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A Study in Fusion

Tsuyoshi Chitose (1898 to 1984) left a legacy in a karate method that he named Chito-Ryu. The name itself implies O-Sensei's own historical view of the origins of Okinawan karate being rooted in Chinese kempo. The most notable feature of this karate method, though, is its claim to be a synthesis of the two main foundation Okinawan self-defence methods, Naha-te and Shuri-te.



O-Sensei didn't just claim to derive his curriculum from these two methods, but he made note that his style, Chito-Ryu, was unique in

that it emphasized that 70% of one's power needed to be utilized in karate practice. Not 80%, like Naha-te, or 50%, like Shorin-ryu, but specifically 70%. This direction suggests a new understanding, and if it is truly derived from a synthesis of the two foundation Okinawan styles of te, then it also implies a very deep knowledge of both.

Here, then, lies the dilemma for the karateka who seeks mastery in Chito-Ryu. Firstly, to arrive at such mastery, one needs to show a deep understanding of the principles of both Shorin- and Shorei-Ryu. And then, one needs to understand clearly where the points of synthesis are. On top of that, the master of Chito-Ryu needs to be able to do it, and also to teach it.

For this author, that is the very dilemma. I have said to Sakamoto-Sensei many times, "*Sukoshi wakarimasu, demo, dekimasen.*" My Japanese is poor, but I try to convey that although I have a glimmer of understanding of what he shows and describes, I can do very little of it to my own satisfaction. So this essay is an attempt to describe what I think I know, and what I would greatly desire to be able to do.

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The Points of Note About Shuri-te

In Shuri-te, the energy point is the centre of the body. In his book, *The Secrets of Okinawan Karate*, Kiyoshi Arakaki writes that the waist is like the wrist of a cowboy, cracking his whip. From this point, you produce energy and transfer the energy to your opponent. The problem lies in trying to relax the body enough to allow a sequence of acceleration from the first waist rotation to the fist reaching the target. Like a whip, even after hitting, the fist remains relaxed. It is only tensed at the point of contact, and then not consciously. Rather, it is a matter of simply allowing the target to curl the fingers.

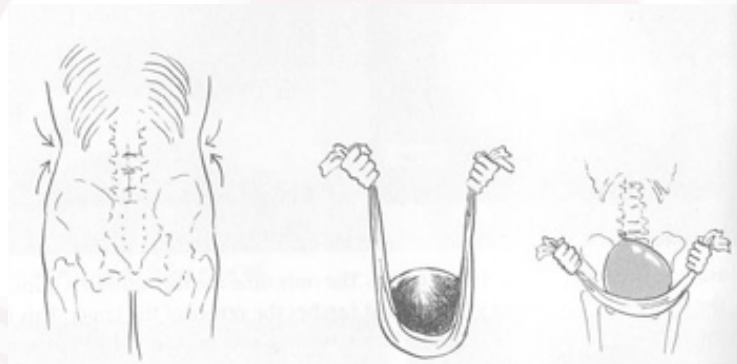


Constant application on the makiwara reinforces this idea. After many years of practice, it becomes second nature to remain relaxed and to allow the natural weight of the motion to penetrate the target.

The tsuki of Shuri-te quivers, because the whipping motion of the body creates energy and transfers energy completely. To do anything else renders the motion something other than whip-like, and therefore not the Shuri-te method.

Shuri-te practitioners employ *gamaku*, or *shimegoshi*. Arakaki describes it as "the moment a fist reaches a target, you employ gamaku so as to rapidly contract but not tighten the muscles between the lower ribs and the sacrum. Gamaku will put extra weight behind your tsuki and help stabilize your position, so when you hit a target, you will not be pushed back by a rebound from your own tsuki." He adds the point that employing gamaku does not mean tightening up your body to protect yourself.

