



空手研究室

THE
UNDERSTANDING
OF CHINKUCHI

by Motonaga Tomohiro

ARTICLE – NO. 2

As the grandson of Kyan Chōtoku, I (Motonaga Tomohiro) deeply appreciate Nakazato Jōen sensei's publication of the Karate-dō textbook 'Kyūdō'. This work not only honors my grandfather's legacy but also sheds light on the profound concept of 'Chinkuchi', which I have come to understand after two decades of practicing karate.

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Introduction:

Two important points that need to be introduced are the grandson of Kyan Chōtoku (1870-1945) sensei, Motonaga Tomohiro (1938-2001), and the book "Kyūdō" by Nakazato Jōen (1922-2010). Nakazato sensei and Motonaga Tomohiro apparently knew each other for many years before the book's publication (1988), and it was an honor for him to write a short article for the book.

Nakazato likely came into contact with the grandson during his time under Kyan Chōtoku – how intense their contact was at that time is uncertain, as is when they reconnected after the war. Further research would be needed to obtain well-founded answers to these questions. Hokama Tetsuhiro mentions the following event in his book "Timeline of Karate History – Pre-History to 2000":

1950: January 19. Motonaga Choyu (Kyan Chotokus's grandson) created the Kyan Chotoku Memorial Group. Among the 20 or so members were Nakazato Joen, Oyakawa Hitoshi, Taira Nagamasa, Oyakawa Jinei, etc.¹

However, Nakazato Jōen was still in Kumamoto in 1950 and only returned to Okinawa in 1952, and Motonaga Tomohiro was only 12 years old at the time of the group's creation. There is a mix-up here, and the group's founding actually took place in 1975 (Shōwa 50) – the group photo in Nakazato sensei's book also indicates the date as Shōwa 50, January 19th.

Nakazato sensei's book was published in 1988, self-published, and describes the kata he learned from Kyan, including the kata "Chinen Shikiyanaka no Kon". Fortunately, the grandson of Kyan Chōtoku has addressed an important topic which I would like to introduce for the first time "correctly" translated into English.



Nakazato Jōen sitting in a black suit, Motonaga Tomohiro standing behind him.

¹ Hokama Tetsuhiro: Timeline of Karate history – Pre-History to 2000, translated by Charles (Joe) Swift, Ozato Print Co., Nishihara (Okinawa) - 2007, page 69.

The Understanding of Chinkuchi

The grandson of Kyan Chōtoku – Motonaga Tomohiro 本永朝裕

This time, I express my heartfelt gratitude as the grandson of Kyan Chōtoku, whose direct disciple Nakazato Jōen sensei is publishing what could be called a *karate-dō* textbook titled "*Kyūdō*".

I received kind words from Nakazato Jōen sensei to write something about my grandfather as his grandchild. Therefore, I have decided to write about "*Chinkuchi*", which I have finally understood after 20 years of practicing *karate*.

Well, currently, *karate-dō* has spread and developed globally. International tournaments are frequently held, and many people have become familiar with *karate-dō*. This widespread interest and deepening of its base are causes for celebration on all fronts.

However, upon examining its content, I feel that in *kata* and *bunkai*, aesthetic elements are particularly emphasized, while the original martial aspects of *karate-dō* seem to have been lost.

Since ancient times, there has been a saying: "*Ti ya naran ten, chinkuchi nuka karan nee ti ya aran*," which means, "If it's not *Ti*, it's not *Chinkuchi*; if it's not *Chinkuchi*, it's not *Ti*."

The following story dates back to when my grandfather Chōtoku was around 50 years old and transported raw sugar in a horse-drawn carriage from Nakagami area towards Tundō (present-day Naha Port). During this time, as Chōtoku was unloading a barrel filled with sugar from the carriage, a lawless man approached from behind and threatened him by swinging his fist to intimidate him. However, Chōtoku pretended not to recognize him, calmly picked up a six-foot staff (*Rokushaku Bō*) that was always kept on the carriage, and without saying a word, hooked the end of the staff onto the approximately 120-pound sugar barrel and lifted it down. The lawless man was startled and quickly apologized for his earlier rudeness.

Five feet tall, the slender man Chōtoku could handle lowering a barrel weighing 120 pounds onto the end of a staff, precisely because he had mastered "*Chinkuchi*" to that extent.

Furthermore, in the stories told by Nakazato Jōen sensei, there is also the tale of the washbowl at the public bathhouse ("*sentō*"), which is another demonstration of Chōtoku's mastery of "*Chinkuchi*".

