

A SHORT HISTORY OF KARATE

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KENKYO-HA GOJU KARATE KEMPO KAI

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IN MEMORY OF
JOHN O'BRIEN

1949–2015

FRIEND AND FELLOW MARTIAL ARTIST

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PREFACE

This short history of karate makes no claim to completeness. A great deal has been omitted; some of what is included is open to debate and would benefit from more discussion. The only purpose of these pages is to give the karateka a broad idea of the origins of his or her art. The final chapter – intentionally controversial – is intended to stimulate thought and reflection on what modern karate is, can be and should be. Anyone who disagrees with us or wishes to correct or discuss anything is more than welcome to get in touch with us. We will do our best to reply to polite communications fully and promptly.

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In this Second Edition we have added a small amount of new material and corrected a few errors that have been pointed out by readers. Our thanks are especially due to Omoto Kazunori for numerous corrections and observations. Responsibility for the opinions expressed in these pages lies with the authors alone.

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1

OKINAWAN BEGINNINGS

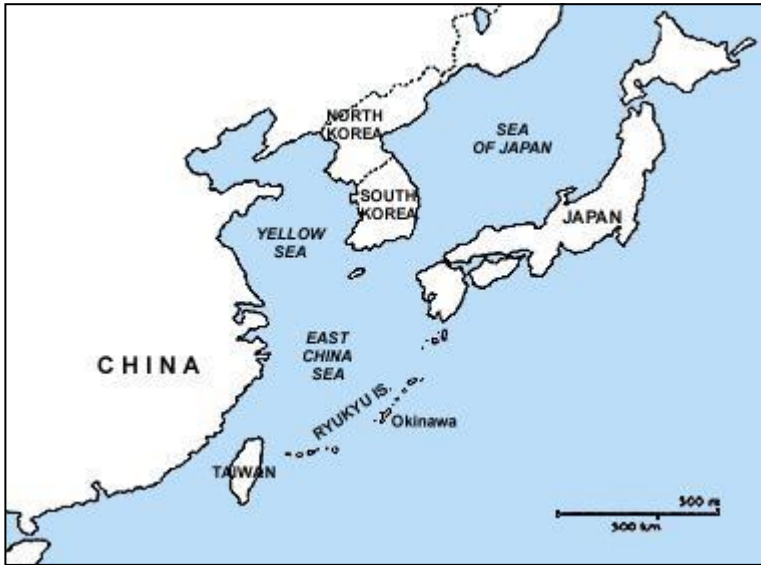
IN MOST PEOPLE'S minds, the expression "martial arts" produces an image of the fighting arts of East Asia; but all cultures and societies have their martial arts. No doubt it is part of the nature of human creatures to fight, if only to defend themselves and their resources against aggressors. To this extent, it is pointless to try to carry the search for the origins of any fighting art too far into the past, because there probably never were human beings not possessed of a repertoire of aggressive and defensive techniques, practised at various levels of sophistication. In the final analysis, the martial arts are only the natural movements of the human body trained and ordered to the specific purposes of attack and defence.¹

The popular perception of karate usually includes the assumption that it is a Japanese art. It is often, though incorrectly, called a Samurai art. In fact its origins lie somewhat to the south-west of mainland Japan, in the Ryukyu Islands (琉球諸島, Ryukyu shoto). These islands comprise an archipelago of small inhabited and uninhabited land masses extending between the Japanese mainland and Taiwan. It is on the largest of them, Okinawa Island (沖縄本島,

¹ The term Martial Arts was used in relation to the combat systems of Europe as early as the 1550s; an English fencing manual of 1639 used it in reference to the "Science and Art" of swordplay. See, e.g., John Clements, "A Short Introduction to Historical European Martial Arts," *Meibukan Magazine* (January, 2006), pp. 2–4.

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Okinawa honto, or 沖縄島, Okinawa jima), that the history of karate begins. Since 1879 the word Okinawa has been used to denote the modern prefecture of Japan that includes the entire Ryukyu archipelago; but, for the purposes of karate history, Okinawa usually means Okinawa Island, with the centres of population in the south of the island being of special importance.



A map showing the size and location of the Ryukyu Islands in relation to Japan

During the fourteenth century,¹ as a result of conquest, alliances and commercial expediency, the numerous tribal fiefdoms that had long existed on Okinawa Island coalesced into three small kingdoms or principalities: Hokuzan (北山, “Northern Mountain”), Chuzan (中山, “Central Mountain”) and Nanzan (南山, “Southern Mountain”). The period between 1322 and 1429 is known to historians as the Sanzan (三山, “Three Mountains”) era of Okinawan history, but relations between the three principalities

¹ For the reader’s convenience we shall almost always use “European” dates.

were unstable and never entirely peaceful. Hokuzan, in the northern part of the island, was the largest in terms of territory and population; Nanzan, the smallest, occupied the extreme southern tip; Chuzan between the two had the advantage of commanding the major trading port of Naha. Thanks mainly to this advantageous position, Chuzan had by the beginning of the fifteenth century achieved a position of military and economic dominance over the other two kingdoms. Sho Hashi, (1371–1439), prince of Chuzan, conquered and annexed Hokuzan in 1419 and Nanzan in 1429, thereby creating a unified Ryukyu kingdom. The capital of the kingdom was established at Shuri, within easy reach of the maritime facilities of Naha.¹

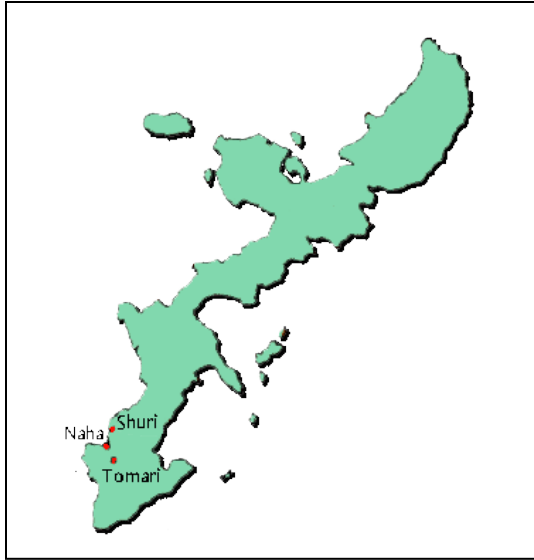
The art that we now know as karate originated among the Pechin class of Okinawa as a method of empty-handed fighting called *te* (手) or Okinawa *te* (沖繩手).² Mainland Japanese, accustomed to take a lofty attitude towards their Okinawan cousins, tended in the early part of the twentieth century to regard Okinawa *te* as a peasant art, not to be mentioned in the same breath as the *koryu* (古流) – old school – arts of the Japanese gentleman. Strictly speaking, however, it was not practised by the ordinary people of Okinawa. The Pechin (親雲上) class comprised a feudal cadre of officials and warriors, divided into several levels of seniority or importance and located near the top of the Ryukyu kingdom's complex social hierarchy. The class equivalent to the Samurai of Japan, whom they tended in later years to imitate, their main traditional functions were to enforce the law and provide military service when necessary. It is said that Pechin families were careful to keep their fighting techniques away from the eyes of outsiders, and transmitted them as secret family arts from father to eldest son. This fact, if it is a fact, suggests that, originally, there would have been a number of variant family styles or methods of *te*, just as we

¹ For a detailed social and political history of Okinawa see George Kerr, *Okinawa: The History of an Island People* (Tuttle, 1958; revised edition 2000).

² "Te" = "hand" or "technique."

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find different family styles in the Chinese martial arts, but we have no information about what these might have been. During the nineteenth century it became customary to refer only to three, named after the places with which they were most associated: Shuri te, Naha te and Tomari te (these places were originally separate, but are now part of the same conurbation at the southern end of Okinawa Island.¹



Okinawa Island, showing the locations of Shuri, Naha and Tomari

We have made some mention of the political history of Okinawa because political events in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries have a significant bearing on the early development of karate. The word “kingdom” does not really give a clear impression of the kind of polity over which Sho Hashi presided. Even after the unification of the three principalities, the tiny

¹ To give an idea of scale, “[t]he whole Shuri/Naha/Tomari triangle is about the same size as Golden Gate Park in San Francisco or Central Park in New York City” (Bruce D. Clayton, *Shotokan’s Secret: The Hidden Truth Behind Karate’s Fighting Origins*; Black Belt Communications, 2005, p.5).

Ryukyu kingdom was hardly a major power. To all intents and purposes it was a tributary state of China, dependent on China for both trade and political support and with a large floating Chinese population. It was the recognition and material support extended to Sho Hashi by China in 1421 that enabled him to achieve and consolidate his position at the head of a unified kingdom, and, in response, he greatly expanded the island's trade and diplomatic links with China. He did not inaugurate those links, however. They had been in place in some form for more than half a century. No doubt Okinawa te began as an indigenous method of fighting or self-defence, but Chinese influences had begun to make themselves felt as long ago as 1372, when commercial relations with the Chinese Ming dynasty were established by Prince Satto of Chuzan. During the late fourteenth century visitors from China – especially from Fujian province in the south – began to arrive in Okinawa in significant numbers. In 1392 or thereabouts a contingent of Chinese families – traditional sources say thirty-six – migrated to Okinawa from Fujian province for the purposes of cultural and commercial exchange. Especially significant is the fact that these families established an enclave of scholars, bureaucrats and craftsmen – one visualises it as a sort of sophisticated Chinatown – in the Kumemura district of Naha City.¹ This enclave, which remained in existence until Japan's annexation of Okinawa in 1879, became a thriving centre of Chinese culture and learning. From it, either intentionally or by the usual processes of social osmosis, knowledge of many Chinese arts and sciences was transmitted to the host culture – including knowledge of the Chinese fighting arts collectively known as quanfa.² The fighting arts that diffused into Okinawa consisted mainly, though by no means exclusively, of the

¹ The “thirty-six families of Kume” (久米三十六姓) may be an explanatory myth simplifying a much more complex and prolonged process of migration from southern China.

² Quanfa (also romanised, according to the Wade-Giles system, as chuan fa) is “fist way,” a term equivalent to the Japanese word kempo (拳法). It is more traditional and more satisfactory than the relatively recent “kung fu” and the modern Chinese “wu shu.”

various “Crane” styles associated with Fujian province. After Sho Hashi’s unification of the Ryukyu kingdom, cultural interchanges with China became a great deal more frequent and intimate than hitherto, and many Okinawan public servants were sent to China for the purposes of study, diplomacy and commerce. As a consequence, the fighting arts of Okinawa, already subject to persistent Chinese influences, were modified more rapidly and more thoroughly by such influences from the early years of the fifteenth century. There may have been other influences also – there were, for instance, trade missions to Thailand under Sho Hashi – but such influences are slight by comparison with those of Chinese provenance. For this reason the indigenous te of Okinawa came in the course of time to be called “tode” or “karate” (唐手), “T’ang hand” or “Chinese hand.” This expression had become commonplace by the early years of the nineteenth century.

The political unification of Okinawa had another effect that is important for our purposes. In 1429, by reason of the instability prevailing at the beginning of the Ryukyu kingdom’s period of consolidation, Sho Hashi forbade the carrying of weapons by all members of the Pechin class apart from his personal bodyguard at Shuri. An established warrior caste thus found that it had for the most part become an *unarmed* warrior caste. The ban seems eventually to have passed into abeyance or been ignored, but it was introduced again in 1609, after the invasion of Okinawa by the Shimazu clan of the Satsuma province of Japan.¹ From the early fifteenth century onwards, therefore – in contrast to the state of things in Japan, where sword arts were paramount – the fighting arts of Okinawa tended to develop in ways that placed special emphasis on unarmed or empty-handed combat. As a further effect of the prohibition of weaponry, the Ryukyu kingdom also saw the development of what is now called Okinawan kobudo (沖繩古武道): an art that makes use of ordinary domestic and agricultural imple-

¹ For this important event in Okinawan history see Stephen Turnbull, *The Samurai Capture a King, Okinawa 1609* (Osprey Publishing, 2009); and see p. 19, below.

ments as improvised weapons. These weapons include rice-flails, staves, sickles, oars and rice quern handles. Okinawan kobudo nowadays has little or no practical application, but it is still practised as a traditional art, sometimes as part of the curriculum of Okinawan karate schools.¹



It is from the three historical methods or schools of Okinawan tode – Shuri te (首里手), Naha te (那覇手) and Tomari te (泊手) – that almost everything that we recognise as “modern” karate developed. Before the late eighteenth century we have little in the way of historical source material to go on, but from about 1750 we have a good deal of information about the prominent teachers of these methods (though some of it is confused over points of detail and some is of doubtful reliability). The history of modern karate in its formative stages consists largely of the biographies of these teachers.

Shuri te

The earliest Shuri te teacher of whom we have any knowledge is Sakugawa Kanga (佐久川 寛賀) (1733–1815) (also called Sakugawa Satsunuku), whom one often sees referred to as the “father” of Okinawan karate. In about 1750 Sakugawa began his martial arts training with an Okinawan martial artist called Takahara Pechin (高原 親雲上) (1683–1760). Takahara had himself studied under the noted kobudo exponent Chatan Yara (北谷 屋良) (1668–1756), who had in turn studied xingyiquan and qigong in Fujian province under a teacher called Gong Xiangjun. Takahara seems to have been the first Okinawan teacher to emphasise the ethical dimensions of te – compassion, humility and love – alongside its technical and instrumental aspects. In about 1756, he suggested to

¹ See Donn F. Draeger and Robert W. Smith, *Comprehensive Asian Fighting Arts* (Kodansha International, 1980); Sid Campbell, *Kobudo and Bugei: The Ancient Weapon Way of Okinawa and Japan* (Paladin Press, 1999). Somewhat confusingly the word kobudo is also used to denote the ancient “koryu” arts of Japan.

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Sakugawa that he study at Kumemura with a Chinese martial artist called Gong Xiangfu or Kushanku (公相君), a native of Fujian province who had been dispatched to Okinawa as a diplomat. Kushanku himself is said to have studied quanfa with a monk of the southern Shaolin Temple in Fujian province, though this piece of folklore is of dubious validity.¹ At all events Sakugawa spent some six years studying with Kushanku, and after his death (ca. 1762) composed in his honour the kata that is still called Kushanku (also called Kanku dai, a name devised for it in the 1930s by Funakoshi Gichin).² When he began teaching in Shuri, Sakugawa became known as Sakugawa Tode – “Chinese hand Sakugawa.” This sobriquet is one of the earliest occurrences, if not the first occurrence, of the expression “tode.”



*Sakugawa Kanga.*³

¹ There is some question as to whether there ever was a “southern” Shaolin temple. Even in the eighteenth century martial artists liked to claim a Shaolin connection, but the famous monastery in Henan province is so far away from Okinawa that it may have been necessary for the purposes of plausibility to invent a nearer one in the south.

² Also attributed to him is the bo kata called Sakugawa no kun.

³ Notice the “topknot” hairstyle, a symbol of warrior nobility, prohibited by the Japanese after 1879. But whether this drawing is a true

One of Sakugawa Kanga's most distinguished students was a native of the Yamagawa district of Shuri called Matsumura Sokon (松村宗棍) (ca 1797–1889). Sakugawa was in his late seventies when the young Matsumura approached him, and not too keen to take on another student, but the old gentleman accepted the lad as a favour to Matsumura's father, who was a friend and apparently anxious about his son's incipient delinquent tendencies. Matsumura studied with Sakugawa from about 1810 to 1815 and is said to have shown unusual ability from the first. He also became a noted scholar and calligrapher. In 1816 he entered the service of the royal family of the Ryukyu kingdom as a bodyguard and martial arts instructor, eventually becoming the chief bodyguard of King Sho Ko (1787–1839). He acquired a reputation as an exacting teacher of great physical strength, speed and personal presence, apparently able to defeat an opponent simply by the "look of death" in his eye.¹ His royal service earned him the titles of Chikudun Pechin (筑登之親雲上)² and Bushi (武士) ("warrior"). It is said that he acquired this title after a successful contest with a bull.

It seems that Matsumura several times travelled to China and Japan on government service. He studied quanfa in China: some versions of his biography say that he studied at the "southern" Shaolin temple; others identify Chinese masters called Ason, Iwah and Wai Xinxian as his teachers. In the Satsuma province of Japan he also studied the Jigen Ryu style of swordsmanship with a Samurai exponent of the art called Ijuin Yashichiro. Returning to Okinawa he taught the kata Naihanchi, Passai, Seisan, Chinto, Gojushiho, Kushanku and Hakutsuru (the last of which is unique

likeness of Sakugawa is open to doubt; it looks suspiciously modern to us. There exists also a photograph of an old man with a long white beard that is sometimes represented as being of Sakugawa, but Sakugawa died more than a decade before the first permanent photographic image was produced.

¹ See Funakoshi Gichin, *Karate-do: My Way of Life* (Kodansha, 1981), ch. 2.

² Chikudun Pechin is the lowest of the three Pechin ranks; the others are Pekumi Pechin (親雲上) and Satunushi Pechin (里之子親雲上).

to the Matsumura line of transmission).¹ He is said to have learnt the kata Chinto from a Chinese pirate or castaway called Chinto or Annan, whom he was sent to arrest and found himself unable to subdue. He is said also to have learnt one or more kata called Chiang Nan or Channan from another Chinese teacher who had come to Shuri on diplomatic business. These Channan kata are now lost, but they are believed to have formed the basis of the first two of the five elementary kata now known as Pinan or Heian. Matsumura, like Takahara, attached great importance to the ethical aspects of martial arts practice when carried to its highest level: self-development, discipline, virtue, sincerity, peace and harmony.²



Matsumura Sokon

¹ Hakutsuru (白鶴) is "White Crane"; the kata was composed by Matsumura evidently by way of homage to the Chinese lineage of his art. There are now several kata called Hakutsuru, all supposedly related in various degrees to Matsumura's original one, though there seems to be some controversy over the authentic form of the original Hakutsuru kata.

² See Matsumura's letter of 13 May, 1882 to his student Ryosei Kuwae: George W. Alexander, *Okinawa: Island of Karate* (Yamazato Publications, 1991), p. 43.

The importance of Matsumura “Bushi” to karate history lies chiefly in the fact that he systematized the various Okinawan and Chinese elements of Okinawa te into a more coherent system than anything that had existed previously. This system became known as Matsumura Shorin Ryu (松村少林流) (“Matsumura Shaolin School”), though it is not clear whether this name was devised by Matsumura himself or by his student Itosu Anko (see below). At all events, it represents a candid acknowledgement of the Chinese roots of the art. It is also possible, though not clearly established, that it was Matsumura who coined the expression Shuri te. Shorin Ryu exists today in a number of variant forms – Kobayashi Ryu (小林流),¹ Matsubayashi Ryu (see p. 17), Shobayashi Ryu (少林流)² – all of which are more or less related to Matsumura’s original version. When Matsumura died, his system passed to his grandson Matsumura Nabe (松村那倍) (1860–1930),³ who passed it to his nephew Soken Hohan (祖堅方範) (1889–1982). The present head of the school is Soken Hohan’s pupil Kise Fusei (吉瀬普成) (b. 1935). A claim of some kind was made in the 1980s by an American called Glenn Premru to be Soken Hohan’s USA representative, but doubt has been cast on the legitimacy of this claim.⁴

Matsumura’s student Itosu Anko (糸洲 安恒) (1831–1915) was another native of the Yamagawa district of Shuri, born into the minor aristocracy of Okinawa and educated in the Chinese classics and the art of calligraphy. Small and unhealthy as a child

¹ Founded by Chibana Choshin (知花 朝信) (1885 – 1969). Some sources say that it was Chibana who first used the name Shorin Ryu.

² Founded by Shimabuku Eizo (島袋 永三) (b. 1925), the younger brother of Shimabuku Tatsuo: see. pp. 62–70, below.

³ Another grandson, Chitose Tsuyoshi (千歳 強直) (1898–1984), became an assistant to Funakoshi Gichin and subsequently founded the school known as Chito Ryu.

⁴ Glenn Premru’s Okinawan Karate Federation seems to have been defunct for some years. Another American, George Dillman, claims to have been introduced to previously secret techniques by Soken Hohan during a three-hour private lesson in 1972, but this claim has been vigorously contested.

he began his martial training with Matsumura at the age of fifteen. In adult life he became a senior civil servant in the service of king Sho Tai until the abolition of the Okinawan monarchy in 1879. Thereafter he was a teacher, first at the Shuri Jingo Elementary School, and later at the Okinawa Prefectural Dai Ichi College and the Prefectural Teacher Training College. He did not invent his own version or “style” of tode, but he conscientiously assimilated and popularised the Shuri te taught by Matsumura and adapted it to educational purposes of his own. It is this that secures for him a significant place in the history of Karate.



Itosu Anko. This image is enlarged from a group photograph; the identity of the young man in front of Itosu is not known

Itosu was possibly the earliest karate teacher to promote the study of the art outside the traditional model of a closely super-vised personal relationship – often a “live-in” relationship – between teacher and pupil. His principal achievement – if we are right to regard it as an achievement (see chapter 4) – was to bring about the introduction of Shuri te into the Okinawan secondary school system

and to promote its practice by large organised masses of students. The supposed advantages of this are set out in a long letter that Itosu sent to the Okinawan Prefectural Education Department in Meiji 41 (i.e. in 1908).¹ In pursuance of his educational goals he devised the series of simplified kata called Pinan, suitable for use by schoolboys and capable of being learnt relatively easily. These are abridged from the Kushanku and Chiang Nan/Channan kata that Itosu learnt from Matsumura. He also broke down the long Naihanchi kata taught by Matsumura into the three shorter kata now called Naihanchi (or Tekki) shodan, nidan and sandan (the original "long" Naihanchi is lost, though there have been conjectural attempts to reconstruct it from the shorter Naihanchi kata currently practised. According to the statements of many of his subsequent students, Itosu taught and created a number of other kata that have since become familiar elements of curricula derived from the Shuri te tradition. He is said also to have invented the helical or "corkscrew" punch that is a characteristic of modern karate (though this is sometimes attributed to Matsumura Sokon). Itosu seems to have been the first to use the regimented or mechanical style of class teaching that has now established itself universally. Among his many students were Mabuni Kenwa and Funakoshi Gichin (see pp. 43–57, below). It is as the teacher of these pivotal figures, and as the *de facto* inventor of karate teaching to large groups as distinct from individual students, that Itosu is important as a link in the historical chain that we are examining.

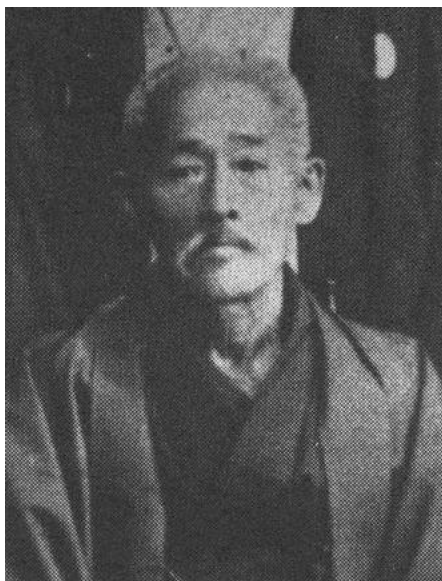
Naha Te

Higaonna (Higashionna) Kanryo (東恩納寛量) (1853–1916)² may be regarded as the first exponent of a distinct Naha te style. He was

¹ This letter is printed in full in Nakasone Genwa's *Karate-do Taikan* (空手道大観) (*A General Survey of Karate-do*) (1938). For an English translation of this book see M.McKenna, *An Overview of Karate-do* (Kowakan Karatedo Ltd., 2009).

² (The kanji of his name are pronounced "Higaonna" in Okinawa, and "Higashionna" in Japan.)

born into a relatively prosperous commercial family in the Nishimura district of Naha City and at the age of fourteen or fifteen began to study Lohan quan (“Monk Fist”) with a teacher called Aragaki Seisho (新垣世璋) (1840–1918). Aragaki was an official interpreter at the Okinawan royal court who had apparently studied in Fuzhou City, Fujian province, with a teacher called Wai Xinxian – possibly the same Wai Xinxian that some sources identify as a teacher of Matsumura Sokon. Highly regarded in his day, Aragaki Seisho’s students are said to have included Funakoshi Gichin, Mabuni Kenwa and Uechi Kanbun (see pp. 70–75, below). Aragaki was known for teaching the kata Unsu, Seisan, Shihohai, Niseshi and Sanchin.¹ It is possible that Higaonna learnt Sanchin and Seisan kata from him: Higaonna is usually said to have learnt a version of Sanchin in China, but Aragaki was certainly teaching it on Okinawa during the 1860s and 1870s.



Higaonna Kanryo

¹ Two kobudo kata are also attributed to him: Aragaki no kun and Aragaki no sai.

In March 1873 Higaonna migrated to Fuzhou, possibly taking with him a letter of introduction to Wai Xinxian from Aragaki. According to some accounts, he remained in China for fifteen years, though others say that he was there for only three (from 1877 to 1880). Some say that he went to China specifically to study the martial arts; others suggest that his anti-Japanese political sympathies made it necessary to go into exile at a time of tension between Okinawa and Japan.¹ He appears to have trained in a number of styles with a number of teachers, but his principal teacher is identified, under several variant forms of his name, as Ru Ru Kyo, Ryu Ryu Ko, To Ru Ko, Liu Liu Gung, Liu Liu Ko or To Ru Ko. Higaonna never wrote this person's name down (it has been suggested, though it seems unlikely, that Higaonna was unable to write) and there has been a good deal of speculation as to exactly who he was. It has been suggested that there never was such a person and that Ryu Ryu Ko (etc.) was actually the name of a place.² This suggestion is not plausible, however (see p. 24, below), and has not found wide acceptance. Another suggestion is that the various forms of the name that have been transcribed from the oral tradition are aliases or nicknames of Xie Zhongxiang (1852–1930), the founder of the Fujian Whooping Crane method of quanfa. This seems to be the most widely held belief as to the identity of Higaonna's teacher and, for want of anything better, we are inclined to accept it, though it has to be acknowledged that the matter is far from straightforward. Higaonna – only a year younger than Xie Zhongxiang – seems at first to have been a domestic servant or factotum rather than a formal student. The legend is that Higaonna rescued Xie Zhongxiang's daughter from a disastrous flood and, in gratitude, Xie Zhongxiang accepted him as a pupil. This, however, is the kind of folklore motif that it is impossible to authenticate.