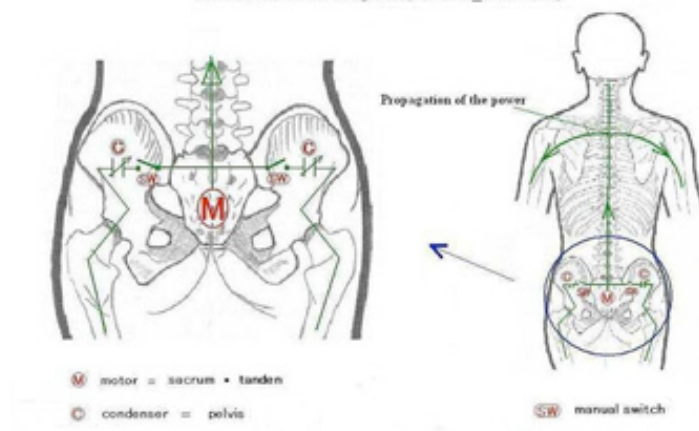
Arakaki uses a clear illustration to describe gamaku. Imagine a balloon filled with water and placing it in a hand towel you are holding at each end. The weight of the balloon will pull down the towel and increase its tension. The position of the balloon in the towel is the sacrum and the ends of the towel are the ribs. It is important to imagine a water filled balloon rather than a solid object, such as a heavy metal ball.



In order to promote the whipping motion of the Shuri-te punch, the practitioner needs to train in a particular way. The risk of hyperextension of the elbows is great, as the punch must remain unchecked on the way to the target. One preparation exercise is to continually extend the arms out from the body as though you were doing a double uraken from a close guard. The arms relax, and even twist a little at the end to encourage an extension a little over 180 degrees. This can also be done from arms crossed, and then extended out to the sides. Arakaki refers to this exercise as tendon cancellation. While in a conversation with Sakamoto-Sensei, he described the efforts to develop a co-concentric contraction necessary to developing a powerful technique.

It is interesting to note that Sakamoto-Sensei has been doing these exercises for a very long time, and so demonstrates clearly the characteristics of the Shuri-te punch, and had done so, I believe, long before he reacquainted himself with Shinzato-Sensei. Sakamoto-Sensei recently introduced some diagrams to offer an explanation of the different approach to power generation that characterize the Shuri-te and Naha-te methods.

mechanism of Shimegoshi (ShuriTe_Naifanchi)



The most important exercise to develop the shuri-te technique is the kata Naihanchi. Mastery of this kata can be seen in the technique of Shinzato-Sensei, whom Sakamoto-Sensei had met many years ago in the U.S.A. and recently visited in Okinawa. Naihanchi is peculiar as it emphasizes sideways, or crab-like movement. Foot and body movements are of critical importance, as is *metsuke*, or eye contact with the imaginary opponent.

The practitioner must learn to move sideways effectively, and then to deliver the Shuri-te whipping punch from the side. Shinzato-Sensei demonstrates his whipping punch, which appears to be a kagi-zuki, as it is delivered from a side position. His opponent is unable to block his punch as he uses the whipping motion without first loading the muscles, and also very fast retraction of the punch that seems to cause a reaction deficit in the defender. It is interesting that the retraction of the punch is a technique that Sakamoto-Sensei has long emphasized as a key ingredient in *hakkei*, or the explosive punch.

