Mario McKenna on Tou’on-ryu

Tradition? What Tradition?

Tou’on-ryu Kicking Techniques

History of Northern Shaolin, Part 1
MISSION STATEMENT

Meibukan Magazine is an initiative of Lex Opdam and Mark Hemels. Aim of this web based magazine is to spread the knowledge and spirit of the martial arts. In a non profitable manner Meibukan Magazine draws attention to the historical, spiritual and technical background of the oriental martial arts. Starting point are the teachings of Okinawan karate-do. As ‘House of the Pure Martial Arts’, however, Meibukan Magazine offers a home to the various authentic martial arts traditions.

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Self-activation

Over the last decades, with the passing of an entire generation of Okinawan karate and kobudo masters who founded many of the ryu’s that exist today, there has been much talk about the loss of technical knowledge that has been lost with them. In many ways, researchers are attempting to recover this knowledge in order to pass it on to future generations. However, one often overlooks that the highest form of education – the kind that stimulates the student in spiritual growth – is vanishing as well. The latter accomplishment is of a much profounder significance regarding the transmission of martial arts than mere technical skills.

Spiritual growth through education is inextricably attached to self-activity. The martial teacher should always keep in mind the delicate personal relationship, which he or she engages when guiding a student. This is to serve general and individual methods that should not only set the door ajar to understanding and creativity, but also fully open the door to integrate this matter into daily life. It is up to the student to enter this door and use the instruments and guidance that are offered during this process.

I observe that in our present materialistic world, the methods that make us introspective are often considered as an assault on every day life. Lessons remain unread and meaningful practice fails to occur. Methods intended to actuate this inner process require interaction between teacher and student, and activation of the dormant intention to achieve complete consciousness. Through discipline, concentration and above all dedication, the source of understanding and creativity can be reached.

We should now, more than ever, attribute a more prominent role to the lessons from the past that have been passed down to us from generation to generation, and combine these with the modern didactic, methodical and psychological knowledge that we possess – all this in order to tap this source of understanding and creativity. These lessons that aim to stimulate and induce self-activity, should not have the objective of obtaining social status, but instead guide the way to personal growth.

Lex Opdam
Editor in chief

Tradition?

What tradition?

Karate-do practitioners often like to think of their martial art as the transmission of a pure and unchanging tradition. But just how ancient and traditional is their daily visit to the dojo? Mario McKenna dispels some of the myths surrounding “traditional karate”.

- by Mario McKenna -

All karate-do practitioners know the feeling of grabbing their keikogi and heading out the door to the dojo two or more nights a week to train. If you stopped and asked him or her what it was he or she was devoting so much time and energy in studying, they of course would answer something to the effect of, “Japanese karate,” “Okinawan karate” or “Traditional karate.” This sounds all very well and good, but what exactly do these terms mean? Out of all these terms, I find “Traditional karate” to be the most suspect. To be perfectly honest, having lived in Japan for well over eight years, I have yet to understand exactly what people are referring to when they say that they practice “Traditional karate.” Karate-do itself is what is commonly referred to in Japan as a shin budo, or new martial way, but more often than not karate is considered the realm of yakuza (gangsters) or thugs – not a true martial art at all. “But”, people may protest, “karate has existed for centuries on Okinawa!” Well, yes that is true to an extent, but karate-do in its current metamorphosis is a fledgling art. And although this word “traditional” may carry with it inspiring images of bygone centuries and colorful, quaint masters, when you get right down to it we are probably talking about traditions begun by your basic ordinary people; the Kinjo’s and Higa’s of Okinawa. So, with that in mind, what I would like to do for the next few paragraphs is to dispel some of the myths surrounding karate in the hopes of giving the reader a better perspective on his or her practice.

Outdoors

The place where all of us sweat and toil several hours a week, week after week, year after year, is the dojo; a place that most of us take for granted. “The dojo will always be there”, we may think to ourselves. I suppose it’s only natural to assume that, but in the distant past, martial arts “dojo’s” as such did not exist. There were no formal schools, no dojo in every shopping mall or within ten minutes drive of your house; not even a building where practice took place. Instead, instruction took place wherever and whenever the teacher decided – whether it is in an open field, at a family tomb or in the hillsides. Such was the case with karate as well. The Ryukyus had imported quan’fa over several generations from Fuzhou and not surprisingly its traditions had been imported as well. This is summarized nicely by Patrick McCarthy who states that, “[sic] the standard dogi (uniform) or dojo concept had yet
“Up until World War II on Okinawa, many of karate’s foremost teachers taught a small group of students quietly out their homes or neighbouring gardens. There were no set curriculum, no ranks, or licensing. Teachers taught individually and tailored the techniques to the needs and disposition of the student. Such was the case for men like Anko Itosu (1832-1915) and Kanryo Higaonna (1853-1915). The students of these teachers, men like Kentsu Yabu (1866-1937), Chomo Hanashiro (1869-1945), Chojun Miyagi (1888-1953) and Juhatu Kyoda (1888-1968), were all known to instruct students out of their homes as well. The modern karate dojo as we now know did not occur on Okinawa to any real extent during this period. So where did the concept of the dojo come from? Not out of their homes as well. The modern karate dojo as we know today is fashioned after the Japanese mainland for the first time in 1915 and Kanryo Higaonna (1853-1915). The students of these teachers, men like Kentsu Yabu (1866-1937), Chomo Hanashiro (1869-1945), Chojun Miyagi (1888-1953) and Juhatu Kyoda (1888-1968), were all known to instruct students out of their homes as well. The modern karate dojo as we now know did not exist on Okinawa to any real extent during this period in karate’s history. So where did the concept of the dojo come from? Not surprisingly, given the influence of the Japanese on Okinawa over several centuries, the karate dojo that we know today is fashioned after the Japanese model, and it too is a relatively recent innovation!

Urban school
As Japan entered the Tokugawa era, relative peace came over Japan. During this period, bushi were no longer being retained by feudal lords for their professional services as warriors. As a result, the bushi were forced to “make their rice” somewhere else. Many of them moved to larger urban centers and opened “dojo’s” to teach the warrior skills. Unfortunately, many of these new machidojo (urban schools) were looked down upon for overly formalized or unrealistic training methods. Ju-jutsu dojo’s are a clear example of how far things had degenerated by the 19th century. Of course, not all schools were interested in selling their skills to prospective students and there were several excellent dojo’s that focused on teaching realistic fighting techniques and skills of the professional warrior (For a detailed discussion of this topic see Draeger, 1973).

It was also during this period of the machidojo, that the concept of fees originated. Traditionally, mainland Japanese bushi were paid a stipend for their services. However, this did not take the form of hard cash, as this would have been considered rather vulgar. Only merchants (one class up from the lowest, the burakumin, or untouchables) dealt with money. Therefore, it was considered good breeding for a bushi not to know much about money, even to the point of not talking about it. Instead, bushi were paid in rice (the fact they turned around and sold the rice for money was conveniently overlooked). However, during the Tokugawa period all this changed. Many bushi readily accepted hard currency in exchange for their instruction.

