

MEIBUKAN MAGAZINE

House Of The Pure Martial Arts



Three level straight punches
Handing Down the Master's Art
Self-defence: Keep it simple
Interview with Renshi Lex Opdam

MISSION STATEMENT

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

FORMAT

Meibukan Magazine is published several times a year in an 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 for a low picture resolution for easy downloading

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

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SUBMISSIONS

Meibukan Magazine is pleased to submit views, concerns and experiences on any subject matter IF related to the mission statement expressed by the Meibukan Magazine. Therefore articles, photographs and illustrations are welcome, although Meibukan Magazine is selective and can not guarantee that submissions will be placed. Submission can be mailed to our P.O. Box by floppy, CD or DVD, or can be sent to our e-mail address (if smaller than 5 MB).

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Myth in the Martial Arts

Since ancient times martial art teachings have been handed down in the form of myth. In a guiding role, mythology continues to be an integral component of martial arts tradition and philosophy today.



MEIBUKAN MAGAZINE

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Our goal is to share

Since I formally started my training in the martial arts, when I was 13 years old, I have always been interested in its backgrounds. One way of providing myself with written information was through the existing martial arts magazines. I borrowed old ones and bought new ones, and throughout the years read many of them. Often, and maybe too often, I was distracted and disturbed by the glossy ads, hidden political agendas, and sports orientated content with its glamorous overkill, which seems immanent in almost all martial arts magazines.

I am very aware of the fact that a magazine, especially in its traditional printed form, must compromise in order to survive, since it is depending on money to produce itself. Money that comes from the readers that buy the magazine and money that comes from the advertisers. In my opinion only very few martial arts magazines have actually found a balance between their viability and serious content. Just a few of those have an approach that reflects a transmission of the martial arts spirit in a way that is acceptable in terms of the ethics of these ancient arts. Ethics that in fact serve a higher goal in life. It is within this spiritual context that the new Meibukan Magazine wants to exist.

The idea of producing a world wide martial arts magazine was in my head for a few years. Due to practical circumstances, however, it never came off the ground until the end of 2003, when conditions were right to actively engage this idea. Together with editor and martial arts student, Mark Hemels, we developed the concept of the international web based magazine that you are now reading. Meibukan Magazine aims to spread the knowledge and spirit of the martial world in its purest form. The magazine is run by volunteers. It is independent and free, and accessible for anyone connected to the Internet. The idea of a world wide martial arts magazine has now become reality, and with our hearts we hope to contribute to the world by sharing the spirit of the pure martial arts.

*Lex Opdam
Editor in chief*

Interview with Renshi Lex Opdam

On Walking the Teacher's Path

Lex Opdam (1967) is the branch leader of Meibukan Goju-ryu Karate-do in the Netherlands. He is the personal representative of Master Anthony Mirakian. Based on his own experiences, Sensei Opdam, Renshi, fifth degree black belt, offers his view on traditional karate practice and the relationship between teacher and student.

- by Willie van Zundert -

Question: Sensei, in what way did you first encounter the martial arts?

Answer: At the age of thirteen, I experienced my first physical encounter with the Indonesian martial art Pentjak Silat. In Berg en Dal, near my hometown Nijmegen, *Kyai* (teacher) George de Groot instructed me in the basic principles of this martial art.

The first real encounter with the martial arts happened years before. I remember well being a young boy of six or seven years old and watching the television series 'Kung Fu'. The wise master, the sense of justice, the protection offered to the oppressed, the complete control of body and mind – these were all strong ingredients to enthral a young boy. In my young eyes, the concept of martial arts was perceived to be something very special indeed.

How did you first encounter Goju-ryu Karate?

I had been working out in a weight training facility for only a few months when a friend and I got into a conversation with a man who gave karate lessons. He invited us to come and watch these lessons. Before long, we decided to join his karate school. Described as a Kempo school, the school was in the process of switching over to Goju-ryu.

The teacher was Harry de Spa. Mr. De Spa began his martial arts training at the age of sixteen, studying Shaolin Kempo. In 1984, along with several

students, he decided to practice the Goju-ryu karate system. His dojo, at which I trained at that time, was affiliated with the International Okinawa Goju-ryu Karate-do Federation. This organization was founded by Master Morio Higaonna in 1979. Morio Higaonna is a former pupil of Master Eiichi Miyazato and An'ichi Miyagi (not related to Goju-ryu founder Chojun Miyagi). Master Eiichi Miyazato was one of Grandmaster Chojun Miyagi's top students.



*Goju-ryu founder
Chojun Miyagi*

Isn't it true that there are several claims as to who is the successor to Chojun Miyagi?

Grandmaster Chojun Miyagi himself never appointed a successor. As to the hierarchy,

it is my opinion that all senior students of Chojun Miyagi can be considered universal successors provided that not only their technical ability is present, but also the intention to pass on Chojun Miyagi's legacy of Goju-ryu to the best of their ability.

