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MISSION STATEMENT

Meibukan Magazine is an initiative of founders 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.

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

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Joe Swift: Taking the Journey
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The Cutting Edge
How could the compassionate spirit of Zen Buddhism ally itself with something as horrific as warfare? There’s a lesson to be learned from those who sought advice on the matter of life and death.

The Dangers of Static Stretching
Scott Sonnon: “If you rely on tissue elasticity for flexibility, you’ll lose it. You must master the regulation of selective tension in order to gain dynamic strength. Tendons do not need to be maximally stretched to be torn.”

Northern Shaolin: From the Nationalists to the present day
In this second and final part of the History of Northern Shaolin, Ravignat reveals the modern developments of Northern Shaolin. The state of the Shaolin Temple today is ‘an interesting mix of very positive and negative events’.

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Our view is that within the martial community there resides a need for overview of organisations and schools that also reveals the rationale of its existence and knowledge. As an independent and free webzine, we feel we are a suitable medium for this purpose. By openly and diversely making information available concerning content about and from a diversity of martial schools, we hope to contribute to the development of respect, tolerance and understanding within the martial community.

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The Kenpo of Kume Village
Speculation on the Original Nafadi

In 1392 the legendary Thirty-Six Families emigrated from China to the Okinawan village of Kume. By the late 19th century a strong martial culture had developed there. From a wealth of resources Joe Swift reconstructs the curriculum of original Nafadi (or Naha-te), the Kenpo of Kume. He discusses the various teachers, events and kata that make up the history of this tradition of early Okinawan karate.

- by Joe Swift -

The 36 families and the Establishment of Kuninda

The first mention of Ryukyu in Chinese historical records appears in the Sui Shu, which was written in 629. About 6 centuries later, in 1296, a force of 6,000 soldiers from Yuan China attempted to invade Ryukyu, but this adventure ended in failure. However, it was not until 1372 when Ryukyu and the Middle Kingdom established formal ties with each other. In this year, the Zhu, Cheng, Wang, Ye and Huai families from China all settled around Shuri Castle². It has been speculated that they may have introduced the Quanfa that formed the seeds of the modern Sui-di (Shuri-te) stream of karate-do.

However, the date that concerns us the most is the year 1392, because it was in this year that the so-called Thirty-Six Families emigrated from Min’an in Fuzhou, to Ryukyu. They are believed to have established a community at Naha’s Kuninda. Many speculate that the number thirty-six refers not to a specific number of actual families, but as a euphemism for a large number. In addition to artisans, shipbuilders and other cultural experts, it has been speculated that Quanfa was also brought by the original Thirty-Six families or their descendents. In either case, a strong martial culture seems to have developed within Kuninda by the late 19th century. In fact, it is said that the Zheng family, including Yiyi Zheng, were responsible for introducing the Quanfa that would form the roots of Nafadi, but again this remains speculation. Having established the background against which Fujian martial culture may have been introduced into the Ryukyu Kingdom, let us now turn our attention to two prominent martial artists from Kuninda, who are believed by some researchers to have taught a young man named Higaonna Kenryu.

“Kogusuku’s fist is said to have been so strong that he could drop a Ryukyu bull with two blows, this earning him the nickname Tekken Kogusuku (Iron Fist Kojo).”

Two Great Bujin of Kuninda: Iron Fist Kogusuku and Aragaki the Cat

One of the most famous names in the history of Naha’s Kenpo traditions is probably Taite Kogusuku (Kojo) (1838-1917). His Chinese name was Cai Ru Yi, and he worked as an official interpreter for the Ryukyu Royal government. His fist is said to have been so strong that he could drop a Ryukyu bull with two blows, this earning him the nickname Tekken Kogusuku (Iron Fist Kojo).

With regards to his teacher, there are two theories, although neither of them has been proven to any satisfaction. The first stems from the writings of Funakoshi (1922, 1925 and 1935), who wrote that a certain Kogusuku studied under the Chinese master Iwah. The second possibility is given by the Kojo family themselves, who say that Taitei learned not only empty hand fighting, but also archery and cudgel fighting from Wzi Xin-xian¹.

Although there is very little known of the exact curriculum Taite Kogusuku taught, noted Japanese Budo historian Professor Ryozo Fujiwara states that Gichin Funakoshi learned Suparinpei/Pechurin from Kogusuku before going on to study Ku-
shanku under Anko Asato and Nai-fuanchi under Anko Itosu. We may be able to assume from this that he probably also taught Sanchin.

Karate historian Tsukuo Iwai also said that Funakoshi learned under Taite Kogusuku, but later left to study with Anko Asato. He was apparently rather cheerful, rare for a native of Kuninda, and hated “training secretly in the back yard” preferring instead to teach on a wide-open beachfront. Kogusuku is said to have been the first to actually openly teach the Southern Boxing that was transmitted in Kune, and Kanryo Higaonna was said to have been a very devout student of him.

If anyone was more famous than Kogusuku in pre-Higaonna Nafadi, it must have been Seisho Aragaki (1840-1920). Perhaps best known for his participation in the demonstration of martial arts in front of the last Sappushi, Aragaki is also said to have been the first teacher of Kanryo Higaonna. Funakoshi has stated that Aragaki’s teacher was the Chinese master Xinxian Wai, but this remains uncorroborated.

The curriculum of Aragaki included at least Sesan, Chishaukiun, Sochin, Unshu and Niseishi, according to various historical records and writings by his student Kenwa Mabuni. More recent research has pointed to the idea that he taught Sanchin, San-seru and Suparinpei/Peichurin as well. According to Mabuni, he was also proficient in Ryukyu Kobudo, which is corroborated by the historical record of his demonstration in 1867 (see below).

Professionally, Aragaki worked as an official interpreter for the Ryukyu Royal government. Indeed, it is said that when he left for China on official business in 1870, that he left his young protégé Kanryo Higaonna in the capable hands of his friend and senior Taite Kogusuku.

**The San-Ru-Chu Demonstration**

The very last Sappushi to visit Ryukyu, Xin Zhao, stayed for a total of five months, between 1866 and 1867. In April 1867, a celebration was held that marked the formal severance of political ties between the two ancient nations. This celebration was called San-Ru-Chu Narabini Shogei Bangumi or the “Show of 3–6–9 and the Arts” and featured not only various performing arts, but also demonstrations of the local Chinese-based fighting traditions which would later become known to the world as karate-do and Ryukyu kobudo.

The ten items of martial arts demonstrated at this event are as follows. Although many modern Japanese writers have offered interpretations of what these mean, they usually end up saying the same thing. Hence, this article will mainly use the explanations given by noted martial arts historian Tsukuo Iwai in his 2000 publication entitled Motobu Choki & Ryukyu Karate and by Akio Kinjo, noted Okinawan karate researcher, in his 1999 publication Karate Den Shinroku.

1. **Tinbei** by Chikudon Maesato Pechin. The Tinbei is the art of using a shield and short spear or a machete-like sword. This art is preserved in several Okinawan kobudo systems. Iwai believes that this Chikudon Maesato Pechin is none other than Ranpo Maesato.

2. **Tesshaku & Bojutsu** by Chikudon Maesato Pechin and Tsuji Aragaki Pechin. Tesshaku (iron ruler) is more commonly known as the sai in Okinawan martial arts. This demonstration seems to be of a sai vs. bo prearranged fighting exercise. Tsuji Aragaki Pechin is the same Seisho Aragaki described in the previous section.

3. **Sesan** by Tsuji Aragaki Pechin. Here, Seisho Aragaki performed Sesan kata.

4. **Bojutsu & Toudi** by Chikudon Maesato Pechin and Tsuji Aragaki Pechin. (Ranpo?) Maesato and Seisho Aragaki performing what is probably unarmed defenses against a staffwielding opponent.

5. **Chishaukiun** by Tsuji Aragaki Pechin. This demonstration by Aragaki is the subject of some curiosity among researchers. Some believe that this may be Shisochin kata.

6. **Tinbei & Bojutsu** by Chikudon Tomimura Pechin and Aragaki Tsuji Pechin. This demonstration was of the shield and short spear vs. the staff. Tsuji Aragaki Pechin has already been identified as Seisho Aragaki, but Chikudon Tomimura Pechin remains unknown.

7. **Tesshaku** by Chikudon Maesato Pechin. Maesato performing what appears to be a solo sai-jutsu kata.

8. **Koushu** by Chikudon Maesato Pechin and Tsuji Aragaki Pechin. Maesato and Aragaki demonstrating what appear to be two-person empty-handed fighting exercises. Interestingly enough, the term koushu (Chn. jiaoshou) literally means crossing hands, a term identified in modern karate-do as kumite.

9. **Shabo** by Shusai Ikemiyagusuku. It is unknown at this time what exactly a shabo (lit. wheel staff) is, but Iwai has speculated that it could be either the shape of the staff used, or a certain type of technical feature of whirling the staff in circular patterns.

10. **Suparinpei** by Chikudon Tomimura Pechin. The previously mentioned Chikudon Tomimura Pechin performing the Suparinpei kata. Although the actual identity of Tomimura is not known, it has been speculated that he was a student of Aragaki.

Although not related to the martial arts, it is also nonetheless interesting to note that...
a certain Kogusuku Peichin performed on the Biwa (a kind of Japanese lute) as well as read poetry at the same celebration.

The “Original” (?) Curriculum of Nafadi
What exactly did the original Nafadi curriculum consist of? Unfortunately, a conclusive answer to this question may never be determined. However, we can make some educated guesses based upon the evidence and data that we do have. First of all, the record of the San Ru Chu celebration tells us, without a doubt, that there was a version of Sesan and of Pechurin/Suparinpei which were performed in 1867, when Kanryo Higaonna was a mere lad of 14 or 15, long before he ever traveled to Fujian. Although we may never know exactly what “versions” these were, for the sake of this article, we shall assume that they are the precursors to the modern Goju-ryu/Shito-ryu/Tou-on-ryu versions. Second, we can compare the kata curricula of Higaonna’s two most prolific students, Chojun Miyagi and Juhatsu Kyoda, as illustrated in tables 1 & 2.

From the above, we can see that only the first four kata, i.e. Sanchin, Sesan, Suparinpei/Pechurin are the same. Whereas Kyoda’s other two kata are clearly identified as to their source, the remaining kata of Miyagi are assumed to be from Higaonna, but there is no clear evidence to either support or deny this assumption. However, with the historical record described above, as well as using some simple comparative analysis with regards to the kata, we can make some deductions.

