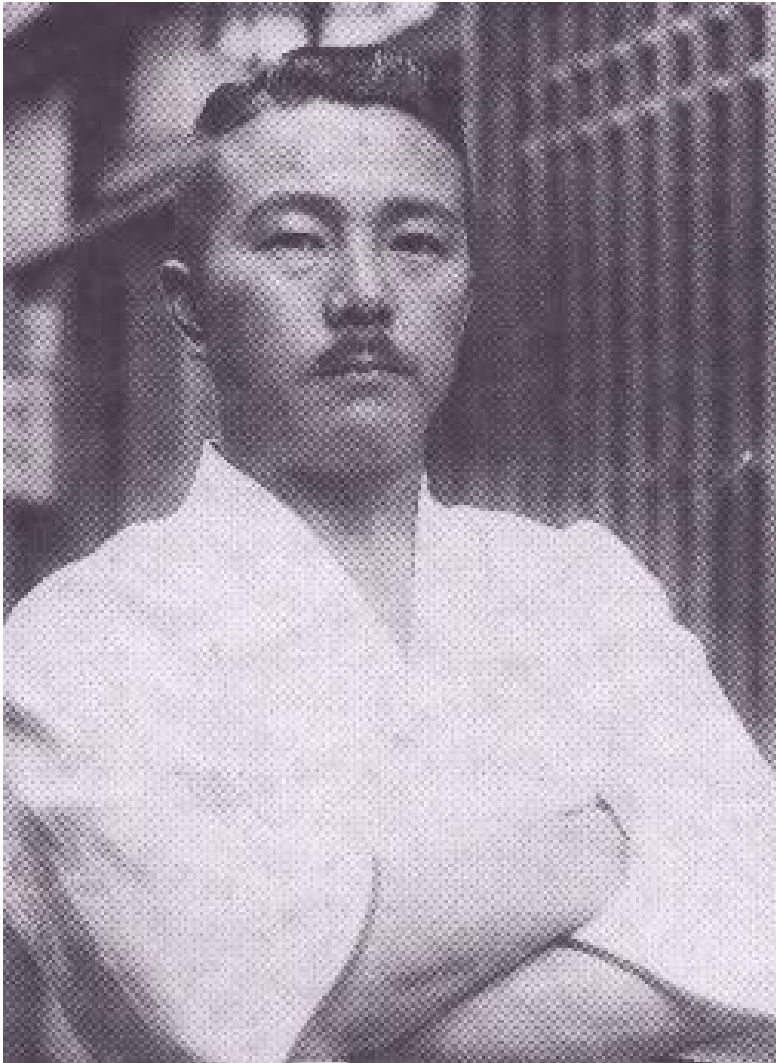


Old Grand Master: Yasuhiro Konishi "Karate-and-his-life"

Written by Howard S. High

Monday, 29 December 2008 00:00 - Last Updated Monday, 29 December 2008 16:25



by Kozo Kazu.

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Yasuhiro Konishi, the founder of Japan Karate-Do Ryobu-Kai first meets Gichin Funakoshi at Keio University. There, the "Study Group for To-te" was formed.

It was around September in 1924 when Gichin Funakoshi appeared at kendo practice hall of Keio University accompanied by Hironori Ohtsuka, an assistant instructor. Funakoshi asked Yasuhiro who was also a teacher of kendo at Keio university, "Can we use this practice hall For a while?" showing an introduction letter prepared by Professor Sadahiro Kasuya. Yasuhiro asked, "What are you going to do?" Funakoshi replied "For demonstration of Ryukyu Kenpo Tote Jutsu."

[...]

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It was October 15, 1924, when the study group of "Tote" started at Keio University. Yasuhiro bought the book written by Gichin about the "Ryukyu Kenpo Tote", but could not fully understand. So Yasuhiro entered into the dormitory called "Meisei-jyuku" where Gichin was living together with other students from Okinawa around the period when the "Study group of Tote" was formed with the strong recommendation from Ohtsuka.

[....]