Following the death of Chojun Miyagi, Miyagi's widow Makato and his eldest daughter Yasuko asked Eiichi Miyazato to continue the training and to serve as head of the Miyagi dojo. This transfer period lasted until 1957, when Eiichi Miyazato opened his own dojo, the

Jundokan. In 1963, ten years after Chojun Miyagi passed away, the Miyagi family approached Meitoku Yagi to act as Chojun Miyagi's style successor in continuing Chojun Miyagi's Goju-ryu karate-do system. This request also implied that Meitoku



Grandmaster
Meitoku Yagi

Yagi would become the official authority on Goju-ryu and ensure the preservation of the Goju-ryu martial art, as Chojun Miyagi would have done, in the eyes of his family.

Were you aware of Meitoku Yagi's existence during the period that you trained under Mr. de Spa?

Until the beginning of 1993, I knew nothing about this. Correct information on existing schools and their teachers, systems and workouts, the transmission of knowledge from teacher to student, the philosophy, culture and art – all these matters are of great importance to me. They are all matters concerning serious treatment of the martial arts. However, for many people who place power, money or other desires above love and compassion, the truth will be something they fear. Many people are negatively dependant on karate, because they see karate as an instrument to supply themselves with money or power, to make them feel better and stronger than others. They abuse karate instead of helping themselves and others to find the truth within oneself. This is one of the main reasons why I did not know about Meitoku Yagi and his prominent role in Okinawan karate. A piece of history and truthful accounts of karate-do were missing.

What is your opinion on the commercialisation of karate?

What one often finds in commercial organizations is that, as far as karate is concerned, the quantity of techniques determines the 'quality'. Many karate schools now add the so-called 'grabbling' or 'Chin-na' to their style or make up techniques of their own. Although this can be positive and creative, often they will – and this is

what I find to be the most important difference – define these 'new' techniques as a part of their traditional system/ryu. The concept of tradition is used as an outer layer for inserting things that do not deserve the title of tradition. All too often, it happens that a system or style uses this to proclaim itself as the truest and best way, without acknowledging the origins or offering the chance to be introduced to other ways.

Could you further define quantity and quality?

Many schools focus on the quantity during the martial arts workouts, often at the cost of quality. Many western schools will offer various martial arts styles to increase their amount of 'customers'. The mental training that should be offered is usually considered too boring. No money to be made in that. What about schools with three hundred students? How can a teacher offer guidance to that many students in the art of karate-do!

"The heart of the matter lies in the continuous repetition of the basics. Simplicity in its purest form, with the fewest of distractions and as fundamental as possible."

When one is serious in their practice of karate-do, one can see for oneself where the intentions of karate-do, its teachers and tradition lie. It is, therefore, most important that people are correctly informed and learn to think for themselves. Simplicity in its purest form: with the fewest of distractions and as fundamental as possible. The heart of the matter lies in the continuous repetition of the basics in the correct environment, and a body that fits the minimum requirements for stylistic practice.

Does quantity get in the way of quality?

The technical skills and the mental growth used to enhance spiritual development can be applied to anything. By taking karate-do seriously, life is taken seriously and the 'great exploration' will not be limited to only the techniques.

If one wants to train oneself mentally, one would do better to focus on the repetition of the basics as opposed to continuously learning new techniques. Spiritual development requires more. Modern day students are so focused on the technical aspect, that they automatically associate self-knowledge with this but how many techniques does one need to require to develop oneself spiritually?

"By taking karate-do seriously, life is taken seriously and the 'great exploration' will not be limited to only the techniques."

The strength of karate-do lies in the way it is practiced. This relates directly to its spiritual power. Spiritual power is also the strength one develops by becoming aware of oneself. Without self-examination spiritual power can never occur. I remember a wise man saying: 'Go to those who seek the truth, but flee from those who possess it!' This



Courtesy of Anthony Mirakian

Master Anthony Mirakian

is one of the most important messages that I have discovered during my life. It is in the dojo of my teacher, Master Anthony Mirakian, that I strongly encounter the mental aspects. People who are only physically very adept or merely possess an enormous amount of technical knowledge no longer impress me. Although this may be useful, the question is whether it is meaningful. People who are completely absorbed in their art impress me. They are people who transcend into oneness. To me these people are universal and, therefore, important. Karate-do is dynamic

and alive, and it goes hand in hand with living people.

Could you tell us how and when you joined the Meibukan School?

At the time (1992-1993), I felt compelled to disassociate myself from Mr. De Spa, and from his working methods inside and outside his organization. This, combined with my own personal development, made me decide to take another path.

On leaving the I.O.G.K.F, I stopped practicing karate for four to five months. After this period of reflection, I started to practice again by myself and with some fellow practitioners.

In the summer of 1993 I went to Israel, and during the training seminar given by Master Meitatsu Yagi, I was introduced to this teacher and the Meibukan School.

Before leaving for Israel, I tried to figure out who Meitatsu Yagi was and whether he and the Meibukan School belong to an authentic and traditional Goju-ryu lineage. This turned out to be the case, which in turn was my foremost reason for partaking in this training seminar. If I was once again to join an organization, it was not going to be an option, but an imperative condition that I be guided and given instruction by people who came closest to Chojun Miyagi's teachings. From the few Goju-ryu books I had in my possession, I could trace Meitoku Yagi to be a student of Chojun Miyagi. His sons Meitatsu and Meitetsu Yagi were also named. During Meitatsu Yagi's training seminar, I had lengthy conversations with him about the Meibukan, the Jundokan, the I.O.G.K.F. and other organizations and schools. When asked whether I would be welcome to join the Meibukan School, Meitatsu Yagi answered positively.

