

Creating chances for experience

Several weeks ago I organised a workout reunion for my former and present karate students and the focus of this special workout was on close combat mass attacks.

During the workout I slowly worked towards a fighting scenario where we ultimately had hardly any space to manoeuvre, often standing shoulder to shoulder as in a huge packed crowd of hundreds and where everybody was fighting everybody. At its climax people were pushed back in the fighting crowd when they escaped the centre of fighting and medicine balls were constantly being thrown in to add another dimension. A scenario with an extremely chaotic and uncontrollable nature. Some of my former students were not familiar with this type of mass attack training where all attacks can be initiated at any time, totally unexpected and unseen. A direct and for some a new confronting way to see in which direction fear leads them, being it fight, flight, freezing or flow, as described in an excellent article from Kevin Secours in this edition.

In experiencing close combat mass attacks it became very clear to some of my students that they used their body differently than expected and often differently than they were trained to do. Some students told me that, among other things, they used more basic motor skills than any complex motor skills and in order to survive' used more of their natural and instinctive way of reacting than they 'normally' were used to. The most important thing and my primary goal, was that they learned something about themselves. Why things were different, what fear did to them in this setting and at the point of self-defence, what changed their way of reacting compared to others scenarios. To be short, what reflection they received from this experience.

From the point of self-defence, I think that every martial artist should train or at least experience all kinds of possible self-defence scenarios if the opportunity exists. Experience is our best teacher and it gives us a direct feedback. Personally I think that every martial art school should do more to let the student experience out the box practise, which broadens our view of things and even gives new insights into our self and our martial art systems. I hope the mass attack scenario example sparks some of our readers to experiment.

Lex Opdam
Editor in chief

Matayoshi Kobudo

A Brief History and Overview

While there are a number of books and numerous articles about the various unarmed systems of Okinawan martial arts, there is little quality written material in English about the various armed arts of the island. There are a small number of sources looking at the performance of various kata, and some on application of these kata, but there are a dearth of sources that clearly examine the content and history of any of the island's major weapons systems.

This article is an attempt to begin to fill some of that gap in the literature by more carefully examining the history and content of the Matayoshi kobudo.

- Frederick W. Lohse III -

The armed arts of Okinawa have always been an integral part of the martial heritage of the island. Indeed, an earlier term for the Okinawan martial arts, Tode, makes no distinction between armed and unarmed technique. Along with the unarmed arts, the island's bushi have always passed down a variety of armed techniques. Many remain extant today, ranging from the bojutsu of "Tode" Sakugawa to the bo and sai of Chatan Yara, the bo and eku from Tsuken jima, and to a number of Chinese based weapons techniques practiced on the island. Traditionally, these weapon skills were passed down along with unarmed technique, preserved and taught (and adapted) by various individual teachers. Also, much like the island's karate kata, many exist in a number of variations, passed down by different teachers but connected to the same root. In the mid-20th century this more organic method of instruction began to change. As Okinawa's karate began to be codified in "ryu", or formal lineages, the same thing happened to the weapon arts.

While there are a number of lineages still extant on the island, many, like the Honshin-ryu, Yamane-ryu and Ufuchiku kobudo, remain very small, even after having been codified. Still other weapon skills remain small parts of individual karate systems, preserved but having little

communal impact. These techniques and systems remain a valuable part of Okinawa's martial heritage, no matter how limited their provenance. However, starting in the middle of the last century two main lineages of weapon arts developed on the island, and, along with attracting their own body of students, started to draw students from karate lineages that had no armed component. Taira Shinken, originally a student of Funakoshi Ginchin, began collecting various kobudo kata and techniques in the early 20th century. He went on to found the Society for the Preservation and Promotion of Ryukyu Kobudo (Ryukyu Kobudo Hozon Shin-

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kokai), now well known world-wide. Earlier, in the late 1800's, another lineage that today practices primarily armed technique began to develop, the Matayoshi family kobudo. This is the other main armed system on the island.

Little exists in English, or in Japanese, about the Matayoshi kobudo system. While it has spread world-wide, and has



Courtesy of ZOKK, pp. 4.

Kokusai Karate Kobudo Renmei main dojo Founding Members, December 17, 1962. Taira Shinken, seated 2nd from left. Higa Seiko, seated, center. Matayoshi Shinpo, standing 4th from left.

had a profound affect on the Okinawan martial arts, most available information about the system is hearsay, or a small smattering of book chapters, short articles, and biographies on websites. Some of this information is contradictory, and some is incorrect. While this article is not meant to be definitive, it is an attempt to more completely convey some of the history and content of the Matayoshi kobudo. In writing it, I draw from my more than 20 years of experience in the system, under Matayoshi Shinko in Okinawa, under Sakai Ryugo- a student of Sensei Matayoshi from the early 1960's- in Japan, under Gakiya Yoshiaki, and under Kimo Wall, a student of Sensei Mata-

yoshi since 1962. It is informed by numerous casual conversations with all of these people, as well as more directed questions about the content and history of the system, including a planned interview with Sensei Matayoshi for another project in 1995. Finally, it draws on the small amount of written information about the system in Japanese. It is my hope it will add clarity to the existing information about system, and help to bring a treasure of Okinawa's martial heritage more fully into the light.

Background

The Matayoshi family traces its lineage back to a famous figure in Okinawan history, Gima Shinjo, or Mashi Gima Oyakata Shinjo (1557-1644). (儀間真常) Gima was a descendant of Oshiro (Ufugushiku) Anshi, the head of the family line. While not known as a martial artist, Gima had a profound effect on the development of the island. He was a noble in the Ryukyuan feudal government, an official of Ryukyu Agriculture (Smits, 1999), and was the patron of Noguni Sokan, who brought the sweet potato back from Fujian, China in 1604 (see Kerr, 2000). Gima took the product his vassal brought back and promoted its development as a crop. Within a few years, it became one of the most important crops on the island. From Okinawa,



Courtesy of Kimo Wall.

Shinjo Gima.

it was later transplanted to Japan. Gima also imported and propagated sugar cane, as a cash crop. These two imported plants dramatically changed the course of Okinawan history, the potato providing a secure sustenance crop suited to the climate and high in nutritional value, and the sugar cane providing a valuable cash crop, jump starting the island's economy.

Gima and Noguni's reputations have remained important on the island. A monument was built to them in a park in Naha in 1937, to honor their work for Okinawa, and Gima's tomb, which was moved from Sumiyoshi Cho in 1959 to make room for the expansion of a US base, was rebuilt in 1993, using state funds. The current Matayoshi family is a collateral line of the Gima family, splitting off some 16 generations ago. Many of



Courtesy of Fred Lohse.

Shinjo Gima's Tomb.

the male members of the family retain the shin (真) character from Shinjo to honor their famous ancestor; this is the shin in Shinko and Shinpo. (Interview with Matayoshi Shinpo, 1995.)

