PAN-AMERICAN GOJU RYU KARATEDO SEIWAKAI NEWSLETTER

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Dedicated to Traditional Goju Ryu Karatedo

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All issues of the Pan-American Seiwakai Newsletter are Dedicated to Accurately Reporting Seiwakai Events, Goju Ryu News, and Karatedo Events, History & Philosophy.

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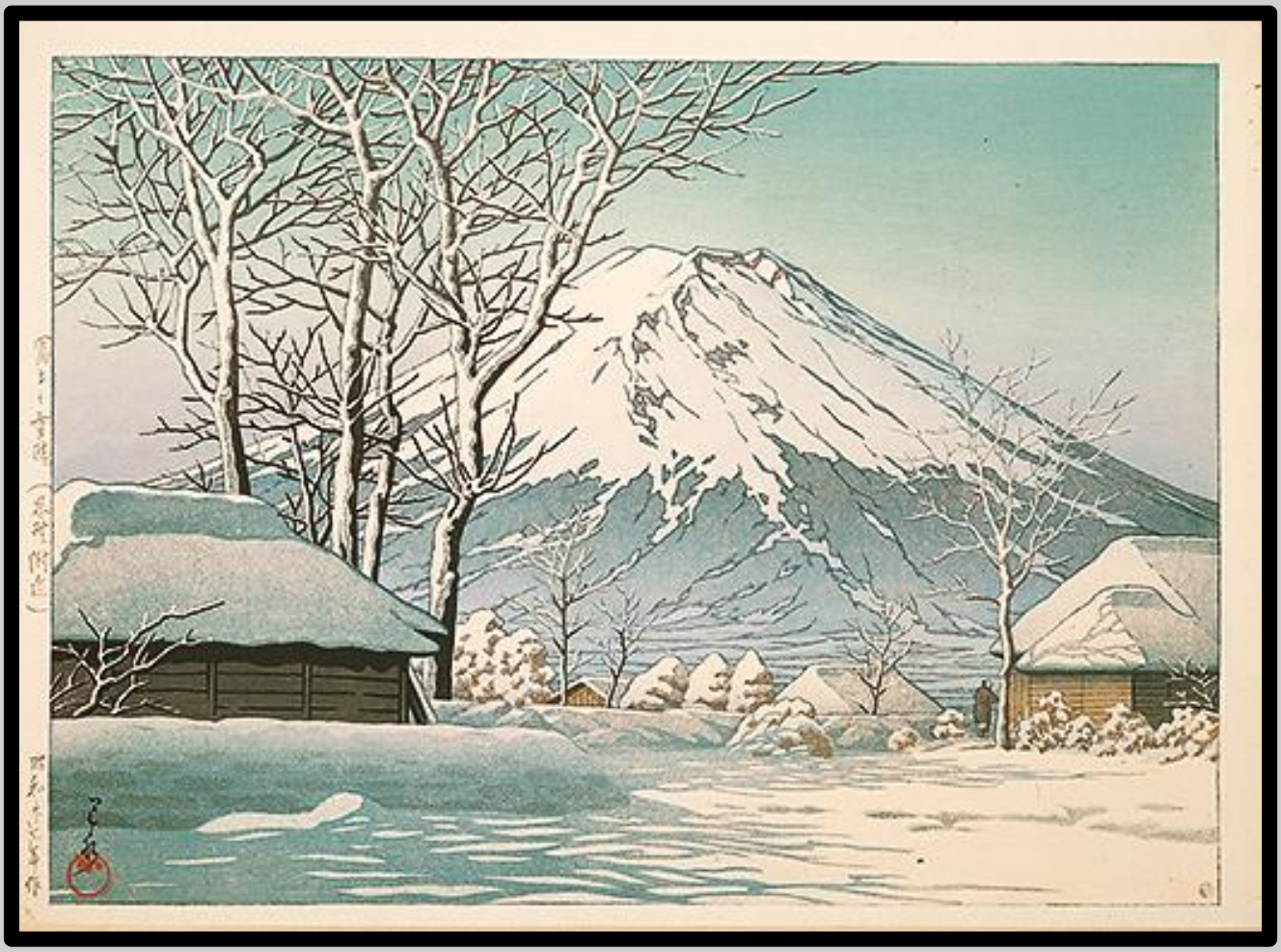

Kawase Hasui: ***Mt. Fuji, Clearing after a Snowfall in Oshiono***

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Pan American Seiwakai Seminar
November 7, 8, and 9
By Griselda Koralewski

Thank you to Shihans Vassie Naidoo, Pal Gila, Craig Vokey, Mark Cramer, Michael Beardwood, and Russ Costello for making the Pan American Seiwakai Seminar in Toledo, Ohio a success. Your excellent instruction inspired us to train hard in the Goju Ryu Karatedo Seiwakai tradition.

