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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.

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

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

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Fear and breathing

Our life starts with a first shout when we enter the world from mother’s womb and when we leave our earthly environment, a last sigh indicates our farewell. Between birth and death, we live in a world in which our breathing is always present.

Breathing has a biologically vital function where the main intention is the distribution of oxygen and the disposal of carbon dioxide, which determines the rhythm of our breathing.

During the practice of our martial arts we adjust our breathing in conformity with our body movement. Especially in our solo forms or kata, we know in advance which movement we should make and a well-considered decision prepares us for the correct supervision of the breathing.

In these solo forms, we ourselves stipulate the moment and the intention with which a fictitious attack descends upon us and in what manner we will answer to this. This is an extremely controlled event where fear impulses play no role. However, during partner forms, in particular those that involve serious security dangers, one can frequently make less well-considered decisions. This because the partner decides not only the initiation of attack but also its manifestation in intensity and form.

The fear factor for injury during partner exercises is acutely present and is reflected in slight to moderate to extreme fear responses that psychologically affect ones breathing. The arisen breathing directly affects the way we move our skeleton with our muscles with all possible implications towards our performance handling attacks.

Because of the practical impossibilities and the consequences for daily life, the average martial artist cannot practice the way the early gladiators did or professionals of elite entities of the army nowadays do. Still, it is very important to incorporate fear factors into our training that provide us with experience. Many of the martial arts training nowadays is much based on circumstances that do not teach us to deal with fear. My criticism on contemporary modern karate, which in my opinion focuses too much on form, both in kata but also kumite, is that the physical confrontations in which fear (and emotion) play a real role, have a secondary place or no place at all. Martial arts should represent a deeper reflection of our being where our biggest enemy within called fear, is confronted and experienced through practice. It is not the breathing we must control; it is the psychological factors which we must master so that our breathing can continue its natural path.

Lex Opdam
Editor in chief

Ku Yu Cheung and his Northern Shaolin System

Most involved in the Chinese martial arts, consider the Nationalist Republic on mainland China (roughly the first three decades of the 20th century) one of the Golden Ages of the Chinese fighting traditions. But surprisingly, many in the west know little about the actual people who were involved in making it such an honored period for Chinese martial arts research and development. This article attempts to fill this void for Ku Yu Cheung (Mandarin Gu Ru Zhang) of the Northern Shaolin (Beishaolin quan Men) system, who Kang Gewu, a famous Chinese historian, identifies as “a dominant figure in the history of external martial arts of this period”, while at the same time exploring the origins and characteristics of his style.

- By Mathieu Ravignat -

Part I: Biography: Ku Yu Cheung’s Early Years

Ku Yu Cheung’s father, Ku Lei Chi (Gu Lizihi), was a merchant and businessman who was originally from Founing, in Chiangsi province, but decided to settle near Nanjing. Ku Lei Chi owned a bodyguard escort service called “Ku Lei Chi’s Bodyguard Service” which, at its peak, included up to two hundred men in its service. The bodyguards specifically served as protection to caravans on the road from villages and cities in Chiangsi to Nanjing (Nanking).

At the time, much banditry plagued China and escorts had to be skilled in the martial arts. Ku Lei Chi, who, as well as owning it, was a bodyguard himself, was no exception. He was a practitioner of Tan T’ui (Ten Spring Leg Method), a form of Kung Fu most popular amongst China’s Hui, or Muslim, minority. Reportedly, he was also skilled in Shaolin quan and shared its lineage.

Ku Lei Chi’s master, Yin Kai Yun, was an expert of Cha Chuan and Tan T’ui, and they apparently met while Ku Lei Chi worked in the bodyguard service. According to oral tradition, that meeting was in exceptional circumstances. On one of Ku Lei Chi’s expeditions, a group of bandits attacked the caravan he was protecting. Yin Kai Yun, who luckily was near the scene, came to Ku Lei Chi’s help. Together they reportedly fought off the bandit horde, where, during the battle, Yin Kai Yun saved Ku Lei Chi’s life and they were able to protect the goods that were in the caravan.

The battle forged a life-long friendship and partnership, which also explains the origin of Ku Lei Chi’s Kung Fu system, who Kang Gewu, a famous Chinese historian, identifies as “a dominant figure in the history of external martial arts of this period”, while at the same time exploring the origins and characteristics of his style.

- By Mathieu Ravignat -
nued to practice his father’s martial arts alone for five years and at the age of twelve was already showing great promise. But at the age of sixteen, Ku Yu Cheung finally left his friend Pak Chi Cheung, to make the trip north to Shantung and find and study with Yin Kai Wun.

Arriving at a place called Yin Gart, about 48 kilometers north of Feicheng in Guangdong province, Ku Yu Cheung finally found Yin Kai Wun teaching a group of students in his yard. After having read his letter of introduction, the master reportedly accepted him immediately as his disciple, a rare thing in such a volatile time in Chinese history. Oral tradition states that Ku Yu Cheung would have studied with this master for eleven years, learning various Shaolin skills including: the Ten Shaolin Sets (See ‘The Anatomy of a Style’), Shaolin weapons, the Small Golden Bell Qigong (Jin Zhong Zhao Qigong) and the famous Iron Palm (Tie Sha Zhang). In turn, these skills made him famous in all of China. At this point, the Chinese republic had been in existence for ten years and Ku Yu Cheung was between 26 and 27 years old. Unfortunately, the news of his mother’s untimely death brought him back to Nanjing and interrupted any further training. After his mothers death Ku Yu Cheung remained in Nanjing looking for work.

In 1928, Ku Yu Cheung became famous by placing himself in the top ten at the National government organized martial arts competition. This competition was, by all accounts, the largest and most prestigious ever witnessed in the history of China at that time. It was also at this time that the central Guo Shu (Kuo Shu) institute was founded, and Ku Yu Cheung was invited to serve as one of its martial arts instructors. This organization brought together what were arguably the greatest martial artists of their day from all over China. These included the well known Five Tigers of Northern China: Won Lai Shen (Pa Gua Division), Fu Chan-Song (Li Far Spear division), Wong Shao Chu and Li Shan Wu (Tan T’ui) and of course Ku Yu Cheung. The institute helped to standardize a national curriculum. It is at this time that certain forms of Tan T’ui, Lian Bu quan (Ling Po Kune) and Gong Li quan (Kung Li Kune) were chosen and/or compiled based on traditional versions to serve as the national basics of external martial arts practice. Ku Yu Cheung more than likely was responsible for Lian Bu quan, a form that would then be taught as a basic empty handed fighting form for the nationalist military.

A year later, these five masters went to Guandong (Kwantung) province to assist the creation of a second Guo Shu Institute in Guangzhou (Kwangchou). There they were also joined in their endeavors by the Five Southern Tigers. But Ku Yu Cheung’s destiny would lead him to the republican capital of Nanjing. It is interesting to note here that when he did leave his provincial school in Guangzhou (Kwangchou), he left it to Lau Kam Taung (Liu Ching Tang), a famous Choy Lay Fut master.

Exchanges with Peers

No doubt, it is in this highly charged political environment with its new ideas and styles that Ku Yu Cheung’s knowledge and skills began to expand. This must have been a very exciting time for this young teacher with exceptional skill. At this time, Ku Yu Cheung would have been 34 years old. Young indeed for a martial arts master at that time, younger still to be named a National Instructor. Although Ku Yu Cheung was one of the junior masters, he was allowed to study other styles with the senior masters. This included the internal styles of Hsing-I, Pa Kua and Tai Chi with Sun Lu Tang. He also had important exchanges with Tan San, one of the Five Southern Tigers of the Choy Lay Fut style. In fact, they reportedly had a bout of which no one is certain of the true victor. What is certain, though, is that the Choy Lay Fut lineage of Tan San incorporated Northern Shaolin sets in its curriculum and vice versa.

Ku Yu Cheung also learnt Wutang sword style from Li Jinglin, and more Cha quan with Yu Zhensheng. He also reportedly shared teaching responsibilities at the Zhongyang Association with a famous Muslim pugilist called Wang Ziping (1881-1973), who was an expert in Tan Tui and Cha quan. It is very possible that they shared much knowledge, especially on how to teach a basic curriculum. This curriculum included using the Ten Tui set (which is not originally a Shaolin set) as a beginning strengthening set. This fact contradicts the claims that this method of teaching beginners, would come from the Ching Woo School. This fact also hints to another possible origin of Northern Shaolin’s Shi Lu Tan Tui (Ten Line Spring Leg method), at the same time explaining the similarities between the Cha quan and Northern Shaolin sets. Though oral tradition continues to insist that he learnt the Ten Line ‘Tan Tui uniquely from
“This must have been a very exciting time for this young teacher with exceptional skill. At this time, Ku Yu Cheung was 34 years old. Young indeed for a martial arts master at that time, younger still to be named a National Instructor.”

his father. These sets may have been similar before Wan Zi Ping and Ku Yu Cheung’s friendship.

However, it is also interesting to note that like Northern Shaolin most styles of Cha quan, including the one taught by Wang Zi Ping, also have Ten Core sets. In turn, many of these sets share the same name as the Northern Shaolin sets, for example, Cha quan’s Plum Flower is found as Moi Fa, Continuous Attack is found in Northern Shaolin as Lien Wa, and finally Cha quan’s Linked Together is found as Ling Po Kune. In turn, many of these sets share the same name as the Northern Shaolin sets, for example, Cha quan’s Plum Flower is found as Moi Fa, Continuous Attack is found in Northern Shaolin as Lien Wa, and finally Cha quan’s Linked Together is found as Ling Po Kune.

Cha quan, much like Northern Shaolin, is a Northern Fist, however, it originated in the Ming Dynasty and was compiled by Jamil, a Chinese Muslim. The name of the style is in turn derived from his Chinese name “Cha-mi-l”. Finally it is also interesting to note that the Northern Shaolin sets that are preserved in the Choy Lay Fut branches of T’an San are preformed with a horizontal fist like in Cha quan, but that the forms, taught to Yim Sheung-Mo, a disciple of Ku Yu Cheung, are performed with a standing fist much like Beng quan (wood) of Hsing-I quan, but not as bent at the elbow.

In the end Ku Yu Cheung became a master of seven different Kung Fu styles including: Bei Shaolin taught to him by Yin Kai Wun, Cha quan, taught to him by his father and Zhensheng, Hsing-I and Bagua, taught to him by Sun Lu Tang, as well as Tai Chi, Baji and Wudang Sword taught to him by Li Jinglin.

Two famous Iron Palm stories about Ku Yu Cheung:

The Stack
The most famous demonstration of Ku Yu Cheung’s abilities was his 12 (and one large stone at the base) brick breaking Iron Palm feat. Unlike many demonstrations today, the bricks were not separated and they were all clearly broken. Furthermore, it is clear by the photograph that they were not unbaked bricks, which stay a red color, but were clearly whitened by hardening.

The break is also done on the length of the bricks making the feat even more difficult. This demonstration reportedly occurred while he was visiting Huo Yuan-Chia, the famous founder of the Chin Woo School and master of Mizhong quan (Lost Track style). Arriving as a visiting instructor, he was asked by Huo Yuan-Chia to demonstrate his Iron Palm, so that they could take a picture for posterity’s sake. Ku Yu Cheung reportedly refused, but Hua insisted. Not wanting to seem obstinate or to lose face, Huo Yuan-Chia finally convinced him that he had a responsibility to show for the record that this was not an exaggerated feat.

To this day, many claim that it was a hoax. But Wong Kiew Kit, martial arts master and writer of The Art of Shaolin Kung Fu, reports that a skeptical onlooker, believing that the feat he saw was impossible, replaced the bricks for the next day’s demonstration with his own. Figuring that the bricks used the first time were fakes and attempting to put Ku Yu Cheung to shame, this jealous onlooker (who Wong Kiew Kit does not identify) anticipated his failure the next day. However, Ku Yu Cheung simply piled the new bricks together and, as usual, slapped the top of the bricks, and to the amazement of the onlooker, smashed the entire stack. Though probably more fact than fiction, this second demonstration clearly showed how people fundamentally believed that Ku Yu Cheung was able to penetrate his Qi through matter itself with his Yi (will). Many also claim that it is because Ku Yu Cheung is beside the stack of bricks and not in front or behind them that this makes the feat impossible. The break down the middle could only be made if Ku Yu Cheung was in front or behind. However, it must be remembered that there is actually a before picture, rarely seen, which clearly shows the beginning of the break. If this is not proof enough, the break itself was witnessed by a high level and respected Kung Fu teacher and a number of his students. Lastly, it must also be remembered that this was not the first nor the last time he had performed this feat.

Ku Yu Cheung showing traditional hard Qigong feats.
The Horse
Other than supporting Model T fords on his stomach and various traditional hard Qigong feats, like smashing bricks on his head and bending iron bars, Ku Yu Cheung also supposedly demonstrated his Iron Palm ability by killing a horse with a single slap. In 1931 (some say 1928), a Russian circus was traveling to all the major sites of China and had arrived in Guangzhou (Kwangchou) where Ku Yu Cheung was teaching. There the Russian circus man had issued a challenge and taunted the Chinese spectators that his horse could beat any Chinese martial artist with a single kick. A very ill tempered horse, which kicked wildly when presented to a crowd, was brought out. Again, the Russian circus man dared that no Chinese was strong enough to tame the horse. Many martial artists tried but all were trampled or kicked into submission. It is at this time that Ku Yu Cheung, a proud nationalist and sick of the humiliation, calmly stepped up and slapped the horse on the back. It is reported that some-time afterwards the horse died. Furthermore, it was discovered according to Lau Fat Mang of the Eagle Claw Style (Ying Jiao quan) by an autopsy conducted by Russian doctors, that all of the horse’s internal organs had split and its backbone was bruised. Amazingly, it had no sign of external injury.