At some point in their history, the Matayoshi family became associated with the martial arts. It is unclear just what this association was- they were not famous on the island as teachers, or closely associated with the Ryukyu government or military- but by the time Matayoshi Shinko was young there was a long tradition of martial arts within the family, a tradition stretching back an unknown number of generations. Sensei Matayoshi Shinko's first teachers were his father, Matayoshi Shinchin, and his paternal grandfather, Matayoshi Shintoku. They initiated him into the family Kenpo and weapon tech-



Shinko Matayoshi.

Courtesy of Fred Lohse.

niques. According to the family, Tsuken Akachu no Eku di is a good representation of these family techniques, and was the technique Matayoshi Shinchin was most proficient in.

The current Matayoshi kobudo has its start with Matayoshi Shinko. He was born in the Kakinohana area of Naha, on May 18, 1888, and grew up in Shinbaru village. He was the third son of Matayoshi Shinchin, and the only child to take a deep interest in the martial arts. As a boy, he began studying under his father and grandfather, learning (among other things) Tsuken Akachu no eku di, and from his father the bo kata Kubo no Kon, Yonegawa no Kon, and Yara no Kon. (ZOKR, 1999.) Later, his father introduced him to a friend and training partner of his from Gishikawa village, Agena Chokubo, who was also known as Gushikawa Tigaguwa and Higa no tanmei. From Agena he learned sai and kama techniques, and deepened his knowledge of the eku and bo. He continued his weapon studies with another family acquaintance, Ire Okina, (old man Ire, also known as Jitoudi Moshigua), from Nozato village in Chatan.¹ Under Irei, he studied the tonfa and nunchiyaku.

Throughout his childhood and teenage years, Matayoshi Shinko focused exclusively on the martial arts. He continued to seek out different teachers, and through this pursuit became friends with

a Chinese tea merchant, Wu Hein Kui, called Gokenki in Japanese. Go was proficient in a Chinese form of White Crane Kenpo, and shared what he knew with the young Matayoshi.² Shinko had heard stories of the great martial arts of China from his family, and from Gokenki, and with the latter's encouragement he decided to go abroad to study. In the Spring of 1905, at the age of 17, he left Okinawa for Hokkaido, planning on entering China through Manchuria.³ He traveled through Hokkaido and Sakhalin Island on his way and in Manchuria, at that time a rather lawless place, he joined a group of mounted nomads for a while. Some stories suggest these nomads were also bandits, and while living with them Shinko learned how to ride, and use the lasso, bola (suruchin), and various other throwing weapons (shuriken), as thrown weapons were essential to how the group hunted and fought. This was a very austere time in Shinko's life- the living was hard, and it is said he also learned a great deal about actual combat at this time.

After 2-3 years with the group (it is unclear how long he stayed in Manchuria), he moved south. Stopping first in Shanghai, he practiced a form of Shaolin Kenpo for a time, though it is unclear exactly what this was. It is possible he practiced at the famous Jing-wu association as some authors have said, but as the Jing-wu was founded in 1909 or 1910, that seems unlikely. From there

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he headed to his initial destination, Fuchow city, in Fujian province. At the time, there was a large Okinawan community in the trading port, and it is unclear why he took such a roundabout way to get there when travel was common between Okinawa and Fujian, but eventually he arrived at the address Gokenki had given him for the family home. There he met Go Koki, Go Kenki's father, and

soon began to receive instruction in Fujian Shaolin Fist from him. Another in the long list of connections in Matayoshi Shinko's training was soon made, and seeing the promise in the young man Go Koki introduced him to a friend, a well known martial artist called Kingai.⁴ Kingai Roshi was an older man, a lifelong student and teacher of the martial arts, and is said to be a senior to the same Zhou Zei He (Shushiwa), who taught Uechi Kanbun. (ZOKR, 1999.)

Kingai Roshi called his style Kingai Noon, or Kingai-ryu (金硬流). He said the

“In 1915 he was invited by Funakoshi Ginchin to demonstrate kobudo on the mainland, possibly the first demonstration of Okinawan kobudo in mainland Japan.”

name implied Kin(金)- reacting supply to change, and Gai(硬) - hard or solid like metal; therefore it embodied the hard-soft ideal. (ZOKR, 1999.) The first is an idiosyncratic reading of the character, which is usually translated as metal or gold, and the system has also been referred to as a Golden Bird style. Kingai's instruction was very severe, but Shinko felt lucky to be learning from such a great master, and applied himself to the practice (ZOKR, 1999). Along with his martial studies, at this time he also began learning acupuncture, moxibustion, and Chinese herbal medicine from Kingai.

In this period, Shinko traveled to Taiwan to see their martial arts, and returned to Okinawa for a few visits between 1910 and 1918. In 1915 he was invited by Funakoshi Ginchin to demonstrate kobudo on the mainland, possibly the first demonstration of Okinawan kobudo in mainland Japan. Then, sometime around 1920, he took up residence again in Okinawa for a number of years. At that time, he acted as a Chinese doctor to the Okinawan community, and founded a martial arts study group (kenkyukai) that brought together a number of the famous martial artists of the day. It is probably at this time that he trained with Chinen Sanra (1842-1925)⁵, Shishi Ryoko (1852-1925),

and Oshiro Chojo (1887-1935), all of whom he learned bo techniques from. In 1921, along with Miyagi Chojun, he participated in a demonstration of Ryukyu martial arts for the then crown-prince Hirohito in the grand hall of Shuri Castle. In 1929 Shinko participated in a memorial demonstration for Emperor Meiji, at the Meiji shrine in Tokyo as a representative for Okinawa prefecture; he did kama and tonfa techniques and Funakoshi Ginchin did karate, and he was presented with a medal by the government for this demonstration.⁶ Shinko was married during this time in Okinawa, and his son, Matayoshi Shinpo, was born in 1921.

In the late 1920's or early 1930's he returned to Fuchow to see his teacher Kingai Roshi again, and to further his studies in the armed elements of the system- tinbe, nunti, sansetsukon, and suruchin. Before his return to Okinawa he was given two scrolls about the style from Kingai, which the family still has; the upper and lower scrolls of Kyomo Taigen Roshi (Guang-ming Da Yuanshuai), Kingai-ryu's patron saint.⁷ He returned to Okinawa for good in 1935.

After his return to Okinawa, he lived in Naha, and opened an import/export business. He continued to act as a Chinese doctor, and started another martial arts research group. He also taught the arts he had learned, working them into the system that would become Matayoshi kobudo, and running dojo in Naha,

Chatan, and Kadena. He was very highly respected in the Okinawan martial arts community, and was given a variety of nicknames, including Shinbaru Mateshi (Matayoshi from Shinbaru), and Kama nu ti Mateshi (Matayoshi of the Kama)⁸. He passed away in May of 1948, at the age of 59, and his passing was seen as a great loss to the Okinawan martial arts community.

