

# A Brief History of Shotokan Kata



prepared by  
Jimmy Bowden Sensei  
July 1, 2020

# The History of Karate

In its current form, karate is less than 200 years old however it has roots that date back thousands of years.

The art originated on the island of Okinawa and in its early form was heavily influenced by ancient Chinese martial arts, collectively known as kung fu.

## **The Beginnings of Karate History on Okinawa**

The history of Okinawan Karate can be traced back to the late 17th century when a ban on weapons was imposed by the samurai rulers of Japan.

The exact evolution of karate history is lost due to the lack of information being written down which is unsurprising when taking into account the strict rules against subjects of the island learning martial arts.

This meant that all training by early masters such as Kanga Tode Sakugawa and Sokon 'Bushi' Matsumura, had to be done in secret and as weapons could not be carried on the island, self-defense tended to revolve around empty handed techniques.

The earliest surviving written evidence of karate in Okinawa was a mention of the word Tode (the Okinawan name for the art) in the late 1700s. It was in reference to a visitor to the island from China named Kushanku who taught a form of Kung Fu and may have introduced the first version of the Shotokan kata kanku-dai. Tode style blended with the martial arts already being cultivated on the island which was known as Te, meaning 'hand'.

Te was popular in three cities in particular, Shuri, Naha and Tamarai. Each city had its own way of doing the martial arts and modern day styles reflect this; Shotokan and Shito-ryu are mostly influenced by the style from the city of Shuri, that is Shuri-te, and to a lesser extent Tamarai-te. Goju-ryu on the other hand is more influenced by Naha-te.

## **Karate History and its Development into a World Martial Art**

At the turn of the 20th century, Anko Itosu gained permission to end the shroud of secrecy for those who wanted to learn martial arts and began teaching Te in Okinawan schools. This led to further expansion by one of Itosu's students, Sensei Gichin Funakoshi, who introduced the art to Japan in 1922.

Funakoshi made many modifications to the art to make it more accessible to the Japanese including changing the name and karate as we know it today was born. Towards the end of his life, Funakoshi was instrumental in forming the Japanese Karate Association (JKA) which set about making karate a world martial art by sending out its best instructors to teach it all over the globe.

Today, karate is practiced by millions of people right across the world and although the lines are often blurred between karate history facts and exaggerations or legends, the contribution made by the old Okinawan masters and those that followed them should not be forgotten.

# **Bodhidharma and the Beginnings of Kung Fu**

While China has a long tradition of developing fighting styles, some believe that most modern systems stem from the teachings of Bodhidharma.

History is sketchy on precise details but he probably went to the Shaolin Temple in the 6th century and taught various exercises to the monks there that would develop into modern day kung fu.

## **The Original Chinese Martial Arts**

From what evidence has survived, we know that Emperor Huang Ti used a basic fighting system called Chiou Ti (or Go-Ti) which dates back to around 2,674 BCE. This evolved into Shuai Chiao, which is similar to Judo and utilizes fast throws and joint locks along with elbow and knee strikes.

These early systems were used to improve the fighting skills of soldiers who tended to be in the army for life. Those that lived long enough however could eventually retire to a monastery where they continued to use their training techniques to stay fit and healthy.

Around 600 BCE, Confucius stated that the martial arts should be encouraged in everyday life and his contemporary Lao Tzu, devised a philosophical system called Taoism. The teachings of these two were handed down through the ages and became entwined with the martial arts of China and later neighbouring countries. While this can be seen as the forerunner to Chinese martial arts, for many, modern day kung fu began when an Indian monk known as Bodhidharma (or Ta Mo in Chinese) arrived at the Shaolin Temple around 527 CE.

## **Bodhidharma – History and Legend**

Ta Mo originally travelled to China in order to meet the Emperor, a pious man who believed enlightenment could be obtained through good works being performed by others in his name. To this end, he had set about translating Buddhist scriptures from the ancient Indian language, Sanskrit, into Chinese in order to allow the common people to practice the religion.

The Indian monk disagreed with this interpretation of the religion and parted ways with the Emperor, heading for the nearby Shaolin Temple where the Sanskrit was being translated. Probably as a result of his disagreement with their ruler, the monk was refused entrance so he sat in front of a wall in a nearby cave and meditated for nine years to prove his worthiness.

### Bodhidharma and the Beginnings of Kung Fu

How much of the story of Bodhidharma's history is based on fact can never really be known but we can say that a number of legends have arisen about him and that they themselves have become a part of the development of kung fu culture. Some tales say that he literally burned holes in the walls of the cave with his piercing eyes and others suggest that while meditating, the sun burned his silhouette directly onto the rock.

Either of these would have proven his dedication and may have eventually got him admitted to the temple, however it is more likely that over time he conversed with monks who brought him food and water and won them over with his great wisdom. The type of Buddhism taught by the Indian monk became known as Ch'an and would have a great influence of the philosophy of the martial arts not only in China, but also in Japan where it was known as Zen.

#### Exercise and the Shaolin Monks

Translating text was painstaking work as it all had to be done by hand. As a result, what Bodhidharma would have seen on his arrival was the Shaolin monks spending long hours hunched over desks, which would have had negatively affected their physical and mental wellbeing.

To combat this, he taught them exercises that were designed to improve internal and external strength that he derived from the *hatha* and *raja yoga* practices from his native India. His teachings were based on the movement of eighteen animals including the tiger, deer, snake and leopard.

While they were not strictly speaking martial arts techniques at this time, many monks would have probably known how to fight due to the dangers of wild animals in the remote areas that temples tended to be built in. The roads for travelling monks like Ta Mo and his contemporaries would also be hazards and protection from bandits would have been a must, either from trained bodyguards or from being able to fight themselves.

As a result, over time Shaolin monks blended fighting techniques with the movements taught by Bodhidharma which evolved into the martial arts of modern China. While these fighting styles vary widely, most have at least some connection in their lineage to the Shaolin Temple and have come to be known collectively as *kung fu*.

# **The Life and Legends of Anko Itosu**

Anko Itosu's teachings are legendary in world martial arts. Along with his Master, *Sokon 'Bushi' Matsumura*, he was instrumental in the development of the Shuri-te style of Okinawan karate.

Itosu can be said to be the first person to practice what would closely resemble the type of Shotokan karate that is practiced today, and was responsible for taking the martial art from being a secretive, behind closed doors art, to being spread to the general public in Okinawa.

## **The Early Life of Itosu**

Born in 1830 in the city of Shuri in Okinawa, Itosu is believed to have had a rough childhood, often being beaten and abused by his father. It is said that his father would tie him up and continually poke him with a stick in order to teach him fighting spirit.

This would be reflected later in the teachings of Itosu, as many of the kata he is thought to have invented and influenced have moves that are designed to disarm a would-be attacker brandishing a stick.

At the age of 16 he started leaning karate from Master Matsumura and by the time he grew up, Itosu was a well-educated man and worked as King Sho Tai's personal secretary, whom he served for thirty years. For Itosu and the rest of the inhabitants of the island, everything changed in 1879 as the Japanese ended the Royal dynasty of Okinawa, sending the king into exile.

Most of the karate masters had worked for the King so as a result of his fall from grace many, including Itosu, suddenly found themselves living in abject poverty even though they were of the higher social class.