In September of 1993 after some deliberation, I opened my Goju-ryu karate-do dojo in the Netherlands with the intention of following and instructing the Meibukan teachings. I opened the dojo to all who wish to practice karate-do with an open mind and a good heart.

Did you have any previous experience in teaching martial arts?

Yes. I remember being a brown belt under Mr. de Spa. One night he was unable to teach and he asked me to take over the class for the evening. I was more or less thrown in at the deep end. Following that evening, I taught many more classes until eventually I was teaching almost half of the classes. In retrospect, it is my opinion that in the west one may only open a dojo when one possesses at least a second degree black belt (Nidan), and then only as a transfer period under strict and direct supervision of his or her teacher [in the following, the neutral 'student' or 'teacher' refers to both male and female]. Furthermore, one should live



Lex Opdam performing Sanchin kata around 1991

Picture taken by Wil Koeh

up to certain standards, other than just the technical ones. When one possesses a third degree black belt, it is possible to open a dojo on one's own initiative, with approval of their Sensei and taking full responsibility in doing so.

I think that at the time, I was too young to carry out the responsibility of a karate-do teacher; I was too young in my karate and too young in my development as a person. As an instructor in technical fragmented fighting techniques and a qualified sports instructor, I complied with the western image of teacher/instructor. However, realizing what I now know, I can honestly say that at that time I was not a fully-fledged teacher of karate-do, even though my style,

organization and dojo were in the tradition of Okinawan Goju-ryu karate-do.

What criteria do you deem right for teaching karate-do?

In my opinion, when it comes to offering a small measure of assistance, all that is required is a certain insight in people and not the rank you hold. When offering good solid assistance, one needs a deeper understanding of the different aspects of karate-do. This includes history, philosophy, psychology, tradition, terminology, technique etc. To be a teacher and carry out your responsibility towards your students, your dojo and ryu – and this is what too many people give too little thought – you must realize the scope of task you are taking upon yourself. If you do not have the correct intention and are not up to the effort, teaching karate-do will cause great damage, not only to the art form and the tradition, but also to people. This realization should be foremost, even before the technical aspect of karate-do, for those who wish to act as teacher and guide.

On Okinawa the minimum requirement for opening a dojo, is to have at least a third degree black belt and be at least 25 years of age. The reason for this, aside from the technical and physical aspects, has everything to do with the mental and spiritual aspects of karate-do.

What is your opinion of the existing training programmes for karate teachers?

In the west, there are associations that provide state approved training program and qualify people to be state approved karate instructors. However, the training for a teacher of an art form is not something acquired by a course for a technical instructor. Although such a western, technical training program is suitable for sport karate, it is not enough to possess only didactical skills complemented with basic physiological and psychological knowledge. The understanding of karate-do as an art, the ability to impart this knowledge on others, combined with insight in human life is also essential. It is when these concepts lack in quality that karate-do,

“The difference between karate and karate-do is as the difference between day and night.”

as my teacher, Master Anthony Mirakian, often says, becomes brutal and dangerous. When mastering only the technical aspects and possessing only factual knowledge, insufficient responsibility will be taken towards society. Moral thoughts and having at least followed a spiritual path with sufficient self-knowledge, serve as conditions to function as a teacher of a martial art. The difference between karate and karate-do is as the difference between day and night.

You mentioned earlier how you gained information during training seminars. How did this occur with the Meibukan?

After returning from Israel, I decided to travel to Okinawa for further instruction. Late 1993, I trained on Okinawa at the Meibukan Honbu Dojo under Master Meitatsu Yagi and Dai Sensei Meitoku Yagi. I also trained at the dojo of Master Meitetsu Yagi and one of his senior students, Sensei Shintetsu Kuniyoshi. It was a very active visit. In addition to the training I received, I spent on average 5 hours a day writing down all that I had observed and the instructions given to me. No mean feat, considering *kote kitai* (conditioning of the limbs) was practiced with regularity and intensity. There were days when I could hardly hold my pen, let alone write. During this visit, my dojo in Nijmegen was officially appointed as headquarters of the International Meibukan Goju-ryu Karate-do Association Netherlands. In the following years, I visited Watertown Massachusetts to train under my main teacher in Meibukan Goju-ryu karate-do, Master Anthony Mirakian. Anthony Mirakian (Hanshi, ninth degree black belt) is the Overseas General Manager of Meibukan, officially appointed in 1972 by Dai Sensei Meitoku Yagi.

Why did you go to Hanshi Anthony Mirakian?