The "Tote Jutsu" was not so popular in this era. Emphasis was put on smashing the piles of roof tiles or bricks with a single stroke of the fist and fundamental principles as well as application techniques were neither clearly defined nor refined. The "Tote" introduced into mainland Japan by Gichin was usually performed by one person and had no satisfactory forms performed by two persons like those found in Kendo and Judo (or Jujitsu). In short, the system inherent to Tote had not been developed yet. Forms were demonstrated and after that, the analysis of the forms was made, but it lacked precise theory which could respond to questions convincingly.

[....]

Practice was usually carried out mainly by Heian Shodan through Godan and Naifanchi Shodan through Nidan from the beginning of practice to the end. It was monotonous and uninteresting demonstration if compared with practice of today's martial arts. It was only natural that the "Tote" introduced to mainland Japan after much efforts could not get explosive popularity at the initial state.

Nothing was fixed in the field from fundamentals to "kata" forms. Analytical theory from "kata" to the designated "kumite" was imperfect. Rules in practice and other rules were also not completed.

"How could we improve Tote to the well developed level that Kendo and Judo had attained?" was the theme they had to tackle. Only few people besides Ohtsuka and Yasuhiro in the pupils of Gichin and Takeshi Shimoda (1901-1934) of "Nenryu" recognized the importance of this.

Hajime Isogai of Judo (Sekiguchi-ryu) and Shuuichi Nagaoka (Kito-ryu) advised Yasuhiro to establish the theory and practice rules of "Tote", at the time when Yasuhiro introduced "Tote" into the Dai-Nippon Butoku-Kai later when the era was changed into Showa.

"Hey, Konishi, the Tote you introduced cannot be understood by the general [public] if you show only the forms. So, why don't you try to search for any appropriate method to have the public understand." Ohtsuka and Yasuhiro started to develop "kumite" forms referring to various martial arts already developed. It has not been clarified how Yasuhiro responded when he encountered with Gichin's "Tote". But as might be expected of the "great swordsman" Nakayama expounded that "Tote" was the sword of bare hands. Yasuhiro made up his mind when he heard of this comment. "If I can improve the Tote-jutsu to the perfect level Kendo and

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Judo achieved, it will become the ultimate martial arts that I am looking for."

Choki Motobu

The following is another excerpt from the story by Kozo Kaku about Yasuhiro Konishi, the Founder of Ryobu-Kai. This particular excerpt relates to a few of the subjects discussed in the Cyber-Dojo.

- * studying under teachers other than your own.
- * differences in perspectives
- * old karate masters were humans too

Yasuhiro exerted tremendous efforts to increase the level of Tote Jutsu. And what he did was a dare-devil exploit which was quite questionable even today.

He asked entry into school of Choki Motobu (1870-1941) a great leader of Ryukyu Kenpo who was recognized by Gichin Funakoshi as his irreconcilable enemy. In another word, Yasuhiro could be considered to betray Gichin. A great swirl of criticism against Yasuhiro was raised among the pupils of Gichin School. Even when Yasuhiro became No. 1 Karate man later, there was still the criticism which did not allow Yasuhiro's betray. Even Gichin who never criticized other people said that Motobu was a densely illiterate person....so, we couldn't help. When the name of Motobu was told, Gichin made a wry face. On the other hand, Motobu called Gichin as mere Jabisen (musical instrument developed in Okinawa) player. The characters of both men were extremely different, and they were cat and dog.

Motobu might have had some envy against Gichin who outstripped Motobu in making success in Tokyo. So far as the real ability was concerned, Motobu boasted that he was by far superior to Gichin. There was an interesting anecdote while Yasuhiro was receiving lessons from Gichin. "Piston" Horiguchi, a representative boxer in Japan entered into the school of Yasuhiro and was practicing Kendo and Karate. One day, an elderly liverish man dropped in the school and said "Punch me."

Horiguchi tried to land punches on him like a machine gun, but failed. The old man dodged all punches Horiguchi tried to land on him and Horiguchi gave in.

The old man was Choki Motobu. He looked unpleasant all the time, but he was really strong. So, it was only natural that he had a pride in saying "I'm really only representative of Ryukyu's traditional martial arts."

