

What's ^{in a} Name?

Confusion and Consistency in the Evolution of the Ryu

by Tom Hunnicutt

Trying to trace your martial arts lineage at times can be more than difficult—it can be almost impossible. The reasons are many, but the main explanation for the dilemma is the Chinese model used to name particular systems. As the Chinese kung fu systems evolved over the centuries and moved from the Shaolin monasteries into the villages, towns and cities, they became the property of common people. Some were educators, some were merchants, some were community and military leaders, and some were criminals, but the need for some form of self-defense and a good exercise program for health had become a cultural preoccupation. As this evolution occurred, each element started to name their own brand of the art. Some used family names, some used animal names, and some used geographical names. Since each was independent of each other, and there was no formal way it was taught, there was great diversity. To make matters worse, many martial artists kept their particular system cloaked in secrecy.

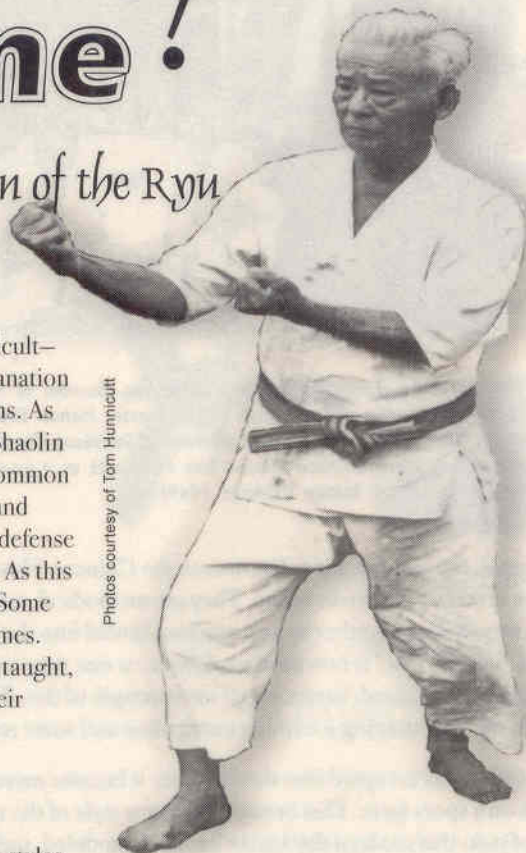
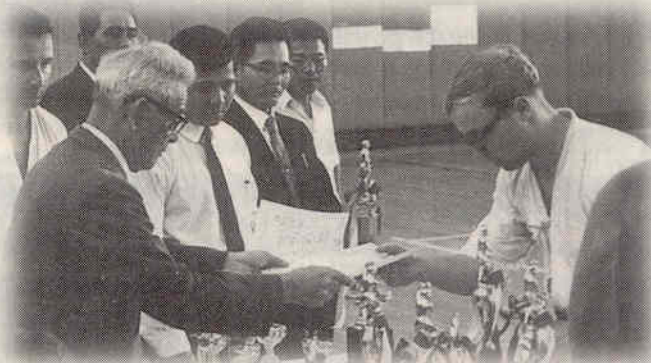
Diverging Systems

As times changed, so did the evolution in kung fu—splitting into hard and soft styles, with each moving into other countries. Two of these countries were Okinawa and Japan, and although these nations are important, the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia are also part of this equation. Nonetheless, Japan and Okinawa are good, modern models to focus on because of their recorded history, particularly since during the early development of karate, Okinawa was an independent kingdom.

As the Chinese and Japanese squabbled for regional dominance, kung fu continued to travel into these countries, as did the ongoing naming and renaming of each particular style or *ryu*. That ongoing struggle has only recently started to abate, adding to the confusion as the different styles continued to grow.

Another fact concerning the evolution of jujutsu (jijitsu) karate is that the systems

Grand Master Hohan Soken giving out an award to Thomas Bellamy, a student of Sensei Hunnicutt's as Grand Masters Higa, Toma, Kise, and Uehara look on. (Torii Station Okinawa Karate Tournament - 1969)



