

FUNAKOSHI GICHIN AND SHOTOKAN KARATE

Funakoshi Gichin (船越 義珍) was born in the Yamakawa district of Shuri in 1868, the year of the 'Meiji restoration.' He suffered from recurrent illness for much of his childhood, and for this reason his parents sent him in 1879 to study karate with Asato Anko (安里 安恒) (1827–1906). Finding that his health improved as his training progressed, the young Funakoshi took to the art with enthusiasm. Later he became a student of Itosu Anko (糸洲 安恒) (1831–1915), whom he regarded as his principal teacher. His original intention was to enter the medical profession. He qualified for entry to the medical school of Tokyo University, but after the Meiji restoration the university was required to accept only students willing to repudiate all aspects of pre-Meiji Japanese culture. Funakoshi's family was among what was called the ganko-to (頑固党) – the obstinate party. Among other things they declined to abandon the old-style chompage (丁髷) 'topknot' hairstyle that the Japanese had prohibited. Excluded from the university, Funakoshi became a schoolmaster (though, to the displeasure of his parents, he cut off his topknot anyway). (It may seem extraordinary to westerners that someone should allow the course of his life to be influenced by something so trivial as a hairstyle; but westerners find it hard to understand the importance of pride and 'face' (mentsu; 面子) in pre-World War II Japanese culture.)



Funakoshi Gichin in later life

Funakoshi was the Okinawan teacher who more than any other was responsible for the establishment of karate on the Japanese mainland. He did not begin to teach karate until 1901, when he was thirty-three years old. In 1906 he was instrumental in forming the Okinawa Shubokai (沖縄修防会) (Okinawa Martial Arts Association), of which he became chairman in 1913. Within a few years his reputation as a karate

teacher was firmly established. In 1917 he was invited to represent Okinawa at a demonstration at the Butokuden (武徳殿) (Martial Virtues Temple) in Kyoto. In 1921, Crown Prince Hirohito visited Okinawa and Funakoshi was again invited to give a performance, by which the future emperor was favourably impressed. Finally, in May 1922, he was asked by Kano Jigoro (嘉納 治五郎) (1860–1938), the founder of Judo, to give a demonstration of his art at the first All-Japan Athletics Exhibition at Ochanomizu, Tokyo. This event was something of a turning-point in Funakoshi's life. So encouraging was its success that he decided to relocate permanently to Japan, and remained in Tokyo until his death at the age of 88 in 1957. It is sometimes suggested that financial difficulties had something to do with this relocation, but we do not know whether this is so or not. At all events, Funakoshi Osensei lived apart from his wife and family back in Okinawa for more than twenty years.

Much of the technical content of what is now called Shotokan karate – especially its kicking techniques – was introduced by Funakoshi Osensei's third son Yoshitaka (義豪) (1906–1945), an exceptionally gifted karateka despite suffering throughout his life from the tuberculosis of which he died at the age of thirty-nine. Funakoshi Gichin's historical significance lies mainly in his determined efforts to secure the acceptance of karate as a Japanese art and to create a foundation upon which a distinctively Japanese karate might be built. To do this he had to work patiently to overcome the inherent conservatism of the Japanese and a certain tendency to look down on Okinawa. The Ryukyu Islands were, after all, effectively a Japanese conquest, and many Japanese were inclined to regard the Okinawans as mere colonials whose culture should not be emulated. Well understanding the importance of recruiting young men, Funakoshi Osensei established karate clubs at Keio, Waseda, Hitotsubashi, Takushoku, Chuo, Gakushuin and Hosei universities, and he was one of the first teachers to adopt the practice of writing the word karate as 空手 rather than 唐手: that is, as 'empty hand' rather than 'Chinese/T'ang hand.' He also introduced into karate the kyu/dan system that had been adopted by Kano Jigoro as a means of ranking judo students.