## **Anko Itosu and his Legendary Fighting Prowess - Tomoyose**

When Itosu was a young man, he built up a reputation by winning several fights and there are a number of legends about his endeavours that have been handed down to us from an oral tradition.

One story tells of how he challenged an obnoxious bully named Tomoyose who was criticizing the Shuri-te style, calling it "parlour karate". Itosu was then attacked by Tomoyose's gang but he quickly dispatched three of them using one knockout blow for each. Tomoyose then decided to attack himself and was also subdued in a similar fashion, being rendered unconscious by Itosu.

# The Life and Legends of Anko Itosu

## Anko Itosu and the Thief

Gichin Funakoshi referred to his teacher's incredible ability to withstand blows, his vice-like grip and his amazing physical strength. Itosu was a well built, strong man who conditioned his body to be able to give and take the hardest of blows. He insisted his students regularly use the makiwara board, a pad that is repeatedly struck in order to make the hands tougher and use to high impact hits.

One story that illustrates this power tells of a thief who tried to break into the master's house. When Itosu heard his wooden gate rattle, he went to investigate only to realise that on the other side was the thief trying to gain access. Itosu, so the legend goes, punched straight through the thick wooden gate, grasping the would-be thief by the arm and creating a gaping hole in the gate.

## Anko Itosu's Influence on Karate

While it can be difficult to know where true karate history ends and myths and legends begin, both these stories illustrate why Anko Itosu's teachings are so important to karate history. It was him that popularized and possibly brought in the concept of finishing an opponent off with one blow, which is often delivered when the opponents begins their opening attack.

Previously karateka, much like kung Fu practitioners, would attempt to overwhelm their opponents with less powerful rapid-fire techniques, use grappling moves or lighter strikes to vulnerable areas such as pressure points, the eyes or the groin. For this reason, the master's karate is said to be the first that closely resembles what is practiced in Shotokan karate today, leading many to see Itosu as the *Grandfather of Modern Day Karate*.

Another major contribution made by Sensei Itosu was to take the art out of secrecy and get it taught in Okinawan schools. This would start a chain of events that would lead to his karate being popularized throughout the world and become one of the most practiced martial arts there is.

# Sensei Gichin Funakoshi - Father of Modern Day Karate

Sensei Gichin Funakoshi is known as the *Father of Modern Day Karate* and is probably the best known name in karate history.

He was born in the city of Shuri on the island of Okinawa in 1868 and by the age of 11, Funakoshi was training with the great Okinawan teachers Anko Itosu and Yasutsune Azato.

At this time it was illegal to learn martial arts, though that did not stop him and many others practicing in secret. Around the turn of the century the art came out into the open and began to be taught in public schools, thanks largely to the efforts of Anko Itosu.

## Sensei Gichin Funakoshi and Japan

By the time Funakoshi was an adult he excelled in karate, so much so that when the Crown Prince of Japan, Hirohito, visited Okinawa, Funakoshi was chosen to perform a demonstration for him.

When the Japanese Ministry of Education held a demonstration of karate in Tokyo a year later in 1922, the Okinawan Department of Education who he worked for as a school teacher asked him to be the one to perform it and introduce the art to Japan; when he did, a new era in the history of the martial arts was born.

The Japanese were so impressed that he was asked to stay in the country to further demonstrate and teach his art. This began with an invitation from Jigoro Kano, the founder of Judo, who asked Funakoshi to demonstrate karate in front of over one hundred of his students.

After this, the requests kept coming so Master Funakoshi decided to move to Japan permanently. He quickly gained students in the universities in and around Tokyo and soon he had enough interest to start his own dojo.

## Sensei Gichin Funakoshi's Development of Karate

Sensei Gichin Funakoshi earned the title the *Father of Modern Day Karate* in a number of ways. One was that he adapted the training methods so that they could be more easily practiced by everybody, regardless of age, ability or sex.

He also made karate more accessible to the Japanese by changing the meaning of the word 'Kara'. Originally the meaning used was 'Chinese' with 'Te' meaning 'hand' but the characters used for Kara could also mean 'empty' in Japanese. As this fitted the style so well and because karate had developed to be very different from the Chinese styles, it became the new meaning of the word. He also changed the name of many of the kata, again making them more acceptable to a Japanese culture that hated everything that was Chinese.

Amongst his more prominent beliefs was Funakoshi's conviction that the best martial arts exponents should be so confident that they had nothing to prove about their fighting prowess. The true art was found in subduing an opponent without fighting, echoing the teachings of the legendary samurai Tsukahara Bokuden from over 400 years previously.

In 1955, Sensei Gichin Funakoshi made another momentous contribution to the karate world when he was instrumental in founding the *Japanese Karate Association* (JKA). Funakoshi was the chief instructor but unfortunately, the great master died not long after in 1957.

However through his most senior students such as Hidetaka Nishiyama and Masatoshi Nakayama, Shotokan karate lived on and grew. Today, it is practiced by millions of students and is a famous fighting system, respected and feared throughout the world.

# Basic Shotokan Karate Techniques

## GENERAL TERMS

- Karate-Do = Empty Hand Way
- "Mokuso" 10 second pause, "Mokuso yama"
- "Shomen Ni, Rei", "Sensei Ni, Rei"
  - a. Command given at start & end of class
- Shotokan = Style of Karate
- Kenkojuku = Our Style of Shotokan
- Dojo = Training Hall
- Kohai = Junior Student
- Sempai = Senior Student
- Sensei = Teacher / Kancho = Chief
- Shihan = Master Teacher
- Obi = Karate Belt
- Gi = Karate Uniform
- Hai = (hi) yes
- Iie = (ee-a) no
- OSU = Greetings and More
- Kyu/Mudansha = below Black Belt
- Dan/Yudansha=Black Belt & above

## REGIONS OF THE BODY:

- Jodan = Upper Area
- Chudan = Middle Area
- Gedan = Lower Area
- Migi = Right
- Hidari = Left

## COMMANDS:

- Kiotsuke = Attention
- Rei = Bow
- Yoi = Ready Position
- Hajime = Begin
- Yame = Stop
- Mawatte = To Turn Around
- Kiah = Vocal Expression

## FORM:

- Kihon = Basic Movements
- Kata = Basic Forms
- Kobudo = Weapons
- Kumite = Sparring

## BODY POSITIONS:

- Kamae = Ready
- Shomen ni = Full Body Facing
- Hanmi = Half Body Facing

## DACHI = STANCES :

- Yoi = Natural Stance
- Zenkutsu = Front Stance
- Kokutsu = Back Stance
- Kiba = Horse Stance
- Fudo = Immovable Stance
- Neko Ashi = Cat Stance

## UKE = BLOCKING:

- Age = Rising High
- Ude = Inside-Out
- Barai = Sweeping Down
- Soto = Outside-In
- Shuto = Sword Hand
- Morote = Augmented

## UCHI - STRIKING:

- Tetsui = Hammer Fist
- Uraken = Back Fist
- Nukite = Spear Hand
- Empi = Elbow
- Shuto = Knife Hand
- Heito = Outside Edge of Hand
- Teisho = Palm Heel
- Sokuto = Knife Edge of Foot
- Kakete = Bent Wrist
- Haishu = Back Hand

