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Naihanchin: An Internal Divided Conflict

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For the past forty years, John Mirrione, Sr. and I have spent endless hours discussing, practicing and perfecting Shorinjiryu katas. Grasping both the notion and enactment of the perfect kata is like trying to hold water in one's hand. Perhaps a keen look back into history might serve as the near-perfect source of martial arts flexible meaning and wisdom. Naihanchin Kata would be a good place to start since it is both a very basic, while at the same time, advanced kata of Shorinjiryu Karatedo.

Naihanchin (aka: Ni Fuan Chi, Nifanchi, Naihanchi) might be translated as "Internal Divided Conflict", "Fighting Within", or "Sideways Fighting". It has a long and varied history spanning back well over two-hundred years to the time of Bushi Sakugawa, Matsumura, and earlier to the Buddhist Sifus of Shaolin Quanfa (Shorinji Kempo) of Fujian, China. It was developed and systematized by the above master of Shurite and over the centuries was transformed into many variations. Furthermore, Naihanchin has many obvious (omoto) and hidden (kakushite) meanings and applications and exists today in Okinawa and Japanese Karatedo in three relatively short katas: Naihanchin Shodan, Nidan, and Sandan. Shihan Kori Hisataka, after decades of practice, thought and deliberation, made additional changes in the form and, as a result, it was altered into its specific shape taught to his Japanese disciples. For example, Hanshi Masayuki Hisataka presently teaches Koshiki Naihanchin and Kudaka-no Naihanchin while Kaicho Shunji Watanabe elected to include Naihanchin-Sho and Naihanchin-Dai in his curriculum. Other Japanese teachers of our style such as Shihan Morita, Yamazaki, Kashimoto and Ishino have taught Naihanchin-no-Kata with slight variations to their mudansha. As Shihan Yamakazi once explained to me, the Shihan encouraged his senior students to think of and practice their own slight variations of the katas he taught them as long as their version has the "same meaning". If one was to observe each of the above Sensei perform his Naihanchin, he would see five or more different opening movements of the kata.

It is not my intention to give an exhaustive history of Naihanchin; one can refer to countless books and articles written on the subject. However, this seminal kata can be

traced to earlier Chinese Shaolin quans (forms) and has given rise to many variations: it can even be found in Japanese transmitted “older” hyungs of Korean Tang Soo Do and Tae Kwon Do. Shihan Mirrione and I have been intrigued with this form ever since we started training in the mid 1960s with Shihan Morita, Yamazaki, and Kashimoto: we noticed how each of them performed the Naihanchin with slightly different variations; in addition, we observed strong links of meaning with other Okinawan and Japanese system. I had these thoughts in mind when I gave a demonstration at Sensei Dan Hayes Bogujitsu Tournaments a number years ago. In collaboration with Shorinjiryu and Shotokan stylists, I endeavored to show the evolution to the form as it exist today in most Karatedo styles, How did Naihanchin evolve in Shorinjiryu Kenkokan Karatedo? Why Did Kaiso Hisataka modify the kata from original “ancient” patterns to the one we practice in our dojos?

“Keep Kata as they are without embellishing them,” stated the venerable Yasutsune Itosu. I can just imagine the howls of dismay, from the masters of the past and the traditionalists of the present, who strongly believe that form must remain faithful to the original and must never change. On the other hand, the advocates of change believe that kata should be modified to make them more meaningful by taking into account the physical differences of their students. These advocates further believe that katas must adapt to changing times. Evidence show that the past master such as Higaonna of Nahate, Miyagi of Gojuryu, Kyan of Shorinjiryu, and yes , even Itosu of Shurite, modified kata as they taught them to their own students: Itosu even synthesized his five basic Pinan (Heian) Katas from the movements of Bassai and Kusanku and included them in his teaching curriculum for Okinawan middle school students. Similarly, Kaiso Hisataka was an advocate of change for the benefit of his students.

The Shinan of our style was profoundly, influenced by Okinawan Karatedo and Chinese Shaolin Quan-Fa. One former students of Shorinjiryu, Sifu Richard Raab, who currently teaches the Chinese Internal Arts, conjectures that Kaiso Hisataka might have studied Xingyiquan (Form-Mind Boxing) with emphasis on whole body motion , rotation of the hips and torso, and the use of the vertical fist (tate ken) in addition to Baquaquan, another Chinese internal; arts, during his travel throughout Manchuria and China. The “hard” external style of Shurite and the softer Okinawan style of Nahate is evident the shihan’s selection of kata within Shorinjiryu Kenkokan Karatedo.

Naihanchin was a basic form of Shurite; the younger Hisataka (aka: Seiki Kudaka) probably practiced it with his major teacher Chotoku Kyan on Okinawa and Taiwan. Hence, Kaiso Hisataka’s system of Shorinjiryu combines the softness Shaolin Quanfa and Okinawan Nahate with their pressure point manipulations, joint-locks, and restraints against one opponent with the powerful debilitating blocks, deadly power strikes, kicks and throws of “hard” Shurite developed by Bushis Matsumura and Itosu. One of Kaiso Hisataka’s contributions of Naihanchin was his emphasis on Taisabaki (body shifting) employment against multiple opponents within in a confined rectangular area.

Therefore, through many years of study and reflection, the Shinan decided to modify the original versions of Naihanchin to include techniques which he thought were lacking; According to Hanshi Masayuki Hisataka, he “slightly” modified the kata “...to cover the full range of basic techniques by adding the front punch (shomen-zuki) and front kick (shomen-geri) sequences.” Furthermore, by emphasizing Talsabaki in short and medium range movement, he created “a truly complete form” of the original.

Traditionalists will vehemently maintain that Kori Hisataka had no right to “embellish” the original kata. Who is he to change the original intent of “Tode” Sakugawa or “Bushi” Matsumura! However, opened minded Karateka, regardless of style, will be able to appreciate that the Shinan acted in the same way as other masters of the martial arts according to the tradition of Shurari. Whether one agrees with his interpretations or not, he “paid his dues” within the context of his times; he earned the right to create his own innovations just as other did before him. Kaiso Hisataka was always thinking of ways to improve his Art.

Today, my Shorinjiryu brother John Mirrione, Sr. and I continue to enjoy our martial arts training and teaching in Florida. Our love for Karatedo is unwavering. Our individualism is rooted in rich history of applied practices, deep in thought, and persistent enquiry. After all, it was Kaiso Hisataka who summed it all up in his Kenkokan Dojo Motto, “Dokuji Gyo Seiki”, “Individuality and Spiritual Development in Mind and Body”. Is time for all schools of thought to commit themselves to the spirit and camaraderie of the Martial Arts.