

SHORIN-RYU STYLES:
KOBAYASHI, MATSUMURA SEITO, & SHOBAYASHI



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History and Lineage of Kobayashi Shorin - Ryu



Master Choshin Chibana, born on June 5th, 1885, was the founder of the Kobayashi-Ryu style of karate. He wanted to train under Master Yatsutsune “Anko” Itosu, but his application was rejected. However he was persistent and applied two more times until finally Itosu accepted him. He started training in the year 1899, under Master Itosu but had to keep the training a secret even from his family until 1903.

“Anko” Itosu was best known for the fact that he wrote the 10 precepts, or “Tode Jukun,” of karate. He got his nickname of “Anko,” meaning horse, from walking in the horse stance which he excelled at. His sensei and greatest influence was Master Sokon “Bushi” Matsumura. Itosu chose to train a select number of students in secret all the way up until 1903 when he finally began to publicly teach karate in schools. Itosu is credited for developing and introducing Pinan katas I-V



to the Okinawan public school system in 1907. He also influenced Chibana by instructing him in the true way of Okinawan Martial Arts. For example, he taught Chibana that a true martial artist should not make his living through teaching the Martial Arts. The reason he said this was so as

not to contaminate it through the influence of making money.

In 1918, Chibana and several other karatekas formed a group for karate study known as the Karate (Tode) Kenkyukai in Shuri City. The interesting thing was that the many karatekas in this group did not study the same methods or styles of karate. Regardless to whether or not they practiced the shuri, naha, or tomari karate styles they still trained together and also exchanged information with one another. Each time this group met, one senior member would teach the group their style, so the group members were exposed to many different styles. The group stopped meeting in 1929. That is also the same year Sensei Chibana opened his first training hall and began his career in teaching Shuri-te karate.

In Chibana's later years he was awarded the Fourth Order of Merit from the Emperor of Japan for his lifelong contributions to the martial arts. He was one of the last pre-World War masters of karate. Choshin Chibana passed away due to complications from throat cancer on February 26th, 1969 at the age of 83. He was a sensei and practitioner of the martial arts until he took his final breath.

Kobayashi Kata and Techniques

In order to learn Kobayashi kata, one must first learn the punches, blocks, kicks, and stances that make up their style. In each area they learn the six basic foundational techniques for kata and sparring. The basic blocks include age-uke (rising block), soto-uke (outside block), uchi-uke (inside block), shuto-uke (knife-hand block), gedan-barai (down block) and also juji-uke (cross block). For punches and strikes they use oi-zuki (step-in punch), kizami-zuki (jab), gyaku-zuki (reverse punch), nukite (spear-hand thrust), kagi-suki (hook punch) and uraken (back fist). The six basic kicks are mae-geri (front kick), yoko-geri (side kick), keage (snap kick), kekomi (thrust kick), mawashi-geri (roundhouse kick) and lastly ushiro-geri (back kick). Lastly, the stances include heisoku-dachi (attention stance), hachiji-dachi (ready position), kiba-dachi (horse stance), zenkutsu-dachi (front stance), kokutsu-dachi (back stance), and nekoashi-dachi (cat stance).

Originally, the ranking system of Kobayashi Shorin-Ryu only used four obi colors. This was because karate students only owned one belt their entire life, and they would dye it when they achieved a new rank. The colors were ordered so it was easiest to dye the belt progressively darker each time; they would begin with a white belt, and dye it green, then brown and lastly black. Now the official ranking system has five color belts: White, Blue, Green, Brown, and Black. More recently, modern dojos have started adding a larger variety of markers and stripes on belts to show achievements between changing ranks. A white belt begins to learn the basic skills of the style. A blue belt begins to learn kata naihanchi ichidan, and may begin to learn a bo

