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Anthony Mirakian was the first Westerner taught by Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi, the top student and successor of Chojun Miyagi, the founder of Goju-ryu. Reflecting on a lifetime of practice, Master Anthony Mirakian discusses the meaning of karate-do and the techniques of Goju-ryu kata.

Feature

Science as a Weapon

Throughout time, scientists have waged war on established beliefs and concepts. Using the same process as the scientist, martial artists are able to test their own theories regarding techniques and personal defence.

Review

Comprehensive Asian Fighting Arts

by Donn Draeger & Robert Smith.

History

The History of Goju-Ryu Karate, Part III

In this last part in a series of three, we continue the exploration of the Chinese influences on Goju-ryu. Where did Chojun Miyagi learn the kata that do not come from Kanryo Higaonna? To understand this, we take a look at the Karate Research Club and the Chinese combat manual the Bubishi.

Experience

What is Ki?

After practising the right punches Mario McKenna went on a search for the meaning of the mysterious ki. After experiencing pleasure and flow he ends up with an ancient meditation technique.
Interview with Master Anthony Mirakian

Karate-do, its purpose and responsibility

After a decade of intensive training in Okinawa, Anthony Mirakian introduced Meibukan Goju-ryu karate-do to the United States in 1960. Mirakian was the first Westerner taught by Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi, the top student and successor of Chojun Miyagi, the founder of Goju-ryu. Reflecting on a lifetime of practice, Hanshi Anthony Mirakian, 9th degree black belt, discusses the meaning of karate-do and the techniques of Meibukan Goju-ryu kata.

- by Lex Opdam -

Question: Sensei, could you give your definition of a martial system and a martial art?

Answer: An art encompasses the philosophical concept of a specific system. Not only as a fighting method but as a way of life, as a philosophical concept. There should be a guideline for all our actions, our interrelations with relatives, friends and students. This is the art.

A system is a composite of techniques that does not have a binding ethical concept that an art form will have. The art form will bring the human element into it, the human spirit, and the physical, mental and spiritual concept.

There was a great Okinawan master called Tode Sakugawa who developed the dojo-kun over more than 200 years ago. Okinawan karate is recognized and highly respected for this moral ethical aspect that the dojo-kun represents.

In a dojo a group of people are training with the same aim. Practicing with a joyful heart and a pure mind, without distractions, training highly spirited without any ego intentions against each other.

Sensei, how would you describe the role of the teacher in a martial art?

An instructor in a system teaches purely physical movements. It doesn’t go any deeper than that.

Teaching an art like karate-do, in our case Okinawan Meibukan Goju-ryu karate-do, which includes aspects of spirituality, means that we are not just practicing the art for the sake of physical movements. The aim is to strive to develop a pristine human nature through hard intensive training, which is a challenge for a person mentally, physically and spiritually.

“The aim of a martial art is to strive to develop a pristine human nature through hard intensive training, which is a challenge for a person mentally, physically and spiritually.”

A Shift in Intention

A while ago I had a conversation with a Tai Chi Chuan Sifu. He told me that for the last decade, more and more people that visited him to receive instruction saw him as a personal trainer. Like the ones presented by the many 24-hours a day television commercials. Those people also saw his martial art as something to fulfill their needs – needs that seem to be dictated by these media monsters but that are not forthcoming from their own inner quest.

I told him that in general I also have noticed a shift in expectations when people visit my school for the first time. People seem to replace the concept of a martial arts teacher to the concept of a ‘personal trainer’. To justify their pre-chewed needs, they are taking over the wrapped up superficial talk concerning the philosophical meaning of martial arts as presented by the commercial media.

Nowadays, with 24 hours commercial television, sales are all that matter, and martial arts are exploited as never before. The way martial arts are presented by the media and received by the unaware seems to form a new part of culture in our western society. With this every new generation seems to slowly erase the deeper meaning of martial art in society in general.

The ego is very easily fed, and with this shift in our high-tech society and tendency for speed, the right questions asked are another step away. Questions that could bring us self-knowledge and understanding of each other. Every martial artist stands in connection to other human beings in our daily life. If we value martial arts and want to keep them alive, not only now but also in the future, we should actively participate in society by letting people know about the deeper ways of the martial arts, and by giving notice to those who want to listen. Those who present or teach martial arts could have a task here in keeping the spirit of the martial arts alive. Maybe they should keep it from being overtaken by those who are only in it for the money.

- Lex Opdam 
Editor in chief
inner aspects of the human being that is actively engaged by the continuous effort, devotion and dedication to the training the practitioner puts into it without egoistic feelings behind it. This process is guided by the teacher whose aim is to help the practitioner on this path.

In this process, you once said, the mind is our worst enemy. Our mind is continuously in conflict. Being a human being, a social being living in society, we have our obligations and daily struggles and often are under pressure, challenging us to live harmoniously within an organized society. This is the existence of many people. But as soon as we have fulfilled harmonizing with societies demands, we then need guidelines to bringing us back to more self-realization and harmonized living. A lot of people live their lives on a terrestrial level, taking care of their body functions but their spiritual level is non-existent. They are not aware of their spiritual side and we should be careful with whom we are dealing with. So, it is very difficult to teach something to someone when it is not part of his nature or his living.

Sensei, is there any difference in the way you teach here in your dojo and the way they teach in Okinawa? Yes, the way I teach is somewhat adopted in a cultural sense. We live in America and have an American way of life. If you live in Europe, for example the Netherlands, then there is also a cultural difference and this will influence the way of teaching. There is nothing wrong with that. This does not mean that the system has been altered. The way people think and live will be a living element for the practice of karate in that specific country.

I have also noticed that not all masters are as approachable as you are when people want to talk to their teacher outside the training. This is my nature, as was my father's who was very approachable, friendly and generous. This can be said also for other masters in Okinawa, China, Japan or anywhere else who want to impart their knowledge in the right and friendly way to their students. But unfortunately there are also those who are not. When I lived in Okinawa I had the privilege to meet many masters and because of my nature and search for information by the many questions I asked, I was granted information by the masters that I would not have received if my personality were different.

When you lived in Okinawa in the 50's you became very close to many Okinawans. One of them was Ryuritsu Arakaki. Was he approachable? Master Ryuritsu Arakaki was very approachable. I would go to his home on the weekends especially on Sundays. And there in his home we would have very lengthy conversations, and he would try to explain to me the meaning of the martial art, karate especially. He told stories of how Okinawans went to China, and how they were taught, so I learned a lot about the martial art from my visits to his home. Master Ryuritsu Arakaki explained many things which otherwise I could not have ever learned if I had never met him. So meeting him was a very valuable experience.

