

TOMARI-TE: THE PLACE OF THE OLD TODE

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The History of the Tomari-te

Tomari-te is not a school or a style, but a tradition where the old Okinawa Tode-jutsu is preserved. In the Shoreijikan Association, Tomari-te from the Oyadomari family – Nakaema Seikichi (from Nago, Okinawa) has been preserved and recently it was founded the Zen Minami Hankyo Okinawa Tomarite Koukai to preserve the Nakaema-ha, and Sensei Fernando Câmara was appointed by the nephew of this master as the head of the organization.

Many of the information of this articles was obtained by oral tradition, when some published work was used, it will be mentioned in the text. Karate originated from Tode-jutsu, name that the Chinese Quan Fa took when it was introduced in Okinawa in the late 18th or earlier 19th Centuries. This Chinese martial art was introduced by Chinese merchants that settled down in Okinawa, by Chinese officials in diplomatic missions, and by the shizoku, youngs of wealthy families that went to China to improve their studies, culture, and also learn some martial arts, that in that times took part of education of noble class. These cultural exchanges continued until the last half of the 19th Century.

Tode-jutsu was developed particularly in the cities of Shuri, old capital of the Ryukyu Kingdom, Naha, the current capital, and Tomari. Actually, what was practiced in Okinawa until the beginning of the 20th was Chinese Quan Fa (Kung Fu). The modern karate began with a movement promoted by Itosu Ankoh to prepare physical and psychologically the students of the Junior and High Schools to serve the Japanese army. Tode-jutsu was strongly modified for this purpose, that is, to be teaching in large groups as physical and sporting practice, being removed all lethal aspects of this fighting method. Itosu followed the example of Jigoro Kano's modification of Ju-jutsu in Ju-do, and Tode-jutsu began to be called Karate-jutsu for emphasize that this new art was now Okinawan, and not Chinese. Later, when Karate/Tode was introduced into Japan, it started to integrate the disciplines of Budo and was known officially as Karate-Do.

With Itosu and Higashionna, karate become a civilian art of self-defense. The fall of the feudal structure of Okinawa and the unemployment of the chikundun Peichin class, leave these men to seek resources to their survival, and they become to teaching Tode or to work as body-guards.

Karate was organized in Shuri and in Naha. Tomari also had its masters but they didn't take participation in this process, perhaps because they were simple people (Tomari was a city of fishers). However, most of the Itosu knoweledge came from a Tomari master called Gusukuma and from the Naha master Nagahama, and not from only Sokon Matsumura. Gusukuma was a disciple of Annan (see below) and of Jion, a budist monk, who learned the kata of the same name. Aparently, Gusukuma to Itosu Naifanchi I & II, Rohai, Wanshu and Chintei, and from Jion he would the personal form of this later, Jion, and two Sai kata, Jitte and Jiin, that he adapted to empty hand kata.

The most famous Tomari-te masters were both the chikundun peikin Kosaku Matsumora (1829-1898), Kokan Oyadomari (1827-1905) and Gikei Yamazato (1835-1905). They were also disciples of the Chinese Annan (also Ahnan or Anan) and of Ason, a Chinese sargeant. According Tomari-te tradition, Annan was a castaway from a shipwreck in the Okinawa coast. Being a pirate, he that took refuge in the cemetery of the Tomari's mountains, starting to live in a cave (a tradition says that this was the master that taught the kata Chinto to Sokon Matsumura). Matsumora and Oyadomari were also disciples from two local masters, Kishin Teruya (1804-1864) and Giko Uku (1800-1850). From Teruya they would learn Passai, Rohai, and Wanshu, and with Uku the kata Naifanchi. According Shoshin Nagamine (in "Tales of Okinawa's Great Masters", Tuttle Pub, Boston, 2000), Teruya was considered by Matsumora as his true master. Matsumora was also an expert in Jo-jutsu (fight method with a short staff) from Jigen-ryu.