Yasuhiro visited often Motobu when Motobu came up to Tokyo and invited Motobu sometime to try to absorb Motobu's practical technique of "Tote". Though any nobleness as Gichin had couldn't be found in "Tote" developed in Okinawa where Motobu was born and based on more actual fighting technique, there was no compromise and ambiguity in the technique. Why it could be achieved? Yasuhiro could understand the position of arms, level of kick and others

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quite well. Especially, Motobu had mastered the prominent skill and technique to avert the attack of an opponent and his thrust was strikingly swift. Only [dis]advantage he had was his Okinawa dialect. The pupils who received lessons had hard time to understand his language. Motobu insisted that "Funakoshi is an impostor.

"My teachers Yazutsune Yasuzato and Yasutsune Ito have opened up a new and unique path in 'Tote'. What that guy does is to imitate the elegant portion of my teachers and that only skeleton of them. He demonstrates wrong Tote that looks like truth. He is a good-for-nothing fellow useless to the world. What is more surprise is his tricky behavior to deceive people with his eloquent explanation. He deceives the world. The general public believes what he demonstrates as the 'Tote'. Nothing is more harmful to the world than the martial arts which do not help actual fighting. Let me have a chance to fight with him if he is allowed to open his Tote Club and let him run away to Okinawa. That is more useful to the world."

The feeling Motobu held towards Gichin was that for his father's murder and he always made blistering remarks on Gichin. But it is sad that no one could understand the meaning of his comments even if people were given chance to hear them ten times. Though strong Motobu was, he hadn't enough ability to express himself. So, when he came up to Tokyo, he instantly suffered from poverty.

While the pupils of Gichin cast side glance at Motobu, Yasuhiro organized "The society for the support of Choki Motobu", and made efforts to find chances for Motobu to visit the clubs at the Tokyo University from where Yasuhiro graduated and acted as interpreter for Motobu and handed Motobu some money he collected from such arrangement.

Some of pupils who were learning Tote slandered Yasuhiro saying "Yasuhiro Konishi is utilizing Mr. Motobu."

But Motobu himself was appreciating Yasuhiro and showed him all of "Tote" mysteries Motobu could learn and master through his experience.

"Mr. Konishi, the secret principle of Tote is only one. It is to defend and attack the center of Human body."

Yasuhiro couldn't forget Motobu who was explaining earnestly the principle of Tote through the rest of his life.

Motobu left a lot of lessons concerning the "kata" forms. For example, foot work. "Don't romp about." According to Motobu, when scooping one's leg and landing soft on the floor, one should land one's leg soft without making sound but just with KIAI. When attacking an opponent's knee with "stomping(ASHIBUMI)" technique, don't romp. Romping might lose body balance after finishing the attack, Motobu explained. "The track is to kick the opponent with spirit(KI) and land the leg soft without losing body balance."

Yasuhiro felt sincerely sorry for the genius martial artist who was not recognized by the world. Motobu disclosed that there were only two types of defense and offense in the secrets of his

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martial arts.

Namely, straight and circle attack and defense. "When starting an attack, we have to choose between the two, straight attack or circle attack. but when shifting from the straight attack to the circle attack and vice versa, the trick differs each other. The point is how to respond your body to your choice. That is how to swiftly move your body by defending your body center and attacking at the same time.:

Before long, Motobu returned to Okinawa. (If I were a warrior in the age of civil war, I might die before the horse of this master of Tote.) Yasuhiro was pure-minded person for the martial artists at that time. He admitted these remarks.

Kenwa Mabuni

But what Yasuhiro mentions and performs made his neighbors and the general public misunderstood further. He solicited to be allowed to enter the club operated by Kenwa Mabuni this time.

Mabuni was born in Okinawa in November 1891 and entered into the school run by Yasutsune Yasuzato (1830-1914) a great master of "Shurite" and then learned from Hiroaki Higaonna (1852-1915) a famous great master of "Naha-te" who mastered Chinese "Hukken-Ha-Kenpo".

Mabuni became a police man, and when he made a business trip in his territory, he made contact with experts and grand masters of Ryukyu traditional martial arts to learn the secrets from them and expanded his domain.

