

On the Origins of Okazaki Seishirō's Mind-Body Training

By George Arrington

It is interesting when one witnesses martial art demonstrations that seem to defy common sense. In some cases, people perform feats that would ordinarily bring severe bodily harm, such as walking on the blade of a sharpened sword or over a pile of broken glass, without incurring any injury or ill effect. In other demonstrations, a person will exhibit a force that appears to be exerted through a distance, such as knocking people over without touching them. (I unexpectedly experienced this from one of my teachers many years ago.) Still other demonstrations have a person of seemingly limited ability exerting Herculean strength, such as holding up "impossible" weights. While some of these can be explained through trickery, others can (or have) not. The Danzan-Ryū world is not exempt from these types of feats. This article will explore one possible source of their inclusion into the system.

The martial and healing arts of Professor Henry Seishirō Okazaki (1890-1951) have been spread throughout the world and are avidly practiced by thousands of people. During his life, which was predominantly spent in the Hawaiian Islands, Okazaki was well-known for being a skilled healer and a teacher/promoter of martial arts, such as Jūjutsu, Jūdō and Sumō. One particular aspect of his life story and subsequent teaching deals with the unusual conditioning of both his mind and his body.

Throughout the curriculum of his Danzan-Ryū Jūjutsu 檀山流柔術, the physical conditioning aspects of the system are obvious. The methods of forging and hardening of the mind/body combination are less apparent.

Born in the Fukushima area of Japan, Okazaki Seshirō 岡崎清四郎 (his name, Seishirō, was later changed to 星史朗) immigrated to Hilo in the Territories of Hawai'i in 1906. Three years later, at the age of 19, he was told by a doctor that he had contracted "consumption" (the term that was used for tuberculosis); a terminal condition at that time. This disease would have a profound effect on the direction of his life. He wrote in his personal history, "I was desperate. At that time, in Hilo, there was a Shinyū Kai Dōjō 心勇會道場 operated by Jūdō master Tanaka Yoshimatsu 田中吉松師範." There is also an account that Okazaki initially sought out Tanaka as a healer prior to practicing Jūdō. Okazaki continues, "I knocked on his door and, risking my life, I practiced Jūdō with all my efforts. While I was practicing Jūdō, I miraculously recovered from my illness." He also claims that through his strenuous practice, he developed what he called an "iron-like body" within himself. Indeed, it was because of this transformation that Okazaki felt the debt of gratitude to teach others in the methods of how to defend themselves. In one noteworthy part of his training, Okazaki made a five-month trip back to his homeland of Japan to further his training. This took place from September 1924 through February 1925. During the three months that he was actually in Japan (the voyage took a month each way), he visited some 50 schools from Morioka in the north to Kagoshima in the south. During this time, Okazaki reported that he mastered 675 techniques. From these and other martial art techniques, he formed his own Danzan-Ryū Jūjutsu.

Much of the actual method that Okazaki practiced to develop himself while learning "Jūdō" at the Shinyū Kai Dōjō has become lost in the mist of history. We do, however, have some clues based on his subsequent Danzan-Ryū curriculum. Notable examples of this are found in the conditioning exercises transmitted to us by some of the Professor's direct students. These include standard calisthenics, but also some more unusual exercises with such titles as: swaying loins, lowering loins, the goldfish

exercise, the "Nishi" exercise, grip strengtheners, mat pounding, body pounding, rock striking and others. While it is not certain, it is likely that these were learned by Okazaki during his early training.

The more advanced practitioners of Danzan-Ryū are introduced to a set of techniques known as the Kiai No Maki 氣合の巻, or "scroll of the Kiai". The Kiai is often thought of as a spirited shout that is done during the strenuous portion of a technique. While this is true, it should also be noted that the meaning of this term involves the understanding of the "unification of the breath", the literal translation of "Kiai". Indeed, the Kiai No Maki, which is often looked at as a course dealing with weapons, is more concerned with developing this Kiai and the subsequent inner strength. Later courses in the Danzan-Ryū system also contain techniques that directly address methods of breathing, concentration, meditation and the ability of discernment.

The Kiai No Maki course contains a variety of "sub-courses" dealing with the following: use of the Tessen 鉄扇 (iron fan), defenses against knife attacks, defenses against Samurai sword attacks, a variety of techniques using a wooden staff, and defense against an opponent using a pistol. While these weapon-based techniques are in the majority of the Kiai No Maki course, the first four techniques (which have sometimes been referred to as the "strength arts") are markedly different from the others. Specifically, they include breaking a chopstick with a piece of paper, breaking a piece of bamboo with a wooden sword, having a stone on one's abdomen smashed with a sledgehammer and the most difficult and dangerous of these, a barefooted transit across the sharpened edge of a Samurai sword. One may wonder where these inclusions may have originated. The following may offer a possible answer.