kata. The techniques they will learn are renzo kyuken, gyakuzoku shodan, gyakuzoku nidan, and the five stances. A green belt is responsible to know and be able to demonstrate all the same information as a blue belt, and more. The kata they learn are naihanchi nidan, naihanchi sandan, pinan shodan, pinan nidan, pinan sandan, pinan yondan, pinan godan. They will also begin learning bo and nunchaku weapons kata, as well as bunkai. An Ikkyu, or brown belt, also learns the kata passai dai, passai sho, kusanku sho, and chinto. They may choose a weapon of their choice to learn weapons kata, and will begin jyu-ippun kumite (semi-free sparring). A Shodan, or first degree black belt, will know the kata gojushiho and kusanku dai, as well as sai and tonfa weapons kata, and jiyu kumite (free sparring). Some credit Choshin Chibana with passing down the legacy of the kusanku dai and gojushiho katas.

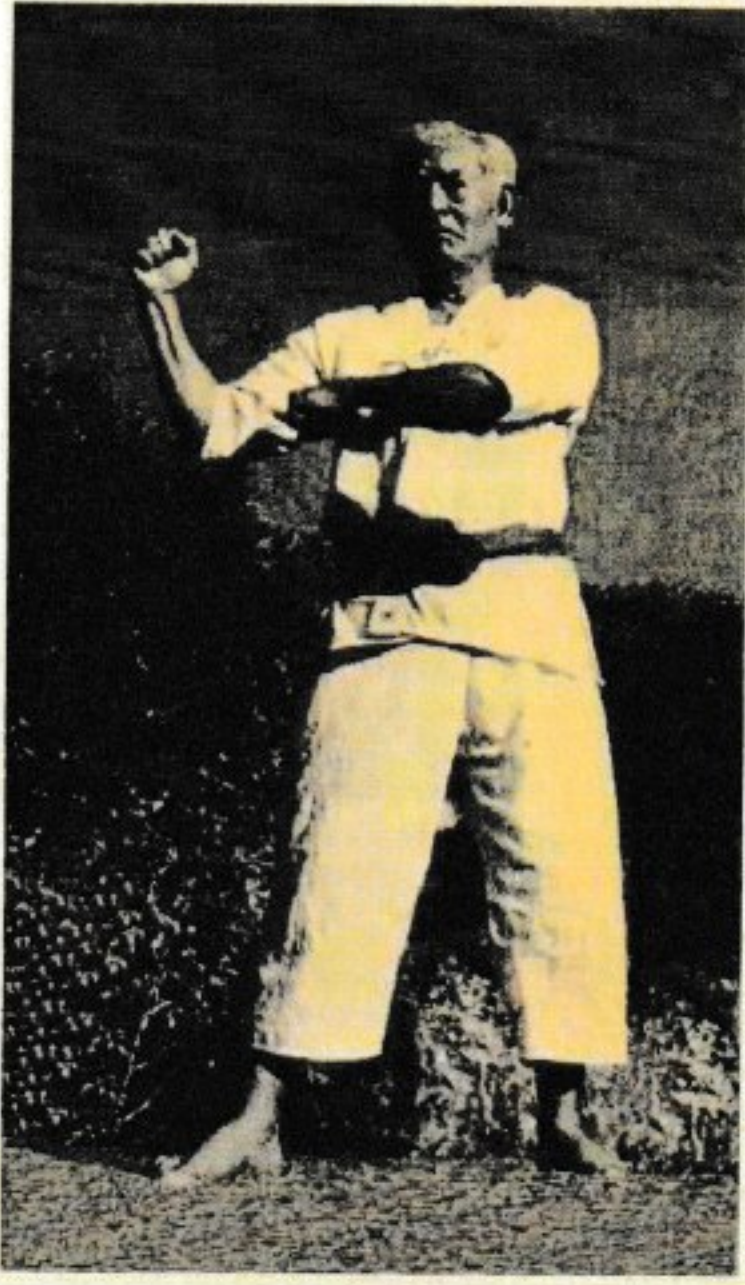
Like the other Shorin-ryu styles of karate, Kobayashi-ryu uses the Okinawan art of kobudo. This is the use of agricultural and fishing tools as weapons. The nunchaku was adapted from a thresh, or bark peeler, and allowed its wielder to strike with deadly force and block blows. The tonfa was the handle of a millstone grinder used for defense for hooking your opponent's weapon and could be flipped around to strike. The eku was an oar used by fisherman which could be used like a bo; the blade of the oar was often used to throw sand into the opponent's eyes. The kama is still used today to cut crops such as sugar cane.

