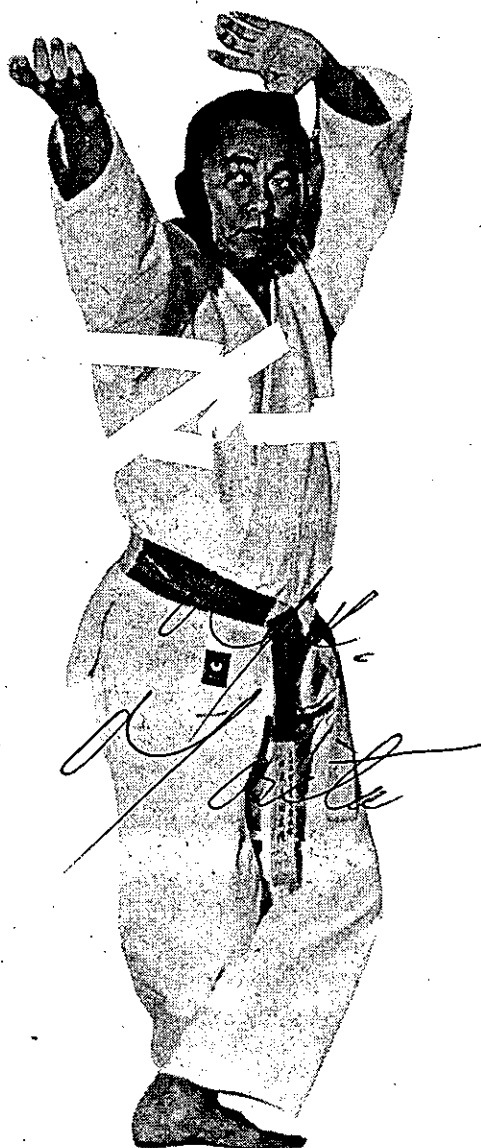


Karate Odyssey

One of Hawaii's top karate men embarks on a pilgrimage to the Far East in search of the deeper meanings of his art, but runs into more than he had bargained for.



TOMMY MORITA looks like the serious-minded type. And he is. He looks more like a college professor than a karate man. But Morita is a karate man, and a good one. One of the best, he is the head of the Chitoryu School of Karate in Honolulu, and is widely respected for his abilities in his native state of Hawaii.

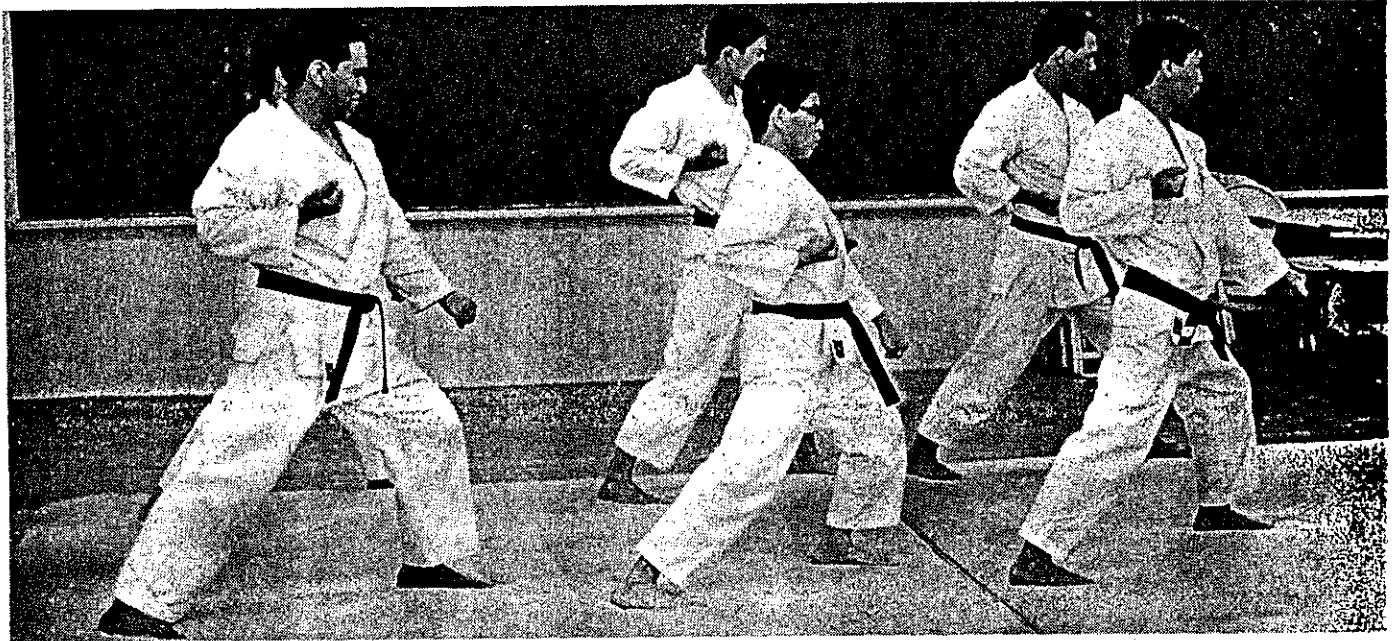
Karate is and has been a way of life for Morita, who formerly studied judo, kendo, and boxing. But for many years, he has dedicated himself to karate and to perfecting his talents in it. Not long ago, Morita had a chance to fulfill one of his lifelong ambitions, and that was to go to Okinawa and Free China to try to find out more about karate and related arts.