¹ I.e. in the years immediately before the Japanese annexation of Okinawa as a prefecture in 1879, when Okinawa was divided into pro- and anti-Japanese factions. See pp. 19–21, below.

² Another suggestion is that Ru Ru Kyo is in fact the Chinese form (or a Chinese pronunciation) of Higaonna's own name, 'Kanryo.'

Higaonna returned to Okinawa in the 1880s and began to teach a style combining his earlier knowledge of Okinawa te with the Fujian White Crane methods that he had acquired in China. According to his student Kyoda Juhatsu (許田重発) (1887–1968)¹ Higaonna taught four kata: Sanchin, Sanseiryu, Seisan and Pechurin (more usually called Suparinpai); though some sources say that he also knew and taught – though perhaps not to Kyoda



*Xie Zhongxiang, Higaonna Kanryo's
probable teacher*

Juhatsu – Kururunfa, Saifa, Seiunchin, Seipai and Shisochin kata. It seems likely, however, that the earliest versions of the kata taught by Higaonna were rather different from the ones practised today. For our purposes the most important of Higaonna's students are Miyagi Chojun (see pp. 23–35, below) and Mabuni Kenwa.

¹ Kyoda Juhatsu is the founder of a relatively little-known version of Naha te called Tou-on Ryu (東恩流) – “Blessing from the East School.”

Tomari te

With respect to the number of modern styles that trace their lineages from it, Tomari te is the least fruitful of the three historical families of Okinawa te. It is also the weakest in terms of an identifiable separate identity. At a fairly early stage it became largely indistinguishable from Shuri te; this is a statement that the purist may wish to dispute, but for all practical purposes it is true. The Shorin Ryu variants that currently exist are, in effect, all merged or syncretic versions of Shuri te and Tomari te.

The principal Tomari te teacher of whom we have knowledge is Matsumora Kosaku (松茂良興作) (1829–1898), who seems to have taught versions of the kata Naihanchi, Rohai, Passai, Wankan and Wanshu. The legend (and the story has all the hallmarks of legend) is that he and a fellow practitioner called Oyodomari Kokan (親泊興寛) (1827–1905) studied with a Chinese pirate called Annan who had been shipwrecked on the Okinawan coast and lived in a cave in the hills to the north of Tomari.¹ Matsumora's principal students were Motobu Choki (本部朝基) (1870–1944), who also studied with Matsumura Sokon and Itosu Anko; and Kyan Chotoku (喜屋武朝徳) (1870–1945). Motobu Choki is the founder of the Motobu Ryu school of karate which has enjoyed something of a revival in recent decades under the leadership of his son Chosei (兆世) (b. 1925). Motobu Choki and Kyan Chotoku were both teachers of Nagamine Shoshin (長嶺将真) (1907–1997) who in 1947 founded the school called Matsubayashi Ryu (松林流).² With the death of Nagamine Shoshin's son Takayoshi (高兆) in June 2012 the headship of this school passed to Taira Takayoshi (平家高兆) (b. 1943). (Kyan Chotoku will presently reappear again, as the principal teacher of Shimabuku Tatsuo.

¹ One assumes that this is the same person as the Annan (or Chinto) said to have taught the kata Chinto to Matsumura Sokon.

² Nagamine wrote two valuable books in Japanese, now available in English translations: *The Essence of Okinawan Karate-Do* (Tuttle, 1976) and) and *Tales of Okinawa's Great Masters* (Tuttle, 2000).



What we have outlined in this chapter is a very simplified picture of what may be called the prehistory of modern karate. The three mainstream styles of Okinawa te are by no means as distinct from one another as a brief account of them suggests. Certainly the distinction between Shuri te and Tomari te is tenuous – arguably so much so as to be practically meaningless. Also, the historiography of early karate – indeed, of karate as a whole – is more than ordinarily difficult. It is clear in broad terms that what we now know as karate is a hybrid art with a complex set of origins, but it is not possible to describe those origins in detail. The most that can be said is that the immediate ancestor styles of the “modern” karate schools arose on Okinawa between the fourteenth and the nineteenth centuries, and that they consisted of indigenous fighting arts increasingly modified by the influence of Chinese quanfa: largely, though not entirely, by the various Crane methods of Fujian. It is to some consideration of the modern karate schools that we now come.

2

THE MODERN KARATE SCHOOLS

FROM THE EARLY part of the seventeenth century, the small and vulnerable Ryukyu kingdom came increasingly under the military and economic sway of Japan. Powerful interests within the federation of the Tokugawa shogunate¹ had every reason to seek control over an important commercial link with China and South East Asia. The refusal of the Ryukyu kingdom to support the Japanese invasions of Korea during 1592–1598 or to give proper recognition to the Shogunate had created tensions that could conveniently serve as a pretext for hostilities, and in April 1609 the Shimazu clan of the Satsuma province – the Ryukyu kingdom’s nearest Japanese neighbour – launched an invasion of the Ryukyu islands. The king, Sho Nei (1564–1620), realising the futility of resistance to a large and well-equipped army, capitulated after only three days of fighting. Sho Nei remained nominally king, but under conditions of vassalage. The Shimazu clan took *de facto* control of the Ryukyu islands, dividing them into two large administrative areas and closely controlling all Ryukyuan commercial activity.

The invasion of 1609 marked the end of what is called Ko Ryukyu (古琉球), “ancient Okinawa.” For more than two centuries thereafter the Ryukyu kingdom found itself in the uncom-

¹ The feudal Tokugawa shogunate ruled Japan from 1603 until the restoration of imperial rule (the “Meiji restoration”) in 1868.

fortable position of being a satellite or tributary of both Japan, as represented by the Satsuma clan, and China, though with Japan as the dominant partner. This division of loyalties was a source of perennial tension, and in 1872, the kingdom finally became a feudal province of Japan and the monarchy was abolished. The last king, Sho Tai (1843–1901), was required to migrate to Tokyo and went home to Okinawa only once in the remainder of his life. Finally, in 1879 the Ryukyu Islands were formally annexed by Japan and became, as they still are, the Okinawa prefecture.

The removal of so many cultural and political boundaries after 1879 prepared the way for the spread of karate – though it seems to have been a comparatively gradual spread – from Okinawa to the Japanese mainland. As a result of this spread there arose, alongside the more or less *ad hoc* and informal practices of Okinawa, the organised and standardised schools or “styles” that have become so familiar. In this chapter, we shall say something about the development of these schools during the twentieth century. The word “style” is not altogether satisfactory – the Japanese usually use the words *ryu* (流), “school” or *kai* (会), “association” – but we shall use it as a matter of convenience.

It was in conjunction with the dissemination of Karate to Japan that the word “karate” acquired what is now its established meaning as the name of an empty-handed – weaponless – martial art. Wishing to systematise and unify their art, a number of prominent teachers and other interested parties met at the Showa Kaikan (Meeting Hall) in Naha City on 24 October, 1936. Their principal objective was to create an association for the regulation of what had evolved into much more than a local Okinawan practice.¹ They seem, indeed, to have been especially anxious to stress the *Japanese* character of karate; one’s

¹ The minutes of this meeting are printed as an appendix to Toyama Kanzen, *Karatedo Dai Hokan* (Tsuru Shobo, 1960), pp. 377–392. In 1937, as a result of the 1936 meeting, a committee calling itself the Okinawa-ken Karate-do Koshin Kai (沖縄縣空手道更新会) (Prefecture of Okinawa Association for the Improvement of Karate-do) was established.

impression is of a public relations exercise intended to dissociate the art from its provincial origins and establish its claim to respectability on mainland Japan. Presently the discussion turned



This is a photograph of the committee established in 1937 after the 1936 meeting. Back row, left to right: Shiroma Shinpan (城間 真繁) (1890–1954), Chitose Tsuyoshi, Chibana Choshin, Nakasone Genwa (仲宗根源和) (1895–1978). Front row, left to right: Kyan Chotoku (喜屋武朝徳) (1870–1945), Yabu Kentsu (屋部憲通) (1866–1937), Hanashiro Chomo (花城 長茂) (1869–1945), Miyagi Chojun (宮城 長順) (1888–1953)

to the question of what the official name of the art should be. Tode and karate, written as 唐手, were terms that had long been in more or less indiscriminate use; but, as we have seen, 唐手 is “Chinese hand” or “T’ang hand.” The author and publisher Nakasone Genwa¹ pointed out to the meeting that the expression “Chinese hand” was not popular in Japan, and a sense emerged

¹ Nakasone, a karateka himself, though not a prominent one, was responsible for the first publication of many of the writings of Funakoshi Gichin.

that it ought to be changed. After some discussion, it was agreed that the word karate should be retained but that in future it should be written as 空手, “empty hand” rather than as 唐手 (the kanji 空(empty) and 唐 (China) are both pronounced in the same way). The adoption of this homophone was not completely an innovation; there are occurrences of 空手 in written sources before 1936 (the term was used as early as 1905 by Hanashiro Chomo); but it now became the recognised general name of the art formerly known as tode or Okinawa te.¹

The teachers who assembled in Naha City in 1936 had as one of their objectives the eventual unification of existing karate styles into a single art with a common set of kata. Gizaburo Furukawa, the Okinawa Prefecture’s Director of Physical Education and one of the interested parties present at the meeting, said:

There are many schools or styles of karate at present; I think we should do all we can to unify them. I understand that there are small differences between the Shuri style of karate and the Naha style of karate.² I think both should be unified and we should create the kata of a Japanese karate-do ... I think karate would become popular all over the country if we had unified kata. For example, we can begin by establishing ten kata as Japanese karate. The name of each kata should be translated into Japanese.³

This aspiration to unity has not been realised or even approached. On the contrary, schools and sub-schools of karate – often hostile to

¹ Part of the reason for the dislike of 唐手 in Japan seems to have been the Japanese antipathy to all things Chinese after the Sino-Japanese war of 1894–1895. Such antipathies can be very trivial and long-lived. But one has to take account also of the evident fact that Okinawan teachers very much wanted their art to be accepted in Japan and as Japanese, possibly for no reason beyond social aspiration.

² Notice that by now there is no reference to a separate Tomari te “style” of karate.

³ He is here referring to the fact that many traditional Okinawan kata have Chinese names. The translation of these names into Japanese was never undertaken systematically and has never been completed or, indeed, carried very far.

one another – multiplied during the twentieth century and may well go on doing so in the future. The three ancestor styles of Shuri te, Naha te and Tomari te have produced numerous offspring, and we have space here to deal only with the most prominent of them.¹ In order to avoid seeming to imply an order of priority, we shall consider them in alphabetical order. The reader should understand also that actual lines of succession – “family trees” – are vastly complex, and naturally become ever more so with the passage of time and the multiplication of the generations. We cannot here give more than a sketch; nor do we intend to go into the perennially controversial question of the authenticity of the various lineages or lines of transmission.

The Larger Schools

Goju Ryu (剛柔流)

Miyagi Chojun, the founder of Goju Ryu, was born in the Higashimachi district of Naha. (his original given name was Matsu; it was changed to Chojun after the death of his father in 1893, when he was adopted into the family of his uncle, a prosperous businessman). When he was ten or eleven years old Miyagi began to study with a Tomari te practitioner called Aragaki Ryuko (新垣龍子) (1875–1961)² who in 1902 introduced him as a promising student to Higaonna Kanryo, who thereafter became his principal teacher. Apart from a two-year period of military service during 1910–1912, Miyagi remained with Higaonna until the latter’s death in 1915. During his military service he studied judo and, as a non-commissioned officer in the army medical corps, acquired a knowledge of anatomy and

¹ For an account of some of the smaller and less well known schools see Mark Bishop, *Okinawan Karate: Teachers, Styles and Secret Techniques* (Tuttle Publishing, 1999).

² It is not clear whether Aragaki Ryuko was related to the Aragaki Seisho who had taught Higaonna Kanryo. The prominent Goju Ryu teacher Aragaki Shuichi (b. 1929) is Aragaki Ryuko’s grandson.

physiology that he was later to put to use in devising the routine of junbi undo (準備運動) – warm-up or conditioning exercises – that is still used by many Goju Ryu karateka.

Shortly before Higaonna's death Miyagi travelled to China with a Chinese friend called Wu Xiangui (1886–1940), known in Okinawa as Gokenki (吳賢貴), who was an exponent of Fujian White Crane quanfa. Initially they seem to have had no particular study plan in view. Their immediate purpose was to try to locate the school of Higaonna's teacher Ryu Ryu Ko – possibly they made the journey at Higaonna's suggestion or request. They were able to locate Ryu Ryu Ko's grave and copy out the inscription on the gravestone, but they could find no trace of the school; they succeeded only in making contact with an elderly former student of Ryu Ryu Ko who told them that his art was no longer practised.¹ On this occasion Miyagi remained in Fujian province for some time, where he is said to have studied baguazhang and Shaolin quan. Some sources say that he visited China three times in all.



Miyagi Chojun

¹ All this of course tells against the suggestion that there was no such person as Ryu Ryu Ko (etc.).

On his return to Okinawa, Miyagi began to teach a synthesis of what he had learnt from Higaonna Kanryo and what he had acquired in China: a combination of the existing Naha te with the hard, linear techniques of Shaolin quan and the soft circular defensive movements of baguazhang. It was not until 1926 that, with the financial assistance of his friend Gokenki (who was a prosperous tea merchant), he opened a dojo in Naha City. His other partners in this venture were Hanashiro Chomo, Motobu Choyu (本部朝勇) (1857–1928) (the older brother of Motobu Choki) and Mabuni Kenwa. Each of the four taught his own version of tode, with additional instruction in Fujian White Crane provided by Gokenki.¹ This enterprise was short lived, however, succumbing to financial difficulties in 1929.

The name Goju Ryu came into being more or less by accident. In 1929, one of Miyagi's senior students, Shinzato Jinan (新里仁安) (1901–1945), gave a demonstration of Miyagi's art at a martial arts festival in Kyoto. He was a little taken aback when somebody asked him what the name of his ryu was, because, so far, no one had thought to give it a name; presumably it was still thought of as Naha te. On the spur of the moment – presumably for the sake of saying something rather than nothing – Shinzato replied that it was called Hanko Ryu (半硬流) (“Half-hard school”). When he told this story to Miyagi, Miyagi, after giving the matter some thought, decided on the name Goju Ryu (“Hard/ Soft School”). The name comes from the third of eight principles of quanfa listed in the ancient Chinese martial arts manual called (in Japanese) *Bubishi*: “Ho go ju don to” (法剛柔吞吐), “The method of hard and soft is breathing in and breathing out.”² The meaning of this pithy saying is hard to explain in writing (one almost wishes that

¹ The kata Kakufa, preserved in the Goju Ryu of Higa Seko (比嘉世幸) (1898–1966) is believed to have been taught or created by Gokenki.

² *Bubishi* (武備志) is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese Wubei Zhi, “A Record of Military Preparation.” This is the title of two different Chinese treatises, the second and shorter of which is the one referred to here. This important text has been translated into English by Patrick McCarthy: *Bubishi: The Classic Manual of Combat* (Tuttle, 2008).

Miyagi had stuck with Hanks Ryu), but Goju Ryu was the name he registered with the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai in 1933.¹

Miyagi visited mainland Japan several times between 1928 and 1931. Okinawan Karate was now solidly established there, especially in the universities, largely thanks to the exertions of Funakoshi Gichin (see below). The purpose of Miyagi's visits seems to have been to promote his own style and secure its acceptance by the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai. In 1931, at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, he met a young law student and enthusiastic karateka called Yamaguchi Jitsumi (山口実美) (1909–1989) who, with Miyagi's encouragement, founded the Ritsumeikan Daigaku Karate Kenkyu



Yamaguchi Gogen in later life

¹ The Dai Nippon Butoku Kai (大日本武徳会, "All Japan Martial Virtue Association") was a martial arts regulatory body founded in 1895 under the auspices of the Japanese Ministry of Education and sanctioned by the Meiji emperor. It was abolished after World War II at the insistence of the allies and re-established in 1953, though not as an "official" organisation. In 1952 a similar body called the Kokusai Budoin (国際武道院, "International Martial Arts Institute") was established in Tokyo. Miyagi Chojun was the first karate teacher to be granted (in 1936) the Kyoshi (教士) title by the Dai Nippon Butokukai.

Kai (立命館大学空手研究会) (Ritsumeikan University Karate Study Association). This was the first karate club to be founded in western Japan and soon acquired a reputation as a centre of karate excellence. Favourably impressed by his ability and enthusiasm, Miyagi appointed Yamaguchi as his personal representative in Japan, deputing to him the task of overseeing the spread and development of Goju Ryu there. At the same time he gave him the name Gogen (剛玄) – “Hidden Strength” – by which he is now always known.¹ It was Yamaguchi who in 1932 designed the famous Goju clenched fist badge, apparently based on a drawing of Miyagi Chojun’s right hand; it was initially intended as the emblem of the Ritsumeikan University karate club, but eventually it became the badge of Yamaguchi’s International Karate-do Goju Association (see pp. 34–35, below).

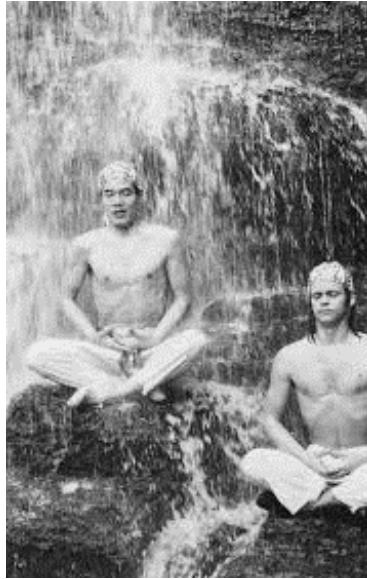


The badge designed by Yamaguchi Gogen; the kanji beneath the fist say “Go Ju Ryu Kara Te Do”

A religious mystic of striking appearance and great personal magnetism, Yamaguchi arguably did more than anyone in the Goju community to foster Miyagi’s art in Japan and beyond. In his day he was probably the best known of all karate masters, not

¹ He is also often commonly referred to as “the Cat” (Neko; 猫), partly, it seems, because of his long hair (like a lion’s mane) and partly because of his agility and speed.

least because of his extraordinary training methods (the images of Yamaguchi meditating under a waterfall are known all over the world). He was born in Miyakonojo Shonai, Miyazaki Prefecture, near Kagoshima City on the island of Kyushu: with him and his generation, karate began for the first time to be disseminated by people of non-Okinawan origin.¹



*Taki renshu (滝練習) – waterfall practice – by
students of Yamaguchi Gogen*

The essence of Goju Ryu as currently practised consists of twelve kata, usually (but not always) taught in the following order:

Sanchin (三戦).

Gekisai dai ichi (撃砕第一).

Gekisai dai ni (撃砕第二).

¹ It is implied in his autobiography, *Karate: Goju-Ryu by the Cat* (International Karate-Do Goju-kai, 1966), that Yamaguchi regarded himself as Miyagi Chojun's successor as head of the Goju Ryu school. This has certainly not been accepted by those students who were with Miyagi at the end of his life.

Saifa (碎破).

Seiunchin (制引戦).

Shisochin (四向戦).

Sanseiryu (三十六).

Seipai (十八).

Kururunfa (久留頓破).

Seisan (十三) (the Goju realisation of this kata is only one of several different versions practised in different schools).

Suparinpei (壹百零八).

Tensho (転掌).

Apart from the two Gekisai kata and Tensho (see below), these are said to be descendants – though they are probably much modified descendants – of the Chinese forms that Higaonna Kanryo had studied and passed on to Miyagi and that Miyagi himself had acquired through his own independent study.¹ Sanchin kata, versions of which occur in a number of Chinese arts, was performed by Higaonna Kanryo with the fingers extended in a nukite (貫手) “spear hand” shape and with less muscular tension than is found in modern Goju interpretations (it is still practised in this way by Uechi Ryu karateka). The practice of performing it with the hands clenched into fists and with continuous “dynamic tension” seems to have originated either with Kyoda Juhatsu or Miyagi Chojun himself, as does the stertorous “Valsalva” breathing which many Goju karateka still employ and which is regarded by some as undesirable or injurious to health.² Miyagi also developed an

¹ The Chinese names and meanings of the kata, and especially their relation to original Chinese “animal” forms, have been obscured by the various attempts made by teachers to “translate” the original Fujian dialect into Japanese homophones. A good deal of work on this interesting and complex subject has been done by the Okinawan karate researcher Kinjo Akio. See his *Karate Denshin Roku (A True Record of the Transmission of Karate)*, Okinawa, Toshō Center, 1999.

² A good deal that is dangerous has been written about “ibuki” (気吹) breathing techniques while performing Sanchin kata. “Valsalva”

abbreviated form of Sanchin kata, leaving out the two 180° turns found in the longer form.¹ Both versions are practised in contemporary Goju dojo. The longer is called Higaonna no Sanchin (東恩納の三戦) (“Higaonna’s Sanchin”) or Sanchin dai (三戦大) (“Large Sanchin”); the shorter is called Miyagi no Sanchin (宮城の三戦) or Sanchin sho (三戦小) (“Small/Lesser Sanchin”).

Miyagi also composed three kata himself. In 1940, the committee of teachers formed after the Naha City meeting of 1936 was asked by the governor of Okinawa to devise “universal exercise” (普及, “fukyu”) kata that might be taught in schools as a means of enthusing pupils and developing their fitness for combat (this was at a time, it must be remembered, of imminent world war). In keeping with the general desire of the time to unify the various karate styles, these “universal” kata were to be independent of any existing school; or, to put it another way, potentially common to all schools. The task of composing them was deputed to Nagamine Shoshin of Shorin Ryu, and Miyagi Chojun. Miyagi’s contribution was the kata now known as Gekisai dai ichi (“Gekisai # 1”). Some time later he added a second elementary kata, based on the first, called Gekisai dai ni (“Gekisai # 2”). These are still practised as separate kata, though they resemble one another very closely.² Earlier, in 1921 or perhaps earlier, Miyagi composed the

breathing is the forcible exhalation of air against a closed or partially closed glottis. This “straining” increases intrathoracic pressure and causes a trapping of blood in the great veins, preventing it from entering the chest and right atrium. When the breath is released, intrathoracic pressure drops and the trapped blood is quickly propelled through the heart, producing an increase in the heart rate (tachycardia) and blood pressure. Immediately after this a reflex bradycardia (abnormally slow heart action) ensues. Especially in older adults these effects can be fatal. And see p. 66 n. below.

¹ An apocryphal story is that Miyagi, asked to give a demonstration before the emperor, eliminated the turns from Sanchin kata in order to avoid the discourtesy of turning his back on the emperor.

² Nagamine Shoshin’s fukyu kata is still practised as part of the syllabus of Matsubayashi Shorin Ryu. Because of the great similarity between the two Gekisai kata, some Goju teachers use it in preference to Gekisai dai ichi or ni.

kata called Tensho with the intention of modifying and balancing the tension or hardness of Sanchin kata with an element of suppleness or softness; in this sense, Tensho is perhaps the quintessential “go/ju” kata. It is usually taught last of all, though it seems illogical that this should be so. Some people suggest that Miyagi based it on the hand forms called Rökkishu (六氣手) illustrated in the *Bubishi*, though there is little resemblance between Tensho as now practised and the drawings reproduced in the *Bubishi*. Tensho looks superficially like a much simplified version of the Wing Chun form called Sil Lim Tao or Siu Nim Tao, which is itself related to the Fujian Crane systems.



Miyagi Chojun teaching Seiunchin kata¹

Sanchin and Tensho kata are customarily called heishugata (閉手形) (“closed hand kata”); the rest are kaishugata (開手形) (“open hand kata”). These terms bear no relation to the way in which the kata are performed, and their significance is not obvious. They

¹ This photograph, taken in 1929 at the Naha Commercial High School, is reproduced by permission of Guillermo Shinzato, a grandson of Shinzato Chijun, the karateka second from the right in the front row.

seem to have been intended to mean that the heishugata are esoteric (i.e. not given with an “open hand” to all comers), whereas the kaishugata are as it were the exoteric or “public” kata of Goju Ryu. This is not, however, a distinction that makes sense in the context of modern Goju Ryu teaching. Also, subsequent teachers – notably Toguchi Seikichi (渡口政吉) (1917–1998) and Otsuka Tadahiko (大塚忠彦) (1940–2012) – have added to and in varying degrees modified the original twelve kata established by Miyagi, so that there are now several “new” Goju kata, practised in some dojo and not others.



The twentieth-century history of karate in Okinawa and Japan is, of course, violently punctuated by World War II. Miyagi’s house and dojo in Naha City were destroyed during the war; his library was lost, his third son and two daughters were killed and many of his former students either lost their lives or were reduced to destitution. Miyagi himself suffered worsening cardiac and hypertensive problems in the years after the war, no doubt as a consequence of these stresses. During the final years of his life, even after his house had been rebuilt with the help of friends and students, he seems to have preferred to teach informally in his garden. In 1952 some of his surviving students created an organisation called the Goju Ryu Shinko Kai (剛柔流振興) (“Association for the Promotion of Goju Ryu”), of which Miyagi consented to become president in spite of his deteriorating health. Having struggled to revitalise Goju Ryu after the war, Miyagi died of a heart attack on 8 October, 1953, without having nominated a successor: his most probable successor, Shinzato Jinan, had died in 1944 during the American bombing of Okinawa.