Photos courtesy of Tom Hunnicutt

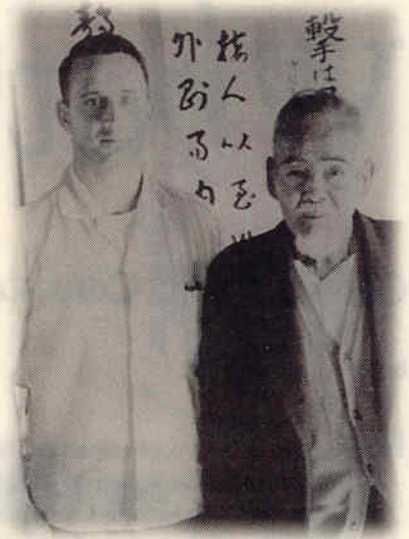
Grand Master Hohan Soken (founder of Matsumura Seito) demonstrating what appears to be old time boxing, but from this position Soken can kick with either foot and set up full or have traps which lead to Karate close combat grappling.

evolved over a long period of time. As hard kung fu emerged in Okinawa, it became known as "Tode" which can be closer linked to the Chinese "Tang" (Way of the Fist or Law of the Fist). To go a bit further, the name Shorin is actuality Shaolin, and the Japanese and Chinese characters mean exactly the same thing: "small" or "young forest." The Japanese and Okinawans pronounced the word as "Shorin,"—and it was added as such to their language.

The soft style of kung fu traveled into Korea and Japan, but the Japanese became the main players in the growth of jujutsu as it spread throughout their land. As in China, various names soon



Top row: Unknown; grand Master Siekichi Uehara (founder of Motabu-Ryu); Grand Master Seitoku Higa (founder of Bugei-kan); Grand Master Hohhan Soken (founder of Matsumura Seito); Grand Master Tsunayansu Toma (founder of Seidokan); Grand Master Fusei Kise (founder of Kenshinkan). Bottom: Grand Master Tom Hunnicutt as a young sensei with Sensei Kinjo and Sensei Shima. Torii Station Okinawa 1969)



Sensei Tom Hunnicutt and Grand Master Shigeru Nakamura at the founder of Okinawan Kempo's Nago, Okinawa dojo. (summer of 1968)

followed, but without any references to the Chinese. However, the Japanese must be given credit where credit is due. They are methodical, and started organizing all systems that were linked together by any common thread into the "martial arts." Although the term "martial arts" is now used worldwide, at one time authorities controlled who was officially recognized; karate is just one example of this. This approach ensured good teaching: encouraging a training curriculum and some name continuity.

As jujutsu was accepted into that institute it became more formal, and as it evolved it took on a sport form. That brought on a new style of the martial arts: judo. It is from the art of judo that modern day karate has been modeled, including the ranking system, the colored belts, testing procedures, and competition.

New Monikers

As karate came into the 20th century, it also changed as it was accepted into various school systems. However, in 1936 the Okinawan karate masters renamed the widely used "Tode"—which reflected the Chinese associations—to karate or "empty hand." That change was accepted by the Japanese, and has been adopted worldwide to this day. But Okinawans did not drop the name of Shorin as the main way to identify their brand of karate. In like manner, it was not accepted into the Japanese martial arts, but had to be modified; all names were changed that had any Chinese relations. In addition, the Okinawans caused more confusion; though their Okinawan art "Tode" was renamed "karate," they did not identify the differences as the Japanese had done between the arts of jujutsu and judo. As a result, we now we have a sport branch of karate with the same name as straight combative karate.

My Grand Master, Hohhan Soken, was absent from Okinawa during this period of change, but he often referred to sport karate as "Kajudo" and later changed the name of his system of Shuri-te to Matsumura Seito (*seito* meaning straight). He wanted to identify that Matsumura's style as "combative or pure" system...and here we have the creation of another "ryu." Even from Matsumura Seito, others have gone on to rename their own brand of this system.

Most masters change the name of the system because they believe it would be like stealing to use your master's name to identify your system. However, this custom causes a lack of continuity. Following are two small examples of how new names appear from a common source as time moves on:

1. Shorin-Ryu Karate Branch Name

Sokon "Bushi"	
Matsumura.....	Shuri-te (founder)
Hohhan	
Soken.....	Matsumura Seito (founder)
Fusei	
Kise.....	KenShinKan (founder)
Yuichi	
Kuda.....	Matsumura Kempo (founder)
Seiki	
Aragaki.....	ShinbunKan (founder)
Tom Hunnicutt.....	Matsumura Seito (founder)

(Note that I used the same name as my Grand Master Hohhan Soken. I, too, was informed that after a grand master passed away, the student should change the system's name or follow the name of another sensei. However, I was trying to maintain continuity and make matters less confusing to those I was teaching.)

