



Kobudo

Kobudo (“ancient martial way”) and *kobujutsu* (“ancient martial arts”) are the terms used to refer generally to martial arts which involve the use of weapons. Students at our dojo are welcome to study this branch of the fighting arts by attending (with Sensei’s permission) the various weapons classes offered at no additional charge. Aside from one elementary bo (staff) kata, required at the brown belt level, a knowledge of karate weapons is not a requirement for black belt level in our system. However, it adds an enjoyable extra dimension to your training, it is good exercise, and it gives you an additional division in which you can compete at tournaments.

At our dojo the weapons training is restricted to *Okinawan kobudo*, that is, the use of only the traditional Okinawan weapons (sometimes also known as *buki-ho*). *Japanese kobudo* includes weapons like the samurai sword, which are instead a part of the Japanese samurai military heritage, and also the various weapons associated specifically with *ninjutsu*. There are also literally dozens of Chinese *kung fu* weapons that are not included in Okinawan weaponry.

Okinawan kobudo consists primarily of the *bo* (long staff) and various non-conventional weapons resembling or said to be derived from common medieval farm implements: the *tonfa* (side-handle baton resembling a crank handle), *kama* (short-handled bladed weapon resembling a sickle for harvesting rice), *nunchakun* (two connected sticks resembling a rice flail), and the *eiku* (Okinawan boat oar). There is also the *sai* (three-pronged steel truncheon), the *shuriken* (throwing star), the *manriki-gusari* or *surushin* (weighted chain), the *teko* (knuckle-duster) and other less common items.

By far the most popular of all these is the *bo* (staff), also called the *rokushakubo* (“six-foot staff”). The common adult bo is six feet long, but children usually begin with a five-foot bo. The bo is considered one of the strongest, most versatile and most effective of the Okinawan weapons, and is also most practical for self-defense in the real world. Nunchakun outside the dojo are illegal, and you can never seem to find a stout boat oar when you need one, but broom handles, mop handles and other bo-like objects are often near at hand. The vast majority of tournament competitors choose the bo, and it is the weapon most familiar to judges (an advantage).

Weapons classes at KoSho focus primarily on the use of the bo, but also get around to the tonfa, sai and nunchakun from time to time. Sensei is a high-ranking expert in most of the Okinawan weapons, and does teach kata for the more exotic ones but usually only in private lessons for students with a special interest in a particular weapon. In general the bo should be studied first as a basic instrument for gaining some kobudo proficiency, then other weapons can be added as the student progresses. Check with Sensei if you think you might like to get involved in a new dimension of the martial arts by expanding your skills to include kobudo.

NOTE: There are two styles of bo used in competition these days: the traditional (non-tapered) bo and the tapered bo. Take your choice. Some tapered bos are rather thin overall (not just toward the ends) and are referred to as “toothpick bos.” A tapered bo is lighter in weight and can be manipulated with greater speed, but has less strength and would have less impact in a real fighting situation. Judges from the more traditional systems (especially Japanese judges) disapprove of tapered or toothpick bos and may downgrade performances with them. They may even demand to “test” your bo (ostensible for safety” reasons) and bend it to see if it breaks. Tapered bos can be a disadvantage at tournaments sponsored by the AAU and the USANKF, but are generally accepted at USANKF tournaments, and are almost universal at USKA and NASKA tournaments.

Incidentally, although extensive kobudo is not included in the karate black belt certification, belt rank can be granted for kobudo independently. This is usually done by the Shihan of our system at weapons seminars, where he can assess the proficiency level of each student and award the corresponding kobudo belt rank and certificate.

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