Would you say that the American society is more goal oriented as opposed to the way of life in the Martial Arts which are a path in the way of life and not a goal? Yes, American society is more goal oriented, they seem to chase the black belt. It is like when somebody is training and, this happened in my dojo, asks: “Could I use the knowledge of karate/technical skill in daily life?” I replied with: “I don’t think you should”. The person then said, “Well then what good is it?” I responded, “When you have a pistol or a revolver with you, do you go around shooting people?” Americans are practical; they want to learn something they can use. Wealth, good health, convenience, poise, inner serenity, well being, all these are actually assets; qualities that are rewarding. A person doesn’t have to have a trophy, that’s more like feeding the ego. Some people like to think they can make black belt in a year, or a year and a half. If a black belt means that, it means nothing. The black belt is a means to a beginning. Earning a black belt is a start of learning the art, not the end. The student embarks on a new aspect in life based on self-imposed discipline. The promotion to black belt is a certain amount of acknowledgement given by the teacher and that the practitioner has reached a certain level. Now, he has to work to a higher level. I’m going to promote this student to a next level, now he is going to learn even more. See, so it’s learning!

Actually, the most important aspect in the martial art is not the end goal, “the black belt”, but the journey itself. It is like a person traveling from here to
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California. The final destination could be San Francisco, Los Angeles or San Diego. The most important thing is the journey to the person traveling. His journey and meeting so many people, enjoying and experiencing himself as he is training and learning. Being curious and learning, seeing different cities, different landscapes, this is the most important thing, not the final destination. So the journey itself is the most important aspect of karate. It is the training of karate that is the most important, not the black belt. When I started training karate I didn’t have my aim on getting a black belt. I was practicing karate because I loved it. Regardless of whether I got a black belt. A person can have all kinds of black belts, but if his heart and enjoyment aren’t in it, he is wasting his time. Even if I wasn’t promoted to black belt, I would still practice karate. If a person is coming into my dojo and aims for the black belt, he is wasting his time. He should go some place else. Because if he wants the black belt, it means he’s coming for the black belt and not for the training. The most important aspect of him being there is his training and what he is gaining from the training. The belt is more a recognition from the master that after a certain amount of time the student has realized this level. A marker for what he has learned. But actually the most important thing is the beginning. That is why I have learned that many grand masters in Okinawa, after a lifetime of dedication, would wear a white belt. Because they felt that after so many years, they do not know “anything”. The artist of the artless art. They are going back to their original status that when actually in the beginning they were ignorant of the art and now in the end they are “ignorant” of the art again. I have only been teaching for 45 years of the over 50 years I have been practicing the martial arts and still I am not “scratching the surface.” But, still there is something that is in the subconscious mind that if we, as a true martial artist, have to protect ourselves, it is there and that will never fade away.

You have a reputation of being strict and demanding when someone enters the dojo for the first time to workout. Training in your dojo also means that one has to train in highly repetitive amount of basics over and over again. This is very demanding for people, especially when you are not used to these kinds of workouts. This also means that not many students stay long. Could you please share your thoughts on these points?

Unfortunately, there are many people who practice the art with the right intentions, but do not know why or what they are doing, and unfortunately, there are many schools in America in which as soon as a person walks in off the streets he is taught to fight without explanation. Because teaching the method of how to block, how to punch, good stance, good body posture and movements takes a few years or even longer depending on the practitioner. It is very easy to get up in the morning and just start swinging, but that doesn’t mean a person knows karate. A person should learn why he or she is practicing the art, starting from the a,b,c all the way up to z. That takes time. After a person learns that he goes his way, he goes off. It is difficult to teach karate to the American people; they don’t have patience. In America everybody wants to learn everything now or quickly. It doesn’t work like that. It took so many years for a master to develop that level of skill and it will take the student as long, or longer, to develop that same level of skill.

Sensei, Chojun Miyagi has said he was not opposed to use certain titles like Renshi, Hanshi etc. but believed that a ranking system, like the system used in some of the Japanese martial arts would not be suitable for Okinawan Goju-ryu. It would distract and feed the ego. After his death in 1953 the Okinawan karate associations, including Goju-ryu schools, adopted the Kyu- and Dan-ranking system. In light of Chojun Miyagi’s thoughts and that he did not want to incorporate the Kyu- and Dan-ranking, what are your thoughts on ranking, how do you personally see its purpose?

We don’t know the way Chojun Miyagi thought. He thought that only members of the Japanese nobility were entitled to promote and award rank to practitioners of karate. He thought that the Japanese Botoku-kai were the only ones who could award rank. For that reason Chojun Miyagi did not award any rank to his students. I think when Chojun Miyagi died, this opened a gate for many people who had very little training from Chojun Miyagi to make ridiculous claims that they were top students of.

him. But the ones in the inner circle knew who was the top student of Chojun Miyagi. They knew Meitoku Yagi was his top student. Then there were some lesser students who claimed to be the top student. I think that if Chojun Miyagi had established some sort of ranking system, many of these claims might not have surfaced. Unfortunately, his untimely death left the possibility of unqualified people making all kinds of exaggerated claims.

How do you see the ranking within martial arts today, knowing that there are schools that do not use ranking?
It all depends on the school and the practitioners. When I was in Okinawa in 1990, I was talking to one of the black belts of Sensei Senaha. He said to me, “Mr. Mirakian, the ranking of karate in Okinawa is no good.” I knew from where he was coming and I asked, “why?” He said, “Some have 8th, 9th, 10th degree, but they don’t deserve half of that rank because they have never worked hard or practiced hard to deserve that rank.” But now they are claiming all kinds of rank. The rank in Okinawa is highly inflated. There are many instructors and masters in Okinawa that are highly qualified and deserve their rank, but there are others who leave much to be desired.

How do you feel about the duality of rank then, feeding the ego of the person, where Zen principals in Martial Arts say the ego is to be shed?
Well, this is a difficult situation. It is very difficult to know exactly what is going on within the inner aspect of the practitioner’s mind. A disturbed person could come and be respectful and polite to the master but that practitioner could have ulterior motivations. Well, the truth, like I always say, is like oil. It will eventually come to the surface. The true character of the practitioner will show in due time. It cannot be hidden forever. Karate is supposed to help develop the person into a better human being. That is the optimal situation. But if a person is of a bad character and a bad spirit, he will take this knowledge and distort it to accommodate his own selfish motivation of how to teach and turn whatever he knows into a money-making method. Rather than teaching the art to the right people, in the right way. What is the right way? To some people the right way is to confuse the practitioner… Ranking is sometimes delayed to bring forth the pristine and true nature of the practitioner.