We can refer to testimony of other direct students of Higaonna, such as Chogi Yo-wa, Higaonna’s first student, who tells us that he learned Sanchin and Pechurin under the master. A complete translation of this record will be presented later in this publication. Soki Ura also stated in an interview with prominent Goju-ryu and Tomari-ti teacher Iken Tokashiki, that “Higaonna only ever taught three or four kata.” Ura himself apparently specialized in Sanchin and Sesan.

Finally, a simple technical analysis of the various Goju-ryu kata tells us a lot. We can immediately discern that the four kata common between Miyagi and Kyoda’s curricula are indeed from a common source. Some of the major features that distinguish these kata from the others are listed below.

1. All start with the typical Sanchin sequence of middle level blocks and reverse punches.
2. Sanchin and Sesan end in the posture known as tora-guchi (a.k.a. Mawashi-uke), whereas Sanseru and Pechurin/Suparinpei end in the double crane beck posture.

### Table One: Chojun Miyagi’s Goju-ryu karate-do kata curriculum

| Sanchin – Kanryo Higaonna | Shisochin – Kanryo Higaonna (?) |
| Sesan – Kanryo Higaonna | Sepai – Kanryo Higaonna (?) |
| Suparinpei/Pechurin – Kanryo Higaonna | Kururunfa – Kanryo Higaonna (?) |
| Saifa – Kanryo Higaonna | Gekisai Dai-ichi – Chojun Miyagi |
| Seiunchin – Kanryo Higaonna (?) | Gekisai Dai-Ni – Chojun Miyagi |
| Tensha – Chojun Miyagi |

### Table Two: Juhatsu Kyoda’s Tou-on-ryu karate-do kata curriculum

| Sanchin – Kanryo Higaonna | Pechurin – Kanryo Higaonna |
| Sesan – Kanryo & Kanyak Higaonna | Jion – Kentsu Yabu |
| Suparinpei – Kanryo Higaonna | Nepai – Kenki Go |

In contrast, the remaining Goju-ryu kata all seem to exhibit dissimilar characteristics. For example:

1. Although Shisochin begins with the familiar Sanchin sequence, albeit with open hands, it is symmetrical in that the major techniques are performed in both the left and the right sides of the body.
2. Although Saifa and Kururunfa both end with tora-guchi, they lack the Sanchin sequence, and the major techniques are performed on both sides of the body.
3. Although the remaining Goju-ryu kata are all symmetrical, with regards to the use of both the left and right sides of the body.

The Uechi-ryu Connection
Let us now turn our attention to Uechi-ryu. It is commonly believed that Kanbun Uechi learned some form of Tiger Boxing, probably with elements of Crane Boxing, from the famed Zihe Zhou in Fuzhou. However, looking at the three kata that Kanbun Uechi is said to have brought back from his time studying in China with Zihe Zhou, we see the names Sanchin, Sesan and Sanseru. Interestingly enough, oral tradition in Uechi-ryu circles states that in the original Quanfa style that Kanbun Uechi studied, there was a kata called Pechurin or Suparinpei, but Uechi never learned this form.

However, the kata names are not the only similarities. The Uechi-ryu Sanchin, although performed with open hands, is highly reminiscent of the Higaonna version. Indeed, oral tradition maintains that Higaonna originally taught Sanchin with open hands. The first half of the Uechi Sesan is also suspiciously similar to the Higaonna version. Although more research is necessary to determine what this actually means, it is entirely possible that Uechi was exposed to the classical Nafadi through his studies at the Kogusuku Dojo in Fuzhou.

Sanchin
Although many modern martial arts writers would like to attribute Sanchin’s roots to the original exercises that Bodhidharma supposedly taught to his acolytes at China’s legendary Shaolin Temple, this remains taught but uncorroborated speculation at this time. In spite of this myth, the Okinawan
versions of Sanchin all have their origins in the Quanfa traditions originating from Fujian Province, where many, if not most, empty hand fighting traditions have a form by this name. In fact, the term Sanchin (the Chinese ideograms of which loosely translate to “three battles”) seems to be found exclusively in Fujian-based Quanfa systems.

Many researchers and writers, especially from the Goju-ryu tradition, credit Kanryo Higaonna for bringing back Sanchin from his studies in China. However, there is also a train of thought that states Sanchin had existed in Okinawa since before Higaonna’s voyage to Fujian and was passed down in the old Chinese settlement in Naha’s Kume village. It is speculated that Higaonna learned Sanchin from Seisho Aragaki (1840-1920), who is said to have been Higaonna’s first teacher.

Higaonna’s teacher in Fujian is believed by many to be Zhong Xiang Xie, founder of Whooping Crane boxing, although there is also much vigorous opposition to this theory. Higaonna is believed to have learned the Happoren form from Xie, which is said by some to be the basis for the modern Goju-ryu version of Sanchin. If Xie was indeed Higaonna’s teacher, then Higaonna probably integrated concepts from Happoren into the Sanchin he learned under Aragaki. When practicing Happoren alone, the breathing is silent.

In either case, Higaonna had his students spend several years on Sanchin alone before allowing them to move on to the other katas he taught. Higaonna apparently taught Sanchin as an open hand kata at first, with fast breathing, but later changed it to a slower, closed fist version. Others give Chojun Miyagi credit for closing the fists and slowing down the breathing.

One provocative account survives about the importance of Sanchin in Kanryo Higaonna’s teachings. An Okinawan man named Saburo Kinjo wrote an article on Kanryo Higaonna for Hiroshi Kinjo’s Gekkan karate-do magazine. The following excerpt relates how severe the practice of Sanchin was under the venerable old master.

“I think our motivation for going to Sensei’s dojo as children was probably to catch a glimpse of his gallant figure as he performed his Toudi. However, no matter when we went to have a look, we saw not Sensei Higaonna’s gallant figure, but rather his students practicing the Sanchin no kata... Whenever we went, all we saw was his students performing Sanchin. ...Sanchin is, as everyone knows, the basic kata of Toudi, which one performs half-naked, breathing in and out, moving back and forth. The teacher stands behind, slapping the shoulders with both palms and fixing the posture as the student goes back and forth. At Sensei’s dojo, this basic I saw the students gripping sand-filled jars that were about 2 feet tall with narrow mouths, and holding them horizontally as they moved back and forth, back and forth, I thought to myself how difficult Toudi really must be.”

The three battles of Sanchin are often described in English as the battles between mind, body and breath. Other descriptions refer to attack and defense on the three levels, i.e. the upper, middle and lower levels. The three important points of Sanchin have also been described as the stance, the breathing method and the spirit, and if any one of these three are lacking, one will not be able to master Sanchin. Kanryo Higaonna’s Sanchin features two turns, and only one step back. In order to remedy the lack of backward stepping, it is said that Chojun Miyagi created a shorter version of the kata, featuring no turns, and two steps backwards. It should be noted, however, that in many schools, notably Tou’on-ryu, the practice of Sanchin is also performed by walking up and down the entire length of the dojo floor, several times, and is not necessarily relegated to a fixed number of steps.

“Many researchers and writers, especially from the Goju-ryu tradition, credit Kanryo Higaonna for bringing back Sanchin from his studies in China. However, there is also a train of thought that states Sanchin had existed in Okinawa since before Higaonna’s voyage to Fujian and was passed down in the old Chinese settlement in Naha’s Kume village.”

Sesan

Meaning 13, some people refer to it as 13 hands, 13 fists, or 13 steps. Customarily taught in both Tomari and Naha, this kata is one of the most commonly practiced traditions in Okinawan and Japanese karate-do.

It is unclear exactly what the number 13 represents. Some think it was the number of techniques in the original kata; some think it represents 13 different types of “power” or “energy” found in the kata; some think it represents the number of different application principles; some think it represents defending against 13 specific attacks; and some think that it is the number of imaginary opponents one faces while performing the kata.

Out of all these theories, this author must disagree with the last, as it is highly unrealistic that kata teaches one to handle such situations. On the contrary, kata was designed to teach the principles needed to survive more common self-defense situations, rather than a long, drawn out battle against several opponents.

Sesan begins with three Sanchin reverse punches, then proceeds into a series of unique knife-hand or palm-heel strikes often described as “the cat washes its face.” A series of knife strikes and finger thrusts are followed by a low side kick to the knee. Scooping hand blocks, double and triple punches, uppercuts and more low side kicks follow, and the kata ends with a strong pull, front kick, reverse punch and a tora-guchi from the cat stance.

There is a fascinating story told about Kanryo Higaonna when he was teaching the stomp (fumikomi) after the last kick in this kata to Chojun Miyagi:

“One of the characteristics of the Nafadi Sesan can be found in its kicking techniques, and I believe that Sensei Kyoda received strict instruction in this method from his teacher Sensei Higaonna.
Sensei Kyoda was especially strict with me when teaching this kick. It also seems that Sensei Kyoda’s brother disciple, Goju-ryu founder Chojun Miyagi, was also greatly influenced by Sensei Higaonna’s instruction in this kicking technique. When Sensei Higaonna himself demonstrated this technique, there was a loud cracking sound. The next day when Sensei Miyagi visited Sensei Higaonna’s house, Sensei Higaonna was separating the floorboards. He said ‘there seems to be something wrong with the floor. Go take a look.’ When Sensei Miyagi went under the house to have a look, one of the large supporting beams under the floor was broken cleanly in two, and the floor was sinking down because of this. This means that when performing that kick in Sesan, one must use that much power.22

Akio Kinjo, noted Okinawan karate researcher and teacher who has traveled to China, Hong Kong and Taiwan well over 100 times for training and researching the roots of Okinawan martial arts, maintains that this kata originally had 13 techniques, but due to a long process of evolution, more techniques were added to it. He also maintains that the Okinawan Sesan kata is derived from Yong Chun White Crane boxing from Fujian Province in Southern China. It is unsure who brought this kata to Okinawa or Japan. 23

Sesan. Also like Susan, the actual meaning of the name is unclear at present. Several styles of Fujian Quanfa use a form called “36,” but to date, there has been no form of this name that is identical to the version(s) used in modern Goju-ryu, Shito-ryu or Tou’on-ryu. Sanseru, like Susan, also begins with three Sanchin steps, but then proceeds into releases from a wrist grab, a leg-scooping throw, a series of kicks, elbow strikes and short reverse punches, then performs two double punches and ends in the double crane beam posture. It is the first kata in the original Kume Kenpo curriculum that teaches the use of the same series of techniques in the four principle directions. This is often described as the “four gates.” There is some contention with regards to Sanseru between the Tou’on-ryu and the Goju-ryu histories. Although the accepted version of Goju-ryu history states that Miyagi learned all of the classical kata of Goju-ryu directly from Higaonna, it should be noted that Juhatsu Kyoda was adamant that only he was taught Sanseru by their teacher. It would seem that Kyoda was taught this kata while Miyagi was away in Kumamoto on military service. Meitoku Yagi recalls the following:

After Sensei Miyagi had passed away, I took Toguchi (Seikichi) with me to Oita Prefecture, where we met Sensei Kyoda, who was a year older than Sensei Miyagi. I had heard from Sensei Miyagi that Sensei Kyoda had practiced Sanseru while Miyagi was away in the army. Although not the purpose of my visit, I asked him to check my Sanseru kata and correct any errors, to which he had replied that my kata was not wrong.24

However, it is also evident from a simple comparative analysis that the two versions are clearly related, although there is great difference in how they are performed between the two styles. The Tou’on-ryu version, for example, uses no front kicks throughout the entire kata. It is always possible, however, that Miyagi had learned the kata from Higaonna at a later date, or from another student of Higaonna, and modified it to suit his interpretation of karate. Of course, the same can also be said for Kyoda. Unfortunately for researchers, the Kyoda Sanseru has never been published in full.25

Pechurin/Superinpei

Often referred to as the highest level kata in Nafadi, Pechurin/Superinpei also begins with the three Sanchin reverse punches before breaking off into its own unique movement patterns. After the three Sanchin steps, both hands thrust out to the sides before launching into a series of tora-guchi, hooking blocks and finger thrusts to the four gates. After a series of three tora-guchi while retreating in the cat stance, the kata continues with double punches and simultaneous down blocks/reverse punches to the four gates. Stepping to the diagonal in a sumo posture (shiko-dachi), a series of middle blocks, one knuckle punches and double down blocks are then performed. After a hooking hand block, front kick, elbow and back fist combination, the kata then turns around with a series of scooping and hooking blocks, a spinning crescent kick, a double front kick, elbow, back fist combination, a fingertip thrust to the rear, and ends with the same double crane beam found in Sanseru. Because Pechurin/Superinpei introduces the four diagonal directions in addition to the four principle directions, it is often said to teach the so-called “eight gates of attack and defense.”

It is often said that the name Pechurin and the name Superinpei are interchangeable with each other. However, a story told by Juhatsu Kyoda’s senior-most surviving student, Shigekazu Kanzaki, tells us a different story.
“I had always been under the impression that Pechurin and Suparinpei were the same kata, under different names. Once, I had the chance to observe a demonstration of karate, during which a Goju-ryu teacher performed Suparinpei, and was surprised at the differences. When I returned and told Sensei Kyoda of these differences, he got an upset look on his face, and said that Sensei Higaonna had only ever called this kata Pechurin.”

Much like Sanseru, although there are technical differences between the Goju-ryu Suparinpei and the To’on-ryu Pechurin, they are essentially the same kata, and can be thought of as variations on a theme. With regards to the actual names, Suparinpei is often translated as “108 steps,” whereas Pechurin is often described as “100 consecutive steps.” Noted Okinawan karate researcher Akio Kinjo has an interesting theory. According to Kinjo, the correct Fujian pronunciation for Suparinpei should actually be Soparinpai, but this pronunciation has been bastardized into the current Okinawan pronunciation over the generations. However, with regards to the term Pechurin, Kinjo has another theory. Although the common translation for this kata is “100 consecutive steps,” Kinjo states that he has not found any extant kata with this name in Fujian. Kinjo argues that this kata name may be an Okinawanized pronunciation of the kata Bagirin, which is a Yongchun White Crane form meaning “100 consecutive techniques.”

Shiscochin – The Eternal Mystery
Shiscochin is an enigma. It indeed starts with the three Sanchin steps, albeit with open hands. This, according to the oral traditions, is the old way that Kanryo Higaonna taught the Sanchin kata, as well. It is also a fact that a kata with a similar name, Chishaukin, was performed by Seisho Aragaki at the 1867 demonstration in front of the last Sappushi. It also follows the pattern of the four gates, as exemplified in both Sanseru and Suparinpei/Pechurin. Is it possible that Shiscochin was also a kata from the original Kaninda Kenpo? The major problems with this theory, however, lie in the fact that Shiscochin is symmetrical, with regards to the major techniques. Also, the order of the four gates differs from that of either Sanseru and Suparinpei/Pechurin. In the latter two kata, the four gates are performed in the order of front, back, right and then left (from the performer’s perspective). In Shiscochin, the four gates are performed to the rear, the front, the left and then the right. It is also true that, unlike Sanchin, Sansen, Sanseru, Suparinpei/Pechurin and Seiunchin, no written evidence regarding the Shiscochin kata can be found prior to 1938. Although none of these are strong enough evidence for supporting or refuting claims that Shiscochin was indeed an original Nafadi kata, it does open up interesting possibilities for future research. To close out this section, let us look at Akio Kinjo’s theories on the etymology of this unique form.

According to Kinjo, Shiscochin is representative of the movements of a cricket and/or preying mantis. The opening kamae (posture) and nukite (finger thrust) in Shiscochin are thought to show the mantis hooking its prey and devouring it. In contrast, the forward stance with the arms extended is indicative of the cricket spreading its wings. He argues that the name Shiscochin should be pronounced Shisauchin in Fujian dialect, which would be roughly translated to mean Cricket – Battle.

Afterthought
In closing, there is one very important point that this author would like to touch upon. That is: what is the source of the additional Nafadi kata as embraced by modern Goju-ryu and Shito-ryu. Although beyond the scope of this article, this point is presented here as food for thought and a topic for future research. If indeed the original curriculum of Nafadi consisted only of Sanchin, Sesan, Sanseru and Pechurin/Suparinpei, then from where did the remaining kata used in modern Goju-ryu actually come from? Noted Japanese martial arts researcher Nobuyuki Hirakami suggests three possibilities:

1. They were brought to Okinawa from Kanryo Fuzhou by Higaonna.
2. They were also ancient kata passed down in Naha from days of old.
3. They were added by Chojun Miyagi from alternative sources.

If we take Goju-ryu’s “creation legend” at face value, then of course we will get number (1) above as the true history. If we look for evidence for number (2), as we saw above, the kata Shiscochin may have been demonstrated alongside Sesan and Suparinpei, as early as 1867. And finally, with regards to number (3), it is interesting to note that in the pre-war books on karate, none of the other Goju-ryu kata seem to have been mentioned in writing prior to 1934, with the exception of Seiunchin and possibly Shiscochin. Unsure of what all of this means, this author and others continue to search for key pieces of the puzzle. Unfortunately, most of these pieces have either been twisted horribly out of shape by those who would force them to fit with the other pieces in a hurried attempt to complete the picture, or have been lost behind the sofas and
under the carpets of history, like a jigsaw whose box has been carelessly kicked around the room…

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1 Kuninda is the native Ryukyuan pronunciation of Kume-sen (a.k.a. Kume-mura or Kume Village).
2 According to Tetsuhiro Hokama’s 2001 publication Karatedo Rekishi Nenpyo, pp. 16.
3 Ibid, pp. 16
4 See, for example, the 1977 Seisetsu Okinawa Karatedo by the Uechiryu Karatedo Association, or Okinawan Karate by Mark Bishop, the second, updated edition of which was published in 1999 by Charles E. Tuttle Publishing.
5 In his 1990 publication Kakutogi no Rekishi, Tokyo: Baseball Magazine. Unfortunately, Fujiwara does not cite his source for this information.
6 In his publications Koden Ryukyu Karatetsu (1992) and Motobu Choki to Ryukyu Karate (2000), both published by Airyudo in Tokyo.
7 According to several researchers, including Patrick McCarthy, Tetsuhiro Hokama, Marco McKenna, Shoshin Nagamine, Iken Tokashiki, Tsukuo Iwai, etc.
8 According to Iwai and others.
9 According to Iwai. However, no record of a Tsuji Aragaki Peichin (the title for official interpreters) on any ship from Ryukyu to China in 1870 has been found by this author to date, even after an exhaustive search in Seiki Akamine’s 1988 book Daikokai Jidai no Ryukyu, which details the records of the ships in and out of Ryukyu over several centuries. However, this does not preclude the possibility that Aragaki’s position was not high enough to be recorded in this abbreviated version of the records.
11 Author’s note: This program was first introduced in English by noted karate historian Patrick McCarthy. See, for example (McCarthy, 1999) for his translation. For this article I have chosen to retranslate the material from alternative Japanese sources.
12 Tsukuo Iwai is a teacher of Motoburyu Karate-jutsu in Gunma Prefecture, where he also teaches Takenouchiyu fujuata and associated weapons arts.
13 Akio Kinjo is an Okinawan karate teacher and researcher who has spent immeasurable time in Taiwan, Hong Kong and mainland China for training and research. He trained with Seko Higa of Goju-ryu and others.
14 Ranpo Maesato (1838-1904) is a legendary figure in Okinawan martial arts but painfully little is known of him.
15 A shusai was a “...Kume village keimochi (aristocratic) boys who would ultimately receive a government stipend to study in China and later hold an official position in the service of the King” (McCarthy, 1999).
16 Tetsuhiro Hokama states that Chojun Miyagi created Safa around 1940, but it is clearly listed in 1938 as a Higaonna-lineage kata by Mabuni and Nakasone (1938).
17 Modern Tou-on’ryu only preserves the Kanyu Higaonna version of Sesan. Kanyu Higaonna is believed to have studied Chinese boxing under Seisho Aragaki and Xinxiang Wai, but was more noted for his skills as a talented musician. His son, Kanjuna Higaonna, was a well known scholar of Ryukyuan history, anthropology and culture. Kanjuna wrote a bit on karate, including a foreword in Gichin Funakoshi’s first book entitled Ryukyu Kenpo Karate, published in 1922. For more on Kanyu Higaonna, please see the article “Martial Artists of Okinawa” contained in this publication.
18 It should be noted that this is how Sanchin is believed to have been practiced before Higaonna changed the kata to a closed fist. Shiho chinn shall be discussed in more detail later in the article.
19 According to Akio Kinjo’s 1999 publication Karate Den Shinroku (True Record of Karate’s Transmission), published by Okinawa Tosho Center in Naha.
20 Much like the Uechi-ryu Sanchin is practiced.
21 See the complete translation of this article in this publication.
22 As told to Katsumi Murakami in his 1991 publication Karate no Kokoro to Waza, pp. 93. This tale is also recounted by Morio Higaonna in his 1995 publication The History of Karate: Gojoryu, pp. 39.
23 This story is recounted in Yagi’s autobiography entitled The Life Drama of the Man, Meitoku, pp. 173, which was privately published in Japanese in 2000. With the obvious differences between the Goju-ryu and the Tou-on’ryu versions of Sanseru (in spite of their similarities), we are left to speculate why Kyoda told Yagi that his kata was correct.
24 Eizo Onishi, in his 1986 book Kenpo-gaku, included what he called Tou-on’ryu Sanseru, but Shigeokazu Kanzaki confirmed that this was not the way Kyoda taught the kata.
25 As found in Akio Kinjo’s 1999 publication Karate Den Shinroku, pp. 320.
26 Pechurin was published in Katsumi Murakami’s 1975 work Karatedo to Ryukyu Kobudo, although, again according to Kanzaki, with some variation from how Kyoda actually taught it.
27 Kinjo (1999), pp. 242-244.
28 Ibid, pp. 244-245.
29 Sanchin, Sesan, Sanseru and Suparinei/Pechurin are all mentioned in Funakoshi’s early books, namely Ryukyu Kenpo Karate (1922) and Renant Goshin Karatejutsu (1925). Seiunchin was mentioned by Choki Motobu in his 1926 book entitled Okinawa Kenpo Karatejutsu Kumite-hen.
30 Kinjo (1999), pp. 234-236.
31 Choki Motobu mentioned Seiunchin in his 1926 and 1932 publications.
Taking The Journey