After his death, the leadership of the system he had founded passed to his son, Matayoshi Shinpo. Shinpo was born on December 27, 1921, in Yomitan. He began training under his father when he was 4 years old. His father also furthered his martial education in much the same way his had been nurtured, introducing Shinpo to a number of his friends and fellow teachers. In this way, Shinpo began studying under Kyan Chotoku in 1928, at age 8, as well as briefly under his fa-

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ther's friend Miyagi Chojun, and then with Higa Seiko, with whom he became close friends. In 1935, he also began training with his father's old friend Gokenki.

Shinpo maintained this training until the end of WWII, when he moved to Kawasaki city, in Kanegawa prefecture, along

with a number of other Okinawans. Okinawa was a very difficult place to be after the war, and he made the move in order to make a living at the time. While in Kawasaki, he taught kobudo in the Okinawan community, and practiced with a number of other Okinawan martial artists who were also living there. He finally returned to Okinawa in 1960.

When he returned to Okinawa, he first took up residence in the dojo of Higa Seiko. His first students on the island were



Kimo Wall and Shinpo Matayoshi with Manji sai, Massachusetts, 1995.

members of Higa's dojo. In 1962, Higa founded the Kokusai Karate Kobudo Renmei (International Karate Kobudo Federation), and Shinpo became a member, along with another noted kobudo instructor, Taira Shinken, who was vice president of the organization. Shinpo lived in the Higa dojo for a number of years, teaching in the dojo, outside in the yard, and at various places around the island. He also spent a good deal of time traveling about the island, talking to and training with various kobudo practitioners, in particular other former students of his father. Martial artists who knew him at that time, like Sensei Kimo Wall, recollect



Kodokan Dojo.

that it was very important to him to re-connect to people he or his father trained with before the war.

Over time, Shinpo saw that the island's karate was getting more and more popular. It was well entrenched with the local population, and had been gaining popularity with foreigners, in particular the American servicemen stationed on the island, for years. However, it did not seem that the armed arts of the island were getting the same level of recognition. He felt this was a loss to Okinawa's martial heritage, and began working to counteract this trend. By the mid-60's he had gathered together a number of kobudo practitioners, and was teaching in the Higa dojo as well as a number of other places. In the mid-60's he founded the Ryukyu Kobudo Organization, a group dedicated to the practice and preservation of the Okinawan weapon arts. In 1969 he opened his dojo, the Kodokan, which he named in honor of his father, taking the ko (光), meaning light or brightness, from his father's name as the first character.

In 1970 he renamed his organization the Ryukyu Kobudo Federation, and in 1972 it became the All Okinawa Kobudo Federation (Zen Okinawa Kobudo Renmei), and received official recognition in Okinawa and from the Dai Nippon Butokukai. Shinpo became the president of the Renmei, and the Kodokan dojo the main dojo. A number of other dojo, mostly of his students and training

partners, immediately joined. In the years leading up to the founding of the organization Shinpo and the senior members of the Renmei, students and training partners of his, had spent a good deal of time refining and formalizing the system, and it is this formalized system that became the kobudo of the Zen Okinawa Kobudo Renmei.

Starting on his return to Okinawa in 1960, Matayoshi Shinpo was a very important figure in the Okinawan martial arts community. Of course, he was primarily known as a martial arts instructor. However, he was also a well known public figure in the martial arts community. He participated in virtually every important public event in and about Okinawa, most notably demonstrating at both the gala event in Kagoshima to celebrate Okinawa's return to Japan, and the athletic and

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sports festival on the Ryukyu island of Amami Oshima to commemorate the same event. His dojo and Renmei maintained a steady schedule of demonstrations, television appearances, and other public presentations throughout his life. He believed the Okinawan martial arts were an integral part of Okinawan culture, and should maintain their connection to the larger community, and their visibility in it. To that end he also stayed active in a number of Okinawan organizations, including remaining active president of the Renmei he founded until his death, Kancho of his dojo, a member of the Okinawa Karate-do Federation, and acting as an advisor to the Naha City Karate Kobudo Association.

Shinpo also believed in the importance of maintaining connections across Japan. He was instrumental in developing Okinawa's connection to the Dai Nippon Butokukai, acting as the Okinawa representative, and his dojo and organization



Courtesy of ZOKR, pp. 2.

Shinpo Matayoshi, Houshu Taira, Seiko Kina, Seiko Higa, Kanki Izumigawa, Seiko Fukichi. Photo commemorating Izumigawa's departure.

were recognized by that body. In 1987, he was formally recognized for his ability and his efforts in promoting and preserving the Okinawan martial arts, receiving his 10th dan on October 10th of that year, from His Imperial Majesty Higashi Fushimi Jigo, President of the Dai Nippon Butokukai. He was also recognized as an important cultural treasure by the Butokukai. Additionally, he was an active member of the administrative council of the Japan Kobudo Foundation.

Through his efforts both in Okinawa and abroad, Shinpo was instrumental in bringing the weapon arts of Okinawa into more public prominence, and in promoting them around the world. Shinpo



Courtesy of Fred Lohse.

Zen Okinawa Kobudo Renmei patch.



Courtesy of Shinpo Matayoshi.

Shinpo Matayoshi with awards from the Butokukai.

believed both in the deep connection between the Okinawan martial arts and Okinawan culture, and that the pursuit of these arts would lead to a better human being. The Renmei he founded was dedicated to promoting and preserving the Okinawan weapon arts, and to that end did demonstrations around Japan and the world, as well as teaching students from many countries.

He maintained a close connection to the training methods of the past, and to that end resisted the push towards display and competition that started becoming popular in Okinawan karate in the 60's and 70's. He also was considered a hard task-master, pushing the students in his dojo hard, and training with a deep intensity. However, he was open to the changing world, inviting in new training methods like the sets of kihon he and his students developed, and open both to bringing his art around the world, and to inviting international students into his dojo. He also deeply believed in the martial arts' connection to Okinawan culture, and to that end fostered relationships with Ryukyu dance and music practitioners. A number of traditional dancers trained in the dojo, and Shinpo supported their artistic efforts, for example working with Miyazato Eiko to develop the "rope kama" dance that has become famous over the years.



Courtesy of ZOKR, pp. 0.

Shinpo Matayoshi.

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tivity. He was a creative and open practitioner, working with his seniors to continue to develop and grow his art right up until he passed away. He also encouraged this in his students, working with them to develop kata and application. This required a personal knowledge of the material, an ability to be creative with it,

and a close personal relationship with Sensei Matayoshi. This is a traditional form of training, and one that centered around the type of relationships through training Sensei Matayoshi wanted to build, more like an apprenticeship than the strictly hierarchical student-teacher relationship more common in, say, a western classroom.