Since Morita is a 7th dan, it wasn't improvement in his techniques that he was seeking. Naturally enough for the type of man he is, he had a far more serious purpose in mind. He wanted to consult with the masters to find out more about the deeper meanings of his art and about the elusive ki, claimed by its practitioners to provide extraordinary strength to those who know its secrets.

Well, we don't know if Morita ever found what he was looking for in the ki. But we do know that he had some mirthful experiences along the way. And he also learned a great deal about the customs of how karate is taught in the lands where it was born (China) and then later developed (Okinawa). Morita dropped by *Black Belt Magazine's* offices recently to tell us about his Oriental misadventures.

From the beginning, it turned out to be a case of an innocent abroad. He started out on his trip with several classic misconceptions:

Coming from a free and open society like that in the United States, with its easygoing manners and customs, Morita naturally enough assumed it would be easy to get instructions from Oriental karate teachers. Just walk into the dojo and tell the instructor you would attend class. Simple enough. That's the way it's done at home. Only



Morita lent a friendly hand to fellow Hawaiian Harry Kealanui (left) and taught at the latter's dojo in Gardena for several months after his return from the Orient!



Morita demonstrates the techniques he learned for Japanese sickle fighting. The sickle is widely used in agricultural areas, of course, so it is understandable that the once-predominant Japanese farmers built a self-defense system around it.

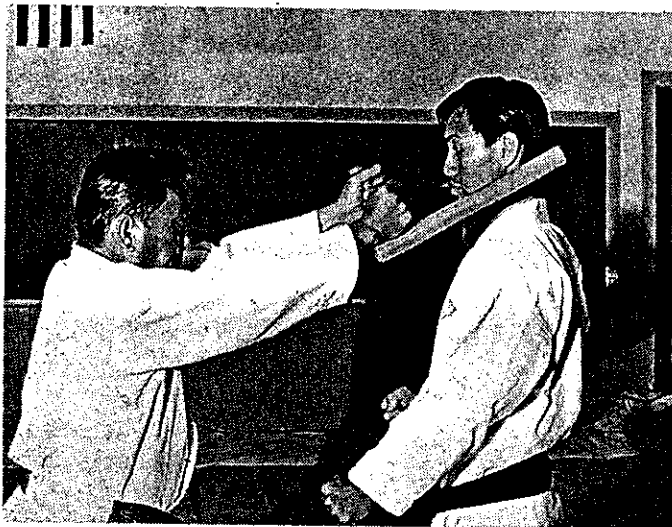
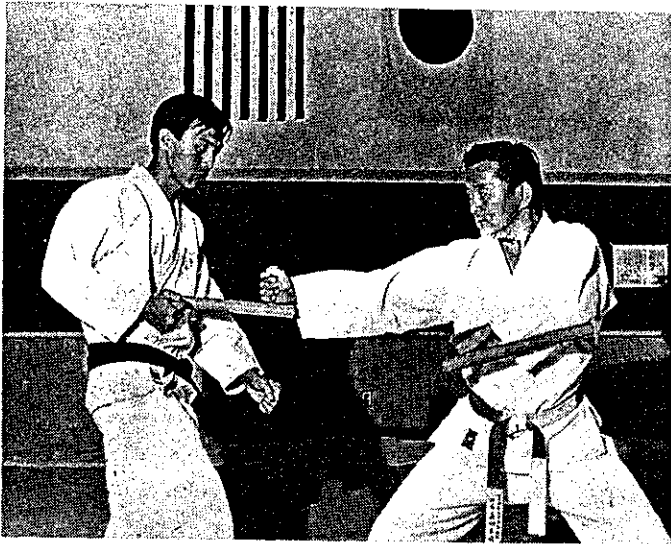
that's not the way it's done in Hong Kong and Formosa, two of Morita's stops.

