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Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey everyone, thanks for coming by! This is [whistlekickmartialartsradio](http://whistlekickmartialartsradio.com) episode 321 and today we'll talk about Anko Itosu, the grandfather of modern karate. If you don't know my voice, my name is Jeremy, Jeremy Lesniak. I'm the founder was kick in the host on the show and I love martial arts that's why I do this, that's why do all of this and I hope you enjoy it. If you want to find our other episodes you can buy them at [whistlekick martial arts radio](http://whistlekick.com). You can find all of our products from sparring gear to kicking paddles, great apparel shirts, and hoodies and baby onesies, all kinds of cool stuff, find that over at whistlekick.com or a lot of it is even on Amazon. And of course it is available via prime so free shipping. Let's talk about today's subject Anko Itosu.

One of the most remarkable founding Masters of karate is Anko Itosu. Itosu is regarded by many as the father of modern karate, even though Gichin Funakoshi is more often given his title mostly because Funakoshi was responsible for promoting karate all over Japan. Since Itosu founded most of the activities in karate and for Funakoshi trained under Itosu, we might consider Itosu as the grandfather of modern karate. Now, there's a bit of confusion with his name the name Anko Itosu may have been confused from some writing. There are two common sets of kanji in Japanese the "an" and the "kun" and both of them can be used interchangeably. So we've got the name Yasatsuni Itosu, and the alternative name Anko Shishu, and are technically the same name. Now, that confusion of who was who began when a Japanese translator named Shingo Ychida use Itosu and Chisu in the same book describing same person but a lot of people who read it thought that there were two different people. Now since



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there are no real firm rules between which kanji should be used in which situation, Anko Itosu, kind of a hybrid is what's generally accepted now. Itosu was born in 1830 in Gibo village, Sherry Ryukyu kingdom. He grew up with his father who was very strict and really harsh in implementing discipline. Moreover their family was a Kimochi, a family of position and it was required that they be strict. As a child Itosu was physically abused by his father and even got regular beatings with stick even though he was really small as a kid. His father's reasoning was wanting Itosu to develop a strong personality and a warrior like spirit. Itosu's introversion and extreme shyness may be due to this kind of discipline and his smaller size. It was difficult for him but this kind is set up as a kid molded him into what he became in his later years. Itosu was well educated with Chinese classics and calligraphy he was in the [00:03:09.24] class under the Ryukyu kingdom caste system. Having exemplified excellent calligraphy skills, Itosu acquired the position of secretary with soshikuri the administrative office of the Ryukyu kingdom. Itosu began learning karate at an early age as it was customary for families of his position to train in martial arts. His first teacher was Nagahama [00:03:34.01] and he progressed with his training quickly. He became a powerful disciple in a short time and at the age of 16, he became a student bodyguard of the famed sokon also known as bushi matsamura. He eventually became the best disciple of this man, Matsamura. Aside from Itosu, Matsamura had another excellent student named kiyuna [00:03:54.29] both Itosu and Kiyuna were known for their great punching power power. One of the stories from that time was the intense makawara practice of kiyuna. The makawara or a post, tree that would be hit you're not a karate practitioner you might not recognize that, but bottom line sometimes people make amount of two by fours now and they'll put a pad on it to soften it so you're not quite directly hitting the wood. The makawara according to the story would break in less than a month under kiyuna's fabled strength. Afterwards, he decided to use a tree for a makiwara and he tied a leather sandals there just for bit cushion. Now it seems like myth but according to this legend the tree died in 10 days, that's how strong kiyuna was claimed to be. There's also story told by Nagamine Shoshu, a former committee member of the protection of cultural assets Department of Shori. According to him, when is about 10 years old this is 1907 he saw Itosu visiting kiyuna at the guard house during kiyuna's breaks as a guard in [00:05:01.00]. He described them both his muscular and their fists full of calluses from the intense makawara training eventually Nagamini became a student of kiyona and he witness how Itosu and Kiyona practice kata together he was amazed how powerfully, how beautifully the two Masters executed kata. Itosu remained a secretary for 30 years until the Sho Dynasty ended in 1879. After that, he started his own printing business. Following his passion he also taught karate to a few students and that group included Gichin funakoshi. These Karate classes were held at Itosu's house at midnight to be secretive. This type of set up lasted for 20 years from 1880 to 1900. During this period, Itosu had another good but unruly student that student was Choki Mutobo or also known as Motobu the monkey because of his great agility. Motobu is often involved in fights because he wanted to try out as new techniques so he'd go down to the [00:06:03.27], the red light district with other people without the consent of his instructor Itosu. Furthermore the techniques were dangerous so we'd often injure the person he was attacking. And it's because of these incidents that Itosu expelled Mutobu from the class and Mutobu later became a master himself founding his own school the Motobu Ryu. In 1902 Itosu



