

Japanese Karate: THE OLD MASTERS

Professor SHINKIN GIMA

Interviewers: LIAM KEELEY and MORIO HIGAONNA

Shinkin Gima has the distinction of being the first person promoted to Shodan in Japan by **Funakoshi Sensei**. He also acted as **Funakoshi Sensei's** partner at the demonstration given to **Kano Jigoro Sensei** and his students at the old Kodokan in 1922.

Prior to coming to Japan, **Mr. Gima** had trained at the Shihan Gakko in Okinawa, under the famous **Yabu Kentsu**.

Mr. Gima is 80 years old, but appears to be 20 years younger. (*This was written in 1977 so Master Gima is now in his 87th year. Editor*). He still practises Karate every day. Only 2 years ago he retired from the Construction company he worked for. Until recently he was attached in an advisory capacity to a Shotokan body. His Karate is Ko-ryu (Old style), much as **Funakoshi Sensei** taught.

The content of the interview focused on his involvement with early Japanese Karate.

THE INTERVIEWERS:

Liam Keeley is a 26 years old South African and practises Goju-ryu Karate in Tokyo, Japan. His wife is Japanese and they have one daughter. He has Nidan (2nd Degree grade) Karate. **Morio Higaonna** is 39 years old. He is Chief Instructor and President of Okinawa Goju Ryu International Karate-do Association. He is 7th dan. (*This was correct at the time of writing some 7 years ago. Editor*).

NOTE

This interview was taped and then the content edited and freely translated from the Japanese.

There seems to be some confusion as to your name. In some books it is given as Makoto, and in others as Shinkin. Why is that?

The KANJI (characters) for my first name can be read in two ways – The Okinawan reading is Shinkin, and the Japanese is Makoto.

When and where were you born?

I was born in Shuri, Okinawa, on the 28th of September, 1897. (Meiji 29).

When and where did you start Karate?

I started Karate at the age of 15; I attended the Shihan Gakko, where Karate, Judo, and Kendo were taught.

Who was your teacher?

The school was officially headed by **Itosu Anko Sensei**, but we received most of our lessons from **Yabu Kentsu Sensei** – nicknamed "The Sargeant". He was an excellent Karateka. He once fought and beat the feared "Monkey" **Motobu Choki**.

What was the first kata you learned?

At that time 'Naihanchi' ('Tekki') was the first kata to be studied. **Itosu Sensei** made up the 5 **Pinan (Heian) Kata** which are now used as the basic kata for beginners. **Funakoshi Sensei** changed the order slightly. He taught 'Pinan Nidan' first, because he considered it easier.

When was Karate introduced into the schools in Okinawa?

I think it was the 38th year of Meiji – that would be about 1906.

How did you come to study under Funakoshi Sensei?



Two great 'Old Masters' of Japanese Karate - Professor Shinkin Gima is on the right and on the left is the late Professor Yasuhiro Konishi.

I was a student at Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo. When **Funakoshi Sensei** came to Tokyo, I continued to study Karate under him. I assisted him at the demonstration given for **Kano Jigoro Sensei**. About a year after **Funakoshi Sensei** came to Tokyo, I was graded **Shodan** (1st degree black belt) and my cousin, **Tokuda Ante**, was graded **Nidan** (2nd degree black belt). Like me, he was an Okinawan who had studied Karate prior to coming to Tokyo.

So you were the first of Funakoshi Sensei's students in Japan to be graded to Shodan?

Yes, that's right.

Could you tell us about your training under Funakoshi Sensei while you were at University in Tokyo?

At first things were makeshift. We trained at the Meisei Jiku, a school for Okinawans, and later at a Kendo Dojo, the Yushinkan. We didn't have any special uniform, we just took off our coats or jackets. Later **Funakoshi Sensei** designed a uniform, and gradually people started using Karategi similar to today's. I used to train every day in the evening. The sessions usually lasted two or three hours.

Did you have much free time?

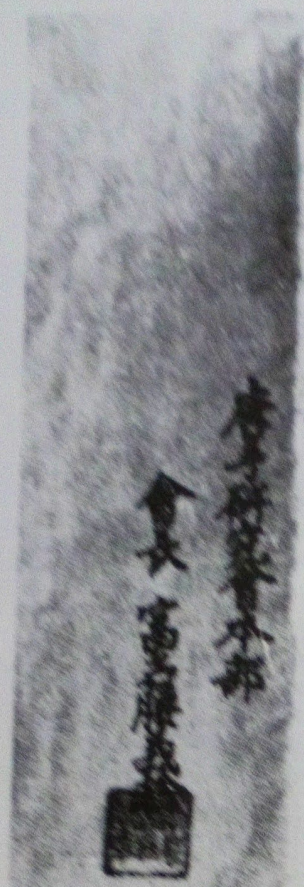
No, I was pretty poor. I was working part-time, going to University and practising Karate. I don't have any regrets though, I've found poverty an excellent teacher.