But another version, no less fantastic, of this story exists. This one told by Lai Hung, a Tan San Choy Lay Fut and Northern Shaolin master teaching in the US. It is believed that the above incident didn’t happen but that Ku Yu Cheung went and visited the horse after the humiliating performance. The Russian recognized Ku Yu Cheung as a famous martial arts master and apologized to him for having issued the challenge. However, reportedly Ku Yu Cheung insisted to see the horse. He was then led to the animal. Ku Yu Cheung then proceeded to pet the horse, turned to its master, and complimented him on its shiny coat. Ku Yu Cheung then simply left, after which the horse died of internal injuries. In any case the result was the same, either by slap or mere touch by petting, contact with Ku Yu Cheung’s palm resulted in a certain and terrible death to the horse and a great embarrassment for the taunting foreigners.

Death and Progeny
Named a general in the nationalist military, Ku Yu Cheung fought the bloody struggle of the Sino-Japanese War and survived such atrocities as the rape of Nanjing to retire from military service to teach Kung Fu in the new capital Nanjing. He continued his study of the internal arts, such as Sun Style Tai Chi with Sun Lu Tang and died in what was believed to be his mid-sixties. Unfortunately, he was executed by the communist revolution in 1952. But he was survived by such notable masters as Yim Sheung Mo (Yang Shang Wu), a Hung Gar master who, after a bout with Ku Yu Cheung, decided to abandon Hung Gar and became Ku Yu Cheung’s disciple. Yim Sheung Mo moved to Hong Kong early in 1952 at the request of Ku Yu Cheung.

Beijing Shool quan Men Lineage*

Bodhidharma
Emperor Zhao Kuang Yin??
Zhao Yuan Heshang/Chiu Jin
(1630, Head Abbot of Shaolin and first to be given and to give permission to teach non monks)
Gan Fengchi /Kan Fon Hsi
Wan Bangcai /Man Pon Choi
Yan Degong /Yin Ta Kung
Yan Sanshen /Yin San Fook
Yin Jin Yun /Yin Kai Yun
(Student of Sanshen)
Yan Jin Yun /Yin Kai Wun
(Student of Sanshen)
Gu Ru Zhang /Ku Yu Cheung
(1894-1952)
Yan Shangwu /Yim Sheung Mo
(1882-1971)
Chen Guo Wei /Chan Kowk Wai
(1936-Present)
Dou Wanchun
(1959-Present)

*Note that Mandarin names are listed first.
who believed it to be increasingly dangerous for him on the mainland. Also, at this time another student, Lun Zhi Cheung (Long Zi Zhang), moved to Hong Kong, became a Catholic and opened a school, teaching many children for free. On the mainland in the city of Guangzhou in the region of Guangdong, his last surviving disciple, Lai Ganqin, one of his youngest disciples, has retired from teaching. His students are still teaching and recently (1998) they founded the Bei Shaolin Martial Arts association. Ku Yu Cheung’s reach was truly international. Many of his grandchildren (in the Kung Fu sense) are teaching in South America, Spain, Uruguay, United States, and elsewhere. The inheritor and standard-bearer of the style from Yang Shang Mo is Grand Master Chan Kowk Wai, who began his training with Yang Shang Mo early in 1952. He currently teaches at Academia Sino-Brasiler De Kung Fu in Sao Paolo Brazil and is the founder of the Chan Kowk Wai International Association. Furthermore, Ku Yu Cheung’s influence is indisputable and he remains an inspiration to all martial artists. The famous photograph of the twelve brick-breaking feat also remains as a reminder to all of the high level of the internal skill achievable by a human being in the traditional Chinese martial arts.

Hints on the Personality of Ku Yu Cheung
On all accounts, Ku Yu Cheung was a complete classical man and yet looked forward to the future of his nation. Thanks to his father’s efforts, he enjoyed a good education and social connections unlike most of his Chinese brethren. However, after his father’s death Ku Yu Cheung was poor for most of his life and no doubt, like most Nationalists, dreamed of a better future for his people. Like many of his brethren, he witnessed the early death of his father at a young age, an event which must have also affected him greatly. Perhaps this is at the origin of his reported openness with his teachings. Perhaps he wished to be a father to those who had none. According to Lai Ganqin, there was no distinction between indoor and outdoor students, nor did Ku Yu Cheung have disciples in the traditional sense of the word and was willing to teach any one of good heart and mind. However, this was only the case after the war. Before the war, he reportedly taught very few students. No doubt, as a nationalist, he must have shared the values of democracy and equality and shared the beliefs in Dr. Sun Yat Sen’s Three Principles of the People: Democracy, Nationalism and Socialism. It is clear that he was extremely patriotic and was a political activist. He believed like others that the Martial Arts could elevate the pride and health of the entire Chinese nation. It simply needed to be systematized and made available to all in a democratic way. But Ku Yu Cheung was also a soldier and fought in one of the bloodiest wars of Chinese history, the massacres by the imperialist Japanese must have left a stain on his mind and heart. This must have also given him an insight into human suffering. The memories of this period must have also been painful in his older age and before his execution. Perhaps this is the reason why he became a healer. By using the same energy which he could express with such disastrous effects out of his palms, he would compassionately heal his fellow men. Furthermore, it is evident that he also had a collegiate attitude on martial arts sharing. He was by no means a stylistic isolationist. This is likely because of his extensive relationships with others from such varied traditions as Choy Lay Fut and Tai Chi. This no doubt also stemmed from his belief in the unity of all Chinese martial arts as an extension to the unity of all Chinese people held by the Guomintang (Nationalist Party). His activities with the Nanjing Central Guo Shu Institute also revealed his desire to see the modernization of Chinese hygiene standards, and athletic traditions. Finally, and no less important we know that he was a family man. In fact, last reported, one of his daughters Gu Nai Ming still lives. No information exists to my knowledge of his relationship towards his wives (he had two) and children. One must assume while lacking this information that he held classical and hierarchical Confucian views on the family.

Part II: The System
The Question of the Origin of Gu Ru Zhang’s (Ku Yu Cheung’s) Bei Shaolin quan Men:
Why is it that, though it is recognized by the temple as a legitimate Shaolin style today, Ku Yu Cheung’s Bei Shaolin quan Men is not practiced at the temple today? Secondly, why is it that when the Chinese government surveyed the Shangtung Institute also revealed his desire to see the modernization of Chinese hygiene standards, and athletic traditions. Finally, and no less important we know that he was a family man. In fact, last reported, one of his daughters Gu Nai Ming still lives. No information exists to my knowledge of his relationship towards his wives (he had two) and children. One must assume while lacking this information that he held classical and hierarchical Confucian views on the family.

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province (the style’s province of origin) for martial arts styles where it reportedly found up to 400 styles it did not discover Ku Yu Cheung’s Northern Shaolin system?

The first question is relatively easy to answer. The style comes from a lineage which has been secular for hundreds of years. It has had a long of time to change and evolve over the years into a different tradition than what is taught at the temple today. On the other hand, the style from the temple today was recently reconstituted based on old textbooks and because of Shaolin sets practiced specifically in the area of the temple.

The second question is a little more difficult to answer because one would think that if Yin Kai Wun (Ku Yu Cheung’s teacher) had other students that lived in Shangtung, these descendants of that teacher must also teach there. However, it is possible that no one has truly looked for surviving branches, or that the branches simply died off. This has happened more often than not, especially because of the volatile political climate of the communist and cultural revolutions. Furthermore, not everyone answered the call of the national survey. Therefore, it is possible that the traditional exponents were killed, exiled or forced to stop teaching because of the Cultural Revolution. It is also equally possible that there remains a teacher who is unknown to the West. There are literally thousands of possibilities, which means researching this will be difficult though nevertheless essential. Therefore, this question must remain to be answered.

**Origins of the Style**

In the following, I offer some elements that may be able to point to certain possible paths of inquiry and answers on the technical origin of Ku Yu Cheung’s Shaolin. I believe that it is of an eclectic origin, compiled from various Shaolin traditions which best explains the technical aspects of the style. I personally don’t see this as a disadvantage, to the contrary, viewed in this way the scope of Ku Yu Cheung’s Northern Shaolin is quite stunning.

What is clear about Ku Yu Cheung’s Shaolin quan Men is that it is typically Northern in expression and Shaolin in content. In this way it is predominantly a long range fighting system, with much use of mobile footwork such as skipping steps and much kicking. It is generally agreed that Ku Yu Cheung’s Northern Shaolin is a branch of the even greater umbrella of Long Fist styles which includes five major branches: the Hua (Flower), Hua (Essence), Cha, Shaolin, Bao and we may add a sixth, the Hung (Red Fist style, not to be confused with Hung Gar a Southern Shaolin style). Legend also reports that the basics of these styles were first invented by the founder of the Sung Empire, Zhao Kuang Yin, in the 10th century and that the Shaolin temple was one of his greatest supporters. This first style was called Taiju Chang quan and only comprised thirteen movements. Confusion exists on whether it is the Emperor who taught the monks or if it was the monks who taught the Emperor. In any case, Shaolin monks at Hunan temple became the most famous practitioners and innovators of this early style of Long Fist. Like many Long Fist styles, Ku Yu Cheung’s also works on a linear basis. With few exceptions, the patterns often repeat themselves in two directions. Secondly, as we discussed earlier it has structurally much in common with Cha quan and other northern styles such as Tang Lang quan (Praying Mantis), Mizhong quan (Lost Track) and Chang quan (Long Fist). Thirdly, its sets are specific strategies that in turn form a greater system of a variety of methods and strategies for long-range combat. (e.g., Plum Flower Fist (Moi Fah), Short Strike (Tun Da), Strike the Heart (Chum Sam), etc…). Who originally compiled them remains a mystery, though oral tradition maintains that it was Chu Jin, Head Abbot of the Shaolin Temple. Verifiably we know that all these sets are directly from Ku Yu Cheung’s Shaolin teacher Yin Kai Wun. How much further back it may go is also unknown and left to legend. Nonetheless, oral tradition and structural evidence supports an ancient systematic origin. In an interview held by Yun-Choi Yueng from Hong Kong in 1998, Lai Ganqing was asked about the origin of the forms to which he answered:

“The ten core forms are from ancient origin. They were taught together with Shilu Tantui (Ten Routine Spring Leg boxing) as the basic Shaolin routines”. But more than this it must also be pointed out that the Iron Palm and Iron Body are completely woven into the very fabric of every single one of the ten core forms. This is an important structural consideration because it is clear that Ku Yu Cheung learnt Iron Palm from his Shaolin teacher, and then it is probable that the forms were also learnt from this single teacher. In addition, the sets surprisingly fit well and compliment each other, supporting each other to create a well balanced fighting system and training for the practitioner. This fact also seems to point to an earlier systemic compilation.

**Internal Aspect of the Style**

It is also clear once the style is practiced and the applications learnt that it has a very internal aspect to it (it seldom counters force with force and it maintains in much of its techniques the important six external and internal harmonies). This may also point to an ancient origin. Of all the external styles, it is perhaps one of the closest to the internal styles both in expression and in technique. This internal aspect was indisputably demonstrated by Ku Yu Cheung, not only with his Iron Palm technique, which is an internal and an external method like its Southern Shaolin counterpart, but also because he was a capable healer."

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Ku Yu Cheung showing traditional hard Qigong feats.

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According to master Chan Kowk Wai, the Small Golden Bell Iron Body consists of 17 martial Qigong exercises, in which the practitioner practices various movements covering the whole body, while at times inhaling through his mouth and exhaling through his nose while at other specific times he inhales and exhales through the nose. The practitioner then beats himself with a bamboo stick in order to promote Qi flow to the outer parts of the body, effectively creating a Qi shield around the entire body. These internal exercises originally were outlined in Ku Yu Cheung’s book published by Long Zi Xiang in January 1933. Many current schools teaching Northern Shaolin have unfortunately lost this knowledge. Master Chan Kowk Wai still teaches it to his indoor students. According to Master Chan Kowk Wai, it must be practiced continuously every day, if possible three times a day, if it is to have beneficial and long lasting effects. The importance of the Small Golden Bell and the Iron Palm, other than martial prowess, health and longevity, is paramount to the style. According to Sifu Horacio Di Renzo, who is a member of the Chan Kowk Wai International Association it is, “the nexus between the external and internal elements of the style”.

Is the Name Northern Shaolin a Misnomer?

At the time of the Nanjing Central Guo Shu Institute, everything of external and Northern in expression and origin was referred to as Northern Shaolin. This was no exception for what Ku Yu Cheung was teaching. It is my personal opinion that this standard name survived the fall of the nationalists and its institute and was adopted by disciples and students of Ku Yu Cheung and the students of his students, which moved to or were from Hong Kong and Taiwan. It is probably more accurate to refer to Ku Yu Cheung’s Northern Shaolin, as Grand Master Chan Kowk Wai does, by the term Bei Shaolin quan Men (Northern Shaolin system). Because there are literally thousands of Northern Shaolin sets which have their origin in the temple on mainland China and few of them make up what we could call a system. Therefore, it must be made clear that no one style has a monopoly on this name. This includes the Chinese government, which has made a concerted effort to claim that it is teaching the only authentic Shaolin."

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Master Lai Ganqing: “I had witnessed his amazing healing power as he healed the humpback by massaging him with his hands.”
And: “Yes, and I am still practicing it daily (Golden Bell at 93!). It has been found to be a very good Qigong practice for health. It is not just a method to toughen the body externally but also to toughen the body internally. It is very important not to stiffen any part of the body during practice.”
Karate-do Kurofune
Interview with Patrick McCarthy

Patrick McCarthy began his training in the 60’s and came up through the ranks with good old-fashioned hard traditional type karate training. He forged his identity on the tournament floor in kata, kumite and kobudo during the 70’s amidst fierce and talented competition. In the 80’s he relocated to Japan, and became widely recognized for his field studies and historical-based writings. His groundbreaking research, several books, including the best-selling publication “The Bubishi”, now translated into several languages, have been published everywhere during the 90’s. He’s even responsible for establishing the world’s first University-level undergraduate Diploma of Martial Arts Instruction program in the new millennium. The success of his international seminars has made him one of the most sought after master instructors anywhere in the world. As a 5th generation master-level instructor of Uchinadi, following Hiroshi Kinjo, Chomo Hanashiro, Ankoh Itosu, and Sokon Matsumura, he has walked in the footsteps of those masters who pioneered modern karate and received his credentials (Kyoshi 7th dan) from the Dai Nippon Butokukai, as they were bestowed upon Gichin Funakoshi, Chojun Miyagi, Kenwa Mabuni, Hironori Ohtsuka, Yasuhiro Konishi, Ryusho Sakagami, and Shoshin Nagamine. A recognized trailblazer in the application practices of traditional kata, Sensei McCarthy has also been invited to teach his theories in more than twenty countries around the world.