Interview with Joe Swift

Joe Swift has lived in Japan since 1994. He currently acts as assistant instructor at the Mushinkan Shoreiryu Karate Kobudo Dojo in Kanazawa, Japan. Swift tells of his training years and compares his experiences in both the East and the West. "In the West, we often have a tendency to place our Japanese/Okinawan teachers on pedestals. We need to start thinking critically and taking a look at the big picture."

- By Lex Opdam -

Mr. Swift, could you share with us something from your background as a professional translator/interpreter, researcher and martial artist?

First of all, please let me clarify that although I currently do not work as a professional translator/interpreter, I had been employed as such in the past. Of course, translating and interpreting is still part of my current job, I am no longer a full-time translator by profession. I currently work as a meteorologist specializing in aviation weather at a large, Japan-based global weather company. I am also considering opening a karate club at the company, time-permitting.

I began training in karate-do in the summer of 1985, at the age of 12. I had been fascinated with the martial arts that were shown in the local TV station on Saturday afternoons, when they ran old Hong Kong kung-fu films. Anyway, after my first lesson, I was hooked. I think that it was probably a combination of the art and the teacher. My first teacher was a man named Steve Wren, who taught Okinawa Ishin-ryu karate-do in Waverly, NY. It was also Sensei Wren who whetted my appetite to learn more and more about the history, philosophy and techniques of classical Okinawan martial arts.

I continued training in Ishin-ryu until the summer of 1994, when I moved to Japan.

What was the reason you moved to Japan?

I majored in meteorology in university, and my minor was in Japanese studies, including language. This was the impetus for me to go to Japan in the first place, to finish my minor at a Japanese university.

I spent a year in Osaka in university, where I trained in Shorin-ryu karate-do and Ryukyu Kobujutsu. In the autumn of 1995, I moved to Kanazawa, and found myself at the Mushinkan Dojo of Yoshiyuki Uematsu. Although not a famous teacher in a famous lineage, it was nonetheless under Sensei Uematsu that I studied the kata of Okinawan Goju-ryu. In addition to his karate, Sensei Uematsu is also a teacher of Iaido and classical Jujutsu, and a licensed appraiser and dealer of antique Japanese swords.

Do you also study Iaido and classical Jujutsu under Sensei Uematsu?

I do not study Iaido formally, but I was grounded in the basic techniques of the style that Sensei Uematsu teaches, Shinkage-ryu. I have studied classical Jujutsu under Sensei Uematsu (Kyoshi, Hachidan, 8th degree black belt), with the purpose to strengthen my understanding of the karate kata.

The style of Jujutsu that he teaches is called Mubyoshi-ryu, and stems from the Kaga province (where the present-day Kanazawa is located).

Sensei Uematsu also urged me to look beyond what he had to offer, and actually encouraged me to seek out older teachers of the Okinawan martial arts, to further improve my understanding. Thanks to his open-mindedness and my own initiative, as well as kind introductions from several close karate friends such as Patrick McCarthy, Mario McKenna and Wade Chroninger, I was able to meet and train under such teachers as Katsumi Murakami (Shorin-ryu and Ryukyu Kobudo: Niafuanchi Shodan and Shushi no Kon), Masaaki Ikemiyagi (Goju-ryu Meibukan: Sanchin and Susen), Tetsuhiro Hokama (Goju-ryu Kenshikai: kata applications, Tuifa-jutsu and Ekudi), Kanenori Matsuo (Motobu Udundi: Tuidi/grappling), Hayashi Shingo (Kojo-ryu: grappling principles) and Shigekazu Kanzaki (Tou’on-ryu: Sanchin), just to name a few. Of course, I would be remiss if I did not cite the major influence on my research and translation work in the specific field of karate-do – Mr. Patrick McCarthy. His groundbreaking publications were what truly inspired me to undertake the arduous journey of historical research in karate-do. Over the past several years, his continued advice and introductions have opened doors that I would have never imagined being opened for me.

Uematsu Yoshiyuki, head of the Mushinkan Honbu Dojo.
Could you tell us in what way you have received instruction the first 9 years under your first teacher Steve Wren who taught you Okinawa Isshin-ryu karate-do?

My first 9 years under Sensei Wren were instrumental in my development. Sensei Wren was a consummate perfectionist when it came to basic techniques and kata. If anything, he instilled in me a work ethic in my training that has stuck with me to this day.

Training was mainly in group classes, with an emphasis on basics and the first kata, Sesan. This lasted until I was promoted to 6th Kyu (green belt in that particular lineage). From this level, much instruction was one-on-one or one-on-two, as the intermediate kata were taught and kobudo training also began. Kumite training was almost always competition style, although after class, some of the guys would stick around and just whack on each other without timers or stopping for points. This was an excellent learning opportunity.

Several times a year, we would perform demonstrations at local festivals or compete in tournaments, and the training during those periods would focus on performance of the kata, and point sparring. We also often focused on practical self-defense against a myriad of common attacks (lapel grabs, wrist grabs, bear hugs, etc.). Many of these principles and techniques, not surprisingly, can be found inside the various classical kata of Okinawan karate. Unfortunately, no one was able to connect the dots for me at that time. It was not until much later that I began to realize that they were inter-related.

Whenever I visit the USA, I try and meet with Sensei Wren, to reminisce about old times, discuss karate issues, and just shoot the breeze. After all, even though I have moved away from Isshin-ryu, I do still, and always will, consider him to be a Sensei of mine.

Did your way of practice and interpretation of the martial arts, except its technical differences, change since you moved to Japan?

Well, I had originally come to Japan with the hopes of finding the "old ways" or the "classical" version of karate still being practiced. Unfortunately, in most instances, this was not the case. I found that much of the karate I had encountered, especially in my first year in Osaka, was much like that I had studied in the USA: competitive-based sport karate.

As the readers probably already know, there is enough technical ambiguity in karate already, so I will leave aside the specific technical differences in how my practice has changed over the past decade of residing in Japan. I will say that I do think my practice has gone from one of being materially goal-oriented (i.e. get a new rank or a trophy at a tournament) to one of harsh physical and mental training imposed upon myself. I have found that I get more satisfaction out of a great training session than passing a grading examination.

Also, I find that my practice has changed to include much more body conditioning (such as kote-kitae, hojo-undo with equipment, kakie, etc.) and partner drills to recreate self-defense principles through specific scenarios found within the karate kata. This is in direct contrast to the sports element that I was exposed to in both the USA and my year in university in Osaka. The impetus for such a shift in practice methods came from several sources, such as my teacher Sensei Uematsu, the historical and application research by Sensei...
McCarthy, and my liaisons with local mentors in mainland Japan and Okinawa.

Could you tell us something about Sensei Uematsu’s Goju-ryu background and the main influence he had upon you concerning Goju-ryu karate and particular practice methods you received?

Well, I know that he said he learned Goju-ryu from his uncle, Mori Goho, who was the head abbot of a Zen temple in Saga Prefecture. Mori was apparently also well traveled when he was serving in the military. The closest we can determine is that he learned from an Okinawan colleague (his name until this day is unknown) in his travels. In addition to karate, Mori was also a practitioner of Iaido.

Sensei Uematsu is my primary teacher of Goju-ryu, and it was from him that I learned the kata. As far as particular practice methods, perhaps one of the most important was that he teaches various breathing methods with Sanchin. He is also a very big proponent of utilizing the JU aspect of Goju-ryu.

"The so-called "soft" aspect of Goju-ryu is utilized in the Mushinkan a lot in deflecting, trapping and parrying techniques. They are striving for without using too much "extra" power, but to utilize the opponent's power and momentum against himself."

Could you tell us what kind of various breathing methods Sensei Uematsu teaches and in what way the soft aspect of Goju-ryu is utilized?

Well, in addition to the "standard" Goju-ryu breathing pattern of inhaling once and exhaling once, he sometimes has us inhale twice and exhale once, inhale once and exhale twice, etc. Other times, we breathe a bit like the Uechi-ryu practitioners when they practice Sanchin.

The so-called "soft" aspect of Goju-ryu is utilized in the Mushinkan a lot in deflecting/trapping/parrying techniques (uke-waza). Sensei Uematsu often calls this the principle of "Ryusui" (flowing water). The standing grappling aspects, especially throws that are striving for without using too much "extra" power, but to utilize the opponent’s power and momentum against himself. This is easier shown than explained with words, however, as I am sure you can imagine!

Could you tell us when the Mushinkan was founded and explain to us what the meaning of Mushinkan is?

The Mushinkan was founded in 1975. The name itself is comprised of three kanji or Sino-Japanese ideograms: MU (roughly meaning nothingness), SHIN (meaning heart or mind) and KAN (meaning hall or building). It was named after the Zen principle of Mushin.

Do you hold a certain position within the dojo of Sensei Uematsu?

I received my “shihan” teaching license from Sensei Uematsu in 2004. My certificate was numbered “1.” I serve as an assistant instructor (Yondon, 4th degree black belt) when I am in the Honbu, but my official position is Tokyo Shibucho (the chief instructor for the Tokyo branch of the Mushinkan).

You have said that you are considering opening a karate club at the company. Would that be a specific style dojo and could you describe your wish in establishing one?

