

YASUTSUNE (ANKO) ITOSU

A LOOK INTO HIS INFLUENCES AND THOSE HE INFLUENCED



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Anko Itosu was born in the Gibo section of Shuri Okinawa in 1830 and died in Yamakawa village in March of 1915. As we explore much of the known influences, impacts, developments of katas and controversies surrounding the possible extrapolation of other known styles to create the Pinans and possibly the Naihanchis. It will become evident that Anko Itosu accomplished much in his life to preserve and leave a lasting mark in Okinawan and martial arts history.

Anko Itosu as a child was said to have been introverted and rather small compared to other boys his age. It is believed that Itosu was brought up in a strict home in the traditional settings of the Kemochi (a family of position). Itosu was well educated in the Chinese classics and in calligraphy. As was often the case for young men from families of position of that era young Itosu was schooled in the art of To-Te (karate). Itosu began his martial arts training under the direction of Nagahama Chikudon Peichin, it is told that Itosu learned quickly and matured into a powerful disciple. In Nagamine Sensei's book "Tales of Okinawa's Great Masters" as well as other credible sources it is known that Itosu continued his training under Bushi Matsumura Sokon Okina. Matsumura was given the title "Bushi" meaning warrior by the Okinawan King in recognition of his abilities and accomplishments in the martial arts. In Nagamine Sensei's book he doesn't state an age that Itosu began training under Bushi Matsumura; however, in an article I read in Katsu Dojo it states that Itosu began training under Bushi Matsumura at the age of 16. Itosu trained vigorously and ultimately became the personal protégé of Bushi Matsumura. In time, Itosu became known as Bushi Matsumura's foremost disciple. To understand what an honor this was we need to understand better who Bushi Matsumura was and

what he represented. Bushi Matsumura was born in 1809 in Shuri's Yamakawa village and it was apparent at an early age that he had an interest in the martial arts. Who first taught Matsumura Te remains the subject of curiosity and debate even though there seems to be some indication that To-Te Sakugawa may have taught Matsumura there is no proof of any connection that I have found. Yet the fact that To-Te Sakugawa (this peculiar prefixing of the nickname "To-Te" proves that he was a master of this martial art) was born in Shuri in 1782, also the birthplace of Matsumura. And that he was around in the same time period as well as the fact that Sakugawa was a master of the Chinese-style self defense of To-Te. So for me to believe that Bushi Matsumura was born and brought up in Shuri with his great desire to pursue the martial arts in the same period without seeking out or having some influence from To-Te Sakugawa seems highly unlikely. It is said that Matsumura learned from an early age the importance of bun bu ryo do (balancing physical training with metaphysical study). And as stated in Nagamine Sensei's book that as well as his relentless pursuit of the combative disciplines, he deeply embraced Confucianism, and also became known as a brilliant calligrapher. Bushi Matsumura was considered the forefather of Shorin-ryu. Bushi Matsumura was said to be recruited into the service of the Sho family (Royal family of Okinawa) and eventually became the chief martial arts instructor and bodyguard for the Okinawan King. At some point of his career, approximately 1830, Matsumura went to China and studied the Shaolin style of Chinese Kenpo (fist method) and weaponry. It is also known that Matsumura traveled to China on numerous occasions for the Okinawan King and that upon his return from China he organized and refined the Shorin Ryu system of Okinawan karate. Bushi Matsumura is credited with passing on the kata or formal exercises of

Shorin Ryu Karate known as Naifanchi I & II, Bassai Dai, Chinto, Gojushiho and Kusanku to name a few. Matsumura is also said to have devised another set of kata, known as Chanan, which is said to be the basis for Pinan I, & II. Now we might have a better understanding of what an honor and privilege it must have been to train under such a great master. Another reason for my belief that Itosu trained with or under Bushi Matsumura is that Itosu's very close friend Yasutsune Azato was a private student of Matsumura. It was his friend Azato who in fact helped Itosu procure his position as a clerical scribe for the administrative office of the Ryukyu Kingdom in Shuri.