So, with this background in mind, it comes as no surprise that after karate had been demonstrated successfully on the Japanese mainland for the first time in 1917 by Gichin Funakoshi, the face of karate slowly started to change. Karate became reshaped into a modern budo, consistent with all other modern disciplines practiced under the umbrella of the Butokukai (For a complete overview of this topic, see McCarthy, 1999). This included having a common training syllabus, terminology, practice uniform, fees, training facility (i.e. dojo), certification (Jigor Kano’s dan/kyu system) and a competitive format. These changes did not occur immediately and took several decades to be phased in, but by the end of World War II, most of the trappings that we call “Traditional karate” were in place: the dojo, uniforms, belts, fees, shiteigata (standardized kata), tournaments, etc. (Take a look at the photos in Gichin Funakoshi’s 1922 publication Ryukyu Kenpo Toudi; he is still wearing a quan’fa (gung fu) sash. Choki Motobu can be seen wearing a quan’fa sash and what are essentially a pair of boxer shorts in his 1926 book Okinawa Kenpo Toudi-jutsu Kumite. Early photos of Uechi-ryu Karate practitioners often shows them practicing outdoors in their fudoshi).

“Like it or not, this process of cultural adaptation and technical modification is the only true karate tradition.”

Traditional smorgasbord
So, what sort of “Tradition” do we have? Certainly not one that is very old. A little over fifty years perhaps. “But,” you may protest, “our Tradition was handed down from teacher to student, all the way back to the founder who studied in China!” Perhaps, but let’s take a closer look at that statement. Specifically, let’s look at Kanryo Higaonna as a good example of someone studying in China and bringing it back to Okinawa and establishing a “Tradition.”

Most of us know that Higaonna studied a form of Southern White Crane quan’fa in China under a teacher named Ryu Ryu Ko. He came back to Okinawa and taught among others Chojun Miyagi who passed the “Tradition” on to his students. Therefore modern Goju-ryu is a continuation of Higaonna’s “Tradition.” Well, not quite. Higaonna studied under a good many teachers, which included not only Ryu Ryu Ko (a.k.a. Xie Zhong Xiang) (1852-1930), but also Seisho Arakaki (a.k.a. Maiya Arakachi) (1840-1918 or 1920), Taite Kojo (1837-1917) and Kaho Kojo (1849-1925). Most likely his instruction contained varying elements of all his teachers. How about Chojun Miyagi then? Certainly Chojun Miyagi passed on Kanryo Higaonna’s “Tradition” intact? Wrong again. After the death of Higaonna, we find Miyagi, travelling to Fuzhou in 1915 for training and research purposes (Higaonna...
in Okinawa and the surrounding islands for people to consult a Yuta, or diviner for matters of importance. Many of the “island” karate teachers I have met while in Japan have sought the advice of a Yuta. When I lived on Amami Oshima, an island to the north of Okinawa, I had the chance to visit a Yuta and listen to her “advice”, something I would not advise for the superstitious or faint of heart.

At any rate, unlike mainland Japan and its professional warrior class, the bushi of Okinawa were never known to embrace Religious belief

The karate dojo and all the other modern innovations aside, many “Traditional karate” practitioners have often argued to me that it is the practice of Zen and its goals of transforming the individual that is what makes karate “Traditional.” They may say something like, “We practice seated meditation before and after class” or “We practice different kinds of breathing methods” or “We bow to the shinden/kamiza before and after class.” Well, like it or not, this process of cultural adaptation and technical modification is the only true karate tradition (Okami 1999)."

Religious belief

The karate dojo and all the other modern innovations aside, many “Traditional karate” practitioners have often argued to me that it is the practice of Zen and its goals of transforming the individual that is what makes karate “Traditional.” They may say something like, “We practice seated meditation before and after class” or “We practice different kinds of breathing methods” or “We bow to the shinden/kamiza before and after class.” Well, like it or not, even the conscious inclusion of quasi-religious training, in the form of Zen, is a modern innovation to the karate dojo occurring after World War II.

The Ryukyus, of which Okinawa is the main island, have traditionally been a melting pot of the religious beliefs and practices of the world. Elements of Animism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shinto and Christianity among others can be found on Okinawa. A veritable smorgasbord of religion. But for a large segment of the population, especially for the older generation, ancient folk religion still reigns supreme. It is still quite common or practice a religious discipline such as Zen Buddhism. Generally speaking, in the modern karate dojo it is the teacher’s decision whether or not to include religious training in the dojo or not. This is not to say that karate training cannot be an indirect or implied expression of Zen, but simply that it has not been overtly practiced in some karate dojo until after World War II (Bishop 1989; Bishop 1996).

Self-realization

So, what does this leave us with? “Traditional karate”, and all it’s accompaniments as we know it, is a little over 50 years old. However, this lack of venerability in no way detracts from karate-do’s ability to serve as a vehicle for people wishing to find “the Path of Karate.” Like any human endeavor, karate can be a profound means to self-realization and personal growth. This is best summed-up by Kenwa Mabuni when he wrote, “When the spirit of karate-do is deeply embraced, it becomes the vehicle by which one is ferried across the great void to enlightenment” (McCarthy, 1999: pp. 102).

Although I have played the “devil’s advocate” a little in this article, for myself, the fact that “Traditional karate” is a shin budo or perhaps the realm of gangsters is of little consequence to me. What matters is that I find karate a profound means of self-analysis and self-learning. It is a physical manifestation of my beliefs, philosophy and my ideals. One that has profoundly affected my life and undoubtedly the many people whose lives have been touched by its practice.

Mario McKenna is a 5th degree black belt in Tou’on-ryu karate-do. He has practiced karate-do for over 20 years and Ryukyu kobudo for 10 years. He resided in Japan from 1994 to 2002. Mario McKenna now teaches Tou’on-ryu and Goju-ryu Karate-do at the Kitsilano Dojo in Vancouver, Canada.

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Tou’on-ryu
A Time Capsule of Okinawan Karate
Interview with Mario McKenna

Tou’on-ryu is the style of karate taught and named by Juhatsu Kyoda, student of the legendary Kanryo Higaonna. In the 1990’s martial artist Mario McKenna moved to Japan where he studied Tou’on-ryu from Kyoda’s student Shigekazu Kanzaki. Meibukan Magazine asked McKenna about his experiences with Goju-ryu and its lesser known brother Tou’on-ryu.

“Tou’on-ryu is very much a time capsule of old Okinawan Karate. I feel a strong sense of responsibility to be a part of protecting this style from extinction.”

- By Lex Opdam -

Mr. McKenna, could you tell us something about your background?
I was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland on October 20, 1968. My parents immigrated to Canada when I was six years old and I later became a Canadian citizen. I currently work as a research and project manager for the Arthritis Research Centre of Canada in Vancouver, BC, Canada. In my first year of high school I was talked into attending a karate class (Shotokan) by one of my friends. The club folded four months after I joined. At that time I looked around for another dojo, and found Sensei Yoshitaka Kinjo of Gohakukai (Goju-ryu Tomari-te Association). Sensei Kinjo was a fantastic teacher and I trained with him from 1984 to 1994. I also managed to do a little bit of Aikido and Judo during my university days. It was in 1994 that I decided to move to Japan. I remained there for the next eight years until 2002. While living in Japan I primarily studied Ryukyu Kobudo, Tou’on-ryu karate-do, and Chikushima-ryu bo-jutsu.

How did you make contact with Tou’on-ryu?
I always had an intense curiosity about Tou’on-ryu, but it wasn’t until the summer of 1998 that I actually started training. It was through the introduction of my good friend and fellow researcher Joe Swift that I found myself in the dojo of Katsumi Murakami. Author, researcher and holder of multiple teaching licenses in the fighting arts, it was no exaggeration to say that he is a walking encyclopedia of information. Although I initially went to his dojo to get additional training in Ryukyu Kobudo, one of the things I noticed right away when we walked to his dojo was that there was a sign by the door saying “Tou’on-ryu”! I was pleasantly shocked and surprised. Apparently Sensei Murakami had studied Tou’on-ryu on a limited basis from Juhatsu Kyoda in the 1950’s and 1960’s and had even received a teaching license from him. After visiting several times I asked Sensei Murakami to teach me Tou’on-ryu. He flatly refused stating that he had not taught any of his students Tou’on-ryu; not even his own sons. He would not even demonstrate the kata. I was stunned, disappointed and speechless. However, the next time that I visited him, he provided me with the address of Shigekazu Kanzaki, the current headmaster of Tou’on-ryu. To say I was overjoyed would have been an understatement. I was ecstatic.