This November 7th, 8th, and 9th we had a Seiwakai Pan-American International seminar in Toledo, Ohio. With the first snow of the year on November 9th, the weather decided to give a not so warm welcome to all of our Seiwakai family flying in.

Welcome to Ohio!

Friday started off with a Seiwakai USA Women's Advisory Committee session with Sensei Mata and Sensei Parsons. They taught a class on Shime and then ran us through some kumite drills.

The first full session of the seminar focused a lot on kihon. For me, it was very tiring, repetitive, and needed. It always feels reassuring to me to get a fine-tooth comb taken to my dachi; with many new sets of eyes to help me pick apart and find what needs to be improved. I can still feel all of the Shiko that we did, but I now understand the stance better. Friday night capped off with a late dinner at Manhattan's Pub, a local restaurant that I have long been a big fan of.

Saturday morning, we started with some tricky multi-directional drills before splitting into individual kata groups to prepare for grading. I was in the Seiyunchin Group led by Krishan Sensei. Training was intense that morning to get us ready for the Seiwakai grading later that day. The banquet was well earned later that night at Carlos' Poco Loco; another Toledo favorite of mine!

Congratulations to Michael Beardwood Shihan on earning his Kyoshi title.

Sunday was the last day of the seminar and we ended with a lot of time spent on kumite. We worked on movement, drills with partners, conditioning, and free sparing. The weekend ended with our first JKF grading held in Toledo.

This seminar was hosted at Toledo School for the Arts (often abbreviated to TSA); where I went to middle and high school specializing in film production and martial arts. It was comforting spending the weekend training in a place that I am so familiar with. It also felt new, thanks to all of our training taking place in the new theatres and dance studios that the school has built since the building expansion that was completed after my graduation in 2020.

Training in the new space I could feel Toledo School for the Arts' mission to support not only current students, but also alumni and the community at large in their pursuit of the arts. Getting to spend the weekend with my TSA community, as well as my Seiwakai community made me very proud and thankful. I got to meet many members of our international Seiwakai community for the first time. I am very excited and filled with anticipation to travel to many more seminars in the future!

One of the rock bands from Toledo School for the Arts performed in between seminar sessions on Saturday. We greatly appreciated the performance. Additionally, three of the band members are presently or were previously part of our Toledo School for the Arts Karatedo program.

Seiwakai Mexico Seminar
November 14, 15, 16, 2025

This weekend our great seminar was very successful, in the company of Shihan Vassie Naidoo, colleagues from Durango, Morelos, Ocotlán and above all of you parents and students who make all this possible. Here we leave you a little of the moments we live these days.

A year ago, our Sensei and colleagues presented exam to advance grade and this Saturday finally received their recognition from Shihan Vassie Naidoo, after passing their respective exams before Seiwakai International

Sensei Eusebio 6th Dan
Armando Ramos 3rd Dan
Ramon Romo 3rd Dan
Luis Camacho 2nd day
Carlos Aguirre 1er Dan
Erick Ramos 1er Dan
Nicolas Tirado 1st Dan
Gemma Romo 1st day
Congratulations to everyone on your new degrees!!!
Goshukan Mexico is still growing
✨

Save these Dates
Toronto June 5-7, 2026
Details to follow

Congratulations to Craig Vokey Shihan (2nd from right) who was reelected as President for Karate Canada this past September for a 3-year term. He is pictured here with his colleagues and friends at the "Last Chance" qualifier for the World karate Federation Senior Championships in Cairo in November. (Vokey Shihan is at the WKF World Championships in Cairo as this issue is being finalized.

Karate: Fact or Karate Fiction

(This article was originally published in Issue 23.)

When I first began to study karate in 1971, there was preciously little historically accurate information written in English about the martial arts in general and about karate in particular. In place of an accurate history of karate, we were often told what turned out to be martial arts myths on a variety of subjects. Similar to the so-called urban myths of today, these stories were told and retold in the dojos throughout the karate community until they gained a life of their own.

This phenomenon was prevalent not only in Western nations but also in Okinawa and Japan. Gichin Funakoshi Sensei explained this: "In the past it was common to embellish stories about the martial arts until they were just short of myths." [i] As we know, there are popular television shows and a number of websites which are dedicated to researching popular urban myths and either confirming them or discrediting them. This same type of research can also shed light on many of these martial arts myths and confirm them as true or expose them as false.

Martial Arts Myths Busted

Below: A young Miyagi and Kyoda training without gi or belts

One of the most frequently told karate stories dealt with the development of the karate black belt. This story explained that in antiquity a karate-ka (karate student) started out wearing a white belt and that over time it gradually darkened as the karate-ka gained knowledge and experience. Since the belt was never washed, it turned darker and darker until it eventually became black signifying that the karate-ka was in possession of true knowledge.

