

FILM REVIEWS

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This video presentation of Okinawan and Japanese martial arts was filmed at the Budō Sai exhibition in Durham, United Kingdom. It was produced by Ed Skelding and is narrated by Terry O'Neill, a veteran martial artist and editor of *Fighting Arts International* magazine.

First the video introduces the Japanese *bushi* (warrior), commonly known as the samurai, and his code of ethics (*bushidō*), with scenes from traditional picture scrolls. The video then explains that with the imposition of civil peace in the early seventeenth century, the samurai sought to preserve their fighting skills by transforming actual fighting techniques (*bujutsu*) into fighting techniques practiced as Ways to personal transformation and character-building (*budō*).

The video employs as an organizing principle the “three Ks” of *kihon* (basic moves), *kata* (forms involving combinations of basic moves), and *kumite* (sparring in which the partners use their basic moves and combinations).

Budo Sai

The Spirit of the Samurai

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70 MINUTES. COLOR



Image of samurai courtesy of Films for the Humanities and Sciences, Inc.

Thus, in the first martial art presented, we see a single swordsman performing *kihon*, then *kata*, and finally two swordsmen with naked blades, carefully executing *kata*. Since *kumite* with real swords would be dangerous, practitioners of *kendō* (the Way of the sword) don padded armor and fight with *shinai* (mock swords of split bamboo).

Ryūkyūan *bujutsu* developed in response to Japanese conquest. The Okinawans, denied the right to bear arms, resorted to homely farm and work implements for self-defense. Eight different implements became weapons, and their use was termed *kōbujutsu*; in modern times this evolved into *kōbudō*. Masters of the art demonstrate *kata* using *tonfa*

(rice-grinder handles), *kama* (sickles), *bo* (staff), *nunchaku* (rice-pounding flail), etc.

The greater part of the video is devoted to Okinawan and Japanese karate. Some attempt is made to explain the “family tree” of the Asian martial arts, but unless the viewer already has some familiarity with the subject, this is covered too briefly to be of much use. The video explains the key role of Gichin Funakoshi, the founder of Shōtōkan karate, who, after learning the art on his native Okinawa, introduced and popularized karate in Japan. *Kihon*, *kata*, and *kumite* of Shōtōkan karate are performed. Then, two variant styles, Shōtō-kai and Yuishin-kai, are introduced.

The origin of Aikidō, a

martial art developed by Ueshiba Morihei and based in part on an earlier system called *Aikijutsu*, from Aizu (a feudal domain in the Edo period), are explained, and a master demonstrates the powerful throwing techniques of this particularly non-aggressive style.

Okinawan *Goju-ryu* karate is represented by Master Higaonna Morio (who was also featured in the book *The Way of the Warrior: The Paradox of the Martial Arts*, reviewed in *Education About Asia*, vol. 2, no. 1) and *Wado-ryu*, a Japanese style of karate, is represented by Master Masafumi Shiomitsu. Seeing these masters sparring with their advanced students should convince any viewer that karate is indeed a lethal system of unarmed combat. In conversations with the narrator, however, both Higaonna *sensei* and Masafumi *sensei* are genial, modest individuals who emphasize the importance of basic techniques, and stress the character-building value of martial arts practice. Proper training under a qualified master should produce a student who is self-confident, but never aggressive. The same conclusion was reached by C. W. Nicol, an Englishman who went to Japan as a young man in 1962 and earned a black belt in Shōtōkan karate; his experiences are described in *Moving Zen: Karate As a Way to Gentleness*.

This video, which is about one hour long, has excellent photography, and an unobtrusive but appropriate musical score. It does not offer an inclusive overview of all the Asian martial arts, but it does cover Okinawan and Japanese armed and unarmed martial arts very

well. The demonstration of Brazilian *capoeira*, which was part of the Durham exhibition, seems somewhat out of place here. All in all, this video should be useful for middle school, high school, and college-level classes, because in addition to showing exciting fighting sequences, it does give the viewer some idea of what the martial arts are all about. ■

REFERENCES

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Tales of Pabuji A Rajasthani Tradition

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1996
33 MINUTES. COLOR

Those searching for cultural connections through art and literature, especially teachers of world studies and Asian studies classes, will welcome this short but rich exploration of the Rajasthan oral epic of Pabuji. The tales, not widely known beyond rural Rajasthan, are based on an actual medieval Rajput prince, a younger son of a younger son in what was to become the ruling line of Jodhpur. Throughout Rajasthan he is seen as a Robin Hood-type hero born in the remote desert village of Kohu. Although not accepted as a deity by higher-caste Hindus, Pabuji is widely worshipped as a divine incarnation and patron protector of livestock and camel drivers among herdsmen and others of rural Rajasthan. Sadly, this important background information is barely hinted at on the video case.

The narrator of *Tales of Pabuji* mentions that the Pabuji epic has twelve books. Teachers attempting to relate this epic to the traditional form for epics of the West like *The Odyssey* then discover that the video divides the narrative into five segments. “The Birth of Pabuji” explains Pabuji’s birth as the



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son of Dhadal Rathor and a nymph he convinces to be his wife after he steals her clothing while she bathes. She agrees to the marriage on the condition that he will never enter her chamber without her permission. When Dhadal eventually breaks his promise, he finds their son, two-year old Pabuji, nursing a tigress. The tigress/nymph disappears after promising her son to return as a mare, complete with a tiger skin saddle, when he is twelve years old. In “How Pabuji Took Kesar Kalami” she keeps her promise.

“How Harmal Went to Lanka” traces the journey of one of Pabuji’s men to collect

information on the camel population and defenses of Lanka and on its demon king, Ravana. With Harmal’s information Pabuji defeats and kills Ravana and brings the Lankan camels home, a promised wedding gift to his half-sister, Kelam. In “The Marriage of Pabuji” the hero attempts to avoid marriage and then escapes the marriage ceremony to keep his promise to protect the livestock of the goddess Deval. In the final segment, “The Great Battle,” the wounded Pabuji and his mare are carried away in a magic palanquin.

Framing each of the Pabuji segments, the video summarizes the ritual performance of the *bhopo*, an itinerant priest who chants the epic in a night-long session before his *par*, a cloth painting about fifteen feet long and four to five feet wide which functions as visual aid and portable temple. Superimposing puppet-like animation onto the traditional stylized images on the *par* and onto footage of contemporary village life, the video narrates the epic while at the same time introducing and explaining the *bhopo* performance tradition. Expository segments provide a glimpse of how contemporary *par* are painted. Background and narrative segments are set to traditional Rajasthani music of the *ravanhattho* or spike-fiddle, an essential part of the *bhopo* performance.

Without considerable classroom preparation, the video’s rich and comprehensive approach may confuse viewers. For example, unless teachers have prepared themselves and their students for a discussion of ancient medicine, the use of opium by Pabuji’s