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Bulletin

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"Ryu-ha"

Ryu-ha can be controversial in more ways than one, and in this bulletin, I hope to shed some

light on this subject in such a way that makes you think in depth about your specific style. I will not denigrate anyone's Ryu-ha as being wrong; I am just not one to be **complacent**, even in my own Ryu-ha. I will not be part of the status quo just to fit in. I remembered why I began my martial arts journey. "*To kick butt.*" over time, my goals changed I grew up. I like to feel I was on the road to "*Enlightenment.*"

Most of my career has been around problem-solving and thinking analytically. I use analytical skills when detecting patterns, brainstorming, observing, interpreting data, and making decisions based on multiple factors and options available to me. I use this ability to better myself, NKJU, and others in martial arts. What I am about to say is my opinion. Based on my years of training, personnel experience, and observations.

I have heard many Instructors repeatedly make this statement while teaching their classes. "**This is the way it is, or this is the way it's done,**" within their Ryu-ha. That in itself means **absolute**. An alternative to this would be to say. "**This is one**

way." This leaves a door open for growth and viewpoints that may not be the same as yours.

There is no such thing as **absolute knowledge** when it comes to martial arts because everything we "know" depends upon at least some basic factors being assumed to be true, despite having no real way to prove such. We can disprove information as being false, but we can't ever truly prove anything as being true. Conversations over the years, two main issues always seem to come up with other karate practitioners.

One: Fighting style.

Two: Kata/Ryu-ha

For now, I will discuss Kata and will leave the discussion on fighting style for another day.

First, I have to start with this statement. Shito-Ryu, Shotokan Goju-Ryu, and Wado-Ryu are considered the four major karate systems of Japan proper. (the Japanese islands excluding Okinawa.) Many offshoots sprang from these styles, each developing its own **Ryu-ha**.

Richard P. Baillargeon, my teacher from 1973 to 1987, headed up the first Seishin kai organization in the USA under

Shogo Kuniba. After ten years of dedication, there was a split. Mr. B created his own organization, the **NKJU**, with over two hundred schools nationwide with many different styles under its umbrella at one time.

From mid-1973 to the present day, I have seen Kata done in various ways, even within my own Ryu-ha. This begs the question of who is right and who is wrong? I say they all **Could** be right. **Could** is what needs to be identified.

The following are the words of a past master. *"He said his goal was to revise Kata. as to make them simple as possible. Times change, the world changes, and the martial arts must change too.*

The Karate that school students practice today is not the same Karate that was practiced even ten years ago, and it is a long way indeed from the Karate I learned."

Recognizing that change is inevitable, that same master also said.

"I have no doubt whatsoever that in the future, as times change, again and then again, even the Kata will be given new

names. And that indeed is as it should be."

This master was none other than the founder of **Shotokan Karate himself, Gichin Funakoshi (1981, 36-37)**

Over time master after master took what his teachers gave him, refined it, and created a new system. Having said that. There are past and present masters **who can create and do change forms.**

"Changing Kata"

There are those who are formally qualified **who should not do so.** You may have the credentials, but credentials only represent an ability.

Whereas those that possess the knowledge of forms. Both historically and technically and having the ability to perform them is part of what it takes to create or change Kata.

At the same time, some organizations and individuals are so deeply invested in their particular systems and methods that they can't recognize any system flaws. The need to change may mean to break away from **traditions.** Or should it? Read further.

Tradition can be defined as. "A belief, principle, or way of acting that people in a particular society or group have continued to follow for a long time.

Following some traditions in martial arts may result in stagnation; you only know what the leaders expect you to know. Martial arts organizations are just like big businesses. When you have CEO's that maintain tight control own their designed SOP's "standard operational procedures." Will, in time, become stagnant or extinct.

Change when change is correct, don't change for change's sake.

Your Ryu-ha can best be served by following the "**TRADITIONAL VALUES.**" Of your style.

Values can be defined in a variety of ways. I tend to lean toward this definition as it relates to martial arts.

Values can be defined as broad preferences concerning appropriate courses of action or outcomes. **As such, values reflect a person's sense of right and wrong or what "ought to be.**

"Generational and cultural change defines traditions."