Another famous and legendary martial artist that was believed to have had some influence in Anko Itosu's martial arts education and development was Matsumora Chikudon Peichin Kosaku (Nihon Karate Kenkyukai, 1956). Matsumora was born in 1829 in Tomari village and died in 1898. Matsumora was born the first son of Matsumora Koten an indirect descendent of the Sho King. Being the first son and from a family of position young Matsumora studied Chinese classics and Confucianism at a school for young men. His education entailed learning both social etiquette and the martial arts. His instructors were Uke Giko (1800-1850) and Teruya Kishi (1804-1864) under which he trained intensely. He first trained under the guidance of Uku for three years in which the emphasis was placed on developing a strong foundation while learning to use his legs for mobility and hips to generate power. To develop these fundamental skills, Master Uke taught Matsumora the three katas known as Naihanchi. When it was time to train under Master Teruya, Matsumora spent more than three years being schooled in Passai and Wanshu, the favorite katas of his teacher. After many years of training with Master Teruya he was invited to train at the family tomb which was supposed to be an honor.

The invitation was extended due to Teruya's admiration for the hard work, motivation and talent Matsumora possessed. It was during these training sessions that Master Teruya revealed the bunkai (application training) to Kosaku so that he could understand how the kata was supposed to be used in practical application.

Under the tutelage of his two instructors Matsumora mastered the principle elements and became a powerful warrior. Matsumora was known for his martial arts abilities and relentless training in karate and kobujutsu. There is a story of Matsumora defending one of his village residents from a sword wielding Satsuma samurai with nothing more than a towel and being able to shame the samurai publicly by standing up to him and disarming him with that towel. During this encounter while Matsumora was disarming the samurai, the sword removed one of his fingers. Even with the loss of one of his fingers he became an expert in bojutsu. In his lifetime he accomplished much in the martial arts and in his community.

Anko Itosu had several master instructors that are known and a few that appear to have had some influences in his martial arts development. One thing is clear, Itosu was well trained and became a master himself.

Sometime around 1879 Itosu retired from his position as a government official to continue his practice and to teach to-te at his home. Master Itosu trained daily and taught constantly. Itosu produced many excellent students, some of which became quite legendary themselves.

Here is a partial list of Master Itosu's most distinguished disciples: Kentsu Yabu, Gichin Funakoshi, Chomo Hanashiro, Chotoku Kyan, Choshin Chibana, Anbun Tokuda and Chojo Oshiro.

Kentsu Yabu was born in 1866 in Shuri's Yamakawa village. Yabu was a Shihandai (senior student) of Master Itosu. In 1890, he like his good friend Chomo Hanashiro was one of the first volunteers to enlist in the Imperial Army and went on to serve honorably in both the Sino-Japanese and the Russo-Japanese wars, where he rose to the rank of first lieutenant. Kentsu Yabu died in 1937.

This next student of Itosu may well be the one of the most famous, Gichin Funakoshi. Funakoshi was born on November 10, 1868 in Shuri's Yamakawa village into a family of the kemochi.

As a child he became a friend of the first son of Master Anko Azato who introduced Funakoshi to the martial arts at a very young age. Master Azato was also skilled in horsemanship and Japanese fencing. "Azato was a brilliant scholar who, in Funakoshi's mind, exemplified the perfect bujin: not only to be brave but also intelligent". It is through this association with Master Azato by the means of his son that Funakoshi was introduced to Anko Itosu. Funakoshi trained diligently under both Master Azato and Master Itosu until their deaths.

In 1922 Funakoshi along with Choki Motobu introduced karate to Osaka and Tokyo, Japan. In May of 1922 Funakoshi moved to Tokyo and became a professional teacher of karate-do. In Tokyo Funakoshi had been teaching karate in a hall at the dormitory for Okinawan students that he had been living at. Due to certain circumstances he had to leave and found himself looking for a place to relocate his dojo. To Funakoshi's great surprise a prominent swordsman and master of kendo named Nakayama Hakudo offered Funakoshi the use of his dojo during the times that it was unoccupied. Nakayama's dojo

had the reputation as being the best in the nation, so this offer was not only an honor but also did much to increase Funakoshi's reputation and bring him increased public recognition. Due in part by this association, encouragement and support from Nakayama as well as Funakoshi's reputation for being a Master of karate and an excellent teacher his dojo outgrew his present facilities. In around 1935 a group of Funakoshi's supporters organized "a dojo establishment committee" in order to collect enough money to build his own dojo. The Shotokan as it was named was to be the first dojo ever to be built in Japan and Funakoshi was seventy years old at that time. Interestingly, the committee decided upon the name Shotokan, which was the pen name Funakoshi used as a youth to sign Chinese poems that he wrote. As well as being famous for his words "Karate Ni Sente Nashi" (there is no first attack in karate) and "Karate wa kunshi no bugei" (karate is the martial art of intelligent people), Funakoshi introduced his "Twenty Principles of Karate-Do which are as follows:

1. Never forget that karate begins and ends with courtesy.
2. There is no first attack in karate.
3. Karate cultivates self-esteem.
4. First know yourself, before trying to understand others.
5. Spirit before technique.
6. Respond with an unfettered mind.
7. Do not dwell on misfortune.
8. Don't believe that karate training is restricted only to the dojo.
9. Karate is a lifelong pursuit.

10. When you learn how karate is related to everyday life, you will have discovered its essence.
11. Karate is like hot water, if its heat is removed it becomes cold.
12. Rather than worrying about winning, think about not losing.
13. Change your tactics according to your opponent's movements.
14. The outcome of any fight depends on dominating both protected and unprotected areas.
15. Think of your hands and feet as swords.
16. When you go out it is best to act as if you had a million enemies waiting for you.
17. Fixed stances are important for beginners until natural postures become second nature.
18. In spite of actual fighting always being different, the principles of kata never change.
19. Don't forget about the strength and weakness of your power, how to stretch and contract your muscles, and the proper execution of technique.
20. Constantly think about improvement.

Master Funakoshi is also credited, not so open heartedly by some, to have change the pronunciation of some of the katas because they were too difficult for the Japanese to understand because they were pronounced in the Okinawan dialect or in Chinese. So Pinan was changed to Heian; Naihanchi was changed to Tekki; Passai was changed to Bassai; Wanshu was changed to Enpi; Rohai was changed to Meikyo; Chinto was changed to Gankaku; Kusanku was changed to Kanku; and Useishi was changed to Gojushiho. There are more documented changes but these serve as good examples of ones that affect our style of Matsubasyi-ryu.

While never actually inventing an art, Master Funakoshi was principally responsible for its development and introduction and is regarded as the father of modern karate-do in Japan and throughout the world.

What a tribute to Anko Itosu to have had a disciple that accomplished so much and to leave such a lasting impression that will live on in the annals of karate as well as the hearts of many Funakoshi's own disciples.

Chomo Hanashiro was another of Itosu's students. Hanashiro was born in 1869 in Shuri's Yamakawa village. At an early age he began his training under the great Bushi Matsumura. Matsumura was quite old at that time and relegated the majority of his training Hanashiro to one of his most senior students, Master Itosu. After Matsumura's death Hanashiro remained with Itosu acting as assistant instructor up until Itosu's death in 1915. Hanashiro taught gymnastics at a high school in Shuri, which gave him the opportunity to help Itosu in introducing To-Te into the school system.

Hanashiro like his good friend Yabu Kentsu was one of the first volunteers in 1890 to enlist in the army. Hanashiro served in both the Sino-Japanese and the Russo-Japanese wars. Like his good friend Yabu, Hanashiro ascended to the rank of first lieutenant. After his career in the military, Hanashiro continued his career by entering politics and serving his community as mayor of Mawashi village.

In the 1920's, Hanashiro was one of the most highly regarded karate masters in Okinawa.

A story that comes from Shoshin Nagamine states that Chomo Hanashiro and Kentsu Yabu met with Nagamine at the Metropolitan police station where he was studying. The two warned Nagamine Sensei that the Karate katas in Tokyo had changed considerably

and that he should take great pains in teaching and keeping the katas in their original forms. Hanashiro was also one of the pioneers to help promote the use of word “karate”. In 1945 Chomo Hanashiro died when Okinawa was caught in the middle of the U.S. and Japanese war that left him 1 of 60,000 victims that died during the 82 days of fighting and when troops occupied Okinawa at the end of WWII.

Chotoku Kyan was another of Itosu’s distinguished disciples. Kyan was born December of 1870 in Shuri’s Gibo village. Born a descendant of the royal family and into the home of a strict father, Chofu Kyan. Kyan was brought up in the traditional fashion of a family of position, good education and martial arts training. Kyan’s father used to make him practice his martial arts outside with him during the miserably cold winter weather.