Matayoshi Shinpo, Soke of the Ryukyu Kingdom Period Weapon Arts (Matayoshi Kobudo), Soke of Kingai-ryu Tode Jutsu, and Soke of Nanban Shorin Hakutsuru Kenpo Tode, passed away on September 7th, 1997. His death was a blow to the Okinawan martial arts community. He will be remembered as

an important figure in the development of the Okinawan martial arts after the war, and in maintaining Okinawa's connection to its martial heritage. He left behind a number of senior students who carry on the tradition, and the formal leadership of the system (soke) was passed to his son, Matayoshi Yasushi. In 1997, the title of 3rd Kancho of the Kodokan, the teaching and technical head of the dojo, was passed to Gakiya Yoshiaki, a long

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time student. The leadership of the Zen Okinawa Kobudo Renmei passed to Miyahira Shoshin, a member of the Renmei for many years, around the same time.



Shinko Matayoshi.

Courtesy of Fred Lohse.

Technical Development

In many ways the Matayoshi kobudo tradition is a classic example of the syncretic development common to most Okinawan martial arts. The technical elements of the system have their base in the Ryukyu Kingdom period martial arts that Matayoshi Shinko studied. These have their base in the family traditions, including ekujutsu from Tsukenjima and Okinawan bo forms like Yonegawa. Together with this are the sai, kama, bo, and eku techniques from Agena, the tonfa and nunchiyaku from Ire, and bo techniques from Yamane, Shishi, and Oshiro. However, added to the more native Okinawan elements are the techniques Shinko learned in Manchuria, whatever he studied in Shanghai, the White Crane of Gokenki, and most importantly the unarmed and weapon techniques from master Kingai, including the nunti, tinbe, sansetsukon, and suruchin. Matayoshi Shinko took these disparate elements and forged them into a more coherent whole, a body of knowledge that he passed on to a few students, and to his son.

However, the development of the system did not stop there. Much like his father, and indeed like most every founder of Okinawa's current systems, Shinpo also had a number of teachers. From his father

he took the various Ryukyu kingdom period techniques, as well as Kingai's material. From there he studied karate and bojutsu with Kyan Chotoku, Goju with Miyagi but primarily with Higa Seiko, and White Crane with Gokenki, as well as participating in a variety of exchanges with different practitioners around Okinawa, including other students of his father. When he came back to Okinawa in 1960, he began to shape these various influences into the more coherent system that was current in his dojo in the last years of his life.

While the development of the system becomes easy to understand by simply stating that Matayoshi Shinpo got it from his father and taught it to his students, that eliminates much of the true depth and cultural value in it. In years leading up to the founding of the Zen Okinawa Kobudo Renmei, Shinpo and his students and training partners spent a good deal of time refining and formalizing the system. A few of the original members had trained under his father, or under other students of his father (for example Odo Seikichi was a student of Kakazu Mitsuo, a student of Shinko's), as well as under other kobudo teachers. Others had been training with him for more than a decade. While Shinpo was the leader, main teacher, and technical director, at this time there was a good deal of collaborative work on the content of the system. Together, under his direction, they formalized the kata system, made decisions about what was going to be included and excluded, and put together sets of kihon for the basic weapons, among other things.

Some of the decisions made at this time are rather surprising. For example, mem-

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bers of the dojo in the start of the 1960's, people like Kimo Wall and Sakai Ryugo, remember 10 or 11 bo kata being taught, but by the mid-70's the dojo had refined this to the 5 that were taught in the late 90's. At the same time, certain students were bringing different forms in for examination and practice. Yogi Jyosei relates that he and a number of other seniors went at Matayoshi's direction to a member of his Uechi dojo to learn the kata Ufutun bo, which they later modified to fit the characteristics of the Matayoshi methodology.

A number of kata were formalized in these years, or even created out of techniques that had been passed down. Some students relate that the tinbe, sansetsukon, and possibly guwa forms were developed early in this period, from the body of techniques passed down to Shinpo. Indeed, many students from the early days have differences in how their kata appear. Sensei Matayoshi encouraged creativity in his students (particularly at demonstrations, so video references often show a great deal of variety in performances⁹), working with them to develop the kata and applications, and students may have taken different things from their training, particularly if they trained with him at different times. Sakai Ryugo, for example, taught a slightly different sai and kama kata. When I asked him about this, he told me "the techniques are what Sensei Matayoshi taught me, but there were so many I wanted to keep the ones I thought were the most important in the kata I did. Also, some of these kata are not so old, they were being worked on while I was a student, so I think its okay to adapt them to maintain techniques in this way. That's what Sensei did." (Conversation with Sakai Ryugo, 1992.) Sensei Matayoshi also worked with his students to help them learn- for example he would sometimes allow students with a strong karate back-

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ground to use their karate stances in the kodubo, though these stances are different to those of the Matayoshi tradition.

This more creative approach to working with the material is in many ways a hallmark of the system. The process was

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also a continuous one: a shorter sanse-tsukon form was developed by one of Sensei Matayoshi's students teaching in France, and Matayoshi liked it enough to have it demonstrated at a number of major events in Okinawa, and in the late 90's one of his senior students was working with him on developing a kata from the techniques passed down for the kudamonbo. Continuous growth was a part of the training, and understanding the material well enough to work with it, not just on it, is a core element of the practice and teaching of the system.

Unlike many kobudo systems, paired work is central to the practice of the Matayoshi kobudo. If you can't apply it, you can't do it would be one way to state the training ideal. An essential part of this emphasis on application was the way much of the paired work was developed. Instead of simply teaching a uniform paired set, many of the kumi waza would be developed by two or more students working together under the guidance of Matayoshi. They would create, he would make sure the content stayed true to the system. This engendered a deep understanding of the material, and also required a very close relationship between student and teacher. While formal paired sets for the bo kata eventually became more standard, the paired sets for most of the weapons in the system remained fairly individual between students, and between different teachers in the Renmei.¹⁰

This variety existed during Matayoshi

Shinpo's lifetime, as evidenced by differences in syllabi and content in different dojo in the Renmei. In looking at the syllabi of other senior students, people like Kanei Katsuyoshi, one can see kata created or changed by these teachers with what they had been taught, kata like the jo form Kanei developed, the slightly different kihon sets different teachers use, or the different introductory kata a number of students have created. While in some organizations this type of variation might be seen as moving away from the core, provided that the base technical elements and kata were preserved and done properly, within the Zen Okinawa Kobudo Renmei, it seems to have been treated more as a strength.