Well, if this idea goes as planned, it will be basically a Goju-ryu club, as it will be under the auspices of the Tokyo Mushinkan. My wish in establishing the club is that our company is currently placing a lot of emphasis on risk management, and I think that one of the most important parts of such an idea boils down to the personal level of each employee. It is my hope that a martial arts club in the company will help contribute to the health and welfare of the employees.

What kind of responsibility do you see fit for yourself in being a karate-do teacher?

This is a difficult question, I think, but basically I feel responsible for not only searching out and preserving the old ways, but to also foster students who are productive members of society, and who will hopefully one day also take up the teaching of karate-do.

What is your personal interpretation of martial art?

Well, first of all, in many ways I still consider myself a student and not ready for a personal interpretation of the arts. However, it is my contention that they are far more than merely ritualized physical violence. While the physical prowess is necessary to carry out the self-defense techniques, I do think that there is more to learning karate-do than merely practicing how to punch and kick the opponent into oblivion. However, what that “something more” is, I think, will differ from person to person. To me, it is about overcoming human weakness, the journey within, so to speak. Without

Works by Joe Swift

Translated books:
- 100 Masters of Okinawan Karate by Tetsuhiro Hokama (translation published 2005).
- Timeline of Karate History by Tetsuhiro Hokama (forthcoming, possibly 2006).
- Karate Kenpo (1933) by Mizaho Matsu (forthcoming, possibly 2007).

Major pre-2005 translations
- Karate in the Imperial Capital by Gichin Funakoshi, 1929.
- Karate-den by Hoan Kosugi, 1930.

Own works:
- The Essence of Naha-te (forthcoming possibly late 2006).
- The Pre-History of Isshin-ryu Karate (forthcoming, possibly early 2007).

(Joe Swift has also translated a considerable amount of portions of books/articles for private use that are not publicly available).

Uematsu Yoshiyuki, Wade Chroninger, Butch Spain, Joe Swift and Wade's students in Okinawa after a seminar on grappling techniques in Okinawa in 1999.
the need to resort to physical violence can be reduced to almost nil. Of course, I do not believe that a teacher of karate has to be a preacher. Much like the physical aspects of karate, it is up to the teacher to point the student on the correct path, but it is up to the student to actually take the journey.

You mentioned Sensei McCarthy had a major influence upon your research and translation work concerning karate-do with focus upon historical and application research. In what way did his influence shift your historical and application research?

Well, simply put, it was Sensei McCarthy who basically taught me to look beyond merely blindly following the oral traditions in the history of karate-do, while at the same time not ignoring it. In addition, his groundbreaking translations and historical writings had shattered many of the old myths of karate-do that I know many of us grew up hearing. It was these publications that actually made me want to study and research the unabridged history of karate.

As far as applications go, a few hands-on sessions (including an impromptu one in the train station at Yokohama!) as well as his video series, have urged me to look beyond what can be described as applications based on the rule-bound competitive format. You know, like the applications found in most karate texts that focus on defending against a cleanly executed lunge punch to the jaw from zenkutsu or the roundhouse kick to the head.

This is another point where I think that understanding the history of karate would help in our search for the physical and technical aspect. If karate was indeed an art of self-defense for the upper classes as well as an arrest method by the local law enforcement in the old Ryukyu Kingdom, then Sensei McCarthy’s application theories and practices seem to jive with those goals.

You have talked to many masters and other martial artists, read and investigate the history and the actual status of karate-do and practicing and reflecting karate-do over the last 20 years. Would you say that to this day the gross of people in Japan including Okinawa, but also in the West, are still following blindly the oral traditions?

I would say that this issue is predominant in both worlds, but due to different reasons. In the west, we often have a tendency to place our Japanese/Okinawan teachers on pedestals, just by virtue of their nationality. In mainland Japan and Okinawa as well, the classical Confucian educational principles often discourage people from questioning the teacher and in many extreme cases, even daring to think outside the box. I think that before we fall back on the old standard, “well, Sensei said such and such,” we need to start thinking critically and taking a look at the big picture.

I also think that in the west, there are more people who know a lot more about the history of karate than there are in Japan and Okinawa. I think this is due, in part, to karate being such a big part of the Okinawan culture, they perhaps don’t take an interest in such aspects. I mean, it has always been there, and always will. In the west, classical karate is a foreign import, and people may be taking an interest above and beyond what their Japanese and Okinawan counterparts might. The same is true in reverse, as well. Perhaps there are a lot of Japanese baseball players who know more about the history and traditions of the game than an American player might!

That being said, however, there are also many in Japan and Okinawa who have spent the time, effort and expense to undertake a serious and in-depth study of karate’s history and traditions. Such people include Kinjo Hiroshi, Tokashiki Iken, Kinjo Akio, Hokama Tetsuhiro, Nakamoto Masahiro, Otsuka Tadahiko, Fujiwara Ryozo, Iwai Tsukuo and others.

Could you explain to our readers those classical Confucian educational principles that often discourage people from questioning the teacher, and to what extent you see the influence upon Western martial art schools?

Well, to be fair, I hope that the original Confucian educational principles did not encourage this, but in addition to an almost unquestioning reverence for elders and seniors, there seems to be a great emphasis on “me-
You have translated and written many articles about karate especially concerning karate’s history. Do you have any new projects we might expect in the future?

Well, time permitting, I have several book translations on the back burner, including Hokama’s Timeline of Karate History, Sakagawa and Hokama’s Kata of Okinawan Goju-ryu Karate, Mutsu’s 1933 classic Karate Kenpo, among others. Hopefully I will be able to finish the first two over the next 3-4 months and have them published and available sometime around mid-2006.

I also have several articles that I am planning on the Goju-ryu kata, including possible etymology and historical origins; and a major article on Itosu Anko and his campaign to revitalize karate at the turn of the 20th century.


The Weapons and Fighting Arts of Indonesia

The Weapons and Fighting Arts of Indonesia consists of a variety of combative forms and empty-hand techniques, and also include such weapons as spears, whips, knives, and the kris dagger. The author shows how the forms are related to those on the Asian mainland as well as to European techniques, and describes the combat methods of the fierce Menangkabau warriors, the Alorلفu headhunters, and the Celebes pirates.

Indonesian martial arts are intricately linked with cultural attainments, especially with music, dance, and art; they are also closely related to marriage customs, tribal law, and native mythology. Well supplemented with over 400 illustrations, this exiting book is the definitive work on Indonesian weapons and fighting arts. (About the author see Meibukan Magazine nr. 4, January 2004)


By Marc van Dam
The Cutting Edge

The Paradox of Zen and the Martial Arts

Although Zen Buddhism and the martial arts have nothing in common at first sight, both have a long history of mutual understanding. But how could the compassionate spirit of Zen Buddhism ally itself with something as horrific as warfare? There’s a lesson to be learned from those who sought advice on the matter of life and death.

- By Mark Hemels -

Bushido, the Way of the Warrior

In the political turmoil of Japan’s 17th century, the martial arts were the privilege of a small class of samurai. These warriors placed their lives in the service of a warlord and maintained the moral code of the Bushido, the Way of the Warrior. Besides the duty of respect for one’s parents, loyalty to the lord, and a compassionate dedication for the good in mankind, this Way of the Samurai requires a constant readiness to die, and even the willingness to take one’s own life when honour is lost. In order to survive in battle, the samurai tried to master the art of the sword through self-discipline and rigorous training. Tales abound in which samurai seek the instruction of a Zen master to attain the right state of mind. For like no other, the masters of Zen were at home in the practice of self-discipline and the matter of life and death.

"He who knows the art of the warrior has no confusion about movement. He acts and is therein unhindered."

Arguably, the most famous story is that of the encounter between Zen monk Takuan and the legendary swordsman Musashi. This 17th century folk-hero from a family of samurai had only one desire: to become the invincible master of the sword. For Musashi, the inevitable battle in which the samurai engaged himself was more than a struggle for survival. Musashi was not afraid of dying. Why be afraid of death when you know you have to die? Musashi didn’t just want to survive; he wanted to gain definitive victory, not in the least over himself. When his path crossed that of the monk Takuan, his fighting art would take on a spiritual dimension. Takuan suggests Musashi read books on Zen, and Chinese Taoist classics such as Sun Zi’s Art of War.

In this more than two thousand year old collection of sayings, the mysterious warrior-philosopher Sun Zi writes:

“He who knows the art of the warrior has no confusion about movement. He acts and is therein unhindered. He who knows himself and his enemy wins without being in danger. He who knows heaven and earth conquers all.”

Musashi decides to dedicate his life to reaching enlightenment by way of the sword. Perfect knowledge of one’s self and one’s enemy, of heaven and earth, should enable him to act determined and free as a human being and as a warrior. Takuan teaches Musashi it is not about entrancing the heart or being dragged along by desire or hate. Accepting death in every aspect of life does not mean drawing the sword in reckless blood thirst. Such ignorance only confuses the mind and tears the heart. The true art of the warrior is self-knowledge. This art is no different from the Buddhist way of “no I”, the absence of ego, of which master Dogen says:

"To study the way of the Buddha is to study oneself. To study oneself is to forget oneself. To forget oneself is to be enlightened by all phenomenons. To be enlightened by all phenomenons creates the withdrawal of one’s body and mind as well as others."

Takuan wrote his letter Unmoving understanding about this perfect knowledge. In these writings, he explains the connection between Zen and swordsmanship.

Unmoving movement

Buddhist teachings distinguish many consecutive steps of mental development. One of those steps is ‘restraint’. This is when the mind concentrates on an object or attaches itself to a certain line of thought. This is the mental attitude that we normally know. In a sword fight, the attention focuses on for example the opponent’s sword, or the mind is occupied by a predetermined plan of attack. One’s watchfulness is limited to that one point of attention, losing the many other options. The warrior is then no longer a free master of his movements. He stands transfixed in the spell of a truly immobile opponent, who reveals no intention or sign of weakness. The point is to conquer this ‘restraint’ by not allowing the heart to be entranced, and not allowing the attention to be distracted by focussing only on a single point. Master Sun writes the following about the importance of a formless empty mind:

“In martial arts, strategy must be inscrutable, form must be hidden and movements unexpected so that no preparations can be made against them.”

Japanese suit of armor, Edo period, 1615-1868.
mental state of no-mind or Buddhist wisdom on not knowing, thetion without restraint. It is able to move in any conceivable direc-
and fixed; on the contrary, it is most flexible. This ‘Unmoving understanding’ is not rigid to any possibility that occurs here and now. That is the only way it can freely adapt to the other’s movements and react instantly.