## ZUKI = PUNCHING

- Choku = Straight
- Oi = Lunge
- Gyaku = Reverse

## GERI = KICKING:

- Mae = Front
- Mawashi = Round
- Yoko = Side
- Ushiro = Back
- Tobi = Jump
- Keikomi = Thrust
- Keage = Snap
- Fumakomi = Stomp

## OTHER TERMS:

- Arigato Gozaimashita= Thank You Very Much
  - a. *ah-ree-gah-toh go-zi-mahs*
- Bogu = Protective Gear in Kumite
- Embusen = Movement Line in Kata
- Dojo-Kun = 5 Part Code of Conduct
- Dan = Black Belt
- Hajime = Begin / Yame = Stop
- Kyu = Below Black Belt
- Kata = Practice Forms
- Kumite = Sparring
- Kobudo = Weapons
- Kiah = Explosive Shout
- Kihon = Basic Techniques
- Kime = Focus
- Kisami-Zuki = Jab Punch like Oi-Zuki
- Ma-ai = Distancing
- Makiwara = Striking Board
- Moto-Dachi = Ready Training Stance
- Onegai Shimasu = Please Teach me
  - a. *oh-neh-guy-she-mahs*
- Renzuki = Alternating Punches
- Tai-Sabaki = Body Movement
- Yori-Ashi = Shifting the Stance
- Zanshin = Final Awareness





## The 15 Kata Gichin Funakoshi Brought To Japan In 1922

Japanese Name of Kata	Meaning of Kata	Original Name of Kata	Developer of Kata (not necessarily the creator)
<i>(Most Japanese Names by Gichin Funakoshi)</i>			
<i>(Some names by Funakoshi did not take*)</i>			
1. Heian Shodan	Peaceful Mind	Pinan (Chennan)	by Yasutsune (Anko) Itosu (1832-1915)
2. Heian Nidan	Peaceful Mind	Pinan	by Yasutsune Itosu (1832-1915)
3. Heian Sandan	Peaceful Mind	Pinan	by Yasutsune Itosu (1832-1915)
4. Heian Yodan	Peaceful Mind	Pinan	by Yasutsune Itosu (1832-1915)
5. Heian Godan	Peaceful Mind	Pinan	by Yasutsune Itosu (1832-1915)
6. Tekki Shodan	Iron Horse	Naihanchi	by Matsumura Sokon (1796-1889) then Yasutsune Itosu
7. Tekki Nidan	Iron Horse	Naihanchi	by Matsumura Sokon (1796-1889) then Yasutsune Itosu
8. Tekki Sandan	Iron Horse	Naihanchi	by Matsumura Sokon (1796-1889) then Yasutsune Itosu
9. Bassai-Dai	Extract from a Fortress	Passai	by Matsumura Kosaku (1829-1898)
10. Jutte	Ten Hands	Jitte	by Bushi Matsumura (1797-1884) then Yasutsune Itosu (1832-1915)
11. Empi	Flying Swallow	Wanshu	by Sappushi Wanshu in 1683
12. Hangetsu	Half Moon / 13 Hands	Seisan	by Tode Sakugawa (1733-1815)
13. Jion (*Shokyo)	Jion Temple	Jion	by Bushi Matsumura (1797-1884) then Yasutsune Itosu (1832-1915)
14. Kanku-Dai	View the Sky	Kusanku	by Matsumura Sokon (1796-1889)
15. Gankaku	Crane On Rock	Chinto	by Bushi Matsumura (1797-1884)

## Additional Kata Developed By Gichin Funakoshi (1868-1957) and Yoshitaka (Gigo) Funakoshi (1906-1945)

1. Ten no Kata	Kata of Universe		by Gichin Funakoshi (1868-1957)
2. Taikyoku Shodan	First Cause		by Gichin Funakoshi (1868-1957)
3. Taikyoku Nidan	First Cause		by Gichin Funakoshi (1868-1957)
4. Taikyoku Sandan	First Cause		by Gichin Funakoshi (1868-1957)

## Eight Kata Added By Tomosaburo Okano (1923 -2003)

1. Niseishi ( <i>Njushihō</i> )	Twenty-Four Steps	Niseishi	by Seisho Aragaki (1840-1918)
2. Wankan (* <i>Matsukaze</i> )	Kings Crown	Wankan	possibility by Gigo Funakoshi (1906 - 1945)
3. Tomari Wankan	Kings Crown	Okan	by Matsumura Kosaku (1829-1898)
4. Tomari Rohai	Visions of a Crain	Kuan Muan	by Matsumura Kosaku (1829-1898)
5. Kanku-Sho	To View The Sky	Kusanku	by Matsumura Sokon (1796-1889)
6. Bassai-Sho	Extract from a Fortress	Passai	by Yasutsune Itosu (1830-1915)
7. Chinte (* <i>Shoin</i> )	Mysterious Hands	Chinte	by Bushi Matsumura (1797-1884) then Yasutsune Itosu (1832-1915)
8. Jiin	Temple Grounds	Jiin	by Bushi Matsumura (1797-1884) then Yasutsune Itosu (1832-1915)

## Four Kata Added By Jimmy Bowden

1. Passai-Dai	Capture a Fortress	Passai	by Matsumura Sokon (1796-1889)
2. Gojushiho-Sho	Fifty-Four Steps	Uesheishi	by Matsumura Sokon (1796-1889))
3. Shushi No Kon Sho		Shushi's Bo Kata	by Chinen Sanda (1846-1928) of the Yamanni-Chinen-ryu
4. Shushi No Kon Dai		Shushi's Bo Kata	by Chinen Sanda (1846-1928) of the Yamanni-Chinen-ryu



The Perry Florida Shotokan Dojo utilizes the fifteen (15) kata Gichin Funakoshi brought with him and renamed them in 1922. He later added three Taikyoku Kata (3) plus Ten No Kata. Tomosaburo Okano added eight (8) more kata and Jimmy Bowden added five (5) additional kata. We only study thirty (30) of the thirty-two kata.

### KATA REQUIRED FOR KYU GRADING

<other requirements not listed>

10 Kyu (Ju-Kyu) (White Belt/Black Stripe) (Shiro-Obi/Stripe) (No Kata Required Here)
9 Kyu (Ku-Kyu) (Yellow Belt) (Kiuro-Obi) <b>TAIKYOKU-SHODAN</b>
8 Kyu (Hachi-Kyu) (Yellow Belt/Black Stripe) (Kiuro-Obi/Stripe) <b>TAIKYOKU-SANDAN</b>
7 Kyu (Nana-Kyu) (Green Belt) (Midori-Obi) <b>HEIAN-SHODAN &amp; 1-4 TEN-NO-KATA</b> (Sho)
6 Kyu (Roku-Kyu) (Blue Bel) (Ai-Obi/Stripe) <b>HEIAN-NIDAN &amp; HEIAN-SANDAN &amp; 1-10 TEN-NO-KATA</b> (Sho)
5 Kyu (Go-Kyu) (Purple Belt) (Murasaki-Obi) <b>HEIAN-YODAN &amp; HEIAN-GODAN</b>
4 Kyu (Yon-Kyu) (Purple Belt/Brown Stripe) (Murasaki-Obi/Stripe) <b>BASSAI-SHO &amp; CHINTE</b>
3 Kyu (San-Kyu) (Brown Belt) (Chairo-Obi) <b>TEKKI-SHODAN, BASSAI-DAI, ANY PREVIOUS-KATA &amp; TEN-NO-KATA</b> (Dai)
2 Kyu (NiKyu) (Brown Belt/1-Black Stripe) (Chairo-Obi/Stripe) <b>TEKKI-NIDAN, JUTTE, SHUSHI-SHO &amp; NO PREVIOUS-KATA</b>
1 Kyu (Ik-Kyu) (Brown Belt/2 Black Stripes) (Chairo-Obi/2 Stripes) <b>TEKKI-SANDAN, NISEISHI, JIIN, SHUSHI-DAI &amp; NO PREVIOUS-KATA</b>