Sensei, you mentioned people making money with karate. What do you think about people who commercialize the art of karate?
The ones that are commercializing the art in my opinion are not teaching the true art. They are using the name of karate to suit their purpose. The worse they teach, the more people are coming to them because they have a certain image and ways to attract people to come to them to fool them. They even give kids of 10 or 12 years of age or even younger a black belt. That is a disgrace. Even a teenager of 16 or 17 years of age that has practiced 7 or 8 years has not developed a mental awareness for the realities of life. Once a person becomes an adult they might, without guarantee, develop awareness about the benefits of this intensive training and learn to respect it.

Today I have seen certain teachers and organizations charging money for grading tests and promotions, and those charges increase as the practitioner reaches “higher” levels. There are even schools that guarantee you that within three years you will become a “black belt” without ever having seen or met the prospective student! Unfortunately there are people that make big money with gassuku and seminars. All they are really accomplishing, in most cases, is fooling the public with these gimmicks. I do not make money with karate. If people want to be fooled it’s their choice, but it is not my cup of tea, it is not the way I operate. Maybe to them I am too old fashioned, not practical, but I am not competing with anybody. If they want to do it like that they should do so, but they don’t have to come to me and say that they teach the real karate, because they are not.

*Bowing to the shrine and to the pictures of the masters is done out of respect. Without their existence we would not be practicing the art, and in bowing to them we show our respect to them.”

Sensei, when your students enter your dojo they bow before a shrine. Could you explain this ritual?
Within the shrine there is a paper, which upon is written “Respect towards the brotherhood of mankind”. This is what Master Meitoku Yagi has written for me. This is a dojo shrine and is not directly depended upon a religion. Bowing to the shrine and to the pictures of the masters is done out of respect. Without their
existence we would not be practicing the art and in bowing to them we show our respect to them.

When meeting a person one shakes hands to show that we have no bad intentions and come in friendship, that we have respect for each other. The bowing in the dojo means the same thing.

Sensei, before training you always burn incense. Is there a special reason for doing this?

Incense has, I would say, a purifying and cleansing effect in the Dojo. It brings the right spirit to the environment. It helps the students realize that karate is not purely physical but it’s spiritual as well. Incense is burned to honor the past masters, because, if it weren’t for them, we would not be practicing that specific style of karate, or martial art. So incense is burnt in due respect to the masters and to bring spirituality to karate training because karate-do has spirit. It is not only the physical aspect but goes beyond the physical realm. It is a place for people’s spiritual development because while the students are developing physically they are developing also mentally and spiritually.

Before starting the actual kata, one prepares oneself in the “Yoi” position. In this preparatory position, what is the exact purpose of bringing both fists next to the body, contracting all the muscles for a short moment, and performing these movements before opening up every kata? Is it correct to state that the reason for this is both a ritual and a preparation for the body and mind?

It is a preparation. You have to tense all of the muscles of the body and get ready from there on to start doing the kata. The movements are like a spring quality. You spring up and make the movements dynamic. Make the body like the coils of a spring. This “Yoi” position is for preparation pushing down like getting a feel of the floor and the feet really planted for tremendous maximum energy development and concentration.

Could you tell me why all the Goju-ryu kata start at the same spot as they do end? In the case of other Okinawan karate styles, like Shorin-ryu you see kata like Naihanchi that do not start at the same spot as they end. Is there a specific reason for this element of the Goju-ryu kata? Is it a philosophical approach or is it just a practical tool?

So many of the kata concepts remain the way that they were brought from China to Okinawa. Some kata, even in Goju-ryu, don’t have the balance in that, what is done from the right is also done on the left.

Returning to the same spot has no deeper philosophical meaning. Its goal was for the symmetry of the kata. If the kata is correct, one should be ending up in the same place. It also depends on the steps that the student is taking. When the student takes a larger step and then the next one short, this can throw the kata off, and the student will not be able to end up in the same place. As far as Shorin, I am not a practitioner of Shorin. But it could be that some of the movements in Shorin have been eliminated or that’s the way it was practiced.

Chojun Miyagi trained Naihanchi extensively. Is there a special reason why Chojun Miyagi did not put Naihanchi in his Goju-ryu system?

In Shorin-ryu, Naihanchi is like the Sanchin of Shorin-ryu, only they do it in a natural way with natural breathing while Goju-ryu emphasizes the deeper and dynamic breathing, rather than natural breathing. Chojun Miyagi taught Naihanchi kata. Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi thought Naihanchi was such a good kata with good movement, that when we were training Goju-ryu karate in the 50’s, we also trained Naihanchi kata. Naihanchi was a Shorin-ryu kata, so it wasn’t incorporated into Goju-ryu kata; we had so many kata that were typical of Goju-ryu, so that kata wasn’t affiliated with Goju-ryu.

“Slow movements in Goju-ryu karate are typical of the system. They are done to develop more concentration in the movement and more awareness of the students while doing this movement”

Could you describe the reason why there are slow movements in some of the Goju-ryu kata?

Slow movements in Goju-ryu karate are typical of the system, which was founded by the late great Grandmaster Chojun Miyagi. Some of the movements in the Goju-ryu kata, like for instance in the Seiunchin kata, and to a certain extent in the beginning of Seipai, Sanseru, Suparinpei and other Goju-ryu kata, are done to develop more concentration in the movement and more awareness of the students while doing this movement. The physical explanation is that when a person is making a movement more deliberately,
Sensei Anthony Mirakian demonstrates a typical slow movement in Goju-ryu’s Seiunchin kata. A person can spend more concentration on the movement and make it more correct.

Could this be applied to all kinds of movement or is it specific for certain schools? This is typical, more typical of Goju-ryu, being hard and soft, slow and fast. There are other schools like Tai Chi or other certain internal systems that have slow movements and rhythm. Not everything is always done slow; certain movements are done slow to develop internal inner energy and strength. Suddenly these movements become fast and explosive. These forms also have rhythm. If everything is done at the same speed, then rhythm is lacking.

