Historical References Regarding the Role of the Spear in Chinese Maritime Defense

In **Tales of Okinawa's Great Masters**, Shoshin Nagamine references the text**Okinawa, 1000 Year History**. He writes:

> "Tribute was the single most important aspect of the Ryukyus' social economy, and, therefore, no expense was ever spared when it come to ensuring the safety of cargo, passengers, and crew.
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> It was the responsibility of the captain and crew to be able to defend their cargo and vessel against attacks during a voyage, Hence, proper training in combative disciplines was essential. Designated the official vessels of the Ryukyu Kingdom, tribute ships carried both valuable cargo and important passengers to China. In the event of an assault, which was quite frequent during feudal times, passengers who were skilled in combative disciplines were, by order of the King, commanded to aid the crew. All tribute ships that sailed the treacherous waters between China and the Ryukyu Archipelago during feudal times were equipped with a turret, artillery, and weapons such as arrows, **spears**, guns, and explosives. Fast and well protected ships were necessary if the habitual attacks by coastal pirates were to be avoided or quelled. The average length of these ships was 159 meters and they sailed in three vessel convoys."

In his text,**Eighth Voyage of the Dragon, A History of China's Quest for Seapower**, Bruce Swanson writes:

> "As Chinese warships and navigational techniques became more sophisticated, so did naval tactics. As early as the period ofWarring Kingdoms, the main combatant was the dayi, or great wing warship. It was over 120 feet long, had a 16 foot beam, and was propelled by 50 oarsmen. There was also a detachment of 26 marines and up to 10 archers assigned to these vessels. The marines were armed with grappling hooks, **spears**, and long-handled axes. From this it can be assumed that these early navies used ram-and-grapple tactics during combat.
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> In subsequent dynasties, as has been mentioned, the Chinese advanced from the ram and grapple to amphibious assault and projectile tactics. However by the sixteenth century, tactics had declined in sophistication. In 1524, a Spaniard in Macao scornfully described Chinese naval tactics as follows:"
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> > "[The Junks] have small iron guns, but not of bronze; their powder is bad... Their arquebuses (primitive muskets) are so badly made that the ball would not pierce on ordinary cuirass (armor breastplate). especially as they do not know how to aim. Their arms are **bamboo pikes** [spears] some pointed with iron, others hardened by fire, short and heavy scimitars, and cuirasses of iron and tin.

> Sometimes a hundred vessels are seen to surround a single corsair, those which are windward throw out powdered lime to blind the enemy, and as they are very numerous, it produces some effect. This is one of their principle warlike stratagems."

> "Slightly more than a century later, in the early Qing dynasty, Chinese naval tactics experienced a brief renaissance. This was largely due to innovations made by Zheng Chenggong during his maritime rebellion in the late seventeenth century. His admirals, for example, used advanced formations that resembled a diamond formation then being experimented with by the British, French, and Dutch navies. Zheng's battle formation was also imitative of Korean formations used by Yi Sunsin against the Japanese in the sixteenth century.
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> Despite Zheng's tactical innovations, lack of effective control typified naval tactics, as the most prominent Chinese military journal of the time pointed out: "Fire arms can be used on large boats but the waves make aiming very hard. The chance of hitting the enemy is very slender. Even if one enemy boat should be hit, the enemy shout not thus incur severe losses. The purpose of having firearms aboard [a ship] is purely psychological, namely that of disheartening the enemy."
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> Such thinking, of course, was responsible for the devolution of the war junk. By the nineteenth century, the standard Chinese naval junk was 120 feet long, 25 foot in beam, and had a draught of 12 feet. It displaced from 250 to 300 tons, had a flush deck, and carried guns of poor quality. The **crews were armed with spears**, swords, and occasional matchlocks. The old rattan shields were still used but offered little protection against musket shot."

In his text **Like Froth Floating on the Sea, The World of Pirates and Seafarers in Late Imperial South China**, Robert J. Antony describes the nature of pirate attacks on vessels off the South China coast.

> "[W]henever those ships appeared vulnerable, pirates would attack. When attacking another vessel, the pirates would run their vessel alongside the victim's ship, fire a volley of cannon or musket shot, then shower the ship with "a great quantity of stink-pots" to set the sails on fire. Once the victim's ship was disabled, the pirates would jump aboard with their knives and **spears** to take command."

In his text **Okinawa Kenpo**, Choki Motobu named twelve kata passed down from Chinese to Okinawans. Funakoshi, in his 1914 article, attributes the kata Chinte, to the shipwrecked sailor that trained a number of Okinawans in combative arts. In his list of twelve kata, Motobu uses the following phrase after the kata Chinte:

“bamboo-yari style”

Yari is the Japanese word for spear.