The loyal nucleus of Miyagi’s students came together shortly after his death to discuss the question of a successor. They were not able to come to a unanimous agreement, not least because several people apparently claimed to have been appointed as Miyagi’s successor in



Shinzato Jinan

private conversations.¹ Goju Ryu was divided – not entirely amicably – into several lines of transmission. Miyazato Ei'ichi (宮里栄一) (1922–1999) was accepted as Miyagi's successor by many in the Goju community (including Miyagi's family) and continued to teach in Miyagi's garden dojo after his death. In 1957, Miyazato opened his own dojo, the Jundokan, in Asato, Naha City. Yagi Meitoku (八木明德) (1912–2003), opened his Meibukan dojo in the Daido district of Naha City immediately after Miyagi's death. Toguchi Seikichi founded an organisation called Shorei kan (尚礼館), opening his first dojo in Koza City, Okinawa, in 1954; in 1962 the first Shorei kan dojo was opened in Tokyo, and in 1966 the Shorei kan hombu dojo in Tokyo was built. Miyagi Chojun's surviving son Takahashi (敬) b. 1919) seems to have played no great part in the perpetuation and organisation of his father's art.

The most prominent contemporary Goju Ryu teacher – prominent not least because he has so assiduously sought publicity – is Higaonna Morio (東恩納 盛男) (b. 1938),² a lifelong

¹ See Toguchi Seikichi, *Okinawan Goju-Ryu II: Advanced Techniques of Shorei-Kan Karate* (Black Belt Communications, 2001), p. 26.

² Not related to Higaonna Kanryo.

and loyal disciple of Miyagi An'ichi (宮城安一) (1931–2009). There has, however, been a good deal of dispute about Miyagi An'ichi's own claim to have been a senior student of Miyagi Chojun (to whom, incidentally, he was not related).¹ A rather pointless controversy has also sprung from the fact that in 1984 Higaonna Morio accepted a ninth dan from Higa Yuchoku (1910–1994), a teacher of Shorin Ryu rather than Goju Ryu.² In 1979 Higaonna founded the International Okinawan Goju Ryu Federation (IOGKF), which now has branches in some 45 countries. Higaonna Morio is now almost certainly the world's best known exponent of Goju Ryu karate. Not the least of his contributions has been the large amount of written and video material he has produced over a period of more than thirty years.³

At the time of Miyagi Chojun's death, Yamaguchi Gogen's Japanese branch of Goju Ryu was already to an extent dissociated from Miyagi's Okinawan students. It swiftly made headway outside Japan also. In 1950 Yamaguchi had founded the International Karate-do Goju Association (IKGA) with himself as its head regardless of the fact that Miyagi was still alive. This organisation is now headed by Yamaguchi's third son, Yamaguchi

¹ Miyagi An'ichi was 22 years old when Miyagi Chojun died, and had studied Goju Ryu chiefly under the supervision of Miyazato Ei'ichi. In his book *The History of Karate: Okinawan Goju Ryu* (Dragon Books, 1998), Higaonna Morio seems to suggest that Miyagi An'ichi was Miyagi Chojun's true inheritor. This suggestion was contested emphatically by Miyazato Ei'ichi, and has been contested by others. It is, though, never possible to see the truth, if there is any truth, behind the constant political squabbles that infect the culture of modern karate.

² "Pointless" because (a) it is not unusual or objectionable for someone to be given an honorary dan grade as a mark of respect, and (b) Higa was acting not as a teacher of Shorin Ryu but in his capacity as president of an umbrella organisation, the Okinawan Karate and Kobudo Association (沖縄空手古武道連盟). The backbiting about this (and other things) appears to have originated with Miyazato Ei'ichi as part of a general animosity that he seems to have felt towards Miyagi An'ichi and Higaonna Morio.

³ In Europe he is especially remembered for his appearance in the 1983 BBC television documentary "The Way of the Warrior."

Goshi Hirofumi (b. 1942), and at the time of writing has branches in sixty countries. Yamaguchi Gogen's eldest son, Yamaguchi Gosei Norimi (b. 1935), is the head of his own organisation in the United States called Goju Kai Karate-do USA. Goju Kai (as the Yamaguchi offshoot of Goju Ryu came to be called) encourages competitive sparring, which the traditional Goju Ryu curriculum does not, and the traditional Goju Ryu kata are performed slightly differently by Goju Kai karateka; but these differences are certainly not marked enough to establish Goju Kai as a new "style." It is best understood as a "Japanified" interpretation of the Goju Ryu that Miyagi had developed from its Okinawan roots.

Kyokushinkai (極真会)

Kyokushinkai is the youngest of the major karate schools, and is said by some to be the most widely practised style in the world. It is by a long way the most challenging in terms of its training regime. That it is called "kai" (association) rather than "ryu" (school) suggests that its founder did not so much suppose himself to be inaugurating a new "style" as to be bringing together the most effective elements of others.



Oyama Masutatsu

Kyokushin karate was the creation of Oyama Masutatsu (大山倍達) (1923–1994). Its formal beginning is usually dated from 1964, though the name Kyokushin had been in use for several years before then. Oyama’s indefatigable self-promotion and the myths that he and his followers have fostered make it difficult to get at the true facts of his biography, but it is clear that he was a remarkable character.

Although he spent most of his adult life there, Oyama was not a native of Japan. He was born in a small village near the South Korean port city of Gunsan and spent much of his childhood on an aunt’s farm in Manchuria; his name originally was Yong I Choi. To say the least of it, he had no small opinion of his own potential. Apparently he became fascinated at an early age by the career of Otto von Bismarck and began to imagine a similarly great future for himself. He migrated to Japan at the age of fifteen and enrolled at the Yamanashi School of Youth Aviation, in the hope of becoming a military pilot. It was at about this time, no doubt with a view to integrating himself more easily into an environment that felt alien to him, that he adopted a Japanese name.¹ He did not become a Japanese citizen until 1964.

Oyama had already begun his martial arts training in Manchuria with an otherwise unknown teacher called Yi or Lee, a seasonal worker on his aunt’s farm, though presumably this initiation was not very extensive or thorough. In Japan, he studied Shotokan karate at Funakoshi Gichin’s dojo at Takushoku University. He achieved the rank of nidan (second dan) in two years, and by the time he joined the Imperial Japanese Army in 1943 he was a yondan (fourth dan). He also studied Daito Ryu aiki jujutsu under the ultra-nationalist Yoshida Kotaro (吉田 幸太郎) (1883–1966), who awarded him the menkyo kaiden (免許皆伝: a certificate affirming that one has mastered the whole of an art) now displayed in the Kyokushinkai hombu dojo in Tokyo.

¹ Oyama (大山) is “Great Mountain”: not a particularly uncommon name, but one has a feeling that it is typical of Oyama to have chosen it.

Intensely devoted to his country of adoption, Oyama served in the Pacific during World War II (there is a story that he almost became a kamikaze pilot). The surrender and occupation of Japan at the end of the war seems to have precipitated him – as it did many Japanese patriots – into a serious psychological crisis. It was at this point, overcome with grief and self-doubt, that he met a senior student of Yamaguchi Gogen's, a fellow Korean called So Nei Chu, who encouraged him to study Goju Ryu and who also turned his mind towards Nichiren Buddhism. In later life Oyama recorded his deep gratitude to So Nei Chu for rescuing him from a kind of spiritual despair. He also studied judo at the Sone Dojo in Nakano, Tokyo, achieving the rank of yondan in four years. In 1946 Oyama met the Japanese historical novelist Yoshikawa Eiji (1892–1962), author of the novel *Musashi*, a fictionalised life of the famous swordsman Musashi Miyamoto (1584–1645). The influence of Yoshikawa and his writing apparently opened Oyama's eyes to the true meaning of Bushido, the warrior code of feudal Japan.

Still restless and dissatisfied with himself and yearning for some elusive perfection, Oyama resolved to spend three years training body and mind in a harsh self-imposed solitude. In 1946, encouraged by So Nei Chu, he and a friend called Yashiro set off for Mount Minobi in Yamanashi Prefecture, intending to live and train there in conditions of self-imposed austerity. Yashiro returned to civilization after a few weeks. Oyama, made of sterner stuff, remained on the mountain for fourteen months, until the friend who had arranged to supply him with food sent a message saying that he could no longer afford to do so. After a short interval – during which he easily won the Karate Section of the 1947 Japanese National Martial Arts Championships – Oyama withdrew from the world again, this time to Mount Kiyosumi in Chiba Prefecture. There, according to his own account, he trained in solitude with fanatical dedication for another eighteen months. At the end of this time he felt that he had finally conquered himself.



Oyama Masutatsu: outdoor makiwara training

There is a good deal of the self-publicist and showman about Oyama, and much of what we know of his early life comes only from his own uncorroborated account of it, but he was clearly a karateka of extraordinary strength and ability. On his return from Mount Kiyosumi he continued to study Goju Ryu under Yamaguchi, eventually attaining the rank of hachidan (eighth dan); but he habitually pushed himself beyond what most people would consider reasonable limits. Most famously, he engaged in a series of bare-handed contests against bulls (possibly he remembered the old story of Matsumura Sokon's contest with a bull). Despite being seriously gored on one occasion in 1957, he is said to have done this fifty-two times and to have killed three of the bulls outright. In 1951 he started teaching Karate to US Army personnel stationed at various Japanese military bases and in 1953, after a year spent promoting karate in the United States, he separated himself from Yamaguchi's Goju and opened his own small dojo in Tokyo. Bigger and better dojo followed in 1957 and 1964. He began to

use the word Kyokushin in 1957, and in 1964 brought the various schools that were by then teaching Kyokushin karate into a central association called the International Karate Organisation Kyokushinkaikan. Thereafter, he dedicated himself – with outstanding success – to spreading Kyokushin karate throughout the world, through demonstrations, challenge matches and with the support of senior students chosen to represent him. In 1969 he inaugurated the All-Japan Full Contact Karate Open Championships, held every year, and, in 1975, the World Full Contact Karate Open Championships, held every four years. It is said that, by the end of Oyama's life, Kyokushin karate was being practised by some fifteen million people worldwide.



*Oyama Masutatsu wrestling with a bull
at some time in the 1950s*

Though it attaches so much importance to full-contact fighting, Kyokushin karate nonetheless has an extensive kata syllabus. The syllabus now varies somewhat between different schools and associations, but Oyama himself taught and practised the following:

Taikyoku (太極) # 1–3: these elementary kata were devised by Funakoshi Gichin's son Yoshitaka (see pp. 51–52; 54, below).

(Taikyoku is the Japanese rendering of the Chinese “taiji”; the idea behind the name is that within their simplicity they contain the ultimate principles of karate.)

Pinan (平安) # 1–5: these are the elementary or training kata extracted by Itosu Anko from the longer Kushanku and Chang Nian/Channan kata taught by Matsumura Sokon.

(The Taikyoku and Pinan kata are also performed within the Kyokushinkai in a way unique to it, called “ura” (裏, “reverse”), with backward spinning turns between each technique. This variant was devised by Oyama as an aid to balance and rapid mobility.)

Kanku (観空): Funakoshi Gichin’s name for Kushanku kata. Whereas Kushanku is the name of Matsumura Sokon’s teacher, Kanku is “looking at the sky.” The name (originally devised by Funakoshi Gichin) comes from the opening move of the kata, with the additional implication of “aspiring to higher things.”

Sushiho (五十四歩): this is a much modified version of the Okinawan kata that in other schools is called Gojushiho or Usheshi.

Bassai (披塞): also known as Passai, this is one of the Shuri te kata originally taught by Matsumura. Oyama seems to have removed it from the Kyokushin syllabus during the 1950s, but it was reinstated by some schools after his death.

Naihanchi (ナイハンチ): roughly the first third of the “lost” kata originally taught by Matsumura Sokon and divided into three separate parts by Itosu Anko. With minor differences it is the same as the Naihanchi of Wado Ryu and the Tekki shodan kata practised in Shotokan schools.

Gekisai # 1–2 and Tensho: the three kata composed by Miyagi Chojun.

Sanchin, Saifa, Seiunchin and Seipai: four of the traditional Naha te/Goju Ryu kata that originated with Higaonna Kanryo.

Yantsu (安三): a kata of uncertain origin, said by some sources to have been brought back from China by Miyagi Chojun's friend Gokenki. As far as we can discover, it is practised only within the Kyokushinkai; it shows clear signs, however, of being related to the Chinese Crane tradition.

Tsuki no kata (突きの型): a kata composed by Yamaguchi Gogen's student Tada Seigo (1922–1997) specifically to train punching techniques.

Garyu: (臥龍 or 臥竜) an energetic and difficult kata composed by Oyama Masutatsu himself. Garyu was Oyama's pen-name: it means either "reclining dragon" or (characteristically enough) "great man."

In addition to the above there are five modern Kyokushin kata called Sokugi Taikyoku. These were devised after Oyama's death along the lines of the Funakoshi Taikyoku kata, but with emphasis on kicking: sokugi (足技) is the same as – i.e. is a different pronunciation of the same kanji as – ashi waza: ("foot techniques").

It will be seen from this list that Kyokushin karate is an eclectic style, combining elements of Shuri/Tomari te and Naha te with innovations devised by Oyama himself. As we have suggested already, he perhaps intended not so much to found a new "style" as to bring together within a single association elements derived from the established traditions.

Not without reason did Oyama decide to call his association Kyokushinkai. The word means "extreme reality association" (most people say "ultimate truth association" as a more elegant translation). The practice of Kyokushin karate is certainly not a pursuit for the meek. At its centre is jiyu kumite (自由組手) – free fighting – done with uncompromising realism: full contact with no protective equipment and only blows to the head and groin forbidden (though kicks to the head are allowed). Brutal and quick effectiveness is prized more highly than artistic polish and

elegance. Before engaging in jiyu kumite the practitioner is required to go through an exceptionally demanding process of physical conditioning. The reputation of Kyokushin as the most gruelling of all karate styles is wholly deserved. The ultimate test of courage and endurance is called *hyakunin kumite* (百人組手): “one hundred man fighting.” The individual is called upon to fight one hundred opponents successively in rounds of about two minutes each with a minute’s rest between each one. To succeed in the test he must win at least half the rounds; if knocked down, he must not remain down for more than fifteen seconds. Needless to say, few people submit themselves to this test, and even fewer do so successfully. Oyama’s original idea was that completion of the *hyakunin kumite* would be a requirement for promotion to fourth or fifth dan, but this plan was – understandably enough – short lived. Oyama himself completed it three times in a row over the course of three days.



Oyama Masutatsu died (of lung cancer) on 26 April, 1994. His organisation had already suffered some degree of fragmentation as a result of quarrels occasioned at least partly by his own unpredictable and difficult personality. Nakamura Tadashi (中村忠) (b. 1942) had left in 1976 to found his own World Seido Karate Organisation; Oyama Shigeru (大山懋茂) (b. 1966) (no relation) left and founded the World Oyama Karate Organisation in 1981; Steve Arneil (b. 1934) of the UK founded the International Federation of Karate in 1991. Before his death Oyama had named the relatively junior Matsui Shokei (松井章圭) (b. 1963) as his successor – apparently to Matsui’s surprise. This development did not (to say the least of it) find favour with everyone. In the midst of litigation and acrimonious dispute Midori Kenji (緑健児) (b. 1962) and Matsushima Yoshikazu (松島良一) (b. 1947) formed breakaway groups of their own. At the time of writing there are at least seven Japanese organisations claiming to represent the Kyokushin tradition.

Shito Ryu (糸東流)

Shito Ryu is the creation of Mabuni Kenwa (摩文仁賢和) (1889–1952), a native of Shuri and a remote descendant of a distinguished fifteenth-century Okinawan warrior called Oshiro Kenyo. It is said that he suffered chronic ill health as a child, and it was with a view to strengthening his constitution that his parents sent him at the age of thirteen to study Shuri te with Itosu Anko. He remained with Itosu for seven years. Then, in 1909, Itosu – who was by now seventy-eight years old – recommended that he broaden his education by studying with another teacher. Mabuni's contemporary Miyagi Chojun introduced him to Higaonna Kanryo, with whom he studied Naha te until Higaonna's death in 1915. He is said also to have studied with several other teachers, including Aragaki Seisho and Miyagi Chojun's friend Gokenki.¹ As an adult Mabuni became a police officer and with the encouragement Itosu taught local law enforcement officers and school students in Shuri and Naha.

Mabuni does not seem to have travelled to China in quest of knowledge, and as far as we know there are no tall stories about him and his exploits. Between 1917 and 1928 he made a number of visits to Tokyo, where he became part of the general movement to popularise karate on mainland Japan. In 1927 he met Kano Jigoro (嘉納治五郎)(1860–1938), the founder of judo, who was apparently favourably impressed by his karate. Finally, in 1929, with Kano's encouragement, Mabuni took up permanent residence in the city of Osaka on Japan's main island of Honshu.

Mabuni's Okinawan martial arts education had made him acquainted with both the hard, linear techniques of Shuri te and the circular, close range methods characteristic of Naha te. Over a longish period the idea formed in his mind that the strengths of Shuri te and Naha te might be brought together in a new

¹ In those days, at least in Okinawa, it was common enough for a martial arts student to learn from a number of different teachers. The idea that one should have only one master and never depart from or question his teachings seems to be a characteristically Japanese idea.

synthesis. He began to teach this integrated style in 1929, opening a number of dojo in Osaka with the financial help of a prosperous student called Sakagami Ryusho (1915–1993), who was himself to become a distinguished Shito Ryu instructor.



Mabuni Kenwa

The teachers who first brought karate to mainland Japan often found themselves up against 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 disposed to regard the Okinawans as colonial bumpkins. Mabuni found that people in Osaka were mystified by his art and inclined to be hostile to it, and he applied himself constantly to devising new and more interesting ways of training. He was one of the first karate instructors to experiment with bogu kumite (防具組手): sparring using padded body armour. Having himself been a police officer in Okinawa, he adopted the practice of giving free instruction at various police stations across western Japan. He also encouraged women to practice – a thing then virtually unheard of – and produced

several introductory and instructional books for the use of students. Mabuni knew Funakoshi Gichin well, and the two are said to have exchanged many ideas.



Mabuni and a training partner wearing experimental body armour

In 1931 Mabuni created an organisation called Dai Nippon Karate-do Kai (大日本空手道会) – the All Japan Karate-do Association – to unite under one administration the various branches of his school (the “Dai” was later dropped from the name, possibly in modest recognition of the fact that his activities were at that time largely confined to the Osaka area). Presently, just as it had for Miyagi Chojun, the question arose of what the school should be called – since before any school could be recognised and formally registered with the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai it was required to have a name. Mabuni’s first choice was Hanko Ryu, “Half-hard School”; but on reflection he settled on the name Shito Ryu. Possibly this change of mind came about partly because he

knew that Hanko Ryu had already been briefly considered by Miyagi as a possible name of Goju Ryu. More substantially, he decided that he wanted the name of his school to reflect his indebtedness to his teachers: “Shi” (糸) and “to” (東) are, respectively, readings of the initial kanji of the names of Itosu Anko (糸洲安恒) and Higaonna Kanryo (東恩納寬量). (Also, the homophone “Shito” (私闘) is “personal struggle”; one suspects that the pun is intentional.) Shito Ryu was thus the name that Mabuni registered with the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai in 1939. Some Shito Ryu organisations claim with pride that Shito Ryu was the first karate school to be recognised by the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai, though this distinction seems in fact to belong to Goju Ryu.

Mabuni is said to have had an encyclopaedic knowledge of kata (he is reputed to have known in excess of ninety) and to have assimilated new kata with exceptional speed. As a syncretic style intentionally combining Shuri/Tomari te and Naha te elements, Shito Ryu has always been distinguished by its large number of kata, drawn from both Shuri/Tomari te and Naha te lineages. The following is the list initially prescribed by Mabuni.

Pinan # 1–5.

Naihanchi # 1–3.

Rohai (鷲牌), a kata that exists in three forms; it is related to, though not the same as, the Shotokan kata called Meikyo.

Bassai/Passai dai (“large”) and sho (“smaller”): two versions of the Bassai/Passai kata, though the “sho” (小) version does not much resemble the “dai” (大) version and is not obviously shorter or simpler than it.

Kosokun/Kushanku (公相君) dai and sho. Again, two versions of the Kushanku kata originally composed by Matsumura Sokon, with the “sho” version not noticeably shorter or less complex than the “dai” one.

Matsukaze (松風). This kata is unique to Shito Ryu. Matsukaze means “wind in the pines,” and the kata may be named after

the Noh play with the same title. We know of no clear account of its origin; it may be that Mabuni composed it himself

Jion (慈音).

Jutte (十手).

Ji'in (慈允).

Nijushiho (二十四步).

Wanshu (腕秀).

Chinto (鎮東).

Seisan: another version of the protean Seisan kata that appears also in Goju, Kyokushin, Shotokan, Wado and Uechi Ryu schools.

Gojushiho (五十四步).

Seiunchin.

Seipai.

Chinte (鎮定).

Unsu (雲手).

Sochin (壯鎮).

Kururunfa.

Mabuni attributed all these kata to either Itosu Anko or Higaonna Kanryo. Subsequently he composed several kata of his own: Juroku (十六), Aoyagi (青柳), Happscho (八方掌), Kenshu (拳掌), Miyajo (明淨), Shinpa (新破) and Shinsei (新生) (though this is almost identical to Miyagi Chojun's Gekisai dai ni). Shinpa kata – apparently inspired by Uechi Ryu – was unfinished at the time of Mabuni's death and was completed by his son Kenei. Aoyagi and Miyajo kata were composed specifically for use by women, though with slight alterations they are routinely used by men also.

To this considerable list, Shito Ryu schools and associations have added many more since Mabuni's death. Some schools now list

fifty or more kata in their syllabuses (including, for example, no fewer than twelve kihon kata and several different versions of Bassai/Passai and Rohai). It is hard to suppose that any Shito Ryu exponent knows and practises them all. It is difficult also to think that it is really necessary to study so many. One's impression is that Shito Ryu organisations have tended to amass kata for the sake of it, without too much attention being paid to repetition and redundancy. Mabuni himself, notwithstanding his own extensive knowledge, encouraged students to concentrate intensively on a few kata.



Mabuni Kenwa died at the comparatively early age of sixty-three on 23 May, 1952, leaving two sons: Kenei (1918–2015) and Kenzo (1927–2005) – both of whom subsequently declared themselves to be their father's successor. Mabuni Kenei – the older son and, according to tradition, his father's natural heir – became head of the western section of the Nippon Karate-do Kai in Osaka, and Iwata Manzo (1924–1993) assumed the headship of its eastern section in Tokyo. The two parts of the organisation were united in 1964 and became the Dai Nippon Karate-do Federation Shitokai, the name of which was changed in 1993 to the World Shito Ryu Karate-do Federation. This organisation, now led by Hisatomi Tokio (b. 1927), recognises Mabuni Kenei as having been the second soke (宗家) – family head – of Shito Ryu. In 1954, however, Mabuni Kenzo established an organisation called Seito Shito Ryu (also called Shito-Ryu International Karate Do Kai), having apparently been asked by his mother to take over the headship of the school in preference to his brother. It is said that it took him two years to prepare himself for the responsibility, though we know nothing of the family politics that must have influenced these developments. On his death Mabuni Kenzo was succeeded as head of the Seito Shito Ryu by his older daughter, Mabuni Tsukasa. In addition to these two organisations there are

now more than a dozen Shito Ryu associations, all of which trace some kind of lineage back to Mabuni Kenwa.

As is always true, it is impossible to arrive at an objective understanding of the political arguments that have led to such differences. The available accounts have all been produced by people who are committed to one side or another; nor are such quarrels particularly interesting. The school of karate called Shukokai (修交会) ("Friendship Association") founded in 1946 by Tani Chojiro (谷長治郎) (1921–1998) is a derivative or offshoot of Shito Ryu, but was not the result of any quarrel or dispute. Ironically enough, it has itself split into several independent associations since Tani Chojiro's death in 1998.

Shotokan (松濤館)

Despite the rival claim of Oyama Masutatsu's Kyokushinkai, it seems likely that Shotokan is the most widely practised style of karate in the world, thanks largely to the efforts and marketing acumen of its founder, Funakoshi Gichin (船越義珍) (1868–1957). Funakoshi was born into the minor Okinawan nobility in the Yamakawa district of Shuri. Like Mabuni Kenwa, he did not enjoy good health as a child (apparently he was born prematurely). For this reason his parents sent him at the age of eleven to study tode with Asato Anko (安里安恒) (1827–1906), whose son was a contemporary of his at school. Finding that his health rapidly improved with a regime of physical exercise, he took to the art with enthusiasm. Subsequently he became a student of Itosu Anko, whom he regarded as his principal teacher.

Superficially, measuring what is known of his personality against the brash extroversion of Oyama Masutatsu or the noted eccentricity of Yamaguchi Gogen, the cultured and literate Funakoshi is the last man in the world that most people would think of as being a karate master. 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 of 1868 the university's policy was to accept only students who were pre-

pared to repudiate all aspects of pre-Meiji Japanese culture, and Funakoshi's family was among what was called the ganko-to (頑固党) – the obstinate party. Among other things they refused to abandon the topknot “Samurai” hairstyle that the Japanese had prohibited. Excluded from the university, Funakoshi became a schoolmaster.¹



Funakoshi Gichin in later life

Apparently 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

¹ To the disgust of his parents, he eventually cut off his topknot anyway. It seems extraordinary that someone should allow his career to be decisively influenced by something so trivial as a hairstyle, but westerners find it hard to understand the importance of pride and “face” in pre-World War II Japanese culture. The legend (and perhaps it is only a legend) is that as late as 1969 Oyama Masutatsu vowed to commit seppuku (切腹) – ritual suicide – if a Japanese did not win the first All-Japan Full Contact Karate Open Championship. In the event a Japanese – Yamazaki Terutomo (山崎照朝) (b. 1947) – did win it.

Association), of which he became chairman in 1913. Within a few years his reputation as a karate master was established so firmly that in 1917 he was invited to represent Okinawa at a demonstration at the Butokuden (武徳殿) (Martial Virtues Temple) in Kyoto – at that time the official centre of the martial arts in Japan. In 1921, Crown Prince Hirohito visited Okinawa and Funakoshi was again invited to give a performance, by which the future emperor declared himself much impressed. Finally, in May 1922, Funakoshi was asked by Kano Jigoro to give a demonstration of his art at the first All-Japan Athletics Exhibition at Ochanomizu, Tokyo. This event was such a success that he decided to remain in Japan – leaving his wife behind him in Okinawa. He remained in Tokyo for the rest of his life. Some sources suggest that he was unable to return to Okinawa because of gambling debts run up by his oldest son Yoshihide (known as Giei) (船越良英) (1903–1961), but this may be a story put about by rivals. It seems to have originated from somewhere in the Wado Ryu family, whose founder is said to have been on bad terms with Funakoshi Giei.

