

## The Root of Imperturbability

The karate stance known as *fudo-dachi* (often translated as “rooted stance”) is shown in some styles as an upright ready stance and in others as a deep stance, half front- and half back-stance. Twist the stance a little and it becomes Shotokan’s *sochin-dachi* (usually translated as “fighting monk stance”), a sort of diagonal horse stance.

Martial artists usually overlook the fact that the root of the term Fudo is the minor Indian god Fudo-Myōō whose popularity grew in China and reached its zenith in Japan, probably because of his warrior-like attitude—one that manifests anger and aggression. Ironically, his reputation is one not of anger but of imperturbability such that *fudo-dachi*, rather than implying a physically rooted stance like the *sochin-dachi* variant, should actually imply mental unflappability, regardless of physical posture.

The renowned swordsman Bokuden Tsukahara emphasized the imperturbable mind, an idea taken up by karate, having already seated itself solidly in the Japanese warrior tradition. Perhaps this is what relates the *fudo-dachi* to the idea of a warrior-monk stance—that the monk had an advantage of training his imperturbable mind through meditation as well as his body through physical exercises. When early samurai achieved *fudoshin* (imperturbably spirit), it was often attributed to the Buddhist deity Fudo-Myōō.

However, in most ideographic renditions of the words Sochin, the So means “Violence” and the Chin means “Calm”. Chin can also mean, “enter into the battle” and probably came to be known as warrior monk because it can also mean “men-of-peace”, i.e. monks. If you look up the ideographs for So in Nelson’s Character Dictionary, you will find the definition as either “manhood” or “prosperity”. The ideograph for Chin, on the other hand, refers not to a person but to “ancient peace preservation centers”. The Men of Ancient Peace Preservation Centers could no doubt be thought of as monks.

There are generally two forms (with variations) of the Sochin kata, the Shotokan Sochin and the Aragaki Sochin, which look nothing alike except for a palm-up spear hand and front kick sequence. The Shotokan form was originally called Hakko, which means Eighth Light, White Light or Radiance. The name was ill fated perhaps because one of its meanings is also “Ill Fated”. The Hakko ideograph has sometimes been Romanized into “Hako” which can mean “a box”, which might easily refer to the boxy opening movement of the form, a shape which, as the other names imply, is decidedly stable, thus imperturbable.

Rooted stances sound more invincible than they are. Certainly a strong root has its value in self-defense (otherwise why learn stances at all?), but stability also means immobility and that has its drawbacks. Whether rooted or mobile, however, the unflappable attitude is universally desirable. Personally, I would rather have a very mobile body (or one that can be mobile if necessary) and an immovable spirit than have an immovable stance and fluttering fortitude.

The roots of the rooted stance are not simply physical but historical and philosophical. A stance can be solid only if the mind maintains its imperturbability.