

# **A HISTORY OF AMERICAN SOKE**

## **Volumes I & II**

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**Head founder, *Nippon Shiho Karano Ryu***

# VOLUME ONE: A HISTORY OF AMERICAN SOKE

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## INTRODUCTION

By Shihan John Williams, 7th Dan, Kaicho  
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In an era where the Martial Arts scene is flooded with thousands of people claiming to be Grandmasters or advertizing ridiculously high black belt ranks, it is refreshing to see that someone was willing to research the traditional process under which the founders of old established a new style or Martial Art:

Soke Clement Riedner is one of less than a dozen people outside Asia who is a legitimate first generation founder: (He is one of those who became sponsored in the traditional Asian method after qualifying to establish his own system.)

There are two types of founders (you could call them Grand Masters) under authentic Asian methods: One is a HEAD-FAMILY; the other is SHODAI- HEAD FOUNDER. A Head Family (called SOKE in Japan and Sijo in China) is a person who inherited an established Asian Martial Art system. A Head Family has traceable lineage or bloodlines going back over several generations. Some of these Head families can trace their lines of succession as far back as 800 years.

A Head Founder is anyone who has first mastered an established Martial Arts System, then studied other systems to Black Belt level and went before a HEAD FAMILY for review and eventual lifelong 'sponsorship'. (When a Head founder dies, his/her art is then passed to an appointed successor who then becomes a junior Head Family.)

Although this book covers the Head Family- Head Founder-history in America, it must not-be forgotten that it is through the efforts of Shodai Soke Clement Riedner that the reestablishment of an international Sponsorship Board headed by Head families is in effect today. His efforts have drawn together the top leaders in North America, Europe and Asia into a common bond (peer group) to assure that those individuals who qualify to establish a new system are allowed to do so legitimately (keeping in mind that there are people out there who will sell one authentic looking papers attesting to one being a founder while not even coming close to qualifying as such. These paper or *diploma* mills are outright frauds. There is- only one method to legitimately start your own art or system, and that can only be done under the sponsorship of a HEADFAMILY. And only one organization has that support, the 'World Soke Council', which was organized by Shodai Soke Clement Riedner.

Through the 'World Soke Council' we will have a body where the upper elite or senior leaders in the Martial Arts can (interact-act among equals) In effect the World Soke Council is a peer group of people who have mastered the true meaning of the Martial Arts. For this reason I am honored to be allowed to associate with these people, and I would hope that anyone who is a part of the 'WSC' and its three national Boards (The

Canadian Sokeship Certification Board, the European Society of Soke and the American Fellowship of Soke) will feel exactly as I do.

In the time that I have worked alongside Shodai Soke Clement Riedner, I have come to realize that the Asians were very precise in delineating at what point in a person's career they were capable of going on their own and formulate their fighting system. I found that not one Asian ever founded his/her own art prior to WWII without studying a traditional system to the Master Instructor level. Then every one of these masters went out and studied several other arts from which to draw from and improve the art they mastered.

Today the trend is to stop learning once a person reaches a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> degree black Belt. Then for some unknown reason, people tend to assume they know enough to start a new art. This is sad, for these people will never know what each art has to offer them. For this very reason the sports winner, media personality, movie or TV star without an in-depth knowledge, ends up establishing a crude variation of the art they studied, passing out high ranks without regard to age.

I believe that once a person stops learning, we cease to grow as Martial Artists. It is only with a consistent study under a person of higher knowledge that we can eventually come to that level known as a 'Master'. And through the efforts of those who are associate with the WORLD SOKE COUNCIL, where the true martial Arts Masters will join together under one banner.

## CHAPTER ONE---What is a Soke?

SOKE is a Japanese title found in the historical Budo and Bujutsu arts which has in recent years made its way into popular usage in the American Martial Arts scene. Even to those of us who have devoted some time and study to its usage and definition, the title remains somewhat illusive. How much more confusing might this all be to the general martial arts public considering the fact that each oriental country, (i.e. Japan, China, Okinawa, Korea, etc.) for the most part, had indigenous Martial Arts which were practiced within their borders.

In America the problem is compounded by the influx, especially in the 20th century, of not only Japanese but Korean, Chinese and other Arts from a multitude of Asian countries. Another factor is that these are not only foreign arts coming from other nations and cultures; they have only gained popularity within the last 30-40 years. .i.e. since 1960.

Obviously these arts have been brought to America by oriental practitioners and by American servicemen who served overseas and studied the martial arts of the countries in which they were stationed. It was only a matter of time before those American students of these Martial Arts would return home and begin to variate what they had learned and thus begin to establish what we might call 'American' Martial Arts styles or systems. Those arts have matured in the sense that a good number of those American students of the oriental arts have gained Shihan-Master ranking with some 20 plus years of experience. They in turn are producing students of 'Shihan' rank who are becoming a 2nd generation of American Martial Artists, and the inevitable is taking place. That is, Americans, most of whom trained overseas have 20 plus year's experience, are founding their own styles or systems.

While this, in and of itself, a natural and not necessarily unhealthy development on the American scene, the understanding and proper usage of the correct oriental titles, if used, is important. It is to that end the following, definitions are offered.

### Japanese Titles:

Sempai.....	Upper ranking students, student teachers
Dai-Sempai....	One upper ranking student under each Sensei
Sensei.....	A teacher, generally a black belt is called Sensei.
Dai or O' Sensei...	An experienced teacher, often a title of great respect
Yudansha Shihan....	Black Belt Headmaster or the head of a group of Black belts
Kaicho. . . .	'President' a federation head Dai-Kaicho. The president of a federation of more than 1 Kai
Shodai..	The first generation Founder-- head of a Martial Arts style
Soke. . .	'Head Family' or Head of a Martial Art or Ryu-most properly the inherited Head.
Dai- Soke....	(Not a true traditional term) first amongst equals -the head of a board Shodan and Soke

Chinese titles:

Sijo-----Founder of a Martial Art  
 Sigong-----Grandfather, Grandmaster of a Martial Art  
 Si-Tai-Gong---Great Grandfather or Grandmaster of a Martial Art

Again we must not only define the terms or titles, but also they are properly received. Unfortunately many Americans, who have founded their own Martial Art style or system, either are not aware of their proper usage or they chose to ignore the Asian protocol. Perhaps the following will help define these terms:

A. SOKE:

Inherited Headship  
 Bloodline inheritance  
 or non-bloodline  
 inheritance

B. SHODAI:

Non-inherited Headship  
 self-appointed, or  
 self-appointed and  
 officially recognized or sponsored  
 by an Inherited Soke.