Did any one else teach you?

Not really. It was **Funakoshi Sensei** mainly. Later **Toyama Sensei** and **Funakoshi Sensei's** son **Yoshitaka** taught me a little. After I left University, I travelled all over Japan, so I never got the opportunity to study under **Yoshitaka** much.

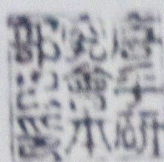
I've heard Yoshitaka's teaching was somewhat different from his fathers'. Is that right?

Yes, You know **Funakoshi** emphasised Kata, but **Yoshitaka** stressed Basics and Pre-arranged Sparring. He also placed more emphasis on kicks.



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The Black Belt Certificate awarded to Shinkin Gima by Master Gichin Funakoshi.

In Funakoshi Sensei's early books, the stances and kicks shown in the kata are somewhat different from those of present day JKA (Japanese Karate Association) style. For example, there are Front kicks, not side kicks, in what today are 'Heian Nidan' and 'Heian Yodan'. How do you account for this?

I think changes were inevitable to some extent. Everyone teaches a little differently. I can remember Itosu Sensei reprimanding my teacher, Yabu for teaching something differently. As regards stances, I feel that some present day Karateka over-exaggerate them. For example, I think *Kibadachi* (Horse stance) is often over exaggerated. Unfortunately, travelling around Japan, I lost touch with events in Tokyo at times. I don't think the changes that have taken place can be ascribed to any one individual.

Did Funakoshi Sensei teach any Kobudo weapons? Yes, he taught a little Bo-jutsu. He taught me a basic Bo Kata, 'Tenryu' (Heavenly Dragon) no Kon', which I still practise.

Did he teach any other weapons? There are photographs of him with Sai.

I don't think so. He may have known the basics of some other weapons, Sai, for instance, but I don't think he knew any other weapons Kata.

Did he teach Nage-waza/Throwing Techniques? Yes, Nine throws in all. I can give you the names, if you like. Let's see: *Udewa*; *Gyaku-tsuchi*; *Byobu-odashi*; *Koma-nage*; *Kubiwa*; *Kata-waguruma*; *Tsubamegaeshi*; *Yaridama*, and *Tani-otoshi*.

Are these throws similar to any Judo throws? Yes, *Kata-wa-guruma*, for example. I have twice demonstrated them at the Budokan Martial Arts hall in Tokyo. They aren't well known today, although I



Professor Gima (on the right) with Okinawan Goju Master Miyazato. This photo was taken at Master Higaonna's dojo in Yoyogi, Tokyo on the occasion of a special commemorative tournament. Photo T. O'Neill.

expect Otsuka and Konishi know them. Actually we are the only 3 of that generation left in Karate. It's strange how many Karateka have lived to a great age - Itosu, Funakoshi and so on. We 3 are all in our 80's. **Editors Note** Unfortunately only Gima Sensei is left now. Otsuka Sensei and Konishi Sensei are no longer with us see note at end.

Do you remember the demonstration that Funakoshi Sensei and you gave at the old Kodokan?

Yes, I remember it quite well. About eighty of Kano Sensei's pupils were there. Kano Sensei really liked

the demonstration. I remember he was most enthusiastic. Even though he was dressed formally in Haori Hakama, he got up and tried out some of the Karate moves. This demonstration, and **Kano Sensei's** enthusiasm, proved an excellent advertisement for Karate.

How about your own Karate? Do you have any favourite Kata?

I like '*Gojushiho*', which I do in the old style, of course. It's a long Kata, with a lot of open hand (nukite) moves.

This Kata has some unusual moves in it. Some people have likened the moves to those of a drunken man. What do you think?

I don't think so. The odd moves which you see are

defences against the *Bo* (Quarterstaff), like grabbing your opponent's *Bo* and wrenching it away from him.

One last question. Do you still practise Karate?

Of course! I train every day in the morning for a couple of hours. I still practise the *Bo* Kata that **Funakoshi** taught me, as well as '*Gojushiho*'. I am also still involved in teaching at the Dojo of my ex-company.

Thank you very much, Gima Sensei.

NOTE See '*Fighting Arts*' Vol. 4 No. 6 and Vol. 5 No. 1 respectively for features/interviews with the other two great Professors of Japanese Karate, **Yasuhiro Konishi** and **Hidenori Otsuka**.

