed sparring can get quite addictive. Your sensitivity and awareness move to a higher level. You begin to perceive movement, distance, and possibility with more than your eyes. You begin to see not just what is but what is possible.

Another benefit of slow-speed sparring is emotional/psychological. You find out exactly where you are stiff, where fear is held. You also find out where you are not practicing with integrity. Speeding up a movement to avoid being hit for instance is out of harmony with the practice. You know that you did it, you partner knows that you did it, you know he knows, and he knows that you know that he knows. You find where you are

not in integrity both on a conscious and unconscious level. The immediate cause and effect is enormously more beneficial for the emotional/psychological growth prospect than the rationalizations for our behavior that make up so much of our defense systems. Thus practicing with integrity not only improves our martial skills, it creates an incredible feeling of being in the flow of "now." It makes you want to spend more time there.

"Our mind is reflected in our physical body. Fear-based judgment produces rigidity; faith produces fluidity. Our own resistance becomes our teacher."

Returning of energy

Our mind is reflected in our physical body. Fear-based judgment produces rigidity; faith produces fluidity. Our own resistance becomes our teacher. The universe was set up to teach us; as it corrects itself so are we corrected. If we give pain we get pain. If we give fear we get fear. If we give love we get love. What we give is what we receive. When you can give up and allow instinctively and intuitively, you can return any energy sent your way like a conduit. This returning of energy to its source means that the attacker gets back what he gave. At higher levels, this returning of energy needs to be felt as how it can be achieved does not seem possible. Hearing about it or observing it leads to incredulity. The difficulty comes in trying to explain something that words are not adequate for. Explain to me how you ride a bicycle. It is an extraordinarily complex relationship where the experience of doing it far exceeds any ability



Courtesy of James Williams

Vladimir Vasiliev teaches Systema.

or attempt to explain it. It is best to feel it for yourself. Again this is not to add mystery to the art, however when you are dealing on the edge there are many phenomena that cannot be adequately explained in words. Your conscious mind does not, indeed cannot, ride the bicycle. That is why you can think, day dream, etc. while you are riding the bicycle. It is your subconscious mind that is making it possible to ride.

The returning-energy phenomenon does not allow an attacker to escape receiving the energy that he generates. It is like standing a few feet from a solid wall and throwing a rubber ball at it as hard as you can. The ball immediately rebounds back at you before you can avoid its path. The human body can return energy in the same way if we do not fight the energy and just let it go back. The vectors can become very complex and almost impossible for the attacker to avoid.

Energy flows in waves. The blood that pulses through your body does so in a wave. You can learn to use these waves to keep your balance when avoiding a strike and you can use these waves to return the energy to its source, your attacker. And these are the beginning levels, relatively speaking. To be able to access kinetic energy efficiently it is essential to truly relax your body. This relaxation is far beyond what we normally feel is relaxed. To achieve higher levels it needs to be deep in your psyche, hence the necessity of faith.

Resistance

We do not realize how much resistance we have to being pushed by other human beings. Our fear makes us contest for space to a degree that is unconscious and reflexive. The use of an object like a knife to apply the pressure engenders a very different reaction. Our fear-based ego response to another person's push or punch all of a sudden gives way to a get-out-of-the-way response. This is because of the pain and damage the knife would cause and, in my opinion, because the knife is an inanimate object our ego also has an easier time letting go of resistance. I use the knife, real, sharp blades, ever more in my teaching because of their ability to help reprogram the resistance response in our brain.

No techniques

There are good reasons why Systema does not teach "techniques." Technique-based systems have a strong tendency to produce technique-based solutions. This "box" that is built, however large and powerful, limits possibilities. It also limits, to a great degree, how the individual can adapt to each different situation. There are an infinite variety of potential problems that are never the same of the sort, best explained by chaos theory. If you have a body of techniques, however large, you try to fit the problem into the existing structure regardless of whether it is the most efficient solution for treating that particular problem. The mind attempts to define things by what it knows already using existing understanding and concepts. This technique-based process does not allow for those possibilities that may exist. In a manner akin to a governor on an engine, the mind itself becomes

"Since the System is made up of the laws of the universe, there is only truth in the teaching. It is not about opinion, it is about discovery and awareness. Systema is a state of consciousness, not a series of techniques."

limited. A bigger box is still a box, and a longer chain is still a chain. The System, quite literally, is the teacher. Since the System is made up of the laws of the universe, there is only truth in the teaching. It is not about opinion, it is about discovery

and awareness. Systema is a state of consciousness, not a series of techniques.

The fist, the stick, and the whip present the double-edged sword of training giving pain, exposing fear, and teaching us how to relax, use breath, and deal with painful energy transfers on many levels, with the mind being positively involved. One enormous benefit is that of inculcating a relaxed exhale-startle response. This contrasts sharply with the "normal" fear based contraction inhale response that is a great detriment to us. We injure ourselves with this rigid, fear based response. A pliable body can take much greater stress than one that has been made rigid with fear. Instead of ribs flexing and absorbing the impact of hitting the steering wheel with force, tensed muscles give the ribs no choice but to break under the impact with a potential penetration of the lung from the sharp broken end. Without the fear-based mind to injure it, the body will protect itself. Integrity is essential in any higher human endeavor, and faith is essential to integrity. In Systema, integrity is essential to proper training. This integrity is required of both practitioners, as this journey cannot be walked alone. It demands that we share ourselves, and in the giving we get more than we give.

Softness

In Systema, soft means sensitive and aware. Systema makes us aware of force vectors so that we do not contest with them. It has nothing to do with an emotional



Courtesy of James Williams

Mikhail Ryabko demonstrates the sword.



Courtesy of James Williams

Vladimir Vasiliev and James Williams.

“feel good” state. As I often remind my students, in the real world that warm, gooey feeling is usually blood. The conscious mind is not accessed when engaged, it is too slow, too emotional, and cannot handle a sufficient number of variables to deal with the time-space-chaos of combat, it is also not possible for the conscious mind to be “present.” Systema does not seek to control the chaos of combat; you ride the wave of it like a surfer, knowing that you cannot control the forces but that if you don’t fight them you can use them. My personal definition of soft is conformity with cosmic law; that which is in conformity is soft, that which conflicts is hard. In my personal experiences the empty-hand arts that are the most sophisticated are all a part of sword-based systems. With edged weapons the space that is being attacked is vacated by you, the opponent’s target. As he enters that space to attack, your weapon meets him in the very space that you vacated. This is the returning of energy that is practiced at many levels and in many different ways in Systema. Energy cannot be created or destroyed, however it can be shaped.