Chotoku’s father once told him “that even though you do not have the body of a martial artist, you can still develop effective technique depending entirely on how diligently you train yourself. If you develop the technique best suited for a person of your body size, and master the application of the kata you can be second to none.” Chotoku also trained under such great masters as Bushi Matsumura Sokon and Oyadomari Kokan in Tomari. Chotoku dedicated himself so much to his martial arts training that he overcame his childhood weaknesses and learned to use his tiny body most effectively to overcome larger opponents.

Chotoku discovered the effectiveness and importance of shifting and moving the body and his smaller frame, to gain a superior position in an effort to overcome an opponent. Chotoku focused his training on ashi-sabki (which means footwork) to develop his skills in body position. He learned that sometimes the best offense might just be to not be there (remember: “karate ni sente nashi”). Chotoku entered many contests of actual contact

grappling and striking challenges and never lost. His fighting skills were superior and his training relentless.

Chotoku trained under another great master of that time named Chatan Yara. Under his training Chotoku learned the Kusanku kata, which he later taught and passed on to Ankichi Arakaki, who taught and passed it on to Taro Shimabuku, who taught and passed it on to Nagamine Sensei. Kusanku is the last kata of our system of Matsubayashi ryu. Before Chotoku died, Nagamine Sensei had the privilege and honor of having Master Chotoku present at the grand opening of his dojo. Chotoku demonstrated both katas and the bo with power and mastery of skill at age seventy-three. On September 20 1945 at the age of seventy-six Master Chotoku Kyan died.

Choshin Chibana was born in Shuri in 1885. He is regarded as the founder of the Kobayashi branch of Shorin-ryu karate-do. Choshin devoted the rest of his life to developing and teaching karate-do after the war. After the war Choshin Chibana was the only remaining disciple of Master Itosu. As commemoration for the life of his great Sensei, Choshin brought together relatives, family descendants, and interested people to erect a stone monument in honor of Master Anko Itosu. His selfless act of honoring his teacher brought Choshin considerable recognition in his community and helped to ignite excitement in the karate community in Okinawa and restore a sense of pride and loyalty.

Choshin has also been credited with systemizing Itosu's style of karate-jutsu and officially changing its name in 1926, from Shuri-te-do-karate-jutsu to Okinawan Shorin-ryu Karate-jutsu

In 1964 Choshin was diagnosed with terminal cancer; however, he was able to continue teaching another 3 years due to his great condition and bujin spirit. But in 1969 he died.

Now that I have given a brief history about Anko Itosu's instructors and his students let's explore some debate that has come up about the actual history of the Pinan as well as the Naihanchi katas.

It is well known and commonly believed that Anko Itosu created and developed the five Pinan katas for the purpose of its inclusion into the school curriculum. His interest in teaching karate into the school system became a reality in April of 1901 when he came to teach To-te as it became part of the school curriculum at Shuri's Jinjo elementary school. With Master Itosu in charge of developing and teaching what is now considered to be the first building blocks in the foundation of modern karate.

In April 1905, Master Itosu became a part-time teacher at a high school as well as at the Teacher's College. Master Itosu knew that in his period of time and before there were no preparatory or fundamental exercises, so if a child had no previous background and was not physically mature the teachings of that era were too difficult for its inclusion to the school curriculum. At that time students started out being taught Naihanchi which proved to be too difficult for beginners. Master Itosu wanted to create some type of systematic method of teaching techniques and katas in order for the students to be able to progress up from one level to the next. It was during this time as a teacher in 1907 that he introduced his five training exercises that he called the Pinan katas. Itosu introduced the Pinan's as a beginners kata that progressed into slightly more advanced techniques.

Even though the Pinans' are considered creations of Anko Itosu one school of thought says that Itosu developed the Pinan series from an older classical form that was present around the Shuri area. Yet another claims that Itosu was re-working a longer version of a Chinese form called Channan.

