



# NETSUI-DO KARATE ASSOCIATION

## **History**

Kenwa Mabuni was born in Shuri Okinawa on the 14th November 1889.

He began learning the art of Shuri-te (Shuri hand) in his home town of Shuri at the age of 13 under the tutelage of Anko Itosu (1831–1915). Over several years Mabuni learned various Katas from Itosu, including the Pinan Katas. It was Anko Itosu who first devised the Pinan Katas.

It was one of Itosu's close friends Chōjun Miyagi (founder of Goju-Ryu Karate-Do) who first introduced Mabuni to another great of that time period, Kanryo Higaonna (1853 - 1915). It was under the tutelage of Higaonna (also called Higashionna) that Mabuni began to learn the art of Naha-te (Naha hand).

Itosu and Higaonna had their own methods and emphases which were quite distinct: the Itosu syllabus included straight and powerful techniques, while the Higaonna syllabus stressed circular motion and shorter fighting methods. Shito-Ryu focuses on both hard and soft techniques from both syllabuses to this day.

Although Mabuni remained true to the teachings of these two great masters, he sought instruction from a number of other teachers as well. By the 1920s Mabuni was regarded as the foremost authority on Okinawan Kata and was sought after as a teacher by his contemporaries. There is evidence that his expertise was sought out in China, as well as Okinawa and mainland Japan. As a police officer, he taught local law enforcement officers and at the behest of his teacher Itosu, began instruction in the various grammar schools in Shuri and Naha.

In an effort to popularise Karate in mainland Japan, Mabuni made several trips to Tokyo in 1917 and 1928. Up until this time most of Karate had been passed down throughout the generations with jealous secrecy. However it was Mabuni's view that Karate should be taught to anyone who sought knowledge with honesty and integrity. In fact many masters of his generation held similar views on the future of Karate: Gichin Funakoshi (founder of Shotokan), had moved to Tokyo in the 1920s to promote his art on the mainland as well.

By 1929 Mabuni had moved to Osaka on the mainland of Japan to become a full-time Karate instructor of a style he originally called Hanko-Ryu or "half-hard style". The name of the style later changed to Shito-Ryu in honour of its two main influencers. Mabuni derived the name for his new style by the first kanji character from the names of his two primary teachers, Itosu and Higaonna. Mabuni opened a number of Shito-Ryu dojos in the Osaka area, including one at Kansai University. To this day, the largest contingent of Shito-Ryu practitioners in Japan is centred in the Osaka area.

Mabuni published a number of books on the subject and continued to systematise his instruction method. In his later years, he developed a number of formal Kata such as Aoyagi, which was designed specifically for women's self-defence. Perhaps more than any other master in the last century, Mabuni was steeped in the traditions and history of Karate-do, yet forward thinking enough to realise that it could spread throughout the world. To this day Shito-Ryu recognises the influences of Itosu and Higaonna: the kata syllabus of Shito-Ryu is still often listed in such a way as to show the two lineages.

Kenwa Mabuni died on May 23 1952.



**Kenwa Mabuni - founder of Shito-Ryu Karate-Do**