Conformity

Knowing is being and doing. It is an understanding in the body and mind that is apparent and perceptible in function. An intellectually grasped concept is not knowing, it is thinking. It exists in the fear-created mind, which is not in touch with reality. The gifts of Systema are free. Free in the sense that the more you are in harmony with the universal Law the more of that universe becomes available to you. You don’t work for individual abilities as you do in other martial arts. This is the result of faith-based process. One analogy would be that of a leaf blowing in the wind. It

blows as far and as fast as the wind blows it. No faster than the wind; no slower, it just is. In training look above the opponent’s eyes with defocused vision. Pick up the totality of the rhythm of movement. Like listening to a symphony with your whole being, become the flow. Separation leaves gaps, nature abhors a vacuum, these gaps are filled, what/who fills them is the question, and you have the answer. Once you can manifest this level, you can begin to play with and change it.

“Virtue is righteousness, conformity with the cosmos.”

We are looking for a state of being, a state of consciousness. Conscious, not-thinking as opposed to unconscious non-thinking. This is another world, a transcendent state. Conformity with cosmic law is living the will of God. Systema is a path to that conformity. Living with faith, not fear, allows us to be aware of and access those energies that have been freely given for us to use. This is true on the physical, emotional, and spiritual levels: “Know the truth and the truth shall set you free.”

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James Williams is a certified instructor of Systema. He has been studying a number of different martial arts since 1960. He teaches Nami Ryu Aiki Heiho (kenjutsu, iaijutsu, and aikijujutsu) and Systema in Encinitas, California. Williams also teaches Close Quarters Combat to police and military both foreign and domestic.



The Russian System Guidebook by Vladimir Vasiliev

138x215 mm, 59 pp, 16 ill.

available at www.russianmartialart.com

THE RUSSIAN SYSTEM GUIDEBOOK

Based on the training of the Russian special forces

The Russian System Guidebook is a short but complete document on the Russian martial art of Systema (the System). According to author Vladimir Vasiliev, the Russian martial art dates back to the 10th century. Following the Revolution of 1917, all national traditions – including the Russian fighting style – were lost for the common man. However, the art lived on in the top Special Operations Units of the Russian Army. For 10 years Vladimir Vasiliev was one of their members. He became a master of the fighting system that made the Soviet Union’s elite soldiers the most feared in the world.

The Special Forces trained soldiers in a way that they could resist any psychological stress. For this reason a great deal of *The Russian System Guidebook* deals with philosophical and psychological issues, such as awareness training, confidence building, and fear and pain control. “Inside Secrets of Soviet Special Forces Training” is the intriguing subtitle of this book, and indeed Vasiliev gives us stunning accounts of extreme physical and emotional training. Most fascinating is the focus on the good side of human beings in everyday life, despite the rough training methods in the army: “With all the aggression in the world, there’s also a great fear of becoming a victim. The Russian System tries to free the student of this fear and protect him from the even greater terror of becoming an aggressor.”

The book closes with an introduction to the Russian Health System. It focuses on increasing the level of vital energy by strengthening the body with water, fasting, movement, proper breathing, and interaction with nature. The exercises are very simple and inviting, although some of them are not for the faint hearted. Think of pouring a large bucket of icy cold water over your head twice a day. “The body reacts to the cold water by very rapidly increasing its core body temperature. This explosion of warmth will kill off most bacteria and viruses.”

The Russian System Guidebook is illustrated with the superb drawings of close combat exercises. These sketches represent the idea of mobility and natural movement, which is at the heart of the Russian System throughout the book. It’s a great read.

By Mark Hemels

The Way the Water Runs

Interview with Vladimir Vasiliev

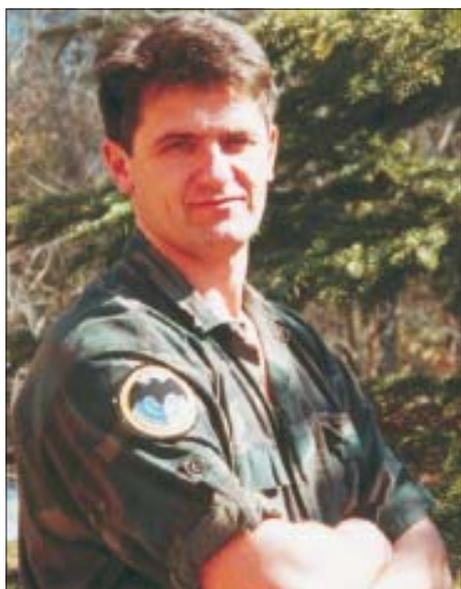
Vladimir Vasiliev is Director and Chief Instructor of the Toronto School of Russian Martial Art. Born in Russia (1958), Vladimir received intense training from the top Special Operations Units instructors. His work spans across 10 years of extensive military service with the Special Operations Unit of Spetsnaz, including regular high-risk covert assignments and missions. Vladimir also served as trainer for paratroopers, SWAT teams, and elite bodyguards. He moved to Canada, and in 1993 founded the first school of Russian Martial Art outside Russia.

- By Mark Hemels -

Mr. Vasiliev, where did you learn the Russian Martial Art of Systema?

I learned a lot of it in the army, and I trained extensively with my main instructor Mikhail Ryabko, Colonel of the Special Operations Unit with the Russian Military. We worked as colleagues in the army some of the time and did a lot of training in the meantime. Before that time, I had experience in karate and boxing. In Russia there wasn't much distinction between different styles. It mainly involved using your legs and arms a lot [laughs]. I did participate in championships a lot and did very well.

Once I was in the army, I realised that as much as karate is effective in competition, for myself it wasn't so good in real combat. I found that the Russian System is a lot more effective in real confrontation. And that's why I started to study it intensively.



Vladimir Vasiliev.

Why do you find the Russian System more effective than, for instance, karate in real combat practice?

The Russian System is more mobile. You can be ready instantly. There are no forms or patterns that you have to prepare yourself with. In the Russian System I learned how to move, and not so much the actual techniques. Techniques are learned step by step, by way of certain patterns, and then it becomes a style. The Russian System focuses more on how to move.

Isn't technique, and the repeated practice of technique, necessary to make fighting effective?

At a certain level you are right; it is good to practice some moves over and over again. But if you want to understand life deeper, it should be the way how to move that you practice, and not certain patterns. The techniques are an illusion in some way, because all the techniques are based on your body being healthy. For example, if you study grappling, you presume that both your arms are working well. But what if you have an injury, or what if one arm is wounded? Or what if even one finger is strained? Then you can't do it anymore. The techniques won't be all that effective. If you learn how to move, it doesn't matter what part of the body is used. The movements rely more on the intuition, and not so much on what you have practiced and memorized.

How are intuition and natural movement developed in your training method?