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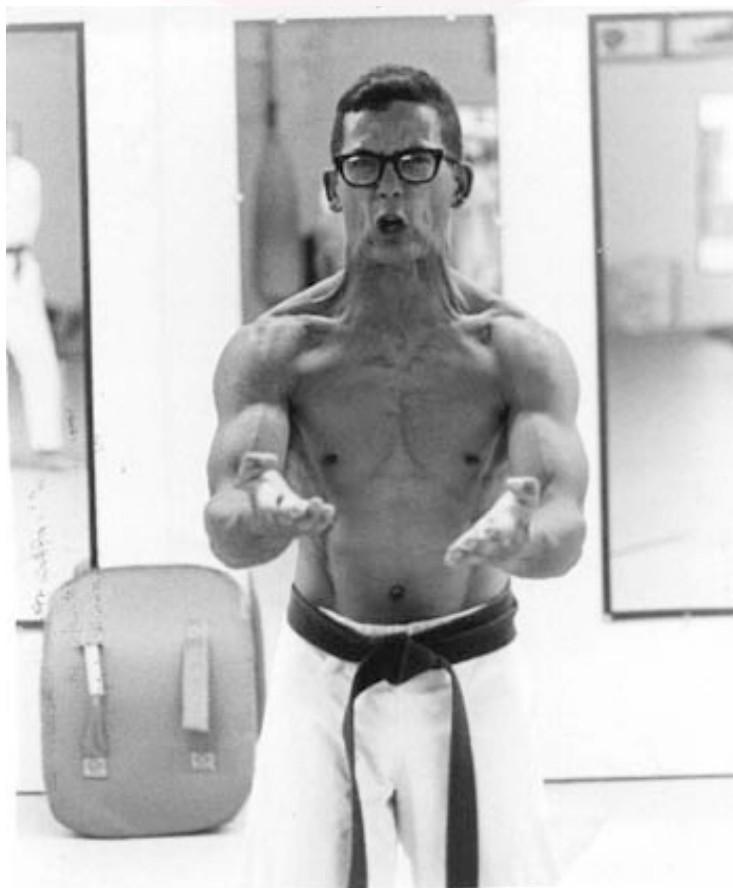
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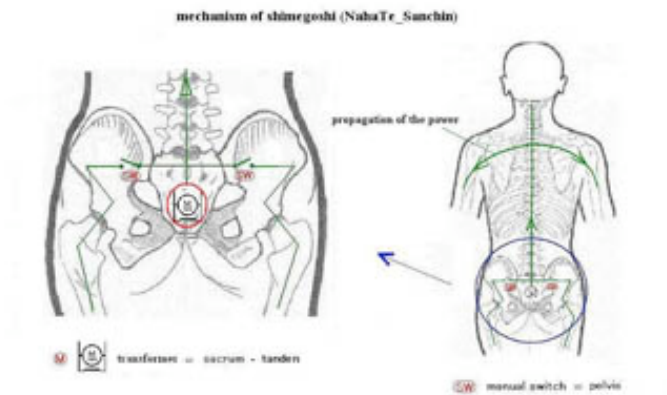
The Points of Note About Naha-te

Arakaki wrote that "the tsuki of Naha-te is delivered by fixing the lower body momentarily, then employing *chinkuchi*, unlike Shuri-te's tsuki, which shakes and snaps the upper and lower body like a whip." He believes that *chinkuchi* is the "one-inch punch," as amazing power is developed even though there is almost no distance between the fist and the target. Contracting the deltoid and trapezium muscles allows you to punch while your arm is bent. In Sanchin kata, the Naha-te practitioner learns to contract muscles in the forearm as well as to extend the fist to the target. The pronator and quadratus muscles of the forearm are contracted, which means the supinator on the backhand side of the arm extends, pushing the knuckles forward.



A. J. Advincula practising Sanchin Kata, 1979

The advantage of Naha-te is that the body is mostly more solid, and there is more emphasis on the tightening or contracting of the body. This implies that the Naha-te practitioner may develop better the ability to absorb punches and kicks as they may rebound from stronger muscles. This is a simplistic summary of Naha-te, as is a description of the forces of expansion (hari) and contraction (shime) that are employed in the arms only. Sakamoto-Sensei has made a diagram of his understanding of the forces of expansion and contraction in the tanden, as the true source of power in the tsuki.



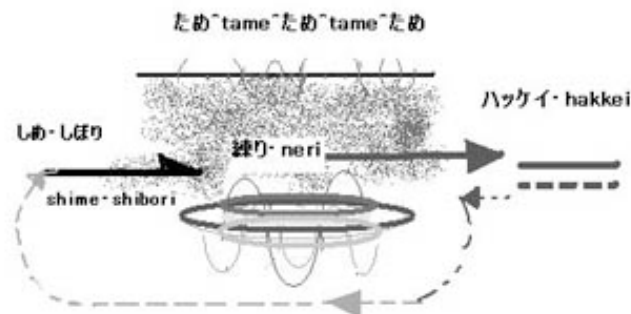
I am presuming here that chinkuchi and hakkei may be the same force, but of course it is never that simple. To produce focused and profound power it is not the arms, but the tanden that promotes the energy required to deliver a punch with real explosive power. Sakamoto sensei summarizes this process:

"TAME" is in the surface of "NERI." It maintains the power which was condensed in NERI. Then, it is possible to connect with momentary HAKKEI and defence. It may have spoken before but I use a crack (^) at this time. I send power to the sole of the foot at this time (^). This is one technique of "nigashi." It is different from "nuki"

Even if it is called NERI, there is big width in the volume. HAKKEI doesn't mean the power to let out from NERI with little volume.