From this we see then a distinction between the Soke who has inherited his Ryu as an established Martial Art, and the Soke (Shodai) who has formed his organization, Style, system or Ryu. While the most common Japanese tradition was for the 'family' Ryu to be passed on to a blood relative, this was not always possible, in some cases. Soke Don Angeir and Soke Albert C. Church are examples of this which we see from the following, which took place in 1954.

"Mr. Yoshida explained to Mr. Angier that, in Japan if a samurai had no heir, he was obligated to take a 'Yoshi' or adopted son to carry on the name and family traditions. He asked if Mr. Angier would agree to become his Yoshi. He readily agreed. That adoption is, of course, not legal procedure in the United States, but a symbolic one. Mr. Yoshida gave Mr. Angier the name Yoshida Kensaburo and passed on the successor ship of the art by presenting him with the school 'Han' (seal)."<sup>1</sup>

Further detail of that event is given later in this book. Shihan Albert Church also became, in 1967 the second American to be adopted as a 'Yoshi' and subsequent Soke of a family Art. Sigong Andrew Tamper was the only American that Chang Chun Feng (Yee Chong) ever taught the family art to, and has become the recognized head of that system. However, the procedure for the transfer was less formal and thus harder to trace and verify. Yee Chong Shaolin Kempo is a recognized Chinese Martial Art registered in the Republic of China as such and Andrew Tamper as the "Sai Tai Gong"--Grand Father of the system. Since only three Americans have ever (to the author's knowledge) inherited a legitimate Martial Art or Ryu, how then does one who has developed his own style or 'Ryu' become a Soke? Because there are no laws preventing any one from starting and teaching his own system, or even using the title of 'Soke', anyone may start

his own Martial Art and claim 'Soke' status. However, many who have started their own Ryu do not use the title. In his IMAL Newsletter Shihan Williams comments on this:

"It is estimated that over 400 people in North America claim head founder status. These are not recognized by anyone but their own organization or membership."<sup>2</sup>

We have previously distinguished between an inherited and a non-inherited 'Soke' or Head Family. The non-inherited Soke is actually a Shodai or first generation 'Head Family', which, under proper Asian protocol, must be recognized or sponsored by an inherited 'Head Family' to be considered legitimate by Asian standards. To again quote Shihan Williams:

"The three North American Head Families (we know of) are the only ones who can certify anyone as a first generation Head founder of a new style or art."<sup>3</sup>

This is where it breaks down in that there is a popular idea that a Shodai can in turn sponsor a Shodai. This is not true in the correct tradition or protocol. Another idea which has surfaced in American Martial Arts is that a board or group of Shihan may vote someone to be the head of their style and thus 'Soke.' This is not the actual traditional method of receipt of the title.

The proper procedure, by which a self-appointed 'Soke' may receive and use his title, is when a 'SOKE' by inheritance officially recognizes him and his Ryu, generally issuing official certification to that effect. The self-appointed 'Soke' then is entitled to the traditional use of the title as a 'Head Family' and 'First Generation' founder of his Ryu.

## CHAPTER TWO: The Era of Soke Albert C. Church Jr., (1930-1980)

While in 1954 Don Angier inherited 'Shidare Yanagi Ryu Aiki Ju-Jutsu' to become the first American 'Soke', it was through the efforts of Shihan Albert C. Church, Jr., who inherited the 'Shaolinji Tetsuken Ryu Kempo' system in 1967 that the traditions of 'Sokeship' have become a lasting part of the American Martial Arts.

Beginning his Martial Arts career with the study of Daito Ryu Aiki Ju-Jutsu under Sagaru Yokohoto in 1939, Shihan Church met and trained under Khooh C. Kim in 'Shaolinji Tetsuken Ryu Kempo' while Serving with the U.S. Marines in Korea from 1950-52. This training and contact continued on into the 1960's with Shihan Church eventually being the 'Ichi bon Deshi' or number one student, of his Sensei.

The authors first knowledge of Shihan Church came in the mid 1960's when Shihan Church became a member of the newly formed (1965) HMAF (Hakkoryu Martial Arts Federation) which brought together the Hakkoryu Ju-Jitsu of Rhuho Okuyama under Shihan James A. Benko, and the Motobuha Shito Ryu of Soke Kuniba under Shihan R.P. Baillargeon. The author served as a representative for the HMAF during the years 1966-73. Joining the HMAF in 1965, Shihan Church, who was working and living in Charleston, S.C. and at the time, participated in several capacities. We remember him as a 6th Dan in the 'Shaolinji Tetsuken Kempo' style at that time. In 1967, when his Sensei, who was dying of cancer, moved to Japan for treatment Shihan Church, due to his civilian job with the Navy, was able to arrange a two year transfer to Japan to be with his O' Sensei. We remember his being appointed as the 'Japan Correspondent' for the HMAF during that period. Shortly after his arrival in Japan and his being reunited with his O'Sensei, Shihan Church received from Mr. Koch the 'soden-secret paper' - transferring to him the Headship (Sokeship) of the Shaolinji Tetsuken Kempo. In Nov. 1967, shortly after this event. Mr. Benko went to Japan for advanced Hakkoryu training under Soke Okuyama. While in Japan Mr. Benko stayed with Shihan Church and, while he did not personally see the 'soden', he was aware of its existence, and what had taken place.<sup>5</sup>

During the months that followed in Japan Shihan Church not only continued to study Hakkoryu Ju-Jitsu, eventually receiving a Sandan ranking, but he also spent time with Siyogo Kuniba, Soke of the Motobuha Shito Ryu system. During that period Soke Kuniba helped Shihan Church translate the 'Soden' and re-organize the 'Shaolinji Tetsuken Ryu' system, renaming it 'Kamishin Ryu'.<sup>6</sup> Soke Kuniba, upon instructions from Soke Hiashi, then-issued a letter stating that Shihan Church was indeed the head of the 'Nippon Kamishin Ryu' system and that Mr. Church was authorized to issue Dan and Kyu ranking in both Kamishin Ryu and Shito ryu.<sup>7</sup> He also graded Shihan Church as Shihan-Godan in Motobuha Shito Ryu, Shihan in Ju-Jitsu and Sandan in Seishin Mugei Ryu Iaido.