Sensei, we have six Goju-ryu kata including Sanchin and Tensho that start in a similar Sanchin dachi posture or the Sanchin guard stance. Obviously, seeing the background and origins of the Goju-ryu system, this seems to differ from the original Chinese versions, which originated in China. Is there any reason why Chojun Miyagi and/or Kanryo Higaonna changed the original versions, (except for Tensho which was created by Chojun Miyagi), adding or changing the first three kata movements as described? It wasn’t appropriate for Kanryo Higaonna to forward the system, as far as we could speak of a system, to the Okinawans exactly in the way he had learnt it in China because of cultural reasons. Okinawa is culturally different to the Chinese. The Okinawans don’t fight like the Chinese and by nature are different from the Chinese. So that’s why Kanryo Higaonna adapted what he had learnt to suit the Okinawan culture, environment and Okinawan people’s way of living.

Would you say that the opening of the kata is to incorporate Sanchin principals into the kata? Well, all of the Goju-ryu kata have the inner aspects of the breath control of Sanchin. Like when you are doing all the movements they are done in a systematic, methodic way of inhaling and exhalung. It’s done in a very quiet manner. It’s like doing the Sanchin, but it is more silent with the concept of Sanchin behind it, of concentrating, and pushing the energy below the navel into the Tan Tien and tightening the strings of the chalice, the perineum, and the anus. Especially doing the Sanchin to create maximum energy. When one performs kata, it is done by moving the body with the concept of Sanchin behind it.

Most of the kata incorporate three steps in the opening movements. Is this done for the purpose of symmetry or is there a deeper meaning to these movements? Well, that could be. It could be that there weren’t that many steps and the Okinawans thought it was more beneficial to them to practice with those three steps. Maybe in the original kata there weren’t the three steps, maybe it was less or more.

I believe that for cultural purposes they made it three steps. Most Chinese kata had highly repetitive movements. The Okinawans thought that rather than making it so repetitious, they preferred to concentrate on one or two of those specific techniques with maximum concentration and power. Kata with highly repetitive movements becomes very grueling and would lack energy. The Okinawans have always emphasized develop, or transition, with a sudden explosive surge of energy. This could be in the form of a kick or a punch, or as in the example of the Seisan kata last movements which is almost a simultaneous and explosive kick/punch combination.

Sensei, in Seisan kata there is a movement where you push and you have a sort of up-down Muchimi. Is there a special reason for incorporating this movement? We see it in Sanchin and Tensho kata; but sometimes it is also found in other kata of our system. Is its purpose the same reason we practice it in Sanchin kata, to develop certain strength, energy and tension? Yes, I think it is done for developing maximum energy in the movement and then slowly, I would say, transferring this energy into another movement. Going from one movement to the next one. So that’s why it is done with a certain amount of speed and concentration. Then the movement can...
power. Power was always very important. Like the concept of one blow, one kill, to develop maximum energy in your movement, especially in the punch, so when attacking a person you eliminate this person with one blow. In actual combat, if your opponent is not defeated with one technique he might be able to fight back and reverse the situation.

You mean by stringing multiple techniques together, very quickly, the body cannot recover and quickly generate enough energy?

Then you are sacrificing power for speed. The Okinawans felt that speed and flexibility are very important, but they have always invested more in power. Okinawans are not built big. They are very strong by nature and felt that they were going to evolve karate to their own physiological make up. The Chinese are more slender, of course there are big boned Chinese, but generally they are slender people. Okinawans historic background, their nature, is that of farmers & fishermen. They worked in agriculture, cultivating the land and fishing from the ocean. So they were strong from the sort of labor they did. Over two to three hundred years ago, Okinawans would practice karate secretly during the night because it was forbidden by the Japanese conquerors of Okinawa. In that time they would practice their techniques on the Gajimaru tree, which is the Banyan tree, trying to break the Gajimaru shoots. The Banyan tree, which grows in Okinawa, grows shoots from some of the branches and the shoots reach the ground and then those shoots eventually become part of the main trunk of the tree. The Okinawan martial artists would try to break these Gajimaru shoots coming down from the branches to the ground with one powerful shuto, punch, kick or forearm strike, to develop maximum power. If they hit someone in actual combat with heavy armor they could penetrate the armor and kill the person.

It’s been said that Chojun Miyagi greatly emphasized Sanchin kata practice and that it was extremely important to the development of the practitioners training. There have also been stories and writings that some people have practiced nothing but Sanchin. Is Sanchin more of a physical exercise for the body, teaching it to strengthen? Or is there a spiritual aspect to Sanchin that had Chojun Miyagi so embrace it as part of the training?

Well, the cultivation and preparation of Sanchin takes so much concentration. Because everything in life starts with breathing and ends with a breath. So the bringing of this energy in Sanchin

“The concept of Sanchin is to maximize the level of energy in the body. Sanchin has a spiritual value to it also. Because Sanchin is performed to develop a level of fighting spirit. To make a person gradually fearless in actual combat.”

is to raise the level of energy of the body. To maximize it. That is the concept of Sanchin. The concept of Tensho is to relax the level of energy in the body. They are two opposites. Sanchin, to increase and maximize the level of energy in the body and then Tensho, to relax the energy level. Sanchin has a spiritual value to it also. Because Sanchin is performed to develop a level of fighting spirit. To make a person gradually fearless in actual combat. That is the tremendous stress control that Sanchin is about.

Do the pauses in the middle of the movements of Sanchin carry any meaning other than a transition point?

Well, that is the concept of inhaling and exhaling, because the person is pushing the energy through the lower abdomen, to what is known as the Tan Tien. Pushing not only in the Tan Tien, but to the sides and the back of the body like a circle. The energy is not only in the Tan Tien but also in the lower Tan Tien, which is a few inches below the navel and to the sides and back of the body. These places are also expanding during Sanchin breathing, like an inner tube. The energy is not only in the front, but also in the back and sides as well.

If somebody performs Sanchin incorrectly, do they do their bodies more harm than good?

Yes, a person could actually hurt himself more than helping himself. Practicing Sanchin has to be a gradual process. A sign that the person has been cultivating and practicing Sanchin right is that when the body is relaxed it is soft like cotton or rubber. When the body is tense, the body should be very tight and hard. Also, the correct practice of Sanchin will develop the body to feel like steel covered with velvet. The actual appearance that a person would give is that his body is soft, but if a person touches that person’s arm or body, he would realize that his body is very dynamic, tight and hard. It is very deceiving. Like for instance,
watching Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi’s biceps. They looked very supple and soft. He had well developed forearms, feet and fists. When Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi did his movements it was like iron covered in velvet. Once I took a magazine over to the dojo, a bodybuilder’s magazine with somebody on the front cover flexing his biceps. These biceps were 21 inches and Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi began mimicking the movement. You could tell that his biceps weren’t that developed. But I have learned that he asked a Japanese soldier to take a rifle and hit him with it on the shoulder. The Japanese soldier broke his rifle butt over his shoulder and Grandmaster Yagi just shook it off as if it was nothing. He had very developed trapezes.

