

YASUTSUNE (ANKO) ITOSU

A LOOK INTO HIS INFLUENCES AND THOSE HE INFLUENCED



BY: MOHAMED FAHMY, JR.

FOR: SHODAN PROMOTION

OCTOBER 13, 2001

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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