This creativity and variety is, I believe, evidence of a system true to Okinawa's martial heritage. Change has been a constant in systems on the island, and the strong technical base of this system allows for innovation without altering the core. This technical core also allows for interpretation and creativity with the material without needing to leave the system,

“As an aside, it is interesting to note that there are also some discrepancies between what the family published at Matayoshi Shinpo's death, and what was taught during his life.”

provided the practitioner truly understands the core material and its principals. Essentially, it is a living martial art, one that is being adapted and changed in small ways by the senior practitioners. It is attached to the technical base and dedication to preservation passed down from the Matayoshi family, but is also alive, able to give its practitioners material with which to grow and develop, to express their understanding of it, not just copy the previous generations.

Content

As noted above, the content of the Matayoshi kobudo system has always been a slightly shifting thing. Here, I will present the content of the system as of the mid

1990's, near the end of Matayoshi Shinpo's life; a snapshot, as it were, of it at that time. This snapshot is of the system as taught at the Kodokan dojo, as at this time there were already differences between different dojo in the Renmei. Depending on how you look at it, it may represent the peak of the development of the system; after Sensei Matayoshi's death the cohesion between different students declined, and there is no longer a single group that can be said to solely represent the tradition, to the exclusion of other dojo, the way Sensei Matayoshi himself could.

As an aside, it is interesting to note that there are also some discrepancies between what the family published at Matayoshi Shinpo's death, and what was taught during his life. Looking at the list on page 9, taken from page 25 of the pamphlet published for Matayoshi Shinpo's memorial celebration, a number of these weapons said to be preserved from the Ryukyu Kingdom period were never

Ryukyu Kingdom Period Buki Jutsu

Kata

Bojutsu (3 shaku, 6 shaku, 8 shaku, 12 shaku)

Shushi no kon
Sakugawa no kon
Choun no kon
Tsuken no kon
Shishi no kon

Eku jutsu

Tsuken Akachu no eku di

Kama Jutsu

I cho gama (nagagama no ti)
Ni cho kama

Suki kama jutsu (chichi)

Tonfa justu

Sai Jutsu

Ni cho sai
San cho sai
Suruchin jutsu

Uni suruchin jutsu

Nunchiyaku

Sansetsukon (dai, chu, sho)

Yonsetsukon

Kudamon bo

Tinbei

Tekko Jutsu

Tecchu Jutsu

seen by any of the seniors I know, including the technical successor to the system Gakiya Yoshiaki. Matayoshi Shinpo, unlike many other Okinawan teachers, was not overly enthralled with creating clear and concise lists of material, or of who knew what. According to his seniors, he was constantly working with his material, growing his technique, and would add to it from the store of what his father taught him. At the end of his life, a number of his seniors state, there were still many things that he had not taught anyone. Indeed, some of the weapons listed in the Ryukyu Kingdom Period Weapon Arts seem to be currently unknown on Okinawa.

However, by the late 1970's, the bulk of the material in the Kodokan dojo was fairly well formalized, and remained essentially the same until his death in 1997. This is the material presented here.

Bo

The bo is the base weapon of the system. Technically, it forms the foundation for most of the other material, and it has the greatest amount of material associated with it. It also forms the closest connection between the Matayoshi lineage kobudo and the other kobudo schools on the island. All the kata taught are taught in different versions in other systems, much as different versions of the karate kata Seisan are common to Goju, Uechi, and Shorin schools. While at times much is made of the differences between the various Okinawan methods of bojutsu, the connection they have in content points to, if not a common ancestor, a great deal of cross-pollination over the years.

The material taught in the Matayoshi system includes:

Kihon/Hojo Undo: There are 3 sets of 5

“This kata is said to have been made by “old man Shushi” (Shushu no tanmei), a Chinese kempo and bojutsu expert who immigrated from Shanghai to Naha in the early 1800s, and lived near Shugen temple, in Anzato, Naha.”



Various bo.

Courtesy of Jim Baab.

techniques taught as basics with the bo. These were drawn from the base classical kata, and were formalized some time in the early 1970's. They were developed by Matayoshi Shinpo, working with a number of his senior students, though it is unclear exactly who. The sets of hojo undo are practiced both solo and paired, giving a basic understanding of some of the movements in the kata.

Shushi no kon: This kata is said to have been made by “old man Shushi” (Shushu no tanmei), a Chinese Kenpo and bojutsu expert who immigrated from Shanghai to Naha in the early 1800's, and lived near Shugen temple, in Anzato, Naha. The kata is named after him, and it is the first kata of the system.

Choun no kon: The characters for Choun imply interrupting or ending the morning mist. This kata was created about 250 years ago by a warrior from Tomari known as Choun Oyakata, and it is named after him. He passed this kata on, and it became popular both in Tomari and with military personnel, as it was thought to give technical advantages when faced with opponents on three sides.

Sakugawa no kon: This kata was developed by Yamashiro Aburaya (Chinen Kana). He is said to have researched village bo techniques. His technique was greatly respected by the ruler at the time, and he was given the nickname “Sakugawa”, after his teacher of that name. Matayoshi Shinko learned this kata from Chinen Sanra (Yamane Chinen).¹¹

Tsuken no kon/Tsuken bo: This kata was passed on by Tsuken Oyakata Seisoku and was compiled by fishermen from

Shoren village on Tsuken island. It is said to contain reverse techniques, and techniques for fighting against a spear. Matayoshi Shinko learned it from Agena Chokubo.

Shishi no kon: This kata is said to be over 300 years old, and to have been created by Shishi Oyakata, a daimyoko (noble) and martial arts instructor to the Ryukyu king. It was passed down only within the family and to the royals, and Matayoshi Shinko learned it from a descendent of the Shishi family, Shishi Ryoko.¹²

Kumi waza and Oyo: paired sets for Shushi, Choun, and Sakugawa were done in the dojo regularly, and sets for the other kata occasionally. There were also bo vs. bo sets using techniques from various kata that different students developed with Matayoshi, varying in length from complete runs through the kata to ippon-style techniques. Except for the kihon, the paired sets were considered less formal than the kata. Along with the longer paired sets, short sets of paired techniques were developed at different times, and much attention was given to the individual techniques in the kata.

There were, at different times, other bo kata taught also by Matayoshi Shinpo, or practiced by his students. These included: Kubo no kon (named after the Kubo area of Gushikawa village), Yonegawa no kon (named after the Yonegawa area of Shuri), and Yara no kon (possibly a variant of Chatan Yara no kon), all taught by Matayoshi Shinchin, the Tokumine no kon Matayoshi Shinpo learned from Kyan Chotoku, and Ufugushiku (Oshiro) no Sakugawa, a variation of Sakugawa no kon that came from Oshiro Chojo. At some point Matayoshi Shinpo decided to stop teaching these kata, though some teachers retain one or more of them. Some seniors of the dojo also practiced Ufutun bo, a village kata a few seniors of the dojo learned from a local teacher. At the time of Matayoshi Shinpo's death, only the 5 main kata were considered formally part of the system.