First of all, why karate? I mean, out of all the different martial arts available, what drew you (and still draws you) to karate? I started learning karate during my childhood, when I perceived it as a vehicle through which life-enhancing transformation towards becoming brave, strong, and courageous could be made possible. From that youthful time, I passed through the difficult years of receiving a good grounding, went on to become infatuated with the competitive arena, and ultimately to become a professional instructor. Frustrated with politics, hypocrisy and egos, I decided to walk away from the sport, and the profession, in search of more meaningful pursuits. My search took me from Canada to Japan where I was introduced to the essence of Bunnburyodo; the twin paths of study and training. That ultimately opened the door to a new and more meaningful personal journey, which continues on even to this day.

Your credentials read like any non-Japanese karate practitioner’s greatest fantasy. You didn’t just come to Asia for a couple weeks to train under a certain “Master”, you lived in Japan for nearly a decade. What was the catalyst that made you pick up and move overseas? That’s very easy for me to respond to; I was terribly distraught with the politics of sport karate (which was my life at that time), the egomaniacal personalities, and the widespread hypocrisy so rife in the professional industry.

What was your first impression of the karate scene in Japan, and how (if at all) did that impression change over the years? Like so many first-timers, I was very impressionable and thought everything was larger than life, so to speak…almost surreal. I was very impressed with the friendly and seemingly modest personalities, wonderfully different culture, delicious food, and ancient temples, etc. The fact that I could freely enter the dojo of well known, and in some cases famous Sensei to train and openly talk shop with them was just a tremendous experience.

Of course, as I became more and more settled in and got to know more about Japanese language, customs and culture, the novelty gradually wore off and I began putting things in their proper perspective. I ultimately came to love many things about Japan and her wonderful culture, her difficult but provocative language, and her profound spiritual connection with nature. I simply love the food, the seemingly friendly behavior (btw. Tatemae would be a great addition to the Western world as it seems that so many folk these days lost their manners, common sense, and the idea of fair play) and myriad remarkable traditions. I always enjoyed how gracious people were; the men are always gentlemen, and the women are generally refined and modest. Of course, having been married in Japan (to a Japanese girl from Nagano, who was educated in Tokyo at Aoyama Gakuin, and worked overseas… which is where we both met; Vancouver), with both of our children also being born there, and working in a Japanese high school for many years, I got
to experience Japan in a way that not many foreigners visiting or working in Japan do. I made many wonderful Japanese friends; found much more than what I had been looking for in karate, and during my pursuits, I even discovered something very special about life itself.

As the years passed on I also grew to dislike several things. Residing in Japan during the Bubble Economy-era, I naturally considered pretty much everything over-priced, especially rents, key/thank you money, and real estate. Look what happened to so many people after the bubble burst! It was very sad. Living in Kanagawa Prefecture, and commuting back and forth to Tokyo, you can imagine how frustrating it was to dislike crowded trains, traffic jams and throngs of people. Socially speaking, in Japan one is expected to behave a certain way… very “in-the-box” like thinking. As I am not much of a conformist, and prefer straightforward-style communication, one can only imagine how frustrating it was working within that mindset.

Growing up in a typical Western multicultural society, I found residing in a more homogeneous and conformist-based Japanese culture simply fascinating and learned much more than I ever could have by reading books or watching. On the other hand, as karate has long been promoted as a vehicle through which physical health could be fostered, I was somewhat amused to find that many of these Japanese Sensei were quite fond of drinking and smoking. This is in contrast with the Western stereotypical image of a Japanese Sensei. Non-Japanese practitioners of karate often place their Japanese counterparts on pedestals beyond reproach. It was pleasing to discover such leaders were just mere mortals, fallible just like the rest of us!

Around 1990 I did a study on a Meiji-period politician named Karou Inoue because of my kobujutsu training under his great grandson, Motokatsu Inoue, and the fact that he’d also served as governor of Okinawa. That study brought me into contact several important historical issues, which allowed me to put cultural behavior in its proper perspective. Specifically, the historical issues were Confucianism, Kokutai Hongi, Shushin and Nihojinron Wa, sonno joi and Deru Kugi wah utarend).

Learning that Japan is a homogeneous, male-dominated and discriminatory/confomist culture provided me with the contextual premise with which to resolve the ambiguity of Japanese culture and customs, and also allowed me to better understand Japanese behavior. This study also revealed what cultural forces had influenced the transformation of a foreign (Chinese-based) discipline like karate and explained how and why it is learned and taught the way it is.

Before anyone brands me a Japan-basher and concludes that I am anti-Japanese, please understand that I do not believe for a moment these issues are limited to Japan. Similar problems exist in my birth country of Canada, and in my present country of residence, Australia. In fact, I am sure that they exist everywhere. The fact, however, that they are common does in no way reduce my disdain for them. I sincerely believe that armed with this information, many foreign residents of Japan would be much better prepared to deal with the many sociocultural issues which are too often bewildering.

If you were to list the three teachers in Japan/Okinawa that made the most impact on your current understanding of the art, who would they be, and what do you remember the most about your time with them (on and off the dojo floor)?

Well, there have been so many wonderful people from whom I have gained so much. I suppose three very important ones are, in no special order, Hiroshi Kinjo (karate), Yoshio Sugino (Kenjutsu), and Nobuhiko Takada (submission-kakutogi). Sensei Kinjo is simply a walking encyclopedia of karate, and a genuine living treasure, and the link between the old and the new. From Yoshio Sugino, I learned how classical attack scenarios were historically identified and catalogued into prescribed responses using two-person training drills (I believed this to be lacking in modern karate). From Nobuhiko Takada I learned how to “think outside the box” when it came to functional applications practices, from which I subsequently linked to the defensive themes in ancestral-based karate.

You are also well known for your historical research, a study that goes far beyond names and birth/death dates. What are some of the most fascinating discoveries you made in the field?

In truth, much of my understanding comes from studying the original works of pioneers like Sokon Matsamura, Ankoh Itosu, Gichin Funakoshi, Choki Motobu, Mizaho Motsu, Nisaburo Miki, Genwa Nakasone, Chojun Miyagi, Seishin Itoman, and Kenwa Mabuni. Of course, beyond that, I studied the principal works of Japanese researchers, like Hiroshi Kinjo, Ryozo Fujiwara, shigeru Takamiyagi, Akio Kinjo, Shoshin Nagamine, Iken Tokashiki, Masahiro Nakamoto, Tetsuhiro Hokama, Tadahiko Ohtsuka, and my colleague, Tsukuo Iwae, to name a few of the most notable ones. I suppose if I had an advantage over anyone else (in the West), I guess...
it would have to have been because I had direct access to the original publications in Japanese where perhaps those not residing in Japan, or traveling in the same circles, did not.

I am not really sure if I’ve actually discovered anything too fascinating but I have certainly enjoyed publishing the results of my historical investigation and the legacy of its pioneers. That was a hugely rewarding personal study for me from which I gleaned immeasurable insight. Of course, my study of the Bubishi and its translation was yet another hugely important learning curve.

Research has also allowed me to clear away most of the historical and tactical ambiguity that has traditionally shrouded the origins and evolution of this tradition. By discovering what and how anthropological forces affected the growth and direction of karate I have been able to bring something to the table that might not be completely understood elsewhere. Finally, I suppose that by being able to put things into the correct perspective it takes away the mystique and the dependency upon sources that may be biased or not completely reliable…which is so often the case these days.

Based on this historical analysis, who would you say are some of the most influential historical figures in the tradition?

I can’t help but wonder if perhaps asking, “what were some of the most influential circumstances surrounding the development and proliferation of karate”, might be a more appropriate question? So much ink has been spilt on the ‘peasant hypothesis’, the ‘historical weapons prohibition’ theory, and the ‘36-family influence’, and “researchers” have paid so little attention to cultural circumstances and local trends. By looking into the history of cultural festivals I discovered the old grappling discipline called Tegumi. When studying the class structure of Okinawa’s old Ryukyu Kingdom I discovered the responsibilities of local law-enforcement officials, their requisite skills with a 6 inch wooden cudgel, iron truncheon and arrest/capturing and control techniques. By looking into the old Ryukyu Kingdom’s commercial/political liaison with the Middle Kingdom I learned about the trade links with China and neighboring SE Asian cultures and the enormous influence it had upon the tiny island culture. That study opened the door through which I discovered how Siamese boxing found its way to Okinawa as a popular exercise. By looking more closely at the holistic aspect of 19th century Chinese Quanfa I came to recognize how kata (Hsing in Mandarin Chinese) was first used as an organized form of physical exercise (not unlike Meiji-period Taiso). Studying the history of Japan’s Meiji Restoration, with a special emphasis on her radical period of military escalation, I discovered why Ankoh Itosu was granted permission to use kata (as a form of human movement) in the school system as a vehicle through which to funnel both physical fitness and social conformity, in support of the war machine, in the same way that Kendo and Judo were being used on the mainland. By looking at the under-pinnings of Japanese society (described earlier in this interview) and the omnipotence of the pre-war Dai Nippon Butokukai, I was able to easily identify how karate conformed under the weight of Budo culture. In fact, I could write an entire book just on this aspect of historical influence alone.

Of course, the contributory authors I have already mentioned stand as central icons in the evolution of this tradition. So too were Kanga Sakugawa (1733-1815), Waixinzan (DOB?), Iwah (DOB?), Anan (DOB?), Kosaku Matsumora (1829-1898), Taike Kojo (1837-1917), Seisho Aragaki (1840-1920), Norisato Nakaima (1850-1927), Zhongxiang Xie (1852-1930), Kanryu Higaonna (1853-1917), Zhihe Zhou (1874-1926), Kambun Uechi (1877-1948), and Xiang Xie (1852-1930), Kanryo Higaonna (1874-1926), Kambun Uechi (1877-1948), Xianhui Wu (1886-1940), Chotoku Kyan, Daiji Tang (1887-1937), Juhatsu Kiyoda (1886-1967), and Xing Miao (1881-1939), who preceded them. There’s also Himonori Ohatsu (1882-1982) and Yasuhiro Konishi (1883-1983) who played a monumental role in the development of modern karate.

Your translations of karate “classics” have also become bestsellers. Why do you think it is important that modern karate practitioners study these old books?

Among my favorite koto waza (maxims) is, “On Ko Chi Shin” (“To search for the old is to understand the new,” … my translation). Based on the Kongzi Lunyu (the Analects of Confucius) from China, the sentence originally reads “zi yue wen gu er zhi xin keyi wei shi yi”. From this comes the contraction “wen gu zhi xin” (On Ko Chi Shin in Japanese). The passage has two main interpretations: 1. “The Sage said: ‘reviewing the old and knowing the new, (one) may be a teacher ‘” meaning that a teacher should be conversant in both old knowledge and the latest developments: 2. A teacher, in reviewing old material, should be able to derive new insights. Noted translator/editor author James Legge, wrote, “The Master said, ‘If a man keeps cherishing his old knowledge, so as continually acquiring new, he may be a teacher of others’”. In short, I believe that any learner well versed in the history of this wonderful tradition will never be inundated by frivolous consideration or superfluous distractions.

Your translation of the Okinawan/Fujian “Bubishi” is one of the best-selling martial arts publications in the world. How did this project come about?

I stumbled onto the little pirate copy of Kenwa Mabuni’s 1934 “Sepai no Kenkyu” (Taiwan published in Toronto’s Chinatown during the 1970’s. As you now know, the publication includes Ankoh Itosu’s version of the Bubishi in the back half of it but I never realized its importance until Teruo Chinen (the student of Jundokan’s Eiichi Miyazato) showed me a copy of the Higa-lineage Bubishi during a tournament hosted by Osamu Ozawa’s in Las Vegas about ten years later. From that time forward I became infatuated with discovering its contents, which ultimately lead to an incredibly rewarding journey; including my immi
36 Individual Attack Scenarios

1. Straight kicks
2. Angular-type kicks
3. Straight punches
4. Circular punches
5. Downward strikes
6. Upward strikes
7. Knee & Elbow strikes
8. Head-but/Biting & spitting
9. Testicle squeeze
10. Augmented foot/leg trips
11. Single/double-hand hair pull from front/rear
12. Single/double-hand choke from front/rear
13. Front neck choke from rear
14. Classical head-lock
15. Front, bent-over, augmented choke (neckhold)
16. Half/fall-elson
17. Rear over-arm bear hug (& side variation)
18. Rear under-arm bear hug (& side variation)
19. Front over-arm bear hug (& side variation)
20. Front under-arm bear hug (& side variation)
21. Front/rear tackle
22. One-handed wrist grab (same & opposite sides-normal/reversed)
23. Two-handed wrist grabs (normal/reversed)
24. Both wrists seized from the front/rear
25. Both arms seized from the front/rear
26. Single/double shoulder grab from front/rear
27. Arm-lock (behind the back)
28. Front arm-bar (triceps tendon fulcrum up supported by wrist)
29. Side arm-bar (triceps tendon fulcrum down supported by wrist)
30. Single/double lapel grab
31. Single/double hand shove
32. Garment pulled over the head
33. Seized & impact
34. Single/double leg/ankle grab from the front (side/rear)
35. Ground straddle
36. Attacked (kicked/struck) while down

You are known the world over for pioneering your "HAPV" theory. Can you please describe this theory, as well as tell us a bit about the “BFO’s” that led you there?