Chojun Miyagi seemed to have two variations of Sanchin and also there may have been more than one variation of Tensho. Do any other variations of Sanchin exist that were developed by Chojun Miyagi? I don’t think so. As far as I know, there was only one Sanchin. It was Chojun Miyagi who developed the deep breathing.

I remember going back to the 1950’s, in Grandmaster Meitoku Yagi’s Meibukan dojo. He practiced the Sanchin open handed; similar to the way we hold our hands in the opening movements of Shisochin kata. When he did the movement it was done slowly, deliberately, with open hand and openhanded strikes, and it was done with dynamic tension. That’s the way that we practiced it at the time. The format of the kata was the same like the regular Sanchin with closed fists, except this was open handed.

It is said that the open hand allows the chi to flow through the arm faster and better than the closed fist, which closes the chi. Is this correct? Well, there is a certain amount of truth in that. Open hand techniques are always much faster than closed fists. When a person has open hands, they always have a longer reach. When a person is closing or making a tight fist with a hand, he is losing a few inches reach. So, Chinese martial arts favor open hand techniques, it was faster to manipulate and to operate, but also they had many various techniques that differed from the closed fist, like the panther punch, eagle eye punch and others. Those techniques were done for when you were facing a fast opponent. It all depended on the skill of the practitioner. If the practitioner was well skilled, he could use either technique. Open handed, or strike with the fingers or closed fist, depending on the level of knowledge and skill of the practitioner. But always open handed techniques are much faster than closed hand.

Sensei, if you could give advice to people starting the practice of Sanchin, what would be the appropriate way to do it? First the posture, then movement, then the technique, then the breathing, then the muscles focus? They should try to learn step by step. Good posture first, and then proper alignment of the body, where the head should be held, proper alignment of the arms and the feet, the relationship of the feet and the hands, then the breathing control which should be coupled with the movement of the hands. All this should be learned step by step. It is better to start slow, and develop a slow progress, rather than trying to learn everything all at once and then failing. So they should go step by step. In the beginning they should breathe as natural as possible. And then later on they can increase it. Young people are dynamic and have so much energy, they could apply so much strength and energy in Sanchin practice. Depending on when a person becomes old, their body loses some of that intensive energy and movements become softer by nature. Most importantly the practitioner should practice Sanchin under the strict supervision of a qualified Sensei to prevent harm to the practitioner.
Daring to challenge time-honored traditions and customs, scientists have succeeded in identifying new and amazing ways in which we might better ourselves and improve our quality of life. One need only look as far as the technological revolution to quickly understand the magnitude of the discoveries of these innovative dreamers. Never before have we as a people served witness to such magnificent and important discoveries. The technological revolution is undoubtedly well underway. Buried within this revolution, often overlooked, is the primary weapon used by these scientific warriors, the scientific method. Serving as a pathway to truth the scientific method has served as catalyst to advancements this world has been subject to virtually every known scientific and technological revolution. The technological revolution is the primary weapon used by these scientific warriors, the scientific method. Serving as a pathway to truth the scientific method has served as catalyst to virtually every known scientific advancement this world has been subject to witness. It serves as a tested procedure for all to use who possess the courage to dream of a more effective and efficient way of doing things. Again and again throughout history the scientific method has labored in theoretical battle as scientists and explorers alike have attempted to test their conclusions against nature. Using the same process as the scientist, we as martial artists are able to test our own theories regarding techniques and individual concepts regarding personal defense.

**Observation**
The first step in the scientific method is that of observation. As practicing martial artists we should be aware of the happenings in the world around us. Any and all events regarding self-protection must be observed as we go through our daily lives. Whether our observations occur in the dojo or training hall, local news, at work or at play, the significance of each event must not be overlooked. Awareness is the key to unlocking the scientific method, without it we simply live day to day in a somewhat unconscious state. Only through training ourselves to maintain a certain state of attentiveness throughout our daily activities can we be truly prepared for any and all situations that might arise. “Only through training ourselves to maintain a certain state of attentiveness throughout our daily activities can we be truly prepared for any and all situations that might arise.”

**Questioning**
Assume for instance that you observe a mass influx of student interest and enrollment in dojo’s that feature the newest “flavor of the month” martial art made popular by television or cinema. Almost naturally the first question that would be addressed is whether this particular Art X is indeed a functional way of training for self-defense. The ability to perform competent research is the key to excelling in the capacity of gathering relevant information. Information that will help us develop a hypothesis as it relates to our original question.

**Hypothesis**
A hypothesis is nothing more than what we believe to be the answer to our immediate question. Simply stated: Because of the information gathered and the evidence of sufficient training philosophies regarding sparring? These are but a few of the questions that must be investigated when trying to answer the immediate question as to the effectiveness of Art X regarding self-defense. The ability to perform competent research is the key to excelling in the capacity of gathering relevant information. Information that will help us develop a hypothesis as it relates to our original question.

**Testing**
Quite possibly one of the most crucial phases within the scientific method is that of the testing of the hypothesis. All bias and personal feelings regarding the question at hand must be removed from the action of testing. One must remember that truth is the only result that is being sought. To allow personal feelings regarding the experiment to taint the
process will result in total failure of the examination.
In order to test our hypothesis that Art X is indeed an effective means of preparing oneself for self-defense, we must ensure that we are actually performing our experiment in the proper format. Therefore, it is imperative that we assess the success of Art X in an environment that closely resembles a real self-defense situation. Simply engaging in sparring sessions with an uncooperative opponent can easily solve the dilemma of reality testing.

“No matter how much we liked the flow of the techniques on the big screen or how magnificently the instructor performs during class, we must test the techniques for ourselves.”

Remember, no matter how much we liked the flow of the techniques on the big screen or how magnificently the instructor performs during class, we must test the techniques for ourselves. The question of whether a person of your individual height, weight, and physical ability can successfully perform the self-defense techniques in question must be answered in the appropriate way.

Examination
Once we have tested our hypothesis we must examine the data accrued from our trial. As in the testing phase of the experiment, it is essential that all personal feelings be ignored during the examination of the results. It is within this phase that the original question will be answered regarding the effectiveness of Art X in self-defense situations. This results in either our original hypothesis being proven correct, or flaws within the hypothesis becoming evident, thus requiring the development of a renewed hypothesis and testing cycle. Operating as a succession of phases the scientific method will hence continue to test hypothesis after hypothesis until the truth is revealed.

