



OKINAWAN KARATE-DO

MASTERS OF THE SHORIN-RYU SYSTEM
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"Karate has an ancient heritage, full of wisdom. Let us follow the way of karate as shown to us by the masters."
Shoshin Nagamine

INTRODUCTION

To study the genealogy of Matsubayashi Shorin-ryu is to enter a time machine and travel back through the very history of Karate itself. The relationships between the Masters of Shorin-Ryu Karate are as confusing and filled with myths, folklore, and inconsistencies as the history of martial arts itself. In this essay I have attempted to present a clear genealogy of our traditional heritage as possible. Through checks and cross checks of various pieces of magazine articles, documented interviews with current Masters and books, I have pieced what appears to be a clear line of the origination of Shorin-Ryu and thus Karate itself.

As with all studies of this nature, the material presented represents the best knowledge of the author at this given point in time, with available materials and is indeed only a starting point. As time passes and we gain more knowledge and materials the windows of time will continue to open and allow us to view and understand more of our past. Knowing our heritage as students of Karate provides us with an understanding of our responsibilities to ensure that our art remains faithful to the traditions and teachings of its founders and forefathers. Master Chosin Chibana said it best at his inauguration as President of the Okinawa Karate-Do Association in Japan.

The most important quality for a martial artist is "Honor. An honorable person is an individual who makes a promise and keeps that promise no matter what. If an individual makes a promise that they do not intend to keep or does not even try to keep, then this person tarnishes one of their most valuable possessions, their honor. I believe above all, a martial artist is an honorable person."

BODHIDHARMA

(Also Known As "DARUMA")

Bodhidharma, or Daruma as he is commonly known, was born into a high "KSHATRIYA" in India in about the sixth century. The "KSHATRIYA" was a cast of highly respected and fierce warriors. He was the third child of King Sugandha who ruled southern India. His father being King was also considered the priest of the cast and Bodhidharma was to follow his father into this unique role of not only King but priest and warrior. As he grew he become very dissatisfied with his life, and his destiny, and choose to leave his position in search of "enlightenment". He traveled for many years and great distances and as he gained enlightenment, meaning an understanding of what he felt was the true meaning of life, he become very involved with meditation. This evolved into what the Chinese would call "CHAN" and later what the Japanese would call "ZEN", both meaning meditation.

After long years of travel he settled in a Shoa-Lin (Shorin in Japanese) Monastery in China. Here he taught the monks the way of his enlightenment, meditation. The strain of long hours of mediation was hard on the body and the monks frequently were not able to withstand the many hours of physical inactivity. Bodhidharma began to teach them breathing techniques that he had learned in his warrior training. This then lead to teaching the monks various fighting techniques more as exercises to relieve the body of the strain of mediation and solitude then defense. Thus the Shoa-lin monks began what is perhaps the first karate training, not for the purposes of fighting, but for the purpose of receiving what would be termed "enlightenment".

SAKAGAWA KARATE

Karate is indebted to this man for he is the individual that brought form and substance to the art of karate. He was born in Shuri Toribari Okinawa in March 1733 and died at the age of 82 in August of 1815. One night when he was 17, his father came home beaten very badly from some bullies. His father would die from this beating but before he died he had Sakagawa make a promise; that he would learn the "fighting arts". So at age 17 Sakagawa began the search for a teacher. The first teacher he sought was Perchin Takahara (1683-1760). Takahara was 67 when Sakagawa came to him, and did not accept him readily. Karate was a "life long duty" and Takahara was not about to accept Sakagawa until he was sure he realized the true meaning of this obligation. For many months, Sakagawa performed the duties of a gopher boy, running errands, cleaning the do-jo floors and the like just to gain entrance into the presence of Takahara. After Takahara was sure of his intentions, he then accepted him as a student and would remain Sakagawa's Sensei until his death.

When Sakagawa had learned a great deal from Takahara, Takahara give permission for him to go to China to expand his training. There he trained under several Sensei's in the fighting arts. After several years, Sakagawa was summoned back from China to Okinawa as his beloved Sensei, Takahara, was dying. Sakagawa arrived just a few days prior to his Sensei's death. It was then that Sakagawa was given the name of Karate Sakagawa by his beloved Sensei. Later Sakagawa would talk about many things he had learned from his Sensei, but none so

important as the explanation of "do". Takahara explained that "do" is more than the way of karate, that is has three aspects. One, "ijo" meaning the way. "I am smaller than you. I'm always a gentlemen with compassion and humility". "Katsu" meaning the laws. "To understand completely". And finally "fo" meaning the life. "A life dedicated and serious if karate is to be understood". Together, one's duty to self and fellow man. Sakagawa learned well from his Sensei both physically and spiritually.

