

23/04/2024, 08:34 - Andrew McCormack: MCSDA Haru Keiko 2024  
By Craige Thompson

I was very privileged to be able to attend the MCSDA academy for the Kodo Butoku Renmei's 2nd annual Haru Keiko. Featuring a variety of martial arts and practitioners it was an interesting and rewarding experience to be a part of. Unlike many mixed style gatherings, I'd attended before there was also the inclusion of the option to engage in a bit of cultural practice outside of the usual with a Shodo (Japanese calligraphy) session.

Unfortunately compared to my usual write up of an event I can't fully comment on each and every single session from my usual participant perspective. I was fortunate to be able to directly interview a couple of the instructors on the day so part of my write up today comes from me reviewing footage I took of the sessions going on. Working from this perspective is something fairly new to me so I apologise in advance if I missed any content or context of what was being delivered. With that said, please seek out the instructors if you have any interest or questions (you would be surprised to find that many martial arts instructors are actually incredibly approachable individuals who are more than happy to answer questions and have you train with them).

The instructors on the day were:

Hanshi Jacob Sibley - teaching Bujutsu  
Hanshi Andy McCormack - teaching Taiho Jutsu  
Meijin Bill Stockey - teaching Karate  
Meijin Gary Stringer - teaching Jukendo  
Meijin Stephen Grayston - teaching Shindo Ryu Karate

Hanshi Sibley opened the day's proceedings teaching bujutsu with his focus being on kuzushi and using it to effectively control and take down an aggressor. I missed the first half of Hanshi Sibley's session due to interviewing Meijin Grayston. What I did manage to get involved with was solid stuff though.

The tai sabaki used in Bujutsu and the maai is fairly alien to me. It's not too dissimilar to what I know but it's enough that I found myself more than once fumbling my steps or losing my rhythm in what I was doing. For what was covered it was solid though. Principles of kuzushi are universal across all martial arts and I've snagged a couple of extra ways to employ my own footwork in unbalancing opponents. Hanshi Sibley delivered his content incredibly well and was able to work round the entire (very packed) tatami to ensure everyone had got the techniques before moving on. It was the ideal start to the session allowing people to use their entire bodies and engage their minds ready for the day ahead.

I'm kind of gutted I didn't get to join in more with Hanshi Sibley's session, and interview him, but I look forward to having the opportunity to see and train with him again in future.

Next up was Meijin Grayston covering Shindo Ryu karate's principles on maai, jikan, and tai sabaki. Meijin Grayston's session was heavily focused on the relationship between distance, timing and the intervals for attacking efficiently. It was an interesting session for me as well because alongside the practical aspects being demonstrated, Grayston Meijin also delved a little into the Japanese language we commonly use (and absolutely bastardise and butcher as westerners). So, besides some distancing and timing drills which were very bread and butter karate (enabling me to comfortably train without having to worry about martial 'incompatibility') we also got a little insight into culture and language.

The physical aspects of Grayston Meijin's session involved the identification of the various stages of Sen and when and where best to place yourself to both stay safe and deliver your best attacks at an opponent. Some of the drills involved identifying when an opponent was about to move or starting to move then utilising tai sabaki to slip offline and deliver strikes. Others were reactive to an opponent already in motion and either shutting down their movement by coming in from a different angle or taking control of the dead time and crashing through whatever they were about to do before their structure became strong.

The third session of the day was a Taiho Jutsu session delivered by Hanshi Andy McCormack. This session is missed almost entirely, which I'm really upset about. Taiho Jutsu is a very little-known art and almost completely dead, that on its own should be enough to band more people together to preserve it. It was originally developed for use by uniformed personnel, predominantly policing units. It is a self-defence art centred around restraining and controlling an individual without causing them massive amounts of physical trauma. The goal is to neutralise an assailant within the bounds of the law.

From the footage I viewed and from talking to Hanshi McCormack after I got an understanding of the basic principles of shutting someone down in close quarters in a legal (and safe) manner. What is interesting is that a lot of the techniques shown appear to come from old school Japanese Ju Jitsu. Some of the locks and controls effectively put immense stress against the joints, bones, and muscles of a person. When taken to the extremes they could easily be used to detach muscles, rip and tear tendons and ligaments, and even cause fractures in bones. Hanshi McCormack's session was wholly unique in that it was entirely delivered from a current legal standpoint. He is very well versed in UK law concerning violence and so almost contradicted every other instructor in saying "well this is what you shouldn't do because you'll go to prison" as opposed to this is what you should do to wreck the guy who's put you in danger. It was a great perspective to add to things. I would definitely recommend anyone who works in any type of security-based job or has to deal with regular violence to get in touch with Hanshi McCormack for an expanded toolset (outside of the crap training being delivered for things like SIA etc these days) that is legally compliant but devastatingly effective and useful.