Everybody is talented, and natural

“To any situation the reaction may be different. That's why it's useless – in a way – to memorize patterns, because the possibilities in life are endless, and you cannot be prepared for every single thing. Therefore it's better to be able to move in a natural way, and not even physically but intuitively.”

movement is just the shortest way to an effective result.

It's like the way the water runs. It always finds the right way. It may not be necessarily the shortest physically, but it's the right way. It flows around by way of the least resistance. It's the same with natural movement; it goes around to find the most effective pathway.

To any situation the reaction may be different. That's why it's useless – in a way – to memorize patterns, because the possibilities in life are endless, and you cannot be prepared for every single thing. Therefore it's better to be able to move in a natural way, and not even physically but intuitively.

How long did you serve in the army?

I had a total of two years in the army, which is standard for Russia. Then I started to specialize in this field. After the army I continued for another ten years, and that was with the Special Operations Unit.

Were you a teacher in these Special Operations Units for all these ten years?

I was trained to work with the S.O.U.,



Courtesy of Vladimir Vasiliev

Vladimir Vasiliev demonstrating self-defence involving a firearm.

and every once in a while there were groups I had to teach. It was all going on at the same time: I was trained myself, I did training of others, and I did the actual assignments.

Why did you leave the army?

When Perestroika happened in Russia in 1985, there were a lot of changes. Some groups in the army started to close, and there was a possibility to leave at that point. I wanted to go and leave Russia and travel for a while, which I did. I ended up in Canada and met my wife Valerie, who was already a Canadian citizen. When we got married I stayed in Canada, and now we have three children.

In Canada I started a school; because that was the thing I knew how to do. I needed a job to support the family. It started with a bit of training I did with a few guys at the gym. Then people saw what I could do and encouraged me to start up a school. It started with something small, and then it developed and grew, and now we just celebrated our tenth anniversary.

It puzzles me how the Russian Martial Art – with its focus on morality and the good in people – can go together with a military unit that is trained to kill. How can these two be combined?

There are different special units, and a big goal of any moral system is to defend your country. That's not a sin at all. They are warriors and have to protect their motherland. A very important principle in my unit was to deliver the least possible harm.

There are different special units; there are some that are really crazy and go overboard; the tough guys like it that way. But fortunately there are others

who have different principles. The Special Forces guys aren't all vicious and out there to kill. One of Mikhail Ryabko's favourite sayings is: "There are no atheists in the trenches." In battle, you right away start to believe in God, no matter what you were before. That's why a lot of guys who participated in military action later on analyzed it – and if they do the right job in analyzing it, it brings them closer to God.

Besides, you cannot assume that all the Special Forces in Russia did the System. It's only a tiny minority that practiced the Russian System. Most other Spetsnaz [members of the Special Operations Unit] did kick boxing, karate, and sambo, the Russian wrestling style. Very few did the Russian System.

Could you tell us something about the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in Systema?

The foundation of the Russian System comes from orthodox Christianity. It's a style that comes from the monasteries in Russia. A whole culture was coming out of monasteries in the old days. A settlement would be built on the banks of a river or a lake, and there was a fort, and the main structure in that settlement would always be a church. The people that defended that fort were monks, religious people, and that's why the foundation of this warrior spirit is really Christianity.

"The key quality that anyone has to develop – a regular person as well as a warrior – is humility. If you don't try to develop humility, what you end up developing is pride, and that's destructive; it destroys yourself and it destroys the world around you."

The warriors that participated in battle were actively defending their country. Once they would become older, they would go and live in the monastery, and they would be the ones teaching the younger generation. And that's why it's all faith based. Warriors would want to go to the monasteries to repent for the sins that they have committed and to continue fighting evil on a spiritual level when they get older, through prayer and a righteous life.

The key quality that anyone has to develop – a regular person as well as a warrior – is humility. Otherwise our land would be gone. If you don't try to develop humility, what you end up developing is pride, and that's destructive; it destroys yourself and it destroys the world around you.

Could you please explain what makes Systema a fighting art in stead of a fighting system?

It's not even an art; it's more a system. That's why it's called a system. It's



Seminar with Vladimir Vasiliev in London, July, 2004. Photo taken by Lex Opdam.

A unique component of Systema as demonstrated during a seminar in London; Mass attack, a chaotic event in which a large group of people is fighting with each other.

common to call it a martial ‘art’ in terminology, but it’s more than that. It combines all levels of human ability and develops all our physiological systems. It develops the breathing system, the circulation, muscular, skeletal, digestive systems. All the bodily systems are developed in a natural way, and then it goes on and develops your psychological state and your psyche. And then, on the next level, it brings you closer to God, it develops your spirit. It gives you strength and a sense of truth. And that’s why it’s not even an art; it’s a whole system. It’s like life.

What do you consider to be your responsibility as a teacher of the System?

It’s really a big responsibility, because people do come to you with their questions. They come because they look for something, and not just for a self-defence skill. The main responsibility is to be a good person yourself; to be humble, not proud, and not try to impress anyone... just try to improve yourself; that’s the most you can do for people. As soon as you do the right thing for yourself, then you achieve real truth and you can pass it on to others.

In your seminars you also give exercises that involve attacking with a knife. Why are these lethal techniques taught to civilians whom you’ve never met before?

I don’t think I teach anything aggressive. All the techniques are just work. I show them how to use the knife, and there is nothing vicious about that. I don’t make animalistic stances or vicious faces, and there is no aggression in this. The main thing that could be harmful is if people



Courtesy of Vladimir Vasiliev

are stimulated to be aggressive, nervous and uptight; then they can do damage. But if people are just taught how to work properly in a calm setting, then that won’t be dangerous.

So that also includes working with knives?

Yes, the knife is just a tool for self-defence. Nobody is presumed to go around and start cutting up people. It’s just a way of self-defence. What I do is relax them, because a lot of people get nervous about weapons. So it’s just a way to relax them and make them feel comfortable with a knife.

In your Russian System Guidebook you say being serious in life and in training is not helpful – in the contrary – when real fighting action is needed. Could you explain this?

Being serious means to be responsible; taking full responsibility for your actions, and not being emotional. Because often our emotions cover up the real truth, and then we don’t see the responsibilities we have. It just cautions against being overly emotional.

In karate training a serious attitude while practicing also means a strong focus and concentration on what you are doing...