Chōtoku had a deep knowledge of folk culture, particularly during the "*Chinku*" (mobilization for battle) of Shuri Gibo in his hometown. Around the 38th year of the Meiji era (1905), he taught the drum ("*taiko*") to the youths of Yara in Chatan Village, which today is known as "*Yara no Chinku*". This cultural practice in Kadena-chō is designated as a cultural asset, as explained by Iha Tsuyoshi² sensei, the chairman of the Kadena-chō Cultural Heritage Protection Committee.

While *karate-dō* has spread internationally and developed significantly, it is concerning that many instructors pursue only the aesthetic elements, neglecting the martial aspects. This trend poses challenges to the development of *karate* as a discipline.

² A different reading could be Iha Takeshi.

Debriefing:

The principle of "*Chinkuchi*" is a very important aspect to understand the *karate* of Kyan Chōtoku. During our interview with Shimabukuro Zenpo sensei on January 22, 2024³, we asked him about an important anecdote he had heard about Kyan sensei and would like to share, which he gladly did:

My father [Shimabukuro Zenryō] heard the maxim from Kyan sensei that '*karate* is not *karate* until *Chinkuchi* is applied.' This saying is explained and interpreted differently by different people. According to my understanding, it means that '*Chinkuchi*' (muscles and bones must be coordinated). To explain it more clearly and in simpler terms: 'Without a body cultivated through daily rigorous training, it is impossible to achieve great results with minimal effort.' In short, without a well-trained body (including experience), one cannot produce significant results instantly. It is said that, at that time, [Kyan] sensei, who worked as a cart driver, easily hooked and lifted large sugar barrels (weighing dozens of kilograms) with a staff (*Bō*) and loaded them onto a ship. This maxim explains a part of what we today call sports science and is close to biomechanics and sports physiology. How to move the body to exert maximum power and activity. I believe that Kyan sensei's maxim is connected to this.

The story of the bathhouse mentioned by Motonaga Tomohiro was also recounted elsewhere by Nakazato sensei, and the following translation is based on that text:

The Story at the Public Bath

This is a story I [Nakazato Jōen] heard from a teacher named Shimabukuro Matsusuke when I started working at Kitagawa Elementary School in 1943:

"One day in December 1927, I [Shimabukuro Matsusuke] was washing away the day's fatigue at the Iha public bathhouse near the Hija Bridge. Since it was evening, the bathhouse was so crowded that there weren't enough washbowls.

At that time, some young men from the south, who had come to buy cattle (as Hija Bridge had a calf trading market), entered the bathhouse in a group. One of them forcibly tried to take the washbowl that [Kyan] sensei was using. Sensei had his left hand on the washbowl and was washing his body with his right hand. No matter how much the young man tried to pull or push, the washbowl did not move at all, as if it were nailed down.

An elderly man, who had been watching the situation from the beginning, lost his patience and admonished the young man, saying, "Do you know that this person is Kyan Dunchi (Chan dunchi)?" The young man's reckless bravado disappeared, he turned pale, and humbly apologized.

There was no one in Okinawa who did not know of the fame of "*Chan mi gwa*".

It is also interesting to read that Kyan always carried his *Bō* as a cart driver, suggesting he already had substantial knowledge in *Bō-jutsu* before his journey to Ishigaki-Jima. It is also intriguing to

³ The interview will appear in an upcoming issue of the german "*Toshiya*" magazine.

note Kyan's strong interest in folk culture, where he was actively involved in teaching. In both these cases, further comprehensive research is needed to possibly uncover any connection to *karate*.

Attached is a section on "*Yara no Chinku*", which was also mentioned in Motonaga Tomohiro's text.

Yara no Chinku:

It is said that as part of the celebration of victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), a tug-of-war event was held as entertainment in the northern part of Chatan and the southern part of Yomitan, and Chinku was instructed by Kyan Chōtoku (*Chan mi*). The Chinku in Yara is said to be called "*Tokkan*", and in the past, it played a role at the forefront of cheering squads during large tug-of-war events, adding excitement to the cheering battles.

Source: <https://www.town.kadena.okinawa.jp/kadena/culture.html>



Note:

The book by Nakazato Jōen sensei was translated into English without permission from the Nakazato family. I read small parts of it and was very disappointed by its content. It consists of incorrect translations, personal interpretations, and the omission of entire sentences. For example, the entire section written in *Uchināguchi* (Okinawan language) was omitted. Another example is the story of the bathhouse, which was translated as 'Furthermore, Joen Nakazato sensei is also a master of this same 'chinkuchi' technique,' a statement that does not remotely resemble the original section. The English translation thus presents a highly distorted picture of the original book and the teachings of Kyan Chōtoku sensei and Nakazato Jōen sensei.