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The Connection between Shindo Yoshin Ryu and Wado Ryu

Wado and TSYR Seminar with Koichi Shimura (Japan) und Toby Threadgill (USA) in Berlin on 15th and 16th February, 2020

Two world-class senseis were the instructors at our Wado and TSYR Seminar on 15th and 16th February, 2020 in Berlin: **Toby Threadgill**, Kaicho and Menkyo Kaiden of Takamura Ha Shindo Yoshin Ryu, and **Koichi Shimura**, 7th Dan JKF Wado-Kai and JKF Wado-Kai 1st Instructor, the Secretary General of the JKF Wado-Kai headquarters in Tokyo. The participation of a total of 130 karateka and TSYR practitioners from Austria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, and the UK were further proof of the international significance of this traditional seminar.

The historic connection between Shindo Yoshin Ryu and Wado Ryu

Shindo Yoshin Ryu is a Koryu school which was established by Katsunosuke in 1864. An authorized sideline, the Ohbata/Takamura line, is now called Takamura Ha Shindo Yoshin Ryu (TSYR) and headed by Toby Threadgill in his capacity as Kaicho and Menkyo Kaiden.¹

Karate is part of Gendai Budo, i.e., the martial arts developed in Japan after 1868. Hironori Otsuka (1892 – 1982) trained between 1907 and 1921 at Tatsusaburo Nakayama´s (1870 – 1945) dojo Shindo Yoshin Ryu.² In 1934, he founded Wado Ryu which must, thus, be classified under Gendai Budo.³ The purpose of this seminar was to answer the following question: What did Otsuka transfer from Shindo Yoshin Ryu (SYR) to Wado Ryu and why?

What Otsuka transferred from SYR to Wado Ryu

Toby Threadgill emphasized at the very beginning of the seminar that Otsuka had derived his Wado Ryu from sword work. The Wado concept of sente/initiative and the principles of ten-i, ten-tai, ten-gi (called san-mi-ittai in SYR), as well as tai-sabaki with the three principles of nagasu (letting flow), inasu (evasion), and noru (following) must always be seen within this context. So, from the historical point of view, Wado Ryu is a martial art of the samurai.

The above principles were the common basis of Koichi Shimura´s and Toby Threadgill´s closely coordinated sessions. Both sensei conveyed in numerous and varied drills that these principles are, in the final analysis, the foundation of any kata and partner exercise in SYR and Wado Ryu: tanto-dori and i-dori in Wado Ryu and SYR, kihon kumite and kata kaisetsu in Wado Ryu, as well as jujutsu kata in SYR.

¹ Tobin Threadgill and Shingo Ohgami: Shindo Yoshin Ryu. History and Technique, Evergreen, Colorado 2019

² Tobin Threadgill and Shingo Ohgami: see above, S. 101 f.

³ Hironori Otsuka established the precursor organization of the Wado Kai association in 1934, the "Dai Nippon Karate Shinko Club". This is deemed to be the actual establishment of Wado Ryu. In the 1950s, Hironori Otsuka founded the "Zen Nippon Karatedo Renmei". On 5th June, 1967, the name Zen Nippon Karatedo Renmei was changed to Wado Kai. With the foundation of the Federation of All Japan Karatedo Organization (FAJKO, later renamed JKF) in the mid-1960s, Wado-Kai became the official designation.

See also.: <http://canadajkwadokai.org/> and <https://www.jkwadokaisohonbu.de/>

Win-win situation

Koichi Shimura's and Toby Threadgill's sessions demonstrated that a fruitful exchange and training together provides all participants with new insights and experiences and are most enjoyable for them. When we look back in history we find that Otsuka prepared the ground for this:

He met Gichin Funakoshi in 1922 on the Japanese mainland, later also Kenwa Mabuni and Motobu Choki and studied Okinawa karate under their guidance.⁴ In so doing, Otsuka realized that the ancient Shindo Yoshin Ryu principles could also be applied to Okinawa karate and transferred them to Wado Ryu. Toby Threadgill illustrated this with a metaphor: Otsuka took the core out and put the Shindo Yoshin Ryu core in it. "Koryu lives a little bit in Wado. Shindo Yoshin Ryu and Wado are like cousins."⁵ With this approach, Otsuka succeeded in making Wado Ryu more accessible to a larger, interested public and popular. In so doing, he helped important SYR core principles survive in contemporary Wado Ryu. This joint Wado and TSYR seminar has, for many years, been proof that Wado and TSYR can learn from one another and exploit synergies.

Toby Threadgill, in his capacity as Kaicho and Menkyo Kaiden of TSYR, and Koichi Shimura, as one of the highest-ranking representatives of JKF Wado Kai, guaranteed an excellent annual seminar in terms of its content and cooperation at a high official level. This exchange and the open-minded interaction of all participants strengthens the link between Wado and TSYR. This year's seminar was again characterized by a spirit of friendship, great motivation and the willingness to learn.

We'll meet again at the 2021 Berlin Seminar

We are looking forward to meeting again at the Wado and TSYR Seminar with Toby Threadgill and Koichi Shimura in Berlin on 20th and 21st February, 2021.

⁴ Gichin Funakoshi (1868 – 1957) taught Okinawa karate on the Japanese mainland since 1922, Kenwa Mabuni (1899 – 1952) since 1928 and Motobu Choki (1871 – 1944) since 1929.

⁵ Toby Threadgill, in: Christina Gutz: 2012 Wado Pentecost Seminar in Berlin. <https://www.wado-karate.de/nachrichten-berichte/> and <http://www.berliner-karate-verband.de/>