In an article that I read titled Channan: The “Lost” Kata of Itosu? There is a passage that references a karate research journal entitled Karate No Kenkyu, published by Nakasone Genwa, Choki Motobu is quoted referring to the Channan and the Pinan kata:

“I was interested in the martial arts since I was a child, and studied under many teachers. I studied with Master Itosu for 7-8 years. At first, he lived in Urasoe, then moved to Nakashima Oshima in Naha, then on to Shikina, and finally to the villa of Barom Ie. He spent his final years living near the middle school. I visited him one day at his home near the school, where we sat talking about the martial arts and current affairs. While I was there, 2-3 of Itosu’s students also dropped by and sat talking with us. Master Itosu turned to the students and said “show us a kata.” The kata that they performed was very similar to the Channan kata that I knew, but there were some differences also. Upon asking the student what the kata was, he replied “it is Pinan No Kata.” The students left shortly after that, upon which I turned to Itosu Sensei and said “I learned a kata called Channan, but the kata that those students just performed now was different. What is going on?” Itosu Sensei replied “Yes, the kata is slightly different, but the kata that you just saw is the kata that I have decided upon. The students all told me that the name Pinan is better, so I went along with the opinions of the young people.” These kata, which were developed by Itosu Sensei, underwent change even during his own lifetime.” (Murakami, 1991; pg. 120)

There is also another reference from Kinjo Hiroshi, one of Japan’s most senior teachers and historians of the Okinawan fighting traditions, and a direct student of three of Itosu’s students, namely Chomo Hanashiro, Chojo Oshiro and Anbun Tokuda. In a series of articles that Mr. Hiroshi wrote on the Pinan katas in Gekkan Karate-do magazine in the

mid 1950's, he states that the Pinan kata were originally called Channan, and there were some technical differences between Channan and the updated versions known as Pinan (Kinjo, 1956).

Now a little about some information that I found to be quite interesting linking Anko Itosu to the possible developer of at least Naihanchi Nidan and Sandan (Kinjo 1991, Murakame1991) and possibly Kusanku Sho and Passai Sho (Iwai 1992). In an online magazine titled Fighting Arts, according to Tom Ross, he states that Itosu did not stop at the Pinans. "After Itosu took the Channan forms he had previously devised (or had been taught him, according to historians) and after having altered some of the movements he renamed them Pinan, which he thought, would be more appealing to students." Tom Ross backs his claims by supporting them with evidence found in journals such as "Karati No Kenkyu" by Nakasone Genwa 1934 and "Kobo Kenpo Karate-Do Nyumon" by Mabui Kenwa and Nakasome Genwa 1938. He also found some supporting information in the research of such noted historians as Kinjo Kiroshi in a series of articles he wrote in 1956 for "Gekkan Karatedo" magazine. After the creation of the Pinans or the modification of Channan to develop the Pinans Itosu went on to supplement Naifuanchin (Naihanchi) by the creation of Naihanchi Nidan and Sandan.

In another article online about Karate history titled "Okinawan Shido-Kan Shorin-Ryu Karate". The author recounts the story of Itosu teaching school in 1905 at the Prefectural Dai Ichi College and the Prefectural Teachers' Training College. In his capacity as teacher Itosu realized that he needed to develop some new teaching methods for the many new beginners. "It was during this period that he developed the Naihanchi and Pinan series of kata that Shorin-ryu presently uses."

Even though there is not enough overwhelming evidence at this point to support the claims that Anko Itosu created or modified the *Naihanchi's*, there is substantial evidence and documentation to have a great deal of certainty that Anko Itosu developed the *Pinans*'.

One thing for certain is that Anko Itosu and his efforts left a lasting mark in Okinawa and the martial arts world. He will be remembered as a visionary, a great teacher and as one of the forefathers of martial arts.

I've included a letter written by Anko Itosu in 1908. This letter preceded the introduction of karate to the Okinawan schools and the eventual introduction to the Japanese mainland.

