

THE HISTORY, PRINCIPLES AND PRECEPTS OF SAKUGAWA KOSHIKI SHORINJI-RYU KARATE

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Abstract: *Sakugawa Koshiki Shorinji-Ryu Karate-do is a unique system of karate in part because of its comprehensive and encyclopedic nature. It has a total of 85 katas required for complete training in the system, and emphasizes classical bunkai (interpretation of techniques), theories of movement, generation of power, and the development of ki. It also incorporates systematic training in taijutsu and other aspects of Japanese unarmed martial systems. Most significantly, it focuses on the classical precepts of Budo and the training of an individual's character through karate-do. The current Director of the International Division of Sakugawa Koshiki Shorinji-Ryu Karate-do is Thomas Cauley, who studied karate in Japan for 17 years and was promoted to seventh dan while there. One of the most highly trained karate teachers outside of Japan, Dr. Cauley seeks to transmit to Americans a rich and complex art dedicated to the principles of Budo, the Martial Way.*

Keywords: *Budo, Karate, Shorinji-Ryu, Bunkai*

History of the System

Sakugawa Koshiki Shorinji-Ryu roughly translates as "Sakugawa orthodox Shaolin Temple system". The name characterizes the system's emphasis on the classical katas and theories of the tradition founded by "Tode" Sakugawa (c. 1733-1815)¹, who is viewed by most karate historians as a founder of the modern karate tradition in Okinawa. It also emphasizes its legendary derivation from the Chinese Shaolin tradition. The addition of the suffix "-do" to Karate further explicates its relationship to the Japanese Budo tradition and to Zen.

According to oral tradition passed on to Dr. Cauley by his teachers in Japan, Jiro Ogasawara (1901 - 1958), a member of the aristocratic Ogasawara family of Aomori prefecture in Northern Honshu, traveled to Okinawa in 1926 and learned karate from Chomo Hanashiro (1869-1945)². Hanashiro is reputed to have been an exceptional karate practitioner and teacher, and was one of the main people responsible for the introduction of karate into the public school system of Okinawa³. Hanashiro in turn learned karate from both Anko Itosu (1832-1915) and "Bushii" Matsumura (1809-1901). Matsumura was a student of "Tode" Sakugawa. Both Matsumura and Sakugawa were legendary figures of early karate, having studied indigenous Okinawan fighting arts, Chinese martial arts, and Japanese weapons systems⁴. Both Sakugawa and Matsumura synthesized their knowledge of these various arts and were major figures responsible for the origin of the modern karate tradition. Sakugawa Koshiki Shorinji-Ryu preserves the katas, techniques and theory of the Sakugawa - Matsumura - Hanashiro lineage.

Jiro Ogasawara returned to Aomori prefecture in 1946. He had previously learned a system of empty hand and weapons fighting passed down within his family, and to his knowledge of Okinawan Shorinji-Ryu he added aspects of this family system- most notably nage waza (throwing techniques), kansetsu waza (joint techniques), shime waza (choking theory) and osaekomi waza (holding or immobilization techniques)⁵. Jiro Ogasawara was succeeded as director of the system he founded by his son Tokushiro (1958-1986). In 1986 Masanao Yamazaki became the current director.

Sakugawa Koshiki Shorinji-Ryu also incorporates training in Yuishinkai Kobudo. Thomas Cauley studied Yuishinkai Kobudo under Yasuhiro Konishi (1893-1983), founder and director of Shindo Jinen Ryu Karate-do. His direct teacher was Shoen Fukuda, Director of Northern Japan Yuishinkai Kobudo. He also studied briefly under the directorship of Motokatsu Inoue and his son Takekatsu Inoue. Both Yasuhiro Konishi and Motokatsu Inoue learned kobudo from Shinken Taira (1897-1970), founder of Yuishinkai Kobudo. Taira had studied kobudo with the Okinawan kobudo master Moden Yabiku (1878-1941).

Sakugawa Koshiki Shorinji-Ryu has therefore retained the classical karate of Okinawa, including both the katas and theory of the empty hand and weapons traditions. In addition it has augmented this tradition with techniques from classical Japanese martial arts, and integrated them into a highly effective martial art.

The International Director

The chief instructor in the United States is Thomas Cauley, who is presently celebrating his fifty-first year of practicing and teaching Shorinji-Ryu. He was appointed to his current position after seventeen years of resident training in Japan under Jiro Okada, Tokushiro Ogasawara and Masanao Yamazaki.