### KATA REQUIRED FOR DAN GRADING

<other requirements not listed>

<b>JUN-SHODAN</b> (Junior Black Belt) ( <i>Black Belt with White Stripe</i> ) <b>HANGETSU or EMPI</b> Age 13 and older plus other requirements from Shodan. Eligible for "FULL Shodan" at age 16
<b>SHODAN</b> (1 <sup>st</sup> Degree) (Kuro-Obi) <b>HANGETSU, EMPI, SHUSHI-SHO &amp; PREVIOUS HEIAN KATA</b>
<b>NIDAN</b> (2 <sup>nd</sup> Degree) (Kuro-Obi) <b>KANKU-SHO, WANKAN, TOMARI-WANKAN, SHUSHI-DAI &amp; ANY PREVIOUS KYU KATA</b>
<b>SANDAN</b> (3 <sup>rd</sup> Degree) (Kuro-Obi) <b>KANKU-DAI, JION &amp; ANY PREVIOUS DAN KATA</b>
<b>YONDAN</b> (4 <sup>th</sup> Degree) (Kuro-Obi) <b>PASSAI-DAI, GOJUSHIHO-SHO &amp; ANY PREVIOUS KATA</b>
<b>GODAN</b> (5 <sup>th</sup> Degree) (Kuro-Obi) <b>GANKAKU &amp; ANY PREVIOUS KATA</b>

edited by Jimmy Bowden, July 1, 2020

# Shotokan Kenkojuku Style American Karate

Shotokan Kata	Exam Kata	# steps	Original Name & Kata Meaning
Taikyoku Shodan 太極初段	9 Kyu-Yellow	20	"First Cause" Developed by Gigo Funaksosh, named by his Father
Taikyoku Sandan 太極三段	8 Kyu-Orange	20	"First Cause" Developed by Gigo Funaksosh, named by his Father
Heian Shodan 平安初段	7 Kyu-Green	21	(Pinan) "Peacefull Mind One"
Ten No Kata 天の形	7 Kyu-Green	40	"Required for 7th Kyu"
Heian Nidan 平安二段	6 Kyu-Blue	26	(Pinan) "Peacefull Mind Two"
Heian Sandan 平安三段	6 Kyu-Blue	20	(Pinan) "Peacefull Mind Three"
Heian Yondan 平安四段	5 Kyu-Purple	27	(Pinan) "Peacefull Mind Four"
Heian Godan 平安五段	5 Kyu-Purple	23	(Pinan) "Peacefull Mind Five Universe"
Chinte 珍手	4 Kyu-Purple/ Stripe	33	(Chinte) "Incredible Hands"
Bassai Sho 拔塞小	4 Kyu-Purple/ Stripe	27	(Passai) "Extracting from a Fortress— Small"
Ten No Kata Dai 天の形大	3 Kyu-Brown	80	"Only required for 3rd Kyu at the Perry, Florida Kenkojuku Dojo,"
Tekki Shodan 鉄騎初段	3 Kyu-Brown	23	(Naihanchi) "Iron Horse One"
Bassai Dai 拔塞大	3 Kyu-Brown	42	(Passai) "Extracting from a Fortress-Big"
Tekki Nidan 鉄騎二段	2 Kyu-Brown/ Stripe	24	(Naihanchi) "Iron Horse Two"
Jutte 十手	2 Kyu-Brown/ Stripe	24	(Jitte) "Ten Hands"
Tekki Sandan 鉄騎三段	1 Kyu-Brown/2 Stripes	26	(Naihanchi) "Iron Horse Three"
Niseishi 二十四歩	1 Kyu-Brown/2 Stripes	24	(Niseishi) "24 Steps"
Hangetsu 半月	Shodan	41	(Seisan) "Half Moon"
Empi 燕飛	Shodan	37	(Wanshu) "Flying Swallow"
Kanku-Sho 觀空小	Nidan	47	(Kusanku) "To look at the Sky - Small"
Wankan & Tomari Wankan	Nidan	24	王冠 Kings Crown
Kanku Dai 觀空大	Sandan	65	(Kusanku) "To look at the Sky - Big"
Jion 慈恩	Sandan	47	(Jion) "Temple of Jion"
Passai-Dai 拔塞大	Yodan	42	(Bassai) "Extracting from a Fortress-Big"
Gojushiho-Sho 五十四方小	Yodan	65	Fifty-Four Steps
Gankaku 岩鶴	Godan	42	(Chinto) "Crane on a Rock"

edit by Jimmy Bowden. July 2020

# Kata

**Kata** is often described as a set sequence of karate moves organized into a pre-arranged fight against imaginary opponents. The kata consists of kicks, punches, sweeps, strikes, blocks, and throws. Body movement in various kata includes stepping, twisting, turning, dropping to the ground, and jumping. In Shotokan, kata is not a performance or a demonstration, but is for individual karateka to practice full techniques—with every technique potentially a killing blow; while paying particular attention to form and timing (rhythm).

Shotokan Karate is comprised of 26 katas, each with their own emphasis on fast and slow or controlled and powerful movements. Virtually all of the katas taught today in the Shotokan system have two kiai points.

The kiai or "spirit cry" as it is sometimes referred to, occurs only at certain pre-determined moments in each kata. It is precisely at these pre-determined moments that the karate-ka is required to demonstrate a total commitment of body, mind, and spirit, and to channel all of their available energy and apply it appropriately to the required technique. The kiai is a common thread that runs through all major styles of karate.

It is important for every student to remember that as they rise up through the various Kyu levels and Dan ranks, the continued regular practice of all of the previous katas that they have been taught is vital to their future progress.

## 15 Kata Gichin Funakoshi was training when visiting Japan in 1922

Pinan 1-5 (Heian)

Naihachi 1-3 (Tekki)

Kushanku (Kanku)

Passai (Bassai)

Seisan (Hangetsu)

Wanshu (Empi)

Chinto (Gankaku)

Jitte (Jutte)

Jion (Jion)

In his 1922 book, "Ryukyu Kempo Karate," Funakoshi list an additional 16 kata:

Passai-Sho, Kuhanku-Sho, Gojushiho, Chinte, Jiin, Sochin, Niseishi, Meikyo (*Rohai*), Unsu, Wankan, Wandau, Jumu, Wando, Sanseiru, Suparinpei and Kokan.

In his 1925 book, "Rentan Goshin Karate Jutsu," Funakoshi lists the same number of kata, with the addition of Sanchin.