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made a big decision by allowing karate to be taught to the public and that changes his previous view which is just complete flip flop. He was granted permission to teach karate in public schools at Shuri. At the age of 75 he began teaching in the prefectural Dai-ichi College the prefectural teachers training college. Around this time Itosu had developed the Pinyang kata series. It's a series of five empty hand forms allegedly derived from older katas such as [00:06:56.00] but he revised them to be easier for newer students to learn. The Pinyang Kata serves as the introduction to learning more difficult katas such as [00:07:09.27] and the first ones to learn these katas were junior high school students at Okinawa's first Junior prefectural high school where he was part-time teacher. Itosu was also credited for breaking down the complex Na Hanchi kata into the three modern katas, [00:07:30.05] Shodan, nidan. Moreover Itosu also created the roha kata from which Funakoshi based his meikyo Kata. Itosu was known to be very peaceful person, he avoided fights and arguments as much as possible. And he died March 11, 1915 in Shuri, Okinawa, Japan.

We dug up some great stories exemplifying Itosu's strength probably the thing he was most famed for. Gichin Funakoshi recalled Itosu to have extraordinary strength and physique. As per Funakoshi, Itosu could crush a green bamboo stock in his fist. He could also take heavy blows without even being hurt. Itosu used to arm wrestle his friends and no one ever one against him. Kinda seeing like an old-school Chuck Norris thing going on here right? Itosu stories maybe the precursor to Chuck Norris stories. There's a story where an attacker punched Itosu in the back but Itosu Didn't flinch instead Itosu grab the attackers wrist and as itosu's grip was so strong the attacker couldn't break away so he dragged the attacker to a crowded restaurant, made him kneel and wait while he ordered drinks and he only let go of the attackers wrist when the drinks arrived. When Itosu attended a bullfight with a friend, one of the bulls broke free in dashed to the frightened crowd everyone panicked and ran but Itosu stood his ground. When the bull approached him angrily, Itosu landed a powerful punch on the bull's nose and took by the horns and wrestled it to the ground. I wonder if this was inspiration for Oyama's bullfights. Part of Itosu's training with Matsamura was using a makawara or striking post. Normally a wooden post is used but he once used a stone wall covered with leather sandal for him to hit instead. With just a few punches the stone behind the sandal broke through the wall, eventually to those who destroy the stone wall itself without having any injuries. Itosu once challenged a bully named Tomiyosi to a fair fight because the latter ridiculed the shuri style of fighting, however, instead of fighting fairly tomayosi's gang members attacked him and some were even armed with clubs. The first attacker was supposed to land a powerful punch to Itosu, but Itosu managed to land a triple renzuki or multiple rapid punches first knocking the attacker unconscious immediately. The second and third attackers who were armed with clubs also failed to hit him, Itosu grabbed the first man's arm while landing a side kick on the jaw of the second man, who is also immediately knocked out. The first man was kicked in the groin and rendered useless the fourth attacker was Tomayosi himself, he threw what would've been a lethal punch at Itosu's head, but Itosu who was able to dodge it with a sidestep and broke Tomiyosi's arm in the process using a Shuto or openhanded strike. When Itosu was 75 years old he was challenged by a judo champion half his age to an arranged fight. The judoka even promised to defeat Itosu "as gently as possible without



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doing any serious damage" as the match started the judoka grab the Itosu by the jacket to execute a throw, but Itosu was quicker he punched the judoka to the solar plexus using only his left hand which resulted in a quick victory. The Judoka collapsed in a heap and only managed to recover when Itosu gave him first aid. This guy sounds like someone that I might've been afraid to train with, right? Pretty hardcore.

