

By Fumio Demura

**SHITO - RYU
KARATE - DO
GENBU - KAI**

Series #1



BO

Karate weapon of self-defense

沖縄古武道

棒術

沖縄古武道連合会

OKINAWA KOBUDO ALLIANCE

History Of The Bo (or Kon)

As with many weapons of ancient heritage, the exact origin of the Bo, Kon, or straight staff is obscure. Anthropologists know, however, that it was among the first tools used by early man to aid in his survival. Initially, it took the form of a stick, branch from a tree, or a club and was used both to defend against attackers and to help acquire and carry food. Over the ages, the use of the Bo or Kon as a weapon has been developed and refined. Still, because modern evolution, several theories on the history of the Bo as it is known today, prevail.

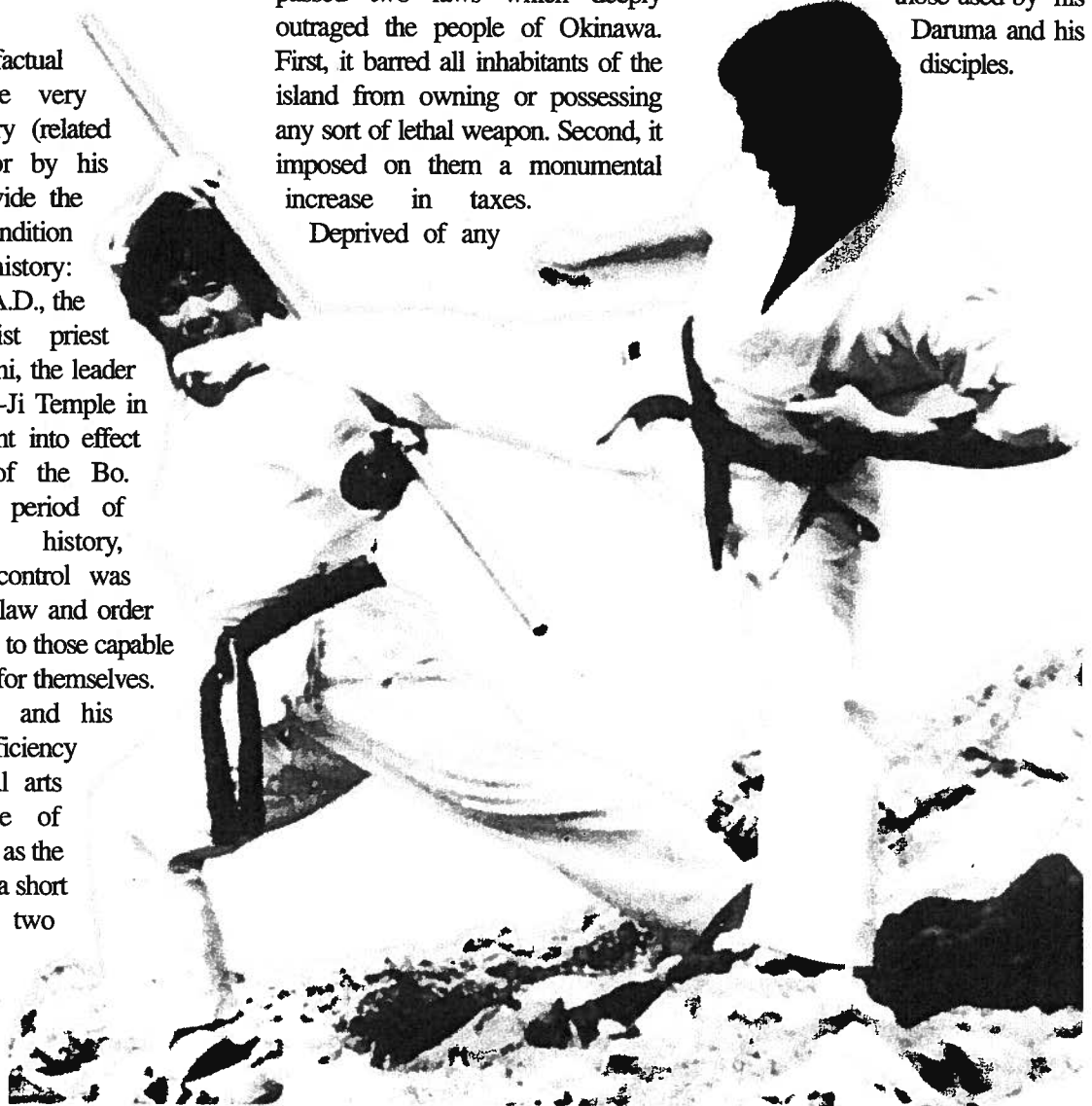
Whether factual or not, one very popular theory (related to the author by his masters) provide the following rendition of this history: Around 517 A.D., the Zen Buddhist priest Daruma Daishi, the leader of the Shorin-Ji Temple in China, brought into effect fluent use of the Bo. During this period of Chinese history, government control was minimal and law and order belonged only to those capable of securing it for themselves. For Daruma and his disciples, proficiency in the martial arts and the use of weapons such as the spear, the sai (a short sword with two

prongs at the handle), and the Bo provided the only feasible means of protecting their temple. The Bo-Jitsu techniques Daruma ordered his disciples to master and perfect greatly influenced the later development of Ryukyu Kobu-Do.