In the traditional source of Professor Okazaki's life history, the graduation scrolls, or Mokuroku 目録, there is little detail on the type of training that he endured. There is, however, one tantalizing clue found in a photograph of a young adult Okazaki performing a very interesting feat. This photograph (shown here) appears to have been taken in Hilo, T.H. The date is not listed, but was probably taken in the mid-1920's. It shows Okazaki standing in street clothes with his left arm extended horizontally, with an icpick piercing through a pinch of skin on the top of his forearm. (It does not go through the arm between the ulna and radius bones.) A string is looped around this icpick and on the other end of the string; a small end table is hanging, suspended above the floor. It is notable that Okazaki's left hand appears to be relaxed and his face does not express pain or distress. Fortunate to those who research such things, the banner that hangs behind Okazaki gives us some very valuable information.



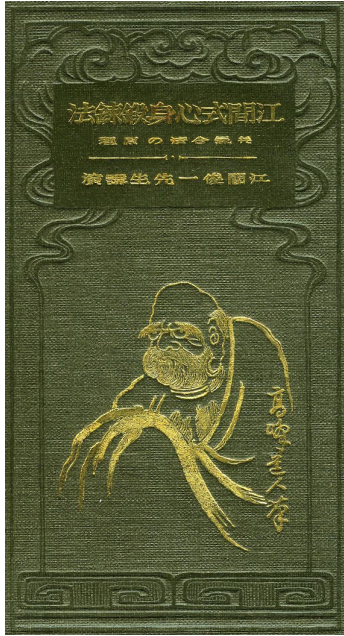
The banner behind Okazaki is in Japanese. Some sources have mistranslated and misinterpreted it. Here is the correct translation.

The vertical portion on the right says: 江間 Ema (a proper name) 式 Shiki=system 心身 Shinshin=mind-body 鍛錬 Tanren=forging 法 Hō=method. The left vertical portion says: 甲島 Kōjima (a proper name) 流 Ryū=style, 心霊 Shinrei=spiritual, 氣合 Kiai=breath unification, 術 Jutsu=art. The bottom section (in large, bold kanji) says: 道場 Dōjō=way place/school.

(Note: Some native Japanese have read the 甲島, Kōjima as 田島, Tajima. In either case, these are proper names of either people or places. The occurrence of the character 甲, which can mean armor or

carapace, does not infer any related characteristic of the Kiai Jutsu style. Together, this banner is best understood as: “The Ema-method of mind-body forging, Kōjima-style spiritual Kiai Jutsu school.”)

The value of this banner to the researcher is that it gives us an insight of, at least some of Okazaki's early training. It turns out that the Ema-style of mind-body forging was well-known in Japan during the early twentieth century. In fact, a book describing the method was first published in 1918 with the familiar title of 江間式心身鍛錬法：並気合法の原理 Ema Shiki Shinshin Tanrenhō : Nara Kiaihō No Genri. The subtitle means that the Ema-method includes principles of Kiai. The book is actually a series of lectures by the teacher and originator of the method named 江間俊一 Ema Shun'ichi (1861-1934).



The cover of the 1921 edition of Ema Shiki Shinshin Tanrenhō.

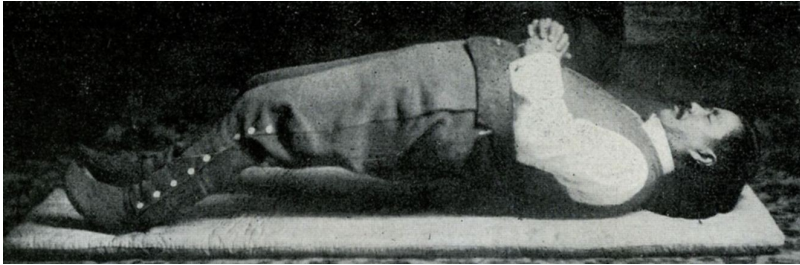


Portrait of Ema Shun'ichi (1861-1934)

