

International Ryukyu Kobudo Federation



Ryukyu Kobudo is the practice of martial arts weapons that developed in the Ryukyu Islands. The Ryukyu Islands are a chain of islands extending southwest from the southern end of Kyushu Island in Japan. Notable islands include Okinawa and Hama Higa Islands. The kata names originate from the island or village where they developed, or from the master that is credited with the kata.



Short History

Okinawa is the largest island in the Ryukyu Island chain. Both Japanese and Chinese settlers have been there since around 300 BC. By 1340 AD. three kingdoms exist in the Ryukyu Islands, Hokuzan, Chuzan, and Nazan. These three kingdoms are at war with each other for dominance of the island chain. It is at this time that trade begins with China.

In 1393 AD. China sends a large group of people to Okinawa as part of the cultural exchange. Included in this group are monks from the Shaolin Temple. This begins the combination of Shaolin Kung Fu with Okinawan Te.

In 1429 AD. The Ryukyu Islands are united under one king. The kingdom prospers due to the trade with all of Asia. In 1447 AD. King Sho Shin bans all weapons from civilians to keep the peace. This is the first “Weaponless Period”.

In 1609 AD. the Satsuma clan invades the Ryukyu Islands and captures the King. They ban all weapons from the islanders. This is the second “Weaponless Period” which brought about the advent of the unique Okinawan weapons from legal objects and tools.

ROKUSHAKUBO

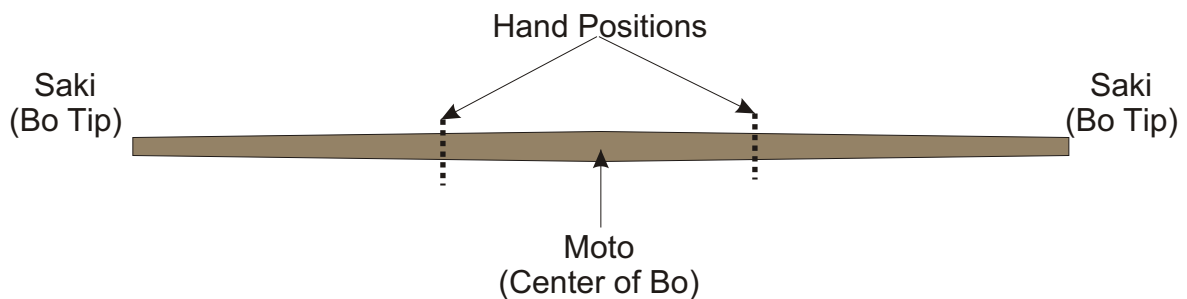
The word “rokushakubo” means 6 foot staff. Roku is 6. Shaku is a measurement approximately 1 foot. Bo is staff. It is made from hardwood. The Bo is approximately 6 feet in length, in principle the Bo should be at least one fist length taller than the wielder. Its diameter is between 1 and 2 inches. The Bo can be straight or tapering towards the ends.

The Bo was used as a walking staff and as a yoke to carry loads in buckets or baskets. In the latter case, the Bo was placed across the shoulders and the loads were suspended by rope from the ends.

The Bo depends entirely on Te (hand) techniques. Proper turning and twisting of the wrist is necessary. Kobudo Masters spent many years practicing with the Bo before attempting combat.

The Bo is gripped with the hands spaced one-third down from each tip. When held horizontally in front, the right palm is facing away from the body and the left hand is facing the body. The opposing grip of the hands enables the Bo to rotate. The power is generated by the back hand pulling the Bo. The front hand is used for guidance. It is important to twist the wrist when striking and poking just like turning the hand over when punching.

KATAS: Sushi No Kun, Sushi No Kun Sho, Sushi No Kun Dai, Sakugawa No Kun, Sakugawa No Kun Sho, Sakugawa No Kun Dai, Kubo No Kun, Sakugawa No Kun Jo



