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Recognizing and Preserving Ancient Koryu Knowledge in Contemporary Wado Ryu Karate

Wado and TSYR Pentecost Seminar with Toby Threadgill (USA) and Shuzo Imai (Germany) in Berlin from 14th to 16th May, 2016

More than 110 participants attended the 2016 Wado and TSYR Pentecost Seminar in Berlin. The instructors were **Toby Threadgill** (Menkyo Kaiden, Takamura ha Shindo Yoshin ryu) and **Shuzo Imai** (8th Dan Wado ryu).

Wado ryu was founded by **Hironori Otsuka** (1892 – 1982) and is based on two pillars: Shindo Yoshin Ryu (SYR) und Okinawa Karate. The historic link between Wado ryu and SYR is reflected in the concepts and main principles of SYR which Hironori Otsuka integrated into Wado ryu.

On the first day of the seminar, Toby Threadgill used Kata¹ and Kunren² to illustrate these main principles in Takamura ha Shindo Yoshin ryu (TSYR) and Shuzo Imai used Kihon kumite 1 – 10 (the key partner kata of Wado ryu) to illustrate the Wado principles. On the second day of the seminar, these principles were further explored by means of Tantodori in Wado ryu and TSYR. Toby Threadgill used the third day to explain these principles in more depth by means of selected TSYR kata. Shuzo Imai made it clear in his session that the current Wado ryu Dan syllabus comprises the Wado ryu core principles which Otsuka transferred from SYR to Wado ryu. Since the participants alternated in two groups between Toby Threadgill's and Shuzo Imai's sessions, they could directly experience the link between TSYR and Wado ryu, between Koryu³ and contemporary Wado ryu.

Kihon, Kunren and Kihon Kumite

Kihon is the basis in TSYR and Wado ryu. Both Toby Threadgill and Shuzo Imai started their sessions therefore with Kihon and based the rest on it.

Toby Threadgill began with foot movements and stepping sequences which, if executed correctly, result in the preservation of body structure (Chushin Tadasu), flexibility and suppleness. The participants tried in the following Kunren to keep their balance and, at the same time, to control their partners. After this, Toby Threadgill had several black belts demonstrate Kihon kumite 1, 2, 3 and 6 and identified with the participants the principles which make Kihon kumite 1 – 10 so subtle and effective. These principles have their origin in SYR: Otsuka extracted the main points from the comprehensive SYR syllabus and, while maintaining the principles, translated these into Kihon kumite 1 – 10. As an example, Toby Threadgill demonstrated a TSYR sword kata in which the deflection of the attack is transformed into a counter attack. This very technique can also be found in Kihon kumite 4 of Wado ryu: Sequence of techniques and principles such as evasion (Taisabaki), entering (Irimi) and a position of control (Tsukuri).

In his session about Kihon kumite 1 – 10, Shuzo Imai explained the main principles of Wado ryu: San-mi-ittai with Ten-i, Ten-tai und Ten-gi⁴. He underlined and demonstrated that San-mi-ittai and relaxation, as well as the correct footwork⁵ makes techniques fast, powerful and effective. As Toby Threadgill did, Shuzo Imai showed that the point is to be cognizant of these principles. He showed the participants numerous applications of Kihon kumite 1 – 10 to help them understand and apply these principles. They realized at the same time that the only way to improve and to internalize the principles and techniques is continuous practice.

¹ In TSYR, all kata are done with partners.

² Kunren are TSYR partner kata which train internal power.

³ Unlike Koryu, the traditional Japanese martial arts which were developed before the start of the 1868 Meiji restoration, karate is part of Gendai budo, the martial arts that were created in Japan after 1868.

⁴ San-mi-ittai are three typical ways of shifting the body. Kihon kumite 1 – 10 may constitute the best examples of this. Ten-i: Changing position or moving away from the attack. Ten-tai: Turning and re-aligning the body to assume a favorable position vis-à-vis the opponent and to offer a small area for an attack. Ten-gi: Changing the technique while "going through" the attack.

⁵ Soku foot movement: The body moves forward as a whole (sok – together).

Tantodori

Shuzo Imai and Toby Threadgill used this basis for their Tantodori sessions: The participants realized both in the traditional TSYR Tantodori and in those from Wado ryu that if they apply the principles, which are at the heart of the exercises, smoothly flowing techniques are possible from a state of relaxation. It is important, however, that they are familiar with and have internalized the kata. This also includes making mistakes while training, learning from them and not giving up, or – as Shuzo Imai put it: If you have not mastered Shodan, you will never attain Okuden.^{6,7}

„Lazy Body, Zero Power and Lazy Zazen“

The participants agreed with Toby Threadgill who said that it was important to know the reasons for which Otsuka developed Kihon kumite 1 – 10 on the basis of the 305 SYR kata: 1. By intensively practicing these sophisticated Kihon kumite we can learn to apply the principles without tension. 2. We can practice together with the partner: Harmonize with your partner that he goes where you want as softly as possible." 3. We can win a fight by not letting the opponent approach us: "I don't let him feel my center."⁸ Toby Threadgill concluded that this was what Otsuka meant by "lazy body" and "zero power".

Hironori Otsuka expanded these thoughts and also spoke of "lazy zazen". Mastering Shoden towards Okuden also makes it possible to convey knowledge and skills via principles and to discover new and similar things, while preserving the tradition and origins of Wado ryu. Shuzo Imai put this across by means of variants of the traditional Wado Tantodori within the spirit of Otsuka: "The skill of Budo is ever changing. Consequently there is no limit for it."⁹

Wado Pentecost Seminar 2017

We invite everybody interested in martial arts to our 2017 Wado Pentecost Seminar in Berlin.

⁶ Shuzo Imai, Wado and TSYR Pentecost Seminar in Berlin, 15 May, 2016

⁷ „Okuden (jap.: 奥伝) is the "conveying what is hidden", and synonymous with *hiden* („conveying what is secret“); term for conveying the esoteric teachings of a martial art. *Okuden* ... refers to that part of the exercise where the form of the technique has already been mastered (*omote*).“ From: <http://www.budopedia.de/wiki/Okuden> (Version: 26.05.2016)

⁸ Toby Threadgill, Wado and TSYR Pentecost Seminar in Berlin, 14 May, 2016

⁹ Hironori Otsuka: Lazy-Zazen. Lazy Meditation and Budo Seishin. Spirits of Martial Arts by the late Sensei Ohtsuka. <http://www.wadoworld.com/articles/lazyzazen/lazyzazen.html> (Version: 21.11.2011)