

# Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi: a turn-of-the-century karate grand master

## Authors' Contribution:

- ☑ **A** Study Design
- ☐ **B** Data Collection
- 📊 **C** Statistical Analysis
- 📄 **D** Manuscript Preparation
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## Abstract

### Background & Study Aim:

Many studies have been devoted to karate and the person of master Gichin Funakoshi. However, no scholarly study has been devoted to Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi's message in karate. Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi is known as a world-renowned promoter of budo values through karate. It was important for the master to treat karate as a martial art, a combat sport and a self-defence system. Accordingly, the purpose of the paper was knowledge about Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi activities in Poland.

### Material & Methods:

The method used was desk research by analysing source materials in the form of articles, books, videos, websites and interviews. Only official and authorized sources were used.

### Results:

A profile of the master is presented concerning his development in martial arts through judo, kendo and karate to his established position in karate in the United States of America. This is followed by a description of his teaching method and the growing interest in his teaching in the divided karate community in Poland.

### Conclusions:

Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi brought karate in Poland into the 21st century with dignity by unifying the Polish karate community at the turn of the century. His leadership position in Central Europe contributed to the development of the Funakoshi Shotokan Karate Association (FSKA).

### Key words:

budo • desk research • Funakoshi Shotokan Karate Association • kata • kumite

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**Gichin Funakoshi** – karate master from Okinawa, who is referred to as the 'father of modern karate.' He had a significant influence on the development of karate in the first half of the 20th century [56].

**Kihon** – basic combat exercises involving repetition of techniques [57].

**Kata** – a formal arrangement of related sequences of movements, attack and defence techniques in specific positions and breathing patterns [58].

**Bunkai** – interpretation of kata techniques – practice by applying parts of the kata in a non-competitive fight with opponents [59].

**Kumite** – fight understood as sport competition according to specific rules or training sparring match [60].

**Shobu ippon** – fight to 1 point: 1 ippon or 2 wazari. The scoring of the ippon results in a win before the end of the regulation time of the fight [61].

**Ippon** – one point. Achieved through the execution of a valid technique on the opponent [62].

Waza-ari – a **judo** term for a technique that cannot be regarded as a full **ippon**, but is very close [62].

**Budo (Budō)** – originally a term denoting the "Way of the warrior", it is now used as a collective appellation for modern martial arts of **kendō**, **jūdō**, **kyūdō** and so on. The primary objective of these "martial ways" is self-perfection (**ningen-kesei**) [62].

**Dan (dan'i)** – a term used to denote one's technical level or grade [62].

**Self-defence** – *noun* fighting techniques used for defending oneself against physical attack, especially unarmed combat techniques such as those used in many of the martial arts [63].

**Technique**– *noun* a way of performing an action [63].

**Kenpō (Japanese)** – is the name of several arts. The word kenpō is a Japanese translation of the Chinese word

## INTRODUCTION

Many studies have been devoted to karate and the person of master Gichin Funakoshi [1]. However, no scholarly study has been devoted to Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi's message in karate [2]. Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi is known as a world-renowned promoter of budo values through karate [3]. It was important for the master to treat karate as a martial art [4], a combat sport [5] and a self-defence system [6]. In his teachings, the balance between physical and mental fighting skills was important [7]. He assumed that if the mind is weak then the body is weak; if the mind is strong then the body is strong. Through the practice of karate, you improve your physicality, your athletic and non-athletic fighting skills [8]. From this perspective, Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi has made himself known in Poland, but above all, he is known as a leader who brought karate into the 21st century.

The purpose of the paper was knowledge about Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi activities in Poland.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The method used was desk research – by analysing source materials [9]. In the first stage of the research work, available data were collected in the form of articles, books, videos, websites, and interviews. In the second stage of the research work, the collected data was selected and unauthorized and unofficial sources were rejected. In the final stage of the research work, a description and scientific interpretation of the facts was made.

## RESULTS

### Profile of the master

Kancho Kenneth Yoshinobu Funakoshi was born on 4 September 1938 as the fourth cousin of master Gichin Funakoshi [10]. At the age of 10, he began training judo under Master Arazaki [11]. In high school, he also trained in football [12] and swimming [13]. From 1956 to 1959, Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi continued his education at the University of Hawaii thanks to an athletic scholarship for his swimming performance. It was then that he trained *kenpo* with master Adriano Emperado, the founder of *kajukenbo* [14]. Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi won the first *Kajukenbo*

Tournament in Hawaii in the *kumite* competition, and after finishing his education, he taught *kenpo* in Mexico for a year.

In 1960 he returned to Hawaii and began training in shotokan karate. He took lessons successively from the following Japan Karate Association (JKA) masters: Hirokazu Kanazawa [15], Masataki Mori [16] and Tetsuhiko Asai [17]. He also practiced for a year with Hidetaka Nishiyama in Los Angeles [18]. It is worth noting that from 1964 to 1968, Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi was grand champion in the JKA of Hawaii and several All American Karate Federation medallists. Due to his talent and skill, in 1969 he was appointed the Chief Instructor for the Karate Association of Hawaii [10]. He was recognized and awarded many times for his teaching of karate.