Funakoshi himself did not give his 'style' a name. Like many early teachers, he did not favour the idea of separate styles or schools, believing that karate should eventually be unified into a single art that might 'pursue an orderly and useful progress into man's future' (*Karate Do: My Way of Life*, p. 38). In 1939 he built a dojo in Tokyo that became known as Shotokan: "Shoto's hall" (Shoto (松濤, 'Waving Pine') was the pen name with which Funakoshi signed his poems and calligraphies); but the synecdoche by which 'Shotokan' became the name of a 'style' originated with Funakoshi's students rather than with Funakoshi Osensei himself.

Another organisation called Dai Nihon Karate-do Kenkyukai (大日本 空手道研究会) was founded by Funakoshi in 1930 and in 1936 changed its name to Dai-Nippon Karate-do Shotokai (大日本 空手道松濤會). One sometimes comes across the expression 'Shotokan Ryu,' but this has never been in general use among Shotokan karateka. The most widely established and influential Shotokan organisation now in

existence is the Japan Karate Association (Nihon Karate Kyokai: 日本 空手 協会), founded in 1949; though many smaller organisations have emerged also, partly as a result of unfortunate disputes between prominent Shotokan teachers.



*Funakoshi Yoshitaka: Funakoshi Gichin's third son,
said to be responsible for much of the technical
content of modern Shotokan karate*

Modern Shotokan practice is divided more or less equally between the three elements of kihon (基本) ('fundamentals'), kata (型) and kumite (組手), though Funakoshi himself strongly disapproved of jiyu kumite (自由組手), 'free sparring' and the competitiveness that it involves. The list of Shotokan kata now published by the Japan Karate Association is as follows (those marked with an asterisk are the original fifteen that Funakoshi began to teach in Tokyo; and see below for the name changes that he introduced). The list was expanded to 26 or 27 after the formation of the Japan Karate Association in 1949.

Taikyoku shodan (太極初段) (Funakoshi Yoshitaka composed six beginners' kata called Taikyoku; but of these only Taikyoku shodan is now regularly practised, and even this is not used in all Shotokan dojo).

Heian shodan (平安初段).*

Heian nidan (平安二段).*

Heian sandan (平安三段).*

Heian yondan (平安四段).*

Heian godan (平安五段). *

Bassai dai (披塞大).*

Jion (慈恩).*
 Enpi (燕飛).*
 Kanku dai (觀空大).*
 Hangetsu (半月).*
 Jutte (十手).*
 Gankaku (岩鶴).*
 Tekki shodan (鉄騎初段).*
 Tekki nidan (鉄騎二段).*
 Tekki sandan (鉄騎三段).*
 Nijūshiho (二十四步).
 Chinte (珍手).
 Sōchin (壯鎮).
 Meikyo/Rohai (明鏡).
 Unsu (雲手).
 Bassai sho (披塞小).
 Kankū sho (觀空小).
 Wankan (王冠).
 Gojūshiho sho (五十四步小).
 Gojūshiho dai (五十四步大).
 Ji'in (慈陰).

As part of his project of distancing karate from its perceived 'peasant' origins, Funakoshi Osensei changed – 'Japanified' – the Okinawan names of several of the kata that he taught when he relocated to Japan. (It should be added that these changes have not met with universal approval, and there have been recent efforts to find more satisfactory ways of writing the Okinawan kata names in Japanese kanji, especially by the distinguished karate historian Kinjo Akio.)

SHOTOKAN NAME

TRADITIONAL NAME

Heian (平安)

Pinan (平安)

Heian is the *kun yomi* (訓讀) (i.e. the Japanese reading) and Pinan the *on yomi* (音讀) (Chinese reading) of the same Kanji, 平安, which denote 'peace/tranquillity.' Heian is also the name given to the period of Japanese history between 794 and 1185 noted

for a remarkable flowering of classical Japanese culture. The Heian/Pinan kata were abridged by Itosu Anko from the long kata called Kushanku (see below) and apparently also from an ancient (and now lost) kata called Channan. Itosu wished to devise a series of kata especially suitable for use by beginners. The Heian kata are a little more elaborate than their older, Pinan, counterparts, largely thanks to innovations introduced by Funakoshi Yoshitaka.