The open-minded empty mind is receptive to the immediateness of the response. Like much as hair’s width”

The Zen saying: “There may not be as much as hair’s width” applies here, meaning the immediateness of the response. Like a koan, a Zen riddle, when the student’s answer must be immediate and without deliberation, the warrior’s response must follow his opponent’s attack without a hair’s width difference. The warrior’s empty mind will steer the sword seamlessly and at lightning speed to the event of that moment. In this way, he turns the opponent’s sword against its wielder. It is in this non-duality that according to Zen master Takuan the perfection of swordsman-

“Everything is void: you, the drawn sword and the arm wielding the sword. Even the thought of emptiness no longer

exists. And from this absolute void springs the wonderful unfolding of action.”

A historic connection

Zen scholar D.T. Suzuki points out three reasons why Zen had such attraction to the Japanese warrior class. Firstly, Suzuki writes, Zen is a religion of will, teaching not to look back once a certain path is chosen. According to him, Zen opposes the unstable intellect and follows the path of decisive intuition that is of a lot more use to soldiers. Secondly, the simplicity and self-consciousness of the ascetic Zen discipline lies closer to a warrior’s mentality. Furthermore, Zen supplies the warrior with stoical virtues, because both Zen and the martial arts agree on overcoming the contradiction between life and death.

Moving Zen

These days, the many martial and fighting arts are fortunately no longer used for actual battle, where most of them originated. The spirit of Bushido is expressed in modern eastern martial arts as harmony of body, spirit and surroundings. Although the fighting element remains present, it is not about violence (with the unfortunate exception of a malevolent karate-kick on the street or the competitive element of martial sports).

It is rather particular, though not really surprising when you think about it, that both the zendo, or meditation hall, and the dojo, the martial arts practise area, carry the same name: Place of Enlightenment. After all, both areas are used to engage battle with one’s ego, the self, the I. A difficult battle that demands a lot of effort, discipline and patience, but eventually enables the practitioner to lose his ‘self’ and overcome himself. Am I myself – with my lust, hate and ignorance – not my greatest enemy? Only when the ‘I’, which continuously defines itself by the ‘other’, forgets itself and dissolves, can both truly become one.

“Who aids a ruler with the Path, does not force the world with weapons, for acts of violence find their own retribution – where armies have lain, thistles grow; great wars are followed by years of misery.

Weapons are instruments of disaster, not tools of the enlightened. When their use is inevitable, it is best to be calm and free of greed and not to enjoy victory. He who enjoys victory creates pleasure in killing people. He who creates pleasure in killing people, his will can not be implemented in the world.”

Lao Zi riding an ox, by Zhang Lu, 1464-1538.

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Lao Zi riding an ox, by Zhang Lu, 1464-1538.
art then turns into living art in the spirit of Zen, albeit as moving Zen, moving intently. An expression of this ‘dancing art’ is kata, an exercise in the form of imaginary battle. According to the purists of the martial arts world, kata as pure movement art forms the highest expression of unity of body and mind. Awa, the master who initiates philosopher Eugen Herrigel in the modern classic Zen in the Art of Archery states:

“Because you now express the ceremony as a cult-like dance, your spiritual awakeness achieves its highest power.”

Path of non-violence

It would be wonderful if martial arts were indeed considered and practiced as non-violent exercises to harmonize the spirit and body; if the Art of War were to be read as the book on peace it really is; and if Bushido, the Way of the martial arts, was indeed followed as a compassionate effort for the better of humankind. Of course it is clear that this is not so. All the more apparent from the study Zen at War by Brian Victoria, in which is outlined how outspokenly the Japanese Zen world conformed to the imperial war machine.

Zen master Daiun Harado Sogaku gives voice to this:

“When given the order to march: stomp, stomp, or to shoot: bang, bang. That is how the highest wisdom of enlightenment manifests itself.”

Is the Buddha wisdom of non-thought hereby transformed into negation of individual responsibility, a denial of independent thought?

According to D.T. Suzuki, even though the free, unbound and unprejudiced Zen spirit is only concerned with an immediate experience of the reality of here and now, it would have no trouble conforming itself to an ‘orders are orders’ mentality.

“Zen has neither teachings of its own nor a philosophical system of rigid concepts and logical rules. Its sole purpose is to try to free humankind from the chains of birth and death, by way of an intuitive understanding that belongs only to Zen. That is why it is exceptionally easy to adapt to nearly any moral doctrine or philosophy, as long as it’s intuitive training remains intact.”

When Suzuki furthermore describes Zen as a religion of willpower, possessed with revolutionary fighting spirit, it creates space for a dangerous union with fascism or warmongering nationalism. But are we still addressing Buddhism, a life of compassion towards all living things, springing from the realization that we are all one?

That the paradoxical union of Zen and martial arts should result in a path of non-violence is nicely demonstrated by an anecdote about Bokuden, a swordsman who understood the true meaning of the sword, not as an instrument of death but one of spiritual self-discipline.

One day, Bokuden was crossing the Biwa Lake by manner of rowing boat accompanied by several passengers. Among them, there was a grim looking samurai dressed in full battle gear. Arrogantly he declared himself the best swordsman alive. The other passengers hung at his lips; however, Bokuden ignored him and gazed dreamily ahead. This displeased the samurai intensely who asked him: “You also carry two swords, why do you not speak?” Bokuden calmly replied: “My art is not the same as yours; it exists of not conquering others, but also not to be conquered oneself.”

That really challenged the samurai. “To what school do you belong then?” “My school is called the School of No Sword.” “Why then do you wear a sword?” “The sword reflects the ego-less self, not the killing of others.”

The samurai became enraged and roared: “Do you really dare fight me without a sword?” “Why not?” said Bokuden.

The samurai yelled to the boatman to head for the nearest shore. Bokuden suggested that it would be better to row to a more deserted island so as not to attract a crowd looking for sensation. The samurai agreed and as soon as the boat reached the small island, he drew his sword and jumped off the boat. Unconcerned Bokuden relieved himself of his sword and pretended to get ready to follow the samurai onto the island. All of a sudden, he grabbed the boatman’s oar and shoved the boat forcefully away from the island. As he left the samurai enraged on the island, he said laughing: “See here, my School of No Sword.”

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This article was first published in the Dutch Buddhism Quarterly (Kwartaalblad Boeddhisme nr. 21, 2000). English translation by Meibukan Magazine Editor Matthew Jones.
The Dangers of Static Stretching

Soviet scientist and physician Alexander Bogomoletz wisely said: "Man is as old as his connective tissues". If you rely on tissue elasticity for flexibility, you’ll lose it. You must master the regulation of selective tension in order to gain dynamic strength. Tendons do not need to be maximally stretched to be torn. Tears result from a special combination of sudden stretch and muscular contraction.

- By Scott Sonnon -

Everyone has slipped on ice at some point in his or her life. When you slip on ice your body is thrown off-balance. It reflexively attempts to restabilize the breach of stance integrity. The tissue that you stretch when you slip, say the hamstring or the groin, will contract to the original position. Voilà … Tear! It’s caused by a stretch from one side and a simultaneous contraction on the other. This involuntary event is called the “stretch reflex”: a muscle that is stretched by an external force too far or too fast will contract to oppose the stretch.

Before beginning dynamic strengthening exercises in Circular Strength Training (CST) to develop plasticity, you must first learn to regulate muscular tension (in CST parlance: “Selective Tension”). This is not as difficult as it sounds, but it requires a paradigm shift away from conventional methods. Someone once asked me the following: “CST seems so fluid and supple. Since I am older and not as flexible, I fear that I will not be able to train in your system. Are there exercises to improve my flexibility so that I can begin to train?” Others have said, “I am highly involved in my sport and am concerned about my performance levels. I fear a lack of connective tissue strength. What can I do?”

Debunking the Stretching Myths

The answer is not simple due to the nature of the question. In CST, stretching is not considered a particularly high premium health practice. Stretching has been a buzzword for the past twenty or so years, but rarely has anyone been given the opportunity to question whether increasing flexibility is a virtue for health and longevity. We have seen a significant deterioration in connective tissue strength and pervasive injuries in every sport and at every age level due to the dangerous stretching practices of the conventional fitness industry. There are important myths to debunk. Some of these myths are as follows:

1. Flexibility is the primary characteristic of health and sportive/combative performance. The more flexible you are the better.
2. Flexibility is a form of injury prevention.
3. Injury results from insufficient warm-up to increase flexibility.
4. Injury happens when tissue is stretched maximally.
5. Static stretching is safe and productive. Dynamic Stretching (mobility training and ballistic motion) is unsafe and unproductive.
6. Daily stretching is mandatory for flexibility maintenance.
7. Flexibility requires many years and is the first characteristic to be lost.
8. (The most terrible) Flexibility is gained through elongating the tissues (deformation).

Flexibility vs. Elasticity

Let’s first differentiate between the concepts of flexibility and elasticity. Flexibility is a measurable range of motion in one specific direction. To increase the flexibility of a tissue you must apply a force pulling the tissue in an isolated range of motion until the stress causes a permanent deformation of that tissue, where it will not return to its original state.

Over the years we cause micro trauma to our tissue from activity. The tissue heals, but only after scar tissue has formed. In healing, the scar tissues mends the wound together by pulling and shortening the tissue. Many people, in the conventional understanding of physical culture, have made the assumption that stretching after activity can prevent the muscle from healing at a shorter length. However, should the stretching manage to prevent shortening (which is debatable), the connective tissues stiffens. Tendons and ligaments are composed of collagen (lending tensile strength) and elastin (lending elasticity, obviously). As we age our tissues undergo an irreversible process of decreasing elastin and increasing collagen. Elasticity is a material’s ability to return to its original state following deformation after removal of the deforming load. To increase the elasticity of a tissue you must apply a load to the tissue in a range of motion and remove that load after the initial stiffness ceases (discomfort, not pain), but before the tissue is permanently deformed, so that the tissue returns to its original state. This stress increases the capacity for storage of elastic energy.

Stored Elastic Energy and Viscosity

The ability to generate Stored Elastic Energy (SEE) is proportionate to the tensile strength of the tissue. Tensile Strength is the maximum stress that a material can withstand before it breaks. Ductility (how malleable a substance is) decreases as it reaches its tensile strength failure, and conversely the amount of SEE increases as it reaches its tensile strength failure. This is the concept of Viscosity: the property of an object that demonstrates that a body at rest tends to stay at rest unless acted upon by an outside force. Many tissues of the human body exhibit constricting, congealing, and thickening characteristics when not exposed to outside forces. The
Viscosity of a tissue is its resistance to a force. The greater the viscosity, the greater the force and time required to cause deformation.

