

**Christina Gutz**

**Dominating the Opponent by Controlling Initiative (Sente) and Distance (Maai)  
Wado and TSYR Seminar with Toby Threadgill (USA) and Kaki Kawano (Japan) in Berlin  
on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> February, 2016**

More than 100 participants trained under the guidance of **Toby Threadgill (Menkyo Kaiden, Takamura Ha Shindo Yoshin Ryu Jujutsu) and Kaki Kawano (5<sup>th</sup> Dan JKF Wado-Kai)** in Berlin. This traditional Berlin Wado and TSYR seminar has promoted national and international exchanges and strengthened friendships for 10 years now.

**The Art of Strategy and Dominance: Sente and Maai**

Unlike Okinawa karate which is based on self-defense and clearly expresses this with its fundamental principle „Karate ni Sente nashi“ – „There is no first attack in karate.“, Wado ryu is based on the principle of Sente, attack and initiative. Toby Threadgill explained that the reason for this is to be found in the origin of Wado ryu, whose combat theory originates in Japanese Shindo Yoshin Ryu (SYR), a traditional martial art (Koryu). The founder of Wado ryu, Hironori Ohtsuka<sup>1</sup>, had been trained in this Budo and translated his knowledge of SYR into Wado ryu and he also developed the earliest methods of karate jiyu kumite from jujutsu-based randori and shiai. From the historical perspective, the sword combat of the samurai era, which is about life and death, is, thus, the origin of kumite. Wado ryu is, therefore, a martial art of the samurai, an art of strategy and dominance.

The purpose of the seminar was to show that this art of strategy and dominance and, thus, the concepts of Sente and Maai, are actually the same because of the historical link between SYR and Wado ryu.

**Dominating the Opponent by Controlling Initiative (Sente) and Distance (Maai)**

Sente and Maai are closely interrelated. This means that Maai is related to the behavior of the opponents as a function of time and space, whereas Sente describes the interactions between opponents in a fight.<sup>2</sup>

Sente means in the first place that the attacker and the defender show great determination and that they act with a challenging, even aggressive attitude. Sente signifies initiative, attack, reaching the target unconditionally and in a straightforward manner: Kakugo. Whereas Okinawa karate is based on Go No Sen, i.e., reactive timing, SYR and Wado place the focus on Sen No Sen (simultaneous timing) and Sen Sen No Sen (pre-emptive timing).

Toby Threadgill emphasized and demonstrated in an impressive manner that mental and physical Sente not only belong together but that the mindset is the pre-condition for success, for winning. Toby Threadgill's exercises, which were excellently designed in didactic and methodological terms, allowed

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<sup>1</sup> Wado ryu was founded by Hironori Ohtsuka (1892 – 1982) in 1934.

<sup>2</sup> „Ma-ai Space-time, physical as well as psychological, that separates the two individuals.“ Ellis Amdur: Old School. Essays on Japanese Martial Traditions, Wheaton 2013, S. 375

the participants to experience for themselves that Sente is a basic tactic and that such principles as Chushin Tadasu, Taisabaki, Irimi, Atemi, Tsukuri and Kake are parts of this concept.

Toby Threadgill elaborated on this basic knowledge by explaining these three types of Sente as a cycle: Go No Sen, Sen No Sen, Sen Sen No Sen may merge together, alternate and induce one another in a partner kata or a fight.<sup>3</sup> The participants practiced this tactic in numerous drills and realized that physical Sente is a function of mental Sente which makes it possible to observe the partner's signals and to profit from this in a combat situation.

In well-coordinated drills, Toby Threadgill and Kaki Kawano conveyed the concept of Maai: It denotes not only distance in terms of space and time, but all the opponents' intentions and movements in a fight. The participants practiced crossing various distances<sup>4</sup> and improved their feeling of the right distance from which it is possible to exert pressure on the opponent, to distract him, to directly control him and to eventually win against him.<sup>5</sup> Both Toby Threadgill and Kaki Kawano underlined in this context the eight directions of sidestepping with a special focus on Taisabaki. They also kept emphasizing in all Sente and Maai-related exercises that acting from a state of relaxation with sudden and smooth techniques, disrupting and controlling the opponent's rhythm, proper timing and breathing are keys to success in partner drills and in free-fighting. This enabled the participants to experience the common point of TSYR and Wado ryu.

The explanations, corrections and exercises made it all eventually clear that Sente and Maai in TSYR partner kata and in Wado ryu kumite and free-fighting are essential elements for controlling the opponent.

### **Wado and TSYR: Identical and timeless principles**

This seminar consistently continued the development started in 2007: TSYR and Wado ryu are closely related and share a great many aspects. These seminars allow us to realize what is behind the form in Wado ryu, which Budo principles are applied and which wealth of knowledge we may tap.

We would like to cordially thank Toby Threadgill for his consistent support over many years and for "opening doors". We are looking forward to meeting him again on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> February, 2017, and invite all martial artists to join us.

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<sup>3</sup> „Three forms of Sente can be merged together“, Toby Threadgill, Wado und TSYR Lehrgang am 06., 07.02.2016 in Berlin

<sup>4</sup> „Ma 間 – Interval in terms of both space and time. In *budō* the spatial distance which, together with timing (*ai*) permits the adjusted movement (*sabaki*). The *kanji* for *ma* denotes "the sun shining through two gates". In *budō*, *ma* is distance, comprising *tōma* (long distance), *chūkanma* or *chūkan* (normal or middle distance) and *chikama* (short distance). ...“  
<http://www.budopedia.de/wiki/Maai>

<sup>5</sup> “Put pressure to force him to do anything, then you take the initiative. Bring him in a position where he can't counter ... You have to be able to take the initiative and own it “, Toby Threadgill, Wado and TSYR Berlin Seminar on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> February, 2016