Due to his persistence and dedication while undertaking collateral training in Japan he also attained rank in other systems, most notably a 5th dan in Shindo Jinen Ryu awarded by the founder of that system himself, Yasuhiro Konishi. He also received a 5th dan in Shotokan, a 5th dan in Motobu Ryu, a 4th dan in Shorin Ryu, a 3rd dan in Okinawan Kenpo, a 2nd dan in Judo, a 2nd dan in Aikido, a 1st dan in Hakkoryu Jujutsu, and a 1st dan in kendo. During his time in Japan he also attained his doctorate in Asian Studies from Waseda University, the rank of Captain in the U.S. Air Force, and the designation of kyoshi in Konkoyo Zen. After returning to the U.S. he attained a 4th dan in Washin Ryu karate from Hidy Ochiai.

While in Japan he married the now deceased sister of then headmaster Tokushiro Ogasawara. According to him, it was after his marriage into the family that his training started in earnest. Seen as a family member by the Ogasawaras, he was expected to devote all of his time to the pursuit of karate-do. He received instruction in the highest levels of Sakugawa Koshiki Shorinji-Ryu as well as instruction in the family's traditional arts. Upon returning to the U.S. he was appointed to his current position, and upon the death of Tokushiro Ogasawara in 1986 he was asked to return to Japan to assume the role of head instructor, an honor he refused in order to continue teaching in

the U.S. While training in Japan he experienced a culture of traditional martial training that few in the U.S. have glimpsed first hand. For example, his account of his introduction to his first Shorinji-Ryu teacher in Japan in 1961 when he was 19 sounds like a classical Japanese martial arts parable. At the time he was training in Shotokan with Masayuki Ueki :

"I worked with master Masayuki Ueki for three months and then, one night after practice, he introduced me to a kind looking old man named Jiro Okada. Master Okada taught the Sakugawa Orthodox Shorinji-Ryu system. I asked for permission to visit his dojo and study with him. He gave it immediately. The following Monday night a friend and I traveled to Fuchu-mura, about five miles away. We were promptly thrown out by the senior student. His instructions were that no new students would be allowed into the dojo without prior approval of the master. We were perplexed and stood outside looking at the practice session inside. For three weeks we stood outside the dojo, night after night, wishing we could enter. Finally, Mr. Takahashi told us that master Okada wanted us to go to his home after practice and discuss our desire to learn karate-do.

We ran all of the way to the master's home, were let in the back door, and proceeded to make fools out of ourselves. The master, his wife, my friend and I were all seated at a low table and Mrs. Okada poured the tea. 'Oh boy', I thought, 'I am going to drink tea with a karate master!' As soon as I tasted my tea I felt hot tea splashed all over my face and neck. Master Okada had thrown his cup of tea into my face for rudely drinking ahead of him! He rose, called out to his wife, and retired for the night. My friend and I sat for a moment, and then rose to leave. Mr. Takahashi came in and asked us if we were leaving. 'Yes, I think it is time', was my answer. 'But don't you want to learn about karate-do?' he asked. He instructed us to stay in master Okada's home and to sleep on the floor. The next morning Mrs. Okada kicked us awake and fed us. From that day onward Jiro Okada was like my father. The training in the Okada dojo was extreme."6

The martial culture that Dr. Cauley experienced obviously focused not only on rigorous physical training, but also on individualized moral lessons intended to foster the development of ethics and personal character. Another example of the intense training that Dr. Cauley encountered is related in his story of the first time he trained as a student in Yasuhiro Konishi's dojo when he was in his early twenties. Konishi is an important figure in Japanese karate, having studied under Gichin Funakoshi, (founder of Shotokan Karate), Chojun Miyagi, (founder of Goju Ryu Karate), Kenwa Mabuni, (founder of Shito Ryu Karate), Choki Motobu and Morihei Ueshiba, (founder of Aikido). Konishi went on to found his own system, Shindo Jinen Ryu Karate. This incident occurred when Jiro Okada took his advanced students to visit Konishi's dojo for black belt training:

"As I stepped out onto the practice area I noticed that I was the only Yudansha (black belt) who had worn his black belt. I knew that I was in for a bad time. I had forgotten that when you visited another dojo you took off your obi [belt] and wore a white belt until that particular teacher asked you about your true rank, or told you to wear it in his dojo. I didn't realize that it was a tradition. After practice the sensei (Konishi) directed me to the head of the line with his black belts, all thirteen of them. As I sat at the head of the class, feeling like someone special, all thirteen of those black belts proceeded to choke me unconscious, one by one. After being choked thirteen

consecutive times without a break I suddenly developed a certain dislike for my black belt. In fact, it was never again in my mind that it was important to impress my rank upon anyone⁷. "

The traditional training that Dr. Cauley received is reflected in his own rigorous teaching. Strict etiquette is enforced in all his dojos, and training is meticulous, precise and physically demanding. He seeks to transmit the art he learned in Japan to Americans with its utility and rich knowledge intact.

