

Ton — Bamboo Bundle



As this old drawing shows, pushing the hands through lengths of bamboo to condition the fingers is nothing new.



Taken in the mid-tsao's, this photograph shows Richard Barrett training with the tow.



Before relocating to Spain, Richard Barrett sensei built a small *dojo* behind his home in Hertfordshire where he trained himself as well as a small group of students. *Mojo undo* played an important role in all of the training.



The author was first introduced to the *ton* by Richard Barrett. This photograph was taken during his first encounter with the tool. It hurt!



The *rmwwara* and *ft?u* at Hokama sensei's *dojo* in Nishihara, Okinawa stand to one side of the entrance and are used often by the students who train there.

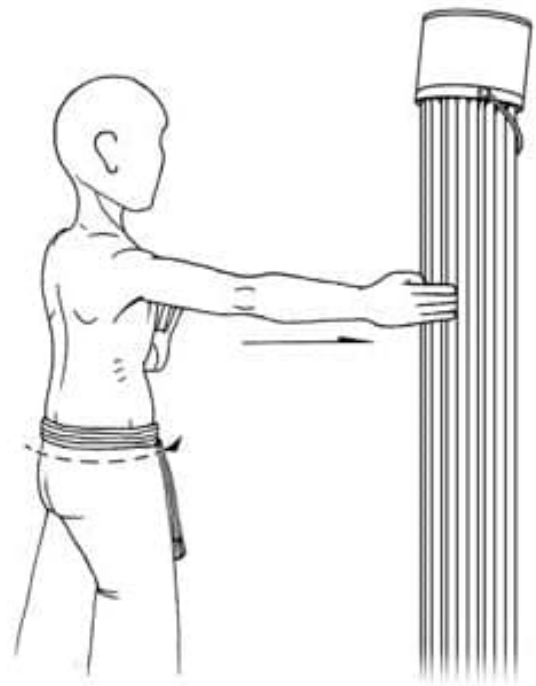


At his private *dojo* in Almeria, Spain, Richard Barrett continues to train himself in the traditional Okinawan way. The *mokiwora* and *tou* are just two of the tools he uses.

When you take into account the number of times the technique *nukite* (spear hand) is used in *karate kata*, it should come as no surprise to learn that there exists a training tool to facilitate the growth of strong fingertips within the *hojo undo* arsenal. In fact, a number of tools survive that center on the development of the fingers, some of which you will find within the pages of this book. However the *ton*, sometimes called *takefaba*, is perhaps one of the best-suited tools for allowing the *karateka* to feel the impact of their spear-hand strikes in a way that closely resembles the situation in which such a strike would most likely be deployed. Standing in a fighting posture, upright and within reach of the *ton*, it is possible to thrust the hand into the tool and withdraw it again before moving swiftly to the side and making a second strike. Grasping the bundle, too, can be done from many angles including a kneeling posture that simulates an attack to the inside of the legs or groin area.

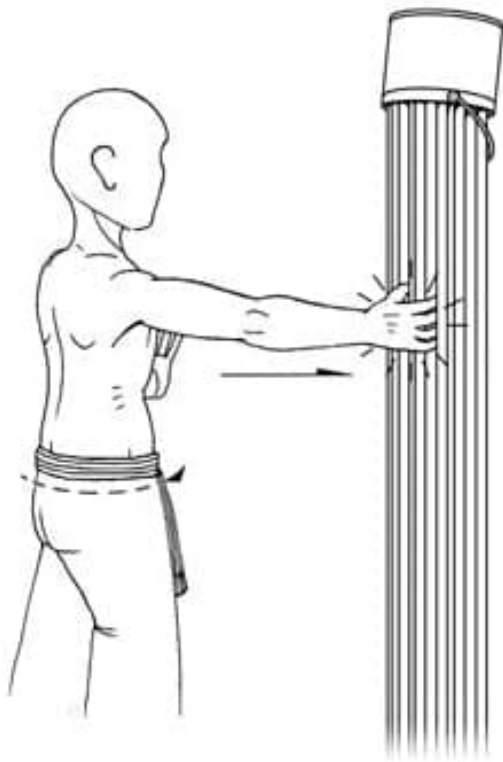
I have been unable to discover the singular origin for this particular tool. Opinions vary; although from old Chinese drawings it is clear that such a tool or something very similar has been in use for centuries. Whether or not the Okinawans took their inspiration