Kumite is the application of hand to hand combat in a fight situation. The word kumite means "crossing of hands," or "deciding hand." The practice of kumite helps karatekas become prepared for real-life fight situations because it improves reaction time. In the Kobayashi-Ryu style, there are different levels of kumite. Brown belts practice jyu ippun kumite (semi-free sparring), and only once students obtain their black belt do they begin to practice jyu kumite

(free sparring). In free sparring, there are not pre-arranged attacks. Sparring can be practiced in many different ways. Sometimes the goal is to try out techniques against different opponents; if one opponent is taller the other will need to adapt their techniques to compensate for the height difference. This can be done for points, or in a no-point, less pressured environment. In Kobayshi another form of kumite practiced is Iri Kumi (Okinawan knockdown kumite). This is a form of free sparring which allows heavier contact, even to the head. Students wear full protective gear to avoid injury, and are cautioned to “hit only as hard as they are willing to be hit back.”

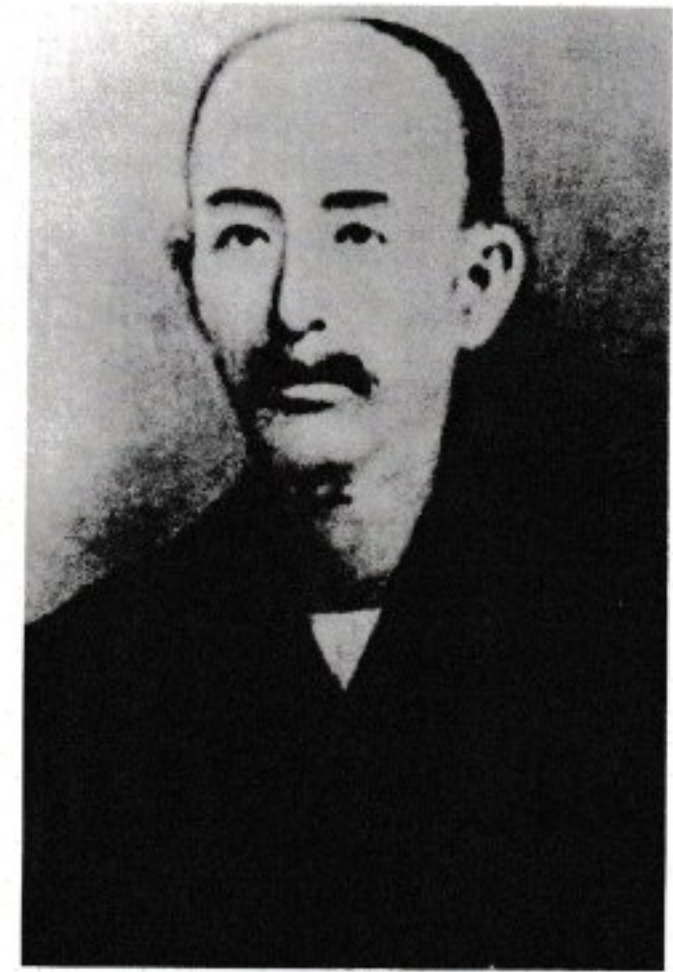
This style of karate uses fast techniques meant to help the karateka strategically evade hits while attacking the sensitive spots of the opponent’s body with multiple hits.

History and Lineage of Matsumura-Seito



Hohan Soken was the founder of the martial arts style of Matsumura-Seito. He was born on May 25th in the year 1889. He was born shortly after the Samurai class had been abolished, so he had to work in the rice fields with the commoners.