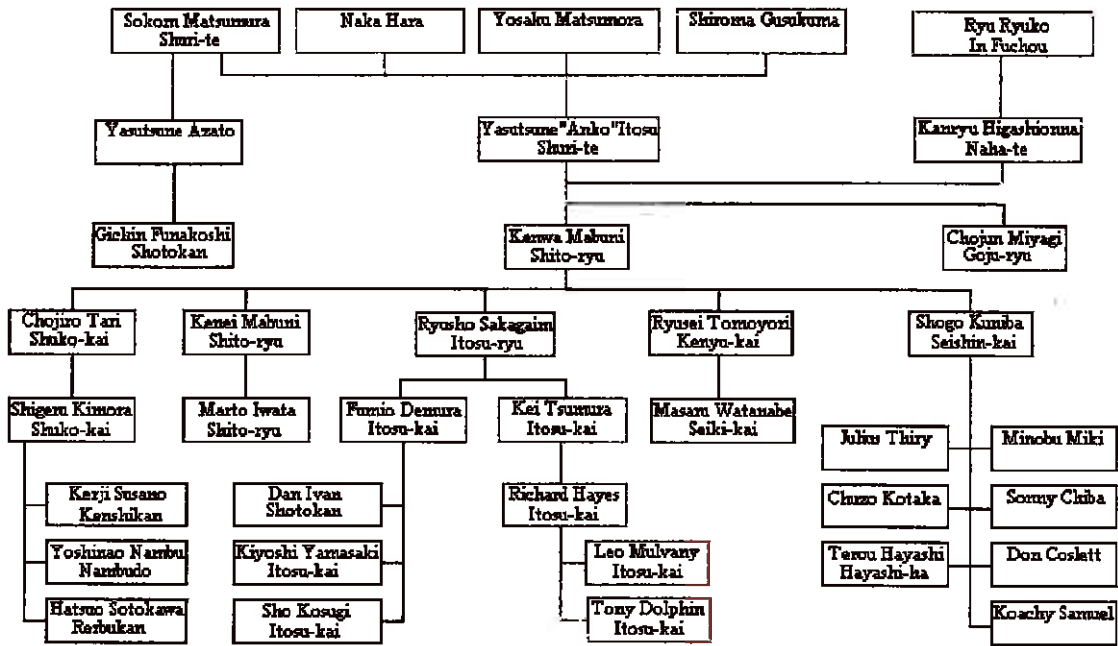
“The Ten Lessons of *To-te*”:

1. Karate does not endeavor only to discipline one's physique. If and when the necessity arises to fight for a just cause, karate provides the fortitude with which to risk one's own life in support of that campaign. It is not meant to be employed against a single adversary but rather as a means of avoiding the use of one's hands and feet in the event of a potentially dangerous encounter with a ruffian or a villain.
2. The primary purpose of karate training is to strengthen the muscles, making the physique strong like iron and stone so that one can use the hands and feet to approximate such weapons as a spear or halberd. In doing so, karate training cultivates bravery and valor in children and it should be encouraged in our elementary schools. Don't forget what the Duke of Wellington said after defeating Emperor Napoleon: “The Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton.”

