

Historical Outline of Karate-do, Martial Arts of Ryukyu

By Chojun Miyagi, delivered at the lecture hall on the 4th floor of Meiji Shoten at Sakaisuji,
Osaka on 28th January 1936

1. Preface

What is karate?

It is the art we engage in as exercise for the mind and body, for health promotion in daily life, and, in case of emergency, it is the art of self-defence without any weapon.

In most cases we fight with our bodies – hands, feet, elbows etc – to defeat opponents. However, in some cases, in accordance with circumstances, we may also use weapons (such as Bo, Sai, Nunchaku, Tonfa, Weeku, Kama, etc).

People often misunderstand karate.

When they see someone breaking five wooden boards or a few pieces of roof tile with his or her fist, they think it is a main part of karate. Of course, it is not a main part of karate but actually a trivial part of karate. Like other fighting arts, the truth of karate or *Tao* of karate can be understood and mastered at the ultimate goal which is beyond teachings and impossible to describe in words.

2. How the martial arts were introduced to Ryukyu (Okinawa)?

The name *karate* is a special term in Ryukyu.

Karate originated from Chinese kungfu. We have few books on the origin of Chinese kungfu, so we cannot conclude immediately that this is true, but according to a theory, the martial arts originated in central Asia and the area around Turkey when the ancient civilization was developed.

The theory goes on to add that it was gradually introduced to China.

However, another theory says that about 5,000 years ago Chinese kungfu originated at the age of Yellow Emperor (Emperor Huang) who built a brilliant culture at the Yellow River basin. It is not difficult to imagine that the prototype of today's martial arts was conceived through struggle and the fighting spirit human beings naturally possess.

For example, most styles of Chinese kungfu were created by mimicking the fighting styles of animals or birds. This is evident in the names of the many forms – *Tiger Style*, *Lion Style*, *Monkey Style*, *Dog Style*, *Crane Style* and so on.

Later, Chinese kungfu split into Southern school and Northern school and subsequently each school then split again into *Neijia* and *Waijia*.

The primary characteristic of Neijia is softness, and it is a defensive fighting art. Wudang kungfu (Taichi, for example) is typical of Neijia.

The characteristic of Waijia is mainly hardness, and it is an aggressive fighting art. Shaolin kungfu is typical of Waijia, which was created at Shaolin Temple in Songshang Mountain, Henan province.

Later, in the periods known as the Tang and Song dynasties, we hear of many kungfu warriors at the height of their success.

When we consider how karate was introduced to Ryukyu (Okinawa), we have a variety of opinions but all are without the support of historical evidence. As a result we have not yet come to a correct conclusion on this matter. There are three main views, however, and these are commonly known as *Thirty-six Chinese Immigrants*, *Oshima Notes* and *Importation in Keicho Period*.

A simple explanation of each opinion follows:

(1) Thirty-six Chinese Immigrants

In 1392 (Ming dynasty in China), thirty-six Chinese immigrants came to Ryukyu from Fujian province. At that time karate was introduced to Ryukyu by Chinese immigrants from Fujian province.

(2) Oshima Notes

In 1762, a merchant ship of the Ryukyu Kingdom was caught in a heavy storm on the way to Satsuma (now known as Kagoshima prefecture), and cast ashore on the coast of Oshima, Tosa (now known as Kochi prefecture).

Shiohira Pechin, a highly ranked official of the ship and an intelligent person, told his stories to Choki Tobe, an intellectual who lived in Oshima. Tobe wrote down Shiohira's fascinating stories about the Ryukyu Kingdom. His notes are called *Oshima Notes*.

The 3rd volume of *Oshima Notes* says *Koshankun, a kungfu warrior, came from China to Ryukyu (Okinawa) bringing his disciples with him.*

According to the *Notes*, at that time people called the martial arts *Kumiaiujutsu* rather than karate.

This *Note* constitutes the most reliable literature available on the establishment of karate.

(3) Importation in Keicho Period

In 1609, the 14th year of Keicho period, the Shimazu clan of Satsuma (now known as Kagoshima prefecture) invaded the Ryukyu Kingdom and prohibited the possession of weapons by the people of Ryukyu. Some believe that karate was created spontaneously due to the cruel oppression by Satsuma. The others insist that karate was not a domestic creation but what was imported from China. I think it is reasonable to consider that karate was a fusion of martial arts from China and *Te*, the native martial art which had already existed.

Karate has developed remarkably and even today it is still being judiciously improved and developed. We have a few further different opinions on the origin of karate, but they are popular misconceptions and not worth listening to.

As mentioned above, however, we still do not have any finite and fully convincing understanding of how karate began in Ryukyu (Okinawa).

Anyway, karate has been developed, modified and improved for many, many years.

3. Karate circles in the past

We also do not know origin of the name *karate*, but it is true that the term *karate* was created only recently. In the old days it was called *Te*. At that time people used to practice karate secretly, and a master taught a few of the advanced Kata out of all the Kata only to his best disciple. If he had no suitable disciple, he never taught them to anyone, and eventually such Kata completely died out. As a result, there are many Kata which were not handed down.

In about the middle of the Meiji period (1868-1912), prominent karate masters abolished the old secret ways. Karate was opened to the public, so it was soon recognized by society. It was the dawn of the development of karate. In accordance with a rapidly progressing culture, karate was also recognized as physical education and it was adopted as one of the teaching subjects at school.

At last karate has won social approval.

4. How we teach karate at present.

According to oral history, in the old days, the teaching policy of karate put emphasis on self-defence techniques. With just a motto of *no first attack in karate*, teachers were said to have introduced their students to the moral qualities of karate. However, I have heard that in reality they tended to neglect such moral principles.