for the *ton* directly from such martial arts texts as they could find in China¹⁹ or developed it themselves through the use or cultivation of the native vegetation, I cannot say for sure. Nevertheless, it is not beyond the realm of possibility to imagine the Okinawans using recently harvested bundles of sugar cane or the reeds they used for their thatched roofs to test their techniques. Such activities could have led to the birth of the *tou*. This is speculation on my part, true, but not an altogether unreasonable hypothesis when you understand the ingenuity of the Okinawan people and their highly developed sense of adapting things to suit their needs. Its simple construction and easy-to-find materials have always made the *tou* one of the easiest tools to acquire, if not to use. With perseverance, the *ton* helps those who wish to develop their *nukite* strike into a technique that is both simple in its execution and yet shocking to the recipient. It seems to me an overly simplistic approach to *karate* to practice techniques in *kata* that cannot be utilized should the need arise. The name *nukite* (spear hand) speaks to the nature of the technique, and who among us would choose to go into battle with a plastic spear? Just as fighting men of olden times kept their swords sharp and modern day soldiers keep their firearms clean, I believe today's *karateka* are obliged to equip themselves with bodies, minds, and techniques that are capable of living up to the purpose of *karate*, and that is to increase the odds in our favor should we ever be attacked. To do otherwise is a bit like owning a Ferrari without the engine; it looks good, but is of little value except as an ornament.



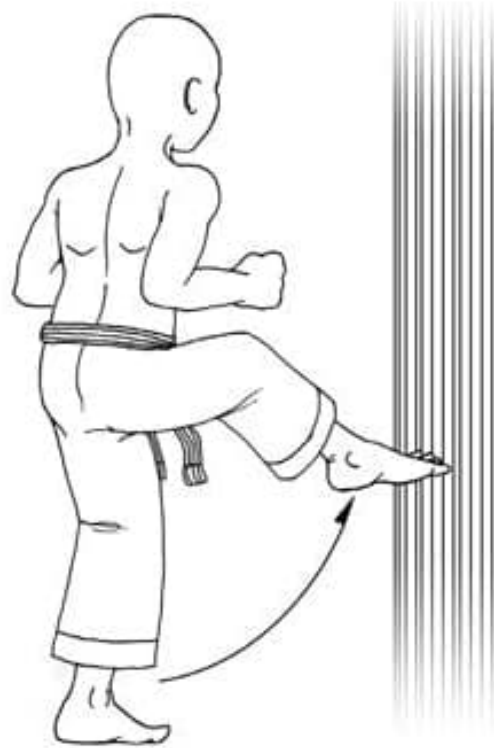
⁴ Exercise I

Stand at arm's length and thrust a hand into the bundle using the *nukite* technique. Take care to hold the fingers as tightly together as possible and try not to let them separate when the hand penetrates the tool. Make sure the thumb is tucked in hard against the side of the hand. Like the punch, make full use of the opposite, returning hand (*hekite*) when practicing. Remember to breathe in first and to exhale with the strike.