A history repeated in several Okinawan sources teaches that the successor of Anan was Kosaku Matsumora. A little before coming back to China, Anan gave to Matsumora a parchment with a drawing of a woman in a fighting posture holding a pine tree branch in one of the hands. According this tradition, that symbol resume the secret of the Tomari-te school. Now, this symbol attests a transmission from master to disciple, a succession, being a type of diploma. But, what means this symbol, what does it transmit? The woman means lightness, cunning, an agility, that is a light style, full of esquivs and feints. She is the spirit of the school. The pine tree branch represents the transmission of the knowledge through generations, and symbolizes full knowledge and ability in the style. Matsumora and Oyadomari were close friends, and Yamazato followed both, and by this reason he exchanged kata and techniques, and each one ordered its students to workout with the another, so Tomari-te become a unique system. There are small differences between the Tomarite of Matsumora and Oyadomari, for example, this later had his own version of Passai (known as Oyadomari-no-Passai) while Matsumora preserved the original Tomari Passai, that is shorter (we preserve these two versions as Tomari-no-Passai Dai and Tomari-no-Passai Sho).

In that time karate was then a civilian art for self-defense used also to maintain the good physical condition and to preserve health. In fact, this was the main reason for which the parents ordered their children to workout with a master. The master taught in his house (there are not dojo in that age) by payment or friendship. There was not open class to the public, because practice of fights were forbidden as measure of maintaining the public order, but the authorities did thick views for this activity type. The masters choice carefully their students because they were responsible for any problems that their students could casue to the people. In fact, no rarely a young karateka, feeling expert in the art after two or three years of training, died ot kill someone during a challenge.

As a method of empty hand fight, Tode-jutsu took part of the training of the imperial guard's members, but it was also spread among the civilians, particularly those of the classes nobleman and merchant that could pay to have instructions with a master. These were generally the chikundun peichin, persons entrusted of maintaining the public order and the law in the small kingdom of Ryukyu. With the extinction of the Okinawa's Kingdom and its annexation to Japan as a prefecture, an unemployment crisis and poverty took care of Okinawa and some of these chikundun peichin began to teach Tode-jutsu to any people to get some money. The purpose continued being the same: self-defense, health, and philosophy, according to the Chinese tradition.

The Chinese physicians introduced physical exercises as universal practice for the development of the discipline and health. In the Chinese culture the best medicine for all malaise are breathing exercises and ritmic body movements. To this philosophy, the universal cause of all diseases is the inactivity. Thus, the Chinese doctors, from the highest antiquity had already observed the value of these exercises. It is also part of this culture the fact that the best form of doing physical and breathing exercises is through imitation of animals movements in fightings. These exercises were not vigorous as the athletics today. The Tode-jutsu, as the old Karate incorporated this principles, and had nothing to do with the modern karate, now a competitive sport and athletics.

The Tode-jutsu, the best name to call the old karate before the Japanese Age, was not a competitive sport, but an ability where survive in a hostile scenario and to have health to work was the rule.

The lineage of the Tomari-te

The masters of the Tomari-te best known in the century XIX was Kosaku Matsumora, Kokan Oyadomari and Gikei Yamazato. From these three great masters from Tomarite, the following masters generation was formed: Nio Sueyoshi (1846-1920), Kinin Kinjo (1856-1897), Giki Yamazato (1866-1947, son of Gikei), Seikichi Nakaema (1866-1932), Koho Kuba (1870-1942), Kamado Higa (1871-1930) and Kotatsu Iha (1873-1928). Kosei Nakamoto (1890-1967) was the Koho Kuba successor. From Kotatsu Iha, were formed the following successors: Seiyu Nakasone (1893-1967), Gisei Maeda (1899-1983), Kosei Iha (1891-1967), Koko Oyadomari (1882-1908), Seijin "One-Eyed" Toguchi (1895-1937), Chojin Kuba (1904-1989), Shoshin Nagamine (1906-). Seikichi Nakaema successor was his brother and from this his son, Moritoshi Nakaema, living in Brazil and the founder of Zen Minami Hankyo Okinawa Tomarite Budo Koukai, that made Fernando P. Câmara, the present head of this organization. Nakaema family is from Nago, Okinawa.

Oyadomari Kokan karate was preserved by his two sons, Kotsu and Konin, and Seikichi Hokama was disciple of both. The name of Chotoku Kyan and Motobu Choki are also associated to Tomari-te tradition, as also the name of Shimabukuro Tatsuo. This later and Soshin Nagamine, have trained also with Motobu. Seyu Nakasone, disciple of Iha, was the master of Tokashiki Iken (founder of Gohakukai), Nakamoto Seiko, Fukichi Isao and Hokama Tetsuhiro. Tokashiki Iken teaches what he was taught by Nakasone, the katas Naifanchi I, II, III, Passai, Wankan, Wanshu Dai and Sho, Rohai, Kusanku, Chinto and Rinkan. This later kata was a creation of Nakasone to be his personal kata (Mario McKenna, personal communication). Although the Naifanchi series, Passai, Kusanku and Chinto taught by Nakasone be similar to the Oyadomari equivalent katas, the Nakasone's Wankan, Wansu and Rohai resembles Goju style and techniques. Nakasone trained with Higa Seiko (they were friends).