Gradually the teaching policy was improved with the change of the times. Now we have discontinued and abolished the wrong tradition of so-called *body first and mind second* and we made our way towards a Tao of the fighting arts or the truth of karate.

Eventually we have established the correct motto *mind first, and body second* which means karate and Zen are one and the same.

Those who are engaged in teaching karate in Okinawa prefecture and outside Okinawa prefecture at present are as follows (in random order):

In Okinawa prefecture:

Kentsu Yabu, Chomo Hanashiro, Chotoku Kyan, Anbun Tokuda, Juhatsu Kyoda, Choshin Chibana, Jinsei Kamiya, Shinpan Shiroma, Seiko Higa, Kamado Nakasone, Jin-an Shinzato, Chojun Miyagi

Outside Okinawa prefecture:

Gichin Funakoshi, Choki Motobu, Kenwa Mabuni, Masaru Sawayama, Sanyu Sakai, Moden Yabiku, Jizaburo Miki, Yasuhiro Konishi, Shinji Sato, Mizuho Mutsu, Kamesuke Higaonna, Shinjun Otsuka, Shin Taira, Koki Shiroma, Kanbun Uechi

5. About karate styles or Ryu

There are various opinions about Ryu or the styles of karate in Ryukyu (Okinawa) but they are just guess work and without any definite research or evidence. With regard to this matter, we feel as if we are groping in the dark.

According to popular opinion we can categorize karate into two styles; *Shorin-Ryu* and *Shorei-Ryu*. Commentators insist that the former is fit for a stout person, while the latter for a slim person. Such an opinion has proved to be false through many studies.

In the meantime, there is the only opinion we can trust. It is as follows:

In 1828 (Qing or Ching dynasty in China), our ancestors inherited the kungfu style of Fujian province in China. They continued their studies and formed Goju-Ryu karate. Even today, there still exists an orthodox group which inherited genuine and authentic Goju-ryu karate.

6. The key features of karate

Some important features of karate are as follows:

- (1) A large place or a spacious area is not required for practicing karate.
- (2) You can practice karate by yourself. You can also do it together with other karate members by forming a group.
- (3) You don't have to spend many hours in practicing karate.
- (4) You can choose kata suitable for your physical strength and practice it regardless of age and gender.
- (5) Without spending much money, you can practice karate with simple equipment (such as Makiwara) or without it.
- (6) Karate is very effective as a means of health promotion. There are many karateka who are healthy and live long.
- (7) As a result of training in mind and body, you can cultivate your character and acquire indomitable spirit.

7. The future of karate-do

The days when karate was taught secretly are over, and we have come to a new age where we can practice and study karate publicly and officially. Therefore, the future of karate-do is bright.

Taking this opportunity, we should stop advertising karate as if it was a mysterious and magical fighting arts in a small island called Ryukyu. We should open karate to the public and receive criticism, opinions and studies from the other prominent fighting artists. In the future, we should invent complete protectors for a safe karate tournament just like other fighting arts, so that karate may become one of Japan's true fighting arts.

Nowadays karate-do has become popular all over Japan, where many people study karate-do very hard. Even outside Japan, karate-do is popular. There is a man who graduated from university in Tokyo. He is now propagating and studying karate-do in Europe. In May 1934, I was invited by Okinawans in Hawaii and a Hawaiian newspaper company to propagate and teach karate-do in Hawaii, U.S.A. Karate clubs have been established in Hawaii since then.

As mentioned above, karate-do has become not only a Japanese martial art but also an international martial art.

8. The karate teaching method

As each person has his or her distinctive character, the muscle development is different depending on his or her muscle use. Therefore, at first, we do *Preparatory Exercise* to develop our muscles so that we can practice karate exercises more easily, then *Fundamental Kata*, *Supplementary Exercise*, *Kaishu Kata* and *Kumite Training*. We teach karate in this way.

An outline of karate practice is as follows:

(1) Preparatory Exercise

We exercise each muscle of our body in order to enhance its flexibility, strength and endurance, and then we practice the fundamental kata, namely *Sanchin*, *Tensho* and *Naifanchi*. We repeat this preparatory exercise after our practice of kata to relax our muscles.

Finally we practice a breathing exercise and take a rest quietly.

(2) Fundamental Kata

Sanchin, *Tensho* and *Naifanchi* are the fundamental kata. By practicing them, we learn to develop correct posture. We can inhale and exhale correctly. We can harmoniously adjust, increase or decrease our power. We can develop a powerful physique and the strong will of warrior.

(3) Supplementary Exercise

This exercise enables us to learn and perform *Kaishu* kata well. We exercise each part of our body with a particular movement. We also practice with various pieces of equipment to enhance our overall strength and, in particular, strengthen individual parts of the body.

(4) Kaishu Kata (A kata apart from Fundamental Kata)

Nowadays we have about twenty or thirty kinds of kata and their names are diverse depending on their creators. Kata has techniques for defence and offense which are connected appropriately. Kata moves in various directions and in this it is something like gymnastics. We should perform kata by using the power of mind and body in accordance with its technical purpose so that we can learn the principles associated with dismantling and putting the kata back together.

(5) Kumite Training

We take apart *Kaishu* kata which we already learned, and we study the techniques of defence and offense in the kata. Understanding its technical purpose, we practice the techniques of attack and defence with fighting spirit just as we would in a real situation.

I summarize as follows. We induce the interaction of mind and body from the fundamental kata, *Sanchin*, *Tensho* and *Naifanchi*. We develop the spirit of martial arts by acquiring fighting techniques through practicing *Kaishu* kata and *Kumite* training correctly.

Chojun Miyagi, 28th January, 1936

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