

Beyond the Basic Boards

By Professor Bob McKean

Anyone who researches the history and teachings of Master Henry Okazaki will quickly realize that many questions about his teaching and life have gone unanswered and will probably never be fully resolved. We know that Master Okazaki taught different “special” classes to different black belts at different times. We will never completely know who and what was taught in many of these “special” classes. We do know that the Founding Fathers of the AJJF passed down to its members the basic boards they study today. These basic boards comprise the foundation of the AJJF and the Ryu.

So what do we know about the other boards and arts that come from Master Okazaki that are not commonly taught today? Fujin Goshin No Maki (women’s self-defense) contains 35 arts which included many atemi follow-ups and 6 defenses against knife and gun attacks. Master Okazaki usually included this board in his basic black belt curriculum and it was commonly taught between Oku No Kata and Kiai No Maki. The techniques of this list are named in the Mokuroku presented to Professor Bud Estes by Master Okazaki. In 1976, the AJJF Board of Professors took some of these arts and their variations and developed a new board that was first called Ladies Yawara, then Advance Yawara, then Jokyu Yawara, and now Goshin Jitsu.

Fusegi Jitsu (25 self-defense arts) and Keisatsu Gijutsu (120 police arts) are two boards that Professor Sig Kufferath, a senior black belt student of Master Okazaki, taught to his students for many years but was not widely taught by the Founding Fathers of the AJJF. As a result of advancements in modern law enforcement defensive tactics training and use-of-force issues, many of the Keisatsu Gijutsu arts are no longer acceptable for police use. If this list is not preserved for its historical value by students of DZR it will likely be lost in a generation or two.

Professor Bill Montero trained under Professor John Cahill and Master Okazaki from 1935 through 1948. He was one of the early members of the AJJF and became the second person to receive the title of Professor from the Founding Fathers of the AJJF in 1953. During his years with Master Okazaki, Professor Montero attended many of the “special” black belt classes. One of these classes included a series of arts using the boken. Master Okazaki taught his “bokendo arts” to John Cahill, Sonny Chang, Markham Spencer, and Bill Montero. According to Professor Montero, the bokendo arts took a considerable amount of time to learn, so Master Okazaki did not include these arts in the general curriculum. Professor Montero taught bokendo classes from 1960 until his death in 1992. With the exception of a few of Professor Montero’s senior black belts, bokendo is almost unknown to the general DZR community.

During his years at the Pacific Judo Academy in San Jose, California (1949 – 1982), Professor Montero taught Keisatsu Gijutsu (police arts) to local police officers. I was fortunate to have attended two of these 60-hour courses during the mid 1970’s. Professor Montero also taught three lists that he said came directly from Master Okazaki. These lists are Nage No Kata II, Shime No Kata II and Oku No Kata II. The origin and the existence of these lists have been somewhat controversial because no “official” record of the lists has ever been found other than in the teaching of Professor Montero. These three lists simply expanded on many of the techniques in the basic boards that also trace their roots to Kodokan Judo.

It seems clear that Master Okazaki was continually adding to and refining his system throughout his life. Many of Master Okazaki's black belts also expanded on the arts he had taught them. Professor Wally Jay and Professor John Cahill expanded into judo. Professor Joe Holk into Matsuno Ryu Goshin-Jutsu, Professor John Chow-Hoon into Kenpo Jujitsu, and Professor Bing Fai Lau into Kung-Fu. These are just a few examples of what the Ryu offers outside of the basic boards. Many of today's black belts and sensei do not know all of the lists and arts that were taught by Master Okazaki to his black belts. Unfortunately many of these other lists and arts are in danger of being lost.

In recent years many of Master Okazaki's black belt students have passed away, but some of what they learned and taught is still being passed on. As a student of Danzan Ryu, one needs to learn and understand the basic boards of the Ryu to build a strong foundation. Once you have obtained this solid foundation, it is time to go beyond the basic boards and seek out and learn new techniques and skills, including the lesser known lists and arts of the Ryu.

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