Characteristics of the Art

Sakugawa Koshiki Shorinji-Ryu is characterized by systematic, integrated and progressive training that is based on classical methods, techniques and katas⁸. There is a structured order for learning basic techniques and kata, with simpler elements learned first and then combined into more complex techniques and combinations only after a significant degree of competency is acquired. Teaching methods are based on the synthesized knowledge, experience and insight of generations of master teachers, and they have been refined to be extremely efficient and effective.

This systematic method of learning incorporates many principles: coordinated movement, generation of force through body mechanics, distancing and timing (ma-ai), movement off the line of an attack (taisabaki), various levels of force in offensive and defensive techniques, coordination of breathing with movement, the use of the contraction and expansion of the body, specific meditative states of mind (mushin, zanshin, etc.), the generation of ki, etcetera. Ultimately this training progression teaches a practitioner to synthesize all of these principles and apply them.

The art is also comprehensive, encompassing the practice of a number of specialized categories of techniques which are again ultimately integrated in the art of the practitioners. These include tachi waza (stances), tsuki waza (punching techniques), uchi waza (striking techniques), uke waza (blocking techniques), geri waza (kicking techniques), kansetsu waza (techniques applied to joints), osaekomi waza (techniques of holding and immobilizing), shime waza (choking techniques), nage waza (techniques of throwing), ne waza (techniques of grappling) and ukemi waza (breakfalls). There is also training in the use of various weapons (kobudo), including the bo (staff), sai (three pronged short swords), kama (sickles), tonfa (wood handles), nunchaku (flail), surichin (weighted chain) and other esoteric weapons.

Shorinji-Ryu retains a focus on meridian theory and the flow of ki throughout the body. Applications of many of the categories of techniques described above focuses on striking, pressing or otherwise manipulating the many vital points of the body for various effects. The classical interpretations of techniques from katas (bunkai) also focus on attacking vital points.

Four primary methods of training are used to practice principles and techniques. First, there is an emphasis on the continual practice and perfection of individual techniques through repetitive group practice of kihon waza (basic techniques). Another method is the practice of advanced techniques with a partner including bunkai (applications) from katas as well as throws, holds, chokes, joint techniques, etc.

There is also an emphasis on the practice of kata. There are 85 katas- 40 empty hand and 45 with weapons. One aspect of the extensive kata training in Shorinji Ryu is encyclopedic- it preserves the classical katas derived from the various traditions of the Okinawan towns of Shuri, Naha and Tomari, as well as the kobudo katas from various places in Okinawa. However, instead of being a haphazard collection they have been organized into a very effective progression which cumulatively teaches a student the various principles of the art. Learning the katas in sequence takes a student from the basic principles of body movement and mechanics to an understanding of ki and meditative states of awareness. The bunkai, or applications of techniques from katas, also have been rigorously preserved.

Last, kumite, or sparring practice, is done full power without the use of protective padding. Participants are not allowed to strike, punch or kick their partners, but instead are required to have enough control over their techniques to stop them a few centimeters from their partner's body (tsun dome). Kumite also typically involves the application of joint techniques, throws, sweeps, choke holds, etcetera, in addition to striking techniques.

Although the physical art of Shorinji-Ryu Karate-do is highly effective, the teachers of the art see its primary purpose as the moral and spiritual development of the practitioner. The physical art of combat is simply a venue for the continuing development of a better self through Budo, the Way of the warrior. Thomas Cauley views the teaching and dissemination of Budo as the primary goal of Shorinji-Ryu.

The Philosophy of the Art

Sensei Cauley's teaching also emphasizes that situations encountered in training foster insights that promote personal development. He is astute at perceiving aspects of both technique and character that need improvement in individual students. His lessons often focus on correcting these weaknesses through individualized experiences. For example, when I was a beginning student I once slipped on a puddle of sweat while performing a high kick during kumite (sparring). I fell, struck my head and sustained a concussion. After I recuperated and returned to classes I was unaware that I had developed an unconscious fear of falling and was inhibiting myself from properly performing high kicks. Cauley sensei recognized that I had developed this problem, and one evening he devoted an entire class to kicking practice. Throughout the evening the kicks we practiced became progressively stronger and higher and eventually included many jumping techniques. As we all became increasingly exhausted, I was forced to perform my kicks without reserve in order to simply continue the practice. After the class finished sensei came over to me and stated "Now you're no longer afraid to do high kicks." I realized then that the session had been in part for my benefit, and learned a lesson about confronting problems in order to solve them. This insight had been Cauley sensei's goal and was ultimately the lesson I was supposed to learn. Similar accounts of personal insights generated from Cauley sensei's lessons are commonly shared among his students.