When I returned home to Nagasaki after visiting Sensei Murakami, I began to draft a letter to Sensei Kanzaki. By the next day it was in the mail. Weeks passed and I had not received a reply. Being persistent I wrote another letter and sent it off and about a week later the phone rang. I picked it up, “moshi moshi” I answered. And then a voice on the other end came on, “Beppu no Kanzaki desu kedo.” It was Sensei Kanzaki. He explained that he had not replied because his wife had recently passed away and that he had had some
surgery. I told him of my interest in Tou'on-ryu and that I would like to come out and meet him. He answered that now was not the best time for him both physically and emotionally. “Phone me back in a few months”, he said, “we’ll see then.” A few months later I picked up the phone and dialed the number that Sensei Kanzaki had given me. He answered and again he asked me to phone back in a couple of months. This went on for quite a while until Sensei Kanzaki finally consented to meet me.

I took the train from Nagasaki to Beppu in Oita prefecture where Sensei Kanzaki resides. He was there waiting at the station for me and greeted me with a warm smile and a handshake. We walked to a local community center near his home where I spent all day with Sensei Kanzaki listening to him talk about Tou'on-ryu, looking at old photographs and video, and of course him demonstrating parts of the kata that he had learned from Sensei Kyoda. After that day I was hooked.

I asked Sensei Kanzaki if he would teach me Tou’on-ryu and he agreed. So for the next three years I devoted all my energies to learning the style.

Finally I practiced Sanchin kata. On the exterior the Goju-ryu version of Sanchin that I had learned was very similar to the Tou’on-ryu version, but on closer examination there were many subtle differences and nuances. For example, when advancing forward instead of twisting on the ball of the foot to straighten the leg before stepping, you twisted on the big toe while maintaining tension in the inside of the thighs. The breathing and punching were faster than the Goju-ryu version. Instead of 1) inhale – chamber fist from Sanchin kamae, 2) exhale – punch, 3) inhale – return to Sanchin kamae, 4) exhale – complete Sanchin kamae, the Tou’on-ryu pattern was 1) inhale – chamber fist from Sanchin kamae, 2) exhale – punch, return to Sanchin kamae and complete. Naturally there were many other difficulties such as stepping, posture, tightening the correct muscles groups, but I found the cadence of the kata the most difficult for me.

This went on for about three or four months. I went out to Sensei Kanzaki’s house, we would go to the park and I relearned Sanchin kata, stances, basics, and strikes. The whole experience was exhausting, at times humiliating and frustrating, but always enlightening. When I started to make progress in the basics I was introduced to Ten-I-Happo along with the corresponding hand and foot techniques. This is a Tenshin drill somewhat similar to Shito-ryu and their Tenshin happo. There were also some basic forms that Sensei Kanzaki made to bridge the introduction to the classical forms that I learned as well. They never had any formal name as far as I know.

There was also all the supplementary training with chi’ishi, ishisashi, nigirigame, makiwara and kakiya. These I encountered when Sensei Kanzaki took me to the original garden dojo of Sensei Kyoda. The kakiya was the most interesting for me. Essentially it is a “wooden man” with a weighted single-arm. We used it to practice kata segments and Tenshin at full power in place of a training partner. Its resistance aided in developing your balance and in improving your strength. This was also the same time that Sensei Kanzaki finally took me one afternoon to meet and practice with two of his students,

Could you describe the training you received from Sensei Shigekazu Kanzaki? When I first started training with Sensei Kanzaki, rain or shine we would go to a park that was close to his house. There he started with the fundamentals of stances, postures, breathing, and bone and muscle alignment. Later we moved to stepping, punching, striking, blocking, and kicking
Ikeda san and Fujita san. Sempai Ikeda, as I would later call him, had been training under Sensei Kanzaki for 20 years, and Sempai Fujita 10 years. I was particularly impressed with Sempai Ikeda. He was fit, strong and polished in Tou‘on-ryu kata and technique. This was the first time I was able to practice some simple applications and Tou‘on-ryu’s version of kakie. This was all done at very close distance. I was also able to see the higher kata such as Pechurin and Nepai. I was particularly intrigued by the kicking techniques found in the kata. No snapping kicks at all, just all low thrusts, stomps or straight legged kicks similar to those found in some kungfu styles.

Did you also receive instruction in the use of weapons from Sensei Kanzaki? Yes, I received instruction in using the bo, sai and nunchaku. For the bo they practice Soeishi no kon, for sai, Tsukenshitahaku no sai and Chatanyara no sai, and for nunchaku there is no kata, simply technique. I asked Sensei Kanzaki where these forms came from and he said that he did not know. All he knew was that Kyoda had taught them to him in the 1950’s. He did not know if they were passed down from Kanryo Higaonna. He also stated that they were primarily used as supplementary training tools for strengthening your karate.

You have trained and researched Goju-ryu for more than 10 years and therefore gained insight and experience in this system. From your past martial history you can oversee and compare Goju-ryu and Tou‘on-ryu with each other. In the Journal of Asian Martial Arts (volume 9, no. 3, 2000) you mentioned that Tou‘on-ryu in many ways is completely opposite to Master Miyagi’s Goju-ryu in the execution of techniques. For example, you mention that Tou‘on-ryu is characterized by swift springing movements and places little emphasis on rooted stances. Yes, Tou‘on-ryu in my opinion does not emphasize rooted stances as much as Goju-ryu, but this needs to be qualified. In the initial stages of learning, a lot of emphasis, much like Goju-ryu, is placed upon Sanchin kata – Its circular stepping, developing power, correct breathing, sinking the body, posture, etc. After these traits are developed they form the foundation for lighter and swifter movement and footwork. This becomes readily apparent in the kata Sanseru, Pechurin and Nepai. For example, Sanseru teaches irimi, or entering and occupying an opponent’s position, Pechurin teaches moving to the eight cardinal points and Nepai teaches continuous circular movement.

You have also said that Tou‘on-ryu’s techniques are more circular, smooth and have a more flowing pattern than their Goju-ryu’s counterparts. In an interview in Meibukan Magazine no. 4, 2005, Sensei Anthony Mirakian mentions that the Okinawan martial artists always emphasized power. That the Okinawans felt that speed and flexibility are very important, but that they always invested more in power. Something that we clearly see within the body dynamics of Goju-ryu and Uechi-ryu. This is the impression that I have always had, that the techniques seemed to be more circular and flowing. This is not to say that Tou‘on-ryu does not place importance on developing a powerful strike, but at least in the execution of kata such as Pechurin and Nepai, the forms tend to be more circular. Take mawashi-uke for example (tora-guchi), generally in Goju-ryu one hand circles high while the other hand inscribes a small circle close to the torso. In contrast, in Tou‘on-ryu one hand circles high and out at 45 degrees while the other hand drops down below the belt line and circles upward. I never got the feeling
that there was any muchimi in the techniques; in fact this term was never used in the dojo.

