

Aragaki Seisan & Chokyu-gata

I originally learned the Aragaki Seisan from Richard Kim during the 1970's. O-sensei was a man who collected, studied and taught many rare kata. Prior to that I had also learned Goju Seisan (several versions), first from Canadian goju pioneer, Bob Dalgliesh, and USA-based instructor Chuck Merriman. Later, I also learned the kata directly from several others including Yagi Meitoku, Miyazato Eiichi and Teruo Chinen. I also learned the (Motobu-ha) Shitoryu version taught to me by Kuniba Shiyogo and the Matsumura Seisan taught to me Sakagami Ryusho (at his residence in Tsurumi) as well as from Kinjo Sensei, too. Other versions include the Tomari Seisan from (Iha Kotatsu to) Kinjo sensei, the "Higashionna" Seisan by Uechi Sensei and Hangetsu from Kanazawa Sensei and Nakayama Sensei. I also had the opportunity to meet and discuss the lineage of Aragaki Seisho's kata in Okinawa with Higa Yuchoku who shared some fascinating insights about the pioneer. Traveling to Fujian and Taiwan to cross-compare similar-based style practices also deepened my overall understanding of Seisan, and other template-based practices.

Aragaki Seisho (1840-1920) taught Higashionna/Higaonna Kanryo for approximately three years; from just after the time young Kanryo first observed his [Seisan] demonstration in March of 1867 at Ochayagoten until his trip to China [in his capacity as an interpreter] in 1870. Aragaki recommended Higaonna to Kojo Taite where he studied for approximately a year or so before setting sail him to Fuzhou himself.

There is a common source for Seisan kata as its collective templates are classically Fujian-based quanfa. Unless there's been some new research that I am unaware of, I don't believe anyone can point to the exact source of Seisan. I do believe that the exercise clearly demonstrates [at least to me] Tiger, Monk, Lion and Southern Preying Mantis [SPM] movement and technique. It's earliest [recorded] appearance dates back to a local demonstration at the Ochayagoten [East Garden Plaza] of Shuri-jo [The Great Castle at Shuri] in March of 1867. Held in honour of the last Sapposhi, Seisan was performed by Aragaki Seisho [1840-1920---Tsuji Pechin] of Kume/Naha and students [Tomura Pechin, Maeda Pechin, and a Ryugakusei/visiting Chinese student] as were other kata, weapons and application practices. See my 1994 English translation of its programme.

Historically speaking, followers of the Miyagi-lineage believe that Sanchin is/was the first kata learned and that may be true from his time, but there seems to be reason to believe that Seisan may have been first taught as a fundamental practice with teachers in Naha, Shuri and Tomari prior to his time. Seisan also forms the basis from which comes Goju Seisan, Uechi Seisan, Shorin Seisan, Shotokan Seisan, Shito-ryu Seisan and Wado Seishan.

Based on the time frames, close geographical proximity [in Okinawa] its physical makeup/unique features, and association with Aragaki, Higaonna, Iha, and Uechi, and what I understand about the forces of change, I think the one kata served as the original [if only embryonic] template from which all today's versions come.

Higa Yuchoku first learned Itosu-style karate under Shiroma Jiro before being introduced Shinzato Jinan. From time to time, according to my conversation with the late Master Higa, he also studied the fundamentals tenets of Kiyuna-type karate from an old timer named Miyahira-guwa, who had learned under Kiyuna. Master Kiyuna had been one of Bushi Matsumura's disciples. I understand that his Seisan kata came from Miyahira. Higa Sensei also studied Itosu/Shorin-type karate under Chibana Choshin. My primary interest in meeting Higa Yuchoku was his knowledge of Aragaki's kata: Sochin, Niseishi, Seisan & Unshu.

Bringing back the classic Fujian-based stepping & sliding movement [where it has vanished in modern kata], calling upon the Yamane Ryu "koshi" [hip vibration] to help improve energy transfer [as it is non-existent in modern kata practices], and the opening the fists [as preferred in the original Chinese version according to testimony by Kyan Chotoku and Miyagi Chojun, and observed in similar lineage based kata such as Anan; Ryuei Ryu], the version of Seisan I now practice & teach represents my own personal interpretation based on lengthy study of many versions, a comprehensive understanding of its history and application practices.

I trust this response might serve as an "official" explanation of the individual work I've carried out with virtually every kata listed in the KU curriculum.

On a personal note, in the past my understanding of kata had been terribly impeded by historical & technical ambiguity, and the ever-changing trappings of rule-bound modern interpretations. Since having carried out this study, and based upon my personal sources of reference, may I say that this is no longer the case...I am no longer "in the dark."

