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Wado-Pentecost Training Course 2012 in Berlin

“Koryu lives a little bit in Wado. Shindo Yoshin Ryu and Wado are like cousins.” (Toby Threadgill)

About 170 participants from Germany, Hungary, Austria, Finland, Portugal, Spain and France met at the traditional Wado-Pentecost Training Course 2012 in Berlin. The Training was led by Shuzo Imai (8. Dan Wado Ryu) and Toby Threadgill (Menkyo Kaiden, Takamura-Ha Shindo Yoshin Ryu).

Wado ryu was founded by Hironori Otsuka (1892 – 1982) and is based on two pillars: The Shindo Yoshin Ryu and Okinawa-Karate. The aim of the training course was to show the historical connection between SYR and Wado. Particular objectives of the course were to develop speed and power through relaxation, the principle of Tai Otoshi, Omote and Ura versions of the Tantodori Kata and different methods of power generation within the Idori Kata.

On the first day of the training course Toby Threadgill presented SYR and Wado within the historical context of the early 20th century. In that time, Otsuka recognized that Jujutsu and Kenjutsu from the old Koryu schools were threatened with extinction because of the massive social changes happening in Japan. In contrast, Karate from Okinawa enjoyed increasing popularity. Consequently, Otsuka decided to transfer the knowledge of the Koryu schools he studied into a new expression of budo he ultimately named Wado ryu. Toby Threadgill used a metaphor to illustrate: Otsuka took Okinawa Karate, removed its core principles and replaced them with the core principles of SYR.¹ That was how he transferred the knowledge of Koryu into Wado ryu: “Koryu lives a little bit in Wado, SYR and Wado are like cousins.”²

In contrast to Wado, knowledge in SYR is passed directly from teacher to student: things are preserved rather than changed over time. Toby Threadgill as Menkyo Kaiden took the course participants on a journey into the past, back into 19th-century Japan. Through Shuzo Imai’s training, participants learned that the principles and some of the partner exercises of SYR, such as Tantodori and Idori, live on in Wado.

During the training course Toby Threadgill also allowed participants to examine some of his certifications (Densho), most notably a Joden Gokui Mokuroku³ and his Menkyo Kaiden.⁴ Shuzo Imai confirmed its validity to the participants.

¹ „Otsuka took the core out and put the SYR core in it. ... He made it more Japanese.” Toby Threadgill: Wado-Pentecost Training Course in Berlin, 26.05.2012

² Toby Threadgill: Wado-Pentecost Training Course 2012 in Berlin, 26.05.2012

³ “The teachings of Takamura-ha Shindo Yoshin-ryu are organized in a manner consistent with most classical schools of budo. The teachings are divided into three levels represented by the issuing of teaching licenses. These are *shoden*, *chuden* and *joden gokui*. An administrative license also exists which represents ultimate authority over the issuing of all these licenses. This administrative license is called a menkyo kaiden. ...” Toby Threadgill and Shingo Ohgami: Takamura-ha Shindo Yoshin-ryu Jujutsu: History and Technique. In: <http://www.koryu.com/library/tthreadgill1.html> (as of 10.06.2012)

⁴ The menkyo system dates back to the 8th century. “Menkyo kaiden (免許皆伝?), (めんきょかいでん) is a Japanese term meaning ‘license of total transmission.’ It is a license that is granted by a school, *koryū* meaning that the exponent has learned everything and pass on all aspects of his/her training within the koryū.” Donn F. Draeger: Ranking Systems in Modern Japanese Martial Arts: Modern vs. Classical. Lecture on 1 April 1976

The Training

Idori and Tantodori

During the training course Toby Threadgill taught the TSYR Idori and Tantodori Kata⁵, which Otsuka transferred into Wado with some modifications, such as reducing their inherent risk of injury. The principles of the SYR transferred into Wado by Otsuka were very important to him, such as Chushin Tadasu (proper body posture), Kansetsu (joint locking) and Kuzushi (balance breaking).

Idori

The Idori were developed in ancient Japan, where both private and public social interactions took place “on the ground” in accordance with fixed social practices. The Idori are partner exercises which are carried out in Seiza/Heiza. Proper body posture (Cushin Tadasu) and working from a relaxed state with proper attention to body dynamics are very important in these exercises.

Toby Threadgill demonstrated which TSYR Idori Kata Otsuka had modified and transferred into Wado whilst preserving their principles.

