



*By Fumio Demura*

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

*Series #2*

# Sai

Karate weapon of self-defense

沖縄古武道

釵 術

沖縄古武道連合会

**OKINAWA KOBUDO ALLIANCE**

# History Of The Sai

During the Japanese occupation of Okinawa some 350 years ago, invading warlords prohibited the use of ordinary weapons such as the sword or spear. So the Okinawans turned to karate and kobu-do (the use of karate weapons such as the bo, a staff; nunchaku, two hardwood sticks securely connected by rope or chain; kama, a sickle; and surushin, a length of rope with weights attached to both ends) for protection. Some kobu-do weapons were farm implements which the ingenious farmers converted into effective protective devices. For instance, the sai (short sword) was dragged through the soil by one peasant, while another would plant seed in the resulting furrow. If approached by a marauding samurai, the sai (pronounced "sigh") doubled as a weapon with which the peasant could counter a sword attack. Usually the peasant employed two sai, one for each hand, and concealed a third inside his obi (wide belt), which even a proficient sai artist may have found cumbersome when engaging in battle with a talented swordsman. Thus the third sai was actually used to throw at the warrior. This maneuver was often the key to winning the encounter.

The sai originally was capable of killing or maiming an enemy with a blow to the back of the neck or a thrust to the throat or the eyes. However, the sharp points of that first sai have been blunted and rounded. It no longer serves as a weapon for mortal combat. Fashioned of steel and chrome-plated, it is a most attractive instrument bearing two prongs at the handle.

Originally, the sai was formed from two components, the curved prong section and the main stem. These separate parts were then pounded into a unit using a process similar to that

employed by Japanese sword smiths. Approximately 100 years ago, a more progressive means for making sai was utilized. A finished sai was laid in the sand to cast an indented impression. When the sai was removed, molten lead was poured into the cavity. After the lead cooled and hardened, rough edges were ground off and the finished instrument was polished.

When first introduced to Japan, the sai was called jutte. It bore a single prong at the handle. The Japanese police found it quite effective in blocking the thrusts of the samurai. The sai was also used against pressure points when making arrests. Japanese karate practitioners at that time accorded the instrument a rather cool reception. Very few found it interesting enough to try, but once they did, they were fascinated with it.

Americans became increasingly aware of the sai

when karateka (karate men) flashed it during kata (form) competition at tournaments. They promptly recognized it as a valuable instrument for developing poise and posture, so essential to good karate.

Rigid training and skill are required to manipulate the sai in techniques which parallel the movements of karate. Practitioners of the sai develop excellent flexibility in the use of their hands and can often handle the instrument with the dexterity of a majorette twirling a baton.

Skillful use of the sai requires special coordination exercises and advanced proficiency in the art of karate. For this reason, Mr. Demura recommends that a person below the rank of brown belt should not attempt to practice with the sai.



# Anatomy Of The Sai

## POINT

The point is sometimes sharp, but more often rounded. Occasionally, a lip or button is placed on the point making the appearance of the sai similar to a fencing foil.

## BLADE

The blade is either rounded or hewn into six or eight symmetrical facets. The faceted type blade is considered the most practical. Some blades are flat like that of a sword.

## PRONGS

The prongs or guards are usually curved like a trident and useful for halting the stroke of a sword or bo.

## GUARD

## GUARD CENTER

The guard center is the hub where the prongs meet the handle.

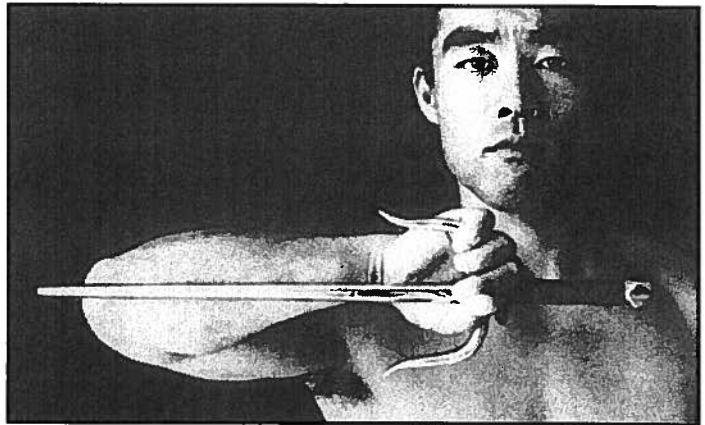
## HANDLE

To provide a firm grip, the handle is often wrapped with cotton tape or thick string.

## BUTT

The butt is designed in various shapes and can be used in the same manner as a karate punch.

The sai is made of chrome plated steel and weighs one pound, 10 ounces. To give the user a better grip, a cotton ribbon over a string wrapping has been wound around the handle. To protect your arm from being



struck, the length of the sai should be approximately one inch past the length of your elbow. The butt of the handle is an inch beyond the tip of your index finger.