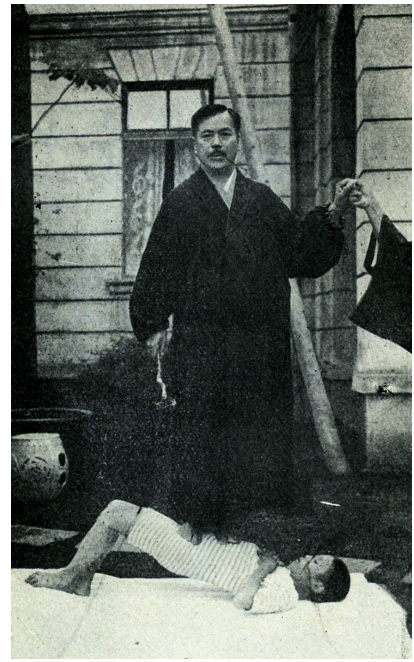
The book begins with a background on Ema Shun'ichi and an overview of the method. The majority of the text (123 pages) deals with the details of the actual method. The method deals with a variety of subjects, including: quiet meditation and contemplation, deep abdominal breathing, dealing with physical disease, dealing with mental disease, selection of friends and spouses, living a long life, the aspects of death, developing psychic abilities, and development of various types of the Kiai.

Throughout all of these subjects, Ema most often stresses the practice of 腹呼吸 Hara Kokyū=deep abdominal breathing as well as the 氣合, Kiai. Throughout the majority of the detailed technique descriptions, this breathing method is included. Indeed, a 38-page section near the end of the book is titled, "Stories of Deep Abdominal Breathing".

To further emphasize the efficacy of his method, Ema includes a variety of photographic plates showing demonstrations of how his method could be manifested. Following are a selection of some of these plates, along with descriptions.



Ema Sensei demonstrating an arched-back position. This is similar to the position used in the "goldfish" spine correction exercise taught by Prof. Okazaki in his Danzan-Ryū Jūjutsu. The position of his heels on the mattress is noteworthy.



An 11-year old boy exhibiting "Herculean" power by demonstrating the arched-back position and having Ema Sensei stand on top of him.



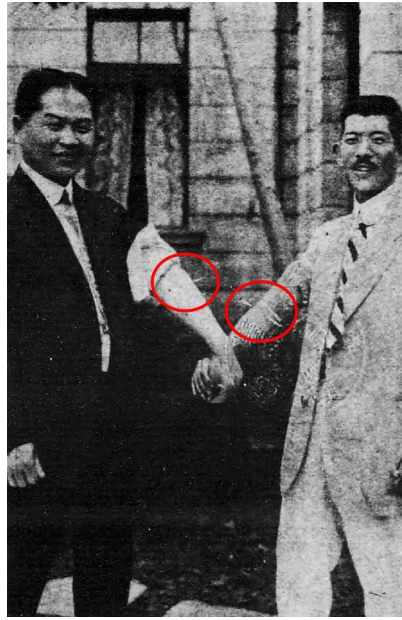
Ema Sensei demonstrating his abdominal strength by taking a punch to his stomach area from a national newspaperman named Yamada Kiichi.



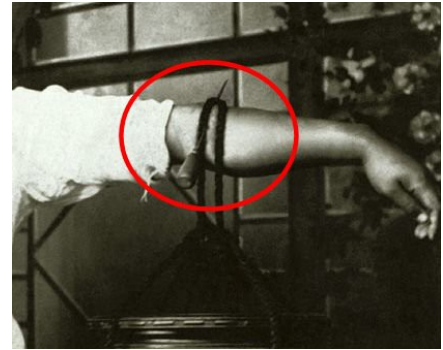
A student of Ema Sensei demonstrating his ability to stand on two live Samurai sword blades, even with another student riding on his back. This is similar to a technique found in Danzan-Ryū.



Ema Sensei and his student, Kōjima Shigeshi with long needles through the student's forearm and cheek.



Two of Ema Sensei's students gripping hands, each with needles through their forearms.



Detail of Okazaki Seishiro with the icepick through his arm.



A student of Ema Sensei demonstrates his ability to pour boiling water into his hand. This ability was later demonstrated by some of Okazaki students.



A student of Ema Sensei shows his internal power by supporting three people standing on him.



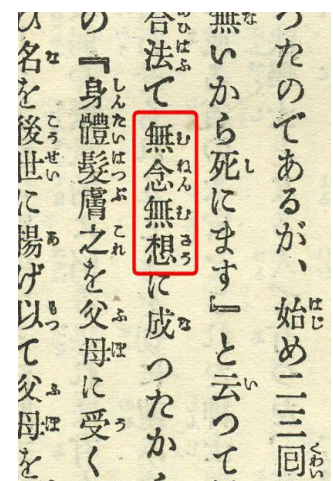
Okazaki Seishiro during his trip to Japan with a Kiai Jutsu instructor named, Hiroshima. It is not certain whether he was associated with Ema Sensei.