After his Sensei's death, Sakagawa became a student of Kusanku and traveled many times to China to learn this Shoa-lin art of fighting. Kusanku had called this art "CH'UAN-FA" and now Sakagawa would call it "TODE" in Okinawan. Sakagawa is responsible for forming this art of Okinawa-Te (Okinawa Hands) which would become known as Karate ("Chinese Hands" and later "Empty Hand" in Japanese). He became well known for his expertise and respected for this abilities.

Later in life, a friend (and political leader of the time) stricken critically ill came to him and asked Sakagawa to raise his young son as a warrior upon his death. He could do no less than to honor his friend and grant his last wishes. The boys name was Sokon Matsumura who would later make one of the most significant contributions to world of karate.

MATSUMURA SOKON ("BUSHI")

Master Matsumura is credited with perhaps the most important and significant contribution to karate, the development of the kata system. Sokon Matsumura studied under Sakagawa at a very young age. His father had made a pilgrimage to Sakagawa as he was terminally ill and wanted his son to become a "warrior". Sakagawa, then almost 78, accepted the boy but only after he was sure the young man understood that to take up the martial arts meant to take up a new way of life. Matsumura's reply, "I will not disappoint you". There are many stories of the extraordinary feats of "Bushi" Matsumura, but perhaps the one that bears repeating is the one of how he got his nick name "BUSHI". In his time there was a custom of have an annual event in which bullfighting and martial arts were used to entertain the populace. It was the high point of the year for the Okinawans. One year, the King decided to match a prize bull (received from the Emperor of Japan) against the best martial artist in the land. Of course, Matsumura was considered the best martial artist of his time and therefore, he was to fight the bull. Matsumura decided to take no chances and upon hearing the decree, decided to take action before the fight. Every day for weeks before the bullfight, Matsumura would go to the stables where the bull was kept and, being sure the bull was tied firmly, would stick a long needle into its nose. This made the bull furious at first, but slowly the bull began to fear Matsumura. When the day of this annual festival finally came, the bull was turned loose into the ring. It pawed the ground and snorted ferociously and pranced about the ring. Then Matsumura entered the ring and when the bull saw him and caught his scent, the he turned the other way and ran. The King was

speechless and when he regained his composure, he decreed that Matsumura would from then forward be called "BUSHI" (Samurai). A name he would carry for the rest of his life.

Matsumura is credited with the development of the kata system and his style became known as Shuri-Te, named after the city in which he taught (Shuri). He formed many katas including Seisan, Naihanchi I-III, Anaku, Wanshu, Gojushido, Chinto, Passai and Kusanku which are all taught in Shobayashi-ryu as well as in other Shorin-ryu styles.

Matsumura also taught many of the great Masters including Chotoku Kyan, and Ankoh Itosu. In his teachings he always cautioned his followers that the hunger for glory and vanity alone would end in defeat.

ITOSU YASUTSUNE ("ANKOH")

Yasutsune Itosu was born in Shuri No Tobaru in 1830 and lived to be 85 years old. He was one of the finest students of Sokon Matsumura. He was considered to be a "meijin" or one who has mastered his art far beyond the boundaries of physical prowess. He father began his training at the early age of seven. He father's goal in the early years was to assure the boy had the "fighting spirit" and would taunt the boy until he would become angry enough to attack him, his father. When Itosu was 16 his father took him to "Busi" Matusmora and requested that he take him on as his "deshi" or student. Although the boy was thin, Matsumura decided to give it a try and the boy matured quickly. As with his father, Matsumura scolded, tormented, taught, punished and demanded unconditional submission and obedience from the boy. Never did the boy miss a day of practice and by the time his was 24, he had become filled out and was the tallest man in Shuri.

Itosu is responsible for passing on the Nahanchis and Kusanku katas. He also created the Pinan Katas I-V. He was a highly educated professor and was responsible for the introduction of karate into the schools in 1904. The first school was the Central Okinawan Middle School in Shuri and it was there, in the school system, that he developed the Pinans.