Continued on next pages

CHOKYU [GEKISAI]

The term Chokyu represents the combination of two separate ideograms: Cho & Kyu: *Cho* represents the alternative pronunciation for the first ideogram of the Japanese/Okinawan surname *Naga*mine (as in Nagamine Shoshin). *Kyu* represents the alternative pronunciation for the first ideogram of the Japanese/Okinawan surname *Miya*gi (as in Miyagi Chojun).

During the years I was travelling to China and researching the origins of karate, I learned very unique two person trapping, seizing & joint manipulation qin-na set. The form contains many techniques as exemplified in Goju's Gekki-sai futari-renzokugeiko (the two-person continuous drill supporting Gekki-sai dai ichi). Later, when I discovered that its origins were Monk Fist quanfa, I formed a working hypothesis believing that it may very well have been connected to that which Miyagi Chojun learned from Monk Fist boxer Miao Xin (1881-1939) at the Chin Wu/Jing Mo Association in 1936. By eliminating the second person (the attacker) in the first part of the drill and then reconstructing the defensive portion of this exercise [a practice I have popularized], I became convinced that it must have been the original source from which Miyagi (& Nagamine) drew upon when developing Gekkisai in 1941. When composing a solo re-enactment of the drill that I learned in China, I decided to draw on the same geometrical configuration developed by Miyagi & Nagamine. Drawing heavily on the vigorous stepping & sliding footwork unique to Southern-style Monk Fist quanfa (something I believe that is missing in modern karate), and the vibrant *Yamaneryu-like* body mechanics (something I also see missing in modern karate), I brought together the closed-fisted inside middle block (bridge) and kakewake tsuki (as exemplified in Gekkisai #1) with the kake uke and mawashi uke (as exemplified in Gekkisai #2) into a single configuration, thereby establishing a modified, and less redundant, version.

Other than the vigorous body mechanics and sabaki I introduced, the differences are that the kake uke is performed in the first half of the form with the uchi uke performed in the second half, so as not to be repetitive. The form ends with the kakewake tsuki being followed by the mawashi uke. Having the tenacity to re-interpret this training exercise, I succeeded in developing a modified practice which more closely supports the original two person Chinese drill. By introducing and teaching this unique practice under my Koryu Uchinadi banner, I have found that those who previously knew the Gekki-sai futari renzoku geiko, and then learned this drill from me, much rather prefer my functional interpretation.

Wanting to honour both Miyagi Chojun & Nagamine Shoshin (in the same way that Mabuni honored Itosu and Higashionna when citing the principal sources he used to establish the style he pioneered), I carefully selected the first ideogram from each of their names to represent my personal interpretation & synthesis of their 1941 work.

Patrick McCarthy
Koryu Uchinadi Kenpo-jutsu
Founder

Notes:

Arguably, the martial art-like traditions in and around the old castle capitol of Shuri predate those elsewhere on the island. As such, the Shuri-based version of Seisan is believed to be the oldest. While several, if not many, other proficient Bujin are known to have resided in the Shuri district prior to the time of Matsumura Sokon [1809-1898], he is regarded as the father of its karate movement; hence, Matsumura Seisan "is" the oldest version.

As to the closed fists over the open hands; let us not forget what Kyan Chotoku said, in his 1929 interview with Mutsu Mizuho, "It's important to understand the difference between Chinese method and Okinawan preference. The Chinese commonly use the tips of their fingers against an opponent while the clenched fist is chiefly used in Okinawa. It should be noted that the clenched fist is one of the fundamental differences that makes karate a unique fighting method [when contrasted with its Chinese counterpart]." Miyagi Chojun also told us that "he" closed the hands, preferring clenched fists over fingertips in Sanchin, etc.

Hangetsu traces its lineage through Funakoshi Gichin to Iha Kotasu of Tomari. Kinjo Sensei sometimes refers to Seisan as Jusanpo (i.e. 13 steps/ways). This Tomari version was taught to him by his teacher, Grandmaster Oshiro Chojo. It originally came from Oyadomari Koken by way of Iha Kotatsu who passed it onto Oshiro. Kinjo sensei believes the Tomari version of seisan may be the "cross-over" Okinawan representation from old Chinese quanfa (i.e. possibly the version from Aragaki or Kume). Kinjo sensei, was influenced by several pioneers, but primarily studied Shuri-based karate under Hanashiro Chomo, Gusukuma Shimpan, and Tokuda Ambun, all contemporaries of Kyan Chotoku. The principal kata I learned from him are Pinan 1-5 (from Itosu/Hanashiro), Seisan (from Iha Kotatsu), Seisan (from Matsumura), Naifanchi (from Motobu), Passai (from Matsumura), Passai (from Oyadomari), Passai Dai (from Itosu/Chibana), Passai Sho (from Itosu), Kusankun Dai (from Yara), Kusankun Sho (from Yara), Chintou (from Matsumura/Gusukuma) and Gojushiho (from Oyadomari). He has others, but those are his mainstream.