Surviving footage of Funakoshi Gichin in action leaves one with the impression that, technically, he was not all that impressive, at least when judged according to modern standards. Indeed, much of the technical content of what is now called Shotokan karate – especially its kicking techniques, long-range attacks and deep rooted stances – was devised by his third son Yoshitaka (known as Gigo) (船越義豪) (1906–1945), an exceptionally talented karateka despite suffering for much of his life from the tuberculosis of which he died at the age of thirty-nine. Funakoshi Gichin's significance lies mainly in the fact that he was indefatigable in promoting karate on the Japanese mainland, thereby indirectly facilitating its spread to the rest of the world. In common with so many of his contemporaries he was determined to reinvent Okinawan karate as a Japanese art and to create a secure foundation upon which a distinctively Japanese karate might be built; in which enterprise he was on the whole more successful than Mabuni Kenwa. Well understanding the importance of

recruiting young men he established flourishing karate clubs at Keio, Waseda, Hitotsubashi, Takushoku, Chuo, Gakushuin and Hosei universities. He substituted Japanese names or readings for the traditional names of several Okinawan kata: Pinan became Heian; Kushanku became Kanku; Naihanchi became Tekki, and so on. He was one of the first teachers to adopt the practice of writing the word karate as 空手. He also introduced into karate the kyu/dan system that had been adopted by Kano Jigoro as a means of ranking judo students.



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

Beyond calling it karate Funakoshi did not give his style a name. In common with many of the early teachers, he was resistant to the idea of separate styles or schools, insisting that karate should eventually be unified into a single art that might “pursue an orderly and useful progress into man’s future.”¹ In

¹ Funakoshi Gichin, *Karate Do: My Way of Life*, p. 38.

1939 he built a dojo in Tokyo that became known as Shotokan: “Shoto’s hall”;¹ but the synecdoche by which the word Shotokan became the name of a “style” originated with Funakoshi’s students rather than with Funakoshi himself. One sometimes comes across the expression “Shotokan Ryu,” but this term has never been in widespread use among Shotokan karateka.²

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 and the competitiveness that it involves. The list of Shotokan kata now published by the Japan Karate Association is as follows:

Heian # 1–5: with minor differences, these are the same as the five Pinan kata devised by Itosu Anko. The pronunciation/reading of 平安 as “heian” was adopted by Funakoshi.

Bassai dai and sho.

Jion.

Empi (燕飛): Funakoshi’s name for the Tomari te kata originally called Wansu or Wanshu ((腕秀 or 汪輯).

Kanku dai and sho: Kanku is Funakoshi’s name for Kushanku.

Hangetsu (半月): Funakoshi’s name for Seisan; hangetsu is “half moon”: the kata is named after the crescent-shaped step with which it begins.

Jutte.

Gankaku (岩鶴): a modified and re-named form of Matsumura Sokon’s kata called Chinto.

¹ Shoto (松濤, “Waving Pines”) was the pen name with which Funakoshi signed his poems and calligraphies.

² Kase Taiji (加瀬泰治) (1929–2004), who taught in France during the 1970s and 1980s, founded a school called Shotokan Ryu Kase Ha (松濤館流加瀬派).

Tekki # 1–3: Funakoshi's name for Naihanchi. The shodan, nidan and sandan forms of it that are now practised are apparently the sections into which Itosu Anko divided the long Naihanchi kata taught by Matsumura.

Nijushiho.

Chinte.

Sochin: this kata was introduced into the Shotokan syllabus in a modified form by Funakoshi Yoshitaka.

Meikyo (明鏡): an amalgamated and re-named version of the three Okinawan kata called Rohai.

Unsu.

Wankan.

Gojushiho sho and dai.

Ji'in.

(Until about 1970 the kata now usually called Gojushiho sho was called Gojushiho dai, and vice versa. The legend is that a senior karateka announced at the All-Japan Karate Championships that he was about to perform Gojushiho dai but in a fit of absent-mindedness performed Gojushiho sho instead – and nobody liked to say anything. We do not know whether this story is true or not. As Winston Churchill used to say, if it isn't, it ought to be.)

Funakoshi Yoshitaka also composed six beginners' kata called Taikyoku; but, of these, all but the first, Taikyoku shodan, seem to have disappeared. Taikyoku shodan itself is not practised in many Shotokan dojo (see below).

Despite Funakoshi's declared commitment to the unification of schools or styles, Shotokan karate is best viewed as a modified – in some respects a highly modified – version of Shuri/Tomari te. It will be noticed that the list of Shotokan kata given above includes none of the Naha te kata that are found in Goju Ryu and Shito

Ryu.¹ Funakoshi considered that, like Mabuni Kenwa, he had brought together the best elements of the Shuri te and Naha te traditions, but it is difficult to see what basis this supposition has, at least with respect to kata practice.



Funakoshi Gichin died (of cancer) on 26 April 1957 at the age of eighty-eight. Predictably enough, internecine strife began at once. During his lifetime, Funakoshi had founded, or been instrumental in founding, two Shotokan organisations: the Dai Nihon Karate-do Kenkyukai (大日本空手道研究会) (All Japan Karate-do Research Association) in 1930 and the Nihon Karate Kyokai (日本空手協会) (Japan Karate Association, usually called the JKA) in 1949. When Funakoshi died, his eldest son Giei let it be known that he wanted his father's funeral to be organised by the older of the two associations, with which Funakoshi had been more closely associated (in 1936 it had changed its name to the Dai Nihon Karate-do Shotokai). The Japan Karate Association – then consisting largely of the university clubs of Keio, Takushoku and Hosei – replied that if they were not allowed to be in charge of the funeral arrangements, they would not come to the funeral. Though this squabble seems rather childish to westerners – anyone who has ever buried a relative has probably seen the same kind of bickering on a smaller scale – to disregard the wishes of the deceased's son was from a Japanese point of view a very grave discourtesy. Also, there were already tensions between the two associations over technical and other matters. The Japan Karate Association had declined to recognise, and did not practise, the Taikyokyu kata introduced by Funakoshi Gigo, and had adopted the practice of jiyu kumite, which

¹ The Shotokan Hangetsu kata is distantly related to the Naha te kata Seisan or Seishan, but is very different from it. This kata in fact exists in several ryu in a number of different forms, all of which clearly have a common origin from which they have diverged more or less widely. It is not easy to account for the degree of divergence that these different forms exhibit.

Funakoshi had explicitly prohibited. There were also more general misgivings within the older – Shotokai – organisation over the direction in which the Japan Karate Association was moving under the “modernising” leadership of Nakayama Masatoshi (中山 正敏) (1913–1987). These objections were undoubtedly sincere and, from a certain conservative point of view, well founded: more traditional karateka, then as now, were opposed to the JKA’s increasingly sporting, tournament-oriented conception of karate. Nonetheless it seems clear that the difficulties following Funakoshi Gichin’s death were compounded by the problem that seems inevitably to arise when a leader dies: too many people wanting to stand on the top of the mountain. One cannot avoid the suspicion that the row over Funakoshi’s funeral was made the occasion for a rift that was well on the way to happening anyway.



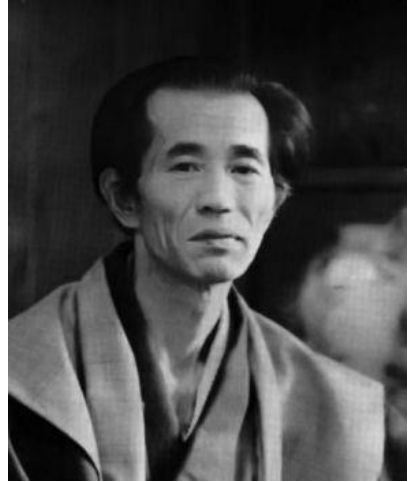
*Funakoshi Yoshihide (Giei),
Funakoshi Gichin’s eldest son*

In the event, the two organisations went their separate ways, the Japan Karate Association under Nakayama and the older and more traditionalist Shotokai association under the leadership of Funakoshi Yoshihide, succeeded almost immediately by Egami Shigeru (江上 茂) (1912–1981). Subsequently the Japan Karate

Association split into at least eight splinter groups, which have in turn given rise to a plethora of smaller groups teaching, or claiming



Nakayama Masatoshi



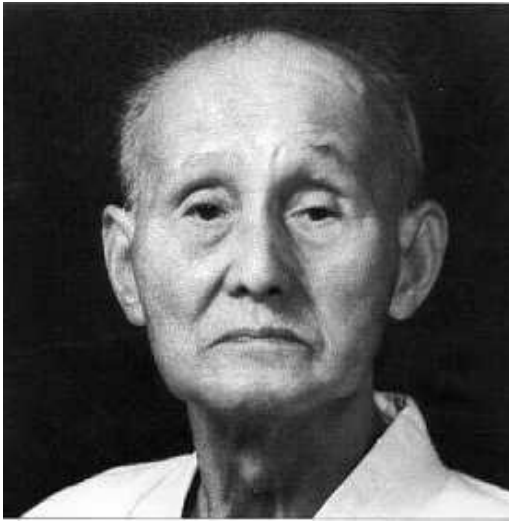
Egami Shigeru

to teach, Funakoshi's authentic karate. Egami Shigeru's group, led after his death first by Hironishi Motonobu (広西元信) (1913–1999) and then by Takagi Jotaro (高木丈太郎,) (b. 1927), continues to insist that it is carrying out Funakoshi's true intentions. A largely separate organisation called Karate-do Shotokai was founded in Europe in 1965 by Harada Mitsusuke (原田満祐) (b. 1928), who also claims to be perpetuating the true spirit of the Master despite the fact that his karate looks very little like anything Funakoshi ever taught or commended. It is ironic that the "style" of a founder so committed to the goal of unity should have fractured into so many competing groups.

Wado Ryu (和道流)

Wado Ryu is one of the only two major karate schools to have originated wholly in Japan (Kyokushinkai is the other). Its founder, Ohtsuka Hironori (大塚博紀) (1892–1982), was born in Shimodate City, Ibaraki Prefecture, the son of a medical

practitioner, and as far as we know spent the whole of his life in Japan. Like Funakoshi Gichin, Ohtsuka was not a flamboyant character. His studies at Waseda university were interrupted by the early death of his father and he was obliged to take a humdrum job as a clerk at the Kawasaki Bank in Shimodate. The record contains no colourful legends about his technical prowess. After some elementary training in childhood with his father and a great-uncle, at the age of thirteen he became a student of Shindo Yoshin Ryu ju jutsu (神道揚心流柔術) under Nakayama Shinzaburo (仲山伸三郎) (1870-1933); he was awarded his menkyo kaiden by Nakayama in 1921. Then, in 1922, he met Funakoshi Gichin, newly arrived in Japan – he seems to have attended Funakoshi's Tokyo display of that year – and immediately began to study karate under him.



Ohtsuka Hironori

Because Shindo Ryu contains kicking and striking as well as grappling techniques Ohtsuka found himself on familiar ground. Soon he became proficient in the fifteen kata that Funakoshi was then teaching. By 1928 he was an assistant instructor in Funakoshi's Meishojuko dojo. Thanks to the experience that he

had acquired in the Kawasaki Bank he seems also to have served as a sort of unofficial dojo treasurer.

At some time in the early 1930s Ohtsuka and Funakoshi parted company. Ohtsuka had come to feel that kumite must be an integral part of “realistic” karate training, whereas Funakoshi was vehemently opposed to any kind of sparring or competitive engagement between karateka. Funakoshi’s view was that karate is primarily a matter of self-mastery and that the desire to defeat others in needless combat is at odds with the true goal of defeating one’s own ego. The formidable Motobu Choki, on the other hand, enjoyed fighting, favoured kumite and had already developed his series of prearranged sparring drills called yakusoku kumite (約束組手). In the late 1920s Ohtsuka had begun to study with Motobu and also with Mabuni Kenwa, and Funakoshi (who is said to have disliked the rather rough and ready Motobu, seemingly on purely snobbish grounds) apparently resented this. It has been suggested also that Funakoshi’s son Giei



Motobu Choki

had accused Ohtsuka of misappropriating dojo funds. This accusation may or may not have been justified (there is also a suggestion, on the other side, that Funakoshi Giei borrowed money from Ohtsuka to pay off his gambling debts and did not repay it),

but at all events Ohtsuka decided to go his own way and develop his ideas into a new school. From this point onwards one has a distinct impression of ill feeling between Ohtsuka and the Funakoshi family.

On 1 April, 1934 Ohtsuka opened his school, the Dai Nippon Karate Shinko Kai (大日本空手振興会) (All Japan Karate Promotion Association), in Tokyo. The curriculum that he adopted was, in effect, a fusion of Shotokan karate with Shindo Yoshin Ryu ju jutsu. Ohtsuka had studied several other arts more or less cursorily, but most of the technical differences between Shotokan and Wado Ryu are explicable in terms of the modifying influence of Shindo Yoshin Ryu. These influences are subtle, but they are clear enough to the attentive eye (though they tend to be neglected in some modern Wado Ryu dojo). Also, Wado Ryu emphasised kumite from the first, ranging from paired sparring drills similar to the ones already devised by Motobu¹ to spontaneous jiyu kumite. Ohtsuka was active in promoting karate competitions – another point of departure from the outlook of Funakoshi – especially during the period of reconstruction after World War II, when it became politically expedient to represent the martial arts as sports or games. The name Wado Ryu (“Harmony Way School”) came into being in 1938 when the school was registered with the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai under the more elaborate name Shinshu² Wado Ryu Karate Ju Jutsu (神州和道流空手柔術).

Ohtsuka incorporated nine traditional kata into Wado Ryu. The changes introduced into the Shotokan kata by Funakoshi Gichin and Funakoshi Yoshitaka are absent from the Wado Ryu versions, mainly because most of them (especially the changes to kicking techniques) were introduced after Ohtsuka’s separation from Funakoshi, but perhaps with a degree of implied criticism also.³

¹ These paired exercises are still practised, though nowadays they vary a good deal from school to school.

² Shinshu (神州) is “Land of the Gods,” i.e. Japan.

³ See Ohtsuka Hironori, *Wado Ryu Karate* (English translation; Rising Sun Productions, 1997), p. 72.

Pinan # 1–5: these are in most respects the same as Funakoshi's Heian kata, though Ohtsuka reverted to the earlier pronunciation of the name. Also, in Wado Ryu schools the numbering of the first two kata is reversed, as a reinstatement of Itosu Anko's original order: Pinan shodan is Heian nidan and Pinan nidan is Heian shodan.

Kushanku: again, Ohtsuka returned to the earlier name of the kata that Funakoshi had called Kanku dai.

Naihanchi: the Wado Naihanchi kata is broadly the same as the Shotokan Tekki Shodan; Wado Ryu has no nidan or sandan forms of Naihanchi.

Chinto: called Gankaku by Funakoshi Gichin.

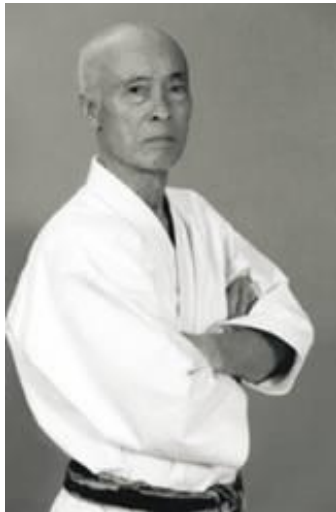
Seishan or Seisan: once more, Ohtsuka reverted to the earlier name of this kata, which Funakoshi had changed to Hangetsu.

Some Wado Ryu schools also practise some or all of the following: Passai, Rohai, Niseishi (Nijushiho), Wanshu, Jion, Jutte and Suparinpai (rarely), and a kihon (fundamental) kata that closely resembles Funakoshi Yoshitaka's Taikyoku shodan.



Wado Ryu is now represented by three main organisations (though there are many smaller independent ones). In 1967 the name of Ohtsuka's original foundation, Dai Nippon Karate Shinko Kai, was changed to Zen Nihon Karate-do Renmei Wadokai (全日本空手道連盟和道会) (In English speaking countries this organisation is called the "Japan Karate-do Federation Wadokai"). Ohtsuka remained as its head until 1981, when he stepped down amid new accusations of financial impropriety and was replaced by Eriguchi Eiichi (d. 2004; its current president is Yoshito Kondo). On 1 April 1981 Ohtsuka – now in his eighty-ninth year – founded another organisation called Wado Ryu Karate-do Renmei (和道流空手道連盟), which he handed over to his son Jiro (b. 1934) shortly before his death

on 29 January 1982. Ohtsuka Jiro then took the name Ohtsuka Hironori II in honour of his father. In 1989, Suzuki Tatsuo (鈴木達夫) (1928–2011), disenchanted with the leadership of Ohtsuka Jiro, founded a third organisation called Wado Kokusai (和道国際) (“Wado International,” usually called the Wado International Karate-do Federation). Since Suzuki Tatsuo’s death on 12 July, 2011 this organisation appears to be headed by an English Karateka called Jon Wicks; Suzuki’s widow Eleni, herself a rokudan (sixth dan), is associated with the organisation in an executive capacity.



Suzuki Tatsuo

Two Smaller Schools

Isshin Ryu (一心流)

Isshin Ryu is an Okinawan school¹ that, in migrating to the West, has achieved much more widespread acceptance in the USA than it

¹ Not to be confused with the Kyokushinkai offshoot called Ishin Ryu, a “sport” karate organisation founded in the UK in 1973 by the English karateka David Donovan.

has in Europe. Its founder, Shimabuku Tatsuo (島袋 龍夫) (1908–1975), was born in Kyan village near Shuri.¹ After picking up some rudimentary knowledge from an uncle, Ganiku Shinko, he began in about 1931 to study the Matsumura version of Shorin Ryu with Matsumura Sokon's student Kyan Chotoku. From Kyan he learnt Seisan, Naihanchi, Wansu, Chinto and Kushanku kata. Under his supervision he also learnt the bo kata called Tokumine no Kun and acquired some proficiency in the use of the sai (see below). He remained with Kyan, whom he regarded as his principal teacher, until 1936. From 1936 to 1938 he studied with Miyagi Chojun, who taught him Seiunchin and Sanchin kata, and, during 1939, with Motobu Choki. These eclectic studies were interrupted by World War II, though it is said that Shimabuku resumed his studies with Miyagi after the war and continued with them until Miyagi's death in 1953.



Shimabuku Tatsuo

¹ His "given name" was Shinkichi; he adopted the name Tatsuo (龍夫, "Dragon Man") after the launch of Isshin Ryu. "Shimabuku" is pronounced "Shimabukuru" in Japan; both romanisations of the name are common.

Isshin Ryu has a well-known foundation myth. Shimabuku opened his first dojo in 1946, in the village of Konbu, near Tengan on the east coast of Okinawa. It was at this point that the idea began to take shape in his mind, as it had earlier in Mabuni Kenwa's, of bringing together the best elements of Okinawan karate – of what



Isshin Ryu no Megami

had by now become Shorin Ryu and Goju Ryu – into a single system; but for a long while Shimabuku lacked the confidence to put this idea into practice. At some point during 1955 he had a vivid dream in which there appeared to him a goddess, half woman and half dragon, who assured him that he now had the ability and knowledge to found a new karate school, and told him that he should create it in her image: half gentle, half fierce. This goddess he later called Isshin Ryu no Megami (一心流の女神) (Isshin Ryu's goddess); some Isshin Ryu practitioners call her Mizu Gami (水神, "water goddess"), though this is apparently incorrect. A picture of Isshin Ryu no Megami against the dream-background that Shimabuku described is now used as the badge of Isshin Ryu. (The version of Isshin Ryu no Megami illustrated above was designed by Shimabuku's student Arsenio Advincula

(b. 1938). The overall shape of the badge represents the vertical fist (縦拳, *tate ken*) which is a “trademark” technique of Isshin Ryu.)

Whether directly inspired by this dream or not, the style now called Isshin Ryu came formally into existence on 15 January, 1956. (Before that date Shimabuku had at different times called his synthesis Chanmigua te (チャンミーグワー手) and Sunsu (スンスウ).¹ “Isshin Ryu” is “One Heart School” or “One Mind School”: something of an irony in view of the fragmentation that the school was to suffer after the founder’s death.

Initially the Isshin Ryu syllabus consisted of the following kata:

Seisan: Shimabuku’s version of this kata differs from the Goju Ryu version; he learnt it from Kyan, not Miyagi.

Seiunchin.

Naihanchi: Shimabuku seems to have studied this kata with both Kyan Chotoku and Motobu Choki. Isshin Ryu’s Naihanchi is a version of what is elsewhere called Naihanchi/Tekki shodan; there is no nidan or sandan in Isshin Ryu. The Isshin Ryu version is unusual (though not unique) in that it begins by moving to the left rather than the right.

Wansu: the adaptation of this Tomari te kata taught in Isshin Ryu schools, with its two side kicks, was devised by Tatsuo Shimabuku himself.

Chinto.

Kushanku.

Sunsu (スンスウ): this long and complex kata was composed by Shimabuku during the 1950s; it brings together elements from the earlier Isshin Ryu kata as well as incorporating

¹ “Chanmigua” apparently means “Cross-eyed Kyan” in the Okinawan language; the word was a childhood nickname of Kyan Chotoku, who was very short-sighted. Evidently the nickname is not as rude as it sounds in English. “Sunsu” is said to mean either “Old Man’s Son” or “Strong Man.”

techniques extracted from kata that are not taught in the Isshin Ryu system as such.

Sanchin: Isshin Ryu favours the shorter (Miyagi) version of Sanchin. Shimabuko regarded the practice of Sanchin as essential to health. Unfortunately, on 30 May, 1975 he suffered a fatal stroke shortly after performing it in his dojo.¹

The Isshin Ryu system is unusual among the better known karate schools in that it includes the study of three weapons traditionally associated with the Okinawan art of kobudo: bo (棒) (staff), sai (釵) (three-pronged fork) and tonfa (トンファー) (rice quern handles). In this sense, though the word 空手 has been retained, Isshin Ryu karate is not an “empty handed” system. As we have noted, Shimabuko had studied kobudo to some extent before World War II, but he did not begin to address the discipline seriously until the late 1950s, with the kobudo master Taira Shinken (平信賢) (1897–1970). Thereafter he introduced the following kobudo kata into his syllabus.

Bo kata:

Tokumine no Kun (徳嶺の棍) (this is the kata that Shimabuko had learnt from Kyan Chotoku).

Urashi no Kun (浦添の棍).

Shishi no Kun (添石の棍) (these two he learnt from Taira Shinken).

Sai kata:

Kushanku Sai (公相君サイ) (a kata devised by Shimabuko himself).

¹ Shimabuko's death may be cited as at least anecdotal evidence supporting the view that the closed-throat breathing introduced into the practice of Sanchin kata in the early twentieth century, probably by Miyagi Chojun or Kyoda Juhatsu, is harmful and potentially dangerous in terms of its cardiovascular effects.

Chatan Yara no Sai (北谷屋良の釵) (learnt from Taira Shinken).

Kyan no Sai (喜屋武の釵) (either learnt from Kyan Chotoku or devised by Shimabuku and named in his honour; Shimabuku later discarded this kata in favour of Kushanku Sai).

Tonfa Kata:

Hama Higa no Tuifa (浜比嘉のトゥイファー); Isshin Ryu's only tonfa kata. It appears to be closely related to the Uechi Ryu version of Seisan kata. Shimabuku preferred the Okinawan pronunciation "tuifa," though there seems to be some doubt as to whether he intended this kata to be a permanent part of his syllabus.¹



One's impression is that Shimabuku Tatsuo is the least highly regarded of the founders of recognised "styles." He and his school have come in for a good deal of criticism over the years. Many of his students disliked the innovations that he started to introduce after World War II, and went elsewhere. He tended to change his mind about what should and should not be in the syllabus, and does not seem to have had the personal presence that enabled other innovators to carry their students with them. Shimabuku's technical competence also has not escaped criticism. The kata that he recorded on film when he visited the USA in 1966 look weak and sloppy, and the reasons often given for this – that he did not want to be filmed; that he was drunk at the time – are not reassuring.² It is said too that he never performed a kata in the

¹ Kobudo kata tend to be named after the individual who devised them or after the place with which they are particularly associated. All the Isshin Ryu kobudo kata seem to have been modified extensively by Shimabuku.

² It may in fairness be pointed out that there exists also footage of Yamaguchi Gogen making rather a hash of Suparinpai kata; a degree of

same way twice (though this is not necessarily a criticism). We do not know whether these adverse judgments are justified, but they tend to be repeated as part of the pattern of reputational damage that Isshin Ryu has suffered during the past thirty years and more, partly as a result of the chronic infighting that has accompanied its spread.

Isshin Ryu transplanted very readily to the USA, largely because, in 1955, Shimabuku was invited to become the karate instructor of the Third Division of the United States Marine Corps stationed on Okinawa Island. He was offered a salary of US\$250 per month and, having been reduced to poverty by the war, this was an offer he was happy enough to accept. He opened a dojo near the American military bases at Agena in Gushikawa City, and quite a number of the soldiers who trained with him opened dojo of their own when they returned to the USA. The channel through which Isshin Ryu made its way to the West was thus very largely formed by the American military. The Okinawan-American Karate Association was formed with Shimabuku's blessing in 1960; in 1961 its name was changed to the American-Okinawan Karate Association (AOKA).