Upon his return to the U.S Shihan Church set up his World Headquarters in Charleston, S.C. and began to develop his System as well as some other projects, including the 'World Sijo Dai Soke Remei'. (See Chapter Five.)



Shihan Church died suddenly in June, 1980, creating not only a great loss to the Martial Arts world, but putting the Kamishin Ryu system and NKR into several years of disunity. At the time of his death, Kamishin Ryu had two Soke-dai --Harold Martin over the Karate and James Brandon over the Ju-Jitsu. Ron Cherry--head of the Kobudo division, was not, however, an official Soke-dai. Unfortunately Shihan Martin had quit the Arts to enter the ministry and Shihan Brandon remained in the System, but was inactive, and Shihan Cherry had left the NKR to establish his own Organization and system when it became apparent that, through his personal will, Shihan Church had left the entire Kamishin Ryu System to his wife, Catherine O. Church. She then became Soke of Kamishin Ryu. The ensuing years were fraught with some confusion in Kamishin Ryu until 1984 when Soke Catherine Church appointed Tony Annesi as Soke-dai of the entire System. The Kai began to experience new growth as Soke-Dai Annesi was able to travel and conduct clinics promoting the System. However, due to personal reasons, Soke Dai Annesi resigned his position in August, 1988. Within a few months, Mrs. Church appointed Shihan Don Phillips as Soke-Dai. Shihan Phillips had been a Soke-dai under Albert C. Church in the 1970's having resigned his Position only a couple of years before Shihan Church's death.

CHAPTER THREE: 'The Recognition of Shodai Soke by Soke Albert Church;

While Soke Angier followed the pattern of many Japanese Soke in seeking to confine his system to a handful of hand picked students, Soke Church took a more active role in the development of the Martial Arts in America, both organizationally and through his Kamishin Ryu. He also cooperated with Dr. Jean ElKhoury in the establishment of the 'World Sijo Dai Soke Remei'. His activity also included the recognition--sponsorship of a number of Shodai Soke. While our records are scanty to the best of the author's knowledge, there were two primary periods of activity on the part of Soke Church during which he recognized and sponsored a total of nine individuals as 'Shodai Soke'. The first few years after returning to the U.S. were, however, devoted to the organization and development of the "NKR" as a Kai and Kamishin Ryu as a positive force in American Martial Arts.

As best as our records indicate the first to receive sponsorship was Rod Sarchanoski in 1971 or 72. Then in 1973 Karl Marx received recognition and sponsorship. The 1975-76 period was more active in that Soke Church sponsored 4 individuals including John Stover, Dr. Jean El Khoury, Scot Russell, and Roy Suenaka. The second period of recognition activity came in the Spring of 1978 when Shihan Church sponsored three individuals. These were the Author and his 'Nippon Shiho Karano Ryu' in March, followed by the sponsorship of Joseph Cowles as the 'Shodai' and 'Sifu' of his Gung Fu based system, and finally in May the sponsorship of Don Wrobel as 'Shodai-Soke. Soke Church died two years later in June 1980, not having to our knowledge, sponsored any other 'Shodai-Soke'. Thus, during a 6 year period, he officially sponsored nine (9) individuals as Shodai Soke' of their own Ryu. Of the nine, the majority are believed to still be active.

Not all of these 'appointed Soke/Shodai' have, in turn, recognized others. To the author's knowledge, Dr. Karl Marx recognized Roland Maroteaux of France, while two others have gone on to establish their own 'Sokeship Boards', and thus been active in recognizing/sponsoring others. In 1972 Rod Sarchanoski set up the United States Society of Soke. The actual number and names of those who have been recognized by that board is not known. A list of members, which we saw dated 1985 would place the number at around 10.

In 1982, Soke Riedner established the SKKI Soke Remmei (American Fellowship of Soke) ..see Chapter Five. That Board has sponsored a total of 7 individuals between 1979 and 1991. Even with these boards the total number of those who can claim any sort of history or personal lineage of legitimate recognition still remains small, probably less than 25. In Chapter Five this is discussed further.

## CHAPTER FOUR: Other Americans Who Have Inherited an Oriental Art

While Soke Albert C. Church may have had the greatest impact upon American Sokeships, Don Angier was actually the first American to officially inherit an oriental Martial Art. Like Kamishin Ryu which can trace it's lineage back some 600 years, the Shidare Yanagi Ryu is likewise ancient, being traced back to the Samurai Yoshida family of the Tokugawa era when most of the changes in the system took place. The modern development of the Ryu came with Yoshida Kotaro who was born around 1875 and became master of his family art. Beginning to make changes in the system, this was continued with his son Kenji who changed the name of the Ryu to 'Shidare Yanagi Ryu.' Because of World War II, he left Japan in 1941, arriving first in Costa Rica and finally in California. Because of his Japanese ancestry he soon became the object of suspicion. Changing his name to that of a dead friend he was captured by the U.S. Department of Justice and sent to Camp Topaz in Utah for the duration of the war. After his release he travelled East, finally settling in New York state in 1948.

In the summer of 1949 he met Mr. Don Angier, who finally persuaded Kenji to teach him his family Art. Beginning classes in an empty garage, training continued until Mr. Angier was drafted in 1952 because of the Korean War. Fortunately, however, Mr. Angier was not sent overseas, but was stationed at the Aberdeen proving grounds in Maryland, allowing him to continue his training. Towards the end of 1954, his health failing, Mr. Yoshida contacted Mr. Angier and explained to him the Japanese custom of taking a 'Yoshi' adopted son, to carry on the family tradition and art when no biological son was available. Asked if he would accept such a title, Mr. Angier agreed and the family 'Han' seal of the Ryu was passed to him. After the death of Mr. Yoshida and his discharge from the Army, Mr. Angier returned to California where he opened the first Dojo of the Art in 1955. Mr. Angier has continued since that time to quietly teach the Shidare Yanagi Ryu system to a handful of chosen students as was the family tradition.

