



**Article Title:** Martial Arts Research on Okinawa.  
PART 4

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**Abstract:** Simon Lailey continues his report on his travels to Okinawa to interview several Martial Arts masters. In relation to Uechi-ryu, Sifu Lailey met with Toyama Seiko Sensei at the Zakimi dojo. Lailey discusses the Suparimpe form from China in relation to the Suparimpe form that was not learned by Uechi-ryu founder Kanbun Uechi Sensei.

## **Part 4**

### **A SECOND AUDIENCE WITH MASTER HOKAMA**

My second meeting with Hokama Sensei proved to be as stimulating as our first meeting three days earlier. As before, we arrived during a children’s karate class, but then this had been my intention as I was keen to capture the youngsters on video while they performed kata, worked-out with weapons, and broke wood. Back home in England I wanted to expand my youngsters Martial Arts class, and so I figured that if I could take home some footage of youngsters training Okinawan-style, I stood a chance of convincing the local council that this would be a very good idea! Hokama Sensei had no objections to my filming his students, and even went out his way to put on a

bit of a show for me!

Bringing his lesson to a close, Hokama Sensei invited Sumako and myself to join him in his karate museum where we could talk together in a more quiet and peaceful environment. We spoke of Ohgimi Village and the lady he introduced us to. We also spoke of his skill in shodo which then very nicely led me in to asking him to write a few characters for me. Shortly before leaving for Okinawa I had been pursuing the idea of opening the Isle Of Wight's very first combined Martial Arts Academy and Oriental Health Centre (an idea that is gradually coming to fruition). The two pieces of calligraphy I wanted Hokama Sensei to write for me would ultimately hang within my envisaged purpose-built School. To this Hokama Sensei readily agreed and so off he went in search of his inks, and his special papers, some for which he once traveled all the way to Shanghai to select personally (thankfully he was not going to Shanghai this particular afternoon!). He very soon returned with a few rolls of papers tucked beneath an arm.

The two calligraphy pieces I had asked Hokama Sensei to write for me were "Sanshangong" and "Yawarakasa". The former is the name I chose for my particular and very personal Martial Arts practice, whilst the latter was a term I had only just recently been introduced to by Seizan and reflects the concept of softness as being the ultimate goal and Way.

Hokama Sensei's adult karate class was due to begin shortly and so we did not wish to detain him any longer than we had to. After he had completed my two scrolls we thanked him very much for his time and for sharing so much of his skill with us, and then left him to his students.

Not quite as busy yet certainly busy enough was the next day of my short but perfectly-formed stay in Okinawa. First and foremost, though, was my need to confirm my flight back to London (and my flight back to reality!). Sumako-san, always at my side and so very willing to help me any way she could, took care of this for me before we took the day in-hand.

Owing to Seizan's teaching schedule at the dojo he was unable to share with us what proved to be a most exciting and rewarding morning, but this

evening the three of us would be meeting, once again at Toyama Sensei's dojo for another evening of talk, training, and exchange.

## **THE “BUNBUKAN” AT TORIHORI**

This morning Sumako and I were to meet with an Okinawan Master named Nakamoto Masahiro. Nakamoto Sensei I first met in Fuzhou, way back in 1988. I again met with him three or four years later at his home-based dojo in Torihori Village (Okinawa), and then a third time (again in Fuzhou) during the mid 1990s.

Nakamoto Sensei is a Master of Okinawan Kobudo whilst at the same time he is also a Master of Sumi-e (Chinese painting). The last time I had met with Master Nakamoto Masahiro he had given me a copy of his own personal collection of paintings and today he would be demonstrating the very same act of his incredible generosity. One signed, dated, and personally dedicated copy to me, and one signed, dated, and dedicated copy to Sumako and Seizan. This anthology was not the same one I had received a decade or so earlier, but a more recent and up-to-date collection of his exquisite artwork.

Master Nakamoto's house and dojo is called the “Bunbukan”. “Bunbu” is a Japanese term/concept used to describe the essential and ultimate balance required within Chinese, Okinawan, and Japanese martial arts (all the ~do arts, in fact) if one is to take one's practice to any kind of high-level realm. The Japanese term ‘kan’ simply refers to a building or a house, and so ‘Bunbukan’ translates to a place where the very nature of ‘bunbu’ is sought, practiced, studied, and cultivated. Nakamoto Sensei's skill and depth is such that it defines the very term ‘Master’.

Nakamoto Sensei is, indeed, a very busy man. It had taken Sumako several phone calls to secure this morning's meeting with him, and upon his receiving us into his home he was very quick to present us with his beautiful collection of hand-painted pictures.