This appears that the total kata knowledgeable to Funakoshi by 1925 were thirty-two (32)

Basically when we refer to the 26 Shotokan Kata, they are comprised of the original 15 kata of Funakoshi plus: Chinte, Bassai-Sho, Nijushiho, Kanku-Sho, Wankan, Gojushiho-Sho, Gojushiho-Dai, Meikyo (*roh*ai), Sochin, Wankan and Unsu.

The Japan Karate Federation (JKF) has designated two kata from each of the "big four Japanese styles" for their kata competitions. They are: Kanku-Dai & Jion from Shotokan, Seishan (Empi) & Chinto (Gankaku) from Wado-Ryu, Bassai-Dai & Seienchin from Shito-Ryu, and Saifa & Seipai from Goju-Ryu.

## Taikyoku

This is the most elementary kata practiced at IMA. Developed by Master Funakoshi's son, Gigo, Taikyoku helps new students learn basic kata principles.

- 太極初段 **Taikyoku Shodan** – (first cause)
- 太極三段 **Taikyoku Sandan** – (second cause)

HEIAN: Created relatively recently, the Heians were originally called Pinan from the Okinawan pronunciation of the Chinese word for safety. When introduced to Japan, Master Funakoshi opted to use the Japanese pronunciation Heian. Considered basic kata for beginning students.

- 平安初段 **Heian Shodan** – (peaceful mind, first level)
- 平安二段 **Heian Nidan** – (peaceful mind, second level)
- 平安三段 **Heian Sandan** – (peaceful mind, third level)
- 平安四段 **Heian Yondan** – (peaceful mind, fourth level)
- 平安五段 **Heian Godan** – (peaceful mind, fifth level)

TEKKI: Originally known in Okinawa as Naihanchi, the katas were renamed by Master Funakoshi upon its introduction to Japan to reflect the strength exhibited with kiba-dachi. Rich in fighting techniques, the Tekki family offers a plethora of close combat techniques.

- 鉄騎初段 **Tekki Shodan** – (iron horse riding, first level)
- 鉄騎貳段 **Tekki Nidan** – (iron horse riding, second level)
- 鉄騎參段 **Tekki Sandan** – (iron horse riding, third level)

## Advanced Katas

- **Niseishi** (twenty-four steps) The movements in this kata resemble waves breaking on a cliff. This kata was later renamed to Nijushiho
- **Chinte** (rare hand) Chinte has a lot of circular and roundhouse techniques. These are rare and are not typical of the shortest distance between two points concept of Shotokan.
- **Bassai-Sho** (to penetrate a fortress – small) This kata was derived from Bassai-Dai. It has a similar performance line.
- **Jutte** (ten hands) The goal of this kata is to teach a student to fight against ten opponents. This is a strong kata, similar to jion and
- **Bassai-Dai** (to penetrate a fortress – big) The strong techniques of this kata emphasize hip movement. Some resemble a battering ram being used against fortress walls.
- **Hangetsu** (half moon) This kata received its name from its principal stance, hangetsu dachi (half moon stance).
- **Empi** (flying swallow) The quick up and down movements of this kata are reminiscent of a fling swallow. Enpi is one of the oldest kata in Shotokan. Its former name was Wanshu.
- **Kanku-Sho** (to view the sky – small) Kanku-Sho was created from Kanku-Dai. The movements and performance line are similar.
- **Kanku-Dai** (to view the sky – big) Most of the elements of the Heian Kata were derived from this kata. The first movement in this kata views the sky, which symbolizes the universe and shows your opponent that you are unarmed. It was Master Funakoshi's preferred kata.
- **Jion** (love and goodness) Jion is a term in Buddhism. It is also the name of a temple in China. It uses basic stances and techniques. It is one of the most traditional kata in Shotokan.
- **Gankaku** (crane on a rock) The main stance in this kata (tsuruashi dachi) resembles a crane ready to strike at its prey. The movements are supposed to simulate a fight in the narrow alleyways of Okinawa. The former name of this kata was Chinto.
- **Jiin** (love and shadow) Jiin is another term in Buddhism. It has similar techniques and performance line as Jion.
- **Wankan** (king and crown) Wankan is the shortest kata in Shotokan.
- **Gojushiho-Sho** (fifty four steps – small) This is a smaller version of Gojushiho Dai. It is also one of the most advanced kata of Shotokan.
- **Rohai** (Meikyo), Tomari-Wankan and Passai-Dai.

# The History of Kihon Kata

**Kihon Kata** (*Basic Form*) is, as the name suggests, the most basic of all the Shotokan kata consisting of just two techniques, a block and an oi-zuki (*lunge punch*).

These forms, known as the Taikyoku kata, were named by Gichin Funakoshi after being developed by his son Yoshitaka. It was intended to be an easy introduction to kata and karate itself.

Originally it was the first of the set of basic kata that Funakoshi introduced, though in modern Shotokan Taikyoku-Shodan is usually the only one taught and in more recent years, kihon itself has disappeared from the syllabus of many schools.

**Taikyoku Kata** (*First Cause*) Gichin Funakoshi Sensei named the set of three Taikyoku kata which were developed by his son Yoshitaka "Gigō" Funakoshi Sensei. In his book "Karate-do Kyohan" Funakoshi, he explains the development of the these kata and why he named them Taikyoku, which translates as **First Cause**.

He also wrote: "Because of their simplicity, these kata are easily learned by beginners. Nevertheless, as the name implies, these forms are of the most profound character and one to which, upon mastery of the art of karate, an expert will return to select them as the ultimate training kata" (*page 42, 'Karate-Do Kyohan'*). (*a side note:- The Chinese kanji used for the name Taikyoku (太極) are pronounced as "Tai Chi" in Chinese, which translated as "Grand Ultimate"*).

**Taikyoku Shodan** (*First Cause, First Level*), often simply referred to as "**kihon kata**" is the first of the series, and involves only two basic moves: the gedan-barai (*down block*), and chudan oi-zuki (*middle lunge-punch*). All stances, except at the starting place, are zenkutsu-dachi (*front stance*). There are 20 steps to this kata, three Kiah's and you always turn inwards to the embusen (*center of the kata*).

**Taikyoku Nidan** (*Many Dojos not require this kata*) The second kata of the series, **Taikyoku Nidan**, is similar to **Taikyoku Shodan**, except that the down the middle chudan punches are all replaced with upper-level (*jodan*) punches.

**Taikyoku Sandan** (*First Cause, Third Level*), is the third kata in this series. This **ka-ta**, is similar to **Taikyoku Shodan**, except that the blocks at top and bottom lines are replaced with inside-out forearm blocks (*chudan ude-uke*) and the blocks down the middle remain as down blocks (*gedan-barai uke*). The middle level inside-out forearm blocks (*ude-uke*) are executed in back stance (*kokutsu-dachi*) whereas all the punches remain executed while in front stance (*zenkutsu-dachi*).

# The History of the Heian Kata

**The Heian** (*Peaceful/Calm Mind*) kata originated in Okinawa where they were known as the Pinan kata. While many styles still use the Okinawan name (*which means the same*), in Shotokan they are usually known as the Heian kata, a name change instigated by the style's founder Gichin Funakoshi when he introduced karate to Japan in 1922.

