



THOMAS SHIGERU MIYASHIRO, TARU AZAMA, KAMESUKE HIGASHIONNA AND SEISHIN UEHARA; FOUNDING MEMBERS OF THE HAWAII KARATE SEINENKAI. KALIHI, 1933. PHOTO DONATED BY THE FAMILIES OF SEISHIN UEHARA AND THOMAS SHIGERU MIYASHIRO.

OKINAWAN KARATE IN HAWAII A CULTURAL LEGACY

THE PRE-WAR YEARS

Karate's roots in the Ryukyu Kingdom can be traced to the end of the 12th century, when a Chinese mission known as the "Thirty-Six Families" was established in Kume Village in Naha. This community served as a center for the dissemination of Chinese culture and education, including the martial arts. Over the centuries, many Chinese envoys visited the Ryukyu Kingdom, accompanied

by large entourages. Ryukyuan exchange students also travelled to China to receive an education. There were even cases where Chinese martial arts experts became shipwrecked in the Ryukyus. Karate developed through the combination of the native Ryukyuan tradition called Di in Hogen (or Te in Japanese) and the Chinese art of Chuan Fa (or Kempo). This combined art was called Tudi in Hogen (or Tote), appropriately meaning "China Hand". Karate was an alternative pronunciation of "Tote". Since the Ryukyu Kingdom also served as a crossroads for trade in Asia, Karate was also influenced by the fighting traditions of other countries.

Karate traditions started to be known by the names of the areas in which they were practiced. The three most well known of these were Shuri-Te, Naha-te and Tomari-Te. In a general sense, the Shuri-Te and Tomari-Te systems became known as Shorin-Ryu, while the Naha-Te system became known as Goju-Ryu. The Chinese pronunciation of "Shorin" is "Shaolin", again showing the Chinese roots of the art. Certain kata (forms) practiced in Shorin-Ryu are actually the names of the Chinese instructors who taught them. Kusanku and Chinto are examples of such kata.

While there were Ryukyuan military forces at certain points of history, Karate developed as a civilian art of self defense. Various bans of weapons, issued by the Ryukyuan Kings, Satsuma rulers, and eventually the Japanese government, created an environment necessitating empty handed forms of self defense (or the use of everyday items as impromptu weapons). Generally, Karate was a form of self defense used by the noble and administrative classes. Top

Karate masters, such as Sokon Matsumura and Anko Itosu, served as bodyguards to the King. It was for this reason that Karate blossomed in the area around Shuri Castle. Karate was part of the training a cultured gentleman was expected to receive (along with literature, calligraphy, art and music). Such a cultured gentleman was known as a "bushi".

In the 1920's, when the art spread to mainland Japan, the kanji used to represent the art was changed to "Empty Hand", which could also be pronounced "Karate". This was a play on words, and reflected the fact that students in mainland Japan were not too eager to practice a Chinese or Okinawan sounding art. "Empty Hand" fit nicely with the Zen concepts prevalent in budo (martial arts) of the day — it reminded students of the concept of emptiness, particularly "mu shin" (empty mind). However, it would have been more accurate to use the China Hand kanji or even to call the art Okinawa-Te (Okinawa Hand). Indeed, some researchers say that the art was properly called Uchinadi (Hogen for Okinawan Hand).

Despite the change of name, it is important to remember that Karate is an Okinawan art and cultural treasure. When I give lectures about the history of Karate, this often comes as

a surprise, even to some older Okinawans. Because Karate became very popular in Japan, many people assume that it originated there. Karate originated in the Ryukyu Kingdom with a strong Chinese influence. Calling Karate Japanese is a bit like calling Hula American. It is true that Hawaii is a part of the United States, but Hula was developed during the time of the Hawaiian Kingdom. Similarly, although Okinawa became a prefecture of Japan in 1879, Karate originated during the time of the Ryukyu Kingdom.