As our conversation got underway, Nakamoto Sensei spoke about his plans to build a Budo university in Okinawa. This was a very personal project for Nakamoto Sensei, an idea that had seemingly been approved already by the Japanese government, and so had gone way beyond the planning stage. Both Sumako and I shared his excitement.

Nakamoto Masahiro's 'Bunbukan' was a three-storey building. One level served as his dojo, another his home, and another level was his "Kobudo Museum". Sumako and I were privileged in that we were invited to visit all three. He treated us as VIPs, as he also allowed us entry into his own personal and very private office – a room where not even his wife (well, maybe his wife!) was permitted to go! Sumako took this act most seriously - as if it was an act of the utmost generosity that redefined the 'act of the utmost generosity'!

Our meeting lasted every bit of two hours. We left the same way we had come in – through his beautiful Chinese garden which also served as his outdoor training space. There we saw weapons, 'makiwara', and all the telltale signs that show you just how deep Nakamoto Sensei has gone into the cultural aspect of his craft. My admiration and respect for this man is certainly (and always has been) of the very highest order.

From the "Bunbukan", Sumako drove me to 'Shuri Castle' – a restored piece of ancient Ryukyu history. The castle did not exist as such during my previous visits to Okinawa (having been ruined during WW2, many years were spent in restoration). 'Shuri Castle' is now a tourist attraction. It was something I had heard about and so was very keen to see for myself, but as I approached the main gate I somehow got the feeling that I was not going to be impressed...so I chose not to bother. Instead I walked around the beautiful 'outer ruins' – the "Dragon Well Pond", the 'Baizento Temple', and the landmark 'Shureinomon' (or "Gate Of Courtesy"). I had visited the outer area on a previous visit to Okinawa. I had seen it before and I could see it again many times without tiring. It is serene, tranquil, and relaxing, and it is a location I could visit a thousand times over.

## **ANOTHER METING WITH MASTER YAGI**

This afternoon I was scheduled to meet, once again, with Yagi Meitatsu. Like Master Nakamoto, Master Yagi has a very real and genuine knowledge of the Chinese-Okinawan cultural overlap. I had first met Yagi at his home-based dojo in Kume in 1990. His disregard for politics had greatly impressed me, and although I had told him that I was (at that time) a student under another Okinawan Goju Master, he was still very happy to meet with me, talk with me, and allow me to train at the 'Meibukan' honbu dojo where his father, the late Yagi Meitoku, had also welcomed me into his family practice.

For more than a decade I had no communication with Meitatsu, but a year or so ago I was asked by his UK representative if I would be willing to host Yagi Sensei in my own home town on the Isle Of Wight. Delighted to do so, I was thus able to rekindle a friendship that has since led to ongoing communications with this karateman who, like Hokama Sensei, shares a passion for classical shodo.

That afternoon, Yagi Sensei took me out to a remote and very beautiful area of Okinawajima (Okinawa Island). The area was the Motobu Peninsula, and there we had a quiet and leisurely drink as I interviewed Sensei on his outstanding project, the aforementioned "Okinawa Traditional Karate Kobudo International Studying Centre".

Earlier this week, Seizan took me to visit the grave of Uechi Kanbun Sensei as I wanted to pay my respects to this great and legendary martial artist. For the same reason I asked Yagi Sensei if he would take me to the burial ground of his father. To this Master Yagi readily agreed, but as time was getting late and since I was meeting with Toyama Sensei later that evening, we both decided that that particular visit would have to wait until next time. After all, I would be back!

Yagi Sensei drove me back to Yomitan where we rendezvoused with Sumako. By way of 'omiage' (a parting gift) Yagi Sensei presented me with a piece of his own 'shodo'. This I accepted with much excitement and appreciation. Upon bidding Sensei farewell I reminded him (not that he

needed reminding!) that I would be seeing him again in May 2006 when, once again, I will be hosting him at my School on the Isle Of Wight.

Sumako and I arrived back at the house with time enough to shower, freshen-up, and dress in the traditional white ‘dogi’. (I had not worn my dogi for more than ten years – not since officially switching from traditional Okinawan Gojuryu Karate-Do to Classical Fujianese Nanshaolinquan). Up until now everyone had dressed in shorts and tee-shirt but this evening, since we were to be joined by the reporter from the “Okinawa Times” and almost certainly photographed, such an occasion warranted more ‘traditional’ attire.

### **“THE OKINAWA TIMES”**

Apparently, the “Okinawa Times” reporter was coming this evening mainly to see and speak with me; there was already a piece published on my intended visit to Okinawa, and now the reporter wanted to follow it up with a face-to-face interview as I neared the end of my visit. I, of course, agreed to this and so later on this evening the “Okinawa Times” reporter spoke with me at length over the results and findings of my visit.

