

WHAT IS SHOTOKAN?

By Steve Cattle.

Shotokan is a highly developed method of combat based on the systems which developed around the City of Shuri and the Village of Tomari in Okinawa during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. What differentiates Shotokan from purely Okinawan styles is the incorporating influences of Japanese Martial Arts, notably the sword style of JIGEN RYU KENJUTSU, and the innovative use of the techniques developed by Master YOSHITAKA FUNAKOSHI and others.

How Did This Development Come About?

The real father of Shotokan is SOKON "BUSHI" MATSUMURA (1796-1893). Born in Shuri, Matsumura was instructed by SATUNISHI 'TODE' SAKAGAWA, legend also has it that he was also taught by the Chinese Military Attache to the Okinawan Court, KONG SU KUNG, also called KUSHANKU (1). Matsumura was employed as Chief Military Retainer for the King of the Ryu Kyu's (2). The King was required to spend several months of the year on the Japanese island of Kyushu, and it was required that he took his retainers with him. It was on these visits that Matsumura was able to train at the sword style of JIGEN RYU which was the main sword style of the SATSUMA Clan of Kyushu.

Matsumura was even sent on a journey to Peking (3) during the 1840's, where he had the opportunity to train at several martial arts. The Chinese were apparently impressed by Matsumura's martial arts ability but not by his Karate, it was his swordsmanship which held his Chinese hosts spellbound. Matsumura was apparently at great pains to explain that he was only a moderate swordsman and by Japanese standards by no means an expert. What was apparent both to Matsumura and his Chinese hosts was that JIGEN RYU was a far more developed martial art than KARATE or TODE as it was then called.

Upon his return to Okinawa, Matsumura set about collecting and developing Karate and amalgamating all the styles practiced around the city of Shuri. In doing so he created the style now known as SHURI-TE or SHORIN-RYU (4).

It is also evident that Matsumura began to incorporate ideas from JIGEN RYU into his system.

Matsumura had several prominent students but two of them are vital to the history of Shotokan. Both of them had the same first name, Yasatune 'Anko' Itosu and Yasatune 'Anko' Azato. It is now almost certain that Matsumura taught Itosu and Azato differently. To Itosu he taught the original Okinawan Tode system, to Azato he taught a system which combined ideas from JIGEN RYU with TODE, this was possible because Azato was already an accomplished swordsman by the time he began training with Matsumura.

Itosu was also introduced by Matsumura to another distant member of his family, KOSAKU MATSUMURA, who was a leading

master of the TOMARI-TE system (5). It was ultimately through this introduction and Itosu's subsequent instruction in the TOMARI-TE style that several of the Tomari Kata entered both the SHORIN-RYU and SHOTOKAN styles.

YASATUNE 'ANKO' ITOSU (1813-1915) was probably the most influential figure in the SHURI-TE system at the latter end of the nineteenth century (6). He is credited with creating the 'Pinan' Kata - 'Passai-Sho, Kushanku-Sho' and the three 'Rohai' Kata's. Itosu's style was pure Okinawan, using high stances and shorter techniques required for a closer range of combat. He was famous for his great strength and punching power, and, for the great line of students he produced - Gichin Funakoshi, Kenwa Mabuni, Kensu Yabu, Cheshin Chibana, Shinpan Gukusuma as well as many others.

Modern SHORIN RYU, especially the Kobayashi system of Choshin Chibana, bears all the hallmarks of the Itosu system, a close range method of combat of great power and effectiveness, however, it is obvious from the outset that there is a great deal of difference between Shorin Ryu and Shotokan, both in technique and ideology. Especially in the area of Kata. The Shotokan versions are so different that one seems not only to be performing a different kata but it is as though one is performing a different martial art.

YASATUNE 'ANKO' AZATO was perhaps the most influential figure in the history of Shotokan. He was the teacher of masters Gichin and Yoshitaka Funakoshi although it is fairly apparent that Gichin Funakoshi practiced the Itosu system. We know that Azato passed Gichin Funakoshi over to Itosu (7) at a fairly early date in his training, we suspect this was due to severe joint injuries which inhibited Funakoshi's flexibility.

Azato was a tall, flexible man with long arms and legs, he was fortunate enough to be a member of the Okinawan Aristocracy with a castle and 'fieldom' around the Azato village. He was therefore able to devote his entire life to the practice of martial arts, both Karate and Kenjutsu. One of the principles which Azato became profoundly aware of was to use basics in a totally different way to the classic shorin-ryu, which practices basic techniques in the exact way in which they are applied.

This may seem a bit vague, but this led to the classic characteristics of Shotokan being developed, both in technique and application closely related to Kenjutsu.

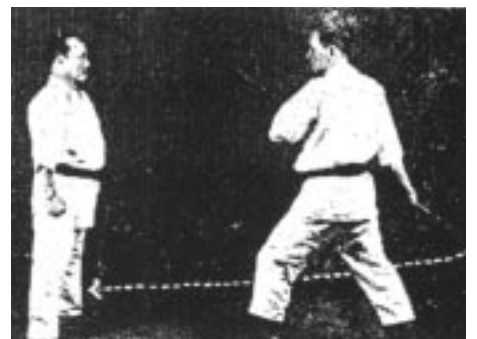
They are:-

- (i) Basics are performed in long, dynamic stances to develop the body and to bring into play the power which the body can generate from a range of dynamic forces, i.e. Hip rotation, shock, forwards momentum, etc.
- (ii) To use the control and power developed from basics one must make a study of technique from a more practical position. (i.e.

using smaller movements which are less obvious to an opponent.)