During the interview for this article I asked Cauley sensei about the distinguishing characteristics of Shorinji-Ryu. Expecting a discussion of theory, training methods, or some similar physical

aspect of the art I again learned a lesson when his reply focused on the philosophical fabric of the art:

"What makes Shorinji-Ryu a fine art and sets it apart from other systems is the Budo aspect. It is a whole educational concept rather than just a physical form of karate. It's a full system of life, centering not only on the physical, spiritual, and mental aspects of the art, but also entailing education and morality. One of our responsibilities as much as possible, one of our foremost goals, is to get oneself into the higher educational system. We stress Chinese classics, anma [massage], shiatsu, acupuncture, studying the meridians of the body, holistic medicine, Zen. That's why we call our schools Isshinkaikan Institutes of Karate-do, not dojos. They're universities of life. Shorinji-Ryu is a life pursuit, not a goal. The only goal we have in Shorinji-Ryu is to appreciate wisdom.

Most [karate] systems today are sport and tournament oriented. There's a difference between bugei and budo. Bugei is martial art. Martial means military, and the goal of a martial art is to beat another person in battle. At all costs, do not loose. The main goal is to defeat your opponent.

Budo is the warrior Way. Do means the philosophical search for truth- that's what the word means in our system. In a martial Way we do not have an opponent, we are our only opponent, and learning of our self is our biggest stepping stone. We learn that winning and losing are not important.

For example, we don't place any emphasis on tournaments. We only have in-style tournaments, we don't have any open tournaments. It's the nature of our art because we really can't compete. In Japan Shorinji-Ryu is full contact. There's no protective gear whatsoever- no mouthpiece, no groin protector, no pads. Full power. So it goes both ways; if you and I are going to spar full power I owe you the respect not to strike you in the face or the groin or any other spot, and I have the utmost respect for my opponent. It's an unwritten thing in our system that you never injure another human being.

That's the basic difference, it is a martial Way, not martial art. We stress harmony, and unity with nature, and cohesiveness with all mankind. Shorinji-Ryu teaches us not only how to live, but how to die properly. It is steeped in ancient traditions, and it is a Zen Way- it's very much a Zen oriented art."

As this quote indicates, Shorinji-Ryu is viewed as a way of life centering on the morality of Budo, Zen training, and continuing education in all facets of life. Sensei Cauley also emphasizes the application of personal and moral lessons learned through physical training to personal development and daily living. As with other aspects of his teaching, he often cites personal experiences as examples, such as the following incident that occurred when he was a student in Japan:

"One night, master Okada had accompanied me to the train station and we had stopped at a market and he bought a handful of bananas for his child. We were standing at the train station and talking

when a young man, about 17 years old, came up and grabbed the bananas out of Master Okada's hands and started to run. Master Okada casually reached out and caught the young lad in a tremendous joint technique. He didn't even look at the lad, but asked me if I could accompany him for dinner. I was overwhelmed and baffled. He dragged the young man about three blocks to a Japanese restaurant and threw the boy inside the seating area beside me. Only then, to my surprise, did he look at the young boy. He calmly asked the boy what he wanted to eat. The lad refused, but sensei Okada ordered him the very best on the menu, beef and rice. The boy would not look up at us, and when Master Okada spoke of things not concerning the incident the lad acknowledged with a red face. Finally, Master Okada asked the lad where he was from. He reported that he had run away from home in Kanagawa City and was going to Tokyo to visit a friend when he ran out of money. After he had finished eating Mr. Okada told the lad to go to his dojo, pry open the back window and take the money and food that was there. "Just don't break anything, and shut the window back so it will not rain on my tatami mats!", said sensei. The lad left with a strict apology. The next day we found him sitting outside the dojo asking permission to learn karate. Sensei found him a job, and the young man is still learning about Karate-do today. He has become a fine, young teacher of the Way.⁹ "

As an art Shorinji-Ryu is rooted in the classical tradition of karate and retains the original theories , applications, and training methods developed by generations of master teachers. As such it is an extremely effective martial art. But Shorinji-Ryu is more importantly a Budo- a Martial Way devoted to moral and intellectual education, to the training of the minds, bodies and spirits of its practitioners. Today, teachers in both Japan and the United States strive to preserve and impart the training, knowledge and benefits of this classical art.

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