

Heian/Pinan Kata

The five Heian/Pinan kata are some of the most commonly taught kata in the world of Karate. Even though these kata's are common, few people know the real meaning and purpose of them.

The Heian/Pinan kata were created by a man named Itosu Anko. Itosu was born in Okinawa in 1831. He started practicing Karate to strengthen his mind and body. Itosu found one of the greatest masters in Okinawa to be his head sensei, Bushi Matsumura Sokon, a legend in the history of Karate.

In 1891, the Japanese army had expressed interest in making Okinawan Karate an official Japanese military martial art, since they were so impressed by the physical condition of several Okinawan conscripts during their medical examinations there, however, the Japanese army quickly lost interest in Karate when they realized it was outdated.

Itosu Anko decided somebody needed to modernize Karate.

The old ways of teaching simply didn't appeal to modern society anymore.

Therefore, he developed a series of five kata, called "Pinan" 1-5.

Although Itosu named these kata "Pinan," they were later renamed "Heian" by Funakoshi Gichin during the introduction of Karate to mainland Japan, in order to suit the Japanese language.

The aim of these five Heian/Pinan kata was simple:

To reorganize the previously haphazard introduction of Karate for beginners, while simplifying the transition to advanced Okinawan Karate kata, like Seisan, Wanshu, and, Passai. Because, with these new katas, Itosu could do something nobody had done before...In 1901, he started teaching Karate at the Shuri Jinjo Elementary School.

The Okinawan people were shocked. Karate was a secret and deadly martial art, not suited for kids in public school. But, they didn't know Itosu had a masterplan. The Heian/Pinan kata system acted as a Trojan horse, allowing Itosu to bring Karate from its secretive darkness into the light of modernization.

Itosu's introduction to Karate became part of the official physical education of Okinawa's school system, eventually making its way to mainland Japan – giving rise to school/university clubs, tournaments, mass teaching methods, ranks/belts, new styles, organizations and later the rest of the world. If it wasn't for Itosu Anko, perhaps none of us would practice Karate today!

Most people think the name "Heian/Pinan" translates to "Peace and Tranquility," but "Pingan", is a pretty common word in China. It's hard to translate exactly, but it loosely translates to, "stay safe" or "be protected from danger."

Heian/Pinan is a personal “stay safe” message from master Itosu Anko, written in Chinese to honor the ancestral roots of Okinawan Karate, wishing you a safe journey in your quest for Karate mastery.