SAI

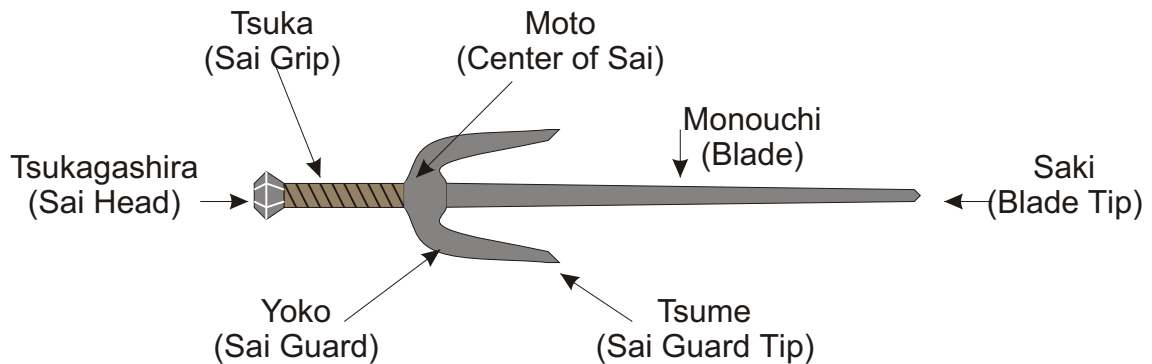
It is sometimes known as a short sword, but is closely related to a trident. It is a hand weapon with a blade between 15 and 20 inches in length with forward curving quillions, hand grip, and pommel. It is made from solid iron weighing up to 3 pounds. The Saki of the Monouchi should extend 1 to 3 inches past the elbow. The Saki can be sharp, blunted, or smoothed out.

The Sai is one of the few Okinawan weapons that did not evolve from farm tools. The iron for the Sai originated in China and was brought in by traders. Often 2 or 3 Sai were carried, 1 in each hand and a third in the belt in reserve. The Sai and its technique are unique to Okinawan-based Karate systems.

The use of the Sai requires a very high standard of training and skill. Each Sai must function in harmony with the other. Proper use of the Sai requires many years of training.

The Sai has several grips. An open Sai is when the Tsukagashira is at the heel of the palm. A closed Sai is when the Tsukagashira is at the finger tips and the Monouchi lies on the forearm. The Yoko is used for trapping and breaking of weapons.

KATAS: Nakazato No Towada Sai Dai Ichi, Nakazato No Towada Sai Dai Ni,
Nakazato No Towada Sai Dai San



TONFA

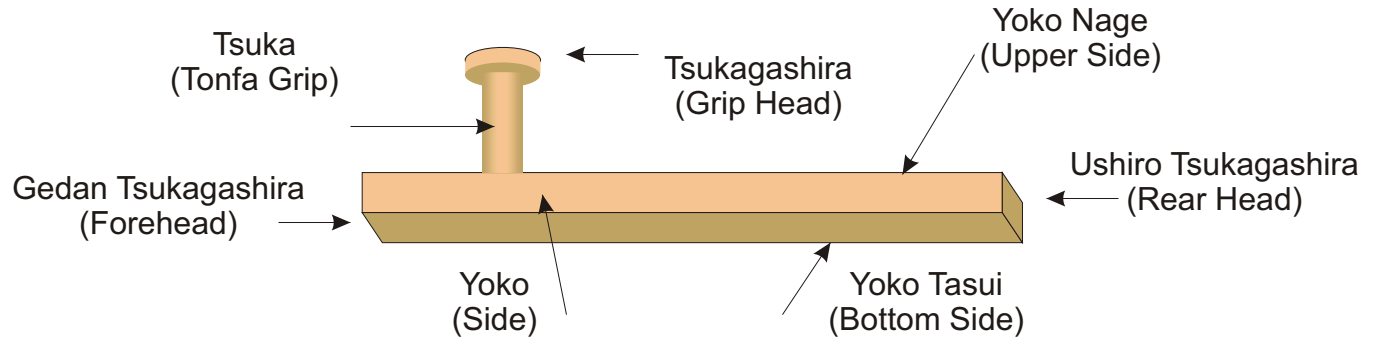
The Tonfa is made of hardwood. It is between 15 to 20 inches in length with a projecting side handle about 6 inches down the from the front end. The Ushiro Tsukagashira should extend 1 to 3 inches past the elbow. The body of the Tonfa may be square or round.

The Tonfa was used as a handle to turn a hand operated millstone when grinding rice. Like the Sai, the Tonfa is used in pairs.

The Tonfa takes time to develop smooth techniques. Each Tonfa must work in harmony with the other. Proper spinning, rotation, and control require many hours of practice.

