Kanu dai

Kanku Dai is one of the most important kata in the Shotokan Syllabus. This is, despite being an advanced kata, quite basic, but is a very long kata. Under the WKF rules, this is one of the Shitei kata alongside Jion, and is fundamentally both challenging and enjoyable to perform.

This kata is famous for being Master Funakoshi’s favourite kata, and was often used in his demonstrations that he performed in his mission in popularising karate in Japan. He stated that this kata contained all of the art’s essential elements.

The kata Kushanku was first introduced by a Chinese kendo expert to the small island of Okinawa, one of the Ryukyu Islands, passing the kata onto an expert Tode Sakugawa of the Shuri-te style, and it from here originated the Kanku-Dai we practice today. Also known as Kwanku, this kata is translated to mean ‘To Look To The Sky’, with the opening sequence being of symbolic significance, and representing the attitude of the kata. In the book Dynamic Karate M. Nakayama practices this opening sequence on a cliff edge, with the sun cast over his body. Below, it is noted that the kata represents the modesty in karate.

This can be taken to mean that we should place our karate in the context of the world, and to look to the sky we see how small we are in relation to the rest of the world. This is very humbling, and in many ways breeds the idea that you are forever a student, not just of karate, but of the world.

Many psychologists have analysed the opening sequence of the hands rising, with the head following the small triangular shape created by the position of the hands. It has been implied by many that the significance of the focusing of your attention through this shape enables you to block out the clutter and distractions of the world, and see the world, yourself and your karate for what it really is.

The opening sequence of this kata has long been studied by all who love it, and along with the karate instructors, psychologists and Martial Art historians, many ides have been projected on the significance of this sequence. Debate aside, it might simply be more valuable to perform this sequence, and appreciate it for what it means to you, and what it offers your karate.