

“Forceless force is forceful.”

This phrase actually sounds contradictory, but I sensed its existence as I experienced it through a physical contact with Mr. Katsuhiko Shinzato, who is a head of Okinawa Karate-Do Shorin-ryu Kishaba Juku. Without any forceful impact on my hand I was easily off-balance and fell down when he made a soft touch against my attacking hand. He seemed to keep his whole body relaxed when confronting with me. It is a very novel method that he has been developing base on body mechanics in Naihanchi Kata since he was in his 60s.

It is said that Naihanchi has the dual purposes: one is to build body by tensing and hardening muscles, the other is to foster pliable body by relaxing muscles. The latter is what Kishaba Juku utilizes so that Naihanchi is performed with relaxed muscles from beginning to end. As a result, each of the motions of Naihanchi looks rather flowing and elastic.

A muscular body is built with flexor muscles. A fluid body is fostered by extensor muscles. No matter how hard you try to develop muscles, they will decline with age. On the contrary, when you gain body of flexibility along with bony structure, you could be an active practitioner for a lifetime. This is the main reasons why Kishaba Juku focuses on practicing all of Kata with extensor muscles.

Kishaba Juku has adopted three ways of training. (1) they train themselves by tensing joints and muscles as seen in most of karate dojo. (2) they practice with Naihanchi stance (relaxed hip joints) by activating extensor muscles, and (3) they practice with the same Naihanchi stance by employing a soft touch to contact targets. They call them respectively as follows:

- (1) Hard contact method,
- (2) Light contact method, and
- (3) Soft contact method.

Above all, when you advance to the 3rd stage, you will be able to surpass a large or more muscular opponent with relaxed power that you gain. It is a unique method that prevents an opponent from reacting immediately regardless of his physical strength.

The strength of relaxed body can be likened to a model of anti-earthquake architecture, which is called 'tensegrity'. Due to stability and flexibility of the relaxed body, you can excel any opponent in the physical actions and techniques of defense and offense. All in all, a relaxed body may appear powerless, but it generates more vital power than that of solid and rigid body.

Mr. Shinzato was born in 1939. He entered University of the Ryukyus in 1957 and began to practice karate at a karate club on the campus. After graduation, he became an English teacher in Junior high school in Naha. He was granted a special scholarship from American administration in Okinawa to study at Indiana University in 1964. After returning to Okinawa, he resumed karate at the headquarter of The World Shorin-ryu Karate-do Federation whose president was Master Shoshin Nagamine in 1967. He left the organization on 1981 and continued further training under Chokei Kishaba, who was the most efficient among practitioners. "Okinawa Karate-do Shorin-ryu Kshaba Juku" was established in honor of Kishaba sensei in 1998. Mr. Shinzato has now been a head of the Kishaba Juku since the year of 2000, when Kishaba sensei passed away.

Kishaba sensei was quite skeptical for the traditional discipline of Okinawa karate, which is Kata centered training, and puts excessive emphasis on body toughening. His main goal was how to be skillful and efficient in the usage of body and manipulation of techniques in order to make Kata alive and practical in Kumite match. Mr. Shinzato has been doing further research and practice such that he was able to develop a new approach to karate, that is, the Soft contact method, which he is convinced is capable of cultivating unknown potentials of the human body regardless of

age or sex.

Mr. Shinzato became 80 this last February. Practicing karate is a part of his daily life. Whenever he practices alone or with his students or karate visitors from outside of Okinawa, he always enjoys finding something new of body mechanics so that he cannot stop training.

Regarding kata performance and physical discipline, Okinawa Karate is considered to be sufficiently preserved and handed down from generation to generation. What about an aspect of skills of karate as an art of self-defense? Mr. Shinzato seems to strive to explore practical and useful method of making the well-built body active and brisk in a desperate situation. He is pursuing a legitimate art which is acceptable to different kind of martial arts.