The Tonfa is gripped so that the thumb and index finger are at the Tsukagashira and the Yoko Nage is on the bottom of the forearm. It can be used for punching and blocking as in karate. The true power of the Tonfa comes from the swinging motions used for striking and blocking.

KATAS: Nakazato No Tonfa, Yaragawa No Tonfa



Nunchaku

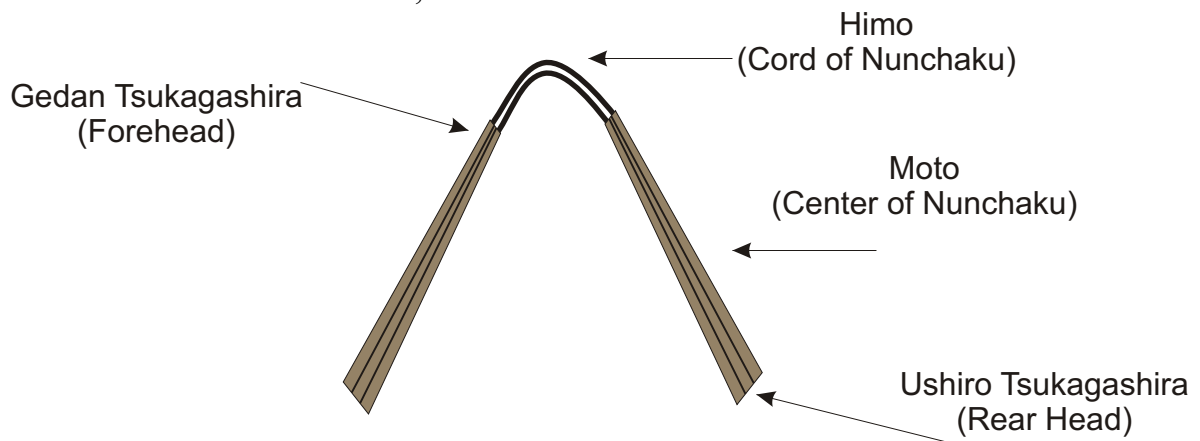
The use of Nunchaku is typically Okinawan. This innocuous looking weapons is made with two equal lengths of hardwood hinged by a short piece of silk cord or chain. The lengths of wood are about as long as your forearm. The cord should span the back of your hand.

The Nunchaku are common as plain agricultural gain flails all over Souther Asia and the larger versions used to be found in Europe.

Under the severe dominance of the Japanese, the Okinawans developed the weapon as subordinate branch of fighting always done from te postures.

The Nunchaku is gripped at the Ushiro Tsukagashira. It is first whirled in a fast figure-eight or zigzag motion before the opponent with the objective of disturbing the composure and gaining a mental initiative. The rotating of the Nunchaku comes from the wrist motion. As the Nunchaku rotates, the two pieces of wood should stay in line with each other. The free hand carries out the normal te movements of blocking and defending as the chances occur. The Nunchaku delivers smashing blows to the face, hands, wrists, knees, shoulder blades, or the ribs.

KATAS: Nunchaku Dai Ichi, Nunchaku Dai Ni



KAMA

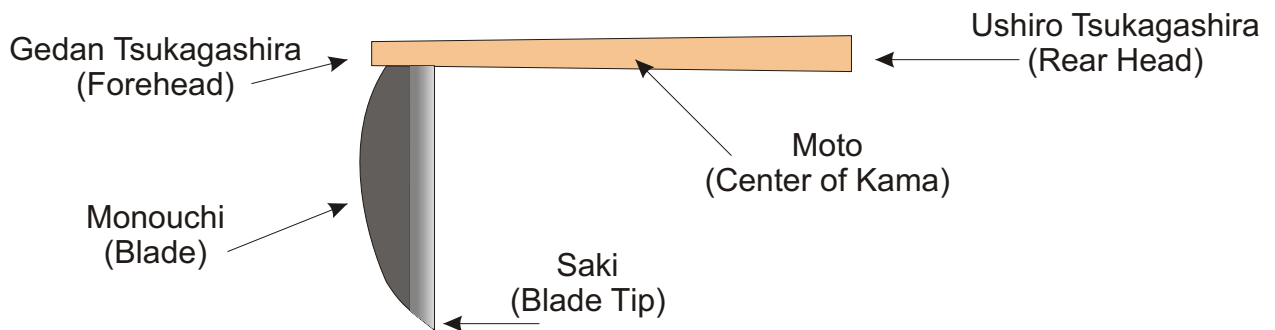
The Kama has a short blade at right angles to a hardwood handle. The handle is a little longer than your forearm and tapers from the Ushiro Tsukagashira to the Gedan Tsukagashira. The Monouchi is between 6 and 10 inches in length. It is sometimes upgraded to Kama-Yari (Spear with a hook blade) and the Kusari-Gama (Sickle and Chain).