Since Master Anthony Mirakian is the Overseas General Manager of the Meibukan, I as the Dutch representative of the International Meibukan School,



Lex Opdam next to Master Meitatsu Yagi at the Meibukan Honbu dojo, Naha, Okinawa. 1993

came under his direction. It is not without reason that Master Anthony Mirakian received such a title. As one of the most senior students of Dai Sensei Meitoku Yagi, and as a westerner living in the United States, actively teaching Meibukan, it speaks for itself that Master Anthony Mirakian acts as supervisor for the Meibukan in the west. He is familiar with the western traditions, culture, and way of thinking. This is the main reason why I asked Master Anthony Mirakian to accept me as his student.



Overseas General Manager of the Meibukan master Anthony Mirakian (front row, left) next to Dai Sensei Meitoku Yagi. Picture taken in the 1950's.

Could you tell something about hierarchy and authority in your relation to students and in karate in general?

The position I have gained has been granted in good faith. Its purpose is to pass on karate-do in the correct manner

“The effort and inquisitiveness of the students in part determines the manner in which the teacher will approach them.”

to the world and specifically the Netherlands. As *Shibu-cho*, branch representative, I am the obvious person to take care of the activities of the Meibukan in the Netherlands. In my own view and adjusted to Dutch culture where necessary, but within the guidelines of the organization and in our case the Meibukan School, I am the one who must take care of the Meibukan education in the Netherlands. Decisions and responsibilities belong to me. My supervisor and direct teacher, Master Anthony Mirakian, is the one I am directly accountable to. Concerning the relation between teacher and student: the effort and inquisitiveness of the students in part determines the manner in which the teacher will approach them. The teacher is not there to entertain you. This thought is worthy of further study.

What is the true meaning of ‘Sensei’?

A direct translation of Sensei is ‘the one



Master Anthony Mirakian presents the document to Lex Opdam in being his official Personal Representative for the Meibukan in the Netherlands. Watertown, MA, USA 1996.

who has gone before'. Meaning that the Sensei has already walked the path that the student is following, and therefore, his knowledge and experience is first hand, natural, true and direct.

"A teacher of an art, such as a martial art, may be called honourable because he not only imparts factual knowledge but also acts as a guide, intent on letting you grow spiritually."

The Sensei is the link between the tradition, the techniques, the rituals and the student. In modern western civilisation, the teacher is often considered as a person who teaches you things. Usually, we see such a person as someone who imparts knowledge, knowledge that often consists of facts. However 'Sensei' does not merely mean teacher as such. It means *honourable* teacher. A teacher of an art, such as a martial art, may be called honourable because he not only imparts factual knowledge but also acts as a guide, intent on letting you grow spiritually. He places his teachings in the service of something higher. At all times, he – in the relationship between teacher and student, and if done with the correct intention, as between two people – is engaged in the spiritual growth of others.

This intention may be called honourable if it stems from love and compassion. This is the deeper meaning of 'Sensei'.

However, not everyone joins a karate-do school for their spiritual growth...

There are many reasons why people take up karate. It is funny and also very

natural to observe those who have not before come into contact with a martial art. In the beginning, they watch the techniques in bewilderment and are filled with awe. They quickly want to master these tricks because they are under the illusion that this is the answer in the case they ever get involved in an external struggle. Having mastered the technique reasonably a few years later, they want to move on to something new. It is precisely at that moment that actual karate-do begins. At that time, a condition is created to continue the journey they have started on a mental level. However, often the student will want to engage on another pleasure trip. When this desire is not fulfilled, this is the moment when most people quit. They no longer see any point in continuing. The individuals who do continue seriously – and they are but few – have discovered something inside themselves, which turns out to be of great value to them. Something that one will be able to describe, whereas another will not. The realisation of this value, the feeling that many cannot (yet) describe, now becomes their reason for continuing to follow karate-do.

Could you tell something about the way you promote students?

A black belt or other grade is a recognition of the way you practice karate-do. It is a ritual of recognition from the Sensei to the student. Although there are several guidelines, the recognition is directly and personally bound to the Sensei who shows this recognition. It is his recognition. This recognition is

not only technical, but means a lot more. Personally, by granting the first promotion in a Kyu-grade, I accept the student as an exploratory student. On obtaining the Shodan, first Dan-grade, I accept the student fully. The exploratory student has a period in which he moves through different stages. During this period, he develops a clearer picture of karate-do. On awarding the first Dan-grade, I accept the student as a student who can make a conscious decision in choosing the Way of the Empty Hand. A second Dan-grade is an acknowledgement of the student's conscious and serious choice to set out on the journey of karate-do. After obtaining the second grade, a strong basis (technically and physically) has been founded and the emphasis moves to very strong spiritual values, even though these were already effective at the very beginning of the training.

In your opinion, what is the most important issue in karate-do training?

The mental issue is essential. Technique and physical ability are conditions to train mentally in karate-do. In art, martial or otherwise, thousands of techniques become useless in the absence of spirit.

All kata of karate begin with defence, and this fact has more meaning than most people do realize. The 'empty' in the ideograph karate (meaning 'empty hand'), means more than literally an empty hand. It is up to the karate-do practitioner to investigate during the great search on which both body and



Canadian and Dutch students together training at the Okinawa Karate-do Academy Meibukan Goju-ryu in Watertown, MA, U.S.A.. Picture taken in 1999.