The set of kata were probably developed from much older forms from China known as Chiang Nan and/or Kushanku (*Kanku-Sho and Dai may also originate from these kata*) and later developed by Okinawan Master Anko Itosu at the turn of the twentieth century.

According to legend, Itosu (*or maybe his teacher Tode Sakugawa*) was taught Chiang Nan (*pronounced Channan in Japanese*) from a Chinese diplomat and martial arts expert who lived in Okinawa called Kung Hsiang Chun. Though the original form is now lost, it is thought that it was extremely long so was divided up into five separate kata to make it easier to learn.

An alternative theory is that Itosu, who had taken the previously secretive martial art into the schools in Okinawa, found that children often had trouble learning the kata that were on the syllabus so he devised the Pinan kata group to aid this.

It is believed by some that he took moves from the Bassai and the Kanku sets in particular and arranged them so they gradually got more difficult through the various Pinan kata, allowing his younger students to progress from very basic moves to more advanced ones.

# The History of the Tekki Kata

**The Tekki** (*Iron Horse*) kata were derived from a single long kata called Naihanchi (*Internal Divided Conflict*) which was a part of the Shuri-te and Tomari-te karate styles in Okinawa and was the most basic kata before the introduction of the Pinan (*Heian*) kata set.

Anko Itosu is credited with developing the Tekki kata, though while some believe he invented Tekki Nidan and Sandan independently of Naihanchi, the fact that only Tekki Shodan has a formal opening move may suggest that they were all based on the Okinawan form.

There is further debate amongst martial arts scholars about what the pattern of the Tekki kata means, all of which follow a simple straight line in kiba-dachi (*horseback stance*). Some believe this represents fighting in a confined space with your back against the wall, others state that they are intended to develop skills for fighting on a boat while others still maintain that they were intended to represent fighting on horseback.

However as the strength and skills developed through the Tekki kata would work for these and other situations, an outright definition is unnecessary as application of kata should work for the individual karateka as opposed to being an absolute.

Gichin Funakoshi considered them a very important part of the Shotokan syllabus and spent three years practicing each of the Tekki kata, believing them to be difficult to master despite the fact that they are relatively short.



# The History of Nijushiho & Niseishi Kata

**Nijushiho** (*Twenty-four steps*) is of unknown origins though some scholars believe that like Sochin, it originally comes from the Chinese Dragon style of fighting. Others believe the kata was created by the 19th century Okinawan master Seisho Arakaki, who may have also invented Sochin and Unsu.

The Okinawan name, Niseishi, was changed by Gichin Funakoshi however both mean the same thing, but the katas have evolved differently. Whenever it was created, its development follows the lineage of Kenzo Mabuni, who was taught it by his father Kenwa Mabuni, founder of the Shito-Ryu style. He learned it from Higaonna Kanryo, a famous teacher from the Naha-te school and it was passed on to him through Seisho Arakaki.

Kenzo Mabuni is said to have spent some time instructing Yoshitaka, Gichin Funakoshi's son and as a result of these instructions, the Shotokan syllabus is believed to have gained Nijushiho, Sochin and Unsu.

# The History of the Bassai & Passai Kata

The **Bassai** (*To Penetrate a Fortress*) kata come in many different versions, varying from one style of karate to the next and in Shotokan, there are two of them, Bassai-Dai (*major/large*) and Bassai-Sho (*minor/small*). Known as Passai in Okinawa, their history is obscure but they are believed to be derived from very old forms from China, then developed in Okinawa.

A four hundred year old silk drawing is thought by some to depict an early version of Bassai-Dai, whose origins some believe can be traced back to either Leopard and Lion kung fu forms or from Five Element Fist kung fu.

When the earlier form arrived in Okinawa, it was taught to Master Sokon Matsumura, probably by a man named Oyadomari Peichin. In turn, Matsumura taught it to Anko Itosu who is often credited with creating Bassai-Sho from Passai sometime in the late nineteenth century.

The Bassai kata that are taught in Shotokan today are believed to have been designed to complement each other as the first, Bassai-Dai, represents forcing your way into a fortress and the second, Bassai-Sho, represents fighting your way out.

# The History of Empi

There are three main scholastic theories on the origins of the kata **Empi** (*Flight of the Swallow, also frequently transliterated as Enpi*). The first is that it was brought to Okinawa in 1683 by a Chinese envoy named Wang Ji, an expert in Shaolin Fujian White Crane.

The second suggests it was brought to Okinawa in the late 14th century by a group of immigrants from China known as the *Thirty-Six Families*, who brought with them new systems of martial arts that were taught to a select few on the island that were deemed worthy.

The third popular theory on the origins of Empi suggest it was developed more recently on the island itself as the kata was previously known as Wanshu, a name that could have come as a result of it being dedicated or even created by an Okinawan karate master by the name of Suppashi Wanshu.

Whatever its origins, it is possible though far from universally accepted that one of the main moves in the kata, the rising punch, was based on a sword technique of the samurai warrior Sasaki Kojiro, who had a particular move that was said to resemble the flight of a swallow. Kojiro was considered to be the finest swordsman of his day until he was famously defeated and killed in a duel by the legendary samurai Miyamoto Musashi in 1612.

What we do know is that by the 19th century, Wanshu was being taught by Kosaku Matsumura of the Tomari-te style who passed it down to Sokon Matsumura and Anko Itosu; the versions they practiced however varied suggesting that they independently developed what they were taught. Itosu taught his version to his student Gichin Funakoshi who went on to introduce it to Japan in the 1920s, changing the name from Wanshu to Empi in the process.

# The History of Hangetsu

**Hangetsu** (*Half Moon*) came through the Naha-te school on Okinawa where it was known as Seishan (*Thirteen*). When the name was changed and by whom is unclear as in Gichin Funakoshi's book, *Ryukyu Kenpo Karate*, it is listed under the name Seishan whereas others are listed under the new names he gave them. That said, he still may have been the one to make the change but did it later in his life.

It is believed that prior to being introduced to Okinawa, the kata has a very old origin and may even be the oldest of all the karate kata. One prevalent theory is that it came from a Chinese folk dance which aimed to explain the importance of the tides.

If this is the case, the name may be in reference to the thirteen day intervals as the moon revolves around the earth and its effect on the tides. However a more likely explanation is that it got its Okinawan name as a result of the fact there are thirteen moves in the kata (*as long as you only count repeated techniques once*).

Another theory on the origins of the kata Hangetsu is that it came from an old form practiced in Southern Chinese martial arts known as Four Gate Hands which is still practiced today in the Southern Praying Mantis Style. This seems more likely to be the case as the two training exercises are very similar though this may denote that they share a common ancestry within the history of the martial arts rather than one deriving from the other.

# The History of Wankan Kata

**Wankan** (王冠) (Japanese: "King's Crown" or "Emperor's Crown") (also called **Okan**) is a kata practiced in many styles of Karate. Not much is known about the history of this kata. It originates from the Tomari-te school and in modern karate is practiced in Shorin-ryu, Shito-ryu, Shotokan, Genseiryu and Matsubayashi-ryu.