Whereas this and many of the other myths proved to be both entertaining and philosophical, they also proved to be false. The truth of the matter is that originally, no black belts were worn in karate. In fact, no karate gi was worn either; practitioners wore short pants and were bare-chested. Karate black belts and uniforms were first adopted in the 1920s and had nothing to do with the story that we were told. The true history of karate's adoption of the black belt proved to be much less philosophical and entertaining but much more informative of the social-cultural climate of Okinawa and Japan at that time.

In the martial arts, there were no black belt dan grade until the late 1800s. It was then that Jigoro Kano, the founder of Japanese judo, created the belt system which originally included white and black belts (kyu and dan grades). This purpose of this system was to differentiate between students who had taken their first and subsequent steps in training. [ii] He also developed the judo gi from the traditional Japanese kimono which had been previously worn, and it became the first modern martial arts training uniform.[iii]

In the early 1920s Okinawan karate was taken to main islands of Japan. However, all Okinawan arts were looked down upon by the Japanese people as being primitive and savage. [iv] Practicing karate naked to the waist and without an organized ranking system only reinforced these beliefs. Consequently, in order for karate to be accepted in Japan as a sophisticated Japanese martial art, the teachers of karate adopted a

number of changes aimed at making Okinawan Karate uniform with other Japanese martial arts. This included adopting Jigoro Kano's system of belts and wearing the gi that he developed. [v]

I can also remember being told that karate was taught to the common people of Okinawa because they were forbidden to possess weapons. By the use of their empty hands (karate) and with the assistance of simple farm tools they were able to defeat the sword-wielding samurai who controlled their island.

Research does reveal a ban on weapons in Okinawa, and most historians agree that it was the impetus for the development of Okinawan karate. [vi] However, karate was not customarily taught to the common folk. Originally, the people who learned karate were members of Okinawa's noble class, and for the most part the common folk were excluded from karate training: "Karate was something that only the rich (meaning the nobility) could afford to learn. Commoners arose before dawn and toiled in the fields farming or on the sea fishing all day long... There was no time for midnight karate lessons at a family tomb, nor was there any money for tuition." [vii]

Furthermore, much of the weaponry that they wielded turned out to be imported from China or copied from the Chinese martial arts. [viii] As it turns out, even this widely believed story about Okinawan commoners learning karate to protect themselves from the Japanese Samurai turned out to be among the martial arts myths.

Other martial arts myths told of karate masters who were so skilled and powerful that they were able to kill tigers with their bare hands and single-handedly eliminate a gang of thugs who were robbing people from two cities. Although these and similar stories circulated for many years and were believed by many karate students, good old-fashioned historical research turned up absolutely no evidence that such events actually occurred.

Peter Urban wrote an account of an incident that supposedly occurred in China where Gogen Yamaguchi Sensei had been sent during the Second World War. He was on a political mission for Japan and was captured by the Chinese. After being arrested as a spy and tortured for several days, the Chinese decided to execute Yamaguchi Sensei in a most horrific manner. His captors put him in a cage with a tiger that they had starved for three days. Upon entering the cage, Yamaguchi Sensei kicked, punched, and chocked an adult tiger to death. As a result of this incident, the Chinese became fearful of Yamaguchi Sensei and the extradentary powers that he possessed. When he was subsequently released, his captors breathed a collective sigh of relief. [ix]

Below: "Go ahead. Make my day!"

There are several problems with Mr. Urban's account. First of all, Yamaguchi Sensei never mentioned this event in his autobiography, and Mr. James Genovese, who trained with Yamaguchi Sensei in Japan, insists that Yamaguchi Sensei denied that this event occurred. [x] Finally, many wildlife experts do not believe that it is plausible for an unarmed human to kill an adult tiger. [xi] It appears as if this account is nothing more than an Urban myth.

Like Yamaguchi Sensei, Chotoku Kyan Sensei also appears to have been the subject of embellished karate myths: "Many stories are told of Kyan's fighting ability and fighting tactics and as always happens, fantasy gets in the way of reality." [xii] There is an often-told story regarding Kyan's fighting abilities and tactics which is certain to have some degree of embellishment included in it. According to one of the

most popular versions of this story, a gang of thugs was harassing and attacking people on the road which connected Naha with Shuri, Okinawa. The thugs demanded a toll for safe passage, and the local police forces were unable to bring the situation under their control. Since the authorities were unable to ensure the safety of the public, the locals persuaded Chotoku Kyan to help get rid of the gang. One night, he walked alone along the road carrying two chickens – one under each arm. Four men accosted him and demanded money and the chickens. [xiii]

Kyan explained to these men that he had little money. He also told the thugs that his mother was ill and that he needed the chickens for broth. The hoodlums reiterated their demands and threatened Kyan with a sword. Immediately, Kyan flung the chickens at the robbers. [xiv] "At the instant he flung the chickens, he jabbed his hands against the two men in front of him, poking one in the eye and the other in the throat. Both dropped on the spot. He kicked the sword bearer in the groin and turned to face the hooligan in the back of him... As Kyan advanced, the tough broke and ran... The street had become safe for travel again." [xv]

Even though it would be nice to believe that these events actually happened, it appears as if fantasy has gotten in the way of reality. Whereas no one is questioning the actual abilities of Chotoku Kyan, this story is not entirely believable. It is difficult to accept that a single unarmed man succeeded in eliminating an armed gang of armed thugs where the police forces of two cities failed.