The scientific method, time tested and dependable, serves as yet another tool available to all students of the martial arts. By effectively utilizing the ideas and concepts of observation, questioning, development of hypothesis, testing of hypothesis and the examination of data, practitioners of any and all forms of martial arts may now take a giant step to freedom within the martial arts community by testing for themselves what they believe to be true or false. The scientific method offers once and for all a systematic approach to truth, freedom and self-expression within the martial arts.

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The History of Goju-Ryu Karate, Part III

New Ideas on Goju-ryu’s Direct Chinese Ancestors

In this last part in a series of three, we continue the exploration of the Chinese influences on Goju-ryu. As we have seen in part II, through his independent research, Chojun Miyagi came to a different system than his Chinese teacher Kanryo Higaonna. But where did Miyagi learn the kata that do not come from Higaonna? To understand this, we need to know more of his friends within the Karate Research Club and the Chinese combat manual the Bubishi.

- By Mathieu G. Ravignat -

Gokenki

On his two trips to Fujian in China, in 1915 and 1936, Chojun Miyagi was accompanied by Gokenki. Gokenki (Chinese: Wu Kiang or Wu Hsien Kuei, 1887-1940), moved to Okinawa in 1910 and worked for the Eiko Chako Tea Company. He taught White Crane in Okinawa between 1912 and his death in 1940. Gokenki was a close friend of Miyagi, Mabuni, Kyoda, Matayoshi, Hanashiro, Kana Kinjo, and other future masters. Gokenki was a respectful nickname, a title bestowed by the locals meaning “great and very honorable master.”

“In Fujian, Gokenki introduced Miyagi to some important kung fu masters, and helped him to find books on Chinese martial arts. It is also believed that Gokenki had something to do with the creation of the Tensho kata.”

In Fujian, Gokenki introduced Miyagi to some important kung fu masters. He helped him to find books on Chinese martial arts and had an influence on the development of To’ on-ryu of Kyoda; for example the kata Neipai. According to Seiko Kina, Chojun Miyagi and Gokenki used to spend long hours playing Go and drinking tea discussing the martial arts (Higaonna 1996, p. 65).

Reportedly, Miyagi originally learned Neipai (also known as Naipaipo) from Gokenki, and Seiko Higa still practiced this kata as late as the 1940’s. However, though it was later dropped from the Goju curriculum for no apparent reason, it survives in Shito-ryu and amongst some kobudo and Shorin-ryu practitioners in diverse versions. It is also believed that Gokenki had something to do with the creation of the Tensho kata and that he based it on his Rokkishu White Crane form.

According to McKenna, Gokenki taught the following forms (McKenna 2000, p. 14):

- Happoren (Babulian/Paipuren): eight linking steps;
- Nijuhachi-uchi (Ershibada or Neipai): twenty eight strikes;
- Chukyo (Zhongkuang): middle save.

These forms may have affected the Chojun Miyagi kata in Goju. However, none of the other kata begin in the characteristic White Crane opening other than Shisochin, nor do any of the above names sound familiar. Because of this, I propose the possibility that Shisochin, which begins with the typical openhanded White Crane guard, may have been influenced by Gokenki, but that it is impossible to tell for the others.

To Daiki

To Daiki (or Tang Daiji) was born in Yaosha 50 km west of Fuzhou, in Fujian province. In 1915, he came to Okinawa to work at his cousin’s teashop and Chinese restaurant in Naha’s eastern district. He quickly settled in and married an Okinawan woman called Ishira Michiko. Interestingly enough, Fujiwara and Gima believe that he taught a form of Five Ancestor Fist, which may have included the forms:

- Chinto (Chentou): sinking the head;
- Sesan: great thirteen;
- Wando: ?;
- Goko Choyo: five tiger morning sun.

What is clear is that Five Ancestor Fist
includes a form called Chentou (Sinking the head). Interestingly enough the kata Chinto also begins with protecting and lowering the head. Five Ancestor Fist also includes a form called Goko Sen or Five Tiger Battles. Five Ancestors was a form of kung fu especially taught in Quanzhou and Shamen (Amoy) districts of Fuzhou where To Daiki lived. Given that he taught a form called Chinto (Chentou) and a form called Goko Choyo (Goko Sen) both similar to those in the Five Ancestor system, it is logical to conclude that he taught Five Ancestor Fist. Probably through Gokenki a fellow Chinese tea merchant To Daiki befriended Chojun Miyagi and Kenwa Mabuni and became part of the Karate Kenkyukai. He participated in a public demonstration in 1920 (Fujiwara & Gima 1986, p. 74). After some disaster, he left for China in 1930 and he died there in 1937. If these dates are correct, conceivably he could have been active in the Kenkyokai for 10 to 15 years; definitely long enough to have a profound influence on Chojun Miyagi’s karate. Though none of the forms above seem to have made it in the Goju-ryu system, it is possible that some of the remaining kata were created based on them. They also may have come directly from To Daiki since we cannot discount that To Daiki may have known other forms that we do not know about.

The Bubishi

The *Bubishi* is a Chinese kung fu manual discussing the historical principles and techniques of the White Crane and Lohan styles of kung fu. The date of its composition and introduction to Okinawa is contested. However, the late Dai Sensei Meitoku Yagi believed that it has its origins among the 36 Chinese families that arrived in the Kume district of Naha during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Some others have proposed that the Okinawan *Bubishi* is a section of a book written in the Ming dynasty by a famous military strategist called Mao Yuan Yi. However, existing copies of this *Bubishi* (or *Wu Bei Zhi* in Mandarin Chinese) do not include material found in the Okinawan *Bubishi* though similarities between its thirty-two empty-handed techniques and those found in the Okinawan *Bubishi* do exist. Therefore, the connection between these two texts may be an older text. The thirty-two empty-handed techniques in the *Wu Bei Zhi* are thought to originate from the famous Japanese pirate buster and Chinese General Qi Jiguan’s (1522-87) treatise on war, the *Jixiao Xinshu* published in 1561 (McCarthy 1995, p. 27).