Do you mean that these heavy slow and sticky movements, which are performed in many of Goju-ryu’s kata’s, are not practiced in Tou’on-ryu? Yes, it’s my general impression that there were not as many ‘muchimi’ based movements in Tou’ on-ryu as compared to Goju-ryu. The few movements that do exist usually come at the end of the four main Nahate kata of Sanchin, Sesan, Sanseru and Pechurin, but are not nearly as ‘heavy’ as in Goju-ryu. The other two forms of Tou’ on-ryu, Jion and Nepai do not have any ‘muchimi’ based movements.

It seems that Tou’ on-ryu, as far as the body dynamics are concerned, has more in common with the Chinese kungfu way of moving. More flexible and less static, more on speed rather than power. In the Journal of Asian Martial Arts (volume 9, no. 3, 2000) you mentioned that there is definitely a more distinctive and obviously Chinese flavor to Tou’ on-ryu compared to Goju-ryu.

As I mentioned earlier, the first time I saw Tou’ on-ryu kata executed I was dumb-founded at what I saw. It was unlike any Okinawa karate I had ever seen. It seemed to have much more in common with kungfu systems such as straight legged toe kicks, but still retained an Okinawan influence with the emphasis of the closed fist.

I have noticed that the stances in Sanchin kata within Tou’ on-ryu are straight and wider than the stances that are used in Goju-ryu. Could you explain the technical difference between the two since both ways share the same principals of rooting? At any rate, I would like to point out that variations between Goju-ryu and Tou’ on-ryu’s Sanchin dachi are simply pedagogical differences. Functionally they are the same. In Tou’ on-ryu the lead leg should “have the feeling of being turned inward”. Tension is always held in the lower abdomen and inside of the legs. The toes are splayed out as if roots are coming from the feet and into the ground. While gripping the ground firmly with the feet, you should have the feeling of drawing the ki from the ground. When advancing in Sanchin dachi, the lead foot is straightened by turning/twisting on the big toe and the rear foot advancing in a semi-circle.

One of my biggest personal contentions is taking the mechanics of Sanchin as they are and grafting them on to all aspects of your karate. If you are not careful then I believe this will result in an overly stiff and artificial karate. For me, the most important aspects are the proper alignment of the muscles and bones in conjunction with the breath, and the use of circular stepping. The conditioning and iron vest training are secondary. Proper Sanchin training should place the body in the right condition to produce quick, explosive movement. This is accomplished by dropping and relaxing the shoulders, keeping the elbows in and maintaining continuity of reaction forces from the ground through the legs, hips, back, and arms.

At any rate, Sanchin is called the basic training kata of Nahate and its simple techniques contain many profound concepts that will gradually reveal themselves to you through serious practice. It is for this reason that the teachers of the past stated that karate begins and ends with Sanchin.

Could you share your thoughts as a martial artist and researcher on why there are so many differences in body dynamics between Goju-ryu and Tou’ on-ryu, especially since both Juhatu Kyoda (1887-1968) and Chojun Miyagi (1888-1953) had Kanryo Higaonna (1853-1915) as their main teacher? I suppose that is the million-dollar question!

It is complex and multi-faceted. Why such differences when both men had the same teacher? There is no definitive answer, but we can speculate a little, taking into account the age in which they lived and their respective outlooks on what karate represented. I believe both men struggled to rationalize their karate for their generation, reviewing and modifying the kata they had learned from Kanryo Higaonna.

Given the two men’s backgrounds, and the pedagogical and cultural reification that was current in so many other areas of society in Japan and Okinawa, I do not see how either of them could have avoided rationalizing their respective karate. If nothing else, they both attempted to unify the performance of the Higaonna kata. In Kyoda’s case he added Nepai, and Jion, while Miyagi brought in additional kata to the original four. Whether these were from Higaonna, Go Kenki, To Daiki, the Kenkyu Kai, or his trips to China, remains to be proven. Although I doubt we will ever know as there appears to be little evidence either way.

To continue on, my guess is that both men could have made these changes and maintained a very real belief that they had preserved and passed on the true core of their master’s karate; particularly in the case of Kyoda as his dedication there was obvious as evidenced by his choice of system name.

The real issue is in the way we execute the movements and especially in the way we generate energy during kata within the confines of a specific pedagogy. Both

“One of my biggest personal contentions is taking the mechanics of Sanchin as they are and grafting them on to all aspects of your karate. For me, the most important aspects are the proper alignment of the muscles and bones in conjunction with the breath, and the use of circular stepping.”

men had different builds, psychological make-up, social status, pedagogical biases and fighting experience. Hence there are differences in the tension and relaxation used, respiration, position of pelvis and lower abdomen as well as neck, shoulders and elbows, differences in utilizing the
lower back and waist and many, many more while executing kata and technique.

You have quoted McCarthy (1995: 5) in the Journal of Asian Martial Arts (volume 9, no 3, (2000) that "Kyoda's methods embraced what has been described as a set of standards no longer fashionable to a generation so dominated by materialism". Could you describe in your own words how you see this set of standards that applied to Juhatsu Kyoda?

I think most readers are aware of the social and political climate of Japan from the Meiji restoration to the rise of militarism in the 1920's. During this time martial arts practice in the education system was meant to instill moral character and combative spirit. It goes without saying that the face of Karate was forever changed: standardized uniforms, universal curriculum, new basic forms, emphasis on "moral and mental" development, competition, etc.

In contrast to this, from what little I know and have discussed with teachers in Japan and Okinawa, old style training involved the three K's - Kitsui, Kiken and Kitanai - Hard, Dangerous and Vulgar. Endless, self-imposed training on a handful of techniques both in pairs and by oneself, combined with weight training using the old style equipment and impact training on the makiwara, sagi makiwara, kakiya, etc. That's it. No systematic or overt instruction in application. Instruction was very hands on, and if the student was lucky and listening, hints were given along the way. But ultimately this apprentice model focused on developing a strong sense of efficacy in the student, as experience is always the best teacher. Hence the need to test oneself via kake-damashi (challenge fight) in the old red light district of Tsuji or perhaps even go so far as try jissen (dueling).

Using this historical backdrop it becomes easier to understand this anecdote about Juhatsu Kyoda. Sensei Kanzaki related that as a young man Kyoda used to practice for hours at a time until he was exhausted and fell asleep on top of bamboo poles he had cut and laid out on the ground. The poles being uncomfortable would force him to wake up and then he would begin practice again. He apparently would repeat this process for days at a time. Perhaps this story is more myth than fact, but it does give an indication of what Kyoda's mentality was like. Looking at this old model from which Kyoda was a product of, it becomes apparent that his methods embraced a set of standards no longer fashionable to a generation so dominated by materialism.

As an aside I am always a little surprised with people who say they want to get back to "karate's roots" and return to "old style training methods". I doubt they really understand what those old methods entail.

"Old style training involved the three K's - Kitsui, Kiken and Kitanai - Hard, Dangerous and Vulgar."

Juhatsu Kyoda was a strong proponent of the licensing system that the Butokukai used. Could you tell us what his main arguments were to propagate and integrate this system into the Okinawan martial arts? Why did Kyoda support the Butokukai in terms of its licensing system? To answer...
that we need to take a closer look at what Kanryo Higaonna taught. I feel that fundamentally Kanryo Higaonna’s system was a complete form of village karate that he had learned in Kunida as a young man. That is, a very objective and efficient method of fighting. However, to the model presented by the Butokukai it had no cultural, technical or historical substance and was therefore considered incomplete. Most Okinawan karate teachers during the 1920’s to 1940’s were trying to get their art accepted by the Butokukai, and needed codification to fit in there. This resulted in external pressure for socio-economic and political reasons, i.e. my teacher’s karate was so great I want to preserve, codify and disseminate it. Hence recognition from the Butokukai was not necessarily to improve karate, but simply to gain honor and acceptance for Okinawa. This I feel was the underlying reason for Kyoda embracing the licensing system of the Butokukai.

