



空手研究室

# YABU KENTSU – THE CAT AND THE TIGER

by Yannick Schultze

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During my recent stay in Okinawa, I observed the Ryū'ei-ryū training led by Sakumoto sensei, which reminded me of stories about Yabu Kentsū's karate. Yabu emphasized a balance of gentleness (lamb), agility (cat), and strength (tiger) in his teachings.

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After I wrote my article about the overseas demonstration, Motobu Naoki sensei also wrote a short article about Kakedī, a technique that was demonstrated during the 1951 demonstration in São Paulo. In addition to the techniques mentioned by Motobu sensei, the program from that time in the newspaper reveals many other very interesting facts. An anecdote reminded me of a very insightful observation from my last trip to Okinawa.

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During my last stay in Okinawa, I visited Shureidō to buy a few things. I went there in the morning, during class hours, and found that the Ryū'ei-ryū group led by Sakumoto sensei was training in the space above the Shureidō store.

It was easy to hear them training upstairs due to the strong stomping sounds in their kata practice.

I asked the staff if it was possible to observe their training. They told me I'd need to ask Sakumoto Sensei directly. So, I did, and I received permission to watch their practice. During the break, Sakumoto Sensei invited me to chat. He wanted to know what style of karate I practice and where I come from. I explained that I train in Tō'on-ryū under Ikeda sensei in Beppu. Sakumoto sensei also shared some of his experiences in Germany, but that's a story for another time.

The main point of this story is that I could hear their training from the Shureidō store, which reminded me of a story I read in one of Kinjō Akio's books. It was written by Kanzaki Shigekazu (1928–2018), the 3rd Sōke of Tō'on-ryū.

In gatherings of teachers like this<sup>1</sup>, they often ended up at a place called Tsuji, which had a playground and was part of the drinking district. In the second floor of one bar, a discussion arose about a certain technique, and [Kyoda] sensei said, "Well then, let me try it," and stood up, leading to a very impressive demonstration.

However, it seems that those drinking in the room downstairs heard nothing at all. For [Kyoda] sensei, who always aimed to be soft like a cat and strong like a tiger, this was only natural. I also heard this story from someone who is the nephew of [Kyoda] sensei named Yamaguchi Shigeo, who resides in Kumamoto.<sup>2</sup>

It's a fascinating story that captures Yabu Kentsū's karate style very well. Recently, in my article about the two karate demonstrations held overseas, my wife and I translated a Brazilian newspaper article where we encountered the idea of the two animals, the cat and the tiger, as well as the lamb in an everyday context. It's possible that Kyoda Jūhatsu (1887-1968) adopted these animal ideas from Yabu sensei, as we see the same concept from another student of Yabu – Yabiku Mōtoku (1886-1951).

"Karatejutsu", is said to embody three essential elements of training: the gentleness of a lamb in everyday interactions, the agility of a cat in sudden movements, and the strength of a tiger in combat.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Members of the Karate Kenkyū Club – Miyagi Chōjun, Kyoda Jūhatsu, Mabuni Kenwa, Go Kenki, Motobu Chōki etc.

<sup>2</sup> Kinjō Akio (1999): Karate Denshin-roku: Denrai-shi to Genryū-gata, p. 321.

<sup>3</sup> <https://budojapan.com/karate/241011ke/>

Additionally, Tō'on-ryū is also a very calm style; in all the katas, there are only two instances where there are stamping foot movements. Of course, this does not apply to the kata Jion.

It should also be mentioned that the description comes from two different sources: on one hand, from Kyoda Jūhatsu, who left Okinawa in 1944, and on the other hand, from Yabiku Mōtoku, who left Okinawa in 1917.

Luckily, the Brazilian program has much more to tell. But this will be part of a future article.