

Gojushiho Dai or Sho!

Rob Redmond, on his sadly long-gone website “24fightingchickens” wrote: “It is rumoured that in a JKA tournament some years ago, the now Head of the JKA Ueki Masaaki 10th Dan performed the Gojushiho Dai kata while accidentally calling out the name “Gojushiho-Sho!” in the last round of competition on National Television in Japan.

According to this story, the judges were compromised, (which is ridiculous as their purpose is to control the competition and make sure the rules are obeyed!) since the performance was perfect, but Ueki had misnamed his kata. The Japanese are serial offenders at changing the rules or cheating as we British call it! Their solution was to give Ueki first place and initiate worldwide changes by switching the names of the two kata. So, today only the karateka who outranked Ueki at the time generally call the more basic kata Dai. However, most people in the JKA, and the Best Karate series of books refer to the more difficult kata as Dai and the easier kata as Sho. How much of this story is urban legend – I do not know, but it is a very popular story!

The truth about the naming difference between SKI and the other Shotokan organisations is quite easily discovered. When Kanazawa Hirokazu formed his own SKIF (Shotokan Karate International Federation.) organisation after being expelled from the JKA. He decided to change the names around as he felt that the smaller, more subtle kata deserved the “sho” designation so that the Gojushiho pair would align better with Bassai and Kanku.

Back in 2003 Traditional Karate Magazine published an article by David Lewin, SKKIF in the UK, where he writes the following account of a weekend course he attended:

“One particularly interesting explanation Shihan gave was the reason why on founding S.K.I.F. he swapped the names of the two katas (Gojushiho Dai and Sho around). He explained that as with the Bassai and Kanku katas, the first one studied was usually the Dai form a kata. The Dai form is usually the longer but less complicated of the two forms. The instructors at the JKA were already practicing the JKA Gojushiho Dai form (i.e. the one with the ippon nukite techniques) before the JKA Sho form (the one with the shihon nukite techniques) had even been introduced into the JKA. Once the new form had been introduced, it was clear that the old kata was the more complicated and so should have been the Sho form, and so Kanazawa swapped the names over.”

So why is the JKA naming “wrong”?

Hopefully this clears up the issue of the difference between the SKI kata names and everyone else, but the bigger question. Why is the JKA naming “wrong”? Why is the smaller kata “dai”, and the larger one “sho”?

Again Kanazawa provides some pointers here too. In his 2009 book “Karate: The Complete Kata”, he provides the following information about Gojushiho: “Through Master Kanken Toyama, the kata ‘Koryu Gojushiho’ was introduced into the Shotokan style”

“The author believes that the ‘Sho’ and ‘Dai’ designations became reversed at the time of their introduction”

This explanation is plausible. We know for example, that in his 1935 book “Karate do Kyohan” Funakoshi Gichin describes the fifteen-core kata of the Shotokan system. Yet, by 1943, we also know that more kata had been added. In 1943’s “Karate Nyumon”, on pages 58 and 59, Funakoshi lists a number of kata that were being studied at the Shotokan, including one “Hotaku” (Hotaku, or “phoenix-peck”, was the name Funakoshi gave to Gojushiho for its introduction as a part of his karate package to mainland Japan). Both Kanku and Bassai are listed separately as dai and sho, but there is only one Hotaku listed.

Masatoshi Nakayama Introduced Gojushiho Sho to JKA

According to Nakayama Masatoshi, he was asked by Funakoshi to travel to Osaka and learn kata from Mabuni Kenwa. In addition, in Randall Hassell’s book “Conversations with the Master”, Nakayama is quoted as saying:

“Some of the kata have come into the JKA system because Master Funakoshi took me around Japan to visit and pay courtesy calls on some of the other old masters in Osaka, Kyoto, Okuyama and Hiroshima” so when we visited Master Mabuni, Master Funakoshi told me to learn Gojushiho and Nijushiho so we could study them more carefully. So Master Mabuni taught me these kata.”

So far this is an edited version of three or four different accounts, explanations and suppositions on this subject, which at best is inconsequential and at worst just confusing!

As with many of this kind of anomaly we need to take a short look into the past and see the canon of kata Funakoshi sensei listed In his 1922 "Ryukyu Kenpo Karate," he lists an additional 16 kata including: an additional Passai kata (listing both Dai & Sho) and Kushanku kata (listing both Dai & Sho), Gojushiho, Chinte, Jiin, Wandau, Rohai, Jumu, Wando, Sochin, Niseishi, Sanseiru, Suparinpei, Wankan, Kokan, and Ushu.

introduced to mainland Japan from 1922. Hotaku figures in this list of 15 kata. As stated previously mentioned Hotaku was the name Funakoshi gave Gojushiho for its introduction to the Japanese mainland... There was no mention of Gojushiho Dai or Sho.

It is my belief that where you find two kata that have a similar pattern and similar sequences, they are really just two versions of the same kata. We see the counter parts of our familiar Shotokan kata in other Ryu, and they are surreally familiar and at the same time different. I am not a great advocate of YouTube but login and have a look at a few examples for yourself. Getting back to the main subject the kata we call Gojushiho Sho (Hotaku) is the original Gojushiho.

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