

NAGINATA



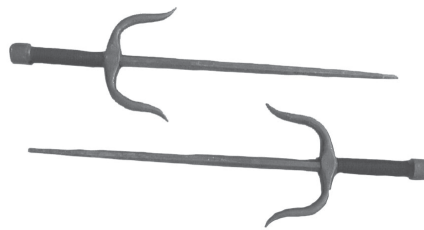
The naginata, or “reaping sword,” was a weapon used primarily by Japanese warriors during military confrontations. Some records indicate the naginata may have been modeled after the earlier Chinese halberd. Due to its extreme length of 7’-8’ and powerful cutting and thrusting capabilities, foot soldiers and horsemen alike could be effectively neutralized by a skilled naginata wielding combatant.

The curved blade was honed to a fine edge and measured between 18”-36” long depending on how the weapon was to be used. Both male and female practitioners are credited with using naginatas in defending Japan’s territories. During the relatively peaceful Edo Period, Japanese women gained great proficiency with the naginata as they took significant roles in protecting their communities while male warriors were dispatched to other regions.

For practice purposes, a bamboo blade was frequently used. The techniques used by male martial arts differed in that they applied precise cutting and slashing movements similar to those witnessed in kendo, sword, or straight staff strikes. Female defenders, on the other hand, relied on the more flowing and circular techniques the long martial weapon afforded its user when fending off and countering more powerful opponents.

Naginatajutsu, “Art of the naginata”

SAI



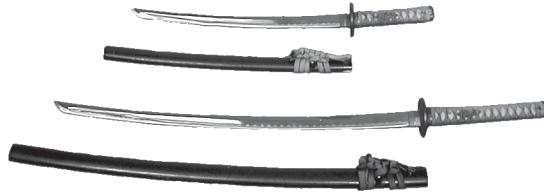
The sai is a three pronged, dagger-like weapon originally used by farmers in preparing furrows and opening the soil for planting seeds. Sai were also utilized in gathering cut grain stalks during the harvesting of crops.

Though intended for singular and paired use during combat, warriors often carried an additional sheathed sai that could be easily drawn forth and utilized in a throwing technique. The long center blade was often sharpened to a fine edge and was thus quite effective for stabbing and slashing techniques. The short outer prongs served as blocking edges and were also employed in trapping, hooking, or gouging movements.

In modern martial arts training, the sai is typically 18”-23” long, made of chrome plated steel, and has a handle that is covered with leather or wrapped with rawhide laces. The jitte, or jutte, is similar to the sai but possesses only one short outer prong.

Saijutsu, “Art of the sai”

SWORD



The oldest forged swords can be traced back to the islands of Japan and the Korean Peninsula. Improved methods of sword making came later from China. However, it is the entire culture of the Samurai and their timeless swords that have gained the greatest attention in the history of the martial arts.

There are several lengths of swords, each created and used in a very specific and artistic manner. The Samurai swords were made in a ceremonial fashion, often taking years to finish. Only the most perfect materials, most skilled craftsmen, and flawless techniques of blade making were implemented in the process of creating a sword fit for the highly honored samurai warriors. From the initial handling and preparation of the raw materials, to the very last, of thousands, of polishings of the blade, the entire creation of the samurai sword was completed in a highly ritualistic and traditional manner.

The following were styles of fighting swords predominant during the heyday of the Samurai Period: Tachi, To, Aikuchi, Tanto, Wakizashi, O-dachi, Mamori-gatana, and Kaiken. Forging of these blades was designated to Shinto monks who conducted their labors in a highly religious and philosophical fashion.

The swords of the Samurai of Japan, as well as tai chi swords of China, were lethal in their function as weapons. Crafted both as works of art and battle ready blades, they have never been equaled in excellence. Combat swords could be curved or straight. In the hands of an expert swordsman, the weapon was capable of cutting completely through leather and ceramic armor. Medium to longer length blades could easily sever an enemy's arm, leg, or head with a seemingly effortless technique. In addition to their magnificent cutting capacities, sword blades of the ninja warriors frequently were dipped in poison. The scabbards, or carrying sheaths, doubled as blowpipes for darts or in scattering debilitating powders. They could also be used as a breathing tube for making stealthy underwater escapes.

Iaido, "Way of drawing the sword"
Kenjutsu, "Warrior way of the sword"