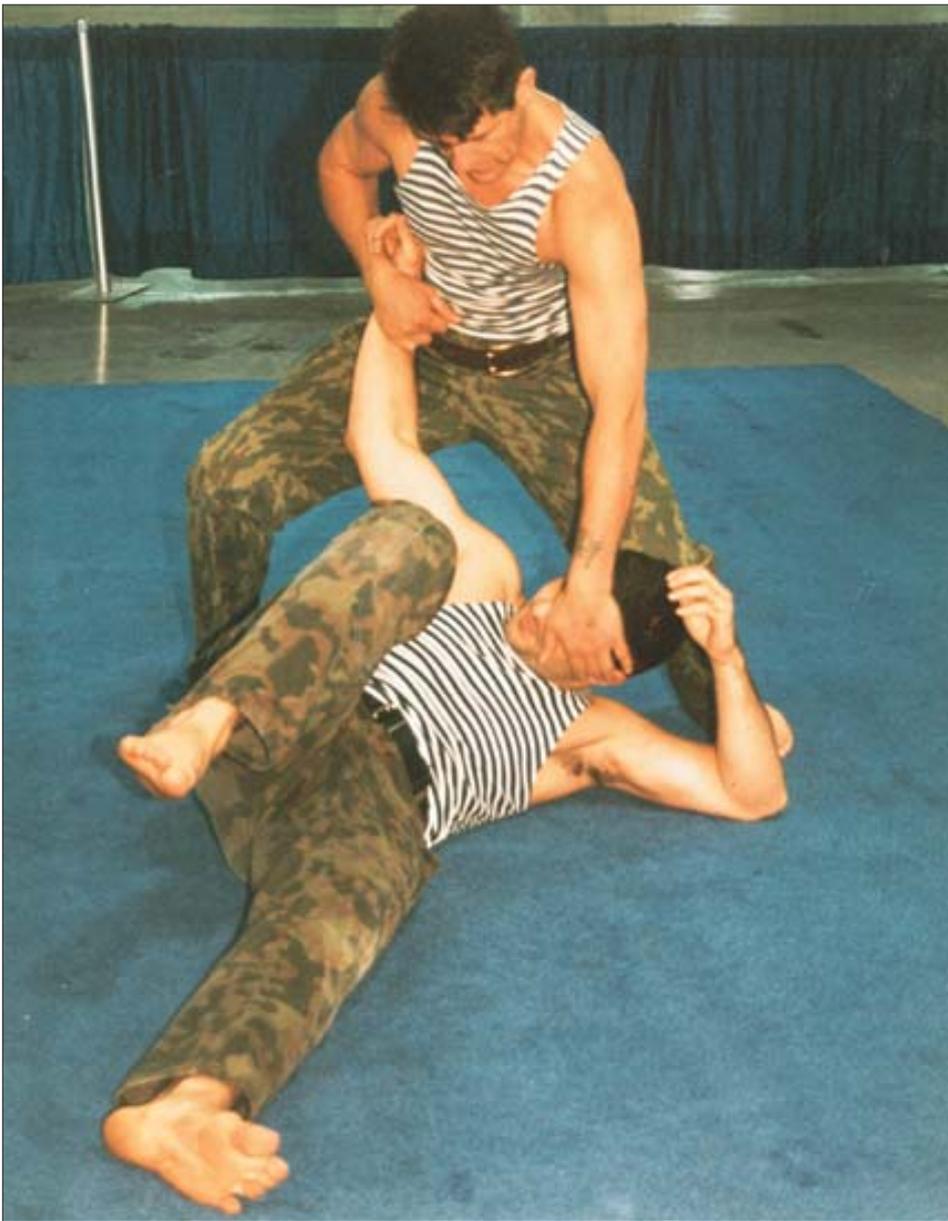
What happens a lot of times in karate is that people are really tense. It may be focus but they are tense, and that’s destructive. It destroys your psyche as well as your physical body. A lot of strikes rebound back into your body and destroy you. A lot of karate fighters have damaged joints, torn ligaments, strained shoulders, knees and hips. In the Russian System there’s a big emphasis on not to hurt your body; to improve the conditions of your joints, tendons and all that, and all the strikes and moves are designed to do that.

How is the sixth sense trained, and why is it important in Systema?

The foundation of it is in just relaxing your body. When the muscles are tight, they prevent the passing of information, and you are no longer aware. Once you relax, then you can absorb the information intuitively. It’s like you catch the right wavelength if you relax. If you’re tense, you’re shutting that information off. So that is the foundation; to just be relaxed. It doesn’t mean being limp. It means that everything is calm and you are really aware. And then, once you’ve got that, prayer is the next stage. When you pray, you feel humble and connected to God. And all the things that are down



Practising punches and taking blows.



Courtesy of Vladimir Vashilev

Working an opponent to the ground.

to earth are cut off from you; you've just got a higher connection. And then a lot of information opens up to you, the kind of information that is not based on vanity or how to be funny or successful. It's the real information.

So, the sixth sense is developed by both relaxation and prayer?

Yes, absolutely. And prayer is not just the repetition of certain words, because then it becomes almost like meditation. Prayer is really if the rest of your life

goes along with the bible. It's trying to do all the right things throughout your life. Then the prayer is really powerful. The key prayer is 'Lord have mercy', so it is in sensing how you are without God, that you are nothing, and that only with God you can be everything. This makes you humble and tolerant towards other people. But prayer isn't taught in training. It's up to the individual, and in fact you don't have to be a Christian to practice this.

In Systema you are taught not to look the opponent in the eye but above his head, whereas in most other martial arts you look the opponent in the eye. Why is that?

A lot of times when people look each other in the eye, it's a challenge. So in karate and in many other martial arts you challenge your opponent. In the Russian System the main goal is to calm your opponent down. And the only time when you would look him in the eye is when you know you can calm him down with your eyes, when you can control him and relax him with your eyes. So that's why we often look above the opponent's eyelevel. And if you have multiple opponents coming at you, then obviously you can't look into their eyes. Then it's more effective to look above because your peripheral vision helps you better.

It is often thought that by looking in the eyes you can read your opponent's mind and anticipate his intentions. Isn't this quality lost?

There is much more to a person than just the eye. Looking in the eye and looking at the body is more a sports



Courtesy of Vladimir Vashilev

Exercise in kicking and taking a blow to the leg.

technique. For me and my teacher, we sense the person as a whole; we don't need to look him in the eye. We just sense the whole thing right away without the actual analysis of visual information. Besides, looking in the eye is more a competition aspect: who's going to hit quicker, that kind of thing.

Is there a special reason why beginners and advanced students all train together in Systema?

Indeed, there are no belt levels or grades. The psyche is primary, it's more important than your physical skills. Often times, when a person reaches a certain level – a black belt for example – he has this prestige that he has to keep up. He has proven himself in some ways and is afraid to lose face. And if a new person comes off the street and all of a sudden chokes him, he doesn't know that this person has such a level of black belt.

When I first opened the school, I tried to teach close to what I was doing in the army, and people were just afraid. A lot of them didn't stay. At one point from the 20 people that started only 2 kept going on. Of course for people who don't have to go to war, that was a bit too much. Now, the principles are more adapted to ordinary life.