As I previously mentioned, it was during the time I studied Tensi Shoden Katori Shinto-ryu, at the Sugino dojo in Kawasaki. Like a ‘blinding flash of the obvious’ (BFO), I learned how classical attack scenarios had been historically identified, studied and ultimately developed into individual and collective leaning templates, each with prescribed responses and variations on common themes. Shinto-ryu accomplishes its combative outcome through using highly functional two-person drills, which I found seriously lacking in modern “rule-bound” karate.

I based my study on those classical acts of physical violence habitually used by men against men in empty-handed one-on-one civil aggression during the 19th and early 20th centuries in China, Taiwan, SE Asia, and Japan/Okinawa. I borrowed liberally from my experience with Chinese and SE Asian martial art practices11, used abstract themes from the Bubishi12, and the contextual premise used in Katori Shinto Ryu13 and contrasted them with classic Shaolin empty-handed scenarios14. Broadening my analysis, I also explored the defensive practices found in turn-of-the-century jujutsu styles15, and medieval manuals on empty-hand fighting16. I ultimately identified 36 individual attack scenarios and 72 variations on these common themes for a total of 108 separate practices. I further divided the attack scenarios into three individual categories:

#1. Seizing,
#2. Impacting,
#3. A combination of 1&2

These 108 attack scenarios provide an opportunity to recreate and study each conceivable scenario of physical violence in a safe learning environment. Analyzing each HAPV (bunkai – kata of karate?) provides the basis of understanding its mechanics, singularities and weaknesses. Without this intelligence it is frivolous trying to develop workable tactical strategies. I brought the application practices (oyo-waza) of these tactical strategies to life in two-person drills. Each HAPV could be recreated by ‘uke’ (attacker/receiver) while ‘tori’ (defender/taker) reenacted the defensive response. As learners gain familiarity and proficiency with each drill they are encouraged to increase power, strength and resistance (gradually or exponentially depending entirely upon physical prowess, and aptitude) so that two outcomes can be achieved:

#1. Making the attack scenario as like as possible, and...
#2. For each learner to develop highly functional skills.

I ultimately chose the acronym HAPV to represent what I identified as ‘habitual acts of physical violence’.

And, how about the things that led you to discover their connection to the classical kata of karate?

By separating the two-person drills into equal parts (#1. the HAPV portion and #2. its prescribed defensive response) I was able to ritualize each part of the practice (i.e. a bear hug & its response) into mnemonic-like templates17. Historically speaking, I believe that kata were originally devised by using such individual model responses and expressed grammatically by using the following ideogram (pronounced Hsing in Chinese and kata in Japanese). By arranging HAPV-related prescribed responses into unique geometrical configurations, expressed grammatically by using the following ideogram (also pronounced Hsing in Chinese and kata in Japanese) early Quanfa pioneers succeeded in developing something greater than the sum total of its individual parts. Not only could students come into contact with the HAPV, and learn highly functional prescribed defensive responses to them, they could also improve their physical skills, mental focus, and holistic condition, hence strengthening the overall learning process. In an effort to establish and standardize core curricula in these early Quanfa schools, I believe that pioneers formalized prescribed model responses into creative geometrical shapes. In this phenomenon we can not only identify the crucible from which kata evolved, it is even plausible to suggest that kata were never originally developed to impart the actual lesson, but rather to culminate that which had already been taught. This, however, I believe changed radically when attention shifted from the classical one-on-one, or, small group hands-on style of instruction, to drilling huge groups of students...
Looking beyond Budo and into the historical landscape of the Japanese it gradually becomes obvious that kata (型), as a mould/ type or model, is as much a product of the culture as the culture is a product of this conformist mindset. A microcosm of the abstract society from which it comes, looking at kata, outside the contextual premise of Budo, we can more clearly observe the profoundly influential it has on the traits and talents of the Japanese. Not unlike the message delivered within the writings of Karel van Wolferen (“Enigma of Japanese Power”) Boye de Mente’s work on kata clearly illustrates how uniquely Japanese this “way/process” influences every aspect of their culture; eating, reading, writing, speaking, walking, sitting, drinking, thinking, to your name it! After living and experiencing a decade of Japanese culture, I agree with De Mente’s position; that the tradition of using kata (“cast” since ancient times) compels the Japanese to learn patience, diligence, precision, form, order, makes them acutely aware of spatial relationships, and honed their manual dexterity, and, that Japanese who do not follow the precise patterns of behavior stick out like sore thumbs, and if they persist, may even be ostracized. As an “out-of-the-box-thinker”, who resided in Japan’s conformist mindset. A microcosm of the abstract society from which it comes, looking at kata, outside the contextual premise of Budo, we can more clearly observe the profoundly influential it has on the traits and talents of the Japanese. Not unlike the message delivered within the writings of Karel van Wolferen (“Enigma of Japanese Power”) Boye de Mente’s work on kata clearly illustrates how uniquely Japanese this “way/process” influences every aspect of their culture; eating, reading, writing, speaking, walking, sitting, drinking, thinking, to your name it! After living and experiencing a decade of Japanese culture, I agree with De Mente’s position; that the tradition of using kata (“cast” since ancient times) compels the Japanese to learn patience, diligence, precision, form, order, makes them acutely aware of spatial relationships, and honed their manual dexterity, and, that Japanese who do not follow the precise patterns of behavior stick out like sore thumbs, and if they persist, may even be ostracized. As an “out-of-the-box-thinker”, who resided in Japan’s conformist-based culture, there’s an important lesson I painfully remember which underscores De Mente’s comments: derukugi wah utareru (A protruding nail gets hammered down or ultimately ostracized — murahachi-bu). Finally, when any number of moulds (型) are brought together into a single study it is also referred to as kata (形); A homonymic term meaning form, shape or (teaching) style.

So far we have touched mainly upon the purely utilitarian aspects of kata, yet we are told by the old masters that kata is so much more than simply this. What are some of the other benefits of kata training? Earlier I described kata as a holistic form of human movement and a vehicle through which to condition the body, cultivate the mind and nurture the spirit.

On a spiritual plane, Kanbun Uechi said, “Only through the relentless study of karate-do could one achieve the highest standards of inner beauty and strength. The fusing of the body and mind through karate-do is indescribably beautiful and spiritual. When totally absorbed in kata one is brought into complete contact with the central core of their being. It is there that the essence of karate-do is to be discovered.”

Kenwa Mabuni concluded that understanding the deepest meaning of karate-do first meant transcending ego-related distractions and finding inner peace. Sensei Mabuni believed that enlightenment could be achieved by happily devoting oneself to training and ignoring trivial distraction, and wrote, in an abstract poem, that “when the spirit of karate-do (written as “bu” for budo) is deeply embraced it becomes the vehicle (described as a boat) in which one is ferried across the great void to the “dao” (described as an island).”

Correctly studied the kata reveals both the physical and metaphysical precepts of karate-do. Best described through the abstract tenets of “shuhari”, Hiroshi Kinjo, a person characterized as a walking encyclopedia of karate history, philosophy, and application, maintains that kata is the bible of karate-do.

To a beginner of karate-do, kata is the vehicle through which the central principles of self-defense are first learned. If there is anything else to be discovered beyond that, it is only something which manifests itself after insightful guidance, intense study and thousands upon thousands of repetitions; a practice, which compels one to turn their attention inward. Musashi Miyamoto, when describing the kata, once wrote, Senjitsu no keiko Tan To ii, Banjitsu no keiko Rento Yu”, (1000 days to forge the spirit, 10,000 to polish it).

About the karate that you teach, Koryu Uchinadi Kenpo-jutsu, can you describe the curriculum for us?


You are also well known for your Yamaneryu Kobudo. What is this unique method?

Patrick McCarthy with Goju-ryu legend Meitoku Yagi, who is demonstrating Goju-ryu application principles.

Patrick McCarthy with Goju-ryu master Eiichi Miyazato at his Jundokan Dojo in Okinawa.
As you know I had studied karate/kobudo in Canada for 17 years before meeting my teacher, Shihan Hiroshi Kinjo. Having already been a K-3 top-ten rated tournament champion I was both skillful and experienced in kata, kumite and kobudo. Knowing that I had both the skills and experience, Sensei Kinjo happily passed his kobudo knowledge onto me (in addition to learning karate under Chomo Hanashiro, Ambun Tokuda, and Shimpan Gusukuma, he also studied under Chojo Oshiro who was also an accomplished kobudo practitioner under Sanda Chinen). I was able to take what I learned from Sensei Kinjo and systematize it into a cohesive learning format, in the same way that I did with my karate practice. In contrast to other mainstream Okinawan-based practices Yamane Ryu kobudo is quite circular and flowing but not at the cost of losing its dynamic forcefulness. It’s also completely application-based.

You spend a lot of time on the road, teaching seminars all over the world. Can you please let us know about what kind of seminars you teach?

My seminars are all kata-based application practices using the HAPV-theory and highly functional two-person drills. More importantly, I try to bridge styles by breaking down political barriers and misunderstanding through illustrating how common acts of violence are effectively negotiated by identical mechanics, and supported by immutable principles. In short, my message is to “think outside the box”.

In closing, is there anything else you want to touch on for readers in Japan?

Don’t be afraid to “Think outside the box”, nor question your teachers (respectfully), as critical thinking is perfectly acceptable and an excellent way with which to help eliminate the terrible ambiguity which tends to shroud the inner workings of this wonderful tradition. In the words of Krishnamurti, “All of us are working together in a spirit of real co-operation in which there is no single authority: it is our interest in the teachings which brings us together and helps us to work together”.

Conclusion

Having simplified the process of reverse engineering kata through his HAPV-theory and highly functional two-person drills, Sensei McCarthy reminds each of us that kata is better understood through studying the sum total of its individual parts. Perhaps it is for this reason that Patrick McCarthy’s popularity is sustaining such longevity in a tradition where other very competent instructors continually come and go. By all accounts his growing popularity seems to be fuelled by four things: #1. A genuine desire to better understand the true nature of kata. #2. The quality of what he is imparting. #3. His student-friendly teaching style. #4. A sincere appreciation for his willingness to openly share the penetrating insights and his practices. Moreover, his open-minded approach to teaching, supported by the friendly and informal atmosphere he cultivates with his charismatic personality, makes attending his seminars not just a rewarding learning experience, but also a genuine pleasure.

Built upon timeless principles, karate is a way to condition the body, cultivate the
mind & nurture the spirit. Through diligent training one can improve health, its holistic purpose; be better prepared to protect oneself, its defensive application; build moral character, its social aim; discover and overcome the source human weakness; its philosophical nature, and finally, to know inner peace, its spiritual essence. Supporting every facet of this practice is a message far greater than the physical conduit through which it is delivered. The art reminds each of us of our own humanity, the importance of improving the quality of daily life and our responsibility to contribute to the welfare of those within the field of our influence. Respecting time honored values, Hanshi Patrick McCarthy is a dedicated professional promoting both this timeless message and functional application practices with a new generation of more progressive learners seeking to better understand traditional Okinawan/Japanese karate and not afraid to look outside their own peer groups to find it. Echoing the wisdom of Gichin Funakoshi:

“All traditional karate is one: karate-do. Traditional karate is budo. We MUST keep this philosophy”.

Joe Swift is a 4th degree Goju-ryu blackbelt. After 9 years of studying Isshin-ryu in the US, he moved to Japan where he has studied Goju-ryu since 1995. He is currently an assistant instructor at the Mushinkan Shorei-ryu Karate Kobudo Dojo of Sensei Uematsu in Kanazawa, Japan and is Shibudo of its Tokyo branch.

Notes:
2. In order to understand education and underlying principles in Japan, it is imperative to study Confucianism and its effect on cultural mindset and ethos of its people. The Japanese might outwardly reject the notion of Confucianism as a dominant force in their culture, but it is evident that Confucian values are implicit in the Japanese way of life: “stability, order, belief in the family, harmony, hierarchy in the work-force, loyalty to employers and superiors, importance of diligence, self-cultivation etc.”
4. Shusin and Kokutai represent diligence, regimentalism, conformism, commitment to mass productivity, strict adherence to seniority, emperor worship, and lifetime loyalty to its precepts.
5. The essential premise of Nihonjirinron is that Japanese people are unlike any others - unlike either Westerners (typified by Americans) or Asians such as Chinese and Koreans. In other words, Japanese customs and people are held to be unique: i.e. Japanese people have different brains from Westerners and hence cannot pronounce “r” and “l” correctly. Even though Japanese youth who grow up in a Western country using “r” and “l” correctly, this has been proposed as a serious theory. Japanese people use the left side of the brain but Westerners use the right side of the brain, or vice-versa. Japan is the only country with four distinct seasons, and Japanese people thus have a unique connection with nature. The Japanese language is uniquely vague and imprecise, in contrast to languages such as English, which are held to be highly logical and precise. This reflects on the Japanese unique way of thinking. Only the Japanese language has words for various emotions, colors, etc. These ideas, colors, etc. cannot be expressed in Western languages. Many of these may seem ridiculous to outside observers. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nihonjirinron.
7. Revere the Emperor! Expel the Barbarians!
8. “A protruding nail gets hammered down;” Metaphoric, referring to failure to conform in Japanese society.
9. The influence of the pre-war Dai Nippon Butokukai, as a microcosm of Japanese Budo culture, transformed the embryonic way karate was embraced in old Okinawa. Such things as the dogi, the obi, the changing of its prefix/suffix, the adoption of the dan/kyu structure, the paper menkyo license, ippon-kumite drills, and the shiai format, are all Japanese innovations based upon early 20th century Judo & Kendo, and largely the product of Yasuhiro Konishi and his colleague/friend Hironori Ohtsuka’s efforts (Ohtsuka studied karate with Funakoshi & Motobu, while Konishi learned under Funakoshi, Motobu, Miyagi, Mabuni and Uechi). Hence, it can be argued that Okinawan karate, especially if an organization, dojo, teacher or student adhere to these Japanese Budo Cultural influences, must then be embracing, practicing and imparting Japanese karate.
11. Two-person hand drills from Silat, Arnis, Wing Chun and Taiji.
12. The section addressing the 48 two-person postures and the section on escapes & grappling.
13. Katori Shinto Ryu lays great emphasis on mastering the use of its curriculum through two-person drills where the tori recreates the classical attack scenario and the uke reenacts the classical response theme.
17. Mechanism used as an aid to assist the memory.
18. Patrick McCarthy believes that virtually every application technique that has to do with hyper-extension/hyper-flexion, balance displacement, and strangulation, etc., can be explained through the 5-ancient machines; Lever [3-categories], the wedge, pulley, screw, and fixed axel & wheel. www.tpub.com/content/engine/14037/.
19. Location (The precise anatomical structure to be attacked).
20. Tool (Which part of the body [fist, foot, elbow, knee, fingertips, etc.] used to attack with).
21. Angle (The angle of energy transfer).
22. Direction (The direction of energy transfer; i.e. back to front, perpendicular to location, etc.)
23. Intensity (The amount of energy transfer necessary to achieve the desired outcome)
Okinawa Karate Vol 1.
by Toyama - Shinjo - Senaha - Hokama - Onaga
DVD, colour, 85 min. English and French commentary
available at www.mikado.nl