To understand this, pull a rubber band in two opposite directions. The more that you pull, the harder it is to pull. For example, if you pull the rubber band one inch (which should produce 40 more units of SEE for a total of 75), the tensile strength of the rubber band has been exceeded. Failure results and it snaps in two. Ultra high degrees of flexibility outside of the natural range of motion of a joint make ‘snapping’ much more likely. ‘Stretching Gurus’ have used this knowledge to make a leap in logic that says, “injuries occur when a muscle is stretched beyond its limit. So prevent injuries by elongating the muscles of the connective tissues”.

This assumption is a physiological falsehood. Tears do not happen because tissues have been maximally stretched (as the stretching pundits would have you believe), but because of the special combination of sudden stretch and contraction called the “stretch reflex”. The stretch reflex happens when tissue that is stretched by an external force too far or too fast contracts to oppose the stretch. When a stretch from one side happens simultaneous with a contraction on the other - you have a tear. We have seen this very frequently in the dance and fitness industries, and in the recent craze involving the pollution of yoga (where Hatha yoga is erroneously associated with static stretching).

Viscoelasticity: Flexibility is Speed Specific

Another erroneous belief states that, if you maintain a certain pull length on the rubber band for an extended time (say at 35 units), the rubber band will begin to deform permanently and as a result lose SEE as it loses its degree of elasticity. This region of training is known as Viscoelasticity, having a combination of viscosity and elasticity. Viscoelastic materials have time-dependent mechanical properties, being sensitive to the duration of the force application. Such materials will continue to deform over a finite length of time even if the load remains constant, until a state of equilibrium is reached (also known as “creep effect”).

High temperatures increase the rate of creep and low temperatures decrease it. For the most effective use of this property the material to be deformed should be warmed, and then have a sufficient load applied over a long period of time. Different tissues respond differently to various rates of loading. When loaded rapidly they exhibit greater resistance to deformation than if they are loaded slowly.

This is why dynamic flexibility cannot be gained through static stretches. Flexibility is speed specific. The “stretch reflex” engages whenever a muscle is stretched suddenly or dramatically, or both. This mechanism is controlled by the muscle spindles, which are two special receptors...
that activate the stretch reflex. One of these is sensitive to stretch magnitude and the other to speed and magnitude. The prevalent static stretch may or may not reset the first receptor, but it is completely ineffective for the second receptor. As a result, flexibility is speed specific.

Health Risks of Static Stretching
The usual practice of the fitness industry is to increase flexibility through static stretching. This is a serious health danger. As we have seen, with age the collagen/elastin ratio changes in favor of collagen. As we grow older and the connective tissue is more likely to snap because of the decreased integrity of tissue elasticity. In our youth the ability to drop into a stretch is more likely to increase integrity of tissue elasticity.

As we grow older the connective tissue elasticity is less to do with longevity. As we grow older we realize that it is not how far in a particular direction we can move but how strong our tissues are, how quickly they resolve deviations in movement and afford us mobile security.

As a result, the first training emphasis in the CST System is: To be flexible in motion (“real world flexibility”) you must coordinate range of mobility, eventually at your activity’s velocity.

Short Range Stiffness
Most people tend to feel ‘better’ when they go through a stretching routine. They tend to feel loose and more relaxed. This is healthy, but it should be properly understood. Physiologically, when inactive we experience Short Range Stiffness: a mechanical property of the muscle tissue whereby the stiffness is high for the first few millimeters of a stretch. After surpassing this initial short resistance there is a substantial reduction in the stiffness of the tissue. This is a temporary physiological phenomenon, not a permanent one. We should concentrate on overcoming SRS, but should not proceed to deformation of the tissue. Static stretching is not a means for permanently remaining flexible. Attempting to alter the mechanical properties of our tissues may work when we are children, but it does not work in developed adults. The goal of allowing the organism to be permanently flexible is met through the regulation of muscular tension to govern the stretch reflex.

Plasticity Changes
Plasticity is at the far end of the spectrum from elasticity. It is a quality of a connective tissue, such as a ligament or a tendon. When subjected to ballistic, prolonged, or sudden forces, that exceed the elastic limits of the tissue, the tissue does not return to its original state after the deforming load is removed. The “Anatomical Plastic Region” (APR) of connective tissue is found between 6-10% of the ligament or tendon’s resting length, and is at the very wall of failure (to the maximum tissue tensile strength).

From Plasticity we learn that some tissues are less injury prone when stressed rapidly. For instance, ligaments are composed of wavy collagen fibers. Uncoiled, the fibers become taught and susceptible to injury. If taken into the APR, the ligament tears. Whereas slow loading uncoils through taking the slack out of the fibers, quick loading does not allow sufficient time to enter the APR.

The properties of cartilage are equally less injury-prone when quickly loaded. Cartilage decreases the stress in a joint by decreasing the friction coefficient between bones, and through distributing load over the surface of the joint complex. Cartilage is composed of 20-40% collagen and 60-80% water. Cartilage behaves with the properties of water in a sponge. When it is compressed it decreases the protection between bones. However, with rapid loading the fluid does not have sufficient time to be squeezed out and shock absorption is maximal.

Discomfort is productive - pain is unproductive. This is completely subjective, and so there must be a dialogue/feedback between you and your CST Instructor, or at the very least between you and your journal/log.

We do not stretch in isolation for its own sake. We do not stretch in isolation (since isolation is the biggest myth!) to induce permanent deformation of the tissue with the goal of increasing flexibility. To begin increasing the plasticity of the body, we stretch locally until Short Range Stiffness is removed. This is a very short and insignificant aspect of preparation. We then move to engage the organism through a complete range of motion.

There are simple biomechanics involving one joint matrix (such as large arm circles through the 135 degree range of motion), and there are complex ranges of motion comprising multi-joint matrixes that require lengthy text to describe (and must be modeled and then experienced kinesthetically). These complex biomechanics are the crux and cornerstone of CST. All of this boils down to the fact that the primary characteristic of maximal flexibility lies in the regulation of the stretch reflex through sensitivity to muscular tension, and in the cultivation of plasticity and viscoelasticity of tissues through Prasara Yoga™ and Body-Flow Biomechanical Exercise™.
History of Northern Shaolin, Part 2
From the Nationalists to the present day

After the Boxer Rebellion, the last battle the Temple fought was against Chiang Kai-Shek's Northern expeditionary nationalist forces. The nationalist forces were reportedly so angry that the famed Shaolin would resist them, that, in 1928, they burned the temple down. Times were changing ahead of the Temple. In this second and final part of the History of Northern Shaolin, Ravignat continues the history of the Temple right after the Nationalist's rise to power and reveals the modern developments of Northern Shaolin. 'An interesting mix of very positive and negative events'.

- By Mathieu G. Ravignat -

The Nationalists
Fortunately, with the nationalist forces came a renewed interest in these varied fighting arts, which were considered, for the first time, as a national treasure. The term Wu Shu (martial art), used for centuries, was replaced by the term Kuo Shu (national arts) to reflect the new national fervor and unity of China. National and provincial martial arts organizations were finally organized, such as: The Nanking Central Institute of National Boxing and Physical Culture set up in Sichuan province; The Chinese Boxing Association, at Chung-king; and the Kiangsu Province Boxing Association, headed by the great Hsing-I, Pakua, and Tai Chi master, Sun Lu T'ang. In 1929, the National Government issued a circular ordering all administrative organs, district, village, municipal, and provincial levels to set up Kuo Shu Institutes. This period also saw many famous schools created, like the Ching Wu Athletic Association, founded by the great Huo Yuan-Chia (1862-1910), a Mi Tsung-I (lost track) master, in 1909.

The great obstacle to open and sincere sharing of the traditional Chinese martial arts, is the Taiwanese communist government, along with the state-sanctioned Wu Shu bodies.”

The Nanking Institute proposed, for the first time, to bring masters together to consolidate the old Wu Shu styles. However, it must be remembered that this was a governmental attempt at standardization and institutionalization. The masters who answered this call included Ku Yu Cheong (Northern Shaolin), Won Lai Shen (Pa Gua Division), Fu Chan-Song (Li Far Spear division), Wong Shao Chu and Li Shan Wu (Tam T’ui). These men were known as the Five Northern Tigers. Other Masters also influenced the institute, including Huo Yuan Chia (Mi Tsung-I Division), Geeng Dar Hai (Ta Chuan Division), Don Ich Gieh (Yang Style Tai Chi Division), and Shun Yu Fon (Northern Lo Han Division). These Five Northern Tigers were sent to Canton to create a southern Central Kuo Shu Association affiliated with the capitals in Nanking. The Masters invited were Lin I- Tan (Mou Cah Chuan), Tan San (Choy Lay Fut Division), Lin Yaw Kai (Dragon Style Division), Chang I Chuan (White Eyebrow division), Lin Shih-Zon (Hung Gar Division), and Wu Gsao-Jon (White Crane Division). At this newly consolidated Central Kuo Shu Association, Northern and Southern Styles were first taught together, and some were reportedly blended (though this is more of an effect of the Ching Wu school than the institute), but most styles today seemed to have remained independent.

The Communists
The Invasion of Japan, in 1937, and the outbreak of the Sino Japanese and Second world wars interrupted this formalization. After the war, the proliferation and knowledge of these styles to the West was aided by the British presence and immigration of Chinese from Hong Kong to the West. Our understanding of the Chinese martial arts was greatly influenced by the access to information that the British presence permitted. This is why it is still safe to say that the most popular traditional Kung Fu styles in the West today are those originally taught in Hong Kong.

To the contrary, on the mainland the Chinese martial arts became a mystery after the communist revolution and the defeat of Japan in 1949. The Cultural Revolution in 1966, sparked by Mao Tse Tung’s increasing loss of power over the Communist Party, was also quite a blow to the proliferation of traditional Chinese martial arts.