The Matayoshi system also included techniques for an 8 or 9 foot bo, which was occasionally demonstrated using Sakugawa no kon, though this kata does not represent all the variant techniques for the longer weapon. Some dojo in the Renmei also maintained a jo form that was developed by Katsuyoshi Kanei, with input from Matayoshi Shinpo.

Sai

The sai techniques taught in the Matayoshi system stem from those taught to Matayoshi Shinko by Agena Chokubo. A set

“At the time of Matayoshi Shinpo's death, only the 5 main kata were considered formally part of the system.”

of 10 kihon was developed for the sai, and was taught solo and paired. There are three kata taught- ni cho sai, san cho sai, and Shinbaru no sai. Shinbaru no sai is also sometimes called Mateshi no sai or Matayoshi no sai. The first two, ni and san- cho sai, were created as training forms by Matayoshi Shinpo sometime after the war, and the third by Matayoshi Shinko. San cho sai and Shinbaru no sai are both practiced using a full set of three sai. All of the forms include one or more throwing techniques, and while they are aimed at the foot, Matayoshi also taught that the sai could be thrown into the body.



Sai.

This is just very difficult to practice in the dojo.

The Matayoshi system also works with a manji sai, though this is something only a few seniors have learned, and is not commonly taught. In this tradition, the weapon is built like a normal sai with a handle on one end, but with one tine turned down, covering the handle of the weapon. There is no separate kata for the manji, though it is sometimes practiced in Shinbaru no sai, and there are a few separate techniques for the weapon. Except for the kihon, paired work was less formal and more individual for the sai.

Tonfa

The tonfa techniques in the Matayoshi system come from Irei Okina. The implement is also called a tunkuwa or tuifa, and it is said the pronunciation of the characters for the weapon comes from the Fuchow dialect. A set of 10 kihon was developed for the weapon, taught solo and paired, though in practice other basics were sometimes added. There is one base kata for the tonfa, Tonfa dai ichi. There is also a second kata, tonfa dai ni, that is very similar and was developed as a demonstration form. Various senior students also worked with personal variations on the tonfa forms and other short kata, but the Kodokan taught only dai ichi, and dai ni for demonstration purposes.

Nunchiyaku

The nunchiyaku techniques were also passed down by Irei Okina. The pronunciation for the characters (which read sosetsukon, or two piece stick) is also supposedly of Fujianese origin. A set of kihon was developed for the weapon, but was rarely practiced. The kata, Matayoshi no Nunchiyaku, is sometimes called Nunchiyaku San Dan. Supposedly it went through a number of slight variations in the 1960's.

Three section nunchiyaku, like a very small sansetsukon, were also occasionally worked with in the dojo, but while they



Tonfa.

had a few separate techniques, they had no separate kata.

Ekū

The eku techniques taught in the Matayoshi kobudo come from two sources, the Matayoshi family- whose tradition maintains that the eku was Matayoshi Shinchin's favorite weapon- and Agena Chokubo. The kata is called Tsuken Akachu no Eku di, the Eku techniques of the “red man” from Tsuken. Tsuken Akachu was a fisherman from Tsuken named Azato who was nicknamed Akachu due to his sunburned face. He learned bo techniques from an exiled warrior- Tsuken Oyakata Seisoku- and from them developed these eku techniques, including the signature technique of tossing sand



Nunchiyaku.

into the eyes of the opponent with the blade of the eku. Matayoshi Shinpo considered this his favorite form, and it was usually what he demonstrated.

Nunti

The nunti-bo is a roughly 5 shaku bo with a nunti-sai affixed to the tip. It was taught as a set- the nunti-bo and two nunti sai, which are kept in the belt. The techniques for the nunti came from Kingai Roshi, though they are also said to be influenced by Ryukyu nunti techniques from Tsuken island. The nunti sai are not used as hand weapons -though they could be used much like manji-sai- they are throwing weapons. The throwing technique is included in the kata, and much like the sai though it is always aimed for the feet it could be thrown into any part of the body. There was one kata taught in the dojo, Nunti noti, in the 90's. However, in demonstrations variations on this kata were also done, and students from the early 60's remember practicing the weapon with bo kata, in particular Tsuken no kon, properly adapted with nunti-specific techniques.



Eku.

Courtesy of Jim Baab.

Guwa

The guwa, a garden hoe, is unique to the Matayoshi kobudo on Okinawa. The techniques are influenced by Chinese arts, as the hoe is used as a weapon in China as well. The kata, Guwa no di or kuwe nu ti, was developed from the techniques passed on in the family, according to some of the seniors by Matayoshi Shinpo, though there is no documentation on this either way.

Tinbe

Tinbe is the name of a pair of weapons- the tinbe, a shield made of cane and usually covered with a thick tar-like substance and a layer of animal hide and then painted, and the seiryuto, a short heavy sword or machete. The metal tinbe most often seen now were developed in the 70's, and allow for paired work without



Guwa.

Courtesy of Jim Baab.

quickly destroying the tinbe. Matayoshi Shinpo would also practice the weapon with a butterfly sword, much as the set is used in a number of southern Chinese systems. The Matayoshi tinbe comes from Kingai Roshi, and is properly called the Southern Chinese Shaolin (Chugoku Nanban Shorin Ken) Tinbe. It is also said to be influenced by Ryukyu tinbe techniques. The kata for the set, Tinbe no ti or Matayoshi no Tinbe, is said to have been developed by Matayoshi Shinpo out of techniques passed from his father.

Sansetsukon

The three section staff, also called the Chinese Shaolin Sansetsukon (Chugoku Shorinji Sansetsukon), taught in the Matayoshi system is based on techniques from Kingai Roshi. There was one kata, possibly developed by Matayoshi Shinpo from the techniques taught to him by his father, taught in the 1990's, a long kata called simply "Sansetsukon" or "Sanset-



Nunti and Nunti-sai.

Courtesy of Jim Baab.

sukon no ti" that was not done at demonstrations. It was not taught to many students, and was hard to practice in the dojo due to the space needed. A second shorter kata, called Hakuho, was deve-



Tinbe and Seiryuto.

Courtesy of Jim Baab.

loped by one of Sensei Matayoshi's students living in France, and gained some popularity in the dojo in the 80's and 90's. It is this kata that was usually demonstrated and is on the video the dojo published.

Kama

The kama techniques taught in the Matayoshi system come from the kama techniques taught to Matayoshi Shinko by Agena Chokubo. Matayoshi Shinko was nicknamed Kama nu ti Mateshi, and was very well known for his skill with the kama. The kata is called simply Kama nu ti. A number of variations exist among the senior students, but the form as taught in the 90's was standardized in the dojo.



Sansetsukon.

Courtesy of Jim Baab.