### YEE CHONG SHAOLIN KENPO

The third American to inherit an oriental Martial Art was Andrew Tamper of Canton, Ohio. Concerning his instructor Chang Chun Feng-(Yee Chong), Mt. Tamper writes:

"He was run out of China by bands of War Lords who wanted his land, when he refused he left his family.. a wife & 9 children and came to America. He ended up in Alliance, Ohio. At the that time they were hiring Orientals, mexicans, etc.. to help build & repair the railroad, which was the P.R.R. "8

Mr. Feng had saved enough money to open a small laundry on Seneca St. in Alliance. In 1923, Andy would take his father's laundry to Mr. Feng. Once, seeing Mr. Feng in his back room doing kata, he asked him to teach him. Finally on May 23, 1927, Mr. Feng consented. Instruction continued 4 hours a day until Andy joined the Army in 1941. After service in the Pacific, an illness forced his return to the U.S. After the war, Mr. Tamper continued to teach the Art Mr. Feng '(Yee Chong) had taught him. Concerning his school, Mr. Tamper writes:

'Our organization originally was called, as my teacher gave me permission to use his name, for the school. I could use it as a personal name to teach it, which was YEE CHONG MU GOW, meaning the way of Yee Chong school'.<sup>9</sup>

Concerning his title of Sigong, Mr. Tamper again states:

'About the Sigong title, I was the only American taught by him. I taught the Hard style of Dove-fist. So I inherited my title as I brought and am keeping the art alive in America.<sup>10</sup>

Mr. Chang Chun Feng--Yee Chong--returned to mainland China in 1941 with the outbreak of WWII. In 1948 he moved to Taiwan with his family and died in Taipei in 1978.<sup>11</sup>

Subsequent research has verified the authenticity of 'Yee Chong Shaolin Kenpo' as a registered and authentic Chinese Martial Art with Andrew Tamper certified by the Republic of China as the Sigong- Grandfather-Grand Master of that Art.<sup>12</sup> A check of the certificate issued by the Republic of China has verified it as being authentic.<sup>13</sup> As the only American student of Chang Chun Feng(Yee Chong), Andrew Tamper became only the 3rd American to officially and legitimately inherit an oriental Family Martial Art.

Since the writing of the above in 1989, the author has had two additional Inherited Head Families come into fellowship with the CBBA/SKKI and be validated as inheritors of Asian Martial Arts. These are two individuals are Soke Scott Sikes and Mas Guru Dale Fryer.

Soke Sikes was, in the late 1970's and early 1980's, one of a handful of students of a Dr. E. G. Roberts. Dr. Roberts was a Cardiologist at the main hospital in Springfield, MO where Scott worked. Dr. Roberts was of Philippine-Chinese ancestry and had inherited a Chinese Kempo system known at the time Dr. Riedner met Scott as 'Si Kempo Jitsu'. Scott was named the inheritor and has subsequently changed the name to 'Ken Kar Do Ryu'. Soke Sikes would be the 4th generation Head Family of the Art and has appointed several Soke-Dai as inheritors of the various elements of the Style. Perhaps the most active of these is Sifu Michael Martin, of VA who has formally inherited the Kung Fu elements of the Style.

Another Inherited Head Family, is Mas Guru Dale Fryer of WV. Mas Guru Fryer's instructor was a man of Dutch-Indonesian descent who had moved to the Pittsburg, PA area around the time of World War II. Mr. Fryer became the senior student and upon the death of his instructor, Mr. Wetzel, became the inheritor of the 'Chaun Fa Tjiminde' Martial Arts Style. Mas Guru Fryer has since gone into semi retirement and formally turned the style over to his senior student, Guru Kevin Mercer of Youngstown, OH. Both are also in fellowship with Dr. Riedner's CBBA/SKKI.

## CHAPTER FIVE: The Establishment of Soke Boards

It would only follow that Soke, whether those by inheritance or appointment, would form 'Sokeship Boards' for the purpose of professional fellowship and accreditation and appointment Shodai Soke. Thus, such a board, if used properly, serves as a means of not only professional fellowship but also of screening and backing those who desire to establish their own Ryu or Martial Art system. Again, information as to the exact dates, personalities, etc., is sketchy. However, as the author understands it, there are currently in operation, or have been established in the past, the following 'Soke Boards' as of the mid 1990's.

While there are a number of organizations headed by Japanese Soke, we cannot find any one individual organization which might be described as the 'Japanese-Okinawan' Soke Board. The author has heard that the Japanese Seibukan has 4 Soke on it, and has seen reference to a 'Zen Nippon Soke Kai'.<sup>14</sup>

As to such boards outside of the orient.. more information is available. Perhaps the first of these boards was the 'European Society of Soke' established sometime in the 1960's by Dr. Gert Van Zantwijk of Holland. He reorganized that board in the early 1980's, and in March 1982, appointed Shihan Frank Newton of England, as the Secretary for the Society. Dr. Van Zantwijk died shortly thereafter and the Society has been inactive until the Present.<sup>15</sup> Prior to the death of Dr. Van Zantwijk, the European Society maintained a relationship with the U.S. Society of Soke headed by Rod Sarchanoski. However, with the Dr. Van Zantwijk's death that affiliation is in question.

Following chronological order, the next 'Soke Board' to be established was the 'World Sijo Dai Soke Remmei', which was a cooperative effort between Soke Church and Dr. Jean El Khoury. Reaching it's zenith in the 1970's, the W.S.N.S.R. did serve its purpose of providing a professional society of Soke and Shihan. With the death of Soke Church in 1980, the W.S.D. S.R., like the European Society of Soke, fell into a state of disarray. The next such board to be established was the U.S. Society of Soke, founded in 1972 by Rod Sachranoski shortly after his recognition by Soke Church. It was initially tied in with the European Society of Soke, and Dr. Gert Van Zantwijk. However, the death of the later places that alliance in question. The U.S. Society also claims affiliation with a Soke Shian Toma of Okinawa. The U.S. Society of Soke is made up primarily of those who have been recognized by R. Sachranoski.

In 1982, some four years after his recognition by Soke Church, Dr. C. Riedner reorganized his Christian Black Belt Association, forming the SKKI--Shiho Karano Kai Int'l, and as a part of the re-organization, the SKKI Soke Remmei. Like the other 'Soke Boards', the SKKI Soke Remmei was established to serve as a professional fellowship for legitimate Soke. The SKKI Soke Remmei also cooperated with the 'European Society of Soke. In 1988, the SKKI Soke Remmei changed it's name to the 'American Fellowship of Soke/SKKI Soke Remmei.'