Okinawa Karate Vol 2.
by Toyama - Shinjo - Senaha - Hokama - Onaga
DVD, colour, 75 min. English and French commentary
available at www.mikado.nl

WAY OF THE WARRIOR
This book is the end product of several years of research into the nature of the world's fighting systems. The research expanded rapidly when BBC Television decided that the authors should make a series of documentaries about the Asian fighting systems. On the physical level, all martial arts contain thorough and carefully planned systems for exercising the body and thus maintaining health and vitality. However, dangerous as these arts are, students quickly become disciplined and aware of the need not to be hurt or to hurt others. The aggressive urges that have brought the student to the training hall are soon controlled, and guided into constructive activity by the instructor or master. Under this guidance, the student's confidence grows and fear of others recedes. At the same time an awareness of physical being, of the body's shape, size and potential ability, is born. As the months and years pass, this physical awareness is heightened and refined. A mechanical understanding of the principles of human movement and activity is instilled and the student becomes absorbed in anatomy, in the structure and functions of the bones, tendons and muscles. Additionally, many martial artists are also versed in the ways of medicine and healing. Practically all of the Indian, Chinese and Japanese masters whom we filmed were practicing doctors as well as martial artists. Furthermore, throughout history martial masters have shown themselves to be thinkers and believers, committed moral beings as well as fighters and healers. Both the theory and the techniques of many fighting systems have been developed in harmony with the moral philosophies of their masters. A major aim of this book is to examine this relationship between theory and practice, and to show how the martial systems in their totality have evolved, traveled and been transplanted and transformed in the great civilizations of Asia.


By Marc van Dam

LET EVERY BREATH...
Secrets of the Russian Breath Masters
Secrets of the Russian Breath Masters was written by Vladimir Vasilev - Scott Meredith, Ph.D., based on the teachings of Mikhail Ryabko. A groundbreaking new manual that reveals the Breathing Techniques of Russia's traditional 'Systema'. Born in the discipline of Russia's ancient holy warriors and brought down to us today through the ranks of their military's most elite modern special forces, these battle-tested principles and techniques are available to you for the first time. Whether you are looking to raise your athletic skills to the next level, or simply seeking to increase your potential and to enjoy life, Systema Breathing is guaranteed to uncover the endless reserve of energy, health and happiness. This book presents step-by-step training drills given to you in a thorough and comprehensive way. You will learn the unique methodology of Systema breathing including the seven Systema breathing principles that provide the foundation for every physical activity of your daily life. Easy reading full of entertaining stories and thought provoking ideas. Probably the most important book you will ever read...

1. A Search in Secret Russia
2. The Teachers Appear
3. The Seven Principles
4. The Fundamental Practice of Relaxed Breathing
5. The Core Work: Part 1
6. The Core Work: Part 2
7. Hit the Road!
8. Relaxation and Tension Methods
9. Conclusion

Interviews (Kwan Lee • Vladimir Vasilev • Mikhail Ryabko)

By Marc van Dam
Once a closely guarded, secretive practice, kata are the very reason karate, as an art, has been preserved and passed down to this day. Its heritage can be traced back to the Chinese progenitors of Quanfa. Sadly, the unique formula once used to help deliver the contextual intentions culminated in kata was lost in the wake of the modernization of karate, which obscured the original defensive application principles. I contend that the original intention set forth by the pioneers was to have learners study the HAPV (habitual acts of physical violence) (this misunderstood analytical process is what is known as bunkai-jutsu) so that they could understand how tactical strategies and application practices (oyo-jutsu) were developed and employed. Using safe learning circumstances (usually a dojo environment), HAPV were systematically recreated and tactical strategies methodically reenacted in two-person drills. Such efforts were repeated with gradual or exponential degrees of intensity depending entirely on the individual aptitude of each learner until a functional spontaneity unfolded and one developed the ability to effectively use the application principles irrespective of the HAPV.

As a researcher, I don’t reject the tenets of karate, but I do disagree with its modern interpretation of kata. In an effort to resolve the ambiguity that shrouds the history and technical theories of kata, I sincerely hope you find the analysis that lies before you compelling.

Habitual Acts of Physical Violence
Through years of research and study I established a theory that early pioneers developed functional self-defense practices built on the knowledge they gleaned from empirical experience. Considering this pragmatic hypothesis helps resolve the frustrating ambiguity shrouding its pre-
“Kata, when learned by themselves were never meant to impart self-defense instruction, but rather, to culminate the important lessons already learned and to promote those requisite physical attributes any functional delivery system necessitates.”

Two-Person Drills
I believe that when a learner comprehends the brutal mentality commonly associated with unwarranted physical violence, the only practical way through which functional defensive response capabilities (against the classical 36 habitual acts of physical violence) could ever be learned and mastered (by the average person), was through recreating each act of physical violence in a controlled environment. Subsequently, I deduced that through trial & error, in a controlled environment with an experienced mentor, and reducing the actual risk of serious injury, learners were afforded the opportunity of testing and exploring which defensive principles were most effective for their body type and personalities. Moreover, my two-person drill theory accommodates the possibility of how each learner could progress exponentially until the process achieved its outcome; To have established enough functional spontaneity that any HAPV, or combinations thereof, could be effectively negotiated.

Rituals
The final results of my lengthy research into the origins and evolution of kata revealed a remarkably simple theory, one that is continually gaining wider acceptance in our extremely critical and highly inflexible international karate community. I concluded that when the attacker was removed from the two-person practice, what remained was a solo reenactment of its defensive application. To establish more improved teaching methodologies, while maintaining ironclad rituals of secrecy, I further deduced that innovative pioneers went on to ritualize the plethora of solo defensive application practices into unique individual templates, each identified with its own special name (i.e. Crane on a Rock, Guardian Closes the Gate, Double Dragons Going out to Sea, etc.). As even the most rudimentary analysis of classical kata reveals a configuration of composite technique, I naturally concluded that the early pioneers of our tradition ingeniously brought their solo templates together into unique mnemonic mechanisms (Hsing/kata) not only to remember important lessons but to nurture holistic concepts too.

Based on this hypothesis, I, therefore, don’t believe that kata, when learned by itself was ever meant to impart self-defense instruction, but rather, to culminate the important lessons already learned and to promote those requisite physical attributes any functional delivery system necessitates. Naturally, this belief does not preclude the holistic benefits obviously associated with practicing kata by oneself, but only to provide a pragmatic defensive explanation where one previously did not exist.

Finally, concerning the myriad of styles & kata, I believe that variations on common themes and separate lineages unfolded over many generations due largely to individual preferences, personal understanding, varying interpretations and political power struggles. During such times, names became changed to reflect lineage and templates were reconfigured or reinterpreted. Recognizing the importance of this theory not only widens our understanding of its pre-history, it deepens our perspective and appreciation of the art.

Physics & Biomechanics
The knowledge and application of common physics are an integral element of effective defensive application. Because of its unique anatomical structures, especially where the limbs and neck are concerned, common levers can and are easily applied with the knowledge of fundamental physics. In order to transfer energy effectively to any given anatomical structure, during a defensive confrontation, it becomes necessary to understand how to move the body correctly. The supporting study of biomechanics affords the karateka the most efficient way of effectively...
transferring of both low intensity & higher velocity kinetic force for the expressed purpose of impeding motor performance; the dispassionate outcome of self-defense.

**Functional Anatomy & Physiology**

Recognizing what value biomechanics and physics play in karate, it’s not much of a stretch to conclude why learning how the human body is constructed and understanding its basic functions can enhance one’s overall application of the art. Understanding anatomical structures and functions reveal specific vulnerabilities and provide learners with valuable insights into physical exploitation. Through my research, I arrived at five issues central to how the application process was imparted in old-school learning:

1. Anatomical location (The precise area to be attacked)
2. Tool for energy transfer (Fist, foot, elbow, knee, etc.)
3. Angle (The angle of energy transfer; i.e. 45°, 90° etc.)
4. Direction (The direction of energy transfer; i.e. back to front, perpendicular to location, etc.)
5. Intensity of energy transfer (How much force required during energy transfer)

**Hojo Undo**

Supplementary training alternatives are a creative expression of necessity and individual insights in order to support the network of any functional delivery system. Classical examples are, makiwara, stone weights etc.

**Anthropology**

With a terribly ambiguous pre-history, the roots of this convoluted tradition are buried in a graveyard of indelible myth and compelling legend linked to Zen Buddhism and the Shaolin Monastery. Actually, the roots of karate lie in several kinds of Fujian Quanfa, which haphazardly found their way to Okinawa during the later part of its old Ryukyu Kingdom. Collected, studied and finally modernized, during the turn of the 20th century, for the purpose of being introduced as an adjunct to physical education in Okinawa’s school system, karate-jutsu was transformed by Japanese Budo-culture after being introduced to the mainland. While socio-cultural & historical anthropology is not exactly at the forefront of most instructors’ teaching fortes, it should not be precluded from one’s independent studies. Through such studies learners are better able to discover and understand how custom, language, cultural landscape, inflexible social ideology & spiritual conviction shaped the evolution, theories & ethos of karate-do.

**Moral Philosophy**

One mistake the modern karateka often makes, when trying to grasp conceptual origins, classical application theories and moral philosophy of karate-do, is to depend too much on contemporary assumptions. Knowledge taken for granted these days was originally locked in an ironclad ritual of secrecy known only by a select minority who had passed the arduous test of time. For the same reason one would never entrust a loaded weapon to immoral hands, so too did the early pioneers of this tradition believe that embracing a body of moral philosophy to govern the ethical behavior of those who mastered its brutal secrets superseded learning to fight.

**Spiritualism**

Realizing that the source of human weakness lay within, early innovators, many of them spiritual recluses, realized that man’s ultimate journey had to be inward, not outward. Discovering the source of human weakness also revealed the inner location in which man’s battles should be first fought & won before the outer circumstances of their daily lives could ever be improved. Transmitting this truth through their defensive discipline the pursuit of emancipation and harmony became a journey more highly desired than the physical vehicle used to achieve it.

**The Whole**

In spite of the many opinions we hold to be true, karate-do continues on as a method of self-protection, a disciplined life-
style, a unique form of physical fitness, a competitive sport and a commercial industry. By identifying its individual parts, and studying the principles on which they rest, we are better able to resolve the ambiguity that shrouds what karate-do is and what it is not.

One of the most fascinating things about delving into the history and evolution of this wonderful tradition is just how much one can learn about the culture, philosophy and people who shaped its practice. In doing so, a message of more important proportions unfolds. What could possibly improve our overall understanding of karate more than walking in the footsteps of those people most responsible for pioneering it? By studying the anthropology of this tradition it becomes evident that many of the early pioneers established a symbiosis with karate so that their lives became as much a product of the art as was the art a product of their lives. With learning the art comes a responsibility to keep this knowledge alive, that extends beyond karate and into society as a whole. Karate conditions the body, cultivates the mind and nurtures the spirit.

Conclusion

The original intention set forth by the pioneers of our tradition was to have learners study the habitual acts of physical violence (HAPV) so that they could understand how tactical strategies and application practices (oyo-jutsu) were developed and employed; this misunderstood analytical process is what is known as bunkai-jutsu. The modern practice of studying the kata in order to discover functional applications is called “reverse engineering”. Using safe learning circumstances (a dojo environment), HAPV were systematically recreated in two-person drills where tactical strategies were methodically reenacted. Such practices were repeated with gradual or exponential degrees of intensity depending entirely on the individual aptitude of each learner until a functional spontaneity unfolded and one developed the ability to effectively use the application principles irrespective of the HAPV. It was through this embryonic process that early pioneers first discovered the need to ritualize the solo reenactment of these defensive practices into individual composites. Intended as mnemonic mechanisms, solo composites helped innovators assemble and remember the myriad of tactical strategies they developed. Originally, solo composites were never developed to impart the actual lesson but rather to culminate what had already been taught. In addition to solidifying their curricula, pioneers reasoned that by bringing multiple composites together into individual templates they could also improve physical, mental, and holistic conditioning, hence strengthening the overall learning process. This phenomenon cradled the birth of what the Chinese Quanfa/Kenpo call Hsing (i.e. kata, in Japanese). Many of the oldest kata handed down in traditional Okinawan karate (Ryukyu Kenpo; i.e. the Quanfa practices of Okinawa’s old Ryukyu Kingdom) trace their roots to this phenomenon.