Turning to Toyama Sensei the reporter then asked him to comment on my visit, to which Toyama Sensei responded saying that many foreigners had visited his ‘dojo’ (karate school) but that I was a dedicated researcher. He went on to say that my practice was very close to the origin of UechiRyu and that he was highly impressed with this ‘young man from the Isle Of Wight!’

The reporter stayed for what I estimate to have been a good couple of hours – maybe even three – as he seemed to be taking a very keen interest in what we were doing. Although karate was very much a part of local culture – his culture – he still seemed to know next to nothing about the martial arts – apart from what everybody ‘knows’ which is only the commercial- and media-based aspect! If this reporter was going to use the information being given by us, then by all accounts, it should be a very good article. We would just have to wait and see. I do not know what Toyama Sensei said to the reporter, but I made it perfectly clear that what we were pursuing was of immense historical value as well as being steeped in ancient and invaluable

Oriental culture. As the ultimate in holistic health, what my own particular study has to offer, and this particular karate system (Old-Style Okinawan UechiRyu) has to offer was of great significance to modern-day society, both back home in the West as well as out here in the Far East.

## **SUPARIMPE**

Just when I was beginning to think that Toyama Sensei had lost interest in the “108” form (the Suparimpe kata) I had learnt in Fuzhou, Seizan informed me that Toyama Sensei was now ready for me to show it to him.

Twenty-seven years earlier Toyama Sensei had been visited by two Fujianese martial artists who apparently had come from the very same ‘daoguan’ (dojo) founded by Uechi Kanbun Sensei. Either these two men were ‘gongfu brothers’ of Uechi Kanbun Sensei and so knew him personally (being friends of Kanbun) or they were from the same ‘guan’ as Kanbun but one generation later.

Traveling all the way from Fuzhou to Okinawa three decades ago was a far greater ordeal than it is now, and cost a great deal of money – the kind of money to which the Chinese do not normally have access – so that visit must have been an essential and a vitally important one. However, the reason for their visit was not altogether made clear to me - not by Toyama Sensei, Seizan, or Sumako. The three Fujianese ‘wushuren’ (martial artists) left their name-card with Toyama Sensei, but this has since gone missing and no-one was going to tactfully insist that Toyama Sensei find it.

No longer a young man, Toyama Sensei’s age is deceptive, for his quick and highly-developed mind allowed him, even now (thirty years later) to honestly put ‘hand-on-heart’ and say that what he saw me demonstrate was indeed the very same form (kata) that his Fujianese visitors had demonstrated all those years ago!

Hearing Toyama Sensei say this justified my traveling all this way to Okinawa. I wanted to ascertain whether or not the 108 form I learnt from my teacher in Fuzhou back in the early 1990s was the so-called missing Uechi

form. Toyama Sensei said that the form I had just showed him was indeed this missing form.

Mission accomplished!

Toyama Sensei complimented me on my performance but he also informed me that it was quite different from the version he had seen so many years earlier. “Soften up” he advised me, “and you will improve and develop your form. Yawarakasa”.

Yawarakasa, yawarakasa!! If I learnt nothing more from this trip it was the importance and the urgency of this all-essential concept. I thanked Toyama Sensei for his words of encouragement, and said that I would work on my performance with my ‘new pair of eyes’. Sensei smiled and nodded his head by way of acknowledgement. He then disappeared for a short while then returned with rather special ornament in his hand. This ornament was the last of a small number of ornate marble spheres he had had made up, and which carried a certain inscription. This sphere he presented to me was a very special gift.

We retired from Toyama Sensei’s dojo rather late in the evening. On the way home Seizan, Sumako, and I talked. When I was talking I was thinking back over the day. Over the day and especially over this night as it was the night when, for me especially, history had indeed been made!

The next morning I was to be taught again by Seizan - another intensive 90-minute lesson where I would be shown the very essence of the original Okinawan and pre-Okinawan ‘Three Challenges’ exercise – Sanchin.

This kept us busy until lunchtime. In the afternoon however I would actually have some free time on my hands as both Seizan and Sumako were unavoidably engaged. Left to my own devices I decided to follow Sumako’s suggestion and take a walk out to ‘Kurushiki Dam’. “It really is quite beautiful out there”, she said. I am sure you will find it interesting.”

And so that is precisely what I did!

**Continued in Part 5 (FINAL) - Kurushiki, Kokusaidori, The Final Day,  
Takamiyagi Sensei, In Closing..., Conclusion.**