Ryukyu Kobu-Do, the Okinawan art of using karate weapons such as the Bo, the sai, the kama (sickle), and the nunchaku (two hardwood sticks connected by rope or chain), first gained prominence around 1314 A.D. when the Japanese government passed two laws which deeply outraged the people of Okinawa. First, it barred all inhabitants of the island from owning or possessing any sort of lethal weapon. Second, it imposed on them a monumental increase in taxes.

Deprived of any

conventional means of physical protest or retaliation, the people turned not only to empty handed martial arts forms for protection, but to their farm implements as well; implements such as the tonfa, the nunchaku, the kama, the kai (boat oar), and the Bo. The Bo itself originated with the tenbin, a stick held across the shoulders, usually with buckets hanging from each end, that were used to carry food, water, etc... When the need arose, the tenbin (Bo) was manipulated to strike or block in techniques based on very similar to those used by his Daruma and his disciples.



Kinds And Types Of Bo

Although the actual size and dimensions of a Bo depend on the individual student's needs, the standard Bo or Kon is the straight, six-foot long roku shaku-bo. Measuring 1-1/4" at its center, it tapers out to 3/4" thickness at both ends. This tapered structure functions in several ways: (1) It insures an even balance and guarantees that the Bo's fulcrum stays at its center. (2) It facilitates easy handling and effortless maneuvering. (3) It reduces rigidity and increases the Bo's tensile strength, thereby diminishing breakage and (4) Making possible strong, powerful whipping, striking and blocking actions.

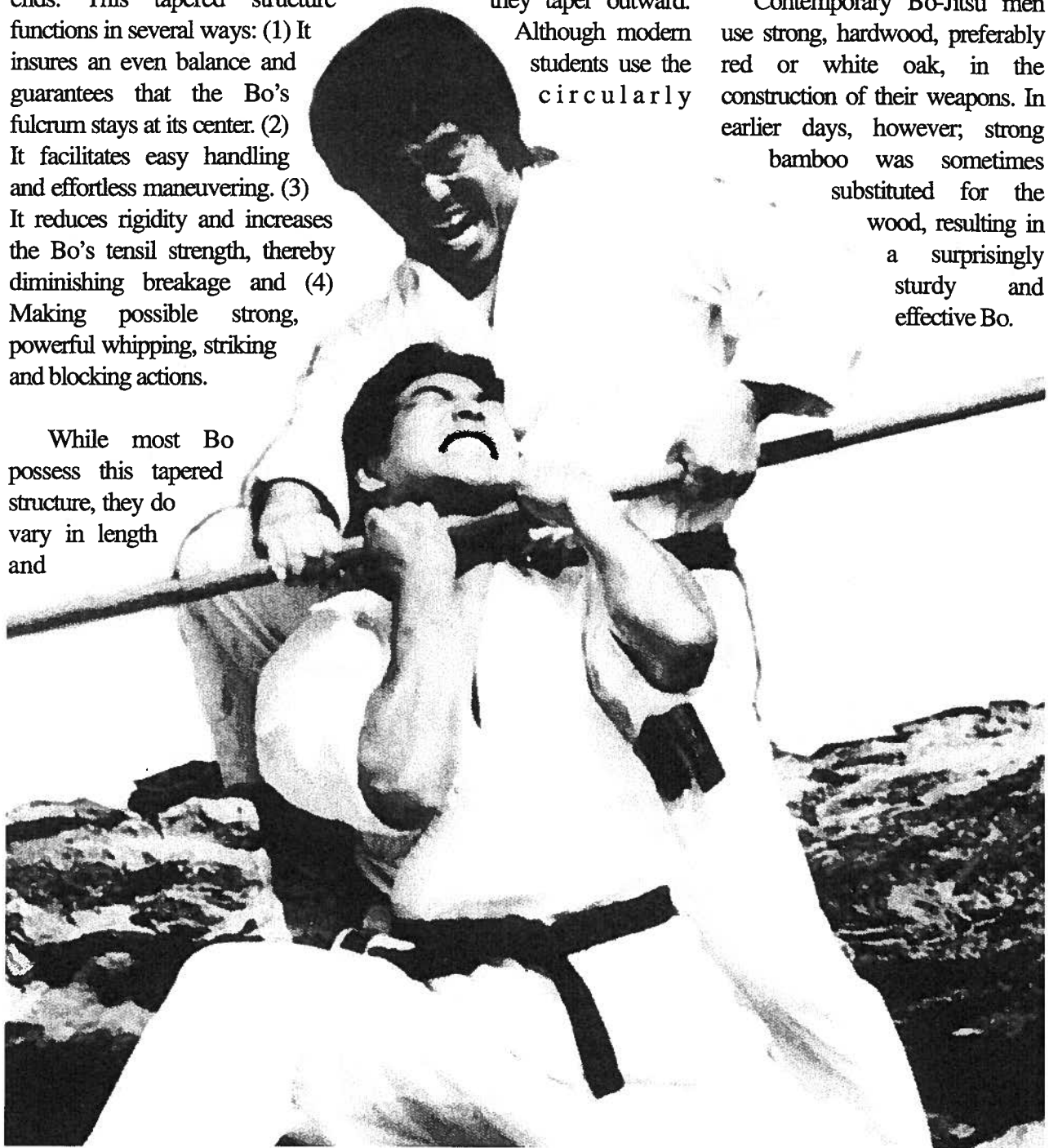
While most Bo possess this tapered structure, they do vary in length and