The SKKI Soke Remmei-'American Fellowship of Soke', is composed mainly of Christians--i.e. those who, because of their Convictions, have founded Styles or Ryu which reflect a Christian rather than a Shinto or Zen philosophy. The SKKI Soke Remmei membership

is not, however, limited to only such Soke or Ryu. Another Christian oriented board is the 'Association of Christian Martial Arts Founders' established in 1984 by Soke's David Brownridge and Dan Grady, both of whom had been recognized by Soke Riedner in 1979. We are not aware of the current status of that board as of this publication.

Another such Soke Board, established in 1988 by Shihan John Williams of Canada was the 'Canadian Sokeship Certification Board'. That Organization was established as a part of another project begun in 1988 by Shihan Williams and Soke Riedner. We are referring to the development of the 'World Soke Council--WSC' which name as later changed to the 'World Head Family/Head Founders Council'. The 'WSC was designed as an international canopy in which the 3 national-regional boards. i.e. the 'Canadian Sokeship Certification Board, the American Fellowship of Soke-SKKI, and the European Society of Soke would function as local-national-regional boards, recommending Shodai candidates to the WSC which was made up of the Head Families along with the Kaicho, and the members of the individual boards. The 'WSC' is an ambitious attempt to provide direction while maintaining proper traditional protocol in 'Shodai-Soke' recognition'

## CHAPTER SIX:     Where do we go From Here?

The purpose of writing this brief history has been to help gain some prospective of where we are today in the traditions of the Martial Arts. From the humble beginnings of the Chicago and Seattle Judo clubs of the early 1900's, the American Martial Arts have grown into a multi-million dollar industry. It is apparent that as the Martial Arts have grown in America since WWII several streams have emerged. This book work is an attempt to trace the early historical and traditional Martial Arts whose roots are in the ancient past, as they have emerged in America. As one examines those traditional roots and looks over the current Martial Arts scene in America, several questions come to mind.

1. Is 'Soke' becoming a fashionable title?
2. Will there be an unchecked proliferation of Soke?
3. What will happen to those who choose to follow the traditional ways of Budo in terms of the proper receipt and use of the title?

Several things are becoming apparent. First of all, Martial Arts in America have come of age. There are a good number of men who, having begun their Martial Arts careers in the late 1950's and early 1960's who have reached 30--40 years of training and experience. These individuals have taken what they learned and modified it for the American Society and Martial Artist. Thus a generation of American Martial Arts has been born. These are the men who are the Shodai Soke of American martial Arts styles/systems.

Another thing we see is an increasing number of Sensei and Shihan developing and teaching their own Systems. Some will do so in an informal manner, while others will formalize their teachings, even adopting a Ryu name.. i.e. using oriental terminology to describe and identify their system or style. The author encounters new systems or Ryu almost every month. These are systems which have been developed by Individuals who--for the most part--began their personal training in the 1950's or 60's. Most of these have some 30 plus years in the Arts and hold solid Dan rankings and Shihan rankings in legitimate Ryu, from which they derive much of their technique and concepts. We have also run across those with only lower Dan rankings who have less that 10-15 years in the Arts, who are starting their own systems.. As this takes place we see an increasing use of the 'Soke' title in the various Martial Arts magazines as it's popularity increases. It is only natural that the use of the 'Soke' title will increase. And, as it's popularity and usage increases, a split will develop due to misunderstandings of the proper traditions surrounding the title and it's receipt and use. We have found some of these individuals who are keenly aware of the traditions and protocol of a true 'Soke' and others who look upon these same traditions as meaningless to them since they are 'American' Soke of American Arts. Thus we see two divergent streams emerging.

Will there be a proliferation of Soke? Yes.. as more heads. of styles become aware of the title, more will assume it and by virtue of their having developed a system will declare their right to the title. What then will happen? Any exact prediction is impossible, but some things are obvious. As information is made available to the general Martial Arts pubic concerning 'Sokeships' and the proper traditions surrounding receipt of the title, we see four things taking place.

1. Those Soke who have received their titles either by inheritance or the Sponsorship of an inherited Soke will continue in the mainstream.

2. Of those who aspire to the title, a split will take place. Some will see the value of the traditional way and will seek recognition for their Ryu from a legitimate Soke Board or Individual Head Family. Others will ignore tradition and hold to the position that they are Soke by virtue of fact that they have established a Martial Arts style or system. They will go their own way and most probably will not seek any form of recognition from a legitimate Soke or Board. Going their own way they will look instead to the market place to validate their style/art

3. Soke Boards will play an increasing role in the future. The existing boards will no doubt become societies of the traditionalist, who will generally maintain the traditions of Sokeships. While individual legitimate Soke may grant personal recognitions, such appointments will, in most cases, be confirmed by a traditional board.

4. At this point we see the position and role of the existing boards increasing as they find themselves in the role of accrediting agencies. We see some new boards emerging--perhaps composed of Soke who reject the traditional protocol in lieu of an 'Americanized' form of headships. In any case, as with previous martial arts fads, the use of the title of 'Soke' will rise, crest, and then subside into a stability dictated to a large extent for the non-traditionalist, by the proverbial market place.

Those legitimate Soke who desire to see proper traditions prevail will, we predict, re-evaluate the criteria for recognition and, while not closing the door to new recognitions will, through the use of the 'Soke Board' as a means of accrediting 'Shodai Soke' tighten the standards, thus making the legitimate receipt of the 'Soke' title something of value.



### CHART OF AMERICAN SOKE

(Of those who have a lineage through the 3 Inheritors discussed in this book)

<p><u>Soke Don Angier Soke</u> (Shidare Yanagi Ryu) <i>Did not sponsor any Shodai</i> <i>Soke that we are aware of.</i></p>	<p><u>Albert C. Church</u> (Shaolinji Tetsuken Kempo- Kamishin Ryu) Sponsored 9 Shodai-Soke</p>	<p><u>Sigong Andrew Tamper</u> (Yee Chong Shaolin Kenpo) Only Sponsored Dr. Riedner, <b><i>Nippon Shiho Karano Ryu</i></b></p>
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1. Rod Sachranoski-1972  
*Unsure certain how many he has recognized*
  2. Karl Marx--1973
  3. Dr. Jean El Khoury-1974
  4. Scott Russell--1975
  5. John Stover-1975
  6. Roy Suenaka—1976
  7. Joseph Cowles-1978
  8. Don Wrobel-1978
  9. Dr. C. Riedner—1978  
*Recognized several Shodai*