The Kama is a hand-held sickle which was used for rice harvesting. It can be found in Southern Asia and Japan.

Typically two Kama are used. Because of the Monouchi and the difficult techniques used, the Kama is considered an advance weapon. Great care and focus is required as well as many hours of practice.

The Kama is gripped at the Ushiro Tsukagashira not at the Moto. The Kama has two positions, open and closed. The open position is when the Kama is gripped like a hammer. The closed position is when the handle of the Kama rests along the forearm. The Kama rotates between the index finger and the thumb when going from the open and closed positions.

KATAS: Kama Dai Ichi, Kama Dai Ni



Eku

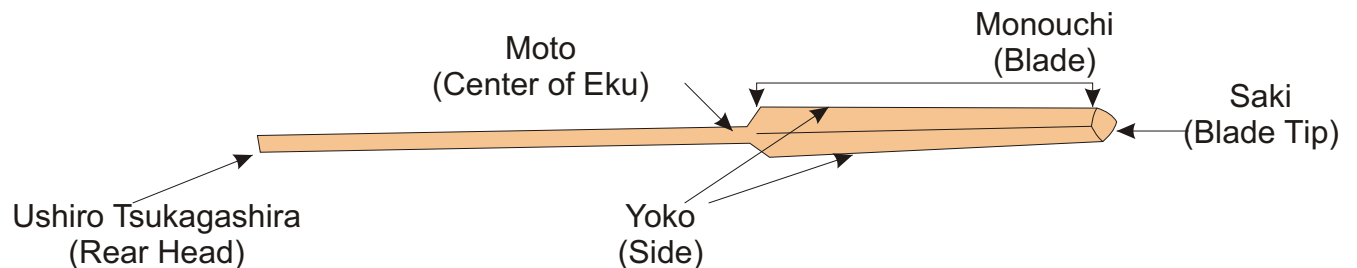
The Eku is made from hardwood. It is shorter than the Bo. In principle the Eku is the same height as the wielder. The Monouchi extends one-third the length of the Eku. The Monouchi has 4 surfaces, the Saki, 2 Yoko, a beveled edge, and a rounded face.

The Eku is uniquely Okinawan. The Eku was a common place oar put to deadly use by the Okinawan fishermen.

The Eku is considered an advance Bo. The Eku uses the techniques of the Bo. However, the Eku requires more skill because of the necessary wrist action needed to use the proper surface. Use of the Eku requires excellent knowledge of Bo techniques.

The grips for the Eku are similar to the ones for the Bo. The right hand grips the Eku at the Moto right behind the Monouchi. The left hand is about one shoulder width down from the right hand. Like the Bo the back hand generates the power and the front hand is used for guidance and control.

KATAS: Shorinkan No Eku Dai Ichi, Suken Sunekake



Japanese Terms for Weapons

BO

Saki	Bo Tip
Moto	Center of Bo

SAI

Saki	Blade Tip
Monouchi	Blade
Moto	Center of Sai
Tsume	Sai Guard Tip
Yoko	Sai Guard
Tsuka	Sai Grip
Tsukagashira	Sai Head

TONFA

Gedan Tsukagashira	Forehead
Ushiro Tsukagashira	Rear Head
Tsuka	Tonfa Grip
Tsukagashira	Grip Head
Yoko	Side
Yoko Naga	Upper Side
Yoko Tasui	Bottom Side

NUNCHAKU

Moto	Center of Nunchaku
Himo	Cord of Nunchaku
Gedan Tsukagashira	Forehead
Ushiro Tsukagashira	Rear Head

KAMA

Gedan Tsukagashira	Forehead
Ushiro Tsukagashira	Rear Head
Monouchi	Blade
Saki	Blade Tip
Moto	Center of Kama

EKU

Gedan Tsukagashira	Forehead
Ushiro Tsukagashira	Rear Head
Saki	Blade Tip
Moto	Center of Eku