Notes

1 Hsing (Mandarin Chinese pronunciation) is its Quanfa equivalent.
2 The innermost meanings of kata represent unique defensive application principles against varying acts of physical violence, which are not obvious to the untrained eye. Often referred to as kakushi (secrets), understanding how to use kata requires a functional understanding of its contextual basis.
3 Until the turn of the 20th century, kata had, for the most part, been a “behind-closed-doors” secret practice in Okinawa.
4 Quanfa is the Mandarin Chinese pronunciation of two separate ideograms Quan & fa that means Quanfa.

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For more information on Patrick McCarthy or on his HAPV theory please visit: www.koryu-uchinadi.com

“With learning the art comes a responsibility to keep this knowledge alive, that extends beyond karate and into society as a whole. Karate conditions the body, cultivates the mind and nurtures the spirit.”

Kentsu Yabu demonstrating karate kumite.

Kentsu Yabu demonstrating karate kumite at the Okinawa Prefectural Teachers’ College.
Two earlier books outlining Uechi-ryu “The Way of Karate” (1963) and “Uechi-ryu Karate-do” (1974), both written by George Mattson, introduced the Uechi style, history and training methods for the first time to the English speaking public. Indeed, during the 1960’s and 70’s these pioneering works were some of the few English language sources of information regarding karate for the general public.

Although a welcome addition to students of Uechi-ryu at the time, these books had some serious shortcomings, which eventually came to light. Among these were some historical inaccuracies with respect to the history of the style and mistakes in the kata and terminology presented in the books.

This was remedied somewhat by Alan Dollar’s (1996) English language text for Uechi-ryu students entitled “Secrets of Uechi-ryu Karate and the Mysteries of Okinawa”. But even with this welcome and much needed addition, information on Uechi-ryu was still pretty scarce. With this in mind, I’d like to try to give a somewhat different account to what is usually found in English language books on Uechi-ryu history and its founder Kanbun Uechi.

Uechi-ryu karate is one of the most recent imports to the Ryukus in terms of fighting arts and was founded by Kanbun Uechi (1877-1948). Kanbun grew up on the Motobu peninsula of Okinawa under the watchful eye of his father and although his family was ‘shizoku’ (noble family), they worked as farmers. During Kanbun Uechi’s teenage years, it was a fashion of that era to perform “karate and bo dances” accompanied by the music of the shamisen (Kinjo, 1999). More than likely Kanbun Uechi was familiar with these dances and they may have served as a means to inspire his martial studies (Kinjo, 1999).

Kanbun had gained some formal training in karate and bo techniques from a man named ‘Tanmei’ Touichi (lit. ‘old man’; a term of respect). But his resolve to study the fighting arts in China was inspired by stories of Chinese masters told to him by a martial artist named Toyama. So, in March 1897, at the age of nineteen, Kanbun Uechi left Okinawa for Southern China.

Kanbun arrived in Fuzhou City, Fujian province, Southern China and like many Okinawans before him (Higaonna, Kinjo, Nakaima, etc.) Kanbun reportedly settled in at the Ryukyukan, a boarding house for the many migrant workers who came to Fujian seeking employment (Kinjo, 1999). Kanbun Uechi started working at a variety of different jobs and began practicing at the Kojo dojo, run by the Kojo family located next to the Ryukyukan (Kinjo, 1999).

Unfortunately, it has never been ascertained exactly what form of boxing was taught at the Kojo dojo during that era. Kanbun trained as hard as he could until one eventful day when the head instructor of the Kojo dojo reportedly called him “Uechi no wada buta gwa” (“little fool”).

Slighted by the insult, Kanbun decided to leave the Kojo dojo and the Ryukyukan to find his studies elsewhere.

Kanbun’s martial studies can be documented with some degree of accuracy up to the time he left the Kojo dojo. After he left, however, it becomes somewhat difficult to determine which direction his martial studies took. Oral tradition states that Uechi eventually became the student of Zhou Zhi He to further his studies of Chinese boxing, but it is not known how it came about. Reportedly, after Kanbun left
During his time in Nansoue, Kanbun Uechi’s life was for the most part uneventful. He taught Quanfa and sold herbal medicine to the local people of that area for several years until an unfortunate incident occurred which changed the course of his life.

Kanbun Uechi with members of the Shataku dojo in Wakayama, Japan.

Nevertheless, Kanbun reportedly studied every day for ten years, but it is unclear exactly what style he was taught. We do know that Uechi brought back the Hsing/kata: Sanchin, Seisan and Sanseru as well as ‘kotekite’ (commonly referred to as arm pounding or conditioning). It should be noted that besides its obvious benefit as a conditioning drill, ‘kotekite’ is a sophisticated push-hands and trapping flow drill. Also of note is that Kanbun reportedly did not learn the final Hsing/kata ‘Suparinpei’.

Besides his training in Quanfa, Uechi’s training with Zhou also included the use and preparation of herbal medicines (Breyette, 1999; Kinjo, 1999). In fact, one medicine still in use in some Uechi-ryu karate dojo’s is known as “Uechi Guza” in Okinawa hogen (dialect) or “Uechi Kusuri” in standard Japanese (English: Uechi medicine) and is used for healing bruises and cuts associated with training. After eight years of continuous training under Zhou, Kanbun Uechi reportedly received his teaching license in “Pangainoon” Quanfa in 1904 at the age of 27 (Kinjo, 1999). He was then granted permission to teach, and opened his first school in Nansoue, about 250 miles Northwest of Fuzhou where he taught for nearly three years (Breyette, 1999).

During his time in Nansoue, Kanbun Uechi’s life was for the most part uneventful. He taught Quanfa and sold herbal medicine to the local people of that area for several years until an unfortunate incident occurred which changed the course of his life. One of Kanbun’s students reportedly had a dispute with another man over a farming issue. Sadly, Kanbun’s student struck a blow to the other man, killing him (Breyette, 1999; Kinjo, 1999). However, there is speculation that Kanbun Uechi himself may have been involved in the dispute directly and may have delivered the fatal blow (Dollar, 1996). Nevertheless, whoever struck the final blow also struck the final blow for Kanbun Uechi’s life in China. Feeling somehow responsible for the man’s death, Kanbun closed his school and left China for Okinawa, vowing to never teach Quanfa again; the year was 1910 (Breyette, 1999).

Like his counterpart Kanryo Higaonna, several decades earlier, after his return to Okinawa, Uechi Kanbun never talked about, or taught Quanfa. In fact, many potential students came to know of Kanbun

“During his time in Wakayama prefecture, many Okinawan karate teachers visited Kanbun. Among them were Shito-ryu founder Kenwa Mabuni and Yasuhiro Konishi of the Shindo Jinen-ryu. Mabuni was intensely curious as to what had kept Kanbun in China for well over a decade.”

has also been described as a Taoist priest and a master of Chinese boxing, who taught among other styles his family system of Quanfa (Breyette, 1999).
learning his father’s system of Quanfa (Okinawa Prefectural Board of Education, 1997).

Around the time that Kanbun was teaching his brand of Quanfa in Wakayama prefecture, the popularization and modernization of Okinawan karate had begun. ‘Toudi’ (China hand) had now become karate (Empty hand). During this boom-era of popularization a multitude of styles were named and renamed. In contrast, Kanbun Uechi seemed reluctant to formally name his system. Indeed, Kanbun Uechi never stated the name of the system of Quanfa he studied in China and simply referred to his art as Pangainoon-ryu karate-jutsu (Jap. Half hard / soft empty-hand technique); a name which his students innocently mistook as a reference to his particular style of karate.

During his time in Wakayama prefecture, many Okinawan karate teachers visited Kanbun. Among them were Shito-ryu founder Kenwa Mabuni and Yasuhiro Konishi of the Shindo Jinen-ryu. Mabuni was intensely curious as to what had kept Kanbun Uechi in China for well over a decade and Kanbun was more than happy to oblige by demonstrating some of the Hsing/kata and techniques that comprised his ‘Pangainoon karate’. So inspired was Mabuni by what Kanbun had showed him, that Mabuni included some of the basic Fujian Tiger boxing techniques in a kata he later developed called ‘Shinpa’ or ‘Mindwave’. Konishi, for his part did not fair as well and Kanbun Uechi relocated his dojo to the city of Futenma in the 1950’s. After Kanbun Uechi’s passing in 1991 at the age of 79, Uechi-ryu karate-kyo was disestablished with the passing of its founder, Kanbun Uechi.

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For more information about Mario McKenna please visit: www.mariomckenna.com
Revealing Power
The Training Methods of The Warriors of Ancient Russia

Since its first public exposure to the Western world in 1993, the Russian Martial Art of Systema has sent shockwaves through the world of martial arts and combative tactics. Alluringly powerful and exhaustingly comprehensive, many are drawn to this art by the promise of achieving the moral and physical excellence of some of the most feared warriors our planet has ever seen.

- By Kevin Secours -

Forged In Adversity
“War is a scalpel that cuts away at excess to reveal truth.”
— Major Konstantin Komarov —

For those who remain uncertain about Systema, for those who still struggle with categorizing or evaluating the small samplings they may have encountered in print, by DVD or through random training, the questions often remain, what is the goal of this art, does it really work and how is their method of training different?

The seeds of this answer are found in the evolution of the style itself. Tracing its earliest roots to the 10th century, the Russian martial arts were challenged by harsh climates, expansive terrain and a persistent history of invaders on every border. Within this crucible, the earliest warriors quickly realized the supreme importance of adaptability. Refining their natural instincts and integrating the most effective elements from each enemy, they developed a method of combat dedicated to individual strengths and unconventional responses.

Even today, the first goal of Systema training is to help the student to identify and explore their natural instincts. Unlike many Oriental martial systems, which emphasize pre-determined forms and memorization, Systema seeks to reveal the inner power of the practitioner’s unique attributes. A common misconception concerning styles that claim to be based on instincts is that any movement or response is natural and therefore good. The simple reality is that not all reflexes are good. In the words of Laurence Gonzales, reflexes are simply those responses that statistically served us best as a species more often than they got us killed and these reflexes were not formed in a day; they were reinforced through trial and error over a massive period of time.

If the reflex to grab served our ancestors well and prevented them from falling out of trees or helped them hold onto weapons during the hunt, it was ingrained into our genetic hard-wiring. This certainly doesn’t mean that same response is our best option when someone is swinging a knife at us or when our hand touches a wire filled with live electricity. The blink response, cultivated by thousands of years of experience, still serves us well most of the time, protecting our eyes from bright light and dust, but the same response could get us seriously injured if we indulge it every time someone throws a punch our way, continuously interrupting our ability to successfully assess and respond. For this reason, the very foundation of all Systema training begins with providing the student with the conditions they need to study and identify their own unique responses to basic stimuli, so they can learn the benefits and dangers inherent in them firsthand.

These conditions include slow and mindful drills that allow the student to study how they can move their body. Critics might argue: “What use is there in training so slowly? A real attack will never come at that speed!” This is a valid point. Our fear of violence often makes us want to rush right into full speed training, risking injury and reinforcing bad habits, but it’s important to note that if you only train at full speed and with full force, you’ll only be reinforcing your existing flinch responses — you won’t be giving your nervous system the time it needs to reprogram itself and improve. Think about any skill you have ever learned: did you learn how to walk by running down a flight of stairs at full speed on your first try or did you start by crawling, toddling and falling, holding onto objects as you walked until finally you could run without thinking about it? If you know how to drive, did you learn by entering a demolition derby the first time you got behind the wheel or rush onto the highway immediately, or did you practice jerking forward and backwards and steering in a parking lot until you could handle quiet streets without hitting people? If you are like most people, you learn through slow, mindful work. In Systema, we extend the exact same, proven approach to all aspects of learning.

Arizona instructor Kwan Lee practices knife defense with his hands tied.
Work can begin in solo exercises. If you cannot control your body effectively in solo work, adding the stress of a partner or “mock attacker” is not going to make it better. This can include unique variations of very common body weight exercises like push-ups, squats and rolling as well as isometric and dynamic tension work. By working slowly, the student becomes more sensitive to their own body, learning to control it better one piece at a time and creating a powerful chain-reaction of self-realization and efficiency. Simply put, the more you can feel the different parts of your body, the better you can move them; the better you move them, the more you will feel them.

Students can also work in an identical manner in pairs or groups, learning to respond authentically to slow stimuli like pushes, grabs or armed attacks. Again, the key is to work at a pace slow enough to separate flinch responses from genuine observation and learning. Flinch responses are like a survival safety net that are with the student from their first lesson and then gradually eroded and replaced with more relaxed, educated and efficient movements. A classic Systema training drill involves having a training partner slowly touch and press against all surfaces of your body with a training knife. The more closely this weapon can emulate a real weapon in size, weight and color the better the psychological conditioning will be, however caution should still be given to using a safe training tool. The purpose of the drill is to authentically feel the blade and to allow it to direct the movements of your body. The recipient should move with energy and timing equal to the poke, neither anticipating it, nor competing against it. They should simply yield upon contact. The misconception regarding this drill is that we are training to get cut. Nothing could be further from the truth. In Systema, the primary goal in a conflict is always to detect and avoid danger before it can erupt. In a fight against a knife, the goal is certainly not to wait until we are being cut to respond. Rather, this drill is a classic example of reverse order training — of preparing for the worst-case scenario first — in this instance, contact having already been made. By studying the effect each movement has on the body, the student bypasses the need for memorized patterns or movements and educates their natural “body intelligence”. They teach themselves how to respond authentically to the knife without conscious thought. As this awareness and confidence grows and the students body becomes more relaxed, the distance is increased to roughly a meter. As stabs and slashes slowly enter, the goal now is to move the body as a whole, pre-emptively stepping to escape harm. If necessary, the arms and legs can be used as probes, to deflect, guide and secure the blade. Should the blade accidentally contact the body, the previous response of yielding to the cut kicks in to minimize harm.