"REALITY"

The reality of any traditional activity or style that refers to themselves as a Ryu-ha will inevitably be subject to change over time. This occurs by successive generations of masters who understand that enlightenment takes many paths.

Whether you agree or disagree with the ideas, I present here is not as important as your commitment to Honesty. Every martial arts practitioner-teacher, student, traditional, or nontraditional should think critically about every part of what they are learning and teaching.

Consider the issues and logically formulate your own reasoned position. Remember, knowledge is understanding skills gained by experience.

"Kata"

Kata can be defined as a series of offensive and defensive moves that follow a defined sequence of actions.

Look at some of the Kata of the four major styles I previously spoke of and compare. You will see a lot of similarities in their moves. **Note:** I said moves, not how a **technique is executed**

within the moves. I have found this is the most significant difference in a Ryu-ha. As in blocks, stances, punches, etc.

The following is what I use as a benchmark to determine if a Kata works, and it's what I use when I test others or asked to judge in tournaments.

My Kata Guide:

If your Kata is aesthetically pleasing and technically potent. If it demonstrates proper speed, power, focus, and flexibility. Does the form prepare one for combat? Do they flow from one technique to another without hesitation, and can the Bunkai be executed appropriately?

Over time, you may have found that many of your Kata you practiced for years have slightly different moves from what you were taught and led to believe came from the style you were associated with. If you found this to be accurate, what would you do?

Only **you** can define your situation of who, what, when, and where your Kata came from. And if those in question truly learned from the master. I refer you back to my topic on **"REALITY."**

So what if your Kata does not match move for move from the Ryu-ha you claim. I will only ask you this.

What difference does it make?

What counts is, does your Kata work? Does it follow the Kata guide I laid out? If you live another ten years, you might see your Kata change again. Where does it stop?

Change when change is right, and not just for change's sake.

" BEING CONTROLLED"

Some martial artists can feel secure under the protection of their group. However, if you do not comply with all the ideals and standards of your Ryu-ha, you could receive a **"ha-mon,"** A Japanese term for expulsion.

A person that follows this type of philosophy will never be a leader but rather a follower.

I will not judge those that want to follow this ideology. Your path of enlightenment is what you perceive it to be. But know this. You only know what you have been told. Everyone has an agenda that is based on good or bad intentions. There is Yin and Yang in all things. It's all about balance.

"What is NKJU"

NKJU is what I like to refer to as an umbrella organization. It is open to **all styles of M/A**. *Note: McDojo's need not apply.* In under five minutes of watching you perform any of your Ryu-ha, I can tell if you are what you say you are.

The number one question asked by potential new NKJU members is. Do I have to change my Kata structure? The answer is **NO**. You do your Kata the way you have been shown. On the other hand, if you feel there may be specific problems within your Kata, ask me, and I will give you my assessment.

New NKJU members who desire to learn additional Kata will do them my way, and this is as it should be. Unlike many teachers who do not like to be questioned during a training session, **I welcome it**. Any teacher who hesitates to answer or begins to babble is a teacher that is not confident in what they teach.

Organizations are only as strong as their members. I want all NKJU members to know I have an open-door policy that you can call me at any time

with any problems you may have. Only through good and honest communication can you ever expect to learn.

"Gichin Funakoshi"

Be careful not to be like those who do not train sufficiently yet become "masters" because their talk resembles that of the experts. From olden times these men have been called Kuchi Bushi (mouth Warriors). Even today. These "mouth warriors" are as common as grains of sand on a beach.

I know this article may not set well with some. But I think it's an issue worth talking about. I would love to hear your personal thoughts on this subject from those who have been in the arts for years.

I believe a person can be loyal to their Ryu-ha by following its traditional values yet making necessary changes for personal growth. Even the decision-makers within your own Ryu-ha are subject to mistakes or have become complacent. If you happen to be part of such a Kai, you might consider moving on.

It's often necessary to understand the history of a style in order to understand how it has evolved to its current

form. This can only occur by not becoming **complacent** in your Ryu-Ha. Through legitimate training and the desire to excel, one can expect to achieve enlightenment.

"Hash May O May" Don't lie, don't quit. **Black Foot**.

"What is a fact?"

Fact: *"A thing that can be shown to be real or true." The usual test for a statement of fact is whether it can be shown to be true.*

Roy D. Davis III "Kaicho"