Incidentally, as for HAKKEI, as for aiming only at the power to let out, it is no good. The power to pull is important.

However, learn the fact that HAKKEI is not the skill that can be easily acquired soon.



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Physics Fu



This is all very complex. A student of mine, Ashley Mackellar, is an engineer. He wrote a very interesting paper titled "[Physics Fu](#)," which he published on the Chitokai Website. After describing the processes involved in the manufacture of the powerful punch in terms of Newton's laws of physics, using formulae for force, momentum, kinetic energy, power and work, he summed up as follows:

The start of a powerful karate strike begins by sinking the body to lower the centre of gravity. From there the largest amount of the body mass must be added to the strike without upsetting the balance of the body. To achieve maximum velocity and acceleration of the impact surface, the body must start relaxed and then tense from the floor to the hand using the hips and linking the momentum. Although the muscles start relaxed, they must be contracted at the moment of impact to protect the body and ensure a better transfer of energy into the target.

For maximum work the target must also be moved back by the strike, this can be achieved by focusing the strike through the target so it ends behind the original position. Both equations are affected by the contact time between the striker and the target, so pulling back quickly after a strike increases the power felt. A quick recovery also allows the karateka to strike again sooner which will allow them to deal with multiple opponents."

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A Fusion?

I make the bold conclusion here that O-Sensei had a very clear understanding of how the Naha-te punch and the Shuri-te punch was produced, and also how the practitioner needed to train to develop an understanding of both techniques.



Naihanchi kata is significant in that it teaches the practitioner to float, to move sideways, to understand the importance of the imaginary centre of gravity and the real centre, and the importance of avoiding the deadlock one has when the imaginary centre of gravity and the real centre of gravity are the same. It is my observation that this is the very problem with the modern interpretation of Chito-Ryu. In the modern style, there is very little delineation in concept between kata, and so the higher kata, like Rohai (which is inspired by the elegance of the crane, and draws on universal energy), are performed with similar basic concepts as the lower form, Seisan. There is no discussion of Naha-te or Shuri-te technique, and it seems no understanding, then, on the technical

foundation of the style.

This is a tragedy, as a style cannot claim to be Okinawan or traditional, let alone a synthesis of the root styles, without this understanding. Indeed, Sanchin is the key kata that informs the fundamental technique of Naha-te. It would seem, then, that Chito-Ryu needs to declare a closer technical link to Goju-Ryu, even though the kata of the same names have little resemblance to each other. With a study of Naihanchi, however, Sakamot-Sensei believes that the link to Shuri-te has been reaffirmed, and the possibility exists to understand more fully the points of fusion that have evolved into the Chito-Ryu technique.

O-Sensei, however, left a legacy that demonstrates he had a very clear understanding of the unique aspects of both lineages, to the point that he offered a synthesis of the two. The selection of kata in his curriculum shows a mixture of Naha-te and Shuri-te techniques, but they differ from kata that today can be identified as either Goju-Ryu or Shorin-Ryu kata.

Sanchin is a good example of this. In the Sanchin of Chito-Ryu, the kata ends with the soft techniques that point towards Tensho. And so too, in Niseishi, the kata begins with emphasis on shime, wakishiburi and neri, and then changes to a softer, whip-like segment, that appears to promote the shimegoshi that is a feature of the Shuri-te concept. This seems vexing, but only if one persists in looking for clear evidence in kata selection of its origins in one style or the other. O-Sensei appears to have fused the concepts of both, and so while in one section of kata there is emphasis on contraction and generation of power toward the target through sudden release, there are other sections where the whip-like action of Shuri-te is employed.