1979 —David Brownridge,  
Bob Rondelli, Dan Grady

1985-86 -- Jerry & Gerry  
Winebrenner, Charles  
Owens, David Epps

1990's -- John Larlee, Dr.  
Ron Cherry

After 2000 -- Kyoshi Frank  
DeAngelo  
Also recognized Scott Sikes'  
inheritance

## CHART OF SOKE BOARDS

### **I. Early Years:**

European Society of Soke  
1960's-- Dr. Gert Van Zantwijk

World Sijo Dai Soke Remmei  
1970's--Soke Albert C. Church & Dr. Jean El Khoury

U.S. Society of Soke  
1972--Rod Sachranoski

American Fellowship of Soke/SKKI Soke Remmei  
1982--Dr. C. Riedner

Assoc. of Christian Martial Arts  
David Brownridge  
& Dan Grady, founders

Canadian Sokeship Certification Board  
1988--John Williams

World Soke(Head family/ Head founders Council(1989)

Cooperative effort of the: European Society of Soke, Canadian Sokeship Certification Board and the American Fellowship of Soke

### **II. 1990's and On:**

It seems that since these early boards, the idea has caught on as we cannot seem to keep up with the new Boards being started. To name just a few--we have heard of a 'World Head of Family Soke Council', Mr. Frank Sanchez--President, The 'World Martial Arts Hall of Fame' now having a Soke Board, and 'Independent Martial Arts Instructors Association having a Soke Board and many more. Perhaps (hopefully) we have reached the limit with (on the web) a Christian Sokeship Board which will grant sokeships to any one over 21 years of age who has a 5th Dan and \$100. For \$300 one gets a better deal with a Doctor of Budo Degree thrown in to help add credibility. To be honest the author does not have the patience to try and track them all. *Let the buyer beware.*

### FOOTNOTES & BIBLIOGRAPHY

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4. Phone conversation between Gary Dills and Richard P. Baillargeon as reported to the author by Gary Dills.
5. Letter from James A. Benko to Soke C. Riedner
6. History of Kamishin Ryu by Shihan James Brandon
7. " " " " " "
8. Letter to Soke Riedner from Sigong Tamper
- 9.
- 10.
11. Letter' to Sigong Tamper from Chin flsiao, Director NationaS! talace fl1:seurn1 Taipei
12. Letter to Sigong Tamper from Shihan ? Mayle, March 5, 1988
13. Letter to Soke Riedner from Saigon ?, April 12, 19?3
14. Official ?
15. Letter to Soke Riedner from, Shihan Newton, Oct. 12, 1987

## VOLUME TWO: THE SHODAI SOKE

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## INTRODUCTION

I well remember my early years--1978-1980's after receiving my initial Shodai Soke recognition from the late Albert C. Church-Soke Kamishin Ryu. I did not have the benefit of a Masters clinic or other such instruction under the tutelage of a Soke (Head Family) as such. Sokeships and Soke traditions were new in America and there were very few legitimate Soke.

Over the years, through contacts with those who had pieces of the puzzle, and personal experience we grew into the role, learning as we went. Also, as the SKKI and SKKI Soke Remmei evolved more information came to light in terms of proper Sokeship traditions, etiquette, etc.. With our involvement in Soke Board activities, that understanding grew. This entire book is an attempt to provide some valid, informative information for those currently recognized Shodai/Soke and Shodai-Soke candidates will look seriously into this handbook and the reference materials as they develop their own Ryu.

I trust this publication will be of value to each and every reader.

Yours in the Arts;  
Clement G. Riedner, Ph.D.  
Cofounder/President of the WHC  
1990-91

## SO YOU WANT TO BE A SOKE

SOKE is the highest title and position in the Martial Arts world. SOKE is the Head of a Martial Art style, system, Ryu. As such it is he who awards rank, determines technique and concepts to be taught within his Ryu/style. That a dedicated Martial Artist should aspire to this position is certainly to be commended. However, we would remind the young Shihan who desires this position and title that it is often lonely at the top. While many may aspire to the title, and many more will take the title upon themselves, in reality, few actually qualify and few obtain the title via the correct traditional method of recognition and sponsorship.

### A. Requirements for Shodai-Soke:

The requirements originally adopted by the WSC/WHC are the general standard and should be followed. (Note that that author found on the WEB a 'Soke board' which has as it's standard at least age 21 with a 5th Dan. The Sokeship is granted for \$100 and for a mere \$300 a Doctor of Budo Degree is thrown in!!!)

1. A minimum of 20 years in the Arts.
2. At least (1) Godan (Full Shihan) ranking in a legitimate Art, or it's equivalent Master's license.
3. At least two (2) other Dan (Black Belt) rankings in other Martial Arts styles.
4. Must provide an accurate lineage of background
5. Must evidence a fine character.
6. Must be at least 35 years of age.
7. Must produce an accurate life-experience record.
8. Must be free of criminal record.
9. Must Demonstrate the theory and techniques--of their Ryu before the sponsoring Head family.

### B. Traditions of Recognition:

Some would certainly argue as to why they need anyone to recognize or sponsor them. After all, can they not set-up or establish anything they want? And certainly they can. However, there are some basic guidelines--i.e. traditions surrounding the assumption of the Shodai/Soke title, which are:

1. Direct recognition and sponsorship by a legitimate inherited Soke is the most proper and correct method.
2. recognition and sponsorship by a legitimate Shodai (who holds Head Family status due to his sponsoring having died or he has passed on his Ryu to the 2nd generation this Soke would then be considered a Jr. Head Family.
3. Election or appointment by a board of Soke/Head Families.

Obviously, the first of these is the most correct and proper method of obtaining the Shodai Soke title. To the person who does not care about traditions and doing things properly these methods are of no value as he will go ahead and proclaim himself a

Shodai Soke anyway. However, to those who do care about the traditions these are important.

### ESTABLISHING YOUR OWN RYU (style-system):

As a natural course of events, after many years of teaching, the average Shihan soon finds himself departing from the methods of instruction, technique, etc. which he was taught and teaches what is in reality, his own style. He teaching is drawn from his experience and technique learned, over the years. While these 'teachings' often are organized in terms of rank requirements, for the sake of testing students; the development of such into a formal style or Ryu is another matter.

