

Nunchaku

The history of the nunchaku is interwoven with the Japanese domination and suppression of the natives of Okinawa, known then as the Ryukyu Islands. Japan took military and political control of Okinawa several hundred years ago. To prevent the rural population from uprising, the Japanese dictated an order to confiscate all fighting weapons including kitchen utensils. To somewhat appease the people, each village was allowed one cutting knife. However, there was one stipulation. The knife was to be kept under lock and key and in the custody of the village constable.

Domination and brutality ran rampant, forcing the natives to seek ways to defend themselves. In order to accomplish their desire, weapons were needed. Because of the original order to confiscate all weapons, they were compelled to transform their simple everyday farming tools into effective fighting instruments. Invented in either the late 16th or early 17th, originally nunchaku were wooden flails used to crush rice. They consisted of two unequal lengths of hardwood connected by a cord made of horse hair. Thus a simple farm tool was converted into what is known today as the nunchaku.

In order to combat the mounted Samurai warrior, the farmers were forced to use unorthodox methods contrary to the Samurai ethics. Concealing themselves behind a building, tree, or other structural forms, they would wait for the mounted Samurai warrior to ride by. When the warrior was within a foot or two, the farmer would time his strike to hit at the exact moment the warrior entered his critical range. Torque from their hip and employing body weight for additional power, the nunchaku undoubtedly produced devastating results. Because of the armor worn by the warrior, it was important to pick the right target. These priorities had to be determined by the farmer. Although the head was the primary target and the torso second, it was not uncommon to see a farmer strike the legs of the horse to topple the rider prior to attacking him.

In addition to utilizing farm implements, the natural weapons, such as hands, elbows and feet, were also forged into useful and effective weapons. Thus it was not uncommon to see nunchaku moves intermittently combined with those of the arms and legs. This was especially true when the farmer was pitted against the ground soldier who was usually armed with a sword, spear, or wooden staff. In order to combat the weapons of the ground soldier, concentric circles and arcs were utilized to ward off attack. When these concentric circles and arcs were sped up, they literally formed an invisible shield that parried the weapons of the ground soldier. Furthermore, it created opportune openings. When these opening appeared, a slight change of wrist movement would conveniently alter the orbit of the circle, rapidly converting the nunchaku from a defensive to an offensive weapon. If the nunchaku was not utilized, a foot or hand took its place to take advantage of an opening.

The nunchaku can also be useful when merely held in both hands. They can be used as a defensive and offensive weapon. The nunchaku can be used to block, ward off or capture kicks, punches and strikes as well as for attacks like thrusts, jabs, hooks, and pokes.

Nunchaku are believed to have personalities emanating from the actual sticks themselves. Tradition says that after someone has practiced long and hard enough, the nunchaku will take on some of their spirit and character. The nunchaku, it is believed, are becoming a part of the practitioner. But this is not an overnight process. It takes countless hours of practice to reach this point.