Notable among Shimabuku's American students were Steve Armstrong (1931–2006), James Chapman (1938–1971), Don Nagle (1938–1999), Harold Long (1930–1998), Harold Mitchell (b. 1933) and Arsenio Advincula. Unfortunately, there have been endless squabbles among some of these people about who learnt what from the Master, who is and who is not teaching "true" Isshin Ryu, and so forth. Part of the problem, one suspects, is that Shimabuku's American students, a number of whom returned to the United States with high dan grades after only a short period of study that can hardly have been intensive, learnt different parts of his system and with different degrees of depth or emphasis. They had also the disadvantage of studying with a teacher with whom

camera shyness is a problem that ought to be taken into consideration when viewing the often unimpressive filmed performances of the older teachers.

they had no language in common: it is hardly surprising that misunderstandings should have arisen.¹ There are now at least a dozen Isshin Ryu organisations in the United States, each under separate leadership. As is so often true, the unity of the art has been compromised by the rivalries and antagonisms of those who have accepted responsibility for organising it.

Shortly before he died, Shimabuku nominated his senior student Kaneshi Eiko (b. 1914) as his successor. His son Shimabuku Kichiro was very much offended by this and insisted that his father preserve the Okinawan Pechin tradition of transmission to the oldest son. Rightly or wrongly, his father capitulated and the headship of Isshin Ryu passed to Kichiro at his father's death; but the effect of this was to divide Isshin Ryu into two camps. Large numbers of Isshin Ryu karateka declined to accept Shimabuku Kichiro as the head of the school and withdrew from it altogether. In 1987, after many bitter quarrels in the course of which Isshin Ryu almost died out completely, Shimabuku Tatsuo's son-in-law Uezu Angi (b. 1935) formed the Okinawa Isshin Ryu Karate Kobudo Association, of which he was the head until his retirement in 1996, when he was succeeded by Uechi Tsuyoshi (b. 1951). The rise to prominence of Uezu in turn displeased Shimabuku's former US Marine students, at least three of whom were more highly ranked in the system than Uezu (Uezu did not begin to study karate until after he married Shimabuku Tatsuo's daughter Yukiko in 1957). Shimabuku Kichiro continues to lead the Isshin Ryu World Karate Association, which he had founded in 1974 with his father's blessing, though he does not seem at all highly regarded in the wider Isshin Ryu community.² In 2007,

¹ Squabbles tend also to arise out of nothing more than clashes of ego. Generally speaking, senior karateka find it hard to accept that there can be valid viewpoints other than their own. We do not know why this should be so, but experience strongly suggests that it is.

² When researching his *Okinawan Karate*, Mark Bishop took an instant dislike to him. In his section on Isshin Ryu he says: "Kichiro Shimabuku, being short, plump and bald with an effeminate squeaky voice, is not what most people imagine a karate teacher to be like."

after a dispute within the Okinawa Isshin Ryu Karate Kobudo Association, yet another organisation, the Isshin Ryu Okinawa Traditional Karate Association, was set up by Uechi Tsuyoshi, who at the time of writing is trying to have himself recognised by the Okinawan Prefecture Karate Rengokai as the official head of Isshin Ryu. None of the twentieth century karate styles has been exempt from succession crises after, or shortly after, the deaths of the founder, but Isshin Ryu seems to have suffered more damage than any other. According to some recent sources the actual survival of Isshin Ryu in Okinawa is now in doubt.

Uechi Ryu (上地流)

Uechi Ryu is now well established as a style, though its practice is not as widespread as that of the larger karate schools, and it seems to be better established in the United States than in Europe. It stands somewhat apart from the larger schools in that its founder appears not to have studied in depth with any of the well known Okinawan or Japanese masters. Uechi Kanbun (上地 完文) (1877–1948) was born in or near the farming village of Takinto on the Motobu peninsula in northern Okinawa – well away from the Shuri/Naha/Tomari nucleus. In 1897, apparently to evade Japanese military conscription, he and a friend called Matsuda Tokusaburo migrated to China and settled in Fuchou City, Fujian province. During his time in China Uechi studied a Southern Chinese art called Pangai noon (or Pan-gai-nun)¹ with a teacher called Zhou Zihe (pronounced Shu Shiwa in Japanese) (1869–1945). Pan-gai-nun is 半硬軟 (han ko nan) in Japanese: i.e. “half hard, half soft,” or “half way between hard and soft.” The name is similar in import to the “Hanko Ryu” considered as a possible school name by Shinzato Jinan and Mabuni Kenwa. Zhou Zihe awarded him a licence to

¹ Pan-gai-nun is now generally regarded as being extinct, but in 1978 a group of Uechi Ryu students led by Seiki Itokazu and Takashi Kinjo left the ryu and began to try to reconstruct Pan-gai-nun from the kata taught by Uechi Kanbun. This Uechi Ryu offshoot seems also be known as Konan Ryu and Kobu Ryu.

teach in 1904, and he remained in China until 1909, teaching in Nansoe, a town about 250 miles to the south of Fuchou. It is said that he abandoned teaching and returned to Okinawa – either out of shame or to escape legal consequences – after one of his students killed a man in a fight over land irrigation.



Zhou Zhihe (Shu Shiwa), Uechi Kanbun's teacher

In 1926, after some years of unsuccessful farming on Okinawa, Uechi relocated to Wakayama City in the Kansai region of Japan, where he found work in a textile mill. It was at this point that he resumed teaching, using the living quarters of the mill as his dojo (this first dojo was called Shataku (社宅), "Company House"). It is said that he began to teach again after he was asked to share his skills with members of the local Okinawan community who were being victimised by Japanese gangs. Another (though not incompatible) version is that he was persuaded to resume teaching by a fellow worker called Tomoyose Ryuyu (d. 1970), who became his first student in Japan (there are several stories about how Tomoyose Ryuyu persuaded a reluctant Uechi to teach him). In 1932, having by now acquired a fairly large number of students, Uechi founded the Pan-gai-nun Karate-jutsu Kenkyu-jo (半硬軟空手術研究所) (Pan-gai-nun Karate Method Research Association) in the Tebira district of Wakayama. In

1940 this was re-named the Uechi-ryu Karate-jutsu Kenkyu-jo. This re-naming was apparently an initiative of Uechi's students, however; it is said that Uechi himself always used the name Pan-gai-nun and had no intention of founding a new "style."



Uechi Kanbun

In 1945 Uechi retired from teaching and returned to his family on Okinawa, leaving the Wakayama dojo in the hands of Tomoyose Ryuyu. In the squalid living conditions of post-war Okinawa Uechi contracted a kidney infection and died at the age of 71. (There is a story that, having been told by a fortune teller that he would live to be 88, Uechi did not bother to seek medical advice and fell down dead while performing Sanchin kata.) On his death he was succeeded as head of what was by now called Uechi Ryu by his son Uechi Kanei (上地 完英) (1911–1991), who had studied with his father in Japan from the age of sixteen. One of the most distinguished students of Uechi Kanei and Tomoyose Ryuyu was an American serviceman called George Mattson, who since 1958 has been almost single-handedly responsible for the establishment of Uechi Ryu in the USA.

Uechi Kanbun's original Pan-gai-nun/Uechi Ryu had only three kata: Sanchin, Seisan and Sanseiryu. Uechi did not, as far as we can tell, supplement what he had learnt in China with anything else; apparently he was resolved as a matter of principle not to add to or change the system that he had learnt from Zhou Zihe. Uechi Ryu is usually classified as a Naha te school, but this classification is not entirely apt; Uechi seems to have had no direct contact, or at any rate very little contact, with Naha or Naha te teachers. One's impression is that the Uechi Ryu kata, having come directly from China without Okinawan mediation, stand much closer to their Chinese originals than the Goju kata do and are a good deal more elaborate than their Goju namesakes. Demonstrations of Uechi Ryu have a much more pronounced Chinese "flavour" than demonstrations of other schools. Uechi Ryu explicitly perpetuates the Chinese quanfa tradition of mimicking the behaviour of real or imaginary animals; its techniques are said to be inspired by the actions of the tiger, the dragon and the crane.



Uechi Kanei

Uechi Ryu in its present form is effectively the creation of Uechi Kanei, who added five kata to the original three taught by

his father. These kata, unique to Uechi Ryu, are all new and in a certain sense “untraditional,” though they are all derived from or inspired by the style’s foundational Seisan and Sanseiryu kata. The current Uechi Ryu kata list, in the order in which the kata are usually taught, is as follows:

Sanchin: the Uechi version of Sanchin kata is performed with the hands open and without the muscular tension and restricted breathing associated with Goju’s Sanchin. It is much closer in style and execution to the known Chinese versions of Sanchin.

Kanshiwa (完子和) (also called Kanshabu): a beginners’ kata, emphasising circular blocks; intended to introduce the student to tiger-type techniques.

Kanshu (完周): a kata consisting principally of crane techniques.

Seichin (十戦): a kata combining elements from Sanchin and Seisan and using whip-like “dragon” techniques.

Seisan: this kata looks very little like the Goju Ryu kata of the same name, though it is clearly related to it.

Seiryu (十六): another “dragon” kata.

Kanchin (完戦): Uechi Kanei intended this kata to be a kind of introduction to Sanseiryu.

Sanseiryu: as with Seisan, this kata is “genealogically” related to its Goju Ryu namesake, but looks very different from it.

For the most part, Uechi Ryu escaped the internecine warfare suffered by other styles after their founder’s death, but only for a generation. When Uechi Kanei retired in 1989, his son Kanmei (1941–2015) replaced him at the head of what was by now called the Uechi-Ryu Karate-Do Association. The inevitable quarrels and personality clashes followed, and two new organisations emerged: the Okinawa Karate-do Kyokai (Okikukai) (沖縄空手道協会), led

by Tomoyose Ryuyu's son Tomoyose Ryuko (b. 1928); and the Uechi Ryu Karate Kenkyukai (上地流空手研究会) led by Shinjo Kiyohide. (The Okinawa Karate-do Kyokai has since developed a slightly modified style of Uechi Ryu called Shohei Ryu (昭平流)). At present, Uechi Ryu is represented worldwide by at least thirteen organisations.



The early aspiration of karate teachers to a unification of the schools into a single art was perhaps always unrealistic, and it certainly became so with the dissemination of karate worldwide. The "mainstream" karate schools have spread with varying degrees of success throughout the world, though not without the heavy costs to the art that we shall consider in due course, and especially not without a great deal of political disruption. Their success during the twentieth century is not, it should be said, so much a sign of their technical superiority over less well-known schools as a result of the energy and promotional skills that have been devoted to their propagation. Chance has also played its part. In turn, the comparatively rapid diffusion of karate has produced a number of offspring and derivatives, and it is to some description of these that we now turn.

OFFSPRING AND COUSINS

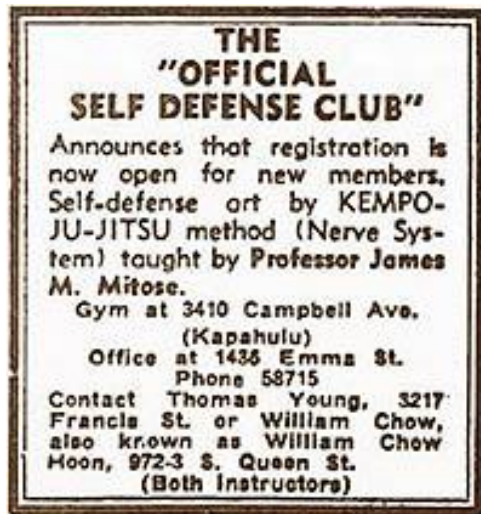
THAT VARIOUS OFFSPRING or cousins of traditional karate should have come into being is natural and perhaps inevitable, as is the fact that the oriental martial arts have to a great extent adapted themselves to the values and customs of the western world. However much the traditionalist may deplore them, these developments are not difficult to explain. The teachers who set themselves the goal of carrying karate from Okinawa to mainland Japan could not have foreseen what a complex sequence of cause and effect they were initiating, or how far those causes and effects would extend. In this chapter, we shall look at a few aspects of the diversity produced by what one might call the postmodern history of karate. We have to repeat our initial caveat, however: this is a *short* history, and the picture given here is much less complex than the reality.

American Kempo/Kenpo

Though it is something of a broad church, American kempo/ kenpo has in recent decades come to be regarded as a martial art in its own right (it has, in fact, now spread well beyond the USA). It is a phenomenon with a problematical history. Modern kempo/kenpo is clearly related to the traditional karate of Okinawa and Japan in some degree, but in ways and by routes that are not easy to identify

and describe. Whatever relation there is now between it and its oriental ancestry is certainly tenuous. The word kempo/kenpo (拳法) is the Japanese rendering of the Chinese word quanfa (see p. 5, n., above). It would be more natural, in terms of how the Japanese word is pronounced, to romanise it as kempo, but most American kenpo practitioners now prefer the “n” spelling – partly, at least, as a badge of difference. For the same reason, they tend to prefer black karate gi to the white ones more usually worn by traditional karateka.

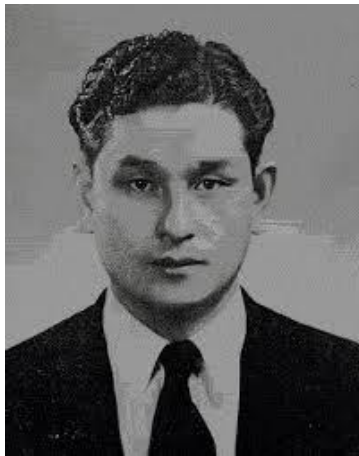
American kenpo has three discernible roots, all of them associated with the island of Hawaii. As far as one can tell it began with an individual called Mitose Masayoshi (1916–1981) – always known as James Mitose – who was born to poverty-stricken Japanese migrants on a coffee plantation at Kailua-Kona in the rural North Kona district of Hawaii. Calling himself “Professor,” Mitose



*James Mitose's first advertisement,
in the Honolulu Advertiser, 1942*

began to teach what he called kempo jiu-jitsu in Honolulu in 1942, opening a dojo advertised as “The Official Self Defense Club” in that year (though the sense in which his club was “official” is not

clear). His teaching career was not extensive, and what he taught seems to have been a straightforward fighting or self-defence method rather than an “art,” though towards the end of his life he was at pains to graft an altruistic quasi-religious ethic onto it. On Hawaii he promoted only a handful of students to black-belt rank: Thomas Young, Nakamura Jiro, Arthur Keawe, Edward Lowe and Paul Yamaguchi. In 1954 he left Hawaii for California, where he spent the remainder of his life, leaving his school in Honolulu in the hands of Thomas Young. On settling in the United States Mitose appears to have taught only a few private students; some sources say that he taught only one, and only for a short period. His reason for leaving Hawaii is not known, but some of his later disciples tell us that he became disillusioned with the attitude of his students there, who wished only to learn how to fight without penetrating into the deeper aspects of his art. The difficulty with this story is that Mitose does not seem to have thought of his art as having any deeper aspects until much later in his life.



James Mitose

During his lifetime, Mitose published two books in which the outlines of his art and its accompanying “philosophy” are set out: *What is Self Defense? Kenpo Jiu-jutsu* (1953) and *What is True Self Defense?* (1981). The second book – written and published with the

assistance of a friend called Arnold Golub – was the first in a projected multi-volume series, but Mitose died before any further volumes could be completed. It is in this second book that we find a late attempt to reconstruct or rebrand his kenpo as an ethical or “spiritual” art. Mitose himself was, at best, semi-literate. His second book was obviously ghost written, and it is impossible to assess the extent of his actual contribution to it; but neither of the two is particularly impressive.

Researches since his death have produced some disturbing facts and allegations about James Mitose’s life and character.

1. He claimed to have been sent to Japan by his parents at the age of four and to have lived between 1920 and 1937 in the Rinzai Zen Shaka-in temple in Kumamoto on the island of Kyushu. There, according to his own account, he studied philosophy, religion and an ancient and secret Japanese martial art called Kosho Ryu Kempo, becoming its twenty-first Grand Master (at the age of twenty-one). There is documentary evidence that Mitose was in Japan between 1920 and 1937, but the authorities of the Shaka-in temple deny that he ever lived or studied a martial art there, and Mitose’s descriptions of his life during his early years do not correspond at all closely with the practices and routines normally found in Japanese Buddhist monasteries.

2. There is no independent documentary record, at the Shaka-in temple or anywhere else, of a Japanese martial art called Kosho Ryu Kempo.

3. What Mitose taught after his return to Hawaii in any case looks much more like Okinawan karate than a Japanese art (in respect, for example, of the use of the makiwara and the kata Naihanchi). Mitose claimed to be a nephew on his mother’s side of Motobu Choki and to have studied karate with him in Japan; but the Motobu family deny that he was related to them or that he ever studied with Motobu Choki or received rank from him. There is some reason to believe that he met Motobu at some point and may

have learnt Naihanchi kata and some other things from him, but that seems to be the extent of the connection.

4. Much of the content of the first of Mitose's two books was clearly plagiarised from three earlier publications: Mutsu Mizhuo's *Karate Kenpo* (1933), Motobu Choki's *Watashi No Karate Jutsu* (1932) and Henry Seishiro Okazaki's *The Science of Self Defense for Girls and Women* (1929).¹ Mitose's *What is Self Defense? Kenpo Jiu-jutsu* does not give the impression that the author is introducing us to an esoteric family art, or an art with a "spiritual" or "philosophical" dimension.

5. Mitose and two associates were arrested by the FBI in 1941 and charged with fraud and conspiracy to impersonate an army intelligence officer: this was in connection with an alleged scheme to blackmail Hawaiian-Japanese businessmen who had been tricked into signing a document appearing to show that they were willing to help Japanese spies.



James Mitose in later life

¹ Some of his students have suggested that his borrowings from Motobu Choki are not in fact plagiarism, but a silent acknowledgment of Motobu as his teacher.

6. Mitose habitually wore clerical dress and claimed (falsely) to be an ordained Christian minister; he appears to have used this persona as a way of extracting money from people for “charitable” purposes. In later life he also laid claim to spurious doctorate degrees.

7. In 1974 he was convicted on charges of extortion and conspiracy to commit murder, having incited a student, Terry Lee, to murder a Japanese man called Frank Namimatsu who owed him money. For this offence he was sentenced to life imprisonment; he died in Folsom Prison, California.

On the one hand, one cannot rule out the possibility that James Mitose was to some extent traduced by enemies and rivals, as his many posthumous advocates maintain. On the other, the facts outlined above are beyond reasonable dispute. It is indisputable also that his “religious” or “spiritual” phase did not begin until the time of his murder trial. It is associated especially with his years in prison, when he was perhaps hoping (and angling) for parole. Before then, he seems to have lived more or less constantly on, and sometimes beyond, the fringes of criminality. At the present time there are those who insist that Mitose was an innocent man, wrongly convicted as a result of conspiracies and misunderstandings. Then again, there are those who believe that “Kosho Ryu Kempo” and its supporting mythologies are fabrications concocted by an inveterate and not always ingenious swindler. On the strength of the evidence as we have seen and understood it, we are inclined to the latter view.¹

Whatever the truth may be, what purports to be Mitose’s kempo is now practised in some form under the auspices of three associations:

¹ Though of course one cannot – and we do not – rule out the possibility that Mitose’s conversion in prison to a different way of life was genuine.

1. Koga Ha Kosho Shorei Ryu Kempo, the head of which is Nimr Hassan. Nimr Hassan is the Terry Lee who was convicted of murder alongside Mitose in 1974. He took the name Nimr Hassan at some time after his release from prison in 1977. He claims to have learnt the whole of Mitose's system in the early 1970s and to have been given a menkyo kaiden by him. He is now known as Grandmaster Nimr Hassan.

2. Sei Kosho Shorei Kai International, the head of which is Bruce Juchnik. Bruce Juchnik is regarded by his supporters as the twenty-second Grand Master of Kosho Ryu Kempo, claiming (despite the rival claim of Nimr Hassan) to be the only person to receive menkyo kaiden and inka shomei¹ certification from Mitose. He studied with Mitose between 1977 and Mitose's death; but since Mitose was in prison at the time, the instruction that he received can only have been verbal. Quite why "training" that presumably consisted only of conversations during prison visits should lead to Juchnik's appointment as the inheritor and head of Mitose's system is not clear. After Mitose's death Juchnik and Mitose's early student Thomas Young worked together until Young's death in 1995 to systematise and integrate Mitose's teaching as they understood it.

3. The International Kosho Ryu Kenpo Association, headed by Thomas Barro Mitose, who also claims to be the twenty-second Grand Master of Kosho Ryu. Thomas Mitose (b. 1940) is James Mitose's natural son; he took the name Mitose only after his father's death. He seems to have spent only two short periods in contact with his father, the second of which was during the older Mitose's incarceration. Thomas Mitose was never issued with any certification by his father, but insists that his father transmitted the headship of Kosho Ryu to him verbally before his death and that he is the rightful inheritor of it by virtue of his blood relation to the founder.

¹ Inka shomei (印可署名) = a signed certificate of transmission.

What is one to make of all this? On the face of it, there is a pattern of fantasy and rationalisation in Mitose's story (the mysterious transmission of a secret art that no one has heard of after years of training in a Buddhist temple) that will ring a bell in the mind of anyone who has studied the subject of martial arts fraud. There are also the familiar techniques of half-truth and misleading suggestion. Perhaps James Mitose *did* spend much of his childhood in Japan; perhaps he *did* meet and learn something from Motobu Choki:¹ but these seem to be, at most, only grains of truth around which a large pearl of falsehood and ambiguity has grown, the growth of which has been aided by the conflicting claims of those who tell us that they are his chosen successors. Then again, perhaps one day definite proof will turn up that will exonerate Mitose from the accusations and suspicions that have attached to his name. No doubt one should try as far possible to remain open and receptive to such proof, but, on the whole, it is difficult to avoid the feeling that the Mitose story has all the hallmarks of a common type of martial arts fraud.

The second root of kempo/kenpo is William Kwai Sun Chow (1914–1987), who was the first kenpo/kempo teacher to have more than a small handful of students. He is known also as William Ah Sun Chow Hoon. Born in Honolulu, he claimed to have learnt his family's style of kung fu from his father, a Shaolin monk called Sun Chow Hoon, before studying for some years with James Mitose (though he received his black belt not from Mitose, but from Mitose's student Thomas Young). According to the orthodox account of his style's history he then united what he had learnt from Mitose with his family art to form a new kind of kempo called Chinese Kara-ho Kempo Karate, of which he eventually declared himself to be a fifteenth dan.² Chow's art was a no-

¹ Some sources suggest that he also studied in Hawaii with an Okinawan instructor named Naburu Tamanaha.

² According to its contemporary exponents, Kara-ho Kempo means "the unity of spirit, mind, soul and body, fist law." It doesn't, though. "Kara-ho kempo karate" – 唐法拳法空手 – is, literally, "Chinese method fist way empty hand", i.e. "Chinese method of self-defence".

nonsense fighting style, ferociously businesslike, with no frills and no kata, though a number of his students subsequently composed kata of their own.



William Kwai Sun Chow

All is not, however, as it seems. There is reason to think that Chow had no systematic martial arts training before he met Mitose, or at least not the training that he claimed to have had. Much of his skill seems to have come from simple street fighting. It is clearly established that his father was not a Shaolin monk but an immigrant labourer from Shanghai who worked in a laundry and fathered sixteen children (he was in jail at the time of William's birth). This is, of course, not to say that he could not have taught his son a family style; but the "family style" itself seems to have been a fantasy. There is a Southern Praying Mantis school called Chow Gar, but neither William Chow nor his father are included in its lineage. It would appear that the "family style" story made its appearance in Chow's curriculum vitae

with empty hands." The word "Chinese" in the English version of the name is redundant.

only after James Mitose's veracity had begun to come under suspicion. Both Mitose and Chow seem to have come from the same kind of sub-literate, proletarian immigrant background and to have invented interesting stories about themselves – undoubtedly for commercial reasons but possibly also for reasons that a psychologist would not find it hard to explain.

Chow began to teach his art in 1949 in various Hawaiian locations; he never established a permanent dojo and seems to have led a more or less itinerant life. The art was soon transplanted to the USA by his students and there are now Chinese Kara-ho Kempo Karate schools all over the United States. These are franchised and overseen by a central organisation called Professor Chow's Chinese Kara-ho Kempo Karate, the current head of which is Samuel Alama Kuoha (b. 1946). William Chow's "Professor" title, like James Mitose's is, of course, self-awarded.

Chow's senior student Ralph Castro went on to develop his own style/school called Shaolin Kenpo Karate in the 1960s, and in 1981 founded an organisation called the International Shaolin Kenpo Association (of which he is now the "Great Grandmaster"). It is at about this point in American martial arts history that we begin to come across the curious habit of mixing Chinese and Japanese words in the names of "styles." Partly this reflects an intelligent wish to combine Chinese and Japanese elements into a new kind of methodology; partly it seems to be a case of simple ignorance. Another of William Chow's students, Adriano Directo Emperado (1926–2009) was one of five teachers who created a style called Kajukenbo, a rigorous and reality-centred system which is supposed to be a street fighting synthesis of *karate*, *ju jutsu*, *kenpo* and western *boxing*. These are only two of the many offshoots and splinters of Chow's system.

Chow's best known student, and the third of our kenpo "roots," was another Hawaiian, Edmund Kealoha Parker (1931–1990). Initially a student of judo (he achieved the rank of shodan in 1949), he was introduced to William Chow by a friend at some

time in the 1940s and studied with him for more than a decade. He was awarded a black belt by him in 1953. Thereafter he opened what is said to be the first commercial karate school in the western United States, in Provo, Utah, in 1954. Though he is sometimes said to have been a student of James Mitose, he explicitly denied this in volume 1 of his *Infinite Insights into Kenpo* (1982). There seem, however, to be many inconsistencies in Parker's accounts of his early life and training. A good deal more skilled at self-promotion than either Mitose or Chow, he seems sometimes to have had a similar difficulty with the distinction between truth and fantasy.



Edmund Kealoha Parker

Edmund Parker – always known as Ed – did more than anyone else to create a distinctively “American” kenpo and turn it into a flourishing business. It is said, though we do not know whether this is true or not, that the development of his kenpo “business” was much helped by his connections with the wealthy Mormon church. It was Parker, incidentally, who finally adopted the “n” spelling of kenpo as normal. Having no knowledge of Japanese (and, somewhat unusually among

occidental karate teachers, being honest enough to admit it) he gave English names to all his techniques and sequences of techniques. Also, kenpo as developed by him lost most of its original “mean streets” image and began to look decidedly respectable. He fully understood the value of courting celebrities (most notably Elvis Presley)¹ and publicity; he had a brief career of his own as a film actor. If Ed Parker is not quite the “father of American Kenpo” he is certainly the father of American kenpo as a commercial enterprise.

