

THE MARTIALIST YEAR ONE FINAL ISSUE

Getting Started with the Weighted Chain

By Phil Elmore

My first exposure to the manriki gusari came in the form of Charles V. Gruzanski's book, *Ninja Weapons: Chain and Shuriken*. First printed in 1968 in Japan, the hardcover version was titled *Spike and Chain: Japanese Fighting Arts*.

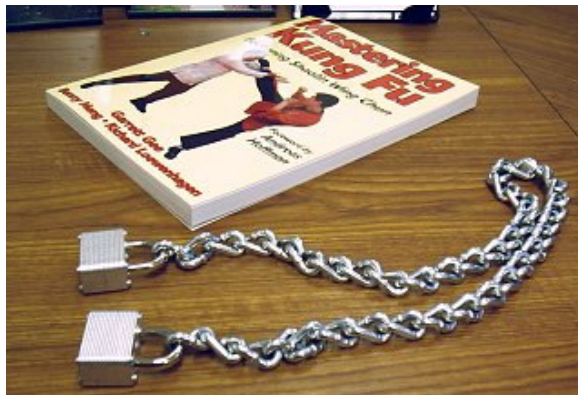


Photo by Phil Elmore

The book asserts that famed swordsman Dannoshin Toshimitsu Masaki was “chiefly responsible” for the development of the weighted chain and its associated methodology over 200 years ago. “Masaki named his weapon *Manrikigusari* [literally, 10,000 power chain] ... because he felt it contained the power and ingenuity of 10,000 persons.”

Master at Arms James A. Keating detailed the use of flexible weapons as whips and grappling tools in the Combat Bandanna videos reviewed online at *The Martialist*. The weighted chain offers all of the advantages of such a flexible weapon (be it a bandanna, a belt, a rope, or what have you) while offering both improved strength and greater striking weight. The physics of a flexible weapon terminating in a weight

are obvious. What the chain strikes, the weight helps it to ensnare. I remember as a kid watching a Western adventure show in which a character used a bola weapon to ensnare and bring down a running man. I have been fascinated by the mechanics of such weapons ever since.

The weighted chain is, therefore, a close-quarters grappling weapon that is also a striking tool at longer ranges. It can even be used to strike at short ranges as a fist load or as a short sap, depending on how it is held.

Building the Weighted Chain

There are *manrikigusari* on the market with nice hexagonal weights – but these are attached to inferior light chains about the weight of dog leashes. Avoid these, as they’re not very strong and have no “legitimate sporting use,” as the politicians like to say. Such a weapon will always be seen as a martial arts toy and will get you in trouble if it is discovered.

A durable, effective weighted chain is as close as your hardware store. First, find the chain and steel cable section. Then, find yourself a helpful clerk.



Photo by Phil Elmore

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Have the hardware store clerk cut you a section of medium-weight chain about the width of your shoulders. You don't want the chain to be too long or it will be awkward, but it must be long enough to effectively guard your body.



Photo by Phil Elmore

Next, get a pair of padlocks. Keyed-alike padlocks are a must. You want to be able to carry only one key for both. The padlocks must fit through the links of your chain, of course, so keep this in mind when selecting both chain and locks.



Photo by Phil Elmore

At this point, do I even need to tell you to **CHECK YOUR LOCAL LAWS** and make sure not to carry an illegal weapon? I didn't think so.

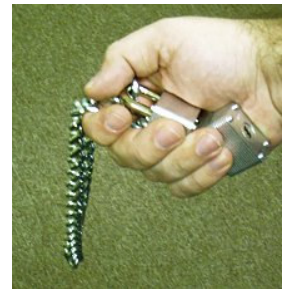
Attach your locks to the ends of the chain. The resulting weapon is a *manrikigusari* of contemporary construction that doubles as a bike chain or general-use security tether.

Intuitive Strikes with the Weighted Chain

Because of its substantial weight, the chain can be bundled up in the palm as a fist load for the most intuitive of striking. There isn't much to this. You simply slug your target with the mass of the chain and the padlocks. It's a little sloppy, but it works.



Using the padlocks as a handle (or perhaps more appropriately, as a handle *stop* to keep the chain anchored in your hand) you can use the folded length of the chain as a flogging tool. This is also a fairly simple technique, though now you have to contend with snapback from the chain after it strikes an unyielding surface.



Grappling with the Weighted Chain

Advanced grappling with the weighted chain is beyond the scope of this article. You should be able to see the implications, however. If you can swing and strike the chain against an opponent's limb or neck, the chain will *wrap* that object. Now, before I get ahead of myself, please understand that we're not talking about using the chain to deflect incoming full-speed blows.

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Most of the time you simply will not be fast enough to manage something like this. The chain can be used, however, to ensnare offered limbs in the course of a physical altercation, especially if you're dealing with someone stupid enough to grab at you or to throw a half-hearted fist or slap.