However, Chojun Miyagi probably believed that the *Bubishi* was an ancient text handed down from master to student for countless ages in the Chinese system, and that it was learned by his teacher Kanryo Higaonna. Therefore, he must have believed that it resumed the essential principles of the style he inherited from his teacher. This would explain both Miyagi’s and Juhatsu Kyoda’s veneration for this book. Given the White Crane content in the book, this would also explain why so many nahate practitioners sought Gokenki’s guidance. Incidentally, this would also explain why Juhatsu Kyoda completed the Higaonna system with the introduction of kata Nepai (learned from Gokenki) and also why Mabuni introduced Nipaipo (his revised version of Gokenki’s Neipai), Hakudo and Paipuren (all from Gokenki) in his system. It is believed that the primary motivation for adding the kata Tensho with the help of Gokenki, came from the Rokkishu hand techniques (see pictures below) in the *Bubishi*. In addition, the name Goju-ryu comes from a verse in the Poem of the Fist, or *Kenpo Hakku*, contained in the Chinese *Bubishi*. Finally, the general principles of hard breathing and soft breathing and balancing hard techniques and soft techniques and the philosophy of Goju-ryu are contained in the *Bubishi*. **Kenkyokai**

In 1926, Hanashiro Chomo Sensei with the help of Chojun Miyagi reorganized the Ryukyu Toudi Kenkyukai (Toudi means China Hand) to ensure the preservation of karate as an Okinawan treasure. Miyagi took out a loan to build the new dojo for the club. The guarantor on the loan was none other than Gokenki. The club established itself in Asahigoko, Wakasa-cho, and Naha-Shi. The co-founders were Chojun Miyagi Sensei, Hanashiro Chomo, Motobu Choyo and Kenwa Mabuni. Others masters who frequented the club included Juhatsu Kyoda, Seikichi Uehara, Shimpan Gusukuma, Gokenki and another Chinese person called To Daiki (Tang Daiji). All these people shared ideas and trained together. They also developed many new methods of training and taught each other what they knew. It is here that Morio Higaonna believes Miyagi first perfected his teaching method: Yobi undo (warm ups), Hojo undo (training with implements), basics, Sanchin and then kata (Higaonna 1996, p. 63). No doubt, contact with all these peers had an influence on the composition and systematization of modern Goju-ryu. However, it is unclear how far this influence goes, since the influences are too many to be accounted for.

**Conclusion to Part III**

It is clear that Gokenki, To Daiki, the *Bubishi* and the Kenkyukai all had their respective influences on Chojun Miyagi
and the modern composition of Goju-ryu karate. What is unclear is whether or not the non Higaonna kata introduced by Miyagi were learned or developed from these sources or if they were strictly learned during Miyagi’s trips to Fujian, or both.

General Conclusion
During this essay, I have been able to narrow down the confusion over the history of Goju-ryu to three major questions:

1. The first and most important is the confusion stemming from the contradictory information coming from China as to who Ryu Ryu Ko was. The dates found just do not make sense and the information as to his profession contradicts the more consistent Okinawan sources. Based on this contradictory information there has been an assumption that Goju in its earliest form must be from Whooping White Crane. Nevertheless, as we have seen the information which leads to this opinion also makes it highly unlikely that it is true. Though a similarity with the names of the kata and forms does prove to be fertile ground, the actual performance of the Whooping White Crane forms and the Higaonna kata are significantly different. To solve these contradictions I have proposed that:

   1. The name Ryu Ryu Ko in Okinawa actually refers phonetically to Wai Xianxian and not the Ryu Ryu Ko found in the records in China.
   2. Wai Xianxian, Higaonna’s first teacher in China was of an older generation.
   3. The style learned by Higaonna, though related to Whooping White Crane, was older, different and known as Lohan (Rakanken).

2. The second question is what did Chojun Miyagi Sensei learn in addition to Higaonna’s kata?
   To which I have attempted to answer that it is highly unlikely that Miyagi would have learned five kata from Kanryo Higaonna that Juhatsu Kyoda did not. Secondly, that because there are clearly stylistic differences between the Higaonna kata and the other kata in the Goju-ryu system, it is likely that Chojun Miyagi learned the other kata from other Chinese sources; either from Okinawa through Gokenki or To Daiki or during his trips to Fujian.

3. It is unclear to what extent other influences in Okinawa may have contributed to Goju-ryu. Specifically, it is unclear to what extent Gokenki and To Daiki may have taught the other non Higaonna kata to Miyagi.

   In answer to this question, I have proposed that Gokenki influenced the creation of Tensho and perhaps the inclusion of Shisochin. Secondly, that To Daiki may have taught kata to Miyagi which we do not know of. Thirdly, that the Kenkyukai had a definite pedagogical influence. Fourthly, that the Bubishi had a theoretical and philosophical affect.

New Avenues of Research
There are two avenues of research that the conclusions of this essay propose to be important for the future of Goju-ryu’s Chinese connection.

1. To find genealogical information on the family of Ryu Ryu Ko to see whether or not there is an older relative who may have been a court official at the relevant period in time which may match the career of Wai Xianxian.

2. To find out where Buwa is, the place in Fujian in China that Chojun Miyagi mentioned during the 1936 Meeting of Masters. It is also paramount to reveal what martial arts were traditionally taught there.

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Disclaimer
This article represents the opinions and speculations of the author and in no way should be taken as a reflection of the historical opinions of the All American Goju-Ryu Meibukan Academy or of its branches. It is designed to incite discussion and thought on the Chinese origins of Goju Ryu Karate. To this end the author invites all who would like to cordially discuss such historical matters to contact him at the following email address: stonelion@cyberus.ca.
What is ki?

After practising the right punches Mario McKenna went on a search for the meaning of the mysterious ki. Through experiencing pleasure and flow he ends up with an ancient meditation technique. McKenna, who teaches karate and kobudo, shares his thoughts on ki and one simple exercise. Well, simple...

- by Mario McKenna -

Not that I am that old, but when I was a young karateka I concentrated on developing good, solid technique. Let’s face it, the spiritual side of karate wasn’t going to interest a teenager and I was hardly an exception. Sure I did my obligatory “mokuso”, but that was as far as it went. I was much more interested in punching the makiwara than sitting in seiza.

