

Dragon Times

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The International Voice of Traditional Karate



Katori Shinto Ryu - The First Interview

RISUKE OTAKE

The Prize Ring

by Harry Cook BA

An ongoing theme in the work of master historian Harry Cook has been his suggestion that all martial arts are the same when one examines them in their purest form. When the trappings of the unarmed warrior are stripped away, the uniform, signs of rank, cultural adornment, and he is reduced to an individual bent on self-preservation, timeless fundamental principles apply.

By the same token, the further we move away from these core principles of fighting, the less effective we become as warriors. Therefore, ironically, competitions designed to test the fighting ability of students, (and in their minds at least the value of the system they study), often prevent real fighting skills being acquired because the rules and regulations that must sensibly be adopted to prevent injuries, create a situation in which real conflict cannot be experienced.

The Prize Ring is a review of pugilistic arts down the ages from the time of the Greeks until the last days of the nineteenth century. It should serve as a reminder that we must stay in contact with history (and therefore reality) if the unarmed arts are to remain effective and thereby survive intact. (Please see page 4.)

Early Karate in Hawaii

Master Mizuho Mutsu

Charles Goodin continues his excellent series on karate in pre-war Hawaii with a look at one of karate's most enigmatic figures, Mizuho Mutsu of the Tokyo University karate club. (Please see page 8.)

As a result of the large numbers of Japanese and Okinawan residents of the islands, many famous masters were invited there to teach making Hawaii one of the first overseas outposts of karate. Chojun Miyagi's year long tour in 1934 organized by the *Yoen Jihosha* newspaper and the Okinawa Kenjinkai, (see *Dragon Times* #17) was a great success, as was that of the redoubtable Shorin Ryu master Juhatsu Kiyoda. An earlier visit by Choki Motobu however, was somewhat less notable as he was not permitted entry by the immigration authorities and subsequently detained by them prior to repatriation.

Mutsu was a pioneer in many senses, (his trip to the islands caused a sensation) and certainly forward looking. He was involved in experiments with protective equipment for sparring and also helped the University Karate Club publish one of the first ever books on karate kata, a fact highlighted in the new Shotokan history book by Harry Cook.



Risuke Otake sensei, headmaster of the Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu. The latest in a line of master swordsman from Japan's oldest extant martial tradition founded in the 15th century by Chobisai Izaasa Ikenao.

Shotokan Karate

Thoughts from Japan

The recent JKA Shotokan seminar by Waseda University's Dr. David Hooper at the Japanese Garden in Los Angeles proved conclusively that his value as a karate instructor is even greater than that as a columnist for this publication, and commentator on the modern karate scene in general. (Please see page 12.)

The seminar attendees from as far afield as Maine were treated to three hours of textbook Shotokan karate in the beautiful Suiho En dojo, performed with the sort of speed, polish, and precision the JKA in Tokyo is noted for, as well as much new instructional and training material that had them running for their notebooks the moment the session ended.

Despite the JKA's well-deserved reputation in the field of competition, David suggests in his column that competition is of little importance in the overall scheme of things. Rather he suggests, karate is something that needs to be perfected over a lifetime, not engaged in as a sport until the age of twenty-five then abandoned.

It is interesting that a senior member of the organization that once epitomized Olympic karate should speak so emphatically on this issue. The study of karate, he suggests, (and the JKA clearly believes) is profound while the pursuit of competition (Olympic?) honors, profoundly trivial.

One Man's Mark

The Story of Taira Shinken by Doug Dalton

Taira Shinken, kobudo weapons expert extraordinary, casts a long shadow down several generations of karate exponents and his influence is still to be felt in thousands of dojo around the world. Most of the Okinawan kobudo methods now taught come from him directly, through his Okinawan students led by Akamine sensei, or by way of his premier Japanese student Inoue sensei and those he trained.

Yet little is known of the man himself beyond his name and achievements, a situation remedied by this lavishly illustrated, painstakingly documented, in-depth look at the man, his method, and his legacy. (Please see page 15.)

Boxing with the Feet

The first part of this article by Harry Cook in our last issue brought a large volume of calls and e-mails, (all positive) asking for more information on this admixture of native French kicking methods and English boxing techniques. Here is the second half complete with another collection of quite delightful period images and observations by the author on the subject of *Boxe Française Savate*. (Please see page 24.)