Hohan Soken began his martial arts training in 1903, under his uncle Nabe Matsumura, who had noticed his potential from his hard work in the rice fields. Nabe Matsumura was known for



being a very private man who shunned the spotlight. Because of this, not much is known about him. Nabe did not have any sons of his own, so he chose to train his nephew instead. He taught Soken the Hakutsuru (crane) style and Soken Kobujutsu (use of weapons).



Both Hohansoken and Nabe Matsumura were descendants of Sokon "Bushi" Matsumura, the famed martial artist. He trained under Satunuku "Tode" Sakugawa. He did not have any sons of his own so he chose to train his grandson, Nabe Matsumura. Although Sokon "Bushi" Matsumura never directly trained Hohansoken, Nabe Matsumura passed on his knowledge and skills to Hohansoken.

Soken. Bushi Matsumura is credited with the development of the kata system, and known for his practice of Shuri-te. There is a legend that he attained the nickname “Bushi,” which means Samurai or warrior, by fighting a bull that was received by the Emperor of Japan. Soken entered the bull-fighting arena and they released the bull. The moment the bull saw Soken it became terrified and fled without confrontation. The Emperor was impressed enough to give Soken the nickname of Samurai. Soken Matsumura also served as a bodyguard to the last three Kings of the Ryukyu kingdom Sho Ko, Sho Iku, and Sho Tai.



“Tode” Sakugawa was one of the first teachers of Okinawan karate. He learned Chinese Kenpo from Kusanku, a member of a Chinese envoy who stayed in Okinawa for some time. Sakugawa combined the Chinese Kenpo with Okinawan Te to create the style that would become known as Shuri-te, and taught it to many students including “Bushi” Matsumura.

The martial arts style of Matsumura-Seito was given its name by Hohan Soken in honor of his family and the men who had trained and influenced him. Translated, Seito means “the true style of” and Matsumura means “pine village.” On November 30th, 1982 he passed away, leaving behind the legacy of Matsumura-Seito to his student Fusei Kise.

Matsumura-Seito Kata and Techniques

Matsumura-Seito uses two ranking systems which both came from other sources: the Kyu-Dan system and the Shogo system. The Kyu-Dan system was originally made for a competitive Japanese board game, but was adopted for use in judo in the 1880s and spread to the other forms of martial arts soon after. Hohan Soken learned karate before the Kyu-Dan system was adapted, and instead students were referred to only as mudansha (those without rank) and yudansha (those who have attained rank). In this system, students wore a white belt until they were invited to wear a black belt by their sensei. The Kyu-Dan system became popular while Hohan Soken was living in Argentina, so when he returned to Okinawa he was slow to approve the new system.

New students begin as a 10th kyu and wear a white obi. As they progress to 9th kyu they add a green stripe, and so on until 7th kyu. At 6th kyu they receive a green obi, and a brown stripe is added when they attain 5th kyu, and another stripe for 4th kyu. 3rd kyu students wear a plain brown obi, and a black stripe is added for 2nd kyu, and another for 1st. When they reach the dan ranks, on Okinawa, a plain black obi is typically worn for 1st - 6th dan. In other countries, those who attain 1st dan wear a black obi with a red stripe; 2nd dan has two red stripes, and 3rd dan has three. 4th dan is the first master's rank, and the obi worn has a red and a white stripe, with the white stripe on top. 5th dan is the practiced master's rank, and the obi is reversed, with the red stripe on top and the white underneath. 6th dan is the experienced master's

rank, and the 7th and 8th dans are senior master's ranks, for all of these the obi has red and white blocks. 9th and 10th dan are the expert master's ranks, and wear a red obi.

The Shogo system is based off of the Japanese government and Imperial family rankings. It only applies to upper-level karate practitioners. There are four levels. The first is Shihan (authorized teacher), and this title recognizes technical excellence and would be awarded sometime after achieving 4th dan. The remaining three levels recognize character, experience, and teaching ability more than technique, because it is assumed at these levels that technique is already excellent. The title of Renshi (accomplished teacher and model), is received sometime before 7th dan. Kyoshi (expert teacher and model) is some point prior to 8th dan, and Hanshi (teacher of teachers) is awarded sometime after 8th dan. The Grand Master of Matsumura-Seito is referred to as Hanshi-Sei (highest master).