As the drill evolves further, the students increase the distance again, learning to identify the precursors to the attack — the changes in posture, expression and emotions, the path of the eyes, verbal cues etc., to the point where students can see the intention before it manifests. Often, students will begin to detect suspicious irregularities in the posture or clothing of their partner that suggests where a weapon may be hidden before it’s even drawn. This attention to pre-combat indicators allows the student to confidently steer clear of potential harm. Since the metal of a knife also carries psychological ramifications, training can be escalated by using dull metal training blades which become progressively sharper with more advanced students. This type of logical progression is used against any manner of attack from guns and sticks, to punches, kicks and grabs. Through slow sparring, the student gradually replaces fear with familiarity. Although this concept has long been a central tenet of the Russian method, it is entirely consistent with the most modern research on stress inoculation, which has shown that the most effective method for preparing one-self to function under duress is to begin with a slow education phase, followed by a relaxed rehearsal phase and ending with testing against resistance. This simple 3-step approach is a continuous cycle in the Systema method.

**The Path of Non-Destruction**

_“The apparent fierceness of the Warrior proceeds from a primary caring for others...like the thorn on the rose, the Warrior exists to protect others.”_  
— Rick Fields —

Tightly connected to the early Russian warriors’ emphasis on adaptability was the fact that ancient Russia lacked a formal army to protect its people. As a result, civilian warriors required an art that was quick and easy to learn without interfering with their daily duties as farmers, hunters and merchants. As a result, the early arts quickly transcended a simple catalogue of tricks, tactics, or techniques and adopted an underlying philosophy of non-destruction. Primary emphasis was placed on ensuring that training and the attitudes and reactions that it created, in no way damaged...
the body or psyche of the practitioner or their training partners. This was essential in keeping the family, village and ultimately the country as a whole strong and healthy.

This is why the art is referred to as Systema (Russian for “the System”); it is a complete set of concepts and training principles for improving every aspect of the practitioner’s training and their life beyond it. Physical training addresses all seven physiological systems (nervous, cardiovascular, respiratory, genito-urinary, digestive, lymphatic/immune, muscular-skeletal). Among the many examples of the principle of non-destruction in application, students learn how to cultivate incredible striking power without relying on any form of traditional body hardening or knuckle conditioning typically found in many oriental styles. Emphasis is placed on learning how to work on the human body rather than inanimate striking pads and how to dissipate the residual shock that often rebounds from the delivery of hits. Instead, practitioners are taught the role of proper biomechanics in generating force and the advantages of integrating breathing and form with a relaxed and focused mind. A wide assortment of innovative drills teach the student how to correctly place their striking surfaces on their partners and then how to generate force with less and less muscular effort.

In Systema, training goes beyond simple conditioning and fitness concerns however to address all three levels of human ability: the physical, the psychological and the spiritual. Psychologically speaking, training teaches the student to confront their individual fears in a safe and productive environment. Unique endurance exercises teach the student the true limitations of their physical body and dissolve the weakening elements of pride and ego, laying the foundation for correct work. These also help students to distinguish between panic, fear and true danger. Students may be placed in circumstances where their attributes are limited: for example, striking without the use of their arms or legs and relying on hidden and overlooked weapons like the shoulder, the sternum, or even the hip. Limitations can come in the form of specific breath work, blindfolded work or lowlight conditions. They can also come from the environment itself, with training being adapted for confined spaces like cars, elevators or stairwells, or natural settings like forests, snow, or even fighting in the water.

All of this work serves a far higher purpose than the literal preparation of the individual for a single threat. Rather, it transcends the immediate context and cultivates an extraordinary strength of spirit, all the while reinforcing the underlying focus on adaptability.

The Modern Era

“The best is always the enemy of good enough.”
— Mikhail Kalashnikov —

When many hear that Systema’s roots date back to the 10th century, they wrongly attach the many connotations carried with this label, including the notions that often accompany traditional Oriental arts. Systema’s origins are quite separate and distinct from these however. Given the conditions in which Systema was formed, the art never developed the uniforms or ranks so often found in many Oriental arts. From the very first session, students of all levels and experience freely train together and exchange ideas in the spirit of true comradery. In keeping with the goal of personal growth, all forms of measurement
and testing are self-imposed, with every student simply striving to achieve their own personal excellence. Attitudes within the training hall are also light and relaxed. Students laugh and joke, talking freely on par with instructors. Students perform according to their own capacities, doing what they can and monitoring their own limits without fear of scorn or reprimand for sitting out if they must. In the absence of formal ranking, students are free to measure their actual personal achievement and for all schools every class ends with a group discussion, where participants share these discoveries, discussing their fears, observations and personal challenges, strengthening themselves and their comrades in the process. This is often followed by massage, back walking and other restorative health practices. Overall, there is a distinctly light, playful and welcoming attitude that permeates any good Systema school.

"Most of us have been conditioned by years of schooling where teachers lectured and students sat in quiet, obedient rows, hurrying to take notes. True learning isn’t about being told; it’s about being allowed to discover."

While the Russian warrior traditions enjoy a rich history, Systema is very much a modern method. When the Communists came to power in 1917, they stifled all national traditions in an attempt to assert their dominance, but they could not deny the potency of their country’s native arts. To came to power in 1917, they stifled all national traditions in an attempt to assert their dominance, but they could not deny the potency of their country’s native arts. To this end, Systema was further refined and reserved only for the most elite tiers of their military’s special forces. Here it continued to be tested in some of the most difficult conflict zones of the 20th century as the characteristic adaptability and strength of spirit cultivated by the Slavic warrior traditions fused with modern weapons and tactics. Leading practitioners guided the style through its continuing evolution in their roles as soldiers, law enforcement officers and bodyguards. As a result, today Systema offers its students a wide array of uniquely modern work, including offensive and defensive work with firearms, knives, sticks and chains, and all manner of improvised weaponry. Students whose professions require this depth of knowledge are naturally attracted to these specializations, but all practitioners, regardless of age or previous experience, can benefit from learning the civilian applications of these fields as well. For example, the focus and resolve cultivated in learning to survive in the wilderness can transfer a positive outlook and appreciation of the simplest benefits in one’s everyday life while professional body guarding tactics can easily be modified for the protection of friends and family. This modern framework also includes a detailed treatment of the psychology of conflict, the role of detecting aggression, the essential components of verbal and non-verbal de-escalation and the preparation of the survivor’s mindset. The net result is an utterly complete system of survival and self-improvement.

A Student’s Perspective

"Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity.”
— General George S. Patton

It’s only natural to wonder, where will this path take me? What does Systema really mean to me as a student? The simple reality is that no two paths to personal mastery are the same. Most of us have been conditioned by years of schooling where teachers lectured and students sat in quiet, obedient rows, hurrying to take notes. In many martial arts schools, the approach is equally rigid. Coming from this, it is only natural that we want a specific formula, a one-word answer, or an all-powerful secret technique that will make us invincible, even though we all know this isn’t how people naturally learn. True learning isn’t about being told; it’s about being allowed to discover. Like combat and life itself, learning must be free flowing, adaptive and responsive.

The Russian Orthodox faith has played an instrumental role in the development of Systema. One of its fundamental teachings, which remains entrenched in Systema’s approach, is the idea that all situations, whether good or bad, ultimately serve to create the best possible conditions for each individual to understand themselves. In this light, Systema’s training curriculum carries the immediate goal of helping every student realize the true depth of their ability. Over the long term, the goal of Warriorhood has always been to exist for an ideal beyond the self and so Systema seeks to strengthen and improve the individual to better serve and protect these values.

Today, thanks to a rapidly growing community of followers and instructors, coupled with the benefit of modern technologies like the Internet and DVD, the generosity of the Style’s leading masters are unbounded, spreading the health, confidence and life-giving benefits of this incredible art worldwide.

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For more information about Systema please visit: www.RussianMartialArt.com
Orthodox Christianity and its Role in the Evolution of Russian Systema

Since it was first revealed outside of Russia's borders in 1993, the martial art of Systema has been intriguing a growing number of novices and experts alike. While many of Systema's founding principles initially appear quite similar to the more familiar Oriental martial art approach, the unique exercises and perspective used to cultivate these attributes in Systema are often so foreign, that non-practitioners are at a loss to understand them. Although there are many factors that contribute to this uniquely Russian approach, undoubtedly one of the most powerful influences is the Russian Orthodox faith. In this article, I will attempt to briefly outline some of the key relationship between religion and the roots of this incredible fighting and life system.

- By Kevin Secours -

“For one must go through many sorrows to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the way all righteous men were saved and inherited the Heavenly Kingdom.”

— St. Seraphim —

from his conversation with N. Motovilov

For the bulk of the 9th century, Byzantine evangelists worked steadfastly to convert Russians to Orthodox Christianity. From the very beginning, the seeds of religion were carried through the difficult social and political climate by Russia’s early warrior pioneers. One example from the late 9th century can be found in the killing of two Viking warlords, Askold and Dir, who were slain by their relative Ryurik, the founder of the Russian Viking state. It is said that he built a church on the site of their burial mound, suggesting that he had been baptized, likely during a raid on Constantinople. Although Christianity would be abandoned by his successor and would struggle continuously to re-emerge, most scholars agree that in AD 988, Vladimir, the Great Prince of Kiev, accepted baptism for himself, thereby formally transforming Russia from a pagan territory into a Christian State.

During the reign of Vladimir, there were no formal monasteries yet established in Russia, although communities of monks were beginning to form. During this period, the forefathers of the present day Cossacks, formed largely by the migration of various European descendants, were settling in the region of modern day Ukraine. Records from the 10th century describe them as being a fiercely independent people that did not subscribe to any of the dominant ruling people of the time, hence the name Cossack from the Tartar word “Kazak”, meaning “The Freeman”. Living in chains of separate communities, the Cossacks were loosely bound by a military character entirely separate form the Russian State, which as Colonel W.V. Chereeshneff noted, was quite similar in nature to the tribal units of the early Scottish clans. These communities became natural homes for many missionaries, monks and evangelists, and entire cities often formed around these early churches. To give some idea of the speed with which the Russian Orthodox faith grew during this period, it is widely estimated that there were no more than a few dozen churches in Russia during Vladimir’s reign, but by the 11th century, Kiev alone would boast more than 600.

The duality between Christianity and Paganism in Russia and the resistance it naturally caused played a key role in most of the struggles for centuries to come. At the forefront of many of these struggles, the Cossacks quickly adopted a role as guardsians and defenders of Russia, growing into nothing less than a society of professional soldiers. While still dedicated to their personal liberty, records show that they fought alongside the Russian Grand Duke Dmitri against the Tartars in 1380. By the 16th century, the various Cossack clans merged into 2 republics: the Zaporojie (on the river Dnieper) and the Don Cossack State (on the river Don). These new republics played an essential role, separating the Russian State from the Mongol and Tartar tribes, who enjoyed the support of the Sultan of Turkey. As Chereeshneff noted, the Cossacks were so pivotal in their role as defenders that were it not for the Zaporojie and the Don, militant Roman Catholicism would have likely conquered the whole of Eastern Europe, while Islam may well have spread everywhere east of Poland.

As the Cossacks’ defensive power grew, so too did the churches and monasteries around which most of their settlements were formed. Monasteries provided the social infrastructure that bound these early clans into more established settlements,

“The duality between Christianity and Paganism in Russia and the resistance it naturally caused played a key role in most of the struggles for centuries to come.”
During the 17th Century, the principal role of the Cossacks switched from protecting Russia to the colonization of the south and east as they extended Russia’s borders, carrying the banner of Christianity with them. They spread along their country’s border in defensive settlements, where they worked tirelessly to fend off continued invasions. Acting much like teams of modern day Special Forces, the Cossacks realized the value of offensive actions in maintaining their borders and so it was, that working in highly versatile and mobile units, they raidied the settlements and camps of neighboring border towns. Hailing from such diverse cultural backgrounds and situated largely on the frontier of ancient Russia, the Cossacks were uniquely poised to continue their engineering and refinement of one of the most versatile and powerful fighting styles the world has ever seen. Battle by battle, treacherous step after step, and these intrepid frontiersmen led the way, conquering the Far East, Siberia, discovering the Bering Strait, and settling as far away as Alaska. In the 18th Century, Cossack regiments were at last incorporated into the Russian Army, serving in the war against Napoleon, Crimea and Turkey. In their travels, outposts continued to be established until at last eleven separate Cossack clans existed before the revolution of 1917.

With the rise of Communism, both the Cossacks and Russian Orthodox Christianity became targeted by the Soviet government; however both religion and the cultural fighting styles and traditions now so closely connected to them, survived underground, and practiced in secret. In addition, the government recognized the value of their indigenous fighting arts and so it was that they also continued to refine these systems, forging them into an eclectic hybrid which they reserved for the most elite units of their special forces.

The Influence of Orthodoxy

As we analyze Russian Systema in its modern form, the influences of the Russian Orthodox Christian faith can still be strongly felt. While the practice of Systema in no way precludes an acceptance or belief in Orthodoxy and while many proponents hail from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, the fundamental philosophy and ideologies of its ancient martial roots are nevertheless heavily influenced by religion, contributing largely to the markedly different flavor it still bears from most Oriental arts.

First, the Russian Orthodox faith believes that every event in life happens for a reason. Good or bad, the ultimate purpose of all experience is to provide the individual with the best possible circumstances to discover and understand their true self. To this end, Systema training is founded on the idea of placing the student into situations where they can safely test their mental, physical and spiritual limits, to grow themselves as people.

“As we analyze Russian Systema in its modern form, the influences of the Russian Orthodox Christian faith can still be strongly felt.”