Is this licensing system also used within the small Tou’on-ryu organization nowadays? Interestingly, Kyoda’s Tou’on-ryu initially did not use any dan or licensing system with his direct students who trained out of the garden dojo. Later on, when Sensei Kanzaki began instructing his own students, Sensei Kyoda signed-off their certificates. Currently the Tou’on-ryu uses a dan/kyu based grading system in conjunction with teaching licenses.

I suppose that your Tou'on-ryu teacher Shigekazu Kanzaki has told you about master Juhatsu Kyoda more than once. Is it correct that master Kyoda was a Buddhist and that he taught his art within certain Buddhist principles?

Yes, Sensei Kanzaki often talked about Sensei Kyoda, but I do not ever recall him stating that Kyoda was Buddhist. At Kyoda’s home of course there was a Buddhist altar, but this is quite typical of most Japanese homes during that era and to a certain extent today. Kyoda was also known to give lectures to his students on proper behavior, morality and karate history. Whether these were tied directly to Buddhism, I do not know.

What was your personal motivation to start your own school and teach Tou’on-ryu?

My own personal motivation was quite selfish. As a Goju-ryu student at the time I wanted to see what the original Naha-te might have looked like. After I started training, I began to appreciate Tou’on-ryu more and more for its honesty and simplicity. Tou’on-ryu has never been a large style and has never actively promoted itself. In many ways it has deliberately avoided any form of attention. In fact Juko Kyoda, Sensei Kyoda's youngest son, was an extremely shy and quiet individual who did not care about taking on students. Juko did teach his son Jumei, but unfortunately he did not continue on with his training and no longer practices. Sensei Kanzaki thinks Tou'on-ryu would have completely died out had it not been for his dojo.

At any rate, Tou'on-ryu is very much a time capsule of old Okinawa Karate in many respects. In this sense it is invaluable and I felt a strong sense of responsibility to be a part of protecting the style from extinction. Therefore I asked permission to teach the style in Canada when I came back. Now I teach Tou'on-ryu to a few students who are serious about learning it.

Do you, like Sensei Kanzaki, also draw a sharp distinction between modern sport karate and classical karate-do within your own teachings?

Yes, I draw a very clear distinction between modern sports karate and classical karate. I believe very much - like Sensei Kanzaki, Sensei Kinjo - that in sport karate there is far too much emphasis on training to win at all costs, and that the
original intentions of karate are lost or overshadowed. These are: self-protection, creating a health body and having a long life. I may upset some readers by saying this, but sports karate is a dead end.

Sports are meant for public display, entertainment and spectacle. They are for public consumption and by their very nature provide little insight into oneself. Whereas classical karate is to train and have the confidence to defend oneself knowing that if you lose a confrontation it can mean your injury or death. By definition this is a very deep and private matter for the individual. To this end, classical karate must teach courtesy, humility, love, kindness and self-reflection, this is the 'do' aspect, its spiritual side. However, karate must also embrace technical proficiency; this is the 'jutsu' or the technical side. The two must balance each other out.

Master Kyoda felt that karate training was to build both a strong body and a strong mind and that a person become a valuable and productive member of society. What responsibility do you have as a Tou'on-ryu representative and what general tasks do you set for yourself in guiding your martial art students?

Classical karate is a very different animal to sport karate and there is definitely a strong ethical responsibility that must be addressed when teaching it. Part of this is the long tradition of secrecy with regards to teaching the meaning of technique etc. This is spelled out quite clearly by Itosu Anko (1831-1915, Itosu Anko was one of Okinawa's great masters and responsible for introducing karate-do into the Okinawan school system) in his sixth precept.

When I asked Sensei Kanzaki about teaching Tou'on-ryu he replied quite bluntly, "saisho wa kyouiku no karate wo oshieru" - teach physical education karate at first.

Karate taught as a means of physical discipline, training and recreation; not as a means of combat. His explanation was that you do not know what kind of character your student has initially so why take the chance. Secondly, even if you want to teach it, the student might not want to learn it! Finally teach the classical techniques once they have put in the hours and you are confident of his/her character.

Are there more active Tou'on-ryu schools outside Sensei Kanzaki’s and your own school at this present time? To the best of my knowledge Sensei Yoshino is still teaching in Mogi, which is located in Kita Kyushu. Like myself he has a background in Goju-ryu, specifically Jundokan. Sensei Ikeda lives in Beppu and teaches a few students out of the company gymnasium that he works for. There is another shihan, Sensei Fujishima, but I believe he is not teaching at the moment as his job keeps him extremely busy. And of course there is Sensei Kanzaki. Although he is retired from full-time teaching he does teach one class a week at one of the local community centers.

If you are interested in the issue of the Journal of Asian Martial Arts (Volume 9, no 3, 2000), which is referred to several times in this article, please visit the website of Media Publishing Company - www.goviamedia.com -

Lex Opdam, Renshi, 6th Dan Goju-ryu, is editor-in-chief of Meibukan Magazine. Mario McKenna was interviewed by Lex Opdam in June 2005.

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According to the Cambridge dictionary, the following definition is given for “kick”: to hit someone or something with the foot, or to move the feet and legs suddenly and violently. Despite its rather base connotation, the kicks of karate-do are some of the most interesting and difficult techniques found within its arsenal. Most students are familiar with fundamental kicks such as mae-geri (front kick), yoko-geri (side kick), ushiro-geri (back kick), and mawashi-geri (turning kick).

When looking at these kicking techniques, we can generally associate them with sporting competition. Yet when we examine classical Okinawan karate-do kata, we see no such kicking techniques. In their place we see short thrusting, stomping or snapping kicks to low targets. This contrast is most likely the result of the sporting format which modern karate-do has embraced within the last 50 years where there has been an increase in the ma-ai, or combative distance between opponents. This is not meant as a criticism, but simply reflects the emphasis of modern karate-do’s training methods.

Kanyu Higaonna
In the following paragraphs I would like to focus on one interesting “old style” kicking technique found in Okinawan Tou’on-ryu karate-do kata, we see no such kicking techniques. In their place we see short thrusting, stomping or snapping kicks to low targets. This contrast is most likely the result of the sporting format which modern karate-do has embraced within the last 50 years where there has been an increase in the ma-ai, or combative distance between opponents. This is not meant as a criticism, but simply reflects the emphasis of modern karate-do’s training methods.

Seisan kata
Left - Seisan Kata performed by Sensei Hidenori Ikeda.
Middle - Application of Seisan Kata performed by Sensei Shigezaku Kanzaki.
Right - Goju-ryu Seisan application of Sokuto-geri and Turn.

Looking at the Goju-ryu (Kanryo) version of Seisan and contrasting it with the Tou’on-ryu (Kanyu) version, we can see several differences. Unlike the Goju-ryu version in which the performer delivers a low sokuto-geri (sword foot kick) and quickly snaps it back, the Tou’on-ryu version does not retract the leg after kicking but instead lunges forward (see photo sequence below). This principle of not snapping the leg back and bringing the entire weight of the body onto the opponent while kicking is a basic concept found in Tou’on-ryu Seisan and Sanseru kata. A former student of Juhatsu Kyoda, Katsumi Murakami, summarizes this particular kick very nicely:

“This kick in Seisan is used as a finishing technique in a kill-or-be-killed situation, and is very frightening.”