Channan Kata

by Charles Joseph Swift

We have all been told that Ankoh Itosu of Shorin Ryu "invented" the Pinan kata as part of his plan to have karate introduced into the educational system in Okinawa. The kata were taken to mainland Japan by karate pioneers like Gichin Funakoshi, and from there spread around the world by means of Funakoshi's students in the Shotokan, Shotokai, and Wado Ryu movements. But did he really invent them; base them on existing kata; or is the modern Pinan really the ancient Channan with a face-lift! In this thought provoking and well-researched article author Charles Joseph Swift shares with us what he has gleaned from his translations of contemporary Japanese literature on the subject. (Please see page 27.)

Exploring Goju Ryu Karate's Past

The Myths and Facts Surrounding Higaonna Kanryo by Mario McKenna

The life of Kanryo Higaonna (Higashionna) still holds many mysteries for researchers, the greatest of which being what martial art/s did he learn as a young man, and from whom did he learn them. Despite the very strong views held by a number of amateur karate historians, Morio Higaonna is probably correct in the assertion (*History of Karate Goju Ryu*) that we really don't know specifically, and perhaps never will.

However, data is available, and while much of it is conflicting, there are areas where sources agree and it is here that one should search for the truth.

Mario McKenna, a lecturer for the Dept. of Comparative Culture at Nagasaki's Junshin University examines all the available evidence and its sources in his article on page 29. What he reveals may not yet be the definitive version of the story, but it does allow the reader to form opinions based on facts rather than rumors and legends.

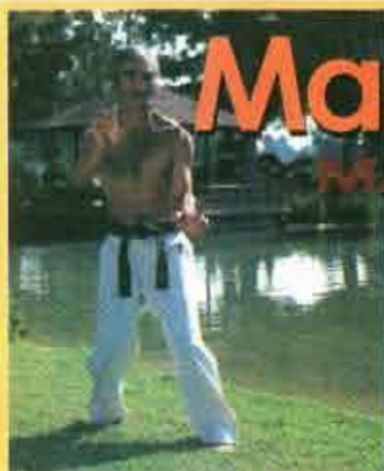
What we do know is that what Higaonna taught a young Chojun Miyagi is now known to the world as Okinawan Goju Ryu.

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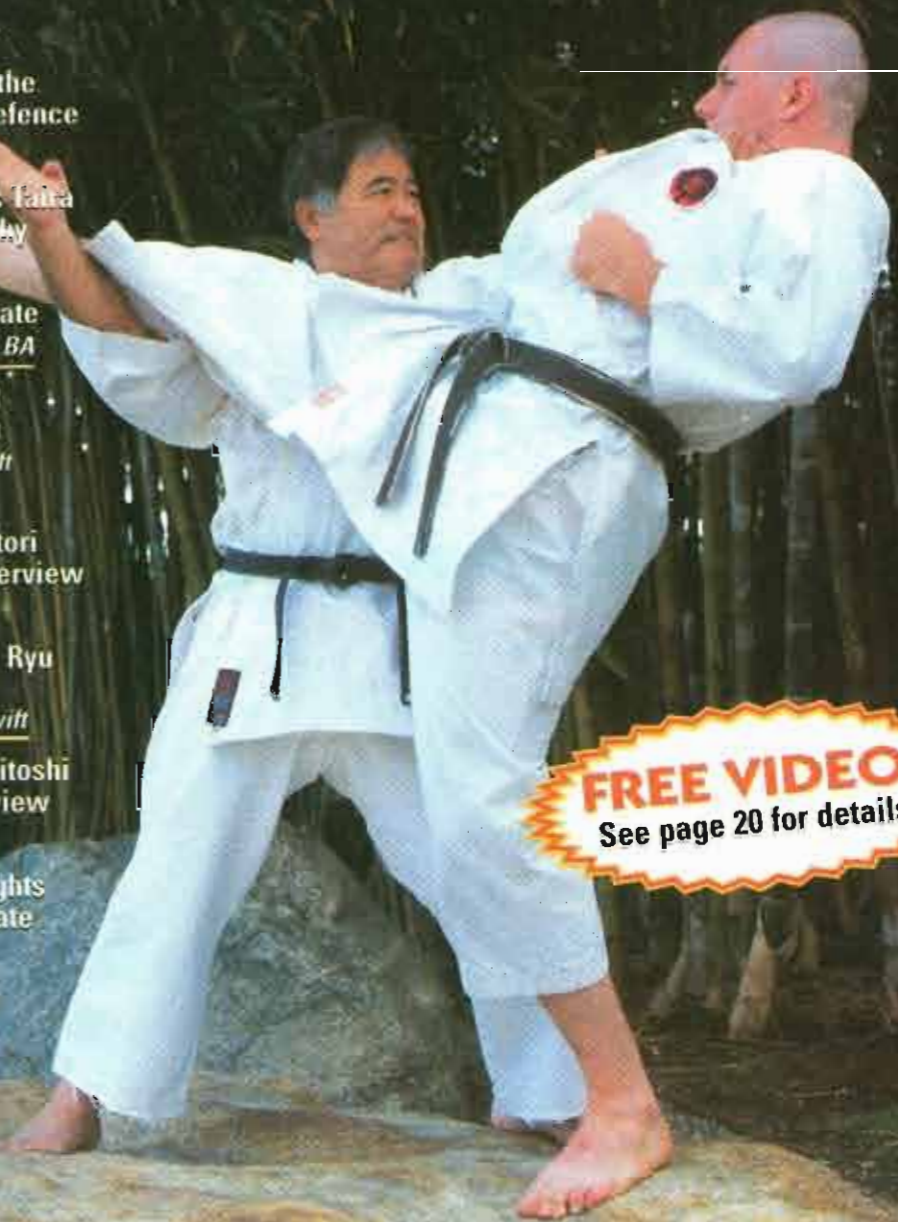
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Equipment, Video and Book Evaluations