Tekki (鉄騎)

Naihanchi (ナイハンチ)

Funakoshi's chosen name Tekki (鉄騎), 'Iron horseman,' is a reference to the strong 'equestrian' stance (kiba dachi, 騎馬立ち) in which the Tekki kata are performed. The traditional Okinawan Naihanchi is performed (for instance by Wado Ryu karateka) in a rather higher and slightly pigeon-toed stance. The Tekki/Naihanchi kata are unique in being performed stepping only in a sideways direction, to left and right, as if one were standing with one's back to a wall. It is sometimes suggested that the Shodan, Nidan and Sandan versions were originally connected parts of one long kata that was divided into three parts by Itosu Anko. Naihanchi (the word is sometimes transliterated as Naifanchi or Naifuanchi) seems to be southern Chinese in origin, but its exact provenance is obscure.

Bassai (披塞)

Passai (パッサイ)

Bassai (披塞) is 'overcoming obstacles' or 'seizing a fortress.' Before adopting the change of name from Passai to Bassai Funakoshi wrote the word in katakana, as パッサイ. Kinjo Akio suggests that it may at some time have been written as 豹と獅子 (Bao shi, in the Chinese reading of the kanji), which is 'Leopard and Lion.' It is quite plausible to suppose that the Passai/Bassai kata are related to the southern Chinese Leopard and Lion boxing schools. It is thought that Funakoshi Osensei learnt both the dai (large, 大) and sho (small, 小) forms of this kata from Itosu Anko.

Kanku (観空)

Kushanku (クーシャンク or 公相君)

Kanku (観空) is 'looking at the sky' or 'looking at emptiness,' a name derived from the gesture with which the dai (大) version of the kata begins (in some schools, incidentally, Naihanchi kata begins with a similar gesture). Kushanku (クーシャンク or 公相君) is the name of the Chinese emissary from Fukien who is said to have introduced the kata into Okinawa. As in the case of the Bassai pair of kata, it is thought that Funakoshi Osensei learnt both the dai (大) and the sho (小) forms from Itosu Anko. It will be seen readily that the five Heian kata are 'embedded' in Kanku dai.

Hangetsu (半月)

Seisan (十三)

Hangetsu (半月) – ‘half-moon’ – is so called from the long crescent-shaped stance called hangetsu dachi (半月立ち) with which it begins. Seisan or Seishan (十三) is ‘thirteen,’ though this is probably a reference not to the number of ‘techniques’ in the kata but to the traditional symbolic significance of thirteen as a factor of 108. Seisan is an ancient kata, probably of southern Chinese origin, that now exists in five or more quite different forms. Funakoshi’s Hangetsu differs significantly from the versions of Seisan practised in other schools, e.g. Goju Ryu and Wado Ryu.

Gankaku (岩鶴)

Chinto (沈頭)

Gankaku (岩鶴) is ‘crane standing on a rock,’ a reference to the one-legged stances that occur in the kata. Chinto is usually thought to be the name of the Chinese teacher (called Annan in some sources) who according to tradition first taught the kata to Matsumura Sokon.

Empi (燕飛)

Wanshu (腕秀 or 汪輯)

Empi (燕飛) is ‘flying swallow’; Wanshu written as 腕秀 is ‘excellent wrist’; as 汪輯 it is ‘Wangshu,’ thought to be the name of a Chinese emissary and exponent of the Fujian White Crane system who introduced the kata to the Tomari district of Okinawa in the late seventeenth century.

Meikyo (明鏡)

Rohai (鷺牌)

Meikyo is ‘clear mirror’; the Shotokan Meikyo is in a certain sense a new kata in its own right: a creative synthesis of three kata called Rohai (‘crane vision’) developed by Itosu Anko from an older Tomari te kata that he learnt from Matsumora Kosaku (松茂良興作) (1829–1898). All three Rohai kata are still practised in Shito Ryu (糸東流) dojo, but they look very different from their Shotokan descendant.

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For more information see:

Funakoshi Gichin, *Karate Do: My Way of Life* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1975).

Kinjo Akio, *Karate Denshin-roku* (Okinawa: Tosho Centre 1999).