“In art, martial or otherwise, thousands of techniques become useless in the absence of spirit.”

spirit commence. Accompanying this search are many riddles that must be solved and secrets that will remain secret. In 1934 in a written explanation on karate, Grandmaster Chojun Miyagi, the founder of Goju-ryu karate-do, tried to explain the misinterpretation of karate due to the exhibition of *tameshiwara*, the breaking of wood and stones etc. By this, he states that it is not the exterior phenomenon for which karate-do is practiced. He also states that in times of peace, karate should be practiced as a spiritual exercise and not for self-defence, although it can be used when life is in danger.

Art in particular, just like religion, attempts to heal the torn man. The art of war, like martial art, should have a universal character. Art has many forms and faces. Art does not proclaim the truth; it searches for it. The value of this is of enormous importance, but only becomes relevant and meaningful when man commences his voyage inwards.



Canadian and Dutch representatives of Master Anthony Mirakian. Renshi Hing-Poon Chan (left) and Renshi Lex Opdam (right)

This interview is the shortened version of an interview between Lex Opdam and Willie van Zundert in January 2000. On the occasion of the tenth year anniversary of Meibukan Goju-ryu Karate-do Nederland, it was revised in December of 2003 by Mark Hemels and translated by Matthew Jones.



Bubushi by
Patrick McCarthy

152x227 mm, 248 pp,
250 ill.

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

THE BUBISHI - The Bible of Karate

The Bubushi is treasured for centuries by karate's top masters. It is a classic Chinese work on philosophy, strategy, medicine, and technique as they relate to the martial arts. Referred to as "the Bible of Karate" by the famous Master Miyagi Chojun, for hundreds of years, the Bubushi was a secret text passed from master to student in China and later in Okinawa. All of karate's legendary masters have studied it, applied its teachings, or plagiarized from it. No other classic work has had as dramatic an impact on the shaping and development of karate as the Bubushi. McCarthy has spent over ten years researching and studying the Bubushi and the arts associated with it and has included numerous explanations and notes to ease comprehension. It also includes ground-breaking research on Okinawan and Chinese history as well as the fighting and healing traditions that developed in those countries, making it a virtual gold mine of data for researchers and practitioners alike.

Patrick McCarthy is recognized worldwide as one of the foremost authorities on the civil fighting traditions of Okinawa. He is also the first Caucasian to ever be awarded the coveted Kyoshi 7th Dan Teacher's License from Kyoto's prestigious Dai Nippon Butokukai. He has been practicing karate-do for over thirty years, and has also studied Tai Chi Chuan, White Crane, Hung Gar, Monk Fist, and Five Ancestors Fist kung fu. During the mid-seventies, while pursuing a successful competitive career, he started his research on the arts. This has brought him not only to Japan, but also Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the People's Republic of China. With an extensive background in both Okinawan and Chinese fighting arts, McCarthy was in a unique position to research the most profound and influential document in the history of karate-do, the Bubushi. Since that time, he has interviewed and trained with the world's top masters of kung fu and karate-do while unraveling the history of this document and the fighting systems associated with it. In 1987 McCarthy established the International Ryukyu Karate Research Society (IRKRS) as an outgrowth of his research.

By Marc van Dam



Budo Secrets by
John Stevens

152x227 mm, 115 pp,
24 ill.

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

BUDO SECRETS – Teachings of the Martial Arts Masters

As Julee Moroz states in this issue of Meibukan Magazine, mythology is an integral part of martial arts tradition and philosophy. This means that even today we can learn from the stories about the masters of the martial arts. We can learn from their thoughts and behaviour, no matter how ancient their teaching tales. *Budo Secrets* is a compilation of the essential training secrets of such masters as the legendary swordsman Miyamoto Musashi, karate's Kanryo Higaonna and Gichin Funakoshi, aikido's Morihei Ueshiba, judo's Kyuzo Mifune, and many more. Author John Stevens is professor of Buddhist Studies and Aikido instructor at Tohoku Fukushi University in Sendai, Japan. He has gathered and translated a historically rich collection of teachings, including principles and practice guidelines from training manuals, excerpts of texts on budo philosophy, and instructional tales.

Some of those teachings are very practical, like Tempu Nakamura's advice on how to face a stressful situation: 'Tighten your anus, center yourself in your lower abdomen, and relax your shoulders.' Other teachings are more esoteric, like the *Neko No Myojutsu* (The Marvelous Techniques of the Old Cat), in which a nonchalant but enlightened old cat teaches a swordsman on the way of harmonizing power and the technique of no-mind.

The wonder of many of the tales in this book – regardless whether or not all of them really happened – is their power to encourage and inspire both inside and outside the dojo. A fine and recognizable example is the 18th century anecdote of Sorimachi Mukaku. This swordsman traveled around the country on a budo quest when he came to a slippery, single-log bridge spanning a deep gorge. Mukaku hesitated and was afraid to attempt the crossing. Suddenly, a blind traveler appeared and sauntered across the bridge without the slightest concern. At that instant, Mukaku realized that if one sees with the eyes of the heart rather than the eyes of the head, there is nothing to fear. Timely and instructive, these writings are not just for martial artists – they are for anyone who wants to live life more courageously, with a greater sense of personal confidence and self-control, and with a deeper understanding of others.