TSYR

1. Tobi Chigai Dori
2. Zu Soe
3. Ashi Dori
4. Kasumi Dori
5. Kanegi Dori
6. Gozen Dori
7. Gyakute Gaeshi

Wado-Kai

- Te Dori
- Zu Dori
- Ashi Dori
- Hiki Dori
- Shumoku Dori
- Gozen Dori
- Hijite Kansetsu Gyakutorinage

Tantodori

The Tantodori are about defending oneself against knife attacks. Three versions of the kata can be distinguished: Omote, Ura and Henka.⁶ Otsuka limited himself to the Omote version in order to convey the principles embodied in the SYR Tantodori. In Wado ryu, the sharp side of the knife is turned upwards – a sign that the attacker was not trained in handling weapons.⁷ Practising Tantodori in Wado is about learning the principles of how to defend oneself against edged weapon attacks. One of the most important principles of Wado ryu that originates in weapon attacks is Taisabaki: fast, effective and precise evasion. It enables one to “go into the opponent” with a counter technique (Irimi), to control him, and unbalance him (Kuzushi) thereby defeating him.

Toby Threadgill demonstrated and taught the TSYR Tantodori that Otsuka had modified and transferred into Wado while preserving their principles.

⁵ In TSYR a partner exercise is termed kata (形), not kata (型)。

⁶ Three versions of the kata can be distinguished: Omote: The "surface" of a kata. This is not about the practical implementation, but about learning the principles. Ura: The "deeper knowledge" that is hidden in the kata, which is only taught to selected advanced students. The Ura version is more based on the application. Henka: The individual version of the kata. It is very realistic - up to the point of killing.

⁷ See: Mario McKenna: An Overview of Karate-dō. Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada 2009, pages 290 – 305.

TSYR

1. Soto Udegarami Dori
2. Tegaeshi Nage
3. Erinage Dori
4. Zu Dori
5. Hikitate
6. Gyakute Gaeshi Nage

Wado-Kai

- Udegarami Dori
- Kotenage Dori
- Erinage Dori
- Zu Dori
- Hikitate
- Hikiotoshi Dori

Development of speed and energy through relaxation and Tai Otoshi

During his training course Shuzo Imai referred to Tai Otoshi (utilization of gravity) and pointed out that this is a fundamental principle of Budo. On this basis, he showed the connection between Wado ryu and SYR by demonstrating that the principles of movement in Karate and SYR are almost the same. The participants practised the basic techniques of Kihon, especially Junzuki No Tsukomi, Tobikomizuki and Nagashizuki on one hand and Kata like Naihanchi, Kushanku and Jitte on the other hand. It became clear that the purpose of the Kata in Wado is learning the correct body movements and that it is about the principles contained in the Kata which are derived from the SYR.

Shuzo Imai further focused on the traditional partner exercises of Wado. In particular, he concentrated on principles of evasion (Taisabaki) and walking into the opponent (Irimi). He clearly demonstrated to the participants that only from a relaxed state and by using gravity (Tai Otoshi) can fast and effective techniques evolve. By practising the traditional Kihon Kumite and Tantodori the participants learned that the knowledge and application of the Budo principles are prerequisites for correct and effective Wado Karate.

Preserving the heritage

At the end of the training course, Toby Threadgill emphasized that it was Otsuka's intention to preserve the historical heritage of SYR in Wado. In SYR there are only about 150 practitioners around the world. We, the Wado Karateka, assist him in preserving the heritage of SYR. His teacher Yukiyoishi Takamura⁸ has given his art and knowledge to a new generation. Toby Threadgill is charged with doing the same. It is his desire that Wado Karateka should assimilate and process what he is teaching us and pass on the heritage of SYR in the Wado way. Toby Threadgill is impressed that so many in Wado are interested in this historical exchange.

Shuzo Imai pointed out the common roots of Wado and SYR. He added that thanks to Toby Threadgill, the Wado Karateka have a unique opportunity to simultaneously learn about the SYR roots of Wado and about the Japanese Budo movement, and by understanding them, to practise Wado the way the founder Hironori Otsuka envisioned it.

The Wado-Pentecost Training Course has shown that practising and learning together is important and that by doing so we can improve and deepen our Wado. The unifying element is the preservation of the common historical heritage of our founder Otsuka, which is based in SYR and communicated by Toby Threadgill.

Wado-Pentecost Training Course 2013

Next year there will be another Wado-Pentecost Training Course. We invite all Karateka to come to Berlin to join us!

⁸ Yukiyoishi Takamura (1928 – 2000), see <http://www.shinyokai.com/interviews.htm>