The kata Seisan and Niseishi are good examples of this fusion. Seisan has its origins in the Naha-te method; yet the Shuri-te schools also practise a kata, Seishan, where the objective is to learn to use a relaxed body to cancel out the opponents' strikes. After intensive training in Sanchin, one tends to practise Seisan with the attributes of the Naha-te method, with emphasis on neri, shibori, hari and the development of power through the sudden release of this built up tension (tame), to produce hakkei, or explosive power.

If one trains in Naihanchi, however, the approach to Seisan is different. The focus now is on the relaxation of the body, the use of the whiplike action in the centre of the body, employing gamaku, or correct hip tension and lower back tension, and the relaxation after the technique that promotes the sudden and whip-like change in direction. The punch then tends to be shorter or at least it recovers to a more relaxed attitude. Again, the idea is to develop hakkei, or explosive power, but here the emphasis is as much on the retraction of the punch as on the extension.

Hakkei is a difficult concept to understand, but if the terms hakkei and chinkuchi refer to the same thing, then it seems both the Naha-te and the Shuri-te practitioners are looking for the same expression of explosive power. My research leads me to the conclusion that although there are stated differences in technique, degree of effort and tension required to produce power, the advanced practitioners of the two methods would have a very good understanding of the principles common to both. O-Sensei would certainly have been in this group. No need to worry about the real origins of Chito-Ryu, if we agree that it is indeed a fusion of these two methods.

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A Tradition of Fusion

It may be worth noting that Shuri-te and Naha-te are relatively new terms in the long history of Okinawan civil self-defence methods. "Todi" Sakugawa is thought to have introduced his Shaolin method in 1806, while Higaonna Kanayro returned from China in 1881. Bushi Matsumura, O-Sensei's grandfather, had a profound influence on both Anko Itosu and Aragaki Seisho. If Nova Scotia, Canada's Michael Colling is correct, Itosu had as senior students Gichin Funakoshi, Chojun Miyagi and Higaonna Kanryo.



This implies that up to the end of the 19th century and even into the early 20th century, Okinawans studied a fusion of ideas and endemic methods that collectively were known as ti, or todì. It seems reasonable to include in the early influences of this local system of self-defence the Chinese martial arts, such as the southern Fujian Qanfa, Ti'gwa from Siam, Tuite, or joint locking used by law enforcement officials and the local Buki gwa, or weapon systems peculiar to the Okinawan archipelago. It is interesting to note that the makiwara is a peculiarly Okinawan invention, used by practitioners of both Shuri-te and Naha-te.

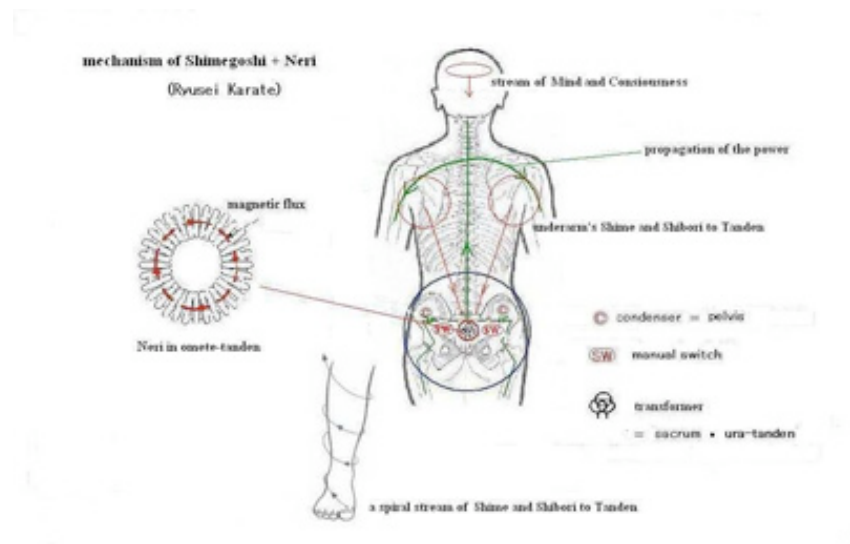
Further to this, both the founders of Shuri-te and Naha-te claim to be influenced by the southern Fujian White Crane system. Shuri-te's Kushanku is said to have evolved from the kata Hakutsuru, or White Crane, and it well known that Higaonna had spend his time in China studying Fujian White Crane.