But he was also an inventive and diligent martial artist, a free-thinker and a tireless innovator who left a comprehensive record of his art behind him in the form of several detailed training manuals.² Kenpo in the form that it had acquired by the time of his death is a very different creature from the hard, linear street fighting style of William Chow. Especially after his relocation to southern California in about 1956, when he came increasingly into contact with Chinese martial artists, Parker changed and revised his kenpo into a softer and more circular style, relying on evasion, deflection and rapid multiple strikes. He also devised a series of six forms – they are usually called forms, not kata – of increasing complexity in which are encoded a range of self-defence sequences intended to provide the practitioner with hypothetical solutions to any imaginable pattern of attack. These forms, especially the complex advanced ones, are difficult to learn and the techniques contained in them are very difficult to apply convincingly. On the whole one’s impression is that the kenpo forms are intricate and flashy in appearance but rather weak and lightweight in application. In this sense kenpo suffers from the same observable weakness as Aikido does. Its techniques have a superficial kind of impressiveness when

¹ Elvis Presley was awarded a second degree black belt by Parker in 1963, a fourth degree at some time in the 1960s, a fifth in 1971, a sixth in early 1973 and an honorary eighth in August 1974.

² His five-volume series called *Infinite Insights into Kenpo* (Delsby Publications) was published between 1982 and 1987.

demonstrated with a compliant training partner; how effective they would be in deadly earnest is a moot point. No doubt everything depends on the skill of the practitioner.

In 1963 or 1964 Parker founded the International Kenpo Karate Association, which after his death disintegrated into a multitude of smaller groups. He left behind a son, Edmund Parker Jr. (b. 1959), who is active within the kenpo community, though he is not regarded as his father's successor and seems to have had no wish to be. Had he not died suddenly and unexpectedly, Parker's own choice of successor would probably have been Larry Tatum of Pasadena, California, who continues to teach the Parker system and who has established his own commercial organisation called Larry Tatum's Kenpo Karate Association. It is difficult to find any kind of consensus in the kenpo world, but Larry Tatum seems generally recognised as the most faithful and effective "mainstream" exponent of Ed Parker's art.



Can American kenpo be taken seriously as a form or descendant or "cousin" of karate? Technically it is a long way removed from the karate of Okinawa and Japan, though that is not of itself a significant objection. Arguably, and more seriously, it is seriously compromised by its questionable origins. If James Mitose and William Chow told falsehoods about their background and training history – and it does seem more than likely that they did – then are not all subsequent kenpo lineages discredited? And what is to be said for an art that traces its origins to a man convicted of extortion, fraud and murder? What is in some ways worse, the transmission of kenpo seems to have become hopelessly confused and diluted. At the present time, there are dozens of different kenpo schools and associations in the USA and elsewhere, all claiming some kind of connection with one or more of the Mitose, Chow and Parker lineages. "Kenpo" of one kind and another seems to be particularly associated with the "McDojo" phenomenon: commercial "shopping mall" schools teaching poor quality martial art and "self-defence

techniques” for money, often to young children. If kenpo is a member of the karate family, it seems to be rather a disreputable one.

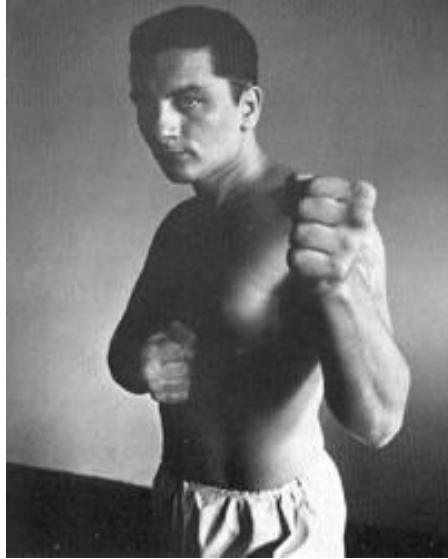
On the other hand, there are undoubtedly many serious, sincere and dedicated practitioners of kenpo. Even if it is true that the founders of “American” kenpo were frauds or fantasists, their honest and unwitting students have nothing to be ashamed of. To a certain extent, the legitimacy of an art is in the eye of the beholder; or, more correctly, in the minds and intentionality of those who practise it. Taking as favourable a view of it as one can, American kenpo is a genuine attempt to mould and adapt an oriental art into a form amenable to the cultural norms of the West. As such, alongside its questionable aspects there is much in it that one can admire.

USA Goju

USA Goju – also called American Goju and Urban Goju – is the brainchild of a native of New Jersey called Peter Urban (1934–2004). It is a largely new art (though it is perhaps more of a “philosophy” than an art) that has grown from traditional roots thanks to the inventiveness and determination of its founder. Peter Urban’s biography is not easy to reconstruct: there are several inconsistent versions of his life story, mostly based on different conversations remembered by different people. What is offered here is a synthesis of the available accounts.¹

One’s impression is that, as a personality, Urban was not unlike Oyama Masutatsu: assertive, intolerant of criticism, strong-willed, indefatigable, self-promoting and capable of inspiring great loyalty. He discovered karate in 1953 when he was stationed in Yokohama as a sailor in the United States Navy. There he met the Hawaiian-American martial artist Richard Kim (1917–2001), with whom he trained for a year. When he was posted to Tokyo in

¹ Urban’s surname was originally Ladis. We can find no record of when and why he changed it.



Peter Urban

1954 Richard Kim introduced him to Yamaguchi Gogen and Oyama Masutatsu, with both of whom he studied for six years, though he regarded Yamaguchi as his chief mentor. According to Urban, the training that he experienced in Japan was exceptionally brutal (American servicemen were not popular with the Japanese during the early 1950s). In 1957 – having trained for only four years – he opened his own small dojo in Tokyo, and in the same year competed in the All Japan College Karate Championships; apparently he was the first occidental ever to do either of these things.

Urban went home to the United States in 1959 having been awarded the grade of godan (fifth dan) by Yamaguchi. Despite a full-time commitment to the United States Navy, he had managed to train intensively enough to achieve this grade from scratch in some six years. One can only conclude either that this was an extraordinary achievement or that a fifth dan in those days meant something different from what it means now.¹ On returning to the

¹ One can make a similar remark about the American servicemen who trained with Shimabuku Tatsuo and went home as fifth dans or higher.



Peter Urban training with Yamaguchi Gogen

United States he opened his first American dojo in his home town, Union City, New Jersey. In the following year he opened another dojo on 17th Street in Manhattan, and thereafter several more in various New York locations, including the “Chinatown” dojo at 232 Canal Street that became his centre of operations. As far as one can tell, he regarded himself at this time as the unofficial American representative of Yamaguchi’s Goju. At some point in the 1960s (there are different accounts of exactly when this happened) he visited Japan again, apparently – though the details of the story are not clear – to ask Yamaguchi to appoint him as his official representative in the United States with a suitable rank. Yamaguchi declined, saying that, according to the principles of

One has to wonder quite what the content of their training was and why Japanese teachers were content to award high dan grades to foreigners after such a short time. Nowadays it would not be possible to achieve the rank of godan in any reputable organisation in less than fifteen or twenty years. In his book *The Karate Dojo* (p. 42), Urban himself says: “In the Gojuryu Karate system ... [i]t takes a completely dedicated person at least seven or eight years of intensive study to attain the ... grade of fourth dan after having trained in the kyu and low dan levels.”

Bushido, no foreigner could hold such a position (and possibly intending that his sons should represent him abroad, as eventually they did).¹ Urban is said to have retorted that, according to the principles of Bushido, Japan could never accept defeat in war, either. This did not go down well with Yamaguchi. The two quarrelled and, though the quarrel was soon made up, Urban thereafter decided to go his own way.

Hence USA Goju, of which Urban presently began to describe himself as the Tenth Dan Grand Patriarch. He also awarded himself the titles “Maestro,” “Professor” and “Dr” and in later years took to printing the letters PhD, ScD after his name.² Having broken away from the karate establishment, and confident of his own ability, he considered himself free to develop in whatever ways he chose, and USA Goju seems to have gone through several stages of evolution (arguably it is evolving still). He also expressed his ideas in several books, the best known of which is *The Karate Dojo: Traditions and Tales of a Martial Art*.³ His system –

¹ This is to read between the lines somewhat. The story of Urban’s quarrel with Yamaguchi exists in different versions, but in one of them Urban reports Yamaguchi as having declined because “no white man can attain nirvana.” However, (a) “nirvana” is an Indian Buddhist term denoting freedom from greed, hatred and delusion, and Yamaguchi was not a Buddhist teacher; (b) it is inconceivable that any Buddhist teacher would say such a thing; and (c) what had nirvana to do with it anyway? Also, the Japanese usually refer to foreigners as “gaijin” (外人) rather than “white men” (白人, hakujin). The “nirvana” sentence is, we conjecture, Urban’s retrospective (and possibly self-serving) version of what Yamaguchi actually said, perhaps in less than perfect English. The account that we have given probably comes as close to the truth of the matter as it is possible to get.

² These degrees were, it seems, conferred by a Hawaiian diploma mill called the Eurotechnical Research University. They recognise Urban’s achievements in “polemikology” – a science that he invented, described as “the study of the structure and organization of combative systems.” The habit of American martial arts teachers of awarding themselves professorships, doctorates and other resounding but unofficial titles was well established by the late 1960s.

³ Tuttle Publishing, 1967. This book was written before his separation from Yamaguchi.

if it can be called a system – is a synthesis of what he learnt from Richard Kim, Oyama Masutatsu and Yamaguchi Gogen, with the addition of numerous innovations of his own. He retained the name Goju and the traditional kata names, but he composed several new kata and extensively revised – often out of all recognition – the standard Goju ones. On the whole, he was resistant to the idea that karate should have a fixed and invariable curriculum, but the kata that he regarded as the cornerstones of USA Goju are:¹

Urban Teikyoku.

Urban Gekkisai.

Urban Tensho.

Urban Empi-Ha.

Urban Seiunchin.

Urban Seisan.

Urban Kooroorunfa.

Urban Suparempei.

Urban Bo.

Urban Han.



To put it as charitably as one can, Peter Urban seems to have been a somewhat odd individual whose behaviour and manner in his later years became extremely eccentric. Undoubtedly there was something of the mountebank about him, as attested by his penchant for grandiose titles and bogus university degrees. It would be pleasant to think that he did much of this kind of thing with tongue firmly in cheek, though it is also possible to think that, in later years, the adulation that he received from his many followers rather went to his head. The gimmicks and untruths that found their way into USA Goju are unfortunate, because

¹ In listing them we preserve the spellings/transliterations that Urban apparently preferred.

there is in Urban's system much that one cannot help applauding. The strength of USA Goju lies in its recognition of the importance of individuality and personal development through karate. To say the least of it, breaking away from so venerated a teacher as Yamaguchi Gogen and developing his own interpretation of karate must have required considerable strength of character. The strength of character to examine what they have learnt and to change and adapt it into something new and alive is precisely what so many contemporary karateka lack – and are encouraged by their teachers not to develop. In this respect, if in no other, Peter Urban has set a good example.

Urban himself successfully resisted the temptation to create a rigid and hierarchical organisation governed by an unchanging orthodoxy. He declined also to be governed by the past or to prescribe in detail what the future of his creation should be. In 2003, aware of advancing age and deteriorating health, he published his will. To everyone's surprise, he declined to name a successor, instead leaving what he was by then calling Gojulandia in the care of a number of trusted associates who would be free to follow whatever paths of development they chose. Since his death, Urban Goju appears to have become a loose federation of schools teaching widely differing syllabuses, united under a blanket organisation called the Urban System of America Goju Association International. There have been the inevitable political arguments and resultant splinters, but Urban's legacy is, on the whole, so flexible and accommodating that there really is nothing much to argue about.

Taekwondo

Taekwondo (the word means "the way of kicking and punching") is both a Korean martial art and the national sport of South Korea; indeed, it is the only martial art to have received such official recognition by a national government. Since 2000 the form of taekwondo sparring called *sihap kyorugi* has been an Olympic

event. Taekwondo thus has the distinction – if it is a distinction – of being one of the only two oriental combat arts (the other being judo) represented at the Olympic Games.

The main Korean ancestor of taekwondo is an ancient striking and kicking art called taekkyeon,¹ which was originally a branch of a more comprehensive military art called subak that made use of hand strikes, kicks, joint locks and throws. Subak, broadly speaking, is the Korean equivalent of Japanese ju jitsu. It is said that subak and taekkyeon can be traced back (by way of wall paintings, tomb inscriptions, etc.) to the fifth century, though taekkyeon does not seem to have become an art separate from subak until the latter part of the eighteenth century. Taekkyeon is still practised as an art in its own right in Korea and to a limited extent in Europe, China and Japan, and several associations exist for its promotion.

The Japanese occupation of Korea from 1910 to 1945 represents a turning-point in Korean martial arts history. On the one hand, intent on suppressing all traces of native Korean culture, the Japanese prohibited the practice of the Korean martial arts. Taekkyeon, insofar as it was practised at all, was therefore an underground art practised in secret for some thirty-five years. It is said that by 1945 only one practitioner of traditional taekkyeon, Song Duk Ki (1893–1987), was still alive. This looks a little like a folkloric exaggeration, but we can at any rate take it that the art was in serious decline by the end of World War II. On the other hand, Koreans who wished to do so were encouraged during the years of occupation to train in the Japanese arts. Thus, when taekkyeon started to re-emerge after 1945, it began at once to exhibit characteristics influenced by Japanese karate. Indeed, given the long-term political and cultural connections between Japan and Korea, it seems likely that Japanese influences were present in traditional taekkyeon long before 1945.

¹ The word is also romanised as taekkyon and taekyon.



Song Duk Ki

If Song Duk Ki's name is not always mentioned as a part of taekwondo history it certainly deserves to be. At the end of World War II, as part of a general Korean cultural revival, he set about the task of rescuing taekkyeon from imminent extinction. By 1953 there were nine kwans (schools) teaching taekkyeon in various forms. Song Duk Ki and his students had effected so successful a revival that the president of South Korea, Syngman Rhee (1875–1965), asked General Choi Hong Hi (1918–2002) to introduce taekkyeon as a part of military training.

It was not, however, introduced in a “pure” or an unmodified form. General Choi had himself trained in taekkyeon but he was also a nidan (second dan) in Shotokan karate under Funakoshi Gichin. The art that he now systematised for the purposes of military training was thus – as he himself said – a fusion of indigenous taekkyeon and Japanese Shotokan karate.¹ In particular, he devised a series of twenty-four forms or patterns – called hyung or teul in Korean – that are obviously influenced by (indeed, are in some respects identical to) the kata of Shotokan. These patterns are still used by the International Taekwondo Federation, though the

¹ H. H. Choi, *Taekwon-Do: The Korean Art of Self-Defence*, vol. 1, pp. 241–274 (3rd ed., International Taekwon-Do Federation, 1993).

World Taekwondo Federation (see below) has adopted a different set of patterns called poomse. It was General Choi who devised the name taekwondo for the synthetic style that he had developed, and this name was officially recognised by the government of Syngman Rhee on 11 April, 1955.



Choi Hong Hi

Over and above its use in military training, taekwondo rapidly achieved popularity as a civilian pursuit. In 1961, as part of an initiative to unify the various schools then in existence and to promote the art more widely, the Korean Taekwondo Union was founded (in the following year – attempts at unification having not entirely succeeded – its name was changed to the Korean Taekwondo Association). In 1966 General Choi established the International Taekwondo Federation to facilitate the spread of the art worldwide, with Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, West Germany, the United States, Turkey, Italy, Egypt and South Korea as its founding national members. The International Taekwondo Federation and its predecessors were official organisations sponsored by the South Korean government.

At this point, however, politics supervened in a more substantial and literal form than its usual appearances in martial arts history. General Choi had been involved in the military coup d'état that in 1961 had established Park Chung Hee as the President of South Korea, but he became increasingly disillusioned with President Park's regime, especially after he was required to resign from the army in 1962 and packed off as the South Korean Ambassador to Malaysia. On returning from his tour of duty in Malaysia he decided that he could no longer live under the Park government. In 1971 he went into exile in Canada, taking the International Taekwondo Federation with him.¹ Meanwhile a new national training centre, called the Kukkiwon, was built in Seoul, and in 1973 the South Korean government formed the World Taekwondo Federation as the art's official governing body. In what looks to the outsider like an extraordinary display of ingratitude General Choi was more or less airbrushed out of taekwondo history. Documents associated with the World Taekwondo Federation either do not mention him at all or refer to him as a figure of no importance. The International Taekwondo Federation and the World Taekwondo Federation continue to exist, though only the latter is recognised by the International Olympic Committee. Thanks to the inevitable disputes over succession when General Choi died, there are in fact now three separate organisations each claiming to be the true International Taekwondo Federation.



According to an official estimate published by the South Korean government, taekwondo is now practised by some seventy million people in 190 countries. This may be an exaggeration, but it is certainly true that taekwondo has succeeded remarkably well in establishing itself internationally. Its emphasis on spectacular kicking techniques and competition fighting have made it

¹ He remained in exile in Toronto until his health began to fail in 2000, when he returned to Pyongyang in North Korea.

especially popular with the young, fit and super-flexible. “Traditional” taekwondo – taekwondo as developed for military training purposes – is still practised, though taekwondo seems nowadays to be regarded by most of its practitioners – in both the World Taekwondo Federation and the International Taekwondo Federation – as a sport rather than as a martial art. We are on the whole justified in regarding taekwondo as a kind of “cousin” of karate. On the one hand, under the direction of the World Taekwondo Federation, it has been intentionally developed and marketed as a purely Korean art/sport, with Japanese influences minimised, denied or eradicated as far as possible. It has not, however, been possible to wish away those influences altogether. Taekwondo as practised within the International Taekwondo Federation, on the other hand, bears the clear imprint of Shotokan karate as part of its ancestry; and its practitioners insist – not without reason – that their version of the art is the one that General Choi formulated and named. It may be pointed out also that the relationship between taekwondo and karate is a two-way affair. Most obviously, the high and acrobatic kicks characteristic of taekwondo are now more and more seen in traditional karate dojo. By and large, the influence that the two arts have had on one another is undeniable; nor, nationalist sentiments apart, is there any reason to regret it.

Kickboxing

The modern contact sport of kickboxing furnishes a good illustration of how, for good or ill, one art can meld with others to create something new. In its current forms kickboxing can be most succinctly described as a hybridisation of karate, muay Thai (Thai boxing), taekwondo and western boxing. There are, however, now so many kickboxing and “freestyle” schools and associations that it is difficult to make meaningful general statements. In comparatively recent years, with the addition of grappling techniques lifted from judo and ju jitsu, kickboxing

has also metamorphosed into the “mixed martial arts” phenomenon.

Contemporary kickboxing began in Japan at the end of the 1950s. In December 1959, Yamada Tatsuo¹ (山田 辰夫) (d. 1967), a former student of Motobu Choki, attended a Thai boxing match in Tokyo and was impressed by what he saw. He had for some time been toying with the possibility of forming an organisation to promote full-contact karate fighting, and he now conceived the idea of arranging fights between Thai boxers and Japanese karateka. He seems from the first to have wanted to make full-contact fighting into a competition sport rather than to replicate the



Yamada Tatsuo (left) practising with Motobu Choki

kind of iron personal discipline cultivated by Kyokushin karateka. In collaboration with a boxing promoter called Noguchi Osamu (野口 修) (1934) he arranged a contest between three muay Thai fighters and three Kyokushin karateka: Nakamura Tadashi, Kurosaki Kenjii and Fujihira Akio. The contest

¹ Not to be confused with the film actor of the same name.

took place on 12 February, 1963 in the Lumpinee Boxing Stadium in Bangkok; Nakamura and Fujihira won their bouts by a knockout (Fujihira, under the ring-name Osawa Noboru, was subsequently to become a prominent kickboxer). Thereafter Noguchi Osamu drew up a set of rules for kickboxing as a sport in its own right, and in 1966 founded the Kickboxing Association as its first sanctioning body.¹ At the same time Yamada opened a kickboxing school of his own in Tokyo called Nihon Kempo Karate-do,² the name of which was changed – perhaps in an intentional departure from traditional language – to Suginami Gym after his death.

The first actual kickboxing event as such – i.e. the first event that was not a mixed match between fighters of different styles – was held in Osaka on 11 April, 1966. The sport became instantly popular; for a while there was a kind of kickboxing craze in Japan. At one point contests were being broadcast three times a week on Japanese television, though the popularity of kickboxing declined somewhat during the 1980s. During the 1990s it revived again, largely thanks to the efforts of a former Kyokushin karateka called Ishii Kazuyoshi who in 1993 set up an organisation called K1 that for a while enjoyed considerable success. (In 1980 Ishii had formed a more conventional full-contact karate association called Seidokaikan (正道会館), of which K1 was a commercial offshoot.) Thanks to the culturally self-destructive wish of many young Japanese to emulate anything American, much of the renewed popularity of kickboxing in Japan during the 1990s seems to have been due to the fact that it was now possible to market it as an American sport.

Kickboxing had spread to the United States by the early 1970s. Much of its initial appeal was to established karateka who had become bored with the formality and lack of realism of traditional

¹ It may well have been Noguchi who coined the Japanese loan-word *キックボクシング* (kikkubokushingu).

² Yamada's Nihon Kempo is to be distinguished from the combat sport of the same name (though usually romanised as Nippon Kempo) created by Sawayama Muneumi in 1932.

karate. One of its earliest proponents was a notorious swindler and criminal called John Timothy Keehan (1939–1975), more usually known as Count Juan Raphael Danté,¹ who in 1964 formed a promotional organisation called the World Karate Federation.² Initially a rough-house affair with few rules and no weight categories, kickboxing in America was formalised under different codes by a number of associations set up for the purpose. Prominent among these have been the United States Kickboxing Association (1970); the Professional Karate Association (1974); the World Kickboxing Association (1976); the International Sport Karate Federation (1985); and the International Kickboxing Federation (1992). As far as we can see, there is no significant difference between kickboxing and what is variously called full contact karate or American full contact karate.

Broadly speaking, kickboxing can be described as jiyu kumite fully transmogrified into a sport, with few if any pretensions to be an art. What differences there are between the various organisations now in existence are partly political and have partly to do with the rules governing tournaments. The format of tournaments is more or less the same everywhere, and resembles that of western boxing: short rounds punctuated by short rest breaks, with contests decided on points or by a knockout. In specific respects, however, there are different sets of rules prescribing the length and number

¹ During the 1960s “Count Danté” promoted himself in advertisements in American comic books as “the deadliest man alive” and as being willing to reveal (in the booklet offered for sale in the same advertisements) the secrets of “the DEADLIEST and most TERRIFYING fighting art known to man.” In 1965 he and an accomplice were charged with attempted arson when they tried to blow out the windows of a rival dojo in Chicago with explosives. There are several similarly discreditable stories about him. In 1969 he founded an organisation called the Black Dragon Fighting Society, which still exists and to which one can belong in exchange for a fee (at the time of writing) of US\$150.

² Not to be confused with the World Karate Federation that was formed in 1990 with the object (among other things) of promoting karate as an Olympic sport.

of rounds, the permitted degree of contact, the height of kicks and the use of clinches, knees and elbows. In contrast to the fearsome full-contact kumite practised by Kyokushin karateka, kickboxing contests always involve the use of protective equipment. There are national kickboxing associations in all the other countries to which kickboxing has spread; in Europe, these have come together with a high degree of success under an umbrella called the World Association of Kickboxing Organisations (1976). There is no overall governing body or central authority, however, and kickboxing “world champions” are often champions of a very small world.

It was not clear to us at first that kickboxing should be included in a list of arts having a family relation to karate. Genealogically, it probably stands closer to Thai boxing than to anything else, though the more ferocious techniques of Thai boxing are mostly forbidden by its rules. To all intents and purposes kickboxing is simply a form of prizefighting. Some emphasis is given in kickboxing clubs to fitness and self-defence, but kickboxing is almost exclusively practised as a competition sport, and if the expression “martial art” is used in relation to it, it is used only in a very loose sense. There are – at least as far as we know – no kata and none of the ritual courtesies found in karate dojo. Kickboxing has no discernible “spiritual” or “philosophical” aspect, and there is no obvious sense among practitioners of being related to an eastern cultural tradition (though the system of coloured belts to denote rank has in many cases been adopted). The main, if not the only, object of the exercise is competition fighting. Nonetheless, it is obvious that kickboxing has borrowed techniques from karate as well as from Thai boxing and other arts. Also, in terms of ancestry Japanese karate was one of its main forerunners and Japanese karateka were among its earliest exponents. It is in this sense fair enough to regard it as a cousin of karate, albeit only a rather distant one.



When we began this book, we took it for granted that it would be an easy matter to set out the development of karate in the form of a straightforward narrative. In making this assumption we were mistaken. That certain people lived, practised and taught is easy enough to establish by conventional means; but beyond such bare biographical facts the story of karate is as much a matter of mythology as of history. The accounts that one comes across often give the impression of being not so much the truth as what people want to be the truth or think ought to be true. Almost nothing is verifiable. Predictable patterns of myth and folklore abound. Written records are sparse and unreliable. Autobiographical writings are often anecdotal, and in some cases self-serving and clearly intended to provide *ex post facto* justifications for earlier decisions and actions; biographical writings are almost always uncritical hagiographies, full of tall stories that one is expected to take on trust. One has to rely heavily on oral traditions that are not capable of corroboration and that exist in different versions. Credulous disciples accept absurdities as truth and weave them into the story (you would, for example, have to be pretty gullible to believe the tale put about by Peter Urban that Yamaguchi Gogen killed a tiger with his bare hands; yet people do believe it, and repeat it as an article of faith.) In some cases, the traditional narrative has been distorted or exaggerated by people with agendas of their own – who wish to enhance or damage the reputation of this or that teacher or school, or to justify themselves and vilify others. Sometimes one comes across stories that appear to be no more than a collection of half-truths or outright falsehoods (as, it would seem, in the case of James Mitose and William Chow). In short, much of what passes for karate history has to be taken with a pinch of salt, and almost everything that can be said will be disputed by someone. In these pages, we have tried to be as accurate as we can, but we conclude this historical section with a strong feeling that the truth will always be elusive.