“Breathing is life. It is the basis of everything. So you have to utilize this resource to the most that you can.”

How important are breathing and breathing techniques in Systema?

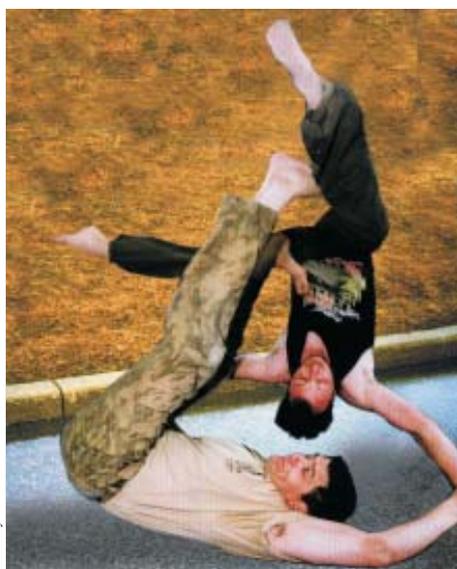
Breathing is life. It is the basis of everything. Literally, it is life. So you have to utilize this resource to the most that you can. That's why there's a lot of breathing practices that are done every class. Systema is the only system that has all the aspects of breathing covered.

The people are taught how to maintain the breathing cycle no matter what, that's one big goal. The other is to make sure the breathing is full, that it goes through the whole body, not just down to the bottom of the lungs but through the whole body. There are so many things you can do with breathing. One of Mikhail Ryabko's colleagues in Moscow, by way of breathing he heals

people even from cancer at the last stages; people who have gone through radiation therapy and nothing helped. These terminal people have been helped by breathing, and cancer just went into remission, to the amazement of the doctors.

Is there anything you would like to add to the interview?

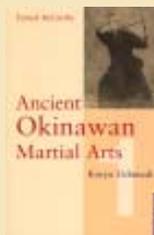
One way to understand the System is to see that there are three levels of human ability. The first level is the physical. Imagine two guys sparring: the one who is healthier and stronger is the one who is going to win – purely on a physical level. The next level is skill; the one who has more techniques and knows more about the ways to move is the one who is going to win. The level beyond that is the spiritual level, the understanding level; the one who can see more is the one who will really win. That comes with experience and awareness of life. That usually happens from the age of forty or fifty and up. The physical part may not be as overwhelming at that point, but if an old person has the right understanding and spirit, then a very skilled and strong young person can not defeat him.



Courtesy of Vladimir Vasiliev

For more information on Vladimir Vasiliev and Systema, visit www.russianmartialart.com.

Mark Hemels is editor of Meibukan Magazine. He interviewed Vladimir Vasiliev on 23 May 2004 with the kind help of interpreter Valerie Vasiliev.



Ancient Okinawan Martial Arts 1 by Patrick McCarthy

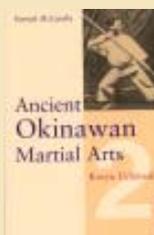
152x227 mm, 116 pp, over 400 photos

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ANCIENT OKINAWAN MARTIAL ARTS 1
Koryu Uchinadi

In *Ancient Okinawan Martial Arts: Koryu Uchinadi* the Western reader has ready access, for the first time, to an extensive collection of the most important documents written by and about Okinawa's most famous karate and kobudo masters and their arts, as well as to photographs of kobujutsu katas of historical significance. This two-volume anthology includes previously untranslated texts by Chojun Miyagi (founder of Goju Ryu karate), Kenwa Mabuni (founder of Shito Ryu karate), Shinken Taira (founder of Ryukyu Kobudo), Choshin Chibana (founder of Kobayashi Shorin Ryu karate), and Choki Motobu (the notorious scrapper who in his maturity went on to teach many who became great masters in their own right). Patrick McCarthy - with the able assistance of his wife, Yuriko McCarthy - provides expert translation and commentary based on his extensive research into these masters and the systems they founded, as well as into the establishment of the Okinawan karate tradition in the main islands of Japan. This first volume featuring the work and technique of Shinken Taira, includes 'Ryukyu Kobudo Taikan - An Encyclopedia of Ancient Ryukyuan Martial Arts' by Shinken Taira, with photographs by Patrick McCarthy and 'Taira Shinken - The Father of Modern Kobudo' by Patrick McCarthy.

By Marc van Dam



Ancient Okinawan Martial Arts 2 by Patrick McCarthy

152x227 mm, 144 pp, 10 photos

available at www.amazon.com www.mikado.nl

ANCIENT OKINAWAN MARTIAL ARTS 2
Koryu Uchinadi

This second volume features Kenwa Mabuni, Chojun Miyagi, and the role of the seminal martial arts organizations in preserving and modernizing the ancient art for posterity.

By Marc van Dam

History of Goju-Ryu Karate, Part II

New Ideas on Goju-ryu's Direct Chinese Ancestors

In a series of three articles, Mathieu Ravignat narrows down the confusion over the Chinese origins of Goju-ryu. Having reasonably established that Kanryo Higaonna learned and taught an older style related to Whooping White Crane, we are now in a position to explain why it is that Goju-ryu karate, as it exists today, is so different from Whooping White Crane and To'on-ryu. For this purpose, we will examine the changes Miyagi Chojun made after his own trips to China.

- By Mathieu G. Ravignat -

As I indicated in the first part of the essay when we compare To'on-ryu to Goju-ryu there are many differences. This fact is supported by Dai Sensei Meitoku Yagi's Book *The Life Drama of the Man Meitoku*, where he discusses his visit to Kyoda Juhatsu in the fifties. Dai Sensei asked Kyoda Sensei if he would act as Chairman of the Goju-ryu style in Okinawa, to which Kyoda replied he did not care about Goju – implying it was too different from To'on-ryu – and did not like what Miyagi had done to Higaonna's teaching (Yagi, 2000, p. 172-174, translated by Mario McKenna). Therefore, we can assume by this that differences abound.

General Differences

This assumption is also supported by recent research on To'on-ryu by Mario McKenna published in the *Journal of Asian Martial Arts Vol 9 No. 3*. McKenna reports that out of the five original kata taught by Higaonna: Sanseru, Seisan, Sanchin, Sepurunpai and Neipai four are still found in Goju-ryu though in a slightly



Chojun Miyagi, founder of Goju-ryu.

changed form. According to his interview with the current grandmaster of the To'on-ryu system Kanzaki Shigekazu, To'on-ryu differs in many regards to Goju-ryu both in overall performance and in the specific performance of the common kata.

To'on-ryu is characterized by swift springing movements and places little emphasis on rooted stances, a Goju-ryu characteristic. Generally speaking, To'on-ryu techniques are executed in a much more circular, smooth, and flowing pattern than their Goju-ryu counterparts. There is definitely a more distinctive and obvious Chinese flavor to To'on-ryu (McKenna, 2000, p. 37).