By Mark Hemels

Three level straight punches

A typical Goju-ryu exercise



This exercise is an example of Goju-ryu's basic punching and blocking while moving forwards and backwards.

The drill sequence, as shown in the photo series, is one of many trained in the Dutch Meibukan Goju-ryu Karate-do Headquarters.

Courtesy of Lex Opdam. Photo's taken by Teun Meeuwesse. Performers Pascal de Haan and René van de Deijl.

- 1 Semete: Heiko Dachi No Kamae
Ukete: Heiko Dachi No Kamae
- 2 Semete: Step forward in Migi Heiko Dachi with a Jodan Tsuki
Ukete: Step back in Hidari Heiko Dachi with a Jodan Age Uke
- 3 Semete: Step forward in Hidari Heiko Dachi with a Chudan Tsuki
Ukete: Step back in Migi Heiko Dachi with a Chudan Barai Uke
- 4 Semete: Step forward in Migi Shiko Dachi with a Gedan Tsuki
Ukete: Step back in Hidari Shiko Dachi with a Gedan Barai Uke
- 5 Semete: Keep the right foot in front but shift in with the left in Migi Heiko Dachi with a Jodan Tsuki
Ukete: Keep the left foot in front but shift in with the right with a Jodan Age Uke
- 6 Semete: Keep the feet steady delivering a Chudan Tsuki
Ukete: Keep the feet steady delivering a Chudan Barai Uke
- 7 Semete: Step forward in Hidari Shiko Dachi with a Gedan Tsuki
Ukete: Shift back with the right foot in Hidari Shiko Dachi with a Gedan Barai Uke

*Semete becomes Ukete
Ukete becomes Semete*

- 8 Semete: Step forward in Migi Heiko Dachi with a Jodan Tsuki
Ukete: Step back in Migi Heiko Dachi with a Jodan Age Uke
- 9 Semete: Step forward in Hidari Heiko Dachi with a Chudan Tsuki
Ukete: Step back in Hidari Heiko Dachi with a Chudan Barai Uke
- 10 Semete: Step forward in Migi Shiko Dachi with a Gedan Tsuki
Ukete: Step back in Migi Shiko Dachi with a Gedan Barai Uke
- 11 Semete: Heiko Dachi No Kamae
Ukete: Heiko Dachi No Kamae



Self-defence: Keep it simple!

Women, stay away from wrestling a stronger man

Okinawan karate styles like Shorin-ryu, Uechi-ryu and Goju-ryu don't rely on pretty movements or unrealistic acrobatical distractions. The techniques are simple yet hard to master. Within these traditional systems one finds a core of basic similarities.

In street situations one can best choose those techniques that one knows and masters, techniques that are close to one's natural reaction and flexible to apply. This concept is also applicable for women. For the average woman a man is often stronger and bigger. Instead of wrestling, pushing or punching on the chest, it would be more wise to go to the vulnerable area's of the man to overcome the physical inequality. Especially when a man is not yet using his full physical potential in initial assault, he can easily be stopped. Some examples of possible assault from a man towards a woman and some direct practical reactions are shown in the next photo series.



Courtesy of Lex Opdam. Photo's taken by Teun Meeuwse. Performers Léontine Veenhuis and Lex Opdam.

Handing Down the Master's Art

Mythology in the Martial Arts

Since ancient times martial art teachings have been handed down in the form of myth. Tales abound in which exemplary masters fearlessly face death and show us the art of life. In a guiding role, mythology continues to be an integral component of martial arts tradition and philosophy today.

- By Julee Moroz -

The existence of martial arts owes much of its legacy to the reality of war in the history of humanity. Methods were developed to enhance combat skills and were eventually diversified to create various methods of fighting. Social stratification designating classes of warriors contributed to the enculturation of martial arts throughout cultures such as those of India, China, Japan, Thailand, Korea, medieval Europe and many others. Where martial tradition of a culture may have survived invasion, occupation and oppression, we see evidence of a continuing tradition that, in many cases, suggests a system not merely of combat, but a veritable philosophy seeking to actualize the total potential of individuals.

These traditions persist today, and continue to be propagated with the assistance of symbolic mediation. Mythology is one of the forms of symbolism used. The purpose of this essay is to show that traditional teachings passed on in the martial arts, in the form of myth, are conducive to transmitting a particular philosophy and world view to the students who will continue to perpetuate the art.

Functional mythology

To classify tales of martial heroism as myth may seem to stretch the folktale into something much more culturally significant. Indeed, many tales of martial arts masters have the flavour of legend and nothing more. However, to leave it simply at that is to ignore that these stories embody the very values of a culture; they present the popular world view, set into a mystical era rich in cultural symbols. They deal with the notions of nature, death and evil, and

they definitely keep alive cultural heroes.