(iii) One should always be in a position to continue from one technique into another. (i.e. The use of techniques which place one in a position of extreme vulnerability, should they fail, are useless.)

All these ideas come from Jigen Ryu Kenjutsu, but what is even more obvious is the fighting distance (Mai-ai). Unlike the close range of Okinawan Karate, both SHURI-TE and NAHA-TE, the fighting range of Shotokan is exactly the same as KENDO, indeed the competition rules are based on KENDO, thus making Shotokan Techniques the most suitable for this distance of combat. Because of this, most of the Japanese styles other than Shotokan now practice techniques which are closer to the Shotokan ideal than the ideals of their founders. In fact one of the most outstanding Okinawan masters of today is quoted as saying that when he first went to



Gichin Funakoshi and Sensei Ohtsuke demonstrating defence against Bo.



Funakoshi demonstrates Heian Godan.c.1928.



Master Yoshitaka Funakoshi.

Japan and saw competitors from Shotokan, Wado Ryu, Shito-ryu and Gojuikai in action, he was convinced that they were all doing the same style!

NOTES

1. There is a great deal of controversy regarding KUSHANKU. The general consensus (although not accepted by all) is that 'KONG SU KUNG' is in fact the military rank of the person involved and is not the actual name of the Chinese Military Advisor.

2. After the capture of the Ryu Kyu's by the Satsuma Clan of Kyushu (1609)—led by the Shimagu family, the King of the Ryu Kyu's was required to spend half the year in Kyushu. He was granted the rank of DAIMYO Lord) and was expected to have retainers and Samurai. It was on these journeys that

Matsumura was trained in Jigen Ryu.

3. The eminent Japanese Karate-man/Martial Artist, Shigo Ohgami, 7th Dan Wado Ryu, has traced the visit of Matsumura to Peking. One of his companions died during their stay and the Chinese beurocrats with their infinite capacity for detail created a special graveyard for Okinawans within the 'Forbidden City'. The headstone names the deceased, his companions, the length of their stay and the reason for their visit!

4. There is some dispute about the creator of



photos from the 1935 edition of ' KARATE-DO KYOHAN'.

Gichin Funakoshi demonstrates ITOSU style karate.

the name SHORIN-RYU, it could have been 'ANKO' ITOSU or his student CHOSHIN CHIBANA who used the name first. The word SHORIN means 'SHAOLIN' in Chinese and SHORIN RYU roughly translated means 'Way



Funakoshi would be in his fifties at this time. or school derived from the Shaolin'.

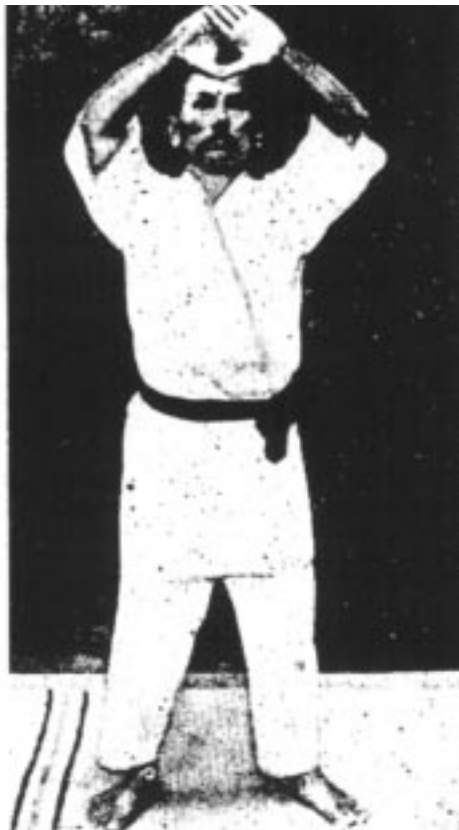
5. The Tomari-te Kata, which Itosu probably learned from KOSAKU MATSUMURA, are—Jion, Jitte, Jiin, Enpi, Wankan and Chinte However, more will be covered on this subject in later editions.

6. Itosu perhaps had the greatest influence on Okinawan Karate through the influence of his students. Shotokan, however, although it retains some elements of Itosu's Karate, is not in the direct line of modern Shorin Ryu.

7. It is probable that Azato found Gichin Funakoshi a difficult pupil as he was afflicted with serious joint problems from an early age. He passed Funakoshi over to his great friend Itosu as he felt his style was more suitable. In later life Gichin Funakoshi was severely disabled with osteo-arthritis of the hips.

8. The first competition rules were devised by Hidetaka Nishiyama in the 1950's, "based on the rules for Kendo."

This remark was made by Master Teruo Chinen of the 'JUN-DO KAN' system of Goju ryu, who first saw Japanese Karate when he was a student at TAKUSHOKU UNIVERSITY, TOKYO.



The opening movement from Kanku dai.



PART II—THE INFLUENCE OF MASTERS GICHIN AND YOSHITAKA FUNAKOSHI.