The kata taught by Hohan Soken are Pinan Shodan, Pinan Nidan, Naihanchi Shodan, Naihanchi Nidan, Passai Sho and Dai, Chinto, Gojushiho, Kusanku, Rohai Ichi-Ni-San, and the Hakutsuru. For weapons, he taught bo, sai, tuifa, kama, nunchaku, kusarigama, and suruchin. One of the weapons forms that he taught was the bo kata tsukenbo which he learned from Komesu Ushi. When using the kama, he prefers the use of a handmade rope instead of an iron chain because then the karateka will not damage themselves.

One thing that sets Matsumura-Seito apart from the other Shorin-Ryu styles is their technique that imitates the elegant movement of the crane. This style came from China, where "Bushu" Matsumura learned it and then brought its influence to Okinawa. The Hakutsuru (White Crane) technique uses upright stances, and whip-like speed. Unlike other styles, it favors upright stances instead of lower power stances because this allows fighters more free movement and

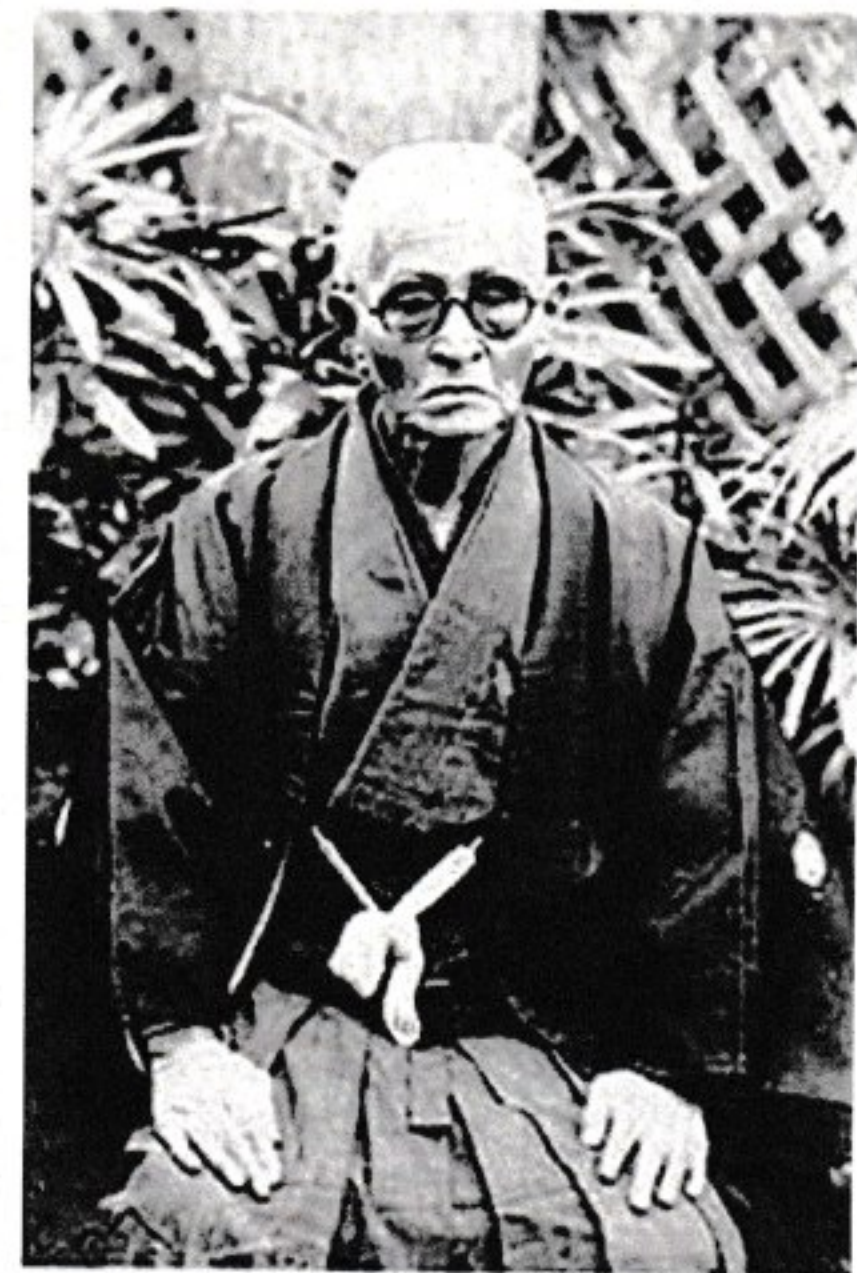
increased speed. It also favors one-legged stances because this allows them to shift away from attacks and react more quickly with a kick if needed. This technique can be seen in their kata, especially in the one-legged stances in chinto, the neck and beak-like movements in gojushiho, and the wing-like movements in hakutsuru. Matsumura-Seito is an interesting and ancient style of karate.