Among others, in 1978 Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi was awarded 'Instructor of the Year' by Black Belt magazine, and in 1984 he was appointed as the Chief Instructor of the JKA in the Pacific region [19]. In 1986 he moved to San Jose to teach karate. A year later, after the death of Masatoshi Nakayama, Chief Instructor of JKA [20], Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi founded the Funakoshi Shotokan Karate Association (FSKA) with the world headquarters, now in Milpitas, California [21].

### Master's mission

Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi's mission was to continue the teachings of master Gichin Funakoshi. Through karate, he promoted the all-round development of the body and mind, which was in line with the theorems of the science of physical culture [22]. He began his teaching with the United States of America and Mexico. In 1992, at the invitation of Andrzej Zarzycki [23] and Janusz Piepiora [24], Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi came to Poland to Kowary [25]. This was the master's first visit to Europe. Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi became known as a man with great fighting skills and a good personality, which led to many followers and supporters [26] who trained under his supervision. The latter were only interested in philosophy [27].

Year after year, more and more karate adepts attended the training seminars conducted by Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi, which significantly contributed to the unification of the Polish karate community in the final decade of the 20th century [28]. Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi placed

special emphasis on *kihon* in his training, which stood out from other teaching models [29]. Specific to this were techniques performed from the guard in dynamic movement based on *kumite*. The master placed great importance on *kata* [30]. He taught that there are many *kata*, and every adept will find a *kata* suitable for himself, but he will only know it when he performs it a thousand times. *Kumite* practice was taught by the master based on combinations with *kihon* and breaking mental blocks in *kata* practice [31]. All sport fighting was done by *shobu ippon* [32]. The composite of these training elements was always *bunkai*. The practice referred to necessary *defenses* adequate for modern threats [33].

Due to the great popularity of karate seminars with Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi at that time, in addition to Kowary (Figure 1), a seminar was organized in Belchatow [34]. Later, alternating karate seminars were organized in Wroclaw [35] and Kowary. It is worth noting that the culmination of each training seminar was examinations for dan master degrees. It is estimated that Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi examined more than 6,000 people in Poland [36].

At the beginning of the 21st century, Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi began to introduce his son Shihan Kyle Yoshinobu Funakoshi as a global karate teacher [37]. For the first time the masters together came to Poland to Kowary in 2007 at the invitation of Janusz Piepiora and his sons Pawel and Zbigniew Piepiora [38]. Thanks to the good cooperation between masters Funakoshi and masters Piepiora, the XII World Championship of Shotokan Karate FSKA was organized in Kowary and Karpacz in 2010 (Figure 2) [39].

Furthermore, the Polish Open Championships of Shotokan Karate according to FSKA regulations were held periodically at that time [40]. These activities again united the Polish karate community [41, 42]. This resulted in more championship tournaments hosted by Andrzej Zarzycki: in 2013, the XV World Championship of Shotokan Karate FSKA [43] was held in Zukowo, and a year later, the European Championship of Shotokan Karate FSKA [44] was held in Poznan. Through training seminars and sparring tournaments, Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi popularized karate [45]. These activities influenced practitioners' intrinsic motivation through their self-improvement in

«*quánfǎ*». This term is often informally transliterated as «*kempo*», as a result of applying Traditional Hepburn romanization but failing to use a macron to indicate the long vowel. The generic nature of the term combined with its widespread, cross-cultural adoption in the martial arts community has led to many divergent definitions. The word *Kenpō* translates thus: "*Ken*" meaning 'Fist' and "*Pō*" meaning 'Method' or 'Law' as in 'Law of gravity', a correct interpretation of the word *Kenpō* would be 'Fist Method', the same meaning as 'Quanfa'. However, it is often misinterpreted as 'the Law of the Fist' [64].



**Figure 1.** From the seminar in Kowary in 2007. From left standing: Pawel Piepiora, Kyle Funakoshi, Kenneth Funakoshi, Janusz Piepiora, Zbigniew Piepiora.

Source: archives of Zbigniew Piepiora.



**Figure 2.** From XII World Championship of Shotokan Karate FSKA in Kowary and Karpacz in 2010. From left standing: José Chagas, Kenneth Funakoshi, Paweł Piepiora, Stephen Roberts.

Source: archives of KS Funakoshi Shotokan Karate.

karate culture [46]. Through years of practicing karate, they perfected their characters [47].

At the end of the second decade of the 21st century, Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi took a well-deserved retirement and he holds his current honorary role in FSKA. He was succeeded as FSKA Chief Instructor by his son Shihan Kyle Funakoshi [48]. During this time, technological advances revolutionized the access to training materials on the Internet. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic period exposed the ease of access to content and methods, forms and means of effective improvement [49-51]. Therefore, Shihan Kyle Funakoshi created an additional opportunity to participate in online karate seminars with

global reach [52, 53]. The name FSKA Premier began to be used for the main dojo to emphasize its superiority over affiliates [54]. Those in Poland currently include Andrzej Zarzycki and Paweł Piepiora [55].

## CONCLUSIONS

It was stated that in the final decade of the 20th century Kancho Kenneth Funakoshi did much to unify the Polish karate community. He was considered to have brought karate in Poland into the 21st century with dignity and his leadership position there contributed to the development of Funakoshi Shotokan Karate Association.

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