KARATE IN THE MODERN WORLD: A CRITICAL OVERVIEW

IN EFFECT, THIS chapter begins a new and separate section of the book. We anticipate that it will be controversial in a way that the earlier chapters were not. In it we intend to get away from history and develop a critical overview of karate as practised at the present time. In doing so we shall repeat some of the things that we have said elsewhere,¹ but we shall elaborate and add to them. We write not in a spirit of mindless conservatism, but in the conviction that the development of karate from the mid twentieth century onwards has involved the loss of much that is valuable and the introduction of much that is not.

There is no denying that distance lends enchantment to the view. It is easy to look at the past through the proverbial rose-tinted spectacles; it is also easy to think that one's own likes and dislikes ought to be the likes and dislikes of the rest of the world. These are pitfalls of which we are aware. We proceed in spite of them, however, conceding straight away that what we say is only a personal opinion. The least that can be said is that it is an opinion grounded in a good deal of experience and honest

¹ See Michael Cowie and Robert Dyson, *Kenkyo-ha Goju Karate Kempo: An Introduction to the Way of Karate* (Kenkyo-ha Budo Renmei, 2011), esp. chs 1, 9–11.

reflection. We know too, of course, that to every unfavourable generalisation there will be many honourable exceptions.

The Ethical Deterioration of Karate

In the long inscription on Funakoshi Gichin's memorial at Engaku-ji near Tokyo there appear two sayings attributed to him: 空手は君子の武芸 (Karate wa kunshi no bugei), "Karate is the martial art of the virtuous man" and 拳禅一 (Kenzen ichi) "the fist and Zen are one." These aphorisms express an important truth: that the founders of karate intended to create much more than a repertoire of physical techniques or a system of self-defence. They saw their art also, and especially, as a means of self-development or self-perfection: a discipline that, properly taught, would enable the practitioner to grow into a virtuous – a well-integrated, mature, socially responsible, unselfish – human being. They understood also that unless taught in conjunction with certain ideals of behaviour – humility, compassion, self-restraint, public spirit – karate might be no more than the skilled application of violence for dishonourable purposes. In a sentence that might be adopted as the motto of all karateka, Funakoshi Osensei says: "The true purpose of the art of karate lies not in victory or defeat, but in the perfection of the practitioner's character."¹

These are not empty words, nor is the sentiment by any means unique to Funakoshi. We remember that, in the earliest times of which we have any solid knowledge, Takahara Pechin and Matsumura Sokon both emphasised the ethical as well as the physical dimensions of their art. There is every reason to think that the founders of karate selected their students with great care and devoted as much time to the formation of their character as to the cultivation of physical prowess.

In this context, it is important also to remember two things. First, the te of Okinawa became transformed into what we now

¹ For a selection of Funakoshi's sayings see Cowie and Dyson, *Kenkyo-ha Goju Karate Kempo*, pp. 9–10.

call karate largely through exposure to the martial arts of China; but those arts were themselves strongly connected to the related moral traditions of Buddhism and Taoism.¹ Second, after its transmission to Japan, karate came into contact with the ancient military ideology of loyalty and self-sacrifice called Bushido (武士道) and with the practice of Zen Buddhism. Bushido is usually translated as something like “warrior way,” but the word “bushi” means a good deal more than “warrior” means in English. “Bu” (武) is “military”; shi (士) is “gentleman.” A “military gentleman” – a Samurai – is more than a skilled fighter. He is person of chivalry and nobility of character.² This may not always have been true in practice. The contention that the Samurai were sometimes arrogant bullies or mindless fanatics no doubt has an element of truth in it. But an ideal is not invalidated by the fact that people fall short of it.

Modern karate thus emerged into a world in which ready-made systems of ethics were on hand to receive and shape it. The fact that karate was so much formed by the example of Bushido is not, when you think about it, all that remarkable. No western student familiar with the medieval European tradition of chivalry will see anything strange in the idea that fighting prowess can be humanised and civilised by association with a code of personal excellence. Such a code is what distinguishes the “knight” from the barbarian, or the righteous fighter from the mere exponent of violence. Contrary to what is sometimes

¹ Itosu Anko, in the letter mentioned on pp. 12–13, above, says: “Karate did not develop from Buddhism or Confucianism.” This is an extraordinary thing to say, given the obvious connections between karate and Buddhist traditions – especially if it is true that Itosu coined the name Shorin Ryu (“Shaolin School”). Many early karateka, indeed, are more than happy to claim a connection with China and the “Shaolin Temple.” One can only assume that Itosu, writing at a time of Japanese hostility towards China and Chinese culture, wanted to play down the extent of Chinese influence on the art that he was trying to “sell” to the Japanese education authorities.

² See Nitobe Inazo, *Bushido: the Soul of Japan* (Charles E. Tuttle, 1969), for an account of the ethical virtues of Bushido.

believed, karate never was a Japanese Samurai art, but it readily embraced the chivalric tradition long ago implanted by the Samurai in the Japanese martial culture.

As far as we know, it was Funakoshi Gichin who first attached the suffix “do” to the word karate. This small terminological change is of great significance. “Do” (道) is “way” or “path,” with the specific meaning of “Zen way” or “Buddhist teaching.” Understood in this sense, karate is more than a collection of fighting skills – more, that is, than a “jutsu” (術). It is a way of life ordered to the development of personal and social excellence. The exterior aspects of practice are only the means by which the practitioner strives to develop interior virtues: courtesy, determination, humility, gentleness, justice, self-knowledge, restraint, non-aggression. As he works to eliminate technical imperfections from his practice, the karateka works simultaneously to eradicate moral imperfections from his character. It may seem hopelessly paradoxical to suggest that one can find a kind of virtue and inner peace through the determined practice of a fighting art, yet this is a central proposition of karate as we understand it. The ultimate and true purpose of training is to defeat the self – the demands and dissonances of ego – and transform oneself into a person of integrity and virtue.

So far, so good. Our strong impression, however, is that in the period since World War II the ethical dimensions of karate have been neglected almost to the point of atrophy. We know that there are groups and individuals of whom this is not true, but there is every reason to think it true in general. As long ago as 1976 Funakoshi Gichin’s senior student Egami Shigeru wrote:

The present situation ... is that the majority of followers of karate in overseas countries pursue karate only for its fighting techniques ... It is extremely doubtful that those enthusiasts have come to a full understanding of karate-do ... Mention should also be made of the negative influence of movies and television on the public image of karate, if not on the art itself. Depicting karate as a mysterious way of fighting capable of causing death or injury

with a single blow or kick ... the mass media present a pseudo art far from the real thing.¹

By “in overseas countries” Egami Sensei presumably means “elsewhere than in Japan,” but it is by no means obvious that Japanese karate is exempt from the kind of reproaches that he expresses, nor is it true that the Japanese themselves have had no part in the ethical deterioration of karate elsewhere. On the contrary, this deterioration is at least to some extent due to the exploitation of karate by some of its most senior Japanese practitioners. At the end of the war, Okinawa and Japan were in ruins, materially, economically and politically. Reduced to destitution, several formerly prominent teachers found themselves having to keep the wolf from the door by teaching karate to American servicemen stationed in their country as part of an army of occupation. One can hardly blame them for earning a crust in the only way open to them, and one can readily imagine how such a necessity must have stuck in the throat. American servicemen, however, were by and large much more interested in learning how to fight than in cultivating personal virtue. One assumes also that they would have thought the Japanese hardly in a position to moralise. The art that American soldiers and marines took home with them (often with high dan grades acquired after only a few years of study) was to that extent incomplete and, so to speak, external. They were understandably proud of their physical accomplishments and full of stories about the wonderful things the Masters could do, but they had little apparent awareness of anything beyond technique.² Similar remarks apply

¹ *The Heart of Karate-Do* (Kodansha International, 1976; rev. edn., 2000), pp. 13–14.

² We here make again a point that we have made already, but one that bears repeating. Certain questions about the “US marines who trained with the Okinawan Masters” myth are never asked, and ought to be. Given that the typical USMC tour of duty on Okinawa or in Japan was for one year and that being an American serviceman was a full-time job, just how much training did the marines in question actually do with the Masters? Those early students were

to the Japanese teachers who came to Europe during the post-war period. They found students who were culturally disposed to learn only the exterior aspects of their art, and that is what they taught them – for money, and usually, it must be remembered, in the face of a language barrier so great as to make the communication of nuances all but impossible anyway. One's strong impression is that, by and large, those early teachers and their students simply failed to understand what each wanted and expected of the other.

The influence of the media to which Egami Sensei draws attention is only one of the factors involved in the decline of karate as an art, and not the most significant one. We shall come back to it shortly, but in the context of other, and more substantial, considerations. Karate and the martial arts in general have suffered from a number of attitudinal changes, some of which are related to general cultural changes and others of which are attributable to specific influences. As long-term and interested observers of the karate world, we are inclined to make the following remarks, all of which are interrelated at different levels of generality.

Sport Karate

The coming of "sport" karate and the emergence of the related phenomena of kickboxing and "mixed" martial arts¹ have had an entirely deleterious effect on the conception of karate as an art or "way." Jiyu kumite – free or largely unregulated sparring – may or may not have something to be said for it. Older teachers – Funakoshi Gichin especially – tended to discourage or forbid it, largely because they saw competitiveness as undermining rather

among those who fostered the belief, prevalent in the 1960s and common until quite recently, that it is a virtually superhuman feat to "get a black belt." How and why were so many of them awarded high dan grades after only a relatively short period of training?

¹ At the time of writing the long-running craze for "Brazilian" ju jitsu – an immediate forerunner of "mixed" martial arts – seems to have run out of steam.

than reinforcing the desired virtues of character.¹ A later, and now the predominant, view is that jiyu kumite introduces a valuable element of reality and “stress-testing” into karate practice. There are respectable arguments on both sides.² At all events, no one who has ever watched the full-blooded kumite of Kyokushin karateka is likely to have any doubts about the participants’ courage and strength of character. It is, however, incontrovertible that the growth and popularity of jiyu kumite has contributed to the common perception of karate as a sport or game.

Part of the problem (if we are right to call it a problem) is the general failure of the “philosophy” of karate to cross the linguistic and cultural divide between East and West. An ethical system that is in essence Buddhist is likely to be completely foreign to the mindset of the average westerner.³ This is probably less true than it once was, but it is still true in general. All occidental karate teachers know a few words and phrases of Japanese, and many pretend to know more than they do. Few, however, take the trouble to study the Japanese language and culture in any depth. They are to that extent ill equipped to grasp and communicate the “inner” nature of karate, and correspondingly ready to slot karate into a familiar pre-existing “sport” framework. There are plenty of people now to whom the idea of karate as being anything *other* than a sport is unintelligible. Every instructor knows – and in many cases will pander to – students for whom kata practice is only an irritating distraction from the fun of fighting or an

¹ See Egami, *The Heart of Karate Do*, pp. 111; 113; also Higaonna Morio *Traditional Karate Do* vol. 4: *Applications of the Kata* (Japan Publications, 1991), p. 136.

² For some account of them see Cowie and Dyson, *Kenkyo-ha Goju Karate Kempo*, pp. 239–241.

³ For example, western Christian-based ethics is teleological and eschatological: goal-directed and “futurecentric.” We don’t think of perfection or enlightenment as something to be lived in the here and now and for its own sake. “Salvation” lies in the future, and we are working our way towards it: life is a sort of journey with a clear destination. Even people who perceive themselves as being completely non-religious have grown up in this tradition.

irksome requirement of a grading syllabus. For many contemporary karateka the only or main object of practice is to fight, to enter tournaments, to win trophies. Numerous organisations have sprung up that have as their main or only purpose the promotion of competitive events. We suspect that it is only a matter of time before karate is accepted as an Olympic sport, as judo and taekwondo already have been.

One objection to sport karate is that habitual participation in no-contact or semi-contact fighting weakens technique and resolve because “pulling” punches and kicks becomes established in the participants’ minds as a conditioned reflex. In our context a far more important point is the effect of competition on the character of the competitor. It may be true that human beings are naturally competitive animals. Nonetheless, the desire to win a karate contest is a desire to gratify the ego: to exult in a victory destitute of moral significance. Are we, then, to take seriously the maxim that “the true purpose of the art of karate lies not in victory or defeat but in the perfection of the practitioner’s character”? It is, of course, open to anyone to disagree with Funakoshi Osensei: to contend that “playing” karate is ethically no different from playing football. If we are to take his dictum seriously, however, rather than merely paying lip-service to it, a simple question presents itself: what, exactly, is being perfected in the character of someone so largely motivated by the desire to triumph over others? No doubt all this will seem mealy-mouthed and self-righteous to some; but you either believe in the idea of karate as a “way” of self-perfection or you don’t, and whether you do or don’t is reflected in how you live in relation to it.

The Media

When Egami Shigeru complained about “the negative influence of movies and television” he was writing at the height of the “kung fu” craze associated with the handful of films made between 1971 and 1973 by Bruce Lee. Perhaps he had also in mind the television series *Kung Fu* (1972–1975) in which David Carradine played a

wandering Shaolin monk looking for his lost family in America. These productions focus on Chinese arts rather than karate, but Egami Sensei's point, presumably, is that they cheapen and vulgarise the martial arts in general by portraying them only as "mysterious way[s] of fighting capable of causing death or injury with a single blow or kick."

This criticism is not without force, though we are inclined to think it an overstatement. Silly and stagey as they are, with their supercilious, invincible hero and caricature villains, it is perhaps going too far to suggest that Bruce Lee's films portray the martial arts in a "negative" light. They are formulaic moralities cast in the same mould as traditional Westerns. The invincible hero is always a virtuous person fighting against wrong or injustice or in defence of the underdog, and right always triumphs in the end. It is true that the audience is invited to admire only the hero's (cinematically enhanced) technical virtuosity. Beyond a few bits and pieces of catchpenny Oriental Wisdom, there is no depth of meaning. But in how many other kinds of action and adventure film *is* there any depth of meaning, and why should there be? Cinema audiences want thrills and spills and spectacular fight scenes, not a lesson in ethics. One can be too puritanical about such entertainments. Flashy and meretricious as "kung fu" films mostly are, they are still only action films and, as such, no more objectionable in their way than Westerns or gangster movies are.

A different and more telling point is the way in which Bruce Lee's name and image were exploited for commercial purposes after his death. Bruce Lee himself was really no more than a mediocre actor and a salesman who found and exploited a niche market, but the "kung fu boom" that he inaugurated turned into a bandwagon that everyone suddenly wanted to be on. Certainly it gave rise to many dubious claims and false expectations. If Bruce Lee and his films have had a "negative" influence, this is due not so much to the films themselves as to the ways in which Lee's name and reputation were used as part of the commercialisation of the martial arts during the 1970s and after.

Commercialisation

We remarked earlier that karate has established itself worldwide, but only at a cost. The spread and popularisation of karate for which early teachers aimed has not been an unmixed blessing. Arguably, it has not been a blessing at all. For one thing, the old idea of a small dojo – perhaps a garden – in which a teacher would preside over the personal as well as the technical development of a handful of students is remembered only as an aspect of history. This particular rot began to set in quite early. It was Itosu Anko who introduced the idea of the karate “class” in the early years of the twentieth century by sponsoring the introduction of karate into the Okinawan school system (see pp. 12–13, above). It was he who first adopted the mechanical or robotic method of training about which we shall have more to say presently. Mass training along lines reminiscent of military drill had established itself by the 1930s. But what, under such conditions, becomes of “perfection of character”?



*Mass training along lines reminiscent of military drill
had established itself by the 1930s*

With the increasing commercialisation of karate since the end of World War II large classes became the norm: classes moreover in which the students are mere fee payers and the teacher a paid service provider. Under such circumstances the traditional relationship of intimacy and example as between teacher and student is lost. There is an exclusive concentration on the students' merely technical and outward development, with no attention paid to broader issues of character formation.

It has been common since the late 1970s to hear references in advertising and the media to "the martial arts industry." What lies behind this expression is an assumption that one hardly ever hears questioned: that martial arts teaching is a business like any other. This assumption is perhaps part of the larger attitudinal change that western societies underwent in the late twentieth century, with the return to prominence in the 1980s of the free market economic ideology of classical liberalism. The most immediate implication of that ideology, transfused into the culture of Europe and the USA with remarkable success, was a doctrine of Philistine consumerism and self-interest. To subscribe to that doctrine is to suppose that every public relationship, however politely disguised, is a commercial relationship, with gain as its object. Everything in the world of human transactions has become an "industry."

The phenomenon of commercialisation is most clearly seen in the slick marketing of some large American kenpo schools. At all levels of size, sophistication and success, however, there are nowadays professional and semi-professional karate instructors, and to the professional instructor karate is necessarily a commodity to be bought and sold. As such, the marketing of it is subject to the same conditions as the marketing of any other commodity. Teachers have to supply what there is a demand for; and what there is a demand for is not, on the whole, karate as a Zen way of self-perfection but karate as punching and kicking and kumite and competitive sport.

We are not, of course, suggesting that commercial karate teachers are necessarily crooks or phonies – we shall come to the

question of fraud later. What we do suggest, however, is that much of what is now on offer has little or no connection with karate considered as an ethical “way.” For more than one reason the last few decades have seen the general demise of old-fashioned blood, sweat and tears training. In the relatively prosperous post-war era, people have learnt to expect rapid gratification in return for not too much effort. Karate practised as an art requires intense and lifelong dedication, but intense and lifelong dedication is at a discount in a consumerist world in which people want and expect the immediate gratification of desire; and what the people want is what the professional teacher has to supply.

The growth of the martial arts “industry” has thus given rise to what one might call a devaluation of the currency, or a watering of the beer. One might also call it “grade inflation.” Every karate teacher knows what the first question asked by a newcomer to the dojo is likely to be: “How long will it take me to get a black belt?” The new student almost always comes with a picture in mind of a destination rather than a journey. But the desire to pass gradings is much the same as the desire to win tournaments. It is a desire for an empty personal gratification – for a trinket that, of itself, has no value. As such, it is a desire that a teacher committed to “perfection of character” ought to eradicate, by instruction and example. But if karate is a commodity to be traded like any other, why should the teacher care, and how can he afford to care, about the perfection of anybody’s character? Like every service provider, he has to give the customers what the customers conceive themselves to be paying for. If he does not, they will go to somebody who will.

One result of this commercial pressure, therefore, is a proliferation of ranks or grades (the attainment of each of which involves a fee) and a lowering of the standards required to achieve each one – because students who “fail” will in all probability never be seen again, and students for whom life is made too demanding will soon give up and go away. Nowadays one comes across holders of dan grades – some of them children – who have

little or no grasp of the inner or “spiritual” aspects of karate. Many of them have no very impressive grasp of its external aspects either. They have been whisked up the grading ladder because that is what the teacher’s livelihood, or part of it, depends on. A degree of lip-service may be paid to the “spiritual” side of karate. It is easy enough, after all, to learn how to say the right things. Rarely, however, does one come across any student for whom karate is a way of life, or is more than a physical pursuit engaged in only for a couple of hours once or twice a week. Often enough one comes across karate “clubs” that are little more than playgroups for children.

The “Compensation Culture”

For reasons having to do with commercial expediency and changed attitudes, then, the arduous “character building” training regimes that older karateka remember (or think they remember) are now rarely seen. It is fair to add that, at least in the United Kingdom, this decline has been compounded by a growing aversion to risk. Anyone who nowadays asked of his students what the teachers of old asked of theirs would soon find not only that he had no students; more to the point, he would very possibly find himself in court.

Karate, like any martial art, has its inherent dangers – particularly, one might add, when practised by large numbers of people in confined spaces. It goes without saying that no one wants to see students injured, and a good teacher will do everything possible to ensure that his students practise in reasonable safety and in ways suitable to their level of experience. But to try to eradicate *all* danger is to remove any semblance of authenticity from practice. *Per ardua ad astra* is a sound maxim – but *ardua* have become dangerous in a new way, and *astra* have had to be placed within a self-defeatingly easy reach. Modern instructors have ample reason to fear the consequences to themselves of injury to students. In all walks of life a “compensation culture” has developed within which people are encouraged to pursue dam-

ages for injuries and misfortunes that are either trivial or to which they have themselves contributed. In Britain, at least, the courts seem to have forgotten the old legal principle *volenti non fit iniuria*: no injury is done to the willing. A consequence has been the emergence of a societal fear of litigation that seems sometimes to amount to a phobia. Everywhere elaborate precautions have to be taken against even remote dangers and improbable mishaps. Inevitably this fear makes itself felt in the dojo. But you cannot have it both ways: you cannot develop a strong, indomitable, self-reliant character in students if at the same time you feel constrained to cosset and protect them from every hurt and every danger.

The Organisation of Karate

The spread and commercialisation of karate began at an early stage to give rise to organisations of the kind now described as “sanctioning” bodies or “governing” bodies. The first such organisations were intended to unite all the dojo associated with a particular ryu within a shared administrative framework. Usually they originated with the teacher’s earliest or largest dojo, which became a kind of head office or “hombu” (本部). Later came large federative bodies such as the World Karate Federation and the European Karate Federation, the purpose of which was to bring the various ryu or “styles” together under a common organisation for the furtherance of mutual (pre-dominantly sporting) goals.

It should be understood that even the largest and most reputable of such organisations are “governing bodies” only because they say they are (we shall mention the disreputable ones later). There is no such thing as a universally recognised governing body for the martial arts (though the Dai Nippon Butoku Kai and the Kokusai Budoin in Japan are held in high esteem), and there is no obligation on the part of individuals to belong to an organisation of any kind. Many modern karate organisations are not much more than commercial entities that exist to promote courses and competitions, register members and grades, collect subscriptions

and act as insurance brokers for their membership. The larger and better known ones are highly effective pyramid selling schemes. A Great Man sits at the top of the pyramid, and those occupying the tiers below him pay for the use of his name, the organisation's name and stationery, and, above all, the opportunity to grade and be graded.

Part of what enables such schemes to succeed as well as they do is what one might call a folk memory of the kind of relationship that used to hold between teacher and student in years gone by. At least down to the late nineteenth century, for x to be accepted as a student of y generally meant that x would be taught by y personally, on a kind of quasi-familial footing that may have been inaugurated when x was a child (the motif of the weak or unruly child sent off by his parents to be taken in hand by a master is part of martial arts folklore). Save in exceptional cases the days of one-to-one or small-group tuition are long gone, but one still hears people proudly claiming that they are students or disciples of So-and-So Sensei. It is quite likely that they have never actually met So-and-So Sensei, or that they have seen him only occasionally, at a course or seminar. They are his "students" only in the sense of being paid-up members of the association of which he is the head; but that membership, however tenuous the real connection involved, seems to give the individual a sense of being part of a family or lineage, or of being somehow validated or approved in what he does. The idea that one is the Great Man's student may for most practical purposes be an illusion, but it is a comforting one. In practice, So-and-So Sensei will probably not have much contact with his organisation's rank and file. Typically access to him will be controlled by an inner circle of subordinates who act as gatekeepers and intermediaries. This strategy of insulation is a way of heightening the awe in which the Great Man is held and protecting him from scrutiny and criticism. It is also an obvious power-game played by the gatekeepers for their own purposes. Nonetheless, the rank and file are somehow able to believe that they are in a kind of personal relationship with the

Master, and through him connected with a long and venerable tradition.

Considered in relation to karate's stated goal of self-perfection, karate "organisations" are dysfunctional in a number of ways, of which the following are the most obvious.

Politics

The formal organisation of karate has fostered the political squabbles and divisions that have been (and still are) so inveterate a feature of relationships within the karate community. When we sketched the twentieth-century development of the larger schools, we saw that in every single case there was a succession crisis when the founder died, or at least shortly afterwards. But crises and quarrels at the top apart, it is also a truth of experience that karate organisations at all levels, from club to international federation, are chronically infected with rivalry, spite and back-biting of one kind and another. No one who has spent any time in the martial arts world can have failed to notice this perennial fact of life.

Why are these things apparently so inevitable? "Human nature" is the short answer. The sort of rivalries and subversive behaviours that we are calling "political" are seen in all organisations. They are not phenomena peculiar to the martial arts. The kind of bodies into which karate has become organised are inherently unstable because they are, or quickly turn into, dominance hierarchies. Typically the alpha male at the top of the hierarchy has a monopoly of power and is able to control those below him by regulating the downward flow of power and patronage (in karate organisations, patronage typically takes the form of dan grades). Below him are the various beta males who engage in strategies to maximise their own power, often at one another's expense. They are in competition with each other for seniority within the hierarchy; they will try to find ways of undermining those with whom they are competing; when a position further up the ladder becomes vacant they will turn on each other in a struggle to fill it. Politics, says Foucault, is war by other means. This kind of highly predictable behaviour occurs at all levels

within an organisation, and all organisations, regardless of the intentions with which they were created, tend to behave according to this pattern. Their members are cordially and covertly at war with one another. Behaviours ostensibly ordered to the achievement of the organisation's goals become rationalisations for the playing of internal power games.

Conservatism

Karate organisations are for the most part instruments of stagnation and fossilisation rather than development and growth. Like all organisations, they maintain their identity by requiring of their members compliance with a set of rules and principles; but karate organisations also characteristically perceive themselves to be part of a highly conformist "oriental" culture. They tend to encourage and reward uniformity and discourage and punish individuality, initiative and creativity. The kata must always be performed in one way and no other; nothing must change; there must be no deviation from what the Master taught, or is thought to have taught; established patterns of deference and submission must be adhered to and are dramatised through systems of etiquette and ritual; significant dissent is regarded as a kind of treachery, and the treacherous can expect to be chastised or expelled. Perfection of character, so understood, amounts to the obliteration of individuality and the adoption of obedience, submission and blind acceptance as virtues.¹ It is not putting it too strongly to say that, in terms of the degree of conformity that they require of their members, some karate organisations exhibit characteristics that are positively totalitarian or cultish.