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Otake Risuke sensei

Interview

with **Otake Risuke**

Shihan of Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu bujutsu

Interviewer: Guy Power

(with Carl McClafferty and Scott Laking)

In August of last year I was privileged to present a series of questions to Otake Risuke, shihan of Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu bujutsu. Carl McClafferty was preparing for his annual pilgrimage to Otake sensei's home and asked me if I had any questions for Otake sensei. Seizing this opportunity, I quickly dashed out a few thoughts that had been on my mind. Some of my questions had been independently raised by others during conversations, and I therefore felt that the answers could be of interest to a wide audience.

I am indebted to Carl McClafferty for this singular opportunity, and also to Scott Laking who was kind enough to lend his expertise in the Japanese language to this worthwhile cause. It was he who was kind enough to pose my questions in Japanese to his budo teacher, Otake sensei.

Note: Otake sensei also refers to Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu as "Katori Shinto Ryu" and as "Shinto Ryu."

SL: I have a series of questions written by an American named Guy Power.

Otake: Hmmm ... I don't know him.

SL: He's with Toyama Ryu; Nakamura Taizaburo sensei's student.

Otake: Oh yes, Nakamura sensei. Yes, yes. Ask me anything and I'll answer.

GP: Mr. Frederic Lovret teaches Tenshin Ryu. At one time Mr. Lovret was calling his style "Itto Tenshin Katori Shinto Ryu." From what I've heard from several of Mr. Donn Draeger's students, Draeger sensei heard about this and was angry. You got word to Mr. Lovret requesting him not to use "Katori Shinto Ryu" as part of their name. Since then, Mr. Lovret has used the name "Tenshin Ryu."

Otake: (Laughing)

GP: Does Tenshin Ryu have any connection with Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu?

Otake: No, it has nothing to do with Katori Shinto Ryu. He can teach whatever he wants to as long as he doesn't call it "...Katori Shinto Ryu."

GP: Sugawara Tetsutaka sensei is Menkyo Kaiden. Since his expulsion, is he forbidden to teach Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu?



Otake sensei is an author of some note

Otake: He does not have Menkyo Kaiden. Without the *soke's* permission, one is not allowed to teach. Personally, I believe that if someone is teaching correctly, it would be all right—if done correctly and without mistake. But I don't think that can be done. However, I'm not the *soke*. I don't have the power to say who can teach and who cannot teach—only the *soke* can.

GP: I have seen your son perform at Meiji Shrine—he looks remarkably like you. Will your son become the next shihan of Katori Shinto Ryu?

Otake: My eldest son will take over after me. When he is no longer able, my second son will succeed. Here, I have a photo of my son...just a minute. (comes out with two framed 18" x 20" photos) This is my younger son. The photos aren't really nice because the camera man was too slow—you can see my son's feet before they're fully underneath him during this jump



Swordsmanship is the foundation of Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu

(high in the air from a kneeling position). (Brings out a Kendo Nippon magazine) This photo is by a famous kendo photographer who always gets the photograph wrong—here is my son in the air as he is coming down... just look at his feet—they're almost touching the floor! He looks like a frog (laughs).

(Goes into the back room and brings out a smaller black and white framed photo). "Would you like this one? It was taken this May (2000) at the same location as these other two photographs. This was taken of the two of us in *seigan* — the first time! This is the first time we've ever taken a photograph together in *seigan* (*chudan no kamae*), all the cameramen like to take jumping photographs. There are many of the jumping photographs, but only this one in *seigan*. *Seigan* is not very interesting to the cameramen."