McKenna also mentions that a major difference exists in the chambering of the fist. To'on-ryu chambers the hand just slightly above the hip like in Shorin-ryu and most Chinese systems as opposed to the chest position in Goju-ryu. But perhaps the greatest difference between To'on-ryu and Goju-ryu is in their pedagogy. McKenna relates that in Kyoda's dojo students were expected to experiment with the bunkai of the kata through personal research and then report these findings to Kyoda who would scrutinize them and approve or disapprove of their interpretation. They were never taught bunkai but had to learn by deduction. By the third year, they were expected to apply what they discovered in simple and complex patterns.

Interestingly enough all these differences reveal that To'on-ryu is characteristically more Chinese than Goju-ryu and therefore we can assume closer to Higaonna's original style.

Differences in kata

Sanchin

There are also substantial differences in the basic kata of both systems. To'on-ryu Sanchin is done with the hands open, whereas Goju-ryu Sanchin is done with the hands closed. This change, which is usually attributed to Miyagi, is according to Shigekazu actually just a preference of Miyagi's, which later became common practice amongst his students. According to this, current Grand Master of the To'on-ryu system Higaonna had told Kyoda Juhatsu that he should do what was most comfortable for him, either closed fists or open hands. The To'on-ryu version also places its feet wider than that Goju-ryu version, this is also probably just a preference (McKenna, 2000, p.37-38).

“Where the Sanchins of Goju-ryu and To'on-ryu differ substantially is in their respective breathing methods. According to Kanzaki Shigekazu, the current grandmaster of the To'on-ryu system, Miyagi changed the breathing method when he came back from his research trip to China.”

According to Shigekazu, where the Sanchins differ more substantially is in their respective breathing methods. To'on-ryu does not take an additional inhale before exhaling the hand back into the Sanchin Guard position. To'on-ryu practitioners inhale while withdrawing and exhale continuously with a slight pronounced “su” exhalation while placing the hand back into Sanchin position.



Kanei Uechi performing Uechi-ryu's Sanchin.

Incidentally, this is very similar to the way Uechi-ryu practitioners breathe in their Sanchin. According to Shigekazu, Miyagi changed the breathing method when he came back from his research trip to China (McKenna, 2000, p.37-38).

Seisan

Seisan differs between To'on-ryu and Goju-ryu only because Kyoda Juhatsu decided not to teach the Kanryo Higaonna version because it was being taught in Goju-ryu and instead decided to preserve the Kanryo Higaonna (cousin of Kanryo) version in his system. Reportedly, they do not differ much in substance (McKenna, 2000, p.48).

Sepurunpai/Pechurin

Sepurunpai and Pechurin are essentially the same kata but only different in name. According to Shigekazu: "Perhaps it was Miyagi Sensei's trip to China that affected the name change of the kata." (McKenna, 2000, p.49).

Sanseru

The two versions are completely different because according to Matayoshi Shinpo Miyagi did not learn Sanseru from Higaonna. According to Shigekazu, the To'on-ryu version uses twice the amount of movements than the Goju-ryu version with many long lunging and jumping movements. Miyagi did not learn it from Higaonna because he was away from home on obligatory military service for

two years. No one knows who taught it to him. It is the opinion of McKenna that he may have learnt a form of it on his trip to Fuzhou in 1915 (McKenna, 2000, p.48).

Tensho/Rokkishu

According to McKenna Rokkishu is a series of techniques taught right after Sanchin in the To'on-ryu system. It has many similarities to Tensho kata but the techniques were not systematized into kata. It is believed that both Miyagi and Kyoda independently created these from their research on the *Bubishi* and or their contact with Gokenki (McKenna, 2000, p.38).

Training Apparatus

In training To'on-ryu practitioners used something very similar to the Chinese Muk Jong called a kakete (suspended hand arm or wooden dummy) made from a telephone pole on which you could practice hooking (kake), striking, deflecting, punching and kicking as well as generally toughen up (McKenna, 2000, p.53).

Miyagi Chojun's Changes

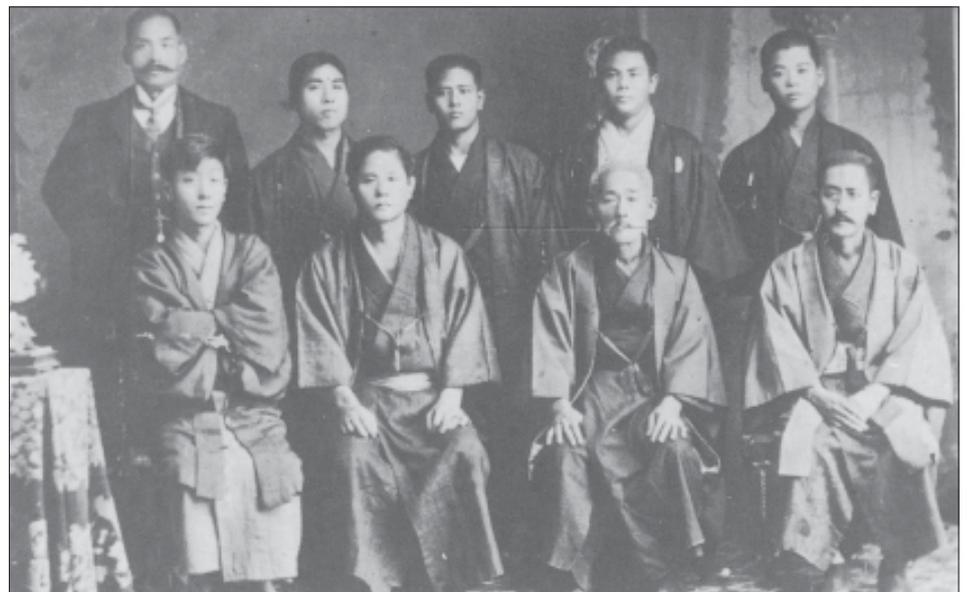
Therefore, amongst the four shared kata all of them have been changed one way or another by Miyagi, though Pechurin in name only. Also none of the following kata: Saifa, Shisochin, Kururunfa and Seipai are accounted for in To'on-ryu. To'on-ryu's current grand master Kanzaki Shigekazu also does not know where Miyagi may have learnt them. Though, considering his opinion

that he changed the name of Pechurin and the breathing in Sanchin because of the trip to China, we can surmise that the trip had long lasting effects on Miyagi's Karate. But we have better reasons to believe that the trip had the most profound influence on his Karate, i.e., the words of Miyagi Chojun himself. In the *1936 Meeting of Masters Minutes* translated by Partick McCarthy, Miyagi Chojun plainly says in answer to whether or not he specifically went to China to learn more karate-do that: "Although I didn't begin my training in China, I went there after realizing that it was the place I had to go for more advanced Kung Fu training." (McCarthy, 1999, p.61). He also mentions a specific place where he had been in China: "When I visited Buwa, the Chinese seemed to be familiar with the term Toudi." (McCarthy, 1999, p. 64).