"You know," Morita said ruefully, "I had the hardest time just to get the master in Hong Kong to even talk to me." With a short laugh and a shake of his lightly greying hair, he continued. "His name is Chan Dow, and he teaches Buddhist Kung Fu. It's called Fotza. I went the first night, and he barely acknowledged my presence. I went the second night and we talked some. But no instruction. The same on the third night."

"You see, the master was testing me," Morita said, turning serious again, "interested in seeing if I wanted really to learn the art. They are very suspicious of anyone who says he wants to find out about it. They're more interested first in learning about the inner man and his attitude."

Morita pointed out that it isn't money that the martial arts instructors are interested in. Most of them do not want money, he says. But when going to the master's house for instruction, it's customary to bring something along, like food or a beverage.





Morita shows here various techniques of Tui Fas, a Chinese stick fighting art he discovered in Taiwan.

"They are most interested at the start in your sincerity," Morita says. "They want to make certain that you're not trying to learn the art to make money from it."

Finally on Morita's fourth visit, master Chan Dow unbent enough to show him one movement. And then there was plenty of talk to probe Morita's intentions and attitude.

"But as the days went by," Morita said, "he began to talk less and show me more. Too soon, I had to leave."

Morita had a chance to study other Chinese boxing arts while in Hong Kong and on the island of Formosa, stronghold of the Nationalist Chinese. During this part of his tour, he had a chance to talk over the principles of Tai Chi Chuan and discuss the Ch'i (Chinese version of the ki) with a number of masters. He also had a chance to study some other little known and Chinese boxing arts.

In Okinawa, a different situation prevailed from that in China. Okinawans by now are used to having foreigners come to study their art. For instance, many American servicemen stationed on the island have taken and are currently taking karate instruction. As a result, what had formerly been a secret art has now been brought largely into the open.

The dropping of the secrecy has given a tremendous shot in the arm to Okinawan karate. The art is flourishing on the island. And the worldwide karate boom has also provided an incentive to several Okinawan masters to export their styles abroad.

As a result of the openness now prevailing, Morita had no trouble receiving training. In the process, he learned more about the changes that have taken place in Okinawan karate since the American occupation following World War II. He also learned something about their practice and training methods.

"The Okinawans are sticklers for conditioning," he said. "They don't take a rest during their practice periods. They train straight through. You're trained according to how much you can take, right up to the full limit of your stamina."