Why then, do the Okinawan kata appear so different fom their Chinese "cousins," and, for that matter, from each other? It would seem that the influence of Chinese martial arts is significant in the development of Okinawan martial arts, but not unique. Rather, this influence built on the long tradition of an eclectic system that over time became Okinawan todì. Shinzato himself said, in an interview in Slovenia in 2008:

It is rather easy to establish that karate's beginnings were in China. The names of all kata sound Chinese, even though they are not pronounced the same way as in China. The way they sound does not resemble Okinawan or Japanese in the least. Despite that it is hard to identify a connection between Okinawan karate and the Chinese martial arts, at least as far as the Shorin-Ryu style is concerned. Karate has been changing through centuries, from generation to generation, until it became in its appearance completely different from Chinese styles of martial arts.

It is reasonable to suppose that as the body types of the early masters were different, so too would be their interpretation of the techniques they had learned, even from the very same teachers. The advanced practitioner, just like the early masters, needs to cross-reference with other systems, making a thorough study of the principles of each system.

Sakamoto-Sensei has dedicated his life to a deep study of karate, but he has not confined himself to a particular system. In his efforts to find s real understanding of O-Sensei's technique, he has researched deeply, travelled to China and Okinawa, drawn on his experience in sumo, judo and aikido, and made a deep study of exercises in meditation, always cross-referencing and making constant adjustments to his own technique. Recently, he sent out to seniors in the Ryusei method an illustration showing how he saw a true fusion of the Shuri-te and Naha-te methods. This is complex, and shows a deep understanding of a system of power generation that I can only make superficial comment about.



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The Importance of Meditation and Breathing

Sakamoto-Sensei has introduced exercises in breathing and movement to promote health, body awareness, the flow of ki in the body, and the relationship between thought and body motion in the cultivation of power. The diagram on the previous page shows clearly that power is not propagated by physical action alone, but by a stream of consciousness that flows from the brain, not just to direct the muscles and joints, but to stimulate the tanden. This higher level of consciousness, or *ishiki*, can only be developed by deep introspection.



Accordingly, Sakamoto-Sensei has introduced into his training curriculum exercises such as Ishi Zen, Hachi Dan Ken, Taichi Bassai and Rohai, an open-handed version of Niseishi and also Sanchin, as well as standing meditation, or Ritsu Zen. Some of these exercises are very old. Hachi Dan Ken, for example, has its origins in the qigong set of exercises, the Eight Pieces of Brocade – developed by Marshall Yu Fei in the 12th century during the Song Dynasty, in order to improve the health of his soldiers.

After experiencing the Ishi Zen exercises, a student in my club, who is a professional acupuncturist, suggested that these exercises may be designed to strengthen and gather ki in the San Jiao, or Three Heaters. This is basically a way of looking at how one's internal organs function on a ki level. The torso and its organs are divided into three heaters or burners. The upper heater contains the heart and lungs; the middle contains the stomach and spleen; and the lower, the kidneys, intestines and reproductive organs, as well as the tanden. The San Jiao communicates with all the meridians via source points on the feet and hands, supplying the meridians with energy. The lower heater is particularly important, as the flow of ki between the kidneys is thought to be the foundation of life, and so the lower heater may activate the other heaters.

With this understanding, it is useful to examine Sakamoto-Sensei's illustration of the fusion of Shuri-te and Naha-te. Sinking in karate stances activates the lower heater. The wringing feeling of shibori acts to move ki from the San Jiao to the meridians. In addition to the other forces of shimegoshi or neri and tame (either process seems to do the job), power to the limbs can be explosive or sustained, depending on the intent.

This not only explains the concept of the "unbendable arm" but also the explosive penetration of the force referred to as hakkei. Martial artists know well that power does not come from muscular force, but from the effective use of the hip area, where the tanden is located. Mastery of technique, I would conclude, comes from the utilization of not only physical but mental, emotional and spiritual strength. This higher state of consciousness is called ishiki.