Martial arts myths for the most part do not describe cosmogonies, but they do describe the birth of the art form. On the subject of differentiating myth from folklore, professor of religion William Paden writes:

‘Myth is essentially different from folktales that tell of a make-believe realm set in a nonexistent time and place with deliberately fictive characters. Rather, myth posits ostensibly real times and places, real heroes and ancestors, real genealogies and events... intended by the believers to represent an actual account of the world’ (Paden, 72).

Cross-culturally these myths include historical characters in historical times, and include as historically correct genealogical data and events as can often be found. Anthropologist Lévi-Strauss once commented that the problem lay in knowing where the myth ended and where history began (Lévi-Strauss, 38), however myths such as those used in martial arts are often ‘for spiritual instruction’ (Campbell, 71) and thus lay beyond the realm of mere historical connotations. Hence we have our functionalist view. For we know that it is not likely that Bodhidharma (the founder of Zen Buddhism) actually sailed across the Blue River on a reed, but we can appreciate that his exemplary degree of spiritual enlightenment may have been likened to his walking on water, leaving a path in his wake that was inspirational to his students.

Bodhidharma's example

Many martial arts myths include reference to the legendary Bodhidharma

(‘Damo’ in Chinese). Bodhidharma was a Buddhist monk said to have left his Kashtriya (Warrior) caste in India to cross the Himalayas into China around 500 C.E.

“Bodhidharma implemented rigorous martial training regimes to harmonize the monk's spiritual development with the physical.”

After frustrating Emperor Wu, an enthusiastic Buddhist, with the complexity of his doctrines, Bodhidharma settled in the Shaolin



Drawing of Bodhidharma

Temple to continue teaching his form of Ch'an, or Zen, Buddhism. Seeing that the monks were too physically unfit to withstand the demanding meditation practices, Bodhidharma implemented rigorous martial training regimes to harmonize their spiritual development with the physical (Soo, 14). Time-honoured Chinese martial arts exercises such as the Yin Jin Jing (Muscle Change Classic), Hsi Sui Jing (Marrow Washing Classic), and the Eighteen Lohan Hands are attributed to Bodhidharma (Cook, 28). 'An interesting story, but unfortunately not one word of it is true, although it is repeated time after time by most followers of the martial arts' (Ibid.).

Spiritual enlightenment, exemplified by Bodhidharma, comprises many martial arts myths which are used to emphasize the unity of the mind, body and spirit as a goal. This practice is in existence even today as many schools continue to use meditation as part of their training. This brings us to the philosophy inherent in the martial arts, which can be directly linked to the warrior's proximity to death. In the Phaedo, Plato explores Socrates' calm acceptance of his impending execution, declaring that philosophy is a detachment from life, and a preparation for death.

Death and the ego

A cultural philosophy or world view affects its institutions. *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* by Inazo Nitobe is an 'exposition of Japanese thought' which includes the code of the samurai. 'Bushido' translates as *bu* (military), *shi* (man or knight), *do* (way) and provides a sample of encultured ethics (Nitobe, 4). In this ethnographic example, the position is that war is the 'foundation of all the high virtues and faculties of men' (Nitobe, 9). The tenderness of a warrior is what is considered noble, and mercy most brave (Ibid., 41). For the samurai of feudal Japan, successful training meant acceptance of the inevitability of death, and the willingness to meet it honourably (Nitobe, 72-81). Moreover, it is this resolve that produces the best warriors. In one Okinawan myth, an artisan who foolishly challenged the great Bushi

Matsumura found himself paralyzed helplessly under the gaze of the master. 'Don't try to console me,' he says, 'I have lost all my strength only to feel your gaze transfix me.' Replies the great Matsumura: 'That's possible, but I believe the reason is the following. You were determined to win. I was quite determined to die if I lost' (Fauliot, 111). To be determined to win is the drive of the ego, and all the attachments that accompany it. The master, in accepting death, was no longer subject to the ego and so was not hindered by attachment. Even Shakyamuni Buddha in India used myths describing the 'four elemental temperaments' to direct warriors away

"Both aspects of the mythic path are revealed in the martial arts: the fearless facing of the monster, and the willingness to die before death, in order to gain a fuller life."

from fear and battle and toward spirituality (Nagaboshi, 198). Whether in India, China, or Japan, 'those engaged in battle...often experience a heightened awareness of life and death, [which] prompted teachers of Buddhism to include conflict as one of the potential areas for spiritual development...' (Ibid, 199). The fear of death reveals the ego, posing one of the greatest obstacles for any warrior. The shedding of the ego and the preparation for death develops into a philosophical world view that gives the martial art its art. Richard Kim, a world recognized karate master, wrote in his book on Okinawan martial arts myths that through the martial arts man can 'rediscover his body as a tool of expression' (Kim, 58). The confrontation with death and the self is undoubtedly part of the teachings of traditional martial arts masters.

Designated heroes

Some myths refer to the true task as one of aiming one's arrow at one's own heart, echoing the Mundaka Upanishad (section 2.2.1). A maxim of kyudo (the art of archery) is based on this principle. One myth, (Fauliot, 103), refers to the master as a mountain guide to point out the path of the stages through which one

must pass in order to aim at one's own heart.