shape. Apart from the standard six foot measurement, Bo range anywhere from four feet in length (yon shaku-bo) to nine feet in length (kyu shaku-bo). They are usually round or circular at the center and maintain this shape as they taper outward.

Although modern students use the circularly

shaped Bo almost exclusively, early practitioners of Bo-Jitsu often took square, hexagonal or octagonal shaped Bo into combat because the multiple edges provided a more destructive effect.

Contemporary Bo-Jitsu men use strong, hardwood, preferably red or white oak, in the construction of their weapons. In earlier days, however, strong bamboo was sometimes substituted for the wood, resulting in a surprisingly sturdy and effective Bo.



Kinds And Types Of Bo



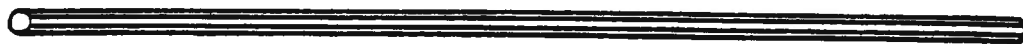
A. Maru-Bo (round)



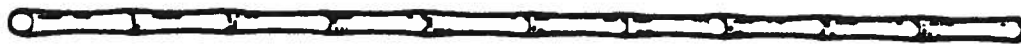
B. Kaku-Bo (four sided)



C. Rokkaku-Bo (six sided)



D. Hakkaku-Bo (eight sided)



E. Take-Bo (bamboo)



F. Yari (spear)



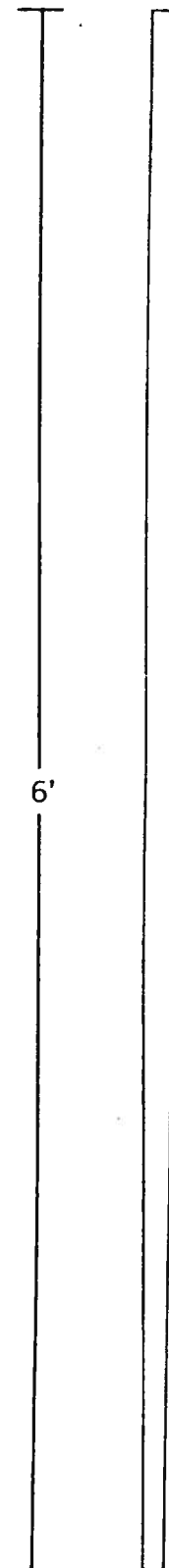
G. Naginata (long sword)



H. Kai (oar) or **Eku**

Sketch *A* shows the most common circularly shaped type of Bo. Sketches *B* through *E* show the types of Bo often used by early practitioners of Bo-Jitsu. While the weapons shown in sketches *F* through *G* are not technically part of the Bo family, in practice, regular BoJitsu techniques are used to handle and maneuver them. As such, they may be classified as different types of Bo.

Anatomy Of The Standard Bo



3/4" End
(Kontei)

1 1/4" Center
(Chukon-Bu)

3/4" End
(Kontei)

Bo or Kon

“Bo” means staff and is made of a hardwood pole.

Usually about six feet in length, the Bo is about 1 1/2” at the center and tapers to the ends to about 3/4”. The Bo is most useful in open areas, giving the user an advantage outside the opponents weapon swing zone. The Bo can be used for striking and poking effectively at a distance from the opponent or can block and parry an attack.