The Tomari-te in the 20th Century

Seikichi Hokama left us precious information on the Oyadomari school. This was recorded by Mark Bishop in his book "Okinawan Karate: Teachers, Styles, and Secret Techniques" (A&C Black Pub., London, 1989). According Hokama, the Oyadomari were very zealous for the health, an albeit our parents made an effort to give us and we should respect. They forbid absolutely alcoholic drinks and smoke among their students. Kata training, two drills men, and makiwara was their formula for the good health and cure of most of the diseases. They also taught the prudence ("in a fight, the life of your opponent is in your hands and your life is also in his hands, therefore, don't underestimate your opponent and be careful") and use strategies to overcome a disadvantage ("if your opponent goes much larger than you and stronger, jump for the sides as a cat "). Hokama counts as he was cured of a tuberculosis in his teenagers only following the prescription of Oyadomari: training with makiwara daily. After one year he was not just cured as he had won a strong body and a strong health.

Again according Seikichi Hokama, the old Tomari-te style had the following characteristics:

1. The training stance was Shiko-dachi. Students walked around the dojo with a companion on his thighs to strengthen the stance. The kata Naifanchi was executed in this base Shiko-dachi, and not in Kiba-dachi, as in Shorin-ryu.
2. The kata Kusanku was very acrobatic, typically Chinese, differing a lot of its current execution.
3. The style was light and not athletic as in the current karate. This light and spontaneous style was forgotten by the modern karate, however, the Chinese still practice in this concept today.
4. The current seiken, with the all turned fist, was not used because it expose the backs of the hand that are very vulnerable (an uraken in this area is very painful and cause palsy). The characteristic punch of Tode-jutsu was vertical, in a posture naturally aligned with the opponent's center and easily adapted for ippon-ken. Apparently this style of punching was preserved by Shimabukuro Tatsuo, the founder of Isshim-ryu, a Tomari-te derivative style.
5. The force of the opponent was used against him, being enough to avoid his strikes to counter strikes the exposed torso of the adversary in the ribs, back, and armpits.
6. The most basic technique was to open the opponent's attack with jodan-uke and to attack its center with hiraken or ippon-ken.
7. All style develops on the principle of protect the center of the body while attacking or defending.

Hokama passed on katas that he said be taught by the Oyadomaris: Naifanchi I & II, Passai, Wanshu, Wankan, Rohai, and Kusanku Dai & Sho, but, according Kojo Kafu the Naifanchi II and the two Kusanku came from Itosu. Another tradition, the purest, counts the katas Naifanchi, Passai, Chinto, Jitte, Jiin, Jion, Chintei, Wanshu, Rohai and Wandun as the original Tomarite.

It is also said that the katas Chinpe, Chinsu, Juma, and Uenibu are of the lineage of Tomari, however, they were probably introduced in the 20th from Taiwan. There is also a kata known as Ananku or Ananko that was probably an old kata of Tomari restored by Chotoku Kyan around 1895. The Chinto passed on by Kyan is now known as Tomari-no-Chinto, however, the original Tomari Chinto was very similar to the Itosu's. Wanduan is also considered a Tomari kata, together the version of Seisan passed on by Oshiro. Most of these kata belongs to the Fujian Monk Fist and Crane Fist systems.

Funakoshi and Motobu about Tomarite

Funakoshi was also initiated in the Tomari tradition, according Kinjo Hiroshi wrote: "Gichin Funakoshi [...] learned Shurite from Anko Asato at childhood. He became an elementary school teacher and learned karate from Anko Itosu. I presume in fact that the students of Itosu taught him. Maybe, they will be Yabu, Hanashiro, etc. He also studied Tomarite there, when he worked in Tomari elementary school". In fact, the original version of Wanshu, Seisan and Niseishi in the Funakoshi Tode-jutsu was from Tomari. He taught also Rohai, but it was discontinued from his system and substituted by Meikyo, that came from other source.