The kicking technique that I would like to examine is a technique from the Kanyu Higaonna version of Seisan. Besides learning Seisan from his primary teacher Kanryo Higaonna, Juhatsu Kyoda also learned a separate version from Kanryo’s cousin Kanyu. Kanyu was an accomplished calligrapher who had studied the kata Sanchin and Seisan extensively while in China, and it is this version of Seisan that I will explore for its kicking technique. As an aside it is interesting to note that only the Kanyu version of Seisan was passed down in Tou’on-ryu. Apparently Kyoda had discussed teaching both kata or combining them into one Seisan. However, this never took fruition.

"This kick in Seisan is used as a finishing technique in a kill-or-be-killed situation, and is very frightening.”
in a kill-or-be-killed situation, and is very frightening. This was perhaps learned in an actual situation by the person responsible for developing Seisan. [...] Sensei Kyoda used to check the floor before practicing this kick. He said that once he didn’t check the floor well enough, and that he injured his foot pretty badly. The kick in Seisan must be performed with great power, and due to this, one naturally puts a lot of strength into the kick when practicing, often resulting in broken floorboards.

Contrasting the old and new
My Tou’on-ryu teacher, Shigekazu Kanzaki, the current headmaster of Tou’on-ryu, describes this technique found in Seisan not as a kick, but as a thrust and stomp with the foot that knocks an opponent down and is then twisted into him. Placement of the foot is extremely important in the proper execution of this technique. It requires the outer metatarsals of the foot to be placed on the femoral neck, where the femur joins the pelvis (see illustration). Then using the entire body weight, the foot is quickly thrust and twisted down at approximately a 25 degree angle. Since most hip fractures occur in the region of the femoral neck and the area below it, attacking this region increases the likelihood of serious injury to the opponent. Perhaps this is what Katsumi Murakami was alluding to in the description of this technique, “as a finishing technique in a kill-or-be-killed situation, and is very frightening”.

Practicing and applying this technique is difficult and dangerous on the part of the performer and his or her partner. Attempting to perform the technique against the open air as in kata is an important first step. However, one must be careful as there is a tendency to pull the body back to maintain balance since there is no target to transfer the force of the kick into. Conversely, using a live partner as a target can be dangerous without proper control. The best initial method for training this technique is to practice against a tire that has been mounted or buried in the ground. This allows you to bring the full force and weight of your body into the target without worry of injuring you or an opponent. This method is how I practiced when I began learning this technique, and I would highly recommend it.

Conclusion
It can be seen that there is a marked difference between modern karate-do kicking methods and earlier methods as illustrated in the Tou’on-ryu Seisan kata. This old style method of kicking has also been pointed out by noted karate-do researcher Nobuyuki Hirakami. Hirakami explains that the sokuto-geri, is often applied as a kick to the back of the opponent’s knee. Although he states that this is not wrong, his interpretation is limited. He states that by practicing on tatami it is easy to apply the same technique as a reaping throw or a sweep to the front of the knee.

Hirakami also points out, rightly so, that these types of sweeps are well suited to real combat and can be used to drop the opponent face down. However, when practicing on a wooden floor or hard ground, it is difficult to take a fall safely, so the kata is often applied as a kick to the back of the knee. However, when practicing on tatami or a sandy beach, one can use nage-waza (throwing techniques) easily. Interestingly, Hirakami laments the loss of such techniques in modern karate-do: This is a kuden, and the competent instructor should know both. However, the sad fact is that the practice of throwing techniques is all but gone from modern karate training.

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1 Shigekazu Kanzaki in personal communication, 2000.
3 These photos originally appeared in the October 2003 issue of Gekkan Karatedo, page 13 and are used here with the permission of Shigekazu Kanzaki and Hidenori Ikeda.
4 Excerpted from http://www.kalate.com/
5 Image copyright 2000 by Nucleus Communications, Inc. All rights reserved. http://www.nucleusinc.com
7 See photo sequence 3.
8 A verbal teaching from the instructor usually only given to senior students.
KORYU BUJUTSU

Koryu Bujutsu takes readers into the cabalistic world of Japan's classical bugei traditions through eight thought-provoking essays by the world's most experienced non-Japanese practitioners of koryu, each of whom has spent decades in Japan training and researching under the headmasters of ancient traditions. Interestingly, several of the essays herein are somewhat contradictory in their analysis of the koryu, highlighting the diversity of thought among these schools. As well, there are interviews with some of the leading Japanese masters. If your only exposure to the bujutsu comes from reading Don Draeger's work, this book provides perspectives that are both similar to and different from his. Furthermore, it contains an overview of a number of classical bujutsu styles by the editor Diane Skoss. After Donn Draeger's books, there have been very few publications in terms of authentic martial arts culture, history, and lore, especially concerning classical budo. This new book is a rarity; it encapsulates and brings into focus all the striving we and others have been doing all these years.

Introduction: Keiko Shokon by Diane Skoss;
The Koryu Bujutsu Experience by Hunter B. Armstrong; The Meaning of Martial Arts Training: A Conversation with Sawada Hanae Interview by Meik Skoss; Field Guide to the Classical Japanese Martial Arts by Diane Skoss; Marishiten: Buddhist Influences on Combative Behavior by David A. Hall; Tenjin Shinyo-ryu Jujutsu by Meik Skoss; Kato Takashi: Reflections of the Tatsumi-ryu Headmaster Interview by Liam Keeley; Koryu Meets the West by Ellis Amdur.

By Marc van Dam

KEIKO SHOKON

Keiko Shokon translates as “Reflecting deeply on the past, illuminate the present.” This volume includes Karl Friday’s masterful translation of the Neko No Myojutsu, a beautiful parable of ancient Japan concerning the warrior. There is a wonderful interview with Nitta Suzuyo, head of Toda-ha Buko-ryu. William Bodiford has contributed an article which should put to rest the use and abuse of the term “soke” in the west, and George H. Bristol, Lieutenant Colonel, USMC has provided a rather modern practical consideration of koryu budo in his essay “The Professional Perspective”. Keiko Shokon, as well as the first two books in the series, is well worth reading by anyone interested in the history behind our modern practice of Japanese martial arts. For those who wish to practice the koryu bujutsu themselves, they are an invaluable resource. Finally, the philosophical questions they raise on such issues as change and tradition are well worth considering in and of themselves.

By Marc van Dam

SWORD & SPIRIT

Following up on the previous book, this volume adds more to the “field guide to the classical Japanese martial arts”. The editors describe Yoshin-ryu, Toda-ha Buko-ryu, Tenjin Shoden Katori Shinto-ryu, Tatsunami-ryu, Takenouchi-ryu, Shojitsu Kenri Kataichi-ryu, Shinto Muso-ryu, Sekiguchi Shinshin-ryu, Negishi-ryu, and Hozoin-ryu Takada-ha. Quite a list... And again eight deep-digging essays. You can read the translation of the Kyujukyu Kakun or 99 Precepts of the Takeda Clan and the importance of this document in the formation of the early Tokugawa era "Bushido" ideals, and its influence on later works of this genre such as the Budo Shoshin- shu, and the Hagakure. There is also an interesting interview with Saito Satoshi, the headmaster of the Negishi-ryu Shurikenjutsu school. Just read the table of contents and you'll know why all us wannabe samurai should read this book carefully at least a couple of times.

Foreword by Yagyu Nobuharu; Introduction: A Coconut Palm in Missouri by Dave Lowry; Kyujukyu Kakun: The Ninety-Nine Precepts of the Takeda Clan by Takeda Nobushige; Neglected Treasure: The Koyo Gunkan by Alexander C. Bennett; Field Guide to the Classical Japanese Martial Arts by Meik & Diane Skoss; Negishi-ryu Shurikenjutsu: An Interview with Saito Satoshi by Meik Skoss; The Tojutsu of the Tatsumi-ryu, Murphy's Law, and the K.I.S.S. Principle by Liam Keeley; Kabala in Motion: Kata & Pattern Practice in the Traditional Bugei by Dr. Karl F. Friday; Uchidachi and Shidachi by Nishioka Tsuneco.