Fortunately, many masters had moved along with the retreating nationalist forces, escaping the Communist revolution to Taiwan. Contact with the Chinese martial arts there was, though difficult, still possible. Robert W. Smith’s groundbreaking work, Chinese Boxing: Masters and Methods (1974) opened the West to the unfathomable resources of the Taiwanese martial arts.
Fortunately, today, Taiwan and the increasingly Western orientated mainland, are slowly sharing their secrets with the West. With this opening, some of the traditions have a better chance of surviving. Even some traditional masters have been able to teach their martial arts to foreigners, as visits by foreigners to the mainland to learn from authentic masters are made with increasing frequency. However, the great obstacle to this open and sincere sharing of the traditional Chinese martial arts, including those of authentic Shaolin origin, is the communist government, along with the state-sanctioned Wu Shu bodies. Following the revolution and the turmoil of the Sino Japanese War, the nationalist Central Kuo Shu Institute disbanded in 1948. After the successful Communist revolution, the establishment of the People’s Republic of China was declared. In 1951, under the slogan that “comrades should not fight comrades”, the All China Sports Federation convened a meeting to discuss the future of Wu Shu. In an overzealous attempt in 1954 to modernize traditional Chinese Wu Shu, this national body started to change Wu Shu standards and practice on the mainland forever. Because there was no agreement amongst various masters, standardization became a difficult affair. For example, principles like self-defense applications, six harmonies, internal strength, tzu-jan, wu wei, yin and yang, and so forth were not sufficiently considered. More modern and foreign western athletic views and operatic aesthetic concerns were included as standards. Gymnastic standards began to dominate martial arts practice.

This, in turn, negatively influenced the development of traditional systems in China. In June of 1957, the first of the new competitions were held. The First National Wu Shu Games followed the National Wu Shu exhibitions and competitions in September 1958. The rules applied at these games promoted the development and classification of newly arranged Chuan Shu (empty-handed forms and sets), Wu Shu (weapon forms and sets), and Chang Chuan (Long Fist) routines. Chuan, i.e., not traditional forms arranged or selected by the athletes themselves became the main routine of competitions. The traditional routines were pushed aside or forgotten by a new generation of “athletes”. The standard in 1959 became “great the difficulty, high the quality and smart the image.”

Whatever that means is as good as anybody’s guess, but it certainly does not reflect the traditional standards that would probably be something like, “great the efficacy, high the ability and smart the practitioner.”

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By 1960, Professor Kang Gewu of the Chinese Wushu Research Institute, a communist government body, critically explained in his Spring Autumn of the Chinese Martial Arts 5000 years (1995), that the aim of these competitions, and the national programs that supported them, became “[to] jump high and land stably... Elevation in jumps, degree of difficulty and aesthetics of posture had become the goal of Wu Shu training” (Gewu, 1995, p.98). The traditional understanding of good, solid Kung Fu was partially if not totally laid aside.

In 1966, the Cultural Revolution exploded, and “old culture, old customs and old habits” were persecuted under a narrow, determinist, and historicist understanding of Marxism. China had to modernize in its head and regardless of the consequences, this was the new goal. Because of this, some traditional illustrated records, books, weapons, and other materials were destroyed. Senior traditional Wu Shu specialists were also physically hurt or badly treated - some were reportedly killed and exiled.

In 1973, the scoring at competitions developed using the decimal system. Additional points of 0.1 to 0.4 for the faultless execution of a routine were appointed, as well as an additional 0.3 for the creation of difficult movements. These so-called difficult techniques are those of jumping, tumbling and positions of balance. Gradually, from this point on, techniques with offensive and defensive maneuvers were replaced with more gymnastic maneuvers. Wu Shu, on the mainland, was institutionally becoming a dance, and the remaining free fighting aspect was slowly evolving into a form of kicking (San Shou).

This ‘sportification’ of the traditional martial arts is an international phenomenon, and happened in almost every country, including Japan and Korea. China, due to various historical conditions, was one of the last to do it. Whether or not the Nationalist Government would have brought about the same reforms to the martial arts as the Communists is a question for pure, historical speculation. However, we do know that the Nationalist government made an attempt at modernization and standardization from 1912 to 1949. Because of various difficulties in the maintenance of power, it could not be done in a systematic way. What result this would have given is also historical speculation. However, we do know that there was a strong tendency to emulate the West in nationalist policies, and that the government organized a visit to various sports facilities in the West. The delegates were reportedly very impressed and wanted to change things in China based on what they saw in the West. We also know that for a long time, and until recently, Tae Kwon Do was taught to the Taiwanese military. As in this case, it generally seems that whenever a government gets its hands on a tradition, the tradition loses both its diverseness and its flavor. However, in Taiwan, there was no Cultural Revolution, and though a uni-party system...
did dominate there until recently, at least the Masters were free to teach and practice.

Advantages of Government Reform
Despite these occurrences, the government reforms to the martial arts on the mainland and Taiwan are not completely negative. A lot of research on the mainland, including video surveys and books, has been dedicated to Wu Shu. In Shangtung province alone, the survey revealed over 400 different Wu Shu styles. In mainland China, a national museum has been set up, and many antiques have been collected in all areas, including books, charts, and weapons. It would also seem that in the last few years, the Taiwanese military and police force have started practicing a synthesized form of Chinese Wu Shu called Chung I Chuan, which is supposed to combine modern physical exercise, physiology, and sports medicine while maintaining the goal of self-defense. Fortunately for us, traditionally minded and forward-looking masters have continued to practice and teach their arts and their principles to a new, though admittedly small, generation. Contrary to some people’s belief, traditional Wu Shu has not completely died in China. But, according to some great masters, they are in irreparable shape on the mainland and some styles will unfortunately die with this generation.

Effects of the Reform in the West
The West has not been isolated to the reforming phenomenon, and in the last couple of decades, an increasing amount of Contemporary Wu Shu has been introduced to Canada and the US. This has included the appearance of real young Wu Shu athletes of various regions of China, (usually shaved members of a provincial or even regional Wu Shu team) and fake Buddhist monks. Unfortunately, the phenomenon of ‘sportification’ is likely to happen to the Chinese Martial arts in the Americas as it has to karate and other arts. As the old guard retreats mainly of Hong Kong or Taiwanese origin, the existing, traditional associations are increasingly bending to the will of this new phenomenon. Perhaps this is the inevitable march of history.

The Shaolin Temple and Style Today
In the midst of all this confusion and politics in Wu Shu, the government had the brilliant idea of rebuilding and reopening the Shaolin Temple, where it had lain in disrepair since 1927. For this, they created the Management Committee of the Shaolin Temple. In 1985, the government and its committee then proceeded to name a new Abbot of the Temple called Yongxin. At 25, he is probably the youngest head Abbot ever to be appointed at the Shaolin temple. He replaced an older Abbot named Xingzheng who reportedly taught him the Shaolin arts and scriptures.

Today, due to government efforts, the Temple is fortunately open to all who want to see it. Unfortunately, it is more of a tourist site than anything else, and its feel is more akin to Las Vegas than a Buddhist monastery."

"Today, due to government efforts, the Shaolin Temple is fortunately open to all who want to see it. Unfortunately, it is more of a tourist site than anything else, and its feel is more akin to Las Vegas than a Buddhist monastery."

"Be forewarned that if you are looking for a piece of truth of the authentic Temple style, there is none. It is impossible to recreate the original Shaolin system, and the monks today are simply practicing a Shaolin variant."

The basic curriculum taught includes state sanctioned external basics, which reportedly have their basis in Cha Chuan (a predominantly northern Muslim style with possible Shaolin roots), but which have been greatly exaggerated and modified, mostly by widening the stances. The sets practiced are from backgrounds that are more traditional and come from the secularized Hong Quan (known as the red fist style) tradition (this is not to be confused with Hung Gar, which is a Southern combined Shaolin system). Therefore, their curriculum is very external and northern in flavor, and seems, at first glance, to just be a stronger form of Wu Shu, i.e., they seem to simply use more muscular strength, though their stances do seem narrower.
Be forewarned that if you are looking for the piece of truth of the authentic Temple style, there is none. It is simply impossible to recreate the original Shaolin system, and the Monks today are simply practicing a Shaolin variant. However, the Hong style is considered by many to be the closest to the original Shaolin system, though why this is so is often unclear - it is probably because it was one of the only styles left documented at the Shaolin Temple. Some say that style encompassed only the basic sets taught at the temple, the advanced sets having been lost. Furthermore, the reasons why the government chose this particular style is, like everything else surrounding the rebirth of the Temple, intentionally shrouded.

What is clear, however, is that the committee officials, mostly ex-Contemporary Wu Shu coaches, compiled various red fists, chi-kung and weapons sets, and created an “authentic” Shaolin system. This style is taught at the official Shaolin Wu Shu Guan near the grounds of the temple. The government is now in the business of selling this authentic style to the West with shaved heads, robes, beads and all, calling on the West’s taste for exoticisms. In my opinion, the sets they learn have strong, traditional Kung Fu roots. The new Shaolin empty handed curriculum includes: Xiaohongquan (small red fist), Dahongquan (big red fist), Zhaohongquan (middle red fist), Laohongquan (old red fist), Fenhoungquan (pink fist), Taizuhongquan (first emperor fist), Erlu-hongquan (second form red fist), Guangxihongquan (Guangxi province red fist), and Changshahongquan (long and short red fist).

Nevertheless, it continues to be hard to know where they found these sets and who taught them to the new monks. This nebulosity is not about to change because martial arts history, in general, is unclear, oral and undocumented. Furthermore, with the new openness and trade initiatives with the West, Shaolin has become a commodity, and the Chinese government it is not ready to compromise Western thinker’s thirst for the system’s perceived authenticity. This is quite unfortunate because if these monks were more forthcoming with their sources and their rationale, many of us might be more confident and willing to learn from them. In addition, more traditional masters would be more willing to respect them and their art and share their knowledge with them. Without this, it will be very difficult for the Shaolin Temple and its system to regain its former glory.

Recently some of these state sanctioned monks have moved or defected to the USA and various European countries. They are both Buddhist missionaries (though their specific vows and their level of Buddhist knowledge remains to be revealed) and businessmen. Ven. Shi Guolin is in charge of the USA branch. Other monks, like Shi Dai Yang, have defected, and though being good Contemporary Wu Shu athletes, they do not have the support of the Shaolin temple in their teaching activities. Many of these defectors have sought the teaching of more traditional Wu Shu masters who have been in the US for decades, in turn greatly improving their traditional skills and teaching. Others have stopped teaching altogether, and are probably very happy to enjoy their new Western lives. Briefly, this seems to be the state of the Shaolin Temple today, an interesting mix of very positive and negative events.

Suggested reading
• Comprehensive Asian Fighting Arts. Robert W. Smith, Don F. Draeger
• Shaolin Long Fist Kung Fu. Dr. Yang Jwing Ming
• Spring and Autumn of the Chinese Martial Arts. Kang Gewu
• www.russbo.com/Shaolin_Temple.htm

In the next issue, Meibukan Magazine will publish a follow-up article by Ravignat on Ku Yu Cheong’s Northern Shaolin. If you would like more information, please visit http://www.stonelionkungfu.com/