Karate came to Hawaii in 1900 with the very first Okinawan immigrants such as Chinzen Kinjo, Seio Morikone, Seiichi Urasaki, Chonin Sanra Arakaki, and many others. Small karate groups were soon formed in Okinawan camps and communities from Hilo to Waipahu to Kekaha. Taught privately in homes and backyards, karate was considered to be a "secret" art of Okinawan self-defense.

In the 1920's, Karate experts started to visit Hawaii. These included Kentsu Yabu (1927), Choki Motobu (1932), Mizuho Mutsu and Kamesuke Higashionna (1933), and Chojun Miyagi (1934). Admiral Kenwa Kanna, a strong supporter of the art, also visited Hawaii in 1927 and 1930. Seishin Uehara and Thomas Shigeru Miyashiro were among the first local Okinawans to teach publicly in Hawaii.

After World War II, soldiers and government workers who learned Karate while stationed in the orient, returned to Hawaii and started to teach the art. Hawaii students also traveled overseas for training. Some instructors, like Goju-Ryu expert Tomu Arakawa, emphasized Karate's Okinawan roots and cultural importance. It is extremely important that Karate's Okinawan roots be remembered. Dr. Mitsugu Sakihara once stressed this to me. "If you are going

to seriously study Karate," he said, "you must also study the history and culture of the people who created it." Karate techniques are used as a last resort, for self-defense only. Karate teaches courtesy, self-discipline, physical

and mental conditioning, and a peaceful way of life. Fights are something to avoid. It is said that a Karateman fears his own hand and that the hand of a Karateman is a treasure in his pocket.

(Article ontributed by Charles C. Goodin, Hawaii Karate Museum)



THOMAS SHIGERU MIYASHIRO (RIGHT) LEARNS KARATE FROM HIS FIRST SENSEI, MR. KUNIYOSHI. KAPIOLANI PARK. CIRCA 1930. PHOTO DONATED BY THE FAMILY OF THOMAS SHIGERU MIYASHIRO.



GUSUKUMA SHINPAN LEADS STUDENTS IN KARATE PRACTICE ON THE GROUNDS OF SHURI CASTLE. 1937.



KITATSU KAWAMAE AND KOTO SHIROMA LEAD CHILDREN IN KARATE PRACTICE IN THE BACKYARD OF DR. UEHARA. WAIPAHU, 1927. THIS WAS DURING THE VISIT OF KENTSU YABU. PHOTO DONATED BY THE FAMILY OF KOTO SHIROMA.

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THIS KANJI OF "TUDI" WAS WRITTEN BY MRS. JUNE ARAKAWA. HER HUSBAND, TOMU ARAKAWA WAS A LEADING INSTRUCTOR OF THE GOJU-RYU FORM OF KARATE IN HAWAII.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS PUBLISHED IN THIS ARTICLE ARE FROM OUR EXHIBIT AT THE HAWAII OKINAWA CENTER GALLERY, COURTESY OF THE HAWAII KARATE MUSEUM (HKM). THE EXHIBIT OPENED ON FEBRUARY 23RD AND WILL FEATURE DIFFERENT PHOTOS PERIODICALLY. PLEASE COME AND ENJOY THE EXHIBIT. IT IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC - FREE OF CHARGE. SENSEI GOODIN WRITES OF OUR OPENING OF THE EXHIBIT, "THE OPENING WAS ESPECIALLY MEANINGFUL TO ME BECAUSE OF THE ATTENDANCE OF MANY OF THE FAMILY MEMBERS OF THE EARLIEST KARATE INSTRUCTORS AND STUDENTS HERE IN HAWAII. IF NOT FOR THEIR SUPPORT, THE EXHIBIT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE."

THE HAWAII KARATE MUSEUM WILL BE FEATURED IN A LARGER EXHIBIT AT THE COMMUNITY GALLERY OF THE JAPANESE CULTURAL CENTER OF HAWAII BEGINNING ON JUNE 25TH. HKM IS ALWAYS INTERESTED IN OLD KARATE PHOTOS, BOOKS AND ARTICLES OF WEAPONS. PLEASE CONTACT:

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