In The Path to Salvation, St. Theofan the Recluse highlighted a number of specific parameters for cultivating the self through Orthodox Christianity which are obviously still present in Russian martial art training. St. Theofan notes that from birth, the body is aroused and in a constant state of living activity. For this reason, “it is necessary to place this activity within proper bounds and to strengthen [the individual] with force of habit so that later there will be less disturbance from it”. Beginning with diet, he cautions that appetite in all of its forms is the seat of passion, and eating should be done to strengthen the body. He goes on to note that movement and the muscles that breed it are the seat of the will and to this end, the body should be used in a manner that is “measured and sensible”, training oneself to work and use the body efficiently. A failure to do so, he notes, leads to unsteady development, be it hyperactivity or inattentiveness. He even describes the role of the nerves...
in the body and their role in our perception and senses. In much the same spirit he counsels us to train our body to “endure every kind of outward influence without misfortune: whether from fresh air, water, change of temperature, heat, cold, pain, wounds, and so forth. The soul in such a man is the full master of the body; it does not postpone, or change, or leave off actions fearing bodily unpleasantness. On the contrary, it will turn with a certain desire to those things that can bring danger to the body.” In all things, the goal should be to strengthen the powers of the body without inflating the ego or pride.

In these basic ideals alone, we can find much of the central philosophy promoted by Russian Systema. Training is used to lead the practitioner through an exploration of their full capacity. Through Systema’s careful progression from slow training with soft contact to incrementally harder and more resistant work, the practitioner learns to maximize every training experience, building confidence and eroding fears that would otherwise inhibit learning. Working constantly at speeds and resistance levels that trigger flinch responses simply reinforcing existing habits equally — both the good and the bad. Only through a mindful and slow attention to every aspect of movement, form, breathing and emotions, can the student learn to free themselves from the weaknesses in their existing programming. In this way, nothing is done to intentionally harm or diminish the student. While training must involve physical and psychological challenges, great care is taken to ensure that it is always done safely and in the spirit of support and growth. From the very beginning, the philosophy of non-destruction is used to guide every aspect of personal training.

In Russian Orthodox Christianity, self-pity is seen as one of the greatest weaknesses in relation to the body. In this spirit, Systema teaches the student to welcome challenges and to focus on solutions rather than to dwell on problems, imbuing them with the mindset of a true survivor. Students are taught to take responsibility for their actions and to find meaning and reward in even the most difficult aspects of training through a host of training drills, whether they be the prolonged static holds in push-up, squat or related positions or intense cardio-vascular conditioning. Work can also be more purely psychological and include controlling flinch responses against specific types of pain, breath control while being exposed to stressors, or the use of selective muscular contraction to escape from holds and maximize power when delivering strikes. All of this work serves to familiarize the student with the habit of surviving hardship with a calm and focused spirit.

“[In Russian Orthodox Christianity, self-pity is seen as one of the greatest weaknesses in relation to the body. In this spirit, Systema teaches the student to welcome challenges and to focus on solutions rather than to dwell on problems.”

In combative application, Systema, like Christian Orthodoxy, cautions the student against malice and ego. Most aspects of violence are foreign to the average person. Most of us do not inflict harm on others on a daily basis or carry and use weapons in our regular lives. For this reason, these aspects of combative training, like anything rare, strange or unfamiliar, carry the risk of becoming sensationalized or exaggerated. As writer Oscar Wilde said: “As long as war is regarded as wicked, it will always have its fascination. When it is looked upon as vulgar, it will cease
As the old adage goes: “If you only have a craving for violence and ultimately seeking it are all too often left in the wake of this, under the guise of preparation and students matrise and excite the student continuously. The very real as any drug. When this occurs in competitive training, training begins to traumatize and to use their environments to their optimal advantage.

Consider this very practical example: every physical action carries the very real and tangible ability to excite the participant’s body, filling them with endorphins, cortisol, adrenalin and a host of other natural chemicals. If combat training is pursued in a manner that consistently provides rushes of these natural chemicals, it’s a natural side effect that the body will come to crave these surges. We’ve all known our share of adrenaline junkies — people who drive too fast, play extreme sports, take needless risks and seek competition. These are all forms of addiction to exhilaration, just as real as any drug. When this occurs in combative training, training begins to traumatize and excite the student continuously under the guise of preparation and students are all too often left in the wake of this, craving violence and ultimately seeking it if not causing it in the world around them. As the old adage goes: “If you only have a hammer, everything starts to look like a nail.” This is a lesson that Systema practitioners learned first hand during many of the wars of the 20th century. As the Russian military experimented with a host of training methods, sending specialized units out to war and studying them upon their return, they learned firsthand that the highest priority must not simply be cultivating the ability to harm, but rather fostering the emotional and psychological structure that permits the soldier to return unscathed by the trauma.

While the connections between Orthodoxy and the training curriculum quickly become apparent, the dilemma often still remains, how can a style founded on the Christian ideals of love and peace, advocate violence? This is perhaps the most important aspect of all. Violence is a very real part of our current world. Balancing between unnecessary aggression and justified self-defense has long been the greatest distinction between the true Warrior and naked aggression. Law enforcement professionals continue to struggle with this balance every moment of their work and every day, the evening news recounts stories of the violence in our world that triggers outrage for this very reason. When is violence justified?

Again, the roots of Russian Orthodox Christianity play a powerful role in Systema’s guiding philosophy. All training is based on the idea of increasing the student’s awareness to improve their ability to detect danger sooner, to improve their confidence and their skill level to allow them to evade harm whenever possible, and only when no other option remains, to protect you from harm or death through the use of physical violence. While this attitude is shared by many Oriental arts as well, it is widely interpreted. For example, Systema does not advocate sport or competitive fighting. As Master Mikhail Ryabko said: “The goal of a ring fighter is to show that he is superior to the other fighter... the goal of the warrior is to save his family, his friends and his country from death and misery.”

In his book “Let Every Breath...”, Vladimir Vasiliev was asked about the most important quality to achieve martial arts mastery. He said: “It’s the same quality that underlies most other skills — humility. That’s what we all need. Humility allows us to understand ourselves. It opens us up to God, and to everything positive that the world can give us. Then the skill just flows in. Humility with hard work allows you to achieve everything. One of the Church Fathers has said it so well: you may have so many virtues and skills that if you write a zero for every one of them, you will fill up an entire book. Imagine a whole book filled with zeros! And unless you have a “one” or any other number in front of the zeros — that is all that they will ever be — nothing. That “number” is humility. It gives true value to all our virtues, skills and achievements.”

Ultimately, all training in both Systema and Orthodox Christianity strives for the same goal: to develop humility in the individual and in so doing, to reveal the intrinsic strength and resolve required to battle self weaknesses in all its forms.

“The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him.”

— Gilbert K. Chesterton —
Kotekitae and Modern Karate-do

Kotekitae is a common training method used to strengthen and condition the forearms of its practitioners. It comprises to the words, kote or forearm and kitae(ru) meaning to forge; hence the common English translation of forearm conditioning. The origin of these drills in Okinawan karate-do is unclear. The kotekitae drill as found in Uechi-ryu was believed to have been brought back from China by Uechi-ryu’s founder Kanbun Uechi. Texts on Five Ancestor Fist by Alex Co and on Tiger Form Boxing or Hu Xing Quan by Wei Quizhai suggest that the transmission of this drill into the Uechi-ryu and Shito-ryu curricula would be from Fuzhou.

- By Mario McKenna -

Most students of Okinawan karate-do know the pain, effort and sweat associated with the routine of kotekitae. Kotekitae is a common training method used to strengthen and condition the forearms of its practitioners. More importantly it sets the stage for beginning training into close-quarters fighting. Different variations of this exercise can be found in Uechi-ryu, Goju-ryu, Shorin-ryu, and many other systems. The term itself comprises to words, kote or forearm and kitae(ru) meaning to forge; hence the common English translation of forearm conditioning. Kotekitae practice is considered invaluable to a student’s training. Well known author and teacher of Five Ancestor Fist Kung Fu or Ngo Cho Kun, Alex Co¹, states:

“Partner conditioning exercises play three important roles in the development of the Ngo Cho Kun practitioner. First, they are intended to strengthen and toughen the inner and outer forearms. Second, they are used to instruct how to maintain the proper distance between you and your opponent when engaged in hand-to-hand combat. Third, they teach the practitioner to be unafraid of not only pain, but of being in close proximity to an opponent”.

Therefore, kotekitae teaches not only how to effectively negotiate an attack physically, but mentally as well.

The origin of these drills in Okinawan karate-do is unclear, but I would speculate that they have been a part of training for at least the past one hundred years.

I first encountered this version of kotekitae in 1994 while training in the dojo of Katsuhiko Minowa, a well known kobudo instructor as well as a teacher of Uechi-ryu. I found the exercise interesting and challenging as well as being a contrast to the kotekitae drill that I had learned as a Goju-ryu student. Although Sensei Minowa primarily taught it as a conditioning exercise, it was easy to see that it could be used as a flow drill that could teach parrying, timing, dis-
Kenwa Mabuni’s Description of a Parrying & Conditioning Drill

1. A (left) starts by delivering a punch with his right fist at B’s solar plexus. B (right) uses his left fist to perform an inside side parry (as shown in photo).

2. Next, B uses his right hand to perform an outside side parry.

3. Finally, B uses his left hand to sweep the attacker’s hand away and deliver a punch with his right fist to the attacker’s solar plexus. A now defends as B did by performing an inside side parry. Second, he performs an outside parry and then a sweeping parry. This is repeated back and forth with A and B changing roles. This is not simply a way of practicing parrying techniques, but also a way to strengthen the arms and is similar to attacking and defending in Kendo, which produces excellent results.

“...tancing and trapping skills. However, when I asked Sensei Minowa about this practice being used as a flow drill, he stated that Kanei Uechi (Uechi-ryu founder’s son) was adamant that it was used predominantly for conditioning.

The kotekitae drill as found in Uechi-ryu was believed to have been brought back from China by Uechi-ryu’s founder Kanbun Uechi. By now we are all familiar with the history of Uechi-ryu and the story of Kanbun, but for those who may not be, I will give a brief overview.

In 1897, at the age of nineteen, Kanbun left Okinawa for Southern China. He initially found himself studying boxing at the Kojo dojo in Fuzhou, but after being insulted, he left the dojo and began studying under Zhou Zhi He⁴. How these two men came together remains a mystery, but Uechi’s teacher, Zhou Zhi He was a bit of an enigmatic figure and there is little factual evidence about him. Zhou reportedly practiced Crane and Tiger boxing, in addition to hard and soft Qigong and was noted for his Iron Palm technique.

Kanbun reportedly studied for ten years until his return to Okinawa under mysterious circumstances, but it is unclear exactly what style he was taught. We do know that Uechi brought back the kata Sanchin, Sesan and Sanseru as well as kotekitae which he first taught to his students in Wakayama Prefecture in the 1920’s. Therefore in Uechi-ryu history and tradition, the kotekitae drill originated with Kanbun Uechi via Zhou Zhi He.

A few years after my first encounter with the Uechi-ryu kotekitae drill, I ordered two books on Chinese martial arts: an English language text on Five Ancestor Fist by Alex Co and a Chinese language text on Tiger Form Boxing or Hu Xing Quan by Wei Quizhai. I was pleasantly surprised to see almost the exact same drill illustrated in both texts! So, it would appear that there is some support for a Fuzhou boxing origin to this drill and its influence on Okinawa karate-do. Interestingly, Co has an entire chapter dedicated to the influence of Southern Fuzhou boxing, particularly Five Ancestor Fist, arguing for a strong influence on Okinawan karate:
The existing styles of Kung Fu popular in Fukien include White Crane, Southern Shaolin styles, Dog style, Tiger style, Snake style and Five Ancestor Fist. Although all of these styles are practiced in China today, the two of interest to us are White Crane and Five Ancestor Fist. These styles were later almost fused into one system because of the great similarities in theory and technique. Both styles eventually found their way to other countries, and do in fact hold other styles eventually found their way to other countries, and do in fact hold other styles eventually found their way to other countries, and do in fact hold other styles eventually found their way to other countries, and do in fact hold other styles eventually found their way to other countries, and do in fact hold other styles eventually found their way to other countries, and do in fact hold other styles eventually found their way to other countries, and do in fact hold systems. This suggested a possible origin of this training technique.

Taken together this would suggest that the kotekitae drill found in Uechi-ryu was originally part of the boxing culture of Fuzhou, although which boxing tradition it is from is unclear.

The story does not end here. Several years later I received a copy of Kenwa Mabuni’s publication Seipai no Kenkyu. The book, published in 1938, contained a photo sequence and explanation of virtually the exact same kotekitae drill that I had learned in Sensei Minowa’s dojo and also illustrated in the two books I had purchased on Tiger Form Boxing and Five Ancestor Fist! To say that I was startled would have been an understatement. It was indeed perplexing.

So, where did Mabuni get this version of the kotekitae drill from? We know that Mabuni had studied with many prominent teachers as a young man, the two most notable being Anko Itosu (Shuri-te) and Kanrroy Higaonna (Naha-te). Could he have gotten this drill from one of them? Possibly, but if we look at the kotekitae drill passed down in Kanryo Higaonna’s tradition via Goju-ryu and Tou’on-ryu, we see that it is virtually identical to Three Star Arm conditioning drill found in Southern Praying Mantis, or Southern Shaolin.

In a previous article, I presented a translation of an account of Kanbun Uechi’s life in Wakayama prefecture written by Yasuhiro Konishi in his book Karate-do Johatsu. It outlined a visit by Mabuni and Konishi to Kanbun Uechi’s school in which Konishi states that they witnessed a display of Pangainun. I later on presented a translation of the question and answer session that took place between Mabuni and Uechi.

If we examine both of these source materials it seems reasonable that Mabuni would have seen the Uechi-ryu kotekitae drill and possibly incorporated it into his Shito-ryu. Indeed, some Shito-ryu groups still retain and practice this drill, albeit very rarely. This would suggest that the transmission of this drill into the Shito-ryu curriculum would be from Fuzhou (Tiger Form Boxing and / or Five Ancestor Fist) to Uechi (Pangainun / Uechi-ryu) to Mabuni (Shito-ryu).

Footnotes
4 More commonly referred to in Japanese as Shu Shi Wa (1874-1926).
5 Ibid 1, pp. 31.
6 Ibid 4.