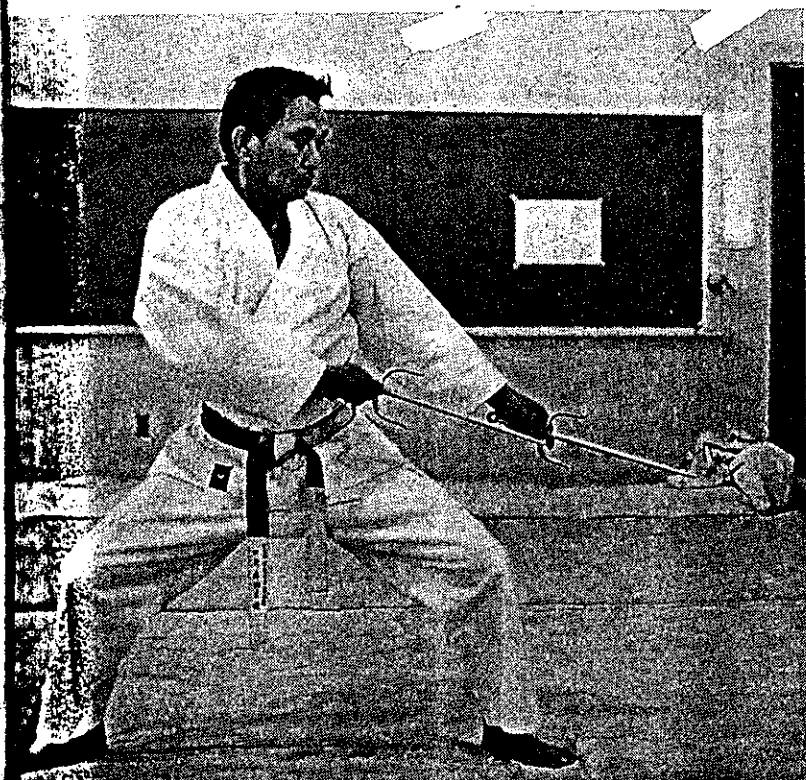
I was there in the summer for two months, and it's plenty hot and humid. I used three gi's a day, and I lost about 20 pounds during my stay. Master Soshin Nagamine, whom I studied with, really keeps you working if you can take it."

Nagamine teaches the Shorin-ryu style of karate. Morita found that there were some resemblances between his own Chito-ryu and Nagamine's Shorin-ryu.

"There are seventeen forms in Shorin-ryu, and some of them have names similar to my own system. But if you see the katas executed together, you can tell the difference."

Morita also had a chance to observe the practice of the Uechi and Goju karate systems in Okinawa. One thing particularly struck him; it was the differences in the breathing exercises.

"The katas look almost identical. But in Uechi, a man



The use of sai, short swords, is an old art in Japan.

practicing breathing exercises makes a sound like a hissing of a snake. In Goju, the breathing comes out with more force, sounding like an open-mouthed haaa."

Morita was asked if it were true that the practitioners of these Okinawans styles had developed almost a sixth sense through their study of the ki and that they were able to know exactly when a man was about to strike.

"I didn't notice it," said the man who went there to look for it.

While the impact of modern times has made a number of changes in Okinawan karate, one thing has remained essentially the same. That is that Okinawan karatemen do not engage much in competition and tournaments. Karate is still studied essentially for self-defense.

But even that is changing, and the Okinawans have had to make some small concessions to the times. For instance, the Uechi-ryu and Shorin-ryu groups do appear in tournaments held occasionally to accommodate visiting karatemen from Japan. One group that has broken completely away from the old tradition of barring tournaments is the All-Okinawa Karate Association, which stages a number of shiais. But this association is still only one of the smaller karate organizations on the island.

Morita rounded out his Far Eastern swing with a stay in Japan, where he studied several different arts. "I met



Morita here demonstrates what he knows best — a technique from his own Chito-ryu style of karate.

Akagawa who is an Iai sensei and Omori who teaches jo-jitsu. Jo-jitsu is similar to sanshaku. In jo-jitsu, the bo is about four feet long. The regular bo, of course, is six feet long.

I also got a chance to learn Nitorigama (two sickles) from Soken sensei. I travelled about 50 miles every day just to learn it. There are two styles — Tokyo and Okinawa. Soken sensei teaches the Tokyo style."

In all, Morita spent about three months on his trip. And he had a chance to study close up a lot of different arts and styles. Morita was asked what aspect of the trip he enjoyed the most. The serious side of his nature showed as he replied without hesitation:

"The long discussions that I had with the masters on their philosophy and what they had learned over the years. This was karate on its highest plane."