Flower-child

This all didn’t change much until I entered university and came into contact with other budo groups, mostly kendo, judo and aikido. Out of those three I was most struck by the aikidoka. Sitting and talking to them gave me a whole new perspective on budo, what I labeled the “flower-child” mentality. They constantly talked about things that I considered quite esoteric, “harmonizing with your opponent”, “being one with the universe” and of course “ki”. We discussed things and compared ideas, but compared to the aikidoka, I suppose I had a “hammerhead” mentality because I didn’t have much use for those concepts. I thought, “How are those things going to help me smash my opponent into nothing?” No real practical application, so not much use to me. At least that was how I thought. The aikido guys would just sigh and say that I just didn’t get it. After my encounter with the aikidoka, I started to bring up the topic of ki with my teacher, Kinjo Sensei, a very down-to-earth Okinawan gentleman. He stated quite frankly that his teacher had never discussed the concept of ki with him, but he intuitively felt that it existed. “But how do you know it exists?”, I asked him. “You just feel it”, he would answer. Now, having been educated in a Western school setting where emphasis was placed on logical, rational and analytical thinking, this answer didn’t help me very much. In fact, it just added to my confusion. Practice and I’ll feel it? What exactly am I supposed to feel? The concept of ki again dropped to the wayside.

Vapor and rice

After I moved to Japan where I stayed for eight years, I came into contact with all manner of budo, religion, meditation, the esoteric, the mundane and the just plain weird. However, through all these encounters, the concept of ki started to make a little more sense. Why? Because it was everywhere. You couldn’t swing a dead cat in Japan without encountering the concept of ki. Let me explain. Ki was originally written as a “vapor” and “rice”, implying some sort of ethereal energy being released by an object or organism. In fact the concept of ki is so prevalent in the Japanese language that it is an integral part of many words and idioms. For example, genki (vigor; energy), kibun (feelings), kien (high spirits), kiomo (gloom), kikaru (light-heartedness), the list is almost endless. What we can see in these examples then, is that at a basic level, ki has quite a lot to do with the human emotional state. Now you might ask yourself what this has got to do with budo? Well, everything. A budoka who cannot control his or her emotions, will never be able to apply any technique or respond appropriately when he or she absolutely needs to. Raw emotion quickly undermines and destroys any technique, no matter how much training the person has had.
That which is pleasurable
So, ki reflects our emotional state and a controlled emotional state is essential for a budoka. So how should ki be seen or defined from a budoka point of view? Well, to give you an idea of ki’s importance and its implications, let’s look at the following definition of ki by the late Walter Todd Sensei (Skoss, 1995). In my opinion this is one of the best nonsense definitions of ki I have read.

Yes, I wanted to demystify aikido and make it simple so that anybody could understand it, at least on a lower level. Just like when they talk about ki – I have my own interpretation of what ki is – but when I ask aiki people to explain to me what ki is, 99% of them give me the old “Well, you’re just not ready to understand it. You’ll understand it when you’re ready.”

Well I say that’s a cop-out. If you really understood it, you could explain it. Here you are trying to teach ki and you don’t even understand it. At least when I teach I can explain what ki is. I have my own little definition of ki, which is: “Ki is the spirit of the movement, from movement to movement, seeking that which is pleasurable.”

And most teachers would not agree because of one word: pleasurable. They say, “You’re making it sound exotic or erotic or something.” No. It’s the feeling of the movement, going from movement to movement, seeking that which is pleasurable. So when we’re working out and you catch me on a really beautiful throw, it feels good, doesn’t it? Like a little ‘body orgasm’.

Flow
Looking at Todd Sensei’s definition we can see the idea and importance of a highly energized and pleasurable emotional state. For myself, after reading this, things started to make a little more sense. Especially if you compare it to studies investigating peak performance, or collegially referred to as “flow”. According to Goleman (1995, p. 103) flow refers to: “a state of self-forgetfulness, the opposite of rumination and worry: instead of being lost in nervous preoccupation and worry, people in flow are so absorbed in the task at hand that they lose all self-consciousness, dropping the small preoccupations – health, bills, even doing well – of daily life. In this sense, movements in flow are egoless. Paradoxically, people in flow exhibit a masterly control of what they are doing, their responses are perfectly attuned to the changing demands of the task. And though people perform at their peak while in flow, they are unconcerned with how they are doing, with thoughts of success or failure – the sheer pleasure of the act itself is what motivates them.”

Interviewer: You have studied many different forms of martial arts. Is there any one in particular that you are fond of?

Murakami: No there isn’t any one in particular that I like. They are all unique. It’s not like I feel, “oh it’s Monday so I should practice Tai Chi Chuan” or “it’s Thursday so I have to practice Shorin-ryu”. Personally, no matter how hard I practice or how well I perform a technique, I never think, “oh, I’m never going to perfect this technique”, that is not the focus of my training. What is important is that in each moment I am focused on that technique, I lose myself in it and enter into a state of mushin (literally “no mind”). This type of training is a form of Zen training, more specifically the Soto Zen (the school of Zen Buddhism founded by Dogen Zenji). Zen Buddhism teaches that the truth (of your existence) can only come from yourself. And can only be achieved through forgetting your own self (ego). In order to forget your own self you must have a singular concentration on the moment which requires you to remove all other distractions or obstacles. When you can achieve mushin you have removed all distractions and have perfect concentration and are able to see the truth for what it is. You have forgotten yourself. In karate, kobudo or Chinese kempo, when you practice, your goal should be the same; achieving that singular concentration and forgetting yourself. The kata and movements found in budo are Zen. Their common denominator is the elimination of the self. When you can achieve this state of forgetting yourself, it is an absolutely wonderful feeling.

Breathe
Murakami Sensei’s answer to cultivating and benefiting from ki is a simple one, to focus the mind by singularly concentrating on the task at hand. Again, Western scientific research corroborates Murakami Sensei’s belief that argues that a sharp focused attention to the activity or task at hand is essential to entering “flow” or getting your ki moving (Goleman, 1995). But this is not as easy as it seems and requires quite a lot of discipline to get passed that initial hurdle. The mind has a tendency to wander and become distracted easily. If you don’t believe me, try the following rudimentary exercise used in Zen. In a
quiet location, sit opposite a wall in a comfortable position either cross-legged or in seiza (you can use a zabuton or cushion). Keep your back perfectly straight and focus your gaze towards the wall, slightly downward. Your eyes should be relaxed, but not closed. Now, slowly breathe in through the nose to a count of one and slowly exhale through the nose to a count of one. Try to complete this cycle 20 times. Easy you say? Just wait. You must not have ANY distractions.

“Slowly breathe in through the nose to a count of one and slowly exhale through the nose to a count of one. Try to complete this cycle 20 times. Easy you say? Just wait. You must not have ANY distractions.”

I’d realize my mind is wandering again. Damn! Back to zero!

Once you can do this simple exercise, try doing it while you practice kata. You will be surprised at the results as ki or flow creates its own feedback loop and produces a state devoid of emotional baggage, save the pleasure it generates.

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