In 1918, when Mabuni became 29 years of age, he established his own club at his home. (Mabuni's junior was born in this year.)

Then Mabuni became a professor of martial arts and was recognized and praised by Jigoro Kano of Kodo-Kan just as Gichin Funakoshi was. He was also known as the founder of "Mabuni-Ryu" which was developed into "Shito-Ryu" later.

Mabuni spent his whole life for disseminating Tote and Karate, and he was evaluated to have fine technique in Tote while Mabuni was a man of real power. He was equipped with fine Tote technique and had enough language and knowledge to explain his skill to the public since he was educated.

Yasuhiro who had almost established his own style exchanged practice with Mabuni, and at a time he invited Mabuni to his home and took care of Mabuni's son for a while.

During this period, Tote was developed into Karate and a lot of Karate followers were started to be recognized in the world. Yasuhiro was one of them, and the reason why I make highly of him is that Yasuhiro made desperate efforts to improve the position of Karate while others devoted

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themselves to mastering and improving their own efficiency in Karate skills. To Yasuhiro, such devotion to spreading the Karate throughout the public was long-cherished desire.

Morihei Ueshiba

Though Ryukyu traditional martial arts, Ryukyu Kenpo Tote Jitsu, and Karate-jitsu had started to be known throughout Japan, the history of its dissemination in the mainland Japan was still short and it could be said that they were considered to be by far inferior in every aspect of martial arts to Kendo and Judo.

The fact that Karate was still called "Karate-Jutsu" while Kendo and Judo were called with "Do" indicating the system. With a strong desire to develop the karate into one of the recognized martial arts by all means. Yasuhiro worked very hard to disseminate karate through the connections in the Jujitsu world. But the results were not satisfactory one. In the Kendo world, people who recognized karate like Hakudo Nakayama was a minority, and there was still a strong tendency to define karate a primitive art in which thrusting and kicking were representative arts. If someone remarked that karate was a kind of fencing without a sword, a lot kendo masters showed a fight against that kind of remarks. From the end of the 1920s, many people pointed out that not a few karate men lacked good manners and behavior. People who were in the Judo world denied unanimously the existence of karate, and there was even a movement in Kodo-kan which tried to introduce the karate into a part of Judo as a self-defense art. The reason why Gichin Funakoshi declined the frequent invitation to the Kodo-kan had a strong relationship with this.

Also the various schools of traditional martial arts didn't give any high evaluation of karate. "Essence of Japanese traditional martial arts was not to defeat the opponent completely, but to pin down or hold an outlaw asking him whether he would correct his conduct or not, and if not, arm or some parts of body would be dislocated, which meant a spirit of allowance to forgive the enemy was left even in the fight. "On the contrary", some of the traditional martial arts masters protested Yasuhiro saying that "karate stars abrupt thrusting or kicking. This is against the code of behavior for SAMURAI spirit." This kind of criticism was not so serious. But the more severe criticism generated by one of the martial arts experts was that forms of karate were not refined historically. This comment hit the weakest point of karate. Expert who made this comment was Morihei Ueshiba who developed Aiki-do later. This martial arts expert was standing unrivaled in the term of the strong and mysteriousness in Te beginning of Showa era together with the fact he mastered various martial arts such as Yagyu-Ryu, Hozoin-Ryu, Jyuken-Jutsu, and other traditional Japanese martial arts concentrating on Aiki-do Jujitsu of Daito-Ryu.

One anecdote tells that he didn't give any chance to a plural of high ranking kendo experts to hit him when he had a match fighting with them, and another anecdote tells that when he was surrounded by a plural of military polices, he disappeared instantly without being observed by the military polices, and another anecdote tells that when he fought with a grand champion of Manchuria wrestling, he threw the opponent with his little finger, and one of his followers Kozo Shiota a master (manager of Yoshinkan) observed Ueshiba fight with "Piston" Horiguchi a boxer

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holding down the opponent forward instantly with his little finger. Anyway, he was a first ranking martial artist who was referring to as "God of martial art".