It is entirely natural to have a comfort zone and to want to remain in it. This is true of students. It is true also of teachers who

¹ In an interview given to the martial arts magazine *Dragon Times* (issue no. 10), Higaonna Morio says: "I am pleased to say my training has hardly changed over the years." It is difficult to imagine any other activity in which not changing (or developing) over a period of some forty years might be something to feel pleased about.

may not be very confident about what they do but whose egos prevent them from admitting ignorance or exposing themselves to scrutiny or criticism. Many teachers are in truth capable of doing little more than mimicking and handing on what they themselves were taught, and the rationalisation for this lack of imagination and creativity is the doctrine that nothing must ever change. These facts, coupled with the inherent conservatism of Japanese culture, have turned “traditional” or “classical” karate into something predominantly static and backward looking.

The idea that education is simply a matter of handing on the heritage of the past unchanged and unquestioned to the next generation is no longer as much a feature of Japanese or East Asian culture as it once was. What is remarkable, however, is the readiness with which so many westerners – to whom the very idea would be absurd in any other context – have accepted this extreme educational conservatism without question: largely, one suspects, because it is so effectively reinforced by the grading system that has become a universal feature of karate training.

Grading

It is as grading or stratification authorities that karate organisations are at their most powerful and most stultifying. In taking over the kyu/dan grading or ranking¹ system of judo, Funakoshi Gichin introduced into karate an extraordinarily effective instrument of control. No doubt he did so unwittingly: it is hard to imagine that anyone could have foreseen the amazing hold that grading would come to have on the minds of karateka, especially in Europe and America. As a way of enforcing conformity and discouraging dissent, grading has proved to be as near perfect an implement of behaviour modification as anybody could have devised. It is as if it were said to every new

¹ The term “grading” tends to be used in Europe, whereas “ranking” is preferred in the USA, possibly because the parallels between karate and military training seem to be more prominent in people’s minds in the USA.

student: "If you want your black belt (and you do), you have to do the tricks that will please the people who can give it to you; and, of course, avoid doing whatever displeases them." It really is as simple as that.

Grading has become one of the most consistently self-defeating features of karate as an organised activity. It is all too often true that karateka see their practice primarily as a journey, by way of an intermediate series of ego-gratifications, towards the coveted "black belt" or dan grade. A practice intended to be a way of self-perfection can easily turn into little more than the ticking off of items on a prescribed list in preparation for the next grading examination. The question of who does and does not deserve what grade is an absolutely guaranteed source of bickering and political infighting in the average karate club. We remark again that no one who has spent much time in contact with the karate world can have failed to notice this.

We have referred elsewhere¹ to an episode in Ian Fleming's novel *Goldfinger* (1959) that illustrates the kind of fantasy that was associated with the "black belt" back in the 1950s, when the oriental martial arts had begun to establish themselves in the West. It will do no harm to mention it again. After Oddjob, his Korean bodyguard, has kicked a piece out of a marble mantelpiece to intimidate James Bond, the villain Auric Goldfinger says:

Have you ever heard of karate? No? Well that man is one of the three in the world who have achieved the Black Belt in karate. Karate is a branch of judo, but it is to judo what a Spandau [machine gun] is to a catapult.

It is interesting to discover that karate is a branch of judo; it would be interesting also to know who awarded their black belts in karate to the only three people in the world to have achieved them.

The myth of the "black belt" and the heady brew of ignorance, gullibility and marketing skill that created it is an abiding mystery.

¹ Cowie and Dyson, *Kenkyo-ha Goju Karate Kempo*, p. 288.

The American servicemen who came home from Japan and Okinawa with black belts were no doubt fit, aggressive and skilled in hand-to-hand combat – but they were serving soldiers and marines, after all. One can take it for granted that they knew quite well that their skill in unarmed combat did not have all that much to do with their being black belts; yet they were among the first to foster the foolish myth of the “black belt” as a lethal fighting machine endowed with powers not accessible to ordinary human beings.¹ Presumably they did so partly for commercial purposes. Such purposes aside, it is no doubt pleasant to have folk believe that you have returned from the East equipped with Ancient Wisdom and Astounding Abilities. What is odd is that they found so many people who were indeed willing to believe such things.

Ironically, the pressures of commerce and mass participation have significantly undermined what was once one of karate’s most useful marketing tools. If people want (and will pay for) a black belt, then, according to the doctrine that karate teaching is only another kind of commodity, a black belt is what they must be given; but this, again, is to water the beer. The myth of the black belt is certainly not as beguiling as it used to be, because so many people have figured out that it is not in fact particularly difficult to get one – even small children can do it. Every time an eight or nine year old child is announced in the local paper as having been awarded a black belt, the whole idea of the black belt as a token of mastery becomes a little more ridiculous. Yet, as we said earlier, the first question that a prospective student will ask is still likely to be, “How long will it take me to get a black belt?” The only sensible answer to this is that it isn’t the right question to be asking, but that is not an answer that it is in the interests of the professional instructor to give.

¹ The idea that one can “be” or “become” a black belt is at least as old as the 1960s. Perhaps the underlying idea is that the achievement of a dan grade is not the mere acquisition of an attribute but a transformation of the whole self into something different. Or perhaps it’s just sloppy English.

Teaching and Learning

The generally negative view that we are taking of the contemporary culture of karate is in a number of respects associated with the issues of teaching and learning that we shall discuss in this part of the chapter. In discussing teachers and teaching we shall, for obvious reasons, name no names, but the reader should understand that everything we say is based on or extrapolated from personal experience.

Class Teaching

We have mentioned already the rise of the large regimented class as a feature of the commercialisation of karate. This is a theme that we think it worthwhile to develop a little further.

A striking feature of the modern commercial dojo is the inflexible and unimaginative character of so much of what goes on inside it. Characteristically, large classes (often of children) are taught kihon and kata by means of mechanical, drill-type repetitions accompanied by only very general supervision and explanation from the teacher. This “mass production” way of doing things is not new. As we mentioned earlier, Itosu Anko adopted something like it when he introduced karate into the Okinawan school system. It seems, however, to have become established universally in the decades after World War II. The growth of the martial arts “industry” has certainly encouraged it, because regimented training – classes in which everyone does the same thing at the same time in response to words of command – is the only way of teaching a large number of people simultaneously. Possibly it has also to do with the militaristic cast of mind that one runs across fairly frequently. Often the students, marching up and down the floor to a shouted ichi-ni-san count, look like soldiers drilling, and the instructor at the front of the class looks and sounds like a drill sergeant. This, indeed, is an image that some instructors seem to enjoy.

An obvious weakness of this way of doing things is that it is, quite simply, boring. This, however, is not our primary objection.

Arguably, it is not a valid objection at all. Up to a point, after all, overcoming boredom and perfecting one's practice through constant and determined repetition are ways of developing the diligence and single-mindedness that ought to be aspects of the martial artist's character. Much more important than boredom are the following considerations:

1. In a large group, individual students can receive only a modicum of personal attention from the teacher. The teacher – who is unlikely to know any of the students personally except at a very superficial level – can attend only to the visible aspects of performance and progress. Karate thus becomes a merely physical and external activity divested entirely of “inward” aspects: a sport or pastime like any other.

2. The excessive practice of repetitive kihon or attack-and-defence “drills” will inevitably imprint on the student's mind a mechanical, robotic habit of response and movement. Over and over again one sees unrealistic and stylised responses to unrealistic and stylised attacks drilled into students as “self-defence” techniques or yakusoku [prearranged] kumite exercises. Training of this kind does nothing more than establish conditioned reflexes that have little or no practical value. The modern karate student needs to understand clearly that most of what he is taught as self-defence (usually by an instructor who has never had to defend himself in real life) is worse than useless. This may be an unpopular truth, but it is certainly a truth. It is a truth that quite a few people have learnt the hard way. Teaching impractical “self-defence” is not only pointless: it is seriously irresponsible.

3. Repetition accompanied by proper explanation and realistic application is indispensable as a way of learning and reinforcement. However, repetition that is a mere collective training in obedience and mimicry will produce an artificial uniformity that takes no account of physical and psychological differences between students. One even comes across the idea that there should *be* no such differences – that individuality should some-

how be swallowed up in a sea of conformity. Everyone has heard the Japanese saying 出る釘は打たれる (*deru kugi wa utareru*): “The nail that sticks up is hammered down” – i.e. it’ll be the worse for you if you show yourself to be different from other people. No student of karate (or anything else) should take this pernicious maxim seriously. All it means in the context of the dojo is that the teacher cannot be bothered, or does not feel secure enough, to explore differences and interact with students as independent personalities.

For these and other reasons, we maintain that karate cannot be taught successfully to large classes. More correctly, we maintain that what is taught as karate to large classes is only an approximation to the real thing. Often it is no more than a delusory ego-trip for the teacher standing at the front of the class and barking commands. One-to-one teaching or small group practice, where each student can be encouraged to develop according to his own strengths and at his own pace, are infinitely preferable to the compliant masses that one sees tramping across the dojo floor to a count. This intimate and personal kind of interaction is, after all, the traditional Okinawan way. By contrast, a quasi-military regimentation that takes no account of individual differences will not build a technical foundation adapted to each student’s personality, physique and aptitudes. If small group practice is not commercially viable, so much the worse for commerce. If the student has the feeling in the dojo that he is only a nameless entity being processed on a sort of conveyor belt in return for a fee, he will be well advised to conclude that there is no point in staying there.

Conservatism Again

The extreme conservatism that infects so much of contemporary karate teaching and learning (and that has, we suspect, driven so many people away from the traditional dojo) is a recipe for intellectual and moral paralysis. We have suggested already that it

may reflect nothing more than the insecurities of the teacher who is reluctant or afraid to stray from the well-trodden path. It is not really surprising that reluctance to deviate from the received way of doing things should be so prevalent. The social system of karate is, on the whole, a highly effective self-policing mechanism. The rebel or maverick is likely to incur a great deal of reproach and animosity, and it is much easier to abandon the practice of independent thought in favour of a safe and comfortable conformity. Nonetheless, the prospective student should at all costs avoid the teacher who insists on unquestioning obedience – who will never let his students do anything apart from exactly what he has shown them: who is unwilling to let them think for themselves or question what they are taught. Obviously, beginners need to learn by simple imitation, and it is right that they should. But what next? If there is no next – if all the student is ever allowed to do is reproduce the transmitted orthodoxy down to the last inch – that is surely because the teacher sees his task as being the production of replicas of himself (or of his own teacher) rather than self-governing individuals. Contrary to what karate students are so often taught, perfection of character does *not* lie in slavish submission to authority and tradition. It lies in self-reliance, confident and mature individuality, and a rational faith in the soundness of one's own judgment.

For the same reason, students should avoid the teacher who will not permit cross-training: who insists on total commitment to the "style" that he teaches and regards any wish to look outside it as a kind of betrayal. This may look and feel and sound like loyalty, but it is not. It is a kind of foolish territoriality that has no place in the world of mature human beings. All arts have a good deal to learn from other arts, and anyone who wants his students to believe that all the answers are to be found in one place is not worth having as a teacher.

Also to be avoided is the teacher who exerts control over his students by means of a grading system. Teachers of a certain kind notoriously use periodic gradings as a way of keeping the

money flowing in (because each grading examination involves a fee and the prospect of the next grading keeps the students hungry). Far worse is the teacher who uses grades to enforce compliance and conformity by exploiting the power to give or withhold them. Grading should never be used as a way of rewarding obedience and punishing independence, and students should be careful not to allow anyone to use coloured belts as instruments for the suppression of their independence. It is all too easy to let this happen. Gradings have no importance unless they contribute something genuine to the student's understanding of his own growth: his own self-creation. No one needs to win approval by conforming to someone else's definition of what or who he should be.

Contemporary karate teaching suffers chronically from the idea that respect for tradition is the same thing as a refusal to depart from what was said and done in the past. Teachers who are trapped, and who want their students to be trapped, in a changeless and unquestioned system of dogma, may say – and may genuinely believe – that their attitude is one of loyalty and devotion to the purity of their art. It is not. It is the attitude of someone who, for whatever reason, is refusing to change and grow, and refusing to let his students change and grow. Having many years of experience is not the same thing as having one year's experience many times.

The Fraudulent Teacher

It is, of course, true that bad teachers – teachers who are “bad” in the sense of being unable to accommodate the ideas of change and growth and independence – may well be honest people with honourable motives who are simply the victims of misconception and flawed understanding. There is no doubt, however, that the growth of the martial arts “industry” – especially during and after the “Bruce Lee boom” – has produced a significant number of teachers who are neither honest nor honourable. Anyone who studies the (surprisingly interesting) subject of

martial arts fraud will come across familiar patterns of untruth, distortion and misinformation, rather in the way that anyone who studies the phenomena of schizophrenia will come across the same recurrent patterns of delusion. There are teachers who make patently ridiculous claims for themselves: who tell you that they can summon up the mysterious “chi” force of the universe and by means of it knock out an opponent without touching him; that they have esoteric knowledge of techniques too deadly to be disclosed; that they can disable or kill an enemy with a single secret touch – and so on and so forth. There are teachers who have grossly exaggerated their training history, or simply lied about it on the assumption (all too often justified) that no one will check; or who falsely claim to have served in elite military units¹ or to have had other kinds of special and unusual experience. There are long-established martial arts teachers whose claims to have a Japanese lineage, or to have trained for many years in Japan, have been exposed as falsehoods. Because claims to have served in the armed forces or to have studied with well-known Japanese teachers are nowadays so easy to authenticate (or disprove), several apparently respectable martial artists have in recent times been exposed as impostors. It is extremely foolish to make statements about yourself that can so easily be shown to be untrue, but this does not seem to deter charlatans and Walter Mitty types from doing it.²

¹ Exponents of this particular fantasy tend also to say: “... but on missions so sensitive that my very existence would be officially denied.” The reader should understand that this statement is in every single case a lie. No exceptions.

² Beware of the teacher who tells you that his sensei kept no records or that all his certificates were lost in a fire, eaten by the dog or destroyed by his ex-wife. For one thing, the Japanese are meticulous – not to say obsessive – record-keepers; for another, it is almost always possible to replace lost or damaged certificates. Of no one now teaching is it likely to be true that all the records of his training were destroyed in the war, though one can certainly remember people who said that they were. Generally speaking, one should always be

In this context, prospective students should be aware of the typical use made by dishonest teachers of half-truth and misleading suggestion: *suppressio veri* and *suggestio falsi*. Lies can be told with silence as well as with words. "I studied with Nanigashi Sensei"¹ may indeed be true in a sense – but possibly only in the sense that the speaker attended a couple of Nanigashi Sensei's seminars back in the 1980s, or regularly watches his videos. Without actually being told an outright falsehood, the student is left to jump to the conclusion that his teacher was Nanigashi Sensei's lifelong disciple. One often finds claims of discipleship supported by what looks like photographic evidence. It should be remembered that anybody can have his photograph taken with a famous teacher. A photograph is not necessarily evidence of anything more than that he once stood next to a famous teacher for a few seconds. Photographs taken in Japan "outside the Master's dojo" may have been taken on a package holiday visit to a local temple.

The prospective student should be aware also that there are now quite a number of organisations that, in return for a fee, will supply a "rank recognition certificate" to anyone who applies for one without making the slightest attempt to verify the applicant's credentials. Such entities – they seem to be particularly common in the United States, though there are European examples also – often have splendid sounding titles (The International So-and-So Association, or The World Federation of Such-and-Such) or Japanese names (anyone with a smattering of Budoese can make one up).² However resounding the name, they

suspicious of stories that seem designed to be uncheckable (e.g. all the records were destroyed; or: my teacher made me swear never to disclose his name).

- ¹ Perhaps we should make it clear that there is no such person – "Nanigashi" (何某) is "So-and-So."
- ² Sometimes this is done with pleasing but unintended results. There is a legend (we do not know whether it is true or not) that an instructor innocent of Japanese called his organisation Seidokan, intending to mean "true way house" (正道館), but wrote the word on his documents as 性道館, which is "sex way house." Pretending to know

always turn out to be less grand and less authoritative than they sound. Organisations of this kind are not, in a strict legal sense, fraudulent. There is, as far as we know, no law against setting up an association with a fancy name and no object other than to part fools from their money by selling them worthless memberships and diplomas. The student should not, however, take seriously a teacher who produces a rank recognition certificate issued by such an organisation. The important question, if rank is important at all, is not who *recognises* a rank (because, after all, anyone can do that), but who awarded it in the first place.

The Narcissist

It is easy to assume that martial arts frauds are no more than confidence tricksters: snake-oil salesmen whose project is to sell to the public whatever the public is witless enough to buy. Most of them probably are. In the light of our own observation, however, we are convinced that the martial arts world also has a substantial lunatic fringe of which the newcomer ought to be made aware. It is said, and perhaps it is true, that if you tell the same lies often enough you come eventually to believe them yourself. It is certainly true in our experience that some apparent swindlers seem actually to believe the fantasies that they have invented about themselves. It is hard for ordinary people to suppose that anyone could genuinely persuade himself that a wholly fictitious curriculum vitae – his own imaginary version of himself – is real; yet the authors of this book have come across individuals of whom this does appear to be true, or of whom it is at any rate true that their fantasies have become so tightly integrated into their personalities as to be no longer explicable as merely cynical lies.

The peculiar psychology of such people is no doubt a PhD dissertation waiting to be written. They seem to be actuated not so much by material greed as by ego-needs associated with their own insecurities. Possibly in some fundamental sense they have

more Japanese than you do is a pretty nearly perfect way of making a fool of yourself.

experienced real life as disappointment or frustration, and now find comfort and security in acting out a fantasy that enables them to believe that they are powerful and successful and admired. The kind of teacher whom we can perhaps call the neurotic fraud wants acolytes or disciples rather than students. He wants to see in them dependence and submission, not confidence and self-reliance, because dependence and submission on the part of others are what minister to the needs of his own ego. Inherently lacking self-worth, he longs to be a figure of importance: he wants to be the Master.

It is easy to be contemptuous of the childish and regressive behaviour of such people. It is perhaps better to recognise that, as people suffering from a recognisable species of personality disorder,¹ they are more to be pitied than blamed. Above all, however, they are to be avoided by anyone who wants to undertake the serious and beneficial study of karate. The prospective student should steer well clear of the teacher who (for instance) claims extraordinary powers but will not demonstrate them (because they are too “dangerous” or “advanced” or because the student is “not ready”) or who will demonstrate them only with the assistance of co-operative “true believers.” Be assured that he cannot really levitate or knock people down without touching them, or read minds or or kill someone with a magic touch. He can’t, because no one can.

There is absolutely no reason why one should not ask a teacher for proof of his credentials – provided, of course, that one does so politely. People who are genuine will usually be proud and happy to oblige. On the other hand, beware of the teacher who lays claim

¹ Most obviously from what psychologists call Narcissistic Personality Disorder, or NPD for short. The question of how this and related disorders arise is a difficult and contested one, but their incidence and symptomatology is well documented. We suspect that it would be possible to develop the thesis that the martial arts tend to attract people – both as teachers and students – who suffer from a range of low-level psychological disorders; but this would have to be the subject of a different book, written by someone else.

to an exotic biography that he cannot substantiate, or who becomes truculent or evasive when asked to substantiate it. He almost certainly hasn't been involved in secret military or espionage operations (very few people are, and those who are probably don't tell the world about it). If he doesn't understand more than a few words and stock phrases of Japanese, he didn't spend years in a secret Buddhist temple at the foot of Mount Fuji studying with an old master of whom no one else has heard. And so on and so forth. It is always a good idea to remain in the world of sane and honest folk, and surprisingly easy to stray into another kind of world altogether.

The Power of Wishful Thinking

One of the most remarkable aspects of fraud in the martial arts world is the extent to which obviously dishonest and dubious teachers are nonetheless sustained in what they do by students who *allow* themselves to be imposed upon – sometimes to an extent extraordinary to the outsider. Students are often prepared to deny or ignore the most glaring evidence that they are being taken for a ride. Anyone who wishes to confirm this truth of experience by their own investigations will find it very easy to do so. Even educated and intelligent people seem prepared to swallow the most lamentable nonsense if a martial arts teacher (especially a Chinese or Japanese teacher) declares it to be true, or if they can be persuaded that it is part of Mysterious Eastern Wisdom.

Why should this be so? Why do people go on handing over their money – and entrusting what is presumably an important part of their lives – to someone who is plainly a cheat or a fantasist? Part of the answer to this, we suggest, is that students are imbued from the first with an unhealthily deferential attitude to their teachers. Unhesitating obedience and unquestioning loyalty are often represented – not without reason – as traditional aspects of oriental culture, and these are, of course, exactly the virtues that the teacher who does not want his

credentials to be too closely examined will try to inculcate in his students. It is strangely easy to sell this doctrine of submission even to intelligent adults. Westerners who outside the dojo exhibit the most robust and healthy scepticism towards authority will – even literally – grovel on the floor in the dojo and believe themselves unworthy to question the teacher.

We think it clear also that students' denial of the obvious arises from ego-needs of their own: from the wish to believe that they are disciples of a Wise and Powerful Master whose wisdom and power will be communicated to them if they wait long enough and practise diligently enough. On the other side of this co-dependency relationship is the teacher whose self-esteem depends upon his students' belief that he has great mysteries to reveal if and when they prove themselves worthy. At the most basic level, no one wants to be the first to point out that the emperor has no clothes. Even the teacher's apparent weaknesses and moral failings can be perceived and justified as parts of the process by which one's faith is confirmed. He gets drunk and lies to us; not, however, because he is a drunkard and a liar, but because he is testing our loyalty. There is a parallel here with the mentality of a certain kind of religious believer. Why does the Lord not return? Why does He allow us to suffer evil and persecution? Because He is testing and strengthening us. The more we are disappointed, the stronger our faith becomes, and the greater the virtue of our continuing to believe. *Credo quia absurdum est.*

It is natural enough to want to belong to an in-group or a "family." It is natural also, at least for a certain type of personality, to want to place oneself in the hands of a trusted authority figure. This is precisely the kind of dependent and exploitable personality that makes "cults" possible. The power of wishful thinking, here as in other kinds of relationship, is very great. It is easy to persuade yourself, even in the face of clear evidence to the contrary, that someone really is what you want him to be. The people who suffer most from the activities of fraudulent or deluded teachers are the students whom they have persuaded to believe in them. To

discover that you have studied for years under someone who has lied to you is a very destructive experience: so destructive, indeed, that some people choose to go on believing obvious lies in order to avoid the pain of accepting the truth. In various ways, peer pressure, individual needs and personality traits, or “the emperor’s new clothes” phenomenon can lead students to pretend – even, less explicably, to convince themselves – that their teacher has knocked them down or controlled them without touching them or that he has other wonderful and mysterious powers.¹ We have seen this kind of collective delusion many times, and it is well documented in sources that are publicly available. It is conceivable also that, in some cases, apparently fraudulent teachers do really come to believe that they can perform near-miraculous feats – because their students so often tell them that they can and shield them from the light of reality. If there are limits to the human capacity for self-deception, they are very broad ones.



A good deal has happened in the century since karate began its migration from the peasant kingdom of Okinawa to the comparatively sophisticated culture of Japan and thence to the rest of the world. Generally speaking, the art as practised throughout the contemporary world is radically different from what its founders seem to have intended, and this is a fact that, rightly or wrongly, we think deeply regrettable in most respects. No doubt the reader will have formed the impression that we

¹ It can, of course, also lead students to allow teachers to exploit and abuse them in crude and obvious ways. In 2011 a previously well-respected English karate teacher and author was prosecuted for, and pleaded guilty to, sexually assaulting a twelve-year old girl student. One can only speculate about the complex interrelations of fear, awe, submissiveness and domination that can precipitate such situations. The parallel that suggests itself is with child-molesting clergy. The relation between a karate teacher and his students often bears a – completely unhealthy – resemblance to that between a priest and his flock, and contains the same potentialities for abuse of trust.

regard the history of karate as being the history of a deterioration. This impression is entirely accurate. However elevated their motives, the early teachers who made such efforts to disseminate their art did so at the cost of divesting it, in the long run, of almost everything apart from its external and physical aspects: of almost everything, in other words, except its most superficial and least important features.

What most people think of and practise as karate nowadays seems more like kickboxing than anything else, with things like kata as annoying distractions from the fun and satisfaction of fighting. The perception of karate that the man in the street has is of just another contact sport, pursued in peculiar clothes and accompanied by a good deal of rather absurd-looking etiquette and posturing. The perception of karate as a sport now prevails almost as much in the East as it does in the West. A Zen way of self-perfection has become a superficial game; commercialisation and the formal organisation of karate into a mass-participation activity have depersonalised it and infected it with incessant political squabbles; cultural conservatism has fossilised “traditional” or “classical” karate into an art that seems incapable of development and innovation; frauds and charlatans abound, and bring discredit upon the heads of honest teachers. Far from enabling the karateka to overcome the tyranny and destructiveness of ego, karate seems all too often to bring out the worst in those who teach and practise it, and to attract a particular kind of neurotic, insecure, ego-driven personality. These are conclusions to which long and sometimes unpleasant experience has led us.

If all you want is sport and competition or vigorous exercise once or twice a week, good luck to you. In that case, none of the things we have said will matter to you. To those who value the ethical ideals of karate, however, these things matter a great deal. As far as those ideals are concerned, the authors of this book have over the years found their way to a simple conclusion. The future of karate does not lie with celebrity teachers, large and prosperous associations and glitzy events with big trophies for the winners to

take home. If the true spirit of karate is to be kept alive, it will be kept alive in humility and obscurity. It will be kept alive by anonymous minorities and individuals practising the art for its own sake: practising with imagination, creativity and commitment in small dojo away from the temptations of money and the exercise of petty power, and with the advice of Funakoshi Gichin always in mind: "Spiritual development is paramount; technical skills are merely means to the end."

道場のみの空手と思ふな

Karate goes beyond the dojo

空手の修行は一生である

Karate training is for life

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