Therefore, we may conclude that: 1. Miyagi's research was the predominant factor in the character of modern Goju-ryu and 2. that his trip to China had the greatest impact on his research. In other words there are essentially two major contributing factors to the differences and additions to Kanryo Higaonna's original style: 1. Miyagi's research in Fujian and 2. Miyagi's research amongst his colleagues in the Kenkyukai (A Karate Research Society) especially the Chinese To Daiki and Gokenki, friends of Miyagi.

Flawed Theories

Incidentally, I discount Miyagi's visit to



Kanryo Higaonna (seated third from the left), Juhatsu Kiyoda (standing second from the right) and Chojun Miyagi (standing in the middle).

Shanghai as a major influence (of which the late and respected Sensei Richard Kim spoke much about and on which Patrick McCarthy has many speculations) because, according to Morio Higaonna, in *History of Karate Okinawa Goju Ryu* he was only there for six weeks, much of which was used up demonstrating for Japanese nationals (Higaonna, 1996, p.78). It is impossible even for the greatest of masters to learn any external or internal system in a matter of six weeks.

More importantly, I also discount the theory held by Morio Higaonna and by countless others that he could have learnt the additional kata from Kanryo Higaonna himself (Higaonna, 1996, p.51). This theory is flawed for many reasons but mainly because the theory claims that Miyagi was somehow favored by Higaonna and would have learnt five kata other than Kyoda Juhatsu who was actually his senior student. It is the opinion of researcher Joe Swift of *Dragon Times* that this idea just doesn't add up because it would mean that Miyagi received five kata more than Kyoda, and yet it is Miyagi who was gone for a full two years doing his obligatory military service during which Kyoda learned Sanseru, (web document McKenna, downloaded January 22, 2003, p.3). Also I find it unlikely that Kanryo Higaonna, who on all accounts was a perfectly moral man, would be so unfair to such a loyal and respected long term student as Kyoda Juhatsu. Finally, it is also generally believed (as reported by Morio Higaonna) that Miyagi was very jealous of Kyoda for having learned Sanseru. Why would a man who had learned five extra kata from his master be jealous of someone who had only learnt one?

Other Influences

Therefore, more than likely Kanryo Higaonna only had four kata to teach and Miyagi only learned three of them. Incidentally, there are technical reasons that point to this. As Sensei Hing Poon Chan has pointed out, all of the Higaonna kata start with the Sanchin guard position. Seisan, Sepurunpai, Sanseru and Sanchin all start with a similar opening but Seipai, Kururunfa, Shisochin and Sieunchin do not. Shisochin differs from the older kata only because its

hands are open. Also, as Charles Swift has discussed in *Dragon Times* vol 23, all of the Higaonna forms are symmetrical and all techniques are done only on the right side (Charles Swift, 2003, p.11). The other kata in the Goju-ryu system (Kururunfa, Seipai, Sieunchin and Shisochin) do not do this. This is further evidence to believe that they are from another source than Higaonna.

If all of the above is correct than we are left with only Miyagi's trips to Fujian and other Chinese influences in Okinawa such as Gokenki and To Daiki to explain the composition of modern Goju-ryu.

Research in Fujian

Miyagi Chojun Sensei visited Fujian in China twice, but his longest and most productive stay was for two years from 1915 to 1917 (Yagi, Wheeler, Vickerson, 1998, p.46). Unfortunately, upon his arrival he learned that many of the Kung Fu masters had fled to other parts of South East Asia because of the Boxer Rebellion and the political turmoil in China at the time. Therefore, there were only signs of rubble left where Kanryo Higaonna had originally learned.

“Unfortunately, upon his arrival in China, Miyagi learned that many of the Kung Fu masters had fled to other parts of South East Asia. In this case Miyagi Chojun would have been left searching for a school and a style to practice. Could he have learnt Five Ancestor Fist Kung Fu?”

Nonetheless, Miyagi was able to find a junior student of Ryu Ryu Ko's (Wai Xianxian) who was still alive. According to Morio Higaonna's research, this student told him that he did not know of anyone else who was teaching the style in Fujian (Higaonna, 1996, p.55). In this case Miyagi Chojun would have been left searching for a school and a style to practice. Could he have learnt Five Ancestor Fist Kung Fu?

Five Ancestor Fist gongfu?

The comparison with Five Ancestor Fist is important because three separate researchers, Co, Fujiwara and Gima believe that this style is Goju-ryu's closest Chinese match. According to

Alexandre Co in his book on *Five Ancestor Fist Kung Fu*, in which he discusses the similarities between both systems, Miyagi Chojun must have learned this system while in China (Co, 1995, p. 30-36), whereas Fujiwara and Gima hint that this influence may come more subtly through To Daiki, a Chinese member of the Kenkyukai who may have been a Five Ancestor Fist master (we will discuss him later) (Fujiwara & Gima, 1986, p. 35). Either way there seems to be some solid evidence to point to a connection between these styles, and a comparison would be useful.

Five Ancestor Fist regroups five distinct styles of Kung Fu: White Crane, Tai Cho (Tai Tzu quan or Sung dynasty emperor boxing), Lohan (Luohanquan, or Buddhist Arhat methods), Kao Kun (Huquan, Monkey), and Tat Chun (Yin Jin Jing, Bodhidharma's method). Interestingly two of these styles (White Crane and Lohan) have a direct historical relationship with Goju-ryu. It is useful to compare what we know of Five Ancestor Fist and Goju-ryu karate.

However, before we make this comparison other more eclectic theories have been proposed which we must address. Most recently, McKenna and Swift in *Dragon Times*, report on research conducted by Kinjo Akio and Tokashiki Iken which purports to show the Fujian animal form origins of all the Goju-ryu kata (McKenna & Swift, 2000, p.35). Iken and Kinjo believe that the original meaning of the names of the kata have been forgotten and that most of them would have had an animal background and name. Interestingly, their list excludes all forms taught originally by Higaonna which have numbers in all their titles (McKenna & Swift, 2000, *Dragon Times*, p. 35). So they are really only talking about those “mystery kata” provided by Miyagi to the system. Certainly, these animal forms do exist in Fujian Kung Fu but so do forms with the traditionally ascribed names of the Goju-ryu kata. When we look at the meaning of the names of the kata given to us through tradition by Dai Sensei Yagi Meitoku and compare them to Five Ancestor Fist we find matches between the non animal names. Therefore,



Chua Giok Beng, founder of ngo cho kun (Fists of the Five Ancestors).

the traditional meaning of the kata passed down from Dai Sensei Yagi can be found in at least one Fujian Kung Fu system, so there is really no reason to think (as do Iken and Kinjo) that they were forgotten or transformed irreparably over the years from their Chinese origin. Also, there is no reason to doubt their attribution and meaning. This etymological degeneration may be the case for the Japanese karate who Japanized the characters but is unlikely for the Chinese reading Okinawans such as Dai Sensei Yagi Meitoku. However, if these meanings did not exist in any Chinese martial art at all then we would have better grounds to doubt the meaning of the kata given to us, but that is not the case.