During this session there was also a separate Shodo class going on for those that wanted to try something a little different. For those unaware, Shodo is the Japanese art of calligraphy. This was a great addition to the day's events and change of pace to the martial arts on display. It's the first time I've been to an all-day event and seen supplementary

activities like this on display. I'd love to see more of this going on at other events. It's a great way to maintain engagement and maybe even spark more interest in the various cultures we're dipping our toes into.

Meijins Stockey and Stringer combined their session to finish the day off, each taking turns to demonstrate and explain techniques. Meijin Stockey demonstrated an eclectic mix of techniques that followed each of the major themes of the day (kuzushi, maai, jikan, tai sabaki) as well as a solid emphasis on irimi. It was interesting seeing his entries into oncoming threat make effective use of toraguchi (mawashi uke) to close down limbs and stick to the opponent. In spite of a slight mobility issue he still worked his techniques and body movement incredibly well, all the while explaining his processes. Much like Hanshi Sibley he was very careful to check people knew what they were doing before moving on as well as working a little with each individual to help them grasp the principle of what was being shown.

Contrasting Meijin Stockey, Meijin Stringer brought his no-nonsense approach to tuite to the fore. He demonstrated a variety of locks, controls, and even takedowns, all of which come tried and tested from his many years in the police force. I've spent a lot of time over the years looking at and training joint manipulation and destruction techniques and can say with certainty that these were some of the smoothest and quickest I've ever seen applied. There was no aikido-like compliancy in what was being demonstrated, and certainly no flashy ukemi, just basic controls that (could) lead to breaks or dislocations. With each technique demonstrated there was a little story that usually related to one of Gary's many encounters with some nefarious individual or other that should have really just run away instead of engaging with an experienced martial artist and officer.

What was really impressive with Meijins Stockey and Stringer was their ability to seamlessly bounce off each other in what they were teaching. Each seemed to have something to add to the other with each technique or principle being conveyed. It's a harmony I've scarcely seen in other groups (maybe only with the Three Amigos really) but one that was warming to see.

When you have martial artists who are teaching that are working from a complimentary angle you get some really special stuff. Not to mention, the banter's fantastic as well!

The day was brought to a close with various students being awarded grades to rounds of applause and cheer. The certificates were works of art, all hand penned with fine calligraphy by Grayston Meijin.

I've purposely (yet again) strayed from delving too deeply into the individual techniques on display. In part this is because it's really difficult to write down without the articles becoming novels, and in part because I think if folks wanted this kind of teaching, they should get off their backsides and pay to attend a seminar.

Outside of the seminar itself I've been fortunate to be able to chat and socialise a bit with the instructors as well. I love these kinds of opportunities because I feel the real magic in martial arts and the greatest value is in the stories of the experiences of these amazing instructors. Now more than ever I think it's really special. We're in the middle of a major social shift and generational change; in martial arts we're losing the last true links to the past. In Japanese martial arts we're losing those people that link us with the people that founded the styles and schools that have become so prolific today. We're truly losing the last of the true martial arts legends now (an article on this to come soon).

Big thanks to everyone who I trained with and who taught on the day. It was a great turnout with loads of hard work across all the mats. Overall I met some amazing individuals and will definitely look to train with them in future.

I have to really put a shout out to Meijin Gary Stringer. First off his dojo is phenomenal, one of the best places I've ever trained at, both beautiful and utilitarian in its design and construction. The MCSDA is arguably one of the most impressive martial arts locations in the country. On top of that it's also very welcoming. Gary doesn't suffer fools but he is open to anyone and everyone of worth to come train or use his space.

Beyond that and on a very personal note I have to thank Gary for not only giving me the opportunity to train, film, and conduct interviews at the Keiko, but for also being an amazing individual. Those that know me know I had a pretty bad mental health wobble a while back. Gary took it upon himself to stay in touch with me, checking in daily and generally being a massive support while things felt unbearable around me. He showed me the kind of camaraderie you only really see in uniformed personell. He's been a true brother, in my corner every step of the way. Not only a fantastic martial artist but also a phenomenal human being, which really is the epitome of martial arts in my opinion.

In spite of dealing with and working with the nature of violence we need to ultimately remain as human as possible.

I consider myself infinitely fortunate to have met the people I have in my martial arts journey. IN spite of a fairly rough and difficult ride outside of that, I can rest easy in the knowledge that my martial brothers will always be there, to train with, grab a drink with, and share knowledge and experiences with.

Ichi go ichi e.

Next up will be a piece centred around the interviews with Stocky and Grayston Meijin.