The pictures shown in Ema Sensei's book initially serve to "wow" the viewer and certainly entice people to learn his methods. The skeptic may view the pictures and suspect fraud or, as some people

have claimed, that these feats are so-called "circus tricks". Indeed, some of the feats shown here could have been accomplished through trickery. Whether this was the case in these photographs cannot be positively determined. The more important point is that the Ema-method offered seemingly miraculous health benefits. The powerful healing aspects of his method are detailed in his book in a section titled: 氣合の治病力, Kiai no Jibyō Ryoku=The Power of the Kiai to Treat Disease. This may have been included in the training at Tanaka's Shinyū Kai Dōjō when a young Okazaki Seishirō sought a cure for his life-threatening tuberculosis.

We cannot know for certain whether the Ema methods were responsible for his recovery, but we can speculate that it was. The primary evidence for this is a single photograph of Okazaki performing an amazing feat with a banner behind him listing the same name as Ema Sensei's book. The same amazing feat appears in Ema Sensei's book. The training methods described in the book, such as deep abdominal breathing, quiet meditation and Kiai development correspond with many of those espoused by some later Okazaki-trained instructors. Further, some of the techniques from Ema Sensei's book, such as the sword walk and abdominal testing are also integrated into the Danzan-Ryū curriculum. These coincidences point to the likelihood that Okazaki's training included some of Ema's system.

There is another tantalizing, albeit remote, hint that Okazaki may have incorporated some of Ema's teaching into his Danzan-Ryū. On page 112 of his book (shown here), in a section dealing with the subject of corporate suicide, the words "Munen Musō, 無念無想" are found. This phrase, meaning to be free of worldly thoughts, is a term that is familiar to advanced practitioners of Danzan-Ryū. Indeed, the final technique of the Shinyō No Maki board is named this. Again, there is no direct evidence of a connection with the Okazaki system, but it is an interesting coincidence.



Finally, a couple of notes are necessary. First, a very real danger exists in attempting some of these potentially injurious techniques. The student may be tempted to try them without the necessary, requisite training. The student may try to "work their way up" to being able to perform some of these. It must be emphatically stated that this is the WRONG approach and is likely to cause very serious injury. It would appear that the young Okazaki Seishirō first went through some rigorous training, such as the Ema-system of mind-body forging, prior to performing these techniques. To repeat, DO NOT TRY THESE. Before Ema's students attempted any of these dangerous techniques, it was necessary for them to endure multi-year, rigorous training. They then only did so under the supervision of Ema Sensei or one of his instructors. There were no "short-cuts".

Second, in performing historical study of this type, it is important to allow the evidence to present the researcher with the facts. Often, we collect many little shards of history that may relate to our study. Just like when paleontologists piece together dinosaur bones to form a complete animal skeleton, we try to take our evidence and form a reasonable narrative. Sometimes, after creating a dinosaur skeleton, the builders find that their creation is inaccurate in some respect. Those paleontologists who have the academic integrity will (sometimes begrudgingly) rework their skeleton with the updated information. Likewise, we who research the history of Danzan-Ryū are sometimes presented with information that is contrary to our earlier conclusions.

As one who has had to alter and correct some of my previous findings, I know that this can be a humbling and sometimes difficult thing to do. The scientific method would lead us to make many

observations and try to find the evidence that will dispute and overturn our claim. Only when we have exhausted as many examples as possible can we (with trepidation) make a statement of "fact". The opposite (and wholly inappropriate) approach is to try to prove a predetermined outcome with thin relationships to the truth. This method has the researcher rejecting contrary evidence on the basis of not promoting the given agenda. Instead of this path, they ought to allow the evidence chips to fall where they may. If this breaks some long-held notion or contradicts the researcher's initial theory, or conflicts with what a previous teacher has claimed, then so be it.

I hope that this article has been interesting and, perhaps, thought-provoking. It is also my hope that this may inspire the reader to make similar efforts and uncover other hidden gems in our history. Further, I welcome scholarly comments, both pro and con on this article. Also, thanks to Sr. Prof. Tom Ball and Senseis Tim Merrill, Nancy Young and Richard Young for help in reviewing the article.

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