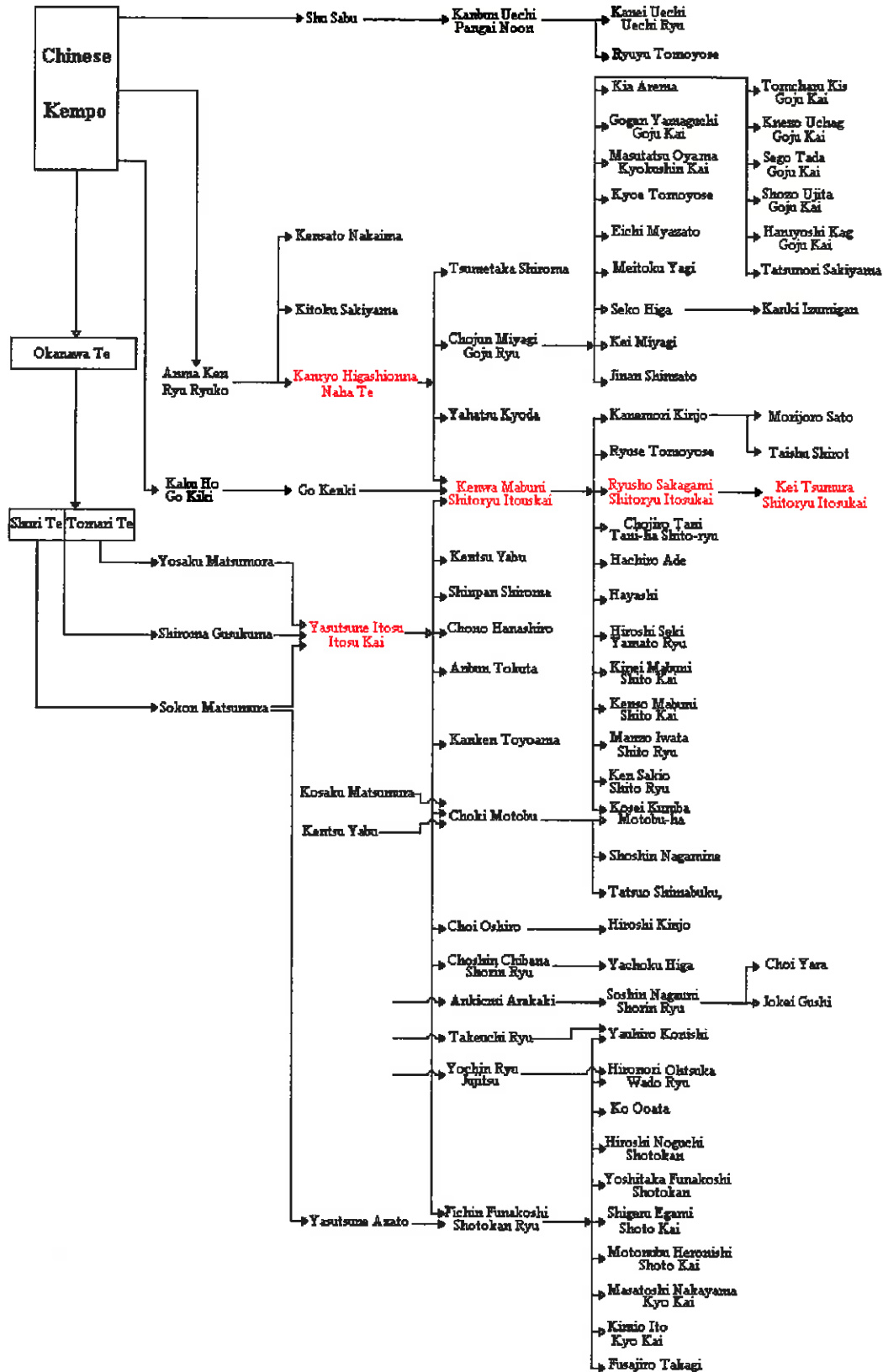
3. Karate cannot be adequately learned in a short period of time. Like a sluggish bull, regardless of how slowly it moves it will eventually cover a thousand miles. So too, for one who resolves to study diligently two or three hours every day, after three or four years of unremitting effort one's body will undergo a great transformation, revealing the very essence of karate.
4. One of the most important issues in karate is the importance of training the hands and the feet. Therefore, one must always make use of the makiwara in order to develop them thoroughly. In order to do this effectively, lower the shoulders, open the lungs, focus your energy, firmly grip the ground to root your posture, and sink your ki (the life force or intrinsic energy), forcing it into your tanden (area just below the navel). Following this procedure, perform one to two hundred tsuki (punches) with each hand every day.
5. One must maintain an upright position in the training postures of karate. The back should be straight, loins pointing upward with the shoulders down, while maintaining a liable power in your legs. Relax and bring together the upper and lower parts of the body with the ki force focused in your tanden.
6. Handed down by word of mouth, karate is comprised of a myriad of technique and corresponding meanings. Resolve to independently explore the context of these techniques, observing the principles of torite (theory of usage), and the practical applications will be more easily understood.
7. In karate training one must determine whether the interpretation of a movement is suitable for defense or for cultivating the body.

8. Intensity is an important issue in karate training. To visualize that one is actually engaged on the battlefield during training does much to enhance progression. Therefore, the eyes should dispatch fierceness while lowering the shoulders and contracting the body when delivering a blow. Training in this spirit prepares one for actual combat.
9. The amount of training must be in proportion to one's physical reservoir of strength and conditioning. Excessive practice is harmful to one's body and can be recognized when the face and eyes become red.
10. Participants of karate usually enjoy a long and healthy life, thanks to the benefits of unremitting training. Practice strengthens muscle and bone, improves the digestive organs, and regulates blood circulation. Therefore, if the study of karate were introduced into our (athletic) curricula from elementary school and practiced extensively we could more easily produce men of immeasurable defense capabilities. With these teachings in mind, it is my own conviction that if the students at the Shihan Chugakko (old name of Okinawa's Teachers College) practice karate they could, after graduation, introduce the discipline at the local levels; namely to elementary schools. In this way karate could be disseminated throughout the entire nation and not only benefit people in general but also serve as an enormous asset to our forces.

The Evolution of Shotokan



Evolution of Modern Karate





BUSHI MATSUMURA



GICHIN FUNAKOSHI



CHOTOKU KYAN



CHOMO HANASHIRO

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