The spirit of this man can be understood in a piece of folklore regarding his abilities. Itosu believed very strongly that Karate was not a sport but rather a killing art. A match was set between a Judo expert and a Karate expert to determine once and for all which was superior. This, the mainland Japanese thought it was the only way for these Okinawans to see that Judo was superior in all ways. Itosu, decided to take on the challenge himself, at 75 years old! The Judo expert, a policeman, circled Itosu clowning around feeling this match with an old man was

Kyan was born in December 1870 and died in 1945 at the age of 75. He lived in Shuri until he was 30 and then spent the remainder of his life in Katema where he taught at a Dojo near Hisabashi. Master Kyan was known for his jumps and kicks. His double jump kick was without equal. Although he was very proficient in his foot techniques he believed in balance. When questioned about whether hand or foot techniques were best he would say, "One should use both for optimum results. Relying too heavily on one or the other will cause unbalance in self defense. It can be said that the hands are like the infantry, the feet like the artillery. Without the protection of the infantry, the batteries of artillery are helpless and without the support of the artillery, the infantry will sustain too many casualties."

As an old man he was very thin and most people were very perplexed at his expertise in the martial arts. They would ask, "what is your secret?" He would answer "develop your *tandem*". Practice your Kata until your kata moves from your *tandem*". When you become the kata you have achieved the secret."

His death was tragic as he died of hunger, a casualty of the second world war. He was a student of Sokon Matsumora and, chiefly, Itosu as discussed earlier. His primary students were Shosin Nagamine and Eizo Shimabuku. He passed down Passi, Chinto and Kusanku Katas.

Kyan believed in "JOSHIKI", a common sense, natural, moral and ethical order to things and lived his life this way. His karate reflected these values as did his way of life.

ARAKAKI ANKICHI

Little is known of this great Sensei, perhaps because of this short life span. Arakaki lived a short twenty-eight years but left a mark on karate that will last forever. He was born in Shuri in 1899 into a large family of eleven children. His parents owned a brewery that made rice wine and were rather wealthy.

Arakaki loved sports and played most any sport of the time, often neglecting his studies. He eventually dropped out of school. This love of sports and physical activities naturally led him to Karate and where he eventually would study seriously under Choshin Chibana. Choshin Chibana had been a student of Sokon Matsumora, Yabu, Kyan and Itosu and were also task masters. Arakaki would spend long hours under his direction learning details of kata from this great master who was decorated by the Emperor in 1967, and was the first President of the Okinawa Karate-Do Association. Arakaki was small but very agile and was not afraid of hard work. He learned quickly and well from this master. Later Arakaki also trained under Master Kyan.

Arakaki was a man of keen insight and, although he dropped out of school, had a great love of his proud Okinawan heritage. He loved the arts, including classical plays, poetry, and the like but most especially classical dance, which he himself did very well. He recognized that dancing showed many similarities in its movements to Karate but there was a big difference. Karate developed from a sense of self preservation where dance developed to express one's most inner thoughts. This, Arakaki would tell his students, can only be understood if you study dance as well as Karate.

Arakaki died December 28, 1927 of stomach ulcers. He was a sensitive person and the decline in his family fortune and the difficulties faced after World War I took its toll on him. He had become most famous for his toe-tip kick (tsumasaki-geri) which it was said, no other karateman could match his speed or power. This kick was lethal and he was said to have killed a SUMO wrestler in a fight when he was nineteen.

MOTOBU CHOKI

Choki Motobu was a very large man by Okinawan standards. He had a very strong personality and was very extraverted by nature. He was born in Shuri in February 1871 and was the third son of a "aji" or lord. Because he was the third son, no education was considered necessary and so Choki had very little.

He gained a great deal of fame from an incident where he knocked out a heavyweight boxing champion. It appears that a German fighter, that had never been beaten in Europe, was visiting Japan and a decision was made to match him against martial artists. The boxer quickly defeated the Judo challengers and arrogantly asked "any more?". Motobu rose to his feet and said, "I issue a challenge. I will represent Okinawa and the Okinawan Karate". The boxer threw many punches but never made contact with Motobu. Finally, the boxer became careless and Motobu was able to scoot behind him. It was at that point the boxer learned why Motobu's agility had earned him the name monkey or "Saru" in Japanese. Leaping into the air he landed on the boxer's back. Then he jumped high in the air and double kicked the boxer. When the boxer fell to the floor, Motobu was right on him and choked him into submission.

Motobu never really propagated a school. He was very colorful as well as controversial. Montobu was very aggressive in his attitude and would often start fights for the sake of fighting. He was a strong believer in "makiwara" training and was a master of the keikoken (forefinger knuckle punch).

Later in life, Motobu learned the value of Kata and of serious Karate training outside of fighting. He gained great expertise in Kata and gained the true spirit of Karate. His aggressive nature turned from fighting to skill.

He died September 2, 1944 in Naha of stomach ulcers at 73 years of age.

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