In a 1914's article to the Ryukyu newspaper, Funakoshi wrote: "Even though Tomari was within the geographical boundaries of Naha, one reason why so many martial artists congregated there was because Shuri administration officially supported its practice for emergency situations".

In this same article, Funakoshi mention some about the Tomarite lineage: "A Fujian-Chinese from Annan who drifted to Okinawa taught 'Chinto' to Gusukuma and Kanagusuku in Tomari [...] 'Chintei' to Matsumora and Oyadamari [...] 'Jiin' to Yamazato [and] 'Jitte' to Nakazato".

Choki Motobu, in his book *Watashi-no-karate-jutsu* he wrote: "[in chronological order] from Naha there were Gushi, who was famous the time Uehara was in Shuri, Sakiyama, Nagahama, the teacher of Itosu, and Kuwae Ryosei, as famous as Nagahama [...]. There was also Matsumora (Kosaku), who was a brilliant technician, Oyadamari (Kokan), famous for his leg maneuvers and foot sweeping skills, and Yamada (Gike), known for his body steel like Kuwae Ryosei, from Tomari".

"Historically, Karate was introduced [...] in the three principal communities of Okinawa's old Ryukyu Kingdom: The ancient castle capitol of Shuri, the Chinese community of Naha, and the deep water port of Tomari. [...] Training methods in and around the old castle district of Shuri maintained that beginners of Karate use only 60 percent strength [...] whereas, in Naha, 100 percent effort was customarily regarded as the standard. In Tomari, a unique system evolved, which, when compared to that of Shuri and Naha, employed a more pliable training syllabus".

"[...] Kata handed down from the old Ryukyu Kingdom include Sanchin, Useishi, Seisan, Seyunchin, Pechurin, Chinto, Chintei, Wanshu and Rohai, with Passai (dai/sho), Naifanchi (1-3) and Kusanku (dai/sho) being amongst the most popular. Sanchin, Useishi, Seisan, Seiunchin and Pechurin are all from China and, apparently, are still practiced only in Okinawa. Wanshu and Rohai were, until the establishment of Okinawa prefecture in 1879, only ever practiced in Tomari and virtually unknown in Shuri or Naha".

"[...] Prior to Okinawa being established as an independent prefecture in 1879, Tomari had served as the second largest deep-water port on the island. Often trading boats from both China and Korea were found washed ashore in Tomari. In fact, so often was this the case that local officials in Tomari were ordered by the King himself to erect special quarters for the victims of such incidents in an effort to accommodate them during their indefinite visit. It was largely because of this phenomenon that villagers befriended foreign bujin, and ultimately established a local and highly eclectic method of Karate. I don't think that there are too many people still around today who actually remember this portion of Karate history in Tomari. In my opinion the prevailing oral tradition that focuses upon a more fanciful story seems to be suspect. Having learned this tradition myself, one thing I am certain of is that the basic postures, footwork and body movements are supported by methods no different from those found in Naha and Shuri. Both have attributes and liabilities, and any learner must pay strict attention to them at all times".

The creation of the modern karate...

In a nutshell, the karate was a creation of Itosu followed by his friend Kanryo Higaonna to adapt the Okinawan culture to the Japanese educational philosophy, that was oriented to motivate the youngs in the study of the sciences as well as the practice of Budo, to develop the bravery and the patriotic spirits. Butokukai, organization entrusted to promote Budo in the country, had reformulated all the Japanese martial arts transforming them in discipline to strengthen the youths' will and loyalty to the Emperor. The old martial arts were no more necessary in a new society with mechanized armies and the modern polices. The old objective of to kill and to mutilate with a punch was drastically modified to competitive sport and physical education concepts, being removed the aspects frankly lethal. But in Okinawa most of the masters didn't think as Itosu, Higaonna and its followers (most of them Junior and High School teachers motivated by the progress of the Japanese society). Tode-jutsu, a secretive art that taught as to kill or mutilate with empty hands, was no more acceptable among the citizens of Okinawa, that entered now in a modern period. Was this new age spirit that made the Itosu concept, an entirely new and truly Okinawan martial art, become the new rule.

The karate of Itosu and Higaonna were now a modern discipline to promote the health and the physical development, invigoration of the will and sporting recreation. They received the Tode masters violent criticisms, but, after all, this new art prevailed because these two men knew the new spirit that had changed the feudal Japan in a modern and competitive society.

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