There are a number of protective postures you can adopt using the chain. The simplest is simply to hold the chain in front of you, ready to rotate it or loop it over targets of opportunity:



Photo by Phil Elmore

There are other methods, such as holding the chain cocked vertically behind your back. For more information I would suggest Gruzanski's aforementioned text on the topic, but I don't think the weapon needs to be that complicated.

Snaring any limb is a matter of both pushing and pulling. This not only entangles the limb but also produces a grating, sawing effect that is quite unpleasant when done properly. In the next two photos, my assistant Kevin (left) exaggerates a half-hearted lunge with his fist so I can demonstrate this pushing and pulling mechanic. Once you've got the limb, of course, you've

got to *move*, for holding it doesn't help you if you just stand there. If you understand how to follow up after applying a joint lock, you understand how to move out of danger while pulling the limb up and out to force your opponent's body down in an assisted "lock" like this.



Beginning of the push-pull mechanic: the chain is in position against the limb.



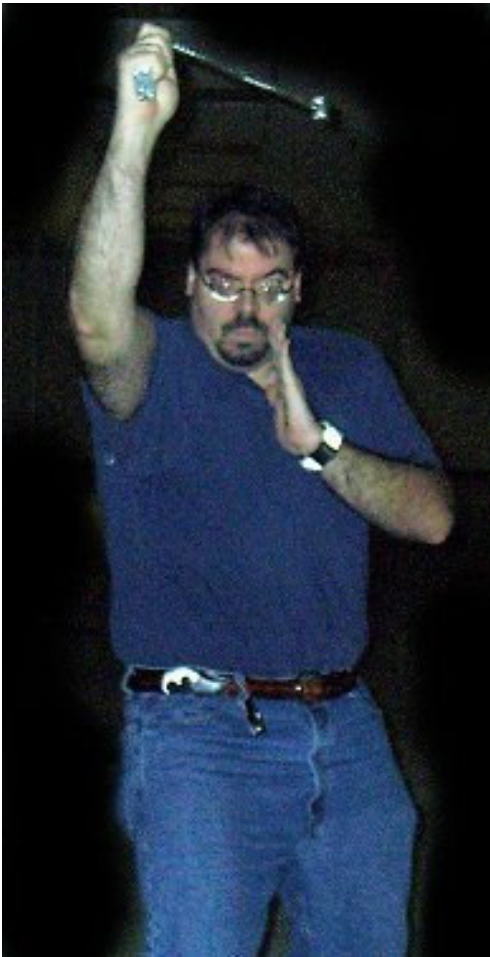
Pushing and pulling (which must be accompanied by moving or "zoning" the body) to ensnare the limb and facilitate follow-up.

Don't practice techniques like these on other people without qualified supervision.

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Swinging the Chain

Swinging the weighted chain in tight circles helps you build momentum for strikes and can have a deterrent effect when done before the body. (It won't fool someone who knows how to counter the chain, however – swinging the chain in figure eights just invites the knowledgeable opponent to grab and thus neutralize it.)



Overhead "helicopter" swing.

No one can teach you how to do this beyond imparting the concept. You must practice moving the chain (please wear eye protection until you have it down) to get a feel for how the weapon moves – and how it moves when you take the swing into a strike or cast.

One of the simplest swings is the overhead "helicopter" movement, from which the chain can be brought easily into a forward strike with a whip of the arm (the circular motion is accomplished using the wrist alone).

Casting the Chain

Casting the chain is a method of whipping it out to strike a target without preliminary swinging. The chain is held bunched in the palm with one weight forward. The arm is then thrust forward and the thumb and forefinger opened to facilitate the cast. It is the last three fingers of the hand that retain the chain (for, as in most grips, it is these three fingers that exert the most power in gripping an object).



With practice, you'll be able to "load" your hand with the weighted chain and then lash out with it, casting it into the target of your choice within an effective range that is the length of your chain. I can hit pretty much whatever I aim at now, and if I can learn to do it, you certainly can.



Casting the chain. Note position of the fingers.

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Snapback

Any flexible weapon will *snap back* after hitting a target. The only way to cope with snapback is to follow through with your strikes and do a lot of practice to learn the feel, mechanics, and tendencies of the weapon. Be sure to wear eye protection, train under qualified supervision, and do your best not to thunk yourself in the head with your weighted chain. I've managed to practice with the weapon successfully without incurring major injury, but there is always the possibility. Never practice with weapons, especially unfamiliar weapons, if you are tired or distracted.



Chain cast immediately after full extension, showing the beginning of the snapback.

No single article can leave you fully equipped to wield an unfamiliar weapon, but these concepts should get you started. The *manrikigusari* is an ancient weapon that remains relevant in contemporary self-defense. Practice often – and practice safely. ♠