History and Lineage of Shobayashi Shorin - Ryu



Shobayashi-Ryu, meaning “young forest style,” is a martial arts style that was founded by Eizo Shimabukuro. He was born on April 19th, 1925 and he is still alive to this day. The reason he started taking karate was because as a child he was bullied and teased at school.

In 1937, at the age of twelve, Shimabukuro started his martial arts training under Chotoku Kyan. Some people give credit to Kyan for founding the Shobayashi-Ryu style of karate, but most argue that Shimabukuro was technically the founder and acknowledge that Kyan greatly influenced the style. He was best known for his incredibly powerful kicks and jumping techniques as well as his mastery of both Shuri-Te and Tomari-Te. Kyan trained many great karate masters such as grandmaster Shoshin Nagamine (the founder of



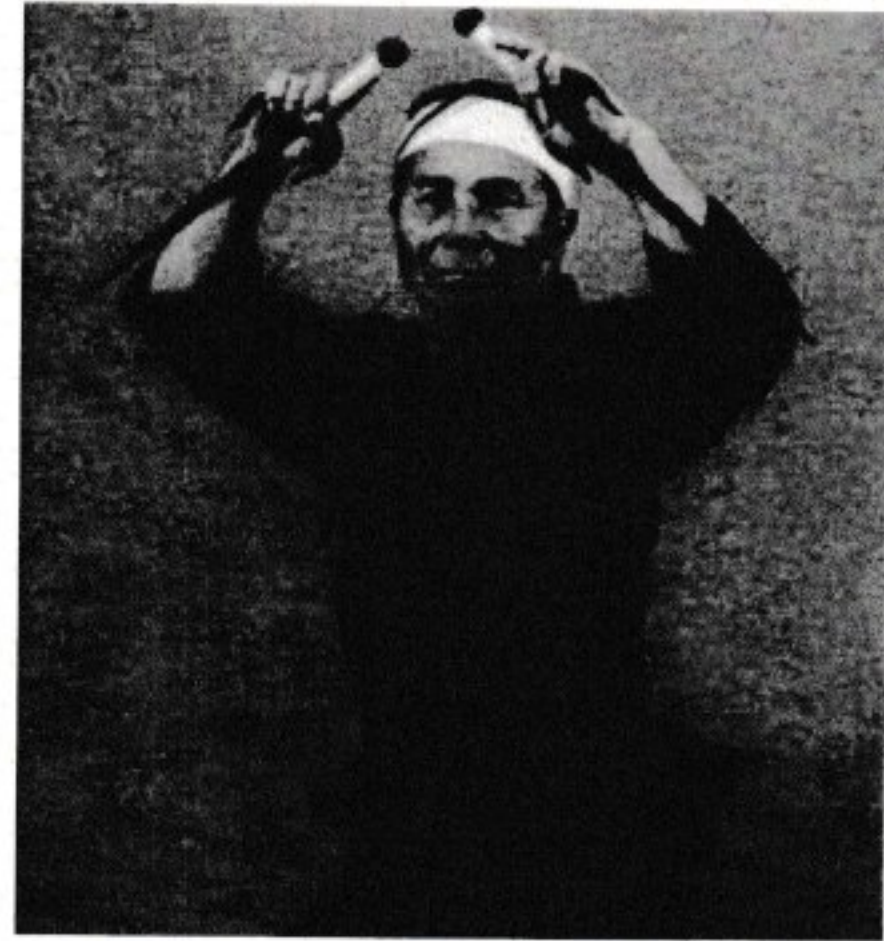
Matsubayashi-ryu), Tatsuo Shimabukuro (Isshin-ryu), Joen Nakazato (Shorinji-ryu), and Zenro Shimabukuro (Chubu Shorin-ryu? Shorin-ryu Seibukan?)



