

THE ART OF CONTROL: THE SPIRIT OF SHINJINBUKAN KARATE

Most young adults in America today grew up as the “Karate Kid generation”. This movie was not only the first encounter we had with Japan but played a key role in shaping the symbols of Japan in the Western World. Being a pure model of this generation, I entered Jimmy Mora Sensei’s Okinawan Karate class with a sense of familiarity and... could I have been more wrong? Mora Sensei from the Shinjinbukan School redefined what the essence of Okinawan karate is and how it differs from other branches of karate.

The School was founded by Onaga Yoshimitsu Kaichō in Okinawa, Japan. His teachings are based on Ti, the ancient Okinawan Martial Art, which preceded modern Karate. Today, hundreds of karate styles have progressively lost the initial spirit of the art. The Shinjinbukan School still preserves and carries the knowledge of Ti, and passes it on to new generations of students. Mora Sensei has been trained by Onaga Kaichō himself in Japan. He was the first foreign student who trained from White to Black Belt at the Shinjinbukan Honbu Dōjō.

The harmony shining from the class reveals a purpose beyond simple body training. I am very impressed to see the dedication in the students’ eyes: women and men, children and adults alike. The primary focus of the Shinjinbukan philosophy is to seek self-improvement through training. Ti is a deep martial art and not a competitive sports. There is no concept of grade or competition between Tichikaya (Ti practitioners) says Mora Sensei. “You are either a master or a student”.

The various movements taught during classes of any levels are all parts of the same precept: control over force in one cohesive system. The goal is not to punch hard, but to use minimal effort with the right muscles to achieve an efficient surgical strike. The training is focused on the three basic elements of Ti: Tsuki (hand strike), Keri (foot strike) & Tenshin (body movement or displacement).

After a few exercises of Tsuki, I realize how powerful this form of karate is. I feel the wave of energy pass through Mora Sensei’s fist, through the 10” padding on my stomach and through my rib cage, finally catapulting me two steps back from my initial position! Various tools are also used during class to improve muscle memory. For instance, a small bundle of hey, called “Niri Dama”, is used to learn how to close the hand before hitting. This control and flexibility to close each finger muscle while making a fist is known as “Shiboru”. All Shinjinbukan students learn to use shiboru to create a “sealed water tight fist”.

Mora Sensei explains that techniques must become natural and instinctive to be executed properly. Unlike other forms of karate, Ti does not call for any unnatural yelling or distorted faces along with a movement. Some of the teaching is done in a low light setting and in a circle, allowing the karate-kas to find their internal rhythm and coordinate it in harmony with the group. The Shinjinbukan New York Shibu Dōjō strives to maintain the purity of its martial art. New students are carefully selected through an application process and trial period before being fully integrated to the program. Thanks to its status as a 501(c)(3) Foundation, the Shinjinbukan New York offers scholarship awards, based on the financial needs of the students. The Shinjinbukan Foundation in New York also sponsors several Gasshuku (training camps) every year in coordination with main School in Okinawa and Shinjinbukan members in other countries.

— Reported by *Ruth Berdah-Canet*

Shinjinbukan New York Shibu Dōjō

Founded by Onaga Yoshimitsu Kaichō in Okinawa, Shinjinbukan New York Shibu Dōjō offers classes to a selected group of students of all ages. The classes take place from 6:30-8:30pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays in the following location.

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1. and 2. Acrobatic figures and tool exercises are used to develop flexibility and joint control. **3.** Some of the exercises are done in a very low light setting and in a circle to focus on one’s internal natural rhythm. **4.** Unlike recent forms of karate, Ti does not use blocking techniques to stop a strike. The key is to glide to avoid it and choose the best technique to prepare the next move.