A variation on the kama, a kama with a string attached, was practiced for a period in the 60's and 70's, primarily as a demonstration or dance form. It is sometimes known a Shimotsuki no kama, but was not considered a formal subject in the dojo.

Kudamon bo

This weapon is essentially a large flail derived from a rice or wheat threshing



Kama.

Courtesy of Jim Baab.

tool. In the 90's Yamashiro Kenichi was working on a kata for this weapon with Matayoshi Shinpo, based on techniques passed on in the Matayoshi tradition. The kata was demonstrated a few times, but was never formally added to the system.

Suruchin

The suruchin in the Matayoshi system consists of a length of rope with a rock at either end, though students from the 60's also remember Matayoshi teaching a suruchin with only one rock. The length can vary, but is usually 6-9 feet long. The techniques for using it came from Kingai Roshi, but were supposedly also influenced by native Ryukyu techniques. While there were a variety of specific techniques taught for the weapon, and different seniors strung these together in various ways for demonstration and practice purposes, there was no formal kata for the weapon.

Other Weapons

There were a number of other weapons in the dojo that had specific techniques, but no actual kata. These included the tekko, ticchu, gifa (kanzashi), nagagama, and a variety of Chinese weapons that Sensei Matayoshi would occasionally



Kudamon bo.

Courtesy matayoshi-kobudo.de.

demonstrate or show, but never taught. None of these were considered formally part of the system.

Paired Work

As stated above, most of the paired work, outside the kihon, was created by various students with Sensei Matayoshi's guidance. At times, these sets would be shared with other students, but none really became formal subjects at the dojo. There was a great deal of emphasis on paired work, and instruction in kata usually included instruction in various applications of the sections of kata, but again this was not formalized. Paired work was usually done with the bo against any of the other



Suruchin.

Courtesy of Jim Baab.

weapons. However, some students also worked on paired sets between various weapons, like tinbe and sansetsukon, or eku and guwa.

Empty Hand

The Matayoshi tradition includes at least two different empty hand systems- the empty hand portion of the Kingai-ryu, and the empty hand portion of Gokenki's Hakutsuru Kenpo. While Matayoshi Shinpo practiced both, he taught neither publicly. A number of senior members of the dojo, as well as various karate friends like Higa Seiko, learned variations on Kakuho, also called Hakaku or Hakutsuru, from the Gokenki lineage. A few also learned variations internal to this form, and other individual kata from both systems. However, while a few students studied this material, it was considered private, and was not taught as part of the system in the Kodokan dojo.

While Matayoshi could probably have attracted a body of karate students by teaching Gokenki's Hakutsuru Kenpo or



Courtesy of Jim Baab.

Nagama.

the Kingai-ryu as a separate art, or by making them a part of his kobudo system, he elected not to. He never made either of these arts a formal part of his system, and never taught either publicly. It is unclear why this is the case, however the emphasis on both native Okinawan arts and on preserving the armed element of Okinawa's martial heritage may be the best clues to the reasons for this decision.

As a whole, the amount of material, even just the formal material, in the Matayoshi tradition is formidable. There are 4 sets of kihon covering 45 separate techniques for 4 weapons, 16 kata covering 11 weapons, techniques and modified kata for at least 8 other weapons, a few acces-



Courtesy of Jim Baab.

Tekko.

sory kata, and of course paired work for all the weapons and kata. This does not include any empty hand material, kata developed by senior students in the dojo, or anything not formally taught by Sensei Matayoshi. This amount of material alone, particularly given the attention to detail in performance of technique



Courtesy of Jim Baab.

Various Weapons.

and the need to be fluent enough with each weapon to act creatively with it, is enough for a lifetime of study. The fact that Sensei Matayoshi knew even more than he passed on is yet another tribute to the depth of knowledge he possessed.

Matayoshi Kobudo Today

At the passing of Matayoshi Shinpo in 1997, an era in Okinawan martial arts ended. Matayoshi was a very public

“There was a great deal of emphasis on paired work, and instruction in kata usually included instruction in various applications of the sections of kata, but again this was not formalized.”

figure in the Okinawan martial arts community, maintaining a high level of visibility, working to link together practitioners across Japan and the world, and practically through force of personality maintaining the links between the various members of the organization he founded, limiting by his senior status the inevitable disagreements over differences in technique and performance that developed over the years. In many ways, through encouragement of creativity in his students, an ability to teach within different people’s methods of movement, and the continuous development of his own practice, he fostered the variations in practice that different generations of his students show. However, he found a way to make these differences less important than the personal and technical elements the practitioners shared.

When he passed away, the formal leadership of his dojo passed to his son, Matayoshi Yasushi. Yasushi is not able to train due to a handicap, but it is very common in Japan for the leadership of family-based organizations to stay within the family regardless of technical proficiency. He was assisted as advisor by Sensei Matayoshi’s wife, and per Sensei Matayoshi’s instruction the technical leadership position, 3rd Kancho of the Kodokan, passed to Gakiya Yoshiaki, who had been doing the bulk of the teaching in the dojo

for a number of years. The leadership of the Zen Okinawa Kobudo Renmei was given to Miyahara Shoshin; it is a separate body from the Kodokan dojo, which is a member.

This situation continued until 2001, when Gakiya Yoshiaki left the Kodokan to form his own organization, the Okinawa Kobudo Doushi Rensei Kai. At that time, the position of technical director of the Kodokan was given to Itokazu Seisho, another long time student. The Renmei remained under the same leadership, and a number of Matayoshi Shinpo’s former students and their organizations, people like Kinjo Takashi, Miyagi Koki, Kanei Katsuyoshi’s Jinbukai, Chinen Kenyu, Maeshiro Shushi, and Yamashiro Kenichi remained members of the Renmei, though not of the Kodokan. (Many had not been members for years.) Adding complexity to this picture, there are also a number of senior teachers, students from as far back as 1960, people like Kimo Wall, who are not formally part of any larger organization, but who maintain the Matayoshi tradition as they were taught it by Matayoshi Shinpo. Although due to the vast amount of material the system contains there are only a few teachers who maintain and teach the entire syllabus as it was at Sensei Matayoshi’s death, these different factions all represent facets of the Matayoshi tradition. Coupled with this are various ancillary lines, like that of Odo



Matayoshi family tomb.

Seikichi, who combined the Matayoshi kobudo with that of other teachers. Taken together the various factions and ancillary lines, and the large body of students they represent, demonstrate the deep impact on the Okinawan martial arts community the Matayoshi family, and the system they taught, has had.