Yasuhiro also entered in his club, but as Ueshiba didn't make any official announcement of Aikido developer yet at that time, the list of license for Yasuhiro which is still preserved carries "Daito-Ryu" and "Aioi-Ryu". When Yasuhiro demonstrated "kata of Heian" Shodan (now Nidan), he was suggested by Ueshiba to discard such martial arts because it didn't work at all. Later Yasuhiro commented that the most great and unrivaled master of martial arts I met so far (he was 83 years old at that time[c. 1973]) was Ueshiba Sensei.

But Yasuhiro's karate was entirely criticized by this great master whom Yasuhiro respected much. The point of Ueshiba's criticism was that "the martial arts with only rough and straight attack doesn't provide any usefulness...." To Ueshiba who believed that only circle movement was the ultimate goal of martial arts, straight attack such as thrust and kick seemed to be mastered quickly, but he could not feel any profoundness in the art and it seemed to him that the art couldn't catch up with the nobleness the martial arts should have at all. Yasuhiro explained the situation later. "I wouldn't like to stop my karate even if I was suggested to stop it because it didn't work out at all. I had responsibility for developing the karate into the recognized martial arts some day with the help of Aiki-do which would be accepted by my teacher Ueshiba. I was planning to show him my karate again, so I asked him to never mention to stop right away." (From memories of Yasuhiro on Karate).

Yasuhiro tried his best to find out the best solution to the above for almost eight months. "Ueshiba was a man having a divine inspiration rather than a man of martial artist. And he seemed a special man to me. His life was full of curious things. Therefore, I admired him and believed in him and what he said was my mental food and I tried by best so that I could be accepted by him." (memories on Karate by Yasuhiro). And when Ueshiba saw demonstration by Yasuhiro which was quite familiar to kata form of "Heian", he was satisfied and said tapping his laps "Mr. Konishi, the demonstration you did now was satisfactory to me, and that deserves well for mastering." This form which was demonstrated by Yasuhiro was developed and referred to as "TAISABAKI" body movement later. "Though it contained no complex movement, the form was consisted of continuous movement instead of pausing after each action. That is to say, the form didn't employ any single action, but employed a chain of action without pausing between them. Not an accumulation of single action, but a flow of movement. The demonstrations I had ever seen were a spell of movement like a puppet doll as Ueshiba pointed out."

At the same time, it is said that Yasuhiro learned from Ueshiba that the art had two kinds of spirit, one expressed externally and one expressed only in mind. Yasuhiro's incessant eagerness to acquire the secret of various kinds of martial arts brought him the chance to meet Seiko Fujita, the 14th generation of master of "Koga Ninjutsu" and made him to obtain the license from "Nanban Kito-Ryu", and to meet Mоторо Kaneda of Yoshin Koryu", and made him to learn swift technique from Haunari Watanabe of "Shiba Shinyo-Ryu Jujitsu" and "Fusen-Ryu Jujitsu" from Eizaburo Nakayama and "Yagyū Shingan-Ryu" from Itsumi Sato.

The author has never heard any one who mastered so wider variety of martial arts as Yasuhiro Konishi. Yasuhiro learned the martial arts other than karate and tried to compare them with

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karate and adopted the arts which did not exist in the karate. His method was to employ the excellent skill form other sections of martial arts and discard what was not useful to his karate to attain the balance combination of various techniques in his karate. Everybody asked "Why are you so eager to acquire the secrets of other martial arts than karate?" He always replied that "I would like to improve karate to the level equal to Kendo and Judo which were traditional Japanese martial arts."

NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN KENDO AND KARATE

Mecca of martial arts in Japan before and during the war was Dai-Nippon Butoku-kai. Yasuhiro boldly introduced karate into this association. As I have mentioned so far, the karate which did not have a history after being introduced into the mainland Japan could not rank equal with other traditional Japanese martial arts such as kendo and Judo.