Below: Chotoku Kyan

Other versions of this story seem to have less embellishment in them. In one of the other variations of this story, Kyan and two of his karate students were walking along a road. Kyan, who was involved in the local sport of cock fighting, was carrying a prize fighting bird under his arm. The two of students wanted to test their teacher's skills so they picked a fight with a group of young men, and then ran off, leaving Kyan alone to defend himself. With only one free arm and his feet, Kyan was victorious in the confrontation. [xvi] Whereas this version is less fanciful, it is more believable.

It is important to be able to separate fact from fiction in these martial arts myths, but it is also important to understand the message behind the myth. In the past, myths were designed to teach a moral lesson such as emphasizing the virtues of hard training or depicting good triumphing over evil. Hence, persistent training leads to the acquisition of knowledge (a black belt), and a skilled yet moral karate teacher can defeat a gang of evil thugs.

Modern Martial Arts Myths

It is also important to point out that martial arts myths are not a thing of the past. Some myths have developed recently. However, the purpose behind these myths is entirely different from the myths of the past. They have nothing to do with teaching a moral lesson. These modern exaggerations include everything from spuriously claiming to win world championships and having nothing to substantiate the claim, to constantly maligning traditional Karatedo and claiming to be the only person in the world who understands the true mysteries of karate. These modern myths are designed to deceive students and/or to line the pockets of unscrupulous martial arts instructors with the money of people who didn't take the time or the effort to research the instructor or dojo.

It is obvious that not all martial arts stories are true. Whereas some are false, the message behind the myth expresses a moral lesson, and it is important to understand the purpose of this lesson. In other words, know the historical truth, but don't miss the moral message.

Other exaggerations in the martial arts are created for personal and/or financial gain, and are the very antithesis of a moral message. Consequently, good old-fashioned research will help in dispelling these misrepresentations of the facts and help with keeping from getting deceived by a charlatan or ripped-off by an unscrupulous karate instructor.

End Notes

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[i] Funakoshi, Gichin, Karate-Do Nyumon: page 13
[ii] Ohlenkamp, Neil Ohlenkamp, Neil: "The Judo Rank System"
JudoInfo.com. http://www.judoinfo.com/obi.htm (Last modified March 25, 2007.).
[iii] Lowry, Dave (2006). In the Dojo pp. 39–42
[iv] Rabson, Steven, JPRI Occasional Paper No. 8 (October 1996)
[v] Miyazato Eiichi: *Okinawan Den Goju Ryu Karate-do*: page 34
[vi] Funakoshi, Gichin, *Karate-Do Nyumon*: page 19
[vii] Goodin, Charles: Dragon Times: Vol.19 page 9
[viii] Cook, Harry: Cook, Harry: Shotokan Karate, page 7
[ix] Urban, Peter: The Karate Dojo; page 106-108
[x] Noble, Graham Dragon Times: Vol. 8; page 31
[xi] Noble, Graham Dragon Times: Vol. 8; page 31
[xii] Cook, Harry: Shotokan Karate: pages 42-43
[xiii] Kim, Richard: The Weaponless Warriors: pages 60-61
[xiv] Kim, Richard: The Weaponless Warriors: page 61
[xv] Kim, Richard: The Weaponless Warriors: pages 61-62
[xvi] Cook, Harry: *Shotokan Karate*: pages 42-43

Seiwakai Around the Globe

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"Lead them by political maneuvers, restrain them with punishments: the people will become cunning and shameless. Lead them by virtue, restrain them with ritual: they will develop a sense of shame and a sense of participation." Confucius 孔子 **(Koshi)**

Greece 2026


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From Shodan (1st Dan)
to Godan (5th Dan)

Germany 2026

Japan 2026

Seiwakai Seminar in Omagari, Japan

- July 15, 16, & 17 Training
- July 18 Rest Day
- July 19, 20, & 21 Training
- July 21 – Shinsa and Seiwakai Party

- **August** 23, 24, & 25 is a three-day seminar for those **grading** in the JKF Goju Kai
- **August** 26 travel day to Yokohama

JKF Goju Kai Seminar in Yokohama, Japan

August 27 & 28 Seminar (Shinsa August 28)
August 29 & 30 Tournament