It is often considered an advanced kata, despite its brevity. Karate master Shoshin Nagamine considered *wankan* to be his favorite kata. A quote from his book describes the kata as "Being characterized by unitary sequences of attack and defense".

Wankan is also known as Matsukaze (松風 or "pine tree wind") in some schools of karate.

Wankan, or "King's Crown," gets its name from the kata's first six moves, which are supposed to form the shape of a crown. When viewing this crown shape, one must appreciate that Wankan is the only Shotokan kata that begins diagonally. Some historians claim Wankan was handed down by the Okinawan royal family, thereby getting its name. As with other kata, Gichin Funakoshi tried to change its Okinawan name to a Japanese one. The names Shofu (Pine Wind) and Hito (Flying Waves) were attempted but failed. Wankan is one of the more recent additions to the Shotokan repertoire, possibly being imported and modified from another style (as with most of the advanced kata) by Yoshitaka Funakoshi. Wankan is a very short kata having only 24 counts and only 1 kiai, leading some karate enthusiasts to the conclusion that the kata's transition to Shotokan was never fully completed due to Yoshitaka Funakoshi's untimely death. Generally, the movements of Wankan do not pose too much difficulty for the practitioner. Moves four and five, although unusual, are not very taxing; in fact, they are even liberating because they are not confined by any stance. The only potentially troublesome technique occurs during #13, when turning from zenkutsu-dachi into neko-ashi-dachi. Although, on the surface, it is a simple mawate (turn), it is quite difficult to perform koko-sukui/koko-tsukidashi quickly, with balance and power. Overall, Wankan is a very fluid and low impact kata, having some very puzzling bunkai. It is not a very popular exam or tournament kata.

Wankan (along with Jiin) is probably one of the least practiced kata in Shotokan dojo. Why? Probably of greatest significance, Wankan (along with Jiin) was never documented in Masatoshi Nakayama's Best Karate series, a karateka's number one resource for Shotokan kata. If this exclusion didn't lend itself to the allusion of Wankan's lack of significance, at the very least, it certainly reinforced neglect of the kata. As a late addition to the compendium of JKA kata, Wankan simply hasn't received as much attention as its predecessors. The JKA has taken steps to increase awareness of this kata by including Wankan in their modernized series of books titled Karate-Do Kata.

## The History of Jion

**Jion** (*Mercy*) probably has its roots in Chinese boxing and according to the acclaimed Shotokan Master Hirokazu Kanazawa, it was invented in the Jion Temple by the Buddhist monks there who were accomplished martial artists. This is backed up not only by the name, but also the fact that it begins with the left hand covering the right fist, a starting posture often used in some kung fu styles. It later spread to Okinawa where it became a part of the Tomari-te syllabus though some believe it was actually invented there by someone with a connection to the Jion temple.

## The History of Ji'in

**Ji'in** (*Inverted mercy*) is no longer a part of the *Japanese Karate Association* (JKA) syllabus and along with Wankan, was left out of the *Best Karate* book series by Masatoshi Nakayama, which is seen as a definitive guide to Shotokan kata. Despite this, Ji'in is still widely taught by many other Shotokan associations as it is believed that it still has a lot to offer students of karate.

Ji'in is often seen as a part of a kata group along with Jion and Jutte as they share the same starting position with the left hand covering the right fist. This may mean that Ji'in and Jutte share the same origins as Jion and come from the Chinese Jion Temple though this is mostly speculation as their origins are unknown.

As with many other kata, when Funakoshi introduced it to Japan he changed the name to Shokyo (*Pine Shadow*), however in this instance the new name did not stick and it was changed back to Ji'in.

## The History of Jutte

**Jutte** according to Masatoshi Nakayama in his book, *Best Karate, Volume 7*, the name Jutte (*Ten Hands*) implies that one must have the strength of ten men. However an alternative theory on the meaning of the name is that it comes from the raised fists hand position from within the kata, which can be said to look similar to a type of Sai known as a Jutte that was used by the police force on Okinawa during the 19th century.

Jutte may have its roots in in China which is suggested by the starting position of the left hand covering the right fist, a posture often utilized in kung fu though it could have been invented on Okinawa and just influenced by what are now seen as its sister kata, Jion and Ji'in.

It was taught as a part of the Tomari-te syllabus and has elements of Gyaku-te grappling techniques. Its main function however is to teach the karateka to defend against weapons, especially the Bo Staff, while helping to develop pliable bones and muscles.

## The History of the Kanku Kata

**The Kanku** (*Looking into the Sky*) kata is a set of two forms (*Sho/minor and Dai/major*) that are practiced by many styles including those of Japanese, Okinawa and Korean karate. Kanku-Dai is the older of the two and was a particular favorite of Gichin Funakoshi, who used it extensively in demonstrations when he was in the process of introducing karate to Japan as he believed it held within it all the essential elements of karate.

Originally called Kushanku, Funakoshi renamed it in the 1930s as, according to his student, Masatoshi Nakayama, the new name reflected that the kata represented, amongst other things, modesty in karate.

Kushanku is thought to have been first introduced to Okinawa in the 18th century by a Chinese diplomat and kendo expert named Kung Hsiang Chun (pronounced Ku Shan Ku in the Okinawan dialect). He is thought to have passed it on to Tode Sakugawa of the Shuri-te school though an alternative theory is that it was Sakugawa who invented the kata and named it in honour of Kung Hsiang Chun.

The younger of the kata set, Kanku-Sho, was probably invented in the 19th century by Sensei Anko Itosu. While, as is the case with the history of most of the Shotokan kata, there is no primary written evidence for this, it contains moves that are typical of kata that were developed by Itosu, such as double punches and moves that are designed to control and or disarm someone with a stick.

# The History of Gankaku Kata

**Gankaku** (Crane on a Rock) is a very old kata that was originally named Chinto (Fighter/Battle to the East), until it was changed by Gichin Funakoshi. In this case the change was brought about not only to make it more acceptable to the Japanese, but to remove any connotations of war the name might have as a result of Master Funakoshi's pacifist beliefs. He also made modifications to the kata, changing its pattern to make it more linear like most of the other Shotokan kata.

Legend has it that it was named after a Chinese sailor called Chinto (or sometimes called Annan), who was ship wrecked off the coast of Okinawa. Chinto stole local crops until the King sent his bodyguard, karate master Sokon Matsumura, to defeat him. Matsumura, was an early exponent of the Shuri-te style and possibly the best martial artist of his day in Okinawa but when he fought against Chinto, the two were evenly matched and the ensuing fight was drawn. This prompted the karate master to invite the Chinaman to give him some lessons in his art and led to further development in what would become modern day karate.



# The History of the Gojushiho Kata

**Gojushiho** (*54 steps*) is a set of two kata (sho/minor and dai/major) that both have their origin in a single kata from the Shorin-ryu style which was called Useishi (*meaning 54*). In a strange quirk of martial arts history, the kata known as Gojushiho Sho was previously known as Gojushiho Dai and vice-versa, but they got reversed.

Legend has it that in the 1960s or the 1970s during the *All Japan Karate Championships*, a high ranking karateka of the JKA announced Gojushiho Dai then did the wrong kata. Nobody dared tell him so almost everybody started reversing the name; though Hirokazu Kanazawa for one kept doing the kata the original way around.