GP: But *seigan* is the most important *kamae*, isn't it.

Otake: That's right!

GP: Is groundwork being laid so that the *soke* will again become Katori Shinto Ryu's technical expert? I understand that the current *soke* does not practice Shinto Ryu, therefore, the *shihan-ke* (Otake sensei) is the technical expert.

Otake: The next *soke* will be a woman. *Soke* has no sons, but two daughters (24 years old). Their husband, if he is good, will become *soke*. We are looking for someone who is good. The current *soke* studied Shinto Ryu until high school. After that, he was employed by Japan Rail as an engineer. Since that time he has had no free time, not even on Sunday.

Therefore he couldn't practice.

GP: His daughters are young, aren't they?

Otake: Yes, he is now 63 years old. He got married late.

GP: Do the daughters train?

Otake: Some *naginata*, but they've probably forgotten. We're diligently searching for a prospective husband who wants to seriously learn Shinto Ryu, but we can't find one. It's hard to find a good match for her husband because today's young people want to get married to someone they love. Therefore, even if no one becomes the *soke*, and after I'm finished, there is some hope that my grandchildren will continue and will be able to teach correct techniques to whoever becomes *soke*. Eventually the techniques will return to the *soke*. That is my intention. I have a small hope that the daughters' husbands will study Shinto Ryu.

GP: What is the future of Shinto Ryu? Do you foresee an increase in students worldwide, or would you prefer to maintain a small group—thus ensuring quality control?

Otake: The world is getting smaller. It is all right to teach Shinto Ryu as long as it is taught properly—that's my thinking. It is wasteful just to keep it secluded. It should be correctly spread so that everybody can practice. Therefore, my way of thinking has changed.

GP: What does the *soke* think?

Otake: That is the problem! The *soke* has not given anybody permission to teach overseas. Although there are some sensei teaching incorrect *waza*, all they have to do is say, "Shinto Ryu," and they have so many people in Europe saying "Please teach, please teach." That is how well known Shinto Ryu is. If it were taught in America, I want a respectful person with *kokoro* (proper heart) to represent Shinto Ryu. Real victory is reaching your goal without fighting. This is the culture of the warrior. Competition is different. Judo and kendo competitions are not *bujutsu*. In *bujutsu*, there is no "tomorrow." In Kendo and judo, there is tomorrow.

In Spain there is a person who has diligently studied Shinto Ryu from video for over ten years. But you just can't really understand things from a video. That is why they have to come to Japan to have the techniques corrected. Every year he comes for one month. Last year he came for one month. This year he will come for a month. It is hard for me to make corrections from these deeply ingrained bad

habits—they have already become his technique. Kenjutsu, bo, *naginata* - they all are very difficult. It is only the *omote* (public) *waza* that are on video. Even in video if you learn *kumitachi*, you can't really see the foot movements.

Therefore, I provide my own intensive training techniques for those who can't stay long, but are eager to learn the warrior's heart. This way of teaching differs from the gradual way I teach those living here.

I want prospective foreign students to learn Japanese. I want my students to learn Japanese because I want to cooperate. Europeans study Japanese so hard because they want to come to study under me.

GP: What is your policy about accepting foreign students? Specifically, will you accept short term commitments of one year or less?

Otake: Yes, if they train seriously. But I won't chase people who leave Shinto Ryu—if they leave, they're gone. As long as they are serious, I won't complain.

GP: Are one-time visits encouraged? I'm speaking about foreign students visiting Japan on a modern type of *musha shugyo*. Not really to enhance their own *waza*, but to experience, or just observe, Japan's oldest documented *bujutsu*.

Otake: Shinto Ryu is very difficult. Even if someone visits once, they won't be able to learn anything. Practicing for a long period of time is very meaningful. I am not concerned if Sugawara makes money off Shinto Ryu. The sole concern is whether he teaches correctly or not. Sugawara is a professional teacher. When he was here I told him, "If you make a living from Shinto Ryu you will eventually become tainted." Still he doesn't understand.

GP: Have you ever been to America?

Otake: I've been to Hawaii twice.

GP: Have you ever been to America to teach Shinto Ryu?

Otake: Until now I never thought of that because no one has ever invited me.

GP: Would you consider coming to California to give a seminar, just to show Americans what true Katori Shinto Ryu is really like?

Otake: Yes, I would like to come if I could bring two students to assist.

— September 2000



Left to right. Scott Laking, Carl McClafferty, Risuke Otake, Shawn Sallaway