

Shin-gi-tai Karate Clubs

Naming of Okinawan Karate

Background:

Many books and discussions revolve around categorising kata into regional influences and styles are referred to by their assumed regional influence but is this correct or just a modern day phenomenon?

It is convenient to have categories like Shuri, Tomari and Naha, but how authentic are they?

Research Opinions:

Over the years this topic has been discussed and various references identified. The purpose of this article to consolidate the information I have shared in various forums and discussions so that my students can save much time in investigating this topic if the desire exists.

Although there has been much discussion on this topic over the years, I think a note produced by the well known researcher, Joe Swift put s it all in context... See the excerpt below;

'Gima Shinkin, a student of Itosu, Yabu Kentsu and later of Funakoshi Gichin, states in the 1986 book "Taidan: Kindai Karatedo no Rekishi wo Kataru" (Conversations on the History of Modern Karatedo) by Gima Shinkin and Fujiwara Ryoza, that when he was growing up in Okinawa in the early part of this century, the terms Shuri-di and Naha-di were never heard or used.

Iwai Tsukuo, in his 1994 book "Koden Ryukyu Karatejutsu" (Old Style Ryukyu Karatejutsu), states that in January 1927, prefectural officials at the Okinawa Prefectural Board of Education assigned these names in place of Toudi. He goes on to state that when Funakoshi heard about this from Mabuni, he could barely conceal his surprise!

These terms, IMHO, had become so imbedded in the culture of the times, probably to emphasise the local development of the art, rather than its (obvious) Chinese origins, that they were quickly accepted, and are kind of stuck in place today, even in Okinawa itself. And guess what, none of the pre-war books on karate that I have seen to date make any reference to these terms!!!

There is one person we can look at here. He is Aragaki Seisho (1840-1920). His kata of Sanchin, Seisan, Sanseiru, and Pechurin were

carried on in Higashionna Kanryo's tradition, which many will tell you is "Naha-di." (See the research of Tokahsiki Iken and others). HOWEVER, his kata of Unshu, Niseishi and Sochin are naught to be found in Higashionna's tradition, but in some of the modern Shorin styles, Shotokan and others that many try and tell us are the "Shuri-di" styles... Hmm, why is that?

Joe Swift
Kanazawa, Japan'

Conclusions:

From other sources as well as the above, it seems quite clear to me that the regional references for styles is a fairly modern method of segmenting a system and probably one of the influences in generating more 'styles' as we know them today.

It is convenient to have categories and provided that we understand they are not the basis of karate but a modern day segmentation for a system of knowledge then I am still happy to use them.

It does also further highlight this big issue with getting the Japanese to accept anything Chinese and why Okinawan arts were labelled.

References:

Besides a lot of information provided to me via e-mail, mainly from sensei Bud Morgan, we also have the following reference points;

1. Documents from the Shotokan Research Society International
2. Other references recorded within the text by Joe Swift

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