Similar Names

Amongst the Five Ancestor forms the following share similar meanings and names as Goju-ryu kata, the meaning used by the Five Ancestor style are in brackets after the Chinese name (Names and meanings are taken from Co, 1996, p. 145):

- Sam Chien (three wars (battles) tensions): Sanchin?
(In this case at least the popular meaning of the kata would come from Five Ancestors. According to Sensei Chan the Chien is a word used for all forms in the Fujian dialect. It refers to stretching or tensing (a conflict in the body) and in no way implies that the tensions or battles are related to the Zen Buddhist religious concepts of mind, body and spirit. It is unclear

where this philosophical idea originated. The three (san) would refer to the characteristics of the form and perhaps the three steps. It is unknown what meaning To'on Ryu uses for their Sanchin kata).

- Se mun kwa (four direction sweeping): Shisochin?
- Chian lit a (chopping attack): Saifa?
- Se mun tia cha (deflecting/intercepting four directions): Kururunfa?
- Sachap lak tian kong wat (thirty six steps of the monkey): Sanseru?

Therefore, it is possible that the kata names are simply Okinawan phoneticizations of Chinese gonfu form names some of which may or may not have been from Five Ancestors.

Other Similarities

Five Ancestors also uses the Sanchin stance as their predominant fighting stance, though it is a little wider than the Goju-ryu version. The fist is also chambered at the rib cage as in Goju-ryu. However, according to Alexandre Co's presentation of Sam Chien there don't seem to be any similarities between the Sam Chien breathing and the breathing of Sanchin (Co, 1996, p.79). But other similarities exist which are quite curious specifically for Meibukan practitioners. For example, much of the time Five Ancestors practitioners hold their fist so that it is held flat so that the thumb and knuckle face inward resting on the rib cage. This is also how the fist is held in the Meibuken kata created by Dai Sensei Yagi which are also the result of his own research in Taiwan. This may also be a strong hint by Dai Sensei Meitoku Yagi about the origins of Miyagi's changes and the creation of the Meibuken kata. Dai Sensei spent a couple of years in Taiwan where many Fujian Kung Fu masters had fled to during the Communist revolution in China. This exodus is confirmed in the specific area of Fouzhou by Morio Higaonna in his *The History of Karate Okinawan Goju-Ryu*, (Higaonna, 1996, p.55). Finally, the following names in the Five Ancestor system have similar animal names as the Meibuken kata:

- Ngo ho chien (Five tiger tension): Byako? (White tiger)

- Hong be chien (Phoenix tail tension): Shujaku? (Red Bird)
- Lieng tao chien (Dragons head tension): Seiryu? (Green Dragon)
- Tian te lin chian (Heaven and earth and man tension): Tenchi? (Heaven and Earth)

Gimbo (black turtle snake monster) is not found in any possible way in the Five Ancestor system.

Other similarities in strategies, body conditioning and mechanics, as well as individual techniques abound between Goju-ryu and Five Ancestors Kung Fu. For more on this I refer the reader to Alexander Co's book *Five Ancestor Fist Kung-Fu* (Co, 1996, p.30-36).

“Similarities in strategies, body conditioning and mechanics, as well as individual techniques abound between Goju-ryu and Five Ancestors Kung Fu. we have no reason to doubt that the kata Miyagi Chojun added to Higaonna's curriculum may have been learned by him on his trip to Fujian in 1915.”

Though all of these attributions and name correspondences are tenuous at best they at least point to the fact that common names for the kata added by Miyagi Chojun can be found in at least one Fujian fighting system. Therefore, we have no reason to doubt that the kata Miyagi Chojun added to Higaonna's curriculum may have been learned by him on his trip to Fujian in 1915.

Lost Kata?

However, the following kata are not accounted for in the above comparison with a Fujian fighting system: Seipai, Gekisai ichi, Gekisai Ni, and Tensho. It is my opinion that Seipai kata is of southern Lohan Shaolin extraction. The number 18 is a sacred Buddhist number and the kata may be related to a southern form of Lohan Shr Da Shou Quan, (18 hands of the Arhat or Buddhists saints). It is my opinion that this kata was taught to Miyagi Chojun by someone else in Okinawa or learnt in China either from To Daiki or Gokenki.

It is well known that Gekisai Ichi and Ni are not Chinese in origin but were



Chojun Miyagi seated in the middle.

created by Miyagi and Shoshin Nagamine as basic kata for the Okinawan school system. They were then included by both of them as basic kata in their systems. It is largely believed that Tensho was created through Miyagi's contact with Gokenki and on the basis of research on and inspiration from the *Bubishi*.

The Kenkyokai and the Bubishi

The Chinese influence already in Okinawa on Goju-ryu is perhaps the least clear of all. To understand this it is important to know something of Miyagi Chojun's friends within the Karate Kenkyukai (Karate Research Club) such as the Chinese To Daiki (reportedly a Five Ancestor teacher) and Gokenki (a White



White Crane master Gokenkin.

Crane Kung Fu master who had followed him to China). It is also important to consider the Chinese combat manual the *Bubishi*. Their influence on Miyagi Chojun's karate will be explored in Part III.

Conclusion to Part II

We may therefore conclude that the differences between Goju-ryu and To'on-ryu are largely due to Miyagi Sensei's independent research. Secondly, that those kata added by Miyagi may arguably be of Chinese origin but from a source other than Kanryo Higaonna. Thirdly, that Five Ancestor Fist Kung Fu or a similar style can safely be argued, though not proven, to have been the style that Miyagi Chojun learned while in China from 1915 to 1917, and which accounts for the presence or the creation of the five kata which do not come from Kanryo Higaonna in the Goju-ryu system.

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This article represents the opinions and speculations of the author and in no way should be taken as a reflection of the historical opinions of the All American Goju Ryu Meibukan Academy or of its branches. It is designed to incite discussion and thought on the Chinese origins of Goju Ryu Karate. To this end the author invites all who would like to cordially discuss such historical matters to contact him at the following email address stonelion@cyberus.ca.

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