A. What constitutes a RYU?: A RYU by definition is the 'Family Art' taught by a Martial Arts family, passed down from one generation to another. But aside from that, there must be some definite distinguishing characteristics. A Ryu is not a Ketsugo. what we sometimes call an 'old McDonald's farm' . . . here a kata--there a kata, here a technique--there a technique. This is often the case in many of the so-called new styles we often encounter. The reason for this is, as Shihan Williams explains it:

"...I have found that not one Asian ever founded his/her own art prior to WWII without having studied a traditional system to the Master Instructor level. Then everyone of these masters went out and studied several other arts from which to draw from and improve the art they mastered. Today the trend is to stop learning once a person reaches a 1st or 2nd degree black belt. Then for some unknown reason, people tend to assume they know enough to start a new art."<sup>3</sup>

That is the reason the minimum Shodai requirement is a Shihan license in one Art plus at least two other Dan rankings in other Arts. Once a person has mastered at least one art and studied two or more others, he then has the background and knowledge to begin to effectively variate what he knows, making intelligent, worthwhile improvements.

### B. Where do I begin?

We have made it clear that the first place to begin is with enough knowledge and experience to be able to develop an intelligent improvement to the Arts. Any style/system/Ryu, to be an honest Ryu as such, must stand firmly on two legs--one being a firm foundation of the scientific principles of physics and anatomy, the other being the leg of a sound philosophy--moral, ethical, and the philosophical view of technique. i.e. of the Arts from a technical view- point. We will thus examine the question of 'where to begin?' by examining each of these 'legs'.

It is impossible for any one system or Ryu to contain and apply all the scientific principles of physics and human anatomy. We mean that a system, if it is viable in terms of a solid technical approach, must limit itself to a few basic principles and a basic view of technique. This basic viewpoint from which technique is developed and taught, must be clear-cut, carefully thought out, and scientifically sound. It must provide a skeleton upon which the meat of the technique may be hung. Thus the Shodai developing his style

must carefully consider what his approach to technique will be, and then discipline himself to stick to that viewpoint as his system takes shape. Sure your Ryu will not teach it all as that is impossible. What is important that a sound view of technique is taught. The development of technique as the student passes through the ranks should be such that previous technique and Concepts serve as building blocks for future technique. Thus, as you ponder what you are going to teach and how you are going to approach the technique, analyze what you have been taught, your own insights, etc and then settle upon a workable, viable philosophy of technique, based upon sound scientific principles. Once you have settled on technique in terms of how it is to be viewed, you will soon find yourself having to be selective in the Kata you use in your Ryu (Hard Fist) or which major Ju-Jitsu or (Soft Fist) technique you will stress and the method of application. If you do this in terms of using Kata and principles which teach the concepts of your style then you are well on the way to developing a viable system.

The second leg of a viable style or Ryu is the Philosophical. Our philosophy gives direction to our actions. The philosophy of a Martial Art gives direction to the Art. Hakkoryu Ju-Jitsu is an excellent example of this in that it has a philosophy of non-resistance-non-violence. Thus, all technique is approached with the idea of Preventing further violence. The philosophy of KI permeates the technique and movements of Aikido, and so on. In fact, the name of a Ryu is often an expression of it's underlying philosophy.

### C. Building Your Ryu:

With these two legs in mind the question now is how to proceed in building the style. We must say that there is no set formula, as those who have developed solid styles have come from different backgrounds and have arrived at their conclusions (style) often by different means. Here are some guidelines:

1. Determine the underlying philosophy of your proposed Ryu. Try to outline it in as much general and specific details as possible. At least at the beginning set forth the basic guidelines which will guide your selection and organization of the art.
2. If necessary, itemize the scientific principles which will be the basis of your system. Which laws of physics and human anatomy will you stress?
3. As you work through your technique, you must take a definite view of technique--how it is to be taught and performed, based upon it's underlying principles and philosophy.
4. You must then determine which technique, Kata, etc. are to be taught at which rank. Thus, a set curriculum of teaching needs to be developed with specific rank requirements, etc..

Following these four steps at the initial level will not be that difficult as most instructors simply take and modify what they received in their own training. It will be at the Shihan level that the real truth will be manifest. That is, 'What do you plan to teach



students as they approach Shihan level in your Art'? What new, in-depth concepts, technique, etc. will be added to their initial instruction to justify their receiving a Shihan ranking? It is at this point that the real depth of training of the Shodai Soke becomes apparent.

### GROWING AS A SHODAI/SOKE

#### A. Technical Background and Continued Training:

When do we stop growing as a Martial Artist? Once we reach Dan level-Sensei, or when we become a Shihan, or is it after we receive our Shodai Soke recognition? We have seen individuals who have ceased to grow at each of these levels. When we have trouble keeping track of what we already know, then certainly our cup is full no matter what size the cup. It is all the more imperative that, as the Shodai Soke establishes himself, he continues to grow and develop personally as a Martial Artist. As our Ryu matures, we will find ourselves having to work harder to keep ahead of our students who are approaching and moving into the Shihan ranks. The author teaches a pyramid concept of rank which operates two ways. First concerning our own training, the author has seen those of high rank (8th Dan and up) who have studied only one art. They are top heavy with little additional knowledge and background to support their high rank. If we build a pyramid of background earned rankings, then we provide our students a broad base of knowledge to draw from. Thus, multiple Dan rankings provide the needed base of knowledge.

Another test is the Shodai's substructure of students. It is no real test of a Shodai if he has only trained and produced Shodan and Nidan students, when he holds a 7th-8th Dan ranking. If, however, he has trained and produced solid Shihan students then he has demonstrated the knowledge Commensurate with a high rank. We feel that one's' students should push us upwards in terms of rank. That is, having produced some solid Shihan is a good measure of the ability of the Shodai Soke to hold a high rank himself. Thus, instead of stagnating once we receive Shodai recognition, we should continue to grow and develop, to study, learning as much as we can of other styles, adding to own Ryu the knowledge we obtain. We have found that the quality Shodai Soke will do this, not only for his own benefit, but so that he can continue to effectively train his Sensei and Shihan.

#### B. Understanding the Etiquette of the Shodai Soke:

As we advance through the ranks we find that each level, student, Sensei, Shihan and Soke, carries with it a distinct set of behavior patterns. etiquette, to be followed. Each level requires certain things of the individual in terms of behavior and responsibility. A viable Ryu/style/system will provide some means of training students so that they will be ready to assume not just technically, but etiquette wise, the title and position their rank indicates. The Shodai Soke is no exception, for it is at this level that etiquette must be at it's best, as he is to take the lead in training others in his style. The Master's clinic conducted by the SKKI should be considered basic for any Shihan and Shodai Soke We

will not repeat that material here, but refer the reader to refer to the SKKI Master's clinic syllabus. Additionally Sokeship etiquette is discussed briefly in the CBBA Code of Etiquette. The main point being that the Shodai Soke will be looked to take the lead in terms of etiquette.