After a year of training under Chotoku Kyan had gone by, Shimabukuro wanted to expand his mastery of karate. Therefore in 1938, at the age of thirteen, he began training under an additional sensei, Chojun Miyagi. Miyagi influenced him by teaching him the Goju-Ryu style of karate which blended Okinawan and Chinese influences. He also taught Shimabukuro about proper

breathing, strength training, and the correct karate spirit.

Later on in his life Shimabukuro also had the privilege of training under Shinken Taira. Taira was best known as an expert in all traditional weapons of Okinawa. For instance, he created a kata that uses metal horse stirrups known as Maezato no Tekko. Taira influenced Shimabukuro by instructing him in Kobujutsu, the art of ancient weaponry.



In 1943, Shimabukuro traveled to Osaka, where he met Choki Motobu and trained under him. Motobu was unusually large for an Okinawan man, and was known for his mastery of the keikoken (forefinger knuckle punch). He used makiwara a lot, and would even have his students do marathon makiwara training. From Motobu, Shimabukuro improved his punching ability.

Many different sensei helped mold and shape Eizo Shimabukuro into the karate grandmaster he is today. Eizo wrote about many great karate grandmasters in his book “Okinawan Karate Old Grandmaster Stories.” He is famous for being, at age thirty-four, the youngest person ever to achieve his 10th dan.

Shobayashi-Ryu Kata and Techniques

Shobayashi-Ryu kata are made up of a foundation of blocks, strikes and stances. The eight blocks traditionally used in this style are jodan uke (upper block), chudan uke (middle forearm block), gedan uke (low block), uchi uke (block using the back of the hand), mawashi uke (circular block), juji uke (cross block), nagashi uke (rising push block), and lastly, shuto uke (knife hand block). They learn nine different strikes: jodan zuki (head punch), chudan zuki (chest punch), nukite zuki (spear hand), age zuki (uppercut), ura uchi (back hand strike), shuto uchi (knife hand strike), tate zuki (vertical punch), haito uchi (ridge hand strike), and empi uchi (elbow strike). Students training in the Shobayashi style learn five kicks: gen geri (groin kick), mae geri (front kick), yoko geri (side kick), mawashi geri (roundhouse kick), ushiro geri (back kick). Lastly, they know five basic stances: heiko dachi, where feet are placed shoulder width apart, kiba dachi or naihanchi (horse stance), where feet are kept parallel and placed slightly wider than a shoulder width, zenkutsu dachi (front stance), neko ashi dachi (cat stance), and kosa dachi (cross legged stance).

The ranking system of Shobayashi-Ryu has only four ranks. Those ranks are identified by white, green, brown and black belts. The sensei awards stripes to children for specific achievements made within each rank. White belts focus on learning the basic techniques they will need to learn kata. When students reach the rank of green belt, they are permitted to learn kata. The six kata they learn as a green belt are seisan (thirteen), naihanchin shodan (hold your ground one), naihanchin nidan (hold your ground two), naihanchin sandan (hold your ground three), ananku (light from south), and wanshu (name of a Chinese military envoy). The next

rank, brown belt, students learn seven more kata which are: pinan shodan (peaceful mind one), pinan nidan (peaceful mind two), pinan sandan (peaceful mind three), pinan yandan (peaceful mind four), pinan godan (peaceful mind five), gojushiho (fifty-four steps), and chinto (name of a shipwrecked sailor). Once a student has achieved the rank of black belt they are permitted to learn more advanced katas such as passai sho (to breach a fortress, lesser), passai dai (to breach a fortress, greater), kusanku sho (name of a Chinese envoy), kusanku dai (name of a Chinese envoy), seiunchin (grab and pull into battle), and sanchin (three battles: mind, body, spirit).