Moving into the 21st century, that impact continues. The fragmentation of the system after Sensei Matayoshi’s passing does leave the system with no clear and sole successor. Gakiya Yoshiaki perhaps has the best claim as a teacher, as he was appointed technical successor at the

“There are 4 sets of kihon covering 45 separate techniques for 4 weapons, 16 kata covering 11 weapons, techniques and modified kata for at least 8 other weapons, a few accessory kata, and of course paired work for all the weapons and kata. This does not include any empty hand material, kata developed by senior students in the dojo, or anything not formally taught by Matayoshi sensei”

death of Matayoshi Shinpo. However, this is complicated by the Soke title and with it formal responsibility for maintaining the system remaining in the family, and the family currently supporting Itokazu Seisho as technical director of the Kodokan dojo. It is further complicated by the number of other students with a great deal of experience in the system (some senior in rank to or having started before both Gakiya and Itokazu) teaching on their own, or as part of the Renmei. In many ways, this resembles the break up of Goju-ryu after the death of Miyagi Chojun: a number of senior students, all with excellent teaching credentials and fantastic technique, each going their own way once their leader passed on. In many ways it also, through the sheer number of very senior practitioners alone, demonstrates the depth of the Matayoshi tradition, both on Okinawa and around the world.

In my opinion, the living nature of the Matayoshi tradition is continued in this

Courtesy of Fred Lohse.



Yoshiaki Gakiya with Suruchin, Okinawa 2006.

manner. This fragmentation is in many ways inevitable. There were already differences in how certain things were done between different dojo in the Renmei before Matayoshi Shinpo's death. These have continued to develop as time passes and individual seniors continue to develop both their own training and the way they are maintaining and passing on the system. (Even the Kodokan has changed its training, adding kihon since Sensei Matayoshi's passing.) Fragmentation of this sort is also inevitable because the system is a living one, the technical core of which is deep enough to allow for its practitioners to work within it and experience it directly, as opposed to simply mimicking the last generation. The simple answer to the question of succession could be that the system is what it was at Sensei Matayoshi's passing and the head of the system is either his son or Sensei Gakiya, depending on how one looks at it. However, working with the simple answer also eliminates much of the complexity in the situation, and therefore some of the living nature of the practice. It takes a vibrant and living practice and fossilizes it at the death of Matayoshi Shinpo.

Certainly there are many teachers out there who make claims of mastery of the

system that do not warrant such recognition. However, the main lines of the tradition are fairly clear, maintained by students with long relationships with Matayoshi Shinpo and teaching an unadulterated version of the art they studied. Through these students the impact of the Matayoshi tradition on the Okinawan martial arts, and on their practitioners, remains strong, and a living treasure of Okinawan martial culture is being maintained and passed on to the next generation of martial artists. This, I believe, is the true heir to the Matayoshi tradition—the many students across the globe practicing the art that the family developed, continuing its tradition into the future.

“The fragmentation of the system after Matayoshi sensei's passing does leave the system with no clear and sole successor.”

Notes

¹ This man is often confused with Ire Matsutare, a famous martial artist known for his kama techniques, and living at roughly the same time. According to what the family has written, this is a different person.

² Gokenki had moved to Okinawa in 1912, had married a local woman by the name of Yoshikawa Makato, and had taken the Japanese name of Yoshikawa Sakaki. He was well known in Okinawan karate circles, having

a strong influence on many of Okinawa's most famous martial artists, including Miyagi Chojun, Higa Seiko, and Kyoda Juhatsu.

³ The Russo-Japanese war had ended, and Japan's influence over Manchuria made that a likely way to enter China for many Japanese at the time.

⁴ Many sources state that Kingai Roshi lived in Shanghai. The documents the Matayoshi family published at the death of Matayoshi Shinpo state that he taught in Fuchow. (See ZOKR, 1999: pp. 19-26.)

⁵ Chinen Sanra was also called Yamane Chinen, and was nicknamed Sakugawa. (Kodokan, 1994.)

⁶ Some sources give this date as 1915, but the date given in documents published by the Matayoshi family is Showa 3, 1929. 1915 would be Taisho 3, and that may be the reason for the confusion. The family still has the medal given to Matayoshi Shinko.

⁷ This generalissimo Guanming may have also been a historic figure in China.

⁸ The term (之手) “nu ti”, also written “no ti” or “no di”, translates directly as “of the hands”, so one way to write the nickname could be “Kama hands Matayoshi”. However, in the Okinawan martial vernacular, the term “nu ti” does not actually refer to the hands at

“Certainly there are many teachers out there who make claims of mastery of the system that do not warrant such recognition. However, the main lines of the tradition are fairly clear, maintained by students with long relationships with Matayoshi Shinpo and teaching an unadulterated version of the art they studied.”

all, but to technique. It is also used in the names of kata, like “kuwe no di”, or “hoe technique”.

⁹ This public variation was done for two reasons. As Sensei Matayoshi said to me at a demonstration for TV in 1990: just have fun. Having fun at public events was a good reason to play with the techniques. The other was secrecy. Some of the material he considered private, and so he would play with it in public, and especially when being filmed. As an example, much of the material for the videos he did in the US in the mid 1990's he made up on the spot, just for the films. He was sometimes able to tell if people had learned from video this way, noting to someone who did a crane form for him once that they must have learned it from a film of a certain demo he did, as that was the only time he had ever done the form that way.

¹⁰ It is important to recognize the difference

Courtesy of Fred Lohse.

between the Kodokan and the Renmei. While Matayoshi Shinpo was president of both, he was the sole teacher in the Kodokan, while the Renmei was an affiliation of a number of kobudo students, all practicing the same system but often with different “flavors” in different dojo. In reality there was no “Matayoshi Kobudo” until Shinpo passed away, just the Kodokan and the Renmei, both teaching the kobudo of the Zen Okinawa Kobudo Renmei.

¹¹ Most histories credit “tode” Sakugawa with this kata, but the Matayoshi tradition dates it from his student. (OKDR, 2004.)

¹² The history given for Shushi, Choun, and Shishi no kon is from written materials from the Matayoshi family and Gakiya Yoshiaki, and from conversations with Matayoshi Shinpo. There are also alternate histories on Okinawa for a number of these kata. Nakamoto Masahiro (1983, pp. 95/172)) credits Sensei Soeishi (Shishi) with creating Choun and Shushi from his studies of Soeishi no kon. Taira Shinken (1964, pp. 38) credits Choun to Soeishi, and the Bugei Ryuha Daijiten (1978, p. 911) also states that Shushi was founded by Soeishi. It should be noted that all this information stems from the Taira lineage—Nakamoto is a student of Taira’s, and the BRDJ information was supplied by Inoue Motokazu, a student of Taira’s and Murakami, a student of Inoue’s and Higa Seitoku’s (Yamani-ryu).

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Special thanks to the late Matayoshi Shinpo, Yamashiro Kenichi, Yogi Jyosei, Sakai Ryugo, Gakiya Yoshiaki, and Kimo Wall for sharing their recollections and knowledge of the Matayoshi kobudo.

Special Thanks

Thanks to Mario McKenna for help with source material.

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