### C. The Question of the Shodai's Rank:

At what rank does the Shodai start after his initial recognition? Does he assume a rank, and who awards it? These are questions which must be answered.

#### 1. What rank does the Shodai/Soke hold?'

While it is true that a Soke is above rank in that he can issue a 10th Dan in his style if he wishes, it is normally found that the Shodai Soke will himself hold a rank designation. While we have heard of this being 8th Dan, we find no substantial evidence for that, which leads us to the next question.

#### 2. Who Awards the Shodai/Soke his Rank?

If he awards himself a rank, then he might award himself an 8th, 9th, or 10th Dan depending upon how he feels about it. However, if the rank of the Shodai Soke is awarded by an agency outside of himself--i.e. a Soke Board, then other factors come into play. This is one advantage of belonging to a Soke Board, in that the rank he holds has not been self-awarded, but rather was awarded by certificate from an established Board. In these cases the rank, awarded to the Shodai Soke is generally based upon an age-time in the Arts=rank equation. While his actual earned ranks remain the same, his highest rank will most likely be that awarded him in his style. Since he is the highest graded official in his style, a duly organized Soke Board is a very useful tool at this point in helping to keep the claimed ranks of Shodai Soke with in the realm of reason and credibility. By following a pre-set age-time in the Arts=rank equation, room is left for the Shodai Soke to advance in rank as he matures in age, confidence, and character.

### D. The Powers of a Shodai Soke:

A Shodai Soke is the final authority with-in his Ryu being the direct 'authority in all gradings, questions of technique, etc.. He has full authority to make whatever changes, etc. within the Ryu and to direct the Ryu as he wishes. Defined by title, the authority of a Soke, whether he is a member of Head Family (inherited) or a Shodai, he is dictator within his Ryu. While the author knows those who take this dictatorial power seriously in terms of making sure they are the 'absolute authority' , we have found that the best kind of authority is not simply that of position, but rather that of leadership. While, it is true that the Soke, be he a Shodai or inherited Soke, is the final authority in is Ryu his authority with his peers and in the Martial Arts world in general is more related to his leadership skills.

The Shodai Soke now finds himself at the pinnacle of the Martial Arts world in, terms of position. Even though his age, etc. may not warrant him a 10th Dan ranking, he is, in reality, higher than those 10th Dans who are not, Soke. How he handles this position will determine exactly how effective his authority is.

In reality, one- man can exercise no more authority over another man than the second allows him to exercise. In other words, if a man has authority over us it is because he has given him that right and authority. And it is just this fact that is so often misunderstood and abused by those who desire the Soke title and prestige. Authority is really a matter of leadership. Someone who is a head family (inherited Soke), who has little leadership ability can easily find themselves exercising their authority over only a few. On the other hand a Shodai who has good leadership skills can exercise far greater authority and have a greater total influence in the Martial Arts world. In truth, it all boils down to the leadership skills of the Soke. A good Soke, leadership wise, will have greater authority than a Soke with poor leadership skills.

#### F The Question of Succession--appointing a Soke-Dai:

Soke dai means first after Soke and is the individual designated to inherit the style Ryu, after the death of the Soke. For the Shodai, his Soke-dai will become an inherited Head Family with a greater stature than the Shodai who developed the Style/Ryu. Ironic, but true Since the true judge of the Validity of a Ryu is it's viability to survive the test of time and be passed on from One generation to the next. The Soke-dai becomes extremely important. When should the Soke-Dai be appointed? This cannot be answered with a simple formula, as several factors enter into this vital decision.

1. The Soke-Dai should be someone young enough to reasonably be expected to outlive the Soke. Since the idea is to prepare someone to inherit the Ryu, obviously, they should be someone who could be expected to outlive the Soke.
2. The Soke-Dai should know the Ryu well enough to be able to continue the teachings of the Soke. Thus he must be a loyal student.
3. How many Soke-Dai should the Soke have? The actual number of Soke-Dai varies from one Ryu to another. We have seen multiple Soke Dai over the various divisions of the Ryu. There is no set formula or tradition on this. However, One of the main factors is the availability of a suitable candidate. We would prefer having one Soke-Dai who would inherit the entire system and, while this is ideal, it is not always possible. When no one individual Shihan is available who can handle the entire system, then multiple Soke-dai must be appointed over the various sub-systems. This then leads to the question of which one will be senior? It is certainly best to so designate one Soke-Dai as the senior, when several have been appointed.
4. How are they appointed? While the most common method is to issue a basic Martial Arts certificate of appointment, it has come to our attention that, while we might

consider a Martial Arts certificate as being legal, it is not actually legal in an American court of law. However a notarized sworn affidavit is a legal document. Thus we would advise the use of notarized statements(or certificates) as the means of appointing Soke-dai.

5. What if the Soke dies without a designated successor? This can be a real problem and often it ends up in a dog fight amongst the senior Shihan for control of the Ryu and often the Ryu splits several ways. Many of the Japanese Ryu have seen this happen. We have also seen this in the American Martial Arts as well. In the case of no appointed successor, the Shihan may come together and elect one of their members as Soke Head Family of the style. This has been done and appears to be an accepted method.

In the final analysis, the appointment and grooming of a Soke-Dai might be one of most important things the Shodai does the preservation of his Ryu. Perhaps, once the Soke reaches retirement time and wishes to become less active and is settled on his successor, it might be best to go ahead and pass on the Ryu. This was done by the Author and other Shodai and Inherited Head Families at the 2000 CBBA/SKKI Annual Conference. The official successors were actually handed the Sokeship's of their respective Arts. The Shodai or inherited Soke/Sigong in some cases remains alive and on the scene, guiding the transition. This is perhaps the best case scenario in that the senior Soke has time to promote his successor and thus insure a smooth transition of the Ryu. With the Shodai retiring 2nd generation Soke is a Nidai Soke and begins to assume the duties as the Head Family. This is perhaps the more stable of transitions and was done for just that reason, to try and prevent the cases we have seen when a Ryu is not smoothly transitioned.