By Marc van Dam

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History of Northern Shaolin, Part 1
From Bodhidharma to the Boxer Rebellion

Too often a Kung-Fu style is attributed to a mysterious monk or master descending from the mountains to teach the local peasants. Though these stories are important folklore, and often have a valuable, ethical message, they are rarely historically accurate. In this first part in a series of two, we examine the history of Northern Shaolin up to the 19th century.

- By Mathieu G. Ravignat -

Some form of empty-handed martial art probably existed from the dawn of human-kind and has its origin in the basic anthropological nature of man. However, a highly systematized art form is an entirely different thing to primitive hunting and self-defense techniques. The Shaolin system of martial techniques, though having its roots probably much earlier in pre-Buddhist Chinese traditions, dates according to written records from the Liang dynasty (6th century A.D.). Legend has it that an innovator, an Indian Bodhisattva by the name of Bodhidharma, created its basis. Before becoming a Bodhisattva, Bodhidharma was a member of the Shatria, or warrior noble class of India. He is considered the 27th father of the Dhyana sect of Buddhism, known in China as Ch'an and in Japan as Zen. In China, where he is known as Ta Mo, he is also proclaimed to be the father of both Northern and Southern styles of Shaolin Kung-Fu. In China, he established himself at a temple in the Songshan mountains. This temple was called the Young (Shao) Forest (Lin) Temple (Shaolin Si) and was built near a young forest, hence the word Shaolin. Shaolin and its derivatives represent some of the oldest living forms of unarmed and armed combat systems in the world. They have in turn greatly influenced many other Asian martial arts including non-Chinese martial arts such as Karate-do and Taekwondo. Because of its 1500-year history, it is known as the father of all empty-handed combat systems. It was first taught to seculars and laymen at the beginning of the Ching dynasty (17th century A.D.) and has since traveled the world as it passed from Sifu to student.

Early Development

The legend of Ta Mo suggests that the history of Shaolin Kung-Fu began when this famed Buddhist monk traveled to China from India in 519 A.D. to introduce his new philosophy called Ch’an Buddhism. When he displeased the emperor, he was forced to seek refuge at a local temple in the Songshan mountains called the Young Forest Temple (Shaolin Si). There he observed that the monks were in poor physical condition and so, out of gratitude for their hospitality he offered them a gift of health and immortality. After meditating in front of the wall of a cave for nine years, he wrote in two volumes the path that the monks must follow to attain spiritual and physical perfection.

The first volume concerned itself with physical strength and health and was named the Muscle Change Classic (Yin-Gin Ching). The second book, the Marrow and Brain Washing Classic (Shii Shouei Ching), concerned itself with internal strength with the marrow and the blood. It promised a healthy Shen (Spirit) to help gain immortality and spiritual enlightenment. Along with these books, Bodhidharma is said to have taught the Monks eighteen self-defense movements. Legend also has it that the monks expanded these self-defense movements through the imitation of the combat movements of five animals: the tiger, crane, snake, leopard and dragon. However, it must be remembered that the earliest report of these books and subsequent additions in written form only date from 1835. So much of our knowledge of the Chinese martial arts has had to rely on a very rich oral tradition. On this early technical basis, the Emperor...
Tai Tsu (A.D.960-976) reportedly further expanded these self-defense movements to thirty-two forms of Long Boxing (Tai Tsu Chang Quan). A century later, the monk Chueh Yuan supposedly modified the system to encompass seventy-two forms. All Northern and Long Fist sets reportedly have these seventy-two movements as their core.

But how is it that the current styles are much more vast than the early version? Because the original style was so well constructed and practiced that it spread throughout China. Primarily this was done through exchanges between temples. Soon there were training monks and Shaolin temples all across the provinces of the vast Chinese empire both North and South of the Yang Tze river.

The different types of cultures and opinions began to change the style irrevocably. In addition to the ethnic changes, wars would also modify the style. As the Shaolin monks involved themselves in politics, or simply favored one warlord over another, the warlord of the opposing army would often burn the temples down and massacre the monks. Therefore, many monks were forced to flee the temples. Outside the temple, they often decided to teach a few chosen disciples. These lay disciples served both as a new hope for the style's future as well as being an effective way to protect themselves from the warlord's bounty hunters. Similarly, the defeated generals or fleeing bandits would often seek refuge in the Shaolin temple. There they were not refused refuge and could live a life of peace away from the violence of politics and war. However, the very principles of compassion that accepted them within the temple were the vows they would have to live by during their stay.

These laymen, or unshaved disciples, as they were known, also shared their Wu-Su (martial arts) with the monks. Certain forms and sets like the 18 Hands of the Arhat, which still exists today, come from such exchanges. This is also how the Shaolin monks came to use bladed weapons like the Chinese Dao or broad sword, and the Qiang or spear. Often these refugees would leave the temple as experts ready to disseminate the Shaolin arts to the public. These above factors resulted in the eventual secularization of the Shaolin styles. The contact with the outside world as well as internal ramifications changed the style so that today it has become the most famous of all Kung-Fu styles. Nevertheless, this popularity probably led many fighting styles to falsely claim their origins to the temple.

However, it is important to remind the enthusiast that even with the secularization of Shaolin Kung-Fu, the initial and ultimate goal of these monks was not that of creating the ultimate fighting system. Their goal was far simpler: enlightenment. Therefore, Kung-Fu to the monks was a tool to help them down the long road to spiritual perfection. It was a means, not an end, to the eventual utopia: the state of Nirvana.

Today, the art is often abused or used for competitive purposes, partially because it has not been taught with the proper emphasis on patience and control. Unfortunately, these sports rarely provide a moral framework to ensure the harnessing of such power. Without the presence of the three largest philosophical influences; Buddhism (the way of Buddha), Lao-Tzu's Taoism (the way of virtue) and Confucianism (the way of Confucius), the art is not complete. All three of these philosophies, albeit in different ways, taught the control of the ego (Hsin) by the will (Yi). This unclouds our judgment and allows us to realize an inner and outer peace and a resolution of the mind. This is why Kung-Fu's strenuous activities were well suited to the Buddhist and Taoist priests of old. Once they understood or harnessed the immortal harmony (Yin-Yang), it was internalized and the priests became like water, like infants; ever yielding yet powerful enough to shape the earth and move mountains.

The Spread and Diversification of the Martial Arts

By the end of the Ming (A.D. 1368-1644) and the beginning of the Ching dynasties (A.D. 1644-1911), the spread of the Shaolin temples and the secularization of their styles led to the proliferation of various traditions. An important figure in this process of secularization was Gan Fench, a disciple of the Monk Chueh Yuan (secular name Zhu Fu). He was, reportedly, the first layman to be taught the entire art of Shaolin, but this is probably an exaggeration, since other styles refer to the teaching of other laymen from either earlier or later dates. Nevertheless, many Northern secular fist styles, including Northern Shaolin, Hua Chuan, and all their derivatives, trace their origins to this original figure. What is perhaps more important is that this secularization
created a plurality of traditions, which, though having their common roots in the first Shaolin temple, possess vastly different technical and theoretical approaches. For example, compare the closed, straight line, short-range techniques of Wing Chun to the open, long-range, flowing techniques of Shaolin Northern Long Fist, and yet both trace their origins to the Shaolin organization and its boxing doctrine.