Eizo Shimabukuro chose to teach kata that he himself had learned from various senseis. From Chotoku Kyan he brought seisan, ananku, wanshu, gojushiho and chinto to the Shobayashi style. However, he decided to drop some other kata he learned from Kyan which was chatan yara no kusanku and oyadamari no passai. He replaced those with kusanku sho and dai, and passai sho and dai katas which were part of Yasutsune Itosu's lineage that he learned from studying under Choshin Chibana. He also learned the five Pinan kata and the three Naihanchi kata from Chibana's school. Because Chibana was too old to teach him, he was technically instructed by his senior student Nakazato. He also studied the naihanchi katas with Choki Motobu, from whom he learned other kata like koryu passai which he did not include in Shobayashi style. From Chojun Miyagi he learned the Goju-Ryu strength-training kata sanchin and seiunchin.

There are seven crucial aspects of Shobayashi-ryu kata. These seven aspects are pattern, breathing, combination and timing, form and meaning, tight-no-tight, eyes (which has two meanings: eye-to-eye and look first), and lastly Kiai. At kata competitions and rank promotions on Okinawa, Shimabukuro explains that there used to be seven judges, each responsible for judging one aspect of kata. When performing kata every detail is important, including the order

of the movement. First the student must look, then they move their feet, and finally they move their hands. Additionally, in katas like sanchin which come from other forms like Goju-Ryu with their own stylistic techniques, they use sweeping steps, slow controlled movement and breath control.

In addition to the nineteen empty-handed kata taught in Shobayashi, students also learn six traditional Kobudo (weapons) kata. These are toyei no sai, towata no sai, tokumini no kun, sakagawa no kun, pinan no nunchaku, and toyei no kama. Shimabukuro himself created the toyei katas. The weapons used in their dojos include bo, sai, nunchaku, kama, tunfa, tekko, techu, nunti-bo, manji-sai, suruchin, eku, tinbei and rochin, nitan, and jo. Shobayashi-ryu is influenced by many different weapons styles such as Shinken Taira's Ryukyu Kobudo, Yamanni-ryu, and the Matayoshi style.

Conclusion

Researching and writing this paper has shown that no single style of Shorin-Ryu martial arts is exactly the same as the other styles, but that being said, there are similarities. These Shorin-Ryu “sister styles” are Kobayashi, Shobayashi, and Matsumura-Seito. The grandmasters that shaped each style often had the same senseis and same influences and ambitions at some point during their training. All three styles share certain katas such as gojushiho, and they all also use some forms of the pinan and naihanchi katas. However, their methods of teaching are different in all three styles, and their techniques vary. Even when they use stances of the same name the execution is slightly different; for instance some are more upright and others are lower stances. A karateka who has learned one style would need to adapt and change if they were to try a new style.

There are many benefits to learning and studying multiple styles of karate. Knowing a wide variety of disciplines helps in daily life. It also helps to understand one’s initial style because they have something to compare and contrast the movements to, and it also helps them to define their style in terms of all the forms of Shorin-Ryu karate. There are also benefits specific to each style such as building up muscle endurance or strengthening the knuckles through makiwara training. A style that favors quick movement over brute strength could help a karate student to increase their speed, and then they could take what they learned from that style back with them and apply it to their initial style.

Karate students would benefit from learning about the many styles of karate because it will give them ideas and hopefully inspire them to study the history of karate and look to the

example of the karate masters who made the styles what they are today. In order to truly know the style of karate that one studies, it helps to examine all of the related styles.

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