This story is unlikely to be true as it really makes little sense when looked at a little deeply. Whoever the mystery competitor was, at least some of his opponents would have been just as highly ranked and expected to be treated fairly in such a major competition, so would not have stood for such a blatant disregard for competition rules.

Sensei Funakoshi attempted to rename the Gojushiho kata 'Hotaku' (Woodpecker) but in this instance, the name did not stick. Both Gojushiho Sho and Dai are believed to have been created by Sokon 'Bushi' Matsumura and are thought to have been both his best, and final addition to kata that comes from his Tomari-te system.

## The History of Rohai Kata

**Rōhai** (鷺牌) meaning “*vision of a white heron*” or “*vision of a white crane*” is a family of kata practiced in some styles of karate. The kata originated from the Tomari-te school of Okinawan martial arts. It was called *Matsumora Rōhai*, after Kosaku Matsumora, who was presumably its inventor (not to be confused with Sokon Matsumura). Ankō Itosu later took this kata and developed three kata from it: *Rōhai shodan*, *Rōhai nidan*, and *Rōhai sandan*. In Shorin-ryū and Matsubayashi-ryū this kata introduces Gedan Shotei Ate (Lower/Downward Palm Heel Smash) and Ippon Ashi Dachi. (One Leg Stance) It contains a sequence of Tomoe Zuki (Circular Punch) exactly the same as the one in Bassai, although the ending of the sequence chains into Hangetsu Geri/Uke (Half Moon Kick/Block).

Shito-ryu teaches all three of the Itosu Rohai kata as well as *Matsumora Rohai*. Some styles such as Wadō-ryū employ only one of Itosu’s kata (*Rōhai shodan* or just *Rōhai*). While other styles such as Genseiryū and Shindō jinen-ryū only teach Matsumora Rohai.

The Shotokan version of Rōhai (renamed Meikyo (明鏡), literally “bright mirror” by Gichin Funakoshi) is very distinct from either the Matsumora or Itosu versions. It is believed that Funakoshi being a much older and earlier student of Itosu than Kenwa Mabuni may have been taught a different version of Rohai from Itosu known as *Gusukuma Rohai*. Sometime in the early 1990s Tetsuhiko Asai introduced two new kata of his own design: *Meikyo nidan* and *Meikyo sandan*.

In Tang Soo Do and Soo Bahk Do unlike most of its forms which can be traced back to Shotokan, their version of *Rohai* was based on the Matsumora version. Over the years practitioners have made numerous changes to the form including the addition of a board (or brick) breaking element, which can be performed using either a downward punch or palm strike.

## The History of Meikyo Kata

**Meikyo** is a kata based on one of Yasutsune Itosu's versions of Rohai (Vision of a Heron). Meikyo is most often translated as "Bright Mirror" or "Polished Mirror," perhaps alluding to the beginning of the kata, when the hands are held up in front of one's face as if looking into a mirror. The kata also contains several duplicate, or "mirroring techniques," for example: the opposing directions of the two sets of gedan-barai and oi-zuki; the pair of bo-uke & bo-dori combinations; and the double ura-zuki, which is an example of two identical techniques performed at the same time (in essence, mirroring each other). Meikyo is considered to be a highly advanced kata yet, for the most part, does not involve any effortful techniques. It has 33 counts and matches Wankan for having only one kiai (#32) instead of the normal two (although some karateka have been known to kiai on move #24 as well). Most of the kata's movements consist of beginner and intermediate level techniques. The advanced sankaku-tobi, or "triangle jump," is the kata's trademark and is said to impart spectacular powers to those who understand its true meaning. However, as jumps go in Shotokan, sankaku-tobi is arguably the easiest (not easy) jump to perform. The only other potentially difficult techniques include the odd angle of entry when executing the bo-uke, followed by the twisting of the hips for bo-dori-sonomama.

Being a more simple and humble kata, Meikyo is not a very popular tournament kata. The true goal of Meikyo lies in the correction of one's most basic techniques to the point of perfection, allowing for a smooth and effortless kata. Often, Meikyo is favored by seasoned veterans of karate since it is not overly strenuous yet it still possesses enough advanced techniques to challenge older and higher level karateka. Meikyo is a kata of self-reflection and introspection, sometimes even being interpreted as meaning "Mirror to the Soul." As karateka mature, they must continually reflect on their technique, searching inward for change and improvement. Looking outward or to others is for beginners. Having little flair, Meikyo is a kata for those who feel no need to prove themselves. It is not a kata to impress; it is about the self, not others.

# The History of Sochin Kata

**Sochin** (Tranquil Force) may have its origins in martial arts history in Dragon Style Kung Fu and then later come through the Naha-te school in Okinawa, where it was taught by Seisho Arakaki. According to legend, Higaonna Kanryo learned it from him then passed it down to Kenzo Mabuni, the founder of Shito-Ryu.

Mabuni is said to have spent some time instructing Gichin Funakoshi's son, Yoshitaka in the art of kata and as a result of these instructions, the Shotokan syllabus gained not only Sochin, but also Nijushiho and Unsu. In his book, 'Karate Kata Zenshu', Hirokazu Kanazawa claims it is a karate history fact that Sochin gets its name from the extensive use of the stance, Sochin Dachi. However this may not be the case as it has been suggested that the stance, originally called 'Fudo,' got renamed Sochin in reference to the kata.

The version of Sochin that is practised in Shotokan karate today, was developed by Yoshitaka in the late 1930s. It is likely that one of the changes he made to the older version of the kata includes the heavy usage of Sochin dachi, a stance he is known to have heavily favoured.

## Interesting facts about Sochin:

1. Sensei Gichin Funakoshi tried to rename it Hakko but the name did not take hold.
2. It is said that this kata was designed to be particularly good for developing the internal energy known as Ki (Chi in Chinese).
3. Other translations of the word Sochin that are used in different styles include; 'Grand prize', 'Grand battle', 'Strong calm' and 'Immovable'.

# The History of Unsu Kata

**Unsu** (*Hands in the Clouds*) is a high level kata and one of the oldest practiced within Shotokan karate. Its exact origins are unknown but it is believed to be of Chinese origins, and of the Dragon Style of Kung Fu. According to Masatoshi Nakayama, anyone who tries to master Unsu before first mastering the Heian kata, Kanku-Dai, Empi and Jion will look like “a scarecrow trying to dance”.

Symbolism is a recurring theme in the history of the martial arts and it has been suggested that the moves in Unsu represent a thunder storm. The first move could be said to be representing a squall line on the horizon, the way the feet draws circles on the ground along with the finger strikes in subsequent moves representing dust devils gathering as lightning strikes the ground.

Following this, the rapid movements in all directions can be seen as symbolic of winds blowing in all directions, and generally throughout the kata the slow movements can be seen as a calm in the storm before it blows up again ferociously. Finally, towards the end of Unsu, the jumping, spinning back kick can be seen as a tornado.

The son of sensei Gichin Funakoshi, Yoshitaka, was sent to learn kata from Okinawan master Kenzo Mabuni and as a result of these teachings, the curriculum of Shotokan is believed to have included Sochin, Nijushiho and Unsu.

These thirty (30) pages were designed and prepared by  
Jimmy Bowden Sensei  
final edit: July 1, 2020

