

Meikyo

Adam Cockfield - 4th Dan Examination Kata

Described by Nakayama Sensei as mellow and serene, Meikyo is an advanced kata within the Shotokan curriculum, mainly noted for the evasive Sankaku-tobi (Triangle Jump), which is unique to this kata. The two kanji, which are combined to make the name Meikyo, can be translated as “*Bright*” and “*Mirror*” perhaps stemming from the opening techniques where the Karateka pulls both palms towards his face as if looking in a mirror. There are several legends which centre around this kata, firstly that it is reminiscent of an ancient folk dance performed to convince the sun goddess Amaterasu to come out, others state that the mirror referred to in the kata’s name is in fact the Mirror of Japan which is one of Japan’s three national treasures. My personal opinion is that the mirror idea has two levels, firstly as the first two thirds of the kata are very basic in comparison to other advanced kata and bear a strong resemblance to Taikyoku & Heian Shodan, the mirror refers to the constant striving for constant perfection of technique throughout our Karate life, and secondly I feel the constant repetitive use of both sides of the body in either a mirror image or double handed moves is teaching us to be versatile and not to limit ourselves by becoming dominant on side of the body.

Evolution and Variations

It is reported in many sources that Meikyo is in fact a “Shotokanised” version of the Rohai series of Kata, which appear in many Okinawan styles of Karate. The name Rohai roughly translates to “Vision of the White Crane/Heron”, perhaps named after the characteristic one-legged posture (Tsuru-ashi dachi) found throughout the kata, or it could be a reference to the influence of Chinese White Crane Kung Fu on the forms origin. Although the originator of the kata is unknown, there are two eminent Karate masters who have played a large part in the four major versions of the kata that are currently practiced in the Karate world, Kosaku Matsumora and Anko Itosu. It is suggested that Itosu formed Rohai Shodan, Nidan & Sandan, from a Tomari-te kata version of the kata named Matsumora Rohai.

I believe that when Funokoshi Sensei restructured many of the kata that we find in modern Shotokan, he based Meikyo on Itosu Rohai Nidan and took elements of the other versions of Rohai, but neglected to keep any of the one legged crane postures due to the similarity to the kata Gankaku (Chinto).

Within Shotokan there are different versions of Meikyo practiced. The Nakayama JKA version of the kata is performed with Gedan Barai + Oi-zuki during the first two repetition of the 45° angle moves (moves 3-6 & 11-14 in *Best Karate Vol 11*) and Uchi-uke + Oi-zuki for the final repetition (moves 19-22). Kanawaza Sensei's SKI perform the 3 repetitions as Age-uke, then Uchi-uke and finally Gedan Barai. SKI also perform two Kiai in the kata, the first being on the "double gedan barai" (move 25 in *Best Karate Vol 11*) the second on the empi during the Sankaku Tobi. The JKA version only has one Kiai, on the Sankaku Tobi. It could be argued that the changes made by Kanazawa Sensei were to distinguish him and his group from the JKA after he left. The most recent addition to the family of kata to come into circulation is Asai Sensei's Meikyo Nidan, which bears a strong resemblance to Itosu Rohai Shodan and incorporates the one-legged crane posture, which is absent in Shotokan's Meikyo. As with all of Asai Sensei kata it is difficult to establish whether they are in fact from ancient pools of kata sought out by Asai and "Shotokanised" or whether they have been created by Asai to fill a perceived gap in the Shotokan curriculum, nevertheless Meikyo Nidan is thought provoking and a useful source of comparison.

Performance

The main theme I found in this kata was to try and establish and maintain fluidity of technique, whilst also being conscious of ensuring that each technique performed had a definitive end, and so not bouncing from one move to another. As the first section of the kata is very basic it is easy to spot the technical flaws in a Karateka's movement, therefore I have focused heavily on making sure the body moves as one unit rather than hands then feet or vice versa. More specifically I have spent time working on initiating the hand movement with the leg movement and ensuring that they reach their focus at the same time.

Bunkai/Oyo

Due to the constant repetition found within the kata Meikyo, especially the first section of the kata I will try and demonstrate how the application of the kata can range from basic karate style attacks and counters, to more practical self defence implications of the kata which may not exactly follow the performance of the kata but utilise the principles implied within the kata. I will use Kihon Bunkai, with Karate style attacks as a means of demonstration as I feel it aids in the teaching of the physical performance of the kata, however from a bankai/oyo/self defence perspective I will try and demonstrate everything using typical attacks you would find used in the street. I will use Jeff Nash's paper (2004) and his list of Habitual Acts of Violence as the basis of the attacks used to demonstrate the Bunkai/Oyo found within the kata. Iain Abernathy in his "Bunkai-Jutsu" books and DVD's state that bunkai/oyo should be something that you do to your partner/opponent and not with them, and this a principle that have used in all of the bunkai/oyo I have looked at.

Classically, the move immediately after the two 45° block/punch sequence (also found in Kanku-Sho) is interpreted as defending against a Bo, again I will demonstrate this for teaching purposes but this kind out attack is not realistic, therefore I have looked at other applications and have found some locks and throws which also work, and are far more applicable in the modern world.

I have also looked in some depth at the opening move of the kata, and have found applications from classical judo such as Ude-hishighi-ude-gatame (upper cross arm armlock) and kubiwa (to encircle the neck) which was one of the throws included in Funokoshi's "Karate-do Kyohan".

The most difficult move to interpret I feel is the Sankaku-Tobi technique found at the end of the kata, as it does not appear in any previous kata and differs from jumps found in other kata. Most jumps in kata tend to imply the generation of power needed to throw an opponent, but in Sankaku-tobi the feet leave the floor and land one after the other rather than both off and both down at the same time. In fact looking at the Rohai series of kata (and Asai's Meikyo Nidan) the jumping technique

does not appear at all however a crescent kick followed by a stepping 180° does. I see this technique implying an evasion, possibly against two opponents aimed at turning a disadvantageous situation in your favour possibly using your opponent as a shield. I have also looked into the possibility of the move being as a throw and will also demonstrate this.