**Secret Societies and Rebellions**

Despite this factor, a more significant variable in the proliferation of the Shaolin martial arts was the conquest of China by the Manchu, in 1644. The rule of the Manchu led to two hundred years of murder and oppression. In order to consolidate their power, the Manchu attacked the powerful Shaolin martial organization and its boxing doctrine. In turn, many monks and their lay disciples formed martial societies and protective organizations. These societies hoped to reduce Manchu abuses towards the population as well as attempt to return the Ming to power and preserve Chinese culture and religion. Two such figures were Monk Chueh Yuan and his disciple, Gan Fench'i, who were arrested in accordance with the imperial edict of Li Wei (who was Governor General at the time), for preaching secret religious doctrines in opposition to the Ching empire. Gan Fench'i reportedly infiltrated the imperial palace by an impressive martial arts demonstration to become an imperial bodyguard. In this position, he acted as a spy for various revolutionary organizations. After gaining the information necessary, it is written that he excused himself from imperial service only to be voluntarily arrested. Later, in 1760, it is reported that the Shaolin organization led a massive attack, which resulted in the death of many monks and the burning of a number of temples. As they were prosecuted, many Shaolin experts fled to various countries in South East Asia, including Taiwan, Vietnam, and Indonesia, where Kung-Fu was further disseminated. The Shaolin temples, both in the South and in the North, were burned by the third Manchu Emperor and then, fortunately, rebuilt afterwards by Ch'ien-lung (1736-1795). The last of these particular burnings was reported to have occurred at the Southern Fukien Shaolin temple. Five monks escaped, and became, according to the legend, the fathers of secret, revolutionary organizations, including that of the famous (or infamous) Hung League. Thought to be predominantly a myth, it is only recently that some archaeological evidence of the Fukienese Temple's burning has been discovered. Though not particularly successful in their attempts, these societies did succeed in spreading the boxing doctrine all over China.

Probably the most famous of these Boxer revolutionaries was a Hakka (a particular cultural non Han Chinese group comparable for some to Gypsies) named Hung. A Christian convert, Hung trained his men in spear and empty-handed play. In the Taiping Revolt, the Manchu and British forces crushed Hung and his League forces. But, for more than twelve years, the Hung League held the Yang Tze River in chaos, even if they were vastly outnumbered and outgunned. This revolt, in turn, inspired Dr. Sun Yat Sen's (also a Christian convert) nationalist revolution as well as inspiring further anti-foreign rebellions. At the end of the 19th century, a full-fledged Boxer (Martial Artists) rebellion occurred. The rebellion was encouraged by the anti-foreign doctrine of the then reigning and corrupt dowager Empress. The birthplace of the Boxer rebellion was Shangtung province, and the core of that rebellion consisted of the I-Ho Chuan, or Righteous Fist Society, who rebelled because the area was powerless against German invasion. They practiced a form of external Chi-Kung, called Iron Body, which they believed would make them invulnerable to bullets. In one of the bloodiest moments of foreign occupation of China, thousands of Boxers were massacred by British and German firearms.

These, however, were not the first of these types of societies. Secret societies have a long history in China. The most powerful of these societies, before the Manchu invasion, were the Triad Societies, which, according to legend, were also founded by renegade Shaolin monks. Further suppression followed, and the societies dissipated, though the arts continued to spread. During this time, most martial artists tended to coalesce around warlords, pitting for power as the Ching dynasty was increasingly being rotted from within and from without. Finally, the conditions were ripe, and through the teachings of the great political philosopher, Dr. Sun Yat Sen, and his Three Principles of the People, a nationalist revolution was finally successful, and a republic was declared in 1912.

However, many warlords did not join the nationalist forces. A number of martial artists joined their respective warlords against the nationalists, though some martial societies opposed the militarization and despotism of the warlords. This was the case for the Society of the Red Spears, which was organized in Shangtung, in 1920. Robert W. Smith reports, in his Comprehensive Asian Fighting Arts (New York: Kodansha International, 1980, p.19), that their motto was: "Against bandits, against militarists, against foreign devils, against opium, against gambling and wine; for peaceful labor and life and for the preservation of Chinese traditions."

Except for some activity in the 1800's, the vast and resistant Shaolin organization had disappeared, and it was time for the secular tradition to take up the cause, though the Shaolin Temple still remained a symbol of resistance, and was still largely held up as the best martial arts school and/or style. However, the arrival of firearms essentially reduced the Shaolin as a threat to the Ching and their foreign allies, as well as reducing their involvement in Chinese politics. The Shaolin organization's glory days were over.

The last battle the temple fought was against Chiang Kai-Shek's Northern expeditionary nationalist forces. The
Monks allied themselves with a local warlord, which took refuge in the temple. The head master, by the name of Abbot Meauw Shing, was a good friend of the warlord, and he ordered his monks to attack the expeditionary forces. The monks were defeated by superior numbers and firearms. The nationalist forces were reportedly so angry that the famed Shaolin would resist them, that, in 1928, they burned the temple down. Times were changing ahead of the temple, and, unfortunately, the monks probably did not know a thing about the principles of justice in Dr. Sun's nationalism as well as his respect for the boxing doctrine.

The Rise of New Styles
During this turbulent period, different secular Shaolin systems and traditions began to increase in popularity - newer systems were being created. In southern China, styles began to be popularized including: Choy Lay Fut, a mix of Northern and Southern family styles; Hung-Gar, a form of Southern Shaolin; White Crane, a Fukienese style which has its root in the Fukienese Shaolin temple; and a Cantonese style called Wing Chun was also being practiced, but mostly in secret.

The historical phenomenon of the specialization and differentiation of all these styles is complex, and every style seems to have a different, particular emphasis and history. Much of these differences can be attributed to completely different cultural origins as well as climates, rural or agrarian origins, individuals, spiritual beliefs, class, etc., i.e., all the differences in the way men lived in China has had their effect on these fighting traditions. We must also be careful not to draw similarities between them. Not all styles that claim they come from Shaolin actually do. If we take this myth out, then we can understand how different styles can evolve in different cultures. Although much unbiased, anthropological work needs to be done. This approach is not very popular amongst traditional martial artists. Dr. Yang Jwing Ming, for example, believes that the variety of the martial arts is the result of the way the Shaolin monks were actually taught. According to him, when the monks reached a high level, they were asked to specialize, which in turn led them to teach their disciples only their area of specialization. According to Dr. Yang, this would cause these specialized forms to be ossified through the years until the styles became one-sided technical traditions. However, Dr. Yang does not explain why the monks would not have taught the same basic unified curricula they learnt. Why did they not follow the same teaching pattern as their temples? He does admit that they had a basic core of techniques taught to all students, but he cannot explain why they were not systematically taught similarly. Secondly, Shaolin cannot realistically be at the root of as many styles as claimed. It is not as simple as saying that they are from either the Song Shan Mountains, the Wudang Mountains, or Emei Mountain. It is more likely that fighting traditions were developed by various scholars, peasants, warriors, and yes, even fishmongers. Equally as likely, it is possible that these traditions developed over the ages through families and small groups of dedicated disciples. Legitimacy was sought afterwards in the history of the particular style. Too often a style is attributed to a mysterious monk or master descending from the mountains to teach the local peasants, and this redundancy reduces its credibility. Though these stories are important folklore, and often have a valuable, ethical message, they are rarely historically accurate. But this inaccuracy, in no way, takes away from the quality of these styles. On the contrary, they are all highly developed and variable fighting concepts, and different versions of the totality. This, in turn, just adds to the unbounded richness of the Chinese martial traditions, and proves the impressive innovative nature of man.

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