Exercise X

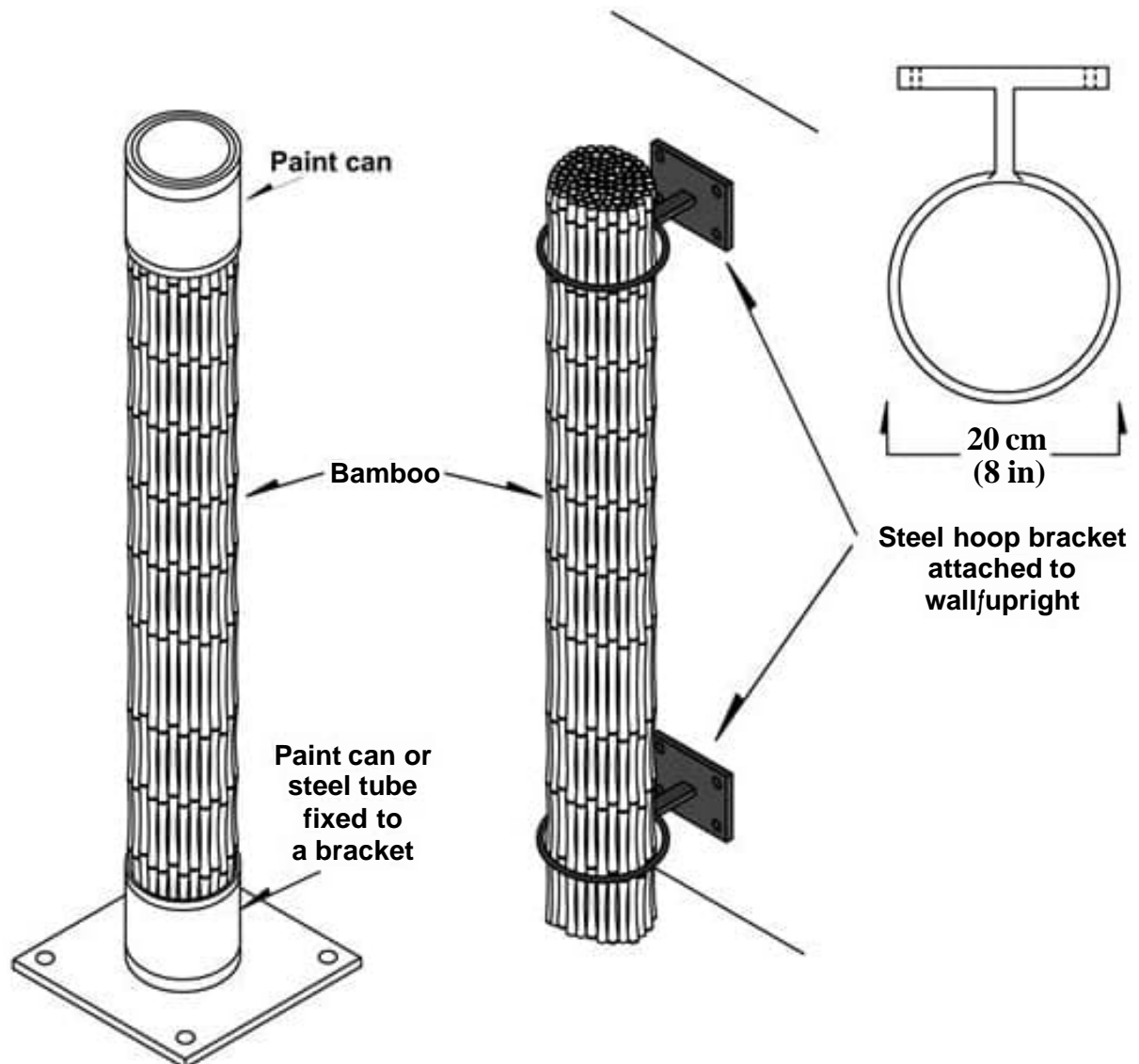
A powerful gripping action can be acquired simply by grabbing at the bundle from the outside and giving it a slight pull, while closing the arm-pit down before releasing it, and then grabbing it with the opposite hand. After one or two grabs like this, begin to move around the tool, all the while remembering to alter the height of the strike upon the *ton* as you do so. In a real confrontation, it would be a mistake to aim all your blows at one spot on the opponent's body] therefore, moving around the *ton* and varying the target keeps the practice that one step closer to reality.



Exercise 3

A favorite of *karateka* from the *Pang-at Noon ryu*, *Uechi ryu*, and *Shohei ryu* schools of Okinawan *karatedo* is to use the *ton* in much the same way as a heavy kick bag might be used, in these schools of *karate*, the practitioners make a point of kicking with the tips of the toes, giving them an opportunity to work on penetrating the target. It is also helpful when impacting with the *koshi* (hard pad on the foot at the base of the toes), the more usual foot position used in most *karate* traditions. Either technique will be helped by constant repetition, and in this simple truth lays the "secret" of improvement.

Tou Construction Notes



More penetrative power is developed if the bundle is kept tight.

Perhaps the easiest of tools to build, the *ton* can be made from a bunch of bamboo garden stakes and two old paint cans, one placed on either end of the bundle. The tool can be fixed **to** the ground **with** a bracket made **from an old** paint can or short length of steel **tubing**. A pair of steel wall brackets (similar to small basketball hoops) can also be used placed one above the other with **the** bamboo simply stacked loosely between the two.