And now in summary, I guess we have you Itosu's 10 precepts of karate. [00:11:13.02] and if you're familiar with Funakoshi's 10 precepts of karate some of these might sound familiar. In October 1908 he wrote the 10 precepts of karate to promote and explain the martial art. The translation is as follows: karate did not develop from Buddhism or Confucianism. In the past the Shorin ryu school and the Shuri Ryu school were brought to Okinawa from China. Both of these schools have strong points which I will now mention, before there are too many changes. One, karate is not merely practice for your own benefit. It can be used to protect one's family or master, it is not intended to be used against the single assailant but instead is a way of avoiding a fight should one be confronted by villain, ruffian. Two the purpose of karate is to make the muscles and bones hard as rock and to use the hands and legs as spears. If children were to begin training in tang tei while in elementary school, then they will be well suited for military service. Remember the words attributed to the Duke of Wellington after he defeated Napoleon "the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton" three, karate cannot be learned quickly. Like a slow moving bull, it eventually travels a thousand miles. If one trains diligently every day then in three or four years one will come to understand karate those who train in this fashion will discover karate. Four, in karate training of the hands and feet are important, so one must be thoroughly trained on the makawara. In order to do this drop your shoulders open your lungs take hold of your strength, grip the floor with your feet and sync your energy into your lower abdomen. Practice using each arm 1 to 200 times each day. Five, when one practices the stances of tang tei, be sure to keep your back straight lower your shoulders, put strength in your legs, stand firmly and drop your energy into your lower abdomen. Six, practice each of the techniques of karate repeatedly, the use of which is passed by word of mouth. Learn the explanations well and decide when and in what manner to apply them when needed. Enter, counter, release is the rule of releasing. [00:13:27.04] seven, you must decide if karate is for your health or to aid your duty. That is my favorite one. Eight, when you train do so as if on the battlefield, your eye should glare, shoulders drop and body hardened. You should always train with intensity and spirit and in this way you will naturally be ready. Nine, one must not over train this will cause you to lose the energy in your lower abdomen and will be harmful to your body. Your face and eyes will turn red, train wisely. And ten, in the past masters of karate have enjoyed long lives, karate aids in developing the bones and muscles it helps the digestion as well as the circulation . If karate should be introduced beginning in the elementary schools then we will produce many men each capable of defeating 10 assailants. I further believe that this can be done by having all students of the Okinawa teachers college practice karate. In this way after graduation they can teach at the elementary schools in which they been taught. I believe this will be a great benefit to our nation and our military. It is my hope you will seriously consider my suggestion. Anko Itosu, October 1908.



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That's the end of the script I have but just going off script a little bit, a lot of what he's talking about here, is stuff that we still discuss today. Stuff that we debate today. Number seven you must decide if karate is for your health or to aid your duty. Is it personal development or is it self-defense? It can be both but he's suggesting a focus on one or the other. He's talking about slow and steady progress, he's talking about training hard but not training too much. He's talking about the benefits both physical and self-defense. There's a lot of great stuff in there. So, what did you think? Let me know, hit me up, email jeremy@whistlekick.com. Comment on the show notes, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com, let us know on social media Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter and if you want Pinterest, Google+. I don't know, I love doing these history episodes and I want to give another shout out to Lester for doing all this great research. So thank you Lester, thank you all for listening. I appreciate your time, I appreciate your faith that when you tune in I'm gonna say something that you want to hear. So I Hope you have a good week, I hope that this episode inspired you whether your karate practitioner or not. I'm fired up. I'm actually gonna go do some kata right now. Until next time. Train hard, smile and have a great day.