

Rifts and Harmony

The feud between Choki Motobu (1870-1944) and Gichin Funakoshi (1868-1957) is a matter of karate history. At the risk of simplifying, Motobu thought that Funakoshi was a pretentious weakling who could not fight his way out of a dojo corner while Funakoshi thought Motobu was a boorish, uneducated ruffian who would rather pick a fight on a street corner than reach respectability. Perhaps each opinion recognized an element of the truth.

When Motobu came to Tokyo to see Funakoshi, an Okinawan of whom he had never heard who was teaching karate, he supposedly got into an argument with Funakoshi and threw him with *kote gaeshi*. This may have shown Funakoshi's relative weakness as compared to the much bigger Motobu or it could have illustrated Motobu's overtly rude behavior in an early form of "dojo storming".

Often ignored in this feud were Hironori Ohtsuka (1892-1982) and Yasuhiro Konishi (1893-1983). Fully licensed to teach Yoshin-ryu Ju-jutsu, Ohtsuka first studied under Funakoshi and later under Motobu. Funakoshi disapproved of his tuition under Motobu (it was not usual to take on more than one instructor) and later Ohtsuka broke away to found his own Wado-ryu (Peaceful Way Tradition). Funakoshi witnessed many people changing what he taught, his own son among them, but his mild nature allowed him to tolerate all of them. Ohtsuka seemed to be the exception, probably because he had chosen Motobu to further his studies.

Konishi stayed closer to Motobu, but nevertheless founded his own Shindo Jinen-ryu (Godly Way Natural Tradition) that later became known after the group that taught it, the Ryobukai.

When Motobu, at age 55, got into the ring to face the challenge of a Western boxer whom he defeated, the sports magazine *Kingu* reported on the event using 2 illustrations of Funakoshi. This wasn't Funakoshi's fault, of course, but one can understand how it added fuel to Motobu's fire.

The negativity of these rifts between two Okinawan legends may have positively influenced the attitudes and arts of both Ohtsuka and Konishi, who, although legends in their own right, were more modern than their Okinawan teachers could possibly have been. Ohtsuka not only studied under two masters of karate, but also merged his Yoshin-ryu Ju-jutsu with karate teachings, yielding a unique art that used both hard and soft concepts, both close and medium distance fighting. Konishi, also originally a ju-jutsu man, studied with Funakoshi, Motobu, as well as Kenwa Mabuni (founder of Shito-ryu, who himself combined two traditions)

and incorporated ideas that he obtained in discussions with Morihei Ueshiba, founder of Aikido. Both Ohtsuka and Konishi combined Japanese with Okinawan, hard with soft, and unified the teaching of several instructors.

One quick story will illustrate the distinction between the older Okinawan attitudes and Konishi's. In 1924, Funakoshi and his student Ohtsuka came to Yasuhiro Konishi at Keio University's kendo dojo to ask if they could teach karate there. Although Funakoshi had a letter of introduction, this idea was revolutionary (it was unheard of for martial arts to share a facility), but Konishi, who simply saw a way to learn more, quickly embraced it. Unfortunately, later in his life, Konishi was often reviled by other karate-ka who did not agree with his accepting attitude.

More on the Accepting Attitude next time.