Sakamoto-Sensei stresses the importance of "seeing with the six eyes." He refers to metsuke, of course, but then also the importance of cultivation of ki in the body. We "drink" and "bite" the floor when we step, and lean forward slightly to activate the "bubbling well" cavity on the sole of the foot. We also "breathe" through the palm of the hand. As can be seen from the illustrations Sakamoto has provided, thought and electrical energy plays as much a role in generation of power as does the physical act of gamaku, and the spiralling, co-concentric action that is shibori. In fact, without the practice of introspection or ishiki, and also the ability to completely relax the muscles, it is not possible to create the motion that he describes as a magnetic flux.

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Both Methods Seek the Same End

Sakamoto-Sensei's previous illustration makes me realize that both methods, Naha-te and Shuri-te, have been seeking the same proficiency, but through different means. To understand this, we can consider an account from a kendo master.

In his book, *Miyamoto Musashi, His Life and Writings*, Kenji Tokitsu recounted his amazement at discovering, at 57 years of age, the secret to perfect technique. Tokitsu had explained perfect technique in terms of physics, although he knew it was insufficient to do so.



Then he discovered that "the tanden and the koshi (a zone situated at

the base of the back opposite the tanden), located on opposite sides of the body, constitute a whole in practice.” Their roles, however, are not the same.

The tanden commands the koshi. Training of the koshi is synonymous with training of the tanden, or centre of the body, and through this it becomes training of the body and mind... If you conceive of training like this, every technique serves to strengthen the musculature of the koshi and the tanden. This has pretty nearly the same effect as strengthening the tanden by practicing zazen. If the practice of kendo remains on a level of mere technical manipulation, the effect cannot be the same. By generating the technique from the koshi and the tanden, we can strengthen different aspects of our mind and appreciate kendo on the level of the highest subtlety.

It seems that Shuri-te places a great emphasis on the role of the back and hip in the cultivation of the motion required to generate speed and power. Naha-te, on the other hand, has placed a greater emphasis on the development of the tanden, through shiburi, hari and neri. Both methods understand the importance of mental development, but it may be fair to propose that Naha-te, through the practice of Sanchin, standing zazen, the cultivation of energy in the body through particular exercises and body postures, has a more deliberate focus on the relationship between the mind and the tanden.

There is much to glean from both methods, then. Some authors suggest that one should not try to mix the methods, as it could be detrimental to your health, or result in a poor understanding of technique in general. I believe, however, that if one understands the points of difference, then surely there can only be advantage in a deep understanding of both.

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Overview of Ryusei Curriculum

It is interesting that Jigoro Kano, in his book, *Mind Over Muscle*, wrote that he wanted to develop traditional jujitsu into a comprehensive method of physical education, intellectual training and moral education. He finally developed his ideas into Kodokan judo:

I did this thoroughly researching the jujutsu that had existed up until that time as much as possible, keeping what I felt should be kept, discarding what I felt should be discarded, thoroughly studying the techniques and theories and establishing them in a way that would be most applicable in today's society.



O-Sensei did the same, and he developed a curriculum that is indeed a synthesis of the two root methods, and as a result is unique in itself. Most kata of Ryusei Chito-Ryu are unique and bear little resemblance to other Okinawan forms of the same name.

Sakamoto-Sensei has continued this tradition of re-examination and improvements that reflect his understandings. O-Sensei changed many of the forms, and left sections out, and Sakamoto-Sensei believes this is a challenge to find out more for himself, as O'Sensei had told him that he had only taught the first half of the method; the rest was up to him.

The Australian Chitokai crest is distinguished by a red line that is narrow at the top and winds its way down to a wider end. I remember a conversation I had with Sakamoto-Sensei in the mid-1990s, over a cup of green tea, in the small flat that visitors bunked in at the Chito-Ryu honbu in Kumamoto. He said that today was a river, and that Chito-Ryu was but a contributor to that river of knowledge. Nobody can claim ownership to the river of knowledge, they can only add to it, and through an austere, lifelong study, hope to promote its legacy.

—Brian Hayes, Chief Instructor, Renshi, Australian Chitokai Karate Association

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