These masters have in turn been designated heroes and mythologized to pass on their teachings (see Richard Kim's *The Weaponless Warriors*). One of these myths tells of Itosu Yasutsune, a 24-year-old martial artist who had been taught by Matsumura. When a bull, mad and loose in Naha city, charged Itosu, he merely sidestepped the bull while grabbing it by the horns. Itosu ran alongside the bull, pulling its head back until it lost its balance. The bull then fell exhausted. The tying together of martial arts myth and esoteric philosophy is described by Peter Payne: 'Both aspects of the mythic path, the hero's journey, are revealed in the martial arts: the fearless facing and overcoming of the monster, and the willingness to be undone, dismembered, to die before death, in order to gain a fuller life' (Payne, 33). Payne's description details an unquestionable description of the symbolism of the initiation ritual.

There is a disparity in the role of the martial arts between the initiated and the uninitiated, similar to the idea of the manifest function and the latent function respectively. For beginners, martial arts can be seen as a means to winning fights and gaining strength; for the initiated, that is to say those whom the esoteric philosophies have affected, martial arts presents a means of harmonizing the body, mind and spirit, of 'power in repose' (Niobe, 55). Today these two functions can be interpreted as representing the martial sports schools training for competition and tournaments, and the traditional martial arts school, seeking to perpetuate a particular philosophy and way of life.

Spiritual teaching

Qualified teachers are highly valued in transmitting the esoteric teachings, just as they are in the Upanishads; 'For the sake of this knowledge let him go, fuel in hand, to a spiritual teacher who is learned in the scriptures and established on Brahma' (*Mundaka Upanishad*, 1.2.13). Traditionally, young students were sent to live with and serve their gurus. The teachers were not paid for their teachings because that would

presume a measurable value on what they gave, which was deemed immeasurable. 'When character, and not intelligence, when the soul and not the head, is chosen by a teacher for the material to work upon and to develop, his vocation partakes of a sacred character' (Nitobe, 100). The teacher's worth is often measured by his students, and so the master guards his secrets closely to make sure only the most deserving of students may learn them. This theme is also taken up in many Japanese, Okinawan and Chinese myths, in which tales of servants or monks spying on the master's training results in the spy becoming a student. Some stories present this in part as showing the great degree of motivation of the student, and some masters wanting to control in what ways their arts are spread after them.

This is one of the reasons that written, technical information is lacking in the traditional martial art forms, perhaps contributing to the teaching myths. 'This was due, no doubt, to the fact that this information was not intended for the general public, but only for those pupils who had proved themselves worthy of the techniques, skills, and tradition of that particular school or

style' (Soo, 13). A master's art was closely guarded and handed down often only within a family, from generation to generation, as more of an oral and ritual tradition. Myth would have been part of that tradition, as illustrated with the Taoist art of Feng Shou, or 'Hand of the Wind' kung fu, which traces its genealogy through the school's uniform, to Chinese mythology thousands of years old (Soo, 25-26). An old man with a flowing white beard, dressed in a yellow cloak and a red and blue hat, stands on the pinnacle of the heavens, holding open a cotton sack with which he directs the wind. When he moves slowly, so does the wind, but if he is angered or startled, then he turns very vast and thus unleashes the devastation of a tornado on the universe. The myth ends 'So don't upset him by becoming aggressive for the one thing he really hates is violence' (Ibid). This is one of the most common themes in the martial arts.

Perhaps one of the most simple and effective myths describes the development of Chinese Tai chi ch'uan. A Taoist immortal named Chang Sanfeng was a recluse in the Wu-tang mountains of the Hupeh Province in the twelfth century. It is said that he witnessed a fight between a snake and a crane, wherein the snake evaded the crane by virtue of its twisting movements in avoiding the crane's sharp stabbing motions with its beak. Lao-tzu's teaching came to mind, which said that the most yielding of things in the universe overcome the most hard (Tao Te Ching, verse 43). This inspiration was the basis for the inception of Tai chi ch'uan (Cook, 29). The style was passed down for generations within the family, as likely was the myth, claimed to have captured the essence of the art.

Conclusion

There are multiple martial arts which have not been touched on in this examination, just as there are many more myths. The aim here has been to demonstrate functionally that the martial arts is a traditional form of enculturation possessing symbolic tools such as myth. Indeed, myth is one of the ways in which transformation of one's self and one's worldly boundaries

can be intimated, presenting the possibility of the inner changes which must precede any radical world change (Payne, 32). The symbols used are instrumental in unlocking a philosophy by those continuing the tradition.

Acknowledging that there is a presence of the mythic symbol and an esoteric philosophy, teaching is the means for mediating this access. The symbol provides an objective and advanced view of the structure of the training, which can support the sometimes intricate patterns of consciousness involved, aiding the actualization of the individual. The teacher is central to the guiding and development of the martial arts student's full potential. In a guiding role, myth continues to be an integral component of the perpetuation of martial arts tradition and philosophy today.

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Okinawan Master Choki Motobu (1871-1944) who, at first, started his martial arts by peeking through a fence while a teacher secretly instructed his personal students in the art. Later on Choki Motobu received formal instruction from several Okinawan masters.

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