2. Shorin Ryu Karate

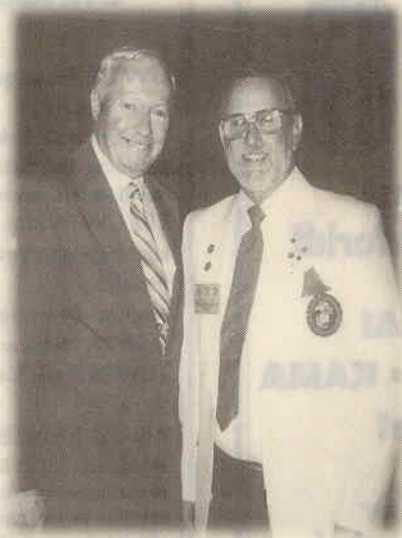
Soken "Bushi"	
Matsumura.....	Shuri-te (founder)

Choki	
Motobu.....	GoTen-te/ Shuri-te (student)
Choyu	
Motobu.....	GoTen-te/ Shuri-te (student)
Seikichi	
Uehara.....	Motobu-Ryu (founder)
Seitoku	
Higa.....	Bugei-Kan (founder)
Tsunayansu	
Toma.....	SeidoKan (founder)
Yohsio	
Shiroma.....	RenbyKan (founder)
Kentoku	
Kaneshiro.....	ShubuKan (founder)

Some of these branches claim that Matsumura was not a part of the Palace Hands System, or Go Ten-te. However, all claim a linkage to him! The very fact that Matsumura was who he was—Chief Retainer of All Palace Samurai and personal bodyguard to King Sho Tae—would imply he had a hand in all martial arts training at Shuri Castle.

More Than a Name

There are several names of many branches and styles, but lineage only gives a person an historic perception of his art. More important than the name of your ryu or branch is: Can it do for me what is



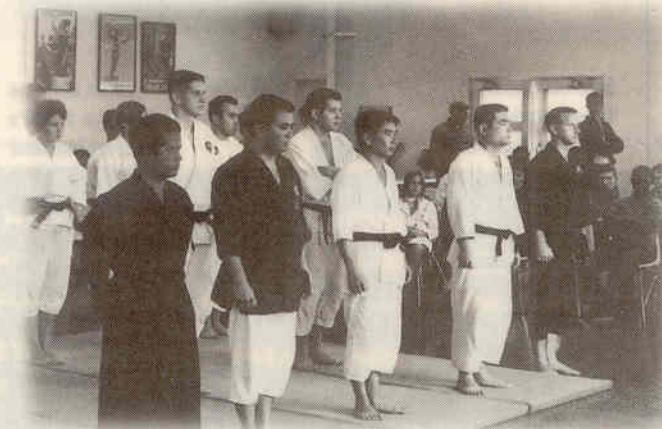
Retired Marine Corps General Al Gray and Shihan Tom Hunnicutt at the Marine Corps Cryptologic Association's 1992 Reunion at Camp Le Jeune, North Carolina.

expected under the most trying circumstances? When survival is a must, will it serve me? When there is no one else to help me, will I have the mental, physical and spiritual strength needed to stand alone against real attackers? If the answer is yes, you have a good system, but if you would answer "no" to even one of these questions, you need to make a quick analysis of the system and the problems ahead.

If it is going to take eight years or more to learn how to defend yourself, something is wrong. (Though if you plainly admit that you're training for sport, not survival, then that's a different matter.) Likewise, if your instructor cannot answer your questions in a logical way, something is wrong. People don't come out safely from a physical confrontation because they had the right name and right lineage. The bottom line:

Don't let the confusion over names bother you. Instead, concentrate on the treasures of your system even as the "evolution of the ryu" continues to evolve. **W**

A retired Marine Corps Special Intelligence Officer, Tom Hunnicutt heads the White Swan Karate Dojo and the All Okinawan Ozark Mountain Karate Association" out of Williford, Arkansas. He is a *judan* (tenth degree black belt) and has studied the martial arts since 1956. He holds black belts in Shorinji-Ryu, Okinawan Kempo, C'huan Fa Bu-De-Ryu, and Matsumura Seito Karate. He has also studied ju jutsu, boxing, judo, and combat-judo. He studied under the late Grand Master Hohan Soken and also became his personal friend.



Front row, L to R: Grand Master Fusei Kise (founder of KenShinKan; Grand Master Yuichi kuda (founder of Matsumura Kempo); Unknown, Sensei Hiroshi Kikumara; and Grand Master Tom Hunnicutt of the AOOMKA (Student of Matsumura Seito). (Jan 1969 at Kadena Air Base Okinawa)

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