"It doesn't matter. I will let the public recognize the karate some day by all means." Yasuhiro put full confidence in Karate. When Yasuhiro demonstrated the forms of karate at the Butoku-kai, Fusataro Hongo, then chairman of the Butoku-kai was surprised Yasuhiro's smooth circle movement of softness and hardness combined and suspended the rest of matches scheduled for the day and ordered Yasuhiro to come to his seat and encouraged him saying "Forms of karate you have demonstrated were very fine. Please continue your study on karate from now on and complete the art."

Finally, karate was admitted as "Karate-Jutsu" in Judo. In July 1925, the license to certify the proficiency of Yasuhiro's karate was granted to Yasuhiro, and in March 1934 license of master of Karate Jutsu and Kendo. (Chojun Miyagi and Sannosuke Ueshima were also given the license at this occasion.) However, the way Yasuhiro followed got exposed under the criticism from many of the karate men.

Yasuhiro told me that "In the pamphlet issued from the club run by Mr. Funakoshi, an article was carried saying that recently there is a man who introduces karate into the public because it was admitted by Butoku-kai, but the man does not understand the karate well, what he is doing made karate misunderstood greatly.... They were all so narrow minded people. But even under such situation, Mr. Funakoshi showed a great confidence in me....."

In 1938, Yasuhiro was assigned as the chairman of screening committee on issuing the license of Judo and Karate Jutsu at Dai-Nippon Butoku-kai and in 1939 he was entrusted as the chairman of screening committee on master and teacher of various martial arts. When we look over the list of karate masters who passed the screening, we can find three masters (KYOSHI) in the list, namely Yasuhiro Konishi, Chojun Miyagi and Sannosuke Ueshima. Toshiyuki Shimizu, Kenwa Mabuni, Masahiro Kasuya, Hironori Ohtsuka, Takehiko Eto, Gichin Funakoshi, Toshiyasu Niizato, Kazuya Nozawa, Toyosaku Sodeyama, Takeshi Shimoda, Masaji Kushihashi, Nuinosuke Yamamoto, Torakichi Inagaki, Kazuo Miura, Kotaro Namiki, Jitsuro Ueno, Shujiro Kihara, Gigo Funakoshi, Kanemori Kinjyo, Ryusuke Kawarabuki, Shosin Nagamine, Seko Higa, Sanemi Yamaguchi, are in the list of instructor (Renshi), twenty two

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people in all. (No one is listed in Hanshi category.) You can find many of those people became famous and great karate men later and contributed to the growth of Karate world.

Since 1938, Karate was allowed to participate in the Butoku-kai festival (The demonstration festival of various sections of martial arts held by Dai-Nippon Butoku-kai in May every year) held in Kyoto. And the 40th Butoku-kai Festival held in 1940 was to celebrate the commemoration of the year 2600 of Japan and karate was officially allowed to show the name of schools and to perform group demonstration of "Kata" of its own school.

Until that time, Yasuhiro referred to his karate as "Shindo Jinen-Ryu Karate-Jutsu" as suggested and advised by Morihei Ueshiba and Danjyo Yamaguchi, a great patriot, and he participated in the festival under this name.

Yasuhiro might be deeply impressed by the fact karate was recognized by the society of martial arts and the general public instead of the fact that he could obtain honor and fame. When he became 88 years of age, Yasuhiro told that "the things a man can do throughout one's short life might be very little, but anyone can achieve one thing at least if one tries one's best without expecting much. Even if one cannot attain anything which is useful to the world, the fact one tried his best efforts might have a meaning in one's life, and the fact that one could devote oneself to one thing might be ultimate end of human being and color to one's life." "Success might be the best, but even if one fails to attain what one expected, the fact one tries one's best might be recognized and that has meaning to one's life and one might attain one's desire. The scale of the target one expects might depend on the capability of the man and the good or bad behavior of the man also depends on the mind of the man has." (From the talk with Yasuhiro held to commemorate his 88 years of age).

In 1983, Yasuhiro Konishi passed away after experiencing various things through his long life of far over than 80 years entrusting his son Takeshiro (Later name was changed to Yasuhiro) with future affairs. Yasuhiro who was always talking that there was no big difference between Kendo and Karate-do expressed his karate-do in the following way: The essence of Karate is "neither to be beaten" by the opponent "nor beat" the opponent.

...end of excerpts