

General Information and Background of the Bo/Jo Staff Weapons

Created: 24 October 2009

Revised: 11 September 2021

History:

The straight staff has been used in daily life for millennia. The bo originated from the *tenbin*, a staff used to carry buckets. In 517 AD Daruma Daishi, a Buddhist priest in China during a time of civil discord, brought the straight staff (the *bo* or *kon*) into fluent use as a weapon. In 1314 AD the Japanese government barred the recently defeated Okinawan warriors from using and possessing traditional fighting weapons such as the sword; therefore, *Ryukyu Kobu-Do* (the art of using karate weapons, such as the bo) first gained prominence. The Bo's length allows it greater range than traditional weapons and proved effective even in fighting swords. Numerous variations of the staff developed including multisided weapons (the sharp edges cause greater tissue injury), iron bound staffs (to better fend off sword strikes), and shorter staffs (under 5 feet) such as the *jo* (developed by Muso Gonnosuke to defeat the great swordsman Miyamoto Musashi - but that is another story). Chinen of Yamane-Ryu developed the *Shu Shi* kata (forms) in the early 1900's. Contemporary forms are still being created such as *Northern Chi No Kon Dai*. We continue to study the bo because it is a practical, simple weapon "available to anybody", easily adaptable to modern self defense; and it improves upper body strength and flexibility. Bo (or Kon) is a staff over 5 feet long (should be slightly longer than your height) and the Jo is a shorter staff usually about 4 feet long.

Vocabulary:

Kobu-Do: The art of using karate weapons such as the Bo or Kama (sickle).

Bo-jitsu (or jutsu): The traditional art of using the bo.

Japanese numbers:

One	itchi	1st	sho
Two	ni ("knee")	2nd	dai
Three	san		
Four	si ("she")		
Five	go		
Six	roku		
Seven	sichi		
Eight	hachi		
Nine	ku (koo)		
Ten	ju		

Bo tips: *saki* or *kontei*

Bo center: *chukon-bu*

Round bo: *maru bo*

Standard bo: *roku* (6) *shaku* (Japanese distance slightly shorter than a foot) *bo* (staff) = six foot staff

Naming forms: *Sushi* or *Shu Shi* (the name of the master)(the initial designation is either the master or the school) *No Kon* (refers to bo form, kon = bo) *Ni* (the number of the form)

Selecting and Caring for the Bo:

1. Selection:

- a. An oak bo is the traditional weapon. Fiberglass bo's are used for fast action in "extreme" katas but not for fighting or self-defense. Fiberglass bo's are extremely light but very fragile. Therefore, we generally favor the oak bo for practice, although it does require greater strength.
 - b. Select an oak bo with straight wood grain and no knots (to prevent cracking the bo). Look straight down the bo to assure it is straight and roll the bo on a flat floor to assure straightness.
 - c. Most Bo's are varnished to protect the wood from moisture that could warp (bend) the Bo; however, varnish may make the bo "sticky" when the palms sweat. An unvarnished Bo absorbs the body oil and stays smooth and un-sticky.
 - d. A standard, adult, kata Bo is 6 feet long, 1 and 1/4 inches diameter in the center and tapering to 3/4 inches at the tip. For smaller hands the adult Bo's are also available in 1 inch and 7/8 inch central diameters. For strength a fighting Bo is not tapered. For shorter students choose a Bo about 6 inches taller than the student and consider reducing the diameter to one inch (the size of the *jo*). A sanded (for smoothness) wooden dowel of appropriate diameter is a good starter Bo.
2. Storage: It is better to store the Bo flat on the ground and fully supported to prevent warping OR perfectly vertical against the wall. In class store the Bo on the floor against the wall for safety.

Safety:

1. The Bo is a lethal weapon that can cause serious injury! Treat the Bo and your classmates with respect and safety.
2. Put one tip of the Bo on the floor and flex the Bo to assure it is not cracked. Tap the tip gently on the floor to listen for any "off" sound indicating a crack. Then run your hand up and down the Bo to feel for rough, splintered, or cracked areas.
3. Carry the bo vertically either:
 - a. in two hands in front of you OR
 - b. in one hand either in front or back of the shoulder.
4. Keep a strong grip on the Bo to avoid the Bo falling and injuring someone. (Tradition: if you drop a weapon, then you drop for ten push-ups.)
5. Before beginning a form or practice, check all around you to insure no one is within a Bo's length of you (hold one end of the bo and swing the bo 360° around you to be certain the space is clear). Warn those around you to stay away.

Bo Basics:

1. The foot stances are the same as with Tae Kwon Do.
2. Basic grip: place the hands to divide the Bo into thirds. Generally the right hand is palm up and left hand is palm down (*jun nigiri*). To grip the Bo place the Bo in the palm and start by wrapping the Bo with the little finger then the other fingers. The thumb should wrap the Bo and over the index finger.
3. Ready Stance (*Joon-Bi*): Several options depending on the tradition:
 - a. Bo held vertically in the right hand with the Bo behind the right shoulder.
 - b. Bo held vertically in the right hand with the Bo in front of the right shoulder.
 - c. Bo held in *jun nigiri* with the left hand and Bo under the right armpit with the bo held straight in front and the far tip pointing a little down. To get to "start

position” the right hand brings the tip up, rotates the Bo backwards 270° and the left hand guides the Bo in front of the right shoulder. The right hand will need to twist the Bo along its axis to right hand to move into the proper position.

4. Bow: Bow at the waist from any of the above positions insuring the Bo tip does not touch the floor.
5. Palm position: The palm position is to prevent the Bo from being dislodged from the hand. The palm should be on the opposite side from the strike or block (the forward hand) or where the stress will occur (the back hand).
6. Hands should stay close to the body for best control. The front hand controls the strike or block and the backhand is for support.
7. Do not position the Bo between the arm and the ribs. Bo should either be at the waist or with the Bo on the outside of the arm.
8. Remember to strike through the target (as in breaking).
9. Like in any poomse or kata, you should always appear as if you are fighting a real opponent your size.
10. Striking Points (*atemi*):
 - a. Head: Forehead, temples, upper lip, back of the skull
 - b. Throat
 - c. Solar plexus (soft area just below the breast bone)
 - d. Groin
 - e. Wrists
 - f. Elbows
 - g. Knees
 - h. Feet
11. Thrusting Points (*atemi*): Between the nose and lips, throat, sternum (breastbone), solar plexus, groin, and top of the foot.
12. When changing hand position, never let go of the bo but rather open the hand, keep the palm on the bo, rotate the had to the new position, then re-grip the bo.
13. Sit Down:
 - a. From *joon bi* (the Bo vertical in back of the R shoulder) slowly move the lower tip of the Bo straight forward until the Bo is vertical in front of you.
 - b. Keeping the Bo vertical move the staff to the left hand.
 - c. Slowly lower the upper tip straight in front of you until the Bo is horizontal with left arm at your side.
 - d. Keeping the Bo pointing in front of you, sit down in good TKD position and lay the Bo flat on the ground on your left still pointing the Bo directly in front of you.
 - e. To get up the sequence is reversed.

References:

1. Bo, Karate Weapon of Self Defense, by Fumio Demura, 1976, Ohara Publications
2. Comprehensive Asian Fighting Arts, by Donn Draeger and Robert Smith, 1969, Kodansha International
3. Interesting Websites (which will lead you to more sites):
 - a. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8gdeXqeMwBM&feature=